

THE DEFAQNE – SOCIO-MILITARY REVOLUTION AND DEMOGRAPHIC DETERMINANT

Lt Cdr E.H. Ward*

Of all the factors which have in some way or another influenced the distribution of mankind on the surface of the earth, his physical environment must surely be regarded as one of the most dominant. However, despite the fact that they encompass some of the most arable and mineral rich areas to be found in the subcontinent, the shattered and periferal nature of South Africa's Black National States suggest that something radically more dramatic than a benevolent *clime* was responsible for this pattern. Lying as they do, like so many land locked islands of humanity, scattered around the perimeter of a strongly depopulated hinterland, they create the impression of having being cast there by the shock waves of some cataclysmic human upheaval which must have occurred at some time in their past. Any attempt to explain the causation of this demographic phenomenon historically must, however, surely be preceded, by a precise definition of one's point of departure in terms of both time and circumstances. Thus, before attributing the present situation to the events of the past, it becomes necessary to first examine the beginning.

In the beginning – a migratory genesis

Despite the fact that archeological evidence tends to suggest that Southern Africa was once the cradle of the Proto-Negroid it is probable that, for a time at least, the sub-continent was completely devoid of human inhabitants. The present population with its multi-ethnic character is the result of a series of migrations which have taken place over the centuries.

The first true human beings to enter the area were the San or Bushmen, a free roaming race of hunters and gatherers who wandered the veld in small family groups, following the vast herds of game in an almost symbiotic relationship with their environment. Unaltered over the centuries, their culture was primitive in the extreme and so inextricably part of the ecology that the advent of semi-nomadic pastoralists from the north threatened their very existence. Good game country is invariably good cattle country, and so, as the

game made way for the advancing *herds*, so too did the bushmen. The first of these herders were the Khoi or Hottentots. Having probably set out from the great lakes of Central Africa, they moved slowly down the west coast, reaching the Cape towards the beginning of the sixteenth century. From here they spread eastward as far as the great Kei River.

On the whole their culture was far more sophisticated than that of the San, however, despite the fact that their rudimentary agriculturally based economy was able to support a larger, and more complex socio-political group, the Hottentot was still largely dependent on the veld for his livelihood.

It is not surprising then that the coming of the White man, with his comparatively sophisticated technology, spelled the beginning of the end for the Khoi. Like the Bushman before him the Hottentot crumbled before the pressure of a more highly developed culture leaving the Europeans free to settle in the Cape of Good Hope and expand almost at will.

The lure of the spice trade brought the first Caucasians to Southern Africa. In search of a sea route to India, the Portuguese rounded the Cape of Storms in 1488 and again in 1497, but it was 1652 before the first permanent white settlement was established there. The Dutch, who by this time virtually monopolised trade with the East, were in desperate need of a half-way victualling station, and as East Africa was in the hands of the rivals, the Portuguese, the Cape was the only logical alternative.

Van Riebeeck's original few soon grew into a thriving young nation. Strengthened by migration from France, Germany and the British Isles and, aided by a healthy economy and an undaunted spirit of independence, this white nucleus expanded rapidly and by 1778 they had reached the Great Fish River. Here their advance was stopped; for it was here that they met the vanguard of the south bound Black migrations.



A migratory genesis
A general indication of the main stream population migrations into Southern Africa (After Benbo 1976)

The origins of the Black people are somewhat obscured by the mists of antiquity. As to where they came from or why they moved is according to the Bantu's own verbal history, such a tapestry of myth and truth as to defy serious scientific investigation, thus giving rise to more than one theory in this regard that would seem more politically than academically based.

Although some protagonists argue an Egyptian or even an European origin for the Black peoples, it seems most likely that they evolved as an independent race in Central Africa as the result of direct contact between pastoral Negroes and invading semi-nomadic Hamites.

Possibly as a result of the inroad of Islamic hordes from the north, or due to their wasteful exploitation of arable land, these peoples began to move drifting ever southward at the pace of their herds.

According to Bryant the 'Southern Bantu' left the Great Lakes around 900 AD trekking southward in three consecutive migrations. The Nguni peoples appear to have followed the eastern seaboard. Reaching Southern Africa toward middle of the 15th century they settled along the

coastal corridor comprising Swaziland, Natal and the Eastern Cape.

The Sotho-Tswana migration took a more central route. Splitting into two waves they penetrated the hinterland and by 1652 had established thriving settlements throughout Botswana, the Transvaal and Orange Free State.

Life in a pre-Shakan Eden

The original Bantu were simple, happy people. Having no great sense of time or purpose, they saw no need to keep a written record of their past. Nor did their cattle based culture inspire the development of more than the most rudimentary of technologies. (In this era of circumnavigation they had not even developed the wheel). To them life, and the world at large had been created solely as vehicles for the care and promotion of their herds.

At the base of the early Black political system lay the tribe. Seldom consisting of more than a few thousand members they took the form of extended clans; a central, royal line ruled by a hereditary chief enlarged by the allegiance of several weaker lines.

Although bound by bonds of political loyalty, these surrogate clans were far from subservient in their relationship to the ruling line. They in fact maintained a strong sense of own identity and a considerable measure of economic self sufficiency. This aspect of the tribal structure did much to temper what could have been a totalitarian system, for, although his subjects openly recognised their Chief as being their supreme, civil, military, judicial and religious leader, they were not adverse to deserting incompetent or autocratic monarchs. Not relishing the idea of thus weakening his position, most chiefs tended to temper their judgement so as to coincide with public opinion. In practice he ruled as a chief in council guided by his personal advisors and the many councils to which all adult male members of the tribe had access. To assist him in the administration of the tribe most chiefs established an elementary bureaucracy. Depending on the size of his territory, he would divide it up into a number of sub areas, placing each under the authority of a trusted friend or relation. In turn each subordinate sub-chief would appoint his own indunas and councils to advise him in the affairs of his office. Thus a chain of political command was created extending from the Chief to the lowliest adult male.

As manhood was regarded as a prerequisite for political participation, they recognised the need to prepare their young men for this responsible state. Thus it was that both Sotho and Nguni tribes practised some form of initiation during which initiates were instructed in tribal customs and the duties of manhood.

Not only did initiation schools serve as the transition from adolescence to membership of adult society, it also provided the basis for a rudimentary regimental system. Including as they did all male children of a certain age group, they served to foster those horizontal bands of loyalty found among all groups who share a common suffering. These ties were further strengthened by the appointment of a group leader to whom they owed allegiance, thus forging them into a permanent unit within the tribe that could be called upon to render public service. In the early history of the region however these age-regiments were regarded as little more than casual groupings, and in time of war most tribes were content to field all their adult men in a single hotch-potch, fighting force.

Conflicts among the various tribes were not uncommon, in fact a mild almost continual state of

war, arising mainly from disputes over grazing rights, was regarded as being the norm. Despite this, they seem to have been particularly inept in the arts of war. They regarded combat merely as an extension of the hunt, and accordingly made no attempt to maintain a standing army or develop specific military skills.

In many respects, battles between these early tribes bear a surprising resemblance to modern day sporting contests and were often prearranged. The combatants would meet at a mutually convenient venue and while the men drew themselves up in disorganised mobs at opposing ends of the battlefield, the women and children would gather on the surrounding hills to give verbal and moral support to their champions.

Tactics were virtually non-existent and battles were usually preceded by protracted harangueing matches during which the warring parties traded insults with each other.

Individual warriors would take this opportunity to *giya*. Howling selfpraise they would rush forward into no man's land dealing death and devastation to an imaginary foe, before returning to the ranks.

Having plucked up sufficient courage the *impis* would begin to edge towards each other hauling assegais as they came, until one side's nerve gave way, on which they would turn tail and flee the field with their opponents in hot pursuit.

The price of defeat was seldom severe. The victor would claim grazing rights and several head of cattle but would rarely inflict a crushing blow to an enemy tribe, let alone think of genocide. The early migrants had a fundamental respect for human life and once the *casus belli* had been removed, they would simply make room for each other and continue in peaceful coexistence. And so life would have continued for as long as there was room to expand. But in 1779 the Nguni migration was abruptly stopped. The first frontier war turned the Xhosa vanguard back upon itself and behind it the pressure began to mount.

Population pressure and cultural shifts

One of the factors sighted as being instrumental in causing the migrations is a population growth, in excess of that which the land could support. If

this assumption is correct, it is unlikely that the situation would have changed once they reached Southern Africa. On the contrary, due to the healthy climate and disease free conditions prevailing in the region, it is probable, that if anything, the population growth would have increased.

As long as there was room for expansion the population explosion did not pose any serious problems. If there was sufficient grazing for everyone the weaker factions simply moved on. While the interior plateau offered the Sotho almost inexhaustible options in this respect, the Nguni were not quite as fortunate. Hemmed in between the Drakensberg and the sea they could only expand along a narrow front which was the cause of a human bottle-neck even before the Europeans stopped their southward march. By the end of the eighteenth century Natal and Zululand were becoming too densely populated to support traditional methods of land tenure. Filled by desperation, tribal conflicts became more frequent and severe. No longer was it safe to stand alone. In order to ensure their own survival, tribes began to join forces and a process of aggregation began.

Initially three large blocks emerged: the Ndwandwe, under Zwide; the Ngwane, under Sobhuza; and the Mthethwa under Dingiswayo.

As a mutual need for protection had helped to trigger the growth of these blocks, it is not surprising that the advent of larger political units also heralded a new school in military thought. No group could longer afford the luxury of an unstable aggregation allowing independent military action. What was needed was a consolidated military front that would at the same time lend stability to the political unit. The obvious choice was a formalization of the traditional age-regiment system. Most authorities recognise Dingiswayo as the foremost protagonist of this system. Primarily a diplomat, his aim was to

pacify Zululand by uniting all the conflicting tribes under a single paramount ruler. To achieve this he realised his need for a strong and highly disciplined army. Thus on ascending the Mthethwa throne, one of his first acts was to place his 500 warriors on a sound regimental footing. Other than this, Dingiswayo made no radical military changes, but he did provide a brand of driving leadership hitherto unknown in tribal military systems.

Aided by his army Dingiswayo set about realising his dream of uniting the Nguni into a sort of Pax Mthethwa. As his empire grew so too did his military strength, and as each intanga was drafted their regimental significance became more and more pronounced.

On the whole Dingiswayo was a mild politician. He allowed vassal tribes to retain their own chiefs and would often return cattle to a defeated enemy, keeping only the oxen to distribute among his warriors. Whenever possible he chose diplomacy above violence, and would far rather arrange a marriage of political convenience or replace a troublesome chief with a more pliable one, than put an entire tribe to the spear.

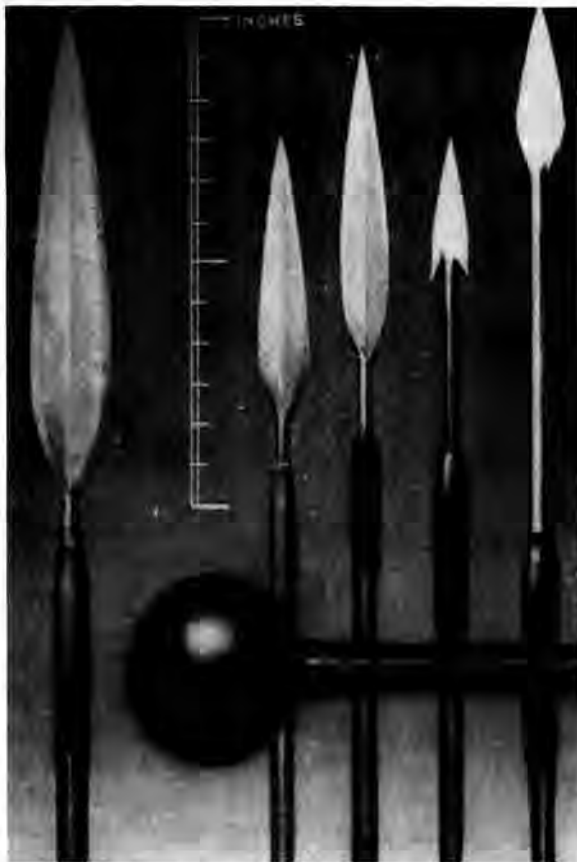
However, with three major political giants competing for the allegiance of the lesser Nguni tribes it is obvious that no amount of diplomacy could prevent the eventuality of a military confrontation. In time, Zwide and Sobhuza met in a bloody clash from which the Ndwandwe emerged victorious. Although not completely routed Sobhuza fled inland where he continued his campaign of political amalgamation giving birth to the embryo of the modern Swazi nation.

The stage was now set for a clash between Dingiswayo and Zwide. However a new power was rising that would change the face of Southern Africa forever.

The rise of Shaka and the Zulu war machine

As the illegitimate consequence of an incestuous flirtation between Nandi and the Zulu chieftain Sansangokana, Shaka's childhood was far from happy. Despised and ridiculed by his Zulu and Elangeni peers, he was made the target of every cruel and painful joke his intanga could devise. It was only when his mother sought refuge among the Mthethwa that his life began to assume some semblance of normality, but even here he was characterised by a brooding obscurity.

At the age of twenty three he was drafted into Dingiswayo's army as a member of the iziCwe regiment. The Mthethwa policy of planned aggression gave him ample opportunity to study both Bantu politics and the arts of war. From the outset his genius in these fields became apparent.



Zulu spear-heads: Left; the *iklwa*, ten inches or more from tip to shoulder and at least "two fingers" in width, noticeably thicker in the centre; sometimes slightly hollow-ground. The tang rammed into a hollowed haft with resin, bound with copper wire, and covered with a tube of wet hide that contracted in drying. The haft about 3 feet long, sometimes even less, tapering slightly from head to butt and often ending in a slight 'bulb'. Right; throwing spears, small-headed and semi-expendable, the hafts up to five feet long. Also shown, the head of the *iwisa*, knob-kerrie. There were many kinds of wooden weapons, of which most were common in civilian use. (McBride)

Politically he became the devout disciple of total subjugation through desimation. In his experiences with the *iziCwe* he had all too often been recalled to subdue a previously vanquished tribe. It is perhaps not surprising then that he chose decisive combat as his means of ensuring political growth and stability above Dingiswayo's brand of diplomacy.

To implement such a political philosophy Shaka realised his need for a strong and disciplined fighting machine.

Shaka's first experiments into matters military were centered around the warrior and his personal equipment. His theories of total devastation required a sure-footed infantryman, well equipped for hand-to-hand fighting. For these purposes the light, six-foot throwing assegai was

far from adequate and besides, Shaka found himself horrified by the idea of literally throwing his weapons away. Consequently Shaka set about designing a short stabbing spear, similar in application to the Roman broad sword. The result was a weapon with a broad, heavy blade about ten inches long, balanced by a sturdy haft. Hefted under hand its effect was devastating at close quarters as its Zulu name *iklwa* – an onomatopoeia approximation of the sucking sound it made when pulled from some luckless victim's body – suggests.

In developing the aggressive man-to-man infighting tactics necessary for the effective use of his new weapon, Shaka also discovered an offensive role for the traditionally defensive oxhide shield. Besides using the centre pole for feinting and jabbing, Shaka found that, by hooking the left edge of his *Isihlangu* behind that of his opponent's, he could pull him off balance while at the same time driving his *iklwa* into his enemy's exposed armpit.

Besides courage, these new techniques required speed and agility if they were to be effective. To this end Shaka discarded his clumsy hide sandals and encouraged others to do the same.

Shaka was not long in proving the worth of his innovations. During a routine operation against the *Butelezi*, Shaka cut the traditional preliminaries dramatically short. Bursting out of the *iziCwe* ranks he cut down a hapless opponent, who had rushed forward to *giya*, with a single blow, before proceeding to charge the stunned *Butelezi* single handed. Gathering their wits about them the rest of the *iziCwe* followed him. In the ensuing massacre the *Butelezi* were routed.

As a result of this action Shaka came to the direct attention of his Chief. Recognising his qualities of leadership, Dingiswayo saw in the young Zulu not just a mere soldier, but a potential vassal chieftain, capable of forming a buffer state between the *Mthethwa* and their powerful adversaries to the North. In preparation for his role Dingiswayo placed his young protégé in command of the *iziCwe* and brought him into his military and civil councils.

As commander of the *iziCwe* Shaka was free to experiment with regimental tactics. Having a healthy disrespect for the traditional undisciplined mob style of attack which, was in vogue at the time, he lost very little time in developing

assault techniques to optimise the aggressive character of his new weapons.

Dividing his regiment into three divisions, he sought to pin his enemy down by engaging them with a central body of men, allowing flanking parties to race out and surround them. Having achieved this objective they would move in for the kill.

Shaka further enhanced the manoeuvrability and range of his impi in the field by introducing the uDibi, senior herd boys, who acted as bearers for the regiment. Not only did this leave the warriors free to concentrate on the business of fighting, but, by moving as far as three miles to the left and right of the main column they doubled as scouts, providing valuable intelligence for the army.

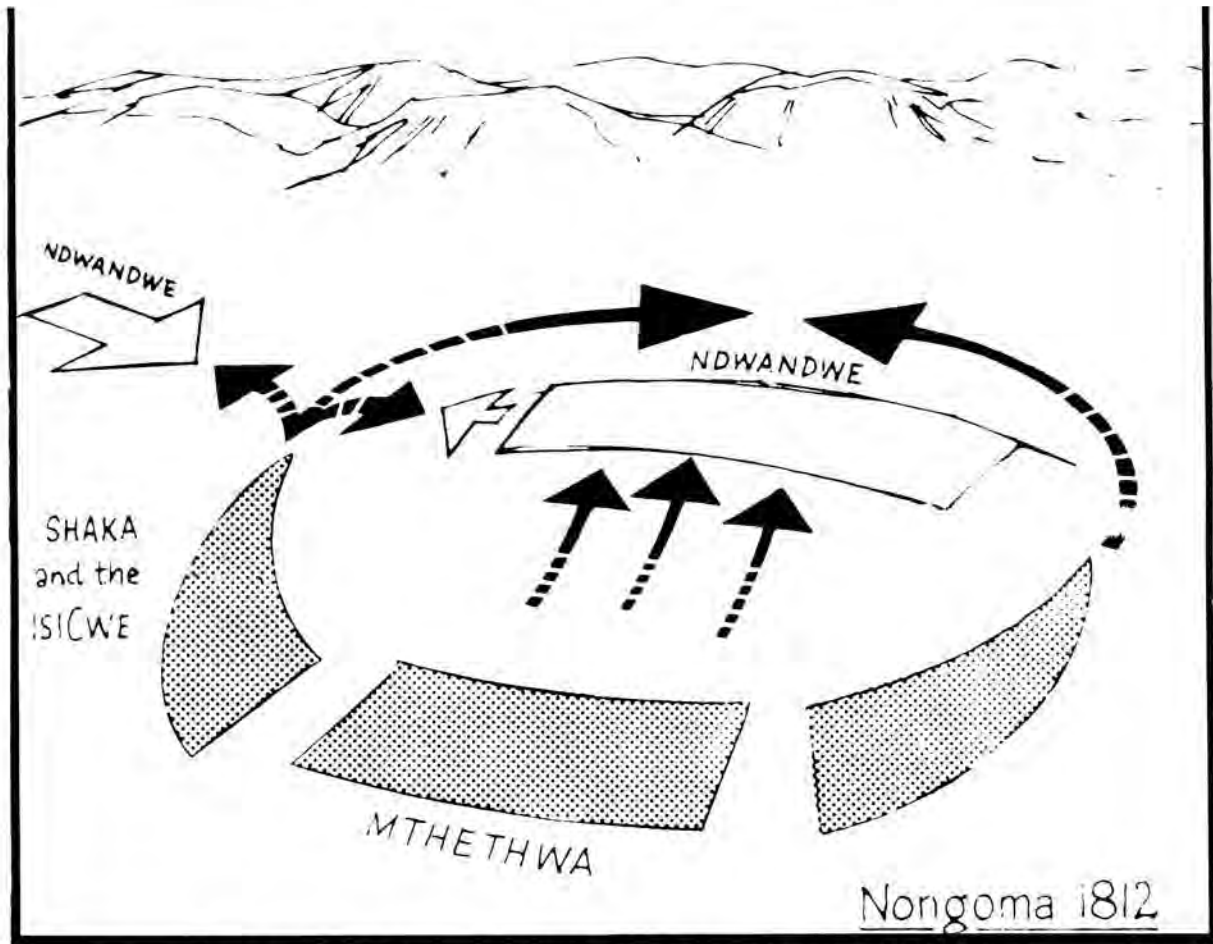
In 1816 Senzangakona died and Dingiswayo lost no time in installing his protégé on the Zulu throne. Although still vassaled to the Mthethwa,

Shaka was allowed very much a free reign to develop his political and military philosophies, after all, Dingiswayo regarded the creation of a strong buffer state between himself and the Ndwandwe more as an asset to his empire than a threat.

Shaka's immediate concern was his army which he saw as being essential to the success of his political philosophies. Thus he set about refining the military prototype he had created in the iziCwe.

Formation fighting and the demanding hand-to-hand tactics he had devised demanded a severe brand of discipline and rigorous training that was unattainable in a part-time army. To obviate this problem Shaka simply drafted his warriors into permanent force regiments which be barracked in military kraals. He also went a step further.

His services with the iziCwe had taught him that men often fought harder for the honour of the

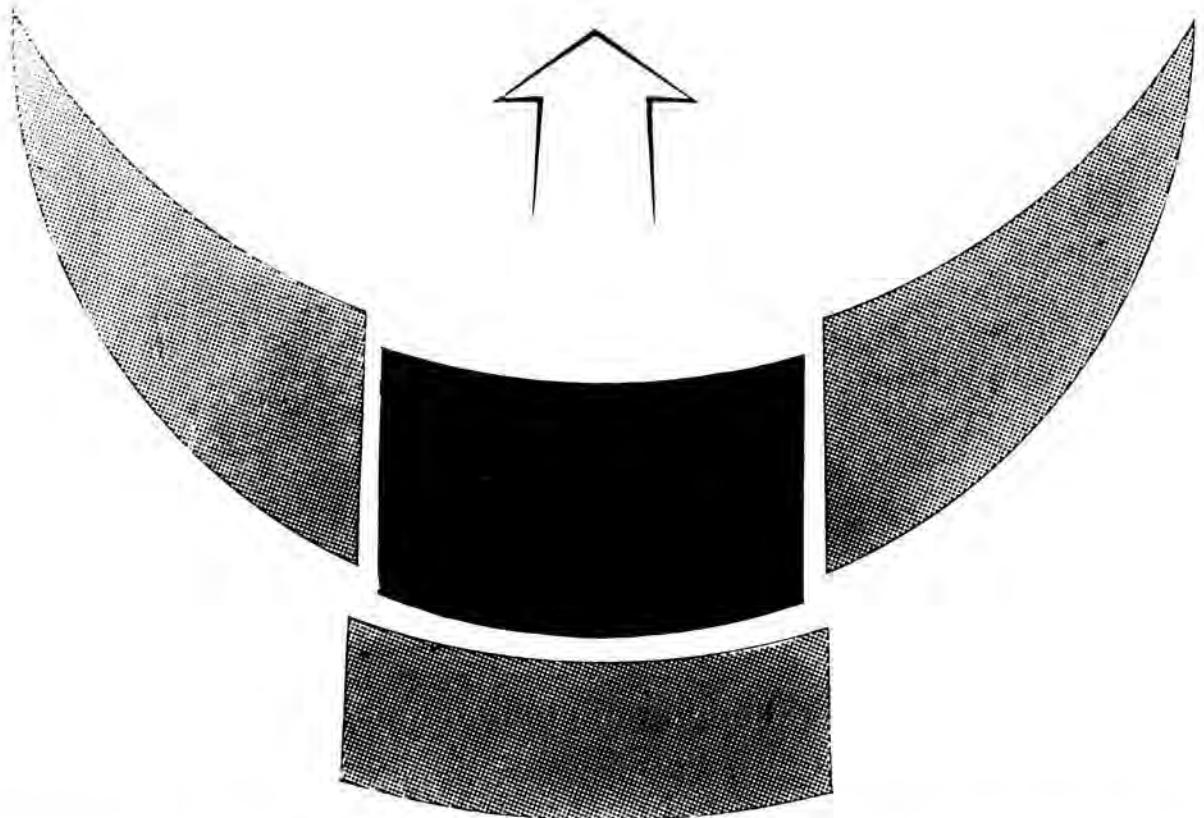


A new concept in tribal warfare Shaka and the isiCwe at Nongoma, 1812 (McBride)

regiment than for the somewhat more abstract principal of patriotism. In order to promote this concept Shaka was careful to instill into each regiment a distinct awareness of their own identity. Each regiment was given its own war cries, its own distinct regalia and war shields whose colours distinguished them from all other regiments. Shaka's joy was complete when, after a while he found it necessary to keep his regiments apart in order to maintain the peace. Not only had he created a solid foundation for his war machine, but also a mechanism that facilitated the rapid assimilation of the remnants of conquered tribes.

Having established his regimental system Shaka set about forging his army into a skilled fighting force, unparalleled in weapons and techniques able to cover up to 50 miles at a dead run and then engage the enemy.

Shaka refined his assault tactics into the devastating manoeuvre which was to become standard Zulu military practice in the years to come. Modelled on a charging bull, it incorporated the coordinated deployment of a minimum of four tactical units. The strongest section or chest would immediately engage the enemy in a frontal assault allowing the two horns to race out and encircle the enemy. On meeting the horns would turn inward and start fighting towards the centre. The fourth section or "loins" acted as a reserve force. Taking up a position behind the chest they would sit with their backs to the fray so as not to become excited and thus impair their judgement. The entire piece was controlled by an induna who could communicate with the field by means of runners. From a convenient elevation he could quite easily follow the progress of the battle and thus deploy his forces wherever the enemy threatened to break out.



***The Shakan bull
This chest, horns and loins deployment of troops into battle became the model on which all Zulu styled tactics were to be based (McBride)***

In theory the deployment of such a formation may sound elementary, but when one considers that the success of its execution is dependent on the movement of massed troops at top speed over broken ground while maintaining perfect silence and alignment, one can not help but wonder at Shaka's military genius.

By 1817 the Zulu army numbered some 2000 men. In a little over a year Shaka had created the most formidable fighting force that Bantu Africa had ever seen. By replacing the hereditary tribal chiefs with his military indunas, he has also succeeded in merging his political and military power. As commoners, the indunas were entirely dependent on Shaka for the maintenance of their positions in his court and, were therefore hardly likely to oppose him in matters of government. The creation of a subservient socio-military bureaucracy thus effectively freed Shaka from the restraints of public opinion, changing his political station from that of the traditional monarch in council to one of virtual despotism.

The Defaqne – an African apocalypse

In his striving to produce effective socio-military self defence systems, as a means of ensuring his survival, mankind had, through the ages, been seemingly blessed with the happy knack of contriving mechanisms as capable of precipitating a holocaust, as they are preventing them. Thus it was that the developments taking place in 19th century in Zululand were to prove no less devastating than any modern day nuclear weapon. Where as traditional forms of warfare had been kind to the defeated, the vanquished were now either annihilated or forced to flee. Stripped of their cattle and their crops these refugees were left with little choice but to pilage or starve, thus setting up a murderous chain reaction that was to lay waste to vast areas of Southern Africa. The very mechanisms which they had created to ensure peace in their over-crowded environment had taken the South Eastern Bantu to the brink of disaster and beyond. They called it the time of 'the crushing' – the Defaqne.

In the winter of 1817 a combined Mthethwa – Zulu impi struck deep into Natal. Warned by the preceding general mobilization of the impending campaign, Chief Matiwane received intelligence to the effect that it was his tribe, the Ngwane, who were the intended victims. Realising that he could not possibly conduct a successful defence against such a formidable adversary as Dingiswayo, Matiwane used what time he had at

his disposal to entrust his herds into the care of his neighbour Mtimkulu of the Hlubi.

Military speaking Matiwane's clash with the Mthethwa was short and indecisive. Dingiswayo, as usual, was quick to accept his opponents surrender and, having delivered a stern lecture on the value of future good relations, withdrew his troops to Zululand.

Matiwane lost no time in trying to reestablish his position, and subsequently sent to Mtimkulu for the return of his cattle. To his astonishment however, the Hlubi monarch refused, but before the Ngwane could avenge this insult they were dealt an even more staggering blow. Taking advantage of Matiwane's weakened state, Zwide flung the full force of the Ndwandwe hordes against his disorganised impis. Reeling under the shock of the attack the routed Ngwane were either massacred or forced to flee their lands.

Homeless and without food, what was left of Matiwane's forces regrouped and with a ferocity born of desperation descended on the unsuspecting Hlubi in a welter of carnage and death. Scattered by the merciless brutality of Matiwane's attack the Hlubi remnants rallied around Mtimkulu's heir, the energetic Mpangazita, who realizing the futility of offering any further military resistance to the blood-crazed Ngwane, fled with his followers across the Drakensberg to wreak havoc among the unsuspecting Sotho clans beyond.

Having subjugated Matiwane to his satisfaction Dingiswayo now turned his attention to Zwide. Although the Ndwandwe had never actually followed a policy of major conquests, they were strong enough to pose a threat to the Mthethwa and as such were potential trouble makers.

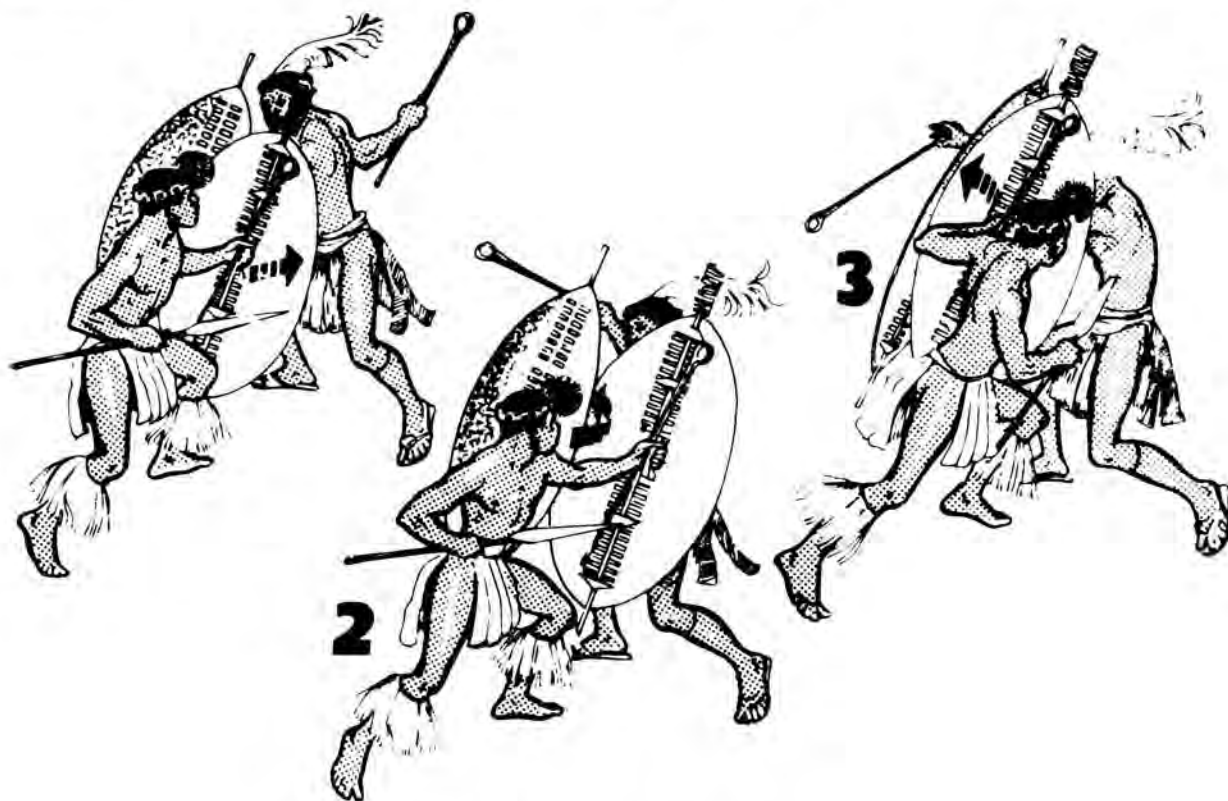
In 1818 matters came to a head when Zwide murdered Dingiswayo's son-in-law. Issuing orders to Shaka to join him the monarch marched to the Ndwandwe. For some reason however the Zulu were delayed and, while their Mthethwa allies waited for them on the Ndwandwe borders, Dingiswayo was captured and murdered by his enemy. Fortunately for the leaderless Mthethwa, Shaka arrived in time to prevent them from being completely routed, however, although steeled by the Zulu's discipline it took all they could do to achieve a retreat in good order.

Dingiswayo's demise left Zululand wide open. Although succeeded by his half brother Sigu-

jana, it was obvious that the Mthethwa, were no longer a force to be reckoned with.

Having been schooled in the old traditions of Bantu warfare, Zwide was convinced that his vast numerical superiority would ensure his victory over the young Zulu nation. Accordingly he dispatched a large force of men to bring Shaka to heel.

Hill. Surrounding Shaka's position the Ndwandwe launched a series of frontal attacks on the summit. These tactics proved catastrophic. Due to its conical shape the hill forced the already closed packed Ndwandwe ranks so close together as to impair the effective use of their throwing assegais, leaving them virtually defenceless against the Zulu's hand-to-hand techniques.



Shakan spear and shield tactics (McBride)

The ensuing defence of Zululand provides us with glimpses of Shaka's military genius. Realizing that the Ndwandwe force was too large to risk a frontal attack, Shaka withdrew with his army to Gqokli Hill, a conical kopjie in the middle of a waterless plain. Taking advantage of a natural depression at the top of the hill to conceal his reserve forces and an ample supply of food and water, Shaka threw a defensive circle around the summit and settled down to wait.

On seeing his enemy approach Shaka ordered a group of his men to take the Zulu herds and flee. The decoy worked. Assuming the fleeing cattle to be a section of the Zulu impi, the Ndwandwe deployed a sizable detachment in hot pursuit.

As the dawn broke so did the Battle of Gqokli

By mid afternoon it was obvious that the Ndwandwe had received a severe mauling. In addition to exhaustion and heavy losses they had been further weakened by the effects of thirst, aggravated by the demands of the battle. Scores of warriors simply deserted and wandered off into the bush in search of water.

Notwithstanding, Zwide goaded his men into a final assault. His plan was simple enough. Forming a phalanx with half his men he would overrun the Zulu, forcing them over the top and down the other side of the hill into the waiting arms of his second division.

As the Ndwandwe charge neared the summit Shaka deployed his reserves. Racing out in a 'horns-like' manoeuvre they encircled and de-

stroyed the Ndwandwe column. Continuing round the hill Shaka then engaged the remainder of Zwide's force from the rear. It was only the return of the impi Zwide had sent in pursuit of the Zulu cattle that prevented Shaka from completing the route. Once again outnumbered, he deemed it wise to fall back to his headquarters at Kwa-Bulawayo. But the Ndwandwe had had enough and instead of pushing home their advantage they withdrew.

In May 1819 Zwide again invaded Zululand. Having regrouped and rearmed his 18 000 warriors with stabbing spears he was confident that victory was assured. Despite the fact that the Zulu too had been strengthened by an influx of volunteers after their success at Gqokli hill, Shaka was once again hesitant to risk his army in a frontal attack against such overwhelming odds. This time he resorted to a scorched earth policy. Hiding the cattle and grain of the tribes he controlled in the forests he engaged the Ndwandwe in a deadly game of hide-and-seek. The Ndwandwe were not prepared or equipped to fight an extended campaign.

Hungry and demoralised they began to retreat. They spent their last night encamped in the Nkandla forest but they did not get much sleep. Small parties of Zulu's infiltrated their ranks and were responsible for instigating sporadic outbursts of fighting among the Ndwandwe troops.

At dawn the exhausted impi resumed its retreat. As they began to move out Shaka attacked. In the ensuing battle the Ndwandwe were finally crushed. Zwide himself escaped the ensuing attack on his kraal but died in exile shortly afterwards.

What was left of the Ndwandwe either joined Shaka or fled. One section, regrouped Zulu fashion under Zwangendaba and fled North. Moving through the Eastern Transvaal and Zimbabwe they finally settled in Malawi where they established themselves as the Ngoni. A second group under Zwide's fieldmarshal, Soshangane, penetrated Southern Mozambique and the areas north of St Lucia where he too established a Zulu styled enclave.

Of those who selected to join forces with the Zulu perhaps the most important was a small group from the Kumalo tribe under the leadership of one Mzilikazi.

To date Shaka's military activities had been dic-

tated by the course of events but even so the results of his socio-military policies were beginning to show. From a patchwork of independent tribes he had forged a united empire capable of fielding 200 000 warriors who enforced his rule over an area comprising some 11 500 square miles. What is perhaps more significant than mere statistics is the fact that Shaka's subjects claimed one central allegiance. Through the regimental system they had become Zulus and were proud to be known as such. From their humble tribal origins the Zulu had, in a few short years, become a nation.

Having destroyed the Ndwandwe to his north, Shaka now turned his attention to the tribes in the south. The first to bear the brunt of the Zulu raids were the Tembu and their neighbours the Cunu. Despite their fierce resistance, they were no match for the disciplined Zulu impis. Crushed and beaten the starving survivors were driven southward, sweeping all before them. By 1824 all that was left of the peoples who had once lived in a belt that extended some 100 miles south of the Tugela, was a few thousand terrified tribesmen who lived mainly by cannibalism in the bush surrounding the remains of their kraals. And still they fled south, sowing chaos and disaster until this refugee tide finally dissipated among the Xhosa on the Eastern Frontier. From the ashes of this human catastrophe two new major tribal entities began to form in the remote corners of Southern Natal. Here both the Bacas and the Fingoes led a precarious existence, until the arrival of the white man brought them both protection and the chance to settle down.

Another tribe dislodged by the Zulu's southward attentions was the Ngwane. Realizing that he would be unable to negotiate a peace settlement with Shaka in the same way as he had done with Dingiswayo, Matiwane elected to desert the lands he had taken from the Hlubi and followed their example by crossing the Drakensberg with his entire clan. Having done so however he found himself unable to settle. To establish a successful kraal economy he needed at least one years peace, and due to the reign of terror sparked off by the invading Hlubi there was little chance of that.

Still reeling from the shock that had wrenched them from their lands, the Hlubi had burst upon the overcrowded central plateau some five years before. Starving and desperate they fell upon the startled Sotho, driving tribe after tribe from their lands. As each group was shaken loose they too

were forced to join the ever growing number of nameless mobs that roamed the territory in search of food and security, stripping the blighted land of everything that was edible, including human flesh.

Blurred by the complexity of the desperate wanderings of these marauding "tribes" and the lack of adequate written records, the history of events becomes here somewhat confused. However, it is probable that the first tribe to fall prey to the Hlubi were the Tlokwa. Unable to withstand the savagery of Mapangazita's attack they broke and fled westward, thus embarking on their own career of wandering conquest.

The first to succumb to Mna Ntatisi's Tlokwa, were the Fokeng, however before they could enjoy the fruits of their victory they were again the victims of a Hlubi attack. Fleeing south-east to Butha Buthe they launched an attack on the mountain stronghold of one Moshesh. Due to his excellent defensive position the future Basuto

chief and his small following were able to repel the attack quite easily. The ferocity of his daring counter attack in fact nearly routed his numerically superior enemy and, although the tide of battle eventually turned against him, it proved enough to persuade the Tlokwa to move on.

Travelling westward they once again stumbled on their arch-rivals the Hlubi on whom they inflicted a severe drubbing. Turning south they crushed the Taung before the flooded Orange River forced them north once more.

Returning to the Butha Buthe area the Tlokwa once again engaged Moshesh laying siege to his mountain fortress. They were forced to abandon this tactic however when a surprise attack launched by Moshesh's Nguni allies sent them scampering in search of a permanent home.

Having learned from Moshesh the value of a defensible mountain stronghold they seized the mountains of Kooaneng and Yoaloboholo. Here,



The forced migrations of the Defaqne (After Omer Cooper)

under Sikonyela, some twenty to thirty thousand Tlokwa came to rest.

By the time that the Ngwane crossed into Transorangia they had already adopted the Zulu regimental system. A formidable military power in their own right, they were more of a match for the desimated Sotho units that stood in their path. Faced by the advent of this new threat some of the Sotho fled while others, like Moshesh allied themselves to the advancing Ngwane.

From his base camp at Senyiotong, Matiwane embarked on a campaign aimed at destroying his arch enemies the Hlubi. For two years the two factions were locked together in a continuing struggle for supremacy in the area. Finally in 1825, Mpangazita risked his entire force in a desperate frontal attack on Matiwane's camp. Taking advantage of the absence of the bulk of the Ngwane regiments, who were away on a foraging expedition, the Hlubi launched their offensive. Outnumbered and taken completely by surprise the Ngwane fell back in good order. Their superior discipline paid dividends however, and they were able to keep the Hlubi at bay until their returning regiments turned the Hlubi charge into a complete and utter rant. What was left of the Hlubi either fled or were absorbed into the ranks of the Ngwane. One section of the tribe under Mehlomakhulu sought refuge amongst the Ndebele. This alliance was however short lived and fearing for his life and the safety of his people Mehlomakhulu fled back over the Drakensberg. Here too he found no peace. His campaign against the Baca proved abortive and he was once again forced to flee, this time to Lesotho where he remained under Moshesh until in 1854 the British gave him land in the Herschel district.

With the defeat of the Hlubi, the Ngwane emerged as the paramount military power on the central plateau. Despite this fact however Matiwane's position was far from stable. Without a healthy kraal economy he could only support his people by continually plundering and replundering the surrounding tribes, until devastated by years of war, the plateau could yield no more. The ravages of starvation began to add their toll to the already high cost of war. Thousands died, and those who did not preyed on each other. Rather than betray their presence by building huts others took to living in trees. Still more fled south east towards the Cape. Here they found a ready home among the 1820 Settlers who offered protection and a chance to regroup in return for their labour.

Starvation and the will to survive drew those who remained into formless undisciplined mobs. Sopping up clans like some great human sponge these masses rolled southward in search of food. In 1823, three of these wandering hordes known to history as the Mantatee, converged a Dithakong, capital of the BaTlapin. Realizing that they could not hope to thwart the intensions of such a formidable mass of humanity the BaTlapin prepared for flight. Robert Moffat, a missionary in the area was, however not prepared to see his flock so dissipated. Having persuaded the BaTlapin to make a stand he appealed to the Griquas for help. Half-castes who had adopted a western culture the Griquas were always spoiling for a fight. Now under the leadership of Adam Kok and Waterboer they rallied to the call, dispatching 100 well armed horsemen to the BaTlapin capital. On 25th June 1823 they rode out with Moffat to parly with the enemy. Being a Christian man Moffat felt duty bound to try and avoid violence if at all possible. But his attempt was to no avail, on the contrary, it was answered by a Mantatee charge. Although hopelessly outnumbered the Griqua held a distinct advantage over their opponents. Using the superior mobility their horses gave them to remain just out of range of their hunger-weakened opponents' spears, they poured volley after volley of rifle fire into their packed ranks. Even when the odds are in the region of 150 to one, an army can absorb just so much of this kind of punishment. The Mantatee horde was stopped, turned and finally routed. The BaTlapin who until now had played no part in the battle chose this moment to join the fray. Rather over zealous in the quest for revenge they concentrated their attack on the wounded, the women and the children. It was all Moffat could do to contain the BaTlapin atrocities to a minimum.

Streaming North in the aftermath of their defeat at Dithakong the Mantatee horde began to break up under the strain of its own weight.

Sebetwane and the Kololo chose a northerly route. Determined to find a new home they penetrated as far north as the confluence of the Apies and Crocodile rivers. Their stay here was short-lived however, for the Ndebele who regarded the territory as being part of their raiding preserves, did not take kindly to the presence of trespassers in the area. Continuing North the Kololo settled for a time in Botswana before finally fleeing across the Kalahari to lake Ngomi and onward into Zambia.

In the mountains Moshesh too had been feeling the effects of the Defaqne. Subjected to constant attacks by the Tlokwa and Mantatees he soon began to realize that Butha Buthe offered inadequate protection to serve as a permanent home for his people. This being the case he decided to move his entire following to a great flat topped mountain standing isolated in fertile plain in the region of western Lesotho. Here he established a fortress capable of withstanding the onslaughts of even the most formidable of the Bantu warlords and in time even the Boers.

Moshesh however did not yet feel entirely safe. The presence of his powerful neighbour Matiwane still made him nervous. Unable to challenge the Ngwane might himself he contrived to bring the might of an even greater power against his overlord. Although Moshesh paid tribute to Matiwane, the cunning Basuto ruler had also offered his allegiance to Shaka, sending him an annual tribute of crane feathers for use in his warriors regalia. One year he failed to deliver his tribute. When questioned as to this oversight he explained that the depredations of the Ngwane made it impossible for him to fulfil his obligations as a vassal to the Zulu king.

Shaka dispatched an impi forthwith and although the ensuing clash was indecisive it proved sufficient to persuade the Matiwane that the time had come to move on. Before he could trek however he could not restrain his followers from trying to drive Moshesh from his hilltop fortress. Expecting the Basuto to fight like plainsmen the Ngwane launched a frontal attack on Thaba Basiu in July 1827. Met by a deluge of boulders and spears their ranks wavered and broke and the Basuto, seizing their opportunity turned the retreat into a route.

Defeated and in constant fear of a Ndebele attack Matiwane withdrew across the Orange River and entered Thembuland in January or February of 1828.

Unfortunately for Matiwane his arrival coincided with the more malicious intrusion into the area of a Zulu raiding party. The colonial authorities, alarmed at the prospect of a fresh flood of refugees being driven into the Colony, dispatched a mixed force of British regulars and volunteers to stem the Zulu advance. It was however the Ngwane and not the Zulu upon whom they blundered.

On 28th August 1828 this force under Colonel

Somerset engaged Matiwane on the banks of the Umtata river, completely smashing the once proud Ngwane army.

Most of the surviving Ngwane settled down among the Thembu and Xhosa and were soon absorbed by the Fingo.

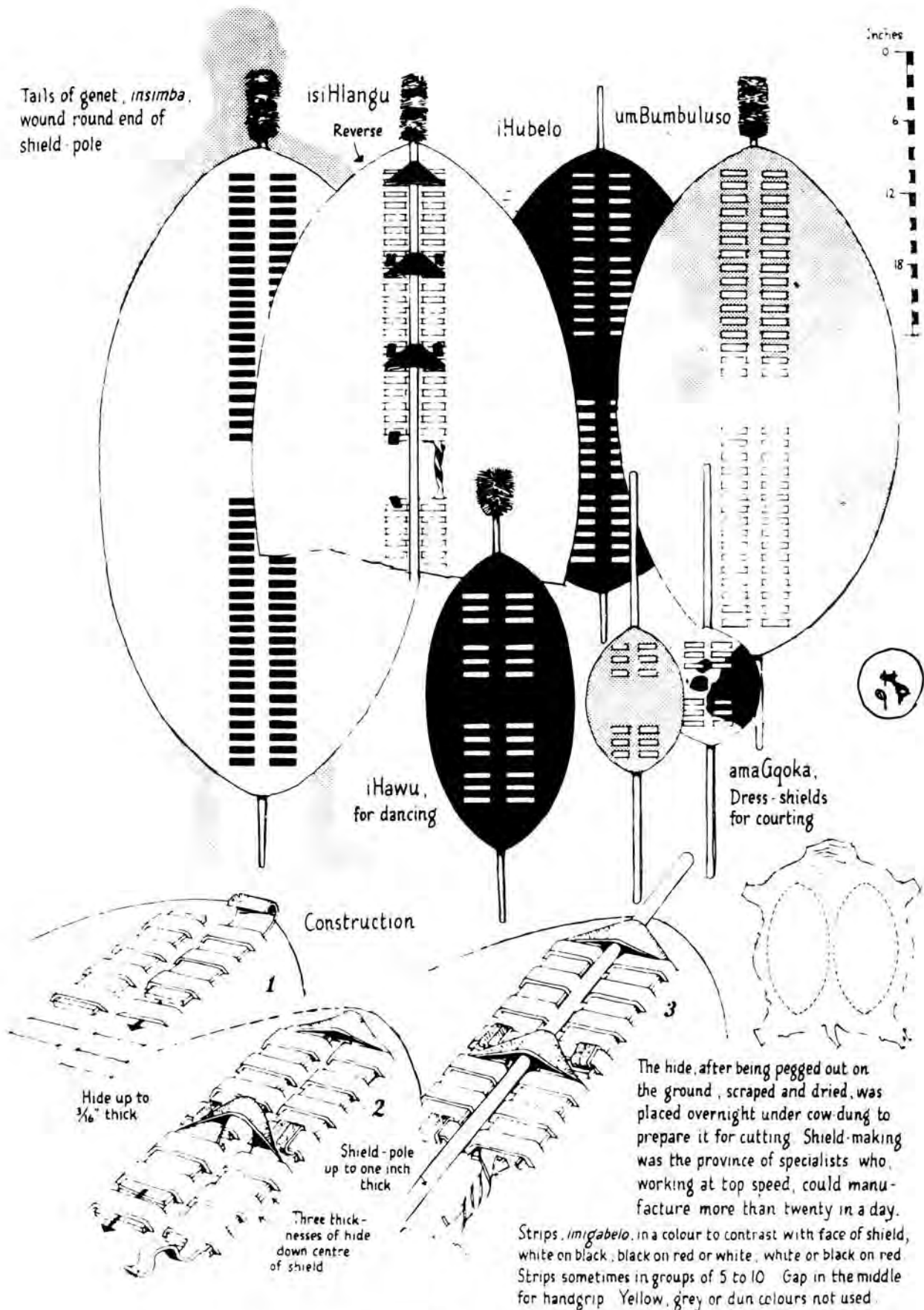
Tired and homesick Matiwane decided to return to the land of his birth. Refusing Moshesh's offer of sanctuary he continued into Zulu territory. At first he was well received, however, Dingane, conscious of the fact that the presence of so great a warrior could pose a threat to his authority, reluctantly summoned the Ngwane chieftain to his court and, having gouged his eyes out, executed him by driving stakes up his nostrils.

The toll of the human conflagration that raised the interior, is usually unfairly added to Shaka's reckoning for although he may have been instrumental in forcing the Hlubi and Ngwane over the Drakensberg, his impis had little enough to do with the devastation of the central plateau. His sphere of influence remained primarily confined to the coastal strip comprising Natal and Zululand.

Having routed the tribes to the south he now turned to harry the scattered Sotho tribes who had spilled over the Drakensberg into Northern Natal. Remaining at home, Shaka entrusted the command of the campaign to his favourite General, the Kumalo Mzilikazi. On his return he stopped off at the Kraal his father had once ruled before he was treacherously murdered by Zwide. His reception there was so heartfelt that Mzilikazi and his men elected to stay.

Shaka however did not leave him in peace for very long.

Noting the discrepancy between the reports he had received as to the cattle taken by the raiding party, and the numbers he had actually received, Shaka immediately dispatched his messengers to claim the balance. To Shaka's surprise Mzilikazi refused, and, cutting off their ostrich-feather plumes as an act of defiance he sent the royal messengers packing. This was in effect an open declaration of war and would normally have triggered heavy retribution, but Shaka was loath to attack his favourite General, consequently he only sent a light impi to collect his cattle. Instead of submitting to his overlords emissaries however, he gave them a first class



Zulu shields
Offensive/defensive weapons and regimental colours (McBride)

lesson in the arts of war. Shaka was inclined to let the matter drop, but his elders would have none of it. Such flagrant flaunting of the Zulu power could in no way be condoned. Shaka's impis were dispatched in force and Mzilikazi realized the futility of offering any form of military resistance, turned tail and fled over the escarpment and onto the interior plateau.

Although surrounded by far more numerous Sotho speaking tribes, the military discipline and Zulu fighting tactics of Mzilikazi's men gave them a distinct advantage over their peace-loving neighbours.

Sweeping all before him Mzilikazi cut his way north until in 1824 he settled near the upper reaches of the Olifants River. From here he set about reinforcing his tribe. Ranging far and wide his regiments made telling use of their superior military tactics to devastate the surrounding tribes, capturing their cattle and bring back the women and children to swell their fighting force. Like the Zulu, they used their military system to ensure the quick absorption of these remnants into the tribe.

Despite his successes however, Mzilikazi was not entirely happy with the north eastern Transvaal as a home. Not only did he regard it as being too close to Zululand for real comfort, but it was also the home of the baPedi. Safe in their mountain strongholds they remained a constant thorn in the Ndebele's side. The drought of 1824 proved to be the final straw. Abandoning their temporary headquarters, they trekked westwards, pausing at the junction of the Apies and Vaal rivers before finally settling near the eastern edge of the Magaliesberg not far from modern day Pretoria.

The arrival of Mzilikazi brought the peaceful existence of the northern Sotho to a sudden and violent end. Between 1825 and 1834 the Ndebele regiments mauled the tribes of the central and northern Transvaal.

Even here he was not free from outside pressure. In 1830 he came off second from a brush with a Zulu raiding party. He had hardly recovered from this setback when in 1831 the Griqua Barend Barendse attacked him and drove off a large proportion of his herds. In an attempt to make good his losses he struck south at Moshesh only to receive a severe drubbing at the hands of the Basuto Chief.

Frustrated, Mzilikazi elected once again to trek. Moving westwards he entered the Western Transvaal where he set up his headquarters in the Marico area. From here he resumed his reign of terror reducing the Bahurutshe, Bangwaketse, Bakwêre and Bamangwato to a bloodied remnant of their former selves.

Shortly after Mzilikazi's departure for the interior things in Zululand began to take a turn for the worse. For some time now Shaka's personality had been showing definite signs of change. Although harsh in the extreme he had always shown a real concern for his men, but now all traces of humanity were on the wane. Shaka had become a calous tyrant. The death of his mother Nandi, on 10 October 1827, brought matters to a horrific head. In a show of mourning he subjected his people to a wave of such unspeakable cruelties as to try the loyalty of even the most devoted followers.

Even his genius in military affairs seems to have left him at this point. Embarking on unrealistically extended campaigns he began to push his impis beyond all human limits.

Morale was low and the patience of the Zulu sorely tried. Not surprisingly, people began to make designs on Shaka's life.

On 22 September 1828, while his impis were away on yet another abortive campaign against Soshangane, Shaka's half brothers Dingane and Mhlangana entered his kraal and aided by Mbhopa, murdered the founder of the Zulu nation.

The king was dead, but as yet there was no king, and Zululand stood under the rule of a shaky triumvirate. Treason, it is said, breeds treason and consequently close allegiance that had existed between the conspirators at the time of assassination, soon became stained by a deadly internal power struggle. To add to these problems the triumvirate had no guarantee that Shaka's returning impis would accept the new situation. It was clear to Dingane that in order to survive he needed some form of loyal army of his own. Accordingly Dingane scraped together a few hundred men and enrolled them as the uHlo-mendidi regiment. Its members may have been iziYendane, unaffiliated and despised survivors of destroyed tribes who lived among the Zulu as menials and cattleherds, but their presence gave Dingane a sense of moral assendency that prompted him into securing his position.

Mhlangane was ambitious and had to be dealt with, thus, after an alleged attempt on Dingane's life he was summarily murdered. Mbhopa on the other hand had no illusions of grandeur and was quite happy to retire gracefully once he had received a few head of cattle in recognition of services rendered.

The only possible remaining challenge to Dingane's assumption of supreme power lay in Shaka's returning impi. Promises of peace and the right to marry along with the memory of Shaka's recent reign of terror were however, enough to convince the war weary warriors that life under Dingane was not such a bad idea. Only Mdlaka, Shaka's veteran general, had the courage to oppose Dingane's assention to the throne. Unfortunately for him he was in the minority and was promptly put to death for his misplaced loyalties.

As leader of the Zulu, Dingane certainly had the right background. He was milder than Shaka and as the son of a chief, schooled in the best traditions of Shakan military policy, he should have led the Zulu to rule under an ideal balance of the old and the new. Unfortunately Dingane was a weakling. Fat and lazy, he devoted more of his time to cattle, wine, women and song than he ever did to the affairs of state. Despite these weaknesses however he did much to foster Zulu military traditions. Although his impi were only deployed in a few major campaigns, against the Ndebele, they were kept more than busy suppressing even the slightest suggestions of political dissidence.

By 1835 the face of Bantu Southern Africa had undergone a radical change. Unequal to the growing pressures exerted upon them, the ancient traditions of society had been swept away and with them the old order of free moving minor tribes. But from the melting pot of rapid cultural change a new order was starting to take shape. Out of the chaos the Zulu, the Ndebele, the Basuto and the Swazi began to emerge as definite and identifiable nations. The upheavals of the passed decade that had claimed an estimated two million lives and left the interior charred and desolated were, however far from over. Still mainly reliant on pillaging for their livelihood, these young nations and the remnants of others faced each other in a continuous state of war dependent on each others misfortune for survival. What the eventual outcome of this struggle would have been is uncertain, for into this chaos trekked the Boers.

The great trek: The white man cometh

Over the years the European population in the Cape had not been immune to change. For one thing, Dutch rule had been forced to make way for a British Colonial system of Government. Staunchly Calvinistic the young Afrikaner nation did not always see eye to eye with their British overlords. Like their Dutch, French and German forebears they had some very set ideas about how their world should be run that did not always coincide with the crown's point of view. Fed by land-hunger and a growing dissatisfaction on the part of the Boers as to the British handling of problems on the eastern frontier, cultural tensions grew until finally, enticed by rumours of a land of milk and honey somewhere to the north, the Afrikaners decided to move.

The movements of the Trekkers were to a certain extent determined by the demographic consequences of the Defaqne. Besides drastically reducing the Black population of the central plateau and southern Natal, the waves of mauling bands had also forced many tribes to abandon their ancestral homes in favour of more defensive positions. Thus instead of a fairly even spread of tribes, a population pattern was created comprising of concentrated islands of people surrounded by vast areas of virtually uninhabited land. It was into these vacuums that the Boers advanced. However the same threats that had driven the tribes from their lands now challenged the Boer forces. If anyone was to settle in the area, these threats would first have to be removed.

In 1836 Hendrik Potgieter and Sarel Cilliers crossed the Oranje River. Having made their peace with Moshesh and Sikonyela's Tlokwa they proceeded north to the Vet River. It was not long however before their presence, or that of their cattle, attracted the attention of Mzilikazi's Ndebele. Consequently, in October 1836 Mzilikazi hurled an impi of 20 000 warriors against the Boer laager at Vegkop. The Boer defences boasted a mere 40 rifles, but by maintaining a sustained and accurate fire, they were able to turn even the Ndebeles most determined attacks. Unfortunately for Potgieter the retreating impi escaped with his cattle, forcing him to fall back to Basuto territory where he was joined by Gerrit Maritz.

To the Boer, as to the Black man, cattle meant wealth. In order to promote conditions conducive to ranching the Trekkers realized that raids

such as that carried out by Mzilikazi would have to be checked. This called for drastic action. Raising a commando of 187 Boers and 40 Griquas they set out in search of Mzilikazi in January 1837. Weary of this strange force the Ndebele attacked it with the full force of their 20 000 strong army. Despite their numerical superiority and military discipline they soon discovered that, in open country, spear armed infantry troops are no match for a mobile mounted contingent armed with rifles. Mzilikazi lost 400 warriors and 7 000 head of cattle to the victorious Boers.

The Boers however realized they would have to break the Ndebele power once and for all. The January Commando had only served to recover the lost herds, a second expedition would be needed to crush Mzilikazi. With 135 men divided into two companies Piet Uys en Hendrik Potgieter set out to achieve just this aim on 4 November 1837. They engaged the Ndebele near the Marico River and after nine days of heavy fighting, they had reduced Mzilikazi's disciplined army into a disorganised route.

The Boers had not lost a single man. His power broken, Mzilikazi fled. Crossing the Dwarsberge he chose a course that carried him through Botswana to the foot hills of the Matoppos. His retreat removed a major threat to peace in the Transvaal, thus opening up the territory to Boer and Sotho communities alike.

News of Mzilikazi's defeat travelled fast. The Zulu impis, returning from a punitive raid against the Ndebele, brought with them reports of the terrible powers of the white man and his guns. It is then not surprising that Dingane was a trifle uneasy when, on the 5th November 1837 he received Piet Retief and his entourage at Ngungundhlovu.

Uncertain of what he should do Dingane elected to play for time. Accordingly he agreed to cede those lands left vacant by the ravages of the Defaqne to the Voortrekkers on condition that they returned some 300 herd of Zulu cattle recently stolen by Sikonyela.

No sooner said than done Retief lured Sikonyela into his camp and handcuffed him. In exchange for his freedom Sikonyela paid some 700 cattle, his horses and guns. The boers, regarding Natal as technically theirs began to pour down the slopes of the Drakensberg and into Natal.

If Dingane was uneasy before, he was now posi-

tively frightened. These advancing wizards with their powerful magic could only be the army that prophecy held would come from the south to destroy the Zulu nation. Thus Dingane decided to employ treachery in a desperate attempt to rid his people of such a formidable threat to their security. On Retief's return to Ngungundhlovu, the Zulu monarch put him and his entire party to the spear before realising the full fury of his impis on the unsuspecting Trekkers who lay camped in the shadow of the Drakensberg. Concealed by the thick bush, the Zulu hordes moved unseen up the Tugela – Bushmans- and Bloukranzriver valleys to fall with unknown ferocity on the Boer laagers. Their cruelty knew no bounds and in their bloody wake they left the mutilated remains of 41 men, 56 women, 185 children and 250 Hottentot servants. Despite the element of surprise that they had enjoyed the Zulu did not emerge from these massacres unscathed. Dazed and bewildered as they were the Voortrekkers had still succeeded in inflicting heavy casualties. By the time the Zulu withdrew some 500 of their number had been killed.

Dingane may have gained 10 000 head of cattle from these raids but he had not succeeded in crushing the Boer migration. Drawing themselves into two central laagers the Trekkers began to lay their plans as to how Natal could best be made safe for Boer and Bantu to live in. However, despite a few indecisive raids and counter raids, it was November before the Boers marched on the Zulu capital under the command of Andries Pretorius.

This was no punitive raid. Comprising some 464 men and a canon, the expedition's sole purpose was to rid the area of the Zulu threat to its peace and prosperity.

On Saturday 15th December Pretorius established his laager on the banks of the Ncombe river. He had specifically chosen this position because of its defencibility, the river itself and a deep donga affording him a measure of protection on two sides. These natural defences were further strengthened by chaining the wagons together and covering their wheels with hides.

At dawn on the 16th December 1838 12 000 Zulus launched themselves into the attack. Four times they charged and four times they were driven back before they came within 10 yards of the Trekker strongpoint. And then they wavered. Sensing that he had gained the ascendancy Pretorius seized the initiative. Ordering the

laager to be opened he struck back at the Zulu with a cavalry charge. Under this mounted onslaught the Zulu ranks gave way and turning they broke and fled, hotly pursued by the Boers. In all, some 3 000 of Dngane's best warriors lost their lives that day.

The following day Pretorius marched on Ngun-gundlhovu, however, on his arrival he found that the Zulu had already fled.

The Boers were victorious but not vindictive. Having broken the Zulu emperor's military power they were quite happy to allow him to return as long as he did nothing to threaten the peace. In this they were supported by the majority of the Bantu population. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that, when, in early 1840, Dingane tried to reestablish his military reputation by embarking on an expedition against the Swazis, Mpande and his 170 000 followers appealed to the Voortrekkers to help them in resisting the campaign.

On the 30th January 1840 Dingane suffered his last defeat at the hands of Mpande's men aided by Trekker reinforcements.

Dingane fled and was murdered in obscurity and on the 9th February 1840 the Boers raised Mpande to the Zulu throne. Tyranny was dead and peace was established in the area.

The Defaqne had been characterised by an era of carnage and devastation. In contrast to this, the coming of the whiteman heralded the dawn of a new age of peace and stability. Terrorised and in a semi-permanent state of war and flight, the tribes of Natal and the central plateau had been reduced from prosperous pastoralists into refugees and marauding cannibals. Now, freed by the Trekkers from the depravations of constant war, they had time to rebuild their cultures, their economy and their shattered lives. The war lords had been brought to heel and peace reigned. The time of *'The Crushing'* had passed.

The Defaqne in perspective – an afterword

Many reasons have been given to explain why, for the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the South Eastern Bantu found themselves embroiled in a socio-military conflagration that was to dramatically change the face of Southern Africa. Not the least of these have been the theories of land hunger and over population, combined with the rise of the Shakan empire.

These may well have been major contributing factors, but should not the ultimate responsibility for these events, be assigned to the inability of an ancient culture to adopt to the demands of a changing environment or to accommodate a rapidly changing order?

Whatever the cause, the immediate effects were catastrophic and it is estimated that some two million people died in the ensuing holocaust. The significance of the Defaqne does not, however lie solely in the past. A closer study reveals that the social, political and military changes which took place have in fact left a profound imprint on the whole of Southern and Central Africa. It also brought into existence peoples who still trace their origins to the wars of the Defaqne.

Probably the most striking of the political changes to be wrought was the disappearance of the multiplicity of tiny clan based tribes and the advent of the large multitribal empires owing allegiance to a central king. At the centre of this political revolution was the military revolution. The Shakan regimental system provided the ideal mechanism for assimilating and uniting tribes into a single nation. The honour and pride of the regiment, combined with a comradeship bred of war, provided strong vertical bonds of loyalty capable of superceding tribal diversity.

The military system also promoted change in the system of government. Ruling as kings in the council, the tribal chiefs had, to a great extent, been held in check by public opinion. In the Shakan state traditional chiefs were replaced by military leaders dependent on the king for their stations in court. As these indunas were not over keen on falling into disfavour, this system effectively countered many of these controls and the king emerged as a virtual despot.

Although indigenous to Zululand, the effectiveness of this form of government soon caused it to spread. Those who came in contact with it soon adopted elements of it, and break away Nguni units carried it with them as far afield as Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

Based on the Shakan model such nations as the Swazi, the Matabele, the Shangane and the Ngoni emerged.

But the Zulu model was not the only successful method of welding smaller tribes into a greater multitribal unit. Others were attracted to a specific nation because of the drive, personality and



*Ethnic uniforms
Regimental regalia was worn with a fierce pride that helped forge new nations (McBride)*

political genius of a certain chief. Moshesh for example succeeded in founding the Basuto nation from the remnants of vanquished tribes on just this basis.

Along with the growth of militarism and strong government came important changes in the moral order. The harsh regimental regime drilled into its followers an almost instructive sense of discipline, loyalty and pride. Travellers who visited the Zulu or the Ndebele in particular, were impressed by their haughty attitude and quiet dignity, as well as the total absence of such social maladies as begging and petty theft.

Perhaps the most marked and permanent effect of the Defaqne was the pattern of demographic distribution that it produced. The establishment of the Swazi, Ndebele and Ngoni empires are probably the most dramatic and obvious examples of this, but the creation of the modern day black ethnic states in South Africa are of no less importance. Relying extensively on the beliefs that safety lies in numbers, and that natural strongholds are the most effective forms of shelter, the shattered Bantu tribes showed a tendency to concentrate in areas dominated by easily defensible natural features, thus leaving vast areas of vulnerable, open land virtually uninhabited.

The result of this tendency, is the erratic horse-shoe of states more or less as we know it today. The most sought after places of refuge seem to have been mountains and the fringes of more arid areas. Accordingly pockets of populations began to develop in the foothills of the Drakensberg and Basutoland mountains under the pro-

tection of Moshesh, while to the north the Pedi made similar use of the Zoutpansberg. The fringes of the Kalahari too offered protection to a variety of tribes.

It is to this arrangement of states then, that the intrekking boers gave a stability born of peace, thus crystalizing it into a natural and historically created order of things.

The Defaqne then, was more than just a chain of chaotic and horrific events, of only passing significance to the history of Southern Africa. It was a watershed for Black society and a potent molding force that changed the face of a sub-continent and forged moral, social and political attitudes as valid today as they were then.

*Lt Cdr E.H. Ward, BA., is attached to the Military Information Bureau of the SADF.

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