

# THE LUTHER SKALD

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*The Luther Skald* is published twice annually, spring and fall, and is intended to provide a venue for outstanding student history writing, which may also serve as a model for students working on history essays during their undergraduate careers. Although Luther's History faculty recommend student work for publication, *The Luther Skald* accepts submissions, in the forms of book reviews and essays, from Luther alumni and current students. Manuscript submissions should follow the style guidelines established in the *American Historical Review* and should be sent to the editor. Manuscripts received by January 1 will be considered for the spring issue, and those received by August 1 will be considered for the fall issue. *The Luther Skald* will also print, from time to time, news of the honors and achievements of History students, faculty, and alumni.

## Table of Contents

<i>A Voice for Justice: The Chicago Defender during World War II</i> .....	3
Hailey Abbey, '22	
<i>Sacrificed to the Movement: Interrogating the Mythic Past of Ex- Servicemen in Post- War Pre- Independence Ghana 1948-1951</i> .....	25
Berit Skogen, '23	
<i>Both Oppressed and Oppressors: Recontextualizing Askari in World War I Through the Maji Maji Rebellion</i> .....	49
Ian Klein, '22	

## A VOICE FOR JUSTICE: THE CHICAGO DEFENDER DURING WORLD WAR II

Hailey Abbey, '22

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### **Introduction**

From its onset in 1905, The Chicago Defender held an important and radical role in the Chicago community, from being the nation's most influential Black-owned newspaper to fighting in every issue for racial equality.. For purposes of this discussion, "radical" as used in this paper is defined as desiring extreme change to part or all of the social order and rejecting traditional social and political values. In the mid-20th century, the dominant social structure in the United States was Jim Crow, a system which discriminated against Black Americans and relegated them to second class citizens. Thus, any idea which advocated changing this social order was seen as "radical" by the general population. Given the commitment from the Defender to fight for racial justice, the question arose during World War II of whether the newspaper could support a country which relegated most of the Defender's writers and readers to second class citizens. During the war, amidst pressure from the government to wholly and unconditionally support the United States, and to cease to advocate for change, the newspaper upheld its long-served role as a radical news outlet and an amplifier for Black voices. Though the Chicago Defender encountered backlash and threats of censorship, it did not compromise on its radical agenda during the Second World War, instead combining patriotism with social responsibility and activism.

### **Historiography**

Although the Black press, including the Defender, was extremely important during WWII for increasing morale and representing Black voices, many histories do not consider it as an

important aspect of World War II. This oversight is symptomatic of a larger problem in history of deeming Black experiences as “less important” than the dominant white narrative and subsequently omitting or glossing over these experiences instead of giving them careful historical analysis.

Although most histories of WWII exclude Black experiences, this paper will focus on sources that do explore the wartime role of the Black press. In 1975, three decades after the end of the war, historian Lee Finkle published the first full length book on this topic titled “Forum for Protest: The Black Press During World War II.” Instead of focusing his research on any newspaper in particular, Finkle examines the Black press as a whole, citing many different prominent newspapers but treating them as one functioning national organ.

As one of the first historians to give proper analysis of the Black press in general, most of Finkle’s sources rely on the newspapers themselves and on studies done during the war to analyze the actual “threat” posed by Far Left journalistic influence. For example, Finkle cites a study done in the Spring of 1945, just before the end of the war, by Fortune examining the front pages of four issues of the 25 leading Black newspapers. This study concluded that positive stories concerning race relations outnumbered articles of protest by two to one, which contradicted the popular notion of the Black press as “inflammatory”.<sup>1</sup> Finkle uses studies such as this to support his point that the Black press, though influential, was not as radical as white Americans assumed and feared. Finkle instead emphasizes the wartime role of the Black press as more assimilationist, intending to create morale and reduce apathy among Black Americans about the war.

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<sup>1</sup>Lee Finkle, *Forum for Protest: The Black Press during World War II* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1977), 86.

Although Finkle does investigate the Chicago Defender, he does not focus on it as an individual, but rather a component of a whole. Therefore it is difficult, if at all possible, to separate his analysis of the Defender from his analysis of other newspapers across the nation. However, Caryl A. Cooper's 1999 article "The Chicago Defender: Filling in the Gaps for the Office of Civilian Defense" expands on Finkle's work by focusing specifically on the role of the Chicago Defender during World War II. Like Finkle, Cooper emphasizes the assimilationist nature of the Defender's war support, arguing that the newspaper aimed to support President Roosevelt's idea of a "psychologically unified nation".<sup>2</sup> However, Cooper goes even deeper in her examination, zeroing in on the leadership role the newspaper played in the Chicago community.

That same year (1999), Bill Mullen published his book "Popular Fronts" which examines the role of communism in African-American culture and politics in Chicago from 1935 to 1946. Although he does not explicitly focus on the Black press like Finkle, Mullen devotes an entire chapter to examining the Chicago Defender and its role during the Second World War. Like Cooper, Mullen's analysis of the Defender examines the Defender from a locally-focused perspective, exploring the impact and relationship of the Defender to the Chicago community.

Mullen uses the Defender's articles during WWII to argue that the Black Left supported and spread communist ideas, taking a slightly adversarial stance to Finkle and Cooper. He argues that historians push aside the influence of Left activists during World War II and unfairly reject the possibility that the Black press (specifically the Defender) supported communism. Mullen points to the Defender's position on equality, which aligns with communist stances on racial

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<sup>2</sup> Caryl A. Cooper, "The Chicago Defender: Filling in the Gaps for The Office of Civilian Defense, 1941-1945." in the *Western Journal of Black Studies* 23, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 111. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=sih&AN=2467539&scope=site>, 117.

issues, the “anti-capitalist” notion of the National Conference of Negro Publishers (NNPA)<sup>3</sup>, and finally evidence of a Left-Black alliance within Defender articles.<sup>4</sup> His argument in “Popular Fronts” is significant because most historians do not associate the Defender with communism, arguing that the Defender took careful action to avoid the possibility of accusations of communist influence or sympathy, a measure especially necessary while the nation was at war and fighting to preserve democracy.

Unlike Mullen, C.K. Doreski does not go so far as to claim the Defender was extremely influenced by communists, but he still interprets the newspaper as maintaining a radical stance throughout World War II. In his 2001 article “Kin in Some Way,” Doreski explores the Defender’s coverage of the American Japanese Internment process, pointing out that the Defender stepped far outside of the norm for other Black newspapers through its coverage of the Internment by denouncing the prejudice Japanese Americans were facing.<sup>5</sup> Through this detailed examination of how the Defender covered the Internment, Doreski digs deeper into the topic of World War II which other historians have covered more broadly, proving there is a lot more nuance to the history of the Black press than implied by the research of other historians.

Recently, several extensive books have been published concerning the Black press and the Defender. First, in 2016 former Defender employee Ethan Michaeli published his book “The Defender”, a detailed narrative of the birth and lifetime of the newspaper spanning over a hundred years. Michaeli focuses primarily on the narratives of key people in the Defender’s story, especially on the roles of the Defender’s presidents. Michaeli condenses the role and

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<sup>3</sup> Bill Mullen, *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 50.

<sup>4</sup> Mullen, *Popular Fronts*, 48.

<sup>5</sup> C.K. Doreski, “‘Kin in Some Way’: The Chicago Defender Reads the Japanese Internment, 1942-1945,” in *The Black Press: New Literary and Historical Essays* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

actions of the Defender during WWII to one chapter in order to fit the history of the Defender into one volume.<sup>6</sup> His perspective on the Defender as a radical paper during WWII falls among the middle ground of scholarly work. On the one hand, Michaeli gives much attention to Defender Editor John Sengstacke's cooperation with top government administrators and to the support given to the war effort by the newspaper, while denying the existence of evidence concretely connecting the Defender to communism during the Second World War.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, Michaeli emphasizes the resilient attitudes of the Defender to threats of sedition from the Roosevelt administration and the FBI, asserting that Sengstacke refused to change the critical tone of the paper or to ignore incidents of discrimination.

In 2017, Fred Carroll wrote a book concerning the role of the Black press over the entire 20th century. Although similar to Michaeli in the timeline covered, Carroll expands his scope beyond the Defender to include the entire Black press, electing to generalize its goals and actions, similar to Finkle's work. Because of his broad scope, Carroll's overview of the role of the Defender during World War II is limited. Similar to Finkle, Carroll maintains that Black newspapers avoided inflammatory articles and also characterizes the newspapers' support of the war effort as assimilatory.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout scholarly work on the role of the Black press during World War II, there is much debate among historians as to the Defender's levels of radical reformist attitudes. While all acknowledge the anti-discriminatory attitudes of the Defender, some historians, such as Finkle, Cooper, and Carroll, emphasize the cooperative and compromising actions of the Defender in its

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<sup>6</sup> Ethan Michaeli, *The Defender: How the Legendary Black Newspaper Changed America: From the Age of the Pullman Porters to the Age of Obama* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Michaeli, *The Defender*, 243, 262.

<sup>8</sup> Fred Carroll, "Race News: Black Journalists and the Fight for Racial Justice in the Twentieth Century," (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.5406/j.ctt1ws7w6f>, 90-91.

effort to promote national unity. On the opposite end of the spectrum, Mullen criticizes these historians for their conservative omission of evidence suggesting communist influence. Other historians, such as Doreski and Michaeli, lie somewhere in the middle of these two opposing interpretations. Since the balance between compromise and progression was a key factor in the wartime role of the Defender, a closer study of this balance in practice without the influence of overarching arguments from broader topics is necessary. This examination finds that the Defender did not compromise on its historically radical stance during World War II, and that the way in which the newspaper framed its support for the war was radical in itself.

### **The Defender: an Overview**

The Chicago Defender was founded in 1905 by Robert Abbott and quickly became the most influential Black-owned weekly newspaper in the nation, known for its radical tone and sensational (albeit profit-driven) headlines.<sup>9</sup> From its output, the Defender consistently reported on and denounced racial violence and discriminatory laws. It served an important role locally in Chicago as an amplifier for Black voices and for the exposure of racial issues in the press, but also extended its reach across the entire nation through railway employees, despite some conservative newspaper distributors' refusal to carry its issues.

Abbott used the Chicago Defender's prevalence in the South to facilitate a campaign in support of the "Great Migration" movement which encouraged Black Americans to relocate from the South. Defender articles spoke to southern audiences by portraying Chicago and the North as more liberated from oppression than the Jim Crow South, advertising extensive housing and job opportunities for Black Americans. The migration campaign was extremely successful and over

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<sup>9</sup> "The Chicago Defender," PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), accessed December 4, 2021, [https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news\\_bios/defender.html](https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/defender.html) and *The Legacy of the Chicago Defender*, YouTube, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oYvNOztKUb4>.



110,000 Black Americans moved to Chicago between 1916 and 1918, demonstrating the incredible influence the Defender held nationwide.

Upon Abbott's death in 1940, his nephew, John Sengstacke gained editorial control and further extended the Defender's reach while continuing to fight for equality. Sengstacke recognized the influence and importance of Black-owned newspapers and sought to decrease competition between the Defender and the rest of the Black press by founding the National Negro Publishers Association (NNPA), now known as the National Newspaper Publishers Association. The NNPA sought to unify the efforts of Black newspapers nationwide.<sup>10</sup> Given the profit-driven methods of Robert Abbot, this move represented a shift in style for the Defender. In fact, Bill Mullen argues that the formation of the NNPA rejects the traditional competitive motivations of newspapers in favor of collective efforts, a symbol of anti-capitalist policy.<sup>11</sup>

At the onset of war in Europe in 1939, the Defender maintained its radical agenda by continuing to advocate for civil rights and against U.S. participation in the conflict. For example, the Defender repeatedly likened Germany's fascist actions to Jim Crow laws in the South, at once pushing for equality and criticizing the hypocrisy of U.S. condemnation of Germany. In an article published in January of 1939, the Defender reported on German intentions to adopt specific Jim Crow aspects and called the United States "double-crossed" for serving as a (supposedly democratic) successful precedent to fascist programs. The Defender criticized the U.S. by proclaiming, "Even Fascism hasn't as yet stooped so low in employing all the acts of

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<sup>10</sup> Earnest L. Perry, "A Common Purpose: The Negro Newspaper Publishers Association's Fight for Equality during World War II," *American Journalism* 19, no. 2 (2002). <https://doi.org/10.1080/08821127.2002.10677874>.

<sup>11</sup> Mullen, *Popular Fronts*, 50.

uncivility practiced against minority groups in a so-called Democracy”<sup>12</sup> implying that the discriminatory policies of the United States were more anti-democratic than fascist Germany.

At this time the Defender did not exclusively support the prospect of U.S. participation in the war, reflecting the opinion of its readers via multiple letters to the editor advocating for an anti-war stance. One reader questioned the worthwhileness of Black support for a war that may employ in the same discriminatory practices seen in World War I.<sup>13</sup> <sup>14</sup> Another reader, a World War I veteran, detailed the losses he had experienced from fighting for democracy on behalf of the U.S., and the continued discrimination he experiences, explaining “I am sorry that I allowed myself to be persuaded to make so heavy a personal sacrifice for a country that does not give a damn about me” and further asserting, “I would not lift a finger to fight for this country ever again even if the Germans should capture our capital... Of course I am bitter. How else should I feel?”<sup>15</sup> However, facing a realistic threat of U.S. entry the next year, the Defender began publishing reports in support of U.S. participation, flipping its position from purely critical to a critical supporter with recognition of both its leadership role in the impending war effort and its responsibility to continue honest reporting concerning race relations.

### **Support for the War Effort**

As the U.S. began preparations for war and the reality of entry became more apparent, the Defender began to exclusively support the U.S. war effort, a move regarded by some historians as disruptive to the paper’s traditionally radical position. However, the Defender did not flip its

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<sup>12</sup> “GERMANY’S RIVAL,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Jan 7, 1939, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>13</sup> Although Black men did serve in World War I, they encountered segregation and prejudice within the military.

<sup>14</sup> Jane Eichelson, “THE WAR ISSUE,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Nov 11, 1939, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>15</sup> Marvin McGuire, “WOULD NOT FIGHT FOR U.S.,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Nov 11, 1939, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

stance on U.S. participation necessarily out of a concession to the wills of the government but as a result of careful evaluation of world events. In October of 1940, the Defender began to support President Roosevelt's foreign policy because of the increased threat the European conflict posed to the entire world.<sup>16</sup> Defender writers along with Black newspapers nationwide also began to recognize the impending war as an opportunity to advocate for civil rights. Some may regard any abandonment of pacifism as an anti-radical stance, but the Defender supported the U.S. war effort in a way which ultimately advocated for racial equality, both at home and worldwide. Less than a week after Japan's 1942 attack on Pearl Harbor, the Defender published an editorial advocating for the participation of its Black audience in the national defense. The editorial seems to speak for the nation's Black members, saying "We want to serve our country as full-fledged American citizens, and not as segregated negroes (sic.) with abbreviated rights" and reminding readers that "in pledging our allegiance to the flag and what it symbolizes, we are not unmindful of the broken promises of the past."<sup>17</sup> This article, published at the onset of America's entrance into the war, sets a patriotic but firmly radical tone for the Defender's coverage of World War II, and further demonstrates the unwillingness of the Defender to give up the fight for equality even during wartime.

As always, these tactics put the Defender in a position to experience backlash, and accusations of disloyalty. Facing threats of censorship from the U.S. government, Defender president Sengstacke took action to meet with the U.S. Attorney General Francis Biddle. During this meeting, Biddle threatened Sengstacke with sedition laws, claiming that the critical aspects of the Defender were harmful to the war effort and promoted disunity.<sup>18</sup> Sengstacke remained

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<sup>16</sup> Michaeli, *The Defender*, 236.

<sup>17</sup> "For Democracy And Unity: AN EDITORIAL," *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Dec 13, 1941, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>18</sup> Sedition legally refers to language inciting people to rebel against and overthrow the government.

firmly in defense of the Defender and replied that its practices were not harming the war effort since the paper exclusively supported U.S. participation. However, he also explained to Biddle that the Defender had an obligation to express the feelings of its readers and to report with honesty when their contributions to the war effort seemed wasted.<sup>19</sup> After this meeting, recognizing the important role the Defender played in raising morale among the U.S.'s Black citizens, Biddle became more or less an advocate for the Black press, helping Sengstacke meet with top federal administrators to aid in the Defender's accurate and patriotic coverage of the war. Biddle initially agreed to help Sengstacke in exchange for a change of tone in the Defender's reporting (to be less critical), but Sengstacke asserted that he could not promise any change of tone and would continue to support the war effort as he had before.<sup>20</sup>

Sengstacke took more measures to protect the Defender while simultaneously following the paper's long-established reformist agenda. In September of 1942, Sengstacke published an extensive "Victory Edition" of the Defender in an effort to solidify the patriotic stance of the newspaper and protect it against censorship and accusations of sedition. This "Victory Edition" aimed to "bolster black support for the war effort, reinforce the need for national unity, and detail black contributions to American society and war mobilization".<sup>21</sup> In order to emphasize loyalty, Sengstacke included contributions from white writers and was able to secure a personal essay to the Defender from President Roosevelt. To some scholars, this "Victory Edition" was overly jingoistic and seemed to undermine the Defender's previous radical stance. However, even the unifying "Victory Edition" did not shy away from radical criticism of current race relations in America. For example, in this edition the Defender published an article from known communist

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<sup>19</sup> Michaeli, *The Defender*, 247.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 248.

<sup>21</sup> Carroll, *Race News*, 89-90.

William Patterson, praising the Soviet Union for its protection of the equal rights of minorities, a contradiction to the U.S.'s commitment to democracy.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, the Defender published an excerpt from Hitler's "Mein Kampf" revealing his racist views toward Black people, in an effort to draw attention to the irony of America's fight against racism and fascism in Germany while simultaneously supporting these same factors at home, and attempting to "shame" those in the U.S. whose opinions toward Black Americans mirrored those of Hitler.<sup>23</sup> Some historians, such as Carroll<sup>24</sup>, argue that the September 1942 Victory Edition crossed the line into overly propagandistic, but a closer look at the articles published reveals that the Defender did not dim its radical stances in this issue. Although this edition supported the U.S. government's war effort, its ultimate agenda remained the same as it always had: to advocate for racial equality.

Before the Defender's support, many Black readers were (because of the state of racial equality in America) apathetic to the war effort. In order to build and maintain support from Black Americans, the Defender joined other newspapers on a "Double-V " campaign. Originating with the Philadelphia Courier, the Double-V campaign, or Double Victory campaign, called for support for a victory against fascism at home and also abroad. In this way, the Defender connected the fight for equality in the U.S. to worldwide efforts.<sup>25</sup> Psychologist Kenneth Clark explains this strategy in terms of morale. Clark clarifies that there are actually three forms of morale: synthetic (stimulated by symbols and slogans), perverse (unfocused and produced by frustration), and genuine morale, the last of which motivates people to die for a

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<sup>22</sup> William L. Patterson, "A NEGRO LOOKS AT RUSSIA: Minorities Enjoy Equal Rights in Land of Soviets, Now Battling German Foe," *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 26, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>23</sup> Michaeli, *The Defender*, 254.

<sup>24</sup> Carroll, *Race News*, 90.

<sup>25</sup> Finkle, *Forum For Protest*, 89.

cause if necessary. Clark explains that although synthetic and perverse morale can support the genuine, they can never maintain it.<sup>26</sup>

Connecting his theory to the ongoing World War II conflict, Clark explains that propaganda produces synthetic morale, and thus would itself be ineffective at maintaining the genuine morale needed to achieve victory and avoid apathy. He recognized that the genuine morale felt by Black Americans in fighting domestically for racial equality was an opportunity to achieve this same kind of morale for the international war effort. By combining the two efforts into the Double-V, the Black press effectively transferred the genuine moral felt towards a victory against fascism at home to a victory against fascism abroad.<sup>27</sup> By employing the Double-V, the Defender continued to garner support for the national war effort by appealing to the desire for equality and the fight against local segregation.

Some historians who question the Defender's radicality during wartime point to the support of the war effort itself as a compromise to the egalitarian stances of the newspaper. Indeed, many Black Americans thought that support was futile and unlikely to lead directly to advancements in civil rights. However, the Defender recognized that to NOT fight in the war would be more detrimental to the rights of the Black citizen than futile support.<sup>28</sup> To not participate in the war would harm any chance of Black Americans being seen as equal citizens, thus hurting the fight for equal rights and freedom. The Double-V placed the duty of supporting the war on the people, and the Defender promised to continue to protest while amplifying the voices of the people.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 110.

## The Military

In addition to its ceaseless reporting on and denouncement of racial issues such as lynchings, poll taxes, and segregation, the Defender also demonstrated continuous progressive reporting on the actual events of the war, including criticism of the military.<sup>29</sup> The Defender presented a unique perspective to its readers by focusing primarily on the experiences of Black people and soldiers, emphasizing the importance of telling local stories. This ensured that the efforts of Black Americans (who may not receive much, if any, coverage in white-run newspapers) in supporting their country came to light. War correspondents praised Black troops, emphasized their achievements, and even reported on the role of African troops as well.<sup>30</sup> For example, The Defender published a picture and short description of the efforts of Black Navy soldier Dorie Miller, who was awarded the Navy Cross for his courage and actions during the bombing of Pearl Harbor.<sup>31</sup> In another example, the Defender published a story complete with pictures of Tuskegee Sergeant Arthur Freeman receiving the Soldier's Medal for Valor.<sup>32</sup> Articles in support of Black troops are found in every issue of the Defender during the Second World War.

At the same time, the Defender remained very critical of the military, recognizing the its duty to expose discriminatory military actions. In particular, the newspaper advocated for reforms and desegregation and reported on incidents of discrimination against Black troops from military officials and fellow soldiers. For example, in spring of 1942 Black soldiers in South Carolina were faced with segregation when they were initially not allowed to attend a play

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<sup>29</sup> Doreski, *Kin in Some Way*, 164.

<sup>30</sup> Carroll, *Race News*, 91.

<sup>31</sup> "Photo Standalone 2 -- No Title," *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Sep 26, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>32</sup> "Tuskegee Sergeant Wins Soldier's Medal For Valor: WINS SOLDIER'S MEDAL FOR SAVING GIRL FROM DROWNING," *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Mar 20, 1943, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

visiting the soldiers intended to boost morale. Eventually, soldiers learned that a “special section of the theater was being reserved for Negro (sic) troops.” This act of segregation led to over 1,000 Black troops boycotting the play for the discrimination involved.<sup>33</sup> The Defender gave full news coverage to all reported instances of discrimination and segregation within the military such as this, and remained critical of the armed forces wherever there was room for criticism, a completely radical act during a time of war.

### **Japanese Internment and the 1943 Race Riots**

At the onset of the relocation of Japanese Americans to internment camps in 1942, General John L. DeWitt, commanding officer of the Western Defense Command, made headlines when he proclaimed, “A Jap’s a Jap (sic)” in reference to the evacuation and internment of Japanese Americans in the West to concentration camps. He justified this generalizing attitude by saying “racial affinities are not severed by migration” and for even those born in the U.S., “the racial strains are undiluted,” assuming that those with Japanese heritage were loyal to Japan even if they were born in America.<sup>34</sup> Many Black-owned weeklies (particularly in the West Coast) saw this movement as an opportunity for Black Americans to obtain jobs and housing in the West and to demonstrate loyalty to the U.S. by agreeing with DeWitt’s attitudes towards Japanese Americans. John Robert Badger, a West Coast-based foreign affairs correspondent, supported internment from its onset as a military necessity. Badger interpreted citizenship as connected to loyalty and, relying on witness testimonies of Japanese-American disloyalty, sided with the government’s War Relocation Authority (WRA). Badger saw internment as a matter having military and political (but not racial) origins, and was perhaps

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<sup>33</sup> “JIM CROWED SOLDIERS BOYCOTT USO SHOW: PROTEST OVER PLAY GIVEN IN WHITE CAMP,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Apr 11, 1942, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

<sup>34</sup> Doreski, *Kin in Some Way*, 163.



unaware of the racial implications of the actions against Japanese-Americans.<sup>35</sup> However, the Defender saw DeWitt's comments about Japanese Americans as reminiscent of the prejudicial rhetoric used against Black Americans in the South. The Defender ultimately tended to condemn the Internment and the racist rhetoric used by government officials for justification, a far more radical stance than that of other newspapers.

The Defender extended its radical position against racial prejudice in forms beyond its words. In fact, in November of 1942 the Defender hired an American columnist of Japanese heritage, S.I. Hayakawa, a professor at the Illinois Institute of Technology.<sup>36</sup> In his column, Hayakawa objected to the prejudiced actions and words of other minorities, including those of Black Americans, against Japanese Americans, referring to this prejudice as a “two-year-old mentality.”<sup>37</sup> Hayakawa argued that because minorities already experience heavy oppression from the majority culture, racism from other minorities against Japanese causes further and unnecessary harm: “When will people understand that racial prejudice is of one piece, and that in perpetuating one kind of prejudice they are perpetuating all other kinds at the same time?”<sup>38</sup> He reasons further in a 1944 article on Japanese and African American prejudices saying, “If a thief squawks about his home being robbed, we don't have much sympathy for him. I'm not at all sure the victim of race prejudice deserves much sympathy when he goes around spreading the poison himself.”<sup>39</sup> Hayakawa demonstrates an extremely radical stance endorsed by the Defender: that the issue of racism in the United States is an issue against all people of color, and furthermore that Japanese Americans during the Second World War deserved respect and equal treatment.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 166-167.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 166.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> S.I. Hayakawa, “SECOND THOUGHTS: Racism In All Directions,” *The Chicago Defender (National edition)*, Aug 12, 1944, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

This point of view stood out against strong resentment throughout the U.S. towards the Japanese, and directly opposed the Internment actions of the government.

Defender columnist Langston Hughes also expressed disdain for the Internment of Japanese Americans by drawing close attention to its racial element. Hughes points out that although the government was discriminating against and detaining Japanese Americans, this same treatment was not given to German Americans or Italian Americans. Hughes argues that this double standard proves there is a racial element to the war. Hughes' condemnation of the U.S. government for the Internment of Japanese Americans uses the logic of DeWitt's own argument: if racial affinities are truly "not severed by migration", then it would be logical to detain German Americans and Italian Americans, regardless of citizenship. Noting that this was absolutely not the reality, Hughes denounces the logic of Japanese Internment as having purely military and political origins and attributes the government's policies to prejudice and racism.<sup>40</sup>

In 1943, racially-charged riots broke out in Detroit, soon followed by riots across the nation. The Defender, which already had a correspondent stationed in Detroit, immediately started covering these events, though it advocated for nonviolence. Some scholars interpret this advocacy for peace as cooperative with the will of the government against the participants in the riots, and therefore unprogressive. However, the Defender did not shy away from directing blame for the riots towards whites.<sup>41</sup> The Defender argued that blaming these riots on "bad behavior [of Black people]" was illogical and counterproductive, asserting that the blame should instead be placed on "race hatreds".<sup>42</sup> <sup>43</sup> This stance acknowledged the economic and social

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<sup>40</sup> Doreski, *Kin in Some Way*, 169.

<sup>41</sup> It's worth noting that had the Defender advocated FOR violence, it would be in direct violation of the law as the First Amendment does not protect speech inciting imminent illegal action (see *Brandenburg v. Ohio*, 1969).

<sup>42</sup> Mullen, *Popular Fronts*, 68.

<sup>43</sup> Michaeli, *The Defender*, 259.

strains influenced by racism put on Black Americans, such as a wealth gap and shortage of housing, transforming coverage of the riots to fit within the Defender's radical, reformist rhetoric.

In response to the Zoot Suit Race Riots in Los Angeles, Langston Hughes pointed out the collapse of "race" and "national origin" into "racial origin". Hughes, using his observation about the Internment of Japanese Americans, argued that because there is a racial element to the war there is therefore a racial element to America's form of "democracy" and even the very definition of an "American". Hughes asserted that given the circumstances of the internment, "alien" is associated with color itself, carrying with this the possibility of extending the "alien" and "disloyal" danger of Japanese Americans to all people of color, a contributing cause to the Zoot Suit Riots.<sup>44</sup> <sup>45</sup> This framing of the 1943 Race Riots by the Defender not only was consistent with the paper's radical stance, it was also highly effective and the riots did not reach Chicago.

### **Censorship and Communism**

The reformist rhetoric employed by the Defender consistently throughout the war led, expectedly, to backlash from the government. President Roosevelt, while sympathetic to the fight for racial equality, believed that "rights came after victory" and that patriotic objectives should come before civil rights.<sup>46</sup> Because of its strong advocacy for racial equality and criticism of the government, the Defender was the target of many attempts by the FBI to indict the paper for

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<sup>44</sup> The Zoot Suit Riots were caused by a clash between white sailors and servicemen and "Zoot Suit-wearers", primarily youths of racial minority, who the military men (unjustly) viewed as unpatriotic "draft-dodgers". In the days following the onset of these riots, the white perpetrators began attacking anyone wearing a Zoot Suit (a loose-fitting suit popular with young men, especially men of color) or displaying other characteristics associated with racial minorities.

<sup>45</sup> Doreski, *Kin in Some Way*, 169.

<sup>46</sup> Carroll, *Race News*, 97.

sedition. In order to try to discredit the Defender, the FBI repeatedly accused it of having communist ties. However, the FBI never proved these accusations and never charged the Defender with sedition.<sup>47</sup>

In general, most historians agree that the Defender was not so radical as to endorse or exhibit heavy influence from communism but Bill Mullen disagrees with this conclusion. Mullen argues that the Defender, was an “emblem of interracial reform” and absorbed communist ideas into a Black American framework.<sup>48</sup> Although the Defender never endorsed communism explicitly, it certainly had connections to the ideology. During the Second World War, the Defender employed two high ranking employees with known previous communist ties: Editor in Chief and Chief Editorial Writer Metz Lochard and National Editor Ben Burns.<sup>49</sup> It also on multiple occasions published articles from known communist William Patterson, including one praising Russia for its anti-discrimination policies. In 1945, a Liberty ship constructed in Abbott’s memory, named the S.S. Abbott, was turned over by the U.S. to the Soviet Union as part of a lend-lease agreement. To commemorate this event, the Defender wrote, “it is altogether fitting that a ship named after [Robert Abbott] should fly the flag of the one country in the world where racial discrimination is prohibited by law,” adding that Abbott would have been proud to know that the ship named in his honor was sailing for a country which actually follows the principles Abbott fought so hard for.<sup>50</sup>

Despite evidence of Leftist ties, Mullen goes too far with his claim that the Defender was heavily influenced by communism, a level of influence some may even label (especially during the 20th century) as “infiltration”. Through several federal investigations, no substantial

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<sup>47</sup> Michaeli, *The Defender*, 243, 262.

<sup>48</sup> Mullen, *Popular Fronts*, 56.

<sup>49</sup> Mullen, *Popular Fronts*, 55 and Michaeli, *The Defender*, 256-257.

<sup>50</sup> Mullen, *Popular Fronts*, 73.

connections to communism were ever found during the Second World War. More likely than “heavy” communist influence is the coincidental alignment of the Defender’s ideas for civil rights with communism’s theories of equality. The two idea systems are compatible, but this does not prove influence. This being said, historians are also incorrect to deny any association between the Defender and communism outright. Clearly, given the Defender’s communist-linked employees, its willingness to openly support countries with communist governments (such as the Soviet Union), and its tendency to publish articles from known communists, the newspaper is more radical in its ideas than historians (other than Mullen) perceive it to be.

### **Conclusion**

The Second World War presented the Defender with a complex question: how does a newspaper whose duty is to represent the voices of a minority support a war fought by a country which doesn’t grant all of its citizens equal rights? The Defender answered this question by balancing both priorities, finding ways to frame the war effort as benefitting Black Americans while refusing to cease reporting on racial injustice. Because the Defender continued to make efforts to change the dominant social structure in the U.S. during the war, it undoubtedly maintained its radical precedent. During a time where national unity was imperative to victory, and thus the will of the government, the Defender did not make compromises to its radical agenda, even while facing threats of censorship. This radical position solidified the Chicago Defender as an amplifier for Black voices and its important role as a representative for the Black American, who had a stake in the nation’s victory during the war, but desired a complete change in the social order.

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***SACRIFICED TO THE MOVEMENT: INTERROGATING THE MYTHIC PAST OF EX-SERVICEMEN IN POST-WAR PRE-INDEPENDENCE GHANA 1948-1951***

Berit Skogen, '23

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**Introduction**

Ghana, the independent country formerly known as the Gold Coast Territories when under the colonial thumb of Britain, was the first sub-Saharan African country to gain independence. Sometimes cited as the first “Real African” country to gain independence due to the geo-political situation in the Northern part of the continent, Ghana’s struggle for independence captivated the continent. The pre-independence period in Ghana was deeply marked by the lingering shadow of the Second World War which ended 12 years before official independence. Soldiers all over the continent were recruited for service in the war. Britain and the Allies recruited from their colonies in areas including West Africa and the Gold Coast Territories were not excluded from this. Around 65,000-70,000 men from the territories went to fight in the war and those that survived had to return to civilian life after the armistice in 1945.<sup>51</sup>

Three years after the war had ended, in 1948, there was considerable popular unrest in the Gold Coast. In February of that year historians claim that it all came to a head in the events that would later be called the Accra Riots, violent outbursts across the Gold Coast that resulted in injury, death, and property destruction. These resulted from a shooting that occurred in Accra during an ex-servicemen’s demonstrative march. Regarded by historians as a turning point in

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<sup>51</sup> Killingray, David. *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012.

Ghana's history, politicians of the time recognized the significance and quickly aligned themselves with the ex-servicemen's plight. Their politicization of this event crafted the national narrative that persists to this day about ex-servicemen's involvement in the revolution for independence. This essay seeks to address the how this national narrative came into being as well as the why, or motivations behind the narrative. Ex-servicemen in pre-independence Ghana were sacrificed to the independence movement as political leaders held them up as figureheads while never meeting their demands after liberation had been achieved, this can be illustrated by using the Accra Riots and subsequent events as a case study in nationalist politics and their impact on national narratives.

Leaders like Kwame Nkrumah effectively used the cause of the ex-servicemen to forward the agenda of the movement for independence from Britain. However, in politicians' exaggeration of the role that ex-servicemen and their martyrs played in the struggle, the ex-servicemen and their original fight were left behind. The effect of this national narrative is an excellent juxtaposition for how and why national narratives are crafted and the dangers that are inherent within these publicized truths. In the case of Ghanaian ex-servicemen, they were uplifted as figureheads, martyrs and heroes of the movement but in the end were used and still left largely uncompensated for their original grievances. Using the Accra and subsequent riots as a case study for the politics of the movement that used the ex-servicemen and their cause will give an efficient and impactful; snapshot into the counter narrative that is being proposed to the accepted national narrative.

## **Historiography**

The historical study of the pre-independence period of Ghana has been evolving since the first works were published after 1957. The earliest historians focused on the "Road to

Independence” of the and the politics of it. In 1960, just three years after independence, F. M. Bourret published the oft-cited *Ghana, the Road to Independence*. This work, like others of the time, was very focused on the political context of the movement. During this period, another oft-cited historian Richard Rathbone, published his work on the Gold Coast after the Second World War. Up to the late 1970s the focus of the research done by historians was primarily directed towards politics and political leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah. Further than this however, they often operated within the narrative of the Second World War as *the* event that triggered everything else in modern African history. This was exemplified in Eugene Schleh’s claim that ex-servicemen formed a cohesive interest group.<sup>52</sup> This view can be attributed to the source material that was heavily relied on during this period with the major emphases being on official British documents and accounts from politicians themselves. Additionally, there was the added advantage or disadvantage, depending on one’s view of the events having recently taken place. The prevailing answer to the question of who drove the revolution in Ghana was that of ex-servicemen whose horizons had been broadened through their war service. This view of ex-servicemen as a cohesive and enlightened interest group through their exposure to Burma and India was perpetuated in scholarship of the first two decades after independence. While continually cited and embraced as the pioneers of the field many of these researchers came from backgrounds in which they were the dominant majority and this informed the way in which they viewed events and Africans.

The next period of study can be defined as the two decades leading up to the new millennium. The 1980s were a significant period for historians taking a stab specifically at the histories of ex-servicemen in Ghana after the war. During this period Adrienne Israel and David

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<sup>52</sup> Killingley, David. “Soldiers, Ex-Servicemen, and Politics in the Gold Coast, 1939–50.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 21, no. 3 (1983): 523–34. doi:10.1017/S0022278X00023545.

Killingray emerged as dominant voices that took this research upon themselves. They expanded upon and critiqued the work that had already been done by scholars like Schleh and opened the doors to a deeper analysis of the pre-independence period in Ghana. During this period historians really started to critique the narrative of the freedom-fighter-ex-serviceman and his influence in Ghanaian politics leading up to independence. Killingray is specific in his argument against Schleh and others who cited veterans as motors of change in Ghana. These two decades saw the emergence of a more nuanced examination of the events leading up to independence and factors drove the movement. It was also during this period of scholarship that access to source material was being greatly expanded and more validity was being posited to less traditional methods. Oral histories were becoming increasingly common and gave a voice to the men who had previously, simply been numbers in the British official documents. Additionally, the added distance between the events that were being written about served these historians as they interrogated previous ideologies and histories.

Finally, the more recent body of scholarship that is being used in this essay, dating from 2000-2020, provides more synthesis to ideas first pioneered in the 1980s and 1990s. Killingray and Rathbone both wrote later pieces that are also being used that demonstrate some of the evolution of thought regarding the impact of ex-servicemen on the independence movement and also the impact of the independence movement on ex-servicemen. More sophisticated ideas about nationalism, nation building, and the decades of history that are now available in Ghana since its independence all have greater emphasis as the study has evolved. Additionally, there has been increased digital media that has focused on this time period in recent years. The BBC developed an episode for its program *Witness History* about Ghanaian veterans and their

involvement in the 1948 riots.<sup>53</sup> This demonstrates continued interest in the field of study. In recent years, while there has been renewed interest in the events leading up to independence, there have not been any particularly notable breakthroughs. As of now the scholarship is seeking to add more nuance to the important ideas pioneered in the 1980s.

While there have been countless histories written about Ghana and the Gold Coast and the effect of the war, limited space has been dedicated to the actual politics of nation building. It is the attempt of this work to form a stronger connection between nationalist politics and the creation of mythic history centering around veterans. The intent behind this has not been particularly interrogated in previous histories as this paper intends to do now.

### **Case Study: The Accra Riots or the Shootings at Christiansborg Crossroads**

Called a watershed moment in Ghana's quest for liberation and thus also in Africa's collective struggle for liberation against colonialism, the events that transpired on February 28, 1948 live in mythic historical memory for those seeking to tell the Ghanaian and African story. This particular event has been chosen as a case study for this precise reason that scholars have viewed it as a turning point in nationalism in Ghana that particularly involved ex-servicemen from the Second World War, underscoring this narrative of the Ghanaian Ex-Serviceman freedom fighter. The mere idea of a turning point implies great significance and specificity in regards to its relation to the movements for which it was a turning point. Drawing not only from British Official and press documents, but also from scholarly accounts of African press coverage and histories of Ghana, a narrative can be constructed of what actually transpired that day and in turn

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<sup>53</sup> "Ghana Veterans and the 1948 Accra Riots" *BBC* video on *Witness History*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01t10s9>

how these events were used and why. Taking all this into account the events can be told accordingly.

In the first weeks of the year 1948, Ex-servicemen had planned and gotten permission to stage a march through the city of Accra in order to air their post-war grievances to the colonial government. The group of ex-servicemen had developed an official petition to the colonial authorities.<sup>54</sup> The intent behind the ex-servicemen's demonstration here was to advocate for their rights and promises that they insisted the British made on condition of their service in the war. While they had met with members of the United Gold Coast Convention [hereafter U. G. C. C.], who were lawyers, to draft the petition, one ex-servicemen related that the decision was made to march without the political influences of the U. G. C. C.<sup>55</sup> They listed 7 specific grievances that included releasing 12 ex-servicemen who were in prison, war pensions that were only partially being paid or not at all, unemployment after demobilisation in spite of their service and the dissatisfaction that came with the Gold Coast Government's alleged neglect of them.<sup>56</sup> While this march was supposed to represent ex-servicemen and their fight for settling their grievances, popular unrest in the city added many individuals to the ranks of the ex-servicemen marching. With these additions to the march, there occurred a deviation from the formerly approved route for the march and the increasingly less orderly mob started to make its way towards the Governor's residence, Christiansborg Castle. Colonial officials, understanding the threat a movement of unrest of this size could pose, called in the police to keep the crowd from rioting. This act however only exacerbated the marchers. Threatened by this agitation, officer Colin

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<sup>54</sup> Austin, Dennis, and Ghana. "The Early Years 1946-1951" *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

<sup>55</sup> Israel, Adrienne M. "Ex-Servicemen at the Crossroads: Protest and Politics in Post-War Ghana." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (1992): 359-68. doi:10.1017/S0022278X00010776.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 364

Herbert Imray recounts that he ordered the crowd to settle and after the majority did not comply, he was “provoked” to fire into the crowd.<sup>57</sup> The panic after the gunfire only increased when it became clear that two ex-servicemen who had been marching for their rights were dead.<sup>58</sup> This news spread quickly and resulted in riots across Accra that spurred other outbursts of similar sort across the Gold Coast Territories. In the context of dissatisfaction and unrest because of the controversial colonial policy towards cocoa trees infected with a disease and the inflated prices on European goods causing economic strain on many citizens, a colonial officer shooting two Gold Coast ex-servicemen exacerbated open wounds.<sup>59</sup> In the course of the riots, stores owned by British and other trading partners were burned and looted in Accra, and as the news spread so did the outbreaks of violence through the Gold Coast. Unrest erupted in several other cities causing 29 more deaths, hundreds of injuries, and large-scale destruction of property.<sup>60</sup> The two ex-servicemen initially killed by the shots fired into the crowd became martyrs of the movement against British Colonialism in the Gold Coast. The march became a foothold for independence fighters and the outrage on behalf of ex-servicemen entered into the politics of independence.

### **Colonial British response**

After the dust settled, the British administration ordered an in depth investigation into the cause of the riots. This became the Coussey Report and Watson Commission. The official story told by British officials, also taken up by the British press, was of ungrateful, violent colonial

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<sup>57</sup> “Colin Herbert Imray (Oral History)” IWM Productions. Recorded by Conrad Wood. 1992. Duration 450 minutes

<sup>58</sup> Initially, it was only apparent that two men had been killed but later it was confirmed that a third bullet had struck and killed someone, the original outrage centered around the two ex-servicemen who had been killed but in public remembrances all three that lost their lives from the six shots fired into the crowd are commemorated.

<sup>59</sup> Israel, *Ex-Servicemen at the Crossroads*, 364

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 365

subjects who, when presented with an opportunity to commit crime, took it.<sup>61</sup> The official enquiry itself played into the narrative of war-time service being the prevailing motivation for unrest around the colony. It states after returning from service “Such Africans by reasons of their contacts with other peoples including Europeans had developed a political and national consciousness. The fact that they were disappointed at conditions on their return...made them the natural point for any general movement against authority.”<sup>62</sup> The fault, according to this narrative, was certainly not with the colonial police who fired into the crowd but rather with the freedom fighters who instigated the whole thing. Acknowledging the backdrop of the boycott of overpriced European goods that had taken place as well as the ex-servicemen’s grievances, British press still wrote “police were provoked to fire on the crowd”<sup>63</sup>. Another correspondent for *The Times* called the riots, “Extremists’ efforts”<sup>64</sup> when describing the riots that took place in Accra and around the territories. Further, in its report on the political aspirations of the Gold Coast parties, *The Times* was critical of the agenda of these pro-independence parties, problematizing their leaders for British readership.<sup>65</sup> This narrative seems less surprising when one considers the fact that the U. G. C. C. publicly came out in support of the effort. Both leaders in the more conservative U. G. C. C. and Nkrumah’s Convention Peoples Party attempted to “capitalize” on the disturbances which led to the arrest of several leaders within the

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<sup>61</sup> G., K. “The Gold Coast: Background to the Coussey Report.” *The World Today* published by Royal Institute of International Affairs, vol. 6, no. 3 (March 1950): 110–119.

<sup>62</sup> Colonial Office, *Report to His Excellency the Governor by the Committee on Constitutional Reform 1949* (Colonial no. 248)

<sup>63</sup> "The Gold Coast Riots." *Times*, March 5, 1948, 5. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed October 31, 2021). [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS84362853/TTDA?u=luther\\_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=005ff04f](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS84362853/TTDA?u=luther_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=005ff04f).

<sup>64</sup> By A Correspondent In The Gold Coast. "The Gold Coast Riots." *Times*, 6 Apr. 1948, p. 5. *The Times Digital Archive*, [link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS85280390/TTDA?u=luther\\_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=041ce7e4](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS85280390/TTDA?u=luther_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=041ce7e4). Accessed 31 Oct. 2021.

<sup>65</sup> FROM A CORRESPONDENT. "Gold Coast Parties' Aspirations." *Times*, September 16, 1949, 3. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed October 31, 2021). [https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS52250928/TTDA?u=luther\\_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=fcc8d65e](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS52250928/TTDA?u=luther_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=fcc8d65e).



movement.<sup>66</sup> This arrest of leaders of the anti-colonial political parties strengthened the associations between the political parties and the events of 1948 and thus ex-servicemen's politics were further linked in the historical mind.

### **Overview of ex-servicemen involvement in post-war Gold Coast**

In order to understand the original march and interrogate the ideas that ex-servicemen were a catalytic force for the independence movement, an overview of their political involvement in the post-war period of Gold Coast history is essential. To begin, the story that has permeated spheres beyond the historical study of the period is grounded in the broader concept perpetuated by European scholars of the Second World War as a watershed moment for Africa's advancement and independence from its colonial masters. This narrative appears in Ghana under the guises of ex-servicemen's exposure during the war to different systems and tastes of equality that influenced their post-war ideologies about the Gold Coast. It also paints ex-servicemen as a much more cohesive and definable interest group.<sup>67</sup> This narrative alleges that soldiers who fought in the theatres of India and Burma were exposed to ideologies that disrupted their former views and beliefs about their own country and colonialism.<sup>68</sup> Following this train of thought it is clear why such advocates might believe that soldiers after being exposed to the greater world through their service to Britain came back with radical ideas that fed into the intelligentsia movements against colonial control. Kwame Nkrumah actually perpetuates this narrative in his own autobiography. Upon his return to the Gold Coast, after his hiatus abroad, he wrote "I was not surprised to find a feeling of discontent and unrest among the people for, while I was editing

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<sup>66</sup> Israel, *Ex-servicemen at the Crossroads*, 366

<sup>67</sup> Eugene P. A. Schleh. "The Post-War Careers of Ex-Servicemen in Ghana and Uganda." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1968): 203–20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/159467>.

<sup>68</sup> Killingray, *Soldiers, Ex-servicemen and politics*, 524

*The New African* in London I came across many African soldiers who had served during the war in Burma and the Middle East . They had become fully conscious of their inferior standard of living (sic.) and when they returned to the Gold Coast, they lost no time in seeking better conditions.”<sup>69</sup> It would then make sense that the enlightened soldiers would be large contributors to these important movements of enlightenment in the Gold Coast if one was operating within this paradigm of historical thought.

However, this narrative is not only ahistorical and inaccurate, it perpetuates harmful implicit biases about West African ex-servicemen. The idea that they would need to be enlightened by fighting in a European war to desire a better life is incredibly degrading. While this tale for independence by the hands of those who put their lives on the line in the war makes sense on the surface, when a deeper dive is taken, it becomes significantly less concrete or black and white. According to David Killingray and Adrienne Israel, research suggests that the demographic of those who were enlisted is important to consider when investigating the effect of the war and the political involvement of ex-servicemen in the post-war period. The data that can be found in British war records indicate that the 65,000+ Gold Coast servicemen that served in the war came from a diverse background of ethnicities and regions. Instead of, as the myth goes, the war smoothed over differences and created a larger sense of national identity between those serving from the Gold Coast, it had a clearer effect of emphasizing the differences and starkly maintaining or increasing division among groups of ex-servicemen who just happened to be from the same colonially drawn area.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, many recruits came from rural areas and previously had made their living as farmers in more homogenous villages and were tempted to

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<sup>69</sup> Nkrumah, Kwame. 1957. *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*. Edinburgh: T. Nelson.  
<https://luther.on.worldcat.org/v2/search/detail/614693769?queryString=au%3A%28kwame%20nkrumah%29&expandSearch=true&translateSearch=false&databaseList=197&clusterResults=true&groupVariantRecords=false> 74

<sup>70</sup> Killingray, *Soldiers, Ex-servicemen and politics*, 525

group up with those who came from similar backgrounds. War for many, it turns out, did not serve as a catalyst for celebrating diversity in the rank and file of the Gold Coast Regiment.

There were instances where men who served in the British forces came back to the Gold Coast and got involved in local politics but this is by no means a trend. Killingray argues that for the “majority” of men it was not connected to the effect their service had on them.<sup>71</sup> Other than those who served in local politics there was one notable, high profile, anti-colonialist politician who was an ex-serviceman, John K. Baku. His anecdote for his political awakening was mistakenly translated to be applicable to the majority of ex-servicemen. This anecdote of Baku’s consisted of the alleged experience of drinking with Indian soldiers in a bar and discussing their politics as well as Indian independence from Britain. Baku claims that this fact influenced him to rethink the structure of his native West Africa. The trope however of African soldiers sitting in a bar with soldiers from the Indian or Burmese front and discussing politics leading to the enlightenment of the Africans should be contended with. Israel asserts that generally there was not that much sustained contact between troops during their service in India and Burma and that talks of political systems likely would not have occurred in the short interactions that most often took place.<sup>72</sup> Thus while this was seen by Baku as significant to his activism it cannot be applied as a blanket experience used to explain the involvement of ex-servicemen in the independence movement as the movers and shakers of nationalist thought in Ghana.

More recent historians have now agreed that contrary to the mythic past narrative of modern Ghana, the vast majority of demobilised ex-servicemen returned to their rural farms. There were those who wanted the promised jobs as drivers or the few that moved into cities in

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<sup>71</sup> Killingray, *Soldiers, Ex-servicemen and politics*, 533

<sup>72</sup> Israel, Adrienne M. “Measuring the War Experience: Ghanaian Soldiers in World War II.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 1 (1987): 159–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/160973>.

their postwar careers. Many were dissatisfied but it was not directly connected to a desire to see the downfall of the colonial administration that grew out of wartime service.

Another myth that tried to connect the war experience to dissatisfaction of life in the Gold Coast after military service is the argument that soldiers were exposed to “equality” in the service to the colonial war effort. This is dismissed by Killingray. He cites that in fact contrary to political idealism touted in the national narrative, it was the unequal treatment of African soldiers during the war that contributed to them becoming “dissatisfied and disillusioned” after they returned.<sup>73</sup> They were not changing their ideologies of political systems but rather understandably reacting to the concrete inequalities that they were burdened with during and after the war.

Killingray succinctly sums up the counternarrative that he and other more recent historians offer about ex-servicemen’s political careers: “In no way could they be said to constitute a single-class or interest group. Indeed it is perhaps fallacious to talk about ‘ex-servicemen’ other than in the context of those who had experienced some years in the army.”<sup>74</sup> The fact that the ex-servicemen did not constitute a cohesive interest group or demographic serves to rebut the narrative that they, as a group, acted as a motor of change. There were unions like the National Ex-Servicemen's Union<sup>75</sup> and even short lived prints of a newspaper called *Ex-service* but these groups did not stake their political platforms on the overthrow of colonial authority. Thus in the lead up to the ex-servicemen’s march that became conflated with nationalist politics, there was little focus by the organized group of ex-servicemen for

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<sup>73</sup> The quote “dissatisfied and disillusioned” is from Israel’s research but is put into practice of Killingray’s claims creating the scholarly discourse that they both are privy to

<sup>74</sup> Killingray, *Soldiers, Ex-servicemen and politics*, 524

<sup>75</sup> This was in fact formed by the colonial government so arguing that it spoke in behalf of veterans would not be a sound statement to base an argument on according to Schleh, 212

collaboration with the nationalist and independence movements headed by the likes of the United Gold Coast Convention at the time that advocated against colonial rule. In some cases, the wartime service that men experienced actually solidified their more conservative views.

Israel states “...those [ex-servicemen] who backed efforts to secure economic benefits for themselves provided politicians with a ‘cause’ and later an ‘incident’ which they [anti-colonialists] used to hasten self-rule.”<sup>76</sup> In an effort to garner their perceived dues from their service, veterans of the Second World War lent themselves to movements that said they would help the plight of the veterans. They were operating within the colonial system, certainly expressing their dissatisfaction but not in the way in which it was later construed. In effect, the majority of ex-servicemen acted as bystanders to nationalist politics, not motors of political change.<sup>77</sup>

### **Politics of the Nationalist Narrative (The making of mythic Past: Nkrumah)**

The usage of the Accra Riots of 1948 in Ghana’s national narrative and further, the exaggeration of the ex-servicemen’s roles in it can be traced back to the initial reactions of the U. G. C. C. under Danquah as president and Nkrumah as secretary. As stated above, Nkrumah in his own autobiography perpetuated the myth of the liberation of soldiers’ minds through their military service, he later was instrumental in politicizing the unrest following the shooting at Christiansborg Crossing. The words and actions of politicians following the unrest of 1948 must be examined in order to understand and examine the ex-serviceman-freedom-fighter narrative that lives Ghanian mythic memory.

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<sup>76</sup> Israel, *Ex-servicemen at the Crossroads*, 366

<sup>77</sup> Killingray, *Soldiers, Ex-servicemen and politics*, 533

Following the news of the riots, Nkrumah writes in his autobiography of the realization that the ex-servicemen's cause can be taken in with their movement for independence. Nkrumah states “As a matter of fact it had been my intention to organize them [ex-servicemen] in due course as an arm of our movement.”<sup>78</sup> But Nkrumah was not the only one who saw the potential that the ex-servicemen had in the time after the riots. Immediately following the news of the riots Nkrumah and J. B. Danquah (president of the U. G. C. C. at the time) sat on a verandah in Accra with other local U. G. C. C. members and Danquah recalls that they met to discuss, “to take advantage of that day’s tragic events and use that advantage as a fulcrum or lever for the liberation of Ghana.”<sup>79</sup>

As the year continued, Nkrumah sought to break with the U. G. C. C. and created his own party, the Convention People's Party [hereafter C. P. P.] where he felt he could more fully represent the people of Ghana, not just the intelligentsia.<sup>80</sup> He was giving a speech and characterized ex-servicemen as “valiant” before going on to invoke one of the officers who died in the shooting, “In the name of... Sergeant Adjetey and his comrades who died at the Crossroads of Christiansborg during the 1948 riot... I declare to the crowd the birth of the Convention People’s Party, which would from that day forward, carry on the struggle for the liberation of our dear Ghana.”<sup>81</sup> Nkrumah explicitly links the unrest that occurred during the ex-servicemen's march to Ghana’s overall struggle for independence. Dennis Austin comments on this usage in his early history of politics in Ghana , “...the name of the ex-serviceman who was killed at Christianborg crossroads aroused genuine emotion among those who cared little enough

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<sup>78</sup> Nkrumah, *The Autobiography*, 76

<sup>79</sup> Nkrumah, *The Autobiography* 74

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 104

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 105

for the Ex-servicemens Union.”<sup>82</sup> Nkrumah’s embrace of the ex-servicemen’s cause and usage of it creates a powerful national narrative centered around the impact of ex-servicemen on the movement. They were, in Nkrumah (and other politicians) public view, freedom fighters who drove the push for independence. The colonial administration had no qualm in portraying them that way either.<sup>83</sup>

It is clear that Nkrumah was the largest political figure of pre-independence period Ghana as he would serve as it’s first independent president, therefore his take on the history has been incredibly influential. The politicization of the riots that happened so abruptly after their occurrence led to the solidification of a national narrative of the road to independence being sparked in some ways, and fueled by ex-servicemen. With influential politicians embracing the ideas about the effect that war service had on ex-servicemen, thus perpetuating the ideology of the war bringing revolution, they started to craft a narrative around ex-servicemen’s role in the independence movement as a collective group. Subsequently, the politicization of the riots added to this creates a compelling story about Ghana’s birth into the independent world. Nkrumah in this context demonstrates the reality of narratives being written by and for those in power. Systems of power in general have incredible sway over the way that history is told. Here this can be seen through Nkrumah’s telling and its persistence since his death.

Throughout this section I have detailed the usage of ex-servicemen initially, this is not to say that they were not also involved afterwards. After the riots the U. G. C. C. grew in their rank and file supporters, some of which came from ex-combat backgrounds and felt that organizations

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<sup>82</sup> Austin, Dennis, and Ghana. *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

<sup>83</sup> Rathbone, Richard. “The Government of the Gold Coast after the Second World War.” *African Affairs* 67, no. 268 (1968): 209–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/719904>.

Government documents as cited by Rathbone support this narrative, reports from local authorities to national and authorities in Britain

like the U. G. C. C. were more likely to help them achieve their goals of pensions, fairer treatment and jobs than the colonial government would be. The caveat to this is that these new members were not the incredibly influential and well known leaders of the movement, they simply saw what was coming and figured this was their best chance.<sup>84</sup> The U. G. C. C. and C. P. P. both told the ex-servicemen they hoped to mobilize that their demands would be answered if they were successful in their movements. This was convincing to a number of ex-servicemen and so they joined.

After gaining independence however, Nkrumah's new government had bigger things on their agenda than rewarding ex-servicemen for their membership and service. As an ex-serviceman recalled about the C. P. P., "We had never, however, been fully accepted by the party, were never able to be fully taken into its confidence."<sup>85</sup> They had a country to run and so while some accommodations and concessions were made, the new government defended their choices because the service that these men had provided was to the British government for a British war and thus it should not be the independent Ghana's issue to pay back what the ex-servicemen were owed by the British.<sup>86</sup> This position taken by the new government left the ex-servicemen that they had rallied to their cause out in the cold. Furthering the image of the ex-servicemen-freedom-fighter were the monuments erected to memorialize ex-servicemen, notably including those of the three who were shot and killed in 1948 at Christiansborg Crossing. The memorialization of ex-servicemen, particularly these few, solidified their place in the narrative of the Ghanaian mythic past's quest for independence, even as the government denied their demands for economic security in the new Ghana.

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<sup>84</sup> This is a quote pulled from Israel's research from an unidentified ex-servicemen who she presumably interviewed

<sup>85</sup> Schleh, *The Post-war Years*, 21

<sup>86</sup> Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, 79



## Contention

Within this argument there are important issues that should be cleared up surrounding the nature of the thesis. This research has sought to lift up further the voices of ex-servicemen who have been spoken for by the independence movement, to give them the voice they wanted in the first place. Additionally, acknowledging that this group, if one can call it that, held a diversity of opinions and experiences.<sup>87</sup> Some of them were satisfied as they were lucky enough to get jobs within the colonial government after the war ended and thus independence threatened their livelihood, but this is beyond the scope of this paper's research. Others, as stated above, advocate for their belief in the movement and the fact that life overall is likely better for those who served in the war than it was under a colonial administration. There were ex-servicemen who were active and fought hard against the colonial system, but there were still the majority who just returned to their farms and participated in the common dissatisfaction with the system having no additional "enlightenment" from their service.

This paper also does not seek to aggressively criticize the independence movement. Those who fought for the independence of Ghana should be commended for their struggle and victory. The first pebble in the landslide that would end with African political independence across the continent was Ghana, and that was a noble fight. Instead, this paper seeks to interrogate the way that history is constructed and how nations are narrated. To delve into the complexities of history itself and the way it has been and continues to be used to serve agendas and how groups and voices can be caught up in this and sometimes lost.

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<sup>87</sup> Killingray, *Fighting for Britain*, 209

## Conclusion

When there is a desire for a national community, as was the case when a former colony gained independence, there are voids that need to be filled from the trauma sustained by occupation and cultural oppression. According to Robert July in his paper on African nationalism, “New nations sought legitimacy in a long-lived, and preferably illustrious, history.”<sup>88</sup> This history therefore has to be constructed in a way that serves the new country and its goals as an independent nation. Nationalism itself is fueled by a sense of greater belonging to a larger community. This belonging can be instigated by a desirable history. Looking at the history of the occupation that was a colonial system from Britain, Ghanians needed something to be proud of that was their own doing. One can even see this desire for a national identity and narrative of pro-Africanism through the very name that was chosen for the new country.<sup>89</sup> Drawing on legendary kingdoms and a past of mythic proportions before colonisation was incredibly important when writing the nation's history.

This lens also has to be applied to the years that led up to independence. The effect of politicizing the so-called Accra Riots and ex-servicemen as independence heroes led to the mythologisation of that area of history. The appealing way to remember the pre-independence period was that of strong heroes who fought against injustice on behalf of the new country that they desired to see. The strength that could be found in this enticing narrative to support the new government for the new country of Ghana whose valiant ex-servicemen had sacrificed so much to bring to the people is essential to understand. This mythologisation was incredibly effective. As seen above, despite historians realizing and arguing that ex-servicemen were not a

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<sup>88</sup> Welliver, Timothy K, and Timothy K Welliver. 1993. *African Nationalism and Independence*. Articles on Colonialism and Nationalism in Africa, V. 3. New York: Garland Pub.

<sup>89</sup> Rathbone, Richard. 2000. *Nkrumah & the Chiefs : The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951-60*. Western African Studies. Accra, Ghana: F. Reimmer.

demographic and that their war experiences did not generally radicalize them, the spirit of perceived freedom has allowed this narrative to persist.

Originally perpetuated to garner support for a new government and politics, the people who were supposedly the backbone of the movement were instead left forgotten when it came to their original grievances and issues that they sought to fight for. They were used, as groups so often are, in the movement that really only sought its own success. This is by no means to say that ex-servicemen were not impactful after the war, they (and their wartime experiences) simply were not the driving force behind the opening of the Ghanaian mind to fight for independence. To that end, when examining the circumstances surrounding the riots that resulted from the shooting at Christiansborg Crossroads, one must see it as a *coincidence* that became a catalyst rather than *the catalyst* for a revolution. Make no mistake, the riots had significant impacts on the pre-independence period in Ghana but only because there was already popular unrest over other issues AND political leaders of the time knew how to use the outrage to their advantage and channel the energy into support for a movement. They made promises that they perhaps intended to keep to the ex-servicemen they asked to support them but history shows that they did not keep these promises. Used as fuel for the fire of independence, with the victims touted as martyrial figureheads of the anti-colonial struggle, the men who served in the war and demanded their dues for it, got left behind in the fight for independence. It could be argued that life in independent Ghana was better for the majority of them than life in colonial Gold Coast Territories, it could also be argued reversely, but it does not change the fact that in all this, their voices got lost. Their bodies were used in more than one fight and they believed that through joining the movement they could gain their voice but while they were memorialized in Ghana's history as heroes they

were not actually treated in such a way. Therefore, it should be argued that ex-servicemen were sacrificed to the movement.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary

- 1) "The Gold Coast Riots." *Times*, March 5, 1948, 5. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed October 31, 2021).  
[https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS84362853/TTDA?u=luther\\_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=005ff04f](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS84362853/TTDA?u=luther_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=005ff04f).

This article provides a brief account of the Accra Riots from the year that they occurred. I hope to use this as part of my section on the riots as there are little to no accounts from an African perspective on them that are accessible to me. I will contrast this account against others that come from different places or different times as I craft the narrative around the Accra riots.

- 2) By A Correspondent In The Gold Coast. "The Gold Coast Riots." *Times*, 6 Apr. 1948, p. 5. *The Times Digital Archive*,  
[link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS85280390/TTDA?u=luther\\_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=041ce7e4](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS85280390/TTDA?u=luther_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=041ce7e4). Accessed 31 Oct. 2021.

Here is another account from *The Times* about the Accra and other riots happening in the Gold Coast at the time. It is dated a month later and provides a different perspective as time passes and the implications of the riots are being thought about. This perspective is from a journalist who was actually in the Gold Coast at the time.

- 3) Colonial Office, *Report to His Excellency the Governor by the Committee on Constitutional Reform 1949* (Colonial no. 248)

This is one of the official colonial documents dealing with the fall-out from the shooting in 1948. It was the report from local officials to the governor. It provides fantastic insight into the colonial narrative.

- 4) FROM A CORRESPONDENT. "Gold Coast Parties' Aspirations." *Times*, September 16, 1949, 3. *The Times Digital Archive* (accessed October 31, 2021).  
[https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS52250928/TTDA?u=luther\\_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=fcc8d65e](https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CS52250928/TTDA?u=luther_col&sid=bookmark-TTDA&xid=fcc8d65e).

Here we get insight into the growth and demands of the anti-colonialism movement in the Gold Coast. It tracks the evolution and cites the different grievances held by the left-wing parties of the time. Written in 1949 it gives a perspective from another year which is helpful in looking at what has changed and what has not since the riots and to independence

- 5) G., K. “The Gold Coast: Background to the Coussey Report.” *The World Today* published by Royal Institute of International Affairs, vol. 6, no. 3 (March 1950): 110–119.

Published in 1950, this article aims to give the reader of the day a background on the recently published Coussey Report that dealt with the unrest taking place in the Gold Coast in the years previous. Another official document from the colonial government perspective, this primary source gives insight into what was considered significant about the events and what preceded them. It grapples with the conversation that was happening at the time about colonialism and the Gold Coast.

- 6) Nkrumah, Kwame. 1957. *The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*. Edinburgh: T. Nelson. <https://luther.on.worldcat.org/v2/search/detail/614693769?queryString=au%3A%28kwame%20nkrumah%29&expandSearch=true&translateSearch=false&databaseList=197&clusterResults=true&groupVariantRecords=false>

This autobiography by Kwame Nkrumah deals with the earlier parts of his career before independence. I believe it can provide insight into the Elite West African perspective. His recollections of events like the Accra riots and how the war was used for his movement are a very valuable resource.

- 7) “Colin Herbert Imray (Oral History)” IWM Productions. Recorded by Conrad Wood. 1992. Duration 450 minutes

This oral history is given by Colin Herbert Imray. He was an officer in the British Colonial forces that was in the Gold Coast during the time of the unrest. He recounts his own firing into the crowd that killed three men.

## Secondary

- 1) Bourret F. M. *Ghana, the Road to Independence, 1919-1957*. Stanford, Stanford University Press. (1960)

Providing a general overview of Ghana’s journey to independence, Bourret writes from a perspective just three years after Ghana gained its independence. His account of the post-war period is interesting to explore as it is before many other accounts and histories are written. His associations and links between impacts of the war and ex-servicemen are important to compare and contrast with other interpretations and broader narratives.

- 2) Austin, Dennis, and Ghana. *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*. London: Oxford University Press, 1966.

This source gives a good overview of politics in Ghana. I have used it for both the pre-independence period as well as the post-period as well. Dennis drew heavily on official documents that I did not have access to so this was a good source to have.

- 3) Eugene P. A. Schleh. "The Post-War Careers of Ex-Servicemen in Ghana and Uganda." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 6, no. 2 (1968): 203–20. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/159467>.

This article provides another look at what ex-servicemen did after the war in Ghana. Written in 1968, it is one of the earliest secondary sources I will be consulting. It provides valuable background information for the part of my paper addressing the ex-servicemen themselves.

- 4) Rathbone, Richard. "The Government of the Gold Coast after the Second World War." *African Affairs* 67, no. 268 (1968): 209–18. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/719904>.

Richard Rathbone, another oft-cited historian for West African history in the 20th century wrote this article about the post-war era in the Gold Coast. It gives insight into the governmental and political dynamics at play in the time immediately following the end of the war. This is helpful for contextualization and informative about what the movement was rebelling against.

- 5) Killingray, David. "Soldiers, Ex-Servicemen, and Politics in the Gold Coast, 1939–50." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 21, no. 3 (1983): 523–34. doi:10.1017/S0022278X00023545.

Killingray takes his own stab at the impact of ex-servicemen in the Gold Coast in politics of independence and anti-colonialism. He grapples also with the narrative of the war as a watershed moment for Africa. His article provides great specificity again for the time period and area. He gives good background and integrates evidence that will be useful for this paper.

- 6) Israel, Adrienne M. "Measuring the War Experience: Ghanaian Soldiers in World War II." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 1 (1987): 159–68. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/160973>.

One of the experts at the time, Adrienne Israel uses primary evidence liberally to try and capture the experience of the Second World War on soldiers from what is now Ghana. Her usage of quotes is very helpful for establishing the perspectives of Africans themselves and their grievances. This history is helpful generally for looking at the impact of the war and being able to contrast the lived experience of soldiers with what the anti-colonial movement wanted to use it for.

- 7) Israel, Adrienne M. “Ex-Servicemen at the Crossroads: Protest and Politics in Post-War Ghana.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 2 (1992): 359–68.  
doi:10.1017/S0022278X00010776.

Another article written by Adrienne Israel but this one published 10 years later and covering more specifically the post-war period. Israel looks particularly at ex-servicemen and their political involvement. This specificity is very helpful in formulating my argument for how they might have been used by the movement. She grapples with some of the “myths” of African nationalism in the post-war period with her case study being the Gold Coast/Ghana.

- 8) Welliver, Timothy K. 1993. *African Nationalism and Independence*. Articles on Colonialism and Nationalism in Africa, V. 3. New York: Garland Pub.

This book is an overarching history of African independence but it has a chapter on Ghana. The themes and investigation of nationalism within African countries is helpful to form the connection between national narratives and independence which can hopefully also be translated to Ghana as case study. How nationalism functions generally is good to know when looking at the movements in Ghana and interpreting their choices and usages of ex-servicemen and grievances about the war.

- 9) Rathbone, Richard. 2000. *Nkrumah & the Chiefs : The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951-60*. Western African Studies. Accra, Ghana: F. Reimmer.

This later article by Rathbone delves into the dynamics of chieftaincy in the period leading up to independence. It provides history as well as analysis on the period in Ghana.

- 10) “Ghana Veterans and the 1948 Accra Riots” *BBC* video on *Witness History*,  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01t10s9>

This video was created by BBC with old footage and witness testimonies. It provides a much more recent look into the events of 1948. I hope to use it more extensively in my second version.

- 11) Killingray, David. *Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012.

I will be using Killingray’s chapters that deal with the Gold Coast territories for his more recent interpretation of the post-war period. His chapter on Ex-servicemen and politics will be the most useful as it deals with the narratives I am exploring as well as a brief description of the Accra Riots as well. His take on the independence and anti-colonial movements has been influential as I try to craft my argument.



***BOTH OPPRESSED AND OPPRESSORS: RECONTEXTUALIZING ASKARI EXPERIENCES IN WORLD WAR I THROUGH THE MAJI MAJI REBELLION***

Ian Klein, '22

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**Introduction**

The East African front in World War I is often regarded as the “forgotten front” of World War I. While the popular memory of the European War is of a meat grinder characterized by trench warfare that devastated the entire continent, the effect the war had on the continent of Africa is often glossed over.<sup>90</sup> The East African front was the only front of prolonged fighting in Africa during the war. In terms of military practice, it bore very little resemblance to the European fronts. Instead of the trenches and stalemate characteristic of the European front, the East African front was a prolonged guerilla war, fought against the Allied forces of Great Britain, Belgium, and Portugal, by the German military under General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. Constantly fleeing, yet never defeated in pitched battle, the German forces under Lettow-Vorbeck marched across East Africa, leaving their own territory in 1917, not to make a prolonged return until after Lettow-Vorbeck’s surrender in British Northern Rhodesia in 1918. At his surrender, Lettow-Vorbeck was accompanied by around 300 European soldiers and 1,200 *askari* soldiers, or Africans who were professional soldiers in the German military.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Samson, Anne. “The Impact of the East Africa Campaign, 1914-1918 On South Africa and Beyond.” In *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, 483–98. Studies in Global Social History 5. 2010. Reprint, Boston, MA: Brill, 2010. Anne Samson opens with a discussion about the lack of collective memory of the East Africa Campaign in British and South African public consciousnesses.

<sup>91</sup> Lettow-Vorbeck, Paul von. *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. Battery Classics. 1919. Reprint, Nashville, TN: Battery Press, 1991. 384.

This picture of a motley force amalgamated between a limited number of European soldiers and a large number of African soldiers provides an intriguing insight into the German colonial system. In particular, it might have been difficult to predict that a subjugated/colonized forces such as the *askari* would remain loyal to the Germans when it became obvious that the German war effort in East Africa was a lost cause. The first World War was not the first prolonged conflict in German East Africa, however. While colonial rebellions and individual polities rising against colonial regimes were not uncommon throughout Africa, the Maji Maji Rebellion (1905-1907) was by far the most widespread of these in German East Africa, and the tactics employed by the Germans during this rebellion had long-lasting effects, impacting the population of East Africa during the course of World War I and well into the 1920s. The participation of the *askari* in the Germans' suppression of the Maji Maji rebellion directly affected their willingness to remain with the German military until the end of World War I. Many works have examined the *askari* participation in World War I, and many have examined their participation in the Maji Maji Rebellion, but the effect of *askari* participation in the Maji Maji Rebellion on their participation in World War I has not received as much scholarship. The colonial German government sought to find a manner by which it could effectively rule its East African colonies. A successful state requires power structures in order to function, but the formation of power structures does not solely come from the ruling class. How did the structures of power that the Germans built and maintained in German East Africa incorporate the *askari*, and what was their influence upon them? The power structures of German East Africa, reinforced by the counter-insurgency measures taken by *askari* troops during the Maji Maji Rebellion created the cultural and political climate for *askari* to remain with the German military throughout World War I.

## Historiography

The early historical works focusing on the East African front in World War I fall largely into two major categories. The first category examined the German war effort, some in the effort to better understand the German war machine during World War II, while the other category examined the life and experiences of the German commanding officer, General von Lettow-Vorbeck. Lettow-Vorbeck published a memoir of his experiences on the East African front, written entirely from memory, in 1920, just 3 years after his surrender. This memoir became the cornerstone of the vast majority of the history written about the East African front for the next several decades. The influences of Lettow-Vorbeck's memoir on the historical work focusing on the East African front are clear as early as 1943, in an economic history article that makes use of Lettow-Vorbeck's insight into the attitudes of the German command during the front.<sup>92</sup> The earliest works are separated in this historiography because while they are certainly connected to the rest of the material, they exist outside of the narratives that would form shortly regarding the German presence in East Africa, and especially surrounding Lettow-Vorbeck himself.

When examining the German East Africa<sup>93</sup> front in World War I, it becomes exceedingly clear that a significant amount of the historical works from both German and English-language sources serve as hagiographical biographies of Lettow-Vorbeck. This tendency originates in the post-war period in Germany, where the defeated nation was desperate for national heroes. His memoirs, along with his continued friendship and contact with European veterans on both sides of the conflict, popularized him and his experiences in East Africa.<sup>94</sup> What started as a political

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<sup>92</sup> Henderson, W. O. "The War Economy of German East Africa, 1914-1917." *The Economic History Review* 13, no. 1/2 (1943): 104–10. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2590519>.

<sup>93</sup> The German name for the colony in East Africa was Deutsch-Ostafrika.

<sup>94</sup> Nason, Bill. "More Than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck: Sub-Saharan Africa in the First World War." *Geschichte Und Gesellschaft* 40, no. 2 (2014): 160–83. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24368708>. 161-62

desire for figures to elevate in the public consciousness quickly became the historiographical norm. Judith Listowel's *The Making of Tanganyika*, published in 1965, is an extreme example of this. Listowel characterizes the East African front as a gentlemanly affair, primarily driven by the guiding hand and the force of personality of Lettow-Vorbeck. While her reasoning is based primarily in the colonialist attitude that Africans required the guiding hand of a white European in order to behave in a civilized manner, she clearly portrays that Lettow-Vorbeck above all else was the reason the East African front was "the Last Gentleman's war".<sup>95</sup> These attitudes continue well after the publication of Listowel's work, with German biographies assigning him the titles *der Held von Deutsch-Ostafrika*, and *der Löwe von Afrika*, "the Hero of East Africa" and "the Lion of Africa."<sup>96</sup> The hagiographical view of Lettow-Vorbeck continues to be common into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, although historians have started to question assigning so much value to one man.<sup>97</sup>

The hagiography surrounding Lettow-Vorbeck has, over the course of its existence, largely served to answer the question regarding the *askari*'s continued loyalty by chalking it up to loyalty to a great and powerful man. This, paired with the continued prevalence of the hagiography in especially the military histories of the East African front, heavily affects how the *askari* are portrayed. These narratives place the power in the colonial regime's hands, largely removing the *askari*'s voice from the equation by interpreting their experiences and choices within the confines of the colonialist value system. That is, by judging and portraying the

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<sup>95</sup> Listowel, Judith. *The Making of Tanganyika*. New York, NY: London House & Maxwell, 1965. 64-65

<sup>96</sup> Michels, Eckard. Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck: *Der Held von Deutsch-Ostafrika: Ein Preussischer Kolonialoffizier*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008. and Stevenson, William, and William Stevenson. *Der Löwe von Afrika: d. legendäre General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck u. sein Kampf um Ostafrika*. Ungekürzte Ausg., 1. Aufl. Goldmann 6719. München: Goldmann, 1984.

<sup>97</sup> Anderson, Ross. *The Forgotten Front: The East African Campaign, 1914-1918*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2004.

German colonial officer's personal heroism through a western cultural lens, and then attributing *askari* loyalty to that heroism, these narratives remove the presence and importance of the *askari*'s own cultural interpretation of the events.

Another common concept regarding the German presence in East Africa is the concept of Germany as a model colonizer. This attitude originates in an interwar German political narrative, the *Kolonialschuldlüge*, or “Colonial guilt lie”.<sup>98</sup> Under this narrative, the continued loyalty of the *askari* troops proves that the Germans were the ideal colonizing force and support an argument that their colonial possessions should be returned to them. While this argument was initially presented to garner public international support for the return of German colonies to Germany, it quickly became an answer to the question of *askari* loyalty. Where the hagiographical interpretation of the East African front attributes sole cause of continued *askari* loyalty to Lettow-Vorbeck, the “model colonizer” mythos attributes *askari* loyalty to the successes of the governmental system that colonized them. This rests heavily on colonialist narratives, notably the claim that civilization was brought to Africa by European colonizers, once again diminishing the importance of the *askari* or the other indigenous East African subjects of the German Empire. Lettow-Vorbeck's continued international popularity in the postwar period, particularly in Britain, helped spread this portrayal into English-language histories of the region.<sup>99</sup><sup>100</sup> There is also a more materialistic interpretation of the model colonizer narrative; that the German government was paying for the loyalty of the *askari*. It is safe to say that the

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<sup>98</sup> Moyd, Michelle R. *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa*. New African Histories. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014. 8.

<sup>99</sup> von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, ii–iii.

<sup>100</sup> In the introduction to General von Lettow-Vorbeck's memoir, there is a discussion of his interwar popularity in Britain. The popular memory of the East African front was that of a gentlemanly conflict, and once it had resolved, Lettow-Vorbeck found himself popular not only in Germany, but Britain as well.

idea of Germany being a model colonizer is misplaced, and ignores the vast human cost of German colonial rule in East Africa.

The newest development of the historiography of German East Africa is the development of the cultural analysis of the *askari* and other colonial subjects. The outstanding figure in this field is Michelle Moyd, whose book and numerous articles have been cornerstones of the recent developments. The cultural histories of German East Africa reject the notion that most *askari*, who remained loyal to the German military throughout the entirety of World War I, remained loyal purely out of blind respect for their commanding officer, the ability of the German state to pay them, or their experiences in a “model colony”. Instead, they focus on a complex balancing act required of the German colonial government to induce the *askari*, a force relied upon for policing and soldiering, to remain loyal. These histories see the Germans begrudgingly engaging in cultural dialogue with the *askari*. Some of this dialogue manifested in the perceptions of certain cultures and their potential usefulness as soldiers, in theory similar to the British military concept of martial races, but a significant amount of this dialogue was an active part of German military life, especially once the East African front shifted gears into a prolonged guerilla war. While some primary source material exists from the colonial subjects of Germany, the vast majority of available source material on the time period is provided by the colonial overlords. This forces cultural historians to read between the lines of the German and British sources to find the common experiences of the *askari*.

When discussing the day-to-day operations of the colonial regimes, the brutal reality of these regimes must be acknowledged. The basic concept of the model colonizer myth is rooted in racist theory, which claims that Africans required European presence to become civilized, and that the Germans performed that task better than any other government. The German colonial

government, like most other colonial regimes, enforced a brutal regime that left thousands of people dead in its wake. There are many ways in which the “model colonizer” myth, or other manners of downplaying colonial atrocities, manifest in historical writing. Tales of war heroism often hide war crimes and unnecessarily harmful wartime behavior, especially in East Africa. Naming practices, as well, often serve to reinforce narratives such as the “model colonizer” narrative, and at the very least gloss over the human cost of its practices.<sup>101</sup> Finally, the agency of the colonial subjects is often ignored in earlier histories, even in those which analyze colonial atrocities. All of these are present within the overall historiography of German East Africa, and I have made every effort to operate outside of these narratives.

### **German East Africa**

The international status of German East Africa was one of isolation, albeit generally conflict-free. Bordered to the north and southwest by British colonial territories such as Uganda, British East Africa (Kenya), and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), to the west by the Belgian Congo, and to the south by Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique),<sup>102</sup> German East Africa’s only connection to Germany was through its ports on the Indian Ocean, most notably Dar-es-Salaam.<sup>103</sup> While the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Portugal fought against Germany during the first World War, relations between them in peacetime were largely conflict-free.

Geographically, German East Africa largely consists of tropical savannah, with a large, central

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<sup>101</sup> For example, the Maji Maji rebellion was not called the “Maji Maji Rebellion” by some Ngoni, but rather as the time of “great hunger” -see Schmidt, Heike. “(Re)Negotiating Marginality: The Maji Maji War and Its Aftermath in Southwestern Tanzania, ca. 1905–1916.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 27–62. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25741396>. 28.

<sup>102</sup> Anderson, *The Forgotten Front*, ii.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 16

arid region. Notably, Lake Victoria, Lake Tanganyika, and Lake Malawi all partially fell under German East African control, as did Mount Kilimanjaro.

### **The *Askari***

The *askari* were African troops hired by the German colonial government to serve the colonial regime both in colonial conflict and as police forces, from the creation of the German *Schutztruppe* in 1891 until the end of World War I in 1917.<sup>104</sup> *Askari* means soldier in Swahili and Arabic, both languages that were common among the troops. Initially, the Germans recruited *askari* extensively from regions that they did not control. There were a few different reasons for these recruiting practices. The clearest reason was that the Germans planned to utilize these troops against native uprisings and as police forces. Soldiers from the local populaces were more likely to be sympathetic to the local causes, and could not be trusted as much by their German commanders in battle against locals. Recruitment from foreign sources was more common in the earlier period of German control in East Africa, when solidifying control of the entire colonial territory was the foremost priority. As the years passed, *askari* recruitment started to draw from native East African groups more and more, with the availability of foreign soldiers to recruit being less common, and German control over East African populaces increasing.

Another driving factor of *askari* recruitment was German allegiance to a theory of martial races, similar to the eponymous British ideology. This was a driving factor for German recruitment of African mercenaries to fill the ranks of the *askari*, and the German value system for the *askari* demonstrates the desires of the colonial government and their active connection to

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<sup>104</sup> Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 36.



the local peoples. The Germans valued most of all an unwavering discipline among their troops, even more than troops who were physically stronger or more ferocious fighters. The German military prioritized recruiting Sudanese soldiers initially. Unwavering loyalty and discipline were values that the Germans held highly among their own soldiers, and it drove their recruitment practices in Africa as well. The Sudanese soldiers they recruited largely fit the Germans' cultural ideal for an *askari* as well-disciplined and loyal, along with Sudan being outside the realm of German control. Significant numbers of Shangaan people from then-Portuguese controlled Mozambique were recruited as well, although the Germans largely viewed them as difficult to control at the best of times. Rounding out the group were the locally-recruited *askari*, who were an initially small, but progressively growing group. Culture alone could not account for why the Germans found different value in the different ethnicities of the troops, nor were the ethnicities prescribed to the *askari* fully correct. While significant numbers of the "Sudanese" troops were recruited from what is today South Sudan, the label was given to any soldier recruited from northeastern Africa. Similarly, the Shangaan troops were given the label "Zulu,"<sup>105</sup> while the locally-recruited *askari* received the label "Swahili."<sup>106</sup> These labels reflect a general, if dismissively poor, understanding of regions the soldiers came from within Africa.

More important for the perception of any given recruit, regardless of culture, was their exposure to European-style military training. Sudanese recruits from all across northeastern Africa were largely drawn from pools of unused mercenaries that the British hired and trained

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<sup>105</sup> While the Zulus and the Shangaan both speak Bantu languages, they were distinct peoples. The Germans likely referred to the Shangaan as "Zulu" due to the former's larger reputation

<sup>106</sup> Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 37.

during their colonial conquest of the region.<sup>107</sup> Their exposure to European military training made the “Sudanese” troops highly prized as recruits for the German army. In contrast, the Shangaan recruits received only six days’ worth of European military training before entering into a battle against a long-time anticolonial merchant in 1911, where initially they performed well in the eyes of the German commander, but “after that they behaved as savages.”<sup>108</sup> While the “Sudanese” were initially prized, the British moved to block recruitment of Sudanese troops who resided within regions they controlled as their need for soldiers ebbed and flowed. While the Germans largely seem to point towards culture and race being the driving factor in the “Sudanese” recruits’ desirability over the “Swahili” and “Zulu” recruits, their prior experience with European-style militaries was the primary driver of their value to the Germans.

The *askari* interacted in many ways with the colonial state, both as subjects and agents of it, serving both material and philosophical roles for colonial German society. While initially hired as professionals to serve the German military, the *askari* continued to serve the German colonial government in elevated roles above other colonized people. While not on expeditions or in active conflict, the *askari* troops lived in communities called mabomas, which were encampments and towns all in one. Mabomas were found in and around colonial cities and towns, and provided the German government with quick access to troops in emergencies. Initially constructed as forts, the mabomas quickly became community and administrative centers, with Europeans and Africans living in close proximity. Within the maboma, all the provisions necessary to outlast a siege were present, including food stores, weapon stores, prisons, and administrative centers. Since mabomas were enclosed, racist hygienist practices

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 37

could not be enforced while also effectively permitting for fort defense.<sup>109</sup> In peacetime, the *askari* carried out many essential roles in support of the colony, such as taxation, police work, and collection of labor levies. These duties were part of their role as subjects of German society, but also gave them power over the non-*askari* African subjects. Materially, this allowed the Germans to extract tax money, and have control over the colony, without expending large amounts of European manpower. Philosophically, however, the Germans upheld the *askari* as African subjects benefited by exposure to German colonialism, taking advantage of the opportunity such exposure brought to them.

The *askari* helped uphold the balance of power in the German colonial regime through active participation in it. While the *askari* by no means experienced the benefits of the German colonizers, they received some passive and active benefits for being productive members of the colonial system. They terrorized the locals when collecting taxes due to their notorious tendency to extract tax money under threat of violence from colonial subjects who had already paid their taxes. They also served as official bounty hunters, retrieving colonial subjects accused of wrongdoing in order for them to face trial. The *askari* were paid by the German government to carry out these duties, and oftentimes would keep additional money and other goods seized in their duties. The *askari* were used in such a manner because their experience with native languages and cultures was far broader than the Germans' own.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, the German colonial government feared that the native population would recognize that they vastly outnumbered their oppressors in the colonial government, and utilizing black African troops to carry out the common oppressions of the colonial system distanced the small percentage of white

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<sup>109</sup> A common racist theory at the time was the idea that it was unclean for Europeans and Africans to live in close proximity to one another, and this theory was commonly practiced in the colonial towns.

<sup>110</sup> At least, the *askari* recruited from the local populaces would have been.

Germans from being the sole administrators of colonial power. This dynamic can be witnessed in the *Deutsch-Ostafrika Zeitung*, a German weekly newspaper published during the colonial system. When reporting on a court decision from the high court in Dar-es-Salaam, in which a white settler was found guilty of assaulting an *askari* police officer, the newspaper cautioned:

Through such assaults, not only will the reputation of the white population be seriously undermined, but also the injured coloreds(sic.) will be provoked into a course of action against the Europeans. Alternatively, people like the accused, lack the insight that even colored(sic.) police officers, whose loyal service was in the self-interest of the Europeans, had to be respected.<sup>111</sup>

The *askari* were used to collect taxes not only because they had more experience in the African inland, but also because common governmental grievances being directed towards the *askari* as well as the German government assuaged German fears of a worst-case colonial revolt.<sup>112</sup> It is for this reason that the *Deutsch-Ostafrika Zeitung* specifically reminded its German readership that it was in their own self-interest that the law is upheld in this manner. The German colonial government integrated *askari* soldiers into its everyday operations in a manner that made the *askari* both subjects and enforcers of colonialism.

### **The Maji Maji Rebellion**

While the *askari* were active in the German colonial system in peacetime and war, it was the large-scale Maji Maji rebellion that really entrenched their position within colonial German society. Beginning in 1905 and lasting until 1907, the Maji Maji rebellion was a rebellion of many peoples who lived in the southeastern regions of German East Africa. The Maji Maji rebellion was largely a rebellion against the colonial state, in response to a widespread practice

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<sup>111</sup> Klein, „Sind Polizeiaskaris Beamte im Sinne des § 113 St. G. B.?“ All further translations of German text are my own, except when noted

<sup>112</sup> One of the major focuses of the German colonial regime was mitigating the threat of a revolt drawn on racial lines. This is largely due to the fact that the black subjects of German East Africa vastly outnumbered the white colonists.

of forced labor on cotton plantations. The participants did not hold much in common beyond their treatment at the hand of the German colonizers, and the rebellion has been described as the first expression of a common Tanzanian political identity.<sup>113 114</sup> The German response to the rebellion was characterized by the scorched-earth tactics utilized by the German commanding officer, Major Kurt Johannes. The atrocities committed by the German troops and those under their command included execution of the elders of the Ngoni, and widespread capture of women and children during the suppression of the rebellion. Some of these women were taken by *askari* troops as wives, and were present in *askari* communities far from their origin as late as 1913.<sup>115</sup> After the rebellion was quashed by the German troops, the aftereffects of the counter-insurgency efforts were immense in human cost. During the period 1905-1910, the region experienced a major famine caused by the scorched-earth efforts of the German colonial troops paired with poor harvest years after the initial razing of crops. The official number of deaths at the hands of the German counter-insurgency efforts is listed at 75,000.<sup>116</sup> The deaths and displacement due to the resulting famine are not fully documented, but the pictures painted by German missionary sources in the region are exceedingly grim, as the mission stations were one of the few sources of consistent food in the region during and after the rebellion.<sup>117</sup> The entire German colonial regime had been mobilized against the Maji Maji rebellion, including the *askari*.

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<sup>113</sup> Iliffe, John. "The Organization of the Maji Maji Rebellion." *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 3 (1967): 495–512. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/179833>.

<sup>114</sup> Giblin, James Leonard, and Jamie Monson. *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004183421.i-325>. 1.

<sup>115</sup> For general information regarding German wartime atrocities, such as the execution of the Ngoni elders, in the Maji Maji Rebellion see Schmidt, "(Re)negotiating Marginality" 27., for the continued presence of captured wives in *askari* communities, see Schmidt, "(Re)Negotiating Marginality", 50.

<sup>116</sup> Anderson, *The Forgotten Front*, 24.

<sup>117</sup> Schmidt describes the scene as "the roads leading to the stations were still lined with the corpses of people who had succumbed to malnutrition" Schmidt, "(Re)Negotiating Marginality" 56.

The *askari* involvement in the Maji Maji rebellion is characterized in many ways. The *askari* notably participated actively in atrocities that were ordered by the German command, seizing supplies, wealth, and captives across their deployment throughout the rebellion. While deployment against colonial rebellions was not uncommon for the *askari*, the Maji Maji rebellion was by far their most widespread deployment. The *askari* were notorious in the regions they were deployed as being the “blunt edge of the colonial rule,” largely due to their deployment as forced labor supervisors and status as police officers.<sup>118</sup> These narratives alone, however, did not explain the behavior of the *askari* in the Maji Maji Rebellion. It is here that the highly-ranking *askari* largely being Sudanese comes into effect. The Sudanese *askari* represented specific examples of honor and virtue that the younger, subordinate *askari* wished to emulate. This dynamic was enforced in no small part by the German colonial regime reinforcing the racial basis of the internal *askari* hierarchy, and in so setting the tone for the *askari*’s internal ideals.<sup>119</sup> The atrocities of the *askari* troops in the Maji Maji rebellion were well known by their colonial officers, and were largely ignored primarily because the German officers saw the *askari* as a force likely to turn against them if it became unhappy. The blind eye turned to the *askari* looting during the Maji Maji rebellion was not the only practice by which the German command rewarded them. German commanders provided financial rewards as well, considering the capture of villages to be distinguished service.<sup>120</sup> That is not to claim that the *askari* operated in a manner out of control. They obeyed orders that clashed with their collective interests, when

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<sup>118</sup> Moyd, Michelle. “All People Were Barbarians to the Askari : Askari Identity and Honor in the Maji Maji War, 1905–1907.” In *Maji Maji : Lifting the Fog of War*, xii, 325. Boston, MA: Leiden, 2010.

<sup>119</sup> Because the Germans placed value on the Sudanese troops, they would often hold officer positions within the *askari* divisions. This would demonstrate to the lower-ranking or newer *askari* that the way the Sudanese troops acted was how a good soldier would act.

<sup>120</sup> Moyd, “All People Were Barbarians to the Askari : Askari Identity and Honor in the Maji Maji War, 1905–1907,” 157–58.

commanded to do so by their officers.<sup>121</sup> The *askari* were primarily interested in remaining *askari*, keeping hold of the power given to them by the German government. Disobeying orders from their commanders was not befitting of a group who wished to keep their preferred status.

## World War I

After the Maji Maji Rebellion, the importance of the *askari* to the colonial German system was obvious. The *askari* continued to carry out their peacetime tasks in the seven-year lull between major conflicts. War came again to East Africa in 1914, and nearly immediately the German East African government realized it was unwinnable. Outnumbered five to one, Lettow-Vorbeck quickly faced the reality that total victory was not a possible outcome of his war. Instead, he shifted his goal in World War I to drawing as many enemy troops and as much equipment as possible away from the European front of the war in order to defeat him. The British forces seized Dar-es-Salaam, and with it the German forces' connection to Germany early in the war. Despite this, the German war effort remained healthy into 1915, with significant *askari* recruitment drives succeeding in bolstering the German ranks. Between 1914 and 1915, more than 10,000 new *askari* recruits for the German military were raised, rounding out the total estimated *askari* forces during the war to around 14,000.<sup>122</sup>

A major contributing factor to the war's human cost was the presence of tropical disease, especially malaria and the tsetse fly. Lettow-Vorbeck claimed that he caught malaria ten times over the course of the war, even as he slept with a mosquito net. Lettow-Vorbeck also believed that the *askari* who lived in the African lowlands were immunized from malaria, while the *askari*

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>122</sup> Pesek, Michael. "Ruga-Ruga: The History of an African Profession." In *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian and Oceanic Experiences*. 2014. Reprint, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017. 93.

from the highlands near Mount Kilimanjaro were vulnerable to the disease. Despite this, a mosquito net requirement was only enforced for the German soldiers.<sup>123</sup> The Tsetse fly was a significant detriment to the war effort as well, causing sleeping sickness among humans and trypanosomiasis among beasts of burden. Medical officers and field hospitals helped mitigate the effect of the disease on the human members of the German military, but in the field every animal in the column succumbed to the disease.<sup>124</sup> As the war progressed, so did the defensive nature of the war. Victories were won, but the German forces could not possess territory from the forces it defeated. Lettow-Vorbeck quickly shifted his gears and motioned his troops towards a guerilla war.

The shift to guerilla tactics in late 1916 marked a significant shift in the war experiences for the *askari*. Cut off from supply, the German military needed to forage and seize food and water from the lands so recently devastated by its scorched-earth tactics during the Maji Maji Rebellion. The decision from Lettow-Vorbeck to move into the southern parts of German East Africa not only exposed his and the Allied troops to the exceedingly scarce conditions present, but also exacerbated the scarcity for the people who still lived there.<sup>125</sup> Despite the fact that the British troops had more resources and support, the challenges of supplying such a vast amount of resources to a widely-spread military group proved too great for the British military to solve effectively.<sup>126</sup> This put even more pressure on the people of East Africa, as every occupying military was requisitioning food from the civilian population. *Askari* participation in German

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<sup>123</sup> von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 24–25.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>125</sup> Moyd, Michelle. “‘We Don’t Want to Die for Nothing’: Askari at War in German East Africa, 1914–1918.” In *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, edited by Santanu Das, 90–107. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511973659.005>. 93.

<sup>126</sup> Anderson, *The Forgotten Front*, 186–87.



columns had a significant impact on the development of supply. The common practice for the *askari* in the German military was for the soldiers to be accompanied by their wives, and oftentimes by servant-boys. This broke from the standard European practice of military divisions being male-only, but the German command largely acquiesced to the practice because it was a method by which the *askari* could be controlled. The cultural forces that drove the *askari* to be a “big man” who could provide for himself placed significant value on the *askari* being able to provide for his own family as well. As this was the case, the *askari* columns consisted of many more people than solely the soldiers who fought in the battles, which meant that there was that much more food that needed to be requisitioned from the local populaces.

As the war dragged on, Lettow-Vorbeck realized that the southern reaches of German East Africa were no longer capable of sustaining his campaign, and by the 21<sup>st</sup> of November, 1917, he withdrew his forces from German East Africa. At this time, the troops were severely depleted, with Lettow-Vorbeck claiming that as they crossed the Rovuma River, into Portuguese East Africa, that he had 300 European soldiers, 1,700 *askari*, and 3,000 native non-combatants.<sup>127</sup> This was a severely depleted force, and many *askari* had been left behind due to injury or inability to continue marching with the column. The decision to enter into Portuguese East Africa proved to be fruitful for the German troops, as the Portuguese soldiers were weakened fighting in their by colonial rebellion, and several fortified and supplied positions were overtaken by the German army a few weeks after entrance into Portuguese territory.<sup>128</sup> At this time, however, the German East African treasury began to run dry. In May 1918, Lettow-Vorbeck reported that around 30,000 rupees were lost from the German treasury, and the ability

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<sup>127</sup> von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 224.

<sup>128</sup> „Commander of the Schutztruppe for German East Africa. - War Diary“, 513.

of the German military to pay its *askari* soldiers was beginning to be questioned. In lieu of paper money, the standard by which the *askari* had been paid, the Germans attempted to offer invoices for the amounts the *askari* should be paid. This was often rejected by the *askari*, who questioned the ability of the Germans to ensure that the invoices would be converted to money.<sup>129</sup> As these problems added up, there was a noticeable response from the *askari* soldiers, largely in the form of desertion.

Desertion and capture of the *askari* troops grew commonplace, as the war progressed. At the height of the war, the Germans fielded around 14,000 *askari* troops in the colonial military. Official numbers at the end of the war list 3,000 *askari* as deserters, 4,200 as captured, and 4,500 as missing.<sup>130</sup> Desertion was initially discouraged by Lettow-Vorbeck, but as the German military entered Portuguese East Africa, he began to cut troops in the interest of only retaining a small enough force that could be adequately supplied on the run.<sup>131</sup> There were many reasons an *askari* could desert from the military, but most were the result of the *askari* soldiers realizing that the German military could no longer provide for their, and their family's well-being. *Askari* culture placed primary importance upon hierarchical superiors being able to care for those they commanded over. An inability to convince the *askari* that they would be provided for, and that their social standing would remain intact post-war, was a driving factor in a significant number of *askari* desertions.<sup>132</sup> In some occasions, the decision to desert was made on the grounds that the British military would provide better patronage, while others merely wished to leave the war.

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<sup>129</sup> Moyd, "We Don't Want to Die for Nothing," 101.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>131</sup> von Lettow-Vorbeck, My Reminiscences of East Africa, 222,224.

<sup>132</sup> Moyd, "We Don't Want to Die for Nothing," 92.

When Lettow-Vorbeck surrendered on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 1918, he was accompanied by just around 1,200 remaining *askari* troops and 1,600 carriers.<sup>133 134</sup> While the ranks of the *askari* had dwindled by around 13,000 men from their peak numbers, the presence of the remaining *askari* at the surrender remains intriguing to this day. Those who stuck with Lettow-Vorbeck until the end of the war were likely influenced to do so by his continuing ability to provide for his limited set of troops until the very end, boosted significantly by the Portuguese spoils in 1917. More significantly, sticking with the German command represented the continuation of the power structures that heavily benefited the *askari* during the German colonial period. The German system gave the *askari* opportunity to gain material wealth, embody their cultural and personal ideals, and exert political power over the civilian population of German East Africa. While over the course of the war, the ability of the German regime to continue to provide these benefits became increasingly unclear, resulting in the significant number of desertions, there must have been a conception among the 1,200 remaining troops that the German regime was the best method of preserving their status in society. During the war, more so than in peacetime, the exact potential and power of the German regime was communicated through the commanding officers, rather than the more diverse exposure that peacetime would offer. This offered the *askari* more power over their own situation, as a single German officer could not prevent an *askari* group from deserting should they want to. The British military had already appointed colonial leaders in the occupied East African territory from the populations oppressed during the Maji Maji rebellion, as well.<sup>135</sup> While it is unlikely that the *askari* knew

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<sup>133</sup> von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 321.

<sup>134</sup> Anderson, *The Forgotten Front*, 294. includes non-active combatants, such as the soldiers wives, servants, and prisoners of war. He states the final number of Africans present at the surrender as 4,416.

<sup>135</sup> Schmidt, "(Re)Negotiating Marginality", 60. The local Ngoni elders, who were primarily in their mid-30s due to the execution of the older elders during the rebellion petitioned the British government for power upon British occupation of the territory in 1916.

this during the war, concerns regarding the power structure were exacerbated by the potentiality for the *askari* losing their power within the system.

## Conclusion

In defeat, the *askari* did not attain their long-term goal of a stable patron in World War I, at least initially. The German government, in a state of disarray after losing the war, did not or could not provide the *askari* with the back pay that Lettow-Vorbeck promised until 1928. Despite this, Lettow-Vorbeck loudly petitioned for the *askari* to receive payment from the German government. Lettow-Vorbeck continued to live in Germany for the rest of his life, initially using his status as a war hero to gain political clout in the 1920s, but never attained any major positions. He would not return to East Africa until 1953, when Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere and several former *askari* welcomed him on an official state visit.<sup>136</sup> The *askari*, and German East Africa, would remain under British colonial rule from 1916 until 1961, as the state of Tanganyika.

The long-term effect that the Maji Maji Rebellion had on the *askari*'s interaction with the colonial government was immense. Serving the colonial regime effectively during the most widespread rebellion faced by the colony, the *askari* solidified their role and position of power within the colonial society. This, alongside a cultural drive to follow a patron so long as that patron could provide for their biological and cultural needs, influenced the presence and role the *askari* played during the first World War in East Africa. The intermediate position of power within German society drove some *askari* to remain loyal, as loyal service to the German regime had been rewarded well in many previous instances, especially during the Maji Maji Rebellion.

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<sup>136</sup> von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, iii.

The *askari* were not driven by external cultural forces alone, as the forces were composed of many different ethnic groups, but the internal culture cultivated by both the *askari* themselves and the German commanding officers set the stage for some *askari* to remain with the German forces. A significant number of *askari* recognized that the German command was not capable of providing for their needs as the war dragged on, but most *askari*, however, were not given total choice in the matter, as significant numbers were either captured or killed in battle.

The *askari* served a complicated role in the German colonial system. Simultaneously colonial subjects of a racist government, and enforcers of the government in their own right, the *askari* carved out a complex way of life that continued until the German surrender in 1918. Driven by their own sense of professionalism, developed by themselves and their German commanders, the *askari* were hugely important pieces of the colonial regime at peace and at war.

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This is a newspaper article for a German-language newspaper operated in German East Africa until 1915. In the article it describes a court ruling from the high court in Dar-Es-Salaam, the capital of German East Africa, in a case where a white German assaulted a black askari police officer because the askari officer would not leave his post to help the white German colonist find his Hippo stick. This is of note because the newspaper goes into detail as to why the German high court would punish a white settler for striking an askari, with details into the perceived frailty of the askari's loyalty.

Lettow-Vorbeck, Paul von. *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. Battery Classics. 1919. Reprint, Nashville, TN: Battery Press, 1991.

This is a memoir written by the commanding officer of the German forces in German East Africa, General von Lettow-Vorbeck. As a memoir, it was written several years after the war had happened, and it is entirely from memory, however it still proves to be a valuable source to see into the mind of the German commanding officer and how he personally interacted with his askari troops.

Various. „Kommando der Schutztruppe für Deutsch-Ostafrika.- Kriegstagebuch“. Bundesarchiv, 1917 1916. RW 51/35. Bundesarchiv-Freiburg.  
<https://invenio.bundesarchiv.de/invenio/direktlink/282aa63a-1348-40e6-9dd1-381c081e5acc/>.

This is a list of engagements and encounters of the German forces in World War I. It provides useful information into the perspective of the German military and how they believed the war was going, along with battle results such as seized equipment and losses.

### Secondary Sources:

*Books:*

Anderson, Ross. *The Forgotten Front: The East African Campaign, 1914-1918*. Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2004.

This is a military history of the East African campaign. Focusing not only on the German troops, and their makeup, but the British, Belgian and Portuguese troops they faced as well. It is rather empiricist, and due to that fact, it does not provide much insight on the German-*askari* relationship, but it provides background and quantitative information that has been corroborated across multiple national archives to the military information in the sources that deal more with the *askari* experience.

Berman, Nina, Klaus Mühlhahn, and Alain Patrice Nganang, eds. *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian, and Oceanic Experiences*. Social History, Popular Culture, and Politics in Germany. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2014.

This is a collection of essays that deal with the topic of German Colonialism, primarily from a perspective that aims to provide voices for the colonial subjects of Germany. These all give focused information on specific aspects of the colonial experience.

Giblin, James Leonard, and Jamie Monson. *Maji Maji: Lifting the Fog of War*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004183421.i-325>.

A collection of essays regarding different aspects of the Maji Maji Rebellion. A comprehensive series of essays that tackles questions of the origins of the rebellion, the involvement of the *askari* in the rebellion and the German response to the rebellion.

Listowel, Judith. *The Making of Tanganyika*. New York, NY: London House & Maxwell, 1965.

This is a British history of Tanganyika, rampant with colonial narratives and portrayals of racial theory that had been out of official practice with the British military for two decades. It is a good example of the historiography that has been affected by both the hagiography of General von Lettow-Vorbeck, and the “model colonizer” narrative.

Michels, Eckard. *Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck: Der Held von Deutsch-Ostafrika: Ein Preussischer Kolonialoffizier*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008.

This is a German-language biography of General von Lettow-Vorbeck. It is a complete biography of the man, and not much information outside of the section dedicated to his participation in German East Africa will be usefull. This section will provide valuable contextualization to von Lettow-Vorbeck’s memoir.

Moyd, Michelle R. *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa*. New African Histories. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2014.

This is an in-depth cultural analysis of the *askari* troops during the German colonial period. Instead of starting at the declaration of war in Europe, Moyd begins her analysis in 1899,

with the first usage of African troops by the Germans. It analyzes, in depth, the colonial perspective, with specific focus on cultural questions regarding the *askari* and their continued loyalty to the German military.

Stevenson, William, and William Stevenson. *Der Löwe von Afrika: d. legendäre General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck u. sein Kampf um Ostafrika*. Ungekürzte Ausg., 1. Aufl. Goldmann 6719. München: Goldmann, 1984.

A hagiographical German-language portrayal of General von Lettow-Vorbeck. It focuses more on East Africa than *der Held von Deutsch-Ostafrika*.

*Scholarly Articles:*

Henderson, W. O. “The War Economy of German East Africa, 1914-1917.” *The Economic History Review* 13, no. 1/2 (1943): 104–10. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2590519>.

This is an economic analysis of the German presence in East Africa during the first World War. It includes a lot of quantitative information and a picture into how the war economy worked for the German *Schutztruppe* during the East African Campaign.

Iliffe, John. “The Organization of the Maji Maji Rebellion.” *The Journal of African History* 8, no. 3 (1967): 495–512. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/179833>.

An examination of the origins of the Maji Maji rebellion, focusing on the multiethnic and religious background of the rebels. Examining how initially grievances were based on governmental treatment and forced labor, but evolved into a religious basis.

Moyd, Michelle. “All People Were Barbarians to the Askari : Askari Identity and Honor in the Maji Maji War, 1905–1907.” In *Maji Maji : Lifting the Fog of War*, xii, 325. Boston, MA: Leiden, 2010.

This article examines the *askari* involvement in the Maji Maji Rebellion, primarily questioning the atrocities committed by the soldiers during the conflict. Moyd also discusses the terminology used to refer to the *askari*, questioning the usage of the term “mercenary”, and proposing “professional” to replace it.

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This article analyses the cultural reasons the *askari* troops had to remain with the German forces after the German forces had lost control of any land in East Africa. It is in conversation with previous stereotypes of the *askari*, and aims to give the *askari* more agency in the historical view.



Nasson, Bill. "More Than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck: Sub-Saharan Africa in the First World War." *Geschichte Und Gesellschaft* 40, no. 2 (2014): 160–83. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24368708>.

This article analyzes the African front as a whole in World War I, dedicating significant time to the perception of General von Lettow-Vorbeck. Unlike most other literature, this article takes a critical view of von Lettow-Vorbeck. It also provides additional cultural analysis of indigenous people in Africa and their reaction to the war.

Pesek, Michael. "Ruga-Ruga: The History of an African Profession." In *German Colonialism Revisited: African, Asian and Oceanic Experiences*. 2014. Reprint, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2017.

This article examines the *Ruga-ruga* mercenary profession and its relation to the German army in East Africa. It covers the history of the profession and the *ruga-ruga* presence in the German military during World War I. That there was a significant difference between the *ruga-ruga* and the *askari* lends credence to the claim that they were separate.

Samson, Anne. "The Impact of the East Africa Campaign, 1914-1918 On South Africa and Beyond." In *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia*, 483–98. *Studies in Global Social History* 5. 2010. Reprint, Boston, MA: Brill, 2010.

An examination of the national memory of the East African front from a British perspective, both from the island of Great Britain and other colonial possessions. It concludes that lack of territorial gain was a major reason the South African government did not stake a significant part of its national identity on its involvement in East Africa.

Schmidt, Heike. "(Re)Negotiating Marginality: The Maji Maji War and Its Aftermath in Southwestern Tanzania, ca. 1905–1916." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 43, no. 1 (2010): 27–62. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25741396>.

This article covers the Maji Maji rebellion from a perspective of the East African indigenous populations. Questioning and highlighting the treatment of the natives, and the rewards given (or punishment not given) to the colonial officers and soldiers fighting against the Maji Maji rebellion. It identifies religious motives as well as material motives for the uprising.