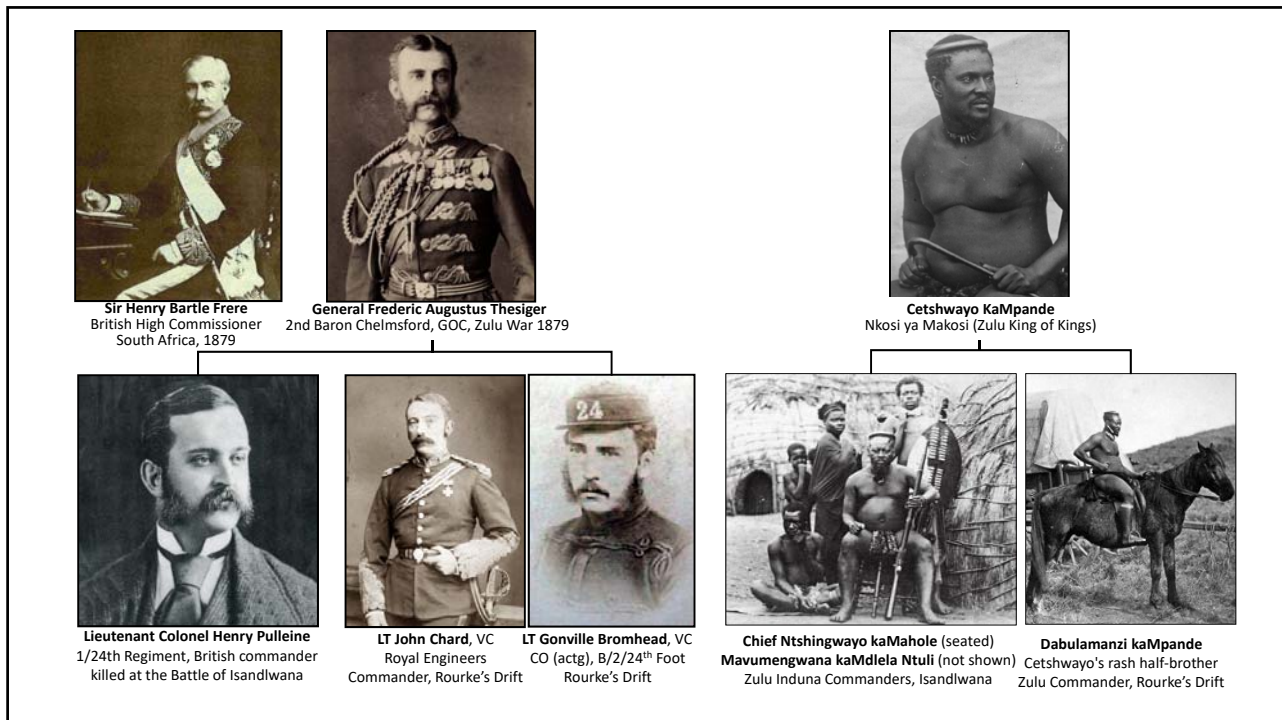


The Zulu War 1879  
The Battles of Isandlwana and Rourke's Drift

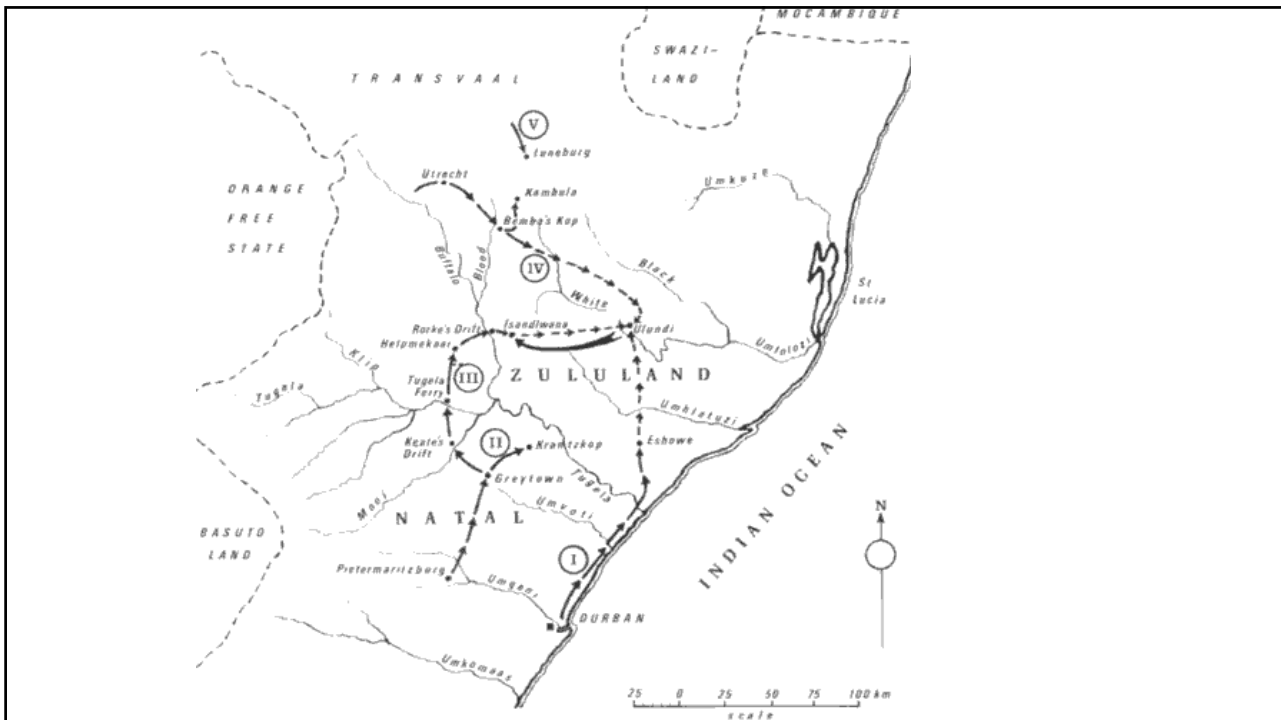


By Drummond McKenzie



## The Zulu War- Background

- Following the successful federation of Canada, the British thought that a similar federation in South Africa would be a good idea.
- However the Boer republics and the Zulus stood in the way
- The British began negotiations with the Boers regarding federation which ultimately proved unsuccessful
- Bartle Frere, High Commissioner for South Africa, with the intent of instigating war with the Zulus, without the approval of the British government, issued an ultimatum to the Zulu king Cetshwayo. This included disbanding the Zulu army, which could not the Zulus could not agree to
- Frere then sent Lord Chelmsford to invade Zululand



## Isandhlwana 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1879 The Lead Up

- 3 columns totaling 15,000 men invaded Zululand- initially unopposed
- Central column, led by Chelmsford and comprising 7,800 men encamped at Isandhlwana on 22 January with no defensive structures in place contrary to established doctrine
- Chelmsford left 1,000 men in camp while he was lured eastwards by diversionary Zulu force, in the hope of capturing Cetshwayo
- The Zulu's main target was the camp at Isandhlwana
- The Zulus outmaneuvered British and the attack began at 11am

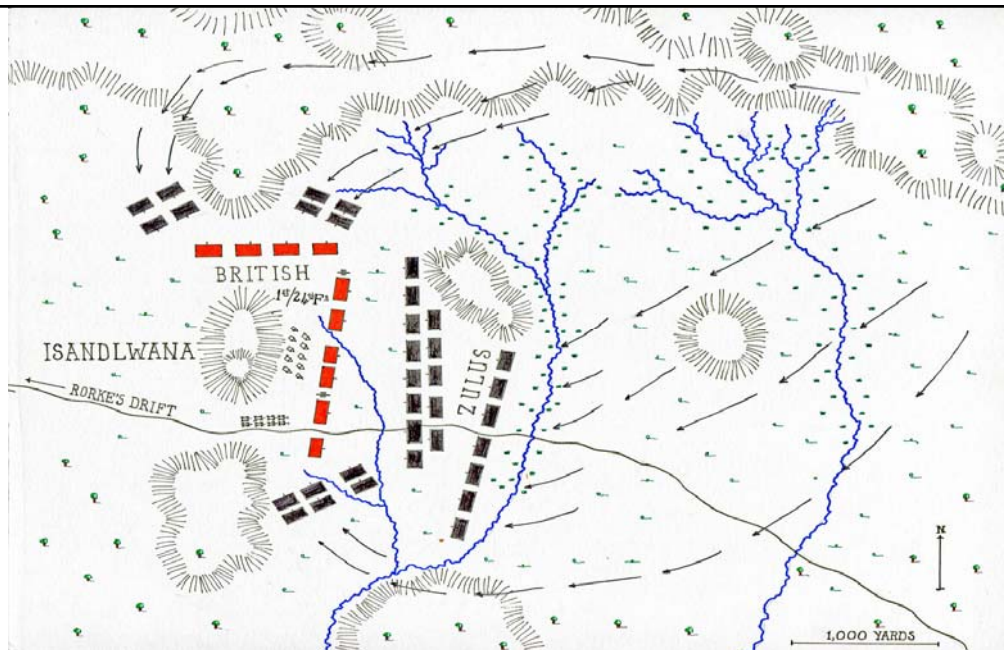
## The Battle of Isandhlwana The Two Sides

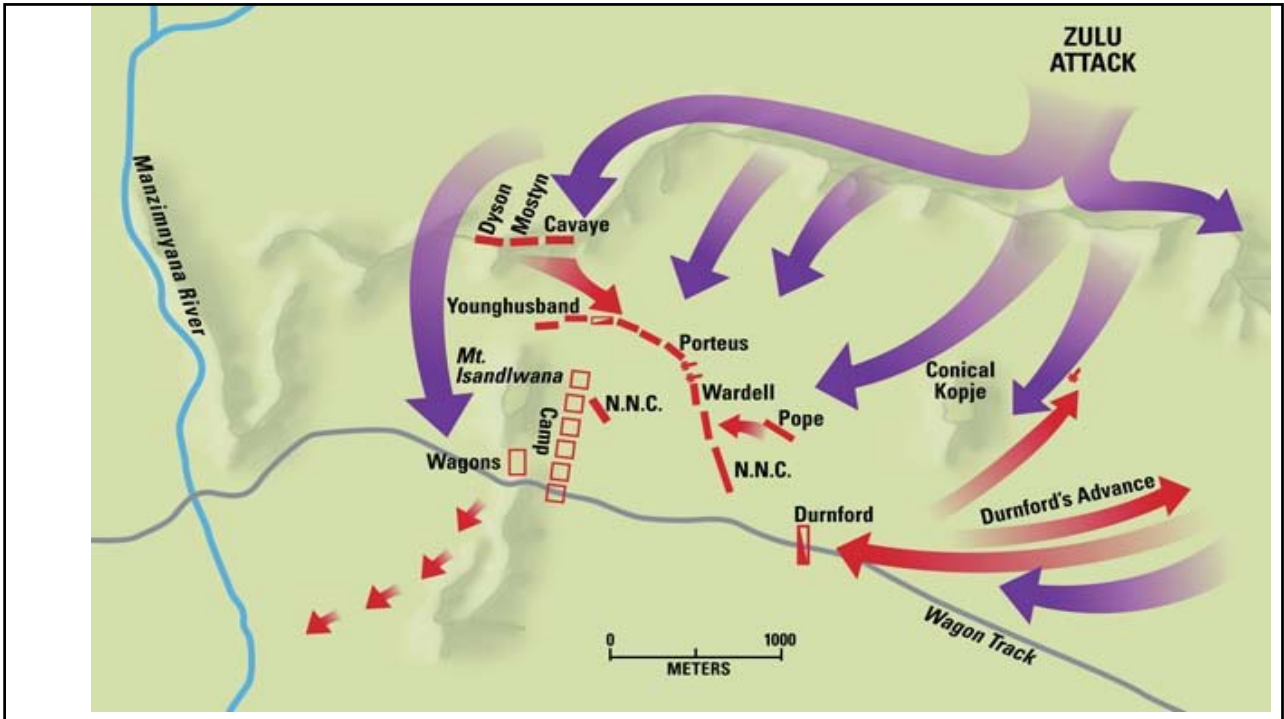
- The British

- 5 companies of 1<sup>st</sup> Bttn and 1 company 2<sup>nd</sup> Bttn South Wales Borderers, 70 men Royal Artillery, 2 companies Natal Native Corp, Natal Police, mounted volunteers- total approx. 1,000
- Arms- breach loading Martini Henry .45 calibre single shot with bayonet, two 7 pounder guns and a rocket battery
- Defensive positions

- The Zulus

- 12,000 Men
- Arms- assegais (short spears) and rawhide shields
- Attacking strategy





## The Battle of Isandhlwana

### The Outcome

- By mid afternoon- the worst defeat a modern army has ever suffered at the hand of men without guns:
- The British:
  - 24<sup>th</sup> Regt (South Wales Borderers)-21 officers and 581 men dead
  - Royal Artillery- 68 dead
  - Natal Native Regt- 58 officers and 500 men dead
- The Zulus
  - Approx. 2,000 dead
  - The Zulus captured some 1,000 Martini Henry breech loading rifles and a large amount of ammunition. Some of these rifles were used at Rorke's Drift



## The Battle of Isandhlwana

### The factors

- Chelmsford “we have certainly underestimated the power of the Zulu army”
- Chelmsford divided and weakened the centre column
- Location of camp at Isandhlwana
- Very poor defensive strategy at Isandhlwana by British CO Col Pulleine
- The British troops could not access additional ammunition supplies
- The Martini–Henry's rifle suffered from cartridge-extraction problems which caused the breech block to jam when hot. Recent testing has shown this would happen after approx 30 rounds fired
- Classic Zulu “horns of the beast” outflanking attacking strategy using concentrated fighting force
- Zulu ability to conceal positions, their skirmishing skills and speed of attack
- Zulu “performance enhancing” substances

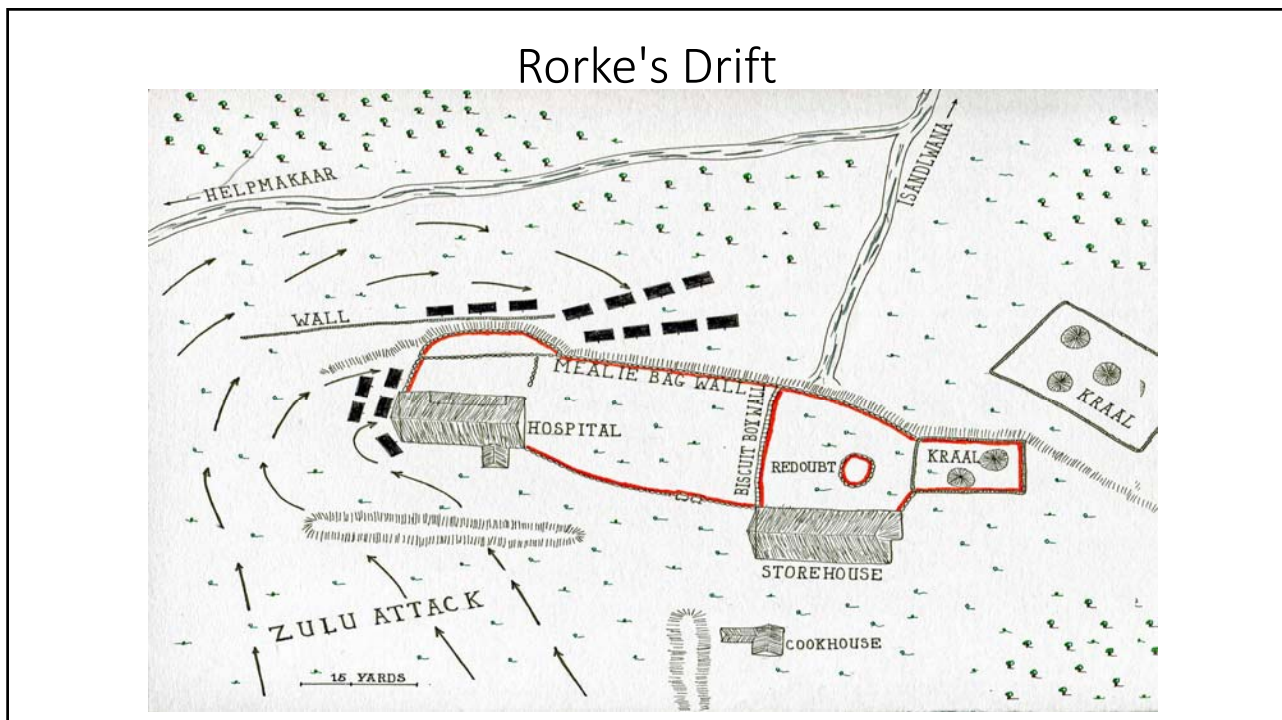
## Rorke's Drift- 22<sup>nd</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> January 1879

### The Lead Up

- Rorke's Drift is the crossing point of the Buffalo River which divided Natal from Zululand. This is where Chelmsford's column crossed into Zululand
- Mission station used by the British as a military hospital
- 1 company left to defend Rorke's drift mission station later joined by some Royal Engineers. They could hear firing from the battle at Isandhlwana which was about 6 miles east, and on climbing a nearby hill could see advancing Zulus
- Set about fortifying the mission station using maize bags and biscuit boxes
- Zulu attack commenced at 4pm and the Zulus only retreated at 7am next day

## The Battle of Rorke's Drift The Two Sides

- The British
  - B company 2<sup>nd</sup> Bttn South Wales Borderers, some Royal Artillery, Medical Corp and Royal Engineers- total 139 men
  - Arms- Martini Henry .45 calibre single shot with bayonet
  - Defensive positions
- The Zulus
  - 4,500 Men
  - Arms- assegais (short spears) and rawhide shields, Martini- Henry rifles captured at Isandhlwana
  - Attacking strategy





## Rorke's Drift



## The Battle of Rorke's Drift The Outcome

- The British:
  - The attack was repelled
  - 17 dead and 10 wounded- mostly shot by Martini Henry breech loading rifles captured by the Zulus at Isandhlwana as the Zulus could not break the defenses to use their assegais
  - 11 Victoria Crosses awarded- the most ever in a single action
- The Zulus
  - Approx. 500 dead

## Rorke's Drift Today



## The Battle of Rorke's Drift The Factors

- **The British:**
  - Concentrated defensive position with coordinated and determined firepower.
  - The Zulus could not break the defensive barriers to use their assegais
  
- **The Zulus**
  - The Rorke's Drift attack was an unplanned raid rather than any organised counter-invasion
  - Cetshwayo had instructed no Zulu attacks in Natal- Dabulamanzi had ignored this instruction
  - Zulus broke off their attack when they saw Chelmsford's column returning to Rorke's Drift

## Zulu War- The Sequel

- Second British invasion of Zululand April 1879- major British reinforcements
- Battle of Ulinde (Cetshwayo's Royal Kraal ) 4 July 1879- final British victory
- Cetshwayo exiled to London and Zululand divided into 13 districts each under a compliant chief
- Britain only achieved federation of South Africa after a much bloodier conflict- The Boer War- 1898-1902.