

Breakfast for Makhanda

The Battle of Grahamstown

22 April 1819

A screen play of 55 Minutes

Philip Copeman

7 May 2021

Cast

Narrator

Expert 1 (British)

Expert 2 (Khoi)

Expert 3 (Xhosa)

No Voice:

Willtshire

Jan Boesack

Makhanda

Stuurman

Enlisted Royal African Corps:

Two White,

Two West African Black enlisted men

Khoi Militia:

Three soldiers, one woman

Xhoza warriors:

Three men, one woman

Fifteen extras:

White towns people, khoi, xhosa

Breakfast for Makhanda

Opening (2:00).....	4
Act 1 Exposition	4
A clash of cultures.....	4
Arrival of the British.....	6
The Eve of the War.....	10
Act 2 Conflict.....	12
Albany.....	12
Amalinde.....	13
Act 3 Rising Action, Climax.....	16
The hand of God moves.....	16
Breakfast for Makhanda.....	16
The hunters become the hunted.....	17
Act 4 Falling Action.....	20
A near run thing.....	20
Act 5 Denouement.....	23
Makhanda came close	23
No medals for the disbanded.....	25
Credits for pilot.....	26

Opening (2:00)

Credits roll

Music is "Isibane" Played with Jazz Quintet. (piano Trio sax and Trumpet)

Scenes of Grahamstown, last post salute, Xhosa women working in their gardens

Narrator:

with Text on Screen

Two hundred years ago, on 22 April 1819, in the now sleepy village of Grahamstown, a battle was fought that would, have a profound effect on the history of South Africa.

Act 1 Exposition

A clash of cultures

Narrator:

Some historians have described this as the most important battle of 19th Century South African history, it foretells events like the [Battle of Blood River](#) (1838) and the [Battle of Rorkes Drift](#) (1879).

The Afrikaners launched a National Holiday to commemorate Blood River and 6 Victoria Crosses were awarded for British heroics at Rorkes Drift. In British military history records, Grahamstown is written up as little more than a skirmish. No accolades for the victors of Grahamstown? In due course I will explain why. First let us look at how the Battle of Grahamstown came about.

Expert 2 Khoi:

Our people had been on the receiving end of Xhosa aggression for hundreds of years. Once our traditional hunting lands extended all the way to modern day Kenya, but we had been pushed ever southward. Our hunter gathering technologies were no match for the well fed pastoralists, who kept moving forward, forever in search of new grazing. We called them "Xhosa" or angry men.

Narrator:

When the white settlers arrived, mostly from Holland, the Khoi soon found themselves trapped between the two cultures. The Dutch brought slavery and servitude. They also brought the Bible and rifles. What they did not bring were women.

Expert 2 Khoi:

The Khoi were indentured into service and mixed both with the slaves and with their masters. offspring of these Unions, were subjects of Dutch derision and racist oppression. There was a strong desire for these mixed families to move away from Dutch Society.

Animation that shows expansion Belville; Stellenbosh, Sellendam, Graaf Reinette

Narrator:

The first 150 years of the Dutch administered Cape Colony had seen a gradual migration Eastwards and an integration of the Settlers with the local Khoi people. The rugged remote life life, while rooted in Calvinism took on the appearance of the African tribes. From this

melting pot came a new culture and a new language - Afrikaans. The Dutch and Khoi rolled into one race, *The Afrikaners*, and rolled ever Eastward. The first real clash with a new culture came in the area East of Algoa Bay when this integrated group met the Xhosa. History placed the Xhosa on a destiny of wars with the Afrikaners and the British Empire that would span 100 years.

Expert 3 Xhosa:

The Xhosa never organised into mass armies in the European sense.

The Xhosa were fractured squabbling tribes continually at peace and at war with each other and the local San and Khoi tribes. They were herders and centered their culture around cattle. The battles were civilised affairs, almost sporting, where warriors lined up for orderly combat, finished by dusk, settled the matter in transfer of cattle and dinner was served to the victors. The Xhosa had never encountered the vicious nature of the British, who burned crops and attacked women and children, because "they couldn't tell the difference".

Arrival of the British

Narrator:

In the early 1800s the Xhosa were ruled by Hintsa and two smaller chiefs [Ngcika and Ndlambe](#) lived in the area East of the Great Fish River. To the West lay the outskirts of the Cape Colony consisting of

the Zuurveld. The Zuurveld was a constant clash area between Settlers and the Xhosa. Both were cattle herders and rustled each others cattle. Zuurveld was history's ideal crucible for war. In the Summer months it provides Africas best cattle grazing (still used today as dairy farms) and in winter the grass dies down and turns poisonous for cattle, who have to be moved off to other pastures. The annual cattle migrations of both Afrikaners and Xhosa, cycled the population and made it a rustlers paradise.

In 1806 the British Empire, now entering the Napoleonic Wars, by the truce of amiens Annexed the Cape and replaced the Batavian Administration. By this time The Xhosas had settled in the Zuurveld (later called [Albany](#)), a district between the [Bushman's](#) and [Fish](#) rivers, which lay beyond the [Cape Colony's](#) frontiers. The Zuurveld was mistakenly assumed by the British to be part of the colony as they misread the frontier laid down by Governor [Joachim van Plettenberg](#) in 1778.

In a time of stress in Europe only the expendibles were sent to the Cape as administrators and soldiers, and the local inhabitants of the Cape Colony, Dutch, Khoi and Xhosa were to bear the frustrations of this maladministration. No significant force could be spared and the Cape therefore teetered in a state of lawlessness and vigilantism. Force and theft contributed to the turmoil. Nowhere was it worse than

in the Zuurveld.

In 1811, Colonel John Graham and his corps was sent with British regulars and Boer commandos to undertake the task which was to define his military career: clearing around 20,000 Xhosa led by Ndlambe from the Zuurveld. The British campaign to push the Xhosa residents from the Eastern frontier was defined by Graham's plan to use "A proper degree of terror." The subsequent battles included the indiscriminate shooting of women and other civilians, as well as destruction of crops.

By 1812 Graham's task was complete, and so on the deserted farm De Rietfontein, he established Graham's Town as Zuurveld's central military post, with a string of linked forts along the Fish River.

The Royal Africa Corps

With resources tied up in Europe, Britain had little time or interest to move resources to the Eastern Cape. The province of Albany remained a lowly guarded area. Grahamstown was the garrison of the Royal African Corps.

Expert 1 British:

The RAC was originally raised in 1800 as the Goree Corps, a penal unit in the [British Army](#) used to recruit deserters and convicts, this

unit subsequently was renamed the African Corps. On 25 April 1804 the distinction of "Royal" was added to the title. In 1806 a detachment of the Royal African Corps was sent to serve in the West Indies as the Royal West India Rangers. The remainder of the Corps continued to perform garrison duties in various African colonies. By 1817 several companies of the Royal African Corps had been posted to the [Cape Colony](#). Its behaviour there was complained of by local residents.

It was onto this group of renegades, that the defense of Grahamstown fell. A motly crew. As Lord Charles Somerset related to Colonial Secretary Lord Bathhurst, "I cannot describe as soldier that of which the Regiment is composed... foreigners, deserters from all nations, grumblers and of general desperate and bad characters." A set of the most desperate villains and worthless thieves and vagabonds that ever disgraced any country in the world.

Narrator:

It was a penal unit, where death and prison sentences were commuted. Those belonging to the Royal African Corps were sent to the frontier and wasted little time in proving the point. Their behavior caused such terror that the colonists feared the Xhosa less than those who had been sent to protect them. Not exactly material for the Order of the British Empire.

Expert 3 Xhosa:

Inevitably, many of them deserted and went to live among the Xhosa.

Once there, they were committed for life. Only the hanging judge waited for them in returning to the Colony.

Narrator:

Many of the Khoi in the colony were bound into service, their livestock and land confiscated. David Stuurman was a leader of the [Khoi people](#), who fought against Dutch and British colonial rule in the [Eastern Cape](#). Stuurman was imprisoned in [Cape Town](#) on 11 September 1809 and sent to Robben Island. He was among the first political prisoners to be jailed on the island.

Expert 3 Xhosa:

Stuurman and others escaped [Robben Island](#) using whaling boats to reach the mainland. Most of them were recaptured, but Stuurman made his way back to the Eastern Cape. He became a trusted advisor to Ndlambe. Stuurman is a hero amongst our people.

The Eve of the War

Narrator:

Until 1815, Christianity had won no converts among the Xhosa. It had however become the dominant religion of the Afrikaner allies. Enter the Wesleyan Missionaries. The area over the Fish River was known as Cafrerira or the land of the unbelievers. Two of the first Christian converts were to have a significance influence. In the religious turmoil, two opposing prophets arose. Makhanda and Ntsikanna. Ntsikanna, woke up one morning to see a golden light shining on his

favourite Ox, washed of his red clay covering and became an aide to Ncgika. His prophesies reflected the fear of the white man and gratitude for the bringing of the new religion. His new God promised him a wealthy life by cooperating with the British.

Makhanda, a trusted leader for Ndlambe, postulated a different world. One in which there were two gods, Thixo the god of the white people and Mdalidiphu, the god of the black people. The whites had murdered the son of their god and had been driven from their country to come and invade the land of the Xhosa. Makhanda had the ear of Ndlambe and the advice of a Sargent who had deserted the Royal African Corps. War was in the prophecy. Makhanda applied his red ochre.

Act 2 Conflict

Albany

Narrator:

The racist politics of 20th century South Africa has blurred our image of frontier history of the early 19th century. We have been sold a clear cut - black vs white history. Albany in 1819 was an outpost of the British Empire and few insiders were spared to go there. Those that did go, predominantly men, soon took local wives and were quickly assimilated. The Local Governor Jacob Cuyler, was himself a US native, whose family had sided with the British in the 1776 Revolution and found himself banished to the Eastern Cape, where he married a local woman. Hence the name "Albany" after Cuylers native New York.

Expert 1 British:

Very few British Settlers actually lived in Albany at this time, 1819. It was only later that volumes of British Settlers arrived in 1820. What made the outcome of the Battle of Grahamstown so important is that given a different result, this British migration may never have happened.

Narrator:

The 1819 war was an African Civil war administered by the British. At the Battle of Grahamstown, Xhosa fought Xhosa, Afrikaner fought Afrikaner, Khoi fought Khoi and Prophet fought Prophet. Such was the Colonial genius of British divide and rule.

Amalinde

Narrator:

The 1811 push of Ndlambe's people East of the Fish River into the Amatolas put strain on the relationship between Nlambe and Britain's Xhosa ally, Ncgika. The rivalries between Nlambe and Ncgika were intensified. This came to a head in the Battle of Amalinde in November 1818, where Ndlambe rose triumphant. Ncgika was soon calling for Help from the Colony and this was obliged by Somerset who sent a contingent led by Lt Colonel Thomas Brereton and the Royal African Corps and the Graff Reinett Commando lead by Andries Stockenstroom. Ndlambe refused to engage his people and scattered them.

Expert 1 British:

Brereton used the opportunity to round up 23,000 cattle and gave 9,000 to Ncgika and the rest were shared by the benefactors of the mission. England always looked after its supporters. This left the followers of Ndlambe and the victors of Amalinde without the spoils of victory. Based on a culture of cattle the people starved. The

platform was set for the attack on Grahamstown. At this point Brereton abruptly resigns and left the Colony. Colonel Thomas Willshire and 45 men of the 38th were docked at Cape Town at the time and were hastily enrolled and sent to The Frontier.

Expert 3 Xhosa:

By all accounts, the warriors of the Ndlambe outnumbered those of the Ngqika. In traditional Xhosa warfare, it was unusual for large numbers to be killed. Engagements were usually short and involved only limited numbers of warriors. Also, most wars were fought over political supremacy and victory was easily worked out by counting the number of cattle captured. The desire to eliminate the enemy was alien.

The Xhosa had started to learn from the British.

Expert 1 British:

The battle of Amalinde appears to have been an exception. Fighting was particularly fierce and the enemy was ruthlessly pursued and killed. Xhosa tradition held that 500 Ngqika warriors were killed during the battle. If one takes this as a base, bearing in mind the exceptional nature of the battle and assuming a 10% kill rate, the total number of warriors could add up to as many as 5 000!

Expert 3 Xhosa:

Since Ndlambe was assisted by his Transkei allies and it is generally held that his troops substantially outnumbered those of Ngqika, one could imagine up to 10 000 Ndlambe warriors involved at a ratio of 2:1 to the enemy.

Narrator:

These figures broadly correspond to those quoted by Peires, based on reports from Dr van der Kemp, Lichtenstein and Colonel Collins who undertook an inspection tour of the Eastern Frontier in 1809. Though these figures remain estimates only, they do seem to indicate that, in 1800, the Xhosa population was well below 100 000 and might even have been as low as 40 000. However Eighteen years later, it would therefore have been quite possible for Ndlambe and Ngqika to muster forces of 5 000 men.

Act 3 Rising Action, Climax

The hand of God moves

Fresh from his victory at the Battle of Amalinde, it was the charismatic preacher Makhanda that led the attack. He had full support of the Xhosa tribes and collected an estimated 10,000 warriors and marched on Grahamstown. Ensign Lennox Stretch said of the Prophet, "His whole soul seems to have been set on revenging the aggression of the Christians and emancipating his country from their arrogant control."

Against a Garrison of 450 soldiers, with 10,000 warriors Makhanda had every reason to believe he would carry the day. He had a spy, Nquka in the garrison, who was ostensibly acting for Ncgika in Grahamstown, but was passing him information. It was Nquka mission to diminish the force in the city. He did this by convincing Willsire to follow a lead suggesting their were Xhosa East of the city, exactly opposite to where Makhanda waited.

Breakfast for Makhanda

Expert 3 Xhosa:

Army style warfare is not in our peoples nature. The idea of seneaking up in the dead of night and attacking an enemy whiel he sleeps would be a stain of dishonor.

It is true that Makhanda brought 10,000 people to Grahamstown, btu they were not warriors, they were farmers. Hte vast majority had

never experiences battle and those that had, had only experienced battle with other Xhosa tribes. Makhanda grossly underestimated the effect of the British artillery.

Narrator:

It was on the 21st that Makhanda sent Willshire the message saying that he would breakfast with him the following day. This act of arrogance was to change the history of South Africa. He warned the enemy of his arrival with such an insolent challenge just as he prepared to lead his followers forward to the high ground East of Grahamstown in to a hill called today Makanna's Kop.

The hunters become the hunted

Narrator:

The defenders, consisting of 48 men of the 38th (1st Staffordshire) Regiment of Foot, 39 men of the Colonial Troop, 135 of the Royal African Corps, 82 Khoikhoi of the Cape Regiment and they held off the attackers with musket and artillery fire. They were reinforced during the battle by the arrival of a group of some 130 Khoikhoi natives from Bethalsdorp under the command of Jan Boezak.

Expert 1 British:

Willshire, even given the challenge by Makhanda did little to preapre the Town. By mid morning he was still scouting the area around the town when he found himself face to face with several thousand Xhosa. It was noon by the time he had regrouped on the towns parade ground and the Xhosas were still preparing their lines for attack.

Grahamstown in 1819 was a straggling collection of 30 houses with no fortification. The defenders stood on the open parade ground with nothing more than their infantry skills in a hopelessly out numbered encounter.

Narrator:

And so it was that a force of consisting 80% of Africans under the command of a British Colonel were able to hold off 10,000 Xhosa warrior who were charging from High Ground. For the next hundred years soldiers of the 19th century soldiers were to learn that warfare had tilted in favour of the defense. Willshire lined up his artillery above his men with a small stream as their protection and then delivered a rendition of precision firing and devastating artillery. The guns were loaded with Shrapnel, exploding bullets that cut lanes through Xhosa and left them stunned. In the midst of this mahem, a renowned Khoi hunter named Jan Boesak arrived with 130 of the finest marksmen in the colony who singled out the Xhosa leaders and levelled the leadership in a matter of minutes.

Expert 3 Xhosa:

Dismayed as their leaders were cut from under them and a wave of shock and awe at their first encounter with Artillery left the Xhosa dased and the attack began to break. Had Makhanda's army had the discipline to follow multiple waves of attach they would easily have over run the parade ground. Instead they stood at a distance - too

far to throw a spear by near enough for musket and artillery fire to tear them apart.

Expert 2 Khoi:

One of the legendary stories of the conflict was that of soldier's wife Elizabeth Salt who walked through the Xhosa ranks unharmed to smuggle in a keg of much-needed gunpowder. It is believed that she disguised ammunition as a child she was carrying, and the Xhosa warriors did not want to attack a woman and a child.

Narrator:

Willshire order the buglars to sound a counter attack and the Xhosa ran. Willshire did not follow further that the protected range of the Cannons. The Battle, that would change the history of South Africa, was over in an hour and panic and rout followed. Between 1,000 and 2,000 Xhosa died on the battle field or shortly thereafter as they crawled away nursing their wounds into the bushes. By night fall the noise of battle had ceased and the bodies lay strewn on the slopes before the village. The garrison lost 5 men, one of whom was shot by a Xhosa marksman, likely one of the RAC deserters.

Act 4 Falling Action

A near run thing

Narrator:

In reporting the battle to the colony, the British Officers had expressed dismay that Makhanda had not attacked at night. For if he had done so, without the arrogant warning, Grahamstown would surely have fallen. Such was the religious zeal that filled Makhanda, that this strategic option never even came up. He was so confident of victory that he scorned the idea of creeping up on the British at night. Instead he brought along wives and families carrying pots and mats in anticipation of dinning that night in Grahamstown. His vision was large and his sense of his own destiny was limitless. This cost his people their country and their religion.

Expert 1 British:

From the evidence and the record it is safe to say that The Battle of Grahamstown was not won by Willshire, but rather lost by Makanda. Willshire dithered, having been given all the signs of the imminent attack. Instead he left his troops to face the assault on open ground. Stretch reported that during the battle Willshire said of his men that he would 'not have given a feather ' for their survival. Captain W.W. Harding described Grahamstown as a 'spirited' affair and thought, 'absolutely that the savages would have carry the day'. It was a 'near run thing'.

Narrator:

Besides the obvious error of giving up the element of surprise, Makahanda also displayed ignorance of generalship. Intoxicated by his own success at Amalinde, he failed to recognise that in fact he did not lead an army, he led a commando of farmers. At Amalinde it was farmers against farmers. At Grahamstown it was farmers against soldiers and as it was to be proved again and again in the 19th Century and right up until 1918 - the thin red line held.

Expert 2 Khoi

The Battle of Grahamstown was the second of the Frontier Wars. They are still billed today as British tourist attractions. The only problem with that description is that there were very few British people there. The Royal African Corps consisted largely of colonial soldiers and the Khoi militia made up ten times those numbers. This was a civil war played out under the script of the British Empire, who had introduced a new warfare that affected both fighters and civilians.

Expert 1 British:

Makhanda had overwhelming advantage, and had he borne the business by leading the main charge himself he might have convinced his men to run through the first barrage and they would surely have beaten the few. Instead - they broke and ran. Most of his men died running away from the battle, rather than running towards it. If you have ever stood in an infantry division, you know the value of the fact that

the man standing next to you has the will to stand. This will is drilled on the parade ground each morning. In battle, if that will crumbles the whole army crumbles. Even a unit of thieves and deserters like the RAC could rely on each other to stand.

Narrator:

In the ensuing months a Commando of 2,500 swept through the Amatolas and pushed the remnants of the Xhosa force back beyond the Keiskama river. The Invasion of Caffreria had begun. The Fish River would no longer be the border of The Cape Colony. Makanda gave himself up and he was taken to Robin Island where he drowned a few months later while attempting to escape.

Act 5 Denouement

Makhanda came close

Expert 3 Xhosa:

Makhanda came as close as any Xhosa or any African leaders after that, to sweeping the Colony back from the Frontier. Had he succeeded South African History could have turned out much differently. Had Makhanda succeeded at Grahamstown, the Settler immigration would not have secured its first foothold. This was the last time that a possible radical change in direction in South African history could have been engineered by indigenous inhabitants. While later clashes with the Zulus and the Boers would be much bigger, for the Empire the result of these was never in doubt. Victory for Makhanda would have seen the collapse of the frontier, instead it spread East and then North.

Expert 2 Khoi:

The troubles were only starting for the Khoi. For thousands of years, the Khoi had been fighting a rear guard action as the pastoralists moved ever south ward. The arrival of the Dutch, their integration into the Khoi, brought forward a new race Afrikaners. These tribes, The Griqwas, The Basters, The Afrikaners who armed with European technology turned hunted gathering into a dismal science. Their marauding tactics had led to them settling a territory far bigger than

the Cape Colony or Cafreria. At its peak the Grikwa territory stretched from North West of Kimberly all the way down to Elliot and Grikqwa Land East. The vital roll our people played in Grahamstown was soon forgotten and under the new British Administration, once finished with the Xhosa, the Cape Colony pushed norwards.

They gave us the Bible and enlisted us in their armies. When the smoke had cleared, we still had the Bibles, but they had the Land.

Expert 1 British:

Back in Europe, Britain had entered a tumultuous recession and economic upheavals would bring first the 1820 Settlers and later more arrivals. These immigrants including artisans and ex soldiers would begin the Anglicization of The Cape, and import the racist caste system that placed Englishmen at the top of a social pyramid. From 1820 onward every South African would be judged first by their race and then by their deeds. This system that would grip the country in a vice that has still not released 200 years later.

No medals for the disbanded

Narrator:

British racism started with the Royal African Corps. In an encounter on a par with Blood River or Rorkes Drift, where were the medals? Read British Military history and Grahamstown is depicted as a skirmish, a footnote in the mediocre career of mediocre officer. Even Willshire's own Biography emphasizes his deeds in Spain and dismisses his actions in Grahamstown.

Expert 2 Khoi:

450 troops and militia had saved the Empire in South Africa, but they were servants, thieves and deserters and worse - they were Black. For their reward, The Royal African Corps was disbanded in 1821.

Our people were divided by an internal racist conflict that would break us into groups - Grikwas, Basters, Boers, and finally Afrikaner and Coloreds. The Frontier was were civil wars in which Brother faught brother and the British controlled the flags. Once they had dvoded and subjuged the Xhosa, they did the same to us.

Narrator:

It is indeed history's irony that 200 years ago that white South Africa was saved by a unit consisting predominantly of Africans.

Credits for pilot

The accompanying pilot is a story board, created and unassisted by Philip Copeman, who plays all roles and liberally uses images from google searches. Material may well be copyright material. This will not be used in the film production and will either be bought in or replaced with original footage.

Noel Mostert, Frontiers

SA Military History, <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol135hk>.

www.satvchannel.com

Eastern Cape Tourism

Addo Elephant Park

Stanley Baker and Cy Enfield, Zulu

The Patriot - Battle of Camden

Sinethemba Majoli, Isibanye

Xavier Foley, Irish Fantasy

Beethoven, 7th Symphony

Sabatón, Rorke's Drift

The number of warriors

(Mostert, 1992, p 466; and Peires, 1987, pp 138-45, giving an overview of Xhosa battle tactics).

According to Soga (c1931, p 165), Xhosa tradition held that 500 Ngqika warriors were killed during the battle.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Battle_of_Amalinde

<https://mg.co.za/article/2014-10-03-00-scarred-land-tells-of-hard-fought-battles>

Other links

Geological explantion for the Mfekane.

http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0038-23532014000300013

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Thomas_Willshire,_1st_Baronet

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Lennox_Stretch

<http://samilitaryhistory.org/10/p10decne.html>

Zulu War

Frances Colenso

https://archive.org/stream/historyofzuluwar00colerich/historyofzuluwar00colerich_djvu.txt