

Following the British defeat at Isandlwana, Lord Chelmsford convened a Court of Enquiry which commenced five days later on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 1879. The Court President was Colonel F.C. Hassard with Lt. Col. Law RA and Lt. Col. Harness RA as Court members. The nature of the enquiry was extraordinary when compared with standard military procedures; their brief was merely to 'enquire into the loss of the camp'. Although a number of officers and men had been required to make statements after their escape from Isandlwana, the Court only recorded the evidence of Majors Clery and Crealock, Captains Essex, Gardner, Cochrane, Curling, Smith-Dorrien and NNC Capt. Nourse. It was subsequently argued, within the Army and the press, both in the UK and South Africa, that insufficient evidence was heard in order to divert the blame away from Chelmsford. Harness was later to defend himself by stating,

I am sorry to find that it is thought more evidence should have been taken. Of course, I know Lord Chelmsford thought so, for he sent an order that it should be done; but he does not know, nor does the general public know, that a great deal more evidence was heard, but was either corroboratory of evidence already recorded or so unreliable that it was worthless.

He also wrote that,

It seemed to me useless to record statements hardly bearing on the loss of the camp but giving doubtful particulars of small incidents more or less ghastly in their nature". The final line of his report indicated his defensive attitude, "The duty of the Court was to sift the evidence and record what was of value: if it was simply to take down a mass of statements the court might as well have been composed of three subalterns or three clerks.

As author Ian Knight wrote, "Of course, the modern historian is left to ponder by what criteria Harness decided which statements were unreliable and worthless". (1) A mute point indeed.

At best, Harness saw the Court as a means of obtaining information about the defeat for Chelmsford. However, it served no real purpose apart from giving Chelmsford time to prepare his explanatory speech before he returned to England to present his case before parliament. The initial observations of the Court certainly enabled the blame for the British defeat to be squarely laid upon the NNC and Lt. Col. Durnford. Crealock's false evidence that he had ordered Durnford, on behalf of Chelmsford, to take command of the camp, was particularly persuasive. With regard to the NNC, the Court had heard confusing evidence as to their location and actions on the battlefield, yet they based their findings on the evidence of Capt. Essex, who had clearly stated that he did not know their location. The Court declined to listen to several surviving NNC officers who did know. Durnford was equally convenient as a scapegoat, he was dead, he was not from an infantry regiment of the line and, the subject of much subsequent debate, and he was the senior officer present. The finding of the Court conveniently accepted, on Crealock's evidence, that Durnford had been in charge, that there had been a defeat, and accordingly highlighted Durnford's various deficiencies to the point that the Deputy Adjutant General, Col. Bellairs, forwarded the Court's findings to Lord Chelmsford with the following observation,

From the statements made to the Court, it may be gathered that the cause of the reverse suffered at Isandhlwana (sic) was that Col. Durnford, as senior officer, overruled the orders which Lt. Col. Pulleine had received to defend the camp, and directed that the troops should be moved into the open, in support of the Native Contingent which he had brought up and which was engaging the enemy.

Not content with blaming Durnford, Chelmsford's staff then began focusing their attention onto Col. Glyn, Chelmsford's second-in command, now isolated from any news at Rorke's Drift. Glyn was sent a number of official memorandums requiring him to account for his interpretation of orders relating to the camp at Isandlwana. Glyn recognised the possible entrapment and returned the memorandums, unanswered but with the comment, "*Odd the general asking me to tell him what he knows more than I do*". Glyn finally accepted all responsibility for details, but declined to admit any responsibility for the movement of any portion of troops in or out of camp. The acrimony continued with Chelmsford even suggesting that it was Glyn's duty to protest at any decisions with which he did not agree. Glyn maintained his position by stating that it was his duty to obey his commander's orders. Little was said beyond this point; Glyn remained silent and loyal to his General but Mrs. Glyn robustly defended her husband in the coming months.

There was no defence for the NNC and initially there was no defence for Durnford. Chelmsford finally dammed Durnford's reputation in his speech to the House of Lords on the 19<sup>th</sup> August 1879, Chelmsford stated that,

in the final analysis, it was Durnford's disregard of orders that had brought about its (the camp's) destruction.

It was thereafter widely believed that Durnford had failed to assume command of the camp from the subordinate Col. Pulleine and then irresponsibly taken his men off to chase some Zulus. Most historical accounts relating to Durnford's actions at Isandlwana are uncertain of his orders, the exact sequence of events, or they suppose that Durnford was seeking to either warn Chelmsford of the presence of the Zulus or prevent Chelmsford's force being cut off from their base at Isandlwana. Even Donald Morris in his highly researched *The Washing of the Spears* says little on this point and confines his comment to two neutral paragraphs.

It is probable that we will never know exactly what happened. It is possible that the five surviving imperial officers' reports were influenced by the nature of the enquiry. After all, it would have been abundantly clear to these officers that Chelmsford and his influential staff were doing everything in their power to apportion the blame away from Chelmsford and on to others, some conveniently dead. The surviving Imperial officers were in an obvious predicament, they may well have felt inclined to 'toe the line' in support of their General.

They were undoubtedly fully aware that their own departure from the Isandlwana battlefield could still be the subject of some uncomfortable consequences. They would certainly have known that Col. Glyn had been ignominiously relieved of his column duties and transferred to the command of the detached garrison at Rorke's Drift, thus effectively isolating him from the enquiry and its aftermath. Even with the possibility of unseen pressure on the surviving officers to support their general, Lt. Curling gave damning evidence of the chaos and confusion at Isandlwana, both before and during the battle. (see the Society's third Journal ).

Notwithstanding the decision of the court, it seems right to raise the question, who actually had command at the camp? At first sight, this difficult question appears to have been a matter of some confusion between Durnford and Pulleine. Durnford had requested clarification of the orders he had received the day before but Chelmsford had not replied. Neither had Chelmsford specifically ordered Durnford to remain at the Isandlwana camp. Having requested clarification, it is probable that Durnford expected to receive fresh orders on his arrival at the camp, yet nothing awaited him. Durnford then set about following his current order to act against Matyana. It is clear from Lieutenant Cochrane's evidence that Pulleine accepted Durnford's decision to leave the camp, the situation being outside the framework of the orders left him by Chelmsford. Only Pulleine had orders to 'defend the camp'. Had Chelmsford intended that the two columns should merge, it is inconceivable that he would not have referred to such an important policy change in his orders.

It was later believed by Chelmsford's staff that Durnford and Pulleine had had harsh words over the issue of taking Imperial troops from the camp, but Cochrane, who claimed he was present, denied that this was so. Durnford's request had been 'persuasive' rather than 'peremptory'.

Cochrane wrote that Pulleine was apparently 'distressed' when Durnford wanted to position two Imperial companies beyond the in-lying pickets yet it is inconceivable that Durnford would have wanted the two infantry companies with him. Foot soldiers would obviously have been more of a hindrance than help to his fast moving mounted force. It seems more likely that Durnford wished to both strengthen the weak position to the north of the camp while also protecting the rear of his mounted men who would be operating on the Nqutu plateau. Pulleine's concern was apparently shared by some of the camp's officers who felt that the removal of such a large part of the camp's force did not accord with Chelmsford's orders. Cochrane recalled that Lieutenant T. Melvill, the adjutant of the 1/24<sup>th</sup>, approached Durnford and said:

Colonel, I really do not think Colonel Pulleine would be doing right to send any men out of camp when his orders are to defend the camp.

Durnford replied:

Very well, it does not much matter. We will not take them.

Whilst one can accept Cochrane's account, no one knows Durnford's objective behind the request. The situation must, nevertheless, have been clear to all the officers, especially those of the 24<sup>th</sup> that the northern aspect was a blind spot in the camp's defences. After Durnford's departure, two companies of the 1/24<sup>th</sup> were subsequently dispatched from the camp to the spur to the north and although the idea for the order could be said to have come from Durnford, Pulleine quite clearly thought it was necessary.

Looked at critically, the question of 'who was in charge?' and why Pulleine and Durnford acted as they did is difficult to answer, especially in the light of the Enquiry's deliberations. The truth may never be known but additional evidence is now available which goes some way towards clarifying the situation. The whole question of Durnford's orders has previously hinged upon the supposition that Durnford received specific orders from Chelmsford. Chelmsford reproduced, from memory, his recollection of this particular order for his official report; it is included below using Chelmsford's exact words.

ORIGINAL TEXT

Head Quarter Camp  
New Rorke's Drift, Zululand  
19 January 1879

No 3 column moves tomorrow to Insalwana (Sic) Hill and from there, as soon as possible to a spot about 10 miles nearer to the Indeni Forest.

From that point I intend to operate against the two Matyanas if they refuse to surrender.

One is in the stronghold on or near the Mhlazakazi Mountain; the other is in the Indeni Forest. Bengough ought to be ready to cross the Buffalo R. at the Gates of Natal in three days time, and ought to show himself there as soon as possible.

I have sent you an order to cross the river at Rorke's Drift tomorrow with the force you have at Vermaak's.

I shall want you to operate against the Matyanas, but will send you fresh instructions on this subject. We shall be about 8 miles from Rorke's Drift tomorrow.

Chelmsford knew that the actual order had never been found and no one challenged Chelmsford's account. In 1885, in an extraordinary twist of fate, the Commanding Officer of the Royal Engineers in Natal, Col. Lourde, heard rumours of a 'cover up' involving the surreptitious removal of Chelmsford's written orders to Durnford from his (Durnford's) body. Lourde cautiously advertised his fears in the Natal Witness newspaper and on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1885 he received the following remarkable reply,

ORIGINAL TEXT

P.M.B. 25 June 85  
F. Pearse & Co  
14 Cole St.

E.D. Natal Witness Office

Dear Sir

Referring to yr. Advertisement wh. Appeared a few weeks ago in the Natal Witness respecting relics of the late Colonel Durnford. I write to inform you that I have in my possession a document which was picked up by my brother A. Pearse late trooper in the Natal Carbineers. It appears to be the instructions issued by Lord Chelmsford to the late Colonel on taking the field.

I have written to my brother to ascertain whether he is willing to part with it in the event of your wishing to have it in your possession.

Yours truly

(signed) F. Pearse

The orders were promptly delivered to Lourde. They were in two parts, the first was Chelmsford's original order dated 19<sup>th</sup> January 1879 and it is on this order that Durnford must have based so much of his decision making when he arrived at Isandlwana. The original text is reproduced below and the order leaves little doubt what was in Chelmsford's mind when he wrote it. It differs considerably from Chelmsford's recollection, printed above.

ORIGINAL TEXT

Lieut. Colonel Durnford R.E.  
Camp Helpmakaar

1. You are requested to move the troops under your immediate command viz.: mounted men, rocket battery and Sikeli's men to Rourke's Drift tomorrow the 20<sup>th</sup> inst.; and to encamp on the left bank of the Buffalo (in Zululand).
2. No. 3 Column moves tomorrow to the Isandhlana (Sic) Hill.
3. Major Bengough with his battalion Native Contingent at Sand Spruit is to hold himself in readiness to cross the Buffalo at the shortest possible notice to operate against the chief Matyana &c. His wagons will cross at Rourke's (Sic) Drift.
4. Information is requested as to the ford where the above battalion can best cross, so as to co-operate with No. 3 Column in clearing the country occupied by the chief Matyana.

By Order, H. Spalding, Major DAAG  
Camp, Rourke's Drift 19.1.79

This is the penultimate order issued to Durnford (the last one being the one received on the morning of the 22<sup>nd</sup>). The text was visible in January 1963 when David Jackson copied the text, but has since disintegrated. The order makes it clear that Durnford's column is to co-operate with column no. 3, viz. Bengough's battalion, which is to operate from the west into the Mangeni valley; his waggons are to accompany Durnford's men, indicating a planned rendezvous later on.

Durnford was clearly ordered to 'co-operate with No.3 Column by clearing the country occupied by the Chief Matyana', he was not ordered to take command of the camp, which was only temporary. Durnford did as he was ordered; at 11.15am. the remaining two troops of Zikhali's Horse, under the command of Lieutenants Charles Raw and J.A. Roberts, were sent under Captain Barton, who had been attached to Durnford's column for General Duties, to the hills to the north to sweep away those thousand or so Zulus who could be seen there about two miles off. Barton accompanied Roberts, and George Shepstone, Durnford's staff officer, went with Raw. At about 11.30am the rocket battery arrived and Durnford gave them orders to be prepared to move out of camp in fifteen minutes. At 11.45am Durnford left the camp. He took with him Lieutenant Harry Davis's fifty-two Edendale and Lieutenant Alfred Henderson's fifty-two BaSotho mounted men, the rocket battery under Major F. Russell supported by D Company and the 1/1<sup>st</sup> NNC under Captain Nourse. His wagons bringing his ammunition and supplies had not yet arrived, but he must have been confident that the Zulus would not stop to fight. The worst he could expect might be a short skirmish. This makes sense, as Durnford's highly mobile No.2 Column was ideally placed to drive the Zulus away from the camp.

Trooper A. Pearse had found these papers on the field of battle while seeking the body of another brother, also a trooper. The papers had been there for some months open to the elements and some parts were folded up in an envelope and so fragile that they could not be unfolded and read. As the papers were not referred to in contemporary writings it is reasonable to assume that they were not examined in detail at that time. The outside of the envelope and part of the first side were presumably sufficiently visible to cause the writer to state that these were Chelmsford's instructions to Durnford. Pearse's brother responded to the advertisement in the Natal Witness alluded to and presumably obtained permission to forward the papers to the editor of the Natal Witness.

Ultimately an unrecorded person placed them in the R.E. Museum at Chatham at an unrecorded date. It may be surmised that Frances Ellen Colenso was responsible for their being sent to the museum. Historian David Jackson first saw the papers in 1963 still in a state in which they could not be examined. The Journal Editor then saw them in July 1998 by which time they had been painstakingly separated to reveal their contents.

The second order found on Durnford's body, copies of which had been sent to all the column commanders, relates to the specific tactics to be used when engaging the Zulus and is dated 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1878. Whilst they are not relevant to the argument, the fact that Durnford kept them on his person indicates his intention to obey his orders. He would still have been smarting from Chelmsford's earlier rebuke and threatening reminder to obey future orders. (Chelmsford's Order 43 dated 14<sup>th</sup> January 1879).

The discovery of the 'evidence' he was seeking galvanised Lourde into action; he wrote a remarkable letter to Sir Andrew Clarke, Head of the Corps of Royal Engineers. His letter indicates his view that he could vindicate Durnford and the whole (unabridged and uncorrected) text is reproduced below,

#### ORIGINAL TEXT

Pietermaritzburg  
Natal  
Colonel Durnford

22<sup>nd</sup> January 1885

Dear Sir Andrew Clarke,

Some circumstances of a very remarkable nature in connection with the late Colonel Durnford R.E. one of my predecessors here, have been brought to my notice, & I write to you about them because you are the Head of the Corps, & because you are known as a man who has the power to do whatever you consider should be done.

I have also written to Sir Linton Simmons, who was T.G.F at the time when Colonel Durnford's name was so prominently before the public, & to Sir Gerald Graham, whom I believe to have been a personal friend of Colonel Durnford's, if General C.G. Gordon were in England I would write to him also, as I know he was a personal friend, & that this is a case in which he would take a great interest.

If, after reading this correspondence you will confer with Sir Linton Simmons & Sir Gerald Graham, & will let me know what mode of action it has been decided to adopt in this matter, I shall be

much obliged, & I beg that you will understand that whatever trouble it may take, or however unpleasant it may render my position here socially, I as a brother Officer & one of the successors of the late Colonel Durnford, am quite prepared to act, if desired, as a local agent in this matter, & to see that justice is done.

But, after due deliberation I have decided that it is most fit to refer this grave matter in the first instance to officers senior to myself.

I have to go back to this day six year ago, when Colonel Durnford was killed at Isandhlwana. Despatches & letters were written, statements & speeches were made & ultimately he was made the scapegoat for the disaster; it is only quite recently that an article by a Military writer appeared in "Blackwood" in which the author was evidently still of opinion that Colonel Durnford was mainly responsible for that disaster to our arms, & this must be assumed to be the general impression both with the general public, & also amongst the great majority of military men, & especially with the latter, as the published official account by the Intelligence Department still conveys that impression.

Prior to the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1879 Colonel Durnford received certain orders, & though it was stated soon afterwards & repeated by Lord Chelmsford on the 18<sup>th</sup> August, & again on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1880 in the House of Lords that Colonel Durnford had received orders to take charge of the camp at Isandhlwana, it subsequently transpired from Colonel Crealock on the 18<sup>th</sup> May 1882, i.e. nearly three & a half years afterwards by a reference to his note book, that Colonel Durnford had not received orders to take charge of that camp. It must be apparent to any Military man that it never could have been intended that he should have assumed that charge, being at the time in independent command of another column of the army, more especially as not a word appears to have said, either to Colonel Glyn whose camp it was, or to Colonel Pulleine who was left in temporary charge of it, that such a change of command was contemplated! It was also intended to move the camp on up-country as soon as possible.

When Colonel Durnford arrived at the camp, he, as senior officer present seems to have taken cognizance of the state of affairs, so far as it was possible for a man in his position to do, & he stated distinctly that he was not going to remain in camp, an expression of which he certainly would not have made use, had orders been conveyed to him that he was to do so. On the contrary there can be no doubt now that he proceeded on his way to join & help his general in the battle that was supposed to be going on at the front.

However the military authorities refused to allow the question of relative responsibility for the disaster at Isandhlwana to be re opened, & the stigma attached to Colonel Durnford's name never having been publicly removed, will remain till that is done.

But what became of the original order, which was sent to Colonel Durnford? & it is mainly in connection with that subject that I now address you.

For four months the bodies of our slaughtered soldiers laid unburied on the field of Isandhlwana, within eight miles of a British force, & with no one to oppose their burial, but on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 1879 a cavalry force under General Marshall, composed of the K.D.Gs, the Natal Carbineers, &c., visited the field & buried some of the bodies, including Colonel Durnford's.

In the Natal Witness for the 27<sup>th</sup> May, & in the supplement of the 7<sup>th</sup> June, a sentence occurred as follows "after the papers & "maps found on Durnford's person had been removed, a pile of "stones was heaped over the body."

It has been stated to me that this sentence about "the papers "& maps," was originated by a telegram which was received by the Editor of the Witness from a Mr. Dormer, then at Ladysmith, that this gentleman received the information on which his telegram was based directly from the mouth of a Mr. Alfred Davis, one of the proprietors of the Witness newspaper, who was anxious to find the remains of his brother who had fallen at Isandhlwana, that, being at Rorke's Drift in May 1879, & having been a member of the Natal Carbineers Mr. Davis seized the opportunity of one of that Corps being ill to borrow his arms & accoutrements & uniform & accompany the Natal Carbineers, that he found his brother's body & took from the pocket of the jacket his sister's letter, written only a few days before the disaster, which tends to show how little the remains had been disturbed since the battle, that Colonel Durnford's body was found at the same spot & that he Mr. Davis rode past haste to Ladysmith, where he met Mr. Dormer &, being very much fatigued, gave him (Mr. Dormer who was correspondent of another paper) the information for himself, on condition that he would telegraph it to the Witness – which he did.

A friend of Colonel Durnford's, on seeing this sentence in the Witness, went & questioned a certain Theophilus Shepstone about it, having been the officer in command of the party of Natal Carbineers who found & buried Colonel Durnford's body, & his reply was that it was quite a mistake, there was no papers of any kind, & could not have been as there was no coat. So the matter was dropped, the questioner having at that time full confidence in the truth of Captain Shepstone's statement.

But on the 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1879, i.e. the day after the visit to the field of the battle of Isandhlwana, veterinary Surgeon Longhurst K.D.G. writing home to his friends in England, described the burial of

Colonel Durnford at which he had been present, & mentioned amongst other articles taken from his body before burial "a letter". When Mr. Longhurst's letter reached its destination a friend of the Durnford family was present, & heard it read aloud, & Colonel E. Durnford about it, who at once wrote out to Natal to request that enquires might be made. Mr. Longhurst was then in the Transvaal but on his return & before arriving at Pietermaritzburg, he was purposely interviewed by Asst. Comm. General Elmes & he then verbally confirmed what he had previously written home a week afterwards, however during which time he had been in P.M. Burg he declined to answer any questions on the subject.

The K.D.Gs went from Natal to India. Colonel E. Durnford wrote twice, at intervals of six months, to Mr. Longhurst, but these letters were not replied to. A third letter was written & sent to Mr. Longhurst's Commanding Officer, Colonel Master, to be given to Mr. Longhurst, who then, three years having now elapsed since the battle of Isandhlwana, replied, confirming in the most circumstantial way his previous letter. A copy of this letter was sent to Natal to a friend of the late Colonel Durnford, who, anxious that Captain Shepstone would have every chance of proving his innocence or of confessing privately, stipulated that he should be told privately of the contents of Mr. Longhurst's statement.

Captain Shepstone met with a complete denial. But I am informed that he did not merely say "I took no papers", but added, "I could not have taken any because there was no coat on the body."

Captain Shepstone then wrote to Colonel E. Durnford, & sent the names of four persons, viz. Mr. Royston, Mr. Cook, Mr. Macfarlane, & Yabez Mulife, (a Basuto who had been attendant on the late Colonel Durnford), as persons who would support by affidavit the statement that there was no papers & no coat on the body when found.

Captain Shepstone subsequently forwarded affidavits Mr. Royston, Mr. Cook & Yabez Mulife, but not one from Mr. Macfarlane. On these affidavits being forwarded to Natal they were examined by a friend of Colonel Durnford's, & they seemed in several respects so insufficient & unsatisfactory that further reference was made to Captain Shepstone, who caused Mr. Cook to make a second affidavit.

By this time very grave suspicions had arisen in the minds of the late Colonel Durnford's friends that the original orders sent to that officer had been found on his body & concealed, & enquiries were then set on foot with the view of obtaining further information, especially to ascertain whether the body of the late Colonel Durnford had or had not a coat upon it when it was found.

The result of these enquiries seems to establish beyond a doubt the fact that he had a coat on at that time.

I must now proceed to explain the position occupied by Captain Shepstone. This gentleman usually known in Natal as "Offy" is the son of Sir Theophilus Shepstone, & is a prominent member of the most powerful & influential family in this Colony. He himself is one of the most astute lawyers in the Colony, & is what is termed a general favourite.

The evidence will be laid before you in extenso presently, but I may say that, when it was far less complete than it is now, the case was submitted to an English Barrister who said it was strong enough to take into any English Court of Justice, i.e. in the Natal Court he seemed to doubt whether justice might be so readily obtained against so powerful & public a man.

It was subsequently submitted privately to a trustworthy lawyer in Natal, who gave it as his private opinion that the case was strong enough to justify any judge in requiring the other side to disprove it, & he has since admitted that if the case were brought into Court. Captain Shepstone must be ruined.

Nevertheless, as an instance of the powerful position held by the Shepstone family in Natal this gentleman whilst giving his private opinion as a friend, refused absolutely to have anything to do with the conduct of the case under any circumstances, as, if he took it up, whether he won or lost it, his position would be rendered so unpleasant that he could scarcely continue to live in the Colony.

I had thought of obtaining an interview with Captain Shepstone, with the view of attempting to get to the bottom of this matter, but I am of opinion that I should not be doing right in taking that step. He has had three chances of clearing himself, & has not availed himself of those chances. In fact it is chiefly due to his attempt to prove too much that the establishment of his guilt has been rendered possible. I do not believe that I am at liberty to render myself individually liable to any legal action which the subtlety of the law might devise, a liability which should be born, if at all, by the Secretary of State for War.

The course which seems the right one to take is that I, as representing the Secretary of State for War, should receive authority to engage the services of a well qualified lawyer, who should be instructed in the first instance to have a private interview with Captain Shepstone, lay before him sufficient evidence to convince him, if he is open to conviction, that his case is one which is sure to go against him if brought into Court, & ask him whether he has anything to urge against a criminal information for theft being laid against him personally.

If he then admits the truth of the charge, & states that he is not alone responsible, & can produce evidence which shall be satisfactory, i.e. if he states – his statement being duly supported; that he took

these papers & handed them over to some one else, the prosecution might be diverted to some one even more guilty than himself.

If, on the other hand, Captain Shepstone on being interviewed, adhered to his denial, I should have authority to take immediate steps to prosecute him, or take such steps as the law may empower, including the appointment of commissions to take the evidence of those persons in India or elsewhere whose evidence is so important.

I may say that there is one lawyer in Natal in whose ability to conduct such a case & in whose intrepidity to undertake it, regardless of consequences, I should have full confidence, & I should be prepared, if duly authorised, to instruct him accordingly.

But as it is possible that, for some reason or other, at present unknown (for I have not communicated with him.) that gentleman may decline to undertake the case, it would be most advisable that a well qualified should be sent from England with full instructions how to proceed, & who should act, if possible, with the lawyer above referred to, who otherwise would be secured by the defendant.

It is, however, for consideration whether, if prosecution has to be undertaken such action should be instituted in our English Court or in a Natal Court, for it must be borne in mind that several of the most important witnesses are colonial gentlemen who are intimately acquainted with, & are in some cases personal friends of Captain Shepstone & the temptation to avoid the consequences of having been instrumental in ruining that gentleman viz the weight of displeasure which could be exerted by members of his powerful family, might have a deterrent effect in obtaining confirmatory of the statements they have made.

This is a point which should be determined beforehand & on which I should receive instructions, but it is manifest that much care would have to be taken to ensure the arrangements being such as will conduce to success & not to failure.

But, whatever course it is decided to adopt, I wish it to be clearly understood that it is not in the smallest degree from what is termed a feeling of revenge, that any of these preliminary steps have been undertaken.

All who have been interested in this matter have worked from no other feeling than the earnest desire that a gallant soldier, who, whatever others may have done, did his duty nobly & well, shall not be defamed. They have felt as I feel that no conduct is more disgraceful, no act more cowardly, than defamation of the dead.

Captain Shepstone is one whose connection with the case must be considered from an abstract point of view. I am only one of a vast number of people who would regard his conviction as a matter most sad in itself, but justice must take its course, &, if convicted he must take on his own head the full consequence of his crime. Something will at all events been done to show what means were adopted to ruin the reputation of as gallant a soldier as ever breathed.

I am

Dear Sir Andrew Clarke

Yours vly truly

C E Luard.

The result was that Shepstone finally agreed to attend a new Court of Enquiry. The Acting High Commissioner in South Africa was quick to see the implications for Chelmsford and wrote to Lourd before the Court convened at the end of April 1886,

I have taken measures to limit proceedings and to prevent, I trust, the possibility of other names, distinguished or otherwise, being dragged into it.

When the Enquiry commenced, it was curiously limited to the investigation of whether or not papers had been removed from Durnford's body. Various important witnesses were unable to obtain leave from the army or the civil authorities and Lourd's case crumbled. Shepstone was cleared and Lourd was obliged to apologise to Shepstone. And there the matter finally rested.

In June 1998, a report made by Capt. Stafford of the NNC came to light. This report was written in 1938 when Stafford was in his late seventies and the report records his memory of the battle at Isandlwana when he was one of Durnford's staff officers. Two interesting points are made by Stafford. Firstly, his account of the initial meeting between Durnford and Pulleine reveals that Durnford was concerned at Pulleine's disposition of the troops so far from the camp. Stafford wrote,

Col. Durnford and Capt. Shepstone entered Pulleine's tent whilst I remained outside. From what I could hear, an argument was taking place between Pulleine and Durnford as to who the senior was. Col. Pulleine appeared to give way and I heard Durnford say, "You had orders to draw in the camp". Alas there was no time for this as the fighting had already commenced. I can never understand to this day why this was not done.

Why did Pulleine deploy his manpower so far from the camp? Because he was obeying to the letter the orders he had received from Chelmsford which referred to the tactics to be used. Incidentally, these very same tactics, as ordered, had been used on the same day and fifty miles from Isandlwana at Nyzane, (discussed elsewhere in this Journal). Pulleine had no battle experience and faithfully deployed his force 'according to the book'. Such tactics were doomed to fail in a defensive position, interestingly, they were never used again against the Zulus.

Secondly, Stafford relates how Durnford deployed his force to stem the advance of the main Zulu force. It would appear that Durnford was anticipating that the camp was about to be attacked and acted accordingly. Stafford records how the Zulus advanced at speed and forced Durnford's men back towards the camp. This was with the exception of Lt. Roberts of Pinetown who...

had managed to get his men into a cattle kraal on the ledge of a ridge. I subsequently heard that this officer and his men had been shelled by our artillery and that Roberts met his death as the result of this blunder.

The final orders received by Durnford at Rorke's Drift on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January were from Crealock, because they are so ambiguous, they are reproduced exactly;

You are to march to this camp at once with all the force you have with you of No.2 Column.

Major Bengough's battalion is to move to Rorke's Drift as ordered yesterday. 2/24<sup>th</sup>, Artillery and mounted men with the General and Colonel Glyn move off at once to attack a Zulu force about 10 miles distant.

Armed with this instruction, together with the orders from the General dated the 19<sup>th</sup> January, Colonel Durnford's mind was clear. He was not instructed to take command of the camp, and indeed had freedom of action to use his independent No. 2 Column. On his arrival at Isandlwana and seeing the Zulus approach in force, he embarked on a course of action to hinder their progress towards the camp.

Was there a conspiracy to blame Durnford? Perhaps not, but with Durnford's death, the subsequent circumstances themselves seem to have conspired against him. Chelmsford set up the Court of Enquiry, its terms and purpose were, at best, curious. Certainly Crealock deliberately lied when he told the Court that he had issued orders to Durnford to "take command of it" referring to the camp, when in fact this was not the case.

The Court's findings enabled Chelmsford to escape the blame and his account to the House of Lords relied on these findings to blame Durnford. Sadly, Chelmsford joined his staff in their attempt to blame Glyn but this tactic backfired when Glyn accepted partial blame.

The writer believes that there is sufficient evidence to prove that Durnford behaved correctly and bravely according to his orders. His reputation should now be seen in the same light as his military record, exemplary.

## **Footnotes.**

a. See Journal 17 for the latest research on the subject of Durnford's descendants by Julian Whybra. (2005)

b. Attempts to trace Durnford's descendants have not succeeded. It is known that his daughter moved to South Africa, she subsequently married a local (unknown) farmer.

## **References.**

1. *The Sun Turned Black* Ian Knight