

BLACK HISTORY MONTH SPECIAL SECTION, PART I



claimed Shaka felt his council should have stopped. Nevertheless, Shaka must be counted among the farsighted black leaders who tried to resist the European incursions and subsequent domination of their lands.

In order to do so, Shaka recognized that he had

to unify the various tribes and areas into one. He began by building a superior army, drafting youths into service at thirteen. For four years of rigorous training they remained in special camps until assigned to a regiment. In the interest of national supremacy, Zulu warriors were expected to be fearless in battle, and only the victorious survived. Celibacy was demanded (most particularly the members of the elite corps called Fasimba) until a suitable mate was chosen for the warrior. Even in marriage strict rules of behavior were enforced; divorce and adultery were punishable by death.

New techniques were adopted; the long, throwing spear was shortened to the assegai, a stabbing spear similar to a bayonet. Each man was responsible for his weapon and was instructed to return from battle with it or lose his life. Shoes were eliminated for fleetness, and the Zulu warrior could march 30-50 miles in a day and still go into battle.

Battle plans were similar to Hannibal's, but the main force was in the center with surrounding, weaker flanks on either side. Thus, G.K. Osei noted, Shaka "... welded the Zulus into a military force (as) fierce as the Vikings and as well disciplined as the Macedonian phalanx."

In a few short years, what had begun as a small village state Shaka enlarged and unified into an area bigger than France. It was at no small price in human life that these gains were won, for the King of the Zulus would entertain no resistance without wreaking terrible havoc. In so doing, he gained the enmity of many and was assassinated by a half-brother.

During his rule, his nation became wealthy from the spoils of war and, as planned, none of the European powers attempted to seize the lands that he controlled. In addition, the name Zulu has become synonymous with fearlessness and victory.

Mosesh, King of Basutoland (1790-1894)

Fleeing the onslaught of Shaka and his devastating army, Mosesh led his tribe onto a plateau in the Drakingsberg Mountains in South

Africa. There he established the Basuto nation. Other refugees fleeing Shaka swelled the population in this isolated, well-fortified area. Here, they easily defended the land against the encroaching Boers (Dutch) who were being pushed out of Cape Colony by the British. Even though the Europeans had superior gun power, Mosesh and his superb horsemen constantly raided the Boers for cattle to increase the Basuto's own herds. Any attempt to invade Basutoland proved fruitless, for from their mountain fortress the Basutos proved to be invincible.

Mosesh, however, recognized that whenever the Europeans decided to unite against him, he would be at a distinct disadvantage. He then signed a peace treaty with the British (rather than the Dutch), and requested missionaries from many European countries to teach his people. This was designed to acquire "friends in high places", for Mosesh was well aware that Europeans were not too well disposed toward pagans.

When Basutoland was attacked by British/Boer forces, Mosesh was ready. General Cathcart, the British governor of Cape Colony was the leader of an army of well-trained white regulars and natives who advanced upon Basutoland with little or no understanding of the craftiness that Mosesh possessed.

The pastoral scene that greeted the European forces lulled them into a dangerous sense of relaxation. Cathcart ordered that the cattle he found grazing upon the plateau (with old women tending them) be rounded up by a third of his force, while another third he sent to seal the pass to prevent the Basutos from fleeing. He then settled in with his remaining troops on a lower valley.

As soon as the cattle were being moved down the mountain, Mosesh sent a force of his cavalry swooping down the mountain, causing the cattle to stampede. The Europeans fled the disorganized animals in a most unmilitary like manner.

(Continued On Page 20)

MOST BLACK ALL-STARS AREN'T IN THE RECORD BOOKS.

Long before black Americans made headlines on the playing field, they were making history. Lots of it. In fields like medicine, exploration, industry, and on the field of battle.

The names of these early "all-stars" probably aren't on the tip of your tongue. That's because they aren't in most history books either.

A black man was the first to reach the North Pole. Matthew Henson, a member of Commodore Perry's expedition, raised the flag there in 1909.

Dr. Daniel Hale Williams, a black surgeon, performed the world's first successful heart operation almost one hundred years ago.

In 1761, Benjamin Banneker designed and built the first striking clock. It was also the first clock made entirely in America.

And, on a September morning in 1864, thirteen black soldiers earned Congressional Medals of Honor. They led the Union Army's successful assault on Chaffin's Farm, a Confederate stronghold on the outskirts of Richmond, Virginia.

There are thousands of stories like these.

Enough to fill a library.

And, thanks to efforts like Black History Month, someday they will.

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