

PEOPLE PROFILES Major

Seth Kwabla Anthony MSG, MBE

First black African commissioned into the British Army



Born in Accra and educated at the Bremen Mission School in Keta, Major Anthony trained as a teacher in Latin, English and mathematics.

Anthony was an excellent soldier and leader. He was the first black African to be sent for officer training at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, England, in November 1941.

While he was the only black man in the College he quickly adapted to his new environment as he was determined to win his commission, which he did on 2 April 1942. He gained the rank of Second Lieutenant and returned home to Ghana.

In early 1939 he became a part-time soldier with the Gold Coast Territorial Force of the RWAFF. As an educated African he was able to apply for a position as an Officer Cadet, which he duly did and within three months rose to the rank of Cadet Sergeant.

By September 1939, Anthony was ready for war. His battalion was involved in guarding Takoradi harbour and operating coastal defences, as this was where British aircraft meant for the North African campaign were shipped and assembled here.



Officer cadets march in a Passing Out parade at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst

Anthony was also involved in training many of the 65,000 Ghanaians who fought for Britain. Nearly half of these fought abroad, helping to liberate Somaliland and Abyssinia, as well as defeating the Japanese at Myohaung in Burma.

On his arrival back in Accra, he was called up for service in Burma. On the way there, the ship carrying the troops berthed in South Africa. While on shore leave he went to join some of his white friends in a pub, but the white



Major Anthony receives his Burma Star from Viscount Slim



RWAFF veterans in Ghana, 2008

landlady refused to serve him. The other officers told her that he was an officer of the King's army and should therefore be treated with respect, but she still refused to serve him because he was black. His friends got very angry but Anthony quietly left, not wishing to cause any trouble.

Many RWAFF soldiers believed in ju-ju and while in Burma they believed that Anthony had been blessed by a ju-ju man or witchdoctor. This meant they thought that he and his men would be protected from enemy bullets.

They also believed that he had the power to make himself invisible to the Japanese because he knew how to get behind enemy lines without them seeing him. He would attack them and then instantly disappear back into the jungle. Similarly to the Australian Special Units (see page 16), Anthony and his men also knew how to live off the land and support themselves.

The Africans were to prove very strong fighters against the Japanese in jungle

warfare. They were very valuable to the Allied campaign in Burma.

After the War, Anthony rode triumphantly in an open car with Field Marshal Lord Montgomery through the streets of London at a victory parade. He was then given a position as in the civil service in Ghana as the Assistant Secretary at the Ministry of the Interior.

Once Ghana gained independence, he became a diplomat and opened the first Ghanaian embassy in the USA. He also served at the United Nations.

Anthony retired from public service in 1973. In 2007 he was awarded one of Ghana's highest honours; the MSG. In July 2008 Viscount Slim, President of the Burma Star Association and the son of Field Marshal Sir William Slim of the Fourteenth Army travelled to Ghana and presented Anthony with the Burma Star Badge.

Major Seth Kwabla Anthony died in Accra in November 2008 and left behind a wife and seven children.

FACT FILE

D.O.B 15 June 1915
P.O.B Accra, Ghana
D.O.D 20 November 2008
Years of service 1939 - 1945
Rank Major
Unit 81st Division
 Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF)
Branch British Army
Engagements
 World War II
 2nd Burma Campaign
Awards Member of the Order of the Star of Ghana (MSG)
 Burma Star
 MBE
 Mentioned in several despatches
Other work
 Teacher
 Diplomat

Project: For your eyes only



Many soldiers from all different countries carried good luck charms. Why do you think they carried them?



Find out what sort of items they would carry?

Make or draw a lucky charm to give to a soldier on the front-line.