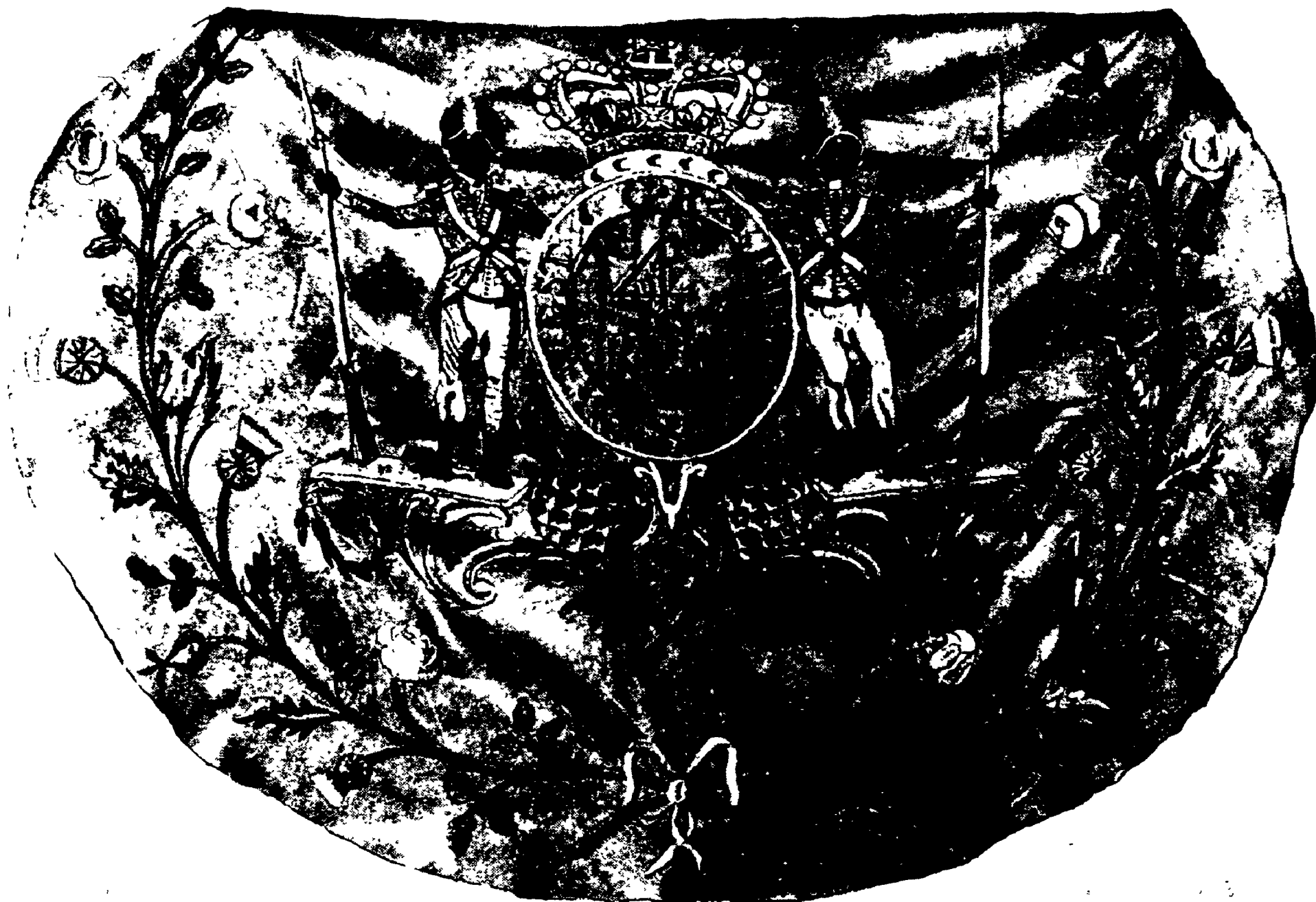


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History

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE WEST INDIA REGIMENTS 1795-1815



4th West India Regiment. Centre of Regimental Colour, 1795.

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE WEST INDIA REGIMENTS 1795-1815:
A STUDY IN BRITISH COLONIAL MILITARY HISTORY

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ABSTRACT

On 2 May 1795 the London Gazette, which announced all notices of commissions in and significant events pertaining to the British Army, called into official existence two black regiments. Almost immediately they became known as the "West India Regiments." This marked the first time that African regiments were placed on the British Military Establishment and acknowledged in Britain's Army Lists. By the end of 1798 a total of twelve black regiments had been raised for service in the West Indies. This subject, a socio-military study, deals with the origin and early development of Britain's prototype colonial army, the West India Regiments, which was a force recruited from the black population both in the West Indies and West Africa. This development is examined within the context of the continuing process of africanization of British West Indian society, war in the Caribbean, and the beginnings of British imperial expansion in western Africa.

RESUME

Le 2nd mai, 1795, le London Gazette, qui publiait les annonces des brevets d'officiers dans l'armée britannique, ainsi que tout autre événement important ayant rapport à cette armée, a donné naissance officielle à deux régiments noirs. Presque immédiatement, les deux corps ont été surnommés "les régiments des Antilles". Cela marquait la première fois qu'un régiment africain soit admis à l'"Etablissement Militaire Britannique" et reconnu officiellement par les "Army Lists" de la Grande Bretagne. Vers la fin de 1798, il y avait un total de douze régiments noirs assemblés dans les Antilles. La présente thèse, une étude socio-militaire, traite de l'origine et du développement de l'armée coloniale prototype de la Grande Bretagne, c.àd. les régiments des Antilles, qui était un corps recruté parmi la population noire des Antilles et de l'Afrique Occidentale. Ce développement est analysé dans le contexte du processus continu d'africanisation subi par la société antillaise britannique, ainsi que la guerre dans les Caraïbes et le début de l'expansion impérialiste de la Grande Bretagne dans l'Afrique Occidentale.

to
my beloved
WILLY

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A.O. Audit Office, Exchequer and Audit Department
 Public Record Office, London
- C.O. Colonial Office, Public Record Office, London
- H.O. Home Office, Public Record Office, London
- P.M.G. Paymaster General, Public Record Office, London
- T. Treasury, Public Record Office, London
- W.O. War Office, Public Record Office, London.

PREFACE

Colonial troops are as old as colonial warfare and during the European era in the New World, warfare began in the Caribbean. All nations in the West Indies relied to some extent on troops recruited in the colonies from among European settlers, indigenous Indians and eventually transported Africans. In British military history, the first black corps placed on the British Military Establishment and acknowledged on Britain's Army Lists were the West India Regiments. These corps, which were recruited with blacks born in the West Indies and Africa, enjoyed a continuous existence from 1795 to 1927.

Warfare was endemic in the Caribbean for nearly three centuries. However, historians, particularly professional British historians, have shown comparatively little interest in this subject. There is, for instance, no single military study in English devoted to the West Indian phase of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Of those studies which have examined the subject of war in the West Indies, the most important is still Richard Pares' War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1753. This work was first published in 1936.

The purpose of this monograph is to provide the first full account of the founding of all twelve West India Regiments. This study also attempts to shed some light on British colonial

military policy and the character of warfare in the Caribbean during the eighteenth century. Furthermore, this investigation provides a more comprehensive picture of the West Indian phase of the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars than has yet been published in English.

There are a number of debts I would like to acknowledge. First and foremost, Dr. Hereward Senior, my advisor who suggested the topic and who also provided invaluable advice and helpful criticism. Many thanks are owing to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, McGill University, which provided me on several occasions with the financial assistance to complete my research in Canada, the United Kingdom and the West Indies. Without this aid the research could not have been completed. I also wish to thank Wilhelmina Wagner Buckley for her assistance in the preparation of the tables and several drafts of the manuscript; Eleanor Senior for two important references which she discovered while in the midst of her own research; Ms. Bertrand of the McGill University Library for her translation of certain documents; my colleague, Mary Alice Parsons, for reading the manuscript and recommending some important changes; and Captain D. C. M. Ormsby, 1st Battalion, The Jamaica Regiment, for certain manuscript records pertaining to the British garrison at Jamaica.

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Last but not least I acknowledge my friends and my family whom I virtually abandoned during the several years I was engaged in researching and writing. That they have welcomed me "back" is a mark of their love and devotion. I am forever indebted.

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Roger N. Buckley

On 2 May 1795 the London Gazette announced the formation of two Negro regiments to serve in the West Indies. Six more black regiments were raised during the same year, reaching a total of twelve regiments by 1798. Almost immediately they became known as the "West India Regiments". The creation of this native West Indian army marked the opening of a new era in British West Indian history and British military history.



CHAPTER I

BACKGROUND: NEGRO MILITARY TRADITION IN THE BRITISH WEST INDIES TO 1795

From the beginning of European colonial conquest in the New World, the need to conquer, protect, and consolidate colonial possessions necessitated the recruitment of non-European peoples for military service. Initially Amerindians were recruited as auxiliaries. Thus Hernando Cortes made immediate and decisive use of the Tlascalcan Indians against the Aztec Confederacy in 1519.¹ Somewhat later, from 1637 to 1641, Johan Maurits engaged the services of one thousand Amerindians to assist his Dutch army in driving the Portuguese out of northeast Brazil.²

Similarly, African slaves were used as a result of the introduction of the plantation system, the failure of the policy of forced Indian labour in the Caribbean, and the substitution of African slave labour in the sixteenth century. According to Bartolomé de Las Casas, missionary, historian, "Protector of the Indians", and one of the originators of African slavery in the western hemisphere, slaves belonging to the King of Spain were employed to build fortifications on the island of Hispaniola

¹Benjamin Keen, ed., Readings in Latin-American Civilization: 1492 to the Present (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1955) p. 60.

²C. R. Boxer, The Dutch in Brazil 1624-1654 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 70.

early in the sixteenth century.³ In 1635 the French enlisted a number of slaves on St. Kitts to fight against the English by promising them their liberty (which they never received).⁴ By the middle of the seventeenth century it was the universal practice among the colonial nations in the West Indies to recruit slaves in order to fulfill a variety of military duties. It had become customary also, as in the case of the Portuguese and the Dutch to grant freedom to those slaves employed as soldiers,⁵ a precedent that would be followed subsequently throughout the West Indies.

While many European nations participated in the scramble for colonies, and while experiences naturally varied from nation to nation and from region to region, there were common factors which encouraged the military employment of native Indians and especially African slaves. In addition to the size of the empires which were being forged and which required troops for their protection, a paramount reason was the inadequate numbers of Europeans in the New World during the first two centuries of colonial settlement. Some regions of Latin America and the American northeast Atlantic seaboard eventually attracted relatively large numbers of white settlers. But other areas did not. In this latter category fall the British West Indies. Largely

³George Sanderlin, trans. and ed., Bartolomé de Las Casas: A Selection of His Writings (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 101.

⁴Alan C. Burns, History of the British West Indies (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1954), p. 220.

⁵Boxer, p. 140.

as a result of the plantation-slave system which quickly eliminated the small white farmer from the islands, an unsuitable climate for Europeans uninured to its rigours, and yellow fever which was nearly endemic in the Caribbean, the British West Indies never became an area favorable to European settlement. As a result the African was to play an important military as well as economic role in the development of the British Caribbean.

British experience regarding the military use of African slaves paralleled that of the other colonial nations. In spite of the dangers and the contested question whether slaves could be armed safely or usefully in defence of their masters, planters often had retinues of reliable slave retainers. In 1655 a contingent of one thousand slaves was recruited into imperial service at Barbados to join General Robert Venables's expedition to St. Domingo and to Jamaica.⁶ Further, in 1689 armed black bondsmen were used to defend the tiny leeward island of Montserrat against the French.⁷ And in 1694, in anticipation of a French invasion of Jamaica which occurred in June of that year, the Jamaica Council decreed that any slave who killed a Frenchman was to receive his freedom.⁸

⁶John W. Fortescue, A History of the British Army, 13 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1899-1930), 1:261.

⁷Eric Williams, Capitalism and Slavery (New York: Capricorn Books, 1966), p. 215.

⁸Minutes of the Council of Jamaica, 31 May 1694, John W. Fortescue, ed., Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies (London: Mackie and Co., Ltd., 1903) Vol. XIV. No. 1074, p. 291.

The dwindling white population in the British islands, coupled with the failure of the deficiency laws to maintain effectively an acceptable black-white ratio, eventually resulted in the inclusion of free blacks and free coloureds into the colonial militia system, a practice that would be followed almost universally in the West Indies by the middle of the eighteenth century.⁹ The "List of all His Maties. Forces, both Horse and Foot, in Jamaica, on June 24, 1700", a militia return sent by Governor Beeston to the Secretary to the Lords of Trade on 7 October 1700, included several "free negroes" among the officers and men of the companies of parish militia.¹⁰

The European wars of the eighteenth century, with their concomitant colonial struggles, accelerated the employment of blacks in both colonial and imperial military service in the British West Indies. Further, the recruitment of slaves already considered "indispensable" to the success of military operations in the West Indies towards the close of the Seven

⁹Richard Pares, War and Trade in the West Indies 1739-1763 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936; reprint ed., London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1963), p. 256. The word coloured refers chiefly to the offspring of a union between a white and a black. The farther from Negro ancestry an individual stood the higher was his or her social rank. Therefore racial distinctions were jealously guarded. These distinctions were reinforced by law. At Antigua, for instance, at the end of the eighteenth century, free coloureds were permitted to vote in elections while free blacks were excluded from this privilege. See Elsa Goveia, Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), pp. 82, 97. As a result, efforts were made to form separate units composed of free blacks and free coloureds.

¹⁰Frank Cundall, The Governors of Jamaica in the Seventeenth Century (London: The West India Committee, 1936), pp. 162-163.

Years' War,¹¹ a fact that was repeatedly confirmed during the American Revolution,¹² gave rise to what might be called africanization or west indianization of the entire British colonial military apparatus. Africanization or the incorporation of blacks, both slave and free, into the British military in the West Indies was encouraged in 1662 by Charles II. In order to conciliate the good will of the troops in Jamaica and to urge them to cultivate the soil, he presented three hundred slaves as a royal gift to the officers to be divided among them.¹³ James II followed the example of his brother during his own reign.¹⁴ This process was hastened by the smallness of the regular British Army and the very character of West Indian warfare.

The restrictions imposed by economy in military spending, the absence of conscription and the employment of regulars as an aid to the civil power prevented the establishment and maintenance of a large standing army in Britain for much of the eighteenth century. The use of soldiers as amphibious troops or a corps of marines, particularly in the West Indies, assisted in limiting the size of the British Army during this period.

Moreover, the great distance between Britain and her

¹¹C.O. 137/61, Egremont to Lyttleton, January 1762.

¹²W.O. 1/51, Calder to Jenkinson, 29 October 1779.
Ibid., Vaughan to Jenkinson, 21 September 1780.

¹³W. Cobbett, The Parliamentary History of England, Vol. XXXIII, Debate in the Commons on Mr. Ellis' Motion for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Negroes in the West Indies, 6 April 1797. Bryan Edward's speech, p. 280.

¹⁴Ibid.

Caribbean plantations created serious logistical problems. Colonial assemblies desirous of imperial protection but adamant in their refusal to take on a more equitable burden of its costs, prevented the British Government from keeping larger numbers of regular troops in the West Indies. With life-time service in the Regular Army unpopular, and with the militia at times successfully competing with the army for recruits,¹⁵ Britain began her wars throughout the second half of the eighteenth century with armies inadequate to the tasks set by a nation with both continental and imperial commitments. During the American Revolution, for instance, jails were emptied of their inmates in order to provide recruits for West Indian service. Felons, deserters, and even murderers were enlisted without enquiries into their crimes.¹⁶ Up to 1793, the year Britain began her greatest struggle against France, the entire regular British Army numbered slightly fewer than forty thousand men.¹⁷ However, the greatest single factor contributing to africanization was a phenomenon now blandly referred to as "West Indian service".

Service in the West Indies during war as well as peace

¹⁵J. R. Western, The English Militia in the Eighteenth Century (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 189, 200, 203, 222, 236-237, 239, 245, cf. 258-271, 442-443.

¹⁶W.O. 1/51, Christie to Jenkinson, 18 May 1780. Recruiting difficulties for the regular army during the American Revolution, for instance, are discussed in Edward Curtis, The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), pp. 51-80.

¹⁷Fortescue, 4(part II): 940.

was to a large extent a hopeless struggle against a debilitating climate and the fatal ravages of yellow fever. It was considered a death sentence by those troops selected to garrison Britain's pestiferous islands. In addition to a chaotic clothing system, uniforms ill suited for tropical service, and the issuance of new rum, a veritable poison, British troops stricken with disease were at the mercy of many unqualified regimental surgeons. The situation was exacerbated by the official acceptance of incorrect medical opinion and poorly administered general hospitals rife with abuse in their system of appointing surgeons and physicians. ¹⁸

The fate of many thousands of British soldiers in the eighteenth century was sealed when the British Government very unwisely sent to the West Indies newly raised regiments composed largely of undisciplined men whose irregular habits frequently led to dissipation and even death. These unfortunate soldiers were quartered in barracks which were often constructed in low swampy areas considered to be unhealthy for Europeans even in the eighteenth century. ¹⁹ West Indian expeditions in the eighteenth century, whether successful in achieving their objectives or not, were all characterized by the same grim feature, namely, the great loss of life due chiefly to disease. Admiral Vernon's expeditions of 1740 to 1742, resulted in the deaths

¹⁸ Robert Jackson, A Treatise on the Fevers of Jamaica (London, 1791), pp. 413, 416-424.

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 393-394, 410-415.

on nine soldiers out of every ten of the original force.²⁰ Of the eighteen hundred men who took part in the Nicaraguan Expedition of 1779 to 1780, fewer than four hundred survived. Among them was Captain Horatio Nelson, who was taken ashore at Port Royal, Jamaica, prostrated by fever.²¹

Nor were reinforcements necessarily the answer to the great problem of wastage among British troops serving in the West Indies. These troops were similarly affected by climate and disease. Moreover, many soldiers sent from Britain never arrived in the Caribbean. One study shows that during the American Revolution, of the twelve regiments which embarked for the West Indies from October 1776 to February 1780, some 8,437 men, 931 died on passage for an eleven percent average loss in each regiment.²² Of those who reached the West Indies, many were sent back immediately to Britain as being too young and others were rejected reluctantly by commanders because of "extreme infirmities".²³

It was unthinkable that British garrisons be withdrawn from the valuable but burdensome sugar islands. Given the character of West Indian society it was logical that slave labour be utilized to conserve the energy and thereby prolong

²⁰Fortescue, 2: 76; William Gardner, A History of Jamaica (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909), pp. 123-125.

²¹Gardner, p. 147.

²²Piers Mackesy, The War for America 1775-1783 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 526.

²³W.O. 1/52, Campbell to Townshend, 20 July 1782.

the life (or so it was thought at the time) of European soldiers. Furthermore, the slave system of the West Indies provided frequent and dramatic examples of the incredible feats of endurance exhibited by the slaves. "The accommodation of the day's journey," wrote George Pinckard, a British regimental surgeon,

were quite West Indian, each had a slave running at his horse's side, or holding at his tail; and each slave was loaded either with a trunk of clothes upon his head, or a bottle of Madeira wine, of rum, or of water in his hand The negroes kept pace with us throughout the whole of the journey, and were not only at hand to give us drink on the road, but were likewise in readiness to supply us with dry clothes on our arrival. ²⁴

Little wonder, that with the availability of slave labour, the ability of the African to survive intense heat and hardship and the imminence of a series of intensifying colonial wars in the 1740s, there was a greatly increased demand for blacks to serve both colonial and imperial military establishments.

Early in the eighteenth century two slave pioneers or military labourers were attached permanently to each company of British infantry quartered on the island of Jamaica for the purpose of relieving white troops of fatigue duties. ²⁵ In May 1741 the Council and Assembly of Jamaica passed an Act authorizing the employment of slaves for imperial military service. ²⁶ Also in Jamaica during the Seven Years' War, a

²⁴George Pinckard, Notes on the West Indies, 3 vols. (London: for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1806), 2: 398-399. Pinckard accompanied Sir Ralph Abercromby's expedition to the West Indies in 1796.

²⁵C.O. 137/107, Abstract of Jamaica's Defence Arrangements 1790-1802, in Hobart to Nugent, No. 4, 4 February 1802.

²⁶Governor Lyttleton's address to the Assembly, enclosed in C.O. 137/61, Lyttleton to Egremont, 12 May 1762.

plan was devised to raise a regiment of five hundred free blacks for service with an imperial expedition preparing for an attack on Cuba.²⁷ However, it was only with difficulty that a somewhat reduced corps of black light infantrymen²⁸ eventually was raised even though the usual bounties were offered as an inducement to enlist.²⁹ Successfully involved in a large number of trades,³⁰ already liable for militia service as freemen, and unwilling to accept the risk of enslavement if captured,³¹ most free blacks saw little personal reward in imperial military service.

However, recruiting slaves was an entirely different matter especially when colonial assemblies chose to be co-operative. The model used for enlisting slaves for military service in the West Indies can be seen in Governor Lyttleton's successful efforts to raise two thousand slave pioneers in Jamaica for immediate imperial service in 1762. After receiving his instructions, the Assembly was made privy to the British Government's requirements by means of a "message" to them from the Governor. In this case the two thousand slaves would be hired out to the British Government at the per diem rate of $7\frac{1}{2}$ pence local currency of 5 pence sterling for a

²⁷Ibid., Egremont to Lyttleton, January 1762.

²⁸W.O. 1/51, The memorial of John Brodbelt, 2 November 1778, pp. 586-594.

²⁹C.O. 137/61, Lyttleton to Egremont, 12 May 1762.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Pares, p. 256.

period of twelve months. An Act was passed subsequently by the Assembly on 17 April 1762 and approved by Lyttleton the following day authorizing the raising of the slaves.

On the strength of this Act, which was to be in force for six months, each parish was given a specific quota to meet. (No doubt this number was based on the total slave population of the parish.) Each slave would be appraised by commissioners representing the parish from which the slave was taken. The value of each slave, not to exceed £70 currency or £50 sterling, would be paid to the owner in the event the slave died in service, was lost, crippled or was not returned to his owner within one year after the passing of the Act of authorization.³² Slaves were recruited similarly in Antigua and other Windward Islands and took part in the British attacks on Guadeloupe in 1759, Martinique in 1761 and Havana in 1762.³³

During the American Revolution the need for slaves continued unabated. Blacks, hired out to the British Government, were used in the construction of fortifications and were employed as porters hauling provisions.³⁴ The Legislature

³²C.O. 137/61, Lyttleton to Egremont, 12 May 1762, with enclosures. An example of a slave dying while on military loan is provided by the case of the slave named Maria. She was killed on 10 September 1799 while being employed by the Engineer Department at Fort Charlotte, St. Vincent. Her owner was paid her appraised value of £80 sterling in April 1802. See W.O. 47/2384, pp. 184-188.

³³C.O. 152/60, Mathew to Germaine, No. 67, 16 March 1780.

³⁴W.O. 1/51, Calder to Jenkinson, 29 October 1779.

of Antigua agreed to arm one thousand of its slaves and to raise an additional corps of slave pioneers to do the fatigue duties of the regulars and militia.³⁵ To the north, in 1779, in the colony of South Carolina, the Black Carolina Corps was raised from among loyalists and free Negroes. Although raised outside the West Indies, this corps was distributed eventually among several British islands as a consequence of the British surrender at Yorktown. On the eve of the French Revolution, this corps numbering some three hundred men, was quartered at Grenada and consisted of pioneers, artificers and a troop of dragoons.³⁶

Thus towards the close of the eighteenth century the extensive use of blacks, slave and free, as pioneers and artificers, infantrymen and cavalrymen in colonial warfare in the West Indies was an established fact.³⁷ By the time Britain went to war again with France in 1793, the process of africanization had a history of well over a hundred years.

Where, though, did africanization of the British military in the West Indies fit into the general pattern and development of contemporary West Indian society? And what were the consequences? Examined in its larger context, africanization can be viewed as part of the overall expansion of

³⁵C.O. 152/60, Mathew to Germaine, No. 85, 4 July 1780.

³⁶W.O. 1/55, Shirley to Yonge, 11 February 1787.
Ibid., Rowe to Yonge, 12 September 1787, p. 37; and 6 October 1787.

³⁷C.O. 140/85, Minutes of 14 December 1795, Votes of the Assembly, p. 68.

Negro slavery in the British Caribbean, a process which had been accelerating towards the end of the eighteenth century. Expanding Negro slavery meant essentially that the slave was no longer labouring only on the plantations. In addition to the slave's traditional mode and site of work, the Negro had been moving into other areas of activity and with significant consequences. Professor Elsa Goveia's study of this development in the British Leeward Islands is illuminating.³⁸ In Nevis in 1788, for instance, twenty-seven percent of the island's entire slave population fit for labour were engaged in domestic service as tradesmen and as fishermen. At Montserrat nearly fifty percent of all adult slaves fit for labour were employed likewise as domestic servants or as tradesmen. As far back as 1774, the coastal shipping of the Leeward Islands was manned already by slaves.

In the British West Indies at large, slave townsmen were employed as servants, porters, carpenters, coopers, blacksmiths and masons. These slave carriers and artisans were usually hired out by their owners, but not infrequently they were permitted to seek employment for themselves. If hired out on this basis, they were expected to pay their owners specified daily or weekly sums.³⁹

The opportunities which gave many slaves this economic

³⁸See pp. 145-151.

³⁹Lowell J. Ragatz, The Fall of the Planter Class in the British Caribbean 1763-1833: A Study in Social and Economic History (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1928; reprint ed., New York: Octagon Books, 1971), p. 25.

mobility were due largely to the dwindling white population in the British West Indies and to the dislocations and demands of the colonial wars which took place during the last sixty years of the eighteenth century. The expansion of Negro slavery helped to drive the poorer whites out of the mechanical trades, domestic services, fishing, huckstering and shopkeeping, and even the sedentary trades such as tailoring. The eighteenth century was coming to a close with the Negro no longer confined to the field and the country. He was also increasingly in evidence in the towns, in the harbours and on board ships, in workshops, and in the military.

In terms of the military consequences of africanization there were of course some obvious benefits to the British Army. British soldiers were generally spared the drudgery and exhausting labours of fatigue work, although British sailors and artillerymen still shared with slave pioneers the arduous tasks of hauling and lifting heavy ordnance and stores. Furthermore, British commanders in the West Indies found it cheaper to hire slaves to haul provisions.⁴⁰ Also, the cost of maintaining a white soldier in hospital was greater than the cost of nursing a slave. If the European soldier should die, there were the additional costs of recruiting, clothing and transportation for his replacement.

On the other hand, africanization had not gone far enough. British soldiers were still dying despite the measures taken by the British Government to insure the health of its

⁴⁰W.O. 1/51, Vaughan to Jenkinson, 21 September 1780.

troops.⁴¹ The corps of slave labourers and especially the occasional infantry corps of free blacks were auxiliaries or temporary contingents whose services could be drawn upon only for prescribed periods of rather limited duration. The need for these types of auxiliaries did not cease when peace was declared. There were garrisons to maintain and supply, installations of all types to be repaired, other colonial powers on which to keep a wary eye, and huge slave populations to hold in check. A permanent native West Indian army was needed.

From about 1779, during the middle of the American Revolution, to the early 1790s there was a rather heavy correspondence among colonial governors, agents, principal Government ministers and other interested parties, dealing with the subject of the establishment of a black and coloured West Indian force. A number of different schemes were recommended. Although the majority of these plans followed West Indian precedents and recommended the raising of black corps only during emergencies, this sizeable body of literature nonetheless indicates the recognition and acceptance by the British Government and colonies alike, of the fact that the augmentation of British military strength in the West Indies could be achieved only by the

⁴¹The origins of Up-Park Camp, Jamaica, a "Remarkably Healthy Situation". C.O. 137/88, Effingham to Grenville, No. 8, 12 September 1790.

utilization of the non-white population. As events soon proved, the question to be resolved was how utilization would be executed within a framework rigidly set by a colonial slave society and colonies with traditional parochial defensive interests.⁴²

Much of the correspondence dealt with the modification of the model already in existence, namely the corps of slave pioneers. The possibility of war with Spain around 1790 provided some of the impetus. Earl Effingham, who arrived in Jamaica early in 1790 as Governor, was instructed in July of the same year to determine whether it would be more advantageous to raise black pioneers as separate and distinct battalions or simply to increase to company strength existing numbers of pioneers attached to British regiments serving in Jamaica. In addition he was to determine the cheapest and most expeditious method of raising these blacks. At the same time he was warned to anticipate colonial opposition to the measure.⁴³

Effingham, who supported the plan and who did not expect local opposition to be insurmountable,⁴⁴ was sent additional secret instructions in October. According to these, priority was to be given to recruiting free blacks and free coloureds. In the event that sufficient numbers of this

⁴²Pares, p. 227.

⁴³C.O. 137/88, Grenville to Effingham, "Secret", 10 July 1790.

⁴⁴Ibid., Effingham to Grenville, No. 8, 12 September 1790.

population could not be induced to enlist, he was to persuade planters to contribute a portion of their slaves. As a last measure, failing the first two, Effingham was to purchase the required number of slaves on public account. ⁴⁵

In order to impress upon Effingham the importance and urgency of this, Lord Grenville, then Home Secretary in Pitt's first administration, reminded Effingham of the advantages of raising black corps and rather bluntly ordered that these men be raised at once. ⁴⁶ However, before Effingham received these instructions, a new directive was sent to him towards the end of October. The raising of either separate black corps or additional companies to be attached to British regiments was to be stopped. Instead, the British Government had decided that ten free blacks and coloureds were to be attached to each company of British infantry on the island. Effingham was also authorized to purchase as many slaves as necessary if the requisite number of free blacks and coloureds could not be obtained. As before, he was given permission to purchase any additional number of slaves in the event that other British regiments were either permanently or only temporarily assigned to the Jamaica garrison. ⁴⁷

But once again, before this despatch could reach

⁴⁵Ibid., Grenville to Effingham, "Secret", 6 October 1790.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., Grenville to Effingham, "Secret", 23 October 1790.

Jamaica, yet another set of instructions was issued. / As a consequence of the amicable turn of events resulting from talks with Spain and the unlikelihood of war, Effingham was ordered to stop all military preparations. However, he was instructed to make a report on the progress that had been made concerning this project. What the British Government wanted to know in particular was what part of the plan Effingham had been able to execute. ⁴⁸

General Adam Williamson, who replaced Effingham in November 1791 when the latter died, claimed that Effingham had gone no further in his efforts to raise black pioneers than to order the various British regiments on the island to recruit whatever blacks they could by offering bounties. ⁴⁹ In any event, the British Government as of August 1791 had not decided whether the blacks to be raised would be embodied as a distinct corps or as detachments for British regiments. ⁵⁰ Here the matter rested until 1793. In March of that year only eighty-seven black pioneers were attached to the British Army then serving in Jamaica. ⁵¹

The plan to raise a force of black pioneers in Jamaica in 1790 is illustrative of at least two salient points. Firstly, the attempt of the British Government to recruit free

⁴⁸Ibid., Grenville to Effingham, No. 7, 6 November 1790.

⁴⁹C.O. 137/89, Williamson to Grenville, 19 December 1790.

⁵⁰Ibid., Dundas to Effingham, No. 11, 8 August 1791.

⁵¹C.O. 137/107, Abstract of Jamaica's defence arrangement 1790-1802, in Hobart to Nugent, No. 4, 4 February 1802.

blacks and coloureds as menial military labourers was an unmistakably clear indication of ministerial ignorance concerning this group. The British Government had already experienced difficulty in encouraging free blacks in Jamaica to enlist for imperial military service during the Seven Years' War. The reason for this was that the basic orientation of this small but highly group-conscious population was towards careers in trade and commerce and the attainment of political equality with whites.

As Professor Goveia's study has shown in the case of free coloureds in the Leeward Islands towards the close of the eighteenth century, they had become a significant group largely because they occupied a marginal position between the slaves and the whites. The fact that the size of this group was increasing while that of the whites tended to decrease further strengthened their position. The free coloured population was concerned primarily with increasing their property and removing the political and economic disabilities under which they suffered because of their colour. ⁵²

In addition, free blacks and coloureds also had to endure humiliating experiences as militiamen. Again in the case of the Leeward Islands, and no doubt throughout the rest of the British West Indies, free coloured militiamen (as well as free blacks) never received commissions. When embodied they were employed chiefly in the degrading capacity of pioneers or military labourers unlike whites who were used as infantrymen

⁵²Goveia, pp. 96-97.

and cavalrymen. ⁵³ To most free blacks and coloureds, then, a military career or even temporary military service held no reward and only reminded them of their disabilities. Under these circumstances they generally were not recruitable, a fact the British Government somehow repeatedly overlooked.

Secondly, the timing of the British Government's decision in October 1790 to purchase slaves for the pioneer corps it was attempting to raise coincided with the first attack on the slave trade in England. ⁵⁴ At this time abolition was not a Government measure because Pitt's cabinet and his supporters in both houses were divided on the issue. ⁵⁵ However, as events proved, the British Government would be placed in a singularly embarrassing position when it subsequently used the trade to purchase thousands of slaves as recruits for the West India Regiments.

In addition to the subject of modification of the slave pioneer corps, as seen in the case of Jamaica, some of those concerned with the ways and means of augmenting British military strength in the West Indies during the period 1779-1790 were recommending far more important alterations. Increasingly, the British Government was receiving plans to recruit blacks not only as service troops but also as infantry-

⁵³Ibid., p. 219.

⁵⁴Frank J. Klingberg, The Anti-Slavery Movement in England: A Study in English Humanitarianism (New York: Archon Books, 1968), pp. 59-96.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 87.

men, armed and trained after the pattern of regular British regiments. This is significant when it is remembered that, although there were specific cases when blacks were armed, colonial assemblies were even reluctant to allow free coloured militiamen to carry arms. Nonetheless, in 1779 Governor Dalling saw fit to prepare a plan to raise two regiments of 530 men each: one composed of free blacks and the other composed of free coloureds. In recognition of their commercial persuasions, since, according to Dalling, they were "all Tradesmen", he hoped to attract them by permitting one third of each regiment to be on furlough for a period of four months. These regiments were to be trained as light infantry corps and were to serve only in Jamaica. ⁵⁶

Apparently the plan was never put into operation because of merchant and planter opposition. They considered it a dangerous measure and correctly saw no need for these corps since the men earmarked for them already served in the militia. ⁵⁷

The British Government was to receive other proposals similar to Dalling's. One received in 1788 from a regular army officer represents a decidedly different approach to the problem of West Indian defence. The regiment which Captain John Gosling of the First Regiment of Foot Guards proposed to raise was not only to consist of free blacks and coloureds, but most signifi-

⁵⁶C.O. 137/75, enclosure No. 2, Dalling to Germaine, 25 May 1779.

⁵⁷Ibid., enclosure in Fuller to Germaine, 30 September 1779.

cantly, it would be a permanent force having white officers and white non-commissioned officers. During peace time it could be maintained either as an infantry corps or be converted into a pioneer battalion. ⁵⁸ Although Gosling's scheme was never adopted, his model was apparently not forgotten. The future West India Regiments were patterned after the two essential features of Gosling's corps: They were permanent regiments and they functioned also as service or labour battalions.

There were other models which underscored more vividly the value of a locally recruited and permanent military force. The Black Carolina Corps, although not raised originally in the West Indies, was a nearby reminder. The importance of this description of troops under the command of regular army officers ⁵⁹ had become so recognized in the West Indies that the Governor of Antigua, for instance, requested that fifty or sixty black soldiers belonging to this Corps be attached to Antigua's garrison. ⁶⁰ A much more distant example was Britain's East India Company's Indian or sepoy regiments. Recruited locally, sepoy troops outnumbered even the combined strength of European soldiers serving in both imperial and Company regiments in India.

There were a number of powerful arguments for the

⁵⁸"A Proposal to raise a Corps of Foot in less than Three Months in the West Indies, to consist of Free Mulattoes and Blacks", British Museum Add. MSS. 28062, fol. 378. The designations mulatto and coloured are used synonymously.

⁵⁹Alfred B. Ellis, The History of the First West India Regiment (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1885), p. 52.

⁶⁰W.O. 1/55, Shirley to Yonge, 11 February 1787.

creation of a permanent native or black infantry force in the West Indies. As mentioned above, the regular British Army for a variety of reasons was simply inadequate to meet the demands of West Indian defence at the end of the eighteenth century. There was of course the possibility that the colonial militias, West Indian and even North American, could take up the slack created by the deficiencies of the Regular Army. As a matter of fact, the precedent of getting militiamen to volunteer for overseas expeditions had already been established although with varying degrees of success. Barbadians had, for instance, relieved Nevis and St. Kitts in 1666 and 1667, respectively. During King William's War, 1689-1697, militiamen had also been induced to serve away from their homes. From the end of the seventeenth century up to and including King George's War, 1740-1748, militiamen, albeit chiefly American militiamen, had taken part in expeditions to Nova Scotia, Quebec, Cape Breton, Florida, Havana and Carthagen. They were encouraged to volunteer because of the attractions of bounty-money, land, high pay, prize money and even plunder. With the Americans now independent, however, this principal reservoir of manpower had dried up.

West Indian militias on the other hand did not prove as adventuresome nor as cooperative in matters of imperial defence. St. Kitts for example, during most of the last three decades of the eighteenth century, had refused to cooperate effectively with the Imperial Government in measures for its own defence. During the American Revolution, Governor Burt

found it impossible to persuade the legislature to undertake a program of military preparation because the inhabitants sought to keep the island from becoming a battleground in order to ensure the protection of their property. They hoped in this way to proclaim their neutrality on the basis of their unpreparedness. The result was that the island fell to the French in 1782 and remained in their possession until the end of the war. Even during the invasion of the island considerable numbers of the militia deserted. ⁶¹

During the years following the American Revolution, St. Kitts again refused to reconstitute its militia. When it finally did so in 1793 by one vote, the Militia Act had so little effect that no commissions could be issued under it. ⁶² Dictated then by a steadily declining white population whose interests were essentially commercial and insular, West Indian militias adhered to a purely defensive role. ⁶³ Furthermore, owing to poor training and discipline, numerous exemptions from service, and slight punishments for offenders, West Indian militias were marked by general inefficiency. ⁶⁴

In addition to the weight of these arguments was the apparent fact that blacks were not susceptible to the ravages of yellow fever which was the curse of Europeans, or at least

⁶¹Goveia, pp. 78- 79.

⁶²Ibid., P. 79.

⁶³Pares, p. 227.

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 227-240; Ragatz, p. 31.

of those who only recently arrived in the West Indies. As a result, early in the 1790s there was an emerging degree of consensus on the subject of Negro immunity to yellow fever.⁶⁵ Prompted by a traditional high death rate among British soldiers in the West Indies and an epidemic of yellow fever as far away as Philadelphia in 1793, a number of assertions were put forth about the biological distinctiveness of the Negro.⁶⁶ Some in the medical profession suggested that Negroes contracted the disease less often and more mildly than did whites. One physician suggested that blacks native to America were susceptible to yellow fever, though not as readily as whites, and called attention to a recent study⁶⁷ by an English doctor, Robert Jackson. Jackson, who had been a doctor's assistant at Savanna la Mar, Jamaica, from 1774 to 1780, and who served later as a surgeon with the British Army in St. Domingo in 1796,⁶⁸ indicated in this study that blacks born in Africa,

⁶⁵"A Proposal to raise a Corps of Foot" British Museum, Add. MSS. 28062, fol. 378; W.O. 1/767, Fuller to Portland, 5 February 1795.

⁶⁶The first epidemic in the New World of what can be indentified with certainty as yellow fever occurred in the Yucatan Peninsular in 1648: Henry R. Carter, Yellow Fever: An Epidemiological and Historical Study of Its Place of Origin (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins Co., 1931), p. 180.

⁶⁷A Treatise on the Fevers of Jamaica, with Some Observations on the Intermitting Fever of America, and an appendix containing some hints on the means of preserving the health of soldiers in hot climates (London, 1791).

⁶⁸Dictionary National Biography. An Outline of the History and Cure of Fever, Epidemic, and Contagious, more especially of Jails, Ships, and Hospitals, and Yellow Fever (Edinburgh, 1798), was a study based on his experiences in St. Domingo.

as well as creole blacks who had lived constantly in the West Indies, were not subject to the disease. ⁶⁹

It is more than likely that Jackson's opinions were known to British officials and that they influenced in some way the British Government's future decision to raise permanent black regiments for service in the West Indies. In addition to his publications on the subject of yellow fever, Jackson received his promotion to the office of army physician in 1794, as the result of the personal intercession of the Duke of York who, in 1795, became the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. ⁷⁰

What is interesting about this episode is that physicians at the time had in fact groped their way towards a reasonably accurate conclusion on racial immunity. With yellow fever endemic in West Africa, and nearly endemic in the West Indies, and with large proportions of both populations contracting it during childhood, survivors did acquire prolonged immunity or a relatively high resistance. ⁷¹ Though blacks did indeed contract the disease, the idea of their immunity faded

⁶⁹pp. 249-250.

⁷⁰Jackson, who became the army medical director in the West Indies from 1811-1815, was also responsible for the reform of both the College of Physicians and the administration of the old army medical board. He retired from the army on half-pay as Inspector General of Army Hospitals. Dictionary National Biography.

⁷¹"That the negro does possess a resistance to yellow fever not shown by any other race is, we think, among the best established facts in the epidemiology of the disease. It is a point of which opinion is all but unanimous and evidence conclusive." Carter, pp. 263-264.

only gradually.

It is interesting to note that although Jackson did believe that creole blacks and African born blacks were particularly equipped to endure the rigours of West Indian climate, he was just as convinced that white soldiers, if properly disciplined and fed, were not only capable of sustaining military fatigues in the West Indies, but were capable of doing military labour equally as well as native born Africans and creole blacks.⁷² Jackson's convictions were based on observations and personal experiences during his residence in Jamaica. He cited the great and continuous fatigues of young European planters, who often remained exposed to the heat and sun for longer periods of time than were customary or advisable for British soldiers. He also cited as further proof his own experience of walking with baggage from Kingston to Lucea, a distance of about 118 miles, in four days. Although he covered the distance without being "materially fatigued", he did confess that during most of his stay at Savanna la Mar, he too believed that death or serious illness would be the consequence for a European undertaking such labours.

Jackson was certain that, in addition to his own remedies, the only other way for ~~British~~ soldiers to be able to campaign effectively in the West Indies was by being employed on military fatigues thereby conditioning their bodies to these demands. For this reason, he was opposed to the policy

⁷²Jackson, Treatise, p. 404.

of attaching black pioneers to each British regiment to perform the fatigues for those corps. To Jackson, victory in West Indian warfare rested not so much on the expert handling of arms as it did on creating disciplined and physically hardened troops. ⁷³ Events during the coming war with France were to confirm Jackson's opinions. ⁷⁴

Despite the arguments for the creation of a permanent black infantry force to assist British regulars in guarding the sugar islands and despite the fact that by 1763 arming blacks was considered universally as one of the principal ways of supplementing military strength in the West Indies, ⁷⁵ colonial opposition and imperial indecision combined to prevent the establishment of such a force. It took nothing less than a British military disaster in 1794 and, ironically, several major slave insurrections in the British West Indies in 1795 to stiffen the resolve of the British Government to order the establishment of this force.

The egalitarian principles of the French Revolution did much to set the character of the early phase of the war which broke out between Britain and France in February 1793. Its

⁷³Ibid., pp. 403-406.

⁷⁴See, for instance, the comparison of medical returns for British and French colonial troops in St. Domingo in 1794 in J. Holland Rose, William Pitt and the Great War (London: G. Bell and Sons, Ltd., 1912), p. 226.

⁷⁵Pares, p. 240.

revolutionary principles and the contemporary confusion in the French Government created political division among the French planters. It also made a deep and lasting impression on the free coloureds or mulattoes and the vast slave population. Furthermore, the vacillating behavior of the National Assembly in Paris, which several times granted and then withdrew full political equality for mulattoes, only aggravated the situation in the French Caribbean. A three sided civil war was the consequence.

In 1790, mulattoes at Martinique staged a brief but abortive rebellion. The French garrison on Tobago mutinied; and in 1792 the Governor of St. Lucia was driven off the island. The first contingent of French troops sent to the West Indies after the disorder began supported the revolutionary party at Martinique prompting an exodus of royalists from both Martinique and Guadeloupe to Spanish Trinidad.

Similar events were also taking place to windward at St. Domingo, the French portion of the island of Hispaniola. A mulatto revolt in 1790, which was viciously suppressed, was followed during the summer of 1791 by a general uprising of the slaves who devastated much of the northern parts of the colony. The years immediately following these events were characterized by confusion, atrocities, and a kaleidoscope of alignments as Jacobin commissioners, French, Spanish, and eventually British troops became enmeshed in the bitter struggle.

Violence in St. Domingo, only one day's sail from Jamaica, and like disorders in Martinique, Guadeloupe and

St. Lucia, caused serious alarm throughout the British West Indies. With a large black servile population of its own, Britain deemed it necessary to increase her military forces in the Caribbean. Thus, before war⁷⁶ had actually been declared by France on 2 February 1793, no fewer than nineteen battalions, out of a total strength of eighty-one, were actually in or on their way to the Caribbean.⁷⁶ The volatile situation in the Caribbean even induced Jamaica to request an increase in its own military establishment and to pay for these additional troops out of its treasury.⁷⁷

Before France's declaration of war, Henry Dundas, then Home Secretary, had already entered into an agreement with certain French planters from St. Domingo. Both parties agreed that in the event of a war between Britain and France, St. Domingo, perhaps the most prized colonial possession in the world, would receive the protection of Britain until the termination of the war.⁷⁸ By 28 February 1793 Dundas had committed the rather meagre British forces to intervene in the growing rebellion in St. Domingo and to conquer the French possessions to windward.⁷⁹

British expeditionary activity in the West Indies in 1793 was marked by inadequate numbers of troops, victory and

⁷⁶Fortescue, 4(part I): 77.

⁷⁷These troops were the 20th or Jamaica Light Dragoons. C.O. 137/108, Hobart to Nugent, September 1802.

⁷⁸Fortescue, 4(part I): 78-79.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 79.

defeat. A small force under General Cornelius Cuyler from Barbados, the seat of the Leeward and Windward Islands Command, captured the tiny island of Tobago in April. A larger force of some eleven hundred men, including the Black Carolina Corps, failed to take Martinique in June. To the north, the Jamaica Command, which was responsible for the protection of the territory of British Honduras, the Bahamas and Bermuda, on 9 September sent a ludicrously small force of about seven hundred men against St. Domingo. Surprisingly, this force captured Jeremie on the 19th and soon after took St. Nicolas and Cape Tiburon.⁸⁰ However, prior to the departure of this force, news was received that not only had Jacobin emissaries been despatched from France to infiltrate the British slave islands and to sow discord among the slaves by bringing to them the message and meaning of the revolution in France, but also that the Jacobin commissioner at Cape François, St. Domingo, had on 29th August 1793 declared the abolition of slavery. This pronouncement was followed in February 1794, by the total abolition of slavery in all the French possessions.⁸¹ Despite British successes in December 1793 and the spring of 1794, with the passing of these decrees the initiative had actually passed

⁸⁰For British expeditions in 1793 see Fortescue, 4(part I): 134-135, 330-333.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 135; Eric Williams, From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean 1492-1969 (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 250-251; C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution rev. 2nd ed., (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), pp. 128-129, 139-142. See also Thomas O. Ott, The Haitian Revolution 1789-1804 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), pp. 65-72, 82-83.

to revolutionary France. British troops sailed into St. Domingo waters and those of the other French Caribbean islands as the champions of the old slave order, red-coated overseers of Britain's slave islands. But a few additional victories were still to be won by British arms before disaster struck.

News of General Bruce's failure to capture Martinique in June 1793 prompted Dundas in early August of that year to prepare a major offensive against the French Leeward and Windward Islands. General Charles Grey, who was given this command, sailed from Barbados on 3 February 1794 with a force of nearly seven thousand troops. As a result of the brilliant combined operations of the navy under Admiral Jervis and Grey's army, Martinique fell on 23 March. Ten British regiments were awarded the battle honour "Martinique" for their part in its capture.⁸² St. Lucia fell on 2 April and the French garrison on Guadeloupe capitulated on 21 April. In the meantime, the Saintes had also been captured.⁸³ And to leeward, on 4 June 1794, British troops marched into Port-au-Prince, St. Domingo.

Although the British amphibious assaults carried out against the French islands were standard operations by West Indian practices, new dimensions were being added to Caribbean warfare as evidenced in the campaigns of 1793 and 1794. For one, the heaviest demands in West Indian warfare for slave labour were placed by both Britain and France. Several months

⁸²Burns, pp. 758-760.

⁸³For Grey's campaigns of the spring of 1794, see Fortescue, 4(part I): 350-365.

before the start of hostilities the British Government had transacted to hire slaves to repair the fortification of Brimstone Hill, St. Kitts. Large sums were spent by Government to victual these slaves. Male and female slaves were even purchased by the British Army in Tobago, after its capture, for the purpose of doing the fatigue duties of the garrison hospital and for British troops. These costs were all met by army extraordinaries. ⁸⁴

British commanders, West Indian governors and officers sent to the West Indies armed with special authorization were instructed on the importance and urgency of raising a huge corps of slave labourers to act in conjunction with the British Army in the West Indies. Certain officers were empowered to procure as many slaves as they considered necessary in order to accomplish certain duties for the military. General Sir John Vaughan, who replaced Grey towards the end of 1794, was instructed in no uncertain terms that the establishment of this large slave pioneer corps was one of the most important tasks of his command. ⁸⁵

Subsequent War Office regulations increased the demand for black labourers. For instance, all commissioned officers who embarked on service in the West Indies were instructed

⁸⁴P.M.G. 14/74, Extraordinaries Abroad 1792, 1793, 1794, pp. 85, 161, 165, indexed under "West Indies".

⁸⁵C.O. 318/12, circular letter from Dundas to General Cuyler, the Governors of St. Vincent, Leeward Islands, Barbados, and the Lieutenant Governors of Dominica and Grenada, "Private and Secret", 21 January 1793; *ibid.*, Dundas to Prescott, "Secret", 12 October 1793; C.O. 318/13, Dundas to Vaughan, 7 October 1794.

not to employ white soldiers on fatigue duties nor as servants. Instead, "Fatigue Negroes" and black servants were to be used. The number of servants employed by each officer, for which he was allowed a monthly sum, was determined by the officer's rank: a field officer was entitled to three black servants; a captain two; and a subaltern one. ⁸⁶

The French, likewise, employed a great number of blacks and mulattoes. The French garrison that surrendered Martinique to Grey's army in March 1794 included a mulatto corps under the command of a mulatto general. ⁸⁷ The French force at Cayenne was said to comprise about one thousand regular French troops and some four thousand blacks and mulattoes. ⁸⁸

Another new feature of West Indian warfare, seen in the early campaigns of the war, occurred initially in St. Domingo. Here the extensive involvement of the slave population not only transported much of the fighting into the unknown interior of the colony, unknown at least to the British, but it also transformed the struggle into a protracted guerrilla war. The small British force on the island quickly found itself in a "war of posts" for which it was totally inadequate and ill-prepared. Scattered, under-strength and unsupported British detachments, dressed in scarlet tunics, quickly proved to be

⁸⁶Printed in Henry Dundas, Facts relative to the Conduct of the War in the West Indies (London: J. Owen, 1796), pp. 185, 191, 193.

⁸⁷Fortescue, 4(part I): 356.

⁸⁸C.O. 318/13, Grey to Williamson, 10 May 1794, enclosed in Grey to Dundas, "Secret", No. 28, 13 June 1794.

no match against a numerous, intrepid and inspired foe who had the added advantage of possessing a personal knowledge of the land. Although no one then realized it, the same type of warfare would soon engulf several of the British islands with catastrophic consequences.

The capture of Guadeloupe and Port-au-Prince was actually the high water mark of British military success in the West Indies during the first years of the war. However, by June 1794 an immense disaster was in the process of overwhelming British forces.

Grey's speedy conquests just as quickly evolved into the continuous nightmare of garrisoning the conquered islands. With a force numbering around 5,300 men,⁸⁹ Grey was responsible for guarding all the British Leeward and Windward Islands, as well as for policing the hostile and unhealthy conquered territories. He was likewise expected to support British operations in St. Domingo with troop reinforcements, which he somehow managed to achieve. But by mid-June Grey was warning the British Government that unless he received reinforcements the conquered islands were in danger of being lost.⁹⁰ In July, Grey reported that the situation in these islands had become "critical", and that a force of more than 11,500 infantry and artillerymen was necessary to defend the islands under

⁸⁹Ibid., Grey to Dundas, "Secret", No. 33, 17 July 1794, enclosure No. 2, "State of His Majesty's Forces in the West Indies Under the Command of His Excellency General Sir Charles Grey, 17 July 1794."

⁹⁰Ibid., "Secret", No. 28, 13 June 1794.

his command.⁹¹ Dundas, now in his newly created post as Secretary of State for War, would receive the same disquieting recommendation from yet another officer.⁹²

There were at least two reasons for Grey's urgent demand for more soldiers. His army, which was rapidly dying out, was not being replaced. With no conscription policy in Britain, the army was completely dependent on the success or failure of its recruiting teams. Furthermore, many of the men who might have gone into the regular army were being siphoned off into Britain's "separate armies": the militia, Fencibles and volunteers. The other reason for Grey's plea for additional troops was that the conquered French islands were not really conquered.

Actually, the British Army in the West Indies was in the process of melting away before Grey had arrived at Barbados. The alarming sickness and mortality among British troops during the summer of 1793, which was thought to have its origins in Africa, had not escaped the attention of the British Government.⁹³ In July 1794, Grey reported that nearly one third of his army had been rendered unfit for service by climate and disease.⁹⁴ Nor were the recruits sent to him of any value.

⁹¹Ibid., "Secret", No. 33, 17 July 1794, and enclosure No. 1.

⁹²W.O. 1/82, Colonel Francis Dundas, Adjutant General, to Henry Dundas, September 1794.

⁹³C.O. 318/12, Bruce to Dundas, 30 August 1793.

⁹⁴C.O. 318/13, Grey to Dundas, "Secret", No. 33, 17 July 1794, enclosure No. 2. It has been estimated that the normal annual wastage among British troops serving in the West Indies at this time was 25 percent. Arthur Bryant, The Years of Endurance 1793-1802 (London: Collins, 1942), p. 86.

They arrived in exceedingly poor health and, wrote Grey, "only serve to fill the Hospitals and are swept [sic] away by the climate." ⁹⁵ By the end of the first week in September he forwarded the startling news that in the space of less than four weeks, his army had been reduced further by 1,359 men. Those now fit for service numbered slightly fewer than 2,500 men. ⁹⁶ To meet the desperate need for troops, the militias in the three conquered islands were embodied. Corps composed of British merchants residing in these islands and their employees were also formed. ⁹⁷

In St. Domingo the situation of the British Army was equally grim. During April and May 1794 some 729 soldiers had died. ⁹⁸ Within the short time of two months after the capture of Port-au-Prince, a further 640 officers and men had died as a result of sickness. ⁹⁹ The losses of these troops necessitated that convalescing soldiers be taken from hospitals in order to discharge the duties of sentinels. ¹⁰⁰ Moreover, slaves who had only recently taken an oath of allegiance to support the British effort, and mulattoes in the area of St. Marc, were

⁹⁵C.O. 318/13, Grey to Dundas, "Secret", No. 32.

⁹⁶Ibid., No. 38, 9 September 1794.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸C.O. 318/15, "Abstract of the Returns of His Majesty's Forces in the Island of St. Domingo - dated 31 May 1794", p. 301.

⁹⁹Bryan Edwards, An Historical Survey of the Island of Saint Domingo (London: printed for John Stockdale, 1801), p. 195.

¹⁰⁰Gardner, p. 224.

were in a state of insurrection. Unable to patrol safely the countryside, British troops were besieged within the walls of the town. ¹⁰¹

But Grey also needed troops to fight a war that paralleled the struggle in St. Domingo. Although French garrisons had surrendered Martinique, St. Lucia and Guadeloupe to Grey's victorious army, segments of the slave populations in these islands continued to struggle from bases in the interior. What inspired these blacks was the revolutionary doctrine of liberty and equality of French republicanism. Grey wrote rather dejectedly in September that all three islands were infested with these "brigands". ¹⁰² Guadeloupe, for instance, was estimated as having a force of four to five thousand blacks under arms. ¹⁰³ However, before he was able to carry through with his threat to resort to any measure in order to bolster Britain's wavering position in the West Indies, Grey, along with Admiral Jervis, resigned his command and returned to England to answer charges of extortion surrounding the property taken from the conquered French islands. He was replaced by Sir John Vaughan.

The brother of Lord Lisburne, a veterat of the campaigns in the West Indies and New York State's Hudson Highlands during the American Revolution, ¹⁰⁴ Vaughan was destined to play a

¹⁰¹W.O. 1/60, Brisbane to Grant, 5 September 1794.

¹⁰²C.O. 318/13, Grey to Dundas, "Secret", No. 37, 9 September 1794.

¹⁰³W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, 24 November 1794.

¹⁰⁴Mackesy, pp. 140, 329.

major role in the raising of the West India Regiments. When he assumed the responsibility of a rapidly deteriorating command he found only one subaltern fit for duty at Fort Royal, the principal garrison of Martinique. On 1 November 1794 the Barbados garrison reported only four men fit for duty and only fifteen men were under arms at St. Vincent. On the same day, out of a total of 2,698 men in the Leeward and Windward Islands Command, 1,189 or 44.1 percent were unfit for military service.¹⁰⁵ By early December the British had been driven from Guadeloupe with the loss of hundreds of their best troops. Their hold on Martinique and St. Lucia was at best tenuous. Insufficient provisions from Britain forced Vaughan to open his ports to American ships.¹⁰⁶ Towards the end of December, Vaughan noted that British arms had been suffering continuous military reverses.¹⁰⁷ It took very little imagination to deduce the cause of Grey's original army of seven thousand, at least five thousand had perished!¹⁰⁸

The reasons for Britain's disastrous situation, a predicament that would undergo further severe shocks, were multiple. Confused and often self-defeating was direction¹⁰⁹ combined with

¹⁰⁵W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, 24 November 1794, and enclosures.

¹⁰⁶W.O. 1/31, Vaughan to Portland, 26 January 1795.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 22 December 1794.

¹⁰⁸Fortescue, 4(part I): 384-385.

¹⁰⁹For a concise assessment of Britain's muddled and multiple fissioned army administration see - Richard Glover, Peninsular Preparation: The Reform of the British Army 1795-1809 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 14-45.

the traditional difficulty of recruiting for the regular army were at the core of the problem. To these were added a number of other factors: simultaneous expeditions which frittered away Britain's already small army; the poor quality of many senior officers in 1793; troops untrained and poorly equipped to wage counter-insurgent warfare in the tropics; army physicians who prescribed fresh air as a cure for scurvy and dysentery, and doses of mercury as a remedy for venereal disease;¹¹⁰ the lack of reinforcements; and the sheer negligence on the part of the British Navy which permitted a French convoy to land fifteen hundred men at Guadeloupe in early June 1794, a force which quickly drove the British off the island.

A number of half measures, some of a rather dubious character, were resorted to by a Government in the throes of crisis. Several War Office regulations were issued in an effort to conserve the health of British troops serving in the West Indies. Marches during day-light hours were proscribed whenever possible. A number of alterations were made in the uniform worn by British troops serving in the West Indies to ward off heat and insects.¹¹¹ Further, in order to augment British forces in the West Indies, a number of catholic battalions was to be raised in Ireland.¹¹² Even jailers in

¹¹⁰See W.O. 1/62, medical report of Anthony G. Forbès, 25 August 1795, pp. 449-461.

¹¹¹Printed in Dundas, Facts, pp. 185-188.

¹¹²Pitt to George III, 4 August 1794, quoted in Arthur Aspinall, ed., The Later Correspondence of George III, 5 vols, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962-1970), 2: 229.

Britain were bribed by recruiting officers to persuade their prisoners to enlist in certain regiments then serving in the West Indies. ¹¹³ The old practice of recruiting criminals was being employed once again.

Yet what was needed essentially by Britain to restore the situation in the West Indies was not uniforms made suitable for tropical service, although this certainly helped, nor even an endless supply of British troops. The remedy lay elsewhere. What the situation demanded was soldiers who could withstand the grueling hardships of West Indian service and successfully fight the brigands on their own terms. British officers as well as the rank and file had proven incapable of meeting these challenges. To Sir John Vaughan there was only one recourse: to raise regular and permanent regiments of creole blacks and coloureds for imperial service in the West Indies. ¹¹⁴

Towards the end of December, Vaughan began a sustained and eventually successful effort to raise permanent black regiments. On 22 December 1794 he wrote the Duke of Portland, the Home Secretary, in somewhat general terms of the plan he had in mind.

I am of opinion that a corps of one thousand Men, composed of blacks and Mulattoes, and commanded by British Officers would render more essential service in the Country, than

¹¹³H.O. 50/386, Lewis to King, 21 January 1795 and enclosure.

¹¹⁴W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, "Secret", No. 6, 25 December 1794. It should be noted here that early in 1780, during the American Revolution, Vaughan had supported a plan to raise a regiment of free blacks to serve in the West Indies. C.O. 152/60, Mathew to Germaine, No. 67, 16 March 1780.

treble the number of Europeans who are unaccustomed to the Climate. And as the Enemy have adopted this Measure to recruit their Armies, I think we should pursue a similar plan to meet them on equal terms. 115

Three days later, in a "Secret" despatch to Dundas devoted entirely to the scheme, Vaughan was much more specific. As a start, the single corps which he proposed to raise for permanent service would be in every respect patterned after British line regiments. It would be divided into ten companies of one hundred men each, and would have the usual complement of officers, staff, sergeants and corporals. The drafts for this regiments would be slaves, "the ablest and most Robust Negroes". They would be given to the British Government as "Grants, or Gifts" by all the British Leeward and Windward colonies, including Tobago, in established quotas for each island. If, somehow, the number levied on each island were not reached, the corps would be completed by enlisting free blacks "at a modest Bounty". Failing even this alternative, there was a contingency plan which called for purchasing slaves from ships recently arrived from Africa. To leave no doubt as to the permanency of this corps, Vaughan insisted that "whether the War should continue, or Peace take Place, the Benefit to be derived from this Regiment . . . remain equally strong." 116

Vaughan reminded Dundas that what he was proposing to create in the British West Indies already had a precedent in India, namely the sepoy regiments. Dundas was also informed

115W.O. 1/31, Vaughan to Portland, 22 December 1794.

116W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 6, "Secret", 25 December 1794.

that Britain's critical position in the West Indies was due to a military imbalance in the Caribbean created by the fact that France had armed large numbers of blacks and mulattoes. In order to restore this balance Britain had no other alternative than to arm its own slaves. The war, in the West Indies, Dundas was warned, could be waged only by "opposing Blacks to Blacks". Vaughan closed this despatch on an ominous note: ". . . I am convinced", he wrote

that unless we can establish and procure the full Effects of such a Body of Men, to strengthen our own Troops, and to save them in a thousand situations, from Service, which in this Country will always destroy them, that the Army of Great Britain is inadequate to supply a sufficient Force to defend these Colonies. ¹¹⁷

About three weeks after Vaughan had written this despatch, Sir Adam Williamson, Commander-in-Chief of British forces in St. Domingo, wrote Dundas from Spanish Town that in addition to a naval blockade, the security of St. Domingo depended on the use of black troops. ¹¹⁸

At the time Vaughan began to press the Government for permission to raise the black regiment, a corps which he offered to command personally, there were already several prototypes in existence. Some were under immediate colonial control and others came under the jurisdiction of the British Army. But all were in one way or another of limited value to the British Government.

Those under the jurisdiction of the colonial assemblies

¹¹⁷Ibid. This despatch appears in its entirety as appendix A.

¹¹⁸W.O. 1/62, Williamson to Dundas, 14 January 1795.

were the various island slave corps and the so-called ranger battalions. According to Thomas Coke, historian, a close associate of John Wesley, and considered by many as the father of the Methodist missions in the West Indies, the former were first raised on the island of Tortola soon after the commencement of the war with France. Because there was no regular force on this island adequate to its defence, the Governor of Tortola requested the superintendent of the Methodist missions on the island, and the other Virgin islands, to arm his trustworthy slave parishioners and to place himself at their head. Impressed with the loyalty of these troops, the Governor General of the Leeward Islands soon after directed the missionaries to prepare returns of all the slaves attached to their stations in the Leeward Islands who could be trusted to carry arms. Although Coke does not indicate how many slaves were thus embodied, he does state that most of those mission slaves who had been raised by the superintendent were taken into the service of the several Leeward Islands. ¹¹⁹

By mid-April 1795 nearly all the British islands had embodied reliable slaves for service in special corps. ¹²⁰ Antigua, for instance, reportedly had embodied one thousand slaves by August 1795. However, few were armed with muskets. Most of Antigua's slave soldiers were armed instead with

¹¹⁹Thomas Coke, An Account of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the Methodist Missions (London: George Story, 1804), pp. 11-12.

¹²⁰W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 22, "Secret", 16 April 1795.

cutlasses and pikes, and were dressed in round black hats, white woolen jackets, with blue cuffs and lapels, and white trousers and shirts. ¹²¹ St. Christopher raised eleven hundred slaves, and the number of slaves eventually armed by this island exceeded the size of the militia. ¹²² Grenada raised a force of some three hundred slaves. ¹²³

These soldiers were all apparently paid for their services as in the case of Antigua's slave contingents. Slaves on this island were paid one pence local currency per diem and their owners two pence local currency per diem. ¹²⁴

Although many of these corps reached a high degree of discipline, they were of limited value to the Imperial Government. Because they were raised by colonial legislatures, they were confined to a defensive role and therefore could not be removed from those islands they were specifically raised to defend.

The ranger corps, also raised under the aegis of the colonial assemblies, presented somewhat similar limitations. A number of these corps, trained along the principle of light

¹²¹C.O. 153/28, Leigh to Portland, No. 3, 19 August 1795; C.O. 152/77, Stanley to Portland, No. 52, 31 March 1795, and enclosures.

¹²²Ibid., No. 61, 15 July 1795; W.O. 1/769, Thomson to Portland, No. 8, 10 October 1797, enclosed in, King to Huskisson, 11 December 1797; C.O. 153/28, Thomson to Portland, No. 11, 19 February 1798.

¹²³W.O. 1/767, Mackensie to Portland, 24 April 1795; ibid., King to Huskisson, 9 October 1795.

¹²⁴C.O. 153/28, Stanley to Portland, 31 March 1795.

infantry tactics, were first raised in the conquered islands beginning in April 1794. Although later recruits came principally from the slave population, apparently most of the first recruits for these corps were free blacks and free mulattoes. Many of the officers were French and the pay of these corps was the same as for British regiments.¹²⁵ Among these corps were Soter's Royal Island Rangers, which was raised in Martinique, and Drualt's Guadeloupe Rangers.

Ranger corps were likewise raised in the British islands. Their pay also appears the same as for regular British troops.¹²⁶ However, unlike the French ranger battalions, the British ranger corps were composed entirely of slaves and were originally hired out to the British Army for the duration of the war. Their owners were paid a fixed daily amount for each slave taken into imperial service as well as the full price of each slave that became a casualty.¹²⁷

British ranger corps were also raised somewhat later than the French ranger battalions in British service. Among the British corps were the Tobago Rangers or Jaegers and the St. Vincent Rangers. Because their rank and file were composed of slaves, which tied them to the defence of those islands where they were raised, most of the British corps were limited to local

¹²⁵C.O. 318/13, Grey to Dundas, No. 21, "Secret", 29 April 1794; *ibid.*, Dundas to Grey, 18 June 1794; *ibid.*, Grey to Dundas, No. 38, 9 September 1794, and enclosures.

¹²⁶W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 9, "Secret", 11 January 1795.

¹²⁷W.O. 1/86, Jones to Cuyler, 20 September 1797.

defence operations unless special arrangement were agreed upon by the British Army and the particular colonial assembly.

One such arrangement involved the Tobago Rangers in 1797. It is worthy of special mention not only because it illustrates the military importance placed on the ranger corps by the British Army, but it also provides a glimpse of a very different side of British West Indian slavery seldom commented on by historians. Early in 1797 Sir Ralph Abercromby, then British commander in the West Indies, desired to incorporate the Tobago Rangers into his forces, which were preparing for a descent on Puerto Rico. We are told in a despatch from the Committee of Correspondence of Tobago to the island's agent in London, that the Tobago Assembly agreed to Abercromby's request but felt that it could not simply order these men off the island, since they had been embodied and armed "for the sole defence of the Colony, and under promise to be returned to their families at the expiration of the War."¹²⁸ Nor could force be employed to make any of these slave soldiers go. Instead, we are told from the same source:

The Corps were drawn up, and . . . it was explained to them the Nature of the Service they were to go upon, and the reason that induced their Masters to wish them to go on it, they all said they were not afraid to fight, and if they were killed they could not help it, but that they did not want to be sold, or to be King's Negroes, and that was the only objection they had to going; on being solemnly assured they were not, nor would not be sold; and would return at the end of the Campaign, they gave three cheers, and all said they would cheerfully go, & fight the french, except one Man rather advanced in Years,

¹²⁸C.O. 285/4, Committee of Correspondence to Petrie, 15 March 1797 (enclosure).

who said he did not wish to go, as he had four Children & did not like to leave them; he was excused and his Master was directed to furnish another in his place. 129

It would appear that slaves were not ignored totally in matters affecting them, nor were they entirely without some leverage under slavery.

On the other hand, because most of the rank and file of the French ranger corps were not bound by the disabilities of slavery, they were quickly given an imperial role. For this reason, too, it seems that during the first two years of the war only those corps raised in the conquered islands were taken directly into imperial service and paid from army extraordinaries. These corps were Malcolm's Royal Rangers, which was raised in Martinique in January 1795, Soter's Island Rangers and Druault's Guadeloupe Rangers. 130 Even though in imperial service, none of these corps appeared on any Army List, nor were the appointments to and promotions in these corps mentioned in the London Gazette.

Although the French ranger corps were more mobile units, they too could not satisfy all the strategic requirements demanded by the British Government. The reason for this lay in the fact that they were raised as "provincial troops". 131 As such, they could be used on expeditions to other islands, but the islands where these corps were raised had a kind of priority on

129Ibid.

130P.M.G. 14/74, Extraordinaries Abroad 1792, 1793, 1794, indexed under "West Indies", p. 278; P.M.G. 14/75, Army Extraordinaries Abroad 1795 and 1796, indexed under "West Indies", pp. 52, 54, 58, 73, 244.

131C.O. 318/13, Dundas to Vaughan, 7 October 1794.

their services, in the event of emergency. In addition to this restriction, these battalions were also temporary establishments, corps raised only for the duration of the war.

The prototype units serving under the direct command of the British Army were the Black Carolina Corps, raised in 1779, and a number of black and mulatto provincial corps which were raised in St. Domingo during the early months of 1794. Although it would still be capable of rendering occasional spirited service,¹³² by 1793 the Black Carolina Corps was a unit largely composed of old worn-out soldiers. In November 1794 Vaughan reported this corps unfit for any service except as pioneers.¹³³ Two months later, he reported that this once proud corps could turn out only eighty men fit for service. Given this condition, the Black Carolina Corps could be counted on little by the British Army.¹³⁴

¹³²W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 11, 31 January 1795.

¹³³Ibid., 24 November 1794.

¹³⁴Ibid., No. 10, 30 January 1795. The Black Carolina Corps actually began its existence as a contingent of the royalist South Carolina Regiment. The Carolina Corps, as it was also called, was raised in 1779 during the American Revolution and was among those British regiments which surrendered at Yorktown in 1781. The South Carolina Regiment was subsequently posted to Jamaica where it was eventually disbanded in 1783. However, because this Regiment contained free blacks, who were persona non grata at Jamaica, they were formed into what eventually became known as the Black Carolina Corps and posted to the Windward and Leeward Islands Command in 1783. See Ellis, pp. 1-51. It is quite possible that a few of the slaves raised in 1775 and 1776 by the Governor of Virginia, Lord Dunmore, for service in the British Army, may have eventually found their way into the black contingent in the South Carolina Regiment. For an account of Dunmore's activities see Benjamin Quarles, "Lord Dunmore as Liberator", William and Mary Quarterly, 15(1958): 494-507.

At St. Domingo a number of irregular corps composed of mulattoes and blacks were raised. These contingents were not only commanded by British officers, creole whites and adventurers from France, but a few were even led by mulattoes and blacks. One of the black Commanders was Jean Kina who led a corps of three hundred slaves which was posted at Tiburon in September 1794.¹³⁵ By October of the same year, 3,600 blacks and mulattoes were embodied in British colonial legions as infantrymen, cavalrymen and artillerymen.¹³⁶ Within one year the number of blacks only under arms had risen to 2,630.¹³⁷

Because the French had emancipated their slaves and had armed them, Sir Adam Williamson considered it "prudent to hold out something like it" to the growing number of slaves in British service in St. Domingo. As a result these slaves were enlisted to serve for a fixed period of five years at the expiration of which they would be given their freedom.¹³⁸ Slaves as well as brigands were enlisted under these conditions of service as early as September 1794.¹³⁹ Although Dundas disagreed with the terms offered to the slaves,¹⁴⁰ Williamson

¹³⁵W.O. 1/60, Williamson to Dundas, No. 1, 13 September 1794.

¹³⁶Blacks 980 and mulattoes 2,620. Ibid., p. 329.

¹³⁷"Return of the Black Corps formed and forming, St. Domingo", enclosed in, W.O. 1/767, Williamson to Portland, No. 2, 12 July 1795.

¹³⁸W.O. 1/62, Williamson to Dundas, 14 January 1795.

¹³⁹W.O. 1/60, Williamson to Dundas, No. 1, 13 September 1794.

¹⁴⁰W.O. 6/5, Dundas to Williamson, 6 November 1794.

assured him that at the expiration of the period of service a few of these blacks would "be alive to partake of the terms now offered them." 141

But once again, even though the importance of these black and mulatto provincial corps was indisputable because of their ability to undertake operations in the mountainous interior of the colony against the insurgents, there were certain restrictions regarding their employment. As provincial corps, none of these units could be removed from the colony. Also, these corps were of a temporary establishment since the men were enlisted for a period of five years only. Added to these factors was the latent fear of British commanders in St. Domingo that these French blacks might desert. This uneasiness was based on the fact that blacks in French service had already been declared free unlike blacks in British service who had to wait five years for their freedom. There was also the disquieting intelligence that French agents were already busy inciting Britain's black troops to desert. 142

The year 1794 had begun with stunning and rapid victories. However, as it came to a close Britain was on the defensive in

141W.O. 1/62, Williamson to Dundas, 14 January 1795. For additional information on Britain's effort to raise levies of slaves in St. Domingo for imperial service from 1794 to 1798, see: W.O. 1/60, Williamson to Dundas, No. 1, 13 September 1794; Ibid., Williamson to Portland, No. 7, 10 October 1794; Ibid., "M. de Charmilli's Proposals", pp. 581-586; A.O. 3/265, unnumbered expenditure abstracts, 1797-1798; T. 81/21, slave enlistment certificates. See also, Fortescue, 4(part I): 333-342, 457-459; Edwards, p. 386.

142W.O. 1/62, Forbes to Dundas, No. 1, 9 December 1795.

the West Indies, and, except for the old Black Carolina Corps, had been forced to bring into imperial service a number of black and mulatto provincial or irregular corps in order to maintain her presence in the conquered territories. These corps, although of great value, were of somewhat limited operational use. Regiments of blacks established "in all Respects upon the same Footing as the marching Regiments", as Vaughan had prescribed,¹⁴³ was the description of soldiers needed by the British Army. However, fearing the type and size of the black corps Vaughan proposed to raise, and doubting the loyalty of these troops in the face of French attempts to seduce them to their cause, West Indian proprietors, using the great power and leverage of their influence in Parliament, dissuaded the British Government from extending permission to the army in the West Indies to implement Vaughan's plan. ¹⁴⁴

Vaughan, in the meantime, had actually gone ahead and augmented Malcolm's and Soter's Rangers which he intended apparently to be the nucleus of the black regiment he sought to raise. The recruits were slaves obtained from planters in Martinique. The cost of these slaves was met by levying a tax on the entire colony. ¹⁴⁵ But before Vaughan received Dundas's rejection of his plan as well as an order to cease enlarging

¹⁴³W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 6, "Secret", 25 December 1794.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., Dundas to Vaughan, No. 9, 19 February 1795.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., Vaughan to Dundas, No. 22, "Secret", 16 April 1795.

the two ranger corps, the disaster which had crippled Britain's army in the conquered territories overtook British forces in their own islands.

What Fortescue has described as a "Negro Revolt" broke out simultaneously in two British islands in March 1795.¹⁴⁶ At Grenada on the evening of 2 March the slaves rose, captured the Governor along with other whites, and massacred every white man at Grenville. The following month it was reported that there were large scale defections among the plantation slaves and that they were being trained and armed.¹⁴⁷ By July, Portland was told that nearly all of the plantations had been destroyed by rampaging slaves.¹⁴⁸ At St. Vincent, also during the early part of March, the Caribs in the northern part of the island had risen and were in the process of putting the torch to that area. And in July even Jamaica experienced a serious rebellion of the Trelawney Maroons which necessitated among other measures the raising of two companies of slaves to assist in crushing the rebellion.¹⁴⁹

Not was this the extent of the disaster. In addition to the fact that the French had effectively exploited their slave population by freeing them and by employing them as soldiers and labourers,¹⁵⁰ a force of some six thousand French troops landed

¹⁴⁶ See Fortescue, 4(part I): 424-476..

¹⁴⁷ W.O. 1/767, Mackensie to Portland, 24 April 1795.

¹⁴⁸ C.O. 101/34, Mackensie to Portland, 11 August 1795, enclosure No. 4.

¹⁴⁹ 100 slaves. C.O. 140/85, Votes of the Assembly, p. 324.

¹⁵⁰ W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 13, "Secret", 25 February 1795. Ibid., Stewart to Vaughan, 25 April 1795 (enclosure)

at Guadeloupe in early January.¹⁵¹ Small parties of these troops with supplies managed to evade British cruisers and landed on the coast of St. Lucia. Greatly assisted by insurrected slaves and some sympathetic whites, this motley force had confined British troops to just two posts by April. By June they had forced the total British evacuation of the island.

In addition to these reverses British forces, despite reinforcements, continued to dwindle. Of the five regiments which arrived in April, all were considered unfit for active service and were almost of no value to the army.¹⁵² One of these regiments, the 45th, which was composed of boys too weak even to bear arms, was dismissed by Vaughan as unfit for service "in any climate". He considered it an "injustice" to be expected to produce military success with such soldiers.¹⁵³ He demanded reinforcements of veteran troops.¹⁵⁴

The cause of this black rebellion in the British islands was the example of abolition of slavery in the French islands, French military support and the activities of both white and black Jacobins among the British slaves. In September 1794 Grey had warned London of this French activity before he resigned his command.¹⁵⁵ It was Wilberforce's belief that a British Act

¹⁵¹Ibid., Vaughan to Dundas, No. 9, "Secret", 11 January 1795.

¹⁵²W.O. 1/31, Vaughan to Portland, 16 June 1795.

¹⁵³W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 22, "Secret", 16 April 1795..

¹⁵⁴Ibid., Vaughan to Dundas, 25 April 1795.

¹⁵⁵C.O. 153/30, Grey to Dundas, No. 38, 9 September 1794.

abolishing only the slave trade in early 1795 would have countered successfully the effects of the French abolition decree of 1794. He imagined this would have dissuaded many blacks in Guadeloupe, Grenada and St. Vincent from joining what amounted to an anti-British or anti-slavery crusade.¹⁵⁶ This seems rather doubtful since the abolition of British slavery itself would be of much greater significance for a British slave than the mere abolition of the slave trade. The latter would still leave him in bondage.

Nevertheless, in what must have proven singularly embarrassing, the British Army was forced to struggle against the large number of rebellious slaves in the rugged interior of British islands, an area which was unknown to them.¹⁵⁷ This revolution in West Indian warfare, which paralleled British military operations and experiences in the conquered territories, and even Dutch military activities in Guiana against the "Bush Negroes",¹⁵⁸ posed very serious problems for the British Army. Many years after the defeat of the insurrected slaves and Carib Indians in the Windward Islands, and the defeat of their own Maroons, Jamaica was still sensitive about the possibility of

¹⁵⁶Cobbett, vol. XXXII, Debate in Commons on Wilberforce's Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 18 February 1796. Wilberforce's speech, p. 739.

¹⁵⁷See W.O. 1/82, "Notes from Sir Ralph Abercromby about the West Indies. London 10 November 1797", pp. 626-627. On the British Army's topographical inadequacies in 1795, see Glover, pp. 75-80.

¹⁵⁸Pinckard, 2: 243.

an enemy occupying the interior of the island. ¹⁵⁹

The landing of the large French reinforcement in early January 1795 prompted Vaughan on 26 January to renew his efforts to obtain official sanction to raise a black or coloured regiment. ¹⁶⁰ On this occasion he communicated with the Duke of Portland. Vaughan personally considered the arming of slaves a "desperate" measure, ¹⁶¹ yet he continued his efforts to convince London of the urgent necessity to adopt his plan. ¹⁶² Despite Dundas's rejection of his proposal, which he received in mid-April, Vaughan deplored the situation in which merchants and planters, rather than the military, should influence Government policy and determine official decisions. ¹⁶³

However, news of the deteriorating situation in St. Lucia and the proportions of the insurrections in Grenada and St. Vincent, which reached London some time in early April, eventually convinced the British Government of the emergency in the West Indies and of the expediency of raising black regiments. On April 17 faced with the imminent loss of British islands, Dundas gave authorization to Vaughan to raise two

¹⁵⁹C.O. 137/126, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 26 January 1809 and 11 April 1809.

¹⁶⁰W.O. 1/31, Vaughan to Portland, 26 January 1795.

¹⁶¹C.O. 152/77, Vaughan to Byam, 14 March 1795 (enclosure).

¹⁶²W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 13, "Secret", 25 February 1795; No. 22, "Secret", 16 April 1795; "Most Private", 18 April 1795; 19 and 25 April 1795; "Most Secret", 12 May 1795.

¹⁶³Ibid., Vaughan to Dundas, No. 22, "Secret", 16 April 1795.

regiments of blacks or coloureds. ¹⁶⁴ On the same day a despatch was forwarded to Sir Adam Williamson, informing him that Vaughan had been authorized to raise these regiments and that he, Williamson, was also empowered to raise a similar corps in St. Domingo along the lines established by Dundas for Vaughan's regiments if the situation warranted it. ¹⁶⁵

Vaughan received the authorization only a few days before the entire British evacuation of St. Lucia on 19 June 1795. His efforts, nonetheless, appeared to have been crowned with success. Regular British regiments composed of blacks and mulattoes were to be raised. They would be borne on Britain's Military Establishment and added to her Army Lists. But the model for these regiments proposed by Vaughan in December 1794 and elaborated during subsequent months was not entirely the same one now prescribed for implementation by British Government. Vaughan, who more than anyone else justly deserves to be called the "father" of the West India Regiments, ¹⁶⁶ never lived to experience this. He died in July and was succeeded by General Irving.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.

¹⁶⁵ W.O. 6/5 (and H.O. 30/1), Dundas to Williamson, No. 5, 17 April 1795.

¹⁶⁶ Fortescue has called Colonel Robert Malcolm the "father of our African regiments" because of his work in raising the Royal Rangers which became, along with the Black Carolina Corps, the first West India Regiment. 4(part I): 489-490.

CHAPTER II

WAR OFFICE PLANS 1795

On 16 April 1795, the day before letters of authorization were written to Vaughan and Williamson, the Duke of York was notified by Dundas of the decision he and the other principal ministers of the king had reached concerning the raising of regular corps of blacks and mulattoes in the West Indies. In his capacity as the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, a post to which he was appointed in February 1795 and in which he would prove himself a most able administrator, the Duke of York was requested by Dundas to transmit the decision to the king and to obtain the king's approval, which was only a formality.¹ Dundas admitted the usefulness of black troops in hot climates where they could withstand the heat and military fatigues, and also their adeptness at pursuing the insurgents.² But, as he made clear to the Duke of York in this directive, the king's confidential servants considered the raising of these corps politic though unprincipled.³ They had been impelled by the emergency in the West Indies to sanction a measure which under other circumstances,

¹W.O. 6/131, Dundas to Duke of York, 16 April 1795.

²Dundas's letter, no date, enclosed in W.O. 1/617, Brownrigg to Huskisson, 14 August 1795.

³W.O. 6/131, Dundas to Duke of York, 16 April 1795.

never would have received their endorsement. This official aversion to the measure proved to be significant when colonial opposition attempted to destroy it.

Towards the end of April letters of service were issued authorizing the raising of two black regiments. At the same time Major-General John Whyte and Brigadier-General William Myers were notified of their appointments as colonels of these corps.⁴ The two regiments were then placed on the British Establishment from the date of the appointment of these officers as colonels in their respective regiments.⁵ Finally, the commissions of Whyte and Myers were gazetted on 2 May 1795:

"A Regiment of Foot, Major-General John Whyte, from the 6th Foot to be Colonel"

"A Regiment of Foot, Brigadier William Myers, from the 15th Foot, to be Colonel"⁶

The selection of these officers, which had royal endorsement, was based on a number of considerations. The most important factor was their West Indian service: "the knowledge they . . . possess of the habits and dispositions of the Negroes and Mulattoes, and of the nature of the operations for which they are destined."⁷ So with no public indication that regiments of blacks and mulattoes would help garrison Britain's precious

⁴W.O. 4/158, Windham to Whyte and Myers, 24 April 1795: Although coloureds were to be recruited also, these regiments will be increasingly referred to as black corps, since the vast majority of those enlisted were black.

⁵W.O. 4/337, circular letter from Lewis to colonels of West India Regiments, 3 October 1795

⁶The London Gazette, 2 May 1795.

⁷W.O. 1/83, Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.

sugar islands, other than the ordinary terse military pronouncements, the West India Regiments quietly came into existence.⁸

As the seriousness of Britain's position in the West Indies continued to unfold in London with each succeeding despatch, the British Government was goaded into further action. In May Dundas sanctioned the raising of four additional black regiments, and on 29 May the War Office informed those officers selected to command these regiments of their appointments.⁹ A few months later, in September, two more "Corps of People of Colour & Negroes" were ordered raised bringing the total number of black and mulatto regiments to eight. On 15 September the colonels of these corps were similarly notified of their commissions.¹⁰

Following British practice, all of the regiments were named after their commanding officers: Whyte's, Myers', Howe's, Nicolls's, Keppel's, Whitelocke's, Lewes's and Skerrett's. In the Army List of March 1796 showing the state of the British Army in 1795, these eight corps were listed and indexed under the heading "Regiments raised to serve in the West Indies."¹¹

What type of force did the War Office and especially

⁸The decision to raise these regiments was not attended with any public debate in the House of Commons or Lords. See Cobbett's Parliamentary History.

⁹W.O. 4/337, Windham to Colonels Stephen Howe, Oliver Nicolls, and William Keppel, and Lieutenant-Colonel John Whitelocke, 29 May 1795.

¹⁰Ibid., Lewis to Skerrett, 15 September 1795; *ibid.*, Lewis to Lewes, 15 September 1795.

¹¹Great Britain, War Office, Army List 1796.

Horse Guards create as reflected in the establishment, recruitment and the conditions of service of this army in embryo? Following Vaughan's plan essentially, the black regiments would be in most respects regular British regiments. They would be raised under the command of British officers, with the exception of Lewes's Regiment which was to have royalist French officers.¹² To emphasize the fact that they were regular British regiments, gazetted officers would have permanent rank in the British Army and would receive half-pay upon being reduced. In case of reduction, the French officers in Lewes's Regiment would not be accorded this compensation.¹³

The original establishment of these corps was fixed at ten battalion companies, this time with the exception of Skerrett's Regiment which had an abbreviated establishment of five companies of five hundred rank and file.¹⁴ Each company would consist of: one captain, two lieutenants, two ensigns, one serjeant major, one quarter master serjeant, four serjeants, five corporals, two drummers and ninety-five privates. In addition to the colonel, each corps had two field officers, a lieutenant-colonel and a major. There was also the usual regimental staff: a quarter master, an adjutant, a surgeon and his assistant, and a chaplain.¹⁵

¹²W.O. 4/337, Lewis to Lewes, 15 September 1795.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., Windham to Portland, 16 September 1795.

¹⁵W.O. 4/158, Windham to Whyte and Myers, 24 April 1795. W.O. 4/337, Windham to Howe, Nicolls, Keppel and Whitelocke, 29 May 1795. Ibid., Lewis to Lewes, 15 September 1795. See also W.O. 24/594, pp. 51-54.

The presence of this last staff officer on the establishment of the black regiments is of particular interest even though a chaplain was included in the establishment of every British regiment. Chaplains of black regiments would be Anglican clergymen. Yet the Church of England in the West Indies was a white man's church and remained so long after emancipation. As a result, although large numbers of slaves had been baptized it was simply a formality unaccompanied by instruction as was the case in Jamaica. With rare exception, blacks were not welcomed in the Established Church. ¹⁶

Unfortunately, it is not known if the British Government had assessed the local situation in the West Indies to determine whether the chaplains of black regiments would carry out their duties in a perfunctory manner in conformity to local dictates, or would offer genuine instruction to the black soldiers. The attitudes of the Church's hierarchy in Britain and of the Anglican clergy in the West Indies are also unknown. The blacks in question would be under the legal control and supervision of the British Army, a jurisdiction that was later contested heatedly by the governments of the West Indian Colonies. In any event, religious instruction of slaves in the West Indies was looked on with mistrust and fear and was generally proscribed by the colonies. ¹⁷

A further examination of the establishment of the black

¹⁶Philip Curtin, Two Jamaicas: The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony 1830-1865 (New York: Atheneum, 1970), pp. 31-32.

¹⁷Burns, pp. 560, 594-595.

regiments discloses the fact that they did not conform entirely to the establishment of British line regiments. At the time these corps were raised in 1795, a typical line regiment consisted of eight battalion companies and two flank companies.¹⁸ The latter were the specially trained and elite grenadier and light companies which were posted on the right and left, respectively, of a battalion drawn up in line. Line regiments essentially were trained to fight in close order and were mainly effective as a body in open and unrestricted terrain. The absence of flank companies from the original establishment of the West India Regiments was due probably to the fact that the black corps were seen then as light troops to be utilized in mountainous and heavily wooded areas employing light infantry tactics. Therefore, it would be unproductive to organize and train them along the principles established for regular line regiments.

The pay of the officers, all of whom were to be white, would commence from the dates of their commissions. That of the other ranks would begin either on the dates of their attestation or enrollment.¹⁹ The pay of a private in the British army in 1795, over and above all other allowances, was six pence per day. This, however, was soon raised to one shilling per diem in 1797.²⁰

¹⁸"The battalions of British infantry are generally divided into ten companies . . . There is not, however, any established rule on this head; as both cavalry and infantry regiments differ according to the exigencies of service in time of war, or the principles of economy in time of peace." Charles James, An Universal Military Dictionary in English and French (London: printed for T. Egerton, 1816), pp. 727-728.

¹⁹W.O. 4/337, Lewis to Skerrett, 15 September, 1795.

²⁰Fortescue, 4(part II): 935.

The first establishment of the black regiments would include also two troops of light dragoons, with the exception of ~~Skerrett's demi-regiment which had only one.~~²¹ Each of these troops would consist of: one captain, one lieutenant, one cornet, one quarter master, four serjeants, four corporals, one trumpeter, and fifty-six ~~privates.~~²² This unusual addition to the establishment of the black corps was recommended by General Whyte,²³ a colonel of one of the black corps, who had served in St Domingo in 1794. The desire to add this type of versatility and also this particular type of cavalry, to the black regiments, was the result of the lessons gleaned from the war against the "brigands" and of the need to make at least a portion of these corps as mobile as possible. Jamaica's war against the Maroons from 1795 to 1796 underscored the value of light dragoons, or rather of mounted infantry, in guerrilla warfare.

This combination of arms also suggests a plan to form each of the black regiments into a kind of modern miniature division. This particular scheme, if it did exist, was never realized. ~~The proposed augmentation miscarried for a number of~~ reasons. In any event, in 1797 with the insurgent phase of the war nearly at an end, it finally was abandoned when the two

²¹W.O. 4/161, Lewis to Skerrett, 3 October 1795.

²²W.O. 4/337, Lewis to Whyte, Myers, Nicolls, Keppel, Howe and Whitelocke, 4 June 1795. W.O. 4/161, Windham to Portland, 25 September 1795. Ellis's history of the First West India Regiment, which is marred by numerous factual errors, mistakenly states this augmentation as one troop for each regiment. See pp. 80-81.

²³W.O. 1/83, Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.

cavalry troops were dropped from the establishment of the West India Regiments.

Before passing on to the crucial plans of the British Government concerning the recruiting of these regiments, a brief comment about the significance of the overall size of this black force is necessary. Excluding the white officer corps, an army of nearly nine thousand black soldiers would be trained and equipped along European lines in 1795. Measured against the traditional size of white garrisons in the West Indies, or even against the total number of blacks raised as labourers and infantrymen during any previous West Indian campaign, this force was enormous. It was about two thousand fewer than the numbers Grey considered as necessary in 1794 for the defence of all the British Leeward and Windward Islands including the conquered French islands. ²⁴

A force of this size, even if distributed among all the British garrisons in the West Indies, still could place a relatively large contingent in each island. Although the possibilities of the following ever occurring were remote, and indeed never took place, a black force of comparable size actually would make the presence of a regular size white garrison in the West Indies redundant. All that would be required to allay the fears of creole whites was a token European military presence.

No doubt these considerations were being entertained

²⁴Grey's figure of 11,540 included 740 artillerymen. The total infantry sought by Grey numbered 10,800. C.O. 318/13, Grey to Dundas, "Secret", No. 33, 17 July 1794, enclosure No. 1.

nervously by the local white inhabitants and the absentee proprietors in Britain when the establishment of the black regiments became known. It would be virtually impossible for a force of this size to maintain a low profile in the West Indies. By the size of this force alone, Britain courted colonial opposition.

In 1795, after months of costly indecision, the British Government had decided to place a major portion of the burden of imperial defence in the West Indies on the newly established black regiments. However, as it will be seen, the British Government's ability to raise and form this army rested on the success of its recruiting plans.

By the end of the summer of 1795, War Office recruiting plans, which were almost immediately modified in the West Indies because of local conditions, called for four black regiments to be raised in British West Indian islands and four to be raised in St. Domingo. Those to be recruited with English speaking blacks and coloureds were Whyte's, Myers', Whitelocke's and Skerrett's Regiments;²⁵ while those that would be raised from among French blacks and coloureds of St. Domingo were Howe's, Nicolls's, Keppel's and Lewes's Regiments.²⁶ Probably in anticipation of the serious problem that was to beset this expe-

²⁵W.O. 1/83, Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.
W.O. 4/337, Lewis to Skerrett, 15 September 1795.

²⁶W.O. 6/5, Dundas to Williamson, No. 7, 4 June 1795.
W.O. 4/337, Lewis to Lewes, 15 September 1795.

riment over the legal status of black soldiers, Vaughan had later reconsidered his original proposal of recruiting slaves, and had recommended instead that free blacks and coloureds be enlisted. ²⁷ Nevertheless, all of the recruits of the eight regiments were to be slaves. ²⁸

In the British Caribbean the slave recruits would be procured by the military through inducing the islands to contribute a proportionate quota of their slaves. ²⁹ The governors of these islands were instructed to bring the entire measure of raising black regiments before the attention of their respective legislatures and to "earnestly" recommend the recruiting plan decided on by the British Government. ³⁰ In the event that the desired number of slaves were not "granted" by the colonial legislatures, Vaughan was authorized to complete, at his own discretion, the establishment of those black regiments to be raised under his command either by purchasing slaves or by enlisting free blacks. ³¹

Sir Adam Williamson, in St. Domingo, was instructed to raise those corps under his command along the same lines the

²⁷W.O. 1/31, Vaughan to Portland, 26 January 1795.

²⁸W.O. 1/83, Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.
W.O. 6/5, Dundas to Williamson, No. 7, 4 June 1795.

²⁹W.O. 1/83, Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.

³⁰C.O. 324/103, circular letter from Portland to the Governors of Barbados, St. Vincent, Grenada, Dominica, Tobago and the Leeward Islands, 18 April 1795.

³¹W.O. 1/83, Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.

British Government had established for Vaughan.³² According to Williamson's "l'Ordonnance de création des Corps Nègres du 26 Juin 1795", the owners of slaves within those parishes where recruiting was ordered were to provide one slave for every fifteen owned. In such cases where proprietors had fewer than fifteen slaves, other contributory provisions would be arranged at a later date. The recruits would be selected by their owners, and none was to be refused unless infirmed, too old, or too weak to bear arms.³³

Unlike recruiting in the British islands, proprietors in St. Domingo would be reimbursed. The method of reimbursement as established in the "l'Ordonnance de création des Corps Nègres du 26 Juin 1795" was as follows: one third of the appraised value of each slave at the time of enlistment: one third six months later: and the final third a year later.³⁴ This method of indemnification was the same used to recruit the black colonial legions or "Corps de Chasseurs" in St. Domingo which were first raised in 1794.³⁵

The conditions of service of the recruits were greatly inferior to those granted to the slaves who were enlisted into the various "Corps de Chasseurs" and alongside whom West India

³²W.O. 6/5, Dundas to Williamson, No. 7, 4 June 1795.

³³Articles IV and VI, in W.O. 1/61, pp. 367-370.

³⁴Article VII, *ibid.*

³⁵Sée, for instance, in A.O. 3/200, Voucher No. 6, Abstract 20, 4 November to 31 December 1795; Voucher No. 6, Abstract No. 21 and Voucher No. 20, Abstract No. 21, 1 January to 29 February 1796.

soldiers were expected to serve. Unlike the slaves who had been taken into British service in St. Domingo earlier and who, as mentioned before, were enlisted for a fixed period of five years after which they were to be "ipso facto enfranchised", the new recruits would be enlisted for an indefinite period of time. According to the Duke of Portland, it would be left to "His Majesty to discharge them when it should be judged proper." ³⁶

Nor were the recruits for Britain's black regiments to be emancipated upon the termination of their military service. Although it was a universal practice in West Indian warfare to reward slaves who had won distinctions with their freedom, and although Britain had seen fit to follow this precedent on a relatively large scale in St. Domingo, Dundas was inflexible when it came to remunerating these troops in this fashion. He underscored this point in his 17 April despatch to Vaughan:

But I cannot help intimating to you the absolute necessity of avoiding forming any eventual engagements with Persons who have not previously acquired their liberty, which might lead them to an expectation of future Emancipation, as a Reward for their Military Services: ³⁷

The reason the British Government proscribed this condition in the case of the new regiments, according to Dundas in the same despatch, was that

any ill time encouragement of this nature, and more especially, if it terminated in a disappointment, would give rise to the most serious evils, and, independently of the great alarm

³⁶W.O. 1/61, Portland to "the Officer Commanding in Chief in St. Domingo", September 1795. This "Officer" was General Forbes who replaced Williamson sometime during the end of the summer of 1795.

³⁷W.O. 1/83, Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.

which it would excite among the Planters, might be considered by the Negroes themselves, as a concession made by necessity, in imitation of the French, and as the first step towards those dangerous expedients to which the Enemy have had recourse in order to encrease their Forces in that quarter of the World. ³⁸

The fidelity of these troops would be ensured by promises of pecuniary rewards or small grants of land in the conquered islands at the end of the war, instead of by emancipation. ³⁹

In stating these reasons for the British Government's insistence that emancipation should not be the reward of those slaves who might enlist in the new regiments, Dundas had omitted to mention two others. A large number of slaves had already been enlisted into British military service on this condition. Totalling two to three thousand men, these were, as we have seen, under arms as rangers in St. Domingo. Recruitment of the West India Regiments on a similar basis would yield a force including almost 12,000 blacks, about 4,500 of which were to be raised in the British islands. This would mean a large number of former slaves would have to be reabsorbed into the slave islands, British as well as French, as freemen. There was also the fact that these blacks had military training and experience. It is certain that Dundas was referring to this situation when he warned Vaughan of the alarm and excitement that emancipation of thousands of black soldiers would cause among the planters. ⁴⁰

However, Williamson, despite Dundas's instructions to the contrary, proceeded to raise his black regiments by enlisting recruits for a period of five years service with the promise of

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid.

freedom upon the completion of this service.⁴¹ Recruits were also promised the continuation of their pay in case of injury acquired during the war. In an apparent move to prevent the blacks in the "Corps de Chasseurs" from transferring to the new regiments, all of the enlistments of the black "chasseurs" were confirmed and declared valid.⁴²

Faced with the facts that blacks in French service were enlisted as freemen beginning around 1794, and that those slaves already in British service in St. Domingo had at least the promise of freedom at the end of a fixed period of time, Williamson had no other alternative in recruiting his new regiments. In view of the French declaration of emancipation in 1794, the confused situation in St. Domingo and Britain's tenuous military presence in the colony, the use of coercion as a recruiting device was not a viable option open to Williamson.

Yet Dundas was insistent. His attitude, which more than likely reflected that of the British planters, had been unaltered since 1794 when Williamson began his recruitment of slaves on this basis.⁴³ Even Portland complained that official instructions regarding recruitment had not been followed.⁴⁴ There can

⁴¹Articles IX and X, respectively, "l'Ordonnance de création des corps Nègres du 26 Juin 1795", in W.O. 1/61, pp. 367-370.

⁴²Ibid., Article XVII and I, respectively.

⁴³W.O. 6/5, Dundas to Williamson, 6 November and 10 December 1794.

⁴⁴W.O. 1/61, Portland to "Officer Commanding St. Domingo", September 1795.

be little doubt, therefore, that Williamson's subsequent recall and replacement by General Forbes was largely Dundas's reaction to the Williamson's Ordinance of 26 June 1795 which Dundas received sometime either in late July or early August.

It would appear also that the subsequent suspension of the recruitment of Howe's and Keppel's Regiments in St. Domingo and the ordering of these corps to Jamaica, where they were to complete their establishments with slaves granted by the Assembly, ⁴⁵ was due likewise to Dundas's opposition. However, Forbes, presumably referring to the other black regiments still in the colony, advised Dundas that it would be both unwise and dangerous to alter Williamson's recruiting measures. ⁴⁶ He also warned Dundas that these inducements were the only means of maintaining Britain's position, already "extremely critical", in the face of the Convention's abolition decree of which every black in the colony was aware. ⁴⁷ It appears that Dundas heeded Forbes's caution and permitted the remaining two regiments to recruit in the colony.

Williamson's modification of War Office plans concerning

⁴⁵W.O. 1/92 (and C.O. 138/39), Dundas to Balcarres, No. 3, 30 September 1795.

⁴⁶W.O. 1/62, Forbes to Dundas, No. 1, 9 December 1795.

⁴⁷Ibid. "I must also beg leave to observe to you, Sir, with respect to the freedom promised to them after five years Service, that our Situation as to the Slaves in the Colony is extremely critical, the Republicans having taken the utmost pains to disperse amongst those who remain faithful to their Masters, and attached to us, the Decree of the Convention giving Emancipation to everyone, and which is perfectly well known to Negroes of every description in the Island, . . ."

the black regiments somewhat complicated the raising of these corps. Some of the recruits would serve indefinitely while others were to serve for a fixed period. Those in this latter category would be emancipated after the completion of their service while at the same time others were to remain slaves. This important difference in the conditions of service of the black troops was certain to result in difficulties.

Vaughan's model of a West India Regiment was a regular British line regiment established on a permanent footing for garrison service in the West Indies. According to Vaughan, these corps, were somewhat of a combination of general service regiments in that they were to be permanent corps as well as Fencible regiments in the limited sense that they were raised specifically for service in the West Indies.⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the model Vaughan had designed already existed in the West Indies, and might well have served as his inspiration. This was the 20th or Jamaica Light Dragoons which arrived at Jamaica in June 1792 with its headquarters detachment and four troops, about 140 strong. This was a permanent corps recruited in Britain from among Europeans specially for service in Jamaica. This unit was borne completely on the

⁴⁸It should be added here that general service regiments or regular regiments were also liable to serve in any part of the world; Fencibles were raised for the duration of the war only.

Jamaica Establishment. ⁴⁹

However, as it appears from War Office despatches, the black corps were established strictly as Fencibles or temporary corps "formed for Service in the West Indies". ⁵⁰ Although evidence on this point is somewhat inconclusive, it appears that the West India Regiments were not considered as permanent troops, the type envisioned by Vaughan, until early 1797. ⁵¹ As late as November 1796 the Duke of York was recommending to the king that a certain number of black regiments should be kept as permanent regiments in British service. ⁵²

The origins of Fencible regiments in British military history can be traced to the raising of the first Fencible corps in Scotland in 1759 during the Seven Years' War. They were raised at that time because Scotland did not have a militia and because a large part of the regular army was required for service abroad. Between 1759 and 1802 some 109 Fencible regiments, infantry and cavalry, were embodied throughout the

⁴⁹First Battalion the Jamaica Regiment, Lathbury Barracks, Up Park Camp, Kingston, Jamaica, "First Report on British Garrison in Jamaica", Jamaica. (Mimeographed). The 20th actually had a predecessor in the 99th or Jamaica Foot. This Corps, according to the Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, was raised in England early in 1780 by the West India Merchants for service in Jamaica. The 99th was disbanded in March 1784. See 14(1935): 181.

⁵⁰W.O. 4/337, Windham to Portland, 15 July 1795.

⁵¹W.O. 1/86, circular letter from Abercromby to the Governors of the Windward and Leeward Islands, 3 January 1797.

⁵²Duke of York to the king, 12 November 1796, in Aspinall, 2: 515.

British isles.⁵³ Despite the fact that Fencible corps competed with regular regiments for recruits, as regiments raised for service in Britain only and for the duration of the war, they did free regular army units for service overseas.

In 1789 this principle was extended to Britain's colonial possessions. In that year a small corps of approximately three hundred troops were raised for the protection of a penal settlement only recently established at Port Jackson in New South Wales. Two years later a similar corps was raised for service in Upper Canada. During 1794 a single independent company was raised for service on the West African coast. And the following year when the West India Regiments were raised, a regiment of Fencible infantry was recruited for service in Newfoundland and North America only. During the same year, veteran soldiers no longer fit for active service, were drafted into a garrison regiment, which, although intended for service at Gibraltar, was employed chiefly in Britain.⁵⁴

Apart from the fact that all of the black regiments originally were established as Fencible infantry, some of these regiments were to be raised for local service in the Caribbean area which meant that they would be permanently attached to the garrisons of certain islands for the war's duration. Others

⁵³I. H. Mackay Scobie, An Old Highland Fencible Corps (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1914), p. 3 and note #3 on pp. 3-4. It should be noted that the term Fencible was a traditional Scottish term, already in use before 1759. Also, Fencibles were the descendents of the "select militia". See Western, pp. 164, 205.

⁵⁴Fortescue, 3: 547-548 and 4(part II): 889-891.

were "general service" regiments signifying that they would be employed on operations throughout the Caribbean. The regiments of Keppel, Nicolls, Howe and Lewes were to be raised for service in St. Domingo. ⁵⁵ This aspect of their establishment was stated in Article III of "l'Ordonnance de création des corps Nègres du 26 Juin 1795":

Ces Corps de Nègres seront attachés à la Colonie, & ne pourront jamais en être distraits pour être employés ailleurs: Ils pourront seulement, d'après nos ordres, se porter dans toutes les parties de l'Isle où le bien du service l'exigera ⁵⁶

Because of Dundas's disagreement with Williamson over the latter's recruiting policy, the corps of both Howe and Keppel were ordered to proceed to Jamaica. Besides changing the recruiting sites of these regiments, Earl Balcarres, who became the Governor of Jamaica in 1795, and Forbes were instructed that unless there was a need to attach one of the black regiments to Jamaica's garrison for the remainder of the war, both of these corps were to be free to serve anywhere in the West Indies. ⁵⁷

The regiments of Myers, Whyte and Skerrett were initially "general service" corps, ⁵⁸ but two months after Skerrett was

⁵⁵W.O. 6/5, Dundas to Williamson, No. 7, 4 June 1795. W.O. 4/337, Lewis to Lewes, 15 September 1795.

⁵⁶W.O. 1/61, p. 368.

⁵⁷W.O. 1/62, (and W.O. 6/5), Dundas to Forbes, No. 5, 30 September 1795. W.O. 1/92, Dundas to Balcarres, No. 3, 30 September 1795.

⁵⁸C.O. 324/103, circular letter from Portland to the Governors of Barbados, St. Vincent, Grenada, Dominica, Tobago and the Leeward Islands, 18 April 1795. W.O. 4/337, Lewis to Skerrett, 15 September 1795.

notified of his appointment to command a black regiment, his corps was reassigned to service at St. Vincent.⁵⁹ A great deal of uncertainty surrounds Whitelocke's Regiment. Since it was recruited in Jamaica and later at British Honduras, it is thought that this corps was originally raised for general service in the West Indies.

The major consideration for determining the type of service of the black regiments in the West Indies in 1795 was the seriousness of the military situation in those colonies where fighting was taking place. This led the British Government originally to deploy four regiments at St. Domingo. The decision was also due partly to the value of the colony and its proximity to Jamaica. St. Domingo was but twenty-four hours sail from Jamaica. The critical situation at St. Vincent lay behind the attachment of Skerrett's Regiment to the garrison of that island. The other regiments, according to a military jargon then in use, were to act as a "disposable force" or expeditionary force in conjunction with European troops in the West Indies. As the British Government would soon learn, the type of service provided by the black regiments would be influenced by the colonies when individual islands designated to give grants of slaves to form certain regiments, attempted to acquire the services of these troops as part of their regular garrison. Such a situation would involve the island of St. Vincent and Myers' Regiment which was to recruit there.⁶⁰

⁵⁹W.O. 1/617, Brownrigg to Huskisson, 18 November 1795.

⁶⁰Resolution of the Planters, enclosure in W.O. 1/84, Leigh to Dundas, 8 October 1795.

In addition to the question of type of service were the issues regarding the size of this black West India Army and its proportional distribution among the British garrisons in the Caribbean. It is surprising, in view of the controversial nature of the measure of raising regular regiments of slaves to guard the sugar islands, that no clear policy concerning these issues was formulated until almost four years after the creation of the West India Regiments. In a letter from the Duke of York to George III, written as late as November 1796, the Duke indicated that "it is wished" that five thousand black troops be kept under arms in the Leeward Islands, Jamaica and St. Domingo.⁶¹ Apparently precise regulations were not agreed to until January 1799. One third of the total British force in the West Indies was to consist of black soldiers. Each island would have a proportion of black troops, and in each garrison where blacks would be quartered the same ratio of one third black to two thirds white was to exist.⁶² Also, blacks in each garrison were to be rotated frequently. A clear indication of the distrust of certain British officers towards this measure was evident in the proposal that no garrison or other place of military value be left to the sole protection of black troops.⁶³

The black regiments were given several designations

⁶¹Duke of York to the king, 12 November 1796, in Aspinall, 2: 515.

⁶²W.O. 1/88, Bowyer to the President of the Council and Speaker of the Assembly, Antigua, enclosed in Minutes of the Council and Assembly, Antigua, 31 January 1799, pp. 292-293.

⁶³Ibid., C.O. 152/79, Bowyer to Dundas, 19 January 1799.

before the title "West India Regiment" was universally adopted. Collectively they were often referred to in certain official correspondence as "Corps" or "Regiments of People of Colour and Negroes".⁶⁴ Individually they were identified usually by the name of the commanding officer. The black regiments were also given this latter designation in the Army Lists of 1796, 1797 and 1798, and the London Gazette. However, in the West Indies these corps were immediately styled "West India Regiments". Muster roll records and other War Office papers make use of this title.⁶⁵ It was not until 1798 that the other designation finally were discontinued.⁶⁶ In the Army List of 1799 these corps were indexed under the title "West India Regiments".

There was also a kind of semi-official numbering system for these regiments in 1795, even though the first Army List to cite the West India Regiments by number was that of 1799. The numbering of these corps was as follows and was determined by the date of each officer's rank in the regiment he commanded:⁶⁷

- 1st West India Regiment of Foot - Colonel John Whyte
24 April 1795
- 2nd West India Regiment of Foot - Colonel William Myers
24 April 1795
- 3rd West India Regiment of Foot - Colonel William Keppel
20 May 1795
- 4th West India Regiment of Foot - Colonel Oliver Nicolls
20 May 1795

⁶⁴For instance, W.O. 4/337, Windham to Portland, 15 July 1795; *ibid.*, Lewis to Skerrett, 15 September 1795.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, circular letter from Lewis to Colonels of black corps, 3 October 1795.

⁶⁶See, for instance, Army List 1799; and Ellis, p. 82.

⁶⁷Army List 1796.

5th West India Regiment of Foot - Colonel Stephen Howe
20 May 1795
6th West India Regiment of Foot - Colonel John Whitelocke
1 September 1795
7th West India Regiment of Foot - Lieutenant-Colonel
John Lewes 15 September 1795
8th West India Regiment of Foot - Lieutenant-Colonel
John Skerrett 15 September 1795

Based on the proposed size of the black West Indian Army, the British Government concurred with Vaughan on the importance of this type of force. However, regarding the overall establishment of this force, the British Government clearly saw it only as a temporary creation and not as the permanent organization suggested by Vaughan. The West India Regiments raised in 1795 differed from the corps Vaughan sought to levy on this aspect. As it will be seen, the fact that these regiments did become a permanent force resulted from the continuation of war, the continued high death rate among European troops, the battlefield successes of these corps, and also from the failure of the original Government recruiting scheme which was too heavily dependent upon colonial assistance.

CHAPTER III

RECRUITING 1795-1796

Alterations of the original War Office recruiting plans did not produce any significant changes. Only two West India Regiments, the 4th and the 7th, were now to be raised in St. Domingo. The rest were to be recruited in the British Caribbean but not necessarily, as it turned out, from among "English blacks" or even creole blacks. Jamaica was to provide the rank and file for the 3rd and the 5th. The Leeward and Windward Islands were to furnish the recruits for the 1st, 2nd, 6th and 8th West India Regiments.

Recruits for these latter corps were to be given to the army by the Leeward and Windward Islands on the basis of numbers established for each by Vaughan in his proposal of 25 December 1794.¹ According to this scheme each island was assigned a specific quota which it was expected to meet for each of the West India Regiments ordered to be raised in that part of the West Indies. The quota fixed for each island was as follows: Barbados 200, Grenada 200, Antigua 150, St. Kitts 150, and Dominica, St. Vincent and Tobago 100 each.²

¹W.O. 1/83, Dundas to Vaughan, No. 14, 17 April 1795.

²Ibid., Vaughan to Dundas, No. 6, "Secret", 25 December 1794; and C.O. 285/4, General Irving's circular letter of 22 July, 1795, contained in the Minutes and Proceedings of the Council of Tobago of 15 August 1795 and enclosed in Lindsay to Portland, No. 18, 28 October 1795.

A major source of information on the recruiting of the West India Regiments are the regimental Succession and Description Books. These records, one of a number of regimental, company, quartermaster and paymaster books kept by every British regiment, provide a wealth of biographical data on the officers, non-commissioned officers and rank and file. When completed according to regulation, these books contained the name, physical description, age, place of birth and trade of every soldier and officer who served with the regiment. They also contained enlistment information, data pertaining to former military service, if any, and any other significant events in the service record of each enlisted man and officer.

Unfortunately, however, these records are not complete for any of the West India Regiments for the period under study. The most complete set of books in existence are those of the 4th West India Regiment.³ Incomplete regimental Succession and Description Books also exist for the 2nd, 5th, 6th and 7th West India Regiments.⁴ In the case of the 2nd, its records only commence after 1800. The transport ferrying the 2nd to Trinidad sank in that year as it attempted to enter the Gulf of Paria with the loss of the whole of the regimental books.⁵ Apparently

³Two of the quartermaster books belonging to the 4th were lost when the transport carrying these records sank off Dominica. W.O. 27/88, Maitland to Myers, 24 July 1804.

⁴For the 2nd, W.O. 25/644; for the 4th, W.O. 25/652 and 653; for the 5th, W.O. 25/656; for the 6th, W.O. 25/657 and 658; and for the 7th West India Regiment, W.O. 25/660, 661 and 662.

⁵James E. Caulfield, One Hundred Years' History of the Second Battalion, West India Regiment, from Date of Raising, 1795 to 1895 (London: Foster Groom & Company, 1899), p. 20.

none of these records has survived for the 1st and the 8th West India Regiments. Nor do any now remain for the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments which were raised in 1798⁶ and which were all disbanded by 1804. ⁶

Those books that have survived show that part of the nucleus of each West India Regiment was a group of European serjeants, corporals, and drummers. Even a few of the rank and file were Europeans. ⁷ Of the first fifty-two names recorded in the regimental Succession and Description Book of the 4th West India Regiment, fifty-one were Europeans. Although enlistment information is not provided for three of those belonging to this group, it is complete for the others. Some twenty-eight were appointed serjeants in the 4th, nineteen as drummers and one as corporal. ⁸ The majority were Irish, chiefly from Cork, Dublin, Tipperary, Galway and Waterford. Nearly all of the drummers, for instance, who ranged in age from eleven to seventeen, were Irish. ⁹ Many had at least one year of former military service while the older serjeants had anywhere from eighteen to twenty-nine years of prior military duty. ¹⁰ Furthermore, practically all belonging to this group had enlisted into the 4th by June 1796 with the chief periods of enlistment being August 1795 and June 1796. ¹¹

⁶See Army Lists for 1803 and 1804.

⁷W.O. 25/653, f. 26.

⁸Ibid., f. 25.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

"West Indian service" took its expected toll of these drafts. Almost all of those serjeants, corporals and drummers who had enlisted into the 4th during June, July and August 1795 were either dead or had been discharged from service as unfit by August 1797.¹² The muster roll for the 1st West India Regiment for the period 25 June to 24 December 1795 also indicates similar casualties and even a few desertions among the white serjeants and corporals.¹³

It should be noted here that desertion among the white soldiers of the West India Regiments never became a problem for the British Army. A tropical climate and a small and highly conspicuous white population did not encourage this means of escape from military service. Only two desertions, for instance, are recorded among those initial white drafts of the 4th West India Regiment for a period extending from the summer months of 1795 to November 1797.¹⁴

The officers who purchased commissions in the West India Regiments in 1795 were, of course, all Europeans. Nearly all were taken on the establishment of their respective corps in the British Isles. In the case of the 4th, at least half were born in Scotland and Ireland.¹⁵ A few, however, were creole whites. Where information is furnished, as in the case

¹²Ibid., f. 13.

¹³W.O. 12/11239.

¹⁴W.O. 25/653, f. 25.

¹⁵W.O. 25/652.

of the 4th, these creoles came mainly from Barbados. ¹⁶

In attempting to complete the officer establishment of the West India Regiments to their prescribed strength, the British Army in the West Indies was confronted with a serious problem that plagued the entire British Army at that time, a problem which was never completely resolved despite some much needed administrative reforms initiated by the Duke of York. Officer absenteeism, particularly officers absent without official permission, was common in the West India Regiments and remained so for the duration of the war against France.

An early indication of this is seen in the raising of the 1st and 4th West India Regiments. Near the end of December 1795 a total of fifty-nine had received commissions in the 1st. ¹⁷ Although most of these commissions in the 1st date from 1 July 1795, ¹⁸ only twelve were present with the 1st in the West Indies by the end of the year. ¹⁹ Of the remaining forty-seven, the Colonel, Major General John Whyte, was in St. Domingo and eleven were listed as not having joined the regiment since their appointments. ²⁰ A further nineteen had either been reappointed to other regiments or been sent back to former regiments, or had

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷W.O. 12/11239, Muster Roll of 25 June to 24 December 1795.

¹⁸Ellis, pp. 79-81.

¹⁹W.O. 12/11239, Muster Roll of 25 June to 24 December 1795.

²⁰Ibid.

resigned.²¹ And ten had either drowned on passage out to the West Indies or had died or been killed, or were sick in quarters.²² The other seven were on official leave of absence.²³

The 4th West India Regiment was in a similar situation. Although letters of service were issued in May 1795 authorizing the raising of the regiment, according to a return dated 11 November only eleven commissioned officers were present with the corps.²⁴ Some twenty-five commissioned officers were listed as "on Board Transport at Cove [Ireland]", but a further ten had not joined since appointed. One of these, a captain, was "supposed" to be in the West Indies. Another officer, also a captain, was listed as being incarcerated in a Winchester jail.²⁵

One of the principle reasons for absenteeism was the fairly widespread practice of exchanging commissions in the British Army. One reason an officer might have wished to exchange his commission for another in a different regiment might have been that his own regiment was ordered to an unhealthy or unpopular station like the West Indies or New South Wales. Another reason, and one which involved the West India Regiments, (and other newly raised corps) was that it was a way to gain entrance into certain more desirable or more prominent regiments where no vacancies as yet existed. The exchange was encouraged,

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴W.O. 17/251.

²⁵Ibid.

for instance, by an officer in a West India Regiment who offered a sum of money to a prospective officer of equal rank who needed cash so badly that he was willing to serve in a less prominent regiment in an inhospitable tropical garrison. It would appear from the persistent problem had by the British command in the West Indies persuading recalcitrant officers to join various West India Regiments, that those whom circumstances forced to exchange into these corps frequently either were a long time in joining their new regiments or simply never appeared, in which case they lost their commissions.

That the system of exchange often involved commissions in West India Regiments is confirmed by Charles Oman, the historian of the Duke of Wellington's army and the Peninsular War. Sir Charles specifically cites the West India Regiments in his discussion of this practice.²⁶ And accounting for the absenteeism of those officers who had originally purchased commissions in the West India Regiments with the hope of later exchanging them, Oman states that it was possible for an officer to get established in his new regiment "without ever really having quitted home, or served in the corps into and out of which he had rapidly come or gone -- on paper only."²⁷

Officer absenteeism actually reflected a more serious and larger problem in the British Army at that time. The demands of the war against France for more and more troops led

²⁶Charles Oman, Wellington's Army 1809-1814 (London: Edward Arnold, 1913), p. 199.

²⁷Ibid. Absenteeism is further discussed in Chapter VII.

to the creation of many regiments, among them the West India Regiments. The resulting proliferation of commissions led to many being obtained by those who had little real enthusiasm for a military career and even fewer qualifications for military leadership. As expected, this led to very serious consequences in the British Army in general. Its effects were perhaps even more acutely felt by the army in the West Indies where Britain was militarily preoccupied from about 1794 to 1797. This leadership crisis was described in rather blunt and unequivocal language by Major-General John Moore, the future and famous Sir John Moore.

Moore arrived at Barbados in April 1796 as part of Sir Ralph Abercromby's relieving force. Before he left the West Indies in May 1797 for England, Moore had served as the military governor of St. Lucia from June 1796 to the time of his departure.²⁸ He also became the colonel of the 9th West India Regiment in 1798.²⁹

Soon after taking up his post at St. Lucia, Moore was openly and harshly critical of the officers serving under his command. In a letter to Abercromby written on 2 September 1796 from Fort Charlotte, Moore noted the low morale of the officers and its consequences. He also noted the means by which many of the undesirable officers had been able to obtain commissions.

²⁸For a description of Moore's services in the West Indies see Chapter IV, "St. Lucia, 1796-1797", pp. 132-160 in Carola Oman's Sir John Moore (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953).

²⁹Army List 1799.

"The Officers and men", he wrote, "are dispirited."

The former thinking only of getting home and framing excuses - in many instances the most shameful - to bring it about

I fear the same fate (should the War continue) will attend whatever troops are sent out unless serious attention is paid to get proper Officers to put at the head of Regiments - who will reestablish discipline, and inspire those under them with some of that zeal and ardor, which I am not too young to have seen - but which you must recollect so much better to have existed in the Service. Such Officers, I am sure, still exist in the British Army, tho they are not to be found exclusively amongst those who have much money or most political interest.³⁰

Two days later Moore was writing again on the same subject. This time he had written to Colonel Robert Brownrigg, Military Secretary to the Duke of York. He complained of the "blockheads at the heads of Regiments", the "bad composition of the Officers", and the "degenerated" state of the Army.³¹ On 11 October he wrote dejectedly to his father that "most of the officers commanding the British Regiments, which fell to my lot, are the most indolent, ignorant and negligent men that ever were placed at the head of Corps."³²

But Moore was also specifically concerned about the types of men being given commissions in the West India Regiments. His concern rested on the fact that the only troops under his command able to carry the war successfully to the insurgents in the interior of the island were his black troops.³³ In his

³⁰London, British Museum, Moore MSS, No. 57327.

³¹Ibid., No. 57321.

³²Ibid., No. 57320.

³³Ibid., No. 57326, letter book entry of 8 July 1796, Fort Charlotte, St. Lucia; and No. 57320, letter book entry of 18 January 1797, St. Lucia.

letter to Brownrigg he gave his high assessment of these troops, but he also sent along a sharp warning and reminder that these

Corps should not be given to General Officers to make jobs of, but clothed by Government and given to Lt.-Colonels and Majors, who are to command and serve with them. These Officers must be chosen and possess certain qualities which render them perculiarly fit for such an Office. ³⁴

Before passing on to the major problem of recruiting blacks for the West India Regiments, a concluding comment is in order concerning the officer establishment of these corps. As I have mentioned above, all of the officers were Europeans. A few were creoles and later in 1798, a fairly large number were French emigrés from Guadeloupe, Martinique and St. Domingo. This latter group held only temporary commissions in the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments. ³⁵ While all of these were white the absence of black officers in the West India Regiments, and the lack of any attempt on the part of the British Government to enlist blacks as officers, was actually a departure from British practice in the West Indies - or at least in St. Domingo. The numerous black corps raised in this former French colony beginning in 1794 all had black officers. Some like Jean Kina even commanded their own regiments. These blacks and mulattoes were all regularly commissioned and all received full British pay commensurate with their rank. ³⁶

³⁴ Ibid., No. 57321, Moore to Brownrigg, 4 September 1796.

³⁵ Army List 1799.

³⁶ See, for instance, W.O. 1/770, King to Brownrigg, 12 July 1799, and enclosures. A careful examination of Public Record Office materials has disclosed that recruiting blacks as officers for the West India Regiments was never a consideration of the British Army.

Surely the reason for an all-white officer corps for the West India Regiments could not have been the paucity of experienced black soldiers in the British West Indies in 1795. On the contrary, there were quite a large number of black veterans of the American Revolution in the West Indies when the West India Regiments were being raised. Many of these soldiers were in the Black Carolina Corps.³⁷ Most of these veterans by 1795 had upwards of fifteen years of military service. A case in point was Richard Durant, the only black recruited into the 4th West India Regiment in 1795 and the first enlistment entry for that year appearing in the regimental Succession and Description Book of the 4th.³⁸ At the time of his enlistment of 25 June 1795 at Martinique, the thirty-eight year old Durant, whose place of birth was "America", had sixteen years military service.³⁹ Because of this experience, Durant was immediately appointed serjeant in the 4th.⁴⁰

Several reasons are suggested for the exclusion of blacks as officers from the West India Regiments. One was that probably few could afford to pay the purchase price of a commission.⁴¹ In 1776 the full price of an ensign's commission in

³⁷Others, I suspect, were attached to British regiments in the West Indies as buglers, musicians, attendants and pioneers.

³⁸W.O. 25/653, f. 25.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid. Durant was discharged from the 4th on 1 June 1801 after twenty-one years of military service.

⁴¹There is no evidence which would indicate that those commissions held by blacks and mulattoes in the colonial corps in St. Domingo were obtained by means of purchase.

a line regiment, the lowest commissioned rank in the British Army, was already the then considerable sum of £400 sterling.⁴² The other standard procedure for obtaining commissions in newly raised regiments was the practice of recruiting for rank. Under this system, commissions were granted to candidates in accordance to the number of recruits each could obtain. But since the colonial legislatures were charged with furnishing recruits, the much vituperated system of purchase was the only recourse.

The illiteracy among black veterans created serious problems. There was the need of officers to read orders and regulations as well as to oversee the pay of their troops and the various company and regimental books. But a more formidable obstacle was the slave society in which these regiments were raised. Britain had already alarmed and antagonized her West Indian colonies by her decision to conserve them by training and arming thousands of blacks. It was distressing enough that these corps were to be put on an equal footing with white regiments, but giving commissions to blacks in regular British regiments would be bestowing on them a dignity and social elevation hitherto the guarded preserve of upper class whites in both Britain and the West Indies. To Britons in Britain, blacks did not possess those gifts needed for military leadership, namely, manners, education and the "way of thinking of gentlemen". To creole

⁴²Curtis, p. 160. The purchase price of this commission increased only slightly during the period extending from 1776 to after the Napoleonic wars. According to the General Regulations and Orders for the Army (the "King's Regulations"), published by the War Office in 1822, the price of an ensign's commission in a line regiment was £450. See p. 46.

whites, blacks were at worst slaves, and at best free men who were still to suffer economic, social and political disabilities. Not even the Imperial Government was willing to offer such an affront to its West Indian colonies. It was not until the present century that the first blacks received commissions in the West India Regiments.

A month before his death Vaughan had recommended to Dundas that the officers as well as the rank and file of Soter's and Malcolm's Rangers be drafted into the West India Regiments.⁴³ He also suggested that the Black Carolina Corps should be reformed and the serviceable men should also be drafted into the West India Regiments.⁴⁴ Vaughan's reasons for these changes were that it would hasten the discipline of the rangers and that this measure would be an inducement for others to enlist.⁴⁵ His proposal received official approval. Malcolm's Rangers and the Black Carolina Corps were both to be drafted into the 1st West India Regiment which, along with the 2nd West India Regiment, was at Martinique. However, it took nearly two years to complete the transfer.

The drafting of Malcolm's Rangers into the 1st did not begin until March 1796 and was not completed until December of the

⁴³W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, 16 June 1795.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

same year.⁴⁶ The Black Carolina Corps quickly provided drafts for the 1st. The September monthly return of the Windward and Leeward Islands Command shows that the rank and file of the 1st West India Regiment numbered fifty-one, of which fifty were drafts from a company of the Black Carolina Corps which had formerly been stationed at Grenada.⁴⁷ These men received about £1.10 each as bounty money for enlisting.⁴⁸ Yet it was not until April 1797 that the old Black Carolina Corps ceased to exist when the last of its veterans of the American Revolution were taken on the strength of the 1st West India Regiment.⁴⁹

Soter's Island Rangers had to wait even longer before being drafted. It was not until October 1798 that this corps was drafted as a body and became the 10th West India Regiment with Gaudin de Soter as its Lieutenant-Colonel.⁵⁰

Efforts to draft these corps into the West India Regiments established the precedent whereby other ranger corps, British and French, were similarly transferred. These efforts

⁴⁶Ellis, pp. 97-98. According to Ellis, pages 64-65, the strength of Malcolm's Rangers in April 1795 was 233.

⁴⁷Cited in Ellis, p. 82. The strength of this corps in May 1794 was 258. Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁸P.M.G. 14/75, p. 237.

⁴⁹Ellis, pp. 98-99. Some of these drafts, it should be noted, did not serve in the American Revolution. A few were recruited into the Black Carolina Corps in 1791.

⁵⁰Army List 1799. The establishment of this corps in May 1794 consisted of 18 serjeants, 18 corporals, 12 drummers and 300 privates. £1,096.4 sterling was allocated by army extraordinaries to "equip the said Corps with every thing necessary". P.M.G. 14/74, p. 278.

also disclosed the fact that some of the soldiers in Soter's and Malcolm's Rangers were slaves belonging to proprietors at Martinique. Upon receipt of the news that the two ranger corps were to be taken directly into imperial service as British regiments, these owners demanded that the British Government either pay the value of these slaves or return them to their owners.⁵¹ Although it was not stated how many men this involved, the Governor of Martinique informed Portland that the amount owed was £8,600 sterling.⁵²

The manner in which this problem was settled illustrates the influence the colonial party possessed in the raising of the West India Regiments, a control that was to prove detrimental to the effectiveness of these corps. The slaves in question would not be purchased outright. Instead, they would continue to be hired out to British Government, but their terms of service would be determined jointly by both the army and the owners.⁵³ This was an unworkable arrangement. As already indicated, the military needs of the colonies and of the army, and the strategies which would satisfy each were diametrically opposed to one another. Two short years would confirm the futility of this venture.

The same slowness experienced in drafting the rangers into the 1st West India Regiment crippled the recruiting efforts

⁵¹W.O. 1/31, Milnes to Portland, No. 6, "Private", September 1795.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., Portland to Milnes, No. 2, November 1795, and enclosures.

of nearly all of the West India Regiments in 1795 and 1796. Despite the British Government's encouragement, the establishment of recruiting teams at the various garrisons, the offering of bounties, and the publication of broadsheets, ⁵⁴ recruits were simply not being provided. Although thirty-nine recruits enlisted into the 1st West India Regiment in December 1795, ⁵⁵ no other increases took place from this time until late March 1796 when Malcolm's veterans began to transfer to the 1st. ⁵⁶ Furthermore, the strength of the rank and file of the 1st during the whole of 1797 to December 1798 stayed just under 350 ⁵⁷ which was well below its establishment.

Although the raising of the 1st was slow, it was rapid when compared to other West India Regiments, according to Colonel Alfred Burdon Ellis, the historian of the 1st West India Regiment. ⁵⁸ Recruiting results for the 2nd were dismal. The same monthly return of September 1795 which gives the strength of the 1st, shows the 2nd with a total rank and file of only fifty-one. ⁵⁹

⁵⁴ According to the records of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts, London, one of these recruiting broadsheets was in the possession of Holburne of Manstie Museum of Art, Bath, Somerset. However, I was informed by the museum's curator that his records showed no such holding. Research at the British Museum and other locations in Britain failed to turn up any other broadsheets.

⁵⁵ P.M.G. 14/75, p. 237.

⁵⁶ Ellis, p. 97.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵⁹ Cited in Ellis, p. 81.

The following month General Leigh, who succeeded General Irving, informed Dundas that there was little hope of completing any of the West India Regiments under the existing plan except by purchasing slaves.⁶⁰ In the same despatch Leigh also informed Dundas that General Myers had recommended and was given local permission to recruit the 2nd West India Regiment on the basis of an alternate scheme that had been proposed by the planters of St. Vincent, where the 2nd was now in garrison. According to this plan "part" of the St. Vincent Rangers, which at this time had a total strength of 247,⁶¹ was to provide the rank and file but only under certain restrictions. The rangers, apparently all of whom were slaves, were to be paid and clothed by the Imperial Government in the same manner as for regular British troops. However, these troops were to remain on the island for the duration of the war, at which time they would be returned to their owners. Furthermore, the Commander-in-Chief of British forces in the Windward and Leeward Islands was to agree that under no circumstances were these men to be taken off the island without the permission of their owners. These conditions of service were then to be confirmed in an Act passed by the island's legislature.⁶²

Myers, who supported the plan if only because of the exigency of the moment, saw it as a means of recruiting his

⁶⁰W.O. 1/84, Leigh to Dundas, 8 October 1795.

⁶¹Caulfield, p. 8.

⁶²W.O. 1/84, Leigh to Dundas, 8 October 1795 and enclosures.

regiment as well as bringing the rangers under greater discipline.⁶³ Until the plan had been officially endorsed in London, Myers ordered those rangers earmarked for transfer to do duty with the 2nd.⁶⁴ Yet by January 1796 the 2nd had a strength of only about two hundred.⁶⁵ As a result of the acceptance of this plan by the British Government, the 2nd West India Regiment was essentially turned into a colonial Fencible corps.

The 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 8th West India Regiments were in even worse straits. The 3rd and 5th West India Regiments only began to recruit at Jamaica around May 1796. Available monthly returns for the Jamaica garrison during all of 1796 show these corps as recruiting cadres only with no effective rank and file.⁶⁶ By 24 December 1797, the 3rd had only two drummers, no non-commissioned officers and no privates.⁶⁷ The regimental Succession and Description Book of the 5th West India Regiment shows only ten enlistments before 1798; eight were Europeans and two were creole blacks.⁶⁸ The 4th, as mentioned above, enlisted only one black during 1795, Serjeant Richard Durant. And during all of 1796 only nine were enlisted, five of whom

⁶³Ibid., Myers to Leigh, 5 October 1795, enclosed in Leigh to Dundas, 8 October 1795.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Caulfield, p. 10.

⁶⁶W.O. 17/1988. The returns for April, November and December are missing.

⁶⁷Ellis, p. 98.

⁶⁸W.O. 25/656, folios 1-27.

were received from the 29th Regiment ⁶⁹ where they probably served as pioneers. These were all slaves since their trade was listed as "Labourer", ⁷⁰ the official and less offensive synonym for slave. No blacks were enlisted into the 6th West India Regiment in 1795, and only ten enlisted during 1796. ⁷¹ The 8th, doomed to an early disbandment, could muster only thirteen serjeants, five drummers and no rank and file in October 1795. ⁷²

The 7th West India Regiment was the exception. A total of 395 men were recruited in 1795. All were enlisted at Barbados, and all were enlisted on the same day, 25 December. ⁷³

While the British Army was failing in its attempt to raise the West India Regiments the British Cabinet, at a meeting held on 14 August 1795, was requesting more troops for West Indian service. Those in attendance, among whom were Pitt, Dundas and Portland, requested no fewer than twenty-seven thousand "effective infantry" in order to undertake offensive operation in the Leeward Islands and at St. Domingo. ⁷⁴ Included in this force

⁶⁹W.O. 25/653, folio 25.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹W.O. 25/657, folio 1.

⁷²W.O. 17/251, "State of His Majesty's 8th West India Regiment. October 23 1795".

⁷³W.O. 25/662, folios 1-39. The fact that these recruits were enlisted at Barbados is interesting since the 7th was originally ordered in September 1795 to be raised at St. Domingo. Evidently, a single corps could be raised in more than one island.

⁷⁴Cabinet Minute, 14 August 1795, enclosed in Dundas to the king, 15 August 1795, in Aspinall, 2: 380-381.

were three thousand men who were to be drawn from the Guard regiments. ⁷⁵ The king, a few days later, agreed with Dundas's troop projections for the joint campaign, but was adamant in his refusal to permit the Guards to perish in the West Indies. ⁷⁶ "The truth", the king rebuked Dundas, "is we attempt too many objects at the same time, and we forget for them that we must keep some force at home." ⁷⁷ George III was correct in his criticism of the direction of Britain's War effort. The limited strength of the regular army was being diffused among several simultaneous campaigns.

The poor recruitment of the West India Regiments is confirmed by the various periodic returns, War Office correspondence and the surviving regimental Succession and Description Books. Yet it is strangely contradicted by the extraordinaries account of the Paymaster General. Table 1 has been compiled from army extraordinaries and the establishment records of the West India Regiments. What is immediately striking about these figures is that although the recruiting results were disastrously low, the exorbitant sum of nearly £65,000 sterling was paid out by the Paymaster General's office for this purpose from the coffers of army extraordinaries. ⁷⁸ For instance, the 3rd West

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶The king to Dundas, 16 August 1795, *ibid.*, 2: 381.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 2: 384.

⁷⁸Around this time the total annual cost to pay, clothe, etc. a British regiment of ten companies of ninety-five men each or 950 rank and file was £21,741.14.9. The amount listed as being paid in 1795 to raise the West India Regiments was the equivalent of three full regiments or over three thousand men of

TABLE 1
ESTIMATED AND ACTUAL ESTABLISHMENT COSTS OF THE WEST
INDIA REGIMENTS FOR 1795 (IN POUNDS STERLING)

Regiments	Date on which Regiment was placed on the British Establishment ^a	Number of days from establishment date to 24 December 1795	Estimated cost of Regi- ments from establishment date to 24 December 1795 ^b	Actual amount paid in 1795 as stated in Pay Master General's ledger, 1795 ^c	Number of officers and men	Estimated establishment cost based on 366 days ^d
1st	24 April 1795	245	19,701.17.1	10,718. 9.9	1259	26,442.10.6 $\frac{1}{4}$
2nd	24 April 1795	245	19,701.17.1	11,225.14.5	1259	132,212.12.7 $\frac{1}{4}$
3rd	20 May 1795	219	17,821. 7.4	8,872.10.8	1259	
4th	20 May 1795	219	17,821. 7.4	9,132.10.8	1259	
5th	20 May 1795	219	17,821. 7.4	8,872.10.8	1259	
6th	20 May 1795	219	17,748.15.3	9,677.19.6	1259	
7th	15 Sept. 1795	101	9,250.19.4	3,405.16.4	1259	26,321. 3.7 $\frac{1}{2}$
8th	15 Sept. 1795	101	4,802.16.5	2,757. 3.7	633	13,743. 6.9 $\frac{3}{4}$
Total		1568	124,670. 7.2	64,662.15.7	9446	198,719.13.6 $\frac{3}{4}$

^aW.O. 24/594, pp. 51-55.

^bIbid.

^cP.M.G. 2/47, p. 11.

^dW.O. 24/596, pp. 15-17.

India Regiment which had no rank and file in 1795 and the 5th West India Regiment which recruited only two blacks prior to 1798 are listed as having been paid almost £9,000 each. What is equally odd is that both of these regiments were paid exactly the same amounts. The probability that two regiments would incur exactly the same expenses is highly unlikely. Even the amount paid to the 7th West India Regiment comes under question. Its 395 recruits were taken on the strength of the 7th on 25 December 1795, the day after the Paymaster General's ledger book closed for fiscal 1795. Prior to this date the 7th existed on paper only.

This expenditure could not have gone to meet the cost of paying the troops. For all intents and purposes none existed in 1795. Nor was this money needed to clothe the regiments. The total amount required to meet the clothing expenses of a British regiment of equal size for one year was £3,295.4.9¹.⁷⁹ This figure is far below that paid to most of the West India Regiments.

What then was the explanation for³ this discrepancy? Although the evidence is at best circumstantial, it would appear

all ranks. The estimated establishment cost of a West India Regiment was higher than a regular white regiment because the establishment of the former included two troops of dragoons, the annual cost of which was £5,909.7.4¹. See W.O. 26/37, "A State of the Distribution of the Charge of a Regiment of Foot on the British Establishment consisting of Ten Companies of 95 Private . . . as it stood on 1st January 1797", p. 99, and W.O. 24/596, pp. 15-17.

⁷⁹Ibid.

that these transactions may have been part of the fraudulent practices then surrounding the administration of army extraordinaries. These were large sums of money ⁸⁰ allocated to cover extraordinary expences that could not be foreseen and which were in addition to sums voted by Parliament upon annual estimates. All of the costs associated with the raising of the West India Regiments were to be met from funds drawn from this source. This would eventually entail hundreds of thousands of pounds once the British Government began its policy of purchasing slaves as recruits for the West India Regiments. The system of army extraordinaries became so abused that it was ultimately abolished in 1836. ⁸¹

News of the recruiting debacle elicited prompt response from London. On 6 February 1796 Dundas wrote to Sir Ralph Abercromby, the new Commander-in-Chief of British forces in the West Indies, about the lack of progress made in raising the West India Regiments. Dundas was particularly concerned with the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th West India Regiments since these were the senior corps. ⁸² It was his opinion that the colonies opposed the measure because the regiments were to be general service corps. Dundas then contrasted the raising of the West

⁸⁰The total amount, for instance, voted by Parliament for the army for 1797 was £10,913,000 of which £4,300,000 was for army extraordinaries. Cobbett, 32: 1257.

⁸¹Great Britain, War Office, Manual of Military Law, (1914) pp. 160-161. This abuse resulted from the absence of a parliamentary auditing of transactions.

⁸²W.O. 1/85, Dundas to Abercromby, 9 February 1796.

India Regiments with the success in raising large numbers of blacks for local and temporary service in St. Domingo and St. Vincent.⁸³ Although he expressed some doubt that local and temporary service corps could satisfy imperial war needs in the West Indies, Dundas had little doubt that the West India Regiments could meet their prescribed strength if raised for this type of service.⁸⁴

In view of the emergency, Abercromby was authorized to use any means to put the black regiments on a serviceable footing. And then as a portent of what was to come, Abercromby was also instructed to transmit at the earliest possible moment his opinion on the best means of reducing and reforming the West India Regiments.⁸⁵

Dundas's belief that raising corps for local and temporary service would guarantee colonial support and recruiting success is not supported by the facts. Somehow he had forgotten

⁸³Ibid. Dundas is here referring to the colonial corps raised in St. Domingo and the St. Vincent Rangers who were drafted into the 2nd West India Regiment under certain conditions.

⁸⁴Ibid. Local service, of which I will have more to say, offered the colonies certain advantages about which Dundas did not elaborate. Also, Dundas need not have been concerned whether or not troops raised for local service could be used on foreign expeditions. As I have shown, West Indian and North American militiamen had already established this precedent and had reaffirmed it on numerous occasions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dundas as Secretary of War should have known this. Also, at this very moment, four thousand sepoys of the East India Company, which were also local troops, were in the process of forcing the surrender of Colombo, Ceylon, which capitulated on 15 February 1796. Dundas as President of the Board of Control of the East India Company and as War Secretary should have known this, too.

⁸⁵Ibid.

that several of the West India Regiments had been originally raised for local and temporary service and that their recruiting had gone just as badly as those corps raised for general service. Of course the 7th was an exception. He also seems to have forgotten that one of the major reasons for the recruiting success of the "Chasseurs" in St. Domingo was the unique situation whereby one of the conditions of service offered to each black recruit was freedom at the expiration of a fixed period.

In April 1796 Abercromby could still report only the continued failure to recruit the West India Regiments. As a consequence it had even become necessary to arm 758 pioneers who were in imperial service.⁸⁶ With the recruiting situation scarcely improved as the summer came to an end, the British Government came to a decision. Towards the end of September it announced its decision to reduce the establishment of four of the West India Regiments and to disband the other four.⁸⁷ Those that were to be reduced were the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th West India Regiments. The 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th were to be discontinued on the British Establishment. These changes were to go into effect on 25 August 1796.⁸⁸ On 29 September the colonels of the West India Regiments were notified of the alterations in their respective corps. The officers of those

⁸⁶W.O. 1/85, "Preparations made by the Quarter Master General for the Army to Serve under the Orders of His Excellency Sir Ralph Abercromby, K. B.", enclosed in Abercromby to Dundas, 9 April 1796, p. 305.

⁸⁷C.O. 153/31, Brownrigg to Lewis, 27 September 1796, enclosed in Dundas to Abercromby, No. 3, 28 October 1796.

⁸⁸Ibid.

regiments scheduled for disbandment were to be continued on full pay during the war. ⁸⁹

It was almost one month later when Dundas wrote to Abercromby of the decision reached concerning the new establishments of the West India Regiments. ⁹⁰ This despatch is of considerable importance not only because it brought Abercromby up-to-date on the alterations affecting the West India Regiments, but because it marks the beginning of the British Government's highly controversial policy of purchasing slaves as recruits for these corps. Dundas's instructions concerning the four remaining regiments were terse and explicit:

As it appears impossible to procure Negroes for these four Corps except by purchasing them for Government, I am to signify to you His Majesty's pleasure that you are to authorize the officer commanding His Majesty's Forces in the Leeward Islands to procure in this manner the number that may be necessary for this purpose ⁹¹

The purchasing of creole blacks, according to Dundas, was limited to British islands. Slaves could be purchased at other non-British islands, but these blacks had to be "newly imported" from Africa. ⁹² The costs for these purchases were to be met by drawing bills on the Lord Commissioners of the Treasury. ⁹³ In order to keep these costs as low as possible, Abercromby was ordered to look into the offer of five hundred

⁸⁹W.O. 4/338, Windham to Whyte, 29 September 1796. Like letters sent on the same day to Myers, Keppel and Nicolls. Ibid., Windham to Skerrett, 29 September 1796. Like letters sent to Howe, Whitelocke and Lewes.

⁹⁰W.O. 1/85, Dundas to Abercromby, No. 3, 28 October 1796. Enclosed in this despatch was Brownrigg's to Lewis, of 27 September 1796.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

slaves made to the British Government by the planters of Demarara. He was also directed to purchase pioneers such as were useful and available and to permit the officers commanding the West India Regiments to enlist free blacks and coloureds provided they were offered no more than the usual recruiting bounty and provided they were from the British islands. ⁹⁴

However, around the time Abercromby received Dundas's instructions of 28 October the British Government had decided to disband only one of the West India Regiments. ⁹⁵ On 14 December William Windham, the Secretary at War, wrote the Paymaster General that only the 8th was to be discontinued. The 5th, 6th and 7th were only to be reduced according to the establishment set for the other regiments. ⁹⁶ The reduced establishment for each of the seven remaining regiments called for eight battalion companies with a rank and file of fifty-seven privates. The full complement of officers and men was 563. The two troops of light dragoons were also dropped from the new establishment. ⁹⁷

The savings to Government resulting from the reduced establishment were considerable. The estimated cost for one West India Regiment for 365 days was now £12,178.12.3⁴ ⁹⁸ as

⁹⁴Ibid. The same despatch appears in C.O. 153/31.

⁹⁵A reason for this sudden reversal was, most probably, the rupture of the peace negotiations with France in December 1796 and Britain's need for additional troops.

⁹⁶W.O. 4/167, Windham to Paymaster General, 14 December 1796.

⁹⁷W.O. 24/602, p. 19.

⁹⁸Ibid..

opposed to the original annual establishment cost of £26,442.10.6¹. The total yearly costs for the seven West India Regiments were £85,250.6.2¹ ⁹⁹ as compared to £198,719.13.6¹ for eight under the first establishment.

Before moving on to the question of colonial opposition to the West India Regiments and its consequences, it is important to mention that recruiting the rank and file of these corps was not limited to the West Indies. The recruiting records, especially the regimental Succession and Description Books, disclosed the fact that while the British Government was attempting unsuccessfully to raise the West India Regiments in the Caribbean, it was simultaneously conducting a small recruiting campaign in Britian itself from among that country's non-white population.

Although at least one Philipino was enlisted in England,¹⁰⁰ recruiting teams operating principally in London were busy recruiting among London's black and East Indian populations. Precise numbers are not known, but by 1770, in the London area alone, the black population has been variously estimated at fourteen and twenty thousand. ¹⁰¹ A fair number of blacks are also said to have lived in several seaport towns and on estates

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰W.O. 25/657, folio 23.

¹⁰¹Kenneth L. Little, Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1947), p. 170. See also James Walvin, "Black Slavery in England", The Journal of Caribbean History 7 (November 1973): 68-86.

in the country. ¹⁰² The East Indians who were brought to England somewhat later than blacks, came as Lascars or seamen in East India Company ships. ¹⁰³ The size of this population around the end of the eighteenth century is also unknown, but in 1814 it was estimated that the number of East Indians coming annually to England was about 2,500. ¹⁰⁴

How many blacks and Lascars were enlisted into the West India Regiments? Furthermore, why were they recruited at all? The first question cannot be answered definitively because the only records that included this information, the regimental Succession and Description Books, are incomplete. However, the data that these invaluable records do contain allow a number of reliable conclusions to be drawn.

1. The recruiting of blacks did not begin until 1796, and it appears that recruitment was confined to the 6th West India Regiment ¹⁰⁵

2. The total number of blacks enlisted appears to have been well under one hundred, and apparently many of these recruits, although enlisted in Britain, were born in the West Indies in British as well as French islands ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 170-171.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁰⁵W.O. 25/657, folios 23, 43.

¹⁰⁶Ibid. Ellis has concluded that a few of the rank and file of the West India Regiments were white simply because they were enlisted in England. Whites certainly did serve in the ranks of black regiments. But as the regimental Description Books clearly show, blacks and East Indians also were enlisted in England. Apparently Ellis never made use of these records. See page 83.

3. The recruiting of blacks does not appear to have continued for more than two or three years 107

4. East Indians were recruited from 1797 up to 1813, with the main period of recruiting being from 1797-1801 108

5. The total number of East Indians recruited appear to have been just under one hundred with recruits going chiefly to the 6th West India Regiment 109

6. Most of the East Indian recruits were from Bengal, Bombay and Madras 110

The failure to recruit a more significant number of blacks in Britain is somewhat odd since a large number of resident black veterans had already served with British forces during the American Revolution. Many, however, chose to remain in Britain. It seems that others considered resettlement at Sierra Leone a more attractive venture and certainly a safer one.

Attempts were made to discontinue the enlisting of Lascars. As expected, opposition came from the Court of Directors of the East India Company and owners of ships engaged in the Company's trade. 111 Dundas seconded these objections on the grounds that enlisting these seamen did material injury to the Company's trade. He also considered Lascars as very poor recruiting material for the West India Regiments.

The Duke of York was requested to cease any further

¹⁰⁷W.O. 25/644, 652, 653, 656-658, 661, 662.

¹⁰⁸W.O. 25/656, folios 3, 7. W.O. 25/657, folios 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19, 25, 31, 35, 37, 38, 39, 43, 62, 66. W.O. 25/662.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹W.O. 6/131, Huskisson to Brownrigg, 18 September 1797.

recruiting of Lascars and to return those already recruited.¹¹² These invitations fell on deaf ears. The most active period of recruiting East Indians for service with the West India Regiments took place three months after the Duke of York had been notified by Dundas.¹¹³ Although the numbers recruited became fewer and fewer after 1797, Lascars were recruited until nearly the end of the war against France. Moreover, there is no direct evidence that any of those recruited were ever returned to their ships and India.

The reasons the army refused to return those Lascars already enlisted and even continued to recruit others lead to the second question concerning the recruiting of blacks and East Indians in Britain, namely, why did the British Government undertake this scheme. Men were certainly needed to recruit the floundering West India Regiments. However, the main reason was that the British Government sought to remove from the country an increasing number of destitute blacks and East Indians who had become a source of anxiety and embarrassment to the British Government.

The origin of a comparatively large number of destitute blacks, or St. Giles Blackbirds as they were referred to in London,¹¹⁴ may be said to have been in 1772 when Lord Mansfield

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³W.O. 25/656, folios 3, 7. W.O. 25/657, folios 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 13, 15, 17, 19, 25, 31, 35, 37, 38, 39, 43, 62, 66. W.O. 25/662.

¹¹⁴Little, p. 183.

declared slavery to be illegal in England. An undetermined number of blacks, brought to England as slaves, left their owners as a result of Mansfield's decision and attempted to seek a living on their own. Many seem to have been unsuccessful and wound up as beggars in London streets. This problem was intensified after 1783 when some of the demobilized black soldiers who had served in Britain's armed forces during the American Revolution settled in London.

The British Government had actually begun to rid the country of this population in 1786 when repatriation was initiated as a means of settling Sierra Leone. Pitt's Government supported this plan by providing free transport and six months maintenance for those "black poor" willing to be resettled in the colony.¹¹⁵ Recruiting destitute blacks for the West India Regiments was also part of Pitt's effort to solve this problem.

There were also a growing number of East Indian vagrants in Britain whom Little feels were even more impoverished and pitiful than were the blacks.¹¹⁶ These men had been set adrift in Britain when they were discharged upon their arrival on board East Indiamen. There were usually many idle months in London and elsewhere before shipping out on return voyage to India.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 184, and Reginald Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933; reprint ed., London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1964), pp. 83-84.

¹¹⁶Little, pp. 185-186.

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 185.

The British Government once again used the occasion to rid the country of these derelicts by enlisting them into the West India Regiments. The officers, however, of those West India Regiments to which blacks and Lascars were posted were never disinclined to accept them. Such was the need for recruits.

The need to find recruits for the West India Regiments led to the enlistment of practically any able-bodied man. Several Portuguese were enlisted in 1796 and 1797 into the 6th West India Regiment, both in England and Jamaica.¹¹⁸ At least two "Charib" Indians were likewise recruited into the 6th. Both joined in 1796, one at Spanish Town and the other at British Honduras.¹¹⁹

Since just about anyone was being recruited, it is strange that the army did not recruit among Canada's small black population, most of whom lived in Nova Scotia. According to "Extraordinaries Abroad", the British Army had recruited in Nova Scotia from 6 October to 3 December 1791 for the Black Carolina Corps.¹²⁰ It is equally odd that despite the need for black recruits for the West India Regiments, blacks were still being recruited into certain ranger corps. According to a warrant dated 2 August 1795 in "Extraordinaries Abroad", thirty-five recruits enlisted into Malcolm's Royal Rangers.¹²¹

¹¹⁸W.O. 25/657, folios 12, 25, 31.

¹¹⁹Ibid., folios 7, 25.

¹²⁰P.M.G. 14/74, p. 69.

¹²¹P.M.G. 14/75, p. 73.

What caused the defeat of the plan to raise the West India Regiments during the first years of their existence? An analysis of events surrounding this measure show that there were a number of contributing factors. The slowness of communication between England and the West Indies was partly responsible for the delay to implement the plan in 1795. Governor Stanley of the Leeward Islands, for instance, reported that he did not receive Portland's circular letter of 18 April announcing the plan until 28 June 1795.¹²² Nor had he received the details of the plan by the middle of July.¹²³ The Governor of Tobago complained of an even longer delay in receiving this message.¹²⁴ This delay would partially account for the poor recruiting results of 1795. However, it does not explain the recruiting situation a year later in 1796, by which time all of the governors had been fully informed of the measure.

There was also opposition to the scheme from what appears to have been a small number of senior British officers who were directly involved with the raising of the regiments. Lieutenant General Henry Bowyer, future Commander-in-Chief of British forces in the West Indies, was rather set against the measure. According to him the difficulties in raising the West India Regiments could be removed and the recruits made serviceable by disbanding the black corps and attaching the men to

¹²²C.O. 152/77, Stanley to Portland, No. 61, 15 July 1795.

¹²³Ibid.

¹²⁴C.O. 285/3, Lindsay to Portland, No. 9, 3 August 1795.

white regiments. ¹²⁵ Dundas quickly admonished Bowyer in a private despatch. It was unnecessary, Dundas informed him, to explain the importance of the black regiments. He lectured Bowyer that all new and significant undertakings meet with difficulties. He reminded Bowyer that it was his, Bowyer's, job to overcome whatever problems were encountered. ¹²⁶

In addition to the above, thousands of blacks who might otherwise have been recruits for the West India Regiments were siphoned off into imperial service as pioneers. Forty-five hundred slaves were originally requested by the British Government in August 1795 to perform the fatigue duties of the army. Jamaica was to provide fifteen hundred while the Leeward and Windward Islands, including Martinique, were to furnish the rest on the basis of a quota system. ¹²⁷ By December 1795 Jamaica disclosed the fact that about two thousand of its blacks were

¹²⁵W.O.1/86, Bowyer to Dundas, 8 September 1798.

¹²⁶Ibid., Dundas to Bowyer, "Private", 14 November 1798.

¹²⁷The cost to hire each slave per diem was to be a maximum of three shilling local currency which was paid to the proprietor. Nor were the pioneers, who were to be clothed in blue jackets and red caps, to be armed. H.O. 30/1, Dundas to Portland, 26 August 1795, and the enclosed Knox Memorandum, 25 August 1795. This memorandum contains the conditions under which the slaves were taken into British service as pioneers. See also W.O. 1/767, Portland's circular to the Governors of the West Indies, 28 August 1795, enclosed in King to Hukisson, 28 August 1795. A copy of this circular is in C.O. 324/103. The annual cost to Government for hiring slaves as pioneers, at the rate of three pence local currency per slave per diem, was estimated at £16,000 sterling. See W.O. 1/95, Trigge to Brownrigg, No. 56, 23 April 1802. Thus even before it began to purchase thousands of slaves as soldiers, the British Government encouraged the trade in slaves with its demand for slave pioneers.

employed daily in imperial service as pioneers.¹²⁸ Also in December, the Governor of Dominica and future colonel of the ill-fated 8th West India Regiment, Andrew Cockrane Johnstone, claimed that 2 percent of the island's slave population were pioneers in British Government service.¹²⁹ And in a return prepared in early April 1796 by Colonel Knox, the Quartermaster General of the British Army in the West Indies and the officer specially charged with the task of raising the corps of slave pioneers, 3,157 slaves had been received from the various Leeward and Windward Islands.¹³⁰ By September of the following year this number had risen to 3,509.¹³¹ So, while the British Government was requesting slaves to serve as soldiers it was simultaneously making additional demands on the islands for slaves as pioneers.

But there was a wider, deeper and more serious reason for the early defeat of the plan. "The West India Regiments . . . no way succeeded under the proposed Plan, not a Man having been given by any one of the Islands towards completing them."¹³²

¹²⁸C.O. 140/85, Votes of the Assembly, minutes of 14 December 1795, p. 67.

¹²⁹W.O. 1/82, Johnstone to Abercromby, 14 April 1796.

¹³⁰This number included the 758 pioneers who had been armed. The distribution of the slaves given as pioneers were as follows: Antigua: 285; Barbados: 300; Dominica: 332; Granada: 258; Guadeloupe émigres: 600; Martinique: 800; Nevis: 72; St. Christopher: 110; St. Vincent: 300; and Tobago: 100. W.O. 1/85, "Preparations made by Quarter Master General . . .", enclosure in Abercromby to Dundas, 9 April 1796, p. 305.

¹³¹W.O. 1/86, Jones to Cuyler, 20 September 1797.

¹³²W.O. 1/85, Leigh to Dundas, 5 December 1795.

So wrote a dejected General Leigh to Dundas on 5 December 1795. In view of the military crisis of 1795, why, did the British colonies so immediately, ¹³³ so effectively and so unanimously prevent the recruiting of the West India Regiments? Quite simply, colonial opposition was due to the fact that the raising of such regiments attacked the basic social, military, economic, legal and political foundations of British West Indian society.

To the planters the raising of the black regiments threatened the already precarious position of their society. The colonists who were asked to live with this measure perhaps saw more clearly than did the British Government the risky business of arming thousands of slaves who were also the object of French revolutionary propaganda. Slaves were already legally

¹³³ According to Ellis the colonies offered no objection to the scheme to recruit black regiments until 1797 when the question of providing for them was raised. See pages 100-101. Ellis is here in error on two counts. First, colonial opposition was immediate. This is confirmed by the minutes of the meeting of the standing committee of the West India planters and merchants in London. On 27 June 1795 this committee, having heard of the opposition to the plan by the planters of the Leeward Islands, resolved on a strong protest to the Metropolitan Government. See Minutes of the Meetings of the West India Planters and Merchants, Vol. II, West India Committee Library, London, United Kingdom. Immediate colonial opposition is also confirmed by the disastrous recruiting results of 1795. Second, the question of providing for the West India Regiments, or their subsistence, was never a general issue in the British West Indies. The cost of imperial defence in the West Indies was borne by the British Parliament. According to D. J. Murray, only Jamaica made a contribution to the costs of defence. See his The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government 1801-1834 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 39. However, Goveia states that all of the legislatures of the Leeward Islands were expected to make grants of money and Negro labour for the construction and maintenance of forts and fortifications in the islands. See p. 65. Apparently, then, the question surrounding the cost of defence was not as contentious in the Leeward Islands as in Jamaica.

disallowed from carrying arms in the British West Indies. Antigua's Militia Act of 1793 stipulated that slaves were not even permitted to carry the arms and ammunition of militiamen.¹³⁴ Experiences with the rangers had shown that the placing of a firelock in the hands of a slave provided him with a knowledge and dignity that no longer made him suitable as a field slave. The British Military Governor of Martinique expressed this alarm¹³⁵ and for this reason one of the conditions of service of the slave pioneers was that they should not be armed.¹³⁶ As we shall see, the army which was responsible for instilling this sense of dignity and pride in its black soldiers, concurred with those who held that slaves recruited as soldiers should never be returned to the "labour of the Field".¹³⁷

According to Professor Goveia, the proprietors in the Leeward Islands viewed the arming of blacks as an example of the inexorable growth of the slave system which excited their already latent terror of it.¹³⁸ To windward, the trepidations of Barbadian planters rested on the presumption that by mingling with discontented blacks from other islands, especially those

¹³⁴Note cited in Burns, p. 490. Antigua later armed large numbers of its slaves.

¹³⁵"A Negro is never of any use in the plantation after they have carried arms." C.O. 318/16, Milne to King, 6 November 1798.

¹³⁶H.O. 30/1, Knox Memorandum, 25 August 1795, enclosed in Dundas to Portland, 26 August 1795.

¹³⁷C.O. 318/19, Abercromby to Hislop, 20 May 1796, enclosed in Trigge to Hobart, No. 30, 22 January 1802.

¹³⁸Goveia, p. 149.

from the French islands, their slaves would be similarly affected.¹³⁹ The spectre of permanent black regiments also raised alarm in Tobago. Portland was told that a reason for that Assembly's opposition was "the dread of . . . having a Black Garrison after the Peace."¹⁴⁰ He was also informed that recruiting slaves would destroy the "confidence & attachment" between master and slave on the island. Should any proprietor consent to give up any of his slaves to the army, Portland was warned that these recruits would make very poor soldiers. This was because only the "refuse" would be offered. It was explained to him that no planter would willingly part with a good slave since the price of such a bondsman was then valued at from £80 sterling and up.¹⁴¹

This fear, however, was not always consistent with colonial practice. Brigadier General Thomas Hislop, colonel of the subsequently raised 11th West India Regiment and Lieutenant Governor of Trinidad in 1803, noted this inconsistency. It seemed ironic to him that some of those who were the most strenuous in representing permanent black regiments as dangerous to the security of the British colonies and as contemptible in the eyes of the French had only recently relied principally on

¹³⁹ C.O. 28/65, Ricketts to Portland, 28 June 1795 and enclosure.

¹⁴⁰ C.O. 285/3, Mackenzie to Portland, No. 12, 3 September 1795.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., Lindsay to Portland, "Private", 6 September 1795.

the fidelity and ability of the black rangers,¹⁴² many of whom became West India soldiers. And as far as the French holding the black regiments in disdain, it was common knowledge in the West Indies that the French had also armed their slaves and that these troops had proven to be reliable and effective troops.

Colonial opposition stemmed basically from the parochial defensive posture of the colonies. Locked into this type of military strategy, the islands were chiefly concerned in tying down within their own garrisons as many troops as necessary, including armed slaves. The colonies, therefore, saw very little benefit for themselves from providing their slaves as recruits for the West India Regiments. As imperial or general service corps these regiments could be shuttled from island to island on imperial business. The fact that certain West India Regiments were to be attached permanently to certain garrisons did not encourage those islands to support the measure. What the islands required to supplement imperial troops, which were both too few in numbers and unreliable since they could be removed to other islands, were troops completely under local or colonial authority. For this reason every British island in the Caribbean, with the exception of Jamaica, embodied fairly large slave or ranger corps under the authority of its assembly.¹⁴³

¹⁴²W.O. 1/95 (and C.O. 318/31), "Remarks on the Establishment of West India Regiments. Written in the Year 1801", pp. 195a-195b, enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

¹⁴³The Leeward Islands: the 1st King's Regiment and the 2nd Queen's Regiment of Black Rangers; Dominica: De Vermount's and the Loyal Dominica Rangers; St. Vincent: Haffey's and Jackson's Rangers and the St. Vincent Rangers; Grenada: Webster's and Angus's Black Rangers; and the Tobago Jaegers.

Even the settlers at British Honduras proposed to raise a regiment of one thousand blacks. ¹⁴⁴

These corps were mostly raised in 1795 and, as in the case of the pioneers, they likewise competed with the West India Regiments for recruits. The two corps, for instance, which were raised in the Leeward Islands had by February 1798 a total rank and file of 998. ¹⁴⁵ By August of the same year this number had increased to 1,168 which included a small contingent of slaves trained in the handling of artillery. ¹⁴⁶ St. Kitts, where the two corps were embodied, made it very clear to the British Army just how these troops were to be employed. No part of these regiments, the army was told, was to be used on offensive operations. ¹⁴⁷

A study of the official despatches between West Indian governors and Britain in 1795 show island after island refusing to part with its slaves. A reason usually given for this refusal was the priority attached to defensive commitments. This necessitated keeping certain numbers of slaves, who had been allotted for military service, on the various islands in order to accomplish these tasks. ¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴C.O. 137/98, Magistrates to Balcarres, 18 July 1796.

¹⁴⁵C.O. 152/78, Thomson to Portland, No. 11, 19 February 1798, and enclosures No. 3 and No. 5.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., No. 26, 10 August 1798.

¹⁴⁷C.O. 153/28, Leigh to Portland, No. 8, 17 January 1796.

¹⁴⁸For instance Grenada: C.O. 101/34, Mackenzie to Portland, 6 July 1795; for Barbados: C.O. 28/65, Ricketts to Portland, 28 June 1795 and enclosure; and for St. Vincent: W.O. 1/767, Collow to Seton, 17 August 1795.

In the case of Tobago these records show a related and most interesting reason for that island's initial opposition to the recruiting scheme. In addition to the Assembly's refusal to support the measure, the slaves themselves were most reluctant to serve in West India Regiments, according to Governor Lindsay. Lindsay informed Portland that their unwillingness to serve in imperial regiments was basically due to the fact that imperial service would send them off the island and away from their families and homes.¹⁴⁹ Imperial service, Lindsay continued, would also separate the slaves from their property which, in the form of huts, furniture, live stock, land and even money, was possessed by all the slaves on the island and to which all were attached.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, the slaves regarded military service, or at least imperial service, as a servitude greater than their own.¹⁵¹

Tobago's seemingly irreversible opposition to the recruiting plan experienced an abrupt and complete about-face, however. By 5 December 1795, almost exactly three months from the time of Lindsay's September despatch to Portland, he was informing Portland that Tobago had met its quota of slaves for the West India Regiments.¹⁵² Apparently these recruits were furnished to the army by private individuals since this method

¹⁴⁹C.O. 285/3, Lindsay to Portland, "Private", 6 September 1795.

¹⁵⁰Ibid.

¹⁵¹Ibid.

¹⁵²C.O. 285/4, Portland to Lindsay, No. 8, 7 February 1796.

of recruiting was recommended and no doubt tried as an alternate solution at other islands.¹⁵³ These recruits were the unusually large body of blacks who were enlisted into the 7th West India Regiment at Barbados on 25 December 1795. The policy of contracting with private individuals to raise recruits as opposed to dealing directly with the colonial legislatures would characterize the British Government's later efforts to raise the West India Regiments. In 1795 and 1796, however, the British Government sought unsuccessfully to work chiefly through the normal and official channels of the governments of the West Indian colonies.

Tobago's reversed stance, which was no doubt influenced by that island's own hostile French inhabitants and its proximity to Spanish Trinidad, had yet another effect. As was mentioned previously, the Tobago Jaegers, a corps of 140 strong was taken into imperial service in 1797. Even those slaves which Tobago had contributed to the corps of pioneers were subsequently armed and trained as soldiers.¹⁵⁴

Linked to above military reason of colonial preference for slave corps under local jurisdiction was a strong and mutually

¹⁵³For St. Vincent, see W.O. 1/767, Collow to Seton, 27 October 1795, enclosed in Seton to Portland, 28 October 1795; and in the case of Barbados, see C.O. 28/65, Ricketts to Portland, 5 December 1795.

¹⁵⁴C.O. 285/4, Lindsay to Portland, No. 24, 27 April 1796; *ibid.*, Portland to Lindsay, No. 11, 19 July 1796. The enlistment of Tobagan slaves into the 7th West India Regiment and the passage of the Tobago Jaegers into imperial service refute Governor Lindsay's contention that slaves were ill disposed towards imperial service.

supportive economic motive. Embodied slaves permanently garrisoned on those islands where they were raised could be continually employed in the various labours of sugar production until the time they were needed for military purposes. Upon the passage of this danger they could then be immediately reemployed in the field. On the other hand, permitting the British Government the use of slaves for its military purposes would result in a corresponding decrease in the number of slaves available for planting, harvesting and the defence of plantations. Furthermore it would be impossible to guarantee the return of these slaves once they had been taken off an island as part of an expeditionary force. Campaigns and garrison duties might combine to keep a corps away for a period of many months, even years.

During the first weeks of the war against France the army was told by planters that the slaves the army required as pioneers could not be supplied because they were needed to harvest sugar crops.¹⁵⁵ In September 1795 the colony of Tobago translated its quota of four hundred slaves into pounds sterling. Portland was told that if the colony supplied these slaves the amount it would lose in terms of their labour would be £8,000 sterling annually.¹⁵⁶ At Jamaica in 1799 harvest time was also blamed as the reason for the planters' unwillingness to provide slaves for the 6th West India Regiment.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵C.O. 318/12, Cuyler to Dundas, 5 March 1793.

¹⁵⁶C.O. 285/3, Lindsay to Portland, "Private", 6 September 1795.

¹⁵⁷C.O. 137/103, Balcarres to Portland, No. 4, 29 October 1799.

Major General John Moore further confirms this colonial preference for troops who could satisfy this dual role. On his return to England, Moore made the following entry in his diary on 8 June 1797 after having observed St. Kitts' two slave corps:

In St. Kitts besides the militia there are two corps of 500 each of Negroes embodied - composed of the trustiest and best slaves. Necessity forced the Whites into this measure - but they are affraid and jealous of them. These corps are only called upon occasionally - at other times [they] work upon the habitations. The officers are the different proprietors. 158

There was yet another important reason which divided the British Government and the colonies over the measure to raise the West India Regiments. This was the British Government's initial effort towards greater assertiveness in colonial government in the West Indies. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the initiative in colonial government, in everything that was related to the internal affairs of the islands resided with the colonial assemblies. This was the way colony government was understood to function in Britain despite the fact that the formal institutions within the colonies were designed to ensure that the direction and regulation of colonial government lay with the representatives within the colonies of the Metropolitan Government.

¹⁵⁸Moore MSS, No. 57327. These arguments were also used by the Barbados Assembly in 1795 and again 1796 in an effort to defeat the measure. To these arguments were added the disorders in St. Domingo and the general fear of arming blacks. John Poyer, The History of Barbados (London: Mawman, 1808; reprint ed., London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1971), pp. 624-628; and Robert H. Schomburgk, the History of Barbados (London: Longman, Brown, Green, 1848; reprint ed., London: Frank Cass & Co., Ltd., 1971), pp. 353-356.

This weakness of the Metropolitan Government was due to at least two factors. For one, the shock of the American Revolution forced politicians in Britain to adopt a policy of caution and non-legislative interference with its West Indian colonies. Parliament simply avoided passing laws that might offend the colonists' sensibilities. The other was that although the governors were the direct representatives of the British Government and were expected to support and promote those actions originating in Britain, they had become more the instruments of the colonial legislatures than Parliament.¹⁵⁹ This situation stemmed to a very large degree from the fact that by the end of the century the majority of West Indian governors had themselves become the owners of estates. As plantation owners they shared a common dependence on West Indian merchants which resulted in a "community of outlook" between themselves and the colonists.¹⁶⁰ The power of the governors was also severely limited since those considerable powers with which they were charged in their Commission and Instructions were not designed for continuous exercise but only for use in emergency.¹⁶¹

However, as the century came to an end the roles of the British Government and the colonies in colonial government slowly started to become reversed. The initiative in colonial govern-

¹⁵⁹For a description of colonial government at the end of the eighteenth century see Murray, pp. 1-12.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 22.

¹⁶¹For additional limitations on the governor's prerogative powers see ibid., pp. 13-31.

ment gradually began to shift from the legislatures in the colonies to that in London. According to Murray, this reversal was the result of the pressure of the Anti-Slavery movement. He cites, for instance, the introduction of Crown Colony government in the conquered colonies, the creation of the Colonial Office in 1801, the reconstruction of government in the old British West Indian islands during the Napoleonic Wars, the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and the emancipation of the slaves in 1838 as evidences of the initiative in colonial government having passed to the British Government.¹⁶² Although not included by Murray, the decision of the British Government to garrison the colonies with black regiments was an important part of the growing contest for supremacy in colonial government and as a result was strenuously resisted by the colonies throughout the war with France.

This reversal was also due to the reduced influence of the West Indian interest in Parliament towards the end of the century. This decline had been exacerbated by economic decay in the islands and shifts in British trade patterns. At the same time, leaders who were both planters and merchants of this once conspicuous pressure group had been rechannelling their wealth and adopting new interests. The Lascelles and the Pinneys, for instance, had become landed gentry at the expense of their West Indian connections. Others, less fortunate, were in the process of squandering their fortunes and passing into

¹⁶²Ibid., xii-xiv.

political oblivion. By the end of the eighteenth century those remaining active West Indians according to one historian were minor figures when compared to their predecessors and were not heeded as much in the councils of power in London.¹⁶³

While the decision to raise the West India Regiments in 1795 did not produce any immediate legislation to which the colonies could take exception, it did lead to one amazing piece of legislation which has been totally overlooked by historians and which, along with those examples cited by Murray, underscores the British Government's intention to assume greater direction in colonial government. In 1807, some twenty-six years before the emancipation of the slaves in the British West Indies, an Act of the British Parliament declared the soldier-slaves of the West India Regiments to be freemen.¹⁶⁴ This Act was not only passed in the face of colonial efforts to bring the black soldiers under the jurisdiction of the local slave laws, but when the British Government was considering this type of legal move in 1801 even the Law Officers of the Crown questioned the legal operation of the Act and asked whether it "would not be an interference with the internal Legislation of the Colonies, which Parliament has of late not been disposed to exercise."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Robert A. Smith, Eighteenth-Century English Politics (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1972), p. 61.

¹⁶⁴ Mutiny Act 1807. The question of the legal status of the West India soldiers is fully discussed in Chapter VI.

¹⁶⁵ C.O. 324/65, Perceval and Law to Hobart, 14 December 1801. On two occasions before the rendering of this opinion, 11 March 1799 and 11 March 1801, the Law Officer of the Crown voiced similar questions when the British Government contemplated using an Act of Parliament as an instrument for enfranchising black soldiers. All three opinions are discussed in Chapter VI.

It is true that in accordance with the late eighteenth century practice of non-interference with the colonial governments, the British Government sought initially to raise the West India Regiments by having the colonies assist in legislating these corps into existence. However, the initiative to create this local black army came from Britain. What is more, when the colonies continued to refuse their assistance in raising this force the British Government unilaterally recruited the West India Regiments and, as we shall see, eventually placed a portion of its black troops in all of its garrisons in the Caribbean. Colonial opponents of the British Government's growing assertiveness in colonial affairs could point to the establishment of the West India Regiments as an example of this unpopular course of action.

Colonial opposition to the raising of the West India Regiments was due to a number of reasons, most important of which was the military-economic argument. These efforts crippled the initial recruiting attempts of the British Army. Ironically, the success of the colonists in thwarting the army's early recruiting efforts would eventually guarantee the raising of the West India Regiments.

CHAPTER IV

THE JAMAICAN EXPERIENCE AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE POLICY OF PURCHASE

All of the reasons for the early defeat of the plan to raise the West India Regiments are evident in the case of the success of planter influence at Jamaica in delaying the formation of the 6th West India Regiment. Before the army attempted to recruit the 6th in Jamaica in 1796, Balcarres had notified Dundas in November 1795 that the principal people on the island had rejected the British Government's original request that a number of slaves be enlisted into one of the West India Regiments which was then recruiting in St. Domingo.¹ Jamaica's contribution of slaves to the corps of pioneers, the Maroon War and the expence that would result from furnishing these slaves were given then as the reasons for the rejection.²

This news came as no surprise in London since Williamson had warned Portland in early July 1795 that he doubted Jamaica

¹H.O. 30/1, Balcarres to Dundas, No. 4, 29 November 1795. See also "Votes of the Honourable Assembly of Jamaica . . ." in C.O. 140/85, pp. 62, 65, 324.

²C.O. 140/85, Minutes of the Assembly, 14 December 1795, Votes of the Assembly, p. 67. However, on the same day the Assembly was also busy with a plan to raise two ranger companies in the parish of St. Elizabeth. The cost amounted to £2,000 local currency every two months of which £1,200 had already been raised. Ibid., pp. 69-70

would raise any black corps "to be sent out of the Island".³ Williamson added that the British Government should not hold out any hopes of enlisting either slaves or free blacks. If the former were to be furnished by the planters, they would have to be purchased at exorbitant prices. The latter were unavailable, or so Williamson thought, since all free blacks were supposed to be serving in the militia.⁴

Nor was Balcarres's own alternative recruiting plan well received. His suggestion to raise two regiments of one thousand blacks each was rejected by both the British Government and Jamaicans. Britain spurned the project because both corps were to be fencible-type regiments and as such they would be tied to Jamaica's garrison. The objection of the planters no doubt rested on the fact that it was Balcarres's intention that the slaves recruited into these corps would be rewarded with their

³W.O. 1/767, Williamson to Portland, No. 2, 12 July 1795.

⁴Ibid. The number of free blacks and free coloureds in Jamaica's militia had increased in the three years since the beginning of the war and probably accounts for part of the failure to enlist them in any large numbers into the West India Regiments. The following comparison also illustrates the significant decline in the number of white militiamen.

	<u>March 1793</u>	<u>March 1796</u>	<u>Change</u>
white cavalry	1,079	1,259	+ 180
white infantry	5,725	4,206	- 1,519
coloured infantry	1,384	1,567	+ 183
black infantry	584	764	+ 180
Total	8,772	7,796	-1,339

C.O. 137/107, Abstract of Jamaica's Defence Arrangement 1790-1802, enclosed in Hobart to Nugent, No. 4, 4 February 1802.

freedom at the conclusion of their service.⁵

However, the failure to raise the 3rd and 5th West India Regiments at Jamaica during 1796⁶ did not discourage London from making a second attempt to raise a black regiment on that island, this time composed of free blacks, free coloureds and slaves. In December 1796 it was decided to station the 6th West India Regiment at Jamaica.⁷ The following month Balcarres was instructed to raise the 6th as quickly as possible and on the "strictest economy".⁸ Actually the Jamaica monthly returns show the 6th was preparing to form on the island in April 1796.⁹

Serious efforts to raise the 6th West India Regiment, however only got under way in April 1797 and produced immediate opposition. At the end of the first week in April, Balcarres wrote to Portland that the Assembly was still opposed to the measure of raising a West India Regiment on the island.¹⁰ Towards the end of the month, on 23 April, Brigadier General Whitelocke, the colonel of the 6th, noted that Jamaicans were

⁵W.O. 6/5, Balcarres to Portland, 21 July 1795, enclosed in Dundas to Forbes, No. 5, 30 September 1795; and W.O. 1/92, Dundas to Balcarres, No. 3, 30 September 1795.

⁶According to the Jamaica monthly returns for 1796, these two regiments, or rather their cadres, arrived from St. Domingo in May 1796. They remained at least until October. The returns for November and December 1796 are missing. See W.O. 17/1988.

⁷W.O. 40/9, Duke of York to Abercromby, 5 December 1796.

⁸C.O. 137/98, Portland to Balcarres, 10 January 1797.

⁹W.O. 17/1989. The March return is missing.

¹⁰C.O. 137/98, Balcarres to Portland, 7 April 1797. According to the enclosed "General Statement of His Majesty's Forces in Jamaica, 1 April 1797", the total strength of the 6th was twenty-seven.

opposed to arming not only slaves but even emancipated blacks.¹¹ Exactly one month later Balcarres was writing a somewhat different story to Portland saying that the colonists were even more opposed to arming free coloureds as distinct from free blacks. "People of colour with Arms in 'their hands", wrote Balcarres, "are a more dangerous body than purchased Slaves, People of colour, they say, look up to Rights and Privileges; a Negro rather looks to indolence and a Red Feather." ¹²

It was enlisting free blacks into the 6th that would deprive the militia of an effective part of its strength since all of these men had a legal obligation to serve in this force.¹³ Recruiting free coloureds was opposed on the same grounds. ¹⁴ The alarm among the white colonists over the plan to arm free coloureds, however, was certainly well founded since it was this group that was in direct economic, social, legal and political competition with the white ruling class. Free men of colour were free in the limited sense that they were not slaves, but they did not enjoy equality with whites. Only in 1830 were all free coloureds declared equal with whites in civil and political rights without regard to racial origin. Before this time the legal and educational rights of free men of colour were circum-

¹¹Ibid., Whitelocke to King, 23 April 1797.

¹²Ibid., Balcarres to Portland, 23 May 1797.

¹³Ibid. See also the resolutions of the meeting of the freeholders of St. John's Parish, Point Hill Barracks, 29 May 1797 in The Royal Gazette of [n.d.] June 1797, enclosed in *ibid.*, Balcarres to Portland, 9 June 1797.

¹⁴Ibid., Balcarres to Portland, 23 May 1797.

scribed, their political and civil rights were limited, and they were barred both legally and socially from the white community.¹⁵ Alarmists elsewhere in the British West Indies could and did point to the very recent turmoil in the French islands and claim that the whole social structure there had been destroyed by the success of the free coloureds in throwing off their subordination to the whites.¹⁶

The colonists in Jamaica, somewhat prone to exaggeration, jealous of their rights and position, frightened by the upheaval going on around them, also saw the arming of free coloureds and their integration with free blacks and slaves in the 6th West India Regiment as a repetition of events in St. Domingo which helped to tear that colony loose from its traditional social, legal and political moorings. Balcarres was aware of the colonists' feelings towards arming free coloureds when he wrote Portland in early June that "the Policy of the Country very properly prevents People of colour [from] attaining too much power or property."¹⁷ Yet contrary to the island's practice of racial subordination and segregation as evidenced in the

¹⁵According to Curtin: "the tensions between the colored and white members of the European society were by far the most serious". On the status of free coloureds in Jamaica before 1830 see Curtin, pp. 42-46.

¹⁶Goveia, p. 222.

¹⁷Balcarres even recommended the recruiting of coloured slaves as an alternative to enlisting free coloureds since recruiting the former would not subtract from the effective strength of the militia and also because arming coloured slaves would not disturb the lines of distinctions and subordination between the races. C.O. 137/98, Balcarres to Portland, 6 June 1797.

militia, for instance, Balcarres's plan for the 6th called for each company to be composed of twenty free coloureds or free blacks, twenty creole slaves and twenty "Ship Negroes".¹⁸

Colonial reaction was swift and hostile. At the end of July in a report to the Speaker of the Assembly, a committee of enquiry looking into the scheme to raise the 6th noted among other things that the plan to integrate free coloureds, free blacks and slaves was contrary to the policy of the island.

The committee found that

- a The Distinction and Subordination of Ranks, by which the Peace, Good Order and Safety of this Island have hitherto in a great Measure been preserved, will be destroyed by the Adoption of this Plan.

Further

The Inhabitants of this Colony consist of Four Classes: Whites, Free People of Color having special Privileges granted by Private Acts, Free People of Color not possessing such Privileges, and Slaves. Hitherto all these Classes when employed in the Public Service have as far as it has been practicable been kept separate. We have in the Militia distinct Companies composed of Whites, of Browns, and of Blacks. Slaves are only employed as Pioneers or as Partymen. The Regiment of Color under Brigadier General Whitelocke is to be form'd as it appears to your Committee on a Footing of Equality, and on a System contrary to this Practice.¹⁹

Whitelocke recommended that in order to conciliate the planters and to ensure the island's payment of subsistence for these troops the 6th should be recruited instead principally from among Musquito Indians and fifty or sixty more "London,

¹⁸Ibid., 23 May and 9 June 1797. In this last letter to Portland, Balcarres stated that he had enlisted about one hundred men.

¹⁹Report of a committee of enquiry enclosed in *ibid.*, Balcarres to King, "Secret and Confidential", 30 July 1797.

Blacks".²⁰ Yet despite the facts that the principal absentee planters in Britain supported the plan to raise the 6th,²¹ and that Balcarres claimed he had made some headway in attempting to persuade local planters to support the measure,²² the assembly had already chosen to wage an all out legal battle.

On 1 May 1797 the Commissioners of Public Account, an administrative body which supervised the financial administration of the island, resolved that since the rank and file of the 6th were "not European Troops sent here for the protection of this Island, for whom alone this Board are of the opinion they are authorized to provide", the Assembly should not furnish subsistence or rations for them.²³ The Commissioners, most of whom were Assemblymen, were attempting here to make a distinction between the 6th West India Regiment and the white regiments of the island. They placed a very limiting definition on the phrase "His Majesty's Troops" (and similar phrases) which was contained in the title of the Jamaica Act regulating the British Government's and Jamaica's commitments towards defending the

²⁰Ibid., Whitelocke to King, 23 April 1797. Musquito coast Indians had previously been employed on several occasions as armed detachments against Jamaica's truculent Maroons and also against Spain in 1742 and in 1747. See Carey Robinson, The Fighting Maroons of Jamaica (London: William Collins and Sangster (Jamaica), Ltd., 1969), pp. 33, 39-41, 45; and Pares, pp. 97-100. See also R. C. Dallas, The History of the Maroons London: A. Strahan, 1803.

²¹W.O. 1/86, Dundas to Abercromby, No. 2, 12 May 1797.

²²C.O. 137/98, Balcarres to Portland, 11 April 1797.

²³Ibid., Minutes of the Council, 23 May, 1797, enclosed in Balcarres to Portland, 25 May 1797.

island.²⁴ This board, vested with the power to make the contracts for victualling British troops quartered on the island, also ordered the resolution inserted for one month in The Royal Gazette, The St. Jago Gazette and The Cornwall Chronicle.²⁵

Subsistence meant the annual grant the Jamaica Assembly had been induced to contribute toward meeting the costs of imperial defence on the island and over which there had developed continuous friction between the British Government and the colonists as to how this money was to be spent.²⁶ In threatening to withhold the grant, the strategy of the colonists was to coerce the British Government into rescinding the measure. To Portland it was "preposterous" that the Commissioners should consider supporting only those troops coming from Europe. According to this argument neither would white troops raised in Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick be entitled to subsistence by the island, if they should be attached to Jamaica's garrison.²⁷ Furthermore, Portland made it clear in his reply to Balcarres that the West India Regiments were included in the Act.

All His Majesty's Troops are raised by virtue of the same Prerogative and are all subject to the same Laws and

²⁴Jamaica Act 30 George III C 9. entitled: "An Act to secure to His Majesty's Troops, that now are, or hereafter may be quartered in this Island, for the protection thereof, to the number for which the Faith of the Country stands pledged, the subsistence they now receive on certain conditions."

²⁵C.O. 137/98, Minutes of the Council, 23 May 1797, enclosed in Balcarres to Portland, 25 May 1797.

²⁶This disagreement stemmed basically from the different military objectives and priorities of the British Government and Jamaica.

²⁷C.O. 137/98, Portland to Balcarres, [n.d.] August 1797.

Regulations and that the West India Regiments are to all intents and purposes as much a part of the King's army as any other Regiment in His Majesty's Service. ²⁸

But before this issue could be resolved, opposition mounted throughout the end of May, June and July. Portland was told that the entire island was aroused and that resolutions and remonstrances were being prepared everywhere. ²⁹ On 29 May the freeholders of St. John's Parish formally resolved that the raising of the 6th was unconstitutional without legislative approval. ³⁰ Three days later the Grand Jurors of the County of Middlesex, at a meeting held in Spanish Town, issued a public protest in which they concluded that "the most calamitous events" would overwhelm the island if the British Government persisted in its efforts to raise the 6th. ³¹ The Jurors then called for the "steady, vigorous, and united opposition" to the plan from their representatives in the Assembly. ³²

While the colonists were marshalling their forces to prevent the raising of the 6th, Balcarres was complaining of inadequate numbers of troops to defend the island. On 20 June Balcarres was lamenting the fact that not only was he unable to furnish British regulars to guard Spanish prisoners of war

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., Balcarres to Portland, 23 May 1797.

³⁰ Resolutions of the meeting of the freeholders of St. John's Parish, Point Hill Barracks, in The Royal Gazette of [n.d.] June 1797, enclosed in *ibid.*, Balcarres to Portland, 9 June 1797.

³¹ Remonstrance of the Grand Jury of the County of Middlesex, 1 June 1797 in *ibid.*

³² Ibid.

at the Bath prison, but "not a Soldier" was available to protect the island to the windward of Kingston. "That very interesting part of the Island", he mused, "is left defenceless".³³ Towards the end of the first week in July Balcarres ordered the 6th, which by then had a total rank and file of 108,³⁴ to stop recruiting until he had been advised by the Attorney General of the island concerning the legal details of purchasing slaves.³⁵

Although the colonists were unanimous in their hostility to the raising of a West India Regiment on the island, they were not averse to using these troops in an emergency. In March of the following year, when the controversy was still raging, several companies of the 6th were purposely retained on the island for use against runaway slaves.³⁶

In July the legal battle widened when the same committee of enquiry, which had been looking into the constitutionality of arming slaves on the island, rendered the opinion that to do so was contrary to the island's annual Gunpowder Act.³⁷ (It is interesting to note that when Balcarres inspected the 6th on

³³Total, British rank and file in June, including artillery, was 1,021. Ibid., Balcarres to Portland, 20 June 1797.

³⁴W.O. 17/251, 1 July monthly return of 6th West India Regiment.

³⁵C.O. 137/98, Balcarres to Portland, 4 July 1797.

³⁶W.O. 1/769, extract of a letter from Balcarres to Portland, 2 March 1798, p. 443.

³⁷The committee's report is enclosed in C.O. 137/98, Balcarres to King, "Secret and Confidential", 30 July 1797. "An Act To regulate the Sale of Gunpowder, And to prevent selling Fire-Arms to Maroons and Slaves." A copy of this Act is enclosed in ibid., Balcarres to Portland, 19 August 1797.

18 August it then had a total rank and file of 130 of which 120 were free blacks and ten only were slaves. 38) According to this Act, the giving, selling or lending gunpowder or fire-arms to slaves with malicious design or "even without any evil intent" was prohibited. However, both Balcarres and Portland were of the opinion that the proviso to Section 5 of the Act, which allowed a slave to be armed in the ~~presence~~ of the owner, an overseer, a person in charge of the slave or "under the direction of such proprietor", provided the legal basis on which slaves could be armed. 39

This proviso was actually meant to preserve the traditional right of the planter in the British West Indies to arm his slaves as he saw fit. This saving clause also permitted the British Government three options. First, by taking title to a slave through purchase from the current proprietor, the British Government, as the new owner, could legally arm the slave. This is precisely what Balcarres had been doing when he reported that because of the intense opposition to the measure he had to be "uncommonly nice & correct as to obtaining the Title of the Slave". 40 Second, an unpurchased slave could be armed with the owner's permission or, as stipulated in the Act, "under the direction of such proprietor". The precedent

³⁸Ibid., Balcarres to Portland, 19 August 1797.

³⁹Ibid., Balcarres to King, "Secret and Confidential", 30 July 1797, and Portland to Balcarres, "Most Secret and Confidential", October 1797.

⁴⁰C.O. 137/98, Balcarres to Portland, 19 August 1797.

for this had already been established on other islands when slaves were hired out to the British Army and armed as rangers. However, the Attorney General of the island found the restrictions of Section 5 "so comprehensive" that no legal basis could be found on which the army could arm slaves on the island.⁴¹ He also warned Balcarres that he considered it a "dangerous" move if the British Government should contest local opposition to the measure by employing the proviso.⁴² Lastly, the British Government could obtain the title to a slave by purchasing the slave directly from a Guinea ship and thereby arm him. However, resorting to this method would in effect place the British Government directly into the increasingly objectionable and controversial business of dealing in human beings. Yet to the British Government there were powerful arguments for doing so. The direct purchase of slaves would circumvent the delay and search costs involved in taking title from local proprietors.⁴³ Furthermore, it was more expensive to purchase a seasoned creole slave than a similarly fit "Ship Negroe" despite the fact that the latter came off the ship "with only a Rag around him".⁴⁴ By the summer of 1797 Britain had either made use of all three alternatives or was about to. But it was the last option that she would rely on most heavily until 1807 in order to raise and

⁴¹Ricketts to Balcarres, 7 August 1797, enclosed in *ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*

⁴³*Ibid.*, Balcarres to Portland, 19 August 1797.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

maintain the West India Regiments.

Apparently Portland and other ministers had also contemplated manumitting prospective slave-recruits before arming them as a device for circumventing the restrictions of the Gunpowder Act.⁴⁵ Balcarres, whose hopes were only slightly raised by this approach, enclosed in his 19 August despatch to Portland a copy of the preamble of the Jamaica Act which regulated the manumission of slaves on the island. According to this Act a slave could not be enfranchised until a "Sufficient" portion of the money required to subsist the slave for the rest of his life was deposited with the church wardens of the parish in which the owner of the slave resided. The annual cost of providing for a freed slave was set at £5 local currency.⁴⁶ This manoeuvre was obviously not a feasible solution and was never resorted to by the British Government. The cost of recruiting in this manner would be not only exorbitant but also wasteful since in addition to the purchase price of the slave there would also be the redundant charges stemming from the manumission and the normal military expences incurred in recruiting, clothing and paying the slave as a soldier. However, in early June 1797 an effort was already underway to end the mounting tension and strained relations between the Assembly and the British Government over the raising of the 6th West India Regiment.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ "An Act for Regulating the Manumission of Negro Mulatto and other Slaves, and to Oblige the owners to make a provision for them during their lives.", enclosed in *ibid*.

On 6 June Balcarres proposed to Portland an alternative to raising the 6th for service at Jamaica. The three thousand British soldiers the island was pledged to subsist should all be white and a considerable portion of these troops would be completely maintained by Jamaica without any expence to the British Government.⁴⁷ This plan, Balcarres continued, would take effect in 1799 at which time the island would be free from debt and could then with sufficient revenue support these troops.⁴⁸ By the end of November Balcarres's plan had widespread local support and had been fully developed.

According to the resolutions passed by the Assembly on 28 November, and which appeared in The Diary and Kingston Daily Advertiser of 5 December 1797, that part of the three thousand man British garrison that was to be paid and subsisted by the island was to number two thousand "white men".⁴⁹ In the event these troops could not be obtained in the British Isles or in North America, they could be recruited from among "foreign European Protestants".⁵⁰ Many of these men were already in British service in the several battalions of the 60th Regiment

⁴⁷Ibid., Balcarres to Portland, 6 June 1797. The question and issues of colonial contribution for military protection, particularly as this problem affected Jamaica, is discussed in Helen Taft Manning, British Colonial Government After the American Revolution 1782-1830 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), pp. 213-249.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹C.O. 137/99, enclosure No. 2 in Balcarres to Portland, No. 3, 10 December 1797.

⁵⁰Ibid.

and also in certain of the foreign emigrant regiments, notably the German and Swiss corps, which were first taken into British pay in 1794.⁵¹

These two thousand troops were also to be permanently attached to Jamaica's garrison. Upon the conclusion of their service they were to remain on the island and were to be provided with small plots of land in the interior.⁵² This last condition was an obvious attempt on the part of the colonists to solve two problems of serious concern to themselves: one, their declining numbers which was reflected in the militia, and two, the need to safeguard the vulnerable interior of the island against would-be invaders, runaways and revolted slaves.

The British Government's eventual acceptance of the plan in early May 1798 and the removal of the 6th West India Regiment from Jamaica to Honduras⁵³ by October 1798⁵⁴ marks a momentary but ignominious retreat of the British Government on the issue of raising black regiments to assist in garrisoning the West

⁵¹A large number of German soldiers were then in British pay and serving in the West Indies. Among these corps were the Lowenstein Chasseurs and Fusiliers, Waldstein's Regiment, the Royal Etrangers and the Hompesch Hussars and Fusiliers. All of these corps were later incorporated into the various battalions of the 60th Regiment. The 60th, then, had a decidedly German character. See Cecil C. P. Lawson, A History of the Uniforms of the British Army (New York: A. S. Barnes and Co., 1970), 4: 139-149.

⁵²C.O. 137/99, enclosure No. 2 in Balcarres to Portland, No. 3, 10 December 1797.

⁵³W.O. 40/10, Duke of York to Portland, 8 May 1798 and Portland to the Duke of York, 10 May 1798.

⁵⁴Ibid. W.O. 17/1990. The last monthly return in which the 6th appears on the island is October's. The November return is missing.

Indies. This decision came not a day too soon. As a result of the British evacuation of St. Domingo towards the end of 1798, hundreds of St. Domingo slaves, some of whom served in colonial legions on the island, began to enter Jamaica much to the horror of white Jamaicans.

The British Government, in its decision of April 1795 to raise the West India Regiments, had finally recognized the invaluable service of black soldiers. It could no longer permit delay in their formation in view of the fact that these troops were the only ones able to conduct certain operations successfully. Their establishment was also encouraged by the fact that they saved the lives of many European troops by requiring the presence of fewer white troops at garrisons that had been notoriously deadly to Europeans. Portland himself restated this latter argument with seemingly irreversible conviction to Balcarres in August 1797 after news reached London of Jamaica's persistent refusal to cooperate in the raising of the 6th.

"I . . . particularly feel myself called upon", he wrote Balcarres at this time,

to press this observation upon you, from the evident advantages which the Publick Service in general, and our West India Islands in particular, are at this moment deriving from the measure in question, which you may be well assured was not adopted on slight grounds, or with confined or temporary views, but on a full consideration of what our West India Possessions may require hereafter as well as at present of what may be the probable extent and nature of the European Force, which can be applied to that Service and of the necessity of endeavouring to render that Force adequate to its various objects by the assistance of the West India Regiments now raising. In forming a Plan of general arrangement for this purpose it is not possible to appropriate a Force composed exclusively of Europeans to any particular Island because such a procedure would Mili-

tate against the very principle of the Plan itself, which by mixing Troops composed of Negroes and Men of Colour with our European Forces, is intended to give strength and efficacy to both, not merely in proportion to their numbers respectively but by a judicious combination of their Force which it is conceived when so composed must be infinitely superior to the same number of Europeans acting alone as heretofore and exposed for any length of time to the severity of that Climate, the Ravages of which have been too fatally experienced not to call upon Government to try every means to avoid or prevent the Troops from being exposed to in the future. His Majesty's Confidential Servants, therefore cannot but feel that they should ill discharge the trust reposed in them if in deference to the respectable authorities by whom opinions are given and apprehensions are entertained which appear to them on the fullest investigation and consideration to be not well founded they were to abandon a measure, which unites the two most important objects that can come under their contemplation, namely, the preservation of the Health and Strength of His Majesty's Forces in the West Indies, and the Defence and Security of our Possessions in that Quarter of the World.⁵⁵

Although it was "not possible to appropriate a Force composed exclusively of Europeans to any particular Island", in the following month Portland instructed Balcarres to accept "any" proposal from the inhabitants to raise and subsist an all-European force for Jamaica's exclusive use in lieu of having a black regiment as part of its garrison.⁵⁶ Moreover, when the British Government found itself unable to raise the two thousand men, probably Dutch and German troops, to be maintained by the island, the 4th Battalion and the 1st Battalion of the 60th Regiment were committed to the sole defence of one of the most unhealthy garrisons in the Caribbean.⁵⁷ Although the principle

⁵⁵C.O. 137/98, Portland to Balcarres, [n.d.] August 1797.

⁵⁶Ibid., 12 September 1797.

⁵⁷W.O. 40/10, Duke of York to Portland, 8 May 1798 and Portland to the Duke of York, 10 May 1798. C.O. 137/99, Portland to Balcarres, 10 May 1798.

of a racially mixed garrison was to be inapplicable only in the case of Jamaica, ⁵⁸ the British Government was nonetheless prepared to send hundreds of its soldiers to a certain death in order to save money and appease the sensibilities of its colonists. It apparently mattered little to white Jamaicans that their insistence on an all-white garrison would mean a death sentence for many of these troops.

The 4th Battalion of the 60th was already on the island when the Assembly finally agreed to receive it as part of its exclusive force in March 1799. A return dated 1 October 1799 shows both the 1/60th and the 4/60th in Jamaica. However, at this time the combined strength of both corps was 1,321, almost seven hundred men under their prescribed establishment. ⁵⁹ The departure of the 6th West India Regiment, and even the subsequent speedy removal of the 5th West India Regiment after it had been reordered to Jamaica from St. Domingo, ⁶⁰ eliminated the controversy over subsistence and the arming and manumission of slaves. The return for May 1799 is the last return showing black troops on the island. ⁶¹

⁵⁸ According to Portland, the principle of a racially mixed force was to be "religiously" adhered to in all the other islands. C.O. 137/98, Portland to Balcarres, 12 September 1797.

⁵⁹ C.O. 137/103, enclosure in Balcarres to Portland, 30 October 1799.

⁶⁰ Anticipating a hostile reception should these troops be permitted to remain for any length of time, Balcarres drafted the privates, about 120 men, into the 6th and shipped the contingent to Honduras. C.O. 137/100, Balcarres to Portland, 29 October 1798.

⁶¹ In January and again in April 1799 small detachments of the Guadeloupe and Royal Rangers were on the island. According

But Jamaica's victory was short-lived. The Assembly continued to haggle over the support of the two battalions. Balcarres, in a sudden lapse of memory, even went so far as to argue that the plan to pay and subsist an all-white force originated with the British Government and not with the Assembly.⁶² There were also fears of a slave insurrection. Both the colonists and the British Government agreed that imperial forces on the island were not in sufficient numbers to repel an invasion from St. Domingo, which by the early months of 1800 was almost hourly expected. Consequently it was decided in London that a reinforcement be sent to Jamaica. This succor was to include a West India Regiment.⁶³ As a result, the agreement of the Assembly to pay and subsist its own force of two thousand European troops was dissolved.⁶⁴ In July 1800 the 2nd West India Regiment, then at Grenada, was ordered to Jamaica.⁶⁵ On 17 April 1801, after a mishap in the Gulf of Paria,⁶⁶ the 2nd arrived

to the Jamaica monthly returns these troops were quickly evacuated from Jamaica by June 1799. W.O. 17/1991. Jamaica's decision to bear the total cost of military defence was an act hitherto unprecedented in British imperial history. Manning, p. 241

⁶²C.O. 137/107, Abstract of Jamaica's Defence Arrangements 1790-1802, enclosure in Hobart to Nugent, No. 4, 4 February 1802. W.O. 1/405 (C.O. 137/101), Portland to Balcarres, "Secret", 7 April 1799.

⁶³W.O. 1/771, Portland to Dundas, 10 March 1800.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵W.O. 1/89, Trigge to Dundas, 21 July 1800.

⁶⁶The official account of this near serious accident in which all of the regimental records were lost is in *ibid.*, 6 September 1800.

at Jamaica amidst a renewed storm of verbal indignations and petitions in Jamaica and in London. ⁶⁷ Balcarres, in what oddly seemed to be a gesture of defeat since he was the representative of the British Government, acknowledged that the principle of employing black soldiers to defend Jamaica had become fixed. ⁶⁸ He even hoped that blacks might also be used to man gun boats as a further and necessary means of defending the island. ⁶⁹

Throughout the conflict and before its removal to Honduras, the 6th West India Regiment was slowly being raised although it remained under-strength for a long period. A return dated 1 February 1798 shows the 6th with a strength of 219 serjeants, drummers and rank and file. ⁷⁰ The Jamaica monthly returns disclose that from March to August 1798 the rank and file of the 6th remained around two hundred men. ⁷¹

Nevertheless, concession was still in the air. The British Government was still willing to make an exception in the case of Jamaica regarding the principle of racially mixed garrisons. London was still inclined to appease Jamaicans and to reduce its own military expenditures but at the certain expense of

⁶⁷See, for instance, the resolutions of the merchants and planters of 6 May 1800 in C.O. 137/107, Abstract of Jamaica's Defence Arrangments 1790-1802, enclosure in Hobart to Nugent, No. 4, 4 February 1802.

⁶⁸W.O. 1/771, Balcarres to Portland, 15 September 1800.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰C.O. 137/99, enclosure No. 1 in Balcarres to Portland, 3 March 1798.

⁷¹W.O. 17/1990.

increased casualties. In early April 1802 Lord Hobart, the Secretary of War in Addington's administration, instructed General Sir George Nugent who had replace Balcarres as Governor, that black troops would remain on the island unless the Assembly shall agree to pay and subsist an all-white force.⁷² However, this time the size of the force that was to be completely supported by the island was to number five thousand men or a proportion of it that the British Government deemed necessary for the defense of the island.⁷³

Failure to raise the West India Regiments in 1795 prompted the British Government to reassess the recommendation to recruit by purchase. Events in Jamaica confirmed that this was the only course of action. Vaughan, as we have seen, was already empowered to purchase slaves in the event that the islands did not contribute the requisite numbers of blacks and if free blacks could not be persuaded to enlist. Before Vaughan, Effingham, too, had been authorized in October 1790 to purchase slaves to act as pioneers for British regiments on the island.⁷⁴

The minutes to the Tobago Assembly of 19 June 1795 disclose the fact that the British Army had already begun to

⁷²C.O. 137/107, Hobart to Nugent, no. 6, 2 April 1802.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴C.O. 137/88, Grenville to Effingham, "Secret", 23 October 1790.

purchase slaves. ⁷⁵ However, we have also seen that few slaves, with the exception of those purchased for the 7th West India Regiment, were obtained by the army in this method. The number of slaves purchased in 1795 was limited by the fact that the British Government relied principally on the grants of slaves from the colonial legislatures which were for the most part never given. The number of purchased slaves was further kept to a minimum because proprietors were mostly unwilling to part with them for a variety of reasons.

The events of 1795 resulted in the adoption of a new recruiting policy. By the early part of 1796 the British Government sought to raise the West India Regiments by resorting to large scale purchases of slaves. This method, it will be remembered, had been again proposed to Dundas, this time by General Leigh in December 1795. By May Abercromby was advising his commanders on the conditions of service of slaves purchased under this scheme. ⁷⁶ Under this plan the British Government instructed the army to purchase thirty-five hundred slaves. These blacks were to be divided into seven regiments of five hundred men each. Five of these corps were to be quartered in garrisons in the Windward and Leeward Islands. One was to be located in Jamaica and one at St. Domingo. ⁷⁷ The preference was for "old

⁷⁵ Enclosed in C.O. 285/4, Campbell to Portland, No. 4, 22 March 1796.

⁷⁶ W.O. 1/95/30, Abercromby to Hislop, 20 May 1796, enclosure in Triggs to Brownrigg, 22 January 1802.

⁷⁷ W.O. 40/9, Duke of York to Abercromby, 12 November 1796. St. Domingo had not yet been evacuated by Britain.

English Negroes", ⁷⁸ but slaves from other islands could be bought provided they were "newly imported" from Africa. The amount the British Government was willing to pay for a fit slave was £70 sterling. This price according to Abercromby was later increased to 70 guineas plus "contingencies". ⁷⁹ Although Abercromby was still authorized to recruit free blacks and coloureds, to Dundas and others, purchase was the only way to raise the West India Regiments. ⁸⁰

The plan to purchase large numbers of slaves was not implemented until early in 1797. Procuring the slaves was to be accomplished by contracting with certain individuals to raise a specific number by a given date. The major contract was awarded to James Bontein of Martinique. Although brief, the conditions of the Bontein contract were explicit. Bontein was engaged to provide the army with twenty-five hundred seasoned recruits within four months beginning from 1 February 1797. The proper title to each slave was to be warranted to the British Government. No recruit was to be younger than eighteen or older than thirty. The minimum height of each recruit was five feet

⁷⁸C.O. 137/98, "The Substance of a Verbal Message from His Excellency Lieut. General Sir Ralph Abercromby K. B. Commander in Chief of the Windward and Leeward Islands", enclosure in Balcarres to Portland, 19 August 1797.

⁷⁹Ibid. According to Balcarres contingency costs included the "Attorney charges for the Searching, Recording . . . which was £6 Currency 3 of which must be paid by the Seller, the other 3 by the British Government." It further included "a Charge of £5 p cent by the Agent General for Commissions, etc." C.O. 137/98, Balcarres to Portland, 19 August 1797.

⁸⁰W.O. 1/85, Dundas to Abercromby, No. 3, 28 October 1796. Duke of York to the king, 12 November 1796, in Aspinall, 2: 515.

and all were to be of "a sound Body, and in all points able to carry Arms". Furthermore, no recruit would be accepted by the army who was "incumbered with a Family or Follower". Recruiting in this case was to be limited to 'English Blacks or Colour'd People'. All were to be delivered to depôts at either Antigua, St. Kitts, Barbados, Martinique, St. Vincent or Grenada at which places they would then be inspected by officers and medical staff and accepted or rejected.

For each approved slave a maximum of £70 sterling was to be paid in bills drawn by the Commissary General upon the Treasury. Bontein was not permitted any contingent charges. He was, however, given the assistance of small recruiting parties from those West India Regiments stationed at the various depôts and the allowance of six pence sterling per diem in lieu of rations for each slave recruited from the date of purchase or attestation to the time when the slave was approved and received at a dépôt. Failing to fulfill these conditions, Bontein was to forfeit a security of £5,000 sterling to the British Government.⁸¹

Instructions to the inspectors and medical officers provide us with an insight onto the problems of purchasing slaves. The inspectors were to be particularly attentive to the authen-

⁸¹W.O. 1/86, Abercromby to Dundas, 26 January 1797, enclosure No. 5 - "Conditions agreed upon between the Commander in Chief on the part of Government, and James Bontein Esqr. by which the latter engages to raise Two thousand five hundred Blacks, or coloured Men". A copy of this contract is in W.O. 40/9, in bundle labeled "1797 - Design for raising in the West Indies 7 Regiments (500 Strong each) of Negroes to be purchased by the Government. Opposed by the Legislature of Barbados."

ticity of the titles of each slave considered acceptable for purchase by the army. To be genuine, each title had to be certified by the Crown Lawyers in those islands where the slave was purchased. Furthermore, pertinent information pertaining to the identification of the slave had to be registered with the office of the island Secretary. No slave was to be received until these instructions had been completely satisfied.⁸²

The age of a slave and the length of time he had lived in the West Indies were additional problems. Sometimes these could be very difficult to determine. The latter was of special importance because a seasoned, fit slave, "a proper Subject for a Flank Company", would cost £70 sterling. On the other hand, the price of a black purchased directly from a slaver would range from only £50 to £56 sterling.⁸³ The army resigned itself to the fact that determining the age of a slave was at best a troublesome task. Inspectors were instructed to be "extremely exact" and to seek the advice of knowledgeable persons. Ascertaining the length of time a slave had resided in the West Indies was somewhat easier. The "principal Proof" was whether or not the slave could speak and understand the European language of the island from which he allegedly came.⁸⁴

⁸²Ibid., enclosure No. 6 - "Instructions for the Officers and Medical Staff, appointed by the Commander in Chief, to Inspect the Men raised for Government by James Bontein Esqr."

⁸³Ibid., enclosure No. 3 - "Heads of Instructions to Major Gen^{rl} Hunter, for his Guidance in the Purchase and Approval of Blacks and Coloured People, for the West India Regts."

⁸⁴Ibid., enclosure No. 6 - "Instruction for the Officers and Medical Staff"

On 23 January 1797 a circular letter was sent by Abercromby to the Governors and Presidents of the Windward and Leeward Islands requesting them to assist Bontein in his efforts.⁸⁵ On the same day the Adjutant General prepared a circular to the Presidents of St. Kitts and Dominica and the Lieutenant Governor of Grenada. It contained copies of the Bontein contract and the instructions for the inspectors and medical staff.⁸⁶ Hope sent a similar circular with the same documents to all commanding officers.⁸⁷

Although those records containing the exact number of slaves that were purchased under the Bontein contract during the four months from February to June have apparently not survived, Bontein was unsuccessful in procuring the number of slaves he had contracted to deliver. On 19 March, less than two months after the start of the contract, Abercromby was writing to Dundas informing him of Bontein's failure.⁸⁸ Once again colonial opposition was blamed as the reason.⁸⁹ As we have seen, Jamaica steadfastly opposed the raising of the 6th. Antigua, St. Kitts and Barbados were specifically mentioned by Abercromby as having opposed the measure.⁹⁰ The Assembly of Barbados had even formally registered its opposition to the new recruiting

⁸⁵Ibid., Abercromby's circular to Governors, 23 January 1797, p. 75.

⁸⁶Ibid., Hope's circular, 23 January 1797, p. 79.

⁸⁷W.O. 40/9, Hope's circular, 23 January 1797.

⁸⁸W.O. 1/86, Abercromby to Dundas, No. 12, 19 March 1797.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Ibid.

policy before Abercromby's circular of 23 January had reached Bridgetown. ⁹¹

Several islands did cooperate but not all in conformity with the conditions of the Bontein contract. Grenada furnished two hundred slaves and promised to raise an additional fifty but under certain conditions. ⁹² Martinique provided three hundred. ⁹³ Tobago agreed not only to sell 160 slaves and any additional number that the army required, but it also permitted its black Jaeger corps to be taken into imperial service for the duration of the war. ⁹⁴ According to the regimental Description Book of the 4th West India Regiment, about sixty-one blacks were enlisted into the 4th at St. Kitts during the period Bontein's contract was in effect. ⁹⁵

The army's swift reaction to its latest failure to raise the West India Regiments to their prescribed strength led to the adoption of a plan under which these regiments were to be raised for the next several years. The garrison commander of Barbados partially countered Bontein's negligible recruiting results by

⁹¹Ibid., enclosure No. 2, Ricketts to Abercromby, 18 January 1797, in Abercromby to Dundas, 26 January 1797.

⁹²C.O. 101/35, Green to Portland, 14 July 1797, and enclosure. W.O. 1/769, King to Huskisson, 7 September 1797, and enclosures.

⁹³Ibid., Keppel to Portland, 22 March 1797, p. 51.

⁹⁴C.O. 285/4, Council Minutes of 25 January 1797, enclosure No. 2, in Delancy to Portland, No. 5, 26 September 1797. Ibid., Committee of Correspondence to Petrie, 15 March 1797, enclosure. W.O. 1/769, King to Huskisson, 4 May 1797, and enclosures.

⁹⁵W.O. 25/653, folios 25-28. Bontein's contract was canceled in late April.

purchasing on his own initiative 250 fit slaves newly imported from Africa for £62 sterling each. ⁹⁶ Murray was certain that five thousand additional slaves could be obtained under this system within one year. ⁹⁷ By November Abercromby, too, was all but convinced that the West India Regiments could only be raised by purchasing slaves directly from those ships arriving from the African coast. ⁹⁸ The apparent accessibility to this source of slaves as well as lower purchasing costs encouraged this mode of recruiting. Furthermore, buying "New Negroes" directly eliminated the dependence on the usually uncooperative and obstructive planters.

By the middle of January 1798 the plan had received official sanction although purchasing slaves from the planters was still left open as an option. ⁹⁹ In order to keep the prices of these slaves down and to save the British Government any future embarrassment that might arise from the fact that shortly it would become a large and steady purchaser of slaves in the West Indies, General Cuyler was instructed to purchase the slaves in small numbers taking every precaution to conceal the fact the British Government was the purchaser. ¹⁰⁰ Here is one of the

⁹⁶W.O. 1/82, Murray to Dundas, 4 May 1797.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid., "Notes from Sir Ralph Abercromby, about the West Indies, London, 10 November 1797", p. 623.

⁹⁹C.O. 153/31, Dundas to Cuyler, "Secret", No. 9, 18 January 1798. At British Honduras, for instance, the Superintendent of the territory was authorized to purchase "well behaved" slaves. See C.O. 137/99, Balcarres to Portland, 5 February 1798.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. The fact that these transactions were buried in the accounts of army/extraordinaries facilitated concealment.

many transactions undertaken by the British Government during the war in the West Indies which it kept under cover. As a result of this policy of secrecy, claims Fortescue, a complete understanding of the activities carried out by the British Government is difficult. ¹⁰¹

We are fortunate, however, in the case of the policy of purchasing "New Negroes" that many contracts regulating these transactions have survived. For the most part they can be summarized since they were similar. The number of "New Negro Slaves" usually contracted for delivery to the army under individual contracts was two hundred. This relatively small number was the result of Dundas's "Secret" order of 18 January 1798. Contractors obtained their slaves for specific West India Regiments. Unlike the Bontein contract, this policy specified that prospective recruits could be no younger than sixteen nor older than twenty-two. They also had to be taller. The army was interested only in those Africans who were at least five feet five inches. Regarding the price per slave, the amount offered for any slave was usually not to exceed £62 sterling. This was actually an increase of £6 sterling from the original contract agreed to under the policy of recruiting almost exclusively newly imported African slaves. ¹⁰²

How many slaves were purchased under this policy in 1798

¹⁰¹Fortescue, 4 (part I): 325.

¹⁰²See, for instance, the Chollet, Campbell and McNully contracts in W.O. 1/86, enclosures in Cuyler to Dundas, 23 March, 29 March and 9 May 1798. Another, the Charles Rance contract, appears in its entirety as Appendix B.

and at what cost to the British Government? Also, what was the consequence of the policy of purchasing large numbers of slaves? Although incomplete, available recruiting records showing purchases, costs and distribution do provide a clear picture of the dimensions of this policy.¹⁰³ Cuyler's replacement, Lieutenant General Henry Bowyer, suspended recruiting operations in September 1798 for several months.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, at least 1,053 slaves were purchased in 1798 by the Windward and Leeward Islands Command.¹⁰⁵ Some 522 went to the 8th West India Regiment which was reraised in Dominica and placed on the British Establishment as of 25 June 1798.¹⁰⁶ Out of this number only 340 were "New Negroes". The rest were mostly creole slaves who formerly belonged to the Loyal Dominica Rangers.¹⁰⁷ The other purchased slaves were distributed among the 1st, 2nd and 4th West India Regiments.¹⁰⁸ Fifty-three slaves were also enlisted into the Royal Rangers.¹⁰⁹ The total

¹⁰³See Table 4 in Chapter VI.

¹⁰⁴W.O. 1/86, Bowyer to Dundas, 6 September 1798.

¹⁰⁵C.O. 318/31, "Account of Negroes Purchased for Government from 25 March 1798", enclosure in Bowyer to Windham, No. 31, 18 April 1807.

¹⁰⁶W.O. 4/339, Windham to Fawquiers, 6 December 1798.

¹⁰⁷W.O. 1/86, Johnstone to Committee of Inspection, 28 June 1798, enclosure in Bowyer to Dundas, 13 July 1798. The correspondence dealing with the raising of the 8th is principally in W.O. 1/82, 86, 88.

¹⁰⁸C.O. 318/31, "Account of Negroes Purchased for Government from 25 March 1798", enclosure in Bowyer to Windham, No. 31, 18 April 1807.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

cost of these purchases was £66,443 sterling. ¹¹⁰

The policy of purchase, which was to continue for almost nine more years eventually involving thousands of slaves at a cost of hundreds of thousands of pounds to the British Government, had a significant and immediate impact on the abolition movement. In the debate in the House of Commons on 18 February 1796 Wilberforce considered it very peculiar that it was still necessary for him to bring forward a motion for the abolition of the slave trade since Commons in 1792 had already resolved to end the trade in January 1796. ¹¹¹ Wilberforce was referring here to a motion carried in Commons for the eventual abolition of the trade, which after much debate was interpreted to mean 1 January 1796.

The utterances of both Pitt and Dundas during this and subsequent debates are of interest since both men were then in the process of initiating a recruiting policy which ultimately depended on the continuation of the slave trade for its success. Pitt, despite his certain knowledge and his probable support of this plan, which could not avoid stimulating the trade, paradoxically still wished to enforce the resolution agreed to by Commons in 1792. ¹¹² Dundas, who was instrumental in 1792 in pledging Commons to the principle of gradual rather than immediate abolition of the trade, still hesitated but for different reasons.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Cobbett, vol. XXXII, Debate on William Wilberforce's Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 18 February 1796. William Wilberforce's speech, p. 738.

¹¹²Ibid. William Pitt's speech, p. 746. There is no evidence that even suggests that Pitt opposed the plan.

this time. According to Dundas only a gradual mode of abolition would succeed in stopping the trade. An abrupt termination of the trade, he continued, would only transfer the trade into the hands of other commercial powers who would carry it on without any regulations. Dundas was even opposed to any public discussion of abolition. He claimed that any debate on that subject and at that moment was ill-timed and dangerous to the security of the British colonies. ¹¹³

From March 1796 to March 1799 all of Wilberforce's motions to abolish the trade were defeated. Pitt, whose support of the abolition movement by 1796 was largely perfunctory, still voted for abolition all during this period. According to Eric Williams, the reason for this was that Pitt was too publicly wedded to the cause. ¹¹⁴ Dundas, when he did speak on these motions, adhered strictly to the policy of gradualism. By March 1799 he had even added to his arsenal of arguments against immediate abolition the opinion that abolition of the trade could not be effected without the consent of the colonists. ¹¹⁵

What caused the abolition of the British slave trade to be postponed until 1807? Many historians have stressed the

¹¹³Ibid. Henry Dundas's speech, pp. 751-753. The previous year, in 1795, Dundas came forward with another amendment which provided that gradual abolition should take place sometime after the conclusion of peace. This amendment was subsequently carried. See Klingberg, p. 111.

¹¹⁴Williams, From Columbus to Castro, p. 262.

¹¹⁵Cobbett, vol. XXXIV. Debate on William Wilberforce's Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1 March 1799. Henry Dundas's speech, p. 534. For the abolition debates from 1796 to 1799, see Cobbett, vols. XXXII-XXXIV.

jacobinism of the French Revolution and its influence in bringing on the tragic events in St. Domingo as constituting potent arguments in Britain against any further alteration in the status quo of the slave regime. ¹¹⁶ The ideological radicalism of the French Revolution certainly resulted in a growing general opposition to abolition which was viewed by many in Britain as an extremist French doctrine. The alarm regarding St. Domingo even caused George III to switch his support to those who opposed abolition of the trade. But jacobinism alone does not explain the continued defeat of the abolition movement from about 1800 onwards since by this time revolutionary excitement on the Continent was generally over and with it the anti-democratic spirit in Britain. ¹¹⁷

Another explanation is offered by Eric Williams, historian and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago. According to Williams the abolition movement was doomed the moment the British Government agreed to the acquisition of St. Domingo and when it emphatically assured the French planters in the West Indies that both slavery and the slave trade would continue. Without a steady fresh supply of slaves to harvest St. Domingo's sugar, this colony would be useless to Britain. ¹¹⁸ Negotiations

¹¹⁶For instance, Ragatz, p. 253; Klingberg, pp. 93-94, 99-100; Coupland, pp. 95-99; and William Law Mathieson, British Slavery and its Abolition 1823-1838 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., 1926; reprint ed., New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1967), pp. 8-9, 20.

¹¹⁷R. R. Palmer, The Age of Democratic Revolution, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1959), 2: 569-575. Mathieson, p. 20.

¹¹⁸Williams, From Columbus to Castro, pp. 261-262.

between French planters and Dundas had already begun before France's declaration of war in February 1793. But Williams's argument does not go far enough. Although it is useful to explain events up to 1798, it becomes indefensible after 1798 when Britain, faced with huge expenditures and thousands of casualties in a losing cause, exchanged its dreams of an expanded Caribbean empire for harsh reality and evacuated the island. Williams's theory is subject to even further criticism when Britain, as a result of the Peace of Amiens, returned to France all the possessions taken from her in the West Indies.

French republicanism, Britain's designs on the French West Indies and the destruction of St. Domingo helped delay abolition. In addition, the startling increase in sugar prices and prosperity of the British West Indies increased the dependence of these islands on the slave trade. But there was another significant factor which contributed to the postponement of abolition until 1807. This was the acceptance by the abolitionists within the British Government of the necessity of continuing the trade in order to obtain slaves for the West India Regiments. From 1794 the policy of purchasing slaves was taking shape until by 1798 it had become full blown and had been ordered kept secret by Dundas. The maturing of this policy also coincided with Pitt's increasingly unenthusiastic support of abolition and the flourishing of the slave trade that reached its zenith during Pitt's administration. By 1799 Pitt showed little inclination to press for abolition, although he gave his formal support. His want of zeal was noticed by and aroused the distrust

of his friends. ¹¹⁹

Since his sympathies remained with the abolition movement Pitt was in a most awkward position. The reasons for his embarrassment as well as his growing detachment from his abolitionist friends and the movement were clear. The British Government was committed to garrisoning the West Indies with black troops who, as the century came to a close, could only be obtained by purchasing them as they disembarked from slavers in the West Indies. The continuation of the slave trade was therefore essential if West India Regiments were to save British lives and to assist in guarding Britain's Caribbean islands effectively.

The British Government's commitment to the trade was extensive, all of which Pitt and other members of his administration knew and supported by their actions. From March 1798 to February 1807 the Windward and Leeward Islands Command alone acknowledged having purchased at least 6,858 slaves. ¹²⁰ The cost was huge. £484,080 sterling was paid by the British Government to slave trade interests. ¹²¹ Because of this reliance on the slave trade the floodgates were opened wider and the trade was encouraged.

Were it not for this reliance on the trade Pitt's vigo-

¹¹⁹Klingberg, p. 114. See also Williams, From Columbus to Castro, pp. 262-264.

¹²⁰C.O. 318/31, "Account of Negroes Purchased for Government from 25 March 1798", enclosure in Bowyer to Windham, No. 31, 18 April 1807.

¹²¹Ibid. See Table 4.

rous support of abolition would have been assured, particularly after Britain's evacuation from St. Domingo in 1798. The support of others, like Windham, also would have been guaranteed. Even Dundas might have reversed his position and supported abolition for he had reversed his position at least once before in April 1795 when he sanctioned the raising of the West India Regiments. The support of these men might have brought about an earlier demise of the trade. As it was, however, the continuation of the trade was vital to Britain's war effort. Even supporters of abolition in Pitt's administrations could not ignore this fact.

By 1807 the reconstituted forces of abolition had succeeded in ending the trade. The reasons usually given for this success are too well known to be restated here. Nor can their impact be denied. But, it is interesting to point out that some of the leading opponents of abolition were present in both Parliament and the Cabinet when the bill for abolition was being debated. Some, like Lord Hawkesbury, vigorously opposed it. Others, like Windham, who in April 1798 as Secretary at War first disclosed his open hostility to abolition, chose not to speak at all. He had however originally supported abolition. However, as Secretary at War from 1794 to 1801, and as Secretary for War and the Colonies from 1806 to 1807, he came to realize that the war in the West Indies could not be prosecuted successfully unless blacks were purchased.

However, the forces of abolition by 1807 were invincible. Their victory was at least partially secured by 1807 because it

was no longer necessary for some to oppose abolition on military grounds. As we shall see, the British Government had already set in motion a plan to exploit a new and far less objectionable source of black recruits for the West India Regiments. Windham's silence was probably due to the fact that the abolition of the British slave trade actually made this new source of manpower possible.

Towards the end of 1798 the number of West India Regiments was increased from eight to twelve. On 25 December the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments were placed on the British Establishment.¹²² Each had eight Companies and a rank and file of 456.¹²³ The 9th, 10th and 12th were in a sense French West India Regiments in British pay since they were composed of French blacks and coloureds.¹²⁴ The greater number of the officers of these corps were French creole whites. The French character of these regiments was reinforced in 1799 when, as a result of the British evacuation of St. Domingo in 1798 about four hundred slaves belonging to emigrant French planters and blacks who had been in British military service on the island were enlisted.¹²⁵ Some French "Chasseurs" were even enlisted

¹²²W.O. 4/339, Windham to Fawquier, 6 December 1798.

¹²³Ibid., Windham to Maitland, 18 October 1798.

¹²⁴W.O. 1/624, Duke of York to Hobart, 28 April 1802.

¹²⁵W.O. 1/87, Dundas to Trigge, 5 March 1799. The correspondence dealing with the enlistment of these French blacks is found principally in W.O. 1/87, 770; and C.O. 137/100, 101, 103.

into the 6th West India Regiment. ¹²⁶

The 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments were actually all former ranger corps. The 9th was Druault's Guadeloupe Rangers. Druault remained with his corps as its Lieutenant-Colonel. General John Moore, then in Britain, was the Colonel. ¹²⁷ The 10th was Gaudin de Soter's Royal Island Rangers. De Soter was also given field command of his regiment. ¹²⁸ The 12th West India Regiment was O'Meara's Rangers. O'Meara, a British army officer, also remained with the corps as its commander. ¹²⁹

The increase in the number of West India Regiments coincided with British efforts to reduce military expenses in the West Indies. Since most of the rangers were slaves, and since it was considered more expensive to continue hiring these men from their owners, the British Government decided to purchase these troops. ¹³⁰ It may have been wiser not to purchase at least some of these men, as the British Government was to learn soon. It seems that at least half of the blacks in the 10th West India Regiment, for instance, most of whom were from Martinique, had been among those originally enlisted into British service on the conditions that they would serve for a specific period of time at the end of which they would receive their

¹²⁶W.O. 1/770, Balcarres to Portland, 11 February 1799.

¹²⁷Army List 1799.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰See, for instance, W.O. 1/86, Dundas to Bowyer, 22 August 1798. See also *ibid.*, Cuyler to Dundas, 4 April 1798, and enclosure, and Jones to Cuyler, 20 September 1797 for information pertaining to the cost to hire slaves as opposed to purchasing them.

freedom. ¹³¹ By about 1799 their service was at an end.

The 11th West India Regiment, formerly the South American Rangers, was raised at Demarara in 1796. Its commander Thomas Hislop, a British officer, became the colonel of the 11th. ¹³² Although also composed of slaves, these troops were taken on the British Establishment without the expense of purchase. ¹³³

The strength of the West India Regiments in early September 1798, before the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th were added to this establishment, was about 1,881 rank and file. ¹³⁴ This was well below the prescribed rank and file of 3,192 for these eight corps. Yet despite the difficulties surrounding their establishment, these regiments had become accepted, at least in Britain, as part of the regular British garrison in the West Indies. They even served as models which adventurous types sought to duplicate in the Caribbean and elsewhere. ¹³⁵

¹³¹W.O. 1/90, Trigge to Hobart, No. 21, 22 November 1801 and Trigge to Brownrigg, 31 December 1801, enclosed in Trigge to Hobart, No. 28, 31 December 1801.

¹³²Army List 1799.

¹³³W.O. 1/1109, Hislop to Hobart, 21 May 1803. W.O. 1/95/30, Hislop to Trigge, 4 January 1802, enclosed in Trigge to Brownrigg, No. 9, 22 January 1802. Other pertinent correspondence pertaining to the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments is found in W.O. 4/173, 339; W.O. 6/5; W.O. 1/87; and C.O. 153/31 and C.O. 318/19.

¹³⁴W.O. 1/86, "Return of the West India Regiments under the command of Lt. Gen^l. Bowyer . . . 6 September 1798.", enclosed in Bowyer to Dundas, 8 September 1798. C.O. 137/99, enclosure No. 1 in Balcarres to Portland, 3 March 1798. W.O. 25/656. See recruiting for 1798.

¹³⁵For the plan to raise a corps of free blacks recruited principally in Canada for service in the West Indies, Canada and Latin America, see W.O. 1/617, Brownrigg to Huskisson, 14 August 1795 and enclosures; W.O. 1/1105, Stevenson to Windham, 14 May

As early as January 1797 Abercromby had notified West Indian governors that the West India Regiments were to become a permanent branch of the British Establishment for the defence of their islands.¹³⁶ No longer were they to be fencibles. By September 1798 many of Britain's Caribbean possessions had West India Regiments as part of their regular garrisons, Martinique, Dominica, St. Vincent, Grenada and British Honduras each had one or more black regiments.¹³⁷ This number was to grow with the addition made to the establishment of the West India Regiments at the end of 1798. In January 1798 Dundas himself could write in reference to the value of Britain's black

and 5 June 1800; W.O. 1/1106, Stevenson to Hobart, 21 April, 15 May, 11 June and 27 July 1801; W.O. 1/1109, Stevenson to Hobart, 23 June 1803; and W.O. 4/280, Lewis to Stevenson, 22 July 1803. This corps was given the title York Rangers. Letters of service were granted in July 1803, but the corps was never completed. It was finally disbanded in March 1805. The York Rangers should not be confused with a foreign corps in British service which also had the same title. There was also the Royal York Rangers. This corps was not raised until 1806. It was disbanded in 1816. See Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 14 (1935): 234.

For the proposal to raise a corps of coloureds and East Indians for service at Demarara, see W.O. 1/88, Turnbull to Dundas, 18 August 1798 and enclosure; and W.O. 6/131, Huskisson to Brownrigg, 30 August 1798. For a plan to raise a black corps for service in the Bahamas see W.O. 1/1106, Murray to Dundas, 14 March 1801. See the unsigned proposal to raise an East Indian Muslim Legion in W.O. 1/88, dated 25 March 1799, pp. 435-441.

¹³⁶W.O. 40/9, Abercromby's circular to West Indian governors, 3 January 1797.

¹³⁷W.O. 1/86, "Return of the West India Regiments. . . 6 September 1798", enclosed in Bowyer to Dundas, 8 September 1798. The 6th was then at British Honduras. The 5th, it will be remembered, was drafted into the 6th by Balcarres after it arrived at Jamaica from St. Domingo.

regiments: "the formation of such Corps is so essential (if not absolutely necessary) to their [the colonies] Preservation."¹³⁸

¹³⁸ G.O. 153/31, Dundas to Cuyler, "Secret", No. 9,
18 January 1798.

CHAPTER V

CAMPAIGNS 1795 - 1802

The war between Britain and France in the West Indies, which lasted almost continuously from 1793 to 1815, went through an almost complete cycle in terms of the conduct of military operations. It began as a traditional West Indian war, namely, one of combined amphibious operations against key coastal targets. Operations of this type, from 1793 to 1794, were quickly terminated by a brief siege or a formal clash between opposing forces. The combatants employed in these operations were for the most part European troops. The conduct of the war resumed its traditional character from about 1798 to the end of the war in 1815.

During the interim years, however, a revolution in West Indian warfare occurred. With the abolition of French slavery in the Caribbean, and the successful efforts of French agents in inciting segments of the slave population to rebellion in certain British islands, the fighting took on the character of large scale guerrilla warfare.¹ Large numbers of slaves, most

¹Guerrilla fighting had actually preceded Britain's entry into the war. This mode of warfare characterized much of the fighting in St. Domingo beginning in 1791 as a consequence of the slave insurrection of that year. See Ott, p. 50. There was of course some irregular type fighting in West Indian wars previous to 1791. In the eighteenth century there was, for instance, the case of Martinique in 1759, but this was sporadic and on a small scale. See Marshall Smelser, The Campaigns for the Sugar Islands, 1759 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1955),

of whom had no previous military training or experience, were recruited by both Britain and France. Protracted operations against insurgent slaves and Carib Indians were conducted for the first time in the mountainous and almost inaccessible uncharted interior of embattled sugar islands. Here, long columns of hundreds of troops moving through hot airless woods, often along narrow trails, were common. Operations frequently sent troops in full battle equipment scrambling back and forth across countless steep and boulder-strewn ravines, as well as up, down and around rugged peaks. All of these movements were executed in the enervating heat of the West Indian tropics. Under these conditions men and equipment rapidly deteriorated. Deaths due to heat and exhaustion were not uncommon.

It was not an accident that Britain and France became locked in a bloody, exhaustive and disruptive guerrilla struggle from 1794 to 1798. Revolutionary France actually called this type of war into existence. First, slaves at St. Domingo rebelled in 1791. Then the Convention in Paris abolished slavery in February 1794 in the French West Indies.. These same former slaves were then called to arms in order to protect this new order against invading British forces. Finally, France seized the initiative in the British West Indies by proclaiming and

pp. 39-59. There were also the several wars against the Maroons in Jamaica. These campaigns, however, were very small scale operations and very much the exception rather than the rule when they were conducted. Even England's conquest of Jamaica during the late 1650s was characterized by frequent guerrilla operations. See, S. A. G. Taylor, The Western Defence: An Account of Cromwell's Expedition to the Caribbean (Kingston, Jamaica: The Institute of Jamaica and the Jamaica Historical Society, 1965), pp. 98-110.

promoting a war of black liberation. Little wonder, then, that with large numbers of blacks under arms a guerrilla struggle of concealment and ambush increasingly set the tone of the war.

The centre of French military operations and revolutionary propaganda in the West Indies was Guadeloupe from which British troops had been driven in early December 1794. Under the determined and capable leadership of Victor Hugues, a mulatto, Guadeloupe served as an entrepôt of arms, men and jacobin propaganda for receptive slaves in the West Indies. Britain never made an immediate second attempt to recapture the island. As a result it remained a thorn in Britain's side during the entire insurgent phase of the war. Guadeloupe was recaptured only in 1810. It was taken again by Britain in 1815 after having been returned to France in 1814.

The conduct of military operations directly affected the tactical role of the West India Regiments throughout the war. During the second or insurgent phase, the West India Regiments served as rangers of counter-insurgent troops. And during the third and longest phase of the war, when operations were once again executed in accordance with traditional West Indian warfare, the West India Regiments were trained and tactically deployed as regular British line regiments.

Because of the poor recruiting results from 1795 to 1797, the West India Regiments saw rather limited service against the insurgents. However, several of these corps, notably the 1st, 2nd, 9th and 12th were actively engaged during this period. Certain of the ranger corps also bore the brunt of much of the

fighting from 1794 to 1798. These corps will be considered as West India Regiments since some were periodically drafted piecemeal into existing West India Regiments while others were taken on the British Establishment as new West India Regiments.

Despite the climate of the West Indies, the lush green vegetation and rugged landscape of the islands where much of the fighting took place, the rank and file of the West India Regiments were issued the standard British uniform. Perhaps the only remaining and reliable known source depicting the uniform of these regiments, the embroidered centre piece of the regimental colour of the 4th West India Regiment, shows that in 1795 West India soldiers were dressed much as other British soldiers.² The two figures wear the short red coat with lapels to the waist.³ Collars, cuffs and lapels were in the distinctive regimental facing.⁴ The lining and lace of the coat were

²See frontispiece. This photograph is a copy of a print in Samuel M. Milne's, The Standards and Colours of the Army from the Restoration 1661, to the Introduction of the Territorial System, 1881 (Leeds: Goodall and Suddeck, 1893), plate XVI.

³Ibid.

⁴Under the heading "General View of the Colour for the Bodies and Facings of the Guards and of the several Marching Regiments and other Corps of Infantry" in the Infantry Clothing Regulations, 1802, the twelve West India Regiments were grouped last under the colour of their facings. They were as follows: white: 1st; Yellow: 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th and 9th; grey: 8th; green: 5th and 11th; and buff: 10th and 12th. The Infantry Clothing Regulations, 1802, which is the popular title of the two MSS. volumes dealing with the clothing regulations of British infantry regiments, and which is preserved in the War Office Library, London, is discussed and summarized in W. Y. Carman's, "Infantry Clothing Regulations, 1802", Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 19 (1940): 200-235. In these regulations the West India Regiments are referred to as "Regiments of People of Colour."

white. The uniform was completed with short black Hessian styled gaiters which came to a point in front and behind, and a large and most improbable looking hat which had a large shaggy bearskin-type crest which ran the full length of the headpiece. ⁵

This hat or helmet worn by West Indian soldiers supports the argument that these corps were among the first regiments in the regular British Army to be trained as light infantry. The hat shown in the embroidered centre piece of the regimental colour of the 4th West India Regiment is the type of headdress prescribed for the infantry of light companies. On the other hand, the universal headdress of regular line infantrymen from 1792 to 1800 was the enormous and unserviceable cocked hat. Moreover, the short jacket worn by West India soldiers was also issued only to light infantrymen. Line regiments were not issued this item until 1796. ⁶

It is unlikely that the two embroidered figures represented only the single light infantry company which was then part of the establishment of regular line regiments. This would mean that the West India Regiments were themselves line regiments when they were first raised. Most of the West Indian soldiers during the first several years of the existence of the West India Regiments were drawn from the ranks of various ranger corps. They were, by virtue of their training and employment, light infantry-

⁵Frontispiece. This uniform is described by Cecil C. P. Lawson, et. al., in "Military Dress West India Regiments, 1800-1810", Military Collector and Historian, vol. 20, No. 4, p. 119.

⁶R. Money Barnes, Military Uniforms of Britain and the Empire (London: Seeley Service and Co., Ltd., 1960), p. 60.

men. (As I have indicated in the section dealing with the original establishment of these corps, West India Regiments did not have flank companies. They were special regiments raised to fight a very different kind of war in the West Indies.)

Nevertheless, the West India Regiments were never officially designated as light infantry corps. Moreover, they also relinquished the light infantry role for that of the line with the change in the conduct of the war at the end of the eighteenth century. Probably for these reasons they were not then and still are not considered as ever having been light infantry regiments by British military historians.⁷ Nonetheless, in terms of their training and operational use during the insurgent phase of the war, they were. As such, they were among the first regular light infantry regiments in the British Army. It is significant, too, that both of the officers who played key roles in the creation of the famous Light Brigade at Shorncliffe in 1803, John Moore and Coote Manningham, served in the West Indies where they personally conducted operations utilizing light infantry principles.⁸

Before passing on to the campaigns during the insurgent phase of the war, it is important to mention that the West Indian soldier was never dressed in green. This would have been the logical colour given the type of operations in which these corps

⁷Even the historian of the British Army, Sir John Fortescue, fails to mention the West India Regiments in his discussion of the evolution of light infantry in the British Army. See 4(part II): 916-921.

⁸Moore's operations against the brigands at St. Lucia are described later in this chapter. For Manningham, see Fortescue, 4(part II): 918.

participated and given the locale of these campaigns. Instead they wore the brilliant but conspicuous scarlet tunic of the British soldier. Once again, despite the painful memories of reverses suffered by British arms during past colonial wars of the eighteenth century, British military caution and inertia triumphed over common sense. In retrospect, this seems strange since the value of green or camouflaged uniforms was acknowledged by other nations and even by Britain herself. For instance, some of the foreign troops taken into British service in 1794 which fought in the West Indies were dressed in green. Fragments of some of these corps were combined to form the 5th battalion of the 60th Regiment in 1798. This entire corps was dressed in green jackets. Britishers themselves knew of this development in 1795 when two companies of the North Riding Militia of York were dressed in the peculiar green tunic.⁹

At least part of the reason for the issuance of scarlet tunics to Britain's black troops was Vaughan's own insistence. In January 1795 he had proposed that the corps he was raising be given this type of uniform.¹⁰ Vaughan's decision no doubt had something to do with the fact that the West India Regiments were not to be temporary colonial corps but regular British

⁹Fortescue, 4(part II): 917-918. British military conservatism did not receive a setback by the fact that the 5/60th was permitted to wear a green jacket. These troops were, of course, drafted into the 60th already wearing this jacket. Furthermore, although on the British Establishment, the 60th was an atypical British regiment because of its colonial origins and because of its historic recruitment with foreign soldiers.

¹⁰W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 10, 30 January 1795.

regiments. The establishment of these black regiments could be served best by clothing them in a scarlet British tunic.

Blacks themselves probably preferred the scarlet jacket. This situation is suggested by Vaughan when he proposed that some type of ornament be added to the hat of the black soldier "as the People for whom it is intended are vain of such things."¹¹

West India Regiments saw very little service in the struggle in St. Domingo. There were several reasons for this. The general failure to raise these regiments in 1795 and 1796 in the Windward and Leeward Islands was also experienced in St. Domingo. The 4th, for instance, did not begin to form until 1797. There was also the continuous relocation to other islands of most of those regiments originally earmarked for service at St. Domingo. This was true of the 3rd and 5th West India Regiments which were shuttled back and forth between St. Domingo and Jamaica during the period from 1795 to 1797. A comparison of the Jamaica monthly returns and commissary records for St. Domingo even shows that the 3rd and 5th, or rather their recruiting cadres, were simultaneously divided between both islands.¹² The 4th, which was formed late, never seems to have served in St. Domingo.

Not only were West India Regiments seldom on the island,

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² W.O. 17/1988 and A.O. 3/265, unnumbered papers, "District of Port au Prince; Supplementary Account of Money Disbursed by John Wigglesworth Esquire, Commissary General of Saint Domingo from 1st March 1796 to 24th February 1797", Abstract No. 5, "Subsistence & Allowance to Colonial Corps." The fullest account of the campaigns fought in the West Indies is still in Fortescue volumes IV, V and VII.

but very few St. Domingan blacks were recruited into any of the West India Regiments. This is confirmed by the Succession and Description Books as well as the periodic returns. Again the 4th West India Regiment can be cited as an example. Although it had been ordered to recruit in St. Domingo, the Succession and Description Books show that in 1797 not one of the 252 blacks enlisted was born in St. Domingo.¹³ This situation stemmed from the fear of the British to recruit blacks who were suspected of having been impregnated with the pernicious ideas of the French Revolution and who inevitably would mingle with British slaves when called upon to guard British islands. Any connection with St. Domingo, therefore, was viewed with utmost caution. Jamaica made it very clear that if any of its slaves were taken from the island for service in St. Domingo they were not to be returned.¹⁴

The chief reason for the limited service of West India Regiments in St. Domingo was the policy of retrenchment which ironically coincided in 1797 with the first significant recruiting success of the West India Regiments. Despite the raising of numerous black and white colonial corps, the pouring into the island of thousands of British troops and British wealth, and the efforts to seduce rebellious mulattoes and blacks out of the war with promises of amnesty and money,¹⁵ it was very clear by 1796

¹³W.O. 25/653, folios 25-28.

¹⁴C.O. 140/85, Minutes of the Assembly, 14 December 1795, Votes of the Assembly, p. 68.

¹⁵W.O. 1/62, Dundas to Forbes, No. 2, "Most Secret", 30 September 1795 and Forbes to Dundas, No. 2, "Most Secret", 9 December 1795.

that Britain was no longer waging a war of conquest. Instead it had become a costly war of self preservation, a struggle to simply maintain a rapidly diminishing presence on the island. The war was a losing cause. There was no point in continuing to pump limited British resources into this misadventure.

A steadily deteriorating military situation from 1795 to 1798, when the colony was evacuated, led to the policy of retrenchment. Towards the end of 1795 Britain irrevocably lost the initiative and her forces were largely confined to the coast.¹⁶ By 1797 insurgent forces, chiefly under the command of Toussaint L'Ouverture, not only greatly outnumbered British troops but there was some evidence which pointed to an impending invasion of Jamaica by blacks from St. Domingo with the assistance of unsurrected Jamaican slaves and Maroons.¹⁷ Also by 1797 the British Army had in effect acknowledged the loss of St. Domingo when all outlying posts were abandoned and its troops were concentrated in a few coastal places affording protection to British navigation and commerce.¹⁸ Finally, under the realistic and cost conscious direction of Brigadier General Thomas Maitland in 1798, British forces were evacuated first from Port au Prince, St. Marc and the parish of Arcahaye, and then they completely

¹⁶Ibid., Forbes to Dundas, No. 1, 9 December 1795.

¹⁷C.O. 140/85, Letter from Sonothanax to General Beauvais, enclosed in Simcoe to Balcarres, 1 June 1797, read into the Minutes of the Council, 31 July 1797, Journal of the Council.

¹⁸Edwards, p. 392.

withdrew from the colony by October 1798. ¹⁹

Although St. Domingo was an overwhelming defeat for Britain, there was still some reluctance in London to withdraw. Writing some four years later, the Duke of Portland confessed to Governor Nugent that black rule in St. Domingo or anywhere else in the Caribbean was even more dangerous to Jamaica than the reestablishment of French power in St. Domingo. For this reason Portland instructed Nugent not to hinder French efforts to retake the colony. ²⁰

Retrenchment particularly effected colonial corps, black as well as white. West Indian soldiers which served on the island were included under this description. Prior to Britain's withdrawal from St. Domingo, Maitland had instructed the Commissary General to prepare an estimate of total future expenses of the military force established by the British Government for the defence of the colony. ²¹ A force of almost sixty-five hundred troops, the number set in London, would cost the Treasury £700,387 sterling annually. The colonial contingent alone was projected at 4,664 effectives and would cost the British taxpayer each year £405,631 sterling. The yearly total of a colonial corps of 379 officers and men was £23,998.19.1.

¹⁹Klingberg is incorrect when he states that Britain withdrew from the island on 1 January 1798. See p. 104. Maitland had not decided on evacuation until July 1798. C.O. 137/100, Maitland's first letter of 31 July 1798 to Balcarres.

²⁰C.O. 137/106, Portland to Nugent, "Private and Confidential", 18 November 1801. A French army under le Clerc began its invasion of St. Domingo in December 1801.

²¹W.O. 1/68, Maitland to Dundas, 6 July 1798, enclosure No. 8.

sterling.²² It was Maitland's opinion that the "advantage to be derived [by keeping the colony] is not equal to the Expence to be incurred."²³

Bleak military prospects finally made these expences unacceptable in London. Royalist French officers were already being forced to resign their commissions in British service in 1797.²⁴ A return dated 1 July 1798 shows no West India troops among the colonial corps then on the island.²⁵ Probably the only West India Regiment that saw any significant service in St. Domingo was the 7th. It appears in commissary records as having served in the district of Mole St. Nicolas.²⁶ The 7th's service record remains a mystery, however, since apparently it was never mentioned as such in despatches.

The removal of West India soldiers from St. Domingo did not solve the very sensitive issue of several thousand blacks and mulattoes who served in other colonial corps. their precise numbers are unknown, but of the 6,019 colonial troops listed by Maitland in July 1798 as being in British service,²⁷ at least three thousand were of this description. As we have already seen,

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Edwards, p. 391.

²⁵W.O. 1/68, Maitland to Dundas, 6 July 1798, enclosure No. 5.

²⁶A.O. 3/265, unnumbered papers, "Account B, No. 2, District of Mole St. Nicolas. An Account of Money Disbursed . . . between the 25th of June 1796 and 24th of April 1797", Abstract No. 3, "Subsistence & Allowance to Colonial Corps."

²⁷W.O. 1/68, Maitland to Dundas, 6 July 1798, enclosure No. 5.

very few of these faithful and brave soldiers were taken off the island when the British withdrew. When news of a likely British withdrawal reached Jamaica, Balcarres warned Portland that the island was opposed "in the extreme" to accepting any troops who would fall "within the legal line of [the] Negroe Race".²⁸ (It should be remembered that Jamaica had just then dissuaded the British Government from attaching the 6th West India Regiment to its own garrison.) Yet, as Balcarres intimated to Portland, Jamaicans were most uncomfortable with their decision to refuse entry to St. Domingan blacks. It seemed certain that if they were disbanded in that colony Toussaint would take them into his own service and might even use them against Jamaica.²⁹ Furthermore, according to Bryan Edwards who visited the colony, these were disciplined and intrepid soldiers.³⁰ Nonetheless, they were turned adrift; and many did indeed join Toussaint's victorious army.³¹

Other West India Regiments narrowly missed serving in St. Domingo. In August 1798 Drualt's and O' Meara's corps, the 9th and 12th West India Regiments, respectively, were ordered to St. Domingo.³² The slowness in communications made it impossible for Dundas to know that on 31 July Maitland had decided on total evacuation.³³ The 9th and 12th would have to

²⁸C.O. 137/100, Balcarres to Portland, 26 July 1798.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Edwards, note on p. 399.

³¹Ibid.

³²C.O. 153/31, Dundas to Bowyer, 22 August 1798.

³³C.O. 137/100, Maitland's first letter of 31 July 1798 to Balcarres.

serve elsewhere.

Unlike St. Domingo, the Windward and Leeward Islands were the scene of some sharp and sustained fighting by West India Regiments and their predecessors, certain ranger corps. Offensive operations utilizing these troops coincided with the arrival of Sir Ralph Abercromby's relief expedition in 1796. Because of violent Atlantic storms, this force which permitted Britain to regain the initiative in the war, finally straggled into Carlisle Bay, Barbados, by April after a delay of four months.

This delay caused some alarm to Portland who was concerned whether the black corps could continue in their operational sectors to hold off the enemy until Abercromby had arrived.³⁴ At St. Lucia, for instance, one company from the Black Carolina Corps and another from Malcolm's Rangers experienced some serious fighting before the British evacuation of the island in June 1795. The latter corps lost more than a third of its strength in only four days of fighting between 14 April and 22 April. A second company of Malcolm's corps was also heavily engaged at St. Vincent from June to October 1795. Along with the St. Vincent Rangers, the 2nd West India Regiment, these corps took part in formal assaults on fortified positions and punitive operations against the Caribs during which fugitive insurgents were hunted down and Carib villages were destroyed.³⁵

Preparations, however, were already under way as Aber-

³⁴C.O. 318/16, Portland to Leigh, No. 5, February 1796.

³⁵Ellis, pp. 66-67 and 69-76.

Abercromby's army concentrated at Barbados.³⁶ Among those forces assembling was a brigade of black troops which included the Dominica Rangers and the Guadeloupe and Royal Island Rangers. These corps became the 8th, 9th and 10th West India Regiments, respectively. Quartered at Constitution Hill near Bridgetown, these regiments had a total strength of 1,210.³⁷ Before sailing with the British expedition against the Dutch Guianas, Dr. George Pinckard, who arrived in the West Indies in one of Abercromby's troop transports, observed these French blacks as they trained. His letter of 29 February 1796 provides us with one of the few eye-witness descriptions of these soldiers. According to Pinckard

They are a fine body of men, who have been enlisted from the revolted French islands, or brought away on the evacuation of them by our troops. They are active and expert, and are training into a formidable corps to assist in our intended expeditions. About sixteen hundred of them bear arms; besides whom there are twelve hundred to be employed as pioneers. They have all the vivacity and levity of the French character about them; and it occasionally, affords us amusement to observe the Barbadoes negroes regard them with evident amazement,³⁸ gaping with wonder at their volatility and alertness.

None of these corps immediately participated in Abercromby's first objective, St. Lucia, which was attacked on 27 April 1796. However, two companies of Malcolm's Royal Rangers,

³⁶See W.O. 1/85, "Preparations made by the Quarter Master General for the Army to Serve under the Orders of His Excellency Sir Ralph Abercromby, K. B.", enclosed in Abercromby to Dundas, 9 April 1796.

³⁷Ibid., "Return of a Brigade of Black Troops, Barbados, 10 March 1796", enclosure in Leigh to Dundas, 10 March 1796.

³⁸Pinckard, 1: 382-383. If we are to believe the accuracy of the return sent by General Leigh to Dundas, dated 10 March 1796, then Pinckard's estimation that 1,600 blacks were under arms is in excess by about 400 men.

about 250 men then in the process of being drafted into the 1st West India Regiment, joined this expedition. They were constantly employed on operations and on the customary but grueling fatigue details.³⁹ With the investment of Morne Fortune, the principal defensive work, the island capitulated on 26 May with the surrender of two thousand men, the vast majority of whom were well-disciplined blacks.⁴⁰ But the rugged nature of the country prevented British troops from quickly establishing a cordon around Morne Fortune and other fortified mornes in order to block the enemy's escape into the craggy interior. Although Abercromby sailed victorious from St. Lucia on 4 June to the relief of Grenada and St. Vincent, the bitter task of pacifying the island, especially the inner regions, was left to Brigadier-General John Moore. Moore was fortunate that O'Meara's Rangers and Drualt's corps were among those troops left under his command to fight what proved to be a guerrilla war.

Moore, who very nearly succumbed to yellow fever, quickly assessed his situation and made his dispositions. Many of his observations and arrangements are worthy of review because they were characteristic of British experience on other islands.

Moore's first and perhaps most important decision was immediately to assign his black and white regiments quite dif-

³⁹For a summary of the services of the 1st West India Regiment during the St. Lucia campaign, see Ellis, pp. 85-92. See also W.O. 1/85, "Return of Killed, Wounded and Missing in the Island of St. Lucia from 28 April to 24 May 1796 inclusive", enclosure No. 2 in Abercromby to Dundas, No. 16, 31 May 1796.

⁴⁰Bryan Edwards quoted in Ellis. See pp. 85 and 92.

ferent operational tasks. Less than three months after taking up his command, Moore had already found "from experience" that his European troops were incapable of acting against the insurgents in the interior,⁴¹ the rugged and broken nature of which he described as "prodigious".⁴² Only his black rangers could operate successfully there.⁴³ Moore just as quickly discerned what made his European regiments ineffective in the interior. Poor diet, rum and a general lack of interior discipline and economy among the troops, and a dispirited and incompetent officer corps were those reasons explicitly cited by Moore in his correspondence.⁴⁴

Implicit in Moore's remarks was the most important need of light infantry training for British troops, the type of training guerrilla warfare demanded.⁴⁵ On the other hand, West India soldiers, who in 1796 were principally creoles, knew the habits of the insurgents. Furthermore they combined their own personal knowledge of tracking through the "bush" with their recent experiences as rangers. Moore relegated his white battalions to the equally important task of occupying coastal positions in order to intercept French efforts to aid the insur-

⁴¹Moore MSS, No. 57326, letter book entry of 8 July 1796.

⁴²Ibid., No. 57320, Moore to his father, 20 August 1796.

⁴³Ibid., No. 57326, letter book entry of 8 July 1796.

⁴⁴Ibid., No. 57327, Moore to Abercromby, 2 September 1796; No. 57321, Moore to Brownrigg, 4 September 1796; and No. 57320, Moore to his father, 11 October 1796.

⁴⁵See for instance, ibid., No. 57320, Moore to his father, 18 January 1797.

gents with men and supplies.⁴⁶

By January 1797 Moore employed his two black corps "for the more active service" against the "Brigands".⁴⁷ According to a November 1796 return, the total strength of both O'Meara's and Drualt's corps was 874 men.⁴⁸ The presence of insurgents, who still held on to certain areas in the deep woods, combined with the death of about half of Moore's white troops, placed the British position in an extremely weak situation.⁴⁹ "The Blacks", Moore confessed dejectedly, "to a man are our enemies".⁵⁰ Nonetheless, his high praise for Drualt's and O'Meara's Rangers remained unchanged. Several months earlier he had written to Abercromby:

In this Country much may be made of Black Corps. I have had occasion to observe them of late. They possess, I think, many excellent qualities as Soldiers, and may with proper attention become equal to any thing. Even at present as they are, for the W. Indies they are invaluable.⁵¹

Actually Moore had experienced the worst of the fighting. What remained in 1797 were desultory mopping-up operations against the insurgent blacks.

⁴⁶Ibid., No. 57326, letter book entry of 8 July 1796.

⁴⁷Ibid., No. 57320, Moore to his father, 18 January 1797.

⁴⁸The individual complete strengths of these corps was O'Meara's: 553 and Drualt's: 321. The total force under Moore's command at this time was 3,260. See W.O. 1/86, "distribution of the Forces in the Windward & Leeward Charibee Islands with the Corps doing duty in each taken from the latest Returns. St. Pierre, Martinico, 13 November 1796", enclosure in Graham to Dundas, 15 November 1796, pp. 35-38.

⁴⁹Moore MSS, No. 57320, Moore to his father, 18 January 1797.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid., No. 57327, Moore to Abercromby, 2 September 1796. See also No. 57321, Moore to Brownrigg, 4 September 1796.

Grenada was relieved by Abercromby on 9 June 1796.

Among the reinforcements were Malcolm's Rangers. In addition to the white regiments already on the island were a company of the Black Carolina Corps and Webster's and Angus's locally raised Black Rangers.

British efforts to end the rebellion at Grenada before Abercromby's arrival met with the same difficulties experienced at St. Lucia. It was not until July 1795 that British cruisers had succeeded in preventing the French from landing supplies.⁵² This blockade, however, could not be maintained during the hurricane season, at which time the French brought in supplies from Guadeloupe and Cayenne.⁵³ Yet despite the inability of the French to provide regular support to their forces on the island, by relying partly on ground provisions⁵⁴ the insurgents were able to maintain control of practically all of the island as 1795 came to an end.

Not only were insufficient numbers of troops to mount a serious offensive against the insurgents, but local British commanders had yet to learn, as did Moore at St. Lucia, how best to utilize their black and white troops. Instead of being sent to scour the woods for insurgent slaves and Frenchmen, black soldiers constituted the major part of the garrison of St. George's, the capital of Grenada.⁵⁵ On the other hand, white troops

⁵²C.O. 101/34, Mackensie to Portland, 26 July 1795.

⁵³Ibid., 16 May 1795.

⁵⁴Ibid., 11 August 1795, enclosure No. 4.

⁵⁵W.O. 1/767, extract of a letter from President Mackensie to the Duke of Portland, 15 September 1795.

floundered when led on expeditions into the interior. Writing his battle report "in a negro hut, on the top of the highest mountain in this rugged island", Brigadier-General A. Campbell provides us with a vivid picture of the desperate situation of untrained troops after an encounter with insurgents in the woods and precipices.

We seem entirely left to poke out our own way in the dark wilds, and fastnesses, not yet having found a guide who knows a yard beyond the beaten tracks, which are here improperly called roads; neither can you get for love or money a person who will venture a hundred yards to gain intelligence, consequently we either fall into ambuscade, or are led to error, through false information. ⁵⁶

It was not until December 1796 that the principal bands of insurgents had been systematically tracked down by detachments of the 1st West India Regiment and the local ranger corps in a very different kind of conflict that white inhabitants had come to refer to as an "unnatural war". ⁵⁷ But small groups still held out. The 2nd West India Regiment was subsequently employed from June 1797 to August 1800 in stamping out the last traces of this rebellion. According to the commander of the 2nd during this campaign, the fighting occurred in such broken country that even the officers of the 2nd had to be assisted personally by black soldiers in traversing the rugged landscape. ⁵⁸

⁵⁶Brigadier-General A. Campbell to Lord Cathcart, 19 April 1795, quoted in H. Everard, History of The^s Farrington's Regiment Subsequently Designated the 29th (Worcestershire) Foot 1694-1891 (Worcester: Littlebury and Company, 1891), p. 195.

⁵⁷C.O. 101/34, Mackenzie to Portland, 16 May 1795, enclosure No. 3.

⁵⁸C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 27 July 1808, and No. 2 enclosure.

The experience of St. Lucia and Grenada were repeated at St. Vincent which was relieved by part of Abercromby's army on 8 June 1796. Here the St. Vincent Rangers, or the 2nd West India Regiment, saw extensive service in 1795 and especially during 1796 against the Caribs, some French troops and blacks. In actions fought in January and from July to October 1796, the 2nd alone suffered about a third of the casualties sustained by British forces. ⁵⁹

Many of the clashes with the Caribs, as well as against the insurgents on other islands, were fought by small units of British troops. The following account, taken from the regimental history of the 42nd Royal Highland Regiment, describes a typical small operation and the character of guerrilla warfare.

The outposts being frequently alarmed by parties of the enemy firing at the sentries at night, a sergeant and twelve Highlanders . . . penetrated into the woods at 9 o'clock in the evening with short swords, to cut their way through the underwood to discover the position or camp from whence these nightly alarms came. After traversing the woods all night an open spot with a sentry was discovered. This man fired his musket at a dog which accompanied the soldiers, and then plunged into the wood, as the sergeant ran forward to cut him down. The soldiers were at the edge of a perpendicular precipice of great depth, at the bottom of which was seen a small valley crowded with huts from whence issued swarms of people, on hearing the report of their sentry's musket.

Having made this discovery the soldiers commenced their journey back, but when they were about halfway, they were assailed by a fire of musketry on both flanks and in the

⁵⁹W.O. 1/85, "Return of the Killed, Wounded and Missing in the attack of . . . 8th January 1796", enclosed in Hunter to Leigh, 19 January 1796; *ibid.*, "Return of the Killed, Wounded and Missing of . . . 20 January 1796", enclosed in Hunter to Leigh, 24 January 1796; and W.O. 1/86, "Return of the Killed and Wounded of His Majesty's Forces in the Island of St. Vincent between 20 July and 15 October 1796", enclosure in Graham to Dundas, 13 November 1796

rear. The Caribs were expert climbers, every tree appeared to be manned in an instant: the wood was in a blaze but not a man was to be seen, the enemy being concealed by the thick and luxuriant foliage.

As the Highlanders retreated, firing from time to time at the spot from whence the enemy's fire preceded, the Caribs followed with as much rapidity as if they sprung from tree to tree like monkeys; in this manner the retreat was continued until the men got clear of the woods. ⁶⁰

A small party of the 2nd West India Regiment was sent in support of this harassed band of Scots. The total loss for both the 2nd and the Highlanders was six killed and eight wounded. ⁶¹

Much of the fighting at St. Vincent, as well as at other islands took place in the debilitating heat of the summer months. The predictable effect of this climate on white troops was disastrous and hindered British operations against the insurgents. One British column, for instance, took three days to cover a distance of less than twenty miles. And as short as this march was, no fewer than eight men died of exhaustion on the last day of the operation. ⁶² Nonetheless, the insurrection came to an end in October 1796 with the surrender of the main body of Caribs. Influenced by Jamaica's example of ridding that island of certain elements of its Maroon population, several thousand Caribs were banished to Roatán Island just outside the Gulf of Honduras. For services against the insurgents, the

⁶⁰Quoted in Caulfield, pp. 13-14.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 14.

⁶²Lewis Butler, William George and Steuart Hare, The Annals of the King's Royal Rifle Corps, 5 vols. (London: Smith, Elder & Co. and John Murray, 1913-1932), 1: 249.

commanding officer of the 2nd West India Regiment was presented with a sword of honour by the inhabitants of St. Vincent. ⁶³

The principal operations involving West India Regiments during the insurgent phase of the war were those conducted at St. Lucia, Grenada and St. Vincent. However, these corps also participated in other operations. Soter's corps, the future 10th West India Regiment, policed the interior of Martinique against small bands of insurrected slaves from 1794 throughout most of 1796. The Dominica Rangers, the 8th West India Regiment, was not only used to hunt down rebellious slaves on that island, ⁶⁴ but by the close of 1797 the defence of the most important post on Dominica was entrusted principally to these black troops. ⁶⁵

There is some question as to whether or not a contingent of the 1st West India Regiment took part in Abercromby's abortive invasion of Puerto Rico in April 1797. According to the historian of the 1st, a section of the Black Carolina Corps sailed with this expedition. ⁶⁶ However a return showing the composition of Abercromby's force shows no mention of the 1st West India Regiment or the Black Carolina Corps. ⁶⁷ The only black corps cited among those troops involved in this attempt of Britain

⁶³Caulfield, p. 15.

⁶⁴C.O. 71/30, Johnstone to Portland, 16 December 1797.

⁶⁵W.O. 1/82, Johnstone to Dundas, 6 November 1797, enclosure No. 5.

⁶⁶Ellis, p. 98.

⁶⁷W.O. 1/82, "State of His Majesty's Forces Porto Rico, 2 May 1797", enclosure No. 1 in Abercromby to Dundas, 2 May 1797, p. 243.

to gain Puerto Rico as a place to unload loyal but burdensome French planters from St. Domingo and Guadeloupe ⁶⁸ was the Tobago Blacks. ⁶⁹

Finally, although the expedition occurred after the conclusion of the insurgent phase of the war, the 9th West India Regiment participated in the rather peaceful occupation of Surinam in August 1799. ⁷⁰

By mid-January 1798 Dundas began to note a pronounced tranquility in the once turbulent sugar islands. ⁷¹ In April General Cuyler, who had replaced Abercromby in 1797, could confirm that the rebellions had been crushed. ⁷² Even Dominica, which was only about twenty-one nautical miles from the still unsubdued and bustling Guadeloupe, ⁷³ was peaceful. By January 1799 St. Vincent and Grenada had reportedly recovered rapidly

⁶⁸W.O. 1/85, Dundas to Abercromby, "Most Secret" and "Secret and Separate", both written on 13 November 1796.

⁶⁹W.O. 1/82, Abercromby to Dundas, 2 May 1797, enclosure No. 1, p. 243.

⁷⁰W.O. 1/87, See return on p. 473. A contingent of the 6th, with a strength of 112, was present at the abortive Spanish invasion of the Honduras Settlement on 10 September 1798. However, with the defeat of the Spanish invasion fleet at St. George's Cay, the 6th never came into action. C.O. 137/101, Balcarres to Portland, 13 April 1799.

⁷¹W.O. 1/86, Dundas to Cuyler, No. 8, 17 January 1798.

⁷²Ibid., Cuyler to Dundas, 3 April 1798. On Abercromby's request to be relieved of his command and Cuyler's appointment, see *ibid.*, Dundas to Abercromby, No. 2, 12 May 1797 and W.O. 6/131, Huskisson to Brownrigg, 28 June 1797. See also the memoir by Abercromby's son James, Lord Dunfermline, Lieutenant-General Sir Ralph Abercromby, K. B. 1793-1801: A Memoir by His Son (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1861), pp. 59-60.

⁷³W.O. 1/86, Bowyer to Dundas, 13 July 1798.

from the devastations caused by the insurrections. ⁷⁴

What were the consequences of the war against the brigands? According to Abercromby, prior to the start of the insurrections the military knew little of the interior of the Windward and Leeward Islands. The reason for this was that operations conducted during previous wars were confined to the vicinity of the principal towns. ⁷⁵ As a result of operations into the interior of the various islands from 1795 to 1798, Abercromby, somewhat exaggeratedly, considered that these islands were all "now well known". ⁷⁶ "It remains", he correctly concluded, "to fix and perpetuate that Knowledge by good Plans". ⁷⁷

The experiences of the war against the insurgents and the critical need for light infantry troops certainly must have had an impact on the subsequent establishment in the British Army of two corps that were trained in light infantry principles: the Rifle Corps in 1800 and the Light Brigade in 1803. There is no doubt that the lessons French Voltigeurs taught the British Army during the Holland or Helder Expedition of 1799 were foremost in the minds of the Duke of York and others when these corps were ordered established. However, the two men who executed the orders to raise these corps were themselves veterans of the insurgent phase of the war. Moore, who also served in Holland in 1799, commanded at St. Lucia and later commanded the Light

⁷⁴C.O. 152/79, Bowyer to Dundas, 19 January 1799.

⁷⁵W.O. 1/82, "Notes from Sir Ralph Abercromby about the West Indies. London 10 November 97", pp. 626-627.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 627.

⁷⁷Ibid.

Brigade at Shorncliffe. Colonel Coote Manningham, who commanded the Rifle Corps which became part of the Light Brigade, trained and commanded several light companies in Grey's army in the West Indies. ⁷⁸

Yet British military historians have been reluctant to acknowledge the impact of West Indian service, more specifically the hard fought and long insurgent campaign, on the permanent establishment of light infantry regiments in the British Army. Fortescue, for instance, mentions the need for light infantrymen only in reference to the Holland Expedition. ⁷⁹ However, when reading those of Moore's letters written in the West Indies (and it is presumed that Fortescue did) one is constantly and candidly reminded of the conspicuous deficiency of this type of training among British soldiers. This shortage was partially satisfied by bringing the various ranger corps on to the British Establishment as West India Regiments and by the periodic drafting of several German Jaeger regiments in British service into the 60th.

Surprisingly, the experiences and lessons of the insurgent war did not have the expected long term effect on the establishment of the West India Regiments. Despite the recommendations of certain officers of these corps that West India soldiers be provided with formal light infantry training, with rifles instead of the traditional smooth bore, and with green uniforms rather

⁷⁸Fortescue, 4(part II): 918.

⁷⁹Ibid.

than red tunics, ⁸⁰ efforts were undertaken instead to transform the West India Regiments into regular British line regiments. There were two reasons for this decision. First, although the war against France was to drag on until 1815, the slave populations never again became a military factor. As a result the struggle took on once more the traditional character of West Indian warfare. Under these conditions, the need was for line regiments as opposed to light infantry corps. Second, as the focus of the war gradually shifted from the West Indies to Europe and elsewhere, the number of British soldiers in the Caribbean was reduced. Furthermore, the permanent presence in the West Indies of several battalions of the 60th Regiment, which were for the most part light infantry troops, made additional regiments of this type unnecessary. ⁸¹

The insurgent phase of the war was the most intense period of military activity preceding the Peace of Amiens in 1802.⁸² But from about 1798 to 1801, when there was a resumption of British expeditionary activity, the West Indies was relatively calm. For Britain it was a respite allowing for much needed

⁸⁰W.O. 1/88, Johnstone to Dundas, "Private", 7 June 1798; and W.O. 1/95, Colonel Hislop's Memorandum - "Remarks on the Establishment of West India Regiments . . . 1801", pp. 207b-208a, enclosure in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804. See also the proposal to train two hundred Africans of the 11th West India Regiment as riflemen in W.O. 6/131, Huskisson to Brownrigg, 7 January 1800.

⁸¹In July 1809 no fewer than five battalions of the 60th were in garrisons in the West Indies. See Charles Oman, pp. 333-337.

⁸²W.O. 1/86, Abercromby's circular of 3 January 1797.

consolidation and reassessment of priorities and objectives.

For the West India Regiments, whose establishment remained basically unchanged,⁸³ and which in 1797 had become permanent corps on the British Establishment, this period between 1798 and 1801 was one of formation and discipline in accordance with British military structures and procedures. Evaluation of this consolidation process was accomplished by a system of semi-annual inspections and confidential reports on the state of the regiments in the British Army. Usually these reports were compiled in early May and October. They acquainted the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army with the actual state of every regiment regarding its field exercise, interior economy, discipline, and the merit and capacity of officers for command. Inspections were undertaken by general officers commanding brigades, and the resulting reports were forwarded eventually to the Adjutant General, London, together with any observations it was judged important enough to include.

These reports were not considered to be the assessment of a regiment at any particular time, but, rather, the result of a continuous inspection of each corps. Some of the more specific categories under which infantry regiments were inspected were the

⁸³The 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th West India Regiments maintained their existing establishment of eight companies and a total strength of 555 men. However, the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments were given a slightly larger establishment. The new establishment for these latter corps which became effective on 25 December 1800 provided each with eight additional sergeants and corporals, and 112 privates. The reason for this is unclear. See W.O. 24/606, pp. 11, 34-36; also W.O. 4/341, Yorke to Don, 18 May 1801. Similar letters sent the same day to Maitland, Hislop and O'Meara.

officers, staff, non-commissioned officers, musicians, enlisted men, men to be discharged, recruits, field exercises and movements, arms and ammunition, colours, clothing, messing, books and accounts, complaints and courts-martial, medical department and religious service. ⁸⁴

As part of the inspection the regiment was formed-up, drilled, and instructed to carry out various manoeuvres and firing exercises, all performed under the scrutinizing gaze of the inspecting officer. The regimental books were examined not only for their completeness and accuracy, but also to see that the pertinent data were recorded on the type and size of paper prescribed under the so-called "King's Regulations", an abbreviated synonym for the General Regulations and Orders for the Army. Officers were questioned on points pertaining to field duty and to the interior economy of their respective units.

It appears that the initial inspection of West India Regiments was not carried out until 1799, after the conclusion of the insurgent war. Caulfield states that the 2nd did not receive its first inspection until January 1799. ⁸⁵ Among those other regiments inspected around this time were the 7th, 8th and 9th. The 7th, which was then in garrison at the strategic Prince Rupert's, Dominica, was found to be understrength and also unsatisfactorily disciplined. ⁸⁶ Nor was it considered

⁸⁴ Great Britain, War Office, General Regulations and Orders for the Army, (1822), pp. 353-367.

⁸⁵ Caulfield, p. 18.

⁸⁶ W.O. 1/87, Trigge to Dundas, 25 June 1799.

prudent to trust the defence of this important post exclusively to the 7th.⁸⁷ The reason for this very poor evaluation was that, although the 7th was included in the British garrison at St. Domingo before the evacuation of that island, it had apparently never been actively employed on any operation.⁸⁸ The 8th West India Regiment, however, was reported to be in excellent order and in a good state of discipline.⁸⁹ The veteran 9th also had an outstanding report and it was already acknowledged by the British Army in the West Indies for its great service record.⁹⁰

The lull in the war from 1798 to 1801 also permitted certain of the islands to rechannel their energies into attempts to prevent West India Regiments from being permanently attached to their garrisons. A case in point involved tiny St. Kitts. On 18 August 1797 a plot was allegedly discovered by which the 4th West India Regiment and the two island slave corps had conspired to murder their officers and then surrender the island to the French.⁹¹ The two island corps which numbered about eleven hundred men⁹² were immediately separated. The 4th, which was raised at St. Kitts and had at that time a strength of about

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸W.O. 1/89, Trigge to Dundas, 29 May 1800.

⁸⁹W.O. 1/87, Trigge to Dundas, 25 June 1799.

⁹⁰W.O. 1/89, Trigge to Dundas, 29 May 1800.

⁹¹C.O. 153/78, Thomson to Portland, No. 8, 10 October 1797.

⁹²Ibid.

three hundred men, was swiftly removed to St. Vincent ⁹³ where it was in effect incarcerated at a remote post in the interior of the island. ⁹⁴

Despite the charge that the conspiracy was rampant in the three corps and that these troops had been moved hurriedly to isolated quarters, a subsequent court-martial convened at St. Vincent convicted only four privates of the 4th. One was sentenced to death and promptly executed; the other three were sentenced to receive one thousand lashes each. ⁹⁵ None of the slaves in the two island corps was implicated in the conspiracy. ⁹⁶

At the behest of the commanding officer at Brimstone Hill, the Chief Justice of the island reexamined those West India soldiers accused of high treason before their removal to St. Vincent. Upon examining these unfortunate victims, Chief Justice Georges declared that he "had never met with so idle and groundless a charge since . . . [he] had the Honour of . . . [his] Commission". ⁹⁷ On the contrary, he added, rather than a conspiracy among the black troops, the evidence etched in bold relief a plan of the Assembly to "get rid of the 4th West India

⁹³There were only about two hundred white regulars then on the island. Ibid.

⁹⁴W.O. 1/770, Ottley to Portland, 17 May 1799, enclosed in King to Huskisson, 4 July 1799.

⁹⁵C.O. 152/78, Thomson to Portland, No. 11, 19 February 1798.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., Georges to Portland, 8 October 1797, and enclosures.

Regiment at all events". ⁹⁸

Georges', integrity merely brought down upon himself the animosity of the Assembly and the Council. He complained bitterly of attempts on the part of both bodies to censure and discredit him. ⁹⁹ After seventeen years as Chief Justice of St. Kitts he requested that the king accept his resignation. ¹⁰⁰

However, this colonial victory was short-lived. On 28 December 1798 the 8th West India Regiment with a strength of 415 non-commissioned officers and men arrived at English Harbour Antigua, from Dominica. ¹⁰¹ The 8th had been ordered to Antigua not only because that island had the barracks to accommodate this corps but because according to the policy surrounding the West India Regiments, every garrison had to have a proportion of black troops. These troops were greeted with a vituperative barrage from the Assembly and Council. According to several passionately written petitions, the sending of this "mischievous corps" of "barbarous", "uncivilized" and "dangerous and obnoxious people" was an "abominable evil". ¹⁰² Another speculated wildly that the consequence of this decision would be "amongst the greatest distresses which this Island can possibly experience". ¹⁰³

Attempting to reassure Antiguan that their fears were groundless, Lieutenant-General Bowyer, the new Commander-in-Chief

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹W.O. 1/88, Minutes of the Council and Assembly, 20, 31 December 1798 and 31 January 1799, pp. 272-273.

¹⁰²Ibid., pp. 265-300.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 270.

of British forces in the West Indies in 1798, was himself rather critical of the 8th West India Regiment. ¹⁰⁴ Bowyer's dislike of the 8th had already manifested itself in the Adjutant General's announcement to the President of the Council that the 8th had been ordered to Antigua. ¹⁰⁵ For this he was in effect censured by Dundas ¹⁰⁶ who correctly judged Bowyer's untrue, unwise, and poorly timed comments as lack of commitment to the British Government's policy of garrisoning its Caribbean possessions with black soldiers. Bowyer soon after admitted the value of West India Regiments. ¹⁰⁷

The Duke of Portland used the incident of Antigua's opposition to the 8th to remind other representatives of the British Government in the West Indies of the importance placed on the West India Regiments. Showing uncharacteristic impatience and bluntness, Portland warned the Governor of St. Vincent that it was "political suicide" to oppose this measure. ¹⁰⁸

Portland's brusqueness was a reaction to continued colonial resistance to the West India Regiments. ¹⁰⁹ Also he

¹⁰⁴"The 8th W. I. Regt. is composed almost entirely of New Negroes & tho uncivilized, I am convinced they are more harmless & less dangerous than old ones." Bowyer to the President of the Council and Speaker of the Assembly in *ibid.*, p. 284.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 265-266.

¹⁰⁶W.O. 1/87, Dundas to Bowyer, 23 March 1799.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, Bowyer to Dundas, 19 January 1799.

¹⁰⁸W.O. 1/770, Portland to Bentinck, 10 March 1799, enclosure in King to Huskisson, 25 March 1799.

¹⁰⁹See, for instance, C.O. 71/30, Dominica Journal, Extraordinary, Wednesday, 30 May 1798, enclosure No. 1.

must have been painfully aware that the preferential treatment, which allowed Jamaica at that very moment to have an all-white garrison, was viewed enviously by other islands. This favoritism, which no doubt encouraged resistance to the measure in other islands, was forcibly brought back to the attention of white West Indians when the 9th West India Regiment landed at Jamaica on 1 December 1798. Landing at Port Royal, owing to the British evacuation of St. Domingo, the loyal 9th was speedily and disgracefully despatched to and confined at Fort Augusta and just as quickly and disgracefully reembarked.¹¹⁰ Balcarres, in an obsequious note to the Jamaica Assembly, reassured that body of the "unavoidable necessity" of having granted entry to the 9th.¹¹¹ This was the same corps that the British command considered to be the best black corps in the West Indies.¹¹²

By August 1799 Antigua realized that the British Government was resolute in its decision to maintain as part of that island's garrison a West India Regiment. The Assembly acknowledged the uselessness of issuing further written remonstrances. Instead it threatened to oppose the decision by the more direct method of discontinuing that island's subsistence contribution.¹¹³ This course of action never matured into a serious confrontation

¹¹⁰C.O. 137/101, Balcarres to Portland, 3 December 1798, and enclosures.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²W.O. 1/89, Trigge to Dundas, 16 July 1800.

¹¹³C.O. 152/79, Resolutions of the Assembly and a message of the President and Council to the Assembly, 1 August 1799, enclosed in Thomson to Portland, No. 46, 25 October 1799.

with the British Government. With the renewal of hostilities the 8th was subsequently taken off the island and never returned.

In 1801 there was a brief flourish of military activity before the establishment of a fragile and temporary peace in March 1802. Several small expeditions were launched against Swedish, Dutch and Danish islands in the Leeward Islands group. West India Regiments took part in all of these operations. The 12th West India Regiment and several companies of the 8th were among those troops that captured St. Bartholomew in March. ¹¹⁴ Four companies of the 8th and the 2nd West India Regiment took part in the capture of St. Martin which also capitulated in March 1801. According to the official battle report, the 8th West India Regiment bore the brunt of the fighting at St. Martin and was "always successful". ¹¹⁵ Upon the conclusion of these expeditions and other equally successful operations against St. Thomas and St. John's, the 8th was divided to provide part of the garrisons of these conquests. ¹¹⁶

These last operations before the peace, during which the West India Regiments played such a prominent part, again underscored the shortage of white troops. As a result, the policy of recruiting criminals or "culprits" was accelerated

¹¹⁴W.O. 1/90, Trigge to Dundas, No. 8, 14 March and No. 10, 22 March 1801

¹¹⁵Ibid., No. 11, 27 March 1801.

¹¹⁶Ibid., No. 18, 13 April 1801. British operations against Swedish and Danish possessions in the West Indies resulted from the hostilities between Britain and the Northern League in the Baltic in 1801. Denmark and Sweden were members of the League. Holland or the Batavian Republic was a French satellite state.

even though the Duke of York opposed it.¹¹⁷ Between January 1799 and October 1802 almost seventeen hundred criminals, including deserters, were transported to serve for life in British regiments in the Windward and Leeward Islands.¹¹⁸ Some regiments were reported to have had a large proportion of these men on their establishment. Others, like the West India Rangers, were in effect penal battalions since their entire strength was composed of convicts and deserters.¹¹⁹

Rather than aiding the war effort these men became a liability since many were unfit for military service and therefore became a useless drain on the establishment of their respective corps.¹²⁰ A number of regulations¹²¹ proved ineffectual in curbing the injurious effects of recruiting criminals. Nevertheless, this practice appears to have continued throughout the war.

In March 1802 a peace treaty was concluded between France and England. Under this agreement the British Government returned all of her conquests in the West Indies with the single exception of Trinidad. The peace and restoration, however, posed a number

¹¹⁷W.O. 3/34, Crew to Lewis, 21 December 1801.

¹¹⁸W.O. 1/96/69, return enclosed in Grinfield to Brownrigg, No. 27, 13 October 1802. See also W.O. 3/22, Windham to officer commanding 4th Dragoons, 2 May 1800; and W.O. 1/623, Brownrigg to Sullivan, 17 November 1801.

¹¹⁹See W.O. 1/635, Gordon to Cooke, 25 July 1807.

¹²⁰W.O. 1/96/69, Grinfield to Brownrigg, No. 27, 13 October 1802.

¹²¹See, for instance, W.O. 3/36, Crew to Grinfield, 18 April 1803.

of problems. There was, for instance, the question of the fate of those Dutch troops which had been taken into British service with the conquest of the Dutch West Indian empire.¹²² There was also the very sensitive issue of disposal of French royalists who fought against revolutionary France. These enemies of the revolution could not remain at Martinique when it was returned to France. The former problem was resolved by shipping some troops home to the Netherlands and by sweeping others into the dumping ground of the British Army, the 60th Regiment. The latter issue was partially decided by settling some on waste lands in Trinidad.¹²³ Among them was Gaudin de Soter, Lieutenant-Colonel of the 10th West India Regiment, along with five to six hundred of his slaves.¹²⁴

The Treaty of Amiens, which lasted for eighteen uneasy months, resulted in a peace establishment or large scale reductions in Britain's armed forces. Even though the peace never looked secure, it did provide the Addington administration, which was formed in February 1801, with a chance to bid for popular support through economy.¹²⁵ From December 1799 to December 1802 the average strength of the total British garrison

¹²²W.O. 1/95/30, Trigge to Brownrigg, No. 10, 23 January 1802; and W.O. 1/624, Hislop to Grinfield, 26 October 1802 and Grinfield to Brownrigg, No. 45, 2 November 1802.

¹²³C.O. 318/19, Trigge to Hobart, 30 May 1802 and enclosure.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵J. Steven Watson, The Reign of George III 1760-1815 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 412.

in the West Indies was approximately 17,500 troops.¹²⁶ Of this number the black soldiery of the West India Regiments averaged about 5,500 men or just under one third of the total force.¹²⁷ Peace and economy dictated that a garrison of this size was no longer necessary.

In June 1802 the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments were ordered disbanded. The other six corps were to be placed on a peace establishment as quickly as possible.¹²⁸ Actually as early as December 1801 the British Government had already been in communication with the Commander-in-Chief in the West Indies in order to determine which West India Regiments would remain on the British Establishment and which were to be reduced.¹²⁹ Of particular concern were those

¹²⁶For the Windward and Leeward Islands Command see C.O. 318/32, unnumbered papers, "Abstract. In Which the Casualties of the European Troops are discriminated from those of the Africans, & a comprehensive view of the whole afforded", enclosed in "General Return of the Sick and Wounded in all His Majesty's Hospitals . . . from December 1799 to January 1803" A similar return does not appear to exist for the Jamaica Command. The figures submitted for this Command, namely two thousand white and one thousand black troops, are based on random returns for the same period.

¹²⁷Ibid. For a more specific breakdown of the strengths and distribution of most of the individual West India Regiments from 1801 to 1802, in both the Jamaica and Windward and Leeward Islands Commands, see W.O. 1/90, Trigge to Huskisson, 21 January 1801; C.O. 137/108, Nugent to Sullivan, 5 July 1802; W.O. 1/96/68, Grinfield to Brownrigg, No. 26, 12 October 1802; and C.O. 318/20, Grinfield to Hobart, "Private and Confidential", No. 23, 5 December 1802, enclosures No. 1 and No. 2.

¹²⁸W.O. 40/15, unnumbered papers, York to Windham, 9 June 1802. See also W.O. 4/341, Yorke to Trigge, and Yorke to Campbell, Johnstone and Hislop, 11 June 1802.

¹²⁹W.O. 1/90, Trigge to Hobart, No. 28, 31 December 1801, and enclosure.

regiments composed of non-English speaking blacks: the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments. ¹³⁰

Lord Hobart, Secretary of War during the Addington administration, was advised by Sir Thomas Trigge that for reasons of expediency the 9th and 12th should be kept and the 10th and 11th disbanded. ¹³¹ It was pointed out to Hobart that most of the men in the 9th and 12th had been purchased by the army and were therefore the property of the British Government. ¹³² The 10th should be disbanded since desertions at Martinique in 1801 apparently had reduced the corps far below its normal strength. Desertions from the 10th, which was raised at Martinique, stemmed from the refusal of these soldiers to leave their home since, as part of the pending British evacuation of Martinique, the 10th had been ordered to Trinidad. ¹³³ Since those troops that remained were either a few English blacks from Jamaica, slaves owned by the British Government, or free French blacks who had already earned their freedom by serving fixed periods of enlistment, it was proposed that they be drafted into the 9th and 12th. ¹³⁴

It was also recommended that the 11th West India Regiment likewise should be disbanded. In suggesting this course of action it was thought that these troops, as was the case of the 10th West India Regiment, would not wish to be permanently removed from Demerara where they had been taken into British

¹³⁰Ibid. The 9th, 10th and 12th were composed almost entirely of French speaking blacks. The 11th West India Regiment, since it was raised in Demerara, was recruited from among Dutch speaking slaves.

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Ibid.

service and from which Britain was about to evacuate.¹³⁵ It was also thought that the proprietors of these slaves would object to their remaining in British service since they were only on loan to the British Army for the duration of the war.¹³⁶ Purchasing these troops was out of the question for the British Government. The cost of purchasing the 11th, which had a strength in July 1802 of 592 men, was over £40,000 sterling.¹³⁷

However the Colonel of the 11th, Thomas Hislop, disagreed with both the proposed method of and reasons for the disposal of his regiment. According to Hislop there was no problem in removing the 11th from Demerara since it had been understood when that corps was raised that it could be sent on foreign service as a "disposeable corps".¹³⁸ This condition of service was clearly understood by the officers and men. Nor, he added, would these West India soldiers willingly return to a way of life as slaves. By 1796 the British Army had already experienced this transformation in those blacks who had been armed. To slaves or former slaves military life was "so superior a situation".¹³⁹ He considered his regiment ready to move.

The impact of peace in 1802 and the pressures to reduce the establishment of the West India Regiments also raised the thorny question of disposal and compensation of French officers,

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸W.O. 1/95/30, Trigge to Brownrigg, No. 9, 22 January 1802 and enclosures. See also C.O. 318/19, Trigge to Hobart, No. 30, 22 January 1802.

¹³⁹Ibid.

most of whom held only temporary rank in the British Army. By the end of April 1802 it was decided that these men would receive remunerations equal to three years full pay.¹⁴⁰ Despite disbandment, a fairly large number of French officers remained with certain West India Regiments for several more years.¹⁴¹ The majority, however, appear to have followed the example of de Soter and settled in Trinidad or elsewhere in the West Indies. At Trinidad, the amount of land de Soter and Major Perein of the 10th were permitted to buy was commensurate with what they had lost at Martinique.¹⁴²

But the fundamental question of disbandment remained: what would be the fate of those black soldiers disbanded in a vehemently hostile white-rule slave society? Furthermore, would they be considered as freemen or as slaves? And if recognized as freemen, how would they support themselves? Hobart understood the seriousness of this problem when he considered disbandment "so delicate a measure".¹⁴³ He instructed the Commander-in-Chief first to consult with the governors of those islands where it was anticipated that West India Regiments would be disbanded.¹⁴⁴ However, before the policy could be implemented the question of

¹⁴⁰W.O. 1/624, Duke of York to Hobart, 28 April 1802.

¹⁴¹See Army Lists for 1804 to 1810. The few that remained after 1807 were on the establishment of the renumbered 7th which was in effect the 9th and 12th West India Regiments.

¹⁴²C.O. 318/19, Trigge to Hobart, No. 36, 3 March 1802 and enclosure, and No. 37, 5 March 1802 and enclosure.

¹⁴³Ibid., Hobart to Trigge, No. 15, 6 May 1802.

¹⁴⁴Ibid.

disposal of discharged black soldiers was propelled into the foreground when the 8th West India Regiment mutinied at Dominica.

On the evening of 9 April 1802 at Fort Shirley, Prince Rupert's, Dominica, soldiers belonging principally to the flank companies of the 8th killed three of their officers and several other whites. By the 12 April the mutiny had been crushed by a relief force composed of militiamen, marines, artillerymen, detachments of the 2/68th and 1/1st, and detachments of the 8th which had remained loyal.¹⁴⁵ A general court-martial was convened at Prince Rupert's from 15 to 20 April. Seven privates were found guilty of "exciting and joining in mutiny" and murder, and were sentenced to death.¹⁴⁶ The executions were carried out on the morning of 27 April at Martinique where the 8th had been ordered.

The 8th was subsequently broken at Barbados on 24 September 1802. All regimental accounts were to be settled to the date of disbandment. Also, all valid demands for pay, clothing and

¹⁴⁵ There are no detailed published accounts of the mutiny. However, one of the few published accounts, albeit a brief one, is in Stephen G. P. Ward's Faithful: The Story of the Durham Light Infantry (London: Thomas Nelson, 1963), pp. 84-85. The Durham Light Infantry, the old 68th Regiment, took part in the crushing of the mutiny. There is also the anonymous "The Mutiny of the 8th West India Regiment From the Papers of a Veteran Officer" and the equally anonymous "A Further Account of the Mutiny of the 8th West India Regiment", United Service Magazine, October (1851), No. 275: 207-209 and November (1851), No. 276: 399-401, respectively. Fortescue has little to say about the mutiny. Nearly all of the Public Record Office manuscripts dealing with the mutiny are found in W.O. 1/90, (particularly) 95, 96; also in C.O. 318/19, 20, and C.O. 71/30 and (particularly) 34. C.O. 71/109 deals exclusively with the mutiny since it contains documents of the general courts-martial of Andrew Cochrane Johnstone.

¹⁴⁶ C.O. 71/34, Johnstone to Hobart, No. 16, 1 May 1802, enclosure No. 5.

other allowances were to be settled fully before the regiment was broken. Those officers desiring to remain in British service were placed on the establishment of the 1st, 3rd and 4th West India Regiments. Those who wished to go on half-pay would continue to draw their full pay until passage to Europe could be provided for them. Then they were to receive two months pay in advance from the date of their departure after which they were to be put on half-pay. ¹⁴⁷

The number of blacks in the 8th to be disposed of was 393. The manner of disposal depended on whether or not each soldier was implicated in the mutiny. As a result of the inquiries, 209 non-commissioned officers and men were found not to have been involved and were drafted into the 1st, 3rd and 4th West India Regiments. One hundred and eighty-four were implicated. Of these some were attached as artificers to the Quartermaster General's Department. The rest were distributed among white regiments in the Windward and Leeward Islands as pioneers. ¹⁴⁸ Four companies of the 4th West India Regiment were ordered to garrison Prince Rupert's in place of the departed 8th. ¹⁴⁹

Was there a connection between the mutiny of the 8th and the plans to disband half of the West India Regiments, including the 8th, as part of the peace establishment? According

¹⁴⁷C.O. 318/20, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 5, 17 September 1802, enclosure No. 4.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., Grinfield to Hobart, No. 5, 17 September 1802 and enclosure No. 4.

¹⁴⁹C.O. 318/19, Trigge to Hobart, No. 40, 16 April 1802.

to the testimony of Serjeant Gold of the 8th, at the Court of Inquiry held at Martinique from 28 to 30 April 1802, slaves from plantations in the vicinity of Prince Rupert's and slaves at the Portsmouth's market had told the soldiers that they were to be reduced and then sold as slaves.¹⁵⁰ Communicating this type of apocalyptic gossip to disquieted West India soldiers was a very simple matter since, much to the intense dissatisfaction of the white inhabitants, contact between slaves and soldiers was rather common around those garrisons where black troops were quartered. The Governor of Jamaica not only stationed his black troops in those posts that were unhealthy to his white soldiers, but he also located them at those installations which were remote from plantations in order to prevent or restrict as much as possible fraternizing between slaves and soldiers.¹⁵¹ Serjeant Gold's testimony is also convincing because news of the peace was circulated in local newspapers¹⁵² which were readily available to those slaves who could read.

Black non-commissioned officers and men of the 8th at the Court of Inquiry were nearly unanimous in their testimony that the mutiny was caused by the fear that they were to be discharged and sold as slaves.¹⁵³ Furthermore, their testimony also shows that the mode of work the 8th was engaged in at the time and for which the men were paid only infrequently, namely

¹⁵⁰Ibid., Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, enclosed in Trigge to Hobart, No. 44, 4 May 1802.

¹⁵¹C.O. 137/106, Nugent to Portland, 15 August 1801.

¹⁵²C.O. 318/19, Johnstone to Trigge, 22 April 1802, enclosed in Trigge to Hobart, No. 41, 23 April 1802.

¹⁵³Ibid.

removing the brush and draining the swamps adjacent to Fort Shirley, merely confirmed their suspicions. ¹⁵⁴ The point was also made during the inquiry that any soldier so employed was issued a billhook which was the tool of the plantation slaves. ¹⁵⁵ Private James testified that the soldiers felt the object of cutting down the brush in the swamps was merely to determine if they could cut cane. ¹⁵⁶

In December 1801 the Commander-in-Chief of the Windward and Leeward Islands had warned London that it was important to prevent black soldiers from being employed as labourers and servants. The continuation of this practice, he continued, would only serve to break their spirit and render them unfit for service. ¹⁵⁷ About three years before this, in September 1798, Bowyer also had advised Dundas on the attitudes and sensitivities of Britain's black soldiers. Dundas was told then that the West India soldier believes himself to be free, equal to white soldiers and superior to slaves. ¹⁵⁸

Disbandment and the mutiny focused increasing attention on the controversial question regarding the legal position of the West India soldier. Trigge had understood the consequences of disbanding black soldiers before it had been determined.

¹⁵⁴Ibid. It was customary at this time to pay British soldiers employed on fatigues nine pence sterling per day.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷W.O. 1/90, Trigge to Brownrigg, 31 December 1801, enclosed in Trigge to Hobart, No. 28, 31 December 1801.

¹⁵⁸W.O. 1/86, Bowyer to Dundas, 6 September 1798.

whether or not they were to enter West Indian society as freemen or as slaves. Almost seven months before the mutiny he had cautioned his superiors at the Horse Guards that black soldiers were tense and anxious as a result of disbandment and the uncertainty of their legal status. As a result, he concluded prophetically, the West India soldier has been left "without a foundation, liable to dangerous and severe shocks." ¹⁵⁹

Although in one sense it was too late, Trigge issued a General Order on 27 April 1802. It declared that no West India soldier would be sold into slavery. ¹⁶⁰ It was also ordered read at least three times before each West India Regiment. ¹⁶¹ In another effort to reassure his black troops, he announced in the same Order that West India soldiers would continue to provide his personal guard and to accompany future expeditions. ¹⁶²

It was the opinion of the Court of Inquiry that the mutiny was caused by the non-payment of work undertaken by detachments of the 8th who had been employed in draining the swamp at Prince Rupert's. The Court further declared the mutiny was also the result of the fear of these troops that they were to be sold as slaves. This fear, the opinion continued, was confirmed by the mode of work in which the men were engaged. ¹⁶³

¹⁵⁹W.O. 1/623, Trigge to Brownrigg, 21 September 1801.

¹⁶⁰C.O. 318/19, General Orders, Port Royal, Martinique, 27 April 1802, enclosed in Trigge to Hobart, No. 42, 30 April 1802.

¹⁶¹Ibid.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³Ibid., Proceeding of the Court of Inquiry, enclosed in Trigge to Hobart, No. 44, 4 May 1802.

The fraudulent practices surrounding the non-payment of the soldiers of the 8th were considered, at least in the West Indies, to be the responsibilities of Andrew Cochran Johnstone, Colonel of the 8th and Governor of Dominica. For this, his government post was taken from him.¹⁶⁴ However, at his subsequent court-martial held in March 1805 at the Royal Hospital, Chelsea, he was acquitted of all charges stemming from the mutiny.¹⁶⁵ Johnstone was undaunted by events in Dominica in 1802. Two years after his acquittal, he was involved in some customs frauds at Tortola and the embezzlement of some of the prize money taken when the Danish Islands were captured in 1807. Somehow he managed to evade punishment for these activities also.¹⁶⁶

With the mutiny over and the Court of Inquiry having determined the causes of the unfortunate and untimely affair, the army returned to the business of reducing military expenses in the West Indies. But the impact of the mutiny was pronounced. The total number of West India Regiments was reduced by only four instead of six regiments as originally intended. And most significantly, although there was the reduction of four regiments, the soldiers of these corps were not discharged from British service. As in the case of the broken 8th West India Regiment, the policy was to retain these troops on the British Establish-

¹⁶⁴C.O. 71/34, Hobart to Johnstone, 8 October 1802.

¹⁶⁵See W.O. 71/109.

¹⁶⁶Burns, see note on p. 544.

ment. Even those old soldiers who were no longer fit for regimental duties because of age and disabilities were retained by forming them into veteran or garrison companies.¹⁶⁷ These companies served the dual purpose of providing additional permanent corps of military labourers for the army as well as making it unnecessary to discharge these soldiers into the certainties of a hostile slave society.

It was not until early 1804 that the final dispositions regarding disbandment were made. By September 1802 the 7th, which was in a much reduced state, had been disbanded and the men drafted into various West India Regiments.¹⁶⁸ Several suggestions were put forth and discussed concerning the future of the 9th, 10th and 12th West India Regiments,¹⁶⁹ including one to disband these corps at Martinique and Guadeloupe with French permission.¹⁷⁰ It was finally decided to incorporate these regiments into a single corps which was renumbered the 7th

¹⁶⁷The number completely discharged from British service in the British West Indies at this time is thought to be negligible.

¹⁶⁸W.O. 1/624, Brownrigg to Sullivan, 8 September 1802 and enclosures.

¹⁶⁹See C.O. 318/19, Trigge to Hobart, No. 60, 13 June 1802; C.O. 318/20, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 14, 22 October 1802; and W.O. 1/625, Duke of York to Hobart, 12 February 1803.

¹⁷⁰The French had not only refused this request but had themselves decided not to employ any more black troops in their West Indian colonies. One black corps had allegedly been gotten rid of by the French by being transported to Roatan Island. It was believed that these soldiers were eventually forced to work in mines on the Spanish main. C.O. 318/19, Trigge to Hobart, No. 61, 1 July 1802 and No. 62, 10 July 1802; and C.O. 318/20, Hobart to Grinfield, No. 1, 4 September 1802 and Grinfield to Hobart, No. 5, 17 September 1802 and enclosure No. 1 and No. 3.

West India Regiment. ¹⁷¹ The combined total strength of these corps in September 1802 was 1,263. ¹⁷² The establishment of the new 7th was eight companies and a rank and file of six hundred. ¹⁷³

The 11th West India Regiment was similarly disposed of. A few of these troops were drafted into the 2nd, 5th and 6th West India Regiments. ¹⁷⁴ However, since by January 1804 nearly five hundred men had not yet been discharged, it was decided they would be retained on the British Establishment as the renumbered 8th West India Regiment. ¹⁷⁵ The establishment of the 8th was also eight companies and a rank and file of six hundred men. ¹⁷⁶

The decision to retain the rank and file of the 11th on the British Establishment was not reached until January 1804. The date on which this decision was made effective retroactively was 25 December 1803. ¹⁷⁷ The Army List of 1804 lists eight West India Regiments. Upon completion of their establishment of six hundred rank and file, the renumbered 7th and 8th would

¹⁷¹W.O. 1/624, Brownrigg to Sullivan, 9 December 1802 and enclosures; W.O. 4/342, Yorke to Don, 28 March 1803 and Yorke to Paymaster General, 31 March 1803; C.O. 318/21, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 36, 6 January 1803, enclosure No. 3; and W.O. 4/206, Pulteney to O'Meara, 7 October 1808.

¹⁷²C.O. 318/20, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 5, 17 September 1802 and enclosure No. 3.

¹⁷³W.O. 3/149, Yorke to Fanquier, 31 March 1803.

¹⁷⁴W.O. 1/625, Grinfield to Clinton, 20 April 1803, p. 229.

¹⁷⁵W.O. 4/342, Bragg to Hislop, 31 January 1804.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

¹⁷⁷In the case of the 8th West India Regiment see *ibid.*

be further augmented to a rank and file of one thousand which had been prescribed for the other six West India Regiments. 178

By the time of the Peace of Amiens the West India Regiments were a proven, reliable (at least to the British Army) and accepted garrison force in the West Indies. During the three years from December 1799 to December 1802 every major British garrison in the West Indies had its complement of black soldiers. In most garrisons during this period West India soldiers constituted about one third of the force. In several garrisons in the Windward and Leeward Islands Command black soldiers even outnumbered white troops. 179

One of the most dramatic proofs of the invaluable service of the West India soldier was his ability to outlive his white comrade. Again, during the three year period beginning in December 1799 in the Windward and Leeward Islands Command,

¹⁷⁸Ibid. The reason for this augmentation was the renewal of war in 1803. Fortescue is therefore incorrect when he wrote that the method adopted for reducing the West India Regiments was that of drafting the men of the last six West India Regiments into the first six, and to allow natural causes to reduce the size of these corps. See 5: 181. This method was suggested (see footnote No. 169) but, obviously, never adopted.

¹⁷⁹C.O. 318/32, "Abstract In which the Casualties of the European Troops are discriminated from those of the African, & a comprehensive view of the whole afforded" enclosed in "General Return of the Sick and Wounded in . . . the Windward and Leeward Colonies . . . from December 1799 to January 1803" See also C.O. 318/20, Grinfield to Hobart, "Private and Confidential", No. 23, 5 December 1802, enclosures No. 1 and No. 2; and C.O. 318/21, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 42, 31 January 1803, enclosures No. 1 and No. 2.

the proportion of mortality among European troops in general, garrison and regimental hospitals was nearly one in ten. The mortality rate among West India soldiers was only about one in twenty-two.¹⁸⁰ During this period some 4,055 white soldiers died of disease as compared to only 578 blacks.¹⁸¹ Another study of the health of the British Army in the Windward and Leeward Islands, this time from April 1796 to February 1802, showed that disease related deaths reduced the number of white troops annually by an average of almost 25 per cent. The average annual decrease among West india soldiers was 6 per cent.¹⁸²

The officers of the West India Regiments were not spared the ravages of the climate. From April 1796 to February 1802 the enormous number of 590 succumbed to disease.¹⁸³

There were certain times however when returns showed an unusually high sickness rate among black troops.¹⁸⁴ On one such occasion Dundas demanded an explanation since, as he pointed out, one of the reasons for raising black regiments was the belief that the African was better able to withstand the rigours of the climate.¹⁸⁵ Dundas was promptly informed that the high

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, these rates should be contrasted with the fact that West India Regiments constituted about one third of the total British force at that time.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² William A. Young, The West India Common-Place Book (London: Macmillan, 1807), p. 218.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ In the case of the 11th at Demerara, see W.O. 1/96/67, Grinfield to Brownrigg, No. 18, 5 October 1802.

¹⁸⁵ W.O. 1/89, Dundas to Trigge, No. 20, 24 September 1800.

sickness rate referred to occurred among "new Negroes". It was necessary to inoculate these recruits against small pox and their subsequent reaction to the vaccine was the major reason for the large number of sick.¹⁸⁶ However, the seasoning process of these newcomers to the West Indies and the fact that they did not wear shoes, resulting in accidents and chigoe infections, also accounted for the disproportionate number of sick black soldiers.¹⁸⁷ Dundas rather naively recommended that these soldiers be made to wear shoes.¹⁸⁸

Many of the events and issues surrounding the West India Regiments from 1803, when the war against France resumed, to 1815 dealt with the routines of garrison duties, which were periodically punctuated with expeditionary activities, and the consolidation of the establishment of these corps. The memorial submitted by General Thomas Hislop in 1801 entitled "Remarks on the Establishment of West India Regiments"¹⁸⁹ proved to be a

¹⁸⁶W.O. 1/90, Trigge to Dundas, 20 November 1800.

¹⁸⁷Ibid.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., Dundas to Trigge, No. 5, 14 March 1801. The apparent reluctance of the African born recruit to wear shoes no doubt stems from their non-use in Africa. This problem continued as an increasing number of recruits for the West India Regiments were "new Negroes". A compromise was reached between the medical needs of the army and the habits of the African recruits. Apparently only when it was necessary, Africans were permitted to wear the more comfortable slipper in place of the boot. See Barnes, p. 96.

¹⁸⁹W.O. 1/95, "Remarks on the Establishment of the West India Regiments . . . 1801", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804. Hislop was also the Colonel of the 11th West India Regiment.

most important document since many of the future reforms and changes made in the establishment of these corps were modeled after those enumerated and developed by Hislop in this proposal. Among those items to which Hislop called attention were recruiting in Africa, purchasing wives for West India soldiers, creation of permanent invalid corps for partially unfit black soldiers and Chelsea-type pensions for those soldiers totally unfit for further military service. ¹⁹⁰ Hislop also raised the question of the legal status of the West India soldier and the urgent need for a decision regarding this crucial question. ¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰Ibid.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

SLAVES OR FREEMEN ?

When violent prejudices are imbibed by People of confined habits and notions, they are undoubtedly very difficult to remove. By persuasion there is little chance of succeeding. Nothing can more strongly prove the truth of this assertion, than the aversion, which many residents in the West India Islands still possess, against the Black Regiments, and when it falls, in any degree, within their power, they will gladly seize the occasion to deprive them of that consideration and respect, which as constituting a part of His Majesty's Army, should be extended to them.

Under the aforesaid impression it has been asserted, and in some instances I have understood the principle has been acted upon, that Soldiers of West India Regiments are amenable to the Slave Laws, and therefore subject to every degradation, that the unfortunate and wretched Slave is doomed to endure. If such a principle were established, how could confidence be justly placed, or indeed with what Justice could it be expected from such Soldiers. The same Duties fall to their lot to perform, as are confided to the European Troops. The same vigilance and exactness in the discharge of them is alike expected, and the same degree of punishment awaits their disobedience or neglect. How then could it be possible, if such were admitted as a fact, that a West India Soldier, could with safety to himself perform his Duty? For instance, if a white Man insults him on his Post, or attempts to act there contrary to the orders he has received, he could not resist him, and if even struck, or any attempt is made to disarm him, he could not oppose with the firmness his duty as a Soldier would demand, and for the neglect of which, the Law by which he is governed, would award him a severe punishment.¹

With these words Brigadier General Hislop described the dilemma of the West India soldier in 1801. By this time the

¹W.O. 1/95, "Remarks on the Establishment of West India Regiments. Written in the Year 1801", pp. 200b-201b, enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

island assemblies were attempting to bring the black soldier under the jurisdiction of West Indian slave laws in order to destroy the West India Regiments. The British soldier was already amenable to civil courts for the adjudication of specific offences committed under certain conditions. His military status did not provide immunity from the jurisdiction of these courts although military courts had nearly ultimate jurisdiction. The fact that both civil and military authorities were responsible for the government of the British soldier, was based on the principle that a soldier was not only a soldier but also a citizen, and as such was subject to civil as well as military law.²

Statutes based on this principle thus provided civil authorities with the legal power to try British soldiers for certain offences. In view of colonial hostility to the black soldier, it was almost certain that this authority would be used by West Indians, conceivably to the point of abuse, in an attempt to cripple the West India Regiments. To simply declare West India soldiers to be slaves would leave them at the mercy of the civil authorities and the literal enforcement of the slave laws. As Hislop pointed out in the example of the black soldier who was assaulted at his post by a white man, such a situation would seriously impede their efficiency as soldiers. The penalties inflicted on a slave found guilty of striking or insulting a white person in the British West Indies around this time were

²Manual of Military Law, p. 85.

whipping, mutilation and sometimes death. ³

By the turn of the century the situation was compounded by the fact that as a result of the latest recruiting policy of the British Government the vast majority of West India soldiers were, indeed, purchased slaves. ⁴ Furthermore the policy of purchasing slaves through the established channels of the West Indian slave trade interest would continue until abolition of the British trade in 1807. By 1801 it was clear that the continued existence of the West India Regiments as regular British regiments was dependent upon whether the West India soldier was judged to be a freeman or a slave, subject as such to colonial police regulations.

There appeared to be some confusion in the army in the Caribbean concerning the legal status of black soldiers. Hislop's description of the plight of black soldiers shows that on some islands these troops were considered amenable to slave laws. A despatch written also in 1801 by the Commander-in-Chief of British forces in the Caribbean indicated that it was almost universally agreed in the British islands that West India soldiers were indeed subject to slave laws. ⁵ The West India

³Elsa Goveia, "The West Indian Slave Laws", Chapters in Caribbean History (Barbados: Caribbean Universities Press, 1970): 24. According to Fortescue, if West India soldiers were subject to local slave laws one magistrate could order that a black soldier be whipped publicly and two magistrates could order him to be hanged. Fortescue, 4(part I): 543.

⁴W.O. 1/623, Trigge to Brownrigg, 21 September 1801, enclosure No. 3.

⁵Ibid., Trigge to Brownrigg, 21 September 1801.

soldier, however, not only considered himself free and therefore superior to his black brother in bondage, but he also believed he was equal to white soldiers in every aspect of military service.⁶ As a result the black soldier was both proud and jealous of his unique situation.⁷

The West India soldier had every reason to believe that he was a freeman or at least that he enjoyed a status far superior to that of a common slave. Black soldiers, for instance, were treated in the same hospitals in which European troops convalesced.⁸ The fact that the West India soldier wore the same uniform as the European soldier and that he enjoyed the same pay, allowances and privileges his white comrade in arms enjoyed naturally tended to confirm this view. Blacks upon enlistment were subjected also to a program of indoctrination in which they were told by their officers that their position as soldiers vis-a-vis slaves was superior and that this situation was the result of their serving the British king in a military capacity.⁹

These instances of equality, which were routinely accepted by the West India soldier, did not come about through mere chance. Since the time the first West India Regiments were raised, the British Government had wisely committed itself to

⁶W.O. 1/86, Bowyer to Dundas, 6 September 1798.

⁷C.O. 318/33, Bowyer to Castlereagh, 10 February 1808.

⁸See the case of the South American Rangers or the 11th West India Regiment in Pinchard, 3: 197.

⁹C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 27 July 1808. See also *ibid.*, General Orders, 12 August 1808, enclosed in Carmichael to Castlereagh, 12 August 1808.

a policy of equality in the governance of its black and white soldiers. Afterwards, London chose occasionally to remind the army in the West Indies that white regiments should not be shown any preferential treatment. Instead, the West India Regiments should receive equal "attention and favor".¹⁰

Within the walls of British garrisons the West India soldier was acknowledged as the equal of white soldiers which implied, at least, that he was a freeman. No similar pronouncement was made by the British Government to cover the status of the black soldier once he stepped beyond the gates of his post. It was not until 1799 that London officially began to break its silence surrounding this question. The British Army, as we shall see, while endeavoring to protect the West India soldier from the jurisdictional grip of hostile colonial legislatures, was able to achieve only dubious success in shielding a specific and comparatively small segment of the West India soldiery. The ambiguous status of the black soldier demanded clarification.

Before the issue was resolved finally in 1807, soldiers belonging to the 5th West India Regiment were incarcerated in a civil jail. Some were even held in public confinement for about a year without trial.¹¹ The occurrence of incidents of

¹⁰C.O. 318/28, Castlereagh to Bowyer, 26 December 1805.

¹¹Belize (British Honduras) Manuscript Records, Magistrate Letters, Series "C", Captain Holwell to Magistrates, 14 January 1805, referred to in John Alder Burdon, Archives of British Honduras, 3 vols. (London: Sifton Pread & Co., Ltd., 1931-1935), 2: 77.

this type stemmed from the principle that since soldiers were also citizens, military courts should not be allowed to try the most serious civil offences, such as, treason, murder or rape, if these offences could be tried in a civil court with reasonable convenience. It should be noted that even these offences came under the jurisdiction of military courts if they were committed by soldiers on active service.¹² By the early part of the eighteenth century the British Government in effect had acquired complete statutory power over its troops both at home and in the colonies by means of the Articles of War and by the periodic extension of the annual Mutiny Act.¹³ Despite the jurisdictional supremacy of military courts, with the legal status of black soldiers as yet undetermined, there was still some doubt in the British Army as to how far West India soldiers were amenable to military law.¹⁴

Nonetheless, colonial obstructionist tactics could be anticipated as a result of the legal involvement of colonial officials in the enlistment process into the British Army. The Mutiny Act of 1694 established that the enlistment of a prospective soldier should be attested before a civil magistrate in order to protect the enlistee from being duped into military service.¹⁵

¹²Manual of Military Law, p. 85.

¹³Ibid., pp. 11-14.

¹⁴W.O. 1/623, Trigge to Brownrigg, 21 September 1801.

¹⁵5 and 6 William and Mary, c. 15, sec. 2, referred to in Charles M. Clode, The Military Forces of the Crown: Their Administration and Government, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1869), 2:7

The local magistrate or Justice of the Peace was to certify the enlistment and attestations of the recruit, one of which was an oath of fidelity. In another the recruit disclosed his age, place of birth, occupation and the fact that there were no restraints on his enlistment into British military service.¹⁶ Therefore West Indian Justices of the Peace, who were generally among those whites opposed to the measure of garrisoning the British islands with black regiments, could be expected to use their authority to block the recruiting of the West India Regiments.

Yet some several thousand slaves were enlisted into the West India Regiments during the height of the controversy. Not a fragment of evidence remains to shed light on precisely how the legally required presence of West Indian civil magistrates was avoided or circumvented during the time these slaves were being enlisted. However, there was one course of action to which army recruiters, intent on bringing the West India Regiments up to their prescribed strength, could and probably did resort. Black recruits after receiving the enlistment bounty apparently were never brought before Justices of the Peace for certification of enlistment. Nor did resorting to this method of circumvention prevent the prospective soldier from being enlisted legally. According to a clause in the Mutiny Act of 1735, anyone who received enlistment money from any officer

¹⁶Robert B. Scott, The Military Law of England (London: T. Goddard, 1810), pp. 187-188. Copies of the oaths are found in the above reference as well as at the rear of the Succession and Description Book of the 7th West India Regiment, W.O. 25/661, folios 112-113.

and, knowing it to be such, absconded or refused to go before a local magistrate for attestation, was considered to be an enlisted soldier. ¹⁷

It is also likely that the enlistment of slaves into the West India Regiments during this time may have gone through the regular enlistment process. If this did occur it was probably with the cooperation of those Justices of the Peace administering the parishes in which principal garrisons were located. Colonial assistance in this direction or in any other connection relating to the West India Regiments was perhaps rare but not impossible. Chief Justice Georges' commendable stand concerning the alleged misconduct of the 4th West India Regiment at Antigua is an example.

Cooperation between the military and civil authorities almost certainly occurred on those islands which were the scenes of military operations. On these islands where plantations were in ruin, where slaves were in open rebellion and where whites only recently had been massacred, the inhabitants were not likely to refuse military assistance even if it meant accepting armed blacks. St. Vincent, for instance, appears to have cooperated steadily with enlistments for the 4th West India Regiment after that corps had been removed from St. Kitts. ¹⁸

The authorities on other islands, which had been spared the ravages of the war, were also willing to assist the British

¹⁷ George III, C. 2, referred to in Clode, 2: 8.

¹⁸ W.O. 25/653, folios 28-36.

Army in its recruiting efforts as long as they did not have to receive West India Regiments as part of their own regular garrisons. However, once this situation became likely, the colonists went to practically any lengths to obstruct the defensive arrangement of the British Government. Jamaicans on the other hand were generally uncooperative and as a result the number of blacks enlisted on that island was minimal.

Before the British Government finally asserted its great power and influence in settling the question of the legal status of the West India soldier, a number of other issues intervened to aggravate an already volatile situation. Chief among these was the British Army's policy of purchasing almost exclusively "New Negroes" as recruits for the West India Regiments. Prevented from purchasing native West Indian blacks in any significant numbers as a result of the recalcitrance of local proprietors and colonial assemblies, the British Army's later recruiting efforts rapidly transformed most of the remaining eight West India Regiments, notably the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 8th, into African regiments or corps predominantly composed of African slaves newly imported into the West Indies.¹⁹ Table 2 shows the preponderance of African born recruits enlisted into the 5th West India Regiment from 1798, when for all intents and purposes recruiting began, until 1807, when the Act abolishing the slave trade eliminated the major source of African recruits.

The remaining West India Regiments retained a largely

¹⁹For the 4th West India Regiment see W.O. 25/653, folios 28-36. For the 5th see W.O. 25/656, folios 1-27.

TABLE 2

REGIONAL ORIGINS OF RECRUITS FOR THE 5TH
WEST INDIA REGIMENT 1798 - 1807

	1798	1799	1800	1801	1802	1803	1804	1805	1806	1807	Total
African born	172	1	2	119	100	-	296	20	-	-	710
Creole blacks	74	1	-	9	1	1	-	-	2	-	88
Europeans	3	3	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
East Indians	4	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7
Total	253	8	3	128	101	1	296	20	2	-	812

SOURCE: W.O. 25/656, folios 1-27.

creole character. However, the available records, although incomplete, show that even these corps had a sizable number of African born recruits. Table 3, which has been prepared from information in the Succession and Description Books of the 7th West India Regiment, confirms this situation.

Colonial sensibilities already excoriated by the establishment of the West India Regiments were irritated further over what they considered an additional affront. Incommunicative even to their officers because they could not speak English,²⁰ these awkward and disoriented "raw" Africans who were being armed, were viewed by white West Indians with an explosive mixture of contempt, terror and hatred. The 4th West India Regiment

²⁰W.O. 27/90, part 2, "Inspecting Officer's Report. Detachment 6th West India Regiment. On the 24th day of July 1806." Ibid., part 1, "Major General W. Archer's Inspection Report of the 4th West India Regiment. Surinam, Fort New Amsterdam, 10 January 1806." C.O. 137/123, Villettes to Castlereagh, 15 June 1808.

TABLE 3

REGIONAL ORIGINS OF RECRUITS AND DRAFTS FOR THE
7TH WEST INDIA REGIMENT. 1795 - 1815

	1795	1800	1804	1805	1806	1807	1808	1809	1810	1811	1812	1813	1814	1815	Total
Creole blacks ^a	281	66	3	5	1	2	5	6	21	20	4	3	65	21	503
African born	61	93	53	97	52	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	358
Europeans	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	5	1	-	6
East Indians	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	2
Origins unidentified	53	23	5	12	5	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	-	2	104
Totals	395	182	61	114	58	3	7	6	23	23	4	9	65	23	973

SOURCE: W.O. 25/662, folios 1-103.

^aThe majority of creole blacks recruited from 1810 to 1815 were listed as having been born at Curaçao and Bonaire

was in effect an African regiment when, with the assistance of chicanery and easily aroused passions, it was suddenly removed from the Leeward Islands in 1797. Nor did the composition of the old 8th West India Regiment, which replaced the 4th and which was also largely composed of recently purchased African slaves, escape the unceasing scrutiny of the white inhabitants. As we have seen, local criticism of this corps was directed at the allegedly "barbarous" and "uncivilized" Africans who comprised the 8th.²¹ Even Bowyer was wary of the "uncivilized" condition of the "New Negroes" in this corps.²² The rapid transformation of the formerly creole West India Regiments into African corps further alienated white West Indians who more than ever were desirous of bringing West India soldiers under the regulations of colonial slave laws.

Besides the impact of the British Army's recruiting efforts on the question of the legal position of West India soldiers, other situations arose with a kind of conspiratorical regularity. By focusing attention on the West India soldier, they kept the issue alive and in the immediate foreground. Although very few in number, some serious offences were committed periodically by black soldiers. For instance, there was the case of a soldier in the old 7th West India Regiment who was charged with the murder of a civilian at Barbados in 1798.²³ Another example

²¹W.O. 1/88, Minutes of the Council and Assembly (Antigua), 20, 31 December 1798 and 31 January 1799, pp. 272-273.

²²Ibid., p. 284.

²³W.O. 1/86, Bowyer to Dundas, 6 September 1798.

was the case of Private Charles Miller of the 2nd West India Regiment who was charged with assault and battery at Grenada in 1800.²⁴ In the latter case, Miller was summoned initially before a Court of General Sessions. However when he presented himself to hear the indictment it was ordered that the slave court held the proper jurisdiction.²⁵

The final disposition of worn out West India soldiers, whose numbers steadily increased as the war continued, also helped to rivet colonial attention on the black soldier. Those blacks found unfit to perform regimental duties but who were capable of rendering garrison duties were retained in British military service by being drafted into garrison or invalid companies. However, those found totally unfit for any further military service, and who were not maintained after being discharged by a Chelsea-type pension, were the subject of much concern to the British Army in the West Indies and hostility from local proprietors.

Occasionally some special arrangements were made to look after old and disabled West India soldiers. In one such situation, veterans of the 11th West India Regiment were

²⁴W.O. 1/771, King to Huskisson, 4 July 1800 and enclosures.

²⁵Private Miller was tried eventually before a Garrison Court Martial. Ibid. It is interesting to point out that the Dutch army in the West Indies had, by the end of the eighteenth century, steered away from this problem by apparently recruiting only free blacks into its service. See W.O. 1/149, Spiering to Hughes, 11 July 1805; and W.O. 1/150, Report of the Committee of the Court of Policy . . . , No. 2 enclosure in Hughes to Windham, 28 May 1806.

provided not only with the usual inadequate and temporary pension of "a bitt a day", but also were placed under the supervision of an English merchant.²⁶ Most, it appears, were simply left to their own devices. According to Hislop, the discharged black soldier often settled near or even on a plantation where he had become acquainted with the slaves of that estate.²⁷ The influence of the idleness, ~~independence~~ and ideas of this old intruder on the slaves naturally aroused the animosity of the estate's proprietor or manager. As a result the old soldier was frequently harried from estate to estate, before finally being driven to seek refuge in towns.²⁸ Reviled by the white populace, the West India soldier found that his discharge certificate was often all that stood between a free if harried existence and confinement in a workhouse for suspected run-aways.²⁹

The British Government's policy of placing a proportion of black troops in all of its garrisons made the legal status of the West India soldier a universal issue in the British West Indies.³⁰ Jamaicans, as we have already seen, were confronted

²⁶W.O. 1/624, Grinfield to Brownrigg, No. 45, 2 November 1802. A "bitt" was equivalent to six pence sterling.

²⁷W.O. 1/95, "Remarks on the Establishment of the West India Regiments . . . 1801", p. 200a, enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 200a-200b.

²⁹A copy of the discharge certificate is in W.O. 25/661, folios 113-114.

³⁰It should be pointed out also that while the issue was being debated throughout the British West Indies, there were some distinct indications of colonial acceptance of the West

with this essential question in 1796 when the 6th West India Regiment was ordered raised on that island. Crafty legal maneuvering combined with bluff resulted in a brief period of success, when this island was permitted to have an all-white regular garrison under certain conditions. However, this merely postponed the issue until April 1801.³¹ In the same year the last remaining significant British West Indian possession with a previously all-European regular garrison was ordered to abide by the imperial policy of racially intergrated garrisons. In May 1801, amid cries of consternation from local whites, 272 rank and file of the 6th West India Regiment went ashore in the Bahamas³² which was then considered by some as the most unhealthy of the British islands.³³

The British Government's policy of distributing among

India Regiments. In 1803 Trinidad was reported to have been "quietly conciliated" to the presence of black soldiers in its garrisons as a result of the good conduct of the 9th and 12th. C.O. 318/21, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 51, 25 February 1803. By August 1804 London was being told that the colonies no longer questioned the utility of black regiments and that colonial opposition to these corps "decreases daily". C.O. 318/25, Myers to Camden, No. 15, 28 August 1804

³¹See C.O. 137/106 and 108 for correspondence dealing with Jamaica's continued efforts in 1801 and 1802 to remove the 2nd West India Regiment from its garrison, and that island's efforts to have an all-white regular garrison.

³²W.O. 1/771, Portland to Hobart, 8 July 1801 and enclosure. Bahamians were soon successful in having all of the black troops removed except for one hundred men. W.O. 1/90, Hobart to Trigge, No. 4, 20 August 1801. Moreover, when drafts intended for the 6th were refused entry into the colony by Governor Halket, orders were issued to remove the 6th from the Bahamas to Barbados. W.O. 1/625, Whitelocke to Clinton, 7 June 1803 and enclosure, and Clinton to Sullivan, 10 June 1803.

³³W.O. 1/623, Brownrigg to Huskisson, 7 February 1801.

the garrisons of the islands its white and black soldiers in the ratio of two to one, respectively, ³⁴ was largely an attempt to counter hostile colonial reaction to the West India Regiments. The purpose of this imbalance in favour of white troops was clearly an effort to conciliate white colonists by preventing British islands from being garrisoned principally by black soldiers. ³⁵ British commanders in the West Indies were reminded from time to time of this policy and the reasons for it. ³⁶

In 1797 the British Army in the West Indies took an extraordinary step to protect the most vulnerable of its black soldiers against the efforts of the colonists to bring them under the jurisdiction of the local slave laws. In April 1797 Sir Ralph Abercromby, apparently on his own authority as Commander-in-Chief in the West Indies, declared all of those West India soldiers found totally unfit for any further military service to be freemen. ³⁷ These soldiers were to be provided with a pension of one shilling per diem, payable every two months, and eventually with a conditional discharge making these old veterans liable for service in invalid companies. ³⁸ The obvious

³⁴W.O. 1/625, Mathews to Sullivan, 7 January 1803.

³⁵As we have seen, in some garrisons blacks actually outnumbered white regulars.

³⁶See, for instance, C.O. 318/20, Hobart to Grinfield, No. 1, 6 January 1803.

³⁷W.O. 1/96, Beckwith to Gordon, No. 46, 10 December 1805 and enclosure. Fortescue was mistaken when he wrote that all black soldiers were enfranchised just before the close of the eighteenth century. See 4(part I): 543.

³⁸Ibid.

purpose of this obligation was to provide the army with the legal right to bring these soldiers once again under the protective shield of military law in the event their freedom was challenged by colonial assemblies. The precedent established by Abercromby was continued by his successors. ³⁹

But the success of this humanitarian effort by the British Army to protect discharged West India soldiers was marginal at best. Not only did the colonial legislatures refuse to acknowledge the free status of discharged black soldiers, but Abercromby's action, even though it was not repudiated by the British Government, never received official endorsement. The conspicuous absence of this important sanction, the reasons for which the Law Officers of the Crown were about to explain, no doubt encouraged the colonies to challenge the legality of the army's unilateral decision.

However, failure to ensure the safety of invalid West India soldiers goaded the army in the West Indies into a sustained effort to persuade the British Government to declare all West India soldiers, both fit and unfit, to be freemen in all matters of civil concern. Towards the end of 1798 certain high officials in the British Government and at Army Headquarters in London were convinced of the need to exempt Britain's black soldiers from colonial slave laws. ⁴⁰ Among the former was the

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰W.O. 1/619, Brownrigg to Huskisson, 9 November 1798 and enclosure. W.O. 6/131, Huskisson to Brownrigg, 29 November 1798.

Duke of Portland who, since the beginning of the debate on the legal status of West India soldiers, had taken the position that as British soldiers raised by royal prerogative, black soldiers were subject to military law and regulations.⁴¹ By the end of 1798 three methods of enfranchising West India soldiers had been recommended repeatedly by army commanders in the West Indies. These ranged from the rather unlikely colonial acts and manumissions to the introduction of a clause in the annual Mutiny Act.⁴²

An official decision from the British Government as to whether West India soldiers were essentially amenable to military law or colonial slave laws was imminent as the last year of the eighteenth century passed into history. Until that time measures were introduced to prevent the possibility of clashes between black soldiers and colonists. Officers with West India troops under their command were instructed to keep those troops in the "strictest discipline" and "good order".⁴³

In early January 1799 the first of several legal opinions was presented to the British Government. On 10 January, in this opinion which clearly influenced most of the subsequent ones, and which had been requested by Dundas in November 1798, the Attorney General of St. Vincent decided that black soldiers purchased as

⁴¹W.O. 1/769, Portland to Balcarres, 9 August 1797, enclosed in King to Huskisson, 19 August 1797. See also W.O. 1/86, No. 1 enclosure in Dundas to Bowyer, 14 November 1798.

⁴²W.O. 1/619, enclosure in Brownrigg to Huskisson, 9 November 1798. C.O. 153/31, Portland to the Attorney and Solicitor Generals, 12 November 1798.

⁴³W.O. 1/770, Portland to Bentinck, 10 March 1799, enclosed in King to Huskisson, 25 March 1799.

slaves were indeed amenable to colonial police regulation.⁴⁴ As a result, the opinion continued, cases involving West India soldiers were to be adjudicated in slave courts or Petty Sessions by one or more Justices of the Peace.⁴⁵ Dundas was cautioned by his commander in the West Indies against the acceptance of Attorney General Gloster's opinion because of the latter's position as public prosecutor and because of his long residence in the West Indies.⁴⁶

Two months later, on 11 March 1799, the Law Officers of the Crown rendered the first of three official opinions all of which proved to be essentially the same. The first opinion was the result of queries put to the Crown's Attorney and Solicitors General by the Duke of Portland on 12 November 1798. At this time Portland requested their advice on the following crucial questions: 1. does military service in the British Army free those blacks serving in West India Regiments from colonial slave laws; and 2. if West India soldiers, despite their military service, are still subject to colonial police regulations, can they be enfranchised by an Act of the king or would it be more advisable to free them by an Act of Parliament.⁴⁷

Whatever hopes Portland and others had of using the

⁴⁴W.O. 1/88, Gloster to Bentinck, 10 January 1799, enclosed in Attorney General (Gloster) to Dundas, 25 January 1799.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶W.O. 1/87, Bowyer to Dundas, 31 January 1799.

⁴⁷C.O. 153/31, Portland to Attorney and Solicitors General, 12 November 1798, pp. 266-267.

leverage of a favourable reply from the Crown's chief legal advisors to refute colonial legal arguments against the West India Regiments were dashed by the opinion of 11 March. Regarding Portland's first question, the Law Officers were unequivocal: being in British military service did not release black soldiers from the operations of the slave laws so far as these laws effect them personally.⁴⁸ As to the second question, West India soldiers could be released from the jurisdiction of colonial slave laws only by manumission agreeable to those various laws of the islands which regulated this practice. Portland was also warned that manumission would not relieve West India soldiers of all legal disabilities since they would still be subject to restrictive colonial laws regulating the activities of free blacks.⁴⁹ Portland was further cautioned regarding his suggestion to enfranchise black soldiers by an Act of Parliament. He was reminded by the Law Officers that such a recourse was not in keeping with Parliament's policy affecting the internal government of the colonies.⁵⁰

Twice in 1801 similar questions were put to the Attorney

⁴⁸W.O. 1/88, Attorney and Solicitors General's Report to Portland, 11 March 1799, enclosed in King to Huskisson, 11 March 1799.

⁴⁹Ibid. Around this time in the Leeward Islands, and most certainly elsewhere in the British West Indies, free blacks were excluded from voting. See Goveia, Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands at the End of the Eighteenth Century, p. 97. Free blacks as well as free coloureds, who were liable to serve in the colonial militias, usually were not permitted to carry arms. Instead they were employed as pioneers or relegated to the "under-services" of the artillery and garrisons.

⁵⁰Ibid.

and Solicitors General for their deliberation. Exactly two years from the date the first opinion was despatched, the Law Officers were forwarding their second opinion to the Duke of Portland. It was merely a duplicate of the first.⁵¹ Gloster's opinion was even acknowledged by these jurists as having considerable influence on the formation of their own.⁵²

On 14 December the Law Officers were for the third time responding to almost identical questions. This time the questions were being asked by Lord Hobart, the new Secretary of War, who had responsibility for the colonies in the Addington administration which was formed in February 1801. The reply was essentially the same as the other two and equally unequivocating.

We are therefore of opinion that they [West India soldiers] do not in consequence of their being employed by His Majesty in military service become soldiers within the Mutiny Act; and we think they remain to all intents and purposes slaves, and that their condition as slaves is in no respect altered in consequence of their being engaged in military service, but they remain precisely subject to the same laws as they would have been subject to had they been the property of His Majesty and employed in agriculture or public works or in any other species of civil service It seems to us that they cannot cease to be subject to such colonial slave laws as immediately respect the police and internal government of the colony, and must be subject to every species of personal incapacity which attaches upon the slaves of any other proprietor.⁵³

Implicit in the query asked repeatedly by Portland and Hobart of whether or not being employed in British military service released black soldiers from the jurisdiction of colonial

⁵¹C.O. 324/65, Scot and Mitford to Portland, 11 March 1801.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid., Law and Percival to Hobart, 14 December 1801.

slave laws was the basic question: were West India soldiers serving under the Mutiny Act? The reason for seeking legal counsel on this question was that Portland and others wished to know if the words contained in the Mutiny Act, "in pay as a soldier", applied to black soldiers since according to military law the acceptance of pay for soldiering placed the recipient of this money under the jurisdiction of military law.⁵⁴ According to British military law, if a man chooses to serve and to take pay as a soldier, he must then be considered as having accepted the conditions under which he was paid and treated as a soldier and therefore is subject to military law. The Chief Justice's opinion in the case of *Grant v. Gould*, which was adjudicated before the Court of Common Pleas in 1792, upheld this law when it was ruled that receiving pay as a soldier "fixed the military character" on Grant and was sufficient to give jurisdiction to a court martial.⁵⁵

The status of soldier was also fixed if after four days from receiving the enlistment money, the enlistee had not dissented before either a civil magistrate or a military judge advocate and had not returned the enlistment money minus the subsistence charge.⁵⁶ Blacks enlisting into the West India Regiments were given the usual bounty or enlistment money.

The change in status of a man who became a soldier was

⁵⁴Manual of Military Law, p. 190.

⁵⁵This case is briefly discussed in W.O. 1/632, Trigge to Brownrigg, 21 September 1801, enclosure No. 3.

⁵⁶Scott, p. 185.

emphasized by a contemporary authority of British military law. According to Scott, a man who enlists into the British Army relinquishes his present situation or status as a civilian and with it the jurisdictional supremacy of civil courts, and assumes that of a soldier who is then subject essentially to military courts. 57

In arriving at their opinion of 14 December 1801, the Law Officers categorically disclaimed the argument that West India soldiers were serving in the British Army under the conditions established in the Mutiny Act. Their argument was brief and they employed as its rationale the British West Indian legal view of the slave. This view considered the slave as a non persona, i.e. a special kind of property only, part chattel and part real property, who was incapable of making decisions and acting on his own initiative. 58

. . . It appears to us that the Mutiny Act relates to persons capable of being enlisted and becoming soldiers by their voluntary consent, which capacity certainly does not belong to the negro slaves of which these regiments are stated to be composed. We are aware indeed that words 'in pay as a soldier' which are used in the Mutiny Act were in the case of *Grant v. Sir Charles Gould* before the Court of Common Pleas held to fix the military character on the person who had received such pay - but then it was in the case of a person who was in a capacity to have elected originally whether he would have received it or not; and we do not think that the words can be understood to mean the receipt of pay by a slave who has no other source of maintenance, has no legal means of resisting the commands of his master, has no capacity of electing whether he will receive it or not, and has no free agency with respect to this or any other condition in which his master may think proper to place or employ him. 59

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 183.

⁵⁸See Goveia, "The West Indian Slave Laws", p. 21.

⁵⁹C.O. 324/65, Law and Percival to Hobart, 14 December 1801.

The major reason for the Law Officers' position as expressed in their opinions was the established political principle in London that there should be no interference by Parliament in the internal affairs of the colonies. Although efforts were underway at that moment that would soon lead to an assertive role for the British Government in colonial government, most ministers and members of Commons were reluctant to recommend any parliamentary action with respect to the colonies.⁶⁰ In each of their three opinions, the Crown's Law Officers reminded the British Government that enfranchising West India soldiers by an Act of the British Parliament would be an "interference" with the legislatures of the colonies. The advisability of the British Government's passing such an Act was not even considered a question of law by the Law Officers. It was, they concluded, a question involving political expediency on which they felt themselves incompetent and therefore not obliged to offer an opinion.⁶¹

The legal opinions of 1799 and 1801 did not result in the anticipated immediate colonial legal assault on the West India Regiments. Instead there was a noticeable waning of colonial efforts to rid the British Caribbean of black regiments. A number of reasons explain this unexpected colonial posture. For one, colonial hostility towards the West India Regiments appears to have been palliated by the three favourable and unequivocal opinions of the Crown's Law Officers. Armed with the strength

⁶⁰See Manning, pp. 67-68.

⁶¹C.O. 324/65, Law and Percival to Hobart, 14 December 1801.

of these opinions, the colonists appeared momentarily disarmed by their own success and, as a result, were in no apparent haste, to confront the army with the ramifications of this legal victory.

Secondly, in addition to the opinions of the Law Officers, the British Government was offering a number of concessions to the colonists regarding the deployment of the West India Regiments. The purpose of these concessions was to placate the hostile colonists into accepting, however grudgingly, the permanent presence of black regiments in the British West Indies. These concessions included the periodic relocation of black regiments; the isolation or confinement of these corps, whenever possible, in those garrisons removed from populous centres, (such as the incarceration of the 2nd West India Regiment at Fort Augusta, Jamaica)⁶² and, as mentioned before, the policy of limiting the number of West India soldiers in each garrison to one third of the total force. The policy of concessions, bolstered by the outstanding service record of most of the West India Regiments, appears to have achieved its intended goal, at least for the moment.

Lastly, a defection from the ranks of the colonists over the issue of legal status of black soldiers apparently assisted in weakening colonial resolve at this time in its battle with the British Government. In September 1801 Attorney General Burke of Antigua claimed that the black soldier was legally a soldier within the Mutiny Act and as such was subject to military law.

⁶² C.O. 137/108, Nugent to Hobart, "Private", 28 June 1802.

Although he recognized the distinction between a British soldier and a slave as it pertained to the voluntary act of enlistment, Burke argued that when a slave purchased by the king is afterwards employed and paid as a soldier, this action ought to be considered as an "implied or virtual manumission". ⁶³

Despite the opinions of 1799 and 1801 there were still some uncertainties as to the legal status of the black soldier. The confusion may have stemmed from the fact that officers in West India Regiments continued to indoctrinate their troops in the belief that their position vis-a-vis the ordinary field slaves was far superior. In a debate on the slave trade abolition bill in the House of Lords on 6 February 1807, Lord Hardwicke wished to know if West India soldiers were freemen or slaves. ⁶⁴ Lord Grenville, then Prime Minister and former Foreign Secretary from 1791-1801, replied that he had always considered them to be freemen. ⁶⁵ No such uncertainty plagued British officers in the West Indies. In October 1806 Bowyer wrote to William Windham, the Secretary for War and Colonies, of his sorrow that even the king and his government considered West India soldiers to be slaves. ⁶⁶

The army remained undaunted by the setbacks of 1799 and

⁶³W.O. 1/632, Trigge to Brownrigg, 21 September 1801, enclosure No. 3.

⁶⁴T. C. Hansard, The Parliamentary Debates, First Series, vol. VIII, Debate in the House of Lords on the Slave Trade Abolition Bill, 6 February 1807. Lord Hardwicke's speech, p. 678.

⁶⁵Ibid. Speech of Lord Grenville, p. 678.

⁶⁶C.O. 318/30, Bowyer to Windham, No. 18, 31 October 1806.

1801. Black soldiers were still considered on an equal footing with European troops. ⁶⁷ The British Government was reminded repeatedly by its commanders in the West Indies of the need for providing some kind of legal protection for discharged West India soldiers. ⁶⁸ London was also informed that the testimonies of West India soldiers were taken upon oath at courts-martial and that black serjeants were given the command of posts of considerable importance. ⁶⁹ "Ought such people", Bowyer queried his superiors in London, "to be deemed and treated as slaves?" ⁷⁰

Notwithstanding the legal opinions of 1799 and 1801 and

⁶⁷C.O. 318/31, Bowyer to Windham, No. 25, 10 January 1807.

⁶⁸W.O. 1/96, Beckwith to Gordon, No. 46, 10 December 1805 and enclosure. C.O. 318/30, Bowyer to Windham, No. 18, 31 October 1806.

⁶⁹C.O. 318/31, Bowyer to Windham, No. 25, 10 January 1807. In mentioning the fact that the testimony of West India soldiers was being admitted as evidence in courts-martial, Bowyer was drawing attention to the legal battle between the colonies and the army over the question of the admissibility of the testimony of slaves in military courts. According to colonial law, the evidence of slaves normally could be presented only in slave courts. Having been declared slaves under the operation of colonial police regulations this would also apply to West India soldiers (until the Mutiny Act of 1807). The question over the admissibility of the testimony of slaves in military courts apparently arose first in Surinam in 1801 after its conquest by Britain. The question was finally resolved in 1809 when the Law Officers of the Crown ruled that the evidence of slaves at military proceedings was admissible. See W.O. 81/27, Morgan to Trigge, "Private", 5 February 1801 W.O. 72/30, Carmichael to Judge Advocate General, 30 April 1809, Ibid., Opinions of the Attorney and Solicitors General, 26 June 1809. W.O. 81/40, Ryder to Gordon, 17 June 1809 and Ryder to Carmichael, 15 July 1809. See also W.O. 81/44, Sutton to Beckwith, 4 May 1811.

⁷⁰C.O. 318/31, Bowyer to Windham, No. 25, 10 January 1807.

the British Government's policy of concessions to the colonies, the legal status of West India soldiers once again became the cause of conflict. There was renewed colonial hostility towards the black regiments as the army in the Caribbean continued its unendorsed practice of declaring discharged black soldiers free.⁷¹ (The fact that the British Government chose not to disallow this practice was a clear indication that there was some ministerial support for this action). As before, the army found this atmosphere of conflict incompatible with its responsibility of protecting British possessions in the West Indies. In December 1805 the commander of British forces was complaining to Viscount Castlereagh, the Secretary for War and Colonies from 1805 to 1806, that the question regarding the legal status of black soldiers had been "some time in agitation, but never perfected",⁷² He recommended that these troops be protected by the introduction of a clause in the annual Mutiny Act.⁷³ Three months later, in despatches to Castlereagh and the Duke of York, Beckwith requested authority to enfranchise all West India soldiers and predicted trouble if his recommendation were not heeded.⁷⁴

The discomfort experienced by the British Government over

⁷¹W.O. 1/96, Beckwith to Gordon, No. 46, 10 December 1805 and enclosure.

⁷²C.O. 318/28, Beckwith to Castlereagh, No. 23, 10 December 1805.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴C.O. 318/29, Beckwith to Castlereagh, No. 41, 2 March 1806. W.O. 1/632, Beckwith to Gordon, 27 March 1806, enclosed in Gordon to Shee, 8 May 1806.

the legal opinions of its Law Officers on one side, and its tacit support of the army's policy of enfranchising unfit West India soldiers on the other, was aggravated by the revival of the abolition movement in 1804. The latter revealed the duplicity of the British Government, or at least of certain ministers, regarding the slave trade. In September 1804 a troubled Wilberforce was writing to Pitt of the knowledge he had recently received from Earl Camden, Secretary for War and Colonies from 1804 to 1805, which pertained to a plan by the British Government to purchase slaves as recruits for the West India Regiments. ⁷⁵

The fact that Wilberforce heard of this method of raising the West India Regiments only at this time is rather remarkable since the policy of purchasing slaves as recruits was already several years old. Wilberforce's ignorance concerning this policy is even more extraordinary since, as Pitt's close friend, he was privy to official documents. ⁷⁶ There was also the fact that the raising of the West India Regiments in 1795 unleashed a virtually unending storm of protest from the colonies as well as from merchants and resident absentee planters in Britain. In addition there were the well publicized events surrounding the mutiny of the 8th West India Regiment in 1802.

However, Wilberforce avoided embarrassing Pitt, whose support he still needed in the renewed battle to end the slave

⁷⁵ Wilberforce to Pitt, 14 September 1804, quoted in Robert and Samuel Wilberforce, eds., The Correspondence of William Wilberforce, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1841), 1: 239-240.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

trade. He skirted the inconsistencies of Pitt and others who publicly supported abolition yet were content to use the same trade to recruit the West India Regiments. Instead, in this letter to Pitt, an apologetic Wilberforce confronted Pitt with the evil ramifications of this "vicious principle" on the slave trade.

That their situation as soldiers would be beyond comparison preferable to that of plantation slaves cannot be doubted; but how can we justify buying slaves for that desirable and even humane purpose, when we reflect that the increased demand will produce a proportionately increased supply, and consequently as many more marauding expeditions, acts of individual rapine, injustice, and condemnations, etc. as are necessary for obtaining the requisite number of negroes.⁷⁷

Although Wilberforce's censure of Pitt's attitude was not made public, the Government, and especially Pitt, had yet to endure public humiliation for having placed expediency before principle. During the debate in the House of Commons on 28 February 1805 on the bill for the abolition of the slave trade, General Isaac Gascoyne, an opponent of abolition who, ironically, became the colonel of the 7th West India Regiment later that year,⁷⁸ disclosed the information that the Government itself had contracted to purchase five thousand slaves for military service. Although he recognized the importance of having black regiments for service in the Caribbean, it appeared to Gascoyne from this action that it was permissible to purchase slaves for

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸His date of rank in the 7th was 10 October 1805. Army List 1806. Gascoyne represented Liverpool.

military employment but not for civil use.⁷⁹ Another speaker found this action of Pitt irreconcilable with the latter's support of the abolition movement.⁸⁰

Pitt's answer to these charges on this occasion was brief, somewhat weak and misleading. He had heard of no such contract which his Government had made for purchasing slaves; nor could he believe that such a contract existed.⁸¹ He confessed that a contract of this type had been recommended to the British Government from an individual in the West Indies, but it had been rejected immediately. Furthermore, he continued, his Government had never conceived the idea of buying slaves for its use. Instead, the plan was to purchase the "redemption" of these slaves from a state of slavery.⁸² To Pitt, this was totally different from becoming purchasers of slaves.⁸³ Wilberforce, who was present during this debate, spoke on the question of abolition but made no comment regarding the Government's alleged efforts to purchase slaves.⁸⁴

Pitt was careful not to mention the fact that his Government (and Addington's) had been buying slaves as recruits since 1795. Nor is there any evidence that the British Government

⁷⁹ Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, First Series, vol. III, Debate in Commons on the Slave Trade Abolition Bill, 28 February 1805. General Gascoyne's speeches, pp. 643, 668, and Earl Temple's speech, pp. 673-674.

⁸⁰ Ibid. John Fuller's speech, p. 656.

⁸¹ Ibid. Pitt's speech, p. 668.

⁸² Ibid. ⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. Wilberforce's speech, pp. 668-673.

ever considered anything else than the purchasing of slaves who were to be employed as soldiers. Pitt's retort that the British Government had been purchasing only the redemption of slaves fooled no one. This argument, born of Pitt's still fertile mind, was nothing more than an attempt by an embarrassed man to avoid a compromising situation.

Pitt may have been correct when he claimed that his Government had never contracted to purchase five thousand slaves from a single contractor. It is impossible to test his veracity on this count since some of the purchasing contracts are no longer in existence. But here again Pitt had skillfully moved the argument away from the central point, which was the duplicity of the British Government (or at least of certain ministers) regarding the slave trade, by quibbling about numbers and the purpose of purchasing slaves.

If Pitt, however, could not believe that a contract to deliver five thousand slaves to the army existed, he could not evince similar amazement regarding contracts for smaller numbers.

On the very day Pitt was forming his last administration, nearly nine months before the Commons debate of 28 February 1805, proposals were being prepared for the British Government's authorization for purchase of as many as two thousand slaves from a single contractor.⁸⁵ Pitt was also careful not to mention that between March 1798 and January 1805 the Windward and Leeward Islands Command alone had purchased already well over four

⁸⁵C.O. 318/25, Myers to Hobart, No. 4, 7 May 1804 and enclosures.

thousand slaves at a cost in excess of £280,000 sterling for those West India Regiments serving within its theatre of operations. ⁸⁶

1806 and 1807 were the years of the underdogs. Motivated by Foxite principles, the Government made important efforts on behalf of blacks and Roman Catholics. These efforts proved far more successful for the former. Although certain of victory by June 1806, the abolitionists finally achieved their goal the following year on 25 March 1807 when the Act forbidding British subjects to trade in slaves received the king's assent. There had been a frenzied haste to purchase as many slaves as possible even before abolition appeared certain. The British Government was no exception. ⁸⁷ The greatest number of slaves purchased by the Windward and Leeward Islands Command was in 1805 and 1806. ⁸⁸ However, the revival of the Abolition Movement in 1804 actually spurred some to consider alternatives to the trade in African slaves. ⁸⁹

Recruiting for the West India Regiments did not have to

⁸⁶ See Table 4.

⁸⁷ W.O. 40/22, bundle No. 1805 A, Gordon to Moore, 3 May 1805 and enclosure. W.O. 1/839, Morrison to Shee, 30 May 1806. W.O. 1/632, Gordon to Shee, 10 June 1806. W.O. 1/634, Gordon Memorandum of 8 April 1807, pp. 317-320 and enclosure. W.O. 1/635, Gordon to Stewart, 6 July 1807. W.O. 1/95, "Remarks . . .", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

⁸⁸ See Table 4.

⁸⁹ See the plan to raise volunteer sepoy corps for service in the West Indies and the introduction of Chinese settlers in W.O. 1/902, Extract of the Sullivan Memorandum (written around December 1804), pp. 153-170.

TABLE 4

SLAVES PURCHASED FROM MARCH 1798 TO FEBRUARY 1807
BY THE WINDWARD AND LEEWARD ISLANDS COMMAND
(IN POUNDS STERLING) ^a

Year	Month	Number of slaves	Average price per slave	Total cost
1798	March	37	56	2,072
	April	98	58	5,686
	June	133	58	7,773
	July	621	66	40,744
	August	82	62	5,084
	December	82	62	5,084
	Year	1,053	63	66,443
1799	January	114	62	7,008
	July	532	53	28,356
	October	144	75	10,816
	December	20	77	1,540
	Year	810	58	47,720
1800	January	3	52	155
	February	255	72	18,324
	April	210	76	16,050
	June	140	75	10,503
	August	1	52	52
	October	107	78	8,295
	December	47	78	3,670
	Year	763	74	57,049
1801	February	127	78	9,947
	June	144	78	11,196
	August	60	80	4,706
	September	21	80	1,680
	November	30	76	2,280
	December	25	75	1,880
	Year	407	77	31,689

TABLE 4-Continued

Year	Month	Number of slaves	Average price per slave	Total cost
1802	January	1	75	75
	February	3	63	189
	May	2	52	104
	July	13	52	674
	Year	19	54	1,042
1803	-	-	-	-
1804	May	71	70	4,970
	July	74	70	5,180
	August	74	70	5,180
	October	206	78	16,070
	November	185	70	12,805
	December	304	68	20,724
	Year	914	71	64,929
1805	January	213	70	14,929
	April	263	75	19,742
	May	42	75	3,150
	June	262	75	19,650
	July	121	75	9,075
	October	206	75	15,450
	November	36	75	2,700
	December	95	75	7,125
	Year	1,238	75	91,821
1806	January	135	75	10,125
	February	5	75	375
	March	455	75	34,125
	May	130	75	9,745
	August	38	75	2,850
	September	59	75	4,425
	October	415	75	31,025
	November	190	74	14,042
	December	127	73	9,175
	Year	1,554	75	115,887

TABLE 4-Continued

Year	Month	Number of slaves	Average price per slave	Total cost
1807	February	100	75	7,500
	Year	100	75	7,500
Total Period		6,858	71	484,080

SOURCE: C.O. 318/31, Bowyer to Windham, No. 31, 18 April 1807 and enclosures: See also C.O. 318/30, Morrison to Shee, 10 September 1806; and Bowyer to Windham, No. 18, 31 October and No. 21, 21 November 1806 and enclosure. See Table 5 for the distribution of these slaves. This tabulation does not include those purchases of the Windward and Leeward Islands Command transacted prior to March 1798 and those between February 1807 and when the Act abolishing the slave trade became effective. Nor does it include those of the Jamaica Command which recruited separately. Purchasing records for the Jamaica Command are largely incomplete. This Command normally included the garrisons at Jamaica, Bermuda, the Bahamas and the territory of Honduras. See C.O. 137/123, Castlereagh to Villettes, 17 February 1808. A conservative estimation of the total number of slaves purchased as recruits by both Commands for service in the West India Regiments for the period 1795-1807 is ten thousand at an estimated cost of £707,122. A very approximate estimation of the number of slaves purchased by the Jamaica Command for the same period can be found in the following: W.O. 25/644, 656-658; W.O. 40/20, in bundle marked "1804", returns enclosed in Nugent to Secretary at War, 29 August 1804; returns in W.O. 17/251; and W.O. 1/630, enclosures in Gordon to Cooke, 25 April 1805.

TABLE 5

DISTRIBUTION OF SLAVES PURCHASED FROM MARCH 1798 TO FEBRUARY
1807 BY THE WINDWARD AND LEEWARD ISLANDS COMMAND

Regiment	1798	1799	1800	1801	1802	1803	1804	1805	1806	1807	1798-1807
1st West India Regiment	233	78	94	65	3	-	184	89	250	47	1,043
2nd West India Regiment ^a	135	52	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	188
3rd West India Regiment	-	14	210	137	-	-	24	132	454	53	1,024
4th West India Regiment	110	-	86	23	2	-	115	494	73	-	903
5th West India Regiment ^b	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6th West India Regiment ^c	-	-	-	-	-	-	512	131	160	-	803
7th West India Regiment ^d	-	20	209	55	-	-	79	295	102	-	760
8th West India Regiment ^d	522	-	87	74	-	-	-	97	515	-	1,295
9th West India Regiment ^d	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1

TABLE 5-Continued

Regiment	1798	1799	1800	1801	1802	1803	1804	1805	1806	1807	1798-1807
10th West India Regiment ^d	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	3
11th West India Regiment ^d	-	-	-	23	-	-	-	-	-	-	23
12th West India Regiment ^d	-	-	73	30	11	-	-	-	-	-	114
Royal Rangers	53	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	59
"H.M.S."	-	108	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	108
87th Foot	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Not mentioned	-	532	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	532
Total	1,053	810	763	407	19	-	914	1,238	1,554	100	6,858

SOURCE: C.O. 318/31, Bowyer to Windham, No. 31, 18 April 1807 and enclosures.

^aThe Windward and Leeward Islands Command ceased purchasing for the 2nd West India Regiment when it was ordered to Jamaica in 1800.

^bThe 5th West India Regiment only served in the Jamaica Command.

^cThe 6th West India Regiment was recruited by the Jamaica Command until 1804.

^dFor changes affecting the establishment of these corps see Chapter IV and Chapter V.

suffer as a consequence of the abolition of the trade. Once again the British Government had been preparing for just such a contingency. By an Order of the King in Council of 16 March 1808 all fit Africans taken from slavers were to be turned over to military and naval authorities for enlistment into Britain's land and sea services. ⁹⁰

Borne on the enthusiasm of reform then affecting the supporters of Lord Grenville's Government, but nearly obscured by the success of the abolition movement, was yet another victory for the African. As had been promised by Grenville on 6 February and by the Secretary at War, the Right Honourable Richard Fitzpatrick, on 9 March, ⁹¹ the Mutiny Act of 1807 contained a clause which declared all blacks in the king's service free to all intents and purposes. In the Tobago Gazette of 11 December 1807, the following notice appeared:

BY ORDER OF THE COMMANDER OF THE FORCES EXTRACT from the Mutiny Act 47 Geo. 3d. cap 32-102 AND be it further enacted that from and after passing of the ACT, all Negroes purchased by or on account of His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, and Serving in any of His Majesty's Forces, shall be, and be deemed and taken to be free, to all Intents and for all purposes whatever, in like manner in every respect as if such Negro had been born Free in any part of His Majesty's Dominions, and that such Negroes shall also to all Intents and Purposes whatever be considered as Soldiers, having voluntarily enlisted in His Majesty's service.

THOMAS WHITE
Acting Assistant Commissary ⁹²

⁹⁰This subject is discussed in Chapter VIII.

⁹¹Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, First Series, vol. VIII, Debate in the House of Lords on the Slave Trade Abolition Bill, 6 February 1807. Lord Grenville's speech, p. 678. Ibid., vol. IX, Debate in Commons on Mutiny Bill, 9 March 1807. Secretary at War's speech, p. 63.

⁹²Tobago Gazette, No. 14, Friday, 11 December 1807.

African slaves, who by chance were chosen to take the king's shilling instead of the yoke of the field slave, were now freemen.

What was the significance of enfanchising blacks in Britain's military services by an Act of the British Parliament? Considered together with the Slave Trade Abolition Act, with the establishment of the West India Regiments and with the origins of the Colonial Office in 1801, these developments were clear indications that the initiative in colonial government was moving away from the colonial governments themselves to that in Britain. The principle of non-legislative interference in the internal affairs of the colonies, which had become fixed as a consequence of the American Revolution, and which provided much of the basis of the legal opinions of 1799 and 1801, was being abandoned.

However, in reversing this policy, the British Government actually was reverting to principles established in law before the shock of the American Revolution. In the eighteenth century Members of Parliament were certain of their abstract right to legislate for the colonies. Also the sovereignty of power vested in the king and Parliament was assumed in Britain to extend naturally to the colonies. This view of the British Parliament's legislative supremacy was made explicit by the Declaratory Act.⁹³ This Act declared that the colonies were "subordinate unto, and dependent upon, the Imperial Crown and

⁹³6 George III C 12.

Parliament of Great Britain'". It also claimed that the king and Parliament had "'full Power and Authority to make Laws and Statutes of sufficient Force and Validity to bind the Colonies and People of America, Subjects of the Crown of Great Britain, in all Cases whatsoever'".⁹⁴ Furthermore, William Blackstone,⁹⁵ the eminent jurist, had asserted that of necessity there must exist in every state "'a supreme, irresistible, absolute, uncontrolled authority in which the jura summa imperii, or rights of sovereignty, reside'".⁹⁶

It should also be pointed out that even during the period beginning with the events of the American War, when the practice of non-legislative interference in colonial affairs accorded with current opinion in Parliament, members of Parliament agreed that the British Parliament could legislate for the colonies in cases of emergency. In the case of the Mutiny Act of 1807 it was assumed, based, no doubt, on Blackstone's assertion, that Parliament was exercising its transcendent powers.

⁹⁴Quoted in Murray, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁵1723-1780.

⁹⁶Quoted in Murray, p. 4.

CHAPTER VII

AN INTERIOR VIEW

Until now little was known about the crucial early history of the West India Regiments. This was because the only two accounts of these corps, those of Ellis and Caulfield, were traditionally written regimental histories in which campaigns were emphasized.¹ There is, however, much more to a regiment than a simple register of its victories and defeats in the field. In peace and even during war a regiment is absorbed in the daily problems of discipline and interior administration. A view of this wider aspect of regimental life is provided best by an examination of those records dealing with what is called the interior economy and management of a regiment. The two chief sources providing this information, neither of which was apparently used by Ellis and Caulfield, are the Succession and Description Books and, particularly, the invaluable semi-annual Inspection and Confidential Reports.

¹G. M. Orr's "The Origin of the West India Regiments", Journal of the Royal United Service Institution February (1927): 129-136, and G. Tylden's, "The West India Regiments, 1795 to 1927, and from 1958", Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 40(1962): 42-49 are of little value. Present day writers, British as well as West Indian, are even mistaken as to when these corps were raised. Watson (The Reign of George III, 1760-1815) lists them as being raised in 1797. See p. 377. C. L. Joseph had the West India Regiments serving in the war against France in 1793. See his "The British West Indies Regiment 1914-1918", The Journal of Caribbean History 2(May 1971): 94.

The Inspection and Confidential Reports show for the most part that the West India Regiments were reliable and efficient corps which were composed of blacks noted for their bravery and very soldier-like appearance.² This was the consequence of a policy to recruit, whenever possible, only those blacks who were of a certain height and who were members of the more warlike African nations. An examination of these reports also indicates the key problems associated with the internal economy of the West India Regiments. These, as well as other aspects of this establishment, notably those which illustrate the impact of these corps on the surrounding slave society, are set out and discussed below.

A Officer Absenteeism

As mentioned previously the problem of officers absent from their corps without official leave was serious in the British Army. This problem was chronic during the eighteenth century. It was particularly serious in West Indian garrisons because of the reluctance of Europeans to serve in unhealthy climates.³ In January 1795, William Windham, Secretary at War, assured the British commander in the Caribbean that a "great"

²See, for instance, W.O. 27/88, "Inspecting Officer's Report, 6th West India Regiment, Fort New Amsterdam, 17 August 1804." and "Inspecting Officer's Report, Detachment of the 3rd West India Regiment . . . 10 July 1804." W.O. 27/90, part 2, "Inspecting Officer's Report. Detachment 4th W.I. Regiment. On the 5 August and 6th September 1806 . . . in the Colonies of Demerary and Berbice respectively"

³See, for instance, W.O. 1/52, Campbell to Townshead, 20 July 1782.

number of officers absent from their regiments on station in the Caribbean were enroute to join their units.⁴ The remainder, he further asserted, had been given the strictest instructions to proceed to their regiments immediately.⁵ However, almost six months later Vaughan was still complaining of the insufficient number of officers serving with their regiments in the West Indies.⁶

At this time Windham promised to concert his efforts with those of the Duke of York to ensure the attendance of those absent officers.⁷ The consequence of this joint endeavor was that some important reforms were initiated by the Duke of York as a part of the total overhauling of the British Army. Much use was made of dismissing or superseding those officers guilty of absence from their regiments without official permission.⁸ Beginning during the summer of 1795 regimental agents, who were the link with absentee officers since they transacted all regimental business of a pecuniary nature, were ordered repeatedly to direct these officers to rejoin their regiments at once. Information and evidence on absent officers were provided by the periodic returns and commanding officers were reminded of the regulations about sending in these returns. The Duke of York demanded a special fortnightly return which was to be forwarded from June to September. It was to show,

⁴W.O. 4/337, Windham to Vaughan, 16 January 1795.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., 4 July 1795.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Glover, p. 167.

among other things, the number of officers present with each unit. Furthermore, towards the end of 1795 and early in 1796 regimental agents were directed to notify the colonels of those regiments they represented of the conditions under which officers could be absent from their corps and the date by which those without approved leave had to rejoin their regiments on the pain of being superseded. The Duke of York also personally reviewed and approved or rejected all applications for leaves of absence. ⁹

The grounds justifying an officer's absence were attendance in Parliament if he were a Member; recruiting; urgent private business which demanded the officer's immediate personal attendance; and ill health provided that the illness was duly certified by a qualified professional and that the Army Medical Board approved of the respectability of the certification. ¹⁰

According to Richard Glover's study of the reforms instituted in the British Army between 1795 and 1809, the Duke of York's efforts against recalcitrant absentee officers were "clearly successful". ¹¹ A parliamentary inquiry, for instance, disclosed that many of those officers absent and eventually dismissed from service were mere children. ¹² But the abuse con-

⁹These decisions were then forwarded to the Secretary at War who in turn informed the applicant's commanding officers. See W.O. 3/34, Windham to Whitelocke, 24 June 1801.

¹⁰Glover, pp. 167-169.

¹¹Ibid., p. 168.

¹²Ibid.

tinued among European regiments in the Caribbean,¹³ and particularly in the West India Regiments.

As it has been shown, officer absenteeism was, from the beginning, a problem in the West India Regiments.¹⁴ It eventually became the most serious problem affecting the establishment of these regiments.¹⁵ The problem was aggravated by the fact that many officers present with their regiments were frequently unfit for service because of illness. Many also died and others were absent from these corps for legitimate reasons. Of the nineteen officers listed as absent in the field return of the 1st West India Regiment at Barbados in October 1815 five were on approved leaves of absence.¹⁶ One of these was Captain Henry Hyde who, like a number of other officers, was on recruiting assignment. Hyde had been attached to the African Recruiting Establishment at Sierra Leone for three years from 1812 to

¹³W.O. 3/152, Windham to Lewis, 20 July 1803, and Crewe to Lewis, 20 August 1803. W.O. 27/90, part I, "General Half Yearly Inspection Report of the Army in the Windward and Leeward Islands etc. for the 24th December 1805. Head Quarters, Barbados. May 1806" and "General Half Yearly Inspection Report of the Army in the Windward and Leeward Islands . . . 24th December 1806. Head Quarters, Barbados, 1 May 1807." Glover came to his conclusion that the Duke of York's efforts were "successful" because he apparently never carried his study of this problem past 1800. An examination of the various periodic returns, particularly those for the army in the West Indies, show that the Duke's reforms had little effect on those determined not to join their regiments. And there were many.

¹⁴See the cases involving the 1st and 4th West India Regiments in 1795 in Chapter III.

¹⁵W.O. 1/95, "Remarks . . .", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

¹⁶W.O. 27/135, enclosed in Inspection Report of the 1st West India Regiment at Barbados, 30 October 1815.

1815. ¹⁷

Not a few officers were absent with permission on medical grounds, among these Lieutenant Hockaday of the 7th West India Regiment who was granted two months leave of absence by the Duke of York in order to recover his health.¹⁸ There were others in England on approved personal business; some were prisoners of war in France¹⁹ or were serving with British troops in Canada during the War of 1812;²⁰ and there were still others who, for a variety of personal reasons, could not join their regiments. Such was the case of Lieutenant Flanagan of the 8th West India Regiment who was in a civil jail in England for debt.²¹

Absenteeism remained a serious problem in the West India Regiments throughout the long war. The regimental history of the 1st shows that out of the forty-three officers gazetted to

¹⁷See W.O. 17/1164 for the monthly returns of the A. R. E. during this period. Recruiting in Africa for the West India Regiments is discussed in Chapter VIII.

¹⁸Calvert to Hockaday "Care of Mr. Campbell, the regimental agent", 6 January 1800, "Public Office Letters 1800", NRA [SCOT] 0473, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

¹⁹W. H. Stephen, "British Prisoners in France in 1813", Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 17(1938): 78-79. At least one officer was a "Prisoner of War in England on Parole". W.O. 27/92, part II, "Field Return of the 1st W. I. Regiment . . . St. Anns, Barbados, 6th day of May" 1808; and W.O. 27/101, part I, "Return of the First West India Regiment . . . Trinidad . . . 16th of November 1810".

²⁰L. Homfray Irving, Canadian Military Institute: Officers of the British Forces in Canada During the War of 1812-1815 (Welland Tribune Print, 1908), pp. 1, 3, 5, 8.

²¹W.O. 3/195, Crew to Commandant of the Army Depot, 4 August 1808.

the 1st in 1795 only twenty-two were present with the corps in 1797.²² The regimental agents frequently were being ordered by the Adjutant General's Office to direct absentee officers to report "immediately" to their units.²³ In April 1803 the officer commanding the 6th West India Regiment, which was then in garrison in the Bahamas, informed his colonel of the many vacant lieutenancies in the 6th.²⁴ During the summer of 1804 a number of officers in various West India Regiments were suspended.²⁵

The Inspection Reports indicate that the 4th West India Regiment suffered particularly from the inadequate numbers of officers present with the corps. In July 1804 while the Regiment was reported deficient in this respect one of the absentee officers was listed as being employed as a clerk in London.²⁶ An inspection of a detachment of the 4th in August 1806 at Post Brandwagt, Surinam, disclosed that since only three officers were present with this unit the colours could not be paraded

²²Ellis, p. 99. In May 1808, of the nineteen officers in the 1st listed as absent, all but three were absent without permission. W.O. 27/92, part II, "Field Return . . . 6th day of May" 1808.

²³See the case involving the 7th West India Regiment in Adjutant General's Office to Campbell, 1 February 1800 and enclosures, "Public Office Letters 1800", NRA [SCOT] 0473, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

²⁴W.O. 1/625, Stirke to Whitelocke, 27 April 1803, enclosed in Whitelocke to Clinton, 7 June 1803.

²⁵See, for instance, W.O. 3/152, Windham to Moore, 15 May 1804 and Crewe to Moore, 28 July 1804 and 10 August 1804.

²⁶W.O. 27/88, Maitland to Myers, 24 July 1804.

according to regulations.²⁷ And in October 1812 only three captains were reported present with the 4th, one of whom was described as not being "fit for anything in this country".²⁸

The seriousness of officer absenteeism in the West India Regiments prompted the British commander in the Caribbean to recommend that no pay be issued to any officer in England absent after 24 December 1808 except those on medical leave. Supersession was advised for those who did not join their regiments on or before the 24 March 1809. Nor should any allowance be made because of an officer's rank or influence.²⁹ In a despatch to the Duke of York, this same commander warned his chief that there were not sufficient numbers of officers present, especially field officers and captains, to carry on the king's service in the West India Regiments.³⁰

Absenteeism was even more of a problem among the junior officers. Table 6, which has been prepared from periodic returns,³¹ shows the attendance record among junior officers

²⁷W.O. 27/90, part I, "Brigadier General Hughes' Inspection Report of the Right Wing of the 4th West India Regiment, Post Brandwagt, Surinam, 26 August 1806."

²⁸W.O. 27/113, Ramsay to Beckwith, October 1812. On 10 July 1811 only twelve officers were reported fit and under arms with the Regiment. W.O. 27/101, Ramsay to Beckwith, "Confidential", 10 July 1811.

²⁹C.O. 318/34, Beckwith to Castlereagh, "Secret", 10 October 1808.

³⁰W.O. 1/96, Beckwith to York, "Secret", 12 October 1808.

³¹W.O. 17/251.

of a typical West India Regiment for an average year.³² Excluding vacancies, most of those absentee officers commissioned as captains, lieutenants and ensigns in the 5th West India Regiment were away from their regiments without permission. Also, throughout 1808, the total number of absentees, with and without approved leaves of absence and vacancies, constituted about two thirds of the regular complement of officers.

What were the causes of the high rate of absenteeism in West India Regiments? As mentioned before, commissions were frequently purchased in West India Regiments as an investment by individuals who had no intention of serving with these corps. Instead they hoped to exchange these commissions for others in regiments of their choice where no vacancies as yet existed.³³ Similarly, rapid promotion was yet another reason for absenteeism. A lieutenant would purchase a captaincy in a West India Regiment for a comparatively modest sum. Then as a captain in this corps, and without having left the comforts of London life, he would exchange on a second payment with a captain in a European regiment stationed in Europe who was in need of ready cash.³⁴ The Duke of Wellington himself had resorted to this practice which, according to Sir Charles Oman, was limited to wealthy officers. From 1787 to 1793 Wellington moved from ensign to lieutenant-

³²Officer attendance records for the 5th West India Regiment for 1808 was selected at random from among those regimental periodic returns which are complete or very nearly complete.

³³See Chapter III.

³⁴Charles Oman, p. 199.

TABLE 6

CAPTAINS, LIEUTENANTS AND ENSIGNS ATTENDANCE RECORD
1808, 5TH WEST INDIA REGIMENT ^a

Month	Rank	Establishment ^b	Total Present	Absent		
				Total	Without Leave	Vacancies
January	Captain	10	6	4	1	2
	Lieutenant	20	7	6	3	3
	Ensign	10	1	10	4	6
February	Captain	10	5	5	2	2
	Lieutenant	20	7	6	3	3
	Ensign	10	2	8	6	2
March	Captain	10	5	5	2	2
	Lieutenant	20	7	6	3	3
	Ensign	10	2	10	8	2
April	Captain	10	5	4	2	1
	Lieutenant	20	7	7	4	3
	Ensign	10	2	10	8	2
May	Captain	10	5	5	3	1
	Lieutenant	20	6	8	4	4
	Ensign	10	3	9	7	2
June	Captain	10	5	5	3	1
	Lieutenant	20	6	8	4	4
	Ensign	10	3	8	6	2
July	Captain	10	5	5	3	1
	Lieutenant	20	6	8	4	4
	Ensign	10	4	8	6	2
August	Captain	10	4	6	2	2
	Lieutenant	20	7	6	4	2
	Ensign	10	3	9	7	2
September	Captain	10	4	4	2	N.A.
	Lieutenant	20	7	4	4	N.A.
	Ensign	10	3	7	7	N.A.
October	Captain	10	5	5	3	1
	Lieutenant	20	5	8	4	3
	Ensign	10	3	8	8	-
November	Captain	10	5	5	3	1
	Lieutenant	20	5	8	4	3
	Ensign	10	2	9	8	1
December	Captain	10	4	5	3	1
	Lieutenant	20	5	9	5	3
	Ensign	10	2	7	6	1

^aW.O. 17/251^bW.O. 27/92, part II, "General Return of the . . . 1st West India Regiment of Foot . . . on the 6th Day of May 1808."

colonel in five steps and through seven regiments.³⁵

In addition to the system of exchanging commissions and the occasional outright desertion of officers,³⁶ there was a more fundamental reason for absenteeism. Service with West India Regiments at this time carried with it no prestige. For example, one officer with twenty-six years service informed Windham that he personally knew of many officers who loathed serving in the West India Regiments.³⁷ Hislop also mentions the disdain many officers held for service in Britain's black regiments.³⁸

It is difficult to determine accurately whether the climate and other personal hardships associated with serving in regiments permanently attached to West Indian garrisons were the only factors deterring both prospective and commissioned officers from joining the West India Regiments, or whether personal opposition to the measure of raising regiments of blacks was also involved. This uncertainty results from the fact that the officers in question apparently never set down in writing their reasons for not wishing to serve with these corps. However, Bowyer's initial opposition to the West India Regiments³⁹

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶For the case of Captain William Davis see W.O. 27/105, part I, Yates to Monro, 1 November 1811, enclosed in Field Return, 1st West India Regiment, Trinidad, 26 October 1811.

³⁷W.O. 1/1105, Stevenson to Windham, 5 June 1800.

³⁸W.O. 1/95, "Remarks . . .", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

³⁹Bowyer's attitude toward the West India Regiments is discussed in Chapters III and V.

suggests that there may have been other officers who were also opposed to the principle of raising black regiments.

Furthermore, Pinckard mentions the incident of two European soldiers in 1796 who, after being arrested for disorderly conduct, were shocked and incensed when they discovered that the detail assigned to guard them was composed of black soldiers of the South American Rangers. According to Pinckard, the indignation of the European soldiers stemmed from the fact that they were being guarded by men who until only recently were slaves and whom they might have abused or derided in that situation. ⁴⁰

The assessment of the West India Regiments by Charles James, an officer in the Royal Artillery and author of the widely used An Universal Military Dictionary, in English and French, is illuminating. Regarding these corps as "dangerous battalions", James recommended that they be disbanded and that the blacks be distributed among white regiments as pioneers. ⁴¹

The fact that a number of officers openly supported the slave system by their actions possibly might reflect a broader based antipathy in the officer corps towards service in corps originally recruited with slaves. Senior military and naval officers had been in the habit of purchasing slaves for their own personal use. ⁴² Other officers who had come into the

⁴⁰Pinckard, 3: 193-194.

⁴¹James, p. 636.

⁴²C.O. 318/34, Beckwith to Castleřeagh, No. 27, 31 October 1808, enclosure No. 1.

possession of slaves through marriage ⁴³ were in no great haste to detach themselves from these bondsmen. It should be added that although blacks in Britain's military service had been declared free in 1807, there were still slaves retained by the Crown until 1831. ⁴⁴

But there were also those officers who were outspoken critics of slavery. For instance, Lieutenant Leach of the 70th Foot was appalled at the sufferings endured by the slaves at Antigua and called for complete, though gradual, emancipation. ⁴⁵ Other officers at the garrison at Fort Zeelandia, Surinam, opposed the harsh treatment of the slaves at the hands of the Dutch and complained of the adverse effect of this punishment on the morale of the British rank and file who were often witnesses. ⁴⁶

Perhaps, like Pinckard, many prospective and commissioned absentee officers questioned the wisdom of arming slaves, and as a result refused to participate in the experiment. In December 1796 Pinckard, who was unalterably opposed to slavery, expressed the following misgivings about arming slaves:

⁴³C.O. 318/46, Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 135, 14 February 1812 and enclosure.

⁴⁴Great Britain, Parliament, Sessional Papers (Commons), 1831, vol. 19, No. 305, "Orders sent to the Colonies for emancipating the Slaves belonging to the Crown . . .", p. 303.

⁴⁵J. Leach, Rough Sketches of the Life of an Old Soldier (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1831), pp. 20-22.

⁴⁶W.O. 1/150, Cranstown to Archer, 23 January 1806 and Skinner to Archer, 27 February 1806.

It is a measure which unquestionably provides a strong defence for the present exigency - but it admits of a question whether it may not be employing a temporary convenience to establish what may be found a future evil. May it not teach the slaves a fact which will not readily be forgotten: may they not learn that they are not only the most numerous, but also, the strongest party: in short - may it not instruct them that they are men - and that a single step might ensure to them the rights of their common nature! Compared to slavery the restrictions of military discipline are as exquisite freedom; and the negro who has once tasted it cannot be expected to return quietly to the yoke, and again expose his back to the whip.

Should the slaves once feel sensible of their power, the effect of this assurance will not be retarded by an religious or moral consideration. ⁴⁷

First in 1801 and again in 1804, Hislop recommended to the army a number of proposals designed to ensure that the requisite number of officers be continually present with the West India Regiments. Hislop's inspiration was provided by the French custom of rewarding their officers who had served in the West Indies for eight continuous years with a promotion and the Croix de St. Louis. The latter was only attainable in Europe after twenty-one years service. ⁴⁸ Based on the principle of compensation, the proposal made by Hislop suggested that as a start the pay of officers serving in West India Regiments be increased by a third above that of officers commissioned in European regiments. He recommended that the practice of purchasing and exchanging commissions under the rank of field officer be prohibited. He further advised that the ranks of 1st and 2nd lieutenant be substituted for the ranks of lieutenant

⁴⁷Pinckard, 3: 194-195.

⁴⁸W.O. 1/95, "Remarks . . . ", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

and ensign. And lastly he proposed that after the completion of a number of years constant service with the West India Regiments, captains should be entitled to the brevet rank of major. ⁴⁹

None of Hislop's recommendations was put into operation although in 1812, in an effort to encourage Europeans to serve in West India Regiments, European Serjeant Majors received the additional allowance of one shilling per day above their ordinary pay. ⁵⁰ Absenteeism combined with mortality from disease, which as late as 1897 killed twelve officers in the West India Regiment in garrison at Jamaica, ⁵¹ continued to beset the West India Regiments with the problems of leadership and interior economy. By the end of the nineteenth century the apparent stigma associated with serving in these corps became even more manifest when cadets who passed lowest out of Sandhurst were posted to the West India Regiments. ⁵²

B Dispersion

A policy which had serious consequences on the efficiency of the West India Regiments was that of dividing these corps at one time or another into several detachments and dispersing

⁴⁹Ibid. This recommendation was again suggested by Bowyer in 1807. See C.O. 318/31, Bowyer to Windham, No. 28, 8 February 1807.

⁵⁰W.O. 4/308, circular to Colonels of West India Regiments, 23 January 1812.

⁵¹G. Tylden, 40(1962): 43.

⁵²Ibid., p. 44.

these units among the garrisons of different islands for extended periods of time. Officers and men of these detachments could expect to be separated from their regiment for several years since much of the war in the West Indies after the insurgent phase was characterized by the tedious and monotonous sameness of garrison duties. Only occasionally were these regiments reunited as a result of sporadic French offensive operations and British expeditionary activity.

Dispersal was the logical outgrowth of the attempt to provide local protection against raids to proprietors and of garrisoning a multiplicity of installations, forts and posts. It also resulted from the fact that as internal security forces, given the major responsibility of policing the slave populations in the various colonies, British regiments, including the West India Regiments, were reduced to a number of detachments and assigned to police posts in order to carry out this function.

This arrangement led to many difficulties among dispersed regiments. All of the detached units of a given regiment, except one, had to operate without the assistance of the regimental staff ⁵³ which remained with headquarters. Detachments experienced frequent changes of their commanding officers. There was also the inevitable relaxation of military deportment among those troops locked-up in remote posts with the result that arms and accoutrements were indifferently kept and discipline rapidly diminished. Barracks at some posts were non-existent. At others

⁵³The paymaster, adjutant, quartermaster, chaplain, and the surgeon and his assistant.

they were of a temporary construction and as a result were often in a ruinous state. A regiment reunited after several years of dispersment required a complete reorganization before efficiency and unity as a corps were regained. ⁵⁴

An examination of the periodic returns show that individual West India Regiments were always scattered among garrisons on two or more islands. The same, it appears, was seldom true for most European regiments. The "General Half Yearly Inspection Report of the Army in the Windward and Leeward Islands" for December 1805 provides a case in point. Of the fourteen European regiments serving under this command only two were dispersed to garrisons on more than one island: the 1/1st which had seven companies at Demerara and three at Tobago, and the York Light Infantry Volunteers, a special corps, which had four companies at Barbados and three each at St. Lucia and Dominica. ⁵⁵

However, of the six West India Regiments serving in the Windward and Leeward Islands at this time, the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th, 7th and 8th, ⁵⁶ four were dispersed as follows:

1st West India Regiment - 6 cos. / Dominica
 3 cos. / Trinidad
 1 co. / Tobago

3rd West India Regiment - 5 cos. / Dominica
 5 cos. / Antigua

⁵⁴For the particulars surrounding a detachment of the 6th West India Regiment, see W.O. 27/97, part I, Inspecting Officer's Report to Beckwith, 31 October 1809.

⁵⁵W.O. 27/90, part I.

⁵⁶The 2nd was then at Jamaica and the Bahamas and the 5th was at the Honduras Settlement.

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result.⁵⁹ Chief among those less serious crimes reported in the court-martial returns were selling regimental necessities, "disobedience to Orders", and theft. Offenders found guilty of minor infractions were usually sentenced to be flogged with hundreds of lashes. However in most instances sentences were remitted as in the case of Private Joseph Derby of the 1st West India Regiment. Tried and found guilty on 12 April 1809 of "tempting to conceal 3 Women out of a number he had in charge", private Derby had his original sentence of three hundred lashes commuted to seventy-five.⁶⁰ Sentences for more serious violations, such as desertion, were carried out with no remission. After floggings had taken place, many of which were awarded for such petty crimes as "denying having received two white Shirts", offenders were examined by the regimental surgeon or his assistant.⁶¹

Offenders guilty of minor infractions in West India Regiments were subject to other forms of punishment. During his eleven years as Lieutenant-Colonel of the 2nd, Major-General Hugh Carmichael⁶² found that an effective way of punishing

⁵⁹Ibid., Inspecting Officer's Report to Beckwith, 31 October 1809.

⁶⁰Ibid., "1st West India Regiment, Return of Regiment Courts Martial From 29 December 1808 to 3 October 1809."

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Carmichael was the military commander at Jamaica from which post he was transferred in 1809 to Demerara owing to a dispute with the Assembly which arose from a disturbance among some recruits of the 2nd in 1808. This incident is discussed in Chapter VIII.

incorrigible offenders, was to reduce them to a situation and position resembling that of a field slave. This was achieved by depriving the soldier of his arms and appointments and employing him on fatigue duties only.⁶³ At Jamaica, instead of corporal punishment, offenders were incarcerated in "black holes". An inspecting officer considered these structures so effective a deterrent that he regretted they were not constructed at other garrisons.⁶⁴

Desertion from isolated and remote detachments was a relatively easy matter. However this was rarely attempted from either detachments or large garrisons as the records indicate.⁶⁵ The reason for this excellent record is simple: there was no place to go. The ceaseless, strength-sapping labour and brutality of the plantation-slave system did not provide the would-be deserter with a viable alternative to a disciplined existence in a British regiment. Those who did desert usually chose to join maroon bands. This was the case of Private Hypolite of the 4th West India Regiment who, along with a group of runaways,

⁶³C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 10 September 1808.

⁶⁴W.O. 27/108, Hull to Morrison, 30 June 1812 (Inspection Report 5th West India Regiment, Jamaica, 30 June 1812).

⁶⁵See, for instance, W.O. 25/653 for the records of those slaves recruited from January 1796 to December 1798. Also W.O. 27/92, part II, "Field Return . . . 1st West India Regiment . . . St. Anns, Barbados . . . 6th day of May" 1808. Desertion records compiled in W.O. 25/2907 are of no value. The most complete records are to be found in the periodic returns. See especially W.O. 17/251.

surrendered at Dominica in March 1814.⁶⁶ Occasionally even white deserters were found among bands of captured or surrendered runaways.⁶⁷

The problem of maintaining discipline among detachments of West India soldiers was magnified by officer absenteeism. In the Inspection Reports there are repeated references to the inability to institute court-martial proceedings because of the insufficient number of officers present with detachments.⁶⁸

The lack of permanent barrack-type structures was another serious problem associated with the policy of dispersion. The smaller and more isolated the post the greater was the likelihood that this post was totally without barracks. These structures were essential in preserving the health as well as the discipline of the troops. There are numerous references in the Inspection Reports to detachments of West India soldiers being poorly housed. For instance, a detachment of the 7th West India Regiment stationed on the Chagauramas Peninsular, Trinidad, in July 1804 was reported to be "huttet" since the post was without barracks.⁶⁹ A unit of the 1st West India Regiment in July 1805 was also reported "Huttet" in "Slight cane Huts, and

⁶⁶Dominica Journal or Weekly Intelligencer, 19 March 1814. A copy of this newspaper is found in C.O. 71/49, "Miscellaneous Section".

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸W.O. 27/88, "Inspecting Officer's Report. Detachment . . . 1st West India Regiment. On the 22 of July 1804 . . . " W.O. 27/90, part I, "Inspecting Officer's Report. A Detachment . . . 6th West India Regiment. On the 11th day of January" 1806.

⁶⁹W.O. 27/88, Hislop to Myers, 20 July 1804.

much out of repair". ⁷⁰

The problem of inadequate accommodations for detachments of West India soldiers also had its roots in the dispute between the British Government and the colonial legislatures over how grants of money, which the colonies made towards the cost of defending the islands, were to be spent. In the case of Jamaica, the Assembly gave priority to preserving internal security against slave insurrections in which case they sought to disperse imperial troops throughout the island. Spending on fortifications, better provisions and improved and new accommodations, which were given a high priority status by the British Government, was to be restricted. The upkeep of the barracks, which came under the control of the local Board of Works, was used by Jamaicans throughout the long war as a pawn for securing their goal. ⁷¹

Permanent troop accommodations at the Honduras Settlement, whose protection and other forms of military assistance were provided largely by Jamaica, were non existent for most of the war despite the fact that in February 1798 the Superintendent of the Settlement had announced that barracks were to be constructed. ⁷²

⁷⁰W.O. 27/89, "Inspecting Officer's Report of a Detachment of the First West India Regiment. On the 17th of July 1805 . . . "

⁷¹Murray, pp. 39-41. All public works such as the barracks, public buildings in Spanish Town, Governor's residence and county jails came under the supervision of the Board of Works which was, according to Murray, part of the regular machinery of government. See p.26. Similar tension between imperial and colonial interests in the Leeward Islands are discussed in Goveia, pp. 65-69, 78-79, 252-253 and 259-260.

⁷²Belize Manuscript Records, Magistrate Letters, Series A, Barrow to the Magistrates, 27 February 1798, referred to in Burdon, 1: 244.

By 1808 no construction had taken place anywhere in the Settlement with the result that the entire 5th West India Regiment, which had provided the garrison for several years, was reported in January 1808 to be in a distressed state. The men, according to the Superintendent, were living in "miserable detached Huts". Under these conditions it was impossible to maintain discipline and the good appearance of arms and accoutrements. ⁷³

The British Government's commitment to the policy of dispersing West India Regiments was irrevocable, but there was the hope among some officers in the West Indies that it could be modified. In October 1809 the officer inspecting a detachment of the 6th West India Regiment at Dominica pointed out the evils of dispersion to the commander of British forces in the Windward and Leeward Islands. In the same report he recommended that the detachment he inspected be returned periodically to headquarters and that other detachments of the 6th be rotated among those posts garrisoned by the 6th as opposed to stationing individual units at these posts for indefinite periods of time. ⁷⁴

These were sound proposals which, if accepted by the army as a policy for all detachments of West India Regiments,

⁷³C.O. 137/121, Hamilton to Coote, 19 January 1808. See also W.O. 1/95, Confidential Inspection Report, 5th West India Regiment, Belize, 21 November 1808, pp. 274-277. The 5th's long confinement and neglect at Belize under deplorable circumstances had long-term adverse effects on discipline, interior economy and field exercises. See W.O. 27/105, part I, Hull to Morrison, 26 January 1812. W.O. 27/108, Hull to Morrison, 30 June 1812 and enclosures.

⁷⁴W.O. 27/97, part I, Inspecting Officer's Report to Beckwith, 31 October 1809.

certainly would have gone a long way towards improving discipline and efficiency. Probably because of the expenses involved in the constant rotation of large numbers of troops and their equipment, and the perennial shortage of military transports in the West Indies, these recommendations were shelved. Dispersion of West India Regiments continued. Three years later an officer inspecting a detachment of the 6th West India Regiment of about 229 men at St. Lucia, noted that this unit had been separated for some time from its regimental staff. ⁷⁵

C Illiteracy and Language

During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars there were probably few soldiers in Britain's European regiments, excluding officers and non-commissioned officers, who could both read and write. Communication between officers and men was, however, naturally and rather obviously facilitated by the fact that both groups spoke English. The problem of illiteracy in these corps was further diminished since the duties of non-commissioned officers, notably serjeants, required literacy. In short, then, although illiteracy was almost universal throughout the rank and file in the British Army, the problems it posed

⁷⁵W.O. 27/113, Wood to Beckwith, 1 November 1812. In 1812 the 3rd West India Regiment was reported to be scattered among five separate garrisons. W.O. 27/108, Inspection Report . . . 18 July 1812. The 4th was dispersed among four islands from 1812 to 1815. See W.O. 27/133, Half Yearly Confidential Report, Antigua, 15 May 1815. The problem of dispersion continued well into the nineteenth century. Detachments of the 1st West India Regiment, after 1815, were usually scattered among five island garrisons. In 1839 the 1st was even dispersed among ten separate garrisons. One company was at Sierra Leone which had been garrisoned by a detachment of the 1st since 1826. See Ellis, pp. 347-359.

were not staggering.

If anything, the situation thus created was only irksome and time consuming. All notices and orders needing the direct attention of the troops were read aloud either by officers or serjeants rather than being posted. However in the West India Regiments the problem of illiteracy, which was universal, was not lessened by any of those advantages noted in European regiments. Before 1800 the vast majority of West India soldiers were not only anable to read and write English, but they were equally unable to converse in it. English was a language completely foreign to them. Nor were these troops tied together by the bond of a common language. Instead a large number of African languages and dialects were spoken in these corps. ⁷⁶

The inability of officers and men to communicate via a language common to both groups created immense problems. All orders had to be translated into innumerable languages and dialects. Numerous commands had to be memorized by a disoriented African recruit who then had to associate these harsh sounds to strange and abrupt movements.

The first reference to this dual problem, which, like

⁷⁶This situation resembled conditions in the old Austro-Hungarian army during the 1914 to 1918 War. In some units various slavic languages and dialects were spoken in addition to German and Hungarian. Interview with Dr. Arpad Kovacs, St. John's University, New York City, Spring 1959. Professor Kovacs served as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army during the First World War. In the British Army, particularly in the infantry, just after the Crimean War, the percentage of illiterates was sixty per cent. See H. de Watteville, The British Soldier: His Daily Life from Tudor to Modern Times (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1954), p. 148.

officer absenteeism and dispersion, was to remain characteristic of the West India Regiments until well after 1815, was provided by the fabricated conspiracy of the 4th West India Regiment in 1797. At that time the services of an interpreter were required in order to cross examine implicated soldiers.⁷⁷ The recruiting data recorded in the Succession and Description Books of the 4th for 1797 show that of the 253 blacks enlisted 155 were "New Negroes".⁷⁸ Less than one year later, Bowyer, who at the time was opposed to the establishment of the West India Regiments, noted correctly that most of the blacks recruited into these corps had no knowledge of any European language.⁷⁹

The consequences of the West India soldier's unfamiliarity with the English language are recorded in the Inspection Reports and other official despatches. An inspection of the 5th West India Regiment at Spanish Town, Jamaica, in June 1812 disclosed that because of illiteracy among black non-commissioned officers, these men were not supplied with the customary written abstracts of rules and regulations.⁸⁰ Earlier, an officer who had never before inspected a West India Regiment confessed that the 4th, which he reviewed at Surinam in January 1806, was unlike any

⁷⁷W.O. 1/769, Evidence relating to the conspiracy of the 4th West India Regiment as contained in the minutes of the Privy Council, St. Christopher, 20 August 1797, enclosed in King to Huskisson, 11 December 1797.

⁷⁸W.O. 25/653, folios 25-28.

⁷⁹W.O. 1/86, Bowyer to Dundas, 8 September 1798. See also Table 2 and W.O. 25/658, folios 1-31.

⁸⁰W.O. 27/108, Hull to Morrison, 30 June 1812.

other British regiment he had seen. Illiteracy among the non-commissioned officers, he discovered, resulted in the accounts being in a confused state. Unless this situation were corrected, he warned somewhat exaggeratedly, the 4th would not be "like other Regiments".⁸¹ Seven months later another officer inspecting a detachment of the 4th at Post Brandwaght, Surinam, noted that

The few Officers Effective, and the entire want of white Non-Commissioned Officers, with a corps composed of raw Africans, totally ignorant of the English language, are disadvantages which the Regiment labours under, and which the utmost assiduity in other respects appear scarcely sufficient to counterbalance.⁸²

The same officer was

Very doubtful . . . how far it is possible according to the Existing System and present Establishment of Black Corps, for a length of time, to make the Black soldier so completely serviceable and of real use, which habits, Constitution, and nature seem evidently to point out and admit.⁸³

Settling the accounts of the soldiers, such as pay, and attempting to explain related items such as stoppage, were particularly difficult under these conditions. Black non-commissioned officers, who were appointed to that rank partially because they were conversant in English, were always present at these transactions as interpreters since the officers were

⁸¹W.O. 27/90, part I, "Major General W. Archer's Inspection Report of the 4th West India Regiment. Surinam, Fort New Amsterdam, 10 January 1806".

⁸²Ibid., "Brigadier General Hughes' Inspection Report of the Right Wing of the 4th West India Regiment, Post Brandwaght, Surinam, 26 August 1806".

⁸³Ibid.

unable to communicate directly with their own men.⁸⁴ The African's different system in measuring time only complicated matters as is evident from the following inspection of a unit of the 6th West India Regiment in 1806.

. . . half these Men cannot speak an intelligible Language, and as their Ideas of time are different from ours, it is extremely difficult at present to make them comprehend what they have a right to in money matters.⁸⁵

Occasionally a positive result could be derived from the communications gulf between officers and men. According to Brigadier-General Wale's inspection of nine companies of the 4th West India Regiment at Pointe à Pitre, Guadeloupe, in November 1810⁸⁶

the Non commissioned Officers and Privates are in general extremely sober, quiet and docile and as tractable as it is possible for men to be, who have so slight a knowledge of the language of their Officers, being most of them Africans by birth, and purchased by Government out of Guinea Ships.⁸⁷

This awkward situation, which steadily worsened as original creole recruits were killed or discharged but were seldom replaced by other blacks born in the West Indies, was a direct result of the policy of purchasing "New Negroes". By September 1798 nearly all of the eight West India Regiments had already become African regiments as a result of this policy.

⁸⁴C.O. 137/123, Villettes to Castlereagh, 15 June 1808 and Carmichael to Castlereagh, 27 July 1808.

⁸⁵W.O. 27/90, part II, "Inspecting Officer's Report. Detachment 6th West India Regiment. On the 24th day of July 1806".

⁸⁶This island surrendered to the invading British forces on 5 February 1810.

⁸⁷W.O. 27/101, part I, Wale to Beckwith, 5 November 1810.

This speedy alteration in the regional origins of the West India soldiers was assisted by the unwillingness of the planters to sell creole slaves to the army. Creole ranger corps were added to the British Establishment at the end of 1798 as the 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th West India Regiments. But these corps were all disbanded by 1804, with the troops from these regiments providing drafts for the renumbered 7th and 8th West India Regiments. By the end of the war, attrition among creole soldiers, the policies of recruiting "New Negroes" from 1797 to 1807 and confiscated blacks taken from captured slavers from 1810 to 1815 had combined to transform all of the remaining eight corps except one onto African regiments.

What were the tribal origins of the African recruits? According to the historian of the 1st West India Regiment, it is virtually impossible to distinguish the tribal origins of these recruits since the slave dealers who collected these men for sale in the West Indies identified their human cargoes only with designations denoting the section of the African coast from which the slaves were obtained.⁸⁸ According to Ellis such designations as "Mandingoes", "Eboes", "Papaws" and "Koromantyns", which was a corruption of Cormantine, were regional distinctions only.⁸⁹

⁸⁸Ellis quoted in Henry M. Chichester and George Burges-Short, The Records and Badges of every Regiment and Corps in the British Army (London: Gale and Polden, Ltd., 1902), p. 878.

⁸⁹Ibid. Mandingos, a Mandinka speaking peoples, were from various tribes in Senegambia - Sierra Leone area. "Eboes" or Ibos, according to Ellis, were from tribes in the Niger Delta region. "Papaws", many of whom were Ewe speaking, inhabited the

Probably because the British Army showed a distinct preference for purchasing Africans from certain tribal groups who inhabited the Gold Coast, ⁹⁰ serious efforts were made at tribal identification, and the fruits of these labours were subsequently recorded in several Succession and Description Books. Nor was this information difficult to obtain. Identification could be determined quite readily with the assistance of tribal members who were West India soldiers or who were members of the slave population in the Caribbean.

Table 7, which was compiled from Succession and Description Books of the 5th West India Regiment, indicates tribal origins for the majority of Africans enlisted from 1798 to 1808. The records even denote in many cases the place of birth of the recruits. ⁹¹ Ibo, Hausa, Moco, Mungala, Popo, Nago, Chamba, Fulla and Matamba, for instance, are clearly tribal names. ⁹² Even Mandingo is a tribal group, ⁹³ and not only a regional designation as suggested by Ellis.

The tribal and regional distribution as reflected in

Slave Coast, while "Koromantyns" or Coromantees came from the Kwi speaking group who were inhabitants of the Gold Coast. See also Orlando Patterson, The Sociology of Slavery (Rutherford, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1969), pp. 113-126.

⁹⁰There are many references which indicate this preference. See, for instance, W.O. 1/634, the Gordon Memorandum of 8 April 1807, pp. 317-320. Among the least desirable were those from Angola. See W.O. 1/88, Johnstone to Dundas, "Private", 7 June 1798.

⁹¹W.O. 25/656, folios 1-2.

⁹²See Patterson, pp. 113-142

⁹³Ibid., p. 114.

TABLE 7

TRIBAL AND REGIONAL ORIGINS OF AFRICAN BORN RECRUITS
OF THE 5TH WEST INDIA REGIMENT 1798 - 1808

Tribe/Region ^a	1798	1799	1800	1801	1802	1803	1804	1805	1806	1807	1808	Totals
Eboe (Ibo)	12	-	-	45	66	-	110	1	-	-	-	234
Congo	44	-	-	23	-	-	35	1	-	-	-	103
Hausa	9	-	-	3	2	-	24	11	-	-	30	79
Moco (or Ibibio)	6	-	-	15	21	-	28	-	-	-	-	70
Mungola	35	1	1	16	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	54
Mundingo	10	-	1	4	1	-	24	-	-	-	-	40
Popo	7	-	-	2	-	-	11	4	-	-	2	26
Nago (or Yoruba)	8	-	-	-	-	-	13	2	-	-	3	26
Mandingo	6	-	-	2	-	-	14	-	-	-	-	22
Coromantee	9	-	-	1	-	-	7	1	-	-	-	18
Mocha	-	-	-	3	3	-	6	-	-	-	-	12
Chamba	5	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	9
Fulla	1	-	-	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	7
Waree	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6
Mozambi	2	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	-	-	-	5
Isa	-	-	-	1	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	4
Baraba	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	3
Olle (Olli?)	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	3
Occum	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
Brehar	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Bona	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Bambara	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2
Wambre	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Beeros	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Banjah	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Quajsee	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Nogaba	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Jarman	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Matambee	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Matamba	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Senegal	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Obano	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Osohaba	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Omoza	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Sardrah	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Otam	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1
Yala	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Beeby	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Totals	172	1	2	119	100	-	296	20	-	-	35	745

SOURCE: W.O. 25/656

^aThe spelling of these names, except for those in parantheses, are as they appear in the returns.

Table 7 are also essentially the same for other West India Regiments. It also appears to correspond with the general pattern of Britain's overall slave trade during the same period. At Jamaica, for instance, the largest percentage of imported slaves were from the Niger and Cross deltas - Ebos, Ibibios and Chambas, chiefly.⁹⁴ Also during this time, there was a substantial increase in the number of slaves imported from South West Africa, an area which during the slave era extended from the Congo southwards to Cape Negro.⁹⁵ The tribal origins of slaves taken from this region were Mungolos, Matambas and those given the regional designation of "Congo".⁹⁶

Unfortunately, the descriptions of body decorations, such as teeth cuttings and especially cicatrices, which were frequently included in the data compiled on many recruits in the Succession and Description Books, are of no value in determining tribal origins although at one time they were tribal badges which set one tribe off from another.⁹⁷ The unreliability of this information is regrettable particularly in relation to the attempt to distinguish the tribal origins of those recruits who were identified by regional designations only. According to one authority, the original significance of the practice of cicatrizing face

⁹⁴Ibid., pp. 131-133.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 131.

⁹⁶Ibid., pp. 139-142. Coromantee, Munding and Congo were clearly regional designations. See pp. 133, 135. The other designations in Table 7 all appear to be tribal groups.

⁹⁷C. K. Meek, The Northern Tribes of Nigeria, 2 vols. (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 1: 44-45.

and body was already lost during the pre-European era in West Africa. They had become at this time mere adornments. ⁹⁸

Yet the Succession and Description Books are filled with descriptions of cicatrices and other decorations. Private John Buckley of the 2nd West India Regiment, a Chamba, was described as having "three large Scars on each Cheek". ⁹⁹ And Private Robert Barrett, also of the 2nd and a "Congo" slave, was listed as having "Two upper Foreteeth Filed". ¹⁰⁰

The reason for the army's diligence in recording the type and location of these decorations ¹⁰¹ was that in the event desertions occurred offenders could be readily identified. Private Edward Gload, a deserter from the 2nd West India Regiment, was described in an advertisement in a Kingston (Jamaica) newspaper as being five feet six inches in height, a member of the "Maraba nation" and as having "a scar on the left side of his mouth, marked also on both sides of the forehead". ¹⁰² The army's assiduity in such matters also disclosed that many of the African-born recruits had suffered from highly infectious diseases characterized by purulent skin eruptions since there are numerous

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 45. This is confirmed by an examination of the description of cicatrices of those Africans recruited into the West India Regiments. In most cases, members of the same tribe had different tribal markings. See W.O. 25/644, 656.

⁹⁹W.O. 25/644, folio 16.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., folio 14.

¹⁰¹For instance, Private Samuel Alderly, an "Ebo" with "37 Small Cuts on Right Shoulder". Ibid., folio 7.

¹⁰²The newspaper and its date are unknown since only the advertisement, which is dated "Fort Augusta, July 13, 1801", was attached to General Sir George Nugent's despatch to Lord Hobart of 21 December 1801 in C.O. 137/106.

references to recruits being scarred and "Pitted with . . . Small Pox". 103

Although the West India Regiments were composed chiefly of recruits from various African nations, as well as a diminishing number of creole blacks, no attempt was made by the army to form companies of Africans belonging to a single tribal or language group or even companies composed only of creole soldiers. On the contrary, the Succession and Description Books show that companies were heterogeneously formed of, for instance, Ibos, Hausas, Mungolas and creoles. 104

Nor is there evidence denoting friction of any kind among Africans of different tribes or between Africans and creole soldiers. This is extraordinary since, as Orlando Patterson has shown in his sociological study of slavery in Jamaica, there was serious dissension between creoles and African slaves, particularly Ibos. His study also shows that antipathy existed among Africans of different tribes. 105 Yet there is not a single reference to this type of disharmony in any of the numerous Inspection and Confidential Reports nor in any correspondence between the West Indies and London. Perhaps the incomparably better position of the African and the creole as British soldiers vis-a-vis that of the slaves eliminated any discord within the ranks of the West India Regiments.

¹⁰³For instance, W.O. 25/656, folios 2, 4, 6.

¹⁰⁴W.O. 25/656.

¹⁰⁵Pages 145-154.

Despite the language problem and attendant difficulties (and even the slowness among the African recruits to learn their musketry drill), ¹⁰⁶ there were certain advantages in recruiting Africans. These were summed up by Hislop in 1801 in his invaluable "Remarks on the Establishment of West India Regiments". According to Hislop

Among other circumstances favorable to the measure of forming the Regiments from new imported Africans, one deserving notice is, that they are received, wholly unacquainted with and uncontaminated by the Vices which prevail among the Slaves in the Towns and Plantations, having no acquaintance or connection of any sort, but such as they form in the Regiment. I have invariably found them to make the most orderly, clean and attentive Soldiers. Out of two hundred and upwards, which have been received into the [11th West India] Regiment in the course of Five years and a half, there are not above three or four instances of any of them being punished, and not one for any serious offence, whereas many of those who are furnished by the Planters, when the Regiment was formed, have very frequently deserved (as some have met) Capital punishment.

The new African recruit becomes gradually initiated into the habits of a Military life, and ere' long discovers the superiority of his situation above the Slave, whose debased state he has never been subject to. He likewise feels himself proportionably elevated, from the rank which his officers hold in Society, and the respect which he sees is paid to them. ¹⁰⁷

Efforts to overcome the dual problem of language and illiteracy were undertaken somewhat late and achieved very limited success. In August 1811 the Duke of York sought official sanction from the Secretary for War and Colonies of a plan to

¹⁰⁶Tylden, p. 43, Tylden's source is the Regimental Orders of the 2nd West India Regiment for 30 September 1802 to 7 July 1804. These manuscripts are located at the War Office Library, London.

¹⁰⁷W.O. 1/95 enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804. A copy of Hislop's memorial is in appendix C.

attach a literate and disciplined European serjeant to each company in every West India Regiment. These non-commissioned officers were to be attracted to this service by the additional pay of one shilling per diem.¹⁰⁸ White serjeants in the past had periodically transferred to West India Regiments from European line regiments stationed in the Caribbean. But these men were frequently court-martialed and reduced to the ranks because of poor discipline and irregular habits.¹⁰⁹ The establishment of a regimental school attended by a "Serjeant Schoolmaster" for each British regiment, white and black, was also considered for adoption at this time.¹¹⁰ These non-commissioned officers were likewise to be encouraged to join the West India Regiments by the attraction of extra pay.¹¹¹

Once the recommendations to improve the establishment of the West India Regiments had been made, efforts to provide them with official approval moved swiftly. In December 1811 the cost of augmenting the establishment of the eight West India Regiments by one European serjeant-major per company was computed at the modest annual sum of £1,460 sterling.¹¹² On 23 January 1812 a circular letter from the Secretary at War notified the

¹⁰⁸W.O. 1/647, Duke of York to Liverpool, 15 August 1811.

¹⁰⁹Ibid. See also C.O. 318/31, Bowyer to Windham, No. 28, 8 February 1807. W.O. 27/92, part II, Maitland to Bowyer, 16 May 1808.

¹¹⁰W.O. 1/647, Duke of York to Liverpool, 15 August 1811.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²W.O. 4/425, Palmerston to Harrison, 23 December 1811.

colonels of the West India Regiments that the establishment of their respective corps would be augmented in accordance with the Duke of York's proposal of 15 August 1811. ¹¹³

However, swift official sanction was not followed by equally rapid implementation. The major obstacle was that the circular letter of 23 January 1812 to the colonels of West India Regiments stipulated that European serjeant-majors were not to be attached to each company until vacancies had occurred. ¹¹⁴ Furthermore, it appears from another War Office circular to the colonels of West India Regiments that the allowance of one shilling per diem, payable to European company serjeant-majors, would not begin until 25 May 1814, more than two years later. ¹¹⁵ No official explanation for this time lag was offered. Under these circumstances it is more than likely that very few of these men had joined the West India Regiments by the end of the war in 1815.

Attempts to reduce illiteracy in the West India Regiments by means of the recently established regimental schools were slightly more productive. But even here there was much room for improvement by 1815. In January 1812 a circular letter from the Duke of York had established these schools in the West India Regiments. ¹¹⁶ From available records it appears that none of

¹¹³W.O. 4/308, 23 January 1812. Also, *ibid.*, Palmerston to Beckwith of the same date.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹¹⁵W.O. 4/311, 9 May 1814.

¹¹⁶W.O. 27/108, Hull to Morrison, 30 June 1812.

the eight West India Regiments had been able to open the doors of their schools during the first year. The reason given was the inability to find a "fit Person" to take charge.¹¹⁷ What was worse, by the end of the war most of these corps had apparently failed to establish their regimental schools. A "Confidential Report on the Inspection of the 7th West India Regiment" at Curaçao on 30 September 1815, for example, disclosed that the Regiment was unable to find a person in the 7th capable of conducting the school. Nor could anyone on the island be procured to start it.¹¹⁸

Only the 4th and 5th West India Regiments seemed to have been successful. By May 1815 the 4th, then at Antigua, had enrolled fifty-seven men and boy "Scholars". In learning to read and write, many were reported as having progressed extremely well. Despite the fact that the "School Master Serjeant" had been reduced to the ranks by a court-martial on charges of drunkenness and neglect of duty, the school had been attended twice a day by a company serjeant-major and a corporal. The school was also visited regularly by the officer of the day who reported on its progress.¹¹⁹ The officer commanding the 4th was also preparing to set up a trade school for younger soldiers.

¹¹⁷Ibid. W.O. 27/113, Gifton to Munro, 14 October 1812. Ibid., "Half Yearly Confidential Report . . . Seventh West India Regiment . . . 5th day of October 1812", enclosed in Hodgson to Morrison, "Confidential", 21 November 1812.

¹¹⁸W.O. 27/135.

¹¹⁹W.O. 27/133, "Half Yearly Confidential Report of His Majesty's 4th West India Regiment. Inspected by Lieut.-Colonel J. Lyons Nixon", Antigua, 15 May 1815.

His fledgling curriculum would include instruction in shoemaking, tailoring and military armourer. ¹²⁰

The 5th West India Regiment's success in establishing its regimental school was cut short by the death of its schoolmaster. Its success was also interrupted when the corps was ordered to participate in the expedition against New Orleans. During the time the school was in operation, privates, drummers and non-commissioned officers had made progress. The plan was to re-establish the school once a capable instructor could be obtained. ¹²¹

The overall success of the army in combating illiteracy in the West India Regiments and educating the African soldier in the use of the English language can be judged from the candid comments of Dr. John Davy. Attached to the Windward and Leeward Island Command, he observed these troops during his tour of duty in the Caribbean from 1845 to 1848. Writing around 1853 Davy noted that the West India Regiments were composed of Africans recruited in Africa. ¹²² The majority of these men, he also noted, were ignorant of the English language, or at most were acquainted with it in the "most imperfect manner". ¹²³ As for the regimental

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid., O'Meara to Fuller, 22 June 1815.

¹²²John Davy, West Indies Before and Since Slave Emancipation, Comprising the Windward and Leeward Islands' Military Command (London: W. & F. G. Cash, 1854), p. 537.

¹²³Ibid., p. 539.

schools, Davy had this to say

There is a school at the head quarters of each regiment, or a school room, but not always provided with a teacher: I can speak from my own knowledge of negligence of this kind, which is likely to be concealed from the higher authorities.¹²⁴

D Clothing

The problem of clothing, as Fortescue has so ably described,¹²⁵ had serious consequences for the entire British Army. The long war against France beginning in 1793 was an additional strain on a system that was already obsolete and cumbersome. According to Fortescue, thousands of British soldiers died of exposure during Britain's three misadventures in Flanders and Holland in 1793, 1794 and 1799 because of wastefulness, inefficiency and helplessness in the army's clothing system.¹²⁶ And in the West Indies, additional thousands had to endure the attacks of insects which left them with malignant ulcers and amputated toes because there were inadequate supplies of shoes. Hundreds of these men were subsequently discharged from the army because of infirmities.¹²⁷

To be sure, the inability to properly cloth the troops stemmed to a large degree from the old system which permitted the colonels of regiments to gain profit from the clothing of their men.¹²⁸ This practice led to inefficiency, delay and

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Fortescue, 4(part II): 898-903

¹²⁶Ibid., pp. 899-900.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 900.

¹²⁸Ibid., pp. 900-901

abuse. But the difficulties experienced in clothing British troops also must have resulted from the unexpected scale of the war and the inability of Britain's still fledgling textile industries to keep pace with the army's needs despite the rise of the industrial revolution in the eighteenth century.¹²⁹ Between 1793 and 1795 army estimates called for more than a threefold multiplication of troops to a total of 317,651 regulars, fencibles, militia and foreign troops.¹³⁰

Little wonder then that the Inspection and Confidential Reports on the West India Regiments are filled with references to clothing shortages, particularly in 1806. During the early part of that year, the entire 1st West India Regiment was found to be suffering severely. Three companies at Trinidad were reported in the "greatest want of clothing".¹³¹ Five companies of the 1st at Prince Ruperts', Dominica, were wanting in many articles of their clothing but especially trousers and shoes.¹³² And a clothing return for a single company of the 1st at Tobago showed that all the men of this detachment were also "wanting" in trousers and shoes.¹³³

¹²⁹See Watson, pp. 28-30, 508-514. The immense increase of manufacturing power in Britain did not prevent France from producing more muskets during the war. Glover, note on p. 47.

¹³⁰Fortescue, 4(part II): Appendix "C", p. 938.

¹³¹W.O. 27/90, part I, "Inspection . . . 1st West India Regiment. On the 25 of February 1806".

¹³²Ibid., "First West India Regiment. Clothing Return . . . 20 January 1806".

¹³³Ibid., ". . . Clothing Return of a Detachment . . . 6 March 1806". See also ibid., "General Half Yearly Inspection Report of the Army in the Windward and Leeward Islands . . . for the 24th December 1806".

Other West India Regiments also suffered. An inspection of a detachment of the 4th at Surinam in August 1806 disclosed that "The Regiment have received no Caps for their Augmentation, and the men are furnished partly with old Caps of different Corps". ¹³⁴ A detachment of about fifty recruits belonging to the 6th were reported to be without uniforms. ¹³⁵ In July 1812, the British commander in the Windward and Leeward Islands angrily informed the Duke of York that not only had the clothing for the 3rd West India Regiment not arrived on time but it was also late for the entire army under his command. ¹³⁶

Another reason for the delay in providing clothing to British soldiers, who were to be issued new clothing once each year, ¹³⁷ was the often confused management of regimental accounts by their agency. Such a case involved the 7th West India Regiment and its agent Patrick Campbell. The Secretary at War repeatedly had ordered all the accounts of those regiments prior

¹³⁴Ibid., "Brigadier General Hughes' Inspection Report . . . 26 August 1806".

¹³⁵Ibid., part II, Maitland to Bowyer, 17 July 1806.

¹³⁶W.O. 27/108, Beckwith to C-in-C, Horse Guards, "Confidential", 18 July 1812. The absence of reports describing clothing shortages for the West India Regiments for the period before 1800 and even those years immediately after 1800 is not an indication that these corps were adequately clothed at this time. The noticeable absence of these criticisms as well as any others was that inspection of the West India Regiments did not begin until 1799. If the plight of Britain's European regiments from 1793 to 1799 can be considered as a reliable indicator of the chaos in the clothing system, then West India soldiers must have suffered equally if not more since they were new corps which were also dependent on a long and vulnerable supply route.

¹³⁷Charles James, p. 113.

to 24 December 1797 in Campbell's agency delivered to the War Office for examination and settlement.¹³⁸ In March 1800 Campbell was commanded by an irate Windham to turn in these records before 25 June "in a proper state". Failure to comply, Campbell was threatened, would necessitate Windham's "taking further measures to enforce the delivery of the same".¹³⁹

Throughout 1800 Campbell continued to receive angry letters from the War Office due to mismanagement in his agency.¹⁴⁰ Even Horse Guard patience with Campbell was at an end when it was discovered that one Lieutenant Campbell of the 74th Regiment, who, as a cadet at the Royal Military College, High Wycombe, had incurred some debts which he never paid, was the nephew of Agent Campbell.¹⁴¹ In December 1800 Campbell was directed once again to comply forthwith to an order from the Duke of York. At this time he was to "Communicate to the Colonel of the 7th West India Regt. His Royal Highness's most positive Injunctions, that

¹³⁸Windham to Campbell, 14 March 1800 and enclosure, "Public Office Letters 1800", NRA [SCOT] o473, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

¹³⁹Ibid. Mismanagement was to hound the 7th almost to the end of the war. See W.O. 27/90, part I, "General Half Yearly Inspection Report of the Army in the Windward and Leeward Islands . . . 24 December 1805 . . ." Ibid., "Inspection Officer's Report . . . 20th day of May 1806". W.O. 27/108, part I, Garrison Orders, Headquarters, Pieter Maay (Curaçao), 30 May 1812. W.O. 27/113, Hodgson to Morrison, "Confidential", 21 November 1812 and enclosures. W.O. 27/135, "Confidential Report on the Inspection of the 7th . . . Curaçao, 30 September 1815".

¹⁴⁰Ibid., Taylor to Campbell, 9 April, 25 July, 27 August, 1 and 3 September 1800.

¹⁴¹Ibid., Calvert to Campbell, 16 June 1800 and enclosures, and 25 November 1800 and enclosures.

the Regiment shall be completed with Accoutrements & every Article of Appointment, with all possible Dispatch." ¹⁴²

In 1798 a number of proposals for reforming the existing clothing system were recommended by the Finance Committee of the House of Commons. These were found unexceptable and in 1801 the old system was continued with only some few changes in detail.¹⁴³ For the West India Regiments the problem of clothing persisted throughout the war. ¹⁴⁴

The uniform of the West India Regiments, although frequently in short supply, had undergone some changes since 1795. In February 1800 British regiments were issued the cylindrical black felt "stovepipe" shako. ¹⁴⁵ White cap covers were probably worn over them by West India soldiers and European troops stationed in the Caribbean. This shako, which remained the headdress of the British Army until 1812, was adorned with regimental plates and coloured hackles: white for grenadiers, green for the light company and white with red base for the battalion companies. The huge bearskin hats which were worn by grenadiers in European regiments apparently were not issued

¹⁴²Ibid., 9 December 1800.

¹⁴³These recommendations and the reasons for their rejection are discussed in Fortescue, 4(part II): 900-903.

¹⁴⁴W.O. 27/99, part I, Carmichael to Beckwith, 4 June 1810. W.O. 27/101, part I, Nixon to Ramsay, 10 July and 24 July 1811, enclosures.

¹⁴⁵R. Money Barnes, A History of the Regiments and Uniforms of the British Army (London: Seeley Service & Company Ltd., 1957), p. 118. Different headgear was worn by the light dragoons, horse artillery, flank companies, rifle regiments and fusiliers. Ibid., plate No. 18, p. 116 and p. 118.

to Britain's black grenadiers.

Two jackets, distinguished by the colour of the various regimental facing, ¹⁴⁶ were issued: the customary short red jacket, which had "wing" epaulettes for the flank companies, and an equally short white jacket which was worn for drill and fatigue with loose-fitting white trousers. A second pair of snug-fitting white breeches which came to an end as a covering over the shoe, gaiter style, was worn on other occasions. Great coats were also issued. All leather equipment was black, but in 1803 buff coloured accoutrements were finally adopted. ¹⁴⁷ Officers wore a long skirted scarlet coat and a high black hat with broad brim. ¹⁴⁸ And, contrary to the belief of some who maintain that no information exists on the uniform of bandsmen of West India Regiments, ¹⁴⁹ the colour of the jacket of drummers, for instance, was of the regimental facing. ¹⁵⁰

It should be briefly mentioned here that clothing was not the only cause of anxiety for officers of West India Regi-

¹⁴⁶See Chapter V, footnote No. 4.

¹⁴⁷W.O. 3/152, Crewe to Moore, 17 October 1803.

¹⁴⁸Information, including a sketch by Cecil C. P. Lawson of the West India Regiments for the period 1800-1810 is in Cecil C. P. Lawson, et al, "Military Dress: West India Regiments, 1800-1810", Military Collector and Historian 20(No. 4): 119-120. Of much greater value is Carmen's "Infantry Clothing Regulations, 1802", pp. 200-235.

¹⁴⁹Cecil C. P. Lawson, et al, p. 119. This statement on the part of Lawson and his collaborators is inexcusable since the Infantry Clothing Regulations, 1802, which these men acknowledged as having consulted themselves, contains information on the drummer's coat. This type of sloppy research has been noticed in many other studies dealing with the West India Regiments.

¹⁵⁰Carmen, p. 220.

ments. Because Britain lacked a modern small arms industry when the war began, there was a serious shortage of muskets until well after 1800.¹⁵¹ The problem however, as it affected the West India Regiments was not the insufficient quantity of arms but rather the condition of those muskets issued to West India soldiers. Nearly all of the complaints recorded in the Inspection Reports tell of old and unserviceable arms many of which had formerly belonged to other regiments.¹⁵² In some cases West India soldiers were armed with captured Dutch weapons.¹⁵³

E Contact between West India Soldiers and Slaves

Because it was customary for British troops to police the slave population¹⁵⁴ in addition to fighting the soldiers of other colonial powers in the West Indies, numerous posts were established in close proximity to plantations. At Jamaica, for instance, several permanent posts like those at Stoney Hill, Maroon Town, and those in Cornwall, had been located in the interior of the island. Nineteen other posts were dispersed

¹⁵¹Glover, pp. 46-62.

¹⁵²W.O. 27/90, part I, "Inspecting Officer's Report 1st West India Regiment . . . 22nd of January 1806 . . . at Prince Rupert's . . ." Ibid., Brig.-General Hislop's Inspection Report of the 8th West India Regiment, 12 March 1806. Ibid., "Inspection Officer's Report . . . 7th West India Regt. . . . 20th day of May 1806". W.O. 27/135, "Confidential Report . . . 7th West India Regiment . . . Curaçao, 30 September 1815".

¹⁵³W.O. 27/88, Maitland to Myers, 16 July 1804.

¹⁵⁴Pares, p. 259 and Murray, p. 40.

along 350 miles of coast. ¹⁵⁵ As late as the governorship of Sir Eyre Coote at Jamaica, 1806 to 1808, a small post was erected at "Woodstock" in Portland, some "twelve Miles from Port Antonio", because of a conspiracy among local slaves. ¹⁵⁶ Even large coastal fortifications, like Fort Shirley, Prince Ruperts', Dominica, nestled alongside plantations. ¹⁵⁷ The distribution of West India soldiers among these posts and forts guaranteed a sustained association between black soldiers and slaves. Even white troops, according to the accounts of residents, readily established relations with the slaves. ¹⁵⁸

West India soldiers mixed with slaves on market days. ¹⁵⁹ These occasions allowed the black soldier to meet slaves who lived many miles away from the market. ¹⁶⁰ Information arising from the conspiracy of the 4th at St. Kitts disclosed that black soldiers were in the habit of traveling around the island

¹⁵⁵ C.O. 137/26, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 26 January 1809. Patterson, map facing p. 288. This reproduction, originally published in 1852 shows several "Barracks" in the interior of the island. Three of these are in Cornwall and were probably some of the barracks referred to by Carmichael. Establishing posts in the interior of the island, and even many of those on the coast, was obviously for reasons of internal security. The posts indicated in the Map of 1852 were constructed prior to emancipation.

¹⁵⁶ C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 28 July 1808.

¹⁵⁷ W.O. 1/95/27, Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, Martinique, 28 April 1802, enclosed in Trigge to Brownrigg, No. 61, 4 May 1802.

¹⁵⁸ Ragatz, p. 32 and Pinckard, 1: 268-269.

¹⁵⁹ W.O. 1/95/27, Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, Martinique, 28 April 1802, enclosed in Trigge to Brownrigg, No. 61, 4 May 1802.

¹⁶⁰ Patterson, p. 226.

speaking to and dining with the slaves. ¹⁶¹ Frequently after being discharged from British service, West India soldiers settled on those plantations that were in the vicinity of their posts and where, during the course of several years or more, they had developed acquaintances among the estate slaves. ¹⁶²

Under these circumstances, it was impossible to separate the two groups. Yet British commanders invariably tried. In the Windward and Leeward Islands, Sir Thomas Trigge's "constant" policy was to instill a sense of pride in the West India soldier in order to give him a feeling of superiority over the "generality of Negroes". ¹⁶³ The reason, as Trigge confessed, was to forestall the slaves and soldiers from making a "common cause" which would endanger Britain's position in the Caribbean. ¹⁶⁴ (Pinckard, it will be remembered, voiced a similar fear.) From Jamaica, the British Government was told that there was something on which the planters and the army could both agree: intercourse between black soldiers and slaves would undermine the planter's control over their bondsmen. ¹⁶⁵ Upon taking command of the 2nd West India Regiment in 1796, Major-General Carmichael made it his first order of business to prevent, as much as possible, all

¹⁶¹W.O. 1/769, Evidence relative to the conspiracy of the 4th West India Regiment, minutes of the Privy Council, St. Kitts, 20 August 1797, enclosed in King to Huskisson, 11 December 1797.

¹⁶²W.O. 1/95, Hislop's "Remarks . . . ", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

¹⁶³C.O. 318/19, Trigge to Hobart, No. 39, 2 April 1802.

¹⁶⁴Ibid.

¹⁶⁵C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 27 July 1808.

communication between the 2nd and the slaves. ¹⁶⁶ Carmichael, like Trigge, hoped to accomplish this impossible task by insulating the black soldier from the slave by indoctrination. ¹⁶⁷ Sir George Nugent, as we have already seen, adopted the same policy immediately upon assuming the office of Governor of Jamaica in 1801.

Private Derby's crime of hiding three women slaves was not an extraordinary incident, although it might appear at first to be so. Based on numerous records, it seems that the West India soldier himself sought to establish ties with the slaves. Furthermore, and most important, his chief reason for doing so was the absence at his post or fort of black women with whom he might form a normal and perhaps lasting association. Because of the army's effort to isolate the West India soldier from the slave population, the black soldier was expected to live as a celibate in a community of soldier-celibates. Even in Britain's European regiments on overseas stations six "lawfull Wives of Soldiers" for every hundred men per regiment were permitted to accompany the regiment. ¹⁶⁸

Given this situation, it was not surprising that proprietors of estates contiguous to military posts began to complain that their female slaves were being lured away by West India soldiers. Sir William Young, author of The West India

¹⁶⁶Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Ibid.

¹⁶⁸General Orders, 29 October 1800, enclosed in Calvert to Campbell, 29 October 1800, "Public Office Letters 1800", NRA [SCOT] 0473, Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh.

Common-Place Book, Governor of Tobago and plantation owner, claimed that black soldiers frequently intruded upon his estate in search of female companions.¹⁶⁹ He also noted that as a result there was a growing animosity between the soldiers and male slaves.¹⁷⁰ Although this divisiveness could be used to good advantage by the planters to prevent the possibility of the slaves and soldiers joining forces, Young saw a potentially great danger in liaisons between West India soldiers and female slaves. This type of association, he warned

. . . may be carried to an extremity, and have consequences, which make me doubt if it is wisely so considered; yet in the alternative of favorable reception, and domestication with the negro families, a connexion and common cause with armed men, at some critical period, might not be safe; and in the ordinary course of Nature and events, a rising generation of children, born and remaining slaves, with relation to a soldier-father, might at some time awaken feelings, and create consequences, endangering the whole colonial system.¹⁷¹

One of the first proposals put forth to remedy the situation called for the establishment of something approaching a military brothel. In May 1799, President Ottley of St. Vincent recommended that some black women be employed "about" the West India Regiment then stationed on the island. It is not known what became of his suggestion.¹⁷² However in 1801 Hislop proposed the more respectable plan that the army purchase female slaves who were to be attached to each black company. These

¹⁶⁹Young, p. 214.

¹⁷⁰Ibid. This is the only reference to this type of problem that I have come across.

¹⁷¹Ibid. Young wrote this book in 1802.

¹⁷²W.O. 1/770, Ottley to Portland, 17 May 1799, enclosed in King to Huskisson, 4 July 1799.

women would then be encouraged to marry the most well behaved men in those companies to which they were assigned. ¹⁷³ The most severe punishment would be meted out to those soldiers who interfered with these marriages as well as to those married soldiers who were found guilty of adulterous behaviour. ¹⁷⁴ Hislop's plan, which was subsequently implemented decades before marriage was seriously encouraged among the slave population, ¹⁷⁵ was motivated by strictly practical considerations. At Demerara in 1801 he wrote that his plan would be of "considerable advantage and profit to the Publick."

The children would of course, be the property of Government, ¹⁷⁶ and whether Male or Female, should remain constantly with the Regiment, and be considered as belonging to it. Boys would be trained to arms, and become in time excellent Soldiers.

The Girls, when at a proper age, would be allowed to marry in the Regiment, and during their younger years might be taught such employment as would make them useful to it. It would also be but just to allow the same ration of provisions to them, as to the Wives and Children of Soldiers in European Regiments. ¹⁷⁷

So the West India Regiments were to recruit themselves.

Records dealing with the number of black women associated with the West India Regiments are fragmentary. They suggest that

¹⁷³W.O, 1/95, Hislop's "Remarks . . . ", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

¹⁷⁵Marriage was one of several reforms of 1803 aimed at the amelioration of the condition of the slave. Little or no success was achieved in this respect until some years later.

¹⁷⁶At the time Hislop wrote this in 1801 West India soldiers were considered to be slaves.

¹⁷⁷W.O. 1/95, Hislop's "Remarks . . . ", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

by the end of the war in 1815 few women were attached to the black regiments. A return for the year 1804 shows that 515 women and 535 children were scattered among British garrisons in the West Indies.¹⁷⁸ It is not clear, however, if these were blacks whites or both. The same return shows a separate listing of 535 "Negroes". But since the sex of these blacks is not given, it is safe to assume that they were "fort Negroes", or military slave labourers, a contingent of whom were attached to each British garrison in the Caribbean.¹⁷⁹

Periodic regimental returns offer more precise information. But since data on the number of black women attached to West India Regiments were not systematically returned, or at least not adequately preserved, these records do not provide a total number for any year. However, those that have survived confirm the suspicion that very few West India soldiers took or were permitted to take wives. A return for the 5th West India Regiment for December 1807 shows that forty-one women were present with the 5th at Honduras with their "reputed" husbands. Twenty-seven children were also present.¹⁸⁰ A return for the 1st West India Regiment for October 1815 lists fifty women and twenty-three children drawing rations.¹⁸¹ In December 1819,

¹⁷⁸C.O. 318/25, Myers to Camden, 2 July 1804, enclosure No. 2.

¹⁷⁹Pinckard mentions them at a British garrison in Dutch Guiana. See 2: 374.

¹⁸⁰W.O. 17/251, "Half Yearly Return of Women legally Married & Children belonging to the 5th (or Duke of York's) West India Regiment . . . 24 December 1807".

¹⁸¹W.O. 27/135, "General Return . . . 1st West India Regiment", 30 October 1815.

when post-war military reduction was still taking place, Governor Woodford of Trinidad noted that few black women had married West India soldiers. 182

Unfortunately, little else is known of the relationship between West India soldiers and the slaves nor of the consequences of this association. It seems almost certain, however, that, despite the disdain with which the West India soldier viewed the slave, and the animosity between the male slave and the soldier, the slaves greatly admired the soldier for his freedom and comparatively pampered way of living. At least one slave was discovered attempting to enlist into a West India Regiment. 183

F Religious Service

Very little is known about the kind and frequency of religious service or instruction offered to the West India soldiers. Apparently chaplains were usually present with their regiments since there is not a single reference to a problem of absenteeism. Yet the Inspection and Confidential Reports are conspicuously silent on this aspect of the establishment of the West India Regiments. Only two references have been located regarding this topic. An inspection of the 7th West India Regiment in October 1812 discloses that this corps was composed

182C.O. 295/48, Woodford to Bathurst, No. 351, 12 December 1819.

183Belize Manuscript Records, Magistrates Meetings, Series A. 3, Slave Court, 13 July 1807, in Burdon, 2: 105.

mainly Roman Catholics. ¹⁸⁴ A more informative report on the 5th West India Regiment at Spanish Town, Jamaica, in June 1812, revealed that the entire Regiment received regular divine service every Sunday. This service was administered by the Rector of Spanish Town on the parade ground at Fort Augusta. ¹⁸⁵ This latter disclosure is most interesting since the Established Church had completely neglected the slave. In Jamaica a local act was passed in 1816 appointing curates to assist the rectors in propagating the gospel among the slaves. They were paid a salary of £300 per annum which was increased to £500 in 1818. But these efforts bore few results. ¹⁸⁶ The same rector, then who refused or who was not permitted to provide religious instruction to the slaves would journey from Spanish Town to Fort Augusta every Sunday in order to instruct the West India soldier.

G The West India Regiments as Labour Battalions

It was customary in the British Army to employ British troops on unusual work details or fatigues. The pay for this work by the rank and file around 1800 was nine pence sterling per day. ¹⁸⁷ By the end of the war privates employed as labourers

¹⁸⁴W.O. 127/113, "Half Yearly Confidential Report . . . Seventh West India Regiment . . . 5th day of October 1812", enclosed in Hodgson to Morrison, "Confidential", 21 November 1812.

¹⁸⁵W.O. 27/108, Hull to Morrison, 30 June 1812.

¹⁸⁶Patterson, pp. 207-208. The salaries quoted were probably in local currency.

¹⁸⁷W.O. 1/95, Trigge to Brownrigg, No. 56, 23 April 1802. Ward, p. 84.

received ten pence sterling per day during the summer and eight pence sterling per day during winter months. ¹⁸⁸ West India soldiers were similarly employed particularly during the frequent lulls in the war which occurred after the insurgent phase of the fighting. Reluctance of the black soldiers to undertake this type of work appears to have been limited to the 8th at Dominica and with justifiable reason. ¹⁸⁹

At Trinidad, West India soldiers were continually employed in fatigue work. The 11th was used to build roads and public buildings in addition to constructing temporary fortifications. At one time three hundred men of the 11th were used each day for four hours in clearing the heights above Port of Spain in order to strengthen the fortifications protecting the city. ¹⁹⁰ Later the 9th and 12th West India Regiments were used to clear the ground of brush at Chaguaramas, preparatory to building a defensive work there. ¹⁹¹ The great use of West India soldiers at Trinidad was probably due to the poor defences of the island. These works appear to have been neglected for some time by Spain right up to the time the island was lost to Britain in 1797.

Elsewhere, at the Honduras Settlement, troops of the 5th

¹⁸⁸ Great Britain, War Office, General Regulations and Orders for the Army, (1816), p. 121.

¹⁸⁹ For the mutiny of the 8th and the causes surrounding the mutiny, see Chapter V. Trigge's trepidations, however, never materialized.

¹⁹⁰ C.O. 318/20, Hobart to Grinfield, 7 October 1802. Ibid., Grinfield to Hobart, 20 December 1802, enclosure No. 1.

¹⁹¹ C.O. 318/21, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 56, 3 March 1803.

were employed to dig a canal for which they received one shilling eight pence (probably local currency) per day. ¹⁹²

The employment of West India soldiers on prolonged and large scale fatigues was generally encouraged by the army in the West Indies and the British Government. The reasons were quite simple: utilizing West India Regiments as service battalions not only made it unnecessary to employ European troops on fatigues, but it was far more economical. The cost of hiring slaves to perform similar duties by 1805 was three shilling four pence sterling per slave per day: two shilling four pence paid to the slave's owner and one shilling for the slave's daily ration.¹⁹³ Despite the presence of a "Corps of Black Military Artificers and Pioneers", which had a strength of 418 in 1808, ¹⁹⁴ West India Regiments were still used as labour battalions.

Some of the problems discussed affected all British regiments serving in the West Indies. Most of the issues, however, were unique to the West India Regiments because of the type of soldier recruited and because of the character of the society in which these regiments were raised.

¹⁹² Belize Manuscript Records, Magistrates Meetings, Series B, Magistrates Meeting, 19 March 1810, in Burdon, 2: 136.

¹⁹³ C.O. 318/27, Myers to Camden, No. 70, 8 May 1805 and enclosure. See "Comparative State of Expence between Work of the Black Soldiers and hired Negroes . . . May 1805". The daily ration issued to the slave consisted of one pound of flour and one pound of salt beef or twelve ounces of pork.

¹⁹⁴ C.O. 318/33, Bowyer to Castlereagh, No. 58, 11 February 1808, enclosure No. 1.

CHAPTER VIII

CAMPAIGNS, RECRUITING AND DISBANDMENT

1803 - 1815

In May 1803 Britain and France were again at war. The growing shift in Britain's major military effort from the West Indies, particularly after Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 1805, to what proved to be the decisive area of operations in Portugal and Spain beginning in 1808, created an increasing need to free as many of Britain's regular white regiments as possible for European service. The plan to establish a "disposable" or expeditionary force for service in Europe composed chiefly of troops from the British Isles had immediate consequences for the West India Regiments as well as other colonial corps.¹ The reduction in the number of "genuinely" British troops in the West Indies was partially balanced by augmenting and modifying the establishment of Britain's black regiments. In January 1804 the establishment of all the West India Regiments, except the 8th, was augmented to ten companies of one hundred rank and file each.²

¹W.O. 1/628, Duke of York to Camden, 8 June 1804.
W.O. 1/647, Duke of York to Liverpool, 11 August 1811.

²W.O. 4/342, Bragge to Somerset, 17 January 1804. Total all ranks was 1,123. The 8th was not augmented until 1807. W.O. 4/203, Fitzpatrick to Hislop, 23 January 1807. How Britain was eventually able to maintain a fairly high number of European troops in the West Indies, despite the drain-off to the Peninsular of troops raised in Britain, is discussed below.

The following month a second major was added to the establishment of the West India Regiments³ in an effort to ensure the presence of senior field officers with these corps. And in 1807, probably because of the shortage of regular artillerymen,⁴ portions of West India Regiments were trained in the use of battalion guns.⁵

Diminished numbers of British regulars in the Caribbean also meant that the West India Regiments saw much service in nearly all of the campaigns fought from 1803 to 1815. St. Lucia was the first objective. This island fell on 22 June for the third time to a total British force of 3,149 which included 696 serjeants, drummers, corporals and privates of the 3rd West India Regiment.⁶ The expedition against St. Lucia, which was a brief affair, provides a case in point of a lingering bias against the West India Regiments among some senior British officers. The three white regiments which formed part of the invasion force were all mentioned in the General Orders of 22 June, including the 68th Regiment which, as the reserve regiment, saw no action in the storming of Morne Fortune and which, therefore,

³Ibid., Bragge to Myers, 2 February 1804. The 8th was again excluded probably until 1807.

⁴Glover, pp. 84, 91.

⁵See Caulfield, p. 27. W.O. 27/133, "Half Yearly Confidential Report . . . 4th West India Regiment . . .", Antigua, 15 May 1815. Also Glover, pp. 84-85.

⁶This force also included seventy-one "Black Pioneers" who were divided among the three participating European regiments and the Quartermaster General's Department. See embarkation return in C.O. 318/22, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 83, 20 June 1803.

suffered no casualties except one drummer returned as missing.⁷ However, the 3rd West India Regiment, which according to the casualty return took part in the assault, and which suffered nearly a quarter of the total casualties of the invading force, was not mentioned in General Orders of 22 June 1803.⁸

The garrison left at St. Lucia included three companies of the 3rd West India Regiment.⁹ It also included a detachment of the Royal Artillery and the doomed 68th Regiment, which was removed from the West Indies in 1806 after a losing bout with yellow fever had nearly annihilated the regiment.¹⁰

Two other expeditions were mounted in 1803. Tobago surrendered in July and one company of the 7th West India Regiment provided part of the garrison.¹¹ In September, the Dutch colonies of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice were captured. The 11th West India Regiment, which was raised at Demerara, was among those troops which took part in the reduction of these territories.¹²

The Dutch empire in the West Indies was revisited soon by British troops. In May 1804 Surinam surrendered only after some serious fighting to a force that included about four compa-

⁷Ibid., Grinfield to Hobart, No. 86, 22 June 1803, enclosure No. 3.

⁸Ibid., and enclosure No. 4.

⁹Ibid., No. 98, 5 July 1803.

¹⁰See below.

¹¹C.O. 318/22, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 98, 5 July 1803.

¹²W.O. 6/184, Sullivan to Grinfield, 10 June 1803.

nies of the 6th West India Regiment which also provided part of the garrison. ¹³ This colony was the scene of further fighting when, in September 1805, sections of the Colonial Black Chasseurs, a corps originally raised by the Dutch in 1772 from among free blacks in the colony, mutinied. The force sent to crush the mutiny included a small detachment of the 4th West India Regiment. This miniature campaign, waged in the dense interior of the colony, continued until December 1806. ¹⁴

The period from 1805 to 1808 was¹ relatively calm in the West Indies. Excluding the operations against the Colonial Black Chasseurs, only four engagements took place, three of which involved West India Regiments. On 22 February 1805 a French force totaling more than four thousand troops and a flotilla mounting 580 guns effected a landing at Dominica but only after a heroic holding action by a greatly outnumbered British garrison which included six companies of the 1st West India Regiment. The small British force evaded capture and retreated to Prince Rupert's leaving Roseau to the French who destroyed much of the town and who extorted the sum of £5,500 from the inhabitants. However, less than one week after their invasion of the island, the French withdrew having suffered high casualties in fire fights at Roseau, Morne Daniel and especially

¹³C.O. 318/24, embarkation return in Green to Hobart, No. 7, 2 April 1804. C.O. 318/25, Myers to Hobart, No. 10, 6 June 1804, enclosure No. 4.

¹⁴The main body of documents covering this campaign and its consequences are found in C.O. 318/28 and W.O. 1/150. A few other despatches are located in W.O. 1/149 and 151.

on the beach at Pointe Michel. Here the light company of the 1st West India Regiment, along with the grenadiers of the 46th Regiment and a company of militiamen, distinguished itself by repulsing four massive French attacks composed of twenty-eight hundred regulars. For its gallant efforts the 1st received the thanks of the Assembly.¹⁵ In November 1808 the 1st was again rewarded, this time with permission to bear the word "DOMINICA" on its colours and regimental appointments. Notice of this battle honour being awarded to the 1st was placed in General Orders to the army serving in the West Indies.¹⁶

In January 1807 Curaçao surrendered, but it is not thought that any West India soldiers assisted in the reduction of this Dutch island. At the end of 1807 the 1st West India Regiment was again engaged, this time in the rather peaceful occupation of the Danish islands of St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix.¹⁷ Eight months later, in August 1808, the 1st was once more called upon. On 29 August three companies of the 1st under Lieutenant-colonel Blackwell of the 4th West India Regiment landed at Marie Galante in a successful effort to thwart

¹⁵The defence of Dominica is described in detail by Ellis, pp. 103-116. Official despatches are in C.O. 71/38, Prevost to Myers, 1 March 1805 and enclosure; and C.O. 318/27, Myers to Camden, No. 51, 9 March 1805 and enclosures. See also London Gazette of 7 May 1805.

¹⁶W.O. 3/47, "W. W." (William Windham) to Somerset. W.O. 3/195, W. W. to Fanquier, 26 November 1808. W.O. 3/580, W. W. to Beckwith, 26 November 1808.

¹⁷Ellis, pp. 118-119. War had broken out between England and Denmark in September 1807. See Fortescue, 7:1-27, for a description of the campaigns fought from 1807 to 1810.

a French attempt to retake the island. In a classic operation involving a series of forced marches over broken country, which were punctuated with several brief but brisk actions with the French force of about three hundred men, the 1st stalked its enemy and finally forced the surrender of the French. One hundred seventy-five French troops were captured along with the drum-major's staff of the French 26th Regiment which the 1st was allowed to retain in its possession. On their return to Barbados, the two flank companies and one battalion company were formed up on a garrison parade at St. Ann's on the right of the other battalion companies of the 1st, and received the thanks of the commander of the Windward and Leeward Islands Command.¹⁸

If there were lulls in the war after the rupture of the Peace of Amiens, no such pause interrupted the unabated fury with which yellow fever and other diseases continued to decimate European regiments in the West Indies. The Windward and Leeward Islands Command sustained the highest casualties since most of the troops stationed in the West Indies were in garrisons which comprised this command. From their arrival in the West Indies in January 1801 until they were ordered back to Britain in May 1806, the two battalions of the 68th Regiment suffered 1,558 fatalities among the officers and men. Out of the total of 2,330 men who served with the corps from 1801 to 1806, an additional

¹⁸ Ellis, pp. 120-124. Official despatches are in C.O. 318/33, Beckwith to Castlereagh, No. 17, 28 August 1808, enclosure No. 3. C.O. 318/34, Beckwith to Castlereagh, No. 21, 14 September 1808 and enclosures; and *ibid.*, Cochrane to Pole, 10 October 1808, pp. 615-618. W.O. 1/96, Beckwith to Gordon, No. 34, 14 September 1808 and enclosures.

two hundred were discharged as unfit for duty.¹⁹ During one particularly bad period, from 22 June 1803 to 31 December 1804, when the regiment was in garrison at Morne Fortune, St. Lucia, a return shows that 529 officers and men had died and another 178 had been discharged.²⁰ The great majority of the deaths and other casualties were attributed to disease.

The periodic returns for the army in the Windward and Leeward Islands show the frightening relentlessness by which disease continued to destroy the British Army. From April to December 1805 a total of 1,396 deaths were recorded in European regiments.²¹ In November 1808 the 1/96th, whose strength upon landing in the West Indies in 1805 plus drafts totalled 812, could only turn out 445 officers and men fit for duty.²² And from 1 January to 24 October 1809 another 1,693 troops had succumbed almost entirely due to disease.²³

The returns from the Jamaica Commands show the same grim statistics. At Stoney Hill, Jamaica, which was considered

¹⁹Ward, pp. 88-89.

²⁰C.O. 318/27, Shipley to Myers, 11 January 1805, enclosure No. 9. See also W.O. 1/96, "Report of the General Hospital Barbados from 24 September to the 5th October"

²¹C.O. 318/29, Beckwith to Castlereagh, No. 32, 19 January 1806, and enclosures. Around this time the total British force considered requisite for the defence of the West Indies was twenty-two thousand men. W.O. 1/632, Duke of York to Windham, 18 March 1806.

²²C.O. 318/34, return enclosed in Beckwith to Castlereagh, No. 31, 21 November 1808.

²³C.O. 318/38, enclosure in Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 1, 16 December 1809.

one of the healthiest posts on the island, ²⁴ two officers and almost fifty men of the 54th Regiment died during one ten day period. ²⁵ One source estimated the number of British deaths for the entire army in the West Indies from October 1797 to March 1807 at 26,328. ²⁶ The vast majority of these were the result of disease.

There were at least two major reasons for this appalling human wastage. The principal cause of death was malarial-type fever, the spread of which was facilitated by locating posts in swampy areas ²⁷ and by the poor interior construction of barracks. According to a report of an inspection of the barracks at Up Park Camp, Jamaica, in March 1806, the mode of sleeping was on damp fixed platforms or, more generally, on damp floors. ²⁸ But "new Rum", which was then reputed to be made from the "refuse" of the sugar crops, ²⁹ accounted for an inordinate number of

²⁴C.O. 318/32, "The Fifth Report of the Board of Health; containing Heads of Enquiry For Ascertaining What Are Healthy Stations in The West Indies . . . 4 September 1805."

²⁵C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 15 October 1808.

²⁶C.O. 318/34, enclosure in Wellesley to Cooke, 2 January 1808.

²⁷See, for instance, W.O. 1/95, Carmichael^A to Gordon, 1 April 1809.

²⁸Ibid., enclosure in Coote to Gordon, 22 March 1806. The ground floor of some of the barracks at Brimstone Hill, St. Kitts, according to Dr. John Davy, were undrained and unventilated. P. 464.

²⁹C.O. 318/34, enclosure in Wellesley to Cooke, 2 January 1808. The planters, on the other hand, consumed rum made only from cane juice.

deaths and illnesses. ³⁰ Major-General Hugh Carmichael even considered the "corrosive and insidious Effects of Rum" the principle cause of disease and mortality among the troops at Jamaica. ³¹

A number of remedies were resorted to in order to reduce casualties, but with little permanent success. Throughout the West Indies European troops were removed from unhealthy posts, ³² whenever possible, and replaced by West India soldiers. ³³ At Jamaica European troops were given minor garrison duties in order to conserve their energy. ³⁴ They were also issued fresh beef three days each week instead of two in addition to an increased supply of fresh vegetables. ³⁵ Also at Jamaica, Carmichael succeeded in reducing the soldiers' pay which was largely used to purchase the poisonous rum. The troops were compensated for

³⁰C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 10 September 1808. C.O. 318/34, Cochrane to Pole, 10 October 1808. Leach, p. 16. Butler, 1: 281-282. See also C.O. 318/32, "General Return of the Sick and Wounded in . . . the Windward and Leeward Colonies : . . from December 1799 to January 1803"

³¹C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 10 September 1808.

³²The 68th, for instance, was removed to Pigeon Island just off the northwest tip of St. Lucia. C.O. 318/27, Shipley to Myers, 11 January 1805. Ibid., Camden to Myers, 6 April 1805. W.O. 1/95, enclosure in Carmichael to Gordon, 13 April 1809. C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 28 July 1808.

³³For instance C.O. 137/126, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 1 April 1809.

³⁴C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 10 September 1808.

³⁵Ibid.

this reduction with additional food. ³⁶

Nevertheless, the total number of European casualties sustained by Britain during the long war in the West Indies, which included sick, wounded, missing and fatalities, were so enormous that they almost defy belief. The most often cited and frequently misread casualty estimates are Fortescue's for the period from 1793 to 1798. According to the historian of the British Army, Britain suffered about 100,000 total casualties of which 40,000 soldiers perished. ³⁷ Because of the difficulty

³⁶Ibid. The problem of diet as it affected the soldiers' health continued to demand the attention of the British Government well into the nineteenth century. W.O. 4/729, Howick to Baring, 30 September 1836. Ibid., Howick to Spearman and Hill both on 15 February 1837. W.O. 4/730, Sullivan to Spearman, 21 September 1837. Ibid., Howick to Baring, 31 May 1838. Ibid., Macaulay to Trevelyan, 19 February 1840. It should be noted that in the Bermuda garrison around 1840, where the average annual rate of mortality was thirty-six per thousand, the diet for convicts and soldiers was the same. Ibid., Macaulay to Gordon, 12 February 1840.

³⁷4 (part I): 496, 565. This total also includes casualties among sailors, troops serving on board warships and fatalities which occurred in Britain among invalid soldiers who had served in the West Indies. The fatalities for this period are higher than any period of similar duration because of the size and protracted nature of the operations conducted from 1793 to 1798. However, Fortescue's estimation that 50,000 men, alone, were discharged from Britain's military and naval services from 1793 to 1798 as unfit is totally inaccurate. See 4 (part I): 565. For 50,000 men (40,000 of them soldiers) to be discharged from service between 1793 and 1798, in addition to 40,000 dead in the West Indies during the same time, would mean that Britain would have had to send an average of almost 14,000 troops each of these years to the West Indies as replacements. This effort was clearly beyond Britain's military capabilities. What Fortescue probably meant was that this figure chiefly represented the other non-permanent casualties most of whom would return to their respective regiments after a period of convalescence. Some were indeed invalided to Britain. Returns show, however, that the average number of soldiers annually discharged as unfit for further service during the war in the West Indies was between 700 and 800. Confusion still reigns concerning Fortescue's famous estimates of total British casualties in the West Indies.

in raising the West India Regiments from 1795 to 1798, these losses were virtually all Europeans.

But Fortescue never tallied the total British losses for the entire war in the Caribbean. The recent location of elaborately and carefully prepared general medical returns, which apparently escaped Fortescue's attention and which probably accounts for his silence on this matter, now make it possible to fairly accurately determine the human cost expended by Britain. Based on these and numerous other available returns, it appears that the total casualties in the West Indies among European troops only from 1793 to 1815 was at least 352,000 of which some 70,000 died. This total also includes 18,000 men who were discharged as unfit for further service and were returned to Britain where many eventually died of diseases contracted in the Caribbean.

According to one general medical return 42,237 European soldiers were admitted into general, garrison and regimental hospitals in the Windward and Leeward Islands Command for the

from 1794 to 1796. British historians have themselves shown a remarkable and persistent inability to read these figures correctly. According to Watson, Britain lost 40,000 troops dead in the Caribbean by 1796. See p. 370. The same error was committed by J. H. Plumb. See his England in the Eighteenth Century (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1969), footnote on p. 198. The cause for this confusion remains a mystery since Fortescue is absolutely clear. He writes: "The number of men buried annually by the Army and Fleet in the West Indies during the three years 1794, 1795, and 1796 cannot be reckoned at a lower figure than from ten to twelve thousand, or say thirty-five thousand men in all, of which twenty-five thousand may be reckoned as belong to the Army." 4 (part I): 496. Britain did indeed suffer 40,000 military deaths in the West Indies. But these deaths occurred not from 1794 to 1796, but from 1793 to 1798. The figure cited by Watson, Plumb and many others is the total British deaths "in all quarters" or all theatres of operations and not just for the West Indies.

period from December 1799 to January 1803 alone. Of these 4,055 died. During this same period the average annual strength of the European garrison serving under the Windward and Leewards Command was 10,089.³⁸ In all of the statistics cited the principal cause was disease.

These staggering figures confirmed the necessity for the West India Regiments. Yet several decades after the great war the average annual mortality rate among European troops garrisoned in the West Indies was reported to range from 5 to 25 per cent while that for the West India Regiments did not exceed 2 per cent

³⁸It is estimated that about 97,000 European troops served in the West Indies during the war. More than seventy per cent of these soldiers died there. This figure is based on the number of troops required to maintain a European garrison strength of about 11,500. Adding to these figures the total casualties among West India troops during the war, the grand total for Britain's military forces in the West Indies is approximately (but conservatively) 424,000 of which 75,000 were fatalities in the Caribbean. These estimates do not include losses among naval personnel and troops serving on board warships for the period from 1799-1815. Although incredible, these totals are based, nonetheless, on detailed and diligently prepared records. C.O. 318/32, "Abstract. In which the Casualties of the European Troops are discriminated from those of the African. . .", enclosed in "General Return of the Sick and Wounded . . . from December 1799 to January 1803 . . ." W.O. 1/96/35, "Return of Casualties in the 68th Regiment . . . from 22 June 1803 - 31 December 1804." C.O. 318/25, enclosure No. 3 in Myers to Hobart, No. 1, 25 April 1804; enclosure No. 5 in Myers to Hobart, No. 10, 6 June 1804; and return in Myers to Camden, 7 August 1804. C.O. 318/27, Shipley to Myers, 11 January 1805; and enclosure No. 9 in Myers to Camden, No. 44, 10 February 1805. C.O. 318/29, Beckwith to Castlereagh, No. 32, 19 February 1806 and enclosure. W.O. 1/95, Coote to Gordon, 22 March 1806 and enclosure; and "Monthly return . . . in the Army in Jamaica, 20 December 1808", p. 266. C.O. 318/34, enclosure in Wellesley to Cooke, 2 January 1808; and return enclosed in Beckwith to Castlereagh, No. 31, 21 November 1808. C.O. 137/123, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 15 October 1808. C.O. 318/38, return enclosed in Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 1, 16 December 1809. See also the casualty returns in W.O. 25 for the period from 1809 to 1815.

annually.³⁹ That thousands of European soldiers were not only knowingly sent to almost certain death in the West Indies, but that they were also expected to become casualties within a four to five year period, is the grimmest and darkest chapter of Britain's military presence in the Caribbean.

About three months before the 1st West India Regiment's duel with the French 26th Regiment at Marie Galante, the second mutiny in a West India Regiment occurred. On the morning of 27 May 1808 some thirty-three recently acquired African recruits of the 2nd West India Regiment, who were then in the midst of being drilled at Fort Augusta, Jamaica, mutinied and killed two of their officers. The remainder of the 2nd, which at the time had a strength of about one thousand men, quickly turned out and attacked the mutineers killing nine. In order to diminish the possibility of a clash between West India soldiers and aroused white residents and militiamen, some three hundred men of the 2nd were interned on board a ship-of-war during the enquiry into the affair.⁴⁰

This incident is noteworthy because it helped to reopen the thorny question of Jamaica's grant towards the costs of main-

³⁹Davy, pp. 537-538.

⁴⁰Official records dealing with the mutiny are found chiefly in C.O. 137/123 and 126. Secondary accounts are in Caulfield, pp. 28-31; Gardner, pp. 245-247. Several sources site a third mutiny in a West India Regiment in 1806. An alleged plot was discovered at Tobago in that year. However, it involved some slaves and black pioneers and not West India soldiers. C.O. 318/29, Rattray to Beckwith, 16 January 1806, pp. 147-149. Careful search through innumerable official records has not shown any other mutiny during the period under study.

taining imperial troops on the island. Already in 1807, the Jamaica Assembly, aroused by certain terms of the Slave Trade Abolition Act, which it considered to be both an infringement of their property rights and their constitutional rights to legislate in internal matters, resolved not to make the grant until a redress of these grievances. Seeking to use this disturbance to prove the justness of their criticisms of West India soldiers, the Assembly requested copies of all proceedings at the Court-martial and Courts of Enquiry. When these were refused by Major-General Carmichael, discord in Assembly forced the Duke of Manchester, then Governor of the island, to prorogue that body.

One consequence of prorogation was that British troops were left to be subsisted from imperial funds only. Carmichael took advantage of this opportunity to transfer subsistence from the Agent General, who was supervised by the Assembly, to the Commissariat Department, which was independent of the Assembly. This transfer merely antagonized Jamaicans and widened the debate surrounding subsistence.

Both the Crown's Attorney General and the Secretary of War and Colonies, Viscount Castlereagh, considered Carmichael's refusal to comply with the Assembly's request unconstitutional. Not only was he instructed to furnish the Assembly with the documents requested, but Carmichael was ordered to testify before this body himself.⁴¹

Having already incurred colonial wrath as a result of

⁴¹C.O. 137/126, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 20 May 1809, and enclosures.

the Slave Trade Abolition Act, and desirous of having the grant restored, London ordered that the 2nd West India Regiment and Carmichael both be removed from Jamaica. Towards the end of 1809 the 2nd was replaced by the 5th West India Regiment which had been in garrison at Honduras.⁴² Carmichael, who had hoped to be reassigned to Europe or the East Indies,⁴³ was given a staff post in the Windward and Leeward Islands Command and was replaced by Lieut.-General Morrison.⁴⁴ Upon assuming his command, Morrison was warned that the deep rooted prejudice of white Jamaicans could only be removed by the "most exemplary Discipline" of the black troops on the island. But he was instructed also to continue the policy of cantoning West India soldiers at Fort Augusta and at other stations "remote from the City of Kingstown".⁴⁵

In 1809 the tempo of the war in the Caribbean quickened. On 14 January, Cayenne, the principal city of French Guiana, fell to the British. The following month a major British force captured Martinique. This expedition included 2,697 soldiers of the 1st, 3rd, 4th and 8th West India Regiments, the largest contingent of West India soldiers employed on a single expedi-

⁴²W.O. 17/2000.

⁴³C.O. 137/126, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 11 April and 12 April 1809.

⁴⁴C.O. 138/39, Castlereagh to Carmichael, 9 August 1809.

⁴⁵Ibid., Castlereagh to Morrison, No. 1, 9 August 1809. For a brief but useful discussion and analysis of the legal and political ramifications of the subsistence question see Murray, pp. 41-43.

tion.⁴⁶ After the war the 1st and 4th West India Regiments were awarded the battle honour "MARTINIQUE" for their services in the capture of the island.⁴⁷ In April of the same year the 3rd West India Regiment and a detachment of the 8th helped to capture the Saints, a cluster of tiny islands some eight nautical miles almost due south of Guadeloupe.⁴⁸

British military operations during 1809 came to an end in July when a combined force of British and Spanish troops forced the surrender of the French garrison in the city of Santo Domingo. The British contingent, thirteen hundred strong, included six hundred soldiers of the 2nd, 5th and 7th West India Regiments.⁴⁹

This expedition revived the latent fears with which white Jamaicans still regarded the island of Hispaniola. Prior to the departure of the contingent of the 2nd West India Regiment from Jamaica, the Duke of Manchester expressed his fears that there would be wholesale desertions once the force had landed.

⁴⁶The total British force was 10,781. Despatches are in W.O. 1/95 and C.O. 318/35. For descriptions of this campaign see Fortescue, 7: 11-17; Ellis, pp. 125-131; and W. Y. Carman, "The Capture of Martinique, 1809", Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 20(1941): 1-4.

⁴⁷W.O. 3/381, Calvert to Officer Commanding the 4th West India Regiment, 11 November 1817. W.O. 3/383, Calvert to Officer Commanding 1st West India Regiment, 6 May 1818.

⁴⁸C.O. 318/35, Maitland to Beckwith, 18 April 1809, and enclosure No. 4.

⁴⁹C.O. 137/126, Carmichael to Castlereagh, 4 June 1809. C.O. 138/39, Castlereagh to Morrison, No. 1, 9 August 1809. W.O. 1/95, Carmichael to Dundas, 10 September 1809, and enclosures. In 1802 the French had captured the city of Santo Domingo and had brought the whole of the Spanish portion of the island under their control.

Carmichael, who commanded the British expedition, was disinclined to believe that the soldiers in his old regiment would behave so treacherously. He noted that when the 2nd was engaged against the insurgents at St. Vincent and Grenada there was only one instance of desertion.⁵⁰ Events proved Carmichael correct: there was no mention of any desertions having taken place during the attack against Santo Domingo.

For all intents and purposes the war in the West Indies ceased at the end of February 1810. On 5 February, Guadeloupe, the bastion of French resistance in the West Indies, which had eluded British capture since 1794, capitulated but only after brisk fighting and a series of forced marches over rough and broken country, in excessive heat, during the six days of the operation. British forces included detachments of the 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th and 8th West India Regiments.⁵¹ Small detachments of the 4th West India Regiment were employed on the island after the French surrendered in order to bring in French and even British deserters.⁵² The 1st and 4th West India Regiments were subsequently permitted to inscribe the word "GUADELOUPE" on their colours as a result of their gallant conduct in reducing the

⁵⁰C.O. 137/26, Carmichael to Manchester, 28 April 1809, pp. 199-200.

⁵¹C.O. 318/40, Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 9, 9 February 1810. See also Fortescue, 7: 20-25; Ellis, pp. 132-140; and Dennis Haggard, "The Last Fight For Napoleon", Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 14 (1935): 231-232.

⁵²C.O. 71/46, Beckwith to Barnes, No. 4, 19 September 1810.

island. ⁵³ Several days after the fall of Guadeloupe one company of the 4th West India Regiment was selected to accompany the expedition against St. Martin and Eustatius which surrendered on 14 and 21 February, respectively. ⁵⁴ These islands, mere rocks breaking the surface of the Caribbean, nonetheless, were important objectives since they were havens from which privateers preyed on British commerce.

The capture of these last two islands meant the virtual extinction of France's presence in the West Indies. The cessation of active operations in this area also facilitated the British Government's prosecution of the war in the Peninsular since many troops from the British Isles who would have been sent to West Indian garrisons as drafts were diverted to Wellington's army. The impact of these developments on the British Army in the West Indies was that West India soldiers and an increasing number of foreigners in British service, particularly Dutchmen and French deserters and prisoners of war, assumed a large share of the burden of guarding the old British West Indian possessions and the conquered colonies. Some of the British regiments which were recruited with large numbers of foreigners, and which were serving in the West Indies around this time, were the five battalions of the 60th, the York Light Infantry Volunteers and the West India Rangers. At the end of the war several of the

⁵³W.O. 3/222, Calvert to Secretary to the Clothing Board, 11 November 1817. W.O. 3/68, Calvert to Somerset, 6 May 1818. W.O. 3/163, "Memorandum for the War Office", 7 May 1818.

⁵⁴C.O. 318/40, Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 18, 26 February 1810.

European serjeants in the 4th West India Regiment were Germans who had been drafted from 5/60th. ⁵⁵ According to Fortescue, by the end of the war the garrisons constituting the Windward and Leeward Islands Command were defended chiefly by African soldiers of the West India Regiments and foreigners in British pay. ⁵⁶ A return of the Windward and Leeward Islands Command dated 6 April 1812 confirms Fortescue's statement. Out of a total strength of 14,617, including artillerymen and one company of invalids, about a half were, indeed, West India soldiers and foreigners. The same was true for the Jamaica Command. ⁵⁷

The calm in the Caribbean, beginning in 1810, was broken only occasionally by small scale police operations against runaways. Usually these operations involved small detachments of West India soldiers. ⁵⁸ This stillness was punctuated also with the bustle of military activity associated with the ill-fated New Orleans campaign of November 1814 to January 1815, in which the 1st and 5th West India Regiments took part, ⁵⁹ and the Guadeloupe expedition of August 1815. Detachments of the 1st,

⁵⁵See Charles Oman, pp. 333-337. Fortescue, 7: 26. W.O. 25/652, folio 68.

⁵⁶7: 26-27.

⁵⁷C.O. 318/46, return enclosed in Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 143, 10 April 1812. C.O. 318/52, York to Fuller, 21 January 1816.

⁵⁸W.O. 27/108, Beckwith to C-in-C, "Confidential", 18 July 1812. W.O. 27/113, Stehelin to Beckwith, 28 October 1812.

⁵⁹Official despatches are chiefly in W.O. 1/141. See also C.O. 295/37, Woodford to Bathurst, No. 103, 6 June 1815; and W.O. 1/142, Barker to Harrison, 1 December 1815. Also Ellis, pp. 141-159.

3rd and 6th West India Regiments participated in this latter campaign. ⁶⁰

The employment of West India Regiments at New Orleans is significant since it marks the first time that these troops were used on operations outside the West Indies where they were raised originally to serve only. ⁶¹ Plans to give the West India Regiments a broader imperial military responsibility, or wider operational area not limited to the West Indian region, were under consideration only a few years after the creation of these corps. In November 1799, Abercromby suggested that "Black Troops" be employed in the proposed "liberation" of Spanish South America. ⁶² Several memorandums written from 1806 to 1808 by Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington, also suggested using "Negro infantry" in the conquest of Spanish Central and South America. ⁶³ However, the only British expedition against Spain's American possessions during the war, which ended in the British fiasco at Buenos Aires in 1807, did not employ

⁶⁰C.O. 318/51, enclosure No. 10 in Leith to Bathurst, No. 37, 12 August 1815. Guadeloupe had been returned to France as a result of the peace settlement in 1814.

⁶¹ Both British Honduras and the Guianas, areas where West India Regiments had already served, are considered part of the West Indies or, more appropriately, part of the West Indian region because of the historical, economic, military and administrative links between these areas and the Caribbean islands.

⁶²Abercromby to Dundas, "Private", 20 November 1799, Melville Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

⁶³Duke of Wellington, ed., Supplementary Despatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda of Field Marshall Arthur Duke of Wellington (London: John Murray, 15 vols., 1858-1872), 6: 35-82.

West India soldiers.

In addition to Latin America there were repeated requests to send West India Regiments to other parts of the expanding British empire. In October 1802, the Sierra Leone Company began petitioning the British Government to send a West India Regiment to that territory.⁶⁴ Also in 1802, plans were being shaped for sending a West India Regiment to Gibraltar.⁶⁵ The following year the Governor of Ceylon requested a black regiment for service against the King of Kandy.⁶⁶ And in 1804 Castlereagh toyed with the idea of interchanging the West India Regiments with the sepoy battalions of the East India Company. Castlereagh cautiously sought this most unlikely exchange because, in his estimation, West India soldiers were the only substitutes for the reduced numbers of European troops in India.⁶⁷

There were several reasons for the requests for West India Regiments to serve in distant corners of the British Empire. Malarial-type diseases, the bane of European soldiers, were present in all of those stations seeking black troops.

⁶⁴W.O. 1/352, Thornton to Hobart, 6 October 1802. See also C.O. 318/20, Hobart to Grinfield, No. 1, 6 January 1803. W.O. 1/625, Brownrigg to Sullivan, "Private", 12 January 1803. W.O. 1/352, Macauley to Sullivan, 24 January 1803. C.O. 318/21, Grinfield to Hobart, No. 51, 25 February 1803.

⁶⁵C.O. 318/20, Hobart to Grinfield, No. 1, 4 September 1802. Ibid., Grinfield to Hobart, No. 14, 22 October 1802. W.O. 1/630, Foxe to Gordon, "Private", 16 January 1805. C.O. 318/31, Bowyer to Windham, No. 28, 8 February 1807.

⁶⁶Barnes, Empire, p. 120. C.O. 318/25, Myers to Hobart, No. 10, 6 June 1804, enclosure No. 5. Ibid., Myers to Camden, No. 13, 31 August 1804.

⁶⁷Castlereagh to Wellesley, 21 and 25 August 1804, in Wellington, 4: 520-524.

There was also the perennial shortage of European troops coupled with the growing military demands resulting from expanding imperial commitments.⁶⁸ The Sierra Leone Company also desired West India troops in order to hold in check the turbulent Maroons and hostile Africans in and around the territory.⁶⁹

Most of the requests for West India soldiers were not sanctioned by the British Government. The Governor of Ceylon, for instance, was authorized instead to recruit the Ceylon Regiments by purchasing African slaves from Portuguese East Africa.⁷⁰ The plan to exchange West India troops for sepoy soldiers was dropped also when a somewhat indignant Arthur Wellesley flatly rejected the proposal in 1805.⁷¹

It was only near the end of the war that the West India Regiments were given a broader imperial function. In 1812 a recruiting depot for all the West India Regiments, originally consisting of some forty-two officers and men,⁷² was estab-

⁶⁸In the case of British plans concerning expansion into western Africa see W.O. 1/92, extract of the Sullivan Memorandum, written around December 1804, pp. 153-170.

⁶⁹W.O. 1/352, Thornton to Hobart, 6 October 1802. The Maroons in question were the Trelawny Maroons of Jamaica who rebelled in 1795, and, upon their surrender in 1796, were transported to Halifax, Nova Scotia, the same year, and subsequently to Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1800.

⁷⁰These slaves were not freed until 1819. G. Tylden, "The Ceylon Regiments, 1796 to 1874", The Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research, 30(1952): 124-128.

⁷¹See Wellesley's "MEMORANDUM ON THE PLAN PROPOSED OF AN INTERCHANGE OF NATIVE TROOPS OF INDIA AND THE NEGRO CORPS OF THE WEST INDIES", in Wellington, 4: 520-531.

⁷²W.O. 17/1164, return for 25 September 1812. Recruiting in Africa is discussed below.

lished at Bance Island, Sierra Leone. This recruiting establishment eventually led to a permanent presence of West India troops on the West African coast. In 1818 it was decided to garrison Britain's West African possessions with West India soldiers and in May 1819 headquarters and five companies of the 2nd West India Regiment arrived at Sierra Leone from Jamaica.⁷³ This contingent included twelve officers and 341 other ranks. The majority of these troops were quartered at Sierra Leone with small detachments on Banana Island and Isles de Los. One hundred and six men were sent also to Gambia, further up the West African coast.⁷⁴

The 2nd was involved quickly in military operations: the Rio Pongo Expedition of 1820 and the disastrous Ashanti War of 1823. Throughout the nineteenth century West India soldiers were to be employed in numerous operations in West Africa, particularly in several tough campaigns against the Ashantis.⁷⁵

Before the establishment of a permanent force of West India troops on the West African coast in 1819, other West India soldiers had already been sent on military duties outside of the West Indian region. As mentioned above, two West India Regiments took part in the New Orleans expedition. And according to a "Statement of Reductions" prepared in 1817, a detachment of two hundred men of the 4th West India Regiment was included in the

⁷³Caulfield, pp. 36-37. Christopher Fyfe, A History of Sierra Leone (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 135.

⁷⁴Caulfield, p. 37.

⁷⁵These campaigns are discussed in both Ellis and Caulfield.

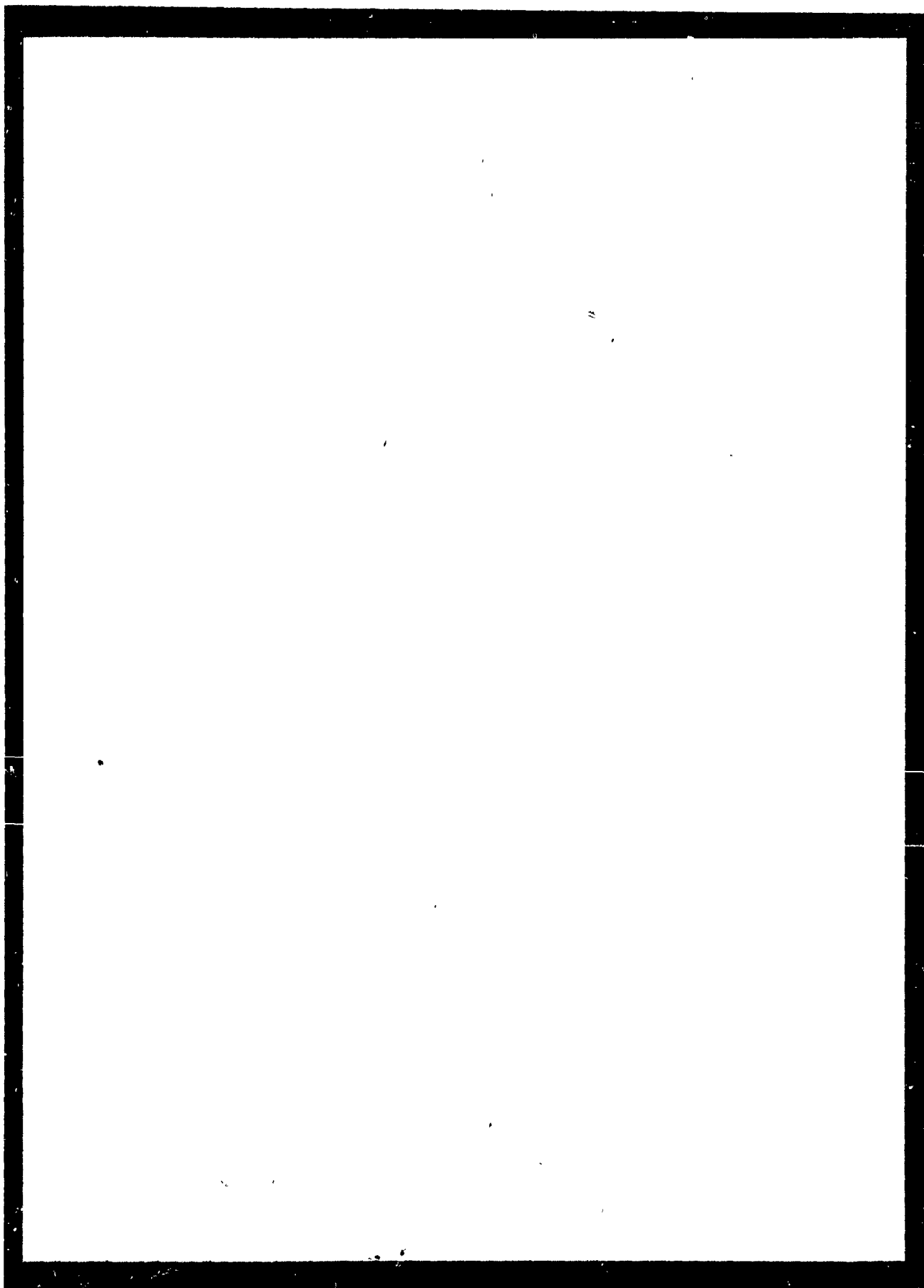
garrison at Gibraltar. ⁷⁶

The principle of enlarging the operational sector of troops originally raised to serve in specified areas or garrisons was applied also to the East India Company's sepoy armies. Actually these troops were the first to be affected. Because of the increasing commitment of Britain's European regiments to other theatres of the war and a new strategic thinking regarding India, which held that the war in the East should be carried to enemy held islands in the Indian Ocean from self-supporting bases of operation on the sub-continent, increasing numbers of sepoy troops were used on overseas campaigns. By the turn of the century a dual function had been developed for the Company's armies: these troops were considered as an internal defence force and as an imperial instrument for overseas expeditions. By permitting the sepoys to volunteer for these expeditions, since according to their enlistment into Company service they were not bound to serve overseas, sepoys served outside of India early in the war. Sepoys participated in the capture of Ceylon, Amboyna and the Spice Islands in 1795, the Egyptian Campaign of 1801, the occupation of Macao in 1808 and the capture of Mauritius and Java in 1810 and 1811, respectively. ⁷⁷

The West India Regiments were also given this dual function with the defence of the West Indian region serving as the internal commitment and West Africa as the overseas respon-

⁷⁶W.O. 4/719, p. 207.

⁷⁷Shiva Tosh Das, Indian Military: Its History and Development (New Delhi: Sagar Publications, 1969), p. 83.



sibility. However, by the end of the nineteenth century West India Regiments were considered as regular troops capable of serving in any part of the world. ⁷⁸

The end of the war found the West India soldier in a uniform that had evolved only slightly and which still remained essentially a copy of the uniform worn by British line regiments - with some modifications. ⁷⁹ In 1811 the "Waterloo" or "Wellington" shako was authorized replacing the "stovepipe". The short red or scarlet jacket was still worn but it was without some of the horizontal white piping and lace which adorned the tunics of Britain's European troops. Instead of the heavy grey overalls, short grey spats and boots or shoes officially sanctioned for British soldiers on active service, the rank and file of West India Regiments wore Jodhpur-styled white or blue cotton trousers, which were also worn by European regiments serving in the West Indies, and black slippers. The latter, a regimental peculiarity, were a necessity since West India soldiers were unaccustomed to wearing boots and probably could not have campaigned in them. A contemporary drawing of a private of a

⁷⁸ Manual of Military Law (1899 edition), p. 247.

⁷⁹ In 1858, however, there was a complete change in the uniform worn by West India soldiers when, at the express wish of Queen Victoria, these troops were issued an adaptation of the uniform worn by the Zouaves of the French Army. The uniform, unlike any other worn in the British Army before and since 1858, is still worn today by the Jamaica Military Band. Tylden, plates facing pp. 46 and 47, and p. 47.

battalion company in the 5th West India Regiment appears in Colonel Hamilton Smith's Costume of the Army of the British Empire, a very limited number of which were published in 1815.⁸⁰

Maintaining the prescribed strength of the West India Regiments became a matter of immediate concern to the army as a result of the Act abolishing the British slave trade. No longer could the army rely, as in the past, on the slave trade apparatus to furnish a steady stream of Africans as recruits.⁸¹ Partially because of the anticipated difficulty in maintaining the established strength of these corps after the trade ceased, Africans would continue to be enlisted for lifetime service despite the fact that as a result of the Mutiny Act of 1806 Europeans were enlisted for limited service or seven years.⁸²

⁸⁰(London: Bulmer and Company, 1815). The print in this chapter is a photocopy of Smith's watercolour of the private of the 5th which is the possession of the National Army Museum, London. This print was made with the permission of the Photographic Librarian. Another print of this same watercolour appears in Tylden, plate facing p. 42. For additional information on the uniform see Barnes, Empire, p. 96 and plate facing p. 96. Also Robert and Christopher Wilkinson-Latham, Infantry Uniforms including Artillery and other Supporting Troops of Britain and the Commonwealth, 1742-1855 (London: Blandford Press, 1969), p.152.

⁸¹W.O. 1/96, Bowyer to Gordon, No. 190, 6 February 1808, and enclosure.

⁸²The stated reasons for this policy were the economic burden placed on the West Indian colonies which would result from the more frequent discharges, and the fear of discharging into the colonial slave society an increased number of blacks with military training. See Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, First Series, vol. VII, Debate in Commons on the Clause in the Mutiny Bill calling for limited service, 6 June 1806. Canning's speech, pp. 547-548. Ibid., Debate in the House of Lords on the

The British Government almost immediately made provisions to ensure that the West India Regiments would still receive African recruits after the Act abolishing the trade became operative on 1 January 1808. Anticipating that enemy shipping interests, as well as a few brazen British speculators, would continue the trade in African slaves, an Order in Council of 16 March 1808 established a Vice-Admiralty Court at Sierra Leone to which all illegally transported or condemned slaves, who were captured by Royal Navy ships of war and privateers along the African coast, were taken for adjudication. Furthermore, all fit liberated or recaptured Africans were to be turned over to military and naval authorities for enlistment into Britain's land and sea services. ⁸³

The decision to enlist Africans taken from captured slavers resulted in another step taken by the British Government to guarantee recruits for the West India Regiments. Since it was illegal to enlist aliens into the British Army, and since captured slaves were classified as aliens, a subsequent relaxation in the law was made in order to facilitate their enlistment. ⁸⁴

same measure, 13 June 1806. Earl of Westmoreland's speech, p. 650. (It should also be kept in mind that in 1806 the West India soldier was still regarded as a slave). Ibid., vol. IX, Debate in Commons on the Slave Trade Abolition Bill, 9 March 1807. Lord Howick's speech, p. 66. See also Young, pp. 241-242 and Fortescue, 5: 301-303.

⁸³ Excerpts of the Order in Council of 16 March 1808 are quoted in Robert Kuczynski, Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire, 3 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1948-1953), 1: 112-113. Instructions to commanders of Royal Navy ships and privateers are in W.O. 1/742, pp. 65-74.

⁸⁴ The same was also done in order to recruit foreigners in British pay. Manual of Military Law, pp. 191-192.

Despite these provisions abolition resulted in a permanent reduction in the overall strength of the West India Regiments until the end of the war. In August of 1807 the total effective strength of these corps was about 7,950. In January 1809 this force returned 7,488 total effectives.⁸⁵ Eleven months later this number had been reduced to 7,149.⁸⁶ And by November 1810 the total effective strength of the eight regiments had further shrunk to 6,745.⁸⁷ This decline reflected, of course, the casualties sustained by the West India Regiments in the series of campaigns which they fought from 1808 to 1810.

This steady attrition is indicated also in specific regimental returns. In May 1808, the 1st West India Regiment returned 1,057 other ranks.⁸⁸ By October 1815 the 1st returned 722 serjeants, corporals, drummers and privates.⁸⁹

How many recruits were provided for the West India Regiments after March 1808 until the end of the war in 1815 as a result of the policy of enlisting so called "Liberated" Africans? According to a return prepared by the Liberated African Department at Sierra Leone, 2,009 men and boys were enlisted into the West India Regiments, the Royal African Corps and the Royal African Colonial Corps during this period.⁹⁰

⁸⁵W.O. 1/645, return on p. 477.

⁸⁶Ibid., "Abstract" on p. 469.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸W.O. 27/92, part II, "General Return . . . 1st West India Regiment . . . 6th Day of May 1808".

⁸⁹W.O. 27/135, "General Return . . . 1st West India Regiment".

⁹⁰This return appears as Table 8.

TABLE 8

NUMBER OF SLAVES CAPTURED AND CONDEMNED, AND THEIR
DISPOSAL, FROM 1808 TO 1815, AT FREETOWN,
SIERRA LEONE

Total						"Entered His Majesty's Land Service as Soldiers for the West India Regiment, Royal African Corps and Royal African Colonial Corps with their wives and Children."				
Year	Men	Boys	Women	Girls	Total	Men	Boys	Women	Girls	Total
1808	39	16	12	11	78	-	-	-	-	-
1809	86	80	57	57	280	-	-	-	-	-
1810	471	281	195	140	1,087	70	-	-	-	70
1811	246	114	121	64	545	45	-	-	-	45
1812	1,265	408	337	180	2,190	959	122	48	7	1,136
1813	227	117	57	45	446	144	17	6	2	169
1814	1,017	426	270	157	1,870	445	13	15	-	473
1815	583	253	277	183	1,296	191	3	4	-	198
1808-1815	3,934	1,695	1,326	837	7,792	1,854	155	73	9	2,091

SOURCE: C.O. 267/127, "Return showing the Number of Liberated Africans received into the Colony of Sierra Leone specifying the Name of the Vessel from which they were landed, the state of Adjudication and the manner in which the said Persons were then and subsequently disposed of as appears by the Register kept in the Office of the Liberated African Department." These figures are not thought to be complete. Nor were they tabulated correctly in the original.

Unfortunately, this return does not indicate the distribution of recruits among these three corps. Nor are Kuczynski's and Johnson Asiegbu's ⁹¹ tabulations of any assistance since the figures cited by both men are composite figures for recruiting into the three corps mentioned above and even enlistments into the Royal Navy. They do not specify recruitment into the West India Regiments. ⁹² What is more important, both Kuczynski's and Asiegbu's studies never made use of the incomplete but, nonetheless, significant recruiting records of the African Recruiting Establishment or Depot at Bance Island.

Although the recruiting records only commenced in 1812 when the recruiting depot was established, and several of the monthly returns are missing, these records do provide some assistance in determining the number of recaptured Africans enlisted into the West India Regiments from 1808 to 1815. The actual number recruited will probably never be known, but it appears that of the estimated 2,009 men and boys enlisted into Britain's military services at Sierra Leone about 1,600 were enlisted into the West India Regiments. ⁹³

An examination of the recruiting returns of the African Recruiting Establishment also disclosed that in addition to the

⁹¹Slavery and the Politics of Liberation 1787-1861
(London: Longman, Green and Co., Ltd., 1969).

⁹²Kuczynski, 1: 114-119. Asiegbu, pp. 24, 27-28.

⁹³The monthly returns of the African Recruiting Establishment are in W.O. 17/1164. See also C.O. 318/46, Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 150, "Military", 18 May 1812. W.O. 25/658, folios 31-34.

enlistment of "captured Negroes", a number of free Africans, who probably lived in Sierra Leone and bordering regions, voluntarily enlisted into the West India Regiments. It is thought that about two hundred men and boys joined these corps by voluntary enlistment.⁹⁴ A total, then, of some eighteen hundred were recruited on the West African coast for service in the West India Regiments.

During the period 1808 to 1815 recruits for these corps were also picked up from a variety of other sources. The Vice Admiralty Courts in the British West Indies turned over about three hundred condemned blacks as recruits.⁹⁵ A few slaves owned by army officers in the West Indies were purchased as recruits by the Commissary General in 1812.⁹⁶ A number of slaves incarcerated in a Kingston, Jamaica, jail on the charge of conspiring to rebel were subsequently enlisted into the West India Regiments.⁹⁷ And several hundred West Indian slaves, chiefly from the Dutch islands, were enlisted.⁹⁸

A grand total of about twenty five hundred, representing

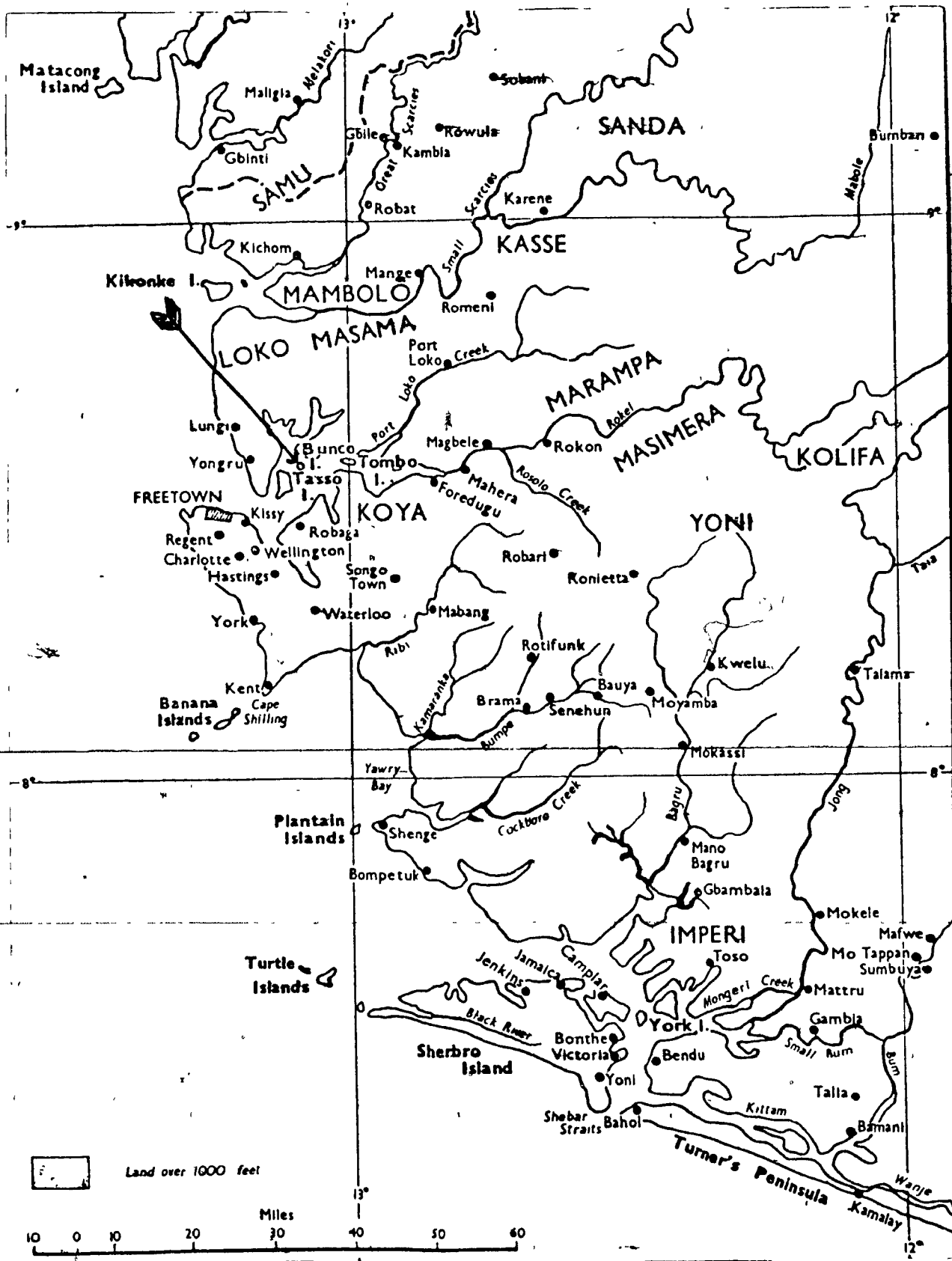
⁹⁴W.O. 17/1164.

⁹⁵C.O. 137/123, Castlereagh to Villettes, 11 April 1808. C.O. 318/44, Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 101, 7 May 1811. C.O. 318/33, Bowyer to Castlereagh, No. 65, 28 May 1808, and enclosure. C.O. 137/134, Morrison to Liverpool, No. 53, 30 April 1812.

⁹⁶C.O. 318/46, Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 135, 14 February 1812.

⁹⁷C.O. 137/131, Morrison to Liverpool, No. 35, 22 December 1811. Ibid., Liverpool to Morrison, No. 7, "Civil", 8 February 1812. C.O. 137/134, Liverpool to Morrison, No. 9, "Civil", 29 February 1812. Ibid., Morrison to Liverpool, No. 52, 30 April 1812. Ibid., Torrens to Peel, 13 June 1812. C.O. 318/46, Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 144, "Military", 17 April 1812.

⁹⁸See Table 3.



Sierra Leone, Coastal Region

→ indicates Bunce (Bance) Island

all recruiting sources, were enlisted into the West India Regiments during the entire eight year period. It is understandable at once why there was ~~an~~ overall diminution in the strength of this force. Why, however, did recruiting fail to produce sufficient numbers of Africans to maintain the prescribed establishment of the West India Regiments? The chief overall reason is that it took about four years to establish the recruiting depôt for the West India Regiments at Sierra Leone after the Order in Council of 16 March 1808, despite the fact that a need for a recruiting depôt on the African coast had been repeatedly recommended.⁹⁹ There was also some confusion as to where this depôt should be located. From 1800 to as late as 1811, Goree, an island off the coast of modern Senegal at Cape Verde, was proposed.¹⁰⁰ Bance Island, however, was finally selected and the depôt opened in April 1812.

More specifically, poor recruiting in Africa, especially during 1808 and 1809, when no enlistments occurred, was the result of the policy of the first Governor of Sierra Leone

⁹⁹W.O. 1/92. Whitelock Memorandum, 26 November 1796, pp. 501-502. W.O. 1/351, Fraser to Dundas, No. 3, 23 January 1801. W.O. 1/95, Hislop's "Remarks", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804. C.O. 318/30 Bowyer to Windham, No. 21, 21 November 1806, and enclosure. W.O. 1/96, Myers to Clinton, No. 11, 13 May 1804. Ibid., Bowyer to Gordon, No. 190, 6 February 1808. W.O. 6/152, Bunbury to Barrow, 20 September 1811. W.O. 1/648, Duke of York to Liverpool, 4 October 1811. W.O. 1/649, Torrens to Tash, 19 November 1811.

¹⁰⁰W.O. 1/351, Dundas to Fraser, 15 November 1800. W.O. 1/628, Duke of York to Camden, 13 June 1804. W.O. 1/638, Duke of York to Castlereagh, 3 May 1808. C.O. 318/39, David Dundas to Liverpool, 6 December 1809, and enclosures. Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Papers (Commons), 1812, vol. 10, No. 370, "Papers relating to Recruiting Depot on the Coast of Africa", p. 301

appointed by the Crown, Thomas Perronet Thompson. Disturbed by the existence of slavery in the colony, Thompson forbid the recruiting of liberated Africans into British military service on the grounds that lifetime service was a form of apprenticeship for those captured slaves who unsuspectingly enlisted.¹⁰¹ In August 1808, the month after Thompson assumed his office, an ordinance was passed declaring the system of apprenticing liberated Africans within the colony to be illegal.

The need to recruit the West India Regiments and the other colonial corps was an item of the utmost importance to the British Government. As a result, Thompson was eventually recalled to Britain. In February 1810 Captain Columbine of the Royal Navy took over the administration of the colony. One of Columbine's instructions was the reinstatement of the practice of recruiting liberated Africans into Britain's land services as set forth in the Order in Council of 16 March 1808. He was cautioned to implement a fair method of inducing these Africans to enlist. But he was directed also not to overlook any proper means in reestablishing this recruiting practice.¹⁰² Such was the need for African recruits.

In 1811 the Duke of York proposed that a bounty of eight guineas be given to each prospective recruit in order to encourage voluntary enlistment.¹⁰³ Enlistment into Britain's

¹⁰¹ J. J. Crooks, A History of the Colony of Sierra Leone, Western Africa (Dublin: Brown and Nolan, Ltd., 1903) pp. 73-75.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁰³ W.O. 1/648, Duke of York to Liverpool, 4 October 1811.

military service finally began in 1810, although the numbers were insignificant for both 1810 and 1811.¹⁰⁴ None of those recruited during this time appear to have been enlisted into the West India Regiments.

Yet, involuntary enlistment of liberated Africans continued. According to Dr. Robert Thorpe, the Chief Justice of the colony and Judge of the Vice-Admiralty Court at Freetown from 1811 to 1813, the consent of the captured slave was never sought.¹⁰⁵ Even Ellis, the historian of the 1st West India Regiment, admits this.¹⁰⁶ Asiegbu claims that Britain's essential interest in the colony was as a recruiting area and as a result coercion was employed in order to obtain recruits.¹⁰⁷ He also points out that the transfer of Sierra Leone in 1808 to the Crown marked the beginning of the end of the humanitarian and philanthropic spirit which had guided the early development of the colony.¹⁰⁸ The monthly recruiting returns of the African Recruiting Depot do indeed show a number of desertions. The consequence of Crown Colony status in effect meant that imperial imperatives shaped the substance and tone of imperial policy regarding Sierra Leone. The evidence pertaining to recruitment strongly supports Asiegbu's assessment.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴See Table 8.

¹⁰⁵Robert Thorpe, A Reply 'Point by Point' to the Special Report of the Directors of the African Institution (London: 1815), p. 84.

¹⁰⁶Ellis, p. 16.

¹⁰⁷Page 33.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹W.O. 17/1164. An island was sought as the site for the recruiting depot because recruits could be confined during training preparatory to being shipped to the West Indies. See Crooks, p. 88.

There were additional factors which explain the poor results of African recruitment from 1808 to 1815. Apparently not all of the slaves taken from slavers seized on the African coast were brought to Sierra Leone where the chances were better that they would be enlisted into the West India Regiments. According to one despatch, some fifty Africans taken from French slave ships were detained by the Customs Collector at the Cape of Good Hope and were attached to British regiments there as labourers. These men were given uniforms and the same pay as British soldiers.¹¹⁰ Also, the human cargoes of seized slavers frequently contained few men and boys who were judged fit for military service. According to some medical reports the inmates of these ships were discovered existing under appalling conditions. Hundreds were found dead and many of the survivors suffered from dysentery, scurvy, smallpox and ulcerations.¹¹¹ Of the adults, some requested to be returned to their homes and many others were indentured as apprentices at Sierra Leone.¹¹²

According to one source the total number of liberated Africans recruited into Britain's military services up to 1833 was only 3,147.¹¹³ Although this figure appears to be a bit low, recruiting in Africa proceeded very slowly. It probably

¹¹⁰W.O. 4/414, Merry to Torrens, 11 July 1810.

¹¹¹Cited in Frederick W. Butt-Thompson, Sierra Leone in History and Tradition (London: H. F. & G. Witherby, 1926), p. 160. See also Table 8.

¹¹²Butt-Thompson, pp. 160-163.

¹¹³Kuczynski, p. 116.

prompted the eventual establishment of a recruiting depôt at Havana, Cuba, ¹¹⁴ where, quite possibly, slaves were purchased.

Despite the difficulties encountered in recruiting on the African coast, the British experiment encouraged the Dutch around 1836 to begin an intensive military recruitment at St. George d' Elmina, on the Guinea coast, for service in the Dutch West Indies. Following closely the pattern established by Britain at Sierra Leone, the Dutch, and later the French, liberated or manumitted prospective recruits after purchasing them. Yet many of these so called liberated or manumitted slaves are said to have been transported to Surinam and the Dutch and French West Indies in chains or under guard. ¹¹⁵

The end of the long, often bitter and totally exhausting war produced the inevitable retrenchment in Britain's military spending. For the West India Regiments this meant first some initial disbandment, then a peace or reduced establishment and finally wholesale disbandment. In May 1817 the 7th and 8th West India Regiments were ordered to be disbanded. The other ranks of the

¹¹⁴W.O. 4/730, Sullivan to Somerset, 5 April 1838. The author has not been able to determine when this recruiting depôt was established.

¹¹⁵Asiegbu, p. 31. Africans had already been raised by the Dutch for service in South Africa as early as the seventeenth century. John B. Wright, Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg 1840-1870 (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1971), pp. 25-26. See also George McCall Theal, History and Ethnography of Africa South of the Zambesi, 3 vols. (London: Allen & Unwin, 1922), 3: 187.

8th, with the exception of those no longer fit for active service, were to be drafted into other West India Regiments in the Windward and Leeward Islands Command. Officers were paid to 24 December 1816 and issued passage money to Britain. The officers of the 7th were similarly settled with and returned to Britain. The other ranks of the 7th were drafted principally into the 5th West India Regiment. ¹¹⁶

An immediate consequence of the disbandments of the 7th and 8th was the disestablishment of the recruiting depôt of the West India Regiments at Sierra Leone. On 7 March 1816 the War Office ordered the depôt to be discontinued forthwith. ¹¹⁷

In January 1817 the remaining six West India Regiments were given a peace establishment of eight hundred rank and file. On 5 February a circular to this effect was forwarded to the colonels of the West India Regiments. ¹¹⁸ The supernumeraries borne on the strength of the reduced corps and the disbanded 7th and 8th West India Regiments, were provided for by being drafted into six garrison-pioneer companies. These troops, who numbered 1,212 in both commands, were paid three pence sterling per day and were also issued clothing and rations. ¹¹⁹ These

¹¹⁶W.O. 4/718, Palmerston to Hislop and Gascoyne, 3 May 1816. C.O. 318/53, Ramsey to Torrens, 17 November 1816, pp. 225-226. C.O. 318/52, York to Fuller, 21 January 1816. C.O. 137/142, Manchester to Bathurst, 4 May 1816. W.O. 4/719, Palmerston to O'Meara, 4 November 1816.

¹¹⁷Kuczynski, p. 119.

¹¹⁸C.O. 318/53, York to Bathurst, 16 January 1817. W.O. 4/719, Circular to Colonels and Officers commanding West India Regiments, and the Paymaster General, 5 February 1817.

¹¹⁹C.O. 318/53, York to Bathurst, 16 January 1817.

labour companies were formed for a very practical reason since it represented a considerable saving over the old and expensive system of hiring slave pioneers. ¹²⁰

Those troops who were to be discharged because of age or wounds were permitted to settle on the islands of their choice. Their disability would determine the size of their pension: eight pence sterling per diem for those who had been rendered totally incapable of other means of support, and five pence sterling per diem to those capable of maintaining themselves. ¹²¹ It is not known how many disabled West India soldiers were discharged into British West Indian society. The number certainly was not large. An establishment for the maintenance of those black soldiers who were judged insane was proposed at Barbados. ¹²²

A reduced establishment for the West India Regiments was followed almost immediately by a general disbandment. Between March 1817 and October 1818 the 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th West India Regiments were ordered to be disbanded. ¹²³ Five companies of the 3rd were kept embodied until 1825 when they were finally reduced. ¹²⁴ The remaining two West India Regiments

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., Torrens to Goulburn, 14 March 1817. Ibid., Robinson to Leith, 4 May 1817. W.O. 3/163, Calvert to the Secretary at War, 3 November 1817. W.O. 4/719, Circular to Agents, Colonels and Officers Commanding the 3rd and 4th West India Regiments. Ibid., Palmerston to Officer Commanding the 3rd West India Regiment. C.O. 318/54, Torrens to Combermere, 30 November 1818.

¹²⁴C.O. 295/63, Woodford to Bathurst, No. 584, "Military", 6 December 1824.

were to have their establishments further reduced to 650 rank and file.¹²⁵ Therefore, each command was to have one West India Regiment among its troops. Britain's special European regiments, the Royal York Rangers, the Royal West India Rangers and the York Chasseurs, were likewise disbanded but not in the West Indies. Probably because these corps contained numerous "culprits" and Frenchmen, they were disbanded in Canada.¹²⁶

General disbandment of the West India Regiments created one major problem in the West Indies: where and how were these troops to be disposed? According to the army's original plan, these troops, who amounted to several thousand, would also be allowed to choose the island they wished to make their home.¹²⁷ In keeping with their persistent hostility towards the West India Regiments,¹²⁸ there was nearly unanimous colonial opposition to this scheme.¹²⁹ Only Trinidad favoured the plan since disbanded troops were seen as a much needed labour force and as militiamen.¹³⁰ The Duke of York requested Earl Bathurst, the

¹²⁵C.O. 318/54, Torrens to Combermere, 30 November 1818.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷C.O. 318/53, Torrens to Goulburn, 24 July 1817.

¹²⁸C.O. 137/119, Castlereagh to Coote, No. 8, 6 August 1807. C.O. 137/31, Morrison to Liverpool, No. 35, 22 December 1811. C.O. 318/46, Beckwith to Liverpool, No. 130, "Military", 28 January 1812. C.O. 137/134, Lyon to Liverpool, 3 March 1812. C.O. 137/142, Manchester to Bathurst, 4 May 1816. See also, Young, pp. 213-216.

¹²⁹C.O. 318/53, Torrens to Goulburn, 24 July 1817. C.O. 318/54, Combermere to Bathurst, No. 16, "Military", 24 January 1818.

¹³⁰C.O. 295/46, Woodford to Bathurst, No. 274, 29 January 1818.

Secretary of War and Colonies, to remind West Indian governors of the great service performed by these troops. ¹³¹ Rather naively, the Duke insisted that because of their faithfulness, West India soldiers should be permitted to select their future homes in the West Indies. He also indicated that there was some dissatisfaction within the ranks of these troops to any plan that would send those born in Africa back to their homeland. ¹³²

Although Bathurst concurred with the Duke of York, ¹³³ a compromise solution was worked out. Some of the West India soldiers were permitted to remain in the Caribbean, but the areas for settlement were limited to Trinidad and British Honduras. A third area selected for settlement was Sierra Leone. Those who were to remain in the West Indies were creole soldiers and those brought from Africa at an early age. The remainder were to be settled at Sierra Leone. ¹³⁴

Some 350 soldiers of the 3rd ¹³⁵ and an undisclosed number of troops from the disbanded 6th West India Regiment, and

¹³¹C.O. 318/53, Torrens to Goulburn, 24 July 1817.

¹³²Ibid. Also, C.O. 318/55, Combermere to Bathurst, No. 22, "Military", 8 January 1819. Ibid., Young to Kempt, 13 January 1819, pp. 249-250.

¹³³Ibid. See Bathurst's note on the bottom of the last page of this despatch.

¹³⁴C.O. 318/55, Treasury to Goulburn, 23 March 1819, pp. 191-192. This was the policy established for the 3rd West India Regiment. It is assumed that troops of the other disbanded West India Regiments were disposed of on the same basis.

¹³⁵C.O. 295/48, Woodford to Bathurst, No. 351, 12 December 1819.

their families, were eventually settled on crown lands in Trinidad as free persons.¹³⁶ It is presumed that the five other companies of the 3rd which were not disbanded until 1825 were also settled in Trinidad. These settlements were located on several sites about two miles distant from each other and about eight to twelve miles east of Arima.¹³⁷ In addition to the pension provided to the soldiers, a daily but temporary provision of one pound of salt meat, eight plantains "or the equivalent" and an undisclosed amount of rice was given to each man and woman. Children received one half of this daily ration. Rum was also issued to the men at the discretion of the governor.¹³⁸ Each settler was to receive a grant of land in the area of the settlement, and each was expected to quickly become self sufficient.¹³⁹

Although these old soldiers were encouraged to settle on the island, there were still some lingering doubts about their loyalty. Accordingly, some of these soldiers were not immediately given arms.¹⁴⁰ Also a superintendency was established to administer the settlements. The superintendent, who

¹³⁶C.O. 318/55, Combermere to Bathurst, No. 24, "Military", 1 May 1819, and enclosures.

¹³⁷C.O. 295/48, Woodford to Bathurst, No. 351, 12 December 1819.

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹C.O. 318/55, Lord Commissioners of the Treasury to Goulburn, July 1819, pp: 209-213. Ibid., Combermere to Bathurst, No. 24, "Military", 1 May 1819, and enclosures.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., Combermere to Bathurst, No. 24, "Military", 1 May 1819, and enclosures.

was to be selected from among the officers of the disbanded regiments, was to receive his half pay as well as an additional salary of £500 sterling. He was to be provided with a grant of land in the vicinity of the settlement and have a small staff, which included a surgeon.¹⁴¹

These military settlers were not unique newcomers to Trinidad. Among the most marked additions to the population of the island before 1819 were several hundred freed American blacks who had served with British forces during the War of 1812. These settlers founded the famous "company towns". Nor were the military settlers of 1819 to be the last. Apparently, disbanded West India soldiers were continuously settled on the island. One authority claims that one eighth of the population in 1862 was composed of discharged African soldiers.¹⁴²

British Honduras was the site selected to settle soldiers belonging to the 5th West India Regiment. Information is incomplete surrounding the disposal of the troops in this corps. However, according to the Succession and Description Book of the 5th, approximately 169 soldiers are listed as having been settled in the territory during the early months of 1817.¹⁴³

The other known area where large numbers of discharged West India soldiers were settled was Sierra Leone. The records

¹⁴¹Ibid., Lord Commissioners of the Treasury to Goulburn, July 1819, pp. 209-213.

¹⁴²Michael Horowitz, ed., Peoples and Cultures of the Caribbean (Garden City: the Natural History Press, 1971), p. 532.

¹⁴³W.O. 25/656, folios 1-27.

show that the majority of discharged West India soldiers were settled in this colony. In 1818, for instance, 1,222 black soldiers, and their families, belonging to the 3rd and 4th West India Regiments, the Bahama Garrison Company and blacks who had served in other British regiments, probably as pioneers and musicians, were settled in Sierra Leone.¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately this figure does not tell us precisely how many were West India soldiers. In April of the following year a further 1,030 soldiers, chiefly from the 4th and some reduced soldiers of the 2nd West India Regiment, arrived in the colony.¹⁴⁵

As in the case of Trinidad, several military communities were established with these settlers. During the first days of settlement the majority of the former soldiers were located at Freetown, probably with a view to the future defence of the capital. Later, some of the discharged soldiers were settled on lands recently ceded to Great Britain. The villages of Waterloo, Gibraltar Town, Wellington, York and Hastings are among those founded by discharged West India soldiers.¹⁴⁶

These settlers were to be similarly subsisted as in the case of their comrades in Trinidad and in British Honduras.¹⁴⁷ Every soldier in good health was to receive an allowance of five

¹⁴⁴The Port of Spain Gazette, 14 October 1842. A copy of this edition appears in C.O. 300/4. W.O. 3/225, Despatch to the Director General of the Army Medical Department, 31 October 1818.

¹⁴⁵Crooks, p. 96.

¹⁴⁶Ibid. Fyfe, p. 136.

¹⁴⁷Belize Manuscript Records, Despatches Inward, Records 1, Bathurst to Arthur, 12 March 1817, in Burdon, 2: 199.

pence per day for the rest of his life. Those suffering from wounds or other disabilities were to receive eight pence each day for life. Food provisions were also issued, exclusive of rum; as was absolutely necessary. Money allowances did not begin until the provision allowance had ceased. And since it was intended that these soldiers should become self sufficient farmers, they were granted consignments of land and agricultural implements. In 1822 these settlers were reported to be content and industrious in their new vocation. ¹⁴⁸

The value of the West India Regiments after twenty years of arduous service was an indisputable fact. Bowyer went so far as to admit that West India soldiers were even more reliable than European troops largely because the latter were addicted to rum which adversely effected not only their discipline but also their health and subsequently their usefulness as soldiers. ¹⁴⁹

To another officer the chief value of West India soldiers was that these troops saved the lives of countless Europeans by requiring proportionately fewer white troops in the West Indies. ¹⁵⁰

Britain was not prepared, however, to garrison the West Indies with an all-black army despite the experiences gained during the war and despite the fact that Lord Howick courageously

¹⁴⁸ Claude George, The Rise of British West Africa (London: 1904; reprint ed., London: Frank Cass and Company, Ltd., 1968), pp. 223-224.

¹⁴⁹ C.O. 318/33, Bowyer to Castlereagh, No. 57, 10 February, 1808.

¹⁵⁰ C.O. 318/39, David Dundas to Liverpool, 6 December 1809.

proposed just such a garrison in 1836.¹⁵¹ Instead the frightful wastage among European troops was permitted to continue probably due to the insistence of white West Indians for a largely European garrison. In 1836 Howick reported that the average annual mortality in the Windward and Leeward Islands Command reduced that garrison by 8 per cent. The Jamaica garrison reportedly died out every seven years.¹⁵²

Fortescue was at times critical of the West India Regiments, a criticism which was largely the result of ignorance and even prejudice. He, nonetheless, recognized their significance. He wrote:

The formation of those native levies for the garrison of our tropical possessions is one of the most important facts in the military history of this period. The principle has since been indefinitely extended¹⁵³

Even among white West Indians there were some who, not handicapped by the blinding passions of racial hatred and the paralyzing fear of the evils of their own slave system, appreciated the services of Britain's black soldiers. In an anonymous letter to the editor of The Gentleman's Magazine in 1815, one proprietor had this to say:

I hope you will permit me, from motives of humanity, to point out, that while so many admirable regulations exist, providing for worn out and decayed Soldiers of the British Army, the worn out and decayed Black Troops of our West India regiments are, poor wretches! absolutely without any provision whatever.

It seems matter of deep regret that this evil should

¹⁵¹W.O. 3729, Howick to Glenelg, 18 January 1836. Also *ibid.*, 18 November 1836.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*, 20 June 1836.

¹⁵³Fortescue, 4(part II): 891.

have escaped the notice of Parliament and the Military Authorities; the benevolent intentions of the Commander in Chief are well known, and it were surely inconsistent with the exalted character Great Britain bears amongst the Nations of the Earth, not, to extend her fostering consolation to the wounds and decrepitude of a class of men, who, during the late twenty years' arduous struggle, have evinced single bravery on many occasions, in advancing her Military and Commercial greatness, and who have so frequently bled in her cause.

A West-India Proprietor 154

154 Anonymous, "Mr. Urban April 10", The Gentleman's Magazine, January to June 1815, vol. 85, pp. 295-296.

CONCLUSION

The war against revolutionary France which began in 1793 required the adoption of at least one revolutionary solution by the British Government in order to successfully prosecute the war in the West Indies. Faced with the perennial shortage of recruits for service with the Regular Army, and unable to find a medical cure to the diseases which systematically and rapidly destroyed European troops, which Britain was able to send to the West Indies with great difficulty only, the British Government had no alternative than to arm large numbers of slaves. In 1795 London sanctioned the raising of eight regiments which were to be recruited with West Indian slaves. By the end of 1798 a total of twelve West India Regiments had been raised and declared as permanent British regiments and borne on Britain's Military Establishment. Armed, trained, uniformed and paid as other British soldiers, and eventually distributed among all British garrisons in the West Indies, black West India soldiers constituted about one third of the total British force in the Caribbean soon after 1795 and for the duration of the war. Although the ratio of white to black troops in each island was fixed at two to one, at some garrisons West India soldiers even outnumbered their European comrades.

Slaves had, indeed, been armed before 1795 in the British

West Indies. Planters had traditionally put arms in the hands of trusted slaves during emergency periods. Jamaica's annual Gunpowder Act contained a proviso which legally permitted proprietors to have armed slave retainers. Also, whole battalions of armed slaves were raised throughout the British West Indies beginning in 1793. These corps, however, which were raised by colonial enactment, and which therefore came under the jurisdiction of the West Indian assemblies, were only a temporary measure, their existence lasting only as long as the emergency which spawn their creation. On the other hand, soon after their raising, the West India Regiments were seen as a permanent garrison force in the West Indies. Furthermore, as imperial troops, their employment and deployment came under the jurisdiction of the British Government rather than the various colonial assemblies.

Such an unprecedented military policy by the British Government elicited an immediate, sustained and violent response from white West Indians who viewed this measure as dangerous to the continuation of the British slave system in the Caribbean. The entire colonial apparatus was at once set in motion to defeat the plan. West Indian legislatures and governors, and the various components of the West Indian bloc in Britain, namely, island agents, West Indian members of Parliament and influential absentee planters, began a systematic and unrelenting effort of pressuring the Home Government into rescinding its controversial scheme.

Local opposition, the center of which was at Jamaica, took several directions and obstructionist tactics did delay

the recruiting of the slave regiments. Legal arguments were employed in an attempt to disarm West India soldiers on the strength that colonial police regulations generally proscribed the arming of slaves. A major but only temporarily successful campaign by the planters was designed to have Britain's black troops unequivocally declared to be slaves as established by British West India slave laws and therefore subject to the disabilities and restrictions of these enactments.

Planters on several islands, notably Jamaica, also repeatedly attempted to compel the British Government into disbanding or at least relocating its West India Regiments to other garrisons by withholding their annual grants towards imperial defence. At one point Jamaicans affected a temporary bargain with the British Government whereby they were permitted to have an all-European garrison provided they maintained and subsisted a major portion of the garrison without cost to the imperial treasury.

Colonial efforts to destroy the West India Regiments failed. When the island legislatures refused to assist in the raising of these corps by contributing a proportion of their slaves to those regiments which were to be raised in their islands, the British Army resorted to purchasing slaves as they disembarked from slavers throughout The West Indies. The consequences of this policy were far reaching: not only did the West India Regiments become a kind of foreign army composed of African as opposed to West Indian born slaves, but the reliance placed on the slave trade in order to recruit the West India Regiments

was one of the chief reasons for the trade's rather unexpected longevity until 1807. The British Army also recruited in Britain itself from among resident blacks, and derelict and shipless East Indian sailors of East India Company ships.

The decisive defeat of the colonists' efforts to crush the measure of guarding the British West Indies with armed African slaves occurred in 1807. An Act of the British Parliament declared West India soldiers to be freemen, although the Crown's Law Officers had repeatedly advised against just such a course of action, largely on the grounds that it violated an established convention between the colonies and Britain concerning colonial government. What prompted the British Government to pursue this action was the totally unworkable situation in the Caribbean where the West India soldier was placed in a conflicting situation owing to his responsibilities as a soldier and his inability to perform certain of his duties because of the legal disabilities resulting from his status as a slave.

The abolition of the British slave trade also significantly affected the West India Regiments. No longer able to use the trade to fill up the ranks of West India Regiments depleted by numerous campaigns and normal attrition, beginning in 1808 these corps were to be recruited principally on the West African coast at Sierra Leone from among Africans seized on captured slavers. To facilitate this policy, a recruiting depôt for the West India Regiments was established at Bance Island, Sierra Leone in 1812. This in turn helped to encourage a broader imperial role for the West India Regiments. Originally raised

as local or garrison troops, these corps served outside the West Indian region during the War of 1812. They also served at Gibraltar. And with the establishment of the recruiting depôt at Sierra Leone coupled with Britain's growing presence in Africa, they became part of the permanent British garrison on the West African coast beginning in 1819.

West Africa, or at least Sierra Leone, was also the site of large scale settlements of discharged West India soldiers after the war. White West Indians, still hostile to the measure of arming Africans for service in the West Indies, were equally opposed to the army's plan which would permit these troops to settle on British West Indian islands of their choice. Moreover, there was good reason to believe that the vast majority of those soldiers about to be disbanded were desirous of remaining in the West Indies. The colonists had their way, however, and the only sites selected for settlement of West India soldiers in the West Indies were, conspicuously, the remote British settlement at Honduras and the former Spanish colony of Trinidad. Few if any were settled in Britain's old West India colonies. The majority of discharged soldiers were discreetly gotten out of the Caribbean by being settled on vacant waste lands at Sierra Leone.

Despite the efforts of the proprietors to destroy these regiments and some chronic internal problems, such as officer absenteeism, illiteracy and dispersion, the measure of garrisoning the West Indies with African regiments was an unqualified success. They participated with distinction in nearly every expedition in

the West Indies after their establishment, receiving in the process three battle honours in addition to numerous encomiums. To one senior British commander, a veteran of numerous West Indian campaigns, Britain's African soldiers were more reliable than European troops for service in that part of the world. The establishment of the West India Regiments also saved the lives of countless European soldiers since proportionately fewer were required to serve in garrisons rightly considered a grave yard for whites.

The contribution of the West India Regiments was also strategic. African soldiers took part in operations in New Orleans and eventually became part of the Gibraltar¹ and West African garrisons. Furthermore, their presence in the West Indies required proportionately fewer European troops. This was of some importance particularly beginning in 1808 when the need for European troops became urgent as a consequence of Britain's sustained involvement against France in Portugal and Spain.

The loyalty of these troops was never questioned by the British Army, not even during the critical insurgent phase of the war when black soldiers were sent against insurrected slaves. Effectively indoctrinated in the superiority of their position as British soldiers vis-a-vis that of the slave, West India soldiers showed no compunction in hunting down insurrected blacks.

¹The author has not been able to determine exactly when detachments of the 4th West India Regiment were added to the garrison at Gibraltar.

There is no evidence in British records that the French ever made any attempt to sow discord in the ranks of West India Regiments as they did with enormous success among the slave populations on several British islands in 1795.

The impact of guarding the British West Indies with regiments recruited with African slaves was not limited to the war years. This measure had long-term consequences. The efforts of the British Government in strengthening the establishment of its West India Regiments by manumitting all black soldiers, encouraging them to marry, providing them with some rudimentary education and religious instruction, and by considering these troops on an equal footing with white soldiers in all matters, may be seen as serious challenges to the basic underlying principle of racial inequality which was intrinsic to British West Indian slavery. Except occasional manumissions, none of these features of military service were provided for the slave until 1838 when a significant beginning had been made with full emancipation. Even then many of these features were not realized for the slave until many decades after emancipation. The British Army, however unwittingly, can rightfully be seen as an agent of reform in the British West Indies for having created in the midst of a society of enslaved blacks, a small but visible community or military caste of free blacks enjoying equal rights and privileges with its white members.

The West India Regiments also had an important influence on subsequent British colonial military developments. West India Regiments, and their predecessors, the colonial ranger corps, were the proto-type askari corps, regiments of Africans

commanded by white officers which were subsequently raised throughout British black Africa. The reasons for and conditions under which askari regiments were raised closely parallel those of the West India Regiments.² The West India Regiments served likewise as an example for the remodeled Ceylon Regiment in 1804.³ By the end of the nineteenth century, as Fortescue stated, the principle under which the West India Regiments were raised had been extended to other parts of the British empire.

The creation of the West India Regiments was a logical development in the evolution of warfare in the West Indies. Once raised these corps were always regarded with suspicion, but it soon became evident that they were indispensable.

²See the example of the Rhodesian African Rifles which was raised in 1940. Christopher Owen, The Rhodesian African Rifles (London: Leo Cooper Ltd., 1970), pp. 1-4.

³African units were employed in the service of native Indian rulers as late as 1889. G. Tylden, "The Ceylon Regiments 1796 to 1874": 124-128.

APPENDIX A

VAUGHAN'S PROPOSAL TO RAISE A BLACK REGIMENT FOR
IMPERIAL SERVICE IN THE WEST INDIES

NR 6
Secret!

Martinico twenty, fifth December 1794

Sir

I have always thought that the Climate of the West Indies; the Mountainous Country of which most of the Islands are formed; and in particular the number of Blacks which are to be kept in Order; required the Adoption of some Plan, from which we could avail ourselves of the Service of the Negroes - The Example of the Seapoys in the East Indies, is a strong Proof of what is capable of being effected by Troops of this Nature. While our Enemy did not use this means of Defence, there was not the same pressing Inducement for us to adopt it - for we remain'd on equal Terms; and probably had we set the Example, they would soon have kept pace: But the Reverse is now our Situation, for the Enemy has gain'd Guadeloupe, from arming and disciplining the Negroes and Mulattoes, and except in the Instance of the Island Rangers, command'd by M. de Soter, and a few, about a hundred fit for any Duty, of the Black Carolina Corps - we have been overlooking the Support, which by Exertion may be derived from opposing Blacks to Blacks - It is an Encouragement that Soter's Corps, has been already of the greatest Utility: keeping the Interior of the Country free from Parties of any kind, in a Manner which our Troops are not formed to execute. Let it also be consider'd, the vast drain which it is to England, from her Population to support a War in this Country, or even to maintain proper Garrisons for Defence; And it is very obvious, from the Change in Politics of late Years; that these Colonies will require a greater Force to keep them, than there was formerly any Occasion for.

The Policy of establishing a great Part of the Force in this Country; of Blacks commanded by White Officers appears so necessary in my Opinion, that I am anxious to lose no time in recommending it to His Majesty's Ministers, to take it into their serious Consideration, and to direct the Execution of it, on such principles, as they may judge, to be most applicable to attain the Object in View.

I recommend to them to begin by raising a Corps of a thousand Men; divided into ten Companies; to be in all Respects upon the same Footing as the Marching Regiments - And commanded by a Colonel, Lieut. Colonel, Major - Ten Captains, twenty two Lieutenants, eight Ensigns, the usual Staff - with four Sergeants and four Corporals per Company. I am confident that it would be beneficial to the Service to allow the full Compliment of Captains, And to grant the same Pay to the Field Officers as if they had Companies.

There offers two Ways of raising this Corps - either by Grants from the Colonies; Or by procuring the Negroes immediately from Africa: The latter would be attended with considerable Expençe. As it is a great Loss of Time, to obtain answers to Questions, or require further Explanations of Plans between England and the West Indies; I think no Time should be lost; but that strong and pressing Recommendations should be sent directly by His Majesty's Ministers to induce the Colonies to make Grants, or Gifts of a Number of the ablest and most Robust Negroes, for the purpose of raising this Corps; in the levying of which a due Proportion should be observed, according to the Populousness of the Islands; In the Margin is mark'd the Number which Consideration, I should determine as just. Should this plan to recruit succeed but in part, probably the Corps could be completed, by inlisting free Negroes, at a moderate Bounty. Or if it that should fail, there remains but another Method, that of procuring the Men from Africa; which if done should be managed with great Précaution, by using Means from the first Outset, to attach them to our Interest, and to gain their Alliance from Good Will, and the Inducements offer'd, previous to any other Engagements. I conceive the latter Description, though the most expensive in Formation, would be the most to be relied on.

I shall willingly, if there is any Difficulty, on this point, offer myself as the Colonel of this Corps, and in doing this, I beg to add that

Antigua	150
Barbados	200
St Kitts	150
Dominica	100
Grenada	200
Tobago	100
S. Vincent	100
	1000

Martinico
St Lucia

it is without any View to Emolument; as I should wish not to derive any from this Situation, which I would only fill, if it is judged that the Commander in Chief, can give a Countenance, and Recommendation by his Authority. In deciding on this whole Matter, I beg it may be taken into Consideration, what great Mortality ensues among our Troops from the Fatigues of Service in this Climate.

Let it only be calculated as a Matter of Expence, and let the total Amount at a moderate Average be shown, of the Value of the lives/according to the real Sum^s they have cost Government/of the Soldiers who have perished here within this Year; And I am convinced that every thinking person will be struck with the great necessity that Exists for the preservation of the Soldiers, and thereby saving an extraordinary Expence to the Nation; of directing without Loss of Time, the Formation of the Corps which I have now the Honor to recommend: In the Calculation must be remember'd the vast Expence of the Transport Service, which must annually takeplace to recruit our own Troops.

Before I conclude, I beg to observe, that whether the War should continue, or Peacetake Place, the Benefit to be derived from this Regiment, and the same Reasons which I have given for it's Formation, remain equally strong;

And I am convinced that unless we can establish and procure the full Effect of such a Body of Men, to strengthen our own Troops, and to save them in a thousand Situations, from Service, which in this Country will always destroy them; that the Army of Great Britain is inadequate to supply a sufficient Force to defend these Colonies.

I have the Honor to be,
With the Greatest Respect),
Sir,
Your Most Obedient and
Most humble Serv^t

John Vaughan

To the Right Honble
Henry Dundas

SOURCE: W.O. 1/83, Vaughan to Dundas, No. 6, "Secret",
25 December 1794.

APPENDIX B

THE CHARLES RANCE CONTRACT FOR THE SUPPLY OF 450
SLAVES AS RECRUITS FOR THE 1ST, 7TH AND
8TH WEST INDIA REGIMENTS

Martinico.

Know all men by these presents that I, Charles Rance of the Town of St Pierre and Island of Martinique aforesaid, Merchant, Do hereby agree and Contract with Lieut General Thom^s Trigge, Commander in Chief of His Majesty's Forces in the West Indies, on the part and behalf of Governm^t to furnish and supply on or before the first day of April next ensuing, Four hundred and Fifty new Negroe Slaves, to be delivered in such proportions as may be required to the First, seventh and Eight West India Regiments, and in the Islands or places where they may be respectively stationed, in Consideration of receiving for each individual Negro so delivered, the sum of Seventy seven pounds Sterling in Government Bills, drawn by the Commissary General on the Treasury of Great Britain at Sixty days sight, which Negroe Slaves shall be of the description hereafter mentioned, and shall be subject to the examination, inspection, and approval of a Board of Military and Medical Officers to be appointed for that purpose;

- 1st " That the said Negro Slaves shall not be under the age of sixteen years, or exceeding Twenty two years old, so far as the same can be known or ascertained,
- 2nd " That they shall be of a late importation from Africa such as are commonly called "New Negroes" never having been employed in any of these Islands or plantations,
- 3rd " That they shall not be deformed, maimed or injured in any respect; but stout, able bodied healthy men, capable of bearing Arms;
- 4th " That they shall immediately on their arrival (at such Island or Islands as the aforesaid Regiments may be stationed at) be brought before a board consisting of Two Army Medical Men, and the Officer commanding the Regim^t for which they are intended, which Board shall examine them, touching their fitness, to serve as Soldiers in any of His Majestys West India Regiments or Corps, as well as to the several particulars of the Articles of this Contract,
- 5th " That the Negroes of about sixteen years

old, shall be five feet three inches in height, and likely to grow, but full grown men must be Five feet five inches high, And furthermore that no Slaves shall be delivered but those of the Gold Coast, Coromantie, or Congo Nations,

That in case the said number of Four hundred and fifty Negroes shall [not] be delivered by the time herein specified, and agreeably to the other particulars required by this Contract, then this obligation to be void, In default of which, We the said Charles Rance, John Gay & Kenneth M^c Leay, do bind ourselves jointly & severally our Heirs, Executors, Administrators and Assign's, in the Sum of £1000 Sterling, Money of Great Britain.

In Witness whereof We have hereunto Set our hands and affixed our Seals, the 21st day of October 1799 and the 39th year of His Majesty's Reign,

(Signed) { Charles Rance
John Gay
K: M^c Leay

Signed Sealed & delivered
in the presence of

(Signed) R: Darling
As to M^r Rance

Signed by John Gay & Kenneth M^c Leay,
in the presence of,
(Signed) Jas Lanne,

St Pierre, Martinico,
26th October 1799,

Registered in the books of this
Office

(Signed) P: R: Bearcroft,
Comm^r of Accounts

SOURCE: C.O. 318/30, enclosed in Bowyer to Windham, No. 21,
21 November 1806.

APPENDIX C

HISLOP'S "REMARKS ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WEST
INDIA REGIMENTS
WRITTEN IN THE YEAR 1801"

Whatever prejudices may have existed, or may still be entertained among the Planters or other Residents in the West India Colonies, against the establishment of Black Regiments, the utility of them, has in every instance been fully proved, whether by their services in the field or by their capability of performing every other description of Military duties -

2) Chance having thrown me into the situation of forming and disciplining a Regiment of the above description, it may justly have been expected from me, that while engaged in that particular duty, my attention would be directed to the various circumstances which appear'd to promise any degree of improvement to the establishment, which like every other of whatever nature, cannot fail to derive benefit from experience -

The Corps of Blacks which were first formed, during the present War, and employed in the service of His Majesty, were raised in the French conquer'd Islands, and consequently composed of the People of colour who had attached themselves to the Royalist party, and of such Negro slaves as belonged to the Royalists, who themselves took up Arms in the cause - The Corps of Soter, Druault & Malcolm were of this description - those together with the old Carolina Black Corps, which at the end of the late War was withdrawn with the Army from America, on every occasion were distinguished for their intrepidity and alacrity -

3 As the extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances of the times, produced the unavoidable necessity of embodying & training those people to Arms, so it alike became requisite to afford every possible support to the measures (however dangerous at any former period, such a step would have been consider'd) as the only possible means which afforded any hope of averting the destruction which through Treason and Rebellion were about completing the annihilation of the whole of the British West-Indies - Independent however of the several Corps above mentioned, great and essential services were performed by such as were for the moment raised in the different Islands by the Proprietors for their immediate protection - St Vincent, Grenada and Tobago had recourse to this measure, and

were much indebted for their safety to the fidelity, activity and boldness of their Black-Rangers -

Their utility was then universally acknowledged, and it is not improbable but that many persons, whose principal reliance was then on the exertions of the Black Troops, have since, (the danger being passed) been among the most strenuous in representing them as dangerous to ourselves, and contemptible in the eyes of an Enemy -

4. But this misrepresentation must have long since discover'd itself, it is therefore unnecessary to dwell thereon - Being myself persuaded of its want of Truth, I shall proceed to point out, the advantages, which a permanent establishment of West India Regiments, must produce, and what appears to me, necessary for its further improvement - An essential benefit will therefore, in the first place, be generally acknowledged by the saving of the many lives of our Countrymen, who must otherwise compose the whole of the Army in the West-Indies -

How dreadfully fatal the Climate has (in the course of the war) proved to our European Regiments, is unfortunately a fact too well established to make it requisite to bring forward any particular instances thereof - or at the present day do we find that the Mortality diminishes -

5. The state of the several Corps, last arrived, is a sufficient proof of this melancholy truth * -

The first circumstance which presents itself as meriting attention with the view of improving the establishment of West-India Regiments is the mode of recruiting them in future -

By far the most eligible plan, as I conceive, will be to purchase new Africans - The lower order of free coloured people, from which it might be expected to recruit, are very generally of a disorderly and dissolute description, on whom little dependence could be placed, and in late times are strongly suspected of possessing a rooted antipathy to the Whites, with whom they fain would consider themselves entitled to equal privileges, but from which they are, by the Laws prohibited -

6. It is therefore in few instances that Recruits should be taken from this Class and certainly only from such whose general behaviour and conduct is known & approved of - Very few however will be found inclined to exchange their actual condition to subject themselves to Military discipline -

Among other circumstances favorable to the

* The two Battalions of the 60th Regiment arrived about the time alluded to, and suffer'd dreadfully at Fort Royal, Martinique -

measure of forming the Regiments from new imported Africans, One deserving notice is, that they are received, wholly unacquainted with and uncontaminated by the Vices which prevail among the Slaves in the Towns and Plantations, having no acquaintance or connection of any sort, but such as they form in the Regiment - I have invariably found them to make the most orderly, clean and attentive Soldiers - out of Two hundred and upwards, which have been received into the Regiment in the course of Five years and a half, there are not above three or four instances of any of them being punished, and not one for any serious offence, whereas many of those who are furnished by the Planters, when the Regiment was formed, have very frequently deserved (as, some have met) Capital punishment -

The new African recruit becomes gradually initiated into the habits of a Military life, and ere long discovers the superiority of his situation above the Slave, whose debased state he has never been subject to - He likewise feels himself proportionably elevated, from the rank which his officers hold in Society, and the respect which he sees is paid to them -

In recruiting the Regiments, attention should be given to the national character, peculiar to the People; some there are of a more tractable disposition than others, and who, in their own Country are habituated to the dangers and hardships of a Soldier's life, while others again are distinguished for stupidity, obstinacy, indolence & other bad qualities -

The Coromantees are reckoned amongst the most intrepid & hardy, being trained from their Infancy to War - The Fantees and Angolas are also esteemed a spirited and an active race of People - On the other hand the Ebos and a few others are of a contrary turn -

The custom hitherto pursued in supplying the Regiments with Recruits, has been to purchase Negroes, out of the Cargoes, which occasionally arrive from the Coast, at the rate of £75 Sterling p. Head which is the sum allowed by Government but a more advantageous method, I should think might be devised - Could not, for instance, Cargoes as they may be wanted, be purchased on account of Government, on the Coast, under the eye of a Governor or Superior officer there, and to be composed of a particular Class or Nation - If this could be effected, it appears to me, a likely method of obtaining the best description of Recruits, and a regular supply might be furnished at a moderate expence, whereas at present, it is very difficult to procure them at all, for the price limited (£75.) as the Planters when buying them in Lotts, where good and bad, old & Young are mixed, are content to pay from £90 to £100 Sterling p. head* - It is therefore a circumstance which appears deserving of consideration thro' which some System may

* This was the case in Demarary, when this paper was written -

be found calculated to secure the desired benefit -

In order to have the Recruiting service conducted with the greatest regularity, an Island might be fix'd on for the Depot, whither the Regiments should send for the proportion of Recruits they are to receive -

That in which the Head Quarters is established, would probably in all respects be the most proper for this purpose -

Among other ideas which have occur'd to me, with a view of improving the establishment, I shall here mention one, which however at the first glimpse, may possibly appear outrè, will on full consideration, I doubt not, clearly convince, that the greatest advantage may be deriv'd from its adoption - It is that of purchasing and attaching a certain number of Women, to each Company, who
 10 should have liberty to choose a Husband, from amongst the most regular and well behav'd Men belonging to it, with the approbation of the Commanding officer of the Regiment -

When such connexions are formed, every possible protection should be afforded them, and the severest punishment, should await those, who should venture to trespass on their domestic happiness, and as this arrangement is intended eventually to afford very material benefit to the Publick service, it would be necessary to notice as a serious offence, any instances of infidelity -

The utility of those Women towards the Economy of the Regiment, would be very great, and as before observed, in progress of time, must naturally prove of considerable advantage and profit to the Publick - The Children would of course, be the property of Government, and whether Male or Female, should remain constantly with the Regiment, and be considered as belonging to it -
 11 Boys would be trained to arms, and become in time, excellent Soldiers -

The Girls, when at a proper age, would be allowed to marry in the Regiment, and during their younger years might be taught such employments as would make them useful to it - It would also be but just to allow the same ration of provisions to them, as to the Wives and Children of Soldiers in European Regiments -

The circumstance which in the next place claims attention is the provision for the West India Soldier, when worn out or disabled in the service, for it must be considered, that there is a total difference in their situation and that of the British Soldier, when discharged under like circumstances - The former has no Parish or place of Family abode to retire to, no trade to assist him in gaining his livelihood, and if he had would find it difficult to exercise it, without being exposed to many vexations and inconveniencies -

The establishment of an Invalid Corps, is therefore the only means, which appears to me suitable to the purpose -

- 12 This might be done, by forming a Company in each Island, to be permanently fix'd there - From such an establishment, great utility might be derived, & under certain regulations much expence might be saved to Government - Such as might be found incapable of Military duty, might supply the place of hired Negroes on many occasions, particularly in such occupations, as require no great exertion - The Invalid thus employed would require only his provisions, with a small quantity of Tobacco and Soap, or a trifle (suppose three pence a day) in lieu thereof, and if cloathed every two years, would be amply provided for -

- At present, when a West-Indian Soldier is invalided, he is entitled to a Bitt (equal to six-pence Sterg) pr day, which is to be paid by the Resident Commissary of the Island, in which he has been discharged, on the 24th of every Month, provided he appears before the Commissary & produces his discharge, by which his person is Identified - But this measure was only intended as a temporary one -
- 13

It has too many objections to admit of its being recommended as a permanent one - The insufficiency of the provision creates other inconveniencies, which it must be prudent always to avoid, and among the number, which immediately results from it is one hereafter mentioned -

- So soon as a Soldier receives his discharge, he betakes himself to such Plantations, wherein he has acquaintance among the Slaves - The example of Idleness which he sets them, is in the first place very bad, but the doctrines which he is apt to hold out, in favor of it, and of the independence of his situation are much worse, and render them (in the consideration of the Planter) very unwelcome visitors - The consequence of the above is, that they get ill-treated (as they indeed deserve) by the Managers and Overseers, and being driven away from one Place to another, they have no other to resort to, but the Town, where associating with the worst Company, they pass their time solely in gambling, drinking, stealing, & every other vice, which eventually leads to their destruction - It will therefore be a humane Act, as well as one otherwise beneficial to devise a Plan for maintaining good order among them, when they are incapable of further active service* - In order to give the necessary stability to this establishment, at the same time the better to ensure the Fidelity and attachment
- 14

* further on the forgoing subject see Pages 30, 31, 32 and 34 -

from the West India Soldier, one particular circumstance demands attention, which has not hitherto appeared to engage the notice which the importance of it, in my opinion is entitled to -

15 When violent prejudices are imbibed by People of confined habits and notions, they are undoubtedly very difficult to remove - By persuasion there is little chance of succeeding - Nothing can more strongly prove the truth of this Assertion, than the aversion, which many residents in the West-India Islands still possess, against the Black Regiments, and when it falls, in any degree, within their power, they will gladly seize the occasion to deprive them of that consideration and respect, which as constituting a part of His Majesty's Army, should be extended to them -

16 Under the aforesaid impression it has been asserted, and in some instances I have understood the principle has been acted upon, that the Soldiers of West-India Regiments are amenable to the Slave Laws, and therefore subject to every degradation, that the unfortunate and wretched Slave is doomed to endure - If such a principle were established, how could confidence be justly placed, or indeed with what Justice could it be expected from such Soldiers - The same Duties fall to their lot to perform, as are confided to the European Troops - The same vigilance and exactness in the discharge of them, is alike expected, and the same degree of punishment awaits their disobedience or neglect - How then could it be possible, if such were admitted as a fact, that a West India Soldier, could with safety to himself perform his Duty? for instance, if a white man insults him on his Post, or attempts to act there contrary to the orders he has received, he could not resist him, and if even struck, or any attempt is made to disarm him, he could not oppose with the firmness his duty as a Soldier would demand, and for the neglect of which, the Law by which he is governed, would award him a severe punishment -

On this important subject, I shall here beg leave to insert an opinion which was given me by a Gentleman of the Law, possessing considerable professional knowledge and particularly acquainted with the local circumstances of the West India Colonies - He says as follows -

17 - "It has been said that in every West India Colony, "there are particular Laws, for the Government of "Slaves, and particular Courts of Indicture established for their trial, different entirely in their "nature and constitution from those to which free Men "are amenable. - This is true - It has also been said, "that in the formation of the West-India Regiments, "it happened in many instances, that the agents of "Government applied to African Factors, and bought "the number of Negroes required for such Regiments - "That being so purchased they were the King's "Slaves, were under the controul of the Slave Laws;

18

"and could be relieved from their influence, only
 "by manumission according to the form prescribed in
 "the Colony where they might chance to be - This
 "requires examination - The different West India
 "Codes say, that Slaves are subject to certain Laws,
 "but none of them, that I know of, declare what con-
 "stitutes Slavery - To ascertain that, as there is
 "no written Law, resort must be had to the Customs
 "and practice of the West Indies -

"Africans when brought there, are bought for
 "the purposes of Agriculture, for domestic occupations,
 "and to be employed in labour generally - These are
 "the objects uniformly, for which Slaves have been
 "imported - They were the descriptions of Men which
 "the West India Legislatures had in contemplation,
 "when the Slave Laws were enacted, and upon them only,
 "I conceive, do such Laws attach; for all the Slave
 "Laws I consider of the nature of Penal Laws, and
 "to be construed strictly, especially as to who are,
 "and who are not, to be deemed under their influence -

"Now, africans purchased for Soldiers, certainly
 "were not in the contemplation of any of the West-
 "India Legislatures, when the Slave Laws were enacted,
 "and are not therefore, I apprehend, within their
 "operation -

19

"In speaking of Colonies, to which the Laws of
 "England extend, it is laid down, by a learned Writer,
 "that such of them as are not convenient, or do not
 "suit their situation, are not in force, and I do not
 "imagine, it will be contended, that it is either con-
 "venient or suitable for Soldiers to class with Slaves;
 "on the contrary, to elevate the African Soldier in
 "his own estimation by giving him the rank of a free
 "Man, and placing him in respectability, above a
 "Slave - as soon as he receives pay, he becomes subject
 "to the Mutiny act, and the Articles of War -

"His evidence is received at Courts Martial, even
 "against whites - By good behaviour he may become a
 "Non-Commissioned officer; nay it may be conceived,
 "tho' not likely, that he may be advanced to the rank
 "of a Commissioned officer; and sit on Courts-Martial -

D20

"Do all, or any of these circumstances accord
 "with the Idea of his being in a state of Slavery, and
 "under the controul & influence of the Slave Laws?
 "In the language of the Writer above alluded to, it
 "may I think be fairly answered as to the latter part,
 "that these Laws are neither applicable nor suitable
 "to his condition, and therefore as to him, are not
 "in force - If those who think differently from me,
 "in this matter, should insist, that the Negro by
 "being bought (no matter with what view) became a
 "Slave, it may with equal energy, and I think more
 "Law be urged, that the King, by making him a Soldier
 "and considering him therefore a free Man (for a

"Soldier cannot be a Slave in the unqualified sense
 "of the word) actually did emancipate him, as much
 "as a Lord formerly did his Villain, by commencing
 "an action against him, and thereby treating him,
 "as a free man -

"The regulations for manumission of Slaves were
 "calculated and intended for the subject, and neither
 "from the letter or Spirit can be brought to apply
 "to the Sovereign" -

21 The foregoing reasoning is strong, clear, and
 I humbly think strictly just, - the necessity of establishing
 the principle of it, is (for the good of his Majesty's ser-
 vice) in my opinion no less urgent -

According to the present establishment, the West
 India Regiments, consist of Six hundred Rank & File, each
 divided into eight Companies - the Company being as follows -
 Viz^t

Capt ⁿ	Lieut ^t	Ensign	Serj ^{ts}	Corpl ^s	Drummers	Privates
1	1	1	4	4	2	71

could the alteration hereafter be permitted to take place,
 it would, I conceive, be found more advantageous to the
 service in every particular -

With this view my proposal would be, to form
 the Regiment into Ten Companies, adding an additional
 Lieut^t to each, and augmenting the strength of the Company
 from 75 to 90 Rank & File - The Field officers remaining
 as at present, without Companys - The Staff Serjeants -
 Drum Major, and Two Serjeants p^r Company to be Europeans -
 22 In order to obtain this last mentioned object, a Corps
 might be formed at the Head Quarter of the Army, from
 drafted European Regiments, the Men of which might be in-
 duced to enter into it, not only with a view of Promotion,
 but by a special engagement for a certain limited term of
 years, at the expiration of which, unimpeachable conduct
 should entitle them to their discharge and a pension at
 home -

Other means probably might be suggested, which
 would be much more to the purpose, but it should be an
 established rule, that none but Men of the best character,
 and who can read and write, should be taken for this
 situation -

The want of these Non Commissioned officers is
 universally felt, it being almost impossible to manage the
 interior detail and regulations of Companies for want of
 them - In fact at present, the officers are obliged to
 make out the Reports, and settle those details, which is
 23 the immediate Duty of the Serjeants and even of the Cor-
 porals - besides it would afford an intermediate degree
 of Rank and authority of Europeans between the officers
 and the Blacks, which must necessarily carry with it a
 superior Idea of the consequence of their officers, than
 if on every trivial occasion they were obliged to commu-
 nicate their complaints to them - A certain arrangement

of this sort, appears wanting for the requisite improvement of the establishment in question - and what I shall now observe respecting the appointment of officers to them, is not less essential -

24 It has been already proposed to form the eight Companies, of which the Regiments at present consist, into Ten, which would give an addition of two Captains, Two Lieutenants & two Ensigns, besides the proportion of Serjeants, Corporals & Drummers - an additional Lieutenant to each Company, has also been recommended - There are two principal motives for this suggestion -

25 First, the necessity which I conceive there is, of having a greater proportion of Europeans in these Regiments than there are at present, and Secondly, the deficiency unavoidably occasioned, by the Unhealthiness of the Climate to which their service is confined - It has fallen within my own knowledge, that from the last mentioned cause, the Regiment under my command, was reduced so low, at one period, (in the year 1798) as to have only a single Captain, & two Subalterns fit for Duty - It is therefore of the greatest import to provide, as far as possible, against the great inconveniences, which might ensue, from leaving those Regiments unofficered, a circumstance very possible to occur, as they at present stand with respect to the limited proportion of their established numbers, which is furthermore so seriously reduced through the means taken to avoid joining their Corps after their appointment - In fact the greatest defect which the establishment has experienced, and is still exposed to, is the want of an arrangement, by which the officers should be kept constantly with their Regiments and should, on no account be permitted, except under very particular circumstances to exchange or leave them -

The peculiar exemption, attending this System, might be recompensed by particular privileges which would be deemed, I conceive, a fair equivalent thereto, as well as a just consideration for the distinct service (certainly not the most preferable) and unfavourable climate, to which they are confined -

On this subject I have partly form'd my Idea, on the former custom of the French service -

26 In their Regiments, serving in the West-India Colonies, officers of eight years constant duty with them, were entitled to a step by brevet and the Croix de St Louis, which mark of distinction was not attainable in Europe, under Twenty one years -

It is by no means an easy matter to suggest a Plan, which would be likely to answer the same intent, in the British service, but still it may be presumed that some one may be devised -

Suppose for instance as follow - First - The pay of each Rank to be increased one Third above the European Regiments - Secondly - To establish a rule pro-

hibiting the purchase or exchange of any Commission, under the Rank of that of a Field officer -

Thirdly 1st and 2^d Lieutenants, as in the Fusiliers Regiments, to be substituted in lieu of Lieutenant & Ensign and Fourthly Years constant services with the Regiment to entitle a Captain to the Brevet rank of Major -

27 An arrangement, somewhat of this description would, I should imagine answer the end proposed, and would secure to this part of the Army, what has hitherto been much wanted in it, a constant effective Corps of experienced officers, habituated to the Climate, as well as to the dispositions of the Soldiers, thereby acquiring the proper mode of managing them by which the preservation of discipline and good order among them must be ensured - Many other advantages would result from the introduction of a System of this nature - the greater degree of influence which the officers would eventually have over the minds of the Men, by being long known to them, securing thereby their attachment and confidence, which cannot to the same degree be expected, while the officers are permitted to be continually changing from and quitting them, as being of inferior consideration to the European Regiments, an Idea which is calculated to do much mischief among those of the West-Indies -

28 Instead of depressing them in their own consideration, every encouragement should be given them, with a view of spiriting them up to feel the consequence of their situation, for nothing can be more certain, than that by gaining that point, you have the strongest grounds for ensuring to yourself their fidelity, and on the contrary by withholding from them such incitements to good conduct & pride in the Character of a Soldier, dissatisfaction is likely to ensue, & with it a general want of discipline -

29 The recent orders which have been given for instructing the West India Regiments in the exercise and movements of Light Infantry have anticipated the suggestions I should otherwise have proposed to that effect - it having always been evident to me, that not only from the local circumstance of the Country to which their services are confined, they will be required to act as such, but that they are also from their constitution & natural Habits, better calculated for that species of Warfare in this Climate than Europeans - If they were put entirely on the footing of Light Troops, by being appointed and Cloathed accordingly, the establishment would in my Idea be found to be more congenial to the service required of them -

Dark Green, instead of Red, would be the colour best adapted to render them unobservable by an Enemy, which for the Duty of a Light Infantry Soldier, is a matter of the greatest consequence -

30 A great advantage which Govern^{mt} may derive from the West-India Reg^{ts} does not appear, as yet, to have been taken into calculation, altho' it will prove one of great consequence in point of Economy - I allude to the labour they are capable of performing, and which should considerably diminish, if not in a great measure preclude the necessity of incurring expence in future for Negro hire, where works are carrying on - I am confident, that many thousands of pounds have been saved to the Publick, by the work which has been done during the last five years, by the Reg^t under my command - Not a farthing has ever been charged to Government on that account, and as I before observed, an immense sum would have been expended, had Negroes been hired for the purpose -

A Regiment which is become thoroughly expert, and well acquainted with the use of Arms, and the principles of March and Maneuvre, will require but little practice to keep it in the best order, and by not harassing the men constantly, with the Firelock in their hands, they more chearfully use it, when required so to do -

T. Hislop

Trinidad July 18th 1804 -

31 Since the proceeding Pages were written, an establishment for invalided Black Soldiers has been formed in the Island of Trinidad - Two Companies were ordered to be embodied in the Month of August last, by the late Gen^l Grinfield, and the measure received the sanction of His Majesty's Ministers at home - These are composed of men capable of Garrison Duty, and receive the same pay & cloathing as the other Corps of Infantry - There are however a great Number of discharged Men who are totally unfit for this or any other military service (in this Island on the 24th of last Month eighty four were muster'd) and are continued on the pension of (6 d.) p^r day, which not being sufficient for their maintenance, and having no means of acquiring an honest subsistence they are necessitated to every expedient they are capable of inventing to procure it by other ways - It appears to me therefore, that a Plan should be struck out, for the more effectually providing for the discharged black Soldier, when he is incapable of any further Military duty, and for taking
32 due care of them when sick, which in many instances is occasioned by the breaking out of wounds, or return of complaints contracted in the service -

Why should not the West-India Soldier have a retirement such as Chelsea to comfort and administer relief to him in those days when age and infirmity succeed to the Vigour and Spirit of Youth - Surely such an Esta-

bishment would only be consonant with the natural feelings of Englishmen, and certainly would not discredit them; That no such at present exists must undoubtedly be imputed to the want of a proper representation of the necessity for it, for Humanity and justice strongly plead its urgency and propriety - It has been before observed that however incapable of Military duty, there are but very few, who could not be turned to some use, and might preclude on many occasions expences at present incurr'd, by the Hire of Negroes - They might certainly in some way or other be so applied as to reimburse Government for their maintenance -

33 Much more might certainly be said on the foregoing subject, than what I have advanced, and infinitely more to the purpose - My great inducement in venturing my humble Ideas thereon (the deficiency of which I fear may too justly subject them to Criticism) is the hope I am led to entertain, that it may give rise to the suggestions of others more competent to the task of devising a System suited in all respects to the great Object in view, and at the same time of embracing a more extended plan, than the establishment at present admits of - I think, for instance that it would be essentially improved by the addition of a proportion of Light Cavalry, and Riflemen, as also a Corps of Artificers to be particularly attached to the Engineers department -

34 Excellent Carpenters, Masons, Smiths &c might be formed, by instructing New Negroes, in these different trades, a Custom which is prefer'd by Individuals. Proprietors, who hire them out for very considerable wages -

The Spanish Horses which are hardy and active; might be got at a cheap rate from the Main, and would I should imagine, answer extremely well for the purposes of Cavalry in this Country - The experiment, at all events, could not be attended with any expence of consequence, certainly not beyond what would not be counter-balanced by ascertaining the feasibility of its success -

T. Hislop B^t Gen^l

SOURCE: W.O. 1795, "Remarks on the Establishment of West India Regiments. Written in the Year 1801", enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, 22 July 1804.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

SYNOPSIS

- A. Introduction
- B. Bibliographies and Guides to Sources
- C. Sources

I. Original Sources

a) Manuscript materials

1. Public Record Office, London, United Kingdom

- (a) War Office Papers
- (b) Colonial Office Papers
- (c) Home Office Papers
- (d) Paymaster General's Office Papers
- (e) Treasury Papers
- (f) Exchequer and Audit Department Papers

2. Other manuscript materials

b) Printed materials

- 1. Parliamentary proceedings
- 2. Parliamentary papers
- 3. War Office publications
- 4. Correspondence, diaries, memoirs, travel accounts, speeches and histories
- 5. Newspapers and other periodicals

II. Secondary Sources

- a) Histories and biographies
- b) Periodicals
- c) Reference material

A. Introduction

The essential manuscript materials for this study were the original correspondence between British Army commanders, West Indian governors, committees of correspondence and other colonial officials in the Caribbean, and Government ministers, members of

Parliament, colonial agents and absentee planters in Britain. The basic and most complete collection of these vital documents are to be found at the Public Record Office, London, although some duplicate copies of this correspondence as well as private papers are located in public archives in the West Indies and North America.

The most important of these records are the numerous volumes of War Office and Colonial Office papers. The relevant correspondence contained within the various classes of these two groups for the period under study is enormous and until now many of these papers have remained virtually untouched, particularly the War Office records. This situation is also true, for instance, for Treasury Papers 81/21, the "Expired Commissions, etc: Santo Domingo Claims Committee", and Exchequer and Audit Department Papers 3/265. These invaluable documents, which were only sparingly used by the author, contain a wealth of untapped information on British activities in Haiti (St. Domingo) during the war.

Other manuscript records were also helpful. The "Public Office Letter 1800", an excellent collection of documents dealing with the administration of a regimental agency, is located at the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh. Sir John Moore's letterbooks at the British Museum were useful for their candid remarks on the West India Regiments and other aspects of the war in the West Indies.

There is a fairly large number of printed primary sources. However, for the most part these publications provided

only peripheral information. The edited correspondence and other records contained only occasional documents which pertained to the West India Regiments. There were also only fleeting references in the histories, diaries and travel accounts. The few substantial exceptions all dealt with the mutiny of the 8th West India Regiment: two works published in 1805 which dealt with the court martial of Andrew Cochran Johnstone and two anonymous eye-witness descriptions of the mutiny, both of which appeared in the United Service Magazine in 1851.

There is even a surprising paucity of documents in British Parliamentary Papers. One would imagine that the novelty of the measure as well as the controversial recruiting policies and the two mutinies would have prompted Parliamentary inquiries. It is most notable that not even the more serious mutiny of the 8th West India Regiment at Dominica elicited any concern in Parliament for investigation. No doubt members of Parliament were more busy watching and assessing nearby events on the continent. Only a small number of papers are devoted specifically to the West India Regiments all of which pertain to the creation of the African Recruiting Depot at Sierra Leone.

West Indian newspapers were more important sources, particularly as indicators or gauges of public sentiments. Occasionally single copies of local papers were found enclosed in despatches from governors to Secretaries of State in Public Record Office materials. However, the most comprehensive collections of local newspapers for the period under study are located at the Public Library, Port of Spain, Trinidad, and at the West

India Reference Library, Institute of Jamaica, Kingston. In the United Kingdom the two most important collections of West Indian newspapers are to be found at the Public Record Office and at the British Museum. However, at neither of these locations were the periodicals systematically collected until the 1830s.

One of the chief reasons so many of the original manuscript records have not been utilized is the traditional disinterest of Britain's professional historians in the war in the West Indies. J. Holland Rose's William Pitt and the Great War is typical of how British non-military historians have largely brushed aside military events in the Caribbean. One rather brief chapter has been allotted to cover Britain's military operations outside of Haiti. Yet this limited space belies the true importance which Britain placed on the West Indies, particularly in view of the vast treasure she squandered in this region from 1793 to 1815 and the enormous casualties sustained by her forces.

A similar disinterest is evident among the writings of Britain's major military intellectuals who have generally ignored British experience in colonial warfare. A case in point is the absence of a much needed study devoted to British garrisons in the West Indies. With but a few exceptions, among them Callwell's Small Wars, their preoccupation has been with the "clash of mighty armies in Europe." As a result a schism developed in Britain during most of the nineteenth century between the problems that interested Britain's chief military thinkers and the actual

operations of the British Army.

The French, however, have lavished attention on their activities in the Caribbean during the long war. De Poyen's Les guerres des Antilles de 1793 à 1815, which was published in 1896, and A. Nemours' ¹ Histoire Militaire de la Guerre d'Indépendance de Saint-Domingue, 1925 to 1928, are but two examples.

Secondary sources also contain incidental information. Again there were a few exceptions. Chief among these were Ellis's The History of the First West India Regiment, 1885, and Caulfield's One Hundred Years' History of the Second Battalion, West India Regiment . . ., which was published in 1895. Although essentially different both works are important and were written by officers who served with a West India Regiment. Alfred Burdon Ellis, an accomplished historian particularly on West African history, has written a fluid narrative. He also provides a first-hand account of the West African services of the 1st West India Regiment. Caulfield's history of the 2nd West India Regiment, although it lacks the literary skill of Ellis's account, is, nonetheless, a contribution since the author has liberally sprinkled either entire or segments of pertinent War Office documents throughout his history. Both accounts are indispensable as campaign histories.

Within the limits imposed by the subjects of their investigations, several other historians have attempted to incorporate and assess the creation of the West India Regiments in

¹General A. Nemours is a Haitian.

the broad expanse of British imperial history. Sir John Fortescue weaved the raising of these corps into his monumental and multi-volumned History of the British Army. The impact that the West India Regiments had on the related problems of the development of colonial government and the financial responsibility of imperial defence during the Napoleonic era are briefly treated in D. J. Murray's The West Indies and the Development of Colonial Government 1801-1834 and Helen Taft Manning's British Colonial Government After the American Revolution: 1782-1820, respectively.

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