Rape claims against British soldiers 'are fake'

By Declan Walsh in Nairobi  Saturday 27 September 2003 00:00

Forgery revelations have rocked a £20m lawsuit by hundreds of Kenyan women who allege mass rape by British soldiers over the past 30 years.

More than 650 Masai and Samburu tribeswomen claim the British troops raped them during war games exercises at remote training ranges in northern Kenya.

Their compensation case, backed by free legal aid, is due to be heard late next month. But British Army investigators say they have uncovered evidence suggesting at least some of the claims are fake.

Forensic tests conducted by Royal Military Police investigators showed that local police station log book entries were fabricated to suggest the alleged rapes had been reported to the authorities. "I am unaware of any genuine entries concerning British servicemen in the police records," said a spokesman for the British High Commission in Nairobi yesterday.

Martyn Day, the British lawyer representing the women, admitted some of his clients were making bogus claims but insisted most were genuine. "I've seen hundreds of forged police documents in Kenya. What surprises me is
that all of these are forged," he said. The revelation will damage, but is unlikely to collapse, Mr Day's compensation bid.

So far the military investigation has been limited to cases supported by police documents. The investigators questioned just 37 of the 650 rape claimants, said Mr Day.

Nevertheless, the pastoralists have described horrific attacks at the hand of the troops - 3,000 of whom train near their villages every year - to human rights workers, lawyers and journalists.

In one of the worst alleged incidents, Gurkha troops on training exercises were alleged to have raped at least 27 women over a five-month period between 1999 and 2000.

One woman told Amnesty International she had been gagged and sodomised while collecting fodder for her goats. She described soldiers "panting like dogs" before she vomited and passed out. Amnesty said the Army's failure to investigate the complaints "may have contributed to perpetration of more rapes".

Last year, Mr Day won £4.5m from the MoD for 233 pastoralists who had been injured or suffered bereavement due to Army ordnance left behind on the same training ranges. In private, British officials also believe some claimants may be genuine. The military police are considering extending the scope of the investigation to include more of the 650 claimants.

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