

## **The King's African Rifles**

The King's African Rifles (KAR) was formed in 1902, from three smaller regiments which had existed since the 1890s. These were the First and Second battalions of the Central Africa Regiment, the East African Rifles and the Uganda Rifles. On their amalgamation, these became the First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth battalions\* of the new large regiment. A further battalion (the Sixth) was later recruited from Somali volunteers.

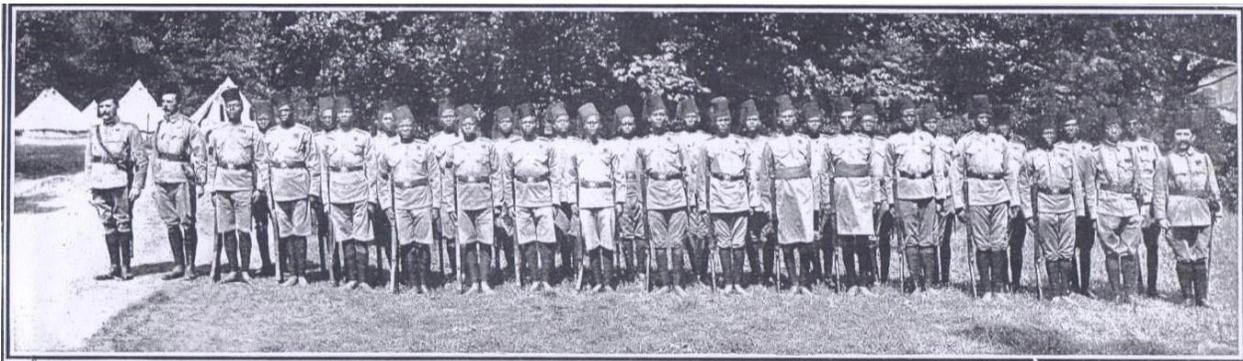
The uniform worn by the soldiers consisted of khaki shorts, khaki jacket or dark blue woollen jumper, grey or light blue puttees and a fez whose colour varied according to the which battalion the soldier was a member of. On campaign the fez was often replaced by a smaller hat with a cloth cover and neck flap. Footwear was unpopular, but locally made sandals were sometimes worn.



Most men signed up for three to six years service, although some non commissioned officers served much longer (one Sergeant-Major served for twenty two years).



Although they were now one regiment, the different battalions continued to be based where they had been. Thus, the First and Second battalions stayed based in Nyasaland (modern Malawi), the Third battalion in British East Africa (Kenya) and Fourth and Fifth battalions in Uganda, and the Sixth battalion in Somaliland (the northern part of modern Somalia). Unusually for the time, many of the officers in the Third and Fourth battalions were Africans.



Between its formation and the start of World War One, the regiment took part in many campaigns, especially in Nigeria and Somaliland. In 1908 the Fifth battalion was disbanded, followed, in 1910 by the Sixth battalion and in 1911, by the Second battalion.

When the First World War broke out, all three remaining battalions of the regiment were scattered across Nyasaland, Uganda and British East Africa in company sized garrisons. When warfare started between the British and the Germans in East Africa though, many of these scattered companies were brought together again into their battalions to form part of the force opposing the Germans. To begin with, the forces in East Africa included a number of English and Scottish regiments, as well as volunteer forces from Rhodesia (modern Zimbabwe) and East Africa. As the war progressed however, it was found that men who had grown up in Britain suffered more from fatigue under the African sun than African soldiers did, and most of these units were moved back to Europe or India, leaving the KAR to provide an increasing proportion of the British force in East Africa. Accordingly, the Second battalion was re-raised in 1916.



In early 1917 the Fifth and Sixth battalions were re-raised, and a Seventh battalion followed. At the same time, the battalions were reorganised as regiments again, and had further battalions of new recruits added to them, meaning that by the end of the war, the seven KAR regiments totalled twenty two battalions (containing around 35,000 men) and made up the majority of the British forces in East Africa.



The last two years of the war in Africa were the harshest and by the end of the war, the KAR had suffered around 18,000 killed or wounded.

After the war, the KAR was reduced in size, but served again in World War Two. When Uganda, Kenya and Malawi gained independence, the KAR regiments based in them became the armies and defence forces of the new nations.

\*The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> battalions were the two former battalions of the Central Africa Regiment; the 3<sup>rd</sup> battalion was the former East Africa Rifles; and the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> battalions were formed out of the Uganda Rifles.