

The Consolidation of the Rhodesian African Rifles: How a New Unit Escaped Disbandment.

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List of Abbreviations:

AFRAF.....	Africa Forces Rhodesia Air Force. Newspaper. Sub description below every title is “Rhodesia’s First Service Newspaper”
BSAC.....	British South African Company
BSAP.....	British South African Police
CO.....	Commanding Officer
COC.....	Chain of Command
CSM.....	Company Sergeant Major
KAR.....	King’s African Rifles
NCO.....	Non-Commissioned Officer
NRR.....	Northern Rhodesian Regiment
RAAC.....	Rhodesian Askaris Air Corps
RAF.....	Rhodesian Air Force
RAR.....	Rhodesian African Rifles
RAR Regtl Assn.....	Rhodesian African Rifles Regimental Association
RNR.....	Rhodesian Native Regiment
RSM.....	Regimental Sergeant Major
UDI.....	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
WW1.....	World War One
WW2.....	World War Two
ZANU.....	Zimbabwean National African Union

Introduction

The Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) was formed in 1940 by the British Colony of Southern Rhodesia to assist in the war effort against the Axis powers during WW2. The unit was a reestablishment and reorganization based on an earlier unit formed for WW1, the Rhodesian Native Regiment (RNR), which was disbanded in 1918. The RAR was active from 1940 up until 1981. This discussion and exploration of the RAR will focus specifically on how this unit would consolidate itself as a permanent and necessary unit for Southern Rhodesia up until the end of (the Second Bush War for some historians) the Bush War of the late 1960s and early 80s. The pride which white and black Rhodesians had for the RAR and its military effectiveness meant it was not disbanded after WW2. The RAR survived the absorption of Southern Rhodesia into The Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and then again after Ian Douglas Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI). This thesis argues that the RAR was able to consolidate itself as a permanent military unit due to its effectiveness in war as well as its popularity among both white and black Rhodesians – because of its social and military accomplishments.

Why is it so fascinating that under white minority rule the RAR existed for this period of time during Zimbabwe's history? The answer is because the RAR stuck strictly to a lesser common practice in modern history of having segregation between enlisted and officer ranks. While it was common in the British Empire, the practice became less common after WW2. This meant that all officers were white Rhodesians and Britons, and almost all enlisted men (with many Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) also being white) being black Africans, or "Askaris". Askari is a term meaning black soldier, or "native soldier". The RAR refused to desegregate their unit while other countries, such as the United States, ended racial segregation in the military in

1948 shortly after WW2. Other African units, such as the King's African Rifles (KAR) and Tanganyika Rifles, dissolved after widespread African independences from European powers during the 1960s. What this thesis looks to explore is how the RAR survived and was able to consolidate as a permanent unit until Robert Mugabe's victory in the Bush War and the end of Rhodesia as a white ruled state. While the RAR operated effectively, and was seen as a positive element of Rhodesian history (and is still seen this way by many of its veterans, both white and black), it also serves as an example of where it was possible to continue racial segregation in the military for an unprecedented length of time during a shift when western white nations were increasing their progressive attitudes towards military service. If one understands the social governing of white Rhodesia while reading, one will also understand that this unit would resort to desegregation only once it became untenable to continue due to the need in manpower during the Bush War. In the RAR's history, only a few Africans would ever be commissioned as an officer, LT Martin Tumbare, and LT Mutero would be the first in 1974.¹ Both men had reached the highest enlisted ranks for Askaris prior to being given commissions. While the RAR was successful in its operations, both at home and abroad, this thesis is in no way suggesting it was due to racial segregation. The RAR was an outlier among other examples of segregation in military history. This was because the rigorous work of white Rhodesians and their ideas of white supremacy over black Africans, deeply rooted in their culture and need for control, kept this unit stagnant for its lifetime.

¹ Alexandre Binda, *Masodja: The History of the Rhodesian African Rifles and its Forerunner, The Rhodesian Native Regiment* (Johannesburg, SA: 30° South Publishers, 2007). 315.

Reasons for Research

Research into this subject matter comes from a personal connection and interest in the RAR. I will start on my own venture of becoming a United States Marine Corps Second Lieutenant within a month of this paper being reviewed for Honors. I ask myself as I look back on the Marine Corps' history of racial segregation, discrimination, and abuse why and how a unit and service would seek to continue such a system of organization. I look back on this period of history in Zimbabwe with curiosity as I consider my own family's role in its structure, as my grandfather served as one of many white infantry officers in the RAR. I have grown up being told of how men of the RAR loved their Officers, and the Officers loved their enlisted "subbies", or subordinates. It seems to me, however, that there cannot be complete truth in this statement, as I imagine individuals would be angered by their stymied career progression, unable to exercise higher authority over another member of their service, solely based on the color of their skin, their upbringing, and their "tribe".

While there were other segregated units in Rhodesia during WW2, they did not survive for very long. For example, the Northern Rhodesia Regiment (NRR) served the colony of Northern Rhodesia (as opposed to Southern Rhodesia which the RAR served), from 1933 up until 1964.² This Regiment was composed of several battalions which were made up of infantry, logistics, and even hospital corps sections, and was also segregated along racial boundaries between whites and Africans. What makes the RAR distinctive is that while the NRR would be dissolved into the 1st Zambian Rifles after independence, the RAR would serve the white

² Anthony Clayton and David Killingray, *Khaki and Blue: Military and Police in British Colonial Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1989). 205.

minority government after UDI, despite this arguably not being in the best interest of the Africans who served the regiments.

How did the white and black men of the RAR live, how did they talk with one another? What was the interworking of white and black relationships and interactions in the RAR? Were military customs and courtesies structured via regulation or were they born naturally from the belief in the RAR's training methods? Were relationships across racial boundaries a product of shared pain in warfare? How did these men live during their service, during training, indoctrination, and after their time in the RAR?

Secondary Source Historiography

Historiographical study of the RAR can be fit into two categories of analysis. These two types of secondary source material are starkly different. There is one camp of historians and writers who chronicle the history of the RAR from a veteran perspective, including Brigadier David Heppenstall, Captain Andrew Telfer, and Captain Russel Fulton. Along with these veterans are historians who were commissioned to write about the unit by said veterans, such as Alexandre Binda. I will draw upon this camp to explain how white officers, and some white enlisted, felt about their "comrades" in arms who were African, despite them being always of a lesser status than whites. These historiographical sources are in this way then both secondary and primary, as they tell a history of the past, but from the viewpoint of those who were there. I will treat these sources as both.

Another camp of analysis is represented by academics of Sub-Saharan African history and military history such as Timothy Stapleton, Myles Osborne, and Paul Singer Thompson.

These two groups present different interpretations of the RAR and many other of the British Empire's units. I will use this camp of texts to inform more macro information, such as numbers of recruits, and second-hand evidence found by those historians. These works also serve as sources of interviews with African soldiers, which will be vital to fill in the gaps which other publications leave. I will explore these historians work on the "martial races" which colonials believed in when recruiting to better explain the role which race and tribe (better explained by the term ethno-linguistic group) played.³

The work spent on archiving and protecting the culture of the RAR has been kept, and continues to be kept, by those men who served in its upper ranks. This compilation of histories regarding the RAR will be used with care, caution, and with an understanding that the statements and stories told by individuals are to be counted as partial, as personal communications.

Academia presents a different picture of the RAR. Timothy Stapleton's articles such as *The Composition of the Rhodesia Native Regiment during the First World War: A Look at the Evidence*⁴, and books such as *African police and soldiers in colonial Zimbabwe 1923-80*⁵, present historically researched evidence and facts, rather than presenting anecdotal stories such as current veterans' works.

Racially segregated units other than the RAR, which operated at the same time will also be referenced for comparison purposes. While the RAR was serving in Burma from 1944 – 1946, in Egypt during the Suez crisis, and Malaya in the "Malayan Emergency" from 1956 – 1958

³ Myles Osborne, *Ethnicity and Empire in Kenya: Loyalty and Martial Race Among the Kamba, c. 1800 to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴ Timothy Stapleton, "The Composition of the Rhodesia Native Regiment during the First World War: A Look at the Evidence," *History in Africa* 30, (2003).

⁵ Timothy Stapleton, *African police and soldiers in colonial Zimbabwe, 1923 – 1980* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011).

fighting the communists, it will be important to understand what other British colonial units at the same time were doing, and how effectively they were doing it.

Primary Sources

The primary sources used for this dissertation are mainly newspaper publications during WW2, specifically collected from The Imperial War Museum and The British Library's collections sourced via the Service Newspapers of World War Two database. *Parade* will serve as the main source of newspaper sources as it holds the most references to the RAR, but there are 18 individual newspaper articles in total collected from the papers: *Parade*, *Springbok*, *AFRAF* (*Africa Forces Rhodesian Air Force*), *Exhibition News*, *Rafters* and the *United Services Review*. These papers mostly deal with "Rhodesian Airmail Bulletins", used to give troops and civilians information. Other articles hold what at the surface seems like tertiary information about parades and ceremonies, information about Askari inspections while in training, and even Askari sporting events. Most publications about the RAR are about their ceremonies. This information will be vital in contributing to an understanding of how the white Rhodesian civilian populace viewed the RAR. However, these papers give little information about how Askaris and Officers interacted. The newspapers presented are even more vital as there are very few mentions of the RAR in newspapers during and after WW2.

Other important primary sources used will be the anecdotes recorded in *Chibaya Moyo*. While this source is listed above as a secondary source, it also serves as a primary source as it presents memories and verbatim quotes of men from the time, told by men who were at the events.

Chapter layout

There are four chapters in total which will cover the consolidation of the RAR as a trusted and permanent unit in Rhodesia. Chapter 1: Historical Context and the Birth of a “Native Regiment” describes the relationship of the RAR to both the RNR and the BSAP (British South African Police). This chapter will explain the mission and purpose of the first regiments of the RAR and its formation. Chapter 2: Recruitment and Life in Garrison is focused on the practices of recruiting new Askaris, where these men were recruited from, how they were trained, how they were indoctrinated, and lastly how the regiments operated while domestically stationed in Rhodesia. Chapter 3: Deployment and Overseas Affairs deals primarily with how the RAR operated while fighting abroad in Burma and, in the immediate years following WW2, Egypt. This chapter focuses on how combat and time away from Africa affected the RAR, its mission, and its internal dynamics. Finally, the conclusion will round out my overall argument that the RAR was able to consolidate itself due to its prestige as a military institution but will also shed light on the men of the RAR before, after, and in remembering their service. This conclusion aims to present how the RAR is remembered today by both prior officers and enlisted. This conclusion will also reflect on the complexities of a military outfit which is famous to its veterans and their families, and infamous to the people who defeated it and the rest of modern-day Zimbabwe. Often how a group is remembered in hindsight can reveal more than how a group was viewed by those who lived it at the time.

There are a multitude of debates and opinions about the effectiveness of the RAR in all aspects, be it social, military, legal, etc. but there is also a more heated and inherently emotional debate over the ethical nature of the unit’s structure. In 2020, most people would say that racial segregation is reprehensible in any environment, be it civilian or military – but white Rhodesians

would challenge this. How the RAR was able to consolidate itself can be argued in a reasoned, evenly weighted, and deeply researched thesis, but there will be a few inherent problems with this paper. It is important to reveal the truth about this topic, that it is complicated as it deals with the intangibles of human experiences, emotions and lives of men most of whom have now died. It would be wrong to over-generalize views and feelings to any particular group of people. To do so would be dishonest and arrogant. When a point is made that many people in a group felt a certain way, the words majority and minority are important, because no one group thinks as one.

As one progresses, it is important to always remember who we are talking about: men who thought their own thoughts, felt their own feelings, had their own reasons, and committed their own acts, all of which we will never truly understand despite how much evidence one collects.

Vocabulary Clarifications

Throughout this dissertation the word “Native” will not be used in reference to black Africans, unless quoted from a historical source. In contemporary study of African History, scholars have begun to refrain from using such language due to the problematic history of the word. White colonial governments would use the word “Native” to refer to African peoples, and soon the term acquired the same negative connotations as other such vocabulary as savage, backward, and primitive. While many non-scholars may use this term frequently, it is not done much now in academia. The use of the term ‘Native’ has a different function in other studies, such as studies of American Indians, or Native Americans (depending on the preference of both the people and the historian). In this way many Americans may see the word native as non-

problematic. However, the history of colonial Sub-Saharan Africa has nuanced differences which requires historians to refrain.

While the word Native will not be used, the word “Tribe” will be used when appropriate. This word has been criticized by historians of Africa due to its etymology, being created by white colonials when meeting African peoples. There is an argument to be made that there were no such things as tribes prior to white Europeans starting to categorize peoples of Africa, like the way Europeans categorized their own peoples in Europe (harking back to Germanic tribes). While this is a valid statement, today many African peoples choose to align themselves with certain groups which they themselves ascribe the name tribe to. For this reason, it is my opinion that, while it can be a complex discussion of whether or not to use the word tribe, it seems to make the most sense to use terminology which African people today choose to use, and even feel pride in. It is also important to focus on the idea of what a tribe, or ethnic group, of people is due to the major arguments presented here concerning martial races. To steer away from tribal ideas would be to ignore an important piece of history about how the RNR, RAR, and other “Native Regiments” went about recruiting.

Lastly, a reader may notice the use of the name “Zimbabwe” only three times total so far in this introduction, yet the name “Rhodesia” has been used ad nauseum. This may seem strange, and somewhat insensitive as Rhodesia is no longer the name of the country which this paper concerns. However, it seems important to refer to the country which the RAR served as the actual country it was dedicated to. The RAR did not serve Zimbabwe, and in fact, it served as a tool of the white minority government’s policy (as every military is simply an extension of a government’s will to enact their policy via force). It is important to remember basic Zimbabwean history: Once Rhodesia became Zimbabwe upon the victory of Mugabe’s Zimbabwean National

African Union (ZANU) forces at the end of the Rhodesian Bush War, it became one of the new government's goals to destroy everything that represented the white colonial government. In this way, it would be inappropriate to refer to the RAR as a Zimbabwean military organization, as it was simply not fighting for Zimbabwe. When referring to the country as it stands today, I will appropriately use the name Zimbabwe. Those who still refer to Zimbabwe as Rhodesia have a political opinion which entails the belief that Zimbabwe should have stayed Rhodesia, meaning that a white minority government should still be in power. These people wish that there was still a white minority government. This is not my view. This dissertation is devoid of current political opinion on my part as it is not relevant. I will only concern myself with the fact that Zimbabwe is the current politically recognized name of the land which is nestled in between the countries of South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique, and Zambia. I will refer to the country as it was called depending on the time period discussed – as is the most logical.

Chapter 1: Historical Context and the Birth of a “Native Regiment”

The RNR and RAR would both face the prospect of disbandment after WW1 and WW2 respectively, but while the RNR would succumb, the RAR would remain steadfast in its ability to consolidate itself as a permanent military outfit in Rhodesia. There was no “Native” Regiment which acted as a pennant military unit for Southern Rhodesia from 1918 – 1940, so the worry that the RAR would be disbanded was understandable as the colony had not needed one in-between the world wars. Understanding the history of the RAR’s forerunner, the RNR, and its feeder institution, the BSAP, is important in understanding the interesting instance of how the RAR operated until the fall of the white minority rule.

The Rhodesian Native Regiment

The first incarnation of the RAR would be the RNR, formed in 1916. The RNR was formed during WW1 as a reaction to the German General von Lettow-Vorbeck, who had violated a predetermined gentlemen’s agreement stating white Europeans would not use African peoples to fight their wars.⁶ While fighting the Germans on the border of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), the British South Africa Company (BSAC) was instructed to assist in raising an African Regiment, to be officered by whites. 500 Ndebele men were supposed to be gathered as enlisted personnel; however, the Ndebele would end up being a minority next to the Shona people who were perceived as the larger group within the regiment. White men were pulled from

⁶ Binda, *Masodja*, 4.

the British South African Police (BSAP) to officer this new unit. These two tribes, Shona and Ndebele, were differentiated in the opinion of the British, who viewed the Ndebele as warlike bullies of the Shona, whereas the Shona were seen as weaker, more peaceful, and victims of the Ndebele. Possibly this initial focus on the Ndebele came from the history of the BSAC working with the Ndebele people during the time of the Pioneer Column. Cecil John Rhodes had taken advantage of the illiteracy of the leader of the Ndebele to illicitly purchase the land that would become Northern and Southern Rhodesia.⁷ In this way, the BSAC could have seen the Ndebele as a source of soldiers. As will be discussed later, the ethnic makeup of the RNR, and RAR was much more complex than simply the Ndebele and Shona.

The mission of the RAR was to aid the British Empire in the fight against the Axis powers. They were formed in 1940 but spent four years training in Rhodesia until they were called up and sent overseas to Burma. The RAR's first fight would materialize in the form of clearing any remaining Japanese forces still alive and resisting in Burma in 1944.⁸ After WW2, the RAR's mission would change time and time again with each battle the British Empire called them into. After Burma, the RAR would be sent to Egypt to keep the peace, and then to Malaya to fight Chinese Communists. In this way, the RAR acted primarily as an infantry supporting contingent for the British Empire's main fighting forces. At home between skirmishes, the RAR would perform guard duties at different Rhodesian Air Force (RAF) bases, including Thornhill, Heany, and Kumalo while operating out of their headquarters in Salisbury (now Harare).

⁷ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*. 2.

⁸ Binda, *Masodja*, 59. And Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 191.

The BSAP and the RAR

It is important to highlight the role which the BSAP had in RAR history. Once the BSAC had colonized both Southern and Northern Rhodesia, they needed Africans to cooperate with the white authorities if there was any chance for white minority control. To control such large territories, with limited people and resources, the whites needed to get local Africans into their service. This promulgated the formation of an African manned police force. The BSAP is interwoven into the history of the RNR and RAR as the BSAP was also used as a para-military outfit which kept order, sometimes in overtly cruel ways, of the local populace of African peoples. The role of the BSAP ranged from policing to tax collecting.

The practice of white colonials employing African men for their services and skills was common, as it allowed Africans to be wage laborers, and it gave whites employees who knew more about Southern Africa than they did. For example, the Native Commissioner of Southern Rhodesia in 1898, Lieutenant Colonel C. L. Carbutt, used trackers and other African men to accompany him on a ten-day trip into the bush to visit local African leaders. His mission was to convince these leaders to pay taxes to the BSAC and colonial powers.⁹ Carbutt would explain that the African populace would be pestered by the colonials constantly, so they should work with them hand in hand to make the relationship easier.¹⁰ These kinds of roles for African men were common, and the tracking ability of Africans, and Askari soldiers, would continue to be a point of pride for whites right up until the end of the Bush War¹¹. The white leaders saw the abilities of their Askaris to be a product of the efficiency and professionalism of their military

⁹ C. L. Carbutt, "Reminiscences of a Native Commissioner", *The Southern Rhodesia Native Affairs Department Annual (NADA)*, 11. (1933).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 65.

structure. When the RNR was disbanded at the end of the war in 1919, the men of the RNR were able to go back to their work in the BSAP. Regardless of intent, the BSAP acted as a pseudo-reserve unit for any possible Askari regiments needed in a possible time of war.

The raising of the RAR in 1940 was made easy by the presence of this permanent police unit. The training of the RAR Askaris was shorter at the outset of WW2 than during WW1, being 6 weeks instead of the previous 3 months, and the NCOs of the RAR would be pulled from the best of the BSAP. The training was reduced during WW2 to quickly get recruits into the regiment. Importantly, all the men of the RAR, RNR, and BSAP were volunteers, and were not drafted into service. This fact can support a larger argument and discussion that the Askaris of the various incarnations of the regiments stayed in the regiments of their own volition. While the British Empire had previously press ganged men into service across all of its territories and colonies, the risk of forcing such a large number of men to serve could have easily backfired in the form of successful revolt in the context of Southern Rhodesia as the white minority was extremely small: five million to two hundred thousand. This made it particularly important that Askaris joined by their own volition, and were persuaded, rather than forced to join.

Understanding the connection between the RAR and BSAP is imperative to understanding the deep roots of the culture of military service for certain Africans in Rhodesia. As long as there were men who were prepared to serve in the BSAP, there were going to be men who were ready to be called up into the service of the RAR. The BSAP was established in the last decade of the 19th Century, so the traditions of African policing were extremely strong in Southern Rhodesia. In this way, the Rhodesian case was distinctive, as these Askaris were sought and trusted by many white Rhodesians. This might have guaranteed the survivability of the RAR

after WW2, after UDI, and up until Ian Douglas Smith's white minority government lost the Bush War and Rhodesia became Zimbabwe.

Tribes and 'Martial Races' in the BSAP and RAR

The BSAP mainly used Shona men within the police force. Again, like the RNR and RAR, a racial bias seemed to be present in the makeup of the military and police outfits. However, this bias was not because whites saw the Shona as a martial race. The BSAP would be used to enforce the laws laid down by the colonial government, and these men would need to be able to extract things, like taxes, from fellow Africans within Rhodesia. The colonial government was interested in using a different tribe's people to extract such taxes. The government would intentionally use the Shona people to interact with other tribes, rather than their own tribe, to ensure the tasks would be carried out without hesitation. Using men who had no connection to the people they were policing, e.g. using the Shona to extract taxes from the Ndebele, would ensure police stuck to regulation and did not look to aid the people they were policing due to bias or an overt connection between them.

While the Shona made up the majority of the RAR, the Ndebele were indeed sought after. The Shona were not targeted but were the most easily recruited, as the Ndebele made up just 20% of Africans in Rhodesia. There is evidence that the Ndebele people were rather the preferred ethno-linguistic group to serve in the BSAP and RAR, despite their size; the Ndebele were considered a martial race by the colonial government as they were romanticized as being descended from the famous Zulu people who had a reputation among whites as a warrior

people.¹² The Ndebele also had a reputation as being better skilled due to their local knowledge of the people and land, so were specifically sought after for the BSAP.¹³ This preference for the Ndebele can be seen over time as the RNR slowly grew in local recruits during its short lifespan and diminished in foreign recruits. The RAR would continue this trend during the 40s. The RAR was composed of 60-70% foreign (to Rhodesia) African Askaris, but as time went on, this number shrank to 45% during WW2, and 25% during the late 40s and 50s.¹⁴ The Ndebele were preferred but many chose not to enlist because they preferred the higher-paying jobs in the mines of South Africa (SA).¹⁵ The men of Mashonaland, Nyasaland, and Portuguese East Africa chose to enlist in the RAR or take jobs in Rhodesia because they were able to fill the empty jobs left open by the Ndebele who left to work as migrant laborers. Similarly, Risto Marjomaa argued that in the case of the KAR the Yao were the preferred ethno-linguistic group for service as they were considered a martial race. He argued that because they were targeted, the Yao found military service more attractive¹⁶. This does not seem to parallel the recruitment of the Ndebele for the RAR in Southern Rhodesia, even though their numbers did grow slowly in the RAR, as the Ndebele remained averse to the RAR for a long time. Other similar reasons for the geographical migrations of the Ndebele to SA can be interpreted via the centers of African languages. The Ndebele and Zulus had a mutually intelligible language which gave them more reason to move southward. In this way, the idea of the RAR being split via martial races has some psychological credibility. The RAR may have preferred certain races but could only take the men they could

¹² Timothy Stapleton, "The Composition of the Rhodesia Native Regiment during the First World War: A Look at the Evidence", *History in Africa*, 30, 2003. 286.

¹³ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 22.

¹⁴ Stapleton, "The Composition of the Rhodesian Native Regiment During the First World War", 29.

¹⁵ Stapleton, *Africa Police and Soldiers*, 40.

¹⁶ Risto Marjomaa, "The Martial Spirit: Yao Soldiers in British Service in Nyasaland (Malawi), 1895-1939", *Journal of African History* 44, 3, 2003. 1.

get. While the idea of martial races existed in the white Rhodesian consciousness, the limited ability of the RAR to enlist Ndebele made the issue of Askaris in the RAR being of a martial status less important. Ethno-linguistic groups in the RAR were not the result of targeted recruiting, but the result of recruiting the men who were willing and available.

This idea of pitting tribe against tribe has been argued to be a creation of white European colonial powers. This is a problematic argument, as African villages had raided one another before the arrival of Europeans, and so the idea that European arrival spelled war between tribes seems less valid. This argument also points out that many Africans did not seem to connect this kind of raiding and warfare with race and tribe prior to European arrival. When Europeans started to colonize Sub-Saharan Africa, they constructed race as a way to understand the different ethno-linguistic groups in Southern Africa as new practices of science (which we now consider pseudo-science) and eugenics were being explored. Darwinism was used as a system to explain and support the division of white Europeans and Africans along the lines of primitive and advanced civilizations, which manifested in the division of peoples along the lines of Europeans' new ideas about race. With this categorization, came the onset of Europeans ascribing stereotypes to different settlements, and deciding which one was more intellectual, strong, weak, and ignorant. This same system of categorization was done in Rwanda and would result in the minority Tutsis being stereotyped as intelligent, and trained for leadership, and the Hutus being described as brawny and slower intellectually, therefore stuck socio-economically into a low status. This kind of categorization of certain ethno-linguistic groups into different positions in society could, and would, result in catastrophe when Africans themselves would resent one another for the social structures which European colonizers imposed upon them. An example of this catastrophe can be seen by looking at the events of the Rwanda genocide in

1994. This history of racial categorization is then important to understand when considering how a segregated society and military unit operated.

With the onset of WW1, the RNR was raised, and with the onset of WW2, the RAR was raised. Both would be pulled from the police force so the Askari regiments of Rhodesia were always ready to serve “Queen and Country”. The men of the RNR, RAR, and BSAP were all volunteers and were chosen due to their specific geographical relation to both whites, and one another.

Chapter 2: Recruitment and Life in Garrison

The majority of time served by the officers and enlisted men of the RAR was spent on Rhodesian soil in garrison. A minority of time was spent away actually fighting wars, battles, and in skirmishes. For this reason, it is important to explore how the lives of men of the RAR in garrison aided the service's institution and reputation, enabling it to remain after the immediate need for the unit was seen to wane. The motives for why men joined can also illuminate why the regiments were able to persevere. The RAR was seen as professional and gleaming, and so was kept for the pride it brought white and black Rhodesians when they watched parades and ceremonies. The RAR, when not at war, served to employ men and instill in them a belief and loyalty to the white minority government, so it served Rhodesia as an indoctrination tool for the African populace it looked to govern. These reasons and more are why life in garrison is an important factor in how the RAR escaped disbandment.

Recruiting

Recruitment is an important aspect of any military organization, and the RAR spent time and money ensuring they were attracting and enlisting the right men. Along with recruitment, the lives of the officers and enlisted who lived in Rhodesia in garrison can be revealing when considering how the RAR operated as a unit. These aspects of the RAR can help explain how this unit was able to become successful in being consolidated as a permanent unit in Rhodesia.

As previously discussed, it is apparent that the large make-up of the RAR consisted of mainly Shona people.¹⁷ While the Ndebele were seen as martial, they were not widely recruited during the formation of the RAR. From the perspective of the colonial government there were benefits to trying to recruit Shona men than Ndebele men. The newspaper *Parade* confirms these findings, with numbers sourced from an issue printed during the time in which the RAR was still training recruits, prior to the Regiment reaching full strength in 1940:

The Rhodesian African Rifles are slowly being licked into shape and show signs of becoming a real first-rate native regiment. Recruiting is satisfactory. Most of the African Soldiers are Mashonas [Shonas], with a good sprinkling of Matabele [Ndebele], Angonis from Nyasaland and Shangaans from Portuguese East Africa.¹⁸

Parade shows that the RAR had a specific ethnic makeup. While newspapers give us some ideas of the general numbers of ethno-linguistic groups in the regiment, they should not be taken at face value. Geography, not just ethno-linguistic groups, played a large part in recruitment. These areas were all either on the borders of, or completely outside of, the colony of Southern Rhodesia. The formation of the RNR for example, was comprised of up-to 71% non-Rhodesian Africans.¹⁹ Plumtree, a Rhodesian town bordering modern day Botswana, was a source of many recruits and was the majority ethno-linguistic group of Rhodesians who were in the RNR.²⁰ Plumtree still exists today and is located a little over 72 miles south-west of Bulawayo. The dominant ethnicity which sits in this area are the Kalanga. The Kalanga was the biggest group of local Rhodesians in the RNR, surpassing both the Shona and Ndebele. Stapleton records that the

¹⁷ Stapleton, "The Composition of the Rhodesia Native Regiment".

¹⁸ "Airmail Bulletin for Rhodesia" *Parade: Middle East Weekly*, vol. 1, no. 10, 19 October 1940, Sourced online from the British Library.

¹⁹ Stapleton, "The Composition of the Rhodesia Native Regiment during the First World War", 288.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 291.

Shona and Ndebele made up 40% of the Rhodesian Askaris in the RNR (making up 20% each) with the Kalanga (and other smaller groups) making up the other 60% of the Rhodesian-born Askaris in the Regiment.* This is surprising because accounts from white officers focus not on the Kalanga, but the Shona and Ndebele when discussing local Rhodesian troops. The Kalanga, remember, are a very small minority of Africans in Rhodesia, but made up the majority of Rhodesian Africans in the RAR. These men were targeted for their location bordering Botswana, rather than their marital status. Why enlist men from peripheral areas into the RAR rather than the larger African population of Rhodesia? The reason is more than likely due to the fear of a large contingent of armed and trained Africans within a white minority colony. The possibility of training and arming African men originating within Southern Rhodesia could result in a successful revolt. Brigadier Heppenstall wrote on the subject of the disbandment of the RNR with reference to this idea with the following:

“The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Rhodesia Native Regiment fought in the East African campaign from 1916 to 1919 when they were disbanded. I suspect that this was due to memories of the Matabele [Ndebele] and Shona uprisings in the mid [18]90s. The powers that be obviously did not want a couple of thousand men fully trained and armed who might become dissatisfied with their lot.”²¹

In this way, recruitment of certain ethnicities of Sub-Saharan Africa into the RNR and RAR can be seen not so much as a strategy which was concerned with martial races, but more so with a

²¹ Brigadier Heppenstall, e-mail to author, September 7, 2019.

Note

* It is important to understand that the numbers collected from the various secondary sources are all estimates. 71% is the maximum percentage of the non-Rhodesian Africans that *could* have been in the RNR regiment. The roster and documented numbers of which ethno-linguistic groups that were recruited were not kept well. Numbers put together are piecemeal and should be understood as estimates. The larger theme of the argument should be considered, rather than the specific numbers as these numbers are different when citing different sources, such as Timothy Stapleton, Melvin Page, and Peter McLaughlin, who have all looked at and counted the numbers of recruits differently.

mind to prevent, or make it difficult to stage a successful large African uprising. While in Chapter 1 it was explained that Ndebele men were sought after, it also seems that the RAR and Rhodesia as a colony continued to resist the BSAP's strategy of enlisting local Africans. As previously explained, once men were recruited into the BSAP, they were likely to serve in the RAR. The recruiting strategies of the RAR were why the unit was so successful at winning over white Rhodesians, as their Askaris posed less of a threat, and so the government was more encouraged to allow the regiment to continue after WW2.

While racial biases may, or may not, have been at the core of recruiting missions, racial ideas and understandings of stereotypes of different tribes was always present. John "Digger" Essex-Clark, an Australian who served with the RAR for much of his military career, has commented on the differences between the Ndebele and the Shona, reinforcing the image of the two having the identities of a bully, and a victim respectively.

"The Ndebele were tall, strong, arrogant, and self-opinionated and natural warriors. The Shona were smaller, thought more deeply and were shrewder; they, of course, had spent many years sparring with and avoiding Ndebele warriors."²²

The regiments were also said to have only been very successful with specific races of Africans due to various unconfirmable rumors that circulated within the regiment, some being that no white officers were able to speak the Ndebele language Sindebele (which was a strange rumor as the Ndebele did not make of the majority of the regiment). Other rumors were that the Ndebele were too proud as warriors to serve alongside the less warlike Shona, so no Ndebele men were

²² Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 66.

motivated to join.²³ There is no evidence that these rumors did affect recruiting efforts however, because troubles recruiting specific races do not seem apparent.

For the above reasons, the regiment was always racially conscious of its Askaris. The unit did not seem to be negatively affected by this kind of stereotyping between the different tribes which served. In fact, during the training of RAR recruits it was said that any differences between men based on ethno-linguistic background seemed to fade.²⁴ In a racially segregated unit, race acted to differentiate between officers and enlisted, but not between the Askari enlisted. This unit was durable and able to escape disbandment as its Askaris did not fight amongst themselves, nor think one better than the other. This was regardless of the perceived (and usually stereotypical) differences which officers such as Essex-Clark saw as obvious.

Heppenstall's comment on not wanting a standing Askari army also raises more questions when considering how the RAR became a solidified and trusted military unit. One way in which the RAR helped both the recruiting efforts and their overall image was via parades and shows. The WW2 newspaper *Parade* details how the RAR took part in the celebration of Southern Rhodesia's Jubilee in 1940 when the regiment had just been formed.²⁵ The "bearing and the drill of the troops" was reportedly "excellent". The occasion was even joined by a performance of the BSAP Native Band. These events which displayed African Askaris in full military regalia allowed the RAR to be shown off to both white and black Rhodesians. Africans have since explained that they were awe struck when they saw the variety of parades which the RAR put on, and so recruiting efforts were made easier with every parade and show put on. Pride in seeing

²³ Binda, *Masodja*, 42.

²⁴ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 40.

²⁵ "Airmail Bulletin for Rhodesian Troops, Southern Rhodesia's Jubilee" Parade: Middle East Weekly, vol. 1, no. 7, 28 September 1940, Sourced online from the British Library.

smartly dressed soldiers expertly parading inspired young men to join up. The same is true for countries like the United States today, and so is not a distant idea to believe. The modern-day Marine Corps uses similar tactics, like televising the Silent Drill Platoon to recruit individuals. An appreciation for the smartly dressed Marines performing well disciplined drill is the same effect which many African boys felt when they saw fellow Africans marching through the streets.

The RAR always ensured its Askari troops had a professional image and a clean and crisp appearance. Every time an Askari looked to go leave their camp, whether it be on leave or liberty, if they went off base, they were required to be inspected by the Duty NCO. On or off base Askaris always had to be in uniform unless given written permission. Any failed inspections would result in the privilege of leave withdrawn.²⁶ Inspections also seemed to be important information for the general populace of Rhodesia as well. Newspapers published how the RAR conducted their inspections.

“They have been inspected by the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief who was pleased with the material sent to him from Rhodesia. The Battalion has been fully equipped and will soon commence field training with the King’s African Rifles on a brigade basis.”²⁷

The good news of the RAR’s crisp reputation was looked forward to by citizens back home during WW2. This outward show of smartness in appearance is one way which white and black Rhodesians took pride in the RAR and enabled it to survive.

Along with parades and shows, many Askaris were drawn to the RAR due to the men who they saw as already part of the regiment. The RAR looked to encourage young men to join

²⁶ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 99.

²⁷ “E Africa Training.”, Springbok, no. 119, 27 January 1944, Sourced online from the British Library.

up by having young African boys watch well dressed and uniformed Askaris marching through the streets of Salisbury (Harare), Umtali (Mutare), and Bulawayo. Stapleton explains this in reference to the BSAP, noting that Sergeant Chitawa joined the BSAP to “become an African constable and look smart with the khaki uniform”²⁸. African men wanted to join for much the same reason many men join the military today: glory, adventure, the sex-appeal, etc. This is one way we can see the RAR as just as necessary a unit as the Rhodesian Light Infantry (RLI) (an all-white Rhodesian unit), as the men who fought in it joined for similar reasons, rather than that of being pressed into service.

There seems to be one unifying factor which links many Africans who enlisted in the RAR. Most of the men of joined seemed to have been educated in mission schools and/or looked to work in the cities of Rhodesia rather than work on farms away from higher population centers. PTE Dube Shradreck was one such African who grew up on a farm but was soon sent away for an education at the David Livingstone Mission. After stopping his education prematurely due to his family’s inability to continue paying, he went back to the farm, but soon found work in the city (not named) as a telephone operator for Supersonic. He would work in the city for two months before enlisting in the RAR.²⁹ Another example is PTE Mamburudze Chipo who started working in Bulawayo for Consolidated Textiles 1967, moved to Umtali in the textile industry there in 1970, he then left in 1972 for Salisbury for another textile job. That same year he would enlist in the RAR.³⁰ Dube is an example of an educated African from a farming background, who turned to working in an urban setting, and Mamburudze is an example of an urban African; both

²⁸ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 20.

²⁹ Brigadier David Heppenstall, *NHOWO: The Magazine of the Rhodesian African Rifles Regimental Association*, 6, 2, October 2017. 18.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 19

of them were attracted to the RAR. For these reasons, it seems that many Africans who supported the RAR as a military institution interacted with white Rhodesians more as they lived in centers of higher white populations and resided and worked closer to them. These men moved to cities for its economic and social advantages. The RAR was another method for these men to continue their goals to become financially stable, and allowed for them to be trusted by whites more in society. In many cases African farmers who had connections to the RAR usually bought their farms after having served for some time in the RAR.

Other motivations for enlisting were also driven by financial need. It is true, then and today, that many men join military service with a short-term plan to secure reliable and regular wages. The same was true for many men who joined the RAR. As a regular soldier continued to serve in the RAR, he would have an increase in pay for every rank he attained above soldier, being the lowest, then on to Lance Corporal, Corporal and so on.³¹ Men joined for the prospects of better opportunities once they left the service, as whites would see them as loyal, more trustworthy, and better Africans to work with. Men joined for the security which the RAR gave to their family, providing housing, and permitting them to not live in the barracks if they had a wife. In this way, soldiers were perceived as lazy by many local Africans in Rhodesia and seen as men who chose comfort in conspiring with whites for social upward-mobility rather than loyalty to their fellow Africans. African Rhodesians did have positive opinions of the RAR, as PTE Mamburudze Chipu was recorded as having said that he was persuaded to join the RAR by his uncle, a member of the RAR, after having met up him at Llewellyn Barracks.³² These motivations did not seem to negatively affect the RAR in its ability to remain active after WW2,

³¹Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 26.

³² Brigadier David Heppenstall, *NHOWO: The Magazine of the Rhodesian African Rifles Regimental Association*, 6, 2, October 2017. 18.

as the unit, and the larger colony as a whole, could use the fact that many men wanted financial and social security in their favor. Once the 1960s started, and more conflict arose due to African nationalism, resentment for African soldiers among other Africans grew. But for the decade following WW2, the white minority government was able to utilize this willingness to serve for material and social gain to draw manpower from the larger majority which surrounded them.

Recruiting was an immeasurably important facet of the RAR, as it is in any military institution past and present. How a service conducts its recruiting efforts largely affects the civilian populace's understanding and opinions of it. The recruiting of men into the RAR should be seen as very similar to other institutions, yet different due to their racially conscious tactics and understandings of the recruits they were enlisting. These conscious attitudes and behaviors while recruiting, as well as their popularity among white and black Rhodesians, built a respectable reputation for the RAR and encouraged their retainment as a permanent unit in Rhodesia after WW2.

Training

The training of Askaris was an opportunity for men to be indoctrinated into the mindset and mission of the RAR. It was an opportunity for Africans to “buy in” to the process and purpose of their new military outfit, and so solidify the confidence which Rhodesia had in their trust of a “native” regiment.

The training for the enlisted men of the Regiment was to be 3 months long at the outset of the RAR's birth in 1940.³³ This is especially interesting as many of the Askaris had also been

³³ Binda, *Masodja*, 4.

taken from the lower ranks of the BSAP. One could reasonably question why such extensive training would be required of men with prior experience. During WW1, another regiment would be raised in the RNR, called 2RNR. This slow growth of the unit indicated the appreciation which Rhodesian society and its military felt towards the Askaris in their ability to fight the Germans. The Askari performance in WW1 planted a seed in the collective mind of Rhodesian society that Askari troops were valuable. If this was not the case, and Askaris were not sought after, it would make little sense to double the size of the RNR within 2 years of its training and fighting during WW1. But unlike the RNR, while white society did appreciate the RAR during WW2 as a military institution, there was still an opinion that these Askaris were childlike and simple in their thinking.³⁴ After WW2, Askaris were subject to 3 additional months of recruit training, totaling 6 months. This increase of training after WW2 was because there was less pressure to get men trained and off to fight.

Company Sergeant Major (CSM) Obert Veremu, of 1RAR and 3RAR, was one of a few Askari drill instructors who trained new Askari recruits during the Bush War. While Veremu served during the Bush War, his role in the RAR can be seen as a continuation of the teachings and morals which the RAR looked to instill in Askaris during and directly after WW2. As far back as WW1, the RAR used Africans as recruit drill instructors. Sergeant Teulo was one such drill instructor who served in the RNR.³⁵ Veremu's billet (job) as a drill instructor alone is an interesting statement about how Askaris perceived their service. Veremu once said that "I joined the Army when I was 20 years old, in 1953. My uncle is a soldier, and I knew if I joined the Army, I would be all right. I enjoy the work very much... These terrors [terrorists] are bad men. I

³⁴ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*. 45.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

have seen tribesmen who have been beaten to death by them.”³⁶ These kinds of stories show that Askaris did have personal reasons for their service, as well as material ones. Veremu and Teulo could have told their recruits similar stories to encourage them in their training. If white men had been the primary instructors for Askari recruits, they could have faced difficulty convincing Africans to obey the orders of white men, because they are both Officers, and because they are white, when fighting in the RAR. While Veremu was speaking of the Bush War thirty years later, instructors during WW2 would likely have encouraged their recruits to fight the enemy in similar ways, as does every generation encourage their men to fight whatever enemy the country is encountering. Recruits had fellow Africans serving as their instructors, and so they could have been more so convinced to follow the orders of white NCOs and officers by a persuasive authority figure with whom they could more closely identify based on race, language, and social status. It could be argued that a more convincing factor would be the threat of court martial for disobeying orders, but the credibility of an authority figure is just as crucial in the following of orders, not just the repercussions of legal military proceedings. What is integral for a unit’s success and the execution of its mission is their belief in why they are serving, and why they should do anything asked of them. All must follow orders, but to what extent they fulfill the task/order can be based on the respect individuals have for the authority figure issuing said order. Because the RAR used Africans to train fellow Africans, they were able to indoctrinate them more easily.

³⁶ Quote found in Major Michael P. Stewart, “The Rhodesian African Rifles: The Growth and Adaption of a Multicultural Regiment Through the Rhodesian Bush War, 1965 – 1980”. Master’s thesis presented to the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1998. 36. Originally from Beverley Whyte, “An Elite Group of Fighting Men,” *A Pride of Men: The Story of Rhodesia’s Army* (supplement to *Illustrated Life Rhodesia*), August 7, 1975: 16-19, 18.

Newspapers were one of the most important mediums for Askaris and the RAR to be praised by. Papers such as *Rafters* published shining accounts of Askaris and Africans in service, saying things such as “The military bearing of the Askaris are, clad in their smart tunics and shorts, is excellent, and their marching is something to be admired.”³⁷ These proud editorials served to promote the institution of “native” regiments in Rhodesia, and served to ease the worries of white Rhodesians when considering retaining the RAR as a permanent unit.

Rules, Regulations, and Sedition in the Ranks

When understanding the effectiveness and efficiency of a unit, it is important to take into account the level of judicial and non-judicial punishments to which it is subject. It is likely that a unit would not escape demobilization, especially if it was seen as unruly. While there would be an option to relieve a commander for a lack of good order and discipline, it could also be better to disband such a unit during a time of military drawdowns. The units which performed the best (professionally, respectably, and tactically) would surely survive, and those which were disbanded, such as the RNR after WW1, could have been too much trouble for their worth.

³⁷“Aikona: The Native in Rhodesia.”, *Rafters*, vol. 1, no. 8, 1 July 1942, Sourced online from the British Library.

Like any military outfit there were a plethora of rules and regulations which both officers and enlisted had to follow. But the same is true that many men found ways to get around these rules. For example, it was against regulations for RAR officers to lend or accept money from Askari soldiers. Officers could not accept gifts either.³⁸ While there is no evidence of money



A Wooden Stump carved into a stool and gifted to LT Wells-West

lending, there is in fact evidence that Askaris gave gifts to their officers. I possess a wooden stool, carved from a tree stump, which an Askari gave to Major John Rutherford Wells-West while he was a lieutenant. The stool may not be recorded as a reputable historical object because it was not found in a museum or academic collection, but the story behind it still stands as evidence that Askari enlisted and white officers circumvented regulation to show one another appreciation. This kind of object shows that the RAR had elements of close-knit bonds which gave it the reputation among those within the regiment that each man looked out for one another.

³⁸ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 99.

The survivability of the RAR was aided by men, officer and enlisted, who trusted one another enough for racial hierarchy to be set aside, even within a segregated unit.

Evidence above should be scrutinized, however. While men got along, many men also did not. The press reported that Askaris naturally took to being obedient under the leadership of young white officers.³⁹ This was not always the case, and these papers could have chosen to not investigate any problems, or report on any problems which they heard of in the ranks so as not to worry readers at home in Rhodesia. Ashley Jackson writes that sedition within the ranks of segregated colonial regiments was not uncommon.⁴⁰ It was the case that in the RAR every African had to address any white military member as Sir, even if the white man was not an officer.⁴¹ Problems occurred when Africans of a higher rank than that of a white enlisted member gave whites orders. In segregated South African units, this problem did not have any regulation to remedy the awkward clash of color-blind military regulation, and rigid social hierarchy.⁴² The remedy seemed to be for African NCOs to avoid giving orders to whites altogether. While the problem may have been present, this did not stop the reduction in the number of white NCOs, and increase in the number of black NCOs, therefore allotting more responsibility to Askaris during and after WW2.⁴³ This problem is not widely written about and is one aspect of the RAR which is muddy and could have resulted in much miscommunication and therefore ineffective leadership. This problem did not stop the RAR from serving up until the 80s and seems to have

³⁹ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁰ Ashley Jackson, "African Soldiers and Imperial Authorities: Tensions and Unrest During the Service of High Commission Territories Soldiers in the British Army, 1941 – 1946" *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25, 4, (1999). 652.

⁴¹ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 99.

⁴² Ashley Jackson, "African Soldiers and Imperial Authorities", 652.

⁴³ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 100.

been an obstacle also overcome by other regiments given that segregated regiments lasted until African independence.

Unlike today, corporal punishment was used within the RAR, and many white officers have been recorded as sometimes being quite inept with handling the affairs and complaints of African Askaris.⁴⁴ Regulation also barred collective complaints as “strictly forbidden.”⁴⁵ Again, such treatment of Africans is not recorded in much detail. Alcohol possession and consumption was initially not permitted for Askaris in the RAR, but these regulations loosened during WW2, and Askari NCOs were given the same “right” as any other British soldier to have a beer allowance. Regular Army officers were more “liberal” in their dealings with Africans than colonial administrators, so it seems that this initial worry about Africans drinking was spearheaded by white Rhodesian society more so than the colonial Army.⁴⁶ For the RAR specifically, regulations were much stricter in comparison to other British Colonial forces, and it is likely that racial prejudice factored into this, as Askaris were not trusted with alcohol as whites stereotypically expected fights to break out if they permitted its consumption. While the RAR may have operated in this way for racially motivated reasons, today alcohol is still regarded as a dangerous drug by many officers of modern desegregated militaries, and so is regulated via official rules and regulations. For this reason, while some practices and regulations of the RAR may seem unfair and racially motivated, the same rules still are used today, which suggests that they did not negatively affect the morale of the RAR more so than any other military.

The main difficulty which the RAR faced was a language barrier. While some officers spoke various African languages, many did not. White officers, such as “Digger” Essex-Clark,

⁴⁴ Ashley Jackson, “African Soldiers and Imperial Authorities”, 649. And Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 99.

⁴⁵ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 99. Originally from Chaza Gahadzikwa, *Bhurakuwacha*, 104.

⁴⁶ Ashley Jackson, “African Soldiers and Imperial Authorities”, 647.

were not born and raised in Rhodesia, and were assigned to the RAR by the needs of the British Army and Colonies at large. There was also no requirement that officers, or white NCOs, be competent in any language other than English. There were, however, examples of white officers being very capable of communicating in African languages. While there are various dialects and sub-dialects within Shona, Major John Rutherford Wells-West, a Lieutenant while a platoon commander, was said to have communicated well enough that his Askaris mistook him for one of their own first language speakers when hearing him speak Shona out of sight.⁴⁷ Language was then both a limiting factor between many officers and their African soldiers, if not the majority of officers, but was not a barrier that was never crossed by white NCOs and officers. The ability for some whites to adapt and learn African languages ensured the RAR ran more efficiently while being a segregated unit.

Life within the garrison however has been recorded as fair and humane. Soldiers were not kept in dirty conditions, as one Lance Corporal A.J. Mmakola said “everything is quite satisfactory, treatment as well as food”.⁴⁸ This statement should be considered more deeply, however. To each man their conditions may, in their perspective, appear vastly different in quality yet they may live in the same barracks. In this way, while A.J. Mmakola may have expressed content, many others may not have felt the same way. Askari living conditions started out very rough, and slowly increased in quality, as the soldiers themselves were required to build their own huts at the camp in Salisbury (Harare) during WW2.⁴⁹ 9 men were assigned to one hut, and as a man increased in rank, he could pick his roommates, and have fewer of them. Company

⁴⁷ Oral history given by Bridget Wells-West, wife of the now deceased Major John Wells-West. Account given in 2016.

⁴⁸ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 97.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

Sergeant Majors (CSM) and Regimental Sergeant Majors (RSM) were Askaris who rated their own quarters. Being a new unit with limited resources, the RAR made the most out of its initial creation in 1940 and was seen as well put together enough in 1946 when the decision was made to retain the regiments.

The recruitment of Africans and their lives in garrison show how the RAR operated during the majority of its time spent in operation. The RAR was not deployed for most of WW2 and made most of its impressions on the white Rhodesian population, which controlled the fate of the regiments. These Africans impressed both black and white Rhodesians via their regular parades, marches, and shows put on in the capitol Salisbury, and white towns such as Gwelo, Bulawayo, and Umtali. While whites did not directly see the prowess of Askaris in person, they read about them in reports during the course of the war.⁵⁰ Whites were also encouraged in their faith in the RAR due to the opportunities which the regiments gave to African men financially, and socially. These opportunities can be interpreted as either products of white society's self-preservation, or interest in genuinely wanting to enable Africans to succeed in white society. Either way, whites preferred an African who had undergone training and discipline in a structure which stressed African subservience to whites - rather than Africans who looked for opportunities outside of white Rhodesian societal approval, for example, via political black nationalism. This is the same reason which made the RAR more so respected by African individuals and African groups in their belief in the military as a system of upward social mobility. Where the RAR did experience troubles in discipline or moral, they made up for in their use of African recruit drill instructors and other loyal Askaris which looked to ensure the

⁵⁰ Papers included *Parade*, *Springbok*, *AFARF*, *Rafters*, *Exhibition News*, and the *United Services Review*

survival of the RAR, whether it be for personal material reason, or beliefs in the moral benefit which RAR brought to Rhodesia, and the British Empire.

In summary, the RAR operated like a well-oiled machine when in garrison and made sure that the public saw this in the form of parades, shows, and the way that the regiment's Africans conducted themselves in both their appearance, and their behavior. These aspects of garrison life, being recruiting, training, and the upholding of rules and regulations amounted to the outward appearance of a well-functioning regiment. The RAR faced an uphill battle to prove that they were a force worth retaining as a permanent African force for Southern Rhodesia to fund. This was due to its being the first African unit to be made permanent in Rhodesia, and also due to the initial worry and mistrust of white Rhodesians in arming and training Africans who could possibly mount a bloody revolt. Despite these worries, the RAR proved to white Rhodesia they were a needed and trusted regiment of professional soldiers.

Chapter 3: Deployment, Overseas Affairs, and Memories of the RAR Today.

The RAR faced the same threat of disbandment which the RNR succumbed to at the end of WW1. The RAR was able to consolidate itself as a permanent unit in service to Rhodesia due in part to white Rhodesians' pride in the unit, but also because of the Rhodesian government's belief that the Regiments operated effectively and efficiently in war. Newspapers explained the pride which Rhodesians had in Askaris for their service and has been confirmed by stories and accounts by officers after the fact.

Behavior on Deployment

One of the principal reasons which allowed the RAR to remain in operation after WW2 was their popularity among the civilian populace. One way they remained popular was by being perceived as well behaved and disciplined, and therefore trustworthy. While in Burma, the Askaris of the regiments were said to have given food to Japanese POWs, treating them humanely, not raping and pillaging the surrounding populace.⁵¹ But while the men were said to be respectful, this did not stop them from jokingly trying to scare the Japanese forces by playing into the racist views which the Burmese cultures already had about them. Askaris were said to tell locals that they were cannibals as a means of psychological warfare. Evidently the Japanese seemed to believe these myths and more as they would cut dead Askaris into pieces to stop them from coming back

⁵¹ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 188.

to life.⁵² This was also done for the amusement of many junior enlisted. In these ways, RAR Askaris showed themselves to be professional on deployment and trustworthy as professional soldiers, as they refrained from the illegal acts which most civilians had suffered from at the hands of various Allied and Axis forces. While they still engaged in self-proclaimed psychological warfare, be it jokingly or serious, they remained professional in the minds of white Rhodesians.

Before being let loose on liberty, the Askaris of the RAR were given regular safety briefs about the dangers of STDs out in town, the importance to refrain from fighting, and the restraint from getting into a situation where they were in trouble with the law. There are no records, outstanding sources, or papers declaring that there were any troubles abroad with Askaris which allowed for the RAR's clean and well-behaved reputation to hold up when on deployment. The practice of almost overexplaining the dangers of what could happen to soldiers on liberty is not an outdated or old phenomenon and is still done today in any unit which looks to prevent unwanted judicial proceedings out in town. The RAR did not have these worries because the Askaris were black, although a historian may be tempted to understand the safety briefs as a way of treating Askaris as irresponsible and childlike. Rather, the concern which officers and SNCOs had for Askaris going on liberty shows the care which the RAR had for upholding their already prestigious and respected reputation (as well as looking to curb headaches for everyone involved, office and enlisted, the morning after). This shows how the RAR looked to uphold the reputation it had garnered over time during WW2 and would enable it to be more appealing to keep as a permanent military unit.

⁵² Ibid., 189.

Escaping Disbandment

The RAR's service during their deployment in Burma during WW2 has been recorded as particularly effective, but with every Western civilization's militaries, major drawdowns were being experienced. How did this unit survive? One large reason can be attributed to the decision by the Rhodesian government to keep RAF bases operating after the end of WW2.⁵³ Askaris in the RAR were to either serve in the Rhodesian Askari Air Corps (RAAC) or remain in the RAR and stand duty as guards at these RAF bases such as Heany, Thornhill, and Kumalo. The decision to keep the RAR in operation can also be seen in the context of the growing threat of the Cold War. The need for active units across the Empire was in the interests of being able to mobilize quickly given a communist threat.⁵⁴ It is very possible that the RAR would have not escaped drawdowns if it were not for the decision by the Colony to keep their presence in the skies of Southern Africa, to face the threat of communism on the horizon. These arguments are more utilitarian, but it seems likely that the RAR did not simply escape disbandment just for these reasons. If the unit were not seen as competent, at home and abroad, and trustworthy (remember that the colonials always had an unconscious worry of an African uprising) then the RAR would have been reorganized to have fewer opportunities and benefits for Askaris. The colony did not have the numbers to create a large enough army to be solely manned by whites. With such a minority of whites the options of using an all-white outfit would not have been preferable strategically. It seems that having a larger African populace to draw from was more enticing given the fact the RAR showed an ability to train loyal soldiers.

⁵³ Binda, *Masodja*, 90.

⁵⁴ Timothy Stapleton, "'Bad Boys': Infiltration and Sedition in the African Military Units of the Central African Federation (Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe) 1953 – 63" *The Journal of Military History* 73, 4 (2009). 1174.

It is a feat that the RAR survived, because apart from disbandment, the RAR resisted any form of reorganization. The RAR remained in the same structure after WW2 suggesting that they showed the government they were worth resuming their normal structure. If the RAR had recorded abnormally high problems on deployment, or a dismal kill to death ratio in combat then the structure could have been adjusted in the following ways: Platoons would have had a higher ratio of white NCOs and officer to black enlisted personnel; fewer billets would be available for Africans, and so limit the number of leadership positions, for example, the highest African rank, being that of RSM, being scrapped; black enlisted personnel would shrink to sizes required solely for guard duty, and result in the RAR either remaining for ceremony, or serving as only a quick reaction force (QRF), rather than its own regimental sized unit designed for deployment and war. Various structures could have been instigated but were not as white society believed the RAR to be a badge of honor representing black loyalty to the white minority government and provided many Africans material and social opportunities for advancement.

When at War

The relationships and roles of Askaris and white personnel were in constant flux during times of battle. While in garrison, there were more clear-cut roles for Askaris staying out of command billets. When put into combat these roles shifted. The RAR's time spent in Malaya produced the largest number of Askari NCOs serving in the billet of Platoon Commander, a duty normally performed by Junior Lieutenants (white officers). These Askaris were not given commissions for their service in these billets.⁵⁵ For reference, this practice of putting enlisted into officer positions

⁵⁵ Ibid., 1175.

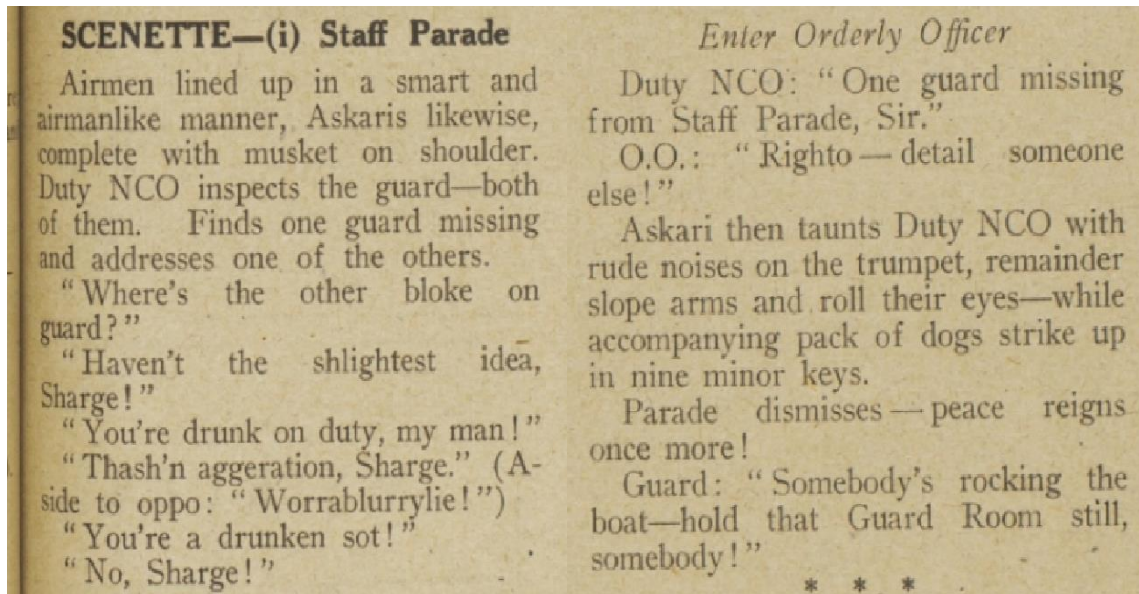
is not unheard of in modern Western militaries, when the need arises either via deaths in the Chain of Command (COC) or through a demonstration of greater leadership abilities on the part of the enlisted members. The performance of Askaris in these higher leadership positions was a clear message that they were men worth trusting, which is shown through the high numbers of cases in which this happened. The ability for the RAR to both serve the social expectations of Rhodesia, as a racially segregated unit, while also being able to bend social rules when in combat, allowed the RAR to remain popular among white Rhodesians who believed in the importance of racial hierarchies and still stay militarily effective. This mix of social order and needs-based military decisions allowed the RAR to survive force drawdowns following deployments in Burma and later in Malaya.

The press acted as one of the most crucial tools which molded popular opinions of the RAR. Most papers which addressed the RAR remained positive and spoke mainly of their professionalism. However, the RAR seemed to be in the minority in this way, as other colonial outfits would consistently butt heads with unfavorable accounts of their time at war.⁵⁶ This favorable coverage of the performance of the RAR enabled the white Rhodesians to hold high opinions of their “Native” Regiments as they read only good news. The argument that the RAR was popular socially, is evidenced in the numerous press releases. Newspapers published complimentary articles explaining the moral character of Askaris, as well as their ability in combat. For example, the *United Services Review* stated, “The African is a kind and cheerful soul... with him the Christmas spirit is characteristic.” This article was published just before Christmas and reported on the worth of Askaris character in relation to the holiday.⁵⁷ Along with

⁵⁶ Clayton, Killingray, *Khaki and Blue*, 217 – 218.

⁵⁷ *United Services Review*, vol. LXXXII, no. 4181, 21 Dec 1942.

moral praise, newspapers humanized many Askaris, reminding readers that these men were not just robotic professional soldiers who spent their only time drilling. This reality can be read when looking at an AFRAF article which mentioned Askaris in its joke section below.⁵⁸



The joke shows readers that just as they themselves might jeer and laugh at such an awkward situation which the Duty NCO found himself in, that Askaris would also think the situation was amusing. In this way, newspapers allowed for Askaris to be shown in a positive light in the eyes of white Rhodesian readers, praising their moral characters, and humanizing them at the same time. This kind of coverage allowed the RAR to remain popular socially, and aid in the regiments remaining a permanent military force in Rhodesia.

⁵⁸ LARYN-GITUS.” (Joke section) AFRAF, Rhodesia’s First Service Newspaper, 8 July 1943. Page 3

Returning Home

When the men of the RAR returned home from deployment the Askaris were warned to remain humble when speaking to any African civilians.⁵⁹ Fights that broke out between African soldiers who felt themselves superior to African civilians, were not uncommon.⁶⁰ While this hurt the image of the Askari after WW2, it did not hurt the larger reputation of the RAR, as an African schoolmaster, Peter Mhletshwa, once wrote that Africans should look to copy the proper behavior of white soldiers and civilians who got along well.⁶¹ The popularity of the RAR in Rhodesian society did not suffer badly then, as some Africans harkened to the good reputation of whites and the RAR as a whole.

Memories of the RAR

Both white and black members of the RAR have recorded their memories of the Regiment fondly. Many officers today keep in contact with former Askaris via the correspondence published in NHOWO. For example, NHOWO published in 2013 a few pages of eighteen pictures of former Askaris as they look today, and how they are doing, with the title “comrade pensioners”⁶². The RAR Regimental Association (RAR Regtl Assn) still raises funds to aid former Askaris financially who are living in Zimbabwe. The Association reports they are careful not to reveal the identities of these men for fear of the Zimbabwean government looking to harm them for their service in the RAR.⁶³ While not all Askaris may remember their time

⁵⁹ Stapleton, *African Police and Soldiers*, 63.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Brigadier David Heppenstall, *NHOWO: The Magazine of the Rhodesian African Rifles Regimental Association*, 2, 3, September 2013. 10.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

fondly in the RAR, the men who have been able to keep in contact, and are still alive have chosen to do so despite the long passage of time and the difficulty posed by geographical distance. This shows the importance which the RAR had not only to Askaris at the time of their service, but for decades after the fact. The tight bonds which Askari men and their officers shared should be noted when understanding the deep roots which the Regiment made into society. Many white “Rhodesians” today, and African Zimbabweans still keep in contact, showing that the regiment was not just a military tool of the government to fend off the Axis in WW2, and CTs (Communist Terrorists) post 1960, but a military organization which looked to care for its veterans, black or white, long after the country of Rhodesia was gone.

It is important to note that while the white minority government relied on Africans to serve in the military, the RAR was able to escape disbandment due to their proficiency in war and due to their solid reputation. When coming back to Rhodesia the need for soldiers and civilians to get along was not only felt by the white officers who beseeched their enlisted, but also by some African civilians as well. The government needed Africans to serve, so one could argue that disbandment was not really a concern. However, the concern of reorganization and major drawdowns was. The RAR escaped disbandment and reorganization by showing that the regiment was worth funding and continuing.

Conclusion

The RAR faced a real threat of disbandment after the end of WW2, and it escaped this fate due to its popularity. While its popularity was shaky among black Africans, it was extremely popular among whites. The RAR could have gone the way of the RNR in 1918 but did not because of what it did in garrison and on deployment.

The RAR was a paramount military outfit which was perceived as professional and smartly outfitted when at home in garrison and marching in parade, and just as professional as a unit that accomplished its mission when deployed in Burma during WW2 and in Malaya soon after in the early 50s. The reason this is so important is because Askaris faced more scrutiny than white units such as the RLI. In Rhodesia whites collectively regarded themselves as superior to Africans, so whites judged African soldiers for their failings in comparison to whites. This explains earlier points about Askaris not initially having the same right under military regulation to possess or drink alcohol. African RSMs held immense authority in the regiment, and were highly respected, and since remembered, by white Rhodesians. In war, Africans would serve in roles reserved for whites due to their necessity, and due to the trust which whites had for them. A major reason why segregation was preserved after Africans showed themselves competent in command was because the RAR had to continue to reflect white Rhodesian society. However popular the regiment was, and however trusted Askaris were, the majority of whites wanted the military hierarchy to reflect their imagined ideal society of racial hierarchy.

It has been pointed out by academics and friends of mine that the necessity for an army in Rhodesia post-WW2 would seem logical only given the threat of Communism, and the fact that almost every country needs (this is a modern idea I would argue, and not one of the Rhodesian

colony in the 50s), and has a military whether its population likes it or not. This counterargument is valid, but does not properly consider, the importance in Rhodesian society of its ideology of race, and the power of that ideology over the entire colony and its systems of government. The RAR escaped disbandment, and reorganization because it performed well in all capacities, and proved it was more important than merely utilitarian need.

While Rhodesia may be seen in hindsight to have needed an Askari military due to numbers (a whites-only military would not be large or strong enough to protect the colony), this was not the case from 1918 – 1940. Rhodesia did not have an Askari military between World Wars. The worry that the RAR would meet the same fate of the RNR is not outside of the realm of reason. While Northern Rhodesia had the NRR, which had Askari soldiers, but mostly African porters, Southern Rhodesia did not have a permanent military force and raised its Askaris only when the larger British Empirical machine called for more troops from the colonies. It should also be understood that Southern Rhodesia could have dissolved the RAR just as they did the RNR because of the role which the BSAP played in the colony. The BSAP acted as a para-military force which kept order domestically and was also available to be called to fight in a solely military capacity if the need arose for soldiers – this was what the BSAP did on the northern borders of Rhodesia during WW1, before the RNR was formed. For this reason, the argument that the RAR was kept because “every country needs a military” is an argument which ignores the role of African police in the Rhodesian context.

The counter argument also ignores the fear which whites had of arming Askaris. Rhodesia arguably did not need a military and could have dealt with the needs of the Empire by calling up Africans to serve as Askaris only when the need arose. The idea of training Africans in the use of weapons and the use of military tactics was probably what caused the RNR to cease to

exist. The RAR settled this fear by reasoning that Askaris were loyal and dedicated to the white Rhodesian colony. If Askaris were reported, key word being reported, to have been less obedient, then the RAR would not have been trusted, as the BSAP was trusted enough to serve after the RNR was disbanded.

Rhodesia saw that the RAR not only provided continued security, but also that the RAR was a particularly adept military unit which was reported on during WW2 as professional and efficient. Even more importantly, the RAR enabled Africans to be indoctrinated into supporting the continued system of acting as a colony of the British Empire. As Africans were trained to follow the orders of whites, they were also supporting the ideals which reflected white society in Rhodesia. This became even more important for Ian Douglas Smith when he made the decision to go through with UDI as he and the rest of white Rhodesia had the support of some Africans (albeit an extremely small fraction of Africans) who would continue to support a system where whites ruled over Africans. So, while Rhodesia did not need a military, it decided to retain the RAR as it stood as a symbol of successful white European governance over a majority black African land.

The RAR escaped disbandment and did so comfortably only because of the reputation which it collected during its time training in garrison from 1941 – 1944, during its first deployment in WW2 to Burma, and the continued success it garnered after it was consolidated as a permanent military unit. The RAR is remembered today with pride by its white and black veterans and is studied today so modern militaries can understand how a military was able to successfully operate while segregated along racial lines. This unit serves as a strange reminder of how the British Empire, and the later independent country of Rhodesia, would use Africans to fight its wars, and to later fight their fellow Africans. The survival of the RAR is fascinating and

teaches us about how countries create their militaries to reflect their social ideals and norms.

What is important to remember is that the desires of society fade away when the shooting starts.

The last concern men have is social hierarchy when looking to their left and right in a fox hole.

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