

The Rise And Fall Of Shaka

By: Dennis Bishop

Legend has it that for years following the arrival of Mnguni (Father of Nguni) in southeast Africa, the Nguni nation existed in the form of scattered homesteads (imizi) governed by chiefdoms. The chiefdoms consisted of clans, sometimes more than one clan, who carried out the daily duties of tending cattle and raising maize. Most conflicts between chiefdoms consisted of disputes over cattle ownership. Cattle raiding frequently caused inter-clan warfare, and the spoils of battle offered the opportunity to plunder the losing clan's cattle herd. The larger the clan herds, even if individually owned, the richer the clan and individuals.

All of the Nguni share a variation of the Bantu language and are often referred to as the Bantu culture that extended from the Drakensberg coastal sector to Delagoa Bay by the sixteenth century. The Bantu were divided between the northern Nguni and the southern Nguni organized in similar social patterns until the end of the eighteenth century. The Xhosa were the vanguard of the southern Nguni migration, and were the first to conflict with Europeans in 1779. The northern Nguni continued as they had for centuries.

The Bantu military institutions were born from the continual, but casual, warfare for limited objectives of pastoral lands, cattle, and territory. A defeated clan moved, paid tribute, and the tension vanished. Every adult male was a warrior

who fought in a mob called an impi, although warriors from an iTanga (young men of the same age group) tended to support one another. The warriors were armed with several assegai (throwing spears, the last often saved as a stabbing spear defensively), and sometimes with an iwiza (knobkerrie), but always an oval shield.

Battles were pre-arranged at a convenient place, and the two mobs faced one another across a stream with women from the high ground urging the warriors to win the battle. There were no tactics, and individual warriors ran forward to "giya" (displays of prowess and self-praise). Both mobs would eventually close to a space where assegai could be thrown, and thrown assegai would be returned to the sender. At some point in the battle, one impi, or the other, would seize the initiative and charge usually routing the opposing clan. This resulted in lost cattle, land, and ransomed captives; but casualties were light, and extermination of a clan was never considered as an option.

This was the setting for the ambitions of unlikely actors in the northern Nguni kingdom. The spark for the holocaust might have been created by Du Pre Alexander, Earl of Caledon, who was acting governor of Cape Colony in 1807. He dispatched an expedition to the Portuguese settlement at Delagoa Bay. The expedition disappeared somewhere in the unknown region between Cape Colony and Delagoa Bay. Among the expedition was Dr. Robert Cowan who, according to Henry Francis

Fynn, befriended Godongwana kaJobe of the Mthethwa clan, who was also known as Dingiswayo ("The Troubled One").

Dingiswayo at the time was an exile following an aborted attempt to seize his father's throne. The attempt resulted in the death of Dingiswayo's brother Tana, and the beginning of two years of wandering. It was during this wandering time that he may have met Cowan. Cowan had a horse and a gun, and circumstantial evidence points to this providing Dingiswayo with his first innovations.

Meanwhile, Jobe, Dingiswayo's father died, and Dingiswayo's younger brother Mawewe kaJobe ascended the throne. Dingiswayo heard of the changes, and with a horse and gun, he returned home. Mawewe fled, but was lured back and killed. With the death of Mawewe, and the new rule of Dingiswayo, centuries of northern Bantu life and warfare began to change.

Dingiswayo inherited a chiefdom of about four thousand people, including the Ntungwa-Nguni clans surrounding the Methethwa and intermarried, but possessed no army. From these humble beginnings, Dingiswayo began to forge an empire and created the Zulu kingdom that survived his empire. He energetically began his reforms by organizing not just an impi as was tradition, but he created amabutho (regiments) for the

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

first time in Bantu history. Beginning with local iNtngas (traditionally gathered young men of the same age group) numbering only five hundred conscripted warriors into a new disciplined organization creating amabutho (regiments) possessing a distinct dress and color of its shields. Dingiswayo called these the Izi-cwe (bushmen) ibutho, the Ema-Ngweni ibutho, and the Yengondlulu ibutho. In this way Dingiswayo used the traditional Bantu grouping of young males the same age into iNtngas to create distinctly different units for the first time. Traditionally, the izinduna (leaders) of the iNtngas collected local taxes, settled local disputes, and acted as leaders in war. However, traditionally iNtngas mixed together within impis. Dingiswayo changed traditional mob warfare into a military organization provided with permanent military officers to provide the force behind Dingiswayo's diplomatic warfare based upon the newly established royal kraal uThulwana.

Dingiswayo proved to be an exceptional individual possessing great ambition, and willing to take advantage of opportunity. Centuries of traditional Bantu warfare influenced Dingiswayo's conquests as he was able to intimidate the smaller clans surrounding the Mthethwa and their allies very early. Once the clan submitted it was left in peace. Another means of subjugating clans took advantage of the Bantu tradition allowing a

chief, or king, to marry as many times as he wished. In this way Dingiswayo purchased and solidified alliances through royal marriages creating a "pax Nguni" state.

At one point in his diplomatic conquests, Dingiswayo looked to the growing populations along the coast hoping to replace the chaos by pinning each clan into position, and replacing the petty policies of minor clans with his single policy. His amabutho would march to the amamisi of the smaller clans and demand submission or destruction. If the clan submitted, it had much more to gain than if it resisted.

With each submission, his army grew larger through the incorporation of each new iNtanga, but the army had never been tested in battle. There were minor rebellions by subjugated clans, but nothing amounting to war. However, Pungashe of the Buthelezi clan was not impressed by Dingiswayo's innovations. When the iziCwe ibutho invaded Buthelezi territory, a Buthelezi impi gathered. The battle was the first to highlight the talents of a young warrior iShaka kaSenzangakona. He led a charge with an iviyo of the isiCwe who broke the Buthelezi impi leaving his half-brother Bakuza kaSenzangakona dead on the field. Following his defeat Pungashe surrendered to Dingiswayo.

The first defeat of the Buthelezi had a profound effect upon Senzangakona kaJobe, chief of the Zulu clan, at his royal kraal isiKlebe (esiKlebeni). He had no idea that his sons had faced one

another across the battlefield, but he certainly mourned the death of his favorite son, Bakuza kaSenzangakona, and certainly pondered the meaning of the defeat of the Buthelezi. In several battles in the past, the Buthelezi had defeated the Zulu, and the Mthethwa victory over the Buthelezi did not make Zulu resistance an option. Ever the diplomat, Dingiswayo held a trump card with the death of the heir to the Zulu throne. He summoned Senzangakona to his great kraal to confront his son, iShaka kaSenzangakona. Senzangakona initially expressed delight at the possibility of an heir, but later changed his mind influenced by his first wife Mkabi who favored her eldest son Sigujana kaSenzangakona. Although he later denied iShaka a position as heir, Senzangakona left the Buthelezi alliance and submitted to Dingiswayo.

Dingiswayo turned north taking the Dlamini clan by surprise and killing their chief Nyanya kaSogidi in a skirmish on the Macana Flats behind the Esi-Halo Mountain creating a domino effect as the Dlamini clan, or Mbateni, under Kali kaShandu immediately submitted. The Donda, Wesi-Ziba's Kumalo clan, submitted soon after followed by the Eba-Tenjini, Ema-Ngadini, and E-Langeni clans.

Dingiswayo knew of an unusual tribe located near Delagoa Bay with valuable new trade possibilities. This offered an opportunity to expand his growing empire to the north and

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

he attempted to establish a trade route of ivory and cattle with the Portuguese. This agreement was less than satisfactory as the European goods offered by the Portuguese could be created by artisans within his paramouncy. One can speculate that he was planning to coerce this "tribe" into his growing confederacy sometime in the future.

Through a mixture of war, diplomacy, and economics, Dingiswayo forged a confederacy greater than any Nguni chieftain since its origin. He was able to incorporate the subjected tribes into new iTangas creating the iNtshangano (Assembly) and iNyakatho (North Wind) amabutho into his growing army. However, success bred competition. While Dingiswayo campaigned to build a coalition of northern Bantu, other empire builders encroached closer and closer. Zwide kaLanga of the Ndwanwe clan had created a confederacy north of the Mfolozi River adjacent to Dingiswayo's expansion to the south of that river.

Zwide was much different from Dingiswayo in that he was said to have been dominated by his mother, and he had a reputation for treachery and cruelty. Although his army was smaller than the Mthetheni army, Zwide copied Dingiswayo's methods of raising an army from subdued clans and this forced Dingiswayo to take the threat seriously. Ironically, Zwide owed his throne to Dingiswayo through his

treachery. He began his ascent by defeating Mlota of the Ema-Ntshalini near the Ntabankulu. Tricking Dingiswayo's commanders into first displacing Mlota, Zwide killed Mlota and incorporated his clan.

Meanwhile, Ishaka kaSenzangakhona, assuming the name Shaka, was a rising star in Dingiswayo's army. An outcast like Dingiswayo, Shaka created innovations of the iklwa (short stabbing spear) and the concept of close combat using a large shield (isihlangu) as both a defensive and offensive weapon alien to traditional Bantu warfare. Dingiswayo provided an iviyo of the isi-Cwe ibutho to Shaka to prove the value of this new form of warfare. This iviyo again broke the Buthelezi, and Dingiswayo's imusi (council) had to recognize Shaka's talent.

Senzangakhona kaJobe died in 1816 leaving the Zulu clan in chaos. Dingiswayo immediately released Shaka from service, and provided him with a strong escort from the newly raised second isiCwe, "Ngomane's Own", ibutho to claim the Zulu throne. This included an impressive staff consisting of Ngomane and Siwangu kaMbikwane, Dingiswayo's nephew. The Zulu clan could offer no resistance as the former pretender, Sigujana kaSenzangakhona, floated lifelessly in a nearby stream. Shaka had sent his half brother Ngwandi kaGendeyana to his father's Esi-Klebeni kraal before him to announce his arrival, and this might have contributed to the

death of the pretender.

Supported by the Second isiCwe ibutho, Shaka assumed the paramouncy of the Zulu clan.

There is no doubt that Dingiswayo manipulated Shaka's coup to provide a strong kingdom between the powerful Ngcobos, Cunus, and Qwabes on one side, and the Ndwanwes and Ngwanes on the other side. This was a gamble on the abilities of a twenty-nine year old vagabond who was only half Zulu. However, Shaka immediately instituted energetic changes within the Zulu clan following the example of Dingiswayo.

Shaka used the isiCwe ibutho to squash any opposition and to settle old scores. He then built his new capital at umBelebele ("The Endless Story," or "Persistently Worrying Matter") on the right bank of the Nolele stream near its source. Within this kraal, Shaka took measures to protect himself from witchcraft with such extreme measures that it made him virtually untouchable following Dingiswayo's assassination.

However, his first concern was the creation of his army for the security of the vulnerable kingdom. Drawing upon Dingiswayo's experience, he used local iTangas to create four amabutho. Initially these were generally the amaWombe (older married men), the umGamule (older unmarried men), who he took away the premature isiCoco, and reorganized the humiliated warriors into the umGamule, or

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

the izimPohlo (Bachelor's Brigade). However, the uDubinhlangu ibutho was allowed to retain some status at its kraal at enTonteleni. Looking ahead, he concentrated his efforts upon the young herdboys who he organized into the uFasimba, "The Distant Blue Haze," which became his preferred ibutho. Each ibutho was allotted an ikhanda (barrack) and a portion of the Zulu herd of cattle divided by colors.

Shaka had concentrated on changing tactics used by the Isi-cwe ibutho while serving Dingiswayo as its commander. Shaka divided the Isi-cwe into four isigaba. The "chest" would pin the enemy from the front while the two "horns" ran to the rear of the enemy. This forced the enemy to defend on two fronts. The "loins" were designated as a reserve to strengthen a weak point, or exploit a success.

Shaka also concentrated on creating a Zulu army that mirrored his concept of warfare. Warriors discarded sandals, throwing assegai, and old ways of warfare. The northern Bantu were on the verge of a new type of warfare. To Shaka there was only total submission, victory, or defeat. Defeat meant death and destruction. Even Dingiswayo never contemplated this radical form of diplomacy. To create élan among the kraals, Shaka ordered the creation of shields of designated colors for each ibutho imitating his mentor.

The initial amabutho included the ama-Wombe who

may have been a section of the emBelebeleni kraal where a number of senior amabutho were quartered. Formed in 1816, by 1821 to 1827 the ikhanda may also have included the uNomdayana, amaPhela, (added to by Ndwendwe warriors following the defeat of King Zwide kaLanga), the iziZimazana, the amaKwenkwe, iziKwembu, (dun colored shields), and the uMpondozobekwapi (red shields).

The izimPohlo "those who smash" brigade was based upon the Mgungundlovu imizi. It consisted of the uGibabanye "Those who oust," but also known as the uPhoko "millet", and carried black shields with white marks on the side. This ibutho might also have included an isigaba of the uMpofu carrying dun colored shields, and section of the uMnyama who carried black shields. The uFojisa carried black shields with white patches, but a section called the uShoyisa carried red shields. The uNgqobolondo carried black shields speckled with white spots. The shield colors of the uMfolozi and uDubinhlangu are unknown.

The political complications arising from the inherited Zulu amabutho seems to indicate that Senzangakhona kaJobe had attempted to change the Zulu military organization from the impi to the amabutho before his death. However, accommodating did not stop Shaka from implementing his plan to create strictly uniform amabutho from iNtngas expected in the future. This is clearly evident in the formation of uFasimba who all

carried white shields. Herd-boys, not mature warriors, this was his preference ibutho, and he conferred the white shield upon them. In deference, Shaka carried a white shield with a large black mark throughout his life.

While Shaka revolutionized the Zulu army, war clouds were gathering. It was inevitable that a struggle for supremacy would occur between the Mthethwa and Ndwandwe. However, Shaka's new Zulu army played an unwitting role in the course of events. Shaka unleashed his new amabutho against the weakened Butelezi clans once again. Using psychology, Shaka instructed his amabutho to carry their shields at a tilt to make their numbers appear smaller. Once the "horns" had extended, the warriors were to bring their shields to the front making their numbers appear to have doubled. The Butelezi panicked and Pungashe fled to the Ndwandwe and the protection of Zwide. Zwide listened to Pungashe's account of his defeat and loss of his kingdom. Then Zwide killed him.

Meanwhile, during the winter of 1817, the Zulu army was called to provide a wing to Dingiswayo's army campaigning against Matiwane of the emaNgwaneni clan. Shaka left Mgobozi in command of the home garrison and Mdlaka to guard the southern frontier with 1500 warriors. Shaka personally led 1000 warriors to join Dingiswayo. Dingiswayo left

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

2000 warriors watching Zwide and the Ndwandwes, and led his impi of 2500 warriors against Matiwane and the Ngwanes. Along the path of advance, Dingiswayo's impi swelled with addition of the 1000 Ntshalini and other tributary clans to almost 4500 warriors.

Meanwhile, Matiwane sensing the danger petitioned Mtimkulu of the neighboring Hlubi clans on his western border to shelter Matiwane's cattle near present day Utrecht. Mtimkulu agreed and the cattle were moved. Seeing that resistance futile, Matiwane quickly submitted and Dingiswayo, true to his plan, accepted the submission leaving Matiwane in peace as an untrustworthy vassal. After the Mthethwani impi returned home, Matiwane sent for his cattle. Mtimkulu refused to release the cattle thinking that the powerful Hlubi clans could easily defeat the starving Ngwanes. The Hlubi also enjoyed special favor from Dingiswayo as they had sheltered him during his "wandering years." However, storm clouds were gathering on the Ndwandwe – Ngwane border.

Seizing the opportunity, Zwide swept down upon the demoralized Ngwanes dispossessing them of their homeland creating a chain reaction called the Mfecane ("the crushing") to occur. Matiwane organized his clans into one large column led by warriors and followed all of the kingdom's women and children. This mob fell upon the Hlube main kraals

with a vengeance, destroying anything and killing anyone who was unfortunate enough to be in its wake, including Mtimkulu. Matiwane recaptured his cattle, captured the Hlube cattle, and then turned on the Hlube sub-clans. The Hlube survivors could not move south because it was inhabited by the coastal clans who were too numerous and prosperous, and by the Boers. The only avenue of escape was through the Drakensberg Mountains populated by the Sutu clans.

A large mob of Hlubis led by Mpangazita, Matiwane's brother, moved into the Sutu domain and continued its rampage until it came into conflict with the Batlokwa clans under the regency of Mantatise, mother of Sikonyela, who was still a child. Defeated, she turned the mob of Batlokwa to the southwest down the Caledon River. She scattered the Ba-Fukeng and plundered the Ma-Khwakhwa. The Ba-Kwena moved out of the path of the mob before being overtaken, and Mantatise's Sutus defeated Msheshwe's Ba-Sutu (Moshesh) at Butabute. Meanwhile Mpangazita's mob continued in a northwesterly direction. Everywhere these mobs moved nothing lived.

Moving in semi-circles of destruction, it was inevitable that the two marauding mobs would eventually come into conflict. Following a savage battle, the defeated Sutu moved across the Caledon River below Koloyama where for years to follow she preyed upon weaker clans. Mpangazita turned his attention away from the Sutus and pillaged

the clans on his side of the river. The surviving deposed clans were scattered and the land became dead.

Matiwane settled his clans in the former Hlubi lands in a crowded section of the foothills. In this vulnerable position, they lived peaceably until 1822.

Meanwhile, inland Zwide stalled Dingiswayo with negotiations and presents. In a desperate scheme he sent his sister, Ntombazi, with an attractive cousin as presents to Dingiswayo. Ntombazi was to acquire a smear of Dingiswayo's semen to be used in the most powerful of magic potions. When Ntombazi returned with the semen, witchdoctors created the potion while Zwide used the planting and harvesting seasons to prepare to defeat Dingiswayo's impi.

In 1818, Zwide felt that he was strong enough to provoke Dingiswayo into a decisive confrontation. The spark for the coming war came through murder. Zwide had Dingiswayo's brother-in-law Malusi murdered knowing that Nomatuli (Dingiswayo's sister) would seek vengeance. Dingiswayo was not long in responding.

Dingiswayo mobilized his Nyelezi impi, doctored them for war, and marched northward over the Umfolozi River toward Zwide's capital Nongoma. The Ndwandwe had been defeated in two prior battles with the Mthethwa, so Dingiswayo planned for a short campaign to

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

restore his family honor. Dingiswayo called upon Shaka and his new Zulu army to simultaneously invade, as well Nqoboka of the Sokulus. In this way three columns would converge on one battlefield.

It was a good plan, but it soon fell apart. For some reason, perhaps the effect of magic, Dingiswayo separated himself from his army somewhere near Zwide's Kwa-Dlovunga royal kraal while he waited for Shaka and Nqoboka to arrive with their warriors. Taking only part of his isiGodlo (harem) with him, he walked into a Ndwandwe patrol at Mbuzi Hill. From there he was escorted to Kwa-Dlovunga where he was treated as a royal visitor for several days.

Without warning, armed Ndwandwe warriors attempted to evict Dingiswayo from the hut where he was residing. His isiGodlo rose to his defense, but to no avail. Dingiswayo must have known that his time had come. When his isiGodlo again attempted to rescue him, he told them in kind words to desist and mourn him when he was gone. Resolutely he walked to the place of execution and asked his executioner to drive the blade quickly into his heart. When Dingiswayo was dead his isiGodlo took ceremonial spears secreted in their bags and joined him rather than obeying Zwide's order to return home. In a moment all of Northern Nguni history changed.

News of Dingiswayo's death was not long in reaching his impi throwing it into

confusion. The Mthethwa were leaderless and when the Ndwandwe warriors began appearing in large numbers, the Mthethwani izinduna put up a half hearted defense before turning toward their home kraals and amamizi. Near Ama-Yiwane Neck Shaka learned about the treacherous death of his mentor and the retreat of the Mthethwani impi. He turned his impi in the direction of kwa-Zulu.

The Ndwandwe did not follow up the coup very far fearing Shaka's army on its flank. So, as the Ndwandwe impi returned, a vacuum existed which would be filled by Shaka. Kwa-Zulu was like a rock in the middle of a flood of enemies. The Ndwandwe were located to the north, the Qwabe to the south, and the Tembus to the west. It was to this bastion that Nogomane, Dingiswayo's "prime minister" set out with the 2nd Izi-Cwe ibutho to be followed by other Mthethwa warriors. Soon Shaka had at his disposal nearly 5000 warriors. His ally Nqoboka of the Sokulu clans also absorbed large numbers of Mthethwani warriors.

Zwide was aware that Shaka was attempting to form a coalition of the Qwabes and Thembu with the Zulu to oppose the Ndwandwe confederation. He also knew that Donda of the Kumalo clans had supported Dingiswayo. This was only buffer clan between the Zulu and the Ndwandwe. To eliminate this clan, Zwide created a deceptive plan. He invited Donda to a "inqina yom Senge" (a short informal hunt) followed by the

usual "ijadu," or love dance. He told Donda not to be alarmed by the presence of armed warriors, and that Donda's greatest threat was from Shaka's impi. Donda fell for the ruse, and his warriors were massacred eliminating the only buffer clan.

Further north was the Mashobane's Kumalo clan. Mashobane was a son-in-law of Zwide, so he trusted Zwide. Zwide used a similar ruse to destroy most of the Kumalo. However, Mzilikazi kaMashobane rallied the remnants of the tribe as a vassal of Zwide, only to switch sides to Shaka. Once the Kumalo allied with the Zulu, Mzilikazi rapidly rose to become a noted induna.

Zwide's ambitions were obvious, but the Qwabes and Tembus continued to rely upon the Zulu as a buffer as Zwide extended his coercive alliances among the clans in the north, east, and west. Sensing the time had come to eliminate the Zulu, Zwide called upon Sezangakona's promise of three selected maidens in exchange for his support of Sezangakona's war against the Butelezi. Zwide had given no aid, but Shaka inherited the debt of his father. In an exchange of messages, Shaka refused to honor his father's debt.

This was Zwide's excuse to declare war on the Zulu in April, 1818. However, he did not anticipate Shaka's preparations. Lacking significant clan support to the south, Shaka mobilized all of the Zulu and allied clans in a "ukukulela ngoqo" (total war). He moved

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

tribe and cattle to the south to the Umhlatuzi River near the Nkandla forest protected by the Nkomendala ibutho (“toothless old cattle”) who became known as the “Old Contemptables.” The ibutho was probably identified as the leading ibutho of the umBelebele Division formed upon the iWombe ibutho at the unBelebele kraal. This left only about 4,000 warriors of the izimPohlo (isiKlebe) Division to confront the Ndwandwe host.

The Ndwandwe impi is more difficult to have a precise idea concerning its organization. Most experts agree that it numbered between 8,000 and 10,000 warriors which was a very large force for the day. By the time that White men came into contact with the remnants of the tribe, it had long since ceased to be an independent nation by being absorbed into the Zulu kingdom, and its leaders dispersed among other tribes, so most information is fragmentary.

Oral Ndwandwe stories provide the best evidence of this once great army. The names of two ibutho appear in tales of the 1st Zulu/Ndwandwe War, so there is evidence that the Ndwandwe were organized into amabutho. Each ibutho seem to have had individual uniforms as some survived in various forms in successor states. The Ndwandwe warriors carried a smaller shield than the Zulu, but they were probably matching colors similar to the Zulu system. The warriors also carried light throwing assegai and amamizi.

Zwide’s northern neighbors, the Swazi were probably called upon to provide a contingent to the Ndwandwe host. More is known about their probable dress because ceremonial dress is still worn on state occasions that look remarkably like sketches made during the nineteenth century. Swazi shields were rounder than the Zulu and they carried throwing assegai like the Ndwandwe. Little is known about the organization, so it might have been the traditional impi organization preceding Dingane and Shaka.

Shaka selected the remote Gqokli Hill south of the swollen White Umfolozi River for a confrontation. He deployed the allied warriors at the only two drifts, and arranged perhaps 2000 warriors in three lines on the summit of the hill. Behind these lines, Shaka held a reserve of perhaps 2000 warriors in the depression of the summit. The udibi with the supplies were also held in this summit. A herd of Zulu cattle guarded by nearly 500 uFasimba warriors was left as a decoy on the southern flank.

The Ndwandwe commanders must have rejoiced to see their quarry standing at bay. Surely they must have thought that 8,000 would prevail ultimately over 2000 warriors, and the Zulu cattle would bring many praises upon their return to Zwide. However, once the Ndwandwe impi reached the White Umfolozi, it was stalled by recent rains that made fording the river difficult. There were only two fords available to the Ndwandwe, and

both of these forced warriors to build human bridges chest deep over which the impi might pass. Breaks in the bridges caused the warriors to be swept to their deaths among the rapids. Undaunted, the Ndwandwe izinduna insisted that their warriors cross regardless of losses to the river and the small groups of Zulus contesting the fords.

Nomahlanjana kaZwide commanded the Ndwandwe impi, and first made a determined attack at the main drift. This was slowed by the Zulu auxiliaries and the still dangerous, but lowering river. These Zulu allies contested long enough for Nomahlanjana to split his impi seeking a second drift.

Shaka must have been pleased by the success of the first phase of the battle as he did not intend to seriously contest the drifts, but merely harass. As the Zulu allies gave way and retreated to the hill, the second part of Shaka’s plan to whittle down the size of his opponent came into action.

Once across the river, the Ndwandwe impis split between chasing a cattle herd Shaka had conveniently allowed to wander into easy grasp. The uFasimba drove the cattle away from the main part of the action drawing a large number of Ndwandwe away from the action. The rest of the impis charged up the steep incline to engage the Zulu at the summit. Shaka initiated a psychological ploy when he had his front line warriors put their shields to their sides. As the

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

Ndwandwe reached the closing range, the amaviyo placed their shields to the front, “magically” doubling the size of the army. Worse, the Zulu refused to throw the assegais back, so the Ndwandwe were running out of weapons.

Beginning early in the morning, the Ndwandwe charged up the hill until the warriors came within range, and they ineffectively threw their assegai. The Ndwandwe warriors made several charges that were all met with mounting losses for them. Meanwhile, the Ndwandwe impi began to dissolve as individual warriors left in search of water by mid-afternoon. As discipline began to break down, the Ndwandwe izinduna decided by late afternoon to gamble on a charge that was planned to break the Zulu lines.

They gather the mixed amaviyo into one “heavy” column behind a screen of warriors surrounding most of the hill. As the “heavy column” forced its way through the Zulu lines, it was taken on the flanks by the uFasimba ibutho that had been held in reserve. The “heavy column” collapsed, but the Ndwandwe impi did not route, even with the loss of five of Zwide’s sons, including Nomahlanjana. The surviving warriors collected at the base of kwa-Gqokli, and they were joined by those with the captured cattle. Although still a viable force, the Ndwandwe warriors began retiring under pressure from Zulu, while the Zulu began to retire. Shaka had used all of

his tactical trumps.

It had been a bloody day for both sides. Zwide lost six sons on the slopes of that hill and perhaps 2000 warriors. However, the Ndwandwe impi still outnumbered the Zulu impi, and could return home with the bulk of the Zulu cattle herd as a symbol of victory. Shaka likewise was pleased with the results of day. Outnumbered, Shaka’s tactical skill held the field, although it decimated his amabutho. The Zulu had lost 25% of their strength. Shaka had succeeded in defeating the Ndwandwe impi in a draw, although he was heavily outnumbered. Word of Shaka’s success spread and his losses were quickly made up by individual volunteers and whole clans.

However, not all of the clans went over to Shaka. Qwabe chief Phakathwayo kaKhondlo, residing between the lower Mhlatuze and Mzinyathi, refused to ally with the Zulu against the Ndwandwe. The Qwabe believed that the Zulu and Qwabe descended from brothers and the Qwabe descended from the older brother. Within a year, Shaka attacked the Qwabe and defeated them. Deposing Phakathwayo, Shaka replaced him with his younger brother and established control over the entire area formerly under Mthethwa influence.

The recruits were added to the original four amabutho creating brigades regardless of their local origins and affiliations. In this way Shaka replaced local leaders, and graphed the new recruits on to existing Zulu

amabutho. By 1819, he formed the additional izinTenjana and umGumanqa amabutho of the umBelebele Division from these new recruits.

Zwide regrouped his army with large numbers of Swazi clan levies he controlled to the north. He also attempted to copy the iKlwa arming some of his warriors with this weapon. In May 1819, Zwide thought himself strong enough to invade Zululand again with 18,000 warriors under Soshangane.

Shaka prepared for the invasion force that outnumbered his warriors by instructing all of the people to move to the forests deep within Zululand. With them they took all of the cattle and grain. Nothing was left that was useable by the Ndwandwe host. Meanwhile, Shaka took his army into the field leading the Ndwandwe on a chase. Shaka must have known that the Ndwandwe impi intended to live off of what was captured, and when the Ndwandwe marched into the deserted landscape they would soon be exhausted and starving. Meanwhile, Shaka supplied his own army using uDibi and younger herd boys. However, the Zulu army did not fight. Instead, the izinduna kept small numbers of warriors within sight but too far away to be attacked. Using this ruse Shaka planned to lure the Ndwandwe deeper into Zululand.

The Zulu plan worked. After a week the Ndwandwe izinduna decided to camp in a forest for the night and begin their return home the next

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

morning. All that evening small parties of Zulu warriors slipped into the camp to create havoc. In the darkness the Ndwandwe and Swazi could not tell friend from foe, and attacked one another. More costly than the few casualties was the lack of sleep the raids created. The next morning the exhausted and starving Ndwandwe impi started its retreat.

The Zulu impi fell upon the Ndwandwe, and for two days fought a series of battles over a series of contested along the Mhlatuze River. Desperately the Ndwandwe attempted to reach safety, but were reduced to a panicked mob that was harassed to death by Shaka's disciplined amabutho. Once the Ndwandwe army was destroyed Shaka ordered two amabutho to march to Zwide's great kraal. The impi arrived in the dark and used another ruse, the amabutho sang a Ndwandwe victory chant. The Ndwandwe came out expecting to greet their returning heroes, but too late they discovered their mistake. The Zulu slaughtered every man, woman, and child from the kraal and set the kraal on fire. Zwide escaped in the chaos and darkness. The next morning, the Zulu impi laid waste to Ndwandwe land, capturing cattle, killing anyone who appeared in their path, and looting or burning everything that was of value.

While the Zulu destroyed his kingdom, Zwide gathered a survivors and trekked north. He settled for a while among the baBelu and began rebuilding his

rebuilding his clan. However, he fell afoul of a powerful witch by the name of Mjanji. Mjanji controlled a small baBelu clan and was known as "Queen of the Locusts." She sent word that she had made up a strong potion against Zwide, and soon after Zwide died.

Soshangane also escaped with the nucleus of the Ndwandwe army to the north. He successfully drove the Portuguese out of the territory beyond St. Lucia Bay. There he stopped and created the Shangane nation outside of Zululand.

The Zulu nation grew in three years from about a hundred square miles to an area of over eleven thousand square miles, and the Zulu army grew from 350 warriors to 20,000 warriors. Shaka was at the center of this empire and he began to wage war for the sake of war. With a huge army, he had to find something for it to do. In 1820, he attacked Ngosa's Sotho Tembu clan on the other side of the Buffalo River. Simultaneously, Shaka sent a division against Macingwane's Sotho Cunu clan. Both clans attempted to defend the river crossings. The Tembu, were defeated and the survivors across the Buffalo River into Natal. The Cunu defeated the Zulu division sent against them and survived. This was the first defeat for the new Zulu empire, and for two seasons Shaka repopulated the Ndwandwe lands and acquired the last few clan holdouts remaining within the new Zulu borders.

Shaka sent his impis toward the Tembu and Cunu again in the winter of 1822. Between 1821 and 1827 the number of Shaka's army grew to eighteen amabutho. The izimPohlo Division included: uDubinhlangu (unTontela) (1816) shields unknown, and uGbabanye black shields with white markings. The uMnyama black shields, the uFojisa carried black shields with white patches, the uNgqobolondo carried black shields speckled with white, while the uMfolozi and uDubinhlangu shields are unknown. The umBelebeleni Division included the amaWombe (1816), shields unknown, the amaPhela (Ndwandwe warriors) shields unknown, the amaKwenkwe shields unknown, iziKwembu dun shields, iziZimazana shields unknown. It also included a section called uMpondozobekwapi who carried red shields with brown patches. The izimPohlo Division had the following amabutho added: uGibabanye (1821-26) black shields with white marks on the side with a section of the uMpofu with dun colored shields, the uFolisa (1821-26) black shields with white patches, with a section called uShoyisa red shields, the uNgqobolondo carried black shields speckled with white markings, and the uMfolozi and uDubinhlangu with unknown shields.

These invasions were uniformly successful after an unsuccessful attempt by both clans to defend their lands. The survivors fled south causing the

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

same mfecane “the crushing” as had occurred earlier. The Sotho fled across the Drakenberg Mountains well armed and motivated. They attacked local clans who when defeated fled and attacked other clans until the interior became little more than marauding bands of desperate people. Making matters worse, the refugees bled into Xhosa lands while the Xhosa were in a life and death conflict with the new white settlers in Natal.

The Xhosa lacked the Shaka’s centralized state and was broken up into a number of clan states. The amaTshawe became the dominate clan through strength of numbers, and its chiefs became paramount chiefs of the fragmented nation. The Xhosa were expansionistic as the sons of local clan chiefs were encouraged to set up their own chiefdoms. This caused the beginning of conflicts between the white settlers and the Xhosa.

Early in the 19th century a severe succession dispute split the Xhosa into two factions. The traditional paramount resided east of the Kei River and those who sided with Gcaleka became known as the amaGcaleka (people of Gcaleka) while the large group who moved into the land between the Kei and Fish rivers became known as the amaNgqika (people of Ngqika). This conflict spilled into Natal. In the end, the amaNgqika acknowledged the technical authority of Gcaleka, but they remained fiercely independent. The reward for this was that the amaNgqika bore the brunt of the

fighting with the Europeans.

By 1824 it was over. For a hundred miles south of the Tugela nothing existed but deserted and burned kraals. Crops were neglected as a few thousand refugees hid in the bush and forests in pitiful little bands. It was said that these poor wretches eventually resorted to cannibalism.

Of those who flooded into Xhosaland and contributed to the chaos, three tribes emerged. These were the Fingoes of British Kaffraria and the Bacas. Neither of these tribes was not much more than rabble, and welcomed the protection of the crown. The third tribe rallied upon the young Sotho chief Moshoeshoe from those defeated clans who had fled across the Drakensberg Mountains. On a large, flat hill called Thaba Bosiu, “The Mountain at Night,” he founded the Basotho nation. The hill was a natural fortress, and the Basotho defeated each attack by Sotho and Nguni raiders. It became a rallying point for all Sotho refugees.

Meanwhile, back on the northern border of Zululand, Shaka launched expeditions to the north against the Sutu baTlokwa, emaNgwaneni, and amaHlube clans. These clans had moved south from Transvaal. The defeat of these clans resulted in the same chaos that occurred in the south. However, this time the Zulu themselves became embroiled in the chaos.

Shaka sent inDuna Mzilikazi with an impi of two amabutho on a raid and upon a successful result, Mzilikazi stopped in the former Ndwandwe

kraal of his father on his way back to Zululand. It was here that he settled with his impi and the cattle he had collected. Not long after, Shaka sent a message to Mzilikazi requesting the balance of cattle that had been reportedly captured. Mzilikazi did not reply.

When Mzilikazi failed to reply, Shaka sent a small impi to collect the cattle. Mzilikazi defeated Shaka’s impi, and with only 300 warriors and his father’s kraal, Mzilikazi began a trek into the chaos to the north as a second impi was dispatched by Shaka. Unlike the Basotho, Mzilikazi had no common language or fortress to forge an empire. However, absorbing the tribes that he defeated, he cut a path of destruction that ended in northern Transvaal. He stayed there until the 1836 when the Boers drove him into Matabeleland.

Also, in 1824, Shaka sent an impi against the one of the strongest Mpondo clans beyond the southern Natal border. Faku’s Mpondo clan was one of the buffer clans between the newly arriving British colonists and the Zulu. Although Dingiswayo knew of the Portuguese, his intentions were diplomatic. The expedition against the Mpondo might be interpreted as Shaka’s attempt to come into conflict the Europeans he had never seen, but knew about in Natal.

The Boers had been populating Cape Colony, the Orange State Republic, and Transvaal since 1815 in scattered

Rise And Fall Of Shaka

Continued

farms. However, in 1824, the British colonists began to arrive in significant numbers. Not only was the British government interested in colonizing Cape Colony, but there was considerable interest in contacting the formidable kingdom of the Zulu. Perhaps the origins of the Zulu kingdom owed its existence to the chance meeting between Dingiswayo and an English explorer. Shaka had learned of the "white tribe" from a convict-interpreter who went by the name of Jacob. Certainly Shaka was curious, and anxious to find out as much as possible about this new tribe. The opportunity came when the Fynn party arrived at kwaBulawayo in July of 1824.

During the Fynn stay a war stirred when Sikhunyana kaZwide gathered an impi of Ndwandwe who rose in rebellion. Fynn accompanied the horrific march to battle and witnessed the hour long battle that resulted in the defeat of the Ndwandwe impi, and consequent slaughter of the women and children. In ninety minutes nearly 40,000 Ndwandwe men, women, and children were killed.

Fynn noted that although Shaka was on the field, he stayed in the rear of his impi, and the Zulu appeared to not have any coordination. The reward was 60,000 head of cattle, but Sikhunyana escaped. Shaka's personal attempt to find Sikhunyana was unsuccessful, and the insurgent leader disappeared to never be heard from again. The Ndwandwe

became part of the Zulu kingdom.

Between 1824 and 1828, Shaka concentrated on repopulating abandoned areas, and only created the uBhenkenya (iNdabankhulu) (1827) who carried black shields, and the iNgocobinga (uJubingqwanga) (1828) who carried speckled grey shields. This ibutho would later be reorganized as the iziNyosi, or "the bees." Six years of expansion and conquest was replaced by four years of draconian dictatorship. Until his thirties, Shaka had been supervised, but by the end of 1826 he was without enemies, commanders, or kings.

The last challenge to Shaka's rule was umBeje of the Kumalo clan holding out in the Ngome forest. These warriors destroyed a Zulu ibutho sent against them as it returned from the from the Sikhunyana campaign, defeated a second Zulu impi by evading it, and stalemated a third impi who could not find the Kumalo army, but were afraid to return to Buluwayo.

This was where Nathaniel Isaacs fits into the puzzle. Isaacs arrived in Zululand with ten English musketeers and twenty Port Natal natives armed with assegais. The eighteen year old Englishman soon found himself commanding a Zulu impi of over 5,000 warriors. The Kumalo impi turned to meet the Zulu, and Isaacs advanced expecting the Zulu to follow his example. However, the Zulu izinduna retreated to watch the outcome of the muskets against assegai. Young as he was, Isaacs was up to the task and advanced until he was wounded. At that

point he retreated thinking that he had been defeated. However, three days later, umBeje sent envoys to Buluwayo offering unconditional surrender rather than face the musketry again.

By 1828, the Zulu were rich and controlled an empire Dingiswayo only dreamed about. However, Shaka was still on the offensive. He sent an impi against the amaPondo and Mdlaka clans. Zulu warriors then returned to Buluwayo to be granted isicocos. He sent an impi against Faku's Mpondos. When the Mpondo fled, Shaka conferred with Fynn about whether to offer a peace treaty with Faku should he consent to become a vassal. Faku agreed to Shaka's terms, but Shaka was still angry with his amabutho who had failed to defeat Faku. Shaka sent impis consisting of 3,000 warriors north and northeast against the Swazi. Before the defeated impi returned, Shaka killed the wives of the warriors on charges of witchcraft. Shaka also killed the udibi boys who arrived before the impi. It was probably his excesses that resulted in his assassination on September 22, 1828, shortly after he re-organized the short lived Nyosi (bees) ibutho from herd-boys as his personal bodyguard.