Military Recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War.
Monsieur Roger Thomas

Citer ce document / Cite this document :
http://www.persee.fr/doc/cea_0008-0055_1975_num_15_57_2610

Document généré le 26/06/2017
Military Recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War

The First World War provided an important and often unasked for introduction to a wider world for thousands of ordinary West Africans. Some 200,000 men from French West Africa and 25,000 from the British West African colonies fought in a variety of campaigns. ‘French’ African troops were involved in the Togo and Cameroons campaigns, and, significantly, on the Western Front. ‘British’ African troops fought in Togo and the Cameroons and, most extensively, in the long drawn out and bitterly contested East African campaign.

Several studies have been made of the recruiting campaigns in French West Africa. It is clear from these that the majority of recruits were conscripted in a brutal but ‘legal’ manner which tallied with peacetime French forced labour policies. The intensity of recruitment and the accompanying increase in wartime taxation and general labour demands often led to the revolt or flight of whole villages into the bush or across borders. At least as far as military service was concerned all West Africans were regarded as Frenchmen—although generally denied the right to serve in ‘metropolitan’ units—and paid for that privilege by dying in the mud of the Somme.

By contrast, although conscription was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1916, there was no de jure extension of this system to the British West African colonies. This had led students of the period to conclude that all the soldiers recruited for the West African Frontier Force during the First World War were volunteers. This paper examines

1. For numbers involved see Michael Crowder, West Africa under Colonial Rule (London, 1968): 266, n. 27.

Cahiers d’Études Africaines, 57, XV-1, pp. 57-83.
the military recruiting campaigns carried out in the Gold Coast during the war and concludes that this is an oversimplified description of the situation.

In peacetime, forced labour ‘on the spot’ in various parts of British West Africa often exceeded the ‘communal labour’ which Governors and Secretaries of State blandly claimed was its limit. Not surprisingly, a similar pattern emerges when the recruitment of ‘volunteers’ for the Gold Coast Regiment is examined. In most of the southern area of the Gold Coast—that is the Colony proper and Ashanti—‘democratic’ control of the chiefs, a relatively sophisticated public opinion, a watchful indigenous press and political representation on the Legislative Council limited the significant use of either direct or indirect forced recruitment of soldiers. If the chiefs were unable or unwilling to produce volunteers, or volunteers refused to come forward, little could be done by the administration except to redouble exhortation. In most cases the chiefs ignored such appeals. In two States, however, Akyem Abuakwa and Manya Krobo, the paramount chiefs were especially eager to demonstrate their loyalty to the British Crown. To this end they put considerable pressure on their young male subjects to enlist. However, in the end, their limited success was only achieved by paying bounties to the men or their families.

**Recruitment in the Northern Territories**

The situation in the Northern Territories, which were in any case the traditional area for military recruitment, contrasted markedly with that in the South. Colonial government here had remained quasi-military in personnel, spirit and action. This administration itself resorted to a variety of methods of compulsion ranging from exhortation laced with insult and threat to direct orders. Chiefs in the area were in many cases appointees of the British who had been imposed on previously acephalous societies or had been vested with greatly enhanced authoritarian powers. They were accustomed to acting as the agents of the administration in the recruitment of labour and sometimes used this position to their own advantage. Opposition to such chiefly excesses was hampered by the fact that the power of popular destoolment of chiefs common in the South was virtually non-existent, or had become monopolised by the administration. Nevertheless, resistance to de facto conscription came from some chiefs, as well as from the young men who often either fled before

---


5. See, for example, the cases of chiefs in the Lawra-Tumu district who used the authority of the administration to collect not only labour for road work and transport but also, illicitly, additional labour for work on their own farms. These are discussed in File ADM 1/143, National Archives of Ghana (hereafter: NAG), Tamale.
enlistment or deserted afterwards. The limitations of the compulsory method were also reflected in the poor physical condition of many recruits, particularly in 1918. The most spectacular example of resistance—the importance of which was exaggerated—came in March 1917 when a small scale ‘revolt’ broke out in the Bole District. Such incidents led the more thoughtful members of the administration, including Governor Clifford, to ponder whether recruitment campaigns of any description did not cause more disruption than was justified by their relatively meagre results.

During the First World War, 9,890 African troops were employed in the Gold Coast Regiment of the West African Frontier Force. Of these, 5,608 were recruited during the course of the war. 4,908 were enlisted in 1917 and 1918, 3,499 in the peak year, 1917. Of the total, 3,879, or over 69%, were recruited in the Northern Territories.

### Table I

**Return of Recruits by District in which Recruited 1914-1918**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1916</th>
<th>1917</th>
<th>1918</th>
<th>1914-1918</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colony</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>896</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>(16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashanti</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>(12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togo</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>91</td>
<td></td>
<td>115</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territories</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>1,887</td>
<td>1,399</td>
<td>3,879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>116</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>3,499</td>
<td>1,409</td>
<td>5,608</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, as with other forms of labour recruitment in the Northern Territories, not all those enlisted in the Protectorate were natives of it. There was a steady migration of able-bodied men across the borders from French territory. These sought work and were fleeing from harsh taxation and labour obligations. The movement increased as the French

6. For a parallel example of the link between unfit labour and forced recruitment, see Thomas: 101-102.


For slightly different figures, see Governor to Secretary of State (telegram), 12 Aug. 1918, NAG-Accra (A) ADM 12/5/123. This reports that pre-war there were 1,386 combatants and 124 gun carriers. Between 4 Aug. 1914 and 6 Aug. 1918, 7,579 fighting troops, 362 gun carriers and 993 motor drivers were enlisted. These figures do not include civilian non-enlisted drivers and carriers for whom records were not kept. Of 7,579 fighting troops, 652 were a total loss through desertion.

8. Return of recruits enlisted showing districts in which recruited, forwarded to Chief Commissioner, Ashanti by Acting Colonial Secretary, 5 Oct. 1920, NAG-Kumasi (K) 1539.
intensified their own military recruitment from 1917 on.\textsuperscript{9} Table II, a breakdown by ethnic group of those recruited in the Northern Territories shows several groups who could only have originated outside the Gold Coast although some individuals would certainly have been long term residents or have been born there. These included the large contingents of Zabarima, Fulani, Hausa and Mosi. Other groups, such as the Grunshi, Sisala and Lobi straddled the borders. Conversely, a number of natives of the Protectorate were recruited in other areas. For example, fifty-four Northern Territories men were recruited in the Kwahu district and sixty-seven in Accra in the first two months of 1917.\textsuperscript{10} In March 1917, twenty to thirty were said to be enlisting each week in Kumasi.\textsuperscript{11}

**Table II**

**Ethnic Breakdown of Men Enlisted in Northern Territories 1914-1918**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1916</th>
<th>1917</th>
<th>1918</th>
<th>1914-1918</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basari*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zabarima*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busanga*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chakosi*</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagarti</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dagomba</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frafra</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grumah*</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grunshi</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>275</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gonja</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hausa*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>591</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sisala</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kampala*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kanjaga (Builsa)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>266</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kipalsi*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Konkomba</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotokoli*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kusasi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>394</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mamprusi</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mossi*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{9} In fact in 1916, at French request, an Ordinance had been passed by the Gold Coast government applicable in Ashanti and the Northern Territories which empowered the respective Chief Commissioners to surrender to the French 'draft evaders' who had crossed the borders. However, Governor Clifford baulked at the suggestion that the arrangement might be extended to the Colony in view of the likely outcry which might arise from a more sophisticated public. Governor Clifford to W. Long, 30 May 1917, PRO/CO 96/579.

\textsuperscript{10} Enclosure 2 in Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 6 Mar. 1917, PRO/CO 445-38.

\textsuperscript{11} Acting Chief Commissioner, Northern Territories (CCNT) to Acting Governor Slater, 30 Mar. 1917, Enc. 1 in Governor Clifford to W. Long, 29 May 1917, PRO/CO 445-39.
In Table III an attempt is made to give an approximate picture of the ratio of Northern Territories recruits (‘foreign’) — those asteriscised in Table II — to Northern Territories recruits (‘native’). Insofar as it does not take account of those ‘foreigners’ who had been long resident in the Protectorate it therefore gives a minimum rather than an exact view of the native Gold Coast element. The composition of recruits in 1914 (59% ‘foreign’, 41% ‘native’) probably represents the normal composition of the regiment in pre-war conditions. The sharp drop in the ratio of ‘foreign’ to ‘native’ recruits in 1917 and 1918 is to be related to the change in recruiting policy from waiting for recruits to come in to positively seeking them out in their villages with the use of forcible or semi-forcible methods. The very sharp drop in ‘foreign’ recruitment in 1918 is presumably also indicative of the success of the notorious intensification of French recruiting under the direction of Blaise Diagne from January 1918 onwards. The overall figure of approximately 50% of recruits from 1914-1918 being drawn from residents of the Northern Territories is to be set against the fact that only some 25-30% of the population of the Gold Coast lived in the Protectorate.

Table III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1915</th>
<th>1916</th>
<th>1917</th>
<th>1918</th>
<th>1914-1918</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total NT</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1399</td>
<td>3879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign NT</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native NT</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>1267</td>
<td>1327</td>
<td>2765</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Gold Coast Regiment took part in three campaigns during the First World War — in Togo, the Cameroons and in East Africa. The Togo campaign was concluded by August 26, 1914 and involved only the existing strength of the regiment. The Cameroons campaign was more extended, lasting from September 1914 until the beginning of 1916. It involved 1,025 troops as well as 3,294 carriers from the Gold Coast.12

12. 1,391 carriers were recruited for the Togo campaign, apparently all in the Gold Coast, although they consisted of Gold Coasters, Sierra Leonians, Nigerians, Togolese and Liberians. A large number of the 3,294 carriers sent to the Cameroons were Ewe from British occupied Togo. NAG-A ADM 39/5/39 and Major-Gen. Dobell to Sec. of State for War, 1 Mar. 1916, Tables 10 & 11, PRO/WO 33/781.
The conduct of this campaign was clearly partly dependent on new recruits since a total of 507 men were newly enlisted in 1914 and 1915, the vast majority (434) coming from the Northern Territories (cf. Table I).

Evidence concerning the organised recruitment undertaken for this campaign—which was confined to the Northern Territories—is limited but suggests that the number of suitable recruits was already severely limited. Compulsion was already necessary and the standard of recruits was consequently poor. In September 1915, Lieutenant-Colonel Rose inspected 195 recruits from the North in Kumasi. He reported that ‘The majority of the men were dull and stupid, and a considerable number of them were dissatisfied and wished to return to their homes—as they said they did not know they were being brought down country to be soldiers—but were under the impression they were coming down for a year at the most as carriers.’ Rose therefore discharged sixty-seven on the spot, considering them ‘unlikely to become efficient soldiers’.

In October 1915, the Acting Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, Major Moutray-Read, wrote to the Officer in Command of the Tamale Recruiting Band requesting him to give information on the methods he had used in recruiting for the Gold Coast Regiment in the North-East in the previous July and August. The enquiry sprang from the fact that thirteen of the recruits had run away between Zuarungu and Gambaga. As Moutray-Read commented: ‘It is difficult to understand why if the recruits were desirous of enlisting so many should have bolted an I cannot help thinking that the terms of enlistment was [sic] not understood by the recruits.’ Further enquiries directed to the Commissioner of the North-Eastern Province satisfied Moutray-Read ‘that pressure was put on certain Chiefs to obtain recruits, a method that was most deplorable which accounts for the men deserting after enlistment’.

The recruitment efforts of 1915-16 were later to be described by the Governor as a failure. Already in 1915 it was being suggested that efforts might safely and profitably be extended outside the traditional military catchment area, particularly into Ashanti. The Chief Commissioner of Ashanti considered that the inhabitants were ‘heart and soul with us now’. He had no doubt that ‘With some flourish of cymbals and trumpets, a whole company of Ashantis could be recruited but—and this is a point I would insist upon strongly—it will have to be a separate company. The Ashanti mixes badly with strangers, least of all with the Northern Territories recruits.’

---

15. Acting CCNT to Officer Commanding (OC) Gold Coast regiment, Coomassie, 21 Oct. 1915, NAG-A DAM 56/1/17.
was suggesting that it might not be 'too fantastic to hope that in the near future we may see an Ashanti company, a Fanti company, and possibly an Akim company in the Gold Coast regiment.'

Such potential sources of troops became all the more important in view of the unprecedented call for new recruits which came from Whitehall after November 1916, especially as efforts in the Northern Territories were temporarily suspended after April because of political disturbances unrelated to recruitment. The new call for recruits, destined for service in the East African campaign, is to be directly related to the increasingly acute manpower shortage faced by the British government. The British lost 420,000 men in the battle of the Somme between July and November 1916 and even with a stringent conscription system it was proving difficult to maintain the required strength on the Western front. One partial solution which came to mind was a greatly expanded use of colonial troops. In November, after pressure in the House of Commons, discussions between the War Office and the Colonial Office led to requests being sent to the Gold Coast government for the inauguration of special efforts at recruitment. If possible, 135 troops a month were to be drafted to East Africa. Governor Clifford felt that it would be impossible to raise such a large number in view of the disappointing results in the Northern Territories in the previous year. He promised, however, to try to raise 500 men in the Colony and Ashanti. The next week the War Office emphasised the need to recruit additional 'native units', 'in view of the fact that the war may not end for a long time to come [. . .] No efforts should be spared to release as many white troops as possible from those employed in the minor theatres for service on the main British front, and also to meet further demands which may arise in such theatres.'

19. Acting Governor Slater to Sec. of State (telegram), 3 Jan. 1917, PRO/CO 445/38. In April 1916, a fight broke out in Bongo, north of Bolgatanga, over a land dispute. The District Commissioner did not investigate personally but sent two separate small forces of constabulary, three of whose number were killed. It was only in July that the Commissioner designed himself to investigate. Without holding any proper enquiry he allowed his force of constabulary to shoot down and kill fifty-nine of the inhabitants. For an introduction to the voluminous official papers on this incident, see PRO/CO 96/570, which volume is devoted to it.
21. This was led forcefully by Major J. C. Wedgwood from July to November 1916. As he commented in the House on 1 Aug. 1916: 'When we are sweeping the highways and the hedges for everything in this country to go into the firing line I think it is about time we turned our attention to every source which is available.' House Common Debates, vol. 85, col. 186. His campaign came to be known in the Colonial Office as 'the Wedgwood agitation for a Black Army'. Minute by Fiddian on Governor Clifford to Sec. of State (telegram), 3 Nov. 1916, PRO/CO 445/36.
22. Draft Telegram, Sec. of State to Governor, Gold Coast, 2 Nov. 1916, PRO/CO 445/37.
Dependencies were already supplying 3,900 combatants (including 985 from the Gold Coast) and 1,600 carriers in East Africa, but suggested that a recruiting tour of West Africa be undertaken by Major (then appointed Lieutenant-Colonel) A. H. W. Haywood.  

Haywood arrived in the Gold Coast on 1 January 1917. Meanwhile the Commissioner of the Eastern Province had visited the Akwapim scarp, Koforidua and Kibi to discuss recruitment. In addition, a special poster was issued in the Colony on Christmas day appealing for volunteers. At the same time a request was made to the Northern Territories administration to supply at least 500 men for East Africa.

At the beginning of January, Haywood, accompanied by the Acting Governor, toured the Eastern Province and in March he returned from Lagos to visit the Western Province, Ashanti and Kwahu. Meanwhile in February the Central Province had been visited by the Acting Governor and follow-up visits to towns in the Eastern Province were made by the Acting Colonial Secretary in the same month. Haywood did not visit the Northern Territories but one of his staff officers, Captain Blackburn, remained there for some time recruiting.

For a variety of reasons the efforts in the south yielded disappointing results. In Accra, despite a number of meetings with the Ga Manche and his sub-chiefs, only a few individuals signed on. As a last effort a meeting was held between the chiefs and the recruiting Committee (one of whose members was T. Hutton-Mills, the Ga lawyer). The chiefs apparently went so far as to agree that the various quarters and villages of Accra should each undertake to provide a certain number of men. If carried into effect this would clearly have involved some measure of ‘indirect compulsion’. The Acting Colonial Secretary considered that the lack of response was due to the fact that the Accra chiefs had ‘very little prestige’. He threatened that if the proposals failed some other means would have to be found of raising an Accra company ‘before the Accras can be permitted to let the occasion of personal service in the war


26. The poster, signed by the Acting Governor, and addressed to the ‘Chiefs and the People of the Gold Coast Colony’, pointed out that ‘those to whom in the course of nature the people of today will pass on their possessions and this country of the Gold Coast will scan with an eager and an anxious eye the records of Family and of Tribe to learn the measure of the manhood and of the courage of their forefathers in these stirring days of war and danger. It is for you to see to it that there shall descend to your children and your children’s children the proud possession of a personal pride and a national esteem in the record that the Gold Coast peoples [. . .] have played their part as soldiers’. It concluded by cryptically hoping that the answer of the Chiefs and People ‘will be the answer, which not only the old men and women, who in times of war must sit still and wait for news of their sons, but which if they could speak the birds and the beasts, the trees and the streams and the stones of the country would bid the young men reply’. Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 11 Jan. 1917, PRO/CO 445/38.

27. Ibid.
escape them’. The proposals came to nothing—but the Ga people were not forced to volunteer.

The Eastern Province

The same was true of other parts of the Eastern Province where chiefs were recalcitrant. It had been expected, for example, that the Anlo district would respond well to the call for recruits since the people had given enthusiastic assistance to the forces involved in the Togo campaign. However at a meeting held in Keta the Anlo paramount chief, Fia Sri III, was sufficiently embarrassed by the lack of response to offer his own services if no one else would volunteer. After consultations with his sub-chiefs, the Anlo war chief, Awadada Katsiriku, listed, in a letter to District Commissioner, a number of reasons why no men would be supplied from the area. The chiefs pointed out that they had given their assistance to the Togo invasion force because Togo was ‘an approximate land’ to theirs—which could not be said of East Africa. They were unwilling to allow men to travel by sea, ‘for the consequences will be nothing than sickness and death’. Moreover they were not accustomed to European food. In any case the ‘European war’ differed from their ‘native customary war’. They also suggested that the supply of recruits would cause social disruption because of the prevalent polygamous marriage system, arguing that ‘if a father of sons from different mothers give a son of one wife to join the regiment and the other is left, the mother of that son [who] joined the regiment, becomes offended and wishes to revenge by giving unusual disturbances owing to her child [having been] offered for the regiment’. Fia Sri’s personal gesture was described as ‘impetuous’ since it had been made ‘without consulting with war generals of the nation, and according to our native customary law our Fia or Paramount chief is under no obligation to appear in the battle-field; and further that should the Fia desire to make an exception of this rule, he must at any rate consult with the nation before’.

32. This response was soundly based on local custom. As G. K. Nkunya points out in his Kinship and Marriage among the Anlo Ewe (London, 1969); to, ‘The king [Awoamefia] has many attributes of divinity [. . .]; he lives in seclusion, in awome, a sacred place associated with the gods. In the past he has always remained indoors and never appeared in public. Consonant with his seclusion from his people was his prerogative of not going to war. By custom he must never fix his gaze on a corpse. This would spell disaster for his people. He was King and High Priest at the same time, and as such he had to remain at home and perform sacrifices for success in war.’
The Anlo chiefs were not alone in the Eastern Province in listing specific reasons why recruits could not be raised. The Kwahu chiefs also wrote to their District Commissioner arguing that their people were not accustomed to sea voyages or warfare, that was not according to their ‘native customary law and rules’. They added the plea of illiteracy, ignorance of European firearms and clothing, and the possibility that their customary diet would not be available. In this case the chiefs were persuaded to withdraw their letter in order not ‘to shame their descendents by allowing so sorry a record to be filed in the archives of the Division’. In fact, they eventually conceded ‘that all the young men must go’ and agreed to beat gong-gong to this effect throughout the Kwahu towns. The District Commissioner concluded that the chiefs would have welcomed conscription. This view was based on the fact that the general burden of the chiefs’ speeches was that ‘in the old days’ they would have been able to produce unlimited numbers of young men by a mere order, but that now their authority was slender. Indeed it is clear from other sources that the power of the chiefs had recently been declining seriously. Thus, in the previous few years, the ‘young men’ or commoners of Kwahu had begun to assert their independence and to make explicit demands on their chiefs. These demands were backed up by a more militant and organised use of the traditional asafo companies, which, in their origin, appear to have been fundamentally military organisations of the ‘young men’ but had already become a feature of the political organisation of most States. However, despite the weakness of the Kwahu chiefs, the campaign, if no spectacular success, was more fruitful than that in Anlo, since by March 1917, 91 Kwahu were in training in Accra.

In only two areas of the Eastern Province was there positive enthusiasm for the recruiting campaign from Paramount chiefs. These were Nana Ofori Atta, Okyenene of Akyem Abuakwa and Nene Mate Kole, Konor of Manya Krobo. When Haywood and the Acting Governor visited Kibi, capital of Akyem Abuakwa on 4 January, they found that Nana Ofori Atta had already obtained thirty-four recruits. In addition, the town had been liberally posted with notices calling for recruits signed by J. B. Danquah, the Okyenene’s secretary. By the beginning of February Akyem Abuakwa had supplied 200 recruits.

Part of the reason for Ofori Atta’s relative success can be traced to

34. See, for example, ‘New orders and Regulations inaugurated by the whole Kwahu Asafos at Abetifi on 6 Nov. 1917 [1915?] and which will always be adhered to’, NAG-A ADM 11/738.
36. Nene Mate Kole had been appointed as the first chief on the Legislative Council in 1911 and held the position until 1916 (and again from 1921-1926). Nana Ofiri Atta had been appointed to the Council in 1916. KIMBLE 456.
his enactment of special bye-laws which gave extraordinary privileges to those men who agreed to enlist. One clause which speaks of compulsion for certain groups of the population also suggests that much unrecorded pressure was placed on those men who were not tempted by Ofori Atta’s bounties. The bye-laws, passed by the Okyenhene and his elders in December 1916,\(^{39}\) enacted that all chiefs should beat gong-gong in their divisions and should put every effort into obtaining men. Any ‘capable man’ who should attempt to persuade (‘seduce’) any person not to volunteer, was himself to be ‘instantly arrested and forced to enlist’. Any old or unfit man doing the same thing was to be fined £12. Each group of fifteen ‘volunteers’ enlisted was to be led by an educated man. If any among the latter refused to enlist ‘such person [was] to be brought before the Omanhene to assign reasons that preclude him from rendering the service required of him to the British Empire and upon such reasons being found unsatisfactory the party [was] to be ordered to enlist forthwith’. The administration’s reaction to this clause was one of benevolent laissee-faire. The Commissioner of the Eastern Province commented that ‘The compulsory enlistment advocated in Section 10, however desirable, could not be enforced.’\(^{40}\)

Some of Ofori Atta’s methods were, however, more positive. Each volunteer was to be given £7 ‘pocket money’ by the Akyem Abuakwa State—the payments supposedly to be funded from voluntary contributions. In addition, the funeral expenses of any soldier who died were to be paid by the town from which he came, and soldiers were to be freed from all debt obligations.

Fears about the faithfulness of their wives which volunteers might have while they were abroad were comprehensively allayed by three further clauses. It was recommended that every volunteer should request his wife to swear that she would maintain her chastity while he was at war. A woman who failed to swear to chastity would \textit{ipso facto} ‘be deemed to have been committed into adultery during absence of husband [sic]’ and she would be liable to pay the customary ‘satisfaction fee’ which could be demanded of adulterers. Thirdly, from the time of a man’s enlistment, his wife was no longer permitted to seek a divorce.

If these provisions were not a sufficient deterrent to erring wives, the recruits were at least offered extraordinary financial compensation for any breach of trust. Thus for as long as a man remained in the army the ‘satisfaction money’ (\textit{ayefare}) normally paid to the aggrieved husband by his wife’s seducer was to be increased from £3 12s to £12, and the ‘taking and seduction fee’ was proportionately increased to £25.

Funds for such bounties and compensations were clearly not part of the normal expenditure of the Akyem Abuakwa State and had to be raised by an extraordinary levy. This supposedly voluntary levy, a side

\(^{39}\) Enc. in Commissioner, Eastern Province to Sec. for Native Affairs, 4 May 1918, NAG-A ADM 11/690.

\(^{40}\) \textit{Ibid.}, Commissioner’s covering letter.
effect of recruitment, appears to have been a major cause of discontent with the rule of Ofori Atta and chiefs in general. In November 1918, the *asafo* companies of the villages immediately surrounding Kibi marched on the capital to demand account from Ofori Atta for some of his commercial activities. However, as Jarle Simensen has pointed out, one of the immediate causes for the ‘rising’ was the war levy voted by the State Council to help finance the Akyem Abuakwa contingent to East Africa.\(^{41}\)

In Manya Krobo, Nene Mate Kole took an equally keen interest in recruiting. In this case, however, massive desertions from the Accra Cantonments, especially of Krobo, were found to have been caused partly by the use of recruiting methods which involved a certain amount of compulsion. This policy emanated from Mate Kole himself and does not appear to have been inspired by the local administration. It was compounded as a cause of desertion by a misunderstanding over terms of enlistment. Mate Kole himself explained that ‘he had asked for one man from each family, that the family had given the recruits £2, £4, £5, £10 and some £25. The Konor himself had given those from his household £30. The families who had put up the money were apparently going to make it uncomfortable for the recruits who had run away’.\(^{42}\)

The incident over terms of enlistment arose because the form of attestation stated that the enlisted men would be employed ‘until discharge’ instead of ‘for the duration of the war’. Two of the educated young men among the Krobo (whom the Acting Governor considered had acted in a ‘designedly malevolent’ way)\(^{43}\) had told their compatriots that ‘they were signing themselves away for the rest of their lives, but that possibly the Government might let them return to their farms and villages when they were wounded or old and worn out’.\(^{44}\)

By 4 March, only 257 men from a nominal strength of 484 new recruits were present in Accra. Of those who had absented themselves about 100 were Krobo. The Acting Governor concluded that

‘‘Persuasion’ brought to bear on many of the recruits by the sub-chiefs was of a somewhat pressing character: others were attracted by the lavish “dashes” that they found were being handed out, while probably all, including those who enlisted from patriotic or adventurous motives, have found the discipline irksome and the duties arduous, while the nearer draws the unknown life overseas the more formidable looms the nature of their undertaking. In these circumstances we may perhaps congratulate ourselves that over 250 have stood the test so far.’\(^{45}\)

---

42. Acting Colonial Sec. to Acting Governor, 1 Mar. 1917, Enc. 4 in Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 6 Mar. 1917, PRO/CO 445/38.
44. Acting Colonial Sec. to Acting Governor, 1 Mar. 1917, Enc. 4 in Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 6 Mar. 1917, PRO/CO 445/38.
With the assistance of loyalist chiefs the government had recruited at least a trickle of men in the Eastern Province. By contrast, in the Central and Western Provinces, despite the willing assistance of the nationalist élite, result were negligible. On 16 February 1917, the Acting Governor held a durbar at Cape Coast Castle attended by chiefs, town council members and representatives of the nationalist Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society. The small attendance at this meeting was ascribed to a rumour ‘that the Government intended to close the gates of the Castle as soon as the meeting had begun and to conscript all those present’. However, the Acting Governor had already conceded that recruits could only be attracted by the use of the most unorthodox methods. He had concluded that success would only come by ‘frankly recognising’ the position of authority held by the Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society in the area. He had therefore decided to entrust the organisation of recruitment to the Society. He dismissed the idea that because the Society had not in the past been an active supporter of government measures, this would allow ‘chiefs and people to evade their duty under the cloak of the Society’. However, despite many ‘excellent speeches’ by government officials and local dignitaries, including members of the Society, and an extensive tour of the Fanti, Agona and Akyem Kotoku States by the Acting Governor, only thirty-four recruits had been enlisted in the Central Province by 3 April.

The Western Province

The Western Province, which was toured by the Acting Governor and Haywood in March, proved even less fruitful. In fact, rumours had been spreading that the government intended to adopt the methods used by the French over the border. In Wiawso, the District Commissioner was informed that several of the young men’s leaders had advocated resistance to all government efforts. After hostile demonstrations from

46. Ibid.
47. The Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society had already demonstrated its loyalty by subscribing £1 500 towards the cost of a military aeroplane in 1915, KIMBLE: 376.
48. Among those who spoke at Cape Coast were the Hon. E. J. P. Brown, Tufuhin Coker, Atta Amonu (son of Nana Amonu V of Cape Coast), and T. F. E. Jones (President of the ARPS). Mr. Crowther, Sec. for Native Affairs, emphasised ‘the perfect character of the “Company” system in the Central Province and the ease with which it lent itself to a military system of this kind’, and exhorted the asafo company members ‘to inscribe a new and honourable common symbol on the Company flags which have in the past caused so many disputes’. Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 9 Apr. 1917, PRO/CO 445/39. A similar meeting held at Sekondi was addressed by the Acting Governor, Justice King Farlow, J. E. Casely Hayford, G. J. Christian (on whom see KIMBLE: 429, 453) and Chief Kuma, linguist of Dutch Sekondi. Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 9 Apr. 1917, PRO/CO 445/39.
49. Ibid. However, by May 150 recruits had been enlisted from the Central Province. Governor Clifford to W. Long, 29 May 1917, PRO/CO 445/39.
some of the local chiefs he arrested the headman of the Wiawso young men and the chief of Kwaokrom. The Omanhene of Sefwi-Wiawso claimed that crossing the sea ‘would disorganise or destroy their fetishes’ and that recruits would have been forthcoming had the conflict been local. By 5 April 1917, only twelve recruits had been enlisted in the Western Province.

The Acting Governor’s recruiting party then moved into Ashanti, visiting Bekwai, Kumasi and Mampong. Recruiting in the Ashanti Protectorate was carried out with due regard to the fact that there were rumours circulating that the Asante ‘would not hesitate to resist by force any attempt at compulsion’. These rumours seem to have emanated from Mampong. Although there is no positive written evidence, it is not impossible that word had spread south from Gonja to Mampong of the contemporaneous forced recruitment activities of the District Commissioner in Bole which led to a revolt in that area. In fact when the members of the recruiting party reached Mampong and held a durbar with the Amanhene of Mampong and Nsuta, they were informed by the District Commissioner that all the young men had fled into the bush. Nevertheless, after an appeal had been made to ‘the compelling force of their [martial?] traditions’, the Mampongene promised fifty men and produced ten on the spot.

Before visiting Mampong the recruiters had spoken in Bekwai and Kumasi. In Bekwai it was made clear that no labourers should leave the Obuasi gold mine to enlist. This only emphasised a general unwillingness to supply recruits but the chief of the area promised £1,000 for the care of war-wounded and orphans in England.

51. D. C. Sefwi to Commissioner for Western Province, 17 Feb. 1917, Enc. 1 in _ibid_. The Acting Governor commented that ‘The objection to crossing the sea is universal among the Coast tribes and I have not been able to discover any means readily of overcoming it: I think it will gradually die if and when those who do cross the sea write that they have safely survived the ordeal but unfortunately letters from East Africa are very few and very belated. This in itself has no doubt helped to persuade the timorous that those who venture are lost.’

A Colonial Office marginal note on the despatch commented: ‘It is a very good thing that there are no letters as we know from private letters that the W. African troops in E. Africa have been suffering extreme hardship from lack of food bordering on starvation.’ For a graphic description of these hardships see Sir Hugh Clifford, _The Gold Coast Regiment in the East African Campaign_ (London, 1920).


53. _Ibid_.

54. _Ibid_. The District Commissioner in Mampong had previously opened the question of recruiting with the chiefs (Mar. 1918) when the chiefs had clearly stated that if recruiting was enforced it would be resisted by force. Only after the Commissioner had read the chief reports of the Germans having poisoned wells in Belgium did the chiefs begin to respond favourably, recalling that at the siege of Kumasi the British had been allowed to collect water from outside the fort each day. Laura Boyle, _Diary of a Colonial Officer’s Wife_ (Oxford, 1968): 133.

55. According to the District Commissioner at Bole, Sheriff’s—whose testimony, however, is not likely to be of the soundest—messages about the ‘revolt’ had been sent to at least as far as Wenchi. Quoted in Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 22 Mar. 1917, PRO/CO 96/578.


57. _Ibid_.
The most important meeting held in Ashanti was at Kumasi on 25 March 1917. This was attended by the Kumasi 'Council of Chiefs' and Amanhene or their representatives from the Central, Northern and Western Provinces of Ashanti. The Acting Governor spoke, quoting Asante proverbs, including the one 'apropos of the porcupine's quills' to the effect that 'if a thousand die a thousand more will spring up'. These, he reported, perhaps confusing politeness with enthusiasm, 'aroused audible expressions of approval'. The Amanhene in their speeches assured the government of their loyalty and promised fifty men each, with twenty to be supplied by each of the 'small chiefs'. The Acting Governor estimated that these promises, if fulfilled, would bring in 1,600 men. He was at any rate hopeful that 500 might be produced. In Haywood's view the recruiting campaign in Ashanti was a failure, which he explained by the fact that it was 'more profitable to grow cocoa than to wear His Majesty's uniform' and, in consequence, 'the martial spirit was dying out'. Yet by April 5, 200 Asantes had been recruited in Kumasi. By the end of 1917, 625 men had been recruited in the whole of the Ashanti Protectorate. This amounted to 18% of the total recruits for the year.

From Kumasi the party proceeded to Mampong and then returned to Accra via Juaso and Kwahu where further durbars were held. In Kwahu some surprise was expressed at the fact that only about 110 recruits were forthcoming, in view of the generous offer to the chiefs of a Union Jack for every twenty-five men recruited and a message stick for every hundred. The Acting Governor found it difficult to account for the 'impassivity' of the Kwahu chiefs. His attempt at an explanation took little account of the wide-ranging trading activities of the Kwahu. He showed his ignorance of the machinery of the Gold Coast economy by noting that 'they come of a race which fled from more virile Ashantis in

58. Ibid.
60. These are specifically referred to as 'Ashantis', as opposed to seventy-six men from the Northern Territories recruited in Kumasi at the same time. Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 9 Apr. 1917, PRO/CO 445/39.
61. The provenance of these men, their social background and the way in which they were recruited remains a mystery which could only be resolved, if at all, by detailed fieldwork. I have so far been unable to gain access to muster lists which may be preserved in Army archives which might throw some light on these questions. Unfortunately, while working in the National Archives in Kumasi in 1970, I only noted details on the Northern Territories ethnic breakdown of recruits from File 1539, since the Northern Territories was my prime interest at that time. Phyllis Ferguson, who visited the Kumasi Archives at the end of 1973, informed me that the file is now reported missing. I am extremely grateful to Phyllis Ferguson and Ivor Wilks for agreeing to check on material in Kumasi for me. Their searches in the National Archives there, and in the Asantehene's archives at the Manhyia revealed no new information on the Asante recruits.
days gone by and [...] they now live on a plateau far removed from the sea which thus acquires a special degree of terror. 63

The visit to Kwahu concluded the round of recruiting tours in the Colony and Ashanti and also Haywood’s visit to the Gold Coast. He then passed on to Lagos. *En route*, however, he visited the French Commander in Togo and discussed recruiting methods with him. He concluded that

‘The French system was one of limited compulsion. That is in certain areas, which were those containing suitable recruiting material, each township, or family, had to produce a fixed percentage of young men for service. The system was of course worked through the chiefs. Such a method would certainly never have been allowed in British Colonies where the Governors and our Colonial Office were emphatically averse to anything approaching compulsory service for the Native.’ 64

Haywood’s conclusions about what would be allowed in British colonies almost fitted the situation in the Colony and Ashanti. Even there, however, as we have seen other forms of ‘compulsion’ or ‘persuasion’ came into play under certain circumstances. However, his description of French methods fitted closely the system practised by British recruiters in the Northern Territories in 1917 and 1918. The methods he attributed to the French differed only in quantitative terms from those used by the Protectorate administration.

**Recruiting Methods and Effects**

As Table II suggests, the major recruiting effort in the Protectorate was concentrated in the relatively highly populated northern areas—that is roughly the modern Upper Region of Ghana. This was also the area—apart from Mamprusi proper—where chiefs had been imposed by the British upon a basically ‘acephalous’ population. Perhaps 64% of the men enlisted in the Protectorate between 1914 and 1918 were from these areas (Dagarti, Frafra, Grunshi, Sisala, Builsa, Kusasi, Lobi, Mamprusi).

Ironically however, what superficially appeared to be the most serious reaction to military recruitment in the Northern Territories, the so-called Bole revolt of March 1917, took place in an area—the thinly populated State of Gonja—which supplied only twenty recruits throughout the whole course of the war. In fact, the tactless way in which the District Commissioner Lieutenant Sheriff—‘a lonely D.C. whose nerves are not in good order’, and apparently also a heavy drinker 65—attempted to collect military recruits was only the spark which led to the situation which the same Commissioner was to identify as revolt. As Governor Clifford was quick to point out, however, Sheriff’s approach was typical of the semi-militaristic administration of the Protectorate 66 and exaggerat-

64. HAYWOOD: 205.
65. Acting Governor Slater to W. Long, 22 Mar. 1917, PRO/CO 96/578.
66. Governor Clifford to W. Long, 6 June 1917, PRO/CO 96/580.
MILITARY RECRUITMENT IN THE GOLD COAST

ed only by caricature of some of the methods used in areas where recruit-
ment was more intensive. Behind Sheriff's blunders were a number of local
factors which exacerbated the situation. These cannot be dealt with in
detail here but notable among them was the long-standing rivalry be-
tween the paramount chief of Gonja, Yabumwura Mahama, and Bolewura
Yaya, chief of the neighbouring but subordinate town of Bole, which was,
however, the seat of the District Commissioner. Yaya was the aggressor
in this rivalry and appears to have taken advantage of two factors in the
wartime situation, other than Sheriff's own actions, to discredit Mahama.

The first of these was the feeling of the local people that the call for
carriers—a normal day to day feature of peacetime—was merely a
pretext for the kidnapping of military recruits. Secondly, it seems to
have been felt that because the administration was making such urgent
requests for military recruits this, ipso facto, implied that they were
running short of soldiers. This in turn suggested the feasibility of
resistance to the irregular recruitment of carriers, which might in any case
prove to be a cover for military recruitment.

In February 1917, having received instructions to obtain recruits for
the Gold Coast Regiment, Sheriff had summoned the Yabumwura and his
sub-chiefs to Bole. His message was in itself a humiliation for the para-
mount chief since it had been sent through the Bolewura, a subordinate,
a procedure which, because of its convenience for the District Com-
missioner, had become a common feature of his administration. Between
7 and 26 February, the District Commissioner held a number of meetings
with the chiefs and informed them that he wanted them to produce
recruits ‘in order to give him and them a good name’. The chiefs per-
sistently refused to supply men and were finally summoned to a meeting
on 3 March where they repeated their refusal. Sheriff reacted by
arresting the Yabumwura and the Bolewura. He then had them publicly
stripped to the waist and locked in the guardroom for several hours.
They were then released and the Yabumwura was told to go away again
to find recruits. Mahama then met the chiefs and headmen of the
commoners near Bole and told them of the District Commissioner’s
instructions. However, after three days Sheriff withdrew his demand;
but by then a large number of Gonja commoners had assembled at
Senyon.

At this point, Sheriff requested the Bolewura to collect together a
number of carriers. Yaya then deliberately sent a message that these

67. The account which follows is based on Clifford’s summary of the evidence
in ibid. But see also other papers in PRO/CO 96/578, 579, 580, 582, 588.
68. For the background to the tension between Yaya and Mahama see ibid.,
and also ‘Tamale Complaints Book’: 13, 6 Apr. 1911, Statement by ‘Mama’, NAG-A
ADM 56/4/8. Mahama had been chief of Bole but in 1912 he was elected against
his will to the prestigious but politically powerless Yabum skin. This election
was engineered by Yaya who then immediately acceded to the Bole skin.
69. For a useful insight into the special significance of Senyon and its shrine
should be provided by Senyon. This in itself was an example of Bolewura’s high-handed contempt for his paramount chief since Senyon came directly under Yabum and not under Bole. Not surprisingly, Donzo, the custodian of the Senyon fetish and commoner headman of the town refused Yaya’s request—not only because Bole was not his overlord, but probably also because he feared that the request was a trick of Sheriff’s designed to entrap unsuspecting men as military recruits. Sheriff was informed of this refusal by Yaya and sent a runner carrying his own message-stick to repeat the demand. This was again rejected and Sheriff, having become convinced by the Bolewura that a revolt was being planned at Senyon, sent a force of constabulary—without the benefit of his leadership—to investigate.

This, in essence, was the ‘Bole revolt’ and was signalled only by the burning of the resthouse in Senyon which, it was believed, was to be used as a fort against the people. At this point Sheriff panicked, reported a revolt under the leadership of Donzo and set in motion the process by which another force of constabulary and soldiers marched on the district and arrested the Yabumwura and his followers. In Tamale the Yabumwura Donzo and the chief of Jang were found guilty of treason and raising armed forces. They were condemned to death. However, after a full investigation of the affair by Governor Clifford they all received a full pardon. Bolewura Yaya and his court interpreter, Osumanu, were exiled to Kumasi.70

The Bole ‘revolt’ was dramatic sufficiently so to be brought to the attention of the Colonial Office by a Governor who had, since the Bongo incident (see above note 19) always been ready, with some justice, to berate the administrators of the Northern Territories for their militarism and isolation from the realities of local politics. However, much more significant than the aberrations of the unfortunate Sheriff were the day to day activities of the Commissioners of the northern parts of the Protectorate (where a relatively high population density gave a superficial impression that there would be an abundance of recruits).

Initially, at least in the North-Eastern Province (which proved to be the area where the biggest recruiting efforts were made), meetings were held to persuade the young men to join up—without any undue pressure being placed on them. These efforts, in February, March and April 1917 proved to be a failure. Significantly, of the seventy-five men recruited in Navrongo—none were recruited elsewhere—most were migrants from French territory.71

In May, when an army recruiting Officer visited the Province, a new method was devised whereby the headman of each section of a town was called upon to supply two young men.72 Similarly, outside the North-

70. Governor Clifford to W. Long, 14 Feb. 1918, PRO/CO 96/588.
72. Ibid.
Eastern Province, in Wa and Dagomba, the chiefs were said to have 'promised' a certain number of men from each village. In the North-Eastern Province the result of this selective service system, which was described as 'a mild form of compulsion' was that four hundred recruits were sent to Kumasi.

However, the Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, Captain Armitage, who prided himself on having buttressed the authority of the chiefs in the Protectorate, grew uneasy over the effects of this method. His uneasiness was not based on the fact that any sort of conscription was basically illegal. Rather, he feared that when the people realised that they are being compelled by their chiefs to sacrifice their liberty—as it appears to them—to become soldiers, the natives will say that the chiefs have "sold themselves" to Government and have no longer the interests of their people at heart, but are sending them into danger and slavery in order to carry [sic] favour with the powers that be. If such an idea gains ground, the work of years will be ruined, and the inhabitants, casting off their allegiance to their Chiefs, will attempt to revert to the state of anarchy that existed in the old evil days, when every man was a law unto himself.

He therefore recommended that 'chiefs should be encouraged to lend their moral support to the campaign but appeal for recruits should be addressed directly to heads of families and the young men themselves'.

In fact, if there was to be any successful recruiting at all, Armitage's proposals were totally impracticable. Firstly in many areas it was impossible even to assemble the young men together without the assistance of the chiefs because of the non-nucleated settlement pattern and because the young men were in any case unwilling to enlist. In a political situation where chiefs had grown used to taking request to mean orders—and where there was no good reason for a District Commissioner to give a contrary impression—such a concept as 'moral support' was meaningless.

The common pattern of recruitment was for Commissioners to order chiefs to provide a certain number of men, or to induce them to promise a certain number. Such a promise was regarded as binding. In March 1917, for example, the Commissioner of the Navarro (Navrongo)-Zuarungu District was told by the chief of Sandema that he had not been able to find any recruits. The Commissioner then told the chief:

'I did not come all the way to Kanjarga, and tell all the chiefs that I wanted recruits, for nothing. That simply because I was not at Navarro he had done nothing, and that he was to go back at once and get busy; and if he had not got

---

73. Recruiting Officer, West African Frontier Force (WAFF), NT, to Commissioner, N.-E. Province, 26 May 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
76. CCNT (Armitage) to Commissioner, N.-E. Province, 20 July 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
me some recruits by the time I visited Kanjarga next week he would "catch
trouble"."77

In May the chief of Pinda, near Navrongo, promised to try to get
twelve recruits from his town. When the District Commissioner returned
in August and was told that no recruits had volunteered, he told the
chief that he would have to name ten recruits from the town.78 In
July 1917, the chief of Songo in the Bawku District came into Bawku
without having fetched 'his men as ordered'. He was instructed to
return to his town to collect them at once.79

A variant on the formula, designed to reduce the burden on the chiefs,
was attempted in August in the Navrongo area. Here, the District
Commissioner instituted what amounted to a copy of the tribunals set up
in the United Kingdom to examine the cases of 'conscientious objectors'.
The chiefs were told to produce a fixed number of recruits and were then
expected to allocate these requirements among the separate 'sections'.

'In cases where the recruits are not forthcoming, the Chief, in conjunction with
the headman is to name certain young men in each section and give these names to
the D.C. The D.C. then issues summonses to these young men to appear before
him in Court. Should they refuse he will deal with them for disobeying an order
of the Court [...] The "Summonses" appear to have the desired effect and in the
absence of the young men summoned—some have run away—their elders have
attended court. Captain Nash has given out that young men who disobey the
summonses of the Court are liable to punishment and, if they do not appear before
him will not be allowed to reside in their houses and will, if caught, be punished [...].
The scheme appears to have received the wholehearted approval of the chiefs, who
are relieved of a considerable amount of responsibility. The recruits obtained
under the scheme appear to be cheerful and resigned and to appreciate the fact
that obstruction is useless. I do not anticipate any desertions in future—but this
remains to be seen.'80

Such recruiting methods had three main effects. Firstly, as Armitage
had suggested, pressure on the chiefs led them to use methods of rounding
up recruits which damaged their relationship with their people. Secondly,
large numbers of newly enlisted men deserted before reaching the training
centres. Finally, it soon became clear that a large number of the recruits
were in a very poor state of health, or unsuitable, because of their extreme
youth or old age for military service.

Armitage seemed to be trying to paint a rosy picture of a normally
happy relationship between chiefs and people. In view of the fact that
the chiefs' main peacetime function at this period was to collected labour
for transport and roadwork this was clearly erroneous. However, even

78. Navrongo District Record Book, p. 171, entries, for 22 May and 13 Aug. 1917,
NAG-A ADM 63/5/1.
1917, describing Captain Nash's scheme, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
this ‘normal’ chief-subject relationship was beginning to break down under the pressure of military recruitment. For example, in March 1917, the chief of Paga, north of Navrongo, complained that he had sent a messenger to one of the sections of the town to tell the young men to bring in some sticks to Navrongo. The people responded by shouting and turned out with bows and arrows saying that the chief wanted to catch them for soldiers.\(^81\) By August, the District Commissioner for Navarro-Zuarungu, Captain Nash, was reporting that the chiefs were definitely having to resort to subterfuge to get recruits. ‘They tell the boys that they are required for road work or carrier work in order to induce them to appear before me as recruits [. . .]. The more I travel and interview chiefs the more I see a look in their faces mutely saying “Cannot you help us? We cannot get boys as recruits without deception and danger.” ’\(^82\)

In the same month Nash reported a fight between the town of Bongo and its subordinate village, Lungu,

‘. . . due to the fact that some natives of Bongo went to Lungu at dawn for the purpose of catching recruits. I have been enquiring into the matter for some time and at first feared it might be a recrudescence of the old troubles [see above note 19]. I have now however come to the conclusion that the riot was altogether due to the Chief of Bongo’s loyal efforts to catch Lungu boys at dawn as recruits. The latter naturally resented this and a fight occurred in which half a dozen boys on both sides were wounded [. . .]. The Chief of Bongo was trying to do his best to get recruits. At the same time it was only the promptings of human nature that urged Lungu people to resist being surrounded and caught at dawn.’\(^83\)

Nash noted that most chiefs had told him that it was now (during the rainy season) impossible to ‘catch’ recruits except at dawn since the young men disappeared during the daytime and hid themselves in the high corn.\(^84\) The Lungu incident was the fourth case reported to him of chiefs’ messengers having been assaulted when in pursuit of recruits, generally at dawn.\(^85\) It was also reported that young men were being induced by their relatives to cross the border whenever Commissioners arrived to recruit.\(^86\)

Another result of the use of conscription was the high level of desertion among those recruits who were successfully ‘caught’. For example, in

\(^81\) Navrongo District Record Book, p. 163, entry for 7 Mar. 1917, NAG-A ADM 63/5/1.
\(^82\) Captain Nash to Provincial Commissioner, Gambaga, 9 Aug. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
\(^83\) District Commissioner, Zuarungu (Nash) to Commissioner, N.-E. Province, 28 Aug. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/165.
\(^84\) Captain Nash to Provincial Commissioner, Gambaga, 9 Aug. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
\(^85\) Ibid.
\(^86\) Report on a Recruiting Campaign Conducted in the North-Western and North-Eastern Provinces of the Northern Territories by the Chief Commissioner in February, March and April 1918, Enc. in Governor Clifford to W. Long, 12 July 1918, PRO/CO 445/43.
August 1917, 240 recruits were escorted south from Zuarungu, but by the time they arrived at Ejura, seventy miles from Kumasi, only 112 remained. By the time a party of 119 assembled at Tong had reached Winduri, about five miles away, twenty-five had run away. Such deserters on the road were said to keep well away from their home compounds for some time and the chiefs therefore had no idea of their whereabouts. Of the 1570 recruits who actually reached the training centre at Tamale between October 1917 and April, 221 later deserted.

The poor physical quality of recruits was another feature which can be attributed to the use of conscription. As Nash succinctly put it: the ‘class of boys which are caught and produced as recruits is of the very worst stamp physically. [I am] inclined to think that they are not strong enough to run away’. Armitage, as usual, blocked his mind to the fact that his administration was supposedly recruiting volunteers. In August 1917 he received a report from the Acting Provincial Medical Officer in Tamale, Dr. W. W. Claridge, who was responsible for inspecting recruits. Claridge pointed out that in some groups of recruits one third showed signs of obvious physical defects. He suggested that chiefs were purposely picking out men who were useless to the local community. Armitage’s response was to suggest that chiefs who brought such men forward should be severely reprimanded for their lack of patriotism, ‘when they have so many fine, able-bodied young men who would reflect credit on them and their people if they came forward instead of skulking in their compounds and allowing their afflicted brothers to take their places’. Such disloyal chiefs should, he continued, be warned that if they repeated the offence serious consideration should be given to the possibility of their being dismissed ‘after having thus deliberately insulted the Government’.

Similar reports came from the Officer Commanding Troops in the Gold Coast, Lieutenant-Colonel Potter, after an inspection in Kumasi in December 1917. Potter considered the condition of so many of the troops to be so poor that he was ‘almost led to believe that they have been specially chosen by chiefs for their defects’. He pointed out that the Medical Officers in the north were not to blame since Lieutenant-

88. Ibid.
89. Major W. H. Baker to CCNT, 20 Apr. 1918, Enc. in Governor Clifford to W. Long, 12 July 1918, PRO/CO 445/43. The Commissioner of the N.-E. Province reported that all the chiefs and headmen he had spoken to were ‘unanimous in declaring that the reason the men ran away was because they had been caught or at least brought in under pressure from their chiefs who in doing so were only performing what was considered to be their duty in complying with the requirements of the Government’. Provincial Commissioner, N.-E. Province to CCNT, 25 Nov. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
91. CCNT to Commissioner, N.-E. Province, enclosing letter from Provincial Medical Officer, Tamale, 5 Aug. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
Colonel Haywood had recommended that any man ‘who could carry a rifle a day’s march should be recruited’. The men were poor in stature, stamina and general appearance; far too many had ulcers and bad feet, and among them were many young boys and even children who had not reached puberty. Potter concluded that

‘... the Gold Coast Regiment has now become the sink of the Northern Territories and that men who are unfitted for any sort of manual labour either in the mines etc., or on their farms, are sent down by their chiefs to recruiting officers to enlist, the chiefs thereby vindicating themselves as loyal subjects, and incidentally, giving totally unsuitable men 1/9 a day.’

Meanwhile, after Nash’s August revelations about the effects in the Navrongo area, recruiting had been suspended in the Protectorate until the end of the rainy season. At the beginning of October the Commissioner for the North-Eastern Province requested Armitage to lay down definite lines regarding the methods which should be used after the reopening of recruitment. Armitage, who clearly saw that a renewal of conscription per se was not possible, could only suggest that chiefs be instructed to fulfil the promises which they had made before recruiting was suspended. He offered no new ideas as to how such promises could be enforced except to suggest what amounted to a new kind of conscription: namely to select by lot the numbers promised by each town’s chief. The idea never came to fruition. The result, which Armitage interpreted as being due to direct disloyalty on the part of his officers was, naturally enough, that the chiefs reneged on their promises.

93. CCNT to all Provincial Commissioners (telegram), 15 Aug. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
95. In August Nash had warned that he could not hold himself responsible for the peace of the district unless recruiting is stopped. Captain Nash to Provincial Commissioner, Gambaga, 9 Aug. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
96. CCNT to Provincial Commissioner, Gambaga (telegram), 24 Oct. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219. In practice there was still little room left for the niceties of volunteering. The Commissioner for Navrongo reported at the beginning of November that the chief of Nangodi had brought in a crowd of men ‘from which I picked 45 likely men. Some of them were willing, while others demurred, giving futile excuses’. Nevertheless all 45 were enlisted. District Commissioner Navarro-Zuarungu to Commissioner, N.-E. Province, 2 Nov. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
98. When Armitage himself put the idea to the chiefs in Navrongo they told him that if the young men were assembled to draw lots they would become frightened and run away. CCNT, Diary, 22 Mar. 1918, NAG-A ADM 12/5/142.
99. For example Armitage had convinced himself that he had been ‘promised’ 1 730 men in the N.-E. Province. When recruiting re-opened the Provincial Commissioner could not find ‘a single chief who owns to such a promise, if any made it, they have now repudiated it’. Commissioner, N.-E. Province to CCNT, 25 Nov. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/219.
Armitage’s own reaction to this problem was to undertake an extensive personal recruiting tour which took him right across the northern part of the Protectorate from Wa to Bawku between February and April 1918. His method of approach to the chiefs, a mixture of anti-German propaganda, exhortation and downright insult, left little room for the indirect role which he had suggested the chiefs should play in recruitment early in 1917. In Wa, for example, Armitage not only described the evils of the German colonial system—ironically, laying special emphasis on the excesses of forced labour in South-West Africa—contrasting this with the peace and prosperity enjoyed under British rule, but also took the opportunity of attempting to shame the Wa chiefs into providing recruits by insulting them. He told them that so far they had not responded well to requests for recruits and had contented themselves with sending in a few young men who were physically unfit. This he regarded as an insult to a government ‘to which they owed their very existence’. Armitage was here referring to an incident during the British occupation of the area, and he did not hesitate to taunt the chiefs further about it: ‘I asked them what had become of their manhood and enquired whether it had fallen to even lower depths than when the Walas basely deserted the small force that Government had sent up to assist them to hold their own against Samory and his son.’

Apparently the chiefs then ‘promised’ to collect a number of recruits and returned to their villages to round them up. Another example of the way in which Armitage stooped to insulting chiefs whose authority he claimed to be supporting can be taken from his visit to Sambruno, near Navrongo. There, in his appeal for recruits he stated that if his

100. CCNT, Diary, 16 Feb. 1918, NAG-A ADM 12/5/142. Similarly, in Tumu, where Armitage had been told that Babatu had killed all the young men he pointed out that it was to keep the ‘German Babatu’s’ out of the country that he was calling for recruits. Ibid., 16 Mar. 1918.

101. Armitage’s remarks clearly refer to the period immediately after April 1897 when the militarily insignificant Henderson Ferguson expedition was forced to withdraw from Wa, after having signed a Treaty of Protection, in the face of an advance by Samory’s forces. The Wa’s ‘desertion’ consisted of their understandable temporisation with Samory’s forces and later fraternisation with a French occupying force which seemed to offer the ‘protection’ which the British had signally failed to give. Nevertheless, in December 1897, the Wa Na was charged with ‘treason’, was considered ‘too insignificant to be put to death’ and was fined £200 on pain of deposition. Lt.-Col. Northcott to Governor Hodgson, 31 Dec. 1897, Enc. in Governor Hodgson to J. Chamberlain, 5 Feb. 1898, PRO Confidential Print, African No. 549, CO 879/52.

102. CCNT, Diary, 18 Feb. 1918, NAG-A ADM 12/5/142. Little has been said about the recruiting campaigns in the North-West in this paper—not because they were insignificant, but because the evidence is scanty. In fact, recruitment figures suggest that more men were recruited in the North-West than in the North-East, especially in 1918. The methods used cannot have been very different from those used in the North-East. For example, Armitage noted that of 624 recruits collected at Lawra, 67 were rejected as medically unfit. He noted that they are ‘to be replaced’. In the same area the inhabitants of forty compounds at Bunfo had crossed the border to escape the attentions of recruiters. Ibid., 2 Apr. 1918.
words met with no response he ‘could look on the Fra Fra in the future as degenerates, lost to all sense of manliness and pride of race’.  

Armitage’s methods typified the approach of the administration—largely composed of old soldiers—which he led. Clearly for these men the concept of voluntary recruitment had lost all meaning. Thus Africans were said to have deserted because they did not volunteer, chiefs were berated for having ‘produced’ physically unsuitable volunteers and chiefs who were supposedly being supported were abused in the presence of their people. While in Wa in 1917, Armitage summarised the situation as follows (although probably exaggerating the enthusiasm of the chiefs):

‘In all previous recruiting efforts volunteers were asked for, but no volunteers were forthcoming and I wish to make myself very clear on this point. The chiefs are all in sympathy with our requirements and will give men, but as they themselves told me if you ask a man “will he join” or “not join” the answer will be “not join”, but if you say “I want men” “and mean to have men” and the chiefs send them in, in this case willingly and readily—such men should be taken and enlisted. There is no other way of obtaining the number that are required. If voluntary enlistment failed elsewhere it cannot be expected to succeed here.’

It is difficult not to accept Crowder’s view that recruitment in British West Africa, in contrast to French West Africa, was on such a small scale ‘that it never produced the social dislocation it did across the border’. His comments on voluntarism must, however, be rejected. It is also clear that a colony like the Gold Coast cannot be looked on as an aggregate when such matters are considered. Social disruption by recruitment was indeed limited, but certain areas, notably the area covered by the modern Upper Region of Ghana, suffered disproportionately. As far as the colony as a whole is concerned it is of some interest to consider the contemporary opinion of one perceptive observer of the effects of recruitment, Governor Clifford. Although Clifford’s views clearly exaggerate the situation they must also modify the view that the War barely caused a ripple on the Gold Coast scene.

As early as May 1917, after the conclusion of the recruiting effort in the south, Clifford attempted an assessment of the effects of recruitment. He considered that even in the Colony proper, very few of those who ‘volunteered’ were ‘in any real sense, voluntary recruits’. Although the Acting Governor and his associates had stressed voluntarism in their propaganda, Clifford felt that it was clear that success or failure in

103. Ibid., 24 Mar. 1918.
104. ‘The Frafras have not responded to the Chief Commissioner’s appeal for recruits and so have deserted’, Commissioner N.-E. Province to District Commissioner, Navrongo, 14 Jan. 1918, NAG-A ADM 56/1/336.
105. By ‘elsewhere’ Armitage presumably meant the United Kingdom. Armitage to Ag. Colonial Secretary, 27 Apr. 1917, NAG-A ADM 56/1/124.
106. CROWDER 255.
107. Ibid.: 254.
any particular area had been mainly dependent on the personality and force of character of each particular chief and the personal attitude which he took towards recruiting appeals. Clifford believed that individual recruits had come forward not in obedience to their own wishes, ‘but because the choice of their chief and his counsellors had fallen on them’. To this extent, he pointed out, they were to be regarded as compulsory recruits. However, he felt that in the Colony and Ashanti this need not be a cause for alarm, although ‘given the character of Twi (includes Fanti) speakers’ he was convinced that any formal system of compulsory service would have been a fatal error of judgement.109

However, other aspects of the recruiting campaign did perturb Clifford. He particularly regretted Slater’s decision to seek the assistance of the Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society—a ‘surrender’ which he considered must have had a great effect on ‘native public opinion’. He saw it as directly contrary to the policy, which he himself had started, of supporting the authority of the chiefs vis-à-vis ‘self appointed and soi-disant “spokesmen of the chiefs”’. How, he asked, could the government’s ‘hand in hand’ approach to the Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society ‘inspire the native population with confidence in our strength, moral or material, [or] yet in our continuity of purpose’. On the contrary, he suggested, it would impress the chiefs and people more with the idea that government was ‘reduced to considerable straits’. All in all, the 150 recruits from the Central Province had been obtained at ‘far too heavy a sacrifice’.

In Clifford’s view, however, the ‘surrender’ to the Aborigines’ Rights Protection Society was only one instance of the way in which the government had given an appearance of weakness. He quoted the Acting Chief Commissioner of the Northern Territories, who suggested that in that Protectorate it was ‘universally said in all the markets and meeting places that we are leaving the country and have no more soldiers to support our authority’. Moreover, Clifford saw similar signs in the south and cited three cases where he thought the people had taken the law into their own hands because they felt that the power of the government was reduced. In Great Ningo in March, a ‘faction fight’ took place not in the absence of the District Commissioner, ‘but precipitated by his approach’. From the report on this incident, Clifford had concluded that the people had resolved to settle their disputes without reference to the administration which they felt had become so weak as to be of no consequence. Again, in December 1916, the Omanhene of Akwamu had sent a number of armed men to Kpong to assert a claim to the town. The Konor of Eastern Krobo had allowed his—something, Clifford suggested, which could not have happened a few months earlier. Finally, in March, the Ohene of

109. Reading between the lines one assumes that Clifford meant by this that any Ordinance introducing conscription would have been greeted with strong opposition in the Press and Legislative Council but that what went on quietly in the villages would probably in any case pass unnoticed by the ‘élite’. 
Half Assini had refused to obey his paramount, the *Omanhene* of Beyin and the latter had sent 800 armed men to ‘bring him to reason’.

All these incidents, Clifford concluded, showed a new tendency—‘to ignore the government or even in some measure to oppose its authority’. Taken alongside the likely effects of vigorous recruitment in the Northern Territories, where Clifford felt that the relations between the administration and the native population were not of ‘a uniformly satisfactory character’, Clifford concluded by wondering whether ‘[we may not be] purchasing the services of small bodies of men to meet immediate emergencies at a cost which may hereafter, and even in the near future, prove to be exorbitant’.

An answer to Clifford’s question lies beyond the scope of the present paper, which has concerned itself with the immediate effects of military recruitment. It seems likely that some of the incidents which he referred to could have been caused as much by the wartime reduction of administrative officers as by recruiting *per se*. However, the reactions of the young men of Akyem and Manya Krobo (see above pp. 68-69) are clearly of a different order and other examples of such behaviour may exist. More important than recruitment as such may be the effects of the return of old soldiers after the war. Much has been made—although little research has been carried out—of the effects of the much larger employment of Gold Coast soldiers in the Second World War. The smaller but not insignificant example of the First World War seems worthy of further research and might yield some important clues to the early history of *masse* opposition to colonial rule, as opposed to that well-tilled field of study—the delineation of the minutaie of élite political consciousness.

R. Thomas — *Recrutement militaire en Gold Coast pendant la Première Guerre mondiale*. Remise en cause de l’opinion reçue selon laquelle le recrutement dans les colonies britanniques d’Afrique occidentale a été exclusivement basé sur le volontariat. Dans le sud de la Gold Coast certains chefs ont utilisé une « persuasion » contraignante pour enrôler des soldats, tandis que dans le nord l’administration coloniale elle-même a étendu à la conscription les méthodes employées en temps de paix pour le recrutement de la main-d’œuvre. Discussion de l’opinion exprimée à l’époque comme quoi ces méthodes portaient atteinte à l’autorité du gouvernement colonial.