HISTORY OF THE YORUBA CIVIL WARS (1877-1893)

Although the Yoruba Civil War was mainly between Western Yoruba (Ibadan and its allies like the Offa, Modakeke and all Oyo forces on Ibadan's side) and Eastern Yoruba (Ijesa, Ekiti, Ife and other Yoruba dominions like Igbomina, Akoko, Egbe, Kabba and the Oworro, a Yoruba sub-tribe in Lokoja, Kogi State); Ibadan was also fighting on four other fronts, making it five fronts, during this civil war.

The first encounter between Ibadan and the Eastern Yoruba forces was between it and Ekiti tagged Ogun Jalumi (battle of waterloo) which ended in ignominy for the Ekiti soldiers. The Jalumi War, also called the Battle of Ikirun, was a battle that took place on 1 November 1878 in the north east of present-day Osun State, Nigeria. It was part of the larger conflict named the Ibadan War or Ekiti-Parapo War. The forces of Ibadan defeated in detail a force of rebellious Yorubas including soldiers from Ilorin, Ekiti, Ila and Ijesa.

It was this defeat that prompted the Ekiti to call on Ogedengbe, a tall, fiery fellow, with shooting eyeballs of Ijesa stock, who had been reluctant to lead the Ekiti-Parapo, having himself had his military training in counter insurgency and infantry at Ibadan, and was wary of leading his people against his benefactors.

Ogedengbe subsequently agreed to lead the Ekiti Parapo War, which also enlisted several Yoruba dominions like Igbomina, Akoko, Egbe, Kabba and the Oworro, a Yoruba sub-tribe in Lokoja, Kogi State. Also, Lagos, Ijebu and Egba were said to have assisted Ekiti Parapo against Ibadan, seen by all, as a common threat to the commonwealth. The Ekiti War generals also held several nocturnal meetings where war strategies were reviewed and perfected. Ilara Mokin in Ondo State was said to have been the headquarters of the Ekiti Parapo secret service.
One source claimed Ibadan Generals were so clever that they would allow Ekiti to capture their women who would bear children for the captors but later spy on them. Several accounts speak of discipline on both sides, especially as regards the treatment of women, children and even prisoners of war.

The Ibadan War or Ekiti-Parapo War was a long bitter war between a terrifying Ibadan military might and other Yoruba sub-tribes tagged Ekiti-Parapo. The War was an epic and chronic civil war between two powerful Yoruba confederate armies of mainly Western Yoruba (Ibadan and its allies like the Offa, Modakeke and all Oyo dominions on the side of Ibadan) and Eastern Yoruba (Ijesa, Ekiti, Ife and other Yoruba dominions like Igbomina, Akoko, Egbe, Kabba and the Oworro, a Yoruba sub-tribe in Lokoja, Kogi State). It is said that the war lasted for about 16 years with heavy casualties on both sides although historians believe that the losses were even. It is on record that the remote cause of this war was the collapse of the Oyo empire, while the immediate cause was the domineering stance of the Ibadan military output on Yoruba towns and cities; in other words, the immediate cause was revolt against Ibadan's desire to rule over other towns in Yoruba country following the decline of Oyo empire.

Before Ibadan's encounter with the Eastern Yoruba forces it had already become involved in yet another war over trade with Egba and Ijebu in 1877, when Ibadan traders on their way from Porto Novo with firearms were attacked by the Egba. Ijebu declared war against Ibadan in 1877. This gave the Ekiti and the Ijesa their chance. Ijesa and Ekiti taking advantage of this war, declared their independence in 1878. This revolt against Ibadan rule in 1878 started with the massacre of Ibadan officials in Ijesa, Igbomina and Ekiti. This led to a war which dragged on for sixteen years.
Eventually, Ibadan found itself fighting on five fronts. First, in the south against the Egba who confined their activities to raids and surprise attacks; secondly, against the Ijebu, in the same south, who pitched a camp against them at Oru under Balogun Onafowokan; thirdly the main war at Kiriji in the east, where their forces fought a long battle against the Ekiti and Ijesa (Ekiti-Parapo forces) under the command of Ogedengbe, the Seriki of Ijesa; fourthly at Offa in the north, where they faced the Ilorin Fulani who pitched their camp against the people of Offa; and finally at Ile-Ife where the Ife people joined the alliance against them in 1882. There had long been friction between the Ife and the Oyo settlers at Modakeke. These animosities were strengthened by the war during which Ife itself was sacked by the Modakeke and their Ibadan allies, and Modakeke was sacked by the Ife and Ekiti.

Although Ibadan was fighting on five fronts, the main action of the war, however, took place in the north-east. The Ibadan and Ekiti-Parapo forces faced each other at Kiriji, a few miles east of Ikirun. Control of the trade routes was a major issue. There were three main routes to the interior, via Egba, Ijebu and Ondo. The Ondo route had been opened up by the British because of the frequent closure of the other roads. During this war, it became the main supply route for both sides (Akintoye, 1969). Some Ibadan supplies were able to get through via Ijebu. The war was unpopular with Ijebu traders, and the Awujale was forced into exile in 1885. Despite this, the flow of supplies was not completely free. Ijebu traders' profit margins were high, and they retained strict control of trade through the kingdom (Johnson, 1921: 610-11).

After some initial reverses, the Ekiti-parapo gained something of an advantage in the conflict, and the help they received from Ekiti Saro merchants in Lagos was crucial. The most important factor was the supply of breech-loading rifles, much more accurate than the arms being
used by the rest of the Yoruba, though the Ibadan were later able to get a small supply of them as well (Akintoye, 1971: 119).

Ibadan suffered so much set-backs in these wars not only because the Ekiti-Parapo were better equipped with larger supplies of the much more accurate breech-loading rifles but also because it had to fight on five fronts and probably because none of the Oyo forces on Ibadan's side actually wished it well. This was partly because of their sufferings under Ibadan's control, and partly because of the arrogant attitude of Are Latosa who, under normal circumstances as head of the town, would not have gone to the battlefield. He was eventually killed at Kiriji.

The failure of Oyo to provide military defence for the Oyo people from the onslaught of the Fulani at Ilorin, had pushed Ibadan into a position of prominence among the towns that succeeded the Oyo empire; it had in consequence wrested effective power from Oyo, but was unable to secure general acceptance as the dominant force in Yoruba country.

Within the Oyo community, where the Alafin's control had been virtually complete, Ibadan's overbearing attitude and the alienation of the Alafin's support had weakened its control, whilst within Yoruba country the fact that it was an upstart town whose real ruler was the Alafin had made it difficult for it to achieve the former prestige of Oyo empire. Moreover, its inability to reach a modus vivindi with the rest of Yoruba country, and its obvious military character led them to combine against it.

However, in spite of Ibadan's disadvantages and set-backs in these wars, these five forces could not effect its defeat. A state of stalemate was reached, from which only the intervention of an outside force could redeem the whole Yoruba country. The intervention of the British
government of Lagos in the interest of trade in the period of the 'Scramble' saved the day.

Before the war eventually came to an end, attempts at mediation had started as early as 1879-80. Both the Alafin and the Oni were involved, but neither was trusted by both sides, and Ife later joined in the fighting. The Lagos government was under instructions from London and Accra to keep out of the conflict, even though the fighting was having serious effects on the economic life of the colony. Under commercial and mission pressure, the Lagos government attempted to mediate but was rebuffed, and from 1882 to 1884 the British did nothing. Attempts by Saro in Lagos and by the Fulani emirs to end the conflict also failed.

After 1885 the attitude of the administration started to change. Firstly, there was the changing political status of Lagos which was separated from the Gold Coast in 1886. Secondly, the scramble for Africa by the colonial powers was well under way, and there were fears of French interference. Thirdly, some of the main protagonists of the war were themselves getting tired of it (Akintoye, 1971: 176).

To negotiate a peace, the administration turned to the CMS. A ceasefire was arranged in 1886 through the efforts of Samuel Johnson, the historian, and Charles Phillips, later the Bishop of Ondo. The parties then signed a treaty in Lagos with Governor Maloney which provided for the independence of the Ekitiparapo towns and the evacuation of Modakeke, to suit Ife,. This proved impossible to carry out. Ilorin refused to stop fighting in the north where it was besieging Ofa. Thus the war dragged on, and the forces refused to disband (Akintoye, 1971: 181-4).

British fears of the French soon appeared justified. There was the curious incident of 1888 when an employee of a French company
persuaded the Egba chiefs to sign a treaty with France, providing for the construction of a rail link with Porto Novo (Ayandele, 1966: 49-51). This was a direct threat to trade with Lagos, but the French refused to ratify the treaty. The two powers hastily agreed on a frontier in 1889 (Anene, 1963). The areas recently invaded by Dahomey fell within the French sphere of influence. The British moved into the interior with the establishment of a post at Ilaro in 1890, while the French invaded Dahomey in 1892.

More aggressive measures to extend British control in the interior came with the arrival of Governor Carter in 1891. Like Glover, he took the view that the key to the situation lay in control of the trade routes through Ijebu and Egba. The result was the Ijebu expedition of 1892 (Ayandele, 1966: 54-69; Smith, 1971b). Ayandele suggests that in fact the Ijebu had showed more willingness to open the road than the Egba, but the decision to attack Ijebu was based partly on the hostility of the missions: unlike Egba, Ijebu had never allowed them in. The impact of the expedition was considerable. In 1893, Carter was able to set off on a tour around Yorubaland, making treaties with Oyo and Egba, and finally persuading the Ibadan and Ekitiparapo forces to disperse. The Egba opened the road to Ibadan, and allowed the start of railway construction. After two final incidents, the bombardment of Oyo in 1895 (Ayandele, 1967) and the capture of Ilorin by the Royal Niger Company in 1897, effective colonial control was established throughout most of Yorubaland.

PART II: Word of mouth (viva voce) Even though stories about the wars are fading like stars at dawn, yet, for those Yoruba people who witnessed the war, September 23 is not just statistics, but a date that leaves an enduring footprint. If you are in doubt, Pa Omiekun Adekunle
(92 years old as at the time he was visited by Vanguard Newspaper reporter Adewale Adeoye in 2011) serves as a living pathway to the rediscovery of one of history’s most chilling story of brutal repression by a once dominant and awe-inspiring Ibadan Empire and the heroic resistance of a people against a superior force, that was later brought on its knees, through share determination, bravery and valour.

Though Pa Adekunle was not a soldier in the Ekiti Parapo War, between a terrifying Ibadan military might and other Yoruba sub-tribes tagged Ekiti-Parapo, his father was a marksman in the Yoruba civil war that lasted for 16 years, and Pa Adekunle said he holds on his palms the “raw, true account of the war” as handed over to him by his father. Vanguard Newspaper reporter Adewale Adeoye visited his village in 2011, Irele-Ekiti, a small community surrounded by lurch green mountains and rocky hills, located North east of Ikole-Ekiti.

The community of mainly agrarian locals played a critical role on the side of the allied forces. According to Pa Adekunle (in Adewale Adeoye's report), “My father played a significant role in Kiriji War, my uncle also belonged to the secret service in the war.” In that particular report by Adewale Adeoye, Pa Adekunle was reported to have said his people fought for 16 years, in one of the longest wars history has ever encountered. "We fought with determination to free the entire Yorubaland from the domineering influence of a unitary government led by Ibadan”, he added, pointing to a mountain top in the center of the village where thousands of military officers of Ibadan origin were said to have been massacred and later buried. He said that in the 1930s, the skeletal remains of the soldiers could still be found littering the mountain top. Palaake was the name of the military commander said to have led the uprising around 1780 against the Ibadan invasion.

What does Kiriji mean and what really is the significance of the war?
Long before the coming of Europeans, the Yoruba people had a rich, wealthy system of government backed with a strong, time tested military machine that at one time was said to be in the range of 10 divisions (about 150,000 soldiers), almost the size of Nigerian armed forces today, which was mainly controlled by the Aare Ona Kakanfo (Field Marshal and Commander of the Armed Forces).

However, around 1769, the Oyo Empire, which was the most fearsome government in Yorubaland, had been faced with deepening cleavages, pitching the military institution against the political class. There were, also, growing disenchantment among the Yoruba sub-tribes, against the unitary system of government. The sub-tribes wanted a federal system with a loose centre, prompting bottled up grievances against the Are, who preferred a command structure.

In his book, History of The Yoruba, the late Rev. Samuel Johnson wrote on the war: “The Are at this time exhibited some of the worst phases of human nature at such a pitch of glory, his words being law to all Ibadan and its dependencies, he became the dupe of his flatterers; he considered himself a god and that nothing was impossible for him to effect. He certainly thought he could make a short and easy work of the task before him.”

Ibadan soldiers were reputed to be fierce and highly skilled in infantry and night pitch battles. At that period, Adewale Adeoye gathered, the art of war was a science. For instance, the then soldiers studied the movement of antelope, leopards and the flight of birds to determine the level of preparedness of on-coming enemies. “When the birds fly in one direction, the enemy is setting to attack, when the birds fly in disarray the enemies are advancing, when the birds gather in droves, singing, the enemies are dining. When antelopes jump about with their heads upright, the enemies are about to encamp, when the antelopes are
downcast, the enemies are far away,” Mr Abiodun Abe, who has done research on the war and now saddled with the responsibility of coordinating the stage performances across the South-west, said. He said the Yoruba warriors of the time, given their skill and wit, could match any sturdy empire of the time.

Are’s forebear, having in 1155 AD, seized several territories stretching to Togo and Ghana, horrified the Fulanis who had invaded Osogbo in 1842, was said to have become emboldened that the sky was not even the limit of his prowess and dexterity.

Around 1770, Are sent emissaries and envoys across the entire Yorubaland, Egba, Ijebu and some parts of today’s Delta State, asking that tributes, in the form of material items, be paid to him. In the spring of 1769, fresh from an extensive infantry and naval training of over 89,000 new recruits, he ordered the arrest of Ekiti’s military commander, Fabunmi, of Oke Mesi, who was accused of planning rebellion in the form of guerrilla warfare to topple Ibadan dynasty. It was the pattern to exterminate voices of dissent in that epoch.

The recruit, who was ordered to arrest Fabunmi, was said to have been arrested and detained. In annoyance, Are again ordered that the whole of Ekitiland be brought by force of arms, under his trampling. Indigenous playwright, Chief Jimoh Aliu, in a recent publication on Kiriji, stated that within a short period, the Ekiti mobilized young men that they trained for a military expenditure that was later to become heroic.

As previously mentioned, the first encounter between Ibadan and Ekiti tagged Ogun Jalumi (battle of waterloo) ended in ignominy for the Ekiti soldiers, prompting the Ekiti to call on Ogedengbe, a tall, fiery fellow, with shooting eyeballs, who had been reluctant to lead the Ekiti Parapo, having himself had his military training in counter insurgency and
infantry at Ibadan, and was wary of leading his people against his benefactors. Ekiti warriors were said to have sought for assistance from their “creek kinsmen, the Itsekiri for training in naval combat.” Johnson described Ogedengbe thus “…..he was a very straight-forward man, he was always true to his words to be faithful to his covenant with them, for he had sworn never to oppose them.”

He added: “Ogedengbe at last issued from Ita Ogbolu his retreat, and took the field of the Ekiti Parapos against the Ibadans. On hearing this, the Ibadan war chiefs sent home again for more reinforcements and on the 3rd November 1779, the Are sent his fighters to the battle field for another round of war. In a chat with Adewale Adeoye, Chief Oyekan Ogedengbe, the grandson of Ogedengbe, said his grandfather gathered 10,000 soldiers which he led to Otun-Ekiti, where the military strategy against Ibadan was hatched.

“The battle was fierce. My grandfather was a trained military leader who commanded thousands of soldiers. The Ijesa and Ekiti are siblings, so my father was excited to lead the battle against a unitary government of the then Yoruba nation”, he said as he led me through a large compound dotted with architectural alleys which Ogedengbe, his grandfather, used as a military outpost at Ilesa.

The Olojudo of Ido Ekiti, Oba Faboro, whose great grandfather was one of the five Ekiti generals that led the war, said the project being put in place by the South-West governors is ‘wonderful.’ He said many of the artifacts associated with the war are either missing, but hopes the governments would help retrieve some that might have been sold for profit.

EXCERPTS FROM:


3. http://books.google.com.tr/books?id=xwI9AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA24&lpg=PA24&dq=%22ibadan+allies%22&source=bl&ots=oduPUQaS0u&sig=vweWcvMr4Comf3T0Ej4wSApUaOQ&hl=en&sa=X&ei=RTUsVNSwHabcywOl-oLwDA&redir_esc=y