

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE NON EUROPEAN ARMY SERVICES OUTSIDE OF THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA (PART II)

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INTRODUCTION

The personnel of the Non European Army Services (NEAS)¹ were employed in various skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled posts throughout the Second World War. In these mustering they delivered outstanding service as motor transport drivers, security guards and artisans. The efforts of the NEAS volunteers in the medical field were also indispensable to the Union Defence Force. Aside from the Medical Corps' total reliance on the NEAS to provide stretcher bearers, the Native Military Corps was the source of many nursing orderlies and hygiene workers. In the rather more pleasant sphere of culinary exploits, namely the mess, the Native Military Corps and Cape Corps

cooks established an enviable reputation during the war. In the South African Air Force particularly, the skill of NMC cooks was legendary. It is interesting to note that most African cooks in this service occupied the posts of master cooks which were actually intended for Whites only.

Notwithstanding all of the above, this paper is not actually concerned with the services provided by the NEAS to the UDF but rather the other way around, in as much as it examines the social and economic circumstances in which the NEAS soldier found himself.

SERVICE CONDITIONS AND PROMOTIONAL PROSPECTS

The standard tour of duty for all UDF volunteers was three years, however, in the case of the NEAS many considered this period to be too long due to the following reasons:

- a. NMC and CC soldiers often experienced difficulty in maintaining a regular and comprehensive correspondence on their domestic and business affairs.
- b. The colour bar policy which was observed throughout by UDF troops outside the Union, officially barred Africans from social contact with White women as well as the women of Egypt, Palestine and Syria. This meant that for their entire three years service they were entirely divorced from women's company (officially



An NMC Chef instructs new recruits in the art of carving. NEAS chefs enjoyed an enviable reputation in the Union Defence Forces.

anyway). This was of course an unnatural situation.

This prolonged separation of three years often meant a deterioration in a soldier's domestic affairs witnessed for example by desertion by wives, the birth of illegitimate children and the neglect of grain fields and stock. A consequent decline in morality and the resultant deterioration of morale and efficiency was often the result.

As far as the promotional prospects of the Black and Coloured soldier are concerned, they were governed by the same rules as those applicable to Whites in the UDF. Any detail who satisfactorily filled an NCO's post qualified for promotion to corresponding temporary (ie paid) NCO rank. Generally this was a satisfactory system although the periodic bans on promotion of NCOs operated unfairly due to their effect on the promotional prospects of Black and Coloured servicemen. This was because the bans were imposed to absorb the redundant White NCOs made available by the disbandment of certain "European units". Fortunately, however, the NEAS was an ever increasing corps and usually suffered from a shortage and not a surplus of NCOs. However this also, meant that for long periods inadequate NCO control was available, which was not in the best interests of discipline and tended to dissatisfy the incumbents of NCO posts.



Successful students on the first NMC staff sergeants course parade before Lt-Gen Len Beyers. The course was held at the NMC School in Rietfontein, Springs during June 1943.

A certain amount of difficulty was also experienced by NEAS officers with the elimination of unsuitable NCOs who had been promoted to the temporary rank without adequate trial during the early days of the war. This was, however, accepted as an inevitable result of rapid mobilisation and lack of experienced NCOs, as in the case of ACF units, and did not cause undue concern. A common mistake initially made with Native Military Corps promotions was the promotion of men merely because they were literate. This created a fair number of "problem children", as such enlisted men, though usually good types, often lacked the respect of the troops. Illiterate Black NCOs of personality and integrity proved more useful, especially when it came to the disciplining and handling the troops, than their clerical counterparts. Some men, of course, combined literacy with personality and they naturally made the best leaders.

Pay and Allowances

The following tables do not include details of additional allowances which were sometimes granted for the execution of certain duties, such as Extra Duty pay, Rations allowance or Trade allowance. The standard rates of Pay and Allowances for Cape Corps and Native Military Corps appear below respectively:

Table 1: Cape Corps-Basic pay per day²

Rank	s.	d.
Private (on attestation)	2	6
Private (after six months satisfactory service)	3	0
Lance/Corporal	3	6
Corporal	4	0
Sergeant	4	9
Staff/Sergeant	5	3
Warrant Officer Class II	6	6
Warrant Officer Class I	7	6

² A list of abbreviated terms appears at the back of the article.

Married and Dependants Allowances : A married allowance at the rate of 3/5 per day was paid to members of the Cape Corps, if the member was married with no children. Equal or lesser amounts (at the discretion of the Secretary for Defence) could in certain circumstances also be claimed by a member in respect of reputed wife and her illegitimate child provided it was proved that they were dependant on the member.

Native Military Corps personnel were not paid a marriage allowance but either with or without dependants as indicated in the table.

Table 2: Native Military Corps-Basic Rates of Pay per Day ³

Rank	With Dependants		Without Dependants	
	s.	d.	s.	d.
Private (on att.)	2	3	1	6
Private (after 6 months satisfactory service)	2	6	1	9
Lance/Coporal	3	3	2	6
Corporal	3	6	2	9
Sergeant	4	0	3	3
Staff/Sergeant	4	3	3	6

Note : NMC Soldiers could not rise above the rank of Staff Sergeant therefore rates of pay for Warrant Officers are not shown.

In comparison with the average remuneration earned by Blacks in civilian employment, the UDF rates of pay were reasonable but whether they were adequate is a very difficult question to answer. To the man in the field these rates of pay and allowances gave general satisfaction but it is questionable whether the allowances were adequate to maintain a reasonable standard of living at home. There were always cases of hardship but in genuine cases dependants could usually obtain relief from the Governor-General's Fund when Army pay and allowances proved inadequate.

The wartime system of according extra remuneration only to certain musterings in the Corps, such as blacksmiths and clerks was unfair. Cooks and drivers were employed in positions in which the exacting nature of their work was very important. The policy of issuing extra pay only to those personnel in dangerous occupations was also unfair as monetary recognition could never be regarded as adequate compensation for loss at risk of life or limb.

DISCIPLINE IN THE NEAS

The maintenance of military discipline outside of the Union was an onerous task. To be successful it required the whole-hearted co-operation of every member of the Union Defence Forces, which was not always easy to obtain. This position was aggravated by the indiscriminate inclusion of bad characters among reinforcements arriving from the Union, the inadequacy of administrative and training staff and holding facilities at the NEAS Depot, and the difficulty in getting recidivists back to the Un-

ion. With the gradual improvement in these areas of shortfall, the discipline in the armed forces improved.

With specific reference to the NEAS it was found that the incidence of criminality was neither unbearably high nor appreciably low. Fortunately the level of serious or violent crime was almost non-existent. The crime statistics in the NEAS compared favourably with those of the other UDF services. The NEAS was also able to record a substantially improved service by the time the war was drawing to a close. The standard of discipline and training in the NEAS had improved dramatically as the war developed. During the Italian campaign cases of offenses and indiscipline had declined to 25% of the Western Desert figure. These developments were attributed to the following factors:

- a. As the war progressed it had become practice to delegate the training and disciplining of CC and NMC members to the increasing number of non-white NCOs.
- b. Improved and effective methods of administration (for example: attachment of NEAS Administration and Welfare Officers and NCOs to SAAF Squadrons).
- c. The development of unit pride and "esprit de corps" by means of drill parades and the arrangement of sporting contests with other units.

Despite these developments, discrimination in UDF circles against NEAS personnel remained

rife. The powers of command of Whites vis-a-vis non-whites in the UDF was clearly defined in Proclamation 15 of 1942 which read:

"Notwithstanding anything in law contained with regard to the relation between European and Non-European personnel in the Union Defence Forces:

a. Non-European non-commissioned officers shall hold the rank as such within the Non-European Army Services only and shall not exercise and command or have authority over European members of the Forces.

b. European personnel will exercise command over members of the Non-European Army Services by virtue of superior rank or having been placed in command of such Non-European personnel provided that in the event of an emergency the senior European non-commissioned officer or private present, shall be deemed to have been placed in command of the Non-European personnel, irrespective of rank.



An officer and some of his staff at an NEAS base camp in Egypt receive a visit from P.V.G. van der Byl, the Union's Minister of Native Affairs.

"The effect of the proclamation is that while the NEAS soldiers at no time take command over European troops, the latter command Non-Europeans of higher rank only when specifically placed in authority or in special circumstances set out. European troops should be instructed to avoid difficulties by refraining from unnecessary ordering about of Non-Europeans of higher rank.

"As has been indicated, the successful employment of Non-Europeans is vital to a maximum effort by the Union of South Africa. The best results are obtainable from the Non-Europeans only if their sacrifice and wish to serve are recognised and if they are treated as soldiers. This does not condone pandering and intermingling socially. It does, however, demand justice under all conditions, a sharing of whatever alleviation of hardship and abstention from manhandling, swearing at and addressing Non-Europeans in a non-military manner.



The UDF encouraged personnel to participate in sport as a means of alleviating boredom and maintaining physical fitness. Here an NCO urges his men on during a tug-of-war contest.

"Non-Europeans are particularly sensitive on these matters and even where good-humoured swearing takes

place among European troops the unit OCs should urge the latter to refrain from similar conduct towards Non-Europeans. Such behaviour will either be regarded by an Non-European as familiarity and reciprocated or as derogatory to their status and resented."

Leave, Welfare and Entertainment

The powers that be in the UDF were of the firm opinion that both physical and mental recreation should be adequately catered for to ensure contentment and efficiency amongst the rank and file. In the Native Military Corps and the Cape Corps this was provided in the form of organised sport, music and singing as well as rest and recuperation leave and lectures of educational, historical or Biblical interest.

Soccer was the most popular outdoor sport in the Native Military Corps and the Cape Corps, where servicemen played every day if the facilities were available irrespective of the weather conditions. Indoor recreation was stimulated by the provision of dart boards, drafts (very popular in the NMC), music, illustrated periodicals and books in the vernacular. The provision of these facilities as well as canteens proved highly successful in the maintenance of health and morale. It kept busy those who would otherwise have been idle during the leisure hours or the long periods in transit which are so often experienced in the army.

Concert parties consisting of Black and Coloured personnel were introduced with much success into the NEAS. It took a long time to obtain the necessary authority for the formation of the parties, but in the end four Concert Parties were established. A system of interchange was then arranged so that two of the parties would always be in the Middle East and two in the Union. When the war ended in Europe the



An NEAS entertainment group rehearses before a performance. A line of troops is clearly visible in the background. Troops would often que for hours so as to be sure of getting a seat.

"Africa Stars", "South Easterns" and "Jabulani" concert parties had concluded a highly successful tour of Italy. Number 3 Cape Corps band also added to the entertainment of soldiers. Although it was primarily a regimental band and was later attached to the NEAS at Depot Garawi, it had a fine repertoire of music and was always very popular. Although these various entertainment groups were actually intended for the entertainment of NEAS servicemen, white members of the UDF and other Allied servicemen were never excluded from attending the shows. The groups consequently acquired widespread popularity.



The UDF established clubs and canteens outside of the Union where personnel could spend their Rest and Recuperation leave. In South Africa troops in transit were served refreshments during long journeys. This hospitality was made possible through the effort of organisations like the SAWAS and the Troops Goodwill Club.

Cinema shows also proved very popular with the troops. To ensure a seat they would sometimes take up a position hours before the show was due to start. The bulk of this type of entertainment was put on by the UDF mobile cinemas which were open to all races. Although Black and Coloured soldiers were not usually barred from ENSA Garrison⁴ Cinemas or similar establishments in towns and cities they felt ostracized because they were indirectly restricted or discouraged.

Separate Leave camps for NEAS servicemen were initially established during the East African campaign when the UDF set up a camp at Mombasa in 1941. The first properly organised leave centre for Black and Coloured UDF personnel, however, did not come into existence until the establishment of an NEAS Leave and Transit camp at Amiriya in the Western Desert in 1942. Other camps in the Middle East were later set up at Amgami Beach, Lake Timsah, Algiers and Jerusalem. Compared with the camps which were later established in Italy, the earlier camps were inadequate rest centres but even then they proved popular, as almost anything was a welcome break from the monotonous life of the desert proper where the forward units were operating. As the difficulties of inadequate staff, vehicles and equipment were overcome the camps were made more attractive and consequently gained in popularity. Rest and Recuperation centres in Rome, Venice and Florence were all situated in villas where the UDFI provided meals and teas free of charge. The UDF rest camps were carefully selected so as to afford access to places of historical interest and other attractions in the area to which conducted tours were regularly arranged.

COMMUNICATION MEDIUMS

The introduction of the NMC newspaper *Ndhlovu/Tlou* towards the end of 1942, supplied a long felt need. The paper was printed in Cairo (under the management of the editor

of "Springbok") from matrices compiled in the Union and flown to the Middle East. *Ndhlovu/Tlou* was distributed to Black soldiers in the Desert and Italy on the basis of one copy to every four details, through the circulation branch of the "Springbok" Forces newspapers. This arrangement proved satisfactory. The paper which consisted of four pages, was comprised mostly of home news (always sought after by the troops) but also contained war



NMC servicemen in Cairo reading copies of "Ndhlovu-Tlou". The newspaper was printed monthly along with "Springbok" in the Egyptian capital.

commentaries and other items of international interest. This weekly paper was a very welcome addition to the functions of the NMC welfare services and always proved very popular with the men. No special paper was published for the Cape Corps servicemen as they were adequately catered for in the "Springbok" newspaper, which was supplied to them on the same basis as to Whites that is one copy to every four details.

An interesting innovation in NEAS welfare circles was the NMC broadcast service from the SA Forces Radio Station in Rome. The service was inaugurated in March 1945 and continued until the closing up of the Studio in August 1945. Broadcasts consisted of an excellent newsletter compiled weekly at General Head-

⁴ The ENSA constituted the formation responsible for the entertainment of the British Forces.

quarters in Pretoria and signalled to Rome, plus a commentary on war items of local and home news prepared by the DAAG/NEAS in Rome. The programmes were further augmented by music from a good library of Bantu musical records, as well as periodical "live" broadcasts by visiting artists in NEAS bands and Concert Parties. The service was given from 18h15 to 18h45 on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. The Wednesday broadcast was a purely musical interlude of request records, while broadcasts of the other two days comprised the mixed programmes as mentioned above. The broadcasts were given in Zulu, Sesotho and Xhosa (on alternative days) by Black soldiers. At the beginning various details assisted with the broadcasts, but from the middle of August 1945 the broadcasts were run by Private Ebenezer Pangwa who had been a school teacher before his enlistment and was employed as a medical nursing orderly before assuming this new job. Private Pangwa was a good and spirited radio commentator who really loved his job. His broadcasts proved very popular and were enthusiastically received by NMC members in units throughout Italy.

Although a certain amount of publicity was given to the activities of the NEAS during the war, more could have been done to publicise the formation's contribution to the war effort. Because of the unspectacular nature of their duties, NMC and Cape Corps troops were doomed to be relegated to the background by the press which has always concerned itself so largely with the sensational aspects of warfare. It is, of course, questionable whether Blacks and Coloureds should have been mentioned

separately when the work of the Corps or Unit in which they were serving was praised. However, if the public of South Africa (and even the UDF generally) had realised how the various units were constituted, the special mention of the NEAS contribution to the success of such formations would not have been necessary. It is precisely because such organisational structure was not generally known that it was considered that NEAS effort justified more specific publicity.

NEAS PRISONERS OF WAR

Approximately four thousand Black and Coloured servicemen were taken prisoner during the Middle East Campaign. They were mostly NMC members who were captured along with the rest of the 2nd SA Division at the fall of Tobruk. The balance consisted of two companies of 107 Indian and Malay Corps Motor Transport and smaller numbers of Cape Corps and NMC soldiers who had been captured around Mersah Metruh during the general retreat from Tobruk to Alamein. There were also Cape Corps and NMC personnel who had been captured when the 5th SA Brigade was so badly battered during the epic battle against Rommel's tanks at Sidi Rezegh in November 1941.

Unlike their White compatriots who were despatched to Europe (mostly Italy) soon after capture, Black servicemen were held back in Africa and employed on the docks, in hospitals and in other work at Tobruk, Derna, Benghazi, Tripoli and other such places. They were mostly employed in labouring duties and had to work very long hours. In return, especially for those who remained in Tobruk, these POWs received very little food and even less water.

The Axis forces held the prisoners in wire cages in the dock areas where they were regularly subjected to the bombing of the Allied Air Forces which kept up a relentless attack on Tobruk. During such raids men were inevitably killed and yet the attacks were welcomed because they meant ultimate liberation. The strikes also enabled many men to escape as the sentries took cover and relented their vigil during the raids.

Those who escaped and undertook the 500 mile journey to Allied lines (then at Alamein) had some amazing adventures. The following stories are typical of the exploits of NMC who escaped and made their way to the Delta:

Two NMC details - Privates Hermanus Chaka and Sprinkaan Masamudi were compelled to



Most NEAS troops were prolific letter writers. Unlike most soldiers they apparently preferred writing letters to receiving them.

work for the enemy in Tobruk for no pay and very little food and water. Not only did they receive no pay, but the Italians took money from them and also their good clothing and boots, replacing them with old and worn articles. Fortunately one of them was able to hide £2 in his clothing, which was to become of great use later. One night, while Allied aeroplanes were bombing the enemy at Tobruk and the Italians who were guarding the Prisoners of War had hidden themselves in holes in the ground, these two men crept out of the fence and went south into the desert. Later they turned eastwards towards the Nile and walked for nearly a month across the hot sands of the Sahara. If the enemy was near at hand they would lie all day under a small scrub until their skin was burnt. At nightfall they would get

up and walk until the sun arose. When their feet swelled they would take off their boots but they continued walking until the swelling went down.



Private Hermanus Chaka, MM.

The escapees met a few Arabs in the desert, most of whom were very helpful when they understood that the men were "English". One Arab, however, who was carrying an Italian gun charged them £1 for two bottles of water. He also gave them the wrong directions. Fortunately the fact that he had carried an Italian gun and asked so much for so little water had made them suspicious and they took no notice of his advice. On one occasion Privates Chaka and Masamudi walked for two days and two nights without any food at all and practically no water. Generally they were able to find just



The presentation of the Military Medal to three NEAS soldiers. Private Springkaan Masekula is pictured on the right in the process of accepting his medal.

sufficient in broken down lorries, and elsewhere where troops had been, to keep life going. Soon after they had reached the UDF lines both servicemen were awarded the Military Medal. Such epic marches by escaped Black soldiers were quite frequent after that.

Another amazing story concerns Corporal Job Maseko who also gained the Military Medal through his exploits while a POW. Corporal Maseko was captured with the 2nd SA Division and held prisoner at Tobruk. During his enforced stay he collected sufficient cordite from rifle cartridges found in the desert sand to fill a jam tin. When he and other Black prisoners were put to work on an enemy ship anchored in Tobruk harbour, he placed the jam tin near a number of drums of petrol. Having worked on the mines Corporal Maseko was able to make a fuse and just before they went ashore he lit the fuse. The ship blew up and sank.

Corporal Maseko also stole an enemy wireless set. This he set up in an empty cellar. The guards were afraid to venture into the cellar as it contained an unexploded bomb. He tuned into Cairo, disproving German statements that the British had been driven out of North Africa. He and several other Native Military Corps prisoners later escaped and after ten days in the desert were rescued by two UDF officers.

In November 1943 about 1 200 NMC and Cape Corps members were released after the Allies had recaptured Tobruk. The remainder of the Black POWs had been moved further along the African coast or to Italy (small numbers including

sick and wounded were later released at Derna, Benghazi, Tripoli and Bizerta). In Italy they were originally held in the south near Brindisi, later at Solerno and then moved to Capua. After that they went to northern Italy and eventually landed up at Beauvais in France after having travelled through Germany. At Beauvais the POWs were again divided up and the bulk of them were taken to work at aerodromes and perform duties in southern France.



Members of the NEAS marching through the streets of Durban during a special retreat ceremony.

With the Allied invasion of France about 800 Native Military Corps and Cape Corps POWs were liberated. These men were sent to Naples from where they returned to the Union. Most of the remaining NEAS POWs were released with the collapse of the Axis Forces in Europe. They were evacuated to South Africa via England where a reception depot had been set up for them.

To be taken prisoner during wartime is never a happy experience. However the Black POWs liberated in North Africa and Europe had been through the worst treatment imaginable. They were forced to stand outside at aerodromes during Allied raids, to dig up unexploded bombs, they suffered hunger, thirst and cold. There were even some instances where men were shot in cold blood.

CONCLUSION

The policy of employing Blacks and Coloureds in the Union Defence Forces was often criticised, which was not surprising given South Africans' peculiar approach to racial matters. The founders of the NEAS had to overcome many political obstacles before the service could proceed with its work unhindered. Having achieved this, the employment of Black and Coloured soldiers in the UDF proved to be most successful.

Volunteers for the Native Military Corps and Cape Corps came forward in large numbers to serve their country at a time when the UDF was desperate for manpower. Appreciation of their services was expressed in the following message by the Acting Prime Minister and the Chief of the General Staff on VE day:

From the CGS : Lt Gen Sir Pierre van Ryneveld

"You have served your country loyally, enthusiastically and with great distinction during the grim struggle which had just ended so victoriously.

At one time there were more than 120 000 Non-Europeans serving in or with the Union Defence Forces. What a mighty contribution that was. We European soldiers, airmen and sailors feel and know the great achievements of South Africa's fighting forces, on the land, in the air and on the seas, would never have been possible without your staunch and unwavering services.

So together we share for all time the honour and the glory of this sometimes hard, sometimes harsh, but always lovable old country of ours - South Africa."

From the Acting Prime Minister : Mr J.H. Hofmeyer.

"Now that we are in the fortunate position of being able to celebrate victory as far as the war in Europe is concerned, I would like to express the Government's very sincere appreciation of the great contribution made by our Non-European troops to that victory.

By their discipline, efficiency and courage they have won golden opinions for themselves and helped to bring honour to the name of South Africa.

I hope that they will set the seal for their good records by maintaining their discipline and efficiency during the period of demobilisation which lies ahead.

My best wishes to them all."

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACF	Active Citizen Force
CC	Cape Corps
Coy	Company
DAAG	Deputy Adjutant General
IMC	Indian and Malay Corps
MT	Motor Transport
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
NEAS	Non European Army Service
NMC	Native Military Corps
SAAF	South African Air Force
SAWAS	South African Womens Auxilliary Services
UDF	Union Defence Forces
UDFI	Union Defence Forces Institute