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How to cite this thesis
THE PARTICIPATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN BLACKS

IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

D.LITT. ET PHIL.

in

HISTORY

in the

FACULTY OF ARTS

at

RAND AFRIKAANS UNIVERSITY

Promotor: Prof. Dr. H.J. van Aswegen

November 1986
DEDICATED TO PA, BEATIE AND ALBERT
SUMMARY

Black South Africans differed in their reactions to the outbreak of the Second World War: some expressed their loyalty to the war effort, others like members of the ANC promised conditional support while by far the majority assumed an attitude of indifference. A campaign to recruit members for the "Native Military Corps" was launched. Eventually 76 000 men enlisted, the majority from the Northern Transvaal. Although there were various reasons which motivated blacks to enlist, such as a spirit of adventure and the attractiveness of army life, the main motive was to find employment and have a regular income.

Racial discrimination which characterised South African society was also evident in the Union Defence Force. This is evident from their conditions of service and also from the fact that in South Africa they were not armed with rifles but knobkerries and assegais.

Having received their training, they served in South Africa and in North Africa inter alia, as guards, stretcher-bearers, cooks, drivers of lorries and cars and as ordinary labourers. Some distinguished themselves in war conditions in North Africa while a number were captured by Germans and Italians.

Discriminating practices, dissatisfaction meted out by white officers and non-commissioned officers, a decline in morale and discipline, limited leave and lack of leisure-time facilities were some of the factors which led to passive resistance or even revolts.

During the war some soldiers were discharged but large-scale demobilisation started in all seriousness in January 1945. Just as there was discrimination between the conditions of service of whites, blacks and coloureds so there was also discrimination in demobilisation benefits. Although there were labour bureaux and special demobilisation committees to advise and help blacks to fit into civilian life again and obtain employment after demobilisation, practical difficulties, such as general unemployment, hampered the placing of ex-soldiers.

Mainly as a result of limitations imposed on black soldiers by the Government the potential change inherent in a war situation did not crystallise for the blacks. Their war experiences contributed very little to the development of their political consciousness nor to the degree of such consciousness. To many the war was an enriching and telling experience, but it did not change their lives radically - after the war they slotted into society in a normal way and after a few years they were not distinguishable from those who had not enlisted.
OPSOMMING

Die reaksie van swart Suid-Afrikaners by die uitbreek van die Tweede Wêreldoorlog was uiteenlopend van aard: sommige het hulle lojaal ten gunste van die oorlogspoging verklaar, ander, soos die ANC-lede, het 'n voorwaardelike lojaliteit beloof terwyl die oorgrote meerderheid onverskynlik was teenoor die gebeure. 'n Werwingsprogram wat verskillende werwingsmetodes ingesluit het om swart rekrute vir die "Native Military Corps" te werf, is van stapel gestuur. Uiteindelik sou 76 000 aansluit – die meeste vanuit Noord-Transvaal. Alhoewel ander redes, soos avontuur, en die aantrekkingskrag van die militêre lewe sommige swartes aangespoor het om aan te sluit, was die hoofmotief om werk en 'n gereelle loon te ontvang.

Rassediskriminasie wat die Suid-Afrikaanse samelewing gekenmerk het, was net so geldig in die Unieverdedigingsmag soos duidelik blyk uit die voorwaardes waaronder rekrute moes aansluit asook die feit dat hulle nie in Suid-Afrika met gewere bewapen is nie, maar met knopkieries en assegaaie.


Diskriminerende praktiese, ontevredenheid oor behandeling deur hul wit officiere en onder-officiere, afname in moraal en discipline, tekort aan verlof en geleentheid vir vrye tyd was van die faktore wat die soldate aangespoor het om in verset te kom, hetsy deur lydelike verset of zelfs geweldadige opstand.

Gedurende die verloop van die oorlog is daar reeds van die soldate ontslaan terwyl demobilisasie in alle erns teen Januarie 1945 plaasgevind het. Net soos daar verskille gemaak is tussen blankes, kleurlinge en swartes ten opsigte van die voorwaardes waaronder hulle aangesluit het, is die demobilisasievoororde ook op dieselde grondslag bepaal. Alhoewel arbeidsburo's en spesiale demobilisasie komitees gestig is om die oud-soldate by te staan ten einde weer in die civiele lewe in te skakel en werk te bekom na ontslag, het die praktiese omstandighede soos algemene werkloosheid, werkverskaffing baie bemoelik.

Hoofsaaklik as gevolg van beperkings vanuit regeringswee op die swart soldate, het die potensiaal tot verandering inherent aan 'n oorlogsituasie, nie vir hulle gerealiseer nie. Die getal wat as gevolg van hul oorlogservarings 'n politieke bewussyn ontwikkel het asook die mate waarin so 'n bewussyn ontwikkel het, was minimaal. Die oorlog was vir baie 'n ryke en blywende ervaring, maar dit het nie hul lewens radikaal verander nie – hulle het na die oorlog weer gewoon by die samelewing ingeskakel en kon na 'n paar jaar nie onderskei word van die swartes wat nie aan die oorlog deelgeneem het nie.
The financial assistance of the Human Sciences Research Council towards the costs of this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed or conclusions reached are those of the author and are not to be regarded as a reflection of the opinions and conclusions of the Human Sciences Research Council.
PREFACE

This study was originally commenced under the guidance of Prof. B.J. Liebenberg of Unisa, Pretoria, but later with his cognisance and approval continued under Prof. H.J. van Aswegen of the Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg. To both these professors I wish to express my sincere gratitude, in particular to the latter under whose able guidance, interest, encouragement and understanding during the last three years this work has been completed.

I am also indebted to my brother, Albert, of the Department of History, Unisa who originally suggested this field of research. He has since followed my progress with keen interest and made some incisive comments on the initial drafts. To exchange ideas with him has been most fruitful and stimulating.

To my father and mother I owe a very special debt of gratitude. Their support and interest throughout my academic career but in particular with regard to this study is highly appreciated. In many ways they have made all this possible.
SELECT LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAG/UDF MEF........Assistant Adjutant-General Union Defence Force Middle East Forces
A/DCS..................Assistant Deputy Chief of Staff
ADD (L and R)...........Assistant Deputy Director (Liaison and Reinstatement)
ADDMS..................Assistant Director Medical Services
ADDNEAS.................Assistant Deputy Director Non-European Army Services
ADO......................Assistant Director Operations
AFHQ.....................Army Field Headquarters
AG.......................Adjutant-General
ANC......................African National Congress
AOC......................Assistant Officer Commanding
AS.......................Air School
AWOL....................Absent Without Leave
AWWW....................African Women War Workers
Bn.......................Battalion
CAC......................Central Advisory Committee
CGS......................Chief of General Staff
CMF......................Central Mediterranean Forces
CNc.......................Chief Native Commissioner
Coastcom.................Coastal Command
CPSA......................Communist Party of South Africa
DAG......................Deputy Adjutant-General
DAQMG....................Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General
DCS......................Deputy Chief of Staff
DCS (DDMI)..............Deputy Chief of Staff (Deputy Director Military Intelligence)
DCGS......................Deputy Chief General Staff
DDC......................Dispersal Depot Committee
DD of O....................Deputy Director of Organisation
DDNEAS.................Deputy Director Non-European Army Services
DDNET.....................Deputy Director Non-European Training
DDV and RS..............Deputy Director of Veterinary and Remounts Services
Deagen....................Deputy Adjutant-General
Dechief....................Defence Chief
DGAF......................Director-General of Air Force
DGDL......................Director-General of Demobilisation
DGMS......................Director-General Medical Services
DHQ......................Defence Headquarters
DJAG......................Deputy Judicial Adjutant-General
DMI......................Director of Military Intelligence
DMT......................Director Mechanised Transport
DNEAS....................Director Non-European Army Services
DOT......................Director of Training
DSDC....................Discharged Soldiers Demobilisation Committee
GGNWF...................Governor-General's National War Fund
GOC......................General Officer Commanding
GPC......................Garrison Provost Company
HCT......................High Commissioner's Territory
ICU..................Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa
IMC..................Indian and Malay Corps
KAR..................King's African Rifles
MDC..................Military Disciplinary Code
MEB (SAEC)............Middle East Brigade (South African Engineering Corps
MEF..................Middle East Forces
MM..................Military Medal
MP..................Military Police
MTSD..................Mechanised Transport Sub-Depot
MTTD..................Mechanised Transport Training Depot
NAD..................Native Affairs Department
NC..................Native Commissioner
NEAS..................Non-European Army Services
POW..................Prisoner-of-War
QMG..................Quartermaster-General
RTD..................Recruits Training Depot
SAEC..................South African Engineering Corps
SAIRR..................South African Institute of Race Relations
SAMC..................South African Medical Corps
SANLC..................South African Native Labour Contingent
SAWAS..................South African Women's Auxiliary Services
SMO..................Senior Medical Officer
SNA..................Secretary for Native Affairs
SO..................Staff Officer
SONBAS..................Staff Officer Non-European Army Services
TAC..................Training Area Commandant
T/Cpl..................Temporary Corporal
TSC..................Technical Service Corps
UDF..................Union Defence Force
UDPI..................Union Defence Force Institutes
VFP..................Victoria Falls Power
WRTD..................Welgedacht Recruits Training Depot
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

War is an all-encompassing phenomenon — indeed a crucible in which deep-seated patterns, structures and traditions of society are challenged and often changed, mostly prompted by the inexorable demands of war. However, the history of battles and campaigns, uniforms and badges have eclipsed the importance of viewing war in its widest context. The purely military fields of study are, of course, valid in their own right but have tended to emphasise only the military side of war, ignoring the importance of placing war in its socio-economic and political contexts. The significance of war lies not only in battles and heroes but also with those individuals or groups not singled out for glory.

However, during the past two decades historians have realised this shortcoming in war studies. Serious academic pioneering work in European and Anglo-American historiography has been done to correct this. War viewed solely as a military phenomenon was captured from the battlefields and found its way into, inter alia, the homes and industries on the home front as a social phenomenon. This shift in emphasis manifested itself in literature generally termed "war and society" studies. (1)

Initially, African historiography lagged far behind Britain, America and Europe in this regard. In 1981 D. Killingray pointed out that

"There is vast but patchy literature on military activity in Africa... These sometimes provide valuable detail about the economic and social consequences of warfare but the main purpose of most accounts was to describe military policy and achievement... Compared to the way in which war and society have been studied in a European context, research in Africa is in its infancy... The lack of research into the two World Wars in Africa is reflected in the paucity of treatment and the assumptions about these two major turning points in the modern history of the continent that appear in many standard text books. Greater space has been accorded to an administrative device, a minor revolt or a small quasi-political association than to two major wars which had wide and pervasive effects on peoples throughout the whole of Africa." (2)

Furthermore, in the military accounts of wars and battles in Africa, the European soldiers are the main protagonists while the Africans' involvement and contributions are mentioned only in passing. Scant attention has also been paid to the structure, organisation and role of the colonial armies in Africa. (3) As far as the Second World War specifically is concerned, modern African historians have not thoroughly researched aspects such as the effect of the war on African politics, the rise of mass
nationalism or class formation. Themes such as the recruitment and utilisation of military labour, the political, economic and social role of ex-servicemen, resistance to authority during war, the impact of the war on Africa's economy, propaganda programmes during the war and the way in which the war displaced people and caused hardship to many have received the attention of some historians, (4) but much more has to be done. As the main battles of the Second World War took place only in North Africa and outside Africa, it was erroneously thought that the war was too remote to influence the people in the rest of the continent. (5)

However, during the past decade, numerous works pointing out the fallacy of these assumptions and filling this gap in African historiography have appeared. (6) Significant contributions were made during the Conference on "Africa and the First World War" in March 1977 (7) and at the Conference on "Africa and the Second World War" in May 1984, (8) both hosted by the School for Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Africa's military involvement in the two World Wars, the way in which these wars influenced African societies and especially the changes they brought about to those who had actively participated as well as those who did not, were the main aspects dealt with. D. Killingray and R. Rathbone thus highlighted the changes following on the Second World War:

"In Africa the war acted as a catalyst for social and economic change. Urbanisation, rising costs of living, new levels of expectation by Africans, many of whom had enjoyed the welfare system of the armed forces, the growth of labour unions and high levels of post-war unemployment placed new pressures on the colonial state... Colonial bureaucracies expanded to service new social welfare infrastructures, to develop agriculture and transport systems... Economic development... spawned a rising demand for further social welfare expenditure, which in a very short period of time made colonies increasingly costly possessions... In such circumstances decolonisation became in the 1950's both a politically and economically sensible policy to pursue, though with caution." (9)

As far as war in the South African historiography is concerned, it is still largely overshadowed by the military and strategic aspects thereof. The South African War of 1899-1902 has attracted by far the most and consistent scholarly attention but until recently, the numerous works which have appeared on this war concerned themselves almost exclusively with the politics and campaigns of the war. P. Warwick and S.B. Spies edited a publication which substantially broke away from this approach, providing a broad survey of the economic and social aspects of the war both within South Africa and abroad. (10) P. Warwick also made a very significant contribution when he examined the history of the black people in this war. (11)

Historiography on the South African War eclipsed the importance of South Africa and the First and Second World Wars to such an extent that the latter has not by far received the attention it
deserves. (12) With regard to black involvement in the First World War, B.P. Willan described the vicissitudes of the South African Native Labour Contingent. (13) Simultaneously A.M. Grundlingh, in a detailed and exhaustive account, examined how the War affected the so-called "Non-Europeans" in South Africa.

(14)

As pointed out above, considerable studies on the Second World War have lately been done on aspects other than military or strategic. The same can not be said for South Africa and the Second World War. In the available literature military themes again dominate, emphasising accounts of battles, key personalities and regimental histories (15) with the seven volumes on South Africa's involvement produced under the auspices of the South African War Histories Advisory Committee and written by N. Orpen, J.A Brown and H.J. Martin (16) the most detailed account. However, it is precisely in the overwhelming detail of military battles in these volumes and lack of penetrating critical analysis and explanation where the main weakness lies. No social questions were asked such as the everyday experiences of the ordinary soldier, the racially organised armed forces and the impact that had on the soldiers, the relationship between different races in the army, the utilisation and exploitation of military labour and ways in which military discipline was enforced, Other themes such as the influence of National Socialism in South Africa, (17) the role of the Ossewa-Brandwag as a major white resistance movement to the war effort, (18) the neutrality question (19) and the food and agricultural production during the War (20) also received attention. There is no work which analyses South Africa's involvement in the Second World War from various socio-economic and political perspectives which can compare with Warwick and Spies's scholarly work, The South African War and which covers such a wide field.

Until recently the black people of South Africa have received totally inadequate attention in the South African historiography. This is one reason why a study on their participation in the Second World War has not yet been attempted. Other reasons are that the South African War of 1899-1902 has dominated all South African war studies and that legislative curbs on military matters and the thirty year archival rule made material inaccessible.

K.W. Grundy thus summarized the state of literature on blacks in South African armed forces:

"Popular literature on the military ignores the real racial issues and, instead, includes laudatory puffery on black units. Few regimental histories mention Africans or Coloureds. (21) Few honor rolls include blacks by name... The white populace would seem more interested in insignia, medals, uniforms, colors. Official materials are even more flavorless, as though everyone in the military were living in frictionless co-existence. Serious scholarly work on the sociopolitics of the South
African Defence Force is almost nonexistent." (22)

It is therefore no surprise that the participation of South African blacks in the Second World War has received only desultory and superficial attention, being relegated to the back waters. Capt J.C. Knoetze and Lt R. Hallack respectively, completed factual reports on the Non-European Army Services (NEAS) outside South Africa (23) and a record of the NEAS (24) shortly after the war. S. Horwitz, also wrote a short factual article about the active participation of "Non-Europeans" in both World Wars (25) whilst F. Rodseth, anecdotally related his experiences with these soldiers in one chapter of his book, Ndabazabantu. (26) H.J. Martin and N. Orpen dismissed black participation in a few lines, (27) while E. Roux (28) and recently K.W. Grundy (29) each touched on the topic in passing. In an article in the South African Historical Journal, M. Roth also cursorily dealt with the subject. (30) These works do not cover the whole spectrum of black participation; they are furthermore not based on thorough archival research, Roth's work excepted.

To fill this void was one reason for undertaking this study; to attempt answering sometimes daunting questions and issues raised by this subject, was another: How did blacks react to the outbreak of the war? Whites perceived the war as a defence of western values, democracy and as an anti-Nazi campaign but how did the blacks view this dramatic event? To what extent and why did they participate actively in the war effort? Were they allowed to carry fire-arms? On what service conditions did they enlist? How were they trained and their labour utilised? What were their contributions and what befell them during the War? To what extent did the Government's policy of racial discrimination affect the lives of the 76 000 blacks who had enlisted? In what way did the authorities exercise social control and military discipline? What was the relationship between white officers and NCO's and the black troops? What was these soldiers' reaction to demobilisation? What happened to them after the war and finally, were their lives changed by this experience and if so, in what way?

This study thus seeks to look at the cataclysmic events of 1939-1945 not from an official or military point of view but from another perspective. I have namely, tried to place the ordinary rank and file black soldier in the centre of the study, analysing his motives, actions and responses. Of course, these took place within the wider structural and socio-political context of South African society at that time and also within the limits of the army with its own set of values which generally departed radically from the earlier orientation of the black soldiers. As officialdom dominated in the former and military authority in the latter, their influence on the black soldiers' lives were all important and can therefore not be ignored. Indeed, the leitmotiv running through the whole study is the relationship between, on the one hand, the civilian and military authorities both representing and enforcing the segregationist structures of South African society and, on the other hand, the black soldiers.
Although a small number of blacks from Namibia (South West Africa) and the High Commission Territories also enlisted in the Union Defence Force, this study concentrates solely on the South African blacks. But, for comparative purposes, where applicable reference is made to these territories. Furthermore, only blacks who became militarily involved in the South African war effort fall within the ambit of this study. The involvement of South African black society in the Second World War as well as the impact of this War on that society is a study still to be done. Strictly speaking then, this is not a fully-fledged "war and society" study. Nevertheless, in so far as the social structures of South Africa loom large in this consideration of the military experiences of these soldiers and as the war took 76 000 ordinary people out of society, exposed them to, trained them for military life and returned them to society, this can be regarded as a "war and society" study.

As has been pointed out in the historiographical survey, no substantial secondary works on the subject have been written. Perforce, this study entailed extensive archival research. Fortunately, this proved to be a very fruitful exercise. A wealth of archival material was available and accessible at the Military Information Bureau, Pretoria. The archives of the Adjutant-General, the Director of Non-European Army Services and the Native Military Corps Group were particularly informative. At the Transvaal and Central Archive Depot, Pretoria the archives of the Secretary for Native Affairs contained most valuable material. Private collections such as the J.C. Smuts Papers, the J.D.R. Jones Papers, the M. Ballinger Papers and the A.B. Xuma Papers were likewise of special importance to this study. In the Library of the South African National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg, I was also fortunate to consult an extensive and completely representative collection of newspaper clippings dealing with the activities of the Non-European Army Services.

Throughout the research and actual writing I became deeply and acutely aware of (and sometimes concerned about) the wide variety of perspectives: government officials, officers and NCO’s, black NCO’s and troops, literates and illiterates, to name the more important ones. The fact that most of the information contained in the sources originated from whites, further complicated the problem of arriving as near the truth as possible. On the other hand, I tried to match this by as much information from black sources as possible; this kaleidoscopic variety of views made the study so much more exciting and rich. The "white" sources were very critically used because the possibility that they could be prejudiced was fairly high; a sobering and exciting insight into the subject was also provided by the oral interviews I was able and fortunate to conduct before the deteriorating security situation in the townships precluded further interviews.

It has been no easy task to handle the mass of archival and other documentary evidence collected eventually. Much chaff distributed in various documents had to be sifted in order to find the grains
of worthwhile material bearing on the main themes of this study. Nevertheless, even the grains proved to be quite substantial so that the references in the original footnotes became too voluminous. These were drastically revised or shortened to reflect only the most important sources.
FOOTNOTES


7. Some of the papers were published in a special issue of the Journal of African History, XIX, 1, 1978.

8. Some of the papers were published in D. Killingray and R. Rathbone (eds.), Africa and the Second World War (1986).


14. A.M. Grundlingh, "Die Suid-Afrikaanse Gekleurdes".


21. The term "Coloured" designates people of mixed racial descent according to South African historical usage, and although unpopular today, is maintained here for clarity.


24. MIB, Union War Histories Box 159, Narratives and Reports Units and Formations, 13, R. Hallack, typescript, "Record of the Non-European Army Services, 1939-1945", 1946.


CHAPTER 2

THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR: BLACK REACTIONS AND THE ISSUE OF INVOLVING BLACKS IN THE WAR EFFORT

LOYALTY, INDIFFERENCE AND DISSENT

When the Second World War broke out in September 1939, some blacks professed their loyalty, some were simply indifferent while others expressed dissent. This pattern also characterised their attitude during the course of the war.

Some black public bodies and organisations affirmed their loyalty to the Crown and others both to the Crown and the Government of the Union of South Africa. (1) The African National Congress (henceforth ANC) did not want to embarrass the Government at the outbreak of the war. At its annual conference in December 1939 the Resolution Committee initially took the hard line that the ANC would not support the Government unless it granted blacks rights and armed them. Eventually, however, the opinion of the moderate members prevailed: it accepted a rather watered-down resolution in which it recorded "its conviction that the decision of the Union Government in favour of a declaration of war on the side of Great Britain was correct" and endorsed "the action of the Representatives of the African people in Parliament in voting against the neutrality motion."

In very moderate terms it added that "the time has arrived when the Union Government and Parliament should consider the expediency of admitting the African and other non-European races... into full citizenship of the Union"

and that "the territorial integrity of the Union of South Africa can only be effectively defended if all sections of the population were included in the Defence system of the country on equal terms..." (2)

This remained the stance of the ANC throughout the hostilities, although the president of the ANC, A.B. Xuma, reiterated in 1941 that their "actions of loyalty do not mean contentment and happiness on our part. We are very much dissatisfied with the lot and status of our people. We want these improved immediately." (3)

On the other hand, the Native Representative Council which had limited responsibility for local affairs, rejected the idea that they should now press for citizen rights or for equality. This might only trouble and embarrass the authorities. (4) Likewise, numerous chiefs as well as church organisations were also eager to express their loyalty. A large number of expressions of
loyalty was received by the Government and subsequently some of these were printed in Government publications such as the News of the War as proof of the blacks' unwavering loyalty. Most of these messages emanated from Natal, the Eastern Cape and Eastern Free State and had a stereotyped familiar ring about them that leaves the impression that these expressions of loyalty were an orchestrated effort. The fact that they were published in official Government publications enhances this view. (5) This does not, of course, necessarily imply that they were insincere or mendacious. The sentiments expressed in the following example recur like a refrain in most of these messages: Chief Abraham Moiloa of the Bahurutshe, Linokana, wrote to his people:

"It is the right thing to be faithful always... it is therefore our duty to prove how trustworthy we are to the Government of our country. We have never lacked in our loyalty during calm weather and now that our liberty is in danger we should more boldly prove worthy of our calling." (6)

In some instances these sentiments of loyalty were backed by tangible monetary contributions towards war funds. Councillor S. Mabude even moved in the United Transkeian Territories General Council (henceforth UTTGC) Session of 1941 that provision ought to be made in the estimates of expenditure "for the contribution of a substantial sum in aid of funds for the prosecution of the war." (7)

These declarations of loyalty were not altogether unconditional. Apart from calls to grant full citizenship rights and privileges and to remove all colour bars in recruitment for the army, resolutions adopted by the ANC, the Transvaal African Congress and the Transvaal Non-European People's Conference, emphasised that black participation in the war effort would not be limited to that of labourers - they wanted to receive proper training as armed fighting forces. (8)

The support of the Government's war effort needs some examination. It seems that there was an ambivalence in the blacks' expressions of loyalty at this time. There was deep resentment in the countryside over the land issue and the Native Affairs Department's programme of conservation and development. It was especially restrictions on keeping live stock and having to pay fees for felling trees that caused discontent. (9) Although this might have dampened their expressions of loyalty somewhat, these grievances were not openly declared. The Chiefs had too much to lose; their position depended much on the goodwill of the Government and therefore any dissenting view might have cost them dearly. Expressions of loyalty were not hard to show - in any case it was expected of them. The support emanating from some chiefs and headmen can thus be regarded as a continuation of their tradition of collaboration and as an attempt to ingratiating themselves with the Government. They were, in the words of Z.K. Matthews of the Fort Hare College, "the 'die-hards' who are prepared to out-British the British in their unquestioning patriotism and support for any cause espoused by His Majesty's Government..." (10)
However, it is difficult to see how the expressions of loyalty by organisations such as the ANC could have been given to win the favour of the Government. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the chiefs, headmen and members of the Native Representative Council who co-operated closely with the Government, did not make their loyalty a conditional one in contrast to the ANC which was more independent of the Government. It was only because the ANC did not want to embarrass the Government, that it was not adamant that its conditions had to be met partially or fully before supporting the war effort. (11) Critique of the Government did not rule out loyalty. However, this does not mean a loyalty to the South African Government rather a wider loyalty to the Allies and their war effort.

M. Roth considered that the way in which the three representatives of blacks in the House of Assembly, M. Ballinger, D. Molteno and G. Hemming, voted can not be regarded as an expression of blacks' opinion on the war. Their vote "was not given with due consideration to the views of their black constituents. It was a reflection of their own personal ideological and political sympathies." (12)

In the light of the discussion above which amply proved that there was support for the war amongst blacks, this conclusion cannot be accepted.

Some Africans underpinned their loyalty by new hopes for and expectations of a better deal after the war. In other instances these expectations had nothing to do with loyalty; they had a millenarian vision that the war offered them the chance, through a German or Japanese victory, of a better future. A third group expected that the war would give them the opportunity of bringing about a better deal by themselves.

Some of the chiefs indeed, had high hopes for the future if they remained loyal to the Government and even joined up:

"If we respond to the call and do our share in the worldwide struggle, we shall be recognised by other nations of the world, and we will not be ashamed but will be justified in claiming by constitutional means our national status as the 'Batho' nation of South Africa." (13)

Others, such as Chief Mathole Buthelezi, held similar views but was not convinced that change would come about:

"If we now do our best in the work for which we are called perhaps our Government will in future view us from a different angle as regards our welfare in this country." (14)

There were also expectations of a better deal amongst the black elite. In a letter to King George VI, M.S. Dube, president of the African Congregational Church, after declaring his wholehearted loyalty, expressed the hope that at the end of the war "Your Highness' mind will not be so overburdened as to forget our meagre assistance physically, morally and financially in the prosecution of the victories of the 1914-1918 and the present wars." (15)
It is significant that this letter was addressed to the British monarch and not to the South African Government, thus implying that he had more hope in Britain than in the South African Government to improve their circumstances.

It is apparent from the following article by "Mlamlankunzi" published in The Star, that their expectations for change were couched in very vague terms:

"...from the debris wrought by such a war would evolve a new order... It is in this new order that the bulk of the Bantu in the Union envisage... the dawning of an era in which man will evince a more sympathetic disposition towards the lot of his less favoured brethren, irrespective of class, colour or creed." (16)

Although vague, it nevertheless reflects a strong conviction that their existing circumstances should not continue and that the war would bring about change for the better. It is clear, therefore, that these blacks argued that as compensation for their loyalty, repressive measures might be lifted. Given their limited range of options to bring about any constitutional change, they regarded loyalty during the war as an additional lever to be utilised in the unequal struggle.

There is also evidence that this hope for a better future was expressed in terms of millenarianism. Millenarianism often constitutes an integral part of black religion in which it is prophesied that a golden era for the blacks would dawn after they have been freed from white hegemony. The advent of the golden age is frequently marked by a cataclysmic event. The Second World War was seen as such an event and therefore the sign of the imminent liberation of the blacks. (17)

In the Engcobo district of the Transkei the police, at a meeting of the "Universal Negro Improvement Association", overheard the following millenial remarks:

"Please God, give that this be the right time for Africa to be returned to the native people"

and

"The Lord has given signs that the time for redemption is at hand." (18)

Although not suspecting the "Universal Negro Improvement Association" of furthering German propaganda, the Secretary for Native Affairs, D.L. Smit, expressed the view that "to the raw native... there is little distinction between pro-Nazi propaganda and American Negro propaganda. Both allege that the present rulers of the country will be driven out and that the new regime will confer multifarious advantages on the Natives." (19)

A section of the black population acclaimed the military success of Japan believing that the Japanese would bring about the expected millenium and liberate them from white oppression. The rulers would be either blacks or Japanese and the whites and blacks who had joined the Union Defence Force (henceforth UDF),
would be relegated to subservient positions. (20) Some blacks looked upon the other two partners of the Axis, Germany and Italy, as enemies of the whites as well as of the the blacks (21); others again saw in these nations the hope of delivery from oppression they suffered in South Africa. In their millenial view, Hitler would open the utopian door of freedom and racial equality with Europeans. (22) Although these hopes might have been exaggerations and based on pure ignorance, a number of blacks believed in them. This is an indication of black discontent with existing circumstances, caused mainly by Government policies. A change was necessary; to them it was clear that the South African Government was not going to effect that change and therefore, as a last resort, they placed their hopes on a foreign power. It was indeed a case of "your enemy is my friend".

Z.K. Matthews was of the opinion that there were only a few blacks who believed in a Nazi millenium and that most blacks regarded it as "tales full of sound and fury signifying nothing." He referred to the history of South Africa which "has taught them that to support one European group against another brings upon them the enmity of the group to which they were disloyal without earning them the friendship of the group to which they were loyal." (23) This is an unquestionable vote of no-confidence in all whites.

Other blacks did not look to the Germans or Japanese to bring about change in South Africa. They felt that the war had brought about favourable circumstances to effect that change themselves. The predicament of the government, wishing to quell or avoid the possibility of internal unrest and to conclude the war successfully offered blacks a golden opportunity to wring concessions from the authorities. This trend of thought was noticeable not only in statements by black organisations and representative bodies such as the Transvaal Non-European People's Conference, the All African Convention and the ANC, (24) but also at some grassroots levels: a certain Gushum 'Ngayi thus wrote to a friend:

"The important thing is - if the war last long enough, and I think it will... Woe to us if we miss this opportunity! Remember we missed it during the last war... They will be in a tight corner... and then will come our chance to use our bargaining power." (25)

According to Z.K. Matthews, however, "the bulk of the people do not believe that advantages extorted out of an unwilling Government during a period of crisis can be regarded as permanent... they deprecate the use of the war as a lever to support their excellent case." (26)

It seems therefore, that some sections of the black community in South Africa felt a dire need for change in society and saw in the war an excellent opportunity - either by expecting rewards for being loyal or by forcing a hard-pressed government to reform or even hoping that the enemy would deliver them from their bondage and bring to pass the dawn of a millenium.
The blacks' expressions of loyalty at the outbreak of the war were as diverse as their knowledge of the war and the issues involved; there were those who were simply ignorant, those who were well-informed and those who were confused.

A large section of the blacks lacked background knowledge of the war, i.e. the causes of the war, geographical position of the warring nations, and had no idea of the relations between the governments of Great Britain, the Union and other African territories; therefore they could not appreciate the scope or inherent threats of the war. The conflict did not have any real significance to them. Moreover, they could not grasp the arguments used by their parliamentary representatives for voting in favour of active participation in the war. (27)

Some official government announcements seem to indicate that the blacks realised

"that their future is just as much at stake in the issues of this war as is the future of the Europeans." (28)

However, these announcements can not be accepted without reservation as they were clearly made with an eye to propaganda and to hoodwink Europeans into the belief that blacks were united with them on the war issue.

Whilst it appears that the enlightened black elite were more knowledgeable on the war issue, (29) the ordinary black man perchance picked up a rather slanted view as the following letter by an anxious A.C. Majuba to the Governor-General, Sir Patrick Duncan, reveals:

"Will you please wire at once and tell the King of English [sic] and French [sic] that I listen by my master's door and he tell [sic] the Mrs. that Germans are going to take this country because Hitler is having long passages made under the ground right to the English soldiers camps and the Germans are going to blow these camps up and kill all the soldiers... So sir your lordship must wire to the King now at once and tell him to move the English soldiers." (30)

As is clear from this quotation and other evidence, (31) the lack of information, aggravated by rumours, instilled fear amongst some blacks and made them apprehensive of what would happen to them as a result of the war. There were indeed reports of blacks leaving their work in white centres and towns and returning to their kraals in the countryside where they felt they would be safer. Cattle speculators, exploiting the fear among blacks, advised them to sell their cattle before the Germans arrived and took away everything. (32) The upshot was considerable confusion, especially in Natal. (33)

One result of this lack of information about the war, was that many blacks were simply apathetic and indifferent. Reports from various quarters confirmed this lack of enthusiasm. After her tour of the Eastern Cape in November 1940, M. Ballinger reported to Prime Minister J.C. Smuts, that she experienced a distinct sense of apathy towards the European war. No one spoke in support
of the war while only a few raised the issue at all. When they did speak about the war their apathetic and even hostile attitude was evident:

"At Peddie... an elderly man of the type one would have expected to represent the old attitude of unquestioning loyalty to the British tradition, wanted to know what we had to do with this war. 'This is a war,' he said, 'for people thousands of miles away on the other side of the world. It has nothing to do with us, and already it is making life harder for us.'" (34)

Ballinger had little cause to feel different two years later. She wrote that

"with significantly few exceptions the African people were simply not interested in the war." (35)

This indeed stands in stark contrast to those blacks (mentioned previously) who had been interested in the war.

Leading figures amongst the blacks likewise noted the lack of enthusiasm for the war. In the Natives Representative Council, Councillors Charles Sakwe and Elijah Qamata did not think that the blacks would be interested in a dispute between two countries in Europe (36) while Moses Kotane expressed similar views in the journal of the Communist Party of South Africa. (37)

Although lack of knowledge about the war was one reason for apathy amongst the blacks, it seems that there was also another important reason about which Z.K. Matthews made no bones:

"But as subject people they are frankly not enthusiastic about participation in this war, because as far as they are concerned, neither the Native Policy of this country, nor British Colonial Policy, nor indeed the Colonial Policy of any other Power represents a cause worth fighting for."

(38)

This opinion that blacks had been alienated by the policy of the country and the discriminations to which they were subjected, was also expressed in other circles, such as in the Johannesburg Joint Council of Europeans and Africans. (39) Finally, to a large number of blacks the outcome of the war seemed to have little bearing on their own welfare. Many were cut off from the outside world, pre-occupied with the problem of eking out a living – hence an understandable apathy. E. Hellmann noted in 1943 that despite efforts by European representatives of Africans and African leaders themselves who stressed how vitally important the result of the war would affect them, the masses were still not convinced. (40)

Although some Africans professed loyalty and some were clearly indifferent, there were also dissenting views. The basis of these views was the disadvantaged position of blacks in South Africa, phrased thus, in a nutshell, by Alfios Maleba of the Communist Party of South Africa:

"Are you people of Africa prepared to go and help this Government which does not consider you as human beings?" (41)

The extent of their dissatisfaction with their circumstances was
evident when M. Ballinger was directly asked by a black man in Queenstown:

"Will the Government be surprised if we are Nazified? People who are desperate will look anywhere." (42)

To some blacks it did not matter who won, because in their view Hitler would treat them no worse and probably even better than they had been treated in the past. (43) Others felt so despondent about their situation that, to them, one white man was as bad as another, English, German or Italian. (44)

Trying to establish that this was in essence a class war, Gushum 'Nqayi perceptively compared the position of the German workers with that of the black workers in South Africa:

"The people in Germany have no say in the affairs of their country, no right to speak or criticise, nor even to think... And we, who know so well forced labour, police terror, prison for going on strike, can only have sympathy for these oppressed German workers and peasants."

To him, Britain and South Africa also oppressed their workers in the same way as the Hitler regime. The claim that they were fighting the war for freedom and democracy was a fallacy. He continued,

"The black man in South Africa must ask where is this democracy and of what does it consist. And if it is really true that what we have today is democracy, then no black man, unless he is a traitor to his people, can raise his hand to defend it." (45)

Others reiterated the same argument that the Government had done nothing for the blacks and therefore it could not be expected of them to fight the Germans or Italians with whom they had no quarrel. (46)

In recalling their experiences during the First World War and subsequently, some blacks found ample justification to defend their dissenting stance. According to Alfios Maleba they were promised freedom and equality but after the war there was no improvement. (47) A.W.G. Champion, leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU), strongly resisted the idea that blacks would have to enlist as labourers as opposed to combatants as they had done during the First World War. (48) It is therefore not surprising that Gushum 'Nqayi emphatically warned against supporting the war effort:

"Once more we must defend our dear free country so that our 'liberty' will not be taken from us. Shall we be fooled again?... They won't fool me this time and I'm not going to believe that you have not as much common sense as I have." (49)

These dissenting views or "subversive propaganda" as it was officially called, were considered so serious that the authorities contemplated interning blacks guilty of "subversive conduct". The first move in this direction was taken after John Magididi, employed by the Rose Deep General Mining Company, had
been convicted at Germiston on 8 July 1940 of "subversive utterances" in the compound. After that, there were other cases in which the authorities intended to intern blacks. However, due to the lack of facilities, no action was taken. (50)

It is clear that the blacks were by no means unanimously loyal at the outbreak or during the war. Z.K. Matthews cogently summed up the divergent opinions amongst blacks towards the war, emphasising that great changes had taken place in African opinion since the First World War. At one time, to say that the King of England, a descendant of Queen Victoria, was at war would evoke a ready response from the blacks. In some quarters this attitude was still prevalent. He continued

"We now have sections which claim to be more discriminating in their loyalty. There are those who contend that this is a white man's affair in which Africans should take no part, albeit they feel convinced that whoever wins the war, the Africans themselves will lose the peace. There are the believers in divine intervention who look upon this struggle between European nations as just retribution for the misery and suffering which civilised nations have inflicted upon so-called primitive people in different parts of the world. There are those who contend that this is a struggle between rival imperialisms to determine who should get the lion's share of the world's natural resources... Finally, we have a vast number who are just plainly indifferent, who when told that there is a war on, point out that as far as the African is concerned, there never has been any peace." (51)

PARTICIPATION IN A WHITE MAN'S WAR

At the outbreak of the war the Government had no intention of drawing the blacks into direct participation in the war. (52) The official reason was that it would disrupt the labour supply to the farms and mines (53) but the Government also feared the political implications most of all. The whites were especially sensitive to the symbolism and precedent attending the militarisation of blacks. This fact was realised with regret not only by the Transvaal and Orange Free State members of the Natives Representative Council (54) but also by Lt.-Col. B.W. Martin, Director of Native Labour, who had already by May 1940 taken preliminary steps to raise a native labour battalion. He had, however, to abandon his efforts. (55) This meant that by mid-1940 it was by no means clear what sort of military service, if any, blacks would be allowed to perform.

Even at the commencement of hostilities, certain sections of the white population opposed the idea of the arming of blacks as well as their participation in the war effort. There was, for example, an outcry against J.F. Philip, the Station Master of Knapdaar, when he allegedly posted a Native Military Corps (henceforth NMC) recruiting poster in the European waiting room. (56)

When the idea was broached that the UDF might use blacks in a
military capacity, the Nationalists were up in arms. (57) They were already strongly opposed to the Union's involvement in the war. That the South African Government should even contemplate recruiting blacks for the war effort, caused thorough alarm in their ranks. Their motive might well have been to try to derive political advantage from an issue that had become a highly emotional one and about which the government was very sensitive. This sensitivity about the "state of public opinion on the matter" (58) and "in view of the present political circumstances", (59) to use the official jargon describing the whites' attitude, inhibited the government from giving great publicity to the training of blacks in a military capacity. This issue was viewed in such a serious light that Col. E.T. Stubbs, Director of the Non-European Army Services (henceforth DNEAS), refused to send a platoon of Native Military Police with a band to assist recruiting in the Northern Transvaal as it might have had "disastrous effects and might even lead to bloodshed." (60)

In short, in the words of Col. Stubbs,

"We must work unostentatiously. We must not embarrass General Smuts politically." (61)

As has been stated, (62) the official explanation why some whites were strongly against the utilisation of black manpower in the war effort, was that the farmers would be upset when their labourers joined the UDF. But the fact that the authorities also feared political repercussions on the Reef (a non-farming community) poses the question whether white objections were not only more deeprooted but also had more aspects than merely a fear of losing labourers. Taking into account the history of white attitudes towards black participation in "a white man's war", this presumption indeed seems to be justified; it can therefore, safely be assumed that this intransigent attitude was so deeply ingrained that it had not diminished by 1939. It was an unwritten law not to use blacks in war service. If anyone would suggest any other line of action, this would have been tantamount to attacking the very basis and fabric of the South African social structure.

As this attitude was already generally prevalent after the unification of South Africa, it was easily incorporated in the South African Defence Force Act of 1912 which explicitly excluded blacks from combatant services. (63) The idea of fighting side-by-side with blacks even in the face of a common enemy, was still positively frowned upon during the First World War.

During the interwar period France rejected any constraints on militarising blacks in her colonies. This exacerbated the fear which haunted South African minds of hordes of black soldiers who might threaten European civilisation on the Continent. It is not surprising to find the same outlook during the Second World War: the General Officer Commanding South African forces in North Africa, Major-General F.H. Theron, noted

"that he is somewhat apprehensive of the reaction on the [South African] European troops having [black] stretcher-bearers in the front line." (64)
It seems therefore that some apprehension was indeed a motive behind white resistance to black participation. What was the content of this attitude?

As in the First World War, (65) whites overreacted and thought that the blacks might take advantage of the whites' preoccupation with the War and so, by instigating uprisings, overcome all the structural constraints imposed on the blacks. To white minds, this danger would be even more acute if blacks were allowed to participate in the war effort and receive training. Moreover, blacks might view themselves as equal to whites and thus not only undermine the white man's prestige but even threaten his future existence in South Africa. (66)

Another aspect of white misgivings was the thought that blacks would be exposed to new ideas which would make them discontented with their position and would equip them with means to alter it. One idea which troubled Europeans was Ethiopianism which professed equality of black and white. An indication of the deep-seated opposition to this idea is evident in the remark by C.A. Bettinton of the South African Light Horse, who already in 1907 disdainfully referred to Ethiopianism as follows:

"...it is nothing less than a terrible sin: it should be debarred altogether and made a criminal offence in S[outh] A[frica]. To tell a black man that he is as good as a white is absurd, because he is not educated sufficiently to understand the difference." (67)

To a great extent, this attitude was still uppermost in white minds at the outbreak of the Second World War. Now, more than ever before, by being trained militarily, the possibility that the ideology of Ethiopianism might raise its head, presented itself; the black man might discover that he was the military equal of the white man. This would not only destroy the prestige and dominating position of whites in South Africa - this was a ghastly thought to whites - but they would also be more capable than ever before of killing the whites. It might be for this reason that the military censors gave instructions that the chapters of a book by M. Birkly, writing on the Abyssian campaign and paying tribute to the services rendered by various African units such as the King's African Rifles, be expunged from the South African and British versions. R.F. Alfred Hoernlé of the University of the Witwatersrand thought that this was motivated by a

"fear that public recognition of the part played by African troops might give material for political criticism here in the Union, or might perhaps seem to detract from the glory of the white South African troops." (68)

The use of black troops in warfare was never unanimously accepted. In the late 19th century arguments against this practice became more widespread and vigorous. Especially under the influence of Social Darwinistic ideas, blacks were again regarded as an inferior, undisciplined and barbaric people and were therefore militarily unacceptable. According to P. Warwick,
"All such stereotypes were patently false, as any appraisal of the earlier performance of black people in military service in South Africa would have indicated, but the ill-founded views of the time quickly assumed the status of accepted wisdom." (69)

By using blacks as soldiers they might realise their strength, clamour for more civil rights and thereby threaten the patterns of social relations and the structures of social control.

There was thus a long-standing tradition that blacks should not play any part in the troubles arising between white men. D.F. Malan, the Leader of the Opposition, and a stern champion of opposition to black participation, tersely and in no uncertain terms stated:

"To every Afrikander the use of black troops against Europeans is abhorrent." (70)

When calls were made in certain circles to arm blacks for the war effort, H. Abrahamson of Pietermaritzburg protested against the suggestion and wrote to Smuts:

"Loyal S[outh] A[frica] has to fight this war for us, and we cannot train and arm men who would turn on us if the opportunity arose at any time." (71)

Although most of these fears proved unfounded, (72) they are an indication of what motivated the Government during this period and of the extent to which distrust, polarisation and tension between white and black in South Africa had grown. Many of them realised that prevailing orthodoxies might be challenged and even changed during the war; consequently, they were apprehensive about the possible ramifications.

Nevertheless, opposition to black participation was only one side of the picture. There was also a large body of opinion favouring such a course. Some whites had a moral approach to the question and thought participation in the war would be a privilege to the blacks. The Bishop of Pretoria thus wrote to Stubbs:

"One knows of course the lopolitical [sic] difficulties but when not only Kenya, Nigeria and the Gold Coast, but also Southern Rhodesia have their native regiments, it is really monstrous that our natives should not have the same privilege." (73)

In the same vain, the Natal Mercury was of the opinion that the future of the blacks was as much endangered as that of the whites and that

"it would be short sighted and morally wrong to deny them the right to defend themselves and their country." (74)

Stubbs himself admitted that he was constantly approached by various groups to press for a greater utilisation of the services of blacks constituting a vast reservoir of man power. (75)

Because the army faced a powerful enemy it seems that the same realisation dawned on those in the higher echelons of the Defence Force. Sir P. van Ryneveld admitted to Col. E.A. Cluver, Director-General of Medical Services,

"I think you have the complete picture of what is coming to us, and the prejudices and difficulties of using
white, coloured and black troops in combination will have to be overcome." (76)

In peace time the whites maintained discriminatory practices but now that they faced a real threat, a maximum war effort had to be mounted and for that purpose the enormous black labour resources had to be harnessed. To this end it was thought feasible to relax some discriminatory practices. (77)

By emphasising that vast man power resources could be utilised if blacks were employed in a military capacity some whites revealed their stereotyped perspective on the black man. As in the past they merely took notice of the black man (and his labour potential) and would possibly contemplate concessions only when they were in a quandary.

Certain sections of the black community also appealed to the Government to form black military units and to make use of blacks increasingly. But, as may be expected, their approach to this issue was quite different from that of the whites. From the outset and during the war appeals emanated from leaders of black organisations such as the ANC, UTTGC, Joint Council of Non-European Trade Unions, Transvaal Non-European Conference and the African Ex-Servicemen’s League. This indicates that suggestions about black participation were confined to an elite section of the blacks. They, in contrast to the white approach, tried to emphasise the fact that, because they regarded themselves as full citizens of the Union, they had a right and responsibility to participate in the war. Their participation would therefore vindicate their claim to full citizenship. (78)

The Government was well aware that the inclusion of blacks in the Defence Force would further stimulate the existing antagonism, among a large section of the white community, towards the war effort. Why, however, did the Government so rapidly discount the idea of excluding blacks? The explanation can be found in both hypocritical and genuine reasons. By wrongly alleging that the blacks were unanimous in their "numerous and constant offers of help" the Government created the impression that it had become possible to acknowledge the blacks' offers of service "because it could no longer turn a blind eye to these offers." (79) However, it seems that this step was prompted rather by more down-to-earth reasons of which the dire need for man power was the most important. (80) In the front lines as many white troops as possible were needed for combatant services. Because it was decided that blacks would not be utilised in a combatant capacity, suggestions had already been made in October 1939 that the protection of vital areas and essential services within the Union could well be supplemented by and assigned to blacks. This would release white troops for combatant service. (81) To allay fears of possible labour shortages in the mining, industrial, farming and other sectors of the economy, Col. Martin gave the assurance that he could raise a force of between 10 000 and 15 000 blacks without interrupting the labour supply to the above-mentioned economic sectors. (82) This fact ties up with the other official reason to utilise blacks: to combat growing
unemployment. The economic disorganisation caused by the war had, for example, curtailed building activities with the result that well over 10 000 blacks had lost their work. There were 4 000 to 5 000 blacks seeking employment in Johannesburg alone. (83) Other justifications for this move boiled down to the Government's somewhat sudden recollection of the "proud record of the service of the natives in the last war" (84) in which they proved their loyalty and bravery and the recognition of the blacks' claim to serve the country. (85) In an exaggerated way, Col. Martin estimated that

"over half a million natives of military age who, while they do not and will not turn out to work either for the mines, farmers or any other employer would be attracted by the glamour of military service, even if it be only of a non-combatant nature." (86)

This is indicative of the extent to which some officials were out of touch with blacks' views and feelings regarding the war.

On analysing these reasons it is evident that they do not constitute a radical deviation of policy. Blacks were merely considered because of changed defence requirements. No mention was made of granting them the rights which elite black groups had made conditional to participation.

THE ISSUE OF ARMING OF BLACKS

The Government did not succumb to the above-mentioned pressure to forbid black participation in the war; but it yielded to some extent on the issue of arming blacks. South Africa's laws prohibited blacks from carrying firearms; it was clear from the beginning that even in time of war, this prohibition would not be relaxed. In June 1940 Smuts categorically stated:

"In order to forestall misrepresentation and prevent possible misunderstanding, it is to be clearly understood that natives will not... be equipped with arms of precision." (87)

It was obviously very important to the Government that this instruction should be strictly adhered to for throughout most of the war it was frequently reiterated. (88) The following incident is indicative of the Government's sensitivity about this matter: in the newspaper, Indlovu Tlou, of 25 September 1943 a picture of a black soldier with a rifle and fixed bayonet was published. On the one hand, the Secretary for Native Affairs, D.L. Smit, was particularly upset that if one did not read the caption, one might think it was a black South African; but on the other hand, he continued,

"to those who do realise that the Native is not of our own, the picture would tend to accentuate the differential treatment and to evoke jealousy among our own Natives. This is particularly so in view of the picture appearing on the opposite page depicting our Natives with assegais." (89)

In this case Smit was concerned about the effect on the black community because they were not armed. But, as will be pointed out below, the Government enforced this instruction because of the negative effect it might have on a large part of the white
community if it were in any way relaxed.

The upshot was that the blacks were only armed with assegais and knobkerries in the Union. An influential officer, Lt.-Col. J.M.L. Fulford, Officer Commanding, 1st Battalion NMC, as late as 1942, still had grave misgivings about this move, describing the assegai as "a pitiful badge of inferiority." (90) When in danger the black soldiers would be supported and protected by white soldiers who were, of course, fully armed. The ridiculousness of this arrangement was realised in the thick of war by none other than Major-General George E. Brink, Officer Commanding 1st South African Division. He pointed out that the aim of utilising blacks was to release whites for combatant duties; but now whites had to be used to protect black and coloured drivers and their vehicles because they were not allowed to carry firearms. (91) This, in some ways, defeated the whole purpose of the exercise.

Numerous explanations and justifications were forthcoming from the official side why blacks could not be armed with firearms but only with assegais and knobkerries. Because the blacks initially only guarded strategic points in the Union, (92) he did not require a firearm. (93) In addition, reference was made to the Biblical David who had slain Goliath with a mere pebble, (94) thus allegorically trying to appease possible black apprehensions about the effectiveness of their arms. The official publication, News of the War, granted that while the arming of a man was a recognition of his manhood, the kind of weapon was unimportant. (95) Moreover, the assegai was the traditional weapon of blacks and symbol of war. (96) To some officials it was therefore appropriate that they should only carry assegais. Even an eminent person like C.H. Blaine, Secretary for Defence, who appreciated how drastically modern warfare had changed, with the use of aeroplanes, tanks and machine guns, probably because of political reasons, refused to admit the anachronism and irony of the South African situation in which blacks were armed with assegais and knobkerries. (97)

The argument that modern warfare not only required armed soldiers but also a large number of men in supportive capacities, was also used to justify the non-arming of blacks. (98) Although it is more sound than the previous justifications, the fact remains that the distinction between combatant and non-combatant soldiers was drawn on racial lines. Probably the most important explanation in the eyes of the Government for this policy, was that white public opinion completely ruled out the possibility of blacks taking a more active part in the war. In the last instance political considerations carried the day as is clear from General Smuts' remarks:

"There was already enough division between the Europeans... He imagined nothing which caused still greater division than the arming of coloureds or natives in South Africa. The Afrikaner people both of Dutch and English extraction were united on this subject..." (99)

Smuts appreciated the dangerous political costs associated with steps to arm blacks in white South Africa.
The whites' opposition to arming of blacks can be traced to the first half of the nineteenth century when firearms became more readily available. At the end of the 1830's Afrikaner settlements on the Highveld not only forbade trade in firearms to blacks, but they were also not permitted to possess arms. (100) After David Livingstone had traded guns with Sechele, Chief of the Kweni, in 1852, the Transvaal settlers showed their utter indignation by destroying Livingstone's residence. (101) In the wars of 1846 and 1850-1853 the Mfengu proved their proficiency in handling firearms so well that it roused white fears. (102) The flood of weapons pouring on to the Diamond Fields of Griqualand West in the 1870's had a similar effect and caused the Cape Government to disarm the blacks. During the Gun War which broke out in September 1880, the Sotho, however, held out and were never disarmed. As A. Atmore points out, "the spectre of an uprising... haunted the white politicians even during the discussions over the union constitution" (103)

and, for that matter, right into the Second World War. Whites were indeed apprehensive about arming blacks because of their previous set-backs with armed blacks, e.g. the war against Mfengu and the Sotho War. In their protestations against the arming of blacks, they naturally did not refer to this aspect, but rather to so-called "tradition". To arm blacks, according to J.J. le Roux, Scriba (Secretary) of the Presbytery of Bethlehem, "sou in stryd wees met en direk indruis teen die geskiedkundige atergrond van ons Boere-volk se verlede."

(104)

Their opposition increased markedly and in virulence after Smuts' announcement in March 1942 that blacks would be armed in the event of a Japanese invasion of South Africa. In Smuts' words, "Manifestoes are raining, the Church has been mobilised to pass angry resolutions, and a campaign of meetings is being arranged." (105)

Whites' abhorrence to the idea of armed blacks boils down to a deep-rooted distrust and fear of the blacks. If they were to be armed, they could easily resist white hegemony and stage an insurrection. The whites thus feared that they would ultimately turn the guns on them. (106) This possible danger was aggravated not only by the fact that the whites were outnumbered by five to one, but also by the fact that large numbers of the white population had been disarmed. Smuts himself realised that his disarming of whites and his proposal to arm blacks in an emergency was a contradiction to many whites. (107) The Nationalist opposition, invoking the somewhat cliche-ridden communist threat, claimed that the arming of blacks would facilitate communist agitation amongst blacks. This was echoed by the Scriba of the Presbytery of Bloemfontein (108) but neither explained how this would come about.

The main thrust of white opposition, however, was based on the belief that if blacks were to be used in combatant capacities, fighting alongside and against whites, they would regard
themselves on equal terms with the whites. In that event the concept of race on which the South African political and social structure was based was likely to be seriously undermined. Referring to the Bible, B.H. Swart, Scriba Synodi of the Nederduitse Hervormde of Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika, stated that

"die beleid van die Kerk gegrond is op die beginsels van Gods Woord wat leer rasseapartheid en voogdyskap van die blanke teenoor die naturel, dat hierdie beginsels die grondslag vorm van die naturelle-wetgewing van die Unie en in ooreenstemming is met die beste tradisie van die Afrikanervolk... Die onheilsame uitwerking van die aankondiging word reeds bemerk in die oneerbiedige houding wat volgens ons berigte op verschillende plekke deur naturelle teenoor blankes, ook teenoor blanke vroue, ingeneem word." (109)

Later in the war, against the background of ferment in the black labour sphere, the white opposition, despite a dire need for combatants, remained adamant. (110) Blacks ought not to be placed in a position that might threaten white dominance; in short, blacks ought not to be armed. Throughout the war the Government therefore backed down on this issue - to them the arming of blacks might have been politically more costly than militarily wise.

In most parts of Africa the arming of blacks was common practice during the Second World War. (111) In the light of the dire need for manpower the British and France waived what prejudices and reservations they might have had on arming the Africans in their colonies. Closer home, coloureds of the Cape Corps were also issued with rifles. (112) Recruits from Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) (113) and the High Commissioner Territories were also armed. The High Commissioner H.E. Priestman, justified this practice, stating that

"Experience in Northern Africa had shown...that working parties were liable to be cut off from their own forces and must therefore have the means to defend themselves." (114)

The South African authorities were thoroughly perturbed by this arrangement. When Rhodesian troops of the 27th Brigade, East Africa Rifles were quartered at the Prisoner of War Camp in Pietermaritzburg and marched through the streets, it was feared "that it would adversely affect recruiting because it gives those Natives who have put forward the excuse... that they will not enlist unless they are armed, the opportunity of making the comparison between... the treatment accorded their brothers in the adjoining Crown Colonies and that meted out to themselves by the Union Government." (115)

After a similar incident had taken place in Johannesburg in August 1942, the DNEAS was equally upset. He was entirely aware of the discontent amongst blacks because they had not been armed. This resentment would have been exacerbated when they were faced with troops from other parts of Africa who were fully armed. Not only that, but the whites who were under the impression that
blacks were not armed, would think, on seeing armed black troops passing through Johannesburg that General Smuts had reversed his decision, since they would be unable to distinguish between foreign black troops and Union black troops. (116) Consequently, Col. Stubbs ordered that in future foreign black troops should pass straight through, avoiding their being seen in the streets of Johannesburg at all. (117) Earlier, H.S. Priestman had already ruled that troops from the High Commissioner territories would no longer be provided with arms prior to their departure from the Union ports. They would only receive their arms after arrival in the Middle East. (118)

Despite considerable opposition to the arming of blacks, there were, on the other hand, numerous calls from various quarters and persuasions that the decision to use blacks only in a non-combatant capacity, should be revised. Influential Government spokesmen such as Col. D. Reitz, Minister of Native Affairs, various political and other organizations, as well as individuals were unanimous that blacks ought to be armed. (119) The most important reasons forwarded for this move were the following: that blacks were willing and keen to be organised in combatant units and that would boost their spirit and morale (120); that they had already proven their stamina and courage in dangerous war situations; (121) that it was advisable from a manpower utilization and military view - white infantry escorts of convoys could drastically be curtailed if blacks were to be armed and trained in the use of arms; (122) and, moreover, it was immoral and unjustifiable to send unarmed and unprotected men into the firing lines. (123) To some it would have been a significant gesture, alleviating to some extent the inequality and discrimination to which blacks were subjected in the army. (124) To others the arming of black soldiers was closely linked to discriminatory practices in South Africa as was succinctly expressed at a Communist Party meeting in Johannesburg:

"How can they [blacks] fight for freedom while they are not allowed freedom?" (125)

If blacks were thus on equal terms with whites, both being armed, they should also receive the same treatment. Therefore oppressive legislation pertaining to them such as the pass laws and poll tax should be repealed and they should be granted the same conditions in the army equal to the facilities granted to white soldiers. (126) In short, by giving them something to fight with, they should also be given something to fight for.

There seemed to be some possibility of a change in attitude on the part of the authorities at the beginning of 1942. Singapore had fallen and the Japanese had reached the Indian Ocean. General Smuts stated that he would not hesitate to arm blacks in the event of a Japanese invasion. (127) This is an indication of how even die-hard prejudices can change in the face of a threatening danger. Although this statement aroused vehement protests from
the white opposition, (128) it did little, if anything, to reconcile blacks. The Japanese did not invade South Africa. Therefore the status quo remained: blacks in South Africa were not to be armed.

This persistence to maintain the status quo caused widespread resentment and disappointment amongst the blacks. They regarded it as an insult to their manhood as Headman Mtulu of the Fingo tribe categorically stated at a headmen's meeting: "We don't want to be left like women." (129) Furthermore, it was seen not only as a slur upon their loyalty but also as an obvious indication that the Government simply did not trust them. (130) It was incomprehensible to them that, whilst they were regarded as competent to render military service in the firing line, the whites still distrusted them to such an extent that they refused to arm them. The result of this stand by the whites was that many blacks demonstrated their discontent in practical terms by refusing to enlist. To them it did not make sense to join the army if they could not be trusted with a rifle. (131)

This represented yet another manifestation of inequality and discrimination which they felt insulted their dignity. This fact was highlighted when the South African blacks compared themselves with blacks from the High Commissioner Territories and other parts of Africa where they were armed. Not only did they feel inferior but it was also incomprehensible to them that while others armed themselves to the teeth, they were debarred from doing the same. It made a mockery of the term "soldier" — in their eyes, they were relegated to the position of labourers. (132) Col. Stubbs explained the quandary in which he found himself because of this policy:

"Union natives are adopting the attitude that the Imperial Authorities have confidence and repose their trust in Protectorate natives sufficiently to train them in the use of arms, whereas the Union Authorities, while expecting the NMC to proceed to the theatre of war, are not prepared to treat them as soldiers." (133)

Furthermore, blacks viewed this policy as a deliberate attempt to deprive them of an opportunity to gain citizenship rights. To many, such as Z.K. Matthews and Rev. B.S. Skojo, the act of taking up arms in defence of one's country was the highest symbol of citizenship whilst F. Sexwale felt this could be a leverage to extract concessions from the Government. (134) But because the Government was not in any way even contemplating such a move, the status quo (with all its implications) would remain. For A.B. Xuma this had a dual significance:

"One is keeping him [the black South African] for ever in subjection and the other is to declare the African by implication that he is an internal and external enemy of the white man in South Africa notwithstanding the African's willingness to die in defence of South Africa." (135)

Their not being armed with rifles also denied them the right to
defend themselves properly against modern combat weapons. Subsequently, those who had already enlisted, were under the impression that they were not being cared for adequately. (136) Understandably, this created a very real fear of having to defend themselves with assegais against rifle fire and machine-gunning from the air. (137) It was therefore no surprise that there was deep-seated dissatisfaction among the black soldiers that they were only to be armed with knobkerries and assegais. They regarded these "weapons" with utter contempt because they were totally useless to them in modern warfare. (138) Caustic remarks about the "assegai and knobkerrie brigade" were therefore not uncommon. (139) A.B. Xuma was completely disgusted with this policy especially because it again negatively affected the dignity of blacks:

"They are expected to fight aeroplanes, tanks and enemy artillery with knobkerries and assegais. What mockery! This seems to be 'inhumanity of man to man'". (140)

It is, however, ironical that despite vehement opposition, the needs of war again forced the authorities to rescind their colour bar policies. It is very difficult to follow old and entrenched ideas and policies when the demands of modern warfare inexorably break them down. Therefore, as early as February 1941, Lt.-Gen. Sir P. van Ryneveld gave the commanders in North Africa and the Middle East a free hand to arm black troops when they deemed it expedient. (141) All black reinforcements proceeding to an operational area were subsequently armed. (142)

Furthermore, instruction in throwing hand grenades and in the use of mortars and rifles and anti-aircraft fire, were also given. (143) This training was apparently effective. In a display performance at Simonstown the black soldiers in 52 Anti-aircraft Regiment South African Artillery Force, manned and fired a Bofors A.A. Gun so impeccably that Col. Stubbs noted:

"I was given to understand the Non-European detachments were as good, and maybe better, than the other European detachments." (144)

The rifles issued, however, were mostly captured Italian 6.5 mm. and other antiquated rifles, mostly of a poor quality. The latter even had "Rorkes Drift" marked on them so that they posed a greater danger to the firer than to the enemy! (145)

The authorities vacillated about making the fact that blacks were indeed armed, public knowledge. In January 1942, Brig. P. de Waal, the Deputy Chief of Staff, had no qualms in publicly releasing a recruiting film which included scenes depicting blacks in action with rifles, (146) while Col. Stubbs, somewhat more cautiously, recommended that the following answer be given to numerous queries amongst blacks on the issue whether black soldiers were armed:

"In modern warfare soldiers do not fight with knobkerries and assegais." (147)

Although evasive, the implication was clear. A probable reason why this fact was openly acknowledged, was, on the one hand, the fear that it might hamper recruitment if blacks thought they
would be unarmed in battle situations; on the other hand the
knowledge that they would be armed, might have stimulated
recruitment.

In August 1942, however, there was a change of policy. The
instruction of the DNEAS to the Director of Information that all
photographs and their respective negatives in his possession
showing black soldiers with arms or those being trained in the
use of arms, be destroyed, (148) was followed by this statement
by the Director of Military Intelligence:

"Please note that, for censorship purposes, the instruction
to which we are now working with regard to the arming of
Natives is as follows: 'Natives will not be trained in
firearms and will not be armed'. Will you please ensure that
this requirement is complied with in all press reports,
photographs and broadcasts." (149)

This "'hush-hush' policy of arming NMC", (150) as the authorities
themselves called it, was again revised in January 1943 when
Smuts thought the time was ripe to state frankly that blacks
outside the Union had been under fire and had therefore been
armed. (151)

Thus, throughout the war this issue of arming the black soldiers
see-sawed. The blacks demanded equality of arms with whites and
some military leaders also appreciated the need for arming them.
Though the authorities armed the black soldiers in North Africa,
they postponed doing the same in the Union until strategic needs
no longer required additional armed soldiers. In short, the
Government arrived at its decision by evading a decision. For the
black soldier, the knowledge that he received training in the use
of arms and participating in this role in North Africa but was
not allowed to reveal it in any way, had a detrimental effect on
his psyche. W. Ngqungqa, for instance, noted that
"he felt bad because I would have liked to have a rifle. I
was a soldier and not armed." (152)

To many whites the issue of arming blacks gave substance to their
fear of black participation in the war. But, despite the vociferous opposition from certain sections of the white
population to the use of blacks both in non-combatant and
combatant capacities, history offers numerous precedents where
the demands of the battlefield determined the policy. There are
no historical grounds for the doctrine that blacks ought not to
be armed because they might be a threat to white dominance. As
the following cursory survey will illustrate, from the beginning
of white settlement in South Africa blacks were to a greater or
lesser extent armed and fought alongside whites.

The white settlers at the Cape employed the indigenous people in
defensive and offensive campaigns. Whites, for instance, armed
the Khoikhoi to take part in expeditions against the San. (153)
Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as the white
population and the colonial authorities pressed northwards, black
men served on commando and in colonial units. During the Great
Trek blacks performed various military duties for the Boer when