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**AUTHORITY AND IDENTITY:**

**MALAWIAN SOLDIERS IN BRITAIN'S COLONIAL ARMY, 1891-1964.**

**Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy of the  
University of Stirling**

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the experience of Malawian soldiers serving in Britain's colonial army between 1891 and 1964. Until recently, the experience of East African colonial soldiers in particular has been largely overlooked, and African soldiers in general have been perceived either as collaborators in the machinery of colonial oppression or, conversely, as victims at the hands of the military authorities. However, little attempt has been made to unify these two views of military service.

Using Malawi as a case study, this thesis investigates social relations within the colonial army and examines perceptions of their often-violent role within wider colonial society. Developing and expanding upon previous scholarship, this thesis provides the first sustained and unified study of the colonial army in Malawi. The project is based principally upon archival sources in Britain and Malawi, but also draws upon interviews with British and Malawian veterans. Chapter one provides an overview of the institutional history of the Malawian forces. Chapter two outlines the development of recruitment policy, with special reference to the concept of 'martial races', and examines the motivations behind Malawian enlistment. Chapters three and four investigate the reactions of African soldiers to the formal military environment and to barrack life. Chapter five examines perceptions of soldiers' roles in warfare and internal security, and contrasts this with the place of soldiers in their own communities.

The thesis highlights the extent to which Malawian soldiers were successfully co-opted by the military authorities, but also stresses the capacity of soldiers to

influence the conditions under which they served. This, combined with the unusually long association which many Malawians had with the army, fed into a growing perception of the colonial army as a Malawian institution.



## Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, and that the work which it embodies has been done by myself and has not been included in another thesis.

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'D' followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that ends in a small loop.

September 2002

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## Abbreviations

AAG	Assistant Adjutant General
ALFSEA	Allied Land Forces South East Asia
ANCO	African Non-Commissioned Officer
BCA	British Central Africa
BCAR	British Central Africa Rifles
BESL	British Empire Service League
BNCO	British Non-Commissioned Officer
CAC	Central Africa Command
CAF	Central African Forces
CAR	Central African Regiment
<i>CAT</i>	<i>Central African Times</i>
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CQMS	Company Quartermaster Sergeant
CSM	Company Sergeant Major
DAAG	Deputy Assistant Adjutant General
DC	District Commissioner
DISC	Director of Intelligence, Security and Censorship
EAA	East African Artillery
EAACHD	East African Army Chaplains Department
EAAEC	East African Army Education Corps
EAASC	East African Army Service Corps
EAE	East African Engineers
EAEME	East African Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
EAF	East African Force / East African Forces
EAMLS	East African Military Labour Service
EAP	East Africa Protectorate
GEA	German East Africa
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
GHQ	General Headquarters
i/c	In Charge [of]
IO	Intelligence Officer
IWM	Imperial War Museum
KAR	King's African Rifles
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MNA	National Archives of Malawi
NA	Native Authority
NAM	National Army Museum
NAC	Nyasaland African Congress
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
NRR	Northern Rhodesia Regiment
OC	Officer Commanding
PC	Provincial Commissioner
PRO	Public Record Office
QM	Quartermaster
RAR	Rhodesian African Rifles



RAAC	Rhodesian Air Askari Corps
RHL	Rhodes House Library, Oxford
RIO	Regimental Intelligence Officer
RNAPC	Rhodesia and Nyasaland Army Pay Corps
RNASC	Rhodesia and Nyasaland Army Services Corps
RNMC	Rhodesia and Nyasaland Medical Corps
RNR	Rhodesia Native Regiment
RNS	Rhodesia and Nyasaland Signals
RNSC	Rhodesia and Nyasaland Staff Corps
RNE	Rhodesia and Nyasaland Engineers
RRR	Royal Rhodesian Regiment
RQMS	Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant
RSM	Regimental Sergeant Major
RWAFF	Royal West African Frontier Force
SACSEA	Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia
S&T	Supply and Transport
SCC	Somaliland Camel Corps
SNA	Senior Native Authority
SRICC	Southern Rhodesian Internment Camp Corps
TT	Tanganyika Territory
WAFF	West African Frontier Force
WOPC	[African] Warrant Officer Platoon Commander

## Note on Terminology

Malawi experienced a number of name changes during the colonial period. The earliest official report termed the country 'Nyassaland',<sup>1</sup> but from 1893 the official name was changed to the 'British Central Africa Protectorate'. In 1907, the name changed once again to the 'Nyasaland Protectorate'. In this work, to avoid confusion, the name 'Nyasaland' has been used throughout, except where reference is made to a specific body such as the British Central Africa administration. To minimize confusion, other territories are also referred to by their colonial names. The spellings of place names in Malawi have generally been normalised to the modern orthography, except where a completely new name has been adopted.

The term 'Malawian' has been preferred in reference to the inhabitants. Of the alternatives, 'Nyasalander' was only rarely used to describe the Africans in Nyasaland, whilst Nyasa is problematic in having gained currency only in the latter part of the colonial period. The significance of the emergence of the term in the current study would be obscured if it were applied indiscriminately for the entire colonial period. Except in quotations, the names of ethnic groups have been modernised, so that Atonga becomes Tonga, Angoni becomes Ngoni, Achewa becomes Chewa, and Anguru becomes Nguru. Possible confusion arising from the recasting of the Nguru as Lomwe which took place in the 1940s is accounted for by referring to the Nguru before the 1940s and to the Nguru/Lomwe afterwards.

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<sup>1</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in Nyassaland*, Africa No.5, 1892, C. 6699.

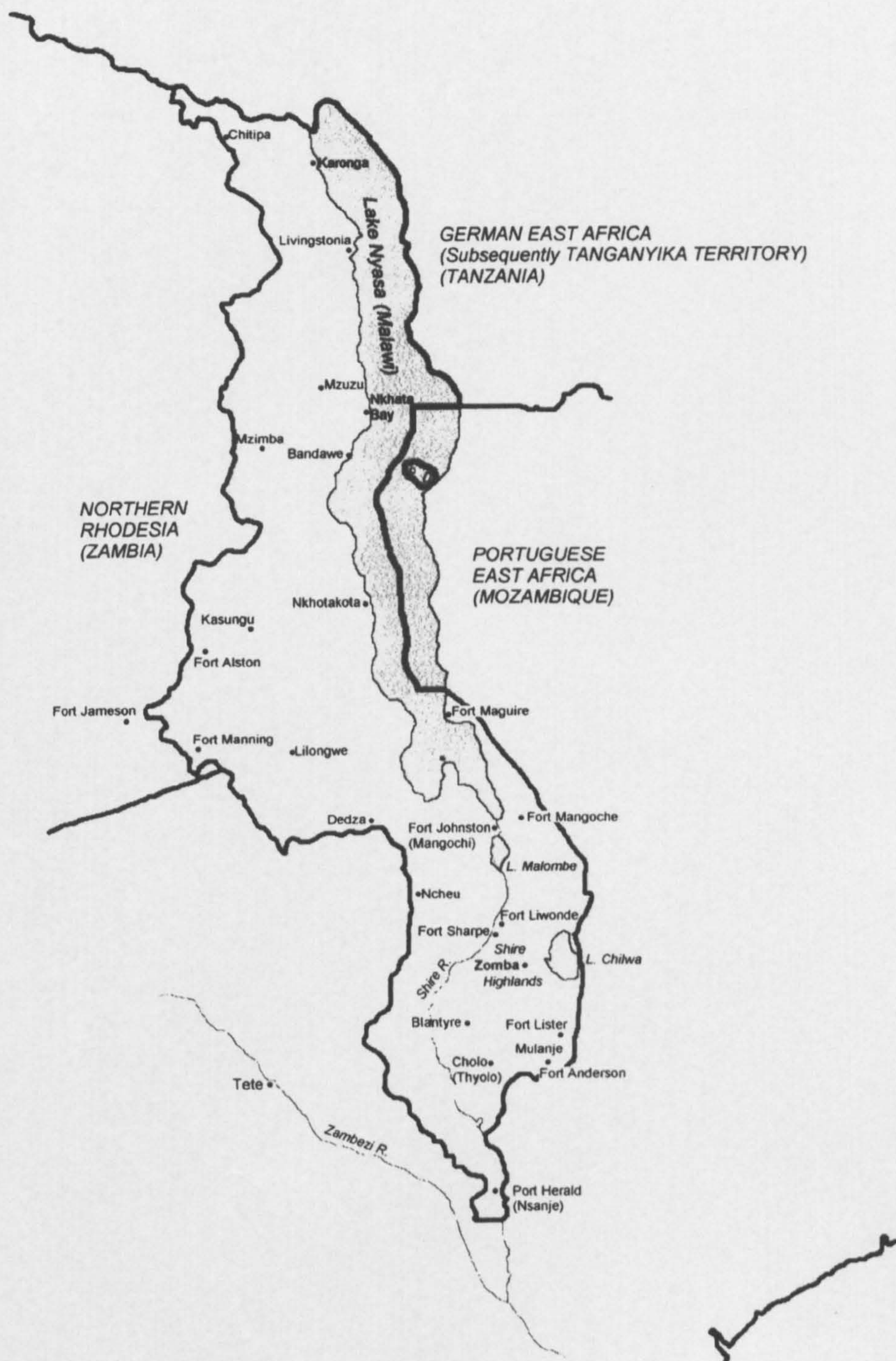
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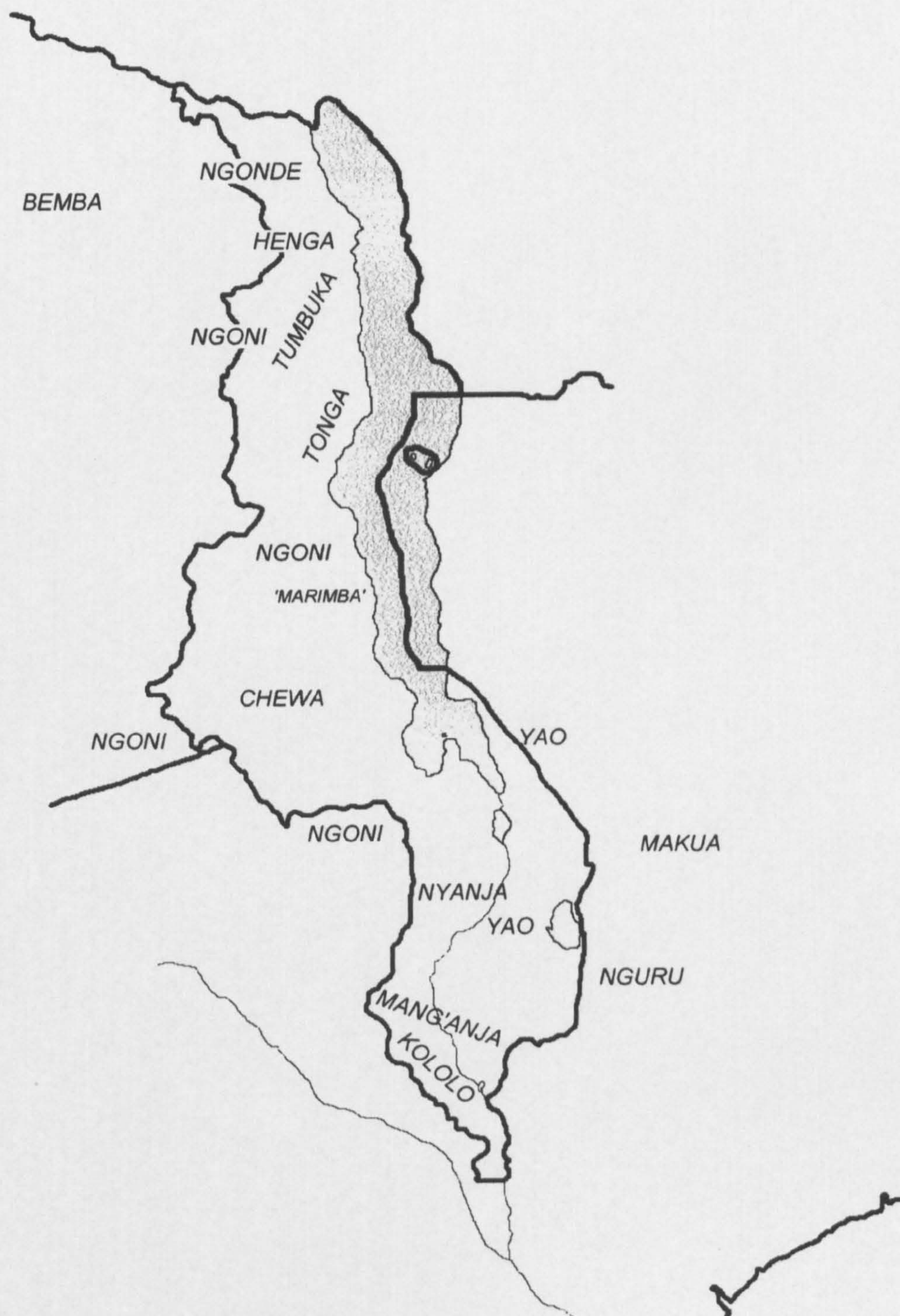




Map 1. Nyasaland/Malawi

Showing places mentioned in the text, important towns and military sites. More recent names are shown in brackets.





Map 2. Malawian ethnic groups  
 Showing the approximate locations of ethnic groups as defined in the colonial period.



## Introduction

### Background

The role of state violence in the maintenance of the colonial project has been acknowledged in many studies of the colonial state. Even those studies which have stressed the importance of consent in the colonial state have pointed to the ability of the state to threaten force as a prime source of the 'legitimacy' of colonial rule.<sup>1</sup> Given the acknowledged centrality of violence, it is surprising that coercive institutions such as the police force, and especially the army, are rarely mentioned in general studies of the colonial state in Africa. Berman's utilization of such concepts as 'control', 'crisis' and 'domination', even in the title of his influential study of the structure of the colonial state in Kenya, clearly suggests the importance of coercion in his understanding of the operation of the colonial state, yet he barely mentions the police force, despite its being one of the largest departments represented in his own tables, whilst the armed forces do not even seem to be included within his definition of the state.<sup>2</sup> This also applies to the major study of Central Africa, where Phyllis Martin's chapter on 'The violence of empire' does not make any reference to the coercive institutions.<sup>3</sup>

In 'The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa', David Killingray has examined in detail the role played by African colonial armies and

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<sup>1</sup> Partha Chatterjee, 'Was there a hegemonic project of the colonial state', in Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks (eds.), *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India* (London., 1994), pp. 79-84.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London, 1990), pp. 73-127.

<sup>3</sup> Phyllis M. Martin, 'The violence of empire', in David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin (eds.), *History of Central Africa, Volume Two* (London, 1983), pp. 1-26.

police forces in sustaining the colonial state.<sup>4</sup> Killingray sees the maintenance of law and order as one of 'two basic pillars', upon which effective colonial government rested, with state violence held in reserve as a constantly present but rarely used threat.<sup>5</sup> After a period of 'conquest and "pacification"' before 1914, during which the army and police force were often interchangeable, Killingray sees the army principally fulfilling a role as reserve behind the colonial police for internal security, with only limited military functions of defending the frontier and providing assistance to neighbouring territories.

Although Killingray characterises the long-term role of African colonial armies as essentially one of policing, he has also looked at the question of an 'imperial' military role for African soldiers.<sup>6</sup> He sees British colonial African armies as having had no real imperial role before the First World War, contrasting this with the role played by the Indian army during the period, which had an important function not only in defence and internal security, but also as an 'imperial military reserve'.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, Africans, Killingray stresses, were 'not to be used in "white men's wars"' as a principle of British policy.<sup>8</sup> Even after the First World War the Colonial Office continued to resist the use of African troops outside their own parts of Africa, and it was only the conditions of the Second World War which led to the acceptance of the use of African troops for imperial purposes.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> David Killingray, 'The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa', *African Affairs*, 85 (1986), 411-437.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p.411.

<sup>6</sup> David Killingray, 'The Idea of a British Imperial African Army', *Journal of African History*, 20, 3 (1979), 421-436.

<sup>7</sup> Keith Jeffery, "'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas'? India in the Aftermath of the First World War', *Modern Asian Studies*, 15, 3, (1981), 369-386 (p. 372).

<sup>8</sup> Killingray, 'The Idea of a British Imperial African Army', p. 422.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 428.



J. 'Bayo Adekson and Anthony Kirk-Greene have both examined colonial attitudes to ethnicity and recruitment for the armed forces.<sup>10</sup> Kirk-Greene identifies the origins of recruitment policy in Africa in the 'martial races' theory which increasingly dominated recruitment in the Indian Army from the mid-nineteenth century, and which ascribed warlike characteristics to particular ethnic groups. The origins of martial races theory have been regarded as arising from an essentially pragmatic decision to recruit from those groups of soldiers, including Sikhs, Gurkhas, and Punjabi Muslims, who had proven most reliable in the 'mutiny' of 1857. This developed into an elaborately codified system of recruitment which saw an increasingly limited number of groups or 'classes' organised in class companies within regiments, which would prevent any single group from dominating, or increasingly in whole regiments of a single class.<sup>11</sup> Many of those groups favoured, such as Sikhs, certainly had a martial history, but recruitment policies were also characterised by a preference for groups who were remote from urban centres (and were therefore less well educated, less politically informed, and most likely to be ethnically 'pure'), and by a bias against the darker-skinned peoples of Southern India.<sup>12</sup>

Kirk-Greene sees recruitment policy in Africa largely as a direct result of the direct introduction of the martial races concept by Indian Army officers seconded for

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<sup>10</sup> J. 'Bayo Adekson, 'Ethnicity and army recruitment in colonial plural societies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2, 2 (1979), pp. 151-165; Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, "'Damnosa Hereditas": ethnic ranking and the martial races imperative in Africa', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 3, 4 (1980), 392-414.

<sup>11</sup> For the Indian Army, see Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army Its Officers and Men* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), pp. 341-61; David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1956), pp. 1-46; Lionel Caplan, *Warrior Gentlemen: 'Gurkhas' in the Western Imagination* (Oxford: Berghahn, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, pp. 32-34.

African service, particularly those brought in by Frederick Lugard to staff the newly formed West African Frontier Force (WAFF) from around 1898. He finds evidence for the impact of these officers in a shifting emphasis in recruitment in West Africa after their arrival, with existing recruiting bases such as the Yoruba increasingly replaced by inland groups, particularly the Hausa. Recruiting policy in Africa mirrored that in India in its shift away from coastal groups who might be 'corrupted' by proximity to urban centres, towards more remote rural groups, a shift which also implied a bias against Christians and in favour of Muslims and practitioners of traditional religions. As both Kirk-Greene and 'Bayo Adekson demonstrate, the Indian Army's bias in favour of fair skinned northern Indians was also echoed in a general preference for northern 'negroid' as opposed to 'negro' groups, as exemplified by the early preferences for Hausas in West Africa and Sudanese in East Africa. At the same time, both writers also recognise that the identification of 'martial races' or 'warrior tribes' in Africa was not straightforward, since some of the most obviously martial groups, such as Maasai, were not recruited into colonial armies.<sup>13</sup> 'Bayo Adekson stresses that this reflected the principle of 'divide and rule', and that 'you can afford to take care of the politically weak, provided you subdue the powerful'.<sup>14</sup> Essentially, only those groups which were 'politically non-dominant' and were not themselves able to threaten the state were believed to be suitable to defend its interests.

What is missing from these accounts of recruitment, and in particular the issue of why certain groups came to predominate, is the question of why Africans

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<sup>13</sup> 'Bayo Adekson, 'Ethnicity and army recruitment', pp. 151-152; Kirk-Greene, "'Damnosa Hereditas" pp. 407-408.

<sup>14</sup> 'Bayo Adekson, 'Ethnicity and army recruitment', p. 153.



themselves were attracted to military service. In 'The maintenance of law and order', Killingray characterises African recruits and their motivation, depicting early soldiers as

hastily raised and poorly trained ... A uniform often provided a licence to loot; black mercenaries and policemen, especially those on active duty lived off the land and frequently exploited those whom they had been employed to protect.<sup>15</sup>

Killingray characterises early African soldiers and police as generally despised by other Africans, with African policemen in Southern Rhodesia referred to as “white men’s dog’s [sic]”,<sup>16</sup> a feeling which he points out was partly a direct consequence of recruitment policies which meant that men in uniform were often outsiders. This view of early African soldiers as mercenaries carrying out an unpopular task in return for material gain has been echoed elsewhere. Myron Echenberg’s study of the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* in French West Africa notes that Africans were so reluctant to engage in military service, that from 1857 to the early 1880s the French authorities were unable to rely upon the attractions of enlistment bonuses and had openly to buy slaves to make up their recruitment needs.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Ukpabi notes recruitment problems in the early WAFF, pointing out the numbers of recruits who deserted as soon as they had ‘earned enough money to pay a debt’.<sup>18</sup>

Omissi also emphasises the importance of pay as a motivating factor in Indian recruitment, emphasising the extent to which recruits were drawn from areas suffering from land scarcity, or from areas where the fertility of the land was poor. Illustrating this, he outlines the way in which recruitment tended to coincide with the

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<sup>15</sup> Killingray, 'The Maintenance of Law and Order', p. 423.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960* (London, 1991), pp. 10-11.

<sup>18</sup> Ukpabi, 'Recruiting for the British Colonial Forces in West Africa', p.92.



season of low agricultural activity, whilst conversely, recruitment tended to be curtailed during periods of prosperity.<sup>19</sup> As a result, Omissi sees economic factors as the major incentive in Indian enlistment. However, Omissi also emphasises the need for a broad conception of the material benefits of military service, including adequate food, healthcare, and clothing.<sup>20</sup> Such fringe benefits were also undoubtedly important in an African context, and in his study of African 'collaborators' in Rhodesia, van Onselen outlines these graphically, adding to higher than average wages, the possibilities to loot, exact bribes, rob, or even 'commandeer' women.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, we should expect African soldiers' motivation to go beyond material gain alone; as Omissi notes, 'It is rarely an act of rational self-interest to risk death in battle, and it would be a feeble army indeed whose soldiers were motivated by nothing more than cool calculations of profit and loss'. Omissi stresses of the roles in the Indian Army of the concepts of 'honour' and 'shame' embodied in the Indian concept of *izzat* as defining forces for the Indian soldier. Omissi sees a number of other elements in the development of identity within the Indian army, including the role of class composition of regiments in creating cohesion, and in particular the role played by the consequent connections to the wider communities from which recruits were drawn; the role of uniform, the connections which its visual language could express, and its significance for the pride of its wearer; the impact of the military on ethnic identity; the practice of indigenous religion by the troops; and

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<sup>19</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, pp. 48-52.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 61-63.

<sup>21</sup> Charles van Onselen, 'The role of collaborators in the Rhodesian mining industry 1900-1935', *African Affairs*, 72, 829 (1973), 401-18 (pp. 406-410).

the function of military isolation from the rest of society.<sup>22</sup> If we substitute the concept of 'tribe' for those of 'class' or 'caste', the value of these ideas for the study of military identity in Africa is immediately obvious, and parallels can easily be drawn. However, very little attempt has been made to study African military identities in these terms.

The approach applied in Benedict Anderson's influential study of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*,<sup>23</sup> can be useful in understanding the formulation of identity within military communities. Anderson looks at the question of how administrative organizations create meaning, and describes the emergence of a 'consciousness of connectedness', based on the asking of the imaginary question, 'why are we ... here ... together'.<sup>24</sup> Anderson also stresses the role of a shared administrative language in creating this consciousness, which also raises questions regarding the role of languages in the colonial armed forces.

In 'The Invention of Tradition', Ranger seems to suggest that the military environment was deliberately constructed to control the behaviour of African soldiers, referring to 'the drill square as source and symbol of discipline and punctuality'.<sup>25</sup> This echoes Foucault's writing on discipline,<sup>26</sup> in which Omissi's 'isolation' becomes the first stage in a conscious process whereby the authorities obtain power over the individuals under their control by separating them from the

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<sup>22</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, pp. 84-103.

<sup>23</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London Verso, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 56.

<sup>25</sup> Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 211-262, p.228..

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault(2nd edn.), *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan (London 1979).



outside world, and partitioning them so that they can be 'know[n] mastere[d] and use[d]',<sup>27</sup>. Foucault refers to the control of activity, such as the control of time by the use of timetables, and the control of individual movements, as in the instructions given in a drill manual. Foucault also describes a system whereby training is divided into a progressive series of segments, each followed by an examination, after which the individual moves on to a higher stage. Where Foucault's work makes explicit reference to the military sphere, he draws mainly on conscript armies, so it is unsurprising that he makes little of the idea of consent, but he nevertheless does provide a useful model of discipline which might be evaluated with reference to colonial armies. However, Berman emphasizes the severe limitations placed upon the collection of knowledge by colonial officials (due especially to problems of communication), which challenges the applicability of Foucault's totalising concept of discipline in a colonial setting.<sup>28</sup>

Works utilizing Gramsci's notion of hegemony have included the concept of consent in the relationship between military authority and military identities. Shula Marks and Dagmar Engels define hegemony as a process of making authority appear 'natural and legitimate' rather than 'alien and repressive' to those subject to it.<sup>29</sup> Crucially, they see hegemony as requiring the 'incorporation and transformation' of indigenous values, and again this echoes Omissi's account of identity in the Indian Army, particularly the active encouragement of indigenous religion by the military authorities.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>28</sup> Berman, *Control and Crisis*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>29</sup> Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks, 'Introduction: hegemony in a colonial context', in Dagmar Engels and Shula Marks(eds.), *Contesting Colonial Hegemony: State and Society in Africa and India* (London., 1994), p. 3.

The exclusion of non-Europeans from commissioned rank is an obvious feature of colonial armies.<sup>30</sup> The idea of hegemony raises the question of how far this position of institutional subordination was accepted as legitimate by African soldiers, and of how the authorities might have promoted its acceptance. In this respect, Ranger emphasizes the role of European ideas of class in defining officers and men in the British army as leader and led, and sees this concept being applied to authority in colonial Africa. This raises the question of how far (if at all) such concepts were accepted by African soldiers. Omissi emphasizes Indian soldiers' indifference towards the position of their socially remote European officers.<sup>31</sup> Again, the nature of this relationship in an African context is worthy of further study.

#### Malawian Soldiers in East and Central African History

The major published source for the history of Malawian soldiers in the colonial forces remains Hubert Moyse Bartlett's *The King's African Rifles*, which examines the history of the colonial armed forces in Nyasaland, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Somaliland and Zanzibar from the 1880s to 1945.<sup>32</sup> Written by a former KAR officer, *The King's African Rifles* shares many of the features of the genre of the regimental history, concentration upon organisational structure and campaign histories, the latter in particular, as George Shepperson has observed, being 'choked

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<sup>30</sup> David Killingray, 'Race and rank in the British Army in the twentieth century', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 10, 3 (1987), pp. 276-290; Bayo Adekun, 'Ethnicity and army recruitment', pp. 155-157.

<sup>31</sup> Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>32</sup> Hubert Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945* (Aldershot, 1956).



with names, dates and places'.<sup>33</sup> However, in providing an overview of the service of the regiment in which most Malawian soldiers served, Moyse-Bartlett provides an excellent framework for any military history of East Africa. For the period before the amalgamation of the Nyasaland, Kenya and Uganda forces into the KAR in 1903, the work provides separate accounts of the three forces, including a thorough account of the early armed forces of Nyasaland.<sup>34</sup> However, for the period after 1903, whilst Moyse-Bartlett's description of organisational development continues to show the distinctive development of the Malawian battalions, in the description of military operations Malawians are increasingly difficult to locate as a discrete group. Moyse-Bartlett treats the ethnic categorisations applied to colonial soldiers as essentially unproblematic, and there is no real discussion of social relations within the armed forces.

Malcolm Page, another ex-KAR officer, has continued the 'regimental history' approach in *KAR*, which provides an overview of the period covered by Moyse-Bartlett, but takes the description of the regiment's history up to independence in the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> This work shares many features with Moyse-Bartlett, being largely focused upon the experience of European members of the KAR, although it demonstrates a greater awareness of relations between European and African ranks.<sup>36</sup> Again, there is little recognition of a distinctive Malawian as opposed to a generalised East

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<sup>33</sup> George Shepperson, 'The Military History of British Central Africa', *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal: Human Problems in British Central Africa*, 26 (1959) p. 24.

<sup>34</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 12-48.

<sup>35</sup> Malcolm Page, *KAR: A History of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Other regimental histories of the KAR include W. Lloyd-Jones, *K.A.R.: Being an Unofficial Account of the Origin and Activities of the King's African Rifles* (London: Arrowsmith, 1926) and James Lunt, *Imperial Sunset: Frontier Soldiering in the 20th Century* (London: Macdonald, 1981), pp. 205-243.

African experience of military service. Regimental histories have also been produced for other units in which Malawians provided a significant recruiting base, notably Brelsford's *The Story of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment* and Owen's *The Rhodesian African Rifles*.<sup>37</sup> Brelsford acknowledges the importance of Malawians in the establishment of the NRR, but makes little reference to the continuing service of Malawians in the unit into the post-war period, whilst Owen makes no overt acknowledgement of the role played by Malawians in the RAR, despite his reference to the ex-KAR Regimental Sergeant Major.<sup>38</sup>

The earliest academic study to pose detailed questions about Malawian military service was George Shepperson's article 'The Military History of British Central Africa'.<sup>39</sup> Shepperson sought to overcome a number of inadequacies identified in Moyse-Bartlett's work. Shepperson emphasises the need to address the social, political, and economic backgrounds of the ethnic groups joining the armed forces, and also points to the fluidity of ethnic identity within the Malawi army, stressing the extent to which the recruiting biases of the colonial army could shape ethnic identities.<sup>40</sup> Shepperson also looks at the wider influence of the army and soldiers within Malawian society, paying particular attention to the development of military style dance societies (*mbeni* and *malipenga*), the impact of the military on Malawian

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<sup>37</sup> W. V. Brelsford (ed.), *The Story of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment* (Lusaka: Government Printer, 1954; repr. Bromley: Galago Publishing, 1990); Christopher Owen, *The Rhodesian African Rifles* (London: Leo Cooper, 1970).

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *The Rhodesian African Rifles*, p. 11.

<sup>39</sup> George Shepperson, 'The Military History of British Central Africa', *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal: Human Problems in British Central Africa*, 26 (1959), 23-33.

<sup>40</sup> Shepperson, 'The Military History of British Central Africa', p. 25.



language, and the extent to which military service connected Malawi with the outside world.<sup>41</sup>

John McCracken has taken up a number of the issues raised by Shepperson in his 1992 study of the Malawian colonial police force, which includes the development of the armed forces up to the division of the military and police in the late 1890s.<sup>42</sup> As well as examining the early role of the army, McCracken looks at the composition of forces in some depth, noting the different strategies of recruitment and enlistment adopted in the 1890s (including the conscription of levies by local chiefs, the co-opting of small mercenary gangs, the commitment of labourers by their employers, and press ganging), and explaining the economic background to military recruitment.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the attraction of higher than average pay, McCracken highlights the declining economic potential of the areas from which most recruits were drawn, resulting from the collapse of long distance trade between Malawi and the east coast and the increasing demands of taxation.<sup>44</sup>

More recently, Melvin Page's *The Chiwaya War* has focused upon the experience of Malawians in the First World War.<sup>45</sup> Page examines the motivations behind African enlistment, looking not only at the role of financial inducements, but also at the genuine fears of many Malawians of invasion by the Germans, and even

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<sup>41</sup> Shepperson, 'The Military History of British Central Africa', pp. 27-29.

<sup>42</sup> John McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy in Malawi: policing and politics in a colonial state', in David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonization: Nationalism, politics and the police, 1917-65* (Manchester, 1992).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 163-164.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 164-165.

<sup>45</sup> Melvin E. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000). See also Melvin E. Page, 'The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and the East African Campaign, 1914-1918', *Journal of African History*, 29, 1 (1978), 87-100.



the appeal of military imagery and images of masculinity.<sup>46</sup> Page also examines Malawian experience of military service and warfare, including material conditions and relations between African and European ranks. Importantly, this work also acknowledges the role of Malawians outside Nyasaland in the Northern Rhodesia Police, Rhodesian Native Regiment, and even in the German forces.

Finally, Timothy Parsons's work on the KAR, *The African Rank-and-File*, has dealt with a number of key issues in relation to the colonial army in East Africa.<sup>47</sup> Parsons work deals with the KAR as a whole, but focuses principally upon Kenya and Malawi, and has posed a number of important questions about military service in colonial East Africa. Parsons provides a thorough analysis of the changing nature of ethnic recruitment criteria, emphasising the grounding of those criteria in the willingness of particular groups of Africans to enlist. Parsons examines African soldiers' experience of military life, showing how military culture was conceived to promote the reliability of soldiers by providing privileges at the same time as alienating them from the remainder of colonial society, and – in an area that has largely been overlooked<sup>48</sup> – the way in which the military authorities sought to maintain the stability of the army by providing access to women. However, he also emphasises the extent to which soldiers sought to shape the character of military service by negotiating for improvements in conditions, or through various forms of resistance to the military authorities. For Parsons, this conflict arose from tensions

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<sup>46</sup> Page, *The Chiyawa War*, pp. 28-37.

<sup>47</sup> Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

<sup>48</sup> See David Killingray, 'Gender Issues and African Colonial Armies', in *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c.1700-1964*, ed. by David Killingray and David Omissi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 221-248, and Timothy Parsons, 'All Askaris are Family Men: Sex, Domesticity and Discipline in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964', in *Guardians of Empire*, pp. 157-178.

between the need for military officials to provide privileges, and the fears of civil officials that the creation of a privileged group would destabilise African society.

Parsons's work has considerably expanded the study of colonial soldiers in East Africa, but does have drawbacks as an all encompassing social history of East African colonial soldiers. The work concentrates heavily upon the experience of African soldiers in the Second World War, although it could be argued that the soldiers recruited during the period were not typical of the broad pattern of recruitment. In terms of specifically Malawian experience, Parsons provides a strong account of the distinctive features of the economy of Malawian recruitment, but elsewhere, a distinctively Malawian voice is lost, providing comparative material for a fuller analysis of the Kenyan experience of the KAR. It is also notable that, with his focus upon the KAR, Parsons fails to deal with the regiment's direct antecedents, and therefore with the formative period in Malawian recruitment policy. This is particularly important in the Malawian context, where the creation of the KAR signified little more than a change in designation.

The Malawian experience of colonial military service is worthy of special investigation for a number of reasons. As will be demonstrated in chapter one, Malawians played a unique role as a reserve within the KAR, with Malawians consistently serving outside the territory between 1899 and the end of the colonial period in 1964. Whilst, as Parsons observes, their heavy engagement in colonial military service means that Malawian soldiers provide an excellent paradigm of military service in colonial Africa, it also poses particular questions about the role



and experience of Malawian soldiers. Further, the close economic – and later political – integration of Nyasaland into Southern Africa, combined with the extensive involvement of Malawians in Rhodesian military units, leaves much scope for a discussion of Malawian experience beyond the confines of East African military organisation. This is underlined by the fact that for at least twenty years of the colonial army's existence, Malawian soldiers had little formal connection to the East African forces. This thesis is intended to examine the experience of Malawian soldiers throughout the colonial period, in the wider context of colonial society in Nyasaland. It aims to examine the development of ethnic recruiting doctrines from the 1890s, taking into account not only the impact of martial races theory but also the effects of local conditions, especially the willingness of Malawians to enlist the colonial army. It will seek to examine the reaction of Malawians to the disciplinary environment of the armed forces, and the extent to which Malawians sought or were able to indigenise the military environment. Finally, it aims to answer the question of how Malawians perceived their role as soldiers, and how the identity of the soldier was understood in colonial Nyasaland.

### Methodology

This thesis is primarily based upon archival sources in the United Kingdom and Malawi. The sources available in Britain fall into two major categories: contemporary documents generated by the Colonial Office, War Office and Foreign Office, and the memoirs of former officers. Foreign Office and Colonial Office Files provide an excellent overview of the institutional development of the colonial army, and of the rules and regulations which governed soldiers' lives. In general, an

account of the experience of African soldiers is difficult to extract from these sources, but annual reports often include accounts of African soldiers' grievances, serious disciplinary incidents, and sometimes detailed breakdowns of statistical information such as criminal convictions. Such records give relatively little indication of the daily lives of African soldiers, but 'war diaries' kept by military units during the World Wars can provide a useful day by day account of Malawian soldiers lives during specific periods. Officers' memoirs, whilst they can only provide a limited account of African soldiers' subjective experience, can provide a reliable account of the public life of the army, as well as specific issues such as relations between European and African ranks. The latter are supplemented by a small number of published memoirs.

The archival sources available in Malawi include much material from lower level administrative sources which relates more directly to the daily routine of the army. Provincial and district files in particular show how soldiers related to wider colonial society, and the files contain large amounts of material generated by Malawian soldiers themselves. These are mainly letters requesting Government officials to deal with specific problems, but also contain a significant quantity of private correspondence intercepted by censors during the Second World War. A limited number of short autobiographies by former soldiers also appeared in publications such as the *Nyasaland Journal*, but it must be recognised that these are heavily mediated.

Reflecting a conscious effort to provide a balanced account of the army throughout the colonial period, it was never intended in this project to focus primarily upon oral testimony. Nevertheless, opportunities were taken to interview former soldiers whenever the possibility arose. English-speaking veterans were interviewed directly, whilst the majority of interviews were conducted by a Malawian Army officer. These interviews provided a valuable insight into the subjective experience and opinions of a limited number of soldiers, which raised a number of new issues. However, the informants contacted were largely veterans of the Second World War, and it should be noted that given the vast expansion of the recruiting base, and the changing conditions which took place during the War, it would be unwise to extrapolate from their experience to the pre-war peacetime army. Thus, efforts to analyse the experience of Malawian soldiers during the majority of the colonial period must rely upon official and other contemporary sources, however inadequate.



## Chapter 1

### **The Role of the Colonial Armed Forces in Nyasaland**

In seeking to investigate the nature of African military identities in colonial Nyasaland, it is clearly vital to establish the role played by the armed forces in the colonial state. The character of any institution is, by definition, bound to its functions, and soldiers' experience of, and reactions to, military service must relate at some level to the nature of that service and the functions which they are asked to perform. The aim of this chapter is not to discuss in detail the military history of either the East African colonial army in general, or Nyasaland's colonial forces in particular, since a number of works have dealt with this history in varying degrees of depth, and a detailed description is outside the scope of this work.<sup>1</sup> Rather, this chapter seeks to place the role played by Nyasaland's colonial forces in a broader context by comparing the particular case of Nyasaland to more generalised, established models of the role of African colonial armies. At a more basic level, by exploring the changing role of the Nyasaland forces, this chapter also aims to provide a narrative framework which will act as a point of reference for the discussion of the African experience of the colonial army in the subsequent chapters.

#### Background to the role of colonial armies.

In 'The Maintenance of Law and Order', David Killingray has provided a periodisation of the role of military and policing institutions in Africa, which

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<sup>1</sup> See H. Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1956); Malcolm Page, *KAR: A History of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces* (London: Leo Cooper, 1998); James Lunt, *Imperial Sunset: Frontier Soldiering in the 20th Century* (London: Macdonald, 1981), pp. 205-43.

identifies four broad phases.<sup>2</sup> Killingray sees the first phase, between the 1880s and 1914, as comprising a period of conquest and the establishment of colonial control by paramilitary police and local armed forces, followed by the development of separate military and police forces. The second phase covers the period of the First World War, and is characterised by the withdrawal of military forces from law-and order to perform military duties, at the same time as an increase in military activities in those areas (including East Africa) where fighting was taking place. The third phase, from around 1920 to the end of the Second World War, is seen as one in which the role of colonial military forces in law and order was reduced in line with a transfer of responsibilities to Native Authorities, a trend which was continued with the withdrawal of forces for military service during the War. The final phase, from 1945 to the end of the colonial period, is characterised as one in which, in the face of growing African Nationalism, both military and police forces were modernised and expanded, and the colonial army was increasingly dedicated to an active role in the maintenance of law and order.

Examinations of the imperial military role of African colonial armies have been, to an extent, the inverse of the scheme relating to law and order. Killingray has again provided a periodisation of official attitudes towards the use of African troops for a 'major imperial role', by which he essentially means service outside Africa.<sup>3</sup> In terms of their imperial function, Killingray sees British African colonial forces as entirely limited to local defence before 1916, which is contrasted with the overtly

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<sup>2</sup> David Killingray, 'The Maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa', *African Affairs*, 85 (1986), 411-37.

<sup>3</sup> David Killingray, 'The Idea of a British Imperial African Army', *Journal of African History*, 20, 3 (1979), 421-36.



imperial role of the Indian Army in providing garrison troops in the far east and an imperial military reserve in general. From 1916, when Indian Army units serving against German forces in East Africa were replaced by African troops, Killingray outlines a change in official thinking, whereby the serious possibility of using African troops outside Africa was raised. Following this, it was agreed in 1918 to send African forces to Palestine to fight against the Turks, a plan which was not carried out due to the cessation of hostilities. However, Killingray also emphasises that in contrast to French policy, there was little support in the British government for the idea of sending African combat troops to the Western Front, both on the grounds of the unsuitability of the climate, and because of a political reluctance to utilise African troops against European forces. The early 1920s saw further interest in the idea of using African troops to garrison the Middle East, especially given the growing unwillingness of the Indian Government to allow their own forces to be used as an imperial reserve.<sup>4</sup> However, this plan was again abandoned, and the inter-war years are thus seen as a period in which African forces were largely withdrawn from an imperial or even a military role, as they were increasingly focused towards internal security duties.

Killingray thus sees the African forces at the outbreak of the Second World War still as overwhelmingly local forces which was not intended for use outside Africa. Although British African troops served outside their own territories against Italians in Abyssinia from the Spring of 1941 to the end of the year, this attitude towards the use of African troops is seen as changing primarily as a result of the

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<sup>4</sup> See Keith Jeffery, 'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas'? India in the Aftermath of the First World War', *Modern Asian Studies*, 15, 3 (1981), 369-86.

pressures placed upon manpower by the entry of Japan into the war in the same year, and especially by the fall of Singapore. Following this, from 1942, African soldiers from both East and West Africa served in Madagascar against Vichy French forces, and in Ceylon, India, and Burma against the Japanese. Finally, in the post-war period Killingray points to a discussion of using African forces on a large scale as an imperial reserve to replace the Indian Army lost in 1947, but he sees this as an idea abandoned by 1950, after which the African colonial forces reverted again to law and order duties, which they performed until the end of the colonial period.

Parsons has generally seen the role of the King's African Rifles in terms which are reflective of Killingray's scheme outlined above.<sup>5</sup> Starting with the formal establishment of the KAR in 1902, out of the local forces of Nyasaland, Kenya and Uganda, Parsons sees a period of 'pacification campaigns' in Kenya and Somaliland before 1914, during which time the colonial governments sought to cut back the KAR to the minimum numbers required for local needs. This was followed by a period of expansion during the First World War, which saw the KAR engaged against German forces in East Africa, initially in a defensive role, but from 1916 as an expanded and much more fully organised imperial force under War Office control. In the years between the First and Second World Wars, Parsons describes a further period of retrenchment, during which the KAR passed back to local control, was drastically reduced in size, and was mainly involved in the suppression of lawlessness in the northern frontier of Kenya and elsewhere, supporting the colonial state by providing a symbol of government strength. Towards the end of this period,

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<sup>5</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 13-52.

with the realisation of the growing threat of war against the Italians in East Africa, attempts were made to prepare the KAR for modern warfare. Thus, battalions were expanded and KAR reserves were prepared for expansion. The Second World War again saw the KAR assuming an imperial military role, placed under the control of the War Office and greatly enlarged, serving in Somaliland against Italian forces, in Madagascar against the Vichy French, as well as subsequently serving outside Africa in Ceylon and Burma from 1943. Finally, Parsons sees the post-war KAR once again reduced in size and - although assuming an imperial role in Malaya in the early 1950s - mainly engaged in an internal security role in the face of growing African nationalism, particularly the Mau Mau in Kenya.

In this chapter, it is intended to investigate how well the Nyasaland forces actually match both the general model of the role of colonial armies, and the general pattern of development in the KAR as a whole. This chapter is not intended to examine the changing function and structure of the East African forces as a whole, as this has been ably carried out by both Moyse-Bartlett and Parsons. Rather it seeks to place the Nyasaland forces within this wider context. More attention is paid to the question of what roles were actually being performed by the forces than to questions of colonial and imperial policy which have been dealt with elsewhere, since it is this former question which has most bearing on the central theme of the experience of colonial soldiers and the development of military identities.



The Nyasaland forces in the period of conquest and pacification, 1891-1914

The first military force in Nyasaland was raised in 1891 for service under the control of the Foreign Office by Sir H. H. Johnston, the Commissioner and Consul-General of the new British Central Africa Protectorate. Despite its title of the 'British Central Africa Police', the core of the force was composed of 71 soldiers from the Indian Army (including 40 Sikh infantrymen from Pioneer regiments and 30 Muslim Cavalrymen from the Hyderabad Lancers, under an Indian Army officer), to whom were added 120 Africans recruited in Zanzibar. However, of this latter number only ten were initially employed in military duties, the remainder being used as labour for the construction of the infrastructure of the new Protectorate.<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that the new force was intended to perform the function of conquest and pacification as described by Killingray. Arriving in Nyasaland with Johnston in July 1891,<sup>7</sup> the small army almost immediately launched into a series of expeditions of conquest against local chiefs. This was nominally aimed at the suppression of the slave trade, but whilst reports of the freeing of slaves were sent back to London, the main aim was clearly to subjugate all possible indigenous opposition to the new colonial government.<sup>8</sup> The numerous expeditions and engagements undertaken by the early armed forces have been well described elsewhere, and a detailed account of them is beyond the scope of this work, but the number of such expeditions was

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<sup>6</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in Nyassaland*, Africa No.5, 1892, C. 6699, pp. 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> *Blantyre Mission: Life and Work*, July 1891.

<sup>8</sup> See A. J. Hanna, *The Beginnings of Nyasaland and North Eastern Rhodesia 1859-95* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) and Eric Stokes 'Malawi Political Systems and the Introduction of Colonial Rule 1891-1896', in Eric Stokes and Richard Brown (eds.), *The Zambesian Past* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), pp. 352-75.

intense until 1897, and punitive expeditions in Nyasaland continued until 1900.<sup>9</sup> Besides their use in expeditions of conquest, it is notable that the armed forces were also employed from an early date to enforce African payment of taxes by burning the villages of defaulting chiefs.<sup>10</sup>

It seems likely that the cavalry component in particular were originally intended to compensate for the small size of the force by taking advantage of a high level of mobility, but in fact their horses soon died of tsetse fly or horse sickness.<sup>11</sup> As Johnston recorded in 1894, 'Were it not for this, we could keep the whole Shiré province under control by a small troop of fifty mounted police'.<sup>12</sup> This was clearly a crucial element in the subsequent development of the Nyasaland forces as an infantry regiment, and the small number of men quickly proved inadequate to the task of imposing the Government's will upon the population. The Indian contingent was increased, Makua men from Mozambique were added to the force, and local Malawians were frequently employed as auxiliaries or 'irregulars', so that by 1895 the size of the force had reached 200 Sikhs, 100 Makua Regulars, and 200 local Irregulars, under nine European officers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Five major expeditions were carried out in the first six months alone.

See Sir Harry H. Johnston, *British Central Africa: an attempt to give some account of the territories under British influence north of the Zambezi* (London: Methuen, 1898), pp. 80-151; Lieutenant-Colonel H. Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1956), pp. 12-48.

<sup>10</sup> *Life and Work: Blantyre Mission Supplement*, December 1891, p.3; *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, June 1892; Malawi National Archives (MNA) 13/WPO/1/1, f. 136, Wordsworth Poole to his mother, Zomba, 16 April 1896.

<sup>11</sup> Johnston, *British Central Africa*, p.98n.

<sup>12</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, Africa No.6, 1894, C. 7504, p.19.

<sup>13</sup> Public Records Office (hereafter PRO), FO 2/88, f. 291, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul-General to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 8 May 1895.



Although almost continuously engaged in military expeditions, the armed forces at this time had an ambiguous role reflective of the lack of a division between the army and the police which is identified by Killingray. As British control extended out from the Shire Highlands in the south of the country, increasing numbers of men were required for garrison duties in numerous newly-established forts and posts.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the distinction between military and civil policing duties was blurred, as local Civil Police tended to comprise a mixture of Regular Sikhs and Makua (who remained members of the armed forces) and local Malawians directly recruited by magistrates.<sup>15</sup> This situation was formally changed in 1896, when the force was reorganised along the lines of a regular infantry regiment of six companies of 126 local Africans, each commanded by a British officer, as well as the Indian Contingent of 185 men. The latter also supplied the three senior officers for the armed forces. Two further companies were detached to become a separate Civil Police.<sup>16</sup> In line with the new fully military organisation, the African portion was granted the title 'British Central Africa Rifles', the force as a whole being called the 'Armed Forces'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> James Njoloma identified 55 separate forts, military camps and fortified government posts which had been manned by the Nyasaland forces before the First World War, not including posts in North-Eastern Rhodesia. James Njoloma, 'A Listing of the British Colonial Forts, Military Encampments and Fortified Bomas of Malawi', *Society of Malawi Journal*, 51, 2 (1998).

<sup>15</sup> PRO, FO 2/55, f.354, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul-General to the Earl of Roseberry, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 8 May 1895; PRO, FO 2/67, 'Estimates for the Year's Expenditure in British Central Africa Protectorate: April 1, 1894, to March 31, 1895', 29 August 1894; PRO, FO 2/67, ff.343-361, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul-General to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 22 October 1894.

<sup>16</sup> PRO, FO 2/106, ff.246-248, 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa proposed by Major C. A. Edwards', April 1896; National Army Museum (hereafter NAM), 6706-64-66, Force Order 7 'Civil Police not furnished from A.F.', 20 December 1896; NAM 6706-64-66, Force Order 9 'Reduction of establishment' [n.d.].

<sup>17</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 84, 'Designation B.C.A. Rifles' [July 1897?]. In fact the title British Central Africa Rifles was in regular use from 1896.



As operations to assert government control in Nyasaland reached a conclusion in the late 1890s, the responsibilities of the BCA Rifles shifted beyond the borders of the Protectorate. Since their establishment in 1891, the Nyasaland forces had had a nominal responsibility for the defence of the British South Africa Company's (BSAC) territory in North-Eastern Rhodesia, and in September 1898 a further three companies, amounting to 350 Malawian men, were raised specifically for service in the BSAC sphere.<sup>18</sup> Three months later, this trend towards a role outside Nyasaland saw realisation on a fuller scale as a Second Battalion of BCA Rifles<sup>19</sup> was raised under the separate command of the War Office, with the First Battalion remaining under the control of the Foreign Office. The new battalion was intended to fulfil the specific role of providing a garrison for the Royal Navy's coaling station in Mauritius, and as such was to be an official component of the British Army. This purpose in itself was not unique in Africa, since the West African Regiment was raised in Sierra Leone as part of the British Army in 1898, principally to defeat rebels in the Hut Tax War, but also to replace the West India Regiment in the landward defence of the port of Freetown.<sup>20</sup> However, the idea of raising such a unit for service so far from the territory where it originated, indeed beyond the African mainland, was quite new, and was significantly different from the experience of African colonial forces elsewhere at this date. This is especially true of the rest of East Africa, where the Uganda Rifles and East African Rifles were still engaged in

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<sup>18</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 190, 'Augmentation of Forces', 5 September 1898; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 192, 'Strength of new force', 5 September 1898.

<sup>19</sup> The two battalions were subsequently renamed the 'Central African Regiment' (CAR).

<sup>20</sup> David Killingray, 'The Mutiny of the West African Regiment in the Gold Coast, 1901', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 16, 3 (1983), 441-54 (p. 444); James Lunt, *Imperial Sunset: Frontier Soldiering in the 20th Century* (London: Macdonald, 1981), pp. 201-204. Outside Africa, the British Army included several 'local' forces such as the West India Regiment, Hong Kong Regiment, 1st Chinese Regiment, and a number of units of the Royal Artillery and Royal Engineers. These were distinct from the Colonial defence forces, and were intended for the defence of particular places of strategic importance.

the conquest of their own territories. Although the nature of the duties undertaken by Nyasaland troops does little to alter the general impression that African troops continued to be used only for local functions, it set a very significant precedent for the subsequent role of the Nyasaland forces.

In fact the new battalion's posting in Mauritius was short-lived, as it was removed after an incident in December 1899 in which Malawian soldiers attacked local Mauritian villagers, who had reacted violently against being garrisoned by African troops.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the battalion was retained for service outside Nyasaland, subsequently being sent to garrison Somaliland, from where in 1900 half of the Battalion were despatched to fight in the Ashanti campaign in West Africa.<sup>22</sup> This unique employment of an East African force for active service in West Africa represented an additional development of the special role of the Nyasaland forces, one which was carried further in the same year when half of the 1st Battalion (still under Foreign Office control) joined the 2nd Battalion in Ashanti.

In 1902 the Nyasaland forces were joined to the East African Rifles (of Kenya) and the Uganda Rifles, to form the five battalion strong King's African Rifles (KAR). Thus, the 1st Battalion CAR and the Indian contingent became the 1st (Central African) Battalion KAR (1 KAR), and the 2nd Battalion CAR became the 2nd (Central African) Battalion KAR (2 KAR).<sup>23</sup> The special function of the 2nd

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<sup>21</sup> 'The African Regiment in Mauritius: Grave Misconduct', *Central African Times*, 7 April 1900, p.3; 'The BCA Rifles in Mauritius', *Central African Times*, 14 April 1900, p.7; 'The BCA Rifles in Mauritius', *Central African Times*, 19 May 1900, p.8.

<sup>22</sup> 'The 2nd Battalion Central Africa Regiment', *The Times*, 18 October 1900, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> The territories to which each battalion of the KAR belonged at this time were as follows: 1st Battalion Nyasaland, 2nd Battalion Nyasaland, 3rd Battalion Kenya, 4th Battalion Uganda, 5th



Battalion was enshrined in the new organisation as it was designated the 'Reserve' Battalion of the KAR, to be posted outside its territory of origin, unlike the Kenya and Uganda Battalions. Accordingly, 2 KAR was stationed in Somaliland, where it took part in operations against the so-called 'Mad Mullah' (Mohammed Abdille Hassan) until early 1904, although it was joined for most of this period by portions of 1 KAR, 3 KAR and 5 KAR.<sup>24</sup> Following the return of 2 KAR from Somaliland, the position of Nyasaland as a supplier of reserve military force to the rest of East Africa was further formalised as 1 KAR and 2 KAR were placed on the same footing for foreign service. The two battalions would take turns as the 'Foreign Service Battalion' serving in Kenya and the 'Home Service Battalion' (always including the Indian contingent) serving in Nyasaland, exchanging stations at the end of three years.<sup>25</sup> This position was maintained until the First World War, although a series of economically inspired reductions in the size of the KAR led to the disbandment of 2 KAR in 1911, and of the Indian contingent in 1912. Following this, however, the same system of Home and Foreign service was carried out within 1 KAR, with two of its four companies serving in Nyasaland and two in East Africa.<sup>26</sup> From this time until the end of the colonial period, in peacetime, a portion of the Nyasaland forces always continued to be stationed outside Nyasaland.

Throughout the 1890s, the Nyasaland forces matched the recognised pattern of conquest and pacification, enforcing the will of the colonial government and acting

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Battalion Uganda Indian Contingent. A 6th Battalion was subsequently raised from the local forces in Somaliland.

<sup>24</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 161-190.

<sup>25</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 775, 'Re-organization of 1st and 2nd K.A.R.', 17 December 1904; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Colonial Reports - Annual. No. 472. British Central Africa Protectorate. Report for 1904-5*, Cd. 2684-18.

<sup>26</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 152-159.



both as army and police force. However, in some respects the early forces in Nyasaland were distinctive. They were organised as a battalion along formal military lines earlier than other East African forces, and in the period before the First World War they were unique in being given a genuinely imperial role outside the African mainland. Further, by the outbreak of the war, the responsibility of Nyasaland troops in supplying reserve manpower to the remainder of East Africa was so well established that it continued even after the reduction to a single battalion.

### The Nyasaland Forces in the First World War

The First World War clearly had a dramatic effect upon the KAR as a whole. By the beginning of the conflict the regiment had been reduced to three Battalions, 1 KAR recruited in Nyasaland, 3 KAR from Kenya, and 4 KAR from Uganda, numbering around 2,300 men in all.<sup>27</sup> However, despite the commencement of hostilities in German East Africa, the KAR was maintained at this low establishment, and the onus of offensive military operations fell upon an Expeditionary Force from the Indian Army.<sup>28</sup> At the outbreak of war, four companies of 1 KAR were stationed in Kenya, and another four in Nyasaland.<sup>29</sup> These two portions of 1 KAR initially took part in defensive operations in their respective areas, and the KAR as a whole stayed under the control of the colonial governments. Indeed, conditions remained unchanged to the extent that two companies of 1 KAR had to be returned from East Africa to Nyasaland in July 1915 because they had exceeded their period of 'Foreign Service'. During this time, the only real attempt to expand the KAR was focused

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<sup>27</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> Timothy H. Parsons, 'East African Soldiers in Britain's Colonial Army, 1902-1964' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1996), pp. 32-33.

<sup>29</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa: Volume I August 1914-September 1916* (London: HMSO, 1941; repr. Nashville: The Battery Press, 1990), pp. 15-16, 167-69.

upon Nyasaland, when 2 KAR was re-raised from elements of 1 KAR serving in Kenya, again reflecting the special pre-war role of Nyasaland as a reserve for the remainder of the force.<sup>30</sup>

A full-scale expansion of the KAR was not carried out until 1916, when a decision was made to transfer the burden of fighting to African troops, especially since European and Indian soldiers were suffering from very high rates of disease.<sup>31</sup> Importantly, the various battalions, previously under the command of the respective colonial governments in whose territories they had been stationed before the war, were now placed under the unified command of the East African Force, under the control of the War Office.<sup>32</sup> The existing battalions of the KAR were converted into 'regiments', each consisting of two battalions (so that, for example, 1 KAR became 1/1 KAR and 2/1 KAR), and a new 5 KAR was raised for service in Northern Kenya. Further expansions followed so that by the end of the war, each of the two Nyasaland Regiments consisted of four battalions, whilst Kenya accounted for five battalions, Uganda for six, German East Africa for two, and Zanzibar for one.<sup>33</sup> By the time that these expansions were completed, the KAR numbered nearly 31,000 men, of whom around 10,000 were serving with Nyasaland units, clearly suggesting the extent to which Malawians continued to play a disproportionately large role in terms

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<sup>30</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 561-62.

<sup>31</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p. 34; Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 210-11, 564.

<sup>32</sup> Brigadier-General C. P. Fendall, *The East African Force 1915-1919* (London: Witherby, 1921; repr. Nashville: The Battery Press, 1992), pp.36-39, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 563-68. The actual territorial origins of the battalions were more complex than this suggests; for example the two German East Africa battalions were raised partly from surrendered Africans from the German forces, and partly from Kenyan recruits.



of military recruitment.<sup>34</sup> Government figures estimated that in total 14,920 Nyasaland men served in the field in the KAR in the First World War, whilst another 3100 did not reach their units in time to see action. Of this number, 1741 died as the result of action or disease.<sup>35</sup> It should be noted that Malawians also served outside the official Nyasaland battalions of the KAR, including up to 1,000 Nyasaland labour migrants who served in the Rhodesia Native Regiment (RNR) from 1916.<sup>36</sup>

Nyasaland did not just supply a disproportionate number of recruits to the KAR during the First World War, Malawian units also seem to have played a disproportionate role in action. Excepting their 4th Battalions, which were training rather than organised combat units, all the Nyasaland battalions served in the field in the offensive campaign against German forces after 1916. By contrast, two Kenyan, one Ugandan, both German East African battalions and the Zanzibar battalion were serving as garrison troops in November 1918, so that although they accounted for less than one third of the men under arms in the KAR, half of the battalions actually in the field were Nyasaland units.<sup>37</sup>

### The Inter-War Period

Although they supplied a large proportion of the combat manpower, there was little else distinctive about the role of Malawian troops in the First World War when compared to the remainder of the KAR. The war had drawn the different

<sup>34</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 18; PRO, CO 534/25, f.105, 'King's African Rifles: Table Showing Distribution, Effectives and Non-Effectives, Trained Men and Recruits, Native Combatant Ranks Only, on 19th December 1917'.

<sup>35</sup> PRO CO 534/49, f.421, 'War Effort: Numerical Records of Nyasaland's Efforts in the War Against Germany', [n.d.].

<sup>36</sup> Jonathan Newell, "'I wore sergeant's stripes because I wanted to be one": protest, punishment and the assertion of rights in the Rhodesian Native Regiment' (unpublished paper, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp.575-76.



components of the KAR closer together, not least physically by providing, in the form of the newly occupied German East Africa, a land connection between all the territories in which the KAR was raised. Nevertheless, the special role which had been undertaken by the Nyasaland units before the war was soon reassumed. Within a short time following the end of the war the KAR was returned from War Office to Colonial Office control, and around early 1919, the KAR as a whole was reduced to a scale not substantially greater than its pre-war peacetime establishment, consisting of 1 KAR and 2 KAR from Nyasaland, 3 KAR and 5 KAR from Kenya, 4 KAR from Uganda, and 6 KAR from the newly acquired German East Africa (Tanganyika Territory).<sup>38</sup> However, the Nyasaland units, unlike those of other territories, were again posted outside their own area, with half of 1 KAR (renamed 1/1 KAR) stationed in Nyasaland, and the other half of 1 KAR (2/1 KAR) as well as the whole of 2 KAR stationed in Tanganyika (alongside the locally raised 6 KAR). The external role of the Nyasaland forces was further expanded in 1922 when a decision was made to permanently attach a contingent of Nyasaland soldiers to the Somaliland Camel Corps (SCC), where they were to replace a company of Indian Army soldiers which had previously served alongside the two Somali companies.<sup>39</sup> The Nyasaland company, each contingent serving for three years, continued to be attached to the SCC throughout the inter-war period.

Despite the experience of the First World War, the inter-war period saw the idea of the KAR as a modern fighting force largely abandoned, following an early

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<sup>38</sup> PRO, CO 534/34, ff.76-81, Commandant's Representative, KAR Nyasaland to Acting Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Zomba, 3 May 1919.

<sup>39</sup> MNA, S 2/32/22/14, Winston Churchill to Sir George Smith, Governor of Nyasaland, 17 August 1922.

consideration of using East African forces to garrison the Middle East.<sup>40</sup> As in the years preceding the First World War, financial constraints meant that colonial governments were anxious to cut back the size of the local forces. Consequently, the KAR was reduced to an internal security role, which in Nyasaland itself translated into little more than a routine of patrols, often incorporating displays of machine-gun fire, which were clearly designed to demonstrate to the African population the continuing power of the colonial state. On occasion, such patrols were used as a direct threat against non-taxpayers.<sup>41</sup>

In 1929 the whole KAR was reorganised along what appeared on paper to be sound military lines. Replacing the system of individual territories controlling units, the KAR was divided into two brigades, the Northern Brigade comprising Brigade Headquarters, 3 KAR, 4 KAR, 5 KAR, a Brigade Signal Section, and a Transport Company from the Supply and Transport Corps, King's African Rifles (KAR S&T); and the Southern Brigade, comprising 1 KAR, 2 KAR, and 6 KAR, as well as Headquarters, Signals and KAR S&T.<sup>42</sup> In fact this new organisation seems mainly to have been intended to permit the reduction of the force by enabling the swift movement of reinforcements between neighbouring territories. As a result, the battalions were reduced to a level of only two companies and a machine gun platoon

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<sup>40</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', pp. 38-39.

<sup>41</sup> MNA, S 2/8/20/1, C. G. Phillips, OC 1 KAR Nyasaland Detachment to Mangoche Detachment 1 KAR, Zomba 5 February 1920; MNA, S 2/8/20/4, OC Troops Nyasaland to Acting Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Zomba 1 December 1923; MNA, S 2/8/20/8A, 'Report on Demonstration Patrol from Zomba to Ntondwe, Mlanje, Cholo, Mikalongwe, Limbe, & Chiradzulu', by Lieutenant C. J. Keegan, 1 KAR, Zomba, 27 December 1923; MNA, S 2/8/20/8C, 'Report on Demonstration Patrol from Zomba to Mpimbi, Ncheu, M'neni, Chikwawa & Blantyre', by Lieutenant W. J. Skinner, 1 KAR, Zomba, 27 December 1923; PRO, CO 534/56, ff. 193-201, '1st. Battalion, The King's African Rifles: Diary of the Battalion March, 1924' [n.d.]; Sir Francis De Guingand, *African Assignment* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1953), pp. 60-62.

<sup>42</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/3, 'Report on the Re-organization of the King's African Rifles', 1929, p. 1.



each, or 13 Europeans and 321 Africans. As the Inspector-General of the KAR noted in 1937, this left the KAR units as 'battalions only in name', and crucially unable to carry out modern military training due to the fact that 'all our infantry tactics are based on battalions of 4 companies'.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, in the Southern Brigade the key feature of the new scheme, the new Supply and Transport Corps, was not enacted. Instead, in Nyasaland six old civil vehicles were simply painted up in KAR colours and their drivers put into uniform as the 'Civil Wing KAR' under civil government control. This emphasises that however important Nyasaland troops were in colonial military thinking, the local government was not willing to subsidise them any more than was absolutely necessary for their own purposes.<sup>44</sup> Clearly the KAR battalions were no longer organised as an effective military force.

Despite growing fears of war from 1935, following the Italian conquest of Abyssinia, this organisation of the KAR continued to obtain. In 1937, however, steps were taken to expand the Regiment in preparation for modern warfare. The KAR as a whole, along with the Northern Rhodesia Regiment (NRR), were finally placed under a unified command structure, and the Inspector-General recommended that one battalion in each Brigade should be expanded to a full four-company battalion, whilst the other two battalions were maintained as cadre battalions of two companies ready for expansion in case of war. Unsurprisingly, in the Southern

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<sup>43</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/1, 'The re-organization of the forces in our East African Colonies', memorandum by the Inspector-General, Royal West African Frontier Force and King's African Rifles, p. 8; Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p. 43.

<sup>44</sup> MNA, S 1/11(2)/29/4, Chief Transport Officer, Nyasaland to Chief Secretary, Nyasaland, 11 November 1930; MNA, S 1/11(2)/29/4a, Officer Commanding Southern Brigade KAR to Chief Transport Officer, Nyasaland, 29 October 1930; MNA, S 1/11(2)/29/7, Chief Transport Officer, Nyasaland to Chief Secretary, Nyasaland, 17 December 1930.



Brigade it was one of the two Nyasaland battalions which was expanded, again confirming their special role.<sup>45</sup>

### The Second World War

Unlike the situation in the First World War, on the outbreak of war in 1939, the KAR quickly passed from Colonial Office to War Office control under the Middle East Command. As in the First World War, the KAR as a whole was increased significantly, from seven battalions to a total of 43, including 12 raised in Nyasaland.<sup>46</sup> From 1939, Malawian soldiers were also recruited into sub-units of a growing number of regionally based support units, such as the East African Artillery, Engineers, Army Service Corps, and Army Medical Corps and Army Education Corps.<sup>47</sup> Although the Nyasaland contingent of the SCC was used as the basis of some of the new KAR infantry battalions, the special role of Malawian troops in Somaliland was continued in 1941 when 500 Malawians were sent to form the Somaliland Gendarmerie. As Parsons has noted, the use of Swahili as the official language in most East African units meant that Kenyan, Ugandan, and Tanganyikan soldiers were increasingly posted to units without reference to their official territorial designations, whilst many support units were inter-territorial. By contrast, the continued use of a Chinyanja as the official language in the Nyasaland forces meant that Malawian units remained largely homogenous. However, it should be noted that numbers of Malawian labour migrants did serve in the Northern Rhodesia

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<sup>45</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/1, 'The re-organization of the forces in our East African Colonies', memorandum by the Inspector-General, Royal West African Frontier Force and King's African Rifles, p. 36; Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p. 48-49.

<sup>46</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', pp. 50, 437; Page, KAR, pp. 60-62. The Nyasaland battalions were 1 KAR, 2 KAR, 21 KAR, 22 KAR, 13 KAR, 14 KAR, 18 KAR, 27 KAR, 29 KAR, 30 KAR, 31 KAR, and 62 KAR.

<sup>47</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p.51; Page, KAR, p.63.

Regiment (NRR), in which Chinyanja was also spoken, and, echoing the situation in the RNR in the First World War, numbers of Malawians resident in Southern Rhodesia joined the newly raised Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR),<sup>48</sup> the Rhodesian Air Askari Corps and the Southern Rhodesian Internment Camp Corps. Malawians continued to serve in Rhodesian regiments in significant numbers after the war.<sup>49</sup>

The first duty undertaken by Nyasaland troops was to support the police in the internment of German citizens in East Africa.<sup>50</sup> However, at the entry of Italy into the war in 1940, Nyasaland forces from 1 KAR were posted in Kenya's Northern Frontier District and were the only KAR battalion present when the Italians invaded in July, successfully defending the border fortress of Moyale. Similarly, the other Nyasaland battalion, 2 KAR, was the only KAR battalion in British Somaliland at the time of the Italian invasion, alongside the Northern Rhodesia Regiment, two Indian battalions and a British battalion, a force which was compelled to evacuate due to the numerical superiority of the Italian forces.<sup>51</sup> However, this was the last point during the war when Nyasaland forces could be said to have played a distinctive role. In the subsequent operations, which saw the Italians expelled from Ethiopia and Somaliland

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<sup>48</sup> Malawians serving in the Rhodesian African Rifles included the Regimental Sergeant Major, Lechanda or Lichanda, who had served as a boy bugler in the Somaliland Campaigns, and reached the rank of Company Sergeant Major in the KAR during the First World War. Christopher Owen, *The Rhodesian African Rifles*, (London: Leo Cooper, 1970), p. 11; PRO, CO 534/34, 'Nominal Roll of Askari Entitled for 1914-15 Star', Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Zomba, 1 December 1919.

<sup>49</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p. 50; W. V Brelsford (ed.), *The Story of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment* (Bromley: Galago, 1990); Owen, *The Rhodesian African Rifles*; MNA, LB 8/7/1, Labour Office, Military, Southern Rhodesia Native Regiments, 1942-1946; MNA, 1/DCKU/1/8/1/7, Adjutant 1 KAR to DC Kasungu, 13 October 1953.

<sup>50</sup> Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM), 3864/03, transcript of interview with Major P. Q. Logan (11 September 1979), pp. 26-27.

<sup>51</sup> Page, *KAR*, pp. 68-74.



during 1941, the two East African brigades (21 (EA) Brigade and 22 (EA) Brigade) contained battalions from all the East African territories.<sup>52</sup>

With the defeat of the Italians in East Africa complete, East African forces were freed for service elsewhere. The War Office transferred command from the Middle East Command to a new East African Command (EAC), with responsibility not only for the East African coast but also for British colonial territories in the west of the Indian Ocean. In June 1942, 22 (EA) Brigade, including one Nyasaland, one Kenya and one Tanganyika battalion, was sent to take over Diego Suarez in southern Madagascar from a British brigade, and was subsequently responsible for completing the successful defeat of the Vichy French forces of the island.<sup>53</sup>

Also in 1942, in direct response to a call for East African troops from the Indian command, the War Office signalled its willingness to use African forces outside the African continent by sending KAR battalions to garrison Ceylon, in the first instance to replace Indian troops in order to free them for service against the Japanese in Burma.<sup>54</sup> However, with the worsening situation in Burma, a decision was taken to send a whole East African Division to the front there, along with two independent brigades, under the South East Asia Command. As in earlier formations in the war, units from the various East African territories were well distributed throughout the formation, and the total of 17 battalions included four from

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<sup>52</sup> Page, *KAR*, pp. 81-82.

<sup>53</sup> The brigade consisted of 1/1 KAR, 5 KAR, and 1/6 KAR.

Page, *KAR*, pp. 115-132; Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', pp. 59-60; Kenneth Gandar Dower, *The King's African Rifles in Madagascar* (Nairobi, East Africa Command [n.d.]).

<sup>54</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p. 59.

Nyasaland.<sup>55</sup> The military history of the East African forces in Burma has been described in detail elsewhere, but it is worth noting that, probably as a result of the military authorities' belief that African soldiers were natural jungle fighters, the KAR played a prominent role in the gruelling campaign in Burma from 1944.<sup>56</sup>

As in the First World War, the Second World War had signalled a dramatic change in the state of the KAR as a whole, from a local force which had been reduced to a level at which it was not fit to fight in modern warfare, to a large effective force under the unified control of the War Office, which was clearly fulfilling an imperial function well beyond the borders of Africa. However, from the perspective of Nyasaland, it is clear that, whilst fully included in the actions of East African forces, Nyasaland troops did not have a distinctive or outstanding role such as they had previously performed both in peace and war. Whereas it had accounted for over 30 percent of recruits in the First World War, less than 10 percent of soldiers raised in East Africa in the Second World War were drawn from Nyasaland.<sup>57</sup>

#### The Nyasaland Forces in the Post War Period

The end of the war again saw a reduction in the establishment of the KAR, and the Nyasaland contribution was once more reduced to 1 KAR and 2 KAR. However, contrary to the situation at the end of the First World War, in 1945 the unified East Africa Command remained in place under War Office control. The KAR as a whole returned to its primary pre-war role of supporting the civil authorities in East Africa,

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<sup>55</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', pp. 61-62; Page, *KAR*, pp. 133.

<sup>56</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', pp. 62-72; Page, *KAR*, pp. 137-175; Gerald Hanley, *Monsoon Victory* (London: Collins, 1946).

<sup>57</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p. 72.



particularly in recognition of growing political aspirations and activities of Africans in Kenya. However, as Parsons has described, a permanent imperial role was also adopted, as up to 1949 the East Africa Command was returned to the control of the Middle East Land Forces, with the intention that the KAR should provide a reserve force for the defence of the Middle East against a possible Soviet threat.<sup>58</sup> This area had been seen as the responsibility of the Indian Army after the First World War, and it was no doubt in response to the loss of this vast reserve as a result of Indian Independence that the KAR found itself fulfilling this new task.<sup>59</sup>

Again reflecting the strain placed upon colonial military commitments by the loss of the Indian Army, in 1952 it was decided to send two KAR battalions to Malaya to combat communist terrorists. Accordingly, 1 KAR from Nyasaland and 3 KAR from Kenya were both sent there early in the same year.<sup>60</sup> Service in Malaya on this basis was to have become a regular duty for KAR battalions during the Malayan emergency, but the outbreak of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya made it impossible to release battalions from the other East African territories, so responsibility for providing troops to Malaya was reserved to the Nyasaland battalions along with the Northern Rhodesia Regiment and the Rhodesian African Rifles. 2 KAR accordingly took over from 1 KAR from 1953 to 1954.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', pp. 75-78.

<sup>59</sup> Keith Jeffrey, "'An English Barrack in the Oriental Seas'? India in the Aftermath of the First World War', *Modern Asian Studies*, 15, 3 (1981), 369-86; David Killingray, 'The Idea of a British Imperial African Army', *Journal of African History*, 20, 3 (1979), 421-36 (pp. 434-35).

<sup>60</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p. 80; Page, *KAR*, pp. 191-92.

<sup>61</sup> Parsons, 'East African Soldiers', p. 81; Page, *KAR*, p. 196.

### The Central African Federation and Independence

The separation of functions between the Rhodesian regiments and the KAR in Nyasaland on one hand and the rest of the KAR on the other was prophetic, as independent political events in central Africa formalised the process. The advent of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in January 1954, which placed Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Southern Rhodesia under one Government in Salisbury, saw a dramatic change in the relationship of the Nyasaland battalions to the rest of the KAR. 1 KAR and 2 KAR were transferred from the East Africa Command to the Federation's Central Africa Command, becoming in the process, as a contributor to the KAR Journal observed, 'completely divorced from the British Army'.<sup>62</sup> Whilst remaining a part of the KAR in name, the Nyasaland battalions now found themselves far more closely aligned in organisation and function to the other two African-manned regular infantry units in the Federation Army, the NRR and RAR, with whom they continued to rotate service in Malaya.<sup>63</sup> The separation of the Nyasaland units from the rest of the KAR was emphasised by the fact that the peacetime policy of drawing European officers from the British Army, which had been a feature of the Nyasaland forces from the 1890s, ceased, and in common with other Federation units, officers were obtained locally from the predominantly white Rhodesian-manned Rhodesia and Nyasaland Staff Corps. This process - referred to bitterly by the commanding officer of 2 KAR as being 'Federalised'<sup>64</sup> - was

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<sup>62</sup> 'Battalion Notes', *The Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 2 (1957), p. 9.

<sup>63</sup> See Brelsford, *The Story of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment* and Owen, *The Rhodesian African Rifles*.

<sup>64</sup> IWM, 83/21/1/177, Lieutenant-Colonel G. Dauncey, OC 1 KAR, Zomba, to Brigadier T. H. Birkbeck, HQ 70 (EA) Infantry Brigade, Nyeri, Kenya, 3 September 1956; IWM, 83/21/1/175, Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. Conroy, OC 2 KAR, Llewellyn Barracks, Southern Rhodesia, to Brigadier T. H. Birkbeck, HQ 70 (EA) Infantry Brigade, Nyeri, Kenya, 3 August 1956.



completed by 1959.<sup>65</sup> To emphasise the new allegiance, the two battalions' sub-titles of '(Nyasaland)' were replaced by '(Central African Rifles)', a resurrection of an earlier title which conveniently fitted new requirements.<sup>66</sup>

Whilst the Federal Government continued to send African battalions to Malaya, following the return of 2 KAR from there in early 1955, this duty was undertaken first by the NRR and then by the RAR. As a consequence, while 1 KAR remained in Zomba, 2 KAR took over first from the NRR in Lusaka, then from the RAR in Bulawayo, before moving back to Lusaka on their return. Thus the Nyasaland battalions found themselves fulfilling a function which was reminiscent of their pre-war role as a reserve - this time within the Federation - with one battalion always serving outside the territory. 1 KAR and 2 KAR exchanged stations in 1958, and once again for the last time in September 1961. As a consequence, 1 KAR was stationed in Zomba and 2 KAR in Lusaka at independence in 1964.<sup>67</sup>

Once they returned to Africa, the role of the African battalions in the Federal Army was mainly one of internal security. In the face of growing African nationalism, and especially strong antipathy towards the white Rhodesian dominated Federation on the part of Africans in both Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, this role increasingly became a reality for the battalions. 1 KAR was subsequently deployed in aid of the civil power in the disturbances of September 1953 in the Southern Province of Nyasaland. In 1959 widespread protests against the Federation by Nyasaland Africans, which culminated in the declaration of a state of emergency,

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<sup>65</sup> 'Newsletters', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 6 (1959), p. 3

<sup>66</sup> *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 4 (1958), p. 8

<sup>67</sup> J. M. Lee, *African Armies and Civil Order* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), p. 40.

saw the involvement of both 1 and 2 KAR in riot control duties, along with white Rhodesian units, as well as in the arrest of Congress Party leaders in 'Operation Sunrise'.<sup>68</sup> Following this, in 1961 1 KAR was deployed against African nationalists in Northern Rhodesia, while in 1962, 2 KAR served in Southern Rhodesia during the banning of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU).<sup>69</sup>

However, Rhodesian efforts to maintain the Central African Federation in the face of African opposition in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia were ultimately unsuccessful, and the Federation was dissolved at the end of 1963, with both territories reverting to the direct control of the Colonial Office. The dissolution of the Federation inevitably meant the end of the Central Africa Command. However, the KAR battalions from Nyasaland and the NRR could not revert to the East Africa Command, since the achievement of independence by Tanganyika, Uganda, and Kenya between 1961 and 1963 meant that the remainder of the KAR had already transformed into the armies of the newly independent states, and was no longer an integrated force. Instead, reflecting the reality that the new Malawi could 'barely afford one' battalion, 2 KAR remained stationed in Northern Rhodesia, the officer commanding 1 KAR noting in his expectation that it would 'probably return [to Nyasaland] for amalgamation or disbanding towards the end of this year'<sup>70</sup> However, in fact when the two territories became independent in 1964, the Nyasaland battalion passed into the army of independent Zambia along with the

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<sup>68</sup> 'Battalion Notes', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 1 (1956), p. 7; *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 6 (1958), pp. 3-5; Sir Roy Welensky, *Welensky's 4000 Days* (London: Collins, 1964), pp. 115-32.

<sup>69</sup> 'News Letters', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, (December 1961), p. 12: 'News Letters', *Askari Journal* (July 1963), p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/5/6, Lieutenant Colonel T. P. J. Lewis, OC Nyasaland, to Brigadier R. R. J. Putterill, Chief of Staff, Army HQ Salisbury, Zomba, 27 May 1963.

NRR, a bizarre final reflection of the army's role beyond the borders of Nyasaland.<sup>71</sup>

1 KAR passed into independent Malawi's army as the Malawi Rifles, but like the Federation before it, the new regime chose a significant sub-title for the regiment, adding '(K.A.R.)'.<sup>72</sup>

In general, it is clear that the armed forces of Nyasaland fit into the picture drawn of African colonial armies. However, within that pattern it is equally clear that their role was often distinctive when compared to other East African forces, and indeed to Britain's colonial armies in other parts of Africa. A Nyasaland unit was deliberately raised for deployment outside their own territory as early as 1899, and a role outside Nyasaland, both in peace and war, was consistently undertaken by Nyasaland forces for the remainder of the colonial period. This was in clear contrast to the function of other forces in the region, which although they often served outside their territories in times of emergency and warfare, had no corresponding formal responsibility beyond their borders. Thus, although the general pattern described by Killingray and Parsons of African forces being largely consigned to local African duties up to the Second World War is quite valid in its own terms, the meaning of this with regard to Nyasaland's army was of a significantly different order to that in relation to other forces.

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<sup>71</sup> Tim Wright, *The History of the Northern Rhodesia Police* (Bristol: British Empire & Commonwealth Museum Press, 2001), pp. 342-43.

The official line was that Banda had not wished to 'deprive Zambians of that very important part of their army' 'Third Battalion to be Recruited as Soon as College Progresses', *This is Malawi*, 6, 1 (1976), p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> Anon., 'Farewell to Commander of the Malawi Army, Colonel D. E. Thornton, C.B.E., E.R.D.', *This is Malawi*, 3, 9 (1967), 12-13 (p. 13); Anon., 'The Malawi Rifles', *Vision of Malawi*, March 1970, pp. 11-15 (p. 15), Society of Malawi Library, Military Album No.2, '1st Battalion the Malawi Rifles (K.A.R.) Officers Mess Rules' [n.d., 1966?].



John McCracken has ascribed the prominence of Malawian soldiers during this period to their relative cheapness.<sup>73</sup> This is a compelling argument; as noted in the following chapter, low wages in Nyasaland meant soldiers' pay was high enough to remain competitive within the territory, but could be kept at a significantly lower level than the pay scales pertaining in the other battalions of the KAR. Thus, on the eve of the First World War, a Malawian private received 10 shillings a month in comparison to the equivalent of about 22 shillings received by a Kenyan.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, in the late 1920s a Malawian private received 20 shillings whilst a Kenyan received 28.<sup>75</sup> However, it is important to recognise that even in the period before the First World War, Malawian soldiers received a fifty percent increase in pay when serving abroad, and when 2 KAR was re-formed in 1915 soldiers received similar rates of pay to their Kenyan counterparts. In the inter-war period, Malawian soldiers serving outside Nyasaland continued to receive the same wage as other KAR soldiers. This is especially significant because individual territories paid for the battalions stationed within their borders, so that after the First World War, the Tanganyikan Administration gave the same pay to its Malawian soldiers as to Tanganyikans, thus receiving little direct benefit from the low rates which Malawians received from their own administration. During the Second World War, Nyasaland pay came into line with the remainder of the KAR. Similarly, after 1953

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<sup>73</sup> John McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy in Malawi: Policing and Politics in a Colonial State', in *Policing and Decolonization: Nationalism, Politics and the Police, 1917-65*, ed. by David M. Anderson and David Killingray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 158-86 (p. 165).

<sup>74</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 541, 'Rates of Pay 1st and 2nd K.A.R.', 17 April 1902; PRO, CO 534/20, f. 105, Colonel E. H. Llewellyn, Commandant KAR, to Chief Secretary East African Protectorate, 6 September 1916. Parsons (*The African Rank-and-File*, p. 62) gives the Kenyan figure as 38 shillings.

<sup>75</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/3, 'Report on the Re-organization of the King's African Rifles', 1929.

the Federal authorities unified conditions of service in the four African Battalions, so cheap labour does not explain the predominance of Malawians in the Federal Army.

Undoubtedly, the low cost of Malawian troops was also an important factor in the decision to send 2 CAR to Mauritius in 1899, since the Malawians were considerably cheaper than either the Indian or British soldiers who had been used to garrison the island to that point. However, Nyasaland was also in a much better position than other East African territories to supply imperial troops. The East African Rifles in Kenya were still engaged in the process of conquest, whilst the men of the Uganda Rifles had recently mutinied. Moreover, both forces were still largely made up of Sudanese soldiers, so that neither territory was established as a major recruiting base. In Nyasaland, by contrast, the process of conquest was largely complete, and the BCA Rifles were already established as an organised regiment. Thus, whilst the decision to send an African regiment to Mauritius was probably motivated by cost, the choice of Malawians in particular owed as much to the military situation in Nyasaland as to economic conditions. Before the Second World War, the cheapness of Malawian soldiers sustained them in their position as the premium suppliers of military labour in East Africa, but this prominence increasingly became self-sustaining as the authorities regarded it as an established fact of KAR organisation. Thus, by the time that the Nyasaland Battalions joined the Central African Command in the 1950s, the Federal authorities simply accepted the Malawians' special function. As a consequence, the Rhodesians made a considerable investment in modernisation of what became the Malawi Army in 1964.

## Chapter 2

### Recruitment and Enlistment

#### Recruitment imperatives and ethnicity

Historians of Britain's colonial armed forces in Africa have been unanimous in drawing attention to the ethnic basis of military recruitment.<sup>1</sup> This is seen as ultimately derived from the influence of Indian army theories of 'martial races' which emphasised the recruitment of racially 'pure' (and therefore necessarily rural) soldiers from particular, politically reliable groups which were identified as 'warlike'. Martial races theory also sought to ensure the security of the state by fostering difference, either between soldiers drawn from diverse ethnic groups, or between 'martial' soldiers and 'non-martial' civilians.<sup>2</sup> In the context of Africa, the concept of martial races is seen as having been translated into a search for groups who had proven their 'warlike' characteristics during the period of conquest, but were not so politically powerful or numerous as to pose a threat to the state. To the colonial authorities, suitable groups would ideally be rural and geographically

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Bayo Adekun, 'Ethnicity and Army Recruitment in Colonial Plural Societies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2, 2 (1979), 149-65; Douglas H. Johnson, 'The Fighting Nuer: Primary Sources and the Origins of a Stereotype', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 51,1 (1981), 508-27; David Killingray, 'Race and Rank in the British Army in the Twentieth Century', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 10, 3 (1987), 276-90; Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene, "'Damnosa Hereditas": Ethnic Ranking and the Martial Races Imperative in Africa', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 3, 4 (1980), 393-414. For the East Africa and Nyasaland in particular, see: Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), chapter 3 'Recruiting and the Doctrine of "Martial Race"'; Anthony Clayton and David Killingray, *Khaki and Blue: Military and Police in British Colonial Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989), pp. 220-26; Jennifer Ann Warner, 'Recruitment and Service in the King's African Rifles in the Second World War' (M.Litt. Dissertation, University of Bristol, 1985);

<sup>2</sup> See David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. 1-46; John McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy in Malawi: Policing and Politics in a Colonial State', in David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonization: Nationalism, politics and the police, 1917-65* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 161-66.



remote, so that they were less likely to have lost their warlike character through the degenerative 'detrabalising' effects of contact with the colonial economy and intermarriage with other groups. It is also generally argued that colonial recruitment policy was biased in favour of Muslim, or at least non-Christian groups, on the basis that those with a missionary education were more likely to be politically aware and less likely to be amenable to military discipline.

In his study of East African soldiers, Parsons has suggested that recruitment patterns in Nyasaland differed from the general model outlined above, insofar as they were much more clearly dictated by patterns of labour migration. He argues that northern Malawians, with better access to missionary education, were able to secure access to better paid work in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, largely leaving military service to southerners for whom employment opportunities were more limited. At the same time, Parsons says very little about the early development of recruitment in Nyasaland before 1914, although this period saw the establishment of the pattern which was to have a lasting impact to the end of the colonial period.<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, it is intended first to examine the changing nature of official recruitment policy, with particular emphasis on the influence of 'martial races' theory. Secondly, the chapter will examine the motivation behind African enlistment, looking at the methods of recruitment employed, African soldiers reactions to these, and the influence of the wider economic environment.

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<sup>3</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 60-61.

*'Tribes' in colonial Nyasaland*

Much of this chapter is concerned with the concept of 'tribe', and it is therefore useful to provide a brief survey of the ethnographic situation in colonial Nyasaland as it was understood by the authorities. Early administrators viewed Nyasaland tribes as essentially discrete entities, although they recognised linguistic affinities between the groups. The Mang'anja in the south, the Nyanja around the south of Lake Malawi, and the Chewa in the centre of the country were identified as closely related groups which were regarded as 'the real indigenous inhabitants of Southern Nyasaland'.<sup>4</sup> To the north lay the Tumbuka and the Lakeside Tonga, and in the far north the Ngonde. To these had been added a number of important immigrant groups. The Ngoni, a group ultimately of Zulu origin, had conquered and incorporated parts of northern and central Malawi in the mid-nineteenth century, although it was recognised that many of those who identified themselves as Ngoni were, in reality, descendants of the indigenous population.<sup>5</sup> In the south, Yao people from Mozambique had established dominance over the Mang'anja groups around the south of the lake and in the Shire Highlands in the 1860s, whilst in the far south, the Makololo porters who had accompanied Livingstone in the 1860s had established control over the Shire Valley. Finally, from the mid-1890s immigrants from Mozambique settled in the Shire Highlands on European plantations and under Yao and Mang'anja chiefs.<sup>6</sup> Reflecting the indigenous population's terminology, they

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<sup>4</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 22.

<sup>5</sup> Leroy Vail and Landeg White, 'Tribalism in the Political History of Malawi', in Leroy Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989), pp. 151-92 (pp. 152-53); Bridglal Pachai, 'Ngoni politics and diplomacy in Malawi: 1848-1904', in Bridglal Pachai (ed.), *The Early History of Malawi* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 179-214, (pp. 179-80).

<sup>6</sup> Vail and White, 'Tribalism', pp. 166-67; Thomas Galligan, 'The Nguru Penetration into Nyasaland, 1892-1914', in Roderick J. Macdonald (ed.), *From Nyasaland to Malawi: Studies in Colonial History* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), pp. 108-23 (pp. 109-11).



were universally identified as 'Nguru'<sup>7</sup> but included members of a number of groups such as the Lomwe and Mpotola.

This picture of the population of colonial Nyasaland was simplistic in a number of ways. The levels of organisation of these groups varied considerably, and few could be regarded as well-defined political entities. The pre-eminence of the Ngoni in the centre of the country meant that many people who would be defined as Tumbuka, Tonga, or Chewa, were living under an Ngoni political system at the beginning of the colonial period. Similarly, in the South many Mang'anja (and later Nguru) lived under the control of Yao or Makololo chiefs.<sup>8</sup> Such conditions made tribal identity ambiguous, especially given the possibilities of inter-tribal marriages. Moreover, these ambiguities were intensified as a direct result of the policies and outlook of the colonial state.

The creation of ethnic stereotypes, which has been identified as such an important feature of colonial armies, was mirrored in the attitudes of the civil authorities, forming a crucial element of the colonial state's economy of knowledge and power, as described by Said. As Ranger has suggested, the attribution of particular characteristics to ethnic groups permitted the division of the African population into specialised categories reflecting their function in the colonial state. To Ranger, such categorisation served a crucial role in the maintenance of colonial government through an implied system of divide-and-rule, so that categories such as

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<sup>7</sup> Following a successful campaign by the Alomwe Tribal Representative Association in the 1940's, the Nguru were officially renamed 'Lomwe'. To avoid confusion, they will be referred to as 'Nguru' for the period up to the 1940s, and thereafter as 'Nguru/Lomwe'.

<sup>8</sup> Vail and White, 'Tribalism', pp. 152-53, 166, 173.



soldiers and bureaucrats received considerable prestige whilst industrial and agricultural labourers were marginalised.<sup>9</sup>

In Nyasaland, such stereotypes were not static, but changed considerably over time, as ethnic identities were not only described by, but also interacted with, colonial structures. In the early 1890s, the Tonga were regarded as the main indigenous allies of the colonial state, and through association with the Livingstonia Mission retained an identification with education, and hence also with 'intelligence'. By contrast, the Yao had initially been regarded as cowardly slave-raiders, but this radically changed as soon as the Yao began to co-operate with the Administration from the mid-1890s. As Vail and White have shown, the new view of the Yao as loyal and trustworthy servants of the Government was dramatically strengthened by the events of the Chilembwe Rising of 1915, in which the predominantly Muslim Yao were contrasted with the Christian followers of Chilembwe. The Rising also had a marked affect upon the Nguru, who had been welcomed as providing urgently needed labour in the 1890s. As Chilembwe's followers were largely composed of Nguru, they were labelled as disloyal, and subsequently their position under Yao chiefs was used to portray them as degenerate and inherently inferior. As Mitchell noted in the late 1940s, this process had an effect upon both Nguru and Yao identity, as many Nguru who had lived in Yao areas for some time tended to identify themselves as Yao for the purposes of prestige.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, this led to a successful attempt to recast the 'Nguru' as 'Lomwe', both dissociating the tribe from its

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<sup>9</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1985); Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 211-62.

<sup>10</sup> J. Clyde Mitchell, *The Yao Village: A Study in the Social Structure of a Nyasaland Tribe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1956), p. 16.

negative image, and enhancing its sense of group identity. As will be shown, such changes had a profound impact upon the nature of military recruitment in Nyasaland.<sup>11</sup>

*The establishment of an ethnic recruitment policy in Nyasaland, 1891-1914*

As McCracken has noted, the influence of the Indian Army upon recruitment in Nyasaland was more than conceptual.<sup>12</sup> As outlined in the preceding chapter, the core of the armed force which accompanied the new colonial administration in 1891 was composed of volunteers under a European officer all loaned from the Indian Army. Until the late 1890s, the colonial army in Nyasaland was almost wholly officered by European officers from the Indian Army, and these men undoubtedly brought the assumptions of martial races theory with them. This was clearly demonstrated by the decision in 1893, at the suggestion of the Indian Army commandant of the armed forces, to replace the Indian Contingent's low caste Mazhabi Sikhs with higher caste Jat Sikhs.<sup>13</sup> In fact, however, the initial selection of African personnel for the colonial army, which was carried out in Zanzibar in 1891, was essentially pragmatic in character, and reflected the personal prejudices of Commissioner Johnston, rather than those of his Indian Army commandant. The majority of the 130 men were Zanzibaris or 'Swahilis'<sup>14</sup> selected on the basis of having accompanied Johnston as retainers on his earlier expeditions in East Africa. These were joined by two Goan cooks, two 'Arab' clerks, 10 Somalis, 21 'ex-Sidi

<sup>11</sup> Vail and White, 'Tribalism'.

<sup>12</sup> McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy', p. 165.

<sup>13</sup> Sir Harry. H. Johnston, *British Central Africa: An attempt to Give Some Account of a Portion of the Territories Under British Influence North of the Zambesi* (London: Methuen, 1897), p. 118; McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy', p. 161.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'Zanzibaris' was used by the administration interchangeably with the term 'Swahilis', and as such could denote people from the coastal region of the African mainland opposite Zanzibar, as well as from the Island itself.



boys' from the Royal Navy, and 13 soldiers seconded from the Zanzibari Army.<sup>15</sup> This process probably differed little from Johnston's recruitment of porters for his earlier expeditions in East Africa, and as such there is little indication that the choice of Zanzibaris reflected any kind of expectations of fighting prowess, so much as being established practice for obtaining armed retainers in the area. This pragmatism also seems to have been reflected in the subsequent decision to recruit 'a few' Makua from Mozambique, as they were already established as suppliers of labour in Portuguese East Africa,<sup>16</sup> and Johnston had successfully used Makua men from Portuguese territory during his earlier expedition to Nyasaland in 1889. A number of Makua police were also inherited by the Nyasaland administration from an earlier expedition undertaken by the British South Africa Company.<sup>17</sup>

Johnston seems to have hoped that the Zanzibari 'police force', being cheaper to maintain than Sikhs, would quickly be able to become the sole military force in Nyasaland.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the authorities rapidly decided that the Zanzibari contingent as a whole were of little use as soldiers, and only ten out of the 120 recruited were actually employed as police, the remainder being used for road building.<sup>19</sup> This probably reflected the fact that unlike the Sikhs, only a small number of the

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<sup>15</sup> PRO, FO 94/2114, f. 236, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Marquis of Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Zomba, 24 November 1891.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Galligan, 'The Nguru Penetration into Nyasaland, 1892-1914', in Roderick J. Macdonald (ed.), *From Nyasaland to Malawi: Studies in Colonial History* (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), pp. 108-23 (p. 111).

<sup>17</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in Nyassaland*, 1892, Cmd. 6699, p. 5; Sir Harry. H. Johnston, *British Central Africa: An attempt to Give Some Account of a Portion of the Territories Under British Influence North of the Zambesi* (London: Methuen, 1897), pp. 82-83, 90, 118.

<sup>18</sup> PRO, FO 2/66, f. 287, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mozambique, 26 April 1894.

<sup>19</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in Nyassaland*, 1892, Cmd. 6699, pp. 2-3.



Zanzibaris were trained soldiers, and at first there was little suggestion that they were lacking martial qualities as a whole. Whilst they were described as lacking 'the discipline and military skill of the sepoy', they were also characterised as 'willing, obedient, and able to stand up to much fatigue'.<sup>20</sup>

It was unsurprising that little emphasis was placed upon the fighting qualities of the Zanzibaris, as they were also perceived as fulfilling a useful political role in the conquest of Nyasaland. Johnston noted that

The Zanzibaris are also useful (having been recruited by the direct permission of His Highness the Sultan of Zanzibar) in showing to the Mahomedan Chiefs of Nyassaland how completely at one with us the Sultan is in his desire to suppress the Slave Trade.<sup>21</sup>

However, by late 1893, the Zanzibari soldiers were coming to be regarded as generically unsuitable for military service. Johnston later observed, 'they were not all of them very brave or reliable in warfare'.<sup>22</sup> This change of opinion seems to have reflected a decline in the Zanzibaris' political value to Johnston, who now claimed that they were 'of little use as fighting men, especially when directed against the Arabs and the Yaos, who were practically the brothers of the Zanzibaris on the fathers' or mothers' side'.<sup>23</sup> Finally, it was probably expedient that the Zanzibari contingent should be projected as poor soldiers, as restrictions placed upon

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<sup>20</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in Nyassaland*, 1892, Cmd. 6699, p. 14.

<sup>21</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in Nyassaland*, 1892, Cmd. 6699, p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> PRO, FO 2/54, f. 71, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to Sir Percy Anderson, Foreign Office, [n.d., 1893]; PRO, FO 2/66, f. 287, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mozambique, 26 April 1894; Sir Harry. H. Johnston, *British Central Africa: An attempt to Give Some Account of a Portion of the Territories Under British Influence North of the Zambesi* (London: Methuen, 1897), p. 118.

<sup>23</sup> PRO, FO 2/66, f. 287, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mozambique, 26 April 1894.

recruitment from Zanzibar meant that sufficient numbers of men could not be raised.<sup>24</sup>

By contrast, the Makua soldiers, as the remaining African component of the armed forces, were now lauded at the expense of the Zanzibaris. Johnston characterised the Makua as 'thoroughly brave' but not behaving 'too arrogantly or harshly towards the friendly natives'.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, however, it was clear that there was a willingness to experiment with different sources for soldiers, particularly since the Portuguese authorities also restricted the number of Makua who could be recruited in Mozambique to around 100. Indeed, by 1894 there were indications of broad reservations regarding the whole principle of employing African troops, Johnston writing that 'In future I am going to spend more money on Sikhs than on a black police'.<sup>26</sup> It was probably in reaction to this that, despite the restrictions placed upon recruitment from Zanzibar, a body of about 40 'Zanzibar Arabs' were also raised for the local forces during 1893. The identity of these men is unclear, since the terms 'Zanzibari', 'Arab' and 'Swahili' were often used interchangeably. However, they were clearly a distinct group from the earlier Zanzibari contingent, and since the majority of the men were former soldiers of the Sultan of Zanzibar's bodyguard, it is possible that the men were actually of Baluchi origin. This

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<sup>24</sup> PRO, FO 2/66, f. 287, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mozambique, 26 April 1894; Sir Harry. H. Johnston, *British Central Africa: An attempt to Give Some Account of a Portion of the Territories Under British Influence North of the Zambesi* (London: Methuen, 1897), p. 118.

<sup>25</sup> PRO, FO 2/66, f. 287, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Mozambique, 26 April 1894.

<sup>26</sup> PRO, FO 2/54, ff. 271-77, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to Sir Percy Anderson, Foreign Office, [n.d., 1893].



experiment also failed, as the men were considered to be 'of poor physique', and were mostly discharged after a year.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, by late 1894 the African portion of the armed forces was essentially a Makua force, officially consisting of 69 Makua regular soldiers under a single Zanzibari Sergeant Major.<sup>28</sup> Emphasising the importance of the Makua element, a decision was taken in October to raise the force to the full 100 men permitted by the Portuguese authorities.<sup>29</sup> However, reflecting the increasing responsibilities placed on the administration by the increasing size of the area under direct British control, a decision was also taken to formally include 150 local Africans in the armed forces for the first time, although they were termed 'irregulars' in contrast to the 'regular' Makua.<sup>30</sup> The group chosen to provide these men were the Lakeside Tonga from the north west coast of Lake Nyasa.<sup>31</sup> This Tonga contingent was raised to 200 in 1895, and the situation was formalised later in the year when a decision was taken to train the men as regular soldiers, initially for a trial period of one year.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 41; Sir Harry. H. Johnston, *British Central Africa: An attempt to Give Some Account of a Portion of the Territories Under British Influence North of the Zambesi* (London: Methuen, 1897), p. 118.

<sup>28</sup> PRO, FO 2/67, f. 186, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 29 August 1894.

<sup>29</sup> PRO, FO 2/67, ff. 343-61, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 22 October 1894.

<sup>30</sup> PRO, FO 2/67, ff. 343-61, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 22 October 1894.

<sup>31</sup> The standard colonial terminology was 'Atonga'.

<sup>32</sup> PRO, FO 2/88, f. 291, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 8 May 1895; PRO, FO 2/89, f. 250, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Marquis of Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 2 October 1895; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, 1897, Cmd. 8438, p. 11.



The choice of the Tonga appeared to be another essentially pragmatic decision, as they were already established as the main providers of civilian labour in Nyasaland, with large numbers travelling to work in the south of the country by the mid-1890s. This was mainly as a result of the presence of the United Free Church of Scotland's Livingstonia Mission, which had drawn the Tonga into the new colonial economy faster than other indigenous groups.<sup>33</sup> Their association with Livingstonia, and by extension with European interests, was also perceived by many Tonga as a source of strength during a period when they faced a very real threat from their Ngoni neighbours. By 1894 Johnston described them as 'a race of singular usefulness to the European settlers' who had 'peculiarly identified themselves with the white men's interests'.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, Tonga men had already served as soldiers for Europeans in Nyasaland. The forces used in the African Lakes Company's wars against 'slavers' at the north of Lake Nyasa in the late 1880s were largely composed of Tongas, whilst the colonial administration had already used numbers of Tongas as soldiers on an informal basis, referring to them either as 'irregulars' or 'armed Atonga labourers'.<sup>35</sup> Despite early harsh appraisals of their fighting capabilities (in 1892 Johnston complained that some Tonga soldiers 'threw down their guns and ran away' on hearing firing), the Tonga were confirmed in their position as suppliers of

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<sup>33</sup> John McCracken, *Politics and Christianity in Malawi 1875-1940: The Impact of the Livingstonia Mission in the Northern Province* (Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 2000); J. van Velsen, *The Politics of Kinship: A Study in Social Manipulation Among the Lakeside Tonga of Malawi* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), pp. 18-19.

<sup>34</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in British Central Africa*, 1893, Cmd. 7031, pp. 2, 5; PRO, FO 2/54, ff. 100-03, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Roseberry, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 29 May 1893.

military labour.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Johnston commenting on the 150 men recruited in 1894 wrote that ‘These men have already for some time past been used by us [...] under the head of portage as they very often act as armed porters for the transport of ammunition and camp equipage on campaigns’.<sup>37</sup>

If the choice of the Tonga as the source of the first indigenous African recruits was in some senses a confirmation of existing civilian and military practice, it seems nevertheless that the choice was underlain by a set of assumptions which largely excluded other groups from consideration. As medical officer Dr Wordsworth Poole observed,

There are certain recognised ideas about the different races wh. [sic] are repeated by everyone. They are passed on from one White man to another originating I fancy from the commissioner. For instance, the Yao is the essence of cowardice and laziness & never will be any good. The Atonga are the faithful servants of the White man or azungu as they call us, plucky and reliable. The Manganja timid and fearful. The Angoni Zulu raiders. Whether all this is gospel I don’t know.<sup>38</sup>

Such prejudices, which resembled a crude form of ‘martial races’ theory, were clearly held at the highest levels, as demonstrated by Johnston’s own appraisal of the qualities of the various indigenous tribes.<sup>39</sup> Significantly, however, against the general assumptions of martial races theory, it was their association with Christianity which had brought the Tonga into such close alliance with the Administration, and many Tonga recruits were professed Christians.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in British Central Africa*, 1893, Cmd. 7031, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> PRO, FO 2/67, ff. 343-61, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 22 October 1894.

<sup>38</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, f. 48, Wordsworth Poole to his mother, Zomba, 21 August 1895.

<sup>39</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years’ Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, 1894, Cmd. 7504, pp. 22-25.

<sup>40</sup> See McCracken, *Politics and Christianity*. Sergeant Major Bandawe, the senior indigenous soldier during most of the 1890s, was educated at the Livingstonia Mission, and was noted for taking part in religious services at the end of military campaigns. Sir Harry H. Johnston, *The Story of My Life* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923), p. 305.



Despite the existence of stereotypes about Malawian tribes, the administration appears to have remained pragmatic in its willingness to experiment with different sources of recruits. Around the same time that 200 Tonga were enlisted as regular soldiers, an experiment was also made in the recruitment of 25 'Marimba' (Chewa) men from Nkhotakota.<sup>41</sup> on the west coast of Lake Nyasa, and of 50 'friendly' Yaos from the Shire Highlands and the southern end of Lake Nyasa.<sup>42</sup> Although it was not explicitly stated, this probably reflected the desire not to rely on one ethnic group, which was a central feature of recruitment policy in India following the Indian Mutiny. The choice of Yaos in particular was surprising. In 1894, Johnston had written that

The Yao is not a brave enemy. He is a wily, skulking robber. You fight with him at a great disadvantage in his own country, where there is plenty of cover; in the open plains, he is too cowardly to come up within range of your guns.<sup>43</sup>

However, against official expectations, the experiment of using Yao soldiers proved to be a success. Johnston reported of the earliest expedition in which the men were involved that

Perhaps the most surprising feature [...] was the behaviour of the Yao Regulars who [...] were repeatedly praised [...] for their steadiness, discipline and bravery. These men came mostly from the Upper Shire, and were themselves fighting against us two years ago.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> In the terminology of the period, 'Kota Kota'.

<sup>42</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, 1897, Cmd. 8438, p. 12; Clyde Mitchell, *The Yao Village*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>43</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 24.

<sup>44</sup> PRO, FO 2/89, f. 250, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Marquis of Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Zomba, October 1895.

By the end of the year, Edwards, the commanding officer of the armed forces, was reporting that the Yao soldiers were 'steadier than the Atonga and Makua',<sup>45</sup> and by early 1896 a decision had been taken to replace the Makua contingent with Yaos, as 'it seemed foolish to keep on the highly paid Makua when we could get much better and braver negro soldiers, locally recruited, who would serve for less than half the Makua pay'.<sup>46</sup> From this point, the Yao were swiftly established as the premium source of indigenous recruits. Using a language clearly reminiscent of the discourse of martial races, Edwards described them as 'the most warlike of the tribes in British Central Africa', noting that

The Yaos are undoubtedly our best soldiers, as they have more self reliance and character than the Atonga, and are more obedient than the Marimba and Atonga, and would be steadier in a critical situation. they are also better shots.<sup>47</sup>

Also in line with martial races theory, unlike the Tonga, many Yaos were Muslims, although little emphasis was placed upon this point by the military authorities.

Nevertheless, the Tonga continued to supply the bulk of manpower to the army, forming three companies compared to two Yao and one mixed Tonga and Chewa company.<sup>48</sup> In fact, Yaos do not appear at first to have shown any great

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<sup>45</sup> PRO, FO 2/106, ff. 43-57, Major C. A. Edwards, OC Armed Forces, BCA, to H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, 27 December 1895.

<sup>46</sup> PRO, FO 2/106, ff. 229-39, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Treasury, 1 April 1896; PRO, FO 2/107, ff. 30-31, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Marquis of Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 11 July 1896; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, 1897, Cmd. 8438, p. 12; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 24, 'Composition of Companies - Tribes to be enlisted', ca. 1896; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 50, 'Composition of D & F Companies', ca. 1896.

<sup>47</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, 1897, Cmd. 8438, p. 12.

<sup>48</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, 1897, Cmd. 8438, p. 12.



inclination to join the army, as it was reported that it was 'difficult to obtain sufficient' recruits at Zomba, whilst Tongas were easily obtained at Bandawe, and so many Chewa recruits were available at Kota Kota that it was decided to set up a new recruiting post there.<sup>49</sup> The armed forces continued to show a willingness to experiment with different sources of soldiers, and when the new 2nd Battalion was raised in 1898, three out of six companies were to include 'Anguru' (Nguru) men.

Despite the apparent diversity of recruitment, military service was increasingly identified with the Yao, to the extent that the 2nd Battalion was referred to in official correspondence as the 'Yao battalion'.<sup>50</sup> This was partly a reflection of the growing difficulty of obtaining Tonga, as they were became more drawn into the colonial economy and particularly into labour migration to the mines in Southern Rhodesia and South Africa. One officer, writing in 1905, still regarded the Tonga as 'born fighters', compared to the 'peaceable' and 'easy going' Yao, but complained that 'As the country settled down and prospered, wages advanced all round, and it became difficult to obtain recruits, especially Atongas', and that 'recruiting for the [South African] mines [...] seriously interfered with the supply of Atonga recruits'.<sup>51</sup> The failure to attract Tongas seems to have inspired a search for alternative sources to balance the Yao companies, and an experiment was made in recruiting from the

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<sup>49</sup> PRO, FO 2/107, f. 288, Alfred Sharpe, Acting Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Marquis of Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 9 September 1896; PRO, FO 2/108, f. 288, Alfred Sharpe, Acting Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Sir Clement Hill, Foreign Office, 1 December 1896.

When the BCA Rifles expanded in late 1898, the proportion of Yaos increased, as they provided two out of three new companies. NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 192, 'Strength of new force', 5 September 1898; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 343, 'Strength new coys.', 21 December 1899.

<sup>50</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence Relating to the Ashanti War 1900*, Cmd. 501, p. 39.

<sup>51</sup> C. Percival, 'Five Years in British Central Africa', in *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle for 1905* (London: John Bale and Sons, 1906), pp. 47-73 (pp. 48-49, 68, 71).

Ngoni, who it was noted showed 'great promise'.<sup>52</sup> Johnston had referred to the Ngoni as early as 1894 as 'warlike [...] altogether a splendid people, and may be regarded as the backbone of British Central Africa', but in the 1890s they were still regarded as a potential source of internal opposition to the colonial Government, and were probably only considered as a source of recruits after Northern Ngoniland had been brought under formal administrative control in 1904.<sup>53</sup> One of the Tonga companies in 2 KAR was also replaced by Bemba men from North-Eastern Rhodesia.<sup>54</sup>

The increasing reliance upon the Yao in the face of falling Tonga recruitment was accompanied by growing signs of concern with ethnic purity, and implied knowledge of tribal characteristics of the kind which informed the more developed martial races theory in India. The authorities had been happy to mix Yao soldiers with their Nguru neighbours in 1898, but by 1906 the Inspector-General of the KAR, finding that half of the Yao contingent of 2 KAR was actually made up of other southern tribes such as the Mang'anja, Nguru and Chewa, complained that 'The Yao element in the battalion is considerably less than it should be [...] there are 149 *pure* Yaos whereas the establishment should be 3 Yao Companies of 100 men'. He further explicitly stated that he was 'not in favour of Manganja or Wa-Nyasa or other

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<sup>52</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, British Central Africa. Report on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate for 1903-4, 1904*, Cmd. 2242.

<sup>53</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa, 1894*, Cmd. 7504, p. 24; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Sir Harry Johnston, K.C.B. on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate April 1, 1895, to March 31, 1896, 1896*, Cmd. 8254, p. 4; Bridglal Pachai, 'Ngoni politics and diplomacy in Malawi, 1848-1904', in Bridglal Pachai (ed.), *The Early History of Malawi* (London: Longman, 1972), pp. 179-214 (pp. 202-06).

<sup>54</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Colonial Reports - Annual. No. 472. British Central Africa Protectorate. Report for 1904-5*, Cmd. 2684-18; Moyse Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 137.



such tribes to replace Yaos'.<sup>55</sup> Rather than eliminating non-Yao tribes from enlistment, the effect of this new emphasis was probably, as Shepperson has suggested, simply to encourage potential recruits to claim to be Yaos, a procedure which must have been relatively easy for those Mang'anja and Nguru recruits who lived under Yao Chiefs.<sup>56</sup> This seems to have been recognised by the authorities, since by 1908, whilst Mang'anja, Nguru and Chewa soldiers were no longer listed on the strength of the battalions, the term Yao had been replaced by 'Yao and Kindred'.<sup>57</sup> In any case, if men were claiming to be Yaos in order to join the KAR, this can only have increased the level of association between the Yao and military service in the eyes of the authorities.

The ascendancy of the Yao reached its apex in the reductions of 1911, when a decision was taken to reduce 1 KAR, already only four companies strong, to two companies. The Tonga and Ngoni companies were selected for reduction on the basis that the men, recruited in Northern Nyasaland, could not easily be transferred into companies made up of Yaos. With the disbandment of 2 KAR and the Indian contingent, this meant that the forces in Nyasaland were composed entirely of Yaos and Mang'anja (now regarded as their 'kindred tribe').<sup>58</sup> This situation was quite

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<sup>55</sup> My italics. PRO, CO 534/3, f. 119, Inspection Report 2 KAR, Brigadier-General W. H. Manning, Inspector-General KAR, Zomba, 20 April 1906; PRO, CO 534/3, f. 128, 'Notes for the Officer Commanding, 2nd Bn, The King's African Rifles', by Brigadier-General W. H. Manning, Inspector-General KAR, Zomba, 19 April 1906.

<sup>56</sup> Clyde Mitchell, *The Yao Village*, p. 16; George Shepperson, 'The Military History of British Central Africa', *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal: Human Problems in British Central Africa*, 26 (1959), 23-33 (pp. 25-26); Violet Lucy Jhala, 'The Yao in the Shire Highlands, 1861-1915: Political Dominance and Reaction to Colonialism', *Journal of Social Science, University of Malawi*, 9 (1982), 1-21 (p.14).

<sup>57</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Colonial Reports - Annual. No. 574. Nyasaland Protectorate. Report for 1907-8, 1908*, Cmd. 3729-38.

<sup>58</sup> The two Yao companies were subsequently increased to four in May 1911.

Moyse Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 151-52; PRO, CO 534/15, f. 46, Inspection Report on the 1st Battalion KAR, 1912-1913, by Colonel G. Thesiger, Inspector General KAR, 12 November

contrary to the generally recognised aims of the doctrine of martial races, which insisted that different ethnic groups within the army should balance each other. Up to this point, the issue of ethnic balance had not arisen in Nyasaland, since the Indian contingent had provided the necessary reliable group in case of a rising by the indigenous population. However, the new situation brought the questions of ethnic balance and the reliability of the African soldiery into sharp focus for the first time. The Inspector-General questioned the new organisation as early as 1912, expressing concern that

[I]n the event of any disturbance amongst the Yaos who include the larger proportion of the population of the country, we should have to deal with it by troops drawn from the same tribes and similar religious sympathies. This has hitherto been considered unsound [...] in our own empire [...] I would very much prefer to see a company available which was composed of men drawn from other tribes such as the Atonga or Angoni.<sup>59</sup>

The fact that the majority of Yao soldiers identified themselves as Muslims increased official fears regarding the ethnic composition of the army, since it was felt that the main internal threat in Nyasaland was the danger of an Islamically inspired rebellion. The Intelligence Officer feared that the Yao soldiers 'could hardly be expected to remain loyal to the British flag' in the event of a 'religious war', and also called for the forces to be composed of more than one tribe.<sup>60</sup> In response, 1 KAR was again expanded, with two new Tonga and two Ngoni companies being raised by April 1914, with the specific aim of maintaining 'tribal balance'.<sup>61</sup> In line with this, contingency plans for a 'native rising' now explicitly drew attention to the usefulness of tribal differences, stating that soldiers of 'tribes other than those showing

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1912; PRO, CO 534/15, f. 60, Return showing Racial and Class Composition of the 1st Battalion KAR, November 1912.

<sup>59</sup> PRO, CO 534/15, f. 46, Inspection Report on the 1st Battalion KAR, 1912-1913, by Colonel G. Thesiger, Inspector General KAR, 12 November 1912.

<sup>60</sup> MNA, KAR 1/1/1, Intelligence Officer 1 KAR, to Adjutant 1 KAR, 2 December 1912.

<sup>61</sup> Moyse Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 157, 159; CO 534/18, f. 163, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Zomba, 7 February 1914.



discontent' should be used, and suggesting that 'differences of religion, prestige and character' which were felt to exist between tribes 'might be worked upon' in an emergency.<sup>62</sup>

By 1914, therefore, a system was established which was in some respects typical of colonial recruitment policy in Africa. The Yao from Southern Nyasaland, on the one hand, were balanced by the Tonga and Ngoni from the north and west on the other, and all three groups were now identified as 'fighting' or 'warrior' tribes. Equally, the enlistment of educated Africans had been avoided in Nyasaland as in other territories, except in specific roles, such as interpreters.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, however, in the Tonga the army had unusually favoured a group which was perceived as being associated with missionary education. Equally, the emphasis which was placed upon the Yao as the premier martial group seemed to owe as much to the increasing unwillingness of the Tonga to enlist, in the face of more lucrative employment alternatives in the mines, as it did to any perceived inherent qualities of the Yao. This point was emphasised by the fluid nature of the term Yao; despite the increasing recourse to the language of martial races, rather than excluding non-Yaos, the authorities ultimately knowingly responded to shortages of Yao recruits by defining other groups, such as the Nguru, Mang'anja, and Nyanja, as 'kindred tribes' to the Yao. Moreover, the Yao's Islam, which has been seen as a typical feature of martial races in Africa, was in fact viewed as their most worrying feature.

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<sup>62</sup> MNA, KAR 1/1/1, Lieutenant Colonel Baldwin, Officer Commanding Troops Nyasaland, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Dedza, 22 May 1914; MNA, KAR 1/2/1, Nyasaland Defence Scheme 1913.

<sup>63</sup> For example, in a list of occupations of 314 men baptised by the Blantyre Mission, 4 were shown to be 'Sergeant-Interpreters' in the army, but only one was an ordinary soldier. 'Analysis of Occupations followed by the Male Baptised Adults of Blantyre and Domasi, as at December 31st 1899', *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, 154 (January-March 1901), p. 13.

Nevertheless, regardless of how far it reflected reality, the pattern which emerged, of Yaos predominating, balanced by Tonga and Ngoni as the premier sources of recruits, was to remain influential at least up to the Second World War.

### *Recruitment policy in the First World War*

Prior to the expansion of the KAR from 1916, the impact of the First World War upon recruitment patterns was relatively limited. The initial requirements for expansion were met from former soldiers and reservists, who were formed into three 'Reserve' companies to reinforce the companies of 1 KAR which were serving in Nyasaland, an arrangement which obviously reproduced earlier ethnic biases.<sup>64</sup> As Parsons has shown, in common with other elements of the KAR, recruitment requirements following the initial small scale expansion were limited to the replacement of casualties. However, in Nyasaland these efforts were so successful that in late 1915 a call for 500 recruits for the detachment of 1 KAR serving in Kenya provided over 1,000 men, permitting the re-raising of 2 KAR.<sup>65</sup> This recruitment continued to concentrate upon established recruiting areas.<sup>66</sup>

Pre-war biases in favour of the Yao, Tonga and Ngoni were also largely maintained during the expansion of 1 and 2 KAR after 1916. Indeed, in the new 2 KAR these patterns seem to have been intensified, as whole battalions were established on a tribal basis, with 1/2 KAR predominantly Yao, whilst all Tonga and

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<sup>64</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa: Volume 1 August 1914-September 1916* (London: HMSO, 1941; repr. Nashville: The Battery Press, 1990), pp. 561, 565-66.

<sup>65</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 64; Hordern, *Military Operations*, p. 562.

<sup>66</sup> Melvin E. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 35.



Ngoni soldiers were sent to 2/2 KAR.<sup>67</sup> However, at the same time as maintaining existing sources of recruits within Nyasaland, a general difficulty in obtaining enough men was reflected in a decision to expand recruiting for 1 and 2 KAR into Northern Rhodesia and Mozambique. However, even here established patterns were reproduced, with concentration in Northern Rhodesia upon the Bemba (who had already provided manpower for the KAR in 1905), whilst in Mozambique efforts were focussed upon the Yao.<sup>68</sup> In a more direct break with pre-war practice, the third battalions of 1 and 2 KAR were to be recruited from captured German territory and from surrendered German soldiers.<sup>69</sup>

By the end of the war, the tribal composition of the Nyasaland battalions was broader than it had been in 1914, but the numbers of Yao, Ngoni, and Tonga remained disproportionately high. From a total of 9,819 soldiers, 35 per cent were Yao, 17 per cent were Nyanja, 22 per cent were Ngoni and Chipeta, and six per cent were Tonga, whilst the remaining 20 per cent were made up of other tribes. In comparison to the numbers who had served as carriers, officially estimated at over 125,000, the number of men serving in the army was trivial. Nevertheless, in the case of a small group such as the Tonga, such figures could be much more significant, as men serving in the KAR accounted for over 10 per cent of the able-bodied male population. It is interesting to note that with the exception of the Tonga, unlike the situation in Kenya, groups such as the Yao and Ngoni who were identified

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<sup>67</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations*, p. 566.

<sup>68</sup> PRO, CO 534/20, ff. 325-26, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor of Nyasaland, 13 October 1916; PRO, CO 534/21, f. 353, 'Scheme for Reorganization of the King's African Rifles', C-in-C East Africa Force to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Nairobi, 25 June 1916; PRO, CO 534/20, f. 312, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 16 August 1916; Page, *The Chiyawa War*, p. 32; Hordern, *Military Operations*, p. 562-63.

<sup>69</sup> PRO, CO 534/20, ff. 325-26, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor of Nyasaland, 13 October 1916.

as martial were not avoided for service as carriers. Indeed, whilst the proportion of Yao carriers, at 20 per cent, was considerably lower than in the army, the number of Ngoni and Chipeta was much higher at 42 per cent of the total.<sup>70</sup>

### *Inter-war recruitment policy*

The period after the First World War saw a wholesale return to pre-war emphases in recruitment policy. Although the Chilembwe Rising of 1915 had been clearly identified with Christianity, the Nyasaland Defence Scheme of 1925 continued to repeat the assertion that the major internal threat to stability in Nyasaland came from the possibility of an Islamic rising involving the Yao. It was again stressed that 'the YAO soldiers amongst the local troops would feel impelled on religious grounds to join such a rising though perfectly loyal to the British Government under ordinary circumstances'.<sup>71</sup> This possibility therefore continued to inform recruitment policy, and particularly the notion of ethnic balance in the army.

The renewed imperative to balance the Yao element in the Nyasaland battalions was evident early after the end of the war. When 1 KAR was reorganised in 1919, many of the Tanganyikan soldiers from the German *Schutztruppen* who had been co-opted by the British during the war were retained, allowing the three 'Yao and Kindred' companies to be matched by one Tonga, one Ngoni, and one 'Ex German' company. Emphasising its 'balancing' function, the ex-German company

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<sup>70</sup> PRO, CO 525/82, f. 64, Hector Duff, Acting Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, January 1919; Geoffrey Hodges, *The Carrier Corps: Military Labor in the East African Campaign, 1914-1918* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 100-02; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 63, 65.

<sup>71</sup> MNA, KAR 1/2/2, f. 17, 'General Defence Scheme for the Protectorate of Nyasaland 1925'.



was to be used to garrison Nyasaland, along with one of the Yao companies.<sup>72</sup> In 1 KAR, even this innovation was abandoned as a decision was taken to disband all but one platoon of the Tanganyikan company and replace them with Tonga and Ngoni recruits from Nyasaland.<sup>73</sup> This effectively left 1 KAR in the state which had been perceived as ideal in the pre-war period, being composed of one half Yao and the other half Tonga and Ngoni, a situation regarded as 'satisfactory from a political point of view'.<sup>74</sup>

In spite of the continued reference to the possibility of unrest amongst the Yao, 2 KAR found it increasingly difficult to maintain the desired tribal balance in the face of falling Tonga and Ngoni enlistment. By 1921-22, about two-thirds of 2 KAR was made up of Yao and kindred tribes, a category which now seems to have included not only Yao, Nyanja and Nguru, but also Makokola, Mpotola, Mang'anja and possibly Chewa soldiers.<sup>75</sup> More significantly, whilst the majority of Tonga men were confined to one company, the remainder of the tribes were distributed evenly throughout the battalion, signifying a break from the established pattern of division

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<sup>72</sup> PRO, CO 534/34, f. 76, Commandant's Representative, KAR Nyasaland, to Acting Chief Secretary Nyassaland, Zomba, 3 May 1919; PRO, CO 534/40, f. 65, Return showing Racial and Class Composition of the 1st Battalion KAR, Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Griffiths, OC 1 KAR, Masoko, May 1920.

<sup>73</sup> PRO, CO 534/41, f. 149, 'Inspection Report 1919-1920, 1st Battalion King's African Rifles and Combined Depot 1st and 2nd KAR Zomba', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, 8 May 1920.

<sup>74</sup> PRO, CO 534/49, f. 487, 'Inspection Report 1921-1922, 1st Battalion The King's African Rifles', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, Zomba, 10 June 1922; PRO, CO 534/46, f. 338, 'Class Composition No. 3. Depot Company 1/1st K.A.R.', Captain Henry Green, Zomba, 11 December 1920; PRO, CO 534/47, f. 26, 'Inspection Report 1920-1921, 2/1st Battalion The King's African Rifles', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, Kilossa, 31 January 1921; PRO, CO 534/49, f. 623, 'Inspection Report 1921-1922, 2/1st Battalion The King's African Rifles', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, [n.d.].

<sup>75</sup> Although the Chewa were clearly linguistically related to the Mang'anja/Nyanja, the colonial authorities tended to associate them with the Ngoni on the basis of geographical proximity.

into tribal companies.<sup>76</sup> However, this practical reaction to changing recruitment patterns did not necessarily represent the abandonment of the imperatives which had informed tribal recruitment in Nyasaland, and in 1927 the Inspector-General complained that

I was not only surprised, but concerned, to find that the old tribal organization had been broken up. I consider the tribal spirit should be maintained; it makes for rivalry and efficiency. It is also a factor of safety in case of unrest in Nyasaland.

He added that 'The sister Battalion (The 1st) still maintains the tribal system [...] with the happiest results', and instructions that 'the traditional tribal organization' should be restored.<sup>77</sup>

In fact, the difficulty of maintaining tribal balance could not be so easily overcome. Even in 1 KAR, which was still maintaining tribal companies in the early 1930s, it was noted that there was 'an increasing difficulty in obtaining Atonga and Angoni recruits', whilst in contrast 'Yaos' presented themselves at the Zomba depot in such numbers that it was found unnecessary to send out recruiting parties. Nevertheless, the Inspector-General still insisted that 'it would be most unwise to allow an undue preponderance of trained men in any one tribe'.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, by 1933, both battalions comprised around two thirds soldiers from tribes formerly considered as 'kindred' to the Yao, and in 1 KAR, Tonga soldiers comprised just 5.5

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<sup>76</sup> PRO, CO 534/47, f. 45, 'Inspection Report 1920-1921, 2nd Battalion The King's African Rifles', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, Tabora, 7 February 1921; PRO, CO 534/49, f. 667, 'Inspection Report 1921-1922, 2nd Battalion The King's African Rifles', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, Tabora, 18 April 1922; PRO, CO 534/49, f. 673, 'Numbers by Tribe', by Major L. G. Murray, OC 2/KAR, Tabora, 18 April 1922; PRO, CO 534/51, f. 378, '2nd Battalion The King's African Rifles. Numbers by Tribes', Lieutenant-Colonel L. G. Murray, OC 2/KAR, Tabora, 1 April 1923; PRO, CO 534/54, f. 390, '2nd Battalion The King's African Rifles. Numbers by Tribes', Lieutenant-Colonel L. G. Murray, OC 2/KAR, Tabora, 1 November 1923.

<sup>77</sup> PRO, CO 820/3/11, 'Inspection Report 2nd Battalion The King's African Rifles', Colonel Walker, Inspector-General, King's African Rifles, Dar-es-Salaam, 4 December 1927.

<sup>78</sup> PRO, CO 820/6/1, 'Inspection Report, First Battalion The King's African Rifles,' Colonel Walker, Inspector-General, King's African Rifles, Dar-es-Salaam, 1927.



per cent of the strength.<sup>79</sup> By this time, southern tribes were so prevalent that the concept of 'kindred' tribes to the Yao seems to have outlived its usefulness and disappeared from official documents.

By 1935, the authorities were forced to legitimise the abandonment of tribal balance by emphasising the importance of martial characteristics in isolation. It was claimed that Tonga and Ngoni recruits 'appear[ed] to be declining in physique', as many were 'discarded as suffering from bilharzia, hookworm, and V.D.' Therefore, it could now be argued that the preponderance of Yaos and Nguru was unproblematic because, in contrast to the 'degenerate' northern tribes, they were 'famous for their fighting characteristics and deterioration in reliability and courage need not be anticipated.'<sup>80</sup> However, as the decline in recruitment from northern Nyasaland continued a more realistic approach was adopted, again associating recruitment difficulties with '[t]he attractions of pay and standard of living of the South African labour market', but by this time the situation was regarded as so serious that consideration was given to engaging men from Northern Rhodesia to replace northern Malawians.<sup>81</sup> By the eve of the war, all signs of tribal balance had disappeared, with 58 per cent of soldiers identified as Yaos, and most of the

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<sup>79</sup> PRO, CO 820/17/6, 'Southern Brigade, King's African Rifles: Racial distribution of African combatant ranks on 30th September 1933', Major P. R. Mundy, Acting OC Southern Brigade KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 30 October 1933.

<sup>80</sup> PRO, CO 820/21/13, 'Southern Brigade, King's African Rifles: Racial distribution of African combatant ranks on 31st December, 1935'; PRO, CO 820/25/9, 'Southern Brigade, King's African Rifles: Racial distribution of African combatant ranks on 31st/12/1936', by Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 20 February 1937.

<sup>81</sup> PRO, CO 820/30/4, 'Southern Brigade, King's African Rifles: Racial distribution of African combatant ranks on 30th November 1937', by Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 31 December 1937; PRO, CO 820/34/12, 'Southern Brigade, King's African Rifles: Racial distribution of African combatant ranks on 31st Oct. 1938, by Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, 7 December 1938.

remainder made up of Nyanja and Nguru, whilst Tonga and Ngoni soldiers together provided only five per cent of the manpower.<sup>82</sup>

### *The Second World War*

The outbreak of the war provoked renewed concern with tribal recruitment patterns, as the increased demand for manpower to fill places in newly raised units meant that the failure of the Tonga to enlist was again seen as an important obstacle to Nyasaland's recruitment capacity. In the face of a request to raise two new battalions in July 1940, the Governor complained that the Tonga were 'not repeat not playing at present', and again identified labour migration from the north as the root cause. The Governor implored the Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia to limit labour recruitment to those men who were unfit for military service, and recruitment for South Africa by the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) was banned until 1941.<sup>83</sup>

Interest in tribal recruitment was increased by the agency of military officers serving with Nyasaland troops who, imbued with the concepts of warrior tribes, sought to ensure that they were provided with what they perceived as the best material. In line with this thinking, failings by particular groups of soldiers were immediately ascribed to particular tribal characteristics. One senior officer complained that

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<sup>82</sup> MNA, KAR 3/3/2, 'Half Yearly Additions and Amendments to the Nyasaland Intelligence Report. June, 1939.'

<sup>83</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 4, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, to Major General D. P. Dickinson, 10 July 1940; MNA, S 41/1/8/1, ff. 22-23, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir Herbert Stanley, Prime Minister of Southern Rhodesia, 16 July 1940; David Killingray, 'Labour Mobilisation in British Colonial Africa for the War Effort, 1939-46', in David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Africa and the Second World War* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986), pp. 68-96 (pp. 79-80).



the only tribe that has shown any sign of being gun shy has been the Nguru, and commanders hope you will not enlist more of them than you must. I think you will agree that [...] it is a pity to include members of a tribe that are not up to the fine fighting quality of the rest.’<sup>84</sup>

Others noted that the Tonga were ‘disappointing’, and in an even more explicit echo of earlier martial races discourse, a company commander was reported as saying that ‘his Atongas had run away’ during fighting in northern Kenya, arguing that this was ‘because they were Christians’.<sup>85</sup> The senior officer who reported this conversation, and who had commanded Tonga soldiers during the First World War, rejected this explanation, but still clearly expressed a belief in martial characteristics, insisting that it was ‘just possible that the wrong sort of people had been recruited and called Atongas’.<sup>86</sup> As late as August 1940, the military authorities were still calling for a narrow recruiting base of 50 per cent Yaos, 30 per cent Ngoni, 15 per cent Tonga and only five per cent from other groups.<sup>87</sup>

In fact, as early as March 1940, even the Yao were no longer the dominant element in the armed forces, providing only 30 per cent of recruits compared to 43 per cent Nguru, 20 per cent Nyanja, five per cent Ngoni and only two per cent others including the Tonga. Faced with the practical responsibility for raising recruits, the civil authorities argued that recruitment had to be broadened, as the tribes favoured by military commanders simply were not presenting themselves for enlistment. Indeed, the Governor cast doubts upon the whole idea of tribal characteristics,

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<sup>84</sup> S 41/1/8/1, f. 38, Major General D. P. Dickinson, Advanced Force HQ, to D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, 12 July 1940.

<sup>85</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (7), f. 37, Colonel Desmond John Bannister, 1936-41; MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 63, Mitchell, CSEAG, to D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, 20 July 1940.

<sup>86</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 63, Mitchell, CSEAG, to D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, 20 July 1940.

<sup>87</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 104, Chief Secretary to the East African Governors Conference to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 3 August 1940.

suggesting that criticisms of the Nguru were the result of 'an anti Anguru complex' in 1 KAR.<sup>88</sup> Following this, in August 1940 the bar on the enlistment of non-martial tribes was lifted at the discretion of the Governor, whilst the Chief Secretary made a further attack on tribal recruitment by pointing out that soldiers of 'the despised N'guru' had recently received two medals for gallantry.<sup>89</sup>

Nevertheless, although it had now been conceded that 'no potentially good soldier shall be rejected by reason of his tribe', the government still permitted an official 'preference' for Yao, Ngoni and Tonga recruits.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, in terms of the total number of recruits required, the failure of the Tonga to enlist was still regarded as a major difficulty, and when in 1941 the officer responsible for recruitment among the Tonga reported that 'the young men refused even to attend village meetings', were 'frightened of aeroplanes and bombs', and were 'determin[ed] to have nothing to do with the war', the Acting Governor resorted to the idea of tribal degeneration, blaming '[a]n individualistic outlook and the fleshpots of Johannesburg'.<sup>91</sup> In line with this, recruitment of Malawians for civilian work outside the Protectorate was again banned in November 1942.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 41, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland to Major General D. P. Dickinson, 24 July 1940.

<sup>89</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1 f.102, 'Record of a meeting held in the Council Chamber, Zomba, at 2.30pm on Tuesday 6th August, 1940'; MNA, S 33/2/1/1, ff. 76-77, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 October 1940.

<sup>90</sup> MNA, S 33/2/1/1, ff. 76-77, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 October 1940.

<sup>91</sup> MNA, S 33/2/1/1, ff. 98-99, K. L. Hall, Acting Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 February 1941.

<sup>92</sup> MNA, S 33/2/2/1/1, E. C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 27 January 1943, p. 12.



Despite the official abandonment of tribal recruitment by the Government of Nyasaland, the military authorities maintained an interest in the idea of distinctive tribal qualities. In late 1941 the East African Command decided to conduct a 'Survey of Soldierly Qualities of African Troops', which asked European officers serving with African units to rate each tribe either 'good', 'fair' or 'bad', according to 25 categories ranging from 'Adaptability', 'Reaction to Discipline' and 'Fighting qualities', to 'Cleanliness and Turnout' and 'Thrift'.<sup>93</sup> Surprisingly, some officers now felt that the Nguru were better soldiers than the Yao, but officers generally appeared to be abandoning the idea of martial races altogether. However, this did not necessarily reflect a complete rejection of the idea of tribal characteristics, but rather a feeling that 'owing to the congestion of the population and the migratory habits of the male population it is not possible to differentiate between tribes'.<sup>94</sup> Underlining this, the results of the survey suggested serious inconsistencies in attitudes towards tribal qualities. As a Nyasaland official pointed out,

I think the most that one could say is that the 'Anguru' would probably come out at the top of an order of merit and the 'Ampatola' at the bottom. This I think clearly illustrates how useless is the analysis for the Ampatola are Anguru. 'Anguru' is a term covering people who live in, or have migrated recently from, a certain area in Portuguese East Africa; the term 'Anguru' covers several tribes, one of which is the Mpatola.<sup>95</sup>

The shift away from martial races concepts may also have been encouraged by the arrival in the East African forces of new officers from the British army who, arriving in the KAR outside the context of colonial Nyasaland, could see little reason to seek inter-tribal distinctions. However, even an officer recruited from Nyasaland's

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<sup>93</sup> MNA, S 41/1/20/5/1, Assistant Adjutant General, HQ East Africa Command, to HQ Central Area, 12 November 1941; S 41/1/20/4/1, 'Survey of Soldierly Qualities of African Troops', HQ East Africa Command, March 1943.

<sup>94</sup> S 41/1/20/4/1, 'Survey of Soldierly Qualities of African Troops', HQ East Africa Command, March 1943.

<sup>95</sup> MNA, S 41/1/20/4, Minute to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 8 April 1943; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 91.

European population noted that 'the opinion of the regular, pre-war K.A.R. officers about the fighting quality of the different Nyasaland tribes was based more on Mythology than fact.'<sup>96</sup> By the end of the war, there is some suggestion that the military authorities were positively encouraging officers to think of all their soldiers as 'Nyasas', and wartime officers certainly seem to have been happier to ascribe characteristics to Malawians as a whole, rather than to individual tribes.<sup>97</sup>

By 1943, following the official abandonment of tribal preferences in recruiting, the Nguru/Lomwe, Yao, and Nyanja nevertheless remained over-represented, accounting for around 65 per cent of the 30,000 soldiers from Nyasaland, with most of the remainder divided between the Chewa and Ngoni, Tonga soldiers still providing only two per cent.<sup>98</sup> Despite the continuing under-representation of the Tonga, the ban on labour migration was lifted in August 1943, both in response to protests from the Governments of Southern Rhodesia and South Africa, and in reaction to fears that the large numbers of Malawians in military and civil employment was having a deleterious effect upon the social structure of Nyasaland. To facilitate this, military requirements for recruits from Nyasaland for the second

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<sup>96</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24A) II, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947, By Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie', 1981; Interview with Professor George Shepperson, 30 March 2000.

<sup>97</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (8), f. 18, Patrick William George Barnes, 1942-45; RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (36), f. 65, Major G. N. Burden, 1940-42; RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (105), f. 24, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass (1937-53); RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (154), ff. 15, 18, 'Memorandum from R. W. Kettlewell concerning the role of British forces in Africa', 20 July 1979; Warner, 'Recruitment and Service in the King's African Rifles', p. 60.

<sup>98</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/2, quoted in Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 91.



half of 1943 were reduced from 14,000 to 2,625.<sup>99</sup> Thereafter, the numbers of men recruited in Nyasaland fell sharply, from 9,117 in 1943 to 978 in 1945.<sup>100</sup>

The war not only changed the tribal composition of Nyasaland's armed forces, it also affected the types of recruits sought by the authorities. Educated Africans had been sought only for a limited number of positions before the war, such as interpreters, and increasingly during the 1930s as musicians and signallers.<sup>101</sup> However, as has been shown elsewhere, the modernisation and expansion of the East African forces during the Second World War created a large-scale requirement for educated Africans to fill clerical and technical positions such as clerks, teachers, medical staff, artillerymen, engineers and drivers.<sup>102</sup> As Parsons has noted, this meant that the colonial army in East Africa was for the first time competing with civilian employers for skilled African labour. This problem was particularly acute in the case of Nyasaland, where the army had to compete with the attraction of the labour markets of the Rhodesias and South Africa. Indeed, even before the war, in Nyasaland it had proven difficult to find enough educated recruits to fill posts in the thirty-three man Southern Brigade Signal Section.<sup>103</sup> Labour migration thus affected

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<sup>99</sup> MNA, S 41/2/2/1/3, E. C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17 January 1944, pp. 3-4, 6-7.

<sup>100</sup> MNA, S 41/2/2/1/3, E. C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17 January 1944, p. 8; MNA, S 41/2/2/1/3, E. C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to G. H. Hall, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 March 1946, p. 7.

<sup>101</sup> MNA, S 2/16/32, f. 1, OC Southern Brigade KAR to K. L. Hall, Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Dar-es-Salaam, 16 January 1932; PRO, CO 820/34/12, 'Enlistments, re-engagements, discharges, desertions etc. for year from 1/12/37 to 31/10/38', by Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, 7 December 1938; IWM Sound Archive, 3960/05 Colonel R. E. S. Yeldham CBE (3 November 1978), p. 13.

<sup>102</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 86-89; Warner, 'Recruitment and service in the King's African Rifles', pp. 128-29; PRO, CO 968/159, General Officer Commanding British Forces in East Africa to Under Secretary of State, War Office, Nairobi, 10 December 1939.

<sup>103</sup> PRO, CO 820/34/12, 'Southern Brigade, King's African Rifles: Enlistments, re-engagements, discharges, desertions etc. for year from 1/12/37 to 31/10/38', Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, 7 December 1938; PRO, CO 820/34/12, 'Southern Brigade, King's African Rifles:

not only the ability to sustain the ethnic composition of the armed forces, but also meant that, as the Governor noted in 1943, '[v]ery few educated Africans [were] willing to enlist' as 'Army rates of pay compare[d] unfavourably with the wages so easily obtained in the mines'. To remedy this, Malawians who failed to reach the required standards of education were sent to the Jeanes Training Centre in Kenya to be educated by the army.<sup>104</sup> By 1945 the army had established a long term requirement for educated recruits.

### *Post-war recruitment policy*

Although the Nyasaland battalions were returned to their pre-war establishment of two battalions after the conflict, there was no official return to tribal recruitment biases. Post-war recruitment drives referred to provinces and districts rather than to tribes, and District Commissioners sending in individual recruits often made no reference to their tribal origin.<sup>105</sup> Enlistment in the army continued to be popular amongst Malawians throughout the 1940s and 1950s, and in early 1949, the Northern and Central Provinces which had proven such difficult recruiting ground in the inter-war period supplied 418 out of a total of 563 recruits.<sup>106</sup> However, a concern regarding the general shortfall of enlistment from northern Nyasaland was still evident in a decision taken in 1952 to keep recruiting in the Northern and Central

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Racial distribution of African combatant ranks on 31st Oct. 1938', Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, 7 December 1938.

<sup>104</sup> MNA, S 33/2/2/1/1, E. C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 27 January 1943, p. 10.

<sup>105</sup> MNA, I DCKU 1/8/1, DC Karonga: Reports, Intelligence: Troops General: monthly, 1946-1953.

<sup>106</sup> MNA, I DCMJ 1/10/1/1, DC Mlanje to PC Southern Province, 8 January 1949; MNA, I DCMJ 1/10/1/5, OC 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion KAR to DC Mlanje, January 1949; F 248/2077, CAC/1012/2/A(1)/78, Lieutenant Colonel R. L. Jackson, OC 1 KAR, to HQ Central Africa Command, 15 February 1955; 'Battalion Notes', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 2 (1957), p. 4.



Provinces open all year round.<sup>107</sup> The army also maintained the requirement for considerable numbers of educated recruits. A 1955 recruitment drive called for '45 intelligent men' for enlistment into the KAR Nyasaland Band, insisting that 'Applicants must have passed Standard V in any recognised school', 'whilst a similar drive in 1956 called for signallers who 'must be in possession of Standard VI Certificate of Education.'<sup>108</sup> Later, in 1960 the Federal authorities introduced pay increases with the specific aim to 'make service in the Army more attractive to the better-educated African'.<sup>109</sup>

However, there were still strong indications that old martial races concepts continued to be transferred from officer to officer. One officer who served with 2 KAR for less than two years in the mid 1950s still recalled that

Some tribes were better than others and also, although I am a practising Christian, I was of the opinion that the heathen and non-Christian Africans were the most trustworthy [...] All our Askari were Nyasers [sic] of varying tribes but we found that the greatest number came from the Ndebele tribe. [...] The Ndebele in our opinion made the best soldier. They were not particularly intelligent but accepted discipline far more easily than the other tribes and in fact liked being soldiers.<sup>110</sup>

Such an account suggests some confusion, since the Ndebele were in fact a group associated with Southern Rhodesia. Nevertheless, the continuing currency of martial races even in an unofficial form cannot have failed to continue to inform recruitment when military officers were directly involved in the process.

As in the war, the establishment of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland

<sup>107</sup> Major M. Wilkinson, 2 KAR, to DC Kasungu, 16 May 1952.

<sup>108</sup> 1 DCKU 1/8/1/66, OC Depot (Nyasaland) KAR to DC Kasungu, 16 September 1955; MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1/81, OC 1 KAR to DC Kasungu, 16 August 1956.

<sup>109</sup> 'Increases for Askari', *Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland Newsletter*, 16 September 1960, p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, pp. 2-3.

in 1954 probably encouraged the idea of Malawian soldiers simply as 'Nyasas', as they were absorbed into a larger framework which invited comparison with Southern and Northern Rhodesian soldiers. Within the Federation, Malawians seem to have become identified particularly with service in the infantry, by the early 1960s providing not only over 97 per cent of the manpower in 1 and 2 KAR, but also nearly 20 per cent of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment, as well as a small number serving in the Rhodesian African Rifles. By contrast, in 1962 Malawians represented only 30 per cent of the Medical Corps and Army Service Corps, and just nine per cent of the Engineers, and seven per cent of the Signals.<sup>111</sup>

Despite an extensive improvement in pay and conditions under the Federation,<sup>112</sup> by the early 1960s there were signs that African opposition to the Federal Government was having a negative impact upon recruitment from Nyasaland. The Tonga had boycotted military 'Flag Marches' as early as 1953, and Parsons notes that by 1961 recruitment had become impossible in the Northern Province as the population there identified the KAR as part of the Federal structure rather than an indigenous military force.<sup>113</sup> Finally, faced with the prospect of Nyasaland's secession from the Federation, the Federal authorities themselves came to doubt the wisdom of recruitment from Nyasaland, particularly in those units which were based outside Nyasaland. In 1962 it was noted that

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<sup>111</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Draft Memorandum on 'The "Transfer" of One, or Both KAR Battalions to the Nyasaland Government', ca. May 1963; MNA F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Minutes of a Meeting held in the Office of the Secretary for Defence at 10 a.m. on Monday, 18th June, 1962', 19 June 1962.

<sup>112</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962; MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation', Army Headquarters, Salisbury, 25 June 1962.

<sup>113</sup> 'Battalion Notes', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 1 (1956), p. 7; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 95.



The Northern Rhodesia Regiment, Rhodesian African Rifles, and other Corps of the Army have serving in them some 300 Nyasaland Africans. [In the case of Nyasaland's secession] it is considered that it is expecting too much of human nature to demand loyalty from them and they [...] should be released from the armed force

As 'a completely unacceptable security risk', 1 and 2 KAR were to be transferred from the Federal Army to the independent Nyasaland, whilst in general it was felt that 'The 2500 trained Askari released from the Army will be an immediate gain for the armed forces of Pan-Africanism.'<sup>114</sup> In these circumstances it was unsurprising that the recruitment of Malawians was no longer a priority for the Federal Army.

Although a coherent theory of Nyasaland's martial races had been established by 1914, over time, recruitment policy in Nyasaland was characterised by vacillation. The Nguru were first identified as a source of recruits in 1898, were then denigrated as an inferior group to the Yao, but as Nguru men continued to join the army, they were subsequently subsumed within Yao identity as a 'kindred tribe'. As the idea of kindred tribe lost its usefulness in the years before the Second World War, the Nguru were again maligned, but ultimately as they came to be the dominant group within the army, the authorities had little choice but to re-identify them as Nyasaland's best soldiers. Similarly the Yao were only identified as a martial group after Yaos had demonstrated their willingness to enlist in the army, and following this their position in the army seems to have been strengthened by non-Yaos simply calling themselves Yaos in order to enlist. The military authorities appear to have actively accommodated this pattern by identifying virtually all the groups in southern Nyasaland as 'kindred to the Yao'. This strongly suggests the extent to which

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<sup>114</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), Paper on the implications of the secession of Nyasaland, Federal Ministry of Defence, 21 June 1962.

recruitment policy was made in reaction to the readiness of particular groups of Malawians to join the Army. The importance of the willingness of Africans to enlist is even more clearly demonstrated in the failure of the military authorities' efforts to arrest the decline in Tonga and Ngoni recruitment, despite the recognition of the problem from the early 1900s. The remainder of the chapter will therefore seek to identify the motivation behind African enlistment.

### Methods of recruitment

African motivation to enlist in the army was reflected in the changing recruitment methods adopted by the military authorities. The most active method adopted was the recruiting '*ulendo*', essentially a Chinyanja equivalent of the KiSwahili *safari*, which was used in various forms throughout most of the colonial period. In the 1890s, *ulendos* usually reflected a requirement for large numbers of recruits, such as when new companies or battalions were formed, or when large numbers of men had reached the end of their periods of service.<sup>115</sup> The use of *ulendos* was limited at this time due to the relatively large number of military posts in the Protectorate, which allowed the authorities to recruit soldiers on a local basis throughout the country. Such recruitment could be very localised, and one officer raising a new company in 1896 obtained his first recruit simply by asking a man he met in a local store 'whether he would like to be a soldier'.<sup>116</sup> To facilitate this process, a dedicated recruitment centre was established at Nkhotakota in the same year, and all six companies of the newly organised BCAR were allocated specific

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<sup>115</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Orders 190-197, 'Augmentation of Forces', 5 September 1898; Moyse Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 125.

<sup>116</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, ff. 189-90, Wordsworth Poole to his Aunt Mary, Zomba, 21 December 1896.



districts from which they were expected to raise their manpower.<sup>117</sup> By the turn of the century, localised recruitment comprised an established process in which the commanding officer of a station simply notified local village headmen of his requirements for men, who were then sent to enlist individually. Indeed, the authorities were so reliant upon this approach that the use of large scale recruiting tours by the newly-raised 2 CAR caused considerable resentment among the officers of 1 CAR, who felt that this disrupted their own enlistments by causing fears of forced conscription.<sup>118</sup>

Early recruiting *ulendos* usually seem to have been carried out by an individual officer, sometimes accompanied by a small party of soldiers. The form of these first recruiting tours is unclear, but officials probably emphasised the material benefits of service, which were regarded as a vital component of the recruiting process.<sup>119</sup> With the reduction of the number of military posts in the 1900s, local recruitment could no longer be relied upon. Accordingly, district officials were co-opted to assist, and recruiting *ulendos* took on a more elaborate form.<sup>120</sup> In 1906, the Inspector-General argued that

If an unknown Military Officer goes by himself to endeavour to obtain recruits he will get none. Application should be made [...] for assistance from Civil Officers in certain districts and a party of picked N.C.Os and men with a few drummers and buglers under a picked Officer should accompany the Civil Officer to likely

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<sup>117</sup> PRO, FO 2/107, f. 288, Alfred Sharpe, Acting Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Marquis of Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 9 September 1896; PRO, FO 2/108, f. 288, Alfred Sharpe, Acting Commissioner and Consul General, British Central Africa, to the Sir Clement Hill, Foreign Office, 1 December 1896; PRO, FO 2/106, f. 248, 'Reorganization of armed Forces in British Central Africa proposed by Major C. A. Edwards', April 1896.

<sup>118</sup> Moyse Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 125-26.

<sup>119</sup> Percival, 'Five Years in British Central Africa', p. 71.

<sup>120</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 346, 'Recruiting Parties', 24 December 1899.

recruiting grounds. Everything should be done to make the service appear as attractive as possible.<sup>121</sup>

From this point, military music became an established feature of recruiting tours in Nyasaland, and when a decision was taken to disband the KAR Band in 1911, the Governor forcefully argued against the action on the basis of the band's usefulness in attracting volunteers.<sup>122</sup> Despite the disbandment of the brass band, the Nyasaland battalions continued to maintain fife and drum bands as well as bugles, and these remained an integral part of recruitment *ulendos* in Nyasaland.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Page has persuasively argued that the widespread use of bands during the First World War was largely responsible for the high levels of enlistment in the Protectorate.<sup>124</sup>

Reflecting the decline in recruitment from northern Nyasaland, *ulendos* accompanied by the band continued to be used in the 1920s and '30s in an attempt to obtain large numbers of Tonga and Ngoni recruits.<sup>125</sup> The concept of the *ulendo* was reinforced in the late 1930s by the prospect of war, and officials even suggested that the image of the *ulendo* itself could be a greater inducement to recruitment than the material rewards of military service:

During the last War numbers of natives were recruited in Nyasaland by special recruiting parties, patrols of the King's African Rifles complete with band and flag-flying and commanded by specially selected officers. Repetition of these methods by their glamorous appeal to native imagination and love of display appear to me to offer greater promise of success. [...] A bonus [of 20 shillings] might be an

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<sup>121</sup> PRO, CO 534/3, f. 128, 'Notes for the Officer Commanding, 2nd Bn, The King's African Rifles', by Brigadier-General W. H. Manning, Inspector-General KAR, Zomba, 19 April 1906.

<sup>122</sup> PRO, CO 534/13, f. 63, W. H. Manning, Governor of Nyasaland, to Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Zomba, 28 October 1911. For the idea of military spectacle as 'theatre', and especially the use of this in recruitment, see Scott Hughes Myerly, *British Military Spectacle: From the Napoleonic Wars Through the Crimea* (London: Harvard University Press, 1996).

<sup>123</sup> MNA, S 1/966/20/4, OC 1KAR to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 28 April 1926.

<sup>124</sup> Page, *The Chiyawa War*, pp. 33-35.

<sup>125</sup> MNA, NN 1/18/1, f. 2, Major Commanding 2 KAR, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 15 April 1935; MNA, NN 1/18/1, f. 5, OC 2 KAR to PC Northern Province, 11 February 1936; MNA, NN 1/18/1, f. 22, PC Northern Province to Captain MacC. Wilkins, 2KAR, 18 June 1937; MNA, NN 1/18/1, Captain MacC. Wilkins, 2 KAR, to PC Northern Province, 2 July 1937.



additional inducement, but it should come from the military recruiting patrol on the spot, and not as propaganda undertaken by District Commissioners.<sup>126</sup>

In line with this thinking, with the onset of the war the new recruiting structure which was established was designed to replicate the most useful elements of the earlier *ulendos*, consisting of four 'mobile recruiting units' which each included buglers and soldiers in uniform, despite the fact that the organisation was under the control of a civilian Director of Recruitment.<sup>127</sup> The explicit aim of such methods was 'to go in for every kind of theatricality', and to add to the impressive nature of the 'show', the Tanganyikan KAR Band was brought in to tour Nyasaland. This was regarded as successful enough that in the absence of a military band the Nyasaland Police Band was used in recruiting for the remainder of the war, and was subsequently supplemented by a mobile cinema showing film of the war.<sup>128</sup>

The late 1940s saw a renewed interest in the use of *ulendos*, as 1 KAR, posted in Northern Rhodesia and lacking a depot in Nyasaland, was compelled to send back recruiting parties as the only means of obtaining the large numbers of recruits which they required.<sup>129</sup> These tours were carried out on a considerable scale; one undertaken in early 1949 consisted of a three week tour of the headquarters of important Native Authorities (NAs) in the Southern Province, and involved a total of

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<sup>126</sup> MNA, S 1/240/34, f. 65, Johnie Abraham, Senior PC, Blantyre, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 31 March 1937.

<sup>127</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 50, Captain G. N. Burden to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 30 July 1940.

<sup>128</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, ff. 165-66, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, 5 August 1940; MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 182, Lieutenant Colonel N. R. G. Tucker, OC Depot Battalion KAR Zomba, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 7 September 1940; MNA, S 33/2/1/1, f. 76, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 October 1940; MNA, S 33/2/1/1, f. 104, K. L. Hall, Acting Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 February 1941; MNA, S 33/2/2/1/1, E. C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 27 January 1943, pp. 11-12; MNA, S 34/1/4/1/12, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 2 of 1943, 10 February 1943.

<sup>129</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 6185/03, Colonel H. P. Williams OBE (15 October 1979), p. 16.

47 military personnel equipped with eight vehicles. The band remained a prominent element in recruitment, with the entire procedure being described as follows:

- (a) Recruiting party arrives at time arranged by the D.C. with the N.A. concerned.
- (b) Corps of Drums plays programme for approximately 20 minutes.
- (c) Recruiting Officer addresses gathering explaining conditions of service in KAR.
- (d) Corps of Drums play further programme of approximately 15 minutes.
- (e) Recruits coming forward are selected.
- (f) Recruiting Party leaves, taking with them all recruits selected, and returns to the Advanced Recruiting Centre (normally D.Cs Boma).<sup>130</sup>

These methods of recruitment continued to be used in major recruiting campaigns at least until the mid-1950s, when the Corps of Drums were still included as a central feature of the recruiting process, considered 'a great "draw"' which 'assist[ed] considerably in recruiting.'<sup>131</sup>

Native Authorities remained an important element in recruitment, serving as hosts to visiting *ulendos*, and apparently sometimes still actively selecting men to present themselves to visiting recruiting parties.<sup>132</sup> Equally, it had always been felt that recruitment should appear to have the blessing of NAs, so that in 1940 it was argued that when possible parties 'should include relations of chiefs or important headmen in the principal areas of recruitment'.<sup>133</sup> However, with the large scale manpower requirements of the Second World War, and particularly the failure of *ulendos* to attract Tonga and Ngoni recruits, the authorities increasingly looked to NAs as an alternative means of recruiting soldiers in their own right. In 1940, the Provincial Commissioner of the Northern Province went to extreme lengths to

<sup>130</sup> MNA, I DCMJ 1/10/1/5, OC I KAR to DC Mlanje, January 1949.

<sup>131</sup> MNA, F 248/2077, CAC/1012/2/A(1)/78, Lieutenant Colonel R. L. Jackson, OC I KAR, to HQ Central Africa Command, 15 February 1955; MNA, F 248/2077, CAC/1012/2/A(1)/37, Lieutenant Colonel F. H. Hyde, OC I KAR, to HQ Central Africa Command, Zomba, 14 December 1955.

<sup>132</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 3864/03, Major P. Q. Logan (11 September 1979), p. 9.

<sup>133</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 52, Captain G. N. Burden to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 30 July 1940.



embarrass a group of Ngoni NAs into actively encouraging recruitment, using a mixture threats, and crude references to inter-tribal rivalries and concepts of masculinity:

The Chiefs had said that, if the war came to Africa, their people would join the army M'mbelwa was asked for men two months ago. He had only sent 12 fit men. Would his grand-father call that an army, even when fighting the Chewa? [...]

In the Inkosi's grand-father's time no young man could marry unless he had been a soldier and no woman would sleep with a man who was afraid to fight. Why did not the women do something about it? He could understand Hitler calling them apes. They certainly did not seem to be men. [...]

Provincial Commissioner said that M'mbelwa had sent his own brother. The Makosana and Malumuzana should do the same immediately and every Village Headman should follow. What were the spirits of their ancestors thinking about them?

(During this harangue, tribal photographs of the 2nd King's African Rifles were held up showing large numbers of Yao, Nyanja and Nguru and a very small group of Ngoni). The Chiefs and old men appeared to be genuinely ashamed, but alleged that they had no control over the young men. They were told that was their fault. [...]

The Chiefs said they [...] would continue to try. Provincial Commissioner said they must get down to it at once. If they did not do something, he would have to consider whether they should continue to draw their pay and whether they were fit to be Chiefs.<sup>134</sup>

However, in general the administration tried to co-opt rather than threaten NAs, attempting to 'flatter' them by providing stocks of uniforms for issue to potential soldiers, and overall it was emphasised that they were making an important contribution to the recruitment process.<sup>135</sup>

Like NAs, district officials had always been involved in recruitment, providing logistical assistance to military recruiting parties, but from the Second World War, they too became more directly involved as recruiters in their own right. Lacking the facilities to create the military 'theatre' of the *ulendo*, in the 1930s the military authorities had tended to turn to civil officials when seeking mission educated

<sup>134</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, ff. 71-72, 'Notes of a Meeting with N.A. M'Mbelwa and Other Chiefs at Mzimba on the 19th July', [n.d., 1940].

<sup>135</sup> MNA, S 33/2/1/1, f. 73, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 26 October 1940.

recruits for posts such as signallers and interpreters, who were felt to be more susceptible to the hard facts of the financial benefits of military service than to displays of military imagery.<sup>136</sup> During the Second World War, with recruitment under civil control, the role of District Commissioners (DCs) in this area was enhanced alongside other methods. By 1944, when the numbers of recruits required had been considerably reduced, and large scale civil recruitment structures had consequently outlived their usefulness, recruitment was placed entirely in the hands of DCs.<sup>137</sup>

Despite the continued use of *ulendos*, the role of DCs and NAs in recruitment expanded after the war, and by the mid-1950s DCs were regarded as the standard medium for recruitment.<sup>138</sup> In 1952, a major campaign was carried out through DCs, who were to appeal for new soldiers using a combination of posters and the notification of requirements to NAs. In contrast to the spectacle which was still employed in *ulendos*, poster campaigns emphasised rates of pay and allowances, as well as the useful skills which might be learned in the army. DCs were furnished with a fifteen-page pamphlet to allow them to provide detailed information on the food, clothing, and facilities which the KAR provided, as well as tables of pay rates and gratuities. Notably, these campaigns made little reference to military life, again

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<sup>136</sup> MNA, S 2/16/32, f. 1, OC Southern Brigade KAR to K. L. Hall, Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Dar-es-Salaam, 16 January 1932; MNA, S 2/16/32, f. 2, Director of Education to K. L. Hall, Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Dar-es-Salaam, 16 January 1932; MNA, S 2/16/32, f. 13, K. L. Hall, Chief Secretary Nyasaland, to OC Southern Brigade KAR, 22 July 1932; MNA, NN 1/18/1, OC 2 KAR to PC Northern Province, 24 September 1938.

<sup>137</sup> MNA, S 33/2/2/1/5, E. C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 January 1945, p. 5.

<sup>138</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 3.



reflecting a perception that educated Africans were less likely to find the army appealing.<sup>139</sup>

The military authorities also made conscious use of less official recruitment methods. At the turn of the century, one officer noted that during periods when active recruitment was not being carried out, 'recruits [...] were generally brought down by men returning from leave'.<sup>140</sup> The army continued to recognise the potential of experienced African soldiers as recruiters, and in 1935 as part of the effort to attract Tongas, Tonga soldiers were instructed 'to inform their friends that recruiting is opening and ask those desirous of joining to present themselves to the District Commissioner'.<sup>141</sup> As in the British army, the authorities also made use of old soldiers as recruiting sergeants, such as ex-Company Sergeant Major Neza who was employed in 1938 to engage 'as many men as possible' in Chinteche, receiving one shilling for each recruit he provided.<sup>142</sup> Similarly, in 1940, in the absence of a local recruiting organisation, it was suggested that 'an old sergeant' should be sent from Nyasaland to the Southern Rhodesian mines to recruit Malawians for the KAR.<sup>143</sup> By the end of the war, such systems were formalised as older serving non-commissioned officers and warrant officers were seconded to DCs to help recruitment.<sup>144</sup> However, whilst established old soldiers were seen as a useful

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<sup>139</sup> MNA, 1 DCMJ 1/10/1/16, Recruiting Poster, ca. 1952; MNA 1 DCKU 1/8/1, OC 2 KAR to DC Kasungu, 16 May 1952; MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1, 'Notes on the King's African Rifles', May 1952.

<sup>140</sup> Percival, 'Five Years in British Central Africa', p. 70.

<sup>141</sup> MNA, NN 1/18/1, f. 2, Major Commanding 2 KAR, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 15 April 1935.

<sup>142</sup> MNA, NN 1/18/1, f. 33, Captain Collen, Adjutant 2KAR, to DC Chinteche, 3 October 1938.

<sup>143</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 43, Nyasaland Labour Officer Salisbury to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 24 July 1940.

<sup>144</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/1/88, Memorandum to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 24 October 1944.

recruiting tool, it was also recognised that serving soldiers' complaints about military life might have an adverse effect upon recruitment.<sup>145</sup>

An extension to the idea of recruitment through individual soldiers was the acknowledgement that soldiers' families offered a potential source of manpower. An officer who served in the late 1920s noted that enlistment often 'went through from the father to the son and then on to the family', and recalled the enthusiasm of soldiers' sons for military drill.<sup>146</sup> A desire to foster an interest in military life among soldiers' sons may have inspired the authorities' decision to support the formation of a KAR Scout Troop in 1951, for which 2 KAR not only supplied uniforms, but also appointed an African sergeant to act as Scoutmaster.<sup>147</sup> The aim of drawing soldiers' sons into the army was made clear in the unofficial, and un-uniformed, 'Boys Platoon' which was established in 2 KAR by early 1961, providing military training in subjects such as close-order drill, map-reading and physical training.<sup>148</sup> In June 1962, the provision of education to soldiers' children was being linked with a new 'scheme for the training of African boys as junior leaders with a view to suitable candidates being sent to Sandhurst for officer training'.<sup>149</sup> By the end of the same month, the aim of using the boys' platoon to feed soldiers' sons into the army was made quite explicit:

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<sup>145</sup> MNA, S 34/1/4/1/12, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 2 of 1943, 10 February 1943.

<sup>146</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 3960/05 Colonel R. E. S. Yeldham CBE (3 November 1978), pp. 9-10.

<sup>147</sup> MNA, 17/BSA/1/42, Captain M. E. W. Morton, 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion KAR, Zomba, to Richard C. Belcher, Organising Commissioner, Boy Scouts of Nyasaland, 6 September 1951; MNA, 17/BSA/1/42, Organising Commissioner, Boy Scouts of Nyasaland, to Major Moss, KAR Zomba, 29 December 1951.

<sup>148</sup> MNA, F 249/1131, G/ARC/A, Annex 'J' to Agenda for 3rd GOC's Conference, 'Nyasaland Area Items', March 1961.

<sup>149</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962.



Boys' platoons have been formed within the African Battalions to enable the sons of serving soldiers to be given basic military training in the hope that this will encourage an interest in an army career. A Junior Leader Unit is now in the process of being formed to groom the sons of Askari or ex-Askari to fill non-commissioned officer posts and also to prepare the more promising entrants for eventual consideration for admission to Sandhurst. It is hoped that the Boys' Platoon will serve as a source of candidates for the Junior Leader Unit.<sup>150</sup>

In the face of Malawians' opposition to the Federation, and the consequent Federal fears regarding 'Pan-Africanism', soldiers' families, already absorbed into military life, probably seemed a uniquely promising source of recruits in the 1960s.

Finally, it is important to recognise that despite the array of active recruiting methods available to the army, in fact, the authorities were often able to take a passive attitude to recruitment throughout the colonial period. One officer writing of the late 1890s recalled that, in contrast to the general use of recruiting parties, 'in Zomba the Yaos used to offer themselves for enlistment' without active encouragement, and Page has noted that large numbers of men simply presented themselves for service at the outbreak of the First World War, consequently being termed '*Waself*'.<sup>151</sup> Another officer serving in the mid-1920s noted that generally there had been no need for *ulendos* as 'People used to come in [to Zomba] and ask to join'.<sup>152</sup> Inter-war reports consistently compared the difficulties of recruitment in the north to the ease with which local recruits were obtained at Zomba. Indeed, in 1927 voluntary enlistment by local men at the Zomba depot was so common that concerns were even raised that it was having a detrimental effect upon the quality of KAR personnel, by discouraging efforts to recruit a 'better type of Yao from the more

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<sup>150</sup> F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation.' 25 June 1962.

<sup>151</sup> Percival, 'Five Years in British Central Africa', p. 70; Page, *The Chiyawa War*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>152</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 3939/03, Major H. F. Bingham OBE (5 May 1978).

distant parts of the Protectorate'.<sup>153</sup> Similarly, DCs' records show that as late as the 1950s, numbers of men continued to present themselves for military service, and sometimes had to be turned away due to the lack of vacancies.<sup>154</sup>

### The motivation to enlist

Official recruitment methods were obviously designed to appeal to potential recruits. As such, changing recruitment methods, which sought to react to shifts in the motivations behind African enlistment, offer some guide to the nature of that motivation. However, it must be recognised that some recruits did not in any sense choose to join the army. Unlike Kenya, Uganda, and Tanganyika, which all introduced forms of conscription during the Second World War, compulsory military service was never officially adopted in Nyasaland.<sup>155</sup> Nevertheless, it is certain that numbers of Malawians who found themselves in the colonial army did not do so through their own choice. In the early 1890s, hundreds of Tonga labourers in European employment were simply loaned to the administration by their employers to act as soldiers, although there is no suggestion that these men became officially recognised members of the army.<sup>156</sup> There is also tantalising evidence for straightforward press-ganging in the early days of the colonial army. In an account of the Ashanti campaign of 1900, Naso, 'a native of the West Shire District', recalls being 'caught, and put on a boat' by soldiers and taken to West Africa where he took

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<sup>153</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 3864/03, Major P. Q. Logan (11 September 1979), pp. 9-10; PRO, CO 820/6/1, 'Inspection Report, First Battalion The King's African Rifles', Colonel Walker, Inspector-General, King's African Rifles, Dar-es-Salaam, 1927.

<sup>154</sup> MNA, 1 DCMJ 1/10/1, DC Mulanje: Military: Recruiting: 1950-1953; MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1, DC Karonga: Reports: Intelligence - Troops General - monthly, 1952-1953.

<sup>155</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 81-83.

<sup>156</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in British Central Africa*, 1893, Cmd. 7031, p. 5.



part in fighting against the Asante.<sup>157</sup> Naso's account is reminiscent of the military's conscription of civilian porters at the turn of the century, but these porters did not usually accompany the regiment on overseas campaigns, so it is certainly possible that Naso was press-ganged into the army.<sup>158</sup>

The use of NAs in recruitment provides much more compelling evidence for an element of compulsion in enlistment. The early practice, outlined above, of military officers notifying village headmen of recruitment requirements implies that headmen were able to guarantee a supply of men, and this is suggestive of some element of compulsion being used by them. Page notes that NAs made concerted efforts to encourage men to join the army during the First World War, but there is little suggestion that this extended to a form of active conscription.<sup>159</sup> However, there is much stronger evidence for unofficial conscription on the part of NAs during the Second World War. Unsurprisingly, given the way in which chiefs were threatened at the beginning of the war, some took active steps to provide recruits, with Tonga chiefs calling for the power to conscript.<sup>160</sup> Hypocritically, the Governor criticised northern NAs for '[t]he use of over-zealous methods', but he also noted approvingly that 'certain Native Authorities in the Northern Province have given their sons and nephews as soldiers in order to show the way to their people', so these men at least probably had little choice in their enlistment.<sup>161</sup> Such compulsion became even more overt in 1942, when village headmen in Nyasaland were unofficially allocated a

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<sup>157</sup> MNA, KAR 2/1/4, 'History of the Ashanti campaign by a native of the West Shire District', 1900.

<sup>158</sup> McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy', p. 164; Sean Morrow, "'War came from the Boma": Military and Police Disturbances in Blantyre, 1902', *The Society of Malawi Journal*, 41, 2 (1988).

<sup>159</sup> Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 28.

<sup>160</sup> MNA, S 41/1/8/1, f. 73, 'Meeting with Native Authorities at Chinteche on the 22nd of July', [n.d., 1940].

<sup>161</sup> MNA, S 33/2/1/1, f. 55, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland to Lord Lloyd of Dolobran, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23 July 1940.

quota of about three recruits each, and as Parsons notes, even a recruiting official came to the conclusion that 'It would be unfair [...] to allow the East Africa Command to believe that all our 1942 recruits are true volunteers'.<sup>162</sup>

Nevertheless, as the authorities' consistently elaborate efforts to attract recruits attest, conscription was never perceived as either a viable or a desirable alternative to voluntary enlistment. Whilst the authorities emphasised the role of military spectacle in enlistment for most of the colonial period, there can be little doubt that financial inducements were always a major factor in Malawians' motivation to join the colonial army. The importance of pay is most clearly demonstrated in the persistent recruitment problem in northern Nyasaland, where the higher pay offered by the mines successfully competed with military pay levels. In this respect, enlistment into the army can be seen as analogous to other forms of wage labour. Supporting the idea of military service as essentially interchangeable with labour migration, van Velsen notes that the Tonga used the same term, '*kujoin*' to refer to enlistment in the army or the police as to contract labour in the mines.<sup>163</sup> As Parsons emphasises, this suggests that the predominance of recruits from southern Malawi was a reflection of the lack of alternative options, due to the combination of more limited access to education, and the absence of direct labour recruitment for the mines.<sup>164</sup>

Pay policy throughout the colonial period certainly suggests the extent to which Malawian willingness to enlist was dependent upon the inducement of pay. In 1894, irregular soldiers from Nyasaland were all paid about five to six shillings per

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<sup>162</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 83.

<sup>163</sup> Van Velsen, *The Politics of Kinship*, p. 19n.

<sup>164</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-file*, pp. 60-61.



month, regardless of rank.<sup>165</sup> However, by 1896, following the formal organisation of the forces, a progressive pay scale had been introduced under which recruits would receive 2 shillings per month, rising after training to either four shillings if they enlisted for under a year (subsequently 3 years) or 5 shillings if they enlisted for a longer period. Men could expect to receive seven shillings on promotion to corporal, 10 if they were promoted to sergeant, and 15 if they reached the rank of colour-sergeant.<sup>166</sup> These levels seem to have compared favourably to a local average wage for unskilled labour (including military porters) of three shillings per month, but in 1897, the authorities were forced to raise recruits' pay from two to five shillings per month, as 'it was found that no natives would enlist at the lower rate'.<sup>167</sup> When the 2nd Battalion was raised for overseas service it was also felt necessary as an extra inducement to increase pay by 50 per cent for men serving outside Nyasaland.<sup>168</sup> Nevertheless, even this inducement proved insufficient, and from January 1902, pay rates were doubled, so that a private in Nyasaland would now receive 10 shillings per month or 15 shillings if he was serving outside the Protectorate.<sup>169</sup> In 1904, it was noted that '[t]he attraction of higher pay has brought many recruits to the colours'.<sup>170</sup> However, at the same time, rates of pay in the mines

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<sup>165</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 42.

<sup>166</sup> PRO, FO 2/106, f. 247, 'Reorganization of armed Forces in British Central Africa proposed by Major C. A. Edwards', April 1896; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 10, 'Conditions of enlistment: Rates of Pay' [January 1897(?)]; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 52, 'Rates of pay amended', [n.d.].

<sup>167</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, 1897 Cmd. 8438, p. 11; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 615, 'Pay of Tenga-Tengas', 30 January 1903; PRO, FO 2/129, f. 85, Alfred Sharpe, Commissioner and Consul General, to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 18 August 1897.

<sup>168</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 236, 'Conditions of Enlistment', 23 December 1898; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 277, 'Pay Rank and File', 20 April 1899.

<sup>169</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 541, 'Rates of Pay 1st and 2nd K.A.R.', 17 April 1902.

<sup>170</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report on the Trade and General Conditions of the British Central Africa Protectorate for the Year 1902-1903, by Major F. B. Pearce, Acting Commissioner*, 1903, Cmd. 1772.

of Rhodesia and South Africa had already reached a level of at least 30 shillings per month, and remained consistently higher than military wages in Nyasaland.<sup>171</sup>

This new scale remained in force at the beginning of the First World War, but the importance of pay was again brought into focus by the differential rates received in the companies serving in Nyasaland and East Africa. In 1915 it was suggested that since all the companies were on active service, neither serving soldiers nor potential recruits would understand why they were paid on a lower scale. In consequence it was proposed that the pay of the Nyasaland companies should be increased by 50 per cent to the foreign service level as an aid to recruitment, but in fact the rate was only increased by 25 per cent.<sup>172</sup> The re-raising of 2 KAR in 1916 compounded the difficulty, as it was formed under East African regulations, and in 1917 the pay of all the KAR battalions outside Nyasaland was standardised so that a private in 2 KAR would receive 15 or 16 Rupees (about 21 shillings and four pence) per month by comparison to 15 shillings in 1 KAR.<sup>173</sup> Unsurprisingly, recruits seem to have been so reluctant to enlist at the lower rate that, if pay levels could not be standardised, it was suggested that 2 KAR recruiting should be stopped to enable 1 KAR to obtain recruits.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), pp. 93, 245.

<sup>172</sup> PRO, CO 534/19, f. 102, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 March 1915; PRO, CO 534/19, f. 110, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 6 May 1915; PRO, CO 534/19, f. 124, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 June 1915.

<sup>173</sup> Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 30; Hordern, *Military Operations*, p. 565; PRO, CO 534/20, ff. 102, 105, Colonel E. H. Llewellyn, Commandant KAR, to Chief Secretary East African Protectorate, 6 September 1916.

<sup>174</sup> PRO, CO 534/20, f. 325, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 November 1916; PRO, CO 534/22, f. 166, Bowring, Officer Administering the Government of the East Africa Protectorate, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22 October 1917; PRO, CO 534/22, f. 388, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 20 March 1917.



Despite the evident reluctance of recruits to enlist for lower pay, rates were actually reduced in 1920 on the basis that they were 'unnecessarily high, in normal times, to attract recruits for local service'. Privates would now receive 15 shillings instead of 18 shillings and eight pence, whilst a Regimental Sergeant Major was reduced from 80 to 100 shillings to 60 to 80 shillings per month.<sup>175</sup> However, the reduction did not seem to have an adverse effect upon recruitment as a whole, and similar rates remained in force through the 1920s.<sup>176</sup> By 1929, a private's pay had reached 20 shillings per month, but outside Nyasaland this rose to 28 shillings, a level which remained in force on the outbreak of the Second World War. At the same time, mechanisation forced the army to compete with civilian employers for educated Africans to fill specialised posts, and this showed the importance of pay as an inducement much more starkly, as a driver in the newly established Supply and Transport Section could expect to earn between 30 and 110 shillings per month, the same rate as that received by a Regimental Sergeant Major in the KAR in Nyasaland.<sup>177</sup>

The differences in pay between soldiers in the KAR and in the support services were less marked than this during the war, but were still significant. A private in the East African Army Service Corps (EAASC) earned 60 shillings a month in

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<sup>175</sup> PRO, CO 534/41, ff. 155-57, 'Inspection Report 1919-1920. 1st King's African Rifles and Combined Depot 1st & 2nd K.A.R. Zomba', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General King's African Rifles, Zomba, 8 May 1920.

<sup>176</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland, 1927), p. 48.

<sup>177</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/3, 'Report on the Re-organization of the King's African Rifles', 1929; MNA, KAR 5/1/1, 'The re-organisation of the forces in our East African Colonies', Inspector-General, RWAFF and KAR, August 1937.

comparison to 28 in the KAR.<sup>178</sup> As in the First World War, this caused problems in recruitment, as men who were aware of the differences declined to enlist at the lower rate, and in consequence recruitment to the EAASC was deliberately carried out in different locations from that for the KAR.<sup>179</sup> Soldiers were keenly aware of such differences, as one EAASC sergeant recalled:

I was getting five pounds a month, when a sergeant in the KAR was three pounds fifty, and a company sergeant major was four pounds ten, and RSM, you know, six pounds, but me, I was at five pounds a month, and I had a lot of privileges.<sup>180</sup>

Nevertheless, reflecting the different recruitment aims which lay behind these differential rates, soldiers' pay did not increase significantly during the war, and by the late 1940s, basic pay for a private had only risen to the equivalent of 33 shillings per month.<sup>181</sup> This was still higher than wages available for manual labour in Nyasaland, but was well behind the lowest wages available for skilled workers, or labour migrants in South Africa.<sup>182</sup> Even the commanding officer of 1 KAR was struck by the 'terrible poverty' of the soldiers, noting that 'pay had not gone ahead with times at all'.<sup>183</sup> This low pay was mitigated by the possibility of extra pay for active service in Malaya which rose to 115 shillings and six pence per month.<sup>184</sup> Finally, the absorption of the Nyasaland battalions into the Central Africa Command in 1954 led to a significant improvement, as new pay rates for African soldiers were

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<sup>178</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 89.

<sup>179</sup> MNA S 33/2/2/1, f. 147, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, to Lord Moyne, Secretary of State for the Colonies [n.d., c. late 1941].

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Wilfred Chipanda, 19 February 1999.

<sup>181</sup> Rates were usually given by day in the post-war period, but here they have been calculated on the basis of a thirty day month for ease of comparison.

<sup>182</sup> In late 1945, an agricultural labourer in Nyasaland was estimated to earn 12 to 25 shillings per month; a hospital assistant could earn up to 330 shillings. A migrant mineworker in South Africa could expect a minimum of 70 to 100 shillings a month.

LB 8/2/1/171, Labour Commissioner Nyasaland, to Directorate of Education and Welfare, Nairobi, 1 December 1945; John McCracken, 'The Age of Development' (unpublished chapter, 2002), p. 28.

<sup>183</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 6185/03, Colonel H. P. Williams OBE (15 October 1979), pp. 3, 17.

<sup>184</sup> PRO, CO 537/4651/1, H. A. Bennet, War Office, to P. H. Pavey, Admiralty. 29 December 1948; MNA 1 DCKU 1/8/1, 'Notes on the King's African Rifles', May 1952, part 6.



standardised between the three territories. Following this, a private's basic pay reached 87 shillings and six pence per month, whilst a Regimental Sergeant Major's pay rose from 167 shillings and six pence to 675 shillings.<sup>185</sup>

It is also important to recognise that the potential financial rewards of military service went beyond the basic pay received by the soldier. In the 1890s, soldiers could expect to receive, according to their rank, a portion of the profits from the sale of any loot obtained during military campaigns, as well as being able to freely loot chickens and foodstuffs from captured villages.<sup>186</sup> In addition to such occasional benefits, soldiers were subject to various allowances and increments over time. Good conduct pay of one shilling per month was introduced in 1899, and by 1927 proficiency pay of between five and 12 shillings per month was available to soldiers on the basis of efficiency.<sup>187</sup> Moreover, by the early 1950s, a marriage allowance had also been introduced which could provide up to 26 shillings per month for a man with two children, and by 1962 this had reached standard rate of 60 shillings.<sup>188</sup>

The financial rewards of military service were not limited to the period of active service. From 1911, after nine-years' service soldiers from Nyasaland were

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<sup>185</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962; MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation', Army Headquarters, Salisbury, 25 June 1962.

<sup>186</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/5/1, Orders by Major C. A. Edwards Commanding the Armed Forces in the British Central Africa Protectorate, 1895.

<sup>187</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 259, 'Regulations on Re-engagement and Good Conduct Pay', 27 March 1899; Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King's African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, ca. 1908), p. 44; PRO, CO 534/41, f. 156, 'Inspection Report 1919-1920. 1st King's African Rifles and Combined Depot 1st & 2nd K.A.R. Zomba', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General King's African Rifles, Zomba, 8 May 1920.

<sup>188</sup> MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1, 'Notes on the King's African Rifles', May 1952, part 6; MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation', Army Headquarters, Salisbury, 25 June 1962.

eligible for life exemption from hut tax on one hut, as well as receiving a half remission on hut tax for the duration of their service.<sup>189</sup> Hut tax exemptions were regarded by the authorities as 'one of the chief inducements to the best type of native to enlist', and were considered to be 'highly prized by the natives'.<sup>190</sup> Indeed, the prospect of exemption from hut tax may even have acted as an inducement before 1911, as many soldiers appear to have erroneously believed that they would be exempt or would be able to avoid the tax by virtue of their position, and in 1900 several confused soldiers complained that their huts had been burned down because of non-payment.<sup>191</sup> From 1933, hut tax exemption was replaced by a system of gratuities, under which a soldier received a lump sum of 150 shillings after nine years' service or of 200 shillings after twelve years. After twelve years this was supplemented by a gratuity of between 180 to 600 shillings, which increased annually to a ceiling of between 270 to 900 shillings by eighteen years service.<sup>192</sup> However, serving soldiers now received a full exemption from hut tax in lieu of the previous half remission, and ex-soldiers could extend their exemption by enlisting in the reserve.<sup>193</sup> Soldiers who served during the Second World War were also eligible for Overseas Service Benefit of one day's pay for each month outside East Africa,

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<sup>189</sup> *The King's African Rifles Ordinance*, Section 27 (8-9); *Nyasaland Government Gazette*, 268, 31 October 1911, p. 254; MNA, S 1/1709/23/2, OC 1/1st KAR to Acting Chief Secretary Nyasaland, [n.d., 1923]; MNA, S 1/879/21, Walter Long, Downing Street, to Officer Administering the Government of the East Africa Protectorate, 14 February 1918.

<sup>190</sup> MNA, S 1/1709/23/11, Bowring, Governor of Nyasaland, to Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 March 1928; MNA, S 1/1709/23/4, Acting Governor of Nyasaland to the Duke of Devonshire, Secretary of State for the Colonies, [n.d., 1923].

<sup>191</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 360, 'Hut taxes by Askari', 15 March 1900; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 570, 'Askari Hut-tax', 16 August 1902.

<sup>192</sup> MNA, S 1/1709/23/64a, *King's African Rifles (Amendment) Ordinance*, 1932; MNA, LB 8/2/1/144, 'Long Service Gratuities', [n.d., 1945].

<sup>193</sup> MNA, S 1/240/34, f. 11, Captain Slayter, OC 2 KAR, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 27 October 1934, MNA, S 1/240/34, f. 41, 'The Native Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance', Acting Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Zomba, 29 January 1937.



and a War Gratuity of up to six shillings for each month of war service.<sup>194</sup> Following Federation, a gratuity based on one month's pay for each year of service became payable after ten years, and this was also supplemented by a pension for those serving over 20 years or reaching 50 years of age, which averaged £40 per year (66 shillings per month).<sup>195</sup>

The material rewards of military service were not only financial. The army also offered the prospect of free food, accommodation, and clothing for most of the colonial period. As will be discussed in the following chapters, such prospects could be illusory, as rations, accommodation and uniforms were often inadequate (in the years before the First World War men had to build their own huts, and in the 1890s soldiers even had to buy materials make their own fatigue uniforms).<sup>196</sup> Nevertheless, all three provisions generally improved over time, and by the early 1960s, the total value of pay, rations, clothing, quarters, and allowances together was estimated to increase the total benefits received by a private from his basic pay of 87 shillings and six pence to 302 shillings and three pence a month.<sup>197</sup>

Evidence for the importance of material incentives is not simply circumstantial. Page notes that some First World War soldiers were quite clear about their financial

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<sup>194</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/1/111, 'East Africa Command Release Instruction No. 16. Instructions for the Release of Africans', 12 June 1945, p. 17.

<sup>195</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Pensions Authorised between December 1959-January 1962', Army Headquarters, Salisbury, 25 June 1962; MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation', Army Headquarters, Salisbury, 25 June 1962.

<sup>196</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 13, 'Clothing', [n.d., 1897].

<sup>197</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation', Army Headquarters, Salisbury, 25 June 1962.

motivation to enlist, and one drew a direct parallel with labour migration.<sup>198</sup> Soldiers who served in the Second World War described their motivation in similar terms. One soldier recalled joining because he wanted to 'try shoes and socks', as well as the attraction of high wages at a time when he was living on two shillings and six pence for a whole month.<sup>199</sup> Others simply stated that they were 'poor and [...] wanted to get some money'.<sup>200</sup> More explicitly, it seems that many recruits in the 1950s enlisted for very short-term material gain, as one officer noted that 'recruits were liable to wait till they were issued with kit, sell it and disappear to their villages'.<sup>201</sup> Earlier, some may even have joined to obtain uniforms specifically so that they could abuse their authority to extort goods or money from civilians.<sup>202</sup>

However, claims to have joined the army for material gain were by no means universal. Some soldiers cited long-standing ambitions to enlist, and many make little reference to pay as their primary motivation for joining.<sup>203</sup> A purely economic explanation of enlistment cannot adequately account for the enduring success of military spectacle in attracting recruits. On a simple level, military service offered prestige in the eyes of the colonial authorities, and the army seems to have played upon this idea from the earliest days. When Yao soldiers were first enlisted in the mid-1890s, they wore a special uniform including a red turban, and it seems unlikely that this was adopted in ignorance of the significance of scarlet headbands as a

<sup>198</sup> Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 30.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with James Chigawa, 6 July 2000.

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Jauma Matola, October 2000; Interview with Alfred Mmambo, October 2000

<sup>201</sup> James Lunt, *Imperial Sunset: Frontier Soldiering in the 20th Century* (London: Macdonald, 1981), p. 234; IWM Sound Archive, 6185/03, Colonel H. P. Williams OBE (15 October 1979), p. 17.

<sup>202</sup> Lewis Mataka Bandawe, *Memoirs of a Malawian*, ed. by B. Pachai (Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 1969), pp. 63-64. See chapter five.

<sup>203</sup> Interview with Henderson Simuja, October 2000.



symbol of senior chiefly authority amongst the Yao.<sup>204</sup> Thus military service at this stage offered direct access to an important symbol of authority which would otherwise be denied. This overt appropriation of an indigenous form was short lived, but the prestige promised by such symbols certainly continued to be realised in many cases. As will be shown in chapter five, ex-soldiers were often preferred for administrative authority. Indeed, when a new administrative structure was being established on the Magomero Estate around the turn of the century, military service became a prerequisite for appointment as a chief.<sup>205</sup> The practice adopted in the late 1890s of appointing chiefs' relatives as non-commissioned officers in the army doubtless strengthened the implied connection between military service and status in wider society.<sup>206</sup> In line with these associations, Page found that some men joined in the army in the direct hope of becoming chiefs.<sup>207</sup>

Even if such high expectations were rarely fulfilled, other posts were also more likely to be open to those with military service. As will be shown in chapter five, the police force drew the majority of its recruits from ex-soldiers before the Second World War, and this association was renewed in the 1950s when the paramilitary Police Mobile Force established a new requirement for men with military experience. Former soldiers were often preferred for other uniformed jobs such as government messengers, and following the Second World War, the government actively

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<sup>204</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, f. 87, Wordsworth Poole to his mother. Zomba, 22 October 1895; Clyde Mitchell, *The Yao Village*, pp. 78, 91-95.

<sup>205</sup> Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 90.

<sup>206</sup> 'The British Central Africa Protectorate', *The Times*, 15 August 1899, p. 13.

<sup>207</sup> Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 30.

encouraged employers to give preference to ex-soldiers.<sup>208</sup> As the technical requirements of the army increased, many ex-soldiers entered civilian life as trained artisans, medical staff, clerks, signallers, and drivers, skills which were attractive to employers.<sup>209</sup> In the immediate postwar period, vacancies for skilled posts in Government service were offered to ex-soldiers in preference to those without military experience, which can only have increased the impression that military service would ensure access to prestigious employment opportunities. By 1952, the authorities clearly believed that this was a powerful incentive to enlistment, as a recruiting poster opened with a list of skills which military service could provide:

1. Learn to shoot
2. Learn how to drive a lorry
3. Learn how to operate telephones and wireless sets<sup>210</sup>

Finally, some of the financial benefits of military service outlined above, and hut tax remissions in particular, were probably valued as much for the prestige which they conferred as for their financial value.<sup>211</sup>

The status associated with military service, however, seems to have extended beyond the simple prospect of privileged access to administrative authority or employment. Military spectacle, and the use of the band in particular, does seem to have acted as a powerful incentive to enlistment. Page notes that men enlisted during the First World War recalled the draw of the smart uniforms of the band, and in particular the appeal of the military musicians to women. Some men cited the

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<sup>208</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/1/4, DC Dowa/Kasungu to PC Northern Province, Lilongwe, 31 October 1942; MNA, LB 8/2/1/64, Secretary, Native Tobacco Board, Limbe, to Labour Commissioner, Zomba, 1 July 1944.

<sup>209</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/4/92, 'Post-War Training and Employment for African Ex-servicemen in Nyasaland' [n.d., c. 1945].

<sup>210</sup> MNA, 1 DCMJ 1/10/1/16, Recruiting Poster, ca. 1952.

<sup>211</sup> MNA, S 1/1709/23/11, Bowring, Governor of Nyasaland, to Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 March 1928.



general attraction of military drill and uniforms, whilst others joined the army in the erroneous belief that they would become bandsmen; as a consequence some regarded the use of the band in recruitment as a misleading trick.<sup>212</sup> As late as the 1950s, potential recruits often expressed a preference for service in the band.<sup>213</sup>

Part of the reason for the appeal of the military spectacle probably lies in its role in wider society. Military style parades were not only used in military recruitment, but as Ranger has described, such ceremonies played an important symbolic role in the state's attempts to legitimise colonial authority, through recourse to rituals of loyalty to the crown.<sup>214</sup> Nyasaland was no exception in this respect. Parades were carried out at all levels of the administration on significant dates, such as the King's Birthday, Coronations, and Jubilees, and might include not only soldiers, but also policemen or even school children, so that the experience of parades was spread more widely than the concentration of military power in the south would suggest.<sup>215</sup>

As McCracken has noted, although it is doubtful whether most Malawians responded to the symbolism of parades in the manner intended by the authorities, some certainly recognised the functions of such symbolism. In any case, there is little doubt that such public rituals often attracted large numbers of civilian

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<sup>212</sup> Page, *The Chiyaya War*, pp. 33-35; Melvin E. Page, 'Malawians and the Great War: Oral History in Reconstructing Africa's Recent Past', *Oral History Review*, 8 (1980), 49-61 (pp. 54-55).

<sup>213</sup> MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1, Weluzani, Mungwe Village, NA Mwase, Kasungu, to OC 2 KAR, 3 January 1953; MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1/6, DC Kasungu to OC 1 KAR, 6 October 1953; MNA, 1 DCMJ 1/10/1/1, DC Mlanje to OC 2 KAR, 3 February 1953.

<sup>214</sup> Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition', pp. 229-36.

<sup>215</sup> McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy', pp. 170-71.

spectators.<sup>216</sup> The KAR band in particular offered a genuinely colourful spectacle, dressed by the early 1900s in a garish uniform of black fezzes, gold-embroidered black jackets, white shirts, red sash and yellow shorts, which led them to be nicknamed the 'Canary Birds'.<sup>217</sup> In 1911, the Governor argued that the KAR band was 'exceedingly popular with the natives and has created an impression among them which tends to be of great assistance in such matters as military recruiting'.<sup>218</sup> Thus the success of military spectacle in recruitment may be seen not only as a result of the immediate display offered by the recruiting party, but also of the more general appeal of public rituals which represented authority (and therefore prestige) within the colonial state, at the same time as providing an aesthetically pleasing display.

The development in Nyasaland of a number of dances based upon the form of military drill is indicative of the importance which was placed upon military spectacle. These dances (*Beni*, which was associated with the Yao, *Malipenga*, which developed in the Northern Province, and *Mganda*, a variation associated with the Chewa) probably all developed from the *Beni* dance, which had emerged on the coast of British and German East Africa after the 1890s. *Beni* seems to have been brought to Nyasaland after 1914 by soldiers returning from East Africa, and German *askari* prisoners-of-war.<sup>219</sup> However, many practitioners of *Malipenga* and *Mganda* believed that the strongly military character of the dances arose independently, from the direct observation of soldiers at drill during the war, and this belief in itself

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<sup>216</sup> PRO, CO 534/13, ff. 70-71, 'The European Community of Zomba' to Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Zomba, [n.d., 1911].

<sup>217</sup> Photograph provided by Dr. John McCracken; Percival, 'Five Years in British Central Africa', p. 47.

<sup>218</sup> PRO, CO 534/13, f. 63, W. H. Manning, Governor of Nyasaland, to Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Zomba, 28 October 1911.

<sup>219</sup> T. O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma* (London: Heineman, 1975).



provides a strong indication of the appeal of military spectacle.<sup>220</sup> There are certainly suggestions that Malawians may have equated military drill with dance; one Malawian working for the UMCA mission at Lungwena in 1916 referred to a military parade as 'dancing with drums and trumpets'.<sup>221</sup> Equally, the influence of direct observation of drill is also indicated by the use of British military commands which were unlikely to have been copied from German soldiers.<sup>222</sup>

The internalisation of military forms in this way, which resulted in considerable expense being incurred on smart military-style clothing and musical instruments, may have acted to provided a context in which the military rituals of recruiting efforts were understood. Indeed, it is even possible that once *Beni*, *Malipenga* and *Mganda* were established, just as men took part in labour migration to enable them to buy equipment for dances, some recruits may have joined the KAR to gain knowledge and experience of military uniforms and drill which would enhance their prestige within dance societies.<sup>223</sup> Ex-soldiers sometimes took a prominent role in early *Beni* societies, providing access to their knowledge of authentic military music and drill movements.<sup>224</sup> Unusually, whilst *Beni* was mistrusted as a parody of the colonial state in many territories, the authorities in

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<sup>220</sup> James Njoloma, *The Malawi Army: A Hundred Years Today*, (Blantyre, Blantyre Printing and Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 16-18; W. P. Koma-Koma, *M'ganda Kapena Malipenga* (Limbe: 1965), quoted in Ranger, *Dance and Society*, p. 117.

<sup>221</sup> Eustace Malisawa, Lungwena Station Notes, *Nyasaland Diocesan Chronicle*, 53 (October 1916), quoted in Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 33.

<sup>222</sup> Koma-Koma, *M'ganda*, quoted in Ranger, *Dance and Society*, p. 120.

<sup>223</sup> Koma-Koma, *M'ganda*, quoted in Ranger, *Dance and Society*, p. 118.

<sup>224</sup> Van Onselen, *Chibaro*, p. 200.

Nyasaland tolerated and even encouraged these dance forms as a possible aid to recruitment.<sup>225</sup>

It is clear that the army offered recruits the prospect of prestige as well as economic benefits, but it is equally possible that some Malawians joined the army with a genuine sense of enthusiasm for military service. In 1905, when 1 KAR were leaving Nyasaland for East Africa, the *Central African Times* noted that

The native soldiers are all very keen to get away, and their enthusiasm communicated itself to other natives on the route to Blantyre, as the officers had many applications for enlistment from natives who have been fired with a desire to go abroad.<sup>226</sup>

However, the military authorities were also concerned that the prospect of overseas service might actually be detrimental to recruitment in some cases. When 2 KAR returned to Nyasaland from Somaliland in 1905 they were disembarked in Kenya on the basis that

It was considered that, if their only experience of foreign service was in Somaliland, the soldiers would give a very bad account of that experience on their return to B.C.A., and that it would, in consequence, be most difficult ever to recruit any Battn. again for service outside B. C. Africa. On the other hand, if they had experience, even for a short time, of a country somewhat like their own, it was thought probable that they would induce others to enlist.<sup>227</sup>

Clearly, the army recognised the disparity between recruits' expectations and the reality of army life. Nevertheless, as George Shepperson has claimed, evidence such as the adoption of 'Sitima' ('Steamer') as a forename in Nyasaland is suggestive of

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<sup>225</sup> Keith Coutanche, 'The Beni Dance', *Central Africa*, 644, August 1936, pp. 157-59, quoted in Ranger, *Dance and Society*, p. 117; MNA, NCF 1/7/1/1b, 'Notes on the Beni Dance', Major F. Stephens, Chief Commissioner of Police, Zomba, 17 February 1921.

<sup>226</sup> 'King's African Rifles for British East Africa - Departure for Blantyre', *Central African Times*, 24 June 1905, p. 9.

<sup>227</sup> PRO, CO 534/2, f. 419, minute to the Secretary of the Treasury, 27 December 1905.



the real attraction to some recruits of the opportunities for travel offered by military service.<sup>228</sup>

Evidence of such prospects could be impressive. Twenty Malawian soldiers visited Britain to attend the Coronation of Edward VII in 1902, and ex-Sergeant Major Makwale of Zomba was still known for his part in this as late as the 1940s.<sup>229</sup> Soldiers from Nyasaland also attended subsequent coronations, while 35 Malawians visited London for the Victory Celebrations in 1946.<sup>230</sup> The Second World War in particular, when many soldiers served outside Africa, probably increased the perception of some potential recruits that military service would provide opportunities to broaden their experience of the world. Some Malawians served in Palestine as part of the East African Army Service Corps, and others had contact with Biblical lands during campaigns in Somaliland and Abyssinia. Soldiers serving in Palestine may have taken part in the tours of Biblical sites organised by East African chaplains.<sup>231</sup> Reports of such experiences probably appealed to Christian recruits, and as McCracken has shown, they could also prove politically valuable.<sup>232</sup> Soldiers who had served outside the country also returned with fashionable skills,

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<sup>228</sup> Shepperson, 'The Military History of British Central Africa', p. 29, PRO, CO 534/34, ff. 447-92, 'Nominal Roll of Askari entitled for 1913-1915 Star', Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for Colonies, 1 December 1919; PRO, CO 534/34, ff. 545-601, 'Roll of men of the 2nd Regiment King's African Rifles entitled to "1914-1915 Star" serving in the 1st KAR BEA', OC Depot 1st and 2nd KAR, [n.d., 1919].

<sup>229</sup> 'The Week', *Central African Times*, 11 May 1901, p. 3; IWM, 83/21/1, 'A History of the KAR: Lecture delivered by Major T. H. Birkbeck at the Goan Institute on Thursday, 18 Nov. 43'.

<sup>230</sup> IWM, 83/21/1, Major-General T. H. Birkbeck, 'KAR Christmas Cards, Programmes, Orders of Service etc.'; RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24A) III, 'Account of 22nd Bn. King's African Rifles (Nyasaland) in Action Burma (Khabaw Valley) 1944 by David Bowie (Intelligence Officer)', 1945-46.

<sup>231</sup> D. H. Barber, *Africans in Khaki* (London: Headly Brothers, 1948), pp. 96-100; 'Maneno', *Rhino Link: Newsletter of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces Officers' Dinner Club*, 8 (1996), p. 22.

<sup>232</sup> John McCracken, 'Conservation and Resistance in Colonial Malawi: the "Dead North" Revisited', (unpublished paper presented at a conference on African Environments Past and Present, St. Antony's College, Oxford, July 1999), p. 16.

such as the ability to play the guitar, and in 1943 N.A. Kyungu claimed that the very presence of a gramophone at a display by the Mobile Propaganda Unit 'made some young men to join the army'.<sup>233</sup>

Of course, service outside Nyasaland not only implied the appeal of travel and unusual experiences, but might also entail first hand experience of combat. In the inter-war years, Malawians joining the colonial army could reasonably expect to see little military action, but at other times there was a strong likelihood of active service. Whilst it is hard to see this as a particularly appealing aspect of service, the military authorities certainly hoped that it might be made so. As noted above, during the Second World War recruiters berating chiefs for low rates of enlistment overtly tried to draw parallels between military service and an idea of 'manliness' associated with pre-colonial warrior status. Similarly, as Parsons has noted, post-war recruiters entreated Malawians to 'Join the KAR and Lead a Man's Life'.<sup>234</sup>

It is questionable whether many Malawians who joined the KAR did so on the basis of a direct analogy between the idea of military service and pre-colonial warrior status. However, there is evidence for an association between military service and masculinity. Some ex-soldiers from the First World War made claims such as 'We joined the war because we were men', or 'I was ready to die [...] I wanted to test my

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<sup>233</sup> MNA, NNK 1/10/1, f. 11, North Nyasa District Newsletter to troops, July 1943; MNA, NNK 1/10/1, f. 19, North Nyasa District Newsletter to troops, August 1943; NNK 1/10/1, f. 180, 'December 1944: North Nyasa District: News for the Troops'; Interview with Black Paseli by Mitch Strumpf, Zomba, November 1989; Ranger, *Dance and Society*, p. 142.

<sup>234</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 149; MNA, 1 DCMJ 1/10/1/16, Recruiting Poster, ca. 1952.



manhood'.<sup>235</sup> The idea that soldiering was an appropriate occupation for a man was probably strengthened during wartime, as many First World War recruits genuinely wished to prevent the possibility of defeat by the Germans.<sup>236</sup> Such anti-German sentiment could certainly have an effect which was conducive to enlistment, and in 1918 a missionary noted school children singing repeatedly 'We can go and fight the Germans, Let us go! Let us go!'<sup>237</sup>

Although the Second World War posed less of an immediate threat to Malawians, similar sentiments seem to have been held by some recruits, and a number insisted that they had joined the army 'to protect [their] country'.<sup>238</sup> However, as in the First World War, there were also indications that some men joined simply because of an attraction to the idea of war. G. N. Burden, the officer in charge of recruitment in Nyasaland, paraphrased a 'rousing speech' made in 1940 by an NA who was a First World War veteran, describing his experiences in the army in graphic terms: "when you come to battle, how exciting it is - I know; I worked a machine-gun in the last war and men fell in swathes before the spray of bullets". Burden noted that 'Everybody was clapping and every attention was given to this speech', and claimed that about 50 men enlisted as a direct result.<sup>239</sup> Reflecting the assumptions behind this, Wilfred Chipanda (a clerk in the EAASC) was keen to emphasise his desire to serve in a combat role: 'I was very inquisitive for going [to] war. They said "no, no, no, no, there is no need, we cannot fight war without people

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<sup>235</sup> Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 29.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> 'Mr. Baird's Report', *Life and Work in Nyasaland*, 1918, 1 (January-March 1918), p. 11.

<sup>238</sup> Interview with Joseph Kalilombe, October 2000; Interview with Seckson Philip Nkhoswe, October 2000; Interview with Ordnance Zulani, October 2000.

<sup>239</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1454, G. N. Burden, pp. 11-12. I am grateful to Andrew Fairweather-Tall for this reference.

in the rear” [...] Now then, I listened to that attentively’.<sup>240</sup> Other Malawians serving in Kenya in 1940 made exaggerated claims of their achievements in their letters home, such as “I am in England fighting the Germans who are being greatly harassed by the British Empire”, or “We have captured the King of the Germans”, again suggesting that part of their motivation in enlisting had been to ‘prove’ themselves.<sup>241</sup>

It is harder to say whether many peacetime recruits were motivated by a desire to prove their masculinity (as opposed to a desire for adventure as suggested above). However, it seems probable that those recruits who were already well-acquainted with military life, and especially the sons of serving or ex-soldiers, did regard soldiering as an appropriate male occupation. As noted above, the army became increasingly dependent upon soldiers’ sons as a source of manpower towards the end of the colonial period, and some families certainly had long standing associations with military service.<sup>242</sup> The seriousness of some recruits’ attachment to the idea of soldiering is also suggested by the adoption of militarily themed names such as ‘Lipenga’ (‘Bugle’), ‘Captain’, ‘Kannon’, or ‘March’; one officer even recalled a recruit who wished to be named after a complete drill command.<sup>243</sup> Whilst such choices could be seen simply as a means of enhancing a recruit’s appeal to the

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<sup>240</sup> Interview with Wilfred Chipanda, 19 February 1999.

<sup>241</sup> S 33/2/1/1, f. 29, K. L. Hall, Acting Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 March 1940.

<sup>242</sup> James Chigawa’s grandson is the fifth generation of his family to serve in the Nyasaland/Malawi armed forces. Interview with James Chigawa, 6 July 2000.

<sup>243</sup> PRO, CO 534/34, ff. 447-92, ‘Nominal Roll of Askari entitled for 1913-1915 Star’, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for Colonies, 1 December 1919; PRO, CO 534/34, ff. 545-601, ‘Roll of men of the 2nd Regiment King’s African Rifles entitled to “1914-1915 Star” serving in the 1st KAR BEA’, OC Depot 1st and 2nd KAR [n.d., 1919]; NAM, 6505-16/1, ‘Nominal Roll and Diary of No.9 Platoon, No.3 Coy. 2/2nd. K.A.R.’ [n.d., 1916?]; IWM Sound Archive, 3960/05 Colonel R. E. S. Yeldham CBE (3 November 1978), p. 9.



authorities, it seems unlikely that anyone would choose to be known by such a name for eighteen years or more unless he had some genuine attraction to the idea of being a soldier. It was probably precisely because soldiers' sons joined the army for reasons which went beyond simple economics that they remained a dependable source of recruits when other sources became less reliable.

To outline the range of motivations behind African enlistment is not to deny the enduring importance of the economic impulse. The consistent failure of the authorities to persuade northerners in general, and Tongas in particular, to enlist is best explained by the attraction of the superior wages available to those who were willing and able to take part in labour migration to the South. However, to explain recruitment patterns throughout Nyasaland by the availability of labour migration in the North and the absence of that option in Southern Nyasaland is a simplification which reiterates the enduring colonial emphasis on northern recruitment. Because the military authorities were eager to obtain Tonga and Ngoni recruits, in an effort to ensure ethnic 'balance', they sought to explain why men from these groups would not enlist. At the same time, the ready availability of recruits in the South meant that there was little need for the authorities to explain why southerners did enlist.

On one level, the army's emphasis on Tonga enlistment is misleading. The 1945 census classified less than 2.5 per cent of the population as Tongas, whilst the various southern groups which had become acceptable recruits by the eve of the

Second World War accounted for almost 50 per cent.<sup>244</sup> Thus the army's pre-war ideal that one quarter of the army should be comprised of Tongas would have entailed the Tonga being vastly over-represented. Even during the First World War, over a decade after competition from the mines for Tonga recruits had first been identified as a problem, statistics showed that there were far more Tongas in uniform per head of population than any other group.<sup>245</sup> In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that Tongas' privileged access to labour migration should have had a dramatic impact upon enlistment. Equally, whilst official recognition of the complex ethnography of southern Nyasaland meant that Nyanja speakers in the south could enlist as Yaos or 'Yao and Kindred', it is possible that non-Tongas in the north were unable to pass themselves off as Tongas in a similar way.

Finally, it is important to note the qualitative difference between military service and labour migration. Whilst the latter necessarily entailed periods away from home, for southern Malawians, service in the KAR in peacetime meant that they could expect to spend half of their service in Zomba. Therefore, whilst they received lower pay than labour migrants, they did so on terms which were less socially disruptive. By contrast, with the withdrawal of military posts in the North before the First World War, northerners who joined the army would be unlikely to be stationed near to their homes, making military service much more analogous to labour migration. Similarly, as military service was increasingly established the south, the extra financial benefits of military service, and the prestige accorded to those in uniform would have been much more readily recognised by southern

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<sup>244</sup> Hailey, *Native Administration*, p. 24.

<sup>245</sup> PRO, CO 525/82, f. 64, Hector Duff, Acting Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, January 1919



Malawians than by those in the North, whose only contact with the army was usually in the form of flag marches or recruitment *ulendos*.

## Chapter 3

### **Military Structure and Routine in Colonial Nyasaland**

Most Western military institutions share common structural features, such as a rigid hierarchy and organisation in which each member's function is identified, a uniform symbolising both the subtleties of the hierarchy and the greater military identity, and are run according to tightly regulated timetables. As Foucault has demonstrated, military bodies have much in common with other western institutions, such as the school, the factory, and the prison. As such, few recruits to the British army since the nineteenth century would have recognised none of the methodologies employed upon them. However, the effect of entry into such a 'total institution' upon a rural Malawian at the turn of the century can only be imagined. This chapter seeks to examine the impact of daily military life upon Malawian soldiers, and the implications of this for their attitudes towards military identity.

#### The Military Hierarchy

The hierarchies of colonial armies like the KAR were distinct from those of the metropolitan army in one obvious respect. Whilst officers and other ranks in the British army were generally distinguished by class, the structures of colonial armies were overtly based on ethnicity. This observation is not new, of course, but, save for a recognition of the 'Africanisation' of officers towards the end of the colonial period, few studies have acknowledged the more subtle changes in the structure of the hierarchy in colonial armies throughout this period. This section aims to examine the changes in the nature of the military hierarchy in the colonial army in Nyasaland,



and to examine the way in which the changing structure of the hierarchy affected the experience of the Malawians who became soldiers.

### *European Ranks*

The proportion of European officers was low in the early 1890s. Initially, the armed forces had only one officer, an Indian Army Captain, who had accompanied the first Indian contingent as its commander. He was officially supplemented by a 'Commandant of Constabulary', who was a Captain seconded from the Royal Engineers, but in practice this officer's role was mainly confined to engineering tasks.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting the central role of the Indian contingent, subsequent officers were also drawn from India, and by 1894 the force had three officers; a Major and Captain from the Indian Army, and a Lieutenant obtained locally from the Bechuanaland Border Police.<sup>2</sup> It was only with the reorganisation of the Nyasaland forces as a battalion in 1896 that the number of officers was significantly expanded to include a British Army officer in command of each of the six new African companies.<sup>3</sup> However, Indian Army officers remained in control, as the three officers of the Indian contingent were to act as Commandant, Staff Officer, and Quartermaster of the reorganised force.<sup>4</sup> Indian army officers gradually passed control to British officers, as a British Army officer was appointed to the command of the new 2nd

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<sup>1</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Papers Relative to the Suppression of Slave-Raiding in Nyassaland*, Africa No.5, 1892, Cmd. 6699, pp.2-3; PRO, FO 84/2114, ff. 19-20, H. H. Johnston, Commissioner and Consul General, to the Marquis of Salisbury, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 10 March 1891.

<sup>2</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, Africa No.6, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> PRO FO 2/106, f. 248, 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards,' 3 April 1896; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 3, 'Arrival of Officers', November 1896; NAM 6706-64-66, Force Order 4, 'Appointments to Command of Companies', November 1896.

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Annual Report on the British Central Africa Protectorate for the Year 1897-98*, Africa No.9, 1898, Cmd. 9048, p. 16.

Battalion in 1899, and in 1902 the commander of the Indian contingent officially became subordinate to the Commandant of 1 KAR.<sup>5</sup> With this exception, however, this structure largely remained in place until the First World War.

Before 1914, the British and Indian armies were mainly officered by the sons of the aristocracy and gentry, military families, the clergy and the professions. As a consequence, such men naturally supplied the majority of officers serving in Nyasaland.<sup>6</sup> African colonial forces were seen by some as a repository for 'regimental rejects',<sup>7</sup> a situation which Parsons stresses was reproduced throughout the history of the KAR. However, there is little to suggest that this was generally the case amongst the officers of the early forces in Nyasaland. Early officers included H. Coape Smith, a former Aide de Camp to the Viceroy of India; Guy de Herries Smith, a nephew of Lord Wolseley; Edward Alston, a godson of Queen Victoria; and Baron Louis von Guttenburg, an Austrian aristocrat. Several officers were also drawn from prestigious regiments such as the Grenadier and Coldstream Guards, the Royal Marine Light Infantry, the Rifle Brigade, and the Sikh Regiments of the Indian Army.<sup>8</sup> It is important to note, however, that as George Shepperson has pointed out, in the early 1890s the armed forces 'included any [European] person who carried and

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<sup>5</sup> Hubert Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1956), p. 27; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 542, 'Command Troops', 17 April 1902.

<sup>6</sup> Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 90-100.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Meinertzhagen, *Kenya Diary 1902-1906* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), pp. 8-10.

<sup>8</sup> MNA, Wordsworth Poole to Francis Poole, Zomba, 8 January 1896; MNA, Note in Catalogue of Alston Papers, made available by Dr. K. J. McCracken; MNA AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston 2 August 1895; *British Central Africa Gazette*, 2, 7, 1 June 1895; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 3, 'Arrival of Officers' [October? 1896]. For the reputation of Sikh Regiments of the Indian Army, see David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1994).



was prepared to use a gun'.<sup>9</sup> Formally appointed officers were often supplemented by 'Volunteer Officers', who were usually former soldiers resident in the Protectorate or civilian Administrators, but might be drawn from any interested members of the European community.<sup>10</sup> In addition, European Naval personnel from Lake Nyasa often served as artillery officers in operations on land. This meant that in 1893, when the armed forces had an official establishment of only three officers, a military expedition could actually include nine European officers as well as thirty-two other Europeans.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, at least until the structure of the army was formalised in 1896, the body of Europeans acting as officers was relatively heterogeneous.

Officers' motivation in applying for service with the Nyasaland forces is clearly an important factor in understanding their relations to each other and to their African subordinates. As with African soldiers, there were strong financial motivations for service in Nyasaland. In the late 1890s, a subaltern in a British regiment, whose pay started at £100 per annum, could expect to receive between £300 and £600 as a company commander in the BCA Rifles.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, the cost of living was low, and as a result, early officers included both a notorious debtor, and an 'ex-ranker', Captain Elwell, who could not afford to live in his

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<sup>9</sup> George Shepperson, 'The Military History of British Central Africa', *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal: Human Problems in British Central Africa*, 26 (1959), 23-33 (p. 26).

<sup>10</sup> PRO, FO 2/106, f. 11, Major Edwards to Commissioner Johnston, Zomba Camp, 1 January 1896.

<sup>11</sup> PRO, FO 2/54, f. 102, Commissioner Johnston to the Earl of Roseberry, 29 May 1893.

<sup>12</sup> Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 105; PRO, FO 2/106, f. 246, H. H. Johnston, 'Revised Estimate for Expenditure on Armed Forces in British Central Africa Protectorate, 1896-97', April 3 1896.

prestigious and costly regiment.<sup>13</sup> As late as 1937, a subaltern could expect to double his salary by serving in Nyasaland, and this remained an important incentive.<sup>14</sup> Service in Nyasaland also offered advantages to an officer's military career. In the 1890s, there was a strong likelihood of seeing active service and qualifying for the rare Central African medal, a great inducement to officers whose regiments were stationed in Britain and who wished to prove themselves.<sup>15</sup> Officers were also routinely given higher 'local' ranks and greater responsibilities than they would have had in their British regiments, an advantage which was clearly advertised by men such as C. A. Edwards, who arrived in Nyasaland as a Lieutenant in 1895, and died two years later as the youngest Lieutenant-Colonel in the Army.<sup>16</sup> The attraction of increased responsibilities was still an important incentive in the 1930s.<sup>17</sup> Finally, given the importance which was placed upon field sports in the social and professional ethos of the British Army, it is important to note that the opportunities for big game hunting also acted as a powerful draw for many. Indeed, an officer such as C. H. Stigand might spend the majority of his Nyasaland service engaged in

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<sup>13</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, f. 106, Wordsworth Poole to Francis Garden Poole, Zomba, 8 January 1896; Note in Catalogue of Alston Papers, MNA, made available by Dr. K. J. McCracken; PRO, CO 534/5, f. 11, Captain P. Elwell, 2 KAR, to Adjutant, 2 KAR, Zomba, 16 February 1907.

<sup>14</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 3, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?]; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (59), f. 6, 'The Role of British Forces in Africa: Serving Officer: Major F. G. Crozier' [1980?].

<sup>15</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, f. 81, Wordsworth Poole to his mother, Zomba, 15 October 1895; Ian F. W. Beckett, *Johnnie Gough, V.C.: A Biography of Sir John Edmund Gough, V.C., K.C.B., C.M.G.* (London: Tom Donovan, 1989), pp. 14-31.

<sup>16</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, f. 106, Wordsworth Poole to Francis Garden Poole, Zomba, 8 January 1896; MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, f. 25, Wordsworth Poole to his mother, Zomba, 14 June 1895; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 1, 'Appointment' [February 1895]; PRO, FO 2/67, f. 62, Commissioner H. H. Johnston to the Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 18 July 1894; MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, ff. 222-23, Wordsworth Poole to his Aunt Mary, Zomba, 20 May 1897.

<sup>17</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 3, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].



sports.<sup>18</sup> Game shooting continued to play an important role in military life in Nyasaland throughout the colonial period.<sup>19</sup>

Whilst military officers were a relatively well-defined group from the mid-1890s, a more ambiguous category of European soldier was gradually introduced into the armed forces. Three British non-commissioned officers (BNCOs)<sup>20</sup> from the Royal Engineers had been present in Nyasaland from 1891, but their official roles were limited to engineering, and any military functions were essentially performed as 'volunteer officers'. From 1896, the armed forces included a European 'Sergeant Major of Artillery and Transport Officer', who was responsible for the artillerymen and porters, but it was soon felt that these duties could be dealt with by the existing European officers, and the new Sergeant-Major was transferred from the armed forces in January 1897.<sup>21</sup> However, the establishment of the new 2nd Battalion in 1898 included a British Sergeant-Major, whose responsibilities for the administration and training of the African Ranks were much more clearly defined and differentiated

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<sup>18</sup> Captain C. H. Stigand, *Hunting the Elephant in Africa and Other Recollections of Thirteen Years' Wanderings* (New York: Macmillan, 1913; repr. Bulawayo: Books of Zimbabwe, 1989); 'The Week', *Central African Times*, 1 February 1902, p. 3; MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, f. 106, Wordsworth Poole to Francis Garden Poole, Zomba, 8 January 1896.

<sup>19</sup> Francis De Guingand, *African Assignment* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1953), pp. 42-49, 79; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 12, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass; 'Battalion Notes', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 1 (1956), p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> The term 'British' was used to identify European NCOs, and did not necessarily indicate that they were seconded from the British Army. The term 'non-commissioned officer' strictly refers to ranks from Lance-Corporal to Staff-Sergeant, with the higher non-commissioned ranks falling into the category of 'Warrant Officer'. However, the term 'NCO' may be taken to refer to both categories in this work, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>21</sup> PRO, FO 2/106, f. 246, 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards,' 3 April 1896; PRO, FO 2/89, f. 250, Commissioner Johnston to Lord Salisbury, Zomba, 2 October 1895; PRO, FO 2/106, f. 11, Major C. A. Edwards to Commissioner Johnston, Zomba Camp, 1 January 1896; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 34, 'Sergt. Major P. Devoy appt. to Civil Dept.', January 1897.

from the duties of the European officers.<sup>22</sup> The status of the Sergeant-Major was ambiguous, as he was to be saluted by the African ranks, a privilege reserved to commissioned officers in the British Army.<sup>23</sup> But whilst the requirements of European prestige meant that African ranks were encouraged to regard the Sergeant-Major as akin to an officer, he was nevertheless excluded from the social life of the Officers' Mess, thus making his position unusually isolated. The Sergeant-Major, seconded from the British Army for a tour of two years, remained the only BNCO in the Nyasaland battalions before the First World War.<sup>24</sup>

The expansion of the KAR during the First World War, and especially after 1916, naturally involved an increase in the number of European officers and NCOs serving with Nyasaland's forces. During the course of the war, the number of officers per company was increased from one in 1914 to six per double company by the end of 1916.<sup>25</sup> As a result, whilst ten officers were serving with 1 KAR in 1914, a total of 273 had served with the regiment by the end of the war. Significantly, whilst the majority of these officers were still drawn from the British Army, 20 were obtained from the Rhodesian forces, 23 from the South African Defence Force, and 34 were recruited locally from Europeans resident in Nyasaland, including members of the Nyasaland Volunteer Reserve. The situation in 2 KAR was similar, although being stationed in East Africa locally obtained officers were drawn from the

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<sup>22</sup> 'The BCA Rifles in Mauritius', *Central African Times*, (Reproduced from *The Times*), 14 April 1900, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King's African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, [1908(?)]), p. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Great Britain, *Regulations for the King's African Rifles*, (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1908), p. 43; PRO, CO 534/18, f. 174, 'Nyasaland Intelligence report No. 29. Quarter ending March 31st 1914'.

<sup>25</sup> PRO, CO 534/21, f. 52, General Smuts to War Office, 14 March 1916.



European residents of Kenya, especially those serving in the East Africa Mounted Rifles.<sup>26</sup>

The proportion of BNCOs did not increase significantly during the first years of the war, although a Quartermaster Sergeant and Orderly Room Sergeant had been added to each battalion by 1916.<sup>27</sup> However, from 1917 this position changed dramatically, as a BNCO was allocated to each company and platoon, and to each machine gun.<sup>28</sup> Thus, by the end of the war, one battalion alone had seven British Sergeants, 27 Platoon Sergeants, two Company Sergeant-Majors, and two Company Quartermaster Sergeants, in addition to the three battalion BNCOs.<sup>29</sup> Like earlier BNCOs, these men were partly intended to relieve officers of onerous administrative and training duties, for which it was felt African NCOs (ANCOs) lacked the required standard of education. However, as the authorities had acknowledged, it was inevitable that such large numbers of BNCOs would appear to displace existing ANCOs, and indeed, they were clearly intended to do so. The authorities' insistence that it was 'essential [...] to have a European in charge of each [machine] gun' openly suggested a lack of confidence in the reliability of African soldiers.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> PRO, CO 525/82, f. 63, '1st King's African Rifles: European Contribution', Hector Duff, Acting Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies; CO 534/20, f. 316, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 21 September 1916.

<sup>27</sup> PRO, CO 534/20, ff. 174-181, King's African Rifles Estimates 1916-1917.  
<sup>28</sup> PRO, CO 534/25, f. 39, 'King's African Rifles: Conditions of Service for British Warrant and Non-Commissioned Officers', August 1917.

<sup>29</sup> PRO, CO 534/28, f. 6, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 6 May 1918.

<sup>30</sup> PRO, CO 534/21, f. 374, Appendix G, C-in-C East Africa Force to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 June 1916.

Unlike the broad range of sources from which officers were obtained during the war, BNCOs continued to be drawn almost exclusively from the British Army.<sup>31</sup> However, whilst the military authorities in East Africa wanted their BNCOs to be taken from the elite of the infantry, the Brigade of Guards, in practice the majority of new BNCOs brought in from 1917 were from the pre-war part-time units of the Territorial Force.<sup>32</sup> More significantly, Europeans ranking as low as Private were seconded to the KAR, automatically being promoted to Sergeant, and receiving all the privileges of that rank in the KAR, including the right to be saluted by African ranks. Although the proportion of junior BNCOs serving as Sergeants in the KAR was low, the subordination of the most senior ANCO to a British Private clearly suggested the extent to which ANCOs had been superseded by Europeans during the war.<sup>33</sup>

The reduced post-war KAR initially maintained a higher proportion of officers than it had in 1914, with four to each company in addition to the regimental staff. Whilst platoon BNCOs were discontinued, five BNCOs were maintained on the regimental staff, as well as a Sergeant-Major for each company.<sup>34</sup> However, the Administrator of Tanganyika (garrisoned by Nyasaland forces) argued that BNCOs were 'unnecessary, and in many respects undesirable', as they damaged 'the evolution of the capable native Non-Commissioned Officer with a sense of

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<sup>31</sup> PRO, CO 525/82, f. 63, '1st King's African Rifles: European Contribution', Hector Duff, Acting Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 27 January 1919.

<sup>32</sup> PRO, CO 534/21, f. 353, C-in-C East Africa Force to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 25 June 1916; PRO, CO 534/28, f. 6, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 6 May 1918.

<sup>33</sup> PRO, CO 534/22, f. 327, Acting Governor, East Africa Protectorate, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22 December 1917; PRO, CO 534/25, f. 6, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Officer Administering the Government of the East Africa Protectorate, 8 January 1918; PRO, CO 534/28, f. 6, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 6 May 1918.

<sup>34</sup> PRO, CO 534/31, f. 193, Commandant, KAR, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 May 1919.



responsibility'.<sup>35</sup> In line with this, by 1923, BNCOs had been limited once more to three positions on the regimental staff, although, perhaps to compensate, the number of officers had officially increased to six per company.<sup>36</sup> European officers and BNCOs were again obtained exclusively from the regular British Army, socially unchanged from the pre-war period. With the exception of the reductions in the strengths of 1 and 2 KAR, this situation prevailed for the remainder of the inter-war period, so that in 1937 both battalions had an establishment of 12 officers and just one or two BNCOs.<sup>37</sup>

Probably reflecting the use of 'colonial' officers in the KAR during the First World War, by the mid-1930s, the European-manned Kenya Territorial Regiment was 'primarily organised for the production of officers and non-commissioned officers' who could be used for the expansion of the KAR in the event of war.<sup>38</sup> The relatively small European population made such an arrangement impracticable in Nyasaland, but a Reserve of Officers was established to train local Europeans for possible service with the KAR.<sup>39</sup> This arrangement was placed on a more formal footing in 1939, when an Officer Training Unit was set up in Zomba to select

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<sup>35</sup> PRO, CO 534/40, f. 35, Administrator of Tanganyika to Secretary of State for the Colonies. Dar-es-Salaam, 24 April 1920.

<sup>36</sup> In 1923, these were Regimental Sergeant-Major, Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant, and Orderly Room Sergeant. PRO CO 534/54, ff. 389, 392, 'Inspection Report 1923-24, 2nd Battalion King's African Rifles'.

<sup>37</sup> PRO, CO 820/25/9, 'Annual Report on the 1st Battalion, The King's African Rifles covering the period from 31st December, 1935 to 31st December, 1936', by Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, 29 January 1937; PRO, CO 820/25/9, 'Annual Report on the 2nd Battalion, The King's African Rifles covering the period from 1st January 1936 to 31st August, 1936', by Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, 6 October 1936.

<sup>38</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/1, 'Memorandum by the Inspector-General, Royal West African Frontier Force and King's African Rifles. The re-organisation of the forces in our East African Colonies', August 1937, p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> MNA, S 2/6/35, f. 1, OC Southern Brigade KAR to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 13 June 1935.

European Officers and BNCOs from a field of 35 applicants.<sup>40</sup> The Officer Training Unit was suspended following the outbreak of war, but six men who had taken the course were granted commissions in the KAR, and a further nine were enlisted as BNCOs.<sup>41</sup> Nyasaland Europeans were subsequently sent to the Kenya Regiment for training, and by the end of 1942, 219 had joined, most serving with Nyasaland troops.<sup>42</sup> Further officers for the Nyasaland battalions were again supplied from the larger European populations of Rhodesia, South Africa, and Kenya.<sup>43</sup>

As in the First World War, the proportion of BNCOs in KAR battalions was radically increased with appointment of European Platoon Sergeants, Company Sergeant-Majors and Quartermaster Sergeants, as well as Mortar Sergeants and other specialists (although by 1944 Platoon Sergeants had been discontinued).<sup>44</sup> In a striking change from previous policy, BNCOs were initially obtained - like the new - officers from East African 'colonials'.<sup>45</sup> Regular KAR officers in Nyasaland feared that men selected to become BNCOs rather than officers would resent 'finding oneself of a lower social grade in the military to one's equal in private life'.<sup>46</sup> In fact, whilst the formal distinction between officers and BNCOs remained intact, the

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<sup>40</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/2, Officer Training Unit Camp Report, 1939.

<sup>41</sup> MNA, S 33/2/1/1, f. 26, Acting Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 March 1940.

<sup>42</sup> MNA, S 33/2/2/1/1, E. C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 27 January 1943, p. 20.

<sup>43</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24 A), f. 95, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie, 1981; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (8), f. 9, Patrick William George Barnes [1980?]; James Lunt, *Imperial Sunset: Frontier Soldiering in the 20th Century* (London: Macdonald, 1981), p. 232.

<sup>44</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (154), ff. 16-17, 'Memorandum from R. W. Kettlewell concerning the role of British forces in Africa', 20 July 1979; PRO, WO 169/2994, 'Field Return British O.R.s and African and Asian O.R.s', 24 May 1941; PRO, WO 172/6529, '1st (NY) Bn KAR Movement Order No.5' [November 1944]; PRO, WO 172/9477, 'Field Return - Other Ranks' March 1945.

<sup>45</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24 A), f. 95, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie, 1981.

<sup>46</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/2, Officer Training Unit Camp Report, 1939.



established social differentiation between the two groups was blurred, as their shared origins meant that some felt that there were 'no social barriers between the different European ranks'. As a result, combined officers' and BNCOs' messes were created, in which forenames were used by all ranks.<sup>47</sup> This situation had an effect on the formal military hierarchy, as many colonial BNCOs quickly 'thought of themselves as sub-officers and not as other ranks', an idea which was reinforced by access to officers' perquisites such as 'Personal Servants', who were paid and uniformed privately by BNCOs before 1945.<sup>48</sup> This situation was disrupted with the arrival of increasing numbers of British (or Imperial') BNCOs as the war progressed. Officers' and BNCOs' messes were again separated, and tensions developed as some colonials felt that Imperial BNCOs were unable to adapt to their 'quasi officer' status.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, although the KAR had been overwhelmingly officered from the British Army before the war, some colonial officers felt disdain for the Imperial officers' lack of knowledge and understanding of African soldiers.<sup>50</sup>

The post-war KAR again returned to a policy of obtaining officers and BNCOs from the British Army. However, whilst pre-war officers had all been drawn from the regular army, around a third of post war needs were met from National Service

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<sup>47</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24 A) II, f. 95, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie, 1981.

<sup>48</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24 A) II, f. 95, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie, 1981; PRO, WO 169/758, 'Battalion Orders by Lieutenant-Colonel T. A. Dillon, Commanding 1st Battalion, King's African Rifles', Isiolo, 14 November 1939; PRO, WO 172/9477 'Field Return - Other Ranks', March 1945.

<sup>49</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24 A) II, ff. 55, 95, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie, 1981.

<sup>50</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (154), f. 13, 'Memorandum from R. W. Kettlewell concerning the role of British forces in Africa', 20 July 1979.

officers who served with the KAR for shorter periods.<sup>51</sup> Probably reflecting the increasingly technical nature of the KAR, the proportion of BNCOs also remained higher than before the war, with sixteen per battalion in the early 1950s, in addition to five or six attached personnel from the East African Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and Signals.<sup>52</sup>

Federation with the Rhodesias brought a major change in the source from which officers and BNCOs were obtained. With the creation of the new Central Africa Command, all new officers and BNCOs in the Federal Army were to be supplied locally from the Rhodesia and Nyasaland Staff Corps (RNSC), which was largely composed of Europeans from Southern Rhodesia.<sup>53</sup> In addition, those BNCOs attached to the Nyasaland battalions from East African support units were to be replaced by Federal personnel 'as soon as possible'.<sup>54</sup> Possibly reflecting the fears of the British Army officers of the KAR, who felt that the RNSC was 'very much in its infancy' with officers who were still 'learning their job',<sup>55</sup> Rhodesian officials recommended that 'the first federal officers posted to those forces should not hold higher rank than that of subaltern'.<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, the existing officers of 1 and 2 KAR resented the change. By 1956, the commanding officer of 1 KAR lamented, 'I cannot help feeling both this Battalion and 2 KAR are getting more and

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<sup>51</sup> '1 KAR Newsletter No. 4 from Malaya. Aug/Sep 1952', *Lipenga: Journal of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, 1, 3 (1953), p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/253/1/SEC/G(int), 'Details of East African Troops stationed in Rhodesia and Nyasaland and of commitment in Malaya 1953' [n.d.].

<sup>53</sup> IWM, 83/21/1/143, Lieutenant Colonel G. Dauncey, OC 1 KAR, Zomba, to Brigadier T. H. Birkbeck, 8 February 1956.

<sup>54</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/253/1/SEC/G(int), 'Details of East African Troops stationed in Rhodesia and Nyasaland and of commitment in Malaya 1953' [n.d.].

<sup>55</sup> IWM, 83/21/1/143, Lieutenant Colonel G. Dauncey, OC 1 KAR, Zomba, to Brigadier T. H. Birkbeck, 8 February 1956.

<sup>56</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/253/1/SEC/G(int), 'Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland: Report by a Conference held at Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia in August, 1953' [n.d.].



more divorced from the KENYA Battalions',<sup>57</sup> whilst the commander of 2 KAR more explicitly complained, 'we are rapidly being Federalised, and I doubt if I shall see any more British ranks come here from UK'.<sup>58</sup> British commanding officers made deliberate efforts to persuade existing BNCOs from the British Army to extend their KAR service, but by 1957 officers and BNCOs of all ranks were being obtained from the Federation. By 1958 no British Army personnel remained, although some existing officers and BNCOs transferred to the RNSC in order to stay in the KAR.<sup>59</sup>

The impetus to keep the Nyasaland battalions under the control of Federal officers was probably sustained from the early 1960s by Federal anxieties that a declaration of independence by the Federation might lead to military intervention by Britain. In this situation, it was feared that ex-British Army personnel would have divided loyalties, and would therefore 'have to be relieved of their posts beforehand on some pretext or other'.<sup>60</sup> However, once it was clear that the Federation was going to break up, the authorities assumed that Federal personnel 'who see a future in Southern Rhodesia' would no longer be willing to serve in the KAR, in contrast to ex-British army personnel who were 'willing serve with whoever is prepared to pay the best price until such time as their services are dispensed with'.<sup>61</sup> In consequence, few new European officers were appointed.

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<sup>57</sup> IWM, 83/21/1/177, Lieutenant-Colonel G. Dauncey, OC 1 KAR, Zomba, to Brigadier T. H. Birkbeck, HQ 70 (EA) Infantry Brigade, Nyeri, Kenya, 3 September 1956.

<sup>58</sup> IWM, 83/21/1/175, Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. Conroy, OC 2 KAR, Llewellyn Barracks, Southern Rhodesia, to Brigadier T. H. Birkbeck, HQ 70 (EA) Infantry Brigade, Nyeri, Kenya, 3 August 1956.

<sup>59</sup> 'Battalion Notes', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 2 (1957), pp. 4, 7, 8; 'Battalion Notes', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 3 (1957), pp. 7, 8; 'Battalion Notes', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 5 (1958), pp. 4, 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/C/G(ops)/5, Brigadier C. M. Grigg, OC Northern Rhodesia District, to Chief of Staff, Army of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Lusaka, 29 September 1961.

<sup>61</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NR/5, 'Intelligence Summary, Northern Rhodesia', Captain N. R. Taylor, Military Intelligence Officer, Northern Rhodesia Area, to Director of Military Intelligence, HQ CAC,

### *African Ranks*

In the early 1890s, African soldiers were generally restricted to the lowest ranks, and in 1894, Johnston noted that even the Swahili and Makua regulars who had been specially enlisted were 'seldom of higher rank than that of corporal'.<sup>62</sup> Instead, early non-commissioned officers were drawn almost exclusively from the Sikh soldiers of the Indian contingent. This partly reflected Johnston's wider ambition that Indian 'traders and agriculturalists' would perform a crucial economic role in Nyasaland by occupying 'a middle place [...] between the two extremes' of black and white'.<sup>63</sup> In line with this concept, the experienced Sikh soldiers were regarded as providing 'a nucleus without which it would be very difficult to train and discipline a useful native force'.<sup>64</sup> However, the use of Sikh NCOs equally reflected the key question of the reliability of African soldiers. Johnston felt that whilst 'Indian troops [...] are to all intents and purposes as good as English soldiers [...] Even the best of negroes as soldiers are unreliable'.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Commissioner Sharpe argued that 'it is somewhat dangerous to rely entirely on a local force [...] drawn from among those tribes whom we have quite recently subdued'.<sup>66</sup>

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21 May 1963. See MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), Draft Memorandum on 'The "Transfer" of One, or Both KAR Battalions to the Nyasaland Government' [May? 1963]; MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Secession of Nyasaland and the possible defence implications on that country that would flow therefrom', Federal Ministry of Defence, 6 July 1962.

<sup>62</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, Africa No.6, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 42.

<sup>63</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, Africa No.6, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 30.

<sup>64</sup> PRO FO 2/106, f. 296, Acting Commissioner Sharpe to Lord Salisbury, Zomba, 16 June 1896.

<sup>65</sup> PRO FO 2/55, f. 354, Commissioner Johnston to the Earl of Roseberry, Zomba, 16 December 1893.

<sup>66</sup> PRO FO 2/106, f. 296, Acting Commissioner Sharpe to Lord Salisbury, Zomba, 16 June 1896.



When the Nyasaland forces were reorganised in 1896, the position of Africans within the military hierarchy was theoretically improved, with African soldiers filling all NCO positions up to the rank of Sergeant.<sup>67</sup> However, the senior NCO in each company, the Colour-Sergeant, remained a Sikh, and each company also received three Sikh 'Drill Instructors', whose official function was 'the training of recruits', but who were used in practice as NCOs.<sup>68</sup> This arrangement was also applied when the new 2nd Battalion was raised in 1898.<sup>69</sup> The continued reliance upon Sikh soldiers in key positions no longer seemed to reflect a mistrust of the fidelity of African soldiers, so much as a genuinely held belief that African soldiers lacked the experience or even the capabilities to perform the functions of NCOs. In 1897, the commanding officer asserted that

It is difficult at first to get [the African soldiers] to realize real discipline. By this I mean they cannot understand the chain of responsibility, and do not realize that an order given by any non-commissioned officer must be obeyed; in fact they at first dislike obeying any orders but those given them direct by their British officers. The non-commissioned officers do not as yet understand or realize the responsibilities of their positions, and so cannot command their men as they should. This will take some time to teach, but when taught the native soldiers should be a most reliable and efficient force [...]<sup>70</sup>

Similarly, in 1898 it was argued that 'The native non-commissioned officer has not yet sufficient authority over his men to be able to take independent charge of a section'.<sup>71</sup> In line with this thinking, as late as 1899 an order was issued that

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<sup>67</sup> PRO FO 2/106, f. 246, 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards,' 3 April 1896.

<sup>68</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 12, 'Strength and composition of a company' [n.d., 1896]; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 16, 'Staff pay and composition of Staff' [n.d., 1896]; PRO FO 2/106, f. 246, 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards,' 3 April 1896.

<sup>69</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 237, 'Companies to be raised stations and tribes to be recruited from', 23 December 1898.

<sup>70</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, Cmd. 8438, p. 12.

<sup>71</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Annual Report on the British Central Africa Protectorate for the Year 1897-98*, Africa No.9, 1898, Cmd. 9048, p. 15.

whenever soldiers were sent out without a European officer, a Sikh 'must always be placed in command'.<sup>72</sup>

In fact, there were notable exceptions to the policy of limiting senior NCOs' positions to Sikh soldiers. The most prominent of these was probably Ali Kiongwe, a 'Swahili' originating from the coast opposite Zanzibar, who served as Sergeant-Major from 1891 to 1896. His position was unusual in that he was not promoted from within the forces, but was simply appointed as Sergeant of the Zanzibari section of the police on the basis of previous service as Johnston's head porter (or *Capitao*) between 1884 and 1891.<sup>73</sup> As such, Ali Kiongwe's appointment was probably based upon his usefulness as an organiser of manpower and intermediary between the Administration and the Zanzibari and Makua soldiers, as much as upon any specifically military capabilities. In support of this, Johnston still referred to him as his 'headman' as late as 1894.<sup>74</sup> Nevertheless, he was regularly given real military responsibilities, and often operated far from the supervision of his European superiors.

The removal of most 'Zanzibari' or Swahili soldiers from the armed forces by 1894 left Ali Kiongwe essentially an alien to the African troops under his command, a separation in status emphasised by a salary which had reached £85 a year by 1896,

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<sup>72</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 280, 13 May 1899.

<sup>73</sup> Johnston, *The Story of My Life*, p. 302n ; PRO FO 2/67, ff. 339-40, Commissioner Johnston to the Earl of Kimberley, 18 October 1894.

<sup>74</sup> Commissioner Johnston to the Earl of Roseberry, 4 February 1894, PRO FO 2/66, f. 70.



compared to £6 received by an indigenous Sergeant.<sup>75</sup> However, the impact of the slave trade in Nyasaland meant that coastal Islamic culture, symbolised by figures such as Mlozi, was closely identified with indigenous power structures. Ali Kiongwe thus may have derived much of his personal authority from this association, and he certainly emphasised his Zanzibari identity, wearing the elaborate dress of a wealthy Omani Arab over his uniform.<sup>76</sup> This probably also applied to Hajji Askar, described as a 'Persian',<sup>77</sup> interpreter on board HMS *Pioneer* on Lake Nyasa in the early 1890s, but who had become a Private in the armed forces by 1896, and retired as Sergeant-Major in 1899.<sup>78</sup>

The kind of status achieved by Ali Kiongwe was not limited to Africans from outside Nyasaland. The indigenous Tonga 'Irregulars' who were attached to the armed forces before 1895 operated under the personal command of their own 'Sergeant-Major', Bandawe, who was allowed considerable independence of action.<sup>79</sup> As such, McCracken has described Bandawe as the 'brutal commander' of men 'no more disciplined or less ruthless than the fearsome bands of *ruga ruga*

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<sup>75</sup> 'Revised Estimate for Expenditure on Armed Forces in B.C.A. Protectorate, 1896-7', April 1896, PRO FO 2/106, f. 222 ; Force Order 12, 'Strength and composition of a company', ca. December 1896, Records of the King's African Rifles, NAM 6706-64-66

<sup>76</sup> Johnston, *British Central Africa*, pp. 83, 127; C. Marlow, *A History of the Malawi Police Force* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1971), p. 1. See Laura Fair, 'Dressing Up: Clothing, Class and Gender in Post-Abolition Zanzibar', *Journal of African History*, 39 (1989), pp. 63-94.

<sup>77</sup> Possibly a Baluchi member of the 'Zanzibari Arabs' enlisted in 1894.

<sup>78</sup> Johnston, *British Central Africa*, p. 125; Sir Harry H. Johnston, *The Story of My Life* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923), p. 305; PRO, WO 100/76, f.159, 'Native Contingent Armed Forces in BCA: List of Officers and Men Entitled to the Medal for operations in Eastern and Central Africa under Army Order 66 of 1895', Major C. A. Edwards, 5 January 1896; NAM 6706-64-66, Force Order 274, 'Discharge S. M. Hadji Askar', 15 April 1899.

<sup>79</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Johnston of the First Three Years' Administration of the Eastern Portion of British Central Africa*, Africa No.6, 1894, Cmd. 7504, p. 42; 'Chikala Expedition', *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, 85, March 1895, p. 4.

utilised by Johnston's Swahili opponents'.<sup>80</sup> There is certainly evidence to suggest that Bandawe's style of leadership owed more to traditional forms than to modern military structures, one officer noting before an operation that 'before they started they shouted their war cry in a band together, and [Bandawe] danced a war dance in front of them'.<sup>81</sup> However, Bandawe was also an ex-'mission boy', who had served as an interpreter prior to joining the Armed Forces, and was able to read and write.<sup>82</sup> Thus, when his Irregulars were integrated into the regular forces, he became Sergeant-Major and Interpreter to the Officer Commanding the Armed Forces.<sup>83</sup> Bandawe's position was therefore derived not only from his ability to command his Tonga followers, but also from his capacity to act as an intermediary between European officers and African other ranks, in a role which could not be filled by an Indian NCO.

Despite the continued dependence upon Sikhs as NCOs, the growing number of European officers increased the requirement for intermediaries between African and European ranks. In the 1890s, officers seem to have received no formal training in Chinyanja, the *lingua franca* of the Nyasaland forces. Some officers made successful attempts to learn the language, but others were unwilling or unable.<sup>84</sup> Lieutenant Alston observed of a fellow officer in the mid-1890s, 'He doesn't understand a word of the language and if a poor wretched native comes up to him

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<sup>80</sup> John McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy in Malawi: Policing and Politics in a Colonial State', in *Policing and Decolonization: Nationalism, Politics and the Police, 1917-65*, ed. by David M. Anderson and David Killingray (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 158-86 (p. 162).

<sup>81</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 25 March 1895.

<sup>82</sup> Johnston, *British Central Africa*, p. 419; Johnston, *The Story of My Life*, p. 302n.

<sup>83</sup> 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards,' 3 April 1896, PRO FO 2/106, f. 224.

<sup>84</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 5 March 1895.



and asks him a reasonable question, he clouts the poor man across the head'.<sup>85</sup> In line with this, from 1896 each European Company Commander was provided with an interpreter.<sup>86</sup> Interpreters were usually found from mission-educated Africans, and often received swift promotion to Interpreter Sergeant, as which they could expect to receive three times the pay of an ordinary Sergeant.<sup>87</sup> Thus, even whilst few Africans had executive authority, some educated Malawians were able to attain important positions of influence in the military hierarchy.

By 1900, the authorities had begun to question their earlier assumption that Nyasaland soldiers must be placed under the command of Sikhs. Despite the continuing assertion that 'The natives become attached to their [Sikh] instructors and follow them readily',<sup>88</sup> the military authorities had expressed reservations about relations between the Sikhs and their African subordinates as early as 1896, when officers were instructed to 'check any tendencies of Sikh Non-commissioned Officers to strike or kick recruits under their instruction'.<sup>89</sup> This order had to be reiterated with the threat of court martial the following year.<sup>90</sup> More generally, in 1897 it was argued that the 'Sikh Drill Instructors [...] cannot make themselves

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<sup>85</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 16 July 1895.

<sup>86</sup> 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards', 3 April 1896, PRO FO 2/106, f. 247.

<sup>87</sup> 'Analysis of Occupations followed by the Male Baptised Adults of Blantyre and Domasi, as at December 31st 1899', *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, No. 154. Jany-March 1901, p. 13; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 254, 'Pay Interpreter', March 1899; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 323, 'Interpreters', 31 October 1899; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 359, 'Interpreters', 15 March 1900; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 378, 'Promotion Interpreter Uledi', 1 June 1900; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 379, 'Promotion Interpreter Salimu James & Bell', 18 June 1900.

<sup>88</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Annual Report on the British Central Africa Protectorate for the Year 1897-98*, Africa No.9, 1898, Cmd. 9048, p. 15.

<sup>89</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 31, 'N.C.Os. striking natives' [December 1896?].

<sup>90</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 65, 'Sikhs not to strike natives' [March 1897?].

clearly understood'.<sup>91</sup> These problems may have reflected the relative inexperience of some Sikh instructors, many of whom were junior NCOs or Sepoys in their own regiments.<sup>92</sup> However, some Sikhs were also said to have abused their authority by lending money to African soldiers, whilst others subverted the military hierarchy by wearing rank badges to which they were not entitled, or even by attacking their superiors.<sup>93</sup>

Subsequently, from the late 1890s, more serious attempts were made to encourage ANCOs to develop real authority. In 1897, the only formal requirement for eligibility for promotion to Corporal or Sergeant was that men should have 'enlisted or extended their service up to 3 years'.<sup>94</sup> However, in 1898, officers were instructed that 'in future no soldiers should be recommended for promotion to Lance Corporal until they are thoroughly competent in instructing a squad in manual and firing exercises and in commanding a guard by day and night', signifying a shift towards a genuine professional requirement.<sup>95</sup> Also in 1898-99, possibly reflecting the success of Bandawe's 'traditional' style of leadership, the authorities attempted to assimilate indigenous African social systems by 'appointing the sons of chiefs and

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<sup>91</sup> *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, Africa No.5, 1897 [C. 8438], p. 12.

<sup>92</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 118, 'Drill Instructor F Coy', 15 November 1897; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 175, 'Staff', August 1898; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 181, 'Appointments', 8 August 1898; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 354, 'Appointment', 5 February 1900.

<sup>93</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 123, 'Extract Summary Court Martial', 9 December 1897; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 739, 'District Court Martial', 15 June 1905; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 104, 'Punishment', 7 October 1897; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 118, 'Drill Instructor F Coy', 25 November 1897; 'H.M. Consular Court Zomba', *Central African Times*, 7 September 1901, p. 3; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 123, 'Extract Summary Court Martial', 9 December 1897; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 91, 'List of duly appointed Lance-Naicks' [September 1897?].

<sup>94</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 53, 'Qualifications for promotion', [January 1897?].

<sup>95</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 177, 'Drill Instruction', 9 August 1898.



headmen to be non-commissioned officers'.<sup>96</sup> Evidently, the authorities still assumed that Africans were unable to fully understand the military hierarchy, and that soldiers would more readily obey the 'natural' authority of 'traditional' leaders.

The role of ANCOs was finally transformed around the turn of the century, following a series of key events. In December 1899, after sustained racial abuse at the hands of the local population, the Malawians of 2 BCA Rifles, stationed in Mauritius, rioted, injuring a number of the local population in the villages of La Caverne and Vacoas. Following the attack, attention was drawn to the inadequacy of the Sikh NCOs as intermediaries between the European and African ranks. It was claimed that to avoid losing caste, the battalion's Sikh drill instructors deliberately lived more than 50 yards from the African soldiers, and that on the day of the attack, they had avoided any contact with them as they had just been provided with an issue of beef.<sup>97</sup> The senior officer in Mauritius even suggested that the Sikhs had known about the attack and had simply failed to inform their officers, perhaps out of resentment against 'a tendency, on the part of some of the officers, to ignore [...] the Sikhs', with the aim 'to train and accustom the African N.C.O.'s to independence, and a sense of their responsibilities in view of the time when the Sikh N.C.O.'s would be entirely withdrawn'.<sup>98</sup> More generally, it was claimed again that 'only one [Sikh] in each company was able to make himself understood'.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> 'The British Central Africa Protectorate', *The Times*, 15 August 1899, p. 13.

<sup>97</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Evidence of Major H. E. J. Brake, OC 2 BCA Rifles, Court of Enquiry, Garrison Orders, Head Quarters, Phoenix Camp, 13 December 1899.

<sup>98</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Lieutenant Colonel Henry L. Jessep, OC Troops Mauritius, to Under Secretary of State for War, 6 January 1900.

<sup>99</sup> 'The B.C.A. Rifles in Mauritius', *Central African Times*, 14 April 1900, p. 7.

For the military authorities it was expedient to place some blame on the Sikhs. Exaggerated claims in the press that several people had been killed in a series of sexually motivated 'acts of savagery',<sup>100</sup> by soldiers 'not able to stand the strain of foreign residence in a civilised country',<sup>101</sup> called the very existence of the battalion into question.<sup>102</sup> The military authorities therefore sought to mitigate the Africans' actions as much as possible. In fact, the ANCOs had not emerged from the incident in a favourable light, as many had taken part in the raid, and most seemed to have deliberately removed their badges of rank, although it is not clear whether this was intended to signify the abrogation of their responsibilities, or simply to avoid identification. ANCOs even seemed to have controlled the raid with military precision by the use of whistle blasts, but this at least demonstrated the fallacy of the idea that ANCOs did not command the respect of their subordinates.<sup>103</sup>

Following the Mauritius incident, 2 BCA Rifles was despatched to Somaliland, and elements of both the 1st and 2nd Battalions were subsequently despatched to serve in the Ashanti War.<sup>104</sup> In Asante, the Nyasaland soldiers created a good impression with the military commanders. The Commandant of the Ashanti Field Force referred to 2 CAR as 'one of the best corps in the Field Force - a reputation it

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<sup>100</sup> 'The African Regiment in Mauritius: Grave Misconduct', *Central African Times*, 7 April 1900, p. 3

<sup>101</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, 147 & 148, June-July 1900, p.4.

<sup>102</sup> PRO, CO 167/724, Sir Charles Bruce, Governor of Mauritius to Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 December 1899; 'Colonial', 'The Mauritius Outbreak', *The Times*, 21 march 1900, p. 14.

<sup>103</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Court of Enquiry, Garrison Orders, Head Quarters, Phoenix Camp, 13 December 1899; PRO, CO 167/728, Lieutenant Colonel Henry L. Jessep, OC Troops Mauritius, to Under Secretary of State for War, 6 January 1900.

<sup>104</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Lieutenant Colonel Henry L. Jessep, OC Troops Mauritius, to Sir Charles Bruce, Governor of Mauritius, 14 February 1900; 'The 2nd Battalion Central Africa Regiment', *The Times*, Thursday, 18 October 1900, p. 4.



has right well maintained',<sup>105</sup> and formally thanked the battalion for 'for their gallant conduct at the action of Ojesu on August 31'.<sup>106</sup> For their service in Asante, a number of Nyasaland soldiers and ANCOs were rewarded for gallantry, with two 'specially recommended' for promotion or distinction to the Foreign Secretary, 15 receiving financial rewards, and a further 38 being promoted.<sup>107</sup> Service in West Africa had been put forward as 'giving officers and men alike the chance of wiping off, in active service, the stigma which they feel attaches to them',<sup>108</sup> and certainly does seem to have eliminated many of the official doubts regarding Nyasaland soldiers' capabilities.<sup>109</sup>

By 1904, the use of Sikh NCOs and instructors had entirely ceased.<sup>110</sup>

Contrary to their earlier assertions, the authorities argued that ANCOs had in fact been held back by the presence of Sikh NCOs:

The withdrawal of the majority of the Sikh drill instructors is not felt as much as was expected, and the native non-commissioned officers show and take more interest in their work since they have ceased to be the cyphers they usually were behind their companies. They are learning their responsibilities as non-commissioned officers, though slowly.<sup>111</sup>

In any case, with the withdrawal of the Sikhs, the authorities were forced to treat the role of ANCOs more seriously, and from 1905 standards for promotion were established for all ranks throughout the KAR. A Lance-Corporal was expected to be

<sup>105</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence Relating to the Ashanti War 1900*, Cmd. 501, p. 103.

<sup>106</sup> 'The 2nd Battalion Central Africa Regiment', *The Times*, 18 October 1900, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, 428, 'Ashanti expedition: Awards and promotions', 25 January 1901.

<sup>108</sup> 'The British Central Africa Rifles', *The Times*, 12 June 1900, p. 14.

<sup>109</sup> 'Our Native Troops', *Central African Times*, 26 January 1901, p. 7

<sup>110</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, British Central Africa. Report on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate for 1903-4, 1904*, Cmd. 2242.

<sup>111</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report on the Trade and General Conditions of the British Central Africa Protectorate for the Year 1902-1903*, by Major F. B. Pearce, Acting Commissioner, Africa No.13, 1903, Cmd. 1772.

‘Capable of imparting instruction in squad drill and of commanding a section on parade and on the field under all circumstances’, a Corporal was also required to have ‘a general knowledge of company drill and [to be] capable of commanding a half-company on parade and in the field’, while a Sergeant was to be ‘Capable of imparting instruction in squad and company drill and of commanding a company under all circumstances both on parade and in the field’. All African NCOs were also required to have a knowledge of discipline, duties in barracks and in the field, musketry, and outpost duty, and frequent classes were supposed to be held for the instruction of NCOs in all these areas.<sup>112</sup> The range of ANCOs’ responsibilities also increased, as specialist appointments developed, such as Provost Sergeant, Signal Sergeant, or Sergeant Drummer.<sup>113</sup> However, the authorities clearly still had doubts about the capabilities of ANCOs, as the *Standing Orders* of 2 KAR cautioned that

It is very necessary that all Non-Commissioned Officers should realize that they are in a responsible position and that in the absence of an Officer their Orders must be obeyed in the same manner as if the Officer was present. Unless a Non-Commissioned Officer can recognize his position he is not dependable and is consequently useless and as soon as this fact is discovered he should be reduced.<sup>114</sup>

By this time, the post of African Sergeant Major had also taken on an established form, distinct from the essentially personal roles fulfilled by Ali Kiongwe or Bandawe. Whilst the African Sergeant Major officially ‘assisted’ the British

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<sup>112</sup> PRO CO 534/2, f. 288, ‘Standard of Promotion of native N.C.Os’, Staff Officer KAR, Zomba, 1 April 1905; Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King’s African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, [1908(?)]), p. 22.

<sup>113</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, British Central Africa. Report on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate for 1903-4, 1904*, Cmd. 2242; Commandant KAR, to Chief Secretary East African Protectorate, Nairobi, 6 September 1916, PRO CO 534/20, f. 104.

<sup>114</sup> Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King’s African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, [1908(?)]), p. 7.



Sergeant Major,<sup>115</sup> in practice he was clearly regarded as a vital link between European and African ranks. By the 1920s, this role was more clearly laid out, as the African Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) was given special responsibility as an advisor 'for all matters affecting native ranks', and as such was expected 'to know the personal history of every N.C.O. and man in the battalion', 'to encourage and foster esprit-de-corps', 'to eliminate any inter-tribal or religious friction', and to take responsibility for soldiers' religious and domestic facilities. At the same time, however, the African RSM was also expected to act as the soldiers' representative, reporting any grievances to the military authorities.<sup>116</sup>

Whilst an African Sergeant was theoretically supposed to be able to command a company, under normal circumstances, there was little likelihood that he would be asked to do so. However, despite the increased proportion of European ranks, the First World War provided an opportunity for many Nyasaland ANCOs to demonstrate their initiative, as European officers were frequent casualties. Colour Sergeant Sumani was awarded the KAR Distinguished Conduct Medal for 'leading his Company in a charge, after all his Officers had been shot down, and driving off the Germans' in early 1914.<sup>117</sup> Sergeant Malemu was similarly awarded when, in late 1917,

The 3 British Officers [in his column] all became casualties. This N.C.O. at once took charge, got his men into suitable formation and replied to the enemy's fire [...]

<sup>115</sup> Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King's African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, [1908(?)]), p. 6.

<sup>116</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland, 1927), p. 20.

<sup>117</sup> 'Kings African Rifles. Roll of Officers N.C.O's and men of the above who have been awarded the Medal for Distinguished Conduct in the Field, for acts of Gallantry and devotion to duty', General Officer Commanding Forces in BEA and Uganda, and IE Force 'B' to Secretary, War Office, Nairobi, 30 June 1915, PRO CO 534/19, f. 262.

the surprise of the enemy's ambush was quickly counter-acted and the enemy driven off.<sup>118</sup>

On another occasion, 33 soldiers under the command of a Nyasaland Sergeant and Lance-Corporal successfully drove off a whole German Field Company including two machine guns.<sup>119</sup> Nyasaland companies were even sent into action under ANCOs alone.<sup>120</sup> Whilst these cases were always the result of emergencies, the authorities were happy to use such incidents as the basis for promoting African soldiers.

Although many wartime promotions were based upon gallantry and initiative in combat, in peacetime, much emphasis was placed upon long and loyal service, especially amongst senior ranks. RSM Juma had served in the KAR for over thirty years when he retired at the end of the First World War.<sup>121</sup> RSM Magomero of 1 KAR, who joined the CAR in about 1899 and retired in 1921, was even allowed to re-enlist as RSM in 1939, and served until the end of the war, when he was probably at least 65 years old.<sup>122</sup> Similarly, RSM Aibu Chikwenga joined the KAR in 1916, was discharged in 1929, rejoined in 1940, and was finally promoted to RSM in 1942, remaining in this post until 1952.<sup>123</sup> This emphasis on longevity was partially a reflection of the unusually high rate of long service amongst Nyasaland soldiers, who

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<sup>118</sup> C-in-C East African Force, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, General Headquarters, East African Force, 16 March 1918, PRO CO 534/27, f. 258.

<sup>119</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 168, 170-71.

<sup>120</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 168.

<sup>121</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 40.

<sup>122</sup> R. E. N. Smith, 'The Centurion', *Rhino Link: Newsletter of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces Dinner Club*, 11 (1996), 10-11.

<sup>123</sup> Chikwenga, Aibu, 'Aibu Chikwenga: an Autobiography', transl. by C. A. Baker, *The Society of Malawi Journal*, 25, 2 (1972), 11-21 (pp. 17-19).



often enlisted for 21 years or more.<sup>124</sup> In the early 1930s, the officer commanding the Southern Brigade noted the contrast with other KAR battalions:

The situation regarding the 1st and 2nd Battalions is entirely different, the Nyasa Native joins the King's African Rifles and, if he is allowed to do so, will remain a soldier for 18 years [...] The average service of Soldiers of these two Battalions is approximately ten years and it is of interest to note that, in the 1st Battalion, there are some 50 Soldiers who either now or in the next few months, are eligible for the grant of the long service and good Conduct Medal<sup>125</sup>

This problem was still retarding rates of promotion for Nyasaland NCOs as late as the mid-1950s.<sup>126</sup> However, it also seems to have reflected the disdain of many European officers for educated or 'intelligent' Africans, which meant that even by the late 1920s an officer could note that 'most of our senior N.C.Os. were almost illiterate'.<sup>127</sup>

The authorities also emphasised the idea of 'character' rather than strictly technical aptitude as a criteria for promotion, so that it was a matter of pride rather than concern that Corporal Chitenga, DCM,<sup>128</sup> 'could tell who relieved not a few *tengatenga* [porters] of their loads in the days when robberies were frequent on the Blantyre-Matopo road'.<sup>129</sup> Similarly, De Guingand delighted in recording Sergeant Magombo's alleged cannibalism:

When discussing food he would brazenly proclaim that a good joint of human flesh beat anything that was then available [...] The old Sergeant was prepared however,

<sup>124</sup> PRO CO 534/40, f.16, 2 KAR Length of Service Return, Lieutenant Colonel W. I. Gunn, OC 2 KAR, 4 March 1920; PRO CO 534/40, f.66, 1 KAR, Tanganyika Territory, Length of Service Return, Lieutenant Colonel A. H. Griffiths, OC 1 KAR, 1 May 1920; PRO CO 534/54, f.1651 KAR Length of Service Return, Adjutant, 1 KAR, November 1923; PRO CO 534/54, f.391, 2 KAR Length of Service Return, Lieutenant Colonel Murray, OC, 2 KAR, 1 November 1923; PRO CO 534/56, f.189, No. 3 Depot Company Length of Service Return, OC Depot 1 and 2 KAR, 4 March 1925.

<sup>125</sup> MNA, S 1/240/34, ff. 2-3, OC Southern Brigade KAR to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 3 April 1932.

<sup>126</sup> MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 6.

<sup>127</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 25.

<sup>128</sup> 'The Week', *Central African Times*, 6 July 1901, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, 154, January-March 1901, p. 3.

to eat most things, and it was well known amongst the recruits that a choice rat or mouse was a most acceptable gift for the old Ngoni.<sup>130</sup>

Finally, reflecting the KAR's wider recruitment policy, there are also suggestions that the authorities showed a bias towards promoting members of 'martial' tribes. In 1925, 22 percent of Privates stationed in Nyasaland were identified as Yaos, yet 37 percent of NCOs were Yao; conversely, 25 percent of Privates were Nyanja or Nguru, but only 11 percent of NCOs came from these groups.<sup>131</sup> It is unlikely that this reflected changing patterns of recruitment, since these groups had been enlisted into the same companies since at least 1907.

Whilst there is no reason to doubt the competence of most ANCOs, the emphasis placed upon length of service and character meant that in practice some ANCOs failed to reflect the authorities' own aspirations as outlined in the 1905 criteria for promotion. As late as the mid-1930s, the officer commanding 1 KAR's Machine Gun Platoon was able to write of his Platoon Sergeant, who had been promoted due to his seniority, that he had 'v[ery] little knowledge of M.G. tactics [...] & although he tries hard he is still v[ery] backward & slow to learn'. The majority of other ANCOs in the Platoon were seen as promising, but an 'old soldier' who had been promoted to Lance-Corporal was felt to be 'unintelligent, but tries hard & is a good instructor if told & shown exactly what to do [...] Owing to his lack of intelligence will never make a good M.G. N.C.O.'<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 30.

<sup>131</sup> CO 534/56, f. 182, 1 KAR Tribal Disposition Return, 23 March 1925.

<sup>132</sup> IWM, 83/21/1, 'No. 2 Platoon, "D" (M.G.) Coy, 1.K.A.R. Roll & Training Diary', November 1935 - April 1936.



*African soldiers' responses to the military hierarchy*

Prior to the Second World War, Nyasaland soldiers seem to have found little reason to question the place of Europeans at the top of the military hierarchy. The army was, after all, an institution set up to serve the interests of the European-dominated colonial state. Anthony Clayton has noted the confidence of colonial military officers in the cordiality of their relationships with their African subordinates, and Nyasaland was no exception to this.<sup>133</sup> The ethnic distinction between officers and other ranks seems to have allowed a 'paternalistic' approach to develop in a much more literal sense than it could in the metropolitan army, as the Malawians' 'otherness' allowed officers to characterise them as 'mere children'.<sup>134</sup> Whilst the well-defined class structure which characterised the British Army demanded separation between the ranks, officers were sufficiently differentiated from their African subordinates to allow a closer relationship to develop, provided that it operated within the parameters of the paternalistic paradigm.

Reflecting this outlook, officers throughout the colonial period generally emphasised the humour and lightheartedness of Malawians. One officer, who served in the late 1930s, recalled that 'Once the language barrier was broken all that was required was patience, enthusiasm and a sense of humour [...] The Africans I knew loved a laugh!',<sup>135</sup> whilst an officer who served in the early 1960s similarly noted

[T]he Nyasa and latterly the Malawians, had a marvellous sense of humour [...] [T]hey were a bit in awe of us, so if you could reduce tense situations to humour, you'd get it done quicker and better [...] So there was a lot of laughter [...] [I]t was

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<sup>133</sup> Clayton and Killingray, *Khaki and Blue*, p. 220.

<sup>134</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 158. See Bruce Berman, *Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectic of Domination* (London: James Currey, 1990), p. 113.

<sup>135</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (7), f. 6, Colonel Desmond John Bannister [1980?].

such a happy, happy regiment; there was very little animosity [...] between the officers and the men.<sup>136</sup>

This interpretation of the relationship between officers and soldiers required Nyasaland soldiers to play a particular role. As de Guingand observed of 1 KAR's officers' mess cook of the mid-1920s:

Jackie was a real K.A.R. pet, and one could almost imagine him being led with a collar round his neck in front of the Battalion when it marched past. I think he loved our officers and never minded the indignities to which he was sometimes subjected [...] I have watched him being [...] hunted around the mess building by a number of high spirited young officers armed with native spears [...] But he always came up smiling for more, and generally finished the evening's 'entertainment' a much richer man with the 'prizes' that he received.<sup>137</sup>

At the same time, as a result of this perceived relationship, African soldiers were allowed greater latitude in some areas of their behaviour. Thus, soldiers' mockery of individual officers was regarded as a harmless signifier of good relations rather than as a threat to the military hierarchy.<sup>138</sup> One officer simply noted that 'the Nyasa askari was a natural mimic and thought it great fun to imitate the Bwana'.<sup>139</sup>

As a corollary to their belief in the strength of the bond between officers and men, officers expected complete personal loyalty from their African subordinates:

The old K.A.R. *desturi* (custom) was that an orderly was responsible for his *B'wana's* life. If he got killed on some expedition or out hunting, then he must never return himself [...] one generally felt that if needs be one's orderly would almost be prepared to sacrifice himself for his master's safety.<sup>140</sup>

Examples of such loyalty were proverbial for many KAR officers. Alston recalled how some of his soldiers refused to re-enlist under another officer, whilst others who

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>137</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 21.

<sup>138</sup> Melvin E. Page, *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 93.

<sup>139</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?], f. 26. See also Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>140</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 26.



had been discharged pleaded with him to take them back.<sup>141</sup> As late as 1941, Amini a Yao Personal Servant, told the story of searching Tanganyika and Kenya so that he could serve with his former master in 1 KAR.<sup>142</sup> More generally, most ex-soldiers recalled good relations with their officers. Ex-Staff Sergeant Joseph Kalilombe observed that 'My bosses were good'; Jauma Matola recalled that he 'liked them very much', and even Henderson Simuja, who stated that 'There was nothing which I liked about life in the army' felt that 'there was a cordial relationship between us. They could understand our problem. Maybe this was so since it was a war time'.<sup>143</sup>

However, the extent to which Nyasaland soldiers as a whole perceived the hierarchy in terms of the kind of loyalty described by many officers is questionable. On a basic level, from the perspective of Nyasaland's long service soldiers, European officers often must have seemed comparatively transitory members of the military community, serving on attachment for one or two tours of three years. This perception was probably increased by the continuing linguistic barrier between officers and soldiers. Before the First World War, officers still received no special training in African languages before their attachment with the KAR.<sup>144</sup> By 1905, they were required to pass a basic test in Chinyanja within a year of their arrival in Nyasaland, but in practice very few attended the examination.<sup>145</sup> Matters were worse

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<sup>141</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/2, Diary of Edward Alston, 21-22 June 1896.

<sup>142</sup> Amini, 'In Search of a Bwana', in *Abyssinian Patchwork: An Anthology* (London, Frederick Muller, 1949), ed. by Kenneth Gandar Dower, pp. 40-42.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Joseph Kalilombe, Zomba, October 2000; Interview with Jauma Matola, Zomba, October 2000; Interview with Henderson Simuja, Zomba, October 2000.

<sup>144</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 16 July 1895.

<sup>145</sup> PRO, CO 534/2, f. 57, 'EJH' to Mr Gamble, 28 October 1905; PRO CO 534/3, ff. 67-68, Brigadier-General W. H. Manning, Inspector-General KAR, to Commissioner and Commander-in-Chief, BCA Protectorate, Zomba, 31 March 1906; PRO, CO 534/2, Acting Commissioner R. R. Wallis to Secretary of State for Colonies, Zomba, 15 September 1905; 'The Week', *Central African Times*, 12 January 1907, p. 3.

for the battalion serving in the East Africa Protectorate, since local regulations required officers to pass an examination in Swahili (the *lingua franca* of the other KAR battalions), effectively dissuading them from attempting to learn Chinyanja. This problem was increased during the First World War, when the many new officers had even less time to devote to learning Chinyanja than in peacetime.<sup>146</sup> A preparatory course for KAR service established in 1917, which was intended to mitigate such difficulties, taught only Swahili, thereby proving of very limited help to officers serving with Nyasaland troops.<sup>147</sup> As late as 1930, some officers failed to treat the Chinyanja examination seriously, and even the Commanding Officer of 2 KAR ‘couldn’t speak a word of Swahili, much less [Chinyanja]’.<sup>148</sup> As a result, interpreters remained an integral component of the military hierarchy.<sup>149</sup>

In isolated stations, this could have serious consequences for the relationship between officers and soldiers. The Nyasaland contingent of the Somaliland Camel Corps (SCC) in 1930 was under the command of officers with very little knowledge of Chinyanja, and only a civilian clerk with a poor knowledge of English in place of a military interpreter.<sup>150</sup> This effectively left power in the hands of the Nyasa Company Sergeant Major, who, other ANCOs claimed, actively prevented them from co-operating with the authorities, withheld soldiers’ access to officers, and even extorted money from his subordinates. As a consequence, soldiers who felt that their

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<sup>146</sup> Melvin E. Page, *The Chiyawa War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 93.

<sup>147</sup> War Office to Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, 7 June 1917, PRO CO 534/23, f. 365.

<sup>148</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (59), Major F. G. Crozier [1980?], f. 6.

<sup>149</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King’s African Rifles*, (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland, 1927), p. 22.

<sup>150</sup> MNA, S 1/2161/23/14, Inspection Report, SCC, 1928-1929, Inspector-General KAR, 11 March 1929; MNA, S 1/2161/23/15a, Inspection Report, SCC, 1929-1930, Inspector-General KAR [n.d., 1930]; MNA, S 1/2161/23/16, Inspection Report, SCC, 1930-1931, Inspector-General KAR, 11 April 1931.



grievances had not been heard by the authorities attempted to shoot their commanding officer.<sup>151</sup>

These events also signified a broader theme in African military service. In return for their acceptance of the military hierarchy, African soldiers naturally expected to be treated consistently, in accordance with the terms under which they enlisted. The soldiers serving in Somaliland expected that their grievances would be recognised, and resorted to violence when they were not. An earlier incident in 1913 partially arose from a similar failure of the military authorities to meet African soldiers' expectations. A half-company of 1 KAR refused to obey an order to continue on a patrol after serving at a remote post for eighteen months, when they had been promised that the posting would last only six months.<sup>152</sup> Again, Page notes that one First World War veteran recalled that his comrades 'almost shot' their Commanding Officer because they felt his order that they should not kill prisoners was contrary to their whole purpose in the war.<sup>153</sup>

This concern with consistent treatment seems to have underlain African soldiers objections to the structure of the military hierarchy before the Second World War. Discussing African soldiers' grievances in 1915, Sergeant Nkwanda recalled

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<sup>151</sup> MNA, S2/11/30/5, 'Somaliland Incident: Narrative compiled from statements made by No. 10545 Corporal Ali Chitenje and No. 10720 Private Makwera to Captain F. W. De Guingand, Native Regtl. Sgt-Major Magareta and Coy Sgt-Major Saidi', 19 November 1931; MNA, S2/11/30/28, Major J. W. Kaye, SCC, to OC SCC, Burao, 28 July 1931; MNA, S2/11/30/17, T. S. W. Thomas, Governor of Nyasaland, to Harold B. Kittermaster, Governor of Somaliland, 24 February 1931.

<sup>152</sup> PRO, CO 534/16, f. 467, Lieutenant-Colonel B. R. Graham, OC Troops, East Africa Protectorate, to Chief Secretary, East Africa Protectorate, Nairobi, 15 April 1913; PRO, CO 534/16, f. 468, Lieutenant-Colonel B. R. Graham, OC Troops, East Africa Protectorate, to Chief Secretary, East Africa Protectorate, Nairobi, 30 April 1913; PRO, CO 534/16, ff. 462-463, Governor of East Africa Protectorate to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Nairobi, 19 May 1913.

<sup>153</sup> Melvin E. Page, *The Chiyawa War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000), p. 104.

visiting England in 1902 as part of the KAR Coronation Detachment, and expressed surprise at finding an East African KAR soldier who seemed to have been commissioned as an officer.<sup>154</sup> More seriously, as the authorities had feared, Nyasaland NCOs serving in the First World War unsurprisingly resented the displacement of African Company and Platoon Sergeants by BNCOs. As the Administrator of Tanganyika noted of the Nyasaland battalions following the war, 'it is certain that [the BNCOs] are disliked by the rank and file, by whom their presence is misunderstood and resented'.<sup>155</sup> This problem, however, seems to have been easily solved by the reversion to pre-war structures.

The Second World War had a much more dramatic effect upon Nyasaland soldiers' feelings towards the military hierarchy. With the new influx of European ranks into the KAR, many Malawians were angered by the racist behaviour of some of the Europeans. Whilst 'colonial' officers from Nyasaland approved of their fellow colonials from Kenya,<sup>156</sup> one British officer conversely recalled that colonial NCOs in particular were 'already broken in in a very anti-African way'.<sup>157</sup> Such distinctions were not unnoticed by Malawians:

The troops much preferred their own Bwanas from Nyasaland. They accepted the Rhodesians and South Africans (many of them had worked in either or both countries at some time) but resented the Kenyans and others who treated them like Kenya natives. They were suspicious of us from the UK until they got used to us.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>154</sup> PRO, CO 525/66, f. 631, Evidence of Sergeant Nkwanda, Native Sergeant Askari, Chiradzulu Boma, Blantyre, 31 July 1915.; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 590, 'Coronation Detacht.' 1 November 1902.

<sup>155</sup> PRO, CO 534/40, f. 35, Administrator of Tanganyika to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Dar-es-Salaam, 24 April 1920.

<sup>156</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (154), f. 16, 'Memorandum from R. W. Kettlewell concerning the role of British forces in Africa', 20 July 1979.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Professor George Shepperson, 30 March 2000.

<sup>158</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (8), f. 25, Patrick William George Barnes [1980?].



Nyasaland soldiers certainly seem to have believed that Kenyan Europeans gave preferential treatment to Kenyan Africans. NA Chikumbu recorded soldiers' complaints that

If it were practicable that Nyasaland Europeans had to be appointed to instruct Nyasaland African Soldiers it would be better [...] Kenya Europeans [...] hate us Nyasaland African Soldiers because of our being praised for bravery and good actions<sup>159</sup>

Similarly, soldiers in Kenya told NA Kawinga that they should have 'European Officers [...] from Nyasaland, Northern or Southern Rhodesia. We do not receive good treatment from Local Officers, they look after their own people of this country.'<sup>160</sup>

Others Malawians both in East Africa and in South East Asia noted a more general racism on the part of some European officers and BNCOs in particular. Nyasaland soldiers in Kenya complained that 'All European soldiers and some of the officers call us by this awful and annoying name "MONKEY" [...] and they further say that we have joined the war to fight against the enemies for no object'.<sup>161</sup> Malawians' resentment was increased by the perception that Europeans treated them as comrades only when it was expedient. Soldiers of 31 KAR in Kenya complained to NA Kadawere that 'When we were fighting we trusted our Officers as if they were our mothers. But now we are no longer fighting the friendship is finished. They regard us as if we were monkeys, just as Hitler said we were monkeys'.<sup>162</sup> NA Mwase simply added, 'We are surprised if not astonished to see that our Bwanas are

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<sup>159</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/49A, 'Native Authority Chikumbu's Journey to Nairobi to visit his soldiers', by NA Chikumbu, no date, 1944.

<sup>160</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/52A, 'Native Authority Kawinga's Journey to Nairobi', by NA Kawinga, 11 January 1945

<sup>161</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/53A, 'Complaints laid down by askari before chiefs against military authority', by NA M'mbelwa, 14 December 1944.

<sup>162</sup> S 41/1/23/4/49B, Report by NA Kadawere, 21 December 1944.

now treating us like dogs. When the war broke out in 1939 we all were treated as human beings'.<sup>163</sup>

Claims that such grievances were universally held by Nyasaland soldiers were dismissed by the military authorities; the commander of 11 (EA) Division asserted that such complaints were 'NOT the opinions of the vast majority of Nyasaland askaris but might have been the opinions expressed by very few educated askaris who were becoming politically conscious'.<sup>164</sup> There may have been some truth in this. On the one hand, the decision taken before the war to promote African soldiers' learning of English, combined with the growing numbers of better educated recruits required to fill technical posts, meant that a minority of African soldiers were increasingly well placed to observe such attitudes.<sup>165</sup> On the other hand, Nyasaland NAs visiting East Africa and the Far East had been surprised to find the disdain with which they were greeted by many soldiers, and it was therefore in their interests to appear to be acting on soldiers' behalf by airing grievances. Nevertheless, some officers were also dismayed at their fellow Europeans' attitudes. One officer from Nyasaland noted,

The Imperials in particular though the 'joke' was shared by colonials who may have initiated the game enjoyed asking Africans to say '66 eggs in a box', which came out as 'sixes sixety egges in a box-s' [...] It was not a joke I liked though I am ashamed to say I also laughed.'<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/53B, 'Report on a visit to Nairobi and Somaliland by Chiefs', by NA Mwase [n.d., 1945]. See MNA, S41/1/23/5/63B, NA Chikumbu to PC Southern Province, 13 August 1945.

<sup>164</sup> MNA, S41/1/23/5/63A, Acting Commander, 11 (EA) Division, to PC Southern Province, 14 September 1945.

<sup>165</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/1, 'The re-organisation of the forces in our East African Colonies', Inspector-General, RWAFF and KAR, August 1937, pp. 21-2.

<sup>166</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24A) II, f. 96, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of the King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', by Donald Fergusson Tait Bowie, 1981.



However, Imperial officers equally blamed colonials for their rigid adherence to the social separation of African and European ranks, although both Imperials and colonials officers argued that BNCOs were often at the root of such problems.<sup>167</sup>

As in the First World War, Nyasaland Platoon Sergeants also felt that they had been displaced with the appointment early in the war of European Platoon Sergeants. As Kettlewell noted, 'They were too near in function and responsibility, and not infrequently the African N.C.O. was of more value than his British counterpart and would have functioned better without him'.<sup>168</sup> Nyasaland soldiers were also angered when they found that some Ugandan and Somali soldiers had been commissioned as officers.<sup>169</sup> Soldiers complained to NA Kadawere, 'Why cannot we become Officers like Uganda asikari? Are we not fighting just as they are?'.<sup>170</sup> Other soldiers seem to have demanded not just commissions for Malawians, but even called for a Malawian to be made a Second Lieutenant, a Lieutenant, a Captain, and a Colonel, to prove that Malawians were valued as soldiers.<sup>171</sup>

In response to such grievances, the military authorities attempted to increase the status of African soldiers throughout the KAR. European Platoon Sergeants were removed,<sup>172</sup> and in an endeavour to meet African aspirations a new rank of Warrant

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Professor George Shepperson, 30 March 2000.

<sup>168</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (154), f. 16, 'Memorandum from R. W. Kettlewell concerning the role of British forces in Africa', 20 July 1979.

<sup>169</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/53B, 'Report on a visit to Nairobi and Somaliland by Chiefs', by NA Mwase [n.d., 1945], p. 4; MNA, S 41/1/23/4/53A, 'Complaints laid down by askari before chiefs against military authority', by NA M'mbelwa, 14 December 1944, p. 2.

<sup>170</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/49B, Report by NA Kadawere, 21 December 1944.

<sup>171</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/49A, 'Native Authority Chikumbu's Journey to Nairobi to visit his soldiers', by NA Chikumbu, no date, 1944.

<sup>172</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (154), f. 17, 'Memorandum from R. W. Kettlewell concerning the role of British forces in Africa', 20 July 1979.

Officer Platoon Commander (WOPC) was introduced in 1942.<sup>173</sup> The WOPC was intended to replace a European officer in one platoon in each of a battalion's four companies. Platoons would therefore be entirely under African command, representing a major advance in the level of responsibility accorded to Africans. However, whilst a WOPC filled a commissioned officer's appointment, it was not a commissioned rank, and as such did not meet the soldiers' largely symbolic call for a Nyasaland officer.

Following the Second World War, there was less evidence of the kind of overt racism expressed by some European ranks during the war. The KAR's regular officers largely reverted to their pre-war paternalistic outlook, with a strong belief in the personal loyalty of Nyasaland soldiers to their officers.<sup>174</sup> However, Malawian aspirations regarding the military hierarchy remained. Service in Malaya in the early 1950s enhanced the role of WOPCs in the eyes of officers, most of whom regarded them as 'first class men';<sup>175</sup> indeed, the commander of 1 KAR considered them to be 'as good as, if not better than, white [platoon commanders]'.<sup>176</sup> At the same time, smaller section patrols were successfully conducted under junior ANCOs' control as a matter of course.<sup>177</sup> Whilst some officers still regarded the existence of the rank of

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<sup>173</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 108-109.

<sup>174</sup> MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 6; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (120), f. 11, Lieutenant-Colonel John T. H. Gunning [1980?]

<sup>175</sup> MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 2.

<sup>176</sup> F 248/2073, CAC/253/1/SEC/G(int), Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Hyde, OC 1 KAR, to Colonel R. F. B. Long, Southern Rhodesian Staff Corps, Defence HQ Salisbury, Zomba, 17 December 1953.

<sup>177</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (120), f. 11, Lieutenant-Colonel John T. H. Gunning [1980?]; IWM Sound Archive, 6185/03, Transcript of interview with Colonel H. P. Williams OBE, 15 October 1979; MNA, 8-9-5-R/14034, 2nd K.A.R. Scrapbook Vol. 6, 1953-1954; '1 KAR Newsletter No. 4 from Malaya. Aug/Sep 1952', 'Lipenga': *Journal of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, 1, 3 (1953), p. 9.



WOPC as an important step towards 'Africanisation' of the Nyasaland battalions, senior ANCOs were clearly aspiring towards commissioned rank.<sup>178</sup> In 1953, the Officer Commanding 1 KAR, Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Hyde, noted that the African Warrant Officers 'asked some very pertinent questions when they saw West African officers going into an Officers' Mess', and they understandably wondered 'If it is necessary for the European [platoon commanders] to be officers, why is it not necessary for the Africans to be officers?'.<sup>179</sup> As a result of the lack of further incentives, it was argued, the best African Warrant Officers were leaving the army for better paid jobs in the police and administration. However, whilst the rank of WOPC had granted African soldiers the responsibilities of officers without the concurrent status, Hyde now supported the creation of a 'Governor's commission',<sup>180</sup> 'with all the prestige and privileges which go with the status', but which would still restrict Africans to commanding platoons, as Hyde did not feel 'that East Africans as a whole are sufficiently advanced to be given Queen's Commissioned status'.<sup>181</sup>

The advent of Federation halted plans for a Governor's Commission in the Nyasaland battalions. The similar rank, termed 'Effendi', was introduced to the East African KAR battalions in 1957, and 39 had been appointed by 1959.<sup>182</sup> The Federal Prime Minister, Welensky, resisted its introduction in the Nyasaland Battalions on

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<sup>178</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (120), f. 11, Lieutenant-Colonel John T. H. Gunning [1980?]

<sup>179</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/253/1/SEC/G(int), Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Hyde, OC 1 KAR, to Colonel R. F. B. Long, Southern Rhodesian Staff Corps, Defence HQ Salisbury, Zomba, 17 December 1953.

<sup>180</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/253/1/SEC/G(int), 'A paper on the Proposal for the Introduction of the Governor's Commissioned African Officer', GOC, EAC, to Chief Secretaries, Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia, Nairobi, 3 July 1953.

<sup>181</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/253/1/SEC/G(int), Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Hyde, OC 1 KAR, to Colonel R. F. B. Long, Southern Rhodesian Staff Corps, Defence HQ Salisbury, Zomba, 17 December 1953.

<sup>182</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 109-110.

the spurious grounds that 'it would be looked upon as a sort of second best'.<sup>183</sup> Instead, by the early 1960s, intimations were made that 'as a matter of policy [...] Africans should be selected as potential officers and the best of these should go through Sandhurst'. In practice, however, it was argued that 'very few Africans [...] could qualify', and that commissioning Africans 'would only lead to a lowering in standards which was NOT acceptable'.<sup>184</sup> The Federal authorities continued to emphasise the idea that the new Junior Leader Unit (used for training future NCOs) would also be used to prepare 'eventual' candidates for Sandhurst, and argued that ANCOs' responsibilities had increased.<sup>185</sup> In fact, the political nature of the Nyasaland battalions' internal security duties meant that African WOPCs were no longer allowed to command platoons on operations. By 1962, given that even former British officers were distrusted by the Federation, and that the Nyasaland battalions were regarded as a future 'gain for the armed forces of Pan-Africanism', there was no real prospect of Malawians being granted commissions.<sup>186</sup>

In an atmosphere of overwhelming African opposition to the Federation, and under the threat of the influx of Federal officers into the army, Nyasaland soldiers were not deflected by promises of commissions in the future. A minority openly questioned the role of European officers in the army. One private was reported as asking his Commanding Officer 'Do European Officers have the same qualifications as are required by Africans? If NOT why? When MCP gets into power will

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<sup>183</sup> PRO, CO 968/666, f. 12, Mr. J. Moreton to Major A. E. Majendie, 4 November 1958.

<sup>184</sup> MNA, F 249/1131, G/ARC/A, 'Minutes of the GOC's Fifth Conference held at Army Headquarters over the period 6-7 March 1961', Major-General R. E. B. Long, GOC, 20 March 1961.

<sup>185</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962.

<sup>186</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), Paper on the implications of the secession of Nyasaland, Federal Ministry of Defence, 21 June 1962.



[European officers] still be here?'. Another asked, 'Why do officers do nothing and the PWO's [WOPCs] run the Platoons? Will the PWO's be commissioned?'.<sup>187</sup> In less formal environments, some soldiers were openly hostile. An ANCO returning from a football match was said to have shouted 'Kwacha, Europeans Fuck Off',<sup>188</sup> whilst a KAR driver wrote a letter to the *Malawi News* demanding to know when control of defence would be passed to a 'Malawian' minister. 'Until when is [the KAR] going to be under settlers and whites from Gatooma?', he asked; 'I will jump up and down with joy when change comes into effect'.<sup>189</sup> If such open hostility was relatively uncommon, it is clear that the desire for commissions was more widespread. The Commanding Officer of 1 KAR simply noted that 'The question of African Officers is also raised from time to time and to this can only be given answers in half-tones much as one tries'.<sup>190</sup>

On the passing of control of 1 KAR to Banda's administration following the dissolution of the Federation, and the consequent prospect of the replacement of Federal by European officers, vociferous agitation for African commissions seems to have ceased.<sup>191</sup> The new administration showed surprisingly little urgency in Africanisation, but possibly in response to the mutiny of the Tanganyika Rifles in

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<sup>187</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, 'Political Subversion in Military Unit', Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, to HQ CAC, 27 September 1960.

<sup>188</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, 'Political Subversion in Military Unit', Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, to HQ CAC, 27 September 1960.

<sup>189</sup> Andison Bed Dinga, 'When Shall We Control Defence?', *Malawi News*, 18 January 1963; Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>190</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/5, Lieutenant Colonel T. P. J. Lewis, OC Nyasaland, to Army HQ, Zomba, 20 October 1962.

<sup>191</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/4/15, Lieutenant Colonel T. P. J. Lewis, OC Nyasaland, to Lieutenant Colonel G. J. Hawkins, Zomba, 21 March 1963.

January 1964, which was partly a reaction to slow Africanisation,<sup>192</sup> the Regimental Sergeant-Major of 1 KAR, Graciano Matewere,<sup>193</sup> and five Company Sergeant Majors<sup>194</sup> were commissioned on the eve of independence, following a brief training course in Britain.<sup>195</sup> Following independence, the Malawi Army had nine indigenous officers and 40 Europeans, but by 1967 there were 36 Malawian officers, all but three of whom had been trained in the United Kingdom. By contrast, in 2 KAR, which passed to independent Zambia before being disbanded, no Africans were commissioned.<sup>196</sup> It was only in 1972 that Graciano Matewere became the first African commander of the Malawi Army.<sup>197</sup>

#### Uniforms: African soldiers and visual identity

The importance of uniform as a recruiting tool was discussed in the preceding chapter. However, clothing played an equally important role in the experience of serving African soldiers. The Indian contingent of the Nyasaland forces was issued with one of the most overtly symbolic uniforms of any soldiers in the British Empire. The gaudy costume cut in the 'Zouave' style consisted of a yellow-trimmed black jacket, worn over a white *kurta*,<sup>198</sup> with voluminous yellow trousers, white gaiters,

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<sup>192</sup> See Tanzania People's Defence Forces, *Tanganyika Rifles Mutiny: January 1964* (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993) and Al J. Venter, *Africa at War* (Old Greenwich, Connecticut: Devin-Adair, 1974), pp. 149-59.

<sup>193</sup> Graciano Matewere had been promoted to RSM in August 1963. In 1972, he became the first Malawian to command the Malawi Army. 'News Letters', *Askari*, July 1963, p. 14.

<sup>194</sup> Including Jonas Limbane, John Oweni and Jonas Mbweteka[?].

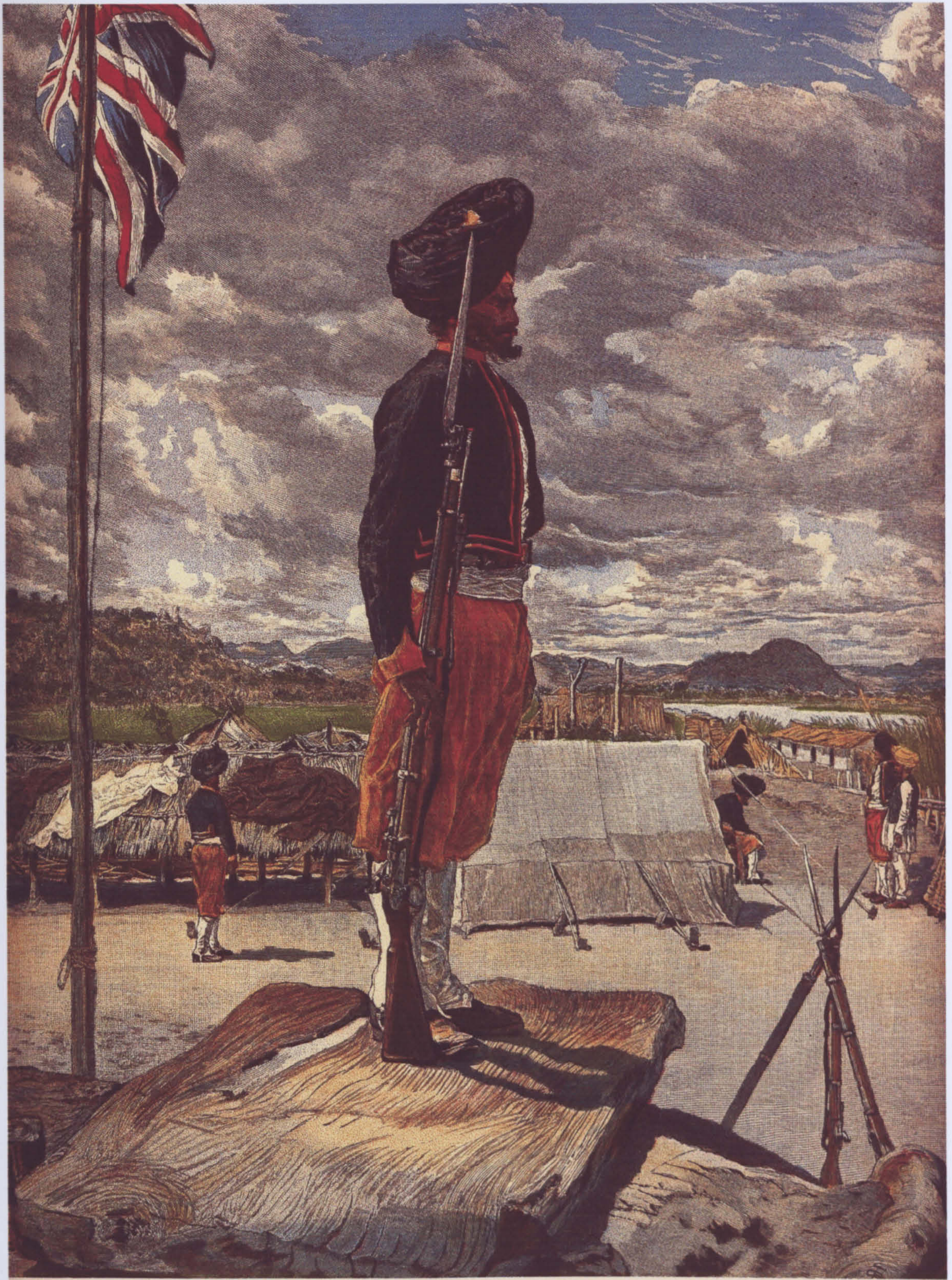
<sup>195</sup> Interview with Major Jonas Limbane, Zomba, 19 February 1999; Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999; RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (205) 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 108-110; J. M. Lee, *African Armies and Civil Order*, Studies in International Security, 13 (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969), pp. 41, 44.

<sup>196</sup> Lee, *African Armies*, pp. 44, 126; Anon., 'Farewell to Commander of the Malawi Army, Colonel D. E. Thornton, C.B.E., E.R.D.', *This is Malawi*, 3, 9 (1967), 12-13.

<sup>197</sup> James Njoloma, *The Malawi Army: A Hundred Years Today*, (Blantyre, Blantyre Printing and Publishing Company, 1991), p. 22.

<sup>198</sup> A shirt-like tunic opening only at the neck.





1. 'A Sikh Sentry at Fort Johnston, British Central Africa'.

Based upon a watercolour sketch by Sir Harry Johnston (who designed the black, yellow, white and red colour scheme), this is a reasonably accurate portrayal of the first uniform worn by members of the Indian contingent in British Central Africa.

[Source: Supplement to *The Graphic*, ca. 1893]



and a broad red cummerbund around the waist. The Sikh identity of the wearer was signified by the addition of a black turban.<sup>199</sup> Johnston explained the use of this scheme as ‘our three colours, black, yellow, and white, with a touch of the English red. Into the sable mass of Africa I have driven [...] Indian Yellow. Over all is the white [...] representing in its best significations the all-embracing white man’.<sup>200</sup> However, whilst the Zouave style originated in France’s North African Army, the cut of the Nyasaland uniform drew on British African patterns, closely resembling the uniforms of the West India Regiment and the West African constabularies, which Johnston must have experienced at first hand in West Africa.<sup>201</sup> The Sikhs were also equipped with a Khaki uniform for field service, but their yellow and black full dress remained much in evidence throughout the 1890s. It is doubtful whether the uniform’s symbolism was recognised by many outside the administration, but its ostentation clearly played an important role in the spectacle which was so important to the power relations of the colonial state. Moreover, its unusual colour scheme had a lasting impact upon the visual identity of the Nyasaland forces.

In contrast to the Sikhs’ elaborate uniform, the earliest African regulars probably had only simple khaki uniforms, whilst many of the local irregulars seem have received no uniform at all, instead wearing cloths tied around their waists.<sup>202</sup> As noted in the preceding chapter, early Yao irregulars seem to have been issued

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<sup>199</sup> ‘A Sikh Sentry at Fort Johnston, British Central Africa, from a watercolour drawing by H. H. Johnston, C.B.’, *Supplement to the Graphic* [n.d.].

<sup>200</sup> Johnston, Sir Harry. H., *British Central Africa: An Attempt to Give Some Account of a Portion of the Territories Under British Influence North of the Zambesi* (London: Methuen, 1897), p. 129n.

<sup>201</sup> Thomas S. Abler, *Hinterland Warriors and Military Dress: European Empires and Exotic Uniforms* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), pp. 100-03; Alan Harfield, *The Indian Army of the Empress, 1861-1903* (Speldhurst: Spellmount, 1991).

<sup>202</sup> Glave, E. J., ‘Glave in Nyassaland: British Raids on the Slave Traders’, *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, 52, 4 (August 1896), 587-606 (pp. 595-596); Moyse-Bartlett, *The King’s African Rifles*, p. 689.



with 'red turbans', which were probably adopted because, as mentioned above, the scarlet headband was a symbol of authority amongst the Yao.<sup>203</sup> However, with the regularisation of the local forces in 1896, a more conventional khaki uniform was adopted for all.<sup>204</sup> Johnston's colour scheme was also perpetuated in the non-commissioned officers' rank chevrons, which were made in yellow on a black ground. The uniform was less European in style than that used in British East Africa or Uganda, with the khaki 'coat' cut more like the Indian Army's *kurta* than the British Army's tunic.<sup>205</sup> As in other East African forces,<sup>206</sup> following the pattern of the Egyptian Army, a fez was adopted, but unlike the red fez worn elsewhere, the Nyasaland fez was black, like the turbans of the Indian contingent.<sup>207</sup> Although this does not seem to have been intended, the use of the fez, with its Islamic associations, may have strengthened the identity of Yao soldiers within the armed forces, at a time when Yaos as a whole were increasingly associated with Islam.<sup>208</sup> With the addition of blue puttees and a blue jumper (also innovations from the Egyptian Army), this basic uniform was adopted by the whole KAR, and remained essentially unchanged before the Second World War.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, f. 87, Wordsworth Poole to his mother. Zomba, 22 October 1895; Clyde Mitchell, *The Yao Village*, pp. 78, 91-95.

<sup>204</sup> PRO FO 2/106, ff. 246-47, 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards,' 3 April 1896.

<sup>205</sup> PRO, CO 534/2, f. 433, Memorandum on Uniform and Equipment of the King's African Rifles [n.d., 1901].

<sup>206</sup> The East Africa Rifles and the Uganda Rifles.

<sup>207</sup> PRO FO 2/106, ff. 246-47, 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards,' 3 April 1896. By 1900, the Uganda Rifles had abandoned the fez in favour of the British Army's blue Field Service Cap.

<sup>208</sup> 'The Blue Book', *Central African Times*, 1 November 1902, p. 10.

<sup>209</sup> PRO, CO 534/2, ff. 432-34, Memorandum on Uniform and Equipment of the King's African Rifles [n.d., 1901]; Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 689.

Non-Nyasaland battalions continued to wear the red fez.

Soldiers were encouraged to treat this uniform with respect, and in the 1890s it was emphasised that it was 'to be kept folded in their racks and never worn except on duty - especially the fez'.<sup>210</sup> This was underlined by the fact that before 1900, except when on important parades or when on 'expeditions', soldiers usually wore a fatigue dress which, consisting of a blue uniform and red 'cloth cap', bore no resemblance to their khaki outfit.<sup>211</sup> Whilst British soldiers returning home on leave were allowed to wear their uniforms, Nyasaland soldiers were 'on no account whatever [to] be allowed to take uniform - whether full dress or fatigue with them'.<sup>212</sup> In 1905, the commanding officer even asked the civil police to arrest soldiers who had been seen wearing parts of their uniform on leave.<sup>213</sup> The wearing of a 'mixture' of uniform and civilian clothing was still treated as a serious offence as late as 1963.<sup>214</sup>

These measures were partly intended to prevent the abuse of the authority vested in the uniform, either by soldiers themselves, or by civilians who had illegally purchased items of military clothing. This reflected a real problem, as noted in chapter 2, Lewis Mataka Bandawe recalled how in the early twentieth century, men 'in soldiers' uniforms' regularly robbed civilians in Palombe.<sup>215</sup> Perhaps more importantly, it was also feared that the wearing of uniform out of the sight of the military authorities might damage the prestige of the armed forces. Thus in 1898, an

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<sup>210</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 13, 'Clothing' [1897].

<sup>211</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 13, 'Clothing' [1897]; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 206, 'Khaki Uniform', 19 November 1898; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Annual Report on the British Central Africa Protectorate for the Year 1897-98*, Africa No.9, 1898, Cmd. 9048, p. 16; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 352, 'Red fezzes discontinued', 27 January 1900.

<sup>212</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 279, 13 May 1899.

<sup>213</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 32, 'Dress', 23 February 1905

<sup>214</sup> MNA, F 249/1129, A/133/Conf D/40, 'Proceedings of a District Court Martial on the Trial of 15146 Cpl. Andison Bed (1 KAR)' 25/26 February 1963, Cobbe Barracks, Zomba.

<sup>215</sup> Lewis Mataka Bandawe, *Memoirs of a Malawian*, ed. by B. Pachai (Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 1969), pp. 63-64.



order was also issued that 'Soldiers in Uniform are strictly forbidden to carry parcels and loads',<sup>216</sup> to which was later added a prohibition on uniformed soldiers drinking alcohol in public.<sup>217</sup>

For Nyasaland soldiers themselves, however, it was not the authority vested in the uniform, but rather the perceived lack of authority which seemed most problematic. Unlike the uniforms of the Uganda Rifles and East African Rifles, the dress of Nyasaland soldiers did not include boots.<sup>218</sup> Even after the formation of the KAR in 1902, when the other battalions received a uniform similar to that of the CAR, boots were retained for certain orders of dress in Kenya and Uganda.<sup>219</sup> The lack of boots caused embarrassment to Nyasaland soldiers when they were sent overseas. Sergeant Nkwanda recalled that when the CAR had served in Ashanti, other African soldiers equipped with 'long trousers and boots [...] were laughing at us because of our bare feet'. Later serving in East Africa, Nkwanda had also resented the issue of boots to Swahili soldiers, who were part of the same regiment, and whose uniform was otherwise similar to that worn in Nyasaland.<sup>220</sup>

The failure to issue footwear to Malawian soldiers also brought derision upon them from the civilian communities among which they were stationed. In 1899, the

<sup>216</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 158, [June 1898].

<sup>217</sup> Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King's African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, [1908(?)]), p. 17.

<sup>218</sup> Anon, 'In British East Africa With The East African Rifles', *Navy and Army Illustrated* [n.d.]; W. Lloyd-Jones, *K.A.R.: Being an Unofficial Account of the Origin and Activities of the King's African Rifles* (London: Arrowsmith, 1926), pp. 68f, 70f; C. Percival, 'Five Years in British Central Africa', in *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle for 1905* (London: John Bale and Sons, 1906), pp. 47-73 [p. 71].

<sup>219</sup> Richard Meinertzhagen, *Kenya Diary 1902-1906* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1957), p. 10; PRO, CO 534/2, f. 436, 'Direct Supply of Boots, Equipment to K.A.R.' 16 August 1905.

<sup>220</sup> PRO, CO 525/66, f. 631, Evidence of Sergeant Nkwanda, Native Sergeant Askari, Chiradzulu Boma, Blantyre, 31 July 1915.

men of the CAR who attacked Mauritian villages near their barracks had been mocked for their bare feet by the local population. Private Jumbe recalled that 'A creole shouted at us from the verandah of a house and jeered at us pointing to our bare feet', after which Jumbe and two other Malawians were set upon by a Mauritian crowd who stole their fezzes and assaulted them using 'sticks stones and knives'.<sup>221</sup> Some of the Malawians had only their blue fatigue uniforms on disembarkation, indeed, the Governor of Mauritius subsequently described the battalion as

A mob of savage undrilled recruits not only without uniform or arms but almost naked. Their clothing did not arrive for some weeks after the Battalion, and an unfortunate first impression was at once created by the rudely grotesque appearance they presented on disembarking.<sup>222</sup>

This aspect of their appearance in particular led to men being derided with shouts of 'Zulu'.<sup>223</sup> More seriously, soldiers stationed in their own depot in Zomba were also laughed at by their fellow Malawians, to the extent that the authorities were forced to issue sandals to mitigate soldiers' embarrassment.<sup>224</sup>

Despite the wishes of soldiers like Nkwanda, who claimed that 'If I put boots on I would walk fast, just the same with my bare feet',<sup>225</sup> the KAR refused to issue footwear as a standard part of soldiers' uniform. As Parsons notes, the first *Regulations for the King's African Rifles* made it an article of faith that 'all tendency

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<sup>221</sup> PRO, CO 167/724, 'Evidence regarding the theft of Regimental Fezzes from No. 315 Private Jumbe and No. 275 Private Nyalapa 2/B.C.A. Rifles at Vacoas on the 26th November 1899', Captain A. J. Gordon, Adjutant, 2nd BCA Rifles, 27 November 1899.

<sup>222</sup> PRO, CO 167/724, Sir Charles Bruce, Governor of Mauritius, to Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 December 1899.

<sup>223</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Declaration by Boodhun to Sergeant A. Sarah, Mauritius Police, 3 December 1899; PRO, CO 167/728, Lieutenant J. Johnson Stewart, 2 BCA Rifles, to Captain A. J. Gordon, Adjutant, 2 BCA Rifles, 10 December 1899; PRO, CO 167/724, Captain A. de Wilton, Inspector-General of Police, Mauritius, to Graham Bower, Colonial Secretary, Mauritius, 11 December 1899.

<sup>224</sup> PRO, CO 525/66, f. 631, Evidence of Sergeant Nkwanda, Native Sergeant Askari, Chiradzulu Boma, Blantyre, 31 July 1915.

<sup>225</sup> PRO, CO 525/66, f. 631, Evidence of Sergeant Nkwanda, Native Sergeant Askari, Chiradzulu Boma, Blantyre, 31 July 1915.



to introduce [footgear] into general use is to be discouraged', as it was felt this would hinder their 'natural mobility'.<sup>226</sup> At the same time, however, provision was also made for sandals to be worn on active service, and it was subsequently ordered that 'chupplis'<sup>227</sup> should be worn 'where the nature of the ground necessitates the use of footgear'.<sup>228</sup> This reflected practical experience, since soldiers often suffered wounds to their feet on active service.<sup>229</sup> Foot injuries, caused by 'thorns and sharp stones', accounted for more 'hospital cases' than any other cause among Malawians serving in Somaliland between 1908 and 1910,<sup>230</sup> and the lack of boots also caused serious problems with foot injuries during the First World War.<sup>231</sup> Such injuries were not uncommon during peacetime training: in 1920, 30 per cent of hospital admissions in 1 KAR were for foot injuries,<sup>232</sup> and in 1924, about 35 men were hospitalised with cracked feet during the first week of the 1 KAR's battalion route march.<sup>233</sup>

In reaction to such problems, boots were issued to some Nyasaland units in the First World War after 1916, although supply was haphazard.<sup>234</sup> Many men

<sup>226</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 118. See Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 96.

<sup>227</sup> A sturdy sandal used in the Indian Army.

<sup>228</sup> Great Britain, *Regulations for the King's African Rifles*, (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1908), p. 21, amendment to paragraph 117.

<sup>229</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/2/1, Wordsworth Poole Journal, 23 September 1895; MNA, KAR 2/1/9, Memorandum by Captain H. P. Bennitt, Msinje, 25 August 1905.

<sup>230</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Colonial Reports - Annual. No. 655. Nyasaland Protectorate. Report for 1909-10*, Cmd. 4964-29, para. 42.

<sup>231</sup> NAM, 6505-16/3, f. 4, '2/2 KAR 1916-1918', Captain E. A. Priestland; PRO, CO 820/30/5/1, Major-General G. J. Giffard, Inspector General, RWAFF and KAR, to C. H. F. Plowman, Officer Administering the Government, British Somaliland, Sheikh, 16 November 1937.

<sup>232</sup> PRO, CO 534/46, f. 338, Report on Camp Sanitation and Requirements for the Patients in Hospital [December 1920].

<sup>233</sup> PRO, CO 534/56, ff. 193-201, '1st Battalion, the King's African Rifles: Diary of the Battalion March, 1924'.

<sup>234</sup> NAM, 6505-16/3, f. 1, '2/2 KAR 1916-1918', Captain E. A. Priestland; PRO, WO 95/5321, War Diary 2/2 KAR, 21 May 1917; IWM, 83/31/1, Diary of A. W. Nichols, CQMS Kent Cyclists, attached 3/2 King's African Rifles, 31 July, 1917.

unaccustomed to footwear suffered from ulcers, but Nyasaland soldiers were pleased to have access to the status which they associated with boots, whilst those who were not issued with footwear felt increased resentment.<sup>235</sup> These boots seem to have been returned to stores at the end of the war, but sandals were made a general issue to soldiers of 1 KAR as an experiment for two years from 1925.<sup>236</sup> However, it was only in 1937 that a decision was taken to provide 'specially designed boots' for African ranks in the KAR.<sup>237</sup> This move was not a reaction to African soldiers' desire for footwear, but mainly reflected an operational concern that KAR soldiers' naked skin should not be exposed to mustard gas in case of war with Italy.<sup>238</sup>

Fears that boots would hamper soldiers' mobility were realised to an extent, as many soldiers found their new footwear uncomfortable at first.<sup>239</sup> In 1 KAR, many soldiers' boots seem to have been badly fitted, and possibly as a consequence of such problems, orders were issued in 1941 that boots should only be worn on guard duties.<sup>240</sup> However, despite the genuine discomfort experienced by many, it is clear

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<sup>235</sup> PRO, WO 95/5321, War Diary 2/2 KAR, 28 June 1917; Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 96.

<sup>236</sup> PRO, CO 534/56, f. 163, Bowring, Governor of Nyasaland, to Lieutenant-Colonel L. M. S. Amery, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22 April 1925.

<sup>237</sup> MNA, S 2/6/35, King's African Rifles Reorganisation - Minutes of meeting held at Government House, Nyasaland, on the 24th of December, 1937.

<sup>238</sup> MNA, KAR 5/1/1, Memorandum by the Inspector-General, Royal West African Frontier Force and King's African Rifles on the reorganization of the forces in our East African Colonies, 1937 August, p. 20; PRO, CO 820/30/5/1, Major-General G. J. Giffard, Inspector General, RWAFF and KAR, to C. H. F. Plowman, Officer Administering the Government, British Somaliland, Sheikh, 16 November 1937; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 119.

<sup>239</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (7), Colonel Desmond John Bannister [1980?], f. 7; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f.23, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?]; RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24 A), f. 91, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie, 1981.

<sup>240</sup> PRO, WO 169/758, Battalion Orders by Lieutenant-Colonel A. H. Thornhill, Commanding, 1st Battalion, The King's African Rifles, 26 September 1940.



that boots were welcomed by Nyasaland soldiers as a 'status symbol';<sup>241</sup> indeed one officer recalled seeing men of 2 KAR in 1942 having 'a good laugh when [they] encountered the barefooted Tamil up country in Ceylon.'<sup>242</sup> The authorities officially recognised the social importance of soldiers' boots by extending their wear to the 'walking out' uniform worn off duty.<sup>243</sup> Even an officer who served in the mid-1950s recalled that Nyasaland soldiers felt that their boots 'gave them social superiority over their bare-footed brothers'.<sup>244</sup>

Prior to the Second World War, whilst the authorities had argued against boots on the grounds of operational efficiency, in practice the only time when footwear could never be worn by Malawians was on the parade ground. This suggests that the authorities valued the symbolism of bare feet as much as any perceived military advantages. Many early colonists and administrators in Nyasaland had certainly deprecated any tendency towards the Europeanisation of African dress. As Hector Duff noted at the beginning of the twentieth century,

it seems to be a *sine qua non* that [the missionaries'] native assistants [...] shall wear coats and trousers, frequently even hats [...] To me, I confess, the sight of a negro thus arrayed is an abomination [...] he loses at once all dignity of mien, all freedom of movement, all harmony with his surroundings.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>241</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (24 A), f. 91, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie, 1981.

<sup>242</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 23, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>243</sup> PRO, WO 169/2994, Battalion Orders by Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Macnab, Commanding, 1/1st Battalion, The King's African Rifles, 4 October 1941; PRO, WO 169/14104, Battalion Orders by Lieutenant-Colonel N. C. Robertson-Glasgow, Commanding, 1st Bn. The 1st King's African Rifles, 27 February 1943.

<sup>244</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), p. 4, 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979.

<sup>245</sup> Duff, *Nyasaland Under the Foreign Office*, p. 214.

Similarly, for some KAR officers, African soldiers' bare feet were a sign of innate 'toughness' which overtly European clothing such as boots threatened to destroy.<sup>246</sup> Thus, whilst the role of uniform in emphasising regimental identity required that some unique features (such as blue puttees) were common to European and African ranks, the more explicitly 'native' black fez which was to have been worn by European officers in 1902 seems to have been quickly abandoned.<sup>247</sup>

As well as seeking to perpetuate the differences between European and African ranks, uniform was also used to reinforce distinctions in status within the African ranks. Whilst combatant and non-combatant ranks were distinguished in the British Army by little more than a badge, in the Nyasaland battalions of the KAR, overt differences in dress were used to emphasise the distinction between those who could and could not consider themselves soldiers in the fullest sense. Thus, before the First World War, 2 KAR's Machine-Gun Porters, who went into action but were unarmed, wore a blue uniform and cap rather than the soldiers' khaki, and a brown jersey rather than the soldiers' blue.<sup>248</sup> By 1927, Machine-Gun Porters and Stretcher Bearers in 1 KAR had acquired the black fez and other items of soldiers uniform in Nyasaland, but were still distinguished as non-combatants by the brown jersey. More menial ranks, such as Messengers and Sweepers, were also identified by the

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<sup>246</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>247</sup> PRO, CO 534/2, f. 300, 'Conditions of service with the troops stationed in the African Protectorates administered under the Foreign Office', Foreign Office, 1 December 1903; PRO, CO 534/2, ff. 432-34, Memorandum on Uniform and Equipment of the King's African Rifles [n.d., 1901]. Photograph no. 68 in NAM, 7807-23, Diary of Lieutenant C. W. Barton, shows the fez still worn in late 1903.

<sup>248</sup> Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King's African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, [1908(?)]), p. 34.



brown jersey, but along with Mess staff, they were further denied access to the black fez, wearing a red pattern instead.<sup>249</sup>

More significantly, from an early date, the authorities clearly recognised and sought to use the social desirability of European style dress which had underlain Malawians' attitudes towards footwear. By the 1920s, senior ANCOs were unofficially granted officers' accoutrements such as Sam Browne belts, European-style tunics, and boots.<sup>250</sup> To meet the aspirations of educated Malawians, interpreters were also granted European uniform elements such as tunics, boots, and long trousers. Both groups, however, retained the fez.<sup>251</sup> The adoption of boots and slouch hats for all ranks in the late 1930s reduced the obvious differences between Europeans and Africans in the field, but African uniforms continued to be of a lesser quality.

Differences were retained in post-war parade uniforms, however, so that Europeans wore the slouch hat whilst African privates still wore the fez. Again, the Europeans' slouch hat, complete with officers' plumes or 'hackles', was used to indicate the status of ANCOs.<sup>252</sup> From 1954, the Federal authorities made more deliberate use of Malawians' uniforms in an apparent effort to mitigate the comparatively slow rate of Africanisation. Whilst East African KAR soldiers

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<sup>249</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland, 1927), pp. 88-89. See MNA, S 2/8/20/1, C. G. Phillips, OC Nyasaland Detachment 1 KAR, to OC Mangoche Detachment 1 KAR, Zomba, 5 February 1920.

<sup>250</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 49.

<sup>251</sup> Society of Malawi Library (hereafter SOM), Military Album No. 1; Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland, 1927), p. 89.

<sup>252</sup> John Scurr, *The Malayan Campaign 1948-60* (Oxford: Osprey, 1982), p. 19; *Askari*, January 1963, p. 13; 'Visitors and Events: Second Battalion Central African Rifles', *Askari*, June 1963, p. 13.

retained the 'native pattern' collarless blouse,<sup>253</sup> Nyasaland soldiers' uniforms were 'Europeanised' with the issue of 'practically the same articles of dress as European soldiers'.<sup>254</sup> African Warrant Officers were given 'gabardine uniforms and shoes, stockings and caps', 'of exactly the same design as that worn by Officers', whilst Warrant Officers and Sergeants were also allowed to wear officers' style 'Mess Dress'.<sup>255</sup>

It is doubtful whether such provisions compensated for the lack of commissions, but there are indications that accoutrements which suggested officers' status were valued by Nyasaland soldiers. Men from 1 KAR serving in Abyssinia in 1941 took to carrying officers' style fly whisks and walking sticks, and had to be ordered to 'cease forthwith and officers only will carry them'.<sup>256</sup> An officer who served in the mid-1950s recalled that 'The African Platoon sergeant major was very proud to wear the bush hat on which was mounted the Guinea Fowl feathers behind the cap badge - the mark of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion'.<sup>257</sup> However, it is important to note that Malawians seem to have been less eager to abandon the more distinctive elements of their dress than the soldiers of other African forces. Whilst

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<sup>253</sup> Iain Grahame, *Jambo Effendi: Seven Years With the King's African Rifles* (London: J. A. Allen, 1966), frontispiece; 'Pictorial Supplement', *Rhino Link: Newsletter of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces Dinner Club*, 11 (1996), 8-9 (p. 9); 'Pictorial Miscellany', *Rhino Link: Newsletter of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces Dinner Club*, 18 (1999), 15-17 (p. 15).

<sup>254</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation', 25 June 1962; MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962.

<sup>255</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation', 25 June 1962; MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962; MNA, F 249/1131, G/ARC/A, 'Minutes of the GOC's Fifth Conference held at Army Headquarters over the period 6-7 March 1961', Major-General R. E. B. Long, General Officer Commanding, 20 March 1961; 'Visitors and Events: Second Battalion Central African Rifles', *Askari*, June 1963, p. 13.

<sup>256</sup> PRO, WO 169/2994, Battalion Orders by Lieutenant-Colonel J. F. Macnab, Commanding 1/1st Battalion, The King's African Rifles, 20 August 1941.

<sup>257</sup> MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979.



Kenyan soldiers serving in Malaya in the 1950s were embarrassed by their khaki uniforms when other forces were clothed in jungle green,<sup>258</sup> Malawians in Ceylon in the Second World War complained that ‘we have had our khaki blouses, our jerseys and boots taken away from us’.<sup>259</sup> Similarly, whilst most independent African armies hurried to divest themselves of the most overtly colonial elements of their dress, the Malawi Rifles Band retained their fezzes, complete with yellow and black colour scheme, at least until the early 1970s, and the regiment was still equipped with the colonial parade uniform of slouch hat, khaki jacket and shorts in the 1980s.<sup>260</sup>

### Temporal structures and discipline.

#### *Military Training and Routine*

Of course, as in other western-style armies, rigid structure was not only inscribed upon soldiers through the military hierarchy and uniforms, but permeated daily life in the garrison. For Ranger, the military environment in colonial Africa, with ‘the drill square as source and symbol of discipline and punctuality’, was deliberately constructed to control the behaviour of African soldiers.<sup>261</sup> This reflects the established Western disciplinary system, described by Foucault, in which institutional authorities sought to mould individuals into useful ‘docile bodies’ through a series of well-defined expedients. Physically, individuals would be ‘enclosed’ to isolate them from wider society, ‘partitioned’ within that enclosure, ‘so

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<sup>258</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 118.

<sup>259</sup> MNA, S 34/1/4/1/7, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 5 of 1942, 22 August 1942.

<sup>260</sup> Anon, ‘The Malawi Rifles’, *Vision of Malawi*, March 1970, pp. 11-15; James Njoloma, *The Malawi Army: A Hundred Years Today*, (Blantyre, Blantyre Printing and Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 25-27.

<sup>261</sup> Terence Ranger, ‘The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa’, in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 211-262, p.228..

that each individual has his own space', and then placed in 'functional sites' devoted to particular defined activities. Temporally, the activity of individuals would be controlled at a general level through the timetable, and at the level of the body through the 'temporal elaboration of the act', as in the minute movements described in the drill manual. This aimed to synthesise the individual's body with the movements which it is required to perform, as a 'body-machine'. Individuals would then be combined, "one by one, then two by two, then in greater numbers" [...] as part of a multi-segmentary machine'.<sup>262</sup>

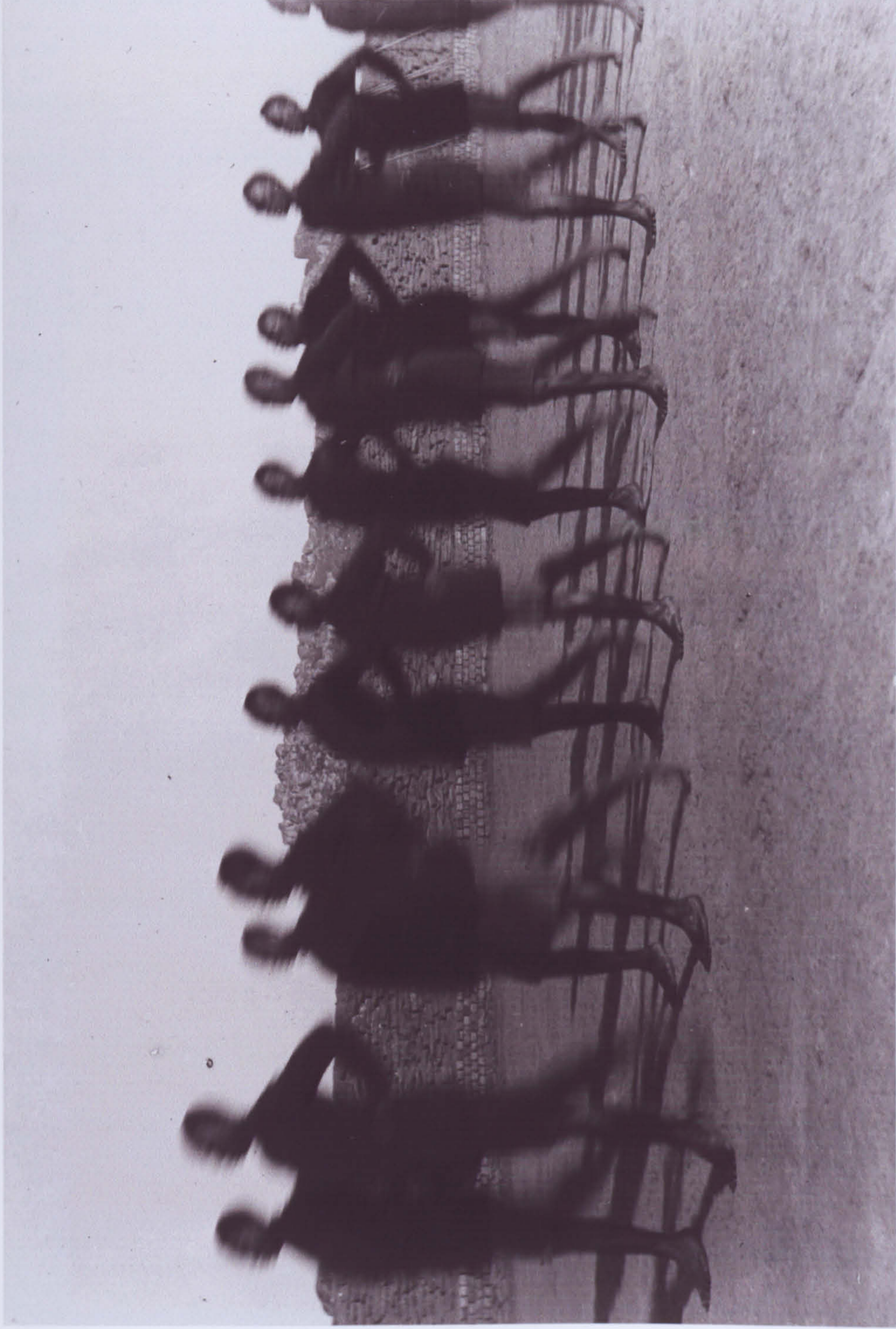
The earliest indigenous soldiers in Nyasaland seem to have experienced only minimal formal garrison life and military training before being sent on operations. Referring to the expedition against 'Zarafi' (Jalasi) in mid-1895, Major Edwards noted, 'As the majority of our Atonga Regulars were only enlisted in June or July I wanted an extra month to train them, more especially in fire discipline and shooting'.<sup>263</sup> However, with the decline in the intensiveness of military activity and the establishment of a formal military camp in Zomba, a more traditional routine of military training, ruled by the bugle call, was quickly initiated. Lieutenant Francis Poole noted the operation of this routine in the late 1890s:

a black bugler steps from the quarter guard & [...] blows a call, which is followed by a hundred & twenty odd soldiery dashing across the bridge, laughing, shouting words of command & left, right eager to come to parade. [...] On entering they stop their noise & with a salute to their European officer, fall in on the parade ground, where the roll is called by a fine looking grey haired Sikh havildar with an enormous turban. [...] The different squads now march off under their instructors & drill begins in earnest. A big fierce looking Sikh [...] is explaining the mysteries of the [diagonal] march to half a dozen recruits, in a mixture of Hindustani, Swahili & Mañanja, very curious to hear. An expression of desire to please & pay attention

<sup>262</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, translated by Alan Sheridan, 2nd edn., (London: Penguin, 1979), pp. 135-69.

<sup>263</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Correspondence Respecting Operations Against Slave-Traders in British Central Africa*, Africa No.4, 1896, Cmd. 8013, p. 14.





2. The 'temporal elaboration of the act'

One of a series of photographs showing KAR soldiers undergoing drill instruction and physical training in Zomba before the First World War, this particular picture seems to show an exercise in posture. Taken by Dr Hugh Stannus Stannus, Medical Officer to the KAR in Nyasaland 1905-1914.

[Source: University of Dundee Archives, MS 49/1/7 (111).]



can be seen on the negro faces, which greatly lessens the labour of training them.  
<sup>264</sup>

This system grew to resemble Foucault's model on a number of levels. From the beginning of their training, recruits were separated from civilian society, not only symbolically through their uniforms, but also physically by moving into the military 'Lines' with their families.<sup>265</sup> As Omissi has noted in relation to the Indian Army, this isolation later served to limit the influence of nationalist politics.<sup>266</sup> In line with this, in the Federal period the military authorities worried when soldiers lived in too close proximity to large urban centres, as in Stephenson Barracks in Lusaka, which an Intelligence Officer described as 'the most exposed to subversive influence in the Federation'.<sup>267</sup> Before the Second World War, the internal organisation of the Nyasaland battalions into tribal companies also performed a useful function from the perspective of the authorities. The same ideas of tribal characteristics which informed recruiting policy also allowed the authorities to categorise what they believed to be the likely behaviour of the bodies of men under their command, and this dictated attitudes towards the most suitable methods of training. An early KAR officer noted,

As regards an order, it is sufficient to say to a Yao, 'You are not do so and so,' but to an Atonga it is necessary to say, 'You are not do so and so, and if you do you will be punished.' [...] An Atonga, in his present state, must be ruled by 'a stick and a smile,' and the stick must come first; on the other hand, a Yao can be ruled by a smile with the rod in the background. I do not wish to suggest that the stick should be frequently used, [...] but let it always be handy.<sup>268</sup>

<sup>264</sup> MNA, 14/FGP/4/2, 'Leaves From Darkest Africa', Francis Garden Poole [late 1897].

<sup>265</sup> See chapter 4.

<sup>266</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. 102-03.

<sup>267</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NR/1/2, Captain D. K. Bales, Military Intelligence Officer, Northern Rhodesia, to HQ CAC, 17 September 1959. See MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NR/1, Colonel C. M. Grigg, OC, Northern Rhodesia, to HQ CAC, 2 September 1959.

<sup>268</sup> Percival, 'Five Years in British Central Africa', p. 50.



Similarly, de Guingand wrote of an incident in the late 1920s, when two men left camp against orders to buy a goat, 'Needless to say, the two men belonged to the Atonga tribe [...] The Atonga were certainly the "spivs" of our Battalion.'<sup>269</sup>

From the start, the authorities sought to limit the amount of idle time available to soldiers. In 1895, Lieutenant Alston observed of the regime in Zomba camp,

Each squad [of Tonga soldiers] is under a Sepoy who acts as instructor and looks after the men, and is responsible that they work. In the morning from 6.30 to 12 they work at clearing the ground, stumping, fetching grass for thatching and bamboos for houses. At 2 p.m. they come on parade again for drill just like recruits and they are dismissed at 5.30. I think it is much too long a day for them, however [Major] Edwards doesn't think so.<sup>270</sup>

The system developed so that both recruits and trained soldiers underwent a well-defined daily routine of training, broken into subjects such as arms drill, weapons training or 'musketry', field training, and physical training.<sup>271</sup> By the 1950s and '60s, the established daily pattern, still marked by bugle calls, involved physical training at 6 a.m., a parade at 7 a.m., with military training during the morning, followed by sports after lunch.<sup>272</sup> For most of the colonial period, the weekly routine was also organised according to a predictable pattern, marked by the weekly Commanding Officer's inspection, and the *Tamaam* parade held each Sunday, at which all men had to appear in their best uniforms as 'the "Last Post" was played and the Union Jack lowered at the flagstaff'.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 28.

<sup>270</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 2 July 1895.

<sup>271</sup> PRO, CO 534 and CO 820, Battalion Inspection Reports 1 KAR and 2 KAR, 1905-1939.

<sup>272</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (120), f. 10, Lieutenant-Colonel John T. H. Gunning [1980?]; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 4; Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>273</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 32, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?]. See PRO, WO 169/24361, War Diary of 21 Nyasaland Battalion, King's African Rifles, 1946.

The nature of training also resembled the Foucaultian model of 'the temporal elaboration of the act'. Recruits' training, based upon infantry training in the British Army, took up to eighteen months around the First World War, but was theoretically reduced to six months by the late 1930s.<sup>274</sup> The training schedule was dominated by drill, conducted by Sikh instructors in the 1890s, and later by ANCOs under the control of the European Adjutant and British Sergeant Major.<sup>275</sup> This drill was intended not only to inculcate automatic obedience to commands, but also to mould the very posture of the body, as graphically illustrated in a series of photographs taken by the medical officer Hugh Stannus Stannus in the early 1900s.<sup>276</sup> Other types of training placed a similar emphasis upon learning by repetition:

The commands were given in English but the explanations of the movements were given in Cinyanja [sic] which we all had to learn. Imitation, and learning by rote, was the basic model of teaching. Even the standard Army descriptions of trees were drummed in by repetition; so 'booshy-top' tree was chanted endlessly until it was engrained [sic] in their memories.<sup>277</sup>

Finally, the long-term structure of training also reflected the model described by Foucault, with recruits moving from individual, through squad, platoon, company, and battalion drills.<sup>278</sup> A similar formula was generally repeated by trained soldiers throughout their careers, as they were put through an annual cycle of field training, moving through individual, squad, company, and battalion exercises, and culminating in the annual battalion march.<sup>279</sup>

<sup>274</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 24, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>275</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (8), f. 9, Patrick William George Barnes [1980?].

<sup>276</sup> See University of Dundee Archives (hereafter Dundee), MS 49/1/7, glass negatives by Hugh Stannus Stannus, showing troops of the Kings African Rifles carrying out physical training exercise [1905?], esp. 111-112.

<sup>277</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) II, ff. 91-92, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947, by Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie' [1981.].

<sup>278</sup> PRO, CAB 45/22, 'General Progress Report on the 3rd/1st K.A.R. from formation to 30th June 1917', Lieutenant Colonel C. W. Barton, Limbe, 7 July 1917.

<sup>279</sup> PRO, CO 534/56, ff. 202-03, 1st KAR Battalion Training Programme, Season 1924-1925; PRO, CO 534/56, ff. 193-201, 1 KAR Diary of the Battalion March, 1924.



Of course, military routine in the KAR often failed to reach the level of systematisation suggested by this ideal. During the First World War, recruits to 3/1 KAR had to be sent out on patrol within four months of their enlistment, and the standard programme of weapons training was curtailed as it was felt that 'it was better to have a large number of men with some knowledge of how to fire a rifle than a few men who had completed a full musketry course'.<sup>280</sup> In peacetime, the totality of the experience was broken up by involvement in military operations, by changes of station every three years, and annually by events such as drill competitions, and public spectacles such as the King's or Queen's Birthday Parade.<sup>281</sup>

Whilst drill and military routine were often regarded as onerous in the British Army, European officers were generally surprised at the extent to which Malawians enjoyed, or at least tolerated, military drill, and the trivial routine tasks or 'bull' which was necessary to the maintenance of uniform.<sup>282</sup> Writing in 1897, Lieutenant Gough noted that his Malawian troops referred to drill simply as 'playing with the rifle'.<sup>283</sup> An officer who served in the 1930s recalled 'The African of my time liked 'spit and polish'; their turnout and standard of drill was proverbial',<sup>284</sup> while another

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<sup>280</sup> PRO, CAB 45/22, 'General Progress Report on the 3rd/1st K.A.R. from formation to 30th June 1917', Lieutenant Colonel C. W. Barton, Limbe, 7 July 1917.

<sup>281</sup> PRO, CO 534/56, ff. 193-201, 1 KAR Diary of the Battalion March, 1924; PRO, WO 169/24361, 'Drill Competition', Lieutenant B. H. Dunkey, RIO, 2/1 KAR [March 1946]; Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>282</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (120), f. 11, Lieutenant-Colonel John T. H. Gunning [1980?]; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (154), f. 15, 'Memorandum from R. W. Kettlewell concerning the role of British forces in Africa', 20 July 1979; James Lunt, *Imperial Sunset: Frontier Soldiering in the 20th Century* (London: Macdonald, 1981), p. 234.

<sup>283</sup> Beckett, Ian F. W., *Johnnie Gough, V.C.: A Biography of Sir John Edmund Gough, V.C., K.C.B., C.M.G.* (London: Tom Donovan, 1989), p. 29.

<sup>284</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (7), f. 7, Colonel Desmond John Bannister [1980?].

noted that 'the African took great pride in keeping his uniform clean and equipment blanched'.<sup>285</sup> Post-war officers formed a similar impression:

The majority of the African Askari liked being a soldier and liked the ceremonial and the dressing-up which is part of the military life. He liked to clean his equipment. He liked particularly to shine brass or steel or leather, and took great pride in presenting himself in the best popular manner. He particularly liked colour and flashy accoutrements.<sup>286</sup>

Such stereotypes must be treated with caution, but as noted in the preceding chapter, many recruits were attracted to the army by military spectacle, the prestige of which was enhanced in Nyasaland society by the *Beni*, *Malipenga* and *Mganda* dances. Soldiers even carried out drill in their spare time. In 1903 Lieutenant Barton observed that 'At times fired with zeal my Yao [Orderly] gives an exhibition of bayonet exercise with a spear to an admiring crowd of Somalis & once I saw him drilling two small boys'.<sup>287</sup> Similar scenes were observed in the 1930s and even during the Second World War; officers noted that 'They'd be so keen about drilling they'd even order themselves about',<sup>288</sup> or

The askari liked arms drill and 'hitting his rifle' and two of them could often be seen in the lines shouting words of command at each other, each in turn completing the rifle movements. The orders given sounded very much like those given by their 'Bwana'.<sup>289</sup>

Some ex-soldiers also remember drill fondly: Jauma Matola recalled that he 'liked drill very much', whilst Seckson Philip Nkhoswe stated that he 'liked drill and physical training as this gave me courage'.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>285</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 24, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>286</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 4.

<sup>287</sup> NAM, 7807-23, f. 24, Diary of Lieutenant C. W. Barton, 2 July 1903.

<sup>288</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 3960/05, Transcript of interview with Colonel R. E. S. Yeldham CBE, 3 November 1978, p. 10.

<sup>289</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 26, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>290</sup> Interview with Jauma Matola, Zomba, October 2000; Interview with Seckson Philip Nkhoswe, Zomba, October 2000.



As in other African forces, training and operations were marked by the use of marching songs, for which Malawians were particularly renowned.<sup>291</sup> According to one observer, 'The Nyasas are the singers of East Africa, or at least the East African forces. Their songs have power and music in them'.<sup>292</sup> Some marching songs, such as '*Poyamba*' ('First'), one of the regimental songs of 1 KAR, were officially inspired. However, the majority of such songs, drawing upon the form of porters' songs, were composed by Nyasaland soldiers in the field, often taking the form of morale boosting recollections of earlier victories against the Germans, or sentimental references to Nyasaland.<sup>293</sup> By the Second World War, many songs, such as 'Sweet Bananas' or '*Yao Letsa Nkondo Gereman*' ('Let's stop the Germans'), had become well-known to officers, and were even used for official performances.<sup>294</sup> However, even amongst the established repertoire, songs could often project soldiers' misgivings about the experience of war or the deprivations of military service, whilst in peacetime soldiers were often able to use song to express their opinions about the military hierarchy.<sup>295</sup> Song was able to be used in this way because of the language barrier between Malawians and their European officers:

You'd get a lot of 'chipongwe', which is 'cheek', put in, they'd sing humorous things, [...] with tears running down their cheeks, laughing at things, you know. And there are so many dialects that you might speak beautiful Chinyanja, but if he used a dialect they'd all understand it [...] but the officers couldn't [...] translate it. And you'd wonder, and it was no good asking them, 'what are you laughing

<sup>291</sup> See Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 123.

<sup>292</sup> Gerald Hanley, *Monsoon Victory* (London: Collins, 1946), p. 163.

<sup>293</sup> Page, *The Chiwaya War*, pp. 101-2; George Shepperson, 'They Went Singing: Songs of the King's African Rifles', in *KAR: A History of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces*, by Malcolm Page (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998), pp. 257-63.

<sup>294</sup> Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999; Interview with Professor George Shepperson, Peterborough, 30 March 2000; IWM, 83/21/1, 'Victory Search Light Tattoo: Souvenir Programme: 11th (East African) Division. 23rd, 24th, 26th & 27th November 1945, Nightly at 17.45 hrs. Ranchi'; Series of Columbia recordings of 2 KAR songs (GE 17813, GE 17814, GE 17815), kindly made available by Major Richard Powell.

<sup>295</sup> Shepperson, 'They Went Singing', pp. 257-63; Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 97.

about?', they'd say, 'Ee, bwana, he's very funny that man,' but they'd be singing about you.<sup>296</sup>

Up to the 1930s, when soldiers were divided into tribally based companies, the scope for such behaviour must have been even greater, since in theory a majority of soldiers in a company would have spoken either Yao, Tonga or Ngoni languages, whilst officers only learned Chinyanja. Soldiers' songs could even be used as a vehicle for Malawians to introduce their own informal drill movements. An officer noted that in the 1930s

One of their more popular songs was 'Bwana General ali ku gona' which, translated, means 'The General's gone to sleep', and the tricky part about this particular song was that at a certain point in the song the whole Company took two steps back!<sup>297</sup>

Although such an adaptation of military training could hardly be considered a form of 'resistance', soldiers' song effectively operated both to indigenise military training and operations, and to provide a forum in which it was acceptable to criticise or mock military authority.

Whilst European officers generally felt that Malawians enjoyed the display inherent in military training and routine, many believed that they were less susceptible to its intended physical and mental effects upon the individual. It was an axiom in Britain that a soldier could always be recognised by his bearing or posture.

However, one officer noted that this was not the case in Nyasaland:

It was noticeable that after a period of long leave, [...] on their return some of the old askari took a few days to shake down and regain their military bearing and smartness. Even the C.S.M. was no exception, arriving back unshaven and bleary-eyed.<sup>298</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999. See Interview with Professor George Shepperson, Peterborough, 30 March 2000.

<sup>297</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 33, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>298</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 25, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].



Similarly, military officials believed that Africans were innately less amenable to the military structures of time and discipline:

an African [soldier] [...] lacked the determination to keep up a standard. If he got tired he would behave rather like an African would in his own village; he'd be out in the field having something to do, if he was tired he'd sit down under a tree and do nothing and then carry on.<sup>299</sup>

Of course, such assertions reflected widely held colonial prejudices regarding African 'laziness', but officers' belief in the fundamental difference of Africans also meant that Malawians were sometimes able to circumvent disciplinary structures without being accused of indiscipline. Another officer remembered that early in the Second World War,

I was taking a PT parade [...] an unfortunate little African hare [...] dashed across the parade ground whereupon the parade simply disintegrated and every single solitary man shouting at the top of his voice tried to chase this wretched animal until it escaped into the bush. And I don't quote that as a case of insubordination at all, it was the natural instinct of a people who are naturally hunters..<sup>300</sup>

Some Malawian soldiers went beyond simple avoidance of military routine, regarding elements of their training and duties as demeaning. In 1937, Nyasaland soldiers serving in the Somaliland Camel Corps (SCC), who had been 'mechanised' by the provision of 14 trucks in the early 1930s, were redesignated as an 'infantry rifle company', requiring them to do much more of their training on foot.<sup>301</sup> The change was badly received by the Malawians, who promptly sent a deputation to the commanding officer, consisting of Bugler Sabiti and Privates Augustine and Simon Zachariah. Simon Zachariah's complaints were summarised:

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<sup>299</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 3939/03, Transcript of interview with Major P. Logan, 11 September 1979, p. 15.

<sup>300</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 3939/03, Transcript of interview with Major P. Logan, 11 September 1979, p. 15.

<sup>301</sup> MNA, S1/652/31/74d, Lieutenant-Colonel A. R. Chater, OC SCC, to Secretary to the Government of Somaliland, 11 July 1938, Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 464.

1. Marching in Somaliland is very much harder than in Nyasaland.
2. The askari returning from Somaliland told them that they always travelled by camel or truck.
3. It appears like a punishment to walk when there are cars.
4. The Somalis always travel by camel, pony or truck.<sup>302</sup>

All the men were agreed regarding the arduousness of marching in Somaliland. However, the main feature of the complaint was that being made to march would reduce the men's status in the eyes of both the earlier Nyasaland contingents, and the camel-mounted Somali soldiers, who were already noted for treating the Nyasaland troops as their inferiors.<sup>303</sup>

Again, the official reaction was informed by officers' belief in the special character of African responses to military life. Whilst it is unlikely that opposition to a fundamental aspect of training would have been tolerated during peacetime in the regular British Army, the company commander wrote, 'I feel that the situation is not without a certain gravity, and although their complaint is misguided, to them it seems a very important thing'.<sup>304</sup> The Governor was brought in to personally address the Nyasaland company, outlining the importance of being trained to march over long distances, and making an appeal to the men's pride, adding that 'a foot soldier who says he cannot march may well feel ashamed'. Finally, the Governor made an open appeal to the men to remain within the bounds of military discipline:

In the past Nyasa soldiers have held a high reputation for steadiness, loyalty and obedience. I hope that you will see that you do nothing to spoil that great reputation, for if you do I am sure that you will be sorry for it as long as you live.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> MNA, S1/652/31/74c, Captain H. French, OC B Company, SCC, to Adjutant, SCC, 5 July 1938.

<sup>303</sup> MNA, S1/652/31/75, Major L. C. Thomas, OC 2 KAR, to Chief Secretary, Nyasaland, 19 August 1938.

<sup>304</sup> MNA, S1/652/31/74c, Captain H. French, OC B Company, SCC, to Adjutant, SCC, 5 July 1938.

<sup>305</sup> MNA, S1/652/31/74e, 'Reply made by the Governor to "B" Company, Somaliland Camel Corps, King's African Rifles, at Sheikh at 6 p.m. July 13th, 1938'.



In fact, despite the threat implicit in the end of the Governor's speech, the protest was successful, since 'to facilitate for the men as dignified a withdrawal as possible from the position they have taken up', a greater use of mechanised transport was reintroduced into the company's training programme.<sup>306</sup>

Finally, as Parsons has noted, peacetime desertion rates in the KAR were generally low, and this was certainly the case for the Nyasaland battalions, which records suggest rarely lost more than three or four deserters annually in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>307</sup> However, it should be noted that many soldiers during the Second World War, whose enlistment was less likely to be the result of personal choice, found military routine extremely onerous. John Phiri wrote to his home village from South Africa:

I and the other eight Tonga fellows had joined up the army thinking that the army life was good but when we joined up we found that the conditions in the army were intolerable. Hence all decided to run away and leave everything behind<sup>308</sup>

Similarly, signaller Alex Nyallapah wrote home from Kenya that 'I am now tired of Signal work and I want to run away so if you hear nothing at all you will know that I have hit the trail for a far place from where I will not return.'<sup>309</sup> Between August 1943 and January 1944, an average of 214 men were deserting every month within Nyasaland alone.<sup>310</sup> Others tried more elaborate means of obtaining release from

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<sup>306</sup> MNA, S1/652/31/74d, Lieutenant-Colonel A. R. Chater, OC SCC, to Secretary to the Government of Somaliland, 11 July 1938. A similar refusal to march took place in 31 KAR during the Second World War: see IWM, 96/17/1, Major D. R. Dunseath, 'A Curious Route to Nanyuki 1940-1950', 1994.

<sup>307</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 198; PRO, CO 820, Annual Inspection Reports 1 KAR and 2 KAR, 1927-1938.

<sup>308</sup> MNA, S 45/3/2/4/17N, John Phiri to Asma Anyamanda, Politsi, Transvaal, [n.d., 1944].

<sup>309</sup> MNA, S 45/3/2/4/3Q, Signaller R. Alex Nyallapah, Sub Area Signals Nanyuki, to William Nyallapah, 29 September 1943.

<sup>310</sup> MNA, KAR 6/2/1, Recruits and Deserters Rolls, August 1943-October 1943; MNA, KAR 6/2/2, Recruits and Deserters Rolls, October 1943-January 1944.

military service. Driver Milos James Mphili, among others, wrote home requesting ‘some of the medicine which causes one to be discharged.’<sup>311</sup> Victor Chintenga, finding that the army was ‘very hard work’, managed to get himself released by feigning an injured leg.<sup>312</sup> Another soldier worked out an elaborate scheme telling his mother to go to the District Commissioner and say that “‘all my sons have died”. “I only have one still alive and he is a soldier. We are left alone”, in order that he might be sent home.<sup>313</sup>

### *Punishment*

Although the authorities were often willing to accommodate African soldiers’ challenges to military routine when they believed that issues such as prestige were at stake, punishment remained a visible and important feature in the maintenance of discipline in the KAR. The ‘BCA Rifles Ordinance, 1897’ laid out a number of summary punishments which could be awarded by officers, including: extra duties for minor infringements; confinement to barracks (CB); fines of up to ten shillings; up to 84 days of imprisonment with hard labour (IHL); and the ultimate sanctions of corporal punishment and dismissal from the force. Later the ‘King’s African Rifles Ordinance’ added the death sentence, which could only be awarded out by Court Martial.<sup>314</sup> The offences for which these punishments were awarded included unsanctioned looting; theft from a fellow soldier, or from the government; sale or

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<sup>311</sup> MNA, S 45/3/2/2/14/E, Driver No. 8565, Milos James Mphili, 2/6 KAR, to Mr. Kelear, 21 March 1942; MNA, S 45/3/2/2/13/J, Driver No. 8567 John Garrason, 8 KAR to Garrason Unjika, no date, 1942; MNA, S 45/3/2/4/7/K, Dresser Ritchie Kaugale, HQ Infantry Training Centre Jinja, Uganda, to T. K. Hampton, 8 December 1943.

<sup>312</sup> MNA, S 45/3/2/4/18/U, Victor Chintenga to Evans Arthur, D Company, 2 KAR, Fort Johnston, 4 May 1944.

<sup>313</sup> MNA, S 45/3/2/2/12/I, Private Suwedi Ngomba, D Company, 1/1 KAR to Mr. Arthur Njewa, 14 February 1942; MNA, S 45/3/2/2/12/I, Private Suwedi Ngomba, D Company, 1/1 KAR to Sano Chinyanja, 14 February 1942.

<sup>314</sup> ‘The King’s African Rifles Ordinance, 1911’, section 38.



loss of personal clothing; failure to assist in the arrest of a defaulter; sleeping at ones post; going absent without leave; drunkenness; disobeying an order; violence to a superior officer; and mutiny.<sup>315</sup>

In practice, corporal punishment, or flogging, seems to have been the most common punishment inflicted upon Nyasaland soldiers in the 1890s, reflecting the widely held belief that physical punishments were most suitable to 'primitive' Africans. Flogging was carried out with a '*chigoti*' or lash, defined in 1903 as 'A strip of hippopotamus hide three feet ten inches in length [...] not to be of extreme pliability, the butt and tip in this respect should only be made to meet by the use of considerable strength'.<sup>316</sup> Performing a didactic function, the punishment was carried out 'before the rest of the men',<sup>317</sup> and the basic form is demonstrated in a sketch by Licutenant Poole showing a naked soldier held prostrate on the ground by two of his fellow soldiers, whilst the flogging itself is administered by a Sikh NCO.<sup>318</sup> The punishment officially consisted of up to twenty-four lashes,<sup>319</sup> and was so brutal that in 1903 the Commanding Officer of 1 KAR issued an order that

In future [soldiers] are not to be flogged 'bare' except for very serious offences -  
The Officer Commanding the Troops in B.C.A. considers that flogging 'bare' is liable

(1) To send the man to Hospital & incapacitate him from work  
& (2) Is a brutal and disgusting spectacle.

Flogging first on one side & then on the other is to cease, as the punishment when inflicted from one side only is sufficiently severe.<sup>320</sup>

<sup>315</sup> PRO, FO 2/126, ff. 178-179, 'The British Central Africa Rifles Ordinance, 1897', pp. 8-9.

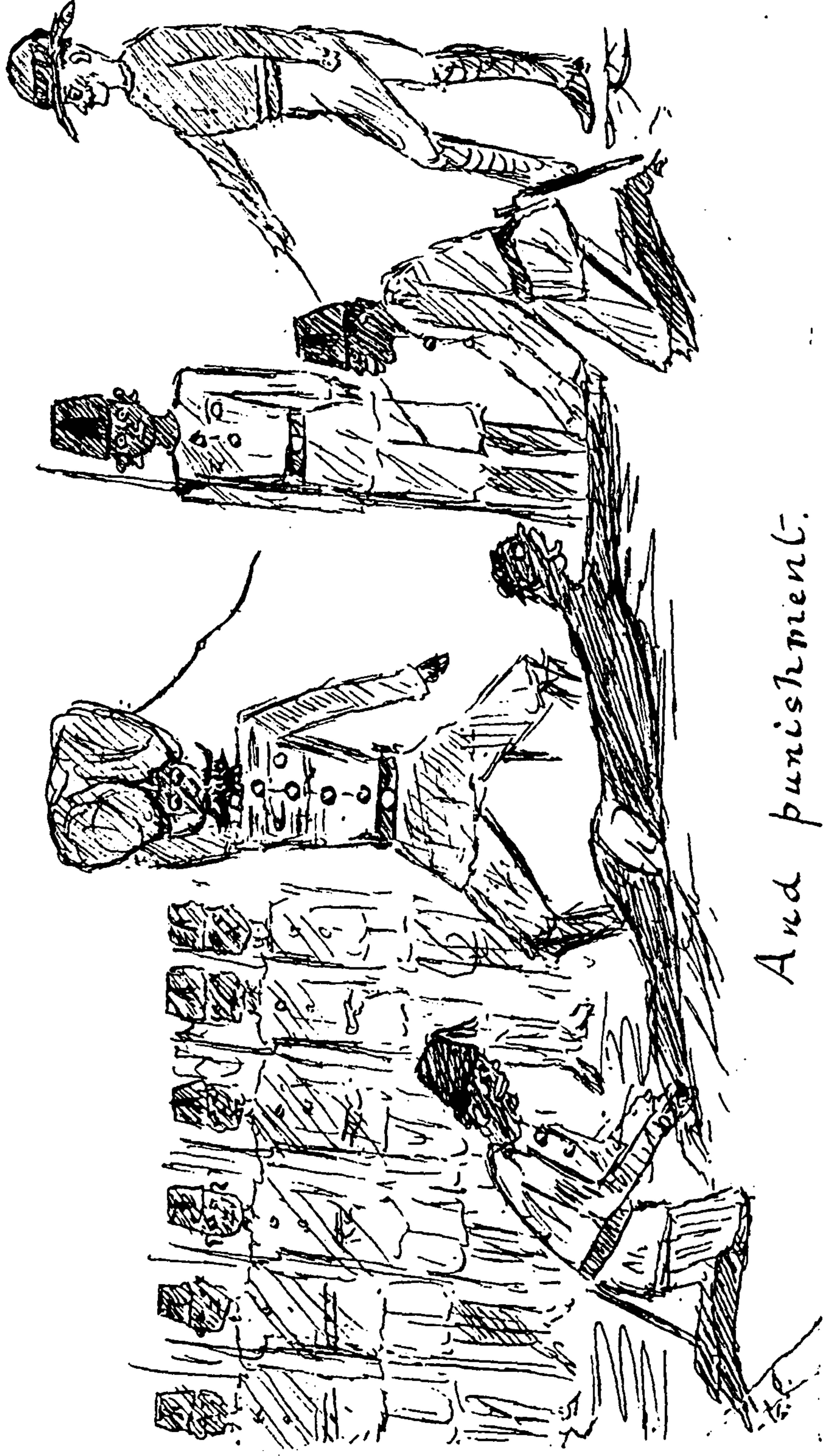
<sup>316</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 651, 'Regulation Chikoti', 23 June 1903.

<sup>317</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/2, Diary of Edward Alston, 20 February 1896.

<sup>318</sup> MNA, 14/FGP/3, 'And punishment', sketch by Francis Garden Poole [1897?].

<sup>319</sup> PRO, FO 2/126, f. 179, 'The British Central Africa Rifles Ordinance, 1897', p. 9; 'The King's African Rifles Ordinance, 1911', section 38.

<sup>320</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 605, 'Flogging', 17 January 1903.



### *And punishment.*

#### 3. 'And punishment'

Cartoon by Lieutenant Francis Garden Poole, who served in the BCA Rifles from 1896 to 1898. This sketch is one of a series which may have been intended to illustrate an account of his service in Nyasaland entitled "Leaves From Darkest Africa" (MNA, 14.FGP/4/2). Despite the light-hearted nature of the cartoons, this seems to provide a reasonably accurate portrayal of the spectacle of corporal punishment. The didactic intent behind the flogging is suggested by the rank of soldiers formed up in the background as spectators, whilst the use of a Sikh intermediary as the instrument of the punishment is also noteworthy.

[Source: MNA, 14/FGP/3]



It is now difficult to measure precisely the extent of flogging in Nyasaland at the turn of the century, but in 1906 the Inspector-General found it necessary to instruct the Commanding Officer of 1 KAR that

The infliction of corporal punishment must as a general rule be limited to crimes of a disgraceful nature and to cases where it is evident that such punishment is needed. The infliction of corporal punishment for minor offences must cease.<sup>321</sup>

Moreover, in 1908, following a year which had seen 55 awards of corporal punishment and a further 50 of IHL, the Inspector-General described discipline in 1 KAR as 'good', and noted that 'corporal punishment [...] is being gradually reduced year by year, but the time has not yet come to abolish corporal punishment altogether even in peace time'.<sup>322</sup>

By the inter-war years, the form of corporal punishment had changed significantly. The flogging itself was now carried out by the Provost Sergeant using a five-foot long rattan cane, considered to be less severe than the *chigoti*, and 'a damp rag would be placed over the man's buttocks [...] to prevent the skin being cut'.

<sup>323</sup> The punishment was sometimes carried out in the guardroom rather than in public, but always retained strong ritual elements; after the punishment, the soldier was ordered to 'stand up erect, replace his tarbush [fez] hat and salute his officer'.<sup>324</sup>

Flogging was still carried out in front of the battalion formed in a 'hollow square' if it was felt that it was necessary to 'make an example' of the offenders.<sup>325</sup> By the mid-1920s, IHL had become the most common form of severe punishment in 2

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<sup>321</sup> PRO CO 534/3, f. 450, Inspector General KAR to OC 1 KAR, Nairobi, 2 March 1906.

<sup>322</sup> PRO CO 534/8, f. 163, Report by the Inspector General on the 1st Battalion, King's African Rifles [1908].

<sup>323</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 27.

<sup>324</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 34, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>325</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, pp. 28-29; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 34, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

KAR, with 139 awards in 1926 to 1927, and 99 awards the following year. However, the number of 'canings', at 50 and 46 respectively, had not declined significantly from 1908.<sup>326</sup> In the late 1920s, the Malawians attached to the Somaliland Camel Corps seem to have been more likely to receive corporal punishment for lesser offences than Somalis (between 1925 and 1928, four out of the five lashings carried out on Malawians were for adultery, whilst the two lashes awarded to Somalis were both for threatening their superiors).<sup>327</sup>

From the late 1920s, the colonial office exerted growing pressure to reduce the extent of corporal punishment throughout the KAR and RWAFF, first requiring the Governor's sanction for floggings,<sup>328</sup> and in the early 1930s by issuing orders against the use of summary corporal punishment. However, officers in the Nyasaland battalions seem to have continued to use flogging when troops were 'out in the bush where you couldn't punish them in any other way'.<sup>329</sup> With the outbreak of war in 1939, KAR soldiers on active service again became liable to corporal punishment awarded by court martial, which was only finally abolished at the end of the war.<sup>330</sup>

Whilst it is clear that corporal punishment continued to be administered in the KAR through the war, it is unclear how far it was used in the Nyasaland battalions.

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<sup>326</sup> PRO, CO 820/1/7, 'Number of Severe Punishments for the Preceding 12 Months Showing Percentage of Punishments to Strength', OC 2 KAR, Tabora, 30 November 1926; PRO, CO 820/3/11, 'Number of Severe Punishments for the Preceding 12 Months Showing Percentage of Punishments to Strength', Lieutenant Colonel Atkin, OC 2 KAR, Tabora, 20 November 1927.

<sup>327</sup> MNA, S 1/2161/23, SCC Returns of Severe Punishments, 1925-28.

<sup>328</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>329</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 3960/05, Transcript of interview with Colonel R. E. S. Yeldham CBE, 3 November 1978, p. 9.

<sup>330</sup> David Killingray, 'The "Rod of Empire": The Debate Over Corporal Punishment in the British African Colonial Forces, 1888-1946', *Journal of African History*, 35 (1994), 201-16 (pp. 210-15), Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 187.



Battalion Orders of 1 KAR contain a number of references to IHL, but none to corporal punishment. Similarly, most ex-soldiers interviewed remembered IHL and confinement to barracks being used, but only three recalled recourse to corporal punishment.<sup>331</sup> At the same time, as noted by Killingray, the influx of new personnel during the war increased the incidence of unofficial physical punishment.<sup>332</sup> Arbitrary beatings seem to have been prevalent for Malawians stationed in Kenya, where the perception that Malawians were singled out for punishment was an important element in their antipathy towards Kenyan officers. Soldiers complained to NA Chikumbu that

If a camp is staffed by KAMBAS or JALUWAS of higher ranks [...] if a Nyasaland soldier makes a very slight mistake when being instructed, there, the Nyasalander has to undergo a very heavy kick, he is beaten just like a wild beast. And if a KAMBA or JALUWA does the same mistake he does not undergo anything.<sup>333</sup>

Even in action, Malawians could find themselves subject to excessive, if understandable, arbitrary physical punishments:

Disciplinary action had to be rough and ready. Ted Onslow bayoneted a man in the leg one night because he was coughing persistently and was in danger of giving away the position and destroying the element of surprise. It worked. The man did not cough again.<sup>334</sup>

As the incidence of formal corporal punishment decreased, other forms of punishment took over the public spectacle of flogging. In 1944, following the abandonment of an officer in the field by his company, the Commanding Officer of 22 KAR set up an elaborate ritual near the front line to punish the offenders:

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<sup>331</sup> Interview with Jauma Matola, Zomba, October 2000; Interview with Elia Noah, Zomba, October 2000; Interview with Henderson Simuja, Zomba, October 2000.

<sup>332</sup> Killingray, 'The "Rod of Empire"', p. 211.

<sup>333</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/49A, 'Native Authority Chikumbu's Journey to Nairobi to visit his soldiers', by NA Chikumbu, no date, 1944.

<sup>334</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) III, 'Account of 22nd Bn. King's African Rifles (Nyasaland) in Action Burma (Khabaw Valley) 1944 by David Bowie (Intelligence Officer)', [1945], p. 65

The whole Battalion was formed up in a hollow square on a small piece of open ground that evening. [...]

The defaulting platoon were marched in front of the Battalion by the R.S.M. The charges were read out. The men answered "guilty" to them, each standing stiffly to attention.

Ken Collen told them he could have them shot for cowardice, and would do so on another occasion. He then reduced the NCOs to the ranks ripping the stripes from their shirt sleeves. He then told them that the platoon would be disbanded and reformed. [...]

The whole ceremony lasted about half-an-hour and was completed just before dusk. It was a theatrical but an extremely effective parade which the troops never forgot.<sup>335</sup>

In wartime, the application of the Army Act to the KAR meant that Malawian soldiers were again liable to execution by court martial. During the First World War, executions were also carried out as a public spectacle. One soldier recalled the execution of two deserters:

We were asked to wake up and stood in lines. Meanwhile, two people were digging pits. [...] The officers said to us, 'You see your friends here! They ran away from fighting. Soldiers are not supposed to run away from fighting. Now we want to punish them.' When the officer was saying this the two were securely tied to a tree. So he took a gun and shouted, 'Present fire!'<sup>336</sup>

Executions do not seem to have been carried out as a public spectacle during the Second World War, possibly in response to official fears that they could engender resistance. Reflecting this, Shepperson remembered a rumour following one execution that, 'instead of lining [the firing party] up, they put them behind individual trees so they wouldn't know who was who'.<sup>337</sup>

Most officers serving with the KAR before the First World War believed not only that that corporal punishment was the most suitable punishment for African soldiers, but also that soldiers preferred corporal punishment, especially to fines.

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<sup>335</sup> MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) III, 'Account of 22nd Bn. King's African Rifles (Nyasaland) in Action Burma (Khabaw Valley) 1944 by David Bowie (Intelligence Officer)', [1945], pp. 54-55.

<sup>336</sup> Interview with Belo Kaponya, quoted in Page *The Chiyaya War*, p. 100.

<sup>337</sup> Interview with Professor George Shepperson, Peterborough, 30 March 2000.



Such claims may have some validity, since they were generally based upon the expressed wishes of Nyasaland soldiers. Yeldham, who served in 1 KAR in the late 1920s, noted that ex-German soldiers in particular ‘always used to say to us “Bwana for God’s sake don’t give us fines or CB give us six for backside”’.<sup>338</sup> Glass, who served in the late 1930s, cited a soldier accused of adultery:

as a punishment he was given the option of 14 days Detention or six strokes in front of the entire Company paraded for this purpose [...] The Askari considered 14 days in Detention away from his wife a far more serious punishment than six strokes administered on the spot; he also forfeited no pay.<sup>339</sup>

Similarly, de Guingand noted ‘I never knew a case where resentment was shown after the punishment, and the *askari*’s usual attitude was: “Thank heaven that’s over and there’s no fine to worry about”’.<sup>340</sup> Yeldham ascribed this preference to the effect of fines upon the soldier’s dependants: ‘it meant of course that the wife and the family didn’t get all the posho and food that they were hoping to get [...] so the askari preferred to be given a punishment’.<sup>341</sup> Of course, the fact that soldiers preferred corporal punishment over fines, and accepted it as part of military life, did not imply that they liked flogging. Glass also noted that Malawians found corporal punishment humiliating: ‘What he did not like was other askari ridiculing him for his crime and this he had to endure for quite a period afterwards’.<sup>342</sup>

During the Second World War, possibly reflecting the influx of better educated personnel, many Nyasaland soldiers became increasingly dissatisfied with the nature of military justice. Complaints collected during the Chiefs’ visits to Kenya and the

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<sup>338</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 3960/05, Transcript of interview with Colonel R. E. S. Yeldham CBE, 3 November 1978, p. 9.

<sup>339</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 34, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>340</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 27.

<sup>341</sup> IWM, Sound Archive, 3960/05, Transcript of interview with Colonel R. E. S. Yeldham CBE, 3 November 1978, p. 9.

<sup>342</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 34, Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

Far East in 1944 and 1945 show that many were unhappy with the heaviness of punishments awarded for what they regarded as minor infringements, and particularly resented receiving two kinds of punishments for the same crime.

Soldiers' complaints included:

If we do wrong we are put in prison for 14 days and fined as much as £5. Why should we be punished twice for the same offence.<sup>343</sup>

If any Nyasalanders loses [sic] even one button, he is accused, and fined 40/- including imprisonment for 40 days.<sup>344</sup>

When we make any mistakes they put us in prison and fine us at the same time, besides which, we are beaten. If we were treated like the D.C.'s prisoners at home we would be alright.<sup>345</sup>

Given the long-standing practice of giving soldiers a choice between fines and imprisonment or corporal punishment, such grievances were understandable.

Others felt that cases were not fairly heard, and that defendants did not get an opportunity to answer accusations. NA Chikumbu summarised the complaints of Nyasaland soldiers in the Far East:

We are not refusing to be punished if we have done a bad thing, but sometimes an African is persuaded to say he has done a bad thing when he has not.<sup>346</sup>

If a soldier is charged on any case either petty or a serious one he is not allowed to make a statement or evidence to defend himself; [...] sometimes the accused soldier may be asked whether he has any questions to put forward, if the answer to this is 'yes' and starts to question, the officer trying the case immediately says 'You have a second case' and the accused soldier stops in a great fear and then after that the Officer passes a sentence on two counts against him accordingly - is that justice?<sup>347</sup>

<sup>343</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/49B, Report by NA Kadawere, 21 December 1944.

<sup>344</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/52A, 'Native Authority Kawinga's Journey to Nairobi', by NA Kawinga, 11 January 1945. See MNA, S 41/1/23/4/55A, 'Journey of Chiefs to the North', by NA Gomani, January 1945.

<sup>345</sup> MNA, S41/1/23/5/63B, NA Chikumbu to PC Southern Province, 13 August 1945

<sup>346</sup> MNA, S41/1/23/5/63B, NA Chikumbu to PC Southern Province, 13 August 1945.

<sup>347</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/4/53B, 'Report on a visit to Nairobi and Somaliland by Chiefs', by NA Mwase, no date, 1945; See MNA, S 41/1/23/4/55A, 'Journey of Chiefs to the North', by NA Gomani, January 1945.



The latter complaint seems to relate to Contempt of Court, but the fact that Nyasaland soldiers were not made aware of this possibility suggests the extent to which many must have felt alienated by court martial procedures.

Such treatment certainly increased the desire of some soldiers to desert or attempt to be discharged from the army.<sup>348</sup> However, particularly in the Far East, where desertion was a less attractive option, individual soldiers occasionally took extreme courses of action against perceived injustices. In just one Nyasaland battalion, 13 KAR, there were at least two fatal incidents as the result of punishments which were perceived as unjust. Following a charge made by a British NCO, Private Devesiasi Ndembo, of D Company, 13 KAR, threw a grenade into the company officers' mess tent, killing an officer and an African Lance-Corporal, and wounding three officers, the British Company Sergeant Major, and an African mess servant.<sup>349</sup> In another incident, again apparently following a charge made by a BNCO, a Regimental Policeman fired a shot through the window of the officers mess, again killing an officer.<sup>350</sup> Such incidents were not, of course, unique to the Nyasaland battalions, but do clearly show the depth of Nyasaland soldiers' grievances in difficult circumstances.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> See S 45/3/2/4/7/K, Dresser Ritchie Kaugale, H.Q. I.T.C. Jinja, Uganda, to T. K. Hampton, 8 December 1943.

<sup>349</sup> PRO, WO 172/6535, War Diary, 13 KAR, October 1944; John Nunneley, *Tales from the King's African Rifles*, (Petersham, Askari Books, 1998), p. 172; Interview with Professor George Shepperson, 30 March 2000.

<sup>350</sup> Interview with Professor George Shepperson, 30 March 2000.

<sup>351</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 200-201.

It is unsurprising that Nyasaland soldiers resisted punishment. However, except in extreme cases, such resistance was usually limited; Malawians accepted the idea of military punishment, but rejected those which appeared to be arbitrary or excessive. Similarly, whilst Malawians' challenged other elements of military life, these challenges were not founded upon a rejection of the idea of military service. African reactions to the military hierarchy were informed by a desire for increased prestige within that hierarchy, rather than a desire to displace it. Malawians' objected to BNCOs when they felt that their existing positions had been diminished, but up to the end of the Second World War, calls for commissions for Malawians were driven by comparisons with Africans who had been commissioned in other forces, rather than with European officers. As such, demands were largely symbolic rather than calling for wholesale change. Where objections to European officers did exist, they were often aimed at specific groups, such as officers from Kenya. Even in the 1960s, when Malawians naturally resented the slow Africanisation of their battalions, criticism of Europeans was often aimed specifically at the Rhodesian officers identified with the Federation, and as a result, such criticism largely disappeared after 1963.

However, whilst Malawians accepted the idea of military service, they frequently sought to negotiate the terms under which that service took place. Both European and African ranks recognised the importance of the symbolism of uniform, both as an external indicator of authority, and as an internal indicator of status. However, Malawians resisted elements of the visual identity which was imposed upon them, and although their efforts were initially unsuccessful, the military



authorities were compelled to recognise Malawians' desires regarding dress to the extent that they were eventually used as a substitute for Africanisation. Finally, whilst the KAR undoubtedly had many of the features of a 'total institution', Malawians were able to effectively appropriate some of its most oppressive features, such as drill, and redefine them as prestigious or even desirable activities.

## Chapter 4

### **‘What the Askari had been used to in his tribal life’?:<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Domestic life in the military lines.<sup>2</sup>**

The military camp is a unique environment. Like the prison, or in the southern African context the mine compound, it is both workplace and living place. However, unlike these functional spaces, the military authorities aimed not only to discipline, but to foster a sense of community. This was particularly significant in the case of Nyasaland, where soldiers often spent over twenty years in the KAR.<sup>3</sup> Another unique feature of the military environment which stood in contrast to the mine compound was the presence of soldiers’ wives. Whilst the military camp was clearly structured upon the status of men, women were perhaps more visibly significant in African colonial armies than in any other armed forces of the twentieth century. This poses particular questions in the case of Nyasaland, since the majority of Malawian colonial soldiers were recruited from matrilineal societies (including the Yao, Nyanja, and Nguru/Lomwe) in which land ownership was nominally vested in women.

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<sup>1</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (7), f. 8, Memorandum by Colonel Desmond John Bannister [1980?].

<sup>2</sup> The term *lines* was commonly used in preference to *barracks* to refer to soldiers’ accommodation in the colonial army. It implied rows of temporary buildings rather than the large blocks common in the metropolitan army.

<sup>3</sup> ‘2nd Battalion The King’s African Rifles, Length of Service Return’, Lieutenant Colonel W. I. Gunn, Officer Commanding 2 KAR, 4 March 1920, PRO CO 534/40, f.16; ‘1st Battalion King’s African Rifles Tanganyika Territory, Length of Service’, Lieutenant Colonel A. H. Griffiths, Officer Commanding 1 KAR, 1 May 1920, PRO CO 534/40, f.66; ‘1st King’s African Rifles, Length of Service’, Adjutant, 1 KAR, November 1923, PRO CO 534/54, f.165; ‘2nd Battalion, The King’s African Rifles, Length of Service Return’, Lieutenant Colonel Murray, Officer Commanding, 2 KAR, 1 November 1923, PRO CO 534/54, f.391; ‘No. 3 Depot Company, Length of Service’, Officer Commanding, Depot 1 and 2 KAR, 4 March 1925, PRO CO 534/56, f.189; Twaya Namonde, ‘The Story of Twaya Namonde’, *Nyasaland Journal*, 16, 1 (1963), pp.49-61; Aibu Chikwenga, ‘Aibu Chikwenga: an Autobiography’, translated by C. A. Baker, *Society of Malawi Journal*, 25,2 (1972), pp.11-21.



Interest in African soldiers' family lives and the role of African women in the military environment has recently grown, with works by both David Killingray and Timothy Parsons.<sup>4</sup> These valuable studies have shed much new light upon the role of African women in the colonial army. However, their predominant focus upon the experience of women has obscured a broader picture of domestic life in the army. They also make little reference to the specific impact of military service upon matrilineal societies. In the context of Malawi, the impact upon gender relations of urbanisation and of labour migration to the Rhodesias and South Africa has received much attention. This has focused upon the changing role of women in the face of male absence, and upon the displacement of women relocated to urban environments, particularly the influence of such displacement upon women from traditionally matrilineal and matrilocal societies. Complementing this, van Onselen has provided a detailed analysis of life for African men living within mine compounds.<sup>5</sup> Just as colonial Nyasaland acted as a labour pool for Southern Africa, it equally served as a military labour pool for East Africa, where Malawian soldiers played a disproportionately conspicuous role from the early years of the century. However, the domestic social structure of the colonial army, where women were generally

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy H. Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), chap. 5, pp. 145-181; Timothy Parsons, 'All Askaris Are Family Men: Sex, Domesticity and Discipline in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964', in *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c.1700-1964*, ed. by David Killingray, and David Omissi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 157-178; David Killingray, 'Gender Issues and Colonial Armies', in *Guardians of Empire*, ed. by Killingray and Omissi, pp. 221-248.

<sup>5</sup> Charles van Onselen, 'The role of collaborators in the Rhodesian mining industry 1900-1935', *African Affairs*, 72, 289 (1973), 401-18; Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976).

present rather than absent, differed markedly from conventional forms of labour migration.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter aims to examine the domestic experience of Malawians in the colonial army as a whole, examining the conditions in which they lived, and the roles performed by different members of the military community. By highlighting the conflict between military desire to maintain order within the camp on the one hand, and the aspirations of soldiers on the other, it is intended to investigate the extent to which Malawians in the military camp were able to indigenise their surroundings, and indeed, how far they wished to do so. Finally, the chapter will focus on the development of official attitudes towards women in the army, and the degree to which their role was developed or subverted by military women themselves. Following from this, the paper examines the reciprocal impact of the military service upon gender relations within the army, and the implications of this for military society.

#### Who was present in the Lines?

The domestic community within the military camp comprised a number of groups in addition to the combatant soldiers of the KAR. These included not only enlisted non-combatants, such as Malawian Interpreters, Clerks, Hospital Dressers,

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<sup>6</sup> PRO, FO 2/108, ff. 30-1, Acting Commissioner Sharpe to Foreign Secretary, Zomba, 29 September 1896; MNA, AL 1/1/2, Diary of Edward Alston, 6 September 1896; 'The B.C.A. Rifles in Mauritius' (Reproduced from the *Morning Leader*), *Central African Times*, 19 May 1900, p. 8; 'King's African Rifles for British East Africa', *Central African Times*, 24 June 1905, p. 9; MNA S2/32/22/27, Governor of Nyasaland to Colonial Office [October 1922?]; MNA S2/32/22/42, Somaliland Administration to Governor of Nyasaland, 29 September 1925; MNA, S1/652/31/62, Commissioner of Somaliland to Governor of Nyasaland, 4 April 1935; MNA S1/652/31/64, Governor of Somaliland to Governor of Nyasaland, 27 May 1935; MNA M2/24/39/37a, Captain Slayter, Officer Commanding 2 KAR to Director of Medical Services, Zomba, 30 May 1936; MNA M2/24/39/39a, Move Table, Acting Adjutant 2 KAR to Director of Medical Services, Zomba, 24 June 1936.



Stretcher Bearers, Artisans, and Machine Gun (MG) Porters, but also civilian 'line boys' such as Messengers and Sweepers. As well as these 'public followers', European officers and BNCOs usually maintained private 'Personal Servants', who were paid and provided with uniform by their masters.<sup>7</sup> Finally, up to the Second World War, the KAR was also reliant upon 'carriers' or '*tenga tenga*' for its transportation needs. Since carriers were normally obtained on an *ad hoc* basis and were not usually accommodated within the military camp, they cannot generally be regarded as part of the permanent military community. However, carriers were occasionally enrolled for longer periods.<sup>8</sup>

Non-combatants often provided a significant proportion of the strength of the Nyasaland battalions. Early lists of the establishment included only Malawian interpreters,<sup>9</sup> and many artisans' positions were provided by the Indian contingent.<sup>10</sup> However, it is clear that Malawian MG porters and officers' personal servants were attached to the Nyasaland battalions from an early date.<sup>11</sup> By 1926, the strength of 1 KAR included four Malawian Clerks, three Interpreters, nineteen medical staff, seven Artisans, sixty-five MG Porters, six Messengers, nine Sweepers, and twenty 'Sanitation Boys' for the Regimental Hospital, in addition to the 374 combatant

<sup>7</sup> PRO, WO 169/758, WO 169/2994, WO 169/7020, WO 169/14104, 1 KAR Battalion Orders.

<sup>8</sup> MNA, S 2/8/20/1, C. G. Phillips, OC Nyasaland Detachment 1 KAR, to OC Mangoche Detachment 1 KAR, Zomba, 5 February 1920.

<sup>9</sup> PRO FO 2/106, ff. 246-47, 'Reorganization of Armed Forces in British Central Africa, proposed by Major C. A. Edwards,' 3 April 1896.

<sup>10</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 58, 'Distribution Staff -Pay Year 97-98', [n.d.].

<sup>11</sup> PRO, FO 2/67, 'Estimates for the Year's Expenditure in British Central Africa Protectorate: April 1, 1894, to March 31, 1895', H. H. Johnston, Commissioner of BCA, to Earl of Kimberley, Colonial Secretary, 29 August 1894; MNA, KAR 2/1/3, Mobilization Scheme for M'Quamba Expedition, August 1899; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 516, 'Pay Maxim Gun Carriers', 31 December 1901.

soldiers. The battalion probably also supported at least thirty personal servants.<sup>12</sup> The number of non-combatants had changed little by 1945, when 1 KAR included twenty-two artisans, thirteen 'Sanitary Orderlies' (sweepers), forty-four cooks, fifteen Mess Servants, and forty-seven Private Servants, who had recently been re-titled 'Orderlies' and were now paid from public funds.

Although not categorised as *askari*, non-combatants were often closely associated with the military structure of the KAR. Non-combatants such as Interpreters obviously played an important role as intermediaries in the military hierarchy. However, MG Porters also became increasingly assimilated into the combatant structure. In 1920, most Malawian MG Porters were enlisted from men who had failed medical examinations to serve as soldiers.<sup>13</sup> By the mid-1920s, MG Porters were uniformed similarly to soldiers, and were drilled alongside recruits, although they were not included in arms drill.<sup>14</sup> In the early 1930s, MG porters were trained to fire machine guns themselves, and provided a source of recruits.<sup>15</sup> Finally in 1939, enlisted porters were redesignated as '*askaris*'.<sup>16</sup>

Unlike enlisted non-combatants, line boys such as sweepers were not provided with their own accommodation, but slept in the kitchens attached to the lines.

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<sup>12</sup> PRO, CO 820/1/10, 1 KAR Strength Return, Lieutenant Colonel Hawkins, OC 1 KAR, Zomba, 1 November 1926.

<sup>13</sup> PRO, CO 534/47, f. 30, 2/1 KAR Inspection report 1920-1921, Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector General KAR, Kilossa, 31 January 1921.

<sup>14</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland, 1927), p. 88; CO 820/6/1, 1 KAR Inspection Report, Colonel Walker, Inspector General KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 1927.

<sup>15</sup> PRO, CO 820/10/9, 2 KAR Inspection Report, by Brigadier H. Walker, Inspector General KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 7 January 1931.

<sup>16</sup> PRO, WO 169/758, Battalion Orders by Lieutenant-Colonel T. A. Dillon, Commanding 1st Battalion, King's African Rifles, 18 November 1939.



Similarly, Personal Servants lived in quarters attached to the houses of the officers who employed them.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, such men were in no way transient figures in the camp. KAR messengers were often selected from ex-soldiers, and indeed, in 1925 the entire complement seems to have been met by veterans, since nine of the twenty veterans resident at the KAR Memorial Home were working as messengers for the KAR.<sup>18</sup> Personal Servants worked and lived alongside the officer's Orderly, a combatant soldier 'of long service and good conduct'<sup>19</sup> who received extra pay and was excused from his normal duties in return for acting as personal assistant to an officer.<sup>20</sup> Orderlies' close proximity to officers made them important intermediaries between European and African ranks, and de Guingand described his Orderly, Subehana, as 'The most important member of one's personal staff' whom he regarded as 'a trusted friend'.<sup>21</sup> Servants such as Jackie, 1 KAR's Officers' Mess cook in the mid-1920s, were equally prominent in officers' lives, and could be long-standing members of the military community.<sup>22</sup> During the World Wars, when Nyasaland Europeans served with the KAR, Malawians such as Ardwell Mlenga or 'Amini' simply followed their civilian employers into the army as personal servants.<sup>23</sup> However, in peacetime, Personal Servants were commonly passed from one officer to another. Following this pattern, Twaya Namonde worked as a cook

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<sup>17</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (7), f. 5, Memorandum by Colonel Desmond John Bannister [1980?].

<sup>18</sup> PRO, CO 534/56, f. 205, 'Report on K.A.R. Memorial Pensioner Home', by A. G. Bishop, Honorary Secretary, KAR Memorial Fund, 30 March 1925.

<sup>19</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland, 1927), p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King's African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, [1908(?)]), p. 14; Sir Francis De Guingand, *African Assignment* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1953), p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 26.

<sup>22</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup> Mlenga, Ardwell, 'An Autobiography', *The Nyasaland Journal*, 17, 2 (1964), 25-28 (p. 27); Amini, 'In Search of a Bwana', in *Abyssinian Patchwork: An Anthology* (London, Frederick Muller, 1949), ed. by Kenneth Gandar Dower, pp. 40-42.

and Personal Servant for at least nine different KAR officers between 1904 and 1942. Like other servants, Twaya Namonde accompanied the KAR on active service in both wars, and was even awarded a special 'follower's' medal.<sup>24</sup>

The most significant group of followers in the military camp, both numerically and in the eyes of the military authorities were the soldiers' wives and families. It is clear that women were living with soldiers in garrisons in Nyasaland as early as 1896.<sup>25</sup> When the newly raised 2nd BCA Rifles sailed for Mauritius in 1899, the 878 Malawian soldiers were accompanied by 220 women and 77 children.<sup>26</sup> As one observer noted, 'Many of the recruits brought their wives and children with them, so that [...] it was a small army which landed'.<sup>27</sup> The proportion of women living with the Nyasaland battalions grew slowly before the First World War, so that in 1905, 600 men of 1 KAR travelling to East Africa were accompanied by 239 women. By the eve of the Second World War, it was estimated that more than ninety-five percent of Malawian soldiers were living in the lines with a woman.

### Accommodation

For the first twenty years of the colonial army in Nyasaland, Malawian soldiers were generally responsible for building their own accommodation.<sup>28</sup> A map of Fort Lister drawn by Lieutenant Poole shows the officer's house, the Sikh soldiers'

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<sup>24</sup> Twaya Namonde, 'The Story of Twaya Namonde', *The Nyasaland Journal*, 16, 1 (1963), 49-61; Society of Malawi Library, World War One Album 4, f. 33, 'Brief historical details of Twaya Namone, in support of his application for admission to K.A.R. Memorial Home Zomba' [n.d.].

<sup>25</sup> Acting Commissioner Sharpe to Foreign Secretary, Zomba, 29 September 1896, PRO FO 2/108, ff. 30-1

<sup>26</sup> Moyse Bartlett, p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> 'The B.C.A. Rifles in Mauritius' (Reproduced from the *Morning Leader*), *Central African Times*, 19 May 1900, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 2 July 1895.



'Lines', and even cow, goat, and fowl houses inside the Fort, whilst the Malawian soldiers' accommodation is simply referred to as a 'Village' occupied by his soldiers, not only some distance outside the Fort, but even on the opposite bank of the stream.<sup>29</sup> This spatial segregation was reproduced at other forts. In 1903, the 'Round and square Askari huts' of 'mud and daub' at Fort Mangoche were also outside the walls of the fort, although the Malawian Interpreter's houses were on the opposite side of the fort with that of the Indian Hospital Assistant.<sup>30</sup> The situation was even more marked at Fort Manning, where the soldiers' houses were sited about 400 yards away from the Fort itself.<sup>31</sup> This pattern was also followed when soldiers served outside Nyasaland. Photographs of 1 CAR in Mauritius show 'the regimental lines' consisting of rows of square thatched houses,<sup>32</sup> and in 1906 it was noted that Malawians serving in Kenya were 'hutting themselves in the bee-hive shaped wattle and daub hut with a grass thatched roof'.<sup>33</sup> The role of the military authorities in such construction seems to have been limited to issuing instructions for the position of the buildings. Supervising the erection of huts for 1 KAR in 1903, Lieutenant Barton recorded that 'As may be expected there is not much the white man can teach the Central African in this work, [t]hough of course the ground has to be laid out and marked before they begin building'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> MNA 14/FGP/4/1, 'Plan of Fort Lister', by Lieutenant Francis Garden Poole, 1897; see 'British Central African Protectorate', *Navy and Army Illustrated*, 3 September 1898, pp. 561-562.

<sup>30</sup> MNA, KAR 1/2/5, 'Report on Fort Mangoche', Captain C. Percival, 1 KAR, 1 June 1903.

<sup>31</sup> MNA, KAR 1/2/5, Map of Fort Manning by Captain Brook, 3 March 1906.

<sup>32</sup> 'The Central African Regiment', *Navy and Army Illustrated*, 12 May 1900, pp. 191-92 (p. 92).

<sup>33</sup> PRO, CO 534/3, f.453, Inspection Report on 1 KAR, 1 February 1906, Brigadier General W. H. Manning, Inspector-General KAR, 3 March 1906. See NAM, 6705-60, 'Personal Narration of Service with the 1st. Battalion K.A.R. by Lieut. Col. C. R. R. Bacon' [n.d.].

<sup>34</sup> NAM, 7807-23, Diary of Lieutenant Charles W. Barton whilst serving in the Somaliland Campaign, 9 July 1903.

By 1912, soldiers stationed in Zomba were living in geometrically arranged, single-storey blocks of rooms, still made by the Malawian soldiers themselves from unfired 'green' brick, which the Inspector General considered 'in every respect preferable to the old mud and thatched huts which required constant attention and were very difficult to keep tidy'.<sup>35</sup> During the First World War, the increase in the size of the KAR, coupled with frequent changes of station, meant that Malawian soldiers were often compelled to build their own huts.<sup>36</sup> Following the war, the brick buildings erected in 1912 were once more taken into use, but the Commandant now argued that iron roofs should be added, since 'grass roofs harbour rats which damage the men's kit, are dangerous on account of fire and are in constant need of renewal and repairs'.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, in 1920, Malawian soldiers from 2 KAR stationed in newly occupied Tanganyika found themselves in a variety of inadequate housing. At Tabora, the Malawian soldiers found themselves sharing rooms in former German barrack blocks, although an overspill of 40 men lived in a corrugated iron house. Accommodation was crowded, since no extra provision was made for the men's wives. Soldiers at Arusha and Dodoma were living in wattle and daub huts, but the 62 Malawians stationed at Bukoba were compelled to live in 'worn out' tents, since it was believed that grass huts were unsuitable due to the spirillum tick.<sup>38</sup> Financial constraints prevented the improvement of these facilities, and by the following year, the situation had deteriorated to the point where soldiers at Tabora were also

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<sup>35</sup> PRO, CO 534/15, f. 49, Inspection Report on 1 KAR, 1912-1913, Colonel G. Thesiger, Inspector-General KAR, 12 November 1912. See MNA, M2/24/39/75, 'The Housing and General Sanitary Condition of the 2nd K.A.R. Lines', Director of Medical Services Nyasaland, 19 November 1938.

<sup>36</sup> NAM, 6505-16, Diary of Captain E. A. Priestland, 2/2 KAR, 4 December 1916, 17 January 1917.

<sup>37</sup> PRO, CO 534/34, f. 412, Inspection Report on KAR in Nyasaland, Brigadier E. H. Llewellyn, Commandant KAR, 12 August 1919.

<sup>38</sup> PRO CO 534/40, f.10, Inspection Report on 2 KAR, 1919-1920, Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, 21 March 1920; PRO, CO 534/40, ff. 22-26, 'Medical Report on 2nd King's African Rifles from January 1919 to January 31st 1920', Lieutenant Colonel W. I. Gunn, OC 2 KAR, Tabora, 14 March 1920.



accommodated in 'porous' tents, whilst the soldiers at Bukoba in 'very bad quality' tents were 'continually getting wet and are consequently very dissatisfied'.<sup>39</sup>

By 1923, money had been found to build new barracks in Tabora, which the Inspector General described as 'exceptionally good',<sup>40</sup> although soldiers in outstations and Machine Gun Porters continued to live in round huts.<sup>41</sup> However, whilst problems in Tanganyika seemed to be solved, the brick lines in Zomba were already beginning to fall into a poor state of repair.<sup>42</sup> No major building projects appear to have been undertaken for the rest of the interwar period, and by the late 1930s, the soldiers' housing in Zomba was regarded as inadequate. Despite the recommendations made in 1919, most houses still had thatched roofs.<sup>43</sup> Soldiers lived in rooms, with no door to keep out insects, measuring only about ten feet by ten feet, or ten feet by fifteen feet for ANCOs. Of the 253 soldiers in the camp, 85 had to share this space with a wife, 72 with a wife and child, 16 with a wife and two children, two with a wife and three children, and one with a wife and four children.

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<sup>39</sup> PRO CO 534/47, ff. 65-70, 'Medical Report for 2nd Battalion the King's African Rifles from January 1st to 31st December 1920', Lieutenant Colonel W. I. Gunn, OC 2 KAR, Tabora, 31 January 1921; PRO, CO 534/47, f. 46, 'Inspection Report 1920-1921: 2nd Battalion The Kings African Rifles', Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, Tabora, 7 February 1921.

<sup>40</sup> PRO, CO 534/54, f. 386, 2 KAR 'Medical Report for 1923', Colonel J. Harington, Inspector-General KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 7 January 1924.

<sup>41</sup> PRO, CO 534/49, ff. 689-96, 'Medical Report for 2nd Battalion the King's African Rifles from January 1st to December, 31st 1922', Lieutenant Colonel W. I. Gunn, OC 2 KAR [n.d.]; PRO, CO 534/51, f. 389, 2 KAR 'Medical Report for 1922', Lieutenant Colonel L. G. Murray, OC 2 KAR [April 1923?]; PRO, CO 820/1/7, 2 KAR Inspection Report, Colonel John Harington, Inspector General KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 17 December 1926; PRO, CO 820/3/11, 2 KAR Inspection Report, Colonel Walker, Inspector-General, King's African Rifles, Dar-es-Salaam, 4 December 1927.

<sup>42</sup> PRO, CO 534/56, f. 171, Inspection Report on 1 KAR, Colonel J. Harington, Inspector-General KAR, Zomba, 8 April 1925.

<sup>43</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles* (Zomba: Nyasaland Government Printer, 1927), p. 54.

Rooms containing more than two adults and one child were considered overcrowded.<sup>44</sup>

By late 1938, the authorities were beginning to make improvements to this accommodation, building blocks of slightly larger rooms, using burnt bricks and corrugated iron roofs, whilst some of the old green brick blocks were renovated with the addition of iron roofs and mud plaster ceilings.<sup>45</sup> However, reflecting the increased requirements for accommodation during the war, the older buildings remained in use. By 1940, with women removed from the camp, the rooms which had previously accommodated one soldier and his family were now used to house three men and their equipment. The Medical Officer described the old green brick buildings as 'in a very bad state of repair and [...] unfit for habitation', whilst the new ceilings in the renovated buildings had blocked old ventilation spaces so that the air was 'foul'. The lines as a whole were condemned as 'largely insanitary and unfit for use'.<sup>46</sup> This situation, however, had not improved two years later, when the old thatched buildings at Zomba were pronounced 'tick infested'.<sup>47</sup> The Director of Medical Services noted that the buildings, some of which had now been in use for thirty years, were 'not built in permanent materials: the floors are earth and the walls of lime plaster are badly cracked, enabling ticks to establish themselves once they are introduced'. However, he advised against improving the buildings since this 'would

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<sup>44</sup> MNA, M2/24/39/75, 'The Housing and General Sanitary Condition of the 2nd K.A.R. Lines', Director of Medical Services Nyasaland, 19 November 1938; PRO, CO 820/30/4, 'Appendix "A", Work required on the King's African Rifles lines at Zomba', Inspector General's Inspection Report, Southern Brigade, KAR, Major-General G. J. Giffard, Inspector General RWAFF and KAR, Tabora, 14 January 1938.

<sup>45</sup> MNA, M2/24/39/75, 'The Housing and General Sanitary Condition of the 2nd K.A.R. Lines', Director of Medical Services Nyasaland, 19 November 1938.

<sup>46</sup> MNA, M 2/24/39/110, Medical Officer to Director of Medical Services, Zomba, 11 April 1940

<sup>47</sup> MNA, M 2/24/39/118A, H. R. Price, Director of Public Works, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Zomba, 14 December 1943.



tend to convert them into permanent buildings without correcting all their defects'.<sup>48</sup> Elsewhere, Malawian soldiers during the Second World War were housed in a variety of accommodation reflecting the diversity of their postings. Many wartime camps in East Africa were equipped with wooden huts, whilst most Malawian soldiers seem to have spent the majority of their wartime service living in tents.<sup>49</sup>

Following the end of the war, Malawian soldiers and their families were again living in the pre-war brick buildings in Zomba. By the early 1950s, in contrast to pre-war practice, married soldiers received separate housing to single soldiers.<sup>50</sup> In practice, this meant that unmarried men lived in the old brick blocks whilst soldiers with families lived in detached 'single mud huts'.<sup>51</sup> However, whilst Malawian soldiers had earlier been issued only bed boards, a married soldier now received beds for a wife and up to two children, two chairs, and a washing basin. Senior NCOs received more comfortable string beds, extra chairs, and a mirror.<sup>52</sup> Following Federation, by 1956 the authorities had begun a full-scale programme of reconstruction, with new brick buildings equipped with an electricity supply for all ranks. Privates and Corporals were to be accommodated in blocks of married quarters, Sergeants in semi-detached quarters, and Warrant Officers each in detached 'superior houses containing their own toilet facilities'.<sup>53</sup> This building project was

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<sup>48</sup> MNA, M 2/24/39/118, Memorandum by Director of Medical Services, Nyasaland, 20 December 1943.

<sup>49</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) II, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie, 1981, f. 55; Interviews, October 2000.

<sup>50</sup> MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1, 'Notes on the King's African Rifles' [1952].

<sup>51</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (120), f. 11, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel John T. H. Gunning, [1980?].

<sup>52</sup> MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1, 'Notes on the King's African Rifles' [1952].

<sup>53</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation' [25 June 1962?]; IWM, 83/21/1/143, Lieutenant Colonel John Dauncey, OC 1 KAR,

intended to be finished by 1958, but in practice financial constraints meant that, whilst the senior ranks' accommodation was completed early, only half of the Privates' and Corporals' buildings had been built by mid-1961.<sup>54</sup> Malawian soldiers stationed in Bulawayo in 1957, where rebuilding was completed earlier, found themselves living in accommodation which the *Journal of The King's African Rifles* described as 'luxurious'.<sup>55</sup> Regardless of where they were stationed, Malawian soldiers seem to have benefited from improved scales of furniture for their homes, which now included beds with mattresses and tables.

There is little evidence of Malawian soldiers' opinions about their accommodation. However, the very absence of criticism by soldiers regarding accommodation, when complaints were evident in so many other areas of military life, suggests that Malawian soldiers were generally at least satisfied with their housing. There is little reason to doubt this satisfaction, since although the military authorities were often concerned about the standard of soldiers' housing, it was generally of a higher quality than that found in the communities from which men were recruited. Thatched mud huts with minimal furnishings, of the kind which had been gradually eliminated in the KAR since the First World War, remained the main form of rural dwelling in southern Nyasaland throughout the colonial period.<sup>56</sup> In

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Zomba, to Brigadier T. H. Birkbeck, 8 February 1956; MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962.

<sup>54</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962.

<sup>55</sup> *Journal of The King's African Rifles*, 1, 2 (1957), p.8. See RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> H. L. Duff, *Nyasaland Under the Foreign Office* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1903), pp. 290-91; J. C. Mitchell, 'The Yao of Southern Nyasaland', in *Seven Tribes of British Central Africa*, ed. by Elizabeth Colson and Max Gluckman (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1951), pp. 292-353



these circumstances, features that became common to KAR houses, such as brick construction and metal roofs, became prestigious.<sup>57</sup> Even when soldiers had been housed in mud huts, because the huts were built by the soldiers themselves, they were able to reproduce the conditions which they would have experienced at home. Even the distinction between traditional round huts and the square huts which became more common in southern Malawi seems to have been evident within the military lines.<sup>58</sup> Emphasising this, Malawian soldiers did object to more impermanent forms of housing which they experienced during wartime. As Private Seckson Nkhoswe recalled, 'We never liked the houses since they were all tents',<sup>59</sup> and Private Henderson Simuja noted that 'accommodation was not up to standard. We were living in houses made from planks.'<sup>60</sup>

Malawian soldiers clearly had less control over the form of their housing once the authorities assumed control for its construction. Nevertheless, they continued to influence their environment through the construction of small pieces of cultivated ground or 'gardens'. Soldiers' seem to have maintained gardens some distance outside the lines as early as the mid-1890s. At this time, they were tended by soldiers' wives (several were kidnapped in the act of gardening by slave raiders), and it seems likely that this continued to be the pattern whenever women were present.<sup>61</sup> There is little direct evidence of soldiers' gardens in the first decades of the twentieth

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(p. 303); Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 102, 214.

<sup>57</sup> White, *Magomero*, pp. 124, 229-30.

<sup>58</sup> White, *Magomero*, p. 191.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Private Seckson Philip Nkhoswe, Zomba, October 2000. See also, Interviews with Staff Sergeant Joseph Kalilombe, Private Jauma Matola, Private Alfred Mmambo, Private Elia Noah, and Private Ordnance Zulani, Zomba, October 2000.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Private Henderson Simuja, Zomba, October 2000.

<sup>61</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 3 October 1895 and 30 October 1895.

century, but by the inter-war period, they were being actively encouraged by the military authorities, both as a source of vegetables to supplement soldiers' diets, and as a pastime. In 1929, the Inspector General noted of the Nyasaland company of the SCC that he was 'glad to see that my recommendation about a garden for the Nyasaland natives has been carried into effect and I saw an excellent little garden which has proved very productive'.<sup>62</sup>

Elsewhere, however, Malawian soldiers' gardens were so prolific that they had a profound impact upon the appearance of the lines. In 1938, Nyasaland's Director of Medical Services found that in 2 KAR's lines at Zomba, 'The ground around these lines, and in some cases that in between blocks of living quarters is under cultivation', and argued that

The cultivation of land in the immediate vicinity of the native lines should be forbidden; Standing crops provide suitable cover for children to defaecate [sic] in, whilst decaying vegetation in neglected gardens gives the camp an unsightly appearance.<sup>63</sup>

The Director of Medical Services suggested that 'Land for cultivation could easily be provided in another part of the Camp, for individual needs are small', and this recommendation seems to have been carried into effect, since by the following year, the commanding officer noted with approval that a single 'vegetable garden' was being established.<sup>64</sup> When African soldiers served in the Far East during the Second World War, the importance of gardens was enhanced, as they were seen as a means to 'Africanise askari life'. In a report on the welfare of African soldiers in Ceylon,

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<sup>62</sup> MNA, S 1/2161/23/14, Inspection Report on SCC, 1928-1929, Brigadier H. A. Walker, Inspector General KAR, 11 March 1929, p. 6.

<sup>63</sup> MNA, M2/24/39/75, 'The Housing and General Sanitary Condition of the 2nd K.A.R. Lines', Director of Medical Services Nyasaland, 19 November 1938, pp 1, 4.

<sup>64</sup> MNA, M 2/24/39/97, OC 2 KAR to HQ Southern Brigade KAR, Dar es Salaam, 2 May 1939.



Chaplain Quick noted, 'the African's flair for gardening [should not] be overlooked. A tiny patch, where he could grow his own relishes, would attach him to the spot. One unit has already taken to gardening as a hobby'.<sup>65</sup> It is tempting to speculate that this unit was 2 KAR. When new quarters were built in the 1950s, the commanding officer of 1 KAR noted soldiers were 'encouraged to make gardens' adjacent to the buildings.<sup>66</sup> Whilst soldiers' gardens were tolerated by the military authorities from an early date, their acceptance within the lines did represent an 'Africanisation' of the military environment, and stood in contrast with the 'spit-and-polish' culture of the British Army. However, whilst gardens meant that the lines were to an extent physically indigenised, the lines remained fundamentally different from the southern Malawian villages where the majority of the soldiers were recruited, insofar as the 'ownership' of the land, albeit temporary, was clearly vested in the status of men.

### Food

Malawian soldiers' rations were limited at the beginning of the colonial period, but unlike other East African soldiers, who had to buy their own food before the First World War, Malawians always received some free food from the authorities.<sup>67</sup> In the late 1890s, soldiers received only a daily ration of half an ounce of salt and either one pound of rice or two pounds of maize, which was ground to flour and used to make a

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<sup>65</sup> PRO, CO 820/55/3, 'Report on Welfare in 21st (EA) Infantry Brigade rendered to the [?]GG East Africa Command at request of Brigadier Portman Officer IC welfare, India', Chaplain Griffith Quick [July 1943].

<sup>66</sup> IWM, 83/21/1/143, Lieutenant Colonel John Dauncey, OC 1 KAR, Zomba, to Brigadier T. H. Birkbeck, 8 February 1956.

<sup>67</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 120.

porridge called *nsima* in Chinyanja.<sup>68</sup> The issue of rice was increased to one-and-a-half pounds by 1908, but otherwise this remained the standard ration until the First World War.<sup>69</sup> Under normal circumstances, soldiers were expected to supplement their diet by 'local purchases' of beans and groundnuts, and presumably by growing their own vegetables.<sup>70</sup> However, if this was not possible, as when Malawian soldiers were on campaign in Somaliland, extra rations of dates and vegetables or occasionally meat were issued.<sup>71</sup> In the 1890s, soldiers were also able to supplement their diets by looting 'fowls, ducks, pigeons and native food', which soldiers were allowed to keep themselves rather than handing to the commanding officer as official loot.<sup>72</sup> The food provided by such activities could be substantial; a minor expedition in 1897 was said to have obtained between 5,000 and 8,000 chickens.<sup>73</sup> Soldiers in Somaliland in 1903, and later during the First World War, were also occasionally allowed to shoot game for meat.<sup>74</sup>

In 1908, the Inspector-General argued that the free rations issued to Malawian soldiers meant that 'it is possible to improve the health and physique of the men

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<sup>68</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Commissioner Sir Harry Johnston, K.C.B. on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate April 1, 1895, to March 31, 1896*, Africa No.5, 1896, C. 8254, p. 12; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Annual Report on the British Central Africa Protectorate for the Year 1897-98*, Africa No.9, 1898, C. 9048, p. 16; NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 236, 'Conditions of Enlistment', 23 December 1898.

<sup>69</sup> PRO, CO 534/8, f. 168, 1 KAR Inspection Report, 1907-1908.

<sup>70</sup> PRO, CO 534/3, f. 446, 1 KAR Inspection Report, Commissioner's Office, Nairobi, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 6 March 1906. See PRO, CO 534/41, f. 155, 1 KAR Inspection Report, 1919-1920.

<sup>71</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Lieutenant Colonel Henry L. Jessep, OC Troops, Mauritius, to Under Secretary of State for War, 6 January 1900; NAM, 7807-23, Diary of Lieutenant Charles W. Barton whilst serving in the Somaliland Campaign, Garrerho, 12 July 1903.

<sup>72</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/5/1, 'Orders by Major C. A. Edwards Commanding the Armed Forces in the British Central Africa Protectorate', Zarafi Expedition, 1895; MNA, 13/WPO/2/1, Journal of Dr. Wordsworth Poole, 23 September 1895.

<sup>73</sup> Ian F. W. Beckett, *Johnnie Gough, V.C.: A Biography of Sir John Edmund Gough, V.C., K.C.B., C.M.G.* (London: Tom Donovan, 1989), p. 30.

<sup>74</sup> NAM, 7807-23, Diary of Lieutenant Charles W. Barton whilst serving in the Somaliland Campaign, 8 September 1903; Page, *The Chiyaya War*, p. 98.



[and] the Officers are able to see that their men are properly fed'.<sup>75</sup> However, even in Somaliland, where rations had included vegetables, the authorities had been compelled to issue lime juice to combat cases of scurvy.<sup>76</sup> During the First World War, rations were again increased to include ghee (clarified butter) and a combination of meat and dates.<sup>77</sup> Unlike earlier campaigns, an increased ration scale was retained after the war, as it had been found that the pre-war allowance was 'barely a living ration' when men were not able to buy supplementary food. Malawian soldiers now received twelve ounces of rice, a pound of maize ('meal'), half an ounce of salt, two ounces of ghee (later ground nut oil) and four ounces of beans per day.<sup>78</sup> The only change to this ration during the inter-war period was the reduction of the beans to two ounces. Three pounds of meat were also issued once per month. This left Malawian soldiers at a considerable disadvantage in comparison to other KAR soldiers. Those in Tanganyika received twice as many beans, whilst Kenyan and Ugandan soldiers also received six ounces of peas or potatoes per day, and two pounds of meat per week. All other KAR soldiers received one pound of maize meal, which was the equivalent of twice the whole maize issued to the Malawians. In 1939, the medical officer responsible for 2 KAR noted the 'poor physique' of the soldiers, and blamed the poor rations issued in Nyasaland:

[There is] a shortage of proteins and fats - practically twice the quantity is required of each - whilst the carbohydrates are in excess. [...] the meat issue should be spread out evenly over the month. There is also a complete absence of fresh vegetables and fruit.

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<sup>75</sup> PRO, CO 534/8, f. 168, 1 KAR Inspection Report, 1907-1908.

<sup>76</sup> NAM, 7807-23, Diary of Lieutenant Charles W. Barton whilst serving in the Somaliland Campaign, Garrerho, 12 July 1903.

<sup>77</sup> IWM, 83/31/1, Diary of A. W. Nichols, CQMS 3/2 KAR, October 1917.

<sup>78</sup> PRO, CO 534/41, ff. 154-55, 1 KAR Inspection Report, 1919-1920, Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector General KAR, Zomba, 8 May 1920.

The authorities moved to bring Nyasaland rations into line with those in the rest of the KAR in 1939, but this was overtaken by the outbreak of war.<sup>79</sup> The war saw an improvement in all KAR rations, with regular issues of meat and vegetables, whilst soldiers serving alongside European soldiers in the Far-East received standardised rations.<sup>80</sup> Improved scales continued after the war, so that in 1952 Malawian soldiers received a daily ration including ground maize, potatoes, groundnuts, milk, dates or beans, rice, sugar, ghee, salt, fresh and tinned vegetables, tea, fresh and dried fruit, sweets, and four ounces of fresh meat.

Other groups within the military community fared less well than soldiers. In the 1920s, non-enlisted followers, such as sweepers and porters, only received reduced ration scales.<sup>81</sup> Whilst the military authorities tolerated and later encouraged the presence of soldiers' families in the lines, financial constraints meant that they were reluctant to provide them with free food. Instead, soldiers had to share their rations with their families, and to supplement this, from the early 1900s both soldiers and their wives were allowed to purchase rice from KAR stores at preferential Government prices.<sup>82</sup> This system naturally made women living in the lines highly dependent upon their husbands' presence, and in recognition of this, the authorities occasionally made free issues of rice to women whilst their husbands were away on active service, as in 1901, when rice was given to the wives in Zomba of men who

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<sup>79</sup> MNA, M2/24/39/84, Director of Medical Services, Zomba, to Medical Officer, Native Hospital, Zomba, 9 March 1939.

<sup>80</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 120-121.

<sup>81</sup> MNA, S 2/8/20/1, C. G. Phillips, OC Nyasaland Detachment 1 KAR, to OC Mangoche Detachment 1 KAR, Zomba, 5 February 1920; Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles*, (Zomba: Government Printer, Nyasaland, 1927), p. 69.

<sup>82</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 603, 'Sale of Rice', 10 January 1903; MNA, S 2/32/22/1, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 23 July 1922.



were serving in West Africa.<sup>83</sup> In the early 1930s, the authorities took steps to issue a 'half ration' to Malawian women living with the SCC in Somaliland, since women were not receiving adequate food when the soldiers were absent on patrol. However, this really represented a formalisation of the existing system, since the rations were to be paid for from the soldiers' wages.

A suggestion to issue free food to soldiers' wives was again rejected in 1940, on the strange grounds that the officer commanding the KAR Depot in Nyasaland believed that soldiers did not 'share their rations to any appreciable extent', and that women would not therefore suffer unduly from the absence of their husbands.<sup>84</sup> The improved post-war ration scales seem to have meant that soldiers were more easily able to share their own rations with their families.<sup>85</sup> Finally, after 1959 the authorities decided that 'free rations be issued to the wives of Askari [living in the lines] whenever their husbands were away from their home stations on duty'.<sup>86</sup> However, even this gesture was driven by a concern with the soldiers' rather than the women's welfare: 'it means that the African soldier "goes to war" knowing that his family is being looked after'.<sup>87</sup>

Before the Second World War, Malawian soldiers seem generally to have been satisfied with their simple rations. Before joining the army, most soldiers would

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<sup>83</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 431, 'Rice issued to Askaris and Capitaos' wives', 28 January 1901.

<sup>84</sup> MNA, S41/1/8/1/170, Lieutenant Colonel N. R. G. Tucker, OC KAR Depot, Zomba, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 8 August 1940.

<sup>85</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'Improvements in African conditions of service since Federation' [25 June 1962?].

<sup>86</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/158/9/G(ops), 'The Nyasaland Battalions - Changes since Federation', Lieutenant Colonel K. R. Coster, AQMG, June 1962.

<sup>87</sup> F 248/2073, CAC/171/1/G(ops), 'A brief survey of the Army lessons learned from the Internal Security Operations in Nyasaland covering the period February-April, 1959' [October 1959?].

have subsisted on a diet largely consisting of *nsima* made from millet, cassava, maize, or occasionally rice flour, and served vegetable 'relish'.<sup>88</sup> The army ration, supplemented by the soldiers' own purchases or cultivation, was therefore no worse than what soldiers had previously experienced, and had the important advantage of being supplied on a regular and reliable basis. The shortage of meat in the soldiers' diet was a point of contention, but it seems likely that this too was at least as plentiful as in civilian life.<sup>89</sup> More serious dissatisfaction arose when the authorities failed to provide the rations which soldiers were accustomed to, and therefore felt justified in expecting. During the First World War, there were often severe shortages of supplies, causing hunger which veterans could still vividly recall in the 1970s.<sup>90</sup> However, soldiers also resented attempts to change the quality of their rations in peacetime. In the late 1920s, Malawians serving in the Somaliland Camel Corps were issued with 'red' (unmilled) rice on the advice of the Medical Officer, and successfully complained so that the authorities returned to the previous issue of white rice.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, in 1939, Malawians resisted attempts to replace their issue of whole maize with machine ground maize, which the Malawians complained was 'ground together with the husks and they get stomach trouble from eating it'.<sup>92</sup> This objection probably reflected the fact that in civilian life, grain husks were only eaten

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<sup>88</sup> White, *Magomero*, pp. 103-05.

<sup>89</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (7), f. 8, Memorandum by Colonel Desmond John Bannister [1980?].

<sup>90</sup> See Page, *The Chiwaya War*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>91</sup> MNA, S1/2161/23/14, Inspection Report on SCC, 1928-1929, Brigadier H. A. Walker, Inspector General KAR, 11 March 1929, p. 6; MNA, S1/2161/23/15a, Inspection Report on SCC, 1929-1930, Inspector General KAR [n.d.]; MNA, S1/2161/23/16, Inspection Report on SCC 1930-1931, Inspector General KAR, 11 April 1931.

<sup>92</sup> MNA, M 2/24/39/97, OC 2 KAR to HQ Southern Brigade KAR, Dar es Salaam, 2 May 1939. See MNA, M 2/24/39/94, Major Tucker, OC 2 KAR, to Director of Medical Services, Zomba, 26 April 1939 and MNA, M 2/24/39/95, H. De Boer, Director of Medical Services, Zomba, to OC 2 KAR, 28 April 1939.



during periods of food shortage.<sup>93</sup> There were few complaints about food following the improvements during the Second World War. The majority of soldiers thought that army rations were good, and some such as Alfred Mmambo identified good food as the highlight of their military service.<sup>94</sup>

Whilst women received few of the benefits of rations, they played a central role in their preparation. By the time the colonial army in Nyasaland was formed, soldiers in the British Army ate in centralised cooking facilities staffed by trained cooks from the School of Cooking.<sup>95</sup> However, no formal system of food preparation was instigated in Nyasaland, and instead this role was instead undertaken by the women who accompanied the KAR. This followed the pattern of labour in civilian society, and had profound implications for the lives of women living with the KAR, since the pounding of grain in particular was a laborious and time consuming activity. An inspection report in 1906 noted that men who had women with them were 'better off' than those without, implying that any man without access to a woman would have to cook for himself.<sup>96</sup> The role of women as the 'catering corps' of the Nyasaland forces continued throughout the inter-war period, and was increasingly formalised.<sup>97</sup> In the late 1920s, in imitation of a practice in other KAR battalions, a system was adopted whereby unmarried recruits were attached to their section commander or another older married man specifically so that his wife could

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<sup>93</sup> David Clement Scott, *Dictionary of the Nyanja Language: Being the Encyclopædic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language*, ed. by Alexander Hetherwick (London: United Society for Christian Literature, 1929), pp. 405-06.

<sup>94</sup> Interview with Alfred Mmambo, Zomba, October 2000.

<sup>95</sup> Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868-1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 140-41.

<sup>96</sup> Inspection Report on 1st Battalion King's African Rifles, 6 March 1906, PRO CO 534/3, f. 446; Inspection Report on 2nd Battalion King's African Rifles, 31 March 1906, PRO CO 534/3, f.99.

<sup>97</sup> Sir Francis De Guingand, *African Assignment* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1953), p.28;

Transcript of interview with Major P. Q. Logan, IWM, Department of Sound Records, 3864/3, p.16.

cook for them in return for a small fee.<sup>98</sup> Malawian soldiers were always fed by male cooks when on patrol or on active service, and during the Second World War men were fed centrally in the same fashion as European troops.<sup>99</sup> Central preparation of food continued in the post-war period for unmarried men, but the majority of married men returned to having their food prepared by their wives, and this system seems to have remained in place until the end of the colonial period.<sup>100</sup>

### Religion

As noted in chapter two, in contrast to the generally recognised bias of colonial recruitment in favour of Muslims, the Tonga men who were enlisted in the British Central Africa forces in the 1890s were closely identified with Christianity through their association with the Livingstonia Mission. There are certainly suggestions that a number of early Malawian soldiers were practising Christians. The former Livingstonia 'Mission boy', Sergeant-Major Bandawe, was remembered by officers for leading traditional 'war dances', but Johnston also recalled that

He learned to play the harmonium quite well: and after one or other of our victories on Nyasa used to make for the nearest mission station with some of his men, and [...] would sit down and play and sing hymns of triumph.<sup>101</sup>

Unlike regular British regiments, which usually had their own chaplain, no official arrangements were made for soldiers' worship, and it is therefore possible that senior Christians such as Bandawe ministered to their men themselves.

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<sup>98</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (105), ff. 31, 33; Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?]; PRO CO 820/6/1, 1 KAR Inspection Report, 1928-1929, by Inspector-General KAR [n.d.]

<sup>99</sup> D. H. Barber, *Africans in Khaki* (London, Edinburgh House, 1948), p.40.

<sup>100</sup> 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', by Major T. D. O'Connell, 1979, p.5, RHL MSS Afr.s.1715 (205); Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>101</sup> Johnston, *The Story of My Life*, p. 302n.



The identification of the administration's 'Arab' and Yao enemies with Islam probably made the Tonga soldiers' Christianity a valuable tool for the military authorities in the 1890s. However, the majority of the Swahili or 'Arab' soldiers recruited from Zanzibar and the East Coast in the early 1890s are likely to have been Muslims. Whilst little reference is made to their religious practices, it is unlikely that they were discouraged, given Johnston's belief that his use of Zanzibari troops might help him to win allies amongst his Muslim foes. The growing predominance of the Yao as the martial group in Malawi from the late 1890s, at a time when the Yao were increasingly becoming associated with Islam, introduced a significant Muslim element into the armed forces. Parsons has noted that the Sudanese and Swahili soldiers who formed the core of the early military units in Kenya and Uganda were responsible for the conversion of many new recruits to Islam.<sup>102</sup> Whilst most Swahili soldiers had left British Central Africa before Yaos were recruited into the army, notable exceptions, such as the Zanzibari Sergeant-Major Ali Kiongwe and the piously named 'Persian' Sergeant-Major Hajji Askar, remained well placed to offer religious instruction to Yao soldiers.

The first major signs of official interference in soldiers' religious practice came in 1904, when a decision by the officer commanding the Mangoche detachment to allow a UMCA mission school to be built in the camp was overturned by the commanding officer, Captain Markham. Markham not only closed the school, but added that no soldiers would be allowed to attend such a school whether it was in the camp or not, arguing that 'Whilst a man is an askari I consider that he owes the

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<sup>102</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 124.

whole of his time and his entire allegiance to his profession [...] Surely there is plenty of time to convert him when he has done with soldiering?'.<sup>103</sup> Markham's emphasis upon conversion suggests that his chief concern lay with active proselytisation, which might interfere with soldiers' existing religious practices. However, the Bishop of Likoma regarded the act as representing a prohibition upon Christianity in the army, and it is possible that some soldiers reacted similarly. During the previous year, Lieutenant Barton had noted his men's strong interest in education:

Their chief recreation off parade is trying to read & write & the game of "House" of "Tommy" is replaced by the chanting of A. B. C. D. etc. & spelling out words in their own language, which being a very rough form of dialect without any native written form they now write in English character with phonetic spelling<sup>104</sup>

This suggests that the presence of the mission school in Mangoche was a response to the soldiers' own wishes, and certainly raises the possibility that the authorities had indeed acted contrary to some of the soldiers' religious leanings. However, the army as a whole continued to be strongly identified with Islam, and was even held to be a mechanism for the spread of Islam in wider Malawian society: in 1911 the Blantyre Mission's *Life and Work* claimed that Islam's 'grip of the people' in the Zomba area was 'largely accounted for by the presence and influence of the troops'.<sup>105</sup>

Whilst missionaries felt with some justification that the army was seeking to restrict the active practice of Christianity within the armed forces, an Islamic rising was still regarded as the major threat to internal stability in Nyasaland on the eve of

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<sup>103</sup> PRO, CO 525, reel 3, vol. 2, Captain Markham to Sharpe, 4 June 1904, in Commissioner Alfred Sharpe to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 7 July 1904, quoted in Robert Greenstein, 'The Nyasaland Government's Policy Towards African Muslims, 1900-25', in *From Nyasaland to Malawi: Studies in Colonial History*, ed. by Roderick J. Macdonald (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1975), pp. 144-68 (p. 152).

<sup>104</sup> NAM, 7807-23, Diary of Lieutenant Charles W. Barton whilst serving in the Somaliland Campaign, 19 July 1903.

<sup>105</sup> *Life and Work in Nyasaland*, October-December 1911, p. 5.



the First World War. As noted in chapter two, the authorities therefore sought to reduce the proportion of Muslim soldiers in 1 KAR by adding Tonga and Ngoni companies to the battalion in 1914.<sup>106</sup> However, the Chilembwe Rising in January 1915, which was based upon John Chilembwe's Providence Industrial Mission, did little to improve the military authorities' disposition towards Christianity. The rising hardened official attitudes not only towards African-run missions, but also towards the missionary enterprise in general.<sup>107</sup> From the military perspective, the rising also probably highlighted the wider question of Christian attitudes towards military service, since Chilembwe, who had criticised the use of Malawian soldiers in Britain's colonial wars as early as 1900, had written a letter to the *Nyasaland Times* complaining about the use of Malawians during the First World War just two months before the rising.<sup>108</sup>

The change in official attitudes towards Christians seems to have had a profound impact upon religious practice within the Nyasaland battalions. In August 1915, in an incident which echoed that in 1904, forty-nine Christian soldiers serving in Zomba sought permission to build themselves a church or church school. This was apparently a reaction to the fact that 'The Mahomedan soldiers in the camp [...] were allowed to have a mosque built in the camp for themselves',<sup>109</sup> but the men bypassed the military hierarchy by seeking the help of a Church of Scotland

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<sup>106</sup> MNA, KAR 1/1/1, Intelligence Officer 1 KAR, to Adjutant 1 KAR, 2 December 1912; PRO, CO 534/18, f. 163, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Zomba, 7 February 1914; Moyse Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 157, 159.

<sup>107</sup> Shepperson, George, and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958), pp. 363-380.

<sup>108</sup> Shepperson and Price, *Independent African*, pp. 133, 234-36.

<sup>109</sup> MNA, Church of Scotland Papers, Hetherwick Papers, Revd. Alexander Hetherwick to Elmslie, 21 August 1915.

Missionary, the Revd. A. M. Anderson. The Revd. Alexander Hetherwick of the Blantyre Mission noted the authorities' response to the request:

They were refused this and the whole of them were flogged for asking Mr Anderson - to whom they were entrusted by their missionary up country - to speak for them. Anderson is forbidden to have anything to do with the Christians among the troops 'lest it should lead to insubordination'.<sup>110</sup>

Given the presence of a 'mosque' in the camp, the Church of Scotland missionaries regarded the refusal as a blatantly anti-Christian act. In fact, the 'mosque' seems to have been simply a hut which Muslim soldiers had been allowed to use during Ramadan precisely because there was no mosque in Zomba, and the military authorities' opposition to a church *school* in particular probably represented a reiteration of the policy of limiting external interference which had already been acted upon in 1904. Moreover, it is clear that the soldiers were flogged for a breach of military protocol, not because of their desire for religious facilities. Nevertheless, in the wake of the rising, when rumours were even circulating in Southern Nyasaland that the Administration was enforcing Islam, it was unsurprising that the Christian soldiers felt that they were being punished because of their religion.<sup>111</sup>

The interwar period saw a continuation of the military policy of limited interference in soldiers' religion, a situation which is indicated by the almost total absence of religious matters from inter-war records. The army continued to accommodate Islam, particularly when it impacted upon the practical running of the KAR. In 1927, 1 KAR's *Standing Orders* issued instructions that 'It is important that the Mohamedan Company should not fire during the month of Ramazan [*sic*], if

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<sup>110</sup> MNA, Church of Scotland Papers, Hetherwick Papers, Revd. Alexander Hetherwick to Elmslie, 21 August 1915.

<sup>111</sup> Greenstein, 'The Nyasaland Government's Policy Towards African Muslims', pp. 162-63.



this can be avoided, as their fasting undoubtedly affects their shooting'. Instead, Muslim soldiers were to be 'employed in collecting grass for thatching purposes'.<sup>112</sup> The authorities also instituted a system for supervising religious practice through the African RSM. This makes it clear that both Muslim and Christian soldiers were now permitted to construct their own places of worship, since the RSM was to be responsible for 'the Mosque and any other native churches in the lines'. Catholic soldiers of one of 2 KAR's companies stationed in Tanganyika in the late 1930s certainly took advantage of this, and were even permitted to call upon the services of a local missionary. One of the company officers recalled,

Roman Catholic Service was held at Masoko once a month. A White Father from a German Mission fifteen miles away used to travel over on his donkey and say Mass for the R.C.s, about a third of the Company were Catholics. A chapel had been constructed by the askari. No other denominations held services.<sup>113</sup>

The growing acceptance of Christian practice probable reflected the increasing proportion of Christian recruits, and the declining number of Muslims, as recruitment from Southern Nyasaland shifted away from the Yao and towards the Nguru/Lomwe. By 1938, the Southern Brigade, which was largely composed of Malawian soldiers, included twice as many Christians as Muslims.<sup>114</sup>

The Second World War saw a major change in official policy towards Christianity throughout the East African forces, as the East African Army Chaplains Department (EAACHD) was formed to provide an official ministry for Church of England soldiers, whilst Catholic Chaplains were also supplied to the forces. The

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<sup>112</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles* (Zomba: Nyasaland Government Printer, 1927), p. 54.

<sup>113</sup> RHL MSS Afr.s.1715 (105), f. 28; Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>114</sup> PRO, CO 820/34/12, Southern Brigade, King's African Rifles: 'Racial distribution of African combatant ranks on 31st Oct. 1938', by Colonel C. C. Fowkes, OC Southern Brigade KAR, 7 December 1938.

EAACHD included both Commissioned European Chaplains and African Chaplains who were classed as Warrant Officers. Later, Sergeant 'Catechists' were introduced to officiate where Chaplains were not available.<sup>115</sup> Although Parsons has shown that the East African forces suffered from a shortage of qualified personnel to fill Chaplains' posts, the new system had a profound impact upon the conduct of religious life within at least some of the Nyasaland battalions. Whilst the army had previously insisted that worship was essentially a personal matter, Protestant soldiers in 1 KAR now found themselves compelled to attend Church of England services, which were to be 'treated as a parade'.<sup>116</sup> Whilst Parsons argues that proselytisation was not accepted until after the war, some active provisions were made to permit soldiers to consolidate their beliefs. In 1944 1 KAR's African Chaplain, David Sibande, was holding daily confirmation classes in his tent, and Catholic soldiers in 13 KAR were confirmed in 1945.<sup>117</sup>

In the post-war period, the Nyasaland battalions remained predominantly Christian, to the extent that Gunning recalled his belief that 'Christians and Roman Catholics' were the only major religious groups represented in 1 KAR in the early 1950s.<sup>118</sup> In Malaya, 1 KAR had one Catholic chaplain, but both Catholic and Church of Scotland services were held with the aid of a Presbyterian chaplain from the British army. In Malaya, the Malawian soldiers' Christianity seems to have been promoted as a propaganda tool with local Chinese Christians, who were impressed by the 'askaris enthusiasm for their religion', and were invited to worship with them.

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<sup>115</sup> Parsons, *African Rank-and-File*, pp. 125-26.

<sup>116</sup> PRO, WO 169/18332, 1 KAR Battalion Orders, 8 June 1944. See PRO, WO 169/14104, 1 KAR Battalion Orders, 10 June 1943.

<sup>117</sup> PRO, WO 172/9483, War Diary of 13 KAR, 6 May 1945.

<sup>118</sup> MSS Afr. s. 1715 (120), f. 11, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel John T. H. Gunning [1980?].



By contrast, Muslim soldiers seem to have received little formal recognition, although the authorities noted that 'some Mohammedans worship with the Malays'.<sup>119</sup>

The end of the Second World War seems to have seen some reduction in the provision of formal religious facilities, so that 1 KAR no longer had its own chaplain in the early 1950s. 2 KAR also had its own chaplain in Malaya, and after its return to Africa it had access to Anglican and Catholic garrison churches, whilst services were also arranged for other Christian denominations.<sup>120</sup> By contrast, the minority of Muslim soldiers 'arranged their own religious services', although an ex-officer recalled that 'Their religious customs were strictly observed [...] Each person's beliefs were respected and he was allowed to get on with what he believed in'.<sup>121</sup>

### Recreation

African dancing or *ngoma* was an important feature of soldiers' recreation. Recording his experiences with the BCA Rifles in the mid-1890s, Lieutenant Alston noted many *ngomas* being performed by the soldiers under his command, both before and after expeditions, and to celebrate victories or important occasions.<sup>122</sup> Whilst these *ngomas* were permitted by the authorities, they seem to have been arranged by

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<sup>119</sup> 'Lipenga': *Journal of the 1st Nyasaland Battalion The King's African Rifles*, 1, 2 (1952), pp. 19, 56.

<sup>120</sup> MNA, 8-9-5-R/14034, 'List of British Officer, British other ranks and African Warrant Officers on Strength of 2nd (Ny) Bn. K.A.R. at 1200 hrs 4th July 1953', 2 KAR Scrapbook, Vol. 6, 1953-1954; RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 5.

<sup>121</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 6.

<sup>122</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 9 April 1895, 10 April 1895, 3 May 1895, 24 May 1895, 24 March 1896, 29 May 1896, 21 August 1896. See MNA, 13/WPO/2/1, *Journal of Dr. Wordsworth Poole*, 23 September 1895 and NAM, 7807-23, Diary of Lieutenant Charles W. Barton whilst serving in the Somaliland Campaign, Wadamgoa, 3, September 1903.

Malawian soldiers themselves, leaving European officers as interested onlookers. Alston simply observed that ‘the Atonga are dancing and yelling away [...] They seem to be able to work all day and dance all night’,<sup>123</sup> or

I have just been out to see the natives, Atonga, Makua, Yaos etc etc. dancing and going through all kinds of extraordinary attitudes. [...] War dances are going on all got up with feathers, spears and shields. Whenever I go out the man who is dancing rushes at me with his spear and then kneels down and clasps my legs.<sup>124</sup>

Large amounts of African beer (*moa*, *mowa* or *pombe*), made by the soldiers themselves, were a central component of the larger celebratory *ngomas*. As Alston observed on the same occasion, ‘[400 soldiers] are now feasting on the 120 large pots of native beer (pombe), about 5-6 gallons in each [...] They are royally drunk’.<sup>125</sup> Beer was thus established as an important and officially sanctioned element of Malawian soldiers’ recreation from an early date.

*Ngomas* remained an important recreational activity for Malawian soldiers until the 1950s. However, the military authorities increasingly appropriated tribal dancing for public purposes. *Ngomas* were formalised, creating the terminology of the ‘Battalion Ngoma’, timetabling dances as regimental events, and requiring official sanction for them.<sup>126</sup> This formalisation was probably mitigated to some extent when new dances such as *Beni*, *Malipenga* and *Mganda* were performed by soldiers following the First World War.<sup>127</sup> The authorities may also have been reluctant to interfere with dances which had strong religious significance, such as *Gule Wamkulu*, the Chewa *Nyau* dance. In 1945, soldiers from 22 KAR were able to

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<sup>123</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 24 March 1896.

<sup>124</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 29 May 1896.

<sup>125</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, Diary of Edward Alston, 29 May 1896.

<sup>126</sup> IWM, 83/21/1, ‘Detachment Orders by Lieut. T. H. Birkbeck, 2nd K.A.R. Commanding S.C.C. Draft, May 1937, on Board the S.S. “Matiana”.’

<sup>127</sup> See chapter 2.



spend two days performing the *Nyau* dance, in a situation where officers were still present as outsiders who felt privileged since 'Not many Europeans have been allowed to watch it'.<sup>128</sup> At the same time, *ngomas* were also increasingly used as entertainment. During the war, *ngomas* were performed to encourage relations between Nyasaland battalions, as Malawian soldiers attended each other's *ngomas* as guests.<sup>129</sup> *Ngomas* were also utilised to entertain European troops serving alongside the Malawians, as in 1942 when 'a selected number of askaris' serving with 1 KAR in Madagascar 'staged' an *ngoma* for soldiers of the Royal Scots Fusiliers.<sup>130</sup> The *ngoma* was coming to be viewed as a cultural artefact of the KAR. By the 1950s, dances were regularly 'attended by all British personnel' in the battalion,<sup>131</sup> and the authorities took deliberate steps to promote them:

Normal tribal customs were encouraged - certainly tribal dancing was a feature of the African life and at certain festival times special beer and meat rations would be made to encourage dancing which would continue very late into the night.<sup>132</sup>

However, under the Federal programme of modernisation, *ngomas* had been abandoned by the early 1960s, disappearing to the extent that an ex-officer recalled 'we didn't get involved in sort of tribal dancing in the army [...] because they were soldiers, they weren't tribal dancers [...] they still don't. Tribal dancing is for the villagers'.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) II, ff. 85-86, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie (1981).

<sup>129</sup> PRO, WO 172/9483, War Diary of 13 KAR, August and November 1945.

<sup>130</sup> PRO, WO 169/7020, War Diary of 1/1 KAR, 27 June 1942.

<sup>131</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (120), f. 11, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel John T. H. Gunning, [1980?].

<sup>132</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 6;

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

Whilst the drinking of beer was accepted as integral to *ngomas*, as in the metropolitan army, the consumption of alcohol was also perceived as a possible threat to discipline. In consequence, the military authorities sought to regulate Malawian soldiers' access to alcohol. The BCA Rifles Ordinance made drunkenness an offence 'whether on duty or not on duty'.<sup>134</sup> In addition, Standing Orders issued by 2 KAR before the First World War ordered that soldiers 'wishing to make beer in the lines' should first seek the permission of their company commander, who would specify the quantity which could be brewed. Soldiers were also prohibited from drinking any alcohol other than beer 'of the same nature as that drunk in Nyasaland'.<sup>135</sup> Although Malawian soldiers continued to brew their own beer,<sup>136</sup> by the 1930s, the authorities sought to control the quantity and quality of beer by supplying it to the soldiers themselves through a 'native beer canteen' which was closely supervised by the Malawian Provost Sergeant and Company Sergeant Major.<sup>137</sup> African soldiers were still restricted from drinking European beer or spirits in the 1950s, and continued to be supplied with African beer by the authorities at the end of the colonial period.<sup>138</sup> It was only in 1961 that senior Malawian ranks were permitted to buy spirits in the Warrant Officers' and Sergeants' Mess.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> PRO, FO 2/126, f. 178, 'The British Central Africa Rifles Ordinance, 1897', p. 7.

<sup>135</sup> Kenya, *Standing Orders of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion, The King's African Rifles*, (Nairobi: Uganda Railway Press, [1908(?)]), p. 16.

<sup>136</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) II, ff. 85-86, 'A Colonial's Experiences in the 2/2nd Bn. of The King's African Rifles (Later Known as 22nd Bn K.A.R.) During World War 2 1940-1947', Donald Ferguson Tait Bowie (1981).

<sup>137</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), f. 29, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>138</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 5, Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>139</sup> MNA, F 249/1131, G/ARC/A, Annex C to 'Agenda, 5th GOC's Conference, Army Headquarters, 6-8 March 1961', by Major C. E. Welch, GSO2, Secretary; MNA, F 249/1131, G/ARC/A, 'Minutes of the GOC's Fifth Conference held at Army Headquarters over the period 6-7 March 1961', Major-General R. E. B. Long, GOC, 20 March 1961.



Malawian soldiers resisted attempts to limit their access to alcohol. Statistics for the Nyasaland battalions during the 1930s suggest that severe punishments for drunkenness rarely exceeded twenty per battalion in any year.<sup>140</sup> Nevertheless, some soldiers were certainly prepared to defy the authorities' instructions. Just a small selection of defaulter sheets from the inter-war period includes three senior NCOs who were found guilty of knowingly permitting men under their command to be drunk.<sup>141</sup> In Tanganyika in 1932, Private Wadi Nyalugwe was also found guilty of illicitly 'Permitting his wife to brew Kangala Beer' and of 'Drinking kangala beer in the bush outside the Lines'.<sup>142</sup> This was similar to the illegal distillation of the strong drink *kachasu* by unmarried women on the slopes of Zomba mountain at the same period.<sup>143</sup> Given the prevalence of this activity amongst African women in Nyasaland towns during the colonial period, it seems likely that similarly displaced military women were also involved in beer brewing on a wider scale than records suggest.<sup>144</sup>

Alcohol occasionally caused serious disciplinary incidents. Soldiers charged with drunkenness were often also found guilty of insubordination, and fighting in the lines was naturally often associated with alcohol. As early as 1895, Alston found that one of the NCOs under his command, Mtoga,

had been drinking ever since he arrived the day before, and was fearfully drunk. [...] gradually became abusive, and when I ordered him out of the stockade to his

<sup>140</sup> PRO, CO 820, Southern Brigade Returns of Severe Punishments, 1932-1938.

<sup>141</sup> MNA, S 1/105/34/85, Defaulter Sheet of No. 5688 Sergeant Ngambani, SCC; MNA, S 1/105/34/139, Defaulter Sheet of No. 10795 CSM Bigula Saidi, 1/1 KAR; MNA, S 1/105/34, Defaulter Sheet of No. 7153 Sergeant Wadi Nyalugwe, 1/1 KAR.

<sup>142</sup> Defaulter Sheet of No. 7153 Sergeant Wadi Nyalugwe, 1/1 KAR.

<sup>143</sup> Defaulter Sheet of No. 7153 Sergeant Wadi Nyalugwe, 1/1 KAR, 1 June 1941, MNA S1/105/34/133

<sup>144</sup> See Joey Power, "'Eating the Property": Gender Roles and Economic Change in Urban Malawi, Blantyre-Limbe, 1907-1953', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 29, 1 (1995), 79-106 (pp. 85-86).

hut he wanted to go for me. So the only thing to do was to put the irons on him and he was locked up till tomorrow.<sup>145</sup>

By the 1960s, drinking had gained a significant political dimension as it became a regular vehicle for nationalist sentiment amongst soldiers. An intelligence report in 1960 noted,

An officer was told by an NCO that troops were being influenced in town by the MCP (the bar near the ENCOs Mess is known to be a hotbed) and troops shout KWACA when returning to the lines at night. They also sing MCP songs in the lines after beer drinks.<sup>146</sup>

However, soldiers' access to alcohol remained a contentious issue which seems even to have transcended nationalist politics. In 1962 cheap Chiperoni beer was condemned in the MCP's *Malawi News* as 'obnoxious' and 'devastating', and the paper warned that

Untold harm has been done to our people by the consumption of this beer [...] People have been fighting each other more than ever before. Chiperoni drunken men have been mishandling harmless women in the streets. Indeed, the consumption of this beer has brought about a decayed state of affairs which has never been seen in this country.<sup>147</sup>

Yet soldiers reacted 'most unfavourably' when the MCP government closed down the brewery making Chiperoni Beer in 1963, so that one of the last outbreaks of discontent by Malawian colonial soldiers was actually aimed against Banda's policies.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/1, The Diary of Edward Alston, 10 April 1895; MNA, AL 1/1/1, The Diary of Edward Alston, 17 August 1895.

<sup>146</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, 'Political Subversion in Military Unit', Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, to HQ CAC, 27 September 1960.

<sup>147</sup> 'Chiperoni Beer: Condition for Nail Factory', *Malawi News*, 15 June 1962. See John Lwanda, 'The Traditional in the Popular: Lyrical Ambiguities in Malawi's Socio-Medical Discourse, 1961-99', in *Twentieth Century Malawi: Perspectives on History and Culture*, ed. by John McCracken et al (Stirling: Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, 2001), pp. 69-95 (p. 76).

<sup>148</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/4/15, Lieutenant Colonel T. P. J. Lewis, OC Nyasaland, to Lieutenant Colonel G. J. Hawkins, Zomba, 21 March 1963; MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/4/16, Lieutenant Colonel G. J. Hawkins to F. Bridgeman, March 1963.



## Army Women and Sexual Relations

### *Official Attitudes to Soldiers' Women*

Officers generally acknowledged the vital domestic roles played by Malawian women in the army, which have been outlined above.<sup>149</sup> However, official military policy towards women was overwhelmingly informed by two sets of concerns. On the one hand, the military authorities believed that the presence of women was essential for the contentment of the African soldiery, and the consequent maintenance of discipline within the ranks.<sup>150</sup> Conversely, they felt that women posed a threat to the efficiency of the army, both as a drain on resources and more specifically as possible carriers of venereal disease (VD). Official policy towards women in the Nyasaland forces was therefore a result of the interaction between the conflicting aims of ensuring access to women whilst limiting their overall numbers and the character of their presence.

Although it seems that women were present with Malawian soldiers from the earliest days of the colonial army, they were given little formal recognition before 1898.<sup>151</sup> In the absence of instructions to the contrary, it seems likely that recruits simply brought women with them when they arrived.<sup>152</sup> There are also suggestions that the military authorities may have allowed the use of women captured in the campaigns of conquest as a form of 'booty' for African soldiers, a practice which was carried out by other East African colonial forces. In what the *Central African*

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<sup>149</sup> Sir Francis de Guingand, *African Assignment* (London: Hodder & Stroughton, 1953), p.28; Transcript of interview with Major P. Q. Logan, IWM, Department of Sound Records, 3864/3, p.16.

<sup>150</sup> Inspector General to Officer Commanding 1st Battalion KAR, 2 March 1906, PRO CO 534/3, f. 446.

<sup>151</sup> Acting Commissioner Sharpe to Foreign Secretary, Zomba, 29 September 1896, PRO FO 2/108, ff. 30-1

<sup>152</sup> 'Plan of Fort Lister', by Lieutenant Francis Garden Poole, 1897, MNA 14/FGP/4/1.

*Planter* described as a 'doubtful policy', Malawian soldiers were allowed to take women prisoner until 1895, and in at least one case it is noted that 3 captured women 'preferred to return with the troops to Loangweni', rather than be released with 37 others.<sup>153</sup> More explicitly, in 1896 Lieutenant Gough noted that one of the Tonga soldiers under his command had kidnapped a local woman.<sup>154</sup> However, this kind of practice again may have reflected soldiers' expectations of the pattern of warfare, based upon pre-colonial experience. Numbers of the predominantly Tonga and Yao soldiers who comprised the bulk of the army from 1894 had undoubtedly been involved in pre-colonial warfare, and certain Yao soldiers in particular were known to have fought against the British.<sup>155</sup>

Women's presence in the military environment can thus be seen in the first instance largely as a result of African initiative. Women only appear to have become an important issue for the military authorities as the armed forces began to serve outside the territory, by which time women's presence was an established feature of the military environment. The growing mobility of the armed forces compelled the authorities to decide whether to separate soldiers from their wives or to enable their inclusion. The army clearly decided that it was important to facilitate the presence of women, since in 1898 formal provision was made for soldiers' wives to be allocated places on lake gunboats when troops were moved around the territory.<sup>156</sup> When the new 2nd Battalion was raised in December 1898 for service in Mauritius, the

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<sup>153</sup> 'Current Chat', *The Central African Planter*, 1, 4 (December 1895), p. 51; MNA, KAR 2/1/2, Captain H. E. J. Brake, Commanding Forces in British Central Africa, to Commissioner and Consul General British Central Africa, Loangweni, 21 January 1898, p. 10; Elizabeth Schmidt, *Peasants, Traders, and Wives: Shona Women in the History of Zimbabwe, 1870-1939* (London: James Currey, 1992), pp.37-38, 40.

<sup>154</sup> Beckett, *Johnnie Gough, V.C.*, p. 21.

<sup>155</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, 154, January-March 1901, p.3.

<sup>156</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 201, 'Passages', October 1898.



conditions of enlistment formally stated that 'A proportion of men going abroad will be permitted to take each one wife', and it was also emphasised that 'recruits need not be refused because they are married'.<sup>157</sup> Clearly, the authorities believed that Malawians joining the army expected to be able to take their women with them when they enlisted, and after this date Malawian soldiers proceeding overseas in peacetime were routinely given a passage for their wives. However, it should be noted that the official emphasis upon soldiers being allowed to take *one* wife with them was a deliberate acknowledgement of the practice of polygamy, and signified a recognition of the need to limit the overall numbers of women who were present, at the same time as providing soldiers with access to women. This prohibition on soldiers having more than one wife in the lines remained in place throughout the colonial period.

In accordance with the instruction that 'a proportion' of men should take wives to Mauritius, only 220 women and 77 children had accompanied the 878 soldiers of 2 BCA Rifles in 1899.<sup>158</sup> As noted in the preceding chapter, when the Malawian soldiers attacked the local villages of Vacoas and La Caverne, several rapes were reported. As part of the discourse of 'savagery' in which the press reaction to the attack was conducted, colonial newspapers alleged that the soldiers were in part sexually motivated as a result of the relatively small number of Malawian women who were present with the regiment.<sup>159</sup> Listing the causes of the attack, *The Times* noted, 'Only a few native women had been permitted to accompany the regiment'.<sup>160</sup> A letter to the same paper more explicitly argued that

<sup>157</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 236, 'Conditions of Enlistment' 23 December 1898.

<sup>158</sup> Moyse Bartlett, *King's African Rifles* p. 29.

<sup>159</sup> 'The African Regiment in Mauritius: Grave Misconduct', *Central African Times*, 7 April 1900, p. 3

<sup>160</sup> 'The BCA Rifles in Mauritius', *Central African Times*, 14 April 1900, p. 7.





LADIES OF THE REGIMENT.  
*With Three of Their Lords and Masters in the Background.*

L. B. Bagot.



IN THE REGIMENTAL LINES  
*A Group of Women in Front of the Kraals.*

4. 'Ladies of the Regiment'  
 5. 'In the Regimental Lines'

Two photographs showing the families of Malawian soldiers in Mauritius, probably taken in 1899 by a regimental officer. Soldiers' wives rarely appeared in the pages of *The Navy and Army Illustrated*, and their inclusion here suggests the unusual prominence of women in the CAR. These photographs belie assertions that the attack by Malawian soldiers upon Mauritian civilians in December 1899 arose from the absence of Malawian women. The presence of a number of small children is noteworthy. In the second photograph, the rows of square thatched huts built by the soldiers for their accommodation can be seen in the background.

[Source: 'The Central Africa Rifles at Mauritius', *The Navy and Army Illustrated*, 12 May 1900, p. 192]



'the military authorities must make up their mind to give back to these men the company of their wives and children, as the only means of protecting them from association with the scum of the population', and described the Malawians as 'brutes exasperated by the unnatural solitude of barrack life'.<sup>161</sup> Similarly, in the wake of the attack, the Governor of Mauritius described the low proportion of women as 'a grave danger'.<sup>162</sup> However, although there was little doubt that rapes had been committed, only Private Molongoti was actually prosecuted, receiving a sentence of five years' imprisonment.<sup>163</sup> The officers of the battalion were generally sympathetic to the soldiers' actions and rejected the idea that the raid was principally motivated by sexual impulses.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless, the senior officer in Mauritius clearly believed that the absence of Malawian women was a significant factor in the raid on Vacoas:

It is much to be regretted that more African women (only 220 landed with the battalion) did not come to Mauritius one cause of some of the disturbances is doubtless due to the endeavours of the African soldiers to have intercourse with creole and Indian women in the villages.<sup>165</sup>

Thus events in Mauritius signalled a significant shift in official thinking from facilitation towards active encouragement of women's presence.

By 1906, the concerns which had been raised in Mauritius had been embodied within official thinking in the Nyasaland battalions, and the presence of wives was clearly being seen as essential to the maintenance of discipline. The Inspector-

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<sup>161</sup> 'Colonial' to the Editor, 'The Mauritius Outbreak', *The Times*, 21 March 1900, p. 14.

<sup>162</sup> PRO, CO 167/724, Sir Charles Bruce, Governor of Mauritius to Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 14 December 1899.

<sup>163</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, F. T. Piggott, Procureur General, Mauritius, to Sir Graham Bower, Colonial Secretary, Mauritius, 4 January 1900; PRO, CO 167/728, F. T. Piggott, Procureur General, Mauritius, to Sir Graham Bower, Colonial Secretary, Mauritius, 8 January 1900.

<sup>164</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Major A. T. P. Hudson, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, Mauritius, to Lieutenant Colonel Henry L. Jessep, OC Troops Mauritius, Vacoas, 17 December 1899.

<sup>165</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Lieutenant Colonel Henry L. Jessep, OC Troops, Mauritius, to Under Secretary of State for War, 26 December 1899.

General of the KAR voiced concerns over the failure of some men of the 1st Battalion to take their wives with them to East Africa:

A certain number of men brought their wives with them from British Central Africa and are therefore better off than those who did not, though any man could have brought a wife had he wished. Arrangements for bringing some of the men's wives who remained behind are now being made.<sup>166</sup>

The Inspector-General was worried that the Malawians might cause disciplinary problems by 'interfering' with the women of the Kenya battalion. As a remedy, it was suggested that soldiers should be compelled to bring women with them from Nyasaland, although as an alternative, the Commanding Officer was even instructed to 'assist his men in marrying the women of the country [Kenya]'. The insistence that men should be married even if Malawian women were not available also reflected a concern regarding the dangers of VD, since the Inspector General ordered that the soldiers were to be warned 'continually of the danger they incur of disease by having relations with loose women in the neighbourhood'.<sup>167</sup>

The risk of VD continued to inform official encouragement of wives in peacetime. In 1908, an increase in VD amongst Malawians stationed in Zanzibar was blamed upon men being 'brought into closer touch with the local natives than is considered desirable'.<sup>168</sup> Similarly, at the end of the First World War, a high level of VD amongst Malawians in 2 KAR stationed in Tanganyika was blamed on soldiers 'breaking out of barracks and [...] having unregistered women in the lines'. The commanding officer also blamed the spread of VD on the fact that many soldiers

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<sup>166</sup> PRO, CO 534/3, f. 443, 1 KAR Inspection Report, Commissioner's Office, Nairobi, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 6 March 1906.

<sup>167</sup> PRO, CO534/3, f. 451, Brigadier-General W. H. Manning, Inspector General KAR, to OC 1 KAR, Nairobi, 2 March 1906.

<sup>168</sup> PRO, CO 534/8, f. 164, 1 KAR Inspection Report, 1907-1908.



were living with officially sanctioned local women, and called for soldiers to be 'encouraged to bring their own wives from Nyasaland'.<sup>169</sup> One reason why the issue of official recognition or 'registration' was crucial to the authorities was because it enabled them to inspect women for VD: as 2 KAR's medical report for 1919 noted, 'All local women, before being allowed to live in the lines, are medically examined and men are only permitted to keep those certificated as free from Venereal'.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, when 1 KAR suffered an increase in VD in the early 1930s, a system was enforced whereby all the registered women were inspected for VD once every two weeks.<sup>171</sup>

Despite the increased awareness of VD, the encouragement of wives was still principally regarded as a disciplinary concern. By the early 1930s, matters had reached the stage where the authorities considered it unusual for any soldiers to be unmarried. As an officer of 1 KAR recalled, 'Virtually every soldier had a wife and a family in the lines. In fact, if he hadn't got a wife one wanted to know the reason why, because they usually got into mischief without one.'<sup>172</sup> In fact, whilst the authorities continued to prefer soldiers to be accompanied by Malawian wives, in an elaboration of the practice of NCOs' wives cooking for recruits, informal systems

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<sup>169</sup> PRO, CO 534/47, f. 65, 'Medical Report for 2nd Battalion the King's African Rifles, from January 1st to 31st December 1920', Lieutenant Colonel W. I. Gunn, OC 2 KAR, Tabora, 31 January 1921.

<sup>170</sup> PRO, CO 534/40, f. 22, 'Medical Report on 2nd King's African Rifles, from January 1919 to January 31st 1920', Lieutenant Colonel W. I. Gunn, OC 2 KAR, Tabora, 14 March 1920. See PRO, CO 534/41, f. 152, 'Inspection Report 1919-1920: 1st King's African Rifles and Combined Depot 1st & 2nd K.A.R. Zomba', by Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, Zomba, 8 May 1920.

<sup>171</sup> PRO, CO 820/17/6, Southern Brigade, KAR 'Health Statistics of African ranks for year from 1st October, 1932 to 30th September, 1933', Major P. R. Mundy, Acting OC Southern Brigade KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 30 October 1933.

<sup>172</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 6185/03, Transcript of interview with Colonel H. P. Williams OBE, 15 October 1979, p. 3

were put into place to ensure access to women for unmarried men. As one officer observed,

If a young askari was not sufficiently wealthy to afford a wife, (so many head of cattle!) the African C.S.M. saw that he took a concubine unto himself - the policy being that for disciplinary reasons that all askari in the lines should have a wife [...]so there was hardly an askari without female company in the lines. This policy worked well and prevented crime.<sup>173</sup>

As Parsons has noted, the identities of such women are unclear. It is likely that they were usually local women whether soldiers were stationed in Nyasaland or overseas, although this is unlikely in the case of the SCC, where colonial racial stereotypes discouraged sexual relations between Malawian soldiers and Somali women.<sup>174</sup> The use of such a system makes it clear that the army's definition of the term 'wife' was flexible, and was mainly governed by a desire to control women's movements rather than to definitively verify their identities. In any case, by the late 1930s official attempts to encourage the presence of women seem to have proven overwhelmingly successful. In 1938, it was stated that the average number of inhabitants of the KAR lines in Zomba was 310 soldiers, 300 women, and 100 children.<sup>175</sup>

The end of the Second World War saw a continuation of the pre-war emphasis upon the presence of wives. Parsons notes that as early as 1946, the authorities in 2

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<sup>173</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (105), ff. 31, 33, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?]. See IWM Sound Archive, 3939/03, Transcript of interview with Major P. Logan, 11 September 1979, p. 11.

<sup>174</sup> MNA, S2/11/30/17A, 'Somaliland Incident: Narrative compiled from statements made by No.10545 Corporal Ali Chitenje and No.10720 Private Makwera to Captain F. W. de Guingand, Native Regtl. Sgt.-Major Magareta and Coy. Sgt.-Major Saidi', Captain F. W. de Guingand, 19 November 1930; MNA, S2/11/30/23, Inspector-General KAR to Governor of Nyasaland, 2 April 1931; MNA, S2/11/30/28, Major J. W. Kaye, SCC, to OC SCC, Burao, 28 July 1931; Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 151.

<sup>175</sup> MNA, M 2/24/39/55A, Major L. C. Thomas, Acting OC Southern Brigade KAR, to Director of Public Works, Zomba, 19 May 1938. Numbers continued to fluctuate: the actual population of Zomba camp in 1938 was 253 soldiers, 176 women and 114 children.



KAR expressed a desire that '100%' of soldiers would be living in married accommodation with families by the end of the year.<sup>176</sup> However, whilst the inclusion of wives continued to be encouraged, the emphasis shifted from a primarily disciplinary concern founded upon assumptions about African sexuality, to a broader desire to cater for soldiers' families. Accordingly, a range of facilities were established or improved. The officer commanding 1 KAR noted that 2 KAR had started a 'small hospital for wives and children' by 1946, and suggested doing the same in his own battalion.<sup>177</sup> By the early 1950s, in addition to free medical care in 'their own special hospital', families received free travel between the camp and their homes, and soldiers were given a family subsistence allowance according to the number of children present.<sup>178</sup>

The new emphasis upon the presence of children was particularly striking. Some pre-war officers had recognised the importance of children, and Glass recalled that the Malawian soldier 'was above all a great family man and very proud of his children and spent a great deal of time with them'.<sup>179</sup> However, soldiers had been discouraged from keeping their children in camp once they were old enough to function within the domestic economy of their home villages. In 1931, rules for Malawians serving with the SCC had noted that 'The number of children should be restricted as far as is compatible with the avoidance of hardship on individuals [...] Only small children who cannot be provided for otherwise should accompany the

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<sup>176</sup> PRO WO 269/98, Quarterly Historical Report, 2 KAR, 30 September 1946, quoted in Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 148.

<sup>177</sup> MNA, M 2/24/39/119, OC 1 KAR, Zomba, to Director of Medical Services, Zomba, 27 August 1946.

<sup>178</sup> MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1, 'Notes on the King's African Rifles' [1952].

<sup>179</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (105), f. 32, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

contingent'.<sup>180</sup> By the 1950s, free compulsory education was provided in a school in the camp, and in 1960, 181 children in 1 and 2 KAR were being taught up to Standard III by six military and civilian teachers.<sup>181</sup> A troop of Boy Scouts was also set up in 2 KAR in 1951, receiving not only uniforms, but also an officially appointed African sergeant to act as Scoutmaster.<sup>182</sup> This was followed by the establishment of a Brownie pack for soldiers' daughters.<sup>183</sup> Finally, the unofficial 'Boys Platoon' established in 2 KAR in the early 1960s also provided as facility for soldiers' children in addition to its primary function as a source of recruits.<sup>184</sup> However, as a corollary of the army's increasing orientation towards families, its tacit recognition of some informal relationships such as the provision of concubines came to an end, and a recruit was now required to 'bring with him a certificate signed by [the Native Authority] stating that he is married'.<sup>185</sup>

### *Malawian reactions to military family policy*

It is clear from the high proportion of women accompanying the Nyasaland battalions that the authorities' policy of encouraging the presence of wives was

<sup>180</sup> MNA, S1/652/31/27b, Lieutenant Colonel H. B. Holt, OC SCC, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Burao, 3 December 1931.

<sup>181</sup> I DCKU 1/8/1, 'Notes on the King's African Rifles' [1952]; RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 5; Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Advisory Commission on the Review of the Constitution of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland: Report: Appendix VI: Survey of Developments Since 1953*, 1960, Cmnd. 1149, p. 130.

<sup>182</sup> MNA, 1/DCMJ/1/10/1, KAR recruiting poster, [1952?]; MNA 1/DCKU/1/8/1/66, OC Depot (Nyasaland) KAR to DC Kasungu, 16 September 1955; RHL MSS Afr.s.1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', by Major T. D. O'Connell, 1979, p.6; MNA, 17/BSA/1/42, Captain M. E. W. Morton, 2 KAR, Zomba, to Richard C. Belcher, Organising Commissioner, Boy Scouts of Nyasaland, 6 September 1951; MNA, 17/BSA/1/42, Organising Commissioner, Boy Scouts of Nyasaland, to Major Moss, KAR Zomba, 29 December 1951.

<sup>183</sup> MNA, 8-9-5-R/14034, 2 KAR Scrapbook Vol. 6, 5 September 1953.

<sup>184</sup> MNA, F 249/1131, G/ARC/A, Annex 'J' to Agenda for 3rd GOC's Conference, 'Nyasaland Area Items', March 1961.

<sup>185</sup> MNA, 1 DCKU 1/8/1, 'Notes on the King's African Rifles' [1952].



largely successful. However, the extent to which the army was able to control the identities of these women through the system of registration is much less certain. Some soldiers flouted rules forbidding them from bringing unregistered women into the lines, and in 1924 Clerk John Kumbanga was convicted of 'keeping 3 unregistered women in the lines' at the same time.<sup>186</sup> However, many more soldiers were able to bring local women into the camp simply by claiming that they were their wives, since officers assumed that many soldiers were polygamous, and consequently expected soldiers to occasionally exchange their wives. One officer noted of the situation in the 1920s:

The *askari* were allowed one wife at a time in camp and would change these around if one was soon to have a baby, or if they got tired of a particular wife and wanted a little change ... If the [*askari*'s] wife nagged too much, he could always send her back to his village and replace her with another!<sup>187</sup>

The number of women coming in and out of the camp meant officers had little means to verify whether wives were legitimate or not, thus a Malawian soldier could effectively bring any woman into the camp and claim she was his wife.

Many of the women brought into the camp as wives in this way were probably drawn from the same categories of local women who provided the officially acknowledged 'concubines' made available for unmarried men.<sup>188</sup> This was effectively a form of 'semi-prostitution' similar to the practice of *malaya* in Kenya, in which women were paid to act as wives.<sup>189</sup> In these circumstances, soldiers often had little faith that the women left behind in the camp would remain faithful to them

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<sup>186</sup> MNA, S 1/105/34/72, Defaulter Sheet of No.7022 Clerk John Kumbanga, HQ Wing 2 KAR; MNA, S 1/105/34, Defaulter Sheet of No.7153 Sergeant Wadi Nyalugwe, 1/1 KAR.

<sup>187</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, pp. 20, 26.

<sup>188</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, p. 151.

<sup>189</sup> Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, *African Women: A Modern History*, trans. by Beth Gillian Raps (Oxford, Westview Press, 1997) pp. 120-21.

when they were on duty. Malawian soldiers of 1 KAR, who mutinied in 1913 after being stationed in the interior of Kenya for eighteen months without their wives, complained that 'they were paying subsistence allowance to their women who were leading immoral lives in Nairobi' in their absence.<sup>190</sup> In 1931, fifteen Malawian women with the Nyasaland company of the SCC were identified as 'not proper wives' who had 'never been married to the men who brought them to Somaliland'. The women had been presented to the authorities as the 'real' wives of the soldiers, but at least one, supposedly the wife of Corporal Ali Chitenje, was already registered as the wife of another NCO in 1 KAR. The officer commanding the Nyasaland company cited the women's 'readiness to live with other men during the absence on duty of their "husbands"' as a cause of much trouble, but argued that the women, who received no official rations, were unable to support themselves unless they had a husband in the camp.<sup>191</sup> As a result of this situation, out of 68 serious crimes committed by members of the Nyasaland contingent between 1924 and 1931, a total of 17, or 25 percent were connected with cases of adultery with comrades' wives, whilst by contrast, out of 101 offences committed by Somalis serving in the same unit, not one was related to adultery.<sup>192</sup> Although the authorities viewed the immorality of the women as the main cause of such incidents, there are strong suggestions that some soldiers actively colluded in the women's activities, since one soldier was convicted of 'Beating his wife for refusing to commit adultery with a

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<sup>190</sup> Lieutenant Colonel B. R. Graham, Commanding Troops British East Africa Protectorate, to Chief Secretary British East Africa, Nairobi, 30 April 1913.

<sup>191</sup> MNA, S2/11/30/28, Major J. W. Kaye, SCC, to OC SCC, Burao, 28 July 1931, pp. 12-13.

<sup>192</sup> MNA, AL 1/1/2, Diary of Edward Alston, 2 June 1896; MNA, S1/2161/23, SCC Returns of Severe Punishments, 1924-1931; MNA, S1/105/34/152, Conduct Sheet of No. 10757 Sergeant Adamson Kuranganji, Nairobi 16 October 1940; RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (105), f. 34, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].



comrade', and another of 'Abetting the wife of a comrade to commit adultery.'<sup>193</sup> It is notable that similar practices were still being carried out in the 1950s, when soldiers were supposed to provide marriage certificates to prove their wives' identities:

Whilst it was necessary to restrict the amount of family allowed on the station it did encourage prostitution in that the Askari sometimes preferred to take a local woman, declare her his wife and set her up in married quarters. It was of course quite impossible to check up on the legality of the woman since African tribal marriages are not registered.<sup>194</sup>

Family relations were also a cause of disputes when women were not present with soldiers. The most obvious cause of absent wives and families was the departure of the KAR on active service, particularly during the Second World War. However, a corollary of the practice of taking local wives and of the army's prohibition upon polygamy was that many soldiers' dependants also lived in their home villages in peacetime. The failure of wives at home in Nyasaland to write letters also became an important grievance for soldiers, both during the Second World War, and later in the 1950s when Nyasaland soldiers served in Malaya.<sup>195</sup> However, there are some indications that the failure of families to respond to soldiers' letters, at least in the Second World War, were due in part to the fact that cheap Air Mail facilities (two letters a month for 20 cents) were available only to soldiers writing home, and not to families writing to soldiers, who found the rate of

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<sup>193</sup> MNA, S1/2161/23/7h, SCC Return of Severe Punishments 1924-26', OC SCC, 1 March 1926; MNA, S1/2161/23/11g, SCC Return of Severe Punishments 1927-28, OC SCC, 15 February 1928.

<sup>194</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 5.

<sup>195</sup> MNA, S45/3/2/4/19/O, 'Letter from Halisoni Phili, 279716, Front-Stalag 133, Rennes (France) to Aluja Banda, Village Sangalurutas, Chief Chakwanika, P.O. Chinteche, Nyasaland', Report from DISC, No. 113, 23 June 1944; MNA, S41/1/23/4/53B, 'Report on a visit to Nairobi and Somaliland by Chiefs', by NA S. C. Mwase [n.d.], p.5; MNA, S41/23/4/55A, 'Journey of Chiefs to the North' [n.d.], p.5; MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4/2, Corporal Johnston Khobwe, B Company 1 NRR, GPO Kuala Lipis, Pahang, Malaya, to DC Zomba, 11 January 1955; MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4/22, EA.18125175 Private Daniel Nkhalambo, HQ Company 1 NRR Signal Section, GPO Kuala Lipis, Pahang, Malaya, to DC Zomba, 10 April 1955.

one shilling three pence too high to pay. It was also potentially difficult for women to write to their husbands, due to the need for them to obtain the services of professional letter writers.<sup>196</sup>

The issue of financial support for absent families was a cause of concern for many soldiers. Up to the Second World War, women living with the KAR had no automatic right to soldiers' pay, but in 1920 it was suggested that soldiers should be forced to pay an allotment of £2 to their first wife and £1 for any other wives (the suggestion was not entirely benevolent, since it was intended to prevent soldiers from applying for hut tax exemptions for women who were not legitimate wives).<sup>197</sup> Soldiers stationed outside Nyasaland were also expected to send remittances to their absent families, and when family subsistence allowances of up to 26 shillings for a wife and children were introduced in the 1950s, these also had to be remitted home when families were absent.<sup>198</sup>

Many soldiers objected to aspects of the remittance system. As early as 1924, Malawian soldiers serving in Somaliland complained that their remittances were not reaching their families, and the problem of non-delivery of remittances became more widespread during the Second World War, as the authorities in Nyasaland were

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<sup>196</sup> MNA, S41/1/1/13/1, Sir William Platt, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, EAC, to Sir Edmund C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, 16 February 1944; MNA, S41/1/1/13/2, Sir Edmund C. Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir William Platt, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, EAC, 1 March 1944,.

<sup>197</sup> PRO, CO 534/41, ff.157-158, 1 KAR and Depot Inspection Report 1919-1920, Colonel G. M. P. Hawthorn, Inspector-General KAR, Zomba, 8 May 1920.

<sup>198</sup> MNA, S 2/32/22/1, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 23 July 1922; MNA, S1/652/31/27b, Lieutenant Colonel H. B. Holt, OC SCC, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Burao, 3 December 1931; MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4/81, OC HQ Company 2 KAR to DC Zomba, 31 January 1957; MNA, 1/DCMJ/1/10/1, KAR recruiting poster [1952?]; W.O.II Alfred W. Kampeny, 'About 1st K.A.R. Battalion', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 1 (1956), pp. 68-69.



unable to deal with the volume of claims.<sup>199</sup> The records of the Zomba DC during the 1950s suggest the extent to which soldiers worried that money was not reaching their wives.<sup>200</sup> However, it is clear that some soldiers were concerned about remittances because they regarded them as a means of saving rather than as a form of support for their dependants. During the Second World War, Malawians complained that they were unable to save money which they sent home, since it was spent by their families in their absence.<sup>201</sup> Similarly, in the 1950s, Private Chikopa James of 2 KAR wrote to his DC to ensure that his wife was receiving remittances, but added 'if she is getting the money, tell her to keep for me'.<sup>202</sup> Many soldiers simply omitted to send any remittance to their wives.

In the post-war period Malawian soldiers' unwillingness to send remittances was often underlain by concerns of adultery on the part of absent wives.<sup>203</sup> This had also been a major cause of concern during the Second World War. Malawians stationed in Nairobi in 1944 used radio broadcasts home, which were intended for morale boosting messages to their families, as a means of chastising chiefs for their

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<sup>199</sup> MNA, S 1/2161/23/5A, SCC Inspection Report 1924-1925, Inspector General KAR, 24 October 1924, pp. 8-9; MNA, S 41/1/1/13/1, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, EAC, to Sir Edmund Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, 16 February 1944; MNA, S 41/1/1/13/2, Sir Edmund Richards, Governor of Nyasaland, to Sir William Platt, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, EAC, 1 March 1944.

<sup>200</sup> MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4, various correspondence.

<sup>201</sup> MNA, S41/1/23/4/53B, 'Report on a visit to Nairobi and Somaliland by Chiefs', by NA S. C. Mwase [n.d.], p.4; MNA, S41/23/4/55A, 'Journey of Chiefs to the North', p.5; Chief Secretary Nyasaland to Chief Secretary to Conference of East African Governors, 9 April 1945.

<sup>202</sup> MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4/5, EA.4099 Chikopa James, D Company, 2 KAR, to DC Zomba, Lusaka, 23 January 1955.

<sup>203</sup> MNA 1 DCZA 1/20/4/27, N.55355 Corporal Paulo Chikagwile, C Company 2 KAR, Lusaka, to DC Zomba, 17 August 1955; MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4/29, DN.30623 Patrick Kumwenda, HQ Company 2 KAR, Lusaka, to DC Zomba, 18 September 1955; MNA 1 DCZA 1/20/4/32, EA.3433 Harold Ndege, B Company 2 KAR, Lusaka, to DC Zomba, 6 October 1955; MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4/66, 15190 Harry B. Gonekah, 2 KAR, Bulawayo, to DC Zomba, 1 November 1956; MNA 1 DCZA 1/20/4/81, OC HQ Company 2 KAR to DC Zomba, 31 January 1957.

failure to prevent adultery by their wives.<sup>204</sup> Moreover, Nyasaland chiefs visiting soldiers in the Far East in 1945 found that the soldiers resented their presence, complaining that 'their work is to look after our wives and families at home [...] If they come here, let them take rifles and march with packs on their backs'.<sup>205</sup> The authorities took measures to allay soldiers' fears through newsletters and radio broadcasts by Malawian chiefs. These emphasised the severe punishments dealt by Native Authority Courts to civilians who committed adultery with the wives of absent soldiers, supported by the names of offenders and details of fines and compensation.<sup>206</sup>

### *Women's experience of the military environment*

This thesis focuses upon the experience of Malawian soldiers within the colonial army. The subjective experience of soldiers' women both within the KAR and as absent wives has been dealt with more fully elsewhere.<sup>207</sup> However, the nature of military women's experience within the camp is an important factor in an analysis of the character of the domestic sphere in the army.

Women were clearly regarded as performing a number of important functions within the army, not only because of the implications of their presence for soldiers' discipline and morale, but also, as outlined above, because of their practical role as

<sup>204</sup> MNA, S34/1/4/1/17, Political Intelligence Bulletin No.1 of 1944, 29 April 1944.

<sup>205</sup> MNA, S41/1/23/5/72B, 'Extract from Report by Rev J. M. Rose of (C/S) 22 (EA) Inf Bde. Visit of African Chiefs' [October 1945?].

<sup>206</sup> MNA, NNK 1/10/1, ff. 36; 37, Specimen Newsletter, October 1943; 'A message from N. A. Kyungu K.M. to his people in Ceylon', NA Kyungu to DC Karonga, Bwiba, 26 November 1943.

<sup>207</sup> See Parsons, *The African Rank-and-File*, pp. 145-181. For a specific study of Malawian military women, see Timothy J. Lovering, 'African Women and the Colonial Army in Nyasaland, 1891-1964', in *Twentieth Century Malawi: Perspectives on History and Culture*, ed. by John McCracken *et al* (Stirling: Centre of Commonwealth Studies, University of Stirling, 2001), pp. 5-20.



providers of domestic labour, which reflected the part played by women within indigenous society.<sup>208</sup> In recognition of this role, and to allow the authorities to control activities within the lines, registered women were integrated into formal military structures. In 1927, the Standing Orders of the 1st Battalion gave the African Regimental Sergeant Major formal responsibility for the women, noting that 'Through his wife he will supervise the behaviour of the askari wives and other women living in the lines'. This situation indicated not only the inclusion of women in the military hierarchy, but also the imposition of an internal hierarchy upon soldiers' women, with the Regimental Sergeant Major's wife performing a function in relation to the women which was analogous to her husband's position in relation to the African soldiery.<sup>209</sup> This position was more than nominal, and army women in the 1920s even found themselves, like the soldiers, subject to physical discipline. As one officer noted,

On occasions even the wives were beaten! If a case of adultery had been proved, it was usual to order the guilty woman to be beaten as well as the man. The 'dirty work' was carried out by the Sergeant-Major's wife ... a large and formidable old dame, but much respected by the other wives! ... The punishment was carried out quietly in the precincts of the R.S.M.'s hut!<sup>210</sup>

Women were equally subject to broader structures of military organisation, being placed under the formal supervision of the Regimental Police, and apparently being required to parade along with their husbands at inspections of soldiers' kit and

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<sup>208</sup> See Jean Davison, 'Tenacious Women: Clinging to Banja Household Production in the Face of Changing Gender Relations in Malawi', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19, 3 (1993), 403-421; Elias Mandala, 'Peasant Cotton Agriculture, Gender and Inter-Generational Relationships: The Lower Tchiri (Shire) Valley of Malawi, 1906-1940', *African Studies Review*, 15, 2-3 (1982), 27-44; Joey Power, "'Eating the Property": Gender Roles and Economic Change in Urban Malawi, Blantyre-Limbe, 1907-1953', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 29, 1 (1995), 79-107; Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>209</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles* (Zomba: Nyasaland Government Printer, 1927), p. 20.

<sup>210</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, p. 28.

accommodation.<sup>211</sup> Emphasising the parallels between the structures applied to soldiers and the structures applied to women in the army, women were also included in organised recreation, such as regimental sports days, as early as 1896, although in contrast to the masculine games (such as the tug-of-war) arranged for soldiers, women's games overtly referred to their recognised roles, including races where women carried water pots on their heads.<sup>212</sup> The finale of a company sports day in the late 1930s was a women's race which involved running to a tree to retrieve the prize (an umbrella) from its upper branches, a spectacle apparently resulting from a conscious effort to exploit the women's 'frantic efforts' to obtain such material goods as a source of general entertainment.<sup>213</sup>

Soldiers' wives stood to gain from some of the same material benefits which attracted soldiers into the army, including housing, medical facilities, and pay, although it should be noted that the medical facilities provided for families before the Second World War were of a lower standard than those provided for soldiers.<sup>214</sup> However, it is important to recognise that for most of the colonial period, the majority of soldiers in the Nyasaland battalions were drawn from traditionally matrilineal groups in southern Nyasaland, such as the Yao, Nyanja, and later the

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<sup>211</sup> Nyasaland, *Standing Orders of the 1st (Nyasaland) Battalion The King's African Rifles* (Zomba: Nyasaland Government Printer, 1927), p. 25; RHL MSS Afr.s.1715 (105), 'Saturday's full Kit and Line Inspection, "B" Company Masoko 1937', Scrap Book by Harold P. L. Glass, second-in-command, B Company, 2 KAR, 1937-1938.

<sup>212</sup> MNA AL 1/1/2, Diary of Edward Alston, 30 May 1896.

<sup>213</sup> RHL, MSS Afr.s.1715 (105), f. 12, Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Harold Patrick Lepel Glass [1980?].

<sup>214</sup> Great Britain, *Nyasaland Protectorate: Report for 1907-8*, Cd. 3729-38, para. 35; MNA, S1/1618/29/1a, Lieutenant Colonel E. B. Hawkins, OC 1 KAR, to Director of Medical and Sanitary Services, Zomba, 23 November 1929; MNA, S1/1618/29/4a. 'Report on the possibility as to whether or not any savings could be effected by the abolition of the present King's African Rifles Hospital', Captain E. L. P. Slayter, OC 2 KAR [1934?]; PRO, CO 820/3/11, 2 KAR Inspection Report, Colonel H. A. Walker, Inspector-General KAR, Dar-es-Salaam, 4 December 1927.



Nguru/Lomwe. Whilst ultimate authority within such communities still resided with the women's male relatives, ownership of the village was vested in the female line. Moreover, the institution of matrilineal residence provided women with the security of living in their own villages with their close relatives. Matrilineal residence, and associated practices such as systems of bride service by the husband could not operate in the KAR lines, which were clearly established as a virilocal environment (insofar as the right to live in the lines was vested in the husband's status as a soldier). Analogy with the impact of urbanisation in Nyasaland suggests that such women moving into the military environment would have experienced a significant reduction in their autonomy.<sup>215</sup>

The common practice of changing wives, as outlined above, clearly had serious implications for the security of women within the military environment. Some temporary wives were able to take up residence with new soldiers when their former partners returned to Nyasaland, but this was not always the case. An officer noted that in the 1950s 'When the Battalion moved then problems were created by abandoned "wives" who had to be paid off by the Askari which created financial problems for him'.<sup>216</sup> Legitimate wives were also often left in significant financial hardship when they were separated from the army. During the Second World War, the wives of Malawians who had joined the Rhodesian African Rifles travelled to Salisbury against official advice to live with their husbands, but finding that there were no married quarters and little space in the designated African 'Location', they

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<sup>215</sup> See Joey Power, "Eating the Property": Gender Roles and Economic Change in Urban Malawi, Blantyre-Limbe, 1907-1953, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 29, 1 (1995), 79-107 (pp. 82-84).

<sup>216</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (205), 'The Service with the King's African Rifles of Major T. D. O'Connell, M.B.E.', August 1979, p. 5. See MNA, S2/11(4)/29, f. 9, Governor of Tanganyika Territory to Governor of Nyasaland, 14 May 1932.

were reduced to 'living in grass shacks on the Commonage and in the squalid hovels in the brickfields'.<sup>217</sup> The possibilities for the abandonment of wives in Nyasaland were increased by the length of separation during the Second World War, and individuals were named in newsletters in an attempt to control the practice.<sup>218</sup> The real impact of abandonment upon soldiers' wives is clearly demonstrated in the Zomba DC's files from the 1950s, which contain much correspondence complaining of the deprivation caused by the failure of soldiers to support their wives:<sup>219</sup>

Agness ... came and complained to this office that ever since she returned from Bulawayo in June this year her husband does not support her. In addition she states that she has no home to live in.

Pte. Alfred remits 25/- monthly to his elder brother SULILA MATOPE. Agness tells me that one day she approached SULILA and asked him to give her some money but he did not do so.<sup>220</sup>

The army took steps to enforce the payment of remittances, but even when these were paid, some wives also suffered when their husbands' families refused to share the money with them against the soldiers' wishes.<sup>221</sup>

Women also faced financial hardship when their husbands were killed on active service. For most of the period, Malawian soldiers were paid a lump sum gratuity rather than a pension on discharge, and the same provision applied to payments to widows, who could not therefore depend upon an income. Before the

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<sup>217</sup> MNA, LB 8/7/1/21, Nyasaland Labour Officer Salisbury to Acting Labour Commissioner Nyasaland, 27 February 1943.

<sup>218</sup> MNA, NNK 1/10/1, f.203, 'Newsletter for the Troops - Karonga', Native Authority Kyungu, 23 April 1945,.

<sup>219</sup> See MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/37, DC Zomba to OC D Company, 2 KAR, Lusaka, 14 February 1956; MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/70, DC Zomba to OC HQ Company 1 RAR, GPO Labis, Johore, Malaya, 14 December 1956; MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/113, DC Zomba to OC B Company, 1 NRR, Ndola, Northern Rhodesia, 19 December 1957; MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/126, OC HQ Company, 1 KAR, Lusaka, to DC Zomba, 26 June 1958.

<sup>220</sup> MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/71, DC Zomba to OC HQ Company 2 KAR, Bulawayo, 15 December 1956.

<sup>221</sup> MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/22, EA.18125175 Private Daniel Nkhalambo, HQ Company 1 NRR Signal Section, GPO Kuala Lipis, Pahang, Malaya, to DC Zomba, 10 April 1955; MNA 1/DCZA/1/20/4/60, 4120 Private Cabbage Bwanali, 1 RAR Signals Centre, Johore, Malaya, to DC Zomba.



First World War, the payment of gratuities to widows was only made at the discretion of the authorities, depending upon the circumstances of the husband's death, so women might receive no money at all.<sup>222</sup> From 1915 the widows of soldiers killed on active service became entitled to a gratuity equivalent to two years' pay (between £12 and £30). Even then, however, the Governor of Nyasaland recommended that the Nyasaland rate should be reduced to £5 and 'distributed to the next of kin according to native custom' at the discretion of the District Commissioner, which presented the possibility of women from matrilineal groups being unprovided for.<sup>223</sup> Gratuities rather than pensions were also awarded to soldiers for long service, and this could also be disadvantageous to their wives, due to the ease with which a lump sum might be spent.<sup>224</sup> It was only in the 1950s that pensions were introduced for the KAR in Nyasaland.<sup>225</sup>

Even when women had secured their place in the army, their isolation from their communities made them vulnerable. In particular, women stationed overseas were effectively trapped within the army. Several examples exist of soldiers convicted or accused of 'wife beating',<sup>226</sup> and for Nyasaland women stationed overseas with their husbands, escaping from this kind of situation could be particularly difficult, involving the making of special travel arrangements, and

<sup>222</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 428 II, 25 January 1901.

<sup>223</sup> PRO, CO 534/19, f. 131, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Zomba, 11 October 1915; PRO CO 534/20, ff. 300, 303, Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Zomba, 21 February 1916.

<sup>224</sup> MNA, S1/1709/23/54, OC Southern Brigade KAR to Chief Secretary Tanganyika, 7 January 1932.

<sup>225</sup> W.O. II Alfred W. Kampeny, 'About 1st K.A.R. Battalion', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 1, 1 (1956), pp.68-69.

<sup>226</sup> MNA, S1/2161/23/9b(8), SCC Return of Severe Punishments 1926-27, Adjutant SCC, 28 February 1927; MNA, S1/2161/23/11g, SCC Return of Severe Punishments 1927-28, OC SCC, 15 February 1928; MNA, S1/2161/23/16g, SCC Return of Severe Punishments 1930-31, OC SCC, 20 March 1931; MNA, S1/105/34/152, Conduct Sheet No. 10757 Sergeant Adamson Kuranganji, 16 October 1940.

consultations between military officials and District officers in Nyasaland.<sup>227</sup> Such cases often came to light only because relatives of the abused women revealed matters to local officials, rather than as a result of direct complaints through military structures, suggesting that the extent of such abuse may have been greater than documentary evidence indicates. Possibly, such cases were dealt with by African non-commissioned officers, as in occurrences of adultery. This is supported by the extreme nature of cases of abuse which did come to the attention of the military authorities, such as the alleged rape by soldiers of the African Regimental Sergeant-Major's daughter in the 1960s.<sup>228</sup>

Colonial officers argued that 'The pattern of life outside training hours was similar to what the Askari had been used to in his tribal life'.<sup>229</sup> There is little doubt that this was true of the physical environment before the First World War, but became less so with the introduction of regimented brick terraces and later, barrack blocks. The domestic roles performed by women within the army did reflect the pattern of indigenous society. Indeed, their overwhelming presence was a striking feature of military service in Nyasaland, contrasting sharply even with other colonial armies. The military authorities both in the metropolitan army and in India clearly held similar fears regarding the influence of access to women upon morale and discipline, but the Indian Army only introduced married accommodation widely in

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<sup>227</sup> MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/20/13, Major for Lieutenant Colonel Commanding Advanced Ordnance Depot, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, EAC, Kenya, to DC Zomba, 11 March 1950; MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/58, DC Zomba to OC D Company 2 KAR, Bulawayo, 3 October 1956; MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/122, DC Zomba to OC 1 KAR, Lusaka, 22 May 1958; MNA, 1/DCZA/1/20/4/58, OC A Company, 1 KAR, Lusaka, to DC Zomba, 4 June 1958.

<sup>228</sup> Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>229</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (7), f. 8, Memorandum by Colonel Desmond John Bannister [1980?].



1891. Even by 1921, married accommodation was provided for only nine percent of Indian Army soldiers.<sup>230</sup> The presence of women also provides a striking contrast between the experience of colonial soldiers in Nyasaland, and the conditions of Malawian labour migrants in the Rhodesias and South Africa, who generally were not encouraged by their employers to take their wives with them. Part of the explanation for this disparity probably lies in the longevity of military service in Nyasaland. Labour migration was generally intended to be based upon relatively short contracts of six months, whilst soldiers often served for 21 years or more, periods which might even be extended if men continued to work as non-combatants after they were retired. These circumstances made the prospect of separating men from their wives less viable to the military authorities than it was to mine owners.<sup>231</sup> However, it also made the KAR much more closely resemble a complete community.

Reflecting the colonial military belief that unsophisticated rustic Africans made the best soldiers, for most of the colonial period, the authorities sought to maintain the lines as an indigenous environment by encouraging a limited range of 'traditional' activities. Like the presence of women, the practice of *ngomas* within the army had originally been the result of African initiative, but increasingly came to be used not for the internal purposes of the military community, but for an external

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<sup>230</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp.64-66.

<sup>231</sup> PRO, CO 534/40, f. 16, 2 KAR Length of Service Return, Lieutenant Colonel W. I. Gunn, OC 2 KAR, 4 March 1920; PRO, CO 534/40, f. 66, 1 KAR Tanganyika Territory Length of Service Return, Lieutenant Colonel A. H. Griffiths, OC 1 KAR, 1 May 1920; PRO, CO 534/54, f. 165, 1 KAR Length of Service Return, Adjutant, 1 KAR, November 1923; PRO, CO 534/54, 2 KAR Length of Service Return, Lieutenant Colonel Murray, OC 2 KAR, 1 November 1923, f. 391; PRO, CO 534/56, f. 189, No. 3 Depot Company, Length of Service Return, OC Depot 1 and 2 KAR, 4 March 1925; Twaya Namonde, 'The Story of Twaya Namonde', *Nyasaland Journal*, 16, 1 (1963), pp.49-61; Aibu Chikwenga, 'Aibu Chikwenga: an Autobiography', translated by C. A. Baker, *Society of Malawi Journal*, 25,2 (1972), pp.11-21.

display of corporate identity, which had little to do with the interests of Malawian soldiers. The authorities sanctioned the use of 'traditional' beer within limited contexts, but simultaneously punished drunkenness. Similarly, in seeking to isolate soldiers from religious proselytisation, the early KAR appeared to be limiting the religious freedom of soldiers with established religious convictions. In their policy of ensuring the presence of women, the authorities created a social system which was significantly different from the matrilineal societies from which most of their soldiers originated. Ironically, this very lack of traditional matrilineal structure may have been an appealing aspect of military service for Malawian soldiers.



## Chapter 5

### **Perceptions of Soldiers and Soldiering in Colonial Nyasaland**

The discussion in the preceding chapters of the place of Malawian soldiers within the social structure of the colonial army inevitably highlights sites of conflict between the military authorities and Malawian other ranks. This reflects the importance of such disputes as indicators of underlying tensions, and on this level it is easy to see soldiers as one more group of colonial subjects negotiating their position within colonial society. Nevertheless, it must also be recognised that, however revealing dissent may be of the tensions underlying Malawian military service, there is little to suggest that this was the permanent state of the Malawian soldiery; annual reports regularly note that discipline was 'satisfactory' or 'excellent', and evidence of this sort, however superficial its nature, cannot be ignored.

Malawian soldiers were not simply the subjects of colonial oppression, but took an active role both as fighting men in wartime and in internal security operations in Nyasaland and elsewhere. In the first part of this chapter, it is intended to address the central question of how Malawian soldiers perceived their own role as members of the colonial army. Some of the ways in which Malawians perceived the idea of military service outside Nyasaland, and especially during the World Wars were suggested in the discussion of the motivations behind enlistment outlined in chapter two. But even if we accept that many soldiers joined the army overwhelmingly for financial reasons, they nevertheless had to perform the duties

required of them by the colonial state. This was relatively straightforward in the case of service outside Nyasaland, but is less easily explained in relation to the period of conquest or later aid to the civil power (over which soldiers appear to have had few misgivings, even when the majority were not in favour of Federation). Finally, if we are to acknowledge the part played by the army as a coercive force, we must also recognise the role played by Malawian soldiers within the colonial society from which they were drawn.

Malawians as soldiers: The Malawian soldier's experience of warfare

In his discussion of the Indian Army, David Omissi has emphasised the role of a well-established concept of honour ('*izzat*') in the formation of Indian soldiers' attitudes towards their role within the army.<sup>1</sup> Thus, whilst he argues that soldiers often joined the army for economic reasons, their behaviour once they had enlisted, and particularly during military operations, was shaped by a genuine desire for honour, as well as a concomitant fear of shame. Crucially, these concepts applied not only to individual behaviour, but also to the corporate identity of the regiment. Finally, whilst Omissi argues that whilst Indian soldiers' loyalty to individual European officers was limited, their view of military service was underlain by a powerful loyalty to the monarch which was successfully nurtured by the military authorities.

Chapters three and four have examined the experience of Malawian soldiers *within* the military community, whilst chapter two investigated the motivation of

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<sup>1</sup> David Omissi, *The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940* (London: Macmillan Press, 1994), pp. 76-112.



soldiers in joining the army. This emphasised the significance of prestige and masculinity as motivating factors in Malawian enlistment, but also acknowledged the overriding importance of material factors. However, soldiers' reasons for joining the army can provide only a limited account of perceptions of military service in a country where men often served in the army for more than a decade. As suggested in the *Handbook to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland*,

Askari of 1 K.A.R., for instance, are drawn from all the Nyasaland tribes [...] What welds these diverse people into a unit? [...] Regular food and steady pay soon became strong inducements to join the Colours. Once *in* the Army the Askari tends to become *of* it, and over the years a steady tradition of loyalty has been built up.<sup>2</sup>

As noted in chapter two, many of the European officers who served with Malawian soldiers regarded the ethnic groups from which they were recruited as 'warrior tribes' with a special aptitude for soldiering. Officers in the early KAR tended to comment upon the bravery of particular ethnic groups rather than Malawian soldiers as a whole. This reflected the needs of the ethnic recruitment policy, which required the military value of different tribes to be judged, but also reflected the perceived reality that all the soldiers of a particular company were likely to be from a particular tribe. Whilst references to the bravery of Yaos, Tongas and Ngonis certainly excluded many Malawian ethnic groups, they did not exclude groups within the army, since by the act of enlisting, a Malawian became a member of a Yao, Tonga or Ngoni company. Opinions about the martial characteristics of particular Malawian tribes therefore came to represent Malawian soldiers as a group. Thus, when fears of Tonga cowardice were raised at the beginning of the Second

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<sup>2</sup> W. V. Brelsford, *Handbook to the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland* (Salisbury, Rhodesia: Cassel, 1960), p. 671.

World War, they were manifestations not only of the practical desire of officers to ensure that they had the best recruits, but also of a broader belief that such behaviour was aberrant for Malawian soldiers, so that the apparent cowardice of the smaller group affirmed the warlike characteristics of the remainder.

The official rejection of tribal recruitment criteria during the war, as well as the consequent expansion of recruitment, necessitated a shift to the more inclusive concept of the 'Nyasa' soldier; a terminology which was already in official use before the war, but which quickly superseded the idea of the Yao soldier.<sup>3</sup> This trend was undoubtedly increased by the unique linguistic position within the Nyasaland battalions, speaking a different language from the remainder of the KAR, which necessitated the maintenance of separate Nyasaland units and provided a focus for a distinct Nyasa identity. As a result, whilst European officers who served with Malawians remained aware of the distinct ethnic identities of their men, and continued to hold opinions about their relative military value, it also became increasingly easy to broadly apply such characteristics to 'Nyasa' soldiers as a whole.

Page notes that during the First World War, Malawian soldiers were believed by military officials to have a special aptitude for close-quarters fighting.<sup>4</sup> This idea carried over to the Second World War when, in common with other East African troops, accounts of Malawians or 'Nyasas' in battle emphasised the use of the panga

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<sup>3</sup> PRO, CO 820/17/6, Colonel T. S. Muirhead, OC Southern Brigade KAR, to Governors of Nyasaland and Tanganyika, 3 April 1934.

<sup>4</sup> Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 101.



or machete, in an image reminiscent of the Gurkha's kukri.<sup>5</sup> A 1 KAR officer's account of fighting against the French in Madagascar noted, 'we were by that time using bayonets and pangas [...] The very first Frenchman captured in this action had a panga wound in his head'. This aspect of the fighting was given added significance in the official publication *The King's African Rifles in Madagascar*, where it appeared in a chapter entitled 'Panga Fighting at Andriba', which emphasized the visceral and instinctive nature of the fighting:

Andriba was not fought with machine guns at a distance. It came in the end to hand to hand fighting with pangas. [...] The fighting was fast and furious now. The blood of the Nyasalanders was up. They had seen their officer killed and, as the colonel of the battalion put it, 'that sort of thing makes them angry.'<sup>6</sup>

Malawians also participated in the creation of a 'warlike' image with the use of a 'war cry' in battle. The commanding officer of 22 KAR, Ken Collen, recorded a particularly hard-fought attack on a Japanese position in Burma:

For two whole days my dear Bn hammered at a blasted Jap position, of very great strength. By incredible guts and determination [they] fought their way to the top, only to be literally blasted off by the M.M.Gs, L.M.Gs and grenades. I was so terribly proud of them, but it was just too agonising. [...] I could hear them whooping and yelling "Sokalai, sokalai, yao-oo-oo" the Nyasa war cry. Then the most appalling noise - all hell let loose; then worse still, the Coy Commanders on the phone asking for more and more stretcher-bearers.<sup>7</sup>

Whilst the use of edged weapons in combat was used to project a martial image of Malawians, when combined with the use of the 'war cry', some officers believed this also performed an important function on the battlefield, particularly when fighting non-African opponents. As Collen noted of one action, 'the Japs were

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<sup>5</sup> Gerald Hanley, *Monsoon Victory* (London, Collins, 1946), pp. 46-62.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Gandar Dower, *The King's African Rifles in Madagascar* (Nairobi, East Africa Command, [n.d.]).

<sup>7</sup> IWM, 79/21/1, "A Story of the Gallant 22nd Battalion King's African Rifles", typescript extracts from K. H. Collen's letters from Burma, dated 16 July 1944 to 21 December 1944', 28 October 1944.

absolutely scared stiff and took every opportunity of beating it. I suppose a mob of yelling askari with bayonets and pangas is a pretty formidable sight'.<sup>8</sup> These aspects of Malawian soldiers' experience were deliberately harnessed for 'jitter parties', designed to unnerve Japanese soldiers in Burma:

When the Nyasas staged their big party, it was with the object of demoralizing the Japs [...] Two companies began surrounding the hill and in the darkness they began howling and screaming. They sharpened their matchets together, and threw dozens of grenades. [...] The Japs became increasingly nervous and began showing terror. Many cried out and whimpered. The darkness around them was filled with screaming black men who were waiting with sharp matchets and bayonets. [...] The Africans took a real and savage pleasure in their jitter-party, and when the time for the attack came, they were singing war-songs of their tribal territory. [...]

When the signal for attack was given, it went in with a rush, and the Nyasas swarmed on to the hills with matchets and grenades. [...] The Japs who were alive had managed to scurry away through the thick jungle, leaving their fox-holes to the Africans, who shouted, "Sokolei! Sokolei!" which is the war-cry of the Nyasas.<sup>9</sup>

This account, which emphasizes a primitive, tribal image of Malawians in warfare, clearly has much to do with the uses to which the military authorities believed the presence of African soldiers could be put. However, the general perception of Malawians as warriors was certainly supported by the genuine courage displayed by countless individual soldiers. Following the Ashanti expedition of 1900, Sergeant Adada of 2 CAR and Corporal Chitenga of 1 CAR, who 'went into the bush by himself and routed out two of the Ashanti who were in such a position that they could do considerable execution to the troops',<sup>10</sup> were both awarded the Medal for Distinguished Conduct in the Field (DCM) for gallantry. At least fifteen more Malawians received rewards of one or two pounds, another thirty-five were

<sup>8</sup> IWM, 79/21/1, "A Story of the Gallant 22nd Battalion King's African Rifles", typescript extracts from K. H. Collen's letters from Burma, dated 16 July 1944 to 21 December 1944', 30 September 1944.

<sup>9</sup> Hanley, *Monsoon Victory*, pp. 184-85.

<sup>10</sup> 'Welcoming The Troops - Address to Capt. Cobbe. - Interesting Ceremony', *Central African Times*, 26 January 1901, p. 7.



promoted for 'gallantry in action and good service', whilst the whole of 2 CAR were commended 'for their gallant conduct at the action of Ojesu on August 31.'<sup>11</sup> On 17 April 1903 at Gumburu in Somaliland, 124 Malawians from 2 KAR who were attacked by a force of over 10,000 Somalis 'fell to a man at their post beside their officers'. Only 37 Malawians escaped, almost all of whom had been wounded, and Private Mandelumba was awarded the DCM. . A few days later at the battle of Daratolch, under attack from several hundred Somalis, Sergeant Nderemani and Corporal Surmoni remained behind to defend a wounded officer, and were also awarded the DCM.<sup>12</sup>

The World Wars saw Malawians rewarded for bravery on numerous occasions. Malawians seem to have received a disproportionate number of awards in comparison to other KAR soldiers. During the First World War, out of about 193 KAR DCMs<sup>13</sup> awarded, at least 113 went to soldiers in the Nyasaland battalions, whilst four soldiers received a second award. In the Second World War, only twelve DCMs were awarded to soldiers of the KAR, but eight of these went to Malawians.<sup>14</sup> At least a further thirty-five Malawians were awarded the East Africa Force Badge

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<sup>11</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 428, 'Ashanti expedition. Awards and promotions', 25 January 1901; Peter Charlton, 'Bravery Awards to 1 & 2 KAR', *The Society of Malawi Journal*, 49, 3 (1996), 15-23 (p. 16); 'The 2nd Battalion Central Africa Regiment', *The Times*, Thursday, 18 October 1900, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> 'Somaliland', *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, No. 173, August 1903, p. 4; 'Reverse in Somaliland', *The Times*, 24 April 1903, p. 5; *British Central Africa Protectorate. Report for 1904-5*, Cd. 2684-18; Moyse Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 178-79; Charlton, 'Bravery Awards to 1 & 2 KAR', p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Between 1903 and 1942, soldiers in the KAR received a special 'KAR DCM' rather than the DCM awarded to European troops.

<sup>14</sup> Charlton, 'Bravery Awards to 1 & 2 KAR', pp. 17-18.

for bravery in Abyssinia in 1941, whilst dozens of Malawians were awarded the Military Medal or 'Mentioned in Despatches'.<sup>15</sup>

Many of the DCMs awarded during the First World War were for accumulated gallantry rather than particular acts of bravery. However, where records do provide accounts of specific acts, they give a vivid impression of the genuine courage of individual Malawians. In August 1917, 'though wounded', Private Kalima of 2/2 KAR 'continued to fire his Machine Gun and helped to get it out of action until he dropped'. In September 1917, Corporal Namati of 2/2 KAR single-handedly dismantled and repaired two damaged Lewis Guns 'under heavy Maxim and shell fire'. A young soldier named Lance-Corporal Matress Dinala 'set an excellent example to his comrades [...] by running up and down the firing line giving encouragements regardless of danger'.<sup>16</sup> On a similar occasion, Sergeant Siabu of 2 KAR 'Although twice wounded in action [...] refused to leave the firing line but walked about encouraging and maintaining a firm hand on his men', whilst Moyse Bartlett records that Lance Corporal Sowera, already the holder of a DCM, 'took command of a section that had become shaky after losing its N.C.O. and danced an *ngoma* up and down the firing line to hearten his men'.<sup>17</sup> Similar accounts from the Second World War include that of Corporal Rabson who single-handedly defended a road in Madagascar despite coming under fire from small arms and field guns for

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<sup>15</sup> MNA, S 33/2/1/1, f. 112, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, to Lord Moyne, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 28 May 1941; MNA, S 33/2/1/1, f. 148, D. M. Kennedy, Governor of Nyasaland, to Lord Moyne, Secretary of State for the Colonies, [December 1941?].

<sup>16</sup> PRO, CO 534/27, ff. 256-260, C-in-C, EAF to Secretary of State for the Colonies, GHQ EAF, 16 August 1918.

<sup>17</sup> PRO, CO 534/27, f. 330, C-in-C EAF to Secretary of State for the Colonies, GHQ EAF, 1 October 1918; Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 392.



four and a half hours, and Corporal Enock Ngwani who risked his life in Burma in an attempt to retrieve the body of a dead officer.<sup>18</sup>

What inspired so many Malawians to carry out acts of heroism in the service of the British state? How far Malawian soldiers assimilated the view of themselves as members of warrior tribes or martial races, as projected by the military authorities, is questionable. There is little suggestion that Malawian soldiers viewed their use of the machete or panga with the same significance as did the military authorities. During the inter-war period, the panga was viewed primarily as a tool for clearing vegetation, and no training was given in its use as a weapon. An officer who served with 1 KAR in the 1930s believed that the Malawian soldiers' name for the panga, 'pwetika', was 'nothing but the Africanised pronunciation [sic] of the English word fatigue'.<sup>19</sup> Whilst it also seems plausible that this name was derived from Chinyanja 'ku pweteka' (to hurt or be painful),<sup>20</sup> this belief at least casts doubt upon the place of the panga as the archetypal Malawian soldiers' weapon. At the same time, however, some Malawians seem to have identified a link between their role in modern and pre-colonial warfare. During his visit to Malawian soldiers in the Far East, NA Kawinga described the use of the 'Sokole' war-cry in these terms:

this word of SOKOLE commenced long long time ago by our parents when fighting the war [...] whenever he happen to meet the enemies and before starting to fire, the first thing to do was to shout with the word of SOKOLE, and then, afterwards firing their guns, and that is, to make them puzzle so that they could not stand bravely against their enemies [...] for this reason all the young men are taking an example of their parents what they were doing on the oldest days, and

<sup>18</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/1/9, 'Heroes from Nyasaland', by K. Gandar-Dower, Ministry of Information, EAC, 9 October 1942; PRO, WO 172/9477, War Diary of 1 KAR, 27 April 1945.

<sup>19</sup> IWM Sound Archive, 3939/03, Transcript of interview with Major H. F. Bingham OBE, 5 May 1978, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> David Clement Scott, *Dictionary of the Nyanja Language: Being the Encyclopædic Dictionary of the Mang'anja Language*, ed. by Alexander Hetherwick (London: United Society for Christian Literature, 1929).

this is why the young men are no coward in fighting because fighting war started with their parents.<sup>21</sup>

There is evidence to suggest that some Malawian soldiers did come to see themselves as a military elite. Page records how a First World War marching song proclaimed that 'The Nyasas are the Lions of the Europeans'.<sup>22</sup> Examples from the Second World War suggest that Malawians sometimes expressed a sense of superiority through disdain for the military value of other colonial soldiers in particular. A 2/2 KAR officer recalled a Malawian sentry refusing to salute Abyssinian Army officers on the grounds that they were 'only' Ethiopians.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, describing 'the extraordinary sight [...] of wounded Nyasalanders and Senegalese lying side by side in adjoining beds', Gandar Dower noted that the Malawians befriended the Senegalese out of 'mutual respect' but would 'refuse to lie in the next bed to a Malgache'.<sup>24</sup>

Such feelings were doubtless increased by the growing sense of being 'Nyasas', which represented not just a change in attitude on the part of the military authorities, but also a genuine trend amongst Malawian soldiers. Service overseas naturally intensified a sense of attachment to home. Serving with 1 KAR in Somaliland in 1903, Lieutenant Barton recorded 'Asking the Yaos the directions of various places, they in their turn asked the direction of Zomba. There is no doubt

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<sup>21</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/5/84A, 'Native Authority Kawinga's Journey to Ceylon', NA Kawinga, 13 December 1945.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Sydney Chituta Nkanda, quoted in Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 102.

<sup>23</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (36), f. 65, Memorandum by Major G. N. Burden [1980?].

<sup>24</sup> Kenneth Gandar Dower, *Into Madagascar* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1943), p. 43.



they are all very home-sick'.<sup>25</sup> Later, in the First World War, soldiers' songs included such powerful sentiments as 'When I die, bury me at Zomba', or in a variation of one of the most popular Malawian soldiers' laments, 'On this journey, I did not know / That I would die in Kenya'.<sup>26</sup> A Second World War song included the simple lines 'the country of Nyasaland [...] wouldn't it be fine to be there'.<sup>27</sup>

Joanna Bourke has emphasised the importance of attitudes towards the enemy as a motivation for soldiers in combat.<sup>28</sup> As noted in chapter two, some Malawian soldiers who joined the army in wartime undoubtedly did so in the belief that they were defending their homes against a real threat. Again, a First World War song celebrated victory over the Germans, 'He has failed, the German has failed'.<sup>29</sup> In 1940 Malawians serving in Kenya made exaggerated claims of their achievements in their letters home, such as 'I am in England fighting the Germans who are being greatly harassed by the British Empire', or 'We have captured the King of the Germans'.<sup>30</sup> Later in Burma, another Malawian soldier's song made the exaggerated claim that 'The Japanese are running away because of the African'.<sup>31</sup> In common with other allied troops, Malawians were encouraged to view the Japanese as absurd, and *Ulemu*, the newsletter for Chinyanja speaking troops in South East Asia

<sup>25</sup> NAM, 7807-23, Diary of Lieutenant Charles W. Barton, 13 September 1903.

<sup>26</sup> Page, *The Chiwaya War*, pp. 97-98.

<sup>27</sup> George Shepperson, 'They Went Singing: Songs of the King's African Rifles', in *KAR: A History of the King's African Rifles and East African Forces*, by Malcolm Page (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998), pp. 257-63 (p. 261).

<sup>28</sup> Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999).

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Anusa Makumba, quoted in Page, *The Chiwaya War*, p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> S 33/2/1/1, f. 29, K. L. Hall, Acting Governor of Nyasaland, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 30 March 1940.

<sup>31</sup> Shepperson, 'They Went Singing', p. 261.

published the typical grotesque caricatures of bespectacled Japanese soldiers.<sup>32</sup> Such images seem to have had an effect upon some Malawians, and a Karonga District newsletter records how a soldier on leave, Sergeant Joseph Mhango 'told us how the Japanese are being chased [and] made the people laugh a great deal by pulling back the corners of his eyebrows to make his eyes appear small'.<sup>33</sup> Some veterans still recall the Germans as particularly 'bad' people,<sup>34</sup> but the extent to which Malawians genuinely believed in the value of the war against Japan seems more doubtful. One officer who served with Malawians in Burma recalled, 'the Nyasas often told me that they should have been fighting their Portuguese neighbours - not the unknown Japanese'.<sup>35</sup>

How far Malawian soldiers in combat were inspired by loyalty to the British cause or to the monarch, as described by Omissi, is more questionable. Soldiers' songs with lines such as the First World War's 'Nyasaland, sit down and play cards on account of the British' suggest that the military successes which Malawians celebrated were seen as 'British' rather than just 'Nyasa' victories.<sup>36</sup> Loyalty to the King in particular was emphasised not only in annual ceremonies such as the King's Birthday parade, but also in the oath of allegiance which soldiers took upon enlistment.<sup>37</sup> KAR officers certainly believed that references to the King would be sufficient to settle any dispute with the soldiers under their command; as Shepperson recalled, officers 'always referred to *Bwana* King George [...] he was very useful

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<sup>32</sup> *Ulemu: Mwezi Uli Wonse*, 1, December 1944, p. 7.

<sup>33</sup> MNA, NNK 1/10/1, f. 192, 'Karonga District. Newsletter for the week ending Saturday April 7th.', Signed DC Karonga 10 April 1945.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with James Chigawa, 6 July 2000, Zomba.

<sup>35</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (8), f. 25, Memorandum by Patrick William George Barnes [1980?].

<sup>36</sup> Anthony Clayton, *Communication for New Loyalties: African Soldiers' Songs* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), p. 51

<sup>37</sup> King's African Rifles Ordinance 1911, in *Ordinances of the Nyasaland Protectorate in Force on the 31st March, 1913* by Charles J. Griffin (London: Stevens and Sons, 1913), p. 144.



was *Bwana King George*'.<sup>38</sup> Whether this reflected a naïve trust in the King's judgement, or a resigned acceptance that the King's will was absolute, cannot easily be distinguished, but it is notable that Malawian soldiers who met the King at the victory celebrations seem to have shown a genuine enthusiasm for the monarch:

As soon as the King was sighted, an almost imperceptible sigh ran through the ranks, and one of the Nyasas was heard to murmur "There he is, he looks just like his pictures." [...]

An hour later Their Majesties left the camp and as they passed the troops yelled and cheered, without encouragement. "Sokole, sokole" could be heard long after the cars had gone. The Askari had seen and talked with King George, and they were satisfied.<sup>39</sup>

It is important to recognise that whilst Malawians were singularly prominent as fighting men in the KAR, individual Malawians were as vulnerable to the traumatic effects of combat as were any other group exposed to the horrors of modern warfare. Page cites the experience of Fololiyane Longwe who recalled 'War itself is bad [...] Listen to the sound from exploding bombs and machine guns, smoke all over and the vegetation burnt and of course deforested. Look at your relatives getting killed, crying and finally dead'.<sup>40</sup> Page also cites a song, 'A beard has grown', mourning the negative impact of the conflict upon soldiers' characters,<sup>41</sup> whilst another First World War song '*Balala*' or 'Scattered' mourns the incredible loss of life with the line 'Germany has completely finished off our young men'.<sup>42</sup> A general rejection of the whole concept of war is also evident amongst veterans of the Second World

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Professor George Shepperson, Peterborough, March 2000.

<sup>39</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) III, 'Account of 22nd Bn. King's African Rifles (Nyasaland) in Action Burma (Khabaw Valley) 1944 by Donald Bowie (Intelligence Officer)' [1945], pp. 77-78.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Fololiyane Longwe, 23 August 1973, quoted in Page, *The Chiyawa War*, pp. 100-01.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Che Kalokwete Likwapi, 8 April 1973, quoted in Melvin E. Page, 'The Great War in Malawian Memory', *The Centennial Review*, 21 (1977), 321-32 (p. 329).

<sup>42</sup> Clayton, *Communication for New Loyalties*, p. 50. Clayton translates '*Balala*' as 'Helter Skelter'.

War.<sup>43</sup> In common with other soldiers, Malawians used humour to cope with some of the more hideous aspects of fighting; the commander of 22 KAR noted that ‘The askari are tickled to death by all the gruesome relics of the battlefield which surround us! [...] There are still a good many dead lying about on the hills’,<sup>44</sup> whilst another officer recalled that the Malawian Regimental Police had nicknamed a particular corpse the RSM’s *mbale* or brother.<sup>45</sup> Such humour could not, of course, protect Malawians from the technology of warfare, which could have particularly devastating effects upon soldiers’ morale. An officer who served with Malawians in 22 KAR in Burma noted

trigger happiness was an added danger and created additional tensions. It made the discipline of the men difficult to maintain. When we were later bombed by Jap planes, men were killed because they could [not] accept that they were safer in their slit trenches. In a wild panic, which was infectious, some Askari left out of their trenches and ran blindly into the falling bombs they thought they were escaping.

On another occasion we had an African suddenly go berserk, rip off his clothes, and run naked straight into the attacking Japs only to be mown down and chopped to pieces.<sup>46</sup>

Perhaps bearing in mind such incidents, some officers rejected the idea of Nyasas as a kind of expanded warrior tribe, as one recalled, ‘The Nyasas were jolly fellows and handy to live with in the jungle, but they were not battle mad at all’.<sup>47</sup> However, ultimately this admission could only serve to make the disproportionate service and heroism of Malawian soldiers all the more remarkable.

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<sup>43</sup> Interviews with Seckson Philip Nkhoswe, Elia Noah, Henderson Simuja, Ordnance Zulani, Zomba, October 2000.

<sup>44</sup> IWM, 79/21/1, “‘A Story of the Gallant 22nd Battalion King’s African Rifles”, typescript extracts from K. H. Collen’s letters from Burma, dated 16 July 1944 to 21 December 1944’, 13 August 1944.

<sup>45</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) III, ‘Account of 22nd Bn. King’s African Rifles (Nyasaland) in Action Burma (Khabaw Valley) 1944 by Donald Bowie (Intelligence Officer)’ [1945], p. 8.

<sup>46</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (24A) III, ‘Account of 22nd Bn. King’s African Rifles (Nyasaland) in Action Burma (Khabaw Valley) 1944 by Donald Bowie (Intelligence Officer)’ [1945], p. 65.

<sup>47</sup> RHL, MSS Afr. s. 1715 (8), Memorandum by Patrick William George Barnes [1980?], f. 18.



Malawian soldiers and Malawian civilians: The problem of internal security

There is evidence to suggest that Malawian soldiers serving during the period of conquest often behaved with considerable and indiscriminate brutality towards the Malawian societies against which they were pitted by the colonial authorities. C. A. Cardew recalled that a group of Tonga irregulars which he sent against a raiding party 'brought in severed legs and arms as evidence of their victory'.<sup>48</sup> Wordsworth Poole noted another incident involving an injured villager in 1895:

The man got away into the bush but the blood-thirsty Atonga tracked him down & had got out their knives preparatory to cutting his throat and were very surprised when Coape Smith stopped them and made them carry the wounded man to a stream. The Atonga's great delight is polishing off a wounded man.<sup>49</sup>

Again, following another operation in 1895, Poole noted

The Atonga, though clothed in khaki & carrying sniders [rifles] are still savages & brutal ones too, they cut the throat of a wounded man, they shoot women with their babies, they tossed a child on their bayonets. One little girl was bayoneted in 5 places [...] All these acts were visited with severe punishment. Yet if people knew of it at home there would be a great outcry.<sup>50</sup>

As Wordsworth Poole's description suggests, Europeans serving with Malawian soldiers seem to have regarded such acts as an inevitable result of the employment of men only recently introduced to the norms of Western conflict. There were certainly many soldiers in the ranks of the BCA Rifles who had direct experience of pre-colonial warfare; indeed, as noted in *Life and Work* in 1901, 'All of these men were two years ago raw untrained natives - not few of them at one time fought against the forces of the Administration'.<sup>51</sup> However, whilst the incidents described by Poole were not sanctioned by the authorities, the actions which

<sup>48</sup> C. A. Cardew, 'Nyasaland in the Nineties', *The Nyasaland Journal*, 8, 1 (1955), 57-63 (p. 59).

<sup>49</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, ff. 63-64, Wordsworth Poole to his mother. Zomba, 11 September 1895

<sup>50</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, ff. 77-78, Wordsworth Poole to his mother. Zomba, 9 October 1895

<sup>51</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, 154, January-March 1901, p. 3.

Malawian soldiers were *required* to perform were often equally brutal in character. Poole outlined the methods employed by the administration to impose its will on chiefs who refused to pay their taxes:

The usual proceeding, they say, we'll give you till such & such a day to bring in your taxes (3/- a hut paid in fowls, grain, mats, baskets, salt etc), & if they are not all in by then we'll burn your village. If a chief's village is burnt, & it makes a good bonfire, and his grain collared he is helpless and knuckles under at once.<sup>52</sup>

Some idea of the frequency of such action, and the routine with which it was regarded, is provided by Poole's brother Francis, an officer in the BCA Rifles who claimed to have 'burnt many, many villages',<sup>53</sup> and noted in 1897 that 'Every now & again I have to burn a village to hurry [the soldiers] up & show them I'm alive'.<sup>54</sup> As noted in chapter two, an important part of this process of destruction was the sanctioned looting of 'fowls, ducks, pigeons and native food' by the soldiers.<sup>55</sup> Malawian soldiers, many of whom had intimate experience of the impact of slave raiding, must have understood only too well the impact of the total destruction of a village's resources. As such, it would be unsurprising if many failed to accept the distinction between this and the physical ill treatment of non-combatants. An inherent element of violence towards civilians can thus be seen to have been embedded in Malawian military service from its inception, and derived not so much from an echo of pre-colonial practice as from the extreme dehumanising violence which was intrinsic to the process of conquest.

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<sup>52</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/1/1, ff. 62-63, Wordsworth Poole to his mother, Zomba, 11 September 1895.

<sup>53</sup> MNA, 14/FGP/1/1, f. 13, Francis Garden Poole to his mother. Fort Lister, 27 September 1897.

<sup>54</sup> MNA, 14/FGP/1/1, f. 5, Francis Garden Poole to his Aunt Mary, Fort Mina, Lake Shirwa, 20 August 1897. See *Life and Work: Blantyre Mission Supplement*, January 1892, p. 3; PRO, FO2/108, ff. 196ff, Captain Stewart to Acting Commissioner Sharpe, Zomba, 5 November 1896; MNA, KAR 2/1/2, Captain H. E. J. Brake, OC Armed Forces BCA, to Commissioner BCA, Loangweni, 21 January 1898.

<sup>55</sup> MNA, 13/WPO/5/1, Orders by Major C. A. Edwards Commanding the Armed Forces in the British Central Africa Protectorate, 1895.



Hut burning continued to be used as an expedient against hut tax defaulters, but with the end of the period of conquest such duties increasingly devolved upon the civil police. However, de Guingand describes how even in the mid-1920s the threat of hut burning by soldiers from 1 KAR was still used to cow NAs into compliance. After the soldiers had built a mock village,

We told Chindi [the defaulting NA] that we would show him how the huts could be burnt up from where we stood. [...] Chindi now saw a hail of bullets racing towards the huts, for the tracers showed up magnificently in the gloaming. Soon one or two of the huts began to smoke, and then the dry grass burst into flame. [...] I looked round to see how all this was affecting Chindi's followers, who had turned up in their hundreds to see the fun. Their expressions were quite wonderful—from complete astonishment to very real fear. [...]

To close the display, the machine guns were stopped and a line of askari with rifle grenades lined up about 200 yards from the now burning targets, and then altogether let loose their missiles. [...]

Chindi returned to his hut that night a subdued and chastened man. The question of his dilatory behaviour regarding Hut Tax payments was never mentioned throughout our stay, but no doubt he fully appreciated the significance of our visit.<sup>56</sup>

As Risto Marjomaa has suggested, such visible proof of the KAR's potency, not just over Malawian civilians, but even over the most senior Africans in Nyasaland, must have had a profound impact upon many Malawian soldiers.<sup>57</sup>

As outlined in chapter one, the KAR continued to be used as a sign of the power of the colonial state over Malawian civilians. The role of 'flag marches' as a recruiting tool has been discussed in chapter two, but the concept of 'showing the flag' was also intended to represent the potential military resources which could be called upon if necessary.<sup>58</sup> Finally, although this function had principally remained a

<sup>56</sup> De Guingand, *African Assignment*, pp. 62-64.

<sup>57</sup> Marjomaa, Risto, 'The Martial Spirit: Nyasaland (Malawi) Soldiers in British Service during Peace, 1895-1939', (unpublished paper presented at the Accra Workshop, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> MNA, NN 1/18/1, f. 17, Captain MacC. Wilkins, 2 KAR, to A. G. O. Hodgson, PC Northern Province, Zomba, 25 May 1937

threat throughout the inter-war period, the State of Emergency of 1959-1960 again brought Malawian soldiers into direct contact with civilians (it should be recognised, however, that it was the presence of large numbers of white Rhodesian troops which caused most resentment amongst the Malawian population). Whilst flag marches increased in importance during the emergency, Malawian soldiers were inevitably involved in violent incidents.<sup>59</sup> On at least six occasions, Malawian KAR snipers shot dead those who had been identified as the ringleaders of violent crowds, and several Malawian civilians were wounded by KAR rifle fire in the same incidents.<sup>60</sup> On 8 March a KAR soldier who was struck by a spear shot the perpetrator in the leg. On 10 March, in an action which resulted in the soldier's conviction for manslaughter, a Malawian soldier illegally shot dead a cyclist who was riding away from him after ignoring an order to stop.<sup>61</sup> The *Commission of Inquiry* recorded a similarly questionable event at Misuku a week later:

A man ran out of a hut and ran towards a group of three askaris obviously without seeing them [...] he was told to stop and he then at once turned round and ran away. The leading askari, according to the orders he had been given, called again three times and then fired and hit the man in the leg. The man got up and went on running, and with a wounded leg could then surely have been caught. But the askari fired again, hit him in the chest and he was killed.<sup>62</sup>

Soldiers from 1 KAR were also involved in a number of incidents in Northern Rhodesia in 1961, where they opened fire upon crowds, killing several civilians.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Colin Baker, *State of Emergency: Crisis in Central Africa, Nyasaland 1959-1960*, International Library of African Studies, 7 (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997), pp. 64-65.

<sup>60</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report of the Nyasaland Commission of Inquiry*, 1959, Cmnd. 814, pp. 64, 65, 69, 104, 107, 124; Baker, *State of Emergency*, p. 111.

<sup>61</sup> *Report of the Nyasaland Commission of Inquiry*, p. 134.

<sup>62</sup> *Report of the Nyasaland Commission of Inquiry*, p. 136.

<sup>63</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, A1, 'Comds Diary - Op Doubloon III', 1961.



Of course, there are few modern states which have not used their armed forces in internal security operations against their own people, and accounts of the violence give some idea of the pressure under which Malawian soldiers were placed:

Hostile gathering shouted KWACHA and stones thrown. Crowd told to disperse. Crowd armed with spears, hatchets, machets. Again ordered by DC to disperse. Four askari under Sgt protecting [right] flank and [transport] attacked by 50 who attempted to seize weapons. This party opened fire. Killed 1, wounded 5. Crowd still remained hostile [...]

Army [patrol] arrested 20 villagers who were caught burning [bridge] LUWINGU-KASAMA [road]. One askari badly slashed by panga.<sup>64</sup>

It would be inappropriate to ask why Malawian soldiers in such circumstances were willing to take part in violence against their fellow Central Africans. However, it is important to acknowledge the general absence of evidence for any unwillingness to take part in such actions, despite the shared opposition of many soldiers to the Federal Government. Indeed, taking the colonial period as a whole, it could be argued that Malawian soldiers not only accepted but also often embraced violence against civilians as a privilege of military service.

This can most clearly be seen in a series of officially unsanctioned violent encounters between soldiers and civilians throughout the colonial period. In the 1890s, the behaviour of Malawian soldiers towards the civilian population can be seen as an extension of the looting and village burning which characterised official military operations during the period. Late in 1896, Lieutenant Gough complained that a party of his Tonga soldiers sent on a raid had started looting friendly Ngoni villages. Shortly afterwards, he noted that his men were 'looting the people

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<sup>64</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, A1, 'Comds Diary - Op Doubloon III', 12, 15 August 1961.

whenever I send them on messages'.<sup>65</sup> Early the following year, he found that some soldiers from Fort Johnston had taken part in a raid by a local chief on another chief who was actually under Gough's own protection at Dedza. The acquisition of women also seems to have been a feature of these incidents.<sup>66</sup>

If such violence in the 1890s can be seen as an imaginative extension of 'legitimate' military activity, there are also suggestions that the experience of such military operations continued to inform soldiers' behaviour towards civilians after the period of conquest. The attack by hundreds of Malawian soldiers on the Mauritian villages of La Caverne and Vacoas in 1899, which has been addressed elsewhere in this work, could be interpreted in this light. Unlike earlier incidents in the 1890s, the raid was effectively a reprisal for racially motivated attacks against the Malawians, who were systematically mocked, insulted and laughed at by crowds of Mauritian civilians. As noted in chapter three, part of the abuse related to the men's appearance, but this appears to have been part of a broader and more sustained campaign. The Malawian soldiers seem to have been systematically 'hooted at', jeered and greeted with cries of 'Zulu' from their arrival in Mauritius.<sup>67</sup> Within a few months, this had turned to physical violence. On 2 October, an Indian man was arrested for stoning two Malawian boy buglers. On 26 November, when Privates

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<sup>65</sup> Ian F. W. Beckett, *Johnnie Gough, V.C.: A Biography of Sir John Edmund Gough, V.C., K.C.B., C.M.G.* (London: Tom Donovan, 1989), p. 22.

<sup>66</sup> Beckett, *Johnnie Gough*, p. 24.

<sup>67</sup> PRO, CO 167/724, Major H. E. J. Brake, OC 2 BCA Rifles to Major A. T. P. Hudson, DAAG Mauritius, 28 November 1899; PRO, CO 167/728, Captain P. A. Charier, 2 BCA Rifles, to Captain A. J. Gordon, Adjutant, 2 BCA Rifles, Phoenix Camp, Vacoas, 18 August 1899; PRO CO 167/728, Lieutenant J. Johnson Stewart, 2 BCA Rifles, to Captain A. J. Gordon, Adjutant, 2 BCA Rifles, 10 December 1899; PRO, CO 167/728, Captain A. J. Gordon, Adjutant, 2 BCA Rifles, to Major H. E. Brake, OC 2 BCA Rifles, Phoenix Camp, 18 December 1899; PRO, CO 167/728, Garrison Orders: Head Quarters, Phoenix Camp: 'Court of Enquiry', 13 December 1899; PRO, CO 167/728, Declaration by Boodhun to Sergeant A. Sarah, Mauritius Police, 3 December 1899.



Jumbe and Nyalapa were mocked for their bare feet and had their fezzes stolen, Jumbe recalled that the crowd of up to 60 Mauritians 'set upon us and beat us. They used sticks stones and knives'. During this incident, Nyalapa was stabbed in the head, and Jumbe in the leg.<sup>68</sup> On 3 December, Malawian Sergeant Amani claimed that

We met a very large crowd of creoles and as we went along these men attacked us with sticks there were so many of them that we did not try to defend ourselves but ran away and the creoles threw stones at us. I was hit by sticks and stones also.

On the same day, Private Mangwana became involved in a disagreement with a local pimp who threatened him with a gun, and he also claimed he was forced to run away when he was attacked by 'a great number of Creoles who were throwing stones'. Privates Bwanadogo, Galosi and Amasi were also attacked and, according to Bwanadogo, 'all got our heads cut open'.<sup>69</sup>

In light of the catalogue of abuse which Malawian soldiers in Mauritius suffered, it is not difficult to appreciate their attack upon two local villages as a simple act of revenge. However, it should also be recognised that the raid itself had characteristics which echoed the Malawian experience of military service in the 1890s. Besides the physical violence which was offered to the villagers, houses seem to have been ransacked just as huts were burned in Nyasaland. Sympathetic officers denied that any looting had taken place, but the Mauritius Police noted that 'Several pieces of clothing and jewellery have been picked up in the road and cane

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<sup>68</sup> PRO, CO 167/724, 'Evidence regarding the theft of Regimental Fezzes from No. 315 Private Jumbe and No. 275 Private Nyalapa 2/B.C.A. Rifles at Vacoas on the 26th November 1899', Captain A. J. Gordon, Adjutant 2 BCA Rifles, 27 November 1899; PRO, CO 167/724, Major H. E Brake, OC 2 BCA Rifles, to DAAG Mauritius, 28 November 1899.

<sup>69</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Statement of Evidence, 4 December 1899.

field which must have been dropped by the soldiers of the African Rifles',<sup>70</sup> and villagers also stated that their goats and chickens had been slaughtered.<sup>71</sup> As noted in chapter four several women also claimed to have been raped by the soldiers, although only one soldier was found guilty, having been seen by an officer, leaving one woman's home 'with his trowsers [sic] down'.<sup>72</sup> Given the similarity of the content of the attack to both official and unofficial violence in Nyasaland, the raid could be seen as an attempt to reclaim the prerogative of violence against civilians which operated so successfully in Nyasaland.

Insofar as it derived from the abuse of Malawian soldiers by Mauritian civilians, the attack in Mauritius was unique. However, the willingness to commit acts of violence against civilians, which it represented, also continued to be evident in Nyasaland itself. The clearest example of this took place in October 1902 when large numbers of African civilians around Blantyre were impressed as carriers to assist in the urgent mobilisation of Malawian soldiers for service in Somaliland.<sup>73</sup> In what the *Central African Times* christened a 'Reign of terror',<sup>74</sup> Malawian soldiers and Blantyre civil police were accused of committing a series of '[e]xcesses':

Local police and soldiers (all called "Askari") were used to seize everyone at hand. The result was that on Sunday night pandemonium reigned at Blantyre, and the state of excitement into which the native population was thrown is only comparable to the old days when slave raiding and intertribal wars were the order of the day. This was not confined to Blantyre but all along the Zomba road and the Katunga

<sup>70</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, Report by Inspector A. Johnson, Mauritius Police, 16 December 1899.

<sup>71</sup> PRO, CO 167/724, Captain A. De Wilton, Inspector-General of Police, Mauritius, to Graham Bower, Colonial Secretary, Mauritius, 11 December 1899.

<sup>72</sup> PRO, CO 167/728, F. T. Piggott, Procureur General, Mauritius, to Sir Graham Bower, Colonial Secretary, Mauritius, 8 January 1900 'The African Regiment in Mauritius: Grave Misconduct', *Central African Times*, 7 April 1900, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> See Sean Morrow, "'War Came from the Boma": Military and Police Disturbances in Blantyre, 1902', *The Society of Malawi Journal*, 41, 2 (1988), 16-29.

<sup>74</sup> 'Reign of Terror – Under the British Government', *Central African Times*, 1 November 1902, p. 4.



road carriers were molested, and it is alleged women were assaulted, and that several have been carried off.<sup>75</sup>

As Sean Morrow has suggested, the interest of the white settler dominated *Central African Times* in the disturbances was largely a response to the indiscriminate character of the soldiers' press-ganging, which included many employees of the settler community. Nevertheless, the subsequent investigation by Judge Nunan seemed to reveal the extent of soldiers' violence against Malawian civilians.

Nunan made efforts to distinguish between the actions of soldiers and civil police by asking Malawian witnesses to identify whether men had worn red fezzes (signifying the police) or black fezzes (signifying the KAR). Many witnesses giving evidence of the worst incidents identified civil policemen as the culprits,<sup>76</sup> including Magasi who was tied up by policemen, Mlekano who claimed to have been beaten and robbed of three shillings, Madambo who was also beaten and robbed of his hoe, and two 'Anguru' women, Nsima and Salima who were raped. Both Madambo and Mlekano noted that soldiers from the KAR had simply passed along the road whilst they were attacked by policemen, but soldiers were identified as 'carrying away' several children, and beating a man called Mtwane whilst he was carrying loads for them. Other civilians could not identify whether they had been attacked by soldiers or policemen; Tuwenaon recalled,

she met many soldiers on the Katungas road [...] four of the askari had, she stated, assaulted her [...] witness was carrying nsima (porridge) and chimanga, and these things the askari took from her [...] she was held by the soldiers, and violated.

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<sup>75</sup> 'The Week', *Central African Times*, 1 November 1902, p. 3.

<sup>76</sup> Morrow, "War Came from the Boma", p. 19.

Unidentified askari also robbed Ngamjo of twelve shillings and nine chickens, then raped her.<sup>77</sup>

Nunan's enquiry found the police rather than the army largely responsible for the worst excesses, although soldiers were found to have been responsible for two sexual assaults and some looting.<sup>78</sup> However, one European witness stated that he 'thought that the natives believed that there was no difference between the Askari and the Police, he did not think they knew the difference,'<sup>79</sup> and the evidence given by Malawian witnesses does suggest that few made any distinction between the army and the police. Chipole, seeing three soldiers 'with black caps' coming to his village stated that he had believed 'the war came from the Boma [government]'.<sup>80</sup> He was clearly not comforted by the fact that the men were soldiers rather than policemen. This lack of distinction had some validity, since the civil police were increasingly being drawn from the ranks of ex-soldiers and as such their behaviour, like that of the Malawian soldiers in Mauritius, must have drawn upon the paradigm provided by their experience of military service in the 1890s.

The *Central African Times* regarded the 1902 disturbances as symptomatic of a much broader pattern of behaviour amongst Malawian soldiers. In the initial response, it was observed that

[W]hat [the disturbances] mean anyone who is acquainted with Native Askari need not be told. They mean theft, they mean personal violence, they mean rape, and in

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<sup>77</sup> 'The Recent Disturbances – Official Enquiry Before Judge Nunan, *Central African Times*, 22 November 1922, pp. 7-10.

<sup>78</sup> Supplement to *Central African Times*, 22 November 1922, p. 2; 'British Central Africa', *The Times*, 21 November 1902, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> 'Askari Troubles - Official Enquiry', *Central African Times*, 15 November 1902, p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> 'The Recent Disturbances – Official Enquiry Before Judge Nunan, *Central African Times*, 22 November 1922, pp. 7-10.



extreme cases, murder [...] When we train savages to murder, and war is simply organised murder, what else can we expect!<sup>81</sup>

This account is clearly reflective of the wider scepticism of the white settler community regarding the wisdom of arming Africans at all, and as such must be treated with caution. However, the genuine panic amongst Malawian civilians which seems to have accompanied the disturbances in 1902 does seem to reflect a more generalised fear of soldiers' continuing potential for violence. Writing in the 1970s, Kamuzu Banda recalled the extent of soldiers' and policemen's use of violence to extract goods and services from the civilian population:

In my childhood, it was not uncommon for the helpless villagers of Kasungu, to see men in shorts, jerseys, and tassled fezzes on their heads, sporting guns on their left shoulders, [...] strutting about the villages, terrorizing the people, demanding fowl, eggs, ufa (maize flour), beer and [...] women. Because they were in the habit of demanding fowl, [...] policemen were called Asilikari wa nkuku, [chicken soldiers] as opposed to soldiers, who were called Asilikari wa nkondo [war soldiers].<sup>82</sup>

Whilst this also suggests that the civil police were mainly implicated in such activity, it is clear that soldiers were perceived to be equally culpable. Lewis Mataka Bandawe recalled that in the 1900s it was common for travellers in Palombe to be robbed by men 'in soldiers' uniforms'. Bandawe described one incident in which a soldier stopped a party of men carrying dried fish:

The soldier stopped them and threatened to shoot them if they dared disobey him. [...] The man said quite proudly that he was a soldier from Fort Lister who was detailed to arrest all the people coming from the Lake carrying fish'.<sup>83</sup>

As late as 1908, it was still felt necessary when soldiers were on the march in Nyasaland to issue an order that 'Any man interfering with the Villagers, or their

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<sup>81</sup> 'Reign of Terror – Under the British Government', *Central African Times*, 1 November 1902, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> 'A Message from Ngwazi Dr. Kamuzu Banda His Excellency the Life President of Malawi', in C. Marlow, *History of the Malawi Police* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1971).

<sup>83</sup> Lewis Mataka Bandawe, *Memoirs of a Malawian*, ed. by B. Pachai (Blantyre: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 1969), pp. 63-64.

property will be severely punished'.<sup>84</sup> Thereafter there is little documentary evidence of abuse of civilians by serving soldiers until the Second World War, although in 1924 Masale, a deserter from 2 KAR, dressed in his uniform and armed with a rifle stole money from numbers of Indian shopkeepers by saying he had been sent by the Government to collect their takings.<sup>85</sup> Reports in the Second World War strongly echoed patterns from earlier in the century. In 1942, a Political Intelligence Bulletin noted that 'Truculence by soldiers in training when dealing with their civilian compatriots has been reported'.<sup>86</sup> Later, in 1943 another bulletin recorded

Instances have been reported of Askari in leave being aggressive and complaints of assaults and extortion have been made. In one such instance an Askari was killed by the villagers. Six men were arrested and are awaiting trial by the High Court. In another, an Askari was sentenced to 12 months I.H.L.'<sup>87</sup>

In addition to actual incidences of violence by soldiers, as in 1902 the presence of soldiers could still engender panic amongst the civilian population. In 1943, Military Police searching for deserters in Lilongwe sparked rumours that they had been sent to kill Africans in order to extract quinine from their brains, whilst women attending a display by the KAR manned Mobile Propaganda Unit were similarly overheard saying that 'people were being urged to attend the show so that they could be killed'.<sup>88</sup> This represented a variation of the concept of *chifwamba*,<sup>89</sup> or kidnapping to extract substances from the body, but it is noteworthy that soldiers themselves may have fostered such fears, since following these rumours a soldier named James

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<sup>84</sup> KAR 3/1/4, 'Company Orders by Capt. W. B. Brook, "C" Company 2/K.A. Rifles', 4 June 1908.

<sup>85</sup> C. Marlow, *A History of the Malawi Police Force* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1971), p. 14.

<sup>86</sup> MNA, S 34/1/4/1/7, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 5 of 1942, 22 August 1942.

<sup>87</sup> Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 6 of 1943 [n.d.].

<sup>88</sup> MNA, S 34/1/4/1/14, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 4 of 1943, 12 August 1943.

<sup>89</sup> Rumours of *chifwamba* could have serious consequences: in August and September 1953 several weeks of rioting followed rumours that men stealing oranges in Cholo had been killed and eaten by white planters. See Robin Palmer, 'Working Conditions and Worker Responses on Nyasaland Tea Estates, 1930-1953', *Journal of African History*, 27 (1986), 105-126 (pp. 123-24).



was convicted of 'spreading the rumour that "Askari" had been sent by the "Boma" to kill Africans to obtain their blood and flesh'.<sup>90</sup>

There were also suggestions that soldiers were using violence to subvert the racial hierarchy of colonial society. Mussa Ahmed, an Indian trader, complained to a relative:

The attitude of Nyasaland natives towards members of the Indian Community here is getting worse by the day. Many incidents have taken place, such as - abusing our Indian brothers, storming in our Indians' stores and robbing goods from our Indian stores. But, worse than that, a few days ago a native 'Askari' beat one of our Indians heavily somewhere near Palombe. A complaint was made and the said Askari was sentenced to one year's imprisonment.<sup>91</sup>

This probably reflected long-standing resentment of Indian traders,<sup>92</sup> but may have been reinforced by a perception amongst Malawian soldiers that the Indian community in Nyasaland had been able to avoid involvement in the war as 'none of them have joined up'. In response to such concerns, the authorities rather unconvincingly explained that 'the Indians in Nyasaland do not come from the military tribes, but that in India itself many thousands of them have joined the forces and have shown themselves to be excellent soldiers'.<sup>93</sup> Later, antagonisms were intensified when Malawians serving in the Far-East were abused by Indian civilians, leading to episodes which closely resembled earlier events in Nyasaland. As Shepperson recalled,

Africans would go into the towns, say Ranchi, and Indian barbers would refuse to cut their hair, just 'Get out jungly wallahs, you're jungly wallahs'. [...] We had a headquarter company clerk, a very nice chap [...] his name was John Leyo [...] John was one of nature's splendid men, pretty well educated, bright type, all the

<sup>90</sup> MNA, S 34/1/4/1/15, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 5 of 1943, 12 October 1943.

<sup>91</sup> MNA, S 45/3/2/4/3/O, Mussa Ahmed, P.O. Box 19, Limbe, Nyasaland, to Hussen Ahmed, Kotda-Sangani, India, 18 November 1943.

<sup>92</sup> NAM, 6706-64-66, Force Order 511, 9 December 1901; MNA, S 1/652/31/27b, Lieutenant Colonel H. B. Holt, OC SCC, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Burao, 3 December 1931.

<sup>93</sup> MNA, S 34/1/4/1/12, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 2 of 1943, 10 February 1943.

rest of it, got on extremely well with the European NCOs and the orderlies. He went to town and was told they wouldn't serve him. He went for some sweets. He just tore the store apart. He was reduced to the ranks.<sup>94</sup>

Antagonism towards the Indian community may also have been fostered by resentment at the better conditions experienced by Indian soldiers in the Far-East,<sup>95</sup> and of service in India, where Malawian soldiers' perceptions of the colonial order must have been challenged by the menial positions of Indians such as low-caste Untouchables.<sup>96</sup> However, what is most striking is that some Malawian soldiers clearly believed that their monopoly of violence even overrode elements of the established social order of the colony.

At least one serious case of unsanctioned violence by Malawian soldiers took place in the post-war period. In 1953, following a beer drink between soldiers of 2 KAR and Malawian employees of the Forestry Department, 'a minor quarrel' broke out as a result of 'over-familiarity on the part of one of the soldiers with a married woman and an allegation that the beer was bad'. As a result, the soldiers later returned to the Forestry Quarters with a large number of their comrades 'armed with bayonets and service matchets [sic]', and 'proceeded to assault every civilian they could find'. The scene reported by a KAR officer bears comparison with Wordsworth Poole's descriptions of the period of conquest:

He arrived in the middle of a sizeable riot and saw askari deliberately setting fire to huts. He managed to get three injured civilians into his truck and managed to rescue a small girl from being attacked by a soldier with a machet [sic] before he and his orderlies were themselves attacked by soldiers. [...] he returned to the

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<sup>94</sup> Interview with Professor George Shepperson, Peterborough, March 2000; see George Shepperson, 'America through Africa and Asia', *Journal of American Studies*, 14, 1 (1980), 45-65 (p. 51).

<sup>95</sup> IWM, 79/21/1, Scrapbook by Brigadier K. H. Collen, 'Kabaw Valley July 1944-Jan. 1945' [n.d.].

<sup>96</sup> MNA, S 34/1/4/1/13, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 3 of 1943, 17 June 1943.



scene of the riot to find that the soldiers had dispersed and that twenty-four houses comprising the Forestry Quarters were alight.<sup>97</sup>

Whilst this incident appears to be isolated, the attack upon employees of a Government department in their 'Lines', combined with the subsequent assault upon a military officer, again suggests the extent to which unsanctioned violence seemed to subvert not only the law but also the colonial order.

Whilst it is clear that early violence against civilians was closely related to the actual pattern of military activity in the period of conquest, this cannot fully explain the recurrence of such violence throughout most of the colonial period, even when Malawian soldiers were not actively engaged in duties which brought them into active contact with the wider population. Frantz Fanon has argued that

In the colonial countries [...] the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge. [...] the agents of government speak the language of pure force. [...] [The soldier] is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.<sup>98</sup>

Whilst it might be argued that this is not an accurate description of the overt role of Malawian soldiers throughout the colonial period, it is probable that soldiers' perception of their position was always informed by the knowledge that they were the ultimate sanction of state power.

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<sup>97</sup> PRO, CO 968/315, 'Disturbance in Zomba involving soldiers of the 2nd (Nyasaland) Battalion of the King's African Rifles', Governor of Nyasaland to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 13 August 1953.

<sup>98</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 29.

### Malawian soldiers in colonial society

Malawian soldiers did not simply act upon colonial society as an external force; as individuals, they also functioned within the societies from which they were recruited. As emphasised in chapter two, the prestige associated with service in the KAR provided an important inducement to enlistment. The keenness of soldiers and ex-soldiers to advertise their military credentials is suggestive of the value which was placed upon service in the army. Between 1950 and 1954, the District Commissioner in Liwonde alone received numerous requests from ex-soldiers for medals to which they believed they were entitled.<sup>99</sup> Some, such as Corporal Rashidi serving in the Tanganyika Police, may have sought medals because of their continuing service in uniformed organisations.<sup>100</sup> Others seemingly wanted them for less tangible reasons, like James Tengenasha who complained that ‘When all my friends were called to the Boma to get the King’s honour Mendle [*sic*] of war I also went there but the D.C. of my Boma did not know me’.<sup>101</sup> Many soldiers also seem to have joined the ex-servicemen’s organisation, the British Empire Service League (BESL), with the aim of gaining visible evidence of their military service. In 1947, the DC of Mulanje wrote to the secretary of the BESL complaining;

I am having an increasing number of queries from ex-Servicemen who state that they have paid their 5/- subscription but as yet have received no badge or card. [...] The fact that certain men have already received their badges is causing anxiety amongst those who have not received badges.<sup>102</sup>

Three years later, the DC of Mzimba recorded similar complaints by ‘numerous’ ex-soldiers:

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<sup>99</sup> MNA, NSL 1/8/1, District Commissioner, Liwonde District: Military: Medals: 1950 February-1954 February.

<sup>100</sup> MNA, NSL 1/8/1, No.8563 Corporal Rashidi, Police Training Depot, Dar-es-Salaam, to Senior Superintendent of Police, i/c Police Training Depot, Dar-es-Salaam, 22 February 1950.

<sup>101</sup> MNA, NSL 1/8/1, James Tengenasha of Mpemba’s Village, Fort Roseberry, to DC Zomba, 28 March 1950.

<sup>102</sup> MNA, NSM 1/4/2, DC Mlanje to Secretary, BESL, Limbe, 28 January 1947.



They were promised, so they say, that they would be issued "A medal" (button) for the 5/-, and ex-soldiers are repeatedly coming to see me to ask when they will receive these lapel-buttons. It is now more than four years since they paid their subscriptions and there is a general feeling among them that they have been defrauded, because they have not received these lapel-buttons.<sup>103</sup>

The prestige ascribed to military service, which provided the impetus for this keenly felt desire to visually demonstrate their wartime experience, operated on a number of levels. From the earliest days of the colonial state, both the administration and elements of the European settler community had given soldiers and ex-soldiers privileged positions within colonial society. As seen in Chapter Three, at the turn of the century, as a response to the perceived difficulty of getting Malawian soldiers to 'realize that an order given by any non-commissioned officer must be obeyed',<sup>104</sup> officers had adopted a policy of appointing chiefs' sons as NCOs.<sup>105</sup> Whilst intended to perform a practical function within the military hierarchy, this must have engendered or strengthened a connection between soldiers and indigenous authority. From the late 1890s, when W. J. Livingstone was establishing new Nguru villages to provide labour on the Magomero Estate in the Shire Highlands, he followed a deliberate policy of employing Yao ex-soldiers as chiefs.<sup>106</sup> It is uncertain how far such a policy was followed on other estates, but it is clear that many Nguru immigrants settled under Yao chiefs. This, combined with the administration's preference for Yao soldiers, may in itself have further encouraged an identification between indigenous authority and military service in Southern Nyasaland.

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<sup>103</sup> MNA, I DCMZ 3/4/1/8, DC Mzimba to PC Northern Province, 13 May 1950.

<sup>104</sup> Great Britain, *Parliamentary Papers, Report by Consul and Acting Commissioner Sharpe on the Trade and General Condition of the British Central Africa Protectorate from April 1, 1896, to March 31, 1897*, Cmd. 8438, p. 12.

<sup>105</sup> 'The British Central Africa Protectorate', *The Times*, 15 August 1899, p. 13.

<sup>106</sup> Landeg White, *Magomero: Portrait of an African Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 90.

Individual soldiers were often important assets to the economies of their home villages, as providers of income for their extended families, as well as for the women who usually lived with them in the lines. As discussed in Chapter Two, soldiers' pay was generally superior to pay in Nyasaland although, except for higher ranks, it was generally inferior to that available in the mines of the Rhodesias and South Africa. Like mine workers, soldiers serving outside Nyasaland generally sent remittances to their wives or other relatives in their home villages. Whilst in Chapter Four, the importance of remittances to the soldiers themselves was emphasised, there is an equal volume of correspondence to suggest the extent to which many civilians were dependent upon the money sent home.<sup>107</sup> Soldiers serving outside Nyasaland also often deferred pay until their return, so that they returned home on leave or on discharge with lump sums. Unlike mineworkers, soldiers, who at different periods might be stationed in Somaliland or on a Tanganyikan outstation, had less opportunity to spend their pay than other migrant labourers, and therefore might bring back private savings in addition to their deferred pay.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, unless they deserted, which was unusual except amongst recruits, soldiers were also more likely to return to Nyasaland than other labour migrants, either when they were sent home on leave, or when the battalion returned home to Zomba. The value of soldiers' pay to their home communities was also enhanced by the half remission on hut tax to

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<sup>107</sup> MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4, various correspondence.

<sup>108</sup> Phyllis Deane, *Colonial Social Accounting*, Economic and Social Studies 11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), p. 313.



which serving soldiers were entitled after 1911, which was replaced by full exemption from the tax from 1933.<sup>109</sup>

During periods such as the Second World War when large numbers of Malawians were serving in the armed forces, army pay clearly represented a large proportion of national income. Phyllis Deane estimated that in 1945, soldiers serving in Nyasaland earned about £206,400, whilst a further £431,100 in cash and goods was remitted back by soldiers serving overseas. This represented eleven percent of all income earned by Africans in Nyasaland during the year.<sup>110</sup> However, even in peacetime, when the number of Malawians in military service might be less than two thousand, the importance of soldiers to local society was still enhanced by the concentration of recruitment in particular areas. Recruitment remained focused in the north and east of the Southern Province, even after the official abandonment of tribal recruitment criteria during the Second World War: in 1945 demobilization plans were complicated by the fact that approximately 8,000 soldiers (about one third of Malawians under arms) would be returning to the Zomba and Liwonde (Upper Shire) districts alone.<sup>111</sup> This concentration meant that military setbacks could have a devastating effect upon local communities. When a company of 2 KAR was wiped out at the battle of Gumburu in 1903, the missionary journal *Life and Work in British Central Africa* observed that 'The killed are chiefly from the Blantyre, Zomba and Mlanje districts. No less than 33 are from Chiradzulu alone. From one village

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<sup>109</sup> *The King's African Rifles Ordnance*, Section 27 (8-9); MNA, S 1/240/34, f. 41, 'The Native Hut and Poll Tax Ordinance', Acting Chief Secretary Nyasaland, Zomba, 29 January 1937.

<sup>110</sup> Deane, *Colonial Social Accounting*, pp. 310, 314, 320.

<sup>111</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/1/138, DC Zomba to PC Southern Province, 18 September 1945.

fourteen have been killed - two of them brothers'.<sup>112</sup> Later, in September the following year, it noted 'A touching incident' at Zomba in which

An old woman had walked eighty miles to welcome back her six sons who were at the war. Standing amid the cheering crowds she saw the troops march past, and enquired after her boys. She then learned for the first time that they had all of them been killed. [...]

In many villages there has been heard the *maliro* or funeral lament accompanied by the beating of native drums.<sup>113</sup>

The economic despair in which the dependents of these soldiers were left provided a major motivation behind John Chilembwe's objections to Malawian military service in the early twentieth century.

Ex-soldiers continued to play a distinctive economic role in their communities following their discharge from the army. As highlighted in Chapter Two, after 1933 soldiers who served over nine years received a 'bonus' of 150 shillings, rising to 200 shillings after twelve years, when it was also supplemented by a long-service gratuity which could reach 900 shillings for a senior NCO.<sup>114</sup> At the end of the Second World War, soldiers received a War Gratuity which could amount in theory to between 248 and 426 shillings for a soldier who served for the duration, the Overseas Service Benefit of one day's pay for each month outside East Africa, a bonus of 56 days' pay in lieu of leave, 56 days ration allowance, and 40 shillings clothing allowance.<sup>115</sup> Whilst most soldiers would not receive the maximum benefits, it is clear that in a country where wages for agricultural labour could still be as low as 15

<sup>112</sup> 'Somaliland', *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, No. 173, August 1903, p. 4

<sup>113</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, No. 186. September 1904, pp. 1, 12.

<sup>114</sup> MNA, S 1/1709/23/64a, King's African Rifles (Amendment) Ordinance, 1932; MNA, LB 8/2/1/144, 'Long Service Gratuities', [n.d., 1945].

<sup>115</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/1/111, 'East Africa Command Release Instruction No. 16. Instructions for the Release of Africans', 12 June 1945, pp. 16-17.



shillings a month in the late 1940s, many ex-soldiers returned to their home communities as comparatively wealthy men.<sup>116</sup>

The colonial authorities worried that ex-soldiers squandered the lump sums which they received upon discharge. In 1932, the officer commanding the Southern Brigade complained that

in the majority of cases, the men squander their gratuities immediately they receive them, they go to the bazaar and spend all their money on cheap German goods. A man was recently paid a gratuity of £9, the day after the payment was made, he was killed in a [sic] accident while riding his new bicycle, in endeavouring to make some provision for his widow it was brought to light that he had only six shillings.<sup>117</sup>

In fact, as McCracken has suggested, as a cheap means of transportation, the bicycle could play an important role in local societies; for example, in 1944 the North Nyasa District newsletter for the troops reported that Company Sergeant Major Jacob Mwakanema had bought 'a new bicycle for his sons to use it when going to school at Mwenelondo', the newsletter recording with some pride that the model was a 'Hercules'.<sup>118</sup>

Deane's economic survey of Nyasaland in the post-war period suggested that soldiers did spend their gratuities quickly, but that much was invested in traditionally economically or socially significant areas, particularly livestock, and luxury foodstuffs such as meat, fish, and African beer.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, Simon Chimwona, from Chitipa in the Northern Province recalled that many returned soldiers had

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<sup>116</sup> John McCracken, 'The Age of Development' (unpublished chapter, 2002), p. 28.

<sup>117</sup> MNA, S 1/1709/23/54, OC Southern Brigade KAR to Chief Secretary Tanganyika, 7 January 1932.

<sup>118</sup> McCracken, 'The Age of Development', p. 28; MNA, NNK 1/10/1, f. 103, North Nyasa District Newsletter, April 1944.

<sup>119</sup> Deane, *Colonial Social Accounting*, p. 87.

bought cattle following the end of the First World War.<sup>120</sup> Perhaps influenced by the conditions which they had experienced in the army, returned soldiers built brick houses and locally-made furniture. Towards the end of the war, many serving soldiers had begun to construct houses ready for their return. Again in 1944, the North Nyasa District newsletter announced that WOPC Wilson Munthali had ‘arranged with his relatives that a big house should be built on his absence [*sic*]’,<sup>121</sup> whilst some soldiers even wrote to their District Commissioners asking them ‘to buy such things as an estate with a brick house on it, a store stocked with trade goods, and even a wife’.<sup>122</sup> Soldiers serving in the 1950s continued to ask DCs to help them to use their money to build new houses in their home villages.<sup>123</sup> Importantly, ex-soldiers invested money not only in their immediate families but also in the wider community. As early as 1904, soldiers returning from Somaliland invested some of their deferred pay in the Blantyre Mission’s Church Fund, including one who donated the impressive sum of three pounds, eight shillings and six pence, considerably more than most labourers could earn in a year in Nyasaland.<sup>124</sup> After the Second World War, Deane noted, returned soldiers ‘gave many gifts to relatives’, but also threw parties for the wider community.<sup>125</sup> Serving soldiers also enjoyed demonstrating largesse, and a 1942 account recorded that Malawian soldiers travelling to Mombassa ‘had just received a welfare gift of tobacco and cigarettes

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<sup>120</sup> F. S. Kalikene Chiwona, ‘The Impact of the First World War on Northern Chitipa’ (Final Year History Seminar Paper, University of Malawi, 1972-1973), p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> MNA, NNK 1/10/1, f. 103, North Nyasa District Newsletter, April 1944.

<sup>122</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/1, Report by M. A. Whitechurch, DC Mlanje, 1 December 1945.

<sup>123</sup> MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4/24, N.52017 Private Stanley N. Matawele, Matawele Village, Ntondwe, to DC Zomba, 18 May 1955; MNA, 1 DCZA 1/20/4/79, EA.3686 Lance Corporal Johasi Kimau, HQ Company 2 KAR, Bulawayo, to DC Zomba, 1 February 1957.

<sup>124</sup> *Life and Work in British Central Africa*, No. 186. September 1904, p. 12.

<sup>125</sup> Deane, *Colonial Social Accounting*, p. 87.



from Nyasaland and every native they passed standing on the track or at stations was showered with cigarettes'.<sup>126</sup>

The material benefits which ex-soldiers brought back into their communities were not limited to the comparative financial and material wealth which a soldier might be able to accrue during his service. Malawians with a good record of military service often received preferential access to government positions. The most prominent of these was the police force, which had been separated from the army in 1896, but which retained a visibly military character and continued to draw 'a large proportion' of its numbers from ex-soldiers on the eve of the First World War.<sup>127</sup> This association was formalised in 1920, when it was instructed that all police recruits should be ex-soldiers. McCracken notes that by the mid-1920s, ex-soldiers formed 91 per cent of the police force, although this had fallen to around 50 per cent by the eve of the Second World War as a result of changing policing requirements. However, the recruitment of ex-soldiers by the police was renewed in 1954 with the formation of the paramilitary Police Mobile Force, which was limited to men with at least five years' military service.<sup>128</sup> Numbers of ex-soldiers also found jobs in the police forces of Northern and Southern Rhodesia, as well as Tanganyika.<sup>129</sup> The prospect of service in the police force offered a range of benefits similar to those enjoyed by serving soldiers. However, as members of the police generally operated

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<sup>126</sup> PRO, WO 169/7020, 'The journey of 1/1 Bn. K.A.R. from Yatta to Mombasa by train and thence by ship to Madagascar and the reaction of the troops to their new experience' [June? 1942].

<sup>127</sup> C. Marlow, *A History of the Malawi Police Force* (Zomba: Government Printer, 1971), p. 3; MNA, KAR 1/2/1, 'Nyasaland Defence Scheme 1913'; University of Dundee Archives, MS 49/2/7 (268), photograph of police at Zomba, by Hugh Stannus Stannus, medical officer, ca. 1905.

<sup>128</sup> John McCracken, 'Coercion and Control in Nyasaland: Aspects of the History of a Colonial Police Force' *Journal of African History*, 27 (1986), 127-47 (pp. 142-43); McCracken, 'Authority and Legitimacy', p. 175.

<sup>129</sup> 'Newsletters', *Journal of the King's African Rifles*, 2, 1 (1959), p. 7; Interview with Major Jonas Limbane, 19 February 1999.

independently, they also offered enhanced opportunities to abuse their authority, as suggested by Banda's recollections quoted above.

Soldiers were also often preferred for other forms of uniformed employment, such as government messengers, or watchmen.<sup>130</sup> The association of military service with such employment was probably increased following the Second World War, when in response to the challenge of the demobilisation of thousands of soldiers, the government took active steps to encourage employers to take on ex-soldiers as watchmen.<sup>131</sup> As a further measure to assist the re-integration of ex-soldiers into society, in Zomba District a number of former non-commissioned officers were appointed as paid Councillors to Native Authorities.<sup>132</sup>

The increasing mechanisation of the army during the war also meant that many ex-soldiers entered civilian life with technical skills, and in the immediate post-war period government vacancies for artisans, medical staff, clerks, signallers and drivers were all offered to ex-soldiers in preference to those without military service.<sup>133</sup> The number of men who actually benefited from such preferences was in fact limited, but the restriction of government vacancies to ex-soldiers can only have increased the association of military service with prestigious employment opportunities.

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<sup>130</sup> PRO, CO 534/56, f. 205, 'Report on K.A.R. Memorial Pensioner Home', by A. G. Bishop, Honorary Secretary, KAR Memorial Fund, 30 March 1925.

<sup>131</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/1/4, DC Dowa/Kasungu to PC Northern Province, Lilongwe, 31 October 1942; MNA, LB 8/2/1/64, Secretary, Native Tobacco Board, Limbe, to Labour Commissioner, Zomba, 1 July 1944.

<sup>132</sup> Lord Hailey, *Native Administration in the British African Territories: Part II: Central Africa: Zanzibar, Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia* (London: HMSO, 1950), p. 52.

<sup>133</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/4/92, 'Post-War Training and Employment for African Ex-servicemen in Nyasaland'. [n.d., c. 1945].



The skills which soldiers took with them into their own communities were not only practical, but also cultural. As suggested in chapter two, when the various military style dances (*Beni*, *Malipenga* and *Mganda*) were developing, soldiers may have been valued as experts on military drill movements. Ex-soldiers from Nyasaland were certainly prominent in *Beni* societies in the Southern Rhodesian mines in the period after the First World War, giving instruction in drill, and providing authentic military music.<sup>134</sup> Later, the army provided access to Western musical forms, so that soldiers such as Jack Banda of 13 KAR used their army pay to buy guitars which were even taken with them to Burma.<sup>135</sup> Malawian soldiers took their guitars back to Malawi, and soldiers such as Sergeants Theodore H: Mungwira and Kelvin Gwebe Nyrenda played the instrument at celebrations such as weddings and religious festivals.<sup>136</sup> This experience laid some of the foundations of modern Malawian music, broadening experience of musical forms, and inspiring the careers of some musicians such as Black Pseli.

The rise of nationalist politics posed particular challenges to the position of Malawian soldiers in colonial society. On one hand, it is sometimes argued that the experience of African soldiers in the Second World War played a formative role in the development of nationalism and nationalist parties.<sup>137</sup> However, as in other colonial territories, serving soldiers were also involved in internal security operations against African nationalists, as has been shown above.

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<sup>134</sup> Van Onselen, *Chibaro*, p. 200.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Professor George Shepperson, Peterborough, March 2000.

<sup>136</sup> MNA, NNK 1/10/1, f. 19, North Nyasa District newsletter to the troops, August 1943; MNA, NNK 1/10/1, f. 180, North Nyasa District newsletter for the troops, December 1944.

<sup>137</sup> John Lonsdale, 'The Depression and the Second World War in the Transformation of Kenya', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. by David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (London: Macmillan Press, 1986) pp. 97-142 (pp. 128, 130).

Wartime service certainly equipped many soldiers with both the motivation and the experience to challenge the colonial administration. In 1943, a 'political intelligence bulletin' noted that many educated Malawians in particular were 'speculating as to the extent of social advancement to which the African will attain after the war', and anticipating 'that their social standard will be raised to a considerably higher level, that salaries will be higher, and that better prices will be paid for their produce'. The bulletin emphasized that 'This feeling is fostered by African Troops returning from such places as Ceylon, where they had experienced social equality with Indian Troops'.<sup>138</sup> This was borne out when soldiers returned to Nyasaland at the end of the war. In November 1945 soldiers being lectured on the various possibilities for post-war employment complained angrily about the low wages paid in Nyasaland. One Malawian Sergeant who had served in South-East Asia made specific reference to his experience during the war, complaining that everywhere the troops had served, wages were higher than in Nyasaland. He continued,

You say that we have done well in the war. We always hear this from Europeans, but when we return to our country you forget us and nothing is done for us. We come back to poverty. We soldiers have got used to a higher standard of living and we cannot be expected to be content with the wages Europeans pay us in Nyasaland.<sup>139</sup>

Former soldiers continued to use their wartime experience to good effect in their home communities. McCracken notes that when in 1953 an Agricultural Officer attempted to encourage people to construct bunds or ridges by claiming that the Garden of Eden had been turned to desert because of the lack of bunds, 'An old

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<sup>138</sup> MNA, S 34/1/4/1/13, Political Intelligence Bulletin No. 3 of 1943, 17 June 1943.

<sup>139</sup> MNA, LB 8/2/1/163, 'Lecture to the Troops at Ntondwe on Labour matters - 20th November 1945', Labour Commissioner, Zomba, to Chief Secretary Nyasaland, 21 November 1945.



soldier got up & said [he] was talking balls; he'd been to Aden & they still had lots of people living there, with gardens too'.<sup>140</sup>

The extent to which African soldiers serving in the Indian Subcontinent were influenced by Indian Nationalism in particular is debateable. Malawian soldiers who encountered the hostility experienced by John Leyo may have felt little inclination to learn from Indian experience.<sup>141</sup> Nevertheless, wartime service certainly heightened many Malawian soldiers' awareness of issues which were central to African nationalism. Whilst many experienced racial prejudice at the hands of European soldiers, Malawians were also struck by the absence of formal racial segregation in the countries in which they served. In 1945, a Malawian soldier writing under the name of 'St Boniface' wrote to the *Askari* journal, comparing conditions in Nyasaland unfavourably with those encountered elsewhere in the Empire:

In Nyasaland there are stores run by Indians, Europeans and also Africans. Often we natives are allowed to purchase from the Indian and native stores; the European stores are not open to natives. This shows that the Europeans have no sympathy and are very rude as in these stores they chase a native out as though he were a dog. Is there a particular brand of money known as 'African Currency'? Or as Nyasalanders Money? If this is not the case why is it that natives are not allowed in these stores?

Many askari have saved a great deal of money to purchase what they desire. They have seen the customs of other countries and they wish to copy these after the war. If the Nyasaland Government makes such laws how can you expect the askari who have been told to save their money to trust you. As I see it there is no reason why the natives should be prevented from entering therein. Why is it that in other countries of the British Empire they do not have this kind of thing?<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> RHL MSS Afr. V 123, Griff Jones, 'Ulendo Diary', 2 August 1952, quoted in John McCracken, 'Conservation and Resistance in Colonial Malawi: the "Dead North" Revisited', (unpublished paper presented at a conference on African Environments Past and Present, St. Antony's College, Oxford, July 1999).

<sup>141</sup> George Shepperson, 'America through Africa and Asia', *Journal of American Studies*, 14, 1 (1980), 45-65 (p. 51).

<sup>142</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/5/60A, Translation of letter from 'St. Boniface' to the Editor of 'Askari', [n.d., 1945].

The aspirations brought back to Nyasaland by soldiers were reinforced by a strong sense that, by serving the British state in the war, Malawian soldiers had earned a right to concessions; as 'St Boniface' concluded, 'You told us to join up and fight for "Freedom of Speech and from Want". We have fought.'<sup>143</sup> The idea that the loyalty and sacrifices of Malawian soldiers had earned reciprocal consideration by the colonial authorities was not limited to soldiers themselves, but became a significant political tool. This use of the idea of military service had already been prefigured by John Chilembwe, whose final letter to the Nyasaland Times in 1915 stated

We have unreservedly stepped to the firing line in every conflict and played a patriot's part with the Spirit of true gallantry. But in time of peace the Government failed to help the underdog. In time of peace everything for Europeans only. And instead of honour we suffer humiliation and names contemptible. But in time of war it has been found that we are needed to share hardships and shed our blood in equality. It is true that we have no voice in this Government.<sup>144</sup>

Whilst Chilembwe fundamentally objected to the use of Malawian soldiers in imperial wars, post-war nationalists seem to have embraced Malawian military service as a useful paradigm of African responsibility. In 1951, a Nyasaland African Congress (NAC) memorandum arguing against federation with the Rhodesias made clear reference to the role played by Malawian soldiers:

In regard to defence, is it not deplorable that the United Kingdom Government should so quickly forget the sacrifices the sons of Nyasaland made in the first wars and the TWO MAJOR WORLD WARS, in combating the King's enemy? Is it not embarrassing that the United Kingdom Government should give its moral support to the Federation issue on the ground of defence? Nyasaland Africans without

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<sup>143</sup> MNA, S 41/1/23/5/60A, Translation of letter from 'St. Boniface' to the Editor of 'Askari', [n.d., 1945].

<sup>144</sup> John Chilembwe, 'The Voice of African Natives in the Present War' [n.d., 1914], quoted in George Shepperson, and Thomas Price, *Independent African: John Chilembwe and the Origins, Setting and Significance of the Nyasaland Native Rising of 1915* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1958), pp. 234-35.



Federation, have defended and are defending and will help in the defence of His Majesty's Empire.<sup>145</sup>

Such rhetoric was not confined to the NAC, but was also employed by more conservative opponents. In a meeting between Southern Province NAs and James Griffiths, the Colonial Secretary, NA Chikumbu argued against federation that

We have already federated with King George. If anything should trouble the King and befall him let him know that every African in Nyasaland is his K.A.R., and because of this we say that we are in King George's hands and we are very proud indeed.

NA Nsomba emphasised that 'there have been many wars such as the Ashanti War, the Somaliland War, the 1914-18 War and the 1939-1945 War. We only fought in those wars because we wanted to be well looked after by Britain'.<sup>146</sup> The KAR had become, rather than the instrument of colonial oppression, a symbol of a functional display of loyalty for which the price was self-determination.

With reference to West Africa, David Killingray has argued that most soldiers and ex-servicemen in the post-war period showed little interest in nationalist politics, and that where such interest existed it focused upon specifically economic rather than political grievances.<sup>147</sup> Closer to Malawi, Nicholas Westcott has made a similar point in relation to Tanganyika, where, he argues, only the best educated soldiers who were already politically aware assimilated new ideas.<sup>148</sup> In Nyasaland, whilst the army still needed well educated personnel for technical services, and continued to

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<sup>145</sup> PRO, CO 1015/54/4, 'Nyasaland African Congress: Memorandum on closer association in Central Africa to be presented on 28th August, 1951, at Lilongwe, Nyasaland on the behalf of the African people and chiefs of the Nyasaland Protectorate' [13 August 1951?].

<sup>146</sup> PRO, CO 1015/54/8, 'Record of a meeting between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and members of the Southern Province African Provincial Council held in the Chiefs' Council Chamber on Thursday 30th August, 1951'.

<sup>147</sup> David Killingray, 'Soldiers, Ex-servicemen and Politics in the Gold Coast, 1939-50', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 21,3 (1983), 523-34.

<sup>148</sup> Nicholas Westcott, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Tanganyika', in *Africa and the Second World War*, ed. by David Killingray and Richard Rathbone (London: Macmillan Press, 1986) pp. 143-160 (p. 154).

value English language skills to a greater extent than before the war, many of the best educated soldiers left the army at the end of their wartime service, either to take up more lucrative civilian posts or because of the reduction in the size of the East African forces.<sup>149</sup> Nevertheless, whilst there is little evidence for the participation of serving soldiers in politics in the immediate post-war period, some ex-soldiers certainly became prominent in NAC conferences, although they seem to have used the occasion mainly as an opportunity to raise the economic grievances outlined above.<sup>150</sup>

Although Malawian soldiers showed little reluctance to align themselves with the colonial authorities in the 1959 emergency, at least some were already members of the NAC, Colour-Sergeant Samuel Kalima having joined in 1958 along with Sergeant James Nyau and Privates Jimu Musba and John Chande.<sup>151</sup> At the same time, troops stationed in Northern Rhodesia were being investigated for involvement with the African National Congress. Intelligence reports recorded telephone calls between William Chimwenya, an ex-soldier involved in the ANC, and Colour-Sergeant Harnecki Namakawa, Regimental Sergeant-Major Alfred, and a Corporal Munuwani, all stationed in Stephenson Barracks, Lusaka with 1 KAR.<sup>152</sup> Around the same time, the Northern Rhodesian 'United National Independence Party' announced its desire to establish a branch in 1 KAR with the aim of obtaining weapons. The

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<sup>149</sup> MNA, F 248/2073, CAC/253/1/SEC/G(int), Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Hyde, OC 1 KAR, to Colonel R. F. B. Long, Southern Rhodesian Staff Corps, Defence HQ Salisbury, Zomba, 17 December 1953.

<sup>150</sup> McCracken, 'The Age of Development', p. 4.

<sup>151</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, Acting Sub-Superintendent, Special Branch, Nyasaland Police, to Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, Zomba, 26 February 1960.

<sup>152</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NR/1, Report on telephone calls between William Chimwenya and Members of 1 KAR, by Captain D. K. Bales, Military Intelligence Officer, Northern Rhodesia, 24 August 1959.



fact that nationalists were also suspected of creating 'several instances in the African township of deliberate provocation of askaris at the beerhall, with a view to causing an incident', suggests that Malawian soldiers were not largely involved in instigating contact, but the authorities, regarding Stephenson Barracks as 'the most exposed to subversive influence in the Federation', were concerned enough to place a Special Branch Agent in 1 KAR.<sup>153</sup>

From the end of the emergency, the expression of nationalist sentiment by soldiers became increasingly overt. In late December, a KAR football team under Colour-Sergeant Samuel Kalima shouted the MCP slogan 'Kwacha' as they entered Zomba barracks.<sup>154</sup> A similar incident happened after a football match in August 1960 when Lance Corporal Allen shouted 'Kwacha, Europeans Fuck off'. In the same month it was reported that

troops were being influenced in town by the MCP (the bar near the ENCOs Mess is known to be a hotbed) and troops shout KWACA when returning to the lines at night. They also sing MCP songs in the lines after beer drinks.<sup>155</sup>

'KWACA' was also found painted on KAR vehicles. Other soldiers expressed approval for the MCP in broad terms. Privates Austin and Chandemale sent letters home praising the MCP, and in September 1960 the KAR Guard at Government House presented arms to Dr Banda.<sup>156</sup> Despite the prohibition on membership of

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<sup>153</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NR/1, Colonel C. M. Grigg, OC, Northern Rhodesia, to HQ CAC, 2 September 1959; MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NR/1/2, Captain D. K. Bales, Military Intelligence Officer, Northern Rhodesia, to HQ CAC, 17 September 1959;

<sup>154</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, Acting Sub-Superintendent, Special Branch, Nyasaland Police, to Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, Zomba, 26 February 1960.

<sup>155</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, 'Political Subversion in Military Unit', Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, to HQ CAC, 27 September 1960.

<sup>156</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, Superintendent, Special Branch, Nyasaland Police, to Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, Zomba, 4 January 1960; MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, 'Political Subversion in Military Unit', Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, to HQ CAC, 27 September 1960.

political parties, soldiers continued to join the MCP, and in August Sergeant-Major Kidney reported that '2 or 3 MCP cars visit the lines at night'.<sup>157</sup>

One of the most striking indications of the identification between the KAR and the MCP is provided in a complaint by Kidney, who claimed that the other members of the Sergeants' Mess accused him of being a 'Capricorn' (a member the Capricorn Africa Society, a moderate organisation whose principles included inter-racial harmony, but which was regarded by Nationalists as a refuge of "stooges" and "sell-outs" by 1960),<sup>158</sup> and had beaten him up and threatened to break into his house and steal his kit.<sup>159</sup> The idea that the senior African members of the principal coercive arm of the colonial state could identify one of their own number as a collaborator illustrates clearly the extent to which the KAR was now perceived as a *Malawian* institution which was, as Andison Bed complained in 1963, being illegitimately controlled by 'settlers and whites from Gatooma'.<sup>160</sup>

At the same time, there were signs that not all Malawian civilians regarded soldiers as being at the forefront of the Nationalist cause. In May 1960, a KAR veteran ex-Company Sergeant-Major Leonard Mtenje had his arm broken and rifle stolen by a gang claiming to be members of the Youth League of Malawi.<sup>161</sup> In

<sup>157</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, J. E. Grundy, Regional Liaison Officer, to Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, Zomba, 28 July 1960; MNA, F 249/1129, A/133/Conf D/40, 'Proceedings of a District Court Martial on the Trial of 15146 Cpl. Andison Bed (1 KAR)', 25/26 February 1963, Cobbe Barracks, Zomba.

<sup>158</sup> Clyde Sanger, *Central African Emergency* (London: Heinemann, 1960), pp. 94-117.

<sup>159</sup> MNA, F 248/2075, MI/1/NY/1/23B, 'Political Subversion in Military Unit', Captain M. M. Roach, Military Intelligence Officer, Nyasaland Area, to HQ CAC, 27 September 1960.

<sup>160</sup> Andison Bed Dinga, 'When Shall We Control Defence?', *Malawi News*, 18 January 1963; Interview with Ian Robertson Glasgow, Lilongwe, 17 March 1999.

<sup>161</sup> 'African War Hero Attacked By Thugs', *Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland Newsletter*, 6 May 1960, p. 9.



1963, Simama Sumali, a seventy-five year old veteran of the Ashanti wars, was accused of striking a member of the Malawi Women's League who, he claimed, had called him 'bad names, a Capricorn, and a stooge'. A local court had sentenced Simama Sumali to one year's Imprisonment with Hard Labour, for being 'one who despised young girls of the Youth League, and he hit one'.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, the MCP made continued efforts to present a favourable image to soldiers and veterans, and when the Malawi News reported that the British Empire Service League was seeking encourage soldiers to support the United Federal Party in the 1961 elections, it emphasised that

'We have all the assurance of ex-servicemen that they are solidly behind the leadership of Ngwazi Dr. H. Kamuzu Banda.' Some ex-servicemen have decided to resign from the League because they say they did not expect the League to indulge into Politics at all.

A meeting at Mitsidi in the Blantyre area organised by the League was a flop when after hearing the League officials ask them to vote for UFP ex-servicemen walked out.<sup>163</sup>

Finally, crucially Banda's regime continued to use the image of the army which had first been used by the NAC in the early 1950s, so that whilst the more explicitly colonial references were abandoned, Malawi's colonial soldiers continued to be projected as having performed an essentially patriotic service fighting for freedom during the two World Wars. By the 1970s, Malawi's *Daily Times* could record that Malawian soldiers who died in the First and Second World Wars had 'lost their lives in a patriotic attempt to ensure peace, freedom and dignity'.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> 'African War Veteran Wins Court Appeal', *Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland Newsletter*, 22 November 1963, p. 5.

<sup>163</sup> 'Empire League is Supporting UFP', *Malawi News*, 22 June 1961, p. 1.

<sup>164</sup> 'Homage to Soldiers', *Daily Times (Blantyre)*, 11 November 1974, p. 5.

Malawian colonial soldiers earned a justified reputation as soldiers, which became a source of pride, for the soldiers themselves, for their European officers, and for much of the wider colonial community. At the same time, their monopoly of violence within the colonial state meant that the arrival of soldiers continued to be a cause of fear for Malawian civilians throughout much of the colonial period. Some Malawian soldiers embraced the opportunity which this presented to abuse their authority, valuing the possibilities for looting or extortion, and all soldiers had to accept the possibility that they would be used in internal security operations against civilians. However, within their own communities, soldiers were in a position as providers, which was analogous to that of the labour migrant, but simultaneously enjoyed the advantages of often being stationed close to their homes, and of the occasional favour of the state. Ultimately, the tensions inherent in the dual roles of symbol of Malawian heroism and tool of colonial oppression were dissipated by the nationalist regime's cooption of the KAR's heritage.



## Conclusion

Given their prominence as a military reserve for Africa, and subsequently for the Empire, Malawian soldiers could be regarded as the premier martial group in colonial East Africa. This prominence arose through a combination of the pressure placed upon the British and Indian armies by Imperial commitments in the late nineteenth century, and the early completion of the process of conquest in Nyasaland, which saw 2 CAR established as a notable exception to the exclusion of African soldiers from an overtly Imperial role. Whilst this experiment failed, the existence of a battalion of Malawian soldiers who were not required for the maintenance of the colonial state within Nyasaland was a crucial factor in their establishment as a military reserve for East Africa. As such, Malawian soldiers had a unique role amongst the colonial armed forces, but as a prominent body of colonial soldiers they also provide a useful paradigm of colonial military service in Africa.

Malawian soldiers often engaged in the army for unusually long periods of service – in the mid-1930s the average period of engagement was ten years – and frequently continued to work within the military environment as servants, messengers or other auxiliaries following their discharge or even between periods of enlistment. This long service was probably derived from the high proportion of soldiers recruited from the area around the Zomba depot, which allowed many soldiers to remain in contact with their home communities without disrupting their employment, since in peacetime they could expect to spend up to half of their service stationed in Zomba. This stood in contrast to Malawian labour migration to the

south, which often saw Malawians divorced from Nyasaland as '*Machona*'. This concentration of enlistment in the south was also enhanced by colonial recruitment policies, which up to the 1930s continued to focus northern recruitment upon the Tonga, despite the increasing engagement of Tongas in the economy of labour migration, and the relatively small size of the Tonga population. The concentration of enlistment amongst southern Malawians demonstrates a radically different pattern from other long-service groups within the KAR, whose long service derived from their complete alienation from their place of origin.

The unusually long periods of engagement undertaken by Malawian soldiers meant that military service was not a transitory experience, but for many peacetime soldiers represented the greater part of their adult lives. Soldiers engaged in the army principally for the material reasons which motivated enlistment throughout East Africa, but these motivations were underpinned by the prestige enjoyed by soldiers in colonial society. However, once in the army, it could be argued that because of their long careers, many Malawian soldiers were more likely to become completely assimilated into military culture. However, what this process meant for Malawians is by no means straightforward. Whilst the draconian nature of disciplinary methods in the colonial army, including flogging, should not be underestimated, the reaction of Malawians to much of the array of disciplinary techniques employed was surprising. Close order drill, regarded as one of the most onerous features of military life in the metropolitan forces, was sometimes valued by Malawians, particularly because of its association with the popular and increasingly culturally important *Malipenga*, *Beni* and *Mganda* dances which grew up after the First World War. Whilst soldiers who



enlisted during the First World War felt cheated by the use of colourful uniforms, military music and ceremonial in recruiting campaigns, Malawians who joined the army in peacetime could expect to experience such attractions in the army. Thus, whilst the army sought to co-opt indigenous culture through their emphasis on tribal identities and upon 'traditional' activities such as *ngoma*, Malawian soldiers simultaneously ascribed new meanings to aspects of military culture.

The 'Malawianisation' of internal military culture fed into a broader process of the acceptance of the idea of the modern soldier in colonial society. The indigenisation of the army was problematic in the colonial state, since the military had played the central role in the violent imposition of colonial rule, and remained its ultimate guarantor. Moreover, it is important to recognise that, whilst Malawian soldiers showed little enthusiasm for warfare in itself, their monopoly of violence was sometimes valued by soldiers for the power and prestige which it implied in wider colonial society. As such, Malawian civilians often justifiably feared the presence of soldiers. However, Malawian soldiers also remained an integral part of their own home communities, and the concentration of recruitment in the area around the KAR's Zomba depot meant that Malawian soldiers were not overwhelmingly isolated from those communities. In this respect Malawian soldiers were in a different position from many African colonial soldiers who were separated from their agrarian origins.

Timothy Parsons' sensitive study of colonial soldiers in East Africa is underlain by a fundamental reluctance to engage with the idea that colonial soldiers harboured any real enthusiasm for their role. His observation that 'Many East African veterans admit to volunteering for the colonial military'<sup>1</sup> realistically reflects the concerns of the 1990s, but betrays an ahistorical need to justify an action which may have seemed politically unproblematic in the 1930s. As a corollary of this approach, Parsons works steadily towards an account of military service which is dependent upon privileging dissent and resistance as defining features. In seeking to highlight the ways in which Malawians soldiers were successfully co-opted by the army, and the ways in which they were able to adapt military culture themselves, this work is not intended to diminish the importance of protest and resistance as signifiers of tensions within military society. Rather, dissent amongst Malawian soldiers was most often a reflection of a belief that a 'contract' between the Government and the soldier had not been fulfilled, or a reflection of a desire for fuller inclusion in the military system, rather than a rejection of the military authorities. Later, political agitation in the 1960s was largely focused upon the Federation, or by extension upon Rhodesian officers, rather than upon the white authorities as a whole, and it is notable that the mutinies which occurred in Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda after independence were not repeated in Malawi.<sup>2</sup> In this regard this work seeks to strike a balance which is closer to the perspective of Omissi, who acknowledges the importance of dissent in the Indian Army, but also emphasises the stability of the Indian Army between 1857 and independence.

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<sup>1</sup> Parsons, *The African Rank and File*, p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> See Tanzania People's Defence Forces, *Tanganyika Rifles Mutiny: January 1964* (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 1993).



The colonial army was ultimately an alien institution, initiated by the Imperial authorities to maintain Imperial interests. As such, Malawian soldiers could be viewed as collaborators. However, there is little to suggest that Malawian soldiers viewed themselves in this light for most of the colonial period; indeed, in some ways military service provided a unique forum in which Malawian identity could be constituted. The shift from tribal identities towards a broader 'Nyasa' identity, which was particularly apparent during the Second World War, emphasised the territorial bond between Malawian soldiers. This trend was enhanced by the use of Chinyanja as an official language by Malawian soldiers, which may also have made this effect stronger for them than for other East African soldiers, who were more likely to serve in mixed units. Whilst Malawian labour migrants in the south also experienced this phenomenon, it must have been enhanced by the grouping together of soldiers in separate units bearing the 'Nyasaland' title.

Finally, to an extent, the increasing emphasis upon 'Nyasa' identity also implied the transference of the specific martial reputations of identities such as the Yao, Tonga and Ngoni onto Malawian soldiers as a whole. This reputation, combined with the very real role performed by Malawian soldiers allowed military service to become a paradigm of broader Malawian capabilities and responsibility. This paradigm in turn was co-opted by the nationalist movement from the 1950s as a signifier of what Malawians had done for the Empire, and by implication of what the metropolitan authorities owed to Malawians in return. This process helped to indigenise the image of the army at a time when the crisis over the Federation might

have alienated it from Malawian society, so that by 1964 the army was largely regarded as a Malawian institution simply awaiting Malawian control.



## Appendix

### Interviews

The majority of interviews used in this study were conducted on the author's behalf by Lieutenant Andrew Peter Kaziputa. Lieutenant Kaziputa carried out the interviews with Malawian ex-soldiers living in the Zomba memorial home in October 2002, using questionnaires. The questions asked were as follows:

#### *Personal and Service details*

1. Soldier's Name
2. Soldier's number
3. Birthplace
4. Tribe
5. Dates of service in the army
6. Regiment or Corps
7. Places where the soldier served
8. Were any other members of his family in the army?

#### *Enlistment and training*

9. Why did he join the army?
10. Where did he do his training? What Happened during training?

#### *Military Life*

11. What did he like about life in the army?
12. What did he not like about life in the army?
13. What did he think about the European Officers and NCO's?

#### *Discipline*

14. What kinds of punishments does he remember being used in the army?
15. What did he think about the discipline and punishment in the army?

#### *Home life*

16. What did he think about the food and housing in the army?
17. What did he think about army pay and conditions?
18. Was he married when he was a soldier? If he was married, did his wife live with him in barracks?

#### *After service*

19. What did he do after he left the Army? Did being a soldier help him to get other work?

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