

The Implementation of British Colonial Defence Policy in Nigeria, 1914-1945

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Abstract

This paper is on British colonial defence policy in Nigeria in the period from the beginning of the First World War to the end of the Second World War from 1914-1945. The main objective of the paper is to present the major policies and practices which occurred in colonial Nigeria's defence sector in the period under study. The paper's findings have demonstrated that Britain's main aim in this enterprise was to ensure 'effective occupation' of colonial Nigeria as enunciated in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. This was achieved through the colonial defence and security sector in Nigeria where the various ethnic groups were given only marginal roles under an alien and imperial system. The paper advances the argument and position that British colonial defence policy was a one-sided and exclusive system of exploitation and was carefully developed to guarantee effective occupation and to serve as pillar of support for the entire colonial system, and enterprise in Nigeria. The methodology adopted is the analysis, and scholarly perspectives on the world wars and colonial defence policy. This methodology also adopted the usage of primary and secondary sources of data collection. The materials so generated were carefully collated, evaluated and analysed, in order to achieve the overall objectives and focus of the paper.

Introduction

The focus of this paper is on the implementation of certain aspects of the British colonial defence policy and practices in Nigeria within the period 1914-1945. This paper examines the conditions which led to Nigeria's involvement in the World Wars, as well as the defence of the British colonial possession and its preparedness for the deployment of forces between 1914 and 1918, and from 1939 to 1945. The paper also specifically examines the recruitment, training, service and demobilisation of Nigerian soldiers in phases of the First and Second World Wars, and during the period of the inter-war years.¹

Scholarly interest in this study and its periodisation has not been direct and precise. Works such as Chukwuma CC Osakwe's "Jungle Warfare: The Formation and Training of the 81st and 82nd West African Divisions for the Second World War, 1939-1945," Sam C. Ukpabi's "British Colonial Wars in Nigeria: Image and Reality," Akinjide Osuntokun and his *Nigeria in the First World War*, and Gabriel Olusanya's work, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria 1939-1953*, have related Nigerians' experiences in the colonial armed services, imperial expeditions within the Nigeria area, and conditions and circumstances of Nigerians in the world wars. The others have discussed Nigeria's role and experiences in the First World War, and how the Second World War shaped the trends and developments in nationalist struggle in Nigeria.²

This study is a contribution to knowledge in the colonial military history of Nigeria with regards to Britain's defence policy making and implementation in Nigeria.

Clarification of Concepts and Presentation of Scholarly Perspectives

Certain major concepts need clarification as they form the central theme of discussion and analysis in the paper. The concepts include 'the world wars' and 'colonial defence policy.'

The World Wars

War generally entails some degree of confrontation using weapons and other military technology and equipment by the armed forces and employing military tactics and operational art within a broad military strategy that is subject to military logistics.³ From its etymology however, the concept 'war' is derived from the German word *werra*, signifying confusion, discord or strife. War is a species of the genus of violence. Many researchers and scholars such as Donald Kagan have emphasised the continuity of violence with other political methods and have agreed with the Clausewitzian adage that "War is nothing but a continuation of political intercourse with an admixture of other means."⁴ The world wars were those fought as a result of conflicting interests among European powers for international political mastery, imperial domination, and global power and hegemony. These wars were waged by Great Britain and her allies and arrayed against Germany and the central powers in the First World War, and against Germany and the axis powers in the Second World War. The European powers' colonial possessions in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean became embroiled in the conflict on the side of

the colonisers, and this made the wars to acquire global spread and significance.⁵ These concepts have been used in this study in order to analyse and explain the conduct of British colonial defence policy and practices in Nigeria in its internal and external dimensions.

Colonial Defence Policy

According to Yomi Akinyeye, citing Thomas A. Imobighe, defence policy can be described “as a nation’s thinking about the plan of action and direction for its protection and security, a dialogue among its national interests, the perceived threats to those interests and the resources available for the defence of such interests in the face of competing demands.”⁶ Colonial defence policy therefore means the protection of the territorial integrity of a colony was the exclusive domain of the colonial power, in this case, Britain.⁷ The British colonial defence forces were also responsible for the internal and external security of the colony.⁸ According to Amechi Okolo:

Defence policy is that aspect of foreign policy which deals with national security. Because it deals with the very survival of the nation, it is in fact the most important aspect of foreign policy. Besides, all the other foreign policies adopted by a nation derive their strengths from the credibility of defence policy. In essence, defence policy has two main tasks: to plan and ensure the repulsion of actual and potential physical external aggression on the territory, and to serve as the backbone from which the other foreign policies derive their strengths.⁹

Defence policy is also the course of action adopted by a state in the promotion of its interests, principles and general security. According to Baylis and Smith: Despite its apparent simplicity, the term hides a multitude of activities some of which emphasise in some uses. Some use the term to refer to purely military policy or operational capabilities, others refer to strategy or strategic policy, and still others to the whole spectrum of national security.¹⁰

British colonial defence policy and its practices therefore, was the pursuit of imperial objectives through the deployment of military or defence forces, resources and capabilities of the colonised territory and its people and society.¹¹ This conceptualisation has been adopted as a major perspective for the direction, focus and analysis of this paper.

Britain and its Defence Policy in Nigeria

According to the Centre for International Information and Documentation, Barcelona, (CIDOB), in the defence policy planning and execution by nations, five strategic institutions generally suffice. These are: the security environment; the safeguard to national interests; risks and threats; values, objectives and interests; and responsibilities in the region and the rest of the world. British colonial defence policy in Nigeria was no exception in this regard. But since the latter was a colonial outpost of Britain, the burden and labours for the entire five strategic institutions

of defence policy were laid upon her while imperial Britain took all the benefits.¹² During the period of British colonial rule in Nigeria, these developments and trend of events began fully with the two world wars.

Recruitment and Training for the First World War, 1914-1918

A major aspect of British colonial defence policy was on the ethnic composition or representation in the recruitment of Nigerian soldiers. For considerations of loyalty and malleability, British policy initially favoured recruits from the Hausa, Nupe, Igala, Yoruba, other Hausa-speaking groups, and among the Tiv. The British military officers then adopted the method and policy of organising the Nigerian soldiers according to ethnic groups and in different companies such as Hausa Company, Nupe Company and Yoruba Company, as it were. According to Ukpabi, this was so arranged in such a way as to ensure that one ethnic group could be used against another in case of a mutiny within the forces. The fighting spirit of the Igbo for the wars of the white man and their loyalty to foreign commanders and their cause was in doubt and suspect, as was their non-malleability, so the Igbo were largely sidelined in the recruitment into the colonial army at this stage. The policy of selection of soldiers was implemented carefully within Nigeria, avoiding those from Lagos and the coastal regions that were regarded as 'contaminated with the politics of protest.' Recruitment was encouraged and carried out in the interior and in rural areas. Thus, as the study by Abdulrahman and Mang also shows, with divisions and lack of cohesion, the colonial army operated at different social levels.¹³

By 1914, the major instrument of British colonial defence policy in Nigeria for recruitment exercise was the West African Frontier Force, (WAFF).¹⁴ The policy adopted for this military organisation was for the rapid mobility of British forces and their military supplies in jungles, forests and across rivers, wherever assigned, and in any part of the world. Lugard also reported to the British parliament that the Southern Nigeria Volunteers' Corps, (SNVC), based in Lagos, was converted to a small artillery volunteer detachment. It was to defend strategic ports of the coastal areas especially Lagos and Forcados from external aggression or attack.¹⁵ British colonial defence policy makers developed the northern and southern Nigerian Carriers Corps, (NCC), beginning with the recruitment of child soldiers ranged from 16-40 years. These corps were run as military units as deserters were shot, their wages were deducted and flogging consistently used.¹⁶

During the war able bodied labour were mobilized, recruited and trained as carriers by the British for the movement of artillery, machine guns' portorage, food and supplies. These carriers from Nigeria were recruited for service in Togoland, the Cameroons and in East Africa, while a small number were sent for service in the Mesopotamian region. The latter region of service saw 14,200 carriers drawn mainly from Sierra Leone and Nigeria.¹⁷ By the time of the Cameroon campaign in 1914, the British carried out an assessment of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria in a bid to identify and mobilise martial groups for recruitment and service. Akinjide Osuntokun has posited that by 1916 when the Germans had to be cleared from East Africa, the Tiv of Central Nigeria were then also recruited for military service in

their large numbers. According to him, the war-time needs of Britain increased by 1916 and 1917 and “the Tiv began to be recruited in substantial numbers.”¹⁸ In 1917, Nigeria ‘pledged’ an additional draft of 1,000 men as carriers in the war and this was redeemed.¹⁹

British policy also included political and economic threats to chiefs and headmen, intimidation and extortion, and kidnappings en masse. David Killingray and James Matthews quoted a European official in Ondo, western Nigeria who wrote in 1915 that, “. . . there was also detentions in prison for days to ensure acquiescence, and forced recruitment with the help of indigenous irregular troops.”²⁰ G.H. Findlay, an administrator in Southern Nigeria recorded that he repeatedly used threats against the chiefs to acquire the much needed carriers.²¹ British colonial authorities continually used force and those who revolted were sometimes instantly shot and killed. Forced conscription was unofficially introduced from 1916 and 1917.²² Nigeria in the First World War contributed 1,802 carriers, 35,064 transport carriers, 353 drivers, and 818 labourers for the Inland Water Transport Services, (IWTS) and in other building and construction projects.²³

Service and Demobilisation in the First World War, 1914-1918

Following the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates in Nigeria, Britain implemented an aspect of its colonial defence policy which enhanced “sufficient reinforcement of troops for the war.”²⁴ This policy made it extremely important and necessary for human resources especially soldiers to be at the constant disposal of colonial officials for internal and external operations. Nigerians therefore, constantly faced massive recruitment, forced conscription and impressments for the war effort. At the beginning of the First World War in August 1914, it was the Gold Coast Regiment that first took the initiative and invaded the German colony of Togoland. The campaign was over within two weeks as the WAFF’s engagements at the regions of Agbeluvoe and Khra led to the German surrender at Kanina on 26th August 1914. The WAFF with the 1 Battalion of the Nigeria Regiment marched from Lokoja against another German possession, the Cameroons, which witnessed fierce fighting both in Yola and Garoua. On 27th September, 1914, and aided by a naval squadron the WAFF captured the useful Cameroonian port of Douala. In the following year, precisely in April 1915, the WAFF began an unsuccessful advance against the German headquarters in Yaounde. A second attempt in October of the same year however, yielded success as Yaounde was captured on 1st January, 1916. Earlier in October 1915, a British colonial military force in Nigeria advancing from Northern Nigeria in support of the larger WAFF force had captured the German-strongly held fortress of Banyo in the Cameroons.²⁵

By November 1916, British policy directed that the WAFF serve in the East African campaign. The British still faced acute shortage of labour and maintenance of lines of supply as disease, overwork and fierce fighting exerted its heavy toll. The Europeans and Indians were not suited for the East African climate and were gradually replaced by Nigerians especially in 1917. By the same year, the Germans were beaten and driven into the nearby Portuguese territory of Mozambique in

disorderly retreat. This success earned for the combined brigade of the WAFF 3 battle honours: the battles of Behobebo, Nyangoa, and East Africa, from 1916-1918.²⁶ A total estimate of over 17,000 Nigerians served in the First World War.²⁷ In Togoland the first theatre of the war, the total number of carrier casualties lost to battles and disease by WAFF amounted to over 2,000. In the Cameroons' campaign, Nigeria contributed 5,002 military carriers and lost 9, while 93 died of disease or declared Missing in Action, (MIA). A further 3,034 were invalided. In the East African campaign, the carriers killed in action and those that died of disease totaled 834 for which Nigerian casualties were substantial. From 29th May, 1917 and 16th March, 1918, 11 Nigerians were killed in the war in all campaigns in East and West Africa.²⁸ The Germans continued the resistance in East Africa with devastating levels of casualties on both sides.²⁹

A further 1,350 motor drivers were sent to East Africa with a small fraction of the Nigeria Regiment being represented. They saw action and service not only in East Africa, but also in India, Mesopotamia, and the Persian Gulf from 1916-1918.³⁰ The Germans also recruited from their subject population. Prominent among these were the over 11,000 soldiers recruited for the German colonial army among the Tanzanians in German East Africa, and known as 'Askaris.' But British colonial defence policy demanded that Africans on the side of their rivals, the Germans, must also be crushed by their fellow Africans in the war. Thus, British policy made it an intra-ethnic war of sorts among the Africans under two imperial flags: Britain and Germany.³¹

During the period of demobilisation which began around 1917, the carriers realised that there was no gratuity or pension and disability allowance. Even within the years of service, carrier pay was often irregular, and according to Osuntokun, series of revolts were embarked upon.³² The principal mechanism for this policy was the Nigerian Comforts Fund (NCF), founded in 1917 which initiated the first programme for the return of the carriers. Through this agency, the sick and wounded were sent home from the Cameroons and East Africa. The carriers on return were quarantined in Lagos before being sent to the centres of recruitment for demobilisation and final pay-off. Port Harcourt and Owerri were other major centres of demobilisation where the ex-carriers awaited their fate under demeaning conditions.³³ Colonel F. Jenkins, the Acting Commandant of the Nigeria Regiment had reported that:

the work done so far at Ikoyi is most unsatisfactory. Neither the roofs nor the walls of the shelters erected afford any protection from the weather. It would be quite impossible to quarter any human beings least of all invalids in these shelters.³⁴

Other serious difficulties which Nigerian soldiers encountered included, lack of accurate record keeping of the returnees were contrived to identify their centres of registration, names of home towns or villages, and thus the accumulation of confused pay records.³⁵ With this inappropriate or inaccurate record keeping, the problems of demobilisation for the veterans of this war dragged on from 1918-

1925.³⁶ At the time when the meager pensions and gratuities were paid, inflation had taken its toll on the colonial economy.³⁷ Chinedu N. Ubah has cited the Nigeria Regiment Ordinance 73 (1) which stated that ‘any ex-soldier who re-enlists or re-engages will receive a bounty of 10 shillings for every year for which he agrees to re-engage.’ By this regulation, the ex-servicemen were enticed to re-enlist into military service.³⁸ A programme of resettlement of war veterans in agricultural centres was proposed by the Resident of Borno, A.C. Francis in 1922. But the resettlement arrangement began to collapse from 1923 because most ex-servicemen were interested to settle down for a permanent agricultural life. The policy itself was not humane in conception and its implementation provided no prospects for a better economy or income generation for the ex-servicemen.³⁹

The the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939

During the inter-war period, Britain was determined to effectively secure her Nigerian colonial territory. Being suspicious of the Germans and now the French on the eastern borderlands of Nigeria, Britain carefully took over a continuous swath of territory through the mandates system and declared it British Cameroons. This took effect from 1922 and reached its peak in 1924.⁴⁰ These areas comprised of parts of northern and Southwestern Cameroons. The British then recruited over 3,000 military personnel from these two parts of the mandated territory to police and secure the eastern borderland with the French-held Cameroons. This group of citizens served as security, intelligence, patrol and scouting personnel especially in operations at the Nigeria-Cameroon borderland.⁴¹ Colonial defence policy also paved the way for demobilised soldiers in the inter-war years to become useful for service in the civil police.⁴²

The role of the Royal West African Frontier Force, RWAFF in the internal security of colonial Nigeria was complemented by the colonial police services. Thus, both the colonial Nigerian soldiers and police personnel served to keep the ‘security and safety’ of British colonialism in the inter-war period.⁴³ By 1928, there was enhanced recruitment of additional 500 men into the police and other internal security agencies to aggressively enforce taxation which was a major back-bone of the colonia policy. Anti-tax riots, demonstrations and violence were ruthlessly put down by this colonial defence and security outfit. According to R. Olufemi Ekundare, this was especially in Aba and other districts of southern Nigeria beginning from 1929.⁴⁴ Following these developments, British colonial policy makers embarked upon secret investigative research into the activities of “tribal associations” throughout the country. This was to identify and nip in the bud any pocket of resistance against colonial domination or the bud of nationalist sentiments. The combined services of the military and police were decisive in crushing offenders; a role in which the ‘chiefs-in-council’ also played an important part.⁴⁵

There were constant submissions of reports on the assigned activities and duties of the Nigeria Regiment of the WAFF in at least less than a five-year period beginning from 1919. There was the compilation of reports on internal and clandestine military operations and the compilation of intelligence reports on the

communities, societies, clans, districts and provinces of colonial Nigeria within the period 1930-1939. These reports updated colonial officials on the effectiveness of policy and helped their plan of action which determined the course of events in the defence sector.⁴⁶ With the imminence of the Second World War, British defence policy in Nigeria in terms of preparatory socio-economic measures and military preparedness were stern and drastic.⁴⁷ Britain placed high demands to be fulfilled by Nigerians for the prosecution of the war through various 'defence regulations' and through the policy of 'sufficient reinforcement of troops overseas.' For example, there was continuous military recruitment for reinforcements in internal and external operations, while the Nigerian War Relief Fund (NWRF) through the Nigerian Supply Board (NSB) established in 1939, developed several schemes to retain foreign exchange and ensure the supply of commodities and primary products that were vital for the war effort. There was heavy demand placed on rubber and coal, cocoa, cotton and palm oil to the detriment of food crops. These products were also prohibited and alienated from enemy countries such as Germany, Italy and Japan.⁴⁸

Recruitment and Training for the Second World War, 1939-1945

In the Second World War, the British colonial authorities rushed to set up the 81 and 82 West African Divisions of RWAFF. This strategic defence policy was to serve the need for human adaptability to a unique terrain against a formidable combat adversary. Britain began recruitment as early as 1942 in several parts of colonial Nigeria. The British had reasons for recruiting Nigerians for the jungle warfare they had to encounter and subdue. One of the jungle warfares was fought in the jungles of the Arakan in Burma which were infested with leeches, maggots and mosquitoes. Thus, British defence policy makers had to seek out people with adaptable nature and character in difficult terrains, and with dogged and resilient fighting skills in such peculiar battles in the jungles. Another challenge to overcome was in a skillful adversary and killing machine that was the Japanese military forces.⁴⁹ Certain factors demonstrated that the British defence policy makers needed more recruits for the war in Southeast Asia. Defending Burma was by only two divisions, the 17 Indian Division and the 1 Burma Division, with some minimal support from the Royal Air Force and the US Air Force. The British at this point desperately needed more divisions with vast numbers of recruits who had the strength and fighting capabilities to withstand the various challenges and difficulties of jungle warfare.⁵⁰

By 1st January, 1943, communications between General Headquarters West Africa, the War Office under General, (later Field Marshall) Earl Wavell, and the Inspector-General of RWAFF, Lieutenant-General Gifford led to the creation and establishment of the 81 and 82 West African Divisions of RWAFF. The 81 Division consisted of the 3, 5 and 6 Infantry Brigades, while the 82 Division consisted of units of the 1, 2 and 4 Brigade Groups.⁵¹ The 81 Division officially came into existence on 1st March, 1943 and the 82 Division on 1st August, 1943. Carriers were recruited and they stood in for armoured vehicles because of their envisaged role in Burma. In addition to the mainly officer corps of colonial Nigeria which was

mainly British, the military personnel of the 81 and 82 Divisions came mostly from the Nigeria Regiment of RWAFF.⁵²

81 Division was trained on a terrain similar to the terrain in Burma. In Nigeria, they trained and retrained in the thickly forested areas of Olokomeji, Abeokuta and Ibadan, and other areas. In anticipation of their role in the war, the recruits of the RWAFF Nigerian Regiment undertook 'obstacles training exercises' at the Military Depot, Zaria beginning from 1939. At the end of service in Burma and other theatres of the Second World War, an estimated 100,000 initial military personnel were recruited among the West Africans with Nigeria as major contributor. They were trained in two phases: normal warfare, which included weapons training, physical exercises, English language courses, battle drills, and field-craft and assault offensives in phase one; training in administration, organisation, documentation, and in jungle warfare, which was part of phase two; and discipline, psychological preparation for war, assault courses, night training, endurance marches, and swamp combat training.⁵³ Recruitment was intense that even with the creation of the 81 and 82 Divisions, 10 Battalions were still behind sufficient enough to garrison the entire West African British territories.⁵⁴ General training of recruits involved marksmanship, and good fire control and direction. They were also taught the consolidation of gains of war, defending a line, or holding a position.⁵⁵ Departure for Southeast Asia began in July, 1943, but recruitment for the war effort continued in several departments in the course of the war as the needs of combat required. According to Chukwuma Osakwe, Lord Mountbatten, who became supreme allied commander in Asia with headquarters in India and later Ceylon, wrote that:

Southeast Asia, mainly owing to the less developed state of the countries, far more men were needed to keep a division in the field than in Europe. Whereas in Normandy, the number was about forty thousand, in southeast Asia it approached fifty-six thousand or seventy thousand including civil labour (which in 1944 reached a total of nearly four hundred thousand) including civil contractors and labour employed by the US Forces in the command.⁵⁶

However, the first set of recruits died on the way to Southeast Asia. One survivor had stated that: "we had to march 5 or 6 kilometres through the water carrying almost entire supplies for the war. It became too daunting for others who could not cope with the various physical strains on the body and mind."⁵⁷ In Southeast Asia, further training of the recruits took place in India in various locations such as Deolali, Nasik, Dhond, Kedgaono, Mashral, and others. The emphasis of the training was on security, knowledge of Japanese infiltration tactics and outflanking methods, the concealment of sentry posts, and on cooperation or otherwise with the indigenous population of Burma. By October and November, 1943, several exercises were conducted in readiness for actual combat. These were: 'Exercise Vengeance,' which helped the divisional staff with the machinery of obtaining air support, air recce, aerial photographs, and the nature of the Air Force operations. 'Exercise Head-load,' was a practice to carry war materials by

auxiliary troops to the frontline soldiers, and 'Exercise Headphone,' tested the signals communications within the division.⁵⁸ Generally, impressments continued and serious consequences awaited those who deserted the army or evaded enlistment for service in the British imperial defence force.

Service and Demobilisation in the Second World War, 1939-1945

A major front in this war was the Arakan Front in the jungles of Burma where the Japanese invasion during the first Arakan campaign threatened the defence and security of India, a jewel in the imperial crown. On 8th January, 1942, Japan invaded Burma by deploying two divisions of her 15th Army for the operation, leaving death and destruction in its wake against the allies.⁵⁹ The Japanese forces moved swiftly overcoming spirited challenges from the allied 17 Division and captured Rangoon in March, 1943. Historians refer to this operation as the first Arakan campaign. The allied defeat and their retreat took approximately four months and about 900 miles to complete. Of the 42,000 soldiers in the allied Burma force, about 30,000 were casualties of the war, the Japanese having only about 4,500 casualties with about the same initial division strength with the allied forces in the battles.⁶⁰

The first Arakan campaign therefore, was a colossal disaster for Britain. The work of Haywood and Clarke shows that Britain and her allies encountered challenges in terms of weather and terrain, forest and jungle vegetation. There were two ranges in the Mayu peninsula and another between the rivers Kalapanzin and Kalladan. The ordinary jungle gave way to bamboo trees which during combat had to be cut to enable penetration. This section of the Arakan was one of the areas where the RWAFF later saw combat and action.⁶¹ The RWAFF proved its worth during the re-conquest of Burma, and the advance to scuttle Japan's final onslaught for an invasion of India. On 30th November, 1943, three divisions of Allied 15th Corps under General AFF Christenson advanced down the Mayu peninsular towards Akyah in order to upset the planned Japanese thrust into India. These were the 5 Indian Division which advanced west of the Mayu range and the 7 Indian Division went east of the range, while the 81 West African Division of RWAFF advanced along the Kalladan valley further to the east. It was these fighting forces along with the British 14th Army that denied Japan's execution of a well laid out plan to seize the plains of Imphal and Kohima in Manipur, for an invasion of India.⁶²

The 82 West African Division was formed in 1944, and it sailed to British Ceylon from the east coast of Africa and on to Burma for the third Arakan campaign in December of the same year. Earlier by April and May, 1944, in the allied battle to retake the Arakan and Burma, Letmauk became the site of bitter and fierce fighting between the 1 Brigade, Nigeria Regiment of the 82 West Africa Division of RWAFF, and the Japanese' 54 and 55 Divisions of the 15th Army during the second Arakan campaign which the former emerged triumphant but with huge casualties. But Japan's 15th Army was almost totally destroyed in this major allied victory against the Japanese in Burma as even with a retreat, they lost 65,000 dead.⁶³ According to Ubah in 1944, one of the most effective fighting forces of the Nigeria Regiment, the

Tiv alone lost 47 in action or died of war wounds. Others included 196 losses on the Nigerian Regiment's side for which the Tiv lost an additional 43 servicemen killed and 70 wounded. As was experienced in the First World War, Nigerian soldiers served as cannon-fodder to their British commanders in the Second World War.⁶⁴ Following this victory, the 82 West African Division occupied the Kalapanzin valley on 12th December, 1944, while the 81 West African Division made rapid advance astride the Kalladan in a final push against the Japanese. The 82 Division captured Buthidaung and established a bridgehead on the bank of the Kalapanzin, thus gaining control of the Maudaung-Buthidaung road. By 29th December, 1944, Kalapanzin valley had been cleared of the Japanese and the move to cross the Mayu River was made. These troops also engaged the Japanese at the region of Goppe Bazar and Palewa.⁶⁵ Documents relating to the war state that the victorious armies of the 81 and 82 West African Divisions of RWAFF continued to drive the Japanese before them, and after heavy fighting at the decisive battle of Myohaung, capital of the ancient kings of the Arakan, the Lemro River was crossed and Minbya was occupied by these allied troops. This became known as Myohaung Day on 24th January, 1945, which is still celebrated among the West African Armed Forces. The capture of Myohaung was a decisive factor in the defeat of the Japanese in Burma as it lay on strategic supply channels and routes of the Japanese.⁶⁶ According to a war veteran, during the war in Burma, the fighting spirit of the Nigerians and other West Africans in RWAFF was always kindled with the song:

There is a light at the end of the tunnel, the battalion is almost there, God,
we ask your forgiveness, and we want victory by any means!⁶⁷

The region of Tamadu was taken by the 82 Division assisted by the British-Indian 25 Division. By 13th May, 1945, the An Pass river was crossed to contain the Japanese and round them up to forestall their retreat and escape. Thus, the 82 West African Division of RWAFF and the 25 Division completed the liberation of the Arakan by their occupation of Taungun. Osakwe states that the battles of Meiktila and Mandalay had earlier been decisive as the allies outwitted the Japanese by crossing river Irrawaddy in February-March, 1945. This action therefore, completed the re-conquest of Burma in May 1945. Rangoon, the capital of Burma was captured and occupied by the allied troops that moved in from all the captured regions of the country. The remnants of Japan's 54 and 55 Divisions of the 15th Army withdrew in disorderly retreat towards Thailand.⁶⁸ According to a testimonial translated from a captured Japanese diary:

the enemy soldiers are not from Britain but from Africa; because of their belief, they are not afraid to die. So even if their comrades have fallen, they keep on advancing as if nothing had happened. It makes things rather difficult. They have an excellent physique and are very brave, so fighting against these soldiers is somewhat troublesome.⁶⁹

Nigerian troops of the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) also served

in the East African campaign as required by British policy. This saw the defeat of the Italians in Somaliland and Abyssinia (Ethiopia). Merca and Mogadishu in Somaliland was captured, as was Harrar, Berber and Addis Ababa in Abyssinia, or Ethiopia. By May 1944 when Emperor Haile Selassie re-entered the capital from his overthrow and exile in the Sudan, it was elements of the Nigerian Brigade of the RWAFF that mounted the Guard of Honour for him.⁷⁰ But British colonial defence policy with regards to the demobilisation process was still chaotic once her interest was served through these wars and battles.⁷¹ The standard policy of colonial demobilisation was only to get rid of surplus troops from the service and not really to care for their welfare after their discharge. As Ubah has put it, “demobilisation was a euphemism for military retrenchment.”⁷² Thus, policy and practice continued to be mostly at variance in the implementation and consummation of British colonial defence policy concerning Nigeria.

At the end of the war in 1945, 299 soldiers were drawn down from Burma. Ubah’s study indicates that the soldiers upon discharge were to receive all financial entitlements which included 56 days’ post-discharge pay and allowances as well as their gratuity, clothing allowance and overseas’ grant. But good arrangements for all cases proved difficult. Upon demobilisation, frantic efforts were made to absorb them into the Native Authority of their specific provinces. The colonial administrators approached the West African Service Brigade, (WASB), Lagos, to assist disabled soldiers who could not go back to their farms with sedentary activities and occupations. Some were sent for training in various skills at the Industrial Training School, Kano. The programme of resettlement of war veterans in agricultural centres proposed and began in 1922 continued but the idea still remained the same for the demobilised soldiers as the village setting was no longer their desired place for earning a living.⁷³ In these circumstances, some were re-absorbed into the Native Authority (NA) Police and for others, re-engagement into the colonial army offered the best option. The vast majority of the ex-servicemen that remained were registered for other paid employment under a colonial government appointed Area Re-settlement Officer, (ARO).⁷⁴ This latter policy was clearly an after-thought and was only adopted as a result of the failures of colonial demobilisation.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the war-time British colonial defence policy and its practices in Nigeria from 1914-1945 in the specific areas of recruitment and training, service and demobilisation in the First and Second World Wars. But the overwhelming factor or reason for colonial defence policy making and implementation was the focus upon the protection of the imperial and colonial system in order to safeguard its possessions and enterprises. This is an area that this paper has made a major contribution to knowledge. The British methods of ensuring the country’s military participation in the world wars which was ultimately for the benefit of her imperial ambition and quest for global hegemony were presented in the paper. The British saw that the nature and character of the Nigerian people and society was most suited for adaptation to various climates and terrains than

the other colonised peoples of India and those of the Caribbean. But the problems of post-war management of the lives of ex-servicemen as regards their welfare and other benefits through the demobilisation process proved a daunting challenge to the British imperialists. This negative trend was not overcome or effectively closed throughout the period under review.

Notes

1. See for example James K. Matthews, "Nigerian Military Experiences in the First World War: Recruitment, Service and Demobilisation," Unpublished Ph.D. History Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 1979.
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