

THE ANGLO ZULU WAR AND ITS PLACE IN HISTORY Imperial Showstopper or Imperial Sideshow?

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The title of this article begs an immediate question: Whose History? For the Zulu Kingdom the Anglo-Zulu War was a seminal event with far-reaching consequences that extend to the present day. From the British perspective, the war was little more than an embarrassing and expensive sideshow. Lord Salisbury, Foreign Secretary at the time of the war and later Prime Minister, accepted the inevitability of small colonial wars but he was accurately reflecting contemporary political opinion when he later described them as “merely the surf that marks the edge of the advancing wave of civilisation”. (1) The Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, which lasted barely six months, was one such war.

In the past 120 years there has evolved a truly prodigious bibliography covering every conceivable aspect (and some inconceivable ones) of this minor Victorian conflict. Michael Caine may have done much to revive modern interest in the war but this interest has never been dormant. It is the sheer drama of the opening weeks of the war that has always captured the imagination. Not since the Indian Mutiny in 1857 had imperial forces been so completely humiliated. As Captain Erich Wagner has recently highlighted (2), the British Army lost more officers at Isandlwana, 52 than it did during the three battles of the Waterloo campaign, 48. No battalion had ever lost so many officers in a single engagement. The heroic stand of the 2nd/24th at Rorke’s Drift partially redeemed imperial honour and captured the public imagination forever. But the conduct of this sad and unnecessary war and the events preceding it raised a broad range of issues, many of which were only later fully understood. The war was the first real test of Cardwell’s “short-service” Army reforms of 1870-71 and the results were not encouraging. (3) This article explores the wider British political context within which the war took place.

The 1874 –1880 Conservative Administration and South Eastern Africa

The Conservative Administration then in power had been elected in 1874. It was the first Conservative majority administration since 1846 but it achieved little of long-term consequence during its time in office. Disraeli (made Lord Beaconsfield in 1876), Prime Minister through the period, was at the end of a long career. By the late 1870s South Africa was no longer the key point on the strategic sea routes to India. That position had been usurped by the Suez Canal that opened in November 1869. Disraeli’s audacious acquisition of shares in the Suez Canal Company in 1875 had underlined its strategic significance for Britain and thereafter Egypt moved increasingly into the British sphere of influence. South-eastern Africa was an economic backwater. The major gold discoveries that later were to transform the region and its complex political relationships were to come in the 1880s. Natal’s economy in the 1870s was essentially pastoral and Whitehall regarded the self-governing colony as a poor stepsister of the Cape Colony. The author Anthony Trollope, in his fourth travel book (4), written between July 1877 and January 1878 during a visit to South Africa, provides a perceptive account of contemporary life in Natal where he arrived in August 1877. Trollope’s account of an essentially settler agricultural society also reflects the contemporary stereotyping of native peoples, and is permeated by his populist, albeit qualified, views on imperial destiny and on relationships between black and white people.

The Colonial Secretary since 1874, the Earl of Carnarvon, a liberal-minded Tory, had been responsible for a successful scheme of Confederation in Canada while serving under Lord Derby in the minority Conservative administration of 1866/67. This precedent transplanted to the South African colonies naturally appealed to tidy-minded administrators in London who wanted to see a northward-stretching African empire better able to support itself economically. Confederation was therefore the lynchpin of the new administration’s southern Africa policy although at the time it attracted little political attention in Britain and Carnarvon was largely left to his own devices to pursue it. Carnarvon informed Disraeli about his plans for the Transvaal in September 1876, seeking his approval. Disraeli, showing little interest, replied (5):

In all these affairs I must trust to you, and you are a person in whom I have much trust. Do what you think wisest.

It was the annexation of the Transvaal in the cause of Confederation in April 1877 that set in motion the destabilising events that culminated in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. As a result of his trip to Natal and the Transvaal Trollope wrote (6):

I left England hoping that I might advocate South African Confederation. But, alas, I have come to think it inexpedient, and, if expedient, still impracticable.

Few people in Whitehall were listening. During Trollope's absence the Government introduced a South African Permissive Bill in support of Confederation. The die was already cast.

The Eastern Question

It is against the backdrop of the "Eastern Question" and the balance of power within Europe that the political significance of the Anglo-Zulu War must be assessed. Seen in this dominating light the war was never more than a distraction for a British government whose priorities were fully absorbed elsewhere.

For much of the nineteenth century Britain had nervously watched successive attempts by Russia to make territorial gains at the expense of a visibly decaying and corrupt Ottoman Empire. The Crimean War was the most extreme manifestation of this concern. It was, however, a case of the head, in the form of Britain's perceived diplomatic and strategic imperatives, versus the heart, in the form of sympathy for the Ottoman Empire's persecuted Christian subjects. This dichotomy had come to the boil in 1876 with the "Bulgarian Atrocities". In the most famous political pamphlet of the nineteenth century Gladstone had used this to launch a moral crusade against Disraeli. (7) The latter, whatever his private qualms, did not see it in Britain's interests to accommodate Russia's concerns for the welfare of fellow Christian Slavs. What Disraeli wanted above all was to deny Russian naval access to the Mediterranean via the Sea of Marmara and, if possible, gain a new naval stronghold at the expense of Turkey in the eastern Mediterranean, to protect the vital shipping route to India. He knew full well that British public opinion did not want to see Russians in Constantinople. In this he was to be supported by Lord Salisbury, Secretary of State for India, and increasingly seen as Disraeli's deputy and eventual successor. Foreign affairs dominated domestic politics for the rest of the Conservative administration's term of office. The issues they raised went to the very heart of the balance of power in Europe, the governance of India, imperial prestige and Britain's traditional wish to avoid entangling treaty-based alliances.

Britain's response to the "Eastern Question" not only polarised the nation along broadly party political lines; it also brought to the surface deep divisions of opinion within the Conservative Cabinet. These divisions were compounded by the early manoeuvrings on the part of potential successors to Disraeli for the leadership of the Conservative Party. As we shall see later, the ripples from these divisions were soon to impinge directly upon the colonial administration in Natal.

By April 1877 the Cabinet was actively discussing contingency plans to occupy Gallipoli in order to forestall a Russian occupation of Constantinople. In late April Russia declared war on Turkey, ostensibly to protect Christian Slavs, and successfully advanced in force into the south-eastern Balkans. By July a deeply divided Cabinet had (with great reluctance on the part of several members, notably Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, and the Earl of Carnarvon, the Colonial Secretary) accepted Beaconsfield's hawkish position that a Russian occupation of Constantinople would constitute a *casus belli*. In December the Turkish fortress of Plevna fell to the Russians, leaving the road to Constantinople open. By this time patriotic feelings in Britain were running high. Music hall "jingoism" had become a powerful political force in the late 1870s reflecting, as we shall see later, a changing perception of the concept of Empire, and it could not be ignored.

We don't want to fight
But, by jingo if we do
We've got the ships, we've got the men,
We've got the money too.
We've fought the Bear before,
And while we're Britons true,
The Russians shall not have Constantinople (8)

Parliament was recalled in mid-January 1878 to approve an increased vote of credit for the army and navy – all part of a gigantic game of diplomatic poker. At that point the total combat strength of the British regular army numbered little more than 100,000 and it was facing the prospect of dangerous overstretch. The Russian army

numbered 1.5 million. Few people at that point realised quite the extent to which militarily the British Empire was one huge bluff.

In the middle of the month the Cabinet finally agreed to send a British fleet to the Dardanelles. As a result, Carnarvon and Derby, believing the defence of Turkey was morally indefensible, resigned in February (Derby withdrew his resignation a few days later) just as the British fleet arrived in the Dardanelles. It was to remain anchored there for six months. By this time Turkey was actively seeking peace and on March 3rd 1878 the Treaty of San Stefano concluded the Russo-Turkish War. Its terms, however, were too draconian for other European powers to accept, particularly Britain, since they effectively tore up the Treaty of Paris that had ended the Crimean War. Disraeli and Salisbury henceforward adopted bellicose diplomatic positions that finally led to Derby's resignation as Foreign Secretary in April and his replacement by Salisbury. The astute Salisbury had initially been a "dove" but early on saw the growing possibility of himself succeeding Derby as Foreign Secretary (and eventually Disraeli as Prime Minister) by assuming the more hawkish position shared by Disraeli and a deeply Russophobic Queen Victoria.

Astute and intense diplomacy in the spring of 1878 culminating in the Congress of Berlin hosted by Bismarck and beginning on June 13th 1878 averted the threat of a general European war. The Treaty of Berlin, which amongst other things ceded Cyprus to Britain, was signed on July 13th. Disraeli and Salisbury returned to Britain in triumph bearing "peace with honour". It was to prove the high point of the 1874–80 Conservative administration.

Egypt

A major preoccupation of the British Government throughout 1878 was the deteriorating situation in Egypt, nominally still a part of the Ottoman Empire but in reality under the control of representatives of European bondholders who had lent large sums to the Khedive. The strategic importance of the Suez Canal inevitably meant an active British involvement in Egyptian affairs. In January 1879 the Khedive led a nationalist revolt and expelled his British advisers. With British forces now hard pressed in Zululand and Afghanistan, a military response to pre-empt any French move was out of the question even though Egypt was a far more important British interest than Zululand could ever be. Instead, using its strong "influence" with its nominal ally in the Near East, Britain "persuaded" the Turkish Sultan to replace the Khedive and the required *coup d'etat* took place in June 1879 just as British forces were closing in on Ulundi at the other end of Africa. It was not until 1882 that British forces were to occupy Egypt.

Afghanistan

As events unfolded in the Near East and Egypt developments in that other zone of conflict between Britain and Russia, Afghanistan, were leading almost simultaneously to armed conflict. British policy in central Asia had always aimed to keep Afghanistan within the British sphere of influence, thereby preventing any chance of a Russian advance into India – *The Great Game*. (9) Lord Lytton, Viceroy since 1876, had favoured an aggressively "forward" policy to achieve this aim, much against the Secretary of State Salisbury's, sound instincts and explicit instructions to do nothing. Lytton had unsuccessfully pressed the Amir to accept a British mission in Kabul, but as early as the spring of 1877 London was becoming seriously worried by Lytton's aggressive stance and its inability to control him. With the mounting storm clouds in the Balkans threatening a general European war, the last thing London wanted was another conflict, least of all with Russia. Yet when news came in July 1878 that the Amir had received a Russian mission in Kabul, Lytton, without reference to London, sent a heavily armed column through the Khyber Pass where it was repulsed. Although Lytton had acted in contravention of strict Cabinet instructions, Imperial prestige required a firm response whatever the risks. In November 1878 three British columns entered Afghanistan. Kabul fell in early January 1879 and a British mission (subsequently massacred in September 1879!) was installed.

Zululand

At precisely the same time as events in Afghanistan and Egypt were coming to a climax, but unknown to London, another aggressive consul, Sir Bartle Frere, was advancing into Zululand half a world away.

The resignation of Lord Carnarvon over the Eastern Question in February 1878 had come at an important juncture in the geopolitics of south-eastern Africa. Carnarvon had been the sponsor of Confederation within the Cabinet and in January 1878 had met high-level delegations from South Africa at the Colonial Office to advance Confederation in the light of the recent annexation of the Transvaal. Carnarvon was succeeded as Colonial Secretary by Sir Michael

Hicks Beach, a tough, obstinate and ill-tempered West Country landowner who had hitherto shown no particular interest in southern African affairs or indeed in colonial affairs generally. He proved no match for Frere who had begun preparing for war with the Zulu Kingdom as soon as he had arrived at the Cape in 1877.

Although colonial affairs were not his departmental responsibility, Salisbury (now in effect Disraeli's deputy) was deeply concerned by the effect of "forward" colonial policies on his management of foreign affairs and relationships with other European powers. He was instinctively cautious about such policies and greatly preferred "the civilising influence of informal empire rather than territorial conquest." (10)

Although the conduct of affairs in Zululand impinged on no other European power, the Cabinet well understood that a "hot" war there would inevitably siphon off desperately overstretched military resources at the precise moment they were required elsewhere. Carnarvon had warned Frere in January 1878, just before his resignation, that:

We cannot now have a South African war on our hands and if the worst comes to the worst you must all temporise and wait for a better opportunity of settling these controversies. (11)

This message was backed up by Hicks Beach in a letter to Frere in November 1878 when he warned: (12)

the fact is that matters in Eastern Europe and India...wear so serious an aspect that we cannot have a Zulu war in addition to other greater and too possible troubles.

It was not until late September 1878 that it really dawned on the Cabinet what was actually going on in South Africa. In a private letter to Lady Bradford on September 28th 1878, Disraeli wrote (13):

If anything annoys me more than another it is our Cape affairs, where every day brings forward a new blunder of Twitters (Carnarvon). The man he swore by was Sir Theophilus Shepstone, whom he looked upon as heaven born for the object in view. We sent him out entirely for Twitters' sake, and he has managed to quarrel with Eng., Dutch and Zulus; and now he is obliged to be recalled, but not before he has brought on, I fear, a new war.

By October 1878, Salisbury was holding meetings of Foreign Office ministers whom he felt opposed a "forward" policy in south-eastern Africa in an unsuccessful attempt to restrain Frere. (14) Salisbury had briefly been Secretary of State for India in Lord Derby's minority Conservative administration between July 1866 and July 1867. He had then found Sir Bartle Frere, a former Governor of Bombay, "quarrelsome and mutinous". In 1866 Salisbury had written how "*impatience of control is a common defect in men of his able and fearless character and his impetuosity of disposition.*" (15) How true this insight eventually proved! Carnarvon had appointed Frere as Governor General at the Cape in 1877 without even consulting Salisbury. The ultimatum to Cetshwayo on December 11th 1878 was sent without Cabinet approval.

The Political Aftermath

When in the early hours of February 11th 1879 news of Isandlwana reached London it was not just a bolt from the blue. It reached a Cabinet table heavily laden with more pressing foreign policy issues. The Cabinet nevertheless had little option but to grant Lord Chelmsford's request for massive reinforcements no matter how much the overstretch. The immediate political debate at Westminster has been well covered by Adrian Greaves. (16)

Within the context of the British Army, Zululand was to prove a significant diversion and its cost (a remarkably precise figure of £5,230,328, subsequently provided by the War Office) was several times higher than any recent colonial campaign. In the late 1870s the total of army ranks, including reservists, was approximately 180,000 of which two thirds were infantry. The total numerical strength of the regular 141 infantry battalions approached 100,000 and by late 1878 more than half of these were stationed abroad. The strength of the home-based regular infantry battalions numbered fewer than 40,000. Chelmsford's three columns advancing into Zululand contained around 5,500 regular British infantry and after Isandlwana he was to be reinforced with a further 10,000 imperial troops. The extent of the overstretch would be familiar to modern British military strategists. (17)

In private Disraeli and most of his Cabinet felt that Frere should have been recalled as soon as news of his ultimatum to Cetshwayo had reached London in early January. In retrospect this would have absolved the Cabinet of responsibility for the Anglo-Zulu War. However, Hicks Beach vigorously defended Frere. The Cabinet, not wanting another public rift so soon after the last one, had reluctantly acquiesced in the subsequent invasion of Zululand. Hicks Beach had written to Disraeli on January 13th 1879

So that, on the whole, though Frere's policy – especially in the matter of cost – is extremely inconvenient to us at the present moment, I am sanguine as to its success, and think we shall be able, without much difficulty, to defend its main principles here. I think it most fortunate that we sent out the reinforcements

when we did. Frere had made up his mind not to be stopped by the want of them; but if the weakness of his forces had led to any failure at first, a most serious war might have resulted, and we should have had to bear all the blame. Now he has got all the force he asked for, in time to finish off the affair easily and quickly, if his calculations as to what he is undertaking are at all accurate. (18)

The Cabinet with its eye more on the public relations of imperial prestige than anything else chose not to recall Frere whom it had appointed in the first place. In time-honoured fashion it instead appointed a Court of Inquiry. Frere enjoyed the support of Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales and Disraeli was never going to impair his close relationship with them both.

In his speech in the House of Lords on February 13th Disraeli deflected criticism by dwelling on the bravery of the 24th Regiment at Rorke's Drift. There was nothing to be gained by defending Frere. The subsequent award of the 11 Victoria Crosses was to be staggered at intervals over seven months in an attempt to manage public opinion. The art of spin was already alive and well. The role of press coverage of the Anglo-Zulu War and its growing influence on the conduct of military campaigns in the mid-Victorian period is well described by Wagner (2).

The private views of most Cabinet members are graphically illustrated by the story of the Conservative MP, Sir Henry Holland, who in a full-scale debate on Zululand in May 1879, had indicated to his Whips his intention to vote with the Opposition on its motion of censure of Frere. He was sent to Salisbury who asked him: "Are you concerned that it is your duty to state your views in the House, and to support the motion?" "I am," answered Holland. "Then I advise you to do your duty, and may I add, for your personal information, that I concur largely with your view of the action of Sir Bartle Frere." (19)

The aftermath of Isandlwana naturally provided the Liberal Party with plenty of opportunity to attack Frere and the Government's ultimate responsibility for the disaster. However, it posed a dilemma for the opposition. Repeated references to imperial failure could easily look like gloating over British defeat and it hardly needed an overly aggressive political campaign to point out the national humiliation of Isandlwana. Significantly, Gladstone chose not to intervene in the Zulu War debate immediately after news of Isandlwana became known, preferring to keep a low profile. In the end Frere stayed and the Government weathered the immediate political storm.

Zululand & The 1880 General Election

By the time of the Anglo-Zulu War the 1874 Parliament was drawing to a close and a general election could be little more than a year away. Gladstone, leader of the Liberal Party, had emerged from retirement in 1876 at the time of the "Bulgarian Atrocities" to begin his moral crusade against "Beaconsfieldism". Although Gladstone was already the member for Greenwich it was not a seat to which he had any particular attachment and at the end of January 1879, just before the news of Isandlwana, he accepted the invitation to contest Midlothian at the next general election. He was determined to turn his election campaign into a state trial of the Government's foreign and colonial policies.

Gladstone launched his famous Midlothian campaign in six set-piece speeches delivered in Scotland between November 24th and December 8th 1879. They were a powerful and closely argued indictment of Disraeli and set the tone for the coming general election campaign. Zululand and the annexation of the Transvaal featured only peripherally in Gladstone's broad attack, however. It was the morality of Disraeli's support for the Ottoman Empire and to a lesser extent the recent disaster in Afghanistan that took the limelight as regards foreign and colonial policies. Zululand received only three passing mentions in the six speeches. The most significant was in the second speech at Dalkeith on November 26th when he stated:

If we cast our eyes to South Africa, what do we behold? That a nation whom we term savages have in defence of their own land offered their naked bodies to the terribly improved artillery and arms of modern European science, and have been mowed down by hundreds and by thousands, having committed no offence, but having, with rude and ignorant courage, done what were for them, the duties of patriotism. You may talk of glory, you may offer rewards – and you are right to give rewards to the gallantry of your soldiers, who, I think, are entitled not only to our admiration for courage, but to our compassion for the nature of the duties they have been called to perform. But the grief and the pain none the less remain. (20)

In early March 1880 the Cabinet finally decided to dissolve Parliament and call an immediate General Election. By that time Zululand, Afghanistan and the Near East were all quiet and recent by-election results had been surprisingly good for a tired Government now in power for six years. Gladstone fought a clever campaign in which on one hand he appealed to his own political enthusiasts over the morality of Disraeli's support for Turkey, while on

the other he appealed to the wider electorate to vote against the Government because it was responsible for the general depression of trade and increase in taxation. Zululand was, therefore, not a mainstream issue in the campaign but the Government's mishandling of it had contributed to a growing climate of electoral dissatisfaction in the late 1870s. (21)(22)

Another indication of the significance of the Anglo-Zulu War within the broader political scene is provided by the references to it in contemporary memoirs and biographies. The overall impression they leave is of a sideshow. In a recent authoritative study of the political life of Lord Salisbury (23), who was at the very heart of the 1874-80 Conservative Cabinet, there is not one single mention of Zululand. It is clear from the memoirs and biographies of all the leading statesmen that their minds were firmly fixed elsewhere. Zululand rarely receives more than a passing mention although many politicians probably had very good reasons to gloss over events for which they had some responsibility.

In the end, the 1880 General Election results were both disastrous and surprising for the Conservatives. Gladstone emerged with an overall majority of 52. How the new Liberal Government was to handle southern African affairs lies beyond the scope of this article. It was not to be a happy outcome either for Gladstone or southern Africa.

The Anglo-Zulu War & The British Empire

The Anglo-Zulu War was therefore firmly positioned on the periphery of imperial strategic interests and of domestic British politics. In reality it was no more than the "surf" so aptly described by Salisbury. Although it highlighted many important weaknesses in British military planning and control, the campaign still reads like an episode from the *Boys' Own Paper* and has lost none of its ability to fascinate. Significantly the *Boys' Own Paper* was first published in 1879 and by the mid-1880s had achieved a circulation of a million.

Yet at the same time the war touched the wider conscience of Victorian England. It heightened awareness of the economic, political and moral issues, often in conflict, that were necessarily inherent in Empire. It was a process encouraged by a well-informed press and an increasingly sophisticated electorate. There had been a growing liberal consciousness during the 1860s and 1870s of the responsibility of Empire towards native peoples as part of a wider debate about the role and purpose of Empire. The brutal suppression of the Jamaica Rebellion in 1865 and subsequent trial of Governor Eyre had sparked a serious debate about the relationship between black and white within the Empire (24). Public opinion had been sharply divided over that issue. In liberal and intellectual circles the notion of basic human equality had taken strong root, epitomised by the work of the Aborigines Protection Society, the British Anti-Slavery Society, the House of Commons Aborigines Committee and various Church missionary societies. The Langa libalele Rebellion in Natal in 1873 had similarly touched the liberal conscience. It was this incident that led John William Colenso, Bishop of Natal, to devote the remainder of his tragic life to the causes of justice, mercy and truth on behalf of the native peoples of southern Africa (25) (26).

The war came at a point in British history when the idea of Empire was moving away from a concept underpinned by the economics of trade towards an ideal driven by jingoism and a sense of moral destiny. By the late 1870s the jingoistic demands of imperialism had, for the time being at least, largely drowned out the liberal message. Arguably the high water mark of Victorian imperialism was the declaration of Queen Victoria as Empress of India on January 1st 1877 just a few months prior to the events covered in this article. Not surprisingly Gladstone and the majority of the Liberal Party deplored the morality of conquest, although when in office they had to qualify this belief with large doses of pragmatism, as subsequent events between 1880 and 1885 were to demonstrate so quickly. Any Conservative Party misgivings about territorial conquest were generally based on more practical grounds and usually expressed in private. However, the economic and military liabilities of territorial aggrandisement were well understood by politicians of all persuasions. "Influence" was much the preferred route. Politicians of all stripes, however, could not ignore the tide of public opinion.

There was nevertheless always an undercurrent of public sympathy for the underdog and a sense of responsibility for native peoples however much at variance that might now seem with modern political values. Hence the great admiration for the Zulu people that continues to the present day and the warm welcome given to Cetshwayo when he visited England in the summer of 1882.

Although final military victory at Ulundi largely took Zululand off the front pages, few at the time foresaw the long-term implications of that victory for the British Empire. Those few were drowned out by the inevitable outburst of jingoism and sense of relief. Yet some thoughtful politicians did realise at the time that elimination of the supposed Zulu menace would simply encourage the Boers to reverse the annexation of the Transvaal. They could not have foreseen that over the next 20 years this was to lead directly to armed conflict and a legacy of bitterness on

a far more ruinous scale than anything seen in the Anglo-Zulu War. It was this that finally “took much of the sheen off the reputation of the British Empire.”(27)

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The Zulus are destroyed and this effectively marks the end of the Anglo-Zulu War. Above: The burning of Ulundi. 8th July 1879 " Lord Chelmsford resigns. Undeniably one of the most obscure and unusual "wars" in history, this is the story of how the killing of an escaped pig almost caused a war between the United States and Britain. read more. Barbary Pirates and English Slaves. The Anglo-Zulu war, the proud Zulu nation against mighty Great Britain. The undelying motive that gave rise to the Anglo Zulu war of 1879 was the fact that Great Britain regarded the Zulus and the "Voortrekker boers" as British subjects. The Zulu army had been so successful at Isandlwana, that its reserve force was not even brought into action. It was this part of the Zulu army that was sent to pursue the handful of British survivors. Loosing almost half of its forces together with most of the supplies at Isandlwana together with the misfortunes of the other two columns, brought the British invasion into Zululand virtually to a standstill. Regrouping and reinforcements were urgently needed. The Anglo-Zulu War was fought in 1879 between the British Empire and the Zulu Kingdom. Following the Constitution Act of 1867 for the federation in Canada, by Lord Carnarvon, it was thought that similar political effort, coupled with military campaigns, might succeed with the African kingdoms, tribal areas and Boer republics in South Africa. In 1874, Sir Bartle Frere was sent to South Africa as High Commissioner for the British Empire to effect such plans. Among the obstacles were the armed How the Zulus inflicted the British army's worst defeat by a native force at Isandlwana. At eleven o'clock in the morning of January the 22nd 1879, a troop of British scouts chased a group of Zulus into the valley of Ngwebeni in Zululand. The scouts stopped dead in their tracks when they saw what the valley contained. Sitting on the ground in total silence were 20,000 Zulu warriors. It was an astonishing sight. The battle that followed this remarkable discovery was a disaster.