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# WORLD WAR I IN EAST AFRICA 1916 - 1918

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fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

## ABSTRACT

The campaign in East Africa is one of the lesser-known and understood theatres of the First World War. Strategically unimportant to the main war effort, East Africa has remained in the shadows of the much better known Western, Mesopotamian and Palestine Fronts. Despite this, the campaign lasted from August 1914 to November 1918 and covered a large portion of East Africa as well as drawing in the majority of its population. Scholarly works have been greatly outnumbered by popular accounts and the final two years, 1916 to 1918, remain vague and contradictory. Nevertheless, a great deal of valuable primary material exists in various archives and it is the aim of this dissertation to describe and analyse the military operations of this period.

At the outbreak of war, the imperial powers in East Africa were unprepared for a major campaign. Although the colonies possessed little strategic value in themselves, the dynamics of imperial rivalry quickly generated armed conflict. The East African campaign evolved haphazardly from neutralising German wireless communications and naval facilities to a wildly over-ambitious plan to conquer the whole of the colony with scant forces. The British wanted to keep any potential spoils for themselves, but were also strongly influenced by the expansionist policies of South Africa, largely propounded by Louis Botha and Jan Smuts.

By September 1916, the British forces, commanded by Smuts, had occupied the bulk of German East Africa with all the railways, towns and ports in their possession. However, he had failed to bring the German *Schutztruppe* to battle and it remained a powerful and well-motivated force. Furthermore, his reliance to manoeuvre and reluctance to fight battles led his troops ever-deeper into enemy territory and dependent on inadequate lines of communication.

Smuts continued his advance until January 1917 when he left for the Imperial War Conference. His forces were in terrible condition and unfit for further offensive operations. He was succeeded by the British General Hoskins for a bare three months, but, who nevertheless instigated badly needed reforms and reorganisation. In May 1917, the South African, General, van Deventer assumed command, an appointment that he would hold until the end of the war. Van Deventer continued to build on Hoskins's work while instigating an aggressive policy of fighting hard battles whenever possible, while concurrently trying to destroy German food supplies. These methods were continued throughout the remainder of 1917 and until November 1918 when the war ended with the *Schutztruppe* being pursued from Portuguese East Africa into Northern Rhodesia.

For both sides, the campaign was dominated not by heavy fighting, but by the questions of health and supply. The levels of sickness, particularly malaria, were many times worse than other theatres and constantly hindered military operations. The provision and distribution of food and other supplies was an enormous problem that was only partially solved by the widespread use of motor vehicles and road construction. For the British, relations with their Belgian and Portuguese allies were never smooth as imperial rivalries often created friction and misunderstanding. In the end, the East African campaign was one of mobility and evasion and quite unlike campaigns fought in Europe and the Middle East.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to acknowledge the excellent assistance and guidance provided by my supervisor, Professor Hew Strachan.

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## CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

The First World War has been the subject of intense description and analysis for over eighty years. Given the scale of operations there, the Western Front has understandably received the bulk of English language attention, although recently, the secondary theatres of Mesopotamia, Gallipoli and Palestine have come to be considered in much greater detail. The opening of archives and increased access to hitherto private papers have enabled scholars to develop their understanding of the conflict while also disposing of a number of popular myths enroute. The background to the formulation and the execution of grand strategy, operations and tactics has been examined under a critical and less nationalistic light with very interesting results.

It is true that compared to the Western Front, the campaign in East Africa was very small scale and strategically unimportant. British troop strengths there peaked at 58,000 in August 1916 while total wartime casualties of 349,311, of whom nearly 330,000 were sick, represented some 5.62 per cent of the Western Front's and 3.15 per cent of the British Empire's total losses.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is easy to become fixated on numbers alone and it is worth recalling that the war there lasted from August 1914 until November 1918, covering a huge swathe of Africa. It ranged from the modern states of Kenya and Uganda in the north, through the Congo, Ruanda, Burundi, and Tanzania in the centre, to Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique in the south. Few inhabitants, European or African, escaped its effects or ravages, while the colonial empires were irrevocably changed by the conflict. It is worth noting too that the casualties suffered were comparable to those incurred in the Anglo-Boer War that had ended just twelve years previously.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps insignificant in global terms, the war was of overwhelming local consequence.

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<sup>1</sup> WO 33/ 858, *European War Telegrams, Series D, Volume 1, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1915 – 28<sup>th</sup> February 1917*, London: War Office, 1918. Henceforth *Telegrams D I*. No. 1235, Telegram N 1394 General Headquarters to War Office, 14 September 1916, pp. 327-329; Mitchell, Major T J and Smith, G M, *Official History of the War, Medical Services, Casualties and Medical Statistics*, London: HMSO, 1931, reprinted by Imperial War Museum and Battery Press, [n.d.]. Henceforth, *Official History - Medical Statistics*. See Table 1 "Approximate Total Casualties in British Expeditionary Forces during the Great War", p. 12. East African troop casualties reached 349,311 over the course of the war as compared to 6,218,540 suffered on the Western Front and 11,096,338 throughout the British forces world-wide.

<sup>2</sup> *Official History – Medical Statistics*, See Tables 2, 3 and 4 on pp. 253-254 for East Africa and Tables 2, 3 and 4 on p. 269 for South Africa. Casualties amongst the troops are fewer in the East African campaign than the South African, but the inclusion of the followers' figures for the former reverses the situation.



## HISTORIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Over the past forty years, it has been popular accounts rather than academic studies that have provided the bulk of the limited coverage of the campaign. It has been only very recently that the scholarly neglect has been rectified by the publication of the first volume of Hew Strachan's *The First World War* which devotes a substantial and informative chapter to Africa.<sup>3</sup> Apart from this excellent and much-needed work, which is a wide-ranging synthesis of the existing literature in English, German and French, most attention has been directed onto detailed studies of subjects such as labour, medicine and transport.

The question of strategy and operational aims has never been covered in great depth, perhaps owing to the theatre's lack of strategic importance. Certainly, the question of why the campaign was actually fought requires greater examination as the politics involved were complex and involved many players outside of London. However, David French has produced two useful studies of British decision making, namely *British Strategy and War Aims 1914 – 1916* and *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition*.<sup>4</sup> At present, there is nothing of similar value concerned specifically with East Africa.

This is not from want of resources as a vast amount of primary and secondary material exists in several languages, but it has not been fully exploited in the published official histories. Study has not been helped by the relative paucity of reliable secondary information in English. In English, the author of the authoritative Official History died before the second and concluding volume could be finished and the period of late 1916 to the war's end in November 1918 remains vague and contradictory.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, the Belgians produced a detailed and thorough history of their own forces' operations.

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<sup>3</sup> Strachan, Hew, *The First World War: To Arms*, Volume I, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 495-643.

<sup>4</sup> French, David, *British Strategy and War Aims 1914-1916*, Unwin and Allen, London, 1986; and *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916-1918*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995; other earlier, but still useful sources include Gooch, John, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c 1900-1916*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974; Rothwell, V F *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy 1914-1918*, Oxford, 1971; and Guinn, Peter, *British Strategy and Politics 1914-1918*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965. The German view is considered in Louis, W R, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.

<sup>5</sup> Hordern, Lieutenant Colonel Charles, *History of the Great War: Military Operations East Africa: August 1914 – September 1916*, Volume 1, London: HMSO, 1941, reprinted Nashville, Tennessee: The Battery Press, 1990. Henceforth, Hordern, *Military*

These volumes are well-documented and possess excellent maps, with good background coverage of concurrent British and Portuguese operations. But, as Belgian direct participation in the campaign ended in late 1917, it is only a partial corrective to the deficiency.<sup>6</sup> It appears that the Portuguese Government never produced an official account of the considerable, although largely unsuccessful, operations of their forces during the campaign.

On the German side the coverage is variable, with the naval history providing a great deal of useful information on the defence of the colony while the land operations volumes are disappointingly thin and short on detail.<sup>7</sup> Apart from the narrative memoir accounts, a number of books emerged in the post-war years largely aimed at chronicling and justifying German rule. Much of the debate resulted from indignation at the victors' accusations of German atrocities and alleged unfitness to hold colonies. It seems that the rise of Nazism and the débacle of the Second World War put paid to further interest in the subject. In recent years, secondary works emerged mainly from the former GDR, and, although slanted against the Wilhelmine and capitalist regimes, they contained some useful insights.<sup>8</sup>

Much of the historiographical deficiency can be traced to the fact that the bulk of all modern English language accounts are based on the version of events presented by General von Lettow-Vorbeck on the German side and Colonel Meinertzhagen on the British.<sup>9</sup> While both were first-hand participants and keen observers, neither could be described as impartial and each had his own domestic points to score. The former's

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*Operations East Africa.* A partial draft of Volume II can be found in the Public Record Office (PRO), London in the CAB 44 series. A number of maps and sketches for the planned volume are contained in the CAB 45 and WO 808 series.

<sup>6</sup> Royaume de Belgique, *Les Campagnes Coloniales Belges 1914 – 1918, Tomes 1 – 3*, Bruxelles: Imprimerie Typographique de l'I.C.M., 1927-1932.

<sup>7</sup> The naval works of interest include Assmann, Kurt Konteradmiral, *Der Krieg zur See 1914 – 1918: Die Kämpfe der Kaiserlichen Marine in den Deutschen Kolonien*, Berlin: Verlag E S Mittler & Sohn, 1935; Raeder and Mantey, *Der Kreuzerkrieg in den ausländischen Gewässern*, 3 Volumes, Berlin: Verlag E S Mittler & Sohn, 1922-1937. The military works are only bare summaries of the known situation and are much less valuable. See *Der Weltkrieg 1914 bis 1918: Die Militärischen Operationen zu Lande*: 9. Band, "Der Krieg in den Kolonien bis Ende 1915. Die Ereignisse in Deutsche-Ostafrika bis zum Ende des Jahres 1915", Berlin: Verlag E S Mittler und Sohn, pp. 480-485 with Skizze 28; also 13. Band "Der Krieg in Ostafrika seit 1916", pp. 452-462.

<sup>8</sup> Stoecker, Helmuth (ed), *German Imperialism in Africa: From the beginnings until the Second World War*, Transl Bernd Zoellner, London: C Hurst & Co, 1986 (originally published in DDR 1977); Helbig, Klaus, *Legende und Wahrheit: Der erste Weltkrieg in Ostafrika und Rolle des Generals Lettow-Vorbeck*, PhD Thesis, Leipzig: Karl-Marx University, 1968.

<sup>9</sup> Lettow-Vorbeck, General Paul von, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, London: Hurst and Blackett, 1920, reprinted Nashville, Tennessee: The Battery Press, [n.d.]. Henceforth, Lettow, *Reminiscences*; Meinertzhagen, Colonel Richard, *Army Diary 1899-1926*, London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960.

account suffers from a lack of precise detail as it was written largely from memory and has a distinct whiff of hindsight, particularly when dealing with tactical or operational decisions.<sup>10</sup> The esteem accorded by his former enemies to the commander of the *Schutztruppe* has given his work an undeserved aura of authoritativeness; that it was almost the sole German account produced in English greatly increased its attractiveness to monoglot authors. Von Lettow was the decisive personality on the German side and was responsible for the strategy of the campaign. The work seems quite reliable when dealing with von Lettow's own experiences, but its accuracy suffers whenever discussing events and personalities away from his immediate presence and his often glib comments do not always stand when set alongside the surviving documents. Provided that it is used in conjunction with other sources, it does, however, remain an important memoir of considerable value.

On the British side, Meinertzhagen's account of his time as an intelligence officer in General Headquarters provides an insider's view that is both immediate and highly critical of the conduct of the campaign, and most especially of the high command. It also provides a number of character sketches and battle descriptions that are of considerable value. However, doubts have been raised about the veracity of all of Meinertzhagen's recollections and whether the diary was "corrected" after the event.<sup>11</sup> He was a talented soldier, but an unusual and difficult personality who was keen to present his version of events. Again, his coverage of events is uneven and ends in December 1916, when he was evacuated from the theatre on medical grounds. Like von Lettow, Meinertzhagen is a useful guide, but should not be used in isolation.

A number of popular accounts have been written in the last 30 years, but most of them suffer from the undue reliance on Lettow and Meinertzhagen, and detailed coverage of the period beyond January 1917 is virtually non-existent. Charles Miller's book, *The Battle for the Bundu*, is often cited as being the standard popular account of the

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<sup>10</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. vii. In the preface to his work, written soon after the war's end, von Lettow frankly admitted that the loss of his records, lack of time and inability to consult former colleagues made errors of detail inevitable.

<sup>11</sup> Amongst the reasons for this scholarly suspicion is the fact that Meinertzhagen's numerous volumes of diaries are composed of typed, ring-bound pages interleaved with captioned photographs. It would have been impossible to produce such an immaculate and error-free work under wartime field conditions and the possibility of subsequent amendments cannot be discounted. His book, *Army Diary*, reproduces selected diary entries almost word for word.



campaign, but it suffers from a number of drawbacks, most notably the lack of any considered analysis of the fighting. While drawing on an extensive list of sources, in both English and German, the book tends to accept statements uncritically and generally ignores the importance of supply and health as vital factors. Several other popular accounts appeared in the same period, although none could be said to have advanced knowledge of the campaign significantly.<sup>12</sup> As a genre, these books are largely confined to narrative accounts based largely on the printed literature in English and make no use of archival sources. In a number of cases, factual errors and a number of myths get recycled without serious question.

This is unfortunate as a great deal of very useful material exists both in print and in various national repositories. From the German perspective, probably the most useful is the semi-official account, *Die Operationen in Ostafrika*, produced by Major Ludwig Boell, a participant in the campaign and later an historian in the *Reichsarchiv*.<sup>13</sup> This clear and detailed work describes the German war effort from start to finish, giving much valuable information on plans and intentions together with the detail of operations. The composition of detachments or *Abteilungen* is laid out as are casualty figures and the determination of success or failure. It is written with a degree of detachment and analysis that makes it invaluable as a source. Sadly, a large number of sketches intended for the volume were destroyed by Allied bombing, although several useful, large-scale maps are provided.

Equally valuable as a primary source is Governor Heinrich Schnee's book, *Deutsch-Ostafrika im Weltkrieg*, written immediately after the war's end.<sup>14</sup> Schnee kept a careful set of diaries and was a perceptive observer. Although not a professional soldier himself, in many ways his account of the campaign is clearer and more accurate than von Lettow's. Certainly, it covers important, but frequently neglected areas, such as the medical system, supply and transport, civil governance and war finance in some detail.

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<sup>12</sup> Mosley, Leonard, *Duel for Kilimanjaro*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1963; Sibley, Maj J R, *Tanganyikan Guerrilla*, Pan/Ballantyne Illustrated History of the First World War, Book No 4, London: Pan/Ballantyne, 1971; Hoyt, E P, *Guerrilla: Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck and Germany's East African Empire*, New York: Macmillan, 1981; James, Lawrence, *Savage Wars: The British Campaigns in Africa 1870-1920*, London: 1985 and Farwell, Byron, *The Great War in Africa*, New York: W W Faber, 1986.

<sup>13</sup> Boell, Ludwig, *Die Operationen in Ostafrika*, Hamburg: Walter Dachert, 1951. Henceforth, Boell, *Die Operationen*.

<sup>14</sup> Schnee, Heinrich, *Deutsch-Ostafrika im Weltkrieg*, Leipzig: Quelle et Meyer, 1919. Henceforth, Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*.

Central to his story is the failure of civil-military relations that resulted in the bitter clash between himself and von Lettow over who would decide the direction and scope of the colonial war effort. Also useful is a later work, entitled *Als letzter Gouverneur Deutsch-Ostafrika Erinnerungen*, in which he reconsiders the conflict after the passage of over twenty years.<sup>15</sup> A synopsis of the dispute together with analysis of the respective points of view is contained in a book review by the former colonial minister, Wilhelm Solf.<sup>16</sup>

Taken together, both Boell's and Schnee's works shed a rather different light on German operations than is provided by von Lettow alone. This can be further supplemented by the perceptive accounts of several other participants, most notably doctors, who served away from the headquarters in the various *Abteilungen*.<sup>17</sup> A number of commanders and soldiers produced their own memoirs during the inter-war period, many of which are of some considerable value.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps a less traditional source for military history, but nonetheless a useful one, is the account of the Governor's wife, Frau Ada Schnee, as it gives a clear picture, but also focuses on the economic and medical systems that underlay the fighting forces.<sup>19</sup> The German colonial state has also been little examined in the context of the war, yet the fighting effectiveness of the *Schutztruppe* depended on the civil administration for the provision of food, equipment and porters. A very useful analysis is provided by John Illiffe, while a newer study by Juhani Koponen helps readers to understand the nature of the colonial state and Wolfgang Eckart examines the politics of colonial medicine.<sup>20</sup>

The Belgian contribution to the East African campaign is not fully appreciated. Apart from the excellent official history on the Africa colonial campaigns, further background information on the pre-war organisation of the *Force Publique* is provided by

<sup>15</sup> Schnee, Heinrich, *Als Letzer Gouverneur in Deutsch-Ostafrika: Erinnerungen*, Heidelberg: Quelle und Meyer, 1964.

<sup>16</sup> Solf, Wilhelm, "Schnee und Lettow-Vorbeck", *Die Deutsche Nation*, 2 (1920), pp. 87-95.

<sup>17</sup> Deppe, Ludwig, *Mit Lettow-Vorbeck durch Afrika*, Berlin: Verlag August Scherl, 1919; Hauer, August Dr, *Kumbake: Erlebnisse eines Arztes in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1914-1919*, Berlin: Hobbing, 1922.

<sup>18</sup> Lettow-Vorbeck, Gen Paul Emil von, *Mein Leben*, published by Ursula von Lettow-Vorbeck, Biberach an der Riss: Koehlers, 1957; Köhl, Hauptmann Franz, *Der Kampf um Deutsch-Ostafrika*, Berlin: Verlag Kameradschaft, [1919]; Methner, Wilhelm, *Unter drei Gouverneuren: 16 Jahre Dienst in den deutschen Tropen*, Breslau: Korn, 1938.

<sup>19</sup> Schnee, Ada, *Meine Erlebnisse während der Kriegszeit in Deutsches Ostafrika*, Leipzig: Verlag Quelle und Meyer, 1918.

<sup>20</sup> Illiffe, John, *Tanganyika under German Rule 1905-1912*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969; Koponen, Juhani, *Development for Exploitation: German Colonial Policies in Mainland Tanzania, 1884-1914*, Helsinki: Finnish Historical Society, 1994; Eckhardt, Wolfgang U, *Medizin und Kolonialimperialismus Deutschland 1884-1945*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997.



Flament while W R Louis has written a very useful study of Belgian policies in the region.<sup>21</sup>

The Portuguese participation in the war was undistinguished by martial success. Despite contributing forces for over two years and having one of their most important colonies as a major battleground, there appear to be few published primary works on the subject and those that do are remarkably difficult to track down.<sup>22</sup> Of the secondary sources, two books stand out, the first by René Pélissier and the second by Malyn Newitt.<sup>23</sup> Pélissier covers the war in greater detail, but both help to explain the conditions that enabled the Germans to continue resistance throughout most of 1918.

“Sub-imperialism” was a key factor in determining the fate of the German colonies as South Africa in particular pursued goals divergent from those of London. Much can be gained from Prosser Gifford’s and William Roger Lewis’s study, *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*.<sup>24</sup> This work highlights many of the local frictions and aspirations that helped to shape the conflict. Of considerable value, too, is Ronald Hyam’s book, *The Failure of South African Expansionism*, which examines the attempts to incorporate much of southern Africa into a single state, most notably by Jan Smuts.<sup>25</sup>

Overall, despite the many different studies, there can be said to be no generally authoritative work on the entire campaign and certainly none that looks at the conflict from more than one national perspective. This gap is not due to lack of archival material; on the contrary large amounts remain, untapped and largely unseen in various repositories. Britain has a huge amount of material in the Public Record Office in the form of Cabinet Office, War Office, Admiralty, Colonial and Foreign Office files, to list

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<sup>21</sup> Flament, F et al, *La Force Publique de sa naissance à 1914: Participation des militaires à l'histoire des premières années du Congo*, Brussels: Departments of State and Public Institutions, 1952; Louis, W R, *Ruanda-Urundi 1884-1919*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963.

<sup>22</sup> Pires, Antonio J, *A Grand Guerra em Mocambique*, Porto: [n pub.], 1924; and Martins, General Ferreira DSO, *Portugal's Co-operation with Great Britain in the Great War 1914-1918*, Lisboa: Servicos de Informacao e Imprensa da Embaixada Britanica, 1943.

<sup>23</sup> Pélissier, René, *La Naissance du Mozambique Résistance et Revoltes*, 2 Volumes, Orgeval: Pélissier, 1984; and Newitt, Malyn, *A History of Mozambique*, London: Hurst & Company, 1995; Isaacman, Allen, *The Tradition of Resistance in Mozambique*, Berkeley: UCLA Press, 1976.

<sup>24</sup> Gifford, Prosser and Louis, William Roger, *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967.

the most prominent. The British Library, the Imperial War Museum and National Army Museum in London also contain a great deal of relevant material as do archives in Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Both the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Documentation Directorate and the South African National Archives contain a large amount of valuable information on the war. The Belgian *Musée Royal de l'Armée* has a considerable amount of printed and original material relating to the campaign, while it appears that a number of important military reports are in the *Archivo Histórico Militar* in Lisbon - although these have not yet been consulted.

The German records in the *Bundesarchiv/Militärsarchiv* in Freiburg contain the terse wartime diaries of General von Lettow together with the huge account of the campaign written subsequently by Major Boell.<sup>26</sup> These are invaluable in supplementing the limited printed sources and making up for the loss of most of the official colonial records during the war. Other *Bundesarchiv* sources, such as the Schnee papers in Koblenz and the *Reichskolonialamt* collection in Potsdam, promise to be useful although time has prevented their exploitation.

The greatest problem with archival sources is the sheer mass and weight of paper; the British sources alone go well beyond the capability of one individual to search and examine comprehensively. These efforts must be viewed as a pioneering attempt to locate and discuss the most important sources. It is highly likely that much of value will continue to be discovered over the coming years.

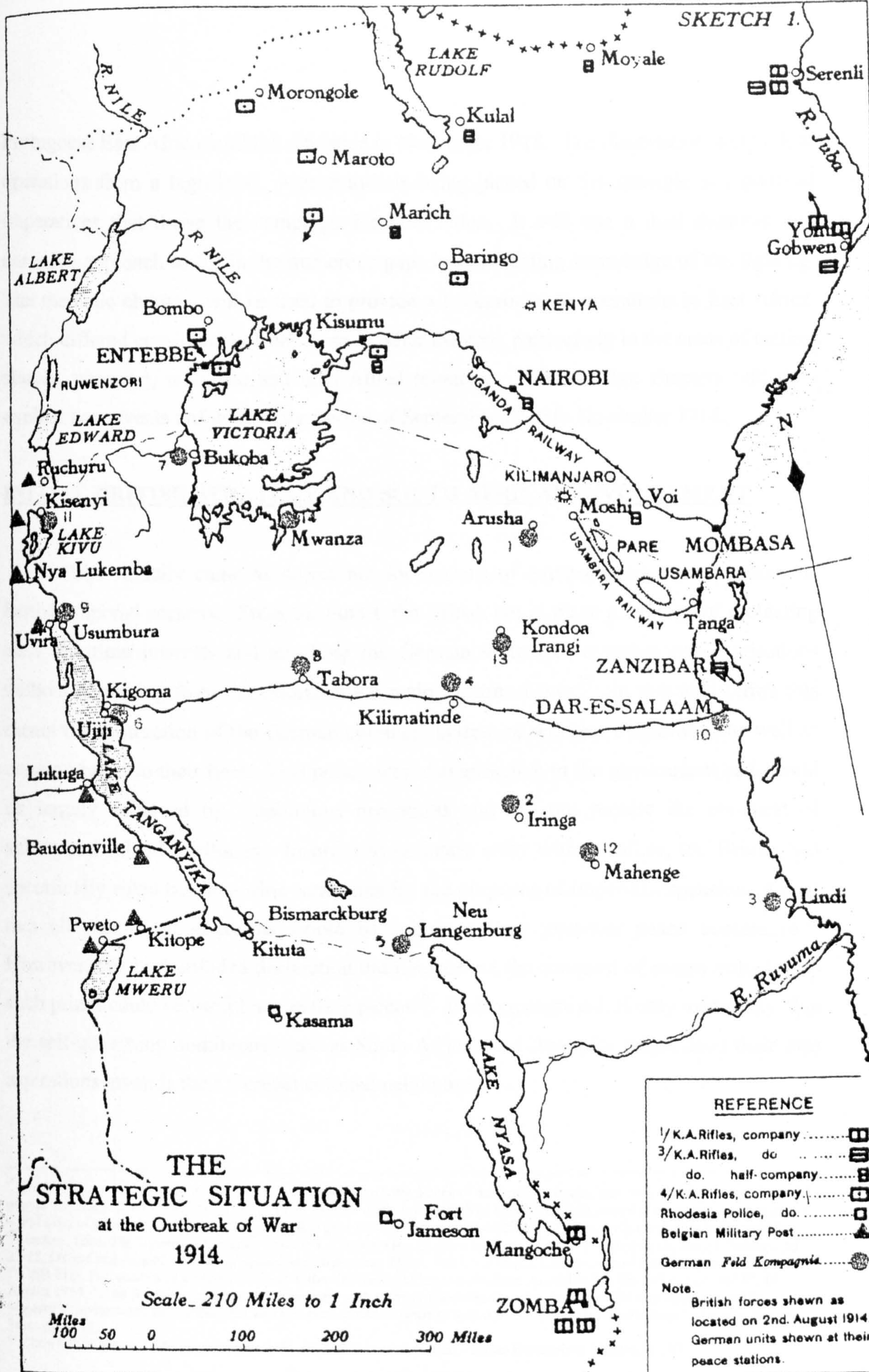
## AIM

The aim of this dissertation is to examine the critical period in the East African campaign from September 1916 to November 1918. This period covers the events from the time that the advancing Allies had reached the centre of German East Africa, through the Germans' evacuation of their colony in late 1917 and the subsequent campaign in

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<sup>26</sup> Hyam, Ronald, *The Failure of South African Expansion 1908-1948*, London: Macmillan, 1972.







Portuguese East Africa until the armistice in November 1918. The dissertation will look at operations from a high level, with emphasis being placed on the strategic and political imperatives that drove the campaign for both sides. It will use a dual thematic and narrative approach to fill in the numerous gaps in our existing knowledge of the fighting. The thematic chapters will be used to provide a background to operations in East Africa, which differed considerably from those in other theatres, particularly in the areas of tactics, supply, transport, medicine and inter-Allied relations. The narrative chapters will then explain how events unfolded in the period of September 1916 to November 1918.

## **INITIAL BRITISH STRATEGY AND SOUTH AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT**

War initially came to Africa not for reasons of expansionism, but for those of British imperial security. From the outset, the British put in place a strategy of protecting their maritime interests and attacking the German system of overseas communications without detracting from the efforts in the main theatre of war.<sup>27</sup> In practical terms this meant the destruction of the German colonies' system of wireless transmitters as well as denying bases to their fleet. This policy was also attractive to the government as it could be largely achieved by amphibious operations and did not require the conquest of substantial inland territories. In order to maintain unity with its allies, the British had specifically ruled out acquiring territories for the purposes of imperial expansion, stating that all permanent decisions would be subject to any post-war peace conference.<sup>28</sup> However, this high-minded declaration did not rule out the conquest of enemy colonies, as such prizes could be useful negotiating pieces.<sup>29</sup> It also recognised, if only informally, that the self-governing dominions, such as South African and Australia, might have their own aspirations towards their German colonial neighbours.

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<sup>26</sup> The diaries are pocket-sized and written in a short-hand covering details of movements, stocks, and casualties together with an end of year summary. They cover from 1914 to 1918. Boell's work, upon which he based *Die Operationen* is enormous, running to over 4,000 sides of paper. Unfortunately, there are a few gaps owing to wartime destruction, but overall it is invaluable to the historian.

<sup>27</sup> Hankey, Lord, *The Supreme Command*, Volume 1, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1961, p. 168; French, *British Strategy*, pp. 27-28; Oxford and Asquith, Earl of, *Memories and Reflections 1852 – 1927*, Volume II, London: Cassel and Company, 1928, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> CAB 21/3, Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence Assembled on the 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1914", 14 August 1914. "...no formal proclamation annexing any such territory should be issued without specific instructions from His Majesty's Government, and further, that an agreement should be come to with our Allies to act on similar lines." ; French, *British Strategy*, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Churchill, Winston S, *The World Crisis: 1911-1914*, Volume 1, London: Thomas Butterworth Limited, p. 283.



The other European powers in Africa had their own views on the subject, but the British made it quite clear, in diplomatic language, that their allies' offers of military assistance in East Africa were unwelcome. The Belgian, Portuguese and even French attempts to contribute contingents against the common enemy were rebuffed early in the war.<sup>30</sup> This may be attributed to British over-confidence in their own abilities to eliminate the Germans as rivals as well as a wish to deny other countries a claim in the potential spoils. Despite the pressing need for military victory over the Central Powers, imperial rivalries and colonial aspirations would remain significant factors throughout the war, and East Africa would be no exception.

However, this littoral strategy did not last very long in its pure form as other factors induced the British to invade German colonies shortly after the outbreak of the war. Sub-imperialism and local fears for security played their part in forming a more aggressive attitude. Togoland fell by the end of August, while colonial expeditionary forces were being prepared to attack the Cameroons in the north and German South-West Africa in the south.<sup>31</sup> While these campaigns were to drag on much longer than initially expected, it was in East Africa that this alteration to the initial British strategy was to have the most visible effects.

Germany faced the war in East Africa from two points of view: one from Berlin and the other from Dar-es-Salaam. From the imperial viewpoint, colonies were not a major priority although, prior to the war, efforts had been made to reduce colonial tensions with Britain, actions that had been only partially reciprocated. Indeed, the two powers had initialled the draft of a secret treaty aimed at carving up the Portuguese colonies in the case of an expected financial default.<sup>32</sup> However, once hostilities broke out, thoughts of conciliation were quickly forgotten and a more aggressive position was taken. A group in

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<sup>30</sup> MS Harcourt, dep 507, "Colonial Office Telegrams Circulated to the Cabinet August 1914 – August 1915", 22 September 1914, Telegram No. 1, Secretary of State for the Colonies to the High Commissioner for South Africa; 3 October 1914, Telegram No. 3, Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor East African Protectorate (for the Belgians); dep 507, 27 August 1914, Telegram, No. 2, Secretary of State for the Colonies to High Commissioner for South Africa; and dep 590 *Foreign Office Print*, 26 August 1914, Telegram No. 176, Sir Edward Grey to Mr Carnegie (for the Portuguese); CAB 21/3, 12 August 1914, Telegram Foreign Office to Sir F Bertie; and Andrew, Christopher and Kanya-Forster, *France Abroad*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1981, pp. 62-63 (for the French).

<sup>31</sup> French, *British Strategy*, pp. 27-28.

the government, exemplified by the Colonial Secretary, Dr Wilhelm Solf, aspired to a German *Mittelafrika*, built on existing colonies and augmented by helpings from the Portuguese- and Belgian-held territories.<sup>33</sup> However, by the end of 1914 all effective links with the colonies had been cut off and regardless of his aspirations, Solf understood the realities of the strategic situation and that any exchanges of territory would follow a general peace settlement.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, the German colonial authorities were faced with the much more immediate concern of survival. They realised both the extent of their isolation and the weakness of their own means. The Governor, Dr Schnee, initially tried to claim neutrality under the provisions of the Berlin Act 1885, but these concerns were not shared by the British, nor indeed the Belgians once their homeland had been invaded.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the commander of the *Schutztruppe* actively opposed this attitude of non-belligerence and a dispute between the two ensued.<sup>36</sup> In fact, pre-war German planners had considered the situation and had correctly concluded that the British were unlikely to accept neutralisation as it went against their direct interests. Accordingly, they had directed that preparations be made for defending the interior of the colony rather than the coast.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, if early surrender in the manner of Togoland was not to be contemplated, the only effective strategy was to delay and try to survive for as long as possible. Von Lettow's personality and the course of events eventually won out, and his strategy of distracting as many enemy troops and resources, even at the expense of evacuating the colony, continued until the end of the war.

While a Belgian colonial adventure may appear unusual with most of the home country under occupation by the Germans and the remainder largely a battleground, the

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<sup>32</sup> Fischer, *Germany's War Aim Aims in the First World War*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1967, pp. 38-39; French, *British Strategy*, p. 9-10 and 14; Langhorne, Richard. "Anglo-German Negotiations Concerning The Future of the Portuguese Colonies 1911-1914", *Historical Journal*, XVI, No. 24, (1973), pp. 378-379.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew and Kanya-Forster, *France Abroad*, p. 57; Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, p. 94.

<sup>34</sup> Fischer, Fritz, *Germany's War Aims*, pp. 102-103.

<sup>35</sup> Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, pp. 37-38; Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 527-528; CAB 8/5, Colonial Defence Committee, No. 431 M. "East and West African Protectorates Position in the Event of War with a European Power", 24 January 1911. The British had examined and ruled out a declaration of neutrality for its East African colonies as early as 1911. It saw such neutrality as favouring the Germans.

<sup>36</sup> Lettow, *My Reminiscences*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>37</sup> MS Boell, N14/14, *Denkschrift über Mobilmachungsvorarbeiten für den Fall eines Krieges mit Grossmacht für Deutsch-Ostafrika*, 27 April 1912.



prospect of a campaign held a number of attractions for the government-in-exile. The advantages included both national pride and diplomacy; in short they needed some tangible gains in order to negotiate from a position of strength in any peace conference.<sup>38</sup> As the official Belgian instructions directed, they wanted “a pawn in the form of a portion of German territory”.<sup>39</sup> The proximity of German East Africa and the support promised by the British made the campaign attractive, as did the wealth and fertility of its provinces of Ruanda and Urundi. A limited campaign to seize and control some of the best parts of German territory at relatively low risk was a most attractive option. It also had the advantages of placing the much stronger British in their debt, of enhancing their Congo colony, and of inflicting pain on the despoilers of their country. Under these conditions and from a Belgian point of view, an offensive made strong strategic sense.

The last of the four powers involved in the East African campaign, the Portuguese also emerge as by far the weakest and least effective, virtually drifting or being pushed along by the will of their stronger neighbours. Hated by their African subjects for the venality and brutality of their rule, the Portuguese were also despised by the European protagonists, including the Germans, for their military and administrative incompetence.<sup>40</sup> They were also aware that the British and Germans had been eyeing up their colonies and that both considered their administration to be hopelessly inefficient and cruel.<sup>41</sup> With the outbreak of war, Portugal stood aloof, declaring neither neutrality nor belligerence, largely in accordance with British desires.<sup>42</sup> This policy also accorded with Portugal’s desire to protect its African colonies against encroachment while recognising Portugal’s own financial and military weakness. However, a combination of internal politics and external pressure led it into the war in March 1916 with ultimately disastrous results.

All of the European powers were in comparable positions with very small white populations ruling over millions of blacks who had no say in questions of war or peace.

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<sup>38</sup> Louis, *Ruanda-Urundi*, pp. 216-217.

<sup>39</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, Volume II, p. 125, “Instruction ministérielle no 563 du 22 avril” quoted and the terms “3. Occuper à titre de gage une partie du territoire allemand: l’effort principale devait être porté vers le Ruanda.”

<sup>40</sup> Pélissier, *Naissance de Mozambique*, Volume II, pp. 650-651 and 656.

<sup>41</sup> Teixeira, Nuno Severiano, *L’Entrée du Portugal dans la Grande Guerre*, Paris: Economica, 1998, pp. 114-119; Vincent-Smith, J D, “The Portuguese Republic and Britain, 1910-1914”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, X, No. 4, (1975), pp. 714-717.

<sup>42</sup> Vincent-Smith, John, “Britain, Portugal and the First World War, 1914-19”, *European Studies Review*, IV, No. 3, (1974), pp. 210-211; Teixeira, *L’Entrée du Portugal*, pp. 188-194.

Yet the African population was to be drawn into the war in a manner and scale quite unprecedented in its history. Whether it was through volunteering to be soldiers or porters, or being compelled to provide manual labour, food and information, frequently by force, few communities escaped the effects of the war and many were devastated by it. Owing to illiteracy and the undeveloped nature of their societies, their voices are largely silent in most historical accounts, yet without their participation few of the events described could ever have occurred.<sup>43</sup> Silence must not be confused with lack of importance and the African contribution to the campaign was absolutely essential if not yet fully explained.

### **THE DEVELOPING STRATEGIC SITUATION FROM 1915 - EARLY 1916**

The East African campaign evolved from the relatively simple plan of destroying coastal wireless facilities and denying the use of Dar-es-Salaam as a port into an ill-judged attempt to seize the whole of German East Africa with two lightly equipped brigades of the Indian Army. The decision to attack was made on a number of erroneous assumptions that arose through a combination of poor planning, inter-departmental rivalries and a lack of firm leadership; it was to have long-lasting effects on the campaign.

The result was the disastrous attempt to land at Tanga in early November 1914.<sup>44</sup> Decisively defeated by the numerically inferior German forces, the British retired to British East Africa where, on the orders of Lord Kitchener, the War Secretary, they went over to the defensive. He correctly realised that East Africa was a strategic backwater and refused further substantial reinforcements as he generally opposed any moves to diminish the main effort on the Western Front.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hodges, Geoffrey, *The Carrier Corps: Military Labor in the East African Campaign 1914-1918*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986. See pp. 223-226 for his African oral history sources; CAB 45/14, *Transport Difficulties in East Africa During the Great War*, by Sir H D Lawrence, [n.d.]. In North-eastern Rhodesia alone, the Administrator estimated that any one time a third of the taxable adult male population (c. 40,000) was directly engaged in carrier service while their wives and children were growing food crops.

<sup>44</sup> A fuller account of the political background and of the battle of Tanga itself is at Anderson, Ross, "The Battle of Tanga 2-5 November 1914", *War in History*, VIII, No. 3, (2001), pp. 294-322.

<sup>45</sup> WO 33/714, *European War Secret Telegrams Series B, Volume 1, 31<sup>st</sup> July 1914 – 31<sup>st</sup> January 1915*, London: War Office, 1915. No. 1522, 4 December 1914, Telegram 2343, War Office to Wapshare. Henceforth, *Telegrams B 1*.



The abject failure at Tanga and the inability to provide significant reinforcements for East Africa led to a change in attitude. By January 1915, official meetings were underway in London between the British and Belgian governments to determine the best method of military co-operation, while unofficial feelers were being put out to South Africa.<sup>46</sup> Despite London's reluctance to bring Portugal into the war, the Governor of Nyasaland was authorised to request military assistance as a measure of last resort.<sup>47</sup>

On the other side, the Germans had much less strategic choice as they had only intermittent communications with their colony that were based on frequently distorted wireless signals and occasional messages spirited through the British blockade.<sup>48</sup> The conquest of German South-West Africa and the Cameroons, together with the destruction of the German overseas raiders, made German East Africa's position much more vulnerable.<sup>49</sup> Throughout 1914 and 1915, it remained a strategic and military backwater for the British while the Germans could do little directly, as their fleet had been penned into the North Sea and the blockade was having an increasing effect on their war efforts.<sup>50</sup> Although the new U-Boat weapon began to emerge as a major threat to the Allied merchant fleet, the technology of the day limited the range of these vessels to mainly European waters. Without access to overseas bases and with insufficient numbers available, the submarine was unable to make an impact on the situation in East Africa although increasing shipping losses would restrict the amount of support to that theatre.<sup>51</sup>

This defensive policy would hold true for the better part of 1915. The forces in British East Africa suffered not only from insufficient numbers, but also widespread sickness from malaria and poor morale. This, and the lack of an energetic commander, sapped their effectiveness and the year was largely spent in static warfare, with both sides relying on small patrols and raids to disrupt their opponents, while simultaneously trying to build up their own limited forces. The one major initiative approved by Kitchener was the

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<sup>46</sup> MS Harcourt, dep 583, 4 January 1915, Telegram No. 2, Kidston to Sir Edward Grey; dep 507, 14 April 1915, Telegram No. 4, Governor General of South Africa to Secretary of State for the Colonies.

<sup>47</sup> MS Harcourt, dep 507, 14 January 1915, Telegram No. 2, Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor Nyasaland.

<sup>48</sup> Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, pp. 162-163; Klein-Arendt, Reinhard, *Kamina ruft Nauen*, Ostheim/Rhön: Wilhelm Herbst Verlag, 1996, p. 292 and 300.

<sup>49</sup> Strachan, *The First World War*, p. 570.

<sup>50</sup> Halpern, Paul, *A Naval History of World War I*, London: UCL Press, 1994, pp. 328-329.

<sup>51</sup> Halpern, *Naval History*, pp. 306-308.

pushing of a spur of the Uganda Railway close to the British-German border, a factor that would be crucial in any offensive operations.<sup>52</sup>

By late 1915, the British Cabinet was divided into two main factions with strongly opposed views on strategy, the management of the war effort, and conscription. Notably, there was strong opposition to further offensives on the Western Front and some ministers sought to find alternative theatres in which to achieve strategic success. Furthermore, Lord Kitchener had lost the confidence of his civilian colleagues who responded by scheming to diminish his powers.<sup>53</sup> One area of contention was East Africa, where Kitchener had maintained his opposition to any further offensive action while keeping its reinforcements to the bare minimum required.

Finally in November 1915, when he had been deliberately sent away on an inspection of the Dardanelles by the Cabinet, his opponents struck. Using a series of pessimistic and alarmist reports from the general in command in East Africa, the CIGS produced an appreciation that called for at least 10,000 reinforcements and a more active stance.<sup>54</sup> In this he was supported by his Director of Military Operations, who later admitted to using Kitchener's absence as an opportunity for going against his express wishes.<sup>55</sup>

The General Staff did this with the knowledge that there was broad support for the scheme.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the King had taken a personal interest in the matter for some time and had had his Private Secretary write to Bonar Law, the Colonial Secretary, about the need to involve the South Africans in German East Africa.<sup>57</sup> He needed little convincing as he had long welcomed such assistance and had been carefully negotiating with the South African

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<sup>52</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D 1*, No. 23, 6 February 1915, Telegram S 215, Wapshare to War Office; Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, p. 130. War Office approval was given on 16 February.

<sup>53</sup> Turner, John, *British Politics and the Great War: Coalition and Conflict, 1915-1918*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, pp. 68-69; French, *British Strategy*, pp. 158-161.

<sup>54</sup> WO 106/310, "The Military Situation in British East Africa", CIGS 8 October 1915. In this report, General Sir A J Murray cited General Tighe's Telegram 322 of 2 August 1915, his despatch of 31 July 1915, and his Telegram 325 of 14 August 1915.

<sup>55</sup> Callwell, Major General Sir C E, *Experiences of a Dug-Out 1914-1918*, London: Constable, 1920, pp. 178-179.

<sup>56</sup> Gilbert, Martin, *Winston S Churchill*, Companion III Documents, London: Heinemann, 1971, p. 1296. Cites 3 November 1916, Letter Curzon to Churchill.

<sup>57</sup> MS Buxton, dep 9930, File August 1915, 13 August 1915, Letter Lord Stamfordham to Buxton.



Government through the Governor General for some time.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, the victory in October, albeit with a reduced majority, of Botha's South African Party, had cleared the main obstacle to an offensive there.

In the circumstances, the CIGS then produced a memorandum advocating an attack against German East Africa, using mainly South African troops, in order to enhance Britain's position at the end of the war.<sup>59</sup> On his return to Britain, Kitchener wasted little time before weighing into the proposal, stating:

"This scheme for offensive operations in the centre of Africa is, in my opinion, a very dangerous project in the present state of the war...The general military policy now advocated, may therefore, lead us to place South African troops in positions where they will be liable to disaster, from which we will not be able to extricate them, as our troops will be fully engaged elsewhere. I think that the recent example we have had of similar proceedings based on wrong premises in Mesopotamia should teach us to be cautious in undertaking similar operations of this nature..."<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless, such was Kitchener's weakened position that the War Committee endorsed the new offensive strategy on 28 December 1915, having gained the support of General Sir William Robertson, the newly-appointed CIGS a few days earlier.<sup>61</sup> It was a vast and ambitious project with the British planning to attack from British East Africa in the north-east and from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland in the south-west, with the Belgians advancing from the Congo in the west. The prospective Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien had identified many of the salient difficulties of campaigning there, but, nevertheless, it is clear that the politicians expected a quick and easy victory.<sup>62</sup> The scene was now set for a major struggle in the heart of Africa.

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<sup>58</sup> MS Buxton, dep 9930, File May 1915, 9 May 1915, Telegram Buxton to Harcourt; 11 May 1915, Telegram Harcourt to Buxton; 19 May 1916, Letter Bonar Law to Buxton; File August 1915, 9 August 1915, Telegram Bonar Law to Buxton.

<sup>59</sup> CAB 22/3, "An Appreciation by the General Staff on the Situation in East Africa", 10 December 1915. It foresaw about 15,000 reinforcements, of whom 14,000 were South Africa and 1,000 were Indian, joining the nearly 15,000 troops already in-theatre.

<sup>60</sup> CAB 22/3, "Minute by the Secretary of State for War", appended to the General Staff Appreciation, 14 December 1915; CAB 22/3, War Committee Meeting of 15 December 1915.

<sup>61</sup> CAB 22/3, War Committee Meeting of 28 December 1915. Robertson's agreement was contained in the "CIGS Note" of 23 December 1915.

<sup>62</sup> WO 106/310, "Appreciation on the Situation in East Africa", General H L Smith-Dorrien, 1 December 1915, pp. 3-4. Smith-Dorrien put great emphasis on the need for careful and thorough preparation on account of the climate and endemic diseases. He

## SUB-IMPERIAL INTERESTS

The involvement of the Union of South Africa in German South-West and subsequently German East Africa was outwardly puzzling. In fact, the presence of a large South African contingent, led by one of the country's foremost politicians and a veteran of the Anglo-Boer War, may be considered remarkable given the traditional Afrikaner hostility to British imperial actions. Yet while the Union of South Africa had only been formed in 1910 and many remained hostile to their new overlords, it must be remembered that the Boer republics had been founded on expansionism, with the Great Trek being the best-known example. Leading politicians, most notably Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, viewed the neighbouring territories of German South-West Africa, British-run Rhodesia and Portuguese East Africa as attractive acquisitions for a Greater South Africa. Indeed there had been considerable frustration at the manner in which the Boers had been "hemmed-in" during the colonial expansion of the late nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> The outbreak of war had presented an unparalleled opportunity to advance these claims under the auspices of loyalty to Britain's cause.

The planned attack on German South-West Africa had been delayed by the outbreak of the Rebellion in October 1914. However, as soon as the dissident forces had been suppressed, the Prime Minister, Botha, took personal command of the operations, with Smuts' assistance from Pretoria and later in the field.<sup>64</sup> The threat of future risings and physical attack from that territory were used to justify the seizure:

"He [Botha] added however emphatically that the cost was worth incurring, if, as he believed, it would make any further rising impossible for the future, and if it secured by annexation the German territory from becoming, as it otherwise would, both a military and intriguing menace against South Africa."<sup>65</sup>

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thought that the Government believed that GEA could be completely subjugated by April 1916, but warned that no decisive result could occur before July or August 1916.

<sup>63</sup> Hyam, Ronald, *South African Expansionism*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>64</sup> Strachan, *The First World War*, pp. 554-555.

<sup>65</sup> MS Harcourt, dep 471, 2 November 1914, Letter Buxton to Harcourt. This letter followed a meeting with General Botha.

Smuts certainly agreed with Botha and had no intention of relinquishing any captured territory.<sup>66</sup> German East Africa was a less obvious target for South African ambitions, separated as it was by the masses of the Rhodesias, Mozambique and Nyasaland from the northern tip of the Transvaal. However, Smuts saw it as a useful bargaining tool with the Portuguese and hoped to swap its southern area in exchange for the southern portion of Portuguese East Africa:

“The Union Govt. are of course anxious to put out a claim to some part of Port: E.A. and think this an opportunity to do so, and the above re-arrangement of territory is Smuts special pet idea.”<sup>67</sup>

Such an exchange would provide first class ports for an enlarged South Africa and remove a rival power from the scene.<sup>68</sup> It also had the merit of coinciding with the British belief that Portugal was unfit to be a colonial power and might welcome an expansion of its colonial interests under the South African banner. Furthermore, as the hard-pressed British and Indian Armies were unable to spare significant reinforcements for the campaign, a strong South African contingent would be welcomed on military as well as political grounds. Smuts already had the spoils firmly in mind:

“...But they [the British Government] now practically intimate that in future German East Africa will be our destination. If that country were conquered by us, we could probably effect an exchange with Mozambique and so consolidate our territories south of the Zambesi and Kunene...”<sup>69</sup>

Smuts's ambitions, however, were getting ahead of themselves as the fighting in German South-West Africa was far from over. It was the Prime Minister, Botha, still

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<sup>66</sup> MS Buxton, dep 9930, File September 1914, 24 September 1914, Letter Buxton to Harcourt. Smuts is quoted as saying, “if the Union Government were successful in these operations, and conquered the territory, it would be impossible in the circumstances to relinquish it to Germany,”

<sup>67</sup> MS Harcourt, dep 472, 18 May 1915, Letter Buxton to Harcourt; MS Buxton, dep 9930, File May 1915, 15 May 1915, Letter Buxton to Harcourt.

<sup>68</sup> Hyam, *South African Expansionism*, pp. 26-28

<sup>69</sup> Hancock, Keith Sir, and Poel, Jean van der. *Selections from the Smuts Papers Volume III June 1910 – November 1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966, 30 August 1915, Letter Smuts to J X Merriman, p. 310.



engaged in personally directing the campaign at the front, who was more cautious, prudently preferring to finish off one campaign before starting another.<sup>70</sup>

Despite this, and as early as May 1915, speculation reached a point where the Government felt obliged to issue a press statement stating that no decision had been made about sending troops to Europe or elsewhere in Africa.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, as the campaign in South-West Africa wound down in July 1915, a new and difficult problem arose, that of winning the required General Election. The Botha government was under heavy pressure from the Nationalists and the Afrikaner population was split.<sup>72</sup> Ministers were seriously concerned about the effects of sending away so many potentially friendly voters before the election:

“The next Election is the most critical this country probably will ever have to face. It has not been possible to prevent the First Brigade from being formed, and that they are leaving before the Election takes place; but the Government are extremely anxious to do nothing that would add further to the disenfranchisement of voters.

Besides, in the uncertain state of politics they do not want to move in the matter of an East African Contingent until after the Election. Both the Contingent itself, and the financing of it might be used as points against them electorally.”<sup>73</sup>

With the election set for October 1915, no outward preparations could be made until the last quarter of the year and it would take several months to recruit, equip and train any contingent. In the interim, nothing was publicly announced about South African participation in East Africa, as it would almost certainly have been a vote-loser in a close run contest. The British Cabinet realised the threat posed by Hertzog's Nationalists and wanted Botha's South African Party to be returned to power; accordingly, London heeded Lord Buxton's advice and refrained from public pressure.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> MS Buxton, dep 9930, File May 1915, 25 May 1915, Telegram D 166 Smuts to Buxton citing 22 May 1915, Telegram B 45 Botha to Smuts.

<sup>71</sup> MS Buxton, dep 9930, File May 1915, 27 May 15, Press Cutting *Cape Argus*.

<sup>72</sup> Meintjes, Johannes, *General Louis Botha*, London: Cassell, 1970, p. 273.

<sup>73</sup> MS Buxton, dep 9930, File August 1915, 11 August 1915, Letter Buxton to Bonar Law.

<sup>74</sup> MS Buxton, dep 9930, File August 1915, 19 August 1915, Letter Buxton to Asquith; 28 August 1915, Telegram Buxton to Bonar

For some time Buxton had believed that the passive, defensive strategy was failing to protect Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland adequately, and had been pressing the Colonial Secretary to take the offensive.<sup>75</sup> Despite War Office opposition, Bonar Law agreed with Buxton's assessment:

“The position in East Africa and surrounding districts is of a nature to cause the greatest anxiety...it would be of the greatest possible advantage to send a large enough force to conquer German East Africa once and for all.”<sup>76</sup>

With the victory in October, albeit with a reduced majority, of the Botha Government, the main obstacle in South Africa disappeared and together with the British Cabinet's agreement, the way for war in East Africa was clear.

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Law.

<sup>75</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D 1*, No. 163, 10 April 1915, Telegram 3970, War Office to Buxton, p. 39.

<sup>76</sup> Yorke, Edmund James, *A Crisis of Colonial Control: War and Authority in Northern Rhodesia: 1919-19*, Cambridge University PhD thesis, 1983, p. 132. Cites Bonar Law to Buxton, 3 September 1915.

## CHAPTER 2 - THE SITUATION AT THE END OF AUGUST 1916

### SMUTS'S APPOINTMENT

With the plan to invade German East Africa approved by the British Cabinet and the South African Government providing the bulk of the contingent, General Smith-Dorrien was expected to lead the force. However, he had fallen dangerously ill of pneumonia during the long sea journey and, despite a recovery, was deemed medically unfit to take up his command. In the circumstances, the British offered the appointment a second time to Smuts in February 1916. He had been approached prior to Smith-Dorrien's nomination, but had declined citing his parliamentary and political responsibilities.<sup>77</sup> With the government now re-elected, his commitments became less demanding and he agreed to take up the post of commander-in-chief of the East African Expeditionary Force (EAEF). The appointment of a colonial officer in supreme command of imperial troops received the assent of both Lord Kitchener and the War Committee on 3 February 1916.<sup>78</sup> It was to be a fateful and far-reaching decision.

The appointment of a politician, although a major general in the Union Defence Force, was extraordinary to say the least. It partly reflected political disillusionment with the Army's senior leadership; to Lloyd George, Bonar Law and Churchill he seemed to personify the great dream of the "gifted amateur" politician who was capable of showing up the narrow-minded and blinkered professional soldiers.<sup>79</sup>

Smuts had also helped manoeuvre himself into the position. As has been seen, he had been instrumental in instigating an aggressive policy in East Africa as well as pushing for a large South African contingent. Although the war in German South West Africa had been far from popular in some Afrikaner circles, he judged that the benefits of

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<sup>77</sup> MS Buxton, File February 1916, 1 February 1916, Telegram Buxton to Bonar Law; 8 February, Telegram Buxton to Bonar Law; Hancock and van der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, III, 29 November 1915, Letter Smuts to A B Gillett, p. 326.

<sup>78</sup> CAB 22/3, War Committee Meeting of 3 February 1916.

<sup>79</sup> MS Long, 947/547, 29 March 1917, Letter Derby to Long; MS Long, 947/602, 11 May 1917, Letter Buxton to Long; Roskill, Stephen, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, London: Collins, 1970, p. 388; and Hughes, Matthew, *Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East 1917-1919*, London: Frank Cass, 1999, p. 24; Gilbert, Martin, *Winston S Churchill*, III, London: Heinemann, pp. 565-566, cites 12 November 1915, Letter Bonar Law to Asquith.



supporting Britain in East Africa would outweigh the unpopularity of a new campaign. For its part, the British Government was anxious to support the Botha government; it had suppressed a major rebellion before conquering one enemy territory and was now actively supporting the Imperial war effort in Europe as well as Africa. In the circumstances, Smuts' appointment, with his Cambridge education and connections, Anglo-Boer War service and more recent experience, seemed to be a good one.

On the other hand, there were serious limitations to Smith-Dorrien's successor. He was not a professional soldier and he lacked experience of higher command in war.<sup>80</sup> He had been a very successful leader of a commando in the Anglo-Boer War, but his troops had seldom numbered more than 300 and the fighting was in friendly and fertile territory. Subsequently, he had served for some time as second in command in the campaign to conquer German South-West Africa, leading a subsidiary column from the south. However, while arid, that country was reasonably favourable for the use of mounted troops and had few of the deadly tropical diseases that plagued the East Coast. Importantly, the German defenders there were not particularly well-led and conducted a mainly passive defence that succumbed easily to Botha's tactics (and logistical planning).<sup>81</sup> Now, Smuts was being called upon to lead over 50,000 soldiers of many nationalities and languages through extremely difficult and often unmapped terrain while battling a harsh climate and a host of deadly diseases. Apart from operational and tactical skill, his appointment also required a firm grasp of administration and supply which had been shown to be so important in previous African campaigns.

Smuts's position was also not made easier by his status as a politician and leading government minister. It was unavoidable that politics would play an important role in his decision-making, be it the appointment of officers, selection of strategy or the issuance of communiqués. With Botha under heavy pressure from the Nationalist party, Smuts was

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<sup>80</sup> MS Buxton, Semi-Official Letter File, 12 February 1916, Letter Smith-Dorrien to Buxton. Despite the public announcements stating that he had recommended Smuts to be his replacement, he privately made it clear that this was not the case. "Concerning General Smuts' powers as an up to date General I know nothing and I certainly should not have selected him had there been time to get a General who had devoted His life to War from Home."

<sup>81</sup> Strachan, *The First World War*, pp. 559 and 567-568.

acutely conscious of the dangers of a large casualty list.<sup>82</sup> He was also well aware of the need for success, as any setback would be used to attack and possibly weaken the government.

### SMUTS'S AIMS AND INTENTIONS

On taking over the chief command from Smith-Dorrien, Smuts received a copy of the former's instructions, which read in part:

“is to undertake an offensive defensive with the object of expelling the enemy from British territory and safeguarding it from further incursion. The decision as to the ultimate scope of the offensive operations to be undertaken against German East Africa after the rainy season should be postponed until General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien has reported in light of the experience gained before the rainy season.”<sup>83</sup>

However, Smuts had no intention of waiting for the dry weather and had been pressing for an early advance well before his appointment as commander-in-chief. He had prevailed upon the Governor General to contest Smith-Dorrien's plans to start after the end of the rains in late May, claiming that delay would have deleterious effects on morale, recruiting and the health of the troops.<sup>84</sup> In this he was successful, obtaining the War Committee's permission to start before the rains, provided that he was confident of success. Accepting the appointment on 5 February 1916, he sailed for East Africa shortly thereafter, arriving at Mombasa on 19 February. He had a meeting with the incumbent General Officer Commanding, followed by a rapid reconnaissance of the areas likely to be involved. Despite the shortness of time for detailed consideration of the situation and his lack of familiarity with the region, he signalled to London on 23

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<sup>82</sup> Hancock and van den Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 13 April 1916, Letter Botha to Smuts, p. 356; Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, p. 166.

<sup>83</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, p. 222.

<sup>84</sup> MS Buxton, File February 1916, 1 February 1916, Telegram Buxton to Bonar Law.

February that he wished to undertake an immediate offensive, receiving approval two days later.<sup>85</sup>

This sense of over-riding haste was to be typical of Smuts's time in command. While it was interpreted as part of his implacable willpower and desire for success, it can also be seen as part of his lack of understanding of the situation. He had pressed for an accelerated offensive timetable before he had been given all of Smith-Dorrien's campaign papers or had inspected the terrain.<sup>86</sup> He made up his mind to attack in less than four days in the country, of which the better part of two were needed for travel, and before the all-important transport arrangements were put in place. Furthermore, his own troops were still in the process of arriving (one brigade would not arrive until after the opening of the offensive) and had had very little time for acclimatisation or reconnaissance. Most significantly, he had already decided that his mounted troops would play a leading role through a country that was known to be infested with the tsetse fly with its fatal effects on all domestic animals.<sup>87</sup> This was not just relevant to the mounted brigades, but also to the overwhelmingly animal-drawn supply system. Ironically, his predecessor had specifically requested that only the front line units have mules with the remainder equipped with motor vehicles.<sup>88</sup> Smuts chose not to wait or rectify this critical weakness.

### SMUTS'S STYLE OF COMMAND

Furthermore, the unique combination of Smuts's previous military experience, his political role and territorial aspirations together with his personal characteristics, gave him a decided approach to campaigning. In order to achieve his ambitious ends, he planned to use manoeuvre as the means of defeating the *Schutztruppe*. He was opposed to fighting heavy battles and preferred to use limited frontal holding attacks supported by

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<sup>85</sup> Smuts, Lt Gen J C, *Military Despatches from the Commander-in-Chief, East Africa Force, Despatch dated 30<sup>th</sup> April 1916*, published in the London Gazette, 'Supplement', No. 29630, 20 June 1916, p. 187.

<sup>86</sup> MS Buxton, File February 1916, 7 February 1916, Letter Brigadier General Simpson-Baikie to Buxton. The relevant files were only despatched on that date while the request for an accelerated attack was sent to London on 1 February.

<sup>87</sup> Orr, Colonel G M, "Some Afterthoughts on the War in East Africa", *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, LXIX, (1924), p. 697.

<sup>88</sup> WO 106/310, "Appreciation on Situation in East Africa", General H L Smith-Dorrien, 1 December 1915, p. 4.



wide turning movements by highly mobile mounted columns aimed at hitting the enemy's flanks and cutting off his escape.<sup>89</sup> He counted on their unexpected appearance in the rear areas and withdrawal routes to cause disruption and disintegration. These tactics had worked well on the South African veldt and in the bush of South-West Africa, but did not take the rather different conditions of East Africa into account.<sup>90</sup>

Above all, he wanted to conquer territory and, despite his pronouncements, he never appears to have been really interested in defeating the Germans in pitched battle. This was not due to physical fear, as he was personally brave and was frequently in or about the front line.<sup>91</sup> The quality of his intellect stood out and he understood manoeuvre very well; his difficulties came when it came to pressing the fight home and translating his grand intentions into attainable and sustainable orders.

That Smuts would be unfamiliar with the British Army's methods was expected and an experienced officer, A R Hoskins, was supplied as his Chief of General Staff (CGS). However, while taking over the bulk of Smith-Dorrien's staff, Smuts had insisted on a number of changes in key appointments. The most important substitution was of Hoskins for the South African J J Collyer as CGS. As this was by far the most influential staff post, Smuts was within his rights in making such a decision, but it was at the cost of losing a highly experienced professional officer who had been Inspector General of the King's African Rifles for one who had only served in South Africa. Matters were not helped by the relative inexperience of many of the more junior staff officers, particularly in the administrative branches.<sup>92</sup> While Collyer was able enough in purely operational matters, he never seemed to grasp the importance of underpinning Smuts's plans with a sound logistical basis. The importance of this weakness would become glaringly apparent in late 1916.

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<sup>89</sup> Smuts, Lt Gen J C *Military Despatches from the Commander-in-Chief, East African Forces, Despatch dated 28<sup>th</sup> February 1917*, published in the *London Gazette* "Supplement", No. 30020 of 18<sup>th</sup> April 1917, pp. 121, 125, and 128-129. These tactics were frequently used by van Deventer and other South African commanders as well. Henceforth, Smuts, *Despatch III*.

<sup>90</sup> Strachan, *The First World War*, I, p. 605.

<sup>91</sup> Meinterzhagen, *Army Diary*, p. 199.

<sup>92</sup> Crowe, *General Smuts' Campaign*, pp. 4 and 7.

The bringing together of British and Imperial forces under South African command was unprecedented and led to rivalry and friction particularly at the higher levels. While Smuts's qualities of leadership and decisiveness were appreciated, considerable doubts over his tactical abilities emerged, particularly from the professional British officers in the force. Indeed, there was some speculation about the motives of Smuts and the other senior South African commanders, most of whom were close associates in private life and were often involved in politics at home. A number of British officers believed that the inability to catch and defeat the Germans in pitched battle was due to a distinct reluctance to incur heavy casualties and therefore opprobrium with the electorate.<sup>93</sup> This sentiment lasted throughout Smut's tenure in command and contributed to ill-feeling between the two groups.

Unhappiness with the commander-in-chief was not limited to British Army officers. Smuts had made himself deeply distrusted by a considerable segment of the South African population, both Afrikaners and English.<sup>94</sup> He was admired for his intellect and energy, but was also aloof and remote, lacking Botha's personal magnetism. He was conscious of his superior mental agility and adroitness, and this confidence often came across as arrogance. He was seldom at his main headquarters, preferring to be forward with a few, trusted officers. Smuts was not a man for discussing matters with his subordinates or seeking advice.<sup>95</sup>

Thus by the end of August 1916, Smuts had outwardly achieved a great deal reaching the heart of the German colony. Much further to the west, the Belgians under General Tombeur, and aided by a British brigade, had driven the enemy out of Ruanda and Urundi and were threatening Tabora. To the south-east, a brigade-sized force under Brigadier General Northey had advanced from the Rhodesia-Nyasaland border and had pushed north-west against light opposition reaching the hilltop town of Iringa. In the far south, the Portuguese had recently entered the war on the side of the Entente, and had

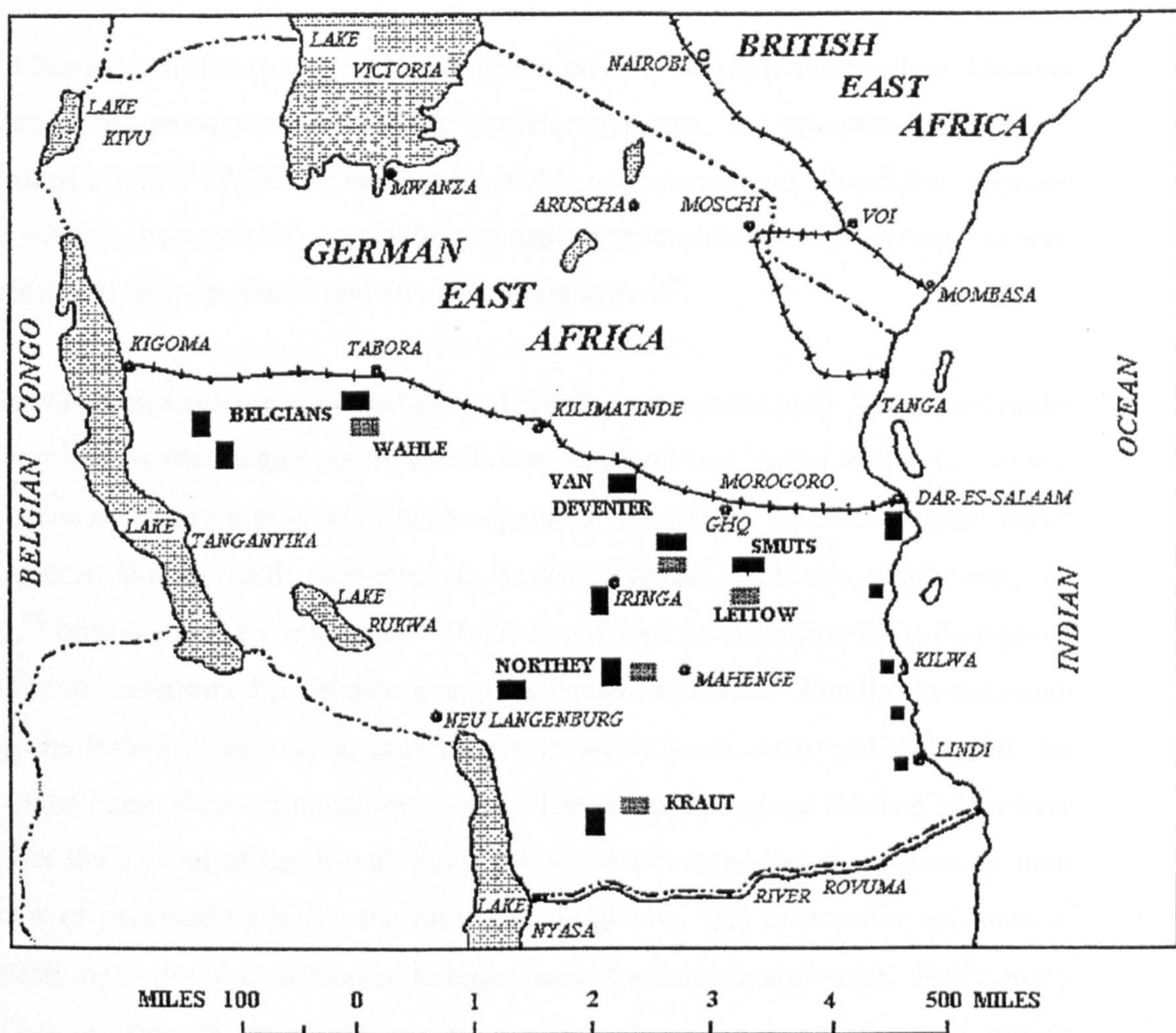
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<sup>93</sup> Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, pp. 198-200; CAB 45/44, Colonel Fendall's Diary, Entry for 29 August 1916; Crowe, *General Smuts's Campaign*, pp. 6-7 is the most tactful.

<sup>94</sup> MS Harcourt, dep 474, 7 May 1915, Letter Buxton to Harcourt, and 17 May 1915, Letter Buxton to Harcourt; Reitz, Deneys, *Trekking On*, London: Faber & Faber, 1933, pp. 68-69 and 105-106.

<sup>95</sup> CAB 45/44, Colonel Fendall's Diary, Entry 12 October 1916; MS Buxton, File June 1915, 6 June 1915, Letter Buxton to Bonar Law.





### STRATEGIC SITUATION AT END SEPTEMBER 1916

ALLIED FORCES ..... ■  
GERMAN FORCES ..... ▨



landed an expeditionary force preparatory to commencing offensive operations against the Germans.

To Smuts, with the richest and most fertile areas of western and northern German East Africa in his possession and having superior numbers, the prospects of an early victory looked bright.<sup>96</sup> While he had not been able to surround and cut-off the Germans as he had wished, there was the satisfaction of capturing vast amounts of territory as well as the majority of the population and all of the main towns.<sup>97</sup>

The German situation appeared to be difficult as the main body in the east under Colonel von Lettow was beginning its withdrawal south of the Central Railway. Several hundred miles of sparsely populated bush separated them from the *Westtruppen* under Major General Wahle, still concentrated around Tabora. In the south-west, an *Abteilung*,<sup>98</sup> now under the command of Major Kraut, had been reinforced and prepared to present more determined resistance along the Iringa highlands. Finally, in the south and along the Indian Ocean coast, only relatively weak forces were available with the majority being lines-of-communications troops. The sea and the great African lakes were firmly under the control of the Royal Navy, while the Germans had lost access to their main means of overland mobility, the railways. Logically, and to preserve as much of their possessions as possible, it seemed to make sense for them to surrender. While many on the German side favoured this approach, it took no account of von Lettow's determination to fight to the bitter end.<sup>99</sup>

Yet, despite appearances and the optimistic communiqués sent to the War Office, things were not quite as they seemed. It was true that by the standards of the Western front, Smuts's advances had been both speedy and lengthy. Furthermore, his battle casualties were relatively light, although this was offset by the disconcertingly high sick

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<sup>96</sup> Smuts, *Despatch II*, p. 132.

<sup>97</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1500, 11 January 1917, Telegram X 1182, Smuts to Secretary of State for War, p. 412.

<sup>98</sup> The Germans seldom used conventional battalion and regimental organisations in East Africa, preferring to create *ad hoc* *Abteilungen* (detachments). The *Abteilungen* (*Abt*), which generally ranged from two to six companies with one or two guns were the backbone of von Lettow's system. The leadership and composition of these detachments changed frequently – the commander's name was used as the main form of designation.

<sup>99</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 149.



rate. Despite his claims to the contrary, the *Schutztruppe* had neither been defeated in battle or nor was it demoralised.<sup>100</sup> It remained an effective and cohesive force, still numbering over 8,000.<sup>101</sup> There were two major reasons for this situation; the first was von Lettow's skillful defence and the second was the unsatisfactory nature of Smuts's tactical methods.

He was faced by a highly professional and determined opponent in Colonel von Lettow. A career soldier, he had served as a Guards officer in Germany as well as in colonial campaigns in China and German South-West Africa, prior to being appointed to command the *Schutztruppe*.<sup>102</sup> He had a very strong personality and although highly demanding and sometimes difficult to deal with, he commanded a great deal of respect amongst his soldiers. From the beginning of the war, von Lettow was of the unshakable belief that the colony's fate would be decided on the battlefields of Europe and that his duty was to tie up and divert as many allied troops as possible from the main front.<sup>103</sup> This he would do regardless of the fate of the colony and unlike his South African counterpart, he was a great believer in decisive battle and did not shrink from head to head clashes. More importantly, he was fully aware of the importance of keeping his army adequately maintained and his diaries bear testament to that concern.<sup>104</sup>

Since being turned out of the Kilimanjaro position in March 1916, he had used the tactics of delay and the trading of space for time to keep his force in being. In this he had been materially aided by the dense bush and lack of roads in the interior of the German colony. The difficulties in sustaining the British forward advance together with Smuts's reluctance to fight an all-out battle aided von Lettow in initially achieving his aims. This is not to say that the Germans had it all their own way as their counter-attack at Kondoa

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<sup>100</sup> CAB 44/9, Draft Chapter XVII, The Campaign of 1917, p. 1. Smuts was cited twice in *The Times*, the first time in South Africa on 29 January 1917 and the second in London on 13 March 1917. In the second statement he asserted "...The campaign in German East Africa may said to be over...but it is merely the remnant of an army that is left, and not a formidable fighting force."

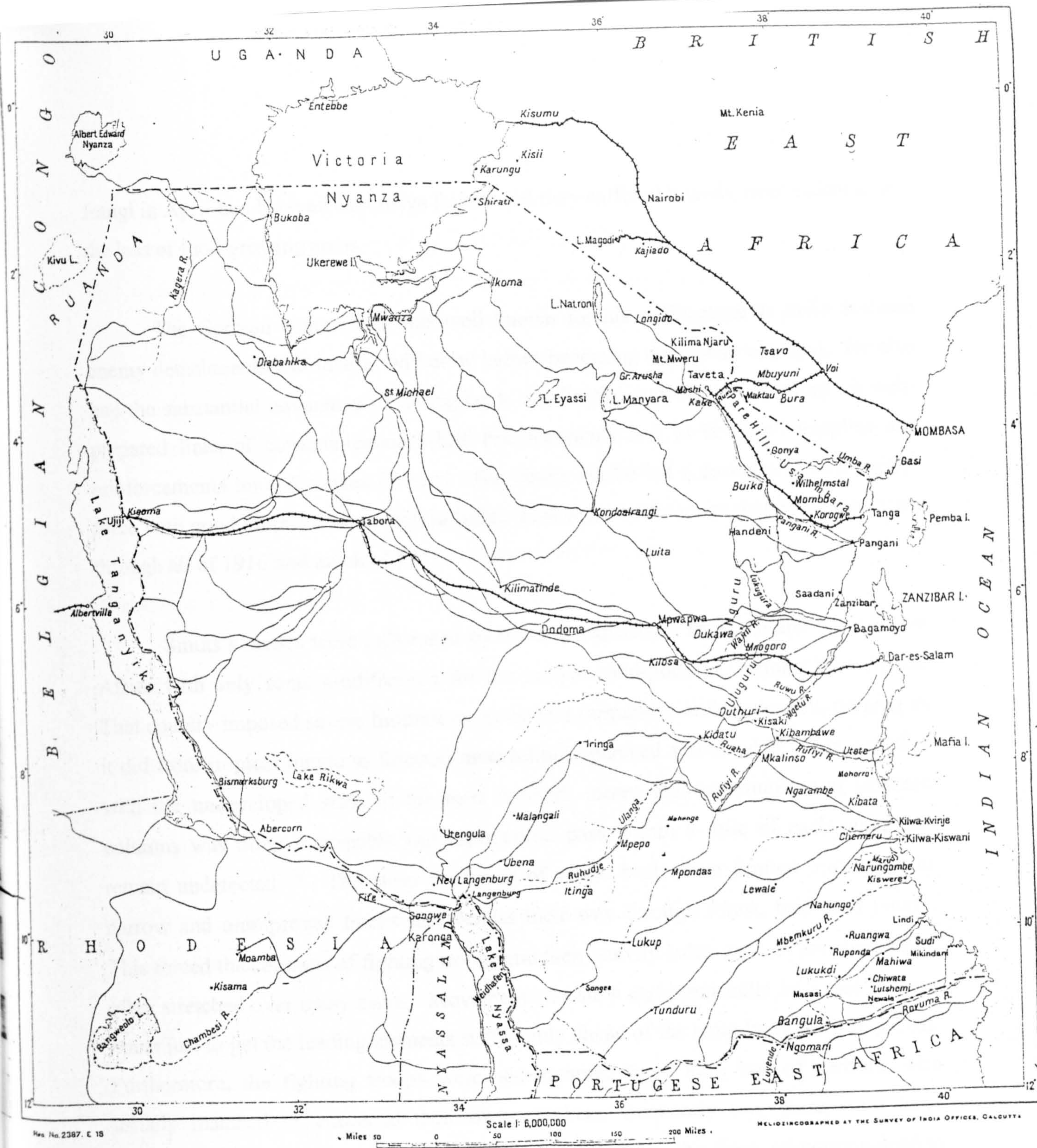
<sup>101</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 25 January 1917, Appendix 46a, Telegram Hoskins to General Ewart 22 January – this repeats Telegram 28209, CIGS to Hoskins. It cites a figure of 600 whites and 6000 *Askaris*. The reply is in War Diary GHQ, 27 January 1917, Appendix 54, Telegram OA 936 Genstaff to CIGS, 27 January and gives the higher figure of 7,500. See also CAB 44/9, p. 3.

<sup>102</sup> Lettow, *Mein Leben*, pp. 20-98.

<sup>103</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>104</sup> MS von Lettow-Vorbeck, N 103/33-39. From mid-1916 onwards, von Lettow recorded the amount of available food supplies on almost a daily basis.





GERMAN EAST AFRICA



Irangi in April had been an expensive failure and they suffered heavily from sickness and the loss of food growing areas.

The German commander was well known for his willingness to strike isolated enemy detachments and then to withdraw before becoming decisively engaged. He also had the substantial advantage of falling back into known and friendly territory on well-prepared lines of communication while his opponents had to bring all supplies and reinforcements long distances forward. But above all, he led a strong and well-trained force with good morale and the will to fight. This was an advantage that he would retain through all of 1916 and much of 1917.

Smuts's tactics were influenced by his own experience in South and South-West Africa with only some modification for the unique conditions in German East Africa. That country imposed severe limitations on tactical formations and movement, ranging as it did from tropical jungle to forested mountains to parched scrubland.<sup>105</sup> This, together with the undeveloped state of the road network meant that communication between columns was often impossible and units could pass within a mile of each other and remain undetected.<sup>106</sup> The sheer thickness of virgin bush often limited movement to narrow and unimproved tracks that wound their way through forest, bush and jungle. This forced the columns of fighting troops and their heavily laden carriers into single file, often stretched over many miles. Movement was slow and predictable as it took several hours just to get the leading elements sufficiently ahead of the main body for it to set off. Furthermore, the fighting troops were accompanied by a long line of carriers, who usually matched or exceeded their own numbers; frequently too, there were large quantities of pack and slaughter animals. Behind them, the lines of communication troops would be straining to maintain touch in order to push the required quantities of food, ammunition and equipment to the forward areas.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 12-14.

<sup>106</sup> Sheppard, Brig Gen S H, "Some Notes on Tactics in the East African Campaign", *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, XLVIII, No. 215, (April 1919), pp. 142-143; Orr, Colonel G M, "Random Recollections of East Africa 1914-1918", *Army Quarterly*, XI, (1928), pp. 292.

<sup>107</sup> Ridgway, Brig-Gen R T, "With No. 2 Column: German East Africa 1917", I, *Army Quarterly*, V, (1922), pp. 13-17; Orr, "Afterthoughts", pp. 697-701.

Strong rivers, rocky outcrops and swamps caused time-consuming diversions, while navigation itself was extremely problematic owing to the virtually non-existent state of survey and consequently inaccurate maps. It was frequently necessary to march cross-country on compass bearings with distances measured only by human pacing and timing. Climate played its part, as for much of the year there was insufficient precipitation to support grazing, while for the remainder there was a superabundance of water that impeded movement, made life generally miserable and promoted sickness. Furthermore, dense vegetation often reduced visibility to a few metres and often even less when moving through bamboo thickets or elephant grass. In the dry season, dust raised by the marching columns enshrouded everybody, while heavy rain and mist made the wet season even more trying.<sup>108</sup>

In a land largely devoted to subsistence agriculture, it was impossible to sustain the indigenous inhabitants and the passing armies without long supply chains and magazines. Disease of both man and beast was to prove decisive; malaria, dysentery, pneumonia and typhoid weakened the human ranks while trypanosomiasis, horse sickness and rinderpest wiped out the animals.

The emphasis on speed left little time for accurate reconnaissance and locating the exact position and depth of the enemy's positions was difficult. For the flanking column, even the initial finding of the defences was a major concern and they often relied upon the sounds of firing in order to close in for the fight. Liaison by telephone or runners between friendly columns was only possible once the objective was near, but these methods were hindered by the activity of the German defenders who often captured runners and cut communication cables. While the British deployed a wireless transceiver with each column, they were insufficient in number as well as being too heavy and unreliable to be usable in controlling a tactical battle. The strain on the advancing allied troops was magnified by the pressures to advance as quickly as possible in virtually unknown country where the first sign of the enemy was usually a short range rifle ambush or a devastating burst of machine gun fire from well concealed trenches. From

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<sup>108</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 12–14; Crowe, *General Smuts' Campaign*, pp. x-xiii.



this unpleasant opening, the battle then followed a predictable sequence, based on German dispositions.<sup>109</sup>

Despite these disadvantages, Smuts was to apply his methods repeatedly, seemingly regardless of the terrain, the weather or the state of his troops.<sup>110</sup> However, at this point, it is important to distinguish the concept of the local flanking attack, which was used to great effect by both sides, and which seldom extended more than several thousand yards from the centre of the battle, from the extended moves favoured by Smuts. These wide turning moves frequently involved marches of up to 10 to 30 miles parallel from the enemy positions before cutting into the rear area. The results of these moves were frequently much less effective than desired.<sup>111</sup>

Throughout most of the campaign, the Germans' defences followed a familiar pattern; they were usually centred on the sole track in an area facing the expected direction of enemy approach. Carefully sited machine guns with interlocking arcs of fire formed the backbone of the system. These were supplemented by cleared fields of fire and range markers, with the guns being manned by selected German NCOs. The rest of the line was then built up around the guns with a series of fire trenches for riflemen placed on the flanks and in depth. The flanks of the entire locality were then anchored on some type of impassable terrain, be it swamp, hills or impenetrable undergrowth. A further series of depth positions were then constructed to the rear of the forward trenches, sometimes as many as eight deep. Finally, a strong and well motivated reserve was kept on the flanks, ready to fend off any breakthroughs or to infiltrate any gaps that appeared between the attacking forces.<sup>112</sup>

The difficulty of the terrain and restricted visibility made the attacker's progress slow and time-consuming while also masking the movement of the reserve. Once

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<sup>109</sup> Sheppard, "Notes on Tactics", pp. 152-153, "Ridgway, "With No. 2 Column", I, pp. 25-27.

<sup>110</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 392-393; Orr, Colonel G M, "The Winter Campaign of 1916 in East Africa", *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, LX, (1930), p. 78.

<sup>111</sup> Orr, "Smuts vs Lettow: A Critical Phase in East Africa: August to September 1916", *Army Quarterly*, VIII, (1925), p. 296; Downes, Capt W D, *With the Nigerians in German East Africa*, London: Methuen & Co, 1919, p. 146; Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 202-203.

<sup>112</sup> Sheppard, "Notes on Tactics", pp. 150-155; Ridgway, "With No. 2 Column", I, pp. 18-19 and 23; Orr, "From Rumbo to the Rovuma The Odyssey of 'One' Column in East Africa in 1917", *Army Quarterly*, VII, (1924), pp. 111-115.

initiated, counter-attacks were fast and furious with the aim of surprising and disrupting the attackers at a time when they were beginning to tire and lose formation. The Germans would then probe to find and, if possible, turn their opponent's flank, and break into the vulnerable rear area with its attendant carriers, ammunition and stores. Success would be reinforced by further reserves if possible. Such tactics required the British to deploy their own local reserves promptly and decisively.

On the other hand, the British usually were advancing in a brigade-sized column, with three to four battalions in single file, of which one would form the advanced guard. The leading company of the advanced guard would be usually be the first to run into the German forward picquets. After reacting to short-range fire, the battalion would deploy the remaining companies forward and attempt to drive back the relatively weak security elements as quickly as possible while the rest of the column kept closed up behind it. Eventually, the main defensive position would be reached and the advanced guard prevented from further advance by heavy machine gun and rifle fire. As the position would normally be well sited and impossible to rush, the column commander would bring up his remaining battalions to form a firing line on either side of the advanced guard battalion while retaining a strong reserve. These actions were intended to enable the maximum number of troops to engage the defenders while simultaneously searching for an open flank. This process would take at least an hour as the rear units had to move forward and then hack through the bush to get to the flanks. The column commander would be careful to keep his units tightly grouped and in physical contact with each other while he maintained control through hand-laid telephone lines. Generally, he and his staff would be no more than 400 yards behind the leading troops while commanding officers of battalions would be immediately to the rear of the forward companies.<sup>113</sup>

If an open or weakly defended flank could be found, then immediately a battalion would be sent to turn it while the firing line continued to engage the enemy. At this time it was vital that the column commander retained a strong reserve under his personal control as the defenders would be attempting to find the end of the British line with the

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<sup>113</sup> Ridgway, "With No. 2 Column", I, pp. 24-25; Orr, Colonel G M, "From Rumbo to the Rovuma", pp. 111-112; Stronge, Capt H C



same intentions. It was not unusual for the flanking moves of both sides to collide and a series of hasty attacks and counter-attacks would ensue and reserves would rapidly be committed. Owing to the strength of the defences and their reliance on machine guns, it was rare for the frontally engaged troops to make significant progress until a flanking move succeeded or the mountain guns, and later Stokes mortars, could be brought into action. Indirect fire support was critical, but the artillery observers had to crawl forward into the firing line, telephone cable had to be laid back to the guns, whose crews in any case would be engaged in felling trees and clearing bush for muzzle clearance. When the Germans had artillery deployed, they were usually able to bring it into action much more quickly as they had pre-prepared fire positions, and had already laid telephone cable and reconnoitred the target areas.

The fighting usually lasted until darkness when either further counter-attacks were launched or the Germans decided to withdraw into the bush. In the latter case, the advancing force was usually too disorganised or worn down to pursue effectively. If all went well, the defenders would carry away their dead and wounded; if not, they would be left on the field of battle for the British to treat and clear. With at least four carriers to a stretcher, it took relatively few casualties to deplete the mobility of a column for at least a day.<sup>114</sup>

In discussing tactics, careful distinction must be made between the advance to contact and the deliberate attack. In the former case, the advancing columns would be aware of the general presence of the enemy but his intentions and locations would be unknown. Accordingly, the columns had the mission of advancing as quickly as possible, to locate any positions and then to engage and drive off any rearguards. The details of the attack off the line of march would then generally follow the sequence outlined above. However, if the position was found to be too strong for a hasty attack or had been previously located through the efforts of the Intelligence Scouts, a more deliberate attack would become necessary. In this instance, a thorough reconnaissance of the position

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T, "Bush Warfare Against Trained Troops", *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, LXXII, (1927), pp. 608-610.

<sup>114</sup> CAB 45/19, "A Record of the Doings of the Oversea Contingent, Nigeria Regiment, during the Campaign in German East Africa: December 1916 – December 1917", [n.d.] [E St Stobart appended in writing], pp. 35-38; Downes, "With the Nigerians", pp. 178-179.

would be attempted while several columns equipped with artillery and mortars would be brought up. A holding attack would be launched against the centre of the German defences with one or two column-sized flanking movements attempted from the outset. Such moves would often involve a march of no more than two to three miles off the centre of the action before striking inwards. Thereafter, the normal round of probes, counter-attacks and commitment of reserves would follow until either side decided to break off the battle. Battles would often last until past dark; their duration thereafter depended on the importance of the position to the German commander with a night-time withdrawal often the result. If not, both sides would entrench in place and try to reorganise for the next phase.<sup>115</sup>

Such tactics were effective, but at a cost in casualties. Whilst the *Schutztruppe* normally managed to use the bush and darkness to effect their escape from their pursuers, they suffered from steady attrition of their irreplaceable troops, particularly the German leaders. It was true that the British casualties were usually greater than the Germans', but they were normally on the attack and had much greater reserves. Furthermore, von Lettow's aggressive temperament and desire for decisive victories often led to heavy losses on his side that, on a percentage basis, equalled those of his British opponent.<sup>116</sup>

If the British were hampered by lack of operational originality in 1916, the Germans also had enormous tactical advantages. They had a huge area in which to fight and the terrain was uniformly difficult to traverse. If mobility was poor, at least they had the time and resources to plan and organise their retreats. They were on the defensive and could largely choose their battles. On the other hand, the advancing British forces were moving away from their depots on precarious lines of communication and into unknown territory. The urgent imperatives of finding water and trying to be able to supply the forward troops alternately forced and hindered the pace of advance. Opportunities were lost through exhaustion of the fighting force or lack of supplies; under-nourishment and sickness played major roles in dissipating the strength of the

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<sup>115</sup> This occurred at Bweho Chini, Narunyu, Narungombe, and Mahiwa to list a few.

<sup>116</sup> Despite von Lettow's claims of great victories, at Mahiwa both sides lost nearly 25 per cent of the engaged forces. Similarly, losses at Kibata, Narungombe and Lioma were high on both sides.



attackers.<sup>117</sup> Certainly, Lettow made the most of these advantages, which, combined with Smuts's reluctance to fight heavy battles, enabled him to keep his force largely intact throughout the year.<sup>118</sup>

## THE OPPOSING FORCES IN SEPTEMBER 1916

By late September 1916, the EAEF had advanced over 300 miles from its starting positions in the Kilimanjaro area. During the advance south, two halts had been necessary, the first owing to the annual monsoon in April and May and the second at the end of July to replenish supplies. The second was particularly worrisome as the lack of adequate logistical preparations meant that much of the force was on the verge of physical collapse. By his own admission, Smuts had driven his force hard,<sup>119</sup> but had failed to appreciate that physical endurance could only go so far and that soldiers and followers had to be fed, clothed, and supplied adequately if they were to be fit for further military operations. Despite considerable advice and warnings from his staff,<sup>120</sup> he had pressed the advance without ensuring that the unglamorous but critical matters of transport, medical support and rear area organisation were in place beforehand. He now contemplated plunging into the low-lying, pestilential and totally undeveloped hinterland south of the railway with a force that was already suffering heavily from sickness and malnourishment.<sup>121</sup> However, the weakness of the troops and the nearing onset of the short rainy season made an operational pause essential.

In the east, the Royal Navy had disembarked landing forces at Dar-es-Salaam and at the remaining coastal ports between that town and the southern border with Portuguese East Africa.<sup>122</sup> The Central Railway was almost entirely in Allied hands although German demolitions had put it out of order for some time to come. If General Smuts's

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<sup>117</sup> Crowe, *General Smuts' Campaign*, pp. 9-10; Orr "From Rumbo to the Rovuma", pp. 110-112; Ridgway, "With No. 2 Column", pp. 15-16; Ridgway, Brig-Gen R T, "With No. 2 Column: German East Africa 1917: Part 2", *Army Quarterly*, VI, pp. 260-261.

<sup>118</sup> Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>119</sup> Crowe, *General Smuts' Campaign*, p. xi. Smuts himself said in the foreword "It may be said that I expected too much of my men, and that I imposed too hard a task on them under the awful conditions of this tropical campaigning. I do not think so. I am sure it was not possible to conduct this campaign successfully in any other way."

<sup>120</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, p. 393; Orr, "Random Recollections", pp. 290-291; South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Documentation Directorate, GSWA, Box 26, 11 September 1916, Telegram 2 Div to Smuts. Henceforth GSWA.

<sup>121</sup> WO 95/5291, War Diary GHQ, 22 September 1916, Appendix 32a, Telegram OA 412, Smuts to CIGS, 21 September.

<sup>122</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 381-383 and 386-389.

British: S  
 Smuts D  
 Van Deventer D  
 Crewe O  
 Hawthorn. H  
 A. Murray R  
 Rodger P  
 Posie & Garrisons ●  
 Lines of Communication.....

Belgian  
 WEADDEASER S  
 Lines of Communication.....  
 Posie ●

Portuguese:  
 Posie ●

German:  
 von Lettow LT  
 Wahle W  
 Wittgens W  
 Detachments A  
 Posie A

**CONTINUED BY METEOROLOGICAL SECTION**

**1st. October 1916.**

Scale 147 Miles to 1 Inch

Miles 100 50 0 100 200 Miles

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physical objectives had been reached, then so had those of the Belgians. They had fielded two brigades, each with six battalions, totalling about 5,000 soldiers.<sup>123</sup> They were now winding down operations as they had achieved their political aim, namely to gain a bargaining chip in any peace negotiations, and were keen to hold the captured regions of Urundi and Ruanda.<sup>124</sup> The *Brigade Nord* held the area of Tabora and the north, while the *Brigade Sud* was deployed to the south and south-east of that town, facing *Abt Wahle*.<sup>125</sup> They had been worn down during the campaign, but were still more than a match for Wahle's much smaller force. However, the termination of Belgian operations was not discouraged by Smuts and shortly thereafter he turned down the opportunity to seek further assistance.<sup>126</sup> After much disagreement, the Belgians finally agreed to recruit 5,000 porters for their ally and to leave an occupation force of some 2,000 Congolese troops with the remainder being withdrawn back to their own colony.<sup>127</sup>

The situation along the German-Portuguese border had been quiet following the disastrous failure of their advance in April and May of 1916. Despite the setback, they retained ambitions of retaking the disputed Kionga triangle and capturing the southern port of Mikandani. To this end, a third expeditionary force of some Portuguese 3,100 soldiers, under Major General F Gil, had arrived in June 1916 to supplement the 19 companies of *Askaris* already in the country.<sup>128</sup> By September, a force of about 2,700 had crossed the River Rovuma, occupying the northern bank and seizing the swampy Kionga triangle that lay in the delta.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>123</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, II, p. 62-63.

<sup>124</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, II, pp. 593-595.

<sup>125</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, II, p. 532 for *Brigade Nord* and p. 574 for *Brigade Sud*.

<sup>126</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1257, 22 September 1916, Telegram 23102, CIGS to Smuts, p. 336. "...although the Belgian Government has expressed reluctance to extend the operations of its troops beyond Tabora, yet it has never, categorically, refused to do so, and it probably could be induced to order co-operation in any way that you wished, with the object of disposing of the German forces retiring from Tabora. Please keep me informed of your wishes in this matter"; No. 1316, 18 October 1916, Telegram F 5867, Smuts to CIGS, p. 356. "Even taking into account the heavy wastage of present numbers from malaria, I hope to be able to finish the campaign without Belgian assistance. If the Belgians press for unacceptable conditions it will be better to finish without them. I shall not, however, be able in that case to release South African Infantry as I had hoped, and the formation of additional South African units for service in Europe will be delayed."; No. 1320, 21 October 1916, Telegram F 5880, Smuts to CIGS.

<sup>127</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, II, p. 596.

<sup>128</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 243-244. An expeditionary force of about 1500 had landed in 1914 with another of similar size arriving in February 1916. Both had effectively been destroyed by sickness and the bulk of the soldiers evacuated to Europe. The third expeditionary force and the existing *Askari* companies were split between protecting the 600 km long frontier and preparing for invasion; Cann, John, "Mozambique, German East Africa and the Great War", *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, XII, No. 1, (2001), pp. 132-133.

<sup>129</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1262, 26 September 1916, Telegram X 757, Smuts to CIGS, London, p. 337; Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 388-391.

The German main body had evaded encirclement in the Uluguru Mountains south of Morogoro and was now in the vicinity of the steamy and low-lying Mgeta River valley. The *Westtruppen* had broken clean from the Belgians and was now making their way eastward in an attempt to rejoin the troops in the Mahenge area. Small detachments watched the British coastal enclaves and a weak *Abteilung* was deployed on the southern border opposite the Portuguese.

### **DETAILED DISPOSITIONS**

Looking now in more detail, the main body of the British force under General Smuts had pushed south of Morogoro and swept around the sides of the imposing and forest clad Uluguru Mountains. Major General A R Hoskins's 1<sup>st</sup> East African (EA) Division, composed of British, Indian and African units, had moved around the eastern slopes to Dutumi while Major General C Brits's 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Division, overwhelmingly South African in composition, had moved along the western sides to Kissaki. Further to the west, Major General J L van Deventer's 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Division, again largely South African, had more or less ground to a halt in and south of Kilossa Station on the Central Railway. Much further north and west, Brigadier General Sir Charles Crewe's brigade-sized Lake Force was in the process of disbandment, having completed its work with its Belgian allies. Finally, many miles to the south and west, Brigadier General E Northey's Rhodesia-Nyasaland Frontier Force, or Norforce as it was usually known, was consolidating its positions around the hilltop town of Iringa, having advanced through many miles of tangled forest and mountain to get there.

The 1<sup>st</sup> EA Division consisted of two understrength brigades, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> EA mustering four and six understrength battalions respectively. It had one mountain and three field batteries of artillery together with four companies of mounted infantry and cavalry.<sup>130</sup> The exertions of the previous months together with the onset of heavy rain in

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<sup>130</sup> Perry, F W (comp), *History of the Great War: Order of Battle Divisions Part 5a: The Divisions of Australia, Canada and New Zealand and those in East Africa*, Newport, Gwent: Ray Westlake Military Books, 1992, p. 85. Henceforth Perry, "*Order of Battle Part 5a*". The 1<sup>st</sup> East African Brigade was composed of 2<sup>nd</sup> Loyal North Lancashire (2 LNL), 2<sup>nd</sup> Rhodesia Regiment (2 RR), 130<sup>th</sup> Baluchis, and a composite battalion of the Kashmir Rifles (KR). The 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade had 25<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers (RF), 3<sup>rd</sup> KAR, 129<sup>th</sup> Baluchis, 40<sup>th</sup> Pathans, 57<sup>th</sup> Rifles, 29<sup>th</sup> Punjabis and the Gold Coast Regiment (GCR). Unbrigaded was the mixed race 1<sup>st</sup> Cape Corps (1 CC) battalion from South Africa.



late September forced the division to halt on the north bank of the River Mgeta, centred on the village of Dutumi while patrols linked up with 3<sup>rd</sup> Division now at Kissaki.<sup>131</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Division was made up of two brigades, one mounted and one infantry. The 1<sup>st</sup> South African (SA) Mounted Brigade had five weak mounted regiments together with a motorcycle unit and an armoured car battery. The 3<sup>rd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade was based on four infantry battalions while the division had one mountain and four field batteries of artillery in support.<sup>132</sup> Divisional headquarters remained at Kilossa while the 1<sup>st</sup> SA Mounted Brigade had been detached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and a column from 3<sup>rd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade had been pushed south to Kidatu, just north of the Ruaha River. By its own reports, it was greatly weakened, with about 4,752 men capable of operations and a further 1,946 unfit.<sup>133</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Division was similarly composed to the 2<sup>nd</sup>, with a mounted and infantry brigade, both numbered the 2<sup>nd</sup>. The mounted brigade had four regiments plus an armoured car battery, while the infantry brigade had four battalions under command. Artillery support was provided by three field and one howitzer batteries.<sup>134</sup> The mounted troops had been reinforced as mentioned above, but taken together the two brigades could hardly muster 1,200 soldiers. It had concentrated at Kissaki where they met up with an equally weakened 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade.<sup>135</sup>

Norforce was an anomaly as it was technically under the control of the Colonial Office, having been raised to protect the Northern Rhodesian and Nyasaland frontier from German incursions. As the war progressed, the pretence of independence vanished, as Northey, a professional officer who had seen service on the Western Front, was careful to liaise closely with General Smuts and to coordinate his actions with that of the main force. He also put a great deal of care and attention into the preparations for the advance

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<sup>131</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 371-374.

<sup>132</sup> Perry, *Order of Battle Part 5a*, p. 90. The 1<sup>st</sup> SA Mounted Brigade had 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> South African Horse (SAH), the SA Motorcycle Corps and 4<sup>th</sup> Armoured Car Battery. The 3<sup>rd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade had 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> South African Infantry (SAI).

<sup>133</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, p. 374-377. Cites War Diary of 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Division of 27 September 1916.

<sup>134</sup> Perry, *Order of Battle Part 5a*, p. 94. The 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Mounted Brigade had 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> SAH together with 5<sup>th</sup> Light Armoured Car Battery. The 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade had 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> SAI.

<sup>135</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, p. 371.

as well as his supply lines. Consequently, he was able to make good progress as he advanced north-westward into the German colony. Although the opposition was relatively weak, the combination of methodical planning and aggressiveness led his troops to occupy the important hilltop town of Iringa on 29 August.<sup>136</sup> His was a mixed formation with units drawn from South Africa, the Rhodesias and Nyasaland; in all it numbered about 4,700 all ranks, of whom about 3,700 were fighting troops.<sup>137</sup> Tactically, it was split into three independent columns, with Colonel Rodger's South Africans east of Iringa at Hange, Colonel Murray's Rhodesians further east near Muhanga, and Colonel Hawthorn's KAR was south-west of Mahenge at Mkapira, a distance of over 200 miles of difficult mountain, forest and lowland valley. All were further dependent on another 180 miles of vulnerable lines of communication back to Lake Nyassa and thence down the Zambesi river to the coast of Mozambique.<sup>138</sup>

On the other side, Colonel von Lettow's troops were split into three main groupings: in the east and south of the Central Railway was the main body of 29 companies, with 16 under his personal command along the Mgeta and Rufiji, with another 13 under Kraut around Mahenge. Several hundred miles further west and now trying to withdraw east from Tabora, was the *Westbefehlshaber*, Major General Wahle with 12 companies. Finally, in the far south, the newly appointed *Südbefehlshaber*, Captain Looff, was due to take over the three companies facing the Portuguese, making a total of 44 overall.

The detailed dispositions were as follows: the main body had two sub-groupings with the bulk of troops under von Lettow near Dutumi, south-east of the Uluguru Mountains. *Abt von Lieberman* and *Abt Schulz*, each of three companies, were facing 1<sup>st</sup> Division supported by *Abt Klinghardt* of two companies and *Abt Tafel* with two companies and a battery in echelon behind them. *Abt Stemmermann* was held back with the equivalent of four companies. The *Kommandeur* kept two companies as a personal

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<sup>136</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, p. 484.

<sup>137</sup> CAB 44/4, p. 1, and Sketch 67.

<sup>138</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 504-505 and Sketch 67; WO 95/5229, Norforce War Diary, September 1916, "Detailed State of Troops as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 1916".



reserve. Further west and on the other side of the mountain range, *Abt Otto* with six companies and a gun was opposite 3<sup>rd</sup> Division holding Kissaki.<sup>139</sup>

Major General Wahle was in the process of moving eastward to rejoin the main body near Mahenge. He had a force of about 12 companies and two guns divided into four groups. Two of the columns, *Abt von Langenn* and *Abt Zingel*, consisted of three companies and a gun; whereas *Abt Wintgens* had five companies and *Abt Hübener* had the equivalent of a company and much of the support services.<sup>140</sup>

In the Mahenge-Iringa area, Major Kraut assumed command of an enlarged force in mid-September. He had an enormous area to cover and deployed *Abt Schoenfeld* with three and a half companies and two guns along the Ruipa River at Kidatu to prevent any further southward move by 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. *Abt Lincke* was given the task of holding the line of the Ruipa River, midway between Mahenge and Iringa, with five and a half companies and two guns. Its mission was to contain Northey's columns operating out of Iringa. Finally, *Abt Krüger* consisting of four companies, one of which was mounted, was placed to the south-west of Mahenge near Mkapira to guard the *Schutztruppe*'s left flank against the combined columns of Hawthorn and Murray.<sup>141</sup>

Songea had been left virtually unoccupied, owing to lack of troops, and once it had been taken by Northey, a small German detachment was sent to prevent a further advance. Finally, in the south and north of the Rovuma River was a three-company strong *Abteilung* facing the Portuguese.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 231.

<sup>140</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 284-285.

<sup>141</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 251-253.

<sup>142</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 244.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE OPERATIONS OF SEPTEMBER 1916 TO JANUARY 1917

##### PRELIMINARIES TO THE REMAINING OPERATIONS OF 1916

As the 1916 dry season ended, General Smuts was increasingly unhappy with his role in East Africa and worried about the effects of the campaign on his South Africans' morale. As a soldier-politician and conscious of the vulnerability of his government at home, the huge sick-rate and difficulty in keeping his units at even half-strength made him anxious to complete the campaign as quickly as possible. Discontent with the administrative and medical arrangements was growing as it was becoming impossible to ignore the effects of severe under-feeding and the failure to evacuate or treat the sick effectively.

Forced to halt by a combination of rain and exhaustion, the commander-in-chief began to consider the next phase of operations. Although the Germans had been pushed into as unhealthy and low-lying ground as the British, reaching them and then beating them in battle would be a very difficult process. Lacking the resources to advance further, he tried bluff, writing to Governor Schnee at the end of September and calling on him to surrender. However, this stratagem was never likely to tempt von Lettow and the letter was ignored.<sup>143</sup> No longer able to delude himself that his opponents would throw in the towel if given one more push, Smuts now had to face the reality of a prolonged campaign.

The ground would also play a major role in determining the course of future operations as the prospective area of operations was difficult in the extreme. In the east, the low coastal plain extended inland to the broad and low-lying plains of the Rufiji and Ulanga River basins. North-west of Kilwa were the Mtumbei Hills which dominated the coastal and delta areas. From there, the land dipped back into the fluvial plains of the Mgeta, Rufiji and Ruaha rivers until it met the northern tip of the Utschungwe

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<sup>143</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 233-234; Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 158.



Mountains, a wide spur of highland that extended from Iringa in the north to Lake Nyassa in the south. Almost in the centre of this broad central plain was the Mahenge plateau which towered above the steaming forest below.

The lowlands were hot, humid and pestilential. There were no roads and movement was by the few footpaths leading from village to village. The numerous rivers were surrounded by dense jungle, high grass, and swamp. Owing to the combination of broad, flat valleys surrounded by steep escarpments and massifs, they were known to flood extensively during the rains. The Rufiji itself was over 400 metres wide during the dry season and during the wet, flooding could reach six miles on either side of its banks. The physical difficulties were compounded by the presence of vast quantities of malarial mosquitoes and the dangerous tropical diseases that were so prevalent throughout their area.

The highlands, particularly around Iringa, were wild and thickly forested although the climate was much less trying than in the valleys below. If the roads were poor and communications also difficult, they still offered a much better approach than through the Rufiji basin. German-held Mahenge was known to be a population centre based on fertile uplands and a relatively healthy climate, but any approaches would have to cross either the Ulanga River from the west or the Ruaha River from the north.<sup>144</sup>

## **PLANS FOR THE OFFENSIVE**

Faced with these and other difficulties, Smuts began to look at options for wrapping up the campaign. He wired his plans to the CIGS on 22 September, outlining both the difficulties and possibilities of a future advance. He noted that the Germans no longer appeared to be falling back onto the Mahenge plateau. They were deployed in three major groupings; the main body under von Lettow to the south of the Mgeta River running east and south toward the coast, a force under Kraut in the Mahenge area, and finally the western group under Wahle still in the vicinity of Tabora.

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<sup>144</sup> WO 153/111, Map of East Africa; Crowe, *General Smuts' Campaign*, Sketch 4; CAB 45/73, Sketch 74, "The Strategic Situation, 1

While Smuts was naturally focused on dealing with von Lettow's main body in the east, he was becoming increasingly concerned about the progress of Wahle's force in the far west. Abandoning Tabora on 19 September to the Belgians, it was believed to be making its way eastward to rejoin von Lettow, probably via the Great Ruaha or Ulanga River valleys. The gap between 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and Norforce was still more than sufficient to allow the *Westtruppen* an uninterrupted passage to the east, which in turn would threaten the vulnerable lines of communications including the small and isolated garrison in Iringa. Smuts was quite clear that his Belgian allies would not pursue the withdrawing force owing to severe constraints in their supply system, lack of political will, and indeed, he had made no effort to convince them otherwise.<sup>145</sup> His own troops in the area, the Lake Force, were unable to move further south owing to lack of sufficient transport and were in the process of disbandment.

In light of the situation, and despite his tremendous difficulties with supply and health, Smuts proposed to keep the bulk of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division between the Great Ruaha River and Kilimatinde to protect his lines of communication and to prevent Wahle from linking up with Kraut. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions would advance south from the Mgeta to the Rufiji while a brigade recently landed at Kilwa would advance north-eastwards to Utete on the lower Rufiji. Northey's force was expected to push east from Iringa and reach Mahenge within a few days. In the far south, Smuts left offensive operations to the newly arrived Portuguese Expeditionary Force, although he expected no practical assistance from them.<sup>146</sup>

Just five days later, his opinion had changed as the sick rate along the Mgeta rose alarmingly. Learning that the area between there and the Rufiji became a vast swamp during October and November, he pulled back Brits's 3<sup>rd</sup> Division to Morogoro for rest and recuperation. Modifying his plans, he decided against a major advance on the Rufiji from the north and proposed to cut down the troops on the Mgeta to a brigade. Kilwa

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December 1916".

<sup>145</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D 1*, No. 1248, 20 September 1916, Telegram OA 411, Smuts to CIGS, p. 333.

<sup>146</sup> WO 95/5291, War Diary GHQ, 22 September 1916, Appendix 32a, Telegram OA 412, Smuts to CIGS, 22 September.



would receive a second brigade and would then operate against von Lettow from the south-east. In light of Wahle's continued withdrawal eastwards, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was ordered to send its infantry brigade to Nyukwa's, a ford on the Ruaha River, to be followed later by the mounted brigade, currently supporting 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.<sup>147</sup>

A personal visit to van Deventer's division in early October confirmed his worst fears, as the route forward from Kilossa Station to Nyukwa's:

"...proceeds 30 miles through the area which must be swamp or lake in rainy season and requires heavy engineering work in other parts. Troops sent that way must be cut off from supplies in rainy season, now fast approaching. On same ground operations from KISSAKI to RIFIJI [sic] are ruled out. In view of these facts and serious state health of troops and need for thorough rest I doubt whether final advance against enemy can be resumed before beginning of January."<sup>148</sup>

These gloomy prognostications were confirmed shortly afterwards by a report from 2<sup>nd</sup> Division that poor roads and lack of transport would prevent it from moving before the first week of November.<sup>149</sup> This unwelcome news meant that Northey would be on his own for the critical period when pressure from both west and east was beginning to develop.

Despite having had his plans accepted in principle by London, Smuts could not ignore the dire physical state of his force, which urgently required rest and reorganisation. Optimistically, he informed Robertson that he believed that his supply situation could be resolved within a fortnight and that the lines of communication running north to British East Africa could be closed down as soon as the Central Railway was reopened. This was tempered by the advice that, as the rains began in late September the low-lying river valleys would become increasingly waterlogged and impassable for any

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<sup>147</sup> WO 95/5291, War Diary GHQ, 27 September 1916, Appendix 36a, Telegram OA 491, Smuts to CIGS, 27 September. This change of mind is puzzling as the facts about the climate and geography of the region had been known to his staff since early September.

<sup>148</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 8 October 16, Appendix 10a, Telegram OA 615, Smuts to CIGS, 8 October.

<sup>149</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 10 October 1916, Entry 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions. The building of roads to Iringa would take at least one month while transport was barely sufficient to cover day to day needs and was completely inadequate to build up stocks.

sort of wheeled transport. In the short term, it was essential to withdraw as many troops as possible back to the Central Railway to ease the problems of supply in the forward areas.

While the above assessment was superficially correct, it glossed over a number of problem areas. Smuts's desire to rest the forward formations and to develop his supply lines was sound, but grossly underestimated the time and resources required. The troops had already passed nearly 50-100 miles beyond their original destination on the Central Railway and there had been no opportunity to stockpile supplies. The railway itself was out of action and supplies had to travel over 300 miles from the railhead at Korogwe on the Northern Railway. It would be some time before the port and rail links would be fully operational, and until then it would be impossible to build up the large stockpiles necessary for a further offensive. The ravages of the tsetse fly and horse sickness ruled out any sustained use of animal transport despite the arrival of over 600 new wagons since June; animals could not be kept alive long enough.<sup>150</sup> Mechanical transport, particularly the 300 extra light Ford Jigger cars, offered some help, but they did not reach the forward areas until the end of September.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, there were insufficient drivers or vehicles to build up large forward reserves of food and ammunition. The poor condition of the few existing roads was likely to worsen dramatically in the nearing rains; in the low-lying areas they would vanish under water altogether. This left the only alternative of human portage, a system already suffering under the pressures of war. If highly inefficient as a means of moving material, it was flexible and could cross ground or water that no vehicle could attempt. However, the carriers themselves were becoming increasingly difficult to recruit (or coerce) as the military requirements escalated and casualties mounted.

It was also an unpalatable fact for the British command that, even if the railway could deliver supplies from the port of Dar-es-Salaam to Morogoro or Kilossa, those

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<sup>150</sup> Blenkisopp, Maj-Gen Sir L J and Rainey, Lt-Col J W, *History of the Great War: Based on Official Documents: Veterinary Services*, London: HMSO, 1925, pp. 416-417. Henceforth, *Veterinary Services*.

<sup>151</sup> Crowe, *General Smuts' Campaign*, p. 217-218. Animals seldom lasted longer than six weeks and it generally took a month to break them in before they could be used to pull wagons. The Ford Cars arrived in August and it took over a month to bring them into full operational use.



railheads were still a considerable distance from the forward areas. The line from Mikesse on the Central Railway to the Mgeta was notoriously difficult as it had been carved out of mountain and virgin forest with many improvised crossings of rivers. The route from Kilossa to Kidete was less mountainous, but suffered from extensive patches of sand and black cotton soil that impeded movement substantially. Furthermore, it passed through a very bad "fly belt" and few animals survived for long after the passage.

In his haste to cut off von Lettow, Smuts had ignored the fact that the landings and shipping needed to capture the remaining Indian Ocean ports had diverted scarce shipping and resources away from the critical and immediate task of clearing the port of Dar-es-Salaam and developing the lines of communication along the Central Railway. He had eliminated the risk of another blockade-runner landing supplies, but at the cost of delay to his own logistical build-up. This was far from academic as the fighting troops were in a state of semi-starvation and severely afflicted with sickness. Without a functional port and railway, he had absolutely no chance of bringing forward the quantities of food and equipment needed to stabilise, let alone improve, the situation.

Grand plans for sweeping encirclements were fine for the map, but the enforced immobility of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in the west and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division at Morogoro, together with the slow build up of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Kilwa, meant that only Northey's troops were capable of any sort of offensive operations in the near future.<sup>152</sup> Given the fact that so many soldiers were seriously debilitated by disease, Smuts decided on medical grounds to reduce numbers and to repatriate the worst affected.<sup>153</sup> A series of medical boards were set up to assess the situation and the answer was bleak - some 12,000 South Africans were medically downgraded and ordered home. This represented some two-thirds of the force that had arrived only in March and April of the same year. For the predominantly British and Indian units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, arrangements were made for the piecemeal replacement of the worst affected units. It would be several months before the worst-affected units would be ordered to Egypt or India, as ongoing operations and

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<sup>152</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 10 October 1916, Entry 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions. Van Deventer informed GHQ that his formation could not move until at least the beginning of November.

<sup>153</sup> WO 95/5300, War Diary DMS, 24 September 1916, Appendix V, Letter DMS to DA&QMG, 24 September.

shipping shortages delayed their withdrawal.<sup>154</sup> It was the indigenous, but still small, KAR that survived the rigours of the campaign best.<sup>155</sup>

The first formation to be disbanded was the exiguous 3<sup>rd</sup> Division under Major General Brits on 15 October. It had withered away during the final advance to the Mgeta and only a much reduced composite mounted brigade was left behind to reinforce van Deventer. The now redundant Lake Force was broken up on the following day. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the weakest units were amalgamated and joined by the survivors of Brits's decimated force, amounting to a reduced 1<sup>st</sup> SA Mounted brigade and 3<sup>rd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division moved to Kilwa with the 2<sup>nd</sup> and newly formed 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigades while the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade remained on the Mgeta Front. It and the Force Reserve, the reduced 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade, remained under the direct control of General Smuts.<sup>156</sup>

In comparison, Norforce's losses through illness were substantial, although nowhere near as bad as Smuts's and large scale evacuation was not required. This reflected the slightly healthier climate through which it had operated, but also the great personal attention paid to medical and supply matters by General Northey.

## THE MGETA LINE

While the high command was pondering its future moves, much of the force remained in close contact with the Germans separated by the swampy and unhealthy Mgeta River. Neither side relished the unpleasant living conditions nor the dense bush that made it ideal for raids and ambushes. In fact, it was singularly ill-chosen as a forward line with swamps extending for some distance on either side of the river and being distinctly malarious. Even by East African standards, the lines of communication were exceptionally difficult and the humble porters bore the main burden. Both sides had to

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<sup>154</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 25 January 1917, Appendix 46a, Telegram OA 846, Hoskins to Ewart, 25 January; Appendix 46b, Telegram OA 847, Genstaff, Dutumi to Genstaff, Dar-es-Salaam, 22 January.

<sup>155</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, Lt-Col H, *The King's African Rifles*, Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1956, pp. 332-333 and 701. At 1 July 1916, the KAR stood at nearly 8,300 all ranks; by 1 January 1917 the numbers had risen to 15,600.

<sup>156</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 15 October 1916, Entry 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions; 16 October 1916, Entry *Lake Det. & Belgian Force*; 24 October 1916, Appendix 29, Telegram F 5892, Smuts to CIGS, 24 October.



struggle to move supplies forward on narrow tracks that produced dense clouds of dust when dry and dissolved in rain. The Germans, too, found it very difficult to keep supplies moving and expended considerable effort in trying to feed the troops.

As the rain fell, and operations wound down, much effort was expended in trying to disrupt the other side's supply chain by small-scale patrols. These achieved no decisive results, but did much to lower morale and increase the sense of isolation. The withdrawal of troops continued with 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade largely holding the Mgeta while the remnants of 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Inf Bde held the forward positions at Kidete further to the west. As the front remained static, large labour gangs of Africans were engaged in the cutting of roads while the engineers worked on improving the bridges across the numerous rivers and streams. Unfortunately for them, the continuing rain in October and November undid much of this valiant effort and large sections of the "road" dissolved into mud.<sup>157</sup>

In October, the British sensibly abandoned attempts to hold the southern bank, keeping only piquets on the northern side with the main body pulled back north onto higher ground. The Germans responded similarly, keeping only *Abt Otto* on the forward line with the remainder of troops drawn back to the Rufiji.<sup>158</sup> Otto's force numbered some eight companies with 950 rifles, 14 machine guns, and two guns.<sup>159</sup> He concentrated the bulk of his troops some 20 miles south of the river, holding the track junction at Alt Behobeho, where he could react to any moves coming from Kissaki or Dutumi.<sup>160</sup>

## **NORTHEY'S ADVANCE IN THE SOUTH**

Norforce was handicapped by a serious insufficiency of soldiers for the task at hand. It was a brigade-sized command that fielded less than 4,000 rifles, split into three columns, separated by 200 miles of wild and mountainous terrain.<sup>161</sup> Despite the high

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<sup>157</sup> CAB 44/6, p. 8; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 30 November 1916. Northey's difficulties began slightly later with the first rains starting on 30 November.

<sup>158</sup> CAB 44/6, p. 11.

<sup>159</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1903-1904.

<sup>160</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1906.

<sup>161</sup> Brown, Ian Malcolm, *British Logistics on the Western Front 1914-1919*. By comparison, in early 1915, the BEF held 50 km of front with 350,000 men. A typical brigade frontage on the Western Front would have been about one mile with its lines of communication a maximum of five miles.

quality of his columns and their commanders, Northey was rightly concerned that his lack of concentration and the dangers of being defeated in detail should the *Westtruppen* move east. As well, his troops were suffering from the effects of climate and disease, although nowhere near as badly as the main body to the north.

In early September, Smuts instructed Northey to advance on and occupy the Mahenge plateau.<sup>162</sup> The plan was for Norforce to move westwards through the Ulanga valley, then to ascend the Mahenge plateau before the withdrawing German main body reached that place itself. The capture of Mahenge was part of his grand plan to cut-off the *Schutztruppe*; this, coupled with the advance from Kilwa would make further retreat impossible and force a surrender.

As was becoming usual, this plan was based on major assumptions that were quickly proven false. Apart from expecting Northey to advance another 100 miles across an enormous flood plain during the short rainy season, it presupposed that the *Westtruppen* would pose no threat to his exposed lines of communication.<sup>163</sup> The second was that Smuts's own troops were in absolutely no condition for further offensive operations and restoring the Central Railway to full capacity was going to take months rather than weeks. Finally, it presumed that it would be possible to prevent the Germans from breaking through the 75-100 mile gap that would remain between Norforce and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

Furthermore, the strength of Wahle's force, still some 350 miles to the west, was seriously under-estimated; it was deemed to be only 1,500 strong and ready to surrender. In fact, it exceeded 2,500 and was determined to fight its way through to Mahenge.<sup>164</sup> Even taking the lower estimate of 1,500 at face value, it was still sufficiently large to inflict serious damage on Northey's dispersed command, not to mention his virtually defenceless lines of communication. The option of a continued Belgian pursuit of the

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<sup>162</sup> WO 95/5291, War Diary GHQ, 2 September 1916, Appendix 4, Telegram F 5213, Smuts to CIGS, 2 September.

<sup>163</sup> WO 95/5291, War Diary GHQ, 3 September 1916, Appendix 6, Intelligence Report for 3 September 1916. Smuts's staff were certainly aware that the Ulanga and Ruhudje Rivers would be impassable in the rains and later evidence shows his understanding of the problem. How he expected Northey to survive at Mahenge is unknown.

<sup>164</sup> MSS Afr.s.1715 (300), Williams, Col H P, *History of 1 KAR*, p. 158; CAB 44/4, pp. 2-3; Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, maps 17-19; CAB 44/4, p.1, Sketch 67.





*Westtruppen* does not seem to have been seriously considered. Despite Northey's repeated representations to Smuts on this issue, the commander-in-chief continued to treat the threat as a minor one and provided no real assistance until it was nearly too late.<sup>165</sup>

Despite these misgivings, Northey resumed his advance in mid-September. He realised that there were insufficient resources at Iringa to support a major advance and decided to sustain operations from Lupembe, further to the south-west. To achieve this, he left Rodger's small column at Iringa and ordered Murray to march south-east to link up with Hawthorn at Mkipira on the Ruhudje River. Once united, the combined column would draw supplies from Lupembe and advance north-east through the lowlands towards Mahenge.<sup>166</sup>

Murray began his preparatory move on 16 September, moving forward from Iringa through Muhanga on the eastern edge of the escarpment some 5,000 feet above the Ulanga valley. Brushing aside minor resistance from *Abt Braunschweig*, he began the arduous descent into the sweltering and steamy valley. Under instructions to join Hawthorn as quickly as possible, he was also looking for potential crossing points along the river as he moved south.

While these movements were underway, Colonel von Lettow was making arrangements to reinforce the Mahenge area. Realising that 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was incapable of further advance for the immediate future, he despatched Major Kraut to take charge of the defences west of the plateau. Despite British fears that it would be a major centre of defence, it was in fact very weakly held and served as an administrative hub. The local commander disposed of no more than 80 rifles, while farther to the south *Abt Songea* held the rich area from Wiedhafen to Songea to the Portuguese border with about 30 rifles and a number of auxiliaries. West of Iringa on the valley floor was *Abt Braunschweig* with five

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<sup>165</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 16 and 30 September and 1 October 1916; WO 95/5291, War Diary GHQ, 24 September 1916, Appendix 33a, Telegram OA 445, Smuts to CIGS, 24 September. Smuts signalled "According to German wireless message intercepted the enemy have orders to retire to the ITUMBA Mountains South-East of KILIMATINDE. I have advised NORTHEY to keep a small force at IRINGA and have ordered VAN DEVENTER to send a force to MAHORE and NJUKWA..."

<sup>166</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 28 August and 16 September 1916. Northey considered that advancing to Mahenge would put too great a strain on his already overstretched supply lines.



companies of 900 rifles and 10 machine guns, supported by 12 FK further south at Tanganika with another 250 rifles and 2 machine guns.

Kraut brought important reinforcements south with him, some ten companies, 12 machine guns and six guns, totalling about 1200 rifles; by the beginning of September, the total force amounted to about 17 companies of 2,450 rifles, 24 machine guns and 6 guns.<sup>167</sup> The Mahenge force was now strong enough to prevent a further advance and offered the chance to deal a sharp blow to any isolated column. Most importantly from the *Kommandeur's* point of view, Kraut was a dependable and aggressive officer who would not give up ground without a fight

Kraut's aims were twofold; the first was to block any movement eastward from Iringa and the second was to prevent a link up between Northey and van Deventer over the Ruaha River at Kidatu. He correctly recognised that the former posed the greater threat and decided to leave only *Abt Schoenfeld* as rearguard at Kidatu to hold the enfeebled 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. He then began to move his powerful force southwest of Iringa and took *Abt Braunschweig* under command. As ever, the supply situation was a major concern as the important magazine at Ifakara on the Ruaha and his own lines of communication needed protection, while foodstocks were low owing to a shortage of carriers.<sup>168</sup>

While Kraut was moving south, *Abt Braunschweig* had been thinning out its forward positions on the escarpment and moving into the Ulanga valley owing to a fear of being cut off. Halting the move, Kraut decided to give Braunschweig greater support. He placed *Abt Lincke* in the valley to the rear of the latter's forces, while detaching three companies further south to block possible exit routes from the Utschungwe Mountains and maintaining a small reserve.<sup>169</sup>

This shift was detected by the British, and Northey was growing increasingly concerned about having to deal with Kraut in the east at the same time as Wahle was

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<sup>167</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 250.

<sup>168</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 250-251.

<sup>169</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 253.

moving in the west. He wanted van Deventer to push south to Iringa so in order to concentrate Norforce to meet the new threat, but the former could not move until his shrunken units were reorganised. Furthermore, Smuts remained anxious to continue the advance on Mahenge.<sup>170</sup>

Hawthorn had arrived opposite the Ruhudje crossing of Mkapira on 10 September, and discovered a strong enemy position held by *Abt Krüger* on the west bank. After careful reconnaissance, his column forded the river and manoeuvred the Germans out of their defences on 27 September. The next day Krüger led a strong counter attack with some 500 rifles and 5 machine guns with the aim of dislodging the British.<sup>171</sup> However, Hawthorn was an able commander and was well prepared for the move, holding off the assaults easily. With Murray now only 10 miles to the north-west, the Germans broke off the battle and withdrew further east.

Despite this success and the imminent arrival of Murray, plans for the advance on Mahenge were now altered. Hawthorn had been informed van Deventer had not even started to move and would not be a position to do so for at least a fortnight. This meant that he would have to face the full weight of *Abt Kraut* while operating from an isolated forward position, linked to his base at Lupembe by a very difficult bush trail. He decided to hold firm and withdrew to the west bank of the Ruhudje where he was joined by Murray on 29 September. Together they set up a strong defensive position while waiting for word of van Deventer's move. At the same time, they attempted to bring forward and stockpile as many supplies as possible from Lupembe.<sup>172</sup>

Much further to the east, von Lettow was viewing these developments with disfavour. He was concerned with what he considered his subordinates' propensity to disperse their forces unwontedly and he wanted to strike a blow against what he considered a vulnerable forward column. Accordingly, he issued orders for Kraut to attack Hawthorn's

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<sup>170</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 16, 17 and 21 September 1916; GSWA, Box 26, 11 September 1916, Telegram K 475, 2 Div to Smuts. By mid-September, van Deventer was reporting that his troops were largely incapable of further effort owing to disease and lack of food.

<sup>171</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 254.

<sup>172</sup> MSS Afr.s.1715 (300), *History of 1 KAR*, pp. 159-160.



column at Mkapira on 1 October, although the latter had only six companies in the immediate area, and required reinforcement from *Abt Falkenstein*.<sup>173</sup> Despite von Lettow's impatience, it was impossible to regroup so quickly in the difficult conditions of the Ruhudje valley and Kraut would require several weeks to make adequate preparations for the attack.

While these moves were taking place, Northey was given yet another task for his stretched forces. The town and rich farming district of Songea was guarded by less than a platoon and its denial to the enemy would reduce their room for manoeuvre and help restrict them to the central portion of the colony. Equally importantly, its loss would reduce their food-producing capability considerably, although it is not clear whether Smuts considered this in his decision-making. Accordingly, as soon as he had been reinforced by a newly-raised African battalion, half of it was despatched as an independent column to Songea. Sailing across Lake Nyassa by steamer, it landed at Wiedhafen on 12 September and immediately marched inland. The tiny German garrison there evacuated the place on arrival of the column and it was occupied without a fight on 20 September.<sup>174</sup>

It was not until 25 September that Kraut heard of the landings and he immediately ordered Falkenstein to secure Songea. Learning the next day that the British had already taken that place, he reinforced *Abt Falkenstein* and agreed to its withdrawal to Likuju to maintain observation of the enemy. He also decided to detach two of Lincke's companies to the south to deal with the growing menace, only to be over-ruled by von Lettow on 30 September. He was concerned about the dispersion of Kraut's force as well as about protecting the open road to the undefended Liwale.<sup>175</sup>

The situation did not remain quiet as the Songea force was ordered to advance further east to Mkuju, reaching it on 5 October. Again, the *Kommandeur* was unhappy with the loss of initiative and he ordered Major von Grawert, the military commander of

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<sup>173</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 254.

<sup>174</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 20 September 1916.

<sup>175</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 253-254.

Mahenge, to attack on 12 October with three companies now moving south to reinforce the threatened area. Ominously, the mood of the African population was changing for the worse as they provided the British with information on German deployments and also began to attack isolated posts and their lines of communication. This region had suffered heavily during the *Maji-Maji* rebellion and had no love for the colonial regime. Von Grawert was well aware of the disaffection and became decidedly cautious about rear area security.<sup>176</sup>

### THE SWITCH OF EMPHASIS TO KILWA

As General Smuts had told the CIGS, the obstacles of the Mgeta line made it worthwhile to switch emphasis. He wanted to redeploy the bulk of 1<sup>st</sup> Division to the coast using the seaport of Kilwa as its base.<sup>177</sup> Initially, this option offered the opportunity to strike west along the line of the Matandu River before moving on the enemy lines of communication as well as cutting off the main route to the south of German East Africa. However, while Kilwa Kisiwani had an excellent anchorage, there were absolutely no port facilities and it would be necessary to build up the base before any advance in strength could be attempted. Kilwa having been occupied on 8 September, the remainder of the month was spent in developing its facilities and landing troops. The first formation to be deployed was Brigadier General Hannington's newly established 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade and it was complete by the first week in October.<sup>178</sup>

Hannington was instructed to push rapidly inland in the hopes of cutting off the enemy forces further north. Hannington decided to act quickly. Early reconnaissances revealed that the village of Njinjo, some 42 miles inland along the Matandu valley, provided a jumping off point for either a move north towards the Rufiji, or alternatively, south towards the food-producing areas of Liwale. However, a second and more direct route was found. Instead of following the Matandu inland, it was possible to cross that

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<sup>176</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 255.

<sup>177</sup> There were two places known as Kilwas; Kilwa Kivinje was at near the mouth of the Matandu River and was usually known as Kilwa; Kilwa Kisiwani was located on a island to the south of Kilwa Kivinje and had an excellent deep water anchorage. It would be subsequently developed as the port.

<sup>178</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 November 1916, Appendix 1, Telegram F 5948, Smuts to CIGS, 1 November.



river following the track north-west to the Mtumbei Hills. The key to the area was the junction at the hilltop station of Kibata that dominated the local region. From there, a route ran through the hills straight to Utete which lay on the lower Rufiji and was a major German supply centre. An advance through the Mtumbei Hills promised to be much shorter than the Matandu route, while they were also cooler and healthier than the coastal plain.<sup>179</sup>

The *Ostbefehlshaber*,<sup>180</sup> Captain Loeff, learned of the landings, but decided to concentrate at Utete, leaving the area north of the Rufiji virtually bare of forces. This order was countermanded by von Lettow who wanted Loeff to concentrate on harvesting and collecting the crops in the lower Rufiji. He declined to do so and was promptly sacked. On 12 September, Major von Boemken was designated as *Ostbefehlshaber* while Loeff was despatched to the southern border to take up the new appointment of *Südsbefehlshaber* against the growing Portuguese threat. Captain Stemmermann took over Loeff's troops together with responsibility for the defence of the food producing areas of the lower Rufiji.<sup>181</sup>

In order to have a more direct presence, von Boemken and his four companies were ordered to march for Kilwa on the evening of 12/13 September. After a lengthy journey by river steamer and much marching, they reached Kimbarabara on the southern slopes of the Mtumbei Hills on 25 September. Only a few miles from Kilwa, von Boemken was still some distance from Njinjo, which apart from its key location also housed an important magazine.<sup>182</sup>

The British were also aware of Njinjo's importance and patrols had already reached there. Desperately trying to evacuate the valuable stocks of food to Mpotora, on 22 September von Lettow sent an urgent telegram to von Boemken, ordering him to secure the magazine. However, the latter was more concerned with his own security and withdrew the

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<sup>179</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 336.

<sup>180</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 235. The former *Kommandant* of Dar-es-Salaam, Loeff, was given the new title of *Ostbefehlshaber*, on 25 June 1916. He was made responsible for the defence of the coastal region.

<sup>181</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, page 238.

<sup>182</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 238.





bulk of his *Abteilung* to the west, leaving Njinjo open to a raid that destroyed most of the supplies and forced the evacuation of the village. Instructed to attack, a reluctant von Boemken launched a half-hearted assault that was easily repulsed and then returned to Kimbarabara.<sup>183</sup>

This left the Matandu Valley open and Hannyngton's troops occupied Njinjo without opposition on 7 October. The misfortunes were capped two days later, when reinforcements sent from Liwale were ambushed and scattered near Njinjo.<sup>184</sup> It was an unpromising start for the German counter-moves against Kilwa.

Von Boemken now shifted his defensive positions to the west of Njinjo in order to block the road to Mpotora. Unfortunately for him, this meant that he was no longer in telegraphic communication with von Lettow, and messengers were now the only means of passing information for the next eight days. The lack of adequate communications and misunderstanding now led to a blunder that left the road to Kibata open to the British.

Von Lettow had wanted to ensure that Kibata was adequately protected and had told von Boemken to send two companies there. However, they left with out-of-date orders, and neither company fell back on the critical road to Kibata and the Mtumbei Hills as intended; one went east towards the coast and the other withdrew to the west. This left the main route from Kilwa to the Rufiji River unguarded at the same time as the British decided to move northwards. Hannyngton sent two battalions to occupy Kibata and the surrounding hills on 10 October, taking the unoccupied fort four days later. One battalion left to garrison Kibata while the other was withdrawn back to Kilwa. At the same time, the brigade pushed one of its units to a position four miles west of Njinjo, at Mchemera, and a screen of outposts to the north and west was established.

On receipt of the news, von Lettow realised that his forces had erred and sent a company down the coast on 14 October to reinforce the isolated troops in the Mtumbei Hills. Another was sent to join *Abt von Boemken*, but like its counterpart, it arrived well after

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<sup>183</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 238-240.

the British and it withdrew to the north in order to guard the evacuation of food supplies from the magazine at Tawa. This undoubted failure led to the second command change in two months, as on 17 October the *Kommandeur* ordered Captain Schulz to take command of the Kibata area and sent von Boemken south to assist *Abt Looff* against the less capable Portuguese.<sup>185</sup>

A great deal of time was then spent on patrolling and the gathering of accurate information on the ground, as the few maps available were poor and frequently misleading. Despite his concerns about the difficult situation being faced by Northey's forces much further to the west, General Smuts decided to make a personal reconnaissance of Kilwa at the end of October. Clearly impressed by its potential, he saw the Kilwa Force as playing a key part in his plan to surround von Lettow, with one element moving westward along the Matandu and the other striking north-westwards from the Mtumbei Hills. His chances seemed favourable, especially as there were no indications that the Germans were moving from the Rufiji area.<sup>186</sup> He decided to send another brigade to the area and to place Major General Hoskins and his 1st Division in command.<sup>187</sup> These deployments were put into effect shortly after Smuts' visit with 1st Division assuming command of the Kilwa area on 15 November and the units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade complete by 29 November.<sup>188</sup>

## THE FIGHT AGAINST THE *WESTTRUPPEN*

While both Northey's and Kraut's columns were manoeuvring for advantage, the *Westtruppen* were moving eastward. Although telegraphic communications between the two main groups had been lost with the cutting of the Central Railway in August, General Wahle had gained important intelligence. He still had his wireless receiver and had intercepted a number of useful British transmissions. From these he learnt that Dar-es-Salaam had been lost and that the main body had been forced south of Morogoro. More

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<sup>184</sup> CAB 44/5, p. 15. The Germans lost 18 dead and 18 wounded out of 60 present. British losses were two killed and six wounded.

<sup>185</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 241-242.

<sup>186</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 November 1916, Appendix 1, Telegram F 5948, Smuts to CIGS, 1 November. Smuts noted that some ten German companies had withdrawn from the Mgeta across the Rufiji with some reinforcement of Utete.

<sup>187</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 November 1916, Appendix 9, Telegram OA 969, Genstaff, Morogoro to Genstaff, Dar-es-Salaam, 7 November.

<sup>188</sup> Smuts *Despatch III*, p. 138.



appositely, these communications revealed that Iringa was only lightly held and was dependent on supply lines running back to Neu Langenburg at the head of Lake Nyassa. He decided to march and attack Iringa so as to disrupt the British advance and relieve the pressure on von Lettow's eastern flank. In order to conceal his true intentions, Wahle then spread rumours and false messages that his objective was Kilimatinde on the Central Railway: a plausible alternative.<sup>189</sup>

After evacuating Tabora on 19 September, the *Westtruppen* had withdrawn southwards to Sikonge where they regrouped and the companies were reorganised. While still largely intact, they now had the daunting task of crossing some 300 miles of largely undeveloped and uninhabited land to Iringa. The countryside in the triangle Tabora - Bismarckburg - Kilimatinde was known to be virtually foodless and water was scarce. Despite careful preparations, the march began badly as over 5,000 locally conscripted carriers deserted at the onset. With 5,500 loads prepared for movement, Wahle had only 800 carriers, 200 British askari prisoners, 350 chain-ganged African civilian prisoners and 80 donkeys to move them. On 24 September, he decided to destroy the excess and between 60-70,000 kg of food, plus spare clothing, tobacco, alcohol and private belongings were burnt. To complicate matters further, the ammunition column soon lost all 160 loads as the pack donkeys rapidly died from the effects of the tsetse fly.

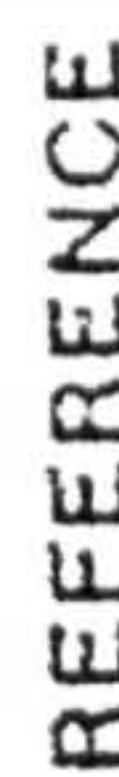
The loss of so much food and the need to forage widely forced Wahle to split his troops across three routes, each some distance apart. *Abt von Langenn* was given the northern route of Kiromo to Idodi, and was to be followed by *Abt Zingel* and Wahle's staff one day later. *Abt Wintgens* was allocated the southern route of Sikonge to Madibira, while *Abt Hübener* was to follow Wintgens two days later, but Hübener's path was to diverge at Mobogo and thence followed the more central route to Idodi. It was planned that von Langenn and Wahle would concentrate at Idodi by 18 October with Hübener arriving the following day. Owing to the longer distances involved, Wintgens was not expected to link up until 22 October. Once together, the entire force would then move up to Iringa and deliver a converging attack four days later.

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<sup>189</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 287.



## Kilete



British

German

Fairweather      - - - - -  
 Freeth            - - - - -  
 Hawthorn        H  
                     & Murray      R  
 Rodger (11th Nov)  
 Posts  
 & Garrisons      2

Langerin  
Wahle  
Wintgens

Kraul	K
Linke	L
Posts	

Contours approximate  
Heights in metres

Scale--35.51 Miles to 1 Inch

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Credence Survey 12M.



On 29 September, with the force largely concentrated in Kiromo, the lead elements began their three-week march to the east. Unimpeded by any serious follow up despite the presence of the main Belgian force a few miles to the north, the *Westtruppen* disappeared from view and nobody had any idea of their exact location or intentions.<sup>190</sup>

None of this was known by Northey, although even a cursory examination of the map made it clear Iringa and its small garrison was a likely objective.<sup>191</sup> Certainly Rodger's column was no match for Wahle's force and could be easily cut off and Northey continued to ask for assistance from 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Unaware of the true state of that formation, Northey had to be content with the despatch of a mounted squadron to Nyukwa's, which duly arrived on 27 September. In the circumstances, it was the best that van Deventer could do, but it still left some 70 rugged miles of forest and mountain between it and Iringa. In practical terms, it was too far away to be of any real use and the threat to Norforce remained undiminished.

Despite the growing dangers, Northey was unwilling to withdraw south. He saw the holding of Iringa as being important in terms of local prestige and the local population had been very helpful to him. It also offered a vital link to the main body, and for supply purposes it was closer to the Central Railway than Lake Nyassa. Smuts, too, did not want to lose Iringa, although he appears not to have fully appreciated the difficulties of Northey's situation. Apart from the slender reinforcements sent to Nyukwa's, the only advice he gave Northey in the event of the Germans appearing in strength was "he should concentrate with transport line via LUPEMBE".<sup>192</sup>

Moreover, he appears to have ignored the consequences of the dual threat posed by Kraut and Wahle as Northey's mission of taking Mahenge at best speed remained unchanged. The commander-in-chief was well aware of van Deventer's inability to send a

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<sup>190</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 286-287.

<sup>191</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 3 October 1916, Appendix 4, Telegram OA 569, Smuts to CIGS, 3 October. It was estimated that the withdrawing Germans were headed for Mahenge with Wahle's 600 rifles moving along the railway and then south and Wintgens with 800 rifles going via Iringa.

<sup>192</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 13 October 1916, Entry *Nyasaland Force*.



significant force south to secure Iringa in order to protect Norforce's rear. Wishful thinking rather than practical measures seem to have been all that he could offer.

In summary, by the beginning of October, Northey had Rodger's column defending Iringa, with Hawthorn and Murray dug-in at Mkapira vainly awaiting the advance of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and with a half battalion in the Songea area. Apart from a single mounted squadron, van Deventer was still unable to move south to link up with Norforce and showed few signs of being able to do so soon. On the German side, von Lettow was pressing for Kraut to attack both Songea in the south and Mkapira in the centre, while Wahle was just beginning the long trek towards Iringa.

The first contact with the approaching *Westtruppen* came on 12 October as one of Rodgers's patrols was driven back across the Great Ruaha River at Kiganga by the vanguard company. Furthermore, intelligence estimated that 6-7 companies were close behind with the intention of taking Iringa.<sup>193</sup> It was impossible to ignore the threat any longer and Smuts was compelled to send a large proportion of 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's usable strength to Northey. One battalion and a section of mountain guns marched from Kilossa on the Central Railway to Iringa via Nyukwa's<sup>194</sup>, while another was despatched on a lengthy and tortuous journey to Nyasaland. Leaving Morogoro on 15 October, it moved by foot, rail, ship via South Africa, and river steamer to Wiedhafen before finally going ashore and marching forward to Songea.<sup>195</sup> It did not arrive until 27 November after an epic journey.<sup>196</sup>

In the meantime, the marching battalion, now only 380 strong with six machine and two mountain guns, was struggling southward, but could not reach Nyukwa's until 17 October. The remainder of Northey's force, the columns under Colonels Hawthorn and Murray, lay well out of reach at Mkapira, over 100 miles away as the crow flies. They were at least a week away from Iringa, and even if either had been ordered to cancel the march on

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<sup>193</sup> CAB 44/4, p. 11.

<sup>194</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 14 October 1916, Appendix 17, Telegram F 5839, Smuts to CIGS, 14 October. 7<sup>th</sup> SAI was given as having about 400 rifles together with 2 guns. The journey was estimated at 6 days but actually took closer to 9 days.

<sup>195</sup> CAB 44/4, pp. 8-9, Sketch 67.

<sup>196</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 14 October and 27-29 November 1916.



Mahenge, they could not have made the journey, as there were insufficient supplies or carriers to sustain them.<sup>197</sup>

By 19 October, Wahle's vanguard was skirmishing against Rodger's detachment. As the degree of threat visibly increased, Northey ordered Rodger to concentrate around Alt Iringa while Baxendale's Northern Rhodesian Police were split between that place and the vital supply dump at Ngominyi. He had already committed his last available reserve, a half battalion of Africans, to Buhora near the southern of his lines of communication.<sup>198</sup> There was nothing to do but brace for the expected onslaught. The road network and supply depots en-route were absolutely essential to Norforce's survival. South of Ngominyi lay the important depot of Malangali and thence Ubena. The latter place occupied a critical junction that linked Iringa in the north with Neu Langenburg in the south-west, while also joining Lupembe in the east. Should Ubena be lost, then all of the forward columns would be isolated from their bases and the approach to Northern Rhodesia would be left wide open.

The attack on Norforce would take place, but not in the manner expected. The patrol action of 11 October had slowed down the advance and it was not until 17 October that the united columns of von Langenn and Zingel cleared the banks of the Ruaha River and pushed on. Suffering the same problems of command and control as the British, *Abt Wintgens* and *Hübener* had been out of touch since the beginning of the march. This was to have major consequences for the timetable as Wintgens, who had been entrusted with escorting a howitzer, had found the going impossible and had dumped the gun on Hübener. This in turn slowed down the latter's progress and would delay his arrival very considerably. Of this Wahle would remain ignorant until battle was joined.<sup>199</sup>

The whole of the Iringa garrison was dependent on the supplies held at Ngominyi and Malangali, both of which were thinly held and isolated. On 21 October, reinforcements were sent Ngominyi, which had only a garrison of 50 together with a pair of old guns. Iringa itself was defended by only 100 soldiers who anxiously awaited the arrival of

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<sup>197</sup> CAB 44/4, p. 12.

<sup>198</sup> CAB 44/4, pp. 9-11.

<sup>199</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 289.



reinforcements still en-route from the north. Malangali was being hastily entrenched by a small reserve detachment brought up from Buhora.<sup>200</sup>

Unfortunately for Northey, the reinforcements from Iringa were delayed for 24 hours in their departure. This enabled the Germans to close the road leading south, ambushing first a supply column on 22 October and then the reinforcements themselves the next day, losing 37 out of 50. Successful in his efforts, Wintgens now moved north towards Ngominyi to rejoin Wahle's main body.<sup>201</sup>

Rodger arrived from Iringa on 24 October, but realised that he was completely outmatched. Unable to attack, he halted and dug in to await help. On the same day, the further reduced reinforcing battalion from 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, now only 225 rifles strong, reached Iringa, plus another 70 men from another unit. On realising that the telegraph line to Northey had been cut, the South Africans hurried south to assist Rodger. It was evident that the enemy was astride the vulnerable lines of communications.<sup>202</sup>

The tense situation at Iringa was relieved by the unexpected arrival of a mounted regiment from Dodoma on 25 October. It and the newly arrived infantry had launched a pre-emptive attack on *Abt von Langenn*, which was in the process of moving into its attack positions, and disrupted its plans. Another vigorous attack on the following day further hampered the German preparations.<sup>203</sup> Although two of his *Abteilungen* were in position to attack Iringa, Wahle decided that the British were too strong and cancelled the attack planned for 26 October. Furthermore, as he was still without news of *Abt Hübener*, who was actually still far to the south, he decided to bypass Iringa and head south. A rearguard was left to mask the move while the main body took the road south to Ngominyi.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>200</sup> CAB 44/4, p. 15-16, Sketch 68; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 19 and 21 October 1916.

<sup>201</sup> CAB 44/4, p.17. The RNR lost 3 KIA and 22 PW.

<sup>202</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 26 October 1916, Entry 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. However, Smuts gave a rather different account in his report to CIGS the same day, Appendix 33, Telegram F 5910, Smuts to CIGS. He said "While the enemy is apparently in no position to do any substantial damage to General NORTHEY it is also clear that the enemy cannot be prevented from dribbling through in small parties along innumerable footpaths in the bush..."

<sup>203</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 27 October 1916, Appendix 35, Telegram F 5917, Smuts to CIGS, 27 October.

<sup>204</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp 290-291.



A key supply depot, Ngominyi had been poorly laid out for defence and had been under siege since 22 October. Wahle ordered the newly arrived *Abt Wintgens* to take Ngominyi, with the attack going in on 28 October. Despite a determined fight, the defenders were greatly outnumbered and cut off, with the post falling to a dawn assault the next morning. It was a major blow to Northey as a large quantity of much-needed supplies was captured and the situation in Iringa still appeared serious.

The vulnerable lines of communication were now severed and Norforce had been cut in half. The loss of further depots would seriously delay future offensive operations as well as threatening the survival of the troops at Iringa. Furthermore, the week's events and prisoner interrogations had revealed that the *Westtruppen* were stronger and more aggressive than previously thought. Given the withdrawal from Iringa and the loss of Ngominyi, it seemed certain that the base at Malangali would be their next objective.<sup>205</sup>

Reinforcements from Iringa had joined Rodgers on 29 October, too late to help at Ngominyi, but with a combined force of only 305 rifles it was greatly outnumbered by the enemy. *Abt Wintgens*, having taken Ngominyi, now turned to deal with this force, attacking heavily over the next three days. Faced with a shortage of food and concerned about the situation at Iringa, led to the battered column's withdrawal on the night of 1/2 November, ending all pressure from the north.<sup>206</sup> For his part, Wahle continued to move south as an expanse of barren mountains prevented an immediate move to the east. As predicted, Malangali was his next objective.

Belatedly, Smuts realised the true threat posed by Wahle. Norforce was in danger of being overwhelmed, its supplies were threatened and 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was in no position to provide further assistance. Poor communications and distance meant that the fight was out of his hands while Northey was out of touch with a number of his own troops. Instead of the early capture of Mahenge, he faced the prospect of a major defeat in the west.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>205</sup> CAB 44/4, pp. 17-20; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 2 and 3-4 November 1916.

<sup>206</sup> CAB 44/4, pp. 19-20. The 7<sup>th</sup> SAI suffered three dead, sixteen wounded and six missing.

<sup>207</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 November 1916, Appendix 1, Telegram F 5948, Smuts to CIGS, 1 November.



Events elsewhere were also taking a turn for the worse. On 21 October, further south, Kraut's advanced guard revealed itself opposite Hawthorn's and Murray's combined position on the Ruhudje. The next day he started to encircle the British, driving in outposts and seizing and fortifying a feature to the west of their position. The envelopment was completed on 23 October and the track leading to Lupembe was cut.

Kraut had a sizeable force, equivalent to the defenders', and was under firm orders to attack the British.<sup>208</sup> However, as the enemy was cut off and isolated from the rest of Norforce, Kraut considered that there was no immediate need to attack as he intended to starve the British into submission. He trusted to the strength of his encirclement of the position and to his belief that the swamps to the north of their defences were impassable.<sup>209</sup> What he did not know was that Hawthorn had stockpiled a large quantity of supplies and was in wireless communication with General Northey at Neu Langenburg.

After a week of isolation, with food running short and hearing of the *Westtruppen*'s approach to Ngominyi, Hawthorn decided to break the German siege. He realised that it would be impossible to escape with his baggage column and precious wireless set without driving the enemy off completely. Laborious reconnaissances had found several routes through the swamps and a plan was devised. Surprise was of the essence, and he determined that the Germans would be unprepared for a simultaneous attack from north and south.

The night of 28/29 October was chosen for the break-out; the Rhodesians were to strike the enemy to the south-east while Hawthorn's troops attacked to the north-west. They struck with considerable violence at dawn on 29 October, having infiltrated through the swamps to within 400 yards of the Germans, breaking-in and capturing a gun. The centre of the German position was reached by 0830 hours followed shortly by the precipitate retreat of the besiegers to the eastern bank of the Ruhudje.<sup>210</sup> The action was a triumph for Hawthorn and, apart from inflicting some sharp casualties at relatively low cost, at 21 British to 118 Germans, it freed up Norforce's only sizeable reserve. The victory and

<sup>208</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 256-257.

<sup>209</sup> MSS Afr.s.1715 (300), *History of 1 KAR*, pp. 160-161.

<sup>210</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 30 October 1916; Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 257.



Kraut's subsequent withdrawal to the north-west now allowed Northey to concentrate his forces around Lupembe in order to deal with the growing threat there.<sup>211</sup>

While Norforce was struggling to regain its balance, van Deventer's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was finally able to move southward in some strength. Having shifted his headquarters to Dodoma, van Deventer took command of the Iringa area on 30 October and was ordered to reinforce it as quickly as possible.<sup>212</sup> The much reduced 3<sup>rd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade was a shell of its former self, having suffered from the prolonged periods of half rations. Nearly 75 per cent of the troops had gone down with sickness and the four battalions were amalgamated into a single unit.<sup>213</sup> The mounted troops were little better, as 1<sup>st</sup> SA Mounted Brigade could muster just 705 men and 245 horses in early October; only by pooling horses and equipment could a single mounted regiment be organised. Joining that unit with the remnants of the 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Mounted Brigade, a total strength of about 900 rifles could be raised. This was to diminish even more drastically as they marched through the tsetse fly-infested bush towards Iringa, losing over 500 horses.<sup>214</sup> In the meantime, a column under Colonel Taylor prepared to follow up shortly from Dodoma. The much-reduced infantry Brigade held Nyukwa's and the ground to the east at Kidodi, thereby securing the routes to Kilosa.<sup>215</sup>

Now that he had handed over Iringa and Kraut had been defeated near Mkapira, Northey was able to concentrate significant forces. Although he had lost telegraphic communications, he had the great advantage of possessing a wireless link to his columns. This enabled him to instruct Murray to march for Lupembe as soon as he had heard of the victory over Kraut. Leaving on 2 November, Murray's Column marched up the Mynera Valley and thence up the escarpment to Lupembe arriving a few days later. One company was immediately sent forward to reinforce the 100 recruits holding Malangali while the rest of the battalion was sent forward on 8 November by motor cars to defend Lupembe.<sup>216</sup> Apart from being a major road junction, with one route leading north to Iringa and another

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<sup>211</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 2 November 1916.

<sup>212</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 November 1916, Entry *General Headquarters*.

<sup>213</sup> CAB 44/4, pp. 39-40.

<sup>214</sup> CAB 44/4, pp. 41-42; GSWA, Box 27, 12 October 1916, Telegram K 651, 2 Div to BGGs. 3<sup>rd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade could muster 799 effectives while 1<sup>st</sup> SA Mounted Brigade had 604. Another 1,500 troops from 3<sup>rd</sup> Division were proceeding as reinforcements.

<sup>215</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 November 1916, Appendix 9, Telegram OA 969, Genstaff to CIGS, 7 November.

<sup>216</sup> CAB 44/4, p. 27; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 2, 7 and 8 November 1916.

going east towards Mkapira, Lupembe was a key supply base. It was the road-head for supplies being delivered north by motor vehicles coming from Lake Nyassa and functioned as the advanced base for conduct of the operations against Mahenge.<sup>217</sup> It was vital for the support of current and future operations.

The Germans surrounded the garrison at Malangali on 8 November, cutting the telegraph wires connecting it to the outside world. The next day, their numbers increased by the arrival of *Abt von Langenn*, they launched a total of three bayonet attacks. Unable to break into the camp, their artillery inflicted a great deal of damage and destroyed much of the precious food supplies. Considerably outnumbered, the defenders held, but the situation was very precarious.

However, prior to the arrival of the *Westtruppen*, Northey had placed considerable emphasis on the improvement of tracks into motor roads. This paid off in the crisis, as Northey decided to risk 50 of his precious light cars in a daring relief move. Late on 8 November, he ordered Murray to take 130 men and 4 machine guns by vehicle to Malangali via Ukena. The remaining 125 men and 6 machine guns marched off cross country with the aim of linking up there subsequently. At the same time, receiving word that *Abt Wintgens* was headed south-west towards Lupembe, Northey told Hawthorn to be ready to march back there.<sup>218</sup>

Murray and his troops arrived to within two miles of Malangali unmolested, having travelled 120 miles over some of the roughest roads possible. Debussing safely, Murray sent the vehicles back to Buhora for supplies. A reconnaissance on the morning of 10 November showed that the Germans were too strong for him to attack and he decided to keep his position and maintain contact. Wahle's efforts against Malangali had cost him heavily and the arrival of the Rhodesians coincided with news of Kraut's defeat further south.<sup>219</sup> He decided to lift the siege and move off south-east towards the Lupembe road to

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<sup>217</sup> MSS Afr.s.1715 (300), *History of 1 KAR*, pp. 161-162.

<sup>218</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 8 and 9 November 1916; CAB 44/4, pp. 29-30.

<sup>219</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 17 November 1916, Appendix 23, Telegram NF 1498, Norforce to Genstaff, 16 November. Norforce suffered one killed and five wounded while reporting that the Germans lost eleven dead, 26 wounded plus 40 cases of ammunition and stores.



join Wintgens. A two-company rearguard was detailed to maintain the blockade of Malangali and to link up with Hübener's detachment, still not yet arrived from the west. As the *Westtruppen* slipped away on the night of 11/12 November, Murray took the advantage to attack and overwhelm this force, causing it serious casualties.<sup>220</sup>

While these events were taking place, Wintgens had reached Lupembe and had put in an attack on 13 November, sending a detachment to cut the road to Ubená. This effectively cut off the garrison of 250 KAR recruits, 50 South Africans, 4 machine guns and several antiquated field pieces. It was well stocked with food and ammunition, but it also had the drawback of having some 300 wives and children of the KAR recruits, whose depot it was.<sup>221</sup> An outwork was taken, the wireless masts destroyed, but the garrison grimly held on. Heavy firing was kept up throughout the day and another determined, but ultimately unsuccessful attack, was put in at 0400 hours on 14 November. Following a ceasefire to deal with the wounded, no further attacks were pressed and Wintgens withdrew the next day.<sup>222</sup>

In the meantime, with Hawthorn still some distance to the east, Northey decided to redeploy Murray by vehicle. His column drove back to Ubená on 14 November from where foot patrols were sent out. They located the enemy roadblock about 30 miles west of Lupembe and the column moved forward for action, spending the better part of two days in reconnaissance. Striking on the evening of 16 November, he overwhelmed the two-company block, clearing the road to Lupembe.<sup>223</sup>

The beleaguered garrison was relieved by the arrival of Hawthorn's column on 15 November, sometime after Wintgens's departure, and following a slow and difficult journey from Mkapira. This was timely for Wahle's main body appeared from the north-east the next day. Knowing that Kraut had been moving westward, the British feared that he would

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<sup>220</sup> CAB 44/4, pp. 28-30; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 11 and 12 November 1916. The British losses were four wounded and the Germans suffered eleven dead and twenty-six taken prisoner as well as losing one machine gun, 72 carriers, 15 mules and donkeys and 50 cattle; Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 293-294.

<sup>221</sup> CAB 44/4, pp. 31-32; MSS Afr.s.1715, *History of I KAR*, p. 163.

<sup>222</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 13, 14 and 18 November 1916.

<sup>223</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 17 November 1916. The British lost one killed and four wounded to the Germans' 13 dead and seven taken prisoner.

combine with Wahle for an attack on Lupembe. Now that Ubena appeared to be safe, Northey ordered Murray to move forward and rejoin Hawthorn at Lupembe.

The link-up duly took place on 18 November, with the two columns united for the first time since the end of October. Together they mustered an effective marching force of about 1100 rifles and had shown themselves well able to give the enemy a sharp blow.<sup>224</sup> However, Wahle had no intention of lingering near Lupembe, as, after the failure of Wintgens's siege, he realised that the British would reinforce it strongly and he decided to bypass it altogether. His main body moved unopposed to the north of Lupembe from 17 to 19 November, moving via the Mynera Valley for the Ulanga lowlands. The march of the *Westtruppen* was finally completed on 22 November, when Wahle met up with Kraut and assumed control of all forces on this front with headquarters at Tanganika.<sup>225</sup>

Freed from the main command, Kraut ultimately advanced up the eastern edge of the plateau, seizing the village of Mfrika, six miles east of Lupembe, and standing at an altitude of 6,000 feet, with the Mahenge plains at 1500 feet above sea level. Too weak to attack, he constructed a strong forward position there, with a second being built some six miles west at Msalala. These fortifications, together with the thick bush and broken ground, made a British attack a difficult proposition.<sup>226</sup> Furthermore, both sides were exhausted after the arduous marching of the past few months and neither had sufficient supplies or carriers to sustain further offensive operations, particularly in light of the coming rains. An operational pause ensued and reorganisation was set in train.

Almost unnoticed under the strain of the battle was the loss of Northey's independence as a field force commander on 14 November. General Smuts had requested that Norforce be placed under his operational command (although without responsibility for supply) on 7 November, citing the need to co-ordinate the fighting in the Iringa-Mahenge area.<sup>227</sup> The change made good sense as it finally united all the British forces in East Africa

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<sup>224</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 18 November 1916.

<sup>225</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 294; CAB 44/4, p. 48.

<sup>226</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 27-29 November 1916; MSS Afr.s.1715, *History of I KAR*, p. 163.

<sup>227</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 November 1916, Appendix 9, Telegram OA 969, Genstaff, Morogoro to CIGS, London 7 November and WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 14 November 1916, Appendix 18, Telegram OA 24, Genstaff, Morogoro to Norforce and Genstaff, Dar-es-Salaam, 13 November.



under a single commander and it also removed the absurdity of having the Colonial Office, with no military staff or resources, controlling one part of the campaign and the War Office the other. The move was welcomed by Northey on military grounds, although it seems that he had no high opinion of Smuts's tactical abilities.

While these actions were taking place in the north, von Grawert had been prodded by von Lettow to deal with the enemy around Songea on 23 October. Advancing on 31 October, he sent orders to Falkenstein to advance on Songea and join him in the attack on 5 November. However, owing to delays and confusion he did not join up with von Grawert until 11 November. Finally, with time short, Falkenstein moved on the British force early on 12 November and without von Grawert's troops, part of whom had been left behind as security detachments, a consequence of the growing hostility of the African population to the Germans.<sup>228</sup> Despite a promising start, Falkenstein was killed leading the attack and ammunition began to run short. Unable to make further progress, the Germans broke off the battle, retiring to a position about three kilometres northeast of the *boma*. By 17 November more reinforcements were marching forward to reinforce the threatened position.<sup>229</sup> This force was too strong for von Grawert who then prudently retired to the village of Njamabengo.<sup>230</sup>

While these events were underway, the almost forgotten rearguard under Lieutenant Colonel Hübener remained at large. With some 300 rifles and a howitzer, it had made very slow eastward progress. It was located at Ilembule on 20 November, and, with Lupembe secure and Wahle safely to the east, Northey decided to eliminate this last threat to his columns. Again, using his superior wireless communications and mobility, he sent Murray with 450 men to Ukena by vehicle, whence it marched off to deal with Hübener the next day. The German officer was not a great tactician nor overly energetic and allowed the British to surround his position and secure the vital waterholes by 26 November. Despite heavy firing by the howitzer, British casualties were slight and the lack of water made

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<sup>228</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 255. *Abt von Grawert* and *Falkenstein* had about 500 men in total. During the battle only 18 Germans and 271 *askaris* with 2 machine guns were deployed against 26 British and 223 *askaris*. The German losses were six killed, 13 wounded and three missing.

<sup>229</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 19 November 1916, Entry *Nyasaland Force*. Half of 5 SAI had arrived and were immediately pushed on to Songea; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 17 November 1916.

<sup>230</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 256.

further defence hopeless. He duly surrendered, with seven officers, 48 Germans and 249 Askaris going into captivity together with one 10.5 cm howitzer and 3 machine guns.<sup>231</sup>

There were now no German forces west of the line Neu Langenburg-Iringa. Despite the local superiority of numbers, Wahle had failed to inflict any significant damage on Norforce and had himself lost over 500 soldiers although he had successfully brought his force across 300 miles of desolate territory. Both Murray and Hawthorn had shown themselves to be determined and effective leaders who had given Wahle's troops some rough handling. Indeed, much more could have been achieved had 2<sup>nd</sup> Division exerted any sort of pressure from the north, but the opportunity was missed. The threat to General Northey's force had passed. Indeed, a relieved General Smuts reported to London that some 71 German and 370 Askaris had been killed or captured during the withdrawal of the *Westtruppen*.<sup>232</sup>

## OPERATIONS NORTH OF THE LOWER RUFJI

The capture of Dar-es-Salaam on 4 September led to a break in contact in the coastal region. It was not until the end of September that the British command learned of the presence of an enemy company in the lower Rufiji administrative centre of Kissangire. Smuts decided to delegate the clearance of the area to his Inspector General of Communications (IGC), a rather unusual choice given the severe administrative problems that the force was undergoing. As the IGC had neither an operational headquarters nor much in the way of fighting troops, an attempt to clear the area on 4 October failed miserably some five days later and he returned with heavy losses.<sup>233</sup>

This setback spurred Smuts to send reinforcements which were in position by 21 October.<sup>234</sup> But, they arrived too late to be of use as *Abt Stemmermann* had reinforced the defences with four companies. While Smuts was concerned about the possibility of raids

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<sup>231</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 29 November 1916, Entry *Nyasaland Force*.

<sup>232</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 25 November 1916, Appendix 35, Telegram X.945, Smuts to CIGS, 25 November.

<sup>233</sup> CAB 44/5, pp. 4-6. The British lost 13 killed, 27 wounded and 8 missing while the German losses were cited as being slight. See von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 160. He states that the defenders were only the inexperienced company of the *Königsberg* crew.

<sup>234</sup> CAB 44/5, pp. 6-7.



against the railway, he does not seem to have realised that the Germans were there for a very different purpose.<sup>235</sup> They urgently required food, and the lower Rufiji region provided rich and plentiful maize crops. The garrison was there to protect the crop until it ripened, the earliest date for which was March 1917, and then to oversee its harvest. Von Lettow had sent Stemmermann there with explicit instructions on the value of his task. However, it appears that Smuts failed to appreciate his opponent's real aims and left the situation unresolved for another two months.

### **KIBATA - THE PRELUDE AND BATTLE**

As operations on the Mgeta wound down, von Lettow reconsidered his options. Apart from remaining on the defensive, he had the option of attacking the now static enemy forces to his north. However, the ground was difficult and the British were now well dug in. Any attack was likely to result in heavy casualties and high levels of ammunition expenditure, neither of which could be afforded. On the other hand, Northey's advance in the west was being dealt with by Kraut and the troops north of the Rufiji were protecting the ripening harvest. It was the growing lodgement at Kilwa that caused him the greatest concern.

As soon as he had learned of the fall of Kibata on 14 October, von Lettow resolved to recover the situation. He ordered the bulk of his troops to move there on the following day, with *Abt Schulz* being despatched on 17 October. In all, he took eight companies plus the bulk of his artillery south, leaving nine companies and a gun to hold the line of the Mgeta under the command of Captain Otto. Von Lettow himself left the Mgeta front two days later before moving to join his main body of troops opposite Kibata.<sup>236</sup> However, owing to the distance and state of the tracks, this reinforcement would take about two to three weeks. This delay, unavoidable as it was, enabled the British to continue the build-up of their troops unimpeded.

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<sup>235</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 November 1916, Appendix 1, Telegram F 5948, Smuts to CIGS, 1 November. He stated "Enemy holds KISSENGIRE and MKAMBA on roads from RUFJI to DAR ES SALAAM and is patrolling very actively further North apparently in expectation of attack from DAR ES SALAAM or as a threat to our railway communications."

<sup>236</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 242; von Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 161-163; He states that he left Tafel in command, but Boell and the course of subsequent operations makes it clear that Otto remained in charge of the Mgeta line.







The Kilwa force was increasingly aware of the growing threat to its advanced positions and took a number of measures to reduce German supplies in the region. A series of fighting patrols went out against the German lines of communication and inflicted some important setbacks; the magazine at Mpotora, on the Liwale road, fell on 29 October and another at Ngarambi Chini was destroyed on 2 November. The outcome of these raids was to force the Germans away from the coast and further north.<sup>237</sup>

In the meantime, reinforcement of Hannington took some time as the 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade was in the process of reconstitution under Brigadier General O'Grady. Reinforced by two newly raised KAR battalions and two more experienced units, the brigade arrived in Kilwa over the last two weeks of November. The divisional commander, Hoskins, realised that it would be very difficult to bottle up the Germans in such wild and mountainous country and that he needed strong forces forward. Accordingly, he divided his area of operations into two; in the north, Hannington's 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade held Kibata and forward positions in the Mtumbei Hills. To the south and west, he deployed O'Grady's force in the Matandu Valley. A small reserve, consisting chiefly of the immobile artillery, was held at Kilwa.<sup>238</sup>

British intelligence assessed, fairly accurately, that the Germans had about 10 companies moving towards Kibata. This increase in strength was confirmed by the capture of documents and the interrogation of prisoners in November.<sup>239</sup> The first probe on Kibata was launched on 7 November, with a two company reconnaissance-in-force led by Captain Schulz. It was repulsed by the British by 9 November and served to increase the volume of their defensive measures. Despite the rebuff, Schulz informed the *Kommandeur* that, with artillery, Kibata could be taken without heavy losses.<sup>240</sup> His forecast of casualties was later to prove sadly inaccurate.

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<sup>237</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 246.

<sup>238</sup> CAB 44/5, p. 21.

<sup>239</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 November 1916, Appendix 9. Telegram OA 969, General Staff Morogoro to General Staff, Dar-es-Salaam, 7 November.

<sup>240</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 246; Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 338.

The position at Kibata, although strong, was far from an ideal defensive position and the fort itself, with high walls on a prominent hilltop, was obsolete for modern warfare. It was almost completely surrounded by a ring of small hills about one thousand yards distant with prominent river valleys running to the west and east. The most important was Picquet Hill, a long and narrow ridge to the north-west of the fort. Originally covered with thorn bush, it had been cleared by the defenders to improve the fields of fire. It was actually higher than the fort and, in recognition of its importance, it had two major positions, known as No 1 and No 2 Redoubts - although they lacked dug-outs and sufficient depth.<sup>241</sup> These features were in turn dominated from the north by a large ridge running west to east.<sup>242</sup> The loss of any of that high ground would make the possession of Kibata fort difficult, but the retention of Picquet Hill was vital as it commanded the roads leading in and out of Kibata as well as two of the three water sources.<sup>243</sup>

In the first week of December, the British garrison consisted of about a battalion with the fort and a series of lesser hills were held by one company, as were each of the two redoubts on Picquet Hill. The nearest reserve battalion was some 36 miles away, with the rest of the brigade further to the southwest. It was on the afternoon of 6 December that the defenders first sighted columns advancing from the north, with the outposts driven in shortly thereafter; the battle now commenced in earnest. Having secured the first line of defences, von Lettow used the night to bring his artillery and machine guns into position. Using the same huge gangs of African labourers who had dragged the guns all the way from the Rufiji, he deployed one of the 4.1" *Königsberg* guns, a field howitzer and two mountain guns onto a commanding feature.<sup>244</sup>

With excellent gun positions ready, von Lettow then pushed two *Abteilungen* forward while a company was ordered to infiltrate around the defenders to cut the track leading back to Kilwa. The Germans now numbered nine companies against the defenders'

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<sup>241</sup> Thatcher, W S, *The Fourth Battalion, Duke of Connaught's Own 10<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment in the Great War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 144-145. This history covers the 129<sup>th</sup> Baluchis.

<sup>242</sup> CAB 44/5, p. 22.

<sup>243</sup> WO 106/273, *History of 3 KAR*, Plan of Kibata, p. 58a; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>244</sup> CAB 44/5, pp. 23-27; Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 339.

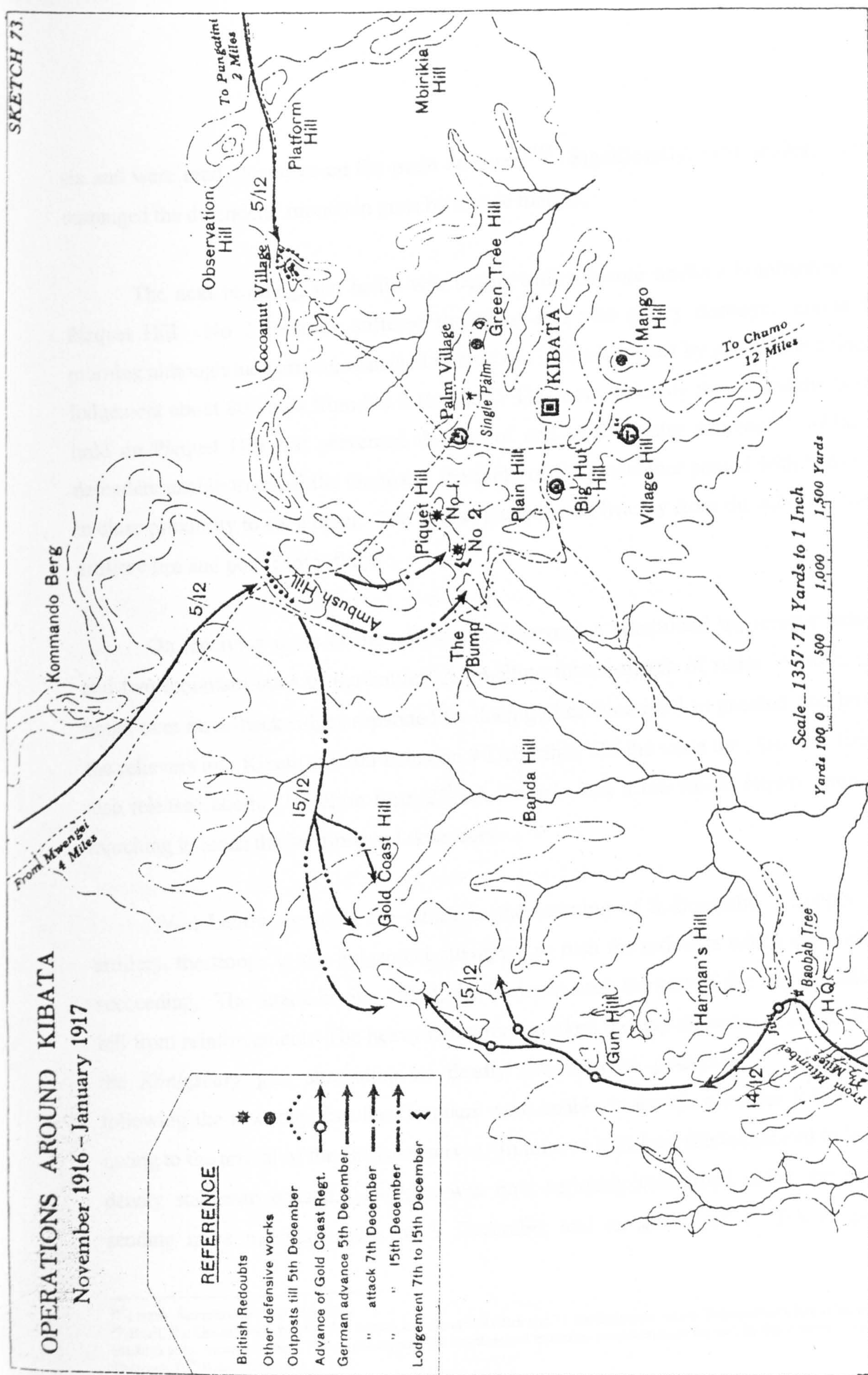


# OPERATIONS AROUND KIBATA

November 1916 - January 1917

## REFERENCE

- British Redoubts
- Other defensive works
- Outposts till 5th December
- Advance of Gold Coast Regt.
- German advance 5th December
- " attack 7th December
- " " 15th December
- Lodgement 7th to 15th December





six and were ready to move on the main defences.<sup>245</sup> Significantly, their artillery group outranged the defenders' mountain guns by a wide margin.

The next morning, the battle was begun with a severe artillery bombardment of Picquet Hill. No 2 Redoubt suffered the worst and was nearly destroyed during the morning although the garrison managed to hold on. A dusk assault by *Abt Schulz* gained a lodgement about 80 yards from No 2 Redoubt. This now seriously threatened the British hold on Picquet Hill and prevented the use of one of the water sources.<sup>246</sup> With the defenders unable to expel the Germans, the night of 7/8 December passed with both sides in close proximity to each other. The British had suffered heavily from the accurate enemy artillery fire and poor camouflage.

On receiving news of the onslaught, Hannyngton committed his reserve battalion and two mountain guns to the battle. A gruelling forced march of some 36 miles in 34 hours over razor-back ridges separated by deep gullies conducted in pouring rain brought the relievers into Kibata at 0200 hours on 9 December. On the same day, General Hoskins also released another battalion from 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade, but it too would require some hard marching to reach the hard-pressed defenders.

Von Lettow resumed the attack in the morning of 8 December. Supported by artillery, the troops in the lodgement attempted to rush the redoubts which came close to succeeding. The attack having failed, the Germans took the rest of the day to isolate the hill from reinforcement. The heavy rain which marked the day obscured observation, with the *Königsberg* gun alternating its deadly fire between positions.<sup>247</sup> More shelling following the next day, but the Germans were unable to launch a further infantry attack owing to the arrival of the British reserves. In turn, an attack on the lodgement failed and a deadly stalemate ensued. Hoskins was now seriously concerned about the situation, sending more mountain guns on 9 December and remainder of 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade the

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<sup>245</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>246</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 247. Von Lettow had about 900 rifles and 15 machine guns versus Hannyngton's 930 rifles and 7 machine guns. However, the 4.1" *Königsberg* gun, the howitzer and mountain guns outranged the two British mountain guns. Thatcher, *10<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment*, p. 146;

<sup>247</sup> CAB 44/5, pp. 25-26; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, p. 6.



following day. Finally, on 11 December he placed General O'Grady in command of the battle.

In the meantime, von Lettow had lost his initial superiority of numbers as the British rapidly built up their strength. After three days of relative quiet, they made an attempt to drive the Germans back. The plan was simple; to seize a rocky and bare feature, later known as Gold Coast Hill, some 3,000 yards to the west of the German right flank and separated from Kibata by a deep valley nearly. This feature provided a covered approach from which a flanking attack could be launched onto the German positions.

The two new battalions began their flanking move on 15 December, but quickly came under fire from an enemy outpost. Now secure on Gold Coast Hill, they were hit by heavy artillery fire that was closely followed by a strong infantry attack. A series of heavy attacks ensued and the defenders' situation became desperate. With heavy casualties, extrication rather than further advance became essential.<sup>248</sup>

While this maelstrom was raging to the west, the newly-arrived General O'Grady was preparing to restore the situation at Kibata. With him came two more mountain guns, ammunition, including Mills bombs (heretofore unknown in East Africa), and food. He planned to eliminate the lodgement on Piquet Hill as a pre-requisite for the turning of the German position. A battalion was given the task of a night attack using the new Mills bombs for shock action while the artillery spent most of 15 December registering the German positions.<sup>249</sup> After dark, a silent night attack drove the Germans out of their trenches, and regained Picquet Hill. At small cost, they had won an important victory and eliminated the most dangerous salient. Ironically, it was von Lettow's earlier decision to use his reserves for the attack onto Gold Coast Hill that left the main sector so vulnerable.<sup>250</sup> With it went his chances for victory at Kibata.

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<sup>248</sup> Clifford, Sir H C, *The Gold Coast Regiment in the East Africa Campaign*, pp. 51-55. The Regiment suffered 146 casualties out of the 340 present.

<sup>249</sup> CAB 44/5, pp. 33-34; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, p.7.

<sup>250</sup> Thatcher, *10<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment*, pp. 154-155. The Baluchis lost 15 killed or wounded and took 13 German prisoners; CAB 44/5, p. 35.

Neither side now had sufficient infantry to renew the offensive and activity was reduced to patrol encounters and intermittent shelling. Both sides needed to regroup and the situation remained largely unchanged until the end of the year.

The battle had drawn in the bulk of 1st Division's fighting troops, while a large portion of von Lettow's force was also engaged. The battle was tactically inconclusive, with both sides suffering heavy casualties for limited gains. Von Lettow had certainly blocked a British advance towards Utete, but he had failed to gain the decisive victory that he sought and had expended large quantities of ammunition. In the circumstances, and given his initial superiority, it is puzzling that he did not try cut off the position entirely. The defenders were on very short rations for over six weeks and their water supply was very vulnerable. He appears to have gone for set-piece assaults rather than more subtle encirclement and starvation. However, the battle also revealed to both sides that the newly raised KAR battalions, although full of potential, were still too inexperienced to meet the *Schutztruppe* head on in battle.

## THE FINAL PUSH TO THE RUFIJI

As the rains continued and he struggled to reorganise his force, Smuts now had to deal with serious dissent both in South Africa and in his own troops. In late October, one of his own battalion commanding officers lodged a formal complaint, making strong allegations of incompetence, indifference to soldiers' welfare and general negligence. Matters were not helped by the harrowing stories beginning to emerge in the South African press, notably the *Rand Daily Mail* and the *Sunday Times*. In mid-November, the latter paper made accusations of serious shortcomings and lack of planning (these are covered in Chapter Six). A court of enquiry was established to deal with the military allegations, while both the Governor General and Prime Minister were forced into political damage limitation.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Brown, *King and Kaiser*, pp. 301-302; WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1388, 17 November 1916, Telegram OA 84, Smuts to CIGS.



Doubtless these matters added to the urgency of ending the campaign. Smuts, too, retained his perennial optimism about the chances of a German surrender. On taking Norforce under formal command on 14 November, he laid out his plans to Northey at some length. Viewing the Germans as operating in two discrete groups under the command of von Lettow in the east and Kraut/Wahle in the west, he wanted to keep them apart and defeat each in turn.<sup>252</sup>

These thoughts were formalised on 30 November, when General Smuts reported his intentions to the CIGS. He began by estimating that von Lettow had about 4,000 rifles on the Rufiji, while Kraut's 2,000 men had been joined by a maximum of 500 or 600 of Wahle's force. With the *Schutztruppe* having a maximum of 7,000 effectives, he proposed to add the newly arriving Nigerian Brigade:

“while on arrival of NIGERIANS at front I shall endeavour to cut off retreat of VON LETTOW'S force and obtain decision on LOWER RUFIJII. Should enemy escape Southward from RUFIJII it will be reduced in numbers and morale...”<sup>253</sup>

To van Deventer, he was blunter, giving his aim as follows:

“to drive the enemy everywhere over the Ulanga (Kilombero) before the end of January, then to leave the Indian and African battalions to hold the line of the river during the rainy season, and to move the white troops back to the railway”.<sup>254</sup>

He believed that the combined forces of van Deventer and Northey would be able to deal with Kraut and Wahle separately. He was optimistic enough to believe that Belgian assistance would probably not be required as their preparations would take too long and they would be a burden on his supply system. Finally, he considered that the expanded KAR would be capable of dealing with any forces beyond February 1917.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 14 November 1916, Appendix 18, Telegram OA 24, Genstaff to Norforce, 13 November.

<sup>253</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 30 November 1916, Appendix 42, Telegram OA 198, Smuts to CIGS, 30 November.

<sup>254</sup> CAB 44/7, pp 1-2.

On 22 December, General Smuts considered that preparations for an advance on all fronts were complete and he and his advanced GHQ left Morogoro on the same day, moving to Dutumi. While it was clear that the British situation was difficult, it did not seem impossible; in the east 1<sup>st</sup> Division had stabilised the dangerous situation at Kibata and von Lettow had pulled back to the Rufiji. While Hoskins's troops were tired and had suffered a number of casualties, they were still capable of offensive effort, although limited by lack of transport. On the Mgeta front, Sheppard's weakened 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade was readying for the move as the first elements of the Nigerian Brigade began to arrive from Dar-es-Salaam. Echeloned to his rear, on the Ruwu-Tulo road, Beves's Force Reserve was making similar preparations. In the west, van Deventer's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was halted at Iringa, its fighting power largely dissipated through disease, under-feeding and overwork. Lacking sufficient porters or vehicles to advance in any strength, it was capable of only limited forward movement. In the far west and south, Norforce force was in relatively good condition although it was still recovering from the exertions and losses during the recent operations against the *Westtruppen*.

In order to force a decision on the Rufiji, Smuts planned a three-pronged operation. Intelligence had ascertained that the German positions on the Mgeta River were fairly light, not numbering more than 1,000. The main body had withdrawn to the Rufiji River area with the principal concentrations at Kibambawe in the west and Utete further east. Smuts's plan was to outflank and cut off the weak forces on the Mgeta by sending a column to the Rufiji at Mkalinso coupled with a rapid flanking march to seize a crossing of the Rufiji at Kibambawe. Once the river had been crossed, the re-united force would turn eastwards and push along its southern banks to Utete. This advance would be supported by a flank column under Colonel Burne moving south from Kissangire to clear the area north of the Rufiji, while Hoskins's 1<sup>st</sup> Division pressed north-west from Kibata to Utete. Indeed, Smuts hoped his moves would compel von Lettow to surrender there.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 30 November 1916, Appendix 42, Telegram OA 198, Smuts to CIGS, 30 November.

<sup>256</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 12-13; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 22 December 1916, Appendix 33, Telegram OA 355, Smuts to CIGS, 21 December. "If the enemy's retreat is delayed until we have crossed the RUFJI near KIAGOBWE [sic] and moved East so as to effect junction with HOSKINS this line of retreat will be closed and enemy may be compelled to end on the LOWER RUFJI."



The details were typically Smutsian - light frontal holding attacks in the centre were to be coupled with outflanking marches in an attempt to encircle his foes. However, even after the pause and build-up of the past several months the lack of stockpiled supplies in the forward areas, the poor health of the troops, and, above all, the insufficiency of the transport were severely limiting factors in the execution of the plan. It was a race, and in many ways a gamble, with fighting troops trying to cut off their opponents, before the weather could do the same to them.

The details of the advance were as follows. Preliminary operations in the west would be launched to draw off the German reserves. Van Deventer's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was ordered to clear the high escarpment east of Iringa and push eastwards to Ifakara along the Ruaha River, helping to close the trap from the west. Northey was to move east, taking the position at Mfrika and driving Kraut's troops behind the Ulanga River.<sup>257</sup> On the Mgeta front, a total of four columns would operate against the forward positions. The newly arrived Nigerian Brigade was ordered to launch a holding attack from Dutumi into the centre of the Mgeta line, while Sheppard's 1<sup>st</sup> EA Infantry Brigade would turn its flank by moving from Dakawa to Wiransi in the west. Concurrently, a small, two-battalion column would make a similar march from Tulo to Tshimbe in east. Sheppard would also detach a single battalion to conduct a deep flanking move against the enemy's lines of communication stretching south-eastwards to Behobeho. Key to the plan, however, would be Beves's Force Reserve. It would start from Kissaki in the west, making a wide sweep around all known enemy concentrations to emerge on the north bank of the Rufiji, near the village of Mkalinso. From there, it would march cross-country to Luhembero, south of the river and astride the road running south from Kimbambawe. Once the defenders had been rounded up, the columns would unite and start the second-stage move on Utete. At the same time, Hoskins's 1<sup>st</sup> Division was to prevent the eastward or southward move of the German main body, should it try to escape in those directions.<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 January 1917, Telegram OA 443, Smuts to Adminstaff, 31 December.

<sup>258</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 13-15.

Even if his army had not recovered from its previous exertions and the weather was bad, Smuts was determined to push on. Rain, although widely expected, was to upset his optimistic calculations. He had planned on Northey's troops moving on 23 December and the remainder 2 - 3 days later, but his report of 20 December was hardly encouraging:

"Very heavy rain has fallen on all fronts and country South of MGETA has assumed appearance of lakes. Weather now improving in RUFUJI area but heavy rains continue to fall in areas covered by General NORTHEY and VAN DEVENTER..."<sup>259</sup>

These optimistic prognostications were soon upset by experience; on 23 December, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division reported that rain had stopped all transport for 10 days, forcing its troops again onto half rations, and that modifications to its operations would be essential.<sup>260</sup> Nevertheless, despite the continuing rain and mounting difficulties in movement, both Northey and van Deventer began their advance as planned on 23 and 24 December respectively. However, conditions were less favourable on the Mgeta and north of Kilwa. It was not until 29-31 December that the weather cleared and not until New Year's Day 1917 that the main advance set to start.

### FIGHTING ON THE MIDDLE RUFUJI FRONT

Facing Smuts on the Rufiji, the main defence force, *Abt Otto*, with five companies in the forward area, was supported by *Abt von Chappuis*, with another three companies along the lines of communication that followed the Kissaki-Behobeho route.<sup>261</sup> No other local reserves were known to exist within the proposed battle area.

On the Rufiji front, there were two major problems for the British commander. The first was the absolute necessity of seizing and maintaining a crossing over the River Rufiji in

<sup>259</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 20 December 1916, Appendix 30, Telegram OA 341, Genstaff to CIGS, 20 December.

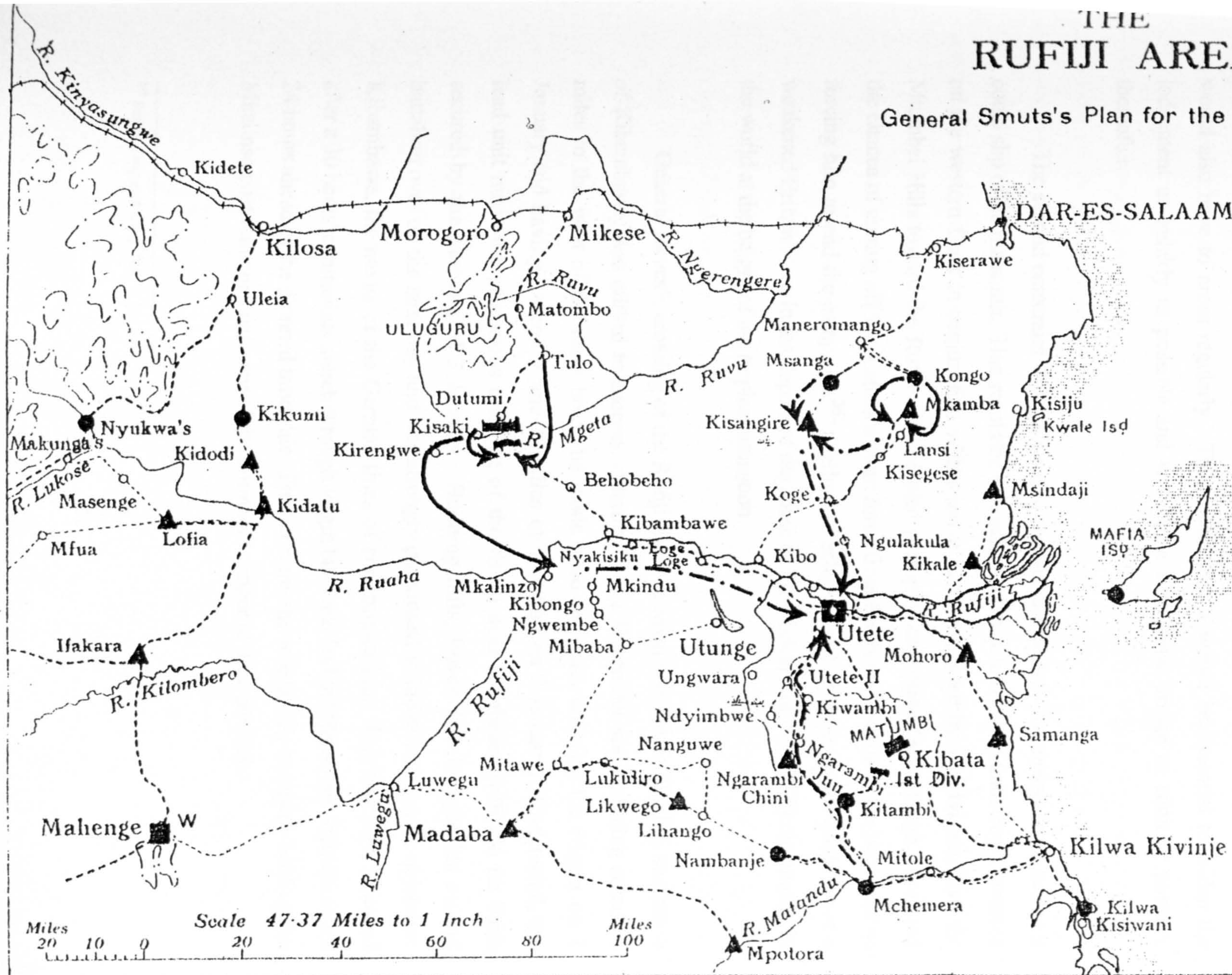
<sup>260</sup> GSWA, Box 29, 18 December 1916, Telegram P32, 2 Div to BGGS. Van Deventer signalled "Have carefully reviewed supply situation which is presenting grave difficulties... Only way out of difficulty is to move part of division back to railway immediately..."; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 23 Dec 16, Entry 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

<sup>261</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1904. Otto had eight companies with von Chappuis as a subordinate; CAB 44/6, p. 11.



# THE RUFJI AREA

General Smuts's Plan for the Offensive



## REFERENCE

### British

Lines of Communication -----

Posts & Garrisons ●

General Smuts —

Proposed 1st Stage —→

do. 2nd Stage - - - - -→

### German

Detached Forces —▲

Posts ▲

H.Q., Western Force ■ W

Main Force (assumed position) ■ G

L. of C. (as assumed) -----

Miles 20 10 0 20 40 60 80 100  
Scale 47.37 Miles to 1 Inch



the face of strong defences. Assault craft were non-existent and a limited number of vulnerable three-man Berthon boats were his main crossing asset. These had to contend with continually rising river waters and a strong current. A daylight attempt to cross against organised opposition would almost certainly be disastrous. Any bridgehead would have to be reinforced quickly against the inevitable counter-attacks, while ammunition and food would also have to cross regularly. This meant that it would be essential to widen the lodgement as quickly as possible and to build a substantial bridge as soon as possible thereafter.

The second constraint was the need to contain and destroy the enemy force before it could slip off to the south. This would be best achieved by achieving an undetected crossing on the western flank in conjunction with a move north-westward by 1<sup>st</sup> Division from the Mtumbei Hills toward the Rufiji. If executed promptly and vigorously enough, it offered the chance of cutting off von Lettow's main force from Kraut and Wahle in the west, and so forcing him to end the campaign.<sup>262</sup> Failure to achieve both of these goals would leave a weakened British force in the depths of some of the wildest and most difficult country in the world at the height of the tropical monsoon.

General Beves's crossing of the Rufiji River at Mkalinso, some 20 miles southwest of Kibambawe, was critical to success. Starting on 31 December and operating some 10 miles to the west of the main body, he made good progress, crossing the Mgeta on 1 January and having covered some 22 miles by nightfall on 2 January. Undetected, the lead unit made the precarious crossing of the Rufiji near Mkalinso, with the far bank secured by the morning of 3 January. Building rafts, Beves then brought his second battalion over on the next day and was strongly positioned to move on his next objective, Kibambawe, the nexus of the German lines of communication. This had been achieved after a 30 hours' continuous march through virgin bush and had put the South Africans about 24 hours ahead of the planned timetable. Furthermore, the sole enemy company holding the Mkalinso post remained unaware of the imminent danger to their position.

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<sup>262</sup> Smuts, *Despatch III*, p. 148.



Early on 4 January, the leading battalion seized Mkalinso, dispersing the garrison and capturing the telephone equipment. Otto received his first information about this force at midday and immediately despatched another company there. However, further reports of the strength of the enemy advance and fears of being outflanked from the west led Otto to withdraw his entire *Abteilung* to the south bank of the Rufiji and to destroy the crossing site at Kimbambawe.<sup>263</sup>

Having achieved a major success and having turned the Mgeta position, the Force Reserve inexplicably halted. It was true that the troops were exhausted by their formidable exertions, but the urgency of the situation was well known and the chief scout, Major Pretorious, had personally located all enemy positions in the area. Claiming a lack of explicit orders from GHQ, Beves now did little, squandering his advantage.<sup>264</sup> Finally, on 6 January Smuts ordered him to attack north-east of Mkalinso, which he did on the following day. The attack was not pressed hard and the garrison escaped through the thick bush. Unknown to Beves, Otto had been forced to divide his force to protect the line of communication running from Njakissiku – Luhembero – Maba on 5 January with only one company to the east. Furthermore, the depredations of Pretorious had already captured the entire German medical reserve, as well as the munitions and food supplies in the process of being evacuated south.<sup>265</sup> A very real chance of catching Otto out at Kibambawe was lost through inaction and insufficient initiative.<sup>266</sup>

On 31 December, Lyall's column was marching 12 miles east of the main force on the route Tulo to Kiruru. There, he crossed the Mgeta and turned south to occupy Tshimbe on the Kiderengwa-Behobeho road. His task was to block the road in order to prevent the Germans from escaping south; his patrols were also to link up with the troops of Sheppard's 1st Brigade, further to the west.<sup>267</sup> By early on 1 January, he was south of the Mgeta and reached his objective by early afternoon. Trenches were dug just as a strong enemy force ran into the column. Successfully pushing the Germans north and capturing a

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<sup>263</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1918-1919; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 4 January 1917, Appendix 4, Telegram OA 518, Smuts to CIGS, 3 January.

<sup>264</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 38-39.

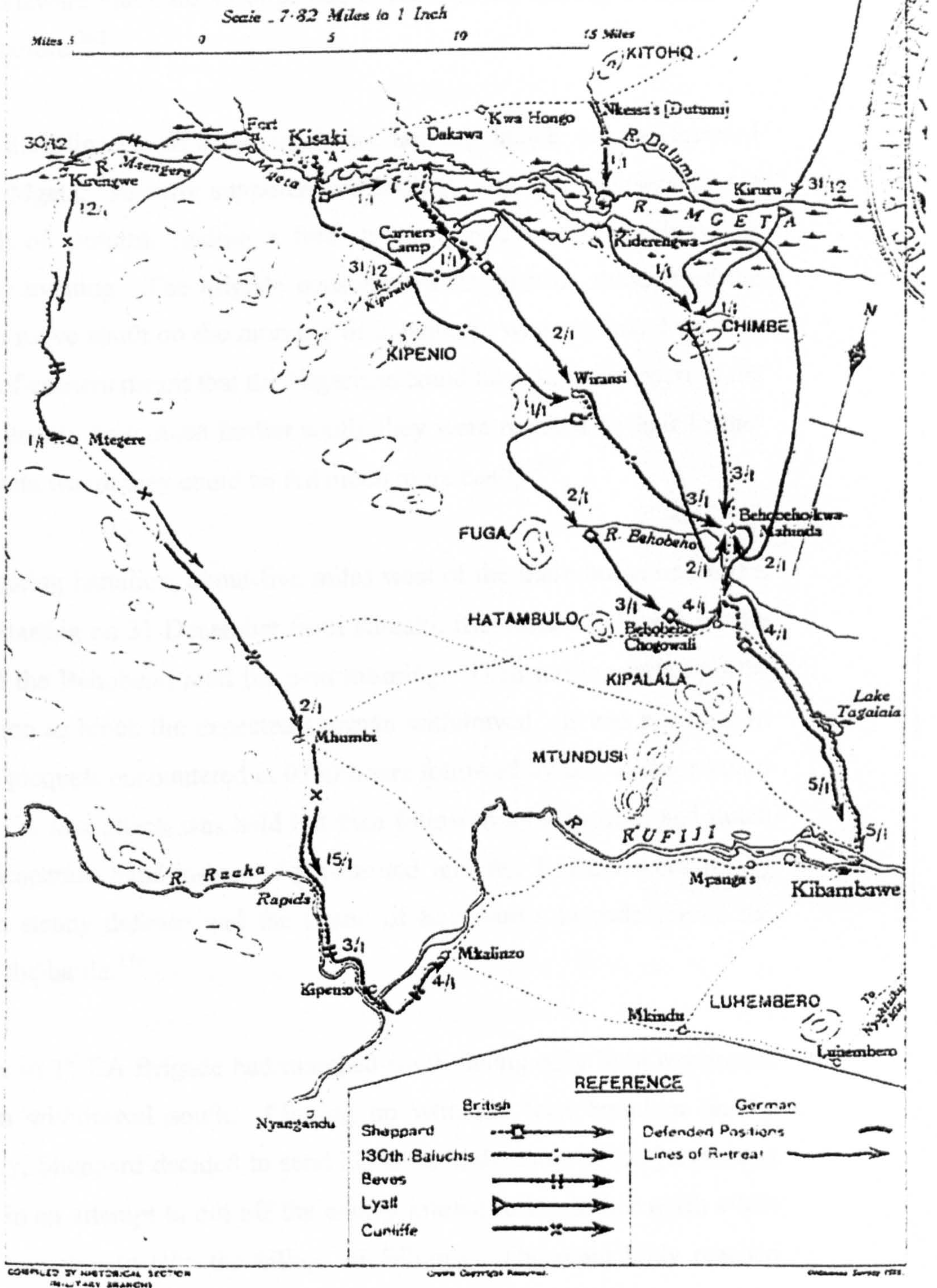
<sup>265</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1920.

<sup>266</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 36-39.

<sup>267</sup> Smuts, *Despatch III*, p. 147.



# THE ADVANCE TO THE RUFUJI 31st December 1916-15th January 1917





howitzer, Lyall then faced a strong counter-attack. Holding firm, he awaited the arrival of the Nigerian Brigade, unaware that Otto's troops had bypassed him, having marched off into the bush the night before.<sup>268</sup>

In the centre, the Nigerian Brigade made its holding attack on the forward positions north of the Mgeta. Heavily supported by artillery and aerial observation a battalion cleared south of Dutumi, finding a ford in the afternoon and reaching the southern bank by early evening. The brigade consolidated its position throughout the night, and resumed the move south on the morning of 2 January, when it linked up with Lyall. The acute lack of carriers meant that the Nigerians could take no further part in the advance, and with the enemy now much farther south, they were recalled to their former positions along the Mgeta where they could be fed much more easily.<sup>269</sup>

Sheppard's flanking battalion, about five miles west of the main body, had had a more difficult time. Starting on 31 December from Kissaki, it crossed the Mgeta on the same day and reached the Behobeho road the next morning. Then turning to the north-west, it took up position to block the expected German withdrawal. It was not long in coming, with the lead picquets encountered at 0730 hours followed by the advance guard of *Abt von Chappuis*. A first attack was held but then followed by a second, and much heavier, effort. A desperate hand-to-hand fight ensued and the Indians were nearly overcome. However, steady defence and the sound of Sheppard's brigade forced the Germans to break off the battle.<sup>270</sup>

The remainder of 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade had marched south facing only light rearguards covering the German withdrawal south. Linking up with the lead battalion on the afternoon of 1 January, Sheppard decided to send his main body south to the junction at Behobeho Chogwali in an attempt to cut off the enemy known to be further north while also sending off another unit to take the village of Wiransi. The main body reached

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<sup>268</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 22-24;

<sup>269</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 25-27; Downes, *With the Nigerians*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>270</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 29-30. The 130<sup>th</sup> only started 454 all ranks and suffered some 36 dead and 29 wounded, totalling 65. The Germans had 12 killed and two taken prisoner.

Wiransi on 2 January, but was unable to reach its objective of Behobeho Chogwali the next day owing to intense heat and difficult terrain.

In the meantime, Sheppard sent a battalion and a battery of guns to support Lyall further to the east in the area of Behobeho kwa Mahinda (north of Chogwali). Reaching that place on 3 January, they linked up with Lyall's two battalions that night and the combined force moved south on the morning of 4 January, linking up with Sheppard's 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade on the main track in mid-afternoon. The next morning the advance on Kibambawe was resumed, with *Abt von Chappuis* giving battle at about 1030 hours. After driving off their opponents into the thick bush, Sheppard decided to push on to the Rufiji at best speed.<sup>271</sup>

On 5 January, 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade, now with all its units back, reached its objective, the Kibambawe bridge. Despite their fatigue and exertions, Otto had beaten them there and the crossing had been destroyed. The failure of Beves to move on 4 January now became doubly important. Not to be deterred, Smuts ordered Sheppard to make a crossing during the night of 5/6 January. As the river was between 400 and 700 yards wide with a swift current and unfordable, he was faced with a major problem. Patrols found a narrow point, some 400 yards in width, about one and half miles from the bridge site and out of direct enemy observation. Severely limited in his crossing capability, Sheppard had only seven Berthon boats capable of carrying three men at a time. Despite the inadequacy of his means, he began ferrying troops across the river during the night of 5/6 January. Only one company with two machine guns managed to cross before daylight and it had to spend the entire day of 6 January hiding amongst reeds and suffering intensely from the heat and lack of food. Through good discipline and camouflage, it managed to remain undetected despite German patrols. With darkness, Sheppard was able to send across the remainder of the battalion plus another company, giving him 400 rifles and 4 machine guns on the south bank by first light on 7 January.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 5 January 1917, Appendix 8, Telegram X 1133, Smuts to CIGS 4 January; CAB 44/6, pp. 32-35. The British suffered 16 KIA and 45 WIA including the famous F W Selous.

<sup>272</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 January 1917, Telegram OA 567, Genstaff to CIGS, 7 January; CAB 44/6, pp. 42-44.



The British lodgement was detected a by patrol early that morning and, believing them to be a weak detachment, a single company attacked it but was firmly repulsed. The appearance of the enemy on the south bank spurred Otto to move up a company to Kunglio as reinforcements while also recalling two others from Mpanga.<sup>273</sup> Four boats attempting to land supplies during daylight were damaged by shrapnel and the resupply effort was ended. A attack was then launched from the bridgehead, first with one, and then two companies, but it was countered by strong German reinforcements. Facing severe shortages by afternoon, ammunition was rowed across the river at great risk and the British bridgehead was stabilised.<sup>274</sup>

The Germans did not counter-attack further, having lost heavily in Europeans.<sup>275</sup> Sheppard used the night of 7/8 January to ferry across the rest of the second battalion and an additional company, giving him a total strength of 600 rifles and 10 machine guns across the river. Early on 8 January another attempt was made on the British lodgement, but it was easily held off with the support of the mountain guns firing across the river. The arrival of two long-range naval guns on the north bank of the Rufiji assisted the forward troops and helped to suppress the German guns. However, the combination of insufficient strength and the high ground dominating the bridgehead meant that a stalemate ensued over the next week.

On 7 January, the German positions were as follows: one company was at Njakissiku, three were around Kunglio-Sud, two more at Mpanga, and one each at Mkalinso and Mkindu. Otto was now faced with a threat from the west via Mkindu while also having to prevent further expansion of the British bridgehead. Keeping three companies on the river, he reinforced Mpanga back to three, with two in reserve, ready to react to further initiatives.<sup>276</sup>

In the meantime, on 8 January Smuts had arrived at the Mkalinso crossing and ordered Beves to re-concentrate his force at his original crossing site. Two battalions of the

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<sup>273</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1923-1924.

<sup>274</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 January 1917, Appendix 11, Telegram OA567, Genstaff to CIGS, 7 January.

<sup>275</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1923-1924. The Germans lost two killed and six wounded.

Nigerian Brigade were ordered from Dutumi, to move west then south and pass through Beves's exhausted column.

The loss of 3,000 kg of supplies at Maba through aerial bombing was a blow and convinced Otto to prepare for a further withdrawal south. The German command was also becoming increasingly apprehensive about the safety of the main line of communication running from the Rufiji to Luwegu and thence to Mahenge. Protected by only a weak detachment, the main ammunition reserve lay at the former place and was now hurriedly evacuated. The headquarters of the lines of communication was ordered to move from Madaba to Mlembwe on 17 January in an attempt to re-align the lines out of range of the British advance.<sup>277</sup>

While the fighting forces had made surprisingly good progress despite their weak condition, behind them the basis of their survival, the British transport system had collapsed. There had never been much of a margin of safety and now the administrative staff warned the commander-in-chief that he would have to reduce the numbers in forward areas substantially if actual starvation was to be avoided. During the previous two weeks, with the combination of sickness amongst the drivers and the breakdown of vehicles, the force had received about 10 per cent of its essential supplies. Full rations could only be maintained until 20 January and a reduction to half rations would be necessary by the end of the month, even sooner if the rains came.<sup>278</sup> Faced with this unmistakable warning, Smuts had to amend his plans

On 15 January 1917, on the eve of his departure from East Africa, he gave the Nigerian Brigade a new role. Believing the enemy to be in small numbers at Kibambawe and Mpanga's, a few miles to the east, he ordered Cunliffe to trace Beves's route to Mkalinso, then to strike east towards Mkindu and Luhembero. Beves was to march

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<sup>276</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1924; CAB 44/6, pp. 44-45.

<sup>277</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1925-1927.

<sup>278</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 108-110. Reproduces Memorandum "Supply and Transport Situation", by AQMG 9 January 1917; GSWA, Box 29, 2 January 1917, Telegram P 71, 2 Div to Genstaff. 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had been on half rations since 24 December.



north-east, attacking the enemy grouping around Mpanga's and linking- up with Sheppard who was to break out south at Kibambawe.<sup>279</sup>

It is noteworthy that his communiqués to the War Office were far more bland and sanguine than those of his staff. On 9 January, he stated merely that Sheppard had crossed the Rufiji at Kibambawe, while Beves had reached Mkalinso and was also across the river, with Cunliffe marching to join him. No mention of the poor weather or enormous supply difficulties was made; interestingly, this was to be his last official report on operations for another nine days, just prior to his handover of command. His final report was broadly positive and noted that the Rufiji south of Kibambawe had been cleared and that Hoskins's forces had reached the eastern part of the river from the Kibata area. Again, no mention of the weather or other problems was made.<sup>280</sup>

It was now clear to the Germans that the main force at the Ruaha mouth was pushing east – during the pause they had detected the preparations for the next British move, notably the build-up around Mkalinso. Otto became concerned and telegraphed Lettow for instructions, being told that his main task was the protection of the lines of communication between Maba and Madaba. In the circumstances, he decided to weaken his force along the Rufiji to only two companies, marching himself with four others to Mkindu to face the main enemy threat.

After a clever feint operation, assisted by massed gunfire, 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade was able to break out of its perimeter in the early hours of 18 January. Kibambawe was cleared the next day, the rearguard putting up only light resistance, while Beves's force made slow, if unimpeded, progress towards Mpanga's. The Nigerians operating to the south had left the Mkalinso crossing site on 17 January and promptly turned out the defenders from Mkindu the next day. This left Otto with four companies in Mkindu Sud with one at Maba with two further north, falling back from Nyakissiku.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> CAB 44/6, p. 50; CAB 45/19, *Nigeria Regiment Record*, p. 11.

<sup>280</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 9 January 1917, Appendix 15, Telegram, OA 594, Smuts to CIGS, 9 January. The next telegram was 18 January 1917, Appendix 18, Telegram F 6339, Smuts to CIGS, 18 January.

However, the advance south across the Rufiji was now stalled; Sheppard had increased the size of his bridgehead, but lacked the offensive power to break-out. It was also becoming apparent that von Lettow's forces were thinning out of the lower Rufiji area. The gap between the western limit of 1<sup>st</sup> Division's advance near Ngarambi and Beves' position at Mpanga's was more than wide enough to permit the escape of the Rufiji force. On 20 January, the Nigerian Brigade attacked Otto's positions. Unable to deal with such strength, he had planned a fighting withdrawal to new positions further south near Mkwembe. Deployed in depth around the important waterholes there, he faced renewed attacks on 24 January. Heavy fighting with repeated counter-attacks by both sides continued through the next day, with panics by the carriers resulting in the loss of much equipment and supplies by the attackers. It was a heavy battle and a fine performance by Otto who had held off much superior forces in difficult conditions.<sup>282</sup>

### FIGHTING NORTH OF THE LOWER RUFJI

The situation north of the lower Rufiji was largely unchanged by the end of December 1916. The defenders were estimated to have no more than 800 rifles and 10 machine guns against the attackers' 1,100 rifles, 7 machine guns and 2 guns. Smuts expected the IGC and his scratch force to push the Germans south of the river. Given the inadequate resources, an attack on 3 January failed to take Kibesa.<sup>283</sup> Finally, an experienced infantry officer was placed in command. An attack on Mkamba on 9 January fell on empty positions, as did a second on Kibesa. With only the major post of Kissengire left, a flanking march was launched. The main column marched south, linking up with 300 rifles who had been landed by the navy on the coast on 8 January. This move was eventually successful and by 18 January the Germans had been forced out of Kissengire, withdrawing across the Rufiji. There was no further opposition since the river was in full flood and all boats had been removed to the far bank. The ill-effects of the now heavy rainfall were also becoming very apparent, as flooding impeded the march and the sickness rate rose.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1928-1931.

<sup>282</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1936-1938. The Germans lost nine killed, 13 wounded and three missing out of some 472 soldiers, making some 5 per cent of strength. The British had 76 killed, 16 wounded and 15 taken prisoner out of about 1,000 soldiers, making some 11 per cent of strength.

<sup>283</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 85-86. This comprised 129 Germans, 630 Askaris, 10 machine guns and 3 guns.

<sup>284</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 87-91.



## FIGHTING ON THE KILWA FRONT

Since the loss of their lodgement on Picquet Hill in mid-December, the Germans had remained on the defensive in the Kibata area. *Abt Schulz* remained in the area with four companies and one 10.5cm gun. Its orders were to mask the movement of the main body back to the Rufiji and to prevent any follow up by the enemy.

Smuts was keen for 1<sup>st</sup> Division to advance towards Utete, but the German positions were too strong to assault without artillery, which in turn lacked the transport needed to reach Kibata until early January. By year end, 1<sup>st</sup> Division had detected the thinning out of the German position, and on 5 January it ordered 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade to advance with the aim of clearing the Mtumbei Hills and linking up with the Nigerian Brigade on the Rufiji. 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade was held back in reserve, partially owing to a severe shortage of carriers.

Using heavy artillery fire and aerial bombardment, the British were able to dislodge the now-weakened opposition with a series of limited flanking moves. On 7 January, 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade began the clearance of the area around Kibata, followed by subsequent moves and minor actions over the next week. Concerned about his flank, von Lettow ordered Schulz to hold the area of Mbindia and to conduct a vigorous opposition.<sup>285</sup>

This was not easy in the circumstances, and Schulz continued to fall back slowly, destroying the *Königsberg* gun owing to the lack of ammunition and the utter exhaustion of its carriers and crew. The British pressure continued with the capture of a magazine and threatening the supplies stockpiled at Pungutini. Now concerned about the situation, von Lettow despatched a reinforcing company to Utete.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1941-1942.

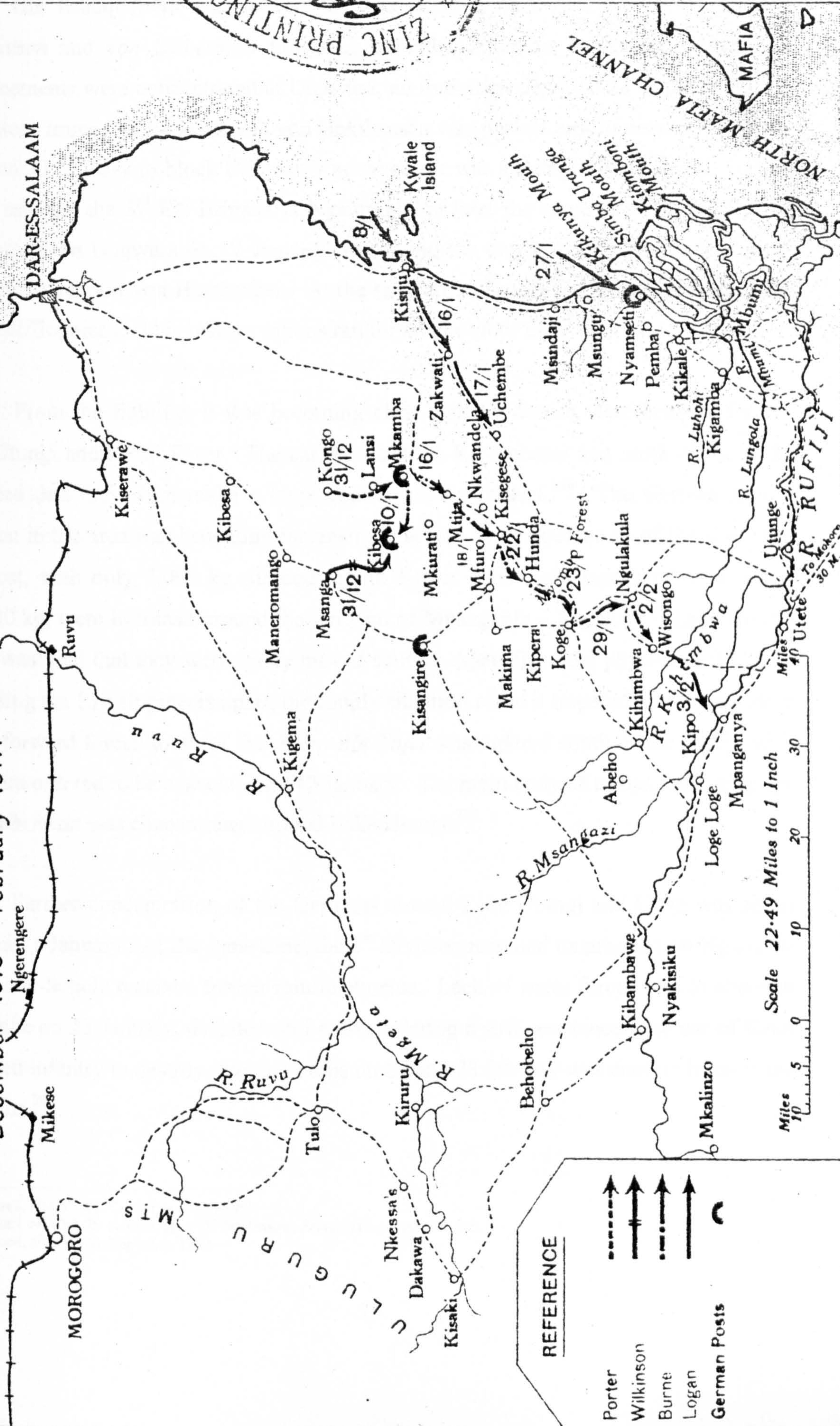
<sup>286</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1948-1952; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 January 1917, Appendix 11, Telegram OA 567, Smuts to CIGS, 7 January; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, pp. 8-9.



SKETCH 81.

# OPERATIONS NORTH OF THE RUFIJI

December 1916 - February 1917.



COMPILED BY HISTORICAL SECTION (MILITARY BRANCH)

Scale 22.49 Miles to 1 Inch

Miles 0 10 20 30

German Posts

Porter

Wilkinson

Burne

Logan

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His headquarters had moved to Lake Utungi on 7 January with *Abt von Haxthausen* and *von Lieberman* following behind. After an exhausting march, the reinforcements were concentrated at Ungwara, an important depot south of the lake, five days later. Immediately on arrival, von Haxthausen was pushed east to defend Ngarambi Chini on 13 January to block the enemy advance. It was successfully occupied, but the troops ran into the 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade at Ngarambi Juu later the same day.<sup>287</sup> The British now moved on Ungwara on 17 January, so forcing the deployment of the sole reserve company to support von Haxthausen. At the same time, Schulz was encountering severe supply difficulties and his reserve rations ran for another four days.

From the fighting, it was becoming clear that the British were heading for the Lake Utungi and Rufiji River. The earlier attack on Kibambawe and north of the river, indicated that they were make a large convergent movement.<sup>288</sup> The German supply situation in the area was becoming increasingly severe as the area north of the river was now lost, with only 7,000 kg of food left in Koge. The main stocks of food, some 175,000 kg, were in transit around the junction of Mpanganja – Logeloge – Lake Utungi and it was vital that they were safely moved south. Apart from the physical difficulties in holding the British pincers apart, the supply situation made it imperative to move some of the forward forces south of the river. *Abt Tafel* was ordered south of the Rufiji, with Ungwara ordered to be evacuated on 12 January. The main body of troops, including *Abt von Lieberman* was concentrated around Lake Utungi.<sup>289</sup>

Further concentration of the Germans around Lake Utungi and Utete was set in train on 21 January. At the same time, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division resumed its pressure on Ngarambi Juu, while Schulz received further reinforcements. Lack of water forced him to abandon Kiwambe on 23 January, despite von Lettow ordering a stiff resistance. The use of KAR mounted infantry to destroy ripening crops on 27 and 28 January was another blow to the Germans.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1953-1956.

<sup>288</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1959-60; Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 174-175.

<sup>289</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1960.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Division continued to press hard, with O'Grady pushed up to the Rufiji, capturing Mohoro on 18 January while Hannington cleared the country west of the Mtumbei Hills, north of Ngarambi.<sup>291</sup> Further west along the river, Utete was taken on 31 January and the north bank of the Rufiji was clear by the beginning of February.<sup>292</sup>

To the Germans, it appeared that British main effort was in the Kilwa area and that *Abt Rothe* needed reinforcements from the north.<sup>293</sup> The worsening of the weather on 25 January hindered both the attackers and defenders. On 1 February, von Haxthausen fell ill and Göring took command of his *Abteilung*. The deployment of the forces in the east was as follows. *Abt Tafel* with five companies was in the area of Mpanganja along the Rufiji river. *Abt Göring* also with five companies was securing Ungwara and its approaches. Headquarters was on the Utungi-See with *Abt Willman's* two companies at Nanguwe. Further to the south, holding 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade at bay, was *Abt Rothe* with three companies at Mpotora.<sup>294</sup>

The British held the general line Njinjo – Ngarambi Chini – Kiwambe – Utete. 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade occupied the centre with two battalions forward, while 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade spread its three battalions between Utete and Kibata. The increasing rains had made motor supply to the forward areas impossible and two of the bridges over the River Matandu were washed away; Hannington was forced to move his troops back to Kibata, while O'Grady also began to pull back towards Kilwa.<sup>295</sup> The rations for the forward troops were of the meagrest.<sup>296</sup>

## FIGHTING IN THE WEST

The plan to draw off German strength through a diversion in the west was bedevilled by difficulties before it even started. Van Deventer's lines of communication back to Kilossa

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<sup>290</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1966-1971.

<sup>291</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 18 January 1917, Appendix 31, Telegram F 6339, Smuts to CIGS, 18 January.

<sup>292</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 31 January 1917, Appendix 63, Telegram OA 27, Genstaff Dutumi to Genstaff, Dar-es-Salaam, 31 January; WO 106/273, *History of 3 KAR*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>293</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1986.

<sup>294</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1977-1980.

<sup>295</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 18 February 1917, Appendix D, Telegram GO 687, 1<sup>st</sup> Division to Genstaff, 18 February.

<sup>296</sup> Thatcher, *Tenth Baluch Regiment*, pp. 169-170.



and Dodoma had started disintegrating in mid-December when the Ruaha River had begun to flood. By 19 December, the bridge over that river had been washed away and the roads were beginning to dissolve into thick mud. With over half his MT fleet continually in workshops, food supplies became even more precarious and it was impossible to build up any substantive stocks.<sup>297</sup> Any remaining offensive potential was seriously weakened by the necessity of placing the troops on half rations from 23 December. Further south, General Northey had similar problems and, as early as 13 December, he estimated that only 45 out of the 350 miles of motor roads were usable. All supplies now had to be carried by porter from Lake Nyassa over the Livingstone Mountains before going forward.<sup>298</sup> Regardless of the determination of the troops, both forces began the operations under immense handicaps.

On the German side, their forces remained spread through an arc based on Mahenge. General Wahle, now the *Westbefehlshaber*, was based there with a single company in reserve, while six detachments were deployed to the north and west against the likely British lines of approach. *Abt Schoenfeld*, with 3 companies, was based on Ifakara and faced generally north, holding the area between the Ruaha crossing at Kidatu. *Abt Lincke*, with two companies, was deployed in the highlands about 30 miles south-east of Iringa and blocking the track from Dabaga to Muhangu. Immediately to his south was *Abt Wintgens*, with four companies and a battery of guns at Makua's. He was centrally positioned and poised to reinforce either to the north or south. Next was *Abt von Langenn* which had four companies around Mfirika. *Abt Kraut* was opposite Northey's main force at Ifinga, some 20 miles distant. He was actually down in the valley of the Ruhuje River although still above the flood plain. Finally, *Abt Grawert* was deployed opposite Colonel Byron's garrison at Songea much farther to the south.<sup>299</sup>

Food stocks were as much a problem as they were for the British. Mahenge was the centre of the supply system for the forward troops. However, two disastrously dry years and lack of co-ordination meant that this formerly fertile area was unable to maintain these

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<sup>297</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 19 December 1916, Telegram P 32, GOC 2 Div to Genstaff, 18 December.

<sup>298</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, 13 December 1916. The mountains reached 9,000 feet in altitude and caused considerable sickness and death amongst his porters.

forces.<sup>300</sup> This was confirmed by Wahle's order that directed all *Abteilungen*, other than those of Lincke and Schoenfeld, to make the north Songea district the source of their rations.<sup>301</sup> This would cause major restrictions on the tactical freedom of the commanders.

On the British side, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was a shell of its former self and represented nothing like a division's strength. Its mounted troops were almost all without horses and were required to act as infantry. The 1<sup>st</sup> SA Mounted Brigade had incorporated the remnants of the now-departed 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Mounted Brigade as well as its own integral units. However, this still only provided four regiments, each fielding a single mounted troop; overall, the total fighting strength of this formation numbered no more than 1,500. As for the infantry, the 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade was reduced to two battalions totalling about 800 soldiers. They were joined by the composite 10<sup>th</sup> SAI, the remnants of the disbanded 3<sup>rd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade, now only 550 strong. Somewhat stronger was an Indian battalion with 800, as well as a KAR unit with nearly 500 rifles. The artillery was limited to four 13-pounders and eight mountain guns, but, owing to the difficult conditions for movement and a lack of horses and mules, there were only sufficient animals to move two of the latter.<sup>302</sup>

General van Deventer's pleas having been ignored by Smuts, he now made arrangements to fulfil his role. He divided his force into three columns, lettered A to C, with approximate strengths of 1,450, 1,150 and 790 respectively. He planned a series of flanking marches against *Abt Lincke*, while Column A under General Nussey leading the mounted troops on a southern flank march and Column C under Colonel Taylor making a similar envelopment from the north. The aim was for the flanking columns to converge on Muhanga and cut off Lincke on the Magomi Ridge before Column B under General Berrangé launched a frontal attack from Dabaga on 25 December.<sup>303</sup> Little was known about the terrain to be traversed except that it was mountainous and difficult.

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<sup>299</sup> CAB 44/7, footnote to p. 4; CAB 45/72, Sketches 74, 83 and 84.

<sup>300</sup> Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, p. 274.

<sup>301</sup> CAB 44/7, p. 30. It was captured by Hawthorn's troops on 5 January 1917.

<sup>302</sup> GSWA, Box 29, 18 December 1916, Telegram P 32, 2 Div to BGGs, for lack of supplies and strength.

<sup>303</sup> CAB 44/7, pp. 7-9. A Column had 1450 soldiers and eight machine guns; B Column had 1150 soldiers and eight machine guns; C Column had 790 soldiers and eight machine guns and two mountain guns for a grand total of 3,390 soldiers, 24 machine guns and two mountain guns; GSWA, Box 29, 22 December 1916, Operation Order 24.



Good, sunny weather on 20 and 21 December deteriorated into rain as the advance began. Column C suffered terribly from the heavy rain and cold, particularly the nearly naked carriers brought up from the plains. A combination of sickness and desertion rapidly reduced the carrying capacity of the column and all tents and heavy stores had to be left behind. The driving rain and slippery conditions soon exhausted the column and on 25 December, Colonel Taylor with a battalion pushed on alone to Muhanga. A short fight drove out the small German detachment there and the road from Dabaga was effectively closed. During the day the remainder of the column made its way forward and prepared its defences.<sup>304</sup>

On the southern flank, A Column concentrated on the eastern bank of the Little Ruaha River. On 22 December, the flanking move was seriously delayed by heavy rain with two units unable to arrive there until the next day. After two days of climbing mountains and crossing thick swamps, A Column had reached its intermediate objective south on the Magomi ridge and prepared to set up its block. Two regiments were ordered to press on to the north and east to link up with Taylor's column, with one holding Makungwa's and the fourth in reserve. This plan required the whole brigade, not more than 1,200 strong, to be spread out over a frontage of some 10 miles of the worst country possible, with tracks so difficult that passage on foot was almost impossible.<sup>305</sup>

Lack of accurate maps and guides reduced this plan to confusion as the link-up force spent much of 25 December in a fruitless march looking for Muhanga, not arriving there until the following day. Brigade Headquarters was established on the high ground between that place and Makungwa's, but communications were limited to runners owing to the rain. By 26 December, the trap appeared to be shut.<sup>306</sup>

In the meantime, the frontal attack planned for Berrangé's B Column was underway on 25 December. Despite the lack of guns, which had been delayed by flooding rivers, the attack was reasonably successful and the troops dug-in within 250 yards of the German line

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<sup>304</sup> CAB 44/7, pp. 12-14.

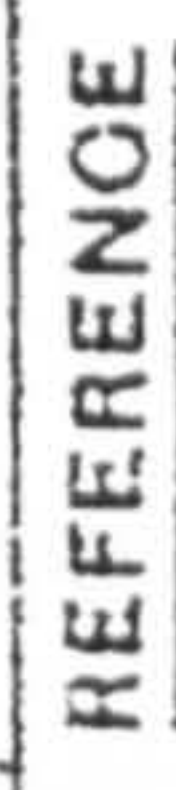
<sup>305</sup> CAB 44/7, pp. 16-17; GSWA, Box 29, 24 December 1916, Telegram D 1484, Brigzar [1 SA Mounted Brigade] to 2 Div. The brigade commander considered it "almost physically impossible cover distances in time allowed."



## SKETCH 83.

A vertical scale bar labeled "Miles" at the bottom. It has major tick marks at 0, 5, 10, 20, 30, and 40 miles. There are also minor tick marks between the major ones, indicating increments of 1 mile.

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with few losses. The next day was spent in an intensive fire-fight between the two forces and was followed by a night infiltration, but, when patrols went forward early on 27 December, the trenches were empty, with the defenders having withdrawn to the south-east.<sup>307</sup>

Van Deventer had hoped to capture Lincke at Muhanga. Unfortunately for him, the German commander chose to escape via the village of Makungwa's, moving towards *Abt Wintgens*. The defenders were now well dug-in, but the shifting of the reserve to Muhanga Mission meant that the whole of Lincke's force, still nearly 500 strong, was able to concentrate against about a third of A Column. Owing to the weather, the reserve only arrived at midday 28 December, by which time they were too tired to launch a night attack against an unreconnoitred enemy and waited until the next morning. It was too late, as *Abt Lincke* had hacked a path through the bush and escaped to the south.<sup>308</sup>

Although Muhanga had been captured, *Abt Lincke* had escaped largely unscathed. Orders for a further advance were countermanded as the transport system had nearly collapsed under the strain of submerged roads and swollen rivers. By 30 December, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had just four days' rations for the European troops and none for the Indians. Either a rapid evacuation would take place or starvation would follow.<sup>309</sup> Accordingly, van Deventer ordered most of his South Africans back to the railway while leaving two battalions, one Indian and one African, to hold the line.<sup>310</sup> On 2 January 1917, van Deventer informed the Commander-in-Chief of the desperation of his situation and that he was forced to abandon the advance through lack of rations.<sup>311</sup> This was virtually the last action of that formation, for five days later GHQ announced that owing to the supply situation it would be withdrawing it to Dodoma as a preliminary to returning van Deventer and his South African whites back to the Union.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>306</sup> CAB 44/7, p. 18; GSWA, Box 29, 28 December 1916, Telegram D 1491, Brigzar to 2 Div.

<sup>307</sup> CAB 44/7, pp. 14-15.

<sup>308</sup> CAB 44/7, p. 19; GSWA, Box 29, 28 December 1916, Telegram KT 422, Col Taylor to 2 Div; Telegram [n.ref.] Col Kirsten to 2 Div.

<sup>309</sup> GSWA, Box 29, 27 December 1916, Letter ADMS to GOC 2 Div. Over 40 cases of pneumonia had been reported in three days and much more was feared. This outbreak was put down to "(1) exposure (2) totally inadequate food."

<sup>310</sup> CAB 44/7, p. 22.

<sup>311</sup> WO 95/5202, War Diary GHQ, 2 January 1917, Appendix 3, Telegram P 71, GOC 2 Div to GHQ, 2 January.

Colonel Taylor was left in command of the remaining two battalions and took up positions on the high ground opposite Lincke's force. The Iringa highland overlooked the flooded valleys of the Ulanga valley that stretched for many miles below. As the month ran on, decreasing patrol encounters and skirmishes soon made it clear that the enemy had begun to thin out their forward positions in this area and were transferring troops to the still militarily active areas further south.<sup>313</sup>

### **HOSKINS ASSUMES COMMAND**

With General Smuts' departure for the Imperial War Conference on 23 January, Lieutenant General Hoskins now assumed chief command. Leaving 1<sup>st</sup> Division in the midst of an offensive, he had little choice but to carry on the plans of his predecessor. His forces were too widely spread and communications were too poor for him to make major changes and in any event the troops were in no condition to do so. He faced the following situation.

In the middle Rufiji, Sheppard's 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade and Beves's 2<sup>nd</sup> SA Infantry Brigade held both banks of the river around Kibambawe while Cunliffe's Nigerian Brigade had pushed south and east to Mkindu. On the lower part of the river, Hannington, now commanding the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, had his 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade at Mohoro on the edge of the delta, with 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade at Ngarambi on the fringe of the Mtumbei Hills. Both groups were trying to link up and trap von Lettow's main body, which was currently located between Mkindu in the west and Utete in the east.<sup>314</sup>

In the west, van Deventer's attack had fizzled out several weeks earlier and his division was strung out between Muhanga and the Central Railway. Further southwest, Northey had cleared the high ground and had driven Kraut east of the Ruhudje River. Songea was secure, although a further advance there was temporarily out of the question

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<sup>312</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 January 1917, Appendix 11, Telegram OA 567, General Staff CIGS, 7 January.

<sup>313</sup> CAB 44/7, pp. 22-23.

<sup>314</sup> Hoskins, Lt Gen A R, *Despatch from the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief East Africa Relating to Operations in East Africa 20<sup>th</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> May 1917*, dated 30 May 1917, published in the London Gazette 'Supplement', No. 30447, 27 December 1917, pp. 156-157. Henceforth, Hoskins, *Despatch*.



owing to the flooding. Wahle retained strong reserves further east and his position was secure for the time being.

None of this reflected the disastrous supply situation and Smuts's optimism had persuaded London that the campaign was in its final stages. After a mere three days in command, Hoskins was instructed by the CIGS to reduce his British and Indian forces significantly in order to release shipping and manpower resources for other theatres.<sup>315</sup> Having just come from the front himself, Hoskins knew only too well the exhausted and worn-out state of his command. He was dealt a further blow on 25 January when the rains struck even harder and the entire area became a swamp. He recognised the dangerous state of affairs, as he later stated:

“But the supply and transport situation was not all satisfactory. There was no reserve in the advanced depots; the number of porters was insufficient; the animals in transport units were dying and the drivers of the mechanical transport were falling sick so rapidly that the numbers of troops in the front line could not be maintained there [the Rufiji].”<sup>316</sup>

By early February 1917, the end could be put off no further and Hoskins was forced to signal Robertson that the offensive was over.<sup>317</sup> In that telegram, he outlined that the German supply position was weak but that he simply lacked the transport and means of mobility to do anything about it. Northey in the south-west was still able to operate as he was on much higher ground, but nonetheless the rainfall there was still substantial. Beaten by the weather and the lack of adequate preparations, the campaign would have to wait until May.

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<sup>315</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 25 January 1917, Appendix 46a, Repeat of Telegram OA 846, CIGS to Hoskins, 22 January.

<sup>316</sup> Hoskins, *Despatch*, p. 157.

<sup>317</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 14 February 1917, Appendices, Telegram OA 261, Hoskins to CIGS, 14 February.

## OPERATIONS IN THE FAR SOUTH AGAINST THE PORTUGUESE

Anglo-Portuguese co-operation proved to be more difficult in practice than in theory. General Smuts feared the worst of their military abilities and wished the Portuguese to do no more than move up to the line of the Rovuma in order to block a German withdrawal south, although he later envisaged a limited advance towards Liwale.<sup>318</sup> Despite the British intention to control the coastline themselves, and under pressure from his own government, General Gil had already decided to march on the small coastal port of Mikindani.<sup>319</sup> Seeking revenge for the defeat inflicted by the Germans earlier in the year, his troops set out from the port of Palmas on 10 September. The news of the British occupation of that place changed his mind and he altered his objective to the undefended Kionga Triangle, a parcel of land in the Rovuma delta. This was occupied on 19 September and honour was satisfied. He now had the choice of advancing over the arid and harsh Makonde Plateau, or moving to Newala which lay just to the south-west of that upland, or remaining along the north bank of the Rovuma. In the end, he chose to maintain his position along the river, just inside German territory.<sup>320</sup>

Although Smuts and the British had a very low opinion of their allies, diplomacy forced a degree of dialogue. The Portuguese Government believed, from British sources, that the campaign would be over in two to three months and wanted to obtain a bargaining chip for the peace negotiations. This, together with Smuts's own recommendation, made Gil march inland towards the nodal village of Newala.<sup>321</sup> However, a rebellion against Portuguese rule broke out along the Zambezi and a number of his troops were withdrawn from the southern end of Lake Nyassa. This limited Gil's capabilities further, although Smuts expressed the hope that they could be used to deny German foraging parties access to the southern part of the German colony.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No 1262, 26 September 1916, Telegram X 757, Smuts to CIGS, p. 337.

<sup>319</sup> Cann, John, "Mozambique and German East Africa", pp. 131-132.

<sup>320</sup> Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 390-391.

<sup>321</sup> Pélissier, *Naissance de Mozambique*, II, p. 692; Cann, "Mozambique", p. 133.

<sup>322</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 22 October 1916, Entry *Portuguese Force*.



This activity caused the Germans a degree of alarm as the Portuguese posed a potential threat to their southern food-growing areas. While they too had a low opinion of their fighting abilities, the sheer lack of military resources in the region was worrying. Captain Loeff, the newly appointed *Südsbefehlshaber*, had only meagre forces, consisting mainly of three companies of young recruits. As this force was also responsible for the containment of the British enclave at Lindi, it was clear that reinforcements were necessary. Assessing the situation, von Lettow decided to send him *Abt Rothe* consisting of two companies and a *Königsberg* gun, and instructions to deal the Portuguese a strong blow.<sup>323</sup>

While these reinforcements were marching south, the Portuguese launched a probe towards Newala in mid-October. This was blocked, but a renewed attack forced the weak defenders out and Gil had reached his objective. German security was also threatened by an uprising of the African population of the nearby Makonde Plateau.

Loeff was now under orders first to eliminate the Portuguese and second to restore colonial authority on the plateau. As soon as *Abt Rothe* reached Lindi, it was sent out to attack the Portuguese at Newala. His small detachment of 50 Germans and 300 Askaris faced nearly 800 Portuguese, who were dug in at Newala, as well as another 750 holding Kivambo. Rothe reached Newala on 19 November and, after a few days in reconnaissance, he surrounded the garrison on 23 November, cutting off the vital water supply. Despite their superiority of numbers, the Portuguese remained besieged for five more days, when they decided a break out was essential. This took place on 28 November and a disorganised force made its way south to the Rovuma, losing four mountain guns, seven machine guns and a large quantity of supplies.<sup>324</sup>

While not a complete rout, the retreat was humiliating and all of the earlier territorial gains were lost within two days. Captain Loeff followed up in due course and eliminated all Portuguese posts north of the Rovuma; indeed, using his *Königsberg* guns, he shelled the border post at Nangade on 1 December, causing a major panic and abandonment of the position. Gil himself was unwell, and lost his nerve completely,

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<sup>323</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 165-166.

claiming that some 2,000 Germans had concentrated around Massassi before attacking Newala.<sup>325</sup> Ironically, the British had sent a warning several days beforehand, that *Abt Rothe*, comprising one or two companies, was about to attack Newala, but word either never got through or was disregarded.<sup>326</sup>

Having fled in disorder south of the Rovuma, rumours then abounded that the Germans were advancing on Palma. This was completely groundless as Loeff's troops remained some 60 miles to the north, unwilling to be trapped by the now rising waters of the Rovuma.<sup>327</sup> Nevertheless, a British warship and a marine detachment were diverted from their blockade duties to reassure their allies. After these panics, any remaining Portuguese credibility was destroyed. Considering that a well-armed and equipped force of nearly 2,000 had been overwhelmed by less than 400 Germans, Smuts now sought the War Office's permission to help defend PEA if required.<sup>328</sup> Although a sensible precaution, the combination of offensive operations and the coming monsoon meant that activity died down on the southern front. By mid-December, the British ship had returned to its normal duties and *Abt Rothe* had moved back to Mpotora.<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Pélissier, *Naissance de Mozambique*, II, pp. 692-693.

<sup>325</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 5 December 1916, Entry *Portuguese Force*.

<sup>326</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 December 1916, Entry *Portuguese Force*. Smuts noted "Above proves how little reliance must be placed on fighting efficiency of GILS army as he grossly over estimates enemy force."

<sup>327</sup> Pélissier, *Naissance de Mozambique*, II, pp. 693-694.

<sup>328</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 12 December 1916, Appendix 17, Telegram OA 267, Smuts to War Office, 11 December.

<sup>329</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 14 December 1916, Appendix 21, Telegram F 6187, Smuts to CIGS, 14 December; Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 166.



## CHAPTER 4

### REORGANISATION AND THE OPERATIONS OF JANUARY - MAY 1917

#### STRATEGY OF THE SECOND COALITION GOVERNMENT

As General Smuts had been making the final preparations for his offensive, greater political events were underway in London. December had witnessed a major crisis in the British government that had resulted in the fall of the Asquith administration. Although long-standing in cause, it had been precipitated by violent disagreement over conscription, Ireland and the conduct of the war.<sup>330</sup> The result was a new coalition, under David Lloyd George, who quickly instituted a smaller and more vigorous War Cabinet to direct the policy of the war.<sup>331</sup>

The new government retained its predecessor's broad strategic goals of retaining Britain's status as a great power together with enhanced security at the end of the war. More than anything else it realised the need for continued public support if these ambitious aims were to be achieved. This meant achieving real victories, not the bloody and inconclusive fighting that the Western Front seemed to offer. In practical terms, this led Lloyd George and others to support operations on the strategic periphery that offered a chance of success and hence a real boost to public morale.<sup>332</sup> While East Africa ranked some way below Italy, Palestine and Mesopotamia in order of strategic importance, it did show considerable promise as the EAEF seemed on the verge of victory.

From a political viewpoint, Smuts had conducted a rare campaign of genius advancing more in a day than the BEF had managed in months. Apart from capturing large swathes of enemy territory and the major centres of population, he appeared to be a daring and decisive leader.<sup>333</sup> This impression had been reinforced by Smuts's own upbeat

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<sup>330</sup> Turner, *British Politics*, pp. 112-116.

<sup>331</sup> Turner, *British Politics*, p. 153; French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, p. 17.

<sup>332</sup> French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>333</sup> Riddell, Lord, *Lord Riddell's War Diary, 1914-1918*, London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1933, Entry 19 March 1917, p. 166.

"...particularly Smuts, of whom L.G. spoke very highly. He said that Asquith held a very moderate opinion of Smuts at the time of the South African War. Asquith did not appreciate what a remarkable man he was"; MS Long, 947/547, 29 March 1917, Letter Derby to Long; MS Long, 947/602, 11 May 1917, Letter Buxton to Long; Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 388; Hughes, *British Strategy in the Middle East*, p. 24. Lord Derby was so impressed with Smuts that he wanted to offer him a high command in France but was dissuaded on

communiqués that emphasized his successes and gave little hint that the achievements had been attained at a huge cost in disease and suffering.

Although his final offensive can only be described as a military failure, it was not initially viewed as such in London. On the surface, it appeared to have driven the Germans into an increasingly tight position, trapped in the wild and undeveloped centre of their colony by converging forces from all sides. In reality, this effort represented the last gasp of an exhausted and gravely weakened EAEF that was incapable of further offensive efforts without both substantial rest and reinforcement. However, this would not begin to emerge until Hoskins began to pick up the many pieces.

This unsatisfactory situation was worsened by Botha's and Smuts's public pronouncements that the campaign was more or less finished with only mopping up left.<sup>334</sup> In fact, nothing could have been further from the truth as the Germans had yet to be defeated in a defensive battle and they had plenty of fight left in them. The damage from Smuts's untrue assertions was to be considerable, as to politicians and senior generals, it appeared that East Africa could be removed from the list of theatres requiring resources and manpower.<sup>335</sup> Unfortunately, these were precisely what Hoskins required if the fighting was truly to be brought to a successful end. It also caused a great deal of anger and dismay amongst his former troops and many South Africans.<sup>336</sup>

It seems that Smuts was aware that the campaign had not gone as smoothly as publicly presented. In many ways, the summons to the Imperial Conference was a

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the grounds that he could not be spared from South African service. The War Cabinet had subsequently offered him command of the forces in Egypt and Palestine before Allenby, but that too had been declined.

<sup>334</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1313, 17 October 1917, Telegram D 280/1973, General Botha to War Office, p. 355; Fendall, *The East African Force*, pp. 87-88; CAB 44/9, p. 13, cites telegram Hoskins to CIGS 4 May 1917. It quotes a speech in Pretoria on 26 January 1917 in a *Times* article of 29 January. Smuts is also quoted as saying on 12 March 1917 "The campaign in German East Africa may said to be over. What is delaying the absolute end is the fact that March and April are the heavy rainy season. After April the Germans will have to surrender or go into Portuguese territory. They cannot hold out in East Africa, and the Portuguese are quite prepared to deal with them. The German Governor and his staff, the Commander-in-Chief, and other officers are still doing their best to keep things going, but it is merely the remnant of an army that is left, and not a formidable fighting force".

<sup>335</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1516, 20 January 1917, Telegram 28209, CIGS to Hoskins, p. 419. This telegram specified considerable reductions in East Africa, largely based on the information provided by General Smuts; CO 691/19, Pike, Surg-Gen W W and Balfour, Col Andrew, *Report of Medical & Sanitary Matters in German East Africa 1917*, Nairobi: Swift Press, 1918, p. 6. Henceforth, *Pike Report*.

<sup>336</sup> MS Long, 947/545, 22 April 1917, Letter Sir Charles Crewe to Long; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 28 February 1917; Downes, *With the Nigerians*, p. 267.



convenient and honourable escape from East Africa.<sup>337</sup> Smuts himself felt it necessary to draft a press statement, justifying his recall in terms of a military success:

“...The military situation in East Africa, is fortunately, such as to make a change in command, and some reorganisation comparatively simple, and indeed the steps that are now contemplated in consequence of the sudden demand for General Smuts’ services elsewhere are those which would have been taken in any case very shortly...His [enemy] forces in consequence of casualties and desertion are much reduced in strength and morale”<sup>338</sup>

### BRITISH REORGANISATION

The failure of the late offensive left Hoskins in a very difficult position, both on the ground and in dealing with London. While the rains had forced a pause in operations, giving a respite for rest and recuperation, they also increased the pressure on the medical and transport systems. The health of the troops deteriorated even more rapidly, while the transport network dissolved into mud or was submerged under water. Drastic action was required to avoid a disaster, as he faced three distinct, but related problems. The first and most pressing was the need to reduce the numbers of the troops in the forward areas to levels that could be physically sustained while concurrently stemming the rising losses caused by disease and ill-health. In short, he had to maintain his army in being.

The second challenge was then to rest and reorganise the entire force so that it was strong enough to resume the offensive in the next dry season. This included a complete overhaul of the supply, transport and medical services together with full replacement of previous losses. Hoskins also recognised that far-reaching changes in the system of

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<sup>337</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1313, 17 October 1916, Telegram 280/1973, General Botha to War Office, p. 355. “...The progress of the East African campaign to its inevitable end is continuing satisfactorily though, as was expected, the campaign has arrived at a stage at which time is necessary to effect certain regrouping and redistribution of forces”; MS Smuts, Box 100, 17 January 1917, Letter Buxton to Mrs Smuts; “But to do this [hand-over command] voluntarily and without any obvious moment or reason was not easy, nor perhaps expedient, and might possibly have given rise to some (quite unjustified) criticism. But this ‘call’ to England disposes absolutely and complimentarily of any possible criticisms on that score”.

<sup>338</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1500, 11 January 1917, Telegram X 1182, Smuts to Secretary of State for War, p. 412. In his private preamble to the statement, Smuts also states “I submit for consideration following draft of statement for Press in connection with my retirement, as it should be made clear that military results which has been accomplished here justify the change in command.”

command and control, both tactical and administrative, were essential as most of the previous year's failures were linked to deficiencies in this area.<sup>339</sup>

The third, and from London's point of view the most important, question was the need to devise and put into place a strategy that would wrap up the campaign as quickly as possible in 1917. This called for a decisive and well-executed plan based on sufficient numbers of fit and well supplied troops. Hoskins understood this very clearly, but it could only be achieved once the first two objectives had been achieved and neither was attainable in the short term.

The situation was not helped by one of the wettest seasons known in East Africa for many years. If December and early January had been bad, the seasonal monsoon would make things unimaginably worse. Roads everywhere ceased to exist and porters were often the only alternative, sometimes having to wade through waist-deep water for miles. As the wet season progressed, the water rose everywhere in the Rufiji-Ulangu-Ruaha basin. For example, a level gauge had been established on the normal dry season high water mark at Kibambawe on the River Rufiji. By 1 April, the river was 147 inches (12.3 feet) over the mark, nine days later the excess had risen to 175 inches (14.4 feet), with the peak of 201 inches (16.8 feet) being reached on 14 April. Thereafter, the level stayed around 180 inches (15 feet) above the gauge until the end of the month, when it again peaked at 201 inches before diminishing in May. Considering that the valleys were generally broad and shallow, the volume of extra water was simply enormous.<sup>340</sup>

Further west, the Dodoma-Iringa line of communications crossed the Great Ruaha River by an easy ford in dry weather. During the wet season, there was not just a flooded river to cross but a swamp six feet deep and six miles beyond either bank. Elsewhere Kilwa and the lower Rufiji suffered heavily from flooding and raging torrents. Only in the Iringa highlands, so far above the river basins, was movement possible, but even then it was made very difficult by the heavy rain and the loss of most roads. Everywhere, sickness levels escalated rapidly, with malaria being particularly acute for Europeans

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<sup>339</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 24 February 1917, Entry *1<sup>st</sup> Division*.



while Africans suffered more from dysentery and pneumonia. Animals could only survive a few weeks and their condition deteriorated badly before death.<sup>341</sup> In the circumstances, there was no escape from the misery for either side.

## THE REDUCTION IN FORWARD FORCES

The problem of reducing the forward forces to a manageable level was Hoskins's first priority. Once 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had ground to a halt in early January owing to lack of food and ill health, it had been withdrawn to the Central Railway and disbandment commenced on 13 January.<sup>342</sup> In its place was a small two-battalion column of Indians and KAR under Colonel Taylor.<sup>343</sup>

The thinning out of the forward areas began in earnest on 14 February.<sup>344</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Division had pulled its two brigades back, with the 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade ordered from Kitambi back to Kibata by 19 February and 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade also drawn back to the Ngarambi-Namatewa area.<sup>345</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade, however, retained the unpleasant task of holding the Rufiji line until the now complete Nigerian Brigade could move forward to relieve it. The commander-in-chief still retained hope that the main supply route between Mikesse and the Rufiji would remain in reasonable condition throughout the rainy season, otherwise the forward positions would be untenable. In the west, the planned concentration of Norforce around Lupembe and Songea was taking place, but was soon to be disrupted by the appearance of *Abt Wintgens*.<sup>346</sup>

The Germans were also forced to make a number of changes to their dispositions. On the middle Rufiji, the forward troops were thinned out considerably, leaving only major concentrations opposite the Nigerian Brigade at Mkindu and at Utenge. Even then, conditions were dangerous; the British took the surrender of a hospital containing 200

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<sup>340</sup> WO 95/ 5293, War Diary GHQ, Entries 1-30 April 1917.

<sup>341</sup> Hoskins *Despatch*, p. 159.

<sup>342</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 2 January 1917, Appendix 3, Telegram P 71, GOC Div to BGGs, 2 January; War Diary GHQ, 13 January 1917, Entry 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

<sup>343</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 26 February 1917, Entry *Nyasaland Force*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had left only the 17<sup>th</sup> Infantry and the 1<sup>st</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> KAR at Iringa under the command of Colonel Taylor.

<sup>344</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 14 February 1917, Appendix of Communiqués, Telegram OA 261, Hoskins to CIGS, 14 February.

<sup>345</sup> CAB 44/9, p. 17.

soldiers that had been cut off by the rising waters and were threatened with either starvation or drowning. In the west, the rise of the Ulanga River forced an evacuation of the west bank and a climb to drier ground. Sickness there was tremendous; *Abt Braunschweig* reported that over 75 per cent of the Europeans were unfit for duty.<sup>347</sup> On the lower Rufiji, life was equally miserable.

Although these reductions prevented starvation, conditions remained deplorable. Rations remained grossly insufficient owing to a severe lack of transport. For example, the Nigerian Brigade was put on half rations on 30 January as all of their porters were required to keep the lines of communication open. This rendered the brigade virtually immobile and dependent on the vulnerable lifeline to the north. Remaining in the area into early February, its sick rate duly mounted, aggravated by the paucity of rations. This was reflected in the casualties from disease; the Brigade had 28 officers and 500 men unfit for duty, or approximately 22 per cent of the officers and 21 per cent of the African ranks that had started at the end of December.<sup>348</sup> These sufferings were not unique to the Nigerian Brigade, as others endured similar shortages. The Gold Coast Regiment, serving in 1<sup>st</sup> Division and stationed south of Utete, had the misfortune not only to be on half rations for most of the period January-February, but also a great deal of the supplies that arrived had rotted and were unfit for human consumption. Many of the soldiers were very emaciated and 80 had to be hospitalised for starvation.<sup>349</sup>

Despite a brief improvement in the food situation in early March, it was decided to withdraw the remainder of 1<sup>st</sup> EA Brigade for rest and recuperation. This left only the Nigerian Brigade along the middle Rufiji position, and by 17 March it held a line of nearly 50 miles, running from Nyangandu to Nyakisiku. However, the Rufiji continued to rise and the supply situation worsened appreciably. From 28 March to 1 May all ranks were on half rations, supplemented only by shooting of game. However, even this source became depleted through flooding and constant depredations by hungry soldiers. To cap things off,

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<sup>346</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 22 February 1917, Appendix of Communiques, Telegram G 218, Hoskins to CIGS, 22 February.

<sup>347</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 253.

<sup>348</sup> CAB 45/19, *Nigeria Regiment Record*, pp. 3 and 18. The brigade started with 125 British Officers, 70 British NCOs and 2402 African NCOs and privates; WO 106/273, *History of 3 KAR*, p. 55. 3 KAR had been on half rations from leaving Mbuyuni on 22 May until 18 September 1916.

<sup>349</sup> Clifford, *The Gold Coast Regiment*, pp. 68-69.



the flying bridge was swept away and the entire force was cut off for three complete days.<sup>350</sup>

Finally, despite all human efforts, on 8 April the Nigerian Brigade was compelled to send half its troops back to the railway line owing to lack of food and clothing. General Cunliffe's words underlined the need for more of everything:

"...lack of supplies in addition to nullifying all possible military initiative is gradually sapping stamina of officers and men who by transfer to healthier conditions would return recuperated for eventual advance."<sup>351</sup>

By mid-April, the food situation was getting worse even with half the brigade back to Morogoro. The returning units were so weakened with hunger that during the 10 day march to Mikesse, large numbers fell out, incapable of completing the trek. The road was a loose description as in many places it was waist deep in water, and littered with the bodies of dead animals and even porters as well as broken down vehicles and carts. It was a depressing sight - even the patrols had to be conducted in canoes. Finally, in mid-May the rains began to abate and the supply situation improved slowly, although active operations would not be possible until the Mikesse Road had been made fit for use by MT.<sup>352</sup>

## REST AND REORGANISATION

The worn-out and weakened forward troops required much more than simple withdrawal to the Central Railway, itself far from healthy or comfortable. They needed complete rest in a dry climate with a proper diet and replacement of their ragged uniforms. This system had already been instigated in early 1916, when a British battalion had been sent to South Africa in an attempt to restore its health and fighting efficiency. One of the assumptions behind the evacuation of most of the South Africans was that a smaller, fitter contingent would return after appropriate rest and recovery. To this end, General Hoskins

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<sup>350</sup> CAB 45/19, *Nigeria Regiment Record*, p. 19.

<sup>351</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 8 April 1917, Appendix 66, Telegram N 715, General Cunliffe to BGGS, 8 April.

<sup>352</sup> CAB 45/19, *Nigeria Regiment Record*, p. 20-22.

was counting on seeing three SAI battalions back in time for the next offensive. Another British unit was then sent to South Africa for recovery, while the four longest serving Indian units were rotated to India in exchange for fresh units as shipping became available.

Obtaining and maintaining sufficient fit soldiers was always one of the biggest problems facing the EAEF. Matters were worsened by the dramatic reduction in infantry manpower that began with the repatriations of October 1916. By the end of December, the loss of nearly 12,000 South Africans had only been partially offset by the arrival of the Nigerian Brigade, some 4,500 strong. On the other hand, the indigenous King's African Rifles had proven their effectiveness in battle as well their resistance to disease, but with only eight battalions, two of them brand new, they were too small a force to be decisive at the operational level. Although an expansion programme had been agreed some months before, the recruiting, equipping and training of these new units would take many months. Hoskins took a particular interest in the KAR, but his efforts were hampered by the lack of suitably trained personnel, while it was particularly difficult to get British officers and NCOs who could actually speak the local languages.<sup>353</sup>

The CIGS's unexpected order to withdraw eight infantry battalions on top of the departing South Africans, as well as five artillery batteries, three armoured car batteries, the RFC squadron and various smaller units to join the forces in Egypt was a major blow.<sup>354</sup> The loss of these units seriously weakened Hoskins's offensive capability and would impede plans to wind up the campaign in 1917. Hoskins replied the same day, citing that the already planned loss of 3,500 infantry from 2<sup>nd</sup> Division plus the 4,000 extras required from his other formations would reduce his numbers to below the bare minimum needed to conduct operations. In its stead, he offered to release his South African field batteries in return for the retention of two Indian infantry battalions, the net decrease being reduced from 7,500 to 6,100.<sup>355</sup> Robertson was quickly won over and on 25 January agreed to let Hoskins keep as many troops as he considered essential to fight the campaign. Indeed, it

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<sup>353</sup> Hoskins, *Despatch*, p 163; Moyse-Bartlett, *King's African Rifles*, p. 701. On 1 July 1916, the regiment was over 8,000 strong; six months later on 1 January 1917, it numbered over 15,000.

<sup>354</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D I*, No. 1516, 20 January 1917, Telegram 28209, CIGS to Hoskins, p. 419 gives the reductions; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 25 January 1917, Appendix 46a, Telegram OA 846, Hoskins to General Ewart, 22 January, gives Hoskins's response.

<sup>355</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 25 January 1917, Appendix 46b, Telegram OA 847, Hoskins to CIGS, 22 January.



was the reduction in shipping rather than an urgent need for reinforcements in the Middle East that inspired the transfers.

It emerged that one of the reasons for the scale of the reductions was that London believed that the Germans were considerably weaker than did Hoskins. The War Office estimated that von Lettow had a maximum of 600 whites and 6,000 askaris lacking either organised bases or communications.<sup>356</sup> This was countered by Hoskins's assertion that the Germans actually had about 1,500 whites, of whom 1,150 were considered effective, together with some 7,300 askaris, making a total of 8,450 – the difference was 1850 men or 28 per cent more than the War Office estimate. Ammunition was plentiful, although food was in short supply especially following the loss of Mohoro and Utete. However, the districts of Lindi, Rovuma and Mahenge all promised to yield good levels of food.<sup>357</sup> Although London accepted the larger figure and the misunderstanding seems to have arisen from Smuts's own over-optimistic reports of only 6-7000 remaining effectives, it was not an auspicious start.<sup>358</sup>

Robertson calculated that with the re-entry of the Belgians into the campaign, the rotation of worn-out Indian Army units, and the return of units recuperating in South Africa, Hoskins would have a significant advantage over the Germans, with some 50,000 troops to counter 8,000.<sup>359</sup> This was followed several days later by confirmation of renewed South African support in the form of two newly raised infantry battalions, plus replacements for the MT and other specialist units.<sup>360</sup> These were welcome additions, although most of the soldiers would be new recruits. Furthermore, Hoskins disputed the figures and placed his "effective" infantry currently at 16,000, with the rotation of tired units and the new South Africans adding another 3,700 and the Belgians a further 3,000. He calculated his effectives at being 23,000, of whom at least 20 per cent would be unable

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<sup>356</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 25 January 1917, Appendix 46a, Telegram OA 846, Hoskins to General Ewart, 22 January.

<sup>357</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 27 January 1917, Appendix 54, Telegram OA 936, Genstaff to CIGS, 27 January.

<sup>358</sup> Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, p. 193, diary entry for 20 July 1916. As far back as July 1916, Meinertzhagen was noting that Smuts believed the Germans to be weaker than his Intelligence estimates and that the Askaris had lost their morale. This trait appears to have coloured his reports to CIGS.

<sup>359</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 19 April 1917, Appendix A120, Telegram 32999, CIGS to Hoskins, 18 April.

<sup>360</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 28 April 1917, Appendix A200, Telegram H 3875, CSO Pretoria to Hoskins, 27 April.

to participate owing to sickness. The new KAR battalions promised to bring another 2,500 men, but the quality of these units would be low for many months to come.<sup>361</sup>

## SUPPLY AND TRANSPORT

Smuts's failure adequately to consider supply and transport when making his operational plans had led to many of the problems that Hoskins was now trying to resolve. The first and most obvious weakness had been the failure to brief or consult his administrative staff; as a divisional commander, Hoskins had seen and experienced the limitations of GHQ's planning. However, on his assuming the chief command, formal evidence of the problem was supplied in a memorandum by the Director of Supply and Transport to the principal administrative officer. It was an indirect, but withering, critique of Smuts's methods as it depicted the gap between the staff branches:

“Without any desire to criticize [sic] the methods of direction of the [campaign], the first difficulty I as D. of T. had to contend with was the absence of information as to the plans of operations, which should normally in my opinion be conveyed in sufficient time to allow of preparation of reserves in animal and mechanical transport.

Had this information been available to me, some opportunity would have been afforded to point out most of the salient transport difficulties regarding these plans and to suggest to you means of meeting such difficulties where they could be overcome.

Speaking generally of the conduct of the campaign, I must with due deference insist that from a transport point of view my resources were overstrained from the fact that long advances were carried out without halts at suitable intervals in order to allow transport to catch with the troops and enable supplies to be accumulated before the next move forward [author's footnote: Two halts were

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<sup>361</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 27 April 1917, Appendix B21, Telegram G 165, Hoskins to CIGS, 27 April.



promised, one at Same and one on the Central Railway, which never were given].”<sup>362</sup>

The reasons for short feeding were due to beginning the advance without any transport reserves, the continual and unexpected changes in forward troop strengths, new units arriving without any integral transport, and the long lead-time for replacement vehicles. The note ended with a plaintive plea:

“...Finally that an opportunity be given to all Administrative Services to discuss the proposals of the General Staff.”<sup>363</sup>

For a commander of the right temperament and training, the problem of co-ordination was relatively easy to solve. However, the resolution of supply and transport difficulties posed much more of a challenge. Food, ammunition and equipment could generally be shipped to the sea ports of Dar-es-Salaam, Mombasa and Kilwa without major problems; it was moving them to the forward troops in a timely and efficient manner that had proven to be such a nightmare.

Ports were a major bottleneck and it took time to clear Dar-es-Salaam harbour of the sunken floating dock and scuttled ships. In the meantime, an engineer company was employed full-time on the building of wharves and installing steam cranes for the unloading of ships there.<sup>364</sup> Furthermore, as the expeditionary force's main base, it required the construction of extensive vehicle workshops and storage facilities. Further south, Kilwa had an excellent natural anchorage, but ships were unable to come close to shore and unloading had to be carried out with lighters. It was almost totally undeveloped when the British occupied it in September and a great deal of further development was required there. Finally, Lindi which was destined to take on a key role in 1917, had only

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<sup>362</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, April 1917. The War Diary enclosed “Printed Notes from War Diaries, Part CCLXXXV, EAEF Force “B”, General Staff, Army Headquarters, India, April 1917, *Confidential Print of Key Extracts for Army Departments*. See Director Supply and Transport, East African Force, 18 to 31 January 1917, Appendix A to DA&QMG, General Headquarters, No. ST 34 dated 18 January 1917, p. 15. Although not addressed to Hoskins personally, the existence of a printed note by Army Headquarters India, and subsequently circulated to all staff branches means that it would have almost certainly come to his attention. Given the embarrassing nature of the contents, it seems unlikely to have been reprinted without his permission.

<sup>363</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, April 1917, *Confidential Print of Key Extracts for Army Departments*, p. 16.

<sup>364</sup> Woodhouse, Capt H L, “Notes on Railway Work in East Africa, 1914 - 1918”, *The Royal Engineers Journal*, XXIX, (1923), pp.

the most basic dock facilities which would require significant enhancement in the coming months. The main problems faced by Hoskins were a shortage of trained technical troops and the time between ordering and receiving the necessary machinery and materials to East Africa.

The most efficient means of moving personnel and stores forward remained the Central Railway. German demolitions had been makeshift and were not particularly difficult to overcome, but they did take time to repair. Despite Smuts's claims that it would take only a couple of weeks to restore operations, it took the in-theatre railway battalion two months of flat-out work just to restore the line to a basic level of function between the coast and Tabora. The destruction of locomotives and rolling stock was another major handicap that was solved by resourcefulness and improvisation. Engineers first opened the tracks to hand-operated trolleys followed by 30 hundredweight lorries mounted on railway wheels. However, the first such motor tractor arriving in Dodoma only on 6 October and this service could only meet a fraction of the daily requirements, let alone build up reserves. It was not until early December before a full service of locomotives drawing railway freight cars could be restored.

Hoskins had attempted to use the Rufiji to move supplies and the navy conducted a survey in late January.<sup>365</sup> An innovative attempt to off-load supplies from ships to motor boats was defeated by the strength of the flooding river's current which simply outmatched the power of the small engines. This meant that the maintenance of troops in the area would have to rely on less efficient means.<sup>366</sup>

The biggest challenge was to create an effective transport system forward of the ports and railheads. The traditional animal transport (AT) system was not a feasible option as the mortality of horses and other draught animals had already been proven. However, despite these major limitations, it still represented a large proportion of the overall effort, if only because of lack of alternatives. The best solution was clearly the developing system

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<sup>365</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 22 January 1917, Appendix 38, Telegram OA 835, Hoskins to CIGS, 21 January.

<sup>366</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 27 January 1917, Appendix 52, Telegram OA 947, Hoskins to CIGS, 27 January.



of MT; in one day a single Ford car of 300 lbs cargo capacity could match the efforts of 300 carriers. However, the almost complete lack of roads in the southern part of the colony coupled with insufficient numbers of vehicles and their vulnerability to bad weather precluded MT from becoming the main form of transport. This meant that considerable reliance on human transport would be essential particularly in areas of difficult terrain or where roads had not yet been constructed.

Hoskins and his staff put considerable effort into calculating the minimum levels of transport resources required to support an offensive. The numbers were huge; plans worked out in February called for 160,000 carriers together with provision of 16,000 replacements per month. By mid-1916, the neglect and poor working conditions had made service in the Carrier Corps extremely unattractive regardless of the rates of pay, and recruiting was becoming very difficult. Even with coercion and the subsequent passing of a Compulsory Service Act in March 1917, in which the mass conscription of Africans for carrier or labour service was authorised, it was impossible to reach anything like the levels required. Special appeals were sent to the various colonial governments for more African manpower, but the pool of healthy labour was insufficient.<sup>367</sup>

The Commander-in-Chief launched his first plea for help on 6 February with requests to the Governors of Uganda and Nigeria for 5,000 additional carriers each.<sup>368</sup> The Governor of British East Africa was also approached and demurred on the need to sustain recruiting.<sup>369</sup> Both territories were heavily pressed, but, caught between the need to support the war effort and the anxiety to prevent a popular revolt, by July 1917 they had only supplied 67,799 and 10,934 men respectively. Even West Africa was approached for some 5,000 carriers, which were eventually provided.<sup>370</sup> The Belgians and Portuguese came under considerable pressure to open up their colonies to British recruiters, but these efforts came to little.

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<sup>367</sup> Hodges, *The Carrier Corps*, pp. 99-102; Hodges, "Military Labour in East Africa", in Page, Melvin (ed), *Africa and the First World War*, London: Macmillan Press, 1987, p. 139.

<sup>368</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 6 February 1917, Appendix A, Telegram OA 109, Hoskins to Genstaff covering OA 56 Hoskins to Governor Uganda, 5 February; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 6 February 1917, Appendix B, Telegram OA 110, Hoskins to Genstaff covering OA 54 Hoskins to Governor Nigeria, 5 February.

<sup>369</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 9 February 1917, Appendix D, Telegram Governor, Nairobi to Hoskins, 9 February covering Telegram Governor, Nigeria to Hoskins.

<sup>370</sup> Killingray, David and Matthews, James, "Beasts of Burden: British West African Carriers in the First World War", *Canadian*

Carriers, although important, were far from the only demand on civil manpower. The existing lines of communication had to be maintained, new roads had to be cut and improved, while defensive positions and camps had to be built along their length. Ports and bases needed labourers, while many worked as personal servants to the military and civil administrations.<sup>371</sup> In a region that had already provided large numbers of soldiers followed by regular trawls for labourers and carriers, first by the Germans and now by the British, the pool of manpower had begun to run dry.

Realising the urgency of his requirements, General Hoskins bombarded the War Office with requests for more materiel and specialist manpower. Despite its lack of strategic importance, Robertson did his best to remedy the deficiencies in transport, armaments and personnel. By early April, a total of 484 light lorries from British sources together with 607 drivers and artificers were underway at sea while a further 563 men awaited berths. Included with these drafts were an additional 300 signals personnel, 400 Lewis guns, twelve of the new 2.75" mountain gun, and twenty Stokes mortars.<sup>372</sup> Perhaps tiny by Western Front standards, these shipments added substantially to East Africa's technical resources.

## MEDICINE

The medical services had been in a poor state of organisation prior to the advance south from Morogoro. Despite the overwhelming importance of health in the campaign, the General Staff failed to appreciate the need to treat and evacuate casualties. Unfortunately, the principal defects of insufficient transport, lack of considered planning, and non-existent briefings to the staffs and units concerned remained uncorrected.<sup>373</sup> One

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*Journal of African Studies*, XIII, No. 1, (1979), pp. 8-11. By 1918, 9,391 had been supplied with the majority employed as carriers.

<sup>371</sup> CO 533/216, East Africa Protectorate, Volume 11, 1919, Letter Acting Governor to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 December 1919. This covers *Report by Lt Col O F Watkins CMG, CBE, DSO, Director of Military Labour to the BEA Expeditionary Force: On the period August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1914 to September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1919*, pp. 451-469. Henceforth, *Watkins Report*.

<sup>372</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 9 April 1917, Appendix A78, Telegram 32324, CIGS to Hoskins. Quotes his 31195 of 18 March and 31391 of 31 March 1917.

<sup>373</sup> Macpherson, Maj Gen Sir W G and Mitchell, Maj T J, *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents – Medical Services General History Volume 4. Medical Services During the Operations on the Gallipoli Peninsula; in Macedonia; in Mesopotamia and North-West Persia; in East Africa; in the Aden Protectorate and in North Russia*, London: HMSO, 1924, pp. 452-453. Henceforth, *Medical Services Volume 4*.



example was the evacuation of the 12,000 South Africans on medical grounds in late 1916. Smuts made the decision suddenly on 25 September, but before an evacuation plan had been drawn up or the various staff branches consulted. The result was a muddle and it took some time for the organisation of routes, transport and camps to be organised.<sup>374</sup>

The medical services were severely overstretched. Already lacking sufficient transport for true tactical mobility, the rains halted the movement of the motor ambulance convoys (MAC). This meant that the sick and wounded had to be evacuated by carriers which was naturally much slower. It also caused casualties to remain away from treatment for longer, placing more work on the remaining fit men, and sapped the vitality of the carriers themselves. Furthermore, in those areas where MT was still feasible, sickness amongst the drivers, particularly the newly-arrived, was a major problem. Seldom could all usable vehicles be driven owing to sickness. The case of a section of a field ambulance at Kilossa is instructive: equipped for a maximum of 50 patients, it had to hold, treat and feed 300 for a considerable time in November 1916.<sup>375</sup>

Reorganisation of the medical services was brought about with equipment being made easier to carry and stretcher-bearers added to establishments. Two extra field ambulances were brought out from India, and the system of evacuation and treatment was rationalised. Individual columns were now allocated their own field ambulance sections as well as elements of the bearer companies and sanitary sections. Forward clearing hospitals were set up on each line of advance linked by rest stations and supported by a forward field depot of medical supplies. Behind them were the stationary hospitals which then fed back patients to the general hospitals in Dar-es-Salaam. Greater use of vehicles in the MACs was made and they delivered the casualties back to the railway where special ambulance trains made the final journey to Dar-es-Salaam. The system of convalescent camps was extended further forward; previously clustered around Nairobi, new builds were erected at Morogoro and Dodoma. In the case of those considered as being too serious to recover in

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<sup>374</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Medical Services Volume 4*, pp. 458-459.

<sup>375</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Medical Services Volume 4*, p. 468.

East Africa, three hospital ships were employed in the transport of patients to India, Egypt and South Africa.<sup>376</sup>

The carriers, on whom so much depended, received much more attention than previously. Numbering over 150,000 strong, they were allocated the use of some 28 mixed rest stations, five casualty clearing hospitals and seven carrier hospitals.<sup>377</sup> However, these changes, overdue as they were, were too late to ease the immediate problems caused by the tropical monsoon. In the period 8 January to 5 May, over 38,000 were admitted to hospital with an admission rate of 206 per thousand per month. Of these, some 23,000 were due to malaria, making an admission rate of 126 per thousand, while dysentery accounted for 2,800 cases and 7.5 per cent respectively. These two diseases represented the bulk of hospital admissions, with malaria accounting for over 60 per cent and dysentery for 7.5 per cent of all admissions. Equally important they respectively caused 26 per cent and 23 per cent of all hospital deaths. Kilwa had the unhappy record for sickness with admissions reaching 41.3 per cent monthly.

The levels of sickness were not just a temporary concern as many of the cases were permanently lost to the campaign. Of the 38,333 soldiers admitted during this four month period, some 10,436 were invalided overseas, 43 were discharged from military service, and 642 died - this represented a permanent loss rate of 5.9 per cent. The carriers also suffered heavily too, as 33,169 were admitted to hospital, with 4,168 dying compared to the 642 soldiers who succumbed. The sick rate reached 7.1 per cent per month, with malaria accounting for 9,629 or 2.0 per cent and pneumonia 2,342 or 0.5 per cent monthly. Malaria represented 29 per cent, dysentery 18 per cent and pneumonia 7 per cent of all admissions. Permanent losses were also high, with 15,845 being invalided out of service, 4,435 deserting and 4,168 dying.<sup>378</sup> Sadly, matters did not improve in the subsequent period, with a peak of 7,500 troops and 2,000 followers in hospital by the first week of December.

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<sup>376</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Medical Services Volume 4*, pp. 475-477.

<sup>377</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Medical Services Volume 4*, p. 477.

<sup>378</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Medical Services Volume 4*, pp. 478-479



## COMMAND AND CONTROL

The previous year had exposed a number of weaknesses in the system of operational command and control. While the divisional structure was well proven elsewhere, it required the constituent brigades to operate relatively closely to one another. This enabled the commander to support his fighting formations with artillery and engineers as required, while divisional supply and transport units maintained the link between them and the lines of communication troops. The system ran best with the combination of a centralised rear area supporting a number of similarly organised formations, all backed up by an efficient rail and road network. To be really effective, it also required a large and well-trained administrative staff under the control of a single officer. Unfortunately, none of these conditions was present in East Africa.

Reorganisation had left only the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, plus a number of independent formations directly under the control of the commander-in-chief. By early 1917 it was clear that the divisional system was not working well in the difficult conditions of the African bush. Quite simply, the system could not cope with the problems of supplying widely spread brigades at great distances from their railheads together with insufficient transport. The answer was the expanded use of the independent column. This was nothing new, as it had been the mainstay of past colonial operations, and had been used most successfully by Norforce. In this system, each column was based on a varying number of fighting troops, usually about 3 - 4 battalions strong, depending on the task.

Transport units had been designed to support a brigade of fixed composition and could not easily cope with increases. The solution was centralise all resources and then allocate them to the columns as necessary. By pooling junior commanders as well as vehicles, the system could become much more flexible. A force headquarters, its size also dependent on the mission at hand, supported a varying number of columns and maintained the lines of communications. The system was more flexible and could be adjusted according to the supply or tactical situation. While it could not resolve the problems of acquiring sufficient transport or moving supplies over difficult terrain, it did give tactical

commanders greater operational freedom. It also made it easier to ensure that the number of troops sent forward were equivalent to the local supply capability; the haunting memories of semi-starved divisions littered around the Rufiji were not forgotten. However, it was not possible to overhaul the entire command apparatus at once and the decision to move to columns, taken in late February, would not be fully implemented for several months to come.<sup>379</sup>

### **PLANNING FOR THE DRY SEASON OFFENSIVE IN 1917**

The halt imposed by the rains also provided an opportunity to formulate the operational plans for the dry season of 1917 which would not begin before late June. The difficulties of trying to advance and sustain operations across the Mgeta and Rufiji rivers had already been amply demonstrated. Fighting at the end of elongated lines of communication in primeval jungle magnified the British weakness in transport while giving few tangible advantages in return. However, by using Kilwa as a base of operations, the British could utilize their maritime supremacy to much better advantage while also shortening the overland supply lines. Movement by ship also made possible the rapid and large scale redeployment of troops, if only along the littoral.

These factors, coupled with the realisation that von Lettow was likely to retreat into southern German East Africa, led Hoskins to select Lindi as a future base of operations. However, the landings in September had left only the immediate area of the town and anchorage in British hands, with the enemy holding the dominating high ground to the west. Before any serious development of the port and base could take place, it would be necessary to clear the area from direct observation and to establish secure forward positions. To ensure this vital task was carried out, Hoskins selected Brigadier General O'Grady, an aggressive and energetic officer, to assume the command there. He and his brigade were to reinforce the small garrison with the initial task of removing the threat to Lindi and then preparing for a subsequent advance.<sup>380</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 24 February 1917, Entry *1<sup>st</sup> Division*, Telegram Hoskins to Hannyngton, 24 February.



Hoskins set out his thoughts to the CIGS at the beginning of March. He envisaged a four pronged advance from widely separated positions converging into the heartland of the German colony. In the north, a column would push south from the Rufiji River towards Madaba and Luwegu, supported in the west by another column advancing from Iringa to Mahenge; from the coast, a third column would move westwards from Kilwa towards Liwale and a fourth would move north-westwards from Lindi in an attempt to cut off any escape to the south. Norforce was to move east, blocking any German attempts to move into either Rhodesia or Nyasaland. Fundamental to the success of this plan was the provision of substantial replacements, particularly signallers and drivers, as well as many more porters. Hoskins stated:

“the speedy provision of light lorries and porters is the crux of the whole question; without these operations cannot commence and unless numbers are adequate and increased progressing as the advance is made hostilities cannot be brought to a conclusion.”<sup>381</sup>

The difficult question of numbers also arose. Of the some 24,000 infantry in the main command, and deducting 1,200 for the lines of communications, only 8,600 were assessed as being efficient for operations. Northey had some 4000 rifles, of whom about 1,900 could be placed in the field making a total striking force of 10,500; provided that the promised three South African infantry battalions, due to return after rest at home, arrived, Hoskins believed he had sufficient troops to make his plan work. However, he emphasized the need for frequent drafts of reinforcements for all troops, especially his West Africans.

The commander-in-chief also informed the War Office that he considered it impossible to stop the Germans from entering Portuguese East Africa if they wished to do so. More ominously, he noted that should he be required to continue the campaign in Portuguese territory, then operations would be very lengthy. It was to be a prescient, if unwelcome, forecast.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 22 February 1917, Telegram G 218, Hoskins to CIGS, 22 February.

<sup>381</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 March 1917, Appendix A, Telegram, G 337, Hoskins to CIGS, 1 March.

<sup>382</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 March 1917, Appendix A, Telegram, G 337, Hoskins to CIGS, 1 March.

General Robertson took only a few days to make a decision, informing Hoskins on 6 March that he agreed with the latter's assessment of German intentions. He also stated that should it be impossible to surround von Lettow owing to a combination of insufficient forces and size of the country, the EAEF should concentrate on the most dangerous or vulnerable enemy columns first, defeating them one at a time. The threat to Nyasaland via PEA was seen as less serious since British control of Lake Nyassa would allow the switching of forces by steamer before any German thrust could be made effective. On a less positive note, he deemed Northey's forces to be overly dispersed and suggested that they be concentrated promptly. On the vexed question of supplying more carriers, negotiations were being conducted with the Belgians and Portuguese, with the former having promised to supply some 5,000 recruits from their occupied territory. The CIGS also announced that the War Cabinet had considered the potential for a campaign in Portuguese East Africa and had decided that if the Germans were to break into that colony in force, then they were to be pursued until they surrendered or were defeated.<sup>383</sup>

Given the go-ahead in principle, Hoskins quickly ran into problems with his assumptions about South African manpower. Based on prior assurances of renewed support after a suitable period of refitting and convalescence, his plans assumed the provision of an infantry brigade. The first sign of trouble was the inability to provide replacements for the units still in East Africa.<sup>384</sup> This was followed by the unwelcome news that the promised battalions would not now return owing to recruiting problems. The Prime Minister, Botha, became personally involved in the decision:

“...General BOTHA greatly regrets that his apprehension already conveyed to you are confirmed and it is now clear that one months leave is quite insufficient for the bulk of the men who have come back, and that it is impracticable by any means to make those battalions up to any respectable strength of trained and fit men.”<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 March 1917, Appendix A4, Telegram 30514, CIGS to Hoskins, 6 March.

<sup>384</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 9 March 1917, Appendix A7, Telegram G 447 Genstaff to Norforce, 9 March. This telegram quotes the signal to UNECA (South Africa) on 26 February and the reply (no date given).



Hoskins promptly made London aware of the magnitude of the shortfall with the corollary that the campaign would be prolonged even further if the shortage of troops persisted.<sup>386</sup>

While this dispute was underway, Hoskins was discussing his plans with Northey telegraphically, having been prevented by the weather from a personal visit. In response, Northey demurred, stating that there were insufficient troops to round up the enemy over such a vast area. He also thought that Wintgens was making for Tabora and that the follow-up would be difficult owing to the country and the lack of supplies in his wake. Given the German foraging parties already in Portuguese territory, he expected to have to commence operations around the southern end of Lake Nyassa before long. In response to a comment, Northey replied that he had been unaware that the Belgian forces had ceased active operations some months before.<sup>387</sup> Hoskins was astonished to learn that Northey had not been informed of such major developments and briefed him on the latest situation. He went on to outline his strategy that boiled down to two essentials: beating the Germans in the field and depriving them of their food centres. Envisaging a commencement of the advance in early May as the ground began to dry out, he reiterated his plans for a converging attack by all his columns towards the centre of the south-eastern portion of the colony.<sup>388</sup>

As March continued, relations between Hoskins and Robertson began to deteriorate, with the CIGS's request for more detailed plans receiving a rather vague reply. The commander-in-chief countered that he would be unable to formulate his exact plans until he received details of the transport that would be available and merely reiterated his idea of a concentric advance, albeit with reduced effectiveness and range.<sup>389</sup> This, and the unco-ordinated nature of his requests, irritated Robertson considerably and he ordered Hoskins to submit a single consolidated and up-to-date list of requirements for the future.

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<sup>385</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 11 March 1917, Appendix A12, Telegram H 3359, UNECA, Pretoria to Hoskins, 10 March.

<sup>386</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 11 March 1917, Appendix A13, Telegram G 487, Hoskins to CIGS, 11 March.

<sup>387</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 18 March 1917, Appendix A28, Telegram NF 2541, Norforce to Hoskins, 17 March.

<sup>388</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 19 March 1917, Appendix A34, Telegram G 601 General Hoskins to Norforce, 19 March.

<sup>389</sup> WO 33/858, *European War Telegrams, Series D, Volume 2, 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1917, to 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1919*, London: War Office, 1919, p. 27, No. 1696, 21 March 1917, Telegram 31391, CIGS to Hoskins. Henceforth, *Telegrams D 2*; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 29 March 1917, Appendix A41, Telegram G 702, Hoskins to CIGS, 29 March.

Once this had been received, the War Office would inform him of what personnel and material could be supplied and as well as arrival dates. Hoskins would then have to make his plans around the available resources.<sup>390</sup>

Confirmation of additional transport and specialist support for East Africa came in early April.<sup>391</sup> Now armed with firmer details, Hoskins signalled his final plans at the end of the month. In terms of enemy forces, the Germans were assessed as having thinned out their troops in the Rufiji area, with detachments near Mpotora, Makangaga, Ukuli and Lindi. Kraut's main body was in the Tunduru area with Wintgens still moving west and north. Hoskins then issued a disclaimer by stating that the plans were dependent on the weather, the arrival of reinforcements, the supply of porters and MT vehicles, and the preparations of the Belgians. However, he remained committed to the multi-column concentric advance, with the Nigerian Brigade advancing south from the River Rufiji towards Madaba, with the Kilwa force of two brigades moving south-west to Liwale, and the Lindi brigade moving either westwards toward Massassi or north-east to the Mbemkuru River as necessary. The Iringa Column would clear the area between the Ruaha and Ulanga Rivers while the newly arriving Belgians would take on responsibility for containing any attempted breakouts to the west and moving on Mahenge. This would enable Northey to concentrate further south and to be prepared to move on either Liwale or Tunduru or both as required. Finally, a general reserve would be kept back at Morogoro. The Portuguese forces were considered valueless and were more likely to provide supplies to the enemy than effective opposition.<sup>392</sup>

## ANGLO-BELGIAN OPERATIONS

The re-entry of the Belgians into the campaign was spurred by the urgency of rounding up *Abt Wintgens* and the need for more troops in the main area of operations. With political agreement reached in London, Hoskins and his Belgian opposite number, Colonel Huyghé, met in Ujiji from 18 - 19 April, and modified the troop levels to a total

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<sup>390</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 1 April 1917, Appendix A6, Telegram 31916, CIGS to Hoskins, 1 April.

<sup>391</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 9 April 1917, Appendix A78, Telegram 32324, CIGS to Hoskins, 8 April.

<sup>392</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 27 April 1917, Appendix B21, Telegram G 165, Hoskins to CIGS, 27 April.



force of 3,000 soldiers divided into two mobile columns of 1,200 rifles, each supported by an operational reserve battalion of 600 rifles, plus a further two battalions of 500 men each to provide individual replacements for casualties.

The first Belgian column was to be ready immediately to take up the pursuit of Wintgens while the second was to be organised and equipped for the main offensive. Once the raiders were dealt with, the two columns were to unite in the Iringa area preparatory for an advance across the Ulanga River towards Mahenge. They would operate between Norforce in the Songea-Ubena area and the British detachment at Iringa. Liaison officers were exchanged at both general headquarters as well as with the various column headquarters, while the Belgian base was fixed at Dodoma on the Central Railway.<sup>393</sup>

A major consideration for both officers was time; for if the conquest of East Africa were to be made before the start of the rainy season (mid-November to early December), it was vital that the offensive commenced by the end of July or mid-August at the latest. Failing that, a new campaign in 1918 would be necessary under even less favourable conditions. It would expose the pursuers to all the problems encountered in the past rainy season and would allow the Germans a chance to regroup and, more importantly, cultivate new food supplies.<sup>394</sup>

Fortunately, Colonel Huyghé had taken a number of precautions beforehand that were now to pay useful dividends. Despite not being required to raise extra forces in the April agreement, he had ordered the re-mobilisation of three additional battalions in case they were needed in the new circumstances. In May, he had organised his available forces into two major columns, one based on the old *Brigade Sud*, armed with the Mauser rifle and the other based on the *Brigade Nord*, armed with the Gras rifle. Each brigade also had a battalion dedicated to the provision of battle casualty replacements as well as a battery of six 70mm St Chamond mountain guns and a pioneer-bridging company. An

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<sup>393</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 34-35.

<sup>394</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, p.131.

operational reserve (*Réserve d'Operation or RO*) of two battalions strength was formed while two others provided security for the lines of communication.

As dealing with *Abt Naumann* was the first priority, Belgian troops were launched in pursuit early in May. Three battalion-sized columns were formed with the aim of preventing interference with the vital Central Railway. Since the allies were unable to prevent Naumann from breaking north of that line, the Belgian columns were launched north in hot pursuit, following the raiders all the way to Lake Victoria. Their task then became one of preventing an incursion into British East Africa.<sup>395</sup>

The regrouping of Belgian troops took place throughout June and July. GHQ moved from Ujiji to Dodoma on 29 June, while the various battalions made the preliminary moves noted above. Thereafter, further time would be needed for concentration and preparation in the forward areas before all was in readiness. On the eve of the operations, the *Brigade Sud*, less one battalion still in Katanga, was concentrated at the Lake Tanganyika port of Kigoma. The organisation of the *Brigade Nord* was less satisfactory as it had two battalions still involved in the pursuit of *Abt Naumann*, with another still guarding the rear areas south-west of Tabora and the fourth en-route for Iringa.<sup>396</sup> The artillery was moving forward to join the brigades while the pioneers were preparing to start work on the new base at Dodoma. The rear services operated on the existing line Stanleyville-Albertville with new stages of Dodoma-Iringa and Kilosa-Ruaha. By the end of June, the Belgians were slowly moving into position for the next phase of the campaign.<sup>397</sup>

## ANGLO-PORTUGUESE OPERATIONS

Relations between the British and Portuguese were not so easily resolved although both sides did make efforts to work together. With the recall of General Gil in 1916, and the planned sending of another expeditionary force in early 1917, the Governor

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<sup>395</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp 132 and 309-310. Orders are given at Annexe No. 16, Tabora, 30 May 1917.

<sup>396</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 133-134.

<sup>397</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp.135-136.



General, Dr Alvaro de Castro, assumed the role of Commander-in-Chief. Conscious of the weakness of his position, he had asked for a meeting with General Smuts late in 1916. However, this was not possible for a number of reasons and it was not until 25 January, two days after he had relinquished command in East Africa, that Smuts met with de Castro in Portuguese East Africa. It seems highly likely that General Hoskins was too busy with taking over his new command and conducting the offensive to make the journey and Smuts was conveniently passing by.

If the renewed Belgian assistance was welcomed, General Northey faced further problems in the south on the Nyasaland-Portuguese border. Apart from being weakened by the pursuit of Wintgens, he also needed trained troops to deal with the developing German threat posed there by *Abt von Stuemmer*. Although the Portuguese were held in generally low regard, General Hoskins did try to involve them in support of both his and Northey's operations.<sup>398</sup>

At the meeting with de Castro on 9 May the subject of military cooperation was high on the agenda. The Portuguese were always slightly suspicious of British intentions and were very reluctant to allow their forces into Portuguese territory. To Hoskins's dismay, de Castro proposed to send a force of over 700 rifles from the coast to Chinde, thence up the Zambezi River into southern Nyasaland and Lake Nyasa, where it would land at Mtengula which was believed to be von Stuemmer's objective. He suggested that this movement would take place between 15 and 20 May, but this was hopelessly optimistic given Portuguese transport facilities. Although received diplomatically, the suggestion was considered most unwelcome as it was seen as likely to get in Northey's way and would cause major supply problems. From the British perspective, it would be far more useful for the Portuguese to establish a strong blocking force along the Rovuma as well as protecting the vulnerable line of communication running up the Zambesi River. Hoskins put his suggestions as tactfully as possible, but, unable to change da Silva's mind, he left the matter unresolved.<sup>399</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 27 April 1917, Appendix B21, Telegram G 165, Hoskins to CIGS, 27 April.

This was as well, for the Portuguese troops only reached Chinde, at the head of the Zambezi, on 25 May and von Stuemer's move on Mtengula forestalled their further advance. Instead, it was agreed that the local Portuguese commander would meet Northey in Zomba to arrange a revised deployment. This was ultimately decided as the reinforcement of the existing Portuguese *boma* at Mlanje, on the other side of the British-Portuguese border, and was forward of both the railway line and River Zambezi. It provided much-needed protection of each force's lines of communications and, as the British desired, kept the two armies separated.<sup>400</sup> With the outbreak of a major anti-Portuguese revolt in the districts of Tete and Barue, to the south of the area of operations, and the need to reinforce the beleaguered garrisons there, it was probably as much as could be obtained. This would remain a major consideration for the Portuguese until the rebellion came under control at the beginning of June.<sup>401</sup>

## GERMAN REORGANISATION

The *Schutztruppe* faced similar problems to their opponents, particularly from insufficient transport, food and medical supplies. However, they did have the advantages of being on interior lines in friendly country and could retire on routes of their own choosing. They were also able to live off the country, having few scruples about clearing out local food stocks.

On 1 April 1917, the total strength of the *Osttruppen* was some 6,534, consisting of 1,423 Germans and 5,111 *Askaris*, of whom 4,419 were considered able to fight.<sup>402</sup> The numbers for the *Westtruppen* were 2,854, with 535 Germans and 2,319 Askari (*Abt Wintgens* had another 554 soldiers).<sup>403</sup> With a total of over 9,000 mouths to feed and the loss of the lower Rufiji, the question of food supply was increasingly severe. Stocks had been consumed far faster than expected, with levels held on the lines of communication some 125,000 kg less than the forecast 300,000. As the forward force consumed over

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<sup>399</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 39-40.

<sup>400</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 40-41.

<sup>401</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 25 and 29 May 1917; Ranger, Terence O,

<sup>402</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 2032; "Revolt in Portuguese East Africa: the Makombe Rising of 1917", in *St Antony's Papers*, (ed) K Kirkwood, Number 15 African Affairs No 2, London: Chatto & Windus, 1963, pp. 62-64.

<sup>403</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 2044.



10,000 kg daily, this was a significant shortfall.<sup>404</sup> The struggle to provide adequate nourishment required drastic measures and rations were reduced to minimal levels. As the historian of the campaign pointed out:

“Nevertheless the German forces found themselves in a more critical situation than the British, the most critical that troops can face, that of existence or non-existence. The spectre of starvation threatened for the second time and it would not be easily overcome by the reoccupation of the southern portion of the Dar-es-Salaam district.”<sup>405</sup>

### OPERATIONS ON THE RUFIJI AND THE EAST

Operations on the middle and lower Rufiji during the period February to May 1917 largely consisted of thinning out the forward positions and patrol actions owing to the rain and flooding of the countryside. Sporadic fighting and occasional raids took place, although, with both sides seriously weakened by sickness and insufficient food, such encounters were usually indecisive.

The Germans had noted the British redeployment and the reductions on the Rufiji line. Suffering from similar problems to his opponents, von Lettow decided to reduce his forward forces and to begin the slow withdrawal to the south. He wanted to be ready to fend off any subsequent British moves against his lines of communication as well as reinforce his troops along the coast.<sup>406</sup> Concerns about rear area security and the loyalty of the African population were also apparent, especially in the area of the Makonde highlands. The British had been trying to induce the inhabitants to rebel against German rule since the previous autumn and had provided some material support. The disaffected tribes began to disrupt food gathering and made the links to the west much more dangerous than previously.

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<sup>404</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1990.

<sup>405</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1987.

<sup>406</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 319.

If the main force was suffering badly from the climate, Norforce, although better off, needed a rest after the long advance to Iringa and the subsequent fight against the *Westtruppen*. The columns were tired and required reorganisation while the long lines of communication were now struggling to function in the wet weather. However, further unexpected events would shortly make this requirement even more troublesome.

Although the heavy rains had brought operations in the Rufiji area to a complete halt, the precipitation further south was not as severe, at least initially. As has already been described, the bulk of the *Westtruppen* had broken through Northey's slender force and had linked up with *Abt Kraut* in the Ulanga valley. Although they had suffered a significant number of casualties, the now-united force was much stronger than Norforce. While the low ground was flooding heavily, two enemy groups remained on the edge of the great escarpment and in close proximity to Northey's troops. *Abt Kraut* remained in its strong defensive position at Mfrika watched by Hawthorn's column, but *Abt Wintgens* was not fixed. From captured documents, Northey was aware of the supply problems faced by the Germans in the Mahenge area as well as Wahle's instructions ordering both Kraut and Wintgens to operate in the Wiedhafen-Songea area for as long as possible.<sup>407</sup>

The threat to Norforce was very real, for on 3 February both *Abteilungen* arrived at Gumbiro and surrounded its garrison. On receiving Wahle's orders of 29 January, the two commanders had a major dispute. Kraut, the senior officer, insisted that they move south in accordance with their instructions, but Wintgens, a strong-willed and difficult personality, wanted to go north. It is unclear why he disobeyed such explicit orders, although it has been suggested that his askaris wanted to return home to Tabora and that he did not get on well with von Lettow. Whatever the reason, on 6 February he lifted the unsuccessful siege and moved north while Kraut took his troops south.<sup>408</sup> It was to be the start of an epic movement that would only end some eight months and many thousands of miles later.

<sup>407</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 315. *Abt Schoenfeld*, *Lincke* and *von Langenn* were drawing on the Mahenge while *Abt Kraut* and *Wintgens* were ordered to move by Wahle on 29 January.

<sup>408</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 325; MSS Afr.c.1715 (300), *History of I KAR*, p. 165.



Norforce was widely stretched over a vast area of country; the distance from his headquarters in Ubena to the forward troops was 130 miles alone. The columns were split between Likuyu, Songea, Kitanda, Alt-Langenburg and Lupembe. As the month progressed, the rains became increasingly heavy and the broad lowlands east of the escarpment continued to flood. Although on higher and healthier ground than Hoskins's main body, the troops of Norforce were still suffering from the climate and disease. Numbers had been reduced to less than half normal strength and the South African units were particularly hard-hit from sickness.<sup>409</sup>

On 8 February, intelligence indicated that Kraut was moving southwards; this was confirmed two days later when he appeared on the Wiedhafen-Songea road making several unsuccessful attacks on isolated British posts. He then continued south the next day with Hawthorn now in hot pursuit. Reportedly in a discontented state from lack of supplies, Kraut's *askaris* moved quickly and, despite some heavy knocks by Hawthorn's column, they managed to make the Portuguese border. On 24 February, Northey was informed that a large enemy force was assembling at Likuyu and he recalled Hawthorn back to Songea.<sup>410</sup> No longer being pursued, Kraut was now to forage in the southern portion of German East Africa and posed a potential threat to the Portuguese.

Wintgens was concerned about the increasingly constricted area of operations and the need to obtain food. In order to regain his freedom of movement, he intended to conduct minor operations on the line Songea-Lupembe and then to break north-westwards towards the northern end of Lake Nyassa, to Tandala. Leaving his sick and wounded behind at Milow Mission on 15 February, he ran into a combined South African and KAR column the next day. The British column was forced back that night, having lost its commander and a number of others killed. This fight confirmed the renewed threat to Northey's lines of communication running between Alt-Langenburg and Ubena, while his forces were too small to prevent a breakthrough to the west. Acting rapidly, he recalled Murray's Column from the Ruhudje, and it promptly marched back to Tandala, at the northern head of Lake Nyassa.

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<sup>409</sup> CAB 44/9, p. 33, Sketch 96.







Two days later, a KAR company near Tandala was nearly surrounded and cut off by the Germans who then besieged the garrison. Murray's Column timely arrival on 22 February forced Wintgens to abandon the siege, leaving behind a destroyed 3.7 cm gun. Heading northwards, Wintgens had about 520 soldiers, 11 machine guns and two field guns.<sup>411</sup> As soon as the relieved garrison was sorted out, Murray set off in hot pursuit on 25 February.<sup>412</sup>

Now faced by serious opposition, Wintgens intended to use his head start and superior mobility to best advantage. He planned to make a series of short marches in a north-westerly direction until he reached the old British lines of communication leading from Neu Langenburg to Iringa. From there, he would feint towards the Rhodesian border while actually moving towards Lake Rukwa. He expected to find more food in that region, which so far had been largely undisturbed by the war, while shaking off his pursuers. These measures were successful and direct ground contact was lost as he turned south-west near Neu Utengule. British aerial reconnaissance subsequently located his camp and then successfully bombed it on 26 February. However, it was not until 11 March, when the *Abteilung* had reached the Igale Pass, south of Alt Utengule, that Murray's patrols were first able to restore contact. The continued pursuit convinced Wintgens to move away from that area and to make for St Moritz further north.<sup>413</sup>

Murray was a determined and capable officer who could be thoroughly relied upon. However, even his best efforts could not force Wintgens into pitched battle, chiefly for reasons of supply. The countryside was lightly cultivated and the Germans stripped all available food in their wake, while Murray had to have his food brought forward by carriers with all the inefficiencies and delays that this method brought. As well, there was considerable uncertainty as to Wintgens's intentions; and arrangements had to be made to cover moves either to the south or west.<sup>414</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Hoskins, *Despatch*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>411</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 325. The Germans lost two killed and seven wounded, while the British suffered nine dead and 13 taken prisoner. Wintgens left Gumbiro with 59 Europeans, 464 *Askaris*, 11 machine guns and two guns.

<sup>412</sup> Hoskins, *Despatch*, p. 160.

<sup>413</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 325; WO 95/5320, War Diary Norforce, Entries 24 February, 10 and 11 March 1917.

<sup>414</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 8 March 1917; Hoskins, *Despatch*, p. 168.

Murray's Column had reached Alt-Utengule on 13 March and St Moritz Mission five days later. He had also tried to secure the Northern Rhodesian frontier by sending a battalion to garrison Bismarckburg, while another, detached from Hawthorn, was ordered to protect Alt Utengule. A further patrol action took place on 17 March with the Germans being scattered. Murray now decided to move on St Moritz, believing that he had Wintgens trapped against the swollen Lupa and Songwe Rivers, which were only crossable by bridges.<sup>415</sup>

However, the patrol victory was reversed on 20 March, when Wintgens launched his main body in an attack. The battalion suffered heavy casualties and was forced from the battlefield, moving to a position some 6 km to the south-west. They were not left at rest, for two days later, their camp was surrounded by the enemy and they were cut-off. A breakout attempt on 25 March was rebuffed by the besiegers, but again Murray marched to the rescue, arriving on 26 March. Once again, *Abt Wintgens* broke off the siege and headed for St Moritz where a strong bridgehead position was taken up.

After some reorganisation the bulk of Murray's troops continued the pursuit towards St Moritz. During this time, Wintgens had been busy devising an escape over the rivers hemming his troops in. Constructing some improvised rafts out of crates and local material, the first crossing of the Lupa began on 1 April with the entire *Abteilung* being evacuated by the 3<sup>rd</sup>. Murray, delayed by supply problems, arrived just as the enemy completed its escape. Lacking rafting or bridging material and suffering from a severe lack of food, he was unable to cross the river and the follow-up was again broken off.<sup>416</sup>

The emergence of these five companies into the previously secure rear areas caused disruption out of proportion to their fighting strength. The thickness of the bush, the sheer size of the country being traversed and the lack of any infrastructure meant that substantial pursuing forces were required. In order to support Murray, at the end of

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<sup>415</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 326.



March Hoskins sent an Indian battalion to take over as the garrison of Bismarckburg, while a still-forming KAR battalion was diverted from training and sent to block any approaches on Tabora.<sup>417</sup> The shortage of British troops and the problems of keeping them supplied now led to a formal request for the resumption of hostilities by the Belgian *Force Publique*. As this would entail the re-mobilisation and re-deployment of the bulk of this force, under similar supply difficulties as the British faced, it would not be fast enough to catch Wintgens quickly.

Wintgens's plans on crossing the Lupa River were to make for Kipembawe, moving in the opposite direction on the route he had used the previous October. He too, was concerned about the ration situation and split off a column to relieve the pressure in the local area as well as to set a false scent by marching in various directions, with orders to rejoin him at Mdabulo. He launched a feint move on Bismarckburg and spent the remainder of the time collecting supplies.<sup>418</sup>

In the meantime, the KAR battalion had reached Tabora by rail and moved south on foot to Kitunda Mission, reaching it on 5 April and remaining there for a number of days. The Germans, having rested for five days, began the move north again, this time towards Kipembawe. In late April after a clash of patrols, the British commander, who was outnumbered, took the prudent course and withdrew back to Sikonge. This left Kitunda Mission open, and it was occupied by the Germans on 4 May. Here Wintgens decided on a major halt as he and many of the Europeans were suffering from typhus. However, Murray was once more in pursuit and his leading elements came into contact from the south on 6 May. It took a number of days for the main body to catch up and it was not until 14 May that the column was close to Kitunda, by which time the enemy had moved north.

By 21 May, Wintgens's condition had worsened seriously and he determined to surrender to the enemy. Command passed to Lieutenant Naumann, who was enjoined to

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<sup>416</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 326. WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 22-26 March 1917.

<sup>417</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 1727, 31 March 1917, Telegram G 738, Hoskins to CIGS, p.38.

<sup>418</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 326; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, 24 May 1917.





link up with the *Westtruppen*, back in the Mahenge area. In the circumstances, with Murray pressing from the south, this was impossible, and Naumann decided to march north-east to the Central Railway and to cross it at Mkalama.<sup>419</sup> Despite the pressure, the *askaris*' morale remained good and they remained full of fight.

In the meantime, the Allies were gathering further forces to deal with the raiders. The Belgians had taken over responsibility for Bismarckburg and Sikonge while the British moved reinforcements up the Central Railway to co-operate with Murray. Brigadier General Edwards, the Inspector General of Communications, was placed in charge of the operations and was now had a total of three and a half battalions and one squadron to deal with Naumann.<sup>420</sup>

The withdrawal of the main body of the *Osttruppe* began in early March as soon as it became clear that the 1<sup>st</sup> Division had pulled back from its forward positions towards Kibata and Kilwa. Leaving only a relatively weak force on the Rufiji, von Lettow moved south on 12 March, establishing his new headquarters at Mpotora five days later. In the meantime, he also strengthened the forces of the *Südbefehlshaber* in order to meet the increasing enemy strength in Sudi and Lindi. *Abt Rothe*, with three companies, arrived there in mid-March, strengthening the defending forces considerably.<sup>421</sup>

South of the Rufiji, the Germans still held Lake Utungi and the Ligonya River valley which was now a formidable obstacle to movement. A number of small battalion-level operations in the second half of April near Utete resulted in local British successes, but fighting petered out by early May as both sides were now in the process of shifting their forces southward towards Kilwa and Lindi.<sup>422</sup>

These moves enabled 1<sup>st</sup> Division to move both its brigades south to the Matandu River. The brigade structure was now dropped, and on 2 April Colonel Grant (the

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<sup>419</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 327. Naumann took over 48 Europeans, 421 *Askaris*, 11 machine guns and two guns.

<sup>420</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 9 May 1917, Appendix A62, Telegram P 19, Edforce to Genstaff, 9 May. The new force was entitled "Edforce".

<sup>421</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 319-320. Loeff had 65 Germans, 500 *Askaris*, nine machine guns and two guns. There were also 100 auxiliaries who had been enrolled as recruits.

<sup>422</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 23-34.

former 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade) was given command of all troops north of the Matandu and Colonel Rose (the former 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade) was given command of all troops south of the river.<sup>423</sup> In early April, patrols noted activity in the area of Kimamba Hill and Rumbo. A camp was set-up in the bush around Makangaga; on 12 April it was estimated that some eight to ten companies were coming up the main road with a further three companies moving further east towards Kimamba via Mchakama.<sup>424</sup> General Hannington, the GOC 1<sup>st</sup> Division, was concerned that the presence of this force would disrupt his preparations for the general advance and decided to take pre-emptive action.<sup>425</sup> In mid-April, he instructed Rose to drive the enemy out of its positions. Accordingly, a column consisting of a reinforced battalion, numbering some 540 rifles, left Rumbo on the morning of 18 April to attack *Abt von Lieberman*, which was over 300 strong.

The journey was not easy as the column had to cross the steeply-sided and swollen Ngaura River before reaching the enemy defences, and it poured with rain throughout the day.<sup>426</sup> The going was slow and difficult with the column soon running into heavy fire. Faced by three companies in good positions surrounded by tall elephant grass and dense bush, visibility was very poor and communications difficult for the attackers. A flanking move was unable to make sufficient progress and it was decided that the enemy was too strong to defeat and a withdrawal was ordered. However, von Lieberman reacted vigorously and threw in a strong counter-attack that nearly overwhelmed the column's rear guard, losing three machine guns after their teams had been killed. Furthermore, a panic amongst the carriers resulted in the loss of a great deal of ammunition and baggage. The situation was saved by a courageous and determined effort by the rear guard, but it was a stinging defeat that did little to improve morale.<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> CAB 44/9, p. 18. Mnasi was 22 miles WSW of Kilwa Kivinje, near the main road to Liwale.

<sup>424</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 19-20.

<sup>425</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 360-361. On the surface this action seems unwise as the column mustered a maximum of 5 companies with the aim of locating and beating a dug-in enemy of superior numbers. There was no general reserve to back up the column.

<sup>426</sup> CAB 44/9, p. 20. The 40<sup>th</sup> Pathans supplied 400 rifles and 2<sup>nd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR 140 men.

<sup>427</sup> Clifford, *Gold Coast Regiment*, pp. 82-86; CAB 44/9, pp. 20-22. Faced by the *Abt von Liebermann* with 300 rifles and four machine guns, the Germans lost three dead and 22 wounded as compared to the British who were much more heavily hit with 36 killed, 70 wounded and 43 wounded, totalling 152.



Hoskins later tried to put a positive gloss on the failure,<sup>428</sup> but it was unlikely to have worried the Germans. Indeed, the whole point of the raid was highly questionable from the outset, as the sending of the equivalent of five companies against a detachment estimated to have 8-13 companies, with at least 300 in the forward defences, was almost certain to fail. As it was, the attack merely re-emphasized the dangers of sending weak and unsupported columns against unreconnoitred defences.

This event marked the end of serious offensive efforts by 1<sup>st</sup> Division for the remainder of the rainy season. The heavy losses, particularly in British officers, and the drop in morale were serious, but the lack of carriers really precluded any resumption of the offensive.<sup>429</sup> It also showed that the new KAR battalions still had a long way to go in terms of training and tactics before they were able to take on the more experienced *Schutztruppe* on equal terms.

It was the combination of the Makonde rising and the British build-up at Lindi that was now the main concern for von Lettow. In mid-March, he ordered *Abt Krüger*, three companies strong, to leave Tunduru for the port of Mikandini. Initially given orders to crush the rebellion in the Makonde plateau, Krüger was soon drawn into Looff's operations against the lodgement in Lindi. Indeed, the *Kommandeur* believed it was time to strike before the British could reinforce further and to drive them "out of the continent".<sup>430</sup>

Meanwhile, O'Grady's brigade launched an attack on *Abt Rothe*, taking a forward company position at Njangwani, some 12 km north-west of the town. Eager to redress the loss and to use his newly arrived reinforcements, Looff decided to strike a week later. Leaving *Abt Krüger* opposite Lindi, he sent *Abt Hinrichs*, with three companies, to take the small port of Sudi. The position was a strong one, with the defenders protected by

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<sup>428</sup> Hoskins, *Despatch*, p. 166. "Although this attack failed in its immediate object, it had the effect of relieving the Kilwa force of any further pressure from this direction."

<sup>429</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 19 April 1917, Appendix A115, Telegram O 402, 1 Div to Hoskins, 18 April; War Diary GHQ, 19 April, Appendix 116, Telegram O 405, 1 Div to Genstaff, 19 April. In this signal, the enemy was estimated at being between 1 - 2,000 strong.

<sup>430</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 321. *Abt Kraut* had been broken up and the bulk of his troops had passed to Krüger. Kraut was ordered to move to Lindi and to assume the appointment of *Südbefehlshaber* from Looff. He assumed command on 5 May.

wire and stake obstacles. Launched on 24 April, the attackers, who lacked artillery, were unable to break through the defences and suffered a number of casualties. The battle was broken off and a single company was left to contain the British.<sup>431</sup> The next day *Abt Rothe* gained its revenge for its earlier setback and seized the lost forward position, driving the Indian defenders back into Lindi.<sup>432</sup>

Despite von Lettow's stated aim of destroying the British coastal enclaves, the attack at Sudi was an expensive waste of scarce soldiers on an operationally and tactically unimportant enclave. A few days later, on 3 May, he declared that the time for decisive measures at Lindi had run out and he ordered two companies to march north to face the growing threat from Kilwa. Dissatisfied with the conduct of operations there and having clashed repeatedly with Captain Looff, he dismissed him as *Südbefehlshaber* on 5 May, leaving him in command of an *Abteilung*. Major Kraut took his place and quickly reorganised the defences with four companies placed in the strong Ngurumahamba position west of Lindi; and with another two positioned to the south and west at Majani.

On 5 May, the Germans caused consternation when they opened fire with a captured Portuguese mountain gun at the ships lying off Kilwa Kisiwani harbour from the mangrove swamps to the west. This achieved little result other than for a minor clearance operation and renewed vigilance in the rear areas. Further north, near Kilwa Kivinje the Germans continued to pull back from the Matandu river and reinforce their existing positions on the Ngaura River. By 20 May, Mpotora had been completely evacuated with the garrison splitting between Liwale and Likawage.

The move of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division south of the Matandu was marked by the end of its formal existence. It became known as Hanforce after the name of its commander, Major General Hannyngton, despite repeated changes due to illness. The changes in structure were also reflected at brigade level which was now formally abolished. The new No 1 Column, now led by Colonel G M Orr, arose from the old 3<sup>rd</sup> EA Brigade, and No 2

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<sup>431</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 320-321. The Germans had a total of 333 soldiers and eight machine guns. Hinrichs lost 11 killed and 29 wounded out of his detachment of 265 men and six machine guns.

<sup>432</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 321. Rothe had 3 companies totalling 280 men and 6 machine guns, losing four killed, 20 wounded as



Column, led by Col H F L Grant, was formed from the old 2<sup>nd</sup> EA Brigade. The troops were deployed as follows; No 1 Column was deployed in an approximately 25 mile long arc, covering the approaches to Kilwa port. Its front followed the line of the River Ngaura to the deep inlet known as Beaver Haven, with a total of five forward posts being held. No 2 Column was more concentrated and occupied Mchemera, on the Matandu River, less a few detachments to the north.<sup>433</sup> It was poised on the main route leading west from Kilwa towards Mpotora and the interior. However, heavy rain continued in the coastal areas until the middle of May and it then required a drying out period followed by intensive repairs on damaged roads and tracks before the supply system could become fully operational and effective.<sup>434</sup>

### OPERATIONS IN THE SOUTH AND WEST

Northey could do little during the wettest months of March and April save hold the defensive and recover. From his headquarters in Ubena, on the junction of the roads leading north and east, his force was strung out south-eastwards on the line Likuyu-Kitanda-Lupembe, roughly paralleling Lake Nyasa. With the loss of Murray's column, his forces had been reduced by over three battalions; if *Abt Wintgens* had passed out of his immediate area, *Abt Kraut* posed another threat further to the south either around Songea or in Portuguese East Africa.<sup>435</sup> One welcome piece of news in March was Hoskins's decision to send a KAR battalion south from Iringa as reinforcements for Northey's weakened columns.

*Abt von Langenn* which was on the Ruhuje to the east of Lupembe and *Abt Lincke* at Likuyu (the crossing of the Likuyu River on the Songea-Liwale road) were worrisome, especially the latter which was about 50 miles north-east of Songea. Colonel Hawthorn was sent from Songea in March to drive Lincke away. He arrived near the Likuyu River on 7 April and, after an inconclusive skirmish four days later, he attempted to cross the flooded river. This took some time and Hawthorn's force was successfully over the

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compared to British losses of 22 killed and one wounded.

<sup>433</sup> CAB 44/9, p. 70, Sketch 94; Orr, "From Rumbo to the Rovuma", pp 109-110..

<sup>434</sup> Hoskins, *Despatch*, p. 167.

<sup>435</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 31 March 1917, "Summary of Situation at End of March"; CAB 44/9, pp. 33-34.

obstacle on 23 April and was some six miles north of the suspected German encampment. He occupied it unopposed on 27 April, with Lincke having evacuated some days beforehand and moved further east.<sup>436</sup>

While Hawthorn was struggling through the sodden bush, Kraut's force had reached Tunduru and was believed to be making enquiries about access to the Rovuma River and the areas to its south. There was considerable doubt as to the veracity of these reports, but these were dispelled on 20 April, when a captured document revealed that Kraut had split his force into two columns, one under himself and the other under Major von Stuemmer who had the mission of raiding Portuguese territory.<sup>437</sup> This was unpleasant news for Northey, who now faced yet another demand on his much diminished force.

A week later, reports confirmed that von Stuemmer, who had left in advance of Kraut, had reached the area of Mwembe, some 80 miles south of the Rovuma River in a fertile tract of land between the Lujenda River and Lake Nyassa. His force was estimated to contain 37 Europeans, 200 Askaris and a large number of *ruga-ruga* (armed African auxiliaries). It appeared that the local Portuguese authorities had been taken completely by surprise and that a large amount of food had been seized.<sup>438</sup> Kraut's force was still on the move and unlocated, but it was presumed to be heading south for the Rovuma.

Whilst Portuguese East Africa had relatively little strategic value in itself, the presence of a German force there was important. Firstly, it could plunder the relatively rich food areas for the supplies so badly needed by the main force further north more or less at will. Secondly, the extreme antipathy felt by the indigenous Africans for their Portuguese colonial overlords meant that recruiting for the German force was both possible and likely. Thirdly, Northey's long and vulnerable lines of communication along the Zambezi River to the Indian Ocean would be at serious risk from such a move. If these were interrupted, then his entire force would no longer be capable of serious

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<sup>436</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 11 and 27 April 1917; CAB 44/9, pp. 34-35.

<sup>437</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 22 April 1917.

<sup>438</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 35-36.



offensive operations as the land links through the Rhodesias were too undeveloped to be of practical use.

Northey reacted at once and sent his only available troops, a South African battalion, to Fort Johnston on 30 April. This unit, which had been badly affected by illness and had been were recuperating while carrying out lines of communication protection duties between Wiedhafen and Songea, was his only formed reserve. Even so, it was far from fully trained and barely equalled the numbers of Germans in the area; it could only be supplemented by KAR recruits diverted from essential training in Zomba.<sup>439</sup>

The situation was becoming critical as, with the pursuit of Wintgens, Northey's brigade-sized force was spread out over 450 miles of wild bush, mountain and swamp. He now risked being defeated in detail whilst his reliance on lengthy supply lines meant that he could not respond as quickly as he would have wished. On 1 May, he telegraphed General Hoskins asking for the return of the detached troops in order to rest and refit them prior to future operations. This request was turned down in light of the pressure to hunt down Wintgens and Northey was instructed to keep Hawthorn from going too far east. Accordingly, Hawthorn was told to stay in the vicinity of Likuyu where he had so recently occupied the camp and crossing site.<sup>440</sup>

While these deliberations were taking place, the threat to Northey's southern flank continued to increase. Von Stuemmer was now known to have over 400 soldiers plus a substantial ruga-ruga contingent. Furthermore, it was clear that the local population welcomed the German presence and were actively supporting their activities. An advance party from his column had already reached as far south as Mtonia, a village only 15 miles from Lake Nyassa and the British border. His main body was believed to be heading for Mtengula which lay north-west of Mtonia on the lake shore. *Abt Kraut* was also identified in Portuguese territory, about 70-80 miles to the east of von Stuemmer, and in Mwiriti on the Msalu River. Apart from the above mentioned supply and recruiting

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<sup>439</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 35-36; CAB 45/73, Sketch 98 "The Strategic Situation 1<sup>st</sup> June 1917".

opportunities that this offered, Mwiriti lay on a motorable road (with telegraph line) that led to the coast and Port Amelia.<sup>441</sup>

Having been denied the return of Murray's column, General Northey made several changes to counter the mounting threat to Nyasaland. On 6 May, he moved his new KAR battalion to Fort Johnston while one of the detached battalions was marching back to rejoin the main body. At the same time, he shifted his headquarters from Ubena (north and east of Lake Nyasa) to Zomba (south of Lake Nyasa and Fort Johnston) in order to be near the greatest threat.<sup>442</sup>

Whilst these further deployments were getting underway, the South Africans had arrived at Fort Johnston with barely 270 effective soldiers. Promptly reinforced by several hundred KAR soldiers from the depot, the unit left immediately for Mangoche, a few miles to the north and east, where they arrived on 8 May. Their speed was needed, for on the same evening an advanced detachment of von Stuemer's force took the Portuguese *boma* at Mandimba, only 6 miles from the border and close to Mangoche. The Germans actually crossed into Nyasaland the next day, but were deterred from a further advance by the presence of the newly arrived battalion and withdrew to Mandimba. The British force then shifted to Namwera, a few miles north-east of Mangoche, where it commanded the main road between Nyasaland and Portuguese East Africa. Neither side was strong enough to force the other and a local stalemate prevailed.<sup>443</sup>

Events continued to move rapidly. General Northey reached Zomba on 14 May and on the same day half of the KAR battalion arrived in Fort Johnston. Given the seriousness of the situation in the south and the fact that the Songea operations were now halted owing to rain, Northey decided to bring Colonel Hawthorn down to command the force in Nyasaland. Three days later, on 17 May, the Germans occupied Mtengula on Lake Nyassa while intelligence showed that they might shift their attentions further to the

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<sup>440</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 2 May 1917.

<sup>441</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 36-37.

<sup>442</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 6 May 1917.



south and towards the key port of Quelimane. This would be a direct threat to Portuguese operations as well as Northey's communications, and needed to be neutralised.<sup>444</sup>

However, it soon appeared that von Stuemmer had encountered more opposition than he had expected and was unlikely to press into Nyasaland, given the relative balance of forces. A detachment occupied Mtonia on 26 May, but patrols and scouts were unable to locate any Germans south of that place. However, presence of any enemy was both a threat and a drain on available resources. Accordingly, Northey resolved to drive them out of Portuguese territory and north of the Rovuma into the developing envelopment being led by the main forces.<sup>445</sup>

On 25 May, the remaining half of the KAR arrived at Fort Johnston, giving Northey a local numerical advantage. This enabled him to order patrols into Mtonia the next day, followed by its capture on 1 June. The Germans appeared to be thinning out and it was decided to reinforce the advantage south of Lake Nyasa. On 3 June, Northey moved his KAR battalion forward to support the South Africans, while withdrawing his details of trained KAR soldiers back to Zomba where they resumed the vital task of training the new recruits for the forthcoming operations.<sup>446</sup>

### HOSKINS'S DISMISSAL

General Hoskins had expended a great deal of effort in the reorganisation and refurbishment of the EAEF. He had taken over a force in the worst of condition and had done much to restore its fighting effectiveness. Much remained to be done, but in the circumstances of an exceptionally wet season, the prevalence of disease and the physical weakness of the troops under his command, he had been successful. However, unbeknownst to him, problems loomed on the home front. Although, he was clearly an energetic and efficient officer, his communications with the War Office had not met with the CIGS's favour. He had issued a large number of piecemeal and sometimes

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<sup>443</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 9 May 1917; CAB 44/9, pp. 38-39.

<sup>444</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 14 and 18 May 1917; CAB 44/9, p. 40.

<sup>445</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 41-42.

uncoordinated requests while not always answering General Robertson's questions in sufficient detail. Perhaps more importantly, his efforts belied his predecessor's pronouncements of the campaign's imminent end, while Wintgens's breakout to the west looked preventable on a large-scale map.

The CIGS began to entertain doubts about Hoskins's suitability to carry out the duties of an independent commander-in-chief. While the matter remains shrouded in mystery and the views of the War Cabinet, of which Smuts was a member, are not known, Robertson did consult Smuts on the Hoskins's performance. A glimpse of this comes in a personal letter written to the CIGS by the South African in mid-April:

"...[I] feel confident that the steps which you have taken to supply Hoskins with personnel and material, should when completed, enable him to bring the campaign to an early conclusion..."<sup>447</sup>

Despite this, discussions in the War Cabinet led to the decision to replace Hoskins in late April. His replacement was a surprise. General van Deventer, formerly commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, was chosen despite the fact that the EAEF was now largely an Imperial rather than a South African force. Smuts supported his selection strongly and provided the necessary political backing to the appointment. Whatever the background negotiations, the change was agreed by the War Cabinet on 23 April with the following comments:

"The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that for some time he had not felt that the British operations in East Africa were being carried out as satisfactorily as could be desired. He had discussed the matter on more than one occasion with General Smuts, who while holding a high opinion of the Officer in Command, Major-General A.R. Hoskins, had agreed that apparently he had lost grip of the operations and perhaps had become tired."<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 1 June 1917; CAB 44/9, p. 42.

<sup>447</sup> MS Smuts, Box 100, 13 April 1917, Letter Smuts to Robertson.

<sup>448</sup> CAB 23/2, War Cabinet Meeting 124, 23 April 1917, paragraph 4.



The reason for the decision is unclear, and certainly by early May, Smuts had changed his opinion of Hoskins sharply:

“The progress of Wintgens in the direction of Tabora makes it clear to me that there is no firm handling of the situation at present in that theatre.”<sup>449</sup>

While he may well have had genuine doubts about Hoskins’s performance, personal animosity may also have played a part. As will be seen in Chapter Six, the results of a Court of Enquiry set up by Smuts in November 1916 were forwarded by Hoskins to the War Office.<sup>450</sup> The findings reflected adversely on van Deventer, but also implicitly criticised the entire administration of the force under Smuts’s command. There is little doubt that Smuts was aggrieved by the findings while the whole tenor of Hoskins’s various requests directly undermined the former’s claim to have finished off the campaign successfully. He later claimed:

“Further, in my opinion, the report is one-sided and does not sufficiently consider the campaign as a whole and the unforeseen physical difficulties encountered nor is there any allowance given for the results achieved by forced marches...”<sup>451</sup>

Hoskins himself received official notification in late April. After the manifold, but as yet largely unpublicized, failures of Smuts’s tenure and his own hard work, it was a very bitter blow. While Hoskins accepted his supersession professionally, the change was widely resented in East Africa, and many felt that an unsavoury political deal had been behind it. As one senior officer put it:

“This seems a more probable explanation – that it was the work of the politicians and that the War Office was merely the conveyor of the order. Surely it can only

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<sup>449</sup> MS Robertson, I/33/48, 2 May 1917, Letter Smuts to Robertson.

<sup>450</sup> CO 551/101, Union of South Africa, 1917, Volume 8, Folio 38195, 31 July 1917, p.473. The report was formally signed off on 17 May 1917, but the outline conclusions were telegraphed to the War Office on 2 May 1917; CAB 23/2, 2 May 1917, War Cabinet Meeting 128. The CIGS announced that they were still awaiting the findings of the board. Smuts was formally approached at the end of July, but it is not known whether there was any early and unofficial knowledge of the findings.

<sup>451</sup> CO 551/101, 9 August 1917, Letter Smuts to Sir George Fiddes, p. 234.

have been so, for such an action might well seem as nothing to the politician when out to please one of their own kind, though a grave injustice to a regular soldier.”<sup>452</sup>

Interestingly, even the German historian of the campaign sympathised with Hoskins’s ill-fortune.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Fendall, *The East African Force*, p. 101.

<sup>453</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, p. 2245.



## **CHAPTER 5 - SUPPLY AND TRANSPORTATION**

### **GENERAL**

If there was one consideration that influenced the conduct of the East African campaign above all others it was supply and transport, part of what is now called logistics. The need to keep the troops, followers and animals of the respective forces adequately watered, fed, armed and equipped was paramount. Yet, while the tribulations of each are amply described in the various memoirs and the official accounts, the secondary literature tends to ignore this unglamorous but essential facet of warfare. Indeed, many of the tactical and operational movements can only be understood when supply is considered; it was often the desperate desire to prevent thirst or hunger and, in a number of instances, to hold starvation at bay, that led to commanders' decisions. Ironically, despite having the full support of the respective civil governments and the settler populations, both sides suffered tremendously from insufficient diet and lack of water. Hunger was constant and malnutrition was commonplace for much of the campaign, while the suffering was probably worst amongst the followers of both sides. Certainly, the health of many of those who participated in the fighting was adversely affected by the conditions under which they served.

Supply and transportation in East Africa were extremely difficult compared to other theatres. The first factor was that the areas of conflict were largely undeveloped and often thinly populated. The farming was limited to subsistence level for most of the African population, while the relatively few European-owned plantations were geared towards producing cash crops suitable for export. It was not possible to support the pre-war settler population without imports, especially of European goods, and the influx of a large number of soldiers, together with the disruption and destruction caused by the war, reduced this ability even further. This was exacerbated by the need to concentrate large forces, often in areas of little food production, and to maintain them for extended periods. The armies and followers literally ate all of the local areas' food in short order and a system of supply depots and magazines was necessary; operations were frequently based

on the numbers of days' marches the force would be from the depot.<sup>454</sup> It was a problem very different from the Western Front and one that any eighteenth century commander would have instantly recognized.

With a number of notable exceptions, the land being fought over was not particularly rich or fertile. The lack of machinery to cultivate crops coupled with the primitive network of roads meant that food could often only be moved from farms to the depots on the heads of porters. Even then, this took considerable time and wastage was considerable, especially in the rainy seasons. From the depots, the move to the forward troops had to be organised and more porters would be required. To compound the problem, the porters carrying the food and those troops on the lines of communications had to live off the supplies being brought forward for the fighting units. The strength of the front line was based on a careful balance between having sufficient supply staff to bring up the food and not having too many non-combatants forward and consuming the same stocks.

The situation was worsened by rinderpest and the encroachment of the tsetse fly throughout large portions of the German colony. This vector, and the trypanosomiasis that it carried, quickly caused the death of all domestic farm animals, especially the cattle so important to local wealth.<sup>455</sup> This influx had been taking place over a considerable period of time and many of the inhabitants of such affected areas had migrated away to less hostile places and their farms quickly reverted to bush. Depopulation also had a more human cause as large numbers of the indigenous locals had been killed or starved during the Maji-Maji rebellion of 1905-06 and its aftermath. German ferocity in suppressing the uprising and the subsequent destruction of many farms and villages, particularly in the south of the colony, had seen the death or migration of at least 75,000 people; certainly 10 years later the many of the affected areas had not recovered in any meaningful way.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, makes frequent references to these considerations. Similar quotations can be found throughout the unpublished British war diaries in the narrative chapters.

<sup>455</sup> Blenkinsop and Rainey, *Veterinary Services*, pp. 407-408.

<sup>456</sup> Koponen, *Development for Exploitation*, pp. 597-599. Some estimates go as high as 250,000 to 300,000.



If lack of sufficient food supplies was a major problem, then obtaining sufficient water was often an even greater nightmare. Despite having a high average rainfall, most of German East Africa was very dry for much of the time; torrential rainfall in the wet seasons is followed by marked aridity in the dry. While major rivers could supply the needs of large forces, problems arose as soon as they moved away. Water holes suitable for villages of 50 people or so were quickly exhausted when a force of 1,000 or more together with pack animals descended upon them. These troops would generally be parched from many hours hard physical labour in the hot sun; desperate was often the best way of describing their condition. Animals required even larger quantities of water and had to be looked after before the troops; frequently supplies were unpalatable or brackish which did little for health.<sup>457</sup> Furthermore, lack of specialist personnel for the treatment and purification of water added to the problem.<sup>458</sup> All could and did survive on reduced rations for considerable periods, but the lack of water was invariably fatal within a very short time.

In contrast, on the Western Front, the forces were highly concentrated and supported by an intricate network of road and rail links. There, an army was seldom more than ten miles distant from the nearest railhead, and light railways were frequently pushed up to forward gun positions.<sup>459</sup> Corps, divisions and brigades fought in close proximity to each other and were seldom spread out over more than thirty miles. Being in the main theatre, they also received the highest priority for stores and equipment while administrative failings in 1915 and 1916 were dealt with at the highest political level.<sup>460</sup> Even in a campaign not noted for its standard of administration, such as Mesopotamia, the advance followed a navigable river back to a seaport. In Egypt and Palestine, the advance was based on the Suez Canal and Port Said and an enormous effort was made to build the water pipelines and railways necessary to support a large force in the desert.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Blenkinsop and Rainey, *Veterinary Services*, p. 410.

<sup>458</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, p. 49.

<sup>459</sup> Brown, *Logistics on the Western Front*, pp. 158-159 and 162.

<sup>460</sup> Adams, R J Q, *Arms and the Wizard Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions 1915-1916*, London: Cassell & Co, 1978, pp. 35-37; Brown, *Logistics on the Western Front*, p. 142. Lloyd George's appointment of Sir Eric Geddes to run the BEF's supply system testifies to this.

## SUPPLY

All armies of the period had distinct supply problems related to the race or background of the forces involved. The bulk of soldiers and followers were Africans who were used to diets particular to their homes, while the officers, NCOs and civil government were largely European. This meant that separate food was essential, as neither group would eat the other's unless absolutely necessary. European style food was almost all imported so the Germans were the first to suffer from shortfalls, but shipping restrictions meant that the British also went short on a regular basis. There was also the complication of outside forces that needed feeding: the British had to supply Indian troops with food appropriate to their religion and caste, West Africans were different from East Africans, and the South Africans were used to different things. The followers presented especial problems as they were often pressed men, unused to travel and unable to adapt to changed conditions. The men drawn from the tropical areas of Uganda and around the Lake Victoria area lived largely on a banana-based diet and suffered gastro-intestinal disorders from a maize or millet-based diet.<sup>462</sup> Understanding of diet was frequently poor and the British, in particular, made a number of major errors in setting up the rations of those who fought for them. Settler prejudice and ignorance played a significant role in the poor diet of some of the African troops while inability to supply the correct types of food or in sufficient quantities was linked to the weak system of supply.<sup>463</sup> However, there were deeper problems, as Surgeon General Pike pointed out in his report:

“Let it be clearly understood that we are not now speaking of the failure of food to reach the troops or carriers, or any shortcomings due to transport, but to the initial error in laying down scales physiologically faulty or deficient...the Supply Department should not operate without scientific advice. If this were the rule scale would not be issued showing substitutes which physiologically are not

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<sup>461</sup> Murray, Lieutenant General Sir A J, *Sir Archibald Murray's Despatches*, London: J M Dent & Sons, 1920, pp. 188-205. These annexes detail the huge logistical effort, for example, on the Kantara East line alone, over 1,300 engines and waggons were supplied by Britain and Egypt.

<sup>462</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, pp 56-57.

<sup>463</sup> Hodges, *The Carrier Corps*, pp. 119-123.



substitutes at all, nor would dietaries be drawn up from which are excluded substances essential to life and health... ”<sup>464</sup>

Specific points included the issue of variable quality meal to the carriers coupled with the fact that it was frequently impossible for them to carry both their full load and their authorised rations. It was also noted that the Cape “Boy” (mixed race) rations had no fats and insufficient vegetables while the West African and West Indian Regiment rations had no vegetables at all.<sup>465</sup>

### TRANSPORTATION – GENERAL

The poor state of tracks and roads made the problems of supply much more difficult when the campaign moved into the more remote areas. The British had solved much of the water problem through the construction of pipelines and railway cars whilst still back in their own colony, but this was never a realistic option once the advance began. Shortages of materials, trained labourers and the means of moving heavy materials precluded such construction in all but the most developed bases. Even where this was attempted, such as at Kilwa or Lindi, the movement of the columns quickly outstripped their means of transporting goods. The Germans, cut off from the outside world, never had that alternative and relied on mobility and an extensive supply system to keep forces in the field. However, it is also clear that they suffered heavily from the same problems as the British and their allies.<sup>466</sup>

Colonel Orr, formerly Hoskins’s DA&QMG at 1<sup>st</sup> Division, and subsequently a column commander of some success, later wrote:

“...The transport had broken down by the end of May. Throughout the June advance and the August advance and even during the July halt, except for a few days, the transport had not been able to deliver more than half the needs of the

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<sup>464</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, p. 56.

<sup>465</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, pp 59-60.

troops...The transport had lost any elasticity it may have had long before the troops reached the Central Railway.”<sup>467</sup>

This was not an isolated view and variants were widespread amongst the GHQ staff and the fighting formations. The Assistant Adjutant General, Colonel C P Fendall, noted in his diary that:

“...In the conduct of the campaign the fault has been movement without sufficient preparation. The administrative staff has not been much to blame. They were constantly faced with new conditions which invariably called for more transport than they had been able to anticipate from previous information. There had been serious breakdowns, causing great privations to the men both by keeping them for long periods on reduced rations, and depriving them of proper hospital accommodation because there was no transport to take it up to them.”<sup>468</sup>

## SHIPPING

The Allied forces did have one major advantage in that the sea lines of communication were open to them throughout the latter part of the campaign. This meant that troops, food, vehicles and stores could be moved from Europe, India or South Africa relatively quickly and in bulk. Importantly, shipping could move unimpeded to East Africa from either the Cape of Good Hope or the Suez Canal routes; external resupply was largely denied to the Germans apart from two small blockade runners. The chief limiting factors were the shortage of ships, particularly from January 1917 onward, and insufficient developed ports at which to unload. Dar-es-Salaam was the principal base and by far the most developed, while Lindi and Kilwa were both relatively primitive at the time of their capture by the British. Furthermore, the ports were often some distance from the fighting and resupply had to be conducted over the difficult conditions

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<sup>466</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1990-1997; Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 294, 299, 318; Schnee, *Deutsch Ostafrika*, pp. 238 and 268-280; and Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 173-179.

<sup>467</sup> Orr, Colonel G M. “Smuts v. Lettow: A Critical Phase in East Africa: August to September 1916”, *The Army Quarterly*, LXX, (1925), p. 294.

<sup>468</sup> CAB 45/44, Diary of Colonel C P Fendall, Entry for 4 February 1917, p. 70.



described above. Still, despite all these handicaps, the possession of sea communications by the Allies and the corresponding lack of external sources of resupply for the Germans made the ultimate capture of the colony possible.

## RAILWAYS

The railways, both British and German, were the most efficient means of moving men and materials within the theatre of war. The Northern Railway connected the Kilimanjaro area with the port of Tanga while the Central Railway linked the capital of Dar-es-Salaam with the interior right up to Lake Tanganyika.<sup>469</sup> While small and having limited rolling stock, these lines made the conduct of large-scale operations possible. Unfortunately, the paucity of connecting communications limited the supply value to a few miles' radius from the major stations. Furthermore, while both made good use of this medium in the early stages, the Germans lost theirs to the British advance by the summer of 1916 and General Smuts never appeared to have understood fully their importance. Obsessed with surrounding and cutting off his foe, he failed to appreciate the need to restore first the Northern and later the Central Railways as a objective of the utmost urgency after capturing their termini. His troops remained reliant for too long on lengthy, slow and inefficient lines of communication rather than switching to a more flexible system of rail linked to sea travel. While it is true that the subsequent operations south of the Central Railway were also dependent on porter and light vehicular traffic, the establishment of a fully operational and effective railway would have greatly assisted the building up of the stocks essential to a successful offensive. On other hand, van Deventer extended light railways from Kilwa and Lindi as far as his resources would permit.

## ANIMAL TRANSPORT

Like their medical counterparts, the veterinary services encountered significant problems through lack of planning and general ignorance of animal management procedures. The South African mounted regiments came in for particular criticism as they

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<sup>469</sup> Woodhouse, Capt H L, "East Africa", *Journal of the United Service Institution of India*, XLVI, (1917), pp. 330 and 334.

lacked centralised procedures and paid little heed to the veterinary officers and their advice. This resulted in enormous wastage rates: for the period March 1916 to January 1917 nearly 100% of animals employed died. One cause was similar to that faced by humans; lack of sufficient food in the forward areas. But, the overwhelming reason was trypanosomiasis as carried by the notorious tsetse fly. While generally fatal to animals, the infection and effects of this disease could be ameliorated by careful procedures and attention to local conditions. However, this good advice was frequently ignored at great cost to subsequent military operations. One example illustrates the consequences of good care:

“During October, 1916, 1,720 horses and mules were taken over at remount depots and conducted forward by regimental personnel. The distance was approximately 200 miles. One hundred and fifty-five animals were lost en route. [9 per cent] During the same period, 2,528 horses and mules were conducted forward by remount personnel over the same route without the loss of a single animal.”<sup>470</sup>

The losses with the mounted troops were enormous - in the period August to October 1916, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was issued with 4,470 horses and 1,831 mules while 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was given 2,168 horses and 1,032 mules.<sup>471</sup> Totalling some 9,501 animals, all would perish before the end of the year. While nothing could be done to cure trypanosomiasis, proper management and feeding could have extended the working lives of the animals by as much as 50 per cent. As with the other administrative services, the veterinary corps had little influence at General Headquarters with most of its advice being ignored:

“during this period of campaign [March 1916 to January 1917]...the commander-in-chief and general staff were not in intimate touch with the Veterinary Services. There was no veterinary staff officer in the field with general headquarters...combating disease was only half the battle. Bad animal management

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<sup>470</sup> Blenkinsop and Rainey, *Veterinary Services*, p. 412.

<sup>471</sup> Blenkinsop and Rainey, *Veterinary Services*, pp. 417-418 and 425.



and starvation could be represented but were out of the power of the Veterinary Service to remedy.”<sup>472</sup>

## MECHANICAL TRANSPORT

Owing to their physical isolation from the homeland, mechanization was never an option for the Germans. However, the British used the earliest cars and trucks to good advantage whenever possible. Ford light cars, capable of carrying 300 pounds of cargo, had an immense advantage over porters as they required only a driver and were capable of much greater effort. The cars did require petrol, were subject to breakdown on the very difficult tracks, and the drivers were as vulnerable to disease and fatigue as the porters. Furthermore, in the rainy season the vehicles were incapable of negotiating the flooded swamps or the surrounding mud and in the dry season the collapse of the roads into fine dust caused considerable difficulties. However, the sheer efficiency of mechanical versus human transport soon made the motor vehicle an essential part of the British supply system; it has been estimated that one lorry was the equivalent of 30 porters.<sup>473</sup> The limits on their use were the speed at which usable tracks could be cut, the provision of sufficient vehicles and drivers, and keeping the system working under the baleful influence of the climate and pestilence. In the final analysis, the motor vehicle was a significant factor in keeping the British advance going, particularly when the supply of porters withered in late 1917.<sup>474</sup>

As with the other areas of administration, there is considerable evidence that the British did not make best use of the available resources. From the onset of the advance in early 1916, out of six MT companies provided to the EAEF, one was allocated to a naval kite balloon section, four were attached to the artillery and only one was actually under the control of the Director of Supply and Transport. The problem of ever-expanding lines of communications also impacted heavily on the MT, as divisional or column

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<sup>472</sup> Blenkinsop and Rainey, *Veterinary Services*, pp. 417-418. The figure of 50 per cent was an estimate given by veterinary officers.

<sup>473</sup> Hodges, *The Carrier Corps*, p. 57.

<sup>474</sup> WO 106/1490, *MT History, Part III, Section IV*, p. 6. At least eight supply routes in excess of 100 miles were serviced by MT; CAB 44/9, p. 67, footnote 1. By 20 May 1917, over 900 vehicles were in use in East Africa with a further 555 on order.

transport generally had a fixed operating radius with the difference having to be met by the support transport.<sup>475</sup> This was a major problem as the distances were frequently huge:

Route	Distance
Voi - Morogoro	500 miles
Korogwe - Morogoro	150 miles
Kondoa Irangi - Kaijado	300 miles
Dodoma - Dabaga	170 miles
Kilossa - Mahenge	130 miles
Lindi - Newala	150 miles
Lindi – Maundi	150 miles
Kilwa - Liwale	150 miles

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It was not until Hoskins assumed command that a thorough reorganisation of the MT was undertaken. Recognising the inflexibility of the system, all vehicles were gradually placed under central control and allocated according to the size of the column to be supported. By Augus 1917, there was a single MT unit that supplied all aspects of the East African force and it was to be the mainstay of the organisation for the remainder of the war.<sup>477</sup>

**CARRIERS**

If the railways provided the best means of transport, local conditions dictated that the armies had to depend on the least efficient method, human portage. It was the adaptation of a long-standing tradition in certain tribes of hiring out men to carry food and stores on their heads for safaris. The urgency of the war and the problems of moving food and ammunition saw a radical and ruthless expansion of the labour force that was unprecedented. Initially supplied with volunteers, the conditions of service, the length of absence and the horrors of the unknown led to large-scale compulsion. The problem with

<sup>475</sup> WO 106/1490, *MT History Part III, Section IV*, pp. 29-30 and p. 39. These routes were not all in use simultaneously.

<sup>476</sup> WO 106/1490, *MT History Part III, Section IV*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>477</sup> WO 106/1490, *MT History Part III, Section IV*, pp. 28-30.



portage was that it involved very hard physical labour in arduous conditions, the food was often insufficient, diseases were rife and there was a very real chance of being a battle casualty. The same diseases and maladies that affected the soldiers were several times more likely for the followers through a combination of poor diet, overwork, lack of basic hygiene and ignorance.<sup>478</sup> The question of porters became a dominating factor for the British and Belgians while it never lost its importance with the Germans.

If getting the correct amount of manpower was essential, then keeping it fit and healthy was equally important. By the end of 1916, it was calculated 160,000 men had been recruited in the northern British territories as well as in the German colony, of whom only some 63,000 remained working in the field.<sup>479</sup> Some 5,349 had died while an astonishing 26,318 were counted as deserters or missing. - the remaining 30,000 had been discharged in line with their engagement.<sup>480</sup> However, on taking stock of the situation after assuming the chief command, General Hoskins and his staff calculated that 160,000 carriers would be needed to keep the force going on the road; in recruiting terms this meant an extra 16,000 carriers per month to keep up with the estimated wastage rate of 15 per cent;<sup>481</sup> These enormous numbers also had to be found in direct competition for carriers with the Belgians who needed 18,000, as well as recruits for the rapidly expanding King's African Rifles. Despite the best efforts of the colonial officials, who exerted considerable pressure on the African chieftains backed by a fair degree of coercion, it was never possible to get sufficient numbers in time for the planned move south. At the end of March 1917, the authorities had managed to come up with another 50,345 men and even by the end of June 1917 the total recruitment since the turning of the year only reached 124,830.<sup>482</sup>

It should also be remembered that these figures only include the manpower necessary to keep a unit mobile with its own limited reserves, usually one day worth for ammunition and two to three days' worth for food. The bringing forward of supplies

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<sup>478</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, p. 6; CO 533/216, *Watkins Report*, pp. 5-8 and 20-22; Hodges *The Carrier Corps*, pp. 126-128.

<sup>479</sup> CO 533/216, *Watkins Report*, Appendix 1 to Table 2 (Total Recruitments) and Appendix 1 to Table 3 (Numbers in the Field).

<sup>480</sup> CO 533/216, *Watkins Report*, Appendix 1 to Table 4 (Deaths by Periods) and Appendix to Table 7 (Total Deserted and Missing).

<sup>481</sup> CO 533/216, *Watkins Report*, p 6 and Hodges, p 54.

<sup>482</sup> CO 533/216, *Watkins Report*, Appendix 1 to Table 2 (Total Recruitments).

from the rear required an elaborate system of its own that had to be independent of the forward troops; the Belgians estimated that some 260,000 people were employed on war-related transported work in their colony.<sup>483</sup>

To give an example of the desperation of the situation, in late 1916 1<sup>st</sup> Division demanded substantial increases in carriers in order to maintain the growing force at Kilwa, while van Deventer's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division needed an additional 4,000 just to increase the rations above half the entitlement that the troops were barely subsisting on. Despite the seriousness of the situation, neither demand could be met as the main effort was directed at keeping the forward troops on the River Mgeta supplied.<sup>484</sup> A later staff paper estimated the first and second line requirements as follows:

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<sup>483</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, I, p. 34.

<sup>484</sup> CAB 44/6, pp. 6-7.



Formation	Battalions	Mouths to Feed	Daily Weight of Food (lbs)	Number of Carriers Needed
Iringa	3	4,865	9,370	10,568
Rufiji	3	4,534	9,066	10,568
Kilwa	7	16,851	33,702	16,851
Lindi	4½	10,374	20,748	8385
Force Reserve	4	?	?	7540
<b>Total</b>	<b>21½</b>			<b>50,297</b>

The third line requirements meant that another 10,000 men had to be added:

Force	Carriers
Iringa Force	3,244
Rufiji Force	2,500
Kilwa Force	1,800
Lindi Force	2,500
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,044</b>

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**THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION**

If logistics appear an unglamorous subject, then its chief means of action, the lines of communication, may be even less so. All forces require the means of collecting people, food, and material from their place of production to the theatre of war. From there, it is necessary to have a system that can hold and sustain them and then move them forward to the required area of operations at the appropriate time. These functions must be carried out regularly regardless of the posture of the fighting forces, although pressure usually increases during times of battle and its aftermath - people require feeding, weapons need ammunition, vehicles need fuel, and equipment may have to be replaced in

full or part more or less continuously. Add to this the need to bring in individual replacements for the sick and casualties of battle, while evacuating those same cases rearward for care as well as prisoners of war, plus the moving forward of reinforcing units and keeping those who operate the lines of communication fully supplied, and a huge responsibility emerges. For all of the combatants, these questions were hugely magnified by the poor infrastructure in the areas of movement and fighting, the difficult and pestilential climate, and the generally insufficient material means of carrying out the desired military operations. Improvisation and flexibility were the hallmarks of the period, although not without considerable suffering by military and civilians alike.

## **BRITISH CASE**

It may be useful to use illustrative examples from each of the major combatants to highlight the problems that faced the opposing sides at a similar point in time, that of September 1916. For the British, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had struggled to reach the thickly vegetated area around Kidodi by 7 September in accordance with the direction of General Smuts. This much reduced formation, which could barely muster 4,700 effectives, had never recovered from the vicissitudes of its earlier advance to Kondoa Irangi and the breakdown of supply that it entailed. However, by the time the short rains forced it to halt opposite *Abt Otto* in September, it was really at the end of its tether.<sup>485</sup> Sketch No A shows graphically the distances involved in keeping the forward troops going. What is striking is the huge distance to the railhead at Moshi; the Official History cites 410 miles while from the map it measures closer to 450 miles. Apart from the difficulties of carrying food, ammunition, fuel and supplies all this way and in primitive conditions, it should be noted that the need to change the types of transport at various points made for inefficiency and invariably slowed down the flow of supplies, particularly when human portage was required. This was not necessarily a criticism of the supply system as it also had to contend with local road conditions; it just illustrates how precarious the margin of existence was. It also shows how critical the reopening of the Central Railway

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<sup>485</sup> Hodges, *The Carrier Corps*, p. 209. See Appendix 2 which cites General Staff plan of 25 February 1917 in the Watkins Papers.

<sup>486</sup> GSWA, Box 26, 17 September 1916, Operation Report 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, van Deventer to Smuts.



was and why the British needed to get Dar-es-Salaam functioning as a port as quickly as possible.

If the plan of operation seemed familiar, then so did the logistical situation. The allocation of motor transport, after the needs of the main force further east had been met, was inadequate for the situation. The poor and now deteriorating state of the roads caused the breakdown rate to soar while local African impressed carriers continued to desert as quickly as they could. The divisional staff had made every effort to maximise its resources and had broken down the lines of communication into five stages, each relatively suited to the mode of transport available and the ground. The stages were organised as follows:

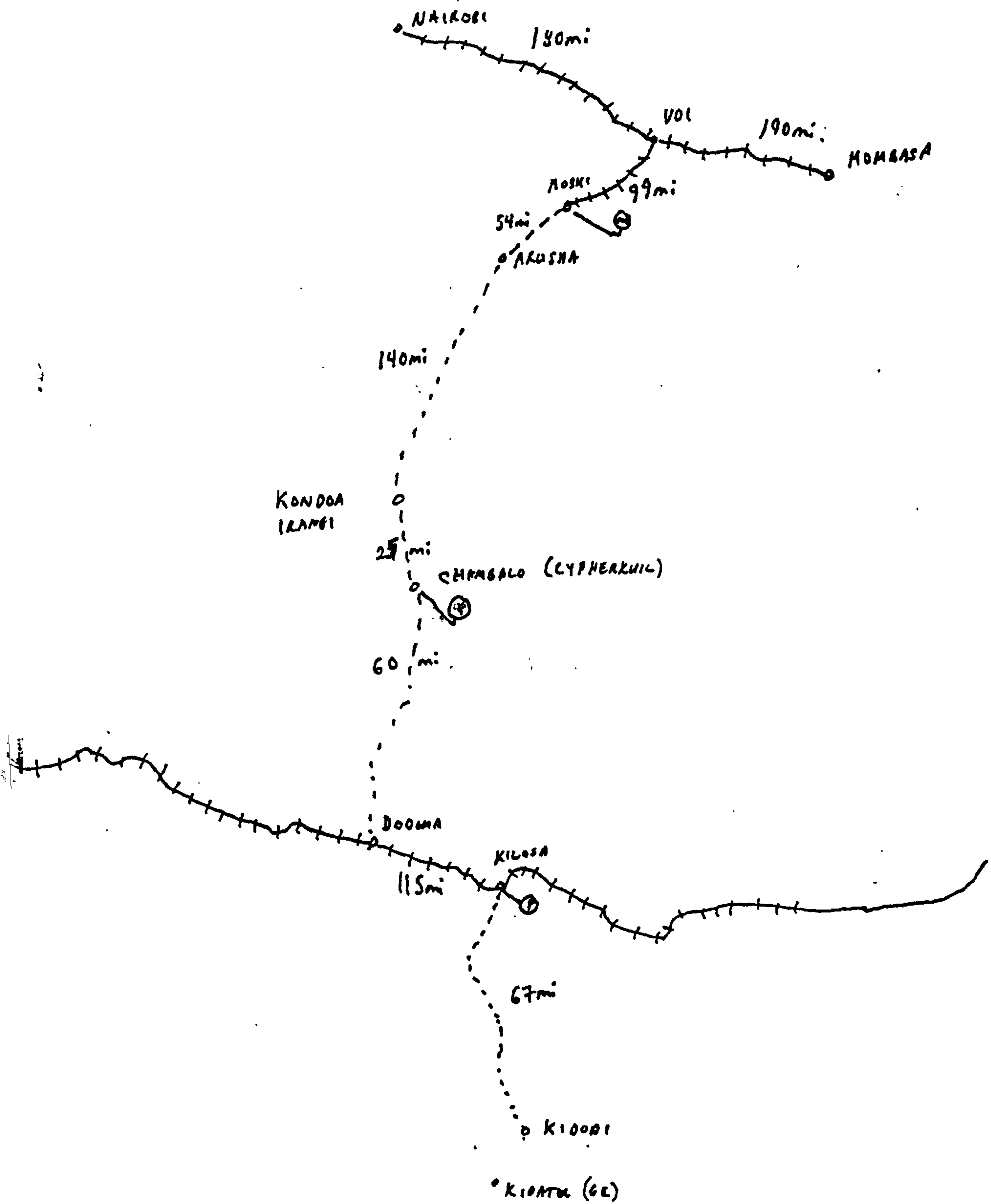
Start Point	Finish Point	Distance (miles)	Method of Transport
Dodoma (Railhead)	Kisomache	12	Carriers and Divisional MT
Kisomache	Temagwe	66	Heavy MT
Temagwe	Sadala (via Ruaha)	23	Light Cars
Sadala	16 Mile Post	17	Carriers
16 Mile Post	Iringa	16	Light Cars

This meant that the total line of communication from the railhead, which represented the most economic method of transport, to the forward base at Iringa was some 134 miles and required the crossing of numerous rivers. Furthermore, the need to exchange loads at five different points, while operationally essential, was wasteful and time-consuming. Finally, it needs to be remembered that Iringa was about 20 miles north-west of the start point at Dabaga with the main objectives another 20 miles further on; for the flanking columns the movement of supplies was probably doubled by the long approach marches.<sup>487</sup>

Despite the hard work by the logistical staff and the supply units, there was no possible way of building up adequate stocks of food prior to the advance. Indeed, it was

2<sup>nd</sup> DIVISION - SEP 16

LINES OF COMMUNICATION



OK cit's 410 miles  
KI0001 - MOSHI



very difficult to maintain full rations as the situation stood and it would be impossible to provide such during an advance. Van Deventer was forced to launch his move in full knowledge that half rations for all troops would be the best that could be provided; he acknowledged this and informed his command accordingly. If the troops could not be fed properly, then it was a certainty that the followers would be even worse off. It is instructive to note that, although van Deventer's division totalled about 5,000 fighting troops, the carriers supporting it reached over 13,600. The poor weather conditions, the hard work and the inadequate diet convinced many to desert and they could not be replaced fast enough.<sup>488</sup>

### BELGIAN CASE

The Belgians suffered from similar problems to the British, and in some ways had a more difficult task in maintaining their forces. The greatest disadvantage was that Belgium was largely occupied and most items had to be procured in either Britain or France prior to being shipped to Africa. There were three sea routes: one leading from La Pallice to the river port of Matadi on the River Congo, another leading from Marseilles to Mombasa and thence through British East Africa, and a third running from London to Cape Town.<sup>489</sup> The first route was naturally preferable as its land portion ran through Belgian territory, but it was far from ideal. Arriving material had to be offloaded the ocean-going transport at Matadi and transferred to the railway. The next stop was Léopoldville where the rail line ended and a further transshipment to boats took place. The cargo then proceeded up the River Congo to Stanleyville where it was separated according to its type and ultimate destination. There, the river had two large unnavigable stretches that were served by railway lines, which of course entailed further loading and unloading. Once on Lake Tanganyika, steamers could be used to move stores to Ujiji, the western terminus of the Central Railway. From there the rail line ran to the main base at Dodoma, where everything was offloaded and moved to the front by MT and carriers.

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<sup>487</sup> CAB 44/7, p. 10 and footnote.

<sup>488</sup> GSWA, Box 29, 7 December 1916, Telegram P 13, 2 Div to BGGS; 10 December 1916, Telegram AA & QMG to GSO I; CAB 44/7, pp. 11-12 and footnote. Some 800 porters deserted in the first 10 days of December, leaving a shortfall of over 3,000.

<sup>489</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, I, p. 29. See Map 1 for overview and Map 2 for more detailed routes.

The chief difficulty in the forward areas was that they were largely uncultivated or infertile and that they had been systematically emptied by the Germans. The British had agreed to supply food up to the railhead at Dodoma, but the Belgians were responsible for moving it forward to the front line troops. The Belgian Commander-in-Chief estimated that some 18,000 carriers would be needed, of which 5,000 had been loaned to the British but were due for return.

Given the practical difficulties of identifying, moving and organising these dispersed individuals, the Belgians agreed to recruit a similar number in British occupied territory. From 27 May to the end of July, this 5,865 carriers, leaving a further 13,000 outstanding. Only 10,000 could be produced from the Belgian-occupied territory and in June authorisation was given to recruit 3,000 carriers from Katanga. These measures were vitiated by the fact that many of the 4,000 carriers being used to support the hunt for Naumann were now incapable of further effort. Originally from the mountainous areas, they found the differing climatic conditions of the plains difficult to cope with and were susceptible to disease. This, plus desertion, led to numerous shortfalls and also to marked losses of clothing and equipment.<sup>490</sup>

Representations by Huyghé to the Belgian Government were answered by permission to enlist a further 10,000 carriers from the Belgian Congo. Again this was only accomplished with great difficulty over the following five months. He had even more problems in obtaining European personnel and the combat units were so undermanned by Belgians that it was impossible to provide supervisors for the carriers. In the end, the British were forced to supply officers to run the most of the Belgian columns' carriers. It was to mean a difficult campaign with the supply of food always perilous.

## GERMAN CASE

From the German point of view, the problems of supply were quite different, but equally as challenging. While they did not have to worry about ever lengthening lines of

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<sup>490</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 136-137.



communication, indeed theirs were shrinking, their means of transport were very much more limited. Apart from a few areas free of tsetse fly, and with few pack animals, they were essentially limited to human muscle power. Although the British failed to close with and destroy the fighting power of the *Schutztruppe*, their rapid advance often forced the Germans to abandon vital stocks of food as they simply not could be carried away in time. Insufficient porters hampered their efforts and there was a constant tension between keeping the various *Abteilungen* fully mobile and keeping the all-important lines of communication functioning. On a number of occasions this caused a great deal of friction between the civil and military authorities. The Germans also had the particular problem of growing sufficient food, harvesting it and then moving it from the farming areas to the lines of communication. This put additional strain on their system.<sup>491</sup>

The Germans operated a series of depots, known as magazines, under the command of an *Etappenleiter*, whose job it was to make sure that the correct supplies went to the right location. This task was made more difficult by the poor communications between the *Abteilungen*, particularly once the Central Railway and its telegraph system had been lost. In September 1916, the system was naturally focused on the main force which was operating on the line of the Mgeta River; a significant detachment was further to the east in the area of the lower Rufiji valley and moving south from Dar-es-Salaam. The system was based on the magazine at Kungllo on the Rufiji which kept the forward troops supplied. The river could be used only with great difficulty and certainly not in the rainy season as the currents were simply too strong, but it did provide a link to the other major supply centre at Utete, further downstream. The remainder of the links were based on improved tracks; the main route ran southwards to Maba, it branched north and westward to Luwegu and thence to Mahenge; the main route continued south to Liwale. Liwale was a major centre of food production and tracks radiated in all directions, connecting Songea in the west, Tunduru in the south, and Massassi in the south-east, with Lindi and Kilwa in the west. The route was by no means easy to traverse, although a number of improvements had been made and the journey from Lindi to the Rufiji took several weeks. Nevertheless, the possession of interior lines

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<sup>491</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 174-178 and 234-235.

of communication made von Lettow's task significantly easier and he took great pains to ensure that it remained intact for as long as possible.

After sowing crops on the lower Rufiji in November 1916, the potential for reasonably adequate food supplies existed.<sup>492</sup> This would be a vital source as it enabled a large element of the force to avoid drawing on the *Etappenleitung* for several months while producing an extra 300 000 kg for the stocks. An example of the tensions in the system comes from the *Lindi-Bezirk* in early November, in which the *Etappenkommando Liwale* reported the movement of 450 – 500 tons of food as well as expecting to extract at least 150 tons from native supplies during the January harvest. In contrast, the local commander, Loeff, signalled on 9 December that the removal of food from his area was causing severe supply problems.<sup>493</sup> In reply, he was told to live off the land and that the expected 150 tons must be kept in reserve.

The replacement of food was a constant concern as the Rufiji force alone consumed about 10,000 kg of cereals per day supplemented by local foraging and hunting. With the harvest of corn in March 1917, the next available crop would be the mtama in June; until then at least 900,000 kg would be needed. But there was a significant shortfall in stocks with only 600 000 kg held; the magazines along the Rufiji had 150 000 kg, the *Etappenleitung* held another 150 000 kg, the magazines in Liwale-Nangano stored another 150 000 kg, leaving 150 000 kg in Lindi.<sup>494</sup>

Von Lettow kept almost daily records of his supply situation. Despite his care, he had the unpleasant surprise of discovering that the *Etappenleitung* held only 175 000 kg of the expected 300 000 kg in its stores. This shortfall was due to wastage and having to feed 20 000 rather than the planned 15 000 people.<sup>495</sup> In order to survive, on 26 January, von Lettow ordered drastic cuts, with the daily ration being reduced from 750g to 600g (rice from 500g to 400g) and meat being produced by hunting. Several days later, he decided on large reductions in numbers, with over 8,000 Africans followers being

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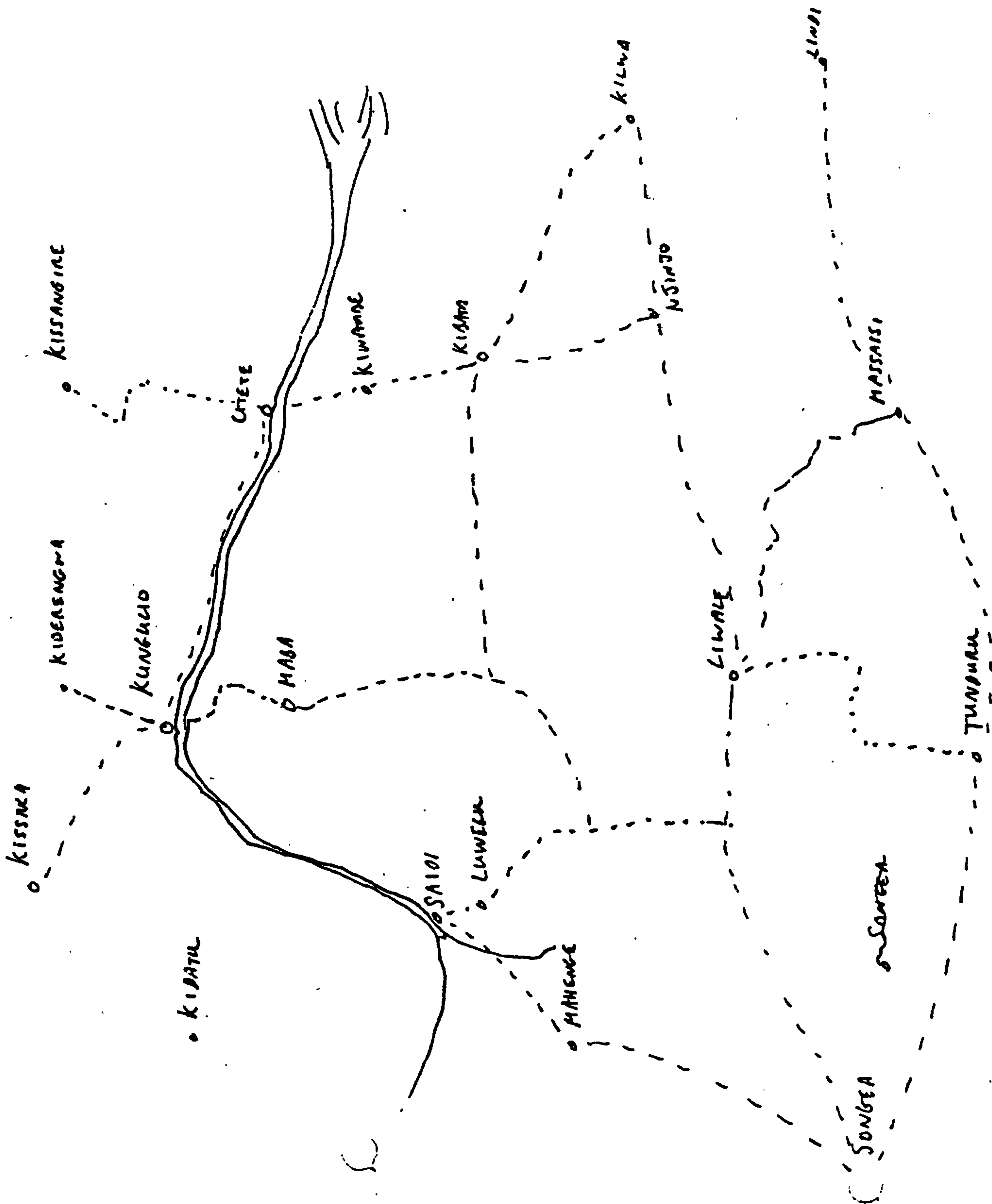
<sup>492</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1967 and 1981-1983.

<sup>493</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1988.

<sup>494</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1990.



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dismissed while formations were ordered not to feed the 500 wives and boys any further. The cuts fell on both the *Feldtruppe* and the *Etappenleitung* who were ordered to shed some 2,500 and 4,000 posts respectively. Henceforth, companies were capped at maximum of 165 carriers each.<sup>496</sup>

Owing to a favourable harvest, conditions eased in early 1917 and rations were raised to 700g meal and 500g rice, but they could never be described as more than adequate given the conditions and hard physical labour that all were enduring.<sup>497</sup>

### INFLUENCE OF SUPPLY AND TRANSPORT ON OPERATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

There is no doubt that the limitations of supply greatly influenced the decisions of the commanders of both sides. The Germans as much as the Entente suffered from severe food and water shortages. Although Smuts had tried to overcome the problems of supply through force of willpower, it was an impossible task and his troops suffered heavily. After his departure, many of both sides' tactical and operational deployments were largely based on considerations of food and water. The need for adequate resources was behind Lettow's decision to hold the lower Rufiji River area in late 1916 and early 1917. Smuts failed to realise this and ignored the area, enabling the Germans to replenish their food stocks at a critical period.<sup>498</sup> Another example of the far-ranging effect of supply on operations was the decision to hold the southern portion of the German colony and to range into Portuguese East Africa. In Lettow's own words:

“The operations of the last few months had narrowed the area from which supplies for the troops could be obtained. The productive areas of Lupembe, Iringa, Kissaki and the lower Rufiji had been lost, and the newly-occupied districts included wide stretches of barren land. The productivity of the more fertile areas was for the most part unknown...At that time I only had a general

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<sup>495</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 1991. Some 6,800 belonged to the *Etappenleitung* and 2,200 to the *Feldintendantur*.

<sup>496</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 1995-1996.

<sup>497</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 2001; Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 176-178.



idea that the eastern part of the Lindi area was very fertile and known as the granary of the colony.”<sup>499</sup>

This understanding led to the despatch of *Abt von Stuemmer* into Portuguese territory in early 1917 to harvest its food resources while shortages at Mahenge led to the dispersal of several detachments to the south in order to lessen the strain on the hard pressed lines of communication.

On the other side, van Deventer's advance on the Lukuledi had to stop on several occasions owing to lack of food, while Norforce's clearance of Portuguese East Africa in early 1917 was specifically intended to deny the enemy resources. Similarly, the withdrawal of the Belgians from Mahenge in late 1917 was aimed at preventing starvation and needless suffering. All had learnt the vital importance of maintaining a functional supply and transport system in place.

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<sup>498</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 160 and 178.

<sup>499</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 190.

## CHAPTER 6 - DISEASE AND MEDICINE

### INTRODUCTION

The East African campaign was quite unlike its contemporaries in the First World War in many ways, but the one factor that made it notably so was sickness. Armies have always suffered from the depredations of disease, particularly in the tropics with their debilitating effects of sun, heat, and indigenous pestilence. The nineteenth century campaigns of imperial conquest in Africa had demonstrated the dangers of soldiering in such unhealthy climates through consistently high mortality and sick rates. However, by the turn of the century, advances in medicine and sanitation had reduced the perils of the continent to much more acceptable levels.<sup>500</sup>

If much progress had been made in the application of medical science to military affairs, a great deal remained to be done as East Africa, particularly in its low-lying and swampy regions, was host to a wide variety of tropical diseases and afflictions. The exigencies of war and the difficulties of resupply made a complex medical situation even worse and added to the problems of the field campaign for both sides. To this must be added the weakening effects of inadequate diet, prolonged exposure to the elements, insufficient protective clothing and a shortage of effective medicines. Furthermore, many on both sides failed to understand the importance of proper hygienic and sanitary measures with hugely detrimental effects to the well-being of soldiers and followers alike. In such circumstances, the high rates of malaria, dysentery, typhoid, pneumonia, blackwater fever, and tuberculosis were unsurprising. Similarly, the less dangerous, but equally unpleasant, effects of leeches, fleas, ticks, flies, ants and bees did little to help either morale or health.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Curtin, Philip. *Disease and Empire The Health of European Troops in the Conquest of Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. ix-xi. Henceforth, Curtin, *Disease and Empire*.

<sup>501</sup> CO 551/101, Union of South Africa, 1917, Volume 8, Folio 38195, 31 July 1917, Court of Enquiry, Findings of the Court, pp. 474-475. The entire text of the Court together with the evidence submitted in contained in this folio – it is a bulky document of over 200 page; Henceforth, CO 551/101, *Court of Enquiry*; CO 691/10, *Pike Report*, pp 87-88;



While the transmission of tropical diseases through such vectors as the anopheles mosquito and the tsetse fly could not be prevented, there were a number of prophylactic measures that could be implemented to reduce the scale and level of suffering. The regular administration of quinine, the use of mosquito nets, the correct siting of camps, spraying and other measures had been proven effective in the past.<sup>502</sup> However, the implementation of preventative actions under difficult wartime conditions required firm discipline and material support. Discipline was required to ensure that medical precautions and other preventative measures were followed by exhausted, hungry and debilitated troops. Efficient organisation was essential in providing the necessary medicines and material for the successful fight against disease. In a difficult and long drawn-out campaign, fought in virgin bush many miles away from the nearest supply bases, both of these requirements were frequently either ignored or simply impossible to carry out.<sup>503</sup>

The vicissitudes of the British forces are by far the best documented in both the popular and scholarly literature. While they clearly suffered from a number of failings, it is also apparent that the other protagonists had an equally tough time in coping with the climate. The evidence is still fragmentary, but the Germans and Portuguese seem to have had even higher levels of sickness than the British. As well, there appear to have been marked differences between the types and rates of morbidity of Africans and Europeans as well as soldiers and followers. Certainly all participants, military and civilian, suffered immensely and many left the conflict with their health permanently impaired.

## **THE BRITISH EXPERIENCE**

The British medical experience in East Africa was not a happy one, as it was marked by significant failures in both administration and command. Overall, it proved to be the most unhealthy theatre of the war and sickness, particularly of malaria, reached

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<sup>502</sup> Harrison, Mark, "Medicine and the Culture of Command: the Case of Malaria Control in the British Army during the two World Wars", *Medical History*, XL, (1996), pp. 441-442.

<sup>503</sup> GG/9/96/18, 21 January 1916, Letter Bonar Law to Buxton. This letter enclosed an article in the British Medical Journal by Sir P Manson on the measures required to ensure health in East Africa, especially precautions against malaria. A copy was almost certainly passed to Botha and Smuts; Secretary of Defence, Group 2, Box 839. Copies of the articles were also sent to the Defence Department.

very high levels. While mortality rates never approached the levels of the campaigns of the early and mid-nineteenth century, the wastage of manpower was enormous and was, in many ways, excessive. The main reasons were the high command's lack of understanding of the need to enforce prophylactic and sanitary measures together with a sidelining of the medical service's own chain of command. However, the medical services cannot escape a share of the responsibility, as a more energetic and determined approach to the problems encountered could well have brought better results. In the end, it was this substantial failure that led to widespread suffering and death.

### **BRITISH MEDICAL ORGANISATION**

The medical services in the East African Expeditionary Force followed standard British Army organisation and structures. At its head was the Director of Medical Services (DMS), usually a surgeon general, supported by one or more Assistant DMS (ADMS). Next in the hierarchy was the Deputy DMS (DDMS), a title given to the doctors running hospitals and the line of communication medical staff. At division level, the principal medical officer used the title of ADMS.<sup>504</sup> Coming under the Adjutant General, these officers were responsible for the efficient running of medical units, treatment of the sick and wounded and advice to their respective operational commanders on all aspects of medical matters.

The system was based on a hierarchy of units designed to treat casualties, sick or wounded, at the appropriate level. This began with the regimental medical officer, a qualified doctor, and a number of stretcher bearers who were trained in first aid.<sup>505</sup> Wounded soldiers were usually given first aid by their comrades, before being carried back to the regimental aid post (RAP) by the stretcher bearers. There, they would be assessed by the medical officer and given limited treatment before being sent back to the field ambulance.

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<sup>504</sup> Macpherson, Maj Gen Sir W G, *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents – Medical Services General History Volume 1. Medical Services in the United Kingdom; in British Garrisons Overseas; and during Operations against Tsingtau, in Togoland, the Cameroons, and South-West Africa*, London: HMSO, 1921, p. 3. Henceforth Macpherson, *Official History Medical Services Volume 1*.

<sup>505</sup> Whitehead, *Doctors in the Great War*, London: Leo Cooper, 1999, p. 181.



The field ambulance was meant to be a mobile medical formation and there were supposed to be three per division, usually meaning one per brigade. It was divided into two groups; the bearer division and the tent division. The former provided stretcher-bearers who collected the wounded while the latter had the advanced dressing station and ten ambulances for their treatment. Operationally, the field ambulance broke down into three sections, each with a third of the bearer and tent divisions' resources, that could operate behind the forward units. A section could treat up to 50 wounded or sick, giving the field ambulance a total of 150 places.<sup>506</sup>

The field ambulance had three major roles; the first was to relieve the RAPs of their sick and wounded; the second was to assist the regimental personnel in clearing the wounded from the battlefield, usually during pauses or at night; and the third was to provide sufficient treatment to casualties so that they were able to be evacuated for more extensive treatment away from the battlefield.<sup>507</sup> The next stage in the medical chain was the clearing hospital which was meant to bridge the gap between the field divisions and the lines of communication. The clearing hospital was meant to have 200 modified stretcher beds, but began the war established for neither ambulances nor nurses.<sup>508</sup> This, and their lack of a significant surgical capability were major limitations in their effectiveness, although as elsewhere these hospitals evolved into the better-known casualty clearing stations (CCS). Unlike the Western Front, where the static nature of fighting and widespread presence of rail lines helped to overcome their limited mobility, the CCS in East Africa had a much more difficult task owing to insufficient transport.

Two other types of unit supported the forward troops; the stationary and general hospitals. The latter was intended to be a light, mobile hospital capable of treating 200 patients and as a link between the clearing hospitals and the base. However, improved methods of evacuation, notably the motor ambulance convoy, made this role redundant and over time the stationary hospital had its capacity increased to 500 cases and assumed the same functions as the general hospital. Finally, on the lines of communication, was the

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<sup>506</sup> Macpherson, *Official History Medical Services Volume I*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>507</sup> Whitehead, *Doctors in the Great War*, p.189.

<sup>508</sup> Macpherson, *Official History Medical Services Volume I*, pp. 10-11.

general hospital. This unit was designed to deal with all likely types of sickness and wounds in the army and was split between medical and surgical divisions capable of treating up to 500 casualties.<sup>509</sup>

One unit that came to particular prominence during the war was the motor ambulance convoy (MAC). As the name implied, this mobile unit was used to move patients between treatment units in specialised vehicles. While the MACs were a great advance on animal-drawn ambulances and stretcher-bearers, they were in short supply and were limited by the road and weather conditions

### **EFFECTS OF DISEASE AND MISMANAGEMENT**

There is little doubt about the debilitating and often fatal effects of tropical illnesses as they figure prominently throughout accounts of the campaign. General Smuts himself was well aware of the unhealthiness of the country and its effect on the escalating sick rate, particularly as he contemplated plunging south of the River Mgeta:

“...According to Medical report about 70% of VAN DEVENTERS Division are unfit for work owing to combined effect of Malaria, Dysentery and Debility. Position in two other Divisions not much better...Above numbers totalling 8000 are none too large to catch 4000 or 5000 of the enemy and will be further reduced by sickness in deadly RUFIJI area...”<sup>510</sup>

Operations in some of the most unhealthy regions of the world could never be free from high rates of sickness, given the state of medicine at the time, but Smuts's telegrams to the War Office always rested on the implicit assumption that the climate was solely to blame. Unsurprisingly, they never touched on the manifold weaknesses of his own administrative arrangements that exacerbated the problems. It does not seem to be a question of awareness of the number of casualties, which were well known, but rather the inability to prevent them. As the previous chapter has pointed out, the lack of thorough

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<sup>509</sup> Whitehead, *Doctors in the Great War*, pp.208-209.

<sup>510</sup> WO 95/5291, War Diary GHQ, 22 September 1916, Appendix 32a, Telegram OA 412, Smuts to CIGS, 22 September.



and well thought out plans for supporting the advancing troops with sufficient food, clothing, protective equipment contributed materially to the poor state of health by September 1916.

In the desire to wrap up the campaign quickly, Smuts and his staff ignored the obvious consequences of driving an already exhausted and fever-ridden force well beyond the existing, inadequate supply lines into a primeval wilderness. The Rufiji Valley was well known to be both dangerous to health and difficult to move through, yet the advance south was continued in September and October. The onset of the short rainy season in the latter month forced a halt to operations, but with the troops in low-lying, swampy and highly malarious areas. The result was to increase the level of sick casualties until many units ceased to exist as fighting entities and the remaining troops were incapable of any serious effort. Concerned about the disappearance of much of his force, particularly the South Africans, in October Smuts ordered a medical board to assess the worst-affected sick cases. The results were dire, as over 12,000 soldiers were considered unfit and invalided home on medical grounds. The problem was amplified by the inability of the services to evacuate many of the cases in a timely or efficient matter; the collapse of the transport and the effects of the rains on the primitive road network caused chaos.

His principal staff officer sent an urgent telegram to the administrative staff in early November about the need for efficient evacuation and treatment, but there was little that could be done in the circumstances.<sup>511</sup> It took considerable effort and time to move the sick back to the railway, which still was not operating at anything like its capacity. In the meantime, the remaining soldiers, many of whom should have been hospitalised themselves, had to shoulder the absent troops' workload, making for a particularly unpleasant and vicious circle.

It is worth considering the factors that allowed this to happen. While sickness had been a significant concern during the first year and a half of the campaign, it had never

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<sup>511</sup> WO 95/5300, War Diary DMS, 3 November 1916, Appendix III, Telegram QC 14, BGGS to Adminstaff.

grown out of control owing to the relatively static nature of the fighting and a reasonable system of administration. However, with the launching of mobile warfare in March 1916 and the advance out of the arid steppes of British East Africa into the heavily vegetated and well-watered lowlands of the German colony, the force entered the habitat of the malarial mosquito and tsetse fly. Second, the pace of advance coupled with an inability to organise the supply services effectively meant that troops were usually underfed and without essential protective equipment. Third, the medical services had insufficient staff and resources to deal with the scale of the problem. Finally, through a combination of operational pressure, poor discipline and ignorance, personal and group sanitary measures were often neglected at great cost to the troops and followers.

Given this potent combination of problems, the health situation worsened significantly as the advance progressed. If the South Africans suffered heavily,<sup>512</sup> the British and Indian troops were also much depleted by sickness and overwork resulting in the need to rotate long serving battalions.<sup>513</sup> The state of the followers was also poor although they tended to suffer much more from pneumonia and dysentery [check] than malaria. By early 1917, matters had reached such a stage that the senior medical officer was recommending that only Africans and a minimum number of Europeans be employed in the Rufiji area and that much higher standards of shelter, food and clothing be applied.<sup>514</sup>

The War Office began to become alarmed as the casualties began to mount in late 1916. While it had always expected a higher than normal sick rate in the campaign, the levels suffered by the East African Force seemed abnormally high. Coupled to this were persistent stories, principally emanating from South Africa, that mismanagement and incompetence had led to much unnecessary suffering and illness.<sup>515</sup> This unease was

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<sup>512</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 15 October 1916, Entry *1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions*. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was abolished and the two mounted brigades amalgamated. War Diary GHQ, 16 October 1916, Entry *Lake Det. & Belgian Force*. The Lake Force was abolished and its commander and staff returned to South Africa. WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 23 January 1917, Entry *2<sup>nd</sup> Division*. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was abolished early in 1917.

<sup>513</sup> WO 95/5300, War Diary DMS, 31 January 1917, Memorandum Surgeon General Hunter to [CinC ?]. The Surgeon General recommended that the bulk of non-African troops be given rotated while the Africans remaining be well house, sheltered and amply fed. Hordern, *Military Operations East Africa*, pp. 520-522, gives further details.

<sup>514</sup> WO 95/5300, War Diary DMS, 11 February 1917, Letter DMS to DA & QMG.

<sup>515</sup> WO 33/858, *Telegrams D 1*, No. 1313, 17 October 1916, Telegram D 280/1973, General Botha to War Office, p. 355. "...I am especially anxious to explain situation frankly to South African public, in view of political conditions here and quite unfounded



strengthened by the return of so many emaciated and fever-wracked soldiers, some of whom had been away for as little as six months, that it became a political matter. Finally, towards the conclusion of General Smuts's time in command, one of his battalion commanding officers, Lieutenant Colonel Kirkpatrick, laid a formal complaint to his brigade commander which was quickly passed up to GHQ.<sup>516</sup> The language was blunt and forthright:

"...The total strength of this Regiment, with reinforcements was over 1200, so that the percentage of EFFECTIVES is approximately 9%, leaving 91% as INEFFECTIVES.

This, I submit Sir, is an appalling state of affairs and in view of the medical reports and representations which have been made from time to time, it is quite clear that a very grave charge must lie against some person or persons who must be responsible for the existing state of affairs...Among other things, Starvation, bad and insufficient Clothing and Equipment, dearth of Hospital Drugs, comforts and accommodation, are given as reasons for the present debacle, and these cannot but be accepted by every Unit Commander and other persons in similar responsible positions. This state of affairs is not due to any sudden difficulty arising, but has existed and continued, at any rate since the entry into Kondoa-Irangi, some 5 ½ months ago, and though repeated representations have been made to you there has been no improvement in the situation..."

Apart from the seriousness of the charges, the explicit threat in the letter to take subsequent action should the matter be ignored left the high command little option but to convene a formal court of inquiry.

"...I venture to say that if the question of an enquiry is not adopted that things will be brought to light in a very disagreeable manner after the campaign is over,

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rumours concerning Brits which have gained credence here last July..."; No. 1388, 17 November 1916, Telegram OA 84, Smuts to CIGS, p. 377. "...General Botha telegraphed me that complaints which are appearing in South African newspapers are having disturbing effect. The complaints are to the effect that owing to mismanagement troops here have been starved and insufficiently clothed..."

<sup>516</sup> CO 551/101, *Court of Enquiry*, 26 October 1916, Letter Lt Col Kirkpatrick, Commanding 9<sup>th</sup> Regiment South African Infantry to General Officer Commanding 3<sup>rd</sup> South African Infantry Brigade, pp. 248-250.

as there are many men of substance, standing and intelligence, in the ranks who are not likely to remain quiet when freed from the restrictions of the Service. I have only fringed on the whole question, but in support of what I say, would call all O's.C. Units, Medical Officers, Supply Officers, Quartermasters, Transport Officers, etc..."

Faced with an unmistakable challenge, the court was established by order of 13 November 1916, some two weeks after the allegations were lodged, and ran until May 1917.<sup>517</sup> The complaints which alleged that one unit suffered from starvation, inadequate medical arrangements and exposure arising from insufficient clothing and equipment were based largely on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's advance to the Central Railway. A lengthy and detailed enquiry by officers of General Headquarters followed, in which a number of witnesses were interviewed and statements taken at length.<sup>518</sup> The evidence was devastating as the other commanding officers in the brigade substantiated Kirkpatrick's claims. In the 11<sup>th</sup> SAI:

"...I left the remnant of my regiment there [KIKUMI]. I had to point out that I was losing men sick at such a pace – 16 men a day was the average. There were 70 men sick in camp and 170 in the field ambulance...The condition of the men became very bad at KIDODI. They had been gradually going back for a long time, due, as I had already pointed out, to their having been drawing on the stamina all the time...The Brigadier knew all about these conditions. I discussed it with him more than once and he expressed his concern to me..."<sup>519</sup>

Things were little better in the 12<sup>th</sup> SAI:

"I attribute the present exhaustion of the men of my regiment to constant exposure to rain and tropical heat without proper cover. Secondly, to shortness of rations and shortness of drugs...In my opinion the absence of proper and constant doses

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<sup>517</sup> CO 551/101, *Court of Enquiry*, "Instructions of Authority Assembling the Court", 13 November 1916, p. 238.

<sup>518</sup> CO 551/101, *Court of Enquiry*, 17 May 1917, pp. 238-485.

<sup>519</sup> CO 551/101, *Court of Enquiry*, "Statement of Col N.H.M. Burn", Commanding 11<sup>th</sup> South African Infantry, [n.d.], pp. 329-333.



of quinine, though ordered by the medical authorities, has been one of the greatest scandals of the campaign...The Brigade Commander was told all about the condition of the men and the inadequacy and unsuitability of the rations as issued, frequently and used to tell me he had done best to improve matters for them...On the march to Mpapua the 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command of the 10<sup>th</sup> S.A.I. told my 2<sup>nd</sup> in Command that 50% of his regiment had fallen out and that my regiment was in much the same state..”<sup>520</sup>

Even the medical evidence was damning. The Deputy Assistant Director of Medical Services for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division stated:

“To sum up, the troops never had full Army rations. They performed miracles on mealie pap and flour and water...the Division has been put out of action as effectively as if it had been done by the enemy...Drugs have been incredibly short from MASHOTI (Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>) comforts, cornflour, arrowroot, stimulants, etc., practically non-existent even from the commencement of the campaign. Prophylactic doses of quinine were ordered but not available and so on with every individual item...”<sup>521</sup>

In light of this, and much more, the Court found in favour of Colonel Kirkpatrick although it was unable to find any one person or specific organisation to blame. It stated:

“...The only conclusion possible is that all the conditions complained of were brought about by want of facilities for transportation. The shortness of food and clothing would not have occurred had it been possible to carry these things forward...The responsibility for the want of facilities for transportation cannot be fixed on any individual or set of individuals. The exigencies of the campaign

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<sup>520</sup> CO 551/101, *Court of Enquiry*, “Statement of Lt Col Bottomley”, Commanding Officer 12<sup>th</sup> South African Infantry, [n.d.], pp. 335-339.

<sup>521</sup> CO 551/101, *Court of Enquiry*, “Statement of Capt W C C Pakes”, Deputy Assistant Director Medical Services, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, [n.d.], pp. 331-335.

necessitated a much longer line of communications than had been contemplated or allowed for at the time the line was so extended...”<sup>522</sup>

While 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had clearly failed to respond adequately to very trying circumstances, the question of why GHQ had not taken any remedial action remained unasked. The crisis in health had been apparent since mid- to late- 1916. For example, the chief medical officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had submitted a report stating that the majority of the fighting troops were in need of rest and were being debilitated by continuous marching, road-making, drift-making, fighting and lack of food, and by malaria and dysentery.<sup>523</sup> This was echoed by reports from medical officers in the forward units as well as the Director of Medical Services himself.<sup>524</sup> For example, on 15 September, 12<sup>th</sup> SAI reported that 75 per cent of its men were unfit for duty “owing shortage rations weakened by fever and dysentery...3½ biscuits per day not sufficient ration” while 1<sup>st</sup> SAH could only muster 5 per cent of its effectives.<sup>525</sup>

The problems were amply reflected in the hospital figures; in September 1916, 1<sup>st</sup> Division had a total strength (including porters) of 10,598, of whom 1,362 sick and 193 wounded were admitted to hospital, and of these some 1,224 had to be evacuated rearwards. Medical officers found that some 17 per cent of the troops had enlarged spleens and anaemia while 30 per cent were unfit for hard work owing to underfeeding and heavy exertions.<sup>526</sup> There is no evidence of either the commander-in-chief or the general staff initiating a sustained effort to sort out the serious problems in supply, transport or health, apart from ordering more evacuations.

The choice of the principal administrative staff officers from GHQ as court members no doubt influenced the outcome, but even the most generous interpretation

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<sup>522</sup> CO 551/101, *Court of Enquiry*, “General Conclusion”, pp. 476–477.

<sup>523</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, p. 450.

<sup>524</sup> WO 95/5300, War Diary DMS, 9 November 1916, Letter DMS to DA & QMG attaching letters 28 November 1916, Senior Medical Officer, 2<sup>nd</sup> South African Field Ambulance, attached 2<sup>nd</sup> Division; 28 November 1916, Assistant Director Medical Services, 2<sup>nd</sup> Division; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 10 October 1916, Entry 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions; and 22 October 1916, Entry 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions; and 23 December 1916, Entry 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. To be fair to van Deventer, he had been reporting the seriousness of his supply and manpower situation throughout this period; GSWA, Box 26, 11 September 1916, Telegram K 475, 2 Div to Smuts.

<sup>525</sup> GSWA, Box 26, 15 September 1916, Telegram SC 548, Thirbrig to 2 Div; Box 29, 16 December 1916, Telegram T 63, OC Composite Regiment [10<sup>th</sup> SAI] to 2 Div.

<sup>526</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, p. 457.



could not hide the substantial failings within the administrative and medical services. The matter was referred back to London where it quickly became a political hot potato between the War and Colonial Offices. General Smuts was shown a copy of the report and asked for his advice on whether to publish it or not. No doubt conscious of his political position at home, he advised its suppression until after the campaign was over. He was also unhappy with the findings of the court:

“After reading the report I have come to the conclusion that, instead of allaying the feeling and agitation [in Johannesburg], its publication might have the opposite effect and I am averse to publishing the report until the campaign is over as it deals very largely with the administration of a Division commanded by General Van de Venter and its publication might seriously weaken his position. Further, in my opinion, the report is one-sided and does not sufficiently consider the campaign as a whole and the unforeseen physical difficulties encountered nor is there any allowance given for the results achieved by forced marches...”<sup>527</sup>

The official War Office line to the South African Government was a whitewash that justified Smuts' conduct of the campaign while admitting that 2<sup>nd</sup> Division suffered from a lack of experience in novel and unexpectedly difficult conditions.<sup>528</sup> It was a lame reply to a very serious matter that deserved closer attention. Doubtless, it was hoped that the matter would now die quietly.

If Whitehall was prepared to brush off a colonial government with a vague and unsatisfactory answer, it was also concerned with the findings of the Court. Despite all of Smuts' reassurances about the unavoidable nature of the administrative problems endured by his forces, it was evident that the medical situation was very unsatisfactory and that independent investigation was necessary. Accordingly, in July 1917 the War Office instructed Surgeon General W W Pike to go out to East Africa and to report on the

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<sup>527</sup> CO 551/101, Union of South Africa, 1917, Volume 8, Folio 38195, 31 July 1917, Letter J C Smuts to Sir George Fiddes, 9 August 1917, p. 234.

<sup>528</sup> CO 551/101, Union of South Africa, 1917, Volume 8, Folio 44918, 10 September 1917, Letter 0165/8468 (MO 2) Secretary, War Office to Under-Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 9 September 1917, pp. 570-571.

medical situation there.<sup>529</sup> His study took four months with a large number of units being visited and numerous personnel interviewed. The team was able to gain a first-hand impression of conditions and in particular the difficulties under which the force operated. The report covered all aspects of medicine and health, coming to a large number of findings. One of the earliest comments was the damage done to morale and efficiency by Smuts's ill-advised pronouncements:

“...A public statement made in England early in 1917 that the war was over in East Africa did incalculable harm as it caused a general feeling of “Oh! The war is over here, why trouble to increase units, get things out from home for camps and build bandas, etc., etc.” The war was not over or anything like over; and all precautions against disease were required with greater urgency than before; but, in spite of the fact that every thinking man out here knew the statement was not correct, it inevitably led to a curtailment of initiative, for the thought could not but intrude itself when a suggestion was made or a requisition sent forward, ‘Is this necessary as the war is said to be practically at an end?’”<sup>530</sup>

Some areas, such as the work of the field ambulances and hospitals together with methods of casualty evacuation were found to be satisfactory. However, the scientific and sanitary aspects of the medical services came in for most scathing and damning criticism although the failure of the command to take note of medical advice was also noted.<sup>531</sup> Of particular note was the failure to supply the microscopes essential to the correct diagnosis of tropical diseases despite repeated requests by medical officers.

There were also substantial criticisms of the discipline of the force, particularly concerning malaria. It had proven to be the biggest medical problem throughout the campaign causing much suffering and disability. Yet, despite its seriousness and well-known effects, GHQ and the medical services had failed to tackle its causes robustly

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<sup>529</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, pp. 1-89.

<sup>530</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, p. 6.

<sup>531</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, pp. 87-88.



enough. Much of the problem related to poor treatment of the initial attack as well as inadequate measures taken to prevent infection. In the words of the report:

“Neither quinine prophylaxis nor the issue of proper mosquito nets, nor what may be termed “malaria discipline” was enforced as should have been the case. No proper anti-malarial organisation was put in force and apparently we entered lightly on a campaign in one of the most malarious regions of Africa without much idea of the seriousness of the undertaking.”<sup>532</sup>

It went on to point out that the use of the former German capital, Dar-es-Salaam, as the primary base after September 1916 had led to many of the problems. It was known to be extremely malarious yet no serious anti-malarial measures were put into place until the Board arrived. It was generally the first landing place of all reinforcements and the transit camps in the vicinity of the town were highly exposed to malarial mosquitoes. It was unsurprising when the bulk of newly arrived troops contracted malaria there and began the vicious circle of repeated attacks that led to a marked decline in health. Once started, it was extremely difficult to break the cycle.<sup>533</sup>

The post-war Official History was less restrained in its language:

“Dar-es-Salaam was probably the most malarious locality within the area of operations and the danger of its incidence existed throughout the whole year...Anti-malaria work was not taken up seriously till the later phases of the military operations, and when it was commenced the troops had already largely been affected to a large extent. Malaria, in fact, practically ran riot in the early stages of the campaign, before adequate arrangements had been made for the protection of new arrivals from the moment they disembarked. Had such arrangements been possible the incidence of malaria in this campaign would undoubtedly have been materially less.”<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>532</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, p. 26.

<sup>533</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, p. 27.

<sup>534</sup> Macpherson, Major General Sir W G, Herringham, Major General Sir W P, Elliott, Colonel T R, and Balfour, Lieutenant Colonel

The Pike Report went on for considerable length and produced considerable evidence for its findings. Nowhere could it be said to be a ringing endorsement of the conduct of the medical aspects of the campaign. Finally, it concluded:

“When, however, all is said and done, and every allowance made for these and other drawbacks, we cannot but feel that there is much to regret in the medical history of this campaign and that a great many difficulties were due to a lack of forethought, of driving power, and of expert knowledge and assistance.”<sup>535</sup>

From this and other evidence it was clear that the link between the general and administrative staffs was inadequate. For example, during the advance south of the Central Railway, there was a lack of detailed planning and poor liaison between the key departments:

“The above outline of the operations shows that they were complicated...There is no evidence, however, that any well-considered scheme was evolved or that medical units were instructed regarding the part they would play during the operations. The medical arrangements appear to have been haphazard, and sections of field ambulances were apparently attached to any formation that happened to be at hand.”<sup>536</sup>

The Official History also highlighted the major shortcomings in the overall organisation of the force:

“No doubt the abnormal sick-rate was in part due to the failure on the part of the responsible military staff to recognize the importance of preventative measures against disease. The D.M.S. of the force had his headquarters too far away. He was not always in direct communication with General Headquarters nor with the

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A, eds *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents Medical Services Diseases of War*, Volume 1, London: HMSO, [n.d.], pp. 254-255. Henceforth, Macpherson et al, *Official History Medical Services Diseases of War Volume 1*.  
<sup>535</sup> CO 691/19, *Pike Report*, p. 87.



Army Commander, and most of his recommendations had to be made by correspondence. Further, rations and equipment were generally inadequate, and there can be no doubt that men who are under-fed, exposed to hard fighting and unsuitably protected against weather conditions fall easy victims to disease...There were not sufficient medical units, and when the medical staff became depleted the reinforcements sent out consisted of young and inexperienced medical officers with little knowledge of tropical medicine or sanitation, and only able to communicate with the troops under their charge by means of inefficient interpreters.”<sup>537</sup>

Matters began to change in early 1917, when the new commander-in-chief took steps to reduce the still-rising sick rate. A complete and comprehensive reorganisation of the medical services was undertaken with emphasis being placed on making the field ambulances more mobile and having a coordinated system of evacuation and treatment. Extra staff was recruited and more effort was directed towards the medical support for the much-neglected carriers.<sup>538</sup> Nevertheless, the critical area of sanitation lacked proper organisation and was inadequately supervised until after the visit of Surgeon General Pike in August 1917.<sup>539</sup>

The general advance that began in mid-1917 benefited greatly from the improved system of medical support although at one stage the rapid advance of the fighting troops outran the medical system and delays in the evacuation of the sick and wounded occurred. Despite the bitterly won lessons of the previous year, this factor does not seem to have figured in the Staff's calculations and nor was it ever reported to the DMS.<sup>540</sup> Even at the end of October 1917, during the pause to regroup prior to the final clearance of GEA, the medical staff failed to make the necessary casualty evacuation plan despite being briefed on the overall intentions. The fact that the DMS still remained in

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<sup>536</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, p. 453.

<sup>537</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, p. 467.

<sup>538</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, pp. 475-477.

<sup>539</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, p. 499. The post was upgraded from DADMS to ADMS (rank range.)

<sup>540</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, p. 485.

Dar-es-Salaam while the commander-in-chief was far away to the south can only have contributed to the inefficiencies of the system.<sup>541</sup>

One area of the administrative system that seems to have been consistently ignored throughout 1916 and 1917 was the motor transport. Given the inefficiencies and weaknesses of human portage, the effectiveness and throughput of the logistical system was dependent on motor transport moving supplies as far forward as possible. However, it required both machines and drivers to operate it and the machines seem to have received the better support. The feeding, welfare and health of the drivers were largely left to chance and they suffered as badly from illness as those in the front line. Again, the reasons are not difficult to determine:

“...These men had been overworked and had driven their cars from early morning till late at night over roads that were never good and often dangerous. They were exposed to great extremes of heat and cold, while their messing and sleeping arrangements were haphazard and the sanitation of their camps defective. No attempt had been made to provide them with a system of rest camps having tent or ‘banda’ accommodation...but it is evident, too, that very little attention was paid to the welfare and comfort of mechanical transport personnel...”<sup>542</sup>

By 1917, opinion both within and outside of East Africa was coming to the conclusion that it was unsuitable for European or Indian troops. With the publication of the Pike Report and the reports of returning officers, the War Office came to share this view, and by the end of that year, all the British, South African and Indian fighting troops had withdrawn to other theatres, leaving behind mainly specialist units. The fighting in 1918 was largely conducted by African troops on the grounds that only they had sufficient resistance to disease and acclimatisation to be effective there although the need to find reinforcements for the Middle East and shipping shortages also played an important role.

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<sup>541</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, p. 487.



East Africa never fared well in medical matters, although it was far from being alone in causing concern. The Medical Research Council expressed its concerns about the Army's inability to replicate the success of the medical system in France elsewhere, particularly in the eastern theatres, as well as the failures in disseminating effective measures of preventative medicine.<sup>543</sup> In contrast to this unsatisfactory situation, there was both high level support and effectiveness in implementing sanitary measures in the BEF in France. The same staff system prevailed as in East Africa, but the chief difference in Europe was that the officer in command of troops took responsibility for their health and the advice of senior medical staff appears to have been heeded.<sup>544</sup> As Ian Whitehead has concluded:

“The combatant branch contributed to these achievements by adopting a generally sympathetic attitude towards the work of the RAMC. The latter proved to be a critical factor as was evident from the disastrous lack of consideration given to medicine on other fronts, such as Gallipoli, Mesopotamia, and East Africa.”<sup>545</sup>

By the end of the war, there was little doubt that much unnecessary and preventable suffering had occurred amongst troops and followers, due to poor planning and coordination. The true numbers of casualties will never be known, but they were excessive by the standards of the day and, most particularly, of the state of scientific and medical knowledge. Perhaps the most telling epitaph was the minute of the Adjutant General on the Pike Report:

“Had this particular campaign been more in the public eye, a very grave scandal would have resulted, owing to the want of supervision on the part of the Commanders-in-Chief over the departments of their staff concerned.”<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> Macpherson and Mitchell, *Official History Medical Services, Volume 4*, p. 474.

<sup>543</sup> Whitehead, Ian R. *Doctors in the Great War*, pp. 144-145.

<sup>544</sup> Whitehead, Ian R. *Doctors in the Great War*, pp. 219-221.

<sup>545</sup> Whitehead, Ian R. *Doctors in the Great War*, p. 254.

<sup>546</sup> CAB 103/94, WO File 0165/9851, Minute by General Sir Nevil Macready on Pike Report. [check details here]

## ANALYSIS OF SICKNESS

While there was little contemporary question that the rate of sickness in East Africa was excessively high, apart from the post-war *Medical Services' Official History*, there was almost no serious coverage of the true scale of the problem. Even the official work, diligent as it was in highlighting the failings of the campaign and providing reams of statistics, only put a limited effort into comparison of the levels of morbidity and mortality across the theatres. Yet, without an objective look at the levels of casualties suffered, it is difficult to come to an accurate assessment of the successes and failures of EAEF's medical effort. Fortunately, the final volume of the *Medical Services' Official History* provides an excellent source of statistical evidence from which a preliminary assessment can be formed. The only drawback is that it relates solely to the British forces and only a rough estimate of German casualties can be compiled from other sources.

Table 1 compares the proportion of battle to non-battle casualties across selected theatres and in the South African War of 1899-1902. It is noteworthy that East Africa had by far the highest proportion of non-battle to battle casualties, over 1.5 times that of the next nearest theatre, Macedonia, and nearly 24 times that of France and Flanders. It is nearly twice the earlier campaign in South-West Africa and the South African War. Even compared to unhealthy theatres such as Macedonia and Mesopotamia, the ratio is extremely high.



**TABLE 1**  
**PROPORTION OF NON-BATTLE TO BATTLE CASUALTIES IN SELECTED**  
**BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY FORCES**<sup>547</sup>

<b>THEATRE</b>	<b>PERIOD</b>	<b>BATTLE CASUALTIES</b>	<b>NON-BATTLE CASUALTIES</b>	<b>RATIO NON-BATTLE TO BATTLE</b>
East Africa	1916-1918	10,717	336,540	31.40x
Macedonia	1915-1918	23,762	481,262	20.25x
South-West Africa	1914-1915	1,588	24,746	15.58x
South African War	1899-1902	26,750	404,126	15.10x
Egypt and Palestine	1915-1918	51,451	503,377	9.78x
Mesopotamia	1914 - 1918	85,207	820,148	9.63x
France and Flanders	1914-1918	2,690,054	3,528,486	1.31x

<sup>547</sup> Mitchell , Major T J and Smith, Miss G M, *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents Medical Services Casualties and Medical Statistics of the Great War*, London: HMSO, 1931, reprinted Nashville, Tennessee: Battery Press, 1997, p. 56, Table 1, "Proportion of Battle to Non-Battle Casualties in the British Expeditionary Forces during the Great War". Henceforth, Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*. It should be noted that all figures for the South African War are for other ranks only. All other figures are for British and Imperial troops and exclude followers.

Table 2 shows the proportion of killed to wounded and total permanent losses to temporary losses. East Africa had the second highest ratio of killed to wounded and of permanent to temporary losses. In other words, battle casualties there were more likely to die, but that overall casualties were much more likely to return to service after treatment.

**TABLE 2**  
**PROPORTION OF CASUALTIES IN SELECTED BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY**  
**FORCES**<sup>548</sup>

THEATRE	PERIOD	KILLED TO WOUNDED	PERMANENT LOSSES TO TEMPORARY LOSSES
East Africa	1916-1918	1 : 3.70	1 : 33.72
Macedonia	1915-1918	1 : 6.50	1 : 46.60
South-West Africa	1914-1915	1 : 3.36	1 : 20.78
South African War	1899-1902	1 : 4.50	1 : 19.50
Egypt and Palestine	1915-1918	1 : 5.43	1 : 26.41
Mesopotamia	1914-1918	1 : 5.36	17.78
France and Flanders	1914-1918	1 : 7.80	1 : 5.60

<sup>548</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, drawn from p. 169, Table 6, "Proportions" (France and Flanders); p. 189 Table 7 "Proportions" (Macedonia); p. 226 Table 8(c), "Proportions – Whole Force (Mesopotamia); p. 211, Table 6 "Proportions" (Egypt and Palestine); p. 256, Table 7, "Proportions" (East Africa); p. 264, Table 6 "Proportions" (South-West Africa); and p. 270, Table 6, "Proportions" (South African War).



Table 3 shows the absolute number of casualties suffered in selected theatres, showing in East Africa’s case how important losses to sickness or injury were relative to those incurred in battle. In terms of troops, the sick reached 86 per cent of those suffered in the much larger South African War; together with the followers, overall sickness levels were 48 per cent higher than those of the previous conflict.

**TABLE 3**  
**APPROXIMATE TOTAL CASUALTIES IN SELECTED BRITISH**  
**EXPEDITIONARY FORCES**<sup>549</sup>

THEATRE	KILLED	DIED OF WOUNDS	DIED OF DISEASE OR INJURY	MISSING AND PW	WOUND-ED	SICK OR INJURED	TOTAL
East Africa (Troops)	2,689	754	6,558	1,301	7,777	330,232	349,311
East Africa (Followers)	376	-	44,911	635	1,333	241,688	288,943
Macedonia	2,797	1,299	3,744	2,778	16,888	477,518	505,024
South-West Africa	185	61	181	782	560	23,565	26,334
South African War	5,774	2,018	14,048	202	19,457	390,444	430,876
Egypt and Palestine	7,394	2,993	5,981	3,871	37,193	497,396	554,828
Mesopotamia	11,008	5,281	16,712	15,221	53,697	803,706	905,625
France and Flanders	381,261	151,356	32,098	319,824	1,837,613	3,496,388	6,218,540
United Kingdom	-	-	-	-	-	1,965,646	1,965,646
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>418,361</b>	<b>167,172</b>	<b>113,173</b>	<b>352,458</b>	<b>2,004,976</b>	<b>6,074,552</b>	<b>11,096,338</b>

<sup>549</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, p. 12, Table 1, “Approximate Total Casualties in the British Expeditionary Forces during the Great War; the numbers of South African War casualties have been drawn from p. 269, Table 3, Not all theatres are shown in the table, but their numbers have been included in the overall totals. For East Africa troops, the totals of sick and injured relate to 1916-1918 only - all other figures cover the entire war. For followers, the totals of killed and died of wounds have been combined under the killed column.





**TABLE 4**  
**INCIDENCE OF MALARIA IN SELECTED BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY**  
**FORCES**  
**(DEATHS AND RATIOS PER 1,000 OF RATION STRENGTH)**<sup>550</sup>

Campaign	Period	Admissions	Deaths	Ratio per 1,000	
				Admissions	Deaths
East Africa	1916 (Jun-Dec)	50,768	263	1,039.11	5.38
	1917	72,141	499	1,422.84	9.84
	1918	22,941	69	559.09	1.68
Macedonia	1916	32,018	287	259.48	2.33
	1917	71,412	228	391.12	1.25
	1918	59,087	272	458.94	2.11
South-West Africa	1914-1915	518	2	15.70	0.06
South African War	1899-1902	25,156	85	45.30	0.15
Egypt and Palestine	1916	1,423	8	7.57	0.04
	1917	8,480	73	45.46	0.39
	1918	30,241	773	130.86	3.35
Mesopotamia	1916	16,957	-	102.54	-
	1917	16,063	118	52.24	0.38
	1918	21,447	166	52.10	0.40
France and Flanders	1916	58	-	0.04	-
	1917	781	2	0.41	0.00
	1918	2,739	4	1.47	0.00

This table shows how truly significant the malaria problem was in 1916 and 1917; in the former year every soldier was admitted to hospital at least once, while in the latter year the admission rate was over 1.4 times. This rate was halved in 1918, but was still

<sup>550</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, p. 80, Table 19.

1.2 times the highest rate suffered anywhere else (Macedonia 1918). Overall, notoriously malarious theatres such as Mesopotamia, Macedonia and Egypt/Palestine compare very favorably with East Africa, especially in the death rates.

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Table 5 shows the incidence of dysentery, including both the bacillary and amoebic varieties.

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**TABLE 5**  
**INCIDENCE OF DYSENTERY IN SELECTED BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY**  
**FORCES**  
**(DEATHS AND RATIOS PER 1,000 OF RATION STRENGTH)**<sup>551</sup>

Campaign	Period	Admissions	Deaths	Ratio per 1,000	
				Admissions	Deaths
East Africa	1916 (Jun-Dec)	8902	306	182.21	6.26
	1917	14,045	429	277.01	8.46
	1918	3,294	86	80.28	2.10
Macedonia	1916	8,204	169	66.49	1.37
	1917	5,792	124	31.72	0.68
	1918	9,438	173	73.31	1.34
South-West Africa	1914-1915	715	13	21.67	0.39
South African War	1899-1902	38,108	1,343	68.60	2.42
Egypt and Palestine	1916	5,597	81	29.78	0.43
	1917	4,431	139	23.27	0.75
	1918	4,906	264	21.23	1.14
Mesopotamia	1916	15,270	-	92.34	-
	1917	11,959	286	38.89	0.93
	1918	12,290	303	29.86	0.74
France and Flanders	1916	5,776	40	2.64	0.04
	1917	6,025	46	3.18	0.02
	1918	12,211	46	6.58	0.02

<sup>551</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, p. 81, Table 20.

The East African figures for dysentery are much lower than for malaria, but were still the highest by far. In 1917 the rate was 6.2x the peak incidence in Macedonia and 3.5x that of the South African War.

Table 6 has been derived from Tables 4 and 5 above. It shows the ratio of admission rates for East Africa against those of selected theatres for both malaria and dysentery.



**TABLE 6**  
**COMPARISON OF EAST AFRICAN TROOP CASUALTIES TO SELECTED**  
**THEATRES**  
**(BASED ON COMPARING ADMISSION RATES PER 1,000 RATION**  
**STRENGTH)**<sup>552</sup>

Campaign	Period	Ratio of East African Troop Casualties to Selected Theatre (Malaria)		Ratio of East African Troop Casualties to Selected Theatre (Dysentery)	
		Admissions	Deaths	Admissions	Deaths
Macedonia	1916	4.0x	2.3x	2.7x	4.6x
	1917	3.6x	7.9x	8.7x	12.4x
	1918	1.2x	0.8x	1.1x	1.6x
South-West Africa	1914-1915	64.1x	93.3x	8.3x	39.5x
South African War	1899-1902	22.2x	37.3x	2.6x	6.4x
Egypt and Palestine	1916	137.3x	134.5x	6.1x	14.6x
	1917	31.3x	25.2x	11.9x	11.3x
	1918	4.3x	0.5x	3.8x	1.8x
Mesopotamia	1916	10.1x	∞	2.0x	∞
	1917	27.2x	25.9x	7.1x	9.1x
	1918	10.7x	4.2x	2.7x	2.8x
France and Flanders	1916	25977.8x	∞	69.0x	156.5x
	1917	3470.3x	∞	89.4x	423.0x
	1918	380.3x	∞	12.2x	105.0x

With regard to malaria, East Africa had admission rates that were generally much higher than Macedonia, Mesopotamia and Egypt/Palestine - all known for their malarial problems. The relative differences in death rates for malaria were quite considerable. The enormous differences of ratios as compared to France and Flanders can be

disregarded owing to the very small number of cases suffered there. Dysentery was less of a problem in absolute numbers than malaria, but nevertheless it was relatively bad as compared with Macedonia, Egypt/Palestine and France & Flanders. The death rate for dysentery was markedly than greater in all other theatres, with the difference between East Africa and France and Flanders being exceptional.

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<sup>552</sup> The figures for East Africa in 1916 are for Jun – Dec only. The comparisons with South-West African and South African Wars have been calculated against the average East African casualties for 1916-1918.



Table 7 shows the incidence of the enteric group of fevers, including typhoid and paratyphoid fevers.

**TABLE 7**  
**INCIDENCE OF THE ENTERIC GROUP OF FEVERS IN SELECTED BRITISH**  
**EXPEDITIONARY FORCES**  
**(DEATHS AND RATIOS PER 1,000 OF RATION STRENGTH)**<sup>553</sup>

Campaign	Period	Admissions	Deaths	Ratio per 1,000	
				Admissions	Deaths
East Africa	1916 (Jun-Dec)	142	33	2.91	.68
	1917	124	24	2.45	.47
	1918	69	13	1.68	.32
Macedonia	1916	1,105	40	8.96	.32
	1917	529	19	2.90	.10
	1918	135	6	1.05	.05
South-West Africa	1914-1915	230	26	6.97	.79
South African War	1899-1902	57,684	8,022	103.88	14.45
Egypt and Palestine	1916	3,108	70	16.54	.37
	1917	573	27	3.07	.14
	1918	1,071	148	2.60	.36
Mesopotamia	1916	3,060	-	18.50	-
	1917	1,535	157	4.99	.51
	1918	1,071	148	2.60	.36
France and Flanders	1916	2,738	30	2.07	.02
	1917	1,275	24	.67	.01
	1918	376	22	.20	.01

<sup>553</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, p. 66, Table 7, "Incidence of the Enteric Group of Fevers during the Great War, with Deaths and Ratios per 1,000 of Ration Strength."

The figures for East Africa compare very favourably with Macedonia, Egypt and Palestine and Mesopotamia although they are less good than those for France and Flanders. The difference with the South African War, in which typhoid was a major killer, is enormous.



Table 8 shows the incidence of pneumonia:

**TABLE 8**  
**INCIDENCE OF PNEUMONIA IN SELECTED BRITISH EXPEDITIONARY**  
**FORCES**  
**(DEATHS AND RATIOS PER 1,000 OF RATION STRENGTH)**<sup>554</sup>

Campaign	Period	Admissions	Deaths	Ratio per 1,000	
				Admissions	Deaths
East Africa	1916 (Jun-Dec)	463	119	9.48	2.44
	1917	1,653	444	32.60	8.76
	1918	2,023	516	49.30	12.58
Macedonia	1916	73	10	.59	.08
	1917	279	43	1.53	.24
	1918	48	-	.37	-
South-West Africa	1914-1915	124	12	3.76	.36
South African War	1899-1902	2,591	466	4.57	.85
Egypt and Palestine	1916	1,080	115	5.75	.61
	1917	228	55	1.22	.29
	1918	1,510	1,027	6.53	4.44
United Kingdom	1916	4,104	-	2.57	-
	1917	4,924	-	2.89	-
	1918	9,484	-	5.88	-
France and Flanders	1916	1,497	135	1.13	.10
	1917	2,157	193	1.14	.10
	1918	1,921	352	1.03	.19

<sup>554</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, p. 71, Table 11, "Incidence of Pneumonia in the British Expeditionary Forces during the Great War, with Deaths and Ratios per 1,000 of Ration Strength." Note that there are no statistics given for Mesopotamia and that figures for the United Kingdom have been inserted instead.

The table shows how serious a problem that pneumonia proved in East Africa. The death rate was particularly alarming and was quite disproportionate to other theatres.

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**TABLE 9**  
**COMPARISON OF EAST AFRICAN TROOP CASUALTIES TO SELECTED**  
**THEATRES**  
**(BASED ON COMPARING ADMISSION RATES PER 1,000 STRENGTH)<sup>555</sup>**

Campaign	Period	Ratio of East African Troop Casualties to Selected Theatre (Enteric Fevers)		Ratio of East African Troop Casualties to Selected Theatre (Pneumonia)	
		Admissions	Deaths	Admissions	Deaths
Macedonia	1916	0.32x	2.13x	16.07x	3.05x
	1917	0.84x	4.70x	21.31x	36.50x
	1918	1.60x	6.40x	133.24x	∞
South-West Africa	1914-1915	0.42x	0.86x	2.52x	6.78x
South African War	1899-1902	0.03x	0.05x	2.07x	2.87x
Egypt and Palestine	1916	0.18x	1.84x	1.65x	4.00x
	1917	0.80x	3.36x	26.72x	30.21x
	1918	0.65x	0.89x	7.55x	2.83x
Mesopotamia	1916	0.16x	∞		
	1917	0.49x	0.92x		
	1918	0.65x	0.89x		
France and Flanders	1916	1.41x	34.00x	8.39x	24.40x
	1917	3.66x	47.00x	28.6x	87.60x
	1918	8.40x	32.00x	48.86x	66.21x
United Kingdom	1916			3.69x	∞
	1917			11.28x	∞
	1918			8.38x	∞

<sup>555</sup> Note figures for East Africa in 1916 are for Jun – Dec only. The comparisons with South-West African and South African Wars have been calculated against the average East African casualties for 1916-1918. There is no data for pneumonia cases in Mesopotamia and figures for the United Kingdom have been used in its place. The reverse is true of enteric fevers.



Table 9 has been derived from Tables 7 and 8 above. It shows the ratio of admission rates for East Africa against those of selected theatres for both enteric fevers and pneumonia.



**THE FOLLOWERS' HEALTH**

The foregoing has compared the fighting forces in various theatres with East Africa. However, casualties among the civilian followers, most notably the carriers, was very high and it is instructive to compare their losses with those of the troops. Table 10 shows the incidence of malaria and dysentery amongst the followers:

**TABLE 10**  
**INCIDENCE OF MALARIA AND DYSENTERY AMONGST FOLLOWERS IN**  
**EAST AFRICA**  
**(DEATHS AND RATIOS PER 1,000 OF RATION STRENGTH)<sup>556</sup>**

Disease	Period	Admissions	Deaths	Ratio per 1,000	
				Admissions	Deaths
Malaria	1916 (Jun-Dec)	7,127	187	90.33	2.37
	1917	40,527	2,291	281.52	15.91
	1918	21,260	361	242.63	4.12
Dysentery	1916 (Jun-Dec)	3,795	1,008	48.10	12.78
	1917	26,607	7,277	184.82	50.55
	1918	3,740	681	42.68	7.77
Enteric Fevers	1916 (Jun-Dec)	9	1	0.11	.01
	1917	40	5	.28	.03
	1918	42	7	.48	.08
Pneumonia	1916 (Jun-Dec)	1,957	372	24.80	4.72
	1917	10,009	3,013	281.52	15.91
	1918	3,116	873	35.56	9.96

<sup>556</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, pp. 259-260, Table 13 "Principal Causes of Admission to Hospital in the East African Expeditionary Force, June to December 1916, with Deaths and Ratios per 1,000 of Ration Strength", Table 14 "Principal Causes of Admission to Hospital in the East African Expeditionary Force, 1917, with Deaths and Ratios per 1,000 of Ration Strength" and Table 15 "Principal Causes of Admission to Hospital in the East African Expeditionary Force, 1918, with Deaths and Ratios per 1,000 of Ration Strength".

Table 11 is derived from Tables 4, 5, and 10 to produce a ratio of casualties between troops and followers for malaria and dysentery:

**TABLE 11**  
**COMPARISON OF MALARIA AND DYSENTERY RATES BETWEEN TROOPS**  
**AND FOLLOWERS IN EAST AFRICA**<sup>557</sup>

Period	Ratio of Troops/Followers Malaria		Ratio of Troops/Followers Dysentery	
	Admissions	Deaths	Admissions	Deaths
1916 (Jun-Dec)	11.5x	2.3x	3.8x	0.5x
1917	5.1x	0.6x	1.5x	0.2x
1918	2.3x	0.4x	1.9x	0.3x

The figures show that troops were much more likely to contract malaria than followers although the latter had a much higher chance of succumbing to the disease if contracted. The same situation prevails for dysentery, except that the death rate for followers is even higher than for malaria.

<sup>557</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, pp. 80-81, derived from Tables 19 and 20.



Table 12 is derived from Tables 6, 7 and 10 to produce a ratio of casualties between troops and followers for enteric fevers and pneumonia:

**TABLE 12**  
**COMPARISON OF ENTERIC FEVER AND PNEUMONIA RATES BETWEEN**  
**TROOPS AND FOLLOWERS IN EAST AFRICA**<sup>558</sup>

Period	Ratio of Troops/Followers Enteric Fever		Ratio of Troops/Followers Pneumonia	
	Admissions	Deaths	Admissions	Deaths
1916 (Jun-Dec)	26.45x	68.00x	0.38x	0.52x
1917	8.75x	15.67x	0.62x	0.55x
1918	3.50x	4.00x	1.39x	1.26x

**COMPARISON WITH PREVIOUS TROPICAL CAMPAIGNS**

Previous campaigns in tropical Africa had suffered heavily from disease although the advances in medical and sanitary science in the 19<sup>th</sup> century meant that morbidity and mortality had been decreasing over time. While the statistics have been drawn from a number of sources and are not entirely consistent, it is instructive to compare previous campaigns with that fought in East Africa. Table 13 shows the deaths by typhoid (enteric fever) by British soldiers in South Africa in the period preceding the First World War.

<sup>558</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, pp. 80-81, derived from Tables 19 and 20.

**TABLE 13**  
**TYPHOID DEATHS AMONG BRITISH SOLDIERS IN SOUTH AFRICA,**  
**1879-1913**  
**(DEATHS PER 1,000 PER YEAR)<sup>559</sup>**

PERIOD	TYPHOID DEATHS	DEATHS FROM ALL DISEASES
1879-84	9.61	18.52
1886-97	1.87	6.56
1899-1902	18.11	24.53
1905-09	0.80	2.58
1909-13	0.33	3.84

**TABLE 14**  
**TYPHOID DEATHS AMONG BRITISH SOLDIERS IN EAST AFRICA 1916-1918**  
**(DEATHS PER 1,000 PER YEAR)<sup>560</sup>**

PERIOD	TYPHOID DEATHS
1916	0.68
1917	0.47
1918	0.32

From Table 14 above, the East African death rates for 1916-17-18 were 0.68, 0.47, and 0.32 per thousand respectively. These are much lower than those of the South African War period and reasonably close to those caused in the inter-war period. However, 1905 to 1913 were not spent on major campaigns so the East African figures

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<sup>559</sup> Curtin, *Disease and Empire*, p. 206, Table 8.1, “Typhoid Deaths Among British Soldiers in South Africa, 1813-1913”.  
<sup>560</sup> Tables above



seem reasonable given the conditions of fighting. It seems that typhoid was no longer the deadly threat it had been in past years.



**TABLE 15**  
**COMPARISON OF ANNUAL DEATH RATES BY DISEASE IN**  
**SELECTED THEATRES 1886-1918**  
**(DEATH RATES PER THOUSAND)<sup>561</sup>**

DISEASE	PERIOD	BRITAIN	INDIA	ALGERIA	EGYPT	PERIOD	EAST AFRICA
Malaria	1886-1894	-	0.74	0.75	-	1916	5.38
	1909-1914	-	0.18	0.34	-	1917	9.84
						1918	1.68
Dysentery	1886-1894	0.37	2.52	0.71	2.80	1916	6.26
	1909-1914	0.30	1.01	0.50	0.47	1917	8.46
						1918	2.10
Typhoid	1886-1894	0.27	5.11	3.66	8.94	1916	0.68
	1909-1914	0.06	0.62	1.50	0.36	1917	0.47
						1918	0.32
Pneumonia	1886-1894	1.31	0.96	1.01	0.96	1916	2.44
	1909-1914	0.41	0.37	0.77	0.44	1917	8.76
						1918	12.58

Table 15 show how effectively typhoid, formerly the biggest threat to military health, had been brought under control in the East African campaign. The greatly reduced mortality rates may be attributed to vaccination, as in all respects water supplies and sanitation in East Africa were generally of a low standard. What is also remarkable is the sharp rise in the lethality of malaria, dysentery and pneumonia which were many times higher than in previous campaigns. Interestingly, deaths from malaria declined sharply in 1918, possibly as a consequence of the increased use of indigenous African soldiers, but pneumonia skyrocketed. Apart from typhoid, the British seem to have

<sup>561</sup> Curtin, *Disease and Empire*, p. 141, Table 5.2, "European Troops in Algeria, Egypt, India and Great Britain Changing Mortality from Major Diseases 1890s to 1909-1913. It should be noted that the figure for dysentery includes all gastrointestinal diseases while those for pneumonia similarly encompass all respiratory afflictions. The figures for East Africa have been drawn from Tables 7, 8, 10 and 11 above.



applied few of the lessons of previous African campaigns or Mesopotamia. Malaria was especially disastrous.

Table 16 deals with the disease mortality suffered by the French Madagascar campaign of 1895. That country is fairly close to East Africa and was covered in dense bush and forest with a large number of indigenous diseases.

**TABLE 16**  
**DISEASE MORTALITY FOR THE FRENCH MADAGASCAR EXPEDITION,**  
**1895**  
**(DEATHS PER 1,000 STRENGTH)**<sup>562</sup>

DISEASE	DEATH RATE (monthly)	DEATH RATE (annualised)	PERCENT OF ALL DISEASE DEATHS	PERIOD	EAST AFRICA
Malaria	32.16	24.12	72.00	1916 – 1918	5.38 – 9.84 – 1.68
Dysentery	3.57	2.68	8.00	1916 – 1918	6.26 – 8.46 – 2.10
Typhoid	5.36	4.02	12.00	1916 – 1918	0.68 – 0.47 – 0.32
Other	3.58	2.69	8.00	1916 – 1916	2.44 – 8.76 – 12.58
Total	44.67	33.50	100.00		

- Notes:
1. The campaign lasted 9 months – the figures have been annualised for comparative purposes.
  2. The average ration strength was 15,000. “Other” figures for East Africa are for pneumonia only.

When compared to East Africa, it can be seen that the annualised malaria death rate in Madagascar was several times higher, while the dysentery rates were generally

<sup>562</sup> Curtin, *Disease and Empire*, p. 188, Table 7.1, “Disease Mortality for the Madagascar Expedition, 1895”.



lower there. The French suffered from typhoid deaths more than 5.9x more than the peak British rate, but they seemed to have ignored established prophylactic measures.<sup>563</sup>

## **THE GERMAN EXPERIENCE**

It is more difficult to come up with a comprehensive description of German medical experiences as communications between *Abteilungen* were often poor while paper was in short supply and the majority of documents did not survive the war. From the memoir literature, and despite bold statements to the contrary, it is clear that they had their fair share of problems.

They began with a relatively good supply of doctors trained in tropical medicine as a number of specialists had been sent out to study sleeping sickness shortly before the war. There was a modern and well-funded research institute at Amani that was far in advance of its counterparts in the British colonies. But the flow of medical supplies was quickly curtailed by the Royal Navy's blockade and it became necessary to manufacture local substitutes from the outset. While *ersatz* goods could help in a number of areas, the medical establishment faced major shortfalls in the stocks of medication, bandages, surgical tools and even reference books.

Isolation was damaging, but the major weakness was in transport. Apart from the two railways, the Germans began the war with only three motor vehicles. By September 1916, all of these mechanical means had been lost and they were almost completely reliant on porters. This meant that the medical system was burdened by the same major limitations as the British while lacking even the inadequate motor transport resources possessed by their adversaries. This imposed tremendous obstacles in the provision of adequate hospital and treatment facilities once the campaign moved into the wilds of the Rufiji and Kilombero valleys. These unfavourable conditions led to widespread sickness, with the hospitals usually full. There were repeated outbreaks of typhoid and virtually nobody escaped serious illness.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Curtin, *Diseases and Empire*, pp. 189-190.

<sup>564</sup> Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika im Weltkrieg*, p. 230.



The year 1917 was little better as the combination of insufficient food, exposure, inadequate clothing and severe exertion led to the same results as experienced by the British: widespread sickness and the collapse of many individuals. Given their lack of transport and medical resources, the German response was simply to leave such cases for the enemy to capture, and thus to be forced to assume responsibility for their care and evacuation. During the course of the year, from the retreat to the River Rufiji to crossing into Portuguese territory, the number of unfit Europeans rose constantly and large numbers had to be left behind. Just prior to the evacuation of the German colony, 669 Germans, or two-thirds of the available strength, and a large number of Askaris surrendered to the British from field hospitals.<sup>565</sup>

Hospitals and their staffs suffered as much from the rigours of the campaign as the fighting troops. As the withdrawal into the heart of the colony continued, more and more equipment had to be abandoned for lack of transport or due to enemy action. 1916 had seen a total of 10 field hospitals, 2 base hospitals and 2 convalescent homes in operation, but by the end of 1917 this had been reduced to 3 field hospitals operating on much reduced scales of equipment. The later march into Portuguese East Africa saw numbers reduced to 2 hospitals, with one being lost at the end of August 1918. The combination of a dwindling number of trained staff and severe shortfalls of critical supplies made the treatment of the sick and wounded increasingly difficult. Only those incapable of walking or requiring serious treatment were admitted to hospital while malarial cases were treated in the ranks.<sup>566</sup> Losses during the campaign also hurt the medical establishment's ability to treat its sick and wounded; the number of doctors declined from 63 at the outbreak of war to 13 by the end of 1917. During the latter stages of the fighting in Portuguese East Africa, medical officers were reduced to a scant 6.<sup>567</sup>

Staff-Surgeon Taute noted the difficulties engendered by the long marches characteristic of the latter year and a half of the war. First by early 1917, owing to food

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<sup>565</sup> Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika im Weltkrieg*, pp. 257-258.

<sup>566</sup> Taute, "A German Account of the Medical Side of the War in East Africa, 1914-1918", *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, pp. 7-8. Henceforth, Taute, "A German Account".

shortages, the African daily ration had been reduced to 600 g of flour or 400 g of rice. This meagre portion, which also had to provide for the soldiers' wives and servants, had to provide sufficient nourishment for marches that averaging 25 km per day with only one rest day in seven. An extreme example followed the seizure of Ngomano on the Rovuma River on 25 November 1917. Desperate for food, the columns marched for 28 straight days, halting only on 22 December. While this exertion was difficult enough for the fit, the wounded, many suffering from severe gunshot fractures, had to be carried on hammocks throughout - including the crossing of a number of rivers.<sup>568</sup>

The marching was especially difficult for the medical personnel who had to take their place in the column all day long with their real work only beginning once a halt was made and camp pitched. Frequently, they had to treat patients through the night, working only by candle or firelight and very short of bandages and medicines. Regardless of their tiredness, they had to be ready to resume the march before dawn the next morning.<sup>569</sup>

The campaign in Portuguese East Africa was only slightly less difficult with regard to medical supplies as the Germans were able to capture large amounts of material, notably quinine, from the Portuguese although they lost a great deal to British action. The reduction in strength meant that there was less pressure on quinine stocks, particularly from the Europeans who always suffered more from malaria than Africans.<sup>570</sup> However, the increasing toll on endurance through overwork and underfeeding undermined health, while malaria, dysentery and blackwater fever remained constant companions. Typhoid made repeated visits and numerous deaths through exhaustion were noted.<sup>571</sup>

From these accounts, it is apparent that sickness was an overwhelming aspect of the campaign. Coming up with an accurate set of casualty figures is more problematic as the Germans were widely scattered and often in small detachments while usually

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<sup>567</sup> Taute, "A German Account", p. 3.

<sup>568</sup> Taute, "A German Account", p. 9.

<sup>569</sup> Taute, "A German Account", p. 8.

<sup>570</sup> Schnee, *Deutsche Ostafrika*, p. 357.

<sup>571</sup> Schnee, *Deutsche Ostafrika*, pp. 374-375.



withdrawing under pressure. The overall health situation in 1917 was very bad with Africans and Europeans suffering heavily from malaria, increasingly of the tertian variety. Dr Taute estimated that, in the worst affected areas, up to 80 per cent of the Europeans were sick from a variety of causes, with blackwater fever (64.2 per cent of deaths) being the greatest non-battle killer. Dysentery proved to be a bigger problem with the African soldiers and carriers being particularly afflicted.<sup>572</sup>

Dr Ludwig Deppe, one of the more accurate and precise observers of the East African campaign, claimed that von Lettow had overturned the existing rules of tropical hygiene and behaviour. Noting the ability of the force to march for up to 12 hours per day, including during the hottest hours, as well as the apparent lack of problems resulting from a lack of mosquito nets or from drinking untreated water, he proclaimed that von Lettow had “eine neue Tropenhygiene begründet”.<sup>573</sup> While the achievements of the Schutztruppe did demonstrate the resilience and toughness of the human body in very adverse conditions, such a pronouncement must be reviewed in light of the available evidence. His claims of the generally good health of the German troops by the armistice seems to be based on an unfavourable comparison with that of the British, who were by then suffering from the ravages of the Spanish influenza epidemic. He did admit that tropical diseases were unavoidable in such a place as East Africa although no figures were given to support these statements.<sup>574</sup> Schnee also made a similar comment, noting that the Germans who had lived in the tropics for some time did hold up much better than the South Africans.<sup>575</sup> There is probably a degree of truth in both statements, in that the Germans showed more stamina, but the British also noticed that younger men, who were more numerous in their ranks, often had difficulty standing up to the climate. Nonetheless, an analysis of the available statistics shows that the German whites suffered from disease on a massive scale.

Interestingly, Deppe did provide casualty figures, for Europeans only, although he made no attempt to analyse or compare them with others. When examined, his own numbers undermine his assertion as they show that disease was an important factor. The

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<sup>572</sup> Taute, “A German Account”, pp. 11-14.

<sup>573</sup> Deppe, *Durch Afrika*, p. 149.

<sup>574</sup> Deppe, *Durch Afrika*, pp. 149-152.

• breakdown was as below:

**TABLE 17 – GERMAN EUROPEAN CASUALTIES 1914-1918**<sup>576</sup>

Nature of Casualty	Numbers of Casualties	% of Total Casualties	% of Total Served 3600
Killed in action	285	7.9	7.9
Wounded in action	875	24.1	24.3
Of whom died of wounds	51	1.4	1.4
Died of disease/injury	190	5.2	5.3
Prisoners of War	1742	48.0	48.4
Missing in action	486	13.4	13.5
Total	3629	100	100.8

If the numbers are broken down further, it can be seen that deaths from disease (190) represent some 36 per cent out of the total deaths (526). It is not known how many of those listed as prisoners of war or missing in action died as a result of either wounds or disease, but even if these categories of losses are assumed to have suffered total death rates of, say 10 per cent and 25 per cent respectively, then the extra losses would amount to (174+122=296). This would give a new mortality figure of 822; disease would still represent 23 per cent of this increased figure.

The most authoritative figures available, given by Major Boell in his semi-official *Die Operationen in Ostafrika*, present the following casualties over the entire campaign:

<sup>575</sup> Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, p. 230.

<sup>576</sup> Deppe, *Durch Afrika*, p. 156.



**TABLE 18 – GERMAN CASUALTIES 1914 - 1918<sup>577</sup>**

Nature of Casualty	Europeans	% of Total Casualties (E)	Askari	% of Total Casualties (A)	Porters/ Boys
Killed in action	354	7.4	1200	7.1	1000
Wounded in action	874	18.4	3669	21.6	?
Of whom died of wounds	80	1.7	?	?	?
Died by accident	23	0.5	?	?	?
Died of disease	277	5.8	508	3.0	5000-6000
Prisoners of War	2718	57.1	4275	25.1	?
Missing in action	?	?	4510	26.5	?
Deserted	2	0.00	2847	16.7	?
Total	4762	100	17009	100	6000-7000

Using Boell’s figures, it can be seen that total deaths by disease (277 Europeans and 508 Askaris) represent 37.74 per cent and 29.74 per cent (734 and 1708) respectively. These should be examined in relation to the approximately 3,600 European and 14,600 Askaris who served in the Schutztruppe over the course of the war.<sup>578</sup> The best that can be said of the mortality of the porters is that they were huge in comparison to both types of soldier. Clearly, their sufferings were many times greater than their fighting comrades. Both sets of figures are broadly comparable and point to the severe health problems faced by all participants, European and African.

By way of comparison, the representative figures for the major participants is shown in the table below:

<sup>577</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 427. Boell’s calculation of the total Askari casualties has omitted the wounded, hence the revision from 13,430 to 17,009.

<sup>578</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 429.

**COMPARISON OF BRITISH AND GERMAN CASUALTIES**

**TABLE 19 – COMPARISON OF BRITISH AND GERMAN CASUALTIES**<sup>579</sup>

	British (Total Force)	German (Europeans)	Ratio German (Europeans) / British	German (Askaris)	Ratio German (Askaris) / British
% Killed in action	0.60	9.87	16.5x	8.22	13.7x
% Wounded in action	2.02	24.28	12.0x	25.13	12.4x
% Died of wounds	0.20	2.22	11.1x	-	-
% Died of disease/injury	1.82	8.33	4.6x	3.48	1.9x
% Prisoners of war	0.06	75.50	1258.0x	29.28	488.0x
% Missing in action	0.20	-	-	30.89	154.5x
% Deserted	-	0.06	-	19.38	-

From Table 19, it can be seen that German Europeans were 4.6x and Askaris were 1.9x as likely as the British to die from disease or accident. This may be attributed to the reduced quantities of drugs and medications available to the Germans as well as to their difficulties in evacuating the sick and wounded. It may also represent the continued attrition suffered in trained medical personnel that worsened as the campaign wore on.

It is notable that the German casualties were much more likely to have been maimed in battle than the British, which may have been a result of the more limited manpower pool. Interestingly, the loss rates suffered by German Europeans and *Askaris* were broadly similar, apart from desertion, indicating that the risk was evenly shared.

**SUMMARY**

Disease and ill-health were factors of overwhelming importance to both sides

<sup>579</sup> Mitchell and Smith, *Official History Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*OH, *Medical Services - Casualties and Medical Statistics*, p. 254, Table 4, "Classification and Percentages of Casualties 1916-1918", p.254. The table in the text has been calculated with casualties being shown as a percentage of the total strength deployed during the period 1914-1918 for the Germans



throughout the campaign. The levels of malaria, dysentery and pneumonia were well above those suffered in previous or other concurrent campaigns, while, for the British at least, the menace of typhoid had been largely solved. The high levels of sickness suffered by followers as compared to troops is notable and were a result of their poor diet and much more limited health care.

Claims the Germans had founded a “new tropical hygiene” must be taken with caution as the high levels of sickness indicate otherwise. Finally, it is clear that significant failures in administration and the medical services occurred during General Smuts’s term of command and these contributed to the alarmingly high levels of morbidity suffered by the troops and followers.

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and 1916-1918 for the British. The German figures have been derived from Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 427 and 429.

## **CHAPTER 7 – THE OPERATIONS OF JUNE – DECEMBER 1917**

### **VAN DEVENTER'S APPOINTMENT**

While Smuts's involvement in Hoskins's sacking remains unclear, it is certain that he played a major role in nominating van Deventer as his replacement.<sup>580</sup> The decision was taken quickly by the War Cabinet and he was confirmed as commander-in-chief in early May.<sup>581</sup> Initially, it was not popular amongst the British officers who believed it to be another political appointment that unfairly deprived Hoskins of his command.

Nevertheless, van Deventer appears to have had little involvement in these machinations. Although he owed much to Smuts and had served with him a number of times from the Anglo-Boer War onward, they were very different in outlook and temperament. He had much more of the professional soldier's outlook and was not known for his politics. Van Deventer had begun his military career as a gunner in the Transvaal Artillery in 1896, rising rapidly through the ranks. A battery commander by the outbreak of war in 1899, he had served under Smuts's command during the last year of the war before retiring to his farm after the peace settlement. He was recalled to service as a colonel in 1914 to participate in the South West Africa expedition, but was given the task of suppressing Maritz's troops when the Rebellion broke out in late 1914. Having completed that mission, he was promoted brigadier in command of the Upington column in the advance against German South-West Africa, finishing as a divisional commander.<sup>582</sup>

After a brief period in South Africa, he was called upon to lead a mounted brigade in East Africa under Smuts. He was rapidly promoted to command the newly-formed 2<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> MS Robertson, I/33/46/1, 23 April 1917, Letter Robertson to Smuts; I/33/47/2, 23 April 1917, Telegram Smuts to Botha; MS Smuts, Box 100, 9 April 1917, Letter Robertson to Smuts.

<sup>581</sup> CAB 23/2, 1 May 1917, War Cabinet Meeting 128.

<sup>582</sup> Beyers, C J and Basson, J L (eds), *Dictionary of South African Biography*, Volume V, Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1987, pp. 809-810; South African National Defence Force, Personnel Archive and Reserves, AG(1) (A)P1/41391/1, *Record of Service of Lieutenant General Sir Jacob Louis van Deventer in the Union Defence Force*.



Division in April 1916 which he then commanded until January 1917, when he and his troops were withdrawn to South Africa on medical grounds. After journeying back with Smuts, he had barely a month at home, before being asked to assume command of the East Africa Expeditionary Force as a lieutenant general.

Van Deventer had learned a great deal about the need for efficient organisation and administration during his time as a divisional commander in 1916. Although he was most at home leading mounted columns, he had learned that the difficult conditions in East Africa demanded different solutions. He was much more of a fighter than Smuts and did not shrink from battle. His methods were direct and while he could not be described as an administrator, he did use his staff more effectively. One British officer described him:

“Van Deventer is calm and collected, divulging his plans to none, not even his staff. He is cunning as an old fox and does not make up his mind till the last moment. Then he acts like lightning; up to that moment he appears dense and slow. To him a decision is final; there is no swerving, no delay, no alteration of plan.”<sup>583</sup>

He believed in using mounted and irregular troops whenever possible although he recognised the limitations imposed by the tsetse fly. He had realised the futility of trying to out-manoeuvre the Germans in such difficult terrain and that they had to be defeated militarily. Also important was his recognition that their chief vulnerabilities were lack of replacement manpower together with low stocks of food and munitions. Disease remained the deadliest foe, but better planning and support for the troops could help reduce its ill-effects.

These factors led van Deventer to adopt his predecessor's aggressive approach together with greater tactical ingenuity. While the power of the machine gun and the strength of defensive works meant that the casualties would generally be higher for the

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<sup>583</sup> Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, p. 180.

attacker than the defender, he also realised that attrition could be an effective option. However restricted his manpower and equipment reserves were, they were still vastly superior to those of von Lettow, particularly in European officers and NCOs. Accordingly, this led to a new strategy of hard-hitting wherever possible, with the aim of inflicting the maximum casualties while lowering morale and the will to continue. It was combined with a campaign against the German lines of communication, and in particular eliminating their food growing areas.<sup>584</sup>

On arriving in East Africa on 29 May, the new commander-in-chief was given very explicit instructions.<sup>585</sup> The CIGS came immediately to the point:

“In view of requirements other theatres and of the fact that it is essential to release at earliest possible moment vessels absorbed by supply and maintenance of your force, His Majesty’s Government attach great importance to early termination of campaign. I must also impress upon you importance during remainder of campaign of limiting demands for tonnage to minimum.”<sup>586</sup>

The attitude of the British Government had changed considerably since it had so lightly sent Smuts off to take the whole of German East Africa. There was now the realisation that von Lettow had to be defeated militarily and that simple occupation of ground was not sufficient for victory. Furthermore, with the growing pressures of the U-Boat campaign and the war in Europe, it recognised that the campaign had to be wound up as quickly as possible in order to release both shipping and manpower.

Van Deventer was authorised, if necessary, to conduct operations in Portuguese East Africa, although the Portuguese themselves could be expected to give little useful assistance. Van Deventer was instructed to try to prevent the enemy from leaving German East Africa for the south as it would prolong the campaign. There was no

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<sup>584</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 1901, 11 June 1917, Telegram G 843, van Deventer to CIGS, p. 97.

<sup>585</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 1868, 29 May 1917, Telegram G 666, Hoskins to CIGS, p. 85.

<sup>586</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 1852, 22 May 1917, Telegram 340907, CIGS to van Deventer, p. 81.



explicit mention of any other campaign objectives, but it was clear that they implied the destruction of the enemy force and its ability to fight.<sup>587</sup>

Although Hoskins had done much to reorganise the British forces, the exertions and overwork of the preceding year had taken a very heavy toll. Furthermore, the Germans retained interior lines in a territory still some 300 miles square and difficult to penetrate.<sup>588</sup> For example, Mahenge to Liwale was a seven days' march for the Germans while for the British to have moved a force from Mahenge to either Kilwa or Lindi, still some distance from Liwale, would have taken the same number of weeks. The lack of maps and difficulty of the terrain amplified these disadvantages.<sup>589</sup>

### **BRITISH STRATEGY IN MID-1917**

By mid-1917 Britain was running out of money to fund the war and the unrestricted U-Boat campaign was increasingly successful. In the first four months of 1917, British losses to submarines had risen from 109,954 tonnes (35 ships) in January to 516,394 tonnes (155 ships) in April.<sup>590</sup> At this rate, Britain would soon be starved into submission, as replacement ships could not be built fast enough to offset the losses. The War Cabinet was under no illusions as to the severity of the crisis and it closely scrutinised the amount of shipping being used to sustain the overseas theatres with the aim of making the maximum reductions.<sup>591</sup> By early July, the figures showed that, overall, the shipping employed on the overseas theatres, some 328 ships, was the equivalent of less than two months' losses to submarines at peak levels and about nine months at the earlier rates. East Africa represented only 10.7 per cent of the shipping employed, but it took up 34.3 per cent of troop and horse ships and 21.9 per cent of hospital ships.<sup>592</sup> In any event, 35 ships

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<sup>587</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 1852, 22 May 1917, Telegram 340907, CIGS to van Deventer, p. 81.

<sup>588</sup> Van Deventer, Lt Gen J L, *Despatch from the General Commanding-in-Chief, British Forces in East Africa, Relating to Operations From 30<sup>th</sup> May to 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1917*, dated 21 January 1918, published in *London Gazette*, "Supplement", No. 30611, 5 April 1918, p. 172. Henceforth Van Deventer, *Despatch I*.

<sup>589</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch I*, pp. 172-173.

<sup>590</sup> Marder, Arthur, *From Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: 1917 Year of Crisis*, Volume 4, London: Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 102.

<sup>591</sup> CAB 23/3, 29 June 1917, War Cabinet Meeting 172. Smuts, now a member of the War Cabinet, had been asked to compile a report and stated "In view of the submarine campaign and the urgent necessity to economise shipping, the Cabinet Committee on War Policy has asked me to investigate the possibility of reducing the quantity of shipping allotted to overseas expeditions outside France.

<sup>592</sup> CAB 23/3, 29 June 1917, War Cabinet Meeting 172, 29 June 1917, Appendix I, "Shipping Allocated to Overseas Expeditions Outside France". The figures for troop and horse ships are 24 of 70; for hospital ships 7 of 32.

represented a great deal of capacity, particularly as the shortfall in shipping for the year was estimated to be 8,000,000 tons.<sup>593</sup> This did not escape the War Cabinet's eye and at a subsequent meeting it considered:

"The urgent necessity of clearing up the position in East Africa once and for all, and the fact that [sic] the conduct of operations by us in that quarter was monopolising the carrying power of thirty-five ships, were [sic] pointed out. It was agreed that, in order that the campaign in this quarter might be brought to a close at the earliest possible moment, every reinforcement that it was found possible to send to General Van Deventer should be sent to enable him to do this."<sup>594</sup>

This was in partial response to a plea by van Deventer for more artillery and limited reinforcements were subsequently authorised.<sup>595</sup> But despite the rhetoric, these were only tiny forces and could not transform the situation in East Africa. They reflected conflicting political pressures regarding war aims; on the one hand there were the imperialists who looked to displace Germany as a colonial power and on the other those, who despite their misgivings about strategy, saw the Western Force as the key to victory.<sup>596</sup> For all, concerns about the state of Ireland, conscription and war-weariness loomed large. Any political hopes for a quick and easy victory in East Africa had been dashed by the realisation that it would remain a lengthy and hard-fought campaign.

### **THE OPPOSING FORCES IN JUNE 1917**

The deployments of the British had changed considerably since van Deventer had left in January. Only the Nigerian Brigade, based on Kibambawe, was situated on the Rufiji front, while further to the east at Iringa there was a small column of two battalions. The Belgians had begun to arrive in the Kilossa area and had pushed several battalions forward to Kidodi although it would be several weeks before the planned brigade was

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<sup>593</sup> French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, p. 77.

<sup>594</sup> CAB 23/3, 23 July 1917, War Cabinet Meeting 193.

<sup>595</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2002, 22 July 1917, Telegram G 447, van Deventer to CIGS, p. 129; CAB 23/3, War Cabinet Meeting 194, 24 July 1917. Although several artillery batteries were also agreed, only a mounted regiment was sent to East Africa.

<sup>596</sup> French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, pp. 62-64; Turner, *British Politics*, p. 202.



complete. Northey's force, now reinforced, was spread between Ubena and Songea with a detachment operating in Portuguese East Africa against *Abt von Stuemer*. Brigadier General O'Grady commanded the Lindi column while Brigadier General Hannington controlled two brigade-sized columns operating from Kilwa. Far to the west and north, the equivalent of a brigade of Belgians was pursuing Naumann and there was a small central reserve at Morogoro. Local reinforcements in the form of two newly raised KAR battalions were due to be fielded by the end of June while other battalions were in various stages of formation in the rear areas, but it would be a considerable period before they could be considered remotely ready for operations.<sup>597</sup> Further help was also due from South Africa with two new reformed battalions scheduled to arrive at the end of the same month.<sup>598</sup> The Portuguese had landed a new expeditionary force of 4,500 at the port of Palma, but it would be several months before the troops were ready to take the field.<sup>599</sup>

The Germans too had redeployed markedly in the preceding months. They remained in two major groupings, with the *Osttruppen* under von Lettow, based at Liwale, and the *Westtruppen* commanded by Tafel at Mahenge. Exact numbers are not available, but an estimate of 6200 and 2500 based on known losses would seem reasonable, leaving combat strengths of 4100 and 1500.<sup>600</sup> The *Osttruppen* had four main detachments; in the far south, *Abt Looff* had six companies and two guns between Lindi and the Portuguese border; *Abt Göring* with seven companies and a gun held the ground near Mpotora against Hanforce; *Abt Otto* had seven companies and a gun on the Rufiji; while *Kommando* had six companies and four guns under its direct control, chiefly in the Mpotora-Liwale area.<sup>601</sup>

The *Westtruppen* under Tafel also had four substantial *Abteilungen* radiating some 70 miles west, north and east of Mahenge down to Likuju, about 50 miles from Songea. They were *Abt von Brandis* with three companies and two guns near Kidodi; *Abt Aumann* with three companies and a revolver gun along the Ruhudje River; *Abt Lincke* with five

<sup>597</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch I*, p. 172.

<sup>598</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 8 June 1917, Telegram G 775, van Deventer to Northey, 7 June.

<sup>599</sup> Cann, "Mozambique and German East Africa", pp. 131-133.

<sup>600</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 2032 and 2044; On 1 April 1917, they had numbered 6,534 and 2,854 respectively, with effective battle strengths of 4,419 and 1,712. The revised figures are an estimate.

<sup>601</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, pp. 2031-2032.

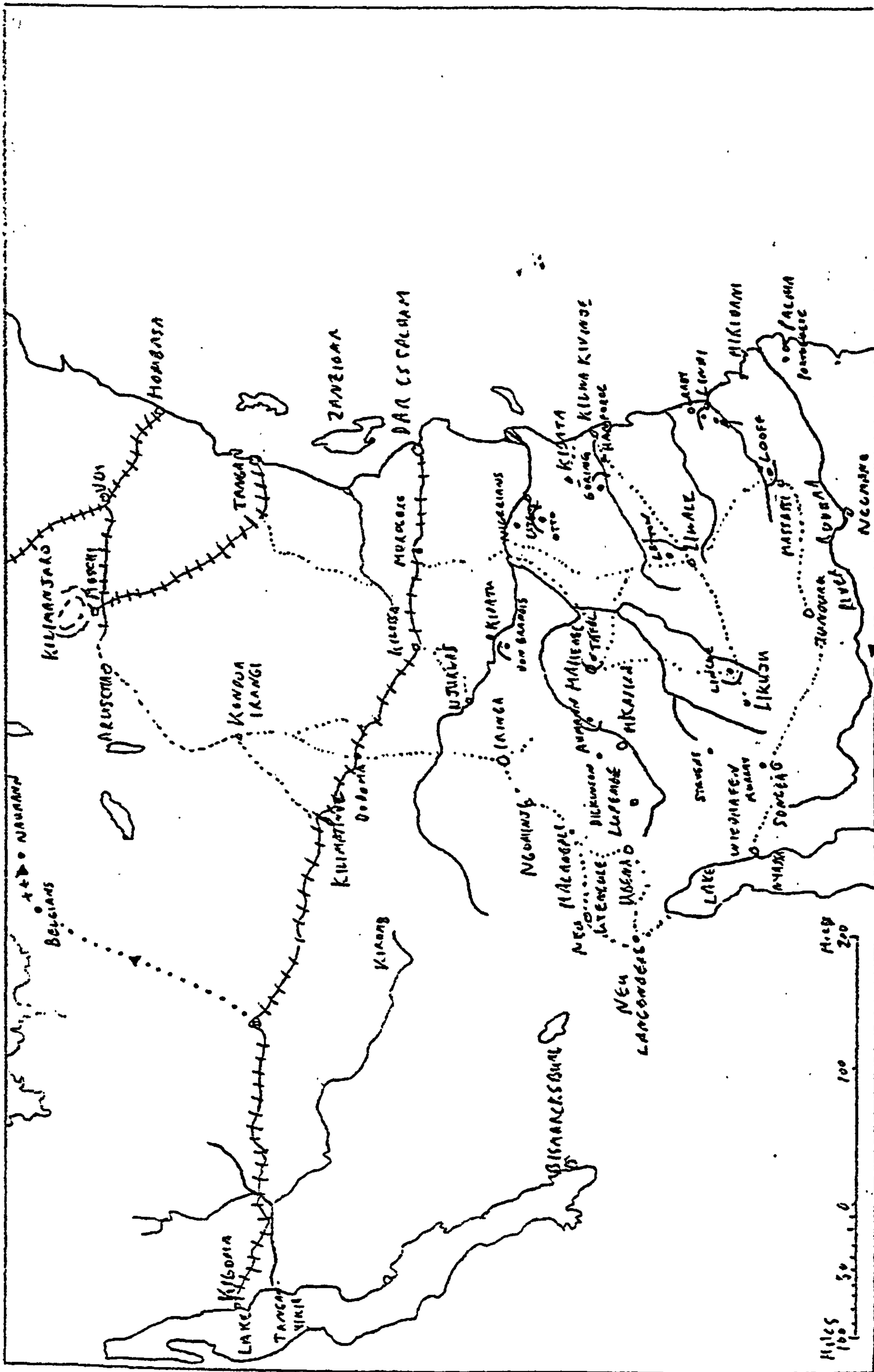
companies and two guns facing the main body of Norforce; and finally the long absent *Abt Wintgens* of six companies and gun now well to the north and west of the other German forces.

### **PLANS FOR THE GENERAL OFFENSIVE OF 1917**

The general offensive for 1917 could not begin before the end of the rains and the subsequent drying out of the countryside in late June at the earliest. Van Deventer had very little time to settle into his new command, but, fortunately, Hoskins had set the necessary planning, reorganisation and regrouping in train. In conducting its appreciation of the situation, GHQ had identified five possible lines of advance for 1917. The first was the Dodoma-Iringa-Mahenge route in the west. While it was the healthiest, it was also the longest and the country between the highlands of Iringa and Mahenge was difficult and low-lying. Furthermore, only a small portion of it could be made passable for MT and it was highly vulnerable to flooding in the wet season. The second option was slightly further east along the line Kilossa-Kidatu-Mahenge. It was shorter and more practical for MT than the first approach, but it too suffered from its vulnerability to the rains.

The third approach followed Smuts' route across the middle Rufiji going via Mikesse-Kibambawe-Mahenge. Plunging as it did through the Mgeta and Rufiji valleys, it was by far the most physically difficult to support. The nightmarish conditions of the wet season were still all too evident while the country south of Kibambawe was a wild tangle of bush and almost totally impracticable for MT. The fourth option was an advance on the line Kilwa-Liwale. It had the unhappy reputation of having the unhealthiest climate of all, although it did offer the advantages of being close to a large proportion of the enemy's forces and to a first-class harbour. There was also the probability that sickness rates would fall with the onset of dry weather. The final choice was the approach Lindi-Massassi. Its chief advantage was that it offered a direct line of advance that could potentially cut off any retreat towards the Portuguese border, although the country was very difficult. Health, too, was a problem, and Lindi harbour had





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considerable limitations, and could only be used by a proportion of the available shipping.<sup>602</sup>

The attractiveness of Kimbambawe as the base for a renewed offensive, which had never been high, now waned significantly. Apart from the unhealthiness of the climate, the difficulty of the countryside, that had so recently been heavily flooded, made the supply of the existing small garrison very difficult. The need simultaneously to build-up supplies and to build roads and river-crossings made it the least desirable option from van Deventer's point of view and fortunately Lettow's redeployments made it possible to drop this line of approach. A contributing factor was the insufficiency of MT; there were simply not enough vehicles to support concurrent advances across the Rufiji as well as from the coast.<sup>603</sup>

General Northey added his views, believing that the Germans would only move into Portuguese East Africa if pushed there, and, until the situation east of Mahenge was cleared up, there was the potential for another raiding force to break westward. He proposed similar converging simultaneous thrusts against the enemy, but, conscious of the time needed to get Murray's Column back and suitably rested, he expected that his advance would start after the others.<sup>604</sup> Van Deventer agreed, realising the importance of having Northey attack Mpepo and Mtarika as it would draw off enemy forces on the Ruipa line prior to the arrival of the Belgians. Once they were ready, Northey could then shorten his line by handing over the Ruhuje sector to them. By that stage, Murray's column would be rested and ready to participate in the general offensive.<sup>605</sup>

This would leave the Songea Column at about 1,000 rifles with 16 machine guns and two mountain guns, and the Fort Johnston Column with a similar amount. While these columns would be ready to start at the end of June, Murray's Column would need extra time to reach Songea and would not be ready to advance before 7 July. This would provide another 1,000 rifles, giving him over 3,000 men advancing on two axes. He also

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<sup>602</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch I*, p. 173.

<sup>603</sup> CAB 44/9, p. 67.

<sup>604</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 26 May 1917, Appendix A195, Telegram NF 2957, Norforce to Hoskins, 25 May.



noted that two battalions' worth of reinforcements would be arriving in July, but neither would be ready for the field before August.<sup>606</sup> Likuju would also form an important staging base, as both a wireless station and small airfield were established there.

At the end of May, Norforce had been stretched out over enormous distances and concentration was impossible in the short term. The pursuit of Naumann together with the countering of von Stuemmer's threat to Nyasaland had drawn off all Northey's available reserves. However, as the campaign season approached, he began to receive more resources to achieve his difficult task. On 29 May, some 50 miles south of the Central Railway, Murray's Column was released from the pursuit of *Abt Naumann* and began its long march home. It was not expected to reach Neu Langenburg until 15 June and a considerable distance would then need to be covered until it could reach the forward areas.<sup>607</sup>

On 10 June 1917, van Deventer signalled his plan back to London. It reflected the changed strategic situation as well as the imperatives given in his own instructions during the previous month. The German re-deployment of its main body south from the Rufiji River to an area opposite Kilwa showed that Colonel von Lettow was aware of the possibilities of being cut-off and wished to maintain an escape route to Portuguese East Africa. It also reduced the importance of an advance from the north, and the need to supply a major force across the Rufiji Valley. The plan also reflected the likely increased importance of Lindi and its hinterland as a means of cutting off the enemy's withdrawal to the south. The elimination of Naumann's raiding force was a priority as the pursuit was tying up Belgian and British forces that could be better used against the main body of the Germans.

Van Deventer's plan was as follows. First, to catch up with and destroy *Abt Naumann* as quickly as possible in order to rest and redeploy the forces involved. Second, to launch a limited attack around Lindi in order to secure the high ground

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<sup>605</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 43-44.

<sup>606</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 9 June 1917.

<sup>607</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 29 May 1917.

surrounding the town and to secure a better water supply. Third, to attack the Ruipa River position from the direction of Iringa in order to deny that rich food-growing area to the Germans. Fourth, to generate an offensive from Kilwa as soon as sufficient reinforcements could be brought up. During these preparations, General Northey was to concentrate his force at Songea, having got Colonel Murray's column back, and then to advance eastwards as soon as he was ready.<sup>608</sup>

The commander-in-chief understood von Lettow's likely response to his plan:

"The establishment of considerable food depots in the MASSASSI (GGF.F.8.c.) area, together with the presence of a considerable enemy force in PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA, appears to point to his eventual retirement by this line. One of my chief aims must therefore be to prevent his main force breaking through into PORTUGUESE EAST AFRICA, as that might necessitate a new campaign."<sup>609</sup>

As he began to finalise his plans, General van Deventer needed to liaise directly with his Belgian counterpart, Colonel Huyghé. Hiding his disappointment over the slowness of the Belgian build-up, he agreed to meet Huyghé at the Belgian *Grand Quartier Général* at Dodoma on 18 June. Prior to the conference, Huyghé was requested to send a column of 1,200 rifles as quickly as possible to Iringa in order to operate against the Germans on the Ruhuje-Ulangu river line between Mpepo and Malinje. This column would be charged with the clearance of Tafel's forward troops from the Ulangu Valley between those two settlements. However, in the circumstances such speedy action was not possible as the reorganisation of the *Force Publique* was taking more time than anticipated. Shortages of transport and the need to shuttle troops along the railway meant that the earliest date of readiness would be at the end of July.<sup>610</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 10 June 1917, Appendix A74, Telegram G 843, van Deventer to CIGS, 10 June.

<sup>609</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 10 June 1917, Appendix A74, Telegram G 843, van Deventer to CIGS, 10 June.

<sup>610</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 127-128.



This was unfortunate as van Deventer was very anxious to start operations as well as to prevent another German raiding force breaking west. In order to bolster the very thinly stretched net around the *Schutztruppe*, the British commander-in-chief pressed Huyghé to provide at least a single battalion for the Iringa front. Despite having strict instructions not to allow his forces to intermingle with those of his allies, Huyghé agreed to do so.<sup>611</sup>

The conference proved to be a success and both men accepted to the new strategic plan. The Belgians were given the role of taking on Tafel and securing the Mahenge area, although they would be dependent on British MT and carriers to move their supplies. The *Brigade Sud* was to establish itself between Colonel Tytler's column at Iringa and Norforce at Lupembe ready for the advance eastwards. In the vital matter of supplies, it was agreed that the British would supply food via its MT fleet and that Belgian pioneers would assist in the improvement of routes to the forward forces. The *Brigade Nord* had already commenced operations on 15 May with three battalions in pursuit of *Abt Naumann* while the remainder continued their concentration.<sup>612</sup> This formation would now take over sole responsibility for the pursuit and destruction of that force with all British columns being withdrawn into reserve. The Belgian supply base was fixed at Dodoma and the provision of pioneers and other troops on road building tasks was also agreed.<sup>613</sup>

After this meeting, van Deventer telegraphed his instructions to both Northey and Tytler on 20 June. He informed them that the Belgians would take over the conduct of the operations against Naumann from 25 June and that they would also provide a column of 500 rifles to move from Dodoma via Iringa to Mtua to operate on the Malinje-Mpepo line. A further column of 1,200 rifles would be made available in the second half of July and it would probably advance on Mahenge from a base at Kilossa and Kidoti. Once Naumann had been dealt with, a further force of 700 rifles would then take over the area

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<sup>611</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 128 and *Annexe No 27, Instructions au Commandant Hubert*, 19 June 1917, pp.329-330.

<sup>612</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 297-298. *Instruction au commandant de la Brigade Nord, 1er Bureau, No 96, dated 15 mai 17.*

<sup>613</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 129-130.

controlled by Tytler who would be used elsewhere. Effectively, this would turn the whole of the Mahenge operations over to the Belgians.<sup>614</sup>

Following these discussions, van Deventer issued his final timetable for the offensive on 27 June. A preliminary operation in PEA would begin on the same day when a Norforce column would begin its advance on Mwembe. The main phase would commence on 2 July, with the Iringa Column attacking the Ruipa position supported by 250 rifles from Norforce moving from Lupembe against Mpepo. The principal attack would follow on 4 July when Linforce moved on Mtua, with an assault planned there on the following morning. Also on 5 July, Hanforce would hit the Nguara River position. In the south, Norforce was to send its main column from Likuju towards Liwale on 5 July. Finally, on the middle Rufiji, a battalion-sized force from the Nigerian Brigade would leave Kibambawe for an attack on Msswega on 9 or 10 July.<sup>615</sup> Furthermore, the Belgians would take over responsibility for the hunt of *Abt Naumann* as well as providing an advance column of 500 rifles to move from Kilossa towards Kidodi on 8 July, although the remainder would take some time to get into position.<sup>616</sup>

### GERMAN STRATEGY FOR 1917

Imperial German strategy for 1917 continued along the same lines as the earlier stages of the war. Solf and his colleagues continued to argue for a greatly expanded African empire largely at Belgian and Portuguese expense, they still lacked any means of directly influencing events there. This led to policy being decided in a partial vacuum, isolated from the events on the ground and totally dependent on military success in Europe.<sup>617</sup>

Colonial German strategy for 1917 was much simpler: it was to continue surviving for as long as possible in the face of superior enemy forces. Von Lettow

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<sup>614</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 20 June 1917, Appendix A116, Telegram G 976, BGGS to Northey and Tytler, 20 June.

<sup>615</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 27 June 1917, Appendix A140, Telegram G 91, Genstaff to Hanforce, GOC Lindi, OC Iringa and General Edwards, 27 June.

<sup>616</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 28 June 1917, Appendix A142, Telegram G 107, van Deventer to CIGS, 28 June; WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, July 1917, Attachment by War Office, MO2(B), 29 June 1917, "East Africa – Prospective Advance".

<sup>617</sup> Fischer, *Germany's War Aims*, pp. 317-319 (1917) and 586-590 (1918); Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht*, pp. 258-260.



realised that he need not restrict himself to the colony, particularly as the bulk of his supply infrastructure had been already lost. He also understood that the Portuguese were the weak link in the situation as their unpopularity amongst their colonial subjects and military incompetence made for easy pickings. The sheer size of the potential area of operations made his main problem one of supply; he needed to protect the key mtama and rice growing areas from the British whilst they ripened. He resolved to continue his war of delaying tactics while using local opportunities to inflict defeat on any British column that strayed into him.

He had already reduced his forces substantially during the wet season through the elimination of a large part of his lines of communication organisation. He was very concerned about his food supply and took great personal interest in the growing of crops for the coming year. As ever, he realised that he was outnumbered, but resolved to give any weak or isolated detachments a hard knock as the opportunity presented.

### **THE INITIAL ADVANCE BEGINS**

The question of effective numbers remained a major concern, as sickness constantly depleted the units and those who were well enough to be forward were still weak. Two South African battalions were due to arrive, but not before the end of July. Furthermore, although they bore the titles of units experienced in the 1916 campaign, they were essentially new with only partial training at this stage. Finally, it is interesting to note that these units could not be sent to General Hoskins, but were so easily available to General van Deventer.<sup>618</sup>

Before the general offensive could begin, it was necessary to make a number of adjustments to the various columns and to launch several preliminary operations. The Kilwa force pressed for reinforcements before being launched into the attack onto the Nguara River position; although Hannyngton had two columns of 1200 and 500 respectively, a shortage of officers and a large number of inadequately trained troops

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<sup>618</sup> CAB 44/9, p. 72.

reduced their effectiveness. Van Deventer quickly agreed this and promised to send a South African and up to two KAR battalions prior to beginning the advance.<sup>619</sup>

Most of June was taken up with preparations for the advance and the return of units from the exhausting chase to the west. Headquarters Norforce left Fort Johnston on 24 June for Songea, arriving there on 2 July. The remainder of his troops made their way to the jumping-off position around Kitanda and Likuju in the north while a separate striking force under Colonel Shorthose prepared itself to clear Portuguese East Africa.<sup>620</sup> Northey too, had insufficient trained manpower, and a number of units had to be relegated to lines of communication duties. By 28 June, all was in readiness for the advance.<sup>621</sup>

### **THE PURSUIT OF NAUMANN**

Naumann had out-marched and eluded his pursuers, reaching the southern shores of Lake Victoria in late June. The Belgian columns had tried hard to slow him down, but difficulties in obtaining supplies and poor intelligence made this difficult. Finally, on 29 June, a combined Anglo-Belgian column caught up with the Germans at Ikoma, a few miles inland from the lake. An unsuccessful battle was fought and the attackers had to withdraw with numerous casualties. This gave Naumann a chance to escape, and turning south, his *Abteilung* now headed for Kondoa Irangi and the Central Railway. After dealing with their losses, the pursuers then spent much of July following the Germans' trail.<sup>622</sup>

### **THE MAIN ADVANCE BEGINS**

General O'Grady faced a difficult situation in early June 1917. Operations in the previous month had shown that the enemy was in good condition and full of fight.

<sup>619</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 4 June 1917, Appendix A23, Telegram O 884, Colonel Grant, Kilwa to BGGS, 4 June; War Diary GHQ, 7 June 1917, Appendix A 47, Telegram G 776, Genstaff to Colonel Grant Kilwa, 7 June.

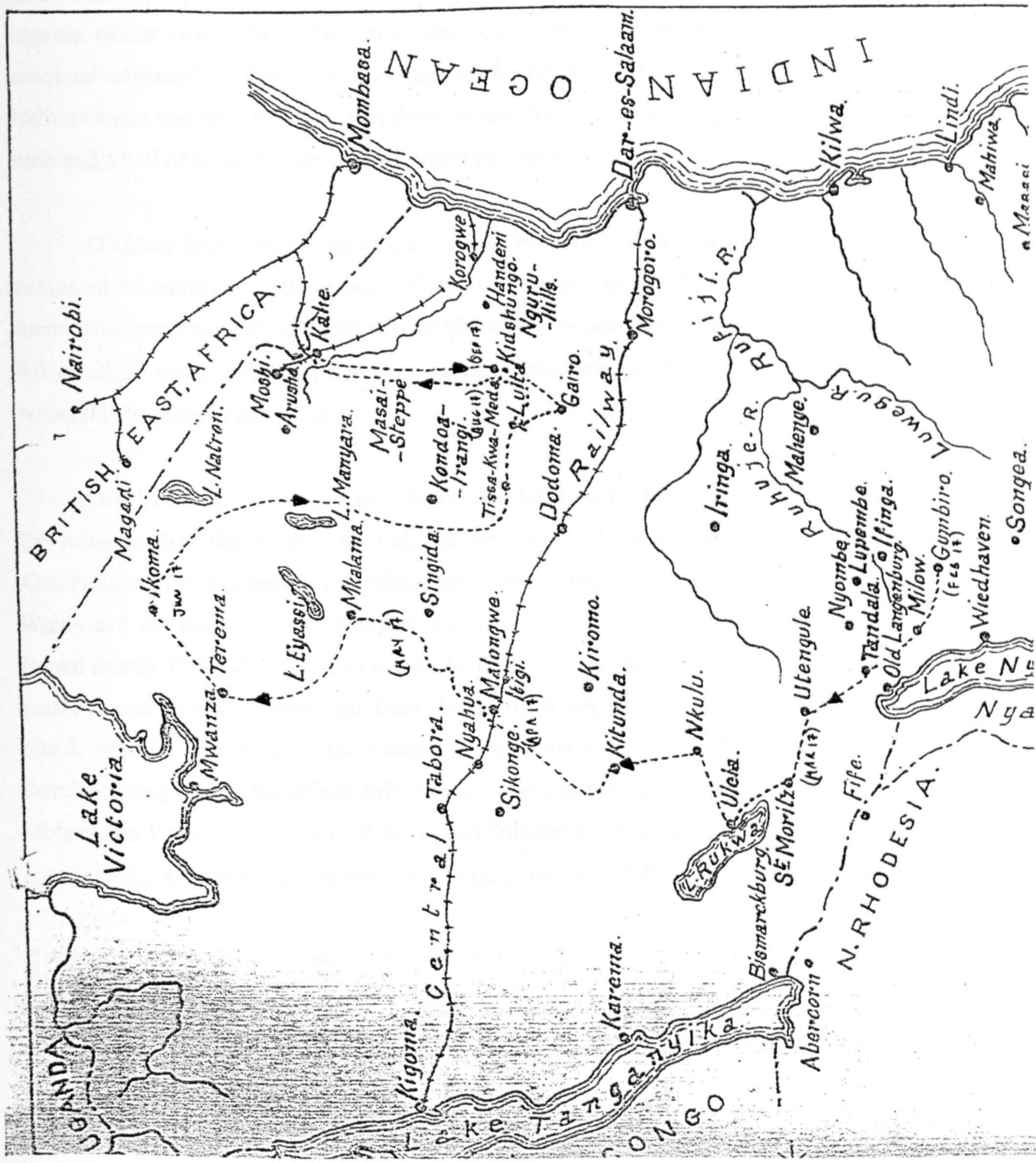
<sup>620</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 24 and 29 June 1917. Stevens' Column now consisted of 1<sup>st</sup>/1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> KAR, and 1<sup>st</sup> SAR. 2<sup>nd</sup> SAR was employed on lines of communication security back to Lake Nyassa.

<sup>621</sup> CAB 44/9, p. 47.

<sup>622</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 56-57 and 105-107.



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Equally, the brittleness of the new KAR battalions was also evident and reinforcements would be necessary for any successful advance. This meant securing the mouth of the Lukuledi River, which emptied into Lindi Creek about one mile south of the River Mohambika about five and a half miles south-west of Lindi town. The small village and port of Mingoyo, which lay along the Mohambika, was vital to any advance as it was here that lighters could offload supplies from ships in the anchorage directly to the trolley line. This was a peacetime line that had been built to service the local plantation and its capture would enable the British to bypass nearly 25 km of swamps that faced any overland advance.<sup>623</sup> The other advantage of the confluence of the two rivers on the Indian Ocean was that the water was deep enough for monitors to approach to within a mile and a half of Mingoyo and provide heavy fire support.<sup>624</sup>

O'Grady had a battle strength of about 3000 rifles with which to dislodge an estimated six companies with around 600 rifles.<sup>625</sup> In reality, the situation was worse as there were seven companies totalling over 900 rifles, 16 machine guns and two guns.<sup>626</sup> All in all, it was a difficult position to crack, particularly as the approaches were so vulnerable to observation and fire.

*Abt Wahle* was deployed as follows: *Abt Looff* with two companies was nearly five miles south of the mouth of the Lukuledi near Namunda while the much stronger *Abt Kraut* mustered five companies, of which three were at the Ngurumahamba position with Wahle and the remaining two companies at Majani.<sup>627</sup> Conscious of the dangers of a frontal assault, O'Grady decided to make a bold pincer movement by land and sea. In the north, a column would move out from the northern edges of the Lindi defences and march west for the Lutende Hills. Once there, it would turn south and head for Naitiwi, thereby cutting off the Ngurumahamba position and threatening the trolley line along the Mohambika River. At the same time, an amphibious move would be launched up the Lindi Creek, landing two battalions which would then march for Tandamuti Hill before

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<sup>623</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, p. 2247; Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 333.

<sup>624</sup> CAB 45/73, Sketch 100, "Operations at Lindi June 1917".

<sup>625</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 9, footnote 1.

<sup>626</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 333. Wahle had a total strength of 900 rifles, 17 machine guns, and 2 guns.

<sup>627</sup> MS Boell, N14/30, 26. Kapitel, p. 2055 and 28. Kapitel, p. 2247.



turning north towards the Mohambika River. Once there, they would cut the trolley line and link up with the northern column.

Working closely with the naval commander-in-chief, O'Grady drew up a detailed plan of action. The Germans were alert to the threat posed from the sea and watched the approaches carefully. Therefore, a night move was decided upon; a blacked out force of boats and lighters would move silently past the German outposts at high tide before the moon had risen, and would land between the Rivers Mohambika and Lukuledi at the Kenjengehe pier marking the southern terminus of the trolley line. Once landed, a two-battalion force would move initially south-west towards Mkwaya and then make the decisive turn north towards Mwreka.<sup>628</sup> However, this did not account for the presence of *Abt Looff* south of the River Lukuledi in the area of Namunda, rather than further west as believed.<sup>629</sup>

The operation began on 10 June and the boats moved undetected past the forward German posts. However, observation posts in the hills had detected boat movement and reported it to Wahle. He immediately ordered his troops closer to the river, while telling *Abt Looff* to march north and rejoin the main body. Similarly, he recalled the other forward companies, leaving only a single one facing Lindi at the Ngurumahamba position. His intention was to hit the British from two sides; his main body would move from the north, while Looff converged from the south with the aim of driving O'Grady back into the water.<sup>630</sup>

British planning had been good and the leading troops landed safely at Kenjengehe. The lead battalion was ashore by early evening and disembarkation continued through the night. With the rising of the moon, visibility was good and early on 11 June the *Königsberg* gun opened fire on HMS *Thistle* leading to a lively engagement. Wahle was now sure that this was no feint and ordered Kraut to attack the landing site with two companies. However, by this time O'Grady's troops had pushed

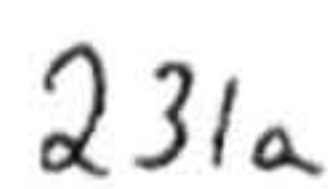
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<sup>628</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 8-10.

<sup>629</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 333.

<sup>630</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 336; MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, pp. 2250-2251.

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nearly five miles inland and had taken Tandamuti Hill, well to the south-west of Mingoyo-Mrweka. The second battalion had turned north-west near Ziwani Ridge and headed for Mrweka. Both sides collided there after daybreak and a heavy engagement followed with the British being held in the Mohambika valley. Both sides reinforced, although Wahle still believed he could drive the attackers back into the sea.<sup>631</sup>

Looff was the key to the plans, but despite frequent signals he and his troops were nowhere to be seen. The fighting raged on all day and in the afternoon Wahle received the highly unwelcome news that a second, undetected British column had marched out of Lindi moving via the Lutende hills and was now in possession of the key track junction at Naitiwi. This immediately rendered the Ngurumahamba position untenable as well as threatening his forward forces concentrated at Mwreka. He immediately ordered the evacuation of the vulnerable baggage train back from Ruaha to Narunyu, five miles up the Mohambika River.

In the meantime, the battalion at Tandamuti Hill was ordered to the main fight at Mrweka. Its piecemeal arrival late in the day ended chances of German victory.<sup>632</sup> Looff's appearance around 1600 did little to change matters and the whole position was evacuated by darkness.<sup>633</sup> This was not the entire story, for *Abt Looff* had actually run into the rear of that battalion, several companies of which broke and ran.<sup>634</sup> Elsewhere on the northern flank, another KAR battalion secured Naitiwi while an Indian unit marched into Mrweka via Majani. The German forward position was lost and a withdrawal to Narunyu became necessary.

The result of the action of 10-11 June was to advance the British line well inland. The Germans now occupied the line Tandamuti Hill – Mohambika Valley – southwest of Ruaha, while the British faced them from positions along Mkwaya – Mrweka – Majani – Naitiwi.<sup>635</sup> However, neither side possessed sufficient strength to defeat the other and

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<sup>631</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, pp. 2252-2255.

<sup>632</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, pp. 2258-2260; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>633</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, p. 2262.

<sup>634</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 337-338. The Germans deployed 741 soldiers of whom five were killed, 20 were wounded and two were missing. 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR lost two killed, nine wounded and 10 missing.

<sup>635</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 338.

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reinforcements were needed for further offensive operations. Success had been close for both sides: the audacious and well-executed landings at Kenjengehe had caught the Germans off-balance, but this was squandered by the splitting of the two battalions between Mrweka and Tandamuti. Wahle, in his quest for a decisive victory, had failed to maintain adequate surveillance of Lindi and had weakened his northern flank so much that it fell without any fighting being necessary. Losses had not been light, with the Germans suffering 62 casualties as opposed to 31 on the British side.<sup>636</sup>

While the advances from Kilwa and Lindi were underway, Colonel Murray and his column were reaching their destination after a long and arduous absence. Having had a week's rest, they marched to Mwaya to embark on a steamer for Wiedhafen where they landed on 25 June. Murray then moved up to Songea where he assumed command of the force. It was joined by a Rhodesian battalion on 4 July, while the remainder of his former column remained in Songea as Northey's general reserve.<sup>637</sup>

On the northern flank, a smaller force was preparing to move against *Abt Aumann*, estimated at having some 300 rifles and five machine guns, at Mpepo. This move was intended to draw off any German reinforcements for Mahenge and thereby assist the Belgian advance further north from Iringa. Northey had instructed Capt Dickinson with three companies to move from Lupembe in conjunction with Lieutenant Colonel Carbutt's moving north from Kitanda.

On the German side, on 27 June, *Abt Lincke* had four companies with a battery near Likuju.<sup>638</sup> Unaware of the scale of the British build-up, Lincke decided to attack his former camp. His troops moved through the bush on 28 and 28 June, putting in a strong assault that was failed to break in. Lincke was fortunate to break off the fight as two strong enemy columns were nearby and nearly cut him off.<sup>639</sup> As soon the area was clear, the various units converged on Likuju for rest and final preparations. Before the

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<sup>636</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, pp. 2270-2273. The Germans fought with 741 soldiers and lost five killed, 20 wounded, and two missing. 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR lost three dead, nine wounded and four missing.

<sup>637</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 3 July 1917; CAB 44/9, p. 48. Three companies of RNR and one BSAP were numbering 400 rifles and eight machines constituted the reserve in Songea.

<sup>638</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, Boell, 29. Kapitel, pp. 2621-2622.

<sup>639</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 48-49.

offensive began, Northey made one final change to his order of battle, disbanding several depleted European units and converted the remaining personnel into Lewis gunners. They were then distributed amongst the various African battalions to provide additional firepower and experience.<sup>640</sup>

While these preparations were underway, Tafel was making alterations to his own deployments, forming an enhanced reserve at Mahenge in early July. This was particularly important as an offensive was expected imminently at Kilwa and he needed to react quickly to changes. One of the major problems of the dispersed deployment was that it took two to three days for reports from the forward areas to reach him and a similar period was required to pass the information back to *Kommando*.<sup>641</sup> A stronger reserve would weaken the forward fighting strength, but would allow him to react to the main threat more quickly.

As June progressed, the weather improved and the country began the rapid process of drying up. While this was very helpful for supply purposes, it also meant that sources of spring and surface water were also disappearing at the same time. This imparted a degree of urgency to General Beves, temporarily in command at Kilwa. He considered that the Germans might withdraw further inland through lack of water before a decisive battle could be fought. Accordingly, he decided to launch a pre-emptive attack whilst the enemy was still in easy range of his own supply bases. He therefore proposed to attack as soon as reinforcements had arrived, but without waiting for more transport. He saw the advantages in fighting close to his own base and trying to inflict heavy casualties as greater than the disadvantages of an immediate, prolonged advance thereafter.<sup>642</sup> To that end, on 13 June, he asked GHQ for permission to divert a battalion from Lindi as O'Grady had already achieved his initial objectives and his own reinforcements were still chasing Naumann. This was agreed by van Deventer and the latter increased the reinforcement to include a battery of 8 Stokes mortars.<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>640</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 3 July 1917.

<sup>641</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 29. Kapitel, pp. 2621-2622.

<sup>642</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 14 June 1917, Appendix A 95, Telegram O 955, Beves to BGGS, 13 June.



Beves's assessment proved to be correct as the Germans had begun to evacuate their forward positions at the end of June. Patrols located them in the Kiturika Hills, still within range of the force's logistical and operational range. As the South African reinforcements began to arrive somewhat earlier than anticipated, General Beves began to make his dispositions for the coming battle. He now had three columns: No 1 had four battalions, eight guns and eight 8 Stokes mortars; No 2 had three battalions, six guns and four Stokes mortars; and No 3, under Colonel Taylor, had about a battalion. His plan was to converge on the enemy's positions near Mchakama, and bring him to battle while attempting to cut off his retreat to the westward.<sup>644</sup> He faced a substantial force, as von Lettow had left *Abt von Lieberman* some ten companies and two guns to hold the area.<sup>645</sup>

General Hannington decided to use both his columns in a converging movement from the north, while the third, smaller column under Colonel Taylor would march south-west from Kilwa, cutting off the southern escape route. Leaving its jumping-off point after dark on 6 July, No 1 Column marched south-west for seven miles, before linking up with its forward reconnaissance elements. While these troops attacked the next morning in the thickly wooded positions, No 2 Column was engaged in an arduous approach march from the north-west. The attack was successful and a flanking movement by No 1 Column forced the Germans to retire to Mtshikama and the two columns linked up the next day.<sup>646</sup>

Hannington then took the opportunity to rebalance his columns, drawing No 2 back to Kirongo in preparation for another flanking move while No 1 Column took over Mnindi. After four days of reconnaissance and planning, a move by that force coupled with pressure from the east by No 3 Column led the defenders to evacuate and move some 10 miles further south to Narungombe. Late on the evening of 17 July, Nos 1 and 2 Columns linked up and readied themselves for the next stage.

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<sup>643</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 73-74.

<sup>644</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 74-75. No 1 (Orr) had four battalions; No 2 (Grant) had three and a half battalions; No 3 (Taylor) had two battalions.

<sup>645</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, pp. 2287-2288.

<sup>646</sup> Orr, "Rumbo to the Rovuma", pp. 110-111.

Orr was given command of Nos 1 and 3 columns for the planned fight at Narungombe, although sickness reduced one of his Indian battalions to company strength. The moves commenced on 18 July with No 1 Column, followed by No 3, going for the water holes at Kihumburo, about six miles from Narungombe. Apart from its garrison, the latter place had a good source of water which made it vital in such a parched land. Indeed, failure to take it would inevitably force a return to Kibumburo, and, if its water proved to be insufficient, then a move even further back might be necessary.

By 1730 hours that day, contact between the opposing sides was lost, and No 1 Column bivouacked about two miles short of Narungombe. Captured prisoners revealed the presence of eight companies and two guns around the water pool with the possibility of reinforcements arriving from the south. Receiving permission to employ No 2 Column in his operation, Orr planned to use No 1 Column to engage the enemy from the front while No 2 moved against the enemy's left flank and No 3 on his right flank. A bombardment by mountain guns and Stokes mortars would commence as soon as daylight permitted.

*Abt von Lieberman* had its position across the road and facing generally north. On its right flank was a substantial swamp while to the left was a hill covered in virtually impenetrable bamboo and bush. The approaches had been carefully cleared and were backed by three sets of trenches and rifle pits. The overall frontage was about 1800 yards.<sup>647</sup> The attack went ahead early the next day. Only limited progress could be made to the front while the two flanking moves went ahead, with No 3 Column making good progress on the right. After several German counter-attacks, Orr put in heavy attack in an attempt to break through the defences. A newly raised KAR battalion in No 3 broke and for a time the column was nearly overwhelmed. However, a final push on the left by No 2 Column broke into the defences and saved the situation. Unable to progress further and unwilling to give up their gains, the British dug in for the night preparatory for another attempt in the morning.<sup>648</sup>

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<sup>647</sup> Ridgway, "With No 2 Column", I, pp. 22-23.



Before dawn, patrols found that the enemy had evacuated his remaining positions and Orr promptly occupied Narungombe and the vital water holes. They were joined by Force HQ and, in light of the casualties and need for water, a further advance was called off. No 1 remained in possession of Narungombe, while No 2 was sent back 12 miles to Rungo where water was plentiful. Liebermann now moved back to Mihambia, where he was joined by an irate von Lettow who had only been a few miles away when the former had evacuated the most important position for many miles.

Narungombe was one of the hardest fights of the campaign and one of the first in which the Germans had been fought out of rather than manoeuvred out of position. Casualties on both sides had been heavy and the fighting had been conclusive before the arrival of von Lettow and four extra companies. It also revealed the degree to which the new KAR battalions still needed experience; 3<sup>rd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> KAR in No 3 Column was only partially trained and had disintegrated when it lost a high proportion of its officers and a severe bush fire swept through its position; its collapse had accounted for the difficulties in which the column found itself that afternoon.<sup>649</sup>

A strong position was now developed at Narungombe with a line of forward outposts established about two miles in front of the defences. A week later, on 28 July, No 2 Column moved south-west towards the enemy post at Mssindy, about ten miles distant. After a number of encounters, the British occupied that place and now had a second well-watered jumping-off point from which to conduct a further advance.<sup>650</sup>

Norforce began its advance on 2 July with the aim of catching up with *Abt Lincke*. It was located the next day, some 23 miles from Likuju at the important track junction linking Songea-Liwale and Songea-Mahenge. A KAR battalion was ordered to attack, while the remainder of Murray's Rhodesians arrived at Songea, completing the arduous return march.<sup>651</sup> The move on Lincke took a few days to develop as Murray endeavoured to cut Lincke off and the deep ravines and densely vegetated valleys were difficult to

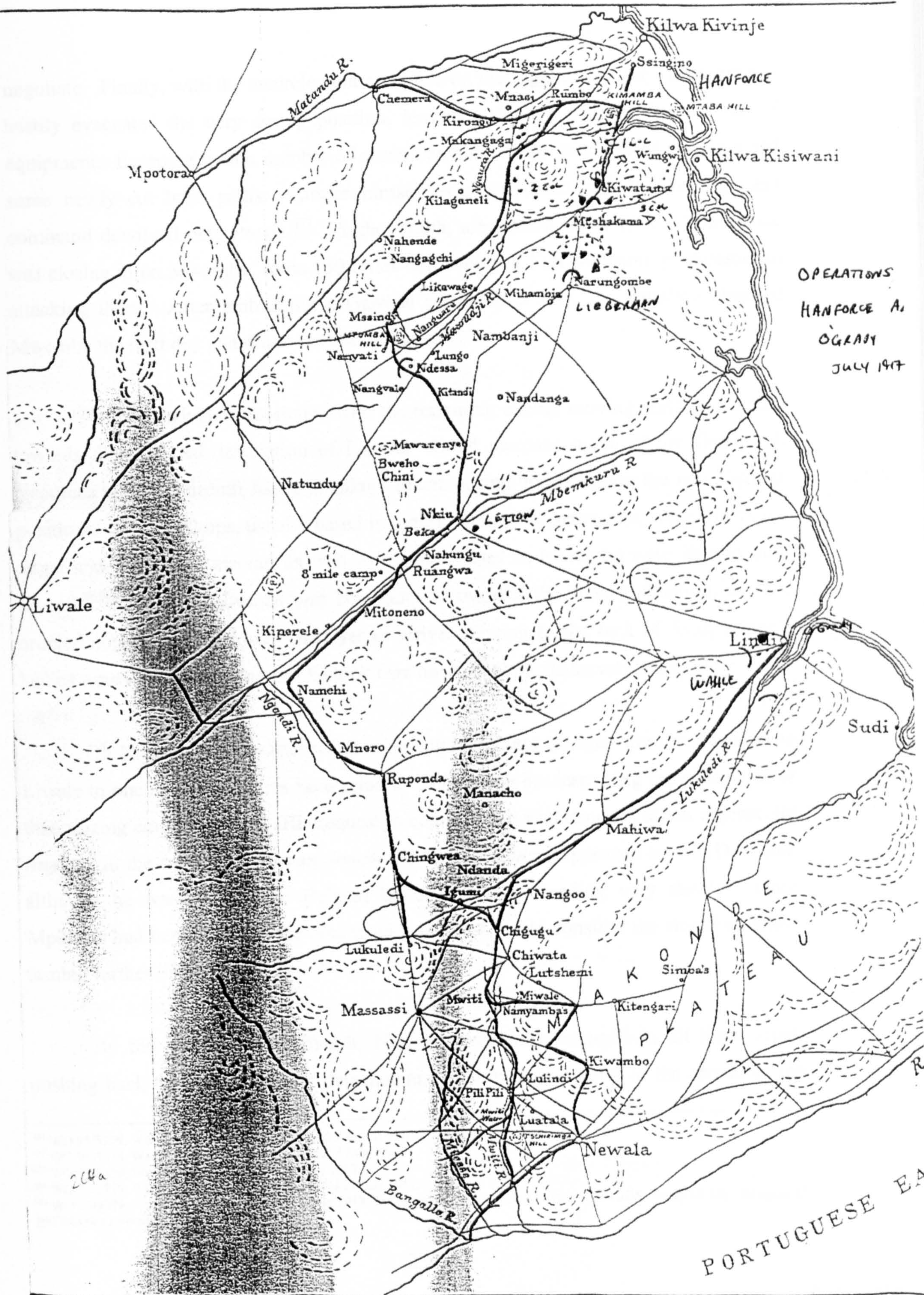
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<sup>648</sup> WO 106/273, *History of 3 KAR*, p. 70.

<sup>649</sup> Orr, "Rumbo to the Rovuma", pp. 114-115.

<sup>650</sup> Ridgway, "With No 2 Column", I, pp. 26-27.





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negotiate. Finally, with the encirclement complete on the night of 6/7 July, the Germans hastily evacuated the very strong position, leaving behind a considerable amount of equipment. Escaping with a number of casualties, they made good use of darkness and some newly cut bush paths. Lincke himself was evacuated sick to Mahenge and command devolved onto Poppe.<sup>652</sup> Further south, a battalion under Colonel Shorthose was closing in on Mwembe, some 150 miles north-west of Fort Johnston, preparatory to attacking there. After ambushing a German patrol on 5 July, the battalion attacked Mwembe the next day and drove out the defenders.<sup>653</sup>

The main advance continued with the retreating enemy moving north rather than towards the expected destination of Liwale. Good use was made of the slender air resources with the aircraft based at Likuju reconnoitring and bombing the new German positions. Supply dumps, usually based in highly flammable grass huts, were a favoured target and the Likuju aircraft as well as another based in Mwembe were able to burn several.<sup>654</sup> Murray's advance was beginning to outpace the supply situation, as MT, ordered some time previously, had yet to arrive. Owing to the lack of food, Poppe's tactics were strictly delaying and he took care not to become decisively engaged.

On 13 July, Northey succeeded in having his orders changed from an advance on Liwale to one on Mpondas, as he wanted to concentrate on destroying the enemy rather than seizing empty territory. His request to continue the simultaneous drives against *Abt Aumann* in the north and *Abt von Stuemmer* in the south were approved by van Deventer, although he warned that the Belgian build-up was proceeding very slowly. Once Mpondas had been reached, the commander-in-chief would consider the situation before issuing further instructions.<sup>655</sup>

By the middle of the month, Norforce was fully engaged in all three areas, pushing back the various enemy detachments. The welcome news of the arrival of the

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<sup>651</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 2 and 3 July 1917.

<sup>652</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 6 and 7 July 1917.

<sup>653</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 8 July 1917.

<sup>654</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 10 and 11 July 1917.

<sup>655</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 12 July 1917. Telegram NF 4139, 12 July Norforce to BGGS; Entry 13 July, Telegram G 300 BGGS to Norforce.

first Belgian contingent at Iringa was received on 15 July together with reports of an impending attack at Mpepo.<sup>656</sup> This was countered a few days later with the disappointing news that the Belgians would not now take over the Lupembe- Mpepo sector as previously agreed, although van Deventer promised to send another KAR battalion from Iringa in recompense.<sup>657</sup>

The Songea Column advanced steadily and fought a number of minor, but time-consuming, rearguard actions reaching to within about three miles from Mpondas, while Tafel had brought reinforcements with him on moving from Madaba to Mahenge.<sup>658</sup> Further to the north, the column now commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Fair had forced back *Abt Aumann* between Mpepo and Mkapira on the right bank of the River Ruhudje by 26 July.<sup>659</sup> Progress had been good considering the relative closeness in strengths between attacking and defending columns: Hawthorn's Songea Column had about 900 rifles as compared to Lincke's 600, while Fair's 650 faced 350 of Aumann's around Mpepo and Shorthose's were pushing back von Stuemmer's 400 or so.<sup>660</sup>

The time spent in these static locations was not wasted, as daily patrols were sent out to locate water sources and roads, as well as to find the enemy and disrupt his supply system. Deforestation, through burning, was also used as a means of denying the enemy covered approaches to the defences. No 2 Column was joined by a flight of aeroplanes at Mssindye and later by the mounted troops of the 25<sup>th</sup> (Indian) Cavalry, who immediately began raiding the enemy lines of communication, often with considerable success, and disrupting the enemy's supply arrangements.<sup>661</sup>

Elsewhere, von Lettow was encountering other difficulties as the Germans' control of the Makonde Highlands was becoming unsustainable. Largely supported by the British, the Makonde tribe rose in active revolt against the colonial regime. Two

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<sup>656</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 15 July 1917.

<sup>657</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 24 July 1917.

<sup>658</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 1 August 1917.

<sup>659</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 26 July and 1 August 1917. *Abt Aumann* was about 350 strong with three companies.

<sup>660</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 31 July 1917. A captured field state, signed by Lincke on 24 July, gave a fair indication of the strength of the German opposition with some 63 Germans, 540 Askaris and 428 carriers on the strength of his *Abteilung*.

<sup>661</sup> Ridgway, "With No 2 Column", I, p. 28.



companies were despatched in an attempt to re-assert German rule as well as to protect vital food-gathering parties in the area. On hearing of the fighting at Mrweka, Von Lettow also sent six companies to reinforce Wahle, with another three drawn from *Abt Otto* being moved to the Kilwa front. Marching with the reinforcements, the *Kommandeur* set up his headquarters at Nahungo on 24 June. His intention was to prevent a breakout from Lindi as well as to attack any detached portion of Linforce that came within range. Five days later, he moved on to the area of Lutende, which had not been occupied following the British advance, and began his preparations.<sup>662</sup> He sent *Abt von Chappuis* with two companies to the area of the Lutende Hills while *Abt Köhl* with three companies was held around Naitiwi.<sup>663</sup> A subsequent personal reconnaissance by von Lettow on 8 July of the Naitiwi position concluded that the chances of a surprise attack were unfavourable and without it no chance of success was possible.<sup>664</sup>

Back at Lindi, O'Grady wanted to develop his earlier advance, but needed more troops. He had been promised another KAR battalion, but as it would not arrive before 5 July, large-scale operations were out of the immediate question. However, reports of patrols in the Lutende area led him to order his own patrols to investigate on 29 June. Not realising the presence of enemy reinforcements, a half battalion had successfully attacked Lutende on 30 June. The response was immediate and, as the defenders streamed back, von Lettow counter-attacked with his three fresh companies. The blow fell heavily on the Indians and they were driven out of their newly acquired position. Casualties were heavy, including the loss of their commanding officer and two machine guns, and the Lutende position was in German hands once again.<sup>665</sup>

Following this setback, O'Grady, always an aggressive commander, proposed that Linforce advance along the road running from Lindi to Massassi, in order to cut off von Lettow's escape route. Believing that the Germans would not hold Liwale but would fall back to Massassi and thence into Portuguese East Africa, he pushed for an initial

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<sup>662</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 338.

<sup>663</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, pp. 2287-2288.

<sup>664</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, pp. 2292-2293.

<sup>665</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 339. The British lost 73 dead, 19 wounded and 18 taken prisoner, while the Germans lost nine killed and 26 wounded.

advance along the road as far as Mahiwa, with a subsequent move onward to Massassi.<sup>666</sup> Given the temporary exhaustion of Hanforce and the closeness of this view to his own thoughts, General van Deventer assented to O'Grady's wishes and authorised the reinforcement of his command.<sup>667</sup>

On the German side, despite his inability to attack, von Lettow chose to remain in the Lutende area for a number of days, using the opportunity to gather supplies and consume as much of the rich stocks as possible. Finally, on learning of the difficulties faced by *Abt von Liebermann* further north, he marched off with five companies and two batteries, leaving Wahle a single company as reinforcement.<sup>668</sup>

The latter part of the month of July was spent ferrying troops and the all-important carriers from Dar-es-Salaam into Lindi. The reinforcements were substantial, consisting of three infantry battalions, a mountain battery and the Stokes mortar battery.<sup>669</sup> While all the organisational and administrative preparations were underway, Brigadier-General O'Grady conducted his reconnaissances and developed his plan.

As van Deventer's operations progressed throughout July and the Belgian build-up continued, friction between the British and Belgian commands began to mount. These were chiefly due to a lack of British troops in the Iringa area and the slow arrival of planned Belgian reinforcements. By the end of that month, one battalion was under direct British command and the various columns were interposed.<sup>670</sup>

Originally, both governments had agreed that the British would set the strategic direction of the campaign and would set the mission for the Belgians within a distinct zone of operations. Within this framework, the Belgian commander-in-chief was responsible for the detailed deployment and operation of his own units and columns. He had been specifically ordered not to allow the formation of mixed allied columns and to

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<sup>666</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 13 July 1917, Appendix A5 and A6, *Note on Situation at Lindi and Note on the relative importance of the Kilwa (A) and Lindi (B) lines of advance by Brigadier-General O'Grady*, 13 July 1917.

<sup>667</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 7.

<sup>668</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 339.

<sup>669</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 7.

<sup>670</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, 3, p. 141.



maintain a distinctly Belgian area of command. Given the pace of deployment and the pressure of operations, this principle had been ignored and Colonel Huyghé now came under national pressure to rectify this situation. This took place at a meeting in the British GHQ in Dar-es-Salaam from 20 to 23 July 1917, whose aim was both to resolve these disputes and to settle the more prosaic questions of supply and transport.

After much discussion, it was agreed that Mahenge would remain the immediate Belgian objective. To that end, the *Colonne Hubert*, presently en route from Iringa to the Kilombero Valley was instructed to reinforce Colonel Tytler's column along the line of the River Ruipa. The *Brigade Sud*, having concentrated at Uleia was then to advance to Kidatu and start preparations to cross the River Ruaha. Once in position, Tytler was to withdraw his column and Hubert was to come under Belgian orders once again. It was also agreed that the British-installed telegraph line would be turned over to the Belgians.<sup>671</sup>

As ever the question of transport loomed large, with the British agreeing to supply African rations to the Belgians, while the purchase of livestock and rice was left to their Royal Commissioner at Kigoma. British MT would move supplies forward from the railheads at Dodoma and Kilossa to the forward line of the Ruipa. From there, the supplies would be moved forward by British carriers and mules. Owing to a shortage of Belgian personnel, the British agreed also to provide overseers to supervise Belgian-recruited carriers.

For their part, the Belgians agreed to take responsibility for the improvement of the road leading from Kilosa to Kidoti and later extended this onward to Kidatu on the Ruaha. They also had to meet the challenges of bridging the many rivers en-route, with the greatest being the requirement to allow eight-tonne vehicles to cross the Ruaha and Ulanga Rivers. As these were, respectively, 70 feet wide and 10 feet deep and 300 feet wide and 20 feet deep, they represented a major task.<sup>672</sup>

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<sup>671</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 140-141.

## THE ADVANCE IN AUGUST 1917

By early August, the situation was as follows. The Germans remained divided into two major groups under Tafel and von Lettow. The *Kommandeur* kept a strong force at Mihambia where it could easily reinforce either Liwale or Massassi with columns facing both Hanforce and Linforce. The British were still unsure as to his ultimate intentions; whereas he had initially appeared to be headed for Portuguese East Africa, he now appeared to be staying in the Mahenge-Liwale area. Furthermore, they believed that the reinforced and aggressive operations from Lindi would draw him in and that resistance would be substantial.<sup>673</sup>

Van Deventer was taking no chances and considered the clearance of *Abt von Stuemmer* from Portuguese territory and the denial of the rich southern districts of the German colony to be essential. By early August, the first stage had been achieved. Shorthose's Column was now moving on Tunduru, an important farming area and road junction. Also germane to van Devnter's plan was the reintroduction of mounted troops into the campaign as the reformed South African mounted regiment began to arrive in East Africa.<sup>674</sup>

Van Deventer paid a personal visit to Lindi in early August, conferring at length with O'Grady and setting out his policy for a further advance. After the losses in June and July, the commander-in-chief ordered that more detailed reconnaissances be carried out beforehand and that a frontal attack was not to be repeated. Instead he wanted a turning movement, using the fordable right bank of the River Lukuledi, against the strong enemy positions.<sup>675</sup> To achieve this, O'Grady had just received substantial reinforcements together with a large number of individual replacement officers and NCOs and eight new Lewis guns per battalion.<sup>676</sup>

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<sup>672</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 142-143.

<sup>673</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 7 August 1917, Appendix A4, Telegram G 650, van Deventer to CIGS, 7 August.

<sup>674</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 8 August 1917, Appendix B, Telegram G 675, van Deventer to CIGS, 8 August.

<sup>675</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 19. Van Deventer left Lindi on 5 August.

<sup>676</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 7.



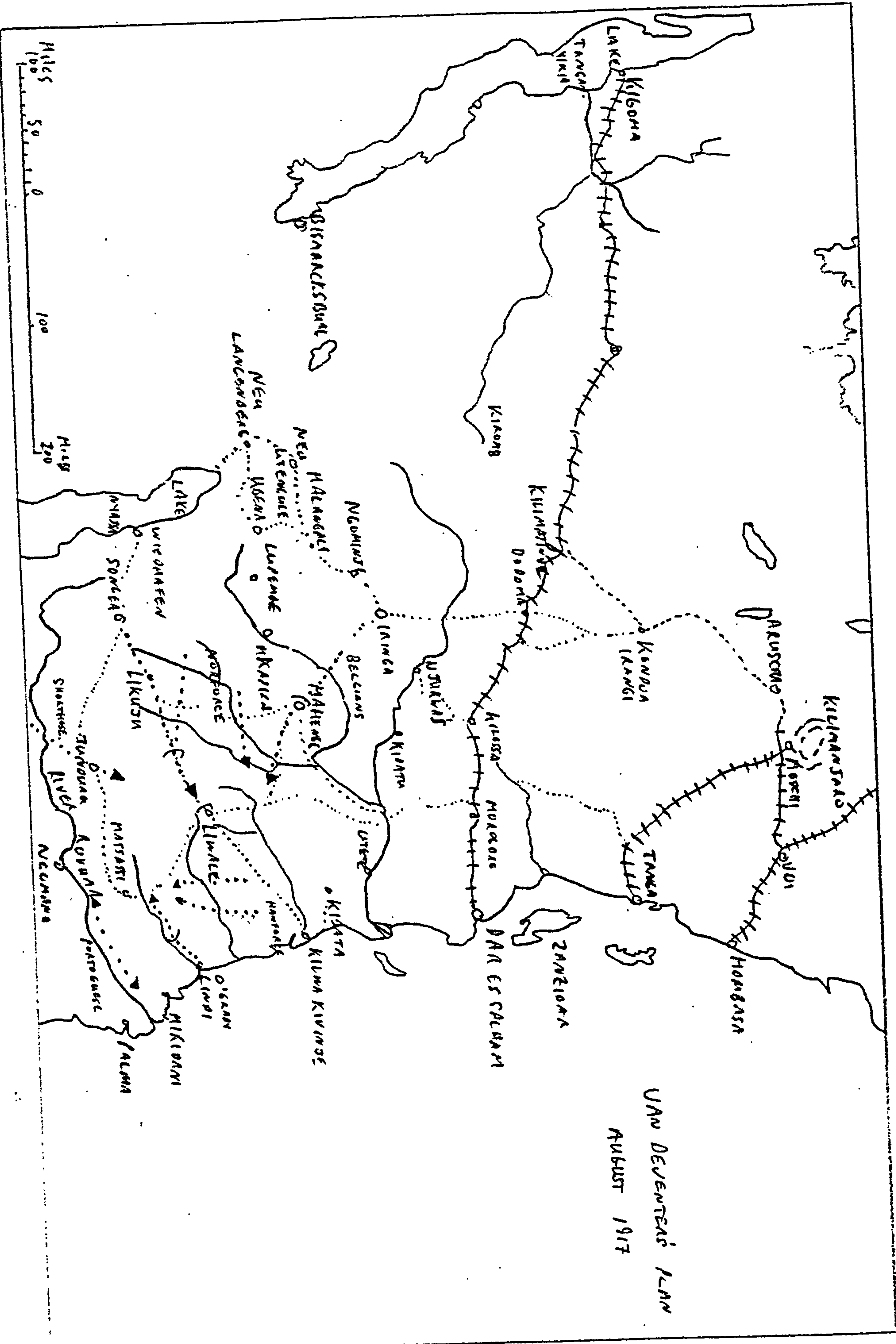
The new plan required a number of changes in the British deployments and O'Grady decided to thin out his forward positions with the bulk of his troops being concentrated in two mobile columns and only weak garrison troops holding Lindi. Colonel Taylor's column of 1,200 rifles was to assemble at Mkwaya to make the outflanking march and to seize a position on the German line of retreat "so as to compel the enemy to leave his entrenchments to fight his way southwards." O'Grady also planned to lead a column himself, about 1200 strong, that would provide the main punch for the attack, which was set for 9 August.

The arrival of the last troops on 6 August meant that all was in readiness for the advance to begin three days later. Intermittent aerial bombing of Tandamuti Hill was used in an attempt to focus German attention on that place. Taylor's Column set off in mid-afternoon of 9 August, crossing the Lukuledi near Mkwaya, and bivouacked near Kiwambi Hill. The next morning the fire plan, which included all the available guns including the two monitors, opened up on Tandamuti Hill. O'Grady's Column then marched west between the hill and the trolley line, hoping to cut off the retreat of the defenders. Opposition was slight, but the dense bush made for slow going and it was not until dusk on 10 August that the leading battalion reached the trolley line about two miles west of the Loop. The column then halted and dug in for the night. In the meantime, Taylor's Column had continued on to its objective, a point one mile east of Narunyu, and began to entrench itself. The plan was now to wait for the Germans to try and break out. At about 1800 hours, a probe from Narunyu was driven off but it was the only engagement of the night and the next morning the defenders found the enemy had withdrawn around their trenches and were now astride the trolley line at Narunyu.<sup>677</sup>

The advance to Narunyu had been successfully accomplished and the Germans forced out of their strong position at Tandamuti Hill. However, the next phase would prove more difficult as the Lindi force was beyond the range of the ships' guns and sickness was rising after heavy rains. Van Deventer signalled O'Grady on 14 August again to avoid frontal attacks and use flanking movements on the Narunyu position. However, this was

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<sup>677</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 19-21; WO 106/273, *History of 3 KAR*, pp. 19-20.



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easier said than done, as the ground was exceptionally difficult since the southern side was protected by wide and impassable swamps formed by the River Lukuledi and the Narunyu stream. The eastern face was largely covered in a dense sisal plantation, while the small stretch of open ground near the trolley line was lined with trenches protected by a sisal abattis. The trenches on the low ground were flanked on the northern side by a steep escarpment, and on the top of the high ground and sheer slope were further entrenchments amid thick bush. However, in the north the country was more open and held the possibility of a flank march.

While these operations were underway, von Lettow had been very active. On hearing of the British attack on Tandamuti Hill on 3 August, he had left Mihambia with five companies and several guns. He had:

"decided to join General Wahle with some of the companies from Ndessa and perhaps bring off the operation that had failed at Narungombe; a decisive success by an unexpected reinforcement."<sup>678</sup>

Marching by way of Mawerenye, he crossed the Mbermkuru at Nakiu below Nahungu, thence to Nahungu and Nyangao, reaching about eight miles to the rear of Wahle's positions at Nyengedi on 15 August. By the morning of 18 August, the German positions were: *Abt Kraut* on the right with three companies; *Abt Rothe* on the left with two companies; and *Abt von Chappuis* with two more in reserve. Von Lettow with two companies remained behind Wahle's troops.

O'Grady decided to use the northern option and issued orders for the move on 13 August. However, continuous heavy rainfall forced the postponement of the attack until the evening of 17 August. His plan was straightforward, a feint towards the marshes to the south coupled with an artillery bombardment of the main position to cover the move of the

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<sup>678</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 204.

main body to the north.<sup>679</sup> Retaining his two-column organisation, O'Grady detached a single battalion to hold the line and make the demonstration against the marshes.

As previously, Taylor led the advance before dark on 17 August. After halting for the night, the advance was resumed before dawn the next day along a compass bearing. Emerging onto a newly made road that ran east-west, the lead battalion ran into minor opposition that was quickly cleared. Despite using the road as a new axis, the surrounding bush became so thick as to make deployed movement impossible and this slowed the advance considerably. By afternoon on 18 August, the lead unit reached a small collection of huts held by elements of *Abt Kraut*. A brisk fire-fight secured the position, but increased firing from the bush induced the battalion to halt and dig in until reinforcements arrived. This proved to be a wise precaution as German reinforcements continued to arrive through the afternoon. Wahle, having already committed one company in the morning, sent in his last reserve at 1500 hours but it was unable to make significant headway owing to the heavy fire. Taylor pushed his troops forward as quickly as possible and by 1600 both his battalions were facing an enemy outflanking movement. Owing to the ground, he pulled back about 600 yards, just as von Lettow arrived with two companies. A close-range battle raged through the night and neither side gave way.<sup>680</sup> Finally, von Lettow had had enough and ordered Wahle to hold his existing positions and to reform an adequate reserve.<sup>681</sup>

While this confused fighting was underway, General O'Grady was following Taylor with his own column; it was difficult to move and patrols were dangerously active. Indeed, O'Grady narrowly escaped capture by a German patrol whilst moving between units. In this situation, he decided to wait until morning before making any further moves. Early on 19 August, he pushed forward, driving back a number of German parties before linking up with Taylor. They found that the enemy had withdrawn less than half a mile to the west and was strongly entrenched, supported by the fire of a *Königsberg* gun. It seemed clear that substantial reinforcements had arrived; a view that was confirmed by GHQ

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<sup>679</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 22-23.

<sup>680</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 346-348; CAB 44/10, pp. 23-24. The 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR under Lt Col Giffard was a much steadier and reliable unit than the battalion that had broken and run in May.



intelligence reports that von Lettow had brought half of his main body to the south.<sup>682</sup> The situation had now changed materially, with Linforce stalled some 20 miles inland and continually losing troops from sickness. The Germans had a marked superiority in numbers and put any further advance out of the question. For this reason, O'Grady pulled back Taylor's Column from its exposed forward position and established defences with a strong reserve back on the Lukuledi River. Linforce now went over to the defensive until support could be obtained from Hanforce, still further north.<sup>683</sup>

### **NORTHEY'S OPERATIONS AUGUST TO SEPTEMBER 1917**

Northey continued to be very concerned about the dispersion of his force, particularly the detachment operating against Mpepo, as it left him nothing to deal with Tunduru on his right flank. He asked van Deventer to send the promised KAR battalion to Mpepo so that he could in turn concentrate his Rhodesian units further south on the Liwale-Tunduru axis. Despite having a force of nearly 4,000 effective rifles, Northey was forced to cover a front of 300 miles with five columns, which meant that only a small proportion could ever be brought to bear in one place.<sup>684</sup> However, he also noted that the main force under van Deventer had already ground to a standstill, with a start strength of 5,000 now being reduced to 2,000. Unhappy with events, he arranged a meeting with General Sheppard, the BGGS, at Iringa, to discuss the future conduct of operations.<sup>685</sup>

Shorthose's battalion continued to make good progress having pushed von Stuemmer back through 250 miles of Portuguese territory. He had out-manoeuvred his opponent, crossing the rapidly flowing and crocodile-infested Rovuma without boats by improvising rafts and ropes out of tree bark and grass. He had to live off the country for two weeks before switching his base from Fort Johnston to Wiedhafen, some 300 miles apart. After a hiatus in communications owing to Shorthose's isolation and the weather,

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<sup>681</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 205.

<sup>682</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 25-26.

<sup>683</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 348; CAB 44/10, pp. 27-28.

<sup>684</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 5 and 8 August 1917.

<sup>685</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 9 and 10 August 1917. The meeting was set up for 16 August and facilitated by Northey's completion of a motor road from Songea to Iringa, nearly 300 miles long.

on 4 August Northey ordered him to continue towards Tunduru while retaining three other battalions in reserve in Nyasaland.<sup>686</sup>

In the meantime, Northey met Sheppard at Iringa and was able to clear up a large number of queries and differences. The passing of the crisis in Nyasaland enabled him to return Colonel Hawthorn to command operations further north.<sup>687</sup> As he was building up his strength for an attack on *Abt Lincke* still heavily-fortified at Mpondas, he used Murray and his Rhodesians to take over the lines of communication. The investment of Aumann at Mpepo continued with Fair's troops dug-in close by and heavy firing taking place.

The Germans struck back on 22 August, launching counter-attacks both at Mpepo and Mpondas that failed to make any impression on the British positions. It was becoming apparent that the stubborn defences of both places were being used to cover the withdrawal of the forces north of Mahenge to the east. At the same time, van Deventer issued fresh instructions to Northey with the aim of increasing the pressure from the west. He was now ordered to attack both Mpepo and Mpondas until they had fallen while also denying the enemy the Tunduru district and any attempted re-entry of Portuguese East Africa.<sup>688</sup>

Events began to gather speed in late August as Shorthose made a daring move on Tunduru, taking it on 23 August while Fair continued to tighten the noose on Aumann at Mpepo. That place was evacuated during the night of 27/28 August, but a hot pursuit followed in which the Germans suffered heavily, with nearly a third of their force as casualties.<sup>689</sup> By the end of the month, Norforce had inflicted significant losses on the *Westtruppen*, with 22 Germans and 241 Askaris being confirmed casualties and three guns taken.<sup>690</sup> August had brought success at relatively low cost.

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<sup>686</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 14 August 1917.

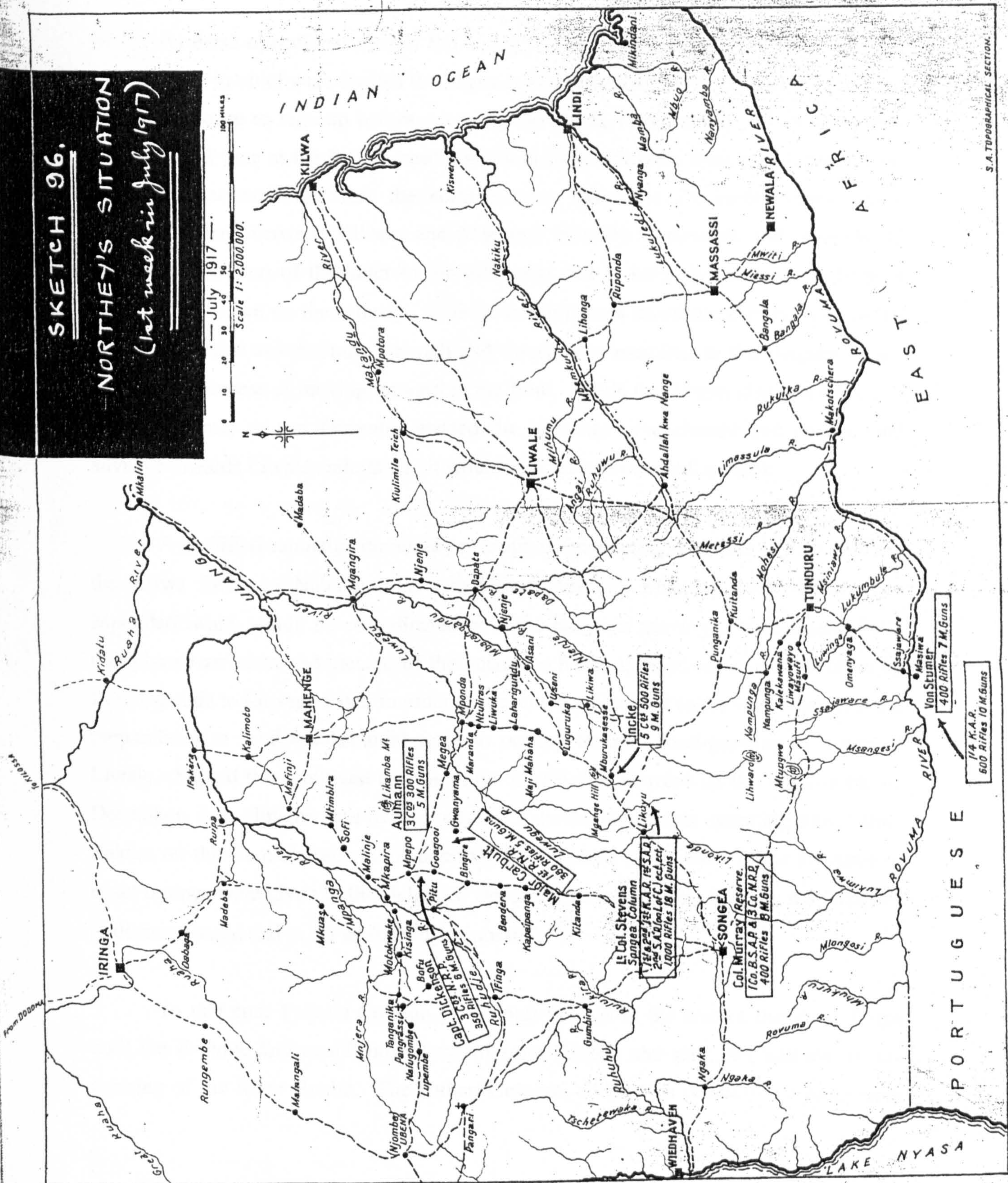
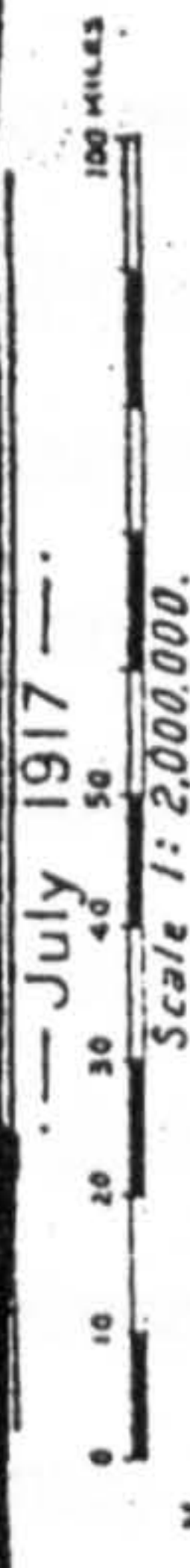
<sup>687</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 15 and 16 August 1917.

<sup>688</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 21 and 22 August 1917.

<sup>689</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entries 28 and 30 August 1917. The Germans suffered 26 killed and 55 taken prisoners; the British lost eight dead and 15 wounded.

<sup>690</sup> WO 95/5329, War Diary Norforce, Entry 31 August 1917.







As these operations were in full swing, communications between the respective commanders-in-chief were limited to telegrams and liaison officers. By early September, during the pause to regroup before renewing the attack, Huyghé and van Deventer met for a second time at the British headquarters in Dar-es-Salaam from 6 to 9 September. Van Deventer explained that the coming rainy season in December would make communications between Kilossa and Mahenge virtually impossible and proposed to reduce the garrison of the latter to the minimum and to keep the bulk of the Belgian forces as a reserve on the railway. This information was unwelcome to Huyghé as his forces were now at maximum strength and the carriers recruited in the Belgian Congo were in the process of moving forward to the front. While the British idea was not taken up at the time, as van Deventer wanted the Mahenge area cleared and an overland advance towards Liwale undertaken, it would bear fruit in the medium term.

A modified campaign directive came out of the meeting, in which the advances of the Kilwa force on Nahungu, the Lindi force towards Massassi, and Norforce on Mponda/Liwale, would be co-ordinated with the Belgians moving on Mahenge. Once that place was taken and cleared of the enemy, a blocking position was to be taken up from Mponda to Luwegu River in order to prevent any breakout to the west while making preparations to send a substantial force to occupy the rich food-growing area around Liwale. Should the combined actions prove insufficient to wind up the fighting before December, then Huyghé was to be ready for a further campaign operating either from Ifakara on the Central Railway or possibly from Liwale or Kilwa. While no dates or exact timings were given to the Belgians, van Deventer urged them to bring the Germans to decisive battle and to act as speedily as possible.<sup>691</sup>

To that end, Tytler's Column would only remain in the area of the River Ruipa until the *Brigade Sud* could move forward from Kilossa and start preparations for the crossing of the River Ruaha. The Hubert Column, which was presently en route from

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<sup>691</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 364-366, *Annexe No. 36*, 7 September 1916, Letter van Deventer to Huyghé.



Iringa towards Makuas-Mpanga to reinforce Tytler would remain in the area and rejoin the Belgian main body on arrival<sup>692</sup>

Meanwhile in the north, the problem of *Abt Naumann* remained unsolved although he had been gradually losing strength. It had reached the Kilimanjaro area in late August and threatened to enter British East Africa. Finally, faced by reinforcements moved hastily by rail, it turned south again. Van Deventer had reinforced the Belgians with a battalion plus mounted infantry who began to outpace the raiders. Wishing to speed up the Belgian concentration further south, on 12 August he made the elimination of the Germans a solely British responsibility.<sup>693</sup>

Finally, after much dogged pursuit and effort, the remnants of *Abt Naumann* were trapped at Luita, north of the Central Railway. It had been run down by the superior mobility of the mounted infantry and was seriously short of supplies. Surrounded in a waterless position, the last Germans surrendered on 2 September.<sup>694</sup> The small force had created disruption all out of all proportion to its size, but now the British could concentrate on destroying the enemy main body.

By the middle of September the time was ripe again for the advance; both the Kilwa and Lindi forces had been substantially reinforced and motor transport was now available to the entire force. Van Deventer wished to push the Kilwa force south with a concurrent move south-westerly by the Lindi force; his aim was to catch the German main body whatever course of action it took. The western troops, both British and Belgian, were to carry on aggressively in order to contain the troops in the Mahenge area.<sup>695</sup>

### HANFORCE PUSHES SOUTH TO THE LUKULEDI

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<sup>692</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, p. 141.

<sup>693</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 117-118; CAB 44/8, pp. 73-78..

<sup>694</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2116, 3 September 1917, Telegram G 095, van Deventer to CIGS, p. 168; CAB 44/8, p. 120.

<sup>695</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch I*, pp. 183-185.

While the advancing columns were pushing hard against the *Schutztruppe* in German East Africa, British intelligence had gathered much useful information about the strength and state of morale from the Portuguese side of the border. Captured prisoners revealed that at the end of July some 1800 Europeans remained in the field, of whom some 300 were sick and another 600 were employed on the lines of communication leaving less than 1,000 in the front line units; morale remained good.<sup>696</sup> This information was supplemented a week later by intelligence showing that resistance would continue and that German morale was being sustained by the reports of the enormous Allied shipping losses:

“...Prisoners estimate total European force in field including L of C and sick 1200. GW in firing line and out hospital thinks they will fight on owing enormous influence personality Von LETTOW. Enemy not recruiting askaris or ruga ruga. Consider askaris remaining good and prepared to fight on...”<sup>697</sup>

Reinforced with the Nigerian Brigade and Colonel Dyke's reserve brigade, Force HQ was well forward, co-located at Mssindy with the bulk of its units. It faced two enemy groupings, with the larger at Ndesa facing No 2 Column and the weaker at Mihambia opposite No 1 Column. The plan was to use the two columns to turn out the defenders from their strong positions, while the Nigerians were used to make a deep outflanking move to cut off their retreat to the River Mbemkuru. The greatest problem was the lack of water and the need to find, secure and develop suitable sources – as ever the best positions were usually defended.

The advance of Hanforce began early on 19 September, with No 1 Column moving towards Mihambia and a small flanking force making for Nitshi, some 12 miles south-west. A local outflanking action, despite the presence of unexpected depth defences, was successful and the all-important waterholes were captured by early afternoon. A further advance the next day achieved only slight success, and, as it appeared unlikely that Nitshi and its water supply could be reached, Hanforce HQ ordered Orr to return to Mihambia on

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<sup>696</sup> WO 158/478, 7 September 1917, Telegram No 127/5, Capt Cohen to Force Intelligence, 5 September.



21 September. Development of the water supplies and difficulties in moving rations forward delayed progress until late on the next day. Opposition was slight and two days of hard marching in hot sun with little food followed. By 24 September, the whole of No 1 Column was in Bweho Chini.<sup>698</sup>

The Nigerian Brigade, less one battalion, had been collected and reached Kilwa by 8 September and began the long move forward to Mssindy, some 80 miles distant. Leaving on 18 September, it was given the intermediate task of developing water sources some 20 miles south-west of Mssindy. On hearing the action at Mihambia on 20 September, the leading battalion moved south trying to find the track that led to the Mbemkuru River before the opposition arrived.<sup>699</sup> On 22 September, the small village of Bweho Chini was reached, and after a short, sharp fight, was hastily occupied. As this lay directly on the most probable escape route to Nahungu, the brigade closed up and began preparing its defences. A strong reconnaissance of two companies was sent out to the north-east, but hardly had it left Bweho chini than it was heavily engaged and nearly cut off. At the same time, a strong attack was launched against the eastern side of the hastily dug perimeter. The advanced force managed to fight its way back to the *boma*, having suffered heavy losses, while the German attack intensified. Charges were led against the northern and eastern faces of the defences and patrols were probing the other sides. By 1700 hours, the brigade was encircled and heavily engaged on all sides. Fighting was fierce and, just before sundown, a very strong attack, supported by heavy machine gun and rifle fire, crashed into the defences. The defenders just held and then a company counter-attack with fixed bayonets drove back the Germans. During the night a lull developed, and the time was used to collect the wounded, improve the trenches and to coral the frightened carriers. Ammunition was beginning to run short and there was no sign of the other columns.

The battle was resumed at 2130 hours by moonlight and continued throughout the evening. A number of attacks followed and firing continued, but the main impetus had been lost so that by midnight the action had been reduced to sniping while the attackers collected

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<sup>697</sup> WO 158/478, 14 September 1917, Telegram No 144-1, Cohen to Force Intelligence, 12 September.

<sup>698</sup> Orr, "Rumbo to the Rovuma", pp. 116-117.

<sup>699</sup> CAB 45/19, *Nigeria Regiment Record*, pp. 33-35.

their dead and wounded. At dawn, it became clear that the battle was over and the Germans had broken up into small parties, moving toward Nahungu. Considerable stores and ammunition were left behind while patrols later rounded up a number of stragglers. Pursuit was impossible owing to the lack of food and water, while the remaining porters were insufficient to carry either the wounded or first line supplies. Finally, the dead had to be collected and buried; a task that lasted all day.

On the morning of 24 September, a patrol linked up with the battered column and cable was re-laid. The wounded were evacuated up the road to Mihambia and the troops marched off to Bweho Juu and rejoined the rest of the brigade. It had been a severe test for both sides, but the Nigerians had retained the field of battle.<sup>700</sup>

In the meantime, No 2 Column and Dyke's Reserve Column were preparing to move on Ndessa. In order to avoid a frontal assault, Dyke and elements of No 2 Column would attack from the north, while the bulk of No 2 Column would move around the position to cut off escape to the west and south-west. With only 1,400 rifles and four guns to cover a frontage of over four miles, it was not an easy task.

In order to achieve success against the inevitable counter-attacks, a modification of lines of communication defence was used. As was usual, the Germans had a series of three to four defensive lines sited in depth and centred on the main road. To counter the strength of the defences, a new road, cut to a point some 3 miles west of Ndessa, was cleared by the flanking force. Protected by a small garrison, the remainder of the column marched up this track and then deployed facing the direction of the enemy. After a pre-arranged advance, the left hand battalion peeled off half left, moving on a compass bearing for a specified distance, then halted, and re-aligned itself with the original direction of advance. It then began constructing a *boma* as silently as possible. In the meantime, the remainder of the column kept advancing to a pre-determined distance, and then repeated the actions of the first battalion. Finally, the fourth and reserve battalion prepared its position to the rear of the right forward unit. After four and a half hours of marching and construction, the *boma* was



ready and the artillery opened up on the defences at 1030 hours. Assailed from the front and taken from an unexpected left flank, the defences were not held long and the Germans attempted to break out to the west. A strong attack was launched against the right hand battalion of the *boma* but was repulsed, followed by another attempt, this time on the left hand unit at 1900 hours. It too failed, and a final drive on the centre of the British line was unsuccessful about midnight. This marked the end of the Ndessa position and a number of stores were abandoned as the Germans withdrew hastily to the south-east.<sup>701</sup>

The loss of both the Ndessa and Mihambia positions increased the pressure on the Germans. Retreating rapidly to the south-east and then turning south-west along the track between Mihambia and Nahungu, the combined detachment suffered heavily when it ran into the block at Bweho Chini and the Nigerian Brigade. As a consequence of the hasty retreat, No 2 Column captured the empty position at Mawerenje together with food stocks, 10,000 rounds of ammunition and a bomb factory.

The next objective was Nahungu. The defences in the north were collapsing and momentum was with the British. After the main columns linked up around Bweho Chini on 24 September, the next steps were taken. No 2 Column went south towards Nakiu on the Mbemkuru while No 1 Column and the Nigerian Brigade pressed south-west to Nahungu. After several days of marching and pushing back rearguards, Nahungu fell without difficulty.

Once Nahungu was secured, attention turned to pushing south of the Mbemkuru. The enemy had taken up a strong position at Ngambururu, some 15 miles to the south-west of Nahungu. Von Lettow had marched up with his reserve, reinforcing the somewhat demoralised force and had developed a very strong position along the road. The British, realising that such defences would be difficult to take as well as wanting to link up with Linforce as quickly as possible, decided to launch a deep right flanking movement aimed at seizing Ruponda and then Lukuledi. No 2 Column was given the task of locating and fixing

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<sup>700</sup> CAB 45/19, *Nigeria Regiment Record*, pp. 36-39. Casualties were eight British and 127 Africans killed or wounded. A total of 16 Germans and 87 *Askaris* were found dead on the field of battle.

<sup>701</sup> Ridgway, "With No 2 Column", II, pp. 248-249.

the opposition at Ngambururu in order to cover the others. Again, the tactic of cutting a road about a 1,000 yards parallel to the existing one was used, together with intensive reconnaissances, including aeroplanes.

The tactic worked, for as soon as von Lettow began to withdraw his detachment to deal with the pressing matters in the south, No 2 Column was able to drive out the rearguards in early October and push south. It was pressed for another 30 miles, going via Ruangwa and ending at Mkoe, a small village on the edge of the waterless plain that led down to the Mkemburu Valley. Ultimately, the advance was too successful, as the forward columns literally outran their lines of supply; on 10 October No 1 and No 2 Columns were recalled to Ruponda and Ruangwa respectively in order to build up sufficient stocks of food. Water, too was in very short supply and would be a major constraint on the final link-up with Linforce.<sup>702</sup>

### **THE ADVANCE UP THE LUKULEDI**

In early September, General van Deventer issued general instructions to his principal commanders. In them, he expressed the belief that the powers of the enemy's resistance were perhaps over-estimated and that one or two serious reverses would bring the end of the campaign nearer. He recognised that transport would be the critical limiting factor and that every effort would be made to improve communications. On the tactical front, he instructed that frontal attacks should be avoided as being slow, costly and indecisive. He wanted formations to seize positions in the enemy's flanks and rear and to defend them. This would force the Germans to attack and return the advantage to the British. However, as a precursor to any operations he required extensive reconnaissance to be carried out by long range patrols, aircraft observation and the Intelligence Scouts. Finally, he expected the forthcoming operations to be continuous and without pause. By making great sacrifices now, he hoped to draw the campaign to an end within two or three months.<sup>703</sup>

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<sup>702</sup> Ridgway, "With No 2 Column", II, pp. 250-253; Orr, "Rumbo to the Rovuma", p. 120; WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 14 October 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 7 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 14 October; and 15 October 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 6 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 15 October.



With the advance of Hanforce southward, attention again turned to Lindi. It had been on the defensive since 21 August and had received some rest and reinforcement. Equally important was the belief that the Germans had reduced their forces in the area in order to deal with the threat to the north. Intelligence estimated that the British now held local numerical superiority. On 4 September, GHQ instructed Linforce that the next advance should be to turn Narunyu from the south. This would involve a strong column moving up the right bank of the River Lukuledi, with a crossing near Mtua and the seizing of a position astride the German lines of communication. However, given the increasing size and importance of the force, it was decided to send Major General Beves to take command, and he left Dar-es-Salaam by ship and arrived in Lindi on 9 September. He then reorganised the force into four groups. The main striking force was based on two columns, each roughly the size of a brigade, under the command of Brigadier General O'Grady and Colonel Taylor. In keeping with the organisation of Hanforce, the columns were renamed No 3 Col and No 4 Col respectively. A Force Reserve was created and the remaining troops were placed on lines of communication duties.<sup>704</sup>

On 18 September, Beves submitted his plans to GHQ for approval. The proposed organisation was as follows: No 3 Column would have three battalions totalling 1,300 rifles, 17 machine guns, 18 Lewis guns, two mountain guns and four Stokes mortars; No 4 Column would have four battalions and a machine gun company with 1,250 rifles, 29 machine guns, 29 Lewis guns, four mountain guns, and four Stokes mortars; Force Reserve had two battalions each of 800 rifles, 12 machine guns, 16 Lewis guns and six guns.<sup>705</sup> As a preliminary to the planned move, a number of reconnaissance and fighting patrols were launched around the Narunyu position supplemented by aerial observation and artillery bombardments. On 8 September a patrol had found a good crossing on the River Lukuledi near Mtua and this became the first objective for the advance.

Operation orders were issued on 20 September. No 3 Column was instructed to make the flanking move to the crossing site in the Lukuledi valley while No 4 Column was

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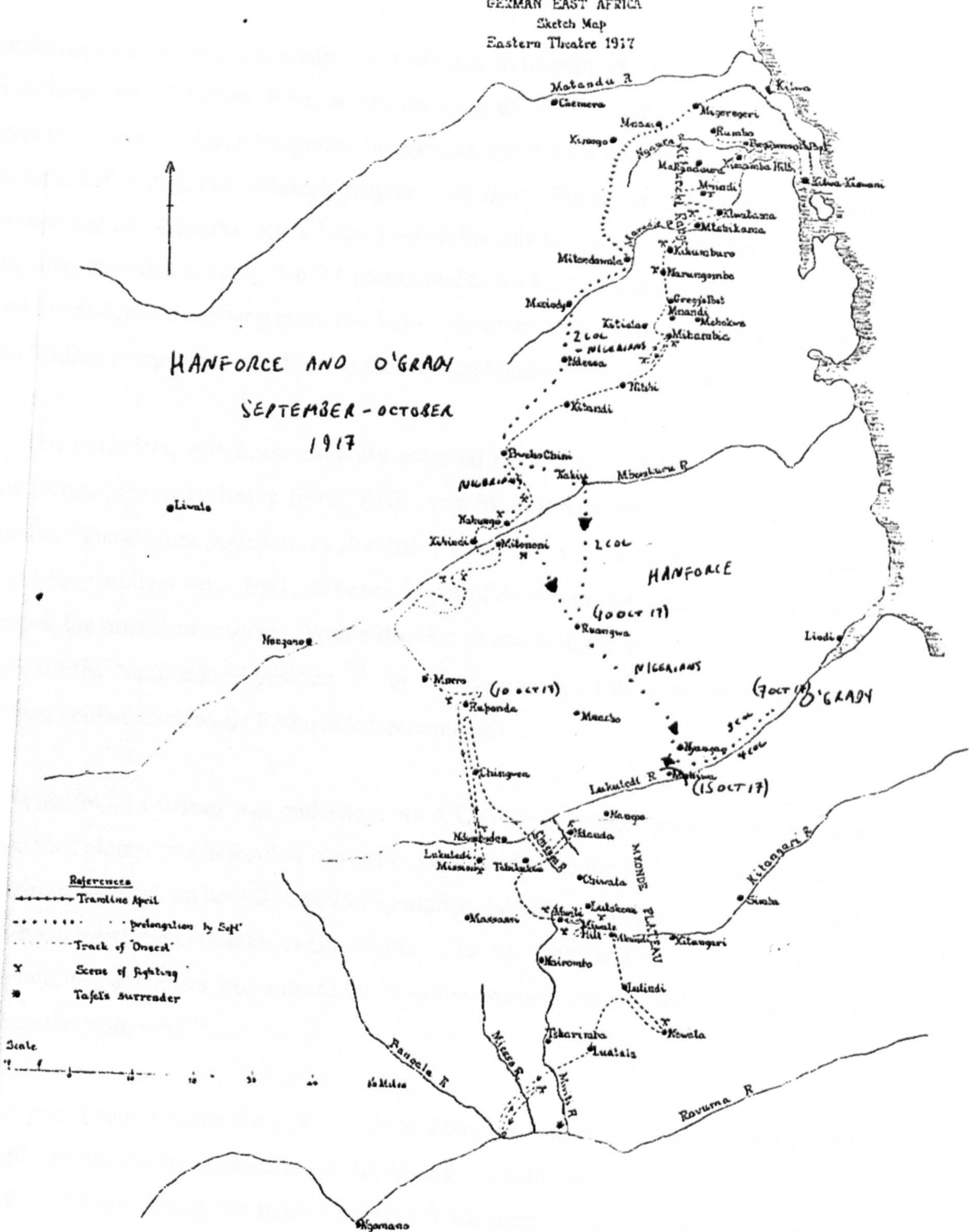
<sup>703</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 2 September 1917, Appendix A3, Telegram G 059, BGGS to Hanforce and Lincol, 2 September.

<sup>704</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 29-30. Two battalions were sent to Lindi on 8/9 and 19/20 September.

<sup>705</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 31.



GERMAN EAST AFRICA  
Sketch Map  
Eastern Theatre 1917



(To face 2)

• • • • • ▶ BRITISH COLUMNS  
( GERMAN DEFENCES

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to remain opposite Narunyu, in readiness to advance in its support. The leading elements of No 3 Column set off before dawn on the morning of 23 September. Lying up to avoid observation during the day, a temporary bridge was constructed over the river. The advance was resumed after nightfall, although progress was slow. Finally halting in the early hours of the morning of 24 September, O'Grady again had his troops lay up for the day. Again starting after dark that evening, No 3 Column had to hack a trail out of the virgin bush and reached the designated crossing point just before dawn on 25 September. Without pausing, the two leading companies waded across the river and pushed onto the main road.

The defenders, *Abt Rothe*, initially assessed this move as being merely a patrol. Quickly proven wrong by heavy firing, Rothe sent his reserves forward to prevent further penetration. These were sufficient to stop the attackers,<sup>706</sup> who then started to dig in and called in heavy artillery fire. By 1300 hours, hopes of dislodging the crossing began to fade and despite the arrival of reserves, Wahle decided to abandon the Narunju position and to fall back on the Nambalika's position.<sup>707</sup> In the evening, the two guns followed by *Abt Kröger* were pulled back while Rothe acted as rearguard.

While No 3 Column was underway, No 4 Column had been cutting paths through the dense sisal plantations in front of Narunyu. Artillery fire on the main defensive position covered this slow work on both 24 and 25 September; the attack was due to go in once No 3 Column had closed the Germans' escape route. This was achieved on 26 September, but was too late; the defenders had slipped away to the west during the night, evading No 3 Column on the main road.<sup>708</sup>

A patrol soon located the new positions along the line of the Nengedi Stream and Beves ordered his troops to close in on the enemy. Advancing up the thickly vegetated Chirumaka Hill and along the main road, No 3 Column ran into a number of strong positions and counter-attacks. By nightfall, the whole Column was committed as was the

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<sup>706</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 32-33.

<sup>707</sup> MS Boell, N14/32, 28. Kapitel, p. 2582.

<sup>708</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 28 September 1917, Appendix B, Telegram G 378, van Deventer to CIGS, 28 September.

lead battalion of No 4. Casualties were relatively heavy, but the ridge was cleared and a final counter-attack was successfully beaten off.<sup>709</sup>

After a day for reorganisation and further planning, General Beves ordered the advance to resume on 30 September. No 3 Column moved along the existing road around the northern end and western side of Chirumaka Hill as well as along the newly cut track. Troops on the latter route pushed back German outposts, launching a battalion attack at 1400 hours, driving back the defenders. On the existing road, a Nigerian battalion had worked around the northern slopes of Chirumaka with considerable difficulty but faced no effective opposition. They reached their objective, a track junction, and rapidly dug in, while one company was sent further forward. It was heavily attacked at 1100 hours, and several hours later it was forced back to the main body. The enemy followed the withdrawing company closely until it reached the main defensive position, whereupon a vigorous attack was launched. The defences were sound and the Germans were unable to make any headway although heavy firing continued until dark. O'Grady sent a battalion to reinforce the hard-pressed Nigerians, but it only managed to arrive after dark owing to the difficult terrain. By this time, however, the enemy had broken off contact completely and had slipped off in the darkness.

Overall, the day's immediate objective, the occupation of Chirumaka Hill, had been achieved and it offered excellent observation of the Nengedi Valley for many miles. However, as so often happened in attacks through thick bush, casualties had not been light and the enemy had got away. General Beves cautiously decided to delay further advance until Hanforce was in closer proximity.<sup>710</sup>

### **THE ADVANCE TO NYANGAO**

If the British were to catch and destroy the German main body in battle, the Lindi-Massassi road that ran east-west, largely following the course of the River Lukeledi,

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<sup>709</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 38. The British casualties were 13 killed, 107 wounded, and six missing. The Germans lost five killed, 32 wounded and one missing.

<sup>710</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 36-37. The British casualties were 30 killed, 75 wounded and five missing. The Germans lost four dead and 23 wounded.



offered the most favourable opportunity. Massassi was an important supply centre and communication node that linked Songea to the west and Newala in the south.<sup>711</sup> The difficulty of the terrain and lack of alternative routes made the road of considerable operational importance to both sides. Hanforce had made good progress in the north and the time for a co-ordinated move with Linforce now seemed to have arrived.

General Beves was in local command of the operations and believed that the Germans had eight to nine companies between the Nengedi River and Mahiwa, of which six were around Mtama. His plan was to have No 3 Column make a frontal push from the east, while No 4 Column advanced up the north bank of the Lukuledi River, crossing at Mputo and then engaging Mtama from south. In the meantime, the Nigerians in the north were to cut the Lindi-Massassi road at Mahiwa and then move north-eastwards into the German rear. They were to prevent the enemy from withdrawing, while Nos 1 and 2 Columns moved south on Massassi. Concurrently, cavalry patrols would range freely to find and destroy as many food supplies and supply depots as possible.<sup>712</sup> The plan was a bold one, but required a speedy advance, close co-operation between widely-spread columns, and aggressiveness.

In the first week of October, a large number of patrols had been sent out to locate the enemy positions. By 7 October, O'Grady had gained a foothold on the far bank of the Nengedi River, launching a reinforced battalion onto the high ground overlooking the river. Supported by artillery fire, the infantry reached their objective, but were hit by a strong counter-attack. Sensing the situation's importance, another unit was pushed forward. This was hit by a strong German counter-attack and the high ground was lost. Fighting stabilised with the arrival of further British reinforcements and the bridgehead on the western side of the Nengedi River was retained. This was followed by a resumption of the advance on Mtama the next day. While O'Grady's troops continued to progress, the resistance was

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<sup>711</sup> CAB 45/72, Map 9508, "The Strategic Situation 20<sup>th</sup> December 1917"; WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 23 September 1917, Appendix A25, "Instructions to O.C. 25<sup>th</sup> Cavalry", 16 September.

<sup>712</sup> Downes, *With the Nigerians*, p. 197.

increasingly stiff and it was becoming clear that the Germans intended to fight hard and cause delay.<sup>713</sup>

In light of the strong defences, Beves now decided not to press a direct attack on Mtama and to encircle it instead. On 12 October, he sent No 4 Column, now under the command of Colonel Tytler, marching west and crossing the Lukuledi below the confluence with the Nengedi stream. After an arduous march lasting several days, the river was crossed and Mtama was entered in the afternoon of 15 October, but the defenders had withdrawn. At the same time, No 3 Column had been moving west along the road, pushing back the German rearguards until they linked up with No 4 Column near Mtama. Van Deventer was anxious to give his opponents no rest and kept pressing Beves to maintain unrelenting pressure.<sup>714</sup>

On 13 October, Beves made a major alteration to the plan, issuing his orders by wireless. The Nigerian Brigade was to march north-west of Mahiwa while sending one battalion to cut the Lindi-Massassi road south-west of that village with the remaining units to attack Mahiwa on 15 October. At the same time, No 3 and No 4 Columns would continue their convergence on Mtama. The die was set for the major, possibly decisive, engagement that van Deventer had been seeking since resuming offensive operations.

## THE BATTLE OF MAHIWA

In his haste to cut-off the Germans, General Beves had greatly underestimated the time required for the Nigerian Brigade to reach its objectives. They had only reached Namupa Mission by late on 14 October and lost direction in the thick bush and darkness. Exhausted, the column dug-in for the night unaware of the exact location of the enemy.<sup>715</sup> Colonel Mann, now in temporary command, was concerned about the vulnerability of his baggage train, and decided to leave it at Namupa Mission. He also had serious misgivings

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<sup>713</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 39-40.

<sup>714</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch I*, p. 187; CAB 44/10, pp. 41-42. Cites Telegram 552, BGGS to Linforce 15 October 1917; "Chief wishes you to push on now as fast as possible towards Massassi. Give enemy no time to make defensive positions and make every endeavour to capture his guns. Enemy is now much shaken, and a determined advance on your line combined with operations outlined in my 549 will probably have decisive effect."

<sup>715</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 42-43.



about his role as his own intelligence pointed to a much stronger enemy at Mahiwa than that assumed by General Beves.<sup>716</sup>

Early on 15 October, a single battalion left the brigade camp to carry out its task of blocking the Lindi-Massassi road at Nyangao. Coming under sporadic fire shortly after leaving, the battalion pushed back the rear guards until just two miles short of Nyangao. After a serious fight, supported by artillery, the Nigerians drove back their opponents and pushed on to their objective. There, they dug in and prepared to meet Wahle's force. In the meantime, the brigade's main body, two battalions strong, left at 0530 hours marching south towards Mahiwa.<sup>717</sup> The advanced guard of two companies encountered heavier resistance almost from the outset, although the enemy rearguards were forced back toward the Mahiwa River.

Despite the evidence of opposition, Beves instructed Mann to press on as quickly as possible. By 1100 hours, the leading company had nearly reached the Mahiwa River when it came under heavy fire. This was clearly no rearguard, but a substantial German position. At this point, the lead battalion consolidated and began digging in immediately, receiving a further company as reinforcements. However, this delay was not received well by Beves and Mann was again instructed to press forward. Realising that a frontal advance was not possible, he sent a company off to try and find a route on the eastern flank of the enemy. Leaving at 1645 hours, it was only able to advance before being hit by a strong frontal attack which forced it to withdraw. The cost had been heavy with some 40 per cent of the company becoming casualties, especially officers and NCOs.<sup>718</sup>

The Nigerians were now in a difficult situation with the Germans holding the dominating feature of Mremba Hill. The newly-arrived *Abt von Ruckteschell* immediately launched a heavy attack on the main defensive positions from the south and south-east. The battalion desperately clung to its ground and fended off the attacks until

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<sup>716</sup> Downes, *With the Nigerians*, p. 197.

<sup>717</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 44. The main body totalled 1,100 rifles, 16 machine and 16 Lewis guns, two Stokes mortars and two 2.95" guns.

<sup>718</sup> Downes, *With the Nigerians*, pp. 198-201. British casualties totalled 63; CAB 45/19, *Nigeria Regiment Record*, pp. 47-48; Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 373-374.

a lull around 1800 hours. Just after dusk, a sudden attack on the eastern flank threatened to overrun the defenders, but again they held on with both sides suffering heavily.

By the evening of 15 October, it was clear to Mann that a large German force was moving forward to attack the Nigerian positions. Furthermore, his battalion at Nyangao and baggage column at Namupa were also under threat. With the heavy expenditure of small arms ammunition, supplies were running low and concentration seemed essential; he pulled his troops together onto a hill overlooking the Mahiwa River. He then radioed Beves to tell him that both water and ammunition were running short and to ask for the return of his detached unit. This was agreed and the battalion was instructed to rejoin the main body at first light on 16 October.<sup>719</sup>

The situation worsened overnight as *Abt Göring* with two companies had moved around the Nigerians, cutting the road and telephone line leading to Namupa Mission.<sup>720</sup> On the afternoon of 16 October, two guns were brought onto Mremba Hill and began bombarding the trenches. The fire raked the rear of the trenches, forcing the defenders to abandon them after suffering heavy casualties. After the Nigerians had been under the relentless bombardment for some time, the artillery lifted its fire and the infantry surged towards the defences from the east and south. The dazed Nigerians managed to stagger back to re-occupy the empty trenches moments before the Germans arrived. A heavy fire-fight ensued with *Abt von Ruckteschell* being halted about 100 yards from the forward positions. Unable to break in, the attackers withdrew after an hour.<sup>721</sup>

As ordered, the blocking battalion returned to Namupa Mission on 16 October, where it took control of the transport, numbering some 3,000 non-combatants in all. The battalion then marched to the relief of its comrades. Hearing the firing, the advanced guard ran straight into *Abt Göring*, which was on its flanking move. Heavily outnumbered and reduced by serious casualties, it was driven back towards Namupa Mission. The rest of the battalion could do little as it was split between escorting the carriers and providing the

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<sup>719</sup> Downes, *With the Nigerians*, pp. 202-203; CAB 45/19, *Nigeria Regiment Record*, pp. 49-51; CAB 44/10, pp. 45-46.

<sup>720</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 30. Kapitel, p. 2802.

<sup>721</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 46-47; Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 374.



rearguard. *Abt Göring* was now joined by *Abt Köhl*, and numbering nearly seven companies they launched a strong attack onto the extended Nigerians.<sup>722</sup> The fighting was bitter and very close range, with the two mountain guns firing at point blank. At the same time, the terrified carriers panicked and attempted to flee only to be held by the fixed bayonets of the rear guard. Desperate not to lose the brigade's reserve ammunition, the troops managed to collect the majority of dropped loads and to move slowly back towards Namupa Mission. This place was reached after dark and order was gradually restored. It had been a bad day with the battalion losing a quarter of its strength and a number of loads lost.<sup>723</sup>

Meanwhile, Linforce was still some way to the east. No 3 Column had left Mtama early on 16 October and reached Nyangao by lunchtime. Unable to find the expected battalion, O'Grady heard the distant sounds of battle that marked a heavy engagement. He then received a message from General Beves informing him that three enemy companies were reported west of Nyangao and it would be up to his judgement whether he attacked immediately or awaited the arrival of No 4 Column. Without hesitating, O'Grady ordered No 4 Column to close with the enemy along the road, while No 3 Column moved north against the German flank positions.

These moves took place in the late afternoon with No 4 Column making good initial progress. However, Wahle reinforced his forward troops, sending in a counter-attack that stopped the advance. Back at Mtua, Beves received a report from the Nigerians at 1600 hours and despite their situation, he ordered them to attack and drive the enemy south along the road. He wanted a co-ordinated attack with Linforce, but the Nigerians' critical shortage of ammunition and physical weakness from lack of food made it impossible.<sup>724</sup>

O'Grady's columns were straining to reach the beleaguered Nigerians. They had marched through the night while great teams of carriers had dragged two 5" howitzers forward. He had been reinforced by a battalion from Force Reserve which was

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<sup>722</sup> CAB 44/10, pp.48-49.

<sup>723</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 49-50. The British casualties were 217 killed and wounded; CAB 45/19, *Nigerian Regiment Record*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>724</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 51-52 WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2224, 17 October 1917, Telegram 10 WO, van Deventer to CIGS.

immediately sent to relieve Namupa Mission. He then followed briefly up the Namupa road with his own three battalions, before turning south-west and moving cross country.<sup>725</sup>

By mid-morning on 17 October, No 4 Column was attacking *Abt Wahle* along the road, supported by machine gun, Stokes mortar and howitzer fire. The Germans retaliated with fire from their own howitzer and a hot battle developed. O'Grady heard the heavy firing and ordered No 3 Column to move in support of its comrades. Extremely dense bush slowed movement and the infantry ran into the enemy at 1100 hours. The leading units were rapidly drawn into the firing line with several attacks and counter-attacks raging over the next three hours. Finally, in late afternoon, O'Grady committed his reserve battalion just in time to thwart a major German attack and restore the situation. His forces now fully committed, No 3 Column could advance no further.<sup>726</sup>

Back on the main road, the fortunes of No 4 Column waxed and waned. On hearing the firing of O'Grady's troops, Colonel Tytler had renewed the attack on the German positions. By 1530 hours, both his leading units were hit by a strong counter-attack on their front and left flank. They were unable to hold against the fresh opponents and the day's gains had to be abandoned. A counter-attack by his reserve then stopped the enemy attack and the situation stabilised. After dark, No 4 Column returned to the area of its start positions of that morning.<sup>727</sup>

Elsewhere on 17 October, von Lettow renewed his efforts to destroy the Nigerian Brigade. Heavy rifle and machine gun fire was directed on the trenches, eventually destroying the vital wireless mast. Now without communications, the only indication of the situation was the sound of firing to the south-east. No attack was pressed and the defenders clung on with grim determination. A break-out was out of the question and the only option was for Linforce to continue its drive through the encircling force. However, with Force HQ still far in the rear at Mtua, Beves was unable to exert detailed control of the operations

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<sup>725</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 53-54.

<sup>726</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 55-56.

<sup>727</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 57. During the 17th Lettow had sent forward reinforcements at intervals to strengthen Wahle's force but pulled most of them back into reserve after darkness; Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 375-376.



and O'Grady was again given local tactical control. He then issued instructions for an attack at dawn the next morning by all units of No 3 and No 4 Columns.<sup>728</sup>

Early on 18 October, O'Grady launched the main body of No 3 Column through the bush while the attached battalion was sent to link up with the Nigerians. Concurrently, No 4 Column surged forward with two battalions leading. Engaged heavily by the defenders, the assault troops drove them out and began to dig in rapidly. The British howitzers and mountain guns soon came into action, suppressing the Germans to their front. However, the advance of No 3 Column was soon checked by a well-sited machine gun to its front. O'Grady made a personal reconnaissance to his left flank, guiding several units in the confusion and rallying some shaken troops. Now seriously weakened, the left flank of his column was rolled up by an enemy counter-attack and pushed back some distance. While the situation was far from happy, the relievers brought the good news that the Nigerian Brigade had been successfully extracted.<sup>729</sup>

To the south, No 4 Column was not having much greater success in breaking through the defenders. The initial advance had resulted in German reinforcements and a heavy fire-fight developed. The lead units had lost heavily in officers, and at 1100 hours a strong attack forced both battalions once more back to its starting positions. As they withdrew, the British howitzers came into action and inflicted a number of casualties on the attackers who abandoned any pursuit. The two sides then took up hasty defensive positions on opposite banks, everyone being exhausted and having fought each other to a standstill.<sup>730</sup>

Unexpectedly, the main opportunity of 18 October was with the Nigerian Brigade. Its patrols had discovered a gap in the Germans' encirclement and Mann ordered a breakout when the battalion from No 3 Column linked up with his patrols. It promptly moved forward, taking over the trenches while the defenders marched out, harassed only by sniper fire, and returned to Nyangao unimpeded. The relief was successful and crisis was over.

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<sup>728</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 59, footnote 1.

<sup>729</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 60-63; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>730</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 64-66; Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 375; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, pp. 27-28.

By late afternoon, Beves was some six miles from the battle lines, still too far to be in direct touch with events. O'Grady adjudged that the retirement of No 4 Column left his left flank exposed while all his troops were much weakened by the strenuous fighting and casualties suffered. Beves ordered him to move back into conformity with No 4 Column at 1700 hours and to set up a defensive line. The move had barely started when a German attack threatened the situation. However, the infantry, well supported by mountain guns, held off the attack with little problem and the withdrawal continued without further interference.

This final counter-attack marked the end of the battle of Nyangao or Mahiwa, as it was called by the British and Germans respectively. It had been the bloodiest battle of the entire campaign, with the British fighting units suffering losses of between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of their strength while ammunition supplies were nearly exhausted. The Germans did not get off lightly either as *Abt Wahle* lost 30 per cent of its strength, while *Abt Göring*, *Köhl*, and *von Ruckteschell* all lost about 16 per cent.<sup>731</sup> The evacuation of casualties, reorganisation and resupply of material would take some time, and for the immediate future the advance of Linforce had halted. Beves himself arrived at the forward positions on 19 October, but his position had been seriously weakened by the failure of the offensive. He was recalled the same day to Dar-es-Salaam in order to make a personal report to the commander-in-chief and was subsequently sacked.<sup>732</sup>

Mahiwa had been an opportunity for both sides to achieve a great success, but neither attained it. It was tactically indecisive and losses were very heavy, with each side losing nearly a third of its fighting strength. Von Lettow had his long-awaited chance to defeat the British in detail, as they had fought with insufficient co-ordination and were too far apart for mutual support. Beves had ignored the dangers of too hasty an advance without knowledge of the enemy positions and blundered into a trap. Then at the end, the withdrawal of the Nigerians for food enabled the defenders to escape unscathed when Beves might have been able to hit them with his other columns. Throughout the battle, he was too

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<sup>731</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 72; Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 377. The British suffered 1,455 casualties as compared to 611 Germans.



far in the rear and had a very imperfect grasp of the conditions facing his troops. On the other hand, the Germans had suffered major losses and had consumed a great deal of their ammunition. Von Lettow despite having a very strong initial advantage, had been unable to destroy either the trapped Nigerians or No 3 Column. His desire to inflict a heavy defeat had drawn him into an attritional slugging match that the British desired and that he could ill afford. Despite his later comments about the scale of his victory, his strategy of prolonging the campaign would not survive another such battle. At the operational level, von Lettow had disrupted van Deventer's planned advance and slowed down his concentration of forces. Linforce was essentially paralysed for three weeks at a time when its presence might have been of vital importance and the battle therefore enabled von Lettow to march away to reinforce Major Kraut much further to the west.<sup>733</sup>

### THE PUSH TO THE PORTUGUESE BORDER

While the serious fighting around Mahiwa was underway, the rest of van Deventer's columns were pushing ahead. Following his plan of cutting off the enemy's food supplies, the newly arrived cavalry was causing a great deal of trouble for the Germans. Hanforce had reached Ruponda on 11 October, capturing a number of sick whites and askaris in the hospital as well as some 2,000 loads of grain.<sup>734</sup> The Belgians had taken Mahenge and were now in the process of advancing towards Liwale, while one battalion had landed at Kilwa and cut a road from Mssindy to Liwale before joining its comrades. The Portuguese, too, resolved to help, through the despatch of three columns across the Rovuma towards Newala.<sup>735</sup> On 17 October, No 2 Column had driven *Abt Köhl* back to Mkoe while No 1 Column had reached Chingwea, en-route for Lukuledi Mission.

One of the reasons for the advance on Mahiwa had been logistical; Kilwa was too distant to be effective as a supply centre and it was intended to switch Hanforce to the Lindi lines of communication as soon as the road to Massassi was cleared. The check at Mahiwa

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<sup>732</sup> CAB 44/10, p. 67; WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2229, 20 October 1917, Telegram OA 559, van Deventer to CIGS. Van Deventer was dissatisfied with Beves's performance and removed him from command, although he did acknowledge that the latter had been suffering from malaria which may have affected his judgement.

<sup>733</sup> CAB 44/10, pp. 70-71.

<sup>734</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 11 October 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 4 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 11 October.

<sup>735</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 13 October 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 6 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 13 October.

forced van Deventer to reconsider his plans. In the short term, No 1 Column had to return north to Ruponda from its forward position at Lukuledi Mission shortly after the battle was broken off. An operational pause of about two weeks now ensued as the British brought up food and ammunition preparatory for the next phase of the advance.<sup>736</sup>

Water difficulties were a major constraint on operations as sources were scarce in the regions inland. However, the construction of roads and rail links continued at top speed with the railhead reaching some six miles south-west of Mtua by 26 October.<sup>737</sup> With Linforce still slowed down by reorganisation and reconnaissance, it was up to Norforce and the Belgians to maintain the pressure. This was consistently applied, although the approaching rainy season in the Mahenge area forced the phased withdrawal of the bulk of the Belgians from there. By 30 October, Norforce had taken Liwale and the Belgians were still attacking near Ligombazi. Importantly, the motor road between Mssindy and Liwale was nearing completion and a Belgian column was approaching Liwale.<sup>738</sup>

At the same time, and against General van Deventer's wishes, the new Portuguese Expeditionary Force was beginning a preliminary move north of the Rovuma, with the aim of taking Newala, Matua and Nangyadi.<sup>739</sup> The move was unwelcome mainly because GHQ had a complete lack of confidence in the ability of the Portuguese to succeed. Nonetheless, the British commander-in-chief tried to co-ordinate the Portuguese moves with his own advance, following the pause imposed by the battle of Mahiwa.

Throughout October, General Northey in the south and west had maintained steady pressure as ordered. Shorthose sent a strong detachment north-east from Tunduru to the Mohesi River. By mid-October, it had moved forward to Abdallah-Kwa-Nanga, which was in the centre of a fertile district some 50 miles south of Liwale. From there, it moved up to Liwale itself, taking the village on 29 October together with some 24 whites. Colonel Hawthorn continued to push along the Luwegu River and by 5 October had established himself on the north bank east of the enemy's position. He attacked on 16

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<sup>736</sup> Orr, Colonel G M, "Von Lettow's Escape into Portuguese East Africa, 1917", *Army Quarterly*, XIII, (1925), pp. 50-51.

<sup>737</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 26 October 1917. Appendix B, Telegram 17 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 26 October.

<sup>738</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 30 October 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 21 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 30 October.



October, but the enemy was forewarned and withdrew down the Luwegu River, having first destroyed his two remaining field guns. Hawthorn followed up relentlessly and by the end of the month both sides were along the river at a point south of Liganduka's.<sup>740</sup>

The combined British-Belgian pressure was felt most strongly by the Germans, and by 28 October the local commander, Captain Tafel, was reported to be withdrawing all forces from the Mahenge area towards Kahambu. Desertions were numerous and many started to surrender to the Belgians in large numbers. It was evident that the whole enemy front in the west was giving way, but Allied supply difficulties and long lines of communication prevented the full exploitation of the situation.

While the pursuit to the south of Mahenge was underway, Colonel Huyghé arrived at Kilwa on 27 October to discuss future operations with General van Deventer. With Mahenge secure and his troops in pursuit of the Germans to the south, the discussions centred on supply problems during the coming rainy season. Having learnt the lessons of the previous year, it was decided to abandon the advance from Mahenge to Liwale and to withdraw the bulk of the Belgian forces before the roads became impassable at the end of November. This would leave a garrison of only two Belgian battalions in Mahenge and spelt the end of offensive operations in the west. Furthermore, if the troops there ran out of food or were attacked in strength, they were given advance approval to withdraw north of the River Ulanga; van Deventer was not taking any chances.

However, he was keen to use the Belgian *RO* to support his advance in the east. It was to be reinforced to a strength of about 2,000 rifles with artillery and services. Under previous arrangements, the *RO*, led by Commandant Hérion, had left Dar-es-Salaam by sea for Kilwa, landing there on 13 October. It was then to move forward to Mitondo where it would halt and assist with route maintenance and the clearance of any German stragglers. If the area were clear, then the *RO* was to push onto Liwale where it would receive further instructions from the British in dealing with *Abt Tafel*. Finally, as soon as the rains

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<sup>739</sup> WO 158/478, 13 October 1917, Telegram 92, Colonel Macdonell to Genstaff, 13 October.

<sup>740</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch I*, p. 189.

commenced, the motor transport used to support the Kilossa-Mahenge line would be transferred to work the Kilwa-Liwale route in order to sustain the *RO*.<sup>741</sup>

Following the meeting, the retirement of the Belgian main body began on 1 November and only a regiment remained south of Mahenge. By mid-November, only a small force of some 2,100 rifles was left in and around Mahenge. At this time, the *RO* had been sent to Liwale to help push *Abt Tafel* into the British net. On 25 November, all remaining Belgian forces around Mahenge were recalled to Kilossa and the occupied territory was handed over to their British allies there. By 2 December, the bulk of the forward western troops had reached the railway where they would shelter for the wet season.<sup>742</sup>

### THE SITUATION IN NOVEMBER 1917

Anxious to wind up the campaign, van Deventer ordered his troops forward with all speed. At the same time, work on lines of communication continued with the Lindi-Massassi route taking over from the 200 mile link between Hanforce and Kilwa. Similarly, the Lukuledi-Mwiti road was much improved, while the tramline now reached Mtama. The sappers and miners, two Belgian battalions and the whole of No 4 Column were engaged in further road building. The newly formed Mounted Column was also hard at work in attempting to cut the Germans' lines of supply and destroying food depots.

By early November, the situation was as follows. *Abt Otto* with about 6 companies was facing Norforce and a Belgian column in the area of Liganduka's. *Tafel* remained in overall command of the forces in the northern area, controlling some 15 companies. In the south, von Lettow disposed of about 25 companies, with seven holding the Mahiwa area, one to two at Mnacho, two mainly convalescent companies at Newala and the main body of 12-13 held centrally between Nangoo and Lukuledi.<sup>743</sup> Indications that *Tafel* was moving southwards to join von Lettow were evident to the British; accordingly the bulk of Norforce

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<sup>741</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 219-221. See also *Annexe No 48, Conférence de Kilwa, à Kilwa de ss. <Pemba>, le 27 octobre 1917*, p.387-388; WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2311, 25 November 1917, Telegram 42 WO, van Deventer to CIGS.

<sup>742</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 221-222.



now swung to the south-east in an attempt to head off any move towards Portuguese territory.<sup>744</sup>

The advance resumed on November with Hanforce marching southward to its former positions around Lukuledi Mission, arriving there on 8 November. Further east, Linforce, now suitably reorganised and brought up to strength, began pushing Wahle's rearguard south-west the following day. No 1 and 2 Columns wheeled south-east on the same day, moving down the Lukuledi Mission-Chiwata track and making good progress. On the flank, the Mounted Column was ordered to seize Mwiti about 5 miles south of Chiwata in order to deprive von Lettow of a great deal of food and supplies, but also to cut the tracks leading south to the Rovuma.<sup>745</sup> However, No 1 Column was then ordered to move north-east to take the village of Ndanda, on the northern edge of the Makonde Plateau in the belief that Wahle's rearguard would have to pass through there.

The movements of the Germans remained unclear to their opponents – *Abt von Lieberman* was fighting around Ndanda while Wahle was moving south via a little-known trail from Nangoo to Chiwata. Once again, the lack of detailed topographic information had slowed down the British advance. Realising the changed circumstances, GHQ recast its plans on the night of 10/11 November. Orders were issued for a strong northerly drive on Chiwata, using No 3 Column from Ndanda and the Nigerian Brigade from Nangoo, supported by an advance from the west by No 2 Column, while No 1 and the Mounted Column swept south-eastwards towards Kitangari, deep in the enemy's rear. This bold move was based on intelligence that indicated Kitangari as being von Lettow's next objective.<sup>746</sup> However, once again misunderstanding struck; the Kitangari on British maps was not the same as that on the Germans', who were headed for Simba's, some nine miles to the north-east of the former place.

In the meantime, the pressure continued. Late on 14 November, No 1 Column had seized the Mwiti defile and blocked any escape route to the south-west. The Mounted

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<sup>743</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 2 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 23 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 2 November.

<sup>744</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 9 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 29 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 9 November.

<sup>745</sup> Orr, "Von Lettow's Retreat", pp. 52-53.

Column had reached Mkunde and was pushing on to Kitangari. No 2 Column was about a mile west of Chiwata with the Nigerian Brigade just north of the town, and No 3 Column was fighting hard against the German rearguards on the Makonde Plateau, to the north-east of that place. The net was closing tightly around the *Schutztruppe*.<sup>747</sup>

Chiwata fell unopposed on 15 November to No 2 Column and the Nigerians. No 3 Column continued its fight with *Abt Wahle* on the plateau while the Mounted Column was ordered to cut the communications between Newala and Kitangari at Lulindi. The next day, it was clear that the enemy was moving south-eastwards and the Nigerian Brigade was sent to clear the ground just below the scarp of the Makonde feature and Mwit Hill while No 1 Column was sent over the hill towards Lutshemi. No 2 Column was placed in reserve, having cut a number of new roads, and moved to Mwit, while, in order to deal with any eventuality, No 4 Column was ordered to improve a track between the east edge of the Makonde and the sea.<sup>748</sup>

As this was happening, Wahle kept to the high ground, while von Lettow's main body was moving just below the plateau and ahead of the Nigerians towards Nambindinga. Again, the British believed that place to be Lutshemi, which was actually about a mile away and on lower ground. By nightfall on 17 November, No 1 Column had occupied Lutshemi, after a very difficult march and secured its water source from von Lettow's rearguard. Again, using darkness, the Germans were able to slip away to Nambindinga that evening. Deciding to leave over 300 Germans and 700 askaris behind, the *Kommandeur* led his troops neatly out of the closely-drawn net and made his way east towards Simba's. The British were now aware that Kitangari could not be the new objective and that the main body was moving away from them.

The occupation of the Makonde Plateau now began in earnest and was notable for the difficulty of movement rather than the ferocity of the defence. The major hospital and base at Chiwata was threatened by a flanking move of No 3 Column to the north-east and

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<sup>746</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 10 November 1917, Annex B, Telegram 30 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 10 November.

<sup>747</sup> Orr, "Von Lettow's Retreat", pp. 53-54; WO 106/273, *History of 3 KAR*, p. 84.

<sup>748</sup> Orr, "Von Lettow's Retreat", p. 55.



No 2 Column together with two Nigerian battalions to the west. It was taken after a sharp fight on 15 November. Nearly 500 prisoners were taken and some 70 prisoners of war were released. This made the aggregate figure of enemy casualties, since the beginning of the month, total some 463 Europeans, 1072 askaris killed, captured or surrendered, plus two 4.1 inch guns, 33 machine guns, and over 1,000 rifles.<sup>749</sup>

The next objective was Lushemi which was held in some force. On 16 November, the Nigerians drove back the rearguards to within a half mile of the main position while No 3 Column advanced some five miles to the south-east of Chiwata, fighting a number of small engagements. No 1 Column moved east and north-east from Mwiti in an attempt to cut off the Lushemi force, but the ground was very difficult and the going slow.<sup>750</sup> Two days later, the British were in possession of Lushemi, the enemy having pulled back to Simba's during the night of 17/18 November. A further large haul of prisoners was taken from a camp a few miles away, some 20 officers, 242 NCOs and 700 askaris as well as 14 civilian males. This was accompanied by the seizure of 172 undamaged rifles and the release of 32 allied officer prisoners.<sup>751</sup>

Elsewhere, the march of the Belgian *RO* had progressed according to plan, and after two weeks of marching under the blistering sun, its advance guard reached Liwale on 30 October, linking up with elements of Shorthose's Column, who had arrived the day previously. The British handed over control of the village and then returned towards Abdallah-Kwa-Nanga on 2 November.<sup>752</sup> At the same time, the transfer of a second Belgian battalion together with mountain guns was underway, with the troops arriving in Kilwa on 30 October; a third had been planned, but its participation had been cancelled after its abortive march from Mahenge.

On the night of 1/2 November, Hawthorn attacked and seized the position at Liganduka's, taking 24 prisoners and a machine gun. The remaining enemy on the Luwegu retired to the east; the British followed, with Hawthorn moving to Kabati Mzee

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<sup>749</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 15 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 34 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 15 November.

<sup>750</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 16 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 35 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 16 November.

<sup>751</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 18 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 36 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 18 November.

and Fair towards Kabati Moro. They maintained the pressure, with Hawthorn having driven the enemy rearguards from both banks of the Luwegu by the evening of 5 November and to within a mile of Kabati Mzee. Fair reached Kabati Moro the next day receiving the surrender of some 142 Germans and 140 Askaris as well as finding three machine guns and some hundreds of damaged rifles.<sup>753</sup> On the same day, 82 more askaris surrendered to the Belgian Column; over the next day or two more sick soldiers surrendered at Kahambu and Mlembwe. Apart from this, it was clear that the Germans were now moving south through Dapate. Hawthorn turned to the south-east while Murray, with 250 rifles, pushed east along the Songea-Liwale road.

At Liwale, there was no major activity until 14 November when a party of 16 Germans, 22 Askaris and 85 porters from *Abt Tafel* surrendered to their advanced posts. Patrol contacts and deserters had already made it clear that this force was not far away. At Abdallah-kwa-Nanga, Major Hawkins held on with a half battalion of KAR, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the remainder under Colonel Shorthose from Tunduru, while Murray, now with 400 rifles, pushed south-east towards his position.

The *Westtruppen*, who were now on top of Hawkins, attacked shortly thereafter. Heavily outnumbering the KAR, they cut-off off the garrison and threatened to destroy it. Fortunately, the Belgians came to the rescue, sending a reinforced company from Liwale on the morning of 14 November and marching until early on 16 November.<sup>754</sup> Surprising and capturing a water party, they learnt that seven companies were attacking the KAR; despite the disparity in numbers they moved forward, hitting the German main body in the rear and scattering them and taking a number of prisoners. Apart from saving Hawkins from destruction, the Belgian intervention also resulted in the capture of documents showing Tafel's routes and order of march.

Huyghé met with van Deventer at Ndanda on 18 November to discuss the future use of the *RO*. They agreed that it would move to Massassi where it would assist in the

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<sup>752</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 222-223.

<sup>753</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch I* p. 190.

<sup>754</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 223-224 and p. 389, 13 November 1917, Telegram No 10873, Huyghé to Hérion.



reduction of the German main body while the remainder of the Belgian forces would remain at Dodoma and Kilossa. However, two additional battalions were already marching to join the *RO*, reaching Mnero at the end of November and subsequently Liwale a few days later.<sup>755</sup>

Van Deventer was ready to finish off the fighting. On 5 December, he informed General Robertson that he would take vigorous action to round up von Lettow before the rains recommenced. With an estimated two months of campaigning weather left, he proposed to hold the southern border along the Rovuma strongly, pushing the Nigerian Brigade as far south as supplies would permit, while General Northey would make the main advance from Nyasaland towards Mwembe. However, he recognised that if the Germans moved south of the Lujenda River towards the Medo district, that they would effectively place themselves out of reach in the period before the rains.<sup>756</sup>

The pressure continued and the isolation of Tafel now assumed major proportions. From captured documents, the size of his force was now known to be double that previously imagined. With over 1700 rifles, it was a serious force to be reckoned with although its ultimate intentions were still unclear. On the British side, three columns were continuously engaged in the advance with the fourth working on road making in the rear areas. The situation was still not good as the road from Ndanda and Newala was still very difficult for light cars and there were insufficient technical troops to improve the situation.<sup>757</sup>

On 18 November, a liaison officer sent by Tafel find von Lettow was captured by the British. His papers revealed that *Abt Tafel* had left Abdallah-kwa-Nanga on 16 November and that it was now headed towards the Makonde.<sup>758</sup> Consequently, GHQ held No 2 Column and the Nigerian Brigade ready to deal with this new threat. On 23 November, Tafel was reported to be on the upper Bangalla River and the two columns were sent in pursuit.

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<sup>755</sup> *Les Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 224-227; WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2311, 25 November 1917, Telegram 42 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, p. 238.

<sup>756</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 5 December 1917, Appendix A6, Telegram 402, van Deventer to CIGS, 4 December.

<sup>757</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 19 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 37 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 19 November.

<sup>758</sup> Ridgway, "With No 2 Column", II, pp. 256-257.

Concurrently, No 3 Column was following von Lettow down the track to Simba's, with No 1 Column moving towards Lulindi, the Mounted Column was reconnoitring north-east and east, while No 4 Column was still on road work. On reaching Simba's on 18 November, von Lettow was desperately short of food and ammunition; it was now time to abandon German East Africa and move into Portuguese territory. Turning south, he reached Newala on 20 November and conducted a final reorganisation of his bedraggled force. All the sick, infirm and uncommitted were left behind as the remaining 300 Germans, 1700 askaris and 3000 porters marched south-west to Mpili on the north bank of the River Rovuma, arriving there early on 21 November.<sup>759</sup>

No 1 Column entered Newala at 1630 hours on the same day, just a day behind their prey. The Mounted Column was pursuing and reached Luatala, some ten miles north of the Rovuma, but the chances of capturing von Lettow were fading rapidly and attention turned to Tafel. Simba's was taken unopposed with 52 Germans and 75 askaris surrendering there while No 1 Column also occupied an undefended Newala taking a further 126 Germans and 78 *askaris* prisoner. Morale was reported to be very low and the troops much tired, but von Lettow was still holding his force together with a combination of exhortation and threats.<sup>760</sup>

The tension increased as everybody neared the Rovuma River. On 23 November, Tafel was located moving south along the Bangala River towards the confluence with the Rovuma, which indicated that a link up was imminent. Two days later, von Lettow was moving rapidly with No 1 Column in hot pursuit, while intelligence indicated that Tafel was unaware of the main body's move south and that he was still moving towards Newala.<sup>761</sup> Despite the difficulties of terrain and supply, the trap was closing. Three columns were now moving on Tafel while a fourth was attempting to catch von Lettow, who was now at

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<sup>759</sup> Orr, "Von Lettow's Retreat", pp. 56-57.

<sup>760</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 21 November, 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 38 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 21 November. The statement on morale was "His force, both European and African is reported to be very tired of the campaign; but VON LETTOW keeps them going by exaggerated tales of German successes in Europe and by assuring the askaris that G.E.A. will very soon be handed back to the Germans and that every deserter will then be hung. This is the enemy's trump card now, and is probably the only thing that enable VON LETTOW to keep his askaris with him."

<sup>761</sup> WO 95/5295, War Diary GHQ, 25 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 43 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 25 November.



Ngomano. Further to the west, Northey was manoeuvring to prevent any move northward towards Tunduru.<sup>762</sup>

On 24 November, it was clear that Tafel was still marching south along the Bangala River and the various columns were unleashed. No 2 Column moved south-west from Massassi and No 1 Column left Luatala at 1600 hours. The weather was very hot and trying, but the British columns were now at both ends of the river.<sup>763</sup> It was here that the efforts of Major Pretorious, the chief scout, paid off in big measure. Having captured a letter from Tafel to von Lettow, Pretorious moved to the nominate junction, and cleared all food and inhabitants from the area. On 27 November Tafel reached his destination, and, unbeknownst to either party, von Lettow's marched north-westwards less than a mile away.<sup>764</sup>

No 1 Column then hit the *Westtruppen* in the front while No 2 Column ran into their rear. Now surrounded and very short of food Tafel decided to surrender. On 27 November some 27 Germans and 178 askaris with 1112 porters of the rearguard surrendered while that evening Tafel's offer of capitulation was received. The next day, he and the remaining 13 companies surrendered, comprising some 1115 Europeans, 3382 *askaris*, 43 machine guns and four guns.<sup>765</sup> At a stroke, the *Schutztruppe* had been halved, while Tafel had also destroyed 1200-1400 rifles, 25-30 machine guns and two guns.<sup>766</sup>

Despite failing to catch von Lettow, this was a major success and marked the end of the campaign in German East Africa. Considering the major fighting over, the British wasted no time in reducing the size of their force and the Belgians did likewise. The *RO* returned to the coast where it was shipped from Lindi to Dar-es-Salaam prior to returning to the Belgian Congo. By early 1918 all Belgian forces were ready to return to the Congo or the Belgian zone of occupation.<sup>767</sup> Henceforth, the campaign would be conducted by the British and Portuguese only.

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<sup>762</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 27 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 44 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 26 November.

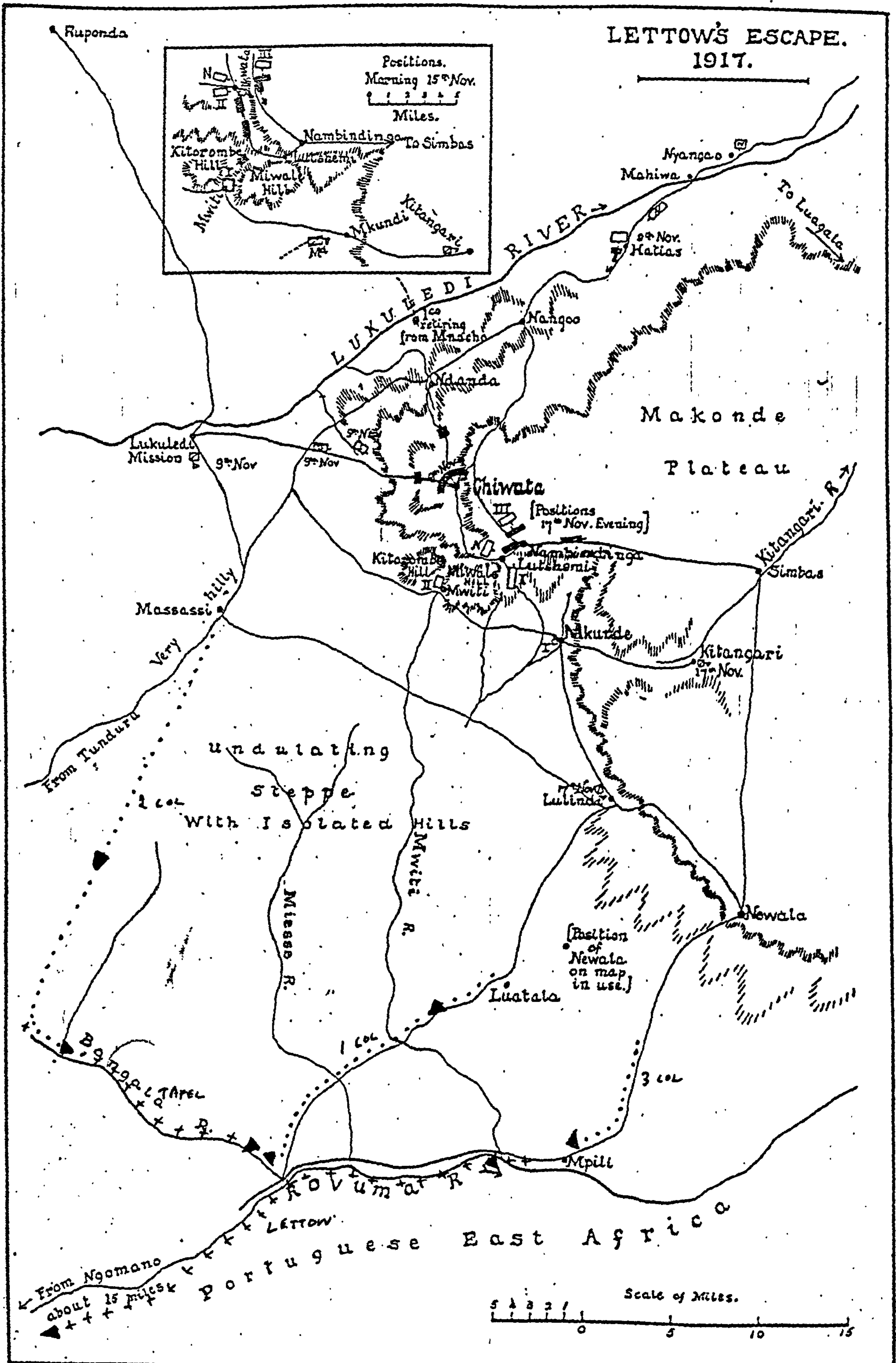
<sup>763</sup> Ridgway, "With No 2 Column", II, p. 258.

<sup>764</sup> Pretorious, Maj P J, *Jungle Man*, London: George G Harrap & Co, 1947, pp. 182-185.

<sup>765</sup> Orr, "Rumbo to the Rovuma", pp. 128-129.

<sup>766</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 30 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 46 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 28 November.

<sup>767</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 227-228.





The political and military situation was evolving rapidly. Von Lettow, known to be short of food, had disappeared south of Ngomano and into the interior of Portuguese East Africa. On 2 December, van Deventer sent a letter to Dr Schnee, informing him of Tafel's surrender and asking for the surrender of the remaining troops, in order to avoid further suffering of the African populations.<sup>768</sup> At the same time, he was in close consultation with the War Office over the future of the campaign.

London soon came to a decision. Given the feebleness of Portuguese military power and the hatred for their form of colonial rule, it was deemed too dangerous to let von Lettow roam around Portuguese East Africa. However, given the small numbers of the remaining enemy, the EAEF was to be reduced to division size and all of the Indian units were to be sent to other theatres. Similarly, the West African units were to be returned to their homes while further Belgian co-operation was seen as being too time consuming, in terms of both necessary reorganisation and political decision-making. The desired option was a land campaign, using Norforce as the main striking force, with operations based on the Mozambique coast to be avoided if possible owing to the shipping shortage. Finally, reductions in numbers of troops were agreed and the campaign was to become largely an African one supported by Imperial technical troops.<sup>769</sup> The continuation of the campaign was a blow to the British, but at least the *Schutztruppe* had lost the bulk of their fighting power.

## TACTICAL INNOVATION

Tactics had moved on considerably since Smuts' departure. The policy of attrition through a constant search for battle combined with operations against the rear areas made good sense in the East African setting. Innovation also played its part, as column commanders sought to neutralise the defender's advantages with new methods. The Germans had long based their centres of resistance around the sole track in an area; the response was the construction of new roads in the forward areas by the fighting

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<sup>768</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 2 December 1917, Appendix A2a, Letter van Deventer to Schnee, 2 December.

columns prior to engaging the defenders. One technique worked as follows. Pioneers began working on a track as the leading troops of the column marched past them, hacking a way through the bush. This continued until the entire column had moved forward for a fixed time and then halted. All troops then spent seven minutes of the 10-minute halt cutting back the undergrowth on either side of the new track before resting. The pioneers then moved up the now 5-10 foot wide track and began to improve the surface for animal and vehicular traffic. The column then resumed the process. This simple method, although tiring for the fighting troops, enabled columns to march on the enemy while allowing the vital supply columns to follow up relatively closely. It represented a major improvement in both tactical mobility and sustainability of operations as the previous method of hacking only footpaths through the bush made linking up very slow and difficult. Subsequently, once the area had been cleared, engineers and road gangs would develop the surfaces further.

Owing to the thick bush, these methods enabled the attackers to move close to the Germans without being detected. Once ready to attack, flanking columns would blaze tracks to a point about three miles parallel to the enemy position. From there, they would strike inward towards the vulnerable flanks and rear. A further refinement to this technique was the construction of a strong *boma* at the end of the new track. Now in close proximity to the enemy, the column would establish itself behind thorn and brush defences, which could be erected in several hours. Once the Germans detected the British presence or tried to withdraw, they would be forced to attack the well-ensconced flanking column. This neatly turned the relative advantage of attackers and defenders around while also disrupting the evacuation of the position.

Van Deventer also grasped the importance of good lines of communication and devoted considerable efforts to building and improving the road network. Apart from easing the problems of supplies, they enabled him to shift forces much more rapidly and healthily. New equipment was used to good advantage; the Lewis gun was introduced in early 1917 to battalions on the same scale as machine guns. It was much more mobile

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<sup>769</sup> WO 95/52394, War Diary GHQ, 3 December 1917, Appendix A4, Telegram 47022, CIGS to van Deventer, 2 December.



than the Maxim and added considerable flexibility to the attacker who now used the heavier machine guns in the firing line keeping the Lewis guns available for the assault group. They increased considerably the firepower available to the attack considerably and were very useful in fighting off counter-attacks.

Another weapon of considerable importance was the Stokes mortar. While it was heavy and its ammunition required a considerable baggage train, its high angle of fire made it especially useful in overcoming strong frontal defences as it could fire over trees and small hills. It complemented the Indian mountain guns and could be brought into action quickly. The Germans found it difficult to counter and disliked its effects intensely. Finally, the Mills bomb, a hand grenade, enhanced close range firepower and was effective in both the attack and defence. All in all, the British forces had been much more aggressive and successful in their aim of defeating the Germans in battle.

## CHAPTER 8 - THE OPERATIONS OF 1918

As soon as von Lettow left German territory, the various British columns were rapidly broken up and the units reorganised for the next phase. However, it was not long before Portuguese unpreparedness forced a modification to these plans. The advance of *Abt Köhl* towards Montepuez threatened Port Amelia on the coast and British reinforcements were requested on 12 December. A force (Rosecol) under Colonel Rose was formed to secure the port and the Gold Coast Regiment landed there the next day. He intended to have the column ready to move inland by the end of December, but much depended on the water supply and the state of the port, which was reported to be primitive.<sup>770</sup>

The supply situation caused concern as ever. On 23 December, the need to support the Port Amelia force forced a redeployment of the Lindi forces. Ngomano, on the Rovuma River, was held by the Nigerian Brigade, with a battalion in reserve at Massassi, and the remainder of the fighting troops were moved back to the railhead at Mtama. In the west, Hawthorn's Column was in the area of Namwera with a battalion operating towards Uniago. However, an unlucky accident was to hinder the actions of Port Amelia force; a troopship carrying the bulk of the Gold Coast Regiment ran aground near Mikindani and the troops had to be evacuated and returned to Lindi to await more shipping.<sup>771</sup>

At the end of December 1917 the situation was largely quiet, apart from near the Nyasaland border. Rosecol was completed at Port Amelia by 29 December while patrols from the Rovuma River had vainly searched up to 110 miles south for the enemy. The Rovuma River was beginning to rise rapidly and the Nigerian Brigade was moved back to the north. In the west, Northey's troops were in contact and were pushing east and north from Mtengula and Namwera. Everywhere, the rain was beginning to fall and the roads started to dissolve.<sup>772</sup>

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<sup>770</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 12 December 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 52 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 11 December; 13 December 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 53 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 13 December.

<sup>771</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 23 December 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 62 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 22 December; 25 December 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 63 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 24 December.

<sup>772</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 29 December 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 68 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 28 December; 1 January 1918, Appendix B, Telegram 71 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 31 December.



The main body of the *Schutztruppe* had narrowly escaped the tightening British cordon and was unaware of the fate of *Abt Tafel*. Moving rapidly along the Rovuma valley, their immediate problem was lack of food as there were only sufficient supplies to last until 1 December. Ammunition was also in very short supply and urgent action was required.<sup>773</sup> Von Lettow realised that the imminent rainy season, due to start at the end of December, would halt any major British offensive operations. Furthermore, the almost totally undeveloped nature of Portuguese East Africa meant that would take time and a great deal of effort to build up the stocks and infrastructure to support a substantial enemy force. This meant that he could deal with the Portuguese first and then split his troops for foraging.<sup>774</sup>

At the end of November 1917, the German intelligence assessed the Portuguese as having a strong force of some 6500 rifles, 42 machine guns and 14 guns with which to guard their border along Rovuma River, a distance of some 400 km.<sup>775</sup> Of these, they believed that Colonel Rosa had deployed nearly 3,000 in a number of posts between the coast and the major *boma* at Ngomano.<sup>776</sup> The fort at Ngomano, which commanded the confluence of the Lugenda and Rovuma rivers, was estimated to support between 1,800 to 2000 rifles. While these were substantial numbers and well-armed, patrols had determined that most posts were poorly laid out and carelessly sited.<sup>777</sup> Past experience had made the Germans contemptuous of their putative foes and von Lettow actually viewed their garrisons as potential supply bases rather than a serious threat. Ngomano was isolated enough from the Portuguese main body and sufficiently far away from the British bases to offer a tempting target.

Although weakened by hunger, the force deployed by von Lettow was still sizeable. Led by *Abt Göring*, with three companies, as the advance guard, next came the main body of 15 companies together with all the support troops, followed by a single company rearguard. Altogether this made for 19 companies, totalling 268 Europeans, 1700 Askari,

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<sup>773</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 399.

<sup>774</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 236-237.

<sup>775</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, p. 1.

<sup>776</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 399.

<sup>777</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, p.2. They had the 3, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28 Native Companies and 2 machine gun batteries.





and about 3,900 carriers and 370 “boys”. Not included in these numbers were over 600 wives and children, plus a further 700 Askari “boys” who had to find their own rations.<sup>778</sup>

In order to preventing any reinforcement of Ngomano, von Lettow sent *Abt Göring* off separately to isolate the smaller Portuguese *boma* at Nampakesho. The main body continued up the Rovuma towards Ngomano. It was reached early on 25 November and von Lettow decided to attack off the line of march. Despite the crossing of the river being in full sight of the garrison, the latter remained passive and did nothing to disrupt the attackers. A mountain gun began shelling the fort from the west while *Abt von Ruckteschell* launched a fixing attack from the north-west. In the meantime, *Abt Köhl* was sent on a southerly march to hit the Portuguese flank. This was done and it stormed the fort supported by artillery and small arms fire. The shock and violence of the attack achieved its aim at a cost of just over 30 casualties; the *Schutztruppe* killed 187 Portuguese and captured well over 500 prisoners, the majority unwounded.<sup>779</sup> The seizure also yielded six heavy machine guns, 600 rifles and a quarter of a million rounds of ammunition. This restored the fighting power of the Germans at a stroke, although African food remained in very short supply.<sup>780</sup>

After a brief halt to treat casualties and collect their booty, the main column set off down the Lugenda valley on 27 November. Von Stuemmer's raid earlier in the year had shown it to be very sparse in food, but the area further south was much more promising.<sup>781</sup> However, it was some distance away, and conscious of the precariousness of his stocks, von Lettow split up the force to forage independently. Fortune, and poor Portuguese dispositions, led to the discovery by *Abt Köhl* of a small platoon-sized *boma* at Nanguare which it duly stormed on 2 December. It was rewarded by a haul of 70 rifles and 300,000 rounds of ammunition. More important was the find of 858 packs of African food. They provided about eight days' rations and would have to suffice for the coming journey through the largely uninhabited and foodless stretch that lay ahead. Despite the find, Köhl's carriers

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<sup>778</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, p.3.

<sup>779</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 229-232; Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, p. 311. He states that German casualties were eight dead and 25 wounded; MS Boell, N14/36, Kapitel 1, p. 3. About 400 Portuguese *Askaris* also ran away. The German battle strength was 675 soldiers, 11 machine guns and two guns; their losses were seven dead and 26 wounded.

<sup>780</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 399.

<sup>781</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, p. 5.

were surviving on half rations and his *Askaris* were spending a great deal of effort in local foraging.<sup>782</sup>

In the meantime, *Abt Göring* was isolated and out of touch with the main body. It had captured some Portuguese papers showing the existence of a magazine at Nampakesho. Marching rapidly, the garrison was able to burn the fort with the petrol stocks held there and only a few supplies were saved. Concerned about his own survival, Göring then marched to Ngomano where he expected to find the rearguard. Arriving on 1 December to find the British there, he waited in concealment for two days before setting south down the Lugenda valley.<sup>783</sup> It was not until 12 December that he was able to catch up with the rearguard, although von Lettow did not learn about the link-up for another six days.<sup>784</sup>

Fortified by these local successes, the main body set off for the south on 4 December, trying to pass the foodless belt as quickly as possible. It reached the post at Chirumba on 11 December, surprising the occupants and taking it without a fight. This was another major *coup* as 800 loads of African food and another 80 of flour were seized, easing the food situation considerably. More success followed as a patrol seized another 15,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and 300 mountain gun shells. Finally, *Abt Wahle*, which had been moving slowly as it foraged, came across a dug-in Portuguese position at Ndimbo in the Mkula Hills. Despite the near parity of numbers, the position was easily overrun and a large quantity of supplies, including valuable quinine and 18 days' food, was taken on 8 December.<sup>785</sup> This was followed by minor captures of food and weapons at another post in the Oizulo Hills on 27 December, in which 34 Portuguese and *Askaris* were killed.<sup>786</sup>

Von Lettow now had the resources to complete his march to the fertile areas in the area of Mwembe - Chirumba – Lusinje – Medo, which, apart from food, also put him at the maximum distance from the various British detachments.<sup>787</sup> En-route, a party under the

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<sup>782</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 399-400; Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, p. 314.

<sup>783</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, pp. 8-9.

<sup>784</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, pp. 20-21.

<sup>785</sup> Schnee, *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, p. 320; MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, pp. 14-15.

<sup>786</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, p. 30. Six Portuguese and 28 *Askaris* were buried there while 41 rifles, 4,700 rounds and 130 loads of food were taken.

<sup>787</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, p. 10.



white flag reached his rearguard at Ngomano, bearing General van Deventer's call to surrender dated 4 December. It finally reached von Lettow on 8 January and formally informed him of Tafel's surrender, although it appears he had learned of that fact following the capture of Ngomano on 29 November.<sup>788</sup> It was too late to have any effect, for the Germans were now buoyed by their considerable successes against the Portuguese and were approaching a land of plenty.

The Germans had used their first two weeks in Portuguese territory very fruitfully, passing from a state of extreme shortage to relative comfort. They had taken some 680,000 rounds of small arms ammunition together with 12 machine guns and 750 rifles. The critical food situation had been greatly ameliorated, at least in the short term, by the very substantial captures and local foraging.<sup>789</sup> For General van Deventer, it was a bitter blow as the Portuguese had effectively collapsed at nearly every stage while presenting the enemy with the means of to carry on the campaign. He could not be said to be surprised at such a dismal performance, but it was highly disappointing, especially as he would be unable to deploy substantial forces south of the Rovuma for several months.

### ALLIED PLANS FOR 1918

The end of 1917 saw politicians, and most especially Lloyd George, concerned about three major areas: manpower, casualties and Ireland. The heavy fighting in Flanders had temporarily drained the BEF of its offensive power and the prime minister looked for a success in Palestine to sustain public morale. With the slow build-up of American forces and the collapse of Russia, the war seemed unlikely to end before 1919.<sup>790</sup> The need to conserve manpower for the perceived final effort meant that reinforcements were unavailable for East Africa, even had the shipping been available.<sup>791</sup> For while the U-Boat threat had been contained, it was far from being eliminated, with merchant shipping losses in the latter part of 1917 running at 241,260 tons or 75 ships per month.<sup>792</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 1. Kapitel, pp. 6 and 11-12.

<sup>789</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 400.

<sup>790</sup> French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, p. 169; Hughes, *British Strategy in the Middle East*, p. 27.

<sup>791</sup> French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, p. 180-181.

<sup>792</sup> Marder, *1917 Year of Crisis*, IV, p. 277.

Another area concerning policy-makers was that of the fate of the captured colonies. From the beginning of the war, the British Government had been careful not to declare any annexations or make formal claims on captured territory. Initially, it had not wanted to add to the size of the Empire and had rebuffed attempts by South Africa and Belgium to proclaim their suzerainty over South-West Africa and Ruanda/Urundi respectively. However, as the war progressed and the complexion of government had changed, attitudes began to harden.<sup>793</sup> Imperialists, such as Curzon, Milner and Amery, and sub-imperialists, such as Botha and Smuts, continued to demand the permanent retention of Germany's overseas possessions.<sup>794</sup>

An influential report in April 1917, presented by a committee chaired by Lord Curzon, looked for substantial gains in African and elsewhere. Supported by the Imperial War Cabinet, although not binding on the British Government, it showed the strength of feeling on the issue.<sup>795</sup> The prolonged resistance in East Africa played its part, as lack of resources had impelled the British to make widespread use of the indigenous Africans, and former German subjects, in their war machine. In German eyes, this constituted treasonous betrayal, and widespread retribution was threatened against perceived collaborators. Smuts noted:

“The Germans also asserted that...any native who had deserted during the war would be hanged by the order of the German Government when that war was over.” .

This view was certainly shared by General van Deventer:

“No German deserter will return to the enemy lines as he knows that he will be forthwith shot or hung...Last and most important is the question of a guarantee and protection...The Germans assiduously assert even granting they lose German East

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<sup>793</sup> Smith, Gaddis, “The British Government and the Disposition of the German Colonies in Africa, 1914-1918”, Giffard and Louis *Britain and Germany*, pp. 283-285.

<sup>794</sup> Louis, W R, “Great Britain and German Expansion in Africa, 1884-1919”, Giffard and Louis, *Britain and Germany*, pp. 40-42; French, *Lloyd George Coalition*, pp. 63-64; CAB 24/4, 8 December 1917, Paper G 182, *German and Turkish Territories Captured in the War*, by Lord Curzon, p. 10.

<sup>795</sup> Smith, “Disposition of the German Colonies”, pp. 288-289.



Africa now it will assuredly be given back to them at the end of the war, and that every man who has deserted or who has helped us in any way will infallibly be hung. And this certainly would be the case unless we can authoritatively refute the statement.”<sup>796</sup>

At a local level, the British realised that the *Schutztruppe* was vulnerable although it still had considerable power and resilience left in it. However, there were a number of important factors to consider for the campaign of 1918. The first was the perennial problem of manpower and health. Many units were now worn out and heavily depleted by sickness. This was by no means restricted to the British and South Africans, as the Indians and West Africans were also suffering badly. Believing that the native East Africans were better able to withstand both the rigours of the climate and the ravages of disease, the bulk of non-KAR fighting troops were sent to other theatres or returned home. However, substantial numbers of Imperial technical and administrative soldiers were retained to support the new campaign.<sup>797</sup>

Shipping was a major limitation as heavy losses from submarines continued to constrain both the numbers and quantities of supplies that could be sent to East Africa as well as the intra-theatre movement of supplies. Because of limitations of vessels, port capacities and unloading facilities, all arrivals into theatre had to come through Dar-es-Salaam. It was uneconomical and virtually impractical to send personnel and stores direct to the sea-base of destination. Instead, a complicated process of unloading at Dar-es-Salaam, waiting and then loading before sailing to Kilwa, Lindi or Mombasa had to be followed. If major operations south of the Rovuma River were to be undertaken, then it would be necessary to set-up and operate one or more ports in PEA, with all the extra effort and delay that that implied.

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<sup>796</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2203, 6 October 1917, Telegram 380, van Deventer to CIGS; Louis, “Great Britain and German Expansion”, pp. 40 and 45-46; CAB 24/4, 8 December 1917, Paper G 182, *German and Turkish Territories Captured in the War*, by Lord Curzon.

<sup>797</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2412, 29 December 1917, Telegram X 9842, GOC to War Office, pp. 271-274. Out of a total strength of 52,000 over 11,000 Indian, 10,000 British and 3,700 South African troops remained in theatre.

The commander-in-chief was well aware that the area south of the Rovuma was sparsely settled and had little food to offer. But, from the previous year's operations against *Abt von Stuemmer*, he also knew that the central districts of the Nyassa Company's holdings were both fertile and healthy. This was ideal for von Lettow as he could stay there indefinitely, while his own approaches from either the coast or Nyasaland were long and ill-served by roads. He was on the horns of a dilemma, for if left undisturbed the Germans could build up strength and recruit more *Askaris*, posing a potentially greater threat than hitherto. On the other hand, a British advance could disrupt and possibly destroy the enemy, but at the cost of immense difficulties in supply and reinforcement. However, his instructions from London were quite clear and PEA would have to be cleared.<sup>798</sup>

Van Deventer had three aims: the first was to fight the enemy wherever and whenever possible in order to cause maximum attrition; the second was to prevent the invasion of Nyasaland; and the third was to prevent the enemy from re-entering German East Africa.<sup>799</sup> In the short term, the approaching rains would make it difficult to achieve the first goal although the others would be helped by the impasse. Once the dry season returned, an aggressive and offensive policy would be needed.

The regrouping of the British force had been underway since the clearance of German East Africa, but had taken some time owing to the need to extract units from forward positions, columns had to be completely reorganized and fresh battalions had to be brought forward. At the same time, scarce shipping was taken up with the withdrawal of the Belgian troops, the removal of the substantial numbers of prisoners of war, and the evacuation of the many sick and wounded back to the base at Dar-es-Salaam. As the Rovuma River would flood from January onwards, it would be impossible to maintain any substantial forces across it until the dry season. This meant that the bulk of British forces would have to remain in the German colony. For the wet weather, van Deventer deployed the Nigerian Brigade north of Ngomano, with a KAR battalion at each of Massassi and

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<sup>798</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2334, 2 December 1917, Telegram 47022, CIGS to van Deventer, p. 246.

<sup>799</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 390.



Tunduru. The remainder of the main force was concentrated at Ndanda for ease of supply and training.<sup>800</sup>

The new striking force would be largely East African and two brigade-sized formations were created at Ndanda. The columns were based on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Regiments KAR, known as Kartucol and Kartrecol, each deploying three battalions of the respective regiments. Norforce was also to play a key role operating from Songea and southern Nyasaland. Its principal column was based on the three battalions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Regiment KAR commanded by the redoubtable Colonel Hawthorn. Northey also had three battalions of 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment KAR, together with various Rhodesian and South African units deployed as garrisons and a reserve.

Northey's lines of communications would remain essentially the same as those employed during the earlier clearance of Portuguese East Africa. Those for the main force would be more difficult as the Rovuma was a significant barrier to movement in the rainy season and the land to its south was barren. Any supplies moved overland would have to come from Lindi via Massassi to Ngomano before going into the largely roadless Portuguese territory. It was a long and tortuous route that promised to be difficult. On the other hand, the sea offered the best possibilities for supply with the harbour at Port Amelia being one of the best on the entire East coast. It also offered a relatively direct route to the main body of the German forces, and, almost uniquely for the coast, it was virtually malaria-free.<sup>801</sup>

At the same time, the Portuguese continued to be alarmed by the progress of the German incursion and especially about Port Amelia. Van Deventer had already despatched Rosecol to secure the port and now decided to develop it as a new advanced base. However, a lack of porters meant that mobile operations beyond the immediate area of the town would be impossible for some time.<sup>802</sup>

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<sup>800</sup> Van Deventer, Lt-Gen Sir J L, *Despatch from the Lieutenant-General Commanding-in-Chief, East African Force*, 30 September 1918 published in *London Gazette*, "Supplement", No. 31069, 16 December 1918, p. 121. Henceforth van Deventer *Despatch II*.

<sup>801</sup> Admiralty (NID), *A Handbook of Portuguese Nyasaland*, London: 1920, p. 51.

Van Deventer was determined to bring the *Schutztruppe* to battle as quickly as possible and with delays caused by the rain and a lack of carriers, he ordered General Northey to start pressuring the Germans from the west. His intention was to drive in the German outposts in order to restrict the enemy's foraging and to harass his tired units.<sup>803</sup> He was equally sure that operations with the Portuguese would be unsuccessful without a unified command and on 1 January he requested the War Office to seek their subordination to him.<sup>804</sup>

The Portuguese at this time held a general line Mocimboa-do-Rovuma-Chomba, securing the area between the Rovuma and Porto Amelia.<sup>805</sup> The Portuguese fielded a substantial force, on paper at least, of one European battalion and ten Askari companies and a battery of mountain guns. They were deployed with the battalion and three companies near Nampula, three companies in the south moving towards Alto Molokwe, and the remaining four companies dispersed amongst a number of stations. The mountain battery was due to move to Nakature, but was immobile owing to a lack of carriers.<sup>806</sup>

The uneasy relationship between the British and Portuguese had to be kept on track, for, despite their private misgivings, the British needed close co-operation if there was to be any chance of ending the fighting in 1918. Accordingly, a conference between van Deventer and the acting Governor-General was held at Lourenco Marques on 29 January. The national governments had agreed that military operations in the Portuguese colony should be under unified command with the British taking the lead.<sup>807</sup> This was absolutely essential as the disasters of January had shown, but it involved a more tactful and sensitive approach to Portuguese national pride.

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<sup>802</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 29 December 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 68 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 28 December.

<sup>803</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 122.

<sup>804</sup> WO 95/5295, War Diary GHQ, 3 January 1918, Appendix A2, Telegram 1B, van Deventer to War Office, 1 January.

<sup>805</sup> WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 4 December 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 49 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 2 December.

<sup>806</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 406-407.

<sup>807</sup> WO 95/5295, War Diary GHQ, 29 January 1918, Appendix A5(1), "Minutes of Conference between the Acting Governor General of Mozambique and General van Deventer", 29 January.



Van Deventer then saw Northey, who had come to Beira for a conference, and subsequently went north to Mocimboa-da-Praia, where he met Colonel Rosa on 12 February. It was agreed that both Northey's and Rosa's forces would co-operate in trying to defeat the Germans in their present locations, or, if necessary, to drive them south of the River Lurio in the hopes that their *Askari* would desert. Further south, the Portuguese were asked to provide a mobile column at Chomba of some 1,500 rifles to attack the enemy from the north in conjunction with the British. KAR battalions were sent to hold Mozambique and the fertile Namule district (60-70 miles east of Lake Shirwa), while other Portuguese forces were asked to secure the line Ribaue-Inagu lying between those units.<sup>808</sup>

An inspection of the main body at Mocimboa left van Deventer distinctly unimpressed and he considered the bulk of the troops militarily worthless; an opinion to be vindicated during the course of the campaign.<sup>809</sup>

### GERMAN PLANS FOR 1918

By January 1918, von Lettow had achieved his immediate goal of positioning his force in the more fertile portions between the Rovuma and Lurio Rivers. His efforts were now set on obtaining further supplies of food while sheltering the troops from the effects of the wet season. He expected the enemy to resume their technique of concentric movements as soon as the rains stopped and the country had dried out.<sup>810</sup>

His plans were to occupy the area between the River Lurio and the line Montepuesi – Msalu – Mtende for as long as possible, and at least until the new crop could be harvested sometime in March–April. The protection of these supplies was a high priority while he also knew that the longer his troops stayed in an area, stripping it of supplies, the more it denied support to the British. As well, this position maximized the length of the enemy's lines of communications with a concomitant weakening of

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<sup>808</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 123.

<sup>809</sup> WO 95/5295, War Diary GHQ, 12 February 1918, Appendix A5, Telegram 36 S, van Deventer to CIGS, 12 February.

<sup>810</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 242.

forward fighting power.<sup>811</sup> Thereafter, he would have to react to the actions of his opponents.

For supply reasons, the Germans were broken into five groupings, with *Abt Wahle*, three companies, in the area Likopolwe-Mwembe; *Abt Göring*, also with three companies, around Muabala; *Abt Otto*, with two companies, en-route from Chirumba to Luambala; *Kommando*, controlling a single company, at Chirumba; and *Abt Köhl* of five companies stretching from Muo to Namunyo opposite Port Amelia.<sup>812</sup>

### OPERATIONS JANUARY – APRIL 1918

Norforce was due to strike first in 1918, and by early January it was divided into two main components: Colonel Murray and the Rhodesian elements and two battalions of the 4<sup>th</sup> KAR were garrisoning the Wiedhafen-Songea-Tunduru line and its vital food supplies, while Colonel Hawthorn with three battalions of 1<sup>st</sup> KAR, and the Cape Corps were operating out of Nyasaland into Portuguese territory.<sup>813</sup>

Hawthorn's column was sent north on 3 January to dislodge *Abt Wahle* which was the closest force to the Nyasaland border and was now gathering food around the River Lugenda. Arriving there on 7 January, he had two battalions with him, as the others were further west, unable to move further owing to a shortage of transport.<sup>814</sup> Von Lettow received word of this two days later, and despatched *Abt Otto* as reinforcements. Wahle met Hawthorn's troops above Luambala, causing some delay, but he fell back east on the night of 11/12 to protect his magazines. In the meantime, *Abt Otto* had been instructed to reinforce Wahle's threatened position and marched from Chirumba on 12 January. However, difficult going and the rising river meant that he was only able to cross the Lugenda River on 15 and 16 January; too late to effect a junction and increasingly short on supplies. Wahle abandoned the *boma* on the night of 16/17 and withdrew east.<sup>815</sup> The

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<sup>811</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, p. 72.

<sup>812</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 403.

<sup>813</sup> WO 95/5330, War Diary Norforce, Entry 1 January 1918.

<sup>814</sup> WO 95/5330, War Diary Norforce, Entries 4 and 7 January 1918.

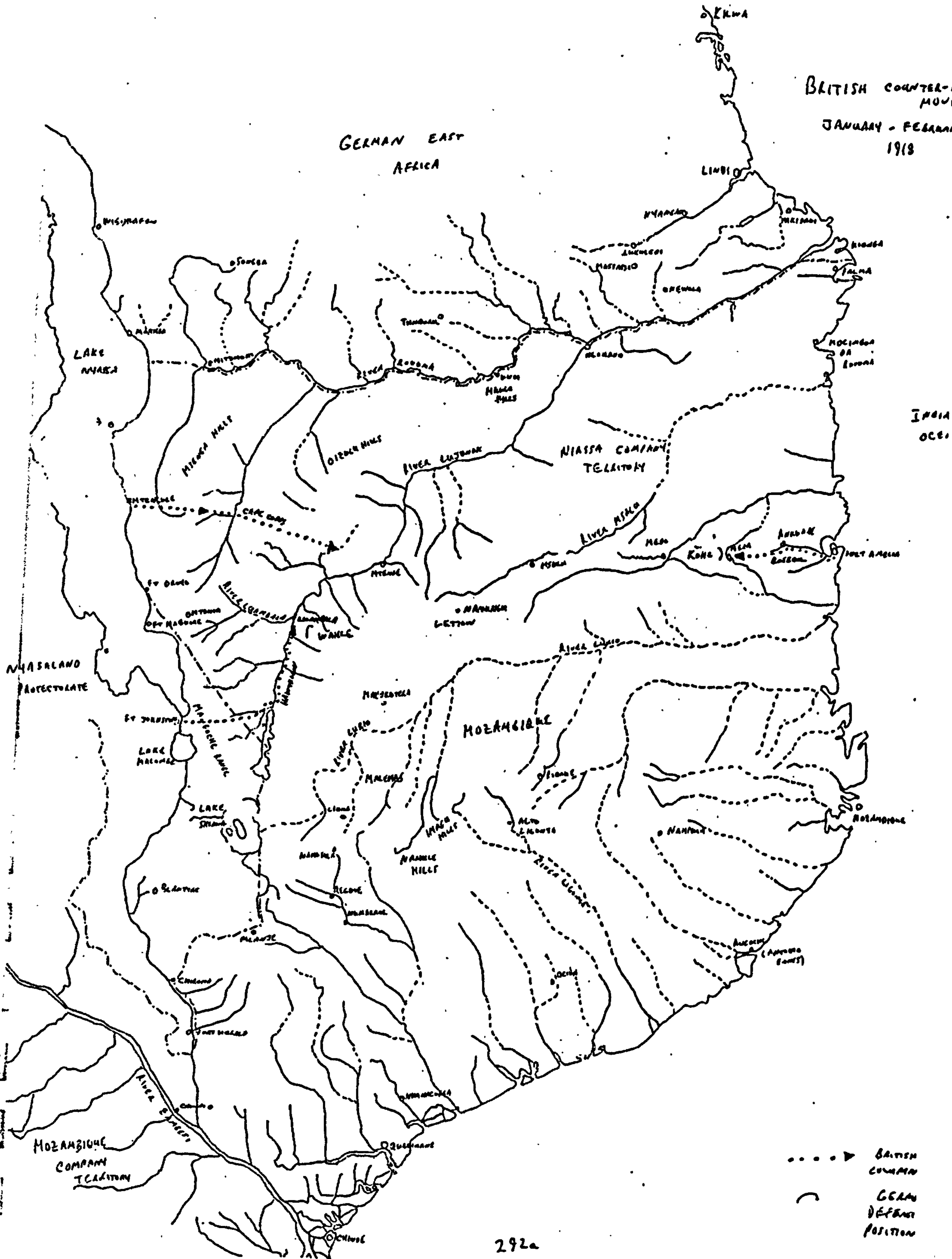
<sup>815</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, p. 49; Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 403.



# BRITISH COUNTER-ATTACK MOVES

JANUARY - FEBRUARY 1918

GERMAN EAST AFRICA



.....> BRITISH COUNTER-ATTACK MOVES  
 ——— GERMAN DEFENSE POSITION

British occupied Likopolwe on 14 January and Luambala four days later, thus achieving their immediate goal, but now hampered by the increasingly heavy rainfall.<sup>816</sup>

As these actions were underway, the rains continued to fall with their customary violence. Further north, Colonel Fitzgerald's Kartrecol was engaged in its task of securing the border with GEA along the line Ndanda-Massassi. It had the secondary aim of being ready to raze crops along the banks of Rovuma River and of moving the population northward should the enemy re-emerge. Finally, it was given the unglamorous, but vital, job of building roads up the Lugenda Valley to Nanguare and also west to Tunduru.<sup>817</sup>

The *Kommandeur* also learned of the British activity in the Mkula Hills, further north. This and Hawthorn's advance meant that an expansion of food-growing areas was impossible and the expected stocks of food in Mwembe - Chirumba – Luambala would only last a few days. Faced by shortages, von Lettow decided to move the main body back to Nanungu, via Mtende, while reinforcing Chirumba with a company from each of Wahle and Köhl.<sup>818</sup>

Northey's advance came as a distinct surprise to von Lettow, coming as it did from the least expected direction.<sup>819</sup> Lettow decided to intensify his food-gathering operations while trying to hold off the enemy columns. *Abt Wahle* was despatched to Chirumba to oversee the transportation of food stocks there while *Abt Otto* maintained a barrier to the west. However, the local African population was now struggling to feed itself and began to hide food supplies from the askaris. The rising waters and deteriorating tracks meant that transport was considerably more difficult and slow than previously. Operationally, the German commander was hamstrung until he could collect enough food to carry on elsewhere.<sup>820</sup>

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<sup>816</sup> WO 95/5330, War Diary Norforce, Entries 14 and 18 January 1918; Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 121, states that the latter place fell on 14 January. This is contradicted by the War Diary.

<sup>817</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 390.

<sup>818</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, p. 49.

<sup>819</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, pp. 32-33.

<sup>820</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 404.



Matters were not helped by a clever British campaign against his African troops. Leaflets and rumours were spread about the hopelessness of the German cause and offering good treatment to deserters. It was effective, as 112 askaris and 150 carriers deserted in the month of January; since this represented 10 per cent of the nine western companies it could be ill-afforded.<sup>821</sup> The effects of success against the Portuguese had been offset by the unexpected speed of the follow-up and growing war-weariness. By von Lettow's order of 2 February, the commanders read out and publicly dismissed the British arguments while some deserters were caught and executed.<sup>822</sup>

This, coupled with the Hawthorn's advance, led von Lettow to move his forces further east, starting on 27 January. *Abt Wahle* was ordered to act as rearguard in the West while *Abt Köhl* fulfilled the same function in the east, with the main body heading for the large supply depot at Nanungu.<sup>823</sup> At the same time, Rosecol had pushed inland nearly 50 miles from Port Amelia, reaching the village of Pamune on 24 January, where it drove back the defenders and captured 5,000 kg of food. Food was beginning to run out in the forward area, and by the end of January *Abt Köhl* had concentrated at Montepusi.<sup>824</sup> Despite the rain, Rosecol was able to occupy Ankuabe by the end of January and maintained contact with *Abt Köhl* some 23 miles further west.<sup>825</sup> The importance of guarding the ripening crops, due for harvest in mid-February, kept Köhl firmly in position and prevented any withdrawal to help relieve the pressure in the west.<sup>826</sup>

This pressure was maintained throughout the rest of January and well into February 1918. Operations were heavily constrained by the rain as many bridges were washed away with a number of Wahle's *askaris* and carriers being drowned.<sup>827</sup> In the west, Hawthorn had cleared the left bank of the Lujenda River and was forcing the

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<sup>821</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 404.

<sup>822</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, pp. 61-62;

<sup>823</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 404; WO 95/5330, War Diary Norforce, Entry 20 January 1917.

<sup>824</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, pp. 66-67.

<sup>825</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 122.

<sup>826</sup> Lettow, *Reminiscences*, p. 245.

<sup>827</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, p. 62.

German rearguard east, while Northey conferred with the commander-in-chief about future strategy at Beira on 4 February.<sup>828</sup>

By early February, the British had four battalions facing the five enemy companies on the road Chirumba – Mtende – Nanungu. On 7 February, Köhl and Otto were ordered to give up a company each to support the threatened area.<sup>829</sup> The exhaustion of supplies around Mtende forced a contraction on Nanungu with *Abt Göring* retiring on the latter place by 14 February. *Abt Wahle*, in turn, was sent off to reconnoitre and to gather as many supplies as possible. By 22 February, Hawthorn was at Mtende, some 75 miles to the east of Luambala while Rosecol occupied Meza a week later, it having been abandoned by Köhl owing to lack of food.<sup>830</sup>

This renewed pressure was worrisome and late in February, von Lettow made the protection of his food supplies the highest priority. He assessed that he faced three columns of some 20-30 companies in the west with at least 30 in the east. He believed that these forces would encounter major difficulties in maintaining sufficient supplies and that he could counter them by concentrating the maximum number of companies to hit a single British column. There were two possibilities: either to march north to the Lujenda towards Luambala or to go south to Hawella-Malema<sup>831</sup>

The British had continued their converging movement, with Northey reporting the area north-east of Luambala clear for 100 miles and his troops occupying Malokotera on 5 March. The same day, Rosecol had clashed with a German detachment some 27 miles to the east of *Medo Boma*, which was clearly held in some strength. As it was a key road junction and led to the main body of the *Schutztruppe*, van Deventer correctly surmised that it would be strongly defended.<sup>832</sup> He decided to reinforce Rose with another column of two battalions of 2<sup>nd</sup> KAR and half a mountain battery under Lieutenant Colonel

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<sup>828</sup> WO 95/5330, War Diary Norforce, Entry 4 February 1918.

<sup>829</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, pp. 63-64.

<sup>830</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 122; Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 404; CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entry 22 February 1918.

<sup>831</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, p. 84.

<sup>832</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch II*, p. 123; CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entry 10 March 1918.



Giffard in mid-March.<sup>833</sup> Both columns were placed under the overall command of Brigadier-General Edwards and known collectively as the Port Amelia Force (Pamforce). The third KAR battalion was sent on to Mozambique to protect the local area and stiffen Portuguese resolve.<sup>834</sup>

At the end of March, the *Schutztruppe* were deployed in three main areas: the *Kommando* and six companies were south-east of Chizona; *Abt Wahle* with two companies were at Nanungu; and *Abt Köhl* with six companies and the mountain guns around Montepuezi. With the British closing in onto the new German positions, von Lettow had been active in ensuring that the newly-ripening crops were harvested. A considerable number of the Askari were employed on this crucial task while others were engaged in training. By the end of March, this foraging had been successful enough to garner food enough to last to the end of May. The Germans now had their freedom of action restored, at least for several months.<sup>835</sup>

## THE BATTLE OF CHIRUMBA HILL

Despite the rain and generally soggy conditions, van Deventer was anxious to bring his opponent to bay as quickly as possible. He had Pamforce with its two columns, Rosecol and Kartucol, pushing westwards on the Medo-Mwalia road against *Abt Köhl*, while in the west Hawthorn was closed up with *Abt Otto*. Pamforce found the first opportunity to attack when it ran into a strong German position of about six companies around Chirumba Hill, a long rocky outcrop that paralleled the road running from Medo to Mwalia. General Edwards determined to seize the hill and to press on to Medo as quickly as possible.

The defenders had placed only two companies on the eastern edge of the hill, where they could block the road. The remainder, under Köhl, were echeloned south-east of the defences, ready to counter-attack or conduct an ambush. This was unknown to

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<sup>833</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 391; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, p. 37.

<sup>834</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 124.

<sup>835</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 406

Rosecol who reached and seized the eastern end of the position by the evening of 10 April. The next day, Kartucol was sent on a flanking movement to the south of Chirumba Hill with the aim of cutting off the Medo-Mloco road and thence to Medo on 12 April, while Rosecol launched a holding attack along the Chirumba Hill to cover the move.

Giffard's column moved off successfully at dawn on 11 April and made reasonable progress bypassing the hill despite encountering a large swamp. However, it was here that he would meet *Abt Köhl* in its depth positions.<sup>836</sup> By mid-morning, the lead battalion was halted by heavy machine gun fire which continued until 1330 hours, when Köhl launched all four companies into the counter-attack. In the meantime, Rosecol had been pushing slowly westwards along the road towards Medo with two battalions. They did well and began to push back the defenders. As the counter-attack was beginning to threaten Kartucol, Köhl noticed that the Rosecol had occupied the high ground to his flank. Despite trying to push them off, he was unsuccessful and with the main position astride the road lost, he decided to break off the battle. The fighting continued until dark when *Abt Spangenberg* with two companies was left to form the rearguard while the remainder went on to rejoin the main body.<sup>837</sup>

This battle, the first major encounter in Portuguese East Africa, cost both sides a number of casualties and forced Köhl to expend some 53,000 of his precious rounds. As well, food was becoming short and he had to live off the land as much as possible in order to conserve stocks. The loss of Chirumba Hill threatened his stores and he had them evacuated from Namunyo to Mdalamia, but was forced to fight another action on 16/17 April to cover that move. This action cost him another 46,000 rounds and he continued to withdraw under pressure, while using fighting patrols to try and disrupt the British supply system.<sup>838</sup>

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<sup>836</sup> Clifford, *The Gold Coast Regiment*, pp. 238-239; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>837</sup> Clifford, *The Gold Coast Regiment*, pp. 244-245; MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, p. 113. German losses were 13 killed, 48 wounded, four taken prisoner and two missing out of 620. The British lost 18 killed, 55 wounded, and one taken prisoner out of 2,000 rifles.

<sup>838</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 407.



The British advance continued slowly against a series of small-scale ambushes that were greatly enhanced by the very difficult country and thick bush in the area. Mwalia was reached on 20 April, with the columns having averaged about 4 miles per day since leaving Medo.<sup>839</sup> *Abt Köhl* continued its move toward Nanungu, taking up a position around Mblama on 24/25 April. Despite the difficulty of the advance and the unfavourable conditions, the British scored a minor coup as Kartucol attacked a German convoy and seized all the spare rifles, ammunition and documents for Köhl's six companies.<sup>840</sup>

Pamforce ran into heavy opposition on 1 May when a German counter-attack nearly led to the loss of a mountain battery near Koronje. A flank attack onto Kartucol caused a high number of British casualties including 42 dead and the loss of two mountain guns. This setback forced a temporary halt in the advance, as General Edwards had to reorganise after the battle and bring up much-needed supplies.<sup>841</sup>

In the meantime, van Deventer had sensed von Lettow's intentions and ordered his forces to converge on Nanungu. Northey was instructed to advance from his position at Mahua while maintaining forces to the north to prevent a breakthrough in that direction. Edwards was told to carry on driving along the Mwalia-Nanungu road while Colonel Rosa was asked to use his troops to cover the gap between the two forces.

In the west, Northey's troops had occupied Mahua on 5 May, having overrun and dispersed a German company the day previously. This move had been worrying von Lettow, who had had moved westward with five companies to block the advance. The British columns reacted to the German response by digging-in near Makoti, less than 25 miles south-west of Nanungu. On arrival, von Lettow launched a ferocious attack, using two flanking movements. Despite the strength of the blow, it was unable to dislodge the defenders and von Lettow had to regroup under cover of darkness. Casualties were heavy on both sides with the Germans having over 100 and they had to amalgamate two

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<sup>839</sup> Clifford, *The Gold Coast Regiment*, p. 256.

<sup>840</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch II*, p. 125.

companies, reducing their overall strength to 13.<sup>842</sup> For their part, the British suffered over 200 losses and were forced to halt to sort out the casualties.<sup>843</sup>

This sharp action led the British to believe that Lettow still considered a move north, a fact apparently confirmed by the statements of prisoners. To that end, van Deventer ordered one column to hold the north along the Msalu River while the remainder of Edwards's and Northey's troops would close in on Nanungu in an attempt to bring the Germans to a decisive battle.<sup>844</sup> The advance resumed on 17 May with Kartucol entering Nanungu unopposed two days later. Finding that place abandoned except for a hospital full of sick soldiers, Edwards despatched Kartucol down the Mahua road in pursuit of the withdrawing Germans. Rosecol and Grifcol were sent off on flanking marches to the north and south of the road respectively on 20 May.<sup>845</sup> Von Lettow had already left in a south-westerly direction along the Mahua Road going in the direction that the British were least prepared and least able to deal with. He had organised his force into four *Abteilungen* with the customary advance and rearguards ready for a move south of the River Lurio.<sup>846</sup> The first major stop was at Korewa, some 24 miles south-west of Nanungu while the *Kommandeur* kept alert for an opportunity to strike at an isolated column.

The next day, Kartucol ran into *Abt Köhl*, now the rearguard, and quickly started working around its position. This the Germans to pull back further through the dense bush and out of British clutches. Despite the break south, the situation was beginning to look favourable for van Deventer as the bulk of the *Schutztruppe* were being concentrated into a fairly tight area, albeit rocky and thickly vegetated, while the flanking columns were pressing in. However, he was unaware that von Lettow was now preparing to strike back at his pursuers.

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<sup>841</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 407; Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 394-395; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>842</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch II*, pp. 125-126; Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 408. Boell cites German casualties as being 34 killed, 106 wounded. This represented 26.7 per cent of their strength with three companies reduced to less than 35 per cent while the British lost 103 killed, 100 wounded and six taken prisoner.

<sup>843</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 408; WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2650, 6 May 1917, Telegram G 269, van Deventer to War Office; WO 95/5330, War Diary Norforce, Entry 5 May 1918.

<sup>844</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 126.

<sup>845</sup> Clifford, *The Gold Coast Regiment*, p. 269.

<sup>846</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 409.



Having first sent off the baggage train to a safe distance, von Lettow instructed *Abt Köhl* to launch a spoiling attack on the morning of 22 May. It was not intended to be decisive, just enough to disrupt the advance and enable the rearguard to break clear and slowly move back. At 0900, Kartucol came into battle as the road went into a narrow gorge flanked by impassable hills. The lead battalion engaged Köhl's troops with its mountain guns and Stokes mortars to good effect while the flanking columns moved on. Grifcol emerged from the south onto the Mahua road to the rear of Köhl's main body, surprising a company at its midday meal and driving it off. Moving on, it then captured *Abt Köhl's* baggage while cutting the German force in half.<sup>847</sup> Von Lettow was not far behind, with both *Abt Poppe* and *Göring*, and immediately advanced on hearing the firing. In danger of being trapped, Köhl had begun withdrawing through the gorge when the *Kommandeur* arrived. A furious counter-attack was launched onto Grifcol by eight companies, including two of Köhl's, but the Germans were unable to dislodge the now-surrounded column. Further east, Kartucol kept pressing hard and von Lettow was compelled to despatch two companies and later a third to protect this flank. His blow had failed, and, in considerable danger of being destroyed in place, he ordered the battle broken off. The night provided an opportunity for the weakened *Schutztruppe* to escape through the dense bush and regroup to the south.<sup>848</sup>

The two-day battle cost both sides heavily, but especially the Germans. They had suffered heavy casualties, losing over 100 troops and 300 carriers. Four companies were effectively destroyed, with the Governor, both artillery batteries and *Abt Köhl* losing their baggage. Over 30,000 rounds had been expended while a further 70,000 were captured by the British; this left only 613,000 for the entire force. Furthermore, food was running short and the whole situation had a distinct resemblance to November 1917 when the force had barely escaped from a similar scrape. This setback forced von Lettow to break contact and march south slowly in order to evacuate the seriously wounded and sick.<sup>849</sup>

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<sup>847</sup> WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>848</sup> WO 95/5330, War Diary Norforce, Entry 22 May 1918.

<sup>849</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 410; MS Boell, N14/36, 2. Kapitel, pp. 166-167. Of a German strength of 880, 17 were killed, 88 were wounded, 317 taken prisoner (296 were carriers) representing some 10.5 per cent of their strength; WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2674, 24 May 1918, Telegram 210 WO, van Deventer to War Office, p. 354. The British reported losses of about 70.

From the British point of view, the battle had represented a chance to end the campaign. Had Rosecol been able to join battle, it might have made the difference. As it was, the Germans were mauled heavily, although at some cost to the advancing columns and a significant reduction in their fighting strength. Nevertheless, they were still not beaten and the British had run into the limits of their supplies again. Nanungu marked a turning point in the campaign as the Germans were under severe pressure to gain both food supplies and ammunition.

### **THE MOVE SOUTH TO MOZAMBIQUE**

Reorganising on the spot, Rosecol was broken up while Kartrecol deployed a battalion to secure the road along the line Malema-Mozambique while another was sent to stiffen the Portuguese detachment along the Ribane-Maleme road. It was left to Kartucol and Grifcol to carry on the pursuit of von Lettow in parallel columns. Rearguard actions were the norm and were only broken up by the capture of another hospital left behind by the Germans.<sup>850</sup>

Von Lettow remained as wily as ever and quickly moved his reduced force south gaining a day and a half's head start on his now-halted opponents. His aim was to replenish his diminished stocks and to secure enough food to live off; going south offered the best opportunities while putting more strain on his opponents' supply lines. By 27 May, the advance guard had reached the River Lurio and had reconnoitered a suitable crossing site near Watiwa.<sup>851</sup>

By 1 June, the Germans had almost completely crossed the River Lurio at Watiwa and now threatened to break through the difficult area between the river and Inagu and into the more settled areas around Mozambique. The land was exceptionally difficult with numerous hills, very thick bush, little cultivation and few paths. The indigenous

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<sup>850</sup> Van Deventer, *Despatch II*, pp. 126-127. One captured hospital yielded 15 Germans, 47 *Askaris*, and 31 Porters as prisoners on 28 May; CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entry 27 May 1918.

<sup>851</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 412.



population was also strongly anti-Portuguese and willing to assist the incoming Germans. Given the past weakness of the Portuguese forces, van Deventer had to assume that they would be incapable of serious resistance and therefore had to deploy his own troops to support them. He asked Colonel Rosa to move some of his troops from their positions just south of the River Rovuma to the port of Quelimane and to be prepared to move them inland from there. The final arrangements were agreed at a meeting in Dar-es-Salaam on 8 June, although subsequently the Portuguese commander's enthusiasm for attacking had to be curbed by van Deventer. Instead, Rosa was instructed to await reinforcement and was to ensure the fortification of the supply base at Nhamacurra, at the end of a small railway line north of Quelimane.<sup>852</sup>

The German push south forced van Deventer to reconsider the ever-lengthening lines of communication. As things stood, Port Amelia was too distant, but the shifting of the entire base by sea to the port of Mozambique was out of the question owing to shortages of shipping. Consequently, a motor road was cut from Medo down to Nanripo, where the Lurio was crossed, and then south to Mcuburi and finally on to Nampula.<sup>853</sup> Van Deventer was particularly concerned about the ability of the Portuguese to defend themselves and decided to reinforce their key garrisons with his own troops. A new column under Colonel Fitzgerald, named Fitzcol, was formed from two KAR battalions at Muo Nluku.<sup>854</sup> Hoping to box the enemy in the Malema area, he sent a unit to Inagu while another moved into Malokotera with an Anglo-Portuguese column concentrated at Ribae. Further north, both Grifcol and Kartucol were still struggling to cross the Lurio in the face of German rearguards, finally making the crossing by 5 June.<sup>855</sup>

The Germans were wasting little time and managed to evade the converging columns on the Malema line. The advance guard, *Abt Müller* with three companies, attacked the Portuguese *boma* at Malema after it had been reinforced by several companies of KAR on 31 May. For once, the attack was unsuccessful and the defenders

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<sup>852</sup> WO 95/5295, War Diary GHQ, 21 June 1918, Entry *Quelimane Area*; WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2688, 1 June 1918, Telegram 218 WO, van Deventer to War Office, pp. 357-358.

<sup>853</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 128.

<sup>854</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 412; WO 95/5330, *History of 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> KAR*, p. 43.

<sup>855</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 128; CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entry 1 June 1918.





held firm.<sup>856</sup> Müller remained there for a few days and then marched off, rejoining von Lettow and the main body on 8 June. The *Kommandeur* then decided to march in the direction of least resistance and sent off Müller towards Alto Molokwe. Arriving there on 12 June, the *boma* was found empty, its garrison of two Portuguese companies having fled without a shot, and a rich haul of food and documents were taken. Most importantly, the captured papers mentioned an incoming ammunition column. Müller immediately followed up this lead and went off searching the local area for its whereabouts. Occupying Ille, Alto Ligonye, Nampave and Muyeba in turn, he seized 2200 loads of food and various materials. Furthermore, the tracks of a column were found and Mueller captured 150,000 kg of food and numerous other supplies on 23 June. A subsequent attack on a lone Portuguese company yielded several machine guns, some food and 13,000 rounds of ammunition. Despite these considerable successes, the munitions column could not be located and ammunition remained scarce.<sup>857</sup>

After halting on the Malema line to sort out the supply situation, on 16 June van Deventer ordered the three mobile columns to move south, with General Edwards assuming command of the Mozambique theatre. The new base at the port of Mozambique opened up the next day, while the lead units of Colonel Rosa's northern troops landed at neighbouring Quelimane on 20 June. It was van Deventer's intention to trap and hammer the *Schutztruppe* between the villages of Ille and Alto Molokwe, and then to drive it towards the coast. General Hawthorn, now having taken over Norforce, brought the bulk of his troops to Ille while Philcol moved to Nakwa and Alto Ligonye; Fitzcol was due to link up with them near Ribawe, while the Portuguese were relegated to securing the coastal towns.<sup>858</sup> But, van Deventer miscalculated as his opponent had already determined to continue south-east and just beat the British to Ille. On 25 June, the lead unit ran into the German advance guard, *Abt Spangenberg*, but was unable to push through. While fighting was underway, the enemy main body and rearguard bypassed the fighting and slipped away.<sup>859</sup>

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<sup>856</sup> CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entry 2 June 1918.

<sup>857</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 413.

<sup>858</sup> CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entries 15, 20 and 24 June 1918.

More troops were now brought into the fighting as Kartrecol was taken off its duties along the Rovuma and brought south. Fitzcol left Mbalama and after a long and exhausting march, joined General Edwards at Nampula on 30 June. This was now more important as von Lettow threatened the port of Quelimane which supported a major supply base at the railway terminus at Nhamacurra, a number of miles north. Nhamacurra was essential for the support of any columns operating north of that port and had a large stockpile of food and essential stores. Van Deventer was especially concerned about its security and he ordered Colonel Rosa to reinforce it while also providing a half battalion of KAR. On at least two occasions, he sent explicit instructions for its defence, charging Rosa with responsibility for the execution of his orders. This was important as the British were short of information owing to the hostility of the local population, but they did realise that von Lettow was in the area.<sup>860</sup>

On paper the garrison was formidable, with three Portuguese infantry and one artillery companies together with the two KAR companies. The defences were laid out over a distance of 3,000 yards with three sectors, the western and central being allocated to the Portuguese and the eastern to the British. The railway station formed the right of the position and was held by the KAR. The Nhamacurra River marked the left before swinging around the rear of the defences.<sup>861</sup>

On 27 June, von Lettow sent off his advance guard, *Abt Müller*, with orders to obtain more ammunition and intelligence with the main body remaining a day's march behind it. Friendly Africans informed Müller of the position at Nhamacurra and he promptly decided to march on it. Emerging from the bush only 30 metres from the Portuguese positions around the sisal factory in the western sector, he was surprised to run into the enemy. However, they fled at literally the first shots and the position quickly collapsed, with substantial quantities of weapons and ammunition being captured. Moving toward the centre of the position, Müller's troops ran into further Portuguese and some British troops, who put up some resistance but were eventually forced out.

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<sup>859</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 414.

<sup>860</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2718, 17 June 1918, Telegram 234 WO, van Deventer to War Office, pp. 369-370; No. 2729, 22 June 1918, Telegram 238 WO, van Deventer to War Office, p. 371.



Consolidating on the objective, he awaited the arrival of the main body who duly arrived on 2 July. Patrols had located the KAR positions at the railway station and Köhl now resolved to attack it. Well dug-in and disciplined, the KAR held their positions and inflicted heavy losses on the attackers.<sup>862</sup> Heavy machine gun and rifle fire continued throughout the day as well as most of 3 July. At 1500 hours, one of the captured Portuguese mountain guns was made serviceable again and began firing. The first round hit the railway station building and drove out a number of Portuguese *Askaris* and carriers in a blind panic. They stampeded through the KAR positions causing chaos while the Germans took advantage of the confusion to infiltrate. Now overwhelmed and being overrun from the rear, the position began to collapse. The defenders tried to withdraw over the deep Nhamacurra river to their rear and many drowned or were shot down as they tried to escape.<sup>863</sup>

The result was a disaster. The Portuguese garrison had been largely wiped out as well as the KAR companies. More importantly, vast quantities of food, weapons, ammunition and stores fell into the Germans' hands, relieving their supply worries at once. It gave them the ability to fight on for some considerable time. They seized some five heavy machine guns, three light machine guns, 484 rifles, 327,000 rounds, 300,000 kg of food, and, critically, 3.75 kg of quinine.<sup>864</sup>

This disaster also caused considerable panic to the Portuguese administration as Quelimane was now directly threatened. On 4 July, Colonel Rosa ordered the families evacuated and the bullion stores placed on ships as a precaution, while there was wild talk of abandoning the town. However, the British resolved to hold it and von Lettow had other ideas. He realised that the Zambesi was in flood and therefore impassable while the British strength lay in their ability to move by sea. He decided to reverse his steps and to head north-east with the secondary aim of disrupting their newly created lines of communication. Marching in five groups with the standard advance guard of *Abt*

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<sup>861</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 3. Kapitel, pp. 216-218; WO 106/273, *History of 3 KAR*, p. 89a.

<sup>862</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, [2-4 July] 1918, pp. 146-147.

<sup>863</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 399-400; WO 106/273, *History of 3<sup>rd</sup> KAR*, pp. 90-91.

*Müller* and rearguard of *Abt Köhl*, the Germans set off on 5 July.<sup>865</sup> However, owing to the loss of contact and active deception by the local population, the British lost track of these movements for a few days.

Finally, Philcol ran into the leading elements of the *Schutztruppe* near Ociva on 11 July. Thus warned, General Edwards sent Fitzcol north from Nhamacurra towards Ociva while the redoubtable Kartucol was ordered to try and head off the Germans at Murrau. Van Deventer released the last of his battalions along the border of German East Africa, sending two KAR battalions from Fort Johnston to Mozambique.<sup>866</sup>

The chase was back in full flight. A Portuguese post at Mtiba fell easily, but Philcol and Kartucol were now closing hard, and Köhl had to hold them off as the main body slipped off north towards the small post of Namirrue, held by two companies of KAR. Fitzcol reached the Namirrue River about 25 miles west of the *boma* on 20 July. Setting off the next day, it could hear the sounds of battle from the direction of the garrison; the column marched as quickly as it could through the heavy bush. Pausing only briefly on the night of 21/22 July, Fitzcol emerged onto the Alto Ligonha-Namirrue road to find the *boma* was already under attack by the six companies of von Lettow's main body while the three companies of advance guard secured the flank.

Fitzgerald was well aware of the potential seriousness of the situation and his lead battalion pressed on to reach the beleaguered garrison. By 1600, the leading German outposts had been driven in, but an hour later a strong attack checked the column's progress. The enemy withdrew at nightfall and both battalions dug-in in line. Von Lettow had been informed about the threat to his rear and had launched a night flanking attack. At 1900 hours, it hit the right flank of the forward position which was still under construction. The *Schutztruppe* managed to break into the defences and routed the battalion completely. The shock was so complete that the commanding officer and his

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<sup>864</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 415; WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, [2-4] July 1918, pp. 146-147. He states that over 100 drowned.

<sup>865</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 3. Kapitel, p. 230; WO 95/5330, War Diary Norforce, Entry 4 July 1918.

<sup>866</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 416; CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entry 13 July 1918.



headquarters staff were taken prisoner.<sup>867</sup> Stragglers quickly reached the second battalion and alerted Fitzgerald to the impending threat. A desperate fight ensued until 2100 hours, when the battle was broken off by the attackers. A much-weakened column then withdrew to protect its baggage train. The next day revealed that one battalion had practically ceased to exist and the other was reduced to less than 200 effectives. Against the main body of the enemy, the column was now helpless and could do little more than defend itself.<sup>868</sup>

The defeat of Fitzcol sealed the fate of the unlucky garrison holding the *boma* at Namirru. Cut off from its water supply and overwhelmingly outnumbered, the post fell on 23 July after a final assault at 1700 hours and surrendered.<sup>869</sup> However it did cost the attackers dear, as one company commander was killed in the attack and another severely wounded.<sup>870</sup> During this time, Kartucol had been far from idle as it had left Munevalia on the night of 2/3 July. It had spent some considerable time chasing rumours of the Germans heading south towards Quelimane when news was received about the disaster at Nhamacurra. The column returned to Munevalia on 14 July, having marched 187 miles or an average of 17 miles per day through heavy bush. Despite their considerable fatigue, there was no opportunity for rest and they marched straight off towards Tipe in an attempt to head off von Lettow before he could cross the River Molocque.

Kartucol reached its objective on 20 July only to find *Abt Köhl* holding the crossings. Showing great determination, crossings were forced and the column pushed up against the Germans until 22 July when firing could be heard from the direction of Namirru. The enemy's camp was located on 24 July, but the column did not attack until the arrival of reinforcements and a much needed food resupply.<sup>871</sup> It then advanced to the site of the camp to find it evacuated and burnt out. On hearing that the Germans had turned east, Giffard ordered a forced march to Calipo, north-east of Namirru, where he then halted to link up with the remnants of Fitzcol. A brief rest ensued as Kartucol had

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<sup>867</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 417; Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 402; CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entries 22 and 23 July 1918.

<sup>868</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 402; WO 106/273, *History of 3<sup>rd</sup> KAR*, pp. 92-93.

<sup>869</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch I*, p. 130.

<sup>870</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, Entries 22-23 July 1918, pp. 152-153.

<sup>871</sup> CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entry 24 July 1918.

marched 330 miles in a month with little food, no blankets or personal kit. It was a remarkable achievement.<sup>872</sup>

The unsatisfactory military situation led to another meeting between General van Deventer and the Governor-General at Quelimane on 22 July. It was decided to give each nation separate zones of operation, with the Portuguese being allocated the defence of the sea ports from Quelimane to Antonio Ennes together with local inland operations. The British took upon themselves the task of maintaining forces south of the line Mozambique-Malema.

A week later on 29 July, van Deventer met with Edwards at Nampula to decide future operations. The Germans were now known to have turned again and this time headed east to the area of Chalaua, which was fertile land lying between the Ligonha and Meluli Rivers. The local population was in a state of near revolt and was actively assisting the invaders against the hated colonial power and its allies. Notable too, was the virtual cessation of desertions since the crossing of the Malema line on 10 June which may have been attributed to the great distances between the Askaris' homes and the location of the fighting forces.<sup>873</sup>

Von Lettow's calculations had been influenced by documents captured at Namirrué that indicated that the area to its north had few supplies of food. The area east of Ligonye had a number of Portuguese posts, mostly abandoned, and, although over 13,000 loads of food were discovered, the lack of porters meant that most had to be destroyed. The *Kommandeur* decided to go east and marched to Pekera, arriving on 24 July, before moving on to Chalaua two days later.<sup>874</sup> The force managed to spend a week in the area and the lack of a close pursuit gave the force time to consider some essential measures regarding manpower. It had been possible to make up the diminished numbers of *Askaris* through the promotion of the best carriers, but in the eight months in Portuguese territory over a third had been lost (1190 from 1790) while 310 good porters

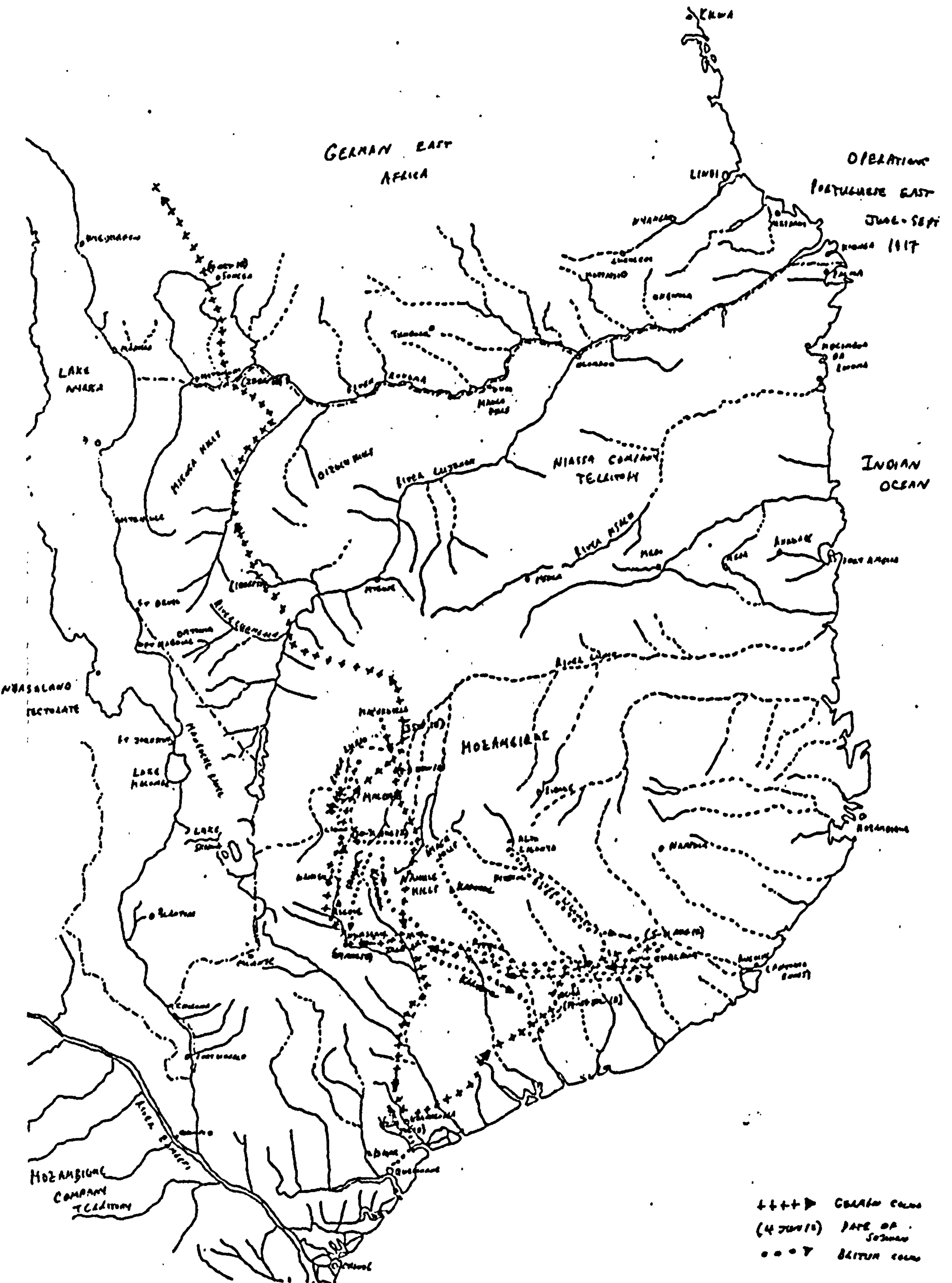
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<sup>872</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 402.; WO 106/273, *History of 3 KAR*, pp. 93-94.

<sup>873</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 131.

<sup>874</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 24-31 July 1918, pp. 154-155; Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 290-291.





had been enlisted to replace them and began immediate training. However, more serious was the diminution of the irreplaceable German officers and non-commissioned officers who had dwindled by nearly 30 per cent in the same time (197 remaining out of 281). The loss rate of 10-11 per month was increasingly serious, particularly when the need for good leaders was especially acute.<sup>875</sup> Pitched battles were becoming too expensive and were working in favour of the British.

While these operations were underway, the British continued their work on improving the communications in Portuguese East Africa. The extension of the motor road from Medo to Nampula was completed quickly and large numbers of vehicles were moved via this route to the Mozambique line rather than by sea. The road leading from Mnapo to Chinga was extended to Ribaue and Malema, while General Hawthorn's engineers continued the road from Nyasaland to Malokotera. Similarly, the Portuguese built a road from Ngomano through Chomba to Medo. The net effect of this activity was that, by the end of August, it was possible to drive from the Rovuma to Medo, through Nampula and Malema and on to Zomba in Nyasaland.<sup>876</sup> It was a major achievement and greatly aided the movement of supplies and troops. A number of smaller tracks were also constructed, as were improved telegraphic links from Nyasaland and the major ports of Quelimane and Mozambique.

These efforts were to have beneficial effects in the next stage of events. With a brief rest being granted to the most tired units, a number of smaller columns were sent out to protect the vulnerable lines of communication. Then, on 9 August, van Deventer initiated a converging movement on Chalaua with the aim of trapping von Lettow. The latter, of course, had no intention of being caught and had already started to collect his dispersed force, with a preliminary move on 7 August toward Namatil as a feint towards Mozambique. His real aim was the British magazine in the rich area of Nyamaroi-Regone. The rapidly closing British forced him to halt on 10 August and then he turned south followed by west and then north-west, in a successful attempt to confuse the

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<sup>875</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 417-418.

<sup>876</sup> Van Deventer *Despatch II*, p. 131.



scent.<sup>877</sup> However, a captured telegram was to have fateful consequences as the *Kommandeur* learnt that the supply centre at Mukubi was being evacuated to Regone. This tipped the balance and he now ordered his columns to make for Regone.<sup>878</sup>

The threat to Nyasaland was never far from van Deventer's mind and the latest move by the *Schutztruppe* led him to order the reinforcement of his western flank. General Hawthorn was ordered to hold Regone while Kartucol was sent rapidly to Alto Molocque; the remaining troops were instructed to follow the Germans as closely as possible. On 24 August, Numarroe had been reached and *Abt Müller* ran into a battalion of KAR. A heavy fight ensued with the battalion being forced back to the *boma* at Regone.<sup>879</sup> It was an advanced supply base of some considerable value, as it contained 10,000 loads of food, 500 cases of small arms ammunition and 200 of Stokes Mortar bombs; its loss would have severely hindered British operations in the area apart from providing the Germans with a large augmentation to their resources.<sup>880</sup>

Von Lettow wanted to take Regone by the use of small side paths, thereby avoiding the main defences. However, his plan miscarried through heavy fog, rain and difficult going. He reached the *boma* on 26 August to find it well defended and recently reinforced. In view of its strength and the approaching columns, he made the decision not to attack and to move off to the north instead.<sup>881</sup>

While these movements were underway, Hawthorn's troops had dug themselves in south of Lioma while Kartucol had its three battalions spread between Inagu and Muanhupa having arrived there from Alto Molocque. A hastily reinforced Fitzcol also went to Muanhupa to add to the defences. On 30 August, the *Schutztruppe* located and attacked the Norforce in its entrenched positions, with eleven of its twelve companies being committed to the assault. Despite being hit from all sides, the battalion held on tightly and was relieved by the arrival of Fitzcol on the same day. That unit sent in a

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<sup>877</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 10 August 1918, p 3.

<sup>878</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, pp. 418-419.

<sup>879</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 419. The Germans lost seven killed and 25 missing; the British 51 dead, seven wounded prisoners and 44 prisoners. Two Lewis guns and 40,000 rounds were seized.

<sup>880</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *King's African Rifles*, p. 405.

<sup>881</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 419; WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 27 August 1918, p. 5; Lettow, *Reminiscences*, pp. 294-295.

counter-attack that was followed by another battalion arriving from Muanhupa early on 31 August. This resulted in the taking of *Abt Müller's* baggage column and the loss of 50,000 sorely needed rounds. Realising that he had stumbled into a strong position, von Lettow changed his plans and began moving north from about 1500 hours.<sup>882</sup> Kartucol followed up with its usual vigour as it located the enemy crossing the Muanhupa River on the next day; its lead battalion launched an attack from the west supported by another from the east. Although able to deflect these blows, the Germans' lost of two of the Governor's key staff officers, a medical officer and the field hospital.<sup>883</sup>

The operations in the Numarroo-Regone-Lioma area had cost both sides heavily. For the British, one battalion had taken a heavy pounding and the remnants of a second were largely finished off at Numarroo. However, the Germans suffered one of their closest escapes at Lioma - Regone. Trying to defeat the British in detail, they were very nearly caught in a trap. Casualties were heavy and the losses of military equipment and medical stores were marked. Sixty-three were killed with a further 70 wounded, while some 250 valuable carriers were captured by the British.<sup>884</sup>

Prisoners taken by the *Schutztruppe* indicated that yet another KAR battalion was now to the east coming from Alto Molocque and Malema. Increasingly desperate to escape the British trap, the *Kommandeur* decided to move north and recross the River Lurio, which was now a trickle. Forced marches between 1 and 3 September were interrupted only by attacks on the rearguard by the persistent British columns.<sup>885</sup> On 5 September, the Germans had their first rest day in 25, but could only pause briefly as the pursuers were close at hand. Supplies were again growing very short, and the country was devastated from previous incursions and the German columns had to separate widely in order to seek food.

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<sup>882</sup> CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entries 31 August and 1 September 1918; Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 406.

<sup>883</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, [31 August] 1918, pp. 10-15.

<sup>884</sup> WO 95/5295, War Diary GHQ, 1 September 1918; MS Boell, N14/36, 3. Kapitel, p. 307. On 30 August, the Germans lost 27 killed, 58 wounded and 14 as prisoners out of 667 troops (14.6 per cent). A further seven carriers were killed and 78 missing. The British were reported to have had 5 killed and 133 wounded out of 900 (15.4 per cent). On 31 August, the Germans lost a further three killed, eleven wounded and 22 missing while 197 carriers were casualties. Furthermore, some 480,00 rounds, ten rifles, 40 loads of medical supplies, 40 company loads, 30 food loads and 115 loads of European kit were lost.

<sup>885</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 1 September 1918, p. 17.



Shortcol was sent ahead to try and prevent the crossing of the Lurio, but collided with the rearguard on 5 September. Kartucol left its camp on the same day and made for the Germans' expected position. But a German detour into the bush quickly confused matters; Kartucol thought that the enemy was some way to its north (and front) when it came under contact. Quite unexpectedly, it had hit the main body while in column of march. This unexpected collision caused great confusion in both opposing columns as the rear battalion of Kartucol clashed with the middle of the German line, that of *Abt Müller*. The engagement was fought in terrain with very limited visibility and it took several hours for reinforcements to arrive on both sides, owing to the dispersed nature of the respective columns. The confusion was exacerbated by the Germans running into the rear of the column and seeing only their transport. They believed that they had chanced upon a supply convoy and initiated a rapid attack. The KAR were placed under heavy pressure as it had to react quickly, while the rest of the column was some two and four miles ahead respectively. It took several hours for the second unit to come into action and stop the German attack at around 1400 hours. Finally, the lead battalion reached the battle at 1700 hours and launched a final counter-attack. This was successful, and the battle was broken off and the Germans moved off into the bush. Kartucol had suffered heavily in the encounter and was unable to continue the advance which was given over to Shortcol.<sup>886</sup> Again, the Germans lost heavily in terms of officers and suffered against the good British defences.<sup>887</sup>

The inevitable reorganisation after battle included the collection, treatment and evacuation of the wounded. Kartucol had to deal with over 200 stretcher cases, including the enemy's, and deliver them to the Lurio where they were met by the MAC. This was completed on 8 September, while it was not until 13 September that the battered KAR battalion was able to rejoin the column.

The battles at the end of August and early September were painful to both sides. The Germans had lost 39 soldiers killed, 133 wounded and 51 captured, as well as 437 carriers lost. Telling was the impact on the command structure as 2 *Abteilung* leaders and

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<sup>886</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, pp. 407-408; CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entry 1 September 1918.

3 company commanders had been either killed or seriously wounded. The force was reduced to 12 companies which had lost a great deal of baggage together with 40 packs of crucial medical supplies.<sup>888</sup> The weather was also hurting the Germans' health as the intense heat of the days was followed by severe cold at nights, coupled with little food or water. An epidemic of lung influenza broke out in early September.<sup>889</sup> For their part, the British had lost 8 soldiers killed and 71 wounded from one unit alone on 6 September.

### **THE BREAK TO THE NORTH-WEST**

By now, von Lettow was anxious to avoid another series of battles and did his best to break free; Mwembe was reached on 17 September after another exhausting march only for the Germans to find all its stores burnt or removed.<sup>890</sup> Shortcol could only support one battalion in the pursuit owing to supply difficulties. Durcol reached Inagu and Malema in early September, only to be disbanded once the enemy crossed the River Lurio. Kartucol lost one of its battalions which went into reserve near Tabora, while the remaining two crossed the Rovuma on 28 September.

While the reasons for this loss of momentum were quite clear to General Hawthorn, the commander-in-chief was very displeased. A sharp telegram accused Norforce of having lost its drive and determination. While Hawthorn's angry rebuttal had some justification, it verged on the insubordinate. There was truth in both views, as some of the column commanders had let opportunities slip, but equally it was clear that the overall strategy had not been a great success either. Firmly rebuked, Hawthorn was given the task of pursuing von Lettow northwards and of bringing him to battle at any cost.<sup>891</sup>

The break northwards naturally gave concerns about the safety of both Mahenge and Songea, which were fertile areas and very familiar to von Lettow. The newly

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<sup>887</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, Entry 6 September, pp 21-22.

<sup>888</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 420.

<sup>889</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 8 September 1918, pp. 24-25.

<sup>890</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 17 September 1918, p.25.

<sup>891</sup> CO 691/15, War Diary Norforce, Entries 25 and 26 September 1918.



developed road system came in extremely handy as units were re-deployed throughout September. Kartucol was broken up, having marched an incredible 1600 miles, crossed 29 large rivers and fought 32 engagements. Its well-worn troops were sent into reserve to secure the southern portion of German East Africa in the area Massassi-Ndanda. Fitzcol was disbanded and the bulk of units transferred to a new formation, Cenforce, to be commanded by Colonel Fitzgerald. Cenforce was based on the Central Railway between Morogoro and Dodoma with columns extended south to Mahenge and Iringa.<sup>892</sup> Van Deventer's aim was to use his strategic mobility to reinforce threatened areas as required while keeping up the close pursuit by Shortcol. Hawthorn recalled his forward units to Fort Johnston, preparatory to a move by steamer up Lake Nyassa and thence to Sphinxhafen. He wanted to catch the *Schutztruppe* in the flank before they could reach the Rhodesia-Nyasaland border. Orders were given by GHQ to send Norforce to Songea and Ubeni, with battalions sent to garrison Mahenge and Iringa while the remaining infantry battalions were concentrated around Massassi.<sup>893</sup>

However, the age and decrepitude of the vessels on Lake Nyassa meant that frequent breakdowns impeded the speed of deployment. Hawthorn's lead battalion left Fort Johnston on 18 September and concentrated at Sphinxhafen by the end of the month. It too was tired, having been marching and fighting continually since the previous March. The Rhodesian police units followed up as quickly as resources permitted.<sup>894</sup>

If the Germans had made good their escape from the clutches of General Edwards, they were not having an easy time of it. Health worries impinged in a major way as influenza and pneumonia hit the force. Weakened by the continual marching and poor rations, all members of the *Schutztruppe* and its followers were suffering from serious weight loss and weakened resistance to disease. At times 50 per cent had influenza and each company had 6 –8 pneumonia cases. Only 90 of the worst cases could be carried and the rest had to walk. Between 1 and 22 September, 12 askaris and 20 carriers had to be abandoned due to exhaustion, while 24 askaris and 67 carriers had

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<sup>892</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 409.

<sup>893</sup> WO 95/5295, War Diary GHQ, 19 September 1918.

<sup>894</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 409.

deserted.<sup>895</sup> Matters came to a head on 20 September when Governor Schnee sent a letter to General von Lettow stating that the carrying along of the seriously ill was an unjustifiable sacrifice of lives and that they should be abandoned as advised by the doctors.<sup>896</sup> This went down poorly with the *Kommandeur* and he retorted that to do so would irretrievably weaken his combat power and many of the sick would recover in time. The situation was not helped by the continued reports of the unfavourable military situation in Europe from the remaining wireless receiver and captured newspapers.<sup>897</sup>

Having rebuffed the Governor, von Lettow then called in all of his *Abteilung* leaders and emphasized their mission of tying up as many Allied troops as possible and telling them not to be depressed by the apparently bad news from Europe.<sup>898</sup> It was a crisis of confidence that appears to have been staunched for the time being. However, the pressure was beginning to show in the columns as they had had only had one day's rest out of 35 marching. Desertions amongst the African troops were increasing - *Abt Kraut* lost 300 of its experienced carriers in two days while over 200 prisoners of war managed to escape.<sup>899</sup>

Having kept his force together with the strength of his personality, von Lettow's next move was to cross the Rovuma some 30 kms east of Mitomani on 29 September and re-enter German territory after an absence of some 10 months.<sup>900</sup> It had been a difficult time, particularly from British pressure in the latter months, and the German force had shrunk from 278 to 168 Europeans, from 1,600-1,700 Askaris to just over 1,000, and the experienced carriers from 4,000 to about 2,000.<sup>901</sup> While the fighting power of the *Schutztruppe* remained formidable, the constant sufferings and losses were taking a toll of its morale. *Abt Wahle* was broken up on 2 October and the force became even more concentrated than ever.<sup>902</sup>

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<sup>895</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 3. Kapitel p. 321.

<sup>896</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 19 September 1918, pp. 31-32.

<sup>897</sup> MS Boell, N14/36, 3. Kapitel, pp. 321-322.

<sup>898</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 421.

<sup>899</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 14 September 1918, pp. 26-27.

<sup>900</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, [29] September 1918, p. 38.

<sup>901</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 30 September 1918, p. 39.

<sup>902</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 2 October 1918, p. 42.



Patrols soon found that the British were holding Mitomani and captured documents indicated that two further companies were en-route from Sphinxhafen to Songea. This resulted in an action on 4 October as *Abt Spangenberg* blocked the progress of these companies along the Wiedhafen-Songea road, while the remainder of the force bypassed to the west and continued their march north.<sup>903</sup> Although successful, this action cost another 30-40 casualties while both *Askaris* and carriers were deserting in greater numbers.<sup>904</sup>

The options facing the Germans at this stage were several, as the British could not move troops rapidly enough to go off in the direction of their choice. Furthermore, the rains were due in December and this would make the roads from the Central Railway to Iringa and Mahenge unusable. Therefore, if either place could be seized prior to then, it would be almost impossible to dislodge them until the following May. With the bulk of the British forces in the long process of redeploying from the heart of Portuguese East Africa, it would be some time before a suitably large formation could be assembled.

As a precaution, van Deventer ordered the reinforcement of the Lindi-Tunduru area in the south with additions to the garrisons of both Mahenge and Iringa while roads leading south from the railway were improved. The main reserve was kept on the Central Railway and, as Tabora appeared the most likely objective, General Edwards was placed in command with his headquarters there.<sup>905</sup>

Having bypassed the first blocking force, von Lettow continued his rapid march north, his intentions still unknown to his opponents. Hawthorn was anxious to stop him at the northern end of Lake Nyassa and ordered two battalions to move by ship up to Alt Langenburg as quickly as possible. With shortages of carriers and food, it was only possible to keep one battalion in the pursuit. Furthermore, the poor condition of the Lake fleet meant that two of the three available ships broke down in the middle of one move.

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<sup>903</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 421.

<sup>904</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 5-8 October 1918, pp. 44-50. About 30 Askaris and 40 carriers disappeared in this period; MS Boell, N14/36, 3. Kapitel, p. 327. The Germans lost eight killed, 53 wounded and 11 missing out of 283 rifles. Losses were 11 per cent.

<sup>905</sup> Van Deventer, Lt-Gen Sir J L, *Despatch from the Lieutenant-General Commanding-in-Chief, East African Force*, 30 September 1918, published in the *London Gazette*, "Supplement" 31310, 26 April 1919, p. 263.

The battalion was finally complete at Alt Langenburg on 18 October and further reinforcements still en-route.

On 15 October the KAR regained contact with *Abt Köhl* and maintained it over the course of the next few days. The Germans were also successful in foraging as some 10 days' supplies were found and carried off during the engagement.<sup>906</sup> On 17 October, von Lettow felt able to have a rest at Ukena, the first in 17 days. It was here that the redoubtable General Wahle was wounded. It was a remarkable effort by a 66 year old man, who had previously retired from the Saxon Army and who had suffered a double hernia and much malaria during the arduous campaign.<sup>907</sup> He was left behind with a number of sick and wounded troops and their followers.

On 19 October, the columns moved onto Gambawano where a quantity of food was collected over the next two days, while the British were unable to pursue and remained static in Ukena. Here, the *Kommandeur* decided to turn west and enter Northern Rhodesia instead of carrying on to Tabora as expected by van Deventer. His troops had largely recovered from the epidemic in September, but badly needed rest, while the low stocks of ammunition constrained their ability to fight battles.

Northern Rhodesia had not been touched heavily by the war since late 1915 and there were few defences to slow down an invader. Von Lettow considered going on to the West Coast and Angola in particular, as neither the Portuguese nor the Belgians could do anything meaningful to stop his movements. The British would have to redraw their extensive lines of communication and commence another campaign. All of this time would enable new harvests to be gathered and the *Schutztruppe* would be able to continue their actions, suitably refreshed.<sup>908</sup> On the other hand, the dire situation in Europe was apparent to the German element and the desertion of carriers continued unabated. As the Governor recorded in this diary:

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<sup>906</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 15 October 1918, pp. 66-67.

<sup>907</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 422.

<sup>908</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 422.



“Everyone hopes for peace...deliverance from our situation, which grows ever more unbearable and which consciously or unconsciously will leave its mark permanently on us...The terrible privations and hardships, the constant danger to health from unhygienic and other causes, the perpetual sickness, frequent periods of insufficient nourishment, the uncertainty of the final result, and the very unpleasant conditions, all have told unfavourably on the health and spirits of the Europeans and our good blacks have worked in vain (one wonders?).<sup>909</sup>

The movement had been very good indeed as they had averaged nearly 18 miles per day since 12 August with only two or three rest days. The long service *Askaris* and porters from the Wanyamwezi tribe were capable of great exertions under pressure.

### **THE END OF THE CAMPAIGN**

Now aware of the changed enemy direction, van Deventer made a number of strategic deployments to contain it. He sent one battalion to Bismarburg at the southern end of Lake Tanganyika, while two others were moved from Ndanda to Lindi from where they were sent by ship to Beira and then on by railway to Broken Hill in Southern Rhodesia. Hawthorn despatched another to Brandt in all haste, arriving on 25 September, but only in time to meet with the rearguard.<sup>910</sup>

Still expecting the Germans to turn north or west, van Deventer was surprised when they continued south into the relatively foodless areas of Northern Rhodesia. Fife was occupied only hours before the Germans arrived on 1 November; an attack the following day was held off by the defenders. Unable to secure the vital stores there, the Germans decided to make further south to Kasama which was the major supply depot from the south. It was a rich source and was also the key to the crossing of the Zambesi River and von Lettow's hopes for a continued campaign. The main body arrived in Kasama on 12 November, while Köhl's rearguard collected supplies back in Brandt. In

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<sup>909</sup> WO 106/1460, Schnee Diary, 1 November 198, pp. 81-82.

<sup>910</sup> Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles*, p. 420; Broken Hill was 500 miles south of Fife and Elizabethville was 400 miles to the west.

the meantime, von Spangenberg's advance guard was reconnoitering crossing sites on the Zambesi.

Desperate to catch the Germans before they moved off again, Hawkins with the KAR, left his supplies far behind and attacked the main body with only his 750 men on 12 November. A number of casualties were inflicted, but he could not move further until his baggage train caught up with him. This was to be the last engagement of the war as the armistice had been already signed in Europe although it was not until 13 November that von Lettow received formal notification from van Deventer.

It was the end to an extremely arduous and hard-fought campaign in which both sides had marched incredible distances in virgin bush and on very short rations with almost no creature comforts. The force that surrendered consisted of 20 German officers, 6 medical officers, the Governor and 32 officials, 3 subordinate officials and 122 German NCOs, 1168 Askaris, 1522 Carriers, 130 Prisoners of War Carriers, 428 Agricultural Carriers/Workers, 282 "Boys" for the Europeans, 427 Wives, and 392 "Boys" for the Africans. An overall total of 155 Germans and 4416 Africans remained together until the end.<sup>911</sup>

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<sup>911</sup> Boell, *Die Operationen*, p. 424.



## CHAPTER 9 - INTER-ALLIED COOPERATION

Despite the joint desire to defeat Germany, the British and Belgians found working together in Africa difficult and troublesome. By far the stronger power, Britain had required Belgian assistance in taking the western tracts of German East Africa owing to the distances involved and insufficient local forces. Anglo-Belgian military co-operation was uneasy during 1916 and the capture of Tabora in September did little to reduce tensions. One senior officer described the combined advance on Tabora:

“...want of cordial co-operation between the two elements of the force. As a matter of fact the movement would be almost better described as the advance of two forces, to some extent in co-operation, and with a similar object.”<sup>912</sup>

The campaign had been marred by personality clashes between commanders and differing national goals. Practical military co-operation ended on a sour note in the autumn of 1916, partly because the Belgians had achieved their immediate political goals and partly over a prolonged dispute about the division of the spoils. Above all, their Government wanted the complete return of occupied Belgium and by seizing sufficient German territory they had strengthened their hand in any peace settlement. They were well aware of German designs on the Congo colony and the possession of Rwanda-Urundi gave them additional security. Ultimately, they wished to add the captured territories to their Congo colony, an approach which clashed with the British desire to leave such settlements to the end of the war.<sup>913</sup>

Aware of British interests, they offered to hand the town over to British administration on 8 September, but the Colonial Office did not reply until nearly two months later.<sup>914</sup> In the meantime, they established their own administration and re-exerted political control over the African population. As time progressed, they made the

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<sup>912</sup> Fendall, *The East African Force*, p. 78.

<sup>913</sup> Louis, *Ruanda Urundi*, pp. 208 and 216-217.

<sup>914</sup> FO 371/2856, Folio 7930, 2 January 1917, “Belgian feeling over question of Tabora & other points”, “Extract of a letter from Sir F. Villiers to Mr. Balfour”.

retention of this area a condition of their further participation in the campaign. This was deemed unacceptable by the Colonial Office as it viewed the area as belonging to the British sphere of influence. A memorandum stated:

“...They propose, as the price of their future military co-operation with General Smuts, a recognition of their rights over the occupied territories in sense described above and acceptance of the principle that Belgium should reap advantages, to be defined hereafter, from her further participation in the campaign in proportion to the measure of her future efforts.”<sup>915</sup>

Bonar Law was intransigent and his uncompromising attitude was reinforced by Smuts's hostility towards Belgian ambitions. Given the disparity of power, the Colonial Office eventually prevailed.

“It appeared to Mr. Bonar Law quite impossible to discuss further Belgian co-operation on any such terms...It is therefore presumed that the question of seeking further military co-operation with the Belgians is settled, and that the Belgian Government will be informed that His Majesty's Government are unable to discuss the question of their co-operating further on the terms which they propose.”<sup>916</sup>

However, it was at a cost and the Belgians felt very strongly about the rebuff:

“In short it [giving up Tabora] would be a “humiliation” – I quote the word used to me several times over by the Prime Minister...In order to make the point more clear I must explain that the King of the Belgians takes a direct interest in these African questions and supports the adoption of a strong line. It is reported that Ministers have positively declared that they will not give up Tabora.”<sup>917</sup>

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<sup>915</sup> FO 371/2856, Folio 7930, 19 January 1917, Colonial Office Memorandum, [n.d.] enclosed with letter Long to Balfour.

<sup>916</sup> FO 371/2856, Folio 7930, 19 January 1917, Colonial Office Memorandum, [n.d.] enclosed with letter Long to Balfour.

<sup>917</sup> FO 371/2856, Folio 7930, 2 January 1917, “Belgian feeling over question of Tabora & other points”, “Extract of a letter from Sir F. Villiers to Mr Balfour”; Albert 1er, [Belgium], *Les Carnets de Guerre*, ed Thielemans, Marie-Rose, Paris: Duculot, 1991, Entry 1 November 1916, pp. 290-291 and 14 February 1917, p. 289.



The intervention of the Foreign Office soothed Belgian feelings to an extent, but in the end they were forced to withdraw to the west. In the circumstances, the Belgians suspended further military operations, although the breach was not irrevocable and did not rule out future co-operation. Only days after the handover, the CIGS announced that Belgian troops would indeed be available for operations without condition and General Smuts accepted the offer.<sup>918</sup> This was in fact an error, as the Belgian position had not changed and the War Office withdrew the telegram on 21 November.<sup>919</sup> However, Robertson did point out that at no time had the Belgians ever categorically refused further assistance, and that they could probably be induced to help if necessary. In reply, Smuts made little effort to retain their services, stating that he did not believe that further Belgian assistance would be needed, even if the campaign were to go into 1917, although he would be happy to have a reserve column of 1,500 rifles available at Tabora.<sup>920</sup>

Given the desperate state of Smuts's own forces in this period, his was a very tepid response; with his own expansionist ambitions, he sought to discourage competition during the post-war settlement. Little action of substance followed and by late December GHQ was officially informed that all negotiations with the Belgians had been dropped.<sup>921</sup> The failure to use his allies in the pursuit of the *Westtruppen* was soon apparent with the breakthrough and near overwhelming of Norforce in October and November. Thus, the first phase of Anglo-Belgian cooperation came to an ungracious end in mid-November 1916, with both sides seemingly more interested in arguing over territory rather than beating the common foe.<sup>922</sup>

However, by early 1917 the shortage of manpower led the British to re-open the question of Belgian assistance. The first approach came on 17 January 1917, when the British Government made the Belgians aware of the possibility of asking for more troops.

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<sup>918</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 19 November 1916, Entry *GHQ*.

<sup>919</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 21 November 1916, Entry *GHQ*.

<sup>920</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 30 November 1916, Appendix 42, Telegram OA 198, Smuts to CIGS, 30 November; FO 371/2856, Folio 7930, 2 January 1917, "Belgian feeling over question of Tabora & other points", "Extract of a letter from Sir F. Villiers to Mr Balfour".

<sup>921</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 20 December 1916, Entry *GHQ*.

<sup>922</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 10 November 1916, Appendix 13, Telegram 6150, Bonar Law to Smuts, 9 November.

A few weeks later, on 9 March 1917, the British formally notified their allies of the approach of *Abt Wintgens* towards Bismarckburg and concluded by a request for 300 Belgian soldiers to take over its defence in order to allow British forces to concentrate to contain the menace. This was easier said than done as the demobilisation of the Belgian colonial forces had started in January 1917 and only four battalions remained in occupied German East Africa. The remainder of the force was either disbanding or in the process of travelling to their permanent garrison locations, many of which were far in the interior of the Congo.<sup>923</sup>

In the circumstances, the Belgian response was quite generous, as they not only prepared to take over Bismarckburg, but also deployed several other units near Lake Tanganyika and ordered another five battalions to concentrate around Kigoma.<sup>924</sup> However, whatever the new found spirit of co-operation, it would take some time to rebuild and redeploy forces back into the main theatre of operations.

Other factors were at play, not least of which was the attitude of General Hoskins who recognised that additional transport was essential to his plans. The recruitment of porters in Belgian territories offered a local solution and he requested this measure in his draft plans to the CIGS.<sup>925</sup> General Northey had always seen the use of Belgian troops as essential and he pressed Hoskins to bring them back, a view that was forwarded to London.<sup>926</sup> These measures were agreed to within a few days, and again the discussions were resumed with the Belgian Government.<sup>927</sup>

In mid-March, the British ambassador formally asked for permission to use the Belgian-controlled section of the Central Railway as well as lake steamers for the movement of British forces in an emergency. Two weeks later, he placed a further request before the Government, this time to recruit African soldiers for the British forces. According to the Belgians, highly sensitive to the situation in their occupied home

<sup>923</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 13-14; WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 10 March 1917, Telegram 30755, CIGS to Smuts, 10 March.

<sup>924</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 16 March 1917, Appendix A25, Telegram 10077, Huyghé to Hoskins, 16 March.

<sup>925</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 1 March 1917, Appendix A1, Telegram G 337, Hoskins to CIGS, 1 March.

<sup>926</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 28 February 1917, Appendix J, Telegram NF 2410, Norforce to Hoskins, 27 February.

<sup>927</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 March 1917, Appendix A4, Telegram 30514, CIGS to Hoskins, 6 March.



territory, such recruiting clashed with the Hague Convention, whereby occupants of an occupied territory could not be forced to take up arms against their former country.<sup>928</sup> They were very concerned about the possibility of retaliation against their own people in occupied-Belgium and little progress followed on this contentious subject.

The British attitude had modified substantially since late 1916. The first and most important reason was the growing realisation at the War Office that the campaign was far from over despite Smuts's utterances. The second was the sheer lack of resources, both in terms of soldiers and of transport, with which to prosecute the fighting. The third was the strain imposed on Britain's shipping resources, now exacerbated by the unrestricted U-Boat campaign. Local Belgian participation, considered a needless encumbrance in late 1916, now became an urgent priority. Finally, inter-departmental rivalries in London played their part. Bonar Law, the Colonial Secretary, had carried out the earlier negotiations in a manner that can only be described as tactless, verging on the rude. However, the Foreign Office differed both in manner and point of view; in early April, the War Office sought its help:

"...The military situation in East Africa has, as Mr. Balfour is aware, been engaging the anxious attention of the Council. Several factors have contributed to the prolongation of the campaign, notably (1) the rainy season; (2) the necessity of exchanging units debilitated by long Service in the country; (3) the abnormally high sick-rates amongst both white and Indian native troops; (4) the difficulty of placing newly-recruited and locally-raised African troops in the field in a sufficient time; (5) the ineffectiveness, hitherto of the Portuguese co-operation.

Moreover, as regards projected future operations, the Council have experienced difficulty in making available the large quantity of mechanical transport, and the great number of carriers, needed for an offensive, whilst in view of the shortage of shipping the maintenance of the strength of the Indian and West

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<sup>928</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 14-15.

African troops represents a diversion of tonnage which it is most desirable to release..."<sup>929</sup>

The War Office highlighted its need for further Belgian military co-operation together with the urgency of the situation. *Abt Wintgens* was seriously disrupting its preparations for the offensive and had sapped Norforce of much of its manpower.<sup>930</sup> Equally important, there were insufficient troops either to cover the gap in the Iringa-Mahenge area or to clear it of enemy forces. The degree of anxiety may be measured in the fact that the Foreign Office arranged a bilateral meeting in London for 11 April, being unwilling to wait even the two extra days proposed by the Belgian Government.<sup>931</sup>

The conference was successful as the two national governments agreed to resume combined operations. The main two priorities were established, with the first being the rounding up of *Abt Wintgens*, and the second being part of the encirclement and destruction of the German main body in the south-east of the colony. It was provisionally agreed that three Belgian columns, totalling some 2,000 rifles with supporting services and carriers, would be provided, although the exact details were left to the military commanders on the spot. Refinement of the numbers was then carried out by the two commanders-in-chief at the Belgian headquarters at Ujiji between 18 and 19 April.<sup>932</sup> After much discussion, the force levels were modified to a total of 3,000 soldiers divided into two mobile columns of 1,200 rifles, each supported by an operational reserve battalion of 600 rifles, plus a further two battalions of 500 men each to provide individual replacements for casualties.<sup>933</sup> The final agreement laid down the contribution as having a maximum of 4,000 rifles and that the Belgian troops were not to be mixed with British forces. Importantly, and with an eye to the future, the Belgian Government reserved its right to decide on any extension of the campaign, should it move into Portuguese East Africa.

<sup>929</sup> FO 371/2857, Folio 72473, 7 April 1917, Letter Secretary, War Office to Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office.

<sup>930</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 3 April 1917, Appendix A25, Telegram 32025, CIGS to Hoskins, 2 April.

<sup>931</sup> FO 371/2857, Folio 72473, 8 April 1917, Telegram 31, Foreign Office to Sir F. Villiers, Havre.

<sup>932</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 14 April 1917, Appendix A104, Telegram 32670, CIGS to Hoskins, 14 April.

<sup>933</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 29-30, Map 3.



For their part, the British promised to provide supplies and equipment for their allies' columns. Overall direction of the campaign would be exercised by the British commander-in-chief who would be the senior officer. He would set out both the objectives and the respective zones of operations for each contingent, but within those constraints, the Belgian commander-in-chief was free to execute his missions as he saw fit.<sup>934</sup>

The military plan of operations was divided into two distinct phases that reflected both the exigencies of the moment and the difficulties of remobilisation. The first phase was the most pressing and involved despatching all the available troops in occupied German East Africa, some 1,200 rifles, against *Abt Wintgens* in co-operation with Colonel Murray's column in the south. The aim of this force was to encircle and destroy the raiders as quickly as possible. The second and subsequent phase, envisaged a reinforced Belgian contingent of some 2,000 to 3,000 rifles working with General Northey's troops in the west and south. Together, they would help to drive the Germans into the general operational encirclement planned for June and July.<sup>935</sup> These arrangements were presented back to the national governments for approval, with the Belgians signalling their assent on 26 April. Despite the irritations of previous disputes, the Belgians were back in the campaign.

The change of command between Generals Hoskins and van Deventer at the end of May 1917 had little immediate effect on Anglo-Belgian co-operation. The general strategy devised by Hoskins was little changed and the Belgians continued to build up their forces in preparation for the planned drive on Mahenge.<sup>936</sup> However, before the main operational objectives could be reached, there were several preliminary operations that had to be completed beforehand. In the prospective Belgian sector to the west, van Deventer wanted them to clear the Kilombero valley while also advancing from Iringa towards Ifakara. This move was aimed at inducing the Germans to weaken the line along

<sup>934</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 21 April 1917, Appendix A132, Telegram P 16, Hoskins to CIGS, 19 April; *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 33-35.

<sup>935</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 294-295. *Instruction au commandant de la Brigade Nord, 1er Bureau No 58/1 dated 25 avril 17.*

<sup>936</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 125-127; WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 27 April 1917, Appendix B21, Telegram G 165, Hoskins to CIGS, 27 April; 10 June 1917, Appendix A74, Telegram G 843, van Deventer to CIGS, 10 June.

the Ruaha River, notably at Kidatu, while covering the move forward of the Belgian main body from Kilossa. Eager to get underway, van Deventer pressed Huyghé to provide a column of 1,200 rifles to clear Kilombero valley by mid-June, but it could not be readied until the end of July. However, a reduced bid for 500 men to fill a gap around Mpanga, south-east of Iringa was agreed, despite breaking the principles of a concentrated Belgian deployment.<sup>937</sup>

*Abt Naumann* occupied the Belgian forces for much of the period May-August 1917 as they chased the ever diminishing raiders through much of the northern part of the German East Africa colony. Despite several checks, they continued the follow up until September, when the British resumed full control of the operations. Henceforth, the main effort focused on the encirclement and destruction of the main body of the *Schutztruppe* in the south-western corner of the colony.

For the remainder of the campaign, the biggest irritations between the two nations were the Belgian inability to supply its own forces and its demand for a separate and distinct sphere of operations. The British provided a great deal of MT and other transport assistance, but as the area of operations constricted, the mixing of British and Belgian units became increasingly hard to avoid.<sup>938</sup> By late 1917 as the *RO* was operating out of Kilwa, Huyghé came under heavy pressure for allowing “mixed” columns and van Deventer sought assistance in resolving the matter. The Foreign Office put pressure on the Belgian Government to relax its rule on the grounds that it would delay the completion of the campaign.<sup>939</sup> Finally, it was agreed to allow some intermingling of units and the remaining Belgian units were able to play their part in the clearance of German East Africa.

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<sup>937</sup> *Campagnes Coloniales Belges*, III, pp. 126-128; WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 20 June 1917, Appendix A116, Telegram G 976, BGGS to Northey and Tytler, 20 June.

<sup>938</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 5 August 1917, Entry *Iringa Column*; 13 August 1917, Appendix A10, Telegram 220/1-1, Huyghé to van Deventer, 6 August; 27 August 1917, Appendix A17, Letter van Deventer to Huyghé; 9 September 1917, Appendix A11, Précis Huyghé to Sheppard.

<sup>939</sup> WO 95/5293, War Diary GHQ, 6 November 1917, Appendix B, Telegram 26 WO, van Deventer to CIGS, 6 November.; WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2271, 7 November 1917, Telegram X 900, van Deventer to CIGS, p. 225; No. 2272, 8 November 1917, Telegram 44997, CIGS to van Deventer, p. 225; No. 2291, 17 November 1917, Telegram 45875, CIGS to van Deventer, p. 232.



The end of Anglo-Belgian military co-operation came in December 1917 with the capture of the *Westtruppen*. The Belgian Government had reserved its right to consider continuing the fight in Portuguese territory while the British now saw the campaign as largely over. Faced with the difficulties of working with the Portuguese, it saw the negotiations for a continued Belgian presence as being too time consuming, in terms of both necessary reorganisation and political decision making.<sup>940</sup> In the end, the two nations ended on a much more amicable note than the year previously.

### ANGLO-PORTUGUESE COOPERATION

Despite its age and duration, the Anglo-Portuguese alliance was never evenly balanced and relations during the war were seldom easy. The British believed the Portuguese to be incapable of serious military effort and put a great deal of pressure on them to remain neutral from the outbreak of the war.<sup>941</sup> However, as shipping grew scarcer, the British attitude changed and by early 1916 they were encouraging the Portuguese to seize German vessels in their territorial waters.<sup>942</sup> They realised that such a course would probably lead to war between the two countries, having previously tried to discourage Portuguese colonial aspirations:

“...We do not want Portugal to establish too great a claim on our gratitude or to be under obligation to protect their Colonies or divide up German territory with them...In view of the above we have discouraged the Portuguese from assisting us either in South West Africa or East Africa in spite of repeated offers on their part...”<sup>943</sup>

The British had long suspected that German mail and contraband had been passing clandestinely through Portuguese East Africa and that many local merchants

<sup>940</sup> WO 33/953, *Telegrams D 2*, No. 2317, 27 November 1917, Telegram 299, van Deventer to CIGS, p. 240; No. 2325, 29 November 1917, Telegram 46804, CIGS to van Deventer, p. 243; WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 3 December 1917, Appendix A4, Telegram 47022, CIGS to van Deventer, 2 December.

<sup>941</sup> Vincent-Smith, John D, “Britain, Portugal and the First World War, 1914-16”, *European Studies Review*, IV, No 3, (1974), pp. 210-211.

<sup>942</sup> Stone, Glyn A, “The Official British Attitude to the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, 1910-1945”, *The Journal of Contemporary History*, X, No 4, (October 1975), p. 732.

were engaged in cross-border trade. The opening of hostilities would probably be the only way in which such exchanges could be stopped, although it would take a major military and naval effort to achieve success.<sup>944</sup> On the other hand, as long as Portugal remained neutral, it would have been politically difficult for the *Schutztruppe* to move south of the Rovuma especially without authority from the Imperial Government.

The seriousness of the situation was underlined by the dismal failure of the Portuguese expeditionary forces sent out in 1915 and 1916. Both attempts to seize German territory had resulted in humiliating reverses and large losses in troops in equipment. National pride was further affronted by the need to ask for British assistance, particularly as General Smuts, a man well known for his appetite for the Portuguese colony, commanded the forces:

“General Smuts, though not extremely popular in Government circles in Portuguese East Africa owing, I am given to understand, to some severe criticisms he has had occasion to express in regard to Portuguese East Africa...”<sup>945</sup>

On the other hand, the weak and highly decentralised rule in Portuguese East Africa gave rise to a very different situation in Anglo-Portuguese relations. Portuguese administration was much less developed than that of other nations and the fiat of the state often did not extend far beyond the various governorships.<sup>946</sup> Furthermore, the north of the colony was under chartered company rule and was virtually unexplored and was quite undeveloped. As well, the severity and rapacity of colonial rule had led to widespread opposition by the African population that would shortly lead to open, armed rebellion.

By the middle of 1916, relations between the British and Portuguese forces were far from cordial. Attempts to improve the situation were unsuccessful, as an attempt to attach a British political officer to the Portuguese headquarters was abruptly rebuffed in

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<sup>943</sup> WO 106/308, "Memorandum on the Situation which may arise as the result of Portugal complying with the request made by the British government that German shipping in the Tagus should be commandeered.", [n.d.] [likely early 1916], p. 2.

<sup>944</sup> WO 106/308, "Memorandum on the Situation which may arise as the result of Portugal complying with the request made by the British government that German shipping in the Tagus should be commandeered.", [n.d.] [likely early 1916], pp. 3-4.

<sup>945</sup> FO 371/2857, Folio 55352, 26 January 1917, Letter Consul General (Errol Macdonell), Lourenco Marques to Foreign Secretary.

<sup>946</sup> Newitt, Malyn, *A History of Mozambique*, London: Hurst & Company, 1995, pp. 367-368.



early November.<sup>947</sup> This attempt to supervise Portuguese administration naturally caused offence and prevented any meaningful exchange of information. For their part, it added to the British sense of distrust of their ally's intentions. The feeling was mutual for the prewar Anglo-German negotiations to carve up the Portuguese colonies had inflamed passions, although the Portuguese had used the formers' rivalry to some advantage since the Anglo-Boer War at the turn of the century.<sup>948</sup> Many local officials were opposed to supporting Britain while also wishing to maintain their exploitation of the local population. Furthermore, neutrality permitted an extensive and lucrative, if clandestine, trade with German East Africa that would be ended by war.

Attempts were made to work together. With the recall of General Gil in 1916, and despite the planned sending of another expeditionary force in early 1917, the Governor General, Dr Alvaro de Castro, assumed the role of commander-in-chief. Although a civilian, he had served in the Army, reaching the rank of captain. He was conscious of the weakness of his position and asked for a meeting with General Smuts in late 1916. However, this was not possible for a number of reasons and it was not until 25 January, two days after he had relinquished command in East Africa, that Smuts met with de Castro in Portuguese territory. By rights the new commander-in-chief should have conducted the meeting, but it seems highly likely that Hoskins was too busy with his new command and conducting the offensive to make the journey.

It is noteworthy that General van Deventer, also on his way home, attended the meeting as did the British Consul General from Lourenco Marques. During the conference, Smuts pressed for the Portuguese to clear a line 50 miles south of the Rovuma of all food and to prevent the inhabitants from sowing any crops in January or February. This reflected his continued belief in a German surrender:

“...the General's argument being that if the enemy are aware that there are not food supplies to be obtained within easy reach of the Portuguese frontier, they

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<sup>947</sup> WO 95/5292, War Diary GHQ, 7 November 1916, Appendix 8, Telegram OA 968, Genstaff to CIGS, London, 7 November.

<sup>948</sup> Newitt, Malyn, *Portugal in Africa*, London: Hurst & Company, 1981, pp. 33-35; Willequet, Jacques, "Anglo-German Rivalry in Belgian and Portuguese Africa?", Giffard and Louis, *Britain and Germany*, p. 265.

will, perforce, surrender to the British troops without having invaded Portuguese territory...”<sup>949</sup>

Smuts went on to advocate that the Rovuma be held only lightly by a line of observation posts and that any garrisons must be strong enough to withstand heavy German attacks. Furthermore, he emphasised both the quality of the enemy troops as well as the need for the thorough training of any newly raised units. For his part, de Castro announced that he was in the process of raising the troops and carriers necessary to make a simultaneous advance with the British at the beginning of the dry season.

Overall, the meeting was adjudged a success with Smuts performing very well and showing considerable diplomacy. The Portuguese were impressed with him and the Governor General pronounced himself convinced of the need to work closely with the British in the future. Little concrete action appears to have been agreed, although one tangible outcome was the agreement to swap liaison officers in the near future and regular communications between the two commanders-in-chief.<sup>950</sup> The meeting also set the scene for much closer co-operation under General Hoskins.

If the renewed Belgian assistance was welcomed, General Northey faced further problems in the south on the Nyasaland-Portuguese East African border. Apart from being weakened by the pursuit of Wintgens, he also needed trained troops to deal with the developing German threat posed there by *Abt von Stuemmer*. Although the Portuguese were held in generally low regard, General Hoskins did try to involve them in support of both his and Northey's operations although the lack of a professional military officer at the head of the forces hindered their military planning. Whatever his qualities, the Governor General was not the man to direct operations.<sup>951</sup> For their part, the Portuguese remained suspicious of British intentions and were very reluctant to allow their forces into their colony.

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<sup>949</sup> FO 371/2857, Folio 55352, 26 January 1917, Letter 227/17/52, No. 13, Macdonell to Foreign Secretary, pp. 2-3. This letter incorporates the minutes of the meeting held on 25 January as well as some comments by the Consul General.

<sup>950</sup> FO 371/2857, Folio 55352, 26 January 1917, Letter 227/17/52, No. 13, Macdonell to Foreign Secretary, pp. 4-5.

<sup>951</sup> WO 158/477, 17 April [May] 1917, Letter No 5, Macdonell to Foreign Secretary and Hoskins, covering Despatch dated 16 May 1917.



As the campaign moved increasingly to the south of the German colony in 1917, the possibility of having to continue operations in Portuguese territory became more and more likely. As the British held no faith in the ability of the Portuguese to defend themselves, diplomatic overtures to the Portuguese Government aimed to determine a joint strategy in the event of invasion. Matters were improved by the appointment of the civilian consul general, Major Macdonell, as military liaison officer to the Portuguese Headquarters in mid-March 1917.<sup>952</sup> However, such an apparently straightforward and logical post was not viewed as such by the incumbent:

“The Portuguese are extraordinarily proud and are convinced that in military and all other matters they are as experienced as any other nation. - They are adverse to any sort of extraneous interference, and on the slightest provocation they consider that the “*brio nacional*” (national honour and prestige) has been offended. A very large number of Portuguese Officers and men are fully alive to the fact that they have up to the present made a hopeless fiasco of the German East campaign, and though this has been stated to me in private, if any foreigner were to make a similar statement he would incur the obloquy of the Military, Press and public...I shall be looked upon with suspicion by the military authorities and it will be with the utmost difficulty and only with the exercise of considerable ingenuity that I shall be able to obtain exact information or be cognizant of the conditions, movements, armament, supplies &c. of the Portuguese Expeditionary Force. It must always be born in mind that the Portuguese hate and suspect all foreigners, and I regret to say that in my opinion they hate the British most of all because they fear them, and also there are many who still remember the British Ultimatum of 1891...”<sup>953</sup>

The appointment was shortly reciprocated in early April with a Portuguese professional officer, Major Azumbuju Martins, being sent to join British GHQ as a liaison officer.<sup>954</sup> He had some experience of the conditions in East Africa and German

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<sup>952</sup> WO 158/477, 19 March 1917, Telegram 617, Macdonell to Hoskins, 18 March 1917.

<sup>953</sup> WO 158/477, 20 March 1917, Letter 634/17/127, Macdonell to Hoskins, 20 March 1917.

<sup>954</sup> WO 158/477, 7 April 1917, Telegram 778, Macdonell to Hoskins, 6 April 1917.

capabilities, having until recently been the Chief of Staff to the ill-fated expedition under General Gil. Such appointments were the vital precursors to effective cooperation; the first task for Major Macdonell was to ascertain Portuguese deployments and to find out whether they even intended to try and defend the Rovuma River boundary.<sup>955</sup>

Finally, a meeting between General Hoskins and Dr de Castro was held at Dar-es-Salaam on 9 April 1917. To the former's dismay, de Castro proposed to send a force of over 700 rifles from the coast to Chinde, thence up the Zambezi River into southern Nyasaland and into Lake Nyasa where it would land at Mtengula which was believed to be von Stuermer's objective. He suggested that it would take place between 15 and 20 May, but this was hopelessly optimistic given Portuguese transport facilities. Although received diplomatically, it was a most unwelcome suggestion as the force was likely to get in Northey's way and would cause major supply problems. From the British perspective, it would be far more useful for the Portuguese to establish a strong blocking force along the Rovuma as well as protecting the vulnerable line of communication running up the Zambesi River. Hoskins put his suggestions as tactfully as possible, and, unable to change de Castro's mind, he left the matter unresolved.<sup>956</sup>

The conference was successful in resolving several other issues; the first was that the British should deal with the German threat to Mwembe and second that their Intelligence Scouts should be allowed to operate freely across the border, receiving full support from the Portuguese authorities. These discussions resolved several thorny issues and gave the Governor General a highly positive view of the South African's intentions.<sup>957</sup> Further British pressure was exerted through their growing intelligence service in Portuguese territory. On 3 July, agreement was reached between Major Macdonell and the Portuguese Chief of Staff that all intelligence and interrogation of prisoners would be conducted by British troops who would also make their dispositions as they saw fit.<sup>958</sup>

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<sup>955</sup> WO 158/477, 4 April 1917, Letter Sheppard to Macdonell, 4 April 1917.

<sup>956</sup> CAB 44/9, pp. 39-40.

<sup>957</sup> WO 158/477, 17 April [May] 1917, Letter No 5, Macdonell to Foreign Secretary and Hoskins, covering Despatch dated 16 May 1917.

<sup>958</sup> WO 158/477, 9 August 1917, "Precis of Interview with the Chief of Staff Portuguese Expeditionary Force", Macdonell to van Deventer, 3 July 1917.



However, in view of the imminent arrival of the new Portuguese commander-in-chief, Colonel Sousa Rosa, discussions were delayed until the matter could be discussed in detail. His coming did little to inspire confidence, as the liaison officer reported to GHQ:

“This appointment has caused the greatest dissatisfaction [sic] among officers of all arms. It appears that the Colonel is one of the most unpopular Officers in the Army and has the utmost difficulty in getting Officers to serve under him. He is a very pronounced Republican and introduces politics into his military duties...”<sup>959</sup>

The likelihood of a German re-entry into Portuguese East Africa rendered detailed cooperation even more vital than previously and Macdonell was instructed to:

“Try to find out quietly whether the direct assistance of British or Belgian troops in the field in P.E.A. would be welcomed or not. It looks as if the Germans were going to try to break into P.E.A. at or near MOCIMBOA ROVUMA and it may be essential to close this door firmly.”<sup>960</sup>

However, the prospect of any British intervention was quickly quashed, and, at Portuguese insistence, General Northey's troops were withdrawn from Mwembe.<sup>961</sup> At a local level and in order to improve relations, British GHQ came up with the idea of sending a French officer, Colonel Viala, on a mission to the Portuguese commander-in-chief. He had been attached to the East African Force for some time as an official observer and was well disposed towards the British. The aim of his mission was to find out the detailed plans and intentions of the Portuguese as well the extent of their transport problems. Importantly, he was also to ascertain whether the direct support of British or Belgian troops would be acceptable to Colonel Sousa Rosa. On the surface, it was a

<sup>959</sup> WO 158/477, 8 August 1917, Letter No. 10, Macdonell to van Deventer, 14 July 1917, p.9.

<sup>960</sup> WO 158/478, 10 September 1917, Telegram G190, BGGS to Macdonell, 10 September 1917.

<sup>961</sup> WO 158/478, 5 October 1917, Telegram G 450, van Deventer to Macdonell, 5 October; WO 95/5294, War Diary GHQ, 30 September 1917, Appendix A27, Telegram 83, Macdonell to van Deventer, 29 September.

highly unusual method of liaison, but the state of Anglo-Portuguese relations was poor and in the words of Brigadier General Sheppard:

“...The Portuguese are probably less suspicious of the French than ourselves, and I think VIALA’s visit will have excellent results, for he is a first class fellow, and very keen on helping on the campaign in any way possible.”<sup>962</sup>

Some three weeks later, the initiative had proved to be a success and Colonel Sousa Rosa’s attitude had shifted favourably. Colonel Viala, together with the professionalism and drive of the British Intelligence Scouts operating south of the Rovuma, had made a strong impression on the Portuguese about the competence of their allies.<sup>963</sup> Even more radically, Colonel Rosa now proposed to lead a three-pronged advance into German East Africa towards Newala, the scene of a previous Portuguese defeat. General Northey was particularly against any such move, having worked with their forces for nearly two years, while the reports of the British liaison officer also alarmed the high command.<sup>964</sup> In a private signal, General van Deventer was highly pessimistic about the chances of Portuguese success:

“...I think that the Portuguese proposals if carried out will be fatal. The Portuguese troops well entrenched on the line of the ROVUMA may possibly be able to prevent a thrust on the left (?) between them on the part of the enemy but in the open field they have no chance whatever against the Germans. Everyone who knows them agrees with this view...I shall be most grateful therefore for any assistance you can give in this matter. The Portuguese are most touchy and I cannot force my opinions for fear of giving offence.”<sup>965</sup>

Matters had not been helped by the tactlessness of Major Martins, the Portuguese liaison officer at GHQ, who was thought to be ill disposed towards Colonel Sousa Rosa:

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<sup>962</sup> WO 158/469, 24 September 1917, Telegram G 345, Sheppard to Macdonell

<sup>963</sup> WO 158/469, 18 October 1917, Letter No 19, Macdonell to van Deventer.

<sup>964</sup> WO 158/478, 6 October 1917, Telegram NF 4662, Norforce to Genstaff, 5 October; 8 October 1917, Telegram 390 S, van Deventer to Genstaff, for onward transmission to the Portuguese, 7 October.

<sup>965</sup> WO 158/478, 8 October 1917, Telegram 391 S, van Deventer to CIGS, 7 October.



“...I was also informed that the question of British and Belgian cooperation had been telegraphed to the Commander in Chief by Major Azambuja Martins and in such a peremptory form that Colonel Souza Rosa was offended and unwilling to consider the matter...”<sup>966</sup>

Fortunately, the efforts of Colonel Viala were also successful in presenting the offer of assistance in much more diplomatic terms, thereby neutralising the hostility of his own liaison officer.

If matters at the highest levels were gradually being smoothed out, the situation on the ground gave the British ample worries. Reports about the weakness of defensive preparations, low morale, and lack of leadership reached General van Deventer on a regular basis, but there was little he could do except to exhort Colonel Rosa to do more.<sup>967</sup> There were very great limits on such leverage, and it would take considerably more to overcome long-term and structural defects in the Portuguese colonial military structures.

Interestingly, the possibility of introducing the Belgians into Portuguese East Africa was quietly explored by the British in September 1917. Acting on a suggestion of Colonel Huyghé, a low key reconnaissance of the harbour and facilities of Mocimboa da Praia was carried out by the naval authorities and without the knowledge of either of the other prospective parties.<sup>968</sup> However, for reasons that remain unclear, this project never went beyond the planning stage.

The balance of power shifted decisively in early 1918, after the disaster at Ngomano. Then the Portuguese authorities, now in a state of great concern, consented to the main British force operating in their territory.<sup>969</sup> The need to build up a new base at

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<sup>966</sup> WO 158/469, Paper 16, Letter No 20, Macdonell to van Deventer, 18 October 1917.

<sup>967</sup> WO 158/478, 29 August 1917, Appendix to Letter No 11, Macdonell to van Deventer, 14 August.

<sup>968</sup> WO 95/5924, War Diary GHQ, 10 September 1917, Appendix A21, BGGs to GSO1, “Establishing a Belgian Force at Mocimboa da Praia”.

<sup>969</sup> WO 158/478, 1 December 1917, Telegram 46895, CIGS to van Deventer, 30 November.

Port Amelia in late December made for the first major clash between methods; within a few days, the British found it difficult to recruit labour as the local Nyassa Company officials were obstructive and unwilling to help. This led to the British Ambassador in Lisbon being formally instructed to seek:

“...Entire control of everything connected with movements of troops and stores at Port Amelia, including hiring and management of dhows. Control, by arrangement with local Portuguese Authorities of the Base and lines of communication inland...It is important that Portuguese Government should agree that actual engagement and payment of carriers &c. should be done by British Authorities, experience having shown danger and inefficiency of Portuguese methods...”<sup>970</sup>

These wide-ranging demands were accompanied by private information for the ambassador that General van Deventer suspected the local Portuguese military authorities of colluding with the Germans.

This was followed the very next day by a demand for further control: now the War Office was asking for the Portuguese to place their military forces under General van Deventer's command. Again the language was notable for its directness and lack of diplomacy:

“...The course of events since the crossing of the frontier by Major-General Von Lettow with a small and exhausted force about November 27<sup>th</sup> last has shown that the Portuguese command is incapable of conducting military operations, or is unwilling to offer effective opposition to the Germans. Detachments have been left in advanced and isolated posts, despite the representations of the British Headquarters, and have surrendered after a feeble resistance with their arms ammunition and stores of supplies, on which the German troops have mainly subsisted...”<sup>971</sup>

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<sup>970</sup> FO 371/3128, Folio 655, 2 January 1918, Telegram No. 3, Foreign Office to Sir L Carnegie, Lisbon.

<sup>971</sup> FO 371, 3128, Folio 2132, 3 January 1918, Letter 0165/9270 (MO.2), DMO to Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 3 January. This move had been requested in FO 371/3128, Folio 2132, 2 January 1918, Telegram 1.b., van Deventer to CIGS, 1 January.



The pressure and a concurrent change of government in Lisbon soon achieved the desired results: the Portuguese acceded to a joint command provided that it was under the highest ranking officer and that a “mixed” headquarters was formed.<sup>972</sup> However, tensions were never far from the surface, whatever the assurances of the home governments. Matters reached a head in late June 1918 when van Deventer felt obliged formally to reassure the local administration that British forces would withdraw from the colony once operations had been successfully concluded. After obtaining Cabinet approval for the statement, he then informed the Portuguese of Britain’s adherence to past treaties and agreements.<sup>973</sup> However, even explicit assurances were not enough and differences continued to rankle on both sides. Only a few days later, General van Deventer, fed up with the continuing Portuguese practice of leaving small detachments scattered throughout the country without adequate support or proper defences, sent a withering critique to the War Office. Instead of adding to his military power, such outposts acted merely as a supply of food, weapons and ammunition for von Lettow, and neutralised many of the successes gained in battle.

Equally exasperated from constantly pressing Colonel Rosa to draw up a more concentrated and workable plan of defence, and achieving little, van Deventer now sought drastic measures: he proposed to relegate all of the Portuguese military forces to rear areas or coastal protection, while all elements of the civil administration were to be withdrawn from the area of operations owing to their obstructiveness. For the sake of good relations, he praised Colonel Rosa’s efforts as well as the civilian Governor of Nyassaland although the Governor of Mozambique was directly accused of being obstructive and unhelpful to the military effort.

“...I think time has come when the Portuguese authorities must be told the truth, namely that their troops in Portuguese East Africa are totally unreliable and a source of grave danger to their allies. The personnel both European and African is of the poorest possible quality, and the natives of Portuguese East Africa detest

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<sup>972</sup> FO 371/3128, Folio 5578, 10 January 1918, Telegram No. 16 (D), Sir L. Carnegie, Lisbon to Foreign Office, 9 January.

Portuguese to such an extent that when we act in conjunction with Portuguese troops we can get no help from them. When acting alone removed from Portuguese sphere of influence natives help us freely...”<sup>974</sup>

The British Ambassador was instructed to deliver this highly undiplomatic message; it was a measure of the desire to conclude the campaign in East Africa that the government assented to such drastic terms. For good measure, the Portuguese Government was to be informed that their colonial authorities were incapable of ruling effectively and were opposed by their African subjects.<sup>975</sup>

By July, operations had moved inland and away from the main concentrations of the Portuguese forces. As van Deventer sent his troops in hot pursuit of the Germans back towards German East Africa, the need for detailed assistance faded, no doubt to his relief. Interestingly, at the end of the war he felt it necessary to draft a supplementary and secret despatch that described his true thoughts about the Portuguese in the strongest possible language. For example:

“..Through the operations of the early months of 1918, I managed to keep the Portuguese troops out of direct contact with the enemy without, I think, hurting their feelings...In May, Colonel Rosa pressed me to give his troops a more active role; owing, I have reason to believe, to urgent representations from LISBON...The results were disastrous...”<sup>976</sup>

After cataloguing the inadequacies of his ally's force, van Deventer summed up the relationship as follows:

“In fact, the Germans simply looked on the Portuguese forces or posts as convenient Ordnance and Supply dumps. The effect of these easy conquests on the

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<sup>973</sup> FO 371/3128, Folio 112227, 27 June 1918, Letter 112227/W/1 Foreign Office to Secretary, Army Council, 27 June.

<sup>974</sup> FO 371/3128, Folio 115649, 26 June 1918, Telegram G 962, van Deventer to War Office, London, 25 June.

<sup>975</sup> FO 371/3128, Folio 115649, 29 June 1918, Letter 0148/694 (MO.2), DD Cubitt to Under-Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 29 June.

<sup>976</sup> WO 158/475, 1 October 1918, Letter van Deventer to Secretary of State for War, p. 3.



morale of the enemy's troops was very great; and it can perhaps be conceived what an incredible handicap the Portuguese forces have been to me, ever since the enemy crossed the ROVUMA in November 1917."<sup>977</sup>

It was fortunate for diplomacy and good relations that this document remained secret.

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<sup>977</sup> WO 158/475, 1 October 1918, Letter van Deventer to Secretary of State for War, p. 5.

## **CHAPTER 10 - CONCLUSIONS**

Four major points emerge from the history of the East African campaign. The first was the sheer difficulty of conditions, most notably climatic and terrain. In many ways, fighting was the least of all problems as any force was under more threat from tropical disease, starvation or dying of thirst than being killed in battle. When assessing the outcome of the campaign due consideration must be given for numerous and severe obstacles faced by all combatants. It was a story of the utmost determination and effort to fight in one of the most difficult areas on earth.

The second factor was the absolute requirement for a well organised system of transport and supply. This as much as anything else determined many of the tactical and operational decisions on both sides. Without an understanding of this critical limitation, the course of the campaign is very difficult to understand. All suffered severely from insufficient rations and equipment and the difficulty of the physical conditions exacerbated any shortages.

The third point was the immense damage caused by tropical diseases. Virtually no humans escaped the ravages of malaria, dysentery, typhoid or pneumonia while animals were wiped out by trypanosomiasis and horse sickness. Despite the advances in medicine, the combination of extremely difficult conditions, poor transportation and lack of discipline meant that the forces suffered extremely heavily throughout. The high levels of sickness were to be the outstanding factor in the campaign.

The fourth is the quality of the generalship which has been the subject of many inaccurate generalisations and assessments. On the British side, General Smuts has been presented as the great general who achieved a huge and relatively inexpensive success, capturing much of German East Africa. There is no doubt, that from his arrival, Smuts supplied a style of dynamic leadership that was badly needed in East Africa. He instilled a sense of drive and purpose that inspired both the staff and regimental soldier of his polyglot army. He certainly achieved what he set out to do; the acquisition of large tracts of territory



with the minimum cost in battle casualties. While his forces had taken the capital, all the major ports, both railways and some of the best farmland, they never defeated the *Schutztruppe* in battle. Smuts left the theatre with his opponents' army possessing both a high degree of combat effectiveness and good morale. More seriously, his claims that the campaign was nearly over were subsequently rebutted by his successors' need to conduct a difficult and arduous campaign for the following year and a half. Furthermore, if he had failed to destroy the enemy's forces, his techniques had largely incapacitated his own army; over 12,000 had to be repatriated through ill-health with the unfortunate 3<sup>rd</sup> Division lasting only four months in the field.

There were two serious criticisms that can be levelled against Smuts' generalship; the first was his reluctance to focus on the enemy's forces and the second was the dire state in which he left his army. Regarding the first, he admitted that he was interested in manoeuvre not fighting. His political concerns, both in avoiding casualties and capturing ground, led him to set unrealistic goals that either exceeded the capabilities of his force or left it seriously under-resourced. This sense of haste and desire to capture ground, coupled with his inexperience of staff work, led him to ignore the vital link between his Administrative and General Staffs. This failure to understand that, without a supply and transport system of sufficient capacity, lift and range, grand operational aims would inevitably founder resulted in the troops suffering immense and, in many cases, preventable hardships. It was not simply, as he put it, "efforts like these cannot be made without inflicting the greatest hardships on all",<sup>978</sup> but a question as to whether better planning could have alleviated the worst.

As to the second criticism, it is undeniable that there were serious shortcomings in the provisioning, feeding and medical care of the force during his tenure in command, although he preferred to refer to the obstacles of nature rather than the inadequacies of planning. Two major enquiries found serious faults with the organisation of his forces and the results were plain to see. It was only his political connections and influence that prevented either report from becoming publicly available.

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<sup>978</sup> Crowe, *General Smuts' Campaign*, Foreword by J C Smuts, pp. xii-xiii.

The final phase of General Smuts's command ended in sombre misery. Although he proclaimed the success of his campaign to the outside world and was initially taken at his word, the reality was rather different. If his army had been in a bad way by September 1916, it was in a shocking state by the time of his departure in January 1917. He had driven his force hard, but without consideration for the essential factors of supply, transport and health. Now, it was largely ineffective and it would fall to others to restore its effectiveness.

He was succeeded by General Hoskins, a regular soldier of wide East African experience. Hoskins had no opportunity to influence the final unsuccessful offensive of which he unexpectedly found himself in command. The rains forced him to halt and he spent the remainder of his tenure trying to rebuild the shattered army left by Smuts. He was a capable officer, but his planning and haphazard requests did not inspire confidence in the War Office and ultimately resulted in his downfall. However, he immediately set about refurbishing his force while maintaining Norforce as his principal offensive formation. The Wintgens raid did not help his reputation in London, but, given the situation, there was little anybody could have done to prevent it. Pursuit of a small, ruthless force in the bush of East Africa was never going to be easy and Hoskins was unlucky on several occasions not to round the raiders up sooner than finally happened. Most importantly, he realised that the way to beat the Germans was to bring them to battle and to deprive them of resources, most particularly food. He set in train the necessary reorganisation and strategy for victory, but had to give way to another to achieve it.

In turn, General van Deventer never fulfilled his instructions although he came close on a number of occasions and the *Schutztruppe* was reduced to very small numbers. He had learned from his earlier experiences of the folly of simply trying to capture territory and the absolutely critical need for an efficient system of logistics. Consequently, he was prepared to delay moves in order to build up adequate stocks of supplies, although, when the opportunity presented itself, he was just as capable as Smuts



in demanding tremendous efforts on reduced rations. He adopted Hoskins's dual strategies of attrition and food denial, and pursued it vigorously. Likewise, once he found himself operating in areas free of the tsetse fly he re-introduced mounted forces that operated to great effect. On the other hand, he did have a tendency to over-control and at times gave far too many detailed instructions to column commanders operating in barely mapped bush. In his keenness to end the campaign, he occasionally committed too many troops to elaborate moves; apart from complicating matters, they also put too great a strain on the supply system and restricted the range of key columns. Largely unnoticed was the vast amount of work that he directed on road making, which eased his supply difficulties considerably. The northern portion of Portuguese East Africa was virtually a trackless expanse at the end of 1916; by war's end it was possible to drive a car from Lindi to Quelimane and Zomba.

The greatest factor that denied him success was the performance of the allied Portuguese forces. Their ineptitude gave von Lettow the opportunity he needed to carry on the campaign on numerous occasions.

General von Lettow had succeeded in his self-imposed task of drawing away British strength, but at considerable cost to his own strength. While the number of troops actually diverted from the main theatres of war were much fewer than he proclaimed, his campaign cost the British a great deal of money and tied up badly needed shipping until the end of the war. In the process, he had lost the bulk of the *Schutztruppe* and the whole of German East Africa, but the retention of the colony was never a priority.

He had marked success against Smuts in 1916 and showed great tactical cunning throughout the campaign. He was undoubtedly a very able commander and achieved a number of notable victories. On the other hand, the bulk of pitched battles were fought in 1917 and 1918, in which victory was often divided between the two sides. While von Lettow was always a dangerous foe and was quick to pounce on any column that strayed too far, his judgement was not always as good as he portrayed. He was particularly taken with the concept of decisive victory and he sought to win battles of annihilation rather

than to inflict steady attrition. As a result, the British suffered heavily, but so too did the *Schutztruppe*, and its losses were much more difficult to replace. Of course, such sharp blows frequently halted the advancing British columns and forced reorganisation, giving von Lettow time to withdraw along pre-planned routes, but they cannot hide the fact that his forces declined from over 9,000 strong at the end of 1916 to less than 1,500 by December 1917.

His, and others' claims for him, of being a guerrilla fighter are not borne out by the facts. He was a bush fighter and tactician of the first order, but there is scant evidence of him employing any of the precepts of the concept in the modern, accepted sense. His forces followed normal German military doctrine, adapted for African conditions and generally fought as conventional companies. Von Lettow made no real use of armed civilian irregulars and nor did he try to raise the populace against the invading British. There appear to have been few attempts to subvert or demoralise the enemy's troops and followers, while he recruited only few replacements during his sojourn in Portuguese territory. On the contrary, it was his opponents who showed a far greater mastery of such techniques as they employed over a thousand armed Intelligence Scouts, recruited from the local population, as well as raising several battalions of ex-German *Askaris* and inspiring uprisings against German rule, as with the Makonde. They also distributed leaflets encouraging desertion and did their utmost to weaken support for the Germans.

Von Lettow never showed any interest in politics, a key element of guerrilla warfare, and treated the governor with disdain. He treated the campaign in East Africa as a strictly military problem and considered that everything else should be subordinated to its achievement. In outlook, he shared much more with the conservative officers of the Prussian Army than with such noted guerrilla leaders as Mao, Giap or even his opponent Smuts. This is not to diminish von Lettow's achievements, but an understanding of true guerrilla warfare was not one of them.



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