



SERVICES OF THE DISTRICT ARMED RESERVE POLICE FORCES IN THE COASTAL DISTRICTS OF ANDHRA IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY, 1925-1947

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Abstract

This research article analysis the services of the District Armed Reserve Police forces during the peak period of the Indian freedom struggle in the Coastal Districts of Andhra of Madras Presidency. They were kept as reserves at all the district headquarters to assist the regular police for law and order especially during emergencies. Though their maintenance was expensive than the regular police, the British strengthened them and their services were utilized to suppress the unrest caused by socio-political, economic and religious factors. These para-military emergency forces were intended for special tasks such as for internal security, during natural calamities, fairs and festivals, political unrest, agrarian strikes, industrial strikes, communal troubles and they also had special responsibilities related to guarding, escorting, touring, etc., and they were stationed at cantonments, ports, railway stations and other places armed or unarmed depending on their duties. These forces had performed their task successfully and loyally with unshaken morale.

Key Words: *Para-Military, Recruitment, Training, Roits, Internal Security.*

The Coastal districts of Andhra are the Northern *Circars* of the erstwhile Madras Presidency comprised of Ganjam, Jeypore, Vizagapatam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Kistna, Guntur and Nellore districts. This region was administratively demanding with vast flourishing agricultural land which contributed to the economy and the dense population played a significant role under the British. The District Armed Reserve Police forces were a unit of the regular police force organized under Madras Police Act of 1959 and Indian Police Act of 1861. They were kept as reserves at all the district headquarters to assist the regular police for the maintenance of law and order especially during emergencies.

District Armed Reserve Police Forces

The District Armed Reserve Police forces had the same powers and functions equivalent to those of regular police but had no functions of investigation.ⁱ Towards the peak period of the India's freedom struggle and with the threat of airborne Japanese invasion, the British government used their services to maintain law and order.ⁱⁱ These Para-military, emergency force were intended for special tasks such as for internal security, during natural calamities, fairs and festivals, political unrest, agrarian strikes, industrial strikes, communal troubles. They had special responsibilities related to guarding, escorting, touring, etc., and they were stationed at cantonments, ports, railway stations and other places armed or unarmed depending on their duties.ⁱⁱⁱ These forces were organized into companies, platoons or troops. Sergeants, Sergeants-Major also known as Charge Sergeants, the *Havildars*, *Havildar-Majors*, *Naik* and constabulary formed the constitution, functioned under Inspector General of Police of the Madras Presidency.^{iv} All the superior cadres officers were Europeans and by 1930, the European Sergeants were replaced with Indians.^v Major-Sergeants were responsible for the training, discipline and general control of the platoons. They were trained by a military officer in physical training, arms, signaling, etc., but not up to the standards of the military.^{vi} Bayonet fighting training was initiated in 1925.^{vii} These forces were not intended to be military in nature and were highly trained to control the riots and to perform guard and escort duties.^{viii}

In 1925, Armitage F, the Inspector General of Police proposed the government to the establish special police on a permanent basis and re-organization of the District Armed Reserve Police.^{ix} The government sanctioned the formation of Special Armed Police units at Tadepalligudem, Elluru, Bheemavaram and Tanuku and the Armed Reserved force in Tanuku was later shifted to Palacole. These Armed Reserve forces were confined only to important towns and were deployed to disperse large crowds and processions.^x The District Armed Reserves were introduced on the recommendations of Stokes, Inspector General of Police.^{xi} The government sanctioned the proposal of Stokes Report for the reorganization and strengthened Armed Reserve Police Forces by abolishing the platoons at Parvatipuram, Rajahmundry and Coconada Reserve as they were not located at the district headquarters.^{xii} In 1928 an additional Armed Reserve was newly formed at Rajahmundry.^{xiii} The District Armed Reserves stationed were reorganized and strengthened in the districts Ganjam, Vizagapatam, Jeypore and East Godavari districts in April 1929 with the abolition of the East Coast Special Police and also in West Godavari district in 1930.^{xiv}

Recruitment and Training

Initially, as an experimental measure the force was recruited from the ex-military men and it was successful. The training, strength, pay and the conditions of service of the sergeant was improved to attract more ex military men.^{xv} The Reserves were sub divided into one or more platoons and the later into four sections, each section consisting of one Head Constable,



one *Naik*, and one *Lance Naik* of twelve Constables. All the head constables were trained in the Central Recruits School of Vellore under a military officer.^{xvi} For the first time they were trained in mob work in 1928.^{xvii} All the Reserves were mobilized once or twice annually and the bi-annual tours were conducted especially in the Agency areas. The District Medical Officer trained the Reserve in First-Aid in Guntur district.^{xviii} The bicycle sections were introduced and train guards were supplied from the Reserve men on all passenger trains on the South Indian railway during the strikes.^{xix} Men who were old were replaced by younger men and the percentage of natives of the head quarters of the Reserves were kept low, attention was paid to the systematic training and its efficiency was increased by inspections by a military officer.^{xx} With the growth of the political unrest, vacancies were rapidly filled and with the persistence of government, the police battalions were replaced by the army in dealing with political disturbances.^{xxi} These striking forces were mooted and planned to be operated in areas where unrest was most likely to occur. Armed Reserves police had training camp at Padwa during 1939 and it was a joint training camp with the Koraput district of Orissa.^{xxii} With the mounting political agitation reaching its peak during the Quit India Movement in of 1942 and with the fear of airborne Japanese invasion, the British government had enlarged the district Reserves.^{xxiii} In the year 1945 there was temporary increase in strength and employment staff.^{xxiv} The Armed Reserve was mostly kept up to strength during 1946 and almost all of them were mobilized at least once during the year. The percentage of natives of the headquarters of the Reserve was kept as low as possible to avoid communal and labour tensions.

A cumulative training programme covering individual, section, platoon and company training was introduced and carried out successfully in the Reserves for the year 1946. The introduction of this varied training programme in the place of monotonous parades eliminated the boredom which was one of the chief causes of the unrest in the early part of the year. They were trained in arms, physical training and signaling and annual classification of the signalers was carried out by an Assistant Commandant.^{xxv} In 1947, Armed Reserve was generally kept up to the strength and most of them were mobilized due to labour unrest, communal, agrarian troubles and the political riots, heavy strain was imposed on them but they discharged their duties efficiently.^{xxvi} A police wireless grid with facilities for communication with district headquarters was established. Reserve police companies were stationed at the ports for security, in 1939 H.M.I.S., Indus Lawrence and Clive ships had visited the Vizagapatam Harbour and complimented the police signalers for their high standards of efficiency.

Services of the District Armed Reserves Police Forces

The services of these troops were used for internal security and as repressive agent during communal and labour tensions, agrarian disputes, railway strikes, political unrest.^{xxvii} They were sanctioned to apprehend unlawful acts where the ordinary police appointed were not sufficient for preservation and protection of the public and security of the property.^{xxviii} In many instances they had opened fire, lathi charged, used muskets and tear gas to control the rioters. They were successful in suppressing the political agitations and faced public criticism, the British government to keep up their morals high had granted them rewards lavishly.

Internal Security

They were sanctioned to maintain the internal security such as touring and guarding of certain vulnerable points like petrol dumps, railway tracts and bridges, canals, etc. Additional Armed Reserve platoon were sanctioned at Godavari and Kistna to guard the East and West canals^{xxix} and at Waltair, Vizagapatam to guard railway bridges.^{xxx} Temporary staff of one constable was sanctioned in 1939 for security purpose during the construction of the roads between Peddapuram municipality and Samalkot *panchayat* in the East Godavari district.^{xxxi} The Armed Reserves platoons at Kistna district and East Godavari districts were retained at Bezwada and Rajahmundry.^{xxxii} To accommodate the Armed Reserves, temporary huts were constructed.^{xxxiii} The Armed Reserve guards in East Godavari district were discontinued at the Burma-shell storage at Cocanada in 1945.^{xxxiv}

During the visit of the British Viceroys to the Madras Presidency, special mobilizations were carried out on the occasions of the *Mahamakham* and *Puskaram* festivals at Kumbakonam and in the Kistna district. For the Krishna *Pushkaram*^{xxxv} and Bezwada *Pushkaram* festivals,^{xxxvi} Reserve forces were deputed for bandobast duty and at other festival centers also. The Vizagapatnam South Armed Reserve performed the agency tour as a routine for internal security and the reserves of Vizagapatnam North and East Godavari were not able to perform the tour during 1939 and due to work burden. Here is another citation where this force was used for guarding purpose in the Kistna district, the communists instigated the villagers of Gazullanka to cut away grass in the night from a disputed land. When the Armed Reserve attempted to prevent this, the villagers surrounded the force and attempted to annihilate it. The police party had to open fire in self defense, killed four, including a woman and injuring a like member. A non-official committee with the Additional District Magistrate as its president was appointed to enquire into the incident and submitted its report to the government.^{xxxvii}



Political Unrest

The District Reserve Police Forces were specially trained with the anticipation of freedom struggle and it included route marches, arms drill, signaling, house surrounding, skirmishing and mob operations to suppress the political movement and also other agitations.^{xxxviii} A combined Reserves forces were sent in connection with anticipated disorders to Kalyan Singapur in the Vizagapatam district under the District Superintendent of Police, Vizagapatam, towards the end of 1929. The force acquitted itself creditably and the gained good practical experience. Local board elections in West Godavari and Kistna districts led to riots and outrages in which several people were killed and many injured in 1933, the Reserve forces were stationed to control the situation. As the political unrest became severe, joint troops of District Armed Reserves and Presidency General Reserve police worked successfully in suppressing the political agitations by using tear gas, *lathis* and muskets during the Civil Disobedience Movement. With the Government of India Act of 1935, these Reserves were increased in its numbers and they were reorganized for improvement. The Presidency General Reserve and the District Reserves together they were totaling nearly 4,000 men in 1936 and worked collectively. The freedom movement had reached its peak in 1942 with the Quit India Movement and the threat of airborne Japanese invasions of southern India. The British government had enlarged the District Reserves by nearly 700 men in 1942. The efficiency of the District Armed Reserves and the Presidency General Reserve improved as a result of better methods of training and the introduction of younger and more energetic men into the service. The government sanctioned the Special Armed Police units at Tadepalligudem to suppress the disturbances due to political unrest in 1947.^{xxxix} The British government gave lot of importance to maintain high morale of these forces and was also successful in keeping the mass agitations under control during the political struggle. The police force had performed their duty successfully and loyally with unshaken moral. The British government had taken care to keep up the morale of the police force as rewards were lavishly given to the constables and officers.

Labour and Agrarian Disputes

The exorbitant rates of land revenue led to a series of spontaneous peasant uprisings in many parts of the coastal districts of Andhra. The Peasants formed into unions and attack the *Zamindars* and their agents. There were propaganda demonstrations advocating the abolition of *Zamindari* System. The government intervened and suppressed the movement by taking rigorous measures with services of the Reserve police.^{xl} The riots in the Kalyanasingapur valley in Visakhapatnam agency and in Jeypore agency during 1931 was suppressed by Armed Reserve force and the valley was for long garrisoned by armed police forces. The death of Maharaja of Jeypore and the interregnum lead to *fituris*, so, in January 1933, a strong force of the combined Armed Reserves of Visakhapatnam, Jeypore, East Godavari and Ganjam marched into the agency. By series of rapid operations day and night, the resistance was crushed throughout the affected area. Later these Armed Reserves were sent on annual training tours to the Agency areas. These tours had benefited the government as well as the people of the agencies as they were protected from the rebellions. In the same year, the tribal group of Khond tenants refused payment of the estate dues and rebelled. A strong armed force of the combined Armed Reserve of Vizagapatnam, Jeypore, East Godavari and Ganjam districts had marched into the Agency under the District Superintendent of Police and the situation was brought under control. Fights between the tenants and the *zamin* officials took place in the same year in the Venkatagiri estate of Nellore district and in the Parlakemdi estate in the Ganjam district but the situation brought under control. Industrial strikes resulted in unrest and violent clashes in a number of places. In very few instances the police had opened fire on the rioters to restore law and order. In 1938 a labour dispute in the tobacco factory at Chirala in the Guntur district resulted in a riot and in the course the police opened fire to control the mob were three men were killed in the firing. On 14th February 1939, a riotous mob of 2000 workers staged a stay-in strike in the Chittavalasa Jute Mills in the Vizagapatam district and refused to leave the mill. There was land dispute between tribal communities such as *Khondas*, *Koyas* and *Zamindars* and agrarian movements took place in various places. In Kistna district in 1938-39, There was a dispute between *Koyyas* and Venkatagiri *zamindari* about grazing rights, parts of Modgole *zamindari* in the Vizagapatam was also under unrest, strikes of working classes of Amalapur *taluk* in the East Godavari district, railway strikes etc., caused public unrest and these situations were handled with premature and injudicious usage of the strike weapon in some instances. These disturbances imposed a very heavy strain on these Reserves and they discharged their duties well on all occasions.

Communal Tensions

The social differences among the Hindus and the communal feelings between the Hindus and Muhammadans were very sensitive especially during religious festivals. There were frequent clashes in many places especially in Nellore, Guntur and Krishna districts and it increased the number of public disturbances. The Reserve forces were stationed during the festive seasons as these places were under frequent distress. Owing to communal disturbances in Nellore district in 1926, the Deputy Inspector General of Police stationed at Nellore for 8 days along with a platoon a Subadar, 5 non-commissioned officers and 50 men to quell the riots.^{xli} The communal tensions prevailed frequently in the districts like Guntur and Nellore and numerous strikes entailed continuous demands on the Reserves. There was an incident of rioting with deadly weapons in the Pattupur village of Ganjam district between the followers of Raja of Sanmokimidi and the ex-Rani. Another incident in same



district, there was a border dispute in the Parlakimedi agency between the villagers of Sandiriguda and Asriguda. The Pamulas tribes of Tadikonda of Guntur district enraged the local *Kammias* regarding pigs during 1936.^{xliii} The Kamma set fire to the huts of the Pamulas, with this, about 200 Malas and Madigas looted the paddy granaries at Bommalur in the Kistna district and created public disturbance and this situation was brought under control by the Reserves. The emergency platoon was sanctioned in connection with a series of strikes and demonstrations against the introduction of Hindi in schools. In 1941, the police opened fire on the rioters in an incident during festival of Dasara in the Nellore district. In spite of the bandabast, the mob surrounded the police party and attempted to overpower it. The Sergeant in charge of the police party opened fire and dispersed the rioters.^{xliiii} The District Armed Reserves, the Presidency General Reserve and Special Emergency Force were amalgamated and reorganized with effect from the 1st of May 1946.^{xliv} Each Armed Reserve had a headquarter wing consisting entirely of specialist staff under the command of a Sergeant. In several districts the reorganized Armed Reserves included a certain number of platoons for railway protection.

Conclusion

The British government ordered for the formation of Special Armed Police units modeled on the Malabar special police force and the East Coast Special Police was organized and employed for agency operations. As desertion and resignations occurred in the East Coast Special Police, the Madras government abolished this force in 1929 and ordered to strengthen the District Armed Reserves in its place. A separate full strength Reserves were sanctioned and stationed in the districts of the Madras presidency to deal with emergencies. They were maintained in an efficient state and kept up to the strength except in a few districts. They were units of the regular police force recruited mostly from the ex-military men. These para-military forces were trained and kept as reserves at all the district headquarters. They came into contact with the public when they were assigned the duty to maintain order during political unrest, fairs, festivals, elections and natural calamities to quell outbreaks of unrest and organized crime. The British government utilized the services of these Para-military police forces to protect their rule from the assaults of communal, political, labour and agrarian agitations. These forces had performed the task of suppressing the disturbances successfully and loyally with unshaken morale. Though the maintenance of the reserve police was expensive than the regular police, the British maintained them to suppress disturbances and to enforce the authority especially during the period of freedom struggle and the Reserves rendered their services well on all occasions.

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