

## **EXTRA-TERRITORIAL AFRICAN POLICE AND SOLDIERS IN SOUTHERN RHODESIA (ZIMBABWE) 1897–1965<sup>1</sup>**

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*Tim Stapleton*  
*Trent University, Canada*

### **Abstract**

During the early and mid-twentieth century, the security forces of colonial Southern Rhodesia were dominated by African men from neighbouring territories such as Nyasaland, Northern Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa who had entered the regional migrant labour system. This included many with previous military experience. As the British South Africa Police (BSAP) evolved from a paramilitary occupation force into a professional law enforcement organisation, extra-territorial recruits were phased out in favour of local men fluent in local languages with western-style education. Despite this, African police from other territories continued to have a disproportionate impact on the force as many became long-serving and accomplished members, who dominated the paramilitary African Police Platoon and served as drill instructors for all recruits. During the First World War, most African soldiers in the Rhodesia Native Regiment (RNR) were migrant workers recruited directly from Southern Rhodesia's mines. During the Second World War, just under half of the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) originated from other territories. The recruiting of extra-territorial African soldiers declined further in the 1950s and early 1960s as military conditions of service in their respective homes improved, the Masvingo-Gutu area became a dependable source of local recruits and eventually newly independent black-ruled states came into conflict with white-ruled Rhodesia.

## **Introduction**

The history of Southern Africa's regional migrant labour system is well known. With the development of the mining industry in the late nineteenth century, Africans from places like Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland (today's Zambia and Malawi, respectively) travelled south to enter the colonial capitalist economy as wage workers. Although their ultimate goal was usually employment in the gold mines of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, many did not make it that far and worked in the various mines of Southern Rhodesia. They were motivated by the need to pay tax and a lack of opportunities for cash cropping at home. Recruited by colonial labour bureaus and housed in closed mine compounds that kept them away from union organisers, they became a transient and easily exploitable form of cheap labour.<sup>2</sup> One aspect of this system that has not been discussed in the existing literature is that some migrant workers, particularly those with previous colonial military experience at home, entered uniformed service in the security forces of Southern Rhodesia and for many years were central to the coercive power of that settler state.

Although often distrusted and resented by the dominant white settler minority, black security force personnel were a constant factor in the history of Southern Rhodesia. In Mashonaland, the British South Africa Company's Native Department first employed African police in 1894 and found them better at collecting tax than European police. The first African police in Matabeleland were recruited in 1895 from the defeated regiments of the former Ndebele Kingdom. Founded in 1903 as the territory's law enforcement organisation, the British South Africa Police (BSAP) employed ever more African police, and by the Second World War they represented a strong majority in the force.<sup>3</sup> For the first half of the twentieth century, Southern Rhodesia did not have a regular army and relied on the BSAP for defence. During both world wars, the small white community struggled to sustain large military units for participation in Britain's various campaigns and therefore formed temporary black infantry battalions under white leadership. The Rhodesia Native Regiment (RNR) fought in German East Africa from 1916 to 1918 and the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) served in Burma from 1944 to 1945. While both units were quickly disbanded upon returning home, the RAR was recreated in the late 1940s because of Cold War tensions and became the core of Southern Rhodesia's new permanent military establishment. The RAR performed imperial service during the 1950s, such as guarding the Suez Canal in Egypt and fighting communist insurgents in Malaya. It is also important to note that Southern Rhodesia's security forces, like those of other colonies, were racially hierarchical organisations in which whites were always superior to blacks. Africans received

inferior conditions of service, such as pay and accommodation, and as they were seen as primitive people, they were usually enlisted under a single name.<sup>4</sup> It is not always clear in the various histories of these formations, both police and military, that they were composed of many African men from neighbouring territories and that this constituted a general trend for many years. This article examines the rise and decline of African labour migrants as security force personnel in Southern Rhodesia.

In different parts of colonial Africa, labour migration both hindered and facilitated military recruitment. The trend of men leaving Nyasaland, where it was difficult to produce enough cash crops to pay colonial taxes, always worked against local military recruiting for the King's African Rifles (KAR). Since migrant labour became more popular in the northern part of Nyasaland, because it was far from agricultural markets, most KAR recruits came from the southern province.<sup>5</sup> In French West Africa, where the colonial army conscripted African men, annual military enlistment was timed to avoid the part of the year when labour migrants travelled to other regions or crossed borders to engage in paid agricultural work.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, 60% of the Gold Coast Regiment before the Second World War originated from across the northern border in the French territory of Upper Volta (today's Burkina Faso).<sup>7</sup> Similarly, for many years Southern Rhodesia's African security force recruitment, which was always voluntary, depended upon men from other territories.

### **Police service**

With the defection of many African police to Ndebele and Shona rebels in 1896–97 and concerns that brutality by local African constables had partly caused the insurrection, Southern Rhodesia's existing local African police were dismissed and new recruits brought in from Northern Rhodesia, Zululand and Zanzibar. They made their first public parade in November 1897.<sup>8</sup> In 1904, most of the 225 African police in Mashonaland were Ngoni from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland with the exception of the Victoria District (present day Masvingo) where most were local Karanga Shona.<sup>9</sup> Given continued European anxiety over potential African police mutiny, in 1906 BSAP authorities ordered that the district (or rural) African police be armed with clubs only. However, the "Reserve Company at Headquarters of 150 Angoni native police are required to be trained as part of the military force which might conceivably be called upon to protect white settlers against natives" so they could "always be ready for duty in quelling any minor breach of the peace or disturbance among local native inhabitants." As the core of the colony's defence, they were each issued with a Martini-Henry rifle and five rounds of ammunition.<sup>10</sup>

Although it is tempting to see the use of Ngoni as a colonial tactic to ensure that African police were socially distant from local people upon whom they enforced exploitive laws, BSAP authorities much preferred local African recruits who knew the country and its languages.<sup>11</sup> By 1923, the police commissioner reported that “the larger portion of the Police Force as a whole consists of natives recruited in this Colony.”<sup>12</sup> In 1928 there were only 18 recruits from outside the territory, particularly Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia, among the 158 in training in Salisbury, and only 20 out of 95 in Bulawayo. Of the 1 086 total African members of the BSAP in 1938, 150 were “alien natives”.<sup>13</sup>

The continued though declining importance of African police from neighbouring territories was illustrated by the changing language policy of the African police magazine. Established in 1937 to promote education and unit spirit among African police, *Mapolisa* originally published articles and letters in the language in which they were submitted, which was usually English or Shona. In 1945, after complaints that many African police could not read the entire magazine, *Mapolisa* began to publish all contributions in English, Shona, Sindebele and Chinyanja (the predominant language of southern and central Nyasaland and eastern Northern Rhodesia). However, the Chinyanja section was dropped after a year because of expense and lack of popularity – the police from Nyasaland tended to be less well educated and thus not avid readers.<sup>14</sup>

After the First World War, the BSAP Reserve Company evolved into the Askari Platoon, which was based at the Native Police Training School (NPTS) in Salisbury and performed ceremonial drill at Government House and acted as an emergency quick reaction force. During the interwar period, they were the only Africans in Southern Rhodesia permitted to carry firearms on a regular basis. Many of the Askari Platoon members were RNR veterans from the First World War. By the 1930s, Africans from other territories were no longer allowed in the BSAP unless they were fluent in a local language. Since this rule did not apply to enlistment in the Askari Platoon, it remained the domain of “alien natives” including “many ex KARs”.<sup>15</sup> When the term “Native Police” was changed to “African Police” in 1947, the Askari Platoon was renamed the African Police Platoon and in the early 1960s, with the rise of African nationalist protest and efforts to remove obvious racial discrimination from the BSAP, it was once again changed to Support Unit. In the 1940s and 1950s, the African Police Platoon retained a distinctly military ethos within a force that was shifting from a paramilitary to primarily law enforcement role. For example, the rank and file of this sub-unit were referred to by the military rank of “private” rather than “constable” and the unit’s senior man was considered the “sergeant major” of the African training depot. Although numbering

approximately 100 men from the 1930s to 1950s, the African Police Platoon would have a disproportionate impact on the force as it provided drill and physical training instructors for all African police recruits. The minimum education requirement of Standard VI for African police recruits, introduced in 1956, was often waived for “non-indigenous” applicants who wanted to join the African Police Platoon “whose duties were very monotonous and therefore not attractive to the African with higher education”.<sup>16</sup> By 1960, as reported by the local European press, “the majority of the members of the BSA Police Band and the African Police Platoon (Government House Guard) are Africans who have their origins in Nyasaland.”<sup>17</sup> Retired policeman Johnson Chikomwe recalls that, as a recruit in 1963, most of his drill instructors were Malawians and many of them had fought in Burma during the Second World War.<sup>18</sup> In 1967 it was reported that at Tomlinson Depot, a new name for the African recruit school, “Most of our present drill instructors are Malawians and Zambians and one has just applied for Rhodesian citizenship.”<sup>19</sup>

Some of the most well-known and longest-serving African policemen of Southern Rhodesia were from other territories. Originating from Chief Khama’s part of Bechuanaland, Samuel Mahoko joined the Bechuanaland Protectorate Police in 1890, was part of the British South African Company column that invaded the Ndebele Kingdom in 1893, and fought against Ndebele rebels in 1896–1897. He served in the Bulawayo municipal police from 1896 to 1907 when he became head of security at Bushtick Mine. In 1912 he joined the BSAP as a detective, retired in 1936, bought a 400-acre farm near Que Que, and by the 1950s was known as “the Grandfather of the African Branch of the BSAP”.<sup>20</sup> Leaving Portuguese East Africa during the First World War, Shabo went to Southern Rhodesia and worked as a caboose attendant for Rhodesia Railways and then took a job with the LonRho Company in Salisbury. In 1920 he joined the police and spent most of the next 32 years working as a detective in the Midlands around Gwelo (present day Gweru).<sup>21</sup> Chikadza was born in Dedza, Nyasaland in 1898 and began work at Mpunzi Mission in 1912 when he was 14 years old. In 1920 he travelled to Southern Rhodesia and joined the BSAP where he served in the Askari Platoon for the next 35 years. He eventually became the highest ranking African in that platoon and therefore the sergeant major of Salisbury’s African Police Training School (APTS). During the Second World War he was seconded to the RAR as an instructor. He participated in riot duties at Shamva in 1927, Salisbury in 1948 and Bechuanaland in 1950–52. By the 1950s, Chikadza was famous for starting the APTS training day at 6 am by summoning recruits onto the parade square with his loud and distinctively Malawian accented call for “Right –Makara! (Right – Marker!)”. At this time, his son was a member of the BSAP band. Retiring from the force in 1955, Chikadza returned to Dedza and used his savings and pension to open a milling business.<sup>22</sup> In 1925

Simon Siachitema left his home in Namwala District, Northern Rhodesia and travelled to Southern Rhodesia in order to “seek his fortune”. In Salisbury he heard that members of the Askari Platoon were the only Africans allowed to carry firearms. Upon arriving in Salisbury, Siachitema saw an African policeman on sentry duty at Government House and

... was most impressed by the Askari uniform, by the smart way in which he marched up and down and above all by the rifle which he handled so expertly. He watched the Askari “as would a duiker if it saw a python moving”.<sup>23</sup>

By 1948, Siachitema was a senior African policeman in the African Police Platoon and he retired in 1958 as the most senior African member of the BSAP.<sup>24</sup> His son, Julius Siachitema, born in Northern Rhodesia and educated in Salisbury, joined the police in 1952 and served in various posts across the country until his retirement in 1977.<sup>25</sup>

The stories of so called “alien natives” who joined the BSAP reveal that these people were often already engaged in the colonial economy. Sergeant Natende, from Kasana in Northern Rhodesia, joined the BSAP in 1925, but before that had worked as an engine driver for the Belgian Congo Railways, a tram operator at Broken Hill Mine in Northern Rhodesia, and as a prison guard.<sup>26</sup> In 1931, Gabriel Bwalya Mwambela, a young Bemba man, left his home in Kasana District, Northern Rhodesia and “went south to seek his fortune”. In Southern Rhodesia he held a number of different jobs, including that of batman for European police, cook for police at Mtoko and “boss boy” at a mine in Mazoe. In 1934, a friend who was an African police sergeant convinced him to travel to Salisbury to enlist in the Askari Platoon and he eventually became a physical training instructor at APTS. During the Second World War, he volunteered for service with the RAR as an instructor.<sup>27</sup> Sergeant Banda, who had been born in Lusaka, Northern Rhodesia, travelled to Southern Rhodesia in 1941 and worked at the Wankie Coal Mine until 1946 when a relative in the BSAP encouraged him to join the African Police Platoon where he remained for 28 years until retirement in 1974.<sup>28</sup> Born in Northern Rhodesia and educated at Livingstonia School, Orimod Mongo worked as a clerk in Bulawayo before enlisting in the BSAP in 1954. Upon retirement in 1977, he was a detective station sergeant who had served in Wankie, Salisbury, Bindura and Victoria Falls and had won several commendations and the prestigious “silver baton” for successful investigations.<sup>29</sup> On the advice of an uncle who was in the Bechuanaland Police, Lekang Montshiwa left his home territory and joined the BSAP in 1957, where he worked for 20 years on stock theft cases around the border areas of Plumtree and Gwanda.<sup>30</sup> Born and educated in Malawi, Burnett moved to

Southern Rhodesia in 1957 to join the BSAP, and retired in 1978 when he, along with a wife and six children, returned home to farm.<sup>31</sup> Originating from Blantyre, Nyasaland Fredson was educated at Mrewa Mission in Southern Rhodesia where he became interested in a police career, but then returned home to work as a government clerk for the next six years. In 1958, he moved back to Southern Rhodesia to join the BSAP where he remained a constable for the next 20 years.<sup>32</sup>

The previous military experience of some labour migrants influenced them to seek employment with the BSAP and they appear to have been welcomed by white authorities. Sergeant Yohane joined the Askari Platoon as a private in 1937 where, because of his fun-loving manner, he was popularly known as “Johnny Walker”. He had joined the KAR in his native Nyasaland in 1916 and had fought in German East Africa during the First World War. He then joined the Zazibari Prison Service in 1923, transferred to the Nyasaland Prison Service in 1933 and then went to Southern Rhodesia where he served in the BSAP for 19 years.<sup>33</sup> A member of the Askari Platoon in the 1930s, Corporal Isa was from Nyasaland and had won a Military Medal (MM) for bravery during the First World War.<sup>34</sup> Corporal Antonio, who came from Nyasaland and had also served in the KAR during the First World War, was one of the original members of the BSAP band when it was created in 1939. Becoming a “drum major”, he led the band in public parades with his “marvelous heavy stick”.<sup>35</sup> He retired in 1950 and returned to Nyasaland.<sup>36</sup> After demobilisation from the wartime KAR in 1945, Sergeant Felesi left Nyasaland and went to Southern Rhodesia to enlist in the African Police Platoon where he became famous for his “Big Voice” during drill practice.<sup>37</sup> Sergeant Marshall served in the BSAP as a medical orderly in Bulawayo Camp clinic from 1948 to 1957. He had undergone medical training in his hometown in Nyasaland prior to serving in the army from 1939 to 1945.<sup>38</sup> In 1952, Manuel joined the African Police Platoon in Salisbury. Originating from Nyasaland, he had been a member of the KAR from 1940 to 1945 with active service in Somaliland and East Africa. Upon his death from illness in 1959, his police colleagues stated that he had joined the BSAP “to live the sort of life he had lived in the Army”.<sup>39</sup> Educated at Livingstonia Mission in Nyasaland, Alick (or Alec) joined the KAR in 1940, was on active service in Kenya and Egypt, and was wounded fighting the Japanese in Burma. In 1949, “because he wanted to work for the Government”, Alick enlisted in the BSAP’s African Police Platoon where he remained until retirement as sergeant major in 1975. During 24 years as a drill instructor, Alick trained “thousands and thousands of recruits”.<sup>40</sup> As a member of the BSAP African Police Platoon/Support Unit and a recruit drill instructor from 1954 to 1976, Sergeant Josamu had originated from Nyasaland. He had enlisted in the KAR in 1940 and saw war service in Kenya, North Africa, Ceylon, India and Burma.<sup>41</sup> Before joining the African Police Platoon in 1956,

where he spent the next 21 years, Frank had done five years in the KAR with service in Kenya and India. He had joined the BSAP on the advice of a friend from his KAR days who was already in the force.<sup>42</sup>

Security work for private companies was also an option for migrants with military experience and offered more freedom than the BSAP. For example, Liwanda was from Nyasaland and had fought with the KAR in German East Africa and Portuguese East Africa during the First World War. He worked as a mine compound policeman in Shamva from 1923 to 1930 and at Wanderer Mine in Selukwe from 1930 to 1950. On several occasions, Liwanda left employment because he did not want to relocate. In 1958 he moved to Kariba, where the massive dam construction project was nearing completion, because he heard salaries there were higher and he landed a position as a security guard for a general store.<sup>43</sup>

### **Military service**

Of the roughly 2 500 soldiers who served in the RNR during the First World War, about 60 to 70 percent originated from other territories. Just over 1 000 were from Nyasaland, around 250 were from Northern Rhodesia, about 200 were from Mozambique and a few others from Bechuanaland, South Africa, Swaziland and Zanzibar. In 1917, since local Africans were difficult to recruit because they were not completely absorbed into the colonial economy, military authorities turned to the Chamber of Mines to provide manpower, and at that time, most mine workers in Southern Rhodesia were labour migrants. Indeed, with decreasing wages in the mines and dangerous working conditions, volunteering for the army might have seemed attractive and it provided a free ticket home as many RNR soldiers remained in East Africa upon demobilisation. A few white mine managers resented losing their workers to the RNR and some made deals to get them back after discharge, such as the 58 soldiers who were “to be returned to Rezende Mines on termination of service”.<sup>44</sup> Despite the fact that RNR records incompletely document the prior military service of the unit’s soldiers, it is clear that at least 69 KAR veterans, mostly from Nyasaland, served in that unit although there were probably more. When the RNR was formed in 1916, the Native Department reported that 15 “foreign” KAR veterans were recruited from the mining town of Que Que, yet their names never made it into poorly kept unit records.<sup>45</sup> Some of the KAR veterans in the RNR had considerable previous military experience. For instance, Lance Corporal Chikoko had a decade of uniformed service with six years in the KAR and four in the BSAP. Private Sofora had 11 years’ prior experience: six in the KAR and five in the Northern Rhodesia Police (NRP). Lance Corporal Lupenga, who had been a signaller in the KAR for five years and worked in the same position in the RNR, was wounded in September 1918. Corporal Ndala, a six-year veteran of the



KAR who had been working as a boiler operator in Southern Rhodesia before enlisting in the RNR, was killed by an accidental rifle discharge in May 1918. Corporal Chikoti had spent three and half years in the KAR and was quickly promoted within the RNR.<sup>46</sup>

Available records from 1944 and 1945 suggest that about 45% of RAR soldiers during the Second World War originated from territories neighbouring Southern Rhodesia. Recruiting records from this period mostly indicate whether or not a soldier was “indigenous” or “alien”, and the only other information provided is the name of the town in Southern Rhodesia where the soldier had been living before enlistment. Consequently, it is difficult to determine the precise origins of the “alien” recruits. Only one monthly list of recruits, dating from June 1944, specifies each man’s home colony. Of the 72 soldiers on that list, 35 were from other territories, with 19 from Portuguese East Africa, eight from Northern Rhodesia, three from Nyasaland and one from Bechuanaland, while four were vaguely recorded as “alien”.<sup>47</sup> Demobilisation records from Gwelo, the only town for which detailed documentation survives, indicate that while almost all of the 82 local African war veterans were considered “indigenous” to Southern Rhodesia, just over a quarter of them were identified with ethnic groups from Northern Rhodesia (Lozi), Nyasaland (Mlozwi) and Portuguese East Africa (Chikunda). It seems likely that these were the children of migrant workers who had moved to Southern Rhodesia earlier and perhaps some were carrying on their fathers’ military tradition.<sup>48</sup>

Experienced African non-commissioned officers (NCOs) from other territories, often veterans of previous conflicts, played a prominent role in the RAR during the Second World War. The battalion’s first regimental sergeant major (RSM), the unit’s senior soldier who reported directly to the commanding officer and who was responsible for the welfare of the men, was the highly decorated Lichanda, holder of both the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and the MM. He was from Nyasaland and had served with the KAR in Somaliland in 1909 and in East Africa during the First World War when he led several successful assaults against German positions. Demobilised in 1919, he moved to Southern Rhodesia during the interwar years and enlisted in the RAR as soon as it was formed in 1940. In October 1942 this middle-aged man dropped dead during a route march in Salisbury.<sup>49</sup> Warrant Officer Tekete then took over as RSM. He had served in the Northern Rhodesia Regiment during the East Africa campaign of the First World War where he won the DCM for taking command of his platoon and leading an attack on a German position in September 1918. He accompanied the RAR to East Africa in 1944, but medical issues prevented him from continuing to Burma.<sup>50</sup> Stephen Machado, who had walked barefoot from Nyasaland to Southern Rhodesia

in 1927 “to seek work”<sup>51</sup> and joined the BSAP Askari Platoon, was seconded to the RAR in 1940 as the unit needed instructors. He served as the battalion’s RSM during the Burma campaign where he gained a reputation as a “tough fighter”.<sup>52</sup> He represented Southern Rhodesia in Britain during the Victory Parade of 1946 and then returned to BSAP duty at APTS until his retirement in 1963.<sup>53</sup>

Several literate RAR soldiers from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland recorded some of their combat experiences in Burma. Private Kalaluka, originally from Northern Rhodesia, described his role in ambushing a Japanese unit that was advancing to counter attack the RAR which had just captured several hills around Tanlwe Chaung:

We lay just off the track, I myself, lying just ahead of the remainder of the patrol forming the ambush. We had been lying there for half an hour when noises and rustling were heard. Then I saw several Jap soldiers crawling along, carrying machineguns. I let the first Jap get past me and then I heard the others of our patrol throwing the Bren gun into position. Unfortunately, the Bren gun jammed, and so I had to fire with my rifle, killing the second in line Jap at a range of five yards. I wounded a second Jap, for he screamed – how the Japs can scream! This man let go his machinegun and off he trotted. The machinegun we captured.<sup>54</sup>

Sergeant James Ojesi Kachingwe of Blantyre, Nyasaland described his first taste of combat by stating,

The Japs looked such fearsome little rats; they squawked like goats. But when the fight developed away went my vertical breeze (fear), for the Japs cannot face an enemy, they rely on tricks: and we have now learnt their tricks ... for we have killed them off like flies in some fights.

At the end of the war, RSM Machado stated:

I am proud to be in this battalion of brave men who fight even as do the elephants in these deep, green jungles. We met the enemy who shelled us so violently with his great guns, but they failed to cause us to turn away from the fight.<sup>55</sup>

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, the number of RAR soldiers from other territories shrank to about 25%. Although records tend to categorise recruits as either “indigenous” or “alien”, a few specific places of origin were given. As during the world wars, these were Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Bechuanaland and Portuguese East Africa, which were all historic sources of regional migrant labour.

It was common for “alien” recruits to give their place of residence in Southern Rhodesia as border towns like Victoria Falls and Umtali or mining towns like Wankie and Gwelo.<sup>56</sup> The decline of extra-territorial African enlistment would seem to indicate that military service was becoming a less attractive form of wage labour for migrants. It could also mean that, as more local men were incorporated into the capitalist economy, in lower paying jobs, they began to see the army as an attractive employment option. The decline of military migrants after the war happened simultaneous with the rise of the impoverished Masvingo-Gutu area, home of the Karanga Shona, as a particularly strong source of recruits for both the army and police.<sup>57</sup> With the 1953 establishment of the Federation of Southern and Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, conditions of service for African soldiers in all three territories improved. This likely prompted young men from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland to enlist in a local unit rather than journey south.<sup>58</sup>

During and after the Second World War, “alien natives” in the RAR, particularly those from Nyasaland, acquired a martial reputation. In 1944, an Army staff officer reported that he believed the African soldiers of the RAR would perform well in combat and that “The Mashonas will get ‘carried along’ by the Nyasas”.<sup>59</sup> A former white RAR officer recalled that the many amphibious operations in Burma were difficult:

... for Africans, many of whom came from Western Matabeleland where water is usually scarce and never navigable. At such times the Northern native came into his own and each platoon marked down its men from the Zambezi and Lake Nyasa. Burmese boats are usually plain dugouts or a type of catamaran, but allow a Mulozwi or a Nyanja to make his own paddle and the craft was his... At one river crossing I remember, two Nyanjas from the lake ferried over a company of 150 men with kit, in two tiny craft holding no more than five men each.<sup>60</sup>

John Essex-Clark, an RAR platoon commander in Malaya in the 1950s, thought that “The Nyasas were from the big lakes far to the north and were intelligent and good warriors but could be very wilful. The two Barotse were quiet and hard working.”<sup>61</sup>

Changing recruiting patterns also led to changing language use within Southern Rhodesia’s primarily African military units. No single language dominated the RNR during the First World War era with Sindebele, Shona, Chinyanja and Yao – the last two being associated with Nyasaland – all being widely spoken, and sometimes sub-units were organised on a linguistic basis. For example, by the end of the German East Africa campaign, “C Company” consisted

mostly of Yao-speaking soldiers from Nyasaland. Many of the RNR's white officers and NCOs were recruited specifically because they could speak an African language or at least the simplified mix of languages called "kitchen kaffir".<sup>62</sup> This mixture of languages sometimes caused confusion as soldiers could not always understand orders or feigned ignorance as an excuse for disobedience. For example, during the last part of the East Africa campaign, three African soldiers were court-martialled for leaving their sentry post. They claimed however that their corporal had given them permission to get food. It turned out that the corporal had given his instructions in Yao, which was widely known in the unit, but the three soldiers – one Shona from Southern Rhodesia, one Nyanja from Nyasaland and one from Sena in Portuguese East Africa – did not fully comprehend.<sup>63</sup> The working language of the RAR in Burma during the Second World War was Chinyanja, as the unit had many men from Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia and it was brigaded with 1 KAR from Nyasaland and 3 Northern Rhodesia Regiment (NRR).<sup>64</sup> Essex-Clark, as a new junior officer with the RAR in the 1950s, was frustrated that his commanders wanted him to learn Chinyanja because by that time "the Nyasas were only a small element of the battalion and most of my askari spoke Chishona or Sindebele." Essex-Clark decided to teach the soldiers in his platoon English, which created "friction with some of my superiors many of whom prided themselves on their fluency in Chinyanja". He also noticed that many of the African soldiers "spoke a sort of pidgin which was basically kitchen Kaffir or Fanagalo mixed with other Bantu languages and corrupted English and military terms."<sup>65</sup> Colonial African military units often had personnel from different ethnic backgrounds and over time a common language developed with or without official encouragement. Soldiers in the East African KAR battalions spoke simplified Kiswahili, called KiKAR, and those in Nyasaland spoke a militarised version of Chinyanja.<sup>66</sup> When Samuel Munenge joined the RAR in 1955 and subsequently served in Malaya, Shona, Sindebele and Chinyanja were spoken in the battalion and these languages were mixed in various sub-units. He remembers that, in the 1950s, most white officers could speak Chinyanja though a few who had grown up in Southern Rhodesia knew Shona. Most black senior NCOs, as they reflected earlier recruiting patterns, spoke Chinyanja because they were from Nyasaland or Northern Rhodesia.<sup>67</sup> By the time Gibson Mugadzah enlisted in the RAR in 1963, the unit's main language had become local Shona, which he pointed out was also the case in Bulawayo where most of the civilian population spoke Sindebele. He maintained that soldiers from neighbouring countries had stopped coming to the army around 1959.<sup>68</sup>

The break-up of the Federation in 1963, the independence of Zambia and Malawi in 1964 and the Unilateral Declaration of Independence of Ian Smith's Rhodesia from Britain in 1965 all combined to sharply reduce the number of

Africans from other territories joining Rhodesian security forces. Although records are unavailable, it appears that a few black military and police migrants fought in the Rhodesian forces during the bush war of the late 1960s and 1970s. As an African Selous Scout, Rich Khama was highly valued during cross-border raids into Botswana in the late 1970s as he was a fluent Setswana-speaker who interrogated locals. It is likely he was originally from that country.<sup>69</sup> Born in Malawi and educated at a mine school near Bulawayo, eighteen-year-old Wilson Banda joined the BSAP Support Unit in 1976 and was killed in action in March 1978. There were certainly others like him.<sup>70</sup>

### **Conclusion**

African police and soldiers from neighbouring territories were central to the coercive power of the colonial state in Southern Rhodesia. These migrant security force personnel were particularly important from the conquest period of the 1890s until the First World War and, although their presence would gradually decline, they never completely disappeared from the uniformed services. With respect to police, the mutiny of local African personnel in 1896 led to the initial recruitment of “alien natives”. The transition of the BSAP from a paramilitary occupation force to a law enforcement organisation from around the late 1940s meant that better-educated African police who were fluent in local languages were needed. Labour migrants usually did not meet these requirements though they continued to dominate the paramilitary African Police Platoon/Support Unit until at least the late 1960s. Even as their numbers were declining, African policemen from other colonies had a disproportionately high impact on the BSAP as they became long-serving senior members and trained all recruits. Most of Southern Rhodesia’s black soldiers who fought in the First World War originated from other territories and had been recruited from the colony’s mines. Just under half of the RAR African troops in Burma during the Second World War had come from beyond the colony’s borders and, given the lack of continuity in African military service in Southern Rhodesia, those with previous military experience played an important role as senior NCOs. With the creation of a permanent African military establishment from the late 1940s, local men came to dominate the ranks and the Gutu-Masvingo area became an important recruiting area where family military traditions were beginning to develop. The independence of black-ruled neighbouring countries and the rise of a blatantly white supremacist government in Southern Rhodesia in the early to mid-1960s corresponded with the end of significant extra-territorial African recruitment.

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- <sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for its support of this project.
- <sup>2</sup> For a classic work, see Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900–1933* (London: Pluto Press, 1976).
- <sup>3</sup> “A Short History of the African Police”, *Mapolisa*, Vol. 23, No. 5, May 1960, pp. 2–3; for an institution history of the BSAP, see Peter Gibbs, Hugh Phillips and Nick Russell, *Blue and Old Gold: The History of the British South Africa Police, 1889–1980* (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South, 2009); for a look at African mine police, see Charles van Onselen, “The Role of Collaborators in the Rhodesian Mining Industry, 1900–1935”, *African Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 289 (Oct 1973), pp. 401–418.
- <sup>4</sup> Timothy Stapleton, *No Insignificant Part: The Rhodesia Native Regiment and the East African Campaign of the First World War* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Alexander Binda, commissioned and compiled by Brigadier David Heppenstall and the Rhodesian African Rifles Regimental Association (UK), *Masodja: The History of the Rhodesian African Rifles and its Forerunner the Rhodesia Native Regiment* (Johannesburg: 30 Degrees South, 2007); Christopher Owen, *The Rhodesian African Rifles* (London: Leo Cooper, 1970); Peter McLaughlin, “Collaborators, Mercenaries or Patriots? The Problem of African Troops in Southern Rhodesia During the First and Second World Wars”, *Zimbabwean History*, X, 1979; Peter McLaughlin, “Victims as Defenders: African Troops in the Rhodesian Defence System 1890–1980”, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (Aug 1991), pp. 240–275; Martin Revai Rupiya, “The Development of the Southern Rhodesian Armed Forces from the 1926 Defence Act to the Dissolution of the Federation in 1963”, D.Phil. thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2000.
- <sup>5</sup> Timothy Parsons, *The African Rank-And-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King’s African Rifles, 1902–1964* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), pp. 60–61, 70, 80–81). For much more detail on military recruitment in Nyasaland, see Timothy Lovering, “Authority and Identity: Malawian Soldiers in Britain’s Colonial Army, 1891–1964”, Doctoral thesis, University of Stirling, 2002, pp. 46–114. Lovering makes the point that the permanent military presence in southern Nyasaland encouraged recruitment from that region.
- <sup>6</sup> Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleura Senegalais in French West Africa, 1957–1960* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), p. 72.
- <sup>7</sup> David Killingray, *Fighting For Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War* (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2010), p. 41.
- <sup>8</sup> “A Short History of the African Police”, *Mapolisa*, Vol. 23, No. 5, May 1960, pp. 2–3.
- <sup>9</sup> National Archives of Zimbabwe (hereafter NAZ), RG3/BR1 41, “Report of the Commandant-General Upon the Police Forces of Southern Rhodesia, 1904”, p. 8.

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- <sup>10</sup> Gibbs, Phillips and Russell, *Blue and Old Gold*, p. 132.
- <sup>11</sup> Van Onselen, "Collaborators", p. 404.
- <sup>12</sup> NAZ, RG3/BR1 41, "Report of the BSAP, 1923", p. 3.
- <sup>13</sup> NAZ, RG3/BR1 41, "Report of the BSAP, 1928", p. 6 and "Report of the BSAP, 1938", pp. 1–2.
- <sup>14</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 8, No. 3, Mar 1945, p. 3; Vol. 8, No. 4, Apr 1945, 3; Vol. 17, No. 3, Mar 1954, 3.
- <sup>15</sup> NAZ, RG3/BR1 41, "Report of the BSAP, 1928", p. 6 and "Report of the BSAP, 1938", pp. 1–2.
- <sup>16</sup> NAZ, S3454/22/6, BSAP Conditions of Service, Civil Service Board Minutes, 20 Aug 1960.
- <sup>17</sup> "Nyasa Wants to Join Police Force in Rhodesia", *Rhodesia Herald*, 23 Sep 1960, p. 13.
- <sup>18</sup> Interview with Johnson Chikomwe, Harare, 19 Jul 2007.
- <sup>19</sup> "BSA Police Training Depot is Home to Many Africans", *Rhodesia Herald*, 30 Jan 1967, p. 7.
- <sup>20</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 1, No. 10, Oct 1937, p. 13 and Vol. 19, No. 5, May 1956, p. 20. For quote see *Outpost*, Dec 1964, p. 36.
- <sup>21</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 15, No. 7, Jul 1952, p. 26.
- <sup>22</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 18, No. 5, May 1955, pp. 9–10 and p. 18.
- <sup>23</sup> "Simon the Sergeant's Dream Came True", *Rhodesia Herald*, 27 Sep 1958, p. 3.
- <sup>24</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 21, No. 9, Sep 1948, p. 12; "Simon the Sergeant's Dream Came True", *Rhodesia Herald*, 27 Sep 1958, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup> *Outpost*, Jan 1977, p. 39.
- <sup>26</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 18, No. 5, May 1955, p. 10.
- <sup>27</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 22, No. 10, Oct 1959, p. 23.
- <sup>28</sup> *Outpost*, Nov 1974, p. 36.
- <sup>29</sup> *Outpost*, Feb 1977, p. 36.
- <sup>30</sup> *Outpost*, Nov 1977, p. 34.
- <sup>31</sup> *Outpost*, Jun 1978, p. 26.
- <sup>32</sup> *Outpost*, Aug 1978, p. 28.
- <sup>33</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Feb 1956, p. 17.
- <sup>34</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 1, No. 18, Jun 1938, p. 7.
- <sup>35</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 13, No. 7, Jul 1950, p. 14.
- <sup>36</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 13, No. 7, Jul 1950, p. 14.
- <sup>37</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 21, No. 5, May 1958, p. 21.
- <sup>38</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 22, No. 8, Aug 1959, p. 11.
- <sup>39</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 22, No. 9, Sep 1959, p. 17.
- <sup>40</sup> *Outpost*, Nov 1975, p. 30; "BSAP Recruits Unlikely to Forget Their RSM", *Rhodesia Herald*, 16 Apr 1970, p. 11.
- <sup>41</sup> *Outpost*, Apr 1977, p. 36.
- <sup>42</sup> *Outpost*, Feb 1977, p. 37.
- <sup>43</sup> "A Lifetime in Uniform: As Told By Liwanda to Sergeant Paine", *Outpost*, Jan 1963, p. 30.

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- <sup>44</sup> NAZ, B4/7/5, Nominal Roll, Rhodesia Native Regiment.
- <sup>45</sup> NAZ, N3/32/4, Superintendent of Natives, Gwelo to Chief Native Commissioner, 14 Jul 1916.
- <sup>46</sup> NAZ, B4/7/5, Nominal Roll, Rhodesia Native Regiment.
- <sup>47</sup> NAZ, S745/11 RAR Orders Depot 1944–45.
- <sup>48</sup> NAZ, S1018/48 RAR, Discharge Records, Gwelo.
- <sup>49</sup> *Bantu Mirror*, 24 Oct 1942, p. 5; Binda, *Masodja*, p. 43.
- <sup>50</sup> *Mapolisa*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Mar 1943, p. 18; Vol. 8, No. 1, Jan 1945, p. 23.
- <sup>51</sup> “African Station Sergeant Machado BEM – Distinguished African Retires”, *Outpost*, Jul 1963, p. 5.
- <sup>52</sup> Interview with Burma veteran Paul Mufanebadza, Gutu, 05 Aug 2009.
- <sup>53</sup> “African Station Sergeant Machado BEM – Distinguished African Retires”, *Outpost*, Jul 1963, p. 5.
- <sup>54</sup> (NAZ) SRG 1/DE “Letters from RAR” 14 Jun 1945.
- <sup>55</sup> For all quotes, see (NAZ) SRG 1/DE “Letters from RAR” 12 Sep 1945.
- <sup>56</sup> NAZ, S745/59, RAR Orders, 1949–52; NAZ, S745/48, RAR Orders, 1947–48 and 1951.
- <sup>57</sup> NAZ, S745/11 RAR Orders 1944–45; S745/48 RAR Orders 1947–48; S745/59 RAR Orders 1949–1952; S745/48 RAR Orders 1951. NAZ, RG3/BR1 41 “BSAP Report 1950”, p. 9; “BSAP Report 1952”, p. 10; “BSAP Report 1958”, p. 5; “BSAP Report 1959”, p. 7; “BSAP Report 1960”, p. 8; “BSAP Report 1961”, p. 8; “BSAP Report 1962”, p. 6; “BSAP Report 1965”, p. 3.
- <sup>58</sup> For improved conditions, see Lovering, “Authority and Identity”, p. 79.
- <sup>59</sup> NAZ, S 726, SW 5/1–2 RAR, Southern Rhodesia Liaison Officer to A/CMF, 30 Jul 1944, “Very Urgent”.
- <sup>60</sup> Mills, “With the RAR in Arakan”, p. 12.
- <sup>61</sup> John Essex-Clark, *Maverick Soldier: An Infantryman’s Story* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1991), p. 32.
- <sup>62</sup> H. Bugler, “C Company Rhodesia Native Regiment”, *Outpost*, Jan 1939, p. 16; NAZ, ORAL/CR 3, interview with F.A. Cross.
- <sup>63</sup> (NAZ) S2294, Discharges RNR, 4924 Acting Corporal Yaseni. Stapleton, *No Insignificant Part*, p. 49.
- <sup>64</sup> M.G. Mills, “With the RAR in Arakan”, *Assegai*, Aug 1970, p. 12 (originally published in *NADA*, No. 26, 1949).
- <sup>65</sup> Essex-Clark, *Maverick Soldier*, pp. 34–35.
- <sup>66</sup> Parsons, *African Rank-in-File*, pp. 112–115.
- <sup>67</sup> Interview with Samuel Munenge, Gweru, 07 Aug 2009.
- <sup>68</sup> Interview with Gibson Mugadzah, Harare, 15 Aug 2008.
- <sup>69</sup> Dennis Croukamp, *The Bush War in Rhodesia: The Extraordinary Combat Memoir of a Rhodesian Reconnaissance Specialist* (Boulder: Paladin Press, 2006), pp. 371–372.
- <sup>70</sup> *Outpost*, Mar 1978, p. 13.