In Defence of “King and Country”: Empire Loyalism, Sierra Leone and World War I

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Introduction

On Sunday 2 August, 1914, the Observer newspaper in London tersely reported that: “Germany has declared war with Russia, and France and Germany have both ordered a mobilization. Thus has vanished the last hope of European peace.” The announcement, conveyed by the German ambassador in St. Petersburg at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday 1 August, set in motion a train of events that plunged the world into war, lasting till 11 November, 1918, when an armistice was signed between the belligerents. As feverish mobilization began in European capitals, war declaration was hardly tempered by an animated media which whipped up war hysteria by castigating alleged German intentions of obtaining “absolute power in Europe,” designed to “ruin France and enslave her.” While ambassadors and diplomatic staff took leave of foreign offices, the “Ordre de Mobilisation Generale,” scheduled to commence on 2 August, unleashed a “tremendous wave of enthusiasm” in Paris, where processions bearing tricolour flags were accompanied by chants of the Marsellaise and “Vive la France.” In St. Petersburg, the German action stirred an unbridled jingoism as reservists enrolled in 100 centers, with women and children accompanying their husbands and fathers. Such scenes were replicated throughout European capitals where “a wave of national pride and optimism” overrode all “divisions of political and social life.” With the failure of international diplomacy, and German violation of Belgian neutrality, Britain declared war on Germany “as from 11 p.m. on August 4, 1914.” Thus began what has been variously christened World War I, The Great War, or La Grande Guerre by the French. The crowds which thronged the main thoroughfares around Westminster bore Union jacks as men waited to enlist outside the central recruiting office in Scotland Yard in London. While these events unfolded in Europe, there was little inkling that Britain’s alliance with the Entente Cordiale would dramatically alter the fate of “ancient and loyal” Sierra Leone, Britain’s most strategic, naval, and coaling station in West Africa, ensconced on the West Atlantic, and bordered on her southeastern frontier by Liberia, where a bourgeoning German colonial spirit was threatening to complicate relations between Britain and Germany.

This paper examines Sierra Leone’s involvement in great power politics and commercial rivalry between 1914 and 1922, a theme ignored by Africanist and British imperial historians. It does so within the framework of empire loyalty, articulated against the background of Britain’s dependence on her colonies for both human and material resources throughout World War I (WWI). It eschews facile definitions of loyalty which imply an unqualified commitment to a cause or ideal, such as the defence of the British Empire in 1914, and argues that notions of loyalty which fail to incorporate ideas of reciprocity ignore the perceived obligations of the recipient of fidelity. In Sierra Leone, the Krio, for example, might have relished their much bandied attachment to the British Crown which, in the course of their history, had earned them the title, “ancient and loyal” but, by the eve of war, the society had chalked up legitimate
grievances which showed that they were not merely passive automatons of colonialism. This paper therefore interrogates the “comforting consensus” about the loyalty of colonial subjects to the interests of metropolitan Britain, even when such loyalty threatened their security in wartime. This consensus is informed by the view that colonies such as Sierra Leone followed Britain unconditionally into war on August 4, 1914. In many ways though, it could not be contested that in 1914, the main sympathies in British colonies lay with Britain for, as the Sierra Leone Weekly News contended, “What concerns Britain, concerns us. When she has to die that we may live we are perfectly willing to go through the ordeal with her.” It should be noted, however, that in Sierra Leone, characterized by a varied demographic profile, such sentiments represented one strand of thought which perceived the war from a moral stand point, as “a just war” against the German Kaiser, a view entertained by “war hawks” and the British press. If “loyalism” suggests that Sierra Leoneans volunteered for service unequivocally as front line troops and carriers, it ought to be emphasized that loyalty to the cause of Empire was markedly ambiguous. While significant sacrifices (such as the dislocation of farming, family and village life, wartime hardship, poverty, malnutrition, disease, and death) were made by those who fought for Britain and by the civilian population, Sierra Leoneans entertained many expectations and hopes of reward for their allegiance to Britain after the war. The study assesses the perceived failure of Sierra Leone’s servicemen in the African theaters of war, and the much more nuanced official perceptions of Sierra Leoneans for military service, particularly in international operations against highly trained, sophisticated, and advanced military forces such as those deployed by the Germans.

In the United Kingdom, where plans to commemorate the Great War centenary in 2014 aroused significant tensions between historians and politicians, and generated diverse narratives about the origins, motives, impact, and legacy of WWI, the contributions, sacrifices, and complex legacies of Britain’s colonies (unlike the white dominions) to the war effort were hardly acknowledged (Mycoc 162). Such an oversight was hardly surprising for, even during the conflict, African theaters of war were regarded as sideshows to the drama that was being orchestrated on European battlefields. Thus, to many observers, the “Great War” was comprised largely of battles and trenches on the Western Front, towering personalities such as Alexander Haig or Marshal Foch, and iconic place names such as Ypres, and the Somme. European soldier poets also helped to ingrain the war in popular Western consciousness.

When the impact is considered, it is invariably the tribulations of the “Home Front” (which hardly transcends the geographical confines of European belligerents) that punctuate most monographs examining the first global crisis. Often less remembered, and in many instances not known, is the African contribution to the war effort. As the title implies, “Empire loyalism” aims to further the recent reawakening of historians’ interest in the broader implications of WWI for African societies. Focusing on Sierra Leone, this study hopes to reconfigure the history of WWI and Africa by examining the colony’s contribution to Britain’s war effort. It debunks initial postulates which viewed the war as solely a “European War” or, as some sections of Sierra Leone’s public dubbed it, “a white man’s palaver.” The study shows that though the triggers for war mainly originated in Europe, Sierra Leone, by dint of her place in Britain’s imperial chain, could not have escaped the motley vicissitudes of WWI. Indeed, though the popular enthusiasm for empire among European powers had begun to wane by 1901, African colonies, had, by 1914, become wedded to the interests of their European metropolitan governments.

This work transcends the bounds of traditional military studies, and aims to navigate the historiography of WWI away from its heavily skewed emphasis on military organization and
logistics, mobilization and deployment, to a wider historical framework which embraces the relationship between war and society. It suggests that Africa’s involvement, though now largely blotted from the collective memory of Sierra Leoneans, was far more complex than the expulsion of the Germans from Mbureku, or the crossing of the Rufiji valley in East Africa. Thus, though Sierra Leone did not constitute a theater of war, WW1 had significant military, social, economic, political, religious, and medical consequences for the dependency. Given the demographic diversity of Africa and its uneven historical development, the study deploys the Sierra Leone experience to show that such radical differences were reflected in the different wartime encounters of respective colonies.

The Case for Remembrance

Part of the dilemma confronting the state in contemporary Sierra Leone has, paradoxically, been the evolving role of the military in forging a nation at least since independence. Plagued by successful coup activity and failed coups, rumors of coups, barrack room revolts and mutinies, mercenary activity, rebel incursions and civil war, the result of such instances of instability has been to catapult the military into the main vortex of politics. Forged largely as a security instrument by Britain to prosecute imperial designs and maintain internal order, Britain’s influence in the development of Sierra Leone’s armed forces has been unmistakably marked since 1901. Climaxed by the deployment of British troops on 8 May, 2008 as a short-term training squad (under Operation Palliser) via the British-led International Military Advisory and Training Team (IMATT), and triggered by the inadequacy of the containment capacity of Sierra Leone’s internal security forces, regional forces such as the Nigerian-led Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), and United Nations-led forces of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) to bring the Revolutionary United Front to heel, Britain was constrained to assist in the restructuring and capacity-building process of a largely compromised, and lackluster Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF), at least, up to 2007.

British assistance in these transformative and security sector reform processes should not merely be seen as a sudden surge of altruism in post-bellum (1992-2002) Sierra Leone. Her involvement in the provision of internal security is as old as the Sierra Leone army and was firmly rooted in Chamberlain’s decision to remodel Britain’s relationship with her colonies. As a colonial force established, inter alia, to fulfill the duties of “imperial policing” and fighting “small wars on the far-flung frontiers of empire (Gann and Duignan 73), the Sierra Leone Battalion, West African Frontier Force (SL.Bn. WAFF), was dragged into a crisis in which it could have exercised no choice in the circumstances of 1914. Moreover, the deliberate extension of the war by Germany away from Europe on to the colonial fronts in Africa was to make Britain’s call on the material and manpower resources of Sierra Leone inevitable. In a war that generated diverse sympathies in Britain’s West African colonies, Sierra Leoneans were quick to view the war as the “present Armageddon,” a crisis that was bound to transform their fortunes significantly. Such sentiments, which echoed the sacrifices made by the country, helped to bolster support for “King and country.” By 1916, recruits such as Regimental Sergeant Major Morlai Yainkain, Company Sergeant Major Kamanda, Sergeant Momo Sankoh, Lance Corporal Sorie Kanu, Private Momodu Alpha, and countless others, had all experienced war and service in Togoland and the Cameroons, and the hazards of bush warfare in German East Africa. Thus thrust into “Whitemen’s wars” and “quarrels” (Duff 102), the Rev. Coker of Saint Patrick’s
Church, Kissy, argued that “Africa finds herself” in the war “without her consent being first obtained.”

In 1920, Lieutenant Commander Kenworthy declared in the British House of Commons that “plenty of the histories of the War have been written already by private people and why the government should go into this business I cannot for the life of me understand.” But the evidence then and now would show that “the public have heard very little” of the “appalling hardships” endured by Sierra Leoneans in WWI. This amnesia in the historiography is compounded by the heavy emphasis on works on the Western Front in France and Flanders. Indeed, “… so obsessive has been the attention paid to that mud-splattered killing ground, that the wars of other theatres have blurred and faded like a sepia photograph of the area.” Not even Anderson’s much hailed history of the East African campaign (2004) managed to engage the social history of the men who prosecuted Britain’s porter’s war in East Africa, and the implications for the communities from which they were drawn.

A preoccupation in the literature by political scientists, economists, and historians, with coup activity and political volatility, notwithstanding the dwindling pattern of this phenomenon in Africa (Souaré 70), state conflict, the destabilizing impacts of civil war, and endemic corruption, all instruments of state failure, has hijacked historical memory in Sierra Leone and blighted reminiscences of the colony’s role in WWI. Arguably one of the worst tragedies to hit colonial Sierra Leone, principally due to its destabilizing impacts on the colony, no historical research, critical inquiry, repertoire of war stories or popular discourses exists on the Sierra Leone experience of WWI. Barring the need for a micro-study approach to the impact of the war on respective African societies, this paper advocates a radical historicization of Sierra Leone’s contribution to the war effort, if only to illuminate various shades of darkness, provide room for reflection, and delineate the historical roots of salient themes (violence and belligerency, the development of public works, the introduction of the motor car, economic distress, strike action and protest movements etc.) in Sierra Leone’s contemporary history.

Against this background, one is forced to ask whether “Remembrance Day” is still observed in Sierra Leone. Given the bourgeoning interest in war memory since the 1980s, it has been suggested that war remembrance and commemoration could be articulated through three important paradigms: the “state-centered” approach, through “social agency,” and “popular memory” (Ashplant 12). Whether addressing the physical and psychological impacts of war, providing gratuities for disablement and charitable allowances, making recommendations for awards of medals, free surgical appliances for the wounded, and post-war employment for war veterans in Sierra Leone after 1918, all elements in the politics of war memory, war commemoration in Sierra Leone has, since the colonial period, been state-led and articulated through the construction of war memorials, which in recent times (Feb. 2011) have morphed into a national monument labelled the “Sierra Leone Peace and Cultural Monument.” But social agency has also been instrumental in the consolidation of war memory in Sierra Leone. Originally a voluntary organization, the Sierra Leone Ex-Servicemen Association (SLESA) was formed in 1947, after the Togoland, Cameroons, East African, and Burma campaigns, as a benevolent society, designed to safeguard the welfare (social, literary, moral, and economic) of ex-servicemen and their families (Killingray 219-220). As a member of the Royal Commonwealth Ex-Service League of 56 member organizations in 48 Commonwealth countries, SLESA has been variously involved in the annual commemorations of International Poppy Day, punctuated by commemorative rituals such as religious services, wreath-laying ceremonies, the planting of white roses, military parades, salutes, playing the Last Post by the bugler, and attending a thanksgiving service at the cenotaph.
Notwithstanding these arenas of articulating war memory in Sierra Leone, the centrality of WWI in the national consciousness has been subsumed in a larger schema of Sierra Leone’s war experience, mainly the civil war (1992-2002). Thus, when President Koroma launched Poppy Week on 28 October 2014, he noted that the commemoration was “not a normal one as the country is right in the middle of a bigger fight against the horrific Ebola virus.” On Sunday 9 November, he attended Remembrance Day service and laid a wreath at the cenotaph, but the occasion was also designed to remember Sierra Leoneans who fell in World War II, in the Congo crisis, and more pertinently, during the civil war. Now conflated with other wars of a global significance since 1914, and partly due to the carnage and trauma wrought by 10 years of civil strife so deeply etched in the popular imagination of Sierra Leoneans, the significance of WWI has been hijacked from popular memory by, inter alia, the passage of time which now privileges the present over the more distant past. This has led observers to lament the fact that, “for quite some time now, the solemnity and respect accorded” to Armistice Day “by the rest of the world is far from evident in Sierra Leone.” The point was underscored in 2007, when, while advocating the need to give “Poppy Week” and “Armistice Day” “a human face,” Winstanley Bankole Johnson opined that:

What passes here for ‘Poppy Week’ and Armistice Day is nothing to write home about and rarely reflects our understanding and appreciation of the term ‘ultimate sacrifice.’ Public interest is low, the occasion perennially underfunded, lacking in coordination and seriousness – even by the Ex-Servicemen and Women themselves – and replete with deep-seated animosity and mistrust between the executive of Sierra Leone Ex-Servicemen/Women’s Association (SLESA) – comprising mainly of former ‘other ranks’ – and the military establishment on the one hand, or between SLESA executives and retirees of the senior officer corps, who feel themselves sophisticated in intellect to be supervised by their former subordinates. The ultimate losers in all of this is us – forced to idly stand by and watch what is left of our military heritage disappear.\[^{35}\]

The problem of official amnesia, however, stretches well beyond Johnson’s analysis of a lack of public interest in WWI. Lack of knowledge in Sierra Leone about the origin of the memorial Poppy, traced to the “shell thrashed and blood swept landscape of Flanders,” which captured the imagination of the Canadian soldier, Lieutenant John Alexander McCrae (field surgeon with the Canadian and British Expeditionary Forces on the Western Front), and stirred his poetic vision to pen the poem, “In Flanders Fields,” is compounded by the marginalization of Africa’s role in WWI in British imperial history, and more poignantly, its sideling from European narratives about the crisis. This phenomenon has helped to foster the occlusion of themes such as “empire loyalism” and “patriotism” in the literature (Dubow 1-27). Reviving such themes as empire loyalism, however nuanced, is all the more important in the case of Sierra Leone where colonial subjects, deeply steeped in Victorian values, yet irked by the yoke of white domination, were still content to regard their fortunes as inseparable from those of metropolitan Britain for, as the Weekly News argued, “We … are greatly concerned in this war for we are part of England and the English.”\[^{37}\] Santanu Das emphasizes the implications of such omissions in British imperial history when he suggests that the colonial home fronts encompassing the lives of millions of colonial subjects, remain “one of the most silent and under-researched areas of First World War history,” a view first mooted by Rathbone in 1978 (1-9). Why therefore was Sierra Leone so important in the British Empire?
Sierra Leone in the Context of Empire

Given Britain’s stranglehold over the money markets, the financial and insurance houses of Europe, and, *ipso facto*, the rest of the world by 1913, it was inevitable that a colony such as Sierra Leone, whose export trade was inextricably tied to that of Britain, would be dragged into WWI. From an international standpoint, Sierra Leone had no stake in the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, that crucial event that plunged the world into disaster in August 1914. This does not suggest, however, that Sierra Leoneans were totally oblivious of the main currents of international politics. The colony was blessed with a vibrant press, chief of which was the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*. Though published on a weekly basis, and with a readership primarily limited to Freetown’s intelligentsia, most of whom had been educated in European, mainly British universities, the paper closely monitored developments on the European scene. So engrossed were Sierra Leoneans in the war that many men would daily assemble “on the platform benches of the Town Hall” in Freetown to discuss the crisis and, by virtue of their activities, were branded, “street politicians.”

From 7 in the morning they came trooping in ... If the onlooker is patient he would have the privilege of being wafted over all the theatres of war in France and Flanders; burrow into captured trenches; see the Crown Prince of Prussia in handcuffs, have a peep at the famous ‘Dardanelles’ and then flutter to Mesopotamia ... then come back to Sierra Leone ... safe and sound ... With them ‘good old England’ must win the war. 39

So important was Sierra Leone in the imperial chain that Britain was loath to accommodate a threat (potential or real) from her most formidable naval rival (Germany) which, since 1852, had been seeking to establish a commercial foothold next door in Liberia. Because Freetown possessed the best natural harbor in West Africa, the protection of the Atlantic trade routes from ships sailing under enemy flags had come to constitute the primary duties of the British navy. Conscious of Germany’s strategic position in her Togoland colony in West Africa, where she already had a naval base and a wireless station at Kamina (Robinson and Gallagher 163-166, 168-175, 177-180; Collins 63; Strachan 13-18), Britain was persuaded that “The harassment of enemy sea-borne commerce must always form an important secondary operation in naval warfare” (Goddard 119-120). Long before war erupted, British commerce followed certain well-defined routes, the greatest of which passed within a comparatively short distance of Sierra Leone. The first ran from Europe to South America. The second was that from Europe to Australia and New Zealand, via the Cape of Good Hope. Though the opening of the Suez Canal had siphoned off a large amount of commerce from this route, the distance from Melbourne to England via the Cape was only some 850 miles greater than that by the Canal route. Were the Canal to suffer any major impediment, Britain would have had to resort to the Cape route and, as the evidence shows, this route was to play a major role in transporting troops and food during the war. The third route ran from Europe to West Africa. Sierra Leone then served as a convenient base for ships employed in protecting these routes from any hostile operation undertaken by enemy nations. The capital, Freetown, then formed the link between Gibraltar and Simon’s Town in South Africa, both of which were equipped with naval dockyards. With the colony situated midway between Simon’s Town and the British Isles, it was also admirably suited for use in war as a rendezvous for convoys of ships on the Cape route, or for those vessels plying the routes between the United Kingdom and West Africa, for mercantile shipping from the UK, and for those from South American and Australian ports, via Cape Horn, or the Straits of Magellan. The
colony also served as a base for replenishing stores and fuel, for repairs, and for effecting changes in personnel. But in order to fulfill these naval requirements, cooperation between land forces and internal fortifications in the colony was vital if Sierra Leone was to be cushioned against any hostile attack. Such cooperation was also imperative to expedite the work of the navy which would thereby be freed to discharge those functions for which it was primarily stationed in Freetown (Goddard 119-120). Were this cooperation to fail, the navy would then be saddled with the responsibility of guarding the approaches to an establishment which was maintained to assist them. The colony’s strategic value was deeply appreciated by Germany, whose colonial secretary confessed in 1918 that, “one of the first results of Teutonic victory would have been the seizure and utilization of the British West African Colonies especially Sierra Leone” (Macmillan 233-234). Some six years after the armistice, the importance of Sierra Leone’s harbor was still being measured by the Admiralty’s decision to man it with a routing and convoy staff comprising 19 officers and men in wartime. Wartime conditions had clearly alerted the British authorities to the manifold naval obligations which could be imposed on Sierra Leone.

Manifestations of Loyalty: Service and Sacrifice

Once thrust into the war on 4 August 1914, Britain came to depend on the natural and material resources of her colonies, and Sierra Leone (like Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and the Gambia) was willing to oblige when Britain’s war demands became desperate in the West and East African campaigns. In Sierra Leone, unlike Malawi, where a virulent opposition was mounted against African support for the war by John Chilembwe, there was no distinct anti-pro-war divide but intellectual opinion was still fractured along fault lines which urged support for the empire, and those convinced that WWI was a “White man’s palaver.” Pro-war sentiments finally won the day, bolstered by the realization that there were enemy aliens in the country, principally Syrians, subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Developments in Europe hardened this conviction particularly when Turkey joined the Central Powers in September 1914. This pro-war thread found expression in a vibrant local press which used the war to open up a new front in the war against the Syrian barons of trade, who were also consolidating their position in Sierra Leone through land acquisition. It was also discernible in calls to establish a volunteer force and a “King’s Own Creole Regiment” to defend the country’s borders against an assumed German invasion. It was apparent in the magnanimous donations of monies to the Aeroplane Fund, the Red Cross Fund, and to the poor. It was expressed through mass meetings and resolutions pledging support to the Empire, through street collections and proceeds from bazaars, the establishment of a fund to procure comforts for West Indian troops, and for those deployed for service in German East Africa, the collection of monies for the West India Committee to help purchase 42,000 Gold Flake cigarettes, and seven gross worth of soap for the troops. At the end of the war, peace celebrations dotted Freetown marked, inter alia, by divine services, grand variety concerts, fancy dress balls, banquets, and a picnic to Conakry, French Guinea. In strange and peculiar ways, through the war, Sierra Leone society seemed to be coming to terms with colonialism for, as one columnist, “Familiar Talker,” argued, “If Sierra Leone is safe today it is because Great Britain is in our immediate background with the many associations that link the Colony with the mighty Empire and because in our feelings and sentiments we are more English than we ourselves suspect.” It was, however, in the military sphere, in the campaigns in Togoland, the Cameroons, and German East Africa, that Sierra Leone’s loyalty to the Empire was more marked.
The deployment of the SL Bn. WAFF in WWI should be seen within the context of British war plans against Germany in West Africa, part of which aimed to hurt “her pride” by seizing German colonies which could then be used as a bargaining counter at the end of any war between both powers. Togoland and the Cameroons were therefore to be occupied by the WAFF. In fact, as early as 1904, the Admiralty had resolved that, should a war ensue with Germany, 300 troops would be shipped from Sierra Leone to the Gold Coast to “participate in the attack against Togoland” (Ekoko 443-444, 449). Britain’s plan for deploying the WAFF, even as early as 1905, was also borne of her desire to fulfill her diplomatic obligations to the Entente Cordiale (Ekoko 450), and the wider imperial objective of destroying German militarism (Fest 285-308). Viewed within these contexts, it is difficult to see how the SL. Bn. WAFF could have escaped being dragged into the subtle and complex formulations of British imperial and naval war strategies. Constituted by ordinance in 1901, the deployment of the SL. Bn. WAFF (distributed, maintained and trained for African risings and disturbances) against a European-directed invasion or an offensive against European-owned territories had never been seriously contemplated before 1914. On the eve of war, the battalion was plagued by significant structural problems. With half of the men derived from the “bush field,” the high percentage of Mende recruits (36 percent) was already arousing serious concerns in official circles. As war clouds gathered over Europe, a review of colonial and imperial forces began in Sierra Leone. Between February and March 1914, five companies of the West African Regiment (WAR) were moved from Karene to the Peninsula to take part in manoeuvres. The cutting of many roads at Signal Hill and Wilberforce village in 1910 had signaled the commencement of improvements in communications aimed at defending Freetown’s harbor in wartime and, by April 1914, plans were in hand to improve the rifle range at Kortright to facilitate more extensive practice in field firing. By May 1914, the force comprised 675 other ranks (ORs), a reserve force (85) which was still far below strength, and 10 machine-gun carriers. A lack of magazine rifles and the continued use of the Martini-Metford carbine rendered musketry practices unsatisfactory, with "too many third class … shots" among ORs. With mobilization initiated on 30 July, all companies of the WAFF at outstations were removed to Daru, with two companies sent to Songo. By August, mobilization was practically complete, and only two companies of the West African Regiment were yet to move from the Protectorate. Thus, at the outbreak of war, the Sierra Leone garrison comprised six companies of the WAFF, 12 companies of the WAR, four companies of the West Indian Regiment, and a company of the Royal Garrison Artillery.

The declaration of war with Germany was to lead to incessant demands by the Cameroons Expeditionary Force (led by Brigadier-General Dobell) for human and material resources on Sierra Leone, necessitating significant modifications of the approved defence scheme, and stretching the patience of Governor Merewether considerably. The initial requests which included the provision of four companies of the WAFF, four companies of the WAR, and two 2.95 millimeter quick firing guns were to generate considerable unease over a possible "sea attack combined with landing operations," and fears of a "native rising" approximating the scale of the 1898 Hut Tax War. Merewether’s reservations over the reluctance of the Colonial Office (CO) to use imperial troops in the absence of colonial troops during any "factional outbreaks" were compounded by fears that the Germans might use Liberia (the headquarters of the German West African Cable, connecting Pernambuco and Tenerife) as a base of attack against Sierra Leone. Germany’s economic leverage in Liberia and their attempts at "inculcating their nationality... into the inhabitants of the Republic" meant that the situation warranted careful attention. By 23 August when C and E companies left for Togoland, Sierra Leone’s contribution to the Expeditionary Force included two companies of the WAFF, machine guns,
small rounds ammunition (5,000 rounds for each machine gun), medical staff with stores, hammocks and tents for officers, rations, 1,200 carriers and headmen, one month’s supply of food for Europeans and Africans, the necessary sea transport to the Cameroons, double common shrapnel shells with fuses for 2.95" guns, and 1,500,000 rounds of Mark VI small arms ammunition to Togo, as approved by the War Office (WO). By September, further requests for one officer, 20 NCOs and men from the Royal Garrison Artillery, four companies of infantry with signalers, 1,000 carriers with headmen and medical staff, and 1,000 rounds of gun ammunition aroused apprehensions about the dangers of reducing Freetown’s garrison to a minimum. In October, 100 carriers were dispatched from Kenema to Freetown and Dobell requested one more doctor, a nurse, and three dressers.

By 25 December 1914, the number of colonial and imperial troops in the Cameroons was 1,206 including officers; thereafter 407 more were dispatched there, but when Dobell pressed for more troops in January 1915, Merewether replied that the only force available for suppressing disorders in the Protectorate were "undisciplined and untrained CourtMessengers." Given the difficulty of securing suitable recruits from the estimated population of 19,400,000 in West Africa, in order to make good the wastage in the unit, and with only 10 per cent of this sample regarded as "eligible males," a regular recruiting campaign began in Sierra Leone to induce more men to the colours. Special bonuses were offered, with recruiting bands sent round the likely districts. Unfortunately, the result "just" enabled the Colonial Office "to fill the gaps in our forces … and keep a small margin over." The recruitment drive of 1915 was fraught with serious problems. British West African colonies and protectorates were thinly populated and it was hard to find groups whose favorite occupation was fighting. Even celebrated resistors to the initial European thrust (Temne, Mende, and Asante) were beginning to exhibit a "special dislike for military discipline," and while in peace time it was very difficult "to keep...local forces up to normal establishment," any recruitment drive had to consider the likely problem of reducing Freetown’s garrison "below a certain number." By February, however, Ronietta District had provided 700 carriers. So "keen" were the men to enlist, that when the District Commissioner informed others that "no more labourers were required many walked from Moyamba to Freetown, a distance of about 80 miles in the hope of being engaged." During the same period, "many hundred carriers" were supplied by Railway District. Throughout 1915, chiefs in Ronietta continued to provide Mende and Temne volunteers as carriers and "the cheerful and manly characteristics of the Mende people call for admiration," but the results of recruiting efforts in Koinadugu were "practically" nil as the people there lacked "the adventurous disposition of the Mendes." Though it is very difficult to determine the extent of the use of compulsion in Sierra Leone, by March 1915, Major Jenkins was suggesting that all District Commissioners were to help "catch recruits." In order to overcome the problems associated with recruitment in 1915, the OC Details WAFF, Daru, enlisted 10 men "to let the natives see that recruiting has not stopped altogether." With fears of Mende dominance still in the ranks, it was decided to locate a skeleton depot at Daru, "which the natives have become accustomed" to associating "in their minds with the WAFF," but the Temne were showing "a disinclination to enlist out of their own country."

Of the 65 men wounded in the SL.Bn. up to June 1915, 52 were likely to be subsequently fit for service. Dobell therefore urged the enlistment of 100 more men to replace casualties, and those likely to be discharged as "time-expired" men, this at a time when Britain was determined to commit more troops to the front by offering pardon to all deserters from the regular forces. Dobell’s requests intensified in July and, by August, recruitment was being pursued with greater vigor. Twenty seven out of 134 recruits had passed their musketry training
and, as more reservists were volunteering, Daniell urged that an additional officer be sent to Daru to help the two already stationed there. The almost feverish call for reinforcements between August 1914 and July 1915 was a function of heightened engagements at Pitti, Kompina, Harman’s Farm, Bare, Mbureku, Mbenga, Jabassi, Kwakwa Creek, Mojanga, Kribi, Nkongsamba, and Duala in the Cameroons. Between 3 September and 14 October 1915, 102 recruits were dispatched as reinforcements to the Cameroons and in December, 90 more proceeded to Duala, “a good many recruits now offering themselves.” Thereafter, the fortunes of the battalion were tied up with the capture of the last German stronghold at Yaounde on 1 January 1916, until the Germans were forced to retreat in a south easterly direction towards Spanish Guinea. The force returned to Freetown on 26 and 29 April 1916, after serving for 20 months in the Cameroons.

Since arriving in Freetown, the future of the battalion was colored by great controversy regarding its performance and though the CO was reluctant to employ them in any future combat capacity, their fate was to be determined by events in East Africa. By June 1916, Britain was determined to wind up the campaign in German East Africa where prolonged bush-fighting was anticipated in the south. The difficulties confronting the sub-committee on imperial defence were manifold. By 1916, it was impossible to undertake any more recruiting in Portuguese East Africa. Indian troops had resorted to self-mutilation and succumbed easily to the hazards of “malaria and debility.” In revenge for having been denied permission by Britain to invade German East Africa from Rhodesia, the Belgians refused to assume the offensive north of Lake Tanganyika. With an anticipated monthly wastage of 15 percent, reinforcements were needed for the Nigerian contingent, and with Governor Lugard in Nigeria complaining that his garrison had been reduced below "safety point," attention once more turned to Sierra Leone. With the Asante refusing to enlist during the cocoa season, and confronted by the specter of "native risings" in Nigeria, Mr. Fiddian at the Colonial Office recommended deploying two companies of the Sierra Leone Battalion either as garrison forces in Nigeria thereby releasing trained troops for service in East Africa as combatants, or as relief for the Gambia Company which could then be sent to East Africa.

By November 1916, the War Office, intent on raising additional African units for service in theaters with favorable "climatic conditions," and prompted by the need to maintain the contingents already supplied by the West African garrisons (3,900), dispatched the Haywood mission to West Africa to raise recruits for service overseas, and to secure efficient forces for operations in tropical or sub-tropical climates, or for garrison work, thereby freeing suitable troops for service in the field. Given the failure to secure levies from South Africa and East Africa itself, this again focused attention on Sierra Leone. But the CO was soon caught up in a thorny debate regarding the suitability of the battalion even for garrison work in Northern Nigeria. Despised by Nigerian troops because they were paid higher rates, it was alleged that they were prone to committing “crime against person or property.” Lieutenant-Colonel Cunliffe and Acting-Governor Boyle therefore suggested that they be deployed for garrison work in Southern Nigeria or the Cameroons. While Mr. Ellis at the Colonial Office found such reports a "mystery," Governor Lugard was most scathing in his denunciation of the battalion. Though no evidence exists to support even the mildest of his claims, he charged them with "murder and rape" alleging that even Brigadier-General Dobell had had problems with them. Deeply apprehensive of the Temne and Mende, Lugard argued that "outside their own country where they are restrained by tribal jujus," they "constantly commit crimes and atrocities on natives." The battalion was therefore to be held as a reserve force for local disturbances in Nigeria or the Gold Coast. Colonel Hastings was however more objective in his appraisal of Sierra Leone’s
soldiers, and though he could not "call his geese swans," he vouched that the Mende and Temne were "a quiet and docile people," and that he had never before heard that they were "atrocities committing." Together with Colonel Haywood, he refuted allegations that Dobell had had trouble with them except for their lack of courage. Mr. Fiddian also doubted allegations about "their Hunnish propensities."\(^85\)

By December 1916, when the demands of the East Africa campaign became more urgent, the question of deploying the battalion soon became wedded to the complications involved in administering occupied Togoland and the need for maintaining a military administration there. What was important, it was argued, was maintaining order in Togoland, for the French "can scarcely tell whether we keep or do not keep any soldiers" there. Were they to discover it, it was hoped that the WO would lend the CO a company of the WAR in Sierra Leone. Major Rew even suggested that the Gold Coast Company could be replaced by a good company of Temne recruits from the SL. Bn. and he found the Gold Coast Regiment just as guilty of "rape, murder and looting in Togoland."\(^86\) In January 1917, when the battalion numbered 726 ORs, the march of the Senusí column on Tawa and Madowa, and the threat posed to the northern frontier of Nigeria led Lugard to request all available troops and field guns from Sierra Leone. These, ironically, were to be drawn from the SL.Bn. and the WAR which he had hitherto condemned.\(^87\)

During the war, recruitment was also undertaken for imperial troops in Sierra Leone. The WAR strongly relied on District Commissioners (DCs) and Moslem priests for assistance during recruiting tours such as those in Moyamba-Mano district, and Kabala in January and February 1915, respectively.\(^88\) Considerably under strength in September 1915, DCs came under tremendous pressure to secure 50 recruits from Moslem and Temne groups only, but responses from Karene and Ronietta Districts were unsatisfactory, most recruits being rejected because of heart troubles. By December, however, 100 men had been assembled at Daru.\(^89\) After collaborating with the SL.Bn. in Nigeria, one company, while acting as garrison troops in the Gambia in March 1917, assisted the French in capturing the murderers of the chef de port at Selety.\(^90\)

Established in 1889, the Royal Garrison Artillery, comprised of ORs and six 2.95" q.f. mountain guns, were instrumental in operations at Jabbassi, the Northern Railways and Kribbi in the Cameroons. However, their most valuable contributions to the war included the construction of field works, improving gun positions and fortifications at Bare, and mounting defences against the Germans at Dschang.\(^51\) Much of the effort of the 36\(^{th}\) Company, Royal Engineers, revolved around construction work and building replacements for field guns. By 8 October 1914, they were constructing roads down the west branch of the Pitti River and, on the 21, repaired broken rails for the advance on Edea. Their services were particularly valuable in using the railway for attacks and retreat. After constructing coffins for French soldiers on 25 October, the Company erected defences for the naval gun to protect their camp at Logbatchek from enemy advances. Between November 1915 and February 1916, when the Company reached Kribbi, they facilitated the advance of the 4.5 inch Howitzer gun, constructed small bridges, rafts and drifts, and repaired and strengthened existing bridges. They were to find these latter tasks particularly arduous at Dschangmangas and Loldorf with Major Cole’s column.\(^92\)

The Impact

Responses to recruitment particularly in the northern districts of Sierra Leone were not always positive. As recruitment interfered with farming in Kabala, many family heads dissuaded their
sons from enlisting. Chiefs were always willing to provide men from October upwards when they were not engaged on their farms. At a time when the British suffered their first defeat at Jabassi, the difficulties entailed in providing guards for prisoners of war were intensified by the need to supply further manpower to the Cameroons. Recruits were simply not forthcoming, and despite their manifestations of a combatant spirit under their war chief Kafura, the Kissi, by 1915, were proving very difficult to train. By January 1915, the stresses caused by recruitment were beginning to manifest themselves even among the Mende, 200 of whom crossed the Liberian border into Monrovia to escape being called up for service. The problems encountered in fulfilling Dobell’s requests were further complicated by the wrangling between the CO and the WO for control of the battalion in wartime. At the root of the problem was the fear that the GOC would merely promote the interests of the WAR. Thus, in April 1915, Merewether had to appeal to the good services of the Mende headman, George Cummings, to meet Dobell’s appeal for 500 carriers. If the recruitment drive begun in August was severely checked by the dearth of officers, by November 1915, the supply of men for carrier service from Freetown and the surrounding districts had been exhausted. Karene had to be excluded because of a smallpox outbreak, and the same was true of Mafwe in Railway District and Mano in Ronietta. The recruiting ground was further impaired by poor results of musketry training among the reserve force. Recruits failed to report on time, and others, hitherto discharged on grounds of misconduct and poor health, tried to re-enlist hoping they would not be recognized because the battalion was away. It should be noted that the incentive to enlist was not predicated on any warlike ability or loyalty to the Empire. As Mr Ellis rightly conceded, the "WAFF rank and file are mercenary troops; the pay is what mainly brings them into the force."

By the end of the Cameroons campaign, a great deal of controversy had come to surround the performance of Sierra Leone’s soldiers but the much vaunted arguments about their inefficiency shows a failure to appreciate the dire problems encountered by colonial and imperial forces. The RGA, for instance, suffered due to the failure to constitute an establishment of gun carriers and, because the 2.95" guns had never been repaired before the war, they failed to come into action at Bagam and the river Nun. Though "loyal and willing," the hasty provision of 312 "untrained carriers" for the battery was dismissed as the equivalent of giving "the Officer Commanding a Battery of RHA a mixture of cab horses and Dartmoor ponies on his way to the Western Front."

The most significant drawback facing the troops was the lack of boots. By 10 July 1915, many were attending hospital due to bad feet. The continuous rain and damp conditions aggravated sickness among the men with an average of 80 reporting sick daily due to colds, rheumatism and, sometimes, smallpox. Clearly, allegations of incompetence against the men were never as widespread as Lugard wanted officials to believe, and breaches of discipline were confined to only a few soldiers such as privates 2791 Fine Boy of E Coy WA R, and 3151 Soriba Temne of B Coy, who were tried by a field general court martial for leaving his post before being relieved, and for sleeping while on active service at Nkongsamba, respectively. More poignantly, if the men of the SL.Bn. suffered from a "loss of confidence," it was partly a function of the failure to place additional officers at the disposal of Colonel Newstead. Above all, during the attack on Yaounde in June 1915, the vagaries of the weather, a combination of sickness, and Belgian inaction from the Congo forced a withdrawal to Ngwe on the Kele river and resulted in the death of Private Lamina Conteh II of C Company. Throughout the campaign, the battalion operated in country covered by dense tropical forest which favored the defensive tactics of the Germans. While restricting their movement, it limited the strength of advancing columns, rendered the enemy invisible, and exposed them to sudden bursts of fire. This blind warfare required constant watchfulness and self-control which imposed a severe strain
on nerves already weakened by the trying climate. These drawbacks notwithstanding, Dobell was very impressed with a group of men, "to whom no day appears to be too long;" by men "endowed with a constitution which inures them to hardship," and by carriers who were very "patient and willing in the most difficult conditions." Governor Wilkinson’s view that Sierra Leone was of little value in supplying troops due to the "unwarlike character … of its tribes" does not therefore adequately explain the true picture of the country’s sacrifice and contribution to the war effort.

The tensions generated in the wake of mobilization were to have serious consequences for the public, the administration, the CO and, more importantly, for the troops who offered their services in defending King and country. The appropriation of lands by the War Department for war purposes caused much damage to property necessitating compensation to claimants at Kissy and Wilberforce villages. In the Protectorate, troop withdrawal and the closure of some trading establishments bred fears of a possible punitive expedition by the government against the Mende or Temne, reinforcing rumors of imminent civil commotion in Railway District. In general, the dispatch of troops and the need to keep many trains under steam all day and night crippled railway traffic and reduced receipts for August 1914. If 1915 was a bad year for dodging the draft in neighbouring French Guinea (Summers 27), the results of recruiting missions organized in Sierra Leone in the same period were equally counter-productive, forcing a wave of emigration from the Protectorate. Merewether was therefore advised to "prevent … the exodus of natives, which the arrival of recruiting commissioners might provoke … amongst the tribes … near the boundary."

The demands made on Sierra Leone’s dwindling resources in wartime were considerably magnified due to the need to provide rations for the troops. Due to the massive build-up of recruits, military demands for rice in Duala exerted severe pressures on the authorities in Freetown and aggravated the problem of shortage. In February 1915, 220,081 lbs of rice were shipped to the Cameroons; Ronietta provided 3,471 tons, and Railway District 318 tons, but so acute was the shortage that the authorities found it difficult to feed recruits awaiting transportation to Duala. Troop movements (from Freetown, via Mabanta to Wongkufu) after their return from the Cameroons impinged significantly on the already depleted supplies in 1916, a year of partial famine. While in Railway District, "levies of rice were made" to provide for returnees, other pressures were soon added to those already endured by the administration. Because mobilization entailed heavy expenditure, the government had to draw on its reserve, releasing cash held by the Bank of British West Africa. Against the background of a very gloomy financial outlook for 1916, the total expenditure on the Expeditionary Force up to July 1915 was £9786.3s.5d; by February 1916, returnees were making heavy demands on the already limited reserve of silver coins, most of which had been sent to the Gold Coast and England, and as the GOC apprehended trouble in paying carriers and troops in notes, he requested £50,000 from the Currency Board urgently.

A significant by-product of recruitment was the spread of disease. In Freetown, mobilization meant stationing troops in the war stations (instead of at Tower Hill) most of which harboured the chief sources of malarial fever. Besides introducing chicken pox from the Cameroons, Indian troops infected Sierra Leone carriers with Benign Tertian malarial fever, while dysentery received a fresh stimulus among thousands of carriers. Dr Young, then in charge of the Base hospital at Duala, attributed the incidence of dysentery to the association of returnees with Indian troops. In the Expeditionary Force, six men of the SL.Bn. and 17 in the WAR succumbed to disease; although in 1915 the WO made the inoculation of British soldiers compulsory, this was not extended to African troops in the Cameroons.
At a time when chiefly loyalty to the war effort was being acknowledged by government, wartime recruitment was further complicated by the institution of slavery. In August 1915, three slaves of Paramount Chief Mafinda of Banni Chiefdom, Kono country, absconded and enlisted in the battalion. In the absence of any slavery ordinance to help determine Mafinda’s claim for restitution, this novel means of self-manumission by slaves caused great embarrassment for the authorities and threatened their hitherto very cordial relations with the chiefs.\textsuperscript{110}

Perhaps the most threatening impact of mobilization was the tendency by troops to use the occasion to indulge in violent excesses and the plunder of farms. In April 1916, 1,000 carriers and 615 ORs of the SL.Bn. left Duala for Freetown. Returnees constituted a social problem intensifying the crime rate and the number of summary convictions for larceny in the Police Magistrate’s Court.\textsuperscript{111} Unlike Nandi veterans in Kenya (Greenstein 91), many returnees in Sierra Leone now spurned the return to agriculture. This caused overcrowding in Freetown, leading to desperate pleas for the application of the Vagrancy Act. In Royema, Karene, mobilization was used as a pretext by returning soldiers for revenge against chiefs who, together with many of their subjects, lost their wives to the returnees.\textsuperscript{112} The return of soldiers of the WAR to Moyamba caused great acrimony between returnees and chiefs. Buoyed up by their new found status, their "arrogant spirit" and demands for lodgings posed a formidable challenge to traditional authority. Undoubtedly, wartime recruitment had altered outlooks and perceptions, and returnees clearly had "great expectations." Though it is not clear to what extent the behaviour of the tirailleurs in neighbouring French Guinea might have influenced recruits from Sierra Leone, it is probable that the claims of the former to being "equal" to white men shaped the demands of returnees in Sierra Leone.\textsuperscript{113} However, these agitations by Sierra Leone’s soldiers could hardly be construed as the beginnings of nationalist protest, as Rosberg and Ogot argue in the case of Kenya, for their activities were clearly not directed at the nerve center of colonial rule, and political consciousness found meaning only at the local level.\textsuperscript{114} Wyse (1985, 1981) and Kilson\textsuperscript{115} found no evidence to suggest this, nor did the activities of the Sierra Leone branch of the National Congress of British West Africa reflect the input of the war veterans after WWI.

Many lessons were to be learnt from the experience in the Cameroons. Whilst it provided young British officers greater knowledge of their men, it also alerted the CO to the need for attaching NCOs to the Battalion.\textsuperscript{116} If the battalion did not perform well in the Cameroons, the reasons were also due to the organizational defects which characterized the command structure in wartime. Designed partly for internal defence, the force lacked the administrative services required for dispatch with an expeditionary force. If command was never centralized in the hands of one soldier, there was no strategic plan of operations befitting a campaign of the scale of WWI, and the short-sighted policy of economy had been too rigidly enforced. More importantly, Freetown’s garrison was an imperial one, commanded by an imperial officer (misnamed General Officer Commanding West Africa), who had no staff, intelligence service, or organization required for dealing with the landward defences of the Protectorate. This anomaly was accentuated in wartime when the battalion, a colonial force, came under his orders, but was still administered by the CO. This meant that during war, the GOC would have neither trained nor administered the troops, and the combined forces (colonial and imperial) would never have been subject to unity of command and training, especially so when the position of the Inspector-General of the WAFF had lapsed. These drawbacks clearly called for a strong imperial policy to deal with the problem of imperial defence. It was therefore argued that ultimate responsibility for defence should fall on the WO for it was deemed "illogical that the War Office should be responsible for dealing with a situation in war for which they cannot prepare in peace."
Many officials in the CO argued that Brigadier-General Kirke’s preference for WO control of the battalion would be disastrous. The Expeditionary Force had come under WO control only because of the latter’s refusal to lend officers and NCOs to the CO, which could not then secure motorcars and howitzers for the advance on Edea. Officials contended that the experience of continued friction in the colonies between the GOC and the colonial governments in West Africa were enough to demonstrate how impossible it would be for a force, such as the battalion, which was stationed throughout the Protectorate, and which had to provide escorts and guards, to be under a GOC who was not subject to the orders of the colonial governor. Mr. Grindle at the Colonial Office considered the proposal "an outrageous piece of militarism" for even the decision to amalgamate colonial military forces in West Africa in 1899 had precluded any control of the WAFF by the WO. Since the WAFF still performed police duties, and because it was still supported from colonial funds, officials found it impossible to diminish either gubernatorial control of or the responsibility of the Secretary of State for the SL.Bn. In 1907, WO control had been effectively checked by the refusal of the Colonial Defence Committee to amalgamate the WAFF and the WAR as the maintenance of internal order rested with the governor. Deeply suspicious of WO officers who had no knowledge of local conditions, Lieutenant-Colonel Beattie urged the importance of preserving the esprit de corps in the WAFF, and the spirit of camaraderie which already existed between that force and local governments. Whilst Brigadier-General Wallace Wright found the proposal "unsound" and "premature," Lieutenant-Colonel Jenkins urged that the role of the WAFF was a purely West African and colonial one and, were the WO to assume control of the force, which had no departmental services of its own, they would need to create new services (a medical and sanitary department, transport and supply services, and a military works department) which would entail significant expenditure.

In many ways, the experience of WW1 exposed the organizational drawbacks of the battalion which had undergone very little change by 1920. Colonel Haywood therefore recommended the double company system to bring it into line with other units. There was also a need to make the reserve force more attractive and efficient. Although the force was well drilled, practices such as exchanging compliments on the march, and the habit of banging the butt of the rifle on the ground unnecessarily, detracted from instructions in the training manuals. No visual signaling was practised, and there were no instructions in bombing with Mill bombs and rifle grenades. Of the six machine guns on battalion charge, four were, by 1920, 20 years old, one 23 years and the other 31 years old. Wartime experience also pointed to the need for significant reforms in recruiting. Though reputedly intelligent, and endowed with a sturdy physique, the Cameroons experience had generated great controversy and led the authorities to conclude that both the Mende and Temne were devoid of the courage and determination necessary to make good soldiers. But officialdom’s abhorrence for the fighting potential of Sierra Leoneans was not limited to the Mende and Temne.

Despite the thrust of Krio loyalty, their attractions to the military profession, and determination to join the colors in 1914, and notwithstanding the availability of potential Krio recruits such as Thomas Johnson, Thomas Cole, and William Coker who, by 1910, had completed an average of 12 years’ service with the battalion, the authorities were loathe to enlist them. No doubt, the numerous press campaigns mounted by Krio activists against the discriminatory practices of white military officers did much to reinforce the administration’s suspicion of the loyalty of Sierra Leone’s Krio who, at least since 1892, had been subjected to "the revolution in public service" (Cromwell 31; Fyfe 615), marked by an insatiable thirst for racial discrimination, which the Weekly News (of 13 January 1912) referred to as "albocracy."
Piqued by what it regarded as the "educated native" who was always "fond of talking about the colour bar," "Rambler’s" plea for setting up a regiment called the "Kings Own Creole Boys" was firmly rebuffed by the administration. Not even the examples of two Krio soldiers (who had enlisted in the British army), Private 91658, F.S. Dove (a first driver with E. Battalion and involved in manoeuvres at the battle of Cambrai on 23 November 1917) and Patrick Freeman (who had served on the Western Front, was wounded, and hospitalized at Liverpool), who had hitherto been "chafing under the restraint of a lack of opportunity" to "have a go at the Germans," were enough to sway recruiting commissioners to heed the Krio plea for enlistment. By 1923 therefore, the WO, now firmly persuaded that "the best recruits come from the northern and north eastern border," was inclining its recruitment towards the Susu, Yalunka, Koranko, Kono and Kissi. Clearly, the notion of the "martial races" (the myth that certain groups were endowed with the capacity for military service) was being given greater prominence after the war, but the administration was also beginning to doubt the effectiveness of the SL.Bn. in providing "that degree of internal security, the assurance of which should be a first charge on the revenue." 

Echoing this apparent loss of faith in the force, Governor Wilkinson recommended "the creation" of a constabulary force "of equal numerical strength" to serve the purpose, for although he believed that it was "possible … to turn poor infantry into passable infantry," the governor doubted whether "the best use of the material gifts of the Protectorate African" would be realized "if we tried to make of him what nature never intended him to be." Inspector-General Haywood, however, did not share this pessimism. With first-hand experience of Sierra Leoneans in the Cameroons, he realized that the men were "unused to such large demands for military service…" and, "as British territory was never seriously threatened in West Africa, the enthusiasm of the natives was never fully aroused" before World War I.

The Fate of Returnees

In Sierra Leone, the treatment accorded to war veterans who had faithfully served the Empire left much to be desired. Officialdom’s failure to adequately reciprocate the services of men who had taken up “arms against our fellow whites” (Duff 102) simply bolsters the thesis that the African contributions in WWI were regarded by the British as ephemeral sideshows. This further helps to explain the failure to commemorate Sierra Leonean heroes of World War I, a hundred years after the conflict erupted. The return of the SL.Bn. to peace-time soldiering at Daru, Bandajuma, and Kailahun hardly constituted a pleasant experience. Because no preparations were made for their return, the men faced serious problems finding accommodation. The necessary repairs had not been done to the barracks, most of which were falling in. At Bandajuma, the officers’ mess had no kitchen and latrines. Generally, the lot of soldiers was far better than that of carriers attached to the battalion, for the former were entitled to gratuities on discharge for disablement. Wilkinson therefore advocated an annual charitable allowance of £6 for both soldiers and carriers who had lost either one or both lower limbs, or who had been blinded in active service in the Cameroons, East Africa, and Mesopotamia, for it was "undesirable that a bad impression be created by too great a delay in recognizing some obligation to these unfortunates." Returnees from other regiments suffered the same fate. As imperial troops, the men of the WAR, unlike those of the WAFF, were not recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal or the Imperial Decoration. For all their efforts, men such as Corporals Musa Kata, Morlai Maniga and Private Akibu Turay were only "mentioned in Dobell’s dispatches," and though the WAFF had been
employed to preserve the “King’s glory.” Wilkinson doubted whether the award of the King’s Certificate would be appreciated by "native African troops" on discharge.127

If military service in the Cameroons disturbed the equilibrium of family life, the subtle battle for control between West Africa command and the CO did little to assuage the problems faced by Sierra Leone’s soldiers. In October 1915, Major Daniell’s proposals for separation allowances for the WAR, the Royal Engineers and the Royal Garrison Artillery excluded the men of the SL.Bn. on the excuse that their pay was "drawn from colonial funds."128 In the ensuing tussle, neither imperial nor colonial troops received the allowances. Officials found it difficult to trace the families of deceased soldiers and carriers. Many had been induced to change and other influences by Krio settlers and missionaries in the Protectorate, and this made it impossible to trace many returnees, or to hand over monies due to them, to their relatives. The fate of deceased relatives was equally depressing. In attempting to claim monies owed to carriers, many wives like Hannah Thomas had to contend with massive extortions, bribes demanded by pay clerks, unbearably long delays, problems of identification and false accounting.129 These problems persisted until 1937 with the claims of one Yattah, sister of Mamboh Sandafu of Gawoon Tongaya, Pujehun District, still being pursued but the government felt that Yattah was merely "shooting an arrow into the air in the hope that it may transfix a doubloon or two."130

By January 1917, free surgical appliances had been offered to the wounded but it was difficult to find employment for all cases of "permanent partial disablement." This drove returnees like Jonathan Frazer to desperation. A painter by trade, Frazer could find no employment "all over the town." Unemployment was chiefly a function of government’s failure to devise a comprehensive scheme for demobilized soldiers. Many exhibited a preference for government work but the men of the WAAF were not originally included in Colonel Faunce’s registration scheme to secure employment for those of the WAR. On 7 May 1918, the Executive Council decided that preference be given to ex-soldiers for vacancies in government posts of £2 a month and below but it was difficult to execute the scheme as there were very few openings in the police, railway, prisons, public works and agricultural departments by 1919. Vacancies, such as those in the railway department for a messenger in 1920, became very competitive, and depended on the "standard of intelligence" demonstrated by ex-soldiers such as Bockari Kamara.131 Only in 1921 was the first government notice gazetted for veterans to fill suitable vacancies in government employment but men like Momo Koroma, who had served the colors for 12 years, soon discovered that they had to compete with applicants with "a prior claim." Others wished to join the police force, but very few openings occurred and, as scores of discharged soldiers loitered about Freetown, the GOC WAR made a desperate appeal to employers of labor in 1924. By 1925, there were no vacancies in the Court Messenger Force and there were serious apprehensions about employing ex-soldiers on the basis of the character profile shown on their regimental and company conduct sheets. Major de Miremont was even determined "to explode the existing theory that government work is awaiting any and every discharged soldier." In some cases, soldiers with previous claims to chieftaincy found themselves in an ambiguous position when they returned to civil life. For example, since 3 September 1914, 2499 Sergeant Kamanda was desperate to know what his position would be under his cousin, Vebbe, who had been crowned paramount chief while he was away in the Cameroons. Because he had been called up for service, Kamanda could not have succeeded his father who died in his absence. The government therefore decided that he should "sit down" under Vebbe and "obey him in all matters" until "the chiefship fell vacant."133
However modest the efforts of Sierra Leone’s soldiers and carriers may have been, their contributions were never to be forgotten. In May 1927, it was decided to honor the memory of 232 soldiers of the SL.Bn., the WAR, the Royal Engineers, the Medical Corps, the Inland Water Transport, and 795 deceased men of the Sierra Leone Carrier Corps. Their memorial was to be erected at George Street, "the Whitehall of Freetown." Recommendations were therefore made for a Portland stone, together with the panels fully engraved, to be sent out to Freetown. The work was completed in February, and unveiled in March 1931. In advocating the call for remembrance, it is pertinent to ask, why therefore did so many men from Sierra Leone offer their services and lives in defence of King and country?

Motives and Expectations

The evidence shows that war enthusiasm in Sierra Leone, while not approximating the popular jingoism that dotted European capitals in the heady days of June and July 1914, was hardly indicative of any unanimity of interests required to bond different groups in society. While the forceful advocacy for a volunteer force advanced by Freetown’s Krio did not detract from their loyalty to the Empire, the need to vindicate the society’s honor was, nevertheless, also at stake. Thus did leading intellectuals long for the Krio youth to be given the “smart uniform and the swaggering gait of the sojer man,” “the hope of an epaulet, a star and a sword,” to help prosecute Britain’s imperial designs in WWI. Notwithstanding these manifestations of “love” for “the soldier’s life,” there were inherent contradictions in the loyalty displayed by Sierra Leoneans to the Empire’s cause. The efforts of recruiting commissioners were to prove particularly onerous in their quest to raise men for the Carrier Corps to serve in East Africa. In some areas such as Pujehun, where carrier service was a novel phenomenon, very few volunteers were forthcoming. At Moyamba, in 1917, though many of the men assembled “were full of enthusiasm,” “many desertions were feared” and DC Kemp apprehended the same results in Bo. Such fears were realized in the Port-Loko sub-District of Karene, where DC Frere attempted to recruit carriers from Magbema and Billeh chiefdoms. Caught up in a war that made little sense to them, five whole towns ran over to French Guinea to escape conscription.

Given the diversity of the rank and file, the variegated spread of their provenance, the absence of war memoirs, diaries and letters, it is difficult to plumb the motivations of recruits for enlisting in WWI and the historian searches in vain for some ideological motif influencing the world view of Sierra Leonean recruits. Most hailed from a world driven by allegiance to their chiefs and traditional values. Theirs was a world whose time-honored orientation hardly transcended the daily and seasonal chores of farm work, trading and fishing, for many were men whose education never extended beyond the mission school. Most had no inkling of developments in the outside world. Indeed, Sierra Leonean recruits had no stake in Serb or Slavic nationalism, nor did they understand the “polarizing philosophy” that guided the actions of the Bosnian Serb, Gavrilo Princip, to assassinate Archduke Ferdinand and his wife, Sophie, in Sarajevo, on 28 June 1914. Bill Nasson has argued that the “civilized boys” of 1916 in South Africa believed in what they were fighting for, were aware of the issues at stake, were passionate about them, and were therefore ideologically driven (63). In Sierra Leone, however, it is doubtful that the vast majority of WWI recruits were motivated by patriotism, ideology, or even loyalty to the Empire. Constrained within the context of the general historiography of “why men fight,” it would seem that many were lured by the trappings of the wage economy, partly to meet the demands of taxation, and in response to pleas from chiefs, intent on satisfying the colonial government. Recruitment should also be seen through the lens of prevailing British assumptions.
about the military potential of different ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. To these ideas should be added the prestige that the “honour” of soldiering, and being awarded “the King’s colour,” (which officials believed) conferred on recruits. But unlike the case of Yao volunteers in colonial Malawi (Majormaa 413-432), loyalty was never the prime motive for enlistment in Sierra Leone.

While the literature on combat motivation for African soldiers in WWI is patchy, historians generally agree that a “range of attitudes and motives” lead men to enlist in armies. These include, peer pressure; group cohesion; male bonding; ideals of manhood and masculinity; concepts of duty; honor and courage; functions of leadership, discipline and coercion, and the role of religion (McPherson 1). Motivations of soldiers are also sometimes guided by ideology. But it is difficult to apply McPherson’s variables as useful analytical tools to explain why men volunteered for the SL.Bn. or for the Carrier Corps. In recognizing the difficulties and ambiguities posed by the concept of “loyalty,” there is therefore a need to establish the objective context in which imperial and indigenous relations were mediated.

The view that Sierra Leoneans did not enter the war blindly in support of the Empire is vindicated by the fact that wartime experiences served as a catalyst of expectations in the colony. Indeed, unfolding events in wartime showed that loyalty hinged on certain expectations by Sierra Leoneans, designed to renegotiate their relations with imperial Britain, and to ameliorate their despondency over the discriminatory practices of officialdom. For Krio activists, the war was a welcome opportunity to jolt the imperial mindset to consider expelling their most formidable trade rivals, the Syrians, then regarded as enemy aliens. In addition, Krio elites yearned for some political dividends after the war, and for the restoration of their previous place of preeminence in the colonial apparatus, from which they had been sidelined since the late nineteenth century. Cognate with the aspirations of black communities the world all over, particularly in America and South Africa, the Krio longed for “race elevation” after the war.

Clearly, perverted notions of social Darwinism, and the supposed inferiority of blacks, repressive legislation and oppressive bills, the exclusion of Krio medical practitioners from the controversial West African Medical Staff, discriminatory practices in the military, on the mountain railway, the judiciary, railway, legal, and sanitary departments, and gubernatorial diatribes against Freetown’s educated elites all drew the ire of influential citizens. As the war unfolded, other grievances were wedged to wartime discontent. Mounting unemployment, economic hardship and government’s discriminatory approaches over the grant of war bonuses, the famine conditions of 1916, and acute rice shortages, the high cost of imported foodstuffs, growing antipathy towards Syrians and European merchants accused of cornering the rice market, the controversial, albeit unresolved, issue of the proposed introduction of a Criminal Code, and government’s decision to make the Freetown City Council financially liable for the 1919 anti-Syrian riots, all helped to shape and alter opinion not only about the wisdom of supporting the Empire, but also about the whole basis of colonialism, and the legitimacy of “the white man” to exercise authority over Africans. By the time of the anti-Syrian riots, public opinion in Sierra Leone had assumed a distinct anti-imperial tone and left the society more fractured than before 1914.

**Conclusion**

Though Sierra Leone was a former British colony which made significant contributions in defending the Empire in 1914, those contributions were hardly acknowledged in Britain’s plans...
for commemorating the centenary of WWI in 2014. This paper debunks initial assumptions which viewed the crisis as a “European palaver” by examining Sierra Leone’s involvement in World War I. It does so within the context of empire loyalty and argues that support for Britain in 1914 was markedly ambiguous. The study argues that the preoccupation in the literature by political scientists and historians with political instability and the destabilizing impacts of civil war have appropriated historical memory in Sierra Leone and blighted recollections of the colony’s role in World War I. It advances the case for remembrance of the colony’s role in WWI in order to illuminate various shades of darkness, provide room for reflection, and explain the historical roots of significant themes in Sierra Leone’s contemporary history.

Support for the war by Sierra Leoneans was expressed through calls for the establishment of a volunteer force, and a “King’s Own Creole Regiment” to defend the country’s borders against an assumed German threat, through generous donations of monies for the war effort, and the provision of supplies for the troops. It was, however, in the military sphere that Sierra Leone’s loyalty was more marked. Viewed within the context of British war plans against Germany in 1914, it is difficult to see how the SL.Bn. WAFF, notwithstanding the structural problems bedeviling the force, could have avoided being dragged into the subtle and complex formulations of British imperial and naval war strategies. The same was true of imperial forces such as the WAR and the Royal Garrison Artillery, both of which assisted the French in the capture of the chef de port at Selsey, and mounted defenses against the Germans at Dschang in the Cameroons, respectively, while the Royal Engineers did extensive construction work by building roads, and repairing broken rails and bridges at Dschangmangas and Loldorf in the Cameroons. In demonstrating the ambiguities of loyalty to the Empire, the study examines the varied responses to recruitment in different districts, and the problems encountered by recruiting commissioners and concludes that the incentive to enlist was not predicated on any warlike ability, patriotism, ideology or loyalty to Britain. Most recruits were lured mainly by the “pay” to meet their tax obligations within the colonial system.

The study finds that the fate of returnees was an unenviable one, chiefly due to the administration’s failure to devise a comprehensive scheme to provide for and accommodate demobilized soldiers and carriers in peacetime. The view that Sierra Leoneans did not enter the war blindly is buttressed by the fact that wartime experience served to intensify expectations in the colony. The Krio, for example, saw the war as an opportunity to persuade the authorities to consider expelling their trade rivals, the Syrians. They also yearned for some political dividends after the war. In general, the public longed for the redress of wartime grievances such as mounting unemployment, economic hardship, natural disasters such as the famine of 1916, and the high cost of imported foodstuffs. All these factors helped to shape and alter opinion in wartime Sierra Leone. Loyalty to the Empire therefore hinged on certain expectations, and in recognizing the difficulties and ambiguities posed by the concept, there is a need to establish the objective context in which imperial and indigenous relations were mediated in Sierra Leone throughout the war years.
Notes
2. The *Observer* 2 August 1914.
4. The *Manchester Guardian* August 5 1914.
5. *SLWN* 1 May 1915.
9. See for example, Jackson, “The British Empire.”
12. The latest of such mutinies is that of 6 August, 2013, alleged to have occurred at Teko Barracks, Makeni, in Bombali Judicial District, by 14 military personnel. *Awareness Times* 17 April 2014.
15. Dorman, *Blair’s Successful War*; Kampfner, *Blair’s Wars*.


28. The only exception in this regard is Author, “Sierra Leone and World War I.”

29. See for example, Wilkinson to Walter Long, 23 Aug. 1918. CO267/578/444591, TNA; Wilkinson to Secretary of State, 28 Dec. 1918. Colonial Secretary’s Office (CSO) Sierra Leone Telegraphic 1918. Sierra Leone Public Archives (SLPA); Yattah to Colonial Secretary 3 Feb. 1937. CSO/N8/37, Open Policy Files on the Navy and Royal West African Frontier Force (OPFN and RWAFF), 1937. SLPA; Fraser, J. to Wilkinson 18 May 1916. CSO Local Matter (LM)/48/16. SLPA.

30. For the war memorial at George Street in Freetown, see Principal Secretary, Imperial War Graves Commission to Colonial Secretary, 20 Jan. 1938, 8/27/13/S/I, CSO/N/25/1930, OPFN and RWAFF. SLPA; Gazette Notice 153. 7 Mar 1931. Print.

31. Basu, “Recasting the National Narrative.”

32. *Awareness Times* 25 October 2011; For SLESA’s activities, see Spitzer and Denzer. “ITA Wallace Johnson.”


40. SL Secret/13 May 1924, 54/4/1924, 16 January 1924. SLPA.


42. See the case of Kalim Nicholas, Syrian trader in Kangahun. Samuel Barlatt, Solicitor for Kalim, to A.V.E. Pearse, Assistant DC, Moyamba, 8 Oct. 1920. CO267/593/57018. TNA.

43. *SLWN* 7 Nov. 1914; *SLWN* 9 Jan. 1915.

44. Merewether to Harcourt, Nov. 15 1914, CO267/561/47102. TNA; Merewether to Harcourt, Dec. 11 1914, CO267/561/51764.TNA; Mr. Calder to Mr. Fiddian, Dec. 7 1914, CO267/561/48345, TNA. *Annual Report, Sherbro District*, 1915, CO267/570/15707. TNA.

45. A.E. Aspinall, Hon. Secretary, West India Committee to Major General Thompson, Jan. 1918; 22nd Annual Minutes, City Council, 21 June 1918, CO267/577/33269. TNA.


47. *SLWN* Oct. 7 1916.


50. Annual Return of Military and Naval Resources of the Colony of Sierra Leone, 12 Jan. 1914, CSO SL/Conf/C/5/1914, MP/Conf/239/1913. SLPA.
51. SAA and QMG West Africa to Colonial Secretary, 17 Jan. 1914, CSO/War Department (WD)/2/1914. SLPA; DAA and QMG to Colonial Secretary, 7 Feb. 1914, CSO/WD/9/1914, W.D/10/1914. SLPA.

52. D.A.A. and Q.M.G. to Colonial Secretary, No. 0/327/5, 16 No. 1910, CSO/WD/29/1910. SLPA.

53. D.A.A. and Q.M.G. to Colonial Secretary 27 Apr. 1914, CSO/WD/28/1914. SLPA.

54. CSO SL/Conf/MP/C/67/1914, 51/1914, 31 May 1914; CO445/34/21542. TNA.

55. “Sierra Leone Defence Scheme,” revised to December 1913, CSO/SECRET (S)/4/1914. SLPA.

56. War diary, Cameroons, Composite Battalions Gold Coast and Sierra Leone Battalion (Field force), September 1914 to March 1916, WO95/5388. TNA.

57. Harcourt to Merewether, 29 July 1914; Merewether to Harcourt, 30 July 1914; Merewether to Harcourt 1 Aug. 1914, CSOS/14/1914. SLPA.


59. Telegram, Harcourt to Merewether, 12 Aug. 1914, CSO S/12/1914. SLPA.

60. Major B. Faunce, Acting GSO to Colonial Secretary 14 Aug. 1914; Merewether to Postmaster General, CSO S/16/1914. SLPA.


63. Telegram, Harcourt to Merewether, 17 Aug. 1914, CSO S/12/1914. SLPA.

64. J.F. Daniell to Merewether, 6 Nov. 1914; Harcourt to Merewether 7 Nov. 1914; Telegram, Harcourt to Merewether, 18 Aug. 1914, CSO S/57/1914. SLPA; CSO WD/109/1914. SLPA.


66. Telegram, Harcourt to Merewether, 23 Aug. 1914, CSO WD/72/1914, SLPA.

67. Telegram IG WAFF to Merewether, 16 Sep. 1914; GOC Daniell to Merewether, 17 Sep. 1914; Merewether to Harcourt, 17 Sep. 1914, CSO S/30/1914. SLPA.

68. Merewether to Harcourt, 12 Nov. 1914, CO267/561/47001. TNA.

69. CSO S/5/15. SLPA; Merewether to Secretary of State 10 Jan. 1915, CO/267/564/1458. TNA.

70. Merewether to Secretary of State 11 Mar. 1915, CO554/35/11878. TNA; Major Jenkins, Memorandum to Mr Strachey, 19 Oct. 1915, CO554/28/48183. TNA.

71. Memorandum on the Assistance of the Colonies and Protectorates in the War, 16 Mar. 1917, CAB 24, “GT” Series/20/2. TNA.

72. Annual Report Ronietta District 1914, CO267/564/12035. TNA; Annual Report Ronietta District 1915, CO267/570/12949. TNA.

73. Annual Report Ronietta District 1915, CO267/571/24882. TNA; D.C. Koinadugu to Colonial Secretary, 6 Dec. 1915, CO30/WD/104/15. SLPA.

74. Jenkins to Ellis, 12 Mar. 1915, CO445/35/11878. TNA; Major R. Litchford a/DAA and QMG, West Africa to Colonial Secretary, 7 Feb. 1916, CO554/11/16. SLPA.

75. Major Jenkins to Mr Fiddian, 22 Feb. 1915, CO445/35/8615.TNA; CSO Secretary of State (SS) Frontier Force (FF) 7/1915. SLPA.

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85. WAFF/Nigeria/Sierra Leone, CO445/36/56556. TNA.


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Moyamba to Colonial Secretary 28 Nov. 1915, General Manager, Sierra Leone Government Railway to Colonial Secretary 23 Dec. 1915, CSO WD/104/15. SLPA; Annual Report Ronietta District 1915, CO267/271/24882. TNA.

90. CO267/582/43238, Encl. C. TNA; B.B. Cubitt to Under-Secretary of State, 5 Mar. 1917, 074/5102, WAFF, Gambia/East Africa, CO 445/41/12025. TNA.

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115. Kilson, Political Change.

116. Lt-Col W.C. Hastings, OC SL.Bn. WAFF to GSO, Military Headquarters, Freetown, 30 April 1916, CO445/36/24886. TNA; Mr. Ellis to Mr. Fiddian, 29 July 1919, CO445/36/35340. TNA; Major Beattie to Colonel Haywood, 8 Aug 1920, CO445/50/384111. TNA.


119. Inspector-General’s Report, Sierra Leone Battalion, WAFF, 12 July 1920, CO445/50/38413. TNA.

120. See CSO FF/12/1910, FF/14/1914 and FF/23/1910. SLPA. The history of the rejection of the Krio from the military in colonial Sierra Leone is as old as the battalion. For details, see
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130. Yattah to Colonial Secretary 3 Feb. 1937; Acting Colonial Secretary to Yattah 15 Oct. 1937, N/8/1937, CSO Open Policy Files on the Navy and Royal West African Frontier Force 1937. SLPA.

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135. SLWN Nov. 7 1914.
136. DC Pujehun to Colonial Secretary, 2 Feb. 1917, Colonial Secretary to DC Moyamba, 13 Feb. 1917, DC Kemp to Colonial Secretary, 14 Feb. 1917, DC Port Loko to DC Karene 11 June 1917, CSO Secret/3/1917. SLPA.


138. SLWN 16 Aug. 1918; SLWN 26 June 1916.

139. For British assumptions and the operations of this principle, see Author “The Sierra Leone Army.” 50-66; Governor Slater, Address to troops, 27 May 1922.


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