



Fighting for Britain: African Soldiers in the Second World War

By David Killingray, Martin Plaut

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During the Second World War over half-a-million African troops served with the British Army as combatants and non-combatants in campaigns in the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, Italy and Burma - the largest single movement of African men overseas since the slave trade. This account, based mainly on oral evidence and soldiers' letters, tells the story of the African experience of the war. It is a 'history from below' that describes how men were recruited for a war about which most knew very little. Army life exposed them to a range of new and startling experiences: new foods and forms of discipline, uniforms, machines and rifles, notions of industrial time, travel overseas, new languages and cultures, numeracy and literacy. What impact did service in the army have on African men and their families? What new skills did soldiers acquire and to what purposes were they put on their return? What was the social impact of overseas travel, and how did the broad umbrella of army welfare services change soldiers' expectations of civilian life? And what role if any did ex-servicemen play in post-war nationalist politics? In this book African soldiers describe in their own words what it was like to undergo army training, to travel on a vast ocean, to experience battle, and their hopes and disappointments on demobilisation.

DAVID KILLINGRAY is Professor Emeritus of History, Goldsmiths, and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London.

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Review

(An) impressive study. CONTEMPORARY REVIEW An important scholarly contribution, but which, with its sweeping introduction and engaging style, can be read by all for pleasure and profit. BBC HISTORY REVIEWS OF THE CLOTH EDITION Sober and judicious but also thrilling and dramatic. AFRICA Will become the one-stop reference for research on Anglophone Africa and its soldiers during World War II. (...) Killingray succeeds in putting human faces on some of the nearly one million African soldiers who laboured and fought. INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF AFRICAN HISTORICAL STUDIES Will be the standard work on the subject for years, probably decades to come, an entirely fitting pedestal given David Killingray's leadership in this field. INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS Of particular interest is (the author's) challenge to the conventional wisdom that returning soldiers were the vanguard of independence movements. Recommended. CHOICE The most comprehensive work attempted on the subject thus far. (...) This book addresses issues which will not only appeal to African specialists, and military and imperial historians, but should interest many social, political, cultural, transnational and economic historians too. REVIEWS IN HISTORY (A)n impressive synthesis of primary and secondary sources on Africans' contributions to the British Second World War effort. (...) It is replete with first-hand examples and voices from African men and draws upon a formidable range of materials and sources. PAMBAZUKA NEWS A well written book that makes a valuable contribution and should be read by anyone interested in the Second World War, Africa and/or race and military service. JOURNAL OF MILITARY HISTORY A ground-breaking book which reveals as much about the imperial British as it does about their African subjects. NORTH SOUTH David Killingray's fascinating new book sets out in compelling prose and finely researched detail the extraordinary story of Africa's stalwart and generous support of the Empire's most perilous of wars. TLS A must for those undertaking historical research. SOLDIER MAGAZINE

About the Author

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