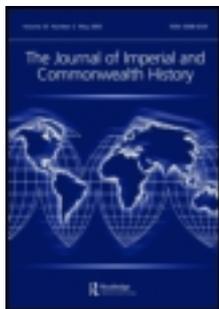


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Dangerous Education? The Army as School in Colonial East Africa

TIMOTHY PARSONS

Early one morning in Malaya, probably in 1951 or 1952, Matthew Kipoin, a Kenyan serving with the third battalion of the King's African Rifles (KAR), stood before a panel of British officers who would decide whether to charge him with the crime of inciting his fellow African soldiers to mutiny. Although Kipoin was an attested soldier holding the rank of Sergeant, he was actually a teacher. Rather than leading jungle patrols against communist guerrillas, his job was to run education classes for 3 KAR's African soldiers. His transgression was to have led a protest against the simple khaki uniforms that rank-and-file East African soldiers, known in Swahili as askaris, wore on leave in Singapore. Kipoin and his fellow askaris wanted the more elaborate jungle-green uniforms worn by the British, Gurkha, and Fijian troops they served alongside in Malaya.

Although Kipoin was eventually acquitted of the charges because the battalion's Regimental Sergeant Major gave conflicting testimony, the British commander of 3 KAR warned him that if he ever led another protest he would face a general court martial which could award the death penalty for mutiny. The commander explained that since Kipoin had the support and respect of the battalion's African soldiers, he was potentially more dangerous than the Malayan communists they were stalking.¹ On the other hand, Major J. H. Jessop, one of 3 KAR's education officers, recalls the uniform protest as 'a storm in a tea-cup'.² Conflicting recollections between informants from different backgrounds are not uncommon, but Matthew Kipoin's brush with a court martial illustrates the complex and contradictory role of African education in the colonial army.

Historians of colonial education have devoted much effort to exploring the nature of African education in mission and government schools, but few have considered that the army was the third (in some cases even the second) largest and most influential educational institution in colonial East Africa.³ Established in 1902, the King's African Rifles was composed of African infantry battalions recruited in Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika (Tanzania), and Nyasaland (Malawi).⁴ This article explores military education in all of East Africa, but draws heavily from the Kenyan experience because Kenya had

the most studied civil education system and provided most of the educated soldiers in the colonial army.

The peacetime KAR, which averaged between 4,000 and 10,000 men, provided internal security for the colonial regime. The colonial army's size and mission changed dramatically during wartime when African soldiers became imperial troops. Approximately 30,000 askaris (plus an additional half-million African 'carriers') helped to drive the Germans from East Africa during the First World War. Two decades later, over 300,000 East Africans saw service with Britain's colonial forces in East Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. The wartime KAR and its support units were trained to the standards of a modern western army. Askaris still provided unskilled military labour, but others served as gunners, engineers, signallers, drivers, corpsmen, and even teachers. The KAR shrank considerably in the post-war era, but it continued to rely on a small cadre of African military specialists during the final decades of British rule.

Although the number of askaris educated by the King's African Rifles was relatively small, the limitations on schooling in colonial East Africa made any form of African education significant and influential. In the early 1930s, the KAR's contingent of educated soldiers amounted to only several hundred drivers and signallers.⁵ During the Second World War, however, there were approximately 600 African teachers in the East Africa Army Education Corps (EAAEC), and trained Africans in the colonial army's other specialist branches numbered in the tens of thousands. Moreover, mission officials estimated that almost half of all African veterans learned to read in their own vernacular languages over the course of the conflict.⁶ In the post-war army, 6,939 of the 12,405 askaris in the KAR (55 per cent) had at least an East African Third Class Army Certificate of Education.⁷

These numbers are especially significant given that most askaris were recruited from societies which had even less access to education than the general African population. Colonial officers believed that the best soldiers came from 'martial races', which by definition were rural, unsophisticated, and uneducated. African soldiers from martial races, on the other hand, saw military service as an alternative to strictly rationed civilian education. Generally speaking, the KAR offered the equivalent of a simple primary education, valuable vocational training and, in some cases, primary schooling for their children. Given the poorly developed state of civilian education in most martial societies, army education and training conferred a measurable degree of social mobility for ambitious veterans of the King's African Rifles.

Yet in spite of their dependency on African military specialists the KAR had a strong aversion to recruiting the graduates of mission schools. Most officers dismissed educated Africans as cowardly 'bush lawyers'.⁸ Before the Second World War, they considered it 'presumptuous' for an African to

address an officer in English, no matter how fluent he was in the language.⁹ Nevertheless, the KAR needed inexpensive African specialists to function, and British officers had no alternative but to produce their own educated askaris. This military education was practically driven and almost entirely free of civil control. It blurred the lines between adolescent and adult education, but in most cases army schooling followed a primary school curriculum with a strong practical focus on literacy and useful military skills.

Michael Apple reminds us that education often serves as an instrument of 'cultural reproduction' by reinforcing and perpetuating divisions of class, race, and gender in a given society.¹⁰ Yet the colonial army's only real concern was military utility. KAR officers rarely served more than eight years in East Africa and had little stake in reinforcing the norms and conventions of the racially-stratified colonial society. Even those who did grasp the intricacies of indirect rule and colonial economics rarely sympathized with the privileged East African settler class.¹¹

As a result, military education was 'dangerous education' because it was outside the scope of civilian control. Incidents like Kipoin's near court martial led many military traditionalists and civilian critics to consider army education unwise and ill-considered because it lacked the supervision and social safeguards of civilian African schools. Military authorities were generally able to keep educated African soldiers under control while they were in the army, but KAR officers had little understanding of the delicate social balance which underpinned British colonial rule in East Africa. They largely ignored complaints from civil and mission officials that their education policies were socially disruptive, and ambitious African soldiers exploited these tensions to enhance their social status. Thus, this article will explore the contradictions and social implications of military schooling. It will also examine the influence of those African veterans who received some form of education in the colonial army. Although historians have long debated the political influence of African ex-servicemen, few have recognized that most politically active veterans of the King's African Rifles were associated with the East Africa Army Education Corps.

I

Any assessment of military schooling must be conducted against the backdrop of the continuing debate over the nature, purpose, and legacy of education in Anglophone Africa. Since the end of colonial rule in the 1960s, the consensus of most African critics has been that colonial education was intended to make Africans subservient by teaching 'deference to foreign authority, unquestioned acceptance of hierarchy, the full embracement of

Christianity ... and the acceptance of the cultural superiority of the metropolitan country'.¹² Charging that the primary function of colonial schools was to train Africans to be manual labourers, they argued that Britain's emphasis on indirect rule and good government was merely a smoke screen to conceal the colonialists' fear of politically aware Africans. By this interpretation, Africans who sought more education were deemed dangerous by the colonial regime and were often imprisoned.¹³ This depiction of colonial education has been echoed by westerners like Edward Berman who has asserted that colonial officials restricted African education in East Africa because they were 'imperialists and racists who could never accept ... that Kenya would one day become an African country'.¹⁴

Conversely, some western historians like Clive Whitehead have defended colonial educators from the charge that they sought consciously to reduce Africans to the status of perpetual drones through substandard education. They point out that the mass education beyond the primary level that was denied to colonial Africans did not become a reality in metropolitan Britain until the Second World War.¹⁵ Whitehead in particular has emphasized that British colonial education policy was usually improvised at the local level and was never part of a conscious effort to keep Africans subordinate. In this view, colonial schools taught positive Christian values and tailored their curricula to the 'African mentality' to protect 'traditional African society' from exploitation by foreign economic interests.¹⁶ Stafford Kay, on the other hand, has convincingly pointed out that both sides of this debate assume that colonial education is best understood from the perspective of the colonial power. In reality, the education offered in African schools was a product of contradiction and compromise between British colonialists and their African subjects.¹⁷

Kay's reminder provides a useful guide to understanding how military schooling fitted into the larger framework of colonial education in East Africa. In spite of their differences, both the critics and defenders of African education would agree that the colonial school was a complex institution. Education was an important manifestation of Britain's 'civilizing mission' that provided moral legitimacy for colonial rule in Africa. Settlers and officials also relied on the new schools to produce the inexpensive African artisans and clerks which underpinned the colonial economy and administration. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the colonial school was an instrument of social control which taught European conceptions of morality, loyalty, and citizenship.

Yet in spite of its obvious value, many colonial officials worried about the social and political consequences of African education. Assuming a link between the introduction of western education in South Asia and the rise of Indian political opposition, they sought to create a form of education that

would limit the growth of African nationalism. They also worried that the introduction of western-style education would lead to 'detrribalization' by fostering individualism, creating dissatisfaction with rural life, and alienating students from their parents' social norms. Left unchecked, this trend threatened to undermine the administrative foundations of indirect rule, which assumed that all Africans belong to 'tribes'. They further believed it had the potential to create a politically unstable urban class of frustrated, unemployed Africans who would vainly seek non-existent positions commensurate with their educational backgrounds.

Thus, in official British eyes an underlying aim of colonial education was to facilitate contact between 'advanced and backward races' that would allow them to 'dwell together unmixed, each preserving its character'.¹⁸ Although the first mission schools in West Africa in the nineteenth century used western customs and values to support evangelism, by the 1920s missionaries and colonial officials were more concerned with preserving the fabric of African 'tribal' society. These assumptions led to the educational policy known as 'adaptation'. Drawn from the model of African-American vocational education in the southern United States, and first articulated in a 1925 White Paper, this policy favoured 'practical' education within the context of African 'tradition' in place of the literary education offered in the early mission schools. In Kenya, adaptation provided mission educators with the opportunity to assert control over African converts who engaged in strikes, political activity, and land protests.¹⁹

While the instruction offered by the mission teachers who ran most of the schools in East Africa could not be described as 'traditionally African', colonial officials expected Christian religious instruction to provide an ethical and moral substitute for rapidly eroding 'tribal authority'. By the 1920s most missions in Kenya received financial support from the colonial government in return for allowing the Education Department to inspect their schools. Even government-run Kenyan schools began each day with a prayer and allotted one class period per week for 'denominational teaching' by 'accredited representatives of religious faiths'. The Kenyan Education Ordinance of 1952 made the link between faith and education official by mandating religious instruction in every African school.²⁰ Under a policy often known as 'Christian ruralism', colonial educators assumed that since it would take one thousand years to bring universal literacy to East Africa, schools should 'train African boys as farmers and African girls to be wives and mothers'.²¹

An increased emphasis on economic development in the colonies following the Second World War led colonial officials to reduce their commitment to indirect rule and acknowledge that rurally focused education could not produce the educated Africans needed to make the

colonies pay. Rising global anti-colonialism also increased the need to strengthen the colonies' cultural links to Britain and prepare Africans for 'responsible self-government', which would arrive at an unspecified date in the relatively distant future.²² In practice, however, colonial educators continued to limit African access to education both by design and by necessity. Kenya's 1949 Beecher Report outlined the need for the slow growth of African education to maintain standards and ensure that the schools did not produce more graduates than the economy could absorb. Colonial educators, who never really abandoned their commitment to adaptation, continued to maintain that 'if education is to be effective, it must be based partly at least on local cultural foundations'.²³

This commitment to adaptation, coupled with the extreme fiscal limitations of most colonial governments, severely restricted African access to all but the most rudimentary forms of education throughout the colonial era. A census in Kenya in 1919 found that only 30,000 out of the colony's approximately 2.7 million African children were in school. In the 1930s the approximate percentage of African children attending some type of school in East Africa ranged from 30 per cent in Nyasaland to ten per cent in Kenya. In every territory the majority of these students were enrolled in simple 'bush schools'. In Kenya, only 200 African students attended secondary schools during the same period. Even in 1949, only five per cent of Kenyan Africans received six years of education and only one per cent received more than eight years.²⁴ Thus, education in colonial East Africa followed the outline of a pyramid with a relatively broad base of agriculturally focused primary education in local vernacular languages, a progressively narrowing middle representing limited access to secondary education in English and, at the pinnacle, a tiny handful of fortunate students able to pursue a post-secondary education at Uganda's Makerere College, South Africa's Fort Hare College, or an undergraduate institution in Britain or the United States.

Most parents and students were understandably frustrated by the limitations of this system. Education was the key to prosperity and security in colonial society, and Africans suspected that the agrarian focus of adaptation was intended to retard their social and political advance. This was understandable given that commercial agriculture was not a viable option for most East Africans. Even some colonial educators sympathized with Africans who wanted to learn to read and write rather than master the 'clay and cardboard work' that was part of vocational education in Tanganyika in the 1930s.²⁵ A literary education provided access to European technology and the necessary credentials for white-collar labour. Therefore ambitious Africans eagerly sought western-style schooling in any form in which it was offered.

Throughout East Africa, but especially in Kenya, Africans established their own independent schools as an alternative to the official education system. Founded in the late 1920s, the Kikuyu independent school movement enrolled approximately 60,000 Kenyan students by 1940. Although some institutions accepted inspection by the Kenyan Education Department in return for financial support, they were essentially outside the scope of government control. The Kenyan government retained the right to close any school which it deemed threatening to 'peace and good government' and used the Mau Mau Emergency in the early 1950s as an excuse to take over all of the Kikuyu independent schools.²⁶ Any form of African education which was not firmly under civil control was dangerous education. Under these circumstances, military education became an important alternative to civilian schools for ambitious Africans, a state of affairs which neither military nor colonial officials expected or intended.

II

One of the primary reasons that the army has been overlooked as an educational institution is that most historians of Africa have tended to misinterpret the debate in British military circles over the value of an educated soldier. In an article on the South African military during the Second World War, Louis Grundlingh has remarked: 'Formal education was never seen as a major aim of the army.'²⁷ Similarly, in writing about Kenyan soldiers during the same era, O. J. E. Shiroya has argued: 'The military authorities did not see any necessity for training an African in an area that would not add to his skills as a soldier. Had literacy been considered functionally needed for the army, no doubt most African soldiers would have had adequate training in reading and writing.'²⁸ While these interpretations are understandable given the overall subordinate status of African soldiers, in point of fact many colonial officers in East Africa did believe that education had military value. They mistrusted profoundly the graduates of civilian schools, but they needed skilled Africans to keep the King's African Rifles running and were therefore prepared to produce their own African military specialists.

Education programmes in the metropolitan British Army date back to the 1860s when military officials introduced Army Certificates of Education to measure and reward the educational progress of rank-and-file soldiers. Indian colonial soldiers received formal English language instruction by the turn of the century, and the British Army established its Army Education Corps in 1920. The supporters of military education believed that educated troops were more efficient and easier to train: 'The soldier who understands the cause for which he fights is likely to be a more reliable soldier than the

one who doesn't.²⁹ In East Africa, however, colonial military officials were less concerned with explaining their aims and purposes to rank-and-file askaris; they required inexpensive and reliable clerks, signallers, mechanics, drivers, engineers, and gunners to reduce the overall cost of the King's African Rifles.

The colonial army's need for military specialists forced it to relax temporarily its bias against recruiting educated Africans during the First World War. Once the hostilities were concluded, however, the KAR established rigid policies against recruiting the graduates of mission schools. Instead, individual battalions began their own improvised educational programmes to provide serving askaris with technical training and limited literacy in either Swahili or English. Nyasaland's 1 KAR required its off-duty African non-commissioned officers (NCOs), signallers, and scouts to attend the battalion school. In Uganda, 4 KAR had the same requirement for NCOs, but allowed interested rank and file askaris to attend as well. The Ugandan KAR was also the only battalion during this period to offer schooling to the sons of African soldiers in the hope that they would enlist as military specialists once they came of age.³⁰

These limited educational programmes were more than enough to meet the requirements of the inter-war KAR, but the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 forced East African military authorities to undertake a rapid modernization programme that increased the army's demand for educated African manpower substantially. The need for trained African signallers was particularly acute. With the old biases against recruiting mission school graduates still firmly in place, colonial military officials adopted the stopgap measure of creating a special KAR signalling class at the Government African School in Machakos. Drawn almost exclusively from the Kamba, one of the KAR's 'martial races', the course sent a yearly average of fifteen graduates into the army between 1935 and 1939.³¹

Furthermore, the prospect of rapid mobilization also increased the likelihood that the colonial army would have to rely on metropolitan British officers who knew very little Swahili. As a result, the Inspector General of the KAR ordered the battalions to begin basic English instruction for the entire African rank and file. The new regulations proved especially popular in Nyasaland where askaris recognized that a command of English was a key to high-paying civilian jobs in South Africa and Rhodesia. Yet this break with tradition alarmed the colonial military establishment's old guard who feared that teaching English would make the KAR too popular, thereby attracting non-martial recruits who would desert once they had acquired enough marketable skills.³² Just as civil officials worried that army education was 'dangerous education', KAR traditionalists believed conventional civil education undermined military discipline.

III

These fears about the dangers of blurring army and civil education were never put to the test because the outbreak of the Second World War brought about a major revision in the East African military's recruiting and educational policies. The necessity of fighting a modern war forced colonial military authorities to modify the training of rank and file askaris. These changes included both formal and informal types of military education. In addition to conventional drill in modern weapons and tactics, African military training during the Second World War was also devoted to acculturating soldiers to the values and customs of the colonial forces.

Wartime training was a type of informal education intended to allow African units to serve in formations with units from both metropolitan Britain and the greater Empire. Africans who served overseas during the conflict became accustomed to western conventions in diet, clothing, and hygiene. Not surprisingly, the exposure to army chaplains, who did not exist in the peacetime KAR, accelerated the spread of Christianity among the African soldiery and an estimated 20,000 askaris were baptized during the course of the war.³³ Although a relatively small percentage of askaris learned English during the war, even those who remained illiterate learned to decipher the intricacies of an army pay book. Soldiers who stayed in East Africa tended to be less affected by these changes in formal and informal military training, but rank and file askaris with overseas experience returned home with a much more sophisticated understanding of western culture.

In terms of formal education, one of the most significant educational consequences of the Second World War came with the army's reluctant decision to institute formal primary and secondary schooling for a small handful of select African troops. The expansion and modernization of the colonial forces over the course of the conflict created an enormous demand for African military specialists. Manpower shortages in Britain sharply limited the number of metropolitan officers available for service in East Africa, and with local European farmers needed to maintain agricultural production, military officials had no choice but to rely on Africans to assume greater leadership and technical roles in the colonial army. In 1943, the East Africa Command's Assistant Adjutant General, Brigadier A. J. Knott, deemed 'intelligent and educated African boys' vital to the war effort. 'There are still many jobs in military as well as civilian life which the African cannot do, but there is a very large number of jobs which before the war we thought an African could not do and which we have taught him to do. We are still finding more of these jobs in which, for war purposes, Europeans can be replaced by Africans.'³⁴ These new jobs included the

senior non-commissioned ranks and skilled positions in the East African forces' artillery, engineering, medical, ordinance, intelligence, and educational branches. Moreover, the army needed as many English-speaking askaris as it could get because, as expected, few of the metropolitan officers posted to East Africa during the war learned fluent Swahili.

Yet the long-standing prohibition against educated recruits was not based solely on the biases of the colonial military establishment. Most graduates of mission schools avoided the army because they could find much better paying clerical jobs in civilian life. These opportunities increased substantially during the Second World War. As a result, military recruiters had to target school boys from approved ethnic groups who had just enough education to be of use, but not enough education to qualify for white-collar civilian jobs. In practical terms, this amounted to five years of primary school, but in most cases such students were under sixteen years of age and were therefore too young for the army.³⁵ Furthermore, mission authorities were often unwilling to allow the army access to their charges, which led recruiters in Nyasaland to charge the mission at Livingstonia with 'pacifism'.³⁶

As the war progressed, the East Africa Command had to scramble to find the educated men that it needed. It considered a proposal to establish recruit training programmes in Kenyan and Ugandan schools, but the scheme failed owing to opposition from African parents and mission authorities. Moreover, the KAR's old guard feared that the plan would allow mission teaching to creep into the army.³⁷ Military authorities therefore had little option but to establish their own basic education programmes at the East African recruiting depots. The largest of these was the Maseno Depot School in western Kenya. Beginning in late 1942, the school offered a four-month course which trained drafts of 450 sixteen and seventeen-year-old boys destined for the Signals and Medical Corps in simple mathematics and basic English.³⁸

These army education programmes were well received by Africans from 'martial races' who had little access to conventional schooling in peacetime. Parents appreciated that the Maseno Depot School was free, and by 1943 there was a long waiting list for admission. The Commissioner of Nyanza Province described the Depot's typical students as 'those whose parents cannot, for various reasons, maintain them at school. They would be of very little use to the society in the Reserve, for they are too young to play much part in production, and are of the type who would become the "loafers" round markets, etc., until such time as they attain maturity.'³⁹ This view was shared by the Commissioner of Central Province who believed that enlistment in the army's specialist branches 'dissipated the disappointment'

of qualified African students who could not afford to continue their education or were unable to secure one of the handful of openings in civilian secondary schools. For the most part, interviews with African veterans of the Second World War confirm these assumptions. K. Keino considered the military a primary source of education. Okong'o Ounya joined the army because his parents could not pay his school fees and Israel Banda became an askari after he dropped out of school for lack of funds.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the army's new commitment to African education did not immediately solve its shortage of skilled manpower. The colonial military establishment did not have enough trained teachers to establish Maseno-type schools at recruiting depots throughout East Africa. Civil education officials refused to share their resources with the military, which prompted Brigadier Knott to threaten to conscript the staffs of all government-run African primary schools if the army's manpower demands were not met.⁴¹ The impracticality of this largely empty threat forced military officials to realize that they needed their own corps of African teachers.

Planning for the East Africa Army Education Corps (EAAEC) began in late 1941 when senior colonial officers began to worry about the African soldiery's declining morale after the defeat of the Italians in the Ethiopian campaign. These concerns became even more pressing in February 1942 after the KAR 25th Brigade in Eritrea refused to board ships for Ceylon. The brigade's askaris believed that the expulsion of the Italians from East Africa signalled the end of the war, and, at the very least, they demanded home leave before going to Southeast Asia or the Middle East.⁴² General William Platt, the General Officer Commanding the East Africa Command, therefore concluded that a general education programme was needed to explain the Allied war aims to the African soldiery. Colonial military authorities believed bored askaris were more likely to drink excessively and seek the company of prostitutes. Platt therefore assumed military education programmes for African soldiers would improve health and morale by providing a more wholesome and productive use of their spare time. He also hoped askaris would prepare for their return to civilian life by learning useful technical skills that would lead to well-paid jobs. Finally, East African civil officials sanctioned formal army education to blunt the Colonial Office's criticism that they had unnecessarily cut back on African education during the war.⁴³

As a result, the East Africa Army Education Corps came into being formally on 7 February 1942. F. G. Sellwood, a teacher from Kenya's Alliance High School, became the unit's first commander with the rank of Major. For its headquarters, the EAAEC took over the Jeanes School on the outskirts of Nairobi, which in turn became the 'Command School of Education'. The EAAEC itself was divided into European and African

'wings'. The former provided Swahili-language instruction for British officers, and the latter trained African interpreters and army education instructors (the military term for teachers).

In terms of personnel, more than half of the EAAEC's European staff was drawn from the civilian education departments of the East African colonies. African recruits had to have at least eight years of primary education and five years of English-language instruction. After a four-month course consisting of teaching methodology, orienteering, hygiene, 'savings methods', and the history and geography of the war, they graduated with the rank of Sergeant.⁴⁴ Some instructors were graduates of Makerere College, but most were drawn directly from the African staffs of civilian primary schools. Although mission educators complained bitterly that the army was poaching their teachers by offering higher wages, military recruiters had little sympathy for their previously unco-operative civilian colleagues.⁴⁵ Initially there were only 50 African education instructors in the EAAEC, but by 1945, the unit numbered over 600 instructors drawn from all of East Africa. Interestingly, almost 40 per cent of the Kenyan education instructors were Kikuyu, an ethnic group which military recruiters had dismissed as a 'non-martial race'.⁴⁶ During the war military necessity clearly outweighed the ethnic biases of the colonial military establishment.

Upon graduation, African education instructors were either reposted to the Command School of Education where they taught British officers Swahili or sent to individual units where they conducted general education courses for rank and file askaris. Generally speaking, these classes consisted of instruction in reading and writing Swahili or Chewa (the lingua franca of the Nyasaland KAR battalions), English, map reading, simple arithmetic, hygiene, wartime geography, soil conservation, and home improvement. The latter two had little military value, but were intended to facilitate post-war demobilization. In practice, however, the actual duties of African teachers were determined by where they served. In the Middle East, where formal education was intended primarily to improve discipline in off-duty African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps companies, army teachers tended to be confined to the class room. In India and Burma they often assumed more explicit military duties. This was due in part to the prejudices of some unit commanders against African education instructors. On the other hand, fluency in English and a grasp of basic mathematics were valuable assets in a combat zone. Thus, some instructors served in intelligence platoons and others commanded East African artillery batteries.⁴⁷

More significantly, army teachers played the informal but equally important task of explaining and interpreting British military culture for their less-educated African comrades. The East Africa Command's Civil

Liaison Officer in Southeast Asia noted that this role gave education instructors a tremendous amount of influence in frontline battalions.

Even in so simple a matter as explaining to the class how their pay-book balances are kept or how remittances are made the questions frequently carry an implication that there is fraud somewhere. If the Education NCOs get these questions on duty, those which they get off duty are probably still more pointed and, as the most educated Africans around, they are certain to be asked all sorts of posers about the war, about civil policy at home and about post-war conditions. Their character must be such as to resist the temptation of showing off; they must be adept at turning aside awkward questions; their loyalty must be beyond question and an example to others.⁴⁸

These fears were well-founded. Senior officers grumbled that army teachers developed 'swollen heads and a mind above drills and soldier's work'. The disciplinary records of wartime East African units detail numerous cases of African education instructors being punished for insubordination that ranged from questioning orders to refusing to accept training as infantrymen. Some battalions dismissed their EAAEC personnel for engaging in explicit 'political agitation', which usually meant questioning the legitimacy of British colonial rule. These incidents are corroborated by several African veterans who credit Paul Ngei, a Kamba Sergeant who taught Swahili to British officers, with 'initiating them into [nationalist] politics'.⁴⁹

The ability of African teachers to undermine military discipline reinforced the colonial military establishment's long-standing bias against educated soldiers. Although they acknowledged the value of teaching askaris to write short messages, read posted orders, and understand the entries on their pay and identity cards, many unit commanders refused to accept education instructors in their battalions. In 1943, senior officers blamed the growing unrest in the 11th (East African) Division training in Ceylon on army education.

No one would question for a moment the ultimate wisdom of [the] educational campaign, but there is no doubt that [African soldiers] remain children at heart and are finding it difficult to digest their newly acquired knowledge. Many of them, in turn, have rather lost their heads and are inclined to be unduly touchy and take an exaggerated view of their newly acquired dignity.⁵⁰

These views were largely shared by the civilian opponents of army education. The Kenyan settler community considered the creation of the EAAEC ill-advised and dangerous. Mission officials agreed on the grounds

that 'The educational sergeant is of the semi-educated type. Without the stabilising aid of religion such a man is a potential danger to morale both now in the companies, and later in the African village.'⁵¹

Rank and file African soldiers, on the other hand, enthusiastically embraced the military's new educational opportunities. The well-attended army education classes ensured that most became literate in their own vernacular languages during the war. The British journalist Gerald Hanley observed that almost 85 per cent of an African artillery battery in Burma had learnt to read and write in just six months.⁵² English-language instruction was also popular (although some battalions limited it to military specialists), and enthusiastic askaris wrote to their relatives in East Africa advising them to attend adult education classes whenever possible.⁵³

The recollections of African veterans confirm these accounts. According to Gideon Kyaitha, a Kamba Signals Sergeant, the EAAEC was one of the most respected branches of service because it offered training which qualified a man for well-paid civilian jobs. Muhammed Mukhtar Shidiye, a nominated Somali member of the Kenyan Parliament, recalls that his uncle Hassan learned to read and write while serving with the East African forces in Burma. In Shidiye's estimation, most educated Kenyan Somalis of the post-war generation were the sons or nephews of askaris.⁵⁴ As members of 'martial races', both Gideon Kyaitha and Hassan Shidiye came from societies which had limited access to civilian schooling. Their enthusiasm for the army education programmes reflected their understanding that military service offered the chance to circumvent the limitations of colonial education.

For a small handful of fortunate ex-servicemen, these opportunities continued during the demobilization process in the immediate post-war era. Civil officials worried that African veterans might constitute a threat to the colonial regime and therefore granted the most educated former askaris, those with the potential to articulate veterans' grievances in political terms, additional vocational training. Conversely, they expected unskilled rank and file ex-servicemen to return to the land. Nyasaland was by far the most generous of the East African territories in granting qualified veterans the chance to continue their education. During the war, the protectorate's governor had promised schoolboy recruits the opportunity to return to school after the conflict was over. The Nyasaland government therefore provided a yearly allowance of 120 shillings to the missions for each ex-serviceman they re-admitted. Uganda's Makerere College also offered a special, short arts and sciences course for former askaris and provided bursaries for 57 East African ex-servicemen to study architecture, agriculture, chemistry, economics, engineering, and veterinary surgery.⁵⁵ On the whole, these programmes were mechanisms of social advancement, and

thus represented a valuable reward for educated African veterans of the Second World War.

IV

The wartime success of the East Africa Army Education Corps helped to put to rest the King's African Rifles' long-standing bias against educated African soldiers. When colonial military authorities set about returning the East African forces to pre-war levels in 1946, they transformed EAAEC into the 'Command Pool of African Education Instructors'. The Jeanes School returned to its original civilian function, and African teachers were posted directly to individual units and the army's new East African Training Centre at Nakuru, Kenya. The size of the new formation varied, but in the late 1950s the KAR's education wing consisted of 12 British officers and NCOs and 50 African education instructors.⁵⁶ This institutionalization of African education in the colonial military reflected the metropolitan British Army's greater emphasis on social welfare programmes to improve the morale and discipline of rank and file soldiers.

Army education took on an added significance in East Africa as a controversy over whether to commission Africans as officers in the King's African Rifles erupted in the late 1940s. The racial segregation of the colonial officer corps became harder to defend once the Royal West African Frontier Force, the KAR's West African counterpart, and the British Army itself commissioned a handful of non-European officers. Faced with mounting pressure from African politicians and anti-imperialist liberals in Britain, the East African colonial military establishment fell back on the defence that there were no suitable East African candidates with the necessary educational background to hold a commission.⁵⁷ This excuse was generally effective until the late 1950s when the growing expense of British military personnel and the sudden realization that the colonial era was drawing to an end forced the KAR to begin a crash programme to recruit qualified African officer candidates. Yet when the East Africa Command's selection board compiled a list of eight candidates for admission to the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, three withdrew to attend Makerere, one dropped out of sight, and four were disqualified because they were Kikuyu.⁵⁸ The KAR had a strict ban on recruiting Kikuyu in the 1950s because of their role in Kenya's Mau Mau Emergency. Thus, senior KAR officers found they had no choice but to find their own politically reliable officer candidates by trying to educate promising askaris.

From the African standpoint, the army's new educational policies made the KAR an even more viable alternative to the civil education offered by

mission and government schools. Beginning in 1945, African soldiers could earn 'education certificates' to document their academic progress. First established in 1860 to promote general literacy among working class metropolitan soldiers, education certificates had long been a requirement for promotion in the regular British Army. In East Africa, the KAR's post-war education certificates provided an ideal gauge to measure the general educational progress and qualifications of the African soldiery. To earn a Third Class Education Certificate and promotion to Corporal, an askari had to read and write Swahili (or Chewa), do simple arithmetic, and recount the regimental history of the KAR. Sergeants needed a Second Class Certificate, which required them to speak English, know intermediate maths, and pass tests on hygiene, agricultural science, colonial government, and the history of East Africa. Promotion to Warrant Officer required a First Class Education Certificate. At this level, instruction was entirely in English and candidates had to demonstrate competency in basic algebra, village economics, 'citizenship', and imperial history and geography. As previously noted, 55 per cent of all rank and file askaris had at least an East African Third Class Army Certificate of Education by 1951. Thirteen per cent held a first or second class certificate, which meant that slightly more than one in ten askaris had some proficiency in English.⁵⁹

This greater emphasis on English-language instruction was part of a new initiative by the colonial military authorities to make English the KAR's primary language of command. After most metropolitan British officers failed to learn Swahili during the Second World War, senior KAR officers decided it was preferable for their askaris to know English. To be sure, the new policy required a substantial attitude shift among the Regiment's old guard. In 1948, a circular issued by the KAR Northern Brigade ordered: 'In the past ... it has been considered "bad form" or even, in some cases, insulting for an African askari to speak English to an Officer or [British] NCO. This feeling must change and, in the future, every encouragement [must be] given to African ranks to speak English on and off duty.'⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it proved impossible to make the African soldiery universally fluent in English. Uganda's 4 KAR reported that askaris with rural backgrounds found the language too difficult and avoided speaking it at every opportunity. This was understandable given that African teachers were expected to use the 'direct method approach' that required students to speak English at all times. Although many Kenyan askaris appreciated the chance to learn English, the colonial military establishment was eventually forced to work on making askaris literate in Swahili.⁶¹ Ambitious soldiers still had the opportunity to learn English, but the KAR's failed English-language programme demonstrates that the colonial army was not an effective instrument of mass education.

On the other hand, the King's African Rifles did become an important educator of African children during the final decades of British rule in East Africa. In 1949, military planners estimated that the 5,428 askaris serving in the KAR had approximately 8,136 children, of which 60 per cent were of school age.⁶² Although many of these children stayed with their relatives in rural East Africa, a substantial number lived in the barracks. Military authorities encouraged the practice because they believed that the presence of families made Africans soldiers easier to discipline. Moreover, they hoped soldiers' sons would become future askaris and recognized that the privilege of keeping a family in the barracks was both an enticement for enlistment and a reward for reliable service.

Thus the colonial military establishment became responsible for the welfare of the children of the African soldiery. In most battalions this obligation included providing for their education. In the immediate post-war era, individual units established their own informal schools with army education instructors serving as teachers. In most cases they followed the civilian primary school curriculum of the territory in which they were stationed.⁶³ As the number of students grew the colonial military relied instead on civilian teachers when a battalion was at home and army instructors when it was stationed in another East African territory. In the 1950s the KAR transferred responsibility for managing its battalion schools to local District Education Boards in an effort to save money and reduce demands on army education personnel.⁶⁴

In the late 1950s the KAR created a Junior Leader Company (JLC) at the Kahawa Barracks in Nairobi to solve the shortage of qualified African officer candidates. Run along the lines of a secondary boarding school, the JLC recruited fourteen-year-old African boys (with their parents' permission) from 'martial' societies throughout East Africa. In addition to having the proper ethnic background, candidates also had to have passed the civilian primary school exam in their home territory. As a rule, the JLC admitted a new class of 50 boys every year.⁶⁵ Admission to the Junior Leader Company was highly competitive because it was better equipped and funded than comparable civilian schools, and parents and students understood that the top graduates would be commissioned. Most recruits passed the Kenya African Secondary Exam, and in 1958 the Company ranked thirteenth in order of merit among the 53 African secondary schools in Nairobi.⁶⁶

Taken as a whole, the army's child and adult education programmes provided a powerful incentive for enlistment and reliable service. Faced with the expense and limitations of civilian education in East Africa, askaris valued army education because it was high quality and virtually free (parents paid a nominal fee for the battalion schools). It was also relatively

free from the rigid structure and religious indoctrination found in most mission schools. Finally, at a time when the Beecher Report limited substantially African access to all levels of the education system, most civil authorities recognized the army's First Class Education Certificate as being equal to the Kenya African Preliminary Examination. The KAPE was important because it was required for promotion to a secondary school. Most veterans were too old to continue their formal schooling after leaving the KAR, but the army's educational training was a key asset in finding a well-paid civilian job.

V

In conclusion, we must now return to the question of whether military education was in fact 'dangerous' education. In other words, did the army's failure to maintain the supervision and social safeguards of civilian African schools produce a politically unstable African soldiery? Historians of West Africa continue to disagree over the role of African ex-servicemen in nationalist politics, but in hindsight it is now clear that civil fears about the political inclinations of East African veterans were largely unfounded.⁶⁷ As Frank Furedi has observed:

Any historian investigating official correspondence for the period will be struck by the discrepancy between the prevalence of imperial concern and the relative absence of specific causes of this concern. ... The discrepancy between the fears expressed regarding the returning colonial soldier and the actual record of unrest is striking. There were of course disturbances and even small-scale mutinies of local troops in Africa. But overall imperial control was rarely challenged and even less frequently threatened by colonial soldiers.⁶⁸

This lack of political activity can be attributed largely to the colonial regime's elaborate demobilization policies which divided the African military class by providing educated specialists and senior African NCOs with tangible opportunities for social advancement while offering minimal vocational training and compensation to unskilled rank and file ex-servicemen.

Generally speaking, East African veterans played a very small role in the organized political resistance to British colonial rule in the post-war era. The major exceptions to this were educated ex-servicemen, particularly the former members of the East Africa Army Education Corps. Many ex-army teachers rose to senior positions in the colonial administration. In Kenya a record of reliable military service advanced men like Musa Amalemba and Jonathan Nzioka to the Legislative Council in the 1950s. Other ex-Army

Education Instructors became teachers, journalists, translators, librarians, and administrative officers.⁶⁹ The combination of military training and political awareness made these former military specialists the most dangerous members of the African military class. Therefore colonial officials had a strong incentive to provide them with vocational opportunities that were commensurate with their experience.

On the other hand, a smaller but still significant handful of educated veterans did assume leadership roles in opposing the colonial regime. In most cases these men either had a personal history of anti-colonial agitation before they joined the army or were politicized over the course of their military service. In the former case, it is most likely that Paul Ngei, the army education instructor who introduced African soldiers to politics, was forced to leave Kenya's Alliance High School due to disciplinary problems that had political overtones. Conversely, Bildad Kaggia, a Sergeant and army clerk who served in the Middle East and Great Britain, was radicalized by the racial discrimination that he experienced at the hands of lower ranking European enlisted men.⁷⁰ Both men were the only ex-servicemen to be jailed alongside Jomo Kenyatta for supporting the Mau Mau guerrillas in the early 1950s. In Tanzania, former members of the EAAEC were active in the Tanganyikan African National Union.

In hindsight, the decision of whether to deal with the colonial system from without or within appears to have been dictated by the inclinations of individual educated veterans. On the whole, members of 'martial races' tended to enjoy the trust of the colonial regime and therefore had greater opportunities for individual advancement. Paul Ngei was able to attend Makerere before he was arrested for Mau Mau activities. Army education gave politically-minded veterans the perspective and ability to oppose colonial rule if they were so inclined, but many chose instead to take advantage of the opportunities presented by their training and military reputations. Matthew Kipoin, the education instructor who barely escaped a court martial in Malaya, read books like Karl Marx's *Das Kapital* in the East Africa Command's library in Nairobi that had been banned by civilian officials.⁷¹ Yet Kipoin was no Marxist, and rather than using his skills to oppose the colonial regime, he instead became an independent film-maker. Thus army education was only dangerous when the colonial regime failed to provide sufficient avenues for social advancement to educated African soldiers.

The complex nature of army education in East Africa underscores the limitations of the debate over the nature and purpose of civilian African education. In theory, military schooling had the potential to be dangerous because it lacked the supervision and social safeguards of the civilian education system. To be sure, the officer corps of the King's African Rifles

was racially exclusive, but senior officers were concerned only with military utility and, unlike civilian educators, had little interest in adapting their education programmes to the 'rural African mentality'. The need for educated African military specialists and then African officers outweighed the need to reinforce the racially subordinate position of Africans in colonial society. As was the case in the United States, the East African colonial military pursued limited integrationist policies before they were accepted by the greater civilian population. Furthermore, army education was more often a stabilizing than a disruptive force in promoting social order. By offering educational opportunities to the African soldiery it helped to relieve the pressure on the under-funded and over-burdened civilian African schools. It also provided ambitious askaris with the credentials and educational qualifications needed for social advancement in colonial East Africa. As was the case with civilian education, army schooling was a contradictory institution which could be both a dangerous and a stabilizing force in colonial society.

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NOTES

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6. Andrew Doig, 'The Christian Church and Demobilization in Africa', *International Review of Missions*, 35 (1946), 176.
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8. Stafford Kay, 'African Roles, Responses, and Initiatives in Colonial Education: The Case of Western Kenya', *Paedagogica Historica*, 16 (1976), 275.
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16. Clive Whitehead, 'British Colonial Educational Policy: A Synonym for Cultural Imperialism?', in J.A. Mangan (ed.), *'Benefits Bestowed?': Education and British Imperialism* (Manchester, 1988), 218–20.
17. Kay, 273.
18. T.G. Benson, 'The Jeanes School and the Education of the East Africa Native', *Journal of the Royal African Society*, 36 (1936), 418.
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20. Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, *Education Department Annual Report, 1935*, 46.
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