

War, Mobilisation and Colonial Crisis in Northern Rhodesia, 1914-1916

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ABSTRACT

This article comprises a study of the devastating impact of the First World War upon colonial authority structures in Northern Rhodesia. Deploying extensive official, private and missionary records from Britain, Italy and Zambia, and the testimonies of a few surviving African war veterans, it reveals how rapidly escalating imperial war demands – especially Brigadier-General Edward Northey's mass mobilisation after May 1916 – caused immense distress and political discontent among the African population. With widespread famine and spiralling mortality rates this article demonstrates how African resistance to conscription, principally as war carriers or porters, rapidly mounted. The deleterious impact of rising African carrier desertion rates and their direct defiance of military and civilian recruiters, culminating in the mushrooming of the anti-war and anti-colonial 'Watch Tower' movement, are personified by the major clashes which occurred between the military and civilian authorities over the critical issue of the widespread military breach or abuse of carrier service contracts. This civil-military breakdown extended from the lowest colonial authority institutions at ground-level right up to the War and Colonial Offices in London. The latter's drastic decision to suspend Northern Rhodesia's logistical role in the imperial war effort in September 1918, in direct response to War Office refusal to reduce mobilisation pressures and offer compensation for wartime African losses, is highlighted to confirm the existence of a major crisis of colonial control. It is contended that only the belated news of the Armistice, arriving as it did in the midst of a devastating, unexpected German invasion, saved an already deeply emasculated Northern Rhodesian state from total collapse.

From first to last hostilities continued on that [Nyasaland –Rhodesian] front longer than anywhere else in the world, and it was there, near the Chambesi River, in Northern Rhodesia, that the last shot in all the War was fired... the enemy lost eighty per cent of his fighting personnel, while the deaths among

carriers and camp-followers on both sides, from starvation, exposure and disease, must be numbered by thousands... The bulk of the armies consisted of natives, and if you are rash enough to start "frightfulness" among black men it may recoil on yourself in the end...¹

As Professor Bill Nasson recently observed in the *Cambridge History of the First World War*, 'the volume of writing about Africa and 1914-18 remains comparatively modest.'² This article will hopefully fill one substantial gap by analysing the initial impact of a total war, the First World War, upon one colonial African political economy, that of Northern Rhodesia. It will demonstrate how escalating imperial war demands overwhelmed the political, social and economic fabric of this immensely fragile and embryonic colonial state. The war ended in a full-scale crisis of colonial control. While the impact of the First World War on South/Central and East Africa has been the subject of several recent and commendable regional studies by leading authors such as Drs Edward Paice, *Tip and Run, The Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa*, Ross Anderson, *The Forgotten Front; The East African Campaign, 1914-18*, and Anne Samson, *Britain South Africa and the East African Campaign, 1914-18*, few, notably, Professors Hew Strachan, *The First World War; Call to Arms*, Malcolm Page, *The Chiwaya War, Malawians and the First World War* and my own study, *Northern Rhodesia and the First World War: Forgotten Colonial Crisis*, have also examined the deeper political repercussions of the complex wartime interrelationships between governors and governed or between the indigenous responses to the exceptional food and labour war demands and the wartime policies of the colonial/imperial authorities. The aim of this article, therefore, is to more deeply explore this dimension with particular reference to the catastrophic impact of the war upon indigenous and imperial authority institutions at all levels of the Northern Rhodesian colonial state.

Northern Rhodesia, at the outbreak of war, represented a unique, grossly underdeveloped British colonial state, a social and economic backwater, undercapitalised and insecure in its own political boundaries, and, until as late as 1912, severely neglected by the ruling administrative authority, the British South Africa Company (BSAC), whose head offices were located in London Wall Street, London (commonly abbreviated to 'London Wall') and whose provincial executive for the territory was established under an Administrator, Sir Lawrence Wallace, in Livingstone. By 1914, even the process of colonial conquest, of political subjugation, was by no means complete; African tribal polities domiciled in substantial areas of the

¹ Sir Hector Duff, *African Small Chop* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933) pp. 174-175.

² Bill Nasson, 'Introduction' in J. Winter (ed.), *Cambridge History of the First World War*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

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Territory, notably the Kasempa District in the north-west and the Bangweulu swamps region in the north-east, remained deeply hostile to Company hegemony. Company investment policies, almost totally concentrated upon her rapidly expanding sister state, Southern Rhodesia, combined with potent environmental barriers to ensure limited European settlement; white mining and agricultural sectors remained embryonic. This lack of white enterprise, facilitated (again by stark contrast to Southern Rhodesia) the survival, even expansion, of large cohesive bodies of African peasantry, notably in the relatively fly-free north-west districts successfully producing for and competing in the domestic market. Such powerful political and economic constraints also meant that even Northern Rhodesia's main economic purpose, to serve as a labour reservoir for the agricultural and mining industries south of the Zambesi River, was severely compromised; by 1914 her labour resources were significantly under-exploited and large groups of Africans remained resistant to sustained participation in the Central African labour economy. The advent of the First World War dramatically changed all this. It called for unprecedented exploitation of African food and labour resources; it exerted an ultimately unacceptable strain upon the political institutions of such a fragile colonial state.

By 1914, after nearly a decade of copper mining, the two principal mines situated at Kansanshi and Bwana M'kubwa had produced only £268,544 worth of copper but at minimal profit and great production cost.³ Output fluctuated wildly, the scattered mines being frequently closed down and reopened as production costs mounted or labour difficulties arose. Similarly, from 'London Wall's' perspective, the potential for white settlement and consequently for commercial agricultural development seemed restricted. The tsetse fly problem, 'discovered' in 1907, and pervading large tracts of north-east and north-west Rhodesia, had emerged as a potent barrier to extensive white settlement particularly in respect of the north-east Plateau. Reviewing the Company's land assets in 1912, H Wilson Fox, the Company's commercial manager, while observing that BSAC land holdings in Rhodesia were 'prima facie far greater than in Southern Rhodesia', nevertheless pointed out that as land 'infested by tsetse fly is in the present state of knowledge useless for settlement or stock-raising, a serious deduction has to be made from the land at present available for these purposes'. Its effect was to reduce available land totalling 141,600,000 by 75,600,000 acres to 66,000,000.⁴

³ National Archives of Zambia, Lusaka, Zambia (NAZ), 'Dept. of Mines, Shelf 17, Box 102'.

⁴ Papers of Sir Philip Lyttelton Gell, BSAC Director, (hereafter, GP) BSA/5/465, 'H Wilson-Fox, *Memorandum containing Notes and Information concerning Land Policy, 21 June 1912.*' For a detailed analysis of Northern Rhodesia's pre-war fragile and

Anxious to reduce the deficit and realise a dividend for its impatient shareholders, Company policy-makers remained increasingly reluctant to expand the district service even as administrative responsibilities mounted. In 1911, L.A. Wallace, the Administrator, had felt compelled to increase white district staff manning thirty five *bomas* (administrative/government posts) from a total of seventy-seven in 1909 to eighty-seven two years later, 'owing to the development of the country', emphasising that it would 'not be safe to estimate for less'.⁵ Nevertheless, the shortage of staff continued, resulting in severe under-manning of district stations in many areas. The comparatively enfeebled state of 'white' administration assumed far-reaching implications for the structure of colonial control.

In one context it precipitated an excessive and deeply disproportionate dependence upon local African agencies to transmit colonial demands. As elsewhere, in Africa, traditional elites provided the cheapest and most convenient medium for this role.⁶ As one district official explained:

In order to manage things as cheaply as possible we have to maintain all the less abominable features of ancient custom – village unity, obedience to headmen, fiefdom to chiefs etc. – and really besides demanding (by tax) a certain amount of work from the natives and preventing them from spending it on spirits we don't do much positive innovation. I can't tell you how great the deficit is even now in running the country but you can't imagine a country run much more cheaply. We make the chiefs and headmen do most of the management.⁷

embryonic development, see E.J. Yorke, *Northern Rhodesia and the First World War: Forgotten Colonial Crisis*. (Basingstoke, Taurus /Macmillan, 2015), especially Chapter 1.

⁵ GP, BSA/10/17, 'Wallace to BSAC', 27 October 1911.

⁶ The importance of indigenous collaborative agencies as the most viable means for colonial states endowed with limited resources to impose their authority, and, thereby secure long-term social, economic and political goals, has been the focus of several studies over the past half century. See principally R.E. Robinson 'Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration' in J. Owen and R.B. Sutcliffe (eds), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London, Pluto Press, 1976), pp. 117-44. For a specialised study of their extensive use within the colonial mining industry, Charles van Onselen, 'The Role of Collaborators in the Rhodesian Mining Industry 1900-35', *African Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 289, 1973; and idem, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-33*, (London, Pluto, 1976). *passim*.

⁷ Williams papers (hereafter WP), Rhodes House Library, Oxford (hereafter RHL), 'T. R. Williams to Mother', 5 August 1918.

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The advent of war: the emerging pattern of strain

For a variety of reasons the outbreak of war in August 1914 directly and again disproportionately affected Northern Rhodesia. One was German strategic ambitions. Despite the misgivings of Dr Schnee, the Governor of German East Africa, his senior military commander General von Lettow Vorbeck had immediately decided upon a determined aggressive and proactive campaign which would absorb and distract the neighbouring principal Allied colonies of the Belgian Congo, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland and British East Africa. Lettow told Berlin that war in the colony should not 'be treated as a self-sufficient episode. It and the great war can react off each other'.⁸ By taking the offensive, his '*Schutztruppen*' (German colonial troops), 'would, using guerrilla tactics, draw British troops way from the main theatre ... German East Africa was therefore a means to an end'.⁹ Moreover, it was to be a total war for many Africans in which African interests would be ruthlessly sacrificed to meet European needs. In the words of distinguished African historian, Professor John Iliffe: 'Lettow-Vorbeck's brilliant campaign was the climax of Africa's exploitation: its use as a mere battlefield'.¹⁰

Secondly, Allied strategic pressures added to Northern Rhodesia's burden. After the 1914 Allied disaster at Tanga, Britain's Belgian allies had themselves strongly pushed for a two-pronged offensive into German East Africa from the south with one major converging thrust to be launched directly from the Northern Rhodesian border. The Belgian military build-up in turn attracted German pre-emptive strikes, notably against Saisi and Abercorn border posts in 1914-1915. But it was the outbreak of the Chilembwe rebellion in 1915 in nearby Nyasaland, partly inspired by anti-war grievances, which, combined with the detrimental impact of the intractable border war, was to convince both the Colonial and War Offices of the imperative need to launch a major offensive into German East Africa to rescue and restore British

⁸ Hew Strachan, *The First World War, Vol. 1: To Arms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 571. Some recent revisionist German historians have recently portrayed Lettow's aggressive actions as less than heroic and constituting 'nothing but a military coup'. Stig Forster, 'Imperial Germany: Civil-Military Relations', in *Cambridge History of the First World War*, p. 116; and Tanja Bührer, *Die Kaiserliche Schutztruppe für Deutsche-Ostafrika* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2011), pp. 401-77. On the precariousness of Northern Rhodesia's position on the outbreak of war and the consequent immediate need for Belgian assistance, see E. Paice, *Tip and Run: The Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007), pp. 32-3; R. Anderson, *Forgotten Front: The East African Campaign, 1914-18* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), p. 46.

⁹ Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 585.

¹⁰ John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 241.

prestige and, after 1916, due to Nyasaland's political instability, to rely far more heavily on Northern Rhodesian 1st line carrier support.

Equally significantly, the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914 and the subsequent major 1916 offensive was to have far-reaching and unforeseen implications for the existing Northern Rhodesian labour economy, thanks to an almost total dependence upon human carrier transport to secure the defence of the north-east border adjoining German East Africa.¹¹ In the words of L.A. Wallace, the B.S.A.C. Northern Rhodesian Administrator:

The difficulties were that between the nearest point on the Railway and the northern border... there was 600 miles of country covered with tsetse fly in which no domestic animals could live and therefore no sustained ox, horse, mule, or donkey transport was possible. Because of this no roads had been made suitable for wheeled traffic and motor traffic was not possible until such roads had been made. We were therefore... limited to native carrier transport.¹²

Furthermore, the opening of the major military front upon the north-east border, ensured that the main burden of supplying the war would be shouldered by the districts of the north-east Plateau, one of the least developed areas of the whole Territory. The population of the Plateau measured no more than three per square mile; administrative stations were about 100 miles apart, interspersed with a few scattered mission stations. The limited surplus food production of much of the area posed further serious problems, not so much for feeding the several hundred troops stationed at the border defence posts as for mobilising the vast quantities of food to ration the carriers themselves *en route*. Official figures estimated that the average carrier or porter travelled fifteen miles per day (seven days a week), the net load totalling sixty pounds in weight, to which was added cooking pots, blankets etc. With

¹¹ The only other 'hostile' border, that adjoining the Caprivi Zipfel (German South-west Africa), was rapidly secured by Company Forces with a virtually bloodless invasion and occupation within six weeks of the outbreak of war.

¹² The National Archives (TNA), CAB 45/14, 'Sir L. A. Wallace: "Transport Difficulties in the Great War and how the Administrator and his civil servants overcame them"'. This critical logistical factor was graphically illustrated by the fate of a single experimental convoy despatched to the north-east border early in the war. Of the 600 oxen drawing thirty wagons loaded with 100 tons of stores despatched from the Railway to Abercorn, not a single animal survived the journey. See also L.A. Wallace, 'Northern Rhodesia and the Last Phase of the War In Africa', in C. P. Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War, Vol.4* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924), pp. 281-310.

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rations fixed at a standard rate of 2 ½ lbs of meal per day, a carrier would, therefore, eat through the full weight of his load in twenty-four days, that is on a twelve days journey outward (180 miles) and a twelve days return.¹³

When *no food* was available along the route, the number of carriers required would have to be massively multiplied. Wallace calculated that

If the route be divided into sections of five days travel over seventy-five miles a carrier would deliver at the end of this distance 7/12 of his load and would eat 5/12, that is seven would be carrying through loads and five would be carrying food for the road trip. On the next section of seventy-five miles 7/12 of what had come over the first section would be delivered and 5/12 eaten. At the end of 450 miles (the distance from the Railway to the main supply depot at Kasama) only 1/27 of the weight originally started would be delivered at the depot and the border was still 150 miles further on.¹⁴

The logistical implications were therefore appalling. To deliver just one ton of food per day over a distance of 150 miles would require 750 carriers if food were available on the road, but 1,800 with food also to be carried; for a distance of 300 miles the figure would be 1,500 and 7,150 carriers respectively; for a distance of 450 miles, 2,250 carriers or 23,300. Finally, for the full 600 mile journey from the Ndola railpoint, 3,000 carriers would be needed if rations were available *en route*, or a massive 71,000 carrying their own food – all to deliver a mere one ton of supplies to the military. The establishment of food depots *en route* did relatively little to alleviate the problem of supplying the carriers who supplied the troops who fought the war.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

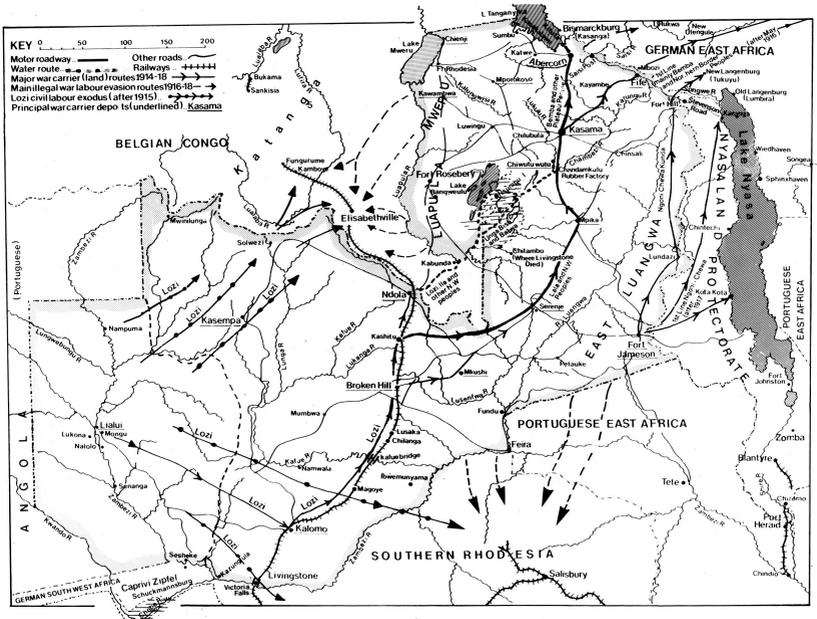


Figure 1: 1914-16 Main wartime labour routes with selected tribal associations

Total war: maximum labour exploitation

The decision, as we shall see, reached in late September 1915, to launch a major offensive into German East Africa completely revolutionised the dimensions of war labour supply in Northern Rhodesia. Thousands more carriers were needed and with them, huge quantities of foodstuffs, to supply, not only the military formations, but also their carriers.

The first effects on the labour supply were felt with the rapid extension of lines of communication and consequent expansion of recruiting areas. On routes parallel to the central route, from Broken Hill to Serenje, Mpika, Kasama and Abercorn, carrier traffic vastly increased during the offensive build-up, especially along the route from Fort Jameson via Lundazi to Fife. Thus government war labour engagements for Fort Jameson district, for instance, rocketed from approximately 1,000 for the year ending March 1915,¹⁶ to 6,084 during the year ending March 1916.¹⁷

¹⁶ NAZ, ZA 7/1/2/4, 'Fort Jameson Annual Report 1914-15'.

¹⁷ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3/4, 'Fort Jameson Annual Report 1915-16'.

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Concerted pressures from the Salisbury military authorities resulted in feverish attempts to complete the motor roads from the rail-point at Kashitu via Kasama to Abercorn and Fife. In terms of increased labour mobilisation, however, it was the inauguration of a new 'water route' extending across the Lake Bangweulu swamp region, which represented the most profound innovation in labour strategy. In February 1916, Wallace told London Wall of the opening of the route, by porters and canoe. To control this new labour route, a new *boma* was established at Nsumbu Island on Lake Bangweulu. During the first six weeks, 500 canoes, able to carry between 3,000 and 4,000 loads had been organised.¹⁸ Five months later, at the height of the Northey offensive, Wallace reported that 1,200 canoes were deployed along the river section, and 3,000 to 4,000 carriers along the land section between Ndola and Luapula.¹⁹ At peak level, there were no less than 12,000 paddlers in 2,000 canoes, carrying loads weighing from 120 to 300 lbs to Chiwutuwutu depot, within thirty miles of Kasama, where the carriers again took over.²⁰

The combination of canoe and motor-lorry transport did little to reduce the over-riding reliance upon African carriers. Wallace thought of the road as no more than 'a safeguard against failure', not least because its running costs were so high, up to £70 or £80 per ton over the whole distance.²¹ It required twenty-six cars to deliver a mere 2,000lbs of food per day to the main food depot at Kasama, and the road could become impassable during the rains. Nor was the canoe route of decisive importance in relieving the strain on carriers.²²

The Northey advance added enormously to existing labour strain. At one point, in August, 1916, Wallace warned the Commandant-General that the transport position would be 'fairly safe', only if water and motor transport were kept going during the rains 'and that we have not to find carriers and food for the transport beyond our own border... If however, more carriers are needed for transport further north or more food for German carriers (which means more carriage of food to the border) men cannot be found for the work'. He was already having to find men to carry

¹⁸ TNA, CO 417/585, 'Wallace to BASC', 14 February 1916.

¹⁹ TNA, CO 417/588, 'Wallace to BSAC', 23 June 1916.

²⁰ TNA, CO 417/597, 'Commandant-General, Report on Military Affairs in Northern Rhodesia 31 March 1916'. For a first hand albeit brief account of the organisation of the wartime canoe route, see J.E. Hughes, *Eighteen Years on Lake Bangweulu* (London: The Field, 1933), pp. 85-6, 98, 246 and 256-7. See also TNA, CO 417/591, 'H C Marshall, Memorandum, "Water Transport through the Bangweulu Swamps", 22 November 1916', (encl. in Wallace to HC 1 October, 1917).

²¹ TNA, CO 417/584, 'Wallace to BSAC', 25 May 1916.

²² TNA, CAB 45/14, 'L A Wallace: "Transport Difficulties..."'

supplies as much as 130 miles into German territory,²³ and by October 1916 the cross-border carrying distance had increased to 200 miles.

The problem of labour supply was compounded by major underestimates of campaign food requirements. An original estimate by a Major Byas of 3,924,000 lbs of foodstuffs required for the period May 1916, to May 1917, was practically equalled during the first six months alone. The Byas estimate of delivery 280,000 lbs of food per month to the border for the initial six month period, proved a hopeless miscalculation. In June 1916 alone, food issues rose as high as 385,000 lbs.²⁴

More food required more labour to transport it, and the north-eastern districts, in particular, paid the price for such administrative blunders. At Abercorn, for instance, a sub-district with an estimated 8,500 taxable males, about 5,000 carriers had been registered by August 1916, as first and second line transport with the troops in German East Africa, and 800 more on roads and telegraphs. At Kasama, the major food and carrier depot, and a sub-district containing roughly 5,000 taxable males, no less than 6,000 war carrier engagements were recorded.²⁵

²³ TNA, CO 417/585, 'Wallace to Cmdt-General Edwards', 21 August 1916.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

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Table 1: Northern Rhodesia – African war carrier engagements officially recorded for the period August 1914 to March 1917²⁶

	N.E. Rhodesia	N.W. Rhodesia	Total
1 August 1914 – 31 March 1915	42,528	–	42,528
1 April 1915 – 31 March 1916	92,337	15,042	107,381
1 April 1916 – 31 March 1917	138,930	24,052	162,982
Totals	273,795	39,094	312,891

‘Statement taken from returns of war carriers 1916-17’

	1: Tax- able males	2: Nos. engaged in war work	3: Total no. months work done	4: Equiv. nos in constant employ- ment	5: Est. nos in civil. employ- ment
Tanganyika	16,470	17,865	55,592	4,633	8,594
Mweru-Luapula	24,749	34,082	55,369	4,615	9,500
Awemba	24,949	43,933	57,261	4,772	10,688
Serenje	5,204	5,893	4,218	352	800
E. Luangwa	48,234	17,159	23,437	2,120	10,370
Totals	119,606	118,932	195,877	16,492	39,952
Add: N.W. Rhodesia Carriers		24,052	67,541	5,628	
Totals		162,982	263,418	22,120	
Add: King’s African Rifles				1,100	
Add: N. Rhodesia Police				1,400	
Average number in constant employment throughout the year				24,620	

To these must be added the unknown numbers who, unregistered, left the country for work in Katanga and Southern Rhodesia.²⁷

²⁶ NAZ, BS3/81, ‘Wallace to HC’, 1 October 1917.

²⁷ Notes on Tables 1 and 2:

a. The taxable males include the old and infirm, and the unfit for work.

Seeds of Crisis

War Imperatives and the Decline of Colonial Office Trusteeship in Northern Rhodesia

The Colonial Office as the primary protector of African welfare in a colony specifically perceived as primarily a black protectorate was deeply compromised by the outbreak of war, although it had frequently investigated pre-war cases concerning the maltreatment of Northern Rhodesian labour, particularly within Southern Rhodesian mining compounds. As early as 1906, for instance, the Resident Commissioner had launched a major enquiry into the abnormally high death rate occurring on the Sabiwa Mine in the Gwanda District of Southern Rhodesia where, out of a total of 364 Ngoni, Bemba, Chewa and Nsenga employed, 24 had died and another 33 had deserted.²⁸

b. The numbers engaged were principally as carriers, but they include some on road construction. The engagements were for periods varying from six months to a few days on short trips from station to station. Each trip is counted as an engagement and many carriers did a number of trips so that the engagements show a higher number than the taxable males.

c. The total months are arrived at as in the following examples:

Awemba District

1,177 men at 6 months	=	7,062 months
15,465 men at 2 months	=	30,932 months
11,242 men at 1 month	=	11,242 months
16,049 men at 1 month or less	=	8,025 months

(called ½ month)

Total months worked 57,261

d. The total months worked divided by 12 give the average number in employment during the whole year. This average was necessarily not constant but varied probably between 15,000 and 30,000.

e. Those in civil employment include carriers for short periods, and many so employed may have carried for war work, and would then be included in column 2.

²⁸ GP, BSA 7/197, 'H. H. Castens to RC', 20 February 1907 (encl. 'Special report on health conditions on the Sabiwa Mine', dated 23 February 1907). The enquiry exposed the poor recruiting conditions of north-east Rhodesian labourers (in transit) and implemented improvements such as a pay rise from 10s 0d to 12 0d, and improved medical facilities and so on. It was an incident which highlighted the profound ambiguity of the pre-war Company-imperial relationship for the *raison d'être* of the grant of the BSAC Charter in 1889 had been to secure imperial strategic interests north of the Limpopo and, ultimately, north of the Zambesi rivers at a minimum cost to the British Treasury. However, its inherently contradictory role as the official protector of African interests against the Company's often rapacious commercial activities frequently complicated this 'unholy alliance', especially, as we shall see, under the added pressures of an imperial war. As one

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The outbreak of war, however, meant the almost immediate abandonment of 'Trust' concepts towards the military porter class of labour. The Colonial Office's position as the official director of war operations within Northern Rhodesia, a role which it retained until just after the launching of Northey's offensive in May 1916,²⁹ inevitably severely undermined its role as a protecting influence over the increasingly indiscriminate mass levies of Northern Rhodesian carrier labour, so crucial to the all-important Allied victory. One observation by a Colonial Office official, concerning the Colonial Office's subordinate role in regard to the important issue of war expenditure, summed up the overall weakness of its wartime position in this respect. The procedure whereby the Colonial office funded the military authorities according to the exigencies of the moment was 'not very satisfactory as it means there will be little control over the naturally extravagant tendencies of the military authorities. The control exercised by the High Commissioner is very slight – except when it is a question of raising fresh troops'.³⁰

Early Wartime Problems of Social Control

Northern Rhodesia, before 1914, comprised a society in which the structural base of segregation and control remained embryonic and extremely vulnerable, by contrast to the white settler states to the south. This fragility reflected the BSAC's almost unbroken neglect by which, on the eve of war, barely 2,500 widely scattered white settlers lived in uneasy co-existence with a black population of over 800,000. Only in Fort Jameson and the capital, Livingstone, the two townships with any significant white populations, had a pass system been introduced by 1914.³¹ The local forces available for protecting white society comprised the few score members of the all-

clearly irritated and frustrated BSAC Director, L.S. Jameson, bluntly informed shareholders soon after the outbreak of the war; 'We are not "persona grata" with the Colonial authorities. I do not know why. The only reason which comes to my mind is that they know we are doing the work which they ought to have done themselves. It is only human nature: we know that you are much more severe on those who benefit you than on those you have conferred benefits upon.' GP, BSA/5/465, 'L.S. Jameson, Report of the Nineteenth Ordinary General Meeting of the BSAC, London', 17 Dec. 1914. For the origins an analysis of the concept of protecting African welfare embodied in the 'Trust' and its application to Africa, see R.E. Robinson, 'The Trust in Central African Policy, 1889-1939', (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1951), *passim*.

²⁹ See, C., Hordern, *Military Operations in East Africa*, Vol. I (London: HMSO, 1941), p. 188.

³⁰ TNA, CO 417/583. 'H. N. Tait, Minute', 30 March 1916.

³¹ L. H. Gann, *A History of Northern Rhodesia: Early Days to 1953* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 148.

white but part-time Rifle Associations, which were deployed in tiny isolated units across the Territory, and the few hundred, possibly unreliable predominantly black, if white-officered, Northern Rhodesia Police Force.

On the outbreak of war in August 1914, the Company's internal and fragile control strategy continued to rest upon the shoulders of the few score white civil servants in the District Service. In fact, their role assumed new significance, with direct responsibility for the supply of food and manpower to the military forces. Almost immediately, however, the Service was rocked by a rush of resignations as many district staff left to join their compatriots fighting the "real war" in Europe. An anonymous article, however, printed in the *Livingstone Mail* and almost certainly written by a senior member of the Livingstone executive, graphically illustrated the fear which senior Company officials entertained for a continuing white supremacy, if stations were left deserted:

It appears that not a few of the officials of the Administration are leaving Rhodesia for the Front. ... It is not a question of getting in hut tax as some people seem to think. Only those who know something of native administration can realise what would happen in some of the outlying districts of the territory if the *bomas* were left empty. The dominant warlike tribes would not be slow to enslave their weaker and more servile brothers. European women and children would have to leave their homes. Chaos would take the place of an order built up by some fourteen years of patient administration.³²

Such dramatic public appeals failed to halt the exodus and, by the close of 1915, the District Service faced a crippling manpower shortage. The total already undermanned peacetime complement of 102 district officers had fallen to seventy-six,³³ a drop of early twenty-five per cent. No reserves were available for relief. The residue of seventy-six was retained on full-time field work without prospects of leave.³⁴ Several *bomas* were manned by single officials.

The Struggle for White Prestige: the Disastrous "Phoney" Border War: August 1914 to May 1916

By mid-1915, it was clear that the credibility of such strategies was being seriously undermined by the disastrous military situation along the north-east border. Meagre Company forces, deployed along a more than 200 mile front in a prolonged defensive

³² British National Library, Colindale, London (hereafter, BNL), 'Quo Vadis', *Livingstone Mail*, 20 November 1914.

³³ TNA, CO 417/583, 'Wallace to BSAC', 16 November 1915.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

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war, were unable to prevent devastating and demoralising raids on British-protected African villages by the German irregular forces. For both Company and imperial officials, this naturally seemed potentially fatal to the image of white superiority. It was a problem soon made more pressing by the anti-war Chilembwe disturbances in neighbouring Nyasaland. In September 1915 Drummond Chaplin, the Southern Rhodesian Administrator, warned Walter Long that the northern border had become 'a matter which affects the Imperial Government as much as Rhodesia as if our forces were seriously beaten on the northern frontier there would be a devil to pay among the natives in Nyasaland where there is a good deal of unrest'.³⁵

This perspective was shared on the ground by officials along the north-eastern border. One official who had been transferred to the north-east *boma* of Mporokoso as part of Wallace's reinforcing strategy, recognised that 'it would become a serious matter (for Rhodesia that is), if our natives did get the idea that we could not or would not protect them'.³⁶ C Boyd-Cunningham, the Commander of the Northern Rhodesia Rifles, also identified the war as one of 'native prestige'; two of his chief objectives were 'to hold the British Border inviolate' and 'protect the native population'.³⁷

During the war of attrition which lasted nearly two years, these objectives proved unattainable for the overstretched Company, Belgian and, later imperial forces. 'British' villages along the border zone were repeatedly attacked, suffering tremendous social dislocation. Huts were burned, crops and livestock plundered and the inhabitants robbed and sometimes killed; British patrols proved helpless to prevent irregular *ruga-ruga* (German-led African/Swahili-speaking irregular troops) bands striking across the border with impunity.³⁸ In August 1915, for instance, a London Missionary Society (LMS) missionary reported that '*ruga-ruga* ... who at

³⁵ Wiltshire County Records Office, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, Papers of Colonial Secretary, W.H. Long (hereafter LP), 947/468, 'Chaplin to Long', 14 September 1915.

³⁶ WP, RHL. 'T. R. Williams to Evelyn', 10 May 1915.

³⁷ NAZ, HM7. Cu/1/1/2, 'C Boyd-Cunningham; Notes on North-east Border and German East African South Campaign', Undated, ff 243-254.

³⁸ As early as November 1914, for instance, one Fife official reported that, as a result of German raids, villages fifteen miles south of the border were 'deserted' with 'approximately 2,000 natives... homeless and feeling the pinch of hunger'. NAZ, BS3/108, 'N C Fife to D C Abercorn', 24 November 1914.

present abound on the border can come to Kawimbe and return in a night'.³⁹ Looting around Mwenzo Mission forced 'most of the people to move inland' in March 1915.⁴⁰

The failure of British forces to protect border villages had profound implications for the perceptual credibility of white rule. As one eye-witness recalled: 'The local natives began to think this was a peculiar kind of war, distinctly one-sided in fact. Here they were, losing cattle and villages, so why didn't the British, who were supposed to be their protectors, do something about it?'⁴¹

Of equal concern was the visible devastation of the institutional manifestations of white power along the border. Both *bomas*, notably Fife and mission stations, notably Kawimbe and Mwenzo, normally permanent shrines of white authority, had to be evacuated during the first half of 1915.

Just as damaging for white prestige was the often outrageous behaviour of Allied troops themselves. The ill-disciplined conduct of white-officered Belgian contingents was a particular problem. After three companies of Belgian *askari* (African soldiers) had passed through Chienji *en route* to Abercorn in September, 1914, serious complaints about their 'misbehaviour' were laid before the Belgian Congo authorities at Pweto. The Chienji official reported a satisfactory outcome. All the local inhabitants 'suffering damage of any kind' were 'awarded compensation and the delinquents tried by court martial and punished'.⁴² Native Commissioner T R Williams thus protested against their frequent ill-treatment of Northern Rhodesian carriers. Describing the Belgians as 'licentious brigands', they were, he observed, 'the cause of nine tenths of the terror of the Rhodesian carriers and the daily trouble we have until I took charge of the carriers and put one messenger over them in place of the 100 or so soldiers that before had been supervising them'. He reported pointedly, that 'the last day that Belgian soldiers walked with their carriers' was 'the last day of complaints of "hard ears" and buffeting'.⁴³

³⁹ Congregational Council for World Missions, SOAS, London, (hereafter CCWM), London Missionary Society (hereafter LMS), Central Afr. Box 17, 'Wareham to Hawkins', 29 August 1915.

⁴⁰ LMS, Central Afr. Box 17. 'W Draper to Hawkins', 6 March 1915.

⁴¹ R W M Langham, 'Memories of the 1914-18 Campaign with Northern Rhodesian Forces, Part II', *Northern Rhodesian Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1953), p. 60.

⁴² NAZ, ZA 7/1/2/8, Chienji Annual Report 1914-15. See also DC Tanganyika to SLA 31 December 1914. NAZ,BS3/108 for further details of serious offences perpetrated within Northern Rhodesian territory by Belgian units.

⁴³ WP, RHL, 'Williams to Mother', 14 November 1915.

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Such misconduct was not confined to black *askari*; some white units could also behave abominably. Missionaries reported cases of theft and immorality. At Chilubula the virtual rape of a fifteen year old African girl by a white trooper was reported; her father had made little protest, fearing a serious *mulandu* (case/argument, dispute) in front of the Europeans.⁴⁴ White columns were often escorted by anxious civil officials. A local missionary recorded the detrimental impact of their indiscriminate behaviour on white prestige.

It is a great pity that such raiding is taking place for it means we are fighting with the natives. We told all the border peoples that war was between the Europeans only and their police ... some officers are wanting a little "kudos". What does it matter if a few innocent niggers are killed in the getting of it, I can imagine they think ... it will not make things easier when the war is over.⁴⁵

Tied in this way to a defensive war, border officials were forced to devise a number of strategies to protect the inviolability of British rule. In a bid to defend African villages from German raids and British prestige they created a *cordon sanitaire* behind the frontier. From March to September 1915, 'in order to prevent the continual harassment of our natives by the enemy's *ruga-ruga* and *askari*',⁴⁶ scores of Lungu, Mambwe, Iwa and Inamwanga villages were forcibly removed to areas ten miles, and, ultimately, as much as thirty miles from the frontier. The policy was sometimes carried out in ruthless fashion. Kayambi missionaries reported in September, 1915 that, 'by order of the English authorities, the frontier villages had been burned after forcing their inhabitants to withdraw further into the interior'.⁴⁷ The resultant social dislocation was undoubtedly as great as that caused by German raiding.

By September, 1915, the growing Company and local imperial concern over the deteriorating situation along the north-east border forced the High Commissioner himself to call for a reversal of the defensive posture. 'The continuing passive defence', Buxton asserted, was having 'a demoralising effect'; he feared that, 'British prestige among the natives' was being 'impaired'.⁴⁸ His recommendations for an offensive were accepted on 27 September. It was a move now welcomed in Colonial Office circles. The recent arrival of Bonar Law as Colonial Secretary heralded this new imperial perspective. 'The most important subject', he wrote:

⁴⁴ White Fathers (*pere blancs*) Archives, Vatican, Rome, (hereafter WFA), 'Chilubula, Mission Diary' (hereafter MD), 14 March 1916.

⁴⁵ LMS Central Afr Box 17, 'Wareham to Hawkins', 17 April 1915.

⁴⁶ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3, 'Tanganyika Annual Report 1915-16'.

⁴⁷ WFA, 'Petit Echo, No. 24', September 1915.

⁴⁸ Hordern, *Military Operations in East Africa* Vol. 1, p. 189.

is in regard to East Africa. The whole position has completely changed since there was a consideration of this subject by Mr Harcourt. The position in East Africa and the surrounding districts is of a nature to cause a good deal of anxiety ...it would be one of the greatest possible advantage to send a large enough force to conquer German East Africa once and for all.⁴⁹

“White Mutiny”: Racial Conflict on the North-East Border

Such strategies could to some extent obviate such perceived external threats but not the profound internal racial issues arising from the deployment of hundreds of armed black troops. Farther south in Southern Rhodesia this policy had already been greeted with not inconsiderable apprehension within Company circles, haunted by memories of the 1896-7 insurrections. One Director observed ‘I suppose the Matabele contingent... is a fait accompli. As a matter of *policy* I dread arming so warlike a tribe but no doubt it was urgent and “needs must when the devil drives”’.⁵⁰

During the long border war, serious racial friction arose when the numerically weaker all-white unit of the local settler population, the Northern Rhodesian Rifles, found itself split up and used to stiffen the larger, predominantly black Police units. In February 1915, at a secret meeting of members of the Northern Rhodesian Rifles, Colonel Hodson, the Border Commander, was presented with an ‘extraordinary’ resolution, which deprecated the social stigma of their enforced subordination to the predominantly black Police contingents, and called for the restoration of their elite status. The resolution demanded that ‘as Premier Corps engaged in operations on the Northern Border, we want the Officers, NCO’s and men to be complimented to seniority over Officers, NCO’s and men of the Native forces of similar grade engaged on the same operations’.⁵¹

This sudden backlash from white settler opinion came as a profound shock to senior border commanders, the military authorities in Salisbury and the Company authorities in Livingstone.

Defensive needs, however, continued to dictate the mixing together of Police and Rifle contingents. Matters came to a head during the defence of the Saisi military border post. Both units had to share the same trenches for long periods of time, and

⁴⁹ Papers of Lord Buxton, High Commissioner to South Africa, (hereafter BP), ‘Bonar Law to Buxton’, 3 September 1915. See also Strachan, *First World War; To Arms* p. 600.

⁵⁰ GP, BSA/3/349, ‘L. Michell to P. L. Gell’, 19 May 1916.

⁵¹ NAZ, HM7, Cu/1/1/2 ‘NRR Resolution’ (encl. in F. A. Hodson to Boyd-Cunningham, 14 February 1915) ff. 26.

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tensions mounted. In one astonishing move, Hodson, in March 1915, rather than, 'go against white opinion as regards the Northern Rhodesia Rifles', reluctantly permitted the latter unit to shift camp away from the main Police position, even though this jeopardised the whole defensive position.⁵²

The mutinous behaviour of the NRR was referred to the Commandant-General.⁵³ Seeing the grave threat to the defence of the whole north-east Border, he delivered a stinging rebuke to Boyd-Cunningham. He deplored the fact that 'such a question should have been raised at such a time when the forces of Empire are fighting shoulder to shoulder, irrespective of class and colour for its existence'.

At the end of March 1915, in a final attempt to defuse this "racial crisis" and to safeguard border operations, Edwards agreed to the discharge of thirty-two NRR members, approximately thirty per cent of its total effective strength.

This drastic action failed to solve the problem. In early May 1915, Boyd-Cunningham again reported: 'The morale of the British Native troops on the border render them undesirable to brigade with white troops'.⁵⁴ Bitter exchanges continued between Boyd-Cunningham and Hodson, this time over the issue of racially-mixed border patrols. In June 1915, Boyd-Cunningham was again severely reprimanded by the Salisbury military authorities:

You clearly undervalue the importance of the duty allotted to you which are prescribed not by myself, or by the High Commissioner of South Africa, but the Imperial Military authorities through the Colonial Office ... in wartime there can be no such thing as picking and choosing one's sphere of action or consulting one's likes and dislikes.⁵⁵

Three months later, the authorities began the removal of what had become a huge political embarrassment. They decided to condemn the NRR to a slow death by refusing to supply replacements for sickness or death.

Military Labour Extraction: Initial Volunteerism and the Growth of Resistance

Early African response to war labour demands, greatly varied, and was by no means wholly negative. Initially, many actually volunteered for war service. The relatively high wage scale provided a clear incentive to enlistment not merely as a means of meeting colonial tribute obligations such as poll tax, but as a means of purchasing

⁵² NAZ, HM7, Cu 1/1/2, 'Hodson to Boyd-Cunningham', 3 March 1915.

⁵³ NAZ, HM7, Cu/1/1/ 2, 'Hodson to Edwards', 15 February 1915.

⁵⁴ NAZ, HM7, Cu/1/1/2, 'Boyd-Cunningham to R Gordon', 10 May 1915.

⁵⁵ NAZ, HM7, Cu/1/1/2, 'Edwards to Boyd-Cunningham', 17 June 1915.

'luxury' goods with the surplus cash.⁵⁶ Thus, one Ngoni veteran remembered the response of some men in his village, 'They were happy because they were going to work and were going to be paid.'⁵⁷ Such financial incentives even attracted a few mission teachers. At St Paul's Anglican Church, Fort Jameson, one missionary scribbled in his log book: 'Fined a teacher, no school, earning money as *tenga-tenga* (war carriers).'⁵⁸ Furthermore, until the May 1916 offensive, carrying distances remained relatively short and were conducted along established routes in conditions akin to peacetime carrier work. During early wartime, therefore, Company officials were surprised by the enthusiastic response to labour calls in some areas. At Abercorn, an official noted the keen response to early war carrier work,⁵⁹ and likewise at Mporokoso.⁶⁰

Where resistance occurred in villages to early labour levies, volunteers would invariably come forward. As one Ngoni eyewitness recalled, 'Some were willing, those who joined freely, but some were forced'.⁶¹ Among the Tumbuka 'some were forced... those who were a bit young and those who were old enough at the normal stage of things (able-bodied) were volunteers'.⁶²

In consideration of overall response to war labour demands, moreover, it is possible, as in peacetime, to broadly differentiate between those tribal polities more decisively integrated into the colonial labour system by the time of the outbreak of war and others who had retained a degree of independence for political or economic reasons, and, consequently, had remained on the periphery.

⁵⁶ For numerous examples of district war-carrier wage rates, see, NAZ, File ZA 1/9/27/10, Carrier wages averaged 10s 0d a month rising as high as 17s 6d for elite first-line porters, while at least £1 0s 0d could be earned as *askari*. In some districts the much-revered calico cloth was issued as partial payment or as bonus, e.g. Serenje sub-district, where men received six yards of calico and 5s 0d cash a month and boys 'carrying half loads' three yards of calico and 2s 6d cash. NAZ, ZA 1/9/27/10, 'D M Serenje to SNA', 21 July 1916.

⁵⁷ Interview, Fikizolo Jere, 16 May 1980.

⁵⁸ Lusaka Anglican Cathedral Archives (hereafter LACA), 'St Pauls Log Book, Ft Jameson', 15 February 1915.

⁵⁹ NAZ, ZA 7/1/2/9, 'Abercorn Annual Report 1914-15'

⁶⁰ NAZ, ZA 7/1/2/1, 'Mporokoso Annual Report 1914-15'. This was despite the fact that carriers had been paid on credit for the first two months as *boma* cash reserves had expired.

⁶¹ Interview, Fikizolo Jere, 16 May 1980.

⁶² Interview, Nathaniel Jabanda, 15 May 1980.

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The Ngoni and Bemba, for instance, responded more positively to war labour calls, even after the Northey offensive, than neighbouring peoples. This undoubtedly reflected their higher degree of assimilation into the pre-war labour economy.⁶³ Local missionaries thus strikingly observed the high degree of Bemba compliancy to war carrier levies:

Our negroes have lent themselves to these requisitions with a good spirit and have carried most it on their backs to Abercorn... One might have feared at first that these requisitions might finish up by awaking the warlike spirit of our Babembas; it has had no effect.⁶⁴

By contrast, peasant-producer areas, such as the Ila districts, of the north west, often skilful evaders of pre-war colonial labour demands, proved far less accommodating. At Serenje, one observer described Ila war carriers as 'the least fitted for carrier work' probably reflecting their relative lack of experience of this form of labour demand.⁶⁵ Similarly, at least one voluntary carrier recruiting tour proved disastrous when Ila recruits demanded 'a definite statement that they would not be taken right up to the war'.⁶⁶ Only thirty-two recruits were obtained for the Northern Rhodesia Police, even when Ila Police regulars were brought up from Livingstone 'for encouragement'.⁶⁷

Similarly, those tribal groups who had retained a degree of independence through the stubbornness of their resistance or the remoteness of their home areas, or both, generally proved recalcitrant recruits to the imperial cause. The Unga, Bisa and Batwa, inhabiting the Bangweulu swamp region, largely inaccessible until the inauguration of the 'water route', often proved elusive as carrier recruits. Thus one official reported that the early response to war labour and food demands had been 'good... except for the Watwa inhabiting the Bangweulu swamps'.⁶⁸ The remote southern Lunda and Kaonde areas also often maintained their pre-war intractability. In 1916, one Kasempa official admitted that war transport was, 'not... a very popular occupation'.⁶⁹ The long distances travelled to the war zone and the fear of involvement in actual hostilities were cited as the chief reasons, despite large bonus payments offered for the return trip to Broken Hill.

⁶³ See Andrew Roberts, *History of Zambia* (London: Homes and Meier, 1976), pp. 179-80.

⁶⁴ WFA, 'Petit Echo No. 25' October 1915.

⁶⁵ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3/7, 'Serenje Annual Report 1915-16'.

⁶⁶ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3/4, 'Namwala Annual Report 1915-16'.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3/8, 'Fort Rosebery Annual Report 1915-16'.

⁶⁹ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3/6, 'Kasempa Annual Report 1915-16'.

If there was any discernible turning-point in general attitudes to war labour recruitment, however, it was the 1916 Northey offensive which provided it. The offensive demanded not only the forcible recruitment of thousands more carriers, but also involved a rapid multiplication of carrying distances in hostile environments, with an associated deterioration of portage conditions. From May 1916 onwards, an irrevocable tide of resistance increasingly characterised African attitudes to military requisitions.

Such a deterioration largely reflected Company neglect of carrier service conditions, a neglect admitted to in one post-war report. Not without a pang of guilty conscience, J C C Coxhead, the Secretary for Native Affairs, recalled the inadequate protection afforded for long route marches in the extreme climates of German and Portuguese East Africa. As he explained, 'the work of the carrier is a very arduous one. There is the cold. Of course we gave each man a blanket whenever we could but some blankets were unprocurable'.⁷⁰

Food shortages aggravated the suffering and added to the growing disillusionment. 'Then there was sometimes lack of food', Coxhead admitted. 'A carrier may be carrying a load of food but he can't touch that, and very often the troops and carriers had to go short'⁷¹. Hunger, perhaps, represented the most potent memory of war survivors. One Chewa ex-carrier recalled, 'They had not sufficient food ... at times they had to go without food'.⁷² Another remembered that carriers 'had to face some troubles, hunger... people were short on the way'⁷³. The problem, usually the result of administrative blunders, received official confirmation. On the Lundazi to Fife route, for instance, during the first two months of 1916, 'war transport was very unpopular... owing to the conditions amounting to famine that prevailed on the road to Fife'. The situation was only remedied 'by sacrificing a sixth part of the native flour sent from Fort Jameson for the Northern Forces'. During that period 'considerable pressure',⁷⁴ had to be exerted to produce carriers. Lozi carriers engaged on the tortuously long route from Lealui to Ndola for deployment on the land section of

⁷⁰ LACA, Handwritten manuscript, 'J.C.C. Coxhead, "The Natives of Northern Rhodesia and the War"', May 1920. See also Malcolm Page, *Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), p 110, for the role of extreme cold in rapidly rising mortality rates, resulting in hundreds of cases of pneumonia and other respiratory ailments.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Interview, Njombolo Muvulu, 22 May 1980. See also Page, *Chiwaya War* pp, 109-113, for the impact of food shortages on Nyasa front-line carriers, which, in turn, encouraged 'pilfering of loads' to avoid starvation.

⁷³ Ndezemani Phiri, 22 May 1980.

⁷⁴ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3/4, 'Lundazi Annual Report 1915-16'.

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the 'water route', were less fortunate. Starving carriers frequently broke formation to raid standing green mealie crops along the route.⁷⁵ A 1918 report on the Ngoni response to carrier employment revealed that, although food allocated 'varied considerably with different gangs, many had complained that they 'were starved and a considerable shortage of rations experienced'.⁷⁶

The extreme, continuous strain formed another focus of grievance. One ex-carrier remembered that war carriers on his route were travelling 'six to eight miles a day, then spend a night, but not enough rest, no good rest'.⁷⁷ Ngoni complaints stressed that the work was 'very hard', that it was 'distant from their homes and people ... and ... that it lasts six months (which with the journey there and back is prolonged to eight or nine)'.⁷⁸ The continuous work was tellingly expressed in the words: 'There are no Sundays. They all complain that they have no time for rest'.⁷⁹ There is little doubt, too, that carriers were frequently overloaded beyond the standard 55 to 60 lbs. Indeed, officials had protested in peacetime about such malpractices.⁸⁰ In wartime, the urgency of demand made this inevitable.

There is little doubt, also, that deliberate ill-treatment of carriers occurred. The ruthless indifference shown by Belgian columns towards their carriers was notorious. Thus, an official observed how, on one occasion, meat shot by a Belgian column was distributed amongst themselves 'while their unfortunate carriers, who had to go

⁷⁵ J H Venning, 'Mwanawina III and the First World War', *Northern Rhodesia Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1959, p. 83.

⁷⁶ NAZ, KDG 1/1/1, 'E. H. L. Poole, Confidential Report', 29 May 1918. Desperate measures were resorted to alleviate the food crises. Private Walker of the Southern Rhodesian Column recalled frantically hunting game in East Africa to feed his starving *tenga-tenga*; 'Shot eland and dished out to boys' was the cryptic comment in his diary. Wright collection, 'Walker Diary'. Deney's Reitz, a member of the South African contingent in GEA, recalled, 'living under famine conditions'; 'we killed four giraffe by galloping alongside them and firing shot after shot, until the poor brutes rolled over dead, still the men and carriers required food and thus they were supplied', Deney's Reitz, *Trekking On* (London: Faber, 1933), pp. 132-141.

⁷⁷ Interview, Ndezemani Phiri, 22 May 1980.

⁷⁸ NAZ, KDG 1/1/1, 'E. H. L. Poole Confidential Report', 29 May 1918.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* For an extended discussion of specifically Ngoni response to war labour recruitment, see Rau, 'Mpeseni's Ngoni of Eastern Zambia 1870-1920', (PhD diss., University of California, 1974), pp. 356-68.

⁸⁰ TNA, CO 879/116. See 'Mwengwa Annual Report 1913-14, HC to SoS', 16 June 1915, and 'SoS to HC', 24 June 1915.

miles and return late last night fetching it, got no more than they could steal'.⁸¹ The official himself was forced to hunt to feed the 390 starving carriers.

The often liberal use of both the *chikote* and *sjambok* (rawhide whips) constituted a major source of resentment. Native Commissioner E. Lane-Poole reported this as, 'a very general complaint, though some gangs have been better treated than others'. Their treatment was 'harsher than they have been accustomed to and more talked about than any other hardship'.⁸² One official who accompanied Ngoni carriers northwards beyond Nyasaland later recalled the brutal treatment of carriers by Northey's troops, including a scathing indictment of Brigadier General Northey himself. He stressed:

What intense suffering mere thoughtlessness can produce and how supremely ignorant of all natives are all South Africans and most Central Africans, ... after hearing from General Northey's own lips how little interested he was in the welfare of his carriers, the admitted main-stay of his force, I was much surprised to see of his East African appointment.⁸³

Aware of these conditions, the Company authorities did deploy two Native Commissioners to supervise Northey's carriers but, as Coxhead again admitted: 'to look after their welfare it would have taken many more than that'.⁸⁴ Coxhead commented on the helpless alienation experienced by carriers:

There was no one near them who understood them and could talk their language ... their immediate white superiors were in so many cases, men from the south, who are absolutely unsympathetic as far as the native is concerned – men who think that the native was intended by nature to be a beast of burden only.⁸⁵

The result of such neglect, deliberate or otherwise, was reflected in the rapidly escalating carrier mortality rate. Statistics for specific districts are virtually non-existent. Individual *boma* officials were, perhaps, reluctant to publicise them. A Mweru-Luapula report, however, provided a rare set of figures. It was observed that, 'though no details are given by Fort Rosebery and Chienji, this has been done at Kawambwa and the rate is rising'.⁸⁶ The Kawambwa figures showed that the

⁸¹ WP, WHL, 'Williams to Mother', 14 November 1915.

⁸² NAZ, KDG 1/1/1, 'E .H. L Poole Confidential Report', 29 May 1918.

⁸³ LACA, 'T.F. Sandford to Bishop A. May', 3 December 1921.

⁸⁴ LACA, 'Coxhead, "The Natives... War"', May 1920.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ NAZ, BS3/416, 'Mweru-Luapula Annual Report', 1917-18.

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percentage of deaths had doubled from 1.56% for the period May 1916 to June 1916 to 3.06% for the period May-June 1917.⁸⁷ The District Commissioner commented that although these figures, 'may not be considered particularly high... the death rate amongst porters sent up between August and November last is bound to be higher by the time all are back'.⁸⁸ Coxhead, himself, hinted darkly at the potential size of the final death toll. The death rate was large... I haven't figures but... what with the cold and lack of food there was a good deal of sickness, and it is very difficult to look after the physical welfare of thousands of natives when they are spread over hundreds of miles.⁸⁹ From the military perspective as early as May 1916, barely a month into the Northey offensive, huge losses of first line porters (many of them Bemba and Ngoni) were being observed: 'Grand country but killing work marching. Bitterly cold. Long after sunset before we made camp. Struggling through deep *dongas* with the guns. Everyone dead beat. The *tenga* boys dropping out all along the line. Many of them made their last journey this time'.

Certainly BSAC official figures of 2,300 or 4.1% carrier dead⁹⁰ for the whole of the war period were patently unrealistic. From the Fort Jameson sub-district alone an estimated 1,000 dead from the Ngoni tribe alone officially perished,⁹¹ nearly fifty per cent of that national total. This latter figure was obtained from a probable 10-12,000 Ngoni who served and it is therefore highly likely that the total national death toll was as high as ten per cent, i.e. 10-15,000 deaths out of the earlier estimated 100 to

⁸⁷ NAZ, BS3/416, 'Kawambwa Annual Report', 1917-18.

⁸⁸ NAZ, BS3/416, 'Mweru-Luapula Annual Report'; In view of the rapidly deteriorating service conditions during the subsequent period of June 1917 to November 1918, the last recorded figure of 3.06 per cent may well have doubled to even tripled. Indeed, one post-war report from Lundazi recorded a local war carrier mortality rate of nearly 5.4 per cent or 7.2 per cent when missing porters were included. See NAZ, ZA 7/1/4/7, 'Lundazi Annual Report, 1919-20'.

⁸⁹ LACA, 'Coxhead, "The Natives... War"', May 1920.

⁹⁰ C F Hodges, 'African Manpower Statistics for the British Forces in East Africa 1914-18,' *Journal of African History*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1978), p. 116, and Wallace, 'Northern Rhodesia... Last Phase', p. 309.

⁹¹ NAZ, BS3/266, 'D C Fort Jameson to SNA', 27 January 1921. The Ngoni carrier death toll may have been considerably higher than this official figure. A post-war report listed 'native casualties on military transport in the German East African campaign' as one major reason for the dramatic decline of the Ngoni male population by a total of 1,650 adults during the period 1918-21. NAZ, Misc. Report, Shelf 16-17, Box 102, 'E. Lane-Poole, Report on Ngoni Reserve Areas, 1922', pp. 8-9.

150,000 carriers recruited from all districts of Northern Rhodesia. Certainly a figure of ten per cent is comparable to estimates for parts of British East Africa.⁹²

A tragically high death rate is strongly suggested by surviving mission records. The paucity of the eternally cost-conscious BSAC medical arrangements meant that the care of the sick and dying *tenga-tenga* largely devolved upon the north-east mission stations. Indeed, missionaries had reported war carrier deaths on the road as early as January 1915. At Kapatu Mission, for instance, the death of two military porters was reported that month, 'abandoned by their companions'. One was buried by a catechist, 'the other must have been the prey of hyenas and vultures'.⁹³ By late 1917, such was the heavy death toll that the Government was forced to use most of the mission stations as medical centres, and set up primitive hospitals on the north-east border. The volunteer White Fathers, deployed to Fife military hospital and tending mostly returning first-line porters, precisely recorded the heavy influx of sick carriers during just the first half of 1918. Their extremely rare statistics again challenged official records and stunningly revealed that in January, 241 sick war carriers were admitted, in February, 163, in March, 238, in April, 190, in May, 161, and in June, the astonishingly high figure of 324.⁹⁴ It was accordingly observed: 'Many of these poor blacks come to us completely exhausted, and it wasn't long before they died of dysentery or pneumonia. Since the beginning of the war we have buried 700 of them'.⁹⁵ Such figures omitted the hundreds who perished on the roads all over German and Portuguese Africa as Northey's columns desperately tried to pin down the German forces led by the elusive Von Lettow-Vorbeck. One veteran survivor recalled the heavy death rate amongst first-line military porters. He had seen, 'many men die' and they had 'to bury them on the road, just a matter of a heap of bushes and off they go'.⁹⁶ Death rates could be high even amongst war carriers employed along *internal* lines of communication. 'Large numbers' of Lozi second-line carriers died from pneumonia and dysentery on the Lealui to Broken Hill route, probably as a result of being packed together on the Kalomo to Broken Hill train.

The rising mortality rate naturally represented the most potent deterrent to war carrier service. 'They were in fear... of the name of war. They had to think and say, if I go this way I will die' observed one veteran.⁹⁷ The BSAC's paltry death gratuity of

⁹² Hodges, 'African Manpower Statistics...', pp 115-16. See Paice, *Tip and Run*, pp. 278-290, for more details on carrier conditions, numbers and mortality rates in the GEA campaign as a whole.

⁹³ WFA, 'Kapatu, MD', 15 January 1915.

⁹⁴ WFA, '*Petit Echo*, No. 61', November 1918.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Interview, Ndezemani Phiri, 16 May 1980.

⁹⁷ Interview, Njombolo Mvulu, 22 May 1980.

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two pounds for relatives of dead carriers probably only increased the odium attached to military portage.

Desertion emerged as the most widespread form of evasion. As government recruiters approached, significant numbers of young males would disappear into the surrounding bush. 'Some were running in the bush, because they knew they were going to die, just because they went to war', confirmed one Chewa veteran.⁹⁸

It was a strategy which severely disrupted military operations. As early as March 1915. C. Boyd-Cunningham reported from Saisi post that desertion had made it, 'impossible to get any carriers here local now and also no food'.⁹⁹ He stressed rather unrealistically; 'Carriers... are to be a source of trouble before long unless we can devise some other means of transport.'¹⁰⁰

Deaths of *tenga tenga* in action, although less common, virtually guaranteed mass desertion. 'The first shot fired', wrote Boyd-Cunningham, 'would see the disappearance into the long grass of the whole of the carrier train and a mile of dumped rations and ammunition boxes strewn in one long line on a narrow native path.'¹⁰¹ The death of five carriers in one border skirmish, was, in the words of one border commander, 'to be quietly regretted... (I) fear there may be trouble to get them to go out in future ...one cannot blame the poor devils'.¹⁰² Boyd-Cunningham's desperate solution of employing armed messengers with carrier convoys was however ridiculed, as, 'nothing will prevent these natives bolting if there is any shooting.'¹⁰³

Even amongst the generally more reliable Bemba villages, a growing negative response to war carrier levies became evident after the mass call-ups of the Northey offensive. In July 1916, at Ipusukilo mission, it was recorded that 'although voluntary enlistment had been called for, it has not experienced great enthusiasm.'¹⁰⁴ Around Chilubula mission, *boma* messengers were seen to 'scour the villages... and the

⁹⁸ Interview, Ndezemani Phiri, 26 May 1980. Compare death gratuities paid in Nyasaland ranging from £3 for '*tenga-tenga*' to £24 for a KAR NCO, Page, *Chiyawa War*, p. 131.

⁹⁹ NAZ, HM7 Cu.1/1/2, 'Boyd- Cunningham to Hodson', 13 March 1915.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ NAZ, HM7, Cu.1/1/2, 'Boyd-Cunningham, "Notes on the North-east Border and German East African Campaign"', undated (1916?), Handwritten manuscript.

¹⁰² NAZ, HM7 Cu. 1/1/2, 'Hodson to Boyd-Cunningham', 14 May 1915.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ WFA, 'Ipusukilo MD', 3 July 1916.

mitanda (outlying garden, huts/settlement) in order to recruit by guile some male and female carriers. They run away before them as from a lion'.¹⁰⁵

Employment on European farms, despite the relatively low wages paid, provided a welcome more permanent refuge from war labour levies. Around Fort Jameson, for instance, the liberal 'ticket system' by virtue of which the normal twenty-eight to thirty day commitment could be spread over several months, provided a popular means of evasion. In 1918, E Lane-Poole observed that the liberal use of the *chikote* (whip) on war carriers 'no doubt act as a deterrent to the young man coming forward and sent him to the farm instead'.¹⁰⁶

Even mine work, despite the attendant dangers, proved a popular long-term means of avoiding the hated war carrier work. From the north-eastern districts, in particular, increasingly large numbers of able-bodied males flocked to the Katanga and Southern Rhodesian mines, rather than engage on war service, a movement accelerated by the higher wages offered. At Chilonga, for instance, it was reported that, of the 2,580 Christians registered, while most of the men had been recruited for the military for ten months, 'others, 137 of them, have left for the Congo, maybe for the Transvaal, to look for their fortunes or flown from the fatigue parties of war'.¹⁰⁷

A less secure refuge, perhaps, was provided by participation in essential or 'favoured industries', such as salt-workings, where labourers were generally exempted from carrier work. At Chilonga, near the Mpika salt pans, the White Fathers observed an early clampdown on this strategy by the local *boma*. 'Some messengers have gone to Chibwa and have taken away to the *boma* all those who were working at the salt without a permit'. 'Most of them', the missionaries noted, 'have been freed, the others are Khaki'.¹⁰⁸

Adherence to missions or enrolment as mission workers represented a further strategy or evasion. Thus at Chilonga, in 1918, the White Fathers noted with surprise, 'There is a lot of people for our small Chilonga, above all in this time of war

¹⁰⁵ WFA, 'Chilubula MD', 28 March 1916

¹⁰⁶ NAZ, KDG 1/1/1, 'E Lane-Poole Confidential Report', 29 May 1918. For further examples of wartime African evasion in Central Africa, see also Page, *Chiwaya War*, chapters 4 and 5, pp. 99-195, and *Mpeseni's Ngoni*, pp. 356-68.

¹⁰⁷ WFA, 'Chilonga Mission Report Annual 1917-18'. For other examples of the growing illegal labour exodus, see WFA, 'Lubwe MD', 3 March 1916, and 'Chibote MD', 23 September 1918.

¹⁰⁸ WFA, 'Chilonga MD', 16 October 1914.

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and government recruitment'.¹⁰⁹ Returning carriers noticeably flocked to the missions, 'eager to come and re-immense themselves at the mission'.¹¹⁰

For some, even service in the regular army was preferable to military portage. Enrolment as *askari* offered superior social status and serving conditions. Thus five men from Chilonga mission village 'in order to escape the forced labour of carrying, to which they have been called, ... enlisted in the army'.¹¹¹ Individual acts of defiance were also often recorded. Thus at Chilubi in February 1916, a messenger arrived 'wounded in the arm with a knife blow', inflicted by a local swamp inhabitant 'refusing to march'. 'Not accommodating our Babisa', the local missionary wryly commented.¹¹²

Descent to Crisis

The Northey Offensive and the Strain of 'Total War' upon Indigenous Authority

With the mass manpower and food levies of 1916 and 1917, those actively collaborationist chiefs, and especially headmen as primary recruiters, became increasingly identified by their peoples with a purely exploitative role. Again, the consequences for the chiefly position appears to have been most severe within acephalous or chief-less societies of the north-west, which also enjoyed a strong and successful peasant base. Tensions between Ila peasant cultivators and their *boma*-appointed chiefs were frequently remarked upon. 'Supplying carriers is the greatest strain on their authority', wrote one Namwala official, 'as the work of carrying ... is extremely unpopular among their people. Astonishingly, cases were recorded in which Ila 'chiefs' had 'had to pay their people to go',¹¹³ a succinct comment on the weakness of their authoritarian base. In the hard-pressed far north-east war zone, where 'compulsory labour for war purposes' was 'distasteful ... to the ordinary native', it was observed: 'In this direction all chiefs have personally exerted themselves to keep up the supply of manpower ... such zeal in the interests of the Government does not tend to increase their popularity amongst the rank and file'.¹¹⁴ In some recruiting areas, particularly the north-east border, chiefs and headmen were openly vilified as puppets of the *boma*.

Discontent was fuelled by the often distinct lack of rewards dispensed for these extraordinary wartime services. Under colonial rule the onus for this former major chiefly function seems to have devolved upon the *boma*. Ngoni and Chewa veterans,

¹⁰⁹ WFA, 'Chilonga MD', 16 October 1914.

¹¹⁰ WFA, 'Petit Echo, No. 44', May 1917.

¹¹¹ WFA, 'Chilonga MD', 11 June 1917.

¹¹² WFA, 'Chilubi MD', 19 February 1916.

¹¹³ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3/5, 'Namwala Annual Report 1915-16'.

¹¹⁴ TNA, CO 417/616, 'Chienji Annual Report 1917-18'.

for instance, recall that wartime rewards were invariably given to chiefs but rarely redistributed below elderly retainers.¹¹⁵ Beyond bonus rates directly paid for certain arduous carrier routes later in the war, *boma* officials provided no wartime rewards for the 'common people'. This undoubtedly encouraged the recorded popular antagonism in some areas towards both traditional elites and the *boma*, the former for their exposed purely exploitative and, sometimes openly repressive role.

In this respect, a most significant piece of documentary evidence was an extremely abusive letter addressed to Mpeseni, the paramount chief of the Ngoni, violently attacking him for his prominent role in war carrier recruitment. Mpeseni and fellow Ngoni chiefs had played an unusually direct and personal role in war carrier levies, particularly the call-up of Ngoni males for first-line portage in early 1917. Written in late 1917 and riddled with obscenities, the anonymous author accused Mpeseni of direct culpability for war carrier deaths; 'and the men have all finished (dead)... and you must bear many children on account of these men you caught', and even of co-habitation with wives of absent police recruits. 'God knows', the author accused him, 'and the blood of these men who have died in the war will cry'. Mpeseni's alleged servility to the colonial authorities and his *boma* war payments were portrayed in a particularly vivid and vitriolic manner, culminating in a blunt accusation of the abject betrayal of his people. 'Does you not know Judas', the author exclaimed; 'How did he do? And how he died? Judas gave Jesus because of his loving the money – oh you Judas... you are a very bad chief indeed'.¹¹⁶

The extreme response of the colonial authorities to this semi-illiterate letter, described as 'constituting about as grave an insult as any native could offer his chief',¹¹⁷ was indicative of the strength of *boma* support for, and reliance upon, chiefly authority in wartime. Significantly, the letter was legally identified as 'undoubtedly an offence under Proclamation 8/1916' while it could, 'hardly be called an offence under common law',¹¹⁸ underlining the vital importance of the former legislation as a prop for the chiefs and as an additional instrument of coercion during the war years. To protect this principal collaborator, an official additionally stressed that 'specifically because... Chief Mpeseni has been insulted in this way on account of his efforts to raise military porters... every endeavour should be made to trace the writer'.¹¹⁹ The

¹¹⁵ Interviews: Sgt. Kamzimbi Mwanza, 22 May 1980, and Fikizolo Jere, 16 May 1980.

¹¹⁶ NAZ, KDG I/1/I, 'Anon. to Chief Mpeseni', undated 1917 (Translation).

¹¹⁷ NAZ, KDG I/1/I, 'NC to DM, East Luangwa', 4 January 1918.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* Paralleling this was a major crackdown by the colonial authorities on 'rogue' elements of African mission-educated elites in the same area who were also identified with anti-war activity and as vilifiers of both the Chiefs and the *boma*. Many were forcibly conscripted into the carrier corps. For a voluminous discussion of this, 149

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matter was even referred to the Criminal Investigation Department of Southern Rhodesia.

Wartime Crime and Punishment: the Link to Social Unrest and Protest

The later war years also witnessed a distinctive rise of the officially recorded crime rate in many districts. The highest crime rates were recorded in the vicinity of major war carrier and food supply depots, and along principal war transport routes. Accordingly, a report by Justice Beaufort justified the 'comparatively large number of whippings' carried out at Kasama from June to December 1916. 'It must be remembered', he asserted,

that Kasama was the chief base of military supply to and from which many thousands of strangers came and went as police, carriers etc., and, while the amount of crime thereby became unusually large, the necessity for prompt punishment and the impossibility of imprisoning so many in wartime is apparent.

For an increasingly desperate Administration, deterrence of this sort was considered essential. Beaufort stressed 'I am quite satisfied that the sentences at Kasama were inevitable'.¹²⁰

Other war carrier bases recorded a substantial proliferation of crime. At Serenje 'most of the petty offences were in connection with War Transport'. Among these were sixty-eight in one gang 'who pleaded guilty to a breach of the peace at a ration depot and paid a slight penalty'.¹²¹ Similarly, at Kawambwa, it was reported in March 1917 that 'larceny seems to be on the increase', and a few 'bad assault cases' were also recorded.¹²² Some of the assault cases involved tribal faction fights, a direct result of service in carrier formations. Thus one large *mulandu* at Chief Kasoma's village adjacent to the 'water route', culminating in a boy's manslaughter, was described as 'an affray brought about principally by the canoe boys challenging some of the villagers to a fight'.¹²³ More significantly, a considerable number of theft cases

see Yorke, *Northern Rhodesia and the First World War*, Chapter 3, and especially, Yorke, 'The Spectre of a Second Chilembwe: Government, Missions and Social Control in Wartime Northern Rhodesia, 1914-18', *Journal of African History*, vol. 13, no. 3 (1990).

¹²⁰ TNA, CO. 417/587, 'L P Beaufort; Report on whipping sentences in Northern Rhodesia for half year ending December 31st 1916', 12 April 1917. (Case records of whipping sentences enclosed).

¹²¹ NAZ, ZA 7/1/3/7, 'Serenje Annual Report 1915-16'.

¹²² TNA, CO 417/603, 'Kawambwa Annual Report 1916-17'.

¹²³ NAZ, KTA 1/1/1, 'AM Ft. Rosebery to Goodall', 26 June 1916.

involved stealing from food depots, and crime, like desertion, must be seen as yet another potent form of protest against war carrier service conditions, in which there were frequent ration shortages resulting in starvation.¹²⁴

After the Northey offensive, which removed most regular police from the Territory and left behind an increasingly enfeebled white administration, the control of crime became extremely difficult if not impossible. Crime waves erupted along the sparsely supervised carrier routes. Along the Ndola-Kabunda land route, for instance, crime raged virtually unchecked; the 'proper and effective control of the carriers on the road' becoming 'a matter of some difficulty'. The problem was accentuated because, after the first twelve miles, the route crossed the Congo pedicle, and therefore lay outside British jurisdiction 'a fact which the less disciplined of the natives employed (e.g. the Baila)', had 'taken advantage'.

The most prevalent form of 'highway crime' was undoubtedly that of large-scale thefts from carrier loads, particularly along the new water route. Thus Wallace angrily reported home to 'London Wall' the 'great deal of pilfering... by the swampy natives who have not yet forgotten their professional thieving and have been too cunning for much of the stealing to be traced to them'.¹²⁵

This problem was by no means confined to the north-eastern war zone. From 1916 to 1918, at a time of acute famine and consequent high social stress in many north-western districts, white farmers reported large scale theft of their growing crops.

Ground-Level Control Crises: the Drift to Government Repression

By late 1916, however, the expanding problems of war labour recruitment and control precipitated actions which bordered upon naked repression. Anxious to meet urgent military imperatives, over-burdened, under-manned, and often isolated Company officials increasingly resorted to punitive measures well outside even the already wide parameters of existing colonial law.

¹²⁴ For a similar interpretation of "crime" as a 'rational and conscious attempt to avoid exploitation', in this case by African workers within Southern Rhodesian mining compounds, see van Onselen, *Chibaro*, pp. 239-240.

¹²⁵ TNA, CO 417/597, 'Wallace to BSAC', 15 January 1917. For a recollection by a former 'water route' official of the serious disruption to war carrier supplies caused by such large-scale pilfering as well as the Government organisation of the route, see G Lobb, 'The Transport Dept at Chiwutuwutu 1914-18', *Northern Rhodesia Journal*, vol. 3, no. 3, (1957), p. 197.

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Perhaps not surprisingly one of the worst example of this occurred in the Bangweulu swamp region where thousands of Bisa, Unga and Batwa carriers and paddlers had been forcibly recruited for service on the 'water route'.

In July 1916, at the height of the Northey offensive into German East Africa, H. B. Goodall, the Native Commissioner for the new war carrier base at Nsumbu Island, became directly implicated in several acts of oppression concerning his illegal orders issued to several *boma* messengers and *capitaos* (overseers) to arrest the wives of large numbers of men who had deserted several villages under a Chief Mwanambulu in order to evade war carrier service. The result was a virtual reign of terror. The arrested women were subjected not only to 'false imprisonment' but also to rape, torture and serious assault. The serious implications for the credibility of colonial authority compelled a full-scale enquiry for which Goodall was forced to admit to his initial responsibility and for which he was severely reprimanded.

Both the leading *capitao* and the *boma* messenger were severely punished for their brutal crimes and the High Court recommended substantial compensation for the victims.¹²⁶ This incident represented only one extreme example of many patently illegal and repressive wartime actions which often directly involved administering Company officials. They were understandably rarely publicised and often suppressed or concealed from the supervising imperial authorities and for these reasons, there is no record of any similar politically embarrassing incident being referred as far as the High Court in Livingstone. Private correspondence, however, does suggest that this was possibly the tip of an iceberg and that similar malpractices were prevalent elsewhere. In Fife sub-district, for instance, it was revealed that African labour was commandeered for war service 'at the end of a rope', a practice disturbingly reminiscent of pre-colonial slave-trading practices.¹²⁷

The Limits of Coercion: Conflict Between the Civil and Military Authorities

Despite evidence of acts of oppression there were, nevertheless, as the Goodall case itself demonstrated, obvious limits to the exercise of coercion, which, on a mass indiscriminate scale, and especially in the absence of substantial security forces, could ultimately threaten the survival of the colonial state itself. In cases where such a potentially explosive situation arose the civil authorities were forced to exercise restraint. By stark contrast however, the external military authorities clearly

¹²⁶ NAZ, KTAS 1/2/1, 'L P Beaufort, Minutes', 20 November 1916. Toroba, the main culprit received twenty-four lashes and six months' imprisonment with hard labour, Muwanga, the lesser sentence of three months' imprisonment. Women 'imprisoned, starved and ill-treated' and husbands of raped women were awarded 5s 0d compensation.

¹²⁷ NAZ, ZA 1/10, 'Acting DC to SLA', 11 July 1919.

recognised no such political limitations; with few exceptions their sole and paramount consideration was the securing of a rapid imperial victory. After the Northey offensive into German East Africa the potential for major conflict between the two was evident and, in October 1916, one occurred as a bitter row erupted over the alleged widespread military abuse of the terms of African war carrier contracts and of their service conditions.

The row was sparked off by Colonel Murray, one of Northey's key column commanders, who, claiming that Northern Rhodesian carriers were contracted to serve the duration of the war, angrily complained of large-scale desertion. Returning deserters, he claimed, had been, 'paid off and... allowed to return to their villages without any action being taken against them'. Murray demanded of the civil authorities that all deserters should be, 'immediately arrested' and returned to the column to face Court Martial and punishment'.¹²⁸ The BSAC Administration was forced to intervene but, in a letter to Wallace, the Administrator, C R B Draper, the Tanganyika District Commissioner, angrily refuted the accusation. He dismissed outright Murray's contention that carriers had been contracted for unlimited service. 'Neither should it ever be advanced', he retorted, 'that first line porters were engaged for six months or the end of the war'.¹²⁹

In direct communication with Colonel Murray, Draper cited five sample cases of men enlisted for two to three months only, but, nevertheless, forcibly absorbed into the advancing column culminating in their desertion. Although he had punished these men, Draper stressed that he did, 'not consider that they should have been treated as deserters'. They were just the tip of the iceberg. Draper further confirmed: 'there is reason to believe that many second line porters have been engaged on first line work', which 'constituted a breach of contract'. In respect of the rapidly deteriorating service conditions, Draper further bitterly complained to Murray about his persistent failure to report carrier mortalities and missing men. Noting ominously the notification of only fourteen deaths to date Draper expressed surprise as 'with such a large number of them in the field one would expect to casualties to be greater'. The cause of death, he continued, needed to be 'at once reported', as knowledge of the cause was, 'important for many reasons e.g. harsh treatment at the hands of an individual, which would at once breed discontent'.¹³⁰

In late October 1916, Draper further telegraphed Wallace to warn him of the dangerous implications for colonial authority of the continued military abuse of war carrier contracts. He protested:

¹²⁸ NAZ, BS3/110, 'Col Murray to Defence, Salisbury', 6 October 1916.

¹²⁹ NAZ, BS3/110, 'D R B Draper to Admr', 19 October 1916.

¹³⁰ NAZ, BS3/110, 'Draper to Col Murray', 18 October 1916.

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Whilst appreciating difficulties and [the] possible most serious consequences should a really large body desert together, [I] am at a loss to see how such men can be legally or with justice punished for running away having duly fulfilled their agreement. Indeed, there had been no complaints from these men except that we have finished our time, are tired, and must make gardens.¹³¹

Nevertheless, by December 1916, the problem had seriously escalated. Draper reported to Brigadier-General Northey, for instance, the return of one batch of seventy military porters 'having left the Column without permission'. Again, he robustly defended their action; it was 'a clear breach of faith that these men were not discharged ... their contract time having long expired'.¹³² Predictably, Northey maintained uncompromising support for his subordinate commanders. Reporting the desertion of a further 250 porters from Murray's Column, having learned that they are not to be punished for doing so, Northey stressed: 'If this campaign is to continue to successful termination every man who leaves [the] column without certificate of release... must be treated by you as a deserter. Even if only enlisted for [a] certain period they must remain with [the] column till relieved'.¹³³

In his reply, Draper, while obliged to conform to Northey's wishes, expressed anathema for his sordid task. 'I must place on record that I consider my action legally wrong and only warranted by exceptional circumstances which have unfortunately arisen'. He nevertheless expressed the hope that some 1,550 time-expired war carriers would be repatriated, that 324 missing Fife carriers from Colonel Rodger's column could be accounted for and deprecated the failure to provide blankets for many gangs. Draper concluded by warning of the potentially devastating consequences of all this for the survival of white authority:

The great fear which presents itself, he warned, 'is the breach of faith. Our natives look to the Administration officials to always keep their word. If the

¹³¹ NAZ, BS3/110, 'Telegram Draper to Wallace', 28 October 1916, This 'crisis of official integrity' was strikingly and tragically underlined when it was also revealed that many 'deserters' had innocently reported back to their home *bomas* believing that their contracts had legally expired, only to be summarily punished by hitherto trusted company officials. NAZ, BS3/110, H C Marshall, 'Memorandum re Military Porters on the Northern Border' (11 April 1916 to 31 January 1917) 2 February 1917.

¹³² NAZ, BS3/110, 'Telegram Draper to Northey', 4 December 1916.

¹³³ NAZ, BS3/110, 'Telegram Northey to Draper', 6 December 1916.

civil authorities fail or appear to fail in this respect, former confidence in our integrity is severely shaken. We cannot afford to lose their trust'.¹³⁴

This profound "crisis of colonial credibility" was soon communicated by Administrator Wallace to his superiors in London.¹³⁵ Such was the extreme concern there that a protest letter was sent by the Board of Directors directly to the Colonial Office. It stressed 'the very great importance of adhering strictly to the terms of contracts made to natives', demonstrating their deeply-held fears of social unrest. The BSAC Directors further demanded that a warning be addressed to Northey via the War Office. Their letter concluded:

The Secretary of State will undoubtedly agree that the native population must be handled with great care, especially if it is necessary to resort to a measure of compulsion in order to keep up the supply of carriers.¹³⁶

The Colonial Office response again clearly reflected their acute wartime dilemma with officials torn between enforcing 'Trust' imperatives or principles, so clearly threatened by issues of African welfare such as breaches of carrier contracts and carrier ill-treatment, and, on the other hand, meeting the urgent requirement of an imperial victory which itself dictated the uninterrupted supply of war carriers. One official thus reflected upon the pre-war 'trouble' over Boundary Commission work where carriers had been similarly 'kept beyond the terms of their contract (a scandal which had elicited strong imperial protest and intervention), describing it as an issue upon which 'it is necessary to be particular'.¹³⁷ He agreed that a warning be addressed to Northey. A second official was, however, more cautious, calling for 'War Office concurrence first'.¹³⁸ More senior officials, however, placed more onus on support for military operations. W C Bottomley thus ruled: 'I think we must make it clear that we accept his [Northey's] view that the carriers must remain till relieved'.¹³⁹ The final draft despatch to the War Office thus attempted an ambiguously worded compromise, but one which clearly capitulated to the military viewpoint. The Colonial Secretary accordingly felt

bound to support the Company's view as to the importance of adhering as strictly as possible to the terms of agreement made with natives, though he realises that it will generally be necessary for the carriers to remain until they

¹³⁴ NAZ, BS3/110, 'Draper to Northey', 9 December 1916.

¹³⁵ NAZ, BS3/110, 'Wallace to BSAC', 12 February 1917.

¹³⁶ TNA, CO 417/597, 'BSAC to USoS', 5 April 1917.

¹³⁷ TNA, CO 417/597, 'H. N. Tait, Minute', 9 April 1917.

¹³⁸ TNA, CO 417/597, 'C. T. Davis, Minute', 11 April 1917.

¹³⁹ TNA, CO 417/597, 'W. C. Bottomley, Minute', 11 April 1917.

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can be relieved, and, is prepared to accept the view expressed by General Northey... that they must so remain, though strong effort will be made to release old carriers as soon as reliefs arrive.¹⁴⁰

The Political Repercussions of the Makombe Rising of 1917

On 2 April 1917, a terse telegram told London Wall of a major insurrection in the Barue region of neighbouring Portuguese East Africa. A crucial half-sentence in the despatch, that the rebellion was 'probably due to commandeering of natives by Portuguese authorities for military service,'¹⁴¹ brought home the potentially disastrous political consequences the rebellion might have for the Company's own tenuous control.¹⁴² At his London Wall Street headquarters, Director D O Malcolm immediately confided to the Colonial Office, with masterly understatement, that 'one doesn't like native risings in one's neighbour's territory'. An official Company despatch about the crucial importance of honouring war carrier contracts more accurately represented the fears of 'London Wall'. It agreed that the rising was the direct result of the 'commandeering of natives... for military service' and stressed that it was 'vitaly important to avoid the risk of similar trouble in Rhodesia'.¹⁴³ The news was accompanied by a stark warning from Wallace:

All district officials are doing all they can but the number of natives is not inexhaustible and all those whose duty it is to press them to work have to watch carefully that their patience shows less sign of exhaustion than their numbers.¹⁴⁴

Crisis

The Colonial Office Carrier Recruitment Ban, the German Invasion and Watch Tower

In the wake of the Makombe Rising, and with evidence of a growing internal labour and food crisis (the latter caused by the war-inspired large-scale male absenteeism from their *mitanda* (fields/gardens) and resultant widespread famine), the Livingstone

¹⁴⁰ TNA, CO 417/597, 'H. Lambert to Secretary WO', 16 April 1917.

¹⁴¹ TNA, CO 417/597, 'Telegram Chaplin to BSAC', 2 April 1917.

¹⁴² For the causes, organisation, aims and results of the Makombe rebellion see particularly, T O Ranger, 'Revolt in Portuguese East Africa; The Makombe Rising of 1917' in K. Kirkwood (ed.), *African Affairs No. 2*, (London: Chatto & Windus, St Anthony Papers No. 15, 1963), pp. 54-80. See also A F & B Isaacman, *Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique: Anti-Colonial Activity in the Zambesi Valley, 1850-1921* (London: Crooms Helm, 1977), pp. 156-85. Both sources confirm contemporary fears that rebel grievances regarding Portuguese war labour impressment policies played a major role in the initial outbreak of the Rising.

¹⁴³ TNA, CO. 417/596, 'BSAC to USOS', 9 April 1917.

¹⁴⁴ NAZ, BS3/110, 'Admr to BSAC', 17 April 1917.

executive launched, in October 1917, a major political initiative, designed to restore administrative control. In despatches, both to the BSAC headquarters at London Wall Street, London, and the Colonial Office, Wallace stressed the urgent need to reduce African discontent and meet future and existing military imperatives through a grand strategy of rewards and bonuses for war services, with compensation for war losses. The carrier pressure, he warned, was 'not going to be lessened for a long time'. In order to keep up the supply, he thought it would now be necessary to make some promise of help (including thousands of hoes and replacement livestock) when the campaign is over 'in re-establishing the conditions that existed before the War'.¹⁴⁵ The limits of coercion had been reached in at least one district, Serenje, where it was considered impossible to recruit a larger number of carriers 'without greater pressure than it was deemed advisable to use'.¹⁴⁶ Wallace urgently called for 'compensation ... for cattle lost and for villages destroyed'.¹⁴⁷ Increases in wages were also necessary for 'those natives who are called up for the third or fourth time' and to combat considerable price inflation.¹⁴⁸ It was an initiative which soon collapsed in the face of the War Office and Treasury refusal to supply any funding. Fearing imminent rebellion, an enraged Colonial Office retaliated by banning, in late September 1918, the use of compulsion for war carrier recruitment, effectively suspending Northern Rhodesia's role in the imperial war effort.

Above all, within five weeks, both the ban and the relief expenditure controversy were to achieve a significance far beyond the wildest imagination of either the Colonial or War Offices as, on 10 October 1918, German forces led by von Lettow-Vorbeck unexpectedly and devastatingly launched a major incursion into Northern Rhodesian territory, in turn fuelling the rise of an intrinsically anti-war African politico-religious 'Watch Tower' movement which encompassed many ex-carriers and *askari* within its ranks and which also directly confronted British colonial authority. The war ended in a full crisis of colonial control exacerbated by the devastating impact of the Spanish influenza virus which effectively paralysed military activities – as German forces penetrated 200 miles into Northern Rhodesia reaching Kasama, fermenting massive chaos and disorder and causing the evacuation of several government *bomas*, the panic stricken Administrator, Wallace, confessed to the Salisbury military authorities that there were now 'no troops available owing to

¹⁴⁵ TNA, CO. 417/600, 'Wallace to BSAC', 2 October 1918. For the devastating impact of wartime large-scale male absenteeism upon agricultural village economies, see also Yorke, *Northern Rhodesia and the First World War*, especially chapter 6, pp. 154-165.

¹⁴⁶ TNA, CO. 417/591, 'Admr to HC', 12 October 1917.

¹⁴⁷ TNA, CO. 417/600, 'Wallace to BSAC', 2 October 1917.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* By late 1917, prices of some basic commodities in the North had quadrupled; salt had risen from 2d to 6d to 9d a lb, and soap from 6d to 2s 0d or more.

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influenza to assist you should he [von Lettow-Vorbeck], come south from Kasama'.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, as Wallace had clearly acknowledged, only the belated but fortuitous arrival of news of the Armistice on 13 November 1918 had saved Northern Rhodesia from total collapse.¹⁵⁰

With the war now finally over the Northern Rhodesian authorities were able to suppress Watch Tower, conducting a campaign which culminated in a mass trial of over 100 adherents in early 1919. But the war had already politicised many military veterans – through the alternative medium of their *mbeni* dance societies they provided an important vehicle for action and protest during the Copperbelt disturbances over fifteen years later which heralded Northern Rhodesia's first entry into the world of urban worker consciousness and future independence.

¹⁴⁹ NAZ, BS3/210, 'Telegram Admr to Defence Salisbury', 6 November 1918.

¹⁵⁰ For a comprehensive and detailed discussion of this major crisis of colonial control see Yorke, *Northern Rhodesia and the First World War*, especially chapters 6-8.

