

The Annotated Maps of Isandhlwana

Keith Smith

Within the extensive archives of the Royal Engineers' Museum at Chatham there lies a collection of documents which are described as the 'Durnford Papers'. They refer principally to Colonel Anthony William Durnford, of Isandhlwana fame but also to other members of the Durnford family including his father and brother. A career in the Royal Engineers was a family tradition.

A number of those documents which refer to Anthony Durnford were the subject of a most interesting paper published in 1990.¹ One of the documents discussed is an annotated copy of J.A. Brickhill's statement about his role in the battle of Isandhlwana.² The authors cite the following entry and initials which suggest that the handwritten notes on that document were made by Lieutenant Alfred Fairlie Henderson, who had commanded Hlubi's troop of the Natal Native Horse during the battle:

Col Durnford rode at the Head of the Column all the way from Rorke's drift & I did not lose sight of him until we were in the camp at Isandhlwana

There was a rumour that some Zulus had been in the camp that morning, had given up their arms, and were allowed to leave again – I saw nothing of them. AFH.³

A further two of the documents discussed are copies of the two well-known maps originally prepared in November 1879 by Captain T.H. Anstey and Lieutenant C. Penrose of the Royal Engineers and published in the *Narrative of the Field Operations*.⁴ To acquaint the reader with the details of the Chatham maps, which received only cursory treatment in the Jackson and Whybra paper, I give below an overview of them.⁵

'Military Survey of the Country Around Isandhlwana', which is identified as map No. 1, covers the wider area of the battlefield and stretches from Rorke's Drift in the west to Magogo and Silutshana in the east, and from the Nqutu hills in the north to the Malakatha/Hlazakazi hills in the south. Prominently shown is the route of the track from Rorke's Drift over the southern saddle of Isandhlwana and continuing eastwards where it divides, the northern path eventually leading to Ulundi and the other further south towards the Qudeni Forest. Among the printed features shown on the map are several letter groups which are identified in the key, the first of which states: 'a.a Valley in which the Zulu army bivouacked on the

¹ F.W.D. Jackson and Julian Whybra, "Isandhlwana and the Durnford Papers", *Soldiers of the Queen*, No. 60, March, 1990.

² The statement is from *The Natal Magazine* of September 1879, Vol. iv No. 17 and is annotated by Lieutenant Alfred F. Henderson, who commanded the Hlubi troop of the Natal Native Horse as part of Durnford's force. RE Museum ref. 4901.44.11.

³ The Zulu were Gamdana kaXonga, brother of Sihayo, and his men. Their surrender had actually occurred on the 21st January (The National Archives, WO 32/7725 and statement of Lt. A. Milne, R.N., British Parliamentary Papers C. 2454, p. 182).

⁴ War Office (Intelligence Branch), *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879*, (Captain J.S. Rothwell, compiler), London, 1881.

⁵ Copyright issues prevent the reproduction of the maps in this paper.

night of January 21st, 22nd'. The letters are to be found on the map along the Ngwebeni stream to the east of Mabaso hill in what has become known as the 'ravine'.

There are, in addition, a number of hand-written notes which have been added to the map. These notes purport to identify the positions of various named Zulu regiments prior to the attack on the Isandlwana camp about noon on the 22nd January and, by means of dotted lines and arrows, to indicate the direction of their movement southwards during that attack. The regiments are shown in an arc on the northern side of the Ngwebeni stream at the foot of the Nqutu hills and stretching from the western edge of Mabaso hill to a point almost due north of Isandlwana hill, a distance of seven kilometres (a little more than four miles). There is an unbroken line, also marked 'a.a', which runs from the Nodwengu regiment on the extreme left of the arc south down the western side of Isandlwana and then east across the southern nek. There is also a mysterious 'x' marked a short distance below the centre of the arc of Zulu regiments. Finally, at a point well to the south of Mabaso hill on the plain are the letters 'DH', written vertically, the 'D' on top.

The second map is identified as No. 3 and is the 'Military Survey of the Battle Field of Isandhlwana', which shows the battlefield around Isandlwana hill in more detail. It should be noted, however, that unlike the published version, the map does not include the diagram of the camp on the eastern flanks of Isandlwana hill. It covers the ground from the Manzimnyama stream in the west to iThusi hill in the east, and from the Nqutu escarpment in the north to the area below 'Black's Koppie', now named Mahlabankhosi, to the south. Prominent in the centre of the map are the two major dongas running from north to south, in the westernmost of which Durnford made his unsuccessful attempt to halt the progress of the Zulu left horn.

There are handwritten additions to this map too, most of which are extended arrows showing the direction of attack by each Zulu regiment or brigade on the camp itself. In addition, there are two vertical columns of small circles which show the locations of Durnford's horsemen as they retreated towards the last donga, accompanied by the words 'N.N. Horse under Durnford trying in vain to check the Uve'.

Jackson and Whybra observe that the notes on the two maps are in the same hand as that of the Brickhill annotations and that their identification as those of Henderson is supported by the entry in the RE Museum register. The handwritten notes on the maps are reproduced in the article, on a conflated map similar to No. 3, with the authors' advice that 'Nothing has been omitted'.⁶ The two symbols from map No. 1 are defined in notations also found on the Brickhill account as (a) 'x': 'Umcityu first seen from here' and (b) 'DH': 'Extreme point to which Durnford advanced, Davies' troop on the left, Henderson's on the right, was 2½ miles to the east of this point'. (The position shown on the conflated map could not show its true position, so this was amplified by the authors in their comment.)

That is the position as it stood yesterday and, frankly, not a great deal has been heard about the maps or their implications since the paper was published.

⁶ I am indebted to Julian Whybra for permission to publish a copy of the conflated map here.

During a recent research visit to South Africa (May 2007), this writer visited the Killie Campbell Africana Library (now known as the Campbell Collection) in Durban. Such visits have been almost an annual pilgrimage for the last eight years and this one was intended to be quite routine. Among the documents to be examined on this occasion, however, were two maps for which I knew the reference numbers but not what they represented. I had seen these references elsewhere and wondered what they showed. I was greatly surprised, therefore, to find that they were what I believed to be the same two Henderson maps which I had viewed in the RE Museum at Chatham in 2005 and 2006 (but not been able to copy), and which I have described above.⁷ I made photographic digital images of the new maps and brought them back to Sydney for study at my leisure.

On an impulse, on my return home I sent an email message about the maps to Julian Whybra, co-author of the paper under discussion, whom I knew would be interested in what I had found, and attached an image of one of the maps. I was astonished to learn from his reply that the map I had sent him was not the same as either of those in the RE Museum, numbered 1 and 3, (which I had not previously known) but is identified as map No. 2. This new map is similar to No. 1 but has additional information on it, in the same hand, and thus is also to be attributed to Henderson. Most important of all, it has extensive handwritten notes down the right side of the map which read as follows:

The Zulu pointed out exactly the position of the Nodwengu in bivouac near a mealie garden, and indicated generally the remainder. The third line a.a shows the intended movements. The dotted lines that actually followed.

x. I believe about where the Basutos fired on the Umcityu.⁸

The Zulus attacked exactly as they bivouacked – all in line of Regiment except the Undi Corps which was ½ a mile in left rear of Ngobamakhosi in bivouac and action.⁹

DH. Approximate position of Colonel Durnford when Hlubi hearing the firing of mounted and other contingents of Basuto persuaded him to retire.

The other notable feature of the map is that the Zulu regiments, except for the Nodwengu on the western side and the Undi and Uve on the eastern side, are not named. The 'x' is also more clearly marked, but in the same position.

Whybra then sent me images of the Chatham maps 1 and 3, on receipt of which I found that the two maps 3 were also slightly different. Whilst the position and directions of the arrows are the same, the details of regiments on the eastern side of the Isandlwana plain are more extensive and clearer. Written in a column across the border of the map, and to the south-east of Ithusi hill, are the names of the regiments 'Ngobamakhosi, Uve, Undi [and in pencil] Corps and Qikasi Regiment'. To the right of these names, as if further explaining, are the names 'Tulwana, Indlondlo and Indluyengwe (making up the uNdi corps) and Udloko' (the proper name of the uGqikazi). The uNdi brigade and the uDloko regiment represented the Zulu reserve at Isandwana. There are two other notations to be found which are also omitted from the RE Museum map 3, to be discussed shortly.

⁷ Campbell Collections, Durban, ref. KCM 89/9/81/23 and 24.

⁸ The underline is in the original.

⁹ Inserted in pencil above 'Undi Corps' are the words 'and Qikazi battalion' (uGqikazi was an alternative name for the uDloko: see Eileen Krige, *The Social System of the Zulus*, Pietermaritzburg, 1977, p. 406).

What, then, are we to make of all this?

We should first examine the provenance of the maps. Jackson and Whybra suggest that the probable source of many, if not all, of these documents could have been Frances Ellen Colenso, whose relationship with Anthony Durnford is well known, and who, in gathering material for her book in defence of Durnford,¹⁰ might well have been in contact with the survivors, including both Brickhill and Henderson. Presumably, these documents were passed to Durnford's brother Edward, also then pursuing a campaign for the restitution of Anthony's name, and then by him to the RE Museum.

If indeed the notations on the Brickhill statement were made by Henderson, this does not demonstrate conclusively that the notations on the Chatham maps were also made by him. Jackson and Whybra, however, are of the opinion that the hand is the same on all three documents. Furthermore, the same, or similar, hand also appears on the new Durban maps. Finally, the RE Museum register attributes both the maps and Brickhill notes to Henderson. It is difficult to go much further than that without scientific examination of the handwriting. The provenance of the Durban maps is still to be discovered but one might postulate that they came from the Colenso family papers, even from Fanny Colenso herself.

Next we should consider the new information provided by the Durban maps. Of crucial importance are the comments on map 2, in particular the first sentence: 'The Zulu pointed out exactly the position of the Nodwengu in bivouac near a mealie garden, and indicated generally the remainder.' It might have originally been thought that the Zulu locations on the map were provided to Henderson by his brother-in-arms Lieutenant Charles Raw, the only white officer who was both on the plateau, and survived the battle. Clearly this notion is now invalid because the source for this particular item, at least, was a Zulu. Did Henderson speak isiZulu? It is known that he did, as shown in his obituary:

It was his extensive knowledge of the Zulu language, his wide experience of Dutch habits and his familiarity with every part of Natal that made him an extraordinarily useful man in these wars.¹¹

Like many young Natal colonists, Henderson probably learnt the Zulu language before his mother tongue, by virtue of being nursed in infancy by African servants; Henry Charles Harford is another example.¹²

The notation continues by stating that the positions marked by the arc of Zulu regiments show the location of their bivouac. This is somewhat extraordinary because the traditional view is that the *amabutho* were in the Ngwebeni ravine further east on the night of 21st January. It must also be recognised that every one of the regiments supposedly bivouacked in their arc along the Ngwebeni would have been seen and reported on the morning of the 22nd by one or all of the three vedettes on the escarpment hilltops: Magaga (or Mkwene), Nyoni and iThusi. That they could have escaped detection for the next twenty four hours is inconceivable.

¹⁰ Frances E. Colenso, assisted by Lt-Col. E. Durnford, *History of the Zulu War and Its Origin*, London, 1880.

¹¹ Quoted in Peter Hathorn and Amy Young, *Henderson Heritage*, privately published, Pietermaritzburg, 1972, p. 232. I am indebted to Huw Jones for bringing this passage to my attention.

¹² See Daphne Child, (ed.), *Zulu War Journal of Colonel Henry Harford*, Pietermaritzburg, 1978, p. 2.

A possible alternative scenario is that the markings were meant to indicate their bivouacs for the night of the 22nd January, since the state of the moon dictated that any Zulu attack should wait until the 23rd. Virtually every significant Zulu account, of which there are at least six, (the Nokhenkhe deserter, Mhoti, Mbonambi warrior, Nzuzi, Uguku and Mehlokazulu) makes this point, which is too many to discount.¹³ Such an error in translation is perfectly possible. We might then conjecture what followed. Following the departure of Lord Chelmsford with half his force at dawn on the 22nd, the Zulu commander, Ntshingwayo kaMahole, may have used the opportunity to commence a number of movements which would place his force in a more favourable position to attack on the morning of the 23rd.

The first of these movements occurred soon after daybreak: two vedettes pairs were driven from their posts about 6.15 a.m.¹⁴ I have argued elsewhere that these vedettes were posted on Qwabe and iThusi hills.¹⁵ This would have left a huge area to the east of the iThusi ridge as dead ground, and still more on the plain eastwards of Qwabe; neither can be observed from either of the two remaining vedettes on the plateau, on Magaga and Nyoni, nor the vedette to the south-east of the camp. This action would have allowed the regiments named to advance from the ravine and under the Nqutu hills towards their final destinations. Their discovery by the advancing mounted units of Raw and Roberts interrupted this movement and precipitated the battle while the Zulu were in motion and unprepared.

From this argument, it follows that the case made by Ron Lock and Peter Quantrill that the battle began in the early morning of the 22nd January when the vedettes were driven off is no longer tenable, if it ever was.¹⁶ Zulu evidence clearly indicates that Ntshingwayo was not planning to attack the camp on that day. Had he been going to do so, why then did he wait from early morning until noon to begin? It seems more likely that he was simply moving his warriors to a more favourable position for the expected attack on the 23rd. This is further demonstrated by the annotation that 'the Zulus attacked exactly as they [intended to be] bivouacked – all in line of Regiment except the Undi Corps which was ½ a mile in left rear of Ngobamakhosi in bivouac and action'. The plan also called for the Nodwengu brigade to act as the left horn and drop down behind Isandlwana to attack across the southern nek, a movement which, although precipitated too soon, was almost successful, failing only to close the ring and thus allowing those fleeing the battle to escape down the Fugitives' trail.

The explanation of the 'x' shown below the arc of Zulu regiments is also explained rather differently on map 2, because the notes state that the annotator, Henderson, believed that point to be 'about where the Basutos fired on the Umcityu'. Whether this refers to Raw's or Roberts' troop is only to be conjectured: perhaps it was Roberts, who is said to have been half a mile north of Raw.¹⁷ If so,

¹³ Nokhenkhe deserter: WO 32/7713; Mhoti: Symons Papers, Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban; uMbonambi warrior: Bertram Mitford, *Through the Zulu Country, Its Battlefields and People*, London, 1883, p. 25-29; Nzuzi: *The Natal Mercury*, January 22nd 1929; Uguku: Colenso, *The Zulu War and its Origins*, p. 410; Mehlokazulu: Royal Engineer Journal, 2nd February 1880, pp. 23-24.

¹⁴ Rev. J. Stalker, *The Natal Carbineers*, Pietermaritzburg, 1912, p. 99, account of Trooper Barker.

¹⁵ Keith I. Smith, 'Isandlwana: The Discovery of the Zulu Army', *Journal of the Anglo-Zulu War Historical Society*, December 2004.

¹⁶ Ron Lock and Peter Quantrill, *Zulu Victory: The Epic of Isandlwana and the Cover-up*, London, 2002, pp. 168f.

¹⁷ Statement of Nyanda, The National Archives, WO 33/34, Inclosure 2 in No. 91, p. 271.

this would have placed Raw on the iThusi ridge at the time of the discovery. If the map is to be believed, it is certainly clear that the discovery of the Zulu army did not take place in the ravine below Mabaso hill as described by Donald Morris and many after him.¹⁸

The notation showing the initials of Davies and Henderson ('DH') is now also described more fully: 'Approximate position of Colonel Durnford when Hlubi hearing the firing of mounted and other contingents of Basuto persuaded him to retire.' The letters indicate that Lieutenant Davies's Edendale troop ('D') was on the left and Lieutenant Henderson's troop of Hlubi's Basotho ('H') was on the right. The position which they reached is almost exactly that given by Davies himself:

We then proceeded round the pointed hill on the left front of the camp, and were about 2 miles beyond the ridge on the left front of the camp (we could not see the camp), and very near another ridge that you cannot see at all from the camp; this would make us about 3½ miles from the camp.¹⁹

This ridge has been determined by the author as almost certainly Nyezi, which is about nine kilometres (5.6 miles) east of the camp. It could not have been the nearer Qwabe because that knoll is visible from the camp and is too far south from their line of march.

We should now turn to the Durban map No. 3, which is almost identical to the Chatham version. The difference is two further notations: the first is to be found at the bottom of the map in the valley to the south-east of Mahlabamkhosi. There is marked a cross and the note 'Last stand 1/24th'. Julian Whybra has suggested this point may relate to Q.M. Pullen's call to the passing soldiery to rally on him,²⁰ which might have been witnessed by a galloping Henderson in passing and who later assumed this was the last stand of the 1/24th. This is unlikely because (a) the point on the map is well away from the fugitives' trail, which was on the other side of 'Black's koppie' and (b) Henderson went to Rorke's Drift and would not therefore have used the Fugitive's trail. Nevertheless, it is perfectly feasible that later survivors on the *nek*, finding their way down the Fugitives' trail now blocked by the Zulu right horn, turned south and moved down the eastern side of Mahlabamkhosi where they would have been intercepted by elements of the left horn. A glance at a map shows that, under normal circumstances, this route offers as good a means of reaching the Manzimnyama stream, and eventually the Mzinyathi river, as the traditional trail itself. It is therefore quite possible that a 'last stand' occurred here.

To the north, halfway up the escarpment between Magaga (or Mkwene) hill and the Nyoni ridge is another 'x', this time with the note '1 co. 2/24?' This can only be a reference to Lieutenant Pope's G company, because every other company of the 2/24th was out with Lord Chelmsford. This also seems unlikely since G Company had been on picquet duty until 6 am, after which it took its place with the other companies when told to 'stand to'. We know that the company was at the southern end of the British line during the battle, separated at some distance

¹⁸ Donald R. Morris, *The Washing of the Spears*, London, 1965, p. 360.

¹⁹ The National Archives, WO 33/34, Enclosure 2 in No. 96: Davies.

²⁰ Statement of Mr Brickhill, British Parliamentary Papers, C. 2252, Enclosure 5 in No. 2.

from Durnford's party in the donga. An explanation offered by Julian Whybra on this notation suggests that it may relate either to Porteous' initial support of the guns (and erroneously written as 2/24, hence the question mark) or a glimpse Henderson had, as his and Davies' troops picked up rocket battery survivors, of Pope's or Dyer's composite company beyond the conical koppie

One final important point to note about this map, and its corresponding cousin at Chatham. The location of the uNdi brigade and uDloko, which composed the Zulu reserve, is shown quite clearly on the plain to the east of Isandlwana, and not in its traditional position following behind the right horn on the plateau. This seems to support the conclusion that the reserve did not take the circuitous route across the plateau but instead crossed the plain, a contentious alternative argued by this writer in 2004.²¹

To sum up, if the notations can be taken as genuine, and there is no current evidence to suggest they are not, then the Durban maps, combined with those at Chatham, throw new light on the circumstances surrounding the battle of Isandlwana, particularly on the discovery of the Zulu army by Zikhali's mounted troops under Raw and Roberts. The extent to which the diagrams of bivouacs and the direction of movements coincide with the other well-known Zulu evidence is unclear as yet, and there are still some obstacles to the development of an acceptable solution, but this is surely a beginning. Once again, the battle of Isandlwana poses more problems than appear to have been resolved.

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²¹ Keith I. Smith, 'The Discovery of the Zulu Army', *Journal of the Anglo-Zulu War Historical Society*, December 2004.

The Annotated Maps of Isandlwana: An Addendum

Keith Smith

Following the publication of my original paper, I received a communication from Ron Lock and Peter Quantrill, co-authors of *Zulu Victory*, which argued that the notations, at least on the Durban maps, were written by Evelyn Wood and not by Alfred Henderson. Their evidence for this assertion was a letter written by Edward Durnford to Wood dated 4th October 1880.²² On my last visit to the Killie Campbell Library, in July 2008, I examined this letter closely and found some very pertinent matters which offer quite convincing evidence for the Lock and Quantrill thesis. For example, the letter begins:

I return with many thanks the two maps you so kindly lent me.
I see you note the mounted natives under Col. Durnford as “Hlubi’s Basutos”.

The two troops under his immediate command were 1 troop Basutos (Hlubi’s) & 1 troop of Edendale men. The 2 troops under Capt. G. Shepstone were Sikali men.

The last paragraph is a reference to the notation on Durban Map 3 which identifies the two parallel lines of circles as the positions of ‘Hlubi’s Basutos under Durnford trying in vain to check the Uve’. Durnford goes on to suggest:

May not the position of the Undi & Uve Regts (map 2) have been on the eastern side of the plateau (2800)? Zulu accounts say they slept in the valley of a small stream & the remaining Regts as shewn in the valley.

Here Durnford refers specifically to what he calls ‘map 2’, which is identical to the name of the Durban ‘Map No. 2’, and refers to the notation showing the Undi and Uve as the rightmost units in the arc of regiments, and slightly north-west of the point Durnford’s force reached before it retired towards the camp. He is arguing that the two Zulu units should be shown in the Ngwebeni ‘ravine’ where the *impi* slept on the night of the 21st January.

The position eastward of the plateau would agree with the description of the first attack on Colonel Durnford. “Having proceeded five or six miles, a mounted man (Trooper Whitelaw, N. Carbineers) came down from the hills on the left, and reported there was an immense “impi” behind the hills to our left, and he had scarcely made the report when the Zulus appeared in force in front of us and to our left. They were in skirmishing order but ten or twelve deep, with support close behind. They opened fire on us at about 800 yards, and advanced very rapidly.”

That reads as if they came round and over the hill (2800). I don’t think Colonel Durnford was persuaded to retire by Hlubi. (Note map 2).

²² Killie Campbell Africana Library, KCM 89/9/34/13: Letter from Edward Durnford to Evelyn Wood, 4th October 1880.

Durnford here cites a passage from Lieut. W.F.D. Cochrane's statement (in WO 32/7713) in support of his argument to place the Undi and Uve in the Ngwebeni ravine rather to the west of Mabaso (which he refers to as '2800'). He concludes by disagreeing with the Durban Map 2 notation that '... when Hlubi hearing the firing of mounted and other contingents of Basuto persuaded him to retire.'

What are we to make of this? The letter certainly refers to details to be found on the two Durban maps but what about their cousins in the R.E. Museum?

The first thing to note is that the two parallel lines of circles on the R.E. Museum Map are identified as 'N.N. Horse under Durnford trying in vain to check the Uve'. Thus the Durnford letter could not have been referring to this map because it refers to *N.N. Horse* and not *Hlubi's Basutos*. Wood may not have known the correct names of the two troops of horse which Durnford took with him, but Henderson, having command of one of them, most certainly did.

A second point is that on the Durban map 2, the Undi and Uve are shown as the right-most units in the arc of regiments. On the RE Museum equivalent, the right-most are the iNdlondlo and the Uve, while to their immediate left are the Undi and iGobamakhosi. Once again, Edward Durnford could only have been referring to the Durban map.

It would seem, therefore, that Durnford had seen only the two Durban maps, and that these had possibly (but not certainly) been annotated by Evelyn Wood, perhaps from information which he gathered when he returned to Natal. We know that he left South Africa with Lord Chelmsford in late July 1879 but returned to Natal in March 1880 when he escorted the Empress Eugénie on her visit to the site of the Prince Imperial's death. His visit lasted until the following July, during which time he and his charge visited Hlobane, Khambula and the site of the Prince's death. Since Edward Durnford's letter was written in October 1880, this was perhaps the only opportunity that Wood could have had to annotate the maps, although he makes no reference to them in his autobiography.

But where do the RE Museum maps fit in? They are too close in their details to have been generated independently. One might speculate that Edward Durnford made copies of the two maps for his own use and these eventually found their way into the RE Museum. If so, it will be noted that he modified some of the entries on the maps to correspond with his own views as represented to Wood.

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