

THE UNION DEFENCE FORCE AND THE STRUGGLE
TO ESTABLISH
A SOUTH AFRICAN CANTEEN SYSTEM, 1914-1916

by

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Opsomming

**Die Unieverdedigingsmag en die stryd om 'n Suid-Afrikaanse
kantienstelsel te vestig, 1914-1916**

Met die uitbreek van die Eerste Wêreldoorlog in 1914, het die Unieverdedigingsmag nie oor 'n kantienstelsel beskik wat saam met die Suid-Afrikaanse troepe na Duits-Suidwes-Afrika gestuur kon word nie. Ná die onttrekking van die grootste deel van die Britse soldate uit Suid-Afrika in daardie jaar, is die Britse kantienorganisasie in Suid-Afrika - die Suid-Afrikaanse Garnisoensinstituut - tot die beskikking van die Unieverdedigingsmag gestel. Die vaagheid van die ooreenkoms tussen die Britse en Suid-Afrikaanse militêre owerhede, tesame met allerlei negatiewe gerugte wat die rondte gedoen het, het tot swak verhoudings gelei. Alhoewel daar 'n mate van waarheid in sommige van dié gerugte was, het die meeste van die kritiek uit 'n misverstand ten opsigte van prysbepaling, die beleid rakende winste, en die toegewings wat aan die SAGI deur die Suid-Afrikaanse regering toegestaan is, gespruit. Dié toedrag van sake het tot die stigting van 'n Suid-Afrikaanse kantienstelsel, die Unieverdedigingsmagsinstituut, in 1916 gelei.

Background

On 10 August 1914 the Union of South Africa entered the First World War on the side of Britain.¹ Immediate steps were taken to plan the proposed invasion of neighbouring German South West Africa (known as Namibia since 1990), a territory which geographically favoured the defence. The primary theatre of war was the large semi-arid central plateau protected on all sides by desert. Of the three invading columns, the Northern and Central forces had to contend with the Namib Desert

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1. Unless otherwise indicated, all archival material consulted for this study, is in the custody of the Military Archives Depot (Documentation Service SANDF), Pretoria.

stretching from the coastline 100 kilometres into the interior; while the Southern, and later the Eastern forces faced the Kalahari Desert. The dry climate had an extremely demoralising influence upon the troops. Supplies did not always reach the front-line timeously and that which did was not always fresh and good. Under these circumstances the necessity of providing field canteens that could advance with the troops was obvious.

However, the nature of these canteens was controversial. The drinking soldier was considered an anomaly, a threat to the war effort and, therefore, also unpatriotic. In fact, the war severely interrupted the consumption of alcohol the world over, as governments intervened in the supply of strong drink. In Britain, alcohol prices were increased, the strength of the drink was weakened, pub opening times were restricted and treating - the custom of buying drinks in rounds - was forbidden.² Elsewhere, prohibition was also strongly associated with patriotism: inebriation in the military camps and the factories, where "a very tiny minority of drunkards could hold up the labours of entirely sober mates",³ could not be tolerated by seriously war-minded citizens. This was a windfall to temperance advocates who in the United States and elsewhere, managed to entrench prohibition until well after the close of the war.⁴ The Transvaal government followed the same line in 1899, prohibiting the sale of alcohol upon the outbreak of hostilities in South Africa.⁵ Thus, most of the canteens which followed South African troops into South West Africa, were "dry" canteens: provisioned with the likes of anchovy, bacon, beans, biscuits, cigarettes and cigars.

Logistic problems

Within days of the start of the First World War, a number of requests from civilian traders seeking permission to follow the South African troops, were received at Defence Headquarters. While their wares could well supplement the uninspiring, standard rations of biscuits and bully beef, the Minister of Defence, General J.C. Smuts, did not believe that it was possible to permit "non-military organisations to proceed to German South West Africa" and trade while military operations were in progress.⁶ The presence of civilians near the front was deemed too problematic and, between August 1914 and January 1915, the tenders were turned down. The exclusion of civilians from the front appears to have been surprisingly successful. When the Prime Minister, General Louis Botha, assumed command of the Northern

2. R. Pope, *War and society in Britain, 1899-1948* (London and New York, 1996), pp. 26, 32, 69, 95; and A. Marwick, *The deluge; British society and the First World War* (London, 1965), p. 64.
3. A. Marwick, *The deluge; British society and the First World War*, p. 65.
4. A. Marwick, *War and social change in the twentieth century; a comparative study of Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the United States* (Basingstoke, 1974), p. 63.
5. F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902* (Cape Town, 1991), pp. 244-245.
6. Archives of the Secretary for Defence (hereafter DC), Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Quartermaster general - General Secretary, YMCA Defence Camp Institute, Booyens, Johannesburg, 13 Jan 1915.

Force at Swakopmund on 10 February 1915, the only civilians in the area were members of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the men staffing the canteens of the South African Garrison Institute.⁷ Smuts had approached this latter organisation, the South African Garrison Institute, then still the canteen organisation of the British garrison in South Africa, to supply the South African columns poised to invade South West Africa, with small items including chocolate, cigarettes and some luxury foodstuffs. The British directors, however, were initially not at all interested.

With no canteen organisation and a young, untried logistical section, the Union Defence Force had difficulty supplying her columns. In fact, well within three weeks of the start of the war, the Union Defence Force could not effectively supply rations to the troops bound for Port Nolloth;⁸ and on 1 September, a contract was signed with the firm of Bennett & Webster of that town, to supply fresh meat to the camps at Port Nolloth and Steinkopf.⁹ The offer of another local firm, to drive livestock with the column to supply A Force with fresh meat until it crossed the Orange River, also had to be accepted.¹⁰ The Germans had astutely removed all livestock from the areas to be traversed by the South African forces. In fact, before the war, South Africa had carefully monitored her neighbour's livestock.¹¹ There was however no alternate plan in the event of a German quarantine of the operational area. The hiring of cattle rangers was the only way to ensure a fresh meat supply for the troops on the interior. Along the coast, the ships *Galway* and *Gaika* were used at various ports as depots. Foodstuffs were stored in their refrigerating chambers.¹² However, as soon as meat left these ships, it was exposed to the full blaze of the African sun.

A means to preserve meat without the use of refrigeration, had to be found; and, as if from heaven, a letter arrived at Defence Headquarters in September 1914, from Karl Hens, an East London butcher of German extraction.¹³ Hens offered the Union Defence Force his patented meat-preservation process¹⁴ and his services as a butcher.

DC, Box 817, file 20281 Report of YMCA SWA: Second Report to the National Council, YMCA, Soldiers' Institute in German South West Africa, 10 Jun 1915 attached to H.N. Holmes, National Secretary of the YMCA(SA) - Quartermaster General, 12 Jun 1915.

8. DC, Box 612, file A.138/9199 Feeding Troops while Traveling and Rations General: Defence - General Lukin, 26 Aug 1914; and Disso - Defence, 26 Aug 1914.
9. DC, Box 787, file 2/3 Supplies Meat Contract, A Force: Contract for the supply of meat dated at Port Nolloth on 1 Sep 1914.
10. DC, Box 787, file 2/3 Supplies Meat Contract, A Force: AQMG - GOC, 2 Sep 1914; and GOC - AQMG, 2 Sep 1914.
11. The Union Defence Force had accurate figures at its disposal. On 1 April 1912, there was 171 784 head of cattle in German South West Africa: an increase of 27 339 since the previous year. (see DC, Box 621, file 166/9199 Registration Horses General: Assistant Director of Veterinary Services - Quartermaster General, 17 Nov 1914.)
12. DC, Box 612, file A.138/9199 Feeding Troops while Traveling and Rations General: extract from General Manager's report, 9 September 1914.
13. DC, Box 613, file A.143/9199 Meat Preservation: Hens - General Smuts, 9 Sep 1914; and Archives of the Managing Director, Kaffrarian Estate and Investment Company, East London (hereafter KEIC), Hens Papers, file 1/1.
14. KEIC: Hens Papers, file 1/1: description of process signed by Hens in 1909.

This was an attractive offer. Hens had slaughtered over 18 000 head of cattle over the previous five years and all had successfully been treated with his patent. After a routine xenophobic inquiry, a check common throughout the British Empire,¹⁵ the Quartermaster General's suspicions were confirmed by the Magistrate at East London - "... Karl Hans [(sic) was] a prisoner of war on parole [and he did] not consider him to be of good standing."¹⁶ The offer was turned down¹⁷ and the Union Defence Force ended up footing an enormous bill with Bennett & Webster: an account which also had to be renewed.¹⁸ Nonetheless, in the end, the UDF's reservations appear to have been justified. Hens, almost caught dealing with the Germans in December 1914,¹⁹ was observed in September 1939, supplying German submarines covertly visiting the South African coast in the vicinity of the Gonubie river, with fresh meat and other vitals.²⁰

After the initial refusal, the directors of the South African Garrison Institutes agreed in September 1914, to supply the Union troops on active service in the Union and in German South West Africa,²¹ with canteen items such as soft drinks, groceries, and - most important to the troops - beer, brandy, whisky and other luxury items. The Board of Directors decided on 7 October 1914, to open branches of the SAGI with each of the columns invading South West Africa, as soon as circumstances permitted.²²

South African Garrison Institute

For centuries, individual regimental commanders in the British Army, called for tenders to staff and run their field force canteens. However, towards the end of the nineteenth century, an arrangement eventually leading to the end of exploitative sutling began, whereby contractors were assigned to provide the supplies for the

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15. R. Pope, *War and society in Britain, 1899-1948*, pp. 33-34.
 16. DC, Box 613, file A.143/9199 Meat Preservation: Magistrate, East London - Quartermaster General, 29 Sep 1914.
 17. DC, Box 613, file A.143/9199 Meat Preservation: Quartermaster General - Karl Hens, 21 Oct 1914.
 18. DC, Box 787, file 2/3 Supplies Meat Contract A Force: AQMG - Supply Officer, Port Nolloth, 14 Oct 1914; Bennett and Webster & Co - Colonel Harvey (AQMG, Port Nolloth), 23 Sep 1914; and QMG - AQMG, 3 Oct 1914.
 19. Archives of the Provost Marshal of the Union, Personal Files (hereafter PMP), Box 47, file Hans-Plans value £50 to obtain: Provost Marshal - Deputy Commissioner, C.I.D., Marshal Square, Johannesburg, 7 Dec 1914; Provost Marshal, Cape Town - Provost Marshal, Pretoria, 15 Mar 1915; and Provost Marshal, Pretoria - Provost Marshal, Cape Town, 16 Mar 1915.
 20. Archives of the Deputy Chief of Staff (hereafter DCS), Box 22, file C.D. 7/2 vol 1 Seaward Defence: Officer Commanding, Eastern Province Command - Director of Coast Defence, 1 Oct 1939; and archives of the Officer Commanding, Coastal Artillery Brigade (hereafter CAB) Group 2, Box 114, file O(CD)20 Intelligence Reports: Deputy Director of Intelligence - Colonel Stanford, 7 Oct 1939.
 21. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Quartermaster General - OC Troops, Pretoria, 18 Nov 1914.
 22. DC, Box 631, file 7/220/9199 SAGI, copy of correspondence covering agreement on all points: minutes of special meeting of the Directors of the SAGI, 7 Oct 1914.

canteens (which were staffed by regular soldiers) on a district basis. By 1900, one of these, the Canteen and Mess Society, had a turnover of more than £250 000; and having proved its efficiency, obtained a contract to supply the whole force under the command of Lord Roberts, the British Commander-in-Chief in South Africa.²³ After the amalgamation of the British forces in South Africa in 1900, a new unified canteen system called the South African Garrison Institutes evolved.²⁴ This proved the deathblow to sutering in South Africa.

The name of the new organisation was misleading. The South African Garrison Institutes (SAGI) was not a South African concern but a semi-military British institution appointed to supply the Imperial troops in South Africa with refreshments and comforts. The SAGI took over the entire South African enterprise of the Canteen and Mess Society; which, left with the business in Britain, eventually developed into the Navy Army Air Force Institute (NAAFI).²⁵ The new undertaking met with success and soon permanent SAGI branches were established in the Cape, Natal and the Transvaal. This prosperity is reflected in the ostentatious stone and brick Institute building erected in 1902 at Roberts Heights at a cost of £26 000 - money derived from the profits of the field force canteens.²⁶

On 26 September 1914, a special meeting of the Directors of the South African Garrison Institute was held at the Castle in Cape Town, then headquarters of the South African (Imperial) Military Command. According to the agreement reached between Major General C.W. Thompson, chairman of the Board of Directors of the SAGI, and Lieutenant Colonel R.H. Rice, on behalf of the Union Defence Force; the SAGI was to supply the staff to run the field canteens, including the services of Timothy Sleith, the General Manager and F.L. Davis, the Chief Accountant, on condition that the Union Defence Department contribute towards their salaries.²⁷ The SAGI, in turn, was to supply all consumable goods from existing stock, and once this had been depleted, the Institute was to act as a buying agent for the Union Defence Force. This was to take place "in exactly the same way as the field force canteen was supplied during the late war [the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902]".²⁸ In return, the Union government was to supply free sea transport to the SAGI canteens serving the Union Defence Force in German South West Africa.²⁹

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23. J. Fortescue, *A short account of canteens in the British Army* (Cambridge 1928), pp. 35-38.
 24. H. Miller, *Service to the services; the story of NAAFI* (London, 1971), p. 17; and J. Fortescue, *A short account of canteens in the British Army*, p. 38.
 25. H. Miller, *Service to the services; the story of Naafi*; and, for the latest publication, see Lord Bramall et al, *Naafi up! more than just char and wad* (Tidworth 1996).
 26. DC, Box 424, file DC 51761 SAGI building at Roberts Heights: Secretary for Defence - Secretary for Finance, 26 Oct 1917. [This is now the Paratus building at the SA Army College, Thaba Tswane.]
 27. DC, Box 631, file 7/220/9199 SAGI, copy of correspondence covering agreement on all points: minutes of special meeting of the Directors of the SAGI, 26 Sep 1914.
 28. DC, Box 631, file 7/220/9199 SAGI, copy of correspondence covering agreement on all points: telegram Chebec - Defence, 24 Sep 1914.
 29. DC, Box 631, file 7/220/9199 SAGI - copy of correspondence covering agreement on all points: telegram Quartermaster General - Chebec, 26 Sep 1914.

This agreement was a clear example of the mutually beneficial relationship existing within the British Empire at the time. In exchange for South Africa's willingness to defend Imperial interests, Britain pledged staff and infrastructure to assist South Africa in her war effort.³⁰ When the Union Quartermaster General, Lieutenant Colonel M.C. Rowland, asked the Directors of the SAGI to open branches of the Institute for the use of the Union Defence Force, the SAGI undertook to charge reasonable prices and to hand over any profit to the Minister of Defence; while the Department of Defence on the other hand, was to provide the SAGI with "all reasonable facilities" and where necessary furnish protection for their stores and provide guards when this was essential.³¹ Such facilities soon proved to be not only reasonable but, in fact, plush: following the capture of Keetmanshoop on 20 April 1915, the SAGI was given occupancy of the Hohenzollern Hotel, in which it established a refreshment centre.³²

German South West African campaign 1914-1915

From the start of the campaign a shortage of cash was experienced in German South West Africa. The troops needed cash-in-hand to purchase from the SAGI, as the Directors had forbidden credit in order to keep bookkeeping expenses at a minimum. A system of re-circulating the available money was subsequently devised between the Department of Defence and the Institute, whereby the shortage of currency was combated and the risk of sending large amounts of gold to South West Africa was minimized. Cash paid in advance to the troops on their arrival eventually found its way to the South African Garrison Institute canteens who, instead of sending the money back to Cape Town, handed it over to the Field Paymasters for payment to the troops the following month, while the Base Paymaster refunded the amount to the Institute in Cape Town. This arrangement saved both parties the concern of sending gold over long distances under insecure conditions.³³

The Union Department of Defence, according to agreement, was to provide free sea transport for stores detailed to SAGI canteens serving the Union Defence Force.³⁴ However, for the early part of the campaign, transport was in an appalling condition.

30. R. Dale, *The South African armed forces and their link with the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth of Nations, 1910-1961*, *Militaria* 9(1) 1979, p. 2.
31. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Quartermaster General - Director of Signals, 15 Nov 1915.
32. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter. Rev T.H. Jones, Presbyterian Chaplain, Keetmanshoop - Committee of Management of the SAGI, 3 Aug 1915.
33. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matters. OC Union Expeditionary Base - Quartermaster General, 13 Oct 1914; Secretary for Defence - Controller and Auditor General, 22 Jul 1915; and Secretary for Defence - Controller and Auditor General, 23 Aug 1915.
34. Members of the staff of the South African Garrison Institute were also permitted to travel to German South West Africa at government expense. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: telegram Dequar - Cobase, Embarking Cape Town, 19 Aug 1915.

Railway lines had to be constructed from Prieska to Upington and from Walvis Bay to Swakopmund. The German railroads were of a different gage and as the Union forces advanced, much of the railway had to be re-laid. This greatly immobilised the Union Defence Force and, of course, the South African Garrison Institute. Goods, detailed for the Southern Force canteens at Upington, were as a result delayed at Prieska and De Aar. However, supply was facilitated after the completion of this railroad on 15 November 1914.³⁵

The transportation of Institute supplies was further delayed by disputes with the Union Defence Force. In February 1915, the Assistant Quartermaster General in Cape Town complained of preference being given to the transportation of SAGI goods over that of the Department of Defence. Orders were subsequently issued to the effect that South African Garrison Institute supplies were not to be shipped until the situation at Walvis Bay had been alleviated; and "unofficial goods" (i.e. SAGI goods) were not to be shipped unless there was room after all government stores had been loaded.

Six weeks later, however, the Assistant Director of Supplies reported that SAGI goods were arriving at Walvis Bay without being "marked with S - A - G - I or other means of distinguishing them from similar stores shipped for Government purposes".³⁶ Faced with the threat of confiscation, Timothy Sleith (general manager of the SAGI) protested that everything "humanly possible" was done on his part to prevent confusion - "the greatest care (being) taken in marking all our goods, not only with S.A.G.I. but with a green band which is put round every case and packet in order to facilitate identity when the goods arrive at their respective ports."³⁷

The canteen established with Central Force at Lüderitzbucht experienced similar logistical problems. However, the Institute obtained special permission to replenish their stock from the stores of two German shopkeepers who were interned at Pietermaritzburg, J. Rosenbluth and Company, and Krobbenholt and Lampe. This was done to the value of £172.3.7 and £112.10.6, respectively.³⁸

Prisoner-of-war camps had been established for captured German soldiers and remained in use after the armistice for those Germans refusing to take the oath of neutrality. The SAGI provided rations to the value of two shillings per day for the officers held at Pietermaritzburg and Okanjande, the Union government having to settle the account at the end of each month. The Institute at Aus served the garrison guard and with the permission of the camp commander, prisoners were permitted to purchase cigarettes and small articles. Unlike the officers who were served by the

35. DC, Box 1108, file DCQB 32 SAGI Canteens, general: telegram Dequar - Asquam, 23 Mar 1915; and Assistant General Manager of Railways, Cape Town - Assistant Quartermaster General, Union Expeditionary Forces, Cape Town, 29 Mar 1915.

36. DC, Box 1108, file DCQB 32 SAGI Canteens, general: Assistant Quartermaster General Union Expeditionary Forces - Naval Transport Officer, Cape Town, 19 Feb 1915.
DC, Box 1108, file DCQB 32 SAGI Canteens, general: Assistant Quartermaster General - General Manager SAGI, 12 Apr 1915; and General Manager SAGI - Assistant Quartermaster General, 23 Apr 1915.

38. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: F.L. Davis - Secretary for Defence, 22 Jan 1915.

SAGI, the other ranks imprisoned at Aus had to draw provisions and cook their own food.³⁹

The SAGI was from the outset a unified canteen system. The Union Defence Force had wanted at all costs to avoid having to deal with sutlers and from the very beginning insisted on working with only one canteen organisation. It is therefore not surprising that in January 1915, when the commander of the newly formed Eastern Force called for tenders from civilian traders to run canteens for his troops, the Quartermaster General immediately stepped-in and offered the contract to the SAGI who readily accepted.⁴⁰

However, in June 1915, the operation of the SAGI was extended to the civilian population of German South West Africa until such time as normal trade conditions were resumed.⁴¹ This, according to the South African General Officer Commanding in South West Africa, combated the extortionate prices charged by the civilian merchants. By the end of July difficulties in feeding the civilian population was accentuated by the delay in shipping 400 tonnes of SAGI supplies to Swakopmund and Lüderitzbucht.⁴² By August 1915, the situation in the Protectorate was such that the Union government permitted South African traders to establish businesses in South West Africa for the benefit of the general public.

Following the surrender of the German commander on 9 July 1915, civilian traders obtained permits for the importing of goods into South West Africa⁴³ and for the opening of businesses there.⁴⁴ These permits were obtained from the Provost Marshal and the Chief Civil Secretary in Windhoek, respectively. However, permit holders were only allowed to do business with the local population and could not accompany the soldiers as had the sutlers of old. As a result, the SAGI was to confine its business to members of the Union Defence Force and government officials.⁴⁵

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39. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: telegram Dequar - Manager SAGI, 22 Jul 1915; Sleith - Quartermaster General, 23 Jul 1915; Quartermaster General - General Manager SAGI, 26 Jul 1915; and J.J. Bruwer, *Aus 1915-1919* (Pretoria 1985).
 40. DC, Box 816, file 20275 Establishment of SAGI for troops: telegram Oostcom Kimberley - Defence Quartermaster General, 28 Jan 1915; telegram Defence Quartermaster General - Cobase Cape Town, 28 Jan 1915; and telegram Defence Quartermaster General - Oostcom Kimberley, 1 Feb 1915.
 41. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Lt Col T.E. Fowle, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, South African Military Command - Quartermaster General, 6 Jun 1915.
 42. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: F.L. Davis, Accountant SAGI - Col Price, Base Commandant, Cape Town, 26 Jul 1915.
 43. Archives of the Provost Marshal of the Union, Correspondence Series (hereafter PMK), Box 126, file PM 9598 Permits General Mrs Trink, Cape Town, Permit to import goods into Military Protectorate: Lewis - Provost Marshal, 3 Aug 1915.
 44. PMK, Box 126, file PM 9617 Permits General German South West Africa: Provost Marshal - Messrs Immelman & Co, Malmesbury, 18 Aug 1915.
 45. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Quartermaster General - General Manager SAGI, 5 Aug 1915.

Commission of inquiry 1915

The agreement reached between the Union Defence Force and the SAGI in September 1914, did not specify the nature of the facilities to be provided by the South African Defence department - with the exception of free sea transport which was specifically provided for - other than they were "to be equal to those afforded by the Imperial Authorities during the South African War".⁴⁶ As the war progressed, the spirit of the agreement gradually eroded. Its vagueness and the apparent unwillingness of the Union government to quell rumours of corruption, led General Thompson to say that "the Directors [of the SAGI] have many times regretted that they ever volunteered their services [however they] are prepared to continue their work, but in this event they ask for more support than has been received sometimes in the past."⁴⁷

In a letter dated 1 April 1915, the Deputy Assistant Adjutant General in South Africa, Lieutenant Colonel T.E. Fowle, delivered an ultimatum on behalf of the SAGI Board of Directors to the Department of Defence in Pretoria. The Board called for a "complete investigation" to clear the good name of the South African Garrison Institutes, which "has held an honourable position in this country for many years and it is not for the present Trustees here to allow it to be constantly and publicly defamed any longer" and unless an inquiry was granted "the only possible course will be for [the Directors] to withdraw the South African Garrison Institutes from German South West Africa altogether."⁴⁸ It was rather unfair of the British to assume the moral highground as in the past - under their direction - the Institute's name had been severely tarnished. In 1902, for example, their auditor, a certain Thomas Douglas, had identified a serious case of theft by a cashier in the Pretoria District, who had stolen £238 of canteen money. The responsible officer, one Major Barton, edited the auditor's report and published an abridged version, not so much to protect his cashier but to save himself from facing the inevitable Court of Inquiry.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the murmuring concerning the SAGI in 1915 was not nearly as serious as the "Canteen Scandal" which rocked the War Office in the previous year.⁵⁰ But in 1915, the SAGI was in the employ of the Union Defence Force and it was for the latter to sort out the problems which were now manifesting in South West Africa.

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46. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Quartermaster General - Director of Signals, 15 Nov 1915.
 47. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Major General C.W. Thompson, General Officer Commanding South African Military Command - General J.C. Smuts, Minister of Defence, 3 Jul 1915.
DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: Deputy Assistant Adjutant General South Africa - Officer Commanding Union Expeditionary Forces, 1 Apr 1915.
 49. Transvaal Archives Depot, Pretoria (hereafter TAD): archives of the High Commissioner for South Africa (hereafter HC), HC 65, file 21: Thomas Douglas - Lt Col Congreve, 9 Jun 1902; and Public Record Office, London (hereafter PRO): WO 32/8690 Disposal of Surplus Funds of the South African Garrison Institute.
 50. J. Fortescue, *A short account of canteens in the British Army*, pp. 44-45.

Publicity was so intense that support for the Institute decreased, eventually affecting the supply of comforts to the troops in the Protectorate.⁵¹ On 8 April 1915, Timothy Sleith, General Manager of the SAGI, wrote to Lieutenant Colonel Rowland (the Quartermaster General) requesting an interview as “what troubles me most is, that after six months of very hard work, and undoubtedly successful, we may be brought to a sudden finish, all because some criticism has been levelled against us - which for the most part has been nothing but misstatements.”⁵²

Complying with the wishes of the Board of Directors, Lieutenant Colonel Rowland constituted a committee consisting of Sleith and a representative of the Defence Department, to inspect the branches of the Institute in South West Africa and deliver a report to the Directors. As most of the SAGI staff in South West Africa were civilians, Rowland instructed that where irregularities occurred, such individuals were to be court martialed under section 176, paragraph 10 of the Union Military Discipline Code and Rule 10 of the Manual of Military Law.⁵³

Local boards, consisting of three Union officers, were established at all bases where SAGI canteens existed, while at advanced posts (such as Garub and Aus in the case of Lüderitzbucht) a senior officer was assigned to report to the Board at the nearest base.⁵⁴ According to General Order 2567 the Boards were not to have executive functions, but could only act in an advisory capacity to the General Manager, inquire into local complaints and forward regular reports to the Board of Directors. This greater decentralisation of management and control immediately bore results and within ten days of the commencement of the investigation, the manager of the SAGI canteen at Kilo 116 was dismissed for overweighing sugar.⁵⁵

Despite truth in some of the disparagement, most of the criticism arose from misunderstanding with regard to the fixing of prices, generation of profits and the concessions allowed by the Union government to the South African Garrison Institutes.

a. Prices

During the investigation the SAGI price list was referred by Lieutenant Colonel Rowland to a Cape Town merchant for comparison with his own rates. According to W. Seale-Wood, the manager of the particular firm, “one can only say in a general way that their prices are reasonable and fair in the average and that it must be a matter of the utmost difficulty for the Directors to fix prices, when so many variable

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51. However, this also appears to be coupled with the popular belief that the soldiers would return to the Union shortly after the fall of Windhuk.
 52. DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: T. Sleith - Colonel M.C. Rowland, 8 Apr 1915.
 53. DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: Quartermaster General - Assistant Quartermaster General, Northern Force and Assistant Quartermaster General, Central Force, 24 Apr 1915.
 54. DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: Quartermaster General - Assistant Quartermaster General, Southern Army, Lüderitzbucht, 9 May 1915.
 55. DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: Garrison Adjutant, Kilo 116 - Officer Commanding Base and Line Communications, Lüderitzbucht, 26 Apr 1915; and Lt Col E. Smedley-Williams, President of the Board of Management, SAGI, Central Force - Officer Commanding Base and Line Communications, Lüderitzbucht, 7 May 1915.

and extraordinary conditions have to be taken into consideration.”⁵⁶ Prices had to be kept as low as possible while still covering loss or damage in transit, depreciation incurred by adverse climatic conditions, and the perpetual risk of looting: by enemy and own forces. Under these conditions it was exceptional that Seale-Wood could state that 56% of SAGI were normally priced, 9,5% very cheap, 29% cheap and only 5,5% expensive (See Figure 1).⁵⁷

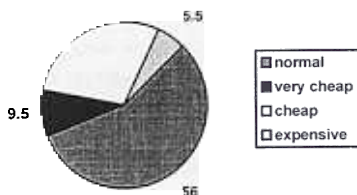


Figure 1: SAGI prices compared to contemporary prices in Cape Town, reflected as percentages, 1915. (Source: DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: W. Seale-Wood - T. Sleith, 29 Apr 1915.)

b. Profit

Most of the trouble initially arose from the misunderstanding that the SAGI was a private enterprise run by military officers for their personal financial benefit. In July 1915, the Union Defence authorities quelled this rumour by publicising its intention to hand over their share of the profits to the Governor General’s Fund.⁵⁸

c. Concessions

According to the agreement signed at the Castle, Cape Town, on 26 September 1914, the SAGI canteens serving the Union Defence Force in German South West Africa, were to be allowed free sea transport. This agreement was misunderstood and soon rumours were spreading to the effect that the SAGI as a whole received this concession, including the SAGI establishments at the Cape and elsewhere which were serving Imperial garrisons.

Establishment of the Union Defence Force Institute

As a result of the soured relations between Defence Headquarters, Pretoria and the British authorities at the Castle, Cape Town and the fact that the SAGI was devoting most of its attention to the service of the Union government, the Union Defence Force (in a further agreement with the British) assumed control of the branches of the Institute operating in South West Africa with effect from 1 January 1916. The

56. DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: W. Seale-Wood, manager of R. Wilson Son & Co., Merchants, Cape Town - T. Sleith, general manager of the SAGI, 29 Apr 1915.
57. DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: W. Seale-Wood, manager of R. Wilson Son & Co., Merchants, Cape Town - T. Sleith, general manager of the SAGI, 29 Apr 1915.
58. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Quartermaster General - Deputy Assistant Adjutant General, 8 Jul 1915.

branches at Potchefstroom and in the Cape Peninsula were handed over on 1 May 1916.⁵⁹ The agreement, however, stipulated that “in the event of Imperial Troops again garrisoning the Peninsula, and wishing [to] control their own canteens,” the branches of the Institute at the Cape were to be handed back on the same basis as they were taken over by the Union authorities.⁶⁰ And so the management and control of the operation passed with the demise of the South African Garrison Institutes on 31 December 1915, from the Imperial authorities at the Castle to the Union Defence Force. The contradictory name of “The South African Garrison Institute” was finally discarded, at the insistence of the British, for that of “The Union Defence Force Institute (UDFI).”⁶¹

Financial position to 1916

When the Union Defence Force assumed control of the management of the canteens in South Africa, the SAGI was in a sound financial position. The canteens serving the Union Defence Force realised a net profit of over £15 000 for the period ended 30 April 1915,⁶² and a further £40 148 for the period May to October 1915: the canteen at Potchefstroom showed little profit as it was open for only three months (*Figure 2*).⁶³

SIX MONTHS ENDED OCT 1915	NET PROFIT (£)	PERCENTAGE
South West canteens	35 935	89.5
Defence share of POW camps	2 909	7.25
Potchefstroom	1 304	3.25
TOTALS	40 148	100

Figure 2: Net profit of the canteens of the South African Garrison Institute serving the Union Defence Force, May-October 1915. (Source: DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter.)

Profits would have been larger had it not been for the looting which took place at Lüderitzbucht and the fire in a canteen at Upington. However, in January 1916, the Institute was able to make a contribution of no less than £30 000 to the Governor

59. DC, Box 1274, file DCM/1283 Union Defence Force Institute: report G.M.2535 by T. Sleith on the Balance Sheet and Accounts of the Union Defence Force Institutes ending 30 September 1916.

60. DC, Box 329, file 34973/0 vol 1. Union Defence Force Institutes, General: minutes of meeting held on 14 June 1916 between Colonel Watling (Board of Directors, SAGI) and Colonel Hodgson (Union Defence Force Institutes) in connection with transfer of branches of SAGI, Cape Peninsula to UDFI, attached to W. Patrick Jones, Acting Chairman, Board of Directors, UDFI - General Officer Commanding, the Castle, Cape Town, 15 Jun 1916.

61. DC, Box 1428, file 37/4/12 SAGI: Lieutenant Colonel T. Fowle, Deputy Assistant Adjutant General South Africa - Officer Commanding Union Expeditionary Force Base, 1 Apr 1915.

62. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: communiqué to the Press A.17/220/9199.

63. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: telegram T. Sleith - Col M.C. Rowland, 10 Jan 1916.

General's Fund.⁶⁴ Some £25 000 of this comprised South Africa's share of the profits.⁶⁵

Theatres of operations after 1916

The South African Garrison Institute, and later the Union Defence Forces Institute, did not accompany the South African force to German East Africa in 1916;⁶⁶ although multifarious applications were received for the shipping and even supplying of canteen facilities for South African troops in this theatre. Some of the applicants were charity concerns and others profiteers. Three women - Miss Wych and the Misses M. and C. Bradley - offered to run canteens in the field,⁶⁷ while a Mr. C.E.C. Bowden of Pietermaritzburg, requested a permit for himself and his partners to run a dry canteen in German East Africa. These were all turned down or referred elsewhere.⁶⁸ With a view to ensuring an adequate supply of fresh meat, an employee of the *Rand Daily Mail*, a certain Mr. Whitaker, even offered to raise "one thousand picked mounted men as Cattle Rangers for German East," which he reckoned could be completed in ten days!⁶⁹ This too was turned down.⁷⁰

It would appear that the presence of NAAFI and the UDF's own supply arrangements in East Africa, were deemed adequate. Water carts, initially 71 in number,⁷¹ all horse-drawn and having a capacity of 108 gallons each,⁷² accompanied the troops. Ideally, one water cart was to attend each battery and five per total column.⁷³ Then there was also the ubiquitous buck wagon supplying the regulated rations - delivered by sea from South Africa to Kilindini - to the various regimental

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64. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: T. Sleith - Col M.C. Rowland, 21 Jan 1915 (sic 1916).
 65. Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (hereafter SAD): archives of the Prime Minister (hereafter PM), PM 1/1/40, PM4/25/1916 European War SAGI: Secretary to the Prime Minister - Secretary for Defence, 16 Mar 1916.
 66. DC, Box 631, file 220/9199 Field Canteens established by SAGI, general matter: Quartermaster General - G.C.A. van Dam, late Brigade Major, 3rd Mounted brigade, 30 Dec 1915.
 67. SAD: PM 1/1/40, PM4/25/1916 European War SAGI: Secretary to the Prime Minister - Secretary for Defence, 18 Sep 1916.
 68. Archives of the Chief Staff Officer (hereafter CSO), Box 1, file CSO 2 Dry Canteen: C.E.C. Bowden - Secretary to the Minister of Defence, 18 Dec 1915; and UNEAF - C.E.C. Bowden, 21 Dec 1915.
 69. CSO, Box 1, file CSO 2 Cattle Rangers Whitaker (Rand Daily Mail) offers to raise 1000: Whitaker - General Smuts, 31 Jan 1916.
 70. CSO, Box 1, file CSO 2 Cattle Rangers Whitaker (Rand Daily Mail) offers to raise 1000: Smuts - Whitaker, 1 Feb 1916.
 71. CSO, Box 11, file CSO 7 Water Carts: Quartermaster General - CSO UNEAF, 22 Dec 1915; and Assistant Secretary for Defence - General Tighe, Nairobi, 8 Jan 1916.
 72. CSO, Box 11, file CSO 7 Water Carts: Assistant Secretary for Defence - General Tighe, Nairobi, 8 Jan 1916.
 73. CSO, Box 11, file CSO 7 Water Carts: General Tighe, Nairobi - Assistant Secretary for Defence, 3 Jan 1916.

messes for the troops on the front.⁷⁴ These rations comprised multifarious items, as the cargo of the *SS Sutlez* - which left Durban for Kilindini on 16 November 1915 - reflects: 916 cases of jam, 134 barrels of cheap brandy, 108 cases of tobacco, one bale of hops, seven bags of sago, two bags of tapioca, two bags of pearl barley, one case of lanco and jelly, two cases of arrowroot (a plant from which a nutritious starch was prepared), four cases of corn flour, six cases Bovril, 520 cases of preserved meat, 27 cases of mustard; and - no doubt for the officers only - thirteen cases of port, 25 cases of good brandy, and four baskets of champagne.⁷⁵ Fresh bread and meat was supplied by the bakery and butchery sections, whenever combat conditions permitted.⁷⁶

Likewise, South African troops moving through the United Kingdom, made use of the various canteen facilities provided by the British public. In this theatre, members of the upper classes, particularly those with religious conviction and wanting to contribute directly to the war effort, considered 'canteening' a genteel leisure activity.⁷⁷ The Countess of Harrowby and her daughter, Lady Frances Ryder, offered hospitality to South African troops in England, a service continued until the eve of the Second World War.⁷⁸

Conclusion

The Union Defence Force, having no canteen organisation of its own, faced a logistic dilemma at the outbreak of the First World War. In 1914, General J.C. Smuts, then Minister of Defence, had the foresight to forbid civilian traders from tailing the South African troops into German South West Africa. At his insistence the Union Defence Force was not only saved the experience of having to deal with sutlers but also eventually obtained the use of the South African Garrison Institute, an organisation established by Lord Roberts in 1900 for the exclusive benefit of the British troops stationed in South Africa during and after the Second Anglo-Boer War. Disagreement regarding the management of the SAGI, led to a South African takeover of the Institute in 1916. This organisation, renamed the Union Defence Force Institute in 1916, was the first truly South African canteen system.

The South African Garrison Institute served in only one theatre of operations during the First World War. In this theatre - German South West Africa - the Institute delivered a valuable service, not only to all members of the invading South African forces but also to the civilian population of the former German colony. It acted for

74. CSO, Box 11, file CSO 7 Buck Wagons.

75. CSO, Box 11, file CSO 8 Transport & Supplies Shipped to East Africa: Embarking Cape Town - Dequar Pretoria, 17 Nov 1915.

76. CSO, Box 12, file CSO 15 Bakery and Butchery Section.

77. A. Marwick, *The deluge; British society and the First World War*, pp. 115, 147.

78. DC, Box 1105, file 51257 Lady Frances Ryder's Hospitality Organization London: Lady Frances Ryder - Sir Roland Bourne, 11 Jan 1922; and DC, Box 3557, file DC 21/1 Camberley Staff College, Introduction to Lady Frances Ryder for young SA Officers visiting England: Annual Report, 1 Jun 1935 - 31 May 1936.

instance, as a major agent in keeping consumer prices down throughout the campaign. Despite complaints, the canteens of the Institute performed an important task in supporting troop morale through the provision of small luxuries and the “cheap, if not exciting, food”⁷⁹ characteristic of all canteens.

Abstract

The Union Defence Force and the struggle to establish a South African canteen system, 1914-1916

The Union Defence Force had no canteen organisation to accompany her troops into German South West Africa, following the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Following the withdrawal of the majority of British troops from South Africa in that year, the British canteen organisation in South Africa, the South African Garrison Institutes (SAGI), was placed at the disposal of the Union Defence Force. The vagueness of the agreement between the British and South African military authorities, together with the presence of large-scale rumours led to a breakdown in relations. Despite truth in some of the disparagement, most of the criticism was found to be rooted in misunderstanding with regard to the fixing of prices; policy regarding the generation of profit; and the details of the concessions allowed to the SAGI by the South African government. These circumstances led to the establishment of a South African canteen system, the Union Defence Force Institute (UDFI), in 1916.

79. A. Marwick, *The deluge; British society and the First World War*, p. 115.