

# 'The Military, Policing and Decolonisation in Sierra Leone, 1953-1957'

Stewart West

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## **The Author**

Stewart West served in the British Army from 1951 to 1957, first as a private and then a commissioned officer in the Essex Regiment, and seconded to the Royal West Africa Frontier Force (RWAFF) from 1953-57. On leaving he joined the Colonial Police, which immediately posted him to Uganda. After resigning from the Uganda Police in 1961, he went on to work for several commercial companies, and completed both a B.A (Hons) in Humanities with Classical Studies and a B.Sc (Hons) in Social Sciences. He is currently retired and living in Malaysia. The main body of the paper below is an account of his time in the Uganda Police.

## **Preface**

### **Karl Hack**

This is the fourth of the Ferguson Centre's Working Papers, and the second to provide *a first-hand account of the workings of empire*. The Centre is eager to help preserve, and make publicly available, more such accounts. We are also happy to consider posting replies or additions to a paper online, where these might add substantively to a paper, or provide an alternative or even competing view or voice.

This particular paper bears on the history of West Africa, and thematically on the history of colonialism, of the living conditions and attitudes of Europeans in colonies, decolonisation, and of colonial military and 'policing' in the widest sense. Its author, Stewart West, was called on to help the civil power control the 1955 to 1956 riots in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown. Following these riots, decolonisation ultimately continued apace post-Suez, to culminate in independence in April 1961. It is fascinating as an eyewitness account of a British officer trying to navigate colonial turbulence and his own conscience, at the sharp end of history.

Stewart West tells the story clearly, and it stands on its own. Readers who wish to get straight to the action, or who already have a good knowledge of Sierra Leone, may wish to skip straight to the main account below.

It may help some readers, however, if I preface and contextualize the local story that follows.

The events that Stewart West has kindly recalled and described for us occurred between 1953 and 1957 in Sierra Leone, one of the most westerly and smallest of Britain's African colonies, and also one with its roots in the slave trade, and then in the anti-slavery movement as well.

This general area of the West African coast had long been home to trading stations for companies such as the 'Company of Adventurers into Africa'. But the late eighteenth century saw a very different sort of European intervention. A first 1787 settlement expedition - with 411 ex-slaves freed as a result of Lord Mansfield's 1772 judgment and 60 European prostitutes - arrived to settle an area of 20 square miles of land which a local 'King' had leased for thirty pounds.

By 1791 the Crown had granted a charter to the Sierra Leone Company (whose directors included William Wilberforce), and the Admiralty used Freetown for anti-slavery operations from 1808, with the Governor of the Colony in Freetown at times overseeing other British interests along the West African littoral, from the Gambia to the Gold Coast. In this period the Colony consisted mainly of the port of Freetown and its immediately surrounding area – virtually a peninsula and screened by hills inland – inhabited mainly by descendants of freed slaves from Britain, Africa, the Caribbean and Nova Scotia. These were sometimes referred to as ‘Creoles’ or Krio.

This tiny coastal Colony struck more than 150 treaties and agreements with inland tribes and groups, formally constituting the territory of the latter as the vastly bigger ‘Protectorate’ from 1896. In this way Sierra Leone’s arrangements echoed similar divisions between coastal colony and inland protectorate in the vastly bigger British administration of Nigeria. Direct rule in the Colony contrasted sharply with indirect rule through local Native Authorities in the Protectorate, with ultimate authority over land in the latter residing with tribal authorities. The Native Authorities of the Protectorate’s provinces initially collected taxes in return for five per cent commission, received stipends, rights to demand labour on their own farms, and retention of judicial power over native cases (from 1925 limited to those subject to a maximum of 6 months jail). ‘Native’ courts were more regularized from 1925, and a school at the Protectorate capital of Bo set up from 1906 to provide a modern education for chieftains’ sons.

The main export was palm kernels and oil, with Lever Brothers the main European investor, though in the postwar period diamonds and still later minerals would become first a boon, and after independence a curse too.

There was thus a demographic as well as an administrative tension between the Colony’s and the Protectorate’s inhabitants, with the Protectorate more rural and tribal, and the Colony more missionary influenced, Creole/Krio, and European-influenced. Furthermore, the Tribal Administration Ordinance had allowed the Governor to recognize tribal chiefs for distinct groups living in Freetown itself, giving the former powers over matters such as relief of the poor, education, registrations, limited taxation and fines (subject to the Governor and Corporation of Freetown agreeing), and even witchcraft. The result was that some enclaves - what elsewhere have sometimes been called ‘urban villages’ – existed within Freetown. Each urban ‘Tribal Ruler’, appointed for five year periods, was also expected to assist the police and Justices of the Peace (JPs). By contrast, a Municipality with an African majority and very limited powers, was always in deficit, and was ultimately dissolved. Not surprisingly, perhaps, Freetown emerged as a diverse and rather unstructured jumble of roads and architectural styles, ranging from brick government buildings, through mixed brick and wood construction, to low-rise wattle and daub, tin-roofed dwellings. All of which was interspersed with tropical plants and colours, but also echoes of England, such as the green double decker buses and abundant churches.

From the First World War onwards the Creole/Krio dominance of the Colony itself was declining. Freetown was, meanwhile, still a vanguard for West African advancement, with Fourah Bay College, established by missionaries in 1827, giving university-level education (it granted Durham University degrees from 1876) before other West African territories could offer this. As a result, Freetown was for a long time a beacon for West African educational and intellectual activity.

Perhaps just as importantly for the story below, Sierra Leone had a long tradition of ‘Native’ representation on its Legislative Council, which in its modern form dated back to 1863. From 1903-24 three of four

nominated unofficial members (a majority of 5 were officials) were Africans from the vicinity of Freetown. West African National Congress petitions resulted in this being increased to 12 official and 10 unofficial members, with election of some of the latter. From 1924 three of the unofficials were also to be elected from the colony, while 7 would be nominated to represent interests (including for first time one Paramount Chief for each of the three Provinces of the Protectorate). This might appear somewhat liberal, though voters were subject to literacy and either property or salary requirement, so in 1924 elections there were just 1,214 ballots cast. Despite two Africans being nominated to the Executive Council as well from 1946, progress towards responsible democracy based on elected representatives was thus still severely circumscribed limited by the end of the 1940s.

A final ingredient in the mix, of some importance to the story below, was the growth of unions. The presence of railways, large bodies of government employees, and of some urban industry, fuelled unions in Freetown in particular. These proved willing and able to strike, and received some support from elected members of the Legislative Council. A 1919 railway strike (over requirements to pass tests to qualify for increments) led to particular bitterness, as the government insisted on the right to dismiss strikers, and to fine them for contravening the Master and Servants Ordinance by leaving work without permission. There was, in other words, an undercurrent of labour and racial bitterness and divide, despite the philanthropic sentiments behind early settlement, with the settlement of military recruits in Freetown following both world wars providing a further admixture of men willing and able to challenge government.

So much for the longer history of this tropical West African possession, once the ‘white man’s graveyard’ due to diseases such as malaria, and still swept periodically by torrential rains and even hurricanes, and yet sometimes desiccated by ‘Harmattan’ winds, which blew from the Sahara far inland from December to February.

What were the Colony and Protectorate like in 1953, when our author – Stewart West – first stepped onto its soil as an officer of the West African Frontier Force?

Fortunately for us, a book was completed in 1953 (and published the following year) precisely with the intention of providing a reliable, Colonial Office approved guide to the general reader. This was Roy Lewis’s *Sierra Leone: a Modern Guide* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1954). Its weakness, that it represents a Western and pro-colonial view, are in some senses a strength for our purpose: of describing a colony as it might have appeared to an incoming British officer. For Lewis, the Colony was a peculiar place, with green British double decker buses, half empty churches, but also tropical bougainvillea, banana plants, and mango trees and brightly coloured garments, and a semi-detached relationship between the ‘Colony’ and the vastly bigger and more populous Protectorate inland:

The Colony is spoken of as a peninsula, an accurate description for the children's geography books, and preferable at a time when all men of good will are trying to give the territory a new unity. But to me it appeared an island-an island racially, culturally, politically: a British made island anchored off the West African coast. When the settlers first landed, it was part of the Temne country which stretches northwards up the river for 100 miles; but communication was always by water rather than by land.

Yet Lewis also noted that the change in the air for the rest of Africa could be detected here too. In 1953, as he finished writing, a milestone towards greater ‘Native’ self-government was reached. The number of Africans invited onto the Executive Council had already been increased from three to six in 1951 (appointed from the

unofficials in the Legislative Council), when universal male adult suffrage was also introduced. From 1951 these Africans on the Executive Council had also been treated as 'Members' of government with responsibilities (a similar experiment started in Malaya in 1951), or as a sort of trainee Minister. In early 1953, the Government declared that this latter experiment had been a success, and that the Members had passed their apprenticeship and would be full Ministers. Dr (later Sir) Milton Margai of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), which had won 16 of 21 directly and indirectly elected seats in the 1951 elections, now became 'Chief Minister'. He continued to work the constitution in cooperation with the Governor and the remaining officials on the Executive Council, whereas the National Council of Sierra Leone which had won more elected seats in the Colony in 1951 opposed working it.

So there was by 1953 an African majority on the Legislative Council of 32 (21 elected, 7 ex officio, 2 nominated by the Governor, and the Governor as President and a Deputy President), and 6 African ministers on the Exco with an African 'Chief Minister'.<sup>1</sup> Lewis noted that:

European power is beginning to pass away. It is passing, however, not to the descendants of the ex-slaves who built Freetown but

to the people of the interior who are, in the fullness of time, claiming what was once sold for an embroidered waistcoat. Even in the capital, the creoles are in a minority. (Lewis, p. 12).

The opposition with its strong roots on more Creole orientated Freetown watched nervously, and looked for opportunities to make political headway against the increasingly dominant SLPP. In the rural areas of the Colony, meanwhile, with its declining 'Villages' (Waterlooville was the largest at 5,000 strong), local democracy was also being completed. At one point these villages and rural areas of the Colony had together been treated like a District, under a British District Commissioner. But by 1953:

Democracy is to be the active principle. There are to be village committees, elected by the ratepayers of the area (either a village or a group of small hamlets); the village area committees of a district elect six of their number to become the district council and each of the six district councils elects one member to go to the Rural Area Council. The President of the Rural Area Council is at present the D.C., who is a creole, Mr. Jones; in 1953 this office, too, will be an elective one. The pyramid of local government will then be complete. Each authority will have its own treasury and finance, and the improvement of the Colony will be in the hands of the rural dwellers themselves (Lewis, p. 28).

Thus, as in Malaya and some other colonies again, there was a British attempt to gradually replace colonial control (assisted by nominees) with genuine democracy from local roots upwards.

The Colony overall – both Freetown and its villages and rural districts – was still heavily flavoured by creoles, many of whom looked to England as a model, by the United Africa Company, by endless small traders and yet also powerful unions, by colonial overlordship and yet also by creeping democracy. It was also the home to the small but historic Fourah Bay College, of Anglicanism and Wesleyanism which coexisted alongside Islamic festivals, and of slightly decayed rural villages. Above all this, the Colony itself was dominated by the growing and modernising port at Freetown – of between 80-90,000 people in the 1950s.

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<sup>1</sup> Some sources do not count the Governor and Deputy President, thus stating 30. The 21 elected were divided into: 12 indirectly via the Protectorate District Councils; 2 indirectly by the Protectorate Assembly; and 7 directly by Colony districts), 7 ex officio. *Commonwealth Yearbook 1991*, p. 335.

More significantly, increasing elections meant that the Colony was increasingly falling under the shadow of the more populous Protectorate in the early 1950s. A 1959 estimate suggests a total population for Sierra Leone of about 2.4 million, with just 88,000 in Freetown, and 20,000 in the Protectorate's capital of Bo. Overall, only about 5 per cent of the population were then in towns of any size at all.<sup>2</sup> The more populous Protectorate was thus likely to dominate the LegCo as the latter became more elected and less nominated and official.

Clearly Sierra Leone was making progress, but still faced formidable challenges, not least in the potential for tension between Christian and Muslim, Colony and Protectorate, urban and rural, and SLPP and opposition. In addition, its economic development – despite the increasing significance of diamonds – had not taken off even to the same extent as the Gold Coast with the latter's vast acreages of cocoa and palm plantations. There were few plantations here, relatively underdeveloped external trade, and less than a third of 5-14 year olds were in school.

Into this tropical canvas, with its mix of progress and severe structural limitation, intruded the riots of 1955-56, starting with the Freetown riots of February 1955. We can capture the flavour of the moment from the exchange on these in the House of Commons on 17 February 1955:

98. **Mr. John Hall** To ask the Secretary of State for the Colonies if he will make a statement about the recent riots in Sierra Leone.

**The Secretary of State for the Colonies (Mr. Alan Lennox-Boyd)** I will, with permission, answer Questions Nos. 97 and 98. For some time two unions in Sierra Leone have been negotiating, through a joint industrial council, for wage increases. A deadlock was reached on 4th February. The employees adhered to a 561 demand for an increase of 10d. a day, while the employers offered an increase of 6d. With a promise to re-open negotiations as soon as new cost-of-living figures were available. The employers asked for arbitration if their offer were not accepted.

The employees' representatives refused both the offer and to go to arbitration. They invited all workers to a mass meeting at which it was decided to call a general strike on 9th February. The Railway Workers' Union publicly dissociated itself from this call, and on 9th of February there was only a partial response. During the next two days the strikers caused a series of disturbances at the railway workshops and the port installations, and a number of arrests were made.

On Friday the 11th, strike leaders and the leader of an opposition political party addressed a meeting of strikers. The strikers were promised the opposition party's support and the failure to get their demands was blamed on the political party in power. The meeting was orderly, but was followed by serious rioting.

The railway workshops, the dock areas and the Eastern Police Station were attacked by the strikers. Troops stood by to help the police, who were becoming exhausted after two days continual pressure, and in the afternoon began operations in support of

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<sup>2</sup> V.I. Junod, ed., *The Handbook of Africa* (New York: New York University Press, 1961), pp. 331-2 .

them. One company relieved the Eastern Police Station, which was in danger of being burned down with men inside it. The police fired a number of rounds of rifle fire in defending the area of the police station. There were three casualties among the strikers and one European police officer was fatally injured by the crowd.

Rioting spread, and continued into the next day, Saturday. Attempts were made to dislocate essential service installations, road communications, water and electricity supplies, and the telephone system, at key points. The Governor states that these appeared to be carefully planned and executed.

Three companies of troops were fully engaged during this period. They and the Police had to open fire a number of times in their attempts to control the widespread rioting, and to prevent the looting, arson, and general destruction of property which was going on.

562 On Saturday afternoon, the strike leaders approached the Government. The Governor informed them that he would appoint a Commission of Inquiry to look into all circumstances of the dispute and the disturbances and that he would immediately set up a Conciliatory Committee to bring workers' and employers' sides together again.

On this the strike was called off. Rioting immediately died down. Patrols and a curfew were maintained over the weekend, and on Monday there was an almost complete return to work. Troops were withdrawn on Monday and the curfew is being lifted today.

Seventeen persons killed and 84 injured have been reported to date, but there may still be some casualties not yet reported. There were no serious casualties among the troops, but besides the police officer who was killed there were four others severely wounded and many suffered minor injuries.

The Conciliatory Committee has met several times, but I have not yet heard that it has reached a conclusion.

I would like to express the regret and the grave concern of Her Majesty's Government at these happenings. I think that I must await the report of the Commission of Inquiry before coming to any conclusions upon them.

**Mr. Johnson** May I thank the Colonial Secretary for his statement, and ask him if he is aware that these 20 people who were killed included five schoolchildren and one woman? Is it not a fact that this is one of the worst incidents in the Colonies for some years? Public opinion, both here and in the Colony, is most disquieted about this state of affairs, and we hope that the Commission will have the widest terms of reference to deal with wages and the circumstances of the shooting and so on.

**Mr. Lennox-Boyd** I can assure the hon. Member that there will be a most searching inquiry into what I recognise as a most serious state of affairs.

**Mr. J. Griffiths** Will the Colonial Secretary take an early opportunity of either making a statement, or of making a statement and presenting copies to the House of the report of the investigation ordered by the Governor? We join with 563 the Colonial Secretary in expressing sympathy to those bereaved and injured. Will he make particular inquiries into what I am told are two of the most important issues in this conflict, the recent steep increase in the cost of living and the position of rice, both as to availability and price? Would those be suitable subjects for inquiry?

**Mr. Lennox-Boyd** In addition to the inquiry, I will follow what the right hon. Member has said. An expert from the United Kingdom is shortly going out to recalculate the cost of living indices, which the Government recognise are probably not entirely reliable.

**Mr. Hall** Is there any evidence that the riots were stimulated or planned as a result of the conflict of interests between the Colony and the Protectorate?

**Mr. Lennox-Boyd** It would be wiser to wait until I have the Commission's report before I attempt to estimate the cause.

**Mr. Bing** Can the Minister tell the House what was the weekly wage over which a 10d. increase was sought?

**Mr. Lennox-Boyd** Of course, that will undoubtedly emerge and be given full publicity in the report of the inquiry. There is not a common wage. There are many varieties of wage, and any answer I gave would be misleading. We had better wait until these things have been sifted and they will be given full publicity.

**Mr. Alport** What is to be the composition of the inquiry for which His Excellency the Governor has called?

**Mr. Lennox-Boyd** What he has in mind is that it should consist of a chairman from the United Kingdom, an expert on industrial relations from the United Kingdom and two judicial representatives from West Africa.

**Mr. Rankin** Can the Minister say whether any other methods have been considered for dispersing a crowd? Time and again it is the bullet that is the method. Is there no alternative like the fire brigade, or tear gas, that might be used in cases such as this?

**Mr. Lennox-Boyd** The hon. Gentleman knows that it is when the bullet is used to disperse a crowd that, naturally and quite properly, much publicity 564 attaches to it. Crowds are frequently dispersed by quite different means. The force that was used and the reasons for using it will be thoroughly thrashed out at the inquiry. ...

**Mr. J. Johnson** Is it not a fact that the meagre pittance of 6d. a day increase will be about a 10 per cent increase in wages?



**Mr. Lennox-Boyd** I have nothing to add to the statement I made that this will be thoroughly investigated by the Commission of Inquiry.<sup>3</sup>

One alleged background factor to the three days of February 1955 riots was opposition encouragement for the unions. The main opposition party – like the SPP founded in 1951 – was the National Council of Sierra Leone (NCSL). Influential only in the Colony, it favoured a federal constitution with separate assemblies for the Colony and Protectorate. In 1957, after universal adult suffrage was introduced, the NCSL lost all its seats in the legislature. The main driving force, however, seems to have been the harnessing of labour direct action to try and get employers to improve wages in the wake of inflation fuelled by a diamond-mining boom.

Less often emphasised, but in many ways even more foreboding, were the peasant disturbances originating in the North of the Protectorate. Perhaps the February 1955 Freetown riots seemed to give these a green light, but they were deadlier – resulting in over 100 dead and almost a dozen chiefs replaced – and directed against local traditional elites who were trying to position themselves to dominate politics and commerce during decolonisation. A whole host of problems combined to bedevil the administration's attempt to transition traditional to modern forms of governance. The Paramount Chiefs in some areas were accused by traders, famers, artisans and other elite players of abusing power, by exacting fines unfairly, by expropriating or mismanaging funds raised by District Councils, or by trying to establish commercial monopolies.

At the same time, decolonisation had seen European District Commissioners removed from many District Councils just as these raised bigger loans and increased expenditure, thus reducing financial oversight. Almost simultaneously, the rural Chieftains' Messenger service was absorbed into the more urban National Police: a logical modernising move, but one which possibly temporarily weakened rural policing. Finally, House and Chieftom's taxes in the Protectorate were replaced after 1954 by a single Poll Tax on all adults at higher combined rates, just as some crop prices were declining.

In short, the processes of decolonisation and modernisation accentuated deeper rooted local competitions over power and resources in the north, which contextual factors then turned critical. The colonial state ignored petitions against particular Paramount Chiefs and their allies in 1954-55, and protests turned violent. Attacks in this 'civil' or 'peasants' conflict ebbed and flowed from November 1955 to March 1956, characterised by protests, processions, attacks on Chiefs' property and on official property, and swings between appeals and violence.<sup>4</sup>

For our purpose, it is sufficient to note that the urban Freetown labour riots and the mainly northern rural disturbances numbered among several that punctuated the advance to independence in British territories across the world from the late 1940s to the early 1960s. These included famous, if not infamous, disturbances at Accra, in the Gold coast in 1948<sup>5</sup>, at Singapore in 1950, 1955, 1956 and 1964, and in

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<sup>3</sup> <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1955/feb/17/situation-sierra-leone-commission-of>

<sup>4</sup> Ismail O. D. Rashid, 'Decolonization and Popular Contestation in Sierra Leone: The Peasant War of 1955-1956', *Afrika Zamani*, No. 17, 2009, pp. 115-144: accessed online in May 2013 at [http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/7-Rashid\\_Zamani\\_17\\_2009.pdf](http://www.codesria.org/IMG/pdf/7-Rashid_Zamani_17_2009.pdf). He particularly locates the origins in protests against Paramount Chief Alkali Modus III of the Maforki Kingdom, who was in addition an SLPP member and Legislative Councillor. In the aftermath, several chiefs were removed, and the Hut Tax set at the reduced level of 25 shillings, while aggravations such as forced labour and illegal levies were removed.

<sup>5</sup> The Accra riots in the Gold Coast started after the commander of a small police detachment fired on a procession of protesting ex-servicemen, killing two. Rioting spread from Accra to Kumasi and two other towns with 29 killed and over

Georgetown, British Guiana between 1962 and 1964 (with independence delayed until 1966 as Guyana).<sup>6</sup> The Freetown riots were also one of many occasions when British controlled police or troops opened fire or caused death by baton charges in labour disputes, notably with several instances during Malayan strikes in 1947.

That there were some such occasions should not be surprising, given the presence in the colonies of relatively small numbers of armed police and security forces faced with inflation, turbulent political change, and with jousting for political leverage between local power players. But it does raise wider questions. What rules and contexts led to loss of life in one instance, and prevented it in another? How did British tactics change across the 1940s and 1950s such that, in Singapore and Malaya for instance, deaths of rioters and protesters caused by security forces became much more rare in the 1950s and 1960s? How did individual police and military officers experience and interpret their role in such circumstances? How did the military perceive the nature and limits of their role in assisting the civil power? Did the idea of ‘minimum force’ hold any sway, or indeed competing ideas about exerting and visibly restoring authority amidst threat and disorder?<sup>7</sup>

These questions can be tackled partly by looking at inquiries, police and military rule books, and documents. But ultimately it was the individual officer on the ground who had to make these work in practice. Hence the value of looking through the eyes of an officer such as Stewart West, which is what the paper below will do.

The paper speaks for itself, but as context it is worth adding that it is extremely difficult to divine what effect, if any, the riots had on the wider flow of events. Sierra Leone received an even more generous constitution in 1956.<sup>8</sup> The SPP again swept into government the next year, winning 40 of 51 elected ‘House of Representatives’ seats, so getting to recommend 11 ministers (one without portfolio) for the Executive Council, with Dr Margai now as ‘Prime Minister’, while the Governor retained reserve powers. In 1958 the remaining officials were excluded from both the Executive Council and House of Representatives, and in April to May 1960 a Constitutional Conference in London agreed to expedite independence.

As in other colonies, once one party commanded such undeniable national support, its claims to full independence were not worth resisting for very long, notwithstanding the serious doubts the Colonial Office had briefly held after the 1955 and 1956 disturbances. Sierra Leone finally achieved full independence in April 1961. That was behind the pace of the Sudan (independent in 1956) and the Gold Coast (always envisaged as the vanguard of West African decolonisation notwithstanding the Accra riots, and independent as Ghana 6 March 1957), but not far out of line with Nigeria (independent in October 1960), and ahead of the

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200 killed in total. J.D. Hargreaves, *Decolonization in Africa*, p.p. 114-18. There followed an Inquiry, Justice Coussey’s mainly African committee, and consequent on the last a new Legislative Assembly of 56 + 2 nonvoting commercial members: 18 members for the Asante, Togoland and Colony chosen by reformed Provincial Councils, 19 for the Northern Territory by a special council, and the remainder for the south by adult male suffrage (all but 5 urban seats indirectly). The Exco also became mostly African, with just 3 ex-officio officials in the LegCo and ExCo. Nkrumah’s CPP (Convention People’s Party won most seats in 1951 elections and he emerged from prison to select candidates for the ExCo, again winning 1954 elections and so paving the way for early independence).

<sup>6</sup> February 1962 riots happened against a backdrop of splits and increasing racial polarization since the British suspended the Constitution and threw out the PPP government in October 1953.

<sup>7</sup> These questions have recently been examined, from a military and counterinsurgency perspective, in David French, *The British Way in Counter-Insurgency, 1945-1967* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> The new House of Representatives had 56 voting and 2 nonvoting members: 1 speaker, 4 ex-officio members, 51 elected members, and 2 nominated commercial representatives who did not have a vote. The SLPP (Sierra Leone People’s Party) led by Milton Morga won 40 of 51 seats in 1957 elections, thus getting Sierra Leone to about where the Gold Coast had been politically in 1954. From 1957 there were 10 ministers with portfolios on the Executive.

east African territories of Uganda (Buganda riots of 1960, and independent in 9 October 1962)<sup>9</sup> and Kenya (Mau Mau conflict of 1952-60, independent 12 December 1963).

The paper that follows outlines one army officer's experiences and views of Sierra Leone at this time with rich texture and immediacy. In doing so, it gives the view from the 'man-on-the-spot', the officer charged with making colonialism work on the ground, in contact with empire's subjects. While other studies may analyse policy and motive, at the end of the day we can only truly understand what such policies meant, if we also look at how they were mediated by, and impacted upon, individuals such as the author of this piece. What the rules and codes say on paper, and what they mean in the hands of individuals with their own unique inheritance of experiences, attitudes, and impressions of Africans and Asians, may be quite different things. How well a police force operated could also depend on things as varied as salary and conditions, weaponry, and training drills and standing orders, for all of which we need evidence of the reception of policies by policemen, and of their execution in conditions of stress. Furthermore, quite apart from this helping to understand why things turned out as they did, there is independent value in learning what things really looked, smelt, tasted, and felt like emotionally to the individuals faced with them. This paper provides some of the vital texture, without which accounts of empire would end up increasingly abstracted and distanced from the reality of lived experience.

Whether it also sheds any light on Sierra Leone's troubled post-independence story – a military coup in 1968, civil war from 1991-2002, still less than 6 million strong and one of the world's poorest countries, with life expectancy in the low 40s – is another question. Already after 1957 the seeds of later disaster were being sown, as the SLPP started to split, different factions drawing strength from particular groups and regions.<sup>10</sup>

*The Ferguson Centre would like to extend its thanks to Stewart West for putting his thoughts, memories and reflections into digital form, and hopes this will encourage others to do likewise.*

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<sup>9</sup> Stewart West has also provided an account of the Buganda riots, see his 'Policing, Colonial Life and Decolonisation in Uganda, 1957-60' of 2012 at <http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/working-papers/working-paper-draft-3-stewart-west.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Most notably Siaka Stevens split from the SLPP and formed the APC (All People's Congress) in 1960 with significant northern support. This went on to win disputed 1967 elections, which were followed by a spate of military interventions.

## The Role of the Military in Policing the Empire

### Stewart West

Prior to joining the Uganda Police I served in the Royal West African Frontier Force.(RWAFF) which was once described by historian Prof David Killingray as little more than a lightly armed gendarmerie (armed police).<sup>11</sup> I would like to examine the validity of that statement.

Whilst doing a tour of duty with the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment on the Suez Canal in 1953 I was selected for officer training and returned to England to attend a thirteen week commissioning course at Eaton Hall OCTU. This course was designed mainly for young National Servicemen (who did two year's compulsory service at that time), but also for Short Service Regular Officers. Afterwards I was commissioned for four years as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Essex Regiment (then in Korea), but was then reassigned to the 4th Battalion, The Nigeria Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) for a three year tour of duty.

Prior to joining my unit I was sent on embarkation leave, during which I received a letter changing my posting to the 1st Battalion, The Sierra Leone Regiment, RWAFF. I was not too sure where Sierra Leone was and had to dig out my old school atlas to find out. There were no reasons given for my posting which had the arbitrary feel that went with most military decisions ('theirs is not to reason why etc.). However, I have subsequently come across a comment by Professor Killingray (*Journal of African History* 23 (1982), p86) where he talked about General Sir George Giffard, GOC West Africa, in 1940 refusing officers from Southern Rhodesia. Giffard had argued that due to their 'peculiar ideas of the treatment of natives...[they] will be... little short of disastrous' He had insisted instead that officers posted to the RWAFF should be from Britain.

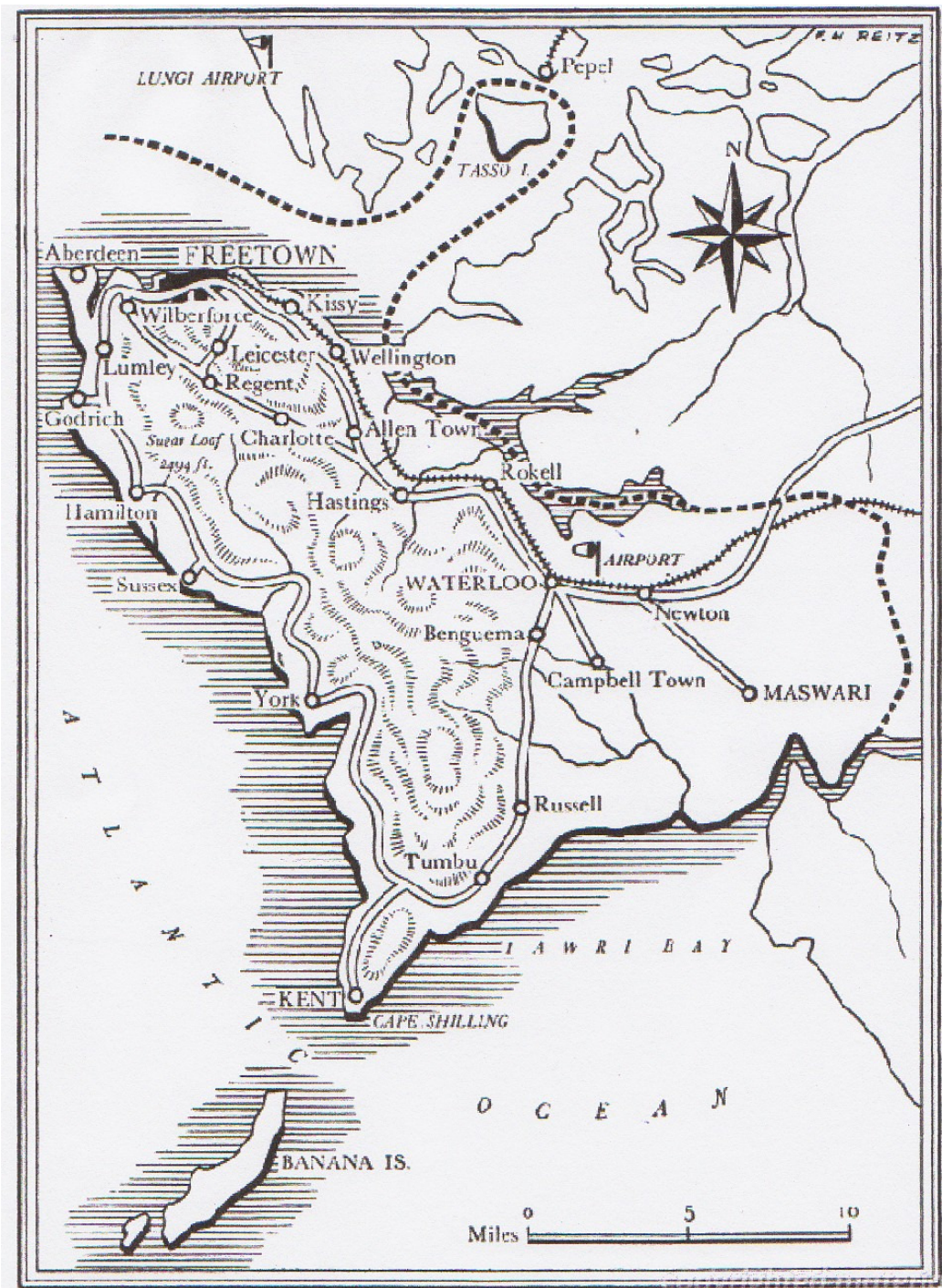
With two other newly commissioned officers from the same course, Duggie Stewart, and John Shipway (both National Service Officers) we flew from Blackbushe airfield to Sierra Leone in October 1953, on what was known as a 'trooping flight'. The aircraft was an Avro York of either Eagle Airways or Scottish Aviation. The Avro York was a derivation of a Second World War bomber and the airline one of the fledgling companies set up around that time. Our flight took us three days, with night stops in Casablanca and Dakar before calling into Bathurst in The Gambia, followed by Freetown in Sierra Leone.

West Africa Command had its Headquarters in Accra in the Gold Coast (later to be named Ghana) and was commanded at that time by Lt General Sir Lashmar Whistler. It was a somewhat skeleton organization

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<sup>11</sup> Editor: David Killingray, 'The maintenance of Law and Order in British Colonial Africa', *African Affairs*, 85, 340 (1986), p. 429 describes British colonial armies of the late 1930s as 'little more than lightly armed gendarmeries'. See also Anthony Clayton and David Killingray, *Khaki and Blue: Military and Police in British Colonial Africa* (Athens, OH, 1989), and David Killingray and David Omissi, *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers, c 1700-1964* (Manchester, 1999).

consisting of five infantry battalions in Nigeria, three in Ghana, one in Sierra Leone, plus one Company of the Gambia Regiment in The Gambia. There was also a support structure of hospitals, signals, ordnance, service corps and engineers. Artillery was minimal and there may have been one Regiment in Nigeria. There were no purely British units in West Africa, but command and control was almost entirely British. The first African had been commissioned in Ghana during the Second World War, and even by 1954 Sierra Leone had just one African Officer, namely Lieutenant David Lansana.



*The Colony of Sierra Leone (demarcated by the dotted line, and showing only part of the Protectorate inland), from Roy Lewis, Sierra Leone (1954), p. 22.*

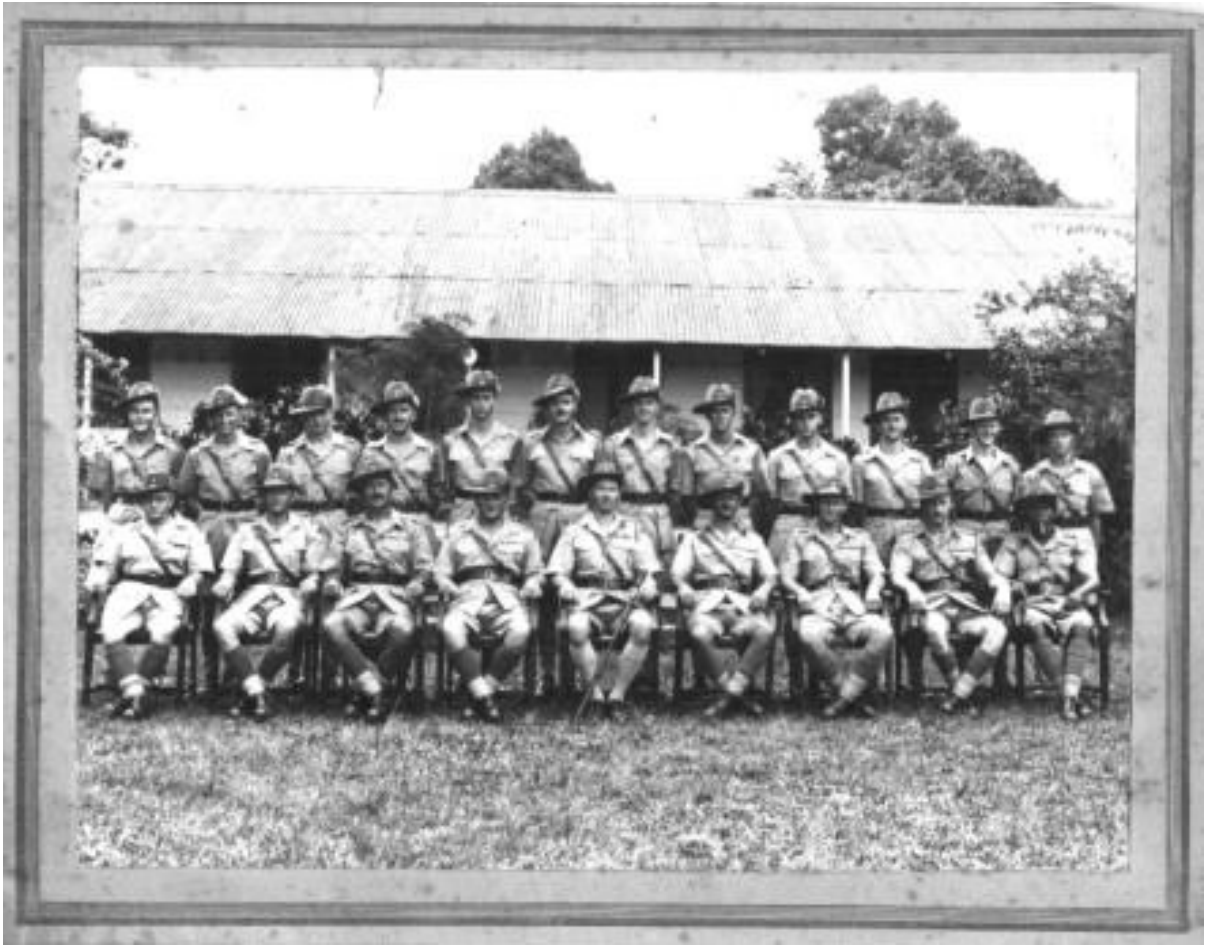
Sierra Leone and Gambia District had its HQ in Freetown and was commanded by a Brigadier with a small staff. At the time of my arrival the latter was Brigadier Joe Parry, an infantryman from The Buffs. Dotted around Freetown were the various support units: a Signal Squadron, a small Military Hospital, (three British doctors and four nursing officers plus African Orderlies), Royal Army Service Corps, Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, a few Royal Engineers for building maintenance and a Troop of Royal Artillery whose main task was maintenance of the coastal defence guns overlooking the huge harbour area. In my time the latter were never fired. There were also a couple of 25 Pounders, which were used for firing salutes. Infantry consisted one battalion in Sierra Leone and one company in Gambia under independent command.

Sierra Leone in the 1950s consisted of the Colony, in which Freetown was located at the northern tip. The rest of the country was a Protectorate, ruled under a system of Paramount Chiefs with the guidance of a handful of British Colonial Officers. The peninsula is a range of hills rising several hundred feet above sea level with the houses of the Colonial Administration at a place named Hill Station, because it was at the highest point to the South of Freetown. At one time Hill Station been reached by a narrow gauge railway from the centre of town. The station building itself was no longer in use by the time I arrived, and had been converted into a small Anglican Church. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion The Sierra Leone Regiment had their barracks in the village of Wilberforce on the Northern edge of Hill Station, so the railway line had at one time passed through the barracks just beyond the guardroom.

Our weapons and equipment were what was known as 'second line', with Lee Enfield No4 Rifles, Bren Light Machine Guns and Sten Sub Machine guns. We also had a 3 inch Mortar Platoon. All equipment was Second World War surplus. Transport was of similar quality with refurbished three ton lorries, one ton lorries and Land Rovers. We had some motor cycles but these were rarely allowed out. We had none of the Vickers Medium Machine Guns, Anti- Tank Guns, or Bren Gun Carriers that had been in use in the first line Regiment I had left in Suez, so Killingray's 'lightly armed' description may be considered apt.

The Regiment also had fewer officers than a first line battalion. The same structure was there, with a Lt Colonel commanding, a Major second in command, and a Captain Adjutant. The Orderly Room, however, was led by a Staff Quartermaster Sergeant, though we did also have two Regimental Sergeant Majors. RSM Egan from the Coldstream Guards and an African RSM Sessay shared the duties between them. We had a Headquarter Company commanded by a Major and under him a Captain Transport Officer, a Lieutenant Signals officer, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenants commanding the Mortars and Intelligence sections. The Lieutenant Quartermaster was seconded from the UK and supported by a British Warrant Officer and a British quartermaster sergeant.

The four rifle companies were each commanded either by a Major or a Captain, and each had two or three junior officers as platoon commanders as well as a British Sergeant. The latter shadowed the work of an African Company Quarter Master Sergeant. The Company Sergeant Majors were all African. My photograph of the officers taken in 1954 reflects how thin on the ground we were even taking into account that one Company was on permanent detachment for Internal Security duties at the Training Depot 200 miles away at Daru on the banks of the Moa River. More about this later.



***Officers Sierra Leone Regt. 1954 (Author's collection)***

*This photograph was taken on the lawn in front of the Officers Mess anteroom verandah in about August 1954, to mark Commanding Officer Colonel Humphrey's retirement from the army just before he left for the United Kingdom.*

I forget quite a few of the names of those in the photograph now, but they include:

Sitting in the front from left to right: Lt (QM) Bob Aspin, York and Lancaster Regt, Adjutant Capt. David Sandeman, Border Regt, OC A Company Maj Michael Nott, Northamptonshire Regt, Bn 2<sup>nd</sup> in i/c, Major P.R.L Gillam MC and Bar, Border Regt, CO Lieutenant Colonel Humphrey Rochefort-Hyde, Manchester Regt, OC HQ Company Major Peter Parrish, Royal Sussex Regt, OC C Company Major Peter Bulmore, Gloucestershire Regt, OC B Company Capt Paddy Heyland, Royal Ulster Rifles and at the end Lieut David Lansana Sierra Leone Regt.

I am standing just behind Colonel Humphrey's right shoulder and at the time was acting as Motor Transport Officer (MTO) of the Battalion. Second from left standing is Lieutenant Ken Churchill Royal Sussex Regiment, the Signals Officer.

All D Company officers are missing from the photograph, because they are on detachment in Daru, but they were commanded at the time by Major Mike Hazlehurst of the Northamptonshire Regiment.

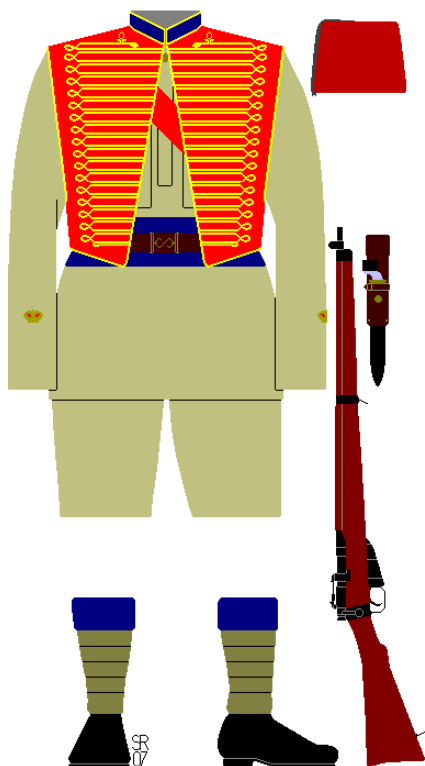
I mention the parent units of the various officers to show what a mixed bunch we were in the RWAFF. Both Peter Parrish and Paddy Heyland had been posted in from other units in Gold Coast and Nigeria and Peter Bulmore had previously served for three years as OC Gambia Company. Colonel Humphrey was a somewhat eccentric character who had spent the war years as a prisoner in Changi following the fall of Singapore. His party trick on Mess nights was to drive off 12 bore cartridges with his golf clubs. He also liked to collect things he picked up around camp like rusty nails and old toothbrushes on the grounds that 'You never knew when something would come in useful'.

Also missing from the photograph is the Regimental mascot, a goat named Kamakwi, presented to Humphrey during a Bush March. More about bush marches later. It was the Orderly Officer's duty after evening Guard Mounting to visit Kamakwi and give him two cigarettes, which he would eat.

Going back to my arrival in October 1953, I was posted to B company, at that time commanded by Captain 'Johnnie' Ribbins of The Royal Ulster Rifles, who was at that time close to completing his tour of duty. A tour consisted of two 18 month periods separated by 3 months recuperation leave to be taken in a temperate climate. Sierra Leone was still a pretty unhealthy place known as "The White Man's Grave", although anti malarial drugs like Paludrine (placed on the breakfast table next to the pepper and salt to be taken daily) and new antibiotics were making life more bearable.

B Company was then on detachment living on the Rifle Ranges at a place called Benguema doing annual rifle firing so I quickly became acquainted with 2nd Lt. Peter Wright of Royal Norfolk Regiment, and Sgt. Wright who was our BNCO (British NCO.) who on detachment messed with officers rather than on his own as would have been the case otherwise. The reason for this was that the British diet and the African diet differed and this was reflected in the scale of rations issued by the RASC.

On return to barracks we resumed the normal pattern of duties. Guards were provided on a daily basis for key



points around the town and in the main these were the military installations such as the Signal Station on high ground above the town. In addition we mounted a 24 hour ceremonial guard on Government House, the Governor's official residence in the centre of town. This guard wore the full ceremonial dress of the RWAFF of Khaki shirt and shorts with blue cummerbund, khaki puttees, a scarlet zouave jacket, and short red fez (as shown to the left, for circa 1956, image from

<http://www.uniformsotw.com/products/cd8.htm>)

The zouave jacket of soldiers below the rank of Warrant Officer did not have the gold frogging on the chest, only the gold braid around the edges. This uniform was not popular with the soldiers because it caused the civilian population to dub them 'the barrel organ monkeys' whenever they appeared on parade. Following Independence the new government quickly replaced it.

Each day a Duty Company would be nominated to provide all guards and other work parties. Examples of this might be two men to the other rank's cook house, two men to QM's stores etc. Guard Mounting. of 24 hour guards took place on the barrack square at 8



am daily, under the Orderly Officer of the day, after which they dispersed to their various locations. There was always an extra man on this parade so that the smartest man on parade would be selected as the CO's 'Stick Orderly'. He held a ceremonial stick and became the CO's Messenger for the day. The Government Housed Guard performed a ceremonial changing of the guard an hour later at Government House. At 6 pm a further Guard Mounting, inspected by the Orderly Officer, took place on the square for the 12 hour night time guards.

It can be agreed that these duties could be equated with Killingray's 'gendarmerie' description. All guards had to be visited by the orderly officer once during the night, the time being decided by drawing a slip from the Adjutant's box. Slips were marked by the hours from 11pm to 5am, plus a blank one which absolved the officer thus allowing him an uninterrupted night's sleep, and one other slip marked 'Adjutant'. The Adjutant had to carry out duties throughout the night. The Adjutant when I arrived was David Sandeman. He was over officious in the execution of his duties so we doctored the slips so that they were all marked 'Adjutant'. It was several days before he realized that more than coincidence was at work when he pulled night duty yet again.

Whilst the Duty Company was engaged on its tasks the remaining two companies would carry out training for which a programme was submitted in advance to the CO. Mostly this covered basic infantry training in things like weapon handling, patrolling and attack tactics, physical training, and foot drill. Occasionally we would also practice 'Riot Drill' from the Army Manual of 'Duties in aid of the Civil Power'. This scenario for this drill was always a crowd of demonstrators blocking a street and attacking the forces of law and order. The civil police had failed to control the crowd and the military had been called in. After a show of force and the reading of the Riot Act the order would be given to shoot the ringleader. At which point the crowd dispersed and order was deemed to be restored. Fine in theory but it never worked out that way in practice. Our general training therefore suited both 'gendarmerie' duties as well as the possibility that at some time we might be required to fight as infantry soldiers.

Our calendar of duties always included a six week period in February at the end of 'the Rains' when the whole battalion set up camp in the Protectorate. Camp was usually at a place called Magburaka, situated midway between Bo and Makeni.

The first and last two weeks of the camp would be occupied with Company and Battalion tactical exercises (to remind us that we were infantrymen) and the middle two weeks with a 'Bush March' to 'show the flag' around the Protectorate. For the latter, the three rifle Companies would each be given a map with a route marked for their march so that there were three loops - North, East and West - in a sort of clover leaf centred on Magburaka. The thing about these marches was that we had to be totally self-sufficient for the two weeks and therefore carried two weeks rations in addition to our normal 'Field Service Marching Order'. There was also a lot of additional kit so we hired porters daily as we went along and they were paid from a bag of shillings held by the Company Commander. For liaison with the chiefs and control of porters we also took two 'Court Messengers' provided by the Provincial Commissioner. Court Messengers were a sort of cross policeman/bailiff employed directly by the civil administration. Who wore a blue jersey and blue fez. We could not have managed without them. I can't remember which loop B Company picked in 1954, but I do remember that Colonel Humphrey decided to come with us. He had an aptitude for spotting snakes and would suddenly dart forward and grab a snake by the end of its tail, then crack it like a whip, thus snapping its spine and killing it. I saw him do this on several occasions and he always commented, 'trick I learned as a small boy in India'. Apart from that it was a pain in the butt having him with us because he was an old slave driver.

Not only that but he was still not speaking to me because he considered it inappropriate in the first six months of a subaltern's service.

Each day we would stop near the local chief's compound and formal visits would take place back and forth. The more affluent chiefs would sometimes give us a cow and sacks of rice or baskets of eggs which made a welcome change from the rations we carried. We would be accompanied by one of the Regimental Imams who would carry out the ritual slaughter of any beast donated in addition to their other duties of leading prayers.

A few days before the end of the march I developed a huge abscess on my left nipple and was marching with my equipment undone. Humphrey spotted this and told me in no uncertain terms to do it up. That evening we were bathing in the river and Humphrey asked Johnnie Ribbins what was wrong with my chest (remember he wasn't yet talking to me). When John told him, a vehicle was called for by radio, to take me back to camp to see our doctor. Captain Joe Gatt, our doc, looked at the problem and said it would have to be lanced, but unfortunately he wasn't carrying any anaesthetic. I braced myself whilst he cut open the abscess with a scalpel and drained it off. I then got the truck and re-joined the company. Humphrey wanted to know why I had come back when I could have remained in camp, and I explained that I wanted to complete the march. He later asked Johnnie for my name and decided to include me amongst those to whom he spoke.

In some ways I wish that he hadn't because shortly after getting back to Wilberforce our Motor Transport Officer (MTO) was repatriated to the UK on psychiatric grounds and Humphrey thought it would be a good idea for me to take over until a trained MTO arrived from England. When I inspected my new command I found a dreadful state of affairs with much equipment missing, accounts in a total mess and an apparent deficiency of some 800 gallons of fuel. The annual MT Inspection was due in a couple of months and when I reported this state of affairs Humphrey pointed out to me that too many CO's had lost their job as a result of a bad SIMT (Staff Inspection MT) and I had better get it sorted out. He didn't offer any advice how this was to be done. Along with my two sergeants I went out on a programme of begging and borrowing around the district as well as doing some 'creative accounting' with the Petrol Oil and Lubricants Account. The latter was sent to the Command Secretary in Accra every month but a careful study of the records convinced me that they only audited Sierra Leone every three months, so I got rid of our deficiencies in the two intervening months. When the SIMT took place we were graded 'Satisfactory', and although this was not 'Good' it was enough and we were all off the hook. Shortly afterwards a trained MTO, Dan Monckton, from the RASC arrived and I handed over to him with great relief.

Humphrey and David Sandeman also left around the same time and our new CO Lieutenant Colonel Gordon Upjohn of The Duke of Wellingtons Regiment arrived from Sandhurst where he had been Chief Instructor. He was a totally different type and set about making his Battalion more professional. A National Service Officer Colin Imray (a few years later Sir Colin Imray and British High Commissioner in Bangladesh) had been standing in as Adjutant. When he went home on discharge, Gordon pulled me in as the new Adjutant. One of the first things he told me was that he would not be completing a full three year tour because he was due promotion to Brigadier. This indeed happened and he went to Malaya to command a Brigade.

The Adjutant is the CO's Staff Officer and is responsible for the running of the Orderly Room, Drill and Discipline in the Battalion through the Regimental Sergeant Major and the Provost Sergeant. An additional duty was liaison with the Civil Police through the Staff Officer to the Commissioner of Police. At that time the Commissioner was Bill Syer and his SO, Peter Muskett, who had previously served in the 13th/18th

Hussars. Several members of the Police became friends of army contemporaries and I remember Senior Supt Peter Noot the Commandant of the Police Training School at Hastings and ASP Mike Everitt who had lost the fingers of his right hand in an ambush in Malaya and had been sent to Freetown for recuperation. Another arrival who quickly became a friend was Mike Borman who had recently done his National Service as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant in the Royal Norfolk Regt and was already known to some of us. It is fair to say that generally relationships between the Army and the Police were far better than I was to meet later in Uganda. We also met officially at the monthly Security Committee Meeting, although we were all fairly blasé about the possibility of any serious unrest in Freetown. Peter Noot on one occasion said all we would have to do in the event of trouble would be to take a loudspeaker van into town and play calypsos, and any rioting would stop for singing and dancing. Later events proved us badly wrong.

Other ceremonial duties included the annual 'Trooping of the Colour.' to celebrate the Queen's Birthday. This parade was always held on the Saturday closest to 6 June, as it is in London, and involved the whole battalion with the Governor taking the Salute. Unfortunately the only place big enough to take the numbers involved was a sports field so the sound of boots crashing on the ground was deadened by the grassy surface. Nevertheless I always remember the cheer from the crowd whenever several hundred soldiers performed a drill movement in unison. Smaller ceremonial parades would also be mounted to mark the Opening of Legislative Council and the High Court, and Guards of honour for the arrival and departure of colonial dignitaries. These activities kept me very busy as Adjutant.

At the beginning of February 1955 both the Governor Sir Robert de Zouche Hall and the Brigadier Joe Parry were away on leave which meant that Gordon Upjohn was temporarily left in charge of the district. The Artisans and General Workers Union had been striking for an increase in pay since 9 February, and the battalion had deployed into its Internal Security role guarding additional Key Points such as the Freetown Power Station and the Oil Storage facility at Kissy.<sup>12</sup> Despite this we were expecting to depart on six weeks planned annual training.

On Friday 11 February I decided to pop across town to Kissy to retrieve my wrist watch loaned to a subaltern on duty there. I used my own car, an old Austin 10, instead of using an army Land rover, and as I reached the centre of town found the road completely blocked with people. What I didn't know at the time was that a meeting of strikers had just broken up in total disorder and at that very moment were about to go on the rampage. One or two started to push my car and I heard one say "why should the European ride when we poor African have to walk? Let us kill him and take the car." I quickly locked my car doors and then heard another say, "Look he is from the battalion. If we kill him, the battalion will come and kill us." The argument went on for quite a while and suddenly a small gap in the crowd appeared in front of my car. I was in gear and accelerating away in no time at all.

After reaching Kissy and retrieving my watch I set out for the return trip and only travelled a few hundred yards along Kissy Street when I was confronted by a makeshift road block manned by – as I realized later – rioters. When a hail of missiles came towards me I turned about and went back to the Oil Storage Depot to phone the Colonel and tell him there was a problem. After doing that I took the back road out of town and over the hills to get back to barracks without passing through town. On arrival I found the place almost deserted but met up with our Quartermaster Bob Aspin who told me that widespread rioting had broken out in

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<sup>12</sup> Editor: On Wednesday 9 February, the first day of the strike, police made about 20 arrests after 'strikers' threw stones at a bus and attempted to attack a train crew. Most bus and many train services stopped. *Manchester Guardian*, 12 February 1955.

town and the battalion had been called in. He had a meal prepared and wanted to get it carried into town so I found a three ton lorry at the transport section and then managed to round up about a dozen soldiers who had not been caught up in the initial call out. We drew arms and ammunition and loaded up the food from the cook house and set out for Police HQ in the centre of town. In the meantime I had collected as a passenger a Major from District HQ who wanted to get back.

Arriving at Police HQ I was met by Paddy Heyland standing in the road. He shouted “Are those men armed?” and when I replied yes he said “get along Pademba Road now, The Colonel’s in the s\*\*\*”. I tore along Pademba Road and sure enough came across Gordon Upjohn standing by his Land Rover holding a 303 rifle, and a dead man on the ground, shot through the torso. Standing looking at him was a large crowd of Africans of both sexes and all ages. He said that he had been attacked in his vehicle and had been forced to open fire. He said that he was returning to Police HQ and I should continue as far as the Prison, make a right turn and do a circuit back into Police HQ ensuring that the roads were clear. Just before the prison I found a road block and a group of Africans standing around not doing very much. My passenger, the Major, told me to shoot one of them, but I refused. What I did do was talk to the crowd and tell them that they should go home because I was going to go around town and when I got back if they were still around I would have to shoot them. I then got my soldiers to clear away the road block and continued with my patrol – returning to Pademba Road as promised, but the place was deserted and all quiet.

Back at Police HQ I learned that the Police Riot Squad had deployed near Kissy Road Police Station and that the OC, our friend Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) Mike Everitt, had been attacked and killed by the mob.<sup>13</sup> The Colonel then gave me orders to go back to barracks and collect some Bren Guns and ammunition to be issued to the Companies deployed in town. This I did and then continued with an assortment of tasks as a sort of mobile trouble shooter.

I think it was the following day, Saturday 12 February, that a subaltern with one of the Companies when confronted by a crowd used his Bren Gun and killed several people.<sup>14</sup> This virtually ended the disturbances and after another couple of days patrolling we handed control back to the Police.<sup>15</sup> Questions were tabled in the Houses of Parliament in London but the Colonial Secretary deflected them saying he had called for a full report. Later at the Judicial Enquiry there were demands by lawyers for the Unions that the officer should be indicted for murder, but this did not happen.<sup>16</sup> The officer concerned was found to have perforated eardrums and was repatriated to the UK on medical grounds, leaving on the next passenger liner to call into Freetown. Later Gordon Upjohn was awarded the OBE and to the chagrin of our signals officer the OC Royal Signals got the MBE even though his radios had failed to work (according to our man!). However our Signal Sergeant got the BEM so honour was partly satisfied.

I went on my three months recuperation leave and when I returned Upjohn sent me to Daru as 2 i/c A Company commanded by Michael Nott. Daru Barracks was close to the border with Liberia in the East of the

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<sup>13</sup> Editor: ASP Everitt was killed on Friday 11 February 1955.

<sup>14</sup> Editor: The total civilian deaths in the 2-3 days of disturbances were officially calculated at 20 in the immediate aftermath.

<sup>15</sup> Editor: The worst events were confined to Friday and Saturday 10-11, and by Monday the town was quiet and the Governor had visited some of the affected areas, though burned buildings remained as evidence of the weekend’s events.

<sup>16</sup> Editor: The Inquiry Report is available in The National Archives at TS50/5, and new papers released in 2013 included FCO141/14340-43 (1955 riots and disturbances including police reports at 14341), and FCO141/14339 (the Chiefdom Tax Disturbances 1955-6). There are also military reports on the riots at WO216/880.

country and was the Training Depot for the Regiment as well as housing a Rifle Company detached from Freetown for Internal Security duties. I learned on arrival that the most sensitive spot in the locality was the diamond mine at Yengema some miles away, and operated by Consolidated African Selection Trust. The mine was open cast. In later years became a serious security problem, but during my time this was not the case. We did spend one social weekend at the mine and I was entertained by the OC Police, Superintendent Reg. Burnham, and his American wife Effie-Lou and small daughter, Lindy-Lou..

The next significant event for me was the medical repatriation to UK of my Company Commander, Major Michael Nott. Upjohn appointed me to replace him, a post I retained for about 16 months until I completed my tour at the end of 1956. This included an annual Bush March in February 1956 during which we walked a huge loop from Magburaka out into the Kono Chiefdom with a couple of short stops at a place called Kayima, where the Paramount Chief had his compound, and later near Yengema at the house of one of the Diamond Mine Security Officers. This was a guy named Peter Sheridan- Patterson who had also been an officer in The Essex Regt before going into civilian life.

After returning to England I completed my commission at The Depot of The Essex Regt in Brentwood spending most of my remaining time training National Service recruits. On completion of my service I applied to join the Colonial Police.

Whilst researching parts of this article I found an article in Wikipedia that talked about widespread rioting in Sierra Leone during 1955 and 1956. I was on leave from March 1955 to June 1955 and on return went straight to Daru (near the border with Liberia) for several months was out of touch with events elsewhere

Returning again to Professor Killingray's description of 'lightly armed gendarmerie' , I think one has to consider what constitutes a gendarmerie, and this is a woolly area. One common feature is that gendarmerie units throughout the world are policemen in military uniform and part of the Political Administration. The UK is different inasmuch as its Military Policemen are only responsible for policing the military. In other countries they can have widespread civilian powers; for example in France, where the gendarmerie is responsible for policing, including criminal investigations, in small towns of under 10,000 people plus other duties such as mountain rescue and airport security. In Canada the Mounted Police started off life as Dragoons and only became the RCMP after the Second World War, but nevertheless retaining their horses and scarlet jackets. This is a huge subject. The most important factor however is that in most countries the gendarmerie have legal police powers such as powers of arrest. The RWAFF were under command of the GOC in Chief West Africa and had no extraordinary civil powers. They were purely and simply soldiers, and were trained accordingly. Although including Crowd Control and riot training, these duties could only be exercised at the specific request of the Civil Authority, usually the Commissioner of Police or when away from the capital, the Provincial or District Commissioner. Once this request had been made then the army could legally detain persons breaching the peace and even in certain carefully laid down circumstances could open fire with small arms. Once order had been restored it was mandatory that the army formally handed back any temporary powers to the civilian authority. In this respect the RWAFF did not differ in any way from the army in the UK. The closest comparison I can make is the similarity in training and equipment with a UK Territorial Battalion of Infantry. In fact the two were almost identical and as I mentioned earlier were considerably weaker units than a first line Regular Battalion.

Overall Professor Killingray's description is reasonably accurate, but the RWAFF were clearly not 'Gendarmerie' in the accepted sense, nor used as such.

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