

Back from the Western Front: African soldiers in WW1 Worksheet

Activity Two: British military policy prevented Africans from entering combatant roles in Europe so they only fought in campaigns in Africa.

‘The War Office thought it undesirable to put coloured people on a par with white men. It might put ideas into their heads.’

Josiah Wedgwood. Wedgwood campaigned for the British use of African soldiers during the First World War.

Discuss in pairs or small groups: Why were African soldiers not allowed to fight alongside British soldiers in Europe? What do you think might have happened if African soldiers had been allowed to fight alongside British forces in Europe?

Case Study

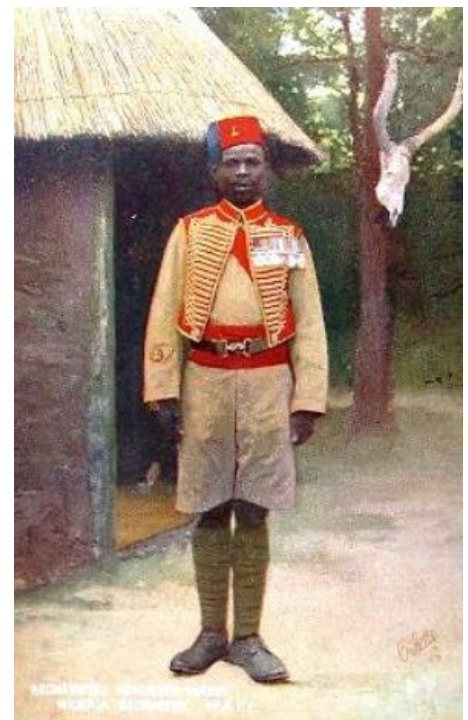
Belo Akure joined the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) Southern Nigerian Regiment around 1897-1901. In the early 1900s, Belo Akure was awarded a medal for bravery for against local Nigerian tribes who opposed the British Protectorate in Southern Nigeria.

By 1914, he had been promoted to Sergeant-Major in recognition of his leadership skills.

1914: Belo helped to hold off a German attack on the Mungo River in the German colony of Kamerun (Cameroon). His superior officer observed his ‘cool conduct and sound judgement’ during other actions, including during an attack on Fongdonera in Cameroon. He was awarded as extra decoration (a clasp or bar) to his D.C.M. medal.

1915-1917: Belo Akure was awarded Military Medal ("M.M.") for shooting a German soldier in the leg during the battle. Following the invasion of British East Africa (now Kenya) by German-led forces, Belo joined a group of Nigerian troops who travelled to East Africa to help combat these forces.

1924-1925: Belo Akure attended the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley to represent Nigeria. His stories of bravery became well-known through the exhibition. Indeed, the Exhibition organiser found that the Nigerian section was so popular that he produced a series of coloured postcards for visitors to buy as souvenirs.



Regimental Sergeant-Major Belo Akure, DCM, MM in 1924. © Brent Museum and Archives: Album Acc. 587 Wembley History Society Collection

