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the proactivity of the Herero in the construction of all of their history, Gewald demonstrates a qualitative approach to the sensibilities and aspirations of the Herero leadership in this most poignant epoch of their history.

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LAWRENCE FLINT

Tales from the King's African Rifles, by John Nunneley. London: Askari Books, 1998. viii+213 pp. £15.00 hardback, £10.00 paperback. ISBN 0-9534-6001-0 and 0-9534-6000-2.

African colonial armies were peculiar institutions. Drawn from a subordinate population with the status of protected persons rather than full British subjects, they served as armed servants of an alien colonial regime. The ideals of nationalism and patriotism that inspire voluntary service in the armies of western nations had little influence on colonial African soldiers. In peacetime, the East African colonial forces, the King's African Rifles (KAR), were used primarily for internal security and border defence but became imperial troops under the jurisdiction of the War Office during major wars. Very little is understood about the inner workings of such forces. How did British officers and African soldiers relate to each other? How much coercion was involved in transforming Africans into disciplined colonial soldiers? How effective were such units when they were actually called upon to fight?

The colonial military establishment's standard answers to these questions can be found in a variety of personal memoirs and unit histories which form the main historical record of the KAR. On the whole, colonial military officers were a highly educated group and have left a rich body of first-hand accounts of their service. Former officers like Sir Francis De Guingand (*African Assignment*, 1953), Iain Grahame (*Jambo Effendi*, 1966) and Hubert Moyse-Bartlett, the official chronicler of the KAR, tended to depict African soldiers as simple rustic people, not unlike the romanticized yeomen farmer-soldiers of England. By this argument Africans viewed the British monarchs as the protectors of rural African life.

John Nunneley's *Tales from the King's African Rifles* is both in the tradition of and a departure from this older historiography. Like his brother officers, Nunneley's recollections are a product of his times; he offers a romanticized ethnography of African martial races that can be found in their earlier works. Yet on the whole, his memoirs also offer a new and much more forthright look into the military culture of the King's African Rifles. To be sure, historians wishing to follow the lead that Lionel Caplan laid out in *Warrior Gentlemen: 'Gurkhas' in the western imagination* to chronicle the British officer corps' construction of reliable African soldiers will find rich material here, but Nunneley's book is far more useful as a window into the inner workings of the KAR during the Second World War.

Having been raised on the adventure stories of Rider Haggard and John Buchan, Nunneley lied about his age to enlist in the British Army at the outbreak of the war. He received his commission in the Somerset Light Infantry at the tender age of eighteen. After chafing under the monotony of garrison duty in Britain, he volunteered for 'special service in the Far East', which turned into a posting to the KAR after Singapore fell to the Japanese. *Tales from the King's African Rifles* is a first-hand account of his journey to East Africa and his service with 3/6 KAR (a Tanganyikan battalion) during the Ethiopian and Burma Campaigns. He has a strong narrative style and is a natural storyteller who has no reservations about recalling the most humorous aspects of his military service. His account of a

leaking bottle of caustic insect repellent that spilled into his crotch during a fire fight in the Burmese jungles is certainly a departure from the older and stuffer versions of the military memoir. Although the book has its share of harrowing war stories, Nunneley is also a keen observer of military life. Social historians will be particularly interested in his recollections of day-to-day life in the KAR, which include discipline, camaraderie, clothing, rations, accommodation and even the debate over sanctioned military prostitution.

Nunneley also offers some shrewd guesses into the inspiration for Kenya's Mau Mau Emergency when he notes the similarities between the fanciful inflated ranks (General Officer Commanding, Brigadier, etc.) adopted by his askaris during sanctioned unit celebrations known as *ngomas* and the *noms de guerre* adopted by the forest fighters. The KAR's *ngomas*, which involved dancing accompanied by the mass consumption of beer and meat, were most certainly related to the Beni dance movements of the East African coast. Nunneley's suggestion of a connection between the *ngomas* and Mau Mau has some merit. Waruhiu Itote, Mau Mau's 'General China', was a mess corporal in Nunneley's battalion. Nunneley describes him as 'capable and well-liked' and is pleased that Itote spoke well of his experiences with the KAR in his own autobiography. Conversely, one of the Storemen in 3/6 KAR was Joseph 'Juma' Ndolo, a non-commissioned officer who would later rise through the ranks to command the postcolonial army of independent Kenya. Nunneley's accounts of his experiences with both men are the kinds of insights that set his book apart from other officers' memoirs.

Finally, the most striking and thought-provoking sections of the book deal with Nunneley's experiences in the jungles of Burma. Where Moyse-Bartlett's official history makes little mention of African perspectives on the fighting, Nunneley provides an unvarnished first-hand account of his battalion's encounters with the Japanese. These include both acts of heroism by African soldiers and their lapses in discipline including mass desertion under fire, collective protests and even the murder of British officers. In spite of these problems, Nunneley remained passionately committed to the men he led into battle, usually as the sole European among a platoon of African soldiers. He is in total agreement with Itote, who maintained that the experience of shared danger during combat broke down the racial barriers and distinctions that defined civil society in colonial East Africa. The book itself is dedicated to Tomasi Kitinya, Nunneley's orderly who was killed during the fighting.

Incidents of insubordination and even outright mutiny which Nunneley chronicles in the KAR in Burma occurred in armies of all nationalities during the Second World War. In addition to being bad for morale, such outbreaks were profoundly embarrassing to military and political leaders. As a result, they are rarely even mentioned in official histories of the war. Yet disciplinary problems can take on an added significance in the colonial forces. Were such incidents acts of political resistance to the colonial establishment and racial inequality in the colonial army? Were reliable service and acts of heroism inspired by an expectation of increased political rights and material rewards for Africans once the war was over? When colonial units broke under fire, were African soldiers expressing their unwillingness to die for the colonial power? Nunneley does not offer clear answers to these questions in his book, but his honest and unvarnished accounts of what it was like to be a young British officer serving with African soldiers provides historians with tantalizing directions for further research and inquiry.