

# MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



*Scroll down to read the article.*

## THE HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNMENT CAMPS AND REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTHERN RHODESIA, 1938–1952

MARTIN R. RUIPIAH

*Department of History, University of Zimbabwe*

### Abstract

*One of the less known episodes in the history of colonial Southern Rhodesia, was the hosting, on behalf of the Empire, of over 12 000 German, Austrian and Italian internees as well as Polish and Iraqi refugees during the Second World War. This study looks at the historical background to the establishment of camps for internees and refugees in the colony. The internees came in two main waves, first as many Axis nationals were interned in British African colonies, and later, as the war developed, Italian internees and refugees, particularly from Poland, arrived. This article describes how the camps were set up and agreements for financing them. It looks at problems that arose in their management, particularly the difficulty in staffing a workable Corp. Finally, it looks at the closing down of the camps, and the subsequent use that was made of the various facilities that had been built.*

ON 21 DECEMBER 1994 the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), handed over to the Zimbabwe government 'impressive infrastructure' worth over Z\$50 million in which over 100 000 Mozambican refugees, fleeing from a raging civil war had been housed since the early 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Facilities such as schools, administrative and dormitory blocks, libraries, modern clinics and one huge warehouse in each camp had been put up by the UNHCR, supported by over 30 non-governmental organisations (NGOs). A single multi-purpose skills training workshop had also been built which drew its candidates from the various camps.<sup>2</sup>

Following the signing of the 1992 Rome Treaty between the Mozambican government and the Mozambican National Resistance Movement (RENAMO) — a process which culminated in the May 1994 democratic elections — the civil war ended, creating peaceful conditions. The result was the organised and voluntary repatriation of the Mozambican refugees from Zimbabwe, leaving the camps vacant. This residual 'windfall' shows that the hosting of refugees is not always a negative undertaking.

<sup>1</sup> *The Herald*, 21 Dec. 1994; 4 Jan. 1995.

<sup>2</sup> *The Herald*, 3 April 1995, reported that Chambuta was still not occupied and despite police presence in the camp, there were fears of looting of the camp's assets, expressed by local government officials.



Tanganyika (now Tanzania) and South West Africa (now Namibia). Other similar European internees were received from Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and Nyasaland (now Malawi). Later on during the war, refugees also came into the country from Poland with a smaller number from Iraq.

Sites chosen for the internment camps and refugee settlements contributed to the faster development of the many rural towns along the line of rail as well as assisting in the establishment of commercial farming concerns and construction projects in Southern Rhodesia. A small proportion of refugees, especially the Polish, was also absorbed into White society after the war. Following the official closure of the internment camps and refugee settlements after the war in 1946-47, the country inherited the present Vengere Township in Rusape,<sup>4</sup> Diggelford School premises near Marondera and other structures north-east of the town; Beatrice Cottages in Mbare, as well as other structures in the present King George VI Army Barracks in the capital, Harare; a fully developed 3 000 acre 'government farm' in Kadoma, on which the Cotton Research and Training Institute now operates; a fully equipped workshop in Umvuma; buildings outside Masvingo, including a small 'Italian church' now a local and tourist attraction.

A preliminary observation on government long term strategy in hosting refugees then and now, can be discerned. Both aimed at stimulating the development of selected areas, with Southern Rhodesia focussing on rural towns, while the Zimbabwe government's donation of land for the camps was directed towards the opening up of remote and generally inaccessible areas. This study examines the historical circumstances under which the earlier facilities were set up.

#### INTERMENT OF ALIENS — POLICY AND THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS, 1939

Internees and refugees received in this country during the Second World War resulted from Britain's war with Germany and Italy. At the outbreak of

refugee settlements. J. D. White, 'Military Units In Rhodesia/Zimbabwe 1890-1980, Insignia and Embellishments' (Salisbury, National Archives of Zimbabwe, nd) records the formation of the Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps Corp as a unit of the Army; White was unaware of its official rejection by the Commander of Military Forces, who informed the Ministry of Justice and Defence that, 'as in the case of the Southern Rhodesia Labour Corp, Air Training Corp and Air Askari Corp (including the Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps Corp), all these had nothing to do with the forces either for duty, discipline or appointments'. See S730/63/42/7, Brigadier E. R. Day, Acting Commander Military Forces to Minister of Defence, 14 March 1945.

<sup>4</sup>F. Velt-Wild, *Dambudzo Marechera a Source Book on his Life and Work* (London, Hans Zell, 1992), 6-7. Marechera writes of Vengere Township having lived in the area, stating, 'which started as a prison camp for so-called aliens, white people like Poles, Italians and Afrikaners (were) interned'. This article provides the documented insight on the structural set up in Rusape. During discussions with the Polish Ambassador to South Africa (who had also served his previous term in Zimbabwe) in Johannesburg in 1994, it was learnt that Polish doctors in this camp had saved the life of Minister Dydimus Mutasa, when they had treated him of some malady when he was still a child.

the war on 3 September 1939, the British government was faced with the problem of holding internees regarded as 'potential German and Italian Fifth Columnists'. There were an estimated 74 000 Germans, of whom 12 000 were known to be active Nazi supporters and an unspecified number of Italians, of whom 1 500 were known Fascists supported by another 8 000 considered 'not safe to leave about', resident in Britain at this time. Added to this figure would be another 3 000 prisoners of war, mostly German, taken off ships and captured on the day the war broke out.<sup>5</sup> The British government was considering holding these aliens and prisoners of war on the various Isles and nearby atolls, when her military chiefs raised serious objections. In their view, the intended plan would not only immobilise a sizeable section of badly needed manpower in the forces but would also act as an attraction to both the Nazi and Fascist regimes on the continent to mount rescue operations. If such an event was to occur, the possibility of mass outbreaks by inmates, into the closely built up areas and amongst civilians, would not be ruled out. Subsequent extrication would cause horrendous casualties amongst mostly British citizens. A further possibility of inmates simply daring to break out during air raids compounded the problem of locating the holding camps on or near the British mainland. The solution to this nightmare lay in sending the prisoners to overseas locations, for which the British government would pay transport and maintenance costs of the internees.

Once the decision was taken, countries within the British Empire were approached to take in quotas. In Southern Africa, the Union of South Africa was to host the largest number of internees from Britain, made up of 13 500 Germans and 8 000 Italians as well as between 3 000–4 000 Germans and 1 000 Italians taken off ships operating from around the Union's shores.<sup>6</sup> Initially, this figure was expected to increase owing to plans to hold there a large number of Germans from South West Africa and other Central African regional British territories including Tanganyika, Kenya, Northern and Southern Rhodesia, Bechuanaland and Nyasaland. However, as Premier General Smuts cautioned, this action and related future plans were being carried out against a rising 'volatile local political situation' since a proportion of the Union's population supported Nazi Germany. The Union of South Africa spurned its involvement in looking after women and children of those interned, a role which was readily welcomed by Southern Rhodesia.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Primary documents used are from the Public Record Office, London, UK and the National Archives of Zimbabwe, Harare. The 'S' series is from the latter repository; S730/63/9/2, United States (London) Embassy to British Foreign Office, 4 October 1939.

<sup>6</sup> PRO, D. O. 119/1147, Telegram, Secretary of State to High Commissioner for UK (Pretoria), 14 June 1940; Prime Minister Smuts to High Commissioner for UK (Pretoria), 22 June 1940.

<sup>7</sup> PRO, D. O. 119/1132, Governor of Tanganyika to High Commissioner for UK (Pretoria), 28 May 1940, quoting the authority of the British Secretary of State in the Colonial Office concerning the approach to the Union for the internment of the first batch of 300 German internees and 180 women. Union replied on 4 June 1940 indicating its preparedness to accept males only.

## INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR INTERNEES DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, 1939-1945

An international framework for handling internees had emerged following excesses against innocent nationals perpetrated by belligerents during the First World War. All the major powers had acceded to the guiding philosophy under the Geneva Convention of July 1929.<sup>8</sup>

In the run up to the rupture of peace in 1939, the United States had hastily reminded the two main adversaries, Germany and Britain, of the key provisions of the Convention on Internees.<sup>9</sup> These held that,

- a) There shall be no wholesale internment.
- b) There shall be established independent tribunals.
- c) Appeals/advisory commissions were also to be set up.

On 19 September, Berlin allayed the US concerns by stating that its behaviour would be governed by the provisions of the Convention while London acknowledged a similar position the next day. Significantly for the British colonies, the British government's letter also pointed out that, 'in the colonial Empire, the general principles as set out above were being followed'.<sup>10</sup> As a consequence, Britain provided a comprehensive definition of an 'enemy alien' both publicly and privately. Publicly, it was given as follows:

Any person who, although now a naturalized British subject, was at any time a citizen of any state with which the King is at present at war or a person who expresses sympathy with any power against which Britain is now at war . . . would be considered an enemy alien.<sup>11</sup>

Following these criteria, some British nationals were to find themselves incarcerated for the duration of the war for their views and sympathies. Privately, a second category was communicated only to governments. This distinguished those for incarceration as,

All ex-Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers, of an alien nation, all aircraft industry mechanics, electricians, civil engineers, welders, miners, traders and other skilled workers.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> S730/63/9/4, Aide-Memoir on Treatment of Enemy Civilians.

<sup>9</sup> S730/63/9/2, United States (London) Embassy to British Foreign Office, 4 Oct. 1939.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> PRO, D. O. 119/1132 quoting *The Star* newspaper from the Union of South Africa, 5 June 1940.

<sup>12</sup> S761/S63, CID to Defence Headquarters, 16 May 1939 -- Schedule passed to Major E. Burt, designate Internment Camps Commandant on 31 May 1939; S730/63/30, Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps Corp to Defence HQ, 14 Aug. 1939 reflecting list of (Starred Germans) internees. A *Red Star System* operated, maintained by the CID and passed on to all Station

## INTERMENT IN SOUTHERN RHODESIA, 1939-1942, THE FIRST WAVE

In the colony of Southern Rhodesia the question of internment of enemy aliens had been secretly under review from the mid-1930s. As the war clouds built up over Europe, the Responsible Government demonstrated its unswerving loyalty by assuring Britain that it 'unreservedly places its resources at the disposal of the Imperial Government'.<sup>13</sup> As a result, the colony had been given the responsibility of coordinating the identification of enemy aliens in the Central African region. Throughout the war, Southern Rhodesia was to remain an inhospitable area to aliens who were ostracised by the largely British White society at social and work places.<sup>14</sup>

Internment for an estimated 709 enemy aliens from Northern and Southern Rhodesia, was effected by the Ministry of Justice and Defence through the Police Criminal Investigations Department (CID), and a small shadowy 'Agricultural' Army Unit. While the CID identified potential inmates, the Agricultural Army Unit was expected to guard physically internees in the established camps.<sup>15</sup> The envisaged structure and the number of internees had been arrived at after consultations by the defence authorities with their counterparts in Pretoria. From these deliberations, it was established that internment in South Africa during the First World War had been dealt with under structures removed from the formal defence pyramid. An Independent Commission of Enemy Subjects had been set up within the Ministry of Interior, falling under the Police Commissioner.<sup>16</sup> *The Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps Corp* was formed, made up of Europeans, drawn exclusively from the Medical Category 'B' and supported by African Askaris and also placed under the police authority. The Corp was armed with army-issue rifles of the SAA .303 type and a limited number of revolvers.<sup>17</sup> Staff of internment camps were paid for by the British government, together with contributions from the territories sending inmates to Southern Rhodesia on an equal basis. The designated

Superintendents on 30 Aug. 1939, in which three Red Stars meant the subject was both hostile and dangerous, two Red Stars denoted 'subject suspected of harbouring strong anti-British feelings' and also connected to similar organisations. A single Red Star indicated that the individual was under suspicion by association.

<sup>13</sup> S759/7, Telegram, Southern Rhodesia government to Britain, 28 Sept. 1938.

<sup>14</sup> Debates in the Legislative Assembly, Second Session, Fifth Parliament, 24 April to 10 June; 13-14 Aug.; 22 Oct. to 8 Nov. 1940; 14 Aug. 1940. A Mr V. Mino, Italian but naturalised British subject, employed as a technician at Wankle Colliery, suffered from this paranoia. He was first interned, paroled in July 1940 on the strong recommendation of his company but was refused re-employment on release. He was eventually forced to seek shelter in an Italian camp.

<sup>15</sup> S730/63B/13, Major E. Burt to Defence HQ, 26 April 1939; Defence HQ to Burt, 21 July 1939, providing schedule of medical category 'B'.

<sup>16</sup> S730/63/4, Defence HQ (Salisbury) to Defence HQ (Pretoria), 9 June; and Reply, 31 July 1939.

<sup>17</sup> S726/W63/7/1/1, Defence HQ to Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps Corp, 5 Dec. 1942, 'Musketry for European and African members'; S730/63/B/13, 'Camp Guard Staff Organization', 26 April 1939.

Commandant of the Internment Camps, working from guidelines received from Britain, sought to identify possible camp sites. Britain however cautioned Southern Rhodesia to put up 'cheap accommodation, similar to that provided by Rhodesian mines, i.e., temporary, inexpensive structures made up of Kimberely brick construction type'.<sup>18</sup> The estimates reflected a camp capable of accommodating 500 inmates, costing £7 500.<sup>19</sup> Each inmate was expected to cost five shillings per day in subsistence, including cigarettes but excluding luxuries. Containment of costs was expected to be achieved through the practice of insisting that internees bring their own clothing and utensils when they arrived.

### INTERNMENT CAMPS EMERGE

The declaration of war against Germany on 3 September 1939 by Britain triggered off the internment process, as the former was accompanied by a proclamation, whose message was repeated in the colonies newspapers:

Warning all enemy subjects within the colonies to register details of their birth, passport and property owned, surrender all arms, ammunition and yourself to the Member-in-Charge of the nearest police station.<sup>20</sup>

Following this announcement, internment on the African continent proceeded apace. In Tanganyika, 4 000 Germans in the Iringa region, were quickly rounded up and dispatched to the Union of South Africa. Their women and children were destined for Southern Rhodesia. In Southern Rhodesia, during the night of 3-4 September, CID and Army details moved swiftly on all 'Starred Germans', capturing 508 who were then gathered at Chikurubi Prison.<sup>21</sup> After a few days interrogation, many were released on parole leaving 52 men and a woman under restriction. These were moved to a temporary holding camp and former primary school in Hartley, 100 kilometers west of the capital, where they were joined by 64 aliens from Northern Rhodesia. At this time, the first selected site in Harare, east of KG VI Barracks, was still under construction. It became ready on 12 October, when it was opened as No. 1 (General) Internment Camp.<sup>22</sup> Later, in 1942, part of the No. 1 (General) Camp became home to 15 refugees from Iraq. Both Northern and Southern Rhodesia had demonstrated

<sup>18</sup> J. F. MacDonald, *The War History of Southern Rhodesia 1939-1945, Vol. 1* (Bulawayo, Mardon Printers, 1947), 242-3.

<sup>19</sup> S807/5, Controller (Defence Forces) to Commandant Military Forces, 4 April 1939; S730/S63R, Commandant (Military Forces) to Secretary of Justice and Defence, 6 Sept. 1939.

<sup>20</sup> S730/63/4, Proclamation No. 30 of 3 Sept. 1939; Proclamation No. 14 of 1940 addressed Italian internees; *The Chronicle*, 8 Sept., 1940; *The Rhodesia Herald*, 8 Sept. 1940.

<sup>21</sup> S730/63/30/6; I am also grateful to Dr J. P. Mtisi of the University of Zimbabwe, for information of where the internees were taken to.

<sup>22</sup> S807/5, Movement of Internees, Hartley; S730/63/33, Movement of Internees by Train, Hartley to Salisbury, 12 Oct. 1939.



capacity to round up enemy aliens within their territories but, in the case of Nyasaland, 50 troops from Southern Rhodesia were dispatched by air on 4 September to gather German nationals. This followed an existing security arrangement in the Central African region involving cooperation among the territories. However, as if to confirm the correctness of the Red Star criteria used, the majority of ex-German officers and non-commissioned officers had left the Central African region by mid-1939 to either rejoin their Units or quietly relocate in neutral zones.

With the physical internment of enemy aliens under way in the region, it was time for the Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps Corp to exist publicly. Major E. Burt was appointed Commandant of the two erected camps, No. 1 (General) in KG VI and No. 2 (Tanganyika) south of the capital, initially meant for housing Italian internees but later allocated for women and children from Tanganyika.<sup>23</sup>

The arrival of the ex-Tanganyika German women and children had been preceded by negotiations between Salisbury and Dar es Salaam for the funding of a more durable camp. The incentive offered to the Tanganyika government was that costs incurred would be recouped, including nominal interest after the war.<sup>24</sup> As a result, an agreement was reached, committing Tanganyika to provide £40 000 for a compound structure due for completion by January 1941. The planned camp was to consist of two blocks each with 80 houses, built back to back and serviced by six blocks of communal wash-houses. Each of the 160 cottages measured 12 by 10 feet, with a small kitchen of 9 by 6 feet fitted with a stove. The whole compound was to be surrounded by a fence, not barbed as the inmates were not expected to attempt to escape. A small area was set aside for games. When completed, the camp gave birth to the now famous Beatrice Cottages in Mbare, Harare. Given the prevailing war conditions, this scheme by the Southern Rhodesia government showed remarkable foresight, as it would provide badly needed additional housing for the growing Harare population after the war.

Occupation of both camps occurred when groups of internees arrived, bringing with them their own school teachers, priests and medical personnel. This is in contrast to the practice in the 1980s when the Zimbabwe government had to provide some of these services in conjunction with donors from around the world. Representatives were chosen to act as the link with the Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps Corp, and as the central control of group discipline and security. The guards of the Corp were responsible for policing the outer perimeter of the enclosures.

<sup>23</sup> *Government Gazette*, 15 Sept. 1939.

<sup>24</sup> S887/3/18/CE, Agreement by Officials, T. C. Fynn, Southern Rhodesia and G. K. Whitlamsmith, Tanganyika, 29 Nov. 1940.

## ESCAPES AND ATTEMPTS TO ESCAPE DURING THE FIRST WAVE

Internment during this period occurred against a background of war and inmates were always looking for an opportunity to escape. In Southern Rhodesia, the first group of internees witnessed early attempts to escape by all nationalities under restriction. Selected examples should illustrate the determination of inmates to escape. Less than a month after No. 1 (General) had been occupied, three Germans slipped out on a Sunday afternoon and hitched a train ride to Portuguese East Africa, then a neutral state in the war.<sup>25</sup> Early in the new year, on 11 January 1940, another 17 inmates from the same camp, with considerable mining experience, skillfully excavated a tunnel ninety-three feet long, but had their escape attempt thwarted when they were spotted emerging from the ground just past the camp perimeter fence. On further investigation, another tunnel measuring twenty-four feet was discovered nearby.<sup>26</sup>

## COST RECOVERY

According to estimates of the Ministry of Justice and Defence, by January 1940, there were 160 internees in Southern Rhodesia, of whom 120 had come from Northern Rhodesia. With both the former Government and Britain equally sharing the costs of their upkeep, Southern Rhodesia received £79 290 10s 1d as compensation for the period from 1939 to 1942.<sup>27</sup>

## THE SECOND WAVE, INTERNEES AND REFUGEES, 1942-1945

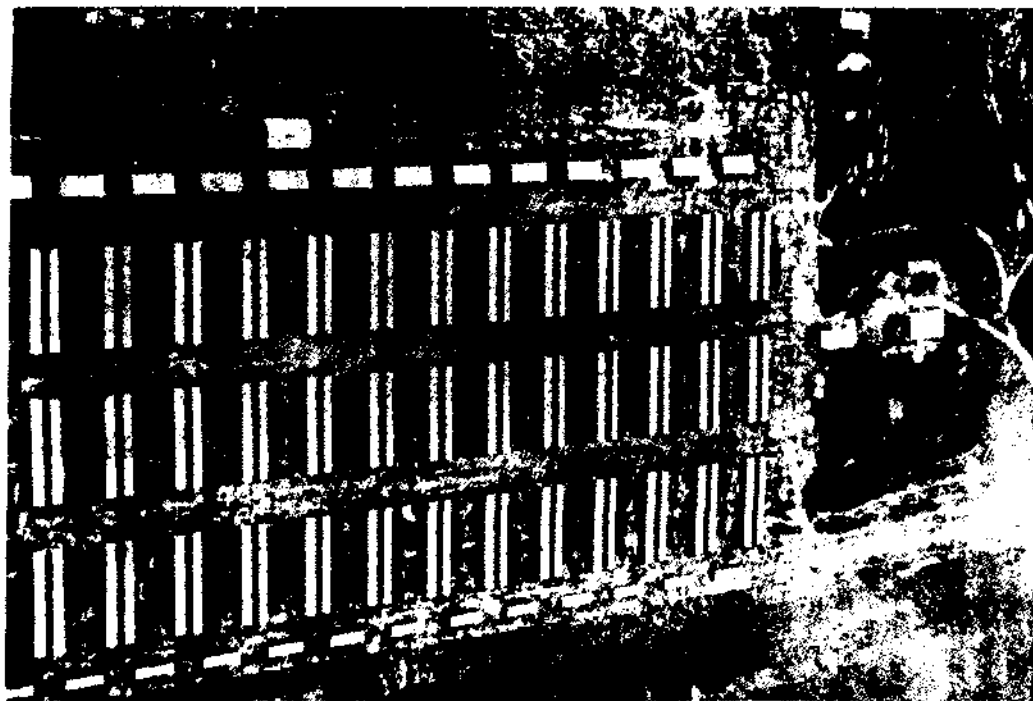
Early in 1941, London instructed Salisbury to prepare to receive some 5 000 Italian internees from Abyssinia and Somalia as well as 1 000 refugees from Poland. Following this request, the Rhodesian Treasury authorised the establishment of another three internment camps and three refugee settlements. The distribution of the expected internees was as follows: 2 000 to the No. 3 (Gatooma — now Kadoma) Internment Camp, located on a 3 000 acre farm, five miles south-west of the town; 1 500 'presumed Italian artisans' destined to occupy No. 4 (Umvuma — now Mvuma) Internment Camp, where a complete workshop had been provided; another 1 500 internees were to be located at No. 5 (Fort Victoria — now Masvingo) Internment Camp. Both No. 1 (General) and No. 2 (Tanganyika) camps were accommodating those who had arrived during the first wave. While

<sup>25</sup> S730/63/18/2, *Commission of Inquiry — Escapes and Supervision*, 25 Jan. 1940.

<sup>26</sup> S482/72/42, *Committee of Enquiry: Internment Camps*, established by the Civil Commissioner (Salisbury), and chaired by Major G. H. Walker, MP; S730/63/18/2, *Monthly Report (Security)*, 25 Jan. 1940.

<sup>27</sup> S726/W631/5/4, *Deputy Assistant Administrator-General to Auditor-General*, 17 Aug. 1942.

Figure 2  
THE NEW INTERNMENT CAMP FOR ITALIAN FARMERS FROM ABYSSINIA: AN AERIAL VIEW



Source: *The Rhodesia Herald*, 31 Jan. 1942.

the financial arrangements of internment were now established, it was pointed out that the Polish government in exile, based in London, would fund the refugee scheme. It was against the impending arrival of large contingents of internees and refugees that there arose a need to reappraise both the policy and organisation of hosting the expected mixed groups.

First, government sought to exploit the known skills in farming, mechanics and other artisan occupations of the Italians 'for the benefit of the then expanding secondary industry'. This was effected through a newly established *Advisory Commission on The Employment of Enemy Subjects Interned in the Colony*. Various interest groups were represented, including Chambers of Industry and Commerce from Salisbury and Bulawayo, the local delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross, the Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture as well as the Director of Internment Camps. The planned camps were also deliberately positioned to benefit and accelerate the development of rural towns lying astride the line of rail.

In relation to the refugees, a Committee on the *Employment of Polish Women Evacuees* was later set up in 1943, seeking to fill gaps in the Army and Air Force canteens, radio communications and other less arduous tasks so as to release White male manpower for the front line. However, the supervision of both internees and refugees was left under the jurisdiction of an expanded Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps and Refugee Settlements Corp. Each of the mooted camps, although falling under an overall structure, now had a complete structure with its own Commandant and Guarding staff. This resulted in the splitting up of the existing No. 1 and 2 into autonomous camps. The new organisation designed for the eight locations (see Figure 1) called for nearly 50 European and 200 Askari staff.

Given the above expanded staff requirements for administering and attending to a combined figure of internees and refugees of 4 650 by mid-1942, and given the limited recruitment area for European staff from Medical Category 'B' or the Home Guards equivalent, shortages of competent staff previously alluded to by the British military chiefs surfaced. A brief look at the quality of some of the men called up to serve in the Corp is illustrative:

E. Rossiter, aged 70, who wears pebble glasses nearly an eighth of an inch thick and cannot see more than a few yards; H. Hewett, suffers from rheumatism in the left arm . . .<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, the first 12 potential candidates on the army's list of internment camps personnel reflected an average age of 53 years. Because

<sup>28</sup> S811/1, Re-employment of British South Africa Police officers on retirement in the Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps Corp, 19 March 1941.

the Corp's duties were not equated with those of active service, finding suitable manpower became increasingly difficult. Even retired military officers seconded to the Corp as Camp Commandants, refused to resign their commissions so that they could join the Internment Camps Corp permanently.<sup>29</sup> Most preferred to be transferred to the 'War Emergency Officers Reserve' instead. Government was forced to consider the employment of 'friendly aliens'. Of 57 contacted, 37 politely declined while 15 agreed, of whom only nine eventually turned up for a cursory fortnight of training at the Gwelo (now Gweru) Leaders Training School, 'joining four Britons, suitable for home service only'. In the interim, Defence Headquarters directed the Rhodesian African Rifles, based at Borrowdale, to assist with the duties of the Corp until June 1942.<sup>30</sup>

In April 1942, 'A' Company of the Rhodesian African Rifles found itself awaiting the arrival of internees off ships at Durban harbour. It successfully escorted 887 Italian internees by train to No. 5 (Fort Victoria) Camp on 23 April, save for the loss of two who had jumped from the moving train somewhere in South Africa.<sup>31</sup>

As the June deadline approached, when the Rhodesian African Rifles was expected to hand over duties to the Internment and Refugee Settlements Corp, police were called up to strengthen the corps. This was in spite of the fact that the organisation was now militarised and adopted army ranks. An organisation with a high proportion of 'European Aliens' eventually assumed its responsibilities, but the general inadequacy of training, lack of motivation and general unreliability of the hastily assembled force were soon to show their negative impact in the policing of the camps. Camps were soon rocked by incidents of indiscipline, resulting in a high rate of escape attempts. This particular period of intense attempts at escaping was compounded by the concentration of fighting in the European theatre. With the escape attempts reaching an unacceptable level later in 1942, made up of 93 attempts from over 5 000 internees in the colony at this time, a *Commission of Enquiry into Escapes From Internment Camps* was established early in 1943. The Commission undertook a country-wide tour of the internment camps and refugee settlements before submitting its report on 25 February 1943, which revealed the general weaknesses of the Internment Corp.

The report brought out issues such as boredom, deprivation of sexual pleasures, adverse internment conditions and the natural desire for freedom

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> T. Chimuka, 'The Role of Southern Rhodesian Africans in Supply of Military Labour and Military Service in World War II (1939-1945)' (Harare, University of Zimbabwe, BA Hons. dissertation, 1989), 1, 24.

<sup>31</sup> S726/W63/10/3/1, 'Report on Italian Internees to Fort Victoria', 22 April 1942; S730/63/42/1/1, Internees Ex-Durban, 23 April 1942.

which together explained why escape attempts had increased. Twenty-six of the reported attempts had been carried out by burrowing beneath the perimeter fence. This determination to escape was also put down to the preponderance of unprofessionalism of 'friendly aliens' constituting a major portion of the Camp Guard staff. Camps No. 3 (Gatooma), No. 4 (Umvuma) and No. 5 (Fort Victoria) were all badly affected by the lack of professionalism of Camp Guard staff. In Camp No. 3 for instance, 'an excessive reliance by the friendly aliens on internees to police themselves' was noted during the period under review, resulting in a series of successful escapes. At No. 4, 'a mixed group of Aliens and Dutch were experiencing a good deal of quarrel amongst themselves' such that duties had been simply abandoned. At No. 5, while the camp guard was under-staffed by 22 in relation to the establishment, 'the European element in charge was found to be not good, having subjected inmates to appalling conditions, making them feel as if they were in a penal settlement'. In this camp, no recreation was organised and it came as no surprise to the Review Committee that 31 inmates had escaped from the camp. Over a third of the posted strength of the Internment Corp of 178 Europeans by December 1943, included 61 Aliens, 12 of whom, aged between 45 and 56, had been subtly coerced to join. The quality of manpower received during the second group of internees was worse than those recruited in the first wave. In October 1943, the Director of Internment and Refugee Settlements complained to Defence Headquarters about some of the Corp recruits:

... Sergeant P. H. Theodosiou, who could not handle a rifle and had been medically boarded 14 months before as a Class C after he damaged his wrist had accepted to join the Corp as he was told that he would sit in an office while Native Guards patrolled; L. Grzicic had been declared epileptic and fit only for non-dangerous sedentary work...<sup>32</sup>

#### REFUGEES — SOUTHERN RHODESIA, 1942-1952

The British Financial Secretary of State advised the Governor of Southern Rhodesia on 11 May 1942 that between 1933 and 1939, Britain had received 55 000 German and Austrian refugees. Further, since May 1940, 63 000 refugees from the Continent and an additional 47 000 British refugees from the Channel Islands and Gibraltar had also been received. As a result, Britain's capacity to absorb refugees had been overwhelmed and the country was therefore seeking alternative locations as a matter of urgency. More territories under the British Empire on the African continent were expected to alleviate pressure on Britain by participating in the new scheme.

<sup>32</sup> S726/W63/10/2/1, Director (Internment) to Defence HQ, 6 Oct. 1943.

Following this communication, Southern Rhodesia received the first batch of 1 000 Polish refugees in January 1943, 500 of whom were accommodated in Marrandellas and Diggleford and another 500 in Rusapi (now Rusape). The camps established were expected to house about 500 refugees each but, by November 1944, a total of 6 831 refugees were in the colony. With Kenya, Nyasaland, Tanganyika, Northern Rhodesia, and the Union of South Africa all holding refugees mostly emanating from the same region or nationality, a policy operated of allowing the transfer and reuniting of split families in any location of their choice. This practice of restoring and maintaining family ties amongst refugees helped to alleviate the pressures on individuals living under restrictive conditions.

The pegged refugee allowances were much higher for married internees, with each adult entitled to ten shillings per day and children to 2s 6d each. A prescribed diet was also available, although that of the Polish community consisted of bread, vegetables, fruit and milk and was low on beef as the authorities viewed them to be light meat eaters.<sup>33</sup>

The Polish refugee camps were jointly administered by local and Polish officials headed by the Polish Consul based in the capital. While the Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps and Refugee Settlements Corp provided the Superintendent and Quartermaster, who sourced provisions from the Supply Branch (a body also centrally catering for the logistical procurement needs of the Army and Police), the Polish officials provided a shadow structure that had its own superintendent, medical doctor, nurses and teachers.

Life in the refugee settlements was best articulated in a report to the Prime Minister, Godfrey Huggins, by G. C. Senn, the local delegate of the International Committee of the Red Cross on 13 January 1944 when he stated:

During a visit to the Polish Refugee Settlements, I found the Administration left too much to the Polish which was a playground of Polish officialdom. In Salisbury at least, half a dozen Polish officials and semi-officials who try to show they are indispensable to the well-being of Polish refugees (but with the aim) of giving civil servants the best possible livelihood until they return to Poland. I dare say at present, it seems Polish Administration does not exist for refugees but refugees are justification to maintain Polish officialdom. Complaints include over organization with constant strain placed on refugees. Recommend end of dualism which would benefit, even in the short term, the Polish underdog.<sup>34</sup>

Huggins acknowledged the concerns raised and promised to curtail the excesses. This process was accelerated shortly afterwards by the

<sup>33</sup> S726/SW100/25/6/1, *MP Bulletins* (6 Nov.-27 Dec. 1942), III, (vi), 120.

<sup>34</sup> S482/72/42, Senn to Prime Minister, 13 Jan., 1944; Prime Minister to Senn, 17 Jan. 1944.

physical occupation of mainland Poland by the Soviet forces who proceeded to instal a Communist regime. The Polish government in exile suffered an eclipse and the Consulate in Salisbury closed down. The deposed Polish Consul, Mr. I. Zietkiewlzz, however, continued to take an active interest in the welfare of the refugees, imploring the Governor to prevail on the government and subordinate officials to alleviate suffering, but to no avail. With the authority of the Polish government-in-exile gone, hosting the refugees in Southern Rhodesia was immediately seen as a burden and efforts to encourage their departure were mounted with a few being sent away in May 1944. Local colonial officials viewed the Polish as an inferior type of White settler because they were considered too willing to take up any jobs on offer and might not be able to compete with local Africans in a free employment market. This discriminatory view put forward by the Alien Internment Selection Board, was to guide government post-war policy on whether or not to admit Poles to settle locally.

#### CLOSING DOWN OF INTERNMENT CAMPS AND REFUGEE SETTLEMENTS

The flow into internment camps received its initial reversal following the collapse of the Mussolini regime in Italy in October 1943. Soon afterwards, limited repatriation commenced by ship through the Union of South Africa. This trickle turned into a torrent from late 1944 with the imminent defeat of Germany. By early 1945, Treasury issued instructions for reducing the internment camps and refugee settlements.<sup>35</sup> By this time, Southern Rhodesia had received £277 600 for internees and £56 700 for refugees.<sup>36</sup> Camps numbers 2, 4 and 5 were immediately closed down in October 1945, while guard staff of No. 1 Camp were reduced to a skeleton with the remaining inmates (over 1 500 Polish refugees) being dispersed to No. 3 (Gatooma). This camp was now placed under the former No. 2 (Tanganyika) Supervisor, Lieutenant (Mrs) Mollie Rule, who was to remain in charge well into the 1950s. The British code-named 'Operation Pole Jump' failed to attract any volunteers from amongst the refugees who, after the war, were found to be accepting menial jobs and not living according to 'European standards' in the view of racist local officials. By 1947, when the remaining 1 282 Poles were invited to be repatriated voluntarily to Poland, only two women agreed.<sup>37</sup> Even after being pressurised by the British government and the United Nations Refugees Programme to accept more Poles, the Southern Rhodesia government only admitted the 10% per nationality (about 726) required by international law.

<sup>35</sup> S726/W63/1/1/3, Secretary for Justice and Defence to Director, Internment Camps and Refugee Settlements on Closure of Camps, 15 Oct. 1945.

<sup>36</sup> S482/72/42, Prime Minister Huggins to the Secretary of State Dominions, 1944.

<sup>37</sup> S730/63/50, Repatriation of Polish Refugees.



### CONCLUSION

With the collapse of the Axis coalition, the Southern Rhodesia Internment Camps and Refugee Settlement Corps experienced an exodus of the remaining European staff, leaving the few who were tasked with the supervision of the orderly closing down of camps and removing the Corp's movable assets to Salisbury. All former internee and refugee camps were now placed under the War (assets) Disposals Committee. Government departments and local authorities interested in the infrastructure and other assets were then invited to submit their bids to the Committee. Following this procedure, Harare Municipality took control of the Beatrice Cottages; Rusape took the present Vengere Township; Kadoma inherited a well developed 3 000 acre government farm; Marondera received several structures including Diggleford School premises; while Umvuma and Masvingo inherited their respective developed sites.