

THE HISTORY OF SIERRA LEONE ARMY

The Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) is the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone, responsible for the territorial security of Sierra Leone's border and defending the national interests of Sierra Leone, within the framework of its international obligations. The armed forces were formed after independence in 1961, on the basis of elements of the former British Royal West African Frontier Force, then present in the country. The Sierra Leone Armed Forces currently consist of around 8,500 personnel.

Before Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961, the military was known as the Royal Sierra Leone Military Force. The military seized control of the reign of the state in 1968, bringing the National Reformation Council into power. On 19 April 1971, when Sierra Leone became a republic, the Royal Sierra Leone Military Force was renamed as the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Force (RSLMF). The RSLMF remained a single service organization until 1979 when the Sierra Leone Navy was established. It then remained largely unchanged for 16 years until in 1995 when Defence Headquarters (DHQ) was established and the Sierra Leone Air Wing (SLAW) formed. The RSLMF was renamed the Armed Forces of the Republic of Sierra Leone (AFRSL).

Former President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah announced in January 2002 that the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) would be unified with the tiny Sierra Leone Air Force and the moribund Sierra Leone Navy to form a reconstituted force known as the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF).^[41]

The President of Sierra Leone is constitutionally commander in chief of the military. The Sierra Leone Ministry of Defence and National Security is in charge of supervising the military. The department is headed by a minister of defence and national security, who is a civilian and a member of the president's Cabinet. The current defence minister is a retired Major, Alfred Paolo Conteh.

The Military is led by Chief of Defence Staff, who is in charge of supervising the military and is the highest ranking uniformed position in the country. The current chief of the defence staff is Maj Gen SO Williams

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) is the professional head of the RSLAF. He is responsible for the administration and the operational control of the Sierra Leonean military. It is the highest rank military position in the country.

Brigadier David Lansana was appointed army commander of Sierra Leone in 1964. Brigadier Lansana took control of the army from British colonial adviser, Brigadier R.D. Blackie when Lansana's close ally Prime Minister Albert Margai came to power. He came from the Mende tribe as did Margai and conflicts existed between northern tribes, the Krios and the Mendes. In 1967 Margai, who promoted a one party (non-democratic) state was beaten in a general election. Lansana staged a brief coup, arresting Siaka Stevens, the democratic winner of the election and the army was purged of Northern and Krio officers. In 1985, General Joseph Saidu Momoh, the army commander, succeeded President Siaka Stevens.

Komba Mondeh served as CDS during the NPRC administration from 1992-1996.

Brigadier-General Tom Carew was Chief of Defence Staff from April 2000 to November 2003.

Major General S O Williams is currently the Chief of the Defence Staff.