



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe – ZWE37113 –
Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) –
Deserters
3 August 2010

1. Deleted.

2. Deleted.

3. **Does the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) pursue deserters? If so, how and when do they commence this pursuit? I.e. how long do they wait until someone is assumed to have deserted?**

Desertion from the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) has been reported periodically since 2005, when reports of large numbers of soldiers making the hazardous journey across the Limpopo River to South Africa can be found. The passports of soldiers were being confiscated in response to this exodus, according to one report.¹

Desertion during training at the Zimbabwe Military Academy was also reported to have occurred during 2003, when only 77 of the 139 officer cadets were commissioned at the end of year graduation ceremony.² In early 2006 the size of the ZNA was reduced by 25%, to 30,000, at the same time as one article published in the *Financial Gazette* referred to the army 'sending soldiers on mandatory paid leave because of food shortages in camps'. Large numbers of security force personnel were said to be leaving because of the inadequate remuneration or had simply deserted.³ Later that year another report referred to 1,500 recruits having gone 'Absent without leave' in the previous 10 months, and 'military police had worked flat out to try to trace the renegades, most of who are reported to have fled to Botswana and South Africa'. However, an army spokesperson claimed this figure was an exaggeration.⁴

Information provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in 2005 suggested that resignation from military service was possible but a period of notice was required. Some financial penalties may also be incurred. Further information provided by the FCO referred to action that could be taken in relation to soldiers who were absent without leave for more than 28 days. Such individuals would be charged with desertion upon recapture, or their surrender.

¹ 'Zimbabwe: Mass desertions from the army' 2005, Norwegian Council for Africa, 18 November, <http://www.afrika.no/Detailed/10872.html> - Accessed 2 August 2010 - Attachment 1

² 'ZNA recruits flee training' 2004, ZW News [*Zimbabwe Standard*], 4 January, <http://www.zwnews.com/print.cfm?ArticleID=8331> - Accessed 29 July 2010 - Attachment 2

³ 'Zimbabwe: Army cut down by 25 per cent' 2006, All Africa [*Financial Gazette* (Harare)], 8 February, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200602090108.html> - Accessed 2 August 2010 - Attachment 3

⁴ 'Zimbabwe: Army lowers the bar' 2006, All Africa [source: *Financial Gazette*], 25 October, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200602090108.html> - Accessed 2 August 2010 - Attachment 4

“If a soldier is absent for more than 28 days he will be charged with desertion upon recapture, or his surrender. Absence for less than 28 days is normally dealt with under the lesser charge of ‘Absent Without Leave (AWOL)’ and can be dealt with summarily by the soldier's Commanding Officer, with punishment ranging from restriction of privileges, to small fines or short custodial sentences of a few days’ duration. Desertion is a serious charge to be dealt with by Courts Martial and depending on the circumstances, could result in long custodial sentences e.g. years, forfeiture of all benefits and salary and dishonourable dismissal from the Service. In wartime, of course, the penalties of desertion are very severe indeed. Occasionally, a Commander will not follow the ‘book’ and summary punishments will go beyond delegated powers.”⁵

Limited information concerning the action taken in response to desertion from ZNA was found. An article published in *The Standard* in January 2007 referred to an unconfirmed report that the army placed posters at camp entrances seeking information on those who had gone missing.

Although not officially confirmed, reports persist of the army itself placing posters at the entrances of camps, in which they appeal for information on the whereabouts of identified soldiers reportedly AWOL -- absent without leave.

Some of the soldiers are quitting at the end of three- and seven-year contracts because of poor pay and working conditions. Many others whose contracts have not expired are simply deserting.

"The salaries are just too little, even after this year's 300% increments and many soldiers are resigning to join other forces within the region. The resignations and desertions are mostly among the ranks of young privates and non-commissioned officers," said the source.

Following the January increment, a private in the army now earns around \$150 000, well below the poverty datum line, which currently is estimated to be above \$370 000.⁶

A few months later, a group of approximately 45 army border guards deserted their positions and crossed the border to South Africa in search of employment. Amongst them five were detained by military police at the Chikurubi maximum security prison and subsequently transferred to the Shamva battle camp and reportedly subject to torture and interrogation.⁷

In August of the same year the commander of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces announced a ban on resignations, due to the large numbers of serving officers who were leaving the forces;

The sources said officers of 50 years and above were exempted from the ban. They said the new rules are targeted at mostly junior officers who are said to be resigning in droves due to low wages, poor working conditions, lack of decent uniforms and boots and poor meals. Junior officers earn about \$2,5million.

A significant number of soldiers are said to be either deserting or going AWOL. Civilian clothed members of the military intelligence unit have been deployed to locate deserters who, upon being captured, are court-martialled and jailed if found guilty.

The latest development makes it difficult for officers to resign formerly. An army officer when first recruited signs a three-year contract and can tender his resignation six months before his contract expires. He can also extend his contact to seven years and sign a permanent contract

⁵ UK Home Office 2009, *Country of Origin Report – Zimbabwe*, December, p. 58 - Attachment 5

⁶ ‘Zimbabwe: Mass desertions from armed forces’ 2007, All Africa [*The Standard*], 21 January, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200701220211.html> - Accessed 29 July 2010 - Attachment 6

⁷ ‘Zimbabwe/South Africa: ‘Mystery’ around disappearance of Zimbabwe Army deserters arrested in South Africa’ 2007, *BBC*, 13 April - Attachment 7

thereafter. He then becomes eligible to resign after serving for 20 years or upon reaching 50 years of age.⁸

In March 2008, army recruitment was further suspended due to financial constraints whilst desertions continued to reduce overall army numbers, an article in *The Standard* claiming that many non-commissioned soldiers were leaving within a year of enrolment.⁹

More recent information concerning the treatment of deserters from ZNA was very limited. A soldier found guilty of conspiring with a group to steal rifles from the Pomona Barracks Armoury in Harare in 2009 was sentenced to 35 years imprisonment in February this year. Two army deserters, who had apparently provided information to those involved in the planned break-in were also sentenced by the army judge-advocate to almost two years jail each.¹⁰

Attachments

1. 'Zimbabwe: Mass desertions from the army' 2005, Norwegian Council for Africa, 18 November, <http://www.afrika.no/Detailed/10872.html> - Accessed 2 August 2010.
2. 'ZNA recruits flee training' 2004, ZW News [*Zimbabwe Standard*], 4 January, <http://www.zwnews.com/print.cfm?ArticleID=8331> - Accessed 29 July 2010.
3. 'Zimbabwe: Army cut down by 25 per cent' 2006, All Africa [*Financial Gazette* (Harare)], 8 February, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200602090108.html> - Accessed 2 August 2010.
4. 'Zimbabwe: Army lowers the bar' 2006, All Africa [source: *Financial Gazette*], 25 October, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200602090108.html> - Accessed 2 August 2010.
5. UK Home Office 2009, *Country of Origin Report – Zimbabwe*, December.
6. 'Zimbabwe: Mass desertions from armed forces' 2007, All Africa [*The Standard*], 21 January, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200701220211.html> - Accessed 29 July 2010.
7. 'Zimbabwe/South Africa: 'Mystery' around disappearance of Zimbabwe Army deserters arrested in South Africa' 2007, *BBC*, 13 April. (CISNET Zimbabwe - CX175520)
8. 'Zimbabwe: Army bans resignations' 2007, All Africa [source: *Zimbabwe Independent*], 3 August, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200708030643.html> - Accessed 29 July 2010.
9. 'Zimbabwe: Army cuts back on recruitment' 2008, All Africa [source: *The Standard*], 9 March, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200803090041.html> - Accessed 29 July 2010.

⁸ 'Zimbabwe: Army bans resignations' 2007, All Africa [source: *Zimbabwe Independent*], 3 August, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200708030643.html> - Accessed 29 July 2010 - Attachment 8

⁹ 'Zimbabwe: Army cuts back on recruitment' 2008, All Africa [source: *The Standard*], 9 March, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200803090041.html> - Accessed 29 July 2010 - Attachment 9

¹⁰ 'Soldier jailed 35 years for arms theft at Pamona Barracks' 2010, *Metro Zimbabwe* [source: *Zimbabwe Times*], 1 February, <http://www.zimbabwemetro.com/news/soldier-jailed-35-years-for-arms-theft-at-pamona-barracks/> - Accessed 29 July 2010 - Attachment 10

10. 'Soldier jailed 35 years for arms theft at Pamona Barracks' 2010, Metro Zimbabwe [source: *Zimbabwe Times*], 1 February, <http://www.zimbabwemetro.com/news/soldier-jailed-35-years-for-arms-theft-at-pamona-barracks/> - Accessed 29 July 2010.