Civil-Military Relations in Colonial Sierra Leone: The Sierra Leone Battalion and the Crisis of Role Perspectives, 1901-1959

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Part of the attempt by European powers to consolidate colonial rule in the wake of the scramble for and partition of Africa was the creation of security instruments designed, inter alia, to curb resistance to the initial European thrust. In the complex and evolving configurations of European alignments and alliances which dominated the last quarter of the nineteenth and first two decades of the twentieth century, the European quest for colonies meant shielding imperial frontiers from competition and guarding colonial interests against penetration by ambitious rivals. While secret and clandestine arrangements were contracted to forestall attempts at territorial aggrandizement by any one European power, in Africa, military and police forces evolved to serve as the main bulwarks of Empire. In West Africa, in which Britain’s territorial holdings exceeded those of many European rivals, a composite formation, the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) was organized. This marked the beginnings of the Sierra Leone Battalion, WAFF, established by ordinance in 1901.

Little attention has however been devoted to the role of the Battalion during the colonial period. Military historians have mainly concerned themselves with the origins and development of the establishment from its inception up to 1959 or the attainment of independence, when Sierra Leone assumed control in principle of her armed forces. Consequently, the difficulties encountered by British authorities in delimiting the precise role of the Battalion, as distinct from that of the Sierra Leone Police, have been largely ignored in the literature. The concentration on military combatants and service personnel, focus on the exploits of African recruits in the African theaters of war during the First and Second World Wars, military organization and logistics, mobilization and deployment, have so far failed to establish a historical framework which embraces the relationship between the military and society. This paper examines the efforts made by the colonial authorities to adequately define roles and functions for the Battalion. If the origins of the institution were directly related to the need for contingency, the efforts of the authorities were handicapped by the existence of other security structures such as the Sierra Leone Frontier Police (established in 1890), The West India Regiment (dating to 1819), The West African Regiment (formed in 1898), volunteer corps, and a Court Messenger Force, whose roles in the dependency did not materially differ from those of the Battalion.

The study argues that notwithstanding the prescriptions of regulations for the Battalion, the Colonial Office, the War Office and the men on the spot were perpetually
caught up in what is here described as a “crisis of functions.” The crisis, it is suggested, was chiefly precipitated by the circumstances which led to the creation of armed forces, not only in Sierra Leone, but also in Britain’s other West African colonies. Borne of the need for contingency, to which the troops were hard put on diverse occasions, it was never contemplated what the precise role of the Battalion should be once the contingency was over. Of greater significance was the fact that though the Battalion was construed by the colonial authorities as an instrument for the preservation of internal security, the development of a national army hardly featured in British colonial considerations and the lack of perspectives over a force which came to fulfill imperial needs, created a situation in which the functions of the Battalion tended to overlap with those of the police, with serious implications for civil-military relations.

Drawing extensively on hitherto untapped archival sources, this paper examines the frequent concerns expressed over the need to define and delimit the precise role of the Battalion, not only in Sierra Leone but of that of other units comprising the WAFF. The evidence shows that on each occasion, attempts made to delineate the role of the forces were marked by an appalling hiatus which was climaxed at the African Forces Conference (AFC), held in 1949. This drawback was never successfully mitigated but was exacerbated by the process of decolonization, the cumulative effect of which was reflected on the psyche of African recruits, who sometimes saw their new-found status as a means of terrorizing and overawing the civilian population. Viewed as symbolizing the colonial presence, diverse perspectives about the African soldiery came to be fashioned by the civilian population with significant implications for civil-military relations during the colonial period. Some questions therefore merit attention. What efforts were made by the British to effectively distinguish between military and police functions? How did African recruits perceive their role in the colony?

**Battalion Origins**

The rationale governing the formation of military and police forces in West Africa provides a valuable yardstick for appreciating the confusion of roles and functions which characterized the colonial period and permeated the post-independence era in Sierra Leone. The development of military and police forces should be seen as an essential concomitant of the extension of imperial rule in Africa. Several units including police forces were created with the ostensible intention of shoring up Britain’s huge imperial possessions, the greatest empire the world had ever known, covering one quarter of the earth’s surface. The motives surrounding the creation of armies were initially divested from internal security considerations. Lee argues that three principal reasons informed official considerations. First, colonies were construed as a great reserve of manpower which could be mobilized in case of war. Added to this was the strategic consideration of the great powers. The possession of colonial bases provided significant insurance against potential colonial rivals. Finally, colonial powers considered it expedient to defend the capital investments undertaken by their own nationals, and those mineral rights and natural resources which were yet to be exploited. This latter motive came to assume great prominence after African states began to secure their independence. Gann and Duignan further suggest that the primary job of British colonial armies was “imperial
policing” and fighting “small wars” on the far-flung frontiers of empire.6 “Small wars,” according to C.E. Callwell, consisted of “campaigns undertaken for prestige pacification and conquest.”7 From the foregoing, it is obvious that a combination of strategic, economic and prestige considerations constituted the basis for establishing armed forces in West Africa. Because imperial designs conditioned the formation of armies, whatever developments were introduced in the military sphere during the colonial period were undertaken with a rather token commitment on the part of the British, and roles accordingly came to be ordained within the general ambit of the preservation of colonial interests. The results were to impinge significantly on civil-military relations in Sierra Leone.

The circumstances surrounding the formation of the Sierra Leone Battalion, WAFF, were not entirely divested from these general considerations. Imperial, rather than local designs largely necessitated the creation of the force and, as will be shown, the furtherance of such designs effectively precluded the cultivation of a professional army, thoroughly grounded in British military norms and traditions, even by the dawn of independence. By the second half of the nineteenth century, when the scramble for African territory was gaining momentum, serious security lapses had become evident in Sierra Leone, Britain’s most strategic colony in West Africa. It is perhaps crucial to observe that the inefficiency of the West India Regiment (whose personnel was reputed to be more resistant to disease and cheaper to maintain than white soldiers), smaller forces such as the Lagos Constabulary (comprising originally of freed Hausa slaves), and the Sierra Leone Frontier Police, constituted by an Ordinance in 1890,8 and comprising chiefly of Mende, Temne and Krio, largely accounted for the formation of the new establishment. Other forces such as the constabulary raised by the Royal Niger Company, comprising primarily of Yoruba and Ibos, and constituted in 1893 to defend the Oil Rivers Protectorate, the Gold Coast Constabulary, set up in 1879, with an initial complement of 16 whites and 1,203 Africans, to ensure the defence of local British interests in West Africa, were proving less efficacious militarily. These considerations largely accounted for the decision by the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, then in his second year in office (1897), to inject some order into the muddle by amalgamating these disparate forces into one composite body, the WAFF.9 Jolted by a new “conception of empire,” Chamberlain’s declared objective was “to show the colonies that the days of apathy and indifference have long passed away.” Such sentiments informed the commencement of other development projects such as railway construction in West Africa.10

In Sierra Leone in particular, the Sierra Leone Frontier Police (formed in 1890 and initially comprised of Krio and men from the hinterland), with its initial complement of 17 officers, 23 NCOs and 300 men, did not amount to much. Their efforts to establish Britain’s military presence, ensure order and prevent hostilities in the hinterland were compromised by their capacity for brutality against local rulers and interfering in the administration of justice, all of which partly helped to exacerbate the 1898 Rebellion or the Hut Tax War. Their military prestige was therefore low and their reputation among the civilian population left much to be desired. It is against this background of an inefficient police force, designed to ensure British interests in the area spanning the Scarcies River in the north, to the Mano River in the south-east, that we must appreciate the formation of the Sierra Leone Battalion, which in every respect took over the
functions of the former Frontier Police, stationed as they were in all districts of the Sierra Leone Protectorate. When therefore in 1901, the Battalion came into being, the “WAFF (Sierra Leone Battalion) Ordinance 1901” repealed the Frontier Police Ordinance of 1890 and provided for the constitution and organization of a military force to be called the WAFF, enlistment, discharge and service, discipline and “general provisions” regarding penalties, enforcement of civil contracts, wills, and distribution of property.\textsuperscript{11}

Notwithstanding the desire to inject some modicum of stability into her West African holdings, strategic considerations were clearly essential to British authorities particularly at a time when the Anglo-French dispute over the Niger was threatening to further complicate the tangled and thorny systems of alignments and alliances inaugurated in Europe by Prince Otto von Bismarck. Since the Sierra Leone Royal Militia was disbanded in 1863, no similar corps was organized till 1901 and, by 1888, officialdom was still anguishing over the desirability of constituting a Volunteer Corps on conditions analogous to those which regulated similar organizations in other British colonies. “But there was little doubt that should it be countenanced and encouraged by the government, it will find favor with the people.”\textsuperscript{12} The importance of the Battalion which evolved over a four year period could be gleaned from the level of expenditure on the military establishment before 1901. Returns furnished by the local officer in charge of the Imperial Chest indicated that £34,666 was spent in 1888 by the Home government on the military establishment in Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{13} In 1889, the returns reflected a phenomenal increase amounting to £62,573.\textsuperscript{14} This increased budgetary allocation reflected the government’s desire to preserve imperial interests in Freetown’s harbor, where fortifications had already been constructed, and which also served as a naval depot and coaling station, with batteries constructed for its defence.\textsuperscript{15} The Battalion therefore had a wider imperial significance and was intended for general service in West Africa against an assumed French threat. In many ways, imperial strategists viewed Sierra Leone both as the key to the defence of British territories in West Africa, and as a strategic colony in the imperial chain, by dint of its importance as a coaling station. Thus, in the event of war, British sea power was expected to prevent European rivals from supplying and reinforcing local African forces or using West Africa as a base for attacking India. British maritime support, it was envisaged, would thus multiply the effectiveness of the WAFF many times over.\textsuperscript{16}

Lord Wolseley, with memories of Mende men from Sierra Leone serving under his command in the Ashanti War of 1873 to 1874, had accordingly appointed an experienced staff officer to raise Mende recruits in 1897. Wolseley’s desire to develop a strong indigenous foundation for a force in Sierra Leone was no doubt dictated by the strategic importance attached to Freetown in Carnarvon’s Royal Commission Report on the defence of empire in 1879.\textsuperscript{17} Expenditure for the military establishment therefore continued to show an increase up to 1890 when it stood at £68,900,\textsuperscript{18} dropping slightly though in 1891 to £60,349.\textsuperscript{19} This was occasioned by the organization of the Sierra Leone Frontier Police in 1890, the cost of which amounted to £8,283.

Apart from strategic considerations, the formation of armies in British West Africa was conditioned by local and domestic factors. In Sierra Leone, the exigencies of trade wars and the expansionistic proclivities of “lawless marauders” or “war boys,” impinging extensively on British territorial, commercial and trade interests in the hinterland, where proper control had not by 1895, been established, and where also by 1895, French
penetration from Futa Jallon, southeastwards, was threatening to give rise to frontier disputes.Indeed, the nature of the French threat had generated the need “to raise [an] armed police force,” the precursor of the Sierra Leone Battalion, WAFF, in order to patrol the frontier road from Kambia on the Scarcies river in the north, to the Mano river in the south-east, ostensibly to protect the agriculturally rich producing areas. In some cases, incursions were made into British territory down to the coastline, while English trading establishments were subjected to sporadic forays. Coming as they did from the far interior, most of the war boys had developed the habit of offering their services to chiefs, who could pay the highest price for mercenary activities. Thereafter, the position altered and these combatants became masters of the situation, the chiefs being powerless to control them. These predatory activities led the Colonial Secretary, Henry Higgins, to comment, in his general observations for 1889, that:

The trade of Sierra Leone being dependent on the tranquility of the adjoining producing areas, has consequently suffered and although expeditions have repeatedly been undertaken to quell these disturbances, no permanent peace has been obtained until so far as the Yonni country is concerned Sir F. De Winton led towards the close of 1887, the military expedition which demolished the stronghold at Robari, which has been made a military station and where a detachment of troops has since been kept stationed, and as regards the Sherbro country, till the successful termination of the expedition to Largo.

The expedition to Largo in 1889 was chiefly designed to bring to heel, chief Makaiah, who had for long been harrying the country in the vicinity, and to provide safe transit for produce. Captured in 1889, Makaiah was deported to Elmina in the Gold Coast, and treaties of friendship were signed with chiefs who exercised jurisdiction in the territories bordering on the colony, and in the distant hinterland, while annual stipends were paid to others in return for their protection of commerce, and for keeping the routes into the interior open. It was in this context of internecine trade wars and repeated threats to British trading interests in the interior that the future role of the Sierra Leone Battalion was more precisely defined. The question of ensuring British commercial interests in Sierra Leone was the cause of the great controversy, much later in 1959, when Sierra Leone’s envoy in London, A. B. Cotay, commented that the troops existed in Sierra Leone precisely for that purpose.

Cognate with the desire to preserve British commercial interests was the need to pacify a turbulent and war-torn hinterland by subjugating several groups deemed inimical to British imperial designs, and to avenge British prestige, which on many occasions had suffered serious and humiliating reverses. This forced the British to undertake several “small wars.” Prior to the establishment of the Sierra Leone Frontier Police, the authorities had begun to feel the need for increased responsibility regarding the maintenance of peace in the interior. Such a need arose out of the rapid increase of British influence in that area. The history of what came to constitute the Sierra Leone Protectorate after 1896 was partly a chronicle of endless trade wars and raiding. This meant stationing detachments of frontier police along the road from Kambia on the
Scarcies River in the north to the Mano River in the south-east, spanning a distance of some 200 miles. Continued incursions by warlike groups from Morecania in French country\(^{27}\) into British territory, and raids from Liberian territory\(^{28}\) also dictated the need for peace in the hinterland, deemed necessary for the continuance of British interests.

The performance of what could be regarded as a “super police” function by the Sierra Leone Battalion could be said to have derived its origins from the expedition against Tambi in April 1891. In many ways, this expedition exposed the inadequacy of the Frontier Police to ensure security and set the stage for the ever increasing dependence by the colonial government on its military establishment to subjugate the interior. What amounted to a punitive expedition (culminating in March 1892) against Tambi, was precipitated by the activities of one Carimoo of the Morea, a free-booter and protégé of Bai Bureh of Kasse, whose war boys had fired on and killed a constable of the Frontiers.\(^{29}\) What the Tambi episode demonstrated was the failure of the Frontier Police to attain the objectives of an imperial power, which by this time was beginning to evince considerable interest in the interior. The first attack, led by a police force of four officers and 150 men under Inspector-General, Major Moore, was forced to beat a hasty retreat, requiring the dispatch of a military expedition to Tambi.\(^{30}\) Thereafter independent police action had to be buttressed by military action to secure the necessary objectives of coercion and subjugation. In this regard, the notion of the Battalion as a main reserve of imperial might was perhaps presaged in the observations of Major-General Crooks at Port Loko on 10 July, 1893, when, accompanied by an escort of 100 men of the West India Regiment, with six field guns, he went to assert sovereignty over the district “ceded” to the government by the treaty contracted in 1885 between Major-General Turner and chiefs of the Baca Loko district.\(^{31}\) Crooks observed that:

> The Military escort was drawn up in line with the field guns to the left and the bright uniforms and glistening bayonets in the morning sun presented a scene such as has never before, I believe been witnessed in that district and it created a very strong impression on the minds of the audience who sat as if spell bound.\(^{32}\)

Subsequent troop marches throughout the Protectorate to “show the flag,” it will be seen, were to stamp a firm imprint of British imperial might on the minds of the inhabitants. With the inauguration of formal control, marked by the declaration of a Protectorate on 31 July, 1896, “over the territory adjacent to the colony of Sierra Leone in which Her Majesty has acquired power and jurisdiction,”\(^{33}\) the need for peace in the hinterland became more urgent. This was adequately underscored by the deplorable conditions prevalent in those regions which were yet to be explored by the British. Vast stretches of territory including practically the whole of Kono had been devastated by Samory, and continued trade wars and slave raids were hampering commercial activities while agriculture was almost brought to a standstill.\(^{34}\)

Perhaps the most formidable threat faced by the British during these formative years was the Hut Tax Rising which commenced in February 1898 in Karene District, ignited by the refusal of Bai Bureh of Kasse, to pay the newly introduced house tax. The details of the rising do not fall within the scope of this survey but the event was crucial.
enough to constitute a factor in the antecedents of the Sierra Leone Battalion, as Gann and Duignan rightly argue. Construed from a military standpoint, the rising, like the Tambi episode, exposed the inadequacy of the Frontier Police to compel the obedience of Bai Bureh, whose followers were reinforced by large numbers of war boys from surrounding countries. More importantly, the 1898 outbreaks called into question the character of British authority and prestige in the more remote parts of the interior, “where the face of the white man was hardly known and the only evidence of British power had been the passing of an occasional small detachment of frontier police.” Due to the difficult and wooded nature of the terrain, and the determined resistance of the insurgents, the operation became protracted into the rainy season and, in their desperation to avenge British prestige, the authorities were compelled to raise an indigenous battalion, the First Battalion, West Africa Regiment, recruited from ethnic groups in the Protectorate, chiefly Mendes and Temnes. In order to augment the force, troops of the Third Battalion, West India Regiment, a detachment of which had recently arrived from St. Helena, were also deployed and dispatched to the front when, on April 25, 1898, a general and simultaneous rising erupted throughout Mende country, commenced by an attack by the insurrectionaries on a small detachment of frontier police.

Of greater significance was the fact that the dream envisaged as far back as 1888, that of raising a small volunteer force, was realized in the wake of the rising. This was embodied in an Ordinance to “organize and establish a volunteer force in the colony of Sierra Leone” due to the need to dispatch most of the regular troops to the front. This measure was a temporary one, dictated by the desperate circumstances of the Karene uprising and the Volunteer Corps was disbanded by Proclamation dated 15 September, 1898, after the general rising had subsided and the insurgents brought to heel. Once more, the military establishment was deployed in aid of the civil power. At the close of the war, a balance sheet of the events revealed that the blow dealt to British prestige was enormous and, throughout the Protectorate, the authority of the government received a severe check. In Panguma and Falaba, though the insurgents were denied any unity of leadership, and though their actions were less effective than in the other three districts, the rising succeeded in incarcerating District Commissioners at their headquarters for more than two months, and in cutting off their communication with Freetown. In the calculation of the authorities, the damage done to British authority was to be repaired by marching expeditionary columns throughout the length and breadth of the Protectorate, ostensibly to “show the flag.”

“Showing the flag” was to become a recurrent phenomenon in the military history of the Protectorate throughout the colonial period up to 1960, in which year also, practically every district was visited by the Sierra Leone Battalion. It had as its desired objective, a show of force calculated to “overawe” and “terrorise” the local inhabitants as will be seen. But it was hardly anticipated in the circumstances of 1898 that the practice would exercise a peculiarly negative impact on the psyche of recruits who, at times, were not averse to using their new status to terrorise and overawe the civilian population. The continuation of this practice was largely a function of the failure of the British authorities to stipulate precise roles and functions for the Battalion once contingencies were over. "Showing the flag" in their own way therefore became a peculiar element grafted into the independent military “catechism” of many an illiterate recruit.
The Battalion as a super police

In the above analysis of British strategic, economic and prestige imperatives resided the seeds for the institutionalization of “internal security roles” to be performed by the newly constituted Sierra Leone Battalion. The Battalion, stationed in the colony, was purely a colonial military force and all expenses connected with it were borne by the colony, unlike the Imperial Garrison which was financed from imperial funds. At the close of 1901, the force comprised 630 ORs with officers seconded for service from the regular army and militia in Britain. From its creation, and the subsequent absorption of a large number of the old Frontier Police, when the rank and file were resworn, till it replaced the West India Regiment, which came under orders for disbandment in 1928, the Battalion came to perform the tasks of internal security originally executed by the former Frontier Police. From this period onwards (though with intervening spells of respite), the energies of the force were engaged in the suppression of internal risings, the pacification of the Protectorate, and the preservation of British interests. These “super police” functions which the force came to assume, consequently involved recruits in a number of clashes (some of which were characterized by a more volatile nature) with the local population.

The conspicuous ubiquity of the Battalion at times of upheavals and disturbances inevitably took its toll on the psyche of the recruits. The impact was to create in the mind of the Sierra Leone soldier, an ethic of domination, and an unquestioned loyalty to the civilian authority, while also simultaneously blurring his independent perception of his role in a colonial army, designed for purposes for which his own interests were constantly relegated to the periphery. What was paramount in official thinking was not the interest of indigenous recruits but the preservation of the King’s glory. In presenting the King’s color to the Battalion in 1922, Governor Slater addressed the troops thus: “Just as you would risk your lives to protect your King in battle, so you will joyfully and valorously do all and dare all to uphold the matchless glory of the King’s colour.”

If for nothing else, the practice of rushing troops to the aid of the civil power or to scenes of riotous conduct denied the troops the opportunity to adjust to new roles and functions when the need arose, particularly after independence. This consideration was hardly entertained in official circles before 1921, 1949 or 1959. Thus, the establishment of the Battalion in 1901 did not materially alter the fortunes of its predecessor, the Frontier Police. Rather, its formation merely served to inject efficiency and celerity of action at precisely that point at which efficiency, in colonial thinking, was most needed and, in any case, efficiency was made synonymous with preserving British interests. When therefore the Battalion assumed the functions of the former frontiers, the desire to pacify the “truculent” ethnic groups of the interior was underscored by the Colonial Secretary in 1901, when he suggested that “…their presence is not only a guarantee of security to the inhabitants but also a great safeguard against lawlessness, oppression and the traffic in slaves.” Such considerations in official circles necessitated stationing detachments of the Battalion in Kissi country to counter the destructive raids, mounted into the Protectorate by a section of the Kissi, headed by chief Kafura. The importance of safeguarding British interests in the interior was underlined by the rising tide of expenditure for military expeditions sent against the Kissi. By 1906, the expenditure...
needed to maintain these detachments stood at £10,366.\textsuperscript{44} In the following year, the total costs incurred to offset the predatory Kissi raids, which had begun in 1904, amounted to £12,236. 3s. 6d\textsuperscript{45} rising to £13,526. 6s. 11d in 1908.\textsuperscript{46}

Similar considerations regarding the maintenance of stability and the preservation of trade interests informed the assistance of the Battalion to the civilian authorities in 1909, in Sherbro District, where the obnoxious activities of the Human Leopard Society were becoming a source of great worry to the colonial government. Due to the murders in Imperri country, the activities of the Society succeeded in dislocating trade as the inhabitants became terrified to go into the bush to collect produce. Consequently, a strong detachment of the force was dispatched to Victoria to restore security. It remained there, patrolling the district until December 1912, when a special court sat at Gbangbama to try the murderers.\textsuperscript{47} Such was the ethic of domination to which the troops had become accustomed that during the disturbances in the Sandoh chiefdom in 1912, Governor Merewether found the number of rounds fired by the troops “excessive” and warned that “when a West African soldier is ordered to fire his one idea is to empty his magazine as quickly as possible.”\textsuperscript{48} The years 1919 and 1926\textsuperscript{49} also saw the Battalion in active service in aid of the civil power during the Anti-Syrian riots and the Railway strike respectively.

If, as has been argued, the role for which the Battalion was created was initially divested from internal security considerations, then its role in the first global crisis in which it played a prominent part in the arduous campaigns in Togoland, the Cameroons and East Africa, should be construed in essentially mercenary terms.\textsuperscript{50} Far away in Mesopotamia, auxiliary detachments were constituted to serve with the Inland Water Transport. Like the Ivorian and Senegalese Tirailleurs, and recruits from India, during World War II, troops from Sierra Leone formed part of half a million men who served the British in the campaigns in India and Burma. Many belonged to the (WA) Auxiliary Group, Sierra Leone Regiment. Of the WAFF’s role in Togoland and the Cameroons, Gutteridge has rightly noted that: “There…they were mercenaries as it were in the service of a foreign power serving against people of their own race and sometimes of their own tribes.”\textsuperscript{51} In fact, as late as 1947, debates in the House of Commons on the rundown of colonial troops show that many members of parliament were determined to preserve this reserve role for African colonies.\textsuperscript{52} Such a role came to be synonymous with the preservation of the King’s honor. His Excellency, Sir Ransford Slater’s address to the troops in 1922 was replete with appeals to the latter to strive to uphold the King’s honor at all times. Slater urged them to:

Remember that the award of the King’s color brings with it a very great responsibility. The King by giving you this colour has said to you, ‘I have confidence in you that you will guard my honour and that you will never do anything that will tarnish my honour in the smallest degree.’\textsuperscript{53}

The same sentiments were reflected by Inspector-General, Colonel A. H. W. Haywood, who saw the pacification of the Protectorate as an honorable task. Referring to the Sierra Leone Battalion in the same year, Haywood argued that: “From its birth, it has played an honourable role in the pacification and development of the Sierra Leone hinterland….”\textsuperscript{54}
Defining the role of the Battalion

Attempts at formally defining the role of the Battalion in Sierra Leone during the colonial period revealed a conspicuous hiatus between the more practical realities of the situation and the wider theoretical conceptions harbored by officialdom. Consequently, the man on the spot, the Colonial Office, The War Office, the troops themselves, and the local population were all caught up in a tangled web of role perspectives as will be shown. Official efforts to determine the role of the Battalion were punctuated by a peculiar ad hocism, though it must be conceded that on the whole, one consideration tended to be paramount; that was the provision of internal security. The first systematic attempt to detail specific roles for the Battalion took place at a conference held at Daru between June 7 and June 8, 1920,ironically at a time when global hostilities had been halted by the Paris Peace Conference, begun in 1919. The Daru Conference was significant for illuminating the considerable strains and pressures exerted on the efficiency of the force due to its performance of diverse functions. The Battalion’s role then, as enunciated by the delegates to the conference involved three distinct obligations, the first being the “provision of obligatory garrisons necessary to support the civil administration.” The second involved the “provision of a striking force required for the suppression of serious internal risings,” while the third was the commitment to provide “a striking force for assisting a neighboring colony.”

If the Daru Conference attempted a formal definition of roles for the Battalion, decision-making was quickly hijacked by a new and more compelling factor particularly at a time when colonial economies were yet to recover from the strains exerted by World War I. The exigencies of economy tended to impose themselves on the general maintenance of a force required for internal security. In attempting to determine in what direction economy of personnel could be effected, the Conference considered, inter alia, “what duties now performed by the WAFF, Sierra Leone Battalion, could equally be done by the Police.” The Conference concluded that in order to fulfill the responsibility of providing strong garrisons to support the civil administration, several duties involving the provision of specie escorts, where no fighting is expected, the provision of small escorts to District Commissioners and surveyors, treasury and bank guards, and the provision of prison guards, all of which were hitherto supplied by the Battalion, and which were proving a severe handicap to the efficient training of a company, were thereafter to be taken over by the police. By 1921, the current expenditure in Sierra Leone, even allowing for economy and increases of taxation was, from £25,000 to £30,000, a month in excess of current revenue. The treasurer’s revised estimates for revenue for the same year (£680,000 instead of £1,037,000, low as it seemed, was likely to prove too high. It was rightly appreciated that revenue could not be increased indefinitely since it was always possible for some unusual measure (for example, direct taxation of the masses, or fiscal changes that could ruin an industry by making it profitless) to cause disturbances in the Protectorate. Though the situation then was peaceful, the parlous state of the colony’s finances meant that the government had to choose between increased taxation and more economy and, considering the inherent
dangers of excessive taxation, it was concluded that economy was more vital than additional troops for the provision of internal security.\[^{59}\]

Several factors had led to the Daru Conference. Cognate with the clamor for economy, officials in the Colonial Office had even begun to entertain serious doubts about the effectiveness of the troops in providing internal security. As early as 1902, only a year after the creation of the Battalion, Inspector-General, Brigadier Kemball, had found that the duties performed by the force were seriously compromising its efficiency and military training. Kemball had therefore recommended that the force be relieved of several duties including the provision of escorts to jailers and warders, orderlies to District Commissioners (DC), orderlies in civil hospitals, and escorts to convicts employed outside the jail. More importantly, Kemball observed that such duties were “much the same” as those performed by the Frontier Police, at a time when he was also persuaded that “a certain number of NCOs and men...are rather past this work...”\[^{60}\]

Despite his recommendations, the same problems regarding the role of the Battalion continued till 1905 and though the supervision of convict labor that year was undertaken by Court Messengers, the new system introduced in 1905 to collect the hut tax in several districts, led to a section of a company of the Battalion being quarantined in the DCs’ headquarters to provide escorts and guards for the latter, and for conveying treasure. Such duties, it was contended, seriously interfered with the general training and musketry of the men.\[^{61}\]

Up to the eve of World War I, officialdom had taken no steps to alleviate the pressures which the force had to contend with and, by 1913, calls were being made to abolish the institution. In September 1913, Major Fairtlough, DC Northern Sherbro, who had joined the Sierra Leone Police in 1894, was proposing the establishment of an armed constabulary force, modeled on the Royal Irish Constabulary. Fairtlough argued that the Battalion, which in 1913 cost £30,000, and an additional £500 for the two new companies proposed, was “contributing nothing to the administration and development of the country except when called upon to aid the civil power.” After 19 years of active service in Sierra Leone, Fairtlough had lost all faith in the capacity of the force to justify its existence. Finding the institution a liability and a burden, he argued that its “utility” was “more evident in the abstract than in the concrete form. Under no circumstances can the Colony support the enormous drain on its resources of a military force...” Fairtlough was highly condemnatory of the 19 white officers in the force, who he described as “birds of passage,” exhibiting only “a cursory knowledge of the Protectorate,” and “evincing no interest in the country.” He therefore urged that selected men from the court messengers and the Frontier Force be constituted into a “new police force” to help ensure security.\[^{62}\]

Such was the loss of faith in the efficiency of the Battalion that in the inter-war years, following the Daru Conference, debates came to center on the viability of maintaining the establishment. No doubt, other drawbacks were impinging on the effectiveness and organization of the force, which was still subjected to the nuances of dual control. In a dispatch to Governor Wilkinson, Winston Churchill doubted whether the WAFF, Sierra Leone Battalion “… in its present condition gives that degree of internal security, the assurance of which should be a first charge on the revenue.”\[^{63}\] This apparent loss of faith was further underscored by Wilkinson’s strident demand for the Battalion to be replaced by a constabulary to exercise the tasks of internal security. In a memo to the Secretary of State, Wilkinson vouched that: “… Were I to remain here, I
should recommend the creation of a constabulary to maintain local order…A constabulary of equal numerical strength, would serve the purpose better.”

Governor Wilkinson’s concerns over the effectiveness of the Battalion were not lost on his successor, Ransford Slater, who on March 23, 1927, convened a conference with the Acting Colonial Secretary, Captain Cookson, the OC Sierra Leone Battalion (Major Taafe), the Staff Officer to the Inspector-General (Major Majendie), Major M. Everett, the Brigade Major, and the Inspector-General, Colonel Butler, to address the problems affecting the Battalion. Colonel Butler was emphatic in his call for “unity of command in Sierra Leone in peace time and in war,” while suggesting an alternative scheme whereby the defence of Freetown and the preservation of order in the Protectorate would be the responsibility of the WAFF. In fact, such a scheme had been mooted by a former Inspector-General, Colonel Haywood, at least verbally in 1923 and 1924. Like Colonel Butler, Governor Slater found the system of dual control unsatisfactory, involving as it did, “undue expense.” In 1922, when he assumed command of the colony, he had suggested that the strength of the Battalion be reduced and, in 1927, he was still convinced that one company, stationed in Karima, four miles north of Kamabai in the Northern Province, would be enough to meet the needs of internal security. Governor Probyn had advanced similar proposals in 1906 and, by 1927, when it was felt that order had been “sufficiently restored in the Protectorate, the time was considered propitious for the proposal to be revived, notwithstanding the honourable traditions of the force, its high standard of efficiency and the remarkable confidence which it enjoyed from the provincial administration and the paramount chiefs.”

There was no shortage of critics advancing the case for dispensing with the Battalion. By 1927, the Colonel Commandant, Colonel G. T. Mair, was convinced that “the military objections to the present system are now even more serious than they were in 1907 as both the units under consideration are smaller than they were, the W.A. Regiment consisting now of H.Q. wing and 2 coys.” Mair found it “uneconomical” to maintain two small units each with a full complement of headquarter staff. He also considered it very “unsatisfactory” that “a unit for whose training I am in no way responsible, and about whose efficiency I have no opportunity of forming an opinion, should, on mobilization, come to form nearly half the infantry under my command.” Predicated on these considerations, Mair advanced a number of proposals, the first of which was to abolish the Battalion and augment the W.A. Regiment by two companies. He suggested that the colonial government should pay the War Office an annual sum of £25,000, this being equal to the estimated cost of the two companies proposed, that one company be stationed in the Protectorate, with the rest in Freetown, and that imperial forces should accept responsibility for all military action needed at any time in the Protectorate. Regarding his second proposal, Mair opined that the total cost of the WAFF then was £41,000, while that for the W.A. Regiment was, for six months in 1925, £25,000. Based on these figures, he estimated an annual cost of £45,000. Since the cost of one company of the W.A. Regiment was estimated at £12,500 per annum, Mair anticipated that the “resulting saving to the colonial government would be £16,000 annually.” He was however apprehensive that the War Office might not be inclined to accept the proposals, “even though they get two companies for nothing, should they be put to heavy capital expense.” Such capital expenditure, he envisaged, would involve the purchase of equipment and clothing, and providing accommodation for both companies,
with the most suitable locations being Freetown and Port Loko. Daru, then the most suitable center where accommodation existed was reputedly “useless strategically.”66 Convinced that the best site for the Makeni Company was Port Loko, Mair suggested that should the scheme be accepted, the barracks for one company, stationed at Port Loko, and the entire unit equipment, then with the Sierra Leone Battalion, were to be handed over to the War Office, without charge.67

While proposals to abolish the Battalion might have seemed convincing, critics were divided over the means of ensuring internal security. Colonel Butler averred that the panacea was to hand over the entire defence of Freetown to the WAFF, abolish the WAR and reduce considerably, the white personnel of the Coast Defence Artillery (CDA) and the various departments. His suggestions were based on the conviction that the threat to Freetown was likely to come from land and not from the sea. Butler was convinced that his solution would approximate the same total cost and provide more infantry and “native” pack artillery as in Nigeria. But the OC, Mair, countered that any attempt to tinker with the CDA would be “problematical” since, “the engineers here” were “all skilled tradesmen” and “cannot be replaced at all by natives or reduced.” He conjectured that the white personnel of the garrison “may possibly be increased at some future date by anti-aircraft troops and perhaps by an RAF unit as … the chief threat to the harbor is not by land but by air.” Mair therefore found it difficult “to see where the necessary saving in cost … is to come from,” or “how the increased numbers of infantry and the native pack artillery are to be paid for.” In his scheme for abolishing the WAFF, Mair conceded that the recruiting of the Kono, who he believed were better soldiers than the Temne, may be adversely affected by the change. This notwithstanding, he was convinced that his scheme would lead to the abolition of dual control in Freetown, thereby enabling the garrison to be placed under the War Office in peace and war, and to improvements in the training and standardization of the entire garrison. Assuming that the colony paid the cost of the two companies proposed, and a contribution to cover the cost of passages and pensions, and that new barracks for one company in the Protectorate and regimental equipments for two companies were handed over by the colony free of charge, Mair believed that the War Office would obtain two strong companies “absolutely free of cost except for that of providing new accommodation at Wilberforce for one company and part of the HQ wing. At the same time, the colony would enjoy a substantial annual saving, while the size of the garrison would not be reduced.”68

The controversy regarding proposals to abolish the WAFF, while remaining unresolved for some time, was put to all District Commissioners for their opinions. Commissioner Hooker (Southern Province) saw no political objections to the proposals, given what he regarded as the loyal and natural law-abiding disposition of the chiefs and their people demonstrated during the Great War and the Railway strike of 1926. Hooker argued that:

Virtually unarmed, wholly untrained from a military point of view, peaceful and law-abiding reasonably contented with their lot and imbued with a profound belief in the government…
I found it impossible to believe that these tribes will ever again cause the government trouble of a serious nature which could not be immediately suppressed by an even smaller military
force than the Colonel Commandant has in mind.

These appreciations notwithstanding, apologists for internal security and stability in Sierra Leone argued to the contrary. Mr. Bowden, Commissioner, Central Province, saw in the proposals to abolish the WAFF, a “very grave risk” since “the presence of HQ with a fairly equipped company at Daru is a guarantee for the peace and safety of this province, with its large commercial commitments.” Bowden regarded the Court Messenger Force as wholly inadequate to meet the needs of internal security and contended that:

it is the shadow of the Company of Frontiers behind the slender Court Messenger Force that enables it to function as it does…
The commercial commitments in this province are greater than in any other. Taking stocks alone apart from produce on hand, the figure must run to well over £100,000. I make no mention of the government’s commitments as well which are also great. There are over £10,000 worth of buildings at Moyamba at present… Is it wise to take anything in the nature of a risk with so much at stake?

Though Bowden did not envision a repetition of 1898, he alluded to the abortive plan of 1907-08 in the old Railway District (in the whole of Mende country) to raid stores on the railway line, and to the inability of the Court Messengers to stop the rioting, when, in 1919, under the guise of the anti-Syrian riots, trading centers were raided and looted. Bowden argued that during instances of raiding, the military always had to be deployed in aid of the Court Messengers. Thus, he suggested, the military’s role to the civil power was “almost more important still.” Above all, Mr. Bowden advocated celerity of action.

The Acting OC, Lieutenant-Colonel A.E. Norton, found Commissioner Bowden’s advocacy unconvincing. Based on a pragmatic assessment of military logistics and the disposition of the troops, he countered that should a threat come from Mano or west of that town, then reinforcements from Freetown could be dispatched there more quickly than they could from Daru. Were the threat to come from Moyamba, then troops from Freetown could be sent there within five and a half to seven hours, while soldiers from Daru would take nine and a half hours to get there, even if rolling stock were available, and perhaps 24 hours longer if it was not. Lieutenant-Colonel Norton was convinced that the presence of troops at Daru provided no insurance against the outbreak of “troubles to which the CCP fears their removal may give rise … Furthermore Daru might be cut off by the distribution of the permanent way without rolling stock.” This, he suggested, “could never happen to Freetown.” He opined that the ethnic groups in the Karima area were particularly docile and had remained loyal to the government “during the house tax rising of nearly 30 years ago…to the east, north and west the country is generally speaking thinly populated, partly through having been devastated in the past by warrior raiders of whom Samori was the last.”

Despite the initiative taken by Governor Slater and his predecessors to determine the fortunes and role of the Battalion, the overwhelming factor of economy led critics to revive calls to reduce the force again in 1935. A similar view was to be echoed much later in 1959, in a bid to follow the Gambian example.
The African Forces Conference

If the Daru Conference and the deliberations thereafter about the Battalion’s role foundered on the exigencies of economy, this inevitably shaped various perspectives about the efficiency of the force. These were reflected in the divergences of opinion between the man on the spot and the Colonial Office. The move (for example) of the Company from Bandajuma in 1920 adequately illustrates this thesis. While the Colonial Office supported the proposal on the grounds of economy, the OC, Sierra Leone Battalion, Lt. Col. Ogilvie, was deeply apprehensive of the move from a security standpoint. Thus, in a memo to the Colonial Secretary, Ogilvie wrote:

As will be readily understood, the Company at Bandajuma plays a vital part in the dispositions which I have made to meet any situation such as a railway strike or demonstrations against any section of the inhabitants of the country or both combined. Its withdrawal might be fraught with serious consequences; the destruction of the telegraph line, an interference of the railway sufficient to prevent the passage of trains would mean a delay of days before I could deal with any situation south or southwest of Bo itself and in such cases, celerity of action is of primary importance.  

From the available evidence, it is clear that in this confusion of perspectives over the role of the Battalion, the desire to “pacify,” “subjugate,” “conquer” and “show the flag” assumed great prominence in official circles. In a governor’s dispatch of April 1922, it was argued that “…this is all it [the Battalion] is intended to do.” Troop marches throughout the Protectorate were therefore calculated to produce a salutary effect on the inhabitants. Among the declared objectives of the march by “B” Company to Kambia via Kamakwei, Kalangba, Kamaranka and Kukuna in 1935, was “the desirability of showing the flag in the Protectorate at least once a year.” In summing up the responses of the people throughout these areas in which military displays were given, the O.C. reported that:

The trek through places where soldiers are rarely or never seen no doubt did a lot of good. I am sure the displays impressed the people and the news of how powerful are the weapons used have travelled far beyond the places we carried them out. I think any chief in the various chiefdoms through which we passed would think twice about causing any trouble.

Of the displays at Kalangba, he reported that although the chief “seemed impressed,” yet “I formed the opinion then that the bushman is very mystified by drill and requires something that he can better understand such as firing and bayonet fighting which make him realise the power of government weapons.”
Such notions about bringing the “bushman” to heel, and the tradition of deploying the Battalion in aid of the civil power, were still prevalent by 1949 when the African Forces Conference (AFC) was convened and, at a time when the “gun” was still seen “in savage countries...often as a symbol of power and has a great moral effect.” The AFC represented one more example of the nuances to which attempts at defining the role of the Battalion was subjected. The Conference, which started on November 8, 1949, was dictated by the events of the decade, 1939-1949, which led to the need to review the broad division of responsibility with regards to defence, both internally and externally in Britain’s African colonies for, by the end of the Second World War, it was becoming increasingly obvious that the roles to be performed by the military and the police were still blurred.

In Sierra in particular, a spate of industrial and labor troubles, and strike action by workers in the War Department, laborers in the Coaling Company at Mabella, and miners of the Sierra Leone Development Company at Marampa and Lunsar, up to the end of 1938 and the beginning of 1939, and, more importantly, the mutiny of the gunners in the Sierra Leone Heavy Battery, Murray Town, in January 1939, were all deflecting the energies of the Battalion, at a time when “no money” was “available at this [military] Headquarters for security purposes.” Intelligence reports for the period therefore concluded that “Freetown...has certain internal security problems of its own.” Furthermore, on the eve of the outbreak of World War II, officialdom was still loath to invest any faith in the efficacy of the Battalion, whose “long stationing in Freetown,” it was feared, was “apt to ‘Creolise’ them and they deteriorate accordingly.” Very little faith was evinced in the Gambia Company then stationed in Freetown, to address the needs of internal security. In addition, fears of raiding and looting by what was regarded as a “scallywag” population imitating the raiders of 1919, still abounded in official circles. From an external standpoint, German penetration of Liberia, then regarded as “far-fetched at the end of 1936,” was now attracting the attention of the British particularly on the southern frontiers of the Sierra Leone Protectorate, as fears of a possible German invasion from Cape Mount, “with lorries … in the Sulima-Fairo area proceeding to Bo,” mounted. What compounded these fears was the renewed German submarine activity in West African waters and the number of “able-bodied and enthusiastic Germans in West Africa.” British apprehensions soon came to center on the inadequacy of the Sierra Leone garrison, which then comprised Battalion Headquarters and three companies, to undertake the onerous burden of covering 14 miles of coastline and, given the possibility of German action, watch 140 miles of frontier. It was therefore considered strategically expedient to maintain troops to serve in a reserve capacity for the Protectorate, such as one company to be stationed in Bo. Unfortunately, in the circumstances of 1939, military strategists concluded that it was impossible to secure such a reserve force.

Considerations of the positions of the troops in West Africa then centered on the proposed reduction of the number of battalions, a reduction in the number of European officers and NCOs, some artificial reduction of the numbers in individual units, and in the administrative units. The problems immanent in determining the role of the Battalion soon attracted the attention of delegates to the Conference. While willing to accept the forces on a somewhat larger scale than those which existed before World War II, Mr. Armitage argued that it was vital to know the role of the army in West Africa.
years earlier, the question of whether the WAFF should be imperial or colonial troops had been considered at the West African War Council (WAWC), where the consensus of opinion among various governors was that “for local, political and sentimental reasons,” the troops were to remain colonial forces. Like the Daru Conference, the AFC, far from resolving the crisis of functions, merely accentuated an already deepening confusion. The CIGS’ reply to the Nigerian delegate clearly reflected the tenor of official opinion which did not materially detract from the tenets of coercion and subjugation. In defining military and police duties, Sir Jefferies, fully conscious of the perceived weaknesses of police forces, contended that:

The primary importance of [the] police is on their CID side. They are also important for penetrating subversive organizations. The 2 important roles of the military forces are: (a) when the police come under strain, this is the time to let them see the troops. (b) When the situation gets beyond the police it is necessary to show [the] military forces.

By November 16, 1949, the issue was far from resolved and the question of the military’s relation to internal security still loomed large at the Conference. The need for governments to provide against three types of disturbances now assumed importance. As adumbrated by the Conference, such disturbances involved “local disorders,” a “more serious situation in which internal disorder[s] got out of hand” and “external aggression.” Of these examples, the third was construed as a purely military responsibility, while the second “should only arise in unusual circumstances.”

Before the Second World War, colonial governments evolved specific measures for their own internal security and local defence against external aggression by maintaining regular and volunteer forces. Some colonies made financial contributions towards the burden of Commonwealth defence, which was for the most part shouldered by the United Kingdom. But the exigencies of the War, its concomitant financial and economic burdens on the coffers of state, the continually rising cost of modern armed forces, and the need to purchase raw materials and equipments in hard currency, compounded the difficulties not only of the United Kingdom, but those also of member countries of the Commonwealth in achieving a balance of payments. These drawbacks necessitated an urgent review of the whole question of defence relating to the forces to be maintained in any colony or group of colonies, and the level of financial responsibility for the cost of colonial forces. In considering the scale of forces to be maintained, three factors were deemed important by the Conference. Such forces were to be “adequate to ensure internal security in their own territory or wider colonial area,” provide local defense for the same area as well as a nucleus ready for expansion in war. Once more, the Chief of Staff rejected the suggestion that internal security could be provided by substituting gendarmerie forces in the form of regional imperial reserves, rather than colonial forces akin to those which existed before the War. This view was based on the assumption that should the situation develop beyond the control of the police, it would then follow that it had reached a point at which properly organized military forces were required since, as it was contended, colonial troops enjoyed a considerable advantage over the police in such circumstances. Furthermore, it was decided that police forces were to be “adequate” and
“efficient” as an essential prerequisite of the limited scale of internal security requirements then envisaged. In other words, a weaker police force was bound to entail increased scales of colonial military forces.

It is pertinent to observe that at a time when the position of the forces was being reviewed, the only threat to security then envisaged in Sierra Leone by the governor was the likelihood of “the emergence at any time of a skilled anti-British demagogue” who could change the situation entirely, “causing disturbances in the Colony or Protectorate.” Secondly, a serious drop in the prices of primary produce, particularly palm produce, was likely to endanger internal security. Apart from these possibilities, the likelihood of any threat was considered slim and the governor perceived in the first, a weak potential since the practice of associating local unofficials with executive government in Sierra Leone was likely to reduce the possibility of a threat of this nature. On the whole, he did not envisage any potential threat to internal security “for the next five years.”

Consequences for civil-military relations

The apparently poor delimitation of roles for the Sierra Leone Battalion both at the Daru Conference and at the AFC was poor augury for the shape of things to come. The AFC represented the last collective attempt to formally define the role of the force. Thereafter, the initiative was to pass to individual governments. As already argued, it complicated the character of troop psyche with ominous consequences for civil-military relations. On the one hand, chiefly failing to correctly perceive his role in the state, the ethic of domination, pacification and conquest, to which the indigenous recruit had become accustomed inevitably led him to construct a universe of dominance in which he could use his new-found status to cow and overawe the civilian population when the opportunity presented itself. On the other hand, the latter came to nurture an implacable hostility towards a colonial instrument, whose role in the society, they too could hardly understand. This situation was in no way ameliorated by the absence of good role models among some European officers as will be demonstrated. The result was a hardened mutual distrust between troops and civilians.

The general causes for this distrust could be attributed to the lack of a clear appreciation by the troops of their real roles and functions and the character of the recruits themselves, the impact of their new-found status, the hostility of the local inhabitants who exhibited a conspicuously low regard for the soldiery, aggravated by the lack of restraint on the part of some soldiers, increased civil-military contacts, compounded by the propensity of the troops to leave barracks without permission, their penchant for drunkenness, and the poor role models provided by some European officers, whose tendency towards lechery did little to ameliorate an already worsening situation. These assertions are best illuminated by an examination of civil-military clashes in Sierra Leone in the period under review.

In 1912, one Sergeant John Labor, no. 2123, SL Bn. WAFF, was convicted of the offence of looting on or about August 20 and sentenced to a prison term of three months with hard labor. The offence occurred at a time when the people were “in a condition of unrest and excitement” and when the troops “were sent about the country searching for...
suspected persons etc., and the opportunity for and temptation to looting must have been great.”

In general, civil-military relations in Sierra Leone were far from cordial and, on many occasions, soldiers were engaged in minor clashes with either local inhabitants or more often with parties of labor, temporarily employed in the colony. It was the apparently regular occurrences of such hostilities that led to the evolution of wide ranging measures to preempt civil-military contacts. In a bid to aid the civil power, the Area Commander made the Fortress Commander responsible for the entire fortress area, for general liaison with the civil authority to forestall any occurrences of “these periodical outbursts,” preparation of plans to provide aid to the civil authority, and for deciding when the troops were to be confined to barracks. The delimitation of the fortress area to include Benguema camp, Waterloo Aerodrome, Newton Depot and Waterloo North Depot, brought all units and detachments in the fortress area under the orders of the Fortress Commander in the event of riots and civil disturbances. All troops had to be addressed by an officer and warned that disturbances with the civilian population, or interferences with the civil police would result in severe disciplinary action against offenders of the peace, and “may result in all troops in the fortress area being confined to barracks except when on duty.”

It is apparent from the list of measures taken that the habit of some soldiers leaving barracks without passes increased the degree of contact with the population and was often the cause of civil-military clashes. In order to preempt such contacts, an officer in the fortress area was delegated to organize staff parade and roll calls for all ORs stationed in the fortress area at 8:30 p.m. each night, to ensure that every soldier, “except those on guard or in hospital, was present.” Cognate with this stipulation was the limitation imposed on the number of entrances to each camp. After dark, only one entrance was to remain open and, before leaving barracks, every soldier was to report at the guard room where the guard commander ensured that he was “clean, correctly and smartly dressed in accordance with the walking out dress laid down in the Area Routine Order…” and, on return to barracks, the guard commander was to satisfy himself as to the soldier’s “turnout and sobriety.” The move to control the number of ORs out of barracks was also ensured by the limited number of passes issued only under special circumstances, and only “to men of exemplary character.” It should be noted that picquets called out during disturbances caused by soldiers were only to be used to assist the police with military offenders of the peace. Such picquets were not to be used to assist the police with the population.

At a time when steps were being taken to limit the degree of civil-military contacts, reports were being received by the Colonial Secretary, of the brutal treatment meted out to members of the public by military sentries at the Annie Walsh Memorial School compound. The Reverend S. D. Nichol, Canon of Holy Trinity Church, Kissy Road, disturbed by these occurrences, painted a graphic picture of brutality when, in a report to the Colonial Secretary, he noted:

Again and again I have seen trouble between this man who is directing the movement of the vehicles and the pedestrians. Kicks and blows have been freely delivered to innocent passersby… On several occasions men have been arrested and beaten and then taken up to the quarters in the yard. I do not know what happens to
them after that.¹⁰³

A second report sent in by a government pensioner, Mr. E. S. George, savored of the same degree of viciousness and white officer complicity.

Yesterday afternoon, about 4:30 p.m., I witnessed the sentries at the AWMS compound, Kissy Road, catch a native man and attempt to drag him into the yard. This man resisted, and they then started to beat him. A third sentry came up with his gun and was beating the man with his butt when a European officer arrived…. The European officer without interrogating the man caught hold of one of the man’s feet and the sentries his body and dragged the man into the compound boxing and kicking him. No one on the scene can tell whether the man’s life was endangered as no one saw him return from the compound.¹⁰⁴

Clashes of this nature seemed to have been very frequent, sufficient to warrant charges of assault being brought against the sentries concerned.¹⁰⁵ The clash between civilians and troops of the Hastings Aerodrome area on 15 July, 1941, was in many ways illustrative of civilian hostility towards the soldiery, the tendency towards indiscipline on the part of some soldiers, their failure to exercise restraint, and their determination to cow the local inhabitants. The incident was ignited when one Lance Corporal, Sonny Bailey, of a platoon of the third Battalion, Sierra Leone Regiment, stationed at the Hastings Aerodrome, physically assaulted a girl, Ayo Palmer, of the same village on the night of 14 July. In retaliation, a number of angry civilians beat up the Corporal, who ran back to barracks and reported the matter to his colleagues. Though the Platoon Commander, Lt. Farilly, sought to deter the men from leaving camp armed the next day, and to eschew all “palaver,” yet by 8:00 p.m., many soldiers stormed the village determined to avenge Corporal Bailey. Demolishing a fence, they used the sticks to assault a number of civilians before returning to barracks. On receiving reports of the affray from one Sarah Jones of Hastings, Acting Police Sergeant Samura proceeded to the village, where he met the men shouting in Mende, one allegedly armed with a rifle and five rounds of ammunition and the others with sticks. On requesting the men to accompany him to their C.O., the soldiers bolted. Though an identification parade of the entire platoon was conducted, Samura found it difficult to identify the men who all protested having been in bed by 8:00 p.m., except one who confessed that he was visiting some friends in the village and had nothing to do with the disturbances.¹⁰⁶ In assessing these disturbances, Major Giffard, O.C. SL Bn., argued that they “were due as much to the unpleasant remarks leveled at the soldiery by the local inhabitants as to the youthful officialism of the young soldiers forming such a considerable proportion of the garrison of the area.”¹⁰⁷

The row had its origins in the detection by Corporal Bailey, “of a certain theft in the Aerodrome area” as a result of which three men were arrested and handed over to the police. Bailey therefore came to be regarded by the locals as a “blackleg,” a “spoilt sport” and one who was “generally to be deplored.” On July 14, Bailey and a “stout hearted private,” Bockari Dina, visited the village and became embroiled in an argument with two girls. In the ensuing mêlée, Bailey lost his stripes and suffered minor bruises and
bumps which caused him to be put on light duty for two days. The Corporal himself was not entirely free from blame as he had struck one of the girls, who referred to him as “dog pickin” (the child of a dog). On receiving reports of the affray, Lt. Farilly toured the village, found none of his soldiers, held a check roll-call and found none of them missing. The O.C. SL Bn. found the story of the five rounds of ammunition untrue and, though he agreed that the soldiers were partly culpable, he contended that:

They are not the only ones who should be blamed. We are continuing to stress to all soldiers forming part of small detachments and on all leave parties the need to treat the jibes of the less-well mannered members of the civilian community with the forbearing disdain that they merit.

In nearly all cases of civil-military conflicts, the police found it difficult to identify the perpetrators. The incidents at Waterloo and Songo on 25 September, 1941, should be seen as a classic example of the tendency by some soldiers to use their status to terrorise the inhabitants. Such incidents were also a function of the character of the recruits and their failure to comprehend their role in the dependency. On September 25, a large body of soldiers of the third Battalion, Sierra Leone Regiment, was proceeding on leave to the Protectorate and, after having been dismissed by an officer, they occupied the two front coaches of the Protectorate train. On arrival at Waterloo, a considerable commotion erupted between the soldiers and a police constable, the soldiers attacking the latter with “sticks, stones and fists; the assault was most savage and the constable had only his bare hands to protect himself with.” The crisis was triggered when the special constable at Waterloo Railway Station removed a woman from the train “at the request of her so-called husband, Partieh Lahai. There is evidence that this man and the woman were living together but no dowry had been paid… A police constable recognized the woman as a country woman of his and persuaded her to leave the train” whereupon five soldiers, apparently drunk, including Sergeant James, attacked the police. Only when the train guard signaled the train to depart did the soldiers abandon their victim.

The same rowdy behavior was perpetrated at Songo on the same day and, at this latter location, palm wine and fruit vendors had their goods pillaged. “Women were knocked down and their clothing pulled off and several children were hurt…Most of the soldiers were worse for drink presumably obtained earlier and with that stolen at Songo would be in a worse state…” The soldiers’ behavior inevitably excited the anger of the villagers who, in a retaliatory mood, hurled stones at the coaches occupied by the former, who had by then closed the shutters apparently anticipating this reaction. From a propaganda point of view, incidents of this nature severely compromised recruiting activities in the Protectorate. The episode was perhaps best summed up by the Assistant Superintendent of Police, in whose “estimation, the whole disturbance…was intended more to terrorise the locals and show that soldiers may do anything they wish than to do any serious damage.”

Animosities between troops and civilians were not merely confined to the metropolis and its environs, and the sometimes complimentary verdicts passed on the troops with regard to discipline, were not always reflected in their contacts with civilians. The behavior of some soldiers at Port Loko in 1942 pointed in large measure, to the need
for closer supervision of African NCOs and ORs when off duty. Soldiers had been stationed at Port Loko since August 1940, but the administrative officers had found little cause to complain of their behavior. By January 1942 however, the situation had rapidly altered, military discipline being seriously eroded.\textsuperscript{116} The Commissioner, Port Loko Division, in his report of 19 January, was deeply apprehensive over the tendency by soldiers to wander about the town in the afternoon and evening, improperly dressed and devoid of regimental badges or caps.

They are often rowdy, ill-mannered and intoxicated. Although they are all supposed to be in barracks at Tattoo roll call, such is not always the case, and it is known that men who have answered their names then leave barracks. Later when checked by Court Messengers they are insulting.\textsuperscript{117}

The units then stationed at Port Loko were the 6\textsuperscript{th} Light Battery West African Artillery, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Bn. Sierra Leone Regiment Recruiting Training Coy, the 6\textsuperscript{th} Field Ambulance WAAMC, the WAASC Patrol Company, and a few Royal Engineers. While the behavior of the first two units was reputedly “excellent,” that of the WAASC was esteemed the “worst.”\textsuperscript{118}

So far, we have attempted to show that the generally lax behavior exhibited by some soldiers, their penchant for “showing the flag” in their own way and, above all, the apparently confused role perspectives partly determined civilian hostility to the soldiery. These factors, however, do not by themselves explain the character of civil-military relations in the period under review. In all fairness to the troops, not all ugly incidents and unruly behavior perpetrated by soldiers were at all times precipitated by them. Unfortunately, because of their predilection for terrorizing the locals, sufficient tension was generated between the soldiery and civilians, and the latter were quick to seize the offensive when the opportunity presented itself. In many instances, soldiers were subjected to immense provocation as could be gleaned from an examination of the incident which occurred on 22 February 1942 at Brookfields, in the west end of Freetown, “when a bus numbered F. 1586 drove into a party of formed soldiers causing them to scatter.”\textsuperscript{119} The soldiers had just returned from Nigeria and were being marched by one Corporal Nwoko. When remonstrated with, “the driver and one particular passenger clad in a black coat and fez cap are alleged to have become extremely offensive and described the soldiers as ‘uneducated dogs,’” the man with the cap striking at the soldiers with a stick.\textsuperscript{120} It is obvious from this incident that the fault lay with the civilians. This is underscored by reference to the habit of drivers “shaving formed parties of troops.”\textsuperscript{121}

Of the many variables considered as instrumental in determining the nature of civil-military relations, the failure of some European officers to provide good “role models” compounded an already worsening situation. This thesis is exemplified in the demonstration of a tendency to lechery exhibited by five European officers from the A.A. Battery, based at Aberdeen, on the night of 22 November, 1941. Hoping to satisfy their libidinous tastes, the soldiers entered the village drunk at about 8:00 p.m. and paid a local boy some money to find them women. The boy resorted to deceit and disappeared behind a house, much to the chagrin of the soldiers who, in their rage, began hurling stones at the
house. The attempts by the landlord, Thomas Richards, to remonstrate with the soldiers proved fruitless. Words led to blows and a scuffle ensued. Though no serious damage was done, the soldiers were waylaid on their way to camp and vigorously assaulted, with two incurring slight injuries, and a third seriously. Two days after this initial brawl, African soldiers were drawn into the fray. Thirty men entered the village at night and threatened to burn it down, striking terror into the inhabitants. The already deepening crisis was compounded by unconfirmed rumors of the death of one of the assaulted European soldiers and by newspaper reports of the Supreme Court trial then in progress, of the soldiers who had burnt Hastings. Though all that was done at Aberdeen by the soldiers was the throwing of stones and the destruction of a few windows, the villagers feared worse recrimination, spent virtually the entire night in the bush and, in the morning, fled to Freetown. In nearly all of the disturbances involving soldiers, the inefficiency of the police to quell disorders was highlighted. At Aberdeen, for example, due to the lack of a telephone at police headquarters, nothing was known of the night’s affray till the morning. In general, this drawback precluded the speedy deployment of police personnel to scenes of riotous conduct.

Conclusion

The crisis of role perspectives examined in the period under review is also significant for an appreciation of the role of the army in post-independent Sierra Leone. Certain salient deductions can be drawn from this examination. Largely due to the motives which governed the formation of the Sierra Leone Battalion, the opportunities for developing a national and professional army were lost. This magnified the tasks of adjusting the Sierra Leone Army to new conditions during the early phase of independence. The nature of the role performed by the Battalion was significantly reflected in the general structural drawbacks immanent in an imperfect colonial heritage. The need to preserve colonial interests in Sierra Leone set in motion a pattern of government’s dependence on “force” to bolster its authority. Indeed, the creation of a tradition whereby troops were frequently rushed to the aid of the civil power was firmly institutionalized during the colonial period and was to permeate the post-independence era, with significant consequences for coup making in Sierra Leone. Thus, Brigadier David Lansana, the first Sierra Leonean to assume command of the Battalion, with his experience of the colonial tradition, found it convenient to refer to his actions in March 1967, as the “usual” practice. The tradition of rushing troops to scenes of riotous conduct presented Lansana with the perfect pretext for staging the first military intervention in post-independent Sierra Leone, in the turbulent days of March 1967. This peculiarly distorted sense of mission no doubt drew its inspiration from the blurred role perspectives firmly embedded in the period under review. The failure by colonial soldiers to rightly construe their role in the colony, partly complicated by the exigencies of economy, was further worsened by the penchant by some soldiers for unruly and rowdy behavior, which found its parallel in civilian hostility towards the soldiery. Judging therefore from the tenor of the remarks made by many members of the civilian population, diverse perspectives about the soldiery had been fashioned by the dawn of independence and these, inter alia, were to affect the pace of Africanization in the military, with negative consequences. Troop clashes with civilians
during this period merely increased and grounded the seeds of military praetorianism with significant consequences for the future.

Notes

6. Gann and Duignan. Rulers of British Africa. 73.
7. C. E. Callwell. Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice.
9. Chamberlain reached this decision in 1897.
15. *SLAR* (1889). 8. SLPA. For the strategic importance of Sierra Leone in Britain’s imperial chain, see Author. “Great Britain, Germany and the United States in West Africa: The quest for commercial supremacy, 1840s to 1914.” Unpublished Paper.
20. To avoid such disputes, it was agreed to fix the boundaries between British and French territories by a treaty dated 21 January, 1895. Haywood and Clarke. *History of the Royal West African Frontier Force*. 18.
36. *SLAR* (1898). 25. SLPA.
37. *SLAR* (1898). 25. SLPA.
38. *SLAR* (1898). 15. Ordinance 13, SLPA.
41. *SLAR* (1901). 32. SLPA.
42. Slater, Ransford. Governor. 27 May, 1922. Speech to Sierra Leone Battalion in recognition of 20 years of service in preserving the King’s honor. In Davies. *The History of The Sierra Leone Battalion*. 113.
43. G. B. Haddon Smith, *SLAR* (1901). 32. SLPA.
44. SLAR (1906). 6. SLPA.
45. SLAR (1907). 7. SLPA.
46. SLAR (1908). 13. SLPA.
47. Davies. The History of the Sierra Leone Battalion. 87.
50. SLAR (1914). 33. SLPA.
52. Lee. African Armies and Civil Order. 27.
53. Governor Slater’s address to troops, 27 May, 1922. 27.
56. Milner, Secretary of State to Governor Wilkinson, 4 December, 1920. CSO N119, CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General 1920-1942, Vol. III. SLPA. See also CSO N.69, 1931. SLPA; Governor Slater’s comments on “Annual Report of the Inspector-General, Royal West African Frontier Force on the Gold Coast Regiment,” to Secretary of State, 7 May, 1931. Encl., Miscellaneous Confidential, 12 May, 1931. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, Vol. II, 1921-1942. SLPA.
57. Inspector-General, WAFF to Wilkinson, 11 June, 1920. CSO N.119, 1920, SLPA.
58. Wilkinson to Secretary of State, 9 June, 1921. CSO N.119, 1920. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, 1920-1942, Vol. III. SLPA.
59. Winston Churchill, Secretary of State to Wilkinson, 16 April, 1921. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, Vol. III, 1920-1942. SLPA.
60. Inspector-General Brigadier Kemball. Report, Copy No. K/45, 5 April, 1902. SLPA.
62. DC Northern Sherbro to Colonial Secretary. Enclosure to Dispatch, SL Conf. C126/1913. SLPA.
63. Wilkinson to Secretary of State, 16 April, 1921, CSO N.119, 1920. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, Vol. III, 1920-1942, SLPA.
64. Wilkinson to Secretary of State, 9 June, 1921. CSO N.119, 1920. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, Vol. III, 1920-1942. SLPA.
65. Slater to Secretary of State, 29 March, 1927. SL Secret 54-6/27, MP 58-30/27. SLPA.
66. No. S.G./161/59/11-3-27. SLPA.
69. SL Secret 54-9/27, SLPA.
70. Lt. Col., CO Sierra Leone Battalion, WAFF, to Colonial Secretary, 4 June, 1935. CSO N.112, 1932. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, Vol. III, 1920-1942. SLPA.
73. Extract from Governor’s Dispatch No. 138, 6 April, 1922. Extracted from MP 506/22, CSO N.119, 1920. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, Vol. III, 1920-1942. SLPA.
74. CSO N.27, 1929. Open Policy Files on the Navy and Royal West African Frontier Force. SLPA.
75. Hereafter SL Bn.
76. OC, SL Bn. WAFF to Colonial Secretary, 28 November, 1934. CSO N.27, 1929, Open Policy Files on the Navy and Royal West African Frontier Force. SLPA.
78. “Report on the March to Kambia.” CSO N.27, 1929. SLPA.
79. Sir Jeffries, Chairman, reply to Mr. Armitage, Gold Coast representative. AFC M. (49) I, 1 November, 1949. 3. SLPA.
80. Sierra Leone Half-Yearly Intelligence Report, period ending 30 June, 1939, Secret. CO267/669/32175. TNA.
81. AFC M. (49) 6, 16 November, 1949. SLPA.
82. AFC M. (49) I, 4 November, 1949. 3. SLPA.
83. WAWC (219). 25 January, 1945. SLPA.
84. Mr. Baker Beall.
85. AFC M. (49) I, 11 November, 1949. 3. SLPA.
86. AFC M. (49) 6, 16 November, 1949. 3. SLPA.
87. Mr. W. C. Johnson, Police Adviser to Secretary of State for the Colonies, AFC M. (49) 7, 16 November, 1949. 2. SLPA.
88. AFC M. (49) 7, 16 November, 1949. 2. SLPA.
89. Secretary of State for the Colonies, Secret dispatch to Governors of Sierra Leone, The Gold Coast, Nigeria and the Gambia, 20 August, 1949. AFC P. (49) I. 10. SLPA.
90. Secretary of State to Governors, AFC P. (49) I. 10. SLPA.
91. “Brief Internal Security Appreciations received from the Governors of Certain African Colonies and Mauritius.” Annex VII, Sierra Leone. AFC P. (49) I0, 10 November, 1949. 12. SLPA.
93. Sergeant Labor was expected to complete 13 years of service on 25 January, 1913. See CSO FF.105, 20 December, 1912. SLPA.
94. OC SL. Bn. WAFF to Colonial Secretary. CSO FF.105, 20 December, 1912. SLPA.
95. “Riots and Civil Disturbances: Aids to the Civil Power,” 1. CSO N.1 1942. Open Policy Files on the Navy and RWAFF. SLPA.
96. This referred to part of the colony up to and including Waterloo Aerodrome, thence west of a line drawn from the Aerodrome southwards from the sea. CSO N.1 1942. Open Policy Files on the Navy and RWAFF. SLPA.
97. “Riots and Civil Disturbances.” CSO N.1 1942. Open Policy Files on the Navy and RWAFF. SLPA.
98. “Riots and Civil Disturbances.” CSO N.1 1942. SLPA.
99. Roll call for British ORs took place at 10:00 p.m. CSO N.1 1942. 3. SLPA.
100. See Area Routine Order No. 36/482, 28 October, 1941. SLPA.
101. “Riots and Civil Disturbances.” CSO N.1 1942. SLPA.
102. “Riots and Civil Disturbances.” CSO N.1 1942. SLPA.
103. Enclosure, Rev. S. D. Nichol to Colonial Secretary, 10 August, 1942. CSO N.163, 1942. Open Policy Files on the Navy and RWAFF, SLPA.
104. Sierra Leone Government Pensioner, E. S. George, 11 Ross Road to Colonial Secretary. CSO N.163, 1942. Open Policy Files on the Navy and RWAFF, SLPA.
105. Colonial Secretary to Rev. S. O. Nichol and Mr. E. S. George, 28 August, 1942. CSO N.163, 1942. 4-5. Open Policy Files on the Navy and RWAFF, SLPA. Both sentries were fined £1 each with an alternative of 14 days imprisonment.
106. Intd. O. R. Lucas, ASP, OC to Commissioner of Police, 18 July, 1941. CSO N.48, 1941. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General. SLPA.
107. Major D. A. A. Giffard to Commissioner of Police, CRSLZ/1687/A. CSO N.48, 1941. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General. SLPA.
108. Giffard to Commissioner of Police, H.Q. Judicial and Freetown Districts, 2 August, 1941. CSO N.48, 1941. SLPA.
109. Giffard to Commissioner of Police, CSO N.48, 1941. SLPA. A similar incident occurred at Campbell Town on June 11, 1941 in which 18 soldiers were charged. See Commissioner, H.Q. Judicial and Freetown Districts to Colonial Secretary, Col./4/25/1 (55), CSO N.48, 1941. SLPA.
110. P. H. H. Bailey, Supt. of Prisons to Colonial Secretary, 25 September, 1941. CSO N.157, 1941. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, 1920-1942, Vol. III. SLPA.
111. Commissioner of Police to Colonial Secretary, 2 October, 1941, CSO N.157, 1941. SLPA.
112. P. H. H. Bailey to Colonial Secretary, 25 September, 1941. CSO N.157, CSO N.157, 1941. SLPA.
113. Bailey to Colonial Secretary, 25 September, 1941. CSO N.157, 1941. SLPA.
114. Bailey to Colonial Secretary, 25 September, 1941. CSO N.157, 1941. SLPA.
116. Commissioner, Port Loko Division to Colonial Secretary, 19 January, 1942, PLD/Secret. CSO N.6, 1942. CSO Confidential on Armed Forces of West Africa General, 1920-1942, Vol. III. SLPA.
117. Commissioner, Port Loko Division to Colonial Secretary, 19 January, 1942. CSO N.6, 1942. SLPA.
118. Commissioner, Port Loko Division to Colonial Secretary, 19 January, 1942. CSO N.6, 1942. SLPA.
120. Lt. Col., A.A. & Q.M.G., Sierra Leone Area to General Manager, SL Railway, 21 March, 1942/JDAL. CSO N.169, 1941. SLPA.
121. Lt. Col., A.A. & Q.M.G., Sierra Leone Area to General Manager, SL Railway, 21 March, 1942/JDAL. CSO N.169, 1941. SLPA.

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