

A 'celibate, man-slaying machine': Sir Bartle Frere's famous comment was more than just propaganda; it reflected the mixture of fascination and horror with which Europeans regarded the independent Zulu army. At once awed by exaggerated stories of warrior courage and discipline, horrified by tales of barbarity, and curiously titillated by the image of sexually frustrated warriors lusting for blood, the whites misunderstood the nature of the Zulu military system, and passed on a distorted image which has clouded perception ever since.

The system had its origins in the early nineteenth century Nguni practice of banding youths of the same age together into guilds known as amabutho (s. ibutho) for the ceremonies attendant upon the onset of manhood. With the political and economic changes wrought by the *mfecane*, the period of bitter tribal fighting which resulted in the rise of the Zulu Kingdom, the amabutho became a means by which the labour potential of a most productive part of the Chiefdom might be realised. When young men were with the amabutho, they were, in effect, at the service of the state. Shaka was quick to grasp the significance of this; it had been customary to employ the amabutho in a military capacity, but Shaka developed the system to the point where the amabutho became military institutions, comparable to the European concept of 'regiments'. The advantages of the system are obvious; not only did it provide all the warriors necessary for Shaka's constant wars, but the organisation, being on an age, rather than regional basis, provided a unifying factor in Shaka's conglomerate Kingdom, where recently incorporated clans might prove unstable. Warriors were drawn from the same age group across the country, rather than from one area or clan. When the warriors were in service, they were quartered in large barracks, known as amakhanda ('heads'), which were carefully positioned around the Kingdom to act as regional centres of royal authority. Shaka carefully delayed and controlled the rate at which his amabutho married, not because he wished to heighten their aggression through sexual tension (Zulu society provided acceptable sexual outlets outside marriage anyway), but because with marriage the warriors were allowed to disperse. Although they were subject to a call-up in times of national emergency, their first allegiance was transferred to their families or local Chiefs. Their 'national service' was, in effect, over, and they were lost to the King as a direct resource.

In the years between the death of Shaka, in 1828, and the outbreak of the Zulu War, the internal dynamics of the Zulu state were far from static. With less energetic and ruthless rulers at its head, the Kingdom began to break up, and the personal power of the King to diminish. Dingane had to cope with attempts by several of his subject clans to break away, and the civil war which resulted in his downfall was positively disastrous. The situation was exacerbated by the growth of the white colony of Natal on the Zulu borders. This offered not only a haven for malcontents fleeing the Zulu Kingdom, but increasingly a rival power base which sucked away the resources by which the Zulu King maintained his position. So many men crossed the Tugela into Natal early in Mpande's reign that the amabutho were dangerously undermanned (1). The king had to lower the age at which the warriors were allowed to marry, because of the availability of wives in Natal. Within Zululand the weakening of state control meant that powerful clans within the country were able to build their own power and influence. The civil war of the 1850s was both a symptom of the lack of central control, and a further cause of it. Chiefs were courted by the rival factions and were therefore able to strengthen their individual positions. During Cetshwayo's reign, the King's position was further weakened by the cattle diseases which decimated the King's herd. These were an important means of royal patronage, and the method of which the amabutho were theoretically maintained.

The struggle to re-assert central authority is one of the themes of Cetshwayo's reign, and it was often resisted by powerful factions within the country (2). Many of these were represented on the ibandhla, the council of izikhulu, or 'great ones', who advised the King. The izikhulu could and did oppose the King. They prevented Cetshwayo from loading the ibandhla with younger men more favourable to his cause, and vetoed several of his projects, most notably a proposed raid on the Swazis in 1876. Significantly, Cetshwayo had wanted the raid to give his amabutho experience, and to raid cattle for the national herds; both would have strengthened his position. Early white observers of Shaka's court noticed the regularity with which he executed his councillors; in Cetshwayo's time, the izikhulu were far too powerful for that. Many were the heads of important clans who had early allied themselves to the Zulus; others were members of the Zulu household. It is no coincidence that when the Thulwana and iNgobamakhosi clashed at the First Fruits ceremony in 1878, the King's half-brother, Hamu ka Mpande, urged his regiment, the Thulwana, to take up arms and kill the iNgobamakhosi; despite the fact that the latter was a large ibutho of young men, particularly favoured by the King. Hamu was widely recognised to have ambitions on the Zulu throne.

Not that the Zulu army was degenerate in 1879. Lord Chelmsford's careful intelligence counts, suggested that the King had in excess of 40,000 warriors at his disposal. There were twenty-seven amakhanda scattered about the Kingdom, thirteen of them in the region of Mahlabatini plain, near Cetshwayo's residence at Ulundi

(oNdine). Ulundi itself was a huge complex of some 1,200 huts, whose garrison was more or less permanently in residence. These were the amabandhla amhlope, the 'white assemblies', who appear to represent a compromise which attempted to prolong the active service of married men. They were married men, who, still comparatively young, and, in Cetshwayo's words, they were 'allowed to live with some of their wives in these (the King's) kraals'. (3) They were, however, allowed some freedom - 'These men do work only at these kraals, and go home when they like'. At Ulundi the ibutho in residence was the Thulwana. As to the young warriors, 'the young men who are called amabutho are liable to be sent anywhere to work, and they live chiefly at some other military kraals, and not those where the 'white assemblies' live'. 'The young men he (the King) keeps to work'. It's important to note that this work was by no means solely of a military nature; 'Building military kraals, planting, reaping and making gardens for the King. These are the men who look after the King.' The majority of the amakhanda consisted of between two and six hundred huts, occupied only when its ibutho was called up by the King. The rest of the time it was cared for by a skeleton staff.

The amabutho were not required to be in service permanently, as they had been in Shaka's time. Most of the time the warriors lived with their families but were subject to call-up. In the latter part of 1878, there were so many call-ups, the result of the difficult political situation with Natal and the Transvaal, which proved false alarms that some warriors became disgruntled, and said they refused to muster 'unless for war' (4). Generally, however, most men were willing to serve in the amabutho. The prestige of the Zulu army was high, the regimental institutions fostered a high esprit de corps, and success in the army offered potential profit or advancement. Furthermore, those who refused to join were derided by their colleagues and, worse, by potential lovers.

For most Zulu males, first experience of the system came when, at the age of about 14, boys became uDibi. The Dibi boys were, in effect, body-servants of the warriors, and they were required to carry his food or weapons whilst on the march. This does not seem to have been a formal institution, the boys carrying for members of their families or warriors appointed them individually, rather than as an organised body. There was considerable reflected prestige in carrying for a renowned warrior. At 'the age of 17, 18 or 19 (they) go up of their own accord to one of the military kraals to kleza'(5), which meant to drink milk directly from the udders of the King's cows, both literally and metaphorically, accepting the King's bounty and offering in return service to the state. Youths kleza'd at the nearest ikhanda to their home district. Once there, they would be formed into amaviyo, companies which varied between fifty and eighty warriors apiece, and set to work. This was a period of cadetship, when the cadets were introduced to life at the amakhanda. Their duties do not seem to have been too onerous, chiefly tending to the cattle or crops by which they sustained themselves.

When the King and his advisors decided that there were sufficient cadets around the country, they were summoned to Ulundi and formed into an ibutho. It's interesting to note that Cetshwayo's youngest amabutho, the iNgobamakhosi and the uVe, were particularly large, reflecting, presumably, the King's success in his efforts to revitalise this national resource. The new ibutho would be introduced to its appointed inDunas, given a name and a uniform, and told to build an ikhanda at a place appointed by the King.

The inDunas were basically officers of the state. Some, like Princes Dabulamanzi and Hamu ka Mpande, were important individuals in their own right; others, like Sigwelegcwele, the dynamic commander of the iNgobamakhosi, were appointed for their military ability. State officials were not necessarily important Chiefs in their civilian life. The inDunas appointed to a new ibutho - a senior one, his second in command and two wing commanders - were senior men picked from other regiments, but each iviyo had one or two leaders picked from the ranks. Mehlokazulu ka Sihayo held such a rank in the iNgobamakhose. Each ibutho was divided into two wings, and some seem to have had isigaba, divisions, consisting of groups of amaviyo who had served as cadets together in the same ikhanda.

When living in a barracks, each regiment was supposedly maintained at the King's expense. Often, however, the cattle produce and locally grown crops proved inadequate, and members of the warriors' families helped provide food. Cattle, indeed, formed the chief part of the King's patronage of his amabutho. Each regiment would be given a herd of cattle, carefully chosen by uniformity of hide markings. The regiment would look after the King's cattle, and would be entitled to use the milk and a small amount of meat. Hides from dead cattle were used to provide war-shields.

The shield was the most obvious part of the warrior's armoury. A large oval cut from the hide by a specialist shield-maker, the hair was left on the outer face, and this formed part of the distinguished uniform. In Shaka's day, the combinations of colour and patches was carefully monitored, the differences between each regiment's colour being detailed and specific. By the 1870's however, the practice was less strictly observed, although married regiments carried predominantly white or red shields, and unmarried regiments black or black with white spots. The full war shield was the isiHlangu, which was intended to cover the warrior between eyes and ankles, and varied slightly from one to another accordingly. The largest shields of this type were as much as five feet long and two feet six inches wide. During the civil war of the 1850's, Cetshwayo's had introduced a smaller variant, called the umbhumbhulosu. Three feet six inches long and two feet wide, it was considered lighter and easier to use. Both shields were carried, even within the same regiment, although

the umbhumbhulosu may have been most popular with younger, less conservative warriors. Certainly most surviving isiHlangu types seem to have come from married regiments. The shields themselves were strengthened by a single stick, fastened to the back by a double row of hide strips threaded through slits in the shield. It was held by a small handle. The bottom of the stick was trimmed to a point, and the top end decorated by a strip of fur wrapped round the protruding stick. The property of the state rather than the individual, the war-shields were kept in special raised stores, out of the way of ants and rodents, within the amakhanda.

The other items of regimental uniform consisted of the warriors' lavish ceremonial regalia. The basic dress for all Zulu males was a thin hide strip around the waist with an ibeshu, an oblong of dressed hide, dangling over the buttocks, and an umTsha, a series of strips of civet cat or samango ('green monkey') at the front. A kilt, comprising civet and monkeyskin pelts, carefully twisted together to look like tails, was worn over this on ceremonial occasions by men of rank and some senior regiments. Garters, were worn around the knees and elbows, and sometimes wrists and ankles, and to these were attached the bushy part of cows' tails. These tails, amaShoba, were worn in profusion, too, in a necklace, hanging in dense bunches to the waist at the front and knees at the back, to cover the whole body. Most distinctive, however, was the head dress. For married men, the basis of the head dress was the isicoco, the heading donned just prior to marriage. This was made by twisting a circular fibre into the hair, plastering it with gum, and polishing it to a glossy black sheen with beeswax. It was fashionable to shave the hair around the ring, leaving the back, sides, and crown of the head bald. Unmarried warriors, who did not wear the ring, sometimes used clay to frizz out their hair into bizarre patterns. Headbands, umQele, were made by stitching a strip of soft animal skin - usually leopard for unmarried men and otter for married - into a tube and stuffing it with either a bullrush, or dried cow-dung. This was tied at the back of the head, where sometimes further strips were attached, to look like tails hanging down over the amaShoba. Oblongs of samango monkey-skin, amaBheqe, were worn hanging down over the ears, or sometimes at either side of the back of the head. The crown of the head was often covered by a pad of fur, which served not only to protect it, but to disguise the fastenings which held the feathers in place. For unmarried men, the most common plumes were the long tail feathers of the sakabuli bird, worn either in a bunch on top of the head, or on either side, over the ears, pointing back. One bizarre item, unique to unmarried men, was the amaPovela. This consisted of two upright strips of stiff cowhide, held in place by a band around the forehead to stand up above the temples. Since the retaining band was hidden by the headband proper, the upright pieces showed as points below the headband, and horns above it. To the top of these were attached bushy cow tails which fell back down over the head. Combinations of black and white ostrich feathers were common to both married and unmarried men, but crane feathers, usually worn singly at the centre front of the head dress, were the privilege of married men. The short scarlet and green feathers of the Laurie were worn in bunches by men of rank, or presented singly to warriors who had distinguished themselves. Other feathers were occasionally used according to the dictates of the King.

According to Samuelson, 'Should a member of a regiment be found not properly attired, he would be asked by his comrades, "Where do you come from?" and be set on, and thrashed with light sticks and sent home in disgrace'.(6) Warriors were supposed to find their own costumes, but since many of the feathers and pelts were rare in Zululand, and had to be traded from outside by the King, the King granted each regiment a supply of such items. This was part of the patronage by which he maintained control of the amaButho.

Since so many of these items were rare, expensive and fragile, they were not worn into battle. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to illustrate what the warriors did wear in 1879 - Zulu sources are largely silent on the subject, and British ones contradictory. This may be due to a misunderstanding of the idea of 'war dress'. Before the start of the campaign, Chelmsford issued a specially compiled booklet, *The Zulu Army*, to his officers, which described - not always accurately - the ceremonial uniforms of Cetshwayo's amabutho. As a result, most British observers seem to have expected the warriors to be fighting in these costumes, and an air of disappointment is noticeable in their descriptions. Lt. H. Davies, a survivor of Isandlwana, notices that the regiment near him all wore a single feather upright in their head dress. Captain Edward Hutton, 3/60th, noted that at Gingindhlovu 'contrary to precedent, they did not wear their full war costume, but carried rifles, assegais and small shields',(7) but at the same battle the correspondent of *The Standard* referred to 'their white shields, their head-dresses of leopard skin and feathers, and the wild ox-tails hanging from their necks'(8). At Ulundi, an NCO of the 17th Lancers described the warriors who opposed him as 'young men, splendidly made fellows, all stripped for fighting'.(9) There are a number of accounts of soldiers looting unspecified items of clothing from dead Zulus, and a photograph in an album compiled by Lt. F. Cookson of the 91st Highlanders shows a trophy of Zulu weapons and costume taken at Gingindhlovu. A number of items of ceremonial dress are included.

One can only make the most tentative guesses when confronted with such sketchy evidence. It may be that, during the Isandlwana battle, the main Zulu army did wear some items of regimental uniform. Some of the amabutho had, after all, been recently mustered for the First Fruits ceremony, when wearing such items was required. It seems to have been a matter of personal choice which items were worn and which retained -

actual 'war dress' was an abbreviated form of full dress. Headbands seem to have been retained; earflaps do not. Items common to several regiments, such as sakabuli feathers or amaPovela, were probably not retained, whilst full cow-tail necklaces and kilts might have been found constricting by many. Officers probably did wear some regalia, however, as a means of distinction. The army which fought at Gingindhlovu was not the same one despatched from Ulundi to Isandlwana and Khambula; it was made up of local men, who had less far to march, which may explain why they apparently wore more regalia actually into battle. It may be that the more conservative older regiments retained more than the younger ones, and that, as the war progressed and morale declined, fewer warriors mustered in costume.

For weapons, the warriors had both traditional spears and European rifles. The famous Zulu stabbing spear had apparently been introduced by Shaka into the Zulu army at the start of his career. This had a blade some eighteen inches long and two and a half inches wide at its widest point, set into a haft two feet six inches long, and variations on this standard remained prevalent in 1879. Shaka had banned the older throwing spears, preferring to drill his soldiers in shock tactics which involved a mass charge to contact and close-quarter fighting, wielding the stabbing spear under-arm. However, in Dingane's reign the throwing spear had been re-introduced, possibly in an attempt to counter the rifle fire of the Boers. There were a number of different types of throwing spears common in 1879, most of which had a blade of about five or six inches, with the iron shank visible for several inches before being set into the wood.

Assegai making itself was a respected craft, at which particular clans, such as the Mbonambi and the Cube, excelled. The iron ore was collected at surface deposits, and smelted in a clay forge with the aid of goatskin bellows. The blade was hammered into shape, tempered with fat, and sharpened on a stone. It was then set into a wooden haft, the shank on the blade fitting securely into a hole drilled at the end of the shaft. It was glued with strong vegetable glues, and bound round with wet cane fibre. A tube of hide, cut from a calf's tail, was rolled over the join and allowed to shrink. At its best, such a weapon was tough and sharp and well designed for its purpose. However, by 1879 there is a suggestion that the importation of iron implements from white traders had led to a decline in the indigenous iron industry. Certainly there are a number of stories of blades bending or buckling in use.

As with the ceremonial regalia, individual warriors were responsible for their own weapons, but the King did receive spears in bulk from those clans which made them. These were distributed to warriors who had distinguished themselves, probably in some quantity.

A number of warriors carried clubs or knobkerries, iWisa. These were simply polished sticks with a bulbous head. Most Zulu boys had become expert in their use when carrying them for everyday protection as herd boys. A number of axes were used, imported from the tribes to the north, like the Pedi, who were highly regarded as manufacturers. They had crescent-shaped blades with a metal tang which was fixed into the wooden handle.

In 1879, the Zulu army possessed guns in large numbers (10). Mpande had first made efforts to acquire guns to strengthen his position after the civil war which brought him to power, and both factions in the 1856 struggle had attempted to arm. John Dunn imported guns in large quantities for Cetshwayo; indeed, this role, in strengthening the position of the King by monopolising the arms trade, was one of the major uses Cetshwayo had for Dunn (11). Nonetheless, those izikhulu that could do so probably attempted to acquire guns in their own right. In the 1870's, as many as 20,000 guns entered Africa through Mocambique alone, most of them intended for the Zulu market. The majority were obsolete military muskets, dumped on the unsophisticated 'native market': Napoleonic Brown Bess muskets bearing the Tower mark. More modern types were available, however, particularly the percussion Enfield, and a number of Chiefs had collections of quality sporting guns. Individuals like Price Dabulamanzi and Zibhebhu ka Maphitha were recognised as good shots, but most Zulus were untrained and did not know how to get the best out of their weapons. Battlefield accounts stress the volume of fire, but noted that most of it was high. Few arms traders provided back-up facilities for spares or even ammunition. After Isandlwana, large numbers of Martini-Henrys fell into Zulu hands. Cetshwayo attempted to collect these at Ulundi to distribute them evenly, but most warriors retained their own booty, claiming they had personally killed the man from who they took it. Cetshwayo pragmatically let warriors who had Martini-Henrys keep them.

For the most part, the presence of firearms did not affect the traditional Zulu tactical approach. This was known as the impondo zankhomo, 'the beasts' horns', and consisted of a frontal assault by a body known as the 'chest' (isiFuba), comprised of senior or married men, and encircling flank attacks, the 'horns' (izimpondo), by younger men. A reserve, the 'loins' was kept some distance away. This system is evident in all the Zulu War battles, and only towards the very end of the campaign did warriors show any reluctance to face British fire-power head on, and the number of skirmishes involving sniping began to increase.

When the King needed to muster his army, the procedure was to send messages to the izinduna at the amakhanda, who summoned the warriors in their areas (12). Those warriors who lived near Ulundi were expected to report there within twenty-four hours, where they were formed up by regiment, and appointed a camping ground. If the regiment in question had its ikhanda nearby, it would be stationed there; if not, the

warriors were appointed a particular location as a camp. At the outlying amakhanda, the warriors would muster and march to the capital by regimental companies, joining their amabutho on arrival. The whole process could be accomplished within a few days in time of emergency. In 1879, the regiments were in a state of readiness for the umKhosi, the First Fruits, or harvest, ceremony which took place in January each year, and coincided with the onset of the British invasion. When the amabutho were mustered, they had to undergo various 'doctoring' ceremonies to prepare them for the coming fight, designed to grant them a magical ascendancy over the enemy and ensure that the warriors were bound together psychologically. The first stage of this ceremony involved a young regiment killing a specially selected black bull by hand. The bull was then skinned by war doctors, and the meat roasted and sprinkled with magical potions. The warriors were then assembled in an umkhumbi, or circle, and strips of meat were tossed above them. Each warrior had to snatch the meat, bite off a piece, and throw it back into the air. The meat was supposed to be chewed but not swallowed, though many warriors did so.

At a later stage in the ceremony, the warriors were required to queue, and approaching in groups of three or four, drink medicine offered to them by the doctor and vomit into a specially prepared pit. At the start of the Zulu War, these ceremonies, which took place in the middle of January, had an added ingredient. A Suthu doctor directed those warriors with guns to hold them barrel down over a pottery shard, beneath which he had lit a fire. On the shard was medicine, the smoke from which was supposed to rise into the guns' barrel. This was to ensure that the guns fired true and killed any European they hit. The King also called up regiments in pairs to challenge one another. Individual warriors would stand out from the ranks and giya, proclaim their own bravery, and challenge members of the opposite regiment known to them to excel in the coming fight. Wagers were made as to who would be the most successful, although the bets were not called in after the fight. Before Isandlwana, Cetshwayo bade the iNgobamakhosi and Khandempemvu (umCijo) amabutho to challenge each other, and later the Nokhenkhe and Mbonambi. These challenges were recalled in the heat of battle and used to spur the warriors on. It's interesting to note that all of these regiments took prominent parts at Isandlwana.

The army began its march in one long column, but then split into several columns. As it neared enemy territory, an advance guard was sent out. This consisted of picked men from each of the regiments, and it made no attempt to conceal itself, hoping to fool the enemy into thinking it the main body. It was preceded by a screen of scouts who did attempt to hide and who reported on the enemy's whereabouts. The advance guard was expected to act aggressively and attack any enemy patrols it came across. The party which attacked Lt. Carey's patrol, and killed the Prince Imperial, seems to have been such a party, and accounts of Rorke's Drift mention an advance guard screening the main Zulu approach. If time permitted, the amabutho would be formed into a circle to receive final instructions before launching an attack, although there was seldom opportunity for such luxuries in 1879, especially as the Zulu attacks were often premature and uncoordinated. Before launching an attack, each regiment would shout its own war cry, but in battle the national cry was always used. In 1879, this was "Usuthu".

The Zulu army was highly mobile, and was expected to cover as much as fifty miles a day, although in 1879 Cetshwayo ordered it to move slowly so as not to tire itself. It had very little logistical back-up, which facilitated manoeuvrability but led to severe supply problems. The Dibi boys carried a limited amount of food for the warriors, and they were augmented by girls from the homes of the individual warriors. This source of supply lasted little beyond the first day, and after that the army was expected to provision itself by foraging. In Shaka's time that first day was probably enough to see the army beyond the Zulu borders, but in 1879 it proved difficult to obtain food from the home civilian population, coercive methods being impractical.

Cetshwayo's strategy in 1879 reflected an understanding of the military difficulties, although the possibility of defeat was not considered by the army as a whole. The King directed those elements of his army living in the coastal and northern districts to muster in amakhanda there, and oppose the advance of Pearson and Wood's column, whilst he assembled a striking arm at Ulundi. This was directed first against Chelmsford's column at Isandlwana, and later against Wood at Khambula, these having been selected as the most dangerous enemy threats. The King advised his izinDuna to refrain from attacking British columns in entrenched positions. Events were to prove the wisdom of this unheeded suggestion. For political reasons - Cetshwayo hoped to gain some advantage in negotiation by defending his side of the border only - the King forbade his regiments to cross the border into Natal. (13)

After a battle, the warriors could look for little support in terms of medical facilities. The izinyanga, traditional medical doctors, had a number of herbal poultices which facilitated healing, but nothing with which to cope with the terrible wounds inflicted by heavy calibre rifles. The army was deeply shocked by its casualties at Isandlwana. It took some time for it to disperse because of the number of wounded men, many of whom died. Some of the badly wounded were killed by colleagues with knobkerries - the knobkerrie being regarded as a symbol of mercy. Some of the dead were buried, either in dongas, ant-bear holes or the grain pits of local kraals - others were simply left with a shield placed over them. In defeat the warriors had no option but to abandon their dead and wounded on the field.

After a successful battle, there were further ceremonies to perform. Any man who had killed one of the enemy was required to disembowel his victim, and to remove and wear part of his clothing. The disembowelling was to allow the dead man's spirit to escape his body, and prevent misfortune haunting the killer. The warrior had to wear his victim's clothing until various cleansing ceremonies were complete. This happened at Isandlwana. After the battle, the King directed his army to return to Ulundi, and appointed places for those who had killed to undergo their ceremonies. To the King's disgust, however, the army dispersed after Isandlwana, only a few reporting to the King. The rest went home, and it was some time before the army could be fully mustered again.

After a fight, the King reviewed his army, listened to an account of the campaign, and assessed the performance of his troops. The inter-regimental challenges were recalled. Those who had particularly distinguished themselves were called out, as were those who were considered cowards. In Shaka's day, cowards were likely to be executed out of hand, but in Cetshwayo's reign they seem to have been merely the subject of abuse and ridicule by the assembled army. Those who had distinguished themselves, on the other hand, were rewarded. Most rewards consisted of a few head of cattle, but some men were granted necklaces made of interlocking chips of wood, which were highly prized symbols of bravery. A few heroes would be given the *ingXotha*, a roughly engraved brass armband, like the cuff of a gauntlet.

In general, the Zulu army acquitted itself well in 1879, given that it was committed to a philosophy of attack that was fundamentally flawed in the face of superior British technology. Despite the corrosive effects on discipline wrought by years of de-centralisation of power, despite the lack of experience and vigorous commanders, and despite the appalling casualties and the creeping realisation of defeat, the army took to the field time and again in defence of its independent way of life. The Zulus could expect no more of it.

The following is a tentative list of those amabutho who took an active part in the war of 1879, together with their ceremonial uniforms. The basis for this description is *The Zulu Army*, a pamphlet prepared by Border Agent F. B. Fynney on the eve of the war, at Chelmsford's request. The pamphlet is neither as comprehensive nor as accurate as it first appears, but it remains the most complete single source on the subject. Additional material has been gleaned from Samuelson's *Long Long Ago*. The testimonies in The James Stuart Archive are invaluable, particularly the account of Mpatshana ka Sodondo, who fought with the uVe regiment at Isandlwana (vol. 3, p. 296).

King Mpande's amabutho

iNdabakawombe - 'The affair (indaba) of the ambush, or clash of arms (wombe)', formed c. 1841 of youths born c. 1821. Was incorporated with Dingane's uKhokothi. Two descriptions of its costume survive: G.F. Angas sketched a member of the regiment in the 1840's carrying a white shield, and wearing a headdress consisting of a pad of fur over the crown, with ostrich feathers on top, and a bunch of crane feathers at the back of the head. A clipped ball of dark feathers is attached to the back of the headband, and there are two large unidentified (eagle?) feathers at the side of the head. Small bunches of Laurie feathers are attached to the leopard skin earflaps. By 1879 Fynney (TZA) described the uniform as that of a typical married ibutho, i.e. otter-skin headband, one or two crane feathers, white shield.

uDlambedu - 'Those who worry at a thing and eat it up', formed c. 1843 from youths born 1823, incorporated with Dingane's iNsewane. The uMlnevu ('the burnt sides') and iNgwegwe ('the hooked stick') amabutho were also added to it. In 1879 said to have worn otter-skin headband, one or two crane feathers in otter-skin headband, white shields with black or red spots (Fynney, TZA).

izinGulube - 'The wild pigs' (also iNkone, 'the black and white pigs'); formed c. 1845 from youths born c. 1825. Seems to have been linked to the uDlambedu; may have been incorporated with it to keep up the numbers. Fynney gives the same uniform (TZA).

iSangqu - 'The hunters' (also known as amaShishi, from their war-cry 'Shi! Shi! Shi!' which was derived from the sound made when setting a dog on the chase). Formed c. 1848 from youths born c. 1828. Sketched as a young regiment by Angas in the 1840's, they are wearing the amaphovela headdress and bunches of sakabuli feathers on either side of the head. Shields probably black. By 1879 Fynney (TZA) gives otter-skin headband, amaphovela, white shields.

uThulvana - Named after a BaSotho chief, Thulare. Also known as amaBoza from amaboza 'nkomo ngotuli, 'those who covered cattle with dust (i.e. looted and drove them off)'. One section was known as iNhlambamasoka, after the emLambongwenya ikhanda, where it kleza'd, and which included a number of royal princes, Cetshwayo among them. Formed c. 1850, from youths born c. 1830. Incorporated with it were iNkonkoni ('the wildebeest', formed c. 1852), and iNdlondlo ('the adult crested mamba', formed c. 1853). At

‘Ndondakusuka in 1856 the uThulwana are said to have carried black shields with white spots on lower side; by 1879 carried white shields with small red marks. Ceremonial uniform in 1879 consisted of otter-skin headband, sakabuli feathers on either side of head, white ostrich feathers on top of head, surmounted by crane feather (Fynney, TZA). Samuelson (LLA) adds that the ostrich feathers were at the side of the head, pointing back. Mpatshana (JSA 3) does not mention ostrich feathers, but confirms other items. He adds that this regiment also wore a number of brass rings on right forearm. Regimental war-cry was ‘Mina! Mina! Mina! Hhah!’

uDlokwe (or uDloko) - ‘The young crested mamba’, formed c. 1855 from youths born c. 1835. According to Maxibana (JSA 2), carried red shields at ‘Ndondakusuka in 1856, and wore a headdress consisting of a row of mixed black and white ostrich feathers. By 1879 Fynney describes their headdress as consisting of an otter skin headband with one crane feather at front, and their shields as red with white patches, or plain white. Chant: ‘Hogo! Hogo! Hogo!’.

Note: the above amabutho had all married and donned the isicoco by 1879; the following regiments do not appear to have been married by that time.

uDududu - From the sound ‘du! du! du!’ made by troops rushing forward. Formed c. 1857 from youths born c. 1837. The iMbube (‘lion’) were apparently incorporated. According to Fynney (TZA), wore otter-skin headband, with sakabuli feathers on either side, and carried black shields with white spots.

iQwa - ‘The frost’, formed c. 1860 from youths born c. 1840. Possibly incorporated into uDududu. According to Fynney (TZA), wore leopard skin headbands with large bunch of black ostrich feathers surmounted by white ostrich feathers. Carried black or red and white shields. May have incorporated iNsukamngeni (named in a reference to the Mgeni river in Natal, where Mpande halted during ‘the breaking of the rope’), who were of a similar age-group and, according to Fynney (TZA), wore the same uniform, but with black shields with white markings low down.

uMxapho - ‘The mongrels, or lapping dogs’, (also iMpunga, from umpung’ongafiyo, which Faye translates as ‘the grey heads that die not’, apparently a praise-name won at Nyezane in 1879). Incorporated with uHlwayi, ‘a shower of shot’. Formed c. 1860 from youths born c. 1840. Samuelson suggests that the uMxapho were incorporated into the uDududu, but as two regiments seem to have functioned separately, they were probably uphalane (i.e. separate but considered closely related). Leopard skin headbands, sakabuli feathers at side of head, black and white ostrich feathers at front of head, black shields, occasionally spotted according to Fynney (TZA). Mpatshana (JSA 3) thought they carried shields of any colour, but confirms ostrich feathers on head. Sometimes associated with the name emLambongwenya, an ikhanda where it may have been quartered. After Gingindlovu, adopted the cry ‘ha, ha, ha, ha! It Dug! It dug! We buried it (i.e. the British) in the ground at Gingindlovu’ (Mpatshana).

uMbonambi - ‘Those who behold or experience sorrow, also known as (or included section) iNkonyanebomvu, ‘the red calf’. Formed c. 1862 from youths born c. 1842. According to Fynney (TZA), wore leopard skin headbands, with one plume of sakabuli feathers on top of the head, black shields, or black with spots 9 perhaps speckled with white. Samuelson (LLA) adds ostrich feathers upright on head, and bunches of Laurie feathers at the side; the latter may, however, have been a distinction granted after Isandlwana, where this ibutho was recognised as having been the first to penetrate the British line.

uNokhenke - ‘A battle formation running out of control (variously rendered “the dividers” or “the skirmishers”’. Formed c. 1865 from youths born c. 1845. According to Fynney (TZA), wore leopard skin headbands, sakabuli feathers on either side of head, and carried black shields, or black with white spots.

iNdluyengwe - ‘The leopard’s fine reddish markings’, formed c. 1867 from youths born c.1847. Incorporated by King Cetshwayo into the uThulwana. Wore leopard skin headbands with black ostrich feathers at the front, surmounted by several long white ostrich feathers, and carried black shields with white spots on lower half (Fynney, TZA). Samuelson (LLA) adds that the ostrich feathers were on either side of the head, pointing back.

uKhandempemvu - ‘Head with black and white markings’, also known as uMcijo - ‘the red needle pointed at both ends’ - principal sections included uMtulisazwe (‘to cause the land to be a peace’) and iNgqakamatshe (‘the catchers of stones’). Formed c. 1868 from youths born c. 1848. According to Mtshapi (JSA 4), who served with the regiment, the ceremonial headdress consisted of a leopard skin headband and amaphovela, with bunches of sakabuli feathers fixed in the headband. This is confirmed by Fynney (TZA) who says the sakabuli

feathers were at the side of the head. Mpatshana (JSA 3) adds that the uMtulisazwe had black cow tails attached to the tips of the amaphovela (confirmed by Mtshapi) and wore wide belts of white cowhide. Mtshapi says that the shields were principally either black or dark brown with white markings (large spots, or patches down one side), although black shields with a white patch across the centre, and even white shields, were added. Regimental war-cry, 'Izulu!' According to Mpatshana (JSA 3), one man of the UKhandempemvu would lead a chant with 'It is not to be seen; the hornbill is not to be seen. Do you burn the whiskers of the buffalo? Do you burn them? We catch the rocks of the sky!' The rest would respond with 'Catch! At the place of Hisi!' The exact meaning of this is obscure, but apparently relates to a campaign against the Xhosa paramount, Hintsá. The uMtulisazwe's chant was 'You were beaten down by the axe that strikes down! Nhla! Nhla! Nhla!'.

iNgobamakhosi - 'The humblers of kings', formed c. 1872 from youths born c. 1853. Leopard skin headband, with white, black or red amaphovela, according to Fynney (TZA). Mpatshana (JSA 3), who served in this ibutho, adds a single bunch of sakabuli feathers on top of the head. Samuelson (LLA) adds white ostrich feathers upright on head. Shields are variously described as black, red or spotted; they may have been mixed, although a consensus suggest the majority might have been a dark mottled brown with some white patches. Regimental war-cry 'Hohho! Hohho! Hohho!' After Isandlwana, they apparently adopted the chant 'Iya! Iya! Iya! O ho, ho, the lightening of the sky (i.e. British rockets). Tshitshilizi, tshitshilizi! This sky is dangerous' (Mpatshana).

Note: both Bryant and Samuelson list an amaPhela ibutho, formed between 1846-51, although this does not appear on other lists. Bryant provides a possible solution to the mystery, since he suggests that it was broken up and sections added to the iNdabakawombe and uDlambedu.

King Cetshwayo's amabutho.

uVe - 'The fly-catcher bird' or oLandandlovu, 'the fetcher of an elephant'. Formed c. 1875-78 from youths born c. 1855-58. Incorporated on eve of Anglo-Zulu War with iNgobamakhosi. Uniform similar to iNgobamakhosi; Mangwanana Mchunu (SOTQ 74) of the regiment recalled that he carried a red shield with white spots in 1879. Probably this regiment carried a mixture of black and brown shields.

Note: a cadet ibutho was kleza'ing at the time of the Anglo-Zulu War; this regiment was buta'd by Cetshwayo on his return from exile as the uFalaza, 'the clouds of heaven', implying that the Zulus were tossed about hither and thither. Amabutho enrolled, post-1879, have not been included in this list, since their function was largely symbolic. Most of King Mpande's amabutho were still functioning in 1879, although the older ones were of limited military value. Elements of the iNdabakawombe and uDlambedu were kept back at oNdini by King Cetshwayo, as a reserve, probably with any other elderly men who had answered the muster: most of the other regiments, however, were fully engaged in the fighting.

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