

An Assessment of the British Demobilisation Exercise in the Nigerian Army during the Post-World War II



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Abstract

This article examines some salient issues associated with the British colonial exercise on the demobilization of Nigerian Army ex-servicemen after World War II in 1944. As complex an exercise as it is in any post-war society, demobilization if not carefully conducted, leads to another security challenge(s) due to difficulties in reintegrating people who are exposed to firepower and now abandoned without proper plan among civilians. This paper adopts qualitative research methodology through the use of historical sources for data collection - both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The article finds out that, the British colonial government established an efficient program even though it was not free from any challenge in resettling the ex-servicemen in different parts of the country for development and consolidation of the colonial rule. An efficient plan was undertaken with careful implementations so that the ex-soldiers would not be allowed to escape and become a nuisance in society, an event that could become a security threat to the colonial state. It concludes that a grand strategy was adopted by the British colonial government in resettling the ex-servicemen, purposely to avoid rebellion which may be ignited by the soldiers who became exposed to war.

Key Word: British, Demobilisation Exercise, Nigeria Army, Post World War II

Introduction

By its nature, the execution of modern warfare necessitates the large-scale expansion of military forces, often through rapid recruitment, conscription, and mobilization. This expansion, however, presents a significant challenge in the aftermath of conflict: the need to demobilize and reintegrate soldiers into civilian life. In many countries, particularly in the developing world, inadequate planning for postwar demobilization has led to serious consequences, including rising insecurity, social instability, and weakened civil-military relations. Nigeria's post-civil war experience is illustrative. Following the surrender of Biafran forces under Philip Effiong in 1970, Nigerian defense policymakers failed to implement effective reintegration strategies for war veterans. As a result, the country witnessed a surge in security-related issues such as armed robbery, indiscipline within the ranks, and a deterioration of trust between civilians and the military.

In light of these challenges, it becomes crucial to examine earlier demobilization efforts in Nigeria, particularly under British colonial rule, and how they compare with Britain's own postwar demobilization strategies. This study explores the demobilization processes in Britain and colonial Nigeria following the World Wars, highlighting the administrative, social, and political dimensions of reintegrating ex-servicemen. It interrogates the extent to which both governments anticipated the complexities of postwar transition, managed the reintegration of military personnel, and mitigated the risks of post-conflict unrest. By analyzing these historical precedents, the study offers insights into the broader implications of demobilization for national stability and postwar development.

Demobilization in Britain, 1919-1921

Demobilization in Britain became paramount because the numerical strength of the British military had rapidly increased by the time World War 1 ended in 1918. One of the factors that led to this increase in the numerical strength of the British military during the war was the mounting of active propaganda by the government to pressure men into volunteering for military services. When the war began in August 1914, almost everyone in Europe believed that the war would be over in a few weeks. This was largely because all European wars since 1815 had ended in a matter of weeks. Therefore, both the soldiers who boarded the trains for the war front in August and the jubilant citizens who bombarded them with flowers when they departed believed that the soldiers would be back home by Christmas.¹

But this became absurd when it turned out differently. The war situation made the various governments in Europe develop more tactics of recruiting more soldiers to execute the war. For instance, by 1916, the British government adopted compulsory military service for all able-bodied men in Britain.² By the time the war ended in 1918, about 1.6 million Britons were

¹ J.S. Jackson, *Western Civilization: A Brief History* (USA: Clax Baxter Publishers, 2008), 476.

² Jackson, "Western Civilization", 483.

wounded, many so severely that they could never work again. This brought a wide speculation of 'lost generation' and the shortage of young men in Britain.³ It is important to note here that, the demobilization exercise in Britain recorded a lot of problems, even though, despite the problems encountered, it could be said to be successful or was in a relatively free process. In November 1918, the British Army had numbered almost 3.8 million men. Twelve months later, it had been reduced to slightly less than 900,000 and by 1922 to just over 230,000. The majority of those who left the armed forces were re-integrated successfully into the British economy. The unemployed ventured into political radicalism and gravitated towards the British Legion for support.⁴

After the election of Lloyd George as Prime Minister in December 1918, one of the compounding problems his administration faced was difficulties of demobilization of troops from the Army. The first demobilization scheme was drawn up in 1917 by the War Secretary Lord Derby who proposed that the government begin by releasing holders of civilian jobs in industry first, leaving the ordinary rank-and-file troops until last. Some alarming protest demonstrations broke out against this in 1918, including large-scale mutinies at British army camps in Calais and Folkestone, as well as a demonstration of 30,000 soldiers in London. This forced the government to change its tactics smartly, adopting a first-in, first-out policy.⁵ Thus, when Churchill was announced as the new War Secretary in January 1919, introduced a new and more equitable demobilization scheme, based on age, length of service, and the number of times a soldier had been wounded in battle. This means that the longest-serving soldiers were demobilized first. This new policy also added salt to the injury. The demobilization of the ex-servicemen in Britain around this period became a difficult task. This situation forced the government to promise the ex-servicemen personal land for settlement. It is what is called 'a land fit for heroes' by Lloyd's government. At this time, there was a serious problem of unemployment in the country and the ambitious wartime programmes of reconstruction were shelved by the 1921 economic slump.⁶

Challenges of Demobilization Exercise in Britain after World War I

One major challenge encountered during the demobilization in Britain was how the soldiers were after leaving the war front before they were discharged to their various homes. They were kept for long periods until transport could be found to ship them home. This brought a mutiny at a camp for Canadian soldiers in Rhyll in March 1919, which was only suppressed after several men were killed. In addition, a few months later, rampaging Canadian soldiers broke into a police station in Epsome, killing one police and causing a serious riot.⁷ The demobilization of soldiers in Britain after World War I also generated social tensions in various British ports. A series of riots took place in Liverpool and Cardiff during June 1919 as the local unemployed white

³ N. Lowe, *Mastering Modern British History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 450.

⁴ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/spotlight/demobilization>.

⁵ Lowe, *Mastering Modern British*, 458.

⁶ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/spotlight/demobilization>.

⁷ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/spotlight/demobilization>.

men clashed with black workers and seamen. As a result of this by mid-September 1919, the government repatriated about 600 black ex-service men.⁸ Immediately after the demobilization, before a soldier left his unit, he would be medically examined and made to claim for any form of disability arising from his military service and be issued with a dispersal Certificate that recorded his personal and military information and also the state of his equipment. If he lost any of it after this point, the value would be deducted from his outstanding pay.⁹

On arrival in England, a soldier would move to a Dispersal Centre where he received a Protection Certificate and a railway warrant or ticket to his home station. This certificate enabled the man to receive medical attention if necessary during his final leave. He got to an Out-of-work Donation Policy, which insured him against unavoidable unemployment of up to 26 weeks in the 12 months following the demobilization. He received, in addition to this, an advance of pay, a fortnight's ration book for the return of his greatcoat to a railway station during his leave. He could choose to have either a clothing allowance of 52 shillings and six pence or be provided with a suit of plain clothes. If he chose the latter, his final leave began the day after he was dispersed. He left to go home, still in uniform and with his steel helmet and greatcoat.¹⁰

Recruitment in the Nigerian Army during the World War II, 1939-1945

By 1939 when the Second World War began, the colonial government used various propaganda to convince able-bodied men to be enlisted into war through different means especially the use of traditional rulers who in most parts of northern Nigeria were accorded high status by their subjects. The traditional rulers used two methods of recruitment. Firstly, they enlisted people within cities or headquarters of their administration directly. Secondly, they sent their subordinates to their respective towns to recruit on their behalf. For instance, when instruction was passed by the colonial government for the enlistment of soldiers, Emir Muhammadu Dikko in Katsina emirate began this assignment with members of his royal enclave.¹¹ Late Alhaji Mamman Dogo testified that:

On receiving the message of the white men, in 1939, Emir Muhammadu Dikko summoned all his servants to his palace and informed them about their request. Without allowing him to finish, nearly all those present cried out that they were ready to go for whatever Emir wanted them to do. Muhammadu Dikko, therefore, selected about fifty-two able-bodied men and sent them to Zaria for military training. Mamman added that they all accepted the judgment of the Emir on them with obedience and respect.¹²

⁸ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/firstworldwar/spotlight/demobilization>.

⁹ C. Baker, 'The British Army 1914-1918: Demobilization and Discharge', *Journal of Modern History*, Chicago, University Press Chicago, 1947, 43.

¹⁰ Baker, 'The British Army 1914-1918', 43.

¹¹ Baker, 'The British Army 1914-1918', 8.

¹² Baker, 'The British Army 1914-1918', 8.

The second method for recruitment came in 1940 when the colonial government ordered forced recruitment in all British West African colonies. Thus, the National Service regulation was passed in 1940, which required certain classes of people in the society such as blacksmiths, bricklayers, carpenters, and those with certain educational qualifications were required to register for enlistment. Other groups of people who were forced to register were those who could settle their taxes as well as criminals found in jail. Similarly, under the forced recruitment policy, by 1941, it was made compulsory for each head of district to supply three (3) able-bodied men for recruitment every month. For example, in a letter written by Emir Muhammadu Dikko to his son Durbi Ummaru, district head of Mani. It is stated:

Daga Sarkin Katsina Muhammadu Dikko dan Gidado Allah shi jikansa amin. Gaisuwa da aminci mai yawa da so ga Durbi Ummaru, na foreku da ku bada kurata uku masu shiga aikin soja, wato ban da leburan da zaku bayar. Wannan sune kurata da zaku bada kowane dan ku sani. Wasalam.

Meaning:

From Emir of Katsina Muhammadu Dikko, the son of Gidado, may his soul rest in peace, amen. Greetings, trust, and love in multitude unto Durbi Ummaru. I hereby instruct you to supply three recruits for military jobs, apart from the number of laborers you are to supply. This is the number of recruits you must supply every month for your information.¹³

With this kind of massive recruitment, about 121, 652 Nigerian soldiers were used in the war in Kenya, Italian Somaliland, Ethiopia, Burma, and the Middle East by the British colonial government.¹⁴ However, the total figure of Nigerians who participated in the whole campaigns of WW II including Europe was 125,000 troops.¹⁵ With the end of the war, therefore, demobilization became inevitable. Unlike the demobilization of the Nigerian Army after World War I, the exercise after World War II differed considering two important points. One, during World War I, colonialism was not fully established in Nigeria as there were still fears and expectations of revolts from different parts of the country. And, the total number of Nigerians who participated during World War II certainly outweighed the number of Nigerians that participated during World War I. Two, at the time World War II ended, colonialism was no doubt fully established in Nigeria which certainly gave room to the colonial government to recruit more people with trust to execute the war compared to during World War I. This situation made

¹³ 'Aikin Soja' The Emir's office Katsina Native Authority, Later Number, 37/1472, File Number NN/16, 8th December, 1941.

¹⁴ V.A Elaigwu, *The Military and the Management of Civil Crises in Nigeria, 1960-1993* (Kaduna: NDA Press, 2003), 67.

¹⁵ G.O. Olusanya, "The Re-settlement of Nigerian E-soldiers After World War II", 1.

the British colonial government fully prepared for the demobilization exercise considering the number of war veterans coming back to Nigeria.

During this period, one major challenge that the colonial officers discovered was that the soldiers returning to Nigeria, while overseas, had the opportunity of comparing their society with other societies to the obvious disadvantage of their own. They were, therefore, determined to see their society develop. While on active service, they dreamt and saw visions. In addition, their ways of life greatly transformed. No longer were many of them content to live the type of life they had hitherto led. Furthermore, the Army had many educational units. They had acquired new skills and new desires. Consequently, they were more likely to resent the failure of the government to resettle them properly.¹⁶ For instance, while they were overseas, a number of them had written home asking: 'What improvement may we expect to find in our villages when we return? This type of question served as a warning to the administration that a proper resettlement scheme ought to be worked out before the return and demobilization of the soldiers. The administration in 1943 set up a Committee to consider the problems of satisfactory employment for soldiers after the war.¹⁷ The Committee was made up of the Deputy Chief Secretary who was the Chairman, a representative of the Army, the Director of Agriculture, the Commissioner for Labor, and two unofficial members of the Legislative Council. In addition, the Committee was given the power to co-opt additional members if necessary.¹⁸

British Demobilization Policies from Theaters of the War to Nigeria

The 81st Division of the West African forces was the first to leave by sea for British West African colonies. After a series of embarkments, all other West African forces were returned to their home colonies.¹⁹ Nigerians who survived the war were thus returned to face demobilization and resettlement. Some members of this force were in the service for quite a long time. This meant that they were long been away from their communities. This by implication had caused them to forget some of their customs and traditions. On the other hand, they had acquired new skills in modern crafts. Having the Committee lacking ideas and imagination to plan a hitch-free demobilization exercise, the administration had no choice but to copy what was being done in Britain on the problem of resettlement.²⁰ The government introduced into the Legislative Council in 1945 a Bill entitled: 'Employment of the Ex-servicemen Ordinance, to make provision for enabling persons whether disabled or able-bodied to secure employment after their services with the armed forces of the Crown and for the purposes connected herewith. This Bill was based on the United Kingdom Employment of the Disabled Persons Act of 1945, though, suitably amended to suit conditions in Nigeria and extended to include registration of able-bodied as well as disabled.²¹

¹⁶ Olusanya, "The Re-settlement of Nigerian E-soldiers After World War II", 2.

¹⁷ Olusanya, "The Re-settlement of Nigerian E-soldiers After World War II", 2.

¹⁸ Olusanya, "The Re-settlement of Nigerian E-soldiers After World War II", 2.

¹⁹ B. T Bakori, "The Impact of the Second World War on Nigerian.", 33.

²⁰ B. T Bakori, "The Impact of the Second World War on Nigerian.", 33.

²¹ Olusanya, "The Re-settlement of Nigerian E-soldiers After World War II", 3.

The Ordinance was divided into a number of parts. Part I empowered the Governor to appoint the additional staff necessary to carry out its provisions. Part II re-enacted legislation already contained in the defence regulations. These were designed to safeguard the interests of men who were called up for compulsory services or who enlisted voluntarily with the consent of their employees. According to this provision, all former employees were to be re-instated into their former employments. Any employer, who failed to do so, was liable to a fine of fifty pounds (£50) and was to pay the person whom he failed to re-instate a sum not exceeding an amount equal to 26 weeks remuneration at the rate which the last remuneration was last payable to him.²² However, an employee must apply within three months after the expiration of his service for reinstatement. If he failed to do so or failed after being offered employment to present himself at the time and place notified and if as a result of a change of circumstances other than the engagement of some other person to replace him, it was not reasonably practicable to re-instate him, or if it was not possible to re-instate him in occupation and under the condition of service he enjoyed before enlistment and the employer had offered to re-instate him in the most favorable conditions reasonable and he refused the offer, then the employer was not liable. Part III provided with the establishment of rehabilitation courses for disabled bodied men, and for vocational training courses during and after the rehabilitation settlement. Parts IV and V dealt with the registration of disabled and able-bodied men and the setting up of registration centers. Part VI empowered the Commissioner for Labor to require employers to register and also to take into employment a quota of ex-servicemen both disabled and able-bodied. Part VII obtained miscellaneous provisions regarding the keeping of records. The Ordinance came into operation on 1st June 1945.²³

Critically looking at the components of the above Ordinance, it simply indicates that the colonial government in Nigeria, considering the large number of troops returning to the country understood the danger of leaving the ex-servicemen staying idle in the societies they belonged to, as that would certainly create serious challenges to smooth running of colonialism in the long run. Thus, making an efficient plan for the resettlement exercise most especially of those who volunteered to join the Army during the war as contained in the Part II of the Ordinance. Another important policy of the demobilization put in place by the colonial government around this period was that the frontiers of Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, and Northern Nigeria were contiguous with those of the various territories of French West Africa, which were subject to the ultimate control of the Governor General at Dakar.²⁴ Agreements were reached with the Governor General on the following points: (i) that all French Africans that joined the RWAFF between 10th January 1940 and July 1943, return independently to their homes on discharge. They could, therefore, proceed over the frontier under their arrangements after leaving the nearest Dispersal Center or Staging Camp. (ii) that such men may wear uniform when returning to French territory. (iii) they may take their money home in

²² Olusanya, "The Re-settlement of Nigerian E-soldiers After World War II", 3.

²³ Olusanya, "The Re-settlement of Nigerian E-soldiers After World War II", 3-4.

²⁴ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Arrangement with the French Colonial Authorities', Number 37412/367, September 1945, p. 367.

Britain's West African currency if they so wish. (iv) they will not be charged for tax incurred in their absence.²⁵

The North-eastern frontier of Nigeria marched with the Chad province of French Equatorial Africa with the Governor General at Brazzaville, agreement was reached with the Governor-General on the above-mentioned points. Similar to this was the case with the French Cameroon that ran along the Eastern frontier of Nigeria which had a Governor-General in Duala. Thus, it was resolved that all soldiers in his territory who joined the RWAFF would be received on their return, their transport would be arranged by the French authorities, they could take their money in British West African money if they so wished and that arrangement of exchange would be made at Duala, they might wear uniform if they so wished and they would be excused for all taxes incurred in their absence.²⁶ By 1945, the Nigerian Armed Forces Resettlement Center (NAFRS) Oshodi, Lagos was established along with the second one located at Gold Coast as two Vocational Resettlement Centers for skills acquisition relevant to the resettlement needs of the colonial West African ex-servicemen in favor of their employment.²⁷ The center had the following as its main objectives for the ex-servicemen:

- i. Establish their business and supervise it very well.
- ii. Be eligible to sit for the National Technical Certificate (NTC) examinations or its equivalent, if so desire.
- iii. Be prepared for gainful employment in all sectors of the economy.
- iv. Be prepared psychologically for resettlement in civil life²⁸

By May 1944, the Colonial Government Department of Labor in Lagos, Nigeria greatly enlarged the scope of its activities and the staff of the department in order to help in the demobilization of Nigerian troops who fought for the colonial government overseas on their return to Nigeria. Branches established in the department for this exercise were Registration and Employment Exchange Offices in Lagos. These were to cater to the industrial workers who were recruited during the war and be classified. The department would also deal with the absorption of the demobilized soldiers where necessary and was charged by Colonel W. Owen, a veteran who had worked for many years with West African soldiers.²⁹

²⁵ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Arrangement with the French Colonial Authorities', 367.

²⁶ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Arrangement with the French Colonial Authorities', 367.

²⁷ D. H. Kruger, 'A Report on the Nigerian Army Resettlement Scheme' School of Labor and Industrial Relations (Michigan University Press, 1972), 4.

²⁸ Kruger, 'A Report on the Nigerian Army Resettlement Scheme' School of Labor and Industrial Relations', 4.

²⁹ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Labour Department will help demobilized Troops', The Chief Secretary to the Nigerian Government, Lagos, 1944, No. 2816/31, 2.

British Colonial Policies on Demobilization in Nigeria, 1944-1945

Among the British West African troops made up of West African Command during the Second World War, Nigeria provided about fifty percent of the soldiers.³⁰ Consequent upon this, as early as 1944, when the war was about to end, district officers in the colony were directed to form Committees in their various districts to come up with modalities for the successful conduct of the exercise. For instance, the major areas the Committees should look at were:

- i. There should be a Holding Camp in the three provinces and the men should be transferred to these camps from the Transit Camps by military units. It should be decided beforehand what units will be sent to these camps and they should be units which are largely composed of men from the provinces of their origin.
- ii. It may be possible to demobilize some of the tradesmen at the Holding Camp.
- iii. Those who cannot be demobilized at the Holding Camps will either have to go to a Training School or, in the case of those who will return to the land or other local employment must be distributed to Demobilization Camps which will be organized on a provincial basis. The men will be distributed to these camps according to their homes and Native Authorities will take a hand in the demobilization of the men from their areas.
- iv. An attempt should be made to enlist the cooperation of the soldiers in carrying out the demobilization plans by letting them know before they return to Nigeria, what are the plans and noting their reactions. It should be made clear to them that wage-earning employment cannot possibly be made available for all and that the majority will have to take up farming:
 - a) The men must be allowed to go on leave from the Holding Camps but payment of gratuities should be deferred until after their return to the Holding Camp.
 - b) Transport expenses to the place of employment should be paid.
 - c) Finally, to observe that the arrangements for enabling the men to return to civil life were primarily the concern of the civil authorities and must in the last resort be their responsibility. In proportion as the arrangements are well thought out and efficiently organized so will the difficulties to the Civil Government both at the time and afterwards, be less. It is essential, therefore, in His Honour's view, that in the organization of all arrangements for demobilization, the military should be prepared to meet the wishes of the civil authorities.³¹

³⁰ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'For His Honour's Information', Number R.002/S.1/T.1/28, December, 1945, 382.

³¹ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization of Soldiers: Machinery for the Chief Secretary to the Nigerian Government', Lagos, 1944, Number, 1992.

At the end of the war on the Burman front, a telegram was sent to the King of England, George VI on behalf of the soldiers from the West African Division.³² On receiving the message, the Secretary of State responded to them in the following words:

Your telegram has been laid before the King. His Majesty has commanded me to thank you for your message of loyalty, a loyalty that has been relatively expressed by your service in Burma he wishes you God speed on your journey home and hopes that will further your efforts of peace with some resolute courage as you fought the terror of war.³³

At the beginning of the evacuation of the soldiers from the war front to their homeland in Nigeria, it was made a policy that, the port of disembarkation would be Lagos.³⁴ The rate of disembarkation was to be from 2500 per month in the case of troops from the Middle East, rising to 7000 per month when the main demobilization commenced.³⁵ It was emphasized that, before the commencement of the evacuation of the troops from the overseas areas, units of the military where African soldiers were in large numbers should be disbanded.³⁶ This may probably explain why the colonial government was afraid of the large concentration of soldiers who had similar war experiences to be stationed at one place on return to their motherlands.

British Policies of the Demobilization

An important policy used in the demobilization of ex-soldiers in Britain was Old age and long years of service but these were not considered in the case of African troops that served the colonial government.³⁷ Another policy for the exercise of demobilization in Nigeria is that the British colonial government ordered in London that, the scheme was entirely the responsibility of the Nigerian Military authority, therefore, she was in no way concerned with the post-war employment or resettlement of the soldiers which was also the responsibility of the civic government in Nigeria.³⁸ Sequel to this, on arrival at the port of disembarkation, nominal rolls of the men were conducted by the Army Records Office, Lagos, given part of their war pay and Discharge Certificates. Concerning the pay, on arrival at the demobilization Centre, soldiers were paid four pounds (£4) each and one pound (£1) per week and if a soldier spent three weeks at the demobilization Center, he would receive a final payment of 1£.10s on leaving the

³² This telegram message was meant to show their loyalty and affirmation to continue to serve him with all honesty and devotion as soldiers or civilian in whatever may be their individual future.

³³ Bakori, 'The Impact of the Second World War on Nigerian', 32.

³⁴ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization Secret File, Number' CRWA/17902/2/A(D), 132.

³⁵ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization Secret File', 132.

³⁶ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'First Key Plan for Demobilization of West African Troops' (Secret File), Number CRWA/17902/2/A(D), p. 287.

³⁷ National Archive Ibadan (NAI), 'Conference on Releases', secret file Number CRWA/7827A, 152.

³⁸ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization Scheme for West Africa', Secret file, CRWA/17902/2/A(D), November, 1944.

Centre.³⁹ At the same time, the Labor Department prepared and immediately issued: (i) a letter of instructions (ii) three copies per man of his ex-service man's service sheet (civil) (iii) a workman's introduction card. The issuances of these papers referred to in paragraphs 2 and 3 above were made either in a transit camp in the vicinity of Lagos or on board a ship depending on the circumstances.

The letter of instruction informed the men of the action they should take on arrival at their homes if they wished to obtain paid employment either immediately or at the expiration of their period of leave. The ex-service men's service sheet was a personal record of the man concerned, from enlistment days up to the time of his discharge from the Army. One copy of the sheet was for filling by the district officer concerned, one for retention by the man himself, and the third was for return by the District Officer to the Labor Exchange, Lagos where the central records were kept.⁴⁰ The District Officer's remarks on the service sheet informed this office of (i) whether the man wished to be registered for paid employment, or (ii) whether he wished to return to his pre-war mode of living. The Introduction Card was retained by the man until he finds, or is found employment when his employer must fill it in, and post it.⁴¹

With regard to further procedure, a register of all enlisted men was arranged and maintained in Lagos. This register was divided into provincial groups which corresponded with the areas covered by each Dispersal Center. There was further sub-division into Provincial Groups which corresponded with the areas covered by each Dispersal Center. Duplicates of this register were made available for the Labor Officer at each Dispersal Center. There was further subdivision into Provincial Groups and effective and non-effective soldiers. The men were classified into trades, disabled men, deserters, discharged with ignominy, and those unlikely to become efficient soldiers.⁴² The evacuation of the men was by train from ship to the three dispersal centers, Ibadan, Kaduna, and Enugu, and thence to the road and railheads decided on by the individual Provincial Committees for demobilization and final dispersal where the Provincial Committee took care of the rest of the work.⁴³

In the case of Northern Nigeria, there were about three Dispersal Centers, namely, Kaduna, Bukuru, and Makurdi. Similarly, there were about eleven Staging Posts, namely; Sokoto, Gusau, Kano, Maiduguri, Potiskum, Bauchi, Gombe, Biu, Yola, Kontagora, and Kabba.⁴⁴ In addition, it was decentralized by opening Labor Offices in Kaduna, Enugu, and Ibadan to which the appropriate duplicate registers were sent. At the port of disembarkation, Labor Officers

³⁹ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Instructions to O.C Demobilization Centres, Dispersal Centres and Staging Camps', secret file, CRWA/17902/2/A(D), 357.

⁴⁰ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization,' Secret File, CRWA/17902/2/A (D), 34.

⁴¹ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization,' Secret File, CRWA/17902/2/A (D), 34.

⁴³ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Aide Memoire on the Recommendations of the N.P Demobilization Committee', Secret File, Number CRWA/17902/2/A (D), 253.

⁴⁴ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization of African: Accommodation at Dispersal Centres and Staging', Post', Number CRWA/17902/2/A (D), 333.

interviewed skilled soldiers who had works preserved for them either in or around Lagos or in special development works elsewhere. Similarly, at the Dispersal Centers (Ibadan, Kaduna, and Enugu), Labor Officers interviewed the men for proper placement into the available vacancies they were notified of. Meanwhile, telegraphic notification of the interviewed men in Lagos was sent to Dispersal Centers in order to avoid duplication. In the case of the skilled men interviewed but preferred to take employment elsewhere in the country, forms were taken to Labor Officers there to ascertain the jobs. Where the position was reversed, the same information would be taken back to the Labor Officer in Lagos through his Dispersal Center.⁴⁵

In the same vein, at the disembarkation center, the military authorities were solely given responsibility for transporting the men from the port in Lagos to the Dispersal Centers. It was emphasized to them that the time the men should spend at the port should be the lowest or the minimum. The exercise was also conducted unit by unit of the soldiers to maintain as much discipline as possible. And their accumulated pay and allowances were paid at the point of the disembarkation.⁴⁶ Concerning the semi and unskilled soldiers, who were the majority, they were advised to get home to apply for employment at their various district and native authorities' offices. On making such applications, they made two copies of their Service Sheet to the District Officer for the proper record. It was also made a general rule that, the men be put into work through their District Officers so as to reduce the rush to large towns. They were induced to stay in their villages and settle down there in their pre-war mode of living. This was the most important and the essence of the whole Demobilization scheme.⁴⁷ Below is the numerical strength of the ex-servicemen returning to Nigeria as of October 1944, beginning with Western Province in accordance with the districts where the soldiers came.

Table 1: Statistics of the Ex-servicemen returned to Western Province

S/N	Districts	Number of the Ex-servicemen
1.	Abeokuta	1,927
2.	Benin	4,512
3.	Ijebu	1,412
4.	Oyo	4,878
5.	Ondo	2,234
6.	Warri	2,017
	Total	16,980

Source: National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization' Secret File, CRWA/17902/2/A (D), 137.

The data indicates that a total of 16,980 ex-servicemen returned to the Western Province following demobilization. Oyo District recorded the highest number (4,878), closely followed by

⁴⁵This can be understood as a colonial government policy to have re-utilized or re-exploit the skills of the skilled-men among the soldiers throughout the country and for the purpose of having full records of their whereabouts.

⁴⁶This was probably applied by the colonial government in order to avoid concentration of the men in Lagos which might result to revolts as had happened in England in 1921 during the demobilization of First World War ex-servicemen as pointed out in the chapter one of this study.

⁴⁷ National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization', Secret File, CRWA/1, 134.

Benin (4,512), suggesting these areas had higher recruitment or enlistment rates during the war. In contrast, Ijebu had the lowest number (1,412), possibly reflecting smaller population size or lower enlistment levels. The relatively even distribution across districts highlights the widespread impact of the war on communities in the Western Province and underscores the scale of reintegration challenges faced by local authorities.

Table 2. Statistics of the Ex-servicemen returned to Eastern Province, 1944

S/N	Districts	Number of the Ex-servicemen
1.	Calabar	5,798
2.	Cameroon	3,116
3.	Onitsha	7,534
4.	Owerri	6,642
5.	Ogoja	2,536
	Total	25,626

Source: National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization' Secret File, CRWA/17902/2/A (D), 137.

A total of 25,626 ex-servicemen returned to the Eastern Province in 1944, reflecting a significant wartime contribution from the region. Onitsha had the highest number of returnees (7,534), followed by Owerri (6,642) and Calabar (5,798), suggesting these districts were key recruitment centers. Cameroon and Ogoja reported lower figures, with 3,116 and 2,536 respectively. The overall higher returnee count compared to the Western Province indicates a greater wartime mobilization in the East, which likely intensified postwar reintegration pressures on local administrations and communities.

Table 2.3: Statistics of the Ex-servicemen returned to Northern Province, 1944

S/N	Districts	Number of the Ex-Service Men
1.	Adamawa	3,762
2.	Bornu	3,291
3.	Bauchi	2,271
4.	Benue	5,557
5.	Ilorin	562
6.	Kabba	1,168
7.	Kano	3,592
8.	Katsina	1,352
9.	Niger	1,149
10.	Plateau	1,031
11.	Sokoto	3,842
12.	Zaria	1,451
	Total	29,028

Source: National Archive Kaduna (NAK), 'Demobilization' secret file, CRWA/17902/2/A (D), 137.

The above table represents that, the total number of ex-servicemen in Nigeria after the Second World War 1939-1944 was 81,635. This strength is no doubt enough to have frightened the colonial government should there be a revolt because of the harsh colonial economic and general administrative policies in the country. Hence, the government outlined and emphasized strict adherence to the above demobilization plans especially not allowing them to concentrate in one place and creating job opportunities for them. At the various units of the soldiers in Nigeria, the soldiers were allowed to visit their towns and villages on the pass for a particular number of days. In the course of this, they must be at any time in possession of their cards and the pass which indicates the number of days approved for the leave by the military authority and the date for the commencement of the leave. During the leave, district heads and village heads were instructed to be vigilant on the movement of the soldiers pertaining to their relationship with other people and cross-check their documents to confirm they did not exceed the period of leave approved for them. If a soldier was caught without a document or exceeding the number of days approved for him, he should be arrested, tight with ropes, and sent to emirs for onward report to his unit.⁴⁸

By 1946, soldiers of the northern region's origin who could not be absorbed into any of the colonial services were provided with fertile land in their towns and villages in order to invest in farming and conform to civil life. Through the support of Village and District Heads in the emirates, many of the ex-servicemen were given either fresh, used, or abandoned land in the fertile areas of their territories.⁴⁹ For effective utilization of the land, new centers for modern skills in agriculture were established in order to train the ex-soldiers on new techniques of farming. In the case of the Katsina Emirate, the land was allocated to them at Kafin Soli Farm Centre, which served as the headquarters of the Agricultural Department of the emirate and the whole province.⁵⁰

During their stay at the centre, the soldiers were supported with feeding allowances.⁵¹ Even with this, it was discovered up to 1947 that many ex-soldiers were unemployed especially the disabled among them. Consequently, the colonial government instructed the emirs to order them to form a forum of ex-servicemen in every village and town to discuss the way they felt they could be assisted. With regards to disabled soldiers, an appeal fund was set up through the sale of flags to people and donations in public places such as markets and sports places in order to assist the heroes of the war.⁵² As a result of the limited number of ex-soldiers that the centers could contain, many of them were still unemployed. As such, the colonial government resorted to engaging the ex-soldiers in different semi-skilled labor available such as carpentry,

⁴⁸ 'Duba Maganar Soja wadanda suka yi laifi', Aikin Soja, Katsina Native Authority, File Number MN/16 Durbi District, 25th/07/1944.

⁴⁹ Correspondence between Durbin Katsina Umbaru and Emir Alhaji Usman Nagogo, Katsina Native Authority, file number MN/16 Durbi District, 25th/07/1946

⁵⁰ M.M. Adamu, 'Farm Centres and Export Production in Katsina Emirate, 1926-1960', in (eds) A.M. Yakubu, A.M. Jumare and A.G. Sai'd, *Northern Nigeria: A Century of Transformation*, Baraka Press, 2005, 327.

⁵¹ 'Aikin Gona ga Tsofaffin Soja', The Emir's Office, Katsina Native Authority, File Number MN/16 Durbi District, 24th/03/1947.

⁵² 'Taimakon Soja Maraunata', The Emir's Office, Katsina Native Authority, File Number MN/16 Durbi District, 25th/07/1947.

bricklaying, and so on, on either permanent or casual assignments. For instance, the emir of Katsina Usman Nagogo ordered district and village heads to announce to all ex-soldiers in the emirate interested in the well-digging jobs to report designated areas.⁵³

One important experience recorded by the British colonial government during World War II was that they lost most of their people and resources as a result of poor training and lack of modern military experience especially with soldiers coming from Africa. Thus, to avoid future occurrences, the British introduced a system in which many Nigerians were encouraged to pursue a career in the Army. Consequently, Cadet Units were established at University College Ibadan and other government Colleges throughout the country. Before this period, military career was considered as a dirty job and only meant for uneducated people. Therefore, the establishment of these Cadet Units by the colonial government was geared solely to change this perception of the people. Consequently, the Units were established in Government College Zaria (now Barewa College), Kings College Lagos, Government College Ibadan, and Government College Umuahia in 1953.⁵⁴ Later others were opened all over the federation. Commanding officers were appointed by the Federal Ministry of Defence to command these Units. They were the ex-servicemen who were demobilized after the WW II. In addition, every Cadet Unit of a secondary school was attached to a military unit in the country. For instance, Government College Zaria was lucky to have the Nigerian Army Depot Zaria; therefore, it helped in drilling the students by sending some instructors. The Depot also provided the Cadet Unit with boots, belts, caps, and other training facilities.⁵⁵

Conclusion

The processes of demobilisation in Britain and Nigeria following the World Wars were multifaceted, shaped by the urgent need to reintegrate vast numbers of ex-servicemen into civilian life. In Britain, the unprecedented expansion of the armed forces during World War I—initially through volunteer enlistment bolstered by patriotic propaganda and later through conscription—resulted in a significant demobilization challenge. Early administrative missteps, particularly the unpopular prioritisation of essential personnel over ordinary soldiers, sparked widespread discontent, leading to the adoption of a more equitable “first in, first out” policy. While issues such as unemployment and social instability persisted, Britain ultimately achieved a measure of success in reabsorbing veterans, even as the cultural memory of a “lost generation” endured due to the war's human cost. In contrast, Nigeria's demobilisation experience was conditioned by its colonial status and the evolving political consciousness of its servicemen, particularly after the Second World War. The increased involvement of Nigerian troops, many of whom had acquired new worldviews and skills during their service abroad, raised anxieties within the colonial administration about the potential for unrest. In response,

⁵³ Correspondence between Durbin Katsina Ummaru and Emir Alhaji Usman Nagogo, Katsina Native Authority, file number W563/101 Durbi District, 5th/03/1948.

⁵⁴ I. Bello, 'History of the Cadet Unit at Barewa College Zaria', BUK, (Unpublished Project), 1991, 51.

⁵⁵ Kamfanin Soja na Kananan Yara', Northern Province, file number W2236/13, November, 1954.

the British colonial government enacted measures such as the Employment of Ex-servicemen Ordinance of 1945 and established institutions like the Nigerian Armed Forces Resettlement Centre (NAFRC) in Oshodi to provide vocational training, psychological support, and structured reintegration. Though fraught with logistical and social challenges, the demobilisation in both contexts represented significant state-led efforts to navigate the complex postwar transitions, reflecting broader concerns with stability, economic recovery, and the reintegration of military personnel into peacetime society.

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