

## A Small Part of Which Empire?

### Swaziland's Combatants in the First World War, 1914- 1918

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#### Introduction

The participation of Swaziland's white combatants during the First World War (WW1) has been a grey area in the British Empire's military history. Save for a few cursory mentions of Swaziland's participation in the First World War, there is no study on Swaziland's white combatants within the context of conflicting Britain's and South Africa's imperial motives<sup>1</sup>. The oversight can be attributed to the country's small numbers, as expressed in the Resident Commissioner's remark that almost all eligible men of British descent had represented "*this small part of the Empire*"<sup>2</sup>, and nearly a century later, in Ross Dix- Peek's rather dismissive remark, "... and even Swaziland"<sup>3</sup>. In 1914 Swaziland was British Protectorate under the Colonial Office through His Majesty's High Commissioner for South Africa, with a Resident Commissioner as the local administrator. During that time the Protectorate had about 1200 whites of which 400 were adult males, mostly of Dutch descent, and about 100, 000 Africans of which 20 000 were adult males<sup>4</sup>. From such a small population Swaziland contributed forty- seven military officers, ninety- three combatants of different military ranks, and a few

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<sup>1</sup> See Buchan (1920), Lucas (1921); Gillis, (1999); Guttman, (2007) and Winegard, (2012). In an effort to unravel subverted First World War experiences, Kleynhans (2015) laments that: "The South African participation in the First World War has been overshadowed by the Union Defence Force (UDF) deployment to France and Flanders during 1916-1918", but he overlooks the contributions of Swaziland's combatants.

<sup>2</sup> SNA, File No. RCS490/18, Officials on Active Service, Letter from the Resident Commissioner to Viscount Buxton, High Commissioner for South Africa, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1918 (emphasis added).

<sup>3</sup> Ross Dix- Peek, "Southern Africa's Birdmen of World War One, 1914- 1919: A list of Southern Africans in the Royal Flying Corps, Royal Naval Air Service and the Royal Air Force", The South African Military Society lectures, <http://rapidtp.co.za/milhist/ross/birdmen1.html>, (accessed 17 December, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> SNA, File No. RCS186/18, "For "the Empire at War" Swaziland", p.1.

nurses. The Swazis, who joined the war front in Flanders in 1917, constituted a contingent of sixty- seven men, who served under the South African Native Labour Contingent (SANLC)<sup>5</sup>.

The cursory attention could also be explained in terms of the British WWI military structure, i.e. the organization of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) under which the South African Overseas Expeditionary Force (SAOEF) served, with the result that Swaziland's white combatants tend to be subsumed under South Africa's WW1 grand narratives. This study sheds light on the Swaziland's white combatants during WWI, showing that they served both the British and South African imperial interests<sup>6</sup>. With reference to South Africa's imperial motives Kleynhans notes that: "The South African pretext for going to war was essentially driven by the shrewd sub- imperialism of the South African Prime Minister, Louis Botha (1862- 1919), and his close ally, Jan Smuts (1870- 1950)".<sup>7</sup> It was in the context of the war against German South West Africa that Swaziland's combatants served South Africa's imperial motives.

### **In Service of South Africa's Imperial Interests: The Swaziland Troop in the Imperial Light Horse, October 1914- July 1915**

The possibility of the First World War being fought on Swaziland soil was envisaged just before the outbreak of the War when the German Consul General in Johannesburg went to Swaziland, where he obtained information on routes, population, and other relate issues. In fact, he ascertained that the main road from Lourenco Marques through Swaziland accorded

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<sup>5</sup> Colonial Reports-Annual, NO. 1138, Swaziland, Report for 1921, [http://libysdigi.library.illinois.edu/ilharvest/Africana/Books2011-05/469190/469190\\_192...\(retrieved on 11September, 2013\)](http://libysdigi.library.illinois.edu/ilharvest/Africana/Books2011-05/469190/469190_192...(retrieved on 11September, 2013)). For a detailed discussion on the Swazi Company that served under the South African Native Labour Contingent/ South Africa Overseas Expeditionary Force see Bonginkosi AB Sikhondze, "Swaziland and the First World War", *UNISWA Research Journal*, Vol. 8, (1994), 56-68.

<sup>6</sup> For details on the South African imperial interests see Hayam (1972).

<sup>7</sup> Kleynhans (2015). Kleynhans also states that Botha and Smut wanted to use acquisition of German South West Africa to unite the British and Afrikaans population in South Africa but that failed.

the Germans an advantage if they ever decided to attack South Africa<sup>8</sup>. By the time Germany declared war in 1914, Swaziland was already vigilant and had started to take defensive precautions. Since Swaziland, like Botswana and Lesotho, was a British Protectorate under the High Commissioner in South Africa, she was obliged to support Britain in the event of any war. On August 4, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany and, in line with the colonial military obligation, South Africa offered the Imperial garrison troops for active service. Likewise, in response to the Britain's call for High Commission Territories' military service, E.F. Walters (Chinarope office) in Swaziland informed the Gravidocle Office in Cape Town: "It is proposed to offer Union Government a troop of fifty men if possible... I have no objection to a small number of men leaving the territory if required".<sup>9</sup> In fact, E.F. Walters wanted to know if there was an overseas recruiting agent in South Africa because several whites in Swaziland were: "anxious to proceed to England to offer their services in new army and *community wish to defray expenses*"<sup>10</sup>. To that end Swaziland made a direct offer for troops to Britain when: "About 36 suitable men were selected for services and it was proposed to send them to England for service in the Imperial Army"<sup>11</sup>. Though working through South Africa, Swaziland's impression was that the Protectorate was offering military service in support of Britain's imperial interests.

Incidentally, South Africa's initiative to support Britain sparked a Dutch rebellion on the same date that Britain declared war on Germany<sup>12</sup>. Although the British settlers in

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<sup>8</sup> SNA, File No. RCS186/18, Empire at War, Document titled "For "The Empire at War", SWAZILAND", enc.; Jan 13, 1918.

<sup>9</sup> SNA, File No. 696/14, Formation of Troop of 50 for Active Service Telegram from E.F. Walters (Chinarope) to Gravidocle, 8 September, 1914.

<sup>10</sup> SNA, File No.696/14, Formation of Troop of 50 for Active Service, Telegram from E.F. Walters (Chinarope) to Gravidocle, Cape Town, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

<sup>11</sup> SNA, File No. RCS141/15, Annual Report for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915, Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner for Police, Swaziland, for the Year Ending March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1915.

<sup>12</sup> In August 1914 the Dutch settlers in South Africa rebelled against the government for enlisting them into military service when South Africa decided to attack German South West Africa in early September, 1914. They questioned the idea of fighting against German oppression when they were under British rule. For details on the 1914 Boer Rebellion see Sandra Swart, "'Desperate Men': The 1914 Rebellion and the Politics of Poverty, *South African Historical Journal*, 42, May, 2000, pp.161- 175; Sandra Swart, "'Men of Influence"- The

Swaziland had started to prepare to join the war front in Europe, the outbreak of the rebellion in the Union diverted the course of their military service when there was an advertisement in the newspaper: “calling for 200 men for Imperial Light Horse Swaziland”.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, at the request of the High Commissioner for South Africa, the Swaziland combatants joined the forces of the Union of South Africa<sup>14</sup>. At the same time that the Police office was recruiting Police Officers who could go to war, Swaziland’s white civilians of British descent took the initiative to organize themselves in preparation for the war. The members of the Swaziland Rifle Club opened their Club to all who wanted to join and immediately as “practically every able-bodied man was enrolled in one or the other of these clubs”<sup>15</sup>. The Government supplied rifles, while the best shots of the Club instructed the new members in musketry, and the officers of the Police Officers gave instruction in Drill<sup>16</sup>. E. F. Walters noted British civilian immediate response to the call to join the war front: “Public offer 30 good men found with horses at their expense”<sup>17</sup>. That the response of the Swaziland Troop was a matter of urgency was expressed by Aplelion, the Assistant Commissioner of Hlatikulu District: “Saw Colonel Davies. Please arrange my leave at once. No time for delay. Davies says men must collect Mbabane by October 1<sup>st</sup> - leaving tonight for Hlatikulu to bring men from there- also 4 or 5 horses”<sup>18</sup>. The government provided assistance in form of warrants for both the combatants and the horses. In accordance to that, the Resident Commissioner informed the

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Ontology of leadership in the 1914 Boer Rebellion”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 17, No. 1, March 2004, pp. 1- 30; Sandra Swart, “The ‘Five Shilling Rebellion’: Rural White male Anxiety and the 1914 Boer Rebellion”, *South African Historical Journal*, 56, 2006, pp. 88- 102.

<sup>13</sup> SNA, File No. RCS696/14, Swaziland Troop for Active Service, Telegram from Resident Commissioner to Captain R.B. Saner, Recruiting Officer, ILH, September 26, 1914.

<sup>14</sup> In a letter JC Smuts, Louis Botha spelt out South Africa’s imperial motives when he stated that the South African military men in German South West Africa were “making great sacrifices for land” (W.K. Hancock and Jean Van Der Poel, 1966, 238- 239).

<sup>15</sup> SNA, File No. RCS 141/15, Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year Ended the 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915 (every able-bodied man referred to man of British birth).

<sup>16</sup> SNA, RCS File No. RCS141/15, Annual Report for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915, Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner for Police, Swaziland, for the Year Ending March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1915.

<sup>17</sup> SNA, File No. RCS696/14, Swaziland Troop for Active Service, Telegram from Resident Commissioner to Captain R.B. Saner, Recruiting Officer, ILH, September 26, 1914.

<sup>18</sup> SNA, File No. RCS696/14, Swaziland Troop for Active Service, Telegram from Aplelion, Hlatikulu, to Chinarope, September 27, 1914.

Imperial Light Horse to send Nicholson warrants for 31 men one Swazi and 24 horses, the cost of which was charged to Swaziland<sup>19</sup>.

Initially, race and gender constituted the categories used to define military personnel of the right stamp. According to John Buchan: “The War office had asked *especially* for infantry, and an infantry contingent was bound to be raised largely from the inhabitants of *British blood*”<sup>20</sup>. In accordance with the racial specification, white men of British descent, who held the conviction that race conferred duty, took it upon themselves to fight for the British Empire. In fact, they had no choice because, according to the Order in Council of 1903 (emended in 1906 and 1909), “Every European Citizen as defined in Section five hereof shall be liable to render personal service in the prevention or suppression of any internal disorder within the territory of Swaziland and in time of War in the defence of Swaziland”<sup>21</sup>. A European citizen referred to “any male European British subject residing in Swaziland who has attained *his* seventeenth year but has not completed sixty years of age”<sup>22</sup>. That it was strictly a white men’s war was emphasized in Swaziland: “it is not anticipated that men will be accepted for African Service”<sup>23</sup>. That the first volunteers were of British descent was therefore not a coincidence.

The first Swaziland Troop of thirty- one men left for Johannesburg on Saturday September 10<sup>th</sup> 1914. They formed the 4 Troop “E” Squadron in the Imperial Light Horse (ILH) that was commanded by Colonel Lingerwood and the Swaziland’s Resident

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<sup>19</sup> SNA, RCS696/14, Formation of Troop of 50 for Active Service, Telegram from Resident Commissioner to OC, ILW, October 2, 1914.

<sup>20</sup> John Buchan, *The History of the South African Forces in France*, London, Edinburgh and New York, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1920, p. 15 (emphasis added).

<sup>21</sup> SNA, File No. RCS490/18, Officials on Active Service, Draft Proclamation Making Provision for the Defence of Swaziland in Time of War etc, as enclosure to letter from C.H. Gibson to the High Commissioner, 6 July 1922.

<sup>22</sup> SNA, File No. RCS490/18, Officials on Active Service, Draft Proclamation Making Provision for the Defence of Swaziland in Time of War etc, as enclosure to letter from C.H. Gibson to the High Commissioner, 6 July 1922 (Emphasis added).

<sup>23</sup> SNA, File No. RCS696/14, Formation of Troop of 50 for Active Service, Telephone message from Chinaroep Office to Perknies, the Imperial Secretary, 17 September, 1914. In South Africa, General JC Smuts initially African and Coloured military service on the grounds that it was a white man’s war, and there is no way Swaziland could have sent African men to German West Africa in 1914.

Commissioner, Lieutenant Bertram Nicholson, in Cape Town<sup>24</sup>. Not all members of the Swaziland Troop served in the infantry, though; a few from the police force were appointed to leadership positions in the ILH. The Assistant Commissioner for Police reported: “In connection with this I was pleased to say every European Officer, N.C.O., and Trooper of the Police wished to go but I was only able to spare 3, viz L/Cpl Brownell, L/Cpl Ansell and Trooper Pipe, the two former being made Sergeants and the latter Corporal in the ILH”<sup>25</sup>. Every one of the British officials was eager to join the war but civil service staff demands determined the number of officers that could be released to join the war front for service in South Africa and in German South West Africa. While the majority went to South Africa, the Assistant Commissioner for Police was: “able to make arrangements to allow Captain Christie and Sub- Inspector Roberts to the 11<sup>th</sup> battalion of the York and Lancaster Regiment with the ranks of Captain and Lieutenant respectively”<sup>26</sup>. By March 1915, about 60 British-born men out of a total of about 380 adult males had gone on active service<sup>27</sup>.

### **Funding the South African Imperial Interests: The Swaziland War Relief Fund, 1914-1915**

Swaziland contributed not only manpower and horses, but provided financial assistance as well. The Swaziland War Relief Fund was inaugurated at the beginning of the war for the equipment of the mounted troop from Swaziland. With reference to financial

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<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.saarmourassociation.co.za/light-horse-regiment.aspx>. The Imperial Light Horse (ILH) raised in Johannesburg for service in the Second Anglo- Boer War took part in the German South West- Africa Campaign as the 5th Mounted Rifles as part of South Africa's contribution to World War 1. Individual members served in the German East Africa campaign, in Egypt, Palestine and France. Lt-Col Bertram Nicholson (1893) CMG, CBE, DSO, MC, Resident Commissioner: Swaziland, Officer Commanding: Imperial Light Horse (Swaziland Troop), was given command of the Swaziland troop of the ILH, and served in the rebellion and in German South West Africa.

<sup>25</sup> SNA, RCS File No. RCS141/15, Annual Report for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915, Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner for Police, Swaziland, for the Year Ending March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1915.

<sup>26</sup> SNA, RCS File No. RCS141/15, Annual Report for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915, Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner for Police, Swaziland, for the Year Ending March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1915.

<sup>27</sup> SNA, File No. RCS141/15, Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year Ended the 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915 (every able- bodied man referred to man of British birth).

assistance for the Swaziland Troop, E.F. Walters noted that: “A number of men from here are anxious to offer their services in new army *and community wish to defray expenses...*”<sup>28</sup>.

Similarly, D. Honey, the Acting Resident Commissioner noted that:

The late Captain H. Clarke- Perkins, D.S.O., called a meeting, with my permission, and it was then decided to a fund for the equipment of a troop of horse to serve in suppression of the Rebellion in South Africa and military operations in South West Africa as part of the Imperial Light Horse. An additional £316.19.5 was received at the end of January, 1915. Each contributor indicated the particular Relief Fund to which his/her money was to be disbursed. Swazis who were members of the Swaziland police also contributed to the Relief Fund<sup>29</sup>.

By the end of 1914 Europeans in five districts had contributed £977.17.0 towards the war effort<sup>30</sup>. In order to beef up the war- time financial coffers, some of the African civil servants were asked to contribute. The Assistant Commissioner for Police appreciated African Police financial contributions and stated that: “A system of monthly subscriptions to the War Relief Fund has been organized by the members of the Civil Service in which many of the public have joined and to which every Native N.C.O and constable makes a regular contribution, a fact which speaks well for the loyalty of native members of the Force”<sup>31</sup>. If race had been used to discriminate against African participation as combatants at the war front, financial needs blurred the same racial boundaries as the military office sought their financial assistance.

Gender precluded White women from enlisting as combatants but they were no exception in support of the war effort. It was noted that: “The Women have also loyally

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<sup>28</sup> SNA, File No. RCS696/14, Formation of Troop of 50 for Active Service, Telegram from E.F. Walters, Chinarope to Gravidio, Capetown, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1914 (emphasis added).

<sup>29</sup> SNA, File No. RCS344/21, Swaziland War Relief Fund, Letter from D. Honey, Acting Resident Commissioner, to Viscount Buxton, The High Commissioner for South Africa, January 19, 1915.

<sup>30</sup> SNA, File No. RCS42/15, War Funds, Letter from D. Honey, Assistant Resident Commissioner to Viscount Buxton, High Commissioner for South Africa, January 19, 1915.

<sup>31</sup> SNA, RCS File No. RCS141/15, Annual Report for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915, Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner for Police, Swaziland, for the Year Ending March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1915.

upheld their part by collectively supplying comforts for the Swaziland Troop”<sup>32</sup>. By 1915 approximately £1,000 had been expended on equipment of a troop from Swaziland which served in the South West African campaign with the Imperial Light Horse”<sup>33</sup>. Because of substantial financial assistance, the Swaziland Troop was noted for being: “the best house and the best equipped”<sup>34</sup>. When the Boer Rebellion was crushed on February 4, 1915 Britain requested South Africa to invade German South West Africa, as Smuts explained: “We have now to proceed with the invasion of the desert in German South West Africa, ... the British Government have appealed to us to do this job, as a ‘matter of grave importance’, and we shall tack it unflinchingly”<sup>35</sup>. South Africa’s imperial motives were spelt out in Louise Botha’s letter to Jan Smuts: “the man are making great sacrifices for land and people...”<sup>36</sup>. On July 1, 1915, the Regiment was designated as the 5<sup>th</sup> Mounted Rifles (Imperial Light Horse) and was transferred to the Active Union Force of the Union Defence Force. German South West Africa was conquered on July 9, 1915 after which the Swaziland Troop “*which was equipped by local subscription*”<sup>37</sup>, was dissolved.

### **Serving Two Imperial Masters: Swaziland’s Combatants in the SAOEF, 1915- 1916**

“To proceed on active service...” was the conventional catch phrase in Swaziland’s military discourse during the First World War. Though phrased differently in the prospective combatants’ correspondence, the underlying commitment was to proceed to Europe to serve in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). In July 1915 Britain accepted General Botha’s

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<sup>32</sup> SNA, File No. RCS141/15, Annual Report for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915, Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner, Mbabane District for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915.

<sup>33</sup> Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1917.

<sup>34</sup> SNA RCS. File No. RCS696/14, Formation of Troop of 50 for Active Service, Letter from (name not clear) to The Resident Commissioner, (no date).

<sup>35</sup> Hancock, (1996), Letter from J.C. Smuts to H.J. Wolstenholme, 9 February 1915, p. 239.

<sup>36</sup> Hancock, (1996), Letter from Louis Botha to J.C. Smuts, 7 March 1915, p. 256. Kleyhans (2015,) notes that Botha and Smuts: “realized that the capture of GSWA could serve as the grounds for the eventual incorporation of the territory into the Union of South Africa. It thus remained imperative that South African troops be used to invade the German colony”.

<sup>37</sup> Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1916 (emphasis added).



offer to provide a contingent of South African Troops for military service in Europe. Since the Union Defence Forces was limited to wars in Southern Africa, the South African Government formed the South African Overseas Expeditionary Force (SAOEF) in July 1915, which was made up of volunteers and was placed under British operational command for operations on the Western Front<sup>38</sup>. The SOAEF was engaged in four campaigns, namely the German East Africa Campaign (1916- 1918), the Egypt Campaign (1916), the Western Front Campaign (1916- 1918), and the Palestine campaign (1917- 1918). Some of the combatants from Swaziland went to German East Africa, where South Africa had territorial interests, while others joined the front in Europe.

Without a formal troop, combatants from Swaziland either joined the SAOEF 3rd South African Infantry Regiment under Commander Lt. Col E.F. Thackeray, or proceeded as independent individuals and joined any of the Regiments on the war front. Combatants who wanted to join the war front had to go through a formal recruitment process. First, they had to apply through the relevant offices. Writing to the Acting Resident Commissioner, Norman Cruddas noted:

I have the honour to forward herewith my application for service with the Imperial Service Unit in South Africa Overseas Contingent, and to request that you will transmit it to the proper granter.

I have already submitted such an application direct to the staff officer, Central Bureau, South Africa, Overseas Contingent, Pretoria, but was directed by that officer in a letter ... dated the 9<sup>th</sup> inst that my application should be made through you<sup>39</sup>.

It may sound a paradox that at the very moment that there was an insatiable demand for combatants, Whites from Swaziland found the war front almost impenetrable. Men of Dutch descent, who constituted the majority among white male population, were not a priority between 1915 and 1916. Men of British descent were mostly in civil service, and

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<sup>38</sup> There was no formal link between UDF and SAOEF units although some of the UDF members joined SAOEF as individuals.

<sup>39</sup> SNA, File No. RCS431/15, Overseas Expeditionary Force (Union), Letter from Norman Cruddas to the Acting Resident Commissioner, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 1915.

because of the civil service demands at home, they could not be readily released for military service. Civil servants had to prove that they had a minimum of two months leave days, they could be replaced, they could go at little or no government cost to be eligible to go to war. The Acting Resident Commissioner, was clear on regulations that governed one's eligibility to join the war front: "In the case of officers who have sufficient vacation leave due, I presume there would be no objection to their proceeding to Europe"<sup>40</sup>. First preference was given to applicants who were interested in joining the SAOEF<sup>41</sup>. Those who were eligible to go to war at government cost would do so through the South African Contingent, failure of which they were allowed to proceed to Europe independently. It was therefore imperative that in their applications to join the war front they specify whether they wished "to join Union Expeditionary Force or proceed to Europe independently"<sup>42</sup>. Those eligible to join the war could do so for a period equivalent to their leave days or else they would forfeit their jobs. For instance, in the case of one applicant, the Acting Resident Commissioner, D. Honey was quite explicit: "Mr. Steward has sufficient leave to enable him to proceed to Europe and return to his duty here in time in case his services might not be accepted"<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, combatants from Swaziland could not serve for the duration of the war.

Prospective combatants encountered external challenges as well. The military structure on the war front had a bearing on the number of whites from Swaziland. In some

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<sup>40</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15 Officials on Active Service, Letter from D. Honey, the Acting Resident Commissioner to Viscount Buxton, the High Commissioner of South Africa, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915.

<sup>41</sup> JX Merriman underscored the importance of military service in German East Africa as a means of gaining territory for South Africa. In a letter to Smuts he wrote: "By asking on the east African campaign Botha would have a show of his own, gain a country which would be of greatest use to South Africa and do very much greater service to the Empire than by coming to France where the contingent would produce little or no effect" (W.K. Hancock and Jean Van Der Poel, 1966, 307). Smuts confirmed: "Unfortunately the first infantry brigade just formed will have to go to Europe as it was recruited on that basis at the request of the British Government. But they now practically intimate that in future German East Africa will be our destination. If that country were conquered by us, we could probably effect an exchange with Mozambique and so consolidate our territories south of the Zambesi and Kunene".

<sup>42</sup> SNA, File No. RCS431/15, Overseas Expeditionary Force (Union), Telegram from E.F. Walters to Aplelion, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1915.

<sup>43</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15 Officials on Active Service, Letter from D. Honey, the Acting Resident Commissioner to Viscount Buxton, the High Commissioner of South Africa, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915.

cases applicants found that there were no vacancies in the SAOEF. For instance, Norman Cruddas complained:

I have the honour to apply through you for a commission in the Imperial Service Unit of the South African Overseas Contingent. My record of previous military service is set forth accompanying application I.S.U.I. I would inform you that I was told by Mr. C.H. Rodwell, C.M.G. Imperial Secretary, that my name would be brought before liet-Colonel Thackeray by Colonel Sir Charles Crewe. I called on Colonel Thackeray at the Drill Hall, Johannesburg, on the 11<sup>th</sup> instant, and handed him a letter of recommendation given me by my late commanding officer, Colonel Lingerwood. Colonel Thackeray told me that he doubted if he would have a vacancy for me<sup>44</sup>.

In the event that there was no vacancy in the South African Overseas Contingent, Cruddas made a special request to proceed to Europe<sup>45</sup>. While some officers could not proceed to Europe against their wish, there were those who could not proceed simply because there were no vacancies in their areas of specialization. For instance, two applicants who wanted to join mechanical transport were advised to wait because “recruiting mechanical now closed”<sup>46</sup>. One of the applicants, Isworth, later attested to mechanical transport in November, 1915 at the rate of seven shillings per day with imperial rate allowances<sup>47</sup>. In another case there was a vacancy in the infantry but the applicant, A.V. Lyon, could not be enrolled in the area of his interest. He complained:

I regret very much that I have not advised you sooner of my intentions. After taking my leave I reported to Defence Head Quarters Pretoria, and expressed my wish to join the Aviation Overseas, or the Artillery, but was told that they only received for the Infantry, but the recruiting officer advised me to see Major Coming whom I told that I wanted to join Aviation. He asked me to write out an application and see Captain Miller in Johannesburg, and he told me he would do his best to get me in the Aviation, in the meanwhile he advised me to go back to the Army, until he heard from the War office as he had written for an extension of men, and if his application is granted he will take me, and if I proved capable he would draft me into the artillery. Therefore

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<sup>44</sup> SNA, File No. RCS431/15, Overseas Expeditionary Force (Union), Letter from Norman Cruddas to the Acting Resident Commissioner, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1915.

<sup>45</sup> SNA, File No. RCS431/15, Overseas Expeditionary Force (Union), Letter from Norman Cruddas to the Acting Resident Commissioner, August 21<sup>st</sup>, 1915.

<sup>46</sup> SNA, RCS431/15, Overseas Expeditionary Force (Union), Telegram from Demecfonty, Pretoria, to Resident Commissioner, September 4, 1915.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

I beg to ensure you that I sail at the same time to Captain Miller either to join the Aviation or the Artillery<sup>48</sup>.

The major challenge for prospective civil servant combatants was that the Resident Commissioner prioritized the civil service needs for the territory. He was explicit: “Seven members of the Swaziland police have applied to go, either with the South African Contingent or independently. ... four of these should be permitted to do so. ... Not more than four men can be spared from the police”<sup>49</sup>. Similarly, Chiltonite explained to the Chinarope office: “beside Engelbretcht I do not consider that more than two other members of the police should be allowed to go”<sup>50</sup>. Demands for combatants in the Infantry service determined the conditions under which eligible applicants could be allowed to join the war front. While first preference was given to applicants who offered to join the war front through SAOEF, conditions for the other officers who were allowed to go independently were that: “previous service in South Wets Africa and willingness to join Expeditionary Forces should count in favour”<sup>51</sup>. By end of March, 1916 “some seventy men, including all available officials and police, out of an adult male population of about 400, have gone on active service”<sup>52</sup>. None of them had joined the front independent of SAOEF.

As the war intensified, the office of the Resident Commissioner in Swaziland devised new regulations in order to ease the release of officials for military service. It was made possible for applicants who had not accrued the maximum number of leave days to be replaced with whites not eligible for military service. For instance, the Acting Resident Commissioner had “the honour to recommend, for your consideration, that the officials of the

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<sup>48</sup> SNA, RCS431/15, Overseas Expeditionary Force (Union), Letter from A.V. Lyon to Government Secretary, 1915.

<sup>49</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Letter from D. Honey, the Acting Resident Commissioner to Viscount Buxton, the High Commissioner of South Africa, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1915.

<sup>50</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Telegram from Chiltonite to Chinarope, September 11<sup>th</sup> 1915.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1916.

Administration, named on the attached list, may be allowed to proceed to the Front in Europe. *They have all been anxious for some time to offer their services*<sup>53</sup>, and such men could be replaced with “the temporary services of men who are either too old to offer for the war or who have been rejected for health reasons”<sup>54</sup>. However, not all the applicants enjoyed that privilege. In some cases the applicants proposed to sacrifice their government salaries so that substitutes could be hired to work while they were away at the war front. A.G. Marwick, the Assistant Commissioner informed the government secretary of such cases:

Mr. Leary wishes to place before you the following proposition for your consideration. He wishes to get leave for the purpose of proceeding to the front and would be prepared to pay a substitute to tide us over the tax collecting which take place in his absence. I recommend his application. Mr. Boast and I are prepared to do any extra work his absence would entail and I do not think that I would want more than two months extra clerical assistance in the course of the year<sup>55</sup>.

The request was not in line with the Union regulations regarding leave of absence for the war front. Buxton, the High Commissioner for South Africa was explicit:

I much appreciate the patriotic offer of the applicants to forego such part of their government pay as may be required to provide temporary substitutes. I understand however, that no such procedure has been is likely to be, generally adopted in the Union and in all the circumstances. I cannot find sufficient grounds for asking secretary of state to depart from the ruling contained in Mr. Harcourt’s circular of August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1914, reinforced as it has been by various decisions since that date. I regret therefore that the leave asked for cannot be granted under present conditions<sup>56</sup>.

In the light of such a ruling, Messrs Leary, Fitzpatrick and Barnard were not allowed to proceed on active service. They later decided to proceed independently in 1918<sup>57</sup>. To facilitate the mobility of the combatants, Swaziland and Pretoria shared expenses incurred.

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<sup>53</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Letter from D. Honey, Acting Resident Commissioner, to Viscount Buxton, High Commissioner of South Africa, March 11, 1916 (emphasis added).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Letter from A.G. Marwick, Assistant Commissioner, to Government Secretary, 29 March 1916.

<sup>56</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Letter from Buxton, High Commissioner of South Africa, to Resident Commissioner, Swaziland, May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1916.

<sup>57</sup> SNA, File No. RCS431/15, Overseas Expeditionary Force (Union), Letter from The Acting Government Secretary to the South African Railways, 30 December, 1916.

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Meals provided by the railway company were “charged to the secretary of defense, Pretoria”<sup>58</sup>, and hotel meals were charged the government in Swaziland “Recruiting Expenses Vote XIV”<sup>59</sup>. By the end of 1916, it was clear that Germany would not be defeated with ease, hence the need for additional manpower on the war front.

### **Swaziland’s Combatants in the Four Campaigns, 1917- 1918**

As the war continued, several applicants in Swaziland showed interest in joining the war but were wary of forfeiting their positions in civil service. For instance, Elders informed the Resident Commissioner:

I have the honour to again apply for permission to proceed on Active Service in Europe. The reason given for not allowing me to go when last I applied was that it was impossible to get anyone to take my place. I am now applying on the presumption that many veterinary officers may, during the next few months, be returning to the Union from East Africa and it may be possible to obtain the temporary services of one of these officers to take my place during my absence<sup>60</sup>.

Most of the volunteers were government officials who could not be spared, but it was not considered desirable that a territory in the position of Swaziland should deplete itself unduly of its few potential defenders. While this was the case from a Government point of view, the only object, in the minds of would be volunteers, was to get to the Front. Several whites of the Dutch descent joined the military service. By June, 1917, thirty- four combatants had proceeded to the war front independently, sixteen of whom went to German East Africa, and eighteen to Europe. Only fifteen went overseas through the South African Overseas

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> SNA, File No. RCS431/15, Overseas Expeditionary Force (Union), Letter from The Acting Government Secretary to the Hotel, Lochiel, 30 December, 1916.

<sup>60</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Letter from Elders, Veterinary Officer, to the Resident Commissioner, Swaziland, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1917.

Expeditionary Forces<sup>61</sup>. Meanwhile, in order to meet the need for additional personnel on the war front, H.J. Stanley sent out a request for more recruits:

His excellency has spoken to me about the question of war leave for officials in the High Commission territories, and has asked me to ascertain from you privately whether you are perfectly satisfied that no arrangements can be made to liberate any more men for active service without reducing your available staff below the margin of safety. If you are satisfied on this point, he would not, of course, wish to press you and he would not have thought of asking the question at all, had not developments on the western front in the last week or two demonstrated the importance of allowing every eligible man to join up who could possibly be spared. At the same time he recognizes the necessity of providing for the effective and efficient conduct of the administration and if on reviewing the whole position you feel that you have got down to bedrock, he will accept your view and support you in the refusal of applications<sup>62</sup>.

The perennial shortage of white civil servants as well as war expenditure determined who, in the Swaziland civil service, could be allowed to proceed on active service. The Resident Commissioner responded:

I fear that I can spare no more officials for the Front without certain danger to the efficiency of the Administration. As it is I am doing without a Government Secretary and my Chief Clerk is acting as Assistant Commissioner of the Peak District, in addition to his other duties. Amongst the officials there is only one bachelor fit for service. This is the clerk in the Peak District. I should be prepared to recommend his application if I could replace him. This would mean extra expenditure (about £25 per month). My present instructions are that applications may be recommended only if no extra expenditure would be occasioned by their acceptance. Fitzpatrick (the clerk in question) being the only bachelor in this Administration eligible for military service, His excellency may be prepared to consider his case as a special one. The police also have as much work as they can do. The European strength is 23 of all ranks and there are now here only 10 of all ranks on the permanent staff, the rest being temporarily enrolled men, unfit for active service. As regards territory generally there are very few "slackers" of British parentage<sup>63</sup>.

Notwithstanding the perennial shortage that bedevilled Swaziland's civil service, the government had to reconsider conditions under which applicants could proceed to war. In

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<sup>61</sup> SNA, File No. RCS. 431/15, List of persons who have proceeded indirectly to Europe and German East Africa and South African Overseas Expeditionary Forces Persons who have joined from Swaziland.

<sup>62</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Letter from H.J. Stanley to D. Honey, April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1918.

<sup>63</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Letter from the Resident Commissioner to Stanley, C.M.E., Pretoria, 2nd May, 1918.

some cases financial benefits were given priority. In the case of one applicant who had been offered a commission in the Royal Air Force, the Resident Commissioner expressed the financial benefits accrued to Swaziland:

If Mr. Fitzpatrick is to be allowed to go it will be necessary to replace him by the appointment of a temporary clerk. Owing however, to the military promotion of officials in the Field, a saving to the Administration is now being made of over £500 per annum on the estimates. Mr. Fitzpatrick is the only unmarried fixed official now in the Territory eligible for war service and I recommend in view of the saving referred above that he should be allowed to go on the same terms as have been accorded in the case of other officials. I am not at the moment in a position to make any recommendation for the temporary appointment of a substitute but Mr. Fitzpatrick could be required to remain at his post until some suitable person could be found<sup>64</sup>.

The Acting Resident Commissioner forwarded Norman Cruddas's application to the Secretary for defence in Pretoria who, on the basis of Cruddas's relevant military experience, appointed him second lieutenant in the Expeditionary Force<sup>65</sup>. To demonstrate his commitment, Norman Cruddas was prepared to pay twelve pounds for the journey to Potchefstroom<sup>66</sup>. The Resident Commissioner noted that by September 1918, "nearly all eligible men of British birth have gone from this Territory, and *have represented this small part of the Empire*"<sup>67</sup>. However, owing to the necessity of carrying on the Government, only twenty- two officials could be allowed to go<sup>68</sup>.

### **Serving Britain's Imperial Interests: Swaziland's Flying Aces in The Royal Flying Corps (RFC)**

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<sup>64</sup> SNA, File No. RCS429/15, Officials on Active Service, Letter from D. Honey, Resident Commissioner, to Viscount Buxton, High Commissioner for South Africa, July 30, 1918.

<sup>65</sup> SNA, File No. RCS431/15, Overseas, Expeditionary Force (Union), Telegram from Gravidio to Chinarope (no date).

<sup>66</sup> SNA, File No. RCS431/15, Overseas, Expeditionary Force (Union), Telegram from N Cruddas to Woodpecker, September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

<sup>67</sup> SNA, File No. RCS490/18, Officials on Active Service, Letter from the Resident Commissioner to Viscount Buxton, High Commissioner for South Africa, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1918 (emphasis added).

<sup>68</sup> SNA, File No. RCS186/18, "For "the Empire at War" Swaziland", p.1.



In an effort to increase the airforce, the British government requested that white South Africans be enlisted for military service with the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). That created an opportunity for Swaziland to serve British imperial interests through the RFC. Major Allister Miller from Swaziland was assigned the responsibility of recruiting South Africans. On 1 February 1917, Payne enlisted in the RFC as temporary second lieutenant<sup>69</sup>, and was appointed a Flying Officer on 24 April 1917<sup>70</sup>. He was credited with 11 confirmed aerial victories while piloting a Bristol F.2 Fighter<sup>71</sup>. When he won the Military Cross for his valour, the award citation gazetted on 26 July 1918, read: “He has at all times displayed the greatest fearlessness and dash”<sup>72</sup>. Another award winning flying ace from Swaziland was Lieutenant Percy Franco (Frank) Charles “Swazi” Howe. He was recruited into the RFC by Major Allister Miller from Swaziland. The fact that, at age 16, Howe lied about his age in order to attest<sup>73</sup>, was clear testimony that serving the army was beyond civil duty; it was a passion on the part of some of the military corps. Percy Frank Charles “Swazi” Howe served in the 10 Squadron as an observer before he trained as a pilot with 74 TDS, and serving as a scout pilot with the 74 Service Squadron under Mick Mannock’s flight. He joined the Royal Flying Corps in April 1917 and was posted to 74 Squadron in November 1917. Howe scored five victories<sup>74</sup> on behalf of Britain’s imperial interests.

### **The Swaziland War Relief Fund for Europe and German East Africa, 1916- 1918**

The Swaziland War Relief Fund was not dissolved after the defeat of German South West Africa. The whites in Swaziland continued to raise funds to support the war effort. The committee of the fund assisted, by means of passage money and rail fares, suitable persons in Swaziland who wished to join the forces in Europe or South Africa. Some of the money was forwarded

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<sup>69</sup> <http://www.theaerodrome.com/aces/safrica/payne2.php> Retrieved 11 November, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> (*Supplement to the London Gazette*, 14 September 1917) <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/30283/supplements/9513> Retrieved 11 November, 2013.

<sup>71</sup> Jon Guttman, *Bristol F2 Fighter Aces of World War I: Volume 79 of Aircraft of the Aces: Volume 79 of Osprey Aircraft of the Aces*. Osprey Publishing, 2007, p. 18.

<sup>72</sup> (*Supplement to the London Gazette*, 26 July 1918) <http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/30813/supplements/8832> Retrieved 11 November, 2013.

<sup>73</sup> “Percy Howe”, <http://www.theaerodrome.com/aces/safrica/howe.php>, retrieved on 11 November, 2013.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

to various funds organized in Europe and South Africa for relief of distress occasioned by the war<sup>75</sup>. By March 1916 the amount collected by the head committee at Mbabane amounted to £1,670, excluding the amount collected for the equipment of the Swaziland Troop that fought in South Africa and German West Africa<sup>76</sup>. The amount subscribed through the local committee up to 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1916 was £3,400. Of this sum £1,187 was invested in the Imperial Government War Loan<sup>77</sup>. By March 1917 contributions had risen to nearly £4 500<sup>78</sup>. White women formed working parties and were indefatigable in supplying comforts to the troops. In addition, by sales of work etc., a sum of £700 was raised and will be distributed to assist hardship resulting from the war<sup>79</sup>. Africans also contributed to the Swaziland War Relief Fund as “some of the educated natives organized concerts and handed the proceeds to the War Relief Fund”<sup>80</sup>. In recognition of their outstanding performance, fourteen combatants from Swaziland were awarded with military decorations at the end of the War<sup>81</sup>. With the defeat of Germany in 1918, South Africa’s imperial motives were realized when she occupied German West Africa, for which Swaziland’s combatants, though small in number, had fought. They served Britain’s imperial interests and contributed to the allied powers’ victory.

## Conclusion

The paper has attempted to highlight the Swaziland’s combatants’ participation during WWI within the context of conflicting imperial interests in South Africa. South Africa capitalized on Britain’s imperial military mandate and the British settlers’ zeal to fight in the War to

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<sup>75</sup> Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1915.

<sup>76</sup> Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1916.

<sup>77</sup> Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1917.

<sup>78</sup> Report on Swaziland for the Financial Year Ended 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1918.

<sup>79</sup> SNA, File No. RCS186/18, “For “the Empire at War” Swaziland”, p.1.

<sup>80</sup> SNA, File No. RCS739/15, Annual Report of Swaziland and Blue Book for the Year 1915 & 1916, Annual Report of the Assistant Commissioner for police for the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1916.

<sup>81</sup> Colonial Reports- Annual, No. 1138, Swaziland Report for 1921, Printed and Published by His Majesty’s Stationary Office, [http://libysdigi.library.illinois.edu/ilharvest/Africana/Books2011-05/469190/469190\\_192...](http://libysdigi.library.illinois.edu/ilharvest/Africana/Books2011-05/469190/469190_192...) (retrieved on 9 November, 2013).

divert Swaziland's military service for her own sub- imperial project. Race and gender initially determined who could join the war front. Meanwhile, the eligible British- born whites found the war front impenetrable for various reasons, chief among which was the civil service and defence personnel needs. There was therefore, a shift from focusing on British- born combatants to include whites of Dutch descent. Not only did Swaziland's combatants play a role in saving the British empire at large. Some of them served in the German West Africa and German East Africa campaigns where South Africa had territorial interests.

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