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## Empire, Race and War: Black Participation in British Military Efforts During the Twentieth Century

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

EMPIRE, RACE AND WAR: BLACK PARTICIPATION IN BRITISH  
MILITARY EFFORTS DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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To Joanne

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of how racial prejudices and stereotypes influenced Britain's utilization of Black military personnel from 1660 to 1997, with an emphasis on the twentieth century. In addition to the economic, strategic, and local causes of British imperialism, the idea of European, or "White," racial supremacy and Black inferiority helped to justify the empire to the government that ruled it, the bureaucrats who administered it, and the subjects, Black and White, who financed its exploration, military conquest, and economic exploitation. Throughout the empire, British authorities utilized Black colonial forces to augment the crown's military power and, logically, the same stereotypes and prejudices against Black peoples in general informed Britain's policies regarding Black military personnel in particular.

I. The Role of Black Colonial Troops

In India, Africa and the West Indies, British authorities found that "native" troops proved cost effective because they could better survive their own climate than

foreign-born and generally higher paid White troops. In 1920, the War Office listed the three purposes for which colonial forces existed:

- (i) For the protection of the area administered by local Government maintaining the Force, or certain vital portions of it, from external aggression.
- (ii) For the support of the Civil Power in the maintenance of law and order, including, in many cases, the protection of the White population from possible violence at the hands of the natives.
- (iii) Assistance in the defence of the Empire as a whole in time of war by providing units, either existing or produced by expansion.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to assisting Britain to control many lands and peoples, Black colonial troops significantly augmented British military strength in the major conflicts of the twentieth century. In the First World War, the empire raised the following numbers of troops (Table 1):

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<sup>1</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/621. "Local Defence Forces: Military Considerations regarding their Composition and Organization," 6 November 1920.

Table 1. Manpower Contributions to the Imperial War Effort.

		Raised	Dead
White Empire			
	United Kingdom	5,704,416	662,083
	Dominions	1,306,512	137,639
	White Totals	7,010,928	759,722
Black Empire			
	India	1,440,437	47,746
	Colonies	134,837	3,649
	Black Totals	1,575,274	51,395
	Imperial Totals	8,586,202	811,117

Source: Figures from Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920 (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1922), 756.

In the Second World War, the United Kingdom's armed forces grew to 4.6 million soldiers, sailors, and airmen and those of the Dominions 1.5 million. Meanwhile, India raised 2.5 million soldiers, probably the largest volunteer army in history.<sup>2</sup> The "Colonial Empire" proper, which included the African and West Indian colonies, contributed another half million soldiers (Table 2):

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<sup>2</sup>F.W. Perry, The Commonwealth armies: Manpower and organisation in two world wars (New York: Manchester University Press, 1988), 117.



Table 2. Colonial Forces in the Second World War.

Strengths as of :	1 September 1939	1 May 1945
East Africa	11,119	227,864
West Africa	8,412	145,862
Mediterranean	1,441	17,732
Middle East	1,742	27,052
Far East	15,227	26,228
Fiji and Western Pacific	681	11,912
Caribbean and Bermuda	4,162	9,921
Mauritius and Seychelles	263	4,943
St. Helena	0	266
Falklands Islands	255	194
<b>Colonial Empire Totals</b>	<b>43,302</b>	<b>471,974</b>

Source: P[ublic] R[ecord] O[ffice] CAB. 21/1689. E.E. Sabben-Clare, "The Colonial Military Forces in the Second World War," 1947.

A glance at the preceding figures reveals the numerical extent of Black involvement in Britain's military efforts, but the nature of that service reflected prevailing British attitudes concerning race. To summarize, in the Great War, Britain's Indian troops fought in Egypt and Mesopotamia against the Turks, in Salonika against the Bulgarians, but only briefly in France against the Germans. African colonial troops fought in the Cameroons and Tanganyika against German colonial troops, but not in Europe. In the Second World War, several Indian infantry divisions, with large British components, fought throughout the Middle East and Mediterranean theaters as well as in Burma against the

Japanese. Meanwhile, African combat troops fought in Ethiopia against the Italians and in Burma against the Japanese but were excluded from the European theater. In both world wars, a majority of the Indian, African and other colonial soldiers deployed outside their home colonies served as military laborers, or pioneers, behind the battle lines in the Middle East and South East Asia. In addition to serving in separate colonial military forces, individual Blacks have formed a small and usually unwelcome proportion of the British Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force. It is contended here that the British Empire's non-European manpower served in secondary or limited roles primarily as a consequence of British sentiment concerning race.

## II. Terms

The term "race" has varied in its meaning, from a single ethnic group, e.g., "the Irish race," to the peoples inhabiting an entire continent, that is, "the African race." The complex evolution of British scientific thought on race will not be retraced in detail here; "race" will refer to skin color and its cultural attributes within the context of common British perceptions. In British eyes, the many peoples of Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean certainly differed physically and culturally from each other, but they shared one crucial link: they were not "White," and, thus,

lacked the primary qualification needed for political autonomy. The all-encompassing term "Black" will identify non-White British citizens, subjects, and protected persons of Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean descent. This usage follows a trend among scholars and British community groups to denote a social category within the British historical experience<sup>3</sup>, and largely supplants the negative and cumbersome device, "Non-European," as well as the tedious and repetitive listing of the various ethnic groups comprising the population of the British Empire.

"European" and "White" will be used interchangeably because, in colonial settings, the recognition of variation in European nationalities gave way to the dichotomy between White and Black. "European" and "White" were used more often than "British" or "Briton" by British military and civilian officials to identify a person from the United Kingdom. The term "colonial troops" will refer to those military forces raised in Britain's overseas possessions and

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<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Laura Tabili "We Ask for British Justice: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain" (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994) and David Killingray, "All the King's men?" Blacks in the British Army in the First World War, 1914-1918," in Ranier Lotz and Ian Pegg, eds., Under the Imperial Carpet: Essays in Black History (Crawley: Rabbit Press, 1986); See also, Wellingborough District Racial Equality Council, "National Curriculum History: Possible Black History Themes," a recent pamphlet prepared for school teachers.

administered by local colonial authorities, including India.<sup>4</sup> "Regular," "imperial," and "the forces" will denote the permanent full-time armed forces (the British army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force) maintained by the United Kingdom for service at home and in any part of the empire. "Volunteer corps" or "the volunteers" will refer to a type of colonial military force which was often unregulated and consisted of amateur part-time soldiers.

### III. Historiography

Published works on the military experience of Black British subjects are numerous, but the most useful tend to fall within a few general categories, including memoirs, regimental histories, monographs, and polemics. The large number of published personal accounts provides much useful information on British attitudes toward Black troops and the inner workings of regimental life.<sup>5</sup> Unit histories mainly

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<sup>4</sup>For the sake of this dissertation, the Indian army will be considered one of Britain's Black colonial forces, although technically, India constituted an administratively separate entity within the imperial framework. The India Office ruled India while the Colonial Office ruled most of the rest of Britain's colonial empire.

<sup>5</sup>This sort of material is vast in the case of White British officers. For accounts by White officers in the African colonial forces, see W.D. Downes, With the Nigerians in East Africa, (London: John Murray, 1919) and Gerald Hanley, Monsoon Victory (London: Transworld Publishers, 1958). For an excellent account by an officer in the Indian army, see John Master, Bugles and a Tiger (New York: Viking Press, 1956. Unfortunately, published accounts by Black service personnel are relatively few. Among these are E.M.

focus on administrative matters and narratives of glorified events in the particular unit's past. However, because their authors are usually current or former members of the regiment,<sup>6</sup> they often prove as useful as personal accounts. There are numerous scholarly studies of the military institutions and war-time experiences of various individual colonial possessions.<sup>7</sup>

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Noble, Jamaica Airman: A Black Airman in Britain, 1943 and After (London: New Beacon Books, 1984) and Elvey Watson, The Carib regiment of World War II (New York: Vantage Press, 1964).

<sup>6</sup>R.A.R. Bent, Ten Thousand Men of Africa: The Story of the Bechuanaland Pioneers and Gunners, 1941-1946 (London: H.M.S.O., 1952); Brian Gray, Basuto Soldiers in Hitler's War (Maseru: Basutoland Government, 1953); A. Haywood and F.A.S. Clarke, The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1964); H. Moyse Bartlett, The King's African Rifles (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1956); E.H. Rhodes-Wood, A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-1945 (Aldershot: Gale & Polden Ltd, 1960). For general accounts of the Indian Army, see Byron Farwell, Armies of the Raj, From the Great Indian Mutiny to Independence: 1858-1947 (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989); Philip Mason, A Matter of Honour (New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1974); S.L. Menezes, Fidelity and Honour (New Delhi: Viking Press, 1993), and Charles Chenevix Trench, The Indian Army and the King's Enemies 1900-1947 (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988). For a scholarly study on administrative matters, see T.A. Heathcote, The military in British India: The development of British land forces in South Asia, 1600-1947 (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995). For an intriguing social history, see David Omissi, The Sepoy and the Raj: The Indian Army, 1860-1940 (London: The MacMillan Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup>Peter B. Clarke, West Africans at War, 1914-18, 1939-45: Colonial Propaganda and its Cultural Aftermath (London: Ethnographicca, 1986); G.O. Olusanya, The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953 (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1973); O.J.E. Shiroya, Kenya and World War II: African Soldiers in the European War (Nairobi:

#### IV. Contribution to Field

The subject of Black people's participation in British war efforts has received some attention. In a chapter of his 1979 dissertation on minority groups and military service around the world, Warren Lee Young took a comprehensive approach to the topic in his analysis of the political consequences of Black service in the British armed forces.<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, David Killingray published two groundbreaking survey articles on Blacks in the British army.<sup>9</sup> Also, there are several provocative works on the military participation and exploitation of Black people which provide valuable information.<sup>10</sup> What has been lacking

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Kenya Literature Bureau, 1985); N.J. Westcott, "The Impact of the Second World War on Tanganyika, 1939-1949." (Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1982).

<sup>8</sup>See chapter four of "Minority Groups and Military Service: Case Studies in World Perspective," Ph.D. diss., (University of Cambridge, 1979).

<sup>9</sup>Killingray, "All the King's Men," and "Race and Rank in the British army in the twentieth century." Ethnic and Racial Studies 10, 3 (July 1987): 276-90.

<sup>10</sup>The Caribbean at War: British West Indians in World War II. (London: The North Kensington Archive, 1992.); Marika Sherwood, Many Struggles: West Indian Workers and Service Personnel in Britain (1939-45) (London: Karia Press, 1984); and Ben Bousquet and Colin Douglas, West Indian Women at War (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991); and J. Lee Ready, Forgotten Allies: The Military Contribution of the Colonies, Exiled Governments, and Lesser Powers to the Allied Victory in World War II. 2 Vols. (London: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1985).

is a reverse approach to the politics of Black military service, a study tracing the impact of British conceptions of race on the utilization of Black service personnel.

In addition to practical, if not insurmountable, impediments such as deficiencies in shipping and supplies, the "racial mindset" of the British military and political establishments limited the use of Black colonial troops. Inculcated over many generations, racial stereotypes and prejudices against Black people informed British military policies but arguments in favor of utilizing Black colonial manpower challenged entrenched military prejudices. Hoping to strengthen the bonds of empire, the politically sensitive Colonial Office lobbied the services, especially the army, to provide opportunities for subject peoples to be "associated more closely" with British war efforts. In general, the military establishment's attitudes fluctuated between indifference to colonial politics and outright bigotry against Black people. This study of race's influence on military policy will complement an enormous body of historical literature dealing with the military experience of the British empire and commonwealth as well as colonialism and race relations.

#### V. Summary

In the balance of this chapter, I provide a background

sketch of the historical relationship of Britain and its Black subjects and colonial troops. Chapters two through four concern Black colonial troops, i.e., the military forces raised in the colonies and usually maintained by colonial governments for local service, from about 1850 through the present. The second chapter, "Racial Supremacy and Military Policy," traces how concerns about "White prestige" tempered British trust in Black colonial troops. Valuable as Black colonial troops might have been, British reliance upon them to maintain European rule actually threatened that rule. Chapter three, "The Perceived Utility of Black Colonial Troops," examines the practical arguments offered by contemporaries to limit the usefulness of Black troops in the imperial order of battle, including a chronic lack of White officers, low British estimates of the fighting abilities of colonial troops and the fear that Blacks could not withstand the European climate. All of these "pragmatic" factors directly related to British perceptions of "race." Chapter four focuses on the West Indian contribution to the imperial orders of battle, especially in the Second World War. Black West Indians, culturally and genetically among the most "British" of Britain's non-European subjects, ironically endured the widespread disdain of British military authorities precisely



because they were supposedly "too" White in manners and blood.

Chapters five through seven address the service of Black individuals in the United Kingdom-based armed forces because, while the policies affecting the conditions of service of colonial troops differed considerably from those of the United Kingdom forces, the stereotypes affecting the former have frequently impeded the service of the latter. Chapter Five discusses the considerable role played by Britain's Black soldiers and sailors during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Georgian-era armed forces highly prized the service of Blacks, but usually as ornately attired musicians or laborers. In contrast, the Victorian era witnessed a general hardening of racial attitudes throughout British society, which the army and navy expressed via the imposition of color bars to Black enlistment and commissioning. In chapter six, the policies of the British government during and after the First World War are analyzed, in part to test how the intensification and lessening of colonial political pressures could alter the military policies of the metropolis. Many Black Britons and colonial subjects succeeded in enlisting in the forces throughout the war and the War Office suspended the color bar in 1918. The inter-war years saw the forces reinstate

their color bars although they were challenged by individuals, student organizations and politicians, but the military establishment clung on to this. In Chapter seven, the color bar's second suspension in 1939 and its consequences are traced. In the Second World War, Britain conscripted and accepted at least ten thousand Black British and colonial volunteers. Many Black personnel received commissions and decorations for their efforts but others suffered from discriminatory policies. Chapter eight will recount how service professionals, especially within the army and navy, strove to return to pre-war restrictions. Overruling the services, the Cabinet decided that, for the good of imperial and commonwealth relations, the color bar could not be renewed. Nevertheless, the forces have never been completely reconciled to being multi-racial in composition.

#### VI. Britain and Black People

While Britain's relationship with Black people dates back many centuries, the historical experience of Black people in Britain has received considerable scholarly attention only recently.<sup>11</sup> Around A.D. 200, long before the

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<sup>11</sup>Peter Fryer, Staying Power (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Gretchen Gerzina, Black London: Life before Emancipation (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995); Jagdish S. Gundara and Ian Duffield, eds., Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain (Aldershot: Avebury, 1992);

British conquered vast tracts of African lands and peoples in the nineteenth-century, the Romans had sent a unit of African soldiers to Britain. They received their discharges and settled there, thereby contributing to the "Romanization" of the country. In the Middle Ages, Africans captured by Vikings frequently participated in their masters' raids on the British isles, particularly Ireland. By the late fifteenth century, African entertainers became common features of English and Scottish royal courts.<sup>12</sup>

The Black presence in Britain has been continuous since the mid-1500s when John Hawkins brought a group of three hundred African slaves to Britain. During England's conflicts with Spain in the late sixteenth century, many Africans were captured from the enemy and brought to Britain. Enough Africans lived in Britain by 1596 to alarm the crown about the Black threat to the purity of English blood. In 1596, despite the fact that she herself had added an African entertainer and page to her court, Queen

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David Killingray, ed., Africans in Britain (London: Frank Cass, 1994); Folarin Shyllon, Black People in Britain, 1555-1833 (London: Oxford University Press, 1977); Rozina Visram, Ayahs, Lascars and Princes: Indians in Britain, 1700-1947 (London: Pluto Press, 1986); James Walvin, Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup>Paul Edwards, "The Early African Presence in the British Isles," in Gundara and Duffield, 9-29.

Elizabeth I called for the expulsion of Africans from England, thus issuing the first known racially discriminatory law in British history.

Nevertheless, the ownership of African servants became fashionable in England among the wealthy and powerful, and within the monarchy itself. Elizabeth's successor, James I, had Black minstrels, and his wife, Black servants. In the 1650s, the conquest of Spanish Jamaica facilitated the acquisition of African slaves. Britain's Black population grew to such an extent that, in 1731, the City of London banned Blacks from apprenticeships in trades.<sup>13</sup>

Alarm at the Black presence aside, Georgian society flirted with various clothing and decorating styles related to Black people and their cultures.<sup>14</sup> For example, the employment or ownership of Indian servants became widespread largely because of "nabobs" who returned to Britain after acquiring fortunes in the service of the East India Company. Once home, they often attempted to recreate the luxuriousness of their Indian existences by constructing Indian-style houses and importing Indian servants to staff them.<sup>15</sup> Other "Black"-inspired customs among Britons

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<sup>13</sup>Gerzina, 4; Shyllon, 93, 84-5.

<sup>14</sup>V.G. Kiernan, The Lords of Human Kind (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 19-22.

<sup>15</sup>Visram, 11-13.

included the imitation of Africans for social gatherings and entertainment. Also, African images became features in the crests of prominent families, whether or not they had actually been involved with slavery.<sup>16</sup>

The institution of slavery continued in the British Isles well after the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. In the celebrated Somerset Case of 1772, a British chief justice, Lord Mansfield, had ruled that an escaped slave could not be forced to leave Britain by a master. This decision did not, in itself, end slavery in the British isles, but a Scottish court in 1778 decreed that slavery was illegal in Scotland. In England itself, slavery remained legal for a further six decades.<sup>17</sup>

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Blacks continued to arrive in Britain, typically as seamen or increasingly as students.<sup>18</sup> Numerically, merchant sailors formed the largest group of Black

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<sup>16</sup>Gerzina, 5-6.

<sup>17</sup>Shyllon, 24-8.

<sup>18</sup>On African students, see Ray Jenkins, "Gold Coasters Overseas, 1880-1919," Immigrants and Minorities 4 (November 1985): 5-52; Hakim Adi, "West African Students in Britain, 1900-60," and John D. Hargreaves, "African Students in Britain: The Case of Aberdeen University," in David Killingray, ed., Africans in Britain (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass, 1994), 129-44.

individuals who settled in Britain. Indian sailors, "lascars," crewed many of the vessels travelling between India and Britain while Africans and West Indians joined the crews of ships carrying transatlantic trade. Between voyages, Black seamen congregated in the major ports of Britain, especially Liverpool and Cardiff and many married local women. Until the large-scale immigration of the post-1945 period, the visible Black population numbered between ten to twenty thousand. As individual Blacks settled in Britain, they and their usually mixed-descent progeny intermarried with the general population and eventually disappeared as a visibly distinct presence. However, the arrival of individual Blacks continually renewed Britain's Black population.

## VII. Racial images

An important focus of the historical scholarship on Black people in the British empire has been the issue of "race" or "race relations."<sup>19</sup> In addition to encountering

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<sup>19</sup>For examples, see Christine Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971); Philip D. Curtin, The Image of Africa (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); Allen J. Greenberger, The British Image of India (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); Ronald Hyam, Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990); Winthrop D. Jordan, The White Man's Burden (London: Oxford University Press, 1974); Douglas Lorimer, Colour, Class and the Victorians (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978); and J.A. Mangan, ed., The Imperial Curriculum: Racial images and education in the British colonial experience (London:

Black individuals in Britain, British people observed thousands of Africans in African and American settings via trade, war and slavery. The physical and cultural differences between the themselves and Africans profoundly affected the perspectives of many Britons.<sup>20</sup> In historian Winthrop D. Jordan's words,

From the first, Englishmen tended to set Africans over against themselves, to stress what they conceived to be radically contrasting qualities of color, religion, and style of life, as well as animality and a peculiarly potent sexuality.<sup>21</sup>

By the eighteenth-century, British racial theorists accepted that African physical attributes were connected to the "African way of life."<sup>22</sup> Thus, in the English world view, "White and Black connoted purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, beneficence and evil, God and the Devil."<sup>23</sup>

The association of racial characteristics with behavior coincided with a demand for cheap labor in the New World. Economic interests induced pro-slavery propagandists to justify African slavery on the grounds that Africans were

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Routledge, 1993).

<sup>20</sup>Gerzina, 5.

<sup>21</sup>Jordan, 25.

<sup>22</sup>Curtin, 30.

<sup>23</sup>Jordan, 6.

inherently inferior to Whites and destined for servitude. These sorts of writers propagated the view that Africans were lazy, sexually aggressive, stupid, and incapable of improvement.

Ironically, the racial prejudice developing among the British in the Georgian era did not translate into segregation or physical danger for Black people in Britain. Historian Douglas Lorimer suggests that, in Georgian Britain, Black peoples, including African slaves, suffered little discrimination or bigotry when it came to inter-racial marriage or to social relations with Whites as a whole. Indeed, Lorimer claims that "no clear pattern of institutionalized or socially sanctioned discrimination was in evidence." Instead, Britons of the period reserved their violent xenophobia for Roman Catholics.<sup>24</sup>

In the late nineteenth century, however, British racism developed into a widely-held antipathy for Black people. Metropolitan attitudes towards Blacks had changed during the Victorian era because of transitions in British social structures. According to Lorimer, as the middle-class expanded and became more highly class-conscious, Blacks, including educated "gentlemen," in Britain became equated with the inferior social status of the working class and

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<sup>24</sup>Lorimer, 28-31.



impoverished Whites. Middle-class Victorians disdained Blacks and lower class Whites in British cities "equally." To summarize, according to Lorimer, "mid-Victorian attitudes to race rested upon assumptions about differences of class rather than upon a perception of the unique physical attributes of racial groups."<sup>25</sup>

Late Victorian racial thought rejected previous philanthropic sentimentality concerning Africans and Asians. Informed by Social Darwinism and other new sciences, British scholars argued forcefully for the biological inability of non-Europeans to improve. Concurrently, philanthropic opinion had been disillusioned by the apparent failure of Caribbean and Indian peoples to improve their societies along English lines after extensive reforms. Instead of adopting English ways, the subject peoples retained their previous norms and, on occasion, violently rejected colonial control.<sup>26</sup> From the British perspective, this demonstrated inherent flaws in Black peoples as well as any other group that failed to adhere to British, particularly, southeastern English standards.

In the Victorian worldview, physical attributes and cultural achievements divided the races of the world into a

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 92-107.

<sup>26</sup>Walvin, 330-2.

hierarchy with Anglo-Saxons and other Germanic peoples at the top. Although the British regarded all Black peoples as "children," Asians were ranked higher than Africans in cultural achievement. In particular, the British placed in the front rank of non-Europeans the "Aryan" peoples of northern India because they most closely resembled the British conception of physical beauty.<sup>27</sup> In comparison, Britons commonly believed that Africans had physical but not mental strength and tended toward a greater degree of "savageness"[sic].<sup>28</sup> African peoples, according to this line of thought, possessed no history, sophisticated political institutions, or ambition to exploit their continent. The contempt felt for Africans could often take incredible forms as when, in 1873, the Times discussed a suggestion to settle "industrious" Chinese in Africa in order to displace the native Africans. The organ claimed that, though it acknowledged the African's inferiority to the Chinaman "as a specimen of humanity," it was not certain whether or not the world was "prepared for the substitution of one race for the other after the fashion proposed."<sup>29</sup>

Historian and journalist Peter Fryer has usefully divided late Victorian racism into eight forms of

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<sup>27</sup>Bolt, 186-7.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 208-10.

expression. As "phrenology," racism informed British rulers that, because of physical characteristics, such as the shape of their skulls, Black people lacked "force of character." As "teleology," racism provided the British with the idea that the destiny of Blacks was to labor for Whites. Anthropological racism held that Black people had more in common with apes than with Europeans. Social Darwinism told Britons that the inherent inferiority of Blacks condemned them to eventual extinction. In the form of Anglo-Saxon nationalism, racism reflected a belief in a divinely ordained mission for Britain to conquer and rule others. Racism also took the form of trusteeship, or the view that Britain had the moral obligation to educate and guide Black peoples, usually for an indefinite period of time. Finally, popular racism, expressed through popular entertainment and jingoistic newspapers, persuaded the British public that British rule benefited colonial peoples. All of these variations of racism served a common political purpose in that they justified British colonial rule over Black peoples.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Times (London), 5 June 1873.

<sup>30</sup>Peter Fryer, Black People in the British Empire (London: Pluto, 1988), 66-67.

## VIII. Racial Conflict in the Twentieth Century

Victorian racial paradigms remained firmly entrenched in the British mindset well into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the Black population of Britain grew because of the service of colonial Blacks in the armed forces and merchant marine. After the First World War, thousands remained in British ports rather than return to their home colonies. However, the poor economic conditions and job prospects for all returning veterans, Black and White, created social stresses throughout Britain. These tensions exploded in 1919 with anti-Black riots in several cities including Liverpool and Cardiff. Often, the local civil authorities proved unable or unwilling to prevent the violence. The 1919 riots marked the onset of a turbulent phase in the experience of Black people in Britain.

Between 1920 and the Second World War, racism mainly took the form of discrimination. For example, in a pre-war survey of individuals, families, and guest houses providing housing for students, about 40 percent "expressed specific unwillingness to take a coloured guest."<sup>31</sup> Since the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of Black people have settled in Britain to escape the poverty or violence of

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<sup>31</sup>K.L. Little, "A Note on Colour Prejudice amongst the English 'Middle Class,'" Man (September-October 1943): 105.

their previous homes. Eventually, the Black presence grew to approximately 5 percent of the British population and concentrated mainly in the larger cities. Paralleling trends in the United States, racial strife became a prominent feature of British national life.

## CHAPTER II

### RACIAL SUPREMACY AND MILITARY POLICY

Virtually wherever the British established a presence in an area inhabited by Black peoples, especially tropical regions, they raised Black troops. The main regions "requiring" the employment of Black colonial units included India, Africa and the West Indies. Inevitably, "racial" considerations became limiting factors in Britain's utilization of Black colonial soldiers. First, British reliance upon Black troops to police the empire raised questions as to just which Black ethnic groups should be tapped for military service. Out of this dilemma arose one of the central racial myths affecting the utilization of colonial soldiers, the "martial races" theory, which held that only certain ethnic groups in Africa and Asia provided good soldiers. Secondly, the British never completely trusted the Black troops they did select for recruitment. The authorities realized that Black troops could and did occasionally mutiny and, within a given colonial possession, White military forces of some kind were always deemed necessary just in case the loyalty and discipline of Black soldiers wavered. Therefore, the extensive use of Black

colonial troops actually reinforced the necessity of maintaining White units throughout the empire. Because regular army regiments and sailors were scarce, the participation of European colonial subjects in military units, particularly amateur volunteer corps, became a necessary support for colonial rule. Logically, the British could only extend the privilege of serving in volunteer units to those peoples thought to be loyal and loyalty became enmeshed in racial politics. A third racial consideration was that the employment of Black troops potentially challenged the "great bluff" of colonial rule, "White Supremacy." After all, colonial troops might have been called upon to kill European enemies or, worse still, travel to Europe where they would have close contact with White civilians, especially women, of all levels of society. Colonial interests feared that Black familiarity with Whites, in the form of mortal or amorous embrace, would lessen European prestige in the eyes of Black servicemen. Also, the diverse nature of the British Empire and commonwealth caused troops of various nationalities to serve alongside each other but the possibility of racial friction between soldiers from different backgrounds threatened the internal harmony of the empire and complicated Britain's war efforts.

## I. Colonial Forces, Race and "Martial Races," 1857-1947

### A. Asia

The first colonial military force to be considered in this chapter, the Indian army, was by far the largest maintained by Britain. The body of literature, scholarly and otherwise, relating to the Indian army is vast because of the force's size and long length of service within the imperial order of battle. From 1600 to 1857, the East India Company functioned as the main agent for Britain in India. For the first century of its presence in India, the company focused its energies on securing trade, and its military forces remained small until the mid-eighteenth century, when the struggles between Britain and France made India a hotly contested prize. The Battle of Plessey in 1757 decided the rivalry in favor of the company, which received the right to tax, or plunder, much of Bengal. The company then possessed its own economic resources with which to expand its authority and assume a direct political role in India. By 1857, the company had either eliminated or neutralized most of its political opponents in the subcontinent. Its military forces were organized into armies based in Bombay, Madras, and Bengal and consisted of native Indian and a small portion of European mercenary units. Regular British army regiments supplemented company forces, but Indian



troops always significantly outnumbered White soldiers by several times.

In its imperial role, the Indian army functioned as a reserve and "fire-brigade" for British interests in the entire part of the globe considered by Britain to be the "East." For example, under company control, Indian troops campaigned in the Dutch East Indies in the early 1800s. Later, under direct crown control, the Indian army fought in Abyssinia in 1867, garrisoned Malta in 1878, and, toward the close of the century, provided contingents for service in East Africa and China.

Just before the First World War, the Indian forces fielded 241,934 soldiers.<sup>1</sup> The army of the "King-Emperor" in 1914 looked much different from the East India Company's forces in the years before the Indian Mutiny of 1857. In that year, much of the company's largest military force, the Bengal army, mutinied against its British officers. The soldiers, a high proportion of whom were high caste Hindus, had been suborned by fears that Christianity would be forced upon them. After the mutiny's suppression, the British government assumed direct rule of India. Over the next half century, the new administration transformed the composition of the military by drastically reducing the recruitment of

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<sup>1</sup>Perry, 85.

darker-skinned southerners, including high-caste Bengali Hindus, while increasing that of "martial races," i.e., Moslems, Sikhs and Gurkhas of the north and northwest. The "martial races" theory held that some ethnic groups and castes possessed characteristics such as simplicity, fidelity, courage and a warrior tradition which others, such as the previously favored Bengali Brahmins, apparently lacked.<sup>2</sup>

British military authorities attributed to each of the "martial races" certain unique qualities. For example, according to a government handbook on Sikh soldiers, the Sikh's "natural profession" was that of a soldier: "offer him but good pay, and there is no service, however difficult or dangerous, for which he will not gladly come forward."<sup>3</sup> Freddie Guest, who served as an officer with a typical mixed cavalry regiment, rated the main types of cavalry trooper within his unit. He ranked Hindu Rajputs as the "first and highest type of fighting soldier amongst the Hindus" while "the Punjabi is probably the best type of fighting Mahomedan in India."<sup>4</sup> Following the dictum of "divide and

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<sup>2</sup>See Pradeep Barua, "Inventing race: The British and India's martial races," Historian 58, 1, (Autumn 1995): 107-117.

<sup>3</sup>A.H. Bingley, Sikhs (Simla: Government Central Printing Office, 1899), 93.

<sup>4</sup>Freddie Guest, Indian Cavalryman (London: Jarrolds,

rule," or, in this case, "counterpoise," most Indian army battalions, excluding the trusted Gurkhas, contained "mixed-class" companies and platoons drawn from different ethnic or religious groups.<sup>5</sup> In 1920, a high-ranking Indian army officer optimistically noted that, "the different races have their own characteristics; by mixing them you get a combination of elan, stubbornness, and endurance."<sup>6</sup> More realistically, by means of "counterpoise," the authorities in India intended to forestall any united dissent among members of any particular battalion. Unfortunately, this pitting of ethnic groups against one another resulted in difficulties in the provision of supplies and replacements during long periods of combat.

## B. Africa

In the early 1800s, Britain's military presence in Africa remained limited, and usually consisted of small penal formations or allied African levies. For example, Britain established the Royal African Corps in 1800 to garrison Goree, just off the West Coast of Africa. Soon,

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1959), 88.

<sup>5</sup>Mark Houston Jacobsen, "The Modernization of the Indian Army, 1925-1939," (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Irvine, 1979), 211.

<sup>6</sup>James Willcocks, With the Indians in France (London: Constable and Company, 1920), 58.

the regiment began to recruit Africans because European soldiers, mostly military criminals, could not survive the diseases associated with the climate; after 1817, it recruited only Africans.<sup>7</sup> Until the late 1800s, White British officers raised temporary levies of soldiers from African allies to supplement their regular forces. These units received few, if any, modern arms and little western military training but fought in most, if not all, campaigns against the Ashanti in West Africa as well as in the numerous campaigns in southern Africa against the so-called "Kaffirs" and Zulus.

British expansion in western and eastern Africa necessitated the establishment of numerous small regular units including the Sierra Leone Frontier Force, the Royal Niger Haussas, Gold Coast Haussas, and the Uganda Rifles. Local colonial authorities controlled most of the African colonial units but the War Office maintained a few of its own for specifically "imperial" duties such as the garrisoning of Mauritius and the naval base at Freetown. By the early 1900s, British authorities had replaced these smaller formations with larger military units: the West African Frontier Force (W.A.F.F.; later "R[oyal]. W.A.F.F.")

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<sup>7</sup>J.J. Crooks, "The Royal African Corps, 1800-1821," United Services Magazine 15 (1917): 213-221.

in West Africa and the King's African Rifles (K.A.R.) in East Africa, each of which contained several regiments or battalions. Following the Indian example, the British applied the martial races theory to their growing African military forces. To fill the ranks of the West African battalions, for example, British recruiters preferred Muslim and "pagan" northerners over coastal, more sophisticated peoples such as the Ashanti and Sierra Leone creoles.<sup>8</sup>

### C. Limitations of the "Martial Races" Theory

The "martial races" theory had no genuine scientific merits, but it met British military requirements. In India, for instance, the British felt that high-caste Hindu Bengalis, a favored group before the 1857 Mutiny, could no longer be trusted. British recruiters then looked to Gurkhas and lighter-skinned Muslims and Sikhs of the north and the northwest. These peoples appeared to possess the hardiness, fidelity, and "simplicity" found lacking in their southern counterparts. Thus, the "martial races" theory reflected immediate political and military necessity. In the long-term, adherence to the paradigm actually created problems for colonial authorities.

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<sup>8</sup>S.C. Ukpabi, "Recruiting for the British Colonial Forces in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century," Odu 10 (July 1974): 79-96 and J. Bayo Adekunle, "Ethnicity and army recruitment in colonial plural societies," Ethnic and Racial Studies 2 (April 1979): 153-8.

By its nature, the "martial races" theory limited the pool of potential Black colonial troops available to Britain. In particular, manpower availability became a serious question during the world wars because the military establishments in both Asia and Africa initially sought to recruit exclusively from minority martial races and not from the general populations. In practice, the "martial races" theory strained the traditional manpower sources of the empire while others remained untouched.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Malaya, adherence to the "martial races" theory contributed to the British defeat at Singapore in 1942 because it had prevented the British rulers from forming regular military units from Malays. Throughout the Victorian era, Malays had been judged as "effeminate," inherently incapable to resist conquest, and far from the physical model of White manliness. During the early twentieth century, influential Malays pressed for a permanent military unit until the British relented in 1933 and created the one-battalion Malay Regiment.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, the regiment remained an

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<sup>9</sup>In addition to regimental histories, see Aubrey O'Brien, "The Inexpansiveness of the Indian army," United Service Magazine ns 54 (February 1917): 376-82; and Rita Headrick, "African Soldiers in World War II," Armed Forces and Society 4 (May 1978): 504-7.

<sup>10</sup>See Nadzam Haron, "The Malay Regiment, 1933-1955: Political and Social Study of a Colonial Military Establishment in Malaya," Ph.D. diss. (University of Essex, 1987), 64-106; and M.C. Sheppard, "The Malay Soldier."

"experiment" and the British formed a second battalion of the regiment only in December 1941, too late to significantly affect the outcome of the Malayan Campaign.<sup>11</sup>

Another problem of the "martial races" paradigm was that, in addition to shunning "effeminate" Black peoples, it discounted the literate, mostly urban recruits required for the efficient functioning of modern armies. The rustic "martial" peoples of the hinterlands of the empire provided Britain with brave and capable soldiers for colonial policing, but, for modern attritional warfare, colonial infantry and cavalry required the support of massive numbers of technologically sophisticated soldiers who would serve in skilled occupations such as lorry drivers, mechanics, electricians, wireless operators, and artillery gunners. Unfortunately for British traditionalists, most educated subjects could be found only among "non-martial" groups, specifically those with a significant degree of Westernization. The British generally held low opinions of western-educated Africans and Asians on the one hand and mixed-descent Eurasians and Black West Indians on the other. In the age of Social Darwinism, these types seemed to be

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Straits Times Annual, (1939): 31.

<sup>11</sup>Donald H. Webber, Letter to Wife, 1945 (?), Webber Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

"artificial" constructs and weak imitators of European culture. In British eyes, mixed-race and "mixed-culture" individuals possessed too much of a non-European background, even if that of a "martial race," to be redeemed by the supposed superior attributes of White civilization.<sup>12</sup>

The case of the Eurasian community in India epitomized a persistent difficulty facing British colonial rule, the conflict between existing racial paradigms and military security. India's Eurasians formed one the most prominent groups of "westernized" Black peoples in the empire whom the British denied a regular military role. Eurasians, descendants of inter-marriage and liaisons between Europeans, often soldiers, and Indian women, usually identified themselves with the local European community. In turn, Whites of Britain's middle and upper-classes in India usually disdained the association. Hoping to benefit economically and socially, Eurasians desired greater opportunities for service in the British military, but their possession of "Asiatic" blood made their martial qualities suspect.<sup>13</sup> Even White proponents of greater Eurasian

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<sup>12</sup>Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995) and William Moore, "Recruiting the Anglo-Indian Army," Imperial and Asiatic Quarterly Review 2 (1891): 48.

<sup>13</sup>F. Loraine Petre, "The Inefficiency of India's Volunteers: An Indictment and a Remedy," Empire Review 5



military participation acknowledged biologically-determined weaknesses in Eurasians. For example, the Anglo-Indian Allen's Indian Mail, argued that Eurasians "may, as a rule, be better at driving quills than wielding swords or rifles," but, "if hereditary instincts count for anything, some of them must possess a martial spirit and a taste for active pursuits."<sup>14</sup> Throughout the history of the Indian empire, Britain denied the Eurasian community a regular military function, but they, and other "non-martial" peoples did find a role in a peculiar sort of military unit, the amateur part-time "volunteer corps."

## II. Trust and Local Colonial Forces

At times, Britain's dependency upon Black troops jeopardized the internal security of the empire. Around the globe, few colonial governments expected that they could rely exclusively on locally raised Black troops to maintain internal security. In the Caribbean area, several mutinies by Black troops in the early 1800s had convinced British authorities to maintain European troops there in order to guard against insurrection. Similarly, after the 1857

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(May 1903): 385.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted in the Times (London), 12 August 1873, p. 6. See, also, Moore, 47-8. See also, Arthur N. Gordon, "Local regiments for India," Empire Review 27 (March 1914): 112-3.

Indian Mutiny, thousands of British troops remained to garrison India, even during world war emergencies. In addition to defending India from external assault, the British garrison watched Indian soldiers. Whenever possible, the authorities maintained a proportion of one White soldier for every two Indian soldiers. They usually assigned one British battalion with two or three Indian ones to a brigade, a pattern strictly adhered to until late in the Second World War.

Since regular army units were often unavailable in sufficient numbers, White colonial subjects looked to "volunteer corps" for their self-preservation. Briefly, the Victorian volunteer movement had originated in Britain with the formation of self-supporting, normally unpaid, part-time, and loosely regulated military units in 1859. Enrollment in a volunteer corps conferred military prestige on members without the social stigma attached to service in the regular army and militia.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>In Britain, large numbers of volunteer units formed during the invasion scares of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries. After the Napoleonic wars, the public's interest in military matters remained dormant until the Crimean War, 1854-56. Then, the physical and spiritual well-being of servicemen became objects of much concern for reform, and elements of British society expressed a desire for a closer association with the army and navy. They received their chance at military glory in 1859, during a war scare with France. Tens of thousands of eager middle class patriots spontaneously formed themselves into amateur "volunteer" regiments. Thus, they avoided

The growing enthusiasm for the military in Victorian Britain paralleled similar trends throughout the empire. However, "race," rather than social class, tended to be the main criterion for membership in a particular colonial volunteer unit. The three main purposes of a typical White volunteer unit, such as the Ceylon Planters Rifle Corps, included 1) defending the colony from external threats 2) assisting the civil authorities in maintaining law and order, and 3) training potential officers for other military forces.<sup>16</sup> Of course, other, if not all, British military forces shared the same general responsibilities. However, the second reason cited is of particular interest here because, in places where Black populations outnumbered Europeans, "assisting the civil authorities in maintaining law and order" meant safe-guarding European lives. As the Navy and Army Illustrated put it, a European man in India "always has hanging over his head the possibility of suddenly being called upon, not only to defend his own life,

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serving in the regular army and militia under aristocratic officers and alongside members of the lower socio-economic orders. See Hugh Cunningham, The Volunteer Force: A Social and Political History, 1859-1908 (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1975); and S.P. MacKenzie, The Home Guard (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

<sup>16</sup>G.L.L. Lushington, "Ceylon Planters Rifle Corps, 1900-1949," TMs, Imperial War Museum, London.

but that also of all those dependent upon him."<sup>17</sup> The Taranaki Rifle Corps in New Zealand claimed the distinction of being the first "British" volunteer unit to see combat, in 1859 against the Maoris.<sup>18</sup> The White settlers of southern Africa could easily dispute that claim because they had frequently formed themselves into volunteer units to fight various African foes since the beginning of European colonization.<sup>19</sup> Even in nominally independent China, the British community formed the Shanghai Volunteer Corps in 1853 in order to protect itself from the "natives."<sup>20</sup>

Volunteering may have seemed, from the European perspective, necessary for the security of White civilians and the maintenance of British influence, but it was not an exclusively White phenomenon. Non-European subjects

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<sup>17</sup>"The Volunteer Army in India--I," The Navy and Army Illustrated 14 (12 July 1902): 419.

<sup>18</sup>W.J. Penn, The Taranaki Rifle Volunteers (New Plymouth, New Zealand, 1909).

<sup>19</sup>F.K. Mitchell, "Sansom's Horse." Military History Journal 2, 6 (December 1973): 213-215. See, "My Volunteer Troop in Kafirland," Bentley's Miscellany 29 (1851): 355-360, for a humorous account of a mounted volunteer unit's misfortune.

<sup>20</sup>H.P.E. Pereira, "Shanghai Volunteer Corps," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 33 (1955): 139; A. McK. Annand, "The Tientsin Volunteer Corps in the Boxer Rising, 1900," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 36 (December 1958): 179-81; "A Report on the Tientsin Volunteer Corps in 1900," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 39 (June 1961): 66-70.

throughout the empire formed or enrolled in volunteer units in order to share in the prestige of military service and demonstrate loyalty, identity, and equality. White reactions to Black volunteering depended upon local political and military conditions. In Victoria, British Columbia, the local Black population raised the Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps in 1860, but White hostility caused it to be disbanded four years later.<sup>21</sup> In West Africa, where the European population was sparse until the twentieth century, volunteering began in 1863 when a small group of African volunteers accompanied a British military expedition against the Ashantis. In 1872, African subjects established the Gold Coast Rifles and the corps, which included African officers, received permission to become permanent in 1892. It had an initial authorized strength of one hundred, although it grew to a strength of four hundred within two years.<sup>22</sup> In the Far East, Europeans and Eurasians had

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<sup>21</sup>S.W. Jackson, "The Victoria Pioneer Rifle Corps," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 39 (March 1961): 41-3.

<sup>22</sup>Gold Coast Rifle Volunteers," The Volunteer Service Magazine 31 (December 1894): 313-318. After 1900, the sparse and scattered European population in the Gold Coast formed small volunteer units of their own, including the Railway Volunteers and Mines Volunteers, but the government did not generally regard them as combat-worthy because of their lack of training. Killingray, "The Military in the Gold Coast," Ph.D. diss. (Cambridge University, 1980), 63-64.

formed the Singapore Volunteer Rifle Corps in 1854 in response to riots among the Chinese population. Indifference by Whites led to its dissolution in 1887, but, in 1900, Europeans formed a new corps, followed soon by separate Chinese, Eurasian and Malay units. Until 1915, Malayan volunteer corps remained exclusively European, although local sultans and maharajahs financially supported them. Ironically, these Asian sponsors acted as honorary colonels of units in which they could not ordinarily enroll.<sup>23</sup>

Though British authorities in India denied Eurasians an opportunity for regular military service, the government allowed them to enroll in volunteer corps. The first "Indian" volunteer units had been formed in the eighteenth century by British merchants and bureaucrats. The much more extensive volunteer movement of the nineteenth century received its impetus from the 1857 Mutiny during which Europeans as well as Eurasians quickly established rifle and cavalry units throughout India. By 1900, the infantry component of the Indian volunteers had become a largely Eurasian body, with Europeans concentrating in the elite and

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<sup>23</sup>T.M. Winsley, A History of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, 1854-1937 (Singapore, 1937), 12-13; G.H. Kelling, "Untitled History of the Military forces of Malaya," n.d., TMs., Imperial War Museum, London.

expensive cavalry units.<sup>24</sup> Despite the practical usefulness of Eurasian volunteers, many Whites criticized the high proportion of them within the volunteers. For example, Major General Edwin Collen, Military Member of the Viceroy's Council, asserted in 1903 that "the volunteer force is intended, and rightly intended, to be a force composed of men of our own racial characteristics and creed..."<sup>25</sup> In regard to volunteering, however, Britain's precarious position in India negated anti-Eurasian sentiment.

By allowing Eurasian volunteers, the Indian government encouraged these mixed-descent subjects to look to Britain for identity and social position. On the other hand, the British denied Indian subjects, in particular, westernized professionals, the right to establish or enroll in volunteer corps out of fear of arming and training potential rebels. Indian participation in volunteering became a charged political issue in 1885 during a war scare with Russia. Indians, especially members of the western-educated urban classes, demanded that they be allowed to demonstrate their loyalty to the empire by sharing equally in its defense.

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<sup>24</sup>A.A. Mains, "The Auxiliary Force (India)," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 61, 247 (1983): 162-3; Madhvi Yasin, "The Volunteer Movement," The Quarterly Review of Historical Studies 24,4 (1985): 29-36.

<sup>25</sup>Edwin Collen, "The Volunteer Forces of India," Empire Review 5 (April 1903): 225.

The opponents of Indian volunteers cited the "effeminacy" and disloyalty of the western educated urban Indians (called "Babus" by the British) who wished to enroll. Ultimately, the government decided against the inclusion of Indians in the "Indian" volunteers.<sup>26</sup>

In the First World War, White colonial volunteer units mainly served as officer pools for regular colonial forces, while Black volunteers assisted local civil authorities in upholding British rule. In Britain itself, enthusiasm for military service had all but disappeared in the decade following the Great War. In contrast, the White populations in the colonies continued to be "militarized," though out of perceived necessity rather than glamour. White colonial subjects remained a key element of the effective external defense and internal security of overseas possessions. With the possible exception of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps Artillery, which contained both European and non-European members in the 1930s,<sup>27</sup> membership in local colonial forces normally depended upon one's descent. The War Office advised colonial governments to maintain:

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<sup>26</sup>See Sinha, 69-95.

<sup>27</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/4153. Minute by Haining, 28 May 1937.



- (i) A small 'Active' Force, composed of one or more of the following types of unit:
  - (a) Native units with White officers on a regular basis.
  - (b) Non-regular native units.
  - (c) Non-regular White units.
  
- (ii) A White 'Reserve' Force including all male Europeans not serving in the 'Active' Force and divided into two sections:
  - A. Composed of young men who with their qualifications are registered, and who, where possible, receive annual training
  - B. Including the remaining men of military age, and forming a 'National Guard' for use in great emergencies.<sup>28</sup>

Colonial responses varied but usually conformed generally to these stipulations. In the mid-1920s, the Gold Coast replaced its autonomous African and European volunteer units with a tightly regulated Local Defence Force (L.D.F.) for Europeans and an African Territorial Force with an exclusively White officer corps.<sup>29</sup> Going a step further, the government of Kenya required White settlers to enroll in the part-time Kenya Defence Force.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/621. "Local Defence Forces: Military Considerations regarding their Composition and Organization," 6 November 1920.

<sup>29</sup>Killingray, "The Military in the Gold Coast," 63-4.

<sup>30</sup>Peter Ernest Walters, Interview, n.d., transcript, Department of Sound Records, Imperial War Museum, London.

Not only did the racial nature of colonialism compel Whites to serve in local forces, racial politics also made it imperative that they serve at the front during imperial war efforts. In 1943, Black Mauritians mutinied in Madagascar, in part because no all-White Mauritian unit had been sent overseas.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, after the decision to send a West Indian contingent to fight Nazi Germany had been made, the military and political leaders in Bermuda judged it politically essential to send a separate detachment of White Bermudians, otherwise, officials on the spot feared, the whole White population will lose prestige with the coloured people after the war."<sup>32</sup>

The experience of colonial local defense forces reflected the political and racial complexities of defending the British empire. Because of "race," certain ethnic groups were regarded and treated very differently from others in regard to imperial defense. The British felt that some Black peoples could not be relied upon to provide effective soldiers. In contrast, all male White subjects in the colonies incurred a duty to serve, largely in order to

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<sup>31</sup>P.R.O. CAB. 21/1689. "The Contribution of Colonial Forces during the Second World War," 1947, 18.

<sup>32</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Extract from Letter from Brigadier H.D. Maconochie-O[fficer].C[ommanding]. T[roo]PS, Bermuda to Lt. Col. C.P. Dawnay, n.d.

keep the Black populations about them subjugated.

### III. Questions of White Prestige

#### A. Black Soldiers in European Conflicts

At the height of the British empire, political, meaning "racial," considerations inhibited Britain's willingness to rely on Black troops in conflicts between White powers and as guardians of British colonial rule. But this had not always been the case. During the American Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, and the War of 1812, Britain frequently employed Black troops against the White troops of France, Spain, and the United States in the Americas. From 1817 to 1819, Black West Indian troops garrisoned Gibraltar.<sup>33</sup>

Consistent with a deepening British antipathy toward Black peoples in the late nineteenth century, concern grew as to whether or not non-Europeans should be used to fight European foes at all. In 1878, British prime minister Benjamin Disraeli brought Indian troops to Malta as a demonstration of British strength and resolve in the face of a Russian threat. Many found this a dangerous precedent, such as the Spectator, which bluntly stated the risks for

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<sup>33</sup>Peter M. Voelz, Slave and Soldier: The military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas. (New York: Garland, 1993) is a comprehensive introduction to this topic. See also, Letter to the Editor by G.E. Boyle, The Times, 8 May 1878, for information on West Indian troops in Gibraltar.

"White prestige" if Indian troops were successfully employed against European enemies: "they would have learned the only lesson we do not want to impart,--that Sepoys can defeat White troops in the open field."<sup>34</sup> Doubts about utilizing non-European soldiers to kill White enemies with non-European soldiers increased in the years leading up to the Boer War.

British subjects around the globe viewed the conflict in South Africa as a crusade for the empire and British ideals. The White communities in India, Ceylon, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada sent thousands of soldiers to South Africa. Likewise, Black subjects wished to serve, but imperial, colonial and Boer authorities considered the open military employment of Africans and Asians against Whites in South Africa to be an atrocity and a direct threat to White rule. To no avail, "every officer and man" of the Jamaica Militia reportedly stepped forward for active service in South Africa.<sup>35</sup> The New Zealand government declined hundreds of Maori offers of service,<sup>36</sup> and even the Queen's own desire for the deployment of her beloved Indian cavalry

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<sup>34</sup>Quoted in they Madras Mail, 29 March 1878.

<sup>35</sup>"The Jamaica Militia," The Navy and Army Illustrated 4 (28 October 1899): 146.

<sup>36</sup>James Cowan, The Maoris in the Great War (Auckland: Whitcombe & Tombs Limited, 1926), 7.

to the war zone could not be fulfilled because the British government formally relegated non-Europeans in this "White Man's war" to support roles such as wagon drivers and stretcher bearers.<sup>37</sup>

In reality, the prohibition against Black involvement broke down immediately because of military necessity. For example, when besieged by Boers during the first months of the war, British-held towns called upon Africans and mixed-race "coloureds" to help in their defense. Both sides attached African scouts to their forces and on the British side, many of the sweeps of Boer civilians off the land were conducted with the assistance of African personnel. Also, in the course of the conflict, Boers frequently raided into the territories of their traditional African enemies, including the Zulus. Rather than intensifying the conflict by openly acknowledging or endorsing Black participation, each side in the conflict adhered to the charade that it waged a "White Man's war." Occasionally, however, one side would publicly accuse the other of engaging in the uncivilized practice of utilizing Blacks as soldiers against the other.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>See Cabinet discussions for February 1900, in P.R.O. CAB. 41/25/30-2.

<sup>38</sup>See Hulme T. Siwundhla, "White Ideologies and non-European participation in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902," Journal of Black Studies 15 (December 1984): 223-234 and

The war in South Africa highlighted Britain's military weaknesses around the globe, but most British government opinion still held that wars between European peoples should be as "civilized" as possible, meaning that Black participation ought to be limited to secondary roles. In 1901, Lieutenant-Colonel Altham prepared a paper for the War Office on the organization of colonial troops for imperial service. He noted that the war in South Africa had been "a valuable illustration of the necessity for organizing the defence of the Empire against far graver contingencies." However, Altham continued, the burden of fighting a European enemy would still "be borne by the White subjects of the King." The value of Black colonial troops was recognized, but only in regard to their local defense roles.<sup>39</sup> Along with Altham, most Britons would probably have agreed with the Spectator's explanation that, "our coloured auxiliaries are invaluable, but our sovereignty is built, like that of the Roman, on the White legionary."<sup>40</sup>

The prevailing wisdom that the use of Black troops in

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Peter Warwick, Black People and the South African War 1899-1902 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>39</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/8303. "The Organization of Colonial Troops for Imperial Service," December 1901.

<sup>40</sup>"Our Black Troops," The Spectator, 23 March 1901, 415.

"White Men's" wars constituted a violation of civilized warfare was illustrated in 1909, when the War Office rejected the idea of using ad hoc "native levies" in its African territories until an enemy did so.<sup>41</sup> Curiously, the prohibition was extended to some of Britain's well-disciplined Black colonial troops. According to the army's 1914 regulations governing the conduct of war, "troops formed of coloured individuals belonging to savage tribes and barbarous races should not be employed in a war between civilized States." The War Office specifically exempted the Indian army, France's African colonial forces, and the United States' Negro regiments,<sup>42</sup> but not Britain's own West Indian and African colonial units. France and the U.S. were potential allies and Britain probably did not wish to antagonize them with any unilateral declarations about the utilization of their own Black soldiers. In the case of Britain's own Indian empire, the War Office had recently begun considering Indian army divisions, with their high proportion of regular British soldiers, as potential reinforcements in the event of a European war. Out of

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<sup>41</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/394. Extract from the Minutes of the 102nd Meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, 29 June 1909.

<sup>42</sup>War Office, Manual of Military Law (London: H.M.S.O., 1914), 242.

necessity, British policy shifted enough to include certain Black soldiers in its strategic planning.

### B. Black Soldiers and White Settings

"Vinculum," an Edwardian proponent of the use of Black troops, asserted that the martial instincts and loyalty of war-like peoples such as the North American Indians, Zulus, and Maori, could be nourished in a multi-racial imperial army.<sup>43</sup> Vinculum's hopes might have had a chance to have been realized in the course of the First World War, in which Britain welcomed the participation of hundreds of thousands of White troops from throughout the empire.<sup>44</sup> As in the case of the Boer War, Black colonial subjects offered themselves for military service.<sup>45</sup> Most British and colonial officials feared the consequences of removing colonial troops from their normal duties in order to serve alongside White troops in Europe. However, the huge

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<sup>43</sup>"Vinculum," "Imperial Recruiting-Grounds," MacMillan's Magazine, ns. 1, (1906): 821-2.

<sup>44</sup>Ceylon sent a contingent of several hundred, many of whom subsequently received commissions in British regiments. British Malaya contributed one thousand and Fiji, 680. See P.R.O. C.O. 323/1673/3. "Note on Combatant and non-Combatant Contingents despatched from certain dependencies during the War, 1914-1918."

<sup>45</sup>For example, the Sierra Leone Weekly News proposed that its colony form a new regiment to be called "The King's Own Creole Boys." E.D.A. Turay and A. Abraham, The Sierra Leone Army: A Century of History (London: MacMillan Publishers, 1987), 39.



manpower demands of the Great War moved the British government to reconsider its stance in two ways. First, the British called upon their only immediately available reserve, the Indian army, to provide an expeditionary force for France within months of the war's outbreak. Secondly, as the war continued into 1915 and 1916, Britain needed to bring Black military laborers by the tens of thousands to France.

Britain's Black troops received heartfelt welcomes in France and Britain,<sup>46</sup> but their presence raised serious concerns for colonial and military officials. In colonial possessions, British civil and military personnel expected that "natives" should be treated as and behave as clear subordinates. Except at points of exploitative or administrative contact, Europeans in the colonies had attempted to maintain distance from Black subjects. If, however, "non-colonial" Whites of various classes in Europe would be willing to associate with Black soldiers, then European prestige would be undermined. Black soldiers would see Whites performing menial tasks or engaging in scandalous

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<sup>46</sup>Tabili, 15-29. For example, the patrons of an exclusive London restaurant treated a wounded and limping Sikh soldier to "See the Conquering Hero Comes" and a standing ovation. Saint Nihal Singh, "India's Blood-Sacrifice," Nash's and Pall Mall Magazine 55 (June 1915): 492.

activities, a far different reality from the pristine and aloof image of Whites that colonial authorities wished to display as part of the "theater" of colonial rule.

Inter-racial sexual contact particularly worried British colonial authorities.<sup>47</sup> Politically, the British felt that inter-racial sex lessened the respect or awe for themselves that they had hoped to instill in Black subjects. Thus, inter-racial sex had become a profound demonstration of equality and colonial authorities wished to avoid it. The British made some attempts to keep Black soldiers away from White women during the First World War, by imposing curfews and segregating medical care, but the effectiveness of such measures is difficult to gauge. Historian Jeffrey Greenhut argues that the attempts at sexual segregation undermined the morale and, ultimately, the military effectiveness of the Indian Corps which fought in France for the first year of the war.<sup>48</sup> Another historian, Laura

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<sup>47</sup>See, for example, Norman Etherington, "Natal's Black Rape Scare of the 1870s," Journal of Southern African Studies 15 (October 1988): 36-53; and John Pape, "Black and White: The 'Perils of Sex' in Colonial Zimbabwe," Journal of Southern African Studies 16 (December 1990): 699-720.

<sup>48</sup>Jeffrey Greenhut, "Race, Sex, and War: The Impact of Race and Sex on Morale and Health Services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914," Military Affairs 45, 2 (April 1981): 71-74; and Gregory Martin, "The Influence of Racial Attitudes on British Policy Towards India during the First World War," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 14, 2 (1986): 92-97.

Tabili, suggests that, in the course of the war, British authorities actually relaxed colonial sexual taboos concerning Black soldiers' access to European women, especially prostitutes, as an implicit reward for loyal service.<sup>49</sup> An alternate explanation for the occurrence of inter-racial romance may be that the strict enforcement of a sexual color bar in Europe was impractical.

In either case, British racial prejudices and sexual anxieties unequivocally reasserted themselves in the decades following the end of the First World War. From 1919, the French government stationed several thousand African troops in the Rhineland and E.D. Morel, an outspoken English radical, referred to France's policy as a "horror" and campaigned extensively for the Black troops' withdrawal. He sensationalized tales of mass rape and other violent crimes supposedly committed by African troops against German civilians. Morel's crusade persuaded the Women's International League for Peace (W.I.L.P.) to adopt the following resolution:

That in the interest of good feeling between all the races of the world and the security of all women, this meeting calls upon the League of Nations to prohibit the importation into Europe for warlike purposes, of troops belonging to primitive peoples, and their use anywhere, except for purposes of police and defence in the country

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<sup>49</sup>Tabili, 24.

of their origin.<sup>50</sup>

Despite Morel's efforts, the British government refrained from interfering in what it considered to be a French matter, but when it came to the possibility of Britain's own African soldiers having sexual relations with White women in Britain, government policy closely resembled the W.I.L.P.'s position. For example, when authorities made arrangements to send West African soldiers to London for the coronation in 1937, their commanding general advised the Colonial Office that they be kept away from White prostitutes because "the accounts of the deterioration in behaviour on the return here of those Africans who have done so are deplorable..."<sup>51</sup> On another occasion, at the beginning of the Second World War, British officials in Nigeria briefly entertained the idea of attaching African women to any African contingent sent to Europe. Otherwise, they feared, the soldiers "would obviously consort with White prostitutes with the most undesirable effects upon them..."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Keith L. Nelson, "The 'Black Horror on the Rhine': Race as a Factor Post-World War I Diplomacy," Journal of Modern History 42, 4 (1970): 606-627.

<sup>51</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1470/1. G.J. Giffard to Cole, 20 January 1937.

<sup>52</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/12. Orde Brown to S.S.C., 13 January 1940 and 14 January 1940. Since it would be impractical to allow all of the soldiers to bring a wife. Orde-Browne proposed that authorities recruit single women, perhaps 20 to 25 percent of ration strength, as "cooks"

While anxieties over inter-racial sex still existed throughout the Second World War, British authorities did little directly, if anything, to prevent it. Many Black colonial servicemen in Britain dated and married Whites with no official prohibitions of any kind.<sup>53</sup> A military censor reported that Black West Indian soldiers in Italy "boastfully and luridly" described their sexual relations with local women in letters home.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, in the course of fostering Anglo-Italian relations, many of them lost rank and pay because they had contracted venereal diseases. According to a Black member of the unit, had the regiment remained where it was, it "would have been wiped out without a shot being fired."<sup>55</sup> Though they punished the contraction of sexually-transmitted diseases because it inhibited military efficiency, the authorities tolerated inter-racial sexual relationships

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(i.e., prostitutes) to the unit. The Governor of Nigeria himself rejected Orde-Browne's suggestion for recruiting "cooks" because it would create "serious resentment locally," especially among Christian missionaries. Governor of Nigeria to Colonial Secretary, 18 January 1940.

<sup>53</sup>See Noble, 42. See also, Rene Webb, Interview, n.d., transcript, Department of Sound Recordings, Imperial War Museum, London; Watson, 62-3.

<sup>54</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Extract from Middle East Military Censorship Summary No. 106, period 27 December 1944 to 9 January 1945.

<sup>55</sup>Watson, 67.

### C. Black and White Soldiers

The world wars brought military personnel from various regions of the empire into contact with one another and British authorities worried about the political repercussions of this contact. White troops had demonstrated a great deal of contempt, even violence, toward Black peoples in colonial settings. As feared, when Black and White soldiers served alongside each other, friction and violence frequently resulted. According to a White soldier in East Africa during the First World War, fights broke out between White, Indian and African soldiers when members of one group transgressed into the camp facilities of another.<sup>56</sup> In a particularly brutal incident, several hundred White patients assaulted fifty maimed Black West Indians in a Liverpool military hospital in 1918.<sup>57</sup> Colonial officials feared that such bad treatment at the hands of White soldiers would cause dissatisfaction among Black colonial troops, which would, in turn, be transferred to the colonies as resentment against White colonial society.

Apart from outright White bigotry, the most significant

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<sup>56</sup>Robert W. Ball, "Reminiscences, Humour and Tales from the German East African Campaign, 1914-1919," TMs., 1920, 58-9, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>57</sup>Fryer, Staying Power, 297.

source of tension revolved around differences in pay and family allowances. On the eve of the Second World War, each colonial force had a pay scale based upon local conditions and types of currency. Normally, authorities paid colonial troops at approximately one-half to three-fourths of British rates. Only forces from the West Indies (including Bermuda) received pay comparable to British troops. In addition to differences in normal pay, colonial soldiers' families received allowances at two-thirds of British rates.<sup>58</sup>

In order to prevent inter-racial antagonism caused by hatred or jealousy, military authorities segregated soldiers of different races as much as possible. For instance, during the preparation for the coronation of King George VI, initial plans to quarter Black colonial troops with White dominion troops had to be changed for fear of inciting racial violence between contingents.<sup>59</sup> When contact became unavoidable, British authorities urged their soldiers to exhibit a combination of formality and respect toward colonial servicemen. A 1940 booklet urged White soldiers headed to India to avoid being "altogether too free" with Indian servants, otherwise, they would become insolent.

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<sup>58</sup>P.R.O. CAB. 21/1689. "The Colonial Military Forces in the Second World War," 1947.

<sup>59</sup>See P.R.O. C.O. 323/1378/6. Ceremonial-Coronation.

Conversely, it advised British soldiers not to label all Indian soldiers together as potential mutineers; instead, "Tommys" were encouraged to maintain good relations with their Indian comrades.<sup>60</sup> An anonymous but apparently semi-official pamphlet, Service Overseas, encouraged White troops bound for Africa to adopt a "colonial" attitude: "In all contact with the natives, let your first thought be the preservation of your dignity" and the maintenance of distance from Africans.<sup>61</sup>

The British government's aim of preventing racial conflict conflicted with its enthusiasm for the military involvement of the Union of South Africa. Especially during the Second World War, overseas South African participation raised concerns about possible violence between Union personnel on the one side and Black troops and civilians on the other. For example, before the Ethiopian Campaign of 1941, the British hesitated about bringing White South African troops to East Africa. Strategic necessity prevailed and, ironically, General Sir Alan Cunningham,

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<sup>60</sup>Our Indian Empire: A Short Review and some hints for the use of soldiers proceeding to India (New Dehli: Government of India, 1940), 65, 52-3.

<sup>61</sup>Advisory pamphlet quoted in "Advice to Britons bound for West Africa: Some dangerous nonsense which should be amended," West Africa (January 1943): 21. See Shiroya, 97-99.



military commander in East Africa, reported that he was "intensely surprised to find [South Africans] even playing football with the K.A.R. and R.W.A.F.F. battalions."<sup>62</sup> It would appear that shared hardship and distance from the Union facilitated White and Black camaraderie in the Ethiopian campaign.

The Union itself remained a delicate political problem because it served as a transit base for troops en route around the Cape, and the guest troops included West Africans and Indians. Early in the war, after some Royal Indian Air Force officers were asked to leave a Cape Town restaurant,<sup>63</sup> the British decided that no further Indian personnel would be sent to the Union.<sup>64</sup> In case this stipulation proved impossible to enforce, Indian servicemen waiting in the Union would be subject, for matters of discipline, to the local British representatives and not to South African military authority.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, tens of thousands of West

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<sup>62</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 820/48/23. Cunningham to Moyne, 16 July 1941. Cunningham qualified his observation with the following: "Though I have to admit with the air of 'Don't tell them in the Union."

<sup>63</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/9362. India Office to Dominions Office, 17 May 1941.

<sup>64</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/9362. Dominions Office to Acting United Kingdom High Commissioner in the Union of South Africa, 7 May 1941.

<sup>65</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/9362. India Office to Dominions Office, 17 May 1941.

Africans passed through the Union on their way to Ethiopia and Burma. The country's prosperity may have impressed them, but the strict segregation proved somewhat disillusioning. Barred from certain areas of South African towns, R.W.A.F.F. soldiers were also prohibited from carrying arms and had to be accompanied by officers or British N.C.O.s when sightseeing.<sup>66</sup> The South African government obviously did not want its Black population thinking that Africans anywhere could carry arms like White soldiers or confidently walk about without close White supervision.

Issues of race influenced the military roles given Black colonial troops in an empire justified by and structured according to a racial hierarchy. First, "race" determined who served: martial races provided Britain with generally reliable imperial guardians, but for major wars, the adherence to the paradigm restricted the numbers and qualities of military recruits. Westernized and mixed descent "non-martial" peoples, though enthusiastic to serve, usually found their opportunities for military service

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<sup>66</sup>A.C. Boreham, "Saga of a Suffolk Soldier," n.d., TMs., 163, Imperial War Museum, London; and Adrienne M. Israel, "Measuring the War Experience: Ghanaian Soldiers in World War II," Journal of Modern African Studies 25, 1, (1987): 164-6.

limited to secondary roles. Secondly, where Black colonial servicemen served was affected by the fears of colonial authorities that "native" troops would be negatively influenced by contact with White troops and civilians in Europe. Britain preferred to keep Black soldiers as "unfamiliar" with European society as possible, but military necessity often over-rode these concerns. Thirdly, the ethnic diversity of the empire complicated Black military participation because the fear always existed that Black and White soldiers would come into conflict.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE PERCEIVED UTILITY OF BLACK COLONIAL TROOPS

Several ostensibly "practical" factors, including a lack of officers, a relatively low level of military effectiveness and the fear of the possible effects of a cold climate on Black soldiers, limited the usefulness of Black colonial troops as part of the British Empire's order of battle. All of these seemingly pragmatic considerations directly related to British perceptions of race. First, until decolonization, the government required that colonial troops be officered exclusively by Whites. It was generally believed that the effectiveness of Black colonial soldiers depended mostly on their White officers. The lack of officers possessing what British authorities held to be the necessary racial background, education, and character prevented a greater utilization of colonial troops during world war efforts.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, no matter how well officered

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<sup>1</sup>P.R.O. CAB 23/1. For the First World War, see "Note on the Availability Resources of Man-power, both White and coloured in the Overseas Dominions and Dependencies of the empire," Minutes of the 41st meeting of the War Cabinet, 23 January 1917; and Perry, 92-3. For similar concerns during the Second World War, see P.R.O. C.O. 323/1672/4. Minute by Lee, 21 December 1939; and Perry, 111.

and effective Black troops might have been, they, with the possible exception of the Gurkha regiments of the Indian army, were not considered to be the equal of European soldiers in fighting abilities. British sources cited racial and cultural attributes for these differences and such beliefs often proved to be self-fulfilling prophecies. A third frequently cited restriction on the use of Black troops, either as combatants or military laborers, was the "Myth of the Black Man's Grave." In a reverse of the "White man's grave," which was the fear, based on long experience, that European troops suffered appalling rates of sickness and mortality in tropical regions, British authorities assumed that Black troops were naturally and extremely vulnerable to colder climates. The fact that the British accepted these "practical" considerations limited the manner in which they could utilize colonial troops.

## I. LACK OF OFFICERS

### A. White over Black

For British observers, the 1857 mutiny of Indian troops of the Bengal army drove home the lesson that the loyalty of Black troops to the British crown depended upon how well their White officers knew their soldiers. In trying to establish the actual spark or first step of the revolt, British military sources almost universally cited the

breakdown in the relationship between White officers and the sepoys, who had been disaffected by rumors that they were going to be forced to accept Christianity. In the decades leading up to the Indian Mutiny, European officers of the East India Company's army (who themselves were despised by the class-conscious royal army establishment) tended to be disdainful of their soldiers. Although a pre-Mutiny guide for Indian army officers praised the native soldier for his fidelity, courage and lack of criminality,<sup>2</sup> indifferent company officers commonly referred to their soldiers disparagingly as "natives" and "those horrible Black nigger sepoys," terms which had certainly gone out of fashion decades later when, under crown rule, the Indian army became an extremely desirable posting for British officers.<sup>3</sup>

Immediately preceding 1857, military voices warned of the deteriorating relationship between European officers and their Indian troops. Albert Hervey, an officer with the 40th Madras infantry, condemned the racial prejudice which he often encountered among colleagues and warned against officers being ignorant of their soldiers' feelings: "the

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<sup>2</sup>John McCosh, Advice to Officers in India (London: Wm. H. Allen & Co., 1856), 124-5.

<sup>3</sup>Trench, 15; Albert Hervey, Ten Years in India (London: W. Shoberl, 1850), I., 88; Amiya Barat, Bengal Native Infantry: Its Organisation and Discipline, 1792-1852 (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1962), 114-6.

poor soldier will be maltreated until his meek and humble spirit becomes roused, his pride hurt, and the consequences are attended with fearful results."<sup>4</sup>

The "fearful" events of 1857 demonstrated to most British observers that thoroughly dedicated officers were needed for the Indian army. Direct crown rule in India dramatically raised the prestige of a Indian military career and by the end of the century, the Indian army drew its British officers from among the top graduates of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst. Normally remaining with their Indian regiments for their entire military careers, these "Indian" officers considered themselves indispensable to the efficiency of their Indian troops, whom they referred to as "jawans" ("youngsters" or "young warriors"), no matter what their actual age.<sup>5</sup> In 1878, a British officer expressed the typical opinion that, "the native fighting

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<sup>4</sup>Hervey, I., 89, 278. See also, "Jack Sepoy," Bentley's Miscellany 32 (1852), 77; John Jacob, Tracts on the Native Army of India (London: Smith, Elder & Col., 1858). Jacob, an officer in the Bombay army, wrote a number of pamphlets in the years leading up to the Mutiny, in which he warned about the deteriorating condition of the officer-sepoy relationship.

<sup>5</sup>E. Candler, The Sepoy (London: John Murray, 1919), x. Later, even Indian officers testified to the deep paternalistic affection felt by British officers toward their men. For example, see D.K. Palit, "Indianisation: A personal experience," Indo-British Review 16 (1989), 60; Evans, 104.

material is inferior to the British. All men require leading, but the Indian needs it more than the Anglo-Saxon..."<sup>6</sup> The official historians of the Indian Corps in France during the First World War noted that Indians demonstrated a degree of dependence on European officers "greater than... in any army in the world." Consequently, they concluded that British officers, no matter their age, developed the "habit and frame of mind of a father, and sometimes... even more the habit and frame of mind of a mother."<sup>7</sup>

The purportedly "unique" relationship between British officers and Indian other ranks has been a central theme in discussions about the effectiveness of the Indian army. For example, Charles Chenevix Trench, historian and former Indian army officer, wrote that,

What made the Indian Army tick was the sepoy's pride in his profession and in his regiment, and complete, unquestioning trust between officer and man. But there was a reverse to this coin: it was a personal relationship between the sepoy and the officers whom he knew. If too many of these officers were killed, and replaced by strangers who might not speak his language or know his name, then the Indian soldier might be utterly lost.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>A.S. Bolton, Letter to the Editor, The Times, Apr. 19, 1878, 9; See also, Dermot M. Killingley, Farewell the plumed troops: a memoir of the Indian Cavalry, 1919-1945 (Newcastle upon Tyne, Grevatt and Grevatt, 1990), 55.

<sup>7</sup>J.W.B. Merewether and F. Smith, The Indian Corps in France (London: 1919), 481.

<sup>8</sup>Trench, 15-16.



Philip Mason, another historian and former Indian army officer, emphasized the Indian soldier's cultural background in his explanation of the bond between officers and men:

[The Indian soldier] took it for granted that in any society there were great differences in social level; some men were leaders by birth, others were destined to be led. He felt neither envy nor discontent when he saw the mess dining-room... On the contrary, he was proud that his sahibs should be rich and should have expensive rifles and polo-ponies...<sup>9</sup>

After having studied the performance of the Indian Corps in France during the First World War, historian Jeffrey Greenhut concluded that traditional British views of the dependence of Indian troops on European officers were essentially true. He stated that the soldier-officer relationship was far more personal than in the British army, and Indian soldiers expected British officers to be many things besides simply a manager.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, David Omissi questions the idea of Indian dependence on and devotion to British officers by citing numerous censored letters written by Indian soldiers who served in France during the First World War. Omissi argues that the letter-writers rarely mentioned their officers and, thus, were indifferent to

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<sup>9</sup>Mason, 390-1.

<sup>10</sup>Jeffrey Greenhut, "Sahib and Sepoy," Military Affairs 48 (January 1984): 15-18.

them.<sup>11</sup> It is doubtful whether this line of reasoning does more than suggest indifference among the literate minority of Indian soldiers, and, unfortunately, Omissi does not differentiate between the "peace-time" Indian army and its expanded war-time incarnation which suffered from heavy casualties. Whether or not Omissi correctly interprets the mail of the Indian Corps in France, his theory would probably not apply to the "peacetime" Indian army, in which officers and men developed relationships over years rather than days or hours.

European officers themselves expected to function differently in their Indian postings than they would in a British regiment. Sir William Slim, famed Indian army general of the Second World War, found that, in contrast to British troops, Indian troops responded immediately and intensely to emotional and spiritual appeals.<sup>12</sup> To be effective leaders, and thereby prevent another Mutiny, British officers believed that they had to take an active paternal interest in their soldiers' cultural and religious practices, especially the complex concept of "izzat" or honor. On leave, they traveled in their soldiers' home

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<sup>11</sup>Omissi, 103-106.

<sup>12</sup>William Slim, Defeat into Victory (Dehra Dun: Natraj Publishers, 1981), 188.

districts and visited pensioners of their regiment. In return for this personal concern, soldiers often initiated deserving officers into their particular ethnic group or caste.<sup>13</sup>

In Africa, officers for colonial troops volunteered for the duty and, after serving for a term of several years, normally returned to their British regiments. Service in Africa offered junior officers better opportunities for higher pay, adventure, and active command responsibilities than they could receive at home. A World War II brochure, intended as an introduction to Nigerian soldiers for European personnel, summarized the unique difficulties ahead:

You may like the African or you may not, but if you feel that he really is an impossible individual remember these things: (i) He probably cannot understand what you say and nobody is at their best under these circumstances. (ii) He may never have left his village until he joined the army and he probably finds everything very strange and frightening. (iii) If he is 'educated', his father almost certainly was not, and what you have acquired in many generations is being forced on him in one.<sup>14</sup>

Newly posted British officers and N.C.O.s found themselves in a foreign place among peoples who presumably viewed the

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<sup>13</sup>Masters, 119; Guest, 90.

<sup>14</sup>Tribes in the Nigerian Military Forces: Their Customs and Markings (Lagos: Government Printing Office, 1943), 5.

world very differently from western Europeans.

British sources expected that, in order to transcend the wide cultural gulf, African troops required better officers than British soldiers. According to Francis Lugard, African troops needed the sort of European leaders who would empathize with and be proud of their soldiers.<sup>15</sup> A 1942 booklet implored new officers to remember that, "by European standards [African soldiers] are children, and that you are their 'father and mother' for the moment."<sup>16</sup> Similar to the usage of "jawan" in the Indian army, British officers in the African colonial forces often referred to their soldiers with such terms as "my Africans," "our Africans," and "the Africans."<sup>17</sup> Officers found that African troops responded positively to a familiar approach without the "stern reserve" supposedly characteristic of

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<sup>15</sup>Francis Lugard, The Dual Mandate in Tropical Africa, (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1922), 577-8. For other examples, see P.R.O. C.O. 96/379. "Report of Mutiny of the West African Regiment." 5 May 1901; J.F. Whitacre Allen, "An African Army: Some Possibilities," Journal of the Royal United Service Institution 63 (1918): 658; Haywood and Clarke, 451; and Moyses-Bartlett, 572.

<sup>16</sup>"The African Soldier in the Nigeria Regt.," 1942. See also, J.A. Kent, "Funga Safari" I, n.d., TMs, Imperial War Museum, London, 6-9.

<sup>17</sup>Hanley, 253; Charles Carfrae, "Nigerians at War," Blackwood's Magazine, (September 1946): 184; and Israel, 159.

British units.<sup>18</sup> Army psychiatrist Captain N. Dembovitz reported that Africans responded positively to "flattery of the most naive sort," but warned that they resented verbal abuse, never forgiving Europeans who denigrated their skin-color or the legitimacy of their births.<sup>19</sup> The apparent "dependency" of African soldiers on White officers revealed itself especially in combat situations. In European eyes, Africans needed to know and trust their officers personally and tended to panic in battle when led by officers with whom they had not time to develop a personal rapport.<sup>20</sup> British officers commonly felt that African troops developed a mystical attachment to them. For example, P.B. Poore discovered during the Burma campaign, 1944-45, that his soldiers considered him lucky because he had a "good and powerful 'Ju Ju.'" Even if he blundered, his soldiers expected that his "ju ju" would retrieve a dangerous

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<sup>18</sup>W. Lloyd-Jones, K.A.R. (London: Arrowsmith, 1926), 142-3.

<sup>19</sup>N. Dembovitz, "Psychiatry amongst West African troops," Journal of the Royal Army Medical Corps 84 (1945): 72.

<sup>20</sup>Allen, 658; Patrick Leslie Edwards, Interview, Transcript, n.d., Department of Sound Recordings, Imperial War Museum, 7; R. C. Glanville, Interview, Transcript, n.d., Department of Sound Recordings, Imperial War Museum, London, 74; Haywood and Clarke, 451; and Moyses-Bartlett, 572.

situation.<sup>21</sup>

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries White officers depended upon the assistance of several types of "native officer" (N.O.) who did not hold commissions equal to that of European officers. Their powers of command were limited to non-European troops and the most senior of them was subordinated to the lowliest young British officer fresh out of Sandhurst. Indian N.O.s, termed "Viceroy Commissioned Officers (V.C.O.s)" rose from the ranks according to seniority and, thus, had much experience, if little formal education. In addition to their command responsibilities as platoon commanders, they helped European officers learn Indian customs and languages. In the massive world war expansions of the Indian army, V.C.O.s became more crucial as intermediaries because fresh officers from Britain did not attain fluency in Urdu, the main language of the Indian army, before being posted to Indian units.<sup>22</sup> Despite the proven value of V.C.O.s, British military authorities doubted the ability of Indians to function effectively as regular, or King's Commissioned Officers (K.C.O.s). General Willcocks, the commander of the

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<sup>21</sup>P.B. Poore, "The First Kaladan Campaign," n.d., TMs, Imperial War Museum, 69-70.

<sup>22</sup>J.B. Harrison, "A Temporary Officer in a Temporary Battalion," Indo-British Review 16 (1989): 103-4.

Indian Corps in France in the Great War, considered Indians "well fitted" to replace fallen European officers temporarily but he did not believe that they could permanently do so as commissioned officers, their obstacles being training and temperment.<sup>23</sup>

In Africa by the 1890s, there existed potential conflicts between N.O.s and the British non-commissioned officers (N.C.O.s) who appeared in increasing numbers to help administer African battalions. If N.O.s attempted to assert authority over White sergeants, it was feared, all concerned, including political leaders, would be embarrassed. By 1900, British authorities in West Africa had decided to end N.O.s. altogether.<sup>24</sup> In East Africa, the K.A.R. finally terminated its N.O. ranks in 1931.<sup>25</sup> W. Lloyd-Jones, a pro-African K.A.R. officer, acidly remarked that nothing had irritated European settlers "so much as to see a 'jumped-up nigger,' so it may easily be imagined that the uniform of an African officer of the K.A.R. is to them anathema."<sup>26</sup> Still needing collaborators, the British

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<sup>23</sup>Willcocks, 6.

<sup>24</sup>Killingray, "The Military in the Gold Coast," 173-6.

<sup>25</sup>Moyse-Bartlett, 465.

<sup>26</sup>Lloyd-Jones, 104.

relied upon African N.C.O.s who, by regulation, always fell under the authority of White N.C.O.s. A.N.C.O.s became essential for the effectiveness of newly assigned British officers who required at least two months to develop into efficient leaders of colonial troops.<sup>27</sup>

In the Victorian era, Britain excluded non-Europeans from officer commissions in its colonial forces, but this may not have always been the case. Immediately after the American Revolution, the British appointed Stephen Bluche, a prominent Black Loyalist residing in Nova Scotia, as a Lieutenant Colonel (probably an honorary or provincial title) in command of the Loyalist "Black Guides and Pioneers."<sup>28</sup> British commanders in the West Indies during the Napoleonic Wars had occasionally incorporated captured enemy Black troops, including a few of their Black officers, into their own service.<sup>29</sup> Early in its existence, the

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<sup>27</sup>Lt. Col. W.P.B. Arkwright, "With the Nigerians in the East African Campaign," Journal of the Royal Scots Fusiliers 18, 1 (January 1951): 37.

<sup>28</sup>Graham Russell Hodges, ed., The Black Loyalist Directory (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), xxiii; In a letter to the author dated March 13, 1996, Hodges stated that Bluche, "like other Black military figures fighting for the English in the Revolution, received informal titles out of respect rather than actual rank."

<sup>29</sup>Peter M. Voelz, Slave and Soldier: The Military Impact of Blacks in the Colonial Americas, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 153.



Sierra Leone militia contained Black officers who commanded White as well as Black personnel.<sup>30</sup> Until the 1860s, Canadian militia regiments, including predominately White units, often appointed or elected Black officers.<sup>31</sup> Individual Blacks thus served as officers in part-time colonial forces, being accepted more or less as "equals" by Whites with whom they served, but they could not yet obtain regular commissions.

In the 1820s, suggestions circulated that Black officers be commissioned for African colonial service in order to spare the lives of European officers.<sup>32</sup> Sir Neill Campbell, Governor-in-Chief of the Cape Coast, proposed that such officers could be found "among the sons of the European merchants who have been educated in England and for whom there is no employment after the death of their fathers. They would not require much pay, no half-pay, no pension..."<sup>33</sup> Other colonial officials questioned the wisdom of appointing Black officers. For example, from

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<sup>30</sup>James St.G. Walker, The Black Loyalists, (New York: Africana Publishing Co., 1976), 192.

<sup>31</sup>Winks, 150-153.

<sup>32</sup>Voelz, 44, 154-5, 250.

<sup>33</sup>Campbell to Bathurst, 12 November 1826, in G.E. Metcalfe, ed., Great Britain and Ghana: Documents of Ghana History, 1807-1957 (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964), 105-107.

Barbados, Governor Warde related the "strong jealousy" of his colony's White population toward such advancement of "free coloured people."<sup>34</sup> Racial anxiety notwithstanding, William Smellie, a Black West Indian, received a commission in the Royal African Colonial Corps in 1827.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, a debate followed in the War Office as to the value of Black officers. The Duke of Wellington, professional head of the British army, disliked the idea of utilizing groups of Black officers but he conceded that there might be Black individuals who were fit to be commissioned.<sup>36</sup> In any event, the brief flirtation with appointing Blacks to colonial military commands apparently ended with Smellie, who left the service after embezzling funds.<sup>37</sup>

Any willingness on the part of the British government to experiment with Black officers dissipated by the late nineteenth century. By then, War Office policy prohibited the normal commissioning of Black officers in the colonial

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<sup>34</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 28/100. Warde to Horton, 20 January 1827, quoted in Eric Williams, ed., Documents on British West Indian History (Port-of-Spain: Trinidad Publishing, 1952), 219.

<sup>35</sup>Christopher Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 178.

<sup>36</sup>Paul Mmegha Mbaeyi, British Military and Naval Forces in West African History, 1807-1874 (New York: Nok Publishers, 1978), 54-5.

<sup>37</sup>Fyfe, History of Sierra Leone, 188.

forces because the empire was justified and structured along racial lines. The commissioning of Asian or African officers on an equal basis with Britons threatened the underlying assumption of the Victorian empire, inherent White moral and intellectual superiority. In 1902, Captain Owen Wheeler plainly argued in the Navy and Army Illustrated against commissions for Indian princes because, "this might conceivably mean the subordination of a British combatant officer to one who, although of princely lineage, was still not of the blood and colour that mean almost everything in India where mastery and leadership, especially in the field against alarming odds, are concerned."<sup>38</sup> In other words, Black subjects could not be given the opportunity of command, as that would demonstrate racial equality in leadership roles.

In addition to the question of White prestige, the British rationalized that Asians and Africans did not possess nor learn the abilities necessary for command. The overwhelming majority of officers in the British crown's various colonial forces would have agreed with A.A.S. Barnes, an officer with the short-lived Chinese Regiment, when he credited the White British officer with possessing a way of identifying himself with those under him,

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<sup>38</sup>Captain Owen Wheeler, "Soldier Princes of India," Navy and Army Illustrated (13 December 1902): 333.

of familiarising himself with their interests, their likes and dislikes, that distinguishes him from the officers of other races, and gives him his unique power of making soldiers out of any material that comes to his hand.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, it was generally accepted that White British officers had the natural ability to command soldiers of any ethnic or racial background.

Not only did the necessity of having White officers over Black soldiers usually appear self-evident, any White officers sufficed during world war expansions of colonial military forces. Frequently, colonial forces received inexperienced and incompetent "war-time" British officers and, in the case of the R.W.A.F.F. in 1941-43, exiled Polish army officers possessing little or no knowledge of Africa, colonial race relations or the English language.<sup>40</sup>

British authorities often asserted that Blacks could not overcome "inherent" character flaws. They assumed that Indians lacked the confidence, self-reliance, organizational ability, and initiative necessary for command.<sup>41</sup> In 1927, a

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<sup>39</sup>A.A.S. Barnes, "The Passing of the Chinese Regiment," United Service Magazine 25 (1902): 634-6.

<sup>40</sup>See the author's "Polish Officers in the Royal West African Frontier Force," presented before the Fifty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences at Georgetown University, June 1996.

<sup>41</sup>F.G. Carden, "The Native army of India," Blackwood's Magazine 162 (August 1897): 206.

British officer commenting about "Indianization" under the pseudonym, "Jewan Singh," wrote that Indian officers, coming from diverse backgrounds, would not work well together, but British officers would "keep the peace--at least outwardly." He warned that weak points in the Indian character such as "slackness and indolence" prevented Indians from being efficient officers.<sup>42</sup> Leonard Handley, another White officer, argued that caste-ridden Indian officers would be susceptible to nepotism, bribery and corruption.<sup>43</sup> British reactions to the idea of African officers were at least as negative as those expressed about Indian officers. For example, Kenneth Gandar Dower, an adventurer and journalist who celebrated the accomplishments of East African troops during the Second World War, chided those calling for African officers: "No one who has not been to Africa can realise how dependent the African is on the initiative of the White man in times of crisis."<sup>44</sup> In other words, children had no business being placed in positions of parental authority.

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<sup>42</sup>"Jewan Singh," "Some Aspects of the Indian army and its Indianization," Army Quarterly 22 (June 1931): 361, 363.

<sup>43</sup>Leonard Handley, Time's Delinquency (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1935), 53-74.

<sup>44</sup>Gandar Dower, Into Madagascar (New York: Penguin, n.d.), 41.

Even had Britain abruptly changed policies in 1900 to allow Black subjects to compete for commissions, other, longer-term aspects of British racialism probably would have severely limited the number of potential candidates. India possessed a large number of western educated middle class gentlemen, but they came from southern Indian cities and tended toward political consciousness. Neither of these characteristics endeared them to the military authorities who derided such westernized Indians, "Babus," as "effeminate" and untrustworthy.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, education policy in Africa actually limited the number of western educated Africans. For the first half of the twentieth-century, for example, British East African education policy, whether missionary or government sponsored, focused on providing Africans with basic literacy and vocational training, but avoided a literary, or liberal, education. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European officials complained about the supposedly damaging effects even limited liberal education could have on the African character. Educators prepared African students to function as laborers and mechanics in

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<sup>45</sup>See Suresh Chandra Ghosh, "'English in taste, in opinions, in words and intellect:' Indoctrinating the Indian through textbook, curriculum and education," in J.A. Mangan, ed., The Imperial Curriculum: Racial images and education in the British colonial experience (London: Routledge, 1993), 175-193.

African students to function as laborers and mechanics in the settler-dominated economy, and not for a life of intellectual reflection and decision-making.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, in all likelihood, most "educated" Africans, particularly in Kenya, lacked the educational qualifications for commissioning, even if African officers had been allowed.

At the height of the Victorian empire and its related racialism, two notable exceptions to the color bar existed which did not necessarily challenge White supremacy. No "colour bar" to Black officers existed in that portion of India normally referred to as the "princely states." These territories, which comprised about one-third of India, had surrendered their foreign policy to Britain in exchange for internal autonomy under their traditional rulers. After 1885, the British reformed the military forces of the Indian princes in order to make them more effective and able to assist the imperial forces. Officered by Indians and often commanded by the "princes" themselves, these forces became known as Imperial Service Troops (I.S.T.), and proved to be a welcome addition to the regular forces of the Indian army. I.S.T.s served alongside European-officered regiments in

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<sup>46</sup>G.D. Killan, The 'Educated African' Theme in English Fiction About Africa, 1884-1939," Phylon 27 (1966), 155-64 and Anthula Natsoulas and Theodore Natsoulas, "Racism, the school and African education in colonial Kenya," in Mangan, 109-134.

numerous campaigns within India and overseas.<sup>47</sup> I.S.T. officers were a common sight in Europe during the First World War; the rulers of fifteen princely states served in France and their presence was publicly lauded.<sup>48</sup> One of the more prominent Indian princes, Lieutenant-General His Highness Sir Pertab Singh of Jodhpore, commanded his Jodhpore Lancers in France at age seventy, but survived the war despite ardent hopes to die while leading a cavalry charge.<sup>49</sup> Britain allowed I.S.T. officers to exist because, as soldiers of nominally autonomous states, they did not represent threats to White prestige in the parts of India directly under the rule of the crown.

In a second recognized exception to the color bar, Britain appointed Blacks to serve as military physicians within the colonial forces. The India Act of 1853 opened

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<sup>47</sup>Farwell, Armies of the Raj, 220-235. Major Bir Bekram Singh, son of the Rajah of Sirmur, commanded the Sirmur Sappers on the famous Tirah expedition in 1897. "Two Indian Princes," The Navy and Army Illustrated 14, 286 (26 July 1902), 476.

<sup>48</sup>St. Nihal Singh, "Indian Rajas at the front," The Windsor Magazine 44 (August 1916): 313-321; Willcocks featured photographs of Lieutenant-General His Highness the Maharaja of Jodhpore; Major-General His Highness Sir Gunga Singh, Maharaja of Birkanir; Captain the Honourable Sir Umar Hayat Khan of Tiwana; Lieutenant Maharaja Kumar Gopal Saran Narain Singh of Tikari; and Captain Shah Mirza Beg, Jodhpore Lancers (I.S.T.). Willcocks, photographs opposite pp. 62, 80, 106, 236, 270, 310, and 340.

<sup>49</sup>Farwell, Armies of the Raj 231-2.



the Indian Medical Service to Indian subjects and by 1909, 109 Indians received I.M.S. appointments.<sup>50</sup> In the Great War, the British commissioned almost seven hundred to serve as medical officers with the Indian forces.<sup>51</sup> Several West Africans received similar appointments, the best known of whom, James Africanus Horton of Sierra Leone, entered the army's service in 1860 after being educated in Edinburgh. He experienced some resentment at the hands of White officers in West Africa, but became a prominent scientist in the region.<sup>52</sup> Thus, in limited circumstances, "coloured" subjects could aspire to be military physicians but this did not signify racial equality, since they never possessed powers of command or discipline over White military personnel. Instead, the policy shows that White doctors willing to risk their lives in tropical regions were difficult to recruit.

The commissioning of Black line officers in colonial military units formed a crucial part of the process of transferring power from imperial to local control during the period of decolonization. In their policies of

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<sup>50</sup>D.G. Crawford, A History of the Indian Medical Service, 1600-1913 (London: W. Thacker & Co., 1914), I., 504-5.

<sup>51</sup>Farwell, Armies of the Raj, 297.

<sup>52</sup>Fyfe, Horton, 40-1.

"Indianization" and "Africanization" of colonial officer corps, British military authorities behaved as if they accepted racial equality even when, in reality, they often did not.

In the decade before the First World War, British policy makers had already begun to discuss when and how Indians would be granted commissions in the Indian army. Hoping to appease its traditional allies, the British granted Indian aristocrats the right to attend Imperial Cadet Colleges and obtain commissions in a hollow military organization called the "Indian Native Land Forces." These commissions, first awarded in 1905, qualified their holders to serve in the Indian States Forces and on the staffs of British generals.<sup>53</sup>

Debates about commissioning Indians continued and, in 1917, the Indian government introduced an interim policy of sending ten Indian candidates per year to Sandhurst from prominent families among the martial races. At Sandhurst, Indian cadets often suffered from racism such as paying higher tips to servants, sitting separately at the cinema, and, under pressure, absenting themselves from situations where they might have contact with White women. Also, in

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<sup>53</sup>DeWitt C. Ellinwood, "A Rajput aristocrat in imperial service," Indo-British Review 15 (December 1988): 93.

general, the British did not promote Indian cadets to posts of authority.<sup>54</sup> Most revealing of all, on one occasion, an Indian army officer attempted to recruit future officers from among an assembly of cadets by assuring them, including the Indian cadets in attendance, that "there will be no chance of you having to serve under Indians."<sup>55</sup>

Successful Indian Sandhurst graduates became King's Commissioned Indian Officers (K.C.I.O.s). In 1932, in order to increase the pace of Indianization, the Indian government established an Indian military academy at Dehra Duhn to train Indian Commissioned Officers (I.C.O.s), whose authority would not extend to British personnel. Thus, the newer and more numerous local Indian commission lacked the power and prestige of the sovereign's commission.<sup>56</sup> Integration of the officer corps proceeded slowly and, in 1939, the Indian army included 4,424 officers, of whom only 396 were Indians.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Muchu Chaudhuri, "Sandhurst Revisited," Blackwood's Magazine 306 (September 1969): 200-202; see, also Kaul, 23-4.

<sup>55</sup>M.R.A. Baig, In Different Saddles (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1967), 33.

<sup>56</sup>For discussions of Indianization, see Jacobsen and Andrew Sharpe, "The Indianisation of the Indian Army," History Today (March 1986): 47-51, or virtually any history of the Indian army.

<sup>57</sup>William Gutteridge, "The Indianisation of the Indian Army, 1918-45," Race 4, 2 (May 1963): 45.

Indianization brought new tensions to the regiments of the Indian army. Initially, Indian other ranks appeared to be apprehensive about Indian officers.<sup>58</sup> One Indian officer attributed this to British officers who, he claimed, had "conveyed an impression" to Indian troops that Indian officers would be "partial to them in promotion, welfare and in other respects..."<sup>59</sup> Moreover, White officers sometimes reacted ambivalently toward Indian colleagues as political and racial tensions entered the officers' messes. Mohammand Ayub Khan recalled that,

there was trouble in the Mess because the British officers would not let us have the food we wanted... Then there was dissension over the question of music, when we wanted Indian records as well as western ones in the Mess.<sup>60</sup>

Except for the required social and training activities, Britons and Indians usually did not mingle. When off-duty, British officers normally frequented local European-only clubs although, in Iraq before the Second World War, "Timmy" Thimayya's commanding officer forced the Basra European club to admit Indians.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Humphrey Evans, Thimayya of India (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960), 102.

<sup>59</sup>B.M. Kaul, The Untold Story (New York: Allied Publishers, 1967), 40.

<sup>60</sup>Mohammad Ayub Khan, Friends Not Masters (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 13.

<sup>61</sup>Evans, 100.

By the late 1930s, Indian applications for army commissions declined and Indianization faced serious difficulties. The discriminatory restrictions on their authority had tempered the enthusiasm of potential officers while the Indian police and civil service actually offered better chances for advancement.<sup>62</sup> According to historian Chandar Sundarum, these forms of racial discrimination towards Indian officers (and other ranks) played a major role in the creation of the Indian National Army, an anti-British military formation raised by the Japanese after the fall of Singapore during the Second World War.<sup>63</sup>

The wartime expansion of the Indian forces provided more opportunities for commissioning and advancement. By 1945, the Indian army contained 32,752 British and 13,947 Indian officers.<sup>64</sup> The discrepancies in authority between king's and Indian commissions did not survive the war. In 1942, the War Office considered an Indian government proposal to grant I.C.O.s the power to punish White personnel, in order to make their authority fully effective and equal to White officers. The War Office conceded this

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<sup>62</sup>Sharpe, 51-2.

<sup>63</sup>Chandar S. Sundaram, "Soldier Disaffection and the Creation of the Indian National Army," Indo-British Review 18 (1990): 155-162.

<sup>64</sup>Perry, 115.

measure as a logical consequence of "Indianization," but hesitated to implement on the grounds that it would undermine White prestige in India at a time of internal and external danger. The War Office informed the India Office that the change in regulations should be delayed, but if this was unacceptable, then the matter should be referred to higher authority.<sup>65</sup> Subsequently, the War Cabinet decided in favor of the Indian government.<sup>66</sup> Inevitably, some White personnel refused to accept this decision. For example, a South African officer serving in Burma balked at serving under an Indian, and successfully requested to be transferred to another unit.<sup>67</sup>

In the decade following the First World War, West African colonial authorities occasionally considered granting commissions in the R.W.A.F.F. to Africans, but policy-makers could not agree on conditions or timetable.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10685. Extract from the Minutes of the Thirteenth Meeting of the Army Council held on 10 June 1942.

<sup>66</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10685. Extract from the Conclusions of the 119th Meeting of the War Cabinet held on 31 August 1942.

<sup>67</sup>Kaul, 68.

<sup>68</sup>Sir George Giffard's comments at the end of William Platt, "The East African Forces in the War and their future," Journal of the Royal United Services Institution 93 (1948): 412; Killingray, "The Military in the Gold Coast," 63.

Such was the extent of anxiety over White prestige, that, on the occasion of the 1937 coronation, authorities prohibited White stewards from waiting on the African N.C.O.s who had been invited to attend. Also, the guests traveled by steamer to Britain in strictly segregated quarters.<sup>69</sup> In that same year, however, both the Colonial Office and Sir George Giffard, the military commander in West Africa, strongly supported a proposal to open the officer corps of the part-time Territorial Battalion of the Gold Coast Regiment to Africans. By 1939, the authorities decided that an African, who served for two years in the ranks and had the educational qualifications, could apply for a commission in the part-time Territorial Battalion. The War Office agreed to the scheme after it received assurances that Europeans would not serve under African officers. The Territorial Battalion would be "Africanized" from the bottom up, with slots being gradually closed to Europeans.<sup>70</sup>

Only two Africans, Seth K. Anthony and Tom Impraim, received commissions in the R.W.A.F.F. before the end of the Second World War. Fearful of being accused of racial discrimination, the Colonial Office overcame deep War Office

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<sup>69</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1469/4. "Points agreed at Meeting held at Colonial Office," 7 January 1937.

<sup>70</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/4142. Gold Coast Local Forces: Admission of Africans to Commissioned and Cadet Rank, 1937.

reluctance to grant King's emergency commissions to African officers. Consequently, Anthony, Impraim and those who followed held full power of command and punishment over White personnel. In 1948, at the end of the wartime emergency, the War Office debated whether these King's commissions should be replaced by local governor's commissions which precluded any authority over White personnel. It was decided that this change would be seen as racial discrimination, because White British officers seconded to the West African forces from regiments of the British army would continue to hold King's commissions. Also, it would be inconsistent because African residents of Britain could already earn King's commissions in British regiments (see Chapters Seven and Eight).<sup>71</sup> In January 1955, Britain finally granted Africans the privilege to gain Queen's commissions in the East African Land Forces.<sup>72</sup>

## II. Military Effectiveness: Black v. White troops

Until the inter-war period, military authorities usually cited biology as the reason for the inferiority of Black to White troops. However, reflecting the intellectual

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<sup>71</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/15483. "Grant of Commissions to Africans: Memorandum by the Adjutant General," "Extract from the minutes of the 84th meeting of the Army Council held on 5 October 1948."

<sup>72</sup>See P.R.O. W.O. 32/13636 for the correspondence regarding the grant of commissions to East Africans.



abandonment of Victorian racialism taking place in Britain, British military leaders, by the Second World War, tended to attribute differences in military efficiency to cultural factors, especially education.

Historically, the British did not think that the "native" troops of the Indian army, with the probable exception of Gurkhas, could equal White troops in military effectiveness. In 1867, a Parliamentary Select Committee investigated the possibility of substituting Indian for British troops in overseas garrisons. Several of the witnesses who testified before the Committee held that British soldiers were twice as effective as Indian troops. The Committee accepted that, for merely showing the flag, Indian troops were adequate. If, on the other hand, colonial garrisons had a genuine military role against serious attack, then their effectiveness should not be reduced by substituting Indian for British troops. In contrast, supporters of a greater Indian role in defending the empire stated that service in the colonies would instill loyalty in Indian troops, and prepare them for imperial conflicts outside of Asia. Critics feared the possible lessening of White prestige by interaction with and friction between Indian troops and European colonists. Ultimately, the Select Committee recommended that Indian troops should

be used in colonial garrisons close to India, but never exclusively.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to enforcing fidelity, the policy of employing British and Indian units alongside each other was intended to provide Indian troops with examples of good discipline and behavior. General Willcocks, commander of the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-15, observed that, there was "no one who is more susceptible to good example than the Indian soldier."<sup>74</sup> In turn, racial pride supposedly forced British troops to exert themselves further, lest they be bested by Blacks.<sup>75</sup>

If, in British opinion, Indian troops could not equal British troops in military ability, they still compared favorably with other European soldiers, especially Russians. During the war scare of 1878, when Disraeli brought Indian troops to the Mediterranean, the condition of the Indian Army became a popular topic of discussion in the Times. Several officials with Indian experience favored Indian involvement. For example, an Indian army officer, Lt.-Gen. Mark Kerr, boasted that the "Native Army in India... is a

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<sup>73</sup>House of Commons. Report of the Select Committee on the Army in India and the Colonies. 1867-68, vol. 6, 789-799.

<sup>74</sup>Willcocks, 244.

<sup>75</sup>Jacobsen, 222.

match for any Continental Army in Europe."<sup>76</sup> Another Indian army general, Patrick Maxwell, cited several examples of pitched battles in which Indians defeated British troops.<sup>77</sup> In India, the Times correspondent in Calcutta highlighted the examples of many Indian soldiers who eagerly volunteered for overseas service.<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, the Madras Mail praised the British government for treating India "as an integral part of the great British Empire, ready to contribute her resources, to add to the strength of her friends, to share in the combat..."<sup>79</sup> Because the crisis of 1878 subsided peacefully, Indian troops never came to blows with their Russian counterparts. The War Office did not again seriously consider involving Indian troops in White Men's Wars until July 1913, when a general European war appeared likely.<sup>80</sup>

Two Indian infantry divisions, each one-quarter British, arrived at the front in October 1914. Writing in 1915, Saint Nihal Singh praised his countrymen for

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<sup>76</sup>Mark Kerr, Letter to the Editor, the Times (London), 19 April 1878.

<sup>77</sup>Times (London), 29 April 1878.

<sup>78</sup>Times (London), 19 April 1878.

<sup>79</sup>Madras Mail, 18 April 1878.

<sup>80</sup>Perry, 84-5.

introducing unforeseen qualities into the trenches, "that uncanny sense of sight and hearing, that panther-like, stealthy movement... the strange weapons which the Indians bore... inspired the Kaiser's hordes with awe."<sup>81</sup> Despite such propaganda, the shock of trench warfare, with its constant shelling and high casualty rates in a cold, wet climate, undermined the troops' morale. Indian soldiers' rates of self-inflicted wounds greatly surpassed those of British troops. Back in pre-war India, Indian soldiers had normally campaigned on the frontiers against various tribes and acted as police in aid of civil authorities. Neither activity, however arduous, resulted in casualties and personal terror on the scale of the western front. A frustrated Sikh soldier wrote home and complained about the lack of "honorable" combat in France:

What you say in letter about not being disloyal to the Emperor, and it being the religion of the Sikhs to die facing the foe--all that you say is true. But if you yourself could be here and see for yourself... There is no fighting face to face. Guns massacre regiments sitting 10 miles off. Put pikes and staves in our hands and the enemy over us with like arms, then indeed we should you how to fight face to face!<sup>82</sup>

Because of an increasing number of failures in military performance on the part of individuals, as well as units,

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<sup>81</sup>Singh, "India's Blood Sacrifice," 490.

<sup>82</sup>Quoted in Tabili, 24.

British commanders decided to relegate Indian troops to quiet sectors of the front. Most British military opinions cited the high casualty rate among European officers as the primary cause of the Indian troops' poor showing. According to this argument, the bonds of trust and loyalty between soldiers and officers, forged during years of relative peace in India, could not be established quickly with replacement officers under the stress of modern war.<sup>83</sup> Others subsequently attributed the high failure rate to the structure of the Indian army, on the grounds that it had neither the training, organization or reserves of officers and other ranks to fight a modern attritional war against the German army.<sup>84</sup> R.W.W. Grimshaw, an "Indian" cavalry officer, actually blamed the failures of the Indian Corps on poor performance by some of its British battalions. Curiously, Grimshaw also cited Indian soldiers' supposedly deeper devotion to family for a lack of aggressiveness in the trenches.<sup>85</sup> In late 1915, the British withdrew the

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<sup>83</sup>For a typical explanation, see Merewether and Smith, 481-4.

<sup>84</sup>Jeffrey Greenhut, "The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-15," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 12 (October 1983): 54-73. The same arguments were used more recently to explain the breakdown of the Indian army during the Mesopotamian campaign against Turkey. See Edwin Latter, "The Indian Army in Mesopotamia, 1914-1918, Part II," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 72 (Autumn 1994): 160-178.

majority of Indian units from France. For the rest of the war, most Indian combatants served in the Middle East, where they were deemed suitable for fighting Turks. The Indian presence in France remained limited to laborers and cavalry regiments usually not employed in the trenches.

Britain's African colonies contributed thousands of soldiers to the imperial war effort in the First World War. In 1914, the W.A.F.F. (later R[oyal].W.A.F.F.) consisted of 7500 men: five battalions of the Nigeria Regiment, one battalion of the Gold Coast Regiment, one Sierra Leone battalion, and the Gambia Company, along with engineers and light artillery. It fought in the Cameroons and East Africa but expanded only moderately. Meanwhile, the K.A.R. numbered 2,400 in 1914 but grew to 35,500 by the end of the war.<sup>86</sup>

Many British authorities sensed that African soldiers possessed an aptitude for army life. In 1883, Sir Garnet Wolseley, one of Victorian Britain's leading generals, acknowledged that Basutos and Zulus learned military drill quicker than Europeans, and cited "some hereditary bias in their brain, in their very blood, which fits them for the

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<sup>85</sup>R.W.W. Grimshaw, Indian Cavalry Officer, 1914-15, (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Costello, 1986) Entry of 28 January 1915, 64-5.

<sup>86</sup>Perry, 199, 203.

easy acquisition of a soldier's duties."<sup>87</sup> In addition to a talent and motivation for drill, British Captain J.F. Whitacre Allen wrote in 1918 that African soldiers possessed dash, cunning, and endurance.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, in contrast to France, which brought many thousands of Black troops from Africa and Asia to the Western Front,<sup>89</sup> the British government never intended to bring African soldiers to fight in France. In 1915, Arthur Bonar Law, the Colonial Secretary, referred to the idea as "the height of folly."<sup>90</sup> Likewise, the War Office objected to the wider use of African soldiers in combatant roles because of perceived limitations regarding African intelligence and ability to

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<sup>87</sup>Garnet Wolseley, "The Negro as a Soldier." Fortnightly Review (London) 264 (December 1888): 689-703.

<sup>88</sup>Allen, 657-9.

<sup>89</sup>On France's use of African troops during the First World War, see Myron Echenberg, Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Senegalais in French West Africa, 1857-1960. (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991), 25-46. Commandant Blanchet, a French colonial infantry officer provided the British with his evaluation of African troops. He judged that Africans did not possess aptitudes for operating automatic weapons or constructing complex field works. Further, they were unable "to understand and sum up a tactical situation quickly, or take a timely and adequate initiative." P.R.O. C.O. 445/45 War Office to Colonial Office, 11 September 1918. "Notes on French-African troops by Commandant Blanchet, Infanterie Coloniale, 19 August 1918."

<sup>90</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/604. Memorandum, "Question of Raising Native Troops for Imperial Service," 18 October 1915.

withstand the European climate. Also, African units required large numbers of European personnel and lengthy periods of training in order to make them effective.<sup>91</sup>

Throughout the war, a number of voices in the British press and Parliament called for a greater use of the empire's African man-power, on both practical and idealistic reasons. Early in the conflict, one M.P. offered to finance the recruitment of African soldiers himself. Later, in mid-1915, Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, "pleaded" for the House of Commons "to take steps to deal with the question of coloured soldiers, and to get them from South Africa." In July 1916, Josiah C. Wedgewood, M.P., perhaps the leading advocate of African military participation, praised the military abilities of Black troops and urged that greater use be made of them, even if shared combat undermined White prestige.<sup>92</sup> In the English Review of October 1916, Major Darnley-Stuart-Stephens, who commanded African pioneers, urged that 500,000 soldiers be

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<sup>91</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 445/45. War Office to Foreign Office, 10 February 1918 and accompanying comments.

<sup>92</sup>Killingray, "The Idea of a British Imperial African Army," Journal of African History 20, 3 (1979): 423-7; Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 5th Ser., vol. 84 (1916), cols. 1530-1536; and vol. 93 (1917), cols. 1107-1108. Also, see Wedgewood's articles in the Daily Chronicle of 27, 30 October, and 7 November; and that of Sir Godfrey Lagden, 31 October; Sir Alfred Sharpe, 1 November; Sir Harry Johnston, 2 November 1916.



raised from African territories and "thrown into the scale" against the Germans in France.<sup>93</sup> However, even an advocate for a greater utilization of African troops, J.F. Whitacre Allen, summed up the limitations of using them in Europe: they panicked easier than European soldiers and did not possess "the same capacity for withstanding hardships of a novel kind, whether mental or physical, as is possessed by the latter."<sup>94</sup> Perhaps the last but most interesting plea for the use of Black troops in Europe came in September 1918, when the British commander in France, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, asked the War Office to provide Black combatant troops for his depleted divisions for the upcoming 1919 campaign. The War Office took no action on this "wild" suggestion and the war ended within a few months.<sup>95</sup>

Warfare changed significantly between 1914 and 1939 as new techniques to kill infantrymen developed including mobile armored combat and air-power. By the Second World War, combatant soldiers constituted only a small proportion of military strength, the balance being technicians or laborers. In order to function effectively under these new

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<sup>93</sup>Major Darnley-Stuart-Stephens, "Our Million Black Army," English Review 22 (October 1916): 359-360.

<sup>94</sup>Allen, 657.

<sup>95</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 445/45. Sir Douglas Haig to War Office, 19 September 1918 and attached comments.

circumstances, military personnel had to master increasingly sophisticated weapons systems and tactics. However, the colonial forces never could recruit enough literate individuals to handle the more complex tasks of "blitzkrieg." For example, military authorities in West Africa found it impossible to fill a recruiting quota of sixty-three literate recruits per month. In fact, for the first three and one-half months of 1944, only twenty-eight had been obtained.<sup>96</sup>

In the Second World War, British military officials acknowledged that the superiority of White soldiers over Black colonial troops was caused by cultural background rather than any genetic inheritance. For instance, in 1945, Col. E. Collins, adjutant-general of colonial troops in the Middle East, explained the significant difference between British and African motivation,

The U.K. soldier has a background of generations of political experience, education and recurrent major wars, the [African] men under consideration have a very different background. The standard of education of the modern U.K. soldier has for example largely abolished the need for footdrill as an essential part of training but footdrill because of its psychological effect will remain necessary for most colonial troops for many years to come.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/107/7. Extract from Summary of West African War Committee Conclusions of Fourteenth Meeting held 14 and 15 April 1944.

<sup>97</sup>P.R.O. D.O. 35/1183/Y1069/1/1/PT2. "Colonial and Local Troops," Report by Col. E. Collins, July 1945. See

In other words, British soldiers required less discipline instilled by repetitive drill because their cultural background already provided preparation and motivation for their military duties. Black soldiers apparently needed a more thorough re-conditioning for western military life. Because of their ignorance of western political values, simple basic military discipline had to suffice to motivate illiterate soldiers to carry out their duties.

At first, the Great War attitude that the Indian army could not cope with a European foe would appear to have largely subsided during the Second World War. From the start of the war, Indian troops played important roles. In particular, Indian divisions distinguished themselves against mechanized enemies in North Africa from 1941 to 1943. After that hard fought campaign, the British brought Indian troops to Sicily and Italy for two years of mountain warfare against the German army. However, Indian brigades serving in the Mediterranean contained British battalions, reflecting the post-1857 fears of another Mutiny. In contrast, the Indian army divisions in the Far East adopted a different but more practical organization after 1943.

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also, Sir George Giffard's comments are found in William Platt, "The East African Forces in the war and their Future," Journal of the Royal United Services Institution 93 (1948): 412.

William Slim, the commander of the British Fourteenth Army in Burma, decided to withdraw British units from his Indian infantry divisions and cited several benefits including a simplification of supply arrangements and enhanced fighting abilities.<sup>98</sup>

Shortly after the Second World War began, the Colonial Office resolved to press for the acceptance of colonial military units, including Africans, for active service overseas. Initially, it appeared that the War Office concurred. For example, General Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson, the Adjutant General to the Forces, agreed that colonial troops could be usefully employed to relieve British garrisons in Egypt and elsewhere, and possibly be deployed on "quiet parts of the front" in France.<sup>99</sup>

Whether sincere or not, Gordon-Finlayson's conciliatory opinion did not reflect government intentions regarding the R.W.A.F.F. and K.A.R. None of Britain's political or military leadership seriously considered employing African troops in battle against the German army. Early in 1941, Winston Churchill, now Britain's prime minister, protested that African infantry divisions should not be termed

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<sup>98</sup>Slim, 523.

<sup>99</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1672/1. Colonial Office Note, September 1939, enclosed in T.H. Lee to Sir John Shuckburgh, 27 September 1939.

"divisions" at all within the imperial order of battle and that "no one contemplates standing them in the line against a European army."<sup>100</sup> At about the same time, British West and East African troops had begun the liberation of Ethiopia against Italian and Italian colonial troops. They earned high praise in the largely infantry-style campaign but, in July, the British commander in East Africa, General Sir Alan Cunningham, predicted that it would be "unwise" to send them against the German army. They would be "staunch," he wrote, but only as long as their White officers survived.<sup>101</sup>

As modern soldiers, illiterate Indian and African troops, still largely recruited from so-called "martial races," generally did not reach the technical effectiveness of British troops. This goal would have required a much longer period of training and education than available during the war. Had vigorous educational and economic development policies been instituted throughout the empire in the decades before the war, then the empire could have been transformed into a far more massive recruiting ground. Since the 1850s, however, Britain's policies toward the

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<sup>100</sup>"Prime Minister to Chiefs of Staff, et. al," 17 February 1941, Quoted in Churchill, The Grand Alliance (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), 623.

<sup>101</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 820/48/23. Cunningham to Moyne, 16 July, 1941. See also, P.R.O. W.O. 106/5214. Cunningham to War Office, 18 July 1941.

"improvement" of subject peoples had reflected an assumption that Black people could not be "improved" and that such education as was provided might actually prove to be injurious, either to the individual concerned or to the political unity of the empire.

British military leaders generally thought that Black troops could not take the field successfully against modern European armies, but they did discover a less glamorous, though absolutely necessary, role for Black soldiers behind the firing lines. In both world wars, British armies in the field required the supporting services of many thousands of military laborers. Pioneers, as military laborers were usually called, unloaded and transported supplies, built and maintained roads, railways, and other means of communications. Since physical and intelligence standards were lower for pioneers than frontline soldiers, a larger pool of potential recruits could be called upon. Training requirements were minimal, being usually limited to basic drill and less vigorous older White officers could be assigned to command them. The utilization of Black laborers freed White personnel, who were considered better suited for modern war, for service in combatant roles. For example, in May 1942, Sir Claude Auchinleck, Commander in Chief, Middle East Forces, asked the War Office for Black troops to

replace Whites in secondary static roles such as garrison and anti-aircraft duties. He argued that, "the White manpower resources of the Empire must be conserved and used to the best advantage by the maximum employment of non-European troops."<sup>102</sup>

Between 1914 and 1918, the War Office recruited several hundred thousand Black laborers from throughout the empire and nominally independent China to work behind the battle lines in France.<sup>103</sup> In 1939, British leaders planned to wage the Second World War in much the same way as they had the First in that a British Expeditionary Force, consisting of British and dominion combatant formations, would again defend the Franco-German Border. Meanwhile, thousands of Black military laborers would be imported to unload and haul supplies behind the front in France. The War Office estimated that there would be fifty thousand military laborers serving in France with the B.E.F. by June 1940 and 150,000 by mid-1941.<sup>104</sup> In early 1940, the War Cabinet

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<sup>102</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10141. C.-in-C., M.E.F., to War Office, 14 May 1942.

<sup>103</sup>For a comprehensive study, see Robin Wallace Kilson, "Calling up the Empire: The British military use of non-White labor in France, 1916-1920," Ph.D. Diss., (Harvard University, 1990).

<sup>104</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1672/1. Hore-Belisha to Macdonald, 13 December 1939.

decided to postpone the employment of colonial pioneers with the B.E.F. in France because Britain itself still had over one million unemployed workers. It would have been "politically dangerous" to employ "coloured" colonial labor instead of Britons.<sup>105</sup>

### III. The "Black Man's Grave"

Whenever discussing the use of Black troops in Europe, as combatants or pioneers, British officials considered the potential impact of the European climate on the health of Black troops. In British eyes, lung afflictions, especially pneumonia, presented the greatest threat to the health of Black troops in colder regions. It is unclear just how far back this view was held, but the New Orleans campaign of 1814-1815, in which the 1st and 5th West India Regiments took part, apparently confirmed it. G.R. Gleig, an officer with a White regiment, blamed the susceptibility of the W.I.R.s to the Louisiana climate for the British failure.<sup>106</sup> Benson Earle Hill, a Royal Artillery officer, recalled that the Black soldiers "suffered most dreadfully from the change of climate and alteration of fare; they were positively not

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<sup>105</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/1. "Extract from Conclusions of the War Cabinet held 25 January 1940."

<sup>106</sup>(G.R. Gleig) An Officer, Narrative of the Campaigns of the British Army at Washington and New Orleans. (London: John Murray, 1821), 241.



only useless, but absolutely in the way." Hill witnessed many W.I.R. soldiers who simply resigned themselves to dying.<sup>107</sup> In fact, according to an officer and historian of a W.I.R. regiment, the primary cause of the suffering of the "Black Corps" in the unexpectedly cold Louisiana climate was that the British had not provided the Black soldiers, who normally campaigned among the Caribbean islands, with adequate clothing.<sup>108</sup>

The "Black Man's Grave" mirrored the "White Man's Grave," the belief, based on long experience, that White soldiers suffered extremely high mortality rates in tropical regions.<sup>109</sup> Whether the concurrent belief in the "Black Man's Grave" reflected racial arrogance or a reasonable scientific supposition, it persisted for quite a long time. In 1885, Alfred B. Ellis, an officer in the 1st W.I.R. strongly advocated a greater use of West Indian troops, but warned that they could never be used in cold climates because, in his words, "the negro suffers from cold in a manner which is incomprehensive even to Europeans who have

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<sup>107</sup>Benson Earle Hill, Recollections of an Artillery Officer, vol. I., (London: Richard Bentley, 1836), 333.

<sup>108</sup>Alfred B. Ellis, History of the First West India Regiment (London: Chapman and Hall, 1885), 145.

<sup>109</sup>See David Geggus, "Yellow Fever in the 1790s: The British Army in Saint Domingue," Medical History 23 (1979): 38-58 and Voelz, 311-30.

passed the best part of their lives in the tropics."<sup>110</sup> In 1878, as Indian troops prepared for possible action against the Russians in the Mediterranean, the European Madras Mail lamented that the vulnerability of Indian troops, especially those from southern India, to cold weather, restricted their deployment to warm regions. It duly recommended that the best suited Indian soldiers to send to Europe included northerners such as Gurkhas, Sikhs, and "Musalmans."<sup>111</sup>

Climate remained a crucial factor in military decision-making in the First World War. For example, in 1915, when pondering a greater use of colonial manpower for the war effort against Germany, Arthur Bonar Law, the Colonial Secretary, reported to the Cabinet that, "West Indian troops could not face a European winter campaign."<sup>112</sup> Africans had a similar reputation for susceptibility to dampness and cold.<sup>113</sup> Despite government fears, medical statistics from the First World War did not support the "Myth of the Black

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<sup>110</sup>Ellis, 8.

<sup>111</sup>Madras Mail, 2 April 1878.

<sup>112</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/604. Memorandum, "Question of Raising Native Troops for Imperial Service," 18 October 1915.

<sup>113</sup>Allen, 657; P.R.O. C.O. 537/604. Memorandum, "Question of Raising Native Troops for Imperial Service," 18 October 1915; P.R.O. C.O. 537/952. H/W Minute, 9 September 1916.

Man's Grave." In 1917, White (British and dominion) troops in France suffered pneumonia at an annual rate of 1.14 hospital admissions per thousand ration strength; Indian troops (mostly cavalry), 1.22; and the multi-ethnic Native Labour Corps (N.L.C.), .94. In the following year, White troops in France suffered pneumonia at a rate of 1.03 admissions per thousand; Indian troops, 2.34; and the N.L.C., a relatively low .61.<sup>114</sup> Tentatively, these statistics suggest that Black colonial soldiers did not suffer from the cold significantly more than White troops and, in some instances, they suffered less.

Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence concerning Black susceptibility to the cold, combined with racial stereotypes, survived the war and significantly affected British military policies in the Second World War. Again, in 1939, when the Colonial Office studied the problems of again recruiting a contingent of "coloured" pioneers for service in France, climate figured prominently. Gold Coast Governor Hodson opposed sending Africans to France because their exposure to the French climate would be "a form of cruelty."<sup>115</sup> The governor of Sierra Leone predicted that,

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<sup>114</sup>Casualties and Medical Statistics of the Great War (London: H.M.S.O., 1931), 164-165, 174-175.

<sup>115</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1672/4. Hodson to A.J. Dawe, 8 December 1939.

"the incidence of sickness would be so high that in a very short time it would become completely ineffective... such a disaster would have serious political repercussions after the war."<sup>116</sup> Cautiously, medical officials in Nigeria predicted that, if provided with sufficient clothing, accommodations, and food, and time for acclimatization to the French climate, the health of Nigerian pioneers would "remain reasonably good."<sup>117</sup>

The European climate became an issue again in 1943, when British commanders in the Mediterranean hoped to bring Black pioneers to Italy with the Eighth Army. Colonial medical officials in Nigeria advised that West African pioneers would be unable to withstand the rigors of campaigning in Italy's winter climate, but they could function adequately at stationary hospitals and base camps if allowed time to acclimatize.<sup>118</sup> Experience bore out the wisdom of this prediction because the British brought soldiers from many tropical regions to Italy and found that they could withstand the climate as well as White troops,

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<sup>116</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/12. Fenton (for Governor) to Lloyd, 29 May 1940.

<sup>117</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/12. Orde Brown to Colonial Secretary, 13 and 14 January 1940.

<sup>118</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/97/1. Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to Allied Forces Headquarters, 14 October 1943.

providing that they had time to acclimatize and were given sufficient food, clothing, and shelter.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, at Colonial Office insistence, the commanders in Italy withdrew West African units to the Middle East in late 1944.<sup>120</sup>

Neither the military's own figures or scientific opinion supported the notion of a "Black Man's Grave." As with the First World War, medical statistics for the Second World War indicated that Indian and African troops (from all regions) serving in North Africa (excluding Egypt) and Italy actually suffered pneumonia at lower rates than White British troops.<sup>121</sup> In early 1945, a War Office scientist informed his superiors that, according to established scientific knowledge, racial differences in climatic tolerance were slight:

Each group is on the whole more in harmony with the physical conditions of its own habitat than is any other group but a short period of acclimatization on the part of the foreigner is sufficient to bring him into a harmony with the conditions of the strange habitat. The coloured

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<sup>119</sup>See reports in P.R.O. W.O. 106/2190. "Brief History of R.W.A.F.F. in MidEast, by Lt. Col. H.A. Lilley;" and P.R.O. D.O. 35/1183/Y1069/1/1/Pt.1. "Report by Lt. Col. R. Charnock, 9 January 1944.

<sup>120</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/97/1. Colonial Office to War Office, 20 October 1944 and War Office to Allied Forces Headquarters, 10 November 1944.

<sup>121</sup>Medical History of the Second World War: Casualties and Medical Statistics (London: H.M.S.O., 1972), 247, 256, 259. Unfortunately, the statistics are not broken down between West, East or South Africans.

man can thrive biologically wherever the White can flourish and vice versa.<sup>122</sup>

Although "established," this scientific knowledge was consistently displaced within the military and political establishment by long-held stereotypes. The British fear of killing Blacks by means of pneumonia lacked empirical support, but the "Myth of the Black Man's Grave" buttressed British reservations about the utility of Black troops.

For Britain's major defense needs, Black colonial troops served as crucial supplements to the White forces of the empire. Ordinarily, however, British and colonial authorities did not rely on Black soldiers exclusively. Racial prejudice, whether in the form of a small and exclusive officer corps, a hesitancy to send Black troops to kill Whites, or a fear of the "Black Man's Grave," limited the usefulness of Black colonial troops. Given that racial considerations were intrinsic to existence of the British colonial empire in the twentieth century, Britain had, in a military sense, acquired an empire it could not exploit to the fullest.

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<sup>122</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/14692. D[irector]. of B[iological]. R[esearch]. to D[irector]. of O[rganisation]., 7 February 1945.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE CARIBBEAN REGIMENT DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR: A CASE STUDY OF RACISM AND BRITISH MILITARY POLICY.

Most of the British military establishment's racial attitudes discussed previously with regard to Asian and African colonial troops affected the military participation of Black West Indians. However, the case of the West Indies is especially instructive because, compared with the Black inhabitants of the Indian Empire and the African colonies, West Indians were the most "English" in culture and race. Because of the degree of West Indian "Anglicization," Black West Indians were not considered to be a "martial race." Consequently, the War Office strenuously opposed any close association of Black West Indian subjects with its war efforts during the twentieth century. The experience of the Caribbean Regiment, the West Indies' only overseas combatant contingent during the Second World War, is discussed in some detail here because it shows vividly how colonial politics and backward-looking military perspectives clashed.

## I. Black Military Experience in the British West Indies.

Black soldiers played important roles in military operations in the Western Hemisphere from Europe's Age of Discovery onward. In emergency situations throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, all of the European colonial powers in the Americas came to rely upon the usually enthusiastic response of African subjects, free as well as slave, to serve against other European powers. Often, such service earned freedom and land for slaves and special privileges for free men of color.<sup>1</sup> In the Georgian period, West Indian militias, with exclusively White officer corps, consisted of a majority of White personnel, but Free Blacks formed a significant minority. For example, the Jamaica Militia, originally formed in 1661, numbered 8,827 in 1825, of whom about three thousand were free Blacks. During the Napoleonic conflicts, the Trinidad militia possessed two infantry regiments of Blacks. Meanwhile, Trinidadian Whites comprised three cavalry regiments and one infantry regiment.<sup>2</sup> As the century unfolded, limited contact with people of color in militias increasingly appalled Whites. By mid-century, many colonial governments

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<sup>1</sup>Voelz, 14-19.

<sup>2</sup>"The Jamaica Militia," 146; R. Chartrand, British Forces in the West Indies (London: Osprey, 1996), 39.



had disbanded or simply left their militias moribund. An 1853 Colonial Office report noted that, in Jamaica's case, such indifference to militia service was due to "the repugnance on the part of the White population against a general association with the coloured races."<sup>3</sup>

Public attitudes toward military service changed and, concurrent with Britain's volunteer movement, colonial local forces experienced a rejuvenation by the late nineteenth century. The new West Indian local forces, like the old, included racially segregated units, (all of which, of course, were officered by Whites). For example, in the 1890s, Trinidad's "Little Army" of volunteers included the 527-strong Light Infantry and 142-member Field Artillery Volunteers, both of which consisted of Black other ranks and White officers. A ninety-nine member Light Horse (cavalry) remained the preserve of wealthier Whites.<sup>4</sup> Bermuda formed its own segregated local units in 1892: the White Bermuda Volunteer Rifle Corps and the predominately Black, but White-officered Bermuda Militia Artillery.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/155. Memorandum, "Militia in the Colonies," 14 January 1853, 6.

<sup>4</sup>"The Little Army of Trinidad," Navy and Army Illustrated 2, (13 November 1896): 256-7.

<sup>5</sup>A.L. Kipling, "The Bermuda Regiment," Bulletin (The Military Historical Society) 16 (May 1966): 92-3.

Apart from direct combatant roles in part-time or emergency military forces, British commanders in the Caribbean during the Georgian period assigned slaves to White units in order to relieve European military personnel of exhausting, and therefore deadly, fatigue duty. European troops suffered high mortality rates and military authorities hoped that Black labor could help preserve White lives.<sup>6</sup> After employing Blacks in strictly controlled militias and pioneers, the next logical step for British military leaders seemed to be the formation of regular regiments of Blacks to permanently replace or augment European garrisons in the West Indies. The War Office did not adopt this policy until 1795, during the war with Revolutionary France. Colonial Whites had opposed any Black regiments besides those already existing in the militia. For example, in 1782, when the Jamaican government, fearful of Spanish and French attack, formed three provisional battalions of free Black volunteers (in addition to existing Black militiamen), it was delayed by the protests of local merchants and planters.<sup>7</sup> The prospect of having more armed Blacks on the island brought no feeling of security to the

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<sup>6</sup>Voelz, 59-71.

<sup>7</sup>Albert W. Haarmann, "Jamaica Provincial Corps, 1780-1783," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 48 (Spring 1970): 11-13.

ruling elite.

During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, few British regiments could be spared for Caribbean garrisons, but various British West Indian colonial assemblies strenuously resisted the creation of regular Black regiments. Historian Roger N. Buckley writes that the British government "demonstrated uncommon toughness in the face of determined colonial opposition,"<sup>8</sup> and by 1799 twelve West India Regiments (W.I.R.s) had been raised. The number of West Indian battalions fluctuated between a dozen and one before the disbandment of the last in 1927. In contrast to locally supported and regulated units such as the Indian army and African colonial forces, the W.I.R.s remained "imperial" regiments under the direct control of the War Office, but separate from White British regiments.

Originally, the British government had planned to purchase slaves in the West Indies for the W.I.R.s but this source yielded few soldiers because of the reluctance of slave-owners to sell physically fit males to the army. W.I.R. recruiters then relied on slaves purchased direct from Africa until the end of the British slave trade in 1807. After this date, escaped and "liberated" African

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<sup>8</sup>Roger Norman Buckley, Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795-1815 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 144.

slaves provided most recruits. These "Black Corps" earned high praise for their services in the Caribbean during the Napoleonic period. From 1818, it became customary for at least one of the W.I.R.s to be stationed on the coast of West Africa,<sup>9</sup> where they campaigned largely unheralded.

Imperial and colonial views of the W.I.R.s remained ambiguous throughout their existence. As an example of the British army's ignorance of the W.I.R.s, the Broad Arrow, a military periodical, cited the story of a general who received the distinction of being named honorary "Colonel" of a W.I.R. and met with one of its officers. The White officer's appearance surprised the general who exclaimed, "God bless my soul, sir! why, you don't mean to say you're a captain in the [W.I.]--Regiment? I thought they were all Black."<sup>10</sup>

White West Indian society, well aware of the "Black Corps," did not like or trust Black West Indian soldiers. As discussed previously, colonial governments felt that London did not understand the racial situation in the Caribbean. However, in the face of Britain's determination

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<sup>9</sup>G. Tylden, The West India Regiments, 1795-1927, and from 1958, Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 40 (March 1962): 43-5.

<sup>10</sup>"A Plea for West India Regiments," The Broad Arrow 2 (13 March 1869): 316.

to form and maintain the W.I.R.s as imperial troops, West Indian governments gradually became accustomed to their presence. The degree of comfort lessened by mid-century when the sources of African recruits disappeared, and the British then sought out West Indian-born Blacks for the W.I.R.s. For West Indian Whites, the recruitment of Afro-Caribbean soldiers seemed threatening to the structure of their colonial society. In 1853, Antigua businessmen protested to the Colonial Office that they preferred African recruits because these foreigners did not sympathize with the creole population, "whom [the Africans] regard with no friendly feelings and by whom they are consequently much dreaded, more even than the White troops..."<sup>11</sup>

## II. The Martial Races Theory and the West Indies

As with Eurasians, Black West Indians did not merit the term "martial race" in military opinion because they, "an inappropriate hybridism," possessed White blood and were exposed to European culture. They were supposedly incapable of incorporating the "best" of European characteristics, including hard work, thrift, and duty. For example, a W.I.R. officer who witnessed the transition from African to

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<sup>11</sup>Daniel & Co. to Duke of Newcastle 18 June 1853, in House Paper 1852-53 (938) 65. 115. Correspondence between West Indian Merchants to the Colonial Office, respecting the Recruiting for the Black Regiments from the Creole population of Antigua.

West Indian recruitment in his unit, judged that, "the pure African makes a better soldier than a Creole. He is generally more subordinate, and is cleanlier than his domesticated brother[sic]." <sup>12</sup> Another observer contrasted the African with the creole and found the first "loyal, brave, honest, and, ... as faithful as a mastiff," while the creoles were "treacherous, dishonest, and ... most brutally cruel to one another, to children, and to such animals as they can get into their power." <sup>13</sup> Sir Garnet Wolseley, one of Britain's most important Victorian generals, summarized the racial basis of Black West Indian defects as soldiers:

The infusion of White blood into the West Indian negro has certainly not improved his physical strength, whilst the education we have given him has as certainly injured his fighting qualities. He has lost the best qualities his forefathers possessed as savages, and he has failed to acquire those which belong to that civilisation [with] which he is now more or less associated. <sup>14</sup>

Another reservation about the W.I.R.s was that, by being treated and fed like British troops, they were "excessively pampered." Being too "civilized," it was believed that they could not fight as well in the bush as African troops. <sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>"P," "Blacks," St. James Magazine 7 (1863): 46.

<sup>13</sup>"Sketches in the West Indies," Dublin University Magazine 56 (November 1860): 612.

<sup>14</sup>Wolseley, 691.

<sup>15</sup>S.C. Ukpabi, "The Origins of the West African Frontier Force," Journal of the Historical Society of

Not all late Victorian officers expressed such fondness for the "noble savage" and dislike for West Indians. Alfred B. Ellis, an officer with the First W.I.R., advocated a greater use of Black West Indians in colonial garrisons to replace British units, which then could be concentrated at home.<sup>16</sup> Ellis differed with the views such as Wolseley's that West Indian units were "no longer of the same use to us as formerly, when they were composed of liberated Africans."<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Ellis thought that creoles made excellent soldiers precisely because of their degree of Anglicization. While he considered West Africans "dull and stupid" and Indians "hostile to us by tradition," Ellis found the West Indian soldier to be "docile, patient, brave, and faithful."<sup>18</sup> More applause came in 1894 from a former head of the West Indian command, Major General Sir Charles Pearson, who wrote that the Black West Indian soldier was "quite as easily managed as the European." The West Indian possessed his "peculiarities... but, when once his officer and he understand each other no one could be more amenable to discipline, and his loyalty is unimpeachable." Pearson

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Nigeria 3, 3, (December 1966): 490.

<sup>16</sup>Ellis, 4-5.

<sup>17</sup>Wolseley, 690.

<sup>18</sup>Ellis, 11-13.

also argued that the W.I.R.s deserved more recognition.<sup>19</sup>

As if in response, albeit belatedly, the Navy and Army Illustrated, in 1898, praised "the cheery and powerful Blacks" of the W.I.R.s for extending British authority in West Africa.<sup>20</sup> However, within the British military establishment, pro-West Indian Black sympathy remained a minority opinion. More typical was the view expressed in a 1901 War Office report that, "the W[est].I[ndian]. soldier in peace time only does well where he can have his Black women without interference--otherwise he may become very troublesome and insubordinate."<sup>21</sup>

### III. White Officers and the W.I.R.s

In contrast to the sought-after postings in the Indian army and African colonial forces, the W.I.R.s usually received reluctant British officers who simply had no where else to go for a military career. In 1894, General Pearson observed that, "of the unpopularity of the [West Indian] service among candidates for commissions in the Army there can be no doubt."<sup>22</sup> Frequently, W.I.R. officers had

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<sup>19</sup>Charles Pearson, "The West Indies and its Command," United Service Magazine (June 1894): 156-7.

<sup>20</sup>"The West India Regiment," The Navy and Army Illustrated 7 (8 December 1898): 278.

<sup>21</sup>P.R.O. CAB. 11/129. Raper to Altham, 17 October 1901.

<sup>22</sup>Pearson, 157.



graduated low from Sandhurst and spent a considerable amount of time and effort attempting to "exchange" to better postings. The Army and Navy Gazette stated that,

the fact these regiments are officered at all is indeed a striking proof of the anxiety of our middle class young men for military service. As a profession their calling may be pronounced miserable. They command blacks, and their service alternates between ...[the West Indies] and the pestilential West Coast of Africa...

Another military journal, the Broad Arrow, suggested that officers disdained serving with the W.I.R.s because, while they received the same low pay as their fellows in U.K.-based units, they were subject to higher costs of living and continuous foreign service in far more hazardous climates.<sup>23</sup>

Some officers strongly detested their West Indian postings. For example, in the 1890s, Scottish-born Ernst Craig-Brown had joined the W.I.R. after Sandhurst but sought to transfer to an elite Highland regiment. Sounding much like a dissatisfied East India Company officer before 1857, he bitterly referred to his Black West Indian N.C.O.s and soldiers as "little removed from the Ape"<sup>24</sup> and "the rottenest lot of sulky, lazy brutes I ever came across."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Army and Navy Gazette Quoted in The Times, 10 December 1867. See Pearson, 158; and "A Plea for West India Regiments," 316.

<sup>24</sup>Craig-Brown, Letter to Father, 22 January 1897, Craig-Brown Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>25</sup>Craig-Brown, Letter to Mother, 15/17 December

Craig-Brown also disparaged his soldiers' marching skills: "the nigger can't walk, he only shambles along." Upon viewing a newly arrived British battalion, he found it "a treat... to see a European regiment at drill after seeing nothing but negroes for 6 months."<sup>26</sup>

A significant proportion of W.I.R. officers came from "non-traditional" sources, which included former N.C.O.s and temporary war-time officers who had been offered permanent, or regular, commissions in the army as rewards for distinguished service. Such officers invariably lacked the independent income required to participate in the social life of a more fashionable U.K. regiment. Perhaps the most famous such example was William Slim, a temporary officer during the First World War, who received a regular commission in the British army. Contemplating the considerable expense of regimental life, he chose the "cheaper" W.I.R. as his "home" regiment. Slim never actually served with the regiment but exchanged into the Indian army before the end of the war.<sup>27</sup>

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1895.

<sup>26</sup>Craig-Brown, Letter to Mother, 2 February 1896.

<sup>27</sup>David Anderson, "Slim," in John Keegan, ed., Churchill's Generals (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 302.

#### IV. Reliability and White Man's Wars

The most notable disciplinary failures on the part of the W.I.R.s occurred before the change in recruiting patterns from Africans to creoles.<sup>28</sup> From the mid-nineteenth century until their final disbandment in 1927, the W.I.R.s remained loyal, despite the fears earlier expressed concerning the fidelity of creole soldiers and the disdain of their officers. The one significant revolt of creole soldiers between 1850 and 1914 involved not the W.I.R.s, but a volunteer corps in Trinidad. In 1896, the racial tensions existing in Trinidadian society violently erupted during a day-long series of athletic competitions which marked the end of annual training periods. A fight broke out between Bombardier Alleyne, a Black member of the artillery and a Light Horse sergeant, Thomas Gibson. The bombardier, who had been drinking, had asked Gibson if he could borrow his horse for a race. Gibson refused and, after being verbally harassed by Alleyne, struck the bombardier. Several of the bombardier's comrades then proceeded to batter Gibson. Other members of both units joined the fray, their officers having lost control. A few artillerymen who had maintained their composure arrested

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<sup>28</sup>For examples, see Michael Craton, Testing the Chains (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 228-9, 236.

Alleyne on an officer's orders and took him to the barracks, where he fell asleep. However, most of the artillerymen refused to obey orders to disband, made loud threats and, because Gibson had not been arrested, demanded that Alleyne be released. After Alleyne had been awakened and released by fearful officers, the mutineers carried him through the streets in triumph. Within days, the governor formally dissolved the Artillery Volunteers and those mutineers who held positions with the government or private firms immediately lost their jobs, including the unfortunate Alleyne, who had been employed by the Port-of-Spain Gazette. Subsequently, a court-martial reduced Gibson to the rank of private for assaulting Alleyne.<sup>29</sup> In addition to illustrating the stresses inherent to colonial society, the "Artillery Riot" demonstrated that Black West Indian soldiers could react with violence to racial slights.

In the First World War, the West India Regiment (the several W.I.R.s had been by now consolidated into one regiment, consisting of two battalions) fought against the Germans in the Cameroons and East Africa. The War Office refused early offers of a separate West Indian contingent, consisting of citizen-soldiers and modeled along the lines

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<sup>29</sup>For the saga of this mutiny, see the Times (London) 15 September 1899; Port of Spain Gazette, 27, 29, and 31 August and 2 September 1899.

of Kitchener's "new armies" then being raised in Britain. "Respectable" West Indian patriots did not wish to simply enlist in the regular W.I.R.s because of the contempt then widely held for professional soldiers, who usually came from the poorest and most desperate sections of society.<sup>30</sup> In 1915, after being subjected to lobbying by influential organizations and persons, including the Colonial Office and King George V himself, the War Office authorized the formation of the British West Indies Regiment (B.W.I.R.) for war-time service. Only two of the regiment's eleven battalions actually served as frontline combat soldiers, and that was against the Turks in the Middle East.<sup>31</sup> In 1917, the War Office decided to permit West Indian colonial governors to nominate "slightly coloured gentlemen" for "governor's" commissions, which were limited in authority to the B.W.I.R. It is not clear how many were eventually appointed before the regiment's post-war disbandment.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>In early 1918, a scheme to amalgamate reluctant members of the wartime British West Indies Regiment with the regular 2/W.I.R. in East Africa had to be dropped because it would have caused "serious trouble," including murder. P.R.O. C.O. 318/347. General Officer Commanding, East Africa, to War Office, 9 April 1918.

<sup>31</sup>C.L. Joseph, "The British West Indies Regiment," Journal of Caribbean History 2 (May 1971): 94-124.

<sup>32</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 318/347. "Men from W[est]. Indies not of pure European descent. Enlistment in British Regts." Minute of 5 June 1918.

Against Germany's African colonies, the W.I.R. fought well, but usually without fanfare. In contrast, the activities of the B.W.I.R., a publicly proclaimed embodiment of West Indian patriotism, remained a subject of acute interest for colonial officials throughout the war. In general, high ranking British commanders commended the battalions of the B.W.I.R. personnel serving under their command. In 1916, the British commander in Egypt, W.J. Murray, did not initially consider the recently arrived battalions of the B.W.I.R. to be fit enough even for pioneer duties in the Middle Eastern heat, but he recognized that the West Indian soldiers wanted a chance to fight.<sup>33</sup> A year of training improved the unit's condition so much that Murray reported that "the discipline of the regiment has been consistently good, and the fine physique and smart turnout of the men has often been noted." In 1918, two B.W.I.R. battalions earned praise for an attack they made in Trans-Jordan.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, in France, Sir Douglas Haig found that the B.W.I.R. personnel he used as pioneers were cheerful under fire, well-disciplined and possessed high

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<sup>33</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 318/339. General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Egypt, to Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 29 June 1916.

<sup>34</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 318/344. "A Short History of the British West Indies Regiment in Egypt by W.J. Murray, 24 June 1917."

morale.<sup>35</sup> In 1947, E.E. Sabben-Clare, a Colonial Office official, concluded that if the War Office had any grounds for complaint about the morale and performance of West Indian troops in the First World War, army authorities themselves were largely responsible because of negligence in providing adequate clothing and dividing the regiment in question among several fronts.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, individual opinions of lower ranking British personnel toward West Indian soldiers ranged from admiration to stereotype to ignorance. W.E. Young, a stretcher-bearer in France remembered that, "they could give points to British [soldiers] in manners, speech and behavior." In Africa, West Indian soldiers staged a concert, an event which A.F. Bowden described as a "real" minstrel show. Roland Mountfort, a corporal with the 25/Royal Fusiliers in East Africa, received the impression that West Indians "thought no small beer of themselves, always speaking

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<sup>35</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 318/344. "Service of Battalions of the British West Indies Regiment," by L.S. Kiggelf for Field Marshal Haig, 8 November 1917.

<sup>36</sup>A Colonial Office official, E.E. Sabben-Clare, referred back to the unfortunate experiences of the B.W.I.R. P.R.O. CAB 21/1689. Sabben-Clare, "The Colonial Military Forces in the Second World War," 1947. B.W.I.R. troops in England suffered a relatively high mortality rate of seventy deaths per thousand during the winter of 1915-16. P.R.O. C.O. 318/340. Minute, "Labourers for Light Railways in France," 30 September 1916.

English if there was a White man anywhere around."<sup>37</sup>

White resentment of Blacks who felt equal to Europeans was returned in kind. Soon after the end of the First World War, soldiers of the B.W.I.R. staged mutinies in Taranto, Italy. The soldiers had become violent in response to racist slurs against them, their lower pay, inferior accommodations, and segregated medical facilities.<sup>38</sup> With this incident, the War Office learned an irritating and far-reaching lesson, i.e., that Black West Indian servicemen would not willingly accept racial subordination or discrimination. The West Indian expectation of equality would pose sensitive problems in any future multi-racial, imperial war effort.

In the 1920s, fiscal pressure and prejudice convinced the War Office to disband the last regular West Indian battalions. The army had judged that a West Indian formation would not be as economical as a European one because the War Office would never bring it to Europe. In

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<sup>37</sup>W.E. Young, "Tales from the Trenches, 1915-1918," TMs., 52, Imperial War Museum, London; A.F. Bowden, "First World War Memoirs of A.F. Bowden," TMs., entry of 16 March 1918, Imperial War Museum, London; and Mountfort, Letter to Father, 1/2 January 1918, Mountfort Collection, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>38</sup>See Sherwood, 3-23; W.F. Elkins, "A Source of Black Nationalism in the Caribbean: The Revolt of the British West Indies Regiment at Taranto, Italy," Science & Society 34 (Spring 1970): 99-103.



the 1930s, during a period of economic distress, West Indian governments as well as leading White colonial citizens unsuccessfully championed schemes to reconstitute the W.I.R. as a means of reducing unemployment.<sup>39</sup>

## V. Another World War

### A. Demands on the colonial empire

In early 1940, Malcolm Macdonald, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, presented his department's opinions on the exploitation of colonial man-power to the War Cabinet. Macdonald ranked the manpower of the empire according to military ability and equipment shortages. He acknowledged that, "all the available supplies of equipment will be required for units considered to be of superior fighting capacity, raised in this country or the Dominions," that is, White units. The Colonial Secretary predicted that, if and when the problem of the equipment shortage was overcome, "it is probable that the fighting races of India would be drawn upon rather than any of the races inhabiting the colonial dependencies." Other factors discussed included the political dangers of deploying colonial troops to places where they were not welcome, and the destructive impact that France's climate was thought to have on troops

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<sup>39</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 318/432/3. "West India Regiment--Reconstitution," 1938/1939.

from tropical regions.<sup>40</sup>

B. Calls for a West Indian Contingent

The concern about Black military participation seemed especially acute in regard to the West Indies, which had experienced numerous labor disturbances in the late 1930s. At the outbreak of war, however, the Caribbean colonies had been swept by a remarkable wave of patriotism. Virtually all segments of West Indian society, including the most militant labor leaders, promised to cooperate fully with Britain.<sup>41</sup>

Many disparate voices lobbied for the greater inclusion of Black West Indian subjects in the war effort, although they often disagreed as to the exact role to be given West Indian troops. Early on, a White West Indian subject wrote to the Colonial Secretary that many West Indians feared that their islands were to be transferred to U.S. sovereignty. He admitted that he himself could enlist freely, "but what of the many West Indians of like means & views who are of mixed or negro[sic] descent... Surely there is a place for

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<sup>40</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1673/4. "Utilization of the Manpower resources of the Colonial Empire," January 1940.

<sup>41</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1672/3. Minute by Lee, 11 September 1939. For an account of pre-war troubles in the West Indies, see Howard Johnson, "Oil, Imperial Policy and the Trinidad Disturbances, 1937," Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History (October 1975): 29-54.

us all in this battle for civilization."<sup>42</sup> In May 1940, Jamaica's Legislative Council expressed "unshaken loyalty" and "undiminished desire" to form a contingent for the war.<sup>43</sup> In July, a public meeting in Trinidad resolved to offer 25,000 men to the imperial government.<sup>44</sup> Two months later, the Rev. E. Elliot Durant, rector of the heavily British West Indian St. Ambrose Episcopal Church in New York City, assured the prime minister that, "it would be a splendid thing" to reconstitute the W.I.R. and "give these loyal subjects of His Majesty an opportunity to help in defending Democracy."<sup>45</sup> In April 1941, Durant appealed directly to the King on the grounds that, "Britain does not possess more faithful subjects than her colored people. They are willing to give their lives for the Empire."<sup>46</sup>

The Colonial Office wanted to maintain these patriotic feelings and inquired of the West Indian governors their

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<sup>42</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/37/10. Smith to Moyne, 3 May 1941.

<sup>43</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/4. Man-Power--Utilization of Jamaica.

<sup>44</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/22. Trinidad Resolution, 4 July 1940, enclosed in A.C. Burkett to the colonial secretary in Port-of-Spain, 4 July 1940.

<sup>45</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/3. Durant to Churchill, 24 September 1940.

<sup>46</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/37/10. Durant to George VI, 28 April 1941.

opinions on whether, in light of the experiences with ex-servicemen of the First World War, military units should be discouraged. Most of the respondents discounted the problem of ex-servicemen but the governor of British Honduras strongly differed:

1. I do not know whether they were any good in the field, but I have heard from some of their officers that they gave a great deal of trouble behind the lines. When they returned here they rioted, and they have always been the cause of a great deal of trouble locally. Most of them think that, having served their King and country as soldiers, their King and country should support them for the rest of their lives.

2. I do not know whether any troops will be asked for from the West Indies during the present War, but for the sake of my successors in office I hope not. There would, however, be no objection to recruiting men for a Labour Corps, and, in fact I should welcome this.<sup>47</sup>

Jamaica Governor Richards favored raising local forces, but he advised against sending any West Indian unit to a cold climate, and doubted whether a combatant unit would be successful. Richards reported that, a "certain amount of interested local agitation" had called for the revival of the W.I.R., but he observed that the scheme was a form of unemployment relief and did not support it.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1672/3. Governor of British Honduras to Colonial Office, 15 September 1939.

<sup>48</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1672/3. Richards, Jamaica, to MacDonald, Colonial Office, 25 September 1939.

In mid-October 1939, the War Office gave tentative permission for raising a symbolic West Indian "field company" if the gesture would facilitate the raising of labor units.<sup>49</sup> The War Office did not act on this concession and, in February 1940, formally postponed the establishment of West Indian pioneer units on the grounds of climate. It decided that, "the most effective coloured labour from overseas for service in France is that from Mediterranean territories such as Palestine and Cyprus."<sup>50</sup>

In June 1940, Winston Churchill, the new British prime minister, suggested that the W.I.R. be reconstituted:

It might have three battalions strongly officered by British officers, and be representative of most of the islands; to be available for Imperial Service; to give an outlet for the loyalty of the natives, and bring money into these poor islands.<sup>51</sup>

At the time, however, "the general feeling" of the rest of the government toward West Indian soldiers remained so low that, in one colonial official's words, "it was not worth proceeding with this proposal."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 193/19. R.H. Dewing to H.R.S. Massy, 30 November 1939.

<sup>50</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/3. War Office to Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 8 February 1940.

<sup>51</sup>"Prime Minister to Secretary of State for the Colonies," Quoted in Churchill, Their Finest Hour (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), 544-5.

<sup>52</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1787/74. Minute by Poynton, 28

C. Colonial Office v. War Office

At the beginning of 1941, the Colonial Office re-opened the question of West Indian military participation, this time as pioneers. David Margesson, Secretary of State for War, wrote to Lord Moyne, the new Colonial Secretary, that West Indians were not an "industrious race," the British climate would be against them, and that he did not "much like the idea of billeting them in" Britain. He assured Moyne that "if the need should arise for tapping this source of man-power [he would], of course, consult [him] at once."<sup>53</sup> Moyne replied that, despite the past poor opinions of West Indian soldiers, "the growing shortage of manpower in the United Kingdom and elsewhere may well compel us to be content with a lower standard than we should have been ready to accept hitherto."<sup>54</sup> In April 1941, the Colonial Office again stressed the availability of manpower in the West Indies because of unemployment and the "very real desire" of West Indian subjects to serve. In response, Margesson told Moyne that the creation of West Indian military units might have propoganda value but, in the First World War, the War

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June 1940.

<sup>53</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/37/12. Margesson to Moyne, 11 February 1941.

<sup>54</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/37/12. Moyne to Margesson, 11 March 1941.

Office had experienced "considerable difficulties in employing West Indians in labour units in this country owing to climatic reasons, difficulties of billeting and accommodation, and the difficulty of providing units with British staff."<sup>55</sup>

West Indian governments continued to pursue military units. In May 1941, The General Legislative Council of the Leeward Islands publicly expressed "the fervent wish of the people of this colony that consideration be given to the formation of a West Indian unit for any service which H.M.'s military advisers may recommend." In response to such requests, the Colonial Secretary advised West Indian governors to make the following announcement:

It is with great regret that this decision has been taken and I share the disappointment which it must cause, but I am sure that West Indians will appreciate that in modern warfare, with all its complexities, it is not given to all individuals or communities even in Great Britain itself to serve out common cause in the way in which their most generous instincts dictate...<sup>56</sup>

In July 1941, after being informed that the War Office had no plans for raising West Indian units, Churchill urged that

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<sup>55</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/1. Resume of Conversation between Colonial Office and War Office officials, 8 April 1941; Margesson to Moyne, 8 May 1941.

<sup>56</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/37/10. Lethem to Colonial Secretary, 8 May 1941; Colonial Secretary to Lethem, 27 May 1941.

the scheme "be pressed forward" and suggested that they could garrison Singapore.<sup>57</sup> However, West Indian political sensitivity precluded the suggested use of Polish officers for training the proposed force, a policy Churchill had adopted for the R.W.A.F.F.<sup>58</sup>

Armed with Churchill's endorsement, Moyne assured Margesson that if enough suitable higher quality recruits could not be found to form a brigade, then a single high-quality battalion of picked men would be preferable.<sup>59</sup> In August, Margesson cited the practical difficulties of shipping and the lack of officers and that, "on racial grounds," it was "undesirable" to mix Black West Indians with African or Asian soldiers. "The cold fact of the matter," the War Secretary related, was that, "it would be an inconvenience" to raise West Indian units, and a waste of resources. As a compromise, Margesson offered Moyne officer commissions in the African colonial forces for a few well-qualified individual Black West Indians.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/1. Ismay to Churchill, 3 July 1941.

<sup>58</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/1. Minute by A. Poynton, 9 July 1941.

<sup>59</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/1. Moyne to Margesson, 14 July 1941.

<sup>60</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/1. Margesson to Moyne, 11 August 1941.



The Colonial Office countered with a suggestion that Britain could meet West Indian aspirations to participate in the war by increasing individual recruitment of both Whites and Blacks for service in Britain or, alternatively, perhaps yet raise pioneer units.<sup>61</sup> In November, Moyne again advocated increased individual recruitment in the British forces and pioneer units as alternatives to combatant units. He cited an August request from Sir Claude Auchinleck, British Commander in Chief, Middle East, for West Indian stevedores, a plea which had been rejected by the War Office on account of practical difficulties.<sup>62</sup> Margesson decided to leave it to Auchinleck to reject Moyne's appeals. In December, the War Secretary asked Auchinleck whether Black West Indian soldiers, who were paid as White British troops, "could satisfactorily work side by side with Indian troops and West African labour units on substantially lower rates, and without risk or repercussions," and whether he was willing to allot some of his shipping space to the West Indians. Auchinleck replied negatively to both matters and, in turn, Margesson informed Moyne that the War Office had to

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<sup>61</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/1. Calder, Colonial Office, to Poett, War Office, 23 August 1941.

<sup>62</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/1. Moyne to Margesson, 21 November 1941.

reject Moyne's proposals.<sup>63</sup>

The debate between ministries over West Indian pioneer units continued into 1942. The need for military laborers in the Middle East increased substantially as the British built up an enormous base there from which to wage war against the Axis powers. At an April meeting, both ministries agreed that shipping, accommodation, and climate did not immediately present insurmountable obstacles to West Indian units. At least in principle then, the War Office accepted the notion of pioneer units in the future.<sup>64</sup> Regardless of its theoretical acceptance of West Indian pioneers, the War Office preferred to tap African sources of manpower for military labor, a tendency which caused Harold MacMillan, Parliamentary Under Secretary at the Colonial Office, to ask, "how can I press Africa still further when the voluntary offers of West Indians are rejected?"<sup>65</sup>

Six weeks after the April meeting, the War Office stated that the lack of shipping still prevented the

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<sup>63</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/1. War Office to Auchinleck, 4 December 1941, and reply, 13 December 1941, encl. in Margesson to Moyne, 17 December 1941.

<sup>64</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/18. Note of a Meeting to discuss a West Indian Pioneer Unit held at the Colonial Office, 14 April 1942.

<sup>65</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/18. MacMillan, Colonial Office, to Henderson, War Office, 15 May 1942.

utilization of West Indian pioneer units.<sup>66</sup> MacMillan then appealed to Philip H. Noel-Baker, Minister of War Transport, who expressed "utmost sympathy" for the "highest political importance" of raising pioneer units in the West Indies. However, Noel-Baker agreed with the War Office's analysis of the shipping difficulties. American troops would have to be delayed in favor of West Indian units and, because the U-boats were finding the Caribbean a good hunting ground, an unusually strong naval escort would have to be provided for the West Indian troop convoy.<sup>67</sup>

In April 1943, the Colonial Office again proposed a West Indian combatant contingent. The War Office argued against such a plan by citing shipping, difficulties of maintaining reinforcements, and the effect the relatively high pay expected by West Indian personnel might have on other Black colonial troops. As an alternative, it suggested garrison duty in Ceylon or Madagascar for the proposed force.<sup>68</sup> Again citing the prime minister's previous support and possible resentment on the part of

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<sup>66</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/18. Henderson, War Office, to MacMillan, Colonial Office, 31 May 1942.

<sup>67</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/18. MacMillan, Colonial Office, to Noel-Baker, Ministry of War Transport, 8 June 1942; and Noel-Baker to MacMillan, 17 June 1942.

<sup>68</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/17/5. Brind, War Office, to Holt, Colonial Office, 20 April 1943.

Black West Indians, the Colonial Office urged an active role for a combatant unit in the Mediterranean.<sup>69</sup>

The War Office commenced its rear-guard action against a West Indian overseas contingent in August 1943. Sir James Grigg, the newest War Secretary, argued against the scheme on several familiar grounds, including the "Black Man's Grave" and West Indian expectations of being treated equally:

In the first place West Indians are not a very robust race, which would detract from their value as combatant troops [and] might easily make them something of a commitment from the health point of view. Secondly, their advent would mean setting up a special administrative staff, and complications over their rates of pay if they were employed, for example, as labour units outside Great Britain. They would presumably have to be paid at British rates, whereas other coloured labour abroad is not. Thirdly, under existing arrangements, they would not provide any accession of strength to the British Army, since they would count against Army manpower ceiling...

With the last point, Grigg implied that, if only a limited number of personnel could be supported by Britain, then they should be White. Moreover, Grigg cautioned that the deployment of a West Indian contingent to the United Kingdom would aggravate the tense racial situation already existing there because of the arrival of large numbers of segregated American forces. The introduction of Black British subjects

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<sup>69</sup>C.O. 968/17/5. Holt, Colonial Office, to Brind, War Office, 6 May 1943.

would, the War Secretary warned, be "asking for trouble and, therefore, politically open to question." Grigg left it ultimately to the Colonial Office to decide if the political advantages to an overseas contingent outweighed the military drawbacks enough to submit the decision to higher authority, i.e, the War Cabinet.<sup>70</sup>

Before referring the matter to the War Cabinet, Oliver Stanley, the then Colonial Secretary, persuaded the War Secretary by arguing that West Indians were just as "robust" as other Black colonial troops; pay differentials already existed in the Allied effort, in particular the pay of American servicemen versus British; and the proposed unit would be sent direct to the Mediterranean instead of the United Kingdom.<sup>71</sup> Apparently, the last condition clinched the deal, for Grigg finally acceded to Stanley's plan and recommended that the West Indian contingent 1) be used for garrison duties without calling it a garrison unit, 2) be sent to North Africa with summer duty in Italy, and 3) be deployed overseas in the summer of 1944.<sup>72</sup> With Grigg's

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<sup>70</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Grigg to Stanley, 17 September 1943.

<sup>71</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/17/5. Colonial Office Comments on Sir James Grigg's Letter, n.d., 1943 and Minute by Sabben-Clare, 12 November 1943.

<sup>72</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/17/5. War Office Memorandum on Employment of British West Indian Soldiers in a Theatre of War, encl. in Grigg to Stanley, 17 December 1943.

acceptance secured, Stanley informed the War Cabinet that he and his predecessors had "since the early days of the war," pursued the idea of a West Indian contingent and that, "the announcement of a decision to send a West Indian contingent to a theatre of war would be most warmly received..."<sup>73</sup> The War Cabinet concurred and decided to ship the contingent to the Mediterranean area as soon as possible after April 1944, the earliest time when shipping would be available.<sup>74</sup> Soon afterward, an absent Churchill minuted his approval: "I favour this."<sup>75</sup>

In addition to a combatant contingent, the War Office, in 1944, discussed the idea of sending specially raised West Indian garrison battalions to British islands in the Pacific in order to replace "island hopping" American troops.<sup>76</sup> The military and political authorities in the West Indies favored the suggestion and began planning for it but, from

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<sup>73</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. "Employment of a British West Indian Contingent in a Theatre of War," by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 January 1944.

<sup>74</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Extract from the Conclusions of the 2nd (44) Meeting of the War Cabinet, 6 January 1944.

<sup>75</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. SEXTANT to Air Ministry, 7 January 1944.

<sup>76</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2851. Minutes of a meeting held to consider the provision of garrisons for the British Empire territories in the Pacific, 27 June 1944.

the Pacific, the New Zealand prime minister deprecated the "introduction of another native race as most undesirable on ethnological grounds."<sup>77</sup> In the event, the War Office never implemented this scheme.

#### VI. The Caribbean Regiment

The War Office informed its commanders in the Mediterranean of the War Cabinet's decision to form a West Indian overseas contingent and asked for their opinions as to the unit's (to be called the 1st Battalion of the Caribbean Regiment or 1/C.R.) eventual role. The War Office acknowledged to its commanders that it rated Black West Indians' value as soldiers as "dubious," but requested that they consider the political implications of relegating the unit to a "static role."<sup>78</sup> Sir Henry "Jumbo" Wilson, Allied commander in the Mediterranean, agreed to train the regiment in Italy as a commando, a small self-contained unit with training appropriate to special tasks such as raiding. Back in London, the Colonial Office itself doubted whether the soldiers would be "mentally alert enough" for the duty.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2851. High Commission, New Zealand, to Dominion Office, 27 July 1944.

<sup>78</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. War Office to Allied Forces Headquarters, Algiers, 21 January 1944.

<sup>79</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Minutes of a Meeting to Discuss the Proposal for a West Indian force to serve overseas, 26 January 1944.

Not all British commanders in the Mediterranean appeared as accommodating to the 1/C.R as Wilson. For example, Major General E.A. Sutton, Director of Medical Services in Italy, claimed that on the basis of "considerable personal experience," (presumably during the Great War) he held an "extremely low" opinion of the Black West Indian soldier. He found them "very prone to reporting sick for the most trivial reasons," they questioned diagnosis, and, "they are in the main 'bone idle.'"<sup>80</sup> Sir Harold Alexander, the Allied land commander in Italy, opposed the idea of a symbolic West Indian contingent being attached to his command for military reasons. On a copy of the War Office's proposal, he protested that,

I cannot accept the West Indian troops here--my battle front is already far too rigid because of the number of nationalities I have. Those responsible must be warned now that we shall be heading for trouble if the Italian theatre is made the dumping ground of all sorts of people who want to be in on the show for political reasons.<sup>81</sup>

Ironically, the War Office ignored dissenting opinions and dutifully pressed forward with a scheme it had never favored.

The battalion consisted of about 1,200 volunteers

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<sup>80</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 204/6672. Sutton to Deputy Adjutant General, War Office, 26 August 1944.

<sup>81</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 204/7377. TROOPERS (War Office) to FREEDOM (Italy), 21 January 1944.



(including replacements) selected from the existing local military forces of the various Caribbean area colonies and Bermuda (Table 3).

Table 3. Geographic Distribution of the officers and other ranks of the Caribbean Regiment.

COLONY	OFFICERS	OTHER RANKS
Bermuda	3	97
Bahamas	1	53
Br. Honduras	1	60
Jamaica	6	240
Antigua	2	75
St. Lucia	1	93
Barbados	2	196
Trinidad	12	194
Br. Guiana	4	151
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>1,159</b>

Source: P.R.O. W.O. 176/41. War Diary of 1/C.R., Orders for Embarkation, 17 December 1945.

The War Office met colonial concerns about racial discrimination by agreeing that Blacks could compete for officer commissions on an equal basis with Whites.<sup>82</sup> However, this concession worried the military authorities in Italy because it might have caused resentment in Black units which could not have Black officers.<sup>83</sup> Most of the regiment's senior officers were White, either West Indians or Britons but most of the junior officers were

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<sup>82</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. War Office to Commander, South Caribbean Area, 15 February 1944.

<sup>83</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 204/6672. Minute of 11 July 1944.

"coloured."<sup>84</sup> Later, Black Londoner Major Joe Moody joined the 1/C.R. in the Middle East after several years service with British anti-aircraft batteries. He became the highest-ranking Black officer and one of the senior officers in the unit.<sup>85</sup>

In view of the War Office's intransigence over bringing the 1/C.R. to Britain because of the growing American presence, it was ironic that the authorities gathered and trained the new battalion near Newport News, Virginia, for six weeks before transporting it to Italy. Before disembarking in segregated America, Lt. Col. Wilkin, the regiment's commanding officer ordered his soldiers to be "particularly careful" when patronizing public transportation, public houses, amusement centers, and places of businesses in order to avoid "those places or vehicles that are obviously reserved for Whites." Wilkin further prohibited his soldiers from communicating with or befriending White women, but assured them that recreational facilities would be provided. "Above all," Wilkin implored, "remember that the honour of your Regiment and your island rests on your shoulders and that if you conduct yourselves

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<sup>84</sup>Arundel (Joe) Moody, Interview by author, 10 December 1995; and H.St.C. Whitehorne to author, 21 May 1996.

<sup>85</sup>Moody.

properly and only go where you are told, you should have no cause to regret the time spent in the U.S.A."<sup>86</sup> H.St.C.

Whitehorne, a White junior officer, recalled that the relationship between the battalion and American civilians was generally "amicable," but also remembered that the color bar had "affected mildly one of our young officers who was coloured and was not welcomed in a club or restaurant, but this raised no real issue."<sup>87</sup>

For entertainment, authorities organized dances and sightseeing tours. Barbadian Elvey Watson remembered that, "if we had stuck to the stringent rules, we would never have had a desire to mix with the Americans." Because they wore British uniforms, the soldiers of the 1/C.R. often managed to visit areas of towns which were off-limits to African-Americans.<sup>88</sup> On 8 June 1944, the 1/C.R. had the unique distinction of being the first British regiment to celebrate the king's birthday on American territory since the American Revolution.<sup>89</sup> Fortunately for colonial relations, the

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<sup>86</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 176/41. Officer Commanding to All Ranks, 6 May 1944, in War Diary of 1/C.R.; also reported in the League of Coloured Peoples Newsletter 10, 60 (September 1944): 91, via the Pittsburgh Courier, 24 June 1944.

<sup>87</sup>Whitehorne.

<sup>88</sup>Watson, 29.

<sup>89</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Anglo-American Caribbean Commission to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 7 June 1944.

battalion emerged largely unscathed from its American stay.

In Italy, British inspectors found that the training which the battalion had received in the West Indies and the U.S. was inadequate. They judged that both officers and O.R.s of the 1/C.R. required six months of intensive training before participating in battle against the Germans. The officers, from the relatively old Wilkin down, were judged "all unfit to look after their men and command in battle."<sup>90</sup> Dismayed, the War Office momentarily considered transferring the regiment to the Pacific but, instead, asked Wilson to try, within a few months, to make the 1/C.R. as effective as possible, even if only for use in a quiet sector of the front. Speed mattered because winter approached. In the course of their late summer training, the 1/C.R. earned congratulations for saving a key ammunition dump from fire and, on another occasion, for loading bridging equipment in record time, an effort which contributed to a rapid allied advance across a river.<sup>91</sup> Inexplicably, the intensive effort to prepare the battalion well enough for a quiet sector failed.<sup>92</sup> Worried about the

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<sup>90</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Wilson to War Office, 26 July 1944.

<sup>91</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1266. Summary of Overseas Career of the 1/C.R., Trinidad (Acting Governor) to Colonial Secretary, 28 June 1945.

<sup>92</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Allied Forces Headquarters

worsening weather, the battalion's commander reported that,

Records of the last war show that West Indian personnel cannot be suitably trained much less fight under damp cold weather conditions without incurring a very high sick rate, due to the West Indian susceptibility to all pulmonary disease.

Wilkin recommended that his battalion be moved to Egypt or India to complete training.<sup>93</sup> Sutton, the chief British medical officer in Italy, agreed and warned that, "the presence of these troops in Italy during the winter months will be a liability, not an asset, and most of their training will have to be done in hospital."<sup>94</sup> In November, the War Office informed Wilson that administrative difficulties prevented the 1/C.R.'s transfer to Southeast Asia and asked that Wilson employ it in a warm coastal area of Italy in the spring of 1945.<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, military authorities replaced many of the battalion's original officers and N.C.O.s with experienced men, including Major Moody. A White South African officer posted to the unit presented a delicate disciplinary problem

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to War Office, 22 September 1944.

<sup>93</sup>Wilkin Quote from P.R.O. W.O. 204/6672. Alexander to Allied Forces Headquarters, 6 September 1944.

<sup>94</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 204/6672. Sutton to Deputy Adjutant General, 26 August 1944.

<sup>95</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. War Office to Allied Forces Headquarters, 17 November 1944.

for the 1/C.R. and was transferred to a South African unit.<sup>96</sup> To further complicate matters, the Colonial Office strongly opposed sending the unit to Palestine because it might be called upon to quell local disturbances, and "such employment of West Indian troops would be objected to by both Jews and Arabs on racial grounds."<sup>97</sup> Eventually, the British assigned the unit to Gaza, but undertook to move it away if violence occurred there.<sup>98</sup>

British commanders worried about the effect of the presence of the 1/C.R. on other troops in the imperial forces. Soon after its arrival in Italy, the British attributed to West Indians the inability to "mix at all well with Africans or other Coloured troops."<sup>99</sup> In Egypt, in common with White soldiers, members of the 1/C.R. contemptuously referred to Egyptians as "wogs" and "gippos."<sup>100</sup> The most serious incident of friction

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<sup>96</sup>Moody.

<sup>97</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Minute by F. Simpson on "Operational Employment of 1. Bn. Caribbean Regiment," 16 October 1944.

<sup>98</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to War Office, 21 October 1944.

<sup>99</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Director of Military Training's Tour of Mediterranean Theatre, August to September 1944.

<sup>100</sup>Vernon Nicholas, "Overseas with the Carib Regiment," Infantry Star 1 (June 1946): 33.

experienced by the regiment, however, involved White servicemen. A violent altercation started while several hundred members of the regiment enjoyed leave in Cairo on Christmas Eve, 1944. In Egypt, military authorities normally provided separate recreational facilities for White and "Coloured" personnel. However, members of the 1/C.R. technically counted as "White" because their paybooks were stamped "B.O.R." (British Other Ranks) rather than "A[frican].O.R." or "I[ndian].O.R." At the "Sweet Melody Cafe," a dance hall frequented by White servicemen, a dispute erupted between a White soldier and a Black 1/C.R. sergeant over a woman. A brawl lasting several hours ensued and involved many more soldiers, including White military police. The outnumbered West Indians boarded themselves up in their hotel and refused to surrender to the provost marshal. They threw mattresses down upon the military police and other White soldiers who attempted to storm the hotel. According to Elvey Watson, American military police achieved a truce and transported the 1/C.R. back to camp. On Christmas Day, Lt. Col. Nicolson, the recently appointed O.C., cancelled leaves and lectured the regiment on the brawl's impact on its reputation and chances to fight in battle. Watson recalled that Nicolson "advised us to count ten before striking, and, if possible, to count ten more,

but after that, 'Strike, and strike hard!'" Subsequently, the unit received a new home in the desert near the Red Sea and remained barred from leave in Egyptian cities for several months, measures which successfully prevented further racial confrontations. Soldiers of the 1/C.R. later claimed that the fight demonstrated their superiority over both other "coloured" soldiers as well as Whites.<sup>101</sup>

The Christmas Eve incident confirmed the fears of British generals in the Middle East. The West Indians presented a difficult administrative problem for the generals because of their expectation of being treated equally to White troops.<sup>102</sup> According to the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, the battalion's morale and behavior remained good only when "actively employed and isolated from other t[roo]ps and from women."<sup>103</sup> Even training policy reflected racial concerns as officials refused to assign the battalion to an Indian division for crucial large formation training "owing to difficulties of colour."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Moody; Whitehorne; and P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Extract from Middle East Military Censorship Summary No. 106, period 27 December 1944 to 9 January 1945; Watson, 93-4.

<sup>102</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1266. Minute by E.E. Sabben-Clare, 11 April 1945.

<sup>103</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to War Office, 12 July 1945.

<sup>104</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1266. Paget to War Office, 26



Nevertheless, according to Major Moody, the battalion received the best training and equipment available to any British battalion, including mountain training in preparation for possible operations against German-held Kos and Leros islands in the Aegean.<sup>105</sup> The 1/C.R. had plenty of time to train since British authorities found it difficult to find a suitable role for it. In London, officials within the War and Colonial Offices continued to discuss the possibility of sending the unit to Burma, but neither strongly favored the idea. On a military level, the War Office still doubted the regiment's effectiveness, while, on a political level, the Colonial Office did not wish the West Indians to come into contact with the lower paid African troops who already served there in large numbers.<sup>106</sup>

Meanwhile, when not engaged in training exercises, personnel of the 1/C.R. won four sporting competitions open to all units in Egypt,<sup>107</sup> but the lack of action threatened the morale and discipline of the battalion. In London,

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March 1945.

<sup>105</sup>Moody.

<sup>106</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 193/124. Minute by Lt.-Col. Garrett, 7 February 1945.

<sup>107</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1266. Summary of Overseas Career of the 1/C.R., Trinidad (Acting Governor) to Colonial Secretary, 28 June 1945.

Harold Moody of the League of Colored Peoples in Britain (and father of Major Moody) urged an active role for the unit and alluded to the possibility of another Taranto Mutiny:

We believe that our men are all keen to pull their weight to the full and that they will not let down their flag. We do hope that you will be able to do something to satisfy the yearnings of these men and not wait until their sense of frustration should result in some act of insubordination for which they cannot be wholly regarded as responsible.<sup>108</sup>

The Colonial Office assured Moody that the War Office realized the "general desirability of allotting an active role to this unit if possible," but the Colonial Secretary could not intervene in the army's field operations.<sup>109</sup> The announced reluctance to interfere notwithstanding, the War Office, within days, formally "offered" its commanders in the Far East the battalion for any operational role they could find for it. The War Office informed Claude Auchinleck, now the Commander-in-Chief, India, of the unit's political significance, but warned that the men were paid at British rates and were "extremely colour conscious," and expected to be treated equally.<sup>110</sup> Auchinleck declined on

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<sup>108</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1266. H. Moody to Stanley, 3 March 1945.

<sup>109</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1266. C.H. Thornley, Colonial Office, to Moody, 14 March 1945.

<sup>110</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. War Office to Auchinleck,

the grounds that the imperial forces in the Far East included enough infantry and that no combatant role could be found for the battalion.<sup>111</sup>

Rebuffed, the War Office again turned to its Mediterranean commanders in order to get the 1/C.R. into combat. On 2 May 1945, with the European war's end just a few days off, Alexander agreed to "call forward" the 1/C.R.<sup>112</sup> On 6 May, the War Office advised him that, "honour would be satisfied if this Reg[imen]t was used in any minor op[eration] in the Aegean or to take part in receiving the capitulation of Crete."<sup>113</sup> On 9 May, Alexander reported that time would not allow either scheme and suggested that the 1/C.R. be sent to the Far East or remain in Middle East to guard prisoners of war.<sup>114</sup> The Air Ministry presented another option in July, when it requested that men of the 1/C.R. be allowed to volunteer for the R.A.F.<sup>115</sup>

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10 March 1945.

<sup>111</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Auchinleck to War Office, 30 March 1945.

<sup>112</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Allied Forces Headquarters to War Office, 2 May 1945.

<sup>113</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. War Office to Allied Forces Headquarters, 6 May 1945.

<sup>114</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Allied Forces Headquarters to War Office, 9 May 1945.

<sup>115</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Colonial Secretary to West Indian Colonies, 18 July 1945.

The British authorities did not adopt these schemes, and once it became clear that the 1/C.R. had no real or potential military function, British commanders urged that it be returned home as soon as possible to forestall disciplinary problems.<sup>116</sup> The Colonial Office feared the political consequences of sending the 1/C.R. home without having been blooded. Following a Colonial Office suggestion, the War Office asked the commanders in the Middle East to "make clear to all ranks that they are returning to their own country with honour," and that it was regretted that they had not gotten an opportunity to fight.<sup>117</sup> Consequently, Sir Charles Allfrey shared the following words with the regiment: "you may feel badly for not getting a fight, but the fault was not yours... On your return to the West Indies, you must not feel ashamed."<sup>118</sup>

The case of the Caribbean Regiment underscored the tensions affecting the British empire during the 1930s and 1940s. Colonial political and racial relations were changing faster than ingrained military prejudices. The

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<sup>116</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 106/2854. Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, to War Office, 12 July 1945.

<sup>117</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1266. Colonial Office to War Office 24 May 1945; War Office to Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, 4 June 1945.

<sup>118</sup>Quoted by Watson, 109.

formation of the I/C.R. resulted from the persistence of the Colonial Office in the face of deeply held War Office prejudices. The Colonial Office hoped to strengthen the bonds of empire by gaining for Black colonial subjects an active part in the British war effort. It was wary of allowing any suggestion that Black West Indians were valued less than Whites. Conversely, the War Office clung to old racial prejudices with little regard for the possible political ramifications of relegating Black West Indians to a distant, secondary role.

## CHAPTER V

### BLACKS IN THE BRITISH FORCES, 1689 TO 1914

British policy toward the service of Blacks in the armed forces of Britain to 1914 fluctuated considerably but, in general, the same attitudes dictating the utilization of Black colonial troops often influenced policies toward individual Black personnel in the Royal Navy, British Army, and Royal Air Force. Black servicemen frequently and successfully served in the Georgian military, although not on a basis equal with Whites. In the Victorian era, the authorities determined that formal distance had to be maintained between White and Black, otherwise, close contact would undermine White prestige. As a result, the services imposed color bars to keep their ranks racially pure.

#### I. Black Sailors and Soldiers, 1689 to ca. 1850

Black seamen often served in the Royal Navy throughout the Georgian era. In 1801, the H.M.S. Ganges had two Indians and three Africans in a crew of just under 700. At Trafalgar, the crew of Admiral Nelson's flagship, H.M.S. Victory, included two Indians, one African and nine West Indians.<sup>1</sup> Until the late-nineteenth century, the manpower-

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<sup>1</sup>Dudley Pope, Life in Nelson's Navy (Annapolis:

starved "senior service" did not overly concern itself with the color or ethnicity of its crews. By 1900, however, the Admiralty relegated Blacks sailors to limited local roles, such as stokers on the West African station.

Black servicemen probably made their most pronounced, or perhaps, visible, impact in the army. Though the courts of Henry VII of England and James IV of Scotland employed Black entertainers,<sup>2</sup> the employment of Blacks as bandsmen in British military units became fashionable later, probably during the wars with France beginning in 1689.<sup>3</sup> Recruited from slaves and free men from the West Indies, Africa, and India, Black musicians usually held the positions of fifers, drummers and trumpeters whose functions included the transmission of orders and setting of marching paces. They served in all of the major battles of the British army from 1689 to 1815. At Waterloo, a Black trumpeter served on the staff of Major-General Sir Hussey Vivian, commander of a brigade of light-cavalry.<sup>4</sup>

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Naval Institute Press, 1981), 109.

<sup>2</sup>Paul Edwards, 15.

<sup>3</sup>Shyllon, 159; Cecil C.P. Lawson, A History of the Uniforms of the British Army, I, (London: Norman Military Publications), 40, 117-8.

<sup>4</sup>Matthew Coglan, "Reminiscence," in Harold Malet, ed., The Historical Memoirs of the 18th Hussars (London: Simpkin & Co., 1907), 143. Billy Blue, a famous early Sydney, Australia, resident, claimed in an 1823 petition to

Regimental commanders desired to exploit the foreign appearance of Black musicians and several regiments made a long tradition of employing them. For example, Farrington's Regiment of Foot, included Black soldiers in the 1690s, but it is unclear when the regiment abandoned the practice. The unit (redesignated as the 29th Foot) re-adopted Black drummers in 1759, when Admiral Edward Boscawen "secured" ten African youths after the British capture of Guadaloupe and sent them to his brother, the commanding officer of the 29th Foot, which was then stationed in Ireland. The 29th had ten Black drummers in 1774 and three in 1834. The last to serve with the regiment died in 1843.<sup>5</sup> As Turkish-inspired military music became popular across Europe, regiments clothed Black musicians, who now played bass drums, kettledrums, cymbals and "jingling johnnies," in exotic uniforms, including turbans. In late Georgian and early Victorian London, ornately uniformed Black bandsmen added to

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have served in the British military for many years and participated in several famous events: witnessing James Wolfe's death at Quebec in 1759, serving as a marine in Germany in the early 1760s, accompanying Major John Andre when he was captured and executed by the Americans in 1780, and spying for Lord Cornwallis during the Yorktown campaign of 1781. See Meg Swords, Billy Blue, The Old Commodore (Sydney: North Shore Historical Society, 1979), 41-4.

<sup>5</sup>J. Paine, "The Negro Drummers of the British Army," The Leading Note: The Journal of the Military Musician 1 (August 1930): 26-7; H. Everard, History of Thos. Farrington's Regiment (Worcester: Littlebury & Co., 1891), 74, 265.



Victorian London, ornately uniformed Black bandsmen added to the ceremony and pomp of the Household regiments that guarded the sovereign.<sup>6</sup> Regiments preferred that their Black musicians be as dark-skinned as possible. In 1823, the 1st (Grenadier) Regiment of Foot Guards discharged a Black drummer because he did not possess "a sufficiently Black complexion[sic]."<sup>7</sup>

Despite the popularity of Black bandsmen, there was some publicly voiced opposition to their employment. For example, Cobbett's Annual Register deprecated the presence of Blacks in the army, "where they never ought to show their heads, in any capacity, or upon any condition."<sup>8</sup> However, a general public acceptance of Black bandsmen is evidenced by the fact that many volunteer and militia regiments, including the most fashionable corps of London, imitated their regular army colleagues.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Georgian racial

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<sup>6</sup>See, for examples, Edward Croft-Murray, "The Wind Band in England," in The British Museum Yearbook 4: Music and Civilisation (London: British Museum Publications, 1980), plates 113, 118, and 124.

<sup>7</sup>Reported in the Fourteenth Report of the Mendicity Society (1832), 41-2, quoted in Shyllon, Black People in Britain, 159.

<sup>8</sup>Cobbett's Annual Register, January/June, 1804, 936-7.

<sup>9</sup>Lawson, III, 149; V, 51, 80, 82; Croft-Murray, 154, pl. 114. Edward Dayes' 1799 watercolor, "King George III reviewing Eight Thousand Volunteers in Hyde Park," depicted most of the assembled bands with at least one Black

stereotypes about the "musical nature" of Blacks combined with military fashion to over-ride any racial anxiety that might have been felt.

The primary reason why the British army used Black bandsmen, their physical appearance, also contributed to their being part of the lore of the British army.<sup>10</sup> The Wexford militia contained a line-soldier named Myrtle, "a half-bred Indian," commonly referred to as "the Devil" because of "his satanic ugliness." The Wexford's commander wagered that Myrtle, possessing "extraordinary power of fascination and agility," could retrieve another regiment's monkey-mascot, Jocko, which was hiding in a grove of trees. To win his colonel's wager, Myrtle dressed like a monkey, climbed a tree and, according to a witness, "commenced a series of the most extraordinary ogling, grinning, grimaces, and diabolical contortions of his ugly countenance that was ever... made by man, devil, or ape." A pacified Jocko eventually jumped into the "Devil's" arms.<sup>11</sup> In another episode, a White drum-major of the 88th Foot (Connaught Rangers) and the daughter of a Spanish notable attempted to

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bandsman.

<sup>10</sup>"A Ramble Round the Military Exhibition," The British Bandsman 3 (August 1890): 243.

<sup>11</sup>T. Ogle, The Irish Militia Officer (Dublin, 1873), 70-71.

elope. When the father searched through the regiment for his daughter, she hid among the Black bandsmen by disguising herself as "a cymbal-boy, with her face blacked."<sup>12</sup> In an event immortalized on canvass by J.S. Copley, a Major Peirson fell dead leading his troops against French invaders of Jersey and a Black servant, named Pompey, reputedly killed the French marksman. Copley depicted Pompey dramatically firing over the body of the martyred Peirson.<sup>13</sup>

Besides being viewed as exotic objects, Black soldiers participated in the normal pass-times of British soldiers, including brawling, crime, and desertion. In 1768, the 29th Foot, with its Black drummers, arrived in Boston, Massachusetts, in order to overawe the residents. In the months leading up to the Boston Massacre of 5 March 1770, its soldiers frequently had violent confrontations with city residents. On 2 March, Thomas Walker, a Black drummer of the 29th, found a bleeding White comrade who had been beaten by some local rope-makers. He then led a group of "redcoats" back to the "rope-walks" for revenge. A local justice saw the soldiers return and shouted at their Black

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<sup>12</sup>William Grattan, "Military Reminiscences," United Service Magazine (August 1945): 526; T.J. Edwards, Military Customs (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1961), 21-22.

<sup>13</sup>Richard Mayne, The Battle of Jersey (London: Phillimore & Co., 1981), 68-9.

leader, "You Black rascal, what have you to do with White people's quarrels?" Walker deceptively replied that he would just "look on," but in the ensuing brawl, he received a severe battering.<sup>14</sup> Nor was such violence absent from internal military relations. On 12 August 1780, two Black bandsmen of the Somerset militia stationed in Plymouth, England, quarreled with members of the Brecknock militia. The confrontation erupted into a full-blown riot between regiments which was quelled only after officers called the guard out.<sup>15</sup> Individually, Black soldiers committed crimes and deserted from their regiments just as White colleagues, but their skin-color probably made them somewhat easier to punish.<sup>16</sup>

Many Black servicemen fought for the king

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<sup>14</sup>Hiller Zobel, The Boston Massacre (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), 182; John Shy, Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 317; See the depositions of Thomas Walker and other soldiers' in P.R.O. C.O. 5/88.

<sup>15</sup>W.J.W. Kerr, Records of the 1st Somerset Militia (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1930), 26.

<sup>16</sup>In 1750, the 4th Dragoons executed a drummer convicted for murdering a country-woman; in 1761, another drummer in the same regiment suffered fines and one thousand lashes for killing his horse. In 1790, Othello and Carter, trumpeters, attempted to desert but were captured, flogged and transferred to the Royal Navy. R.O. Rickwood, "Black Drummers in the Army," Journal of the Society of Army Historical Research 4 (1925): 136-7.

involuntarily, but it is also true that others chose to enlist. For example, an African named Ukawsaw Gronniosaw served on a British naval vessel in the Seven Years War and received his discharge in New York. Because he wished to visit England, he enlisted in the 28th Foot, which then fought in the capture of Havana in 1762.<sup>17</sup> During the Napoleonic Wars, an escaped slave served as a drummer of the 25th Foot for seven years and participated in the capture of Guadaloupe and Martinique.<sup>18</sup> In 1813, John Baptist, of Martinique, joined the Royal Waggon Train but transferred to the Third (Scots) Regiment of Foot Guards in 1818 as a cymbalist. He served with the regiment until 1841.<sup>19</sup>

The outbreaks of the American Revolution and War of 1812 presented numerous opportunities for Blacks to enlist in the king's forces. Prior to the Revolution, colonial governments had been extremely reluctant to recruit Blacks for their militias. For example, the colony of Virginia

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<sup>17</sup>J. Albert, A Narrative of the most remarkable particulars in the life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as related by himself (Bath: 1770), 22-3.

<sup>18</sup>Fifth Report of the Mendicity Society(1823), 39-40, quoted by Shyllon, Black People in Britain, 163-164.

<sup>19</sup>C.H. Masse, The Predecessors of the Royal Army Service Corps (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1948), 16; Percy Sumner, "Jean Baptiste, Cymbal Player of the Scots Fusilier Guards, 1832," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 22 (1943-44): 1.

refused even the limited mobilization of Black manpower during the Seven Years War because of a fear of teaching Blacks how to efficiently kill Europeans, as well as a hesitancy to interfere with the property rights of slave-owners.<sup>20</sup> In November 1775, Lord Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, proclaimed martial law in his colony and called upon slaves to side with the king in exchange for freedom. He formed the Ethiopian Regiment from runaways, many of whom wore the slogan, "Liberty to Slaves," stitched onto the front of their uniforms. Soon after its first battle and defeat, the regiment withdrew to Royal Navy ships in the Chesapeake, where fever and smallpox severely decimated its ranks.<sup>21</sup> Except for Dunmore's short-lived scheme, British policy regarding Black loyalists remained ambivalent until 1779, when the war shifted southward to the slave-holding southern colonies. Historian Benjamin Quarles concludes that British schemes for raising masses of Black troops never materialized because of the need for laborers and the problem of controlling armed slaves.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, British

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<sup>20</sup>Larry G. Bowman, "Virginia's use of Blacks in the French and Indian War," Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine 53 (1970): 57-63.

<sup>21</sup>James St.G. Walker, "Blacks as American Loyalists," Historical Reflections 2 (1975): 54.

<sup>22</sup>Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 146.

military authorities assigned thousands of escaped or liberated Black men, women and children to the various branches and units of the army to function as orderlies, cooks, smiths, carpenters, seamstresses, and, most crucially, as pioneers who constructed fortifications. In a nice bit of irony, Ralph Henry escaped from the bondage of Virginia politician Patrick Henry and, in the spirit of "GIVE ME LIBERTY OR GIVE ME DEATH," served with the Royal Artillery.<sup>23</sup>

During the first two years of the war, Loyalist units welcomed Black recruits as line-soldiers as well as for the customary role of drummers and trumpeters. Richard and Peter Martin had been owned by a Colonel Butler, a prominent New York Loyalist whose property, including slaves, had been seized and auctioned off. The Martin brothers escaped, rejoined their master, and enlisted in his provincial regiment.<sup>24</sup> However, in 1777, Alexander Innes, Inspector General of the Provincial Forces, moved to end the "abuse" of enlisting "Negroes," "Mullattos" and "Indians" into Loyalist regiments because he thought that the practice brought "disgrace and ruin" to the provincial service.

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<sup>23</sup>Ellen Gibson Wilson, The Loyal Blacks (New York: Capricorn, 1976), 28.

<sup>24</sup>"The Petition of Peter Martin," Papers and Records of the Ontario Historical Society 26: 244.

Innes attempted to "discharge all improper persons" from provincial corps and issued "strict orders" against the future recruitment of Blacks.<sup>25</sup> Individual regiments did not strictly enforce the color bar. Years later, Butler's Rangers still contained Black soldiers Jack Baker, Richard Parepoint, James Robertson, and the Martin brothers.<sup>26</sup> The Queen's Rangers, probably the most famous Loyalist unit, still included drummers listed by the names of "Black Prince" and "Black Barney."<sup>27</sup>

The expansion of the war to the southern colonies prompted a rethinking of policy. In 1779, Sir Henry Clinton, British Commander-in-Chief in America, proclaimed that Blacks captured in rebel service would be sold as slaves, but those who sided with the king would receive protection and freedom.<sup>28</sup> As a result, loyalists raised the Carolina Corps from among Whites and Blacks; consisting of

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<sup>25</sup>"A Letter Regarding the Queen's Rangers," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 20 (1922): 369.

<sup>26</sup>Ernest Cruickshank, The Story of Butler's Rangers and the Settlement of Niagara (Niagara Falls, Ontario: Renown Printing Company): 116-122; Green, 365-366.

<sup>27</sup>C.J. Ingles, The Queen's Rangers in the Revolutionary War, (1956): 289-299. Presumably, the names of the drummers were intended to be descriptive.

<sup>28</sup>Sylvia R. Frey, "The British and the Black: A New Perspective," The Historian 38, 2 (February, 1976): 225-238.



both infantry and cavalry, it served throughout the southern campaign.<sup>29</sup> Curiously, the German regiments hired by Britain, popularly known as "Hessians," recruited two hundred African-Americans as drummers and line-soldiers, many of whom accompanied their teutonic colleagues to Germany after the war.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately for the king's cause, British policy regarding Black manpower vacillated. Because of a combination of prejudice and fear of offending colonial slaveowners, the British did not exploit this massive resource of manpower to decisively change the course of the war in favor of the king.

In the War of 1812, African-American slaves again represented a potential source of military manpower for the British forces but, as in the American Revolution, official attitudes alternated between encouraging slave escapes and fearing White American outrage. The king's commanders did not foment wide-scale insurrection but they normally protected any escaped slaves who desired sanctuary. African-Americans served the British as guides and, in the

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<sup>29</sup>Tylden, "The West India Regiments," 43.

<sup>30</sup>Elliot W. Hoffmann, "Black Hessians: American Blacks as German Soldiers," Negro History Bulletin 44 (1981): 81-2, 91; and George Fenwick Jones, "The Black Hessians: Negroes Recruited by the Hessians in South Carolina and other Colonies," South Carolina Historical Magazine (1982): 287-302.

mid-1814 raids against settlements in the Chesapeake Bay area, Black British soldiers played key roles and also helped to burn Washington D.C. By September, three hundred African-Americans had been organized into three companies of Royal Marines and grouped with three White companies to form a battalion.<sup>31</sup> Though they provided a welcome reinforcement for the British forces, the Black marines were "wretchedly equipped; some without blankets, others without great coats, scarcely a haversack or canteen between [sic] them, & many even shoeless."<sup>32</sup>

Throughout the Georgian period, the British government and military proved to be ambivalent in their treatment of Black soldiers and sailors. Historian Sylvia Frey claims that "racial prejudice" was "an important formative factor" in British decision-making toward African-American soldiers during the American Revolution and cites many instances of their being treated differently from White personnel in pay, punishment and functions.<sup>33</sup> Racial discrimination sometimes

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<sup>31</sup>Gleig, 84; John K. Mahon, The War of 1812 (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1972), 313-4.

<sup>32</sup>Colonel Cyril Fields' Britain's Sea Soldiers (Liverpool: Lyceum Press, 1924), Vol. I, 302-3, quoted in Anthony Gero, "The Use of Ex-slaves in the Royal Marines, circa 1814-1815," Military Collector & Historian 31 (Winter 1979): 154. Rene Chartrand provided the author with a copy of the Gero article.

<sup>33</sup>Frey, 225-238.

reached across the Atlantic. At an inspection of the Wexford Militia during the 1790s, a British general, in "a towering passion," demoted Black Dan, an African, from sergeant to private because he found it offensive to see a Black man commanding Whites.<sup>34</sup>

While Black personnel suffered from racism, other evidence suggests that the political need to preserve "White prestige" by maintaining distance and racial subordination evoked far less anxiety during the eighteenth and mid nineteenth centuries than it would later. As proof of the Georgian navy's "relatively liberal outlook on questions of colour," historian N.A.M. Rodger cites a 1761 court-martial in which a Black seaman acted as the principal prosecution witness against two White sailors accused of sodomy. The defendants objected on the grounds that a Black should not testify against "Christians," but the court found his testimony trustworthy and hanged the two defendants.<sup>35</sup> One of the earliest winners of the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest award for gallantry, was a long-serving Black Nova Scotian sailor named William Hall. He received the decoration while fighting as part of a naval shore party

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<sup>34</sup>Ogle, 31.

<sup>35</sup>N.A.M. Rodger, The Wooden World: An anatomy of the Georgian Navy (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1986), 159.

during the Indian Mutiny.<sup>36</sup>

In the Georgian military, Black personnel often functioned in disciplinary positions over Whites. In the Georgian army, drummers had the task of carrying out corporal punishments, which included hundreds and even thousands of lash strokes. In his study of the Napoleonic-era Irish militia, Henry McAnally raised the question of whether Black drummers administered the lash, but found no evidence one way or the other.<sup>37</sup> In the case of the 29th Foot in colonial Boston, Black drummers such as Thomas Walker did perform the duties required by their status, a situation which caught the attention of Bostonians, who generally did not approve of the military practice of flogging anyway. For them, the sight of White soldiers being "scourg'd by Negro drummers" on the Common, was, according to the Boston Evening Post, "a new and very disagreeable spectacle."<sup>38</sup> In 1782, a unit of Black British

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<sup>36</sup>"Humble Hero: William Hall, Son of Slaves, Brought Canada Her First Naval VC," The Crowsnest 4 (1952): 16-17, 32. Under heavy fire, and with his colleagues dead and wounded around him, Hall single-handedly loaded and fired the heavy naval gun that breached the wall of a mutineer stronghold.

<sup>37</sup>Henry McAnally, The Irish Militia: A Social and Military Study (Dublin: Conmore and Reynolds, 1949), 204.

<sup>38</sup>Oliver Morton Dickerson, ed., Boston under Military Rule, 1768-1769, as revealed in a Journal of the Times (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1968), 3, 6.

cavalry served in another enforcement role in the Carolina countryside by apprehending British deserters.<sup>39</sup> In the same year, on the West African coast, Governor Joseph Wall of Goree improperly ordered that a White sergeant, Benjamin Armstrong, be flogged for mutiny. Because he did not trust his other White soldiers, Wall ordered several African civilian employees at the fort to execute the punishment.<sup>40</sup> From the authorities' perspectives, the use of Blacks in disciplinary roles as military police or floggers was merely a matter of military function. In contrast, by the late Victorian era, the British generally did not allow Blacks to exert such authority over Whites, a situation which would not change until the Second World War.

## II. Black Soldiers and sailors, 1860-1914.

The Victorian era brought significant changes in the officially sanctioned use of Black soldiers. Most regiments ceased employing Black musicians by the 1840s, but the reason for the end of the practice remains unclear.<sup>41</sup> There

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<sup>39</sup>William Seymour, "A Journal of the Southern Expedition, 1780-1783," Papers of the Historical Society of Delaware 2 (1896): 35.

<sup>40</sup>Armstrong died from his injuries and Wall was hanged for the soldier's murder in 1802. "Proceedings on the Trial of an Indictment against Joseph Wall," Howell's State Trials, Vol. 28, (London: Longman, 1820), 51-182.

<sup>41</sup>Paul Edwards, 21; Michael Foss, The Royal Fusiliers (London: Hamish Hamilton), 52; see also Paine, 27.

seems to have been confusion within the late-Victorian military establishment as to whether any non-Europeans could actually enlist in British regiments. The Army Acts of 1881, 1884 and 1914 specifically allowed for the enlistment of Blacks into the British army according to the following provisions:

...(1.) Any person who is for the time being an alien may, if His Majesty think fit to signify his consent through a Secretary of State, be enlisted in His Majesty's regular forces, so, however, that the number of aliens serving together at any one time in any corps of the regular forces shall not exceed the proportion of one alien to every fifty British subjects, and that an alien so enlisted shall not be capable of holding any higher rank in His Majesty's regular forces than that of a warrant officer or non-commissioned officer.

...(2.) Provided that, notwithstanding the above provisions of this section, any inhabitant of any British protectorate and any negro or person of colour, although an alien, may voluntarily enlist in pursuance of this Part of the Act, and when so enlisted, shall, while serving in His Majesty's regular forces, be deemed to be entitled to all the privileges of a natural-born British subject.<sup>42</sup>

The exception noted in paragraph (2) had originally been made by the War Office to allow liberated African slaves, who were genuine "aliens," to enlist in the W.I.R.s.<sup>43</sup> Historian David Killingray interprets this

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<sup>42</sup>War Office, Manual of Military Law (London: H.M.S.O.), 1881, 443-; and 1914, 471.

<sup>43</sup>Manual of Military Law, 1884, 256, 444. In 1947, legal experts confirmed that, since 1881, British law had technically allowed for both the recruitment and

stipulation as an example of institutional racism because the War Office considered Black people to be "aliens."<sup>44</sup> However, the Army Act never specifically addressed British-born Black subjects, "Black Britons," who were neither inhabitants of British protectorates nor "aliens." Anyone who worked at the War Office in London probably had to have been aware that Black people lived in Britain.

"Legal" did not mean "mandatory;" the same Army Acts that regulated recruitment also granted the War Office, acting in the sovereign's name, the authority to regulate enlistment and commissioning. The army's highest officials expressed their views on Black enlistment into British regiments in 1886. The question had originally arisen during the 1870s and '80s, when Europeans and Eurasians in India called for the unrestricted enlistment of Eurasians into British regiments and the formation of specifically Eurasian regiments. Ironically, the Indian government,

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commissioning of "coloured" aliens. "Opinion of the Solicitor-General and Mr. Parker," 14 November 1947 and "Case for the Opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown: Whether Gurkhas serving in the British Regular Forces may be Granted Commissions in those Forces." P.R.O. W.O. 32/12319. See also the Ninth (1969) edition of the Manual of Military Law (London: H.M.S.O., 1969), 304.

<sup>44</sup>Killingray wrote that, "Army law classified Blacks as aliens." See his "All the King's Men? Blacks in the British Army in the First World War, 1914-1918," in Rainer Lotz and Ian Pegg, eds., Under the Imperial Carpet (Crawley, Sussex: Rabbitt Press, 1986), 166-169.

always deeply concerned about matters of race, believed that British regiments stationed in India could already recruit Eurasians who possessed three-fourths European parentage, at the discretion of commanding officers. Eurasian soldiers suffered only from the disability that, once enlisted, they could not expect to be repatriated home to India at "public expense" if, by the end of their service, their British regiment had left India. According to the highest Indian officials, it was well known that Eurasians often "work(ed) their passage ...to England, in order to enter the Army there, as they cannot do so out here, owing to the difficulty of obtaining the necessary certificate of descent."<sup>45</sup> Ever conscious of Britain's tenuous hold on India, the Indian government supported unrestricted individual Eurasian enlistment in British regiments "in order to remove a grievance to which some importance is attached, by a class whose tendencies are loyal and patriotic."<sup>46</sup>

In direct contrast, War Office officials in London assumed that army regulations already prohibited Black

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<sup>45</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/6889. Military Department of India to Secretary of State for India, 23 July 1886; and Adjutant-General, India, to Secretary of the Government of Madras, 2 December 1875.

<sup>46</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/6889. Military Department, Simla, India, to Lord Kimberly, 23 July 1886.



enlistment of any kind. The Duke of Cambridge, Commander-in-Chief, and Sir Garnet Wolseley, the Adjutant-General, both strongly opposed Black enlistment. In particular, the latter described the proposal of opening British regiments to "men of a cowardly race" as "insidious and very dangerous." Such a policy, Wolseley feared, would result ultimately in the "enlistment of full-blown Black men" and the ruin of the army.<sup>47</sup>

Black men, whether "full-blown" or by degree, certainly served as soldiers of the queen despite War Office rhetoric. In 1882, a petitioner, using the pseudonym "A. Eurasian," claimed that,

There are more Eurasians in the British Army than is commonly supposed. Being sufficiently White to pass for Europeans, they have been enlisted as such, and of course their identity as Eurasians has been lost. Several of the store-sergeants, sub-conductors, &c., are to my personal knowledge Eurasians, and they have the reputation of being efficient men.<sup>48</sup>

Many Black soldiers probably passed for White, but others served despite obvious non-European descent. For example, the Edwardian-era Durham Light Infantry had a Black Corporal of Buglers who had been found as a two-year-old

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<sup>47</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/6889. Minute by Wolseley, 29 September 1886.

<sup>48</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/6889. Remarks by "A. Eurasian," Proceedings for April 1882, 7.

child in the Sudan in 1885. "Little Mustafa's" father had been killed in a battle against the British. N.C.O.s of the regiment christened him "John Francis Durham," raised him, and paid for his education. When he came of legal age, Durham enlisted in the regiment, married an English woman, and died in Ireland in 1910.<sup>49</sup> Though unique, Durham's case was, in all likelihood, not the only exception. Regiments at home required no proof of descent for enlistment and, within the United Kingdom, British regiments increasingly recruited from the urban areas in which significant numbers of Black people dwelled. Recruiting officers, perpetually short of recruits, probably did not concern themselves much with strictly enforcing racial purity.<sup>50</sup>

### III. Black Officers to 1914

The possibility of Black line officers in British regiments does not seem to have occurred to the War Office until the 1880s. Until 1871, most regular line officers purchased their commissions, a policy that made the army the creature of Britain's landed classes. The regulations for

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<sup>49</sup>S.G.P. Ward, Faithful: The Story of the Durham Light Infantry (Durham: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1962), 274; William More, The Durham Light Infantry (London: Leo Cooper, 1975): 10, 13.

<sup>50</sup>Killingray, "All the King's men?," 166. On general recruiting patterns in Britain, see Alan Ramsey Skelley, The Victorian Army at Home (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977), 289-298.

officer commissions made no mention of color, but, under the purchase system, they really did not need it. It seemed obvious that, except in rare circumstances, potential officers would come from the upper classes of the United Kingdom. The end of purchase in favor of application and competition necessitated clarification of the regulations. In 1884, authorities inserted a clause into the regulations which stated that "only British born or naturalised British subjects will be eligible to offer themselves for examination" for the army's cadet colleges.<sup>51</sup>

A decade later, after an unexplained 1893 case involving a man name Ezechiel, a further qualification stipulated that "candidates must, in the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief, be in all respects suitable to hold Commissions in the Army."<sup>52</sup> The War Office defined "suitability" in 1896 during an exchange of letters it had with Dadabhoi Naoroji, a London-based Indian nationalist and Liberal M.P., who had asked by what authority British military officials barred non-European British subjects from receiving commissions. The War Office replied that no Act of Parliament prohibited the practice, but military

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<sup>51</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/3759. "A Statement Giving the History of the Case." May (?) 1910.

<sup>52</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/3759. "A Statement Giving the History of the Case," May (?) 1910.

regulations laid down by the Secretary of State for War under the Queen's Royal Warrant on the pay, appointment, and promotion of the army, did.<sup>53</sup> Naoriji argued that no specific exclusions to Indian officers existed in the Royal Warrant authorizing commissions. Also, he cited an Act of Parliament of 1833 governing the East India Company which stated "that no Native of the said territory nor any natural-born subject of His Majesty, resident therein shall, by reason of his religion, place of birth, descent, or any of these, be disabled from holding any place, office, or employment." Naoriji then cited the Queen's 1858 proclamation and its 1887 reaffirmation that there would be no racial or religious discrimination in government appointments.<sup>54</sup>

Such arguments convinced Lord Lansdowne, the War Secretary, that his ministry should be explicit on the policy of excluding British subjects "not of pure European descent." He reasoned that a British private soldier would never follow "a half-caste or native Officer." Nor, Lansdowne thought, would "junior Officers of pure British blood serve efficiently under a senior Officer of mixed

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<sup>53</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/8651. Copies of Correspondence 5 June to 23 July 1896.

<sup>54</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/8651. Naoriji to War Office, 7 August 1896.

origin." In addition to recognizing these prejudices, Lansdowne cited "physiological reasons for which, in an Army which may be called upon to serve in all parts of the globe, Officers of Eastern extraction would not be suitable."<sup>55</sup> A "frank" letter drafted for Naoriji's benefit stated that "it is clearly laid down that only such candidates as those 'in all respects suitable to hold a commission in the Army,' are eligible;" and the War Office had decided that "pure European descent" was "an essential qualification." The War Office further added that,

nothing whatever, either in the Queen's Proclamation, or in the regulations for the admission of University Candidates to which you have referred ... could have the effect of obliging the Military Authorities to grant Commissions in the army to candidates who are not considered suitable.<sup>56</sup>

In 1900 and 1901, the War Office considered suggestions that the army should adopt the navy's recent and open bar to commissions for persons not of pure European descent. On both occasions, higher officials vetoed the idea because the existing rule provided the Commander-in-Chief enough of a tool to weed out objectionable candidates on the basis of

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<sup>55</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/8651. Minute by "L" (Lord Lansdowne), 15 October 1896.

<sup>56</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/8651. Haliburton, War Office, to Naoriji 21 December 1896.

"suitability."<sup>57</sup>

In 1911, the War Office prepared to revise the regulations for entrance to its military colleges at Sandhurst (infantry and cavalry) and Woolwich (artillery and engineers) to explicitly bar candidates "not of pure European descent." The India Office protested on the basis that several serving Indian army officers possessed an "admixture of Indian blood."<sup>58</sup> In its reply to the India Office, the War Office protested that the ambiguity of the regulations allowed "a repetition of cases" in which candidates prepared for the entrance examination but eventually had to be rejected because of the unclear rule that they must be "suitable" to hold an army commission. One difficult case involved A.G.C. de Smidt, who, during a medical examination for Sandhurst, was reported as "fit" but having "the appearance of not being of pure European descent." The War Office invited him in for a visual exam and decided that he did not have the necessary background. Soon after, however, De Smidt successfully appealed on the grounds that 1) he could prove his descent; 2) his brother had been previously accepted to Woolwich; and 3) that the

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<sup>57</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/3759. "A Statement Giving the History of the Case."

<sup>58</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/3759. Montagu, India Office to War Office, 18 August 1911.

regulations contained no clause warning that "candidates whose complexions happen to be unusually dark" would be refused admittance.<sup>59</sup> Far from ending the controversy, the War Secretary decided, for unspecified reasons, to retain the unclear 1909 regulations.<sup>60</sup>

In 1908, the "vexed question" of Black commissions arose again, this time in connection with the Officers Training Corps (O.T.C.s) at British universities. The presence of "coloured" students at British educational institutions was increasing and they demanded equal access to all university activities, including the "senior" divisions of O.T.C.s. O.T.C.s consisted of junior and senior divisions, the former of which was open to any students, often including non-Europeans, having an interest. The latter was restricted to advanced students who intended to gain commissions in the army's Territorial Force and Special Reserve. Up to this point, Glasgow had been the only university to impose a formal color bar on membership to its contingent. The War Office decided to extend the ban

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<sup>59</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/3759. War Office to India Office, 1 September 1911, and Appendix B. "Examples of Recent cases of Gentlemen not of pure European descent applying to enter the British Army."

<sup>60</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/3759. Minute, Chief of the Imperial General Staff to Director of Manpower Training, 13 October 1911.

to all universities on the grounds that it was "economically unsound" for "coloured" students to be allowed to enroll in O.T.C.s, which had been formed to supply officers for the British reserve forces.<sup>61</sup>

Despite War Office vehemence concerning race, the color bar did not prevent the commissioning into Britain's regular forces of several officers "not of pure European descent." For example, R.F. Warburton had an Afghan grandmother but earned a commission in the Somerset Light Infantry in 1892 and later joined the 5th Gurkhas in India. F. Rennick, whose mother was an Indian, initially received a commission in the North Lancashire Regiment in 1885 and opted for the Indian Army, subsequently rising to the command of the 40th Pathans.<sup>62</sup> It may be argued that in examples such as these, mixed-race officers passed for White, and therefore, did not count as Black or "not of pure European descent." However, considering the relatively small circle of British and Irish families that provided officers to the British army, someone in the Colonial, India or War Offices had to have known such

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<sup>61</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/2734. War Office Minute 11 December 1908 and Circular War Office to Officer Training Corps, 2 January 1909.

<sup>62</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/3759. India Office to War Office, 29 September 1911. In 1915, Lt. Col. F. Rennick died of wounds incurred while leading his battalion in France. R.S. Waters, History of the 5th Battalion (Pathans), 14th Punjab Regiment (London: James Bain, 1936), 144.



officers' genealogy. Perhaps, out of a sense of fair play or favoritism, officials simply looked the other way. In 1939, Governor A. P. Richards of Jamaica claimed that his colony had contributed many officers "of undoubted colour" to the army. They had evaded the color bar "presumably through having been at the best schools in England and having estates there as well as in Jamaica." In particular, Richards named H.S. Sewell, who served with distinction with the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, and rose to command a brigade of cavalry during the Great War.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, royal pleasure could expand War Office rules regarding "suitability," as in the case of Prince Victor Duleep Singh, the British-born son of Sir Duleep Singh, a prominent Indian exile and sometime favorite of the Queen. Victor attended Sandhurst and obtained a commission in an exclusive Household Cavalry regiment, a unit which, ordinarily, would not be sent out of Britain.<sup>64</sup>

The matter did not rest there. In 1897, the India Office and War Office debated an Indian maharaja's proposal

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<sup>63</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1673/5. Richards to Beckett, Colonial Office, 6 September 1939. See a similar comment made in 1917 by The Daily Gleaner on 15 September 1917.

<sup>64</sup>Chandar S. Sundaram, "Preventing 'Idleness': The Maharaja of Cooch Behar's proposal of officer commissions in the British Army for the sons of Indian Princes and Gentlemen, 1897-1898." South Asia 18 (1995): 120, nt. 25.

to commission the sons of aristocratic Indian families into the British army. The India Office failed to overcome the War Office's opposition to implement this plan. But just a few years later, Indian princes became eligible for Imperial Cadet Corps at "Princes Colleges," which would prepare them for honorary commissions. Their aspirations to serve the King-Emperor would have to be satisfied by being attached to the staffs of British generals as honorary aides.<sup>65</sup>

Despite a lack of consistent enforcement, the political need to maintain a formal color bar remained a key factor in setting military policy. In addition to injuring individuals, the British army's desire to formally exclude Blacks from positions of authority inhibited attempts to rationalize the administration of the crown's military forces. In 1864 and again in 1881, for example, schemes to amalgamate the Indian Medical Service with the Army Medical Department foundered on the fact that the former accepted Indians while the latter prohibited non-Europeans.<sup>66</sup>

The Augustan and Georgian armed forces welcomed Blacks to fulfil a variety of functions. In the army, they usually

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<sup>65</sup>"Soldier Princes of India," Navy and Army Illustrated (13 December 1902): 333-5; Sundaram, "Preventing Idleness," 115-130.

<sup>66</sup>Crawford, II., 283-4.

served as regimental musicians, but they also often found themselves fighting as line soldiers. The navy proved particularly accepting of Black recruits, especially when its ships took station near colonies with Black populations. Black soldiers and sailors participated in most of the battles of the British army and Royal Navy between the Restoration and the Crimean War. Later, during the Victorian period, British military policy formally barred non-European individuals from enlisting or receiving commissions in the regular forces. However, numerous individuals "not of pure European descent" did manage to serve as officers and other ranks of the Queen. Still, officially sanctioned-racial integration would have conceded racial equality in an empire increasingly justified by the perceived inequality of the races.

## CHAPTER VI

### BLACKS IN THE BRITISH FORCES, 1914 TO 1939

The exigencies of the First World War challenged the British government's policy regarding Black soldiers and officers. Initially, Britain's massive mobilization caused many service recruiters to ignore the color bar when Black Britons and colonial subjects volunteered but many other Black volunteers were turned away. Late in the war, political pressures forced the War Office to amend its rules governing Black involvement. However, the military establishment did not whole-heartedly welcome its Black personnel and the alterations in policy demonstrated how colonial political considerations could affect domestic policy during times of crisis.

#### I. An Imperial War

The outbreak of war in 1914 quickly brought forth numerous British subjects "not of pure European descent," who attempted to enlist directly into the British armed forces. The army did not desire Black recruits but, publicly, the War Office maintained an ambiguous position regarding its policy. The 1914 example of W. A. Moore, who had held "a good position in the West Indies," typified the

problems involved when a recruiter rejected a Black volunteer who had actually traveled to Britain at his own expense to enlist. Moore complained to the West India Committee, a London-based lobbying organization that color was the reason.<sup>1</sup> In response, Lord Dundonald, the Committee's secretary, deceptively disclaimed any knowledge of War Office recruiting policies and suggested that concern for Moore's health in the European climate was the probable reason for the rejection.<sup>2</sup> In November 1915, the Under-Secretary of State for War, H.J. Tennant, claimed in Parliament that no regulation barred enlistment on account of "colour," but he warned that, "the fact of a man being a British subject and of military age and fit to serve does not in itself entitle him to be enlisted."<sup>3</sup>

The lack of candor on the part of the War Office meant that Black enlistment often depended on the judgements of individual recruiting officers, who may or may not have been

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<sup>1</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 318/333/46453. Dundonald to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23 November 1914.

<sup>2</sup>C.O. 318/333/46453. Dundonald to W.A. Moore, Nov. 23, 1914. The correspondence had been forwarded to the Colonial Office for advice and an official there had remarked that Dundonald's reply had been disingenuous. Sometimes, such rejections by British recruiters resulted in alternate arrangements. See also, Killingray, "Blacks in the British Army," 177-8.

<sup>3</sup>Parliamentary Debates (Commons). 5th Ser., vol. 75 (1914-15), col. 653.

aware of the War Office's real intentions. Hundreds of Black volunteers from Asia, Africa, the West Indies and Britain actually served in the British forces despite institutional prejudices.<sup>4</sup> For example, six hundred "coloured" Ceylonese joined British regiments, including elite units such as the Coldstream Guards and Royal Fusiliers.<sup>5</sup> W.R. Clarke, a Black Jamaican, became a pilot in the Royal Flying Corps, a forerunner of the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.).<sup>6</sup>

Various pressures eventually compelled the War Office to officially sanction Black enlistment into the army. In fact, an absurd situation developed after 1916 when Britain introduced conscription. Britain's Blacks, whether native or temporarily resident, were technically liable for service and, thus, the Ministry of National Service often called up men whom the army did not want. Consequently, the British

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<sup>4</sup>Norman Manley, "The Autobiography of Norman Washington Manley," Jamaica Journal 7 (1973): 4-19, 92; Lobagola, An African Savage's Own Story (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), 357-62. Two Nigerian brothers studying in Britain, Eugene and John Brown, served in the 5th North Staffordshire Regiment. Philip Vasili to author, 19 March 1996.

<sup>5</sup>Charles Lucas, The Empire at War (London: Oxford University Press, 1921) Vol. V, 357-8.

<sup>6</sup>Roger Lambo, "Achtung! The Black Prince: West Africans in the Royal Air Force, 1939-46," in David Killingray, ed., Africans in Britain (Ilford, Essex: Frank Cass and Co., 1994), 146.

government alternately prosecuted and ignored Blacks who failed to answer call ups.<sup>7</sup> Further embarrassment arrived from overseas because the War Office sought out British subjects of pure European descent for military service wherever they could be found, including the United States. Because of fears about political ramifications in the West Indian colonies, the War Office could not ask that only White subjects overseas enlist in the British forces. Meanwhile, for Black British subjects in the United States, the War Office held out the prospect of a separate labor battalion. In February 1918, General White, head of Britain's military mission in New York, informed his superiors that an insufficient number of Black West Indian subjects had come forward to form a complete battalion but, he warned that rejection of "British subjects of colour" would create "adverse comment." At the bottom of a copy of White's dispatch to the War Office, an unidentified person spelled out the army's views on individual Black enlistment with the following lines:

Wooly headed niggers. We now refuse to post coloured men to 'White units.' These 'niggers' must therefore go to native units, if accepted.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Killingray, "Blacks in the British Army," 175-6.

<sup>8</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/4765. General White, New York, to War Office, 19 February 1918.

To better exploit their manpower, the British and American governments had signed a recruiting convention whereby British citizens living in the United States who had not registered for enlistment in the British forces could be conscripted into the American military. The fear of being drafted by the United States brought forward over two thousand Black West Indian applicants for British service by March 1918. Although the numbers exceeded those required to form a single battalion, the War Office no longer wished to take them, claiming that the transportation of American troops to Europe required every ton of available shipping. From Washington, D.C., Britain's Military Attache cautioned that the situation created ill-feeling and fed into anti-British propaganda among West Indians.<sup>9</sup> Appeals from the West India Contingent Committee persuaded the War Office to formally accept a Black Trinidadian who had traveled to Britain ignorant of the color bar. The Committee had warned the War Office that the color bar would have the "most far reaching and regrettable results."<sup>10</sup>

Mounting political pressure caused a change in policy. In June 1918, the War Office formally, but quietly, agreed

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<sup>9</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/4765. Military Attache, Washington, D.C., to War Office, (?) March 1918.

<sup>10</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 318/347. Aspinall, West Indian Contingent Committee to War Office, 24 May 1918.



to enlist "British subjects of colour" into British units on three conditions: 1) that they had to eat British rations, 2) that they be paid as British soldiers, and 3) that they had to understand and speak English.<sup>11</sup> The Colonial Office informed colonial governments that as long as these conditions were strictly followed, the War Office would allow the enlistment of any British subjects of "pure Negro descent," "pure Oriental descent," and of mixed descent.<sup>12</sup> Alarmed, the War Office protested that its intention had been only to recruit "British subjects of colour resident in Great Britain and the United States" and those colonies not already possessing combatant units.<sup>13</sup> In other words, military authorities hoped to simultaneously allow, but limit, the enlistment of Blacks at a time when the British army desperately needed soldiers at the front. The war ended in November, before these more inclusive policies could possibly affect its outcome.

It is difficult to gauge the everyday experiences of individual Black soldiers in the British forces during the

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<sup>11</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/4765. Cubitt, War Office, to Ministry of National Service, 13 June 1918.

<sup>12</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/781. Circular, Colonial Office to Colonial Governments, 15 July 1918.

<sup>13</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/4765. War Office to Colonial Office, 24 August 1918.

Great War. Near the end of the war, several hundred White patients, incited by soldiers with South African experience, attacked fifty Black patients at a military hospital in Liverpool.<sup>14</sup> These Black men appear to have been the victims of a racial bigotry originally adopted in a colonial setting and exacerbated by the frustration caused by the sudden end of the war. The Liverpool attackers possibly felt their position threatened by those who obviously appeared not only to be different and inferior, but also present in significant numbers.

Most individual Black British soldiers probably served in the forces without incurring such blatant hostility. For example, in the summer of 1918, two merchant sailors from Sierra Leone, Ernest Marke and his friend Tommy, took advantage of the army's new policy of toleration and enlisted in Liverpool. The war ended while they trained:

The two months I spent in the army were very happy times. I encountered no colour prejudice of any kind and the feeling that we were all in the same uniform was a strong one... Tommy and I became favourites in the camps.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to the besieged men of the B.W.I.R., White soldiers did not perceive Black individuals such as Ernest

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<sup>14</sup>Shryer, Staying Power, 297.

<sup>15</sup>Ernest Marke, In Troubled Waters: Memoirs of my Seventy Years in England (London: Karia Press, 1986), 24-25.

Marke and Tommy as any sort of threat. Indeed, they were treated as novelties. A possible explanation for the relatively good relations between Whites and individual Black service personnel may be found in the nature of the U.K.'s war-time forces. The small pre-war regular forces of several hundred thousand had served as imperial guardians and upholders of White British rule. In colonial settings, British servicemen had become accustomed to treating non-European subjects disrespectfully and brutally. In contrast, the expanded war-time army achieved a strength of about five million men and the navy, about one million. The sheer expansion of the forces diluted the number of virulent racists who had thrived in the small "peacetime" professional forces. If anything, skin color or cultural difference ensured that individual Black soldiers frequently became novelties in their respective units.<sup>16</sup>

The notion of commissioning Black officers conflicted with the empire-justifying idea of White superiority. A few years prior to the First World War, racial anxiety had caused the War Office to refuse a request from an African officer of the Gold Coast Volunteers to train with British units in the United Kingdom. It had been decided that the

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<sup>16</sup>This theme is discussed more fully in later chapters. More evidence exists for the Second World War and post-war period than for the First World War.

visiting officer would probably not be treated with respect by the N.C.O.s and men he would command.<sup>17</sup> In this decision, the War Office implicitly denied its ability and responsibility to influence the attitudes and behavior of its ranks. Also, the reply disguised the War Office's prejudices against Black people with a contrived concern for the well-being of the officer in question.

During the war, racism sometimes impeded promotion. Norman and Roy Manley enlisted in the Royal Artillery after the former had been refused entrance into Oxford University's Officers Training Corps (O.T.C.). Norman attained the rank of corporal and recalled that, "the rank and file disliked taking orders from a coloured N.C.O. and their attitude was mild by comparison with that of my fellow N.C.O.s." The latter resented sharing equal status with Manley and he found that he could turn only to his White officers for "ordinary decency."<sup>18</sup> A Jewish African named Lobagola actively recruited Jews for British military service while a resident of New York City. He eventually

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<sup>17</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 96/502. Ward, War Office, to Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 10 May 1910.

<sup>18</sup>Manley, 7. During the First World War, Cambridge University's O.T.C. allowed Indian enrollment into an ambulance unit, though not into the regular unit. Hew Strachan, History of the Cambridge University Officers Training Corps (Tunbridge Wells, Kent: Midas Books, 1976), 143.

enlisted and joined the predominately Jewish 38th battalion of the Royal Fusiliers in Palestine. Lobagola experienced occasional resentment at the hands of White other ranks but, because he found favor with his officers, he attained the positions of quartermaster sergeant and orderly sergeant.<sup>19</sup>

Political and military realities gradually wore down the color bar in officers' commissions. Indian officers of the Imperial Cadet Corps and Imperial Service Troops became a common sight in Britain and on the Western Front. For example, Sir Douglas Haig's headquarters staff included Lt. Narain Singh of Takari, who alternated between delivering messages by motorcycle at reckless speeds and sniping at Germans with his tiger gun.<sup>20</sup> The legality of commissioning Black officers was conceded in November 1917, when the War Office's Judge Advocate General, Sir Felix Cassel, interpreted Section 95 of the Army Act as allowing for the commissioning of alien persons of colour.<sup>21</sup> It is unclear what effect, if any, Cassel's decision had on the commissioning of Blacks because several persons "not of pure

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<sup>19</sup>Lobagola, 357-62. The 38th was one of three Jewish battalions of the Royal Fusiliers to serve in the Middle East.

<sup>20</sup>Farwell, Armies of the Raj, 231-2.

<sup>21</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/12319. Cassel to War Office RE: Elie Avout, 22 November 1917.

European descent" had received commissions well before the ruling. Also, Cassell did not negate the army's authority to restrict precisely who it commissioned.

Walter Daniel Tull, a professional footballer and Folkestone native, became one of the first war-time officers of obviously African descent. Along with other footballers, he had originally enlisted in the 23rd (1st Football) battalion of the Middlesex Regiment. In May 1917, Tull received a commission and, according to a fellow officer, he "bore a very high reputation for courage and devotion to duty." Superiors recommended Tull for the Military Cross and his divisional commander sent him a note of appreciation for "gallantry and coolness." German fire killed him in March 1918.<sup>22</sup> Other Black officers included G.A.R. Williams of St. Lucia, who obtained a commission in the North Staffordshire Regiment,<sup>23</sup> Rama Jodha Jang Bahadur of Nepal who earned a Military Cross at Ypres in 1915,<sup>24</sup> and Mahaduv Singhji, who received a British army commission, but

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<sup>22</sup>Major Poole to Tull's family, 12 April 1918; Pickard to Tull family, 17 April 1918; and "Note of Appreciation," Sydney Lampnel to Walter Tull, Finlayson Collection.

<sup>23</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1673/6. Governor, Windward Islands, to Malcolm MacDonald, 17 November 1939, and enclosure.

<sup>24</sup>Farwell, Armies of the Raj, 231-2.

transferred to the Indian army in 1918.<sup>25</sup> At least four Indians received commissions in the Royal Flying Corps, and one of them, Indra Lal Roy, scored ten victories and earned the designation of "ace."<sup>26</sup>

Thus far, no evidence has surfaced to indicate that Black officers experienced racism in uniform. In all likelihood, the resentment directed at Black N.C.O.s by White N.C.O.s and privates did not affect Black officers to the same extent because a wide legal and social gulf formally separated officers on the one hand from N.C.O.s and privates on the other. Officers and N.C.O.s existed in worlds with different rules, responsibilities, and privileges. A Black officer, who, by definition, was a "gentleman," was too high ranking to be a threat to the status of a White sergeant or corporal.

## II. Inter-War Color Bar

The services' acceptance of Black enlistment and commissioning ended soon after the war. The navy and the newly formed Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) specifically barred "coloured" recruits in their published recruiting regulations. In contrast, the War Office prohibited the enlistment of Blacks, not through formal regulations, but,

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<sup>25</sup>Menezes, 310-11.

<sup>26</sup>Lambo, 146; Menezes, 313.

by ordering medical officers to reject "undesirable" recruits on the basis of medical reasons, which would not be disclosed to the applicants themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Explicit racial discrimination by the army appeared a decade later, during a period of internal reform. Because of a recruiting shortfall in the 1930s, the army had, by 1937, instituted several measures including an improvement of conditions, lower physical requirements, and an acceptance of illiterate recruits.<sup>28</sup> At the same time, however, the War Office decided to alter its regulations to explicitly bar Blacks. Army authorities adopted this restriction because of "the difficulty experienced in placing a coloured British subject" who had been inexplicably allowed to enlist. All of the regimental depots "to which the man was offered were extremely reluctant to accept him."<sup>29</sup> Thus ended the discrepancies and confusions between army regulations and those of the

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<sup>27</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/14692. "Report of the Committee on the post-war regulations respecting the nationality and descent of candidates for entry to the army." 16 March 1945. The Ministry of Defence has confirmed to the author that the relevant files on the case do not exist.

<sup>28</sup>Gerald F. Spillan, "Manpower Problems in the British Army, 1918-1939," D. Phil. diss., (Oxford University, 1985), 179, 185.

<sup>29</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10592. "Report of the Committee on the post-war regulations respecting the nationality and descent of candidates for entry to the army," 16 March 1945.



other services.

The enforcement of the color bar in the armed forces usually relied on a simple visual examination to ascertain whether or not an individual met the requirement of "pure European descent." To prevent embarrassing questions, the Air Ministry issued instructions that a candidate for enlistment could be rejected if he voluntarily provided written evidence that he was not of pure European descent or, if he appeared to possess non-European blood. Hoping to avoid controversy, the R.A.F. required its recruiters to conceal the reasons for a Black candidate's rejection unless directly asked.<sup>30</sup>

In 1936, the R.A.F. applied its racially exclusive policy in several cases with varying degrees of success. Patrick Thomas Blake was born in India in 1917 to a British soldier and a woman of unidentified descent in India. The Manchester Recruiting Depot had passed Blake through his medical and educational exams but, just a few minutes before the oath, the attestation officer rejected him. The officer informed Blake that he did not possess sufficient knowledge of electricity, but the recruit claimed to have informed the

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<sup>30</sup>P.R.O. AIR 2/2248. Air Council to the Inspector of Recruiting, 5 December 1932. I am uncertain as to the case involved in the production of this document, which was referred to in 1935-6.

recruiters about his expertise earlier. Afterwards, Blake sarcastically claimed that he may have appeared as a spy because of his "dark complexion and decidedly foreign appearance." To support his appeal, Blake provided evidence only on his father's descent and military service. An investigation of army records revealed that his father had married a Marcella Josephine Baptiste in India but the inquiry yielded no evidence as to her descent. The Air Ministry decided to inform Blake only that he had no possibility of being accepted. In the event Blake appealed through a Member of Parliament, the Air Ministry intended to explain the real reason to him "sympathetically."<sup>31</sup>

In a second case, the father of J.F. Adam appealed his son's rejection, whereupon the Air Ministry admitted to the color bar. Mr. Adam responded by castigating the attestation officer for being a "super Solomon-cum-Daniel." He provided a family genealogy to assure the Air Ministry that his son had pure European descent.<sup>32</sup> At the Air Ministry's request, the applicant reappeared so that an official could have a "final look" at him. The R.A.F.

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<sup>31</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/2248. Blake to Officer Commanding, R.A.F., Altrincham, Cheshire, 10 November 1935; War Office to Record Office, R.A.F., Ruislip, 29 November 1935.

<sup>32</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/2248. J.A. Adam to Air Ministry, 3 April 1936.

interviewer judged that the younger Adam's "eyes and perhaps his mouth and head" were oriental and his color dark, "but no darker than many south Europeans." Ultimately, the Air Ministry decided to accept Adam although it considered his to be a borderline case.<sup>33</sup> A third case went more smoothly for the R.A.F., which informed the father of D.J.L. Gabbatiss that his son had failed to fulfil a vaccination requirement before a required deadline.<sup>34</sup> Mr. Gabbatiss then asked the R.A.F. if any future possibility existed for his son to enter the R.A.F.<sup>35</sup> Avoiding mention of "race," the true reason for rejection, the R.A.F. responded that it had "given the matter careful and sympathetic consideration" but the younger Gabbatiss could not be considered for any openings.<sup>36</sup>

Despite having secretive schemes in place to reject unsuitable applicants, British military recruiters failed to keep the British forces racially pure. For example, Londoner Cyril Charles Alcindor enlisted in the 1930s and

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<sup>33</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/2248. Minutes of 24 and 27 April 1936.

<sup>34</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/2248. Pollock to E. Gabbatiss, 10 June 1936.

<sup>35</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/2248. W. Gabbatiss to Officer-in-Charge of Records, Air Ministry, n.d.

<sup>36</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/2248. J.M. Spaight to W. Gabbatiss, 28 August 1936.

served with the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment in volatile Palestine and attained the rank of sergeant by 1939.<sup>37</sup> The Air Ministry made an outright exception to its color bar in 1938 for Cyril Wellesley Bourke, a twenty five year old Black Jamaican who had traveled to London to apply for a commission. An R.A.F. selection board interviewed and rejected him on account of color. He then attempted to enlist in the ranks but was again rejected because of race. In order to prevent controversy, the Air Ministry decided to make an exception for Bourke.<sup>38</sup>

At the end of 1938, the color bar nearly became a public issue because Sir Stafford Cripps, M.P., championed the cases of "half-castes" who wished to enlist in the R.A.F. Cripps, a prominent critic of colonialism, had received a letter from an indignant schoolmaster regarding a mixed-race pupil who had been "made to feel that he is not as other men are" by being rejected because of color.<sup>39</sup> After making inquiries, Cripps received what he considered to be an unsatisfactory explanation from the Secretary of

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<sup>37</sup>Jeffrey Green to author, 17 February 1996.

<sup>38</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/3936. Air Ministry Minutes, 28 September 1938; 6 October 1938; and 11 October 1938.

<sup>39</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/3936. Schoolmaster to Cripps, n.d., encl. in Cripps to Kingsley Wood, Secretary of State for Air, 20 December 1938.

State for Air, Kingsley Wood, on the supposed need for a color bar. Cripps then asked for a full explanation of the color bar from Wood and threatened to publish the correspondence.<sup>40</sup>

Before replying, the Air Ministry conferred with the other two services on the necessity of maintaining the color bar. The War Office assured the Air Ministry that it faced the same problem of rejecting men "not of pure European descent" but "would most certainly exclude a man who had any noticeable mixture of non-European blood, even though he had been educated in England." The army cited the "prejudice among the men in the ranks against serving with men who show any signs of color." The navy replied in a similar vein: men "not of pure European descent" would be miserable in the service due to "ragging" by other sailors.<sup>41</sup> Rather than sending a written explanation, Wood persuaded Cripps to meet with him personally to discuss the matter. The position of the Air Ministry was that, while the R.A.F. opposed racial discrimination, the good order and discipline of the service, as well as the happiness of individuals "not of

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<sup>40</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/3936. Cripps to Wood, 30 December 1938.

<sup>41</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/3936. Roseway, War Office, to Sandford, Air Ministry, 13 January 1939, and Admiralty to Sandford, 23 January 1939.

pure European descent," necessitated a color bar. In turn, Cripps impressed upon Wood the importance of allowing Black subjects opportunities to serve and suggested the formation of segregated units.<sup>42</sup>

The inter-war color bar reflected the British military establishment's deep racial anxiety, an abhorrence of any close association between the regular army and Black people. For example, in 1937, the Jamaica Engineer Corps, a unit of the mostly Black Jamaican local forces, applied to the War Office to be officially "affiliated" with the Royal Engineers.<sup>43</sup> Such relationships involved exchanges of personnel for training, gifts, and greetings on the anniversaries of glorious events in the regiments' pasts. In effect, the units concerned shared in each other's prestige. White military units from the colonies and dominions commonly obtained affiliations with British regiments, especially those with which they had some connection.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, the War Office refused the

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<sup>42</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/3936. Minutes by Sandford to Secretary of State for Air, 9 February 1939, and Draft (not sent), Secretary of State for Air to Cripps, (?) February 1939. For the question of segregated units, see Air Ministry Minutes of 14 and 17 February 1939.

<sup>43</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/4153. Denham to Ormsby-Gore, Colonial Secretary, 15 March 1937.

<sup>44</sup>For example, in 1929, the all-White Bermuda Volunteer Rifle Corps established an affiliation with the Lincolnshire Regiment because, during the Great War, 122 of

Jamaica Engineer Corps' request on racial grounds, but offered the compromise of a "local alliance" between it and a Royal Engineers company then stationed in Jamaica.<sup>45</sup> The maintenance of "White prestige" via separation remained of paramount importance and the army probably felt that a full affiliation between a regular army unit and a Black colonial unit would have been a step toward the inclusion of Black soldiers in the armed forces.

After the end of the war, the forces re-adopted their color bars to commissions and in 1920, the issue of non-European candidates at Sandhurst emerged again. The War Office decided to bring Sandhurst's regulations into line with those of the Navy. The amended rule stated that a candidate had to "be a British subject and the son of British subjects, and ... he must be of pure European descent."<sup>46</sup> Because of the recently introduced program of "Indianization," the regulations did allow Indian candidates destined for the Indian army to attend Sandhurst.

Almost two hundred Indians attended Sandhurst and some claimed to have suffered from British prejudice. For

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its members served with the British regiment. Kipling, 92.

<sup>45</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/4153. War Office to Colonial Office, 30 June 1937.

<sup>46</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/3763. Memorandum, "Naturalization of foreigners for commissions in the Regular Army."

example, some Indians were not allowed to command British cadets.<sup>47</sup> Once commissioned, Indian officers normally served with British regiments in India for one or two years before joining an Indian regiment. The purpose was to give young officers experience and confidence before facing "native" troops. Presumably, White troops would be less damaged by an inexperienced officer than Indians. In British regiments, Indian officers normally received the proper respect and treatment due their rank. Ayub Khan served with a battalion of the Royal Fusiliers in the late 1920s, and "got along very well" with British colleagues.<sup>48</sup> "Timmy" Thimiyya was apprehensive about commanding a platoon of the elite Highland Light Infantry, but he found that they would follow him anywhere. On his last day with the regiment, his Glaswegian soldiers carried him on their shoulders, an honor rarely bestowed on anyone.<sup>49</sup> P.K. Sahgal claimed to have made many White friends in the British units in which he served and won some over to what he thought was the immorality of the British presence in India.<sup>50</sup> As recently as 1995, the Cheshire Regiment

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<sup>47</sup>Khan, 10; Chaudhuri, 201.

<sup>48</sup>Khan, 11-12.

<sup>49</sup>Evans, 93-4.

<sup>50</sup>The I.N.A. Heroes (Lahore: Hero Productions, 1946), 107-8.



maintained close contact with a former guest officer who became a general in the army of the Republic of India.<sup>51</sup>

Certainly, not all Indian officers experienced smooth relations in their British regiments. B.M. Kaul joined the 1/East Surrey Regiment in 1933 and participated in most of the unit's customary activities, including sports, but he refused to hunt and drink. Instead of Anglicizing himself, he engaged in "heated arguments with fellow British officers who argued in favor of the inevitability and the benevolence of the British raj."<sup>52</sup>

Government policy in relation to university O.T.C.s laid bare the military's prejudices against Black people more publicly than the regulations for commissioning into the regular forces. Membership in the racially exclusive senior division of the O.T.C.s became a sore point for the increasing number of African and Asian subjects who attended universities in the United Kingdom. In April 1920, the War Office sanctioned the enrollment of Indians in the senior divisions as part of Indianization but cancelled this policy in 1921. Rejected Indian applicants were to be informed that O.T.C.s existed solely for the training of potential

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<sup>51</sup>Major John Ellis (Ret.), Cheshire Regimental Museum, to author, 29 November 1995.

<sup>52</sup>Kaul, 36-7, 40.

officers for the British army.<sup>53</sup> The War Office revisited the matter later in the decade. The Colonial Office pressured the War Office to open O.T.C.s on the grounds that local colonial defense forces, especially those in Ceylon, needed suitably trained officers. On the political side, the Colonial Office argued that the color bar was "antagonistic to our general policy and is looked upon as a slur by the colonies themselves." The War Office repeated its stance that O.T.C.s existed solely to provide officers for Britain's reserve forces which had color bars. In 1929, the War Office elicited opinions from officials at the Universities at Glasgow, London, Cambridge, and Oxford.<sup>54</sup> D.J. Medley of Glasgow University wrote that its O.T.C. would become "stigmatized" as the "Club of the Nigger" and that White interest would decline.<sup>55</sup> L.N.G. Filon, University of London, admitted "that one of the strongest attractions of the O.T.C. for these lads is the fact that it is the only University Institution which excludes women and

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<sup>53</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/18651. Creedy, War Office, to Officers Commanding, all Senior Division Contingents, Officers Training Corps, 2 August 1921.

<sup>54</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1060/7. Ling, War Office, to Officer Training Corps Commanders at Glasgow, Cambridge, London, and Oxford, 1 January 1929.

<sup>55</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1060/7. D.J. Medley to Ling, 12 January 1929.

those whom they call 'niggers.'"<sup>56</sup> However, Charles Searle of Cambridge answered that enrollment would probably not suffer because the only members who would object would be White "colonials."<sup>57</sup> Most respondents agreed in their deprecation of the idea of accepting Indian students, who were regarded as unreliable and solely intent on causing trouble.<sup>58</sup>

Eventually, university students became embroiled in the O.T.C. issue. In July 1935, R. Nunn May, the Secretary of the National Union of Students of the Universities and University Colleges of England and Wales protested to Lord Halifax at the War Office about the color bar to the Senior Divisions of the O.T.C.s. Nunn May thought that the color bar caused much resentment and constituted one of the Indian students' major grievances.<sup>59</sup> Once again, the War Office's objections to the admission of Indians included the stated purpose of O.T.C.s, i.e., to provide officers for the

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<sup>56</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1060/7. Filon to Ling, 4 January 1929.

<sup>57</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1060/7. Searle to Ling, 13 January 1929.

<sup>58</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1060/7. Letters from Medley, 12 January 1929; Filon, 4 January 1929; Stratton, 12 January 1929.

<sup>59</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/2738. R. Nunn May to Lord Halifax, 10 July 1935.

British forces. India had, by then, established similar training facilities for the program of Indianization and did not need O.T.C.s in Britain. Again, the army cited the potential resentment among White members. Also, the majority of Indian students in Britain were considered to be from "non-martial" races, their desire to enroll in O.T.C.s being "purely political." The War Office predicted "incidents" between civilians and Indians in uniform, especially at Scottish universities because the O.T.C. uniform included the kilt. More significantly, if the War Office dropped the color bar for Indians, then other non-European and "mixed" British subjects would potentially expect admittance, and all these together might clamor for the opening of army commissions.<sup>60</sup>

Before responding to the National Union of Students, the War Office sought out the opinions of other ministries on the issue. Neither the India or Colonial Offices wished to officially raise the matter.<sup>61</sup> Major S.J. Cole, a military officer attached to the Colonial Office reasoned that if O.T.C.s accepted Africans, then, logically, they

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<sup>60</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/2738. Memorandum, "Admission of Indians to the Senior Division, Officer Training Corps," (?) August 1935.

<sup>61</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/2738. War Office Minute, 5 May 1936. The Colonial Office's Major S.J. Cole informed the War Office that his ministry did not desire the scheme.

would have to be admitted to Britain's Territorial Army and Reserve. Another official cited a sartorial concern: "a Black man in kilts -I think the majority of W[est] A[frican]s go to Scotland- would be even more ridiculous than an Indian." The Colonial Office surmised that only Ceylonese students could benefit because Ceylon alone had a local defense force in which graduates of O.T.C.s could be commissioned.<sup>62</sup> Bolstered by these arguments, the War Office responded negatively to the National Union of Students, stating that "a change in the present policy would have many far-reaching effects..." but would produce very few interested students.<sup>63</sup>

In 1937, Cambridge's O.T.C. officials briefly discussed the possibility of accepting Egyptians and Iraqis, but did nothing constructive about it. A second proposal, to allow the enrollment of Indian members, received more thorough consideration. On this occasion, the officials expressed the common concerns about Indian mischief, but they agreed that such fears were outweighed by the good records of Indian students who had previously attended Cambridge and

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<sup>62</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1348/5. Cole, Minute, 25 February 1936; Robinson, Minute, 27 February 1936; and other Correspondence in this file regarding the admission of colonial students to the Senior Divisions of O.T.C.s.

<sup>63</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/2738. War Office to R.Nunn, May and September 1936.

Sandhurst and the potential value of Indians being involved in their own country's defense. However, the proposal failed to win any further support.<sup>64</sup> In April 1939, Black students at several British universities, including Cambridge, complained that they had been prohibited from enrolling in their local O.T.C.s. The Colonial Office referred the matter to the War Office which did not reply before the outbreak of the Second World War.<sup>65</sup>

To summarize, between 1914 and 1939, British policy toward the racial purity of the United Kingdom forces alternated between lip-service to political concerns and a stubborn adherence to racial prejudice. Once colonial political considerations faded with the end of the Great War, the services re-imposed their pre-war color bars. When Britain turned to face Germany in another world war, the racialist ideas that had prevented a fuller mobilization of the empire during the Great War, dominated the British military mindset. The services did not want Black people serving as enlisted men or officers within their ranks and only allowed it as acknowledged exceptions or under narrow restrictions. Nevertheless, even at their most virulently

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<sup>64</sup>Strachan, Cambridge O.T.C., 156.

<sup>65</sup>Sherwood, 3-4.

racist moments, the services accepted individual Blacks who had evaded or had been allowed through the color bar. The forces' public image as racist institutions became politically embarrassing during the Great War and increasingly in the inter-war period because the empire was changing. Simple White supremacy justified on biology no longer matched British scientific beliefs, imperial politics, or recruiting realities. Increasingly, westernized colonial peoples demanded concessions toward the recognition of racial and political equality. These rising expectations fell on deaf ears in the armed services where the assumptions and prejudices of the Victorian empire remained current.

## CHAPTER VII

### BLACKS IN THE BRITISH FORCES DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

#### I. Second Suspension of the Color Bar

Immediately preceding and following the outbreak of war in 1939, several Blacks encountered rejection at the hands of British recruiting authorities. Almost immediately, the government received warnings about the adverse consequences of the color bar on imperial relations.<sup>1</sup> In September 1939, military service in Britain was no longer strictly a matter of voluntary enlistment, as the British had adopted conscription several months before the war. The National Service (Armed Forces) Act contained no provisions for racial exclusion and the War Office decided that "coloured people" in Britain would, in fact, be called up.<sup>2</sup> This was not an enthusiastic affirmation of racial equality. The army's Adjutant General, General Sir Robert Gordon-Finlayson, actually deplored the inclusion of Blacks and

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<sup>1</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1673/5. A.P. Richards to Colonial Office, 6 September 1939; Ministry of Information to Colonial Office, 29 September 1939.

<sup>2</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1673/5. War Office Meeting to consider employment of Dominion and Colonial personnel, and Aliens, by the British Army in the War, 28 September 1939.



stated that, "for practical reasons the admission of coloured British subjects into the Army here would involve very serious difficulties."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, any attempt at rejecting Black conscripts at the depots would be administratively difficult and politically controversial. In mid-October, the Colonial Office announced the Cabinet's decision that,

British subjects from the colonies and British protected persons who are in this country, including those who are not of pure European descent, are to be on the same footing as British subjects from the United Kingdom as regards eligibility for voluntary enlistment in the armed forces and for consideration for the grant of emergency commissions in those forces...<sup>4</sup>

Since the decision had been made largely for political reasons rather than service enthusiasm, misunderstandings and individual cases of rejection continued well into 1941.<sup>5</sup> Colonial governments, private companies, and business associations, particularly in the West Indies, encouraged and arranged to pay for the passages of Black volunteers who wished to enlist in Britain. However, in July 1940, the

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<sup>3</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1672/1. Colonial Office Note, September 1939, enclosed in T.H. Lee to Sir John Shuckburgh, 27 September 1939. See also Sherwood, 4.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1673/5. Communique, 18 October 1939.

<sup>5</sup>See Sherwood, 6-7, and Killingray, "Race and Rank," 280-1.

Colonial Office warned the Jamaican government that, while "coloured" Black British subjects in Britain were eligible for service in the British forces, "it was never contemplated that coloured persons should be specially sent to England for enlistment."<sup>6</sup>

Instead of displaying patriotic zeal, some Blacks in Britain reacted to the services' pre-war color bars by refusing to answer conscription summons. For example, George Price, who had unsuccessfully attempted to join the navy before the war, applied as a conscientious objector to protest British racial policies.<sup>7</sup> Also, Pan-Africanist activists Ras Makonnen, Jomo Kenyatta, and George Padmore answered call-ups by hiding from authorities and expressing anti-colonialist sentiments on their conscription notices.<sup>8</sup>

## II Evasions by the Services

Dissatisfied with the Cabinet's ruling, the armed forces attempted to hinder Black enlistment in several ways. The professional naval officers at the Admiralty intended to simply reject Black men who, once called up, chose to join

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<sup>6</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/4. Colonial Secretary to Governor, Jamaica, 4 July 1940.

<sup>7</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/13. Rev. Charles A. Smith to Arthur Woodburn, M.P., encl. in Harold Moody to Malcolm MacDonald, 1 February, 1940.

<sup>8</sup>Ras Makonnen, Pan-Africanism from Within (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 132-3.

the Royal Navy. Otherwise, they reasoned, if the navy had to accept a few Black recruits out of political expediency, they would be enlisted for "hostilities only." The admirals also wanted to discourage Black colonial subjects from traveling to Britain to enlist and provided local service opportunities such as minesweeping in the West Indies and West Africa.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, the newly appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, opposed this racial discrimination and minuted that,

There must be no discrimination on grounds of race or colour... I cannot see any objection to Indians serving on H.M. Ships where they are qualified and needed, or if their virtues so deserve rising to be Admirals of the Fleet. But not too many of them, please.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the qualified tolerance expressed by the navy's civilian head, it appears that the navy was the service most evasive in recruiting Blacks. In a clearly discriminatory gesture, the Admiralty decided to accept British-born "persons of pure European descent," whose fathers were "British either by birth or by naturalisation," but in the

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<sup>9</sup>See the internal correspondence in P.R.O. ADM. 1/10818. Allan C. Wilmot, a Jamaican, served in the Royal Navy on a minesweeper on the West Indian station until 1944, when he transferred to the R.A.F. in Britain as a rescuer. Wilmot to author, 29 June 1995.

<sup>10</sup>P.R.O. ADM. 1/10818. Minute by Churchill, 14 October 1939.

cases of Black applicants, their fathers had to be "British by birth."<sup>11</sup> Although concerned, the Colonial Office hesitated at pressing the matter while the navy was busily fighting the Germans: "...great harm would be done if we were now seriously charged with a breach of faith to the colonial peoples. If all publicity can be avoided, that might be all right."<sup>12</sup> A few Blacks did serve in the navy during the war, but as late as 1943, its recruiting regulations stated that Blacks were ineligible for entry unless granted specific sanction by the Admiralty.<sup>13</sup>

By the summer of 1940, various colonial governments received requests from White residents for funds to travel to Britain and enlist in the forces.<sup>14</sup> What worried the colonial authorities, in Britain and overseas, was that Black subjects would make the same demands for the opportunity to enlist.<sup>15</sup> The War Office held that, "if the

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<sup>11</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/13. Poynton to Calder, 30 January 1940.

<sup>12</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/13. Minute by M(alcolm). M(acDonald)., 16 April 1940.

<sup>13</sup>Sherwood, 42, nt. 24.

<sup>14</sup>P.R.O. 323/1801/22. Governor, Trinidad, to Colonial Secretary, 22 May 1940; Colonial Secretary to Governor, Trinidad, 4 and 5 June 1940.

<sup>15</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/13. Calder, Colonial Office, to Woods, War Office, 30 May 1940.

enlistment of White personnel entails accepting coloured we would prefer to do without the White...," but the army would accept colonial Whites who managed to come to Britain discretely.<sup>16</sup> In 1943, the contradiction between Britain's need for manpower and the military's antipathy toward Blacks prevented the British government from conscripting Britons who resided in the West Indies lest Black West Indians construe the action as a form of racial discrimination.<sup>17</sup>

Eager for active service, hundreds of Black West Indians arrived in Britain on their own and presented themselves to recruiting offices. Some initially encountered an initial army hesitancy to accept Black volunteers, but the Colonial Office and the West India Committee usually persuaded the military authorities to accept them. In a significant shift, the War Office agreed, in December 1940, to pay for the passages of Black West Indian skilled tradesmen to Britain for enlistment in the army.<sup>18</sup> In May 1941, the Colonial Office tested the War Office's enthusiasm by requesting that the army pay

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<sup>16</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1801/13. Woods, War Office, to Calder, Colonial Office, 24 June 1940.

<sup>17</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/76/5. Mayle to Williams, 19 March 1943.

<sup>18</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/37/13. Minute by Calder, 2 January 1941.

additional "incidental expenses" incurred by colonial applicants en route to the recruiting offices in Britain. The War Office refused because it did not wish "to make any further concession which would encourage more direct volunteers."<sup>19</sup> By the end of 1941, the War Office sought to limit the enlistment of West Indian tradesmen on the grounds that it was dissatisfied with their performance.<sup>20</sup>

In June 1942, the War Office again agreed to accept skilled West Indian tradesmen provided that, "enlistment should be carried out in the West Indies in all cases and the men [sent] to Middle East by the most direct route..."<sup>21</sup> The Jamaican press widely advertised the scheme and five hundred applied, but, within a few months, the War Office suspended it because of shipping constraints.<sup>22</sup> The army's underlying desire to prevent or limit a Black influx to Britain was revealed to the Colonial Office in late 1942 and

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<sup>19</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/4. Poynton, Colonial Office, to Hobbs, War Office, 28 May 1941 and War Office to Colonial Office, 11 September 1941.

<sup>20</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/37/10. Minute by Calder, 24 November 1941 and Colonial Office to Caribbean Colonial Governors, 26 November 1941.

<sup>21</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/17. Williams, War Office, to Thomas, Colonial Office, 19 June 1942.

<sup>22</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/17. Extract from Report by General Kerr, British Army Staff, Washington, D.C., on the Local Forces in the Caribbean, October 1942.

1943. In August 1942, the War Office indicated that it would help find transportation for Jamaican lorry drivers to come to Britain before being sent on to the Middle East. The Colonial Office suspected that the War Office was being disingenuous, to which suggestion the War Office assured the Colonial Office that it had no objections to "looking after" the drivers.<sup>23</sup> In fact, the War Office did have a "policy" against bringing Jamaican drivers to Britain, a secret "carelessly referred to" during a phone call between low-level bureaucrats in September.<sup>24</sup> In March 1943, the War Office agreed to resume recruiting skilled West Indian tradesmen for the Middle East, but only for a few specific categories.<sup>25</sup> The army imposed the condition that recruitment was "subject to facilities being available for direct shipment to that area." In Colonial Office opinion, this condition meant that there would be no actual recruitment.<sup>26</sup>

As a compromise designed to placate West Indian

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<sup>23</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/18. Henderson, War Office, to MacMillan, Colonial Office, 17 September 1942.

<sup>24</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/18. Minute by Mayle, 26 September 1942.

<sup>25</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/17. Colonial Office to War Office, 10 March 1943.

<sup>26</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/17. Minute by Mayle, 5 March 1943.

aspirations, the Colonial Office informally encouraged West Indian enlistment into the Canadian military. In May 1942, about one hundred Black West Indians served with the Canadian forces in Britain.<sup>27</sup> Always seeking a more direct outlet for West Indian desires to serve in the British war effort, the Colonial Office did not formalize the Canadian scheme because it feared that the War Office might have seized upon the idea as the logical and sole outlet for West Indian military aspirations.<sup>28</sup>

The color bar to the Auxiliary Territorial Army (A.T.S.), the army's branch for women, outlived that for the rest of the military by several years. The War Office wanted to recruit White West Indian women to serve as clerks, drivers, and mechanics in Britain and at its offices in America and the Caribbean, but it resisted the enlistment of Black West Indian women for the A.T.S. In 1943, after mistakenly accepting a Black Bermudian, a compromised War Office reluctantly agreed to accept Black West Indian women along with Whites, with the notable exception of service in Washington, D.C. By the end of the war, over half of the

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<sup>27</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/14. West Indians serving with the Forces in the United Kingdom, 27 May 1942.

<sup>28</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/15. Enlistment of West Indians in the Canadian Forces.



six hundred West Indian A.T.S. recruits were Black.<sup>29</sup>

Black servicemen made their most celebrated and numerous contribution serving with the R.A.F. However, for the first year of the war, the Air Ministry resisted accepting Blacks. Until June 1940, the R.A.F. rejected Black applicants as being unnecessary and possibly disruptive for the service.<sup>30</sup> The Air Ministry had been unwilling to integrate Blacks into aircrews because "the team of an aircraft crew is so small and there has to be such a high degree of mutual confidence between them that they have never liked to take the risk of putting a coloured man in among the crew."<sup>31</sup> The fall of France in June 1940 and the Battle of Britain (August-October) convinced the Air Ministry to extend the recruitment of aircrew to the colonies but it quickly reversed itself. In April 1941, the Air Ministry informed the Colonial Office that, for existing training vacancies to provide maximum output, the R.A.F. had to reduce the number of Black entrants in favor of Whites: "On the experience gained... [with Indians] it is clear that

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<sup>29</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/81/4. Stanley, Colonial Secretary to Grigg, War Secretary, 15 April and War Office to Caribbean Commanders, 21 April, and Grigg to Stanley, 19 May 1943. See also, Bousquet and Douglas.

<sup>30</sup>Lambo, 150-1.

<sup>31</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1729/40. Colonial Office Minute by Poynton, 2 July 1940.

non-Europeans require about half as long again to complete their training as the normal British entrant."<sup>32</sup> Aghast, the Colonial Office persuaded the Air Ministry to reconsider this discrimination on political grounds.<sup>33</sup>

R.A.F. authorities in the colonies had difficulty in finding physically and educationally qualified candidates for aircrew training. Only four out of the fifty-eight Gold Coast applications made during the first two and a half months of the overseas recruitment program passed the medical exam.<sup>34</sup> As of July 1942, Gambia had produced no aircrewmen; Sierra Leone, five; the Gold Coast, two; and Nigeria, six.<sup>35</sup> In Nigeria, rumors circulated that Africans were being rejected by authorities on the grounds that they all possessed malarial parasites.<sup>36</sup> Political pressures caused some colonial governments to recruit personnel specifically precluded by the Air Ministry. For example, in

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<sup>32</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1828/19. Air Ministry to Colonial Office, 4 April 1941.

<sup>33</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1828/19. Bigg, Colonial Office, to Shone, Air Ministry, 31 May 1941.

<sup>34</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1828/38. Gold Coast to Colonial Secretary, 23 July 1941.

<sup>35</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/55/8. Minute by Bigg, 24 July 1942.

<sup>36</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1828/28. Minute by Bigg, 12 December 1941; See Also, West African Pilot, 18, 24 September, and 14 October 1941.

1941, the Duke of Windsor, Governor of the Bahamas, enthusiastically recruited ground crew although the Air Ministry sought only aircrew. The governor reported that it would "be very desirable on political grounds if they could be accepted..."<sup>37</sup>

By the end of the war, over four hundred of the "most carefully selected" Black colonial aircrew flew with R.A.F. squadrons based in Britain. In general, they "settled down well" in the service.<sup>38</sup> In May 1944, the Air Ministry ended the overseas recruitment of aircrew on the grounds that it no longer needed them. Exceptions were made for Black West Indians already accepted for training and for British subjects in foreign countries.<sup>39</sup> In addition to aircrew, from 1943, the R.A.F. also recruited and transported to Britain about 5,500 Black West Indians for ground-crew duties. They served as armorers and maintenance technicians for aircraft and base facilities.

The number of Black servicemen and women in the U.K.-based forces is unknown, but assuming that the visibly Black

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<sup>37</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1828/34. Windsor to Secretary of State for Colonies, 13 June 1941.

<sup>38</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 20/1022. Manpower Contribution of the Colonies to the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945.

<sup>39</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/8269. Air Ministry to Colonial Office, 6 May 1944.

population in Britain numbered between fifteen and twenty thousand, perhaps fifteen hundred to two thousand -- representing ten percent of Black people in Britain -- so served during the war. In May 1942, the British forces also included over one thousand West Indians, of whom the R.A.F. accounted for about half. Meanwhile, West Indians served in about forty different corps of the army, but only a few had enlisted in the navy.<sup>40</sup> By the end of the war, approximately eight to ten thousand Black colonial subjects traveled to Britain at their own expense or under the sponsorship of the services, especially the R.A.F., in order to enlist.<sup>41</sup>

### III. Black Over White: Black Officers

Once again, British authorities confronted the question of commissioning Blacks as officers. The racial purity of an O.T.C. kilt became an issue again in July 1940 when a Jamaican student, R.A. Peat, attempted to enroll in the O.T.C. of Aberdeen University. The commander of the contingent rejected Peat's application on the grounds of

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<sup>40</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/14. West Indians serving with the Forces in the United Kingdom, 27 May 1942.

<sup>41</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/74/14. West Indians on Service. Totals registered with the West India Committee at the end of September 1944 and 1945, enclosed in West India Committee to Colonial Office, 22 October 1945. In September 1944, 4,421 West Indians had registered with the Committee; in September 1945, the total was 8,054.

color. The student angrily appealed and the matter was referred to the Colonial Office. He wrote that, "I can only be a Private... whereas White 'worms' who have neither my education nor refinement, are readily accepted as Officers merely because of a difference in pigmentation..."<sup>42</sup> The War Office attempted to evade the issue by arguing that O.T.C.s technically did not form part of the armed forces of the Crown, and, consequently, did not fall under the order suspending the color bar in 1939. Moreover, the War Secretary, James Grigg, reminded the Colonial Office that Aberdeen's contingent wore the kilt, and the officer who refused Peat's application "no doubt had in mind the probability that a Scotsman's susceptibilities might be hurt by the sight of a gentleman of distinctly non-Scottish appearance wearing the kilt."<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the War Office relented on O.T.C.s and, subject to Colonial Office assurances that they would receive commissions in their own local forces, Black colonial students became eligible to enroll.<sup>44</sup> Questions about this discriminatory policy at

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<sup>42</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 820/45/22. Peat to Colonial Office, 8 August 1940.

<sup>43</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 820/45/11. Grigg to Hall, 20 September 1940.

<sup>44</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 820/45/11. Peat to Strathdee, 6 August 1940; War Office to all Universities furnishing Contingents of the Senior Training Corps, 14 December 1940; and P.R.O. C.O. 820/49/12. Colonial Secretary to Gold

universities continued into 1941.<sup>45</sup>

After the 1939 Cabinet decision, Black Britons and colonials became eligible for promotions and commissioning on an equal footing with Whites. According to Allan C. Wilmot, a Black sailor on a naval minesweeper in 1942 and 1943 and later an R.A.F. sea rescuer, there was an unwillingness among the services to promote Blacks to positions of authority over Whites.<sup>46</sup> This may have been the case in Wilmot's unit and others, but, overall, the evidence indicates that, for the wartime emergency, the services granted Blacks opportunities for considerable advancement and responsibility. Even the Royal Navy commissioned at least one Black West Indian officer during the conflict.<sup>47</sup>

With the assistance of the Colonial Office, Arundel "Joe" Moody received his commission by early 1940,<sup>48</sup> thus setting a precedent for other "openly Black" officers.

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Coast, 19 June 1941.

<sup>45</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 829/49/12. Enlistment of Coloured Students in the O.T.C., 1941.

<sup>46</sup>Allan C. Wilmot to author, 29 June 1995.

<sup>47</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/10. Minute by Thomas, 15 December 1942.

<sup>48</sup>Moody was the son of noted West Indian physician and political activist, Harold Moody.

Prior to the announcement of the color bar's suspension, Moody, who possessed a public school education and O.T.C. experience, applied for officer training with one of the Guards regiments. At first, the interview board attempted to dissuade him by explaining the high expenses incurred in the social life of the regiment. After Moody assured the board that his father would support him financially, the officers presented an Attestation Form stipulating that only British subjects "of pure European descent" were eligible for commissions and advised him to enlist in the ranks and hope for a commission. Moody's father then appealed directly to the Colonial Office. Soon after, the government announced the color bar's suspension, and Moody tried again. The Colonial Office regarded Moody as a test case for the government's new policy and sent an official, Colonel Cole, to accompany Moody through his entire enlistment process, including physical examinations.<sup>49</sup> In Moody's case, the War Office waived the recently imposed requirement that all aspirants for commissions serve in the ranks before applying for a commission.<sup>50</sup> He joined an Officer Cadet Training

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<sup>49</sup>Moody. A Colonial Official had minuted that Arundel Moody had answered an advertisement to the Royal Tank Regiment. P.R.O. C.O. 323/1673/6. Minute of 26 September 1939.

<sup>50</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 323/1692/7212/4. Note on Dr. Moody's Memorandum Calling for the Permanent Removal of the Colour Bar, November 1939.

Unit (O.C.T.U.) in December and received a commission in the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment.

At the regimental depot, Moody's superiors warned him that, while he was a first-class soldier, there would be "dead silence" the first time he entered the regimental officers' mess, but that he should not worry about it. The advice proved correct. Moody fitted in well with his White colleagues and did not experience any racism on the part of British personnel. The one possible exception occurred when he attempted to transfer to the commandos, a request his commanding officer refused on the grounds that the Black officer would be required to infiltrate enemy lines, but would stand out. The government's interest in Moody continued throughout the war. A few years after commissioning, a superior informed him that, according to his file, the War Office would not allow Moody to be demoted except in the case of a very serious violation of military regulations. Presumably, this was a guard against potential charges of institutional racism.<sup>51</sup>

Another notable Black officer, Surrey-born Jimmy Clarke, received his lieutenancy in March 1942, and captaincy in October. In 1943, at the age of twenty three,

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<sup>51</sup>Moody.



he achieved the rank of major in a battalion of the Royal Irish Fusiliers (R.I.F.). Also, he earned a Military Cross and Bar for gallantry in Tunisia and Italy, and became, according to a regimental historian who does not mention Clarke's "descent," a legend in the regiment.<sup>52</sup> According to Joe Moody, who had heard rumors of a Black officer serving with an Irish regiment in Italy, there was some embarrassment about Clarke's attainment of such high rank and responsibility in a White unit.<sup>53</sup> Another Black officer, Sergeant Cyril C. Alcindor, had been a pre-war regular soldier, and received a commission in 1944 and attained a captaincy in 1946.<sup>54</sup> Though not a commissioned officer, Sergeant Major Benjamin MacCrae commanded a platoon in the Royal Norfolks and received the Military Medal for skill and initiative at leading fighting patrols and killing Japanese soldiers in Burma.<sup>55</sup>

Britain's colonies in West Africa provided several

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<sup>52</sup>Amanda Moreno, Royal Irish Fusiliers Regimental Museum, to author, 13 August 1996; Official Record of Major Clarke's action of 1/2 December, quoted in Letter (League of Coloured Peoples Newsletter ) 10, 56 (May 1944): 31. See also, John Horsfall, Fling our Banner to the Wind (Kington: The Roundwood Press, 1978), 10.

<sup>53</sup>Moody.

<sup>54</sup>Jeff Green to author, 17 February 1996.

<sup>55</sup>Macrae, Interview, 1993, tape recording, Reel 2, Department of Sound Recordings, Imperial War Museum, London.

officers to the British army as part of the program of "Africanization." The first, Seth K. Anthony had been a teacher at Achimota College near Accra. In 1939, he spotted the announcement of the Local Forces Ordinance which established, for the first time, officer cadetships for Africans in the 5/Gold Coast Regiment, a territorial battalion. War came before Anthony had been in the program for more than a few months, and he had to join the 5/G.C.R. on a full-time basis, quickly earning promotion to sergeant. In May or June 1941, General Sir George Giffard, British commander in West Africa, summoned Anthony for a brief interview and informed him that he was going to be sent to Britain for officer training. On 2 April 1942, Anthony received a King's emergency commission, thus becoming the first African officer commissioned for the R.W.A.F.F. In general, his White colleagues treated him well. However, in Burma, a British N.C.O. once refused to serve under Anthony, but submitted after having been threatened with disciplinary action by higher authority. Ironically, after a time, this N.C.O. did not wish to be transferred away from Anthony.<sup>56</sup>

The second African R.W.A.F.F. officer, Tom Impraim, recalled that White officers in Africa were polite, but

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<sup>56</sup>Anthony to author, 11 February 1997; and P.R.O. C.O. 820/48/18. Commanding Officer, No. 17 Infantry Training Centre, to Major J.C. Preston, 18 May 1942.

there were few who would deal with him on equal and honest terms.<sup>57</sup> Before the end of the wartime emergency in 1948, several more West Africans received commissions. Higher military authority concluded that properly selected and trained African officers "have held and are holding commissions with full powers of command and punishment over British troops with success."<sup>58</sup>

Certainly, more Blacks received army commissions or otherwise held positions of authority, but they possibly passed for "White," or have simply gone unnoticed so far. The R.A.F. probably commissioned more Blacks than the army simply because it was the most glamorous of the services, no doubt in part because of the publicity surrounding the Battle of Britain. No matter what their skin pigmentation, many young men throughout the empire wanted to fly and the R.A.F. wanted qualified individuals, no matter their color. Of the four hundred Black colonial aircrew recruited during the war, at least seventy gained officer commissions. Most Black aircrew, either officers or highly qualified N.C.O.s, served successfully with White colleagues, but, in 1944, the

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<sup>57</sup>T.K. Impraim to David Killingray, Answers to Questionnaire, 22 December 1980, Killingray Collection, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

<sup>58</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/15483. Grant of Commissions to Africans, by Nicholson, 26 August 1948.

Colonial Office reported the case of a Black pilot who complained that "some of his brother pilots said quite openly that they refused to sleep alongside a -coloured man."<sup>59</sup> With Flight Sergeant Sylvestre, a bomber pilot, the R.A.F. faced the question as to whether Black pilots could or should be placed in the command of large aircraft. In early 1944, dissension occurred among Sylvestre's White crew on account of color and Sylvestre had previously earned a reputation for being racially "super sensitive."

Unfortunately, Sylvestre's commanding officer took his example as proof that Blacks could not make effective Captains of Aircraft on the grounds that they could not inspire the complete trust and confidence of their White crew members.<sup>60</sup> Superiors removed Sylvestre from the resistant crew and placed him in command of another. It appears that this case was an exception as most Black aircrew flew, lived, and sometimes died alongside Whites free of racial antagonism.

#### IV. Black Experiences in the British forces

As in the case of officers (and R.A.F. aircrew), evidence suggests that most individual Black other ranks

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<sup>59</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1223. Minute by Hutchinson, 16 March 1944.

<sup>60</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/8269. Headquarters, No. 3 Group, R.A.F., to A.J. Capel, Bomber Command, 17 May 1944.

encountered relatively little racial animosity during this period. Alfie Lawes had superb relations with other Welsh soldiers, officers, and even with his German prison guards. Ramsay Bader, a gunner in the Essex Yeomanry, found a friendly attitude among most people in uniform but, in one instance, suffered at the hands of a regular soldier with Indian experience. Notably, Benjamin Macrae felt that the harassment and bullying he initially experienced had been a normal aspect of army life and reacted accordingly.<sup>61</sup>

For most White soldiers, Black comrades were a curiosity, a point emphasized in 1962 by a Ministry of Defence official:

the ordinary British soldier (at least in the war) was able to assimilate the odd one or two coloured man [sic] very happily (indeed, they tended to make "pets" of them, a fate which the people in question accepted graciously, though goodness knows what they really felt about it!).<sup>62</sup>

Perhaps being even more of a curiosity, Black service women suffered little or no racism from other military personnel. Black females, if anything, were considered to be more of a attractive novelty than a threat to White-dominated

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<sup>61</sup>This generalization is based on the accounts given by the Black service personnel on file at the Imperial War Museums as well as interviews conducted by the author.

<sup>62</sup>P.R.O. DEFE. 7/1043. Minute by W.B. Wilton, 2 January 1962.

forces.<sup>63</sup> Overall, it appears that the diluted nature of the services during war-time aided in making their White members more hospitable to individual Blacks than they had been in the small regular forces.

Nominally equal conditions of service did not extend to the posting of Black service personnel who could not be sent anywhere that their presence might prove embarrassing for allied or colonial race relations. For example, the R.A.F. trained most of its aircrew overseas in the dominions but, because of racial feeling in those places, Black colonial personnel had to be brought directly to Britain for their training. However, in 1942, the Royal Canadian Air Force agreed to accept Black R.A.F. candidates for training.<sup>64</sup>

Blacks entered the British forces under the same conditions as Whites and, therefore, their presence in colonial settings raised questions about traditional racial subordination. In 1942, Black R.A.F. men in the Middle East encountered "a distinct colour bar particularly amongst

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<sup>63</sup>Bousquet and Douglas mention no instances of animosity against Black A.T.S. or Women's Auxilliary Air Forc personnel. Norma Best, of British Honduras, and Lilian Bader, of Yorkshire, told the author that Black servicewomen were, in fact, quite popular.

<sup>64</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/55/14. Colonial Office to Caribbean Colonies, 7 November 1942, and Governor Sir A. Gimble to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17 November 1942.

White colonial personnel." They complained about the discriminatory treatment they received in "cinemas, restaurants, and other public places in towns in Egypt and other countries..." In response, the Air Ministry decided to withdraw Black R.A.F personnel to Britain, including V.A. Bunting, a fighter pilot.<sup>65</sup> Inexplicably, in early 1943, five West African airmen were posted to West Africa, which resulted in the "most unhappy results" regarding transportation and holding facilities. Subsequently, the Air Ministry withdrew them and undertook not to send any more Black personnel to West Africa.<sup>66</sup> For similar reasons, thirty four Black West Indian aircrew training in Canada had to be informed that they could not be sent to their squadrons in Southeast Asia because of color restrictions.<sup>67</sup> Curiously, Roland Alcindor, brother of Charles, an army officer, flew with the R.A.F. as a Warrant Officer in India.<sup>68</sup> Either Alcindor passed for White or he slipped

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<sup>65</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/8269. Air Ministry Minute, "Posting of Coloured Personnel," 1 September 1942.

<sup>66</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/8269. Resident Minister, West Africa, to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 March 1943 and reply, 12 March 1943.

<sup>67</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/8269. United Kingdom Air Liaison Mission, Ottawa, to Air Ministry, 9 June 1945.

<sup>68</sup>Green. A Warrant Officer was an intermediate rank between commissioned and non-commissioned officer and denoted a special qualification.

through the cracks in the racial barrier.

As was the case with the R.A.F., the army dealt with the overseas assignment of its Black personnel inconsistently. Early in the war, Alfie Lawes volunteered for service with a battalion of The Welch Regiment stationed in India but was rejected because of racial considerations. However, "race" did not prevent another Black Briton, Benjamin Macrae, from serving as a senior N.C.O. and platoon commander with the Royal Norfolk Regiment in Burma.<sup>69</sup> The example of Joe Moody's voyage to the Middle East illustrates the extent of racial hyper-sensitivity on the part of dominion and colonial Whites. In 1942, the army sent Moody to East Africa to train African troops in anti-aircraft tactics. En route, his ship stopped over in Capetown but the South African authorities forbade him to land. Moody's fellow passengers, mostly White British officers, "raised hell." The South Africans subsequently presented Moody with a certificate asking that full courtesy be extended to this British officer. Once ashore, Moody's circle of friends took the precaution of sending a White colleague ahead to restaurants and bars to gauge the likely reaction to a "coloured" officer. Consequently, Moody's stay, which

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<sup>69</sup>Lawes, Interview by author, May 1996; Macrae, Interview.



lasted several weeks, passed without serious incident.

In East Africa, local authorities proved to be even less receptive to Moody than those in South Africa. The White officers with whom Moody had arrived quickly received postings but Moody remained at a depot, presumably isolated as far as possible from Kenya's racially stratified society. Nothing publicly happened to Moody, but he found himself assigned to the French island of Madagascar. There, he got on well with the White British officers and African other ranks. The army then posted Moody to the Royal Artillery Depot in Cairo, Egypt. Before being assigned to a particular battery, his superior officers discussed who would take the Black officer. Once accepted, Moody experienced no outward signs of friction, but was told afterwards that there had been problems because the unit included a large proportion of bigoted Liverpudlians. In a demonstration of the "strange bedfellows" cliché, Moody befriended several South African officers in the Middle East, one of whom admitted that they could never be friends in South Africa. Incredibly, Moody accepted an invitation to the South African officers' mess in Cairo.<sup>70</sup>

After the United States entered the war, Britain and its service personnel became involved in the "domestic"

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<sup>70</sup>Moody.

racial conflicts of their American allies. During Operation Bolero, the American build up in Britain, violence frequently occurred between European- and African-American soldiers, especially in villages and towns where Black soldiers competed openly for friends, women, pubs and cinemas.<sup>71</sup>

In order to foster good relations with its American Allies as well as protect its own colonial service personnel from precisely those same Allies, the British government generally acquiesced to American segregation policies. In Britain, U.S. and British military officials often divided the recreational facilities in a given town between their respective personnel.<sup>72</sup> Also, certain postings became "off-limits" to Black British servicemen in deference to White American racism. Thus, Black R.A.F. personnel could serve in Bomber, Fighter and Coastal Commands based in Britain, but R.A.F. Transport Command requested that it not be assigned Black personnel because of its close contact with U.S. personnel.<sup>73</sup> American sensibilities similarly affected

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<sup>71</sup>See Graham A. Smith, When Jim Crow met John Bull: Black American Soldiers in World War II Britain (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 1987).

<sup>72</sup>Baron Baker's account, in Forty Winters On: Memories of Britain's Post-War Caribbean Immigrants (Lambeth: Lambeth Council, 1988), 17.

<sup>73</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/8269. Transport Command to Air Ministry, 18 December 1943.

British overseas assignments. For example, in July 1943, Flying Officer R.C.F. Foresythe, an R.A.F. code and cipher expert, was transferred from North Africa to Britain because of U.S. racial prejudice toward him.<sup>74</sup> The War Office similarly refused to allow Black West Indian A.T.S. to serve at its military mission in Washington, D.C.<sup>75</sup>

Black and White members of the "integrated" British forces often found themselves victims of American inter-racial conflict. At a "Jim Crow" indoctrination lecture for British military personnel, an American lecturer, according to a British observer, "made no bones about the fact that not to conform with the American view of race was to be the victim of actual physical violence."<sup>76</sup> In a typical occurrence White American soldiers threw "a coloured member of the R.A.F." out of a pub. On the following night, the victim returned there with White comrades and "beat up the Americans."<sup>77</sup> Cy Grant, later a performer on the British

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<sup>74</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/8269. Headquarters, Northwest African Air Forces to Air Ministry, 28 July 1943.

<sup>75</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/81/4. Stanley to Grigg, 15 April and War Office to Caribbean Commanders, 21 April and Grigg to Stanley, 19 May 1943.

<sup>76</sup>Roe Ottley, "Dixie Invades Britain," Negro Digest 3 (November 1944): 6.

<sup>77</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1223. Minute by Poynton, 17 March 1944.

stage and screen, arrived in Britain from British Guiana in 1941 and became a navigator in R.A.F.'s Bomber Command. In Britain, he experienced no racism but, when a prisoner of war in Germany, Britons and Nazis alike treated him with the respect appropriate to his rank. However, an American P.O.W. called him a "nigger." In Piccadilly Circus, an American serviceman confronted Flying Officer Johnny Smythe of Sierra Leone with the same racial slur as well as some physical jostling. The accosted R.A.F. officer, who had been speaking with a White female, laid the offender out cold. After a brief investigation, Smythe's commanding officer unofficially congratulated his six foot six-inch-tall subordinate.<sup>78</sup> In July 1944, an American court-martial tried and convicted an American soldier of striking yet another Black R.A.F. officer at a dance. The victim received an apology from a U.S. general while the offender was sentenced to two years of hard labor and a dishonorable discharge.<sup>79</sup> Beyond being onlookers or victims, Black R.A.F. personnel at times acted as protectors of African-American servicemen who sometimes felt reluctant to fight back against White American military police.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Cy Grant, Interview by author, 16 June 1995; Johnny Smythe, Interview by author, 4 June 1995.

<sup>79</sup>News-Letter 10, 60 (September 1944): 97.

<sup>80</sup>Allan C. Wilmot to author, 29 June 1995.

Echoes of America's segregation policies existed in the nominally desegregated British forces. In November 1942, in order to prevent Black colonial servicemen from being demobilized in the United Kingdom after the war, the War Cabinet had recommended that the forces concentrate these men "in separate units," restrict their service to theatres of war overseas, and repatriate them in complete units.<sup>81</sup> The tangible impact of this statement is difficult to measure but, at least, it indicates the general frame of mind of the British government.

In fact, informal types of segregation actually took place. Many of Britain's Black army and R.A.F. personnel served together in small groups of a few numbering from two or three to several dozens within predominately White support units where they endured the boredom and anxiousness of rear area routine. In units with significant numbers of colonial Blacks, Black and White members commonly separated themselves as much as possible. The tendency for individuals to cling together intensified as a result of low morale, itself caused by the boring routine of military life. For example, at an army base at Clitheroe, Lancashire, a number of West Indian soldiers complained

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<sup>81</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 20/9051. Extract from War Cabinet Paper W.P. (42)498, 16 November 1942.

about the slowness in assignment to army workshops, a lack of promotion, the cold weather, lower family allowances, the slowness of the mail, and, ironically, of being unwillingly inducted into the army.<sup>82</sup> Many expressed their resentment at the cold climate and military discipline by disobedience and assaults on N.C.O.s. According A.J. Lane, a White soldier, officers and N.C.O.s became reluctant "to have anything to do with the wild men of the West Indies..." Lane forestalled deadly violence by secretly destroying a cache of ammunition hidden by several disgruntled West Indians.<sup>83</sup>

In Egypt and Palestine, Black army personnel faced problems similar to those in Britain. In early 1944, a group of Jamaican soldiers at No. 2 Electrical Base Workshop in Egypt charged (a) that they were segregated from U.K. soldiers; (b) that the men received no opportunity to take trade tests which would earn them promotion and pay increases; (c) that their letters were tampered with by censors; and (d) that they had received no encouragement in sports or congratulations when a West Indian team had won a

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<sup>82</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/37/10. Harold Moody to Lord Moyne, 22 November 1941.

<sup>83</sup>A.J. Lane, "What more could a soldier ask of a war," TMs., n.d., Imperial War Museum, London.

cricket competition.<sup>84</sup> British commanders on the spot discounted (b) and (c) and discovered that the segregation of facilities had been introduced voluntarily when the West Indians first joined the unit in November 1942, but had since lapsed. The authorities regretted non-recognition of the cricket victory, but, overall, the investigators concluded that, "there are no reasonable grounds for any of the allegations of discrimination which have been made."<sup>85</sup>

The R.A.F., although only about one-third the strength of the army, included most of the services' total Black colonial personnel. Relatively good relations existed between West Indian and British ground crew during most of the war. However, by the last year, the racial situation within the R.A.F. worsened. Following VE-Day, violent clashes became frequent as all servicemen waited anxiously for demobilization.<sup>86</sup> The Air Ministry blamed the background of West Indians for these difficulties. It cited a correlation between poor upbringing, intelligence,

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<sup>84</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 820/58/9. Leonard Lyle, M.P., to Oliver Stanley, 12 January 1944.

<sup>85</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 830/58/9. Memorandum, "Treatment of West Indians," by Lt.-Col. Whitbread, for Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Forces, enclosed in War Office to Thornley, 5 May 1944.

<sup>86</sup>The correspondence in P.R.O. AIR. 20/9051 details the breakdown in West Indian moral and discipline after the end of the war.

education and adaptability on the one hand with racial friction on the other.<sup>87</sup> R.A.F. authorities reported that a significant proportion of the later drafts of West Indians, were not amenable to discipline and were inclined to take the law into their own hands. The mentality of some of these was so low, their unreliability so pronounced that they could only be used for menial tasks and the effort of administering them was not repaid by the output of work. They resented being given orders by N.C.O.s and spoiled the reputation of the West Indian Contingent as a whole by their outbreaks of violence...<sup>88</sup>

Also, West Indian R.A.F. men complained directly to the British government about racial discrimination instead of seeking out their officers.<sup>89</sup> This would suggest that the airmen did not feel confident of their officers' concern, a most dangerous situation in and of itself.

It should be noted that the experiences of groups of Black servicemen contrasted sharply with those of Black individuals, whether officers or other ranks. Once White and Black personnel within a given rear area unit became separated as visibly and culturally different groups, friction and segregation in some form commonly developed.

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<sup>87</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/13437. "Recruitment of Personnel from Colonies into post-war Air Force," 21 May 1945.

<sup>88</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 20/1022. "Manpower Contribution of the Colonies to the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945."

<sup>89</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 537/1223. "Welfare of H.M. Colonial Forces in U.K.: Appointment of Liaison Officer, R.A.F."



Thus, with the exception of individual Black personnel, a situation emerged that resembled that of the U.S. military.

Despite its traditional racial anxiety over Black servicemen's contact with White settings, it does not seem that the British government ever prohibited socializing between its Black personnel and civilians. Throughout the war, the British people welcomed colonial personnel into their villages and homes. The behavior of a group of West Indian R.A.F. ground crew training at a nearby base so impressed the Yorkshire village of Hunmanby Moor that its inhabitants signed a petition praising the behavior of Black West Indian airmen.<sup>90</sup> E.M. Noble's description of an English village he encountered as a member of the R.A.F. reveals the ignorance of many British people:

On my walk almost everyone gave me a greeting, and some, more bold than others, even stopped for a chat. They wanted to know what part of the world I was from, and marveled at the fact that I spoke English perfectly, and without any trace of a foreign accent. The high spot of my afternoon's walk for me was a darling old couple, who humbly begged to be allowed to shake my hand for luck. Until then I thought that sort of superstition was confined to uneducated colonials.<sup>91</sup>

When it came to wartime inter-racial romance, families expressed surprise and White British personnel, occasional

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<sup>90</sup>Noble, 42.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 41.

jealousy, but, in general, Black servicemen associated freely with, and, not infrequently, married, White British women.<sup>92</sup> In a rare exception, British authorities apparently attempted to assuage American sensibilities by discouraging, though not prohibiting, White service women from associating with African-American personnel.<sup>93</sup> This attitude may have influenced race relations within the British forces. Baron Baker, a Jamaican R.A.F. policeman, remembered an aloofness on the part of W.A.A.F. personnel at service dances: "When we tried to get dances all the W.A.A.F.s would want to rest. But when an English airman approached, they would take the floor with them[sic]." Baker's commanding officer then instructed that W.A.A.F.s not wishing to dance should avoid attending dances.<sup>94</sup> It might have been that these particular W.A.A.F.s simply did not wish to dance with Black servicemen. In any case, formal restrictions on inter-racial contact would have been inoperable. With regard to Black personnel, War Office bureaucrats and generals had more pressing concerns than enforcing sexual color bars.

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<sup>92</sup>Grant, Interview; Noble, 46-9; and Wilmot.

<sup>93</sup>Smith, 64-80.

<sup>94</sup>Forty Winters On, 17.

The decolonization of Britain's Black empire had begun in the inter-war period with constitutional concessions to India, but the Second World War hastened the transition in colonial relations. In the process of transferring political power, the British government hoped to maintain close relations with current and former subjects. One of the consequences of this priority was the suspension of the color bar in the British military. The temporary end of the color bar testified to Britain's anxiety to distance itself from its no longer fashionable or tenable racial policies. The ten thousand Black servicemen and -women made a significant contribution to the British military effort although many endured an unhappy existence within the forces.

## CHAPTER VIII

### OLD PATTERNS AND NEW REALITIES IN THE BRITISH FORCES

For most of the Second World War, the leadership of all three branches of H.M. forces assumed or hoped that they would be allowed to re-impose the color bar once the war ended. In 1947, the British government decided that a formally restored color bar would weaken Britain's relationship with Black peoples of the empire and Commonwealth. Over the following five decades, the forces as well as Black British subjects struggled with the consequences of what would prove to be the government's rather indifferent policy.

#### I. The Future of the Color Bar

In April 1941, the League of Coloured Peoples informed the Colonial Secretary, Lord Moyne, that one of their members who was serving in the forces received a printed notice regarding re-enlistment for regular service after the end of hostilities. It stipulated that applicants had to be "of pure European parentage."<sup>1</sup> The War Office explained that, "these instructions embodied a pre-war practice which

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<sup>1</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/10. Extract from Letter, League of Coloured Peoples to Lord Moyne, 24 April 1941.

was due to the fact that a large part of the army served abroad, and that it was undesirable to have coloured men in the ranks of British units in Indian, Egypt, Singapore, and so on."<sup>2</sup> The War Office acceded to a Colonial Office request to revoke the restriction and adopt a non-committal stance with regard to post-war enlistment and commissions.<sup>3</sup> However, in August 1943, when planning for the post-war army, the War Office summarily decided to re-impose the color bar to candidates for regular commissions. Oliver Stanley, the latest Colonial Secretary, asked that the War Office remove this stipulation because it flatly contradicted colonial policy and that Black officers had proven themselves worthy. Stanley wanted to have the question of the color bar re-examined, something with which the War Office concurred, but with far different intentions.<sup>4</sup>

In December, the War Office informed the Colonial Office that the good of the army required a color bar because of the prejudices on the part of White soldiers and

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<sup>2</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/10. Speed, War Office, to Eastwood, Colonial Office, 12 July 1941.

<sup>3</sup>P.R.O. C.O. 968/38/10. Speed, War Office, to Thornley, Colonial Office, 15 January 1942.

<sup>4</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/14692. Memorandum, "Nationality and Descent of Candidates for Permanent Commissions in H.M. Forces," 28 November 1944.

officers alike. At the same time, the War Office established a committee to study the issue in case it became a matter of general government policy.<sup>5</sup> One of the factors on which the War Office hoped to base its opposition was physiology. However, a scientific report prepared by an army biologist for the War Office's "Nationality and Descent Committee" repudiated any idea that physical limitations impeded the efficiency of Black officers. The report stated that, "experience during the war has shown that every ethnic group can provide successful candidates for commissions..." Apparently, the author of the report went beyond his original brief by analyzing the origin of British racial prejudice:

The color bar which looms so large in certain human societies is mainly rooted in social and economic considerations... It would seem that males of our own group dislike the thought of males displaying a constellation of characteristics markedly different from our own, mating with females of our own kind.... The attitude of our own people toward individuals of other ethnic groups and cultures is almost entirely if not completely an acquisition from their education.<sup>6</sup>

The committee's chairman, Major General J.F. Hare, decided

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<sup>5</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/14692. Extract from the Minutes of the 190th Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Army Council held on 1 December 1944; and Draft Letter from War Secretary to Colonial Secretary (marked 56A), n.d.

<sup>6</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/14692. D.B.R. to Director of Organization, 7 February 1945.

that these sentiments would not be circulated.<sup>7</sup>

In its report, issued on 22 March 1945, the committee formally objected to the inclusion of Blacks on several grounds:

(a) [The Committee] consider that although non-Europeans may possess many of the necessary officer qualities, the crux of the matter is the question of racial and traditional background. It cannot be expected that such officers will be able to establish the relations with their men which are essential if leadership is to be fully exercised. They feel that man-management would never be satisfactory and in particular that the officer could never be capable of dealing with the family and domestic problems of his men. They are, therefore, unanimously opposed to the commissioning of men of non-European descent in U.K. forces.

(b) The Committee also feel that the enlistment of non-Europeans in U.K. regiments and corps of the Regular Army is undesirable. The case is perhaps not quite so strong as it is against commissioning, but there are two good reasons. Firstly, there is evidence that in general the non-European is not acceptable as a companion and brother-in-arms to the British soldier. Secondly, it is considered that in the post-war Army it will be essential that no man entering the ranks should be regarded as ineligible for a commission as would be the case if our views at (a) are accepted.

The committee's most startling conclusion was that, "to get the best results units must as far as possible be homogeneous... it must surely be undesirable for British

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<sup>7</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/14692. Minutes of the Third Meeting of the Committee on the Post-War Regulations Respecting the Nationality and Descent of Candidates for Entry to the Army held 12 February 1945.

soldiers to be commanded by men of another race."<sup>8</sup> At that moment, thousands of British army officers served in the various colonial forces throughout the empire.

In May 1945, the Air Ministry considered the "external" difficulties involved in accepting Blacks for regular enlistment. First, Black R.A.F. personnel could not be posted where they would encounter the color bars of the United States, Rhodesia, and South Africa. Secondly, difficulties would be created by Black R.A.F. personnel serving alongside Black colonial troops who were paid considerably less than British servicemen.<sup>9</sup> In September 1945, George H. Hall, the new Labour government's Colonial Secretary, adhered to his Conservative predecessor's policy of ending the color bar and pressed the armed forces on the issue. In view of the successful service of Black aircrew during the war, the Air Ministry over-rode its own racial anxieties and broke with the other services, deciding that the color bar should not be re-imposed for regular commissions and enlistment.<sup>10</sup> In order to avoid

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<sup>8</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10592. "Report of the Committee on the Post-War Regulations Respecting the Nationality and Descent of Candidates for Entry to the Army," 16 March 1945.

<sup>9</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/13437. "Recruitment of Personnel from Colonies into post-war Air Force," 21 May 1945.

<sup>10</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10592. Air Ministry to War Office, 3 October 1945.



embarrassing the other ministers, the Secretary of State for Air, Lord Stansgate, undertook to enact the R.A.F.'s open policy "as unobtrusively as possible."<sup>11</sup> Unilaterally, the R.A.F. had decided to accept Blacks for regular enlistment and commissioning provided that they met the standards of Whites; that "they satisfy the Selection Board or recruiting officers that they are likely to mix with other entrants and hold their own in the corporate life of the Service;" and that they travel to Britain at their own expense to attempt their enlistment, in which success was not guaranteed.<sup>12</sup>

Hoping to effect similar changes in policy elsewhere, the Colonial Secretary circulated the R.A.F.'s new policy of inclusion around to the other ministries. The First Lord of the Admiralty, A.V. Alexander, recognized that there were "political and moral objections to the colour bar pure and simple," but he still wished to maintain it. Because of the probable shrinkage of the service, Alexander argued that, it was "essential that every man recruited to the Royal Navy is of the highest possible calibre, capable of being used in any ship or establishment... in any part of the world,

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<sup>11</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10592. Secretary of State for Air to First Lord of the Admiralty, 19 November 1945.

<sup>12</sup>P.R.O. AIR. 2/13437. Air Ministry to Inspector of Recruiting, 21 February 1946.

whatever the climate and local racial prejudices may be."<sup>13</sup>

In the spring of 1946, J.J. Lawson, the War Secretary faced considerable pressure in Parliament regarding the color bar. Because the Colonial Secretary was determined to raise the matter in Cabinet, Lawson proposed to his formal body of advisors, the Army Council, that the color bar be terminated in principle and allow practical difficulties to impede Blacks from becoming officers. The Army Council unanimously balked at this compromise.<sup>14</sup> Lawson disagreed with the professional officers but, nevertheless, presented their views to the Cabinet as follows:

To describe the exclusion of coloured persons from the British Army as an example of the colour bar is an undue simplification of the problem. Service in the British Army is not one of the rights of man, nor indeed of British subjects.... Moreover, it is the accepted policy of the Army Council that men should be commanded by officers having the same territorial connections as themselves with some part of the British Isles, e.g. that Scottish troops should be commanded by Scottish officers... Distrust of coloured men as commanders may be a prejudice; but this prejudice is nonetheless a fact which cannot be ignored in assessing the fitness of the Army for its primary duty, which is waging war.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10592. Alexander to Hall, 18 December 1945.

<sup>14</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/10592. Extract from the Minutes of the Sixty-Fourth Meeting of the Army Council held on 12 April 1946.

<sup>15</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/14692. Draft Cabinet Paper, "Admission of Coloured Persons into the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom," n.d.

Yet again, the army refused to recognize and exercise its control over the minds and bodies of its soldiers.

In June 1947, over War Office and Admiralty objections, the Cabinet finally decided that,

British subjects and British protected persons of non-European race should be admitted to the Royal Navy and the British Army, provided that they attained the requisite standards, were resident in this country, and could satisfy the selection authorities that they were likely mix with other entrants and hold their own in the corporate life of the services.<sup>16</sup>

The Cabinet's decision followed the Air Ministry's restrictive formula and embodied a minimum requirement to formally end the color bars of the reluctant forces.

Shortly before the Cabinet's decision to end the color bar to regular enlistment, Lord Montgomery of Alamein, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (the professional head of the army), informed his staff that the regular army was threatened by a dangerous lack of recruits.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, but perhaps predictably, the army followed as restrictive a recruiting policy as possible in order to perpetuate what it considered to be necessary, if informal, racial

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<sup>16</sup>Quoted in Killingray, "Race and Rank," 282.

<sup>17</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 163/282. "The Final Post-War Army: Outline Statement of the Dangerous Situation that is likely to develop unless we get more regular recruits," by Lord Montgomery of Alamein, 30 May 1947.

discrimination. Adhering to the minimum requirements of the Cabinet's decision, the War Office required that a Black volunteer for the army must be a British subject or British protected person and be resident in the United Kingdom. Moreover, a Black applicant had to "satisfy the selection authorities that he is likely to mix with other entrants and hold his own in the corporate life of the army."<sup>18</sup> In contrast, British subjects "of pure European descent" could enlist at any British military base in the world.<sup>19</sup>

The War Office's determination to retain an informal color bar thwarted Black individuals throughout the empire and commonwealth who wished for a career with the British army as a method of escape from the lands of their birth. For example, Anglo-Egyptian and Anglo-Indian (formerly "Eurasian") children of British fathers and local mothers looked to an uncertain future and they desired employment and a secure life in Britain. Similarly, many West Indians hoped to be allowed to enlist as an escape from chronic unemployment at home. Generally, neither of these groups could afford the luxury of a passage to Britain for a chance to gain admission, but the War Office repeatedly rejected

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<sup>18</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/12913. Memorandum for All Home Commands, 13 October 1947.

<sup>19</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/12913. War Office Minute, 25 November 1952.

appeals for a change in policy.<sup>20</sup>

A 1953 episode illustrates the army's determination to remain as White as possible. For administrative simplicity, responsibility for army recruiting of White subjects in Ceylon fell on the R.A.F. Several Anglo-Indians successfully enlisted in the army via the R.A.F. in Ceylon by claiming European ancestry. They were then sent on to army authorities in Singapore, who subsequently discharged them because "their retention in the army would establish a dangerous precedent."<sup>21</sup> Obviously, these actions caused hardship for the individuals involved and created potential embarrassment for Britain. The War Office resolved the difficulty by transferring authority for army recruiting from the R.A.F. in Ceylon to the army headquarters in Singapore. The British government continued to receive large numbers of applications by Anglo-Indians for enlistment, but the War Office steadfastly reaffirmed its policy and told officials in India, Pakistan, and Ceylon to tell prospective Black recruits to travel on their own to Britain.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>See the correspondence dated from 1948 through the mid-1950s in P.R.O. W.O. 32/12913.

<sup>21</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/12913. Minute of the Director of Manpower Planning, 16 July 1953.

<sup>22</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/12913. Director of Manpower Planning to Commander-in-Chief, Far East Land Forces, 17

## II. Gurkhas: Britain's Beloved Black Soldiers

In contrast to its reluctance to accept individual Blacks, the army enthusiastically employed Gurkha mercenaries. After India and Pakistan achieved independence in 1947, both Britain and the new government of India retained the services of several Gurkha regiments.

Britain's Brigade of Gurkhas served within the British army as an administratively segregated element and the Gurkhas' treatment has differed significantly from the rest of the army. While Gurkhas have been eligible for Queen's commissions since 1947, the army did not appoint a Gurkha as battalion commander until 1995. Until February 1997, they received less pay than other British soldiers and, under the treaty governing Britain's employment of Gurkhas, they received their army discharges and pensions in their homeland. Consequently, officers and N.C.O.s commonly discouraged soldiers from marrying British or Chinese women.

Until 1997, the Gurkhas' primary mission had been to patrol Hong Kong's borders against illegal immigrants from mainland China, but the British army has used them in various roles around the world. For example, Britain employed Gurkhas extensively to kill communist guerrillas in Malaysia during the 1950s. A battalion has occasionally

served in Belize to protect that country against Guatemalan imperialism and, for several decades, Britain has regularly leased one battalion to the Sultan of Brunei. Also, there has usually been at least one battalion stationed in Britain, where its members frequently perform ceremonial duties. A battalion recently served in Bosnia as part of the British peacekeeping force, but Gurkhas have never been deployed to Northern Ireland. In 1989, George Younger, Minister of Defence, reported to the Parliamentary Defence Committee that, "We do not exactly bar it, but we think they would not on the face of things be very suitable for [Northern Ireland] duty, particularly owing to the language difficulties."<sup>23</sup> In all likelihood, concerns about racial antagonism have figured into this policy, beyond the problem of language. In the past, individual Black soldiers in predominately White units have been "targets for special abuse" by Irish mobs.<sup>24</sup> Propagandists on both sides of the issue would probably protest the insertion of Gurkhas into their own tribal conflict.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>House of Commons, The Government's Announcement on the Future of the Brigade of Gurkhas; Minutes of Evidence (London: H.M.S.O., 1989), 10.

<sup>24</sup>Angus MacPherson, "The colour clash that shook the Army," Daily Mail, 21 November 1972.

<sup>25</sup>It was Gurkha soldiers who fired on the unarmed civilians in the Amritsar Massacre of 1919, an event still officially mourned in India. Ironically, the Republic of

In successive budget reductions since 1947, the number of Gurkha soldiers in British service has dwindled from fourteen to three thousand, but a considerable lobby within the government and army allowed them to continue, although on a modest scale, in British service. Historically, of all the "martial races" which had comprised the Indian army in the colonial period, the British military establishment and public generally felt the greatest warmth and literary interest for the Gurkhas recruited from Nepal.<sup>26</sup> In 1989, however, parliamentary supporters of the Gurkhas disclaimed sentimentality as their reason for maintaining the Brigade of Gurkhas. Instead, they cited a "dispassionate analysis of the future role of the British army."<sup>27</sup> Although practical arguments for maintaining the Brigade of Gurkhas possess some merit, had the British not historically romanticized the fighting abilities of the Gurkhas, they

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India currently employs at least fifty thousand Gurkha mercenaries, presumably because they are neutral and effective instruments.

<sup>26</sup>See, N.S. Lawrence, "The Gurkha as I know him," Chambers's Journal 104 (Aug. 6, 1927): 574. For a typical "scholarly" tribute, see Farwell, The Gurkhas (New York: Norton, 1984). For an analysis of how British military historians treat the subject, see Lionel Caplan, "'Bravest of the Brave': Representations of 'The Gurkha' in British Military Writings," Modern Asian Studies 25, 3 (1991): 571-597.

<sup>27</sup>David Hencke, "Keep Gurkhas, say M.P.s," The Guardian, 3 March 1989, p. 2.



would have been disbanded decades ago.

The Gurkhas' reputation as loyal and enthusiastic soldiers among Britons has been rivaled by accusations by critics that Gurkhas were "savages" and tools of a tyrannical New World Order. Rumors of cannibalism preceded a battalion that served in the 1982 Falklands-Malvinas war between Britain and Argentina. Argentines spread many blood-curdling stories about the Nepalese "savages," accusations the British did little to dispel. In New York City, Argentine sympathizers protested the deployment of Gurkha soldiers to the South Atlantic by greeting the wartime troopship Queen Elizabeth II with a sign stating the following: "Beware! In this ship are hiding 500 young Argentinian head[sic] decapitated by its fomers[sic] passengers, the Gurkhas[sic] mercenaries."<sup>28</sup> More incredibly, Gurkhas have been implicated in a supposed plot to form a world dictatorship. A number of American conspiracy enthusiasts believe that a Windsor family-controlled United Nations is conquering the United States by means of Gurkha troops in Black helicopters.<sup>29</sup> Such fears

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<sup>28</sup>Farwell, The Gurkhas, photo and caption on page 172.

<sup>29</sup>Ambrose Evans-Pritchard, "The British are coming, says the apple pie home guard," Electronic Telegraph, 1 May 1995.

have probably been fueled by mainstream suggestions that Gurkhas be employed as professional peacekeepers in United Nations operations.<sup>30</sup>

### III A Final End to the Color Bar?

Gurkhas aside, by the end of the 1950's, the army experienced acute difficulties in maintaining the regular voluntary core of its mostly conscript army. The War Office's aversion to Black soldiers declined in proportion to the rise in manpower requirements. In 1947, the Cabinet had compelled the army and navy to accept a few Black applicants able to meet basic requirements, but nothing was intended by the decision to prevent the forces from adopting more open recruiting regulations in the future. In 1957 and 1958, it considered the possibility of tapping Black manpower from the colonies and newly independent Commonwealth countries. By the early 1960s, in a complete reversal of policy, the army had begun actively recruiting overseas in the West Indies, Seychelles and Fiji.<sup>31</sup> In 1968, 2,087 Blacks, excluding officers, were serving in the army. About 40 percent held non-commissioned rank, although

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<sup>30</sup>See, for example, Jennifer Griffin, "Homecoming Blues: Famed warriors lead difficult lives in Nepal after being discharged," Far Eastern Economic Review 157 (7 July 1994): 48-50.

<sup>31</sup>P.R.O. W.O. 32/194521. War Office Paper, "Recruitment of West Indians, 11 August 1961."

largely at the lower end of the rank scale, i.e., corporals and lance-corporals.<sup>32</sup> For the next twenty years, the forces maintained no official published statistics concerning Black service personnel. However, in 1967, the Times revealed that the army operated a 4 percent cap on Black soldiers in most of its units and a complete ban in "sensitive" assignments such as signals, intelligence and advanced weapons.<sup>33</sup>

Concerns about overseas posting continued into the era of decolonization. Throughout the 1950s, the army, "in order to protect the dignity and status of coloured personnel," prohibited Black soldiers from accompanying their units to Kenya. The army claimed that it did not wish to send them "where they might suffer possible discourtesy or embarrassment."<sup>34</sup> The Admiralty came under public criticism in 1961 because it withdrew seven Black sailors from the aircraft carrier H.M.S. Victorious prior to an official visit to South Africa. Exceptions had been made for Black sailors with family in that country because they

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<sup>32</sup>E.J.B. Rose, Colour and Citizenship: A report on British Race Relations (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 306.

<sup>33</sup>"Army Quota," Times (London) 8 May 1967, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup>P.R.O. DEFE. 7/1040. P.D. Martyn to Montgomery, 17 May 1960.

already understood the racial climate.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, the R.A.F avoided posting its Black personnel overseas, including South Africa, Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Kenya, Norway, and "certain areas of the United States where colour difficulties might be experienced." The R.A.F. did not officially compile statistics on race but, in order to enforce its posting policy, maintained an informal list of known (or, the author supposes, "suspected") Black servicemen.<sup>36</sup> In September 1967, Britain's Middle East Command banned Black airmen from the Persian Gulf, and, in March 1967, from Aden for two reasons. First, difficulties developed with the local populations. Secondly, and more galling for the Black R.A.F. men, White R.A.F. police often stopped and searched them as possible Arab terrorists. In contrast, both the R.A.F. and the army posted Black personnel to Malaya served with no reported difficulty.<sup>37</sup>

The Black experience in the scaled down regular forces of the post-war era varied considerably, but generally seems

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<sup>35</sup>P.R.O. DEFE. 7/1040. Lord Carrington, First Lord of the Admiralty, to Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, 5 June 1961.

<sup>36</sup>P.R.O. DEFE 7/1040. "Policy for Posting Coloured Personnel to Overseas Stations," by A.W.B. McDonald, Air Member for Personnel, 7 June 1960.

<sup>37</sup>"Coloured R.A.F. men 'humiliated,'" and Minister explains Aden ban," Times (London), 8 May 1967, p. 4.

to have worsened over the decades. Black servicemen suffered from racism in the form of outright verbal or physical violence, stereotyping, or in being made a "pet." Barbadian John Ashton Brathwaite was an outstanding example of a man thoroughly embittered by his army career in the early 1960s. He witnessed many cases of racism, especially vicious name calling and intimidation. At considerable financial loss, he obtained an early discharge, citing the fact that he gained no benefit from the army, could not integrate socially, and "most important," he perceived the British army to be "a brutal and racist organisation" in which, he, "being a Black person, was wasting precious time."<sup>38</sup> In addition to outright hostility, Black personnel faced stereotyping by Whites. For example, Allan C. Wilmot's colleagues asked him whether he lived in a tree or never needed a wash, or where he learned to speak English.<sup>39</sup> A former, and perhaps, typical, White officer informed the author that "From my own experiences of [West Indian soldiers] when we served in West Germany 1959-63 they complained of the cold and when we were posted to Libya in 1963-66 all they wanted to do was lie in the shade of a palm

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<sup>38</sup>J. Ashton Brathwaite, Black British Soldier (New York: Kibo Books, 1986), 64.

<sup>39</sup>Wilmot.

tree."<sup>40</sup> More positively, but still patronizingly, many individual Black servicemen became popular,<sup>41</sup> often being remembered for their athletic abilities.<sup>42</sup>

Black individuals have achieved high rank within the forces. In 1996, The King's Regiment had a Sikh captain who had risen through the ranks<sup>43</sup> while the Royal Regiment of Wales had a captain of Arab descent who had also been a private soldier.<sup>44</sup> Trinidadian Larry Osborne joined the R.A.F. in 1943 and remained with the service after the war, served in a number of capacities and rose to the rank of Group Captain before retiring in 1977.<sup>45</sup> Also, Jamaican Vidal Dezonie enlisted in the R.A.F in 1944 and remained until 1982, retiring at the rank of Flight Lieutenant. Throughout his long service, he found the R.A.F. free of

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<sup>40</sup>N.D. McIntosh to author, 27 November 1995.

<sup>41</sup>R.A. Bonner wrote of two St. Lucians in the Manchester Regiment: "They were very popular young men, although rather fond of the German girls." Bonner (Manchester Museum Committee of the King's Regiment) to author, 24 January 1996.

<sup>42</sup>J.S. Cowley (Light Infantry Office) to author, 28 November 1995; J.M. Grundy (Regimental Museum of the Royal Regiment of Wales) to author, 6 December 1995.

<sup>43</sup>Bonner.

<sup>44</sup>Bryn Owen (Curator, The Welch Regiment Museum), to author, 27 November 1995.

<sup>45</sup>Obituary, Sunday Guardian (Port of Spain), 14 April 1996, p. 14.

racism.<sup>46</sup> In 1987, the highest ranking Black army officer was a major general in the signals branch.<sup>47</sup> Although Blacks can attain high rank, the author has not discovered any Black officers in command of infantry or mounted units, with the exception of a Gurkha battalion.

#### IV. The Return of the Color Bar?

It appears that the 1970s witnessed the largest presence of Blacks, proportionately as well as numerically, in Her Majesty's forces, especially the army. It has been estimated that, during the 1970s, Blacks made up 10 percent of the army's Royal Green Jackets, an elite regiment,<sup>48</sup> and about one hundred members of the Royal Anglian Regiment.<sup>49</sup> In 1987, however, only 1.6 percent of applications to the forces came from minorities, although they comprised 5.7 percent of Britain's fifteen to twenty four year-old age bracket. The fear of racial abuse was believed to be a factor for the low figures.<sup>50</sup> By 1990, the only infantry regiments with a "noticeable number" of Blacks included the

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<sup>46</sup>Vidal Dezonie, in Forty Winters On, 11.

<sup>47</sup>Killingray, "Race and Rank," 284.

<sup>48</sup>Antony Beevor, Inside the British Army (London: Chatto and Windus, 1990), 26.

<sup>49</sup>Quoted in St. Jorre (de), 199.

<sup>50</sup>"Forces Aim to breach colour barrier," Times (London), 19 February 1988, p. A8.

Green Jackets, the Parachute Regiment, and southeast English regiments. According to a recent account on the British army, Scottish regiments have a well-known reputation for loathing Blacks, "yet they have a great affinity for the Gurkhas, presumably because they are fellow highlanders and play bagpipes."<sup>51</sup>

From the mid-1980s, the forces have experienced numerous publicized instances of racism. Perhaps the most embarrassing situation involved the Queen's personal bodyguards, the Foot Guards and Household Cavalry regiments of the Household Division. These exclusive regiments, whose ceremonial duties draw hundreds of thousands of tourists to London annually, have stubbornly and notoriously resisted accepting Black volunteers. One of the tactics used by the Guards to prevent Blacks from joining them had been to allow applicants to go through the recruiting process, including tests, medical exams, and interviews. Black applicants would then be told that, for undisclosed reasons, they failed the physical or that no vacancies currently existed, and that other regiments should be considered.<sup>52</sup> In 1986, Prince Charles, in opposition to his father, the Duke of Edinburgh, publicly criticized the Guards' color bar. In

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<sup>51</sup>Beevor, 26.

<sup>52</sup>Quoted in St. Jorre (de), 198.



response, the Grenadier Guards admitted Richard Stokes who, on 16 May 1988, became the first Black member of the Household Division to stand guard at Buckingham Palace. However, he left the regiment in 1990, ostensibly because of racist threats and bullying.<sup>53</sup> In June 1995, the Commission for Racial Equality charged that the elite Household Cavalry regiments systematically excluded Blacks from enlisting or transferring in from other units. Soon after, the Royal Life Guards accepted Mark Campbell.<sup>54</sup>

Public pressures forced the Ministry of Defence to encourage minority enlistment by adopting equal opportunities directives and monitoring the number of Blacks in the forces. In 1988, the forces recorded the entrance of 28,652 Whites (35 percent of 81,098 applicants), 195 Blacks (24 percent of 825 applicants), seventy three Asians (18 percent of 398 applicants), thirty four Other Ethnic Groups (35 percent of ninety six applicants), 459 not specified (39 percent of 1,174 applicants).<sup>55</sup> The Ministry of Defence rejected an all-party committee's demand that it monitor the

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<sup>53</sup>"Black Guard at Palace," Photo., Times (London), 16 May 1988, p. 3.

<sup>54</sup>"Army racism under fire," Sunday Times (London), 18 June 1995, sec. 1, p. 5; "First Black Life Guard asks to leave the Army," Times (London), 9 December 1995, p. 9.

<sup>55</sup>Ministry of Defence, U.K. Defence Statistics (London: H.M.S.O., 1994), 34.

number of Blacks enlisted into each particular regiment of the army.<sup>56</sup> The refusal allowed individual regiments to continue barring Blacks.

Discriminatory recruiting policies coincided with accusations of rampant racial abuse within the forces, especially the army, to discourage prospective minority applicants. In the late 1980s and 1990s, a number of Black servicemen and ex-servicemen filed suit against the Ministry of Defence. In early 1987, Stephen Anderson left the army because, while a private in the Devon and Dorset Regiment, he allegedly suffered verbal and physical abuse at the hands of White soldiers.<sup>57</sup> In 1991, the Ministry of Defence awarded him five hundred pounds.<sup>58</sup> In 1988, the army discharged Winston Lindsay, the second Black Grenadier Guard, for going absent without leave, just nine months after enlistment. Two years later, he sought damages from the Ministry of Defence for racial harassment and discrimination.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Geoffrey McKay, formerly of

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<sup>56</sup>"Race check rejected," Times (London), 19 July 1988, p. 2.

<sup>57</sup>"Forces aim to breach colour barrier," Times (London), 19 February 1988, A8.

<sup>58</sup>"Compensation," Times (London), 16 October 1991, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup>"Big guns fail to quell army racism claims, Times (London), 28 January 1990, p. c10.

the Queen's Own Royal Irish Hussars, received eight thousand pounds in 1992; and Anthony Evans of the Royal Regiment of Wales, eighty-five hundred pounds in 1993.<sup>60</sup> Evans testified that a kangaroo court of his colleagues had charged him with "being Black."<sup>61</sup>

The decisions in favor of the soldiers directly challenged the services' long-held assumption that soldiers' behaviors and attitudes could or should not be controlled by higher authorities. The army confirmed the change in attitude in early 1996, when it issued all soldiers with a code forbidding racist jokes, graffiti, nicknames, terms, and the "exclusion of individuals from social occasions."<sup>62</sup> Also, the commanding officer of the Household Cavalry, a regiment which had been singled out by the Commission for Racial Equality for "institutional discrimination," ordered every member of the regiment to attend race relations classes as part of his training.<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, in July

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<sup>60</sup>"Army racism under fire," Times (London), 18 June 1995, sec. 1, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup>Hugh Muir, "Officers mostly to blame," Electronic Telegraph, 5 March 1996.

<sup>62</sup>Philip Johnston, "Army aims to curb racism in its ranks," Electronic Telegraph, 28 March 1996.

<sup>63</sup>"Household Cavalry to be taught a lesson on racial discrimination," Times (London), 29 March 1996, p. 1.

1997, the Ministry of Defence created a confidential telephone help-line for Black service personnel "who feel they are being bullied and do not know what to do about it or how to make an official complaint."<sup>64</sup> Thus, Black service personnel received permission to circumvent the chain of command to seek relief.

Despite the current trend of downsizing, the army has been unable to recruit enough men to meet its shrinking requirements, in part because of low minority enlistment. Minority recruitment in 1993-4 stood at 1.8 percent in the navy, 1 percent in the army, and .5 percent in the R.A.F.<sup>65</sup> To deflect criticism, the Ministry of Defence produced a number of recruiting brochures in the 1990s specifically targeted for racial minorities. Often presented in several languages, they invariably contained personal testimony by serving Black service personnel disclaiming any experience of discrimination.<sup>66</sup> Unfortunately for service recruiters and public relations officers, in April 1996, the minority presence in the forces stood at 1.4 percent with only 1.1 of

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<sup>64</sup>Joy Copley and Hugh Muir, "MOD acts to stamp out racism in the ranks," Electronic Telegraph, 28 July 1997.

<sup>65</sup>"Advisors to combat racism in Army," Times (London), 28 March 1996, p. 6.

<sup>66</sup>The Ministry of Defense provided the author with recruiting literature developed with racial minorities in mind. In a navy brochure, an officer of Sikh descent is featured in a naval version of the turban.

all officers being Black.<sup>67</sup>

In 1996, the Office of Public Management (O.P.M.) reviewed the ethnic recruiting initiatives and racial atmosphere of the three branches. The navy, according to the O.P.M.'s report, was "not justified in describing itself as an equal opportunities employer."<sup>68</sup> Meanwhile, the O.P.M. criticized the army because "racially offensive language, behavior, and attitudes remain a significant feature of life in the Army."<sup>69</sup> The O.P.M. urged the services to reform themselves in order to better reflect the diversity of the British population and tap an under-represented source of manpower.<sup>70</sup>

As part of the military's new policy of racial inclusion, an updated version of the famous First World War "Your Country Needs You" poster has been adopted by the Ministry of Defence's public relations firm. In it, the face of a Black Royal Artillery officer replaced that of Lord Kitchener, one of the most successful and influential imperial generals of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>Office for Public Management, Review of Ethnic Minority Initiatives: Final Report (London: 1996), 14.

<sup>68</sup>O.P.M. Review: Royal Navy/Royal Marines, 4.

<sup>69</sup>O.P.M. Review: Army, 6.

<sup>70</sup>O.P.M. Review: Final Report, 11-2.

<sup>71</sup>Andrew Gilligan, "'We got it wrong on Blacks,'

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Army chief admits," Electronic Telegraph 12 October 1997.  
Dr. Jo Hays pointed the new recruiting strategy out to the  
author.

## CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to trace how the racial attitudes of the British military establishment affected imperial defense policy from the Glorious Revolution through the present, with an emphasis on the period from 1900 to 1950. Historically, Black colonial troops formed a crucial part of the imperial order of battle, but British racial views limited the extent of colonial military participation. By adhering to the "martial races" theory, British authorities relied upon a relatively small proportion of their subjects for military service. Also, the degree of White racial anxiety was expressed through policies regarding locally raised militia and volunteer corps. Further, the fear for White prestige, which would be supposedly weakened by inter-racial sex and violence, made the British reluctant to bring Black troops into contact with Europeans outside of structured colonial settings.

Other, seemingly "practical," matters limited the involvement of colonial troops in British war efforts. First, a lack of "suitable" officers restricted the expansion of colonial forces during the world wars. Prior to Indianization and Africanization, the empire-justifying

idea of White prestige had necessitated Black subordination. Non-European officers were introduced into the colonial forces gradually and only as part of the process of decolonization. Secondly, colonial troops never received the confidence of British authorities in regard to military effectiveness. In the nineteenth century, the British assumed that White troops were inherently better than Black soldiers. However, as Social Darwinism lost ground in Britain and the complexity of warfare increased during the twentieth century, British authorities generally cited cultural and educational background for the superiority of White soldiers. The lack of education, in turn, owed much to British policies informed by stereotypes and political requirements. Finally, the British had decided that Black colonial troops could not be brought to Europe because they would die in the cold climate, a belief that had mirrored the British army's own medical experience in tropical regions.

In the British armed forces proper, formal policies concerning Black enlistment and commissioning changed significantly over time, although the actions of the forces usually reflected a desire to restrict Black enlistment as much as possible. The Georgian army and navy frequently sought out Black recruits to serve in the roles of musicians



or seamen. To appear superior in a growing multi-racial empire justified by Victorian constructions of "race," the forces had to be or, at least, pose as racially pure. British military policy and attitudes limited who could serve and these policies ran counter to the chronic scarcity of recruits experienced by the forces throughout their histories. The acceptance of the scarcity of recruits was part of the trade off of colonial rule over Black subject peoples. In the First World War and again in the Second, the imperial government over-ruled military sentiment and temporarily suspended the color bar. These actions reflected a political anxiety about the racial situation within the empire.

The period since the Second World War witnessed many changes in the colonial relationship between Britain and its Black subject peoples although one nostalgic throwback to the "glory" days of empire has been the continued employment of Gurkha mercenaries. Reflecting new political realities, the government permanently removed the color bar in 1947. However, within the forces, it appears that race relations have not been harmonious. During the past decade, they actually deteriorated and minorities have been discouraged from enlisting. The forces have now come under close public scrutiny for widespread racism, but they have retained a remarkable degree of internal autonomy in resolving their

chronic race problems. The army's sentimental attachment to the "martial races" theory of a by-gone empire has coalesced with its hostility to Blacks in a current Ministry of Defence plan to integrate, into existing recruit-starved British units, hundreds of redundant Gurkha soldiers whose own units disbanded as a direct result of the return of Hong Kong to China.

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

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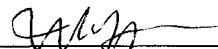
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The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

April 1, 1998

Date



Director's Signature