

ESTABLISHING COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN KENYA

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ONE of the roles of the military in Kenya during the offensive against Mau Mau has been the attempted establishment of collective security on a minor scale throughout the country. Briefly and simply the population were told " We will show you how to protect yourself and how to minimize the risk of danger to your possessions and property ; but after we have finished you must be responsible for your own protection ". This article shows how, in a small part of the colony, the principle of collective security was established and put into action, and the results it achieved.

Three weeks after " Operation ANVIL " * the 1st Bn Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers were split up and my company was sent on detachment to the White Sisters Mission near Thika, some 25 miles from Nairobi. The area we were to look after covered approximately 160 square miles of scrub, coffee plantations, pineapple fields and citrus groves. In it were approximately forty inhabited farms scattered over a wide area, connected only by the " Murram " roads, of tropical red earth which when driven over in the hot period produced clouds of dust and in the rain were reduced to quagmires, a curse to every driver in Kenya. The bridges over rivers were also objects of suspicion since they occasionally collapsed under the weight of a three-tonner with disastrous results, though luckily this never happened to us whilst in the Thika district.

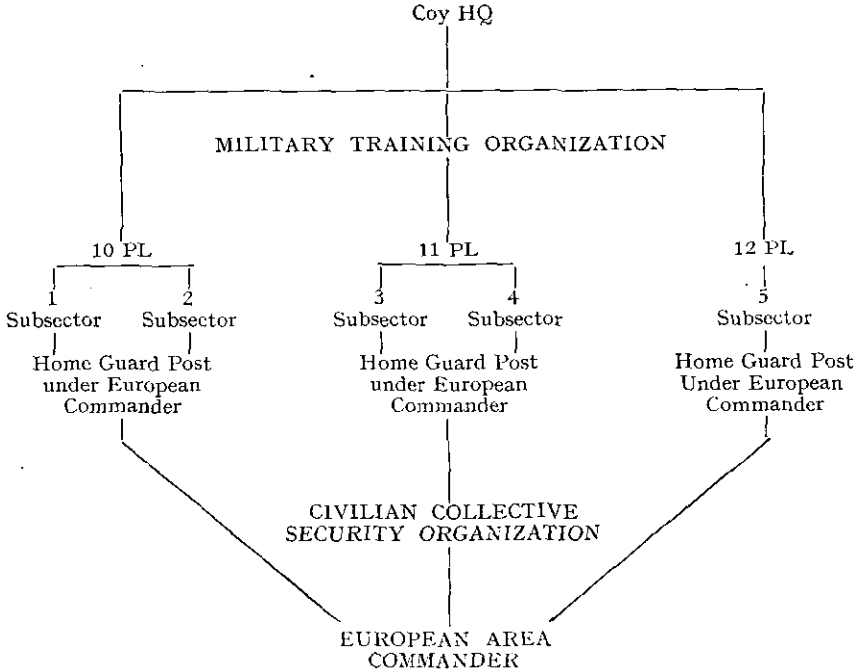
We were given a week to settle down in the new location whilst the company commander visited in turn every farm in the area, the District Commissioner, the district officers and the various officials of the Kenya Police. Finally, in an ' O ' Group lasting over two hours, the situation was presented to us. The area was not an active Mau Mau centre but evidence from intelligence reports tended to show that it was being used as a stopping place for Mau Mau between Nairobi and the Reserve. Oathing ceremonies in the district had been few ; on the whole the natives were neither pro Mau Mau nor pro British but tried to please the whims of both.

Our task was to clean up the area and at the same time establish an effective civilian security organization. The maximum time we could hope for was three months. On the first Sunday morning the farmers in the area were invited to a lecture to hear the security plan put forward in detail, followed by a cocktail party afterwards.

From the military aspect, the area was divided into three sectors, the protection of each sector being provided by one platoon. From the civilian aspect, each sector was divided into two sub-sectors, the farms within them coming under the command of a European (see diagram). On his farm was to be built a Home Guard post, manned by natives chosen from amongst the farms in his area, who would be able to act in an emergency under his command. It was our task to train these natives into an effective Home Guard unit.

*Operation ANVIL was the code name given to the operation to clean up Nairobi.

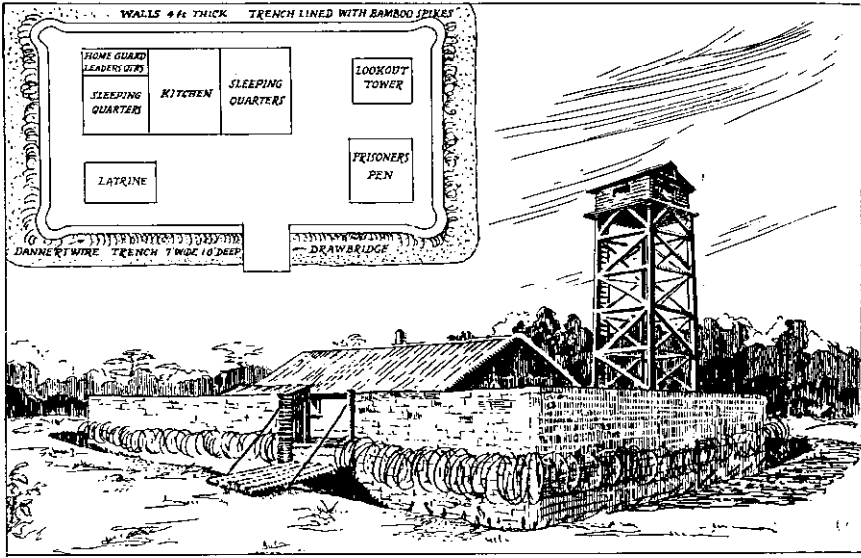
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THE CIVILIAN AND MILITARY ORGANIZATION IN THE COMPANY AREA

The location of the Home Guard posts had to be considered most carefully. They had to be built as near the European commander's house as possible. Since most of the Mau Mau attacks came by night, it was necessary for some infallible means of direct warning to be given to the post from any particular farm in the sub-sector. A forty foot lookout tower was built in each Home Guard post and all farms were in communication with the post by telephone. Some other form of warning had to be devised in the event of the line being cut. Rockets on the rooftops, electrically set off, were tried but through the vicissitudes of the Kenya climate failed to explode. The problem was solved by trip flares erected on the roof of each house with a wire kept taut, running into the bedroom, from each one. These could withstand any sort of weather, the glare could be seen for five miles and any attempt to prevent them detonating was bound to fail, the pressure of a panga (a large sharp knife) cutting the wire being sufficient to set off the flare on the roof, just as slight pressure on the wire from inside would do likewise. In addition the noise of the flare exploding would be enough to warn anybody in the vicinity of danger.

In the building of the Home Guard posts the combined labour resources of the farms in each sub-sector were pooled and most of the posts, much to the credit of the settlers, were ready for occupation within three weeks, though final completion took about two months. The walls of each post were between three and four feet thick with battlements at each corner. Accommodation with tiered bunks was built for forty natives with a kitchen and a deep trench latrine. There was also an enclosure for prisoners and a lookout tower was situated at one end of the camp (see diagram). On the outside the walls were flanked with coils of dannert wire and a moat seven feet wide and ten feet deep surrounded the camp, with a drawbridge entrance. Sharpened bamboo sticks



were placed on the bottom and sides of the moat, so that anyone falling in had little hope of getting out again.

Home Guard selection and training

Meanwhile during the three weeks of building the District Officer had been extremely busy. With a screening team of interrogators and police he had the formidable task of selecting forty natives suitable for training in each of the posts. Of the forty for whose training I was responsible all, with one exception, had admitted to having taken the first Mau Mau Oath, though the information they gave was too dated to be of use.

Whilst the screening was taking place, a training programme was slowly being evolved in the company. The difficulties that cropped up were numerous. Most of the natives in the posts were Kikuyu, Embu and Meru, the principal adherents to Mau Mau, or Wakamba, a non Mau Mau tribe. Some spoke Swahili, some Kikuyu. We had a Kenya Regiment sergeant, whose main role was as interpreter but his Kikuyu was rather hazy and lacking in the technical vocabulary necessary to put our training programme into action. However we were lucky in finding a trainee (an ex King's African Rifles sergeant), who spoke English, Swahili and Kikuyu.

The amount of time that could be devoted to training each day was strictly limited. The natives worked from seven o'clock in the morning until three in the afternoon on the coffee plantations. At three thirty they reported to the post for training which lasted until half past six, by which time it was growing dark ; when ambush training was in progress we finished at eight. As none of us had trained natives before the programme was something of an experiment ; though designed for four weeks training, in actual fact it took double that time to complete.

The syllabus was divided into groups with as little theory and as much practical instruction as possible. Under the heading of propaganda several lectures were given, stressing the value of the posts, the protection they were affording to the population, the value of giving information and the fact that

the Home Guard were chosen because they were trustworthy. Finally, as a demonstration to give the natives confidence in the post as a means of protection, an extremely powerful volume of fire from small arms was directed on the post which failed to penetrate the four feet thick walls.

The manning of the post during the day was done by two ex King's African Rifles sergeants who lived permanently in the post, both of whom had had considerable experience against Mau Mau. To them we left most of the administrative work, the mustering of the Home Guard, the replacement of sentries and the detailing of lookout men for the tower. Both of them did their job extremely well, though one eventually had to be sacked for taking to drink one night and threatening the guard with a shotgun.

The guard themselves were taught the stand-to procedure in the post, how to raise the alarm, how to challenge correctly, how to deal with an outbreak of fire and finally the basic principles of health and hygiene.

Fieldcraft was included in the syllabus to the extent of elementary hand signals, the procedure to adopt when fired upon, and methods of crawling—a subject in which the results were astonishingly good.

On the tactical side, they were taught how to carry out sweeps, search for arms and ammunition, look for Mau Mau notes, tracks and hides, and methods of silent attack. It was felt that they could be of considerable use in surprise raids on labour lines and in this respect they proved first class. Ambush and counter-ambush training were included, but when put into practice we found that the natives could not remain still in one position or refrain from making a noise for more than half an hour, so in the end it was more or less excluded. A small amount of drill was taught in order to make them stand, sit, or march as a platoon, though they often asked to be taught more.

The weapon problem

The problem of weapon training was controversial. Their main weapons in the post were pangas, spears, bows and arrows and sticks. The only persons with weapons were the ex King's African Rifles sergeants who had shotguns, effective up to a range of forty yards. Bows and arrows and spears could be used effectively in expert hands at close quarters but would be of little use against well-armed gangs. On the other hand, to give the natives experience in using shotguns, and access to ammunition, was a risk that most settlers were not willing to tolerate. One must remember that a large majority of the Mau Mau hard core came from East Africa Pioneer battalions that saw no active war experience, yet were fully trained in the use of small arms. We were dealing with natives whose loyalty was still in the balance, natives of whom we had no experience nor any real chance to sum up adequately. It was finally decided that as two shotguns were insufficient amongst forty people, the District Officer should carefully choose six men in the post to be trained in their use and six guns were to be kept locked up in the post in case of emergency.

Teaching by example

A day's training in the post might be as follows. Myself, my platoon sergeant, the Kenya Regiment sergeant, a corporal and six fusiliers would arrive at the post, where four sections of ten men would be waiting for us. Roll call would be taken, each section having a special Swahili name, and work would then begin. The corporal and six fusiliers would act as a demonstration section, the natives imitating anything they did. Consequently it was comparatively easy to teach subjects such as field signals or simple drill. Some time during

the day the previous day's training was repeated and so, by constant repetition, perfection was achieved.

The natives' reactions to an emergency were good. Several times they were called out to assist in searching labour lines and in the end they could be ready to move within five minutes of warning. In spite of the fact that there were members of four different tribes inside the post, morale was very high.

The emergency system worked as follows. If the guard in the watch tower saw a trip flare burning, he would immediately tell the sub-sector commander its approximate direction and distance. From a special chart he could determine which farm was being attacked and rush there with three sections of Home Guard until the police arrived.

In the middle of the eighth week we learnt that the company was shortly to move to a new location, so training was gradually brought to a close. It finished with a "baraza"* similar to a tribal meeting, consisting of a bombing demonstration by the RAF from Eastleigh Airport, Nairobi and a sports competition between the various Home Guard posts, with prizes presented by the District Commissioner. A week later the company left Thika for Meru, in the Reserve, on an operational role against Mau Mau.

Showing results

These were, then, the results of the three months spent in Thika. Firstly we gave the Europeans and the natives a confidence and security that had been lacking in the district since the start of the emergency. Secondly the labour lines in the district were purged of their more doubtful elements, thus reducing the danger of any widespread outbreak of terrorism. Thirdly we established Home Guard posts consisting of Kikuyu, Embu and Meru, as part of the collective security organization and thus used members of their tribes against the Mau Mau—a most powerful deterrent.

The work we did was carried on by the European sub sector commanders. The results of our efforts can be shown by the fact that two small gangs were captured whilst we were in Thika and, during the month after we left, three Mau Mau were killed or captured by the Home Guard detachments that we trained.

In conclusion, there are now hundreds of these Home Guard posts in Kenya, all built for the purpose of protecting the population, be it black or white. They act as a great morale raiser and a deterrent to would-be mischief makers. They are all part of the effort to eliminate strife and brutality and bring peace to a country which by virtue of its low standard of native civilization, in contrast to the high standard of European civilization, has been the perfect breeding ground for the troubles which have beset it.

*Baraza—An official assembly of natives.

