

The Service and Legacies of Black Caribbean and West African RAF Wartime Service Volunteers (Part 2!)

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Introduction

'Why did you fight?' is perhaps a question for the individual, as much as the answers would be suggested as societal. Could we reasonably expect for one answer to be universal for a nation, for the response to be singular?

To then take that and apply it to a contingent of those who chose to fight for Britain would see a non-monolithic response, regardless of from where. Different reasons exist from a number of perspectives, as well as background details.

Present research investigates some of the reasons to those who volunteered for the British RAF amongst Empire colonies predominantly made of Black African and Caribbean personnel. Although there are some reasons which spanned any subject of the Empire of the time, some of which distinctly different to escape the imperial monolith, but some even distinct enough to escape something more national.

Focus areas include:

- Post WW1/interwar years
- Volunteering with a view to independence for their home nations
- Chronology of change regarding service restrictions. Where resistance to more equal service rights was at its strongest and where the 'Mother Country' would or would not update policies.
- Were attitudes to change consistent amongst the British Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force?

'From the moment I saw the film In Which We Serve, I had made up my mind that no self-respecting able bodied young man could honourably remain at home when the fate of the world was literally at stake in Europe.'

- Eddie Noble, Jamaican RAF volunteer

We need to talk about the 'Colour Bar'

Specifically, the matter of this being more than one thing! Neither a monolithic or universal term, the term differs between civilian circles and military parlance, but even amongst the military of wartime Imperial Britain this can carry multiple meanings, down to **where** mentioned and **whom** is discussing it!

A pivotal conversation withing the topic due to the scale of policies being written around the diplomacy of race relations. The quantity and nuance of interactions which shaped policy are as complex and bespoke as the minutiae of maintaining the British Empire. Different colonies and Dominions did not function by entirely the same guidance and regulations. Equally, management of accommodating the Allies (particularly the U.S.) as a whole regularly raised challenges in this regard.



Factors affecting the recruits were not all down to policy or ideals. The BBC World Service communication kept Caribbean volunteers apprised of the wartime situation. Even though often far away, knock-on effects were unavoidable. Shipping difficulties impeded transport and supplies.



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