

Second Anglo-Ashanti War

The second Anglo-Ashanti War took place between 1863 and 1864. With the exception of a few minor Ashanti skirmishes across the Pra in 1853 and 1854, the peace between the Ashanti and the British Empire had remained unbroken for over 30 years. Then, in 1863, a large Ashanti delegation crossed the river pursuing a fugitive, Kwesi Gyana. There was fighting, with casualties on both sides, but the governor's request for troops from England was declined and sickness forced the withdrawal of his troops.

ref>W. David McIntyre, *The Imperial Frontier in the Tropics, 1865–75: A Study of British Colonial Policy in West Africa, Malaya, and the South Pacific in the Age of Gladstone and Disraeli*. (1967) pp. 87–88. "three+Ashanti+armies+marched"+McIntyre&pg=PA87&printsec=frontcover online (https://www.google.com/books/edition/Imperial_Frontier_in_the_Tropics/EYevCwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=)</ref>

Third Anglo-Ashanti War 1873–1874

The Third Anglo-Ashanti War, also known as the "First Ashanti Expedition", lasted from 1873 to 1874. In 1869, a German missionary family and a Swiss missionary had been taken from Togo to Kumasi. They were still being held in 1873.^[8]

The British Gold Coast was formally established in 1867 and in 1872, Britain expanded their territory when they purchased the Dutch Gold Coast from the Dutch, including Elmina which was claimed by the Ashanti. The Dutch had signed the Treaty of Butre in 1656 with the Ahanta. The treaty's arrangements proved very stable and regulated Dutch-Ahanta diplomatic affairs for more than 213 years. This all changed with the sale of the Dutch Gold Coast. The Ashanti invaded the new British protectorate.

General Garnet Wolseley was sent against the Ashanti with 2,500 British troops and several thousand West Indian and African troops (including some Fante) and subsequently became a household name in Britain. The war was covered by war correspondents, including Henry Morton Stanley and G. A. Henty. Military and medical instructions were printed for the troops.^[9] The British government refused appeals to interfere with British arms manufacturers who sold to both sides.^[10]

Road building

Wolseley was appointed on 13 August 1873^[2] and went to the Gold Coast to make his plans before the arrival of his troops in January 1874. On 27 September 1873 a team of Royal Engineers landed at Cape Coast Castle. Their job was to expand the single file track that led to Coomassie, 160 miles (260 km) away, into a road that was suitable for troop movements. At the end of each day's march, roughly every 10 miles (16 km) a fortified camp would be built with 70 feet (21 m) long huts inside a stockade in an area that had been cleared of trees and undergrowth to provide some protection against hostile natives.^[11]

Bridges were built across streams using trees, bamboo and creepers for ropes and a major bridge across the 63 yards (58 m)-wide River Prah was built using pre-manufactured pieces brought from Chatham, England. In total 237 bridges would be built. Some of the camps were larger—Prahuse, next to the bridge had a medical hut and a tower on a mound, stores, forge, telegraph office and post office.^[12] It was stocked with 400 tons of food and 1.1m rounds of ammunition.^[13] The labour was supplied locally. To start the workers did not know how to use European tools and were liable to vanish into the forest if they heard a rumour that the Ashanti were nearby. Sickness, despite taking quinine daily, claimed the European engineers. Even so, the road progressed. By 24 January a telegraph line reached Prahuse.^[14]

The first troops arrived in late December and on 1 January 1874 started marching along the road to the front, half a battalion at a time.^[15] The troops comprised a battalion each from the Black Watch, Rifle Brigade and Royal Welsh Fusiliers, along with the 1st and 2nd West India Regiments, a Naval Brigade, two native regiments, Royal Artillery, Royal Engineers and Royal Marines.^[16] By 29 January, the road was more than half completed and they were close to Ashanti outposts. Skirmishing between the two forces began. Wolseley prepared to fight a battle.^[17]

Battle

The Battle of Amoaful was fought on 31 January. A road was cut to the village and the Black Watch led the way, forming square in the clearing with the Rifle Brigade, while flanking columns moved around the village. With the pipes playing "The Campbells Are Coming" the Black Watch charged with bayonets and the shocked Ashantis fled. The flank columns were slow moving in the jungle and the Ashantis moved around them in their normal horseshoe formation and attacked the camp 2 miles (3.2 km) to the rear. The Royal Engineers defended themselves until relieved by the Rifle Brigade. Although there was another small battle two days later, the Battle of Ordashu, the action had been decisive and the route to Kumasi was open.^[18] There were three killed and 165 wounded Europeans, one killed and 29 Ashanti troops wounded.^[19]



The 1874 burning of Kumasi

The capital, Kumasi, was abandoned by the Ashanti when the British arrived on 4 February and was briefly occupied by the British. They demolished the royal palace with explosives, leaving Kumasi a heap of smouldering ruins.^[19] The British were impressed by the size of the palace and the scope of its contents, including "rows of books in many languages."^[20]

The Ashanti signed the Treaty of Fomena in July 1874 to end the war. Among articles of the treaty between H.M. Queen Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and Kofi Karikari, King of Ashanti were that "The King of Ashanti promises to pay the sum of 50,000 ounces of approved gold as indemnity for the expenses he has occasioned to Her Majesty the Queen of England by the late war..." The treaty also required an end to human sacrifice^[8] and stated that "There shall be freedom of trade between Ashanti and Her Majesty's forts on the [Gold Coast], all persons being at liberty to carry their merchandise from the Coast to Kumasi, or from that place to any of Her Majesty's possessions on the Coast." Furthermore, the treaty stated that "The King of Ashanti guarantees that the road from Kumasi to the River Pra shall always be kept open..."^[21] Wolseley completed the campaign in two months, and re-embarked for home before the unhealthy season began.

Wolseley was promoted and showered with honours. British casualties were 18 dead from combat and 55 from disease (70%^[8]), with 185 wounded.^[19]

Some British accounts pay tribute to the hard fighting of the Ashanti at Amoaful, particularly the tactical insight of their commander, Amankwatia: "The great Chief Amankwatia was among the killed [...] Admirable skill was shown in the position selected by Amankwatia, and the determination and generalship he displayed in the defence fully bore out his great reputation as an able tactician and gallant soldier."^[22]

The campaign is also notable for the first recorded instance of a traction engine being employed on active service. Steam sapper number 8 (made by Aveling and Porter) was shipped out and assembled at Cape Coast Castle. As a traction engine it had limited success hauling heavy loads up the beach, but gave good service when employed as a stationary engine driving a large circular saw.^[23]



British troops ransacking palace in Fomena en route to Kumasi in 1874



A bush fight, Third Anglo-Ashanti War. *The Graphic* 1874



West Africa circa 1875

Before the 1873 war, Wolseley had campaigned for a more comfortable clothing for hot climates and in this war had managed to get his troops kitted out in a better uniform.^[24]

Fourth Anglo-Ashanti War

The Fourth Anglo-Ashanti War, also known as the "Second Ashanti Expedition", was brief, lasting only from December 1895 to February 1896. The Ashanti turned down an unofficial offer to become a British protectorate in 1891, extending to 1894. The British also wanted to establish a British resident in Kumasi. The Ashanti King Prempeh refused to surrender his sovereignty.^[25] Wanting to keep French and German forces out of Ashanti territory (and its gold), the British were anxious to conquer the Ashanti once and for all. The Ashanti sent a delegation to London offering concessions on its gold, cocoa and rubber trade as well as submission to the crown. The British however had already made their minds up on a military solution,^[2] they were on their way, the delegation only returning to Kumasi a few days before the troops marched in.^[26]

Colonel Sir Francis Scott left Cape Coast with the main expeditionary force of British and West Indian troops, Maxim guns and 75mm artillery in December 1895, and travelling along the remnants of the 1874 road arrived in Kumasi in January 1896.^[2] Major Robert Baden-Powell led a native levy of several local tribes in the campaign. The Asantehene directed the Ashanti not to resist, but casualties from sickness among the British troops were high.^[27] Soon, Governor William Maxwell arrived in Kumasi as well. Asantehene Agyeman Prempeh was unable or unwilling to pay the 50,000 ounces of gold so was arrested and deposed.^[2] He was forced to sign a treaty of protection, and with other Ashanti leaders was sent into exile in the Seychelles.

Baden-Powell published a diary of life giving the reasons, as he saw them, for the war: To put an end to human sacrifice. To put a stop to slave-trading and raiding. To ensure peace and security for the neighbouring tribes. To settle the country and protect the development of trade. To get paid up the balance of the war indemnity. He also believed that if a smaller force had been sent, there would have been bloodshed.^[26]

The British force left Kumasi on 22 January 1896, arriving back at the coast two weeks later. Not a shot had been fired but 18 Europeans were dead and 50% of the troops were sick. Among the dead was Queen Victoria's son-in-law, Prince Henry of Battenberg,^[2] who was taken ill before getting to Kumasi and died on 20 January on board ship, returning to England. In 1897 Ashanti territory became a British protectorate.^[2]

Fifth War or "War of the Golden Stool"

Technology was reaching the Gold Coast, a railway to Kumasi was started in 1898 but had not progressed far when another war broke out. The railway was to be completed in 1903.^[28]

In the War of the Golden Stool (1900), also known as the "Third Ashanti Expedition", on 25 March 1900, the British representative, Sir Frederick Mitchell Hodgson committed a political error by insisting he should sit on the Golden Stool, not understanding that it was the Royal throne and very sacred to the Ashanti.^[29] He ordered a search be made for it. The Ashanti, enraged by this act, attacked the soldiers engaged in the search.

The British retreated to a small stockade, 50 yards (46 m) square with 12 feet (3.7 m) loopholed high stone walls and firing turrets at each corner,^[30] where 8 Europeans, dozens of mixed-race colonial administrators, and 500 Nigerian Hausas with six small field guns and four Maxim guns defended themselves. The British detained several high-ranking leaders in the fort.^[30] The stockade was besieged and the telegraph wires cut. A rescue party of 700 arrived in June, but many sick men in the fort could not be evacuated. The healthier men escaped, including Hodgson and his wife and 100 Hausas, and meeting up with the rescue party, managed to avoid the 12,000 Ashanti warriors and make it back to the coast.^[30]

On 14 July a second relief force of 1,000 made it to Kumasi having fought several engagements along the route, relieving the fort on 15 July when they only had a few days of supplies left. The remaining Ashanti court not exiled to the Seychelles had mounted the offensive against the British and Fanti troops resident at the Kumasi Fort, but were defeated.

Yaa Asantewaa, the Queen-Mother of Ejisu, who had led the rebellion, King Prempeh I, and other Ashanti leaders were also sent to the Seychelles. The Ashanti territories became part of the Gold Coast colony on 1 January 1902, on the condition that the Golden Stool would not be violated by British or other non-Akan foreigners. The Ashanti claimed a victory as they had not lost their sacred stool. In September the British sent flying columns out to visit neighbouring peoples who had supported the rebellion, resulting in a number of skirmishes.

The British and their allies suffered 1,070 fatalities in total. The Ashanti casualties are estimated to have been around 2,000. The sacred golden stool, which is depicted on the Ashanti flag, had been well hidden and was only discovered by road workers by accident in 1920. King Prempeh I returned from exile in 1924, travelling to Kumasi by a special train.

Awards

Four awards were made of the Victoria Cross, for Gallantry in the period 1873-74 and two for the 1900 campaign. (see List of Victoria Cross recipients by campaign)

An Ashanti Medal was created for those involved in the War of the Golden Stool. This expedition lasted from March – September 1900. It was issued as a Silver or bronze Medal.

Footnote

After the 1896 Expedition, King Prempeh was exiled to the Seychelles. Eleven years later, Baden-Powell created the Boy Scout Movement. King Prempeh was released from exile and restored to Ashanti, and became Patron of Ashanti Scouts.

See also

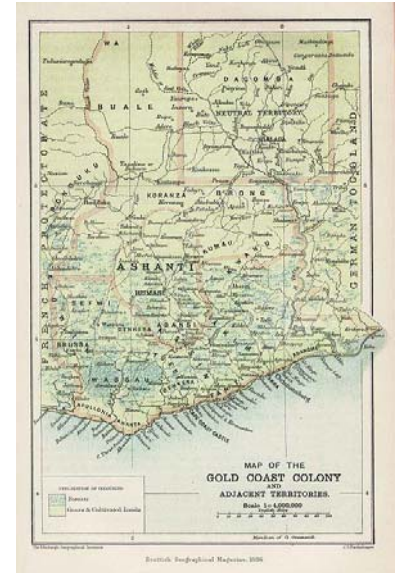
- List of rulers of Asante
- History of Ghana
- African military systems after 1800

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- Raugh (2004)



Wounded soldiers being conveyed to hospital ships



Map from 1896 of the British Gold Coast Colony showing Ashanti

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7. Lloyd 1964, pp. 39–53.
8. Goldstein (2005)
9. Lloyd (1964), pp. 88–102
10. Lloyd (1964), p. 83
11. Porter (1889), p. 11
12. Porter (1889), p. 13
13. Raugh (2004), p. 36
14. Porter (1889), pp. 14–17
15. Porter (1889), p. 17
16. Raugh (2004), p. 15
17. Porter (1889), p. 19
18. Raugh (2004), p. 16
19. Raugh (2004), p. 37
20. Lloyd (1964), pp. 172–174, 175
21. Anonymous (1874)
22. Low (1878), p. 174 (https://archive.org/stream/cihm_09106#page/n183/mode/2up)
23. Nowers (1994), pp. 10–11
24. Kochanski (1999)
25. Raugh (2004), p. 30
26. "THE DOWNFALL OF PREMPEH A DIARY OF LIFE WITH THE NATIVE LEVY IN ASHANTI 1895-96" (<https://web.archive.org/web/2002112100941/http://www.pinetreeweb.com/bp-prempeh-01.htm>). pinetreeweb.com. Archived from the original (<http://www.pinetreeweb.com/bp-prempeh-01.htm>) on 12 November 2002.
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28. "A Railway Through the African Jungle" (<http://mikes.railhistory.railfan.net/r139.html>). mikes.railhistory.
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Further reading

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External links

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