



Mashonaland Branch of the History Society of Zimbabwe

Brochure No.10

Copy 138

Centenary of the Matabele War of 1893: Visit to the Laager Site near Iron Mine Hill, the Shangani Battlefield and Fort Gibbs

*Souvenir of an outing to the Midlands area
by members of The History Society of Zimbabwe
25th–26th September 1993.*

The Last Stand of Major Allan Wilson — 4 December 1893



from a painting by Allan Stewart

Source: National Archives

Brief Outline of the Matabele War



On 16th October 1893 the Victoria Column commanded by Major Allan Wilson joined up with the Salisbury Column, under command of Major Patrick Forbes, at what is now Finland Farm, 3 kilometres west of Iron Mine Hill, the feature chosen as the meeting point of the two columns.

A third column, 448 soldiers in strength, commanded by Lt.-Col. Goold-Adams of the Bechuanaland Border Police including 225 men from Tuli under Commandant Pieter Raaff, known as the Southern Column, left Tati on 19th October 1893.

The objective of these forces was to overcome the power of the Matabele under their King, Lobengula, and to annex Matabeleland to the British South Africa Company's territory.

The first casualty of the Campaign occurred on 14th October 1893 when Capt. Campbell was shot in the thigh and, following the amputation of his leg by Dr Jameson, died and was buried near the spot where the two columns first laagered.

The Victoria and Salisbury forces, numbering 672 troops, under the overall command of Major Forbes, progressed in a south-westerly direction towards Bulawayo. Their first major test under fire came shortly before 4 a.m. on 25th October 1893 after they had crossed the Shangani River. They were attacked by Matabele warriors of the Insukamini, Isiziba, Ihlati and Induba Regiments, with the Amavoni, Ujinga and Exna Regiments in reserve. The Maxim machine guns dealt their devastation on the attackers, who, abandoning their traditional methods of warfare and fighting with modern rifles they were unused to, were forced to retreat.

The Column progressed towards Bulawayo and on 1st November 1893, encountered more determined and better organized Matabele Impis, including the Imbezo and Ingubo Regiments, at the battle of the Bembezi. A frontal attack on the laager reflected the great courage of the Matabele. A near catastrophe for the invading force was narrowly averted when the Column's horses stampeded. But for the skill of Lt. Tyndale-Biscoe on the Maxim and the horsemanship of a few members of the Column, the horses would have been lost to the Matabele. The weight of fire power again won the day and Bulawayo was occupied by Forbes's Column on 4th November 1893.

Lobengula fled north and the decision was taken to follow him in the hope of catching up with him and bringing him back to his capital. Thus arose the most controversial aspect of the campaign when 158 men, again under the command of Major Forbes, marched off to attempt to capture the King. This culminated in the heroic deaths of Allan Wilson and 33 of his men in the mopani forest 7 kilometres north of the Shangani River, and some 50 kilometres east of Lupane on 4th December 1893.

Major Forbes and the tattered remnants of his Column withdrew along the Shangani River, harried by the Matabele, desperately short of food and clothing, and surviving primarily through the cunning and experience of Commandant Raaff.

Lobengula and a band of his followers continued their move northwards. Lobengula died on about 22nd January 1894 and was buried in a cave called Malindi in north-west Zimbabwe.



Personalities



Lobengula ('Driven by the Wind')
Second king of the Matabele. Born in the Transvaal in 1837. Succeeded father, Mzilikazi, on the 22nd Jan. 1870 after considerable political in-fighting. Harsh with his subjects but allowed many Europeans to hunt in his land prior to 1893. Skillfully held the balance between the demands of his warriors and the requests and claims of the Europeans. Had fled north from his capital Bulawayo by 1 Dec. 1893 and died, a fugitive, on 22nd or 23rd Jan. 1894 in north-west Zimbabwe.



Comdt P. J. Raaff CMG
Fought in the Zulu wars. Commanded 'Raaff's Rangers'. Directed much of the Shangani Patrol's withdrawal after the loss of Allan Wilson and his men. His experience largely accounted for the safe return of the Patrol to Bulawayo. Died Bulawayo 26 Jan. 1894.



Major Patrick William Forbes
Born 1861, Oxfordshire, UK. Commissioned into 6th Inniskilling Dragoons. Went to South Africa 1880 — becoming Second-in-command of BSACP during 1890. Was Resident Magistrate in Salisbury at start of 1893 campaign. Commanded Salisbury and then complete Northern column. Wrote best-detailed account of Shangani battle. Generally blamed for the death of Allan Wilson and his men. Died in UK in 1922.



Dr Leander Starr Jameson
Rhodes' 'right-hand man' in Rhodesia. Came up with the 1890 Pioneer Column. Set up the 1893 campaign. Despatched further column to capture Lobengula on the 14th Dec. 1893. Later led ill-fated 'Jameson Raid' Dec. 1895. Prime Minister of the Cape Colony 1904–08. Died London Nov. 1917 and later buried in the Matopos Hills.



Major Allan Wilson
Born 1856 in Scotland. Came to South Africa 1878 and joined Cape Mounted Rifles, then commissioned in Basuto Police. Became Bechuanaland Exploration Co's representative at Fort Victoria in 1892. At start of 1893 campaign was senior officer of the Victoria Volunteers and commanded the Victoria Column throughout campaign. Killed at Shangani on 4th Dec. 1893.

1893 Sequence of Events

(Note: items in square brackets are comments/queries; modern names are in capitals.)

Sun	9	July	Matabele impi commenced killing Mashona in Fort Victoria region
Tues	18	July	Jameson's indaba at Victoria. Matabele dispersed with force.

Salisbury Column (Salisbury-Fort Charter-Iron Mine Hill)

Date	Distance travelled (miles)	Events
Tues 28 Aug	-	Advance Party (Capt. Finch) left Salisbury for Fort Charter.
Tues 5 Sept.	6	15:00 hrs. Salisbury Column (Major Patrick Forbes) left Salisbury
Wed 6 Sept.	6+	Crossed Hunyane at daybreak.
Thurs 7 Sept.	12	(Uneventful)
Fri 8 Sept.	12	Crossed Umfuli and laagered.
Sun 10 Sept.	10	Reached Fort Charter (total distance ± 46 miles). 59 horses arrived 7 Sept and 109 on 22 Sept..
Sat 30 Sept.		Jameson and Sir J. Willoughby visited Fort Charter.
Mon 2 Oct.	6	Left Fort Charter. To first water.
Tues 3 Oct.	±11	To Dawson's (disused) cattle post. [Present FEATHERSTONE]
Wed 4 Oct.	-	Remained at Dawson's. Forbes to and from Fort Charter.
Thurs 5 Oct.	-	Remained at Dawson's.
Fri 6 Oct.	11½	To Dawson's (other) cattle post.
Sat 7 Oct.	2	Left old Bulawayo-Salisbury Hunting Waggon route.
Sun 8 Oct.	7	Jameson confirmed 'push on'. Slight rain in evening.
Mon 9 Oct.	±2½	Crossed Umniati (Matabeleland 'border'). Laagered beyond river.
Tues 10 Oct.	10	Two scout parties sent out (Capt. Williams followed Umniati to old road and then turned south; 'A' troop went to Iron Mine Hill [through present CENTRAL ESTATES]).
Wed 11 Oct.	9	Crossed Sebaque River, reached Umvumi River.
Thurs 12 Oct.	5	Crossed Umvumi.
Fri 13 Oct.	9½	Near headwaters of Bembeswane.
Sat 14 Oct.	±2	Reached Iron Mine Hill ('Sigala') in the morning (total distance 76 miles); in the afternoon laager moved 3 kms west-south-west to site nearer water. First Victoria Column Scouts reached laager that afternoon.
Sun 15 Oct.	-	Patrol out to try to recover cattle [LALAPANZI area]. Capt. Campbell shot (died/buried next day. Grave at grid 085553.) More Victoria Column Scouts arrive after an incident in which they killed 20 Matabele.

Victoria Column (Fort Victoria-Iron Mine Hill)

Fri	6	Oct.-	} 38	Left Fort Victoria. Appears covered 30 miles up main road to Salisbury, via Makori/Makorisi [now CHATSWORTH], and then (to avoid very broken country around Chilimanzi) turned north-west for further 8 miles.
Sun	8	Oct		
Mon	9	Oct. -	} -	Stayed put, awaiting arrival of Artillery and Tuli Detachments (who arrived on 10th)
Wed	11	Oct		
Thurs	12	Oct.	7	Crossed Umshagashi [Shagashi] to within 2 miles of Shashi River.

Date			Distance travelled (miles)	Events
Fri	13	Oct.	12	Crossed Shashi River (border with Matabeleland) then Tetekwe River. Passed kraals of Chaka and Masibadonda. Stopped 1 1/2 miles south-west of Matonga River. Jameson and Willoughby then left column (which was then 29 miles from Iron Mine Hill) to ride ahead. They stopped that night near Makamia's kraal.
Sat	14	Oct.		Jameson and Willoughby reached Iron Mine Hill.
Sun	15	Oct.		Column continued [through CHILIMANZI COMMUNAL LAND]
Mon	16	Oct.		Victoria column reached Iron Mine Hill at 08:00 hrs (29 miles from Matonga River laager).

Combined Columns (Iron Mine Hill-Bulawayo)

Tues	17	Oct.	10 1/2	05:30 hrs. Combined columns left Iron Mine Hill. [Laagered about 2 kms west-north-west of site of FORT GIBBS (built in 1896).]
Wed	18	oct.	8	Continued west. False alarm of 4 000 Matabele turns out to be 100 Mashona! [Laagered just south of present SENALE FARM]
Thurs	19	Oct	-	No move. Day to rest horses.
Fri	20	Oct.	11	Passed 'old gold workings', crossed Gwailo (GWERU) River. Laagered under kopje [around DAYLESFORD]. Major Wilson left at midnight with patrol and burned new Insukameni Regiment Kraal (built for 3 000 people) recently deserted, beyond Khoboli [now KENYANI?] hill. [Name Insukameni still on maps ±12 miles west of GWERU]. Rejoined Column in afternoon of 21st.
Sat	21	Oct	6	Passed south of [GWERU] kopje. Laagered about 3 miles short of WILLOUGHBY SIDING [named after Dr Jameson's military adviser, Sir John Willoughby]

Thereafter the route was some kms north and west of present main road until Shangani

Sun	22	Oct	11	Through corner of Somabhula forest (missing Matabele ambush) in thick fog. Crossed virtually dry Vungu River [GRASSYMEAD area]. Scout skirmish in which 7 Matabele were killed.
Mon	23	Oct.	6	Early-morning fog again. Crossed Vunguane River. Laagered on west bank of Tyabenzi [Niyabensi] River 7 miles north-east of Shangani River. Forward patrol shot up in a small kraal. Trooper Burnett killed.
Tues	24	Oct.	7	Crossed Shangani River and laagered on west bank.
Wed	25	Oct.	3	Battle of Shangani. Three miles travelled in afternoon [to near SHANGANI].
Thurs	26	Oct.	11 1/2	Crossed PONGO River. Jingen and Zinyangane kraals destroyed. Capt. Williams lost (and killed when his horse bolted).
Fri	27	Oct	6?	Several skirmishes [west past NSIZA].
Sat	28	Oct.	-	No move. Searched for Capt. Williams.
Sun	29	Oct.		Uneventful.
Mon	30	Oct.		Uneventful.
Tues	31	Oct	2+	Moved in afternoon.
Wed	1	Nov.	5?	Early morning fog. Battle of the Bembezi.
Thurs	2	Nov.	8	Laagered 3 miles short of Intabas Induna [nr HEANY JUNCTION].
Fri	3	Nov.	6	Bulawayo magazine blown up. Town starts burning.
Sat.	4	Nov.	6	Crossed Umguzu River. Bulawayo occupied.

Southern Column

Thurs	19	Oct.	Left Tati (under command Lt.-Col. Goold Adams (with 223 men of BBP) plus BSAC column of 225 men under Comdt Raaff with 5 Maxims.
Thurs	2	Nov.	Attacked by Gambo.
Tues	14	Nov.	Arrived Bulawayo.

Shangani Patrol

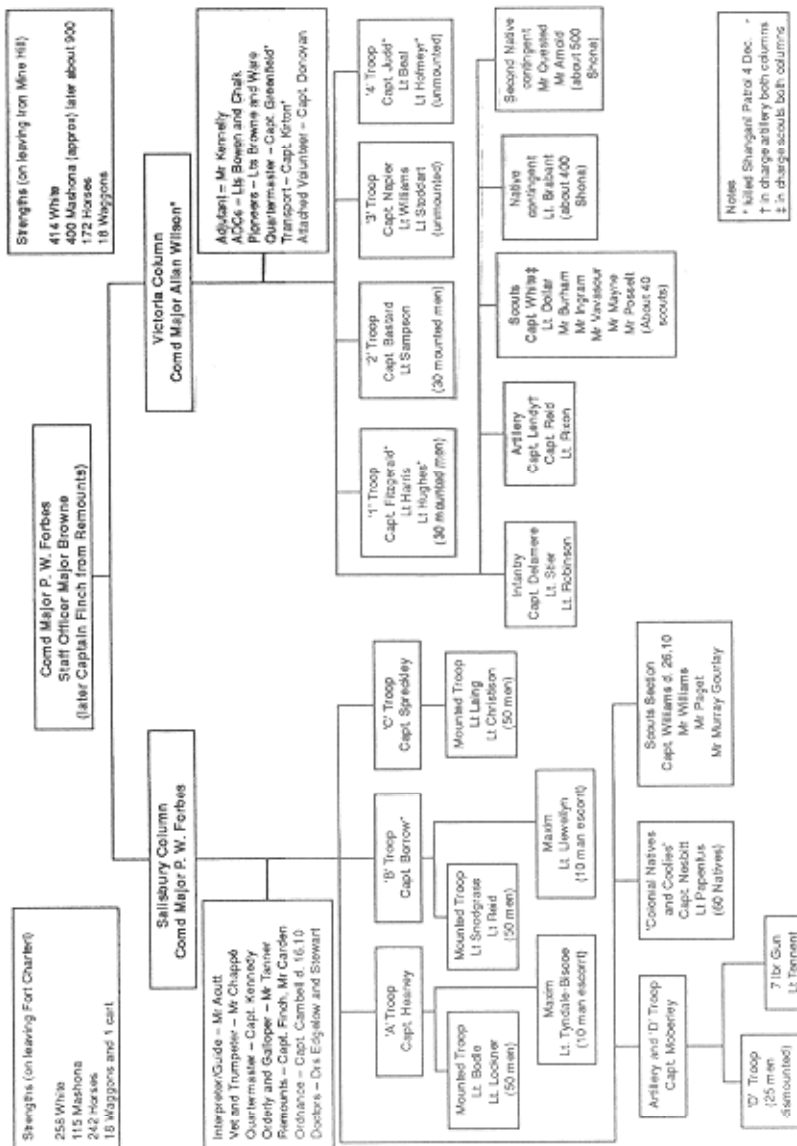
Tues	14	Nov.	Left Bulawayo 19:00 hrs. (300 men, 3 days food, no waggons.)
Thurs	16	Nov	Arrived Inyati. Abortive follow-up to Bubi River.
Thurs	23	Nov	Arrived Shiloh. Waggons and resupply arrived from Bulawayo.
Sat	25	Nov	Left Shiloh.
Wed	29	Nov	Column halved (reduced to 158 men).
Sun	3	Dec	Reached Shangani. Wilson Patrol crossed river at about 17:00 hrs.
Mon	4	Dec	Wilson Patrol killed. Main column also attacked.
Tues	5	Dec	Withdrawal starts.
Sun	10	Dec	'Silent Escape' (Maxim carriages left behind).
Thurs	14	Dec	Sighted by rescuers (Selous and Acutt with relief column).
Mon	18	Dec	Reached Bulawayo.

Thereafter

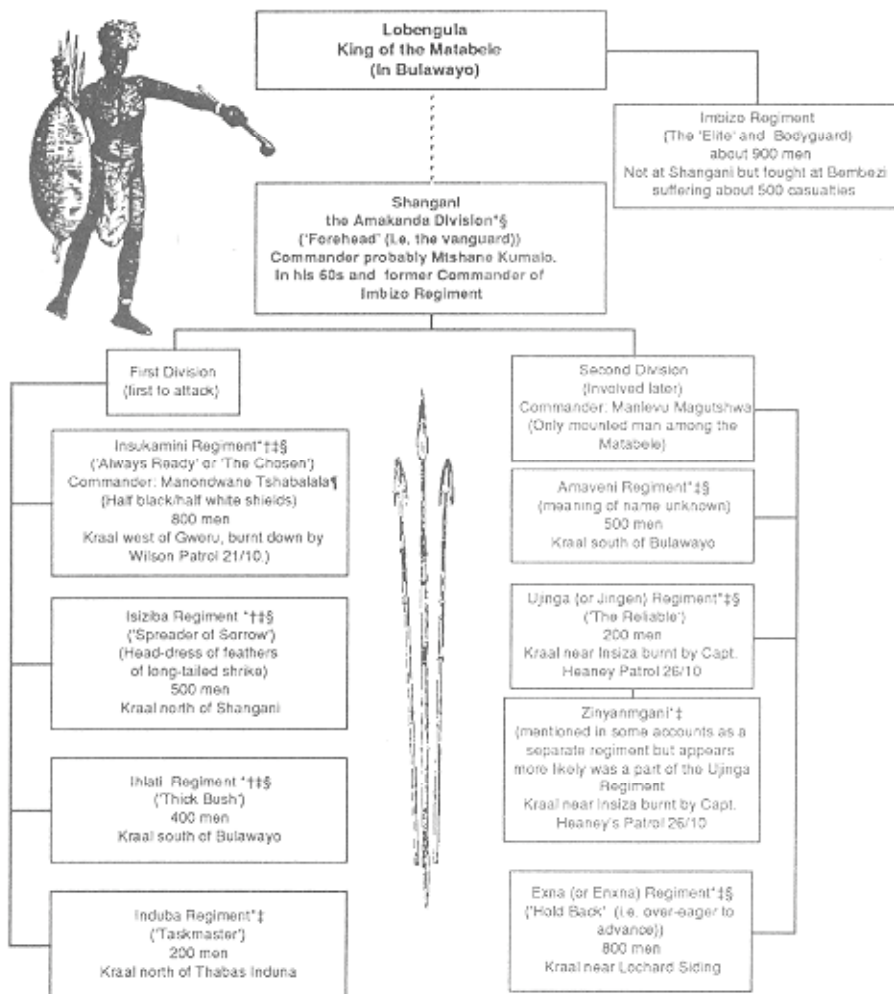
26	Dec	1893	Raaff died in Bulawayo
13	Jan	1894	Capt. Lendy died in Bulawayo.
22/23	Jan	1894	Death of Lobengula.
24	Feb	1894	Trader Dawson found remains of Wilson Patrol.
14	Aug	1984	Wilson Patrol remains interred at Great Zimbabwe.
5	July	1905	Shangani Memorial unveiled at Matopos.



Organization of the Combined Columns



Organization of the Matabele

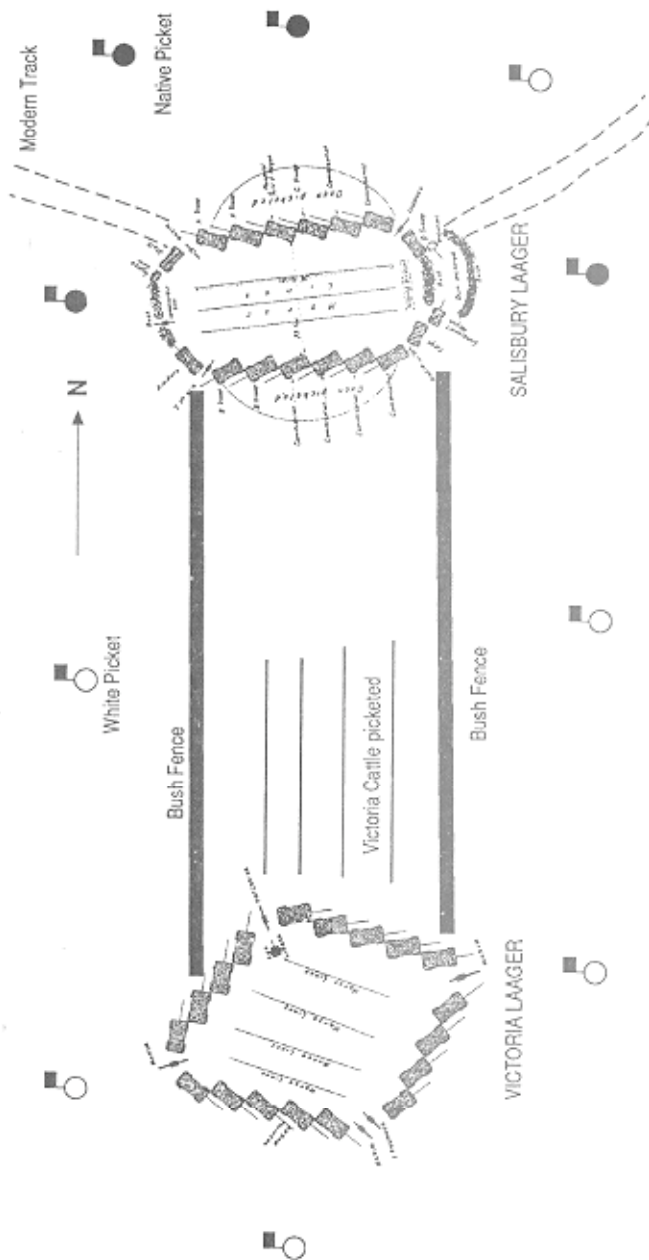


Notes:

- * At the battle according to Forbes, The Defeat of Lobengula
- † At the battle according to Bulpin, To the Banks of the Zambezi
- ‡ At the battle according to Storry, The Shattered Nation
- § At the battle according to Summers and Pagden, The Warriors
- ¶ Reputed to have been wounded in the battle and hanged himself

An 'impi' or task force sent out on a campaign, could be anything from 50 to several thousand men. Regiments tended to be about 750 strong. Total strength at Shangani was possibly about 5 000, but it is more likely that there were 3 800 involved in the battle of whom about 500 became casualties. The total Matabele army was estimated to be 35 to 40 Regiments with a total strength of 16 000 men.

The Laager. Night 24/25 October 1893



Notes:

1 Each White picket = NCO and 6 men; each Native picket = NCO and 3 men.

2 [A laager] could be formed when on the march in from two to three minutes, and when bushed was very strong. It provided room for all the men and horses inside; the oxen were all picketed in front of the right, left, and rear faces. Each driver was provided with two three-foot steel posts, and immediately his wagon was driven into its place, he unhooked the whole span of oxen, and took them clear of the wagons, and as soon as the side was complete, fastened both ends of his trek-tow down, and then tied the oxen up to it. The oxen when crowded close to the wagons, took up very little room, and formed a most effective obstacle. If time allowed, a thick thorn bush fence was always put outside them, and all the wagons not covered by oxen were protected by thorn bush pulled under them. . . . in bush country the whole laager could be completed and bushed up in about ten to fifteen minutes. (Maj P. W. Forbes, in Wills and Collingridge, *The Downfall of Lobengula*)

Battle of Shangani Wed. 25 Oct. 1893 — Summary

(Note: Details primarily from Major Forbes's account)

By 03:45 hrs	Laager surrounded. Isibizi Regiment to north-east, Ihlati Regiment to north-north-west, Induba Regiment to south-south-west, Insukamini Regiment to south-south-east.
03:50 hrs	Water party from Queded's Native Contingent bumps into Isibzi Regiment which in turn attacks contingent killing about 50. Alarm raised. Stand to.
03:55 hrs	First Attack. Laager attacked by rifle fire, but not rushed. Number of Shona sleeping outside laager killed but most get into laager. Attack lasts about 30 minutes and then dies away.
04:30 hrs	Capt. Spreckley's Troop circles close to laager. Finds few Shona and some shots fired.
Dawn	Second Attack. All or part of Insukamini Regiment move down slope of kopje and commence firing when reach bottom. Rifles/maxims break up attack and Regiment retires. This attack also supported by rifle fire from other sides.
Daylight	Three patrols sent out. Capt. Heaney to north, Capt. Spreckley to west, Capt. Bastard to south. Each find Matabele in bush within 1/2 mile, have sharp skirmish and forced to retire to laager. Third Attack. Large Matabele force on kopje forms (probably including Induba Regiment). Shelled and dispersed. Small parties to south, either side, and north of Tisikiso Hill also shelled.
07:30 hrs	Three further patrols sent out. Capt. Heaney to north-west; about 1 000 yards away found Matabele and engaged them but had to retire quickly to new position when attacked on both flanks. Dispersed Matabele from new position. Other patrols went west. Accounts differ as to whether they found little or nothing or if they retired when Heaney came under attack. The Matabele force which had attacked Heaney's troop retired behind a kopje and started to attack but were shelled and dispersed.
08:30? hrs	Further patrols. Capt. Borrow to north (east of kopje last shelled), Capt. Heaney (probably) to west. Neither found anything.
09:00 hrs	Few Matabele on hills (to west). Mr Nesbit's Native Contingent sent out, as ground too difficult for horses, but Matabele retired. End of Battle.

Statistics

<i>Casualties</i>			<i>Ammunition expenditure</i>	
Column	Killed	1 (Tpr Walters)	Martini Henry (incl. Maxims and Nordenfeldt)	3 645 rounds
	Wounded	6	7-lbr	7 rounds
	Shona killed	±50	Hotchkiss	28
	Horses	10	Gardner	400 rounds
	Oxen	'Several'		
Matabele	Killed and wounded	±500		

Battle of Bembezi 1 Nov. 1893

- 1 Columns laagered, a little before noon, on a generally good tactical position on a small hill; Salisbury Column to the north and Victoria Column to the south. Horses and oxen taken to water to south and pickets put out on all sides.
- 2 'Dark cloud' of Matabele seen over a mile to the west. Shelled but not considered a problem. This was in fact the Insukumeni Regiment trying to start the right 'horn' of the attack, but it lost cohesion with the shelling. A little later the left 'horn', the Amaveni, were seen advancing to the east, but came within the range of the maxims with devastating effect.
- 3 Meanwhile the 'chest' (Imbesu or Mbizu — Lobengula's bodyguard) and Ingubo Regiments had got to within 400 yards of the laager without being seen. At about 13:00 hrs they (1 400 men) suddenly charged (unlike at Shangani) straight for the waggons. They got to within nearly 100 yards of the laager before they were decimated by rifle and maxim fire. (One 2-man picket failed to hear the alarm bugle. One trooper was killed but the other, Tpr White, a marathon runner, ran the race of his life and got back to laager — hence the name of the local road).
- 4 When this battle started, the horses which were on their way back from being watered, took fright and stampeded westwards. Without them the Column would have been immobilized and helpless. Fortunately there were still a few men with horses in the laager and they eventually turned the horses back.
- 5 One hundred men, with fixed bayonets, were then sent forward to clear the bush, and troops of horsemen were sent west. The infantry and cavalry were not co-ordinated and the cavalry ran into the fresh Innobo Regiment. However long-range shell and machine-gun fire dispersed them. The battle then spluttered to an end.

Casualties

Column 5 killed, 5 severely wounded.

Matabele Unknown but the Imbesu Regiment lost 500 out of 700 members.

Of the Matabele Charge: 'I cannot speak too highly of the pluck of these two regiments. I believe that no civilised army could have withstood the terrific fire they did for at most half as long' (Sir John Willoughby). Burnham referred to it as 'a battle of Gettysburg [U.S. Civil War] in miniature'.



The Wilson (Shangani) Patrol, 3–4 Dec. 1893

The Background

Bulawayo occupied 4 Nov. A Column with orders to capture Lobengula left Bulawayo on 14 Nov. under the command of Maj Forbes, Maj Wilson and Comdt Raaff. The Column was poorly equipped (little food, no waggons or medical support), morale was low and the leaders bickered. Following the elusive King it eventually reached the Shangani River (about 200 kms downstream of the site of the 25 Oct. battle). Lobengula was thought to be only a few miles north and a patrol, under Maj Wilson, crossed the river in the afternoon of 3 Dec. to attempt his capture. The Patrol was reinforced during the night but surrounded, attacked and wiped out on 4 Dec.

The Events

The sketch map on the opposite page is based largely on conjecture. Only the Shangani River and the final battle site are certain, all other positions, distances and routes are approximate. In reality routes followed by Maj Wilson, Capt. Napier and Capt. Borrow probably followed the same route (the tracks of Lobengula's waggons); but have been separated on the map for clarity. Burnham probably followed a more circuitous route to escape.

Composition for the Patrol

Initially

(left Column ± 17:00 hrs 3 Dec.)

Major Allan Wilson*
Capt. Freddie Fitzgerald*
Capt. Harry Greenfield*
Capt. William Judd*
Capt. Argent Kirton*
Capt. Napier
Lt. Arend Hofmeyer*
Lt. George Hughes*
Sgt. Maj S. C. Harding*
Sgt. Maj Judge
Sgt. C. Bradburn*
Sgt. H. A. Brown*
Cp. F. C. Colquhoun*
Cpl. Ebbage
Tpr D. M. C. Dillon
Tpr A. Hay-Robertson*
Tpr H. J. Hellet*
Tpr J. Robertson*
Tpr E. E. Welby*
Mr Russell Burnham
Mr Robert Bain

Capt. Borrow's Reinforcements

Left Column 01:00 hrs 4 Dec.; joined Wilson at dawn)

Capt. Henry Borrow*
Sgt. W. H. Birkley*
Sgt. H. D. W. M. Money*
Cpl. H. G. Kinloch*
Tpr Abbot*
Tpr W. Bath*
Tpr W. H. Britton*
Tpr. E. Brock*
Tpr P. W. de Vos
Tpr L. Dewis*
Tpr Gooding
Tpr Landsberg
Tpr E. G. MacKenzie*
Tpr M. Meiklejohn*
Tpr. Nesbitt
Tpr P. C. Nunn*
Tpr w. A. Thompson*
Tpr H. StJ. Tuck*
Tpr F. L. Vogel*
Tpr H. G. Watson*
Tpr T. C. Watson*
Mr Pete Ingram

Strengths

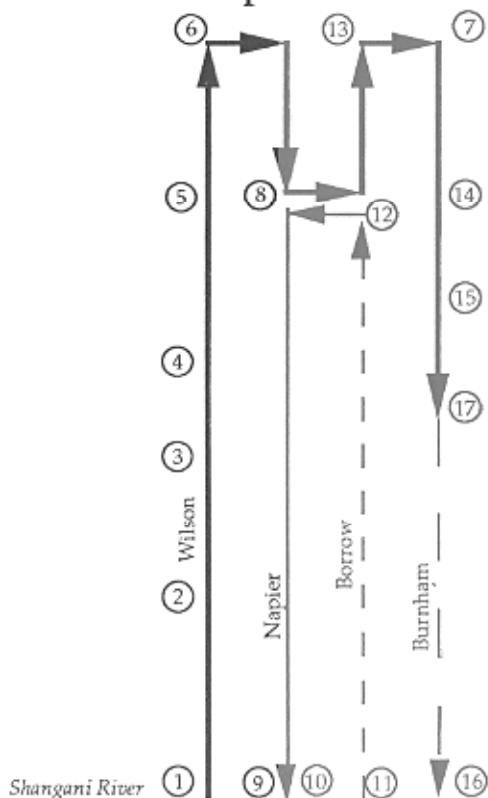
21 (at start)
19 (after Tprs Judge and Ebbage sent back)
16 (after Capt. Napier group left)
17 (after Tpr Robertson rejoined)
16 (after Burnham broke out)

Strengths

22 (when left Column)
20 (when Landsberg and Nesbitt lost their way)
18 (when Gooding and Ingram broke out)

Final Strength: 34 killed on 4 Dec. (Shown as * above)

Wilson Patrol — Sequence of Events 3–4 Dec. 1893



- 1 Late afternoon. Patrol (Wilson and 18 others) cross river.
- 2 Cover 5 miles. No contact. Raining.
- 3 Light fading; more open country.
- 4 Pass low hill with scattered Matabele men and women.
- 5 Cover further mile. Find very large Matabele force on either side, but patrol passes through without incident. Sgt. Maj Judge and Cpl. Ebbage sent back as horses 'knocked up'.
- 6 Cover further mile. Practically dark. Find 2 waggons. Is Lobengula there? (In fact he had already gone.) Suspect a trap. Matabele closing in on either side.
- 7 Scouts report Matabele Impi going towards river. Patrol may be cut off. Decide to retire.
- 8 Retire 1 mile in dark to thick bush. Decide they must get message to Column: 'Forbes must cross and reach us by dawn'. Capt. Napier and 2 troopers go back. Patrol spends night at this spot.
- 9 Capt. Napier and troopers back at laager at 9 p.m. No incidents on the way.
- 10 Forbes decides cannot cross river in the dark especially as Column is itself surrounded (Column only 145 men).
- 11 Forbes decides to send assistance. Capt. Borrow and 20 others (but no maxim) leave at 01:00 hrs.
- 12 Borrow joins Wilson at dawn with no incident. Wilson decides to attempt the capture of the King.
- 13 Return to waggons. Ambushed. Patrol attacked either side.
- 14 Gallop back to anthill. Attacked. 3 wounded.
- 15 Retire slowly, with wounded, under attack. Burnham, Ingram and Gooding manage to break out and get back.
- 16 Burnham reports to Forbes, 'we are the only survivors'.
- 17 Patrol has to stop. Not able to break out in any direction. Final stand. Battle lasts several hours before all killed. Up to 400 Matabele also killed.

1896 Matabele Uprising in the Gwelo Area

Places and events

The Start

On 20 March, 1896, an African policeman and two bearers were murdered near Essexvale (Esigodini). The main 'storm' arose on the 24th when Bulawayo was roused by the first of a stream of reports of Europeans being murdered. The total number of settlers killed (by the Matabele) was 145. (About 28 settlers were murdered in the Gwelo district and their names are recorded on a memorial outside the present Memorial Museum). The news reached Salisbury on 25th March.

Reaction in Gwelo (Gweru)

This settlement was first sited by Dr Jameson (an early proposal to call it Jamestown or Jamesontown appears, however, to have been dropped) and was pegged out by a surveyor called Brown (although an American scout, Burnham, claimed to have done so in 1894). The settlement was envisaged as a centre for mining and transport.

On Tuesday 24 March the usual Zeederberg coach set out for Bulawayo as only half-believable rumours had reached Gweru by that time. On 25 March the settlement received firm news of the uprising (from 'young Napier from Shangani') and a laager was formed that night (there were only 40 rifles available). On the same day, after only a couple of hours notice, Capt. J. A. C. Gibbs (West Riding Regiment) with Mr. J. D. Tennant and a detachment of 10 men of the Rhodesia Horse, left Salisbury for Gwelo with 2 Maxims and 1 000 rounds of ammunition together with 50 spare rifles and 20 000 rounds of ammunition.

They arrived four days later in the late afternoon on the 29th, to find that 350 men, 27 women and 22 children (including 70 from Selukwe and 20 from Shangani) had taken refuge in a rough waggon laager (at the junction of the present Lobengula Avenue and Fifth Street; that is, where the main Police station now stands). 'Captain Gibbs disgusted with state of laager, formed fatigue parties and commenced fixing us up; it's a Godsend he came to camp'. A week after Captain Gibbs arrival the laager was fortified and in order. Surprisingly, the telegraph line to Bulawayo was not cut until 1st April.

On 6th April another force of 150 men of the Rhodesia Horse, under Lt.-Col. Beal left Salisbury, taking with them ample supplies for Gwelo. This column would have started several days earlier if it had not been for the scarcity of transport oxen due to the outbreak of the Rinderpest. This force was accompanied by Cecil Rhodes and reached Gwelo on Saturday 2nd May. It had several minor engagements on the way plus a sharp fight at Maven on 19 May. (Maven appears to have been about 25 kms north-west of Gwelo). The force later linked up with the Bulawayo Force on 24th May at Pongo Store.

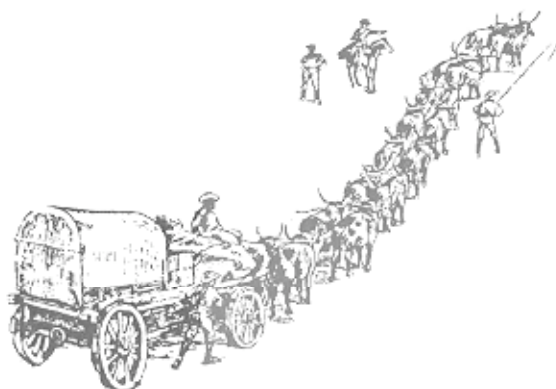


Fort Gibbs

Capt. Gibbs left Gwelo on 20th May with a force of 66 troops and 120 others. On 22nd May he sited Fort Gibbs on Makalaka, a low but commanding kopje controlling the Charter-Bulawayo road and which dominated 'rebel grain lands'. Outer stone walling was completed in a week (still in very good condition) and work started on a brick iron-roofed store on 1st June (no sign of this today). Two weeks later the fort was completed. It was built in the form of a square. Later 'a cattle kraal and pole and dagga huts for officers' mess, hospital and telegraphist were built outside the fort entrance and a larger hut for the men inside'. (No sign of these remain today.)

The Fort never saw action, except for a skirmish on 6th June when a coloured scout killed 3 Matabele. Gibbs left a garrison there on 25th June and went on to Shangani. At the end of 1896 the Fort was taken over by the BSAP and then abandoned at the end of the rebellion.

Fort Gibbs as it is Today



Further Reading

Causes of the War

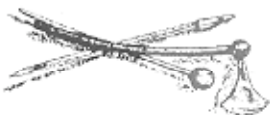
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S. Glass, *The Matabele War* (Longmans, Green, 1968).

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