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'WARRIORS WITHOUT WEAPONS'

BLACK SERVICEMEN IN THE UNION DEFENCE FORCE DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR.

by

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'A dissertation submitted
to the
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ABSTRACT

The central feature of service in the Second World War for black soldiers, was the continuation of racial discrimination along the lines of that experienced by them in civilian life in South Africa. This discrimination affected almost every aspect of military service; from recruitment and training, to their deployment as unarmed soldiers in non-combatant duties in various units.

This dissertation uses both oral and archival sources to comment upon, and analyze, the responses of black members of the Union Defence Force to their service in the war. These responses are at times complementary, and at other times contradictory, but one general conclusion to be drawn from them, is that black soldiers felt their contribution to the South African war effort had gone largely unrecognised, either in remunerative or socio-political terms.

Black servicemen were not only discriminated against by both the state and individual whites in the Union Defence Force, they were also used inefficiently in a military context. The views of certain white soldiers have been used to illustrate this, both from a contemporary perspective and a historical one.

The hasty formation of the Corps in which blacks served; the Non-European Army Services, its administrative weaknesses, and occasional disunity in its leadership, also hampered the effective use of black servicemen in the war.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university.

SIGNED _____

5th day of November, 1995

DEDICATION

This dissertation is respectfully dedicated to the memory of Mickey Vilikazi and Donald Madingoane, and to all the men who served in the Native Military Corps between 1940 and 1946.

PREFACE

This dissertation was inspired by a conversation between myself and Mickey Vilikazi, an ex-member of the Native Military Corps, in 1985, on the subject of black participation in the Second World War. I must express thanks to the Human Sciences Research Council for their financial assistance in the writing of this dissertation, and stress that the views expressed herein are my own and should not be regarded as those of the Human Sciences Research Council.

I would also like to thank the Archives of the South African Defence Force for their patience and assistance, General Ian Gleason for his invaluable suggestions and contributions and all those ex-servicemen who consented to being interviewed. Thanks too, go to Desireé, who typed this under conditions of extreme pressure.

I am deeply indebted to Dr Iain Hamilton, my supervisor, without whose constant correction, encouragement and guidance, this dissertation would not exist.

Most of all, I wish to thank my parents, family and friends, whose support has been unfailing, and whose interest has never flagged.

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SELECT LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAG	-	Assistant Adjutant General
ADCS	-	Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff
ADDNEAS	-	Assistant Deputy Director Non-European Army Services
A.G.	-	Adjutant General
ANC	-	African National Congress
AOC	-	Assistant Officer Commanding
AWOL	-	Absent Without Leave
Bn	-	Battalion
CGS	-	Chief of General Staff
CMF	-	Central Mediterranean Forces
CPSA	-	Communist Party of South Africa
DAG	-	Deputy Adjutant General
DCS	-	Deputy Chief of Staff
DCGS	-	Deputy Chief of the General Staff
DDC	-	Dispersal Depot Committee
DDNEAS	-	Deputy Director of Non-European Army Services
Dechief	-	Defence Chief
DGMS	-	Director General Medical Services
DMI	-	Director Military Intelligence
DMT	-	Director Mechanized Transport
DNEAS	-	Director Non-European Army Services
DSDC	-	Discharged Soldiers Demobilisation Committee
GGNWF	-	Governor General's National War Fund
GOC	-	General Officer Commanding
GHQ	-	General Headquarters
HCT	-	High Commission Territory

IMC	-	Indian and Malay Corps
KAR	-	King's African Rifles
MDC	-	Military Disciplinary Code
ME	-	Middle East
MEF	-	Middle East Forces
MM	-	Military Medal
MP	-	Military Police
MT	-	Motor Transport
MTTD	-	Mechanical Transport Training Depot
NAD	-	Native Affairs Department
NEAS	-	Non-European Army Services
NCO	-	Non-Commissioned Officer
OC	-	Officer Commanding
POW	-	Prisoner of War
QMG	-	Quartermaster General
SAEC	-	South African Engineering Corps
SAIRR	-	South African Institute of Race Relations
SAMC	-	South African Medical Corps
SNA	-	Secretary for Native Affairs
SO	-	Staff Officer
TAC	-	Training Area Commandant
UDF	-	Union Defence Force

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CHRONOLOGY OF THE N.M.C.

July 1940	-	Formation of Non-European Army Services (NEAS).
August 1940	-	Establishment of Native Military Corps (NMC) and beginning of Recruitment. (The first DNEAS was Lt. Col. B.W. Martin, with Major F. Rodseth, M.B.E. as ADNEAS)
September 1940	-	First Indian and Coloured Units leave the Union for East Africa.
November 1940	-	E.T. Stubbs Replaces Martin as DNEAS, Martin appointed DDNEAS and sent to Middle East.
January 1941	-	First NMC MT units leave for Abyssinia.
June 1941	-	NEAS units in East Africa leave for the Middle East.
June 1941	-	Establishment of the Deputy Directorate of the NEAS in the Middle East.
January 1942	-	Beginning of Dilution.
June 1942	-	Fall of Tobruk, Beginning of Disciplinary problems in NMC, many NMC troops taken prisoner at Tobruk.
January 1943	-	Increase of Disciplinary problems and unrest in NMC, especially in the Union.
March-May 1943	-	Stubbs obliged to defend his jurisdiction over training of NMC, end of recruitment of NMC.
April 1944	-	Directorate of Demobilization established.

July 1944	-	Publication of NEAS welfare guidelines and appointment of welfare officers for all NMC units.
January 1945	-	Beginning of formal demobilization.
August 1945	-	J.C. Knoetze prepares first history of the NEAS.
September 1947	-	End of demobilization.

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INTRODUCTION PART I.

The history of South Africa's military participation in the Second World War is quite exhaustive and detailed. N. Orpen, H.J. Martin and J.A. Brown's seven volume history of this participation is both comprehensive and highly informative.[1] The only significant lack in this monumental series is the almost complete disregard for the participation in the war of over 100 000 non-white soldiers from the Union of South Africa. Where mention is made of these men, it is cursory and vague. The newest addition to this series, by General Ian Gleason, is in fact concerned with precisely this omission. It is not yet in publication, but can only be a welcome (if tardy) addition to the series and will, hopefully do something towards encouraging the long overdue recognition of the contribution made by black, 'coloured' and Indian soldiers to the South Africa war effort.

Interest in the participation of black soldiers in the war is of fairly recent vintage. Until as recently as 1983, little outside of Edward Roux's (at the time, banned in South Africa) Time Longer Than Rope[2], had taken even a cursory look at South African blacks in the war. Even Roux - who is ultimately more concerned with analysing the effect of black participation on the liberation struggle in the Union, than with the intricacies of actual military service for blacks - is less than thorough in his chapter on black participation.

In 1983, both Kenneth Grundy[3] and Mirjana Roth[4] published pieces on black participation in World War II. Roth's article focuses on the issue of recruitment of blacks for the Union Defence Force (the official defence force of South Africa at the time), and the various incentives and methods used to encourage recruitment. Her conclusions, that the discrimination practised by the UDF towards black soldiers made little difference to recruitment figures, and that apathy and indifference best characterised the black response to the war, do have a certain validity. This must be briefly qualified however, by saying that many of her conclusions are based on limited evidence, and some assumptions, such as the following:

> In spite of the many complaints about the conditions in which Native Military Corps had to serve, there were surprisingly few manifestations of dissatisfaction. [5],

will be severely questioned by the findings of this dissertation.

Grundy, while also suffering from problems generated by limited evidence, does have one particularly substantive point to make. This is, that the limitations placed on the use of black troops in the UDF, by the racial prejudices of the South African state, led to a situation of both chronic misuse of black personnel, and, what amounted to a grievous waste of manpower.[6] Grundy also refers to several issues which will form areas of analysis in this dissertation. These include the poo organisational structures of the branch of the UDF created to deal with black recruits; the Directorate of Non-European Army Services

(DNEAS),[7] and the ineffectuality of black representative organisations in helping to redress the grievances of black soldiers.[8]

In 1986, Louis Grundlingh completed his doctoral thesis on black participation in the Second World War.[9] This proved to be detailed and thorough enough to compensate for the lack of other material on the subject. Almost every aspect of black service in the UDF is covered, and his command of sources and evidence is impressive, to say the least. Nevertheless, Grundlingh's work has, in my view, one serious drawback: because of his concern with painstaking detail and comprehensiveness, one is often left with the sense that the more subjective aspects of the topic - for instance the perceptions of black servicemen themselves, and the internecine squabbling that characterised the high command of the NEAS - have been somewhat neglected. In addition, one sometimes gets the sense that the level of analysis in the thesis is subordinated to the presentation of empirical data. In other words, the wealth of archival detail is occasionally not subjected to sufficient analytical scrutiny. Having said that, one must concede that there is no other work on the topic which has the authority and scope of Grundlingh's.

My own interest in the subject was generated by two factors. The first was that during a conversation with a musical acquaintance, he happened to mention that he had played in the Native Military Corps band (NMC) during the war. This led to my discovery of the lack of study done on black participation between 1939 and 1945,

and encouraged my interest in addressing that lack. The second was my realisation, after reading Grundlingh's thesis, that my access to oral sources could provide a study based largely on these sources, which would address some of the above areas of criticism.

The dissertation then, is an attempt to understand the reality of service in the UDF for black soldiers, and to gain some understanding of how they perceived this service. It is also concerned with examining the extent to which overall South Africa military efficiency and effectiveness, was hampered by the South African state's discriminatory racial policies, during the war. It does not attempt to cover every aspect of black service, nor is it specifically concerned with the Cape Corps, or Indian and Malay Corps, who have at least some coverage in the official sources.[10] This study is concerned with entering the debate about black participation in the Second World War by affirming the value of oral history to this topic in particular; partly because of the simple availability of such oral sources (although this is rapidly being eroded by time), and partly because only through a clear presentation of the contrasts between oral and archival sources, can we create a clearer picture of this black service. Paul Thompson has said of oral evidence that:

> It gives history a future no longer tied to the cultural significance of the paper document.[11]

This is of particular importance when most of the paper documents relating to a particular period were compiled and dictated by a repressive, culturally autocratic regime. It is in this context

that the evidence of black ex-servicemen assumes special significance.

This is not to say that oral evidence does not have limitations. One is wise to remember that, memory can be defective, that informants sometimes embroider or even fabricate evidence, that the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee influences and sometimes inadvertently directs oral testimony, and, that often, in group interviews, group pressure can influence testimony. It is also necessary to stress that throughout the course of this study, we will keep the historiographical elements of the topic in mind, and the limitations of oral evidence will be examined whenever they present themselves.

Some of the interviews I conducted were done in a group context. Some were with individuals from the groups at later dates. Some interviews were done in series and one, that with Mr J.C. Knoetze was conducted in the knowledge that he was the author of (until Grundlingh's 1986 thesis), the most comprehensive history of the NEAS, written in 1945 when he was liaison officer for the Deputy Director of Non-European Army Services (DNEAS) in the Middle East (M.E.).[12] The opportunity to assess the continuity of his judgements was unique, and provides one of the central themes of this study; namely, the extent to which lack of communication and personal antipathies in the high command, and the lower levels, affected the smooth and efficient functioning of the NEAS. The next section of this introduction will provide a brief

overview of the main figures mentioned in the dissertation, and a breakdown of the basic structure of the Native Military Corps (NMC), as a preliminary to the first chapter.

PART II

The Non-European Army Services was the final name of the Corps created to allow black, 'coloured' and Indian men to serve as soldiers in the Second World War. A brief examination of its structures and tensions was considered more appropriate to the introduction - due to its relationship to all the participants who will be introduced in the next section - than to the first chapter, which is concerned more with the general circumstances leading up to its formation, than its actual composition.

At the outset (12/7/1940) the organisation consisted of the Director of Non-European Army Services (DNEAS), who had command over three Corps. The Cape Corps (C.C.), the Indian and Malay Corps (I.M.C.), and the Native Military Corps (NMC). Under him, a Deputy Director (DDNEAS) was appointed to command all members of the NEAS in the Middle East, and a number of Staff Officers (S.O.) were appointed to fill the organisation.

The first DNEAS was Lt. Col. B.W. Martin who had been Director of Native Labour on the Witwatersrand[13] before the war. With him he brought a number of young men who had worked in his

organisation in pre-war days, and this included the then junior NCO, J.C. Knoetze. Immediate organisational problems were experienced, partly due to the tendency of the rest of the UDF to regard the NEAS with some considerable condescension. In November 1940 therefore, in order to lend more weight to the Corps, Senator E.T. Stubbs, (a personal friend of Smuts) was appointed new DNEAS, and Martin was given the Deputy Directorate in the Middle East. Stubbs did have some experience with blacks. He had been responsible for raising a Native Labour Contingent during the First World War and had been a Native Commissioner in the Rustenburg district between 1924 and 1928,[14] but this was not impressive enough for the existing administration of the NEAS.

There is no doubt that Martin and his subordinates, Knoetze among them, regarded this as an insult:

> Col. Martin was very upset at this appointment. It was regarded as a political appointment. Stubbs was a very arrogant person,[15]

and, as a result, co-operation between the DNEAS in the Union, and the DDNEAS in the Middle East, was never what it should have been, with, as we shall see, extremely negative results for black troops. Even in the Union itself, Stubbs was never a universally popular administrator, and the tensions created in his organisation by his occasional conflicts with senior staff officers - the General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.), for one - and Unit Commanders, often caused serious problems for NMC troops themselves.

* * *

PART III

The subjects of the interviews which form the basis of this dissertation come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. Yet they all had one thing in common; service in the NMC during the Second World War. Of particular interest to my study is the testimony of the four subjects I interviewed individually, and two of those interviewed in a group context. All the other subjects appear in this dissertation, but not with the frequency or authority of these six. The full list of interviewees appears on page 253.

Donald Madingoane:

Mr Madingoane worked for the Y.M.C.A. before, and during the war. He joined the NMC in 1940, at the age of 20. he served as a clerk and a canteen worker, both in the Union and 'up North', and was demobilized in 1945. He lived in Soweto, until 1990, when he sadly passed away.

Frank Sexwale:

Mr Sexwale joined in 1940, at Pietersburg. He trained as a driver before being sent to the Middle East in 1941. He was demobilized in 1944, and lives in Soweto.

Samuel Maseko:

Mr Maseko joined the NMC at Nigel in 1941. He played in the NMC band, both in the Union, and in the Middle East,

and after demobilization, played in jazz bands with many famous South African jazz stars such as Zakes Nkosi and Mickey Vilikazi.

Abiel Sello:

Mr Sello joined the NMC in 1943. He worked as a medical orderly both in the Union and at 101 Military Hospital near Cairo, and attempted to get a similar job on his return to the Union, but was prevented by the industrial laws then in force.

Ray C[illegible]:

Joined the UDF in January 1940, and the NMC sometime later that year. He was a driving instructor at West Vlakfontein for a period, and ran a petrol depot for the UDF near Tripoli till the end of the War. He was a staff sergeant, and worked for Escom after his discharge.

J.C. Knoetze:

Mr Knoetze worked for the Native Affairs Department (NAD) before the war, and was the first NCO in the NMC in 1940. He served as senior welfare officer and liaison officer between the DDNEAS and the South African Airforce (S.A.A.F.) in the Middle East as a captain, till his discharge, when he rejoined the NAD. He later became head of the West Rand Administration Board, and continues to work in civil administration in Sebokeng to the present day.

These then are the principal commentators in the pages that follow. It is through their voices, and the voices of all those interviewed, that we will draw a picture of the NMC during the Second World War, which will both complement and contrast that drawn from the archival sources.

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FOOTNOTES : INTRODUCTION

1. Orpen, N.; Martin, H.J. and Brown, J.A. South African Forces, World War II, Vols. 1-7 (1968 - 1979).

2. Roux, E. Time Longer Than Rope: The Black Man's Struggle For Freedom in South Africa. University of Wisconsin Press (1948 and 1964), pp. 303-317.

3. Grundy, K.W. Soldiers Without Politics. Blacks in the South African Armed Forces, Berkeley and Los Angeles (1983).

4. Roth, M. "'If you give us rights we will fight': Black involvement in the Second World War" in South African Historical Journal, No. 15, (1983).

5. Ibid., p. 103.

6. Grundy, p. 81.

7. Ibid., pp. 78-79.

8. Ibid., pg. 69.

9. Grundlingh, L.; 'The Participation of South African Blacks in the Second World War'. Unpublished P.H.D. Thesis, Rand Afrikaans University, (1986).

10. Notably; Orpen, N. South African Coloured and Indian soldiers in World War II - A comment in South African International, Vol. XI, No. 3, (3/1/81).

11. Thompson, P. The Voice of the Past: Oral History. Oxford University Press (1978), pg. 64.

12. Knoetze, J.C. 'Historical Survey of the Non-European Army Services outside the Union of South Africa', Archives of the South African Defence Force, Pretoria (Rome, 1945).

13. Ibid. pg. 2.

14. Stubbs, E.T. Africana Library, University of the Witwatersrand; Stubbs Collection, Whole Biography.

15. Knoetze, J.C.; Sebokeng (1992).

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CHAPTER I

PART 1:

South African participation in the Second World War was always a contentious and controversial issue. Powerful and, at times violent, opposition from the right characterised both the prelude to South Africa's entry into the fray, and its continued participation. It is not the task of this dissertation to discuss the white opposition to South African participation, but this opposition does have a direct bearing on black participation as well. Therefore while the question of white opposition is well documented elsewhere, it is nonetheless necessary to refer to it briefly as part of the discussion of black participation in the war.

There were a number of general areas of controversy over proposed black participation, aside from the abovementioned one. This introductory section will attempt to address them in some detail although this particular debate is not a point of concentration in the dissertation. It is also important to keep in mind that there is a historiographical element to the discussion, and constant reference will be made to the viewpoints of various historians on the subject. There were really two main areas of controversy over the proposed recruitment of blacks into the Union Defence Force (UDF). The first was opposition from sectors of the white community as already mentioned, and the second was the attitude of the black community.

For many South African whites, particularly conservative sectors of the Afrikaans community, entry into the war, particularly on the side of Britain, was an unpopular and deeply resented decision on the part of the Smuts Government. Smuts had barely acquired a mandate to enter the war and many of his wartime decisions were qualified and limited by the power of the right wing opposition.

As Edward Roux put it:

> Smuts was in a difficult position. His pro-war motion had been carried by a narrow majority. He could not rely on a large section of the Afrikaner population. While the more moderate Nationalists were merely non-co-operative, others, such as the Ossewa-Brandwag members, were actively hostile.[1]

Many Afrikaners were active supporters of Germany and hated Britain vehemently. Others simply felt that the war was a Eurocentric conflict and had nothing to do with them. Thus, when manpower difficulties and shortages at the end of 1939 provoked the announced intention of recruiting blacks into the UDF, the outcry was immediate, the opposition steep. The spectre of blacks serving side by side with whites (and possibly being treated as equals by them) was anathema to most Nationalist followers, as was the thought of numbers of armed, highly trained black soldiers in their midst.

This was accentuated by the fact that these blacks would be

serving in an army whose high command, i.e. the British eighth army command, came from a country whose colonial policy towards blacks was, in Nationalist eyes, dangerously liberal:

> The Nationalist view, expressed by Pirow in 1933 when he had been Minister of Defence, was infused with the general spirit of resistance to the first hints of decolonisation and liberalism throughout the colonies to the North.[2]

Many whites were afraid that contact with politically aware blacks from other African territories would 'dangerously' influence South African blacks[3], particularly if these new political ideas were to be carried over into a post-war South Africa. The military authorities themselves were distinctly wary of any use of blacks which would threaten the status of whites in the forces.[4]

As both Albert and Louis Grundlingh have discussed, there was a distinct history of white opposition to the use of blacks in 'white' wars in Southern Africa. Kenneth Grundy has shown how, as far back as the Boer war, the use of blacks to fight whites (even if these whites were the enemy) was embarked upon reluctantly at best.[5] The exclusion of blacks from combatant roles in South African forces was included in the 1912 South African Defence Force Act, which effectively meant that blacks in the South African forces in the First World War served exclusively in non-combatant roles:

> The idea of fighting side-by-side with blacks even in the face of a common enemy, was still positively

frowned upon during the First World War.[6]

Although blacks had served in significant numbers in the First World War (± 20 000) they had been limited to duties such as stretcher bearing and manual labour. Albert Grundlingh in his book Fighting Their Own War (Ravan, 1987) has shown that the South African authorities had, even then, been nervous of the reactions of white soldiers to blacks being regarded as their equals in the army. Many blacks were in fact sceptical of Smuts's plans to include them in the U.D.F. based on the cavalier treatment accorded black soldiers in the 1914-18 war. Furthermore, the contribution of these men to that conflict had been largely forgotten by the South African State. Certainly the political benefits they hoped to accrue from participation were not forthcoming, and even the tragic loss of 607 black lives in the sinking of the 'Mendi'[7] an allied troopship in 1917 went largely unrecognized by the state till as late as 1986. Thus a history of discriminatory and reluctant use of blacks in 'white' wars in South Africa had been dictated by unavoidable white manpower shortages. It seemed unlikely that the pattern would be broken in 1939.

There were of course many whites who were strongly in favour of black participation in the war. Most prominent among these were the three parliamentary representatives of the blacks, Molteno, Ballinger and Henning. Roux has discussed the belief of these, and other white liberals, that black participation in the war would lead to a softening on the part of the state towards blacks, with possible political rewards to follow.[8] Most white

liberals were, therefore outraged at the decision not to arm blacks. Nevertheless, they did not withdraw their support for black participation. Mirjana Roth has asserted that:

> It can only be concluded that the 1939 vote for war by these representatives was not given with due consideration to the views of their black constituents. It was a reflection of their own personal ideologies and sympathies.[9]

That was probably so, but Roth has seriously underestimated the extent of real black support for the war, and, while it may be something of an exaggeration for Roux to claim that:

> The overwhelming majority of Africans were prepared to join up and fight the Nazis, provided they were given arms.[10]

This dissertation will show clearly that the representative's view of black support for the war might not have been as clouded by white liberal 'sympathies' as Roth would have us believe.

What then constituted black attitudes towards the war? Well, as with the whites, opinion and support was divided. Part of the problem is, as Roth has pointed out, that:

> As far as can be ascertained there is no published [or unpublished for that matter] work which has attempted to deal in any detail with the attitude of the Africans as a whole to the war.[11]

We therefore have no convenient overview of general black attitudes towards the war. As with many aspects of the subject at hand, perhaps the most authoritative work is Louis

Grundlingh's excellent 1986 doctoral thesis. While his chapter on the issue of black attitudes to the war is not exhaustive, it is detailed and relatively comprehensive. Grundlingh basically seems to conclude that while there were many blacks for, against and indifferent to the war, the prevailing opinion among blacks at the time (those who even had the leisure or indignation to take an interest) was one of limited support.[12]

One of the barometers we do have of black attitudes to the war is that of official black organisations' attitudes on the issue. The most prominent of these organisations was of course the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC's position was initially one of support for the government, conditional upon the 'full'[13] (i.e. Armed) participation of black soldiers in the war. When, however, the state refused to sanction armed black participation in the conflict, the ANC nonetheless maintained support, and although the organisation's requests for full participation and political rewards for support went largely ignored by the authorities, continued to do so (although with increasing reservation) till the end of the war. The ANC's main difficulty therefore, was in reconciling its support for the war (to which it felt committed for ideological reasons) with acceptance of the inferior status accorded to blacks in the UDF. It was this anomaly which led Grundy to comment that:

> The ANC had difficulty throughout the war formulating a consistent and widely acceptable policy on black involvement in the war.[14]

Perhaps this was an inevitable consequence of the fact that there

was little consensus on the war issue among the black community at large. Other bodies, such as the Native Representative Council also agreed to conditional support for the war effort and called for an amendment to the abovementioned Defence Act of 1912, which would have allowed blacks to serve in an armed capacity. Much mention has been made of this limitation on black service and it needs to be examined more fully. In the next section which will deal with the creation and early establishment of a corps designed for the participation of blacks, I will discuss the issue of non-armament as well as examining the responses of participants, black and white, to the armament debate.

By February 1940, the decision to recruit blacks for service with the UDF had been taken. At first, the stated intention of the government was to raise a number of labour battalions for military duty. Naturally, the black community (those who were interested) were outraged and, along with numerous white liberals protested strongly. Nor was the white community appeased by this measure. Many white farmers were alarmed at the prospect of losing labour to the army[15] and although the government tried to conciliate them by assuring them that their supply of cheap labour would not be cut off by recruitment and that major areas of agricultural activity would be avoided by recruiters,[16] they were not entirely convinced. The mines and industry also expressed misgivings, but manpower shortages in the UDF dictated the fact that blacks would nonetheless be recruited. For once, however, the state did take cognizance of the protests of the

black community at the notion of labour battalions and, more than this, of the spectre of farms and mines without workers created in the minds of some whites by the title, and so the name of the black corps was to be changed.

It was decided, in June 1940, to raise a brigade of four battalions of 'Native Military Guards'. These guards would be deployed in security roles at strategic installations around the Union, however, since the decision had been taken not to arm black soldiers, the question of how they were to perform their guard duties adequately promised to become an interesting one. There is some confusion over when the final name of Native Military Corps (NMC) was decided upon and the Corps established. It is certain that sometime between July and October the Corps became official.[17] Also official was the news of the non-combatant status of the Corps. As mentioned, the black community was immediately conscious of the fact that non-armament of black soldiers would probably consign them to the same menial and uncongenial tasks they had performed in the First World War, and that the change of name of the Corps was a change in name only. While this was not to prove entirely true these fears were nevertheless not unjustified and the ANC, among other organisations, protested strongly against the non-combatant status of black soldiers. The Reverend Z.R. Mahabana, President General of the organisation prevented it from outright refusal of support for the government and an amended statement was released.

The territorial integrity of the Union of South Africa

> can only be effectively defended if all sections of the population were included in the defence system of the country on equal terms, and that those who are or may be eligible for military service shall receive military service and shall receive military training in all its aspects.[18]

In not withdrawing its support, the ANC perhaps wasted an opportunity to make some real political gains at the expense of a government under pressure. It is important though, to remember that Smuts was still far more concerned about white fears of armed blacks than black protest [illegible] rdinate status in the UDF.

Initially the only duties envisaged for black soldiers were as guards or labourers. The proposals to use blacks as guards at power stations, military installations, etc. did little to alarm whites, but the intention of using them to guard white prisoners of war (P.O.W.'s) incensed the right[19] and so much pressure was brought to bear upon Smuts that assurances were given that only foreign prisoners would be guarded by blacks. All internees from the Union would be guarded by whites. Of course, this was wasteful of manpower and in fact made nonsense of the very reason blacks were being recruited in the first place, that is, to free white soldiers for combat duty. This type of mismanagement of manpower and personnel as a result of racial criteria was a persistent problem in the UDF throughout the war, and will form one of the central themes of this dissertation. As Grundy has said:

> There was an extraordinary waste of black manpower,

> first due to the limitation of blacks officially to non-combatant roles (even against the intentions of Field Marshall Smuts and many of his line and combat officers), and second due to the dilution policy ...[20].

Furthermore, we can see from the above extract that communication and co-operation between the Government and the UDF over the NMC was not always as smooth and unified as could have been wished, partly because the government and the army were sometimes at odds as to how blacks should be utilized, and partly because the government expected the UDF to make optimum use of blacks, despite the limitations imposed by the racial policies of the South African state.

Once again, due to a shortage of manpower, the duties of black soldiers had shortly to be expanded, and by early 1941, blacks were serving in capacities as diverse as:

> ... motor transport drivers, dispatch riders, stretcher bearers, medical aids (sick), shoemakers, tailors, clerks, typists, etc.[21]

They served in these capacities both in the Union and 'Up North' and one of the major tasks of this study is to attempt to understand how black soldiers perceived their roles and responded to them. Many black veterans expressed satisfaction at the duties they had performed during the war, fine Mlambo, for instance, recalled:

> I was driver, Up North ... was good job ... was good driver ... was driving, water truck in Egypt ...[22]

Of course, motor transport duties were among the more prestigious

(if also more dangerous) duties performed by black soldiers in the war, so a favourable memory of it is not all that surprising, especially in the light of considerably more veterans who did not remember their duties with much affection. According to Frank Sexwale:

> It wasn't a happy experience for most of us. Because of the discrimination ... we had to do the most junior duties like driving, carting things and nothing else, and doing guard duties.[23]

It is interesting to note the difference between Sexwale's perception of MT duties and Mlambo's. This highlights another focus of this dissertation, namely the fact that there is as much divergence of opinion and memory among black veterans on the subject of their service in the NMC, as there is consensus.

Back in 1939 however, it did not seem as if blacks would even have the chance to participate as drivers. Insult was seemingly added to the injury of menial duties when it was decided that blacks would be confined to the Union, thus denying them even the possibility of travel, for some a motivation for recruitment. However, manpower shortages in early 1940 again compelled the government to reverse this policy and by the end of the year blacks were serving throughout Africa but not 'elsewhere'.[24]

It was thus in the face of a partially hostile white community and a sceptical, if not indifferent, black one that the UDF began its recruitment drive in 1940. The success of this recruitment drive was dependent upon four things; the efficiency of its

system of information dissemination, the methods of recruitment it employed, its understanding of the needs of the various black communities at the time (which is closely linked to the incentives it was offering) and its ability to cope with a manpower situation unprecedented in South African military history.

For the potential recruits it was both a familiar and unfamiliar experience. Familiar because the same (or similar) racial prejudices were present, both in the government's attitude towards them and in that of the army, as had prevailed before the war, and unfamiliar because the army environment itself was in a number of ways a truly new, and sometimes frightening one. It was bound to be a confusing, frustrating and often enlightening experience for both the UDF and its newest set of recruits. This experience forms the substance of the next section of this chapter.

PART II: RECRUITMENT

A. THE CAMPAIGN

The UDF's recruitment drive, particularly in the early stages was an uneasy mixture of racial stereotyping and assumptions, poor organisation, hit and miss methodology, and reliance on often untrustworthy accomplices. Nevertheless, through the course of the war it managed to recruit over 80 000 black soldiers. We need therefore to understand not only the failures of the

recruiting campaign, but its successes as well, even if there were certain limits on these successes.

It is clear that initial requirement figures kept changing. From an initial figure of 8000 in early 1940, Stubbs, the Director of Non European Army Services (DNEAS) had raised the figure to 500 000 (!) in March 1941.[25] This figure was however adjusted more realistically, and set at around 60 000 (excluding replacements). There is thus not a large discrepancy between the figures required and those obtained, certainly not enough for Roth to proclaim recruitment a virtual failure.[26] After all, 80 000 men were recruited and did serve in the UDF. Where then, did they come from? Why did they come? How did they learn of the possibility? What options did they have? These questions are crucial to any investigation of the UDF's recruitment policy between 1940 to 1943 - (when recruitment was ended. Mainly due to the turning tide of the war).

The two most popular recruitment methods initially favoured by the UDF were recruitment films and posters. These films were generally shown in beerhalls, schoolrooms and other gathering places in the townships and by three mobile film units in the rural areas. With an obviously high propaganda content and a fairly romanticised view of the role of the black solder in the UDF the films were nevertheless popular. Mockford (the ADNEAS in the Union) in a letter to a NMC patron, wrote:

> The films shown from the vans are very well received, and the increase in recruiting response has been very

marked.[27]

Although as Grundlingh has shown:

> In all likelihood, however, the entertainment factor was the main drawcard.[28]

Also, Mockford may have been attempting to gratify Bouchier, whose company, The Tea Market Expansion Bureau, had donated three mobile film vans to the UDF. This brings us to those private companies who attempted to involve themselves in the recruitment process, an aspect of the subject largely neglected by Louis Grundlingh in his otherwise outstanding chapter on recruitment. Official policy was that only the NMC would pursue a recruitment programme. This was decided largely because the initial poor response was attributed to the use of Native Commissioners as recruiters. Over the years, some of these commissioners had acquired very poor reputations among black people, due to their abuse of authority, and it was felt that their participation in the recruitment campaign was becoming counterproductive[29], but any help private companies had to offer, short of actual recruitment itself[30], was greatly appreciated. This extended to attempting to persuade companies to encourage trained personnel (particularly drivers), to join the NMC.[31] While it may be thought that this would have had little appeal to employers, sometimes those who were themselves joining up, encouraged their black staff to follow suit. However, it must be said that those employers that did so were probably actuated by pragmatic motives (i.e. lack of employment) rather than ideological one's:

> My boss tell me ... 'look I'm going to the army now' ... Everything is closed ... I'm going to the army,

because what can I do here? I got no money, no job.

Recruitment posters, like the films, were high on propagandistic content and were posted at almost any public place: train stations, bus stops, schools, Native Commissioners' offices. The broad ideological content of the initial posters proved too general however and were subsequently altered to focus on economic incentives rather than appeals of the 'Your Country Needs You' variety.[33] In any case, many of the black soldiers who did join for 'patriotic' reasons claimed allegiance to the British crown rather than to the Union:

> Later on there came a chief (1941) ... he say: 'The King says there's a war. Everybody must go fight for the King ...'[34].

Although, this was probably the chief's perception rather that of his listeners, many of whom were hearing about the war for the first time, and of course not all the chiefs and recruiters phrased their appeals thus.[35]

Stubbs's initial recruitment drive was proving far less successful than had been hoped, partly due to a poorly planned propaganda campaign, partly due to the poor quality of many of the recruiters chosen for the task. In a letter to Colonel Stubbs, dated 17 August 1941, the O.C. recruiting for Natal states that:

> Correct type [of recruiter] and adaptability are the key notes, no clearer example is needed than scrutiny of Durban returns where one recruiter averages 45

> recruits while others average between 4 and 6 monthly.[36]

The problem obviously lay in the varying commitment and reliability, not to mention the honesty, of the NMC recruiters:

> ... the abovementioned native recruiter carried out his recruiting duties in an extremely unsatisfactory manner. He was frequently under the influence of liquor, and while in Durban was involved in an affray with the result that he was in hospital for several days.[37]

One method of addressing the problem, devised by the DNEAS, was the involvement of chiefs in the recruiting process very early on.

As we have seen, for many black people, the first time they encountered the war was via their chief. The NMC realized quite quickly the value the chiefs would have as recruiting agents. Not only did they have influence over their followers, they had authority, without the attached stigma of the Native Affairs Department. Grundlingh asserts that the NMC went further and used the mechanism whereby a chief could attest (join the NMC), and subsequently use the power he ultimately had to compel his followers to follow suit:

> By adopting this attitude their authorities could, of course, waive their formal policy of only enlisting volunteers and simultaneously proclaim that they were piously respecting tribal traditions.[38]

The extent of coercion in this and other ways is difficult to

quantify. What is certain is that (to some extent of least) it did exist:

> ... the majority of the people were recruited from the rural areas by, I think, their chiefs. They had no choice. They accepted what was given to them.[39]

Of course, the chiefs were provided with incentives for doing this:

> To win the Paramount Chief and his henchmen to the War effort, arrangements were made to provide him and some of his principal chiefs with uniforms and a monthly allowance in money.[40]

Actually this was no more than any recruiter could expect to receive as an incentive, although the chief's remuneration was obviously higher than that of the average recruiter. At first the use of chiefs proved quite successful. Stubbs, following his belief in personal contact with his troops, would often accompany the recruiting parties which generally included a band, a chief and a selected group of soldiers to perform activities that would allow the civilian population to:

> ... see for themselves how the Native [illegible]diers are treated in the army.[41]

Samuel Maseko, who played in one of these recruitment bands has spoken of the success of most of their expeditions:

> We used to go recruiting ... Pietersburg, Sbilana ... we used to march past with all the military stuff, so the chiefs would know what we mean when we say 'soldiers'. To impress the people that they need

> soldiers. That's how most of these people joined the army ... Col. Stubbs came with us every time.[42]

Of course, Pietersburg and the Northern Transvaal generally, were special cases, because the severe drought in the area provided a further impetus for recruitment. Still, this does not negate the effectiveness of the method generally. The problem was that Stubbs could not monitor all the chiefs all the time, and some of the methods and behaviour employed by these individuals proved to be a hindrance to recruitment, rather than a help.

Many chiefs accepted the uniform and monthly allowance and simply ignored their recruitment duties. Others used their military positions to mistreat their followers,[43] still others abused their authority and employed blatant coercion to induce people to recruit[44]. Michael Thothela remembers:

> 'Even if you did not want to go or what, the chief he says this and you just do it'.

The DNEAS felt, in fact some chiefs were not doing enough in this regard:

> I have always felt, and I think I have expressed this view to you on several occasions, that the Paramount Chief Mshiyeni is not pulling his weight, despite all that has been done for him.

This extract is from a letter written by Stubbs, the DNEAS, to the Secretary for Native Affairs and goes on to say:

> It might be explained to him that he holds his high office at the pleasure of the Supreme Chief (Governor General) and that if he no longer enjoys the

> confidence of his people sufficiently to compel them to join up, the Hon. the Minister will be compelled to advise the Supreme Chief (the Governor General) to take such steps as may be necessary to bring about a more satisfactory state of affairs.[45]

Thus it is clear that the UDF was quite prepared to used the big stick if it became necessary, and that compulsion, albeit disguised was part and parcel of the NMC's recruitment campaign.

The use of chiefs as part of a semi-coercive recruitment campaign was by no means isolated to the Union. Throughout Africa this became a standard procedure for the colonial powers.[46] Always the preference was expressed for chiefs to persuade their followers to join up, but coercion was invariably the approved method should this fail. Naturally the chiefs were often caught in two minds, trapped between alienating their supporters and subjects or alienating the state. Grundlingh puts it thus:

> When evaluating the efforts by chiefs and headmen to obtain recruits, the dilemma in which some chiefs must have been must also be appreciated ... Therefore, many simply prevaricated.[47]

As far as the DNEAS was concerned, with the exception of Zululand where the recruiting figures were so bad as to be ridiculous, the use of the chiefs <u>was</u> a fairly successful strategy. In my view, the NMC's policy with regard to the chiefs was a fairly typical piece of poor organisation and hypocrisy on the part of the DNEAS's office. Stubbs expressed fairly frequently his office's commitment to the voluntary nature of recruitment[48] while

simultaneously endorsing coercion of both recruiters and recruits. At the same time, the use of the chiefs was only made necessary by the inability of the NMC's extremely ad hoc organisational structures to cope with the demands of a modern recruitment programme. While not denying the sincerity of the DNEAS's intentions and his genuine concern for those who were recruited (a theme I shall explore throughout this dissertation), it is nonetheless necessary to recognize how prominently these twin themes of official hypocrisy and poor organisation run through any discussion of the NMC in the Second World War.

Examples of this inefficiency and poor organisation abound. One of the major factors adversely affecting recruitment was the poor and inadequate treatment received by potential recruits on arrival at recruitment depots:

> ... Josiah Ndlovu [an NMC recruiter] states: ... Shortly after arriving at Ladysmith I took three natives to one of the officials ... He informed me he was busy and could not attend to me and I was told to return later. I again approached him in the afternoon but he would not attend to me and said I must find someone else to attest recruits. These prospective recruits then left and did not return.[49]

Furthermore, prospective recruits often had to endure physical hardship as a corollary to recruitment:

> Many natives who were willing to join eventually did not do so as there were no facilities for feeding them and some of those already attested wandered away on

> account of receiving no rations and were never seen again.[50]

Recruiters themselves began to get disillusioned and lost interest in the proceedings and this was hardly conducive to positive recruitment figures:

> Is not their [recruiters'] dissatisfaction likely to spread and react adversely upon recruiting?[51]

The answer was of course, yes, but at the same time this aspect of recruitment was merely a part of the whole picture. This picture included many things, like the objections of white industry and agriculture to their perceived loss of labour, the poor informational content of the recruitment campaign, non-armament of black recruits, the poor remuneration package offered by the NMC and general economic and social conditions at the time. One further aspect of the problem was the issue of the Zulus, whose expected wartime ardour and militarism did not materialize, and from whom the poorest response to recruitment emerged.

Grundlingh has stated that:

> In keeping with colonial thinking in the rest of Africa, the Zulu was regarded as an outstanding "martial race", and, it was argued, therefore likely to enlist. Their failure to do so effectively demonstrated the myth of the "martial race".[52]

Grundlingh describes an almost pathetic belief in this myth on the part of the UDF authorities, which persisted despite the

ridiculously low recruitment figures from Zululand.[53] We have spoken of the general mistrust of blacks for Native Commissioners. It would appear that in Zululand this mistrust was particularly acute due to a long history of conflict between the Zulus and the white authorities:

> Mr Shepstone stated ... we had failed in our forms of civil administration over a long period of time [,] that had been largely responsible for setting up antagonisms and distinctions among the tribalised and detribalised natives in the NATAL Province.[54]

Furtnermore, the recruiting organisation in Natal was poorly run and inadequately administered and, the report continued, the recruiting methods employed, were even less effective than elsewhere, particularly in the lack of film vans and the recruitment band.[55] We have seen furthermore, that the apathy of Paramount Chief Mshiyeni of the Zulu's was of great concern to the DNEAS, precisely because of the negative effect he had on recruitment figures. The fact that the response of the Zulus - who were not experiencing particularly acute economic problems compared with the rest of the country (particularly the Northern Transvaal) - was so poor, is perhaps the best proof we have that the UDF's recruitment drive and campaign itself had far less to do with the relative success of recruitment, than immediate, material conditions in certain areas.

B. THE RESPONSE

The NMC was well aware of the fears of white industry and agriculture over what they felt would be a loss of cheap labour on a large scale to the army. On the 8th November 1940 a circular was issued explaining the UDF's position on the issue, which was basically that there was no factual justification for fears of labour shortages (since there was a fair amount of unemployment in certain areas as a result of the war having interrupted certain industries, e.g. the building trade) but, should labour shortages occur in certain areas, recruitment there would cease.[56] Stubbs was quite prepared to take a stand on this issue:

> ... you asked me to inform you who made the representations regarding the recruiting in the Postmasburg area and its effect on the manpower of the Manganese mines. The person who made these representations to me telephonically was Col. Soner of the Secretary for Defence. I have meantime replied to him that the number of recruits emanating from that area was so small as to indicate quite clearly that recruiting there could not have had any effect on the Manpower for the Manganese Mines.[57]

Quite apart from what this reveals as to the progress of recruitment it is decidedly a rebuttal, one amongst many, to the complaints of the private sector. They, of course, did not simply accept the state's reassurances with passivity, and in

many cases began to employ their own methods of prevention of loss of labour. Threats of physical obstruction, of the withdrawal of labour tenant privileges, and of persecution of families in the absence of the potential recruit were not uncommon during the early period of recruitment. How much this actually affected recruitment is hard to say, and it must be remembered that as was mentioned earlier, employers did sometimes also encourage black employees to enlist.

Lack of information and general ignorance about the war played a significant part in slowing down recruitment. Many black people, particularly those in the rural areas, did not even know there was a war being fought in Europe.[58] Furthermore, poor information about service in the NMC was a feature of the ad hoc organisation of the initial stages of the NMC's recruitment campaign. NMC propaganda of the vague 'Your Country Needs You' variety was prominent and factual information fairly sparse. This is confirmed by the extent of the enquiries from the Black press about almost every aspect of service, from pay and welfare to the nature of duties in the NMC and travel.[59] Moreover, certain recruiters made promises that could not be fulfilled (expressly against instructions from the DNEAS) and deliberately misled potential recruits.[60] Many recruits in fact joined up in the expectation of learning trades from which they were barred in civilian life by South Africa's restrictive labour policies:

> We were told we would learn trades ... With us. The law didn't permit you see ... You couldn't be taught how to fix up a car or how to weld. So we joined up

...[61]

> No we did not get the training they [the recruiters] said ... we were disappointed.[62]

These complaints will be examined in more depth in chapter two. For our purposes it is sufficient to recognize the adverse effect these frustrated expectations and perceptions of deception must have had on potential recruits coming into contact with those disappointed by their enlistment.

One of the major areas of controversy at the outset of the formation of the NMC was the non-armament of black soldiers. When it was decided that guard duties would comprise the bulk of the duties of most NMC members, it became necessary to find a way of arming the guards without incurring right wing opposition. The solution, apparently, was to arm black recruits with assegaais, their 'traditional' weapon. This measure pleased nobody, especially not the recruits, many of whom came from urban areas and had never held an assegaai in their lives,

> We used to laugh at some of the chaps ... they did not know what to do with ... an assegaai.[63]

Aside from black protests, many whites were afraid of the affront to the dignity of the blacks implied by the non-combatant status. Deneys Reitz, the Minister of Native Affairs, was afraid that recruiting would be adversely affected by this issue[64] and Mirjana Roth feels that this was one of the major causes of the relatively poor response to the recruitment appeal.[65] Undoubtedly this was a factor militating against recruitment, but whether it was a significant one was questionable. At a meeting

held to discuss the alarmingly poor response in Zululand in early 1942, the consensus was that non-armament was not one of the major factors. There was doubt whether:

> ... arming the Zulus would have any appreciable effect in inducing them to join up.[66]

Grundlingh[67] feels that the non-armament issue may have been significant in hampering recruitment, but I would be inclined to question that in the light of his own conclusion that the bulk of recruitment derived from economic rather than military or ideological motives. Non armament did however remain a home of contention throughout the war and inevitably led to some difficult and at times ironic situations. The photograph below is an excellent illustration of the distasteful and, at times, ridiculous situation black soldiers found themselves in due to white fears of armed blacks in their midst.[68]



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[68]



Captioned 'Black soldiers receiving infantry training, 1942', it features soldiers, dressed in modern, military uniforms, wearing 20th century gas masks, charging an imaginary modern enemy, with 19th century stabbing weapons.

Black responses to recruitment were coloured by far more than just non-armament though. More important was the remuneration and welfare package offered by the NMC. Although this will be dealt with comprehensively in the next section of the chapter it is necessary to look briefly at the comparative pay and benefit scales for whites and blacks to understand why black feelings were high and the state once again accused of discrimination.

	Pay Per Day[69]
Blacks	1/6 or 2/3 with dependants
Coloureds	2/6
Indians	2/6
Whites	5 shillings

This in fact, was reflective of general discrimination as to the way the army would treat blacks in comparison to other races. Awareness of this in the black community did much to discourage recruitment, while the paucity of the package itself often exacerbated the situation:

> Dear Sir
>
> As advised in the Umteteli of the 25th instant, I beg to state that I have always wanted to join the Native Military Corps but owing to the low pay I could not be able to support my children.[70]

TABLE 1 TOTAL RECRUITMENT FIGURES: BY REGION; COMPILED FEB 1946 [71]

Transvaal	:	53 037
Cape	:	9 355
Natal	:	7 366
O.F.S.	:	4 521
TOTAL	:	80 469

Recruitment in Transkei and Ciskei began after April 1941, tho' admittedly was poor.

The next table shows the difference between the expectations of the Transvaal quotas in August 1940 and the actual figures achieved. On a smaller scale, a similar picture is repeated for the other provinces. This pattern of recruitment persisted until the end of recruitment in 1943.

TABLE 2 RECRUITMENT OF NMC: TRANSVAAL QUOTAS: 7/8/1940 [72]

District	Quota	No. of Recruits in Camp - 27/7/40	Balance Required
Potgietersrust	100	86	14
Zeerust	50	50	-
Piet Retief	25	4	21
Taungs	25	9	16
Sekukuniland	150	100	50
Mafeking	25	17	8
Louis Trichardt	100	75	25
Pietersburg	100	77	23
Bushbuckridge	50	22	28
Rustenburg	75	6	69

TABLE 3 GENERAL RECRUITMENT FIGURES FOR BLACKS THROUGHOUT SECOND WORLD W[AR] [73]

July	1940	1 000
December	1941	7 274
April	1941	17 793
September	1941	30 390
January	1942	39 101
July	1942	48 895
December	1942	60 000
April	1943	61 969

TABLE 4 TOTAL RECRUITMENT FIGURES FOR URBAN AREAS THROUGHOUT WAR [74]

Johannesburg	:	18 331
Pretoria	:	4 610
Bloemfontein	:	873
Pietermaritzburg	:	1 258
Durban	:	2 836
Port Elizabeth	:	540
East London	:	214
Kimberley	:	771
Cape Town	:	321
TOTAL	:	29 754

Often pay in the urban areas (in certain occupations) was superior to what the army was offering. The comparatively low recruitment figures from the urban areas, serve to confirm this, but just as often, especially out of town, pay was inferior to that of the NMC, or non-existent. Many people felt that army rates of pay were suspiciously comparable to the rate of mineworkers (one of the most onerous jobs in black eyes):

> Right from the beginning we were aware of it ... they took the mineworkers' rate and paid the soldiers under the rate of the mineworkers[75]

and most blacks in the army were not happy with the pay:

> We were all dissatisfied with wages.[76]

Nonetheless, certain factors ensured that many blacks were forced to enlist out of fiscal necessity. In the Northern Transvaal - the area of highest recruitment by far (more than 50% of all recruits) - drought and a stricken maize crop led to impoverishment and large scale unemployment. It is not surprising that this area yielded the highest recruitment figures. Army pay may not have been lavish:

> Albeit inadequate, the army at least provided a regular pay, free food, clothing, housing, medical care and allotments to soldiers' dependants. It was a question of relative poverty and improvement.[77]

Donald Madingoane, an ex-NMC member, confirmed this:

> There was so much unemployment ... People said 'If you want a job, there's the army. Join up. You'll get paid'. That's how many people joined.[78]

It is thus clear that although NMC pay rates were comparatively low and discriminatory when compared to white pay rates, they were sufficiently attractive to induce a large proportion of those that did enlist, to do so.

Another area which posed problems for the NMC's recruitment campaign was that of discrimination over rank, and the subordinate status of blacks in the NMC. The ANC was very vocal over the subordinate status of NMC members and the fact that the highest rank to which a black soldier could rise was sergeant (later staff sergeant) and many blacks who had already attested, resented this passionately:

> The highest promotion for the NMC is the rank of Sergeant and the highest for the Cape Corps and Indian and Malay Corps is the rank of Warrant Officer Class I. Is it because the Coloured and I.M. members are doing more service to win this war than the members of the Native Military Corps![79]

This letter, from Sgt. Mphako to the Bantu Press in 1942, is an excellent reflection of the resentment felt by black soldiers over their status. The authorities' reply to the letter (sent to the editor of the publication) is a clear example of the insensitivity, not only to individual soldiers' needs but to public opinion as well, with which the DNEAS's office often behaved:

> You must agree that the Soldier's Friend Column [a regular column in the Bantu Press papers] is not to criticize army regulations, but to assist in

unravelling personal difficulties of Non-European soldiers and their defendants.[80]

One suspects that the sardonic tone of Sgt. Mphako's letter irritated the DNEAS as much as the content.

To add to the situation, it was decided that no black of any rank would be allowed to give orders to any white soldier. There was an immediate public outcry at this and after much debate, it was finally decided that blacks with rank would be allowed to command whites of subordinate rank, but only if they had permission to do so from a white officer. Again this was an ad hoc and inefficient solution and did nothing to pacify black protest. There is no doubt that these further instances of discrimination did much to hinder recruitment. Indeed it is remarkable, in the light of the many forms of discrimination practised against blacks in the NMC that so many of them did, in fact, enlist.

Recruitment ceased in March 1943. The total recruitment figure up till then was just over 80 000. The percentage of black recruits from the urban areas was just about 30% of the total. The percentage from Zululand was under 5% - a fact which puzzled the authorities, who expressed the usual stereotyped opinions about the supposed martial ardour of the Zulus[81] (The fact that earlier opinions had dismissed non armament as a recruitment deterrent, is an indication both of the inconsistency of the NMC authorities, and the fact that defence of NMC policies to GHQ was often couched in whatever terms were most effective at the particular times they were necessary) - and was probably

attributable to the lack of co-operation evinced by the Zulu chiefs and headmen. (Most likely due to a general mistrust of the South African authorities). The rural areas provided more recruits than the urban, mostly because of adverse economic conditions in the country, higher wages in the towns and a lack of the coercive measures employed by the chiefs, in the urban centres:

> ... if you were recruited by the chiefs. Then you just had to go into the army whether you liked it or not.[82]

The recruitment figure was, however, considering the size of the black population, relatively low. This does not accord with the DNEAS's view of the situation, expressed by Horwitz in 1949:

> The results were excellent. Men started streaming in from the whole of the Union of South Africa and South West Africa ...[83]

This was something of an exaggeration. On the whole, recruitment was not a resounding success. Numbers are not everything, and much of the bitterness engendered by the various follies of the NMC recruitment policy would have adverse consequences later, as we shall see. Recruitment ended in 1943 because the tide of the war had turned and the manpower pressures were easing. We have seen that there were a variety of reasons why people enlisted in the NMC: Economic need (primarily), commitment to the Crown, the desire to travel and be exposed to other countries, coercion, and even occasionally ideology:

> Better the devil you know than the devil you do not

know ...[84]

Reuben Moloi, who said this to me in 1989 - and was a holder of the Military Medal for having successfully escaped from a German P.O.W. camp in North Africa during the war - expressed a very clear preference for the South African Government of the war years, over a German one. This view was no doubt unusually sophisticated at the time and probably highly unusual, but it is a clear illustration of the diversity of motivations behind black enlistment in the NMC during the Second World War.

PART III: CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

Once a new recruit had become part of the NMC there were a several challenges ahead of him. The first was the chronic state of unpreparedness of the NMC to deal with this sudden influx of black soldiers. Stubb's organisation was, by its very nature, new and untested. It had little, if any, experience in handling black troops and was labouring under many of the racial limitations imposed on it by the government, quite apart from its own racial idiosyncrasies.

South Africa was not alone in treating its black soldiers in a discriminatory fashion. Almost all the colonial powers raised African contingents during the war, and discrimination figured in all their activities to a greater or lesser extent. On the whole, blacks in the NMC fared better than most. Killingray has pointed to the differing pay scales of whites and blacks in most

colonial armies[85] and shown that blacks were aware of the discrepancies and resented them deeply. Blacks in other countries did, however, have the option of joining combat units, where the pay was higher (a choice denied Union blacks) and often blacks deserted from their labour units in order to rejoin in a combat unit.

A. LIVING CONDITIONS

In the Union, blacks had very little choice when it came to the type of unit they were placed in, and most ended up in security battalions. (These battalions were used to guard strategic installations, military areas and later, P.O.W. camps). Initially though, they arrived at recruitment depots, and it was here that the first of the problems associated with conditions of service in the NMC began to emerge. The DNEAS, short of facilities and in need of any help that was available, had accepted the Chamber of Mines' offer of old and secondary mine compounds for use as camps for NMC soldiers. From the DNEAS's point of view this was not an unmixed blessing since the mines, fearing loss of labour to the army, were concerned to have the army obliged to them. This enabled them to coerce the UDF into agreeing not to recruit from Transkei and Ciskei for instance, and kept them in touch with NMC activities.[86] For the recruits, this was no kind of blessing at all. There was a highly unattractive stigma a tached to the mine compounds, which was a result of the years of oppression and misery these had generated in the black community of the Union. Moreover, black recruits

were well aware of the background of the camps and deeply resented this. The DNEAS, under pressure to find ample space for his recruits, had perhaps not taken the wisest course in the long term. Donald Madingoane saw in these camps one reason why so many black soldiers preferred to go 'Up North' than to stay in the Union:

> All the camps were mine compounds, they were not very clean, ... most of us ... hated them. Now 'Up North' it was military camps. So it was clean because it was outside ... and airy and all that.[87]

There were other reasons for going 'Up North', for instance the fact that relations between black and white troops in the UDF seemed to improve (this and other related issues will be examined in later chapters) but for many black troops this one was the most compelling.

In fact, the camps themselves, quite apart from their odious origins, were not always as bad as they could have been. To be sure they often revealed many negative aspects such as poor hygiene, discriminatory ration practices and other areas of concern. The DNEAS was however concerned enough to maintain an inspection unit which provided regular reports on the state of NMC camps. Nevertheless many irregularities and deficiencies persisted. Often camps were poorly equipped to deal with black troops, particularly in large numbers and inspectorate reports complained of '... inadequate accommodation', '... overcrowding ...' and '... poor facilities for the troops ...'[88]. Even when the inspectorate reports were favourable it is necessary to keep

in mind that what the DNEAS's office considered adequate accommodation may not have been in complete harmony with the opinions of the recruits themselves.

Often problems occurred in camps due to poor organisation. The inadequate hygiene reported at the 9th Bn, NMC, Umtata, is assessed thus:

> The problem is the outcome of two different administrations sharing the same camp.[89]

This, in fact, caused several other problems in the camp, such as disciplinary problems, poor quality rations and low morale. To compound the situation, black NCO's food was cooked in the same kitchen as that of black privates. This was common to many NMC camps and engendered much resentment since white NCO's, as well as NCO's in the Cape and Indian and Malay Corps', had their food cooked separately. On the whole though, the inspectorate reports through the course of the war reflected a situation in the camp which was, if not satisfactory, then at least bearable for most black soldiers:

> Most of the time, the camps were alright, you know? ... Well, Driefontein ... [the arrival depot] was not so good, but at Welgedacht it was not so bad.[90]

Material conditions in the camps may have been tolerable (if only just), but other things were not.

B. DISCRIMINATION

It has been mentioned that discrimination with regard to the cooking of food for the NCO's was a perceived grievance in the NMC. In fact, discrimination generally, particularly in camps in the Union, was a major problem, both for the troops themselves and the DNEAS. White rations were significantly better than blacks and so were the uniforms and equipment whites were issued with. Stubbs frequently complained about this and used it as an argument to try to prevent dilution as, he argued, conflict would arise between black and white troops over the differentiation between them.[91] It is clear that Stubbs was not entirely comfortable with the discriminatory way in which NMC recruits were viewed by the army, for he often warned of the folly of such an attitude, and yet he was a firm supporter of the view that black soldiers must never be allowed to believe they were the political or social equal of whites. Perhaps his was the typical attitude of a white 'liberal' Smuts supporter at the time. Whatever his personal beliefs however, he was constrained by the times and was obliged to make the most of what the army supplied him with.

Before dilution (the policy of 'diluting' white combat units with black and coloured soldiers in order to free whites for combat duties) began, friction over unequal ration scales was not all that prominent since most black soldiers had no access to white soldiers and did not realize that they were getting the short end

of the stick. This was David Masuku's experience:

> Well I couldn't say because I didn't know what the whites were getting.[92]

One aspect of discrimination that was visible however, was the limited rank to which a black soldier could rise and his inability to have authority over any white, regardless of rank. Sam Maseko recalled:

> We were not happy about that ... and we could not get to be more than a sergeant ... Even the Nigerians, they had officers, they had captains.[93]

The point was a good one and clearly reflected the resentment blacks felt over this issue, particularly when they saw troops from other African states receiving better treatment than them:

> It was terrible ... a white private could have rank over you, even if you were a sergeant.[94]

And although the ruling was changed in 1943 (after a storm of public controversy), to state that whites of lower rank could only be considered higher in authority than a black of higher rank if given specific authority therefore, Madingoane claimed that the old system prevailed regardless.[95] Furthermore they resented the greater dignity accorded black troops from outside the Union:

> ... the people from Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland were above us.[96]

Thus it was the troops who were or had been 'up North' that had the clearest perception of the discrimination present in the UDF, specifically because of their exposure to troops (both black and white) from other countries.

To be sure, discrimination did exist in other colonial armies, but the authorities, in particular the British and French, ensured that its profile was much lower than in the UDF. Furthermore, the British colonial forces at any rate, did not feature as harsh a level of racism as existed in the NMC. Nevertheless they did occasionally accede to Union pressure not to alienate Union blacks by according other blacks greater privileges, as when they initially agreed not to arm troops from the High Commission Territories (HCT): Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana.[97] Discrimination was thus an issue for black soldiers and while the effects of this discrimination would only be felt later in the war, the seeds it planted were deep and profound.

C. REMUNERATION

The NMC's pay and benefits package was many things, but essentially it was just another chapter in the discrimination story. We have seen the option 'enjoyed' by troops from other African countries of joining a combat unit for the higher pay. NMC recruits had no such option. However, NMC troops did, sometimes, gain on troops from the rest of Africa.

The basic NMC pay package looked like this in comparison to the white UDF pay package:[98]

NMC	PER DAY	:WHITE UNITS	PER DAY
Privates; No dependants	1s6d	Private; No dependants	5s
With dependents	2s3d	With Wife	5s3d
		With wife and child	+2s

This discrepancy is obvious and it is a sharp reminder that economically times must have been very hard for many black recruits to have accepted this level of discrimination. Some blacks were of course unaware of the discrepancy and still others felt that it was something which had merely to be accepted, as Donald Madingoane said:

> We just reckoned that what was done by the government had to be correct.[99]

Possibly this attitude was more widely held and can help to account for the significantly low level of protest in the NMC during the war. In any case, for some people this package was sufficient to meet their needs; John Sekori and S. Monaisa were two such soldiers:

> If you were a soldier, without a family ... you could come out.[100] I was satisfied with the pay because I was not smoking.[101]

In this case, what is not said is probably as important as what is since, the implication seems to be that while the NMC remuneration scale was adequate (just) if you were a soldier without dependants, if you were not you had a problem. This was in fact the case.

A letter from a 'liberal' farmer's wife to the Rand Daily Mail in 1942[102] complains to the DNEAS about the dire straits of soldiers' dependants in the Northern Transvaal and points out that not only are the allotments inadequate to meet their needs but generally speaking they are unaware of their entitlement to them. There were in fact many complaints about the lack of information provided by the NMC on the issue of family benefits for recruits. Many recruits wrote in to the 'soldiers friend' column complaining that they were unaware of what they and their family were entitled to, or how their family could collect it.[103] Of course there were complexities involved. The differences between rural and urban costs of living for instance were significant, with the urban costs being far higher.[104] Aside from this the system of payment of allotments again reflected the poor organisation, and in this case predilection towards passing the buck of the NMC.

Allotments were to be paid through magistrates in the various districts from which recruits came. This not only necessitated travel to the magistrate's office by a family member (often old or infirm) of, at times, great distances, but also meant that the onus of informing the dependants about their rights and

privileges fell on the magistrates who were not all always as conscientious in this regard as they could have been.[105]

These complications notwithstanding, the most important fact was that many recruits' families simply could not subsist on the NMC's allowance, even if they could get hold of it. In late 1942 A.B. Xuma wrote, in a letter to the Home Front League:

> It is felt that the chief reason for the poor recruiting in the Union is due to the fact that a man is not prepared to enlist without the assurance that his wife and children will be satisfactorily provided for.[106]

Even after the Parliamentary Select Committee of 1943 increased the rate of pay of black privates to 4/6d per day, family allotments were not increased. It was left up to auxiliary organisations such as the Governor General National War Fund (G.G.N.W.F.) and the Y.M.C.A.

The G.G.N.W.F. did indeed provide a supplementary income and seems to have pursued the dissemination of these supplements with slightly more commitment than the NMC, who often tended to rely on Magistrates and the Native Affairs Department to fulfil these tasks. Still even with the extra pound that the G.G.N.W.F. paid to soldier's dependants every month (assuming they could locate them), it was neverth less difficult, if not impossible for them to manage financially.[105*] The question has to be asked though; Why should a supplementary allowance have been, not just necessary but crucial, to the ability of a black soldier in the

NMC to support his family? It reflects badly on a military organisation's long term planning if it does not provide emotional stability in its soldiers by taking adequate financial care of their families. This sub-section and the next one are joined by a photograph which is a perfect visual reminder, both of why most blacks joined the UDF, and the necessity for adequate remuneration and welfare of these recruits.

106*



D. WELFARE

The NMC was, comparatively speaking, often quite commendably concerned about the welfare of its troops. While Stubbs may have been a typical example of a paternalistic, conservative South African, whose 'liberal' views were at best stereotypical and middle class, he was nonetheless genuinely interested in the well-being of his troops, and attempted all through the war (even after dilution), to monitor this closely. Having said that though, it is important to keep in mind that it took Stubbs an

inordinately long time fully to structure his welfare policy.

When one looks at how some of the blacks from the rest of Africa fared, those conscripted into forced labour battalions in Southern Rhodesia and Sierra Leone for instance,[107] the welfare aspects of the NMC are shining examples by comparison. At first welfare was effectively in the hands of auxiliaries such as the Y.M.C.A. Although the NMC supposedly had a welfare mechanism, it was initially as inefficient as the rest of the organisation's structures. This was however, fairly quickly rectified. It was obviously in the best interests of the NMC to maintain morale by seeing to the welfare needs of recruits and, especially, their families. As Grundlingh has shown:

> The army authorities ... realised the importance of the prompt investigation and possible redressing of the soldiers' domestic complaints in order to maintain morale. Subsequently, a fairly elaborate welfare organisation attending to the needs of the soldiers and their families developed.[108]

Still, we have seen that the NMC authorities (possibly with the excuse of state pressure upon them) did not always follow the most rational course when it came to black recruits. It would be pointless to cover the details of the NMC's welfare structures, which are analyzed in exhaustive detail by Grundlingh. Later, I would like to try and provide an insight into the perceptions of these structures by the black recruits themselves. We should note however, that although there were

welfare officers in most NMC units by 1942-43, it was only in June 1944 that the DNEAS printed a booklet of official guidelines for these officers.[109]

One is constantly aware of the limitations of oral evidence, and I have attempted, wherever possible, to offset it with suitable archival sources. Nevertheless, as a guide to the day to day emotions and perceptions of individuals in historical circumstances, it is irreplaceable. Donald Madingoane was initially with the Y.M.C.A. serving in military canteens in the Union. Since it had been decided that no unattested blacks could leave the country, he, and a group of his friends - who also wished to travel beyond the borders of the Union - attested in 1941, at the age of 20. The UDF worked closely with the auxiliary organisations, particularly with regard to canteens, and grouped all the auxiliaries together under the aegis 'UDF Institutes'.[110] A quick glance at the records of the 'Goodwill Club, Pretoria Station'[111] shows both the closeness of the relationship, since the club was run by the Y.M.C.A., supplied by the NMC quartermaster, and the extent to which black soldiers availed themselves of it:

> As requested ... I have to advise that refreshments served to Non-European troops at the above canteen is as follows:-
>
> July 1943 - 5527
>
> August 1943 - 5 55
>
> September 1943 - 5519 [etc ..][112]

Thus Madingoane and company, who were stationed at a similar canteen in Johannesburg, had been performing a useful and essential function. After attestation they realized that:

> Your duties were a bit wider because now you were a soldier. They could use you any way ... to go and do a labouring job ... or go and do some guard duty.[113]

Thus they found themselves doing jobs that anyone could have done, and their particular skills being wasted. While this type of bureaucratic waste is often a feature of all military organisations, the frequency and extent of it in the NMC was alarming.

It was only in 1944 however, when the formal NEAS welfare scheme came into effect, that Madingoane's talents were recognized and put to work in the NMC's welfare organisation 'Up North', under the supervision of one of the appointed welfare officers who were seconded by the DNEAS to diluted units. He performed a number of vital roles, along with his fellow welfare workers, and was an example of the fact that by this stage the NMC was starting to utilize its resources in a far more positive manner. (Although welfare was always one of the better handled aspects of the NMC):

> Most of the people at that time were illiterate ... So we used to write letters for them, we used to read letters to them, we used to arrange entertainment ... and also serve in the canteen.[114]

Nevertheless, it was still family allotments and domestic matters generally that concerned most recruits:

> We were all dissatisfied, ... with us, who had been with Y.M.C.A. it was a little better because the Y.M.C.A. gave us a little extra ... the Y.M.C.A. paid straight to our families. Some people didn't know what was happening with their families ... they were very unhappy.[115]

The NMC's methods of answering queries was not always satisfactory. Sometimes they would advise recruits to tell their families to contact the nearest Native Commissioner's office, but often these Commissioners disclaimed responsibility for problems arising from a family member serving in the NMC.[116] The expansion of the NMC's own welfare organisation however, eventually began to address these problems with more efficiency.[117]

Abiel Sullo for instance who was a medical orderly in the NMC, told me:

> I remember, I was on leave in Lesotho, before I went overseas [this was in late 1943, when the DNEAS had really begun to come to grips with NMC welfare] and I ran out of money. I telegraphed my camp to send some money, and the following day I received it. Right in Lesotho.[118]

Captain J.C. Knoetze, of the Deputy Directorate of the NMC in the Middle East (M.E.), was the author of a remarkable short history of the NMC in the Middle East. He completed it in Rome on the 15th August 1945. Although it is fairly propagandistic, and occasionally tends towards hyperbole about the NMC, its recruits and its officers, it is also surprisingly frank about problems

in the NMC and quite informative on the welfare issue:

> To the average Non-European remuneration in the army is reasonable (especially when compared with Civilian Earnings) but whether it is adequate is a very difficult question to answer.[119]

Knoetze had to play the usual staff officer game of stating what he felt was right, while avoiding upsetting the racist sensibilities of many senior officers on the general staff of the UDF. He is concerned with reinforcing the worth and reliability of the NMC recruit to the UDF:

> It is a fallacy and grossly unjust to say or to think that when on leave a NE soldier is happy only when under the influence of liquor. It has been proved in units and leave camps that if a regular supply of drink in moderation is provided under control, NE's will drink in moderation and maintain their discipline.[120]

This is not as paternalistic as it sounds since, if one substitutes the word 'soldier' for 'NE', the sentiments expressed are universal and common to all officers in charge of men in a large army on campaign. And the following extract is a good indication, both of the genuine concern for the welfare of the troops under the care of the DNEAS's office, and the benefits that accrued from this concern:

> Providing alternative attractions for the NE's has proved highly successful in maintaining health and morale, preventing drunkenness and improving discipline.[121]

Although his later comment that the same measures should be used with civilian blacks to produce '... contented and healthy communities ...'[122] places Knoetze firmly in the political context of the time, that is, still essentially bound by the racist structures of the South African political system. Samuel Maseko, who as a member of the 'NMC entertainment group', was part of these 'alternative attractions' remembers:

> It was quite enjoyable, although we only played for NMC units. Everybody enjoyed themselves ...[123]

It is nice to be able to record that, in one respect at any rate that of welfare, the NMC had as much (if not more) success than otherwise.

* * *

Almost a third of total South African field strength during the Second World War was comprised by black soldiers. Most of them

attested knowing that they would encounter some kind of discrimination be it official or not. Many had hopes that the level of discrimination would be less than that encountered in civilian life. The army, hoping to use these soldiers to the fullest extent, was bound by the racial limitations of the government on the one hand, and its own unreadiness to cope with the particular needs of a large influx of black soldiers.

The restrictions imposed on the effective use of black soldiers by the above two problems (among others) ensured that the military experience was, for the recruits themselves, sometimes an unhappy one, often a confusing one and, always, an extremely complex one for recruit and historian alike. The following chapters will examine the extent of those complexities and attempt to show the methods and mechanics devised by black recruits to cope with, and survive, the rigours of a war in which they were considered 'second class soldiers'.[124]

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CHAPTER II

This chapter deals with the training programme instituted by the NMC for its black recruits, and how and why it changed over time. The inclusion of the dilution programme in this chapter is unavoidable since dilution was a crucial step in the above-mentioned process, and is a good case study of the effectiveness of NMC training schemes. Of course, there is more to dilution than training alone, but the introduction of the scheme in this chapter is appropriate since it came into being primarily as a method of manpower utilisation.

The second part of the chapter concerns education, and is interested primarily in understanding the discrepancy between the expectations of recruits regarding education, and the perception of the DNEAS and his staff towards it. That is to say: how far apart were the views of black recruits and those who employed and commanded them, as to the nature, extent and quality of education, in the NMC during the war?

PART 1: TRAINING

If recruitment had been a hasty, 'ad hoc' programme, with only limited results, then training turned out to be just as bad, initially at least. The DNEAS faced certain obstacles from the outset. So too, did the recruits themselves. In many instances, these problems were the same for both.

The first major obstacles to be overcome were, as was so often the case with the NMC, racist in nature. Many officers, NCO's and even staff officers of the UDF were reluctant, if not completely unwilling, to grant blacks any sort of competence or skill at all. Major General Dan Pienaar, when asked in 1942, about the abilities of blacks in the field, replied that:

> Until natives had had years of training with Europeans they would not be able to face conditions of modern European warfare.[1]

Stubbs was not in agreement with this assessment and neither were many of his officers,

> Dear Sir Pierre [Van Ryneveld: Chief of General Staff (C.G.S.)]
>
> Hot upon Dan Pienaar's declaration of the lack of bravery of my natives in front line operations, comes a note from Douglas Smit, ... in which his son, a Lieutenant in the artillery, bears high testimony to the bravery of the NMC under fire.
>
> ... E.T. Stubbs,[2]

nevertheless, such opinions coming from such em. ent officers as Pienaar had to be given cognizance and often did, to some extent hamper Stubbs's plans for the NMC.

To the extent however that Pienaar was complaining of the lack of training of NMC recruits, there was some justice in his position. From the start, training facilities and instructors in the NMC were limited. This was unimportant as long as black

soldiers were to be limited to guard and labouring duties, but as their roles expanded, so did the need for adequate training and the problems created by that need. The first issue we need to examine however is the form that training took. What types of training did blacks receive on attestation? How and why did their roles change, and how did this affect training? The problem of racism with regard to training will be examined in the light of these questions, along with many other problems that arose.

When it was decided in 1940 to recruit blacks for the UDF, there was little intention to use them for any duties outside of guarding installation and prisoners, and labouring duties. by 1941, the war was progressing badly for the allies, and it was decided to use blacks in other capacities to free whites for combat duties. These included drivers, medical orderlies, clerks, and certain forms of skilled labour (e.g. carpentry and bootmaking).[3] As more and more NMC recruits went to North Africa, partfcularly once dilution got off the ground in 1942, training included jobs such as signallers, stretcher bearers, loaders (with the artillery), refuellers (with the S.A.A.F.) and finally (and unofficially), rudimentary small arms training.[4]

That problems should have been encountered was inevitable. That they were not always the usual problems encountered by the military in similar situations requires detailed analysis: The first form of training received by black recruits on joining the NMC was a very basic form of infantry trainin/. This was carried

out at various camps throughout the Union, but mainly at the Welgedacht and Palmietkuil North and South Recruits Training Depots, and after six weeks of this, most recruits were posted out, either to join a security battalion or to go on to more specialized training.[5] At first, basic training consisted of drill, route marches and P.T., with the rudiments of military procedure being a part of the course. In June 1940 however, this basic training was expanded to include a 'Field Works Training' course which included digging protective trenches, digging "fire" trenches and erecting wire entanglements.[6] Since these are essential skills for any foot soldier, it would seem that whatever basic training had preceded this, it must have been 'basic' indeed. The recruits themselves were not unaware of this:

> Most of the time we just drilling ... and standing guard ... it was not much training, we just got to be a guard.'

The handling of the field work courses is a case in point of the contradictory and inefficient approach of the UDF to the use of black soldiers. The Director of Military Training (D.M.T.) initially wanted these courses to be run by the Engineer organisation of the UDF as he had no wish to increase the number of trained black NCO's on establishment at these depots. Not only was this unwieldy and wasteful but it had to be abandoned fairly quickly, as manpower requirements once again forced the use of the black instructors who should simply have been used in the first place.[8] We need not labour the point that needless

time and manpower was wasted, but it is important to point out that this type of waste was characteristic of so much of the UDF's policy towards black soldiers throughout the course of the war.

One of the major issues associated with the early days of training in the NMC (at least as far as the recruits were concerned), was the fact that most of the areas and compounds used for training and accommodation were mine dumps and compounds. We have seen in the previous chapter, that for many recruits this was a serious grievance, particularly since, in the early days at least, they had little expectation of going 'Up North'. The conditions of training and drill on the mine dumps were often harsh and unpleasant aside from the stigma attached to the mines:

> Many people complained about living in the mine compounds ... and even the training there, it was where the old mines were, you know?[9]

[10]



When I mentioned this grievance to Mr Knoetze (Ex-Captain Knoetze of the NMC) he seemed genuinely unaware of it.[11] Which could mean either an understandable memory lapse or, more likely, that the DNEAS's office was unaware of it during the war. This would explain the lack of archival material on the issue. Nevertheless for many black recruits it was real, and it undoubtedly affected training and efficiency, certainly in the early period (1940 - 41).

Many, if not most, black recruits in the UDF, came to find that the bulk of their duties consisted of guard duties. In particular, those who stayed in the Union in Security Battalions, although not all NMC recruits in the Union were guards. Nevertheless it is important to know how well they were trained, and how those who were guards perceived their training. As with many of the DNEAS's programmes, the quality and depth of training guards seems to vary from camp to camp:

> An adequate training plan has been worked out on a 14 week basis and bns base their training programme on this.[12]
>
> Training of NMC units remains unsatisfactory ...[13]
>
> Training of this BN. lacks enterprise by the officers.[14]

Recruits themselves seemed to have experienced a similar situation. David Masuku felt that he had been inadequately prepared for his tasks:

> Say Welgedacht, when we go night guard duty. We must go guard the mines. They give me a knobkerrie ...

> that night ... no, I didn't know what to do ...[15]

and yet Paulus Lethuba, who was an M.P. in a security battalion, was of a different opinion:

> What we had was ... many lectures. Instructions on how to arrest people and so forth. Afterwards they ask us, "Any questions?"[16]

We can thus see that the norm for guard training seems to have been inconsistency. The question is why? Well, one answer is inexperience on the part of the DNEAS, who although he had brief command of a battalion of Native Guards in the First World War, had never dealt with the training and deployment of black soldiers on the scale that now confronted him.[17]

Another possible answer is that the inspectorate system was, even as late as 1943, still essentially flawed as a method of maintaining standards with regard to NMC troops. The inspectorate commander had his own views on where the problem lay, and it was a problem that ran through many areas of difficulty and inefficiency in the NMC throughout the war: The poor quality of white NCO's and officers in the NMC; an inadequate report from March 1945 states:

> The standard of discipline and training in BN's ... varies considerably. This gives a true reflection of the capabilities or otherwise of BN and Det. Commanders concerned.[18]

The extent to which this problem hampered training generally will be discussed as we examine further aspects and types of training.

Notwithstanding the importance of security duties, they are nonetheless, relatively simple. Inconsistency in training methods and facilities were thus not as important as they may have been in other, more specialized military occupations. The fact that these occupations were opened up to black soldiers was, as we have seen, due mainly to manpower requirements dictated by the course of the war in 1940 and early 1941. Kriotze remembered that it was the early setbacks in North Africa that prompted the initial use of black and coloured drivers 'Up North':

> The British, after Tobruk, said 'We need drivers', ... we told them that they [the blacks] had not been recruited for that purpose and they had no training. They'd probably lose a lot of vehicles. They said 'We've got more vehicles than we know what to do with, we need people.' So we began training and in three months we trained the people they needed ... They asked us for 40 M.T. companies in three months and we trained them.[19]

The fact that in North Africa the reputation of the NMC and Cape Corps (C.C.) drivers was good, had a certain amount to do with the fact that much of the training was done or assisted by the British army:

> We got a lot of help from the British Army, and we used their mechanics for training ... and a lot of their equipment.[20]

Back in the Union, the picture was not so sanguine. The quality of the driving of Union trained drivers, was very rarely adequate.

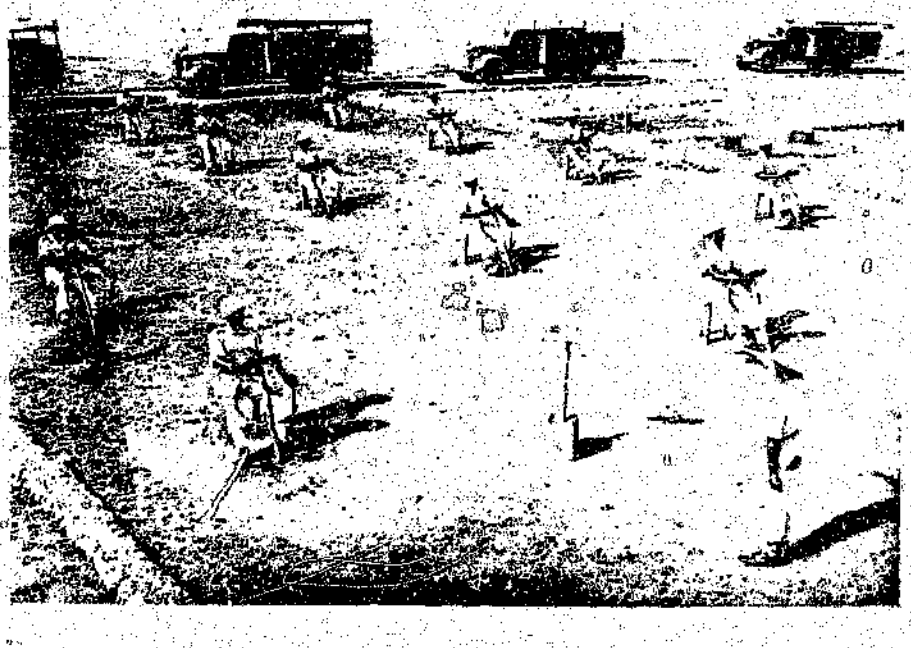
Os.C. both inside and outside the Union, complained of the quality of training of many drivers trained inside the Union. Os.C. up North, in particular, often felt that Union trained drivers frequently had to be re-trained once they got to the Middle East (M.E.).[21] Naturally, this was wasteful and inefficient, and very often recruits themselves took the brunt of the blame for poor training, particularly by bigoted Os.C. in the Union itself.[22] That is to say, Os.C. and unit commanders would often complain of the inability of blacks to handle or understand basic tasks associated with Motor Transport duties, preferring to blame these difficulties on supposedly inherent racial flaws, than on inadequate or inconsistent training.

That this training was, in the Union at least, frequently poor and ad hoc, was largely due to the problem which plagued so many of the DNEAS's training programmes in the war, that is, the unsuitability of many of the white instructors who 'ended up' in the NMC. This phrase is particularly apt since one of the aspects of the issue which rendered it such a complex one, was the fact that the DNEAS was often fobbed off with men who were not considered 'good enough' for other branches of the UDF.[23] The problem was a persistent and complex one and will be examined more fully later in the chapter. It is only important now to stress that it affected M.T. training as much, if not more, than any other form of training in the NMC.

As we have seen shortage of equipment was, initially at least, not a problem for the British Army up North, and this was a boon

to M.T. training in the desert. In the Union however, a different situation prevailed, and shortages of training equipment provided a further continuing problem for the DNEAS. The high accident rate in the early phase of training led to MT trainees receiving the initial parts of their training in simulated conditions,

[24]



which while perfectly adequate in the early phases of the course soon, for obvious reasons, became somewhat less than useful. Of course, generally trainees went on to driving real vehicles, but occasionally one come across an O.C. complaining that he doubts whether certain NMC drivers sent his way, ever got beyond the sand simulator.[25]

Ray Capel, who was a staff-sergeant in the NMC, and a driving instructor at West Vlakfontein on the East Rand for a period, told me:

> I had a saying, 'If a black man could open and close

> a door, he was ready to go up North'. I mean, I never put that into practice, but that was my attitude to the M.T. training they [blacks] received. It might not have been everywhere, and I'm not trying to criticize the training at West Valkfontein, but you must understand ... the linguistic difficulties, and the limited time we had for training. The pressure from up North made it very hard.[26]

The recruits themselves, at least those that were trained in the Union, seem to confirm this somewhat gloomy picture of MT training in South Africa in the war. John Sekori remembered:

> No, I had no licence ... I just drive like I drive my taxi ... I was just helping on the ambulances.[27]

and D.T. Nkosi, who was a driver in the M.E., but was trained in the Union at Dunottar (outside Springs) had this to say:

> I joined on the 18th of July 1941 at Driefontein. We moved to Dunottar and there we train to be drivers. Dunottar didn't train you long, to be driver ... On 10 August they take us to the train ...[28] [to go up North].

This means that Nkosi, among others, received less than one month's training, both as a soldier and a driver. No wonder O.s.C. up North complained of having to retrain drivers. In fact, many commanders expressed deep misgivings about the quality of training of drivers in the Union and, understandably expressed themselves forcibly on the subject,[29] while some were inclined to credit the poor training to misunderstanding of conditions up

North, rather than inefficiency or indifference in the Union:

> ... the sand here is of varying nature ... the towns here are very narrow and congested ... and this is the most important, ... we have righthand right-of-way while some of the vehicles have steering wheels.... on the right hand side ...[38]

Whatever the case, the fact remains that many, if not most, drivers trained in the Union required re-training upon arrival in the M.E. This represented a not negligible loss of both time and manpower and reflected serious deficiencies in the organisational structures of the DNEAS's office.

* * *

M.T. training was not the only form of training undergone by NMC members . As more occupations were opened up to them after 1940, they began to be trained in a number of fields. Many became batmen, chefs, clerks, tailors, bricklayers, stretcher bearers, medical orderlies and hygiene personnel. Some issues relating to many of these occupations are important to this thesis. Some occupations, such as bricklaying, manual labouring on major engineering projects etc. have been covered in some detail by Grundlingh, and in any case are complex enough to require studies in their own right. We will thus deal in detail only with those jobs that are of direct interest to our argument.

The Training and use of black clerks in the NMC will be fully discussed in the part of the chapter which deals with education

in the NMC, as it is more appropriate to that section. One of the greatest shortages in manpower experienced by the UDF was in the area of medical auxiliaries. This included jobs such as stretcher bearers, medical orderlies, nurses, hygiene personnel and other associated positions. Obviously, for the state, these were politically sensitive jobs, since they implied a certain amount of fairly intimate contact between white and black. More importantly, whites, it was considered, would come into contact with blacks in ways which would often differ from the usual employer/employee, master/servant relationship, i.e. being attended to by black nurses or orderlies, relying on black stretcher bearers, etc.

'Hygiene assistants' of course, were little more than the usual manual labourers in the new guise of the Medical Auxiliary Corps. Their jobs consisted generally of duties such as latrine cleaning, waste disposal and menial work in sickbays and hospitals. These duties hardly called for highly specialized training, but even those positions in the Corps that did call for more training were not free of the abovementioned fear of racial contagion:

> ... trained NMC orderlies ... will normally clean NMC sick bays but not European sick bays.[31]

and although, in the end, as usual manpower shortages forced this to change, the intention to attempt to enforce whatever racial separation possible, is evident. As this excerpt comes from a directive on dilution, the instruction seems twice as inexplicable since the bulk of duties for a black medical orderly

(m.o.) in a diluted unit would occur in the white sick bays. The importance played by racist criteria in reducing the efficacy of the NMC during the war becomes more and more evident, as one examines each aspect of the corps.

Up North, there was less concern with racial mixing and the exigencies of war led, understandably, to M.O.'s being given more responsibility and training in areas which had been consciously ignored in the Union. Those with prior education fared especially well. Abiel Sello was one of these:

> I did a little bit of laboratory work at 101 [military hospital in Suez]. I did three months. I was an assistant lab technician.[32]

Of course, Sello had been trained as a stretcher bearer, and, if there was one aspect of the NMC's training programme which did live up to the claims made for it by the DNEAS, it was this one. There is an almost remarkable degree of accord between the archival sources and the interviewees on the depth and quality of the training received by NMC stretcher bearers.[33] First aid training was instituted from 1941 in the training camps, and from 1942 in many of the individual NMC units in the Union. Those who received specialized training as stretcher bearers and field orderlies were sent up North and used quite extensively in the front line.

Abiel Sello has said of his training as stretcher bearer:

> I was transferred to Palmietkuil South for a course on stretcher bearing. It was a good course. We learned

> a lot. It lasted six months. I was then transferred to 1 Military Hospital, Voortrekkerhoogte where we took over from the one pins as medical orderlies.[34]

After which he was sent to Suez. Reuben Moloi, who won a military medial in October 1942 for a daring escape from a P.O.W. camp, felt that his training in first aid had been above reproach:

> We trained at Springs ... first aid. Very strong training there before we go up North.[35]

The effects of good, solid training manifested themselves in the exemplary performance of NMC stretcher [illegible] in the field. Even General Dan Pienaar concluded that

> ... there had not been a single case where a wounded man had to wait as much as one hour for medical treatment.[36]

while a large percentage of the awards, including numerous Military Medals (M.M.'s), won by NMC troops in the war, were garnered by the stretcher bearers. The attitude of white soldiers to these men was often a curious blend of admiration, and patronization based on certain stereotyped racial assumptions:

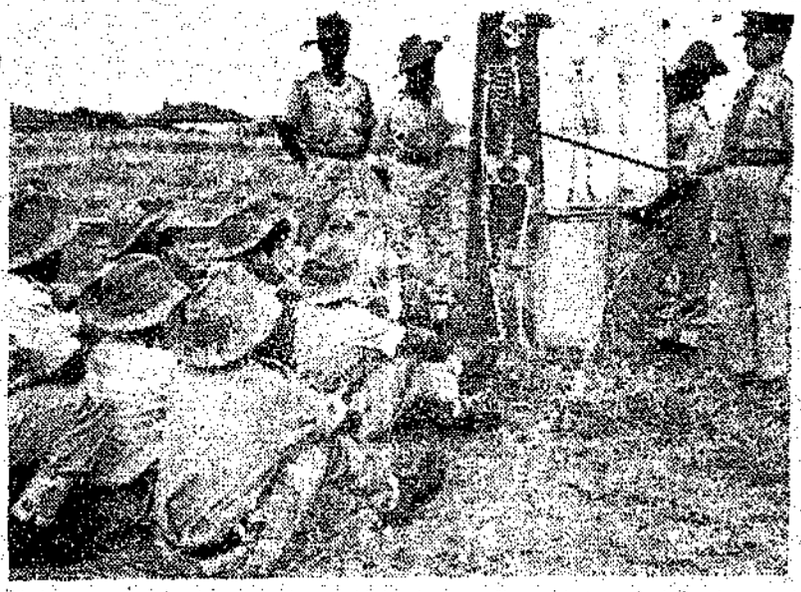
> I would go so far as to state that I would prefer these Non-Europeans as stretcher bearers to the Europeans I have had in the past for two reasons. Firstly, the keenness shown by the Non-Europeans was [in] marked contrast to the almost "fatigue" attitude of the Europeans ... and secondly the advantage of the unimaginative Non-European in action when confronted

with severe wounds was very apparent.[37]

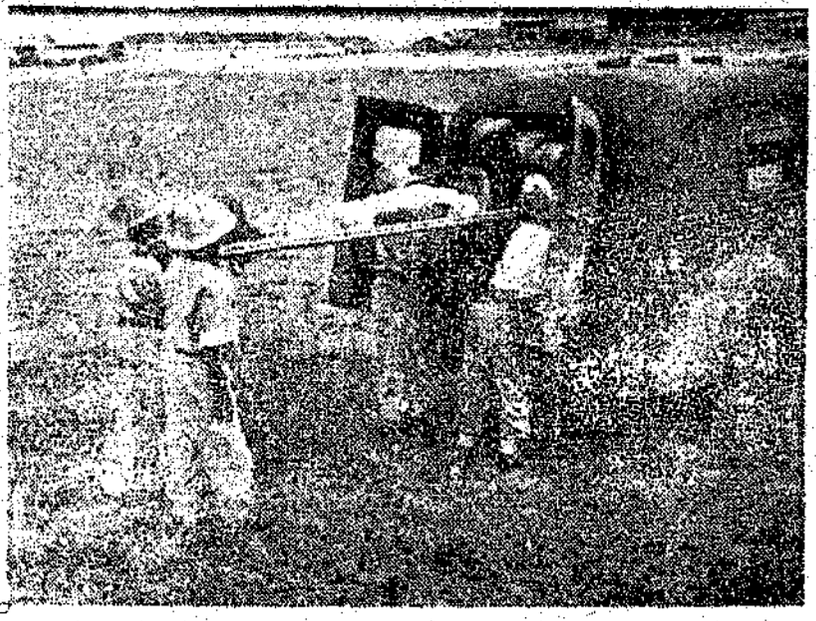
In fact, the DNEAS frequently served the stretcher bearers up as proof of the positive effects of adequate training on black troops.[38]

Part of the reason for this success, lay in the length of time spent on the stretcher bearer courses (generally from 3 to 6 months)[39], partly on the amount of time trainees in this particular field were given off from security duties[40] (not a concession readily granted to most other forms of NMC training), and largely to the amount of assistance given to the DNEAS by the Red Cross and other auxiliary organisations. These organisations provided the UDF with instructional charts, posters, films and even, on occasion, instructors themselves.[41] Had the DNEAS been able to bring in outside, civil organisations, for other forms of training, the overall training picture may have looked decidedly different.

* * *



The streatcher-bearers receive a thorough training before proceeding to the front. Here a group of men of the Native Military Corps are seen listening to a lecture on anatomy, for they must qualify in first aid before they are allowed to take the field.



A wounded soldier being placed into mobile field ambulance after receiving First Aid attention.



Party of stretcher-bearers under training demonstrate correct procedure under fire. No less than three men from this training camp received decorations for bravery in carrying out Fist Aid work on active service in the Middle East.

It was unfortunately true however, that not all the training courses in the NMC were handled as well. In fact, the quality and depth of the medical courses in the NMC seem to have been the exception rather the rule.[43] We have seen that training for drivers, in the Union at least, was far from adequate, and similar problems were encountered with regard to other areas of training in the NMC. Many black soldiers were trained as 'batmen', personal retainers to officers. There was much resemblance between this position and domestic service in civilian life and the training was hardly complex or demanding.[44] In fact, although many officers became attached to their 'batmen' and insisted on having them accompany them wherever they went,[45] the recruits themselves did not generally regard the position particularly favourably:

> Being a batman ... it was just a master and servant relationship.[46]

Cooks, too, were not particularly well trained and as Grundlingh has shown:

> Often the courses left much to be desired ...[47]

In fact, the courses in general were tailored to address the specific tasks the recruits would be expected to perform. In other words, carpentry or bookkeeping courses would be utilitarian in both depth and duration, in that they would be geared towards teaching a recruit to fix broken army equipment or keep the books in a canteen, but without going much further than that.

The question of course arises: if then, the UDF was concentrating

on the specific military usefulness of the recruits in the NMC, why did they not use them in a more specifically military sense, i.e. as combat soldiers? Many high ranking officers, including Stubbs himself, raised this point, throughout the course of the war. The answer was of course, that at an official level at any rate, it was not politically expedient and blacks would remain non-combatants. At an unofficial level however, the picture was slightly different. Most informants agree that once up North, most, if not all, NMC recruits went through some kind of basic training in weaponry and were armed, albeit with ancient Italian 'Mussolini'[48] carbines. That the high command knew of the situation, and approved, is unquestionable since it was almost accepted policy for Os.C. in the M.E. to arm and train NMC recruits as an inevitable step in their induction into the front line. Even an officers as high ranking in the NMC as Captain Knoetze [he was in charge of NMC welfare in the M.E. from 1942 onwards, and acted as the direct representative of the Deputy DNEAS, Col Sayer, until the end of the war] was quite aware of the policy of armament of black troops in the M.E., although he stressed that it was never official policy:

> I wasn't aware of 'official' sanction of arming black soldiers, although I knew that many were armed.[49]

There is evidence that Stubbs knew of the unofficial policy of Os.C. up North but the poor communication between the DNEAS in the Union and the DDNEAS in the M.E., may have provided a convenient escape route for ignoring an unofficial policy which many military men, including Dan Pienaar, would have liked made

official.[50] A point which will be expanded upon as the dissertation progresses is that of problems caused by the breakdown of liaison between the DNEAS and DDNEAS in the Middle East. It is in fact, one of Knoetze's central criticisms of DNEAS policy in his 1945 report on the NEAS in the M.E.[51] Nevertheless, despite the seemingly perennial confusion between South African state policy, DNEAS policy, individual commander's policy and the war, black soldiers were being armed in the M.E. How well were they trained in the use of these arms? What difference did it make to their outlook? And was this the only form of weapons training undergone by NMC recruits?, are all questions we need to address. These questions will be approached in some detail in the section of the chapter dealing with the reactions of black recruits to their training but one question, that of other forms of weapons training in the NMC, will be examined here as it is a good example of the lack of both communication and consensus between the DNEAS and the O.'s C. he dealt with. In September 1942 the DNEAS stated in a letter to the A.G. that it would be prudent to:

> ... train the equivalent of a platoon (at full strength) of each NMC BN. in the 3" mortar.

presumably due to the threat of a Japanese invasion, since -

> ... circumstances at some future date may necessitate the use of these units for purposes other than security ...[52]

The A.G.'s reply was to forward a letter from the O.C. Coastal Area who seemed a little puzzled by the directive:

> As I understand the p sition, these BN's are <u>Security</u>

> Units and as such would never be called upon to fight with Mortars. Moreover, in order to use these weapons, it will, in addition be necessary to provide covering fire by troops equipped with rifles (or possibly even automatic weapons) ...[53],

official sanction for which (certainly in the Union) would never be forthcoming, showing a high degree of both political and military perception on the part of the O.C. Coastal Area, also clearly highlighting a certain military naivete on the part of the DNEAS and, possibly strengthening Knoetze's notion that Stubbs's appointment was a political rather than a military one. The scheme, which was in fact implemented, was not a rousing success. Most Os.C., plagued by demands for guards, coping with their own basic training programmes, even indifferent to further training for blacks, either implemented the programme sketchily or ignored it altogether. The A.G., concerned about the effect on the productivity of black troops by the course and, furthermore, nervous at the thought of blacks in proximity to high explosives, was vociferous in his disapproval:

> It is highly undesirable that N.E. personnel at Lenz should be trained in the use of the above arms, particularly as their duties are mostly those of factory labourers, and also by reason of the fact that when the stage is reached in training with live Mortar ammunition and Hand Grenades, there is a serious possibility that such will be a great source of danger to Lenz Factory.[54]

The reply was prompt:

> NMC personnel at Lenz Factory will not be trained in the use of Mortars and Hand Grenades.[55]

Whether the A.G. was more concerned about the supposed inability of blacks to handle explosives carefully or about an alarmingly competent handling of explosives with sinister intent, we are left to conjecture.

We have seen that training programmes in the NMC were handled with varying degrees of importance, competence and success. The reasons for the inconsistency and discrepancy lie in a variety of areas. The next section will address these problem areas, and the following section will attempt to provide an assessment of the views of the recruits themselves on the training they received in the NMC.

* * *

The first, and possibly the most important, problem associated with training in the NMC was, as has been mentioned, the poor quality of the white instructors the DNEAS had at his disposal. We have seen that this affected M.T. training in the Union to such an extent that Union trained drivers often had to be retrained on arrival in the M.E. The reasons behind this situation were only partly military in origin. The DDNEAS explained the problem to the Quartermaster General (Q.M.G.) in 1941:

> ... my difficulties are that it is not easy to obtain men trained in mechanical

> (r)ansport and combine that training with linguistic qualifications in one or other of the many ranges.[56]

The problem moreover, went further than the immediate one of lack of harmony between technical ability and linguistic competence. Often men with sufficient technical or military expertise were quite simply not in sympathy with black troops, or regarded them with extreme racial prejudice. Stubbs himself often complained of this[57] and yet he, himself was inexperienced in dealing with the general military training of blacks at such a scale and with military training in particular. Knoetze has pointed to this inexperience as a possible reason for much of the inconsistency in the DNEAS's policies with regard to the NMC in the war.[58] Certainly it is evident when we look at the lack of success Stubbs had in redressing the situation whereby he (as representative of the NMC) would be landed with all the least competent or most intractable white officers or NCO's, who could not be slotted anywhere else in the UDF.[59]

In addition there was certainly a degree of confusion at the highest level over exactly what was going on with regard to training. On the one hand Stubbs and his inspectorate of[illegible]ers were constantly blaming the poor selection of white officers and NCO's for the low standard of training in the NMC, and yet in May 1943, Stubbs was vehement in his defence of the high quality of training in the corps.[60] In fact, at this stage, whatever poor training he does admit to, he blames on Dilution, of which he had been a previous critic.

There can be no doubt that the problem was real and did in fact seriously affect training until well into 1943, when recruitment ended. The DNEAS inspectorate reports are constant and consistent in their assertions that NMC training is not up to standard, and they are clear in apportioning the blame for this largely on the abovementioned issue:

> Training of NMC units remains unsatisfactory. The main reason for this is the average of low standard of training of officers and European N.C.O.'s. The reason for this is twofold.
>
> (a) Selection of officers and N.C.O.'s was apparently based on linguistic and not essentially military qualifications.
>
> (b) Large numbers of officers and N.C.O.'s have attended no courses of any description since absorption into these B.N.'s.[61]

This extract comes, in fact, from a general report on the standard of training in the whole of the NMC in the Union at the time (1943) so we can see that the problem was widespread.

The problem was compounded by the fact that even had sufficiently skilled, military or technically, talented whites been available, chances are they would have been racially unsympathetic to black troops. The testimony of ex-NMC members seems to confirm this; according to Donald Madingoane:

> It was difficult because many people were illiterate ... so many instructors because very impatient. They used to swear and kick and do all sorts of things.[62]

The situation seemed to change somewhat, outside of the Union. Stubbs would have liked to have credited Dilution with deficiencies in training, yet the evidence of his own inspectorate shows that the problem existed from the very start of the NMC, long before the institution of Dilution in 1942. In fact, it would appear that, in the M.E. at any rate, blacks in diluted units probably received better training on the whole, than their Union based, non-diluted compatriots; Frank Sexwale said:

> Actually, most people felt that the training [M.T. training] was better up North.[63]

And D.T. Nkosi agreed with him:

> Well, up North you were quite well trained because you were in the front line you know ... I was a driver with the signals.[64]

Mr Nkosi, it will be remembered, had been so inadequately prepared for his tasks at Dunottar, in the Union. The point that it is crucial in a combat zone to have reasonably well trained personnel is of course, most pertinent to understanding why black troops up North were generally better trained. Instructors in the M.E. were no doubt far more highly motivated than their colleagues in the Union.

The relatively poor quality of white instructors in the NMC was not the only obstacle to efficient training. One of the major factors was, as was mentioned in the previous section, the poor quality and paucity of training equipment, especially in the Union. We have seen that in the M.E. the British often made not

only instructors, but materials available to the NMC for training. No such facilities existed back in South Africa. There is ample evidence to suggest that material shortages in training camps in the Union created serious difficulties for the DNEAS; Various inspectorate reports reflect this:

> No equipment is available ...
>
> No equipment ...
>
> No training done so far and no equipment issued ...[65]

These equipment shortages were compounded by the incessant demand for recruits from the M.E. These demands were particularly acute between 1941 and 1943 when recruitment was not proceeding as successfully as had been hoped. Often there was simply not enough time adequately to train men who were urgently needed up North and yet, as we have seen, this only led to further delays when the men finally reached the M.E.

It is surely not outrageous to suggest that had the Smuts government been firmer in their commitment to use black soldiers in the war, and utilized them to the fullest extent, the UDF would have been in a position to make a substantially greater contribution to the war in North Africa, than the by no means inconsiderable one they did in fact make. That is not to suggest that the use made of black soldiers was marginal or token, but merely that had more direct military use been made of black soldiers, and had their training been pursued with as much care as that accorded to white soldiers, they could have had a significant effect on the relief of combat soldiers in front line

positions. Black soldiers themselves were often very aware of this and many felt that their subordinate positions were an unfair reflection on both their dignity and capabilities.

* * *

As we have seen before, the admitted responses of black soldiers to the many experiences that befell them were as varied as human individuality and the vagaries of memory would permit. Yet there were certain areas in which a kind of consensus emerged, and this was so with aspects of training. Although there were those who joined the KMC for specifically military reasons, they were relatively rare. Most joined for immediate, pressing reasons of subsistence, while some joined because they felt they might learn new skills. Even those who attested for simple economic reasons, felt that they might benefit from some form of training in the UDF.

For most black recruits though, 'Training' implied training in skills which were not primarily military in orientation. This perception was held in common with many black troops from other parts of Africa and possibly accounted for many of the breakdowns in communication between troops and white instructors. These expectations in black troops were often created by exaggerated recruiting promises, but generally they grew out of bypassing the racial restrictions placed on blacks in the industrial arena:

> Many people hoped to learn trades ... we were not allowed to qualify in civilian life. Sometimes

recruiters said we would learn trades.[66]

Thus whether or not one was trained in the use of the 3" mortar became of far less interest than whether one would receive instruction in welding or carpentry while in the NMC.

The conclusion could, of course, be drawn that since the interests of many black troops were primarily vocational or economic, then the refusal to allow them combat duties could have been no hardship. I would actually be prepared to concede this as a possibility had the learning of industrial skills been a possibility at a general level for NMC troops, but on the whole, it was not; As the DNEAS wrote to the O.C. 4th Bn NMC in 1914:

> ... As far as training in concrete and carpentry work is concerned this appears to be somewhat outside the scope of your BN, but in any event, Defence would not be willing to find the equipment for this training such as in the case of carpentry tools and the necessary material.[67]

and even when it was instituted it was, as we have seen, not particularly well handled. (In the Union at least).

Up North the picture was somewhat different and men were often trained in skilled occupations. Members of the Cape Corps (C.C.) were even given trade allowances, a privilege not extended to NMC troops.[68] Abiel Sello was trained as a lab assistant in 101 Military Hospital in Suez, an opportunity denied him in the Union:

> I loved that job so much. When I came back to 1

> Military Hospital [Voortrekkerhoogte, Pretoria] they wouldn't allow me to do that job anymore. Because I'm black ...[69]

In fact, in the Union, most NMC recruits were relegated to basic labouring or security duties which required fairly little training:

> ... waiters, latrine cleaners, batmen, etc. ...[70]

and if individual Os.C., or company officers wanted to investigate further training, they did so at their own discretion and expense. The recruits themselves, as we have seen, were very conscious of this and remembered it as a genuine grievance, although whether or not the passing of time has exaggerated the importance of the complaint is difficult to tell:

> No, we didn't get any training. They promised us when we come back from the army we might ... get an education you see ... of which it never happened.[71]

The tendency to conflate the concepts of training and education among veterans is common, and casts light on how they viewed the training they hoped to get in the army. In other words, when most black recruits spoke of training in the army, they thought of it as leading to long term, civilly useful, skills rather than military training such as drill or musketry.

Many veterans are adamant in their claims that some black P.O.W.'s in the war learnt trades as a result of the duties they were expected to perform in German and Italian P.O.W. camps; For instance Donald Madingoane insisted:

> I remember one chap, he lived in White city [in Soweto] when he came back, he started making these burglar proofs himself, and making baths and dishes ... and he used to sell it to the people ... because he had learnt it from Germany.[72]

And Sam Maseko concurred:

> Those who were in the workshops [in P.O.W. camps] fixing up cars, best mechanics ...[73]

There is however, little, if any, archival corroboration of black P.O.W.'s being used in skilled occupations, and other veterans, one of them an ex P.O.W. himself, seem to feel that the majority of black P.O.W.'s performed little but the most menial and exhausting tasks, not all that different from their experiences in the Union:

> I was in Bordeaux, you know, in France, picking grapes ... and I was just offloading ships and doing work for the Germans. We work very hard.[74]
>
> One man, he was a P.O.W. in Germany. He says you must just work. Loading and offloading ships and such ... just work.[75]

We must thus conclude that if certain veterans did learn trades as P.O.W.'s, they were few and far between, and the exception rather than the rule.

It has been mentioned that NMC troops on arrival in the M.E., were issued with arms and given the rudiments of weapons training. By 1943, this was almost official policy. In fact, Grundlingh has shown that Smuts was under pressure to make it so,

but he never did completely.[76] What was the response of blacks to both being armed and the training they received in this area? Well, the first reaction seems to have been a type of pleased bewilderment:

> We were pleased, because now we are soldiers ... but we are not sure what to do ... if the German come.[77]

but it was of course the training they received that was of primary concern to the recruits, and again inconsistency seems to have prevailed:

> Every driver had to have a gun ... we are trained in Garawi [NMC camp in the Middle East] ... two weeks ...[78]
>
> As soon as we arrived in El Alamein they give us those Italian guns ... we train so long that when you shoot, you find your shoulder is so sore.[79]

But memory is relative and what to one man is a long time in the desert sun, may actually be wholly inadequate for true combat purposes. Since the policy was not an official one, army policy seems to have been to gear training to immediate and specific needs, and two weeks of basic musketry training the usual period assigned.[80] Donald Madingoane felt that, comparatively speaking the South African blacks did not fare well in the area of weapons training:

> It [rifle training] was just a crash course, it wasn't enough. You know, people from Bechuanaland, we used to watch them. They used to go training right through the day ... I remember they had rifle competitions ... the Bechuanaland troops were involved ... it was all

> Australians and New Zealanders, and the man who took the first, who won the competition was from Botswana.[81]

Thus although blacks from South Africa were trained in the use of small arms in the M.E., the training obviously left something to be desired, certainly in the minds of the recruits themselves. Moreover, they were aware of the unfavourable comparison between their training and that of other African troops, a comparison that often extended into areas other than training. Was this justified though? Did other African troops fare better in the area of training than NMC troops?

Most African troops seem to have felt the need to upgrade their skills through training in the army. Unlike NMC troops however, many were afforded the opportunity to do so,[82] and some were fortunate enough to find themselves in armies for whom historians could authoritatively assert that:

> By the end of the war, 97 000 Africans [from Kenya] had served in the forces. The army had trained 600 of its own teachers and no less than 15 000 drivers. About 70 percent of demobilised soldiers were reckoned to be literate.[83]

Even allowing for exaggeration at the time, the figures are impressive, in particular the literacy rate, a problem which as we shall see in Part III of this chapter, the NMC did little if anything to address. It was surely not unreasonable for NMC

troops to envy Kenyan training programmes, especially since other African troops were allowed to have black officers, a point of great moment to NMC troops.[84]

* * *

It is clear that training in the NMC was beset by problems of complexity from the start: Inadequate and inappropriate instructors to handle courses, equipment shortages, time limitations, demands from the front, linguistic difficulties with instructors. All these played a big part in hampering the DNEAS's training programmes. But by far the biggest obstacle to the efficient training and use of black manpower in the Second World War, was the persistent refusal of the South African state to amend its policy of racial discrimination in the interests of efficiency, victory, and simple gratitude for their participation. The UDF's training of black troops was not a resounding success, but this had far less to do with the lack of ability of black troops to learn (Stubbs himself was fervent in his praise of them, and he was not alone), than with the limitations the UDF had placed upon it by the state and, occasionally (since it was not entirely free of racism in its own ranks) by itself.

Thus for Stubbs to state in 1945 that:

> .., at least 70% [of all black soldiers] were given vocational training: thousands were trained as cooks, batmen, bootmakers, tailors, bricklayers, carpenters, stretcher bearers and hygienic assistants, while 25

000 men were fully trained as motor transport drivers.[85]

Is surely not just an exaggeration [70%? At least 30% of all NMC troops served in security bn's. Can this be considered 'vocational' training?), but an embroidering of the facts, since many of the occupations mentioned were, in reality, not nearly as exalted as the speech makes them sound. Moreover, the fact that 25 000 men were 'fully' trained as drivers had little to do with the NMC training courses in the Union. Regardless therefore of Stubb's claims for the training programme of the NMC it seems to me that most ex NMC troops themselves would be far more inclined to concur with Anthony Ndi's analysis of Cameroon's wartime experience (which was one of the less fortunate African one's):

> Many of the pronouncements [about training] were simply propaganda and most of the programmes never evolved past the planning stage.[86]

PART II **DILUTION**

In late 1941, dictated largely by the defeats in North Africa, the Middle East Forces issued a directive stating that all units were to be 'diluted' with non-combatant troops in order to free combat troops for duty at the front. The directive filtered through to the UDF early in 1942 and it was decided to use mainly black and coloured troops for dilution purposes.[87] The scheme had proven relatively successful with women in the U.K. replacing

men in the industrial arena, in order to free them for combat duty. Arthur Marwick has pointed out that the possibilities for economic and political advancement thus seemingly presented to women should not be exaggerated, and this is perhaps a caution which also applied to NMC soldiers in the Dilution situation.[88] Yet these possibilities cannot be ignored entirely, since there is evidence to suggest that Dilution had beneficial as well as prejudicial effects.

Stubbs as DNEAS was initially unequivocally opposed to the scheme. He was convinced that the mixing of the black and white troops in the same units could lead to friction, might lead to unhealthy comparisons being made by black troops, and dilution was against the stated racial policy of the South African state. (A policy about which, it should be noted, he had clear reservations). Within this framework he felt Dilution would be a mistake. And yet, once the policy had been decided upon, he made it clear that he would attempt to carry it out to the best of his ability as is clear from his letter of 7/5/1943 to the A.G:

> I looked upon it as my duty to express my fears to Defence, when dilution was first mooted, of the difficulties and dangers associated with it, but when it became apparent that policy had been definitely decided upon, I exerted every effort at my disposal to make it a complete success.[89]

The latter was part of a long detailed defence of the DNEAS's

handling of training for blacks in general and dilution in particular, in order to prevent a b[illegible] by the General Officer Commanding, Inland Area, (G.O.C. I.A.) to assume control of the NMC. (Why the G.O.C. wanted to do this is not entirely clear, except for his conviction that the DNEAS was handling the job badly). In the end, control of the NMC stayed with the DNEAS, but we need to understand how the situation declined to the point where he had to defend his right to maintain control.

In the first instance, it was clear that a certain amount of racial mixing was the inevitable consequence of dilution. The D.A.G. himself expressed fears about this and particularly fears about the mixing of blacks and coloureds 'in the same units'.[90] That very little friction did in fact occur is testimony to the speciousness of these fears. Actually most disciplinary problems in NMC detachment of diluted units came from disputes between the black recruits and their own officers or NCO's or the camp Os.C., not from disputes between troops of different races. Stubbs himself had worried about possible friction, but in the end, used the lack of it to defend his office's handling of dilution.[91]

The real problem came from an earlier cause, and one for which the DNEAS's office was responsible. Most Os.C., on recruiting black troops into their units, found that they were inadequately or barely trained for the duties they were expected to perform. While, in the M.E., there was insufficient time to complain at length about this, and preparing NMC troops for duty took primacy, in the Union Os.C. were at leisure to ask the A.G. why

this situation should exist. This was the point at which the G.O.C. stepped in and attempted to seize control of the situation. Stubbs of course, was ready to defend his office and yet, in his defence itself is a clear admission of the very change he is refuting:[92]

5. G.O.C. I.A. fails to appreciate

(a) that Non-European Army Services grew from nothing at 1st July 1940 to 100,00 in 18 months with 1,130 officers and 2,150 E/N.C.Os.

(b) that there were no ranks to select the best men from as in European Units, and that officers and N.C.Os. had to be taken on at face value from other units or recruited from civilians.

(c) that, except in the early stages, appointment of Europeans to Non-European Army Services has been limited to over-age and low category personnel and that for a long time my main source of recruitment was from the derelicts at C.A.T.D.

(d) that because of their low category many of the officers and N.C.Os. could not comply with the medical standard required of students at the Military College.

(e) that being a non-combatant unit many appointments which were influenced by political considerations were posted to the Native Military Corps - often under protest from me.

(f) that all the best officers and E/N.C.Os. went North thus lowering the general standard in the

Union.

(g) that, despite frequent representations, I was never allowed a "pool" to enable officers to attend courses (this has been agreed to on a modified scale within the last few days), and that as Non-European Army Services has been expanding all the time since its inception, I have always been short of officers and have not been in the happy position of selecting the best as other Units do.

It is clear that not only had the DNEAS been struggling against a constant policy of G.H.Q. racism for almost three years, but that he had never adequately adapted or responded to the situation. It was only when his control was jeopardised that Stubbs took control of the situation. From this point on, the face of the NMC changed somewhat. Stubbs's inspectorate teams were upgraded, their reports became more detailed and stringent, a policy of standardisation of treatment of NMC detachments in diluted units was introduced and NMC welfare officers were more carefully chosen and seconded to all NMC units or detachment. However, since the standardisation brochure was only issued on 31 December 1943[93] (almost two years after the introduction of dilution), and the welfare guidelines for welfare officers (W.O.) on 1 June 1944 (!)[94] we [illegible]s that the DNEAS's office was still not exactly the epitome of efficiency and despatch, and it is not difficult to understand the G.O.C.'s impatience with it, since the M.E. forces of the UDF could ill afford the time spent

on re-training and lack of discipline.

Knoetze maintained that it was Stubb's poor liaison with the DDNEAS and his officers in the M.E. which led to the situation, and it is clear that it was a problem largely ignored by the DNEAS, who spent little time in the M.E.:

> In concluding this section it is appropriate to comment on the lack of personal liaison between the DNEAS and his staff at G.H.Q., Pretoria, and DDNEAS and his staff, in the field. Only on one occasion, and that towards the end of the European War, did a senior officer from the DNEAS Office visit the DDNEAS and N.E.'s with fmns [formations] in the field. The occasion referred to was when Lt. Col. H.S. Mockford (ADNEAS G.H.Q Pretoria) visited M.E.F. ... in Oct./Nov. 1944.[95]

Knoetze still stands firm that the 'indifference'[96] of the DNEAS to the NMC troops and officers in the M.E. was largely responsible for the poor training and discipline up North.

Black soldiers in diluted units had little time however, to be concerned about takeover bids at Staff level. They were kept extremely busy with a host of duties which covered almost everything except actual combat duty (and even then blacks were used as loaders in the artillery). Most of the duties were, in fact, unpleasant ones, and involved menial tasks or physical labour. 'Hygiene personnel' for instance, had their duties clearly delineated in the above-mentioned standardisation

pamphlet:

> [They were to clean ...] ... Latrines, ablution blocks, collection and disposal of refuse, grease traps, chemical precipitation and disposal of sullage water, disinfectant, rodent, mosquito and fly control. Note: Estimate provides for cleaning of European sick bays ... by Non-European Hygiene Personnel.[97]

This last because, as we have seen, blacks were initially not allowed to clean 'European' sick bays.

It is true that most soldiers, regardless of race, are forced to do these duties every now and then, but most black soldiers found that these type of duties were reserved specifically for them, most of the time. Still, they were not the only duties performed by blacks in the war, and many NMC veterans felt that Dilution had benefitted them in some ways: Firstly by training them for tasks which would become useful in civilian life:

> I was a first aid man ... in 44 squadron in Cairo, the Airforce Camp. I learnt many things with the airforce ...

In 1942 it was decided that all black civilian labour working in NMC camps, and this included auxiliaries such as Y.M.C.A. workers, had either to attest to the NMC, or lose their jobs. Donald Madingoane was a Y.M.C.A. worker with the NMC, who attested and then was sent to the M.E. He remembered that dilution opened some doors for blacks, but it was not without pitfalls:

> Your duties were a bit wider, because you could do

> courses and things ... you know, driving and being a cook and such ... but they could use you in any way, now that you were in the army. If you were unlucky, you would have to be a labourer ... or go and be a guard.[99]

Secondly, exposure to white troops at on everyday level often improved perceptions of each other on both sides; according to Frank Sexwale:

> Well, we saw that we were all soldiers and ... they [white troops] saw that we just did our jobs, and they respected that.[100]

Knoetze commented thus:

> The general attitude therefore was that Europeans throughout were prepared to accept the N.E. as an inferior, but resented his being allocated equal responsibilities. In spite, however, of this inherent prejudice, a tremendous amount of co-operation and mutual respect developed between the Europeans and N.E.'s and the colour bar was not as strong as in civil life in the Union.[101]

So we can see that a certain growth of understanding was often the result of dilution, particularly in the M.E., but the warning bell is rung by the first part of the Knoetze extract. We should not get too taken by the notion that dilution proceeded smoothly or entirely peacefully, in the area of contact between white and black troops.

Numerous problems arose as a result of dilution. The first was the resentment of black troops at the fact of being saddled with 'B and C category men . . .'; officers and NCO's who often could not do the simple military tasks they required of their black troops. Numerous incidents of conflict occurred, and Stubbs was continually attempting to address the further problem of the attitudes of racist whites towards blacks in diluted units.[102] Once up North, the NMC troops passed ever further from the DNEAS's jurisdiction and yet, it seems in the M.E., that general NMC welfare and well being was far more adequately handled than in the Union. It is not unreasonable then, to assert that the DDNEAS and his staff in the M.E. were far more efficient and conscientious in their pursuit of decent treatment for NMC troops in diluted units than the DNEAS in the Union, and furthermore, that possibly their efficiency was enhanced by lack of contact with the bureaucracy beset office of the DNEAS.

It is thus clear that dilution had drawbacks as well as successes, and while the policy may have been a success in logistical terms, and did in fact achieve some of its purely military objectives (i.e. the replacement of potential combat troops by black troops, in order to free combat troops for front line duty), it was not an entirely unmixed experience for most black troops.

> O.R. [other ranks] generally, and some officers also, resented (sometimes severely criticised) the employment of N.E.'s alongside Europeans.[103]

And it would not be unreasonable to suggest that Donald

Madingoane's attitude toward dilution was widely shared by blacks in the NMC:

> What our chaps preferred, was to be attached to either Australians, New Zealanders or some other troops. Not South African troops because we were not happy with South African troops.[104]

PART III EDUCATION

For the DNEAS there were two distinct aspects to the NMC's attitude towards education. The first, and the most important, was the propaganda aspect. The second, and secondary aspect, was education proper. For black recruits in the NMC, the possibility of extending their education in the army was high on the list of reasons for recruiting. Most NMC recruits, whatever their primary reasons for joining, seem to have expected some kind of educational content to their military service. While the DNEAS recognized the value to the UDF of literate, numerate troops, he was nonetheless inclined (probably due to state pressure) to concentrate on 'propaganda' when he instituted the post of 'Native Propaganda and Educational N C.O.' in late 1943.[105] Prior to this there had been no organized scheme for education in the NMC however, so recruits were probably grateful for the existence of even an ideologically inclined educational programme.

Up until this point most 'education' encountered by black recruits had been in the course of training, and geared

specifically toward facilitating the performance of particular tasks. The bulk of non-specific, general education, had been left in the hands of auxiliary organisations such as the Y.M.C.A. From the beginning of recruitment in 1940, it was the policy of the UDF to leave the conducting of educational activities in the hands of the auxiliaries. Organisations such as the British and Foreign Bible Society, the organisation of the Rev. Ray Phillips and the Books for Troops Committee were expected to attend to the educational needs of black troops. Of course, the Y.M.C.A. was especially prominent among these.

It is true that the DNEAS was hampered by little co-operation from G.H.Q. and had minimal time for training in immediately utilitarian tasks, let alone general education. Still, one of the recruitment lures had been the prc of furthering one's education, and NMC recruits were entitled to expect something to be done. Stubb's initial problems were lack of funds, and lack of qualified personnel. Even when the official NMC educational scheme was instituted in 1943 the problems persisted:

> In October 1943 classes were held at NMC barracks V/hgte when approximately 200 men attended, unfortunately, owing to lack of facilities and financial assistance these classes had to be discontinued, although the camp Y.M.C.A. attendant, under the direction of Lt. A.C. Schwikkard carried on with this work until the officer was transferred in December '43.[106]

So we can see that right [illegible] war, the Y.M.C.A. was

expected to carry the NMC's educational burden, if not by the DNEAS, then by individual Os.C.

Donald Madingoane, who was with the Y.M.C.A. at the outbreak of war, worked in NMC camps until 1942, when he attested and left for the M.E. His duties up North seemed to fit in with his pre-attestation tasks and he remembers:

> I was in the Y.M.C.A. ... most of the people at that time were illiterate ... so we used to write letters for them, we used to read letters to them, we used to arrange entertainment and also serve in the canteen. The only thing the NMC used to give us was short courses about how to keep books and how to, you know, write in stuff for the shops, and make orders ...[107]

This was probably the pattern for most men recruited from the Y.M.C.A., and the extract raises an interesting point. That most education conducted by the NMC was geared to immediate, short term purposes. Grundlingh asserts that education of recruits was, in fact, of little consequence to the NMC, and that only the Corps' immediate needs were of any importance in its educational programme:

> The education was functional and limited. The soldiers were taught the rudiments of reading, writing, arithmetic and Geography ...[108]

Doug Hyslop has spoken of the policy of the South African state of the 1950's to attempt to produce a limited, semi-skilled workforce designed to service the changing needs of the secondary

sector, but not to foster long term, qualitative education. The means chosen for this was Bantu Education and the ultimate aim of the policy was to control the black, urban workforce in the interests of the Apartheid economy. The consequence would presumably be a productive, although fairly docile and unenlightened proletariat carefully geared toward maximum production with minimum protest.[109] This is, of course, an oversimplification of the hypothesis, but we can see a clear parallel with the NMC's policy towards education of its black recruits in the war. Not that I am suggesting that any long term programme geared towards ensuring a docile black population was being engineered, merely that education was seen by the NMC authorities as a method of social control rather than social enlightment. Knoetze tells us:

> A common mistake in NMC promotions made in the early stages was the promotion of men merely because they were literate .?. Illiterate NMC NCO's ... proved more useful, especially when it came to discipline and handling men.[110]

It followed therefore that the 'propaganda' and social control aspects of the NMC's educational policies were to the fore, and when, in 1943, the DNEAS finally instituted a general educational scheme for the NMC it was logical that he should encourage Educational NCO's for the NMC to be selected from men who could be:

> ... encouraged to give lectures to the Native details ... in order to assist them in understanding the

> present war situation and improve their standard of education, which in turn has the affect of keeping them occupied and so preventing them from sheer ennui from seeking diversion in shebeens and other places of that nature.[111]

and that Welfare Officers were reminded that in weekly information lectures:

> ... precaution must be taken in choosing suitable topics; political issues to be left severely alone.[112]

Even though the educational scheme of December 1943 became official NMC policy, it was never fully implemented and, in the end operated largely at the discretion of individual O.'s C. The section on 'Education' in the June 1944 Welfare brochure issued by the DNEAS is, in point of fact, an admission of this:

> In some NMC Units provision has been made for a NMC Educational NCO ... Where no provision has been made ... you should nevertheless endeavour to persuade persons suitably qualified to undertake the job voluntarily outside duty hours. The latter has been done in M.E. with great success.[113]

In other words, use as many Donald Madingoanes as possible since, not only are they good at the job, but they require little training and they're free.

One cannot place all the blame for the partial failure of the Educational Scheme at the door of the DNEAS though. There were a number of factors behind the limited success of the scheme, and

one of them was the reluctance of some O.'s C. to implement it. This reluctance was the consequence of a variety of reasons, not the least of which was political in nature. In 1943 'Sgt (Miss) Dorothy Chadwick' contributed an article to 'Trek' magazine on the holding of educational classes by women of the 61 C.D. Coy. S.S.S. of the Somerveld U.D.E. station, for blacks in the UDF. Brigadier Borain, Fortress Commander in Cape Town responded to the article by; a) stopping the classes on the grounds that women were not allowed on NMC camps; b) Requesting and received official sanction for this action from G.O.C (Coastal Area), and c) informing the DNEAS that:

> I cannot believe that anything but trouble will result from such night classes ... I am quite certain in my own mind that Sgt. (Miss) Dorothy Chadwick must be a disciple of Dr. Sacks who is, I believe, probably the most important communist in Cape Town.[114]

Not for the first, or last, time the thread of (real or imagined) 'Reds under the bed' proved useful to Os.C. who were nervous of 'liberal' or politically sensitive activity connected with black troops. Some Os.C. were so nervous that they refused to implement even the DNEAS's education scheme.[115]

Other problems with the scheme were experienced. Very little financial assistance was provided to help O.'s C. implement it, and generally, those conscientious enough to take education of black troops seriously were forced to rely on civilian assistance and the presence of auxiliary organisations in camps. Some commanders could not spare their educational officers, and some

refused to grant them the time for these classes for the sorts of reasons we have already discussed. Of course, the scheme was implemented in some camps and often proved quite successful[116], but not successful enough to justify the claim by the Handbook of Race Relations in 1949 that:

> The classes were always well attended, and were supported by the European Officers and N.C.O.'s who were attached to the various battalions.[117]

In the M.E. the scheme also had only limited success, partly, says Knoetze, due to a lack of co-operation between educational authorities at the M.E. NEAS Depot personnel.[118] The problem was compounded by the fluctuating personnel in the M.E., and the constant movement of troops in and out of the depot. By contrast, Knoetze claims that in individual units the scheme was generally well implemented, with a high degree of co-operation between Unit Commanders and educational officers.[119] Once again apparently, the M.E. proved to be kinder to black troops than the Union.

What of the black troops themselves? What were their reactions to the provisions made for their education in the NMC? We have seen that NMC troops were aware of the functionalist bias of the DNEAS's education policy, and this awareness often provoked dissatisfaction:

> We were very unhappy because they didn't have any classes.[120]

> They promised us when we came back from the army we

> ... not have an education, you see, of which it never happened.[121]

> No, not many classes ... sometimes up North we go, but not a lot.[122]

Donald Madingoane felt that the problem (in the M.E. at least) was that people up North were too fluid for a proper scheme to flourish:

> It wouldn't work because people were shifted from place to place.[123]

Still, he felt that education in the M.E. was decidedly better handled than in the Union, certainly in that blacks were not consciously prevented from educating themselves further:

> The thing about Educational courses up North, was that you could correspond. You could do matric ... by correspondence and you could do a degree by correspondence.[124]

Thus it seems that for many blacks, education in the NMC was a disappointment and although some felt they had learnt something in the UDF, '... they taught us a lot at 101 ...'[125] many others considered themselves to have received a raw deal.

One aspect of the NMC which is closely related to education is that of the literature provided by the authorities for the troops. On 2 November 1942 the weekly NMC newspaper 'Indaba-Tlou' was established. This, along with the Native Affairs Department's 'News of the War' was intended to be the primary reading material of the NMC troops.[126] Obviously both

publications were slanted towards a viewpoint that both supported the South African state, and was propagandistic in the extreme. Most blacks were instantly conscious of this and avoided these publications if alternatives were on offer. A year after the start of publication of 'Indlouv-Tlou' a conference between the N.A.D., the NEAS and the Bantu Press was held and some of the problems were ironed out. Nevertheless the NMC publication never quite achieved the success the DNEAS had hoped, as can be deduced from this request from the O.C. M.T. Coy Saldanha Bay for,

> 200 'Indlouv-Tlou'
> 150 'Umteteli wa Bantu' } (Both civilian
> 150 'Bantu World' [127] } publications)

Naturally the DNEAS was reluctant to acknowledge that the overtly propagandistic nature of the NMC publication was at fault and the problem was never completely resolved, at least not to the satisfaction of the troops themselves who:

> If we could, we prepared to read British, or other papers ... up North.[128]

It is clear that black troops were fully aware of the NMC's attempts at social control and, when and wherever possible, did their best to resist them, even if only in minor ways such as the above. The following photograph is interesting in that it clearly illustrates the NMC's idea of a contented soldier, complete with his fascinated perusal of 'Indlovu-Tlou', and yet at the same time is such an obvious piece of posed propaganda, that we begin to gain some insight into the crudity of so many of the DNEAS's efforts to direct the thinking of his black

troops. The photograph is from the NEAS collection and depicts a soldier getting ... 'The latest news from the Union!.

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It is obvious that one of the main reasons for the ineffectuality of so many of the DNEAS's programmes during the war, was administrative inefficiency. Poor communication in the Union, inefficient inspectorate groups, bad relations with many O's.C., coloured the DNEAS's handling of many aspects of service for the NMC. To add to this there was a clear lack of liaison between the DNEAS in the Union and the DDNEAS in the M.E. What is not clear is: a) Why the DNEAS replied to criticism with defensiveness and haphazard solutions, rather than well considered, long term plans? and b) Why he allowed the lack of communication between his office and the M.E. to persist for so long, particularly since, it would seem, his office could have learnt something from that of the DDNEAS?

Wherever the answers to these questions lie, and we will continue

to search for them throughout this study, the result of the situation was a training programme that was so inadequately handled that control of it was almost wrested from the grip of the DNEAS, an educational scheme that looked far better on paper (and was instituted very late in the day) than in reality and, associated with, a large, unwieldy organisation, clearly split into two parts by more than just geography, and ill equipped to handle the myriad problems of its constituents. Letters such as this one, posted to Stubbs by a missionary, the Rev. James Dexter-Taylor on 25 April 1941:

> ... our native clergy ... approved strongly ... of the provision of welfare for our native troops and the wonderful effects of a few weeks training.[130]

indicate either an extremely rose tinted sense of vision, or a very selective viewing of NMC units.

Not that black troops from the Union were the only ones to have their expectations of training and education in the army dampened by experience. Other African troops had had similar expectations:

> Some saw themselves as 'the bright genii' and promised to come back to our homeland with experience in foreign lands to start the construction of our post war plan.[131]

which all too often proved to be far too optimistic, and like the NMC, they found that they had expected far too much from the military experience:

> ... Education and Health are the two most important

things the Africans fail to get.[132]

Still, as we saw earlier, Kenyan troops could boast 600 army trained teachers by the end of the war, and an approximately 70% literacy rate among demobilized soldiers. Even the DNEAS, in his constant policy of exaggerating the achievements of the NMC (and consequently playing down the failures), would not have dared to claim anything like this for the NMC in the same period.

CHAPTER TWO FOOTNOTES

1. C.G.S. (War) 32/3. Extract from Staff Conference 11 of 18/11/1942.
2. C.G.S. (War) 32/3. Stubbs to C.G.S., 18/11/1942.
3. A.G. (3) 154 x 935 File 99, DNEAS to D.A.G. 1941.
4. Knoetze, J.C.; 'Historical Survey of the Non-European Army Services outside the Union of South Africa', 15/8/1945, pg. 4; S.A.D.F. Archives, Pretoria.
5. Grundlingh, L.; Pg. 175.
6. A.G. (W) 168/56 Box 97 File A15, Memos between DNEAS, A.G. and the Director of Military Training (DMT) June/July 1941.
7. D. Masuku; Soweto (1988).
8. AG (W) 168/56, Box 97 File A15, Ibid. Above.
9. D. Madirgoane; Soweto (1989).
10. NEAS Photo Album; No. S.A. 1573; S.A. Museum of Military History. J.H.B. Caption: Monuments to the gold mining industry look down a strange scene. Black troops march over the dump they helped to build in days of peace.
11. J.C. Knoetze; Interview, Sebokeng (1992).
12. NEAS NAS 3/41/1/7; Inspectorate Report 7 NMC Guard BN. Temple, Jan. 1943.
13. Ibid. Extracts from Inland Area Report on Training, 31/3/1943.
14. Ibid. See also numerous other inspectorate reports for the periods before and after this one.
15. Masuku; 1988.
16. P. Lethuba; Atteridgeville, (1992).
17. NEAS Press Clippings; S.A. Museum of Military History.
18. NMC NAS 3/41/1/7; Inspectorate Report, Summary, March 1943.
19. Knoetze; 1992.
20. Ibid.

21. A.G. (3) 154 x 286. D.A.G. to DNEAS, 1/10/1942.

22. NMC NAS 3/20/1/ Box 47 File A1 Lt. Col. Mockford to D.G. Stocks, 8/4/1941.

23. NMC NAS 3/1/6 Box 2 Various files. DNEAS to A.G. 1941 - 1945.

24. NEAS Photo Albums, War Museum, Photo No. S.A. 1581; Caption: First lessons at the A.B.C. school ... The grating of crashed gears are no problem in these synthetic cars.

25. C.G.S. War 32/3 Extract from M.P.'s conference of 18/11/1942.

26. Capel, R; Johannesburg, (1992).

27. John Sekori; Soweto (1989).

28. D.T. Nkosi; Atteridgeville (1992).

29. NMC NAS 3/20/1 Box 47 File A, 1+2, Various memos to Stubbs from O.'s C. in M.E. 1941-1942.

30. NMC NAS 3/21, Letters to DNEAS 23/3/1944.

31. A.G. (3) 154 (104) Memo on Dilution from A.G. to all S.A.A.F. units with NMC detachments, 31/12/1943.

32. Abiel Sello; Atteridgeville (1992).

33. Knoetze. Ibid; 'Survey of the NEAS ...', Pg. 28. Also interviews with Sello, Moloi etc.

34. Sello; (1992).

35. R. Moloi; Soweto (1989).

36. C.G.S. War 32/3, File 1640, Maj. Gen. Dan Pienaar at a conference of Members of Parliament on NMC troops in the UDF. 18/11/1942.

37. NMC NAS 3/21 file N18, Capt. Ian McGregor, 3 Tvl. Scottish to DNEAS, 9/12/1941.

38. DNEAS NAS 3/1/14 Memo from Stubbs to Os.C. all NMC units, 5/8/1942.

39. NMC NAS, Box 46, File A15, Director of General Medical Services to A.G. (DNEAS) on Stretcher Bearer courses, 13/10/1942.

40. Ibid.; 9/9/1942.

41. NMC NAS, Box 46, File A15, 3/26/13; DNEAS to General Secretary, S.A. Red Cross, 9/9/1942.

42. Ngomgqibelo, May 30, 1942.

43. Knoetze. Ibid; pg. 21-22 et al (1945).

44. C.G.S. (2) DMT 1229 Box 692, Memo from Director of Coastal Services (DCS) to A.G. 2/9/1942.

45. Knoetze; (1992). 'General Brink insisted on having his black batmen transported by air from the Union. [This was unheard of generally] and this was done'.

46. F. Sexwale; Soweto (1988).

47. Grundlingh, L. Ibid; Pg. 177.

48. Masuku; (1988).

49. Knoetze; (1992).

50. C.G.S. (War); 32/3 File 1640, M.P.'s conference 18/11/1942.

51. Knoetze. Ibid; Pg. 21-22, ETAL (1945).

52. C.G.S. (2) DMT 1229 Box 629 Memo from Director of Coastal Service (DCS) to A.G. 2/9/1942.

53. Ibid.

54. C.G.S. (2) DMT 1229 Box 692. A.G. to D.C.S., 12/12/1942.

55. Ibid.; D.C.S. to A.G. 15/12/1942.

56. NMC NAS 3/28/16 File A13 Lt. Col. H.S. Mockford (DDNEAS(to QMG 11/2/1941.

57. NMC NAS Box 23 File 3/26/14/2, Inspectorate reports to Stubbs January to March 1943.

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59. NMC NAS 3/1/1; DNEAS to D.A.G. on NMC as dumping ground for lower category whites. 23/12/1942.

60. C.G.S. (War) 32/3; Stubbs to A.G. 7/4/1943.

61. O.G.S. (2) DMT 1229 Box 629; Inland Training Report, March 1943. Also DNEAS, NAS, 3/1/6 Inspectorate Reports, 1941 - 1942.

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63. F. Sexwale; (1988).

64. D.T. Nkosi; (1992).

65. NMC NAS 3/41/1/7; Inspectorate reports on NMC BN's 1943. Also DNEAS NAS 3/1/6 and 3/1/1; Inspectorate reports 1940 - 1942.

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67. NMC NAS 3/42/1; DNEAS to O.C. 4 BN NMC 1/5/1944.

68. Knoetze; (1945) Pg. 30.

69. Sello; (1992).

70. C.G.S. (War) 32/10; Gen. Memo from C.G.S. 1/6/1940.

71. Maseko; (1989).

72. Madingoane; (1989).

73. Maseko; (1989).

74. D. Masuku; Soweto (1988).

75. Lethuba; (1992).

76. Grundlingh, L. Ibid; Pg. 30.

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96. Knoetze; (1992).

97. A.G. (3) 154 (104); Dilution Pamphlet, 1943.

98. Chaba, J.; Atteridgeville, (1942).

99. Madingoane; (1989).

100. Sexwale; (1988).

101. Knoetze; (1945) Pg. 53.

102. A.G. (3) 154/x/268; DNEAS to A.G.; 23/12/1942.

103. Knoetze, (1945) Pg. 53.

104. Madingoane; (1989).

105. A.G. (3) 154/104; A.G. to all S.A.A.F. units with NEAS on detachment, 31/12/1943.

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111. A.G. (3) 224 DNEAS to SAAF diluted units 31/12/1943.

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117. Horwitz; Pg. 543.

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119. Ibid.

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121. Maseko; (1989).

122. Masempla; (1992).

123. Madingoane; (1989).

124. Madingoane; (1989).

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127. NMC NAS 3/21/A1; O.C. 201 MT Coy to DNEAS, 9/3/1944.

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129. NEAS Photo Albums, War Museum; No. N.E. 15. Caption; The latest news from the Union.

130. A.G. (3) 224; Rev. J. Dexter-Taylor to Stubbs 25/4/1941.

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CHAPTER III

The previous chapters of this dissertation have dealt with issues that were, to a certain extent quantifiable. One can look at the expectations of recruitment for instance, compare these figures with the actual ones attained, and make a comment about the success or failure of this programme. To quantify the success or failure of relations between white and black in the UDF, is a slightly more difficult task. I have chosen to concentrate my attention therefore, on relations between black troops and their white officers and NCO's, mainly because it is in this area that the bulk of archival evidence is most informative, but also because relations between these two groups were at the heart of the NMC's military effectiveness.

Other areas of contact between NMC troops and those outside the Corps, have not been neglected of course, and the rest of the chapter will show how these areas of contact came about, what problems they caused, and the extent to which state decreed discrimination influenced all of the above. We will examine the problems that arose as a consequence of discrimination and attempt to assess to what extent these problems did not reflect purely military concerns.

Beyond these points we will attempt to examine where and how the abovementioned problems affected the efficiency, organisation, and ability of the NMC to function as a useful part of the UDF.

Again, these are difficult issues to quantify, but certain specific incidents and occurrences are open to generalisation, and use will be made of a case study to highlight, for instance, the nature of relations between white and black in diluted units in the Union.

There are three general areas of examination in this chapter:

a) The broad spectrum of problems which arose from the interaction of whites and blacks in the UDF between 1940-45.

b) The specifics of these problems, investigated through a case study from 1942. This case study is particularly concerned with the relationship between black soldiers and their white NCO's and officers.

c) An awareness, through the course of the discussion, of the differences and similarities between inter-race relations up North, and in the Union. Firstly, between white officers and black troops, and secondly between black troops and others; such as white troops, white and black civilians, etc.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The first deals with relations between black troops and white officers and NCO's. It does so mainly by means of a case study, and also examines the growth of disciplinary problems in the NMC during 1943.

Part one is divided into four sections which examine, respectively: Officers and NCO's in the Union; Officers and

NCO's up North; the crisis of discipline of 1943, and; grievances and general conflict between troops and rank in the NMC on a larger scale.

Part two is concerned with relations between white and black troops in the UDF, between NMC troops and foreign troops both black and white, and finally between NMC troops and civilians, also both black and white.

Part two is thus an attempt to assess how general the specific observations and conclusions of Part one are in the context of the chapter as a whole.

PART I

From the instant a black man enlisted in the NMC he was subject to forms of discrimination that had little to do with the normal course of a soldier's subjugation to military authority. Regardless of the level of education or political awareness of a black recruit in the UDF, the fact that the state regarded him as an inferior soldier was immediately brought home. Blacks were paid significantly lower family allotments , their duties were on the whole, menial and repetitive, they could not bear arms (assegaais don't count), and they could rise no higher in rank than staff sergeant. Grundlingh notes that:

> ... when the granting of passes is withheld on racial grounds, [military laws] ... lose their purely

> military function and become a method to implement and maintain the social structure of South Africa.[1]

This has a twofold implication. Firstly, that the influencing of the military by the purely political requirements of the ruling faction calls the autonomy of the military into serious question, and secondly, that the temptation for whites in the military to treat blacks in a manner not covered by military procedure, becomes exaggerated. In other words, when the state decrees that black troops are to be regarded as outside the normal province of the Military Disciplinary Code (M.D.C.) - the international standard of military procedure, and in its way, a fairly democratic document - can it be expected that white troops, officers and NCO's will regard them as equals? We shall see that many officers and NCO's barely regarded blacks as soldiers at all, and thus often did not feel bound by the M.D.C., which should constrain those in charge as much as those in their charge.

Let us not forget though, that when the NMC was established, this danger was foreseen, particularly by the DNEAS, Col. B.W. Martin. Col. Martin followed an initial policy of recruiting white NCO's and officers who had experience in dealing with black troops, generally drawn from the NAD. Most of these recruits (though not all) were reasonably sympathetic to black troops, although we have discussed how the choice of officers for linguistic rather than military reasons often hampered efficiency. Still, these men's experience was valuable when it came to dealing with black

troops. In late 1940, Col. Martin was replaced as DNEAS by Col. Stubbs. The appointment was not popular with many of the early white recruits and a good number of them, including J.C. Knoetze (then an NCO), chose to go North with the first NMC detachments sent to the Middle East. Stubbs, whose talents for man-management seem not to have equalled those of Col. Martin, was left to re-staff his local organisation with the kinds of NCO's and officers that have been mentioned in previous chapters.

> The first NMC units were staffed very largely with people who were experienced with blacks ... but gradually, less experienced and sympathetic people began to come in.[3]

Of course, it wasn't only G.H.Q. squabbling that caused this, it often occurred:

> ... partly to replace those who had been disabled.[3]

Still, the fact remained that after 1942 at any rate, the NMC in the Union was staffed, to a large extent, by officers and NCO's who were often far less sympathetic to the particular needs of the black troops, than their counterparts up North.

PART I (i) OFFICERS AND NCO'S IN THE UNION

How did this affect black troops? At the most basic level, and certainly before (and even, to an extent, after) the introduction of dilution, their white officers and NCO's constituted the bulk of the whites with whom blacks came into contact in the UDF. This was, as it were, the frontline of racial relations in the forces. At a general level it would seem that relations between

NMC troops and their 'rank' were better, on the whole, than one would have expected; two inspectorate reports stated:

> Man management is good ... the officers and NCO's being keen and efficient.[4]
>
> The officers and NCO's take a keen interest in their men and good results have been obtained.[5]

Black troops often concurred with this, in fact, more often than not. Frank Sexwale said:

> Well it was not a question of colour. It was ... just the gove nment policy. People resented the policy, not the individuals.[6]

And the DNEAS himself, in a letter to the C.G.S. in 1945, affirmed the positive aspects of the treatment of black troops by their officers and NCO's in the NMC:

> They [the recruits] expressed gratitude for the sympathetic manner in which they had been treated in the NMC.[7]

No doubt the DNEAS had black troops from the Middle East predominantly in mind when he sent this, since it was they, rather than troops who remained in the Union, who were mainly of this opinion. Even the inspectorate reports began, from mid 1943 onwards, to reflect a less sanguine picture. We have discussed briefly, some reasons for the better conditions up North and we will continue to refer to these and other reasons as the discussion progresses. We also need to address the fact that, even if relations in the Union up until 1943 were not completely negative, throughout the course of that year they declined steadily.

One of the reasons for this was dilution. When the policy was introduced in late 1941-early 1942, the number of black troops on detachment to white units was fairly small, certainly small enough for Stubbs to maintain some kind of contact with them Grundlingh has shown that between August 1942 and January 1943 the number of NMC troops on detachment to white units rose from 11 981 to 19 310[8], and has commented on the problems posed by this to the DNEAS's control over his troops. Not only did Stubbs experience a loss of control over the NMC troops on detachment, he found it difficult to monitor their problems and progress and, consequently, discipline suffered. Of course as dilution proceeded, more and more NMC troops were distanced from the DNEAS's jurisdiction and the discipline problems increased. It was only when Stubbs's authority was challenged in mid 1943 that he took positive steps to upgrade his inspectorate units in the Union, and appoint welfare officers for every NMC unit on detachment in the Middle East (The lack of which had caused most of the disciplinary problems up North, in Knoetze's view at any rate).[9]

However, although there were disciplinary and jurisdictional problems up North, caused largely by dilution, they were relatively minor compared to the problems that began to appear in the Union from the middle of 1942. Let us not overstate the case. There were many camps in the Union where good relations prevailed between officers and recruits in the NMC. There are inspectorate reports and interviews confirming this. The point is that from 1942 onwards a trend began to become evident of

declining relations in the Union, and even to a degree up North, and we need to understand why. The discussion about officers and troops up North will be entered into more fully in the next section of the chapter. The preceding comments about it have been included in order to give a general perspective to the following examination of relations in the Union. At this point, I propose to use a particular incident, which occurred in late 1942, to identify and comment upon the above problems. This case study is perhaps unique in the extremity of the reactions of the participants, which invests it with particular interest, and yet it is all too representative in its general details - of the ways in which officers and men in the NMC in the Union, came to deal with each other.

The task of the inspectorate group in the Union, was to travel to the various NMC camps and 'white' units with NMC details on detachments, assess the standards of training, discipline, accommodation, welfare and treatment of black troops, and report back to the DNEAS. These visiting officers were more than just the usual military inspecting officers, since their roles had a political as well as a military cast to them. Not only were they assessing the military treatment of black soldiers, they had to be alert for racial discrimination too, and in this regard ran even more risk of being perceived by Os.C. as spies for the DNEAS, than would usually be the case. Nevertheless, they were, in the end, Stubbs's only real avenue for monitoring the treatment and welfare of blacks in the NMC and, as such, vitally important. Being answerable only to the A.G. via the DNEAS, and

often being inferior in rank to the Os.C. of camps they were inspecting, they ran still greater risks of engendering resentment. Generally speaking, these factors did not cause undue antagonism, but in one instance, all the potential for conflict represented by these officers was, in fact, fulfilled.

* * *

In July 1942, Stubbs's senior visiting officer was Captain A.S. Mehan. He was on attachment to the DNEAS from the General Services Corps and was, at this time, on a routine inspection of the 7th Bn NMC at Tempe, Bloemfontein, which was under the command of Major/Temporary acting Lieutenant-Colonel Dawes. On the 10th August 1042, Mehan was temporarily recalled to sit on a court of enquiry investigating charge of '... gross physical and mental cruelty alleged by certain non-europeans ... 'at Cullinan[10]. On 14th August he returned to his inspection at Tempe.

During his initial period at the 7th Bn. Mehan did not form a particularly good impression of Col. Dawes. On numerous occasions the senior officer made disparaging remarks about the DNEAS and his staff, and also admitted freely to having drawn Lt. Col.'s pay whilst still only entitled to that of a major. Mehan wrote:

> I reserved judgment and noted mentally that I had to deal with an Officer of doubtful honesty.[11]

Mehan guardedly defended Stubbs and Mockford, but did not say too

much to antagonize Dawes, in the light of ...

> ... it being my duty to preserve a friendly relationship with Col. Dawes ...[12]

Whether Lt. Col. Dawes had reason for his hostility to the DNEAS other than general resentment at his policies is not clear. It is however, one more addition to the picture of a leader who did not necessarily engender instant loyalty and commitment in the bulk of his corps.

Mehan expressed further doubts about Dawes, on the grounds of Dawes's apparent animosity towards blacks. He said that Dawes had told him that ...

> ... the great thing was to be the master and to show them that you were the master. He said that he was not going to be bossed about by any black.[13]

This caused Mehan to conclude silently that ...

> ... this was just the type of officer that the Non-European Army Services could do without.[14]

Unfortunately it would seem that it was just the sort of officer that turned up in the NEAS a lot more frequently than would have preferred. David Masuku remembers ...

> They were just treating us the same as back home. I must just know that I'm a kaffir. They treated us well in that way I must know I'm just a black man .. and he's a baas. Never mind I'm a soldier or what.[15]

Dawes and Masuku's statements could be two sides of one coin. With the qualification Mehan felt that Dawes and his officers, were in fact not treating their troops well, under any

circumstances, complaisant or not.

On his return to Tempe from Cullinan on the 14 August, Mehan proceeded to the 7th Bn. Detachment stationed at Potchefstroom. Complaints had been received from blacks at this detachment alleging ill-treatment, and one of these had been forwarded by Mehan to Dawes. Dawes had also received complaints forwarded to the DNEAS by the Area Commandant, Welgedacht, but all complaints were simply sent by him to the O.C. 7 Bn Detachment at Potchefstroom to 'sift'.[16]

Mehan was surprised at this since he suspected that ...

> ... the O.C. Detachment himself might have been involved.[17]

Dawes had in fact previously dropped charges brought against officers in his command under the M.D.C., on grounds of '?.. triviality'[18] and because he was tired of being bothered with disciplinary problems in his command.

The O.C. Detachment was a Captain Christensen and on Mehan's arrival, he gave Mehan a long written report describing his own poor state of mental health, and displayed symptoms of what Mehan described as 'neurasthenia'.[19] A few days later, after a brief visit by Dawes, Christensen burned the report and asked Mehan to forget he had seen it. Mehan, upon investigation found Christensen's ...

> ... administrative arrangements in a tangle and ... he had given over the running of the Detachment to two young officers ... who were generally acting in

> contempt of their Detachment Commander and carrying him.[20]

This was, Mehan concluded, the problem at the root of the complaints, which he began hearing the following day. Mehan wrote ...

> I did not expect any difficulty in solving their difficulties. I had met with the same sort of thing in my previous visits to NMC Units and had managed to restore matters without recourse to the M.D.C.[21]

Mehan was no blind bureaucrat, which possibly accounts for his appointment. He obviously attempts, wherever possible, to resolve problems without invoking authoritarian methods. After hearing various complaints from black soldiers, he concluded that one officer in particular, 2nd Lt. Jan Frylinck, had attempted to intimidate men in order to prevent them laying complaints. Mehan then requested Christensen to keep Frylinck away while investigations were continuing. He also requested Dawes to travel up from Bloemfontein to hear the complaints.

Dawes arrived on September 24th and Mehan immediately perceived that the superior officer was displeased at being called to Potchefstroom to deal with, as Mehan puts it ...

> ... blacks always giving him trouble and he expected that the whole thing was a waste of his time and he was sick of blacks at any rate.[22]

Mehan alleged that he was surprised at Dawes's hostile attitude towards himself, since they had parted on relatively friendly terms at Tempe on the 9th of August. Dawes refused to read the

report so Mehan took it to the O.C. Troops of the SAAF unit to which the NMC troops were attached, Wing-Commander Cox:

> ... it was alleged that the two young NMC officers had been in the habit of spitefully keeping individual N.E. sentries on continuous duty for two to five days, to twenty one days and even to two months, and as Wing-Commander Cox was responsible for his own defence, being O.C. the School and under threat of armed Ossewabrandwag attack. I was obliged confidentially to expose the actual position to him ... I wish to reiterate here that under the normal circumstances and had Lt. Col. Dawes not had the bit so obviously between his teeth I should not have broken the security as I did.[23]

3/4/11

The following signal to be coded and sent to Air Force Signals (Hut 10A) for urgent transmission by Waterkloof Air Station please.

TO: O.C. 6 Air School, Potchefstroom.

DIRECTOR NON-EUROPEAN ARMY SERVICES REQUESTS YOU PLEASE ASK CAPTAIN MEHAN CARE 7TH BATTALION S.A.M.C. DETACHMENT IN YOUR CAMP TO ADVISE COLONEL DAWES THAT THREE OFFICERS IN THAT DETACHMENT SHOULD BE REMOVED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE STOP TO ASSIST HIM THREE OFFICERS ARE BEING LOANED AND WILL ARRIVE TODAY FROM WELGEDACHT DISPOSITION NEW OFFICERS IN COLONEL DAWES DISCRETION

FROM: Waterkloof Air Station.

DIRECTOR OF NON-EUROPEAN ARMY SERVICES
DEFENCE HEADQUARTERS
24 SEP 1942
PRETORIA
DIREKTEUR, LEERDIENSTE, NIE-BLANKES

DIRECTOR OF NON-EUROPEAN ARMY SERVICES
DIREKTEUR LEERDIENSTE NIE-BLANKES

It was obvious that a difficult situation was developing and it came to a head when the DNEAS, upon receipt of Mehan's report sent a telegram ordering Col. Dawes to replace the three officers in the involved detachment, although their replacements were to be at Dawes's discretion. Mehan, intending to give the telegram to Dawes once the parade Dawes was conducting ended, heard Dawes informing the assembled black troops that ...

> ... In future you are to ignore any officer sent by the Adjutant General and to take your complaints only to the present Company Officers.[24]

Mehan, understandably took exception to this and proceeded to deliver the signal to Dawes on the parade ground. Dawes dismissed Mehan contemptuously but the Visiting Officer refused to leave the parade ground, referring to his orders to deliver the message. Dawes in turn refused to acknowledge the orders and informed Mehan he was under arrest. Mehan acceded and the two officers left the parade together.

The two then parted company and Dawes appeared to forget completely about the arrest. Following the incident, Stubbs sent another officer, Captain Mitchell, to elicit a statement from one of the NMC complainants, about the incident. The complainant, Private Solomon Nqikala, stated that:

> We were all very surprised at the happenings because we knew that Captain Mehan came as the representative of the Director, and we all felt that ... after this ... Col. Dawes sent instructions to those officers in Potchefstroom that they should go on treating us as

> they had been ... The Colonel told us that if we had complaints we must go only to see Captain Christensen, and Captain Christensen used to say to us "What did you want in the European's Army, and who asked you to come? ..." ... I am only a native and Captain Mehan is a white man, but Captain Mehan has made gold out of stones. As we never thought there would be any European Officer to take our part as Captain Mehan did.[25]

Both Dawes and Mehan then sent in their own versions of the incident. As a result, a number of things happened. The first was that the three officers in question were, in fact, replaced and transferred to other NMC units. The second was that on the 15 October 1942 another inspection unit was sent to Tempe to inspect the 7 Bn NMC. Their report was highly unfavourable and Colonel Dawes was replaced as O.C. by Lt. Col. Benkes at the end of October.[26] The report criticized not only the state of discipline, training and 'esprit de corps' in the various detachments sent out by the BN, but also at the home unit itself. Pte. Nqikala, who had expressed doubts about his future at the Potchefstroom detachment said:

> On account of making this statement I don't know what will happen to me; perhaps it will put me in the soup now that we have no protector. I am still waiting for my transfer and I hope it will come through soon.[27]

He need not have been concerned as the DNEAS had a solution to his problem, and the problems of many other members of this

detachment:

> This Det. is being disbanded owing to unrest and disturbances. The officers are being returned to Tempe and the N/E's to Welgedacht.[26]

The fact that another inspection was ordered within a few weeks of Meham's is proof of the seriousness with which Stubbs regarded the incident. That he had to use this rather roundabout method to displace Dawes, is proof of the fact that as head of the NEAS, his authority was not nearly as highly regarded as that of officers in charge of white corps. This perceived inferiority of the NMC as a corps by senior white officer was often a problem for Stubbs's authority. Nevertheless, Dawes was replaced and the detachment disbanded. The problems however, that had led to the Dawes/Mehan conflict, did not disappear and, throughout 1943 came to be a major source of the disciplinary problems in the NMC.

* * *

The clash between Mehan and Dawes is interesting to this study at two main levels. The first is the sociological level. We need to know how significant it is for one white to have stood up to another, senior, white officer, on behalf of blacks, with no guarantee of coming unscathed out of the conflict, and how did Blacks respond to this? The second is the general political and military level. How representative was this whole situation of the relationship between officers and troops in the NMC? How common was this type of situation in a dilution context? How

effective was Stubbs's inspectorate in monitoring and controlling the situation?

It is quite possible that Dawes's background (he was not a career officer, but was in fact a beekeeper from Stellenbosch, who resented the loss of revenue his military service entailed)[29] was a fairly common one among Os.C. in the NMC. Ray Capel, who was a Staff Sergeant both in the Union and up North for the NMC, told me:

> There were a lot of guys who were, you know, owners or directors of big motor companies who were brought in as Os.C., given the [illegible] and so on, and couldn't speak any African languages. Just brought in for their experience in the motor trade. [They were Os.C. of M.T. companies]. Not that there was anything wrong with these guys it's just that they weren't necessarily all that well suited to being in charge of black soldiers.[30]

In other words, when it came to officers, sometimes senior, usually junior, Stubbs had to take what he could get. While his H.Q. staff were generally efficient, conscientious and proud to be in the NMC, the same was not always true of officers and NCO's outside of DNEAS HQ.

It is thus not surprising that junior officers in Dawes's command should have been as racist and inefficient as they were, when their Commanding Officer set such a poor example. What is surprising is that Mehan went to the lengths he did to rectify

the situation. As it was, the Visiting Officer was regarded with suspicion by most Os.C. simply because of the nature of his job. The situation was further exacerbated by the fact that Mehan was a fairly junior officer. Thus the lengths to which Mehan was prepared to go on behalf of black soldiers was both surprising and unusual. There is very little on Captain Mehan's background in the archives. We know he was brought in specially to head Stubbs's Inspectorate unit in 1942. His duties were extensive and important. They included responsibility for ' ... all Non-European training in ... Inland Area and Coastal Area, ... Inspection of NE units ...', '... all nominations for courses both for European and Non-European personnel',[31] among others.

We can see then that Mehan, his lowly rank notwithstanding, was a very important part of the DNEAS's organisation, and was surely aware of this. He was indeed a conscientious officer and yet he knew he had the support of the DNEAS - even in the face of Dawes's claims of 'friends in high places'[32] - should he be forced to adopt extreme tactics, such as with Dawes, to achieve his aim. In the end of course, his aim was the welfare of the black soldiers for whom he was responsible and, what is unusual is that he did take his job seriously enough to risk a high level clash with Dawes. Regardless of whether or not he had DNEAS support, most inspecting officers, however unfavourable their reports on units, would never risk a head on collision with the O.C. Instead they would submit reports, and leave the situation in the hands of the DNEAS. The effect of this was to leave black soldiers relatively in the dark as to what was being done for

their welfare. This tended to engender a feeling of abandonment, particularly in diluted units where NMC soldiers were even further removed from the auspices of the DNEAS.

To be sure, in some camps, certainly in the Middle East, committees were set up to deal with NMC complaints. Abiel Sello remembers:

> In o[illegible] camp we had, sort of a committee of NCO's, with an officer, a captain, to hear our grievances, so communications were very good,[33]

but these were usually set up at the discretion of individual camp commanders, not by the DNEAS (who probably could not have enforced them anyway). But in most units, particularly in the Union, communication between officers and black troops left something to be desired:

> Actually, in some camps there were committees to hear our problems. But in some cases the representatives were not even learned people. They was used to be a foreman in the mines, now he is a sergeant or staff-sergeant and he doesn't understand. There is no communicating with him.[34]

Thus does Basilas Maredi remember how the problem faced by Stubbs of acquiring good, sympathetic, white rank, manifested itself. This of course often tended to reduce the beneficial effect of the committees, where they did exist. For most black soldiers in the UDF though, the committees, and even the inspecting officers, were a luxury they felt they had little access to. Paulus Lethuba, when asked about communication between black

soldiers and white rank, had this to say:

> No we didn't have anyone to listen to our complaints ... Most troops did not know of such a thing, [Inspectorate visits] we never see such a thing, never,[35]

and Maredi was also revealing on the issue of the Inspectorate visits:

> In fact the troops themselves, they didn't know anything about it.[36]

What this implies is that even if the DNEAS was genuinely concerned with the welfare of his black troops, the fact that often they did not know the inspecting officers for what they were, and the Director's concern became all but invisible to black eyes. This tends to highlight the importance of the Mehan/Dawes incident, particularly as it made clear to black recruits that the DNEAS was concerned about their welfare. Had Stubbs heeded the words of Solomon Nqikala (see note 25) and made his inspectorate's efforts a little more visible, possibly some of the disciplinary problems the NMC were to encounter, could have been avoided. Much of the problem lay, of course, in Stubbs's persistent paternalism. He never understood that even though his welfare officers and inspecting units may have been conscientious and thorough they needed to make their function clear to the NMC troops. Of course, Stubbs was concerned about antagonizing white Os.C. as well, since they may have felt that the inspectorate officers were trying to undermine their authority (as Dawes in fact did), so protocol undoubtedly played

a part in the low profile of the inspectorate, as did the fact that at least some of the inspecting officers weren't as concerned about letting black troops know that the DNEAS had his eye on them, as Mehan.

Nevertheless, we can see that while Capt. Mehan's actions were, to an extent, exceptional, his concern for the welfare of black troops was not isolated. Certainly not at an official level. This is borne out by officers such as Knoetze and Capel, who were themselves at pains to treat black soldiers with some consideration. The next section is an elaboration of this point, and serves to introduce us to the more general examination of disciplinary problems in the NMC during the war.

PART I (ii) RANK UP NORTH

Up North the picture was somewhat different. To be sure, there were disciplinary problems and complaints from both Os.C. and black troops, particularly during 1943, but not on the same scale as in the Union. Knoetze was appointed by the DDNEAS in the late 1942 to head the team detailed to solve the disciplinary problems in the Middle East. In many ways he was the equivalent up North, of Mehan, with the qualification that he operated far more at a staff level, less at a field level. Still, he was in the best position to identify the causes of problems he had been asked to solve. There were, in his view, four main areas of concern;

a) The disbandment of the MT units and Works Coys which had developed a fine esprit de corps during their

operations in the East African Campaign.

b) The effects of idleness on over 4 000 NMC and CC left out of battle when the 2nd Div. went into action.

c) The difficulties with untrained and insufficiently trained personnel.

d) The existence of relatively small numbers of recidivists who were exercising an undesirable influence on others that they came into contact with. Some of these had developed their crime records in the field, but at least 50% could easily have been eliminated in the Union had the selection of the NE's for service outside South Africa been done more conscientiously and discriminately.[37]

In one way or another these were all problems which afflicted the NMC troops in the Union as well. Broken down, they present a good picture of the ways in which racism hampered efficiency in the NMC (by Knoetze's own admission in fact)[38]:

a) No-one was ever particularly concerned with the loss of black 'esprit de corps' (with the exception of Stubbs and his staff) so long as NMC troops could be deployed to do jobs that were not combat oriented, or that were not considered appropriate for white troops.

b) The non-combatant status of black troops always was, and remains, a source of harsh criticism of Smuts's wartime policy, with special regard to the blow to black dignity it represented.

c) Problems encountered with training in the NMC

(discussed at length in a previous chapter).

d) The policy of recruitment of known criminals for the NMC. (This will be examined in depth a little later in the chapter. It must be said however, that one can detect a distinct flavour of criticism of DNEAS policies in the Union in the tone of Knoetze's points in this instance).

We need to understand here, exactly how Knoetze perceived the relationship between white rank and black troops affecting the above situation. Knoetze was of the opinion that whites generally had a poor opinion of blacks in the NMC, and that white NCO's and officers in the corps left a great deal to be desired.[39] He too deplored the lack of training of many NCO's and officers in the NMC and saw in this a further source of the disciplinary problems in the Middle East. His appointment and the recommendations that followed this had a positive effect on the situation and by early 1944, these problems seemed to be dying down. Knoetze recommended certain measures in 1943 to contain the situation. One can see in these measures, that the NMC authorities had difficulty in perceiving protests against material conditions for what they were. The usual South African cry of 'agitators' was generally hauled out whenever material conditions in the UDF provoked protest among black soldiers. The measures include :

(c) Formation of purely Non-European units under control of Officers and Senior NCO's only.[40] e.g. The NMC MT Coys.

(a clear criticism of both the quality of junior white NCO's in the NMC, and the adverse effects of dilution) and,

(d) Disposal of recidivists.[41]

The authorities generally tended to lump all grievances under the label of 'agitators' whether their grievances were genuine or not. Further than this the spectre of 'political' protest in the army tended to haunt them to the extent that even specific material complaints were often labelled as political unrest, and the protectors punished while the grievances remained unaddressed. This point will be addressed in some detail in the next section.

Nevertheless, within a particular framework, Knoetze was as conscientious in his duties as South African racial policies would allow. This meant that he would criticize the poor training and negative attitudes of white NMC members without restraint, if he felt they deserved it, and frequently did so.[42] It is possible that had the relationship between the NMC staff in the Middle East and the Union been better, they would have learned from each other in a much more constructive way. Stubbs could certainly have learned from Knoetze's forthright handling of the disciplinary problems up North. Knoetze frequently pointed out:

> Had it [weeding out of 'recidivists'] been done in the Union, as consistently advocated by the DDNEAS, much precious time, manpower and transport ... could have been saved.[43]

Having examined relations between troops and officers in the Union in the context of a particular example, and having looked at the general situation up North, it is perhaps appropriate to examine some other incidents of unrest (still within the context of relations between black troops and white command), and attempt to address how general these phenomena were. We will continue to discuss this with reference to the Dawes/Mehan conflict, and we will evaluate the responses of the NMC authorities.

PART I (iii) THE CRISIS OF DISCIPLINE

Actually, to call it a 'crisis' is to exaggerate somewhat. After the introduction of dilution in late 1941, disciplinary problems, occurrences of conflict between white and black in the UDF, and protest, began to increase by comparison to the pre-1942 position. During the course of 1943 the difficulties worsened, and after mid-1944, seemed to die down. Most of the conflicts between black servicemen and their white rank were rooted in immediate material conditions, although there were instances of 'political' or 'ideological' conflict. In the grand scheme of things, nothing occurred that remotely resembled a challenge to the authorities in any genuinely threatening sense. Yet for servicemen themselves, their grievances were very real and important.

Throughout 1942 a mood of discontent with their lot seemed to be growing among black servicemen. We have seen via the Dawes/Mehan incident, that this could occasionally lead to serious

consequences - in that case, the disbandment of a detachment and the transferral of several officers including the O.C. of the unit and numerous other incidents throughout 1942 and 1943 increased the nervousness of the DNEAS. In June 1942 several NMC recruits from one of the Transvaal SAAF bases protested against the order that they were not allowed beer in their tents.

While attempting to enforce the order, two white NCO's became involved in a fracas with the recruits. Six NMC servicemen were arrested and, while on arrest parade, resisted their orders. A reserve brigade of white soldiers was called out to restore order, and one NMC private was wounded and two killed in the resulting clash.[44] The 'Field Security Officer' of the camp clearly placed the blame for the incident on the NMC 'mutineers', without consideration of the background to the events or of the grievances of the NMC recruits. He concludes his report accordingly:

> The position is now normal as far as this situation is concerned.[45]

The DNEAS, who had to deal with the other Corps with caution, asked the A.G.:

> What have you to say about this? And what action are you taking?[46]

Predictably enough, the A.G. did very little. The situation in the camp had apparently stabilized, the A.G. had little desire to antagonize the Airforce by questioning their decisions too closely and Stubbs's suspicion that the NEAS was regarded as the 'poor cousin' of the army by the rest of the UDF, was again

confirmed. As were his complaints about the adverse effects of dilution on the wellbeing of NMC troops.

Again, the quantity and poor quality of Stubbs's white staff proved a stumbling block to the speedy rectification of the situation. His inspectorate unit was understaffed and overworked, his welfare provisions at this stage 'ad hoc' and generally in the hands of unit O's.C., and his competent white NCO's stretched over a wide area and a large number of black recruits. On the 3rd July 1942 the War Establishment Table (W.E.T.) of the NEAS gave the figures of 485 officers, 1 581 white NCO's and 48 895 blacks in the NMC.[47] This implied one officer to every 100 men, and one NCO to every 31 men, when the desirable situation would have required at least double that amount. If we take into account the fact that recruitment was still progressing and the recruits were scattered in 12 security bn's countrywide, numerous M.T. and other training camps, various transit depots and attached to almost every white unit in the Union and up North, the scope of the problem becomes clearer.[48]

By the end of January 1943 the figures were 541 officers, 1 745 NCO's to 59 781 recruits which placed the ratio at one officer to every 110 men and one NCO to every 35 men.[49] The increase in this ratio persisted until the end of recruitment in March 1943, so it is easy to see in it one of the causes of the growth of unrest during that year. If we compare the July figures of the NMC to those of the Cape Corps we can see that the C.C. had one officer to every 92 men, and the Indian and Malay Corps had one

officer to every 86 men.[50] Admittedly these Corps were smaller than the NMC, but they were comprised of men who were generally from urban areas, spoke English or Afrikaans, and had a fairly high standard of education. They certainly did not require the level of concern, welfare and sympathetic handling that the NMC recruits - most of whom were lost in unfamiliar circumstances, linguistic difficulties and bureaucratic indifference - did. These figures are further confirmation of the fact that the NMC received only what the other Corps either did not need, or were finished with, in terms of officer material.

What were the grievances that led to black soldiers protesting? Most of them, as we have discussed were immediate, material grievances. Troops complained of ill treatment by officers and NCO's:[51]

> They showed us no respect.[52]
>
> They used to kick and swear and do all sorts of things.[53]

In most cases these referred to officers and NCO's from units outside the NMC. In other words, dilution did in fact present a problem from the perspective of relations between officers and troops. Not that the NMC itself did not include in its ranks whites who had little time for blacks on racial grounds. The attitudes of Dawes and Christensen is testimony to that. How general was this attitude in the NMC itself? It has to be said that before 1942 and the Tobruk disaster, after which manpower needs up North increased dramatically, most NMC officers and NCO's attempted to treat black soldiers with consideration and

fairness, as even a casual glance at inspectorate reports from this period will confirm.[54]

Most of the initial whites in the NMC were drawn from the NAD and had experience with blacks. They were often linguists (as in the case of Knoetze) and could make themselves understood in several African dialects. But by 1943 most of these men had gone North, and the new whites that were being shunted into the NMC (often reluctantly) had little time or sympathy for black troops.[55] Ray Capel, who had joined in 1940, remembered:

> Yes, well later on you know, some of the chaps they sent up North were not so good with the blacks. But then, they had to replace some of the people who had been lost. But I was at the depot, so I didn't come into contact with other NMC whites all that often.[56]

There was a twofold response to the problem on the part of the DNEAS. On the one hand he accepted that closer monitoring of the NMC troops in detached units was necessary, on the other he saw black misunderstanding of the MDC as a prime cause of the problems. The fact that a proper, formalized welfare scheme for the NMC was only established in mid 1944, shows that the latter solution was uppermost in Stubbs's mind. Stubbs was both right and wrong about this. Many black servicemen were indeed illiterate and found the conventions of the military difficult to grasp. The Adjutant General was convinced that misunderstanding of the MDC lay at the heart of most communication problems in the NMC:

> In view of the fact that the full implications of Military Law are not easily appreciated by the native mind, it will be adopted as a general policy that, as far as possible, the application of the MDC to NMC personnel will be left to their own Coy and Bn commanders and the authority of Fortress commanders, O'sC. commands, etc, will only be evoked when matters of a serious nature are dealt with.[57]

Once again with reference to Mehan's visit to Tempe in 1942, we have seen the results of NMC justice being in the hands of individual Os.C. and company commanders. Stubbs himself was not convinced that this was the best policy, and the streamlining of the inspectorate in 1943, and the introduction of individual welfare officers for each NMC group on detachment in 1944, was partly introduced as an alternative to the A.G.'s solution.

In any case, the assumption that black soldiers did not understand the MDC may have been partially accurate, but it was far from being the whole truth. It has already been mentioned that since the MDC makes no mention of colour, the state had virtually placed NMC recruits outside of its jurisdiction. There can be no doubt that many black soldiers were well aware of this: Frank Sexwale recalled:

> I came across a book. The Military Disciplinary Code ... that book actually exposed to us the discrimination ... we did not like that one bit.[59]

One doubts whether the authorities could have anticipated the MDC being seen as a subversive document, or the perception that

soldiers like Sexwale brought to it. Still Sexwale never saw the MDC as a basis for a general political platform, rather as an illustration of immediate, material discrimination. This tendency to view discrimination in the NMC as a continuation of state policy, rather than the product of individual racism on the part of white officers and NCO's, is quite prevalent among black veterans. What is curious, is that this perception did so little to politicize black soldiers. Even in the disappointment of their immediate post-war situation (which we will touch upon in the final chapter), it was post-war events, rather than wartime experiences that tended to politicize veterans of the NMC.[59] The spectre of armed, ideologically charged, black servicemen, protesting violently against their white masters, remained largely (though not entirely) a paranoid nightmare of the South African authorities, both military and civil throughout the war.

* * *

PART I (iv)

What were the other grievances? How did the DNEAS deal with them? And what differences and similarities were there between the problems in the Union, and in the Middle East? These are the questions that will concern us in the final section of the examination of the relations between black troops and their officers and NCO's.

One of the complaints was that NMC troops received inferior

rations. This became especially visible to them in the Middle East where they could see the difference between their food and that of the white soldiers. Donald Madingoane told me:

> There was once a protest, and fighting in Garawi ... about Europeans and Non-Europeans food. And the kitchens.[60]

The incident occurred on 17 August 1943 and in the course of what amounted to a riot, three NMC recruits were killed and nine wounded. A great deal of property was also damaged in the course of the dispute when, after a group of prisoners had refused to go with the Provost personnel to the orderly room, the prisoners then managed to break into the quartermaster's stores and arm themselves. During the riot, the ringleaders of the recalcitrant prisoners, David Sabiya and Joseph Dafet, commandeered weapons and set fire to the provost tent. They then broke into the quartermaster's stores and began distributing rifles to their followers. The conflict spread to isolated patches all over the camp and there was an attempt by some of the more peaceable NMC members to pacify the protesters, but it was only when the Battalion Commander called up armoured cars, that the situation was resolved and order restored. Due to the confusion, many innocent men were accused of being rioters, while some of those really involved were not apprehended.[61]

Now, the interesting thing about this incident is that the black soldiers involved, and the veterans who remember hearing of the incident, have an entirely different view of what caused it, than the military authorities. Most veterans recalled that it was

poor food and hygiene conditions in Garawi (which very few black soldiers remembered particularly fondly) that caused the riot. Statements taken from black soldiers at the time indicated a dissatisfaction with the treatment received from their officers and NCO's and even indicated that they were physically abused by these men.[62]

The view of the military authorities however, was that a hatred of whites and the influence of political 'agitators' lay behind the disturbance.[63] This was the prevailing view, but it was not the only one. When the court of enquiry on the affair had concluded, they admitted the poor conduct of many white officers and NCO's in the camp, but saw the problem as one of 'poor control'[64] rather than racial discrimination. They further blamed the incident on the presence in the camp of 'incorrigible' black elements, especially Joseph Dafet, who led the riot and shouted constant abuse at the authorities at the court of enquiry.[65] Grundlingh has disputed the 'agitation' claim:

> ... there is no satisfactory proof of any concerted plan or of any previously arranged conspiracy.[66]

So, the truth lies somewhere between the two versions. The fact that Major Gibson, the O.C. of the Depot of Garawi (and one of the main targets of black complaints) was transferred immediately after the incident, would seem to indicate that there was some veracity in the claims of NMC recruits, even if the official interpretation of the transferral was 'strain' on the part of Major Gibson.[67] On the other side, the continued recalcitrance

of Joseph Dafet (who, among others, received a life sentence for his part in the riot), and the presence in the camp of many ex-criminals and ex POW's, who refused to accept military authority, does lend some weight to the authorities' cries of 'agitation' and troublemaking.

One is inclined however to suspect that Dafet's 'troublemaking' may have been a legitimate form of protest over very real grievances, and conclude that his civil background, criminal or not, had little to do with it. One qualification of this view is that Donald Madingoane, a long standing member of the ANC, told me that most soldiers did not feel a great deal of sympathy with the more unruly elements, whose criminal backgrounds were, they felt, an affront to their own dignity as law abiding soldiers of the king:

> Well, the thing was, those guys, the criminals, they were just on their own. We did not mix with them much.[68]

The fact of the matter was that the UDF authorities had, as so often happened in the NMC, created their own demon. Donald Madingoane and other NMC veterans insisted that the NMC had consciously recruited criminals by giving them a choice between prison or the army:

> Even those who were in jail, criminals ... They [the NMC] said, 'If you still got three, four years to do, if you go to the army and you are not killed. When you come back you are a free man. I know of so many that happened to, like, those 'Tsotsis', the

> 'Thuta Rangers', from Alexandra Township. They took them in a whole group and they dumped them in Spaarwater in Motor Transport, because they could drive [they were car thieves]. And they didn't w[illegible] time, they sent them straight to the front. I remember, when they came back they used to be a nuisance there in Garawi camp. There were only about four or five of them that survived. Because they were sent straight to the front ... They were ammunition convoy drivers.[69]

Even if we acknowledge that there are certain apocryphal elements to this statement, it is undisputed that criminals were recruited into the NMC[70] (intentionally or not. The evidence is unclear). Although since many were pass offenders, the label criminal is open to question - and the disciplinary problems they eventually posed, made their recruitment seem rather shortsighted. This was especially so since other NMC members resented being regarded in the same light as criminals.

In this particular instance however, the criminal background of the participants may have been neither here nor there, since the evidence indicates that material grievances; poor food, hygiene, inadequate welfare provisions and the lack of home leave, were what lay at the heart of the Garawi riot.[71] These types of grievances were fairly common in the NMC and, by 1943, quite widespread. The number of 'disturbances' related to material grievances amounted to over 50 during 1943, both in the Union and the Middle East [72] This increase caused the high

command, particularly in the Middle East, so much concern that General Len Beyers, (CGS) pressed Stubbs for an explanation. Stubbs's reply, while perceptive in its general theme, tends in my view, to gloss over the importance of material grievances, or rather to minimise the fundamental relationship between material conditions and discrimination.

> k) It is vain to search for their disillusionment and insubordination in the comparative trivialities of pay, rations, quarters, leave etc. ..., which are merely the pegs on which <u>all</u> soldiers hang their grievances.[73]
>
> l) The fundamental background to it all is that as soldiers are ready to fight for their King and Country, they continue to be treated in the army with the same disregard to the fact that they are human beings as they experienced in civilian life.[74]

While these were commendable sentiments in the Director of a non-white corps, this summary dismissal of material grievances as a source of genuine complaint, was a serious error. Perhaps we can hear in Stubbs's reluctance to deal with specific issues, and his fondness for rhetoric (albeit noble), echoes of the Senator he was before the war. And perhaps we can see furthermore why, to career administrators like Knoetze (whose stock in trade was organisation and problem solving), Stubbs's seemed like a political appointment: filled with good intentions and grand strategy, but with little idea of how to implement these.

In point of fact, it was in the hands of Knoetze and those like

him, that the solutions to the problems did lie. We have seen that the A.G. placed the dispensing of justice firmly in the hands of individual O'sC. and company commanders. As with Col. Dawes and Capt. Christensen, this was often abused, (though not always), and there is ample evidence to suggest that most commanders did not abuse their authority over black troops.[75] The range of punishment options open to commanders was vast though, and one can readily see how abuses could have occurred. Punishments included pay stoppages, fines, sentences in D.B.*, route marches, extra drill, extra guard duty (a highly abused punishment. See Mehan, etc.) and, as we have seen, occasionally courts martial, prison terms and dishonourable discharges.[76] The importance of the Visiting Officers and the scrupulousness of Mehan, in the light of the above, is unquestionable. Their effectiveness can be judged by the frequency with which follow up reports on discipline in NMC camps report progress, although most never without reservation.[77]

To be sure, many black soldiers felt that white officers abused the punishments they meted out:

> Sometimes you were punished without even knowing what you did wrong.[78] Even you did not understand. You could still stand extra duty. Plenty times I stand extra duty.[79]

(*Detention Barracks)

Even the native representatives in Parliament complained about this:

> Some natives complained that they had been treated like criminals in Detention Barracks.[80]

Black troops often complained that white officers and N.C.O's refused sometimes to explain why they were being punished. Furthermore, when they protested they were punished again.[81] This is partly attributable to linguistic difficulties, and the problems associated with two groups of people from essentially alien cultures, trying to understand each other across vast linguistic barriers. The situation lent itself to abuses, when we consider the extent of authority one group had over the other. Ray Capel placed the blame for many misunderstandings at this door:

> Half the blacks couldn't speak a word of English. And I was no linguist, so we struggled a bit at times.[82]

and Capel was a scrupulous and relatively liberal NCO. One can easily picture the impatience and irascibility of less open-minded whites.

Up North, the situation was in the hands of the DDNEAS and his staff. Captain Knoetze organized the programme to improve relations and discipline in the Middle East. Among his suggestions, were the education of white officers and soldiers into understanding and appreciating the contribution of blacks to the war, posting of more sympathetic and better quality officers and NCO's to the NMC, '... adequate and effective

methods of NE administration (e.g. attachment of NE Adm. and Welfare Officers and NCO;s to SAAF squadrons)' [Knoetze had particular responsibility for NMC liaison with the AirForce], humane and just punishment for offenders, the provision of recreational facilities for NMC troops[83], (which were almost non-existent in the Middle East at first)[84], and the '... elimination of the small minority of confirmed criminals who could not possibly be reformed in the army'.[85]

Knoetze was also concerned to show that the apparent indifference of the DNEAS and his staff in the Union to the NMC on detachment in the Middle East, was a contributing factor to the problems experienced up North. In particular, he felt, the DNEAS had little contact with the NMC troops in the field, and, the scarcity of DNEAS visits to NEAS headquarters in the Middle East weakened the authority of the DDNEAS up North:

> ... the ... ways in which the NEAS was treated as the Cinderella of the UDF did much to damage the 'Esprit de Corps'.[86]

Also, the lack of Staff level inspection visits to NMC detachments in the field led, he believed, to a feeling of abandonment on the part of the NMC and C.C. units. In 1942 the Minister of Native Affairs, Major P.V.D. van der Bijl visited NMC units in the Middle East. He reported back on the general well being of the men, and felt that morale was quite good. This may in fact have been his impression, but it was unlikely he would have been presented with any other by the DDNEAS representation escorting him,

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and anyway, as Evan Connell has remarked of black soldiers in the army in the 19th century American West:

> There is hardly a soldier on earth, regardless of colour, dumb enough to start a fight [or complain, for that matter] when the Secretary of War is present.[88]

For even when representatives from the Union did come out, the visits were little more than cosmetic.[89] It is clear that breakdowns in goodwill and liaison between the DNEAS's office in the Union and the office of the DDNEAS up North, did considerable damage to the efficiency and smooth running of the NEAS, and ultimately hampered the ability of the DDNEAS to properly monitor the treatment of his troops in the field:

> When one remembers the frequent liaison visits by

Staff Officers of other Corps, from G.H.Q. Pretoria to MEF and CMF (and vice versa) and the great value of such tours, it is not clear why similar visits between DNEAS and DDNEAS did not materialise.[90]

* * *

To summarize the position: Disciplinary problems between July 1942 and 1944 increased for a number of reasons:

1) Dilution began to proceed more rapidly and the DNEAS lost touch with his troops to a certain extent,
2) The availability of sympathetic, healthy, efficient and competent white officers and NCO's decreased steadily in this period, partly due to the perception in the UDF high command that the NEAS, was an 'inferior' Corps, and thus not entitled to first preferment of quality white rank.
3) Material complaints were not adequately addressed by the authorities, who often dismissed black protest in the UDF as 'agitation' or troublemaking,
4) Punishment and justice for disciplinary affairs was often in the hands of Coy. level Os.C., who were less than fair in their treatment of black troops,
5) Linked to the above two points is the fact that the DNEAS left the appointment of individual welfare officers for each NMC unit until July 1944, and did not upgrade his inspectorate division until well into 1943,
6) Linguistic difficulties and communication problems between white officers and instructors, and black recruits often

led to misunderstanding and conflict,

7) Breakdowns in trust and liaison between the DNEAS in the Union, and the DDNEAS up North, often led to impaired efficiency and administration (as well as resentment) in the Middle East depot of the NEAS,

8) Finally, simple racism and prejudice on the part of some white officers and NCO's caused conflict and disciplinary problems in many NMC units, both in South Africa and up North. Ray Capel was one of those NMC NCO's who ...

> ... treated them [black recruits] in a way that I thought was appropriate for an NCO to treat a private. I didn't look at it from the perspective of colour[91]

but there were many other whites of rank in the UDF who did not share his attitude.

PART II (i) BLACK SOLDIERS AND WHITE SOLDIERS

The first time most black troops had any contact with white troops was at the onset of dilution. Although some NMC recruits had been posted to white units, usually to do labouring duties) before the institution of the dilution policy, the bulk of black recruits had little contact with white recruits, until dilution came into effect. By July 1942, 24 544 NEAS recruits were attached to white units in the Union and 28 179 to units in North Africa and the Middle East.[92] The total of 52 723 represents by far the bulk of NEAS troops in the UDF, the rest being in reserve M.T. Coys and Security Bn's. Of these 48 895 were NMC troops.

We can see that most black troops were thus in circumstances of daily contact with non-ranking white troops. It is thus crucial to attempt to understand what sorts of relationships developed between these two groups.

This is a more difficult task than that of understanding the relationship between black troops and those commanding them, since the archival sources are not as informative. This, in turn, is due largely to the fact that it was conscious UDF policy to keep black and white troops as segregated as circumstances would allow. As Grundlingh has said:

> Physical provisions were a ... means of social control. The black soldiers were specifically accommodated in camps which not only separated them from the white soldiers and civilians, but also from black civilians in nearby townships or from miners who were thought of as "undesirable characters" with whom the soldiers should avoid contact.[93]

Aside from this, except in cases where conflict occurred (which was not as often as one might think), the UDF authorities showed little interest in the relationship between white and black recruits. Knoetze, along with many other officers in the NEAS, was convinced that racism on the part of the white soldiers was an inescapable fact of life in the UDF:

> The employment of N.E.'s in purely NEAS units such as C.C. and NMC security Battalions, Works and Construction companies and M.T. units, proved more acceptable to both officers and other ranks than using

N.E.'s to dilute European units.[94]

Yet the incidents of conflict between white troops and black troops were far more unusual than that of conflict among black troops themselves, or black troops and civilians (of both races).

In fact, it seems that the relationship was a little more complex than Knoetze's report indicates. Most black veterans themselves offer a wide variety of views and memories on this issue; Frank Sexwale said:

> Relations were quite good between us and the white soldiers. We were just one and the same thing[95]

and Johannes Chaba remembered: In fact, in our camp we got on well with the white troops, the airforce people ...[96]

But Donald Madingoane also recalled a different picture:

> What our [NMC] chaps preferred, was to be attached to either Australians, New Zealanders or some other troops, because we were not happy with South African troops.[97]

There is in fact some archival corroboration of the notion that, in the early years of the war at least, the relationship between black and white troops began to overcome the traditional mistrust and hostility that had prevailed in pre-war South Africa.[98] This was particularly so in the combat zones, where shared dangers could lend a spirit of comradeship to the equation. Ray Capel shared Sexwale's view to some extent:

> I would say that. I was less conscious of colour up North. You know it was clearer to us up North that we

> were all comrades. If you went into Tripoli and you saw a black man with an orange Tab, you naturally felt an affinity because, in spite of his skin, he was also a South African.[99]

Of course, Capel was an early member of the NMC and thus inclined to be more accepting of blacks, but Sam Maseko, another ex-NMC veteran, confirms that, initially at least, relations up North were an improvement on those in the Union:

> When we first got there [Middle East 1942] everything was still the same. And then all of a sudden they started changing ... they put some boards up saying 'Europeans this side' and 'Non-Europeans this side' ... it was not like that [free of discrimination] for long ...[100]

Clearly then, once black and white troops got up North, the influence of the racial policies of the Union loosened its grip and, if the natural racism of white troops did not entirely disappear, it did not seem to have the venom it did when in the atmosphere of state orchestrated racism. Not that the UDF up North was free of the influence of the South African state's policies, rather that the more egalitarian and cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Middle East, and the heterogenous nature of the Eighth Army, surely helped to lessen the force of racism among white South African soldiers. Official evidence seems to confirm this, since the incidence of clashes between white and black troops in the Union was far greater, throughout the war, than that of clashes between the two groups up North.[101]

Yet we can see from Maseko's statement, that things changed up North too. Possibly it was the influx of less liberal whites into the NMC as the war progressed that began to offset the previous atmosphere of 'tolerance'. More likely it was that the urgency and dependence of the early, 'crisis', years of the war gave way to a more confident, less reliant attitude on the part of the UDF authorities, and the white soldiers' sense that matters were returning to 'normal', the situation becoming closer to what had prevailed in the Union in peacetime. The fact that in the Union, where frontline exigencies were more distant, the comparatively egalitarian atmosphere of the Middle East never really prevailed, serves to reinforce this. In other words, while whites up North were under pressure and felt the need for the assistance of blacks acutely, their sense of comradeship was far greater than when the tide of battle turned in late 1942, early 1943. Possibly the changing attitudes of whites in this period contributed to the disciplinary problems up North in 1943.

Why was the opportunity to improve relations between black and white which the war presented, not encouraged and explored by the authorities? In the first place, as we have mentioned, the South African state was not really interested in improving relations between black and white, particularly if this improvement smacked of 'equality'.[102] Secondly, many cultural and social prejudices, held by both groups of soldiers about each other, simply proved impossible to overcome. Stubbs's own persistent paternalism, and tendency to make stereotypical assumptions about black troops, particularly when his intentions are of the best, are typical of

this:

> The [NMC recruits] ... were controlled by officers they know and who ... were responsible for the efficiency of the unit, to extend consideration of their peculiar human frailties and an undertaking of their special race psychology.[103]

Stubbs was attempting to explain the disciplinary problems of 1943 in terms of the prejudicial effects of dilution and the consequent loss of black 'esprit-de-corps'. Yet he continued to employ stereotypical arguments, based on assumed inherent racial characteristics in blacks, to do so. This is typical of the attitudes of almost all white offices in the UDF at the time. Whether they were predisposed towards black participation or against it, they conceived of black soldiers in stereotyped and racially predetermined ways.

This leads logically to the final reason that barriers between whites and blacks in the UDF were not broken down as well as they may have been. The fact was that as long as the state practised numerous forms of official discrimination, not only reinforcing racism against black people, but legitimizing it, there was little likelihood of ordinary black and white soldiers overcoming their racial differences to any great extent. For that matter, there was little likelihood they would ever want to. How could any white soldier regard as his equal someone who was paid less than him, received comparatively inferior rations and billeting, and whom he automatically outranked, regardless of his own rank? How could any black soldier be expected to maintain his dignity

knowing he could never outrank a white[104], would never be considered a combat soldier and was in every way, considered inferior to whites by the state? The surprising thing is that the extent of protest was, in fact, so limited. Frank Sexwale, who always felt that relations between black and white soldiers - up North at least - were fairly good, nevertheless maintained:

> The discrimination ... it never led to conflict [obviously in his own personal experience], but it led to animosity.[105]

and Michael Thothela remembered :

> We were always aware of the discrimination even up North. It was not so bad ... but it was still there.[106]

The fact that even in the army official segregation was practised, had the effect of distancing black and white troops further:

> Owing to the unavoidable segregation of European personnel [for whom recreation was provided as a matter of course] it is very necessary that [NMC] officers and NCO's should do everything in their power to foster enthusiasm for healthy recreation for their troops during periods when they are not on duty[107]

and on the whole, the attitude of white troops to black seems to have been of indifference, rather than hostility, probably fostered by official attitudes. Len Fraenkel, who was a dental technician with the SAMC in the Middle East and Italy, told me:

> You know, we saw black soldiers now and then, and we

> keow they were around, but we didn't have much to do with them, and so we didn't think about them much.[108]

and Ray Capel felt that:

> ... in my experience ... there was very little hostility between black and white up North ... but then ... you have to keep in mind, in those days we didn't pay much attention to the blacks, they were just part of the scene.[109]

Still, it was Capel who also felt that his army service had gone a long way towards hastening his changing attitudes towards South Africa's race policies:

> ... my wartime experiences definitely accelerated my changing attitudes towards blacks. I would say that the war made me see blacks as human beings, rather than just servants or people in the background[110]

and many other whites who came out of the NMC, including J.C. Knoetze, became involved in post-war activities which were centred in the black community. Liberal organisations that came out of the war, such as the Springbok Legion, also have the stamp of war as a liberalizing experience. Even if this did not represent the experience of the majority of white soldiers, the fact that the war helped to liberalize some of them, adds a positive note to the somewhat sombre picture we have of relations between white and black soldiers in the UDF.

* * *

PART II (ii) SOLDIERS AND CIVILIANS

Because most of the NMC battalions and training camps were situated near towns or townships, the issue of contact between black troops and civilians, both black and white, was of great concern to the South African authorities. The biggest fear was the thought of black soldiers in daily contact with the white, civilian women who worked in UDF bases. It was thus decreed that contact between blacks and white women who were part of the UDF was to be restricted to the bare minimum necessary for military purposes, and contact between white, civilian women and blacks to be completely avoided, if at all possible.[111]

Up North, enforcing this was not so easy, as blacks were initially permitted into the towns, while on pass, and monitoring their movements was very difficult. Not for the first time, the South African authorities enlisted the aid of the British in exercising control over black troops:

> ... caution was exercised to prohibit black soldiers from visiting brothels in which there were white women. The police in places such as Alexandria and Cairo were requested to enforce this restriction and no passes were granted to remain in these cities after 1800.[112]

Other controls, such as making sure black soldiers knew they were prohibited from contact with white women, and excessively harsh punishment for any 'misconduct' towards these women, were stringently exercised.

To be sure, black soldiers did fraternize with white women, particularly in Italy and Tripoli, where the women were not particularly colour conscious. According to Capel:

> Up North, it was a revelation to me that some of the Italian women in Tripoli found the black troops attractive. Some of the black troops themselves used to boast about it, because it was a new experience for them as well. To suddenly find that white women showed an interest in them.[113]

The educative aspects of the war experience were obviously manifold, for both whites and blacks in the UDF in the field. Still, some of these experiences can probably be ascribed to male boasting and exaggeration on the black side, (a universal trait in soldiers in the field) and racist paranoia on the part of the whites. When this type of fraternisation did occur, very few so called 'unsavoury' or 'unlawful' incidents were in fact recorded, and the twin spectres of wholesale miscegenation and/or rape of white women did not come to pass. Nor did the 'possibility' of returning black soldiers bent on sexual congress with white women in South Africa.[114]

However, white women were not the only concern of the authorities regarding black soldiers. Some of the restrictions on black soldiers in the Union were designed to prevent them coming into contact with black women from neighbouring towns. The two main reasons for this were, disease, and conflict over women, between civilian blacks and recruits from the NMC.[115] To a certain extent these fears were well founded:

> One detail killed [,] one seriously injured [,] two in hospital [,] result of fight ... between NMC and native civilians [,] Paarl Location [,] matter being investigated.[116]

The fight allegedly occurred due to an argument between an NMC recruit and a black civilian over a woman. The fight took place in a shebeen in the township, and it was precisely this sort of incident that confirmed UDF prejudices about black soldiers, and furthermore, helped to justify restrictions on NMC recruits visiting townships. In addition, black civilian women were not allowed to enter NMC camps, and many troops resented this. Having restricted access to women was not something black troops found easy to accept, and the fact that they were thus restricted as a result of incidents in which they were often the injured parties, exacerbated this resentment.

> Native [civilian] residents of Greenpoint native location, charged with (i) Assaulting a member of the Native Military Corps, (ii) Assault on a native female, (iii) Malicious injury to property, and (iv) theft.[117]

Disputes between black servicemen and white civilians also occurred, especially in the Union. Many whites were virulently opposed to blacks in the UDF as it was - some were opposed to South African participation in the war 'per se'. In addition one must recognize that hostility between civilian males, and soldiers in wartime, is a universal problem even without the added element of race hatred. Numerous incidents served to

illustrate this fact.

On January 13, 1943, the Rand Daily Mail reported a clash between white youths and NMC details on the West Rand.
Very briefly, what occurred was that the youths began berating the NMC recruits with racist epithets and physical threats, to which the NMC troops responded in kind. The exchange degenerated into violence and the police were called in to stop it.[118] Generally, in these cases, NMC recruits were punished with D.B. or similar measures, but it was rare that charges were actually brought against the whites. Stubbs, although recognising the delicacy of the Government's position on blacks in the UDF, was nevertheless determined that his corps would not shoulder all the blame for these incidents, and the conviction of three white youths for a similar offence on the 9th of January in the same year, serves to confirm this.[119]

Sometimes the incidents were more sinister. On August 13, 1941, Pte. Isaac Mptyuso was abducted from his camp at Spaarwater, while on guard duty (effectively armed with an assegaai), by three white men in a car.[120] The report speculates that the men were probably 'Ossewabrandwag' members (the semi-fascist Afrikaner organisation was prone to these sorts of attacks), and describes how Mptyuso was driven out of the Transvaal, into the Orange Free State, assaulted and insulted by the men, and thrown from the car. While the Pte. was not seriously injured, the men were never apprehended and the potential dangers to NMC guards became obvious. We can see then that Stubbs's claim, that the

restrictions on NMC troops were as much for their own good as that of civilians, has some validity.[121] Nevertheless, the outcome seemed to imply that black recruits were the ones restricted, often for reasons which were not of their making, while bigoted whites could prey on them with little fear of consequences.

NMC veterans themselves remembered their contacts with civilians in the war in different ways. Donald Madingoane recalled that:

> Some of the people in the locations ... they resented us because they said we were no better than them. And some said we were only soldiers because the whites told us to ... Sometimes there were fights, but I was never involved in a fight. I was not in the NMC in the Union for very long. Then we went up North.[122]

Mithael Thothela felt that this was another reason to prefer living in the Middle East to being in South Africa:

> ... It was better up North. Back home, the people, those people from the location ... they did not like it when we go to the shebeens, but up North we could go into the towns sometimes ... and no-one would fight with us.[123]

Fine Mlambo's experiences up North were slightly different, and it is likely that his recollections, of little contact with civilians in the Middle East due to NMC restrictions on movement, were probably common to many black servicemen up North.

> Now we didn't see civilians very much ... mostly we

spend our passes at Garawi.[124]

Although, as we have seen from Capel's evidence, black troops did get to spend some time in the Middle East and Italian cities, and the experience was one which most of them valued highly. Sometimes these visits were educational in unexpected ways. David Masemola for instance, saw for the first time, whites who were in worse economic straits than most blacks:

> The end of the war I was at Milano ... we get a chance to go to Rome ... Those people were poor ... the army has smash everything ... some people live in holes in the ground.[125]

The contacts which NMC troops had with civilians, were then, quite complex. Contact between them and white civilians in the Union, particularly with women, was highly restricted by the authorities. Often considering the hostility with which many white males regarded them, this worked to their advantage. On the whole black soldiers regarded this particular restriction with equanimity, if not indifference. One restriction which was not of indifferent interest to black servicemen was that placed upon their access to black, civilian women. Their efforts to bypass or ignore this restriction sometimes led to conflict, often to bloodshed, yet it was the authorities' inability to understand the significance of this restriction to black recruits, that really caused the disciplinary problems it engendered. Had the UDF high command been more sensitive over this issue, they could surely have found a compromise which would have cut down on the incidents of township violence between NMC

recruits and civilian men, over women.

Up North, the fact that for the first time South African blacks had access to non racist white women alarmed the authorities. They attempted to restrict the movement of black troops by confirming them to rest camps on leave. Yet, not all blacks were thus confined, and many actually had jobs in depots in cities, both in the Middle East and Italy. So some of them did fraternise with white women, much to the chagrin of the high command, yet there were few incidents of trouble as a result, although many white, South African soldiers were highly outraged by this fraternisation.

On the whole then, it was the restriction placed on their contacts with civilians which defined this aspect of service in the UDF, for black servicemen. Getting around these restrictions was often a priority for blacks; in the Union to gain access to women and alcohol, up North, to enjoy the sights and sounds of foreign lands (often a reason they had joined up in the first place):

> Sometimes people would go AWOL [Absent without leave] from Garawi, just to go into town, to see what it was like ...[126]

The NMC authorities, who recognized the dangers posed by hostile civilians, both black and white, did, to some extent, have the interests of black servicemen at heart in restricting their movements, but on the whole, it was the racial policy of South Africa at the time that determined their attitude towards contact

between NMC troops and civilians.

* * *

PART II (iii) A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

One aspect of their service in the war which had more positive memories than otherwise for black recruits, was their contact with non-South African troops, both black and white. Almost all the colonial forces raised troops in their African territories and, since most of them served in the North Africa/Middle East area, South African blacks often came into contact with them. Also, NMC recruits encountered - sometimes on a daily basis - troops from Europe, America, Australia and Canada.

The South African authorities found the thought of this form of fraternisation quite disturbing. They were concerned about a number of things: firstly, the facts that black troops from other African countries were armed, could rise in rank as high as Captain and were sometimes better paid than NMC troops, alarmed the DNEAS because he felt that NMC recruits would feel the comparative deficiencies acutely. Secondly, he worried that contact with more politically aware African and overseas troops would infect the UDF blacks with 'dangerous' political ideas. Consequently stringent efforts were made to reduce the contacts between NMC recruits and troops from other African countries, as far as possible.[127] The official reason for this was that the UDF authorities feared conflict between these two groups. Well,

there may have been some truth in this but, in fact, other actions by the High Command of the UDF confirm that their main concern was with political 'contamination' by foreign troops.

For instance, in 1940 when it was decided that black troops would be recruited from South Africa, the South African government put a good deal of pressure on the British Colonial authorities not to arm troops from the High Commission Territories (HCT), as they were afraid it would reflect badly on their own non-armament policy, particularly since the HCT troops were from so close to home. The British authorities, who (as we have seen) were inclined to co-operate with the South African government with regard to black troops, initially complied, but in late 1940/early '41, the military situation up North was worsening and it was decided to arm the HCT troops.[128] In this context Killingray has shown how the British made excessive use of black troops in non-combatant roles, partially to appease the fears of the South African authorities.[129]

In fact, other African troops faced their own problems too. Most African armies were paid less than their white compatriots. Some black soldiers deserted from non-combat units and rejoined in combat units for the superior service benefits these units received.[130] Forced recruitment and conscription were features of most colonial armies' recruitment policies[131] and in some areas, civilians were conscripted into labour battalions.[132] Racial discrimination was thus a fundamental part of the military policies of all the colonial powers, but, no country other than

South Africa limited all its black soldiers only to non-combatant roles, prevented them from reaching a rank higher than staff-sergeant and restricted their movements specifically to prevent them from fraternising with white women.

NMC recruits were of course, fully aware of this: As Donald Madingoane said:

> We were very surprised at some things we saw. We used to be treated by black doctors from the Nigerian army.[133]

and it was this awareness, rather than any 'influence' on the part of foreign troops that engendered resentment among NMC troops. Moreover, the South African authorities had been correct in their speculation that the relatively superior position of HCT troops would engender particularly acute resentment among South African blacks:

> Even the people from Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland were above us.[134]

Not that South African troops saw all that much of other African troops, partly due to official restrictions, and partly to inclination. Michael Thothela told me:

> Well, we did not see much of them. They kept to their own camps and so did we ... Sometimes, in the town, in Cairo and Alexandria, we would see them, but usually we did not talk to them much.[135]

However, sometimes the relationship between the two groups became quite close, particularly when exchange was taking place. Abiel

Sello had this experience:

> When I was in 101 [military hospital near Cairo] ... nearby us we had troops from Basutoland, Swazi troops, Bechuanaland, and we were the only camp where you get, what do you call it?, Kaffir beer ... And so we were a very popular camp. We brewed it from sorghum ... and we had some leisure, so we had time to brew it.[136]

Apparently this was tolerated by the authorities of what, if Sello's whole interview is accurate, was an extremely enlightened, well run South African camp. On the whole though, contact between NMC troops, and other African troops, was quite limited.

On the other hand, contact between troops from overseas, and NMC recruits was fairly extensive. Of course the South African authorities nervousness increased at the thought of 'egalitarian' foreign troops filling the NMC troops with liberal attitudes.[137] Furthermore, the authorities were concerned by the influence of libertarian foreign troops on South African blacks:

> Our non-Europeans are being supplied with liquor by ... Imperial soldiers, who fraternise with them ... and, very sad to relate use them to secure native women for immoral purposes.[138]

Although, one wonders if this is was not a rather puritanical piece of exaggeration, since it seems unlikely that NMC soldiers, being strangers in the Middle East themselves, would have been any more adept at procuring 'native' women than foreign whites.

Nevertheless the authorities were concerned about the possible 'dangers' of NMC troops consorting with overseas troops.

Frank Sexwale seemed to think that they may have had a point:

> We met troops from Australia, America, especially the negroes ... and the British. Mainly on leave ... Sometimes I thought they were trying to incite us against our own [white] comrades ...[139]

However, we have seen in an earlier part of the chapter that most disturbances up North occurred as a result of material conditions, rather than political agitation (be it from within or without) the ranks of the NMC). The above statement then has to be seen as a description of the type of inter-army baiting that tends to occur in large, heterogenous military bases. Sam Maseko remembered that:

> ... they [the UDF authorities] put up boards saying European ... and non-European ... when the British and American soldiers came to the camp [white soldiers], they said 'We're not Europeans', and they joined our queue.[140]

While there are again elements of the apocryphal about this story, namely the vagueness of which particular 'Americans and British' are being referred to, we can see in it both a possible source of the continuing fears of the UDF regarding 'fraternisation', and an example of the sort of inter-corps antagonism described above.

It should certainly not be seen as an example of the democratic

nature of the average British or American soldier. Discrimination both at the official and unofficial level, was rife in the armed forces of both these nations during the war. It is, for instance, a fact that British colonial forces often protested against various forms of official discrimination, including discrepancies between white and black pay scales,[141] and Grundlingh has quoted P.L. Prattiss on discrimination in the U.S. army during the war, as saying:

> 'Many factors in the armed services and outside have made the Negro serviceman a victim of split morale'.[142]

Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that discrimination in these forces did not operate at the official level to the extent that it did in the UDF, nor was it the prime motivational force behind almost all policy decisions made regarding these camps, as it was with the NMC. There was also a distinct difference in the attitude of the white, foreign troops to black troops (a kind of condescending paternalism), to that of white troops from South Africa. Ray Capel remembers:

> We were in Tripoli, a friend of mine and myself. We wanted to go into the 'old town', which was off limits ... Anyway, one day we decided to go there regardless. We had been there for about ten minutes when we were picked up by some Sudanese M.P.'s. I remember, we were very indignant at the time, at being arrested by blacks. And when the case came before our O.C. it was dropped ... mainly because we weren't going to be prosecuted after having been arrested by blacks. That

> was just the way it was with white South Africans back then.[143]

In the light of this, the American, Australian, British and Canadian troops, white or black, must indeed have seemed fascinating and pleasant to NMC recruits. In fact, some NMC recruits considered having come into contact with these troops a justification of their service in the UDF:

> If I had not joined ... I would never meet Americans, or Australians ... that is the good thing, up North.[144]

The experience of meeting and mixing with, foreign troops, was then, for most NMC members, a refreshingly positive experience. The UDF authorities' fears that this experience would lead to large-scale political unrest in the NMC, remained unfounded, and even the spectre of highly politicized black soldiers returning to the Union to foment unrest has now been shown to be a myth of both the South Africa state at the time, and of contemporary historiography.[145] For the recruits themselves, meeting foreign troops was a new, enlightening and educational experience, but in the end a temporary and rare one, especially when seen against the background of the totality of their war experiences.

* * *

CONCLUSION

A number of points have emerged from this investigation into the various relationships black troops had with other groups of people:

1) Their relations with their officers and NCO's depended largely on the quality of those officers and NCO's. If their 'rank' were sympathetic, well educated and had experience with black people, or were linguists, black troops generally fared better than if their 'rank' were not endowed with these qualities. Availability of suitable officers and NCO's often depended on a number of factors;

a) Overall manpower availability in the UDF,

b) High level discrimination against the NEAS as a Corps, and

c) The administration and communication skills of the DNEAS, which were not always everything they could have been.

On the whole, the abuse of power for racist reasons was not as prevalent among officers and NCO's of the NMC as one might expect. As Capel puts it:

> I mean, in the NMC, the normal officer/troop relations <u>did</u> apply. There wasn't that much white/black discrimination.[146]

Still, a fair amount of 'white/black discrimination' did exist and it was contained largely through the efforts of the DNEAS's inspectorate unit which, led by A.S. Mehan took its job seriously and, from the evidence, seems to have done it quite scrupulously. In the end though, it has to be said that, the

'normal officer/troop relations' in the NMC were not that normal since they were determined by essentially abnormal conditions, i.e. the race policies of wartime South Africa. It must therefore be acknowledged that, individual intentions notwithstanding, racist relations between officers and NCO's, and their troops, were endemic in the NMC.

Naturally, this has to be extended to apply to relations between NMC troops and all other groups of people. This includes white South African soldiers with whom, according to the oral testimony we have seen, relations were fairly good, despite the determination of the state to enforce segregation, even as far away from the Union as Egypt and Italy.

2) Relations between civilians and the NMC troops were again informed by the desire of the state to enforce segregation. In this particular instance, the instances of conflict between these two groups (be the civilians white or black), particularly in the area of the NMC and civilian women, lent some weight to the segregationist logic of the state. However, we should keep in mind the issue of how much suspicion and hostility was actually fostered by the persistence of segregation, especially during wartime.

3) Finally, the extension of the segregationist logic to preventing excessive contact between NMC troops and troops from other countries, especially other African countries, did not prevent this contact from occurring. And, while

the outcome of this contact was, on the whole, not the politically charged black soldiery the Union authorities feared, for black soldiers themselves it represented one of the few positive aspects of their time in the NMC.

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FOOTNOTES - Chapter 3

1. Grundlingh, L.; pg. 233.
2. Knoetze, J.C.; (1992).
3. Ibid.
4. NMC NAS 3/41/1/7; Inspectorate Report for 7 BN NMC, Kimberley, 16/1/1943.
5. Ibid; 22 Air School, Vereeniging, Oct. 1942 and Jan. 1943.
6. Sexwale; (1989).
7. C.G.S. (War) 32/3; DNEAS to C.G.S. 8/3/1945. Also A.G. (3) 154 (104) for positive reports on treatment of black troops by white officers and NCO's.
8. Grundlingh, L.; pg. 188.
9. Knoetze; (1945) pg. 21.
10. NMC NAS 3/4/1; Box 43; Captain Mehan's report to the DNEAS, 25/9/1942.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid.; Statement of Pte. Solomon Nqikala, 26/9/1942.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 3/(continued)

26. DNEAS NAS, Box 18, file 3/40; Inspectorate report 7 Bn NMC and follow up report, 27/10/1942, 2/11/1942.

27. Ibid. Mehan; (1942).

28. DNEAS NAS Box 18 File 3/40; G.O.C. Inland area to DNEAS, 27/10/1942.

29. NMC NAS 3/41/1; Mehan; (1942).

30. Capel, R.; Johannesburg, (August 1992).

31. NMC NAS Box 37, File A12; Mehan to DNEAS (1942).

32. NMC NAS 3/4/1; Mehan 29/9/1942.

33. Sello; (1992).

34. Maredi; (1992).

35. Lethuba; (1992).

36. Maredi; (1992).

37. Knoetze; (1945); pg. 7.

38. Ibid; pg. 52.

39. Ibid; pg. 53.

40. Ibid; pg. 7.

41. Ibid; pg. 7.

42. Ibid; pg. 13, 23, 53.

43. Ibid; pg. 13.

44. CGS (War) 32/3; Report on disturbances in Union to DNEAS 3/7/1942.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid; DNEAS to A.G., 5/7/1942.

47. DNEAS NAS Box 3, File 1/3; NEAS W.E.T. to D.A.G. 3/7/1942.

48. Ibid.

49. DAG (o) Box 16; Weekly strength, NEAS, 29/1/1943.

50. DEAS NAS Box 3; File 1/3, NEAS strength, 3/7/1942.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 3/(continued)

51. NMC NAS 3/1/6; O.C. 4 BN NMC to DNEAS 18/6/1941. Also NAS Boxes 42-45, Numerous Inspectorate reports 1941-45.

52. Thothela; (1989).

53. Madingoane; (1989).

54. DNEAS NAS Box 3, file 3/1/1 (1940-41). See also NMC NAS Box 4, File 3/1/14 (1941-42).

55. Knoetze; (1945) pg. 53.

56. Capel; (2992).

57. A.G. (3) 154/201/0; A.G. to Heads of Sections, DHQ, 8/2/1943.

58. Sexwale; 91988).

59. Grundlingh, L.; 'Ex-servicemen and Politics: A comparative Study between Black South African and British Colonial Soldiers after the Second World War' in the SADF Archives, 1989, pg.21.

60. Madingoane; (1989).

61. A.G. (2) 60/3/471; Court martial of offenders of riot at Garawi, A C to C.G.S , 29/5/1944.

62. A.G. (2) 196/4810, Box 79; Disturbance at Garawi (NEAS DEPOT) 17/8/1943, pg. 35.

63. Ibid.

64. Grundlingh, L.; 'Black Servicemen in Second World War', pg. 275.

65. Ibid; pg. 275.

66. Ibid; pg. 271.

67. Ibid; pg. 275.

68. Madingoane; (1989).

69. Ibid.

70. Knoetze; (1945) pg. 36.

71. Grundlingh, L,; pg. 276.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 3/(continued)

72. Ballinger Papers, (University of Witwatersrand), Ballinger/Stubbs correspondence, September 1940 - March 1941.

73. NMC NAS 3/36/4; Whole file, also Boxes 25-30. (1940-1945).

74. C.G.S. 32/3; Stubbs to C.G.S. 7/4/1943.

75. NMC NAS 3/4/11; DNEAS to A.G. 7/1942.

76. Grundlingh, L.; pg. 276-283.

77. NMC NAS, Boxes 41-47, Inspectorate reports for Union 1941-1946, also DNEAS NAS, Boxes 16, 17 and 18, Inspectorate reports 1942-1945.

78. Maseko; (1989).

79. Masuku; (1988).

80. C.G.S. (War); 32/3, Extract from M.P.'s conference 18/11/1942

81. NMC NAS /1/1; O C. Warmbaths NMC det. to DNEAS, Nov. 1941.

82. Capel; (1992).

83. Knoetze; (1945) pg. 35-36.

84. Capel; (1992).

85. Knoetze; pg. 36.

86. Knoetze; (1945) pg. 23.

87. Photo N.E. 123, Min. of Native Affairs on visit to NMC units in Middle East (?)/1942. See also various press reports on visit in NEAS press clippings album. (S.A. War Museum).

88. Connell, E.S.; Son of the Morning Star: General Custer and the Battle of the Little Big Horn, Picador, 1985, pg. 123.

89. Knoetze; (1992).

90. Knoetze; (1945) pg. 25.

91. Capel; (1992).

92. DNEAS NAS Box 3 File 1/3; Strength of NEAS 3/7/1942.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 3/(continued)

93. Grundlingh, L.; pg. 239.

94. Knoetze; (1945) pg. 53.

95. Sexwale; (1988).

96. Chaba, J.; (1992).

97. Madingoane; (1989).

98. NMC NAS 3/1/1; Major Mockford to DNEAS on improvement of relations between white and black troops in North and East Africa, 25/10/1941.

99. Capel; (1992).

100. Maseko; (1989).

101. NMC NAS Boxes 28 and 29; See various reports on disciplinary problems in the NMC, 1941 - 1946.

102. NMC NAS Box 28, 3/1/7 AS; Director Military Intelligence (D.M.I.) to DNEAS on strict enforcement of non-fraternisation between white and black troops in the UDF, 9/12/1942.

103. CGS (War) 32/3; Stubbs to C.G.S. 8/3/1945.

104. A.B. Xuma Collection (Wits); Box 0, File 14, Xuma to Min. of Defence, (?) 1942.

105. Sexwale; (1988).

106. Thothela; 1989.

107. NMC NAS Box 48; Inspectorate reports 11, 12 Bn NMC, 14/4/1943.

108. Fraenkel, L.; (Ex- South African Medical Corps, 1941-1945); Johannesburg (1991).

109. Capel; R; (1992).

110. Capel; R; (1992).

111. A.G. (1), 736/79/41/3, Vol. IV, Box 698, A.G. to O.C. Cape Fortress (1944).

112. Grundlingh, L.; pg. 245.

113. Capel; (1992)

114. C.G.S. (War) 32/13; C.G.S. to C in C 24/5/1941.

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 3/(continued)

115. NMC NAS Box 46, 3/26/3; Circular in NMC troops in civilian townships (1943)

116. NMC NAS Box 26, 3/36/4; Telegram from O.C. 3 Bn NMC to DNEAS, 15/11/1943.

117. Ibid; Deputy Commissioner of Police, S.A.P. Kimberley, to Commissioner S.A.P. Pretoria, 23/8/1943.

118. NEAS Press Clippings, War Museum; Rand Daily Mail - repot on NMC in violent dispute, 13/1/1943.

119. Ibid.; R.D.M., 9/1/1943.

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121. NMC NAS Box 27, File A1; DNEAS to NMC O'sC. (?) 1943.

122. Madingoane; (1989).

123. Thothela; (1989).

124. Mlambo; (1988) - Garawi was the main NMC rest camp in the Middle East during the war.

125. Masemola; (1992).

126. Madingoane; (1989).

127. C.G.S. (War) 32/10; DNEAS to A.G. an undesirability of allowing blacks from South Africa to come into contact with East African black troops. (15/6/1940).

128. A.G. (3) 154/315/2/0; General Officer Commanding (G.O.C) East African Forces to A.G. 15/3/1941.

129. Killingray, (Africa and the Second World War); pg. 71.

130. Ibid; pg. 73.

131. Ibid; pg. 76.

132. NDI, A.; 'The Second World War in S. Cameroon and its Impact on Mission-State Relations 1939-50', in Africa and the Second World War, pp. 210-212.

133. Madingoane; (1989).

134. Ibid.

135. Thothela; (1989).

FOOTNOTES - Chapter 3/(continued).

136. Sello; (1992).

137. NMC NAS Box 26, 3/36/1A, Circular from DNEAS, (?)/1941.

138. NMC NAS Box 23, File B11; A.T. Perry to DNEAS, 3/9/1942.

139. Sexwale; (1988).

140. Maseko; (1989).

141. Killingray; pg. 73. See also, 'New York Herald Tribune'; 'As one officer told me, "We'll take 'em just on, jump from the jungle, put a pair of shoes and pants on 'em and have 'em driving American made motor trucks.' Reported by Hiram Blauveldt, Nairobi, 1942. NEAS Press Clippings (War Museum).

142. Grundlingh, L.; pg. 250.

143. Capel; (1992).

144. Mlambo; (1988).

145. Grundlingh, L; 'Ex-servicemen and Politics', pg. 23.

146. Capel; (1992).

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CHAPTER IV . PART ONE:

Of all the complaints voiced by NMC veterans about their service in World War II, the most emphasis was placed on their disillusionment with the UDF's demobilisation package. We have seen that many aspects of this service were odious and unpleasant. Many were contrary to the expectations of the servicemen themselves. The demobilisation package devised by the authorities for the troops of the NMC certainly fell into this category.

Discharges from the UDF, prior to the creation of the formal policy of demobilisation, had of course taken place. The discharge of white soldiers was fairly comprehensively handled from very early on but, according to Grundlingh:

> ... no definite plans existed regarding the future of black ex-servicemen until July 1944 and some them were finalised only in the course of 1945.[1]

The basis of the Union's demobilisation policy for blacks was a report drafted by the Native Ex-Volunteers Benefits Committee (appointed April 1944), which attempted to deal with most aspects of demobilisation. The report led to the creation of an organisation to deal with the mechanics of demobilisation, the most important body of which, was the Dispersal Depot Committee set up at each Disposal Depot. The parent organisation was the Directorate of Demobilisation and it set up over three hundred Dispersal Depot Committees (DSDC's) throughout South Africa.

It is important to stress the difference between discharge and demobilisation. Toward the end of the war, admittedly they frequently amounted to the same thing, but on the whole, they were distinct from each other. Aside from the fact that 'discharge' generally referred to an individual's exit from the army (for whatever reason) and 'demobilisation' really meant the general, blanket scheme for the total discharge of soldiers after the war, 'discharge' very often also meant 'dismissal for undesirable reasons', whereas demobilisation was an invariably 'honourable' and acceptable term. Acceptable that is, to the authorities, if not the soldiers themselves.

Initial reasons for the discharge of soldiers had included medical unfitness, redundancy in their particular units, and the expiration of their service times. Later however, when most NMC soldiers were considered to have joined for 'the duration', many of these considerations fell away. By this stage though certain disciplinary problems had become evident and the UDF adopted a policy of discharge of any individuals they considered troublesome or difficult. Grundlingh feels that many soldiers with genuine grievances were lumped in the 'criminal' or 'agitator' class by this policy and unfairly dismissed.[2]

We have seen that the UDF authorities had a tendency to classify material grievances as 'agitation', but we have also seen that there <u>were</u> people with criminal backgrounds in the NMC. Again, we need to qualify this with the knowledge that this group included pass offenders and others whose 'criminal' offences were

highly questionable. Sometimes moreover, unfair dismissal was not entirely unwelcome. Donald Madingoane remembered one such case:

> There was one chap. A real 'tsotsi' [criminal]. He did so many things that eventually they kicked him out ... and, I remember, he was so happy ...[3]

As it was, many soldiers sought legal discharges for various reasons. (Not always successfully). Many had family problems, some needed to help with the cultivation of their land, many were simply tired of army life. Some were so tired of army life they discharged themselves:

> I know many people deserted ...[4]
>
> I'm not sure why, I think some of them were missing home too much.

There is little evidence to show that desertion (in the Union at least) was very strenuously followed up, so it would seem that the army was often relieved that certain soldiers were no longer their concern. The fact that by 1946, 2693 black soldiers had deserted from the NMC, suggests both that as the war progressed, this seemingly became a fairly popular method of protest against NMC policies, and that the UDF did not prosecute deserters with as much vigour as may have been expected.[5] This was due to the excessive amounts of labour and time required to track down deserters, especially from the Middle East.

In February 1944, General Theron quoted the Chief of the General Staff (C.G.S.) as having said that:

... the natives have served their purpose in Africa and should now return to agriculture and industry ...[6]

and cited this as a reason for speedy demobilisation of black soldiers. The C.G.S. however, denied having proposed such a scheme, and re-affirmed that demobilisation of black soldiers would take place in the time and space which had already been allocated. While black soldiers may have objected to General Theron's reasons for speedy demobilisation they would certainly not have objected to the concept itself. This was not necessarily to be realised, as delays with demobilisation fast became a major problem in the NMC.

One of the reasons for this was a problem that was at the heart of so much in the NMC: poor organisation. We have seen repeatedly that the ad hoc nature of the formation of the NMC and NEAS had led to a situation where clumsy administration and inexperience combined with the personal antipathies of senior officers in the NEAS both in the Union and up North, led to inefficiency and serious administrative problems. Demobilisation was to prove no exception. The DSDC's were at the heart of the demobilisation scheme. One could see them as forming the link between the Directorate of Demobilisation and the ex-servicemen themselves.[7] Their specific functions were to include finding employment for ex-servicemen, and providing financial assistance. Given the fact that there was no black representation in the composition of these committees, in addition to the tendency (along with many other branches of the UDF) to fob off many of their functions onto Native Commissioners, it is not surprising

that the job done by the committees was not always wholly satisfactory.[8] Most of the DSDC sub-committees dealing specifically with black servicemen were composed of serving officers, not all of whom were sympathetic in their approach.[9] Petrus Monaisa experienced this at first hand:

> Sometime they tell us ... go ... you just lazy, you don't want to work no job ... there's no money for you. But I look for job for a long time.[10]

Obviously, not all of the DSDC sub-committees handled ex-servicemen in this way. Nevertheless, before long, there began to emerge very definite problems with the UDF's demobilisation policy for black soldiers.

We have seen that, prior to the institution of the formal demobilisation policy, discharges had taken place. Very often the authorities had used discharges to get rid of people they considered troublemakers, particularly since a dishonourable discharge implied discharge without benefits. A more detailed discussion of these benefits will follow. Suffice it to say at present that, as disappointing as they may have seemed to those who received them, to those who did not, things looked twice as bleak. Occasionally the authorities were forced to concede that they had been precipitate in dismissing a recruit and often had to admit their error.[11] It has been suggested that (in 1943 at any rate) this type of discharge, along with discharges for spurious medical reasons, amounted to a conscious policy on the part of the NMC authorities. The reason being the saving of eventual expenditure on demobilisation benefits.[12] By mid 1944

however, this form of discharge had begun to interfere with the mechanics of the formal demobilisation policy and was eventually scrapped in favour of the latter. Demobilisation without benefits did continue to take place. Those discharged in this way now had no discharge priority over other demobilised soldiers, whereas before they had received priority. (Probably in the interest) of processing as many as possible before demobilisation became organised).

Even those discharged with benefits (certainly before 1944) were distinctly disappointed with their circumstances. In a letter to the editor of 'Umteteli wa Bantu', ex-Sergeant Hastings Mzozoyana of Benoni explained how, after serving for two years in South and North Africa, he was discharged as being medically unfit (27 march 1942) and after searching 'high and low without success'[13] for work he was obliged to appeal for help from the press. His discharge benefits had been, in his view, woefully inadequate to meet his needs:

> The sum of £2 as bonus. Am I expected to buy clothing with this measly sum of money? That money only served to buy me a good pair of shoes that is all.[14]

He further protested the gazetted directive that black ex-servicemen were not allowed to wear their uniforms and asked finally:

> Is it the 1914-18 story are we going to be forgotten men issued only with invalidity badges and £2 after what we have done in helping the Government ...[15]

and signed his letter 'A Forgotten Soldier'.

One of the first things to keep in mind when considering this letter is that the NMC's policy regarding discharge benefits underwent several changes during the course of the war, and at the outset of the war was almost unconsidered. Initially, the discharged soldier was awarded a cash payment of £2 plus civilian clothing and a gratuity, regardless of rank. Furthermore he had the right to claim further benefits regarding families, tax rebates, etc., depending on personal circumstances. These benefits altered as the war progressed, for instance the provision for civilian clothing only came into effect in August 1942, too late to benefit Sergeant Mzozoyana, and, while many of the later benefits were intended to be retrospective, the administrative difficulties presented by this more often than not denied success to the intention.

Once the formal demobilisation process had come into effect certain aspects of the benefits package improved further, although never (to my knowledge) to the satisfaction of the ex-servicemen themselves. By 1945 'Umteteli' was able to describe the demobilisation package thus:

> On being discharged, the African ex-serviceman receives a civilian suit, tie and hat in addition to his military clothing, two blankets, a haversack, ground sheet, water bottle and mess tin, plus £6 for incidental expenses on his journey home or to his place of civilian employment.[15]

In addition, he was supposed to be assisted in finding employment after the rest period granted by the NMC had elapsed.

It is not surprising that no mention of the poor quality of the clothing is made, since 'Umteteli' was supplied with the above information by the Directorate for Demobilisation. Furthermore, not all ex-servicemen received what was legally due to them. It is interesting that among all the subjects interviewed, this is the one area in which there was general agreement. Frank Sexwale and Fine Mlambo, both of whom were demobilized in 1945, recalled:

> ... what I was provided with by the [Native] commissioner in Pietersburg ... was a khaki suit. Nothing else.[17]
>
> No, I didn't get nothing ...[18]

(In fact, it was very unusual that any veteran received absolutely nothing, and this raises a point about oral evidence. We do need to be careful of, a) defective memories, and b) veterans embroidering on the truth. Nevertheless, the comment does have value in that it reveals to us the attitude of the veteran towards his reward for service in the NMC).

> No, it was a very poor reward. We were unhappy about it at the time ...[19]

According to the archival sources, most ex-servicemen at least received what was officially due to them.[20] The insistence of most veterans interviewed, to the contrary, leads us to conclude that some ex-servicemen however did not even receive the little that was due to them. Again, we are led to consider the limitations of oral sources. It has been my experience however, that exaggeration among ex-NMC members is rarely as pronounced or unified as it is on the subject of demobilization. This leads

me to conclude that the paucity of the NEAS demobilization package was especially felt by ex-servicemen. Part of the reasons for the above, apparent anomaly did not seem to lie directly with the directorate. Many ex-servicemen were unaware of the gratuities available to them, particularly since most (± 80%)[21] opted for the rest period available to them, before seeking employment or applying for the gratuity:

> ... it appears that many natives failed to avail themselves of thee provisions, either through ignorance or because their initial approach to the DSDC proved discouraging.[22]

We must thus conclude that even ignorance or reluctance on the part of the ex-servicemen concerning their benefits, stemmed (partially at least) from the DSDC's inefficiency in providing information and education as to what was due departing servicemen. We have seen before, the hardship caused by the inadequate communication techniques of the DNEAS's office (with regard to welfare and recruitment for instance) - and this deficiency in organisation now began to affect the post-war lives of veterans.

Disparities between the benefits received by ex-servicemen of different races were glaring and immediately apparent. Most NMC members felt very strongly about this:

> We did not blame the white soldiers ... We knew it was the Government, but still we were definitely not satisfied with what we got ...[23]

The following tables show clearly how the respective

demobilisation packages were organised. The tables are taken from the Handbook of Race Relations, published in 1949:

TABLE 1

Gratuities payable to volunteers discharged with benefits:-

European Men ... 30s for every month of service after 90 days

Coloured Men ... 15s for every month of service after 90 days

Natives ... 5s for every month of service after 90 days

TABLE 2

	Discharged with Benefits		Discharged without Benefits (Dishonourably Discharged)	
	Cash	Clothing All	Cash	Clothing All
	Pounds	Pounds	Pounds	Pounds
Europeans	5	25	5	15
Coloured	3	15	3	9
Natives	6	Suit [Valued at ± £2]	4	0

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The comparison shows disparities that were not only unfair and disproportionate but an affront to the dignity of the demobbed NMC member:

> The khaki suit is of deplorably poor quality and quite unacceptable. It should be noted that the honourably discharged African soldier fares much worse than the dishonourably discharged coloured soldier.[25]

The state refused to reconsider this policy and the disproportion

of benefits and pensions to ex-servicemen based on race, continued until fairly recently. According to the S.A.I.R.R. in 1945:

> So far the representation [to the state] have been fruitless.[26]

Pensions for instance, have been a clear example of the continuing tendency of the state to discriminate between veterans' races in the awarding of money:

Whites	(Cities)	- £56	P/A	Blacks	Excluded
	(Towns)	- £48	P/A		..
	(Rural)	- £40	P/A		..[27]

After the accession of the Nationalist government in 1948, it became even more difficult for black veterans to claim remuneration for their service:

> ... started 1970's ... R 2.50 it started, a month ... later on it was R24 a month ... my last payment I was given at the municipality offices, and I was robbed. Since November last year it was R 466 every second month ... now I'm happy that I'm getting my money from the bank, because the bank won't rob me.[28]

It has thus taken almost forty years for the South African state to begin to appreciate the contribution of black soldiers in the Second World War and even now, the pension scheme is far inferior to that of white veterans.

There an is almost disconcerting moral schizophrenia in the disparity between the determination of the state to maintain the

racial distinctions between servicemen in the UDF, and its persistent paternalism toward NMC members. On the one hand it clearly expresses its intentions of doing right by the black veterans who served in the war,

> They [the state] ... stated that the position of the black ex-servicemen would be exactly the same as any other member of the UDF. They furthermore pledged that these men would not be forgotten but be cared for[29],

yet on the other hand, it quite calmly maintains and in fact reinforces the racial divisions that have existed before the war. It is no wonder that confusion was so rife among black servicemen in World War II.

Fortunately the state was not the only option left open to black veterans after the war. (Although many of them were unaware of this). The most important outside organisation to offer aid to ex-servicemen was the Governor General's National War Fund (G.G.N.W.F.). This fund was inaugurated shortly after the start of the war and a Bantu Soldiers Sub-Committee was set up to administer the black section of the fund. The problem faced by the Committee was:

> ... that the Bantu people were generally unaware of the existence of the fund or that it could be invoked to help them over their difficulties ...[30]

The way the fund operated was that, soldiers would make a claim for assistance from the fund, the fund would then consider the application, and from 1943 the Fund was empowered to make a

housing grant of £1 to all servicemen who came from urban areas. This was in addition to the standard grant of ± £52 a month to serving soldiers whose families could not subsist on their NMC pay, £1.12s per month to dependants of deceased soldiers, and £1,6 per month to disabled soldiers. However, by 1947 the fund was only making these grants to 671 ex-servicemen and their dependants. Since it is unlikely that this constitutes the total who needed the aid we can see just what a problem ignorance of the fund posed, and just how many NMC veterans missed out as a result of this.

One of the main objectives of the demobilisation policy was supposedly to find employment for ex-servicemen. One of the stated intentions of the UDF during the war being that the civilian employment found for returning black servicemen should be commensurate with what they had done in the army (especially those who had learned trades) and that the same standard of living should be aimed for.[31] Once more, these intentions (although commendable) proved either too difficult or too much trouble to fulfil.

Grundlingh[32] has covered this area in some depth, and to a large extent, any review of the material is a repetition of his work. He has however, given very little space to the actual perceptions of ex-servicemen themselves on the issue of post-war employment. I have thus divided this discussion into two sections. The first is a brief summary of the employment opportunities offered by the UDF's demobilisation package, the limitations it imposed, the

extent to which ex-servicemen availed themselves of it, and the extent to which it fulfilled its own expectations. Secondly, I will address the perceptions of some ex-servicemen themselves.

The main body aimed at securing the employment of black ex-servicemen was set up by the Directorate of Demobilisation and consisted of a number of Bantu Ex-Volunteer Employment Bureaux (B.E.E.B.'s). It was hoped that these would meets the needs of black veterans seeking employment. The Bureaux relied heavily on help from the Native Affairs Department and the local Native Commissioners.[33] By far the bulk of the employment opportunities offered were in the area of unskilled labour. Although the UDF had expressed its intention of attempting to find recruits employment commensurate with what they had done in the army, the realities of post-war civil employment, combined with the discriminatory labour practices of the state, militated against this. Since the post-war concentration was on the employment of white ex-servicemen, black recruits naturally were secondary. For instance, colour bars in the building industry led to the prevention of black ex-servicemen trained in building related skills, finding formal employment, especially in the urban areas.[34]

Nevertheless, employment of a sort was found for a sizeable percentage of ex-NMC members. Between 1945 and 1947 the B.E.E.B.'s placed 27 487 black ex-servicemen in civilian employment. This was out of a total of ± 40 000 who applied for employment assistance.[35] However, most were placed in positions

of unskilled labour; domestic service, manual labourers, messengers, even in the last resort mineworkers (although this was generally anathema to black ex-servicemen). Of the 25 000 drivers allegedly trained by the NMC, very few found similar work in the civilian sector.[36]

We can see that at least 30 to 40 000 ex-recruits did not apply to the B.E.E.B.'s. This was largely due to ignorance of their existence on the part of many ex-servicemen. At least 10 000 of these had been discharged without benefits and as such, were not entitled to aid but still, this leaves a significant group of ex-servicemen left to their own resources in the extremely fragile employment market of the post-war South Africa, and the UDF surely bears at least some responsibility for the ignorance of its ex-members.

There is clear evidence that a scheme for a permanent force of NMC soldiers was planned, to start sometime in 1947. However, the scheme, like many UDF policies regarding black soldiers, was not implemented within the proposed time period, and with the change of Government in 1948 this fell away.[37] As far as vocational training was concerned, the only scheme to come to fruition was inaugurated at Milner Park in Johannesburg, but by 30 June 1947 a total of only 431 bricklayers, carpenters, painters, cooks and waiters had been trained.[38]

While the UDF's employment policies for its black ex-volunteers had certainly proven more successful than most of its programmes,

it nonetheless left much to be desired. The large number of ex-recruits who did not even apply for assistance speak volumes of the inadequacy of the NMC's information services. As do the amount of servicemen who had to write to the Bantu Press to enquire about what they were entitled to M.T. Mewigwi wrote to the 'Soldier's Friend' column to ask:

1) Will a teacher who has joined up be able to take up his old post or any other he may choose after the war?

2) Will you make clear to me whether a teacher who has joined up will get his minimum wage of £7.30s and £1.20s cost of living allowance?

The army answered thus:

1) As conditions differ in the various provinces you should apply to the Educational Authorities by whom you are now employed and who will furnish the necessary particulars.

2) This is answered in question 1.[39]

The whole of which is the sort of neat, buck passing episode at which the NMC became so adept, and an indication of the poor information services of the NMC. The organisation came to rely very heavily on this column as the war progressed and, during the demobilization period it became indispensable.

While this was partly due to poor organisation and administration, it also points to a high level of indifference, and a willingness to pass the buck to the Native Affairs Department,[40] among other organisations. Granted the

difficulties of communication in rural areas and the confusion of records in the immediate post-war era, but ± 30 000 recruits who did not even apply for aid in finding employment might suggest that all these men found gainful and fruitful employment by themselves. This seems unlikely to say the least. As we shall see in the following section, according to many ex-servicemen, the attitude of the NMC to finding employment for its members was not always all it claimed to be. The NMC itself was fairly well satisfied with its own efforts. S. Horwitz, who had been a senior officer in the NMC, wrote, in 1949:

> It is commonly conceded that the South Africa government achieved a remarkable degree of success in dealing with the problems of demobilization.[41]

However, since 1946 very few servicemen, black or white, would go along with that. Ray Capel maintains that:

> Even before the Nats [the National Party] took over in 1948, we weren't as well provided for as we would have hoped, and after '48, well we were lucky if we got anything. I'd hate to think what it was like for the blacks.[42]

A letter to 'Umteteli wa Bantu' on 26/5/1945 gives some indications of just how blacks felt on this issue:

> It is reported that Africans, honourably discharged, with benefits, are entitled to £4, whist Europeans, dishonourably discharged, receive the sum of £20. The Africans are asking if the price of honour could

> possibly be so small. They do not regret their having done their bit, but simply want to know if this is the way Europeans express appreciation.[43]

The question was certainly a pertinent one. Did ex-NMC members feel unappreciated? Frank Sexwale definitely did:

> If you were lucky you got a bicycle, a khaki suit, maybe ...[44]
>
> We thought that when we went to war, that when we came back we would be somebody. Now we were even worse off.[45]

Apparently, many did indeed feel a sense of outrage at their treatment and in fact a form of betrayal. Whether they had an exaggerated sense of what to expect from the state is not really at issue. What is important is the realisation that many blacks were deeply disappointed, not just at the paucity of their demobilisation package but at the state's apparent indifference and reliance on discriminatory structures to avoid an honourable and commensurate reward for black participation in the war.

We have seen in an earlier chapter, that what training blacks did receive in the army was, more often than not, haphazard and inadequate. However, some black soldiers were trained in skilled areas and, since the state had promised to find them civil employment commensurate with these areas, were entitled to expect some kind of fulfilment of these promises. Again, they were bound for disappointment.

> ... all reports from voluntary organisations made it clear that African ex-servicemen were not finding

> employment commensurate with the new skills they had acquired in the army or with the new status and standard of living to which they had become accustomed.[46]

It is quite clear that the veterans themselves were actually aware of this.

> I got my discharge in 45 ... there was no going back to school as they had promised us. It was just up to myself. So I joined some pals, some musicians who were playing there ...[47]

Samuel Maseko's story is often repeated by other veterans, among whom a further complaint was that no housing or resettlement schemes had been provided for blacks.

The following newspaper clipping shows that the NMC authorities sometimes also found ingenious ways of reneging on their obligations to their African volunteer. If this was the treatment handed out to 'coloureds', who were less discriminated against than blacks, the future for NMC troops looked bleak indeed:

Cape Standard
12/6/45

DEMOBILISED AFRICAN SOLDIERS

Must Take the Work They're Given

A news correspondent of the Cape Standard has drawn our attention to regulations which have been gazetted to provide for reduction in pay for African members of the Non-European army services who refuse "suitable employment".

"REASONABLE" EMPLOYMENT

According to these regulations, if a native whose discharge has been authorised refuses employment which the committee considers reasonable, he will be allowed to remain on the depot's strength but on the reduced scale of pay of 10s. a month. Should he be living outside the camp in a rural area he will be paid 10s. a month and £1 a month in an urban area.

On a second reasonable offer of employment being refused all pay and allowances will be stopped seven days after that refusal and the member will be immediately discharged.

In any event, should a second suitable offer not be made pay and allowances will cease 120 days after the member has been placed on the reduced scale, and he will be immediately discharged.

WHAT IT REALLY IS

Our correspondent says:

"Here is one instance of "suitable employment". A number of discharged Coloured soldiers applied for work to the Demobilisation Committee here in Kimberley. They were dispatched to work at Vaal-Harts, 60 miles out of Town, away from their families, as pick-and-shovel labourers for 10d. an hour, i.e. 6s. 8d. a day, which amounts to £1 18s. per week, and although porridge and coffee were issued to them in the morning, payment had to be made from their wages for food otherwise supplied.

As the majority of these men were "Boarded", i.e. physical categories below normal health, they were compelled to give up the work, the result of this was that they were refused further help by the Demobilisation Committee, who, presumably are working on much the same basis as the Gazette sets out.

"If this term, 'suitable employment' is of the nature that these men had to undergo, I wonder what the nature of a second offer of suitable employment would be."

'Cape Standard', 12/6/1945

NEAS Press Clippings

(War Museum)

Black soldiers themselves confirmed this:

> We thought they [the army] would help us with houses you know ... and jobs ... but in the end there was not much.[48]

This is confirmed by Horwitz, who asserts that despite the fact that:

> Elandsdoorn farm settlement, some 100 miles north-east of Pretoria, was established by the Department of Social Welfare for 'old Natives who are totally detribalized or physically totally unfit detribalized natives',[49]

nonetheless:

> Despite repeated representations, no land settlement scheme, comparable in any way to European schemes, has been instituted for native ex-volunteers.[50]

Again most black veterans harboured no resentment against the white soldiers, but aimed their disappointment instead at the government.

Of course it is true that the NMC did attempt to help black veterans at least sporadically. There was the Milner Park scheme which only trained 431 tradesmen by 1947. Donald Madingoane remembers:

> So about two or three of us wanted farms ... they said to us 'no you can't have farms, you must have training' ... We actually went to an agricultural school for two years, the army paid. So when we came

> back in 48 the government said, 'Go speak to General Smuts, we know nothing about this'.[51]

Thus, even the relatively poor attempts at aiding black veterans after the war amounted to nothing, after the ascendancy of the Nationalists in 1948.

It is fairly clear that demobilisation, while better handled than most of the NMC's policies, followed a fairly well worn and predictable path. The policy was relatively haphazard and ill-conceived, inadequately planned and unfairly structured. The mechanisms devised to handle the scheme were not particularly efficient and the racist nature of the benefit and remuneration packages prejudiced any chances the army may have had of leaving a good impression on its departing black veterans:

> Yes, I came back to Joburg. I got my discharge. Then I went to the pass office to look for job ... the man at the pass office say 'Yes, I get you job, but you owe me tax for five years'. I had to pay five pounds ...[52]

This only occurred because Michael Thothela had not been made aware by the UDF authorities, that he was still liable for taxes during his service, and it was all too common a problem faced by returning black servicemen.

PART II EXPERIENCES OF NMC TROOPS AND P.O.W.'s

For many NMC veterans, the war was a learning experience. Sometimes the lessons were positive and sometimes not. Most of the veterans interviewed by myself live in Soweto, in fairly close proximity to each other. Most attend regular meetings at their hall. For all the hostility and resentment many feel toward their wartime experiences they nevertheless still feel a sense of comradeship and pride at their achievement. This section then, is an examination of the peculiar ambivalence engendered in NMC veterans by their service in the war, and how this ambivalence came about.

As we have repeatedly seen the duties of most NMC soldiers consisted of guard duty, labouring tasks, drivers, stretcher bearers, signallers, batmen, etc. In the Union in particular, most NMC troops were either guards or drivers or both. Petrus Monaisa, a corporal who joined the NMC in 1941 at the age of 24 became a clerk in the Quartermaster's Stores. He had joined specifically because he wanted to go overseas. Ironically, despite repeated applications, he remained in the Union until his discharge in 1945. For Petrus, the war was a relatively unproductive time:

> No, I had not training ... mostly I was just guarding and working in the Q.M. stores. I was bored sometimes and sometimes it was just as if we were wasting our

time.[53]

Many other veterans felt the same way. Even the DNEAS had to admit that duties in the Union were generally boring and unsatisfactory to the troops. In a memo dated 8 August 1941, Stubbs states that no NMC member is to spend more than six months in a guard battalion before going North as the duties are too boring for optimum efficiency to be maintained. Of course, due to manpower deficiencies in the Union, this policy was never strictly followed, and some troops spent their entire service engaged in security duties.[54]

Naturally enough, this boredom, combined with the limited options for entertainment in NMC units, often led to trouble occurring when troops got passes and went into local towns. Numerous disturbances, generally involving drink and women, occurred in the Union during the war. Often guards were discovered drunk on duty.[56] More seriously, drunken NMC troops were involved in clashes with civilians. These clashes generally took place in townships close to the military bases and caused considerable anxiety for O.C.'s. The following report from the O.C. Northern Command (Pretoria) to the A.G. about troop related disturbances at Piet Retief in the Northern Transvaal contains some factors which were common to many NMC troops in the Union during the war:

1) It is openly expressed that; why are they not quartered in the Cape, the Transvaal is not their home.

2) That there is none of their people with whom they

can fraternise.

3) That they cannot obtain their wines and have to resort to concoctions and adulterated liquor illegally supplied to them.

4) That they have to resort to local Native women for the purpose of intercourse.

5) That there is no social entertainment outside the camp.

6) That when they go to town [the white section of town] there is nothing of interest and leads to aimless wandering.[56]

The quartering of the NMC troops in foreign areas within the Union did engender resentment:

> Many of us did not get along with the local people near the camp ... sometimes there would be fights,[57]

but allocating troops according to native regions was not catered for in overall NEAS strategy, so little could be done about this. Again, this was cited as a reason for a preference to being out of the Union:

> There was less friction between us and the civilians when we were up North.[58]

The NMC's answer to many of the problems cited above was simply to tighten up pass restrictions and sentences for offences and place local townships out of bounds to NMC soldiers.[59] Furthermore, NMC patrols, under the command of white NCO's were ordered to patrol townships on a regular basis.[60] While this

placated local white residents, it did not necessarily end the NMC's problems, since the tensions which had been eased by visits to the local townships (however short of entertainment), were now confined to NMC camps almost totally devoid of entertainment.

One of the avenues of entertainment which did exist was the visits by the entertainment unit of the NMC to the various NMC camps, and to NMC detachments in diluted units. Samuel Maseko, who was a member of the NMC band, remembers these visits:

> Before we went North ... we played at the sports days, and at ceremonies. Everybody enjoyed the show.[61]

These entertainment days certainly helped to ease tensions, but they were few and far between and the general lot of the NMC soldiers in the Union, especially those on security duties, was boredom and disillusionment.

* * *

Up North the situation was somewhat different. The men were being exposed to new and, to some, exotic places, to fresh and often egalitarian attitudes, to soldiers from other countries and to the attractions of cities like Cairo and Alexandria. For some, this was why they had volunteered. For others, these things came as pleasant surprises. Even when troops were restricted from entering the towns and confined to rest camps such as Garawi, they still found them preferable to similar camps in the Union.

For many soldiers of the NMC, the North African experience was unforgettable and positive:

> Most people preferred being up North. You met other soldiers and they treated you like anyone else ... we didn't get to Cairo much but, even Garawi ... was better than black home ... even with the trouble.[62]
>
> Even the white soldiers ... the South Africans ... well they were better to us up North. And it was a good thing to see another countries ...[63]

For some, the relatively democratic atmosphere of the Eighth Army in the Northern Desert was to prove a problem, when demobilisation and return to the Union saw raised expectations fall. For others the experience was one that engendered pride in their achievement:

> Was driver in Egypt, 1942, was good driver ... drive water truck ...[64],

and often they were achievements that went beyond mere pride in a job well done.

A number of NMC troops were decorated in the Second World War. In total, 119 commendations of NMC troops were awarded during the war. Of these, one was the Distinguished Conduct Medal, sixteen were Military Medals and two were British Empire Medals. The D.C.M. was awarded to Corporal Lucas Majazi, who, while wounded himself continued to evacuate wounded soldiers from the battlefield all through the night whilst under continuous enemy fire.[65] I interviewed Sergeant Reuben Moloi, winner of the Military Medal. Sergeant Moloi was reluctant to describe his act

of valour but we know from archival material that on 20th June 1942 he was captured by the Germans at Tobruk. A few weeks later, he and a companion escaped from Matruh, where they had been transferred. The next night they split up and, after seventeen days of wandering through the desert, living off food and water stolen from Italian units, he stumbled on a unit of the 8th Army.[65] Sergeant Moloi's comment to me on the incident was:

> We were told it was our duty to escape if we were captured. And we were afraid we might be bombed by the allies by mistake. So I told the others it was time to escape.[67]

Although Grundlingh has cited fear of reprisals, were orders to be disobeyed, as a very strong incentive for bravery,[68] this does not minimize these acts of courage in any way. Most of the acts for which medals were won required a certain sense of duty (to the crown at least) on the part of the soldiers, along with a quite understandable sense of self preservation. It is an extremely demanding commander who orders the kind of actions performed by most men who were decorated in the NMC.

Of course, not all experiences up North were positive ones for NMC members. We have already seen that conditions in many camps and particularly rest camps, were often bad enough to provoke unrest and even rioting. Furthermore, restrictions on movements and the security and brevity of home leave were potential areas of dissatisfaction.

NEAS Press Clippings: SA National Museum of Military History.

Three Africans Awarded MM

At a parade held at the South African base in the Middle East last week, Major-General F. H. Theron presented three Africans with the Military Medal, says an official observer.

They were Sergeant Reuben Maloi, formerly of the South African Police, Hermans Chaka, a Bloemfontein native, and Springkaan Massemula, who comes from Grasfontein.

The ceremony was attended by representatives of the British forces.

AFRICAN HERO



SERGEANT REUBEN MOLOI, who made a dramatic escape from an enemy-occupied area in Tobruk last [illegible] Saturday Military

> Many of us were homesick ... some even deserted ... and there was often trouble in the camps, because, you know, we all wanted to go to town on pass, and after a while we were not allowed to. I remember some fellows got into a fight in town once. And there was a lot of trouble.[69]

Other incidents were even more serious:

> Rioting broke out in the South African Camp at Helwan last night. Two cinemas and a row of Egyptian owned shops were burnt down. The cause of the trouble is the alleged failure of the government to repatriate [NMC] members of the UDF with anything like the speed promised.[70]

This may have been a complaint of black troops up North, yet strangely enough, most of my informants felt that in this area the UDF had been relatively efficient and they, themselves, experienced little delay in repatriation.[71]

Still more serious incidents pointed to the less attractive aspects of the NMC experience in the Middle East:

> Sentence of Death was passed here recently by the Military Court on four natives of the South African Forces for robbery and murder of Moshe Yakubowitz, a local Jewish chemist. The murder was committed last July in the neighbourhood of Haifa.[72]

We know that in the desperation of their recruitment drive, the NMC inducted criminals and township gang members. This was obviously the price paid for such recruitment methods,

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particularly since this and similar incidents reflected badly on all NMC members. Of course, many (if not most) occurrences of unrest were justified fully by the conditions prevailing in the NMC in the Middle East. Still, for most of the soldiers up North, the experience was preferable to spending the war in the Union.

The actual experience of battle or combat, is perhaps best examined in our discussion of the NMC members captured by the enemy during the war. During the war 1753 NMC troops were captured by enemy forces, most at Tobruk in 1942.[73] On the whole, by all reports, they were not treated as badly as one would have expected to have occurred to black troops captured by the Germans and Italians during the war. This is quite surprising considering the racial attitudes prevalent in Germany and Italy at the time. Be that as it may, all archival and oral evidence indicates that prisoners were treated better by the Germans than the Italians, and that most of the conditions specified by the Geneva Convention were not broken. NMC troops were allowed to receive food parcels, Red Cross contact and letters from home.[74] Most informants stated that in German camps, some P.O.W.'s even learnt trades as part of their labouring duties, although this is still archivally unconfirmed:

> Yes, many of the P.O.W.'s learnt trades ... mechanics, welders, everything.[75]

Many P.O.W.'s however admitted that they had been peppered with propaganda urging them to revolt against the whites in the Union,

but the DNEAS hastened to assure the A.G. that they had proven impervious to these blandishments:

> Several spokesmen admitted the truth of the statement that the Germans had told them to revolt against the white man's rule but stated that after having heard my advice to them they were satisfied that it would be wisest to retain the social and economic structure of pre-war days ...[76]

Stubbs's concern with the return of socially and politically conscious soldiers is obvious. The question of how far his lectures went towards stemming this consciousness, or even suppressing it, is one that will be discussed in detail later in this dissertation. For the present, it is sufficient to note that the DNEAS himself felt that the task of 'deprogramming' ex-NMC P.O.W.'s important enough to address it in person.

We must keep in mind however that the treatment of NMC P.O.W.'s was only relatively good. They were still issued with the most menial and laborious tasks. They were often placed in great danger by their captors, (particularly when working in bases and ports which were Allied bombing targets), and they were frequently beaten and mishandled by the Germans and Italians. They certainly fared better than captured Russians and Jews though. Responses to ill-treatment ran the gamut from acquiescence to sabotage and escape. We have already discussed Sergeant Reuben Molofi's escape from the Germans in some detail. Lance Corporal Job Masego took this a step further, and expressed his annoyance of mistreatment ('especially by the Italians')[77] in

concrete terms. Captured in June 1942, he was put to work on German and Italian boats. Concealing the fact that he had knowledge of explosives, he proceeded to secrete some dynamite and fuses on his person and one day, before returning to camp, set an explosive device which sank a German ship in Tobruk Harbour. He later escaped and returned to his own forces, where he was awarded the Military Medal.[78]

The response of apathy and despondency was however, understandably, the more common one. This was particularly so since many P.O.W.'s were transferred to Europe, thus rendering escape highly impractical. David Masuku was also captured at Tobruk. He remembered the rigours of North Africa:

> In Tripoli we also worked for the Germans ... offloading ships ... when our troops came to bomb the ships, many of us died.[79]

Masuku was later transferred to Capua, Italy, then to Germany, then to Bordeaux in France where he was put to work:

> '... in the plantations there'.[80]

Although his memories of treatment as a prisoner were not good his comments on the comparative treatment under Germans or South Africans are interesting:

> The Germans, they say we're just schwartzes, we didn't know about the war ... but they didn't have such a hatred for us as the South Africans.[81]

Even taking into account bias and defective memory, that is not a pleasant reflection on relations between black and white in the UDF between 1941 and 1945.

Most veterans remember being under fire as a terrifying and unpleasant experience. Frank Sexwale rememberd:

> At Tobruk it was frightening, ... we were not sure that this was what we had volunteered for,[82]

And D.T. Nkosi, who was at El Alamein recalled:

> At El Alamein, the first night ... the Germans come with the aeroplane, and they bomb us ... well, I was not afraid because I think; 'If I die, I die. If I live, I live'.[83]

In fact very few blacks ran or deserted under combat conditions and, considering their relatively unarmed and untrained status, fully earned the accolades that Stubbs accorded them in his missives to G.H.Q.:

> ... high testimony to the bravery of members of the NMC under fire.[84]

* * *

Thus it is clear that for most veterans of the NMC, particularly those who spent time in North Africa or the Middle East, the war was a time of ambivalence. Many remembered the discomfort, the discrimination, the friendships and the excitement. Some felt the experience a worthless one:

> It was just a waste of time.[85]

and others valued the experience as a major chapter in their lives:

> I see things I will never see back home ... I meet new peoples ... I am glad of the chance to see other

countries.[86]

However they view the experience, it was enough to form a bond which keeps on ever dwindling group of veterans rendezvousing every few months at a small hall in Soweto. Enough to keep them reminiscing, and enough to keep them feeling that they made a significant contribution to a major event in world history. A contribution which has, by and large, been forgotten.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 4

1. Grundlingh; pg. 334.
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5. Grundlingh; pg. 260.
6. A.G. (3) 154. Liaison letter from General Theron, 22/2/44.
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8. NTS, Box 9729, File 837/400/1, Memo on Demos (Archives of Native Affairs) of Black Servicemen, 7/45.
9. NTS, Box 9726, File 837/400, 3/4/1945.
10. Petrus Monaisa, 1989.
11. DNEAS NAS 3/30/16 Box 19, 27/4/1945.
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13. A.G. (3) 154; Letter from ex Sergeant Hastings Mzozoyana to the editor of 'Umteteli wa Bantu' July 1942.
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15. Ibid.
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17. Sexwale; 1988.
18. Mlambo; 1988.
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20. S. Horwitz, 'The Non-European War Record in South Africa' in E. Hellman (Ed). Handbook of Race Relations (1948), pg. 550-551.
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23. Sexwale; 1989.
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Footnotes/Chapter 4/(continued)

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28. D. Masuku, Soweto, 1988.

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30. Horwitz. Ibid; pg. 549.

31. DNEAS NAS 3/30/6/I. Report of the Native Ex-Volunteers Benefits Committee, pg. 74 (1945).

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38. Horwitz. Ibid; pg. 554.

39. NMC NAS Box 17, 3/21/1F; Questions to 'Bantu Soldier's Friend', 20/7/1942.

40. NTS Box 9727, File 837/400/1.

41. Horwtiz, S.; In Race Relations Handbook, pg. 550.

42. Capel, (1992).

43. 'Umteteli wa Bantu', NEAS Press Clippings, 26/5/1945.

44. Sexwale, 1988.

45. Masuku, 1988.

46. Horwitz. Ibid; pp. 553-4.

47. Samuel Maseko, 1989.

48. Michael Thothela, 1989, Soweto.

49. Horwitz. Ibid; pg. 554.

Footnotes/Chapter 4/ (continued)

50. Ibid. pg. 555.

51. Madingoane, 1989.

52. Thothela, 1989.

53. Petrus Monaisa; Soweto, 1989.

54. NMC NAS 3/1/1. Memo from Stubbs to O.C.'s 3 + 4 BNS NMC, 8/Aug/1941.

55. Ibid. Memo to Stubbs from O.C. 4 Bn, 27/4/1942.

56. NMC NAS 3/36/4. O.C. Northern Command to A.G. 3/11/1943.

57. Thothela, 1989.

58. Madingoane, 1989.

59. NMC NAS 3/36/4. A.G. to O.C.'s/??/1943.

60. Ibid. A.G. to Lt. Col. Brink, O.C. S.A. Police, Kimberley, 4/8/1943,

61. Maseko, 1989.

62. Madingoane, 1989.

63. Thothela, 1989.

64. Fine Mlambo, 1988.

65. Horwitz. ibid; pg. 545.

66. NMC NAS 3/21/N78, Despatches to G.H.Q. from M.E. Oct/1942.

67. Reuben Moloi, Soweto, 1989.

68. Grundlingh. Ibid; pg. 273.

69. Madingoane, 1989.

70. NEAS Press Clippings, 'Cape Mercury' 23/8/1945.

71. Maseko, Madingoane, Moloi, Etc. 1988/89.

72. NEAS Press Clippings, S.A. Jewish Times, 16/6/1944.

73. Horwitz. Ibid; pg. 546.

74. P.O.W. box 9, File A7, General Reports P.O.W.'s 1942-1945. S.A.D.F. Archives, Pretoria.

Footnotes/Chapter 4/(continued)

75. Maseko, 1989.

76. A.G. (3) 154, DNEAS to A.G. 8/2/1945.

77. NMC NAS 3/27 Report from DNEAS to Secretary of Native Affairs 23/3/1944.

78. Ibid.

79. Masuku, 1988.

80. Ibid.

81. Ibid.

82. Sexwale, 1989.

83. Nkosi; (1992).

84. A.G. (3) 154, DNEAS to Sir Pierre Van Rynevled, 18/11/1942.

85. Sexwale, 1988.

86. Sekori, 1989.

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CONCLUSION

Arthur Marwick, in his book War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century, quoted the 'Committee on Civil Rights' set up by Truman in 1947, as saying:

> The record shows that the members of several minorities, fighting and dying for the survival of the nation in which they met bitter prejudice, found that there was discrimination against them even as they fell in battle. Prejudice in any area is an ugly, undemocratic phenomenon: in the armed services, where all men run the risk of death, it is particularly repugnant.[1]

If one were to delete the word 'fighting' from this extract and substitute 'groups' for 'minorities', the quotation would apply with equal force to the soldiers of the NMC, as it did to black Americans in the U.S. armed forces during the war. Discrimination was the major determining factor of service for blacks in the UDF between 1940 and 1946. State ordered discrimination structured and controlled their lives in both the most general, and specific ways. Black responses to this discrimination ranged from outright protest and insubordination (which was comparatively rare), through legal and military approved complaints, to passive acceptance. White responses ran the gamut too; from wholehearted approval to paternalistic dissent.

From the beginning of the establishment of the NEAS and the NMC, it was clear that Smuts's government, beset as it was by rightwing opposition to the war, was going to structure the Corps' in discriminatory terms. It was to this kind of structure that Stubbs came in 1940. The NEAS had been hastily and haphazardly assembled. From its tentative origins as a 'police' corps, a 'labour' corps and finally a 'security' corps, it rapidly developed into the human scrapyard of the UDF.

Any jobs that were considered too menial, too boring or too labour intensive for white troops were fobbed onto black ones; particularly those from the NMC. Stubbs, as DNEAS, protested vociferously all through the war about the subordinate status of his troops. He, (among other senior white officers), always felt that the NMC would have been far more effectively employed had the integrity of the corps been maintained, the men been allowed to participate as combat soldiers, and the policy of dilution not been adopted.[2]

Much of Stubbs's protest has to be weighed in the light of his own paternalistic attitudes to blacks, and his broad agreement with the principles of segregation (in the civilian sector at any rate). It can also be understood in the perceived threat to his authority, of the fact that many senior UDF officers regarded the NMC as an inferior and negligible corps. It was because of this that so many sub-standard, unfit and unsympathetic officers and NCO's were transferred to the NMC, (particularly after 1941), despite Stubbs's vociferous complaints about this to the A.G.[3]

To add to the problems at the NEAS GHQ, many of the initial officers and NCO's recruited by the NMC (particularly those recruited from the NMC), showed little support for Stubbs after his appointment in late 1940, and chose to join the Deputy Directorate in the Middle East. The result of this was a severe breakdown in communication and liaison between the NEAS in the Union, and their Directorate up North. It is not easy to understand this breakdown. Most of the senior spokesmen from the office of the DDNEAS, especially Knoetze, seem to have shared Stubbs's viewpoints - certainly with regard to the armament of black troops and the deleterious effects of dilution - so why then, did they mistrust him to the extent they did? Part of the reason lay in the personal loyalty to Col. B.W. Martin, who was the first DNEAS, and whose deposition by Stubbs was deeply resented by the initial group of NCO's and officers recruited by Martin.[4] Stubbs's method of solving problems in the NEAS, which tended to be slow, 'ad hoc' and often only partially successful, also alienated many younger officers, as did his seeming inability to command the kind of respect for his corps that they desired.

One of the consequences of all this was that many of the officers and NCO's who replaced the early group, especially in the Union, tended to be far less sympathetic to black troops, less linguistically gifted, more explicitly racist in outlook and often, simply less capable. The disciplinary problems that arose as a result of this were so acute (especially during 1944), that Stubbs's authority was challenged by the G.O.C., and he was

forced to restrutture his inspectorate division, and appoint welfare officers for all NMC units - (which should surely have been done at the outset) - in order to retain his authority. Beyond this, and Knoetze himself continually stressed this, discrimination resulted in the misuse and waste of black manpower in the UDF.[5] There is no doubt that numerous, vital NMC programmes such as M.T. training and demobilization were adversely affected and retarded by discrimination.

We have seen the general response of the NEAS 'staff' to the discriminatory structures of the NEAS. What of the responses of the ordinary troops, both black and white? It is clear that the responses of black troops to their service in the NMC were neither simple nor consistent. Some black veterans felt that their wartime experiences had been fairly negative and had few good memories of the time. Frank Sexwale was one such veteran:

> Actually, I felt it was an utter waste of time. It was a question of frustration ... I've never come across anyone who said he was happy about his time in the war. We felt we had a raw deal.[6]

Yet Sexwale's major grievance was not racism by white troops or officers. He repeatedly states that blacks held the state to blame for their subordinate position. Other veterans, Sam Maseko for instance took an entirely opposite view:

> [White South African troops] ... used to treat us like enemies ... as if we weren't fighting the same battles,[7]

but, Maseko seemed to feel that the DNEAS's presence on

recruitment tours was an indication of his genuine concern for his troops.

Sexwale's contention that no black troops had good memories of their service is not entirely accurate either. Basilas Maredi, who joined in 1942 and never even went North, chose at the end of the war, to stay on with the UDF. Surprisingly enough, he worked for the South African Defence Force (in the auxiliary services for most of the time) until early 1992, when he retired. He told me:

> I would do it again. It was ... an adventure for us ...[8]

Abiel Sello, who no doubt had one of the better war experiences of black troops, had this to say:

> Well, in the war, it was a good experience. Especially for me you know. Because I was at 101 [Military Hospital] and there we were well treated ... and I liked my job. Of course, I also wanted to travel ... and the army made it possible to do that.[9]

Sello stressed that the war experience itself, had been a good one. The reason he made this distinction, was that the one aspect of service in the NMC which all veterans agreed had been negative, was that of demobilization. Not only did they feel they received less than whites but, more importantly to them, they got less than they expected. Sam Maseko summed it up thus:

> They promised us we would lead better lives as veterans of the army, but it never materialized.[10]

While there is therefore, no broad consensus on service in the NMC among black veterans, all of them had qualifications about that service, and those qualifications were invariably generated by one or other manifestation of racial discrimination; official or otherwise. One possible explanation of the differing attitudes of many veterans, is that the Soweto group of veterans, such as Sexwale and Madingoane are more highly politicized and seem to have closer links with political organisations than the Pretoria group, which includes Maredi and Sello. The Soweto veterans seem thus, to have a more acute sense of the discriminatory aspects of the NMC, than their Pretoria colleagues, and consequently have less pleasant memories of the war years, even if this sense is coloured by some degree of hindsight.

The responses of whites in the NMC to the experience of the Second World War are simpler to identify and assess. We have seen that many white officers and NCO's who came into the NMC reluctantly or with racist attitudes, more often than not found their prejudices hardened and deepened by the war experience. This was particularly so in the Union. As Knoetze put it:

> More pity, ... that selection of Officers and European NCO's should not have been more discriminating from the start and that this branch of the service should have been used throughout to absorb redundant officers and NCO's from other Corps. Many such men were unsuitable to lead Non-Europeans, mainly because they were not interested and had no faith in them and

> seldom really tried to understand or appreciate the mentality and quality of the men they were called upon to lead.[11]

Knoetze of course, represented the other type of white who served in the NMC. These men had either come from a background of working in the black community, or harboured little outright animosity towards blacks. In Knoetze's case, his service in the NMC confirmed his career direction. He has worked in jobs connected with black administration since 1945. For Capel, the NMC changed his political attitudes, as his many critical letters to the press, directed at the Apartheid system clearly indicate. So we can see that for some whites at least, the experience of living and working with black soldiers in the NMC, appears to have had positive effects.

The final aspect of black participation in the UDF that requires attention, is whether or not the experience of discrimination and misuse in the NMC affected the socio-political outlook of black soldiers to any great extent. Donald Madingoane felt that it did:

> It means nothing. We were so disgruntled ... yes it helped to politicize us because so many of us were dissatisfied ... we looked to the ANC. My father was a member, even my grandfather was an ANC member ...[12]

Yet Grundlingh, Killingray and others have shown quite convincingly that the notion of the war politicizing NMC soldiers

(or most African soldiers for that matter) is, by and large, a myth. Grundlingh in fact quotes Sexwale as saying:

> 'I only became politically aware in the 1950's. The army did not contribute to that ...'[13]

Madingoane's statement actually strengthens Grundlingh's case, since Grundlingh argues that it was only servicemen who were already politicized that derived anything of permanent political value from the war. Madingoane, as we can see, came from a background of confirmed political activity; which again adds to the school of thought that negates the myth of military inspired political activity, since this school would contend that his (Madingoane's) civilian connections were probably far more politically active during and after the war, than his military ones.

On the whole, the black experience of the war was from a military perspective, not a particularly positive one. While travel, exposure to other cultures and peoples, the cultivation of new comrades and friends and, occasionally the learning of useful skills, were certainly worthwhile experiences; discrimination, mistreatment, patronization, white indifference and non-combatant participation, were decidedly not. Considering that 1519 NMC members were killed in the war, 770 wounded and 1753 taken prisoner,[14] the 'price of honour' was indeed too high.

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FOOTNOTES CONCLUSION

1. Marwick, A.; War and Social Change in the Twentieth Century, pg. 178-9.
2. A.G. (3) 154/x; DNEA&S to A.G., (7/5/1943).
3. Ibid.
4. Knoetze; (1992). 'As far as I knew, he had very little experience with what was then Native Affairs'. Which was not strictly true since Stubbs had been a Native Commissioner for four years in Rustenburg in the 1920's.
5. Knoetze; (1945), pg. 52.
6. Sexwale; (1988).
7. Maseko; (1989).
8. Maredi; (1992).
9. Sello; (1992).
10. Maseko; (1989).
11. Knoetze; (1945), pg. 2.
12. Madingoane; (1989).
13. Grundlingh, L.; 'Ex-servicemen and Politics', pg. 22.
14. Horwitz, S.; In Handbook of Race Relations, pg. 546.

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