

The Nigeria Regiment

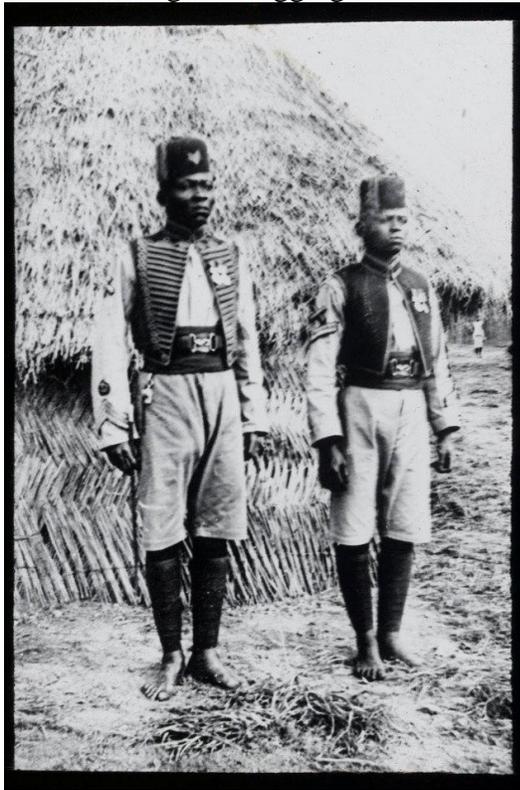
The earliest Nigerian military force was raised in 1862, when Lieutenant Glover, governor of Lagos Colony, raised a militia of eighteen men known as Glover's Hausas, to assist the West India Regiment companies who provided for the security of the colony. The militia was later expanded to a strength of one hundred, renamed the Lagos Constabulary and largely took over the security of Lagos from the WIR.

In 1886 the Northern Nigeria Protectorate was established and a force of two paramilitary battalions, known as the Royal Niger Constabulary, was raised for its protection.

In 1890 the Southern Nigeria Protectorate also established a small locally raised constabulary, known as the Oil River Irregulars. In 1891 this was renamed the Niger Coast Constabulary,

In 1897, to guard against French expansionist moves in West Africa, two battalions of soldiers were raised in the Northern Nigeria protectorate. Later in 1897, once the French threat had subsided, the battalions Northern and Southern Protectorates and the Lagos Colony were converted from constabularies to full military status and grouped together with most of the other military forces in West Africa to form part of the West Africa Field Force (WAFF).

The uniform which was adopted for the whole West Africa Frontier Force was modelled on the one worn by the earlier Gold Coast Artillery Corps and consisted of a khaki sleeved waistcoat, shorts and puttees. Footwear was optional and most chose to go barefoot. For dress and parade order, a red cummerbund and a red sleeveless jacket edged in gold were also worn, along with a red fez with a tassel. The jackets of senior non commissioned officers were further decorated with lines of gold 'frogging'.



Two Nigeria Regiment NCOs. The soldier on the left with gold frogging on his jacket is a Sergeant Major.

For normal duties a brown woollen jumper could be worn over or instead of the sleeved waistcoat and a green woollen 'Kilmarnock' cap with a pom-pom was worn instead of the fez. For campaign dress the Kilmarnock cap was worn with a khaki jacket or the brown jumper instead of the sleeved waistcoat. Wide brimmed hats were also sometimes worn. Photographs show that the red cummerbund was often worn on campaign as well and Nigerian soldiers also commonly carried machetes.

In 1900 the two northern battalions which had been raised three years before absorbed the Royal Niger Constabulary and became the Northern Nigeria Regiment, which remained part of the WAFF.

In 1906 the Lagos colony was joined with the Southern Nigerian Protectorate and its forces amalgamated into a Southern Nigeria Regiment of two battalions.

Eight years later, in 1914, the Northern and Southern Nigerian Protectorates were amalgamated into one large colony and the Northern Nigeria Regiment was joined under one command with the Southern Nigeria Regiment to form the Nigeria Regiment - a single regiment of four battalions, although these had not had an opportunity to train together yet when the First World War broke out.



Nigeria Regiment in action at Majuka in November 1914



Nigeria Regiment in action at Yabassi, Cameroon, October 1914

The Nigeria Regiment was part of the Anglo-French force which invaded the German colony of Kamerun (Cameroon) in 1914. They served throughout the eighteen months of this campaign and fought many successful actions, with many soldiers receiving medals for bravery and dedication to duty. At the conclusion of the hard-fought campaign to capture Kamerun, the Nigeria Regiment was selected for service in East Africa. However the terms of the soldiers' contracts meant that they were not obliged to serve outside West Africa. Volunteers were sought and new companies were formed which comprised equal numbers veterans and new recruits. These companies were formed into four battalions and the force was designated the Nigeria Brigade, with a strength of about 2500 men.



The Nigeria Brigade departed for East Africa in December 1916. It was very active throughout the last two years of the war and served in many areas of the campaign, including the invasion of Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique) in late 1917. The last two years of the war were very hard and marching columns travelled huge distances in pursuit of the Germans, often with minimal supplies, leading to a great deal of sickness and exhaustion. This, combined with casualties from the fighting, led to a constant need for reinforcements. By November 1918, when the war ended, 13,980 Nigerian soldiers served in the African campaigns.



The West Africa Frontier Force became the Royal West African Frontier Force in 1928 and the Nigeria Regiment continued to serve as part of it, serving also in the Second World War in India and Burma. Following the war, the Nigeria Regiment's name changed a number of times, becoming first the Queen's Own Nigeria Regiment, then the Nigerian Military Force in 1956 and the Royal Nigerian Army in 1960. On Nigerian independence in 1961, it became simply the Nigerian Army, forming the basis of all Nigerian military forces.