

An information “black hole”: World War I in Africa

Marika Sherwood

Introduction

There has been much commemoration on our television screens, on our web-sites and in our newspapers on World War I. But where was the war fought? That World War One was also fought in Africa is usually relegated to a sentence or a brief paragraph in most books on the War. The BBC's website, www.bbc.co.uk/history/0/ww1, for example, states that it was fought 'from the trenches and the Somme on the Western Front, to the collapse of Russia and the Ottoman Empire on the Eastern Front'. There are 19 films/videos, innumerable articles and speeches on <http://www.history.com/topics/world-war-i>, but no mention of Africa. On the Wikipedia website which many people would look at, there are c.19,000 words dealing with the war itself of which 90 are on Africa. (But, to be fair, there is a reference to a useful website.) In *The Guardian* newspaper's archive on WWI (available on the web), there is nothing on Africa.

Any reports published in the newspapers during the war in Africa are either a sentence in a general report on the war, or occasionally very very brief reports issued by the War Office. South Africa merits a few more sentences. Thus information was very tightly controlled. *The Times* published *one* article by 'Our East African Correspondent' on 22 January 1918: 'A Land of Promise: the possibilities of East Africa', which deals with the problems being faced by the settlers, their participation in the war and the many hopes for increased products from East Africa once the Germans are expelled. There are no other articles by him/her and the paper does not appear to have had a 'West African Correspondent'. Or were *The Times* and other newspapers not permitted to publish any horror stories of the war from Africa?

Why is this? Are only the Europeans fighting in the trenches in Europe important? Even the one hundred thousand Chinese labourers digging those trenches are usually ignored.¹ Was

¹ The numbers of Chinese on the Western Front varies from author to author: eg <http://www.1914-1918.net/labour.htm> states 126,000; <http://militaryhistorynow.com/2013/12/04/the-forgotten-trench-diggers-of-the-western-front-meet-ww1s-chinese-labour-corps/> states 140,000; <http://www.remembrancetrails-northernfrance.com/history/nations-in-war/chinese-labourers-in-northern-france-during-the-great-war.html> states 80,000 and is the only site with a number for deaths: 7,900. Etc, etc.

information on the many aspects of the war ever kept by the colonial masters? If it was, it was certainly not made available to the public, either in Britain or in the colonies. Trying to discover how many men (and women?) were involved in the battles in Africa, how many died, and were wounded², and the numbers of civilians who died, reveals the disinterest of the colonial masters. The carnage was so horrific that 'Whitehall deemed it to be a "bloody tale" that was best ignored, or even suppressed'.³ The Chief of the Colonial Division of the American delegation argued at the 1919 Peace Conference that: 'the number of native victims...may be too long to give to the world and Africa'.⁴ In view of this, I guess that the highest numbers are the closest to the truth.

This article is an introduction to Africa, to the War and to the lack of and conflicting information available.

The Western powers' interests in Africa

At 11pm on 4 August 1914 Britain declared war on Germany. On August 6 from their neighbouring colony of Dahomey the French began to invade Togoland, one of Germany's four colonies in Africa. Britain joined her ally with troops from the Gold Coast, also adjacent to Togoland. The first 'British' shot in what became World War I was fired by Alhaji Grunshi of the Gold Coast Regiment on August 7th.⁵

Does this readiness to invade indicate that the Allies had been ready not only to prevent Germany's desire to enlarge its empire in Africa,⁶ but also to take over Germany's four colonies there? I have only found one source indicating this: it states that on July 31 'Accra mobilized its military forces. The Gold Coast Regiment comprised thirty-eight British officers, eleven British warrant or non-commissioned officers and 1,584 Ghanaians, including 124 "carriers" for guns and machine guns, and about 300 reservists'. (Or were there 4,282 in the Regiment?)⁷ This certainly makes one wonder if there would have been an attempt by the

² Of course, there is no accounting of how many of the wounded survived/died.

³ Edward Paice, *Tip & Run*, London 2007, p.394. The use of the word 'casualties' in some of the reports is, I presume, deliberately misleading, as it can mean dead, injured, wounded.

⁴ Edward Paice, *How the Great War Razed East Africa*, 4 August 2014, www.africaresearchinstitute.org/publications/counterpoints/how-

⁵ Grunshi fought in all three campaigns; he was raised to the rank of sergeant and in 1919 was awarded the Military Medal for his part in the East African Campaign.

⁶ Germany had a plan for Mittelfrika for some time – that is to acquire land to join its colonies from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, and this was revived in August 1914. David Olusoga & Caspar W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, London, 2011, p.267. See also M.E. Townsend, *The Rise and Fall of Germany's Colonial Empire*, New York, 1930, chapter 12. Marc Ferro, *The Great War*, London, 2002, pp.154, 156-7.

⁷ www.photius.com/.../ghana/.../ghana_national_security_world_war_i.ht. What 'reservists' in this report means is unclear. Roger Thomas, 'Military Recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 1975, 15/57, p.59.

British in the Gold Coast to invade its German-owned neighbour, Togoland, without a formal declaration of war. Was Britain perhaps trying to prevent a further growth of Germany's already extensive trade with Britain's own colonies?

Germany's four African colonies were Togoland, Kamerun, South-West Africa and North-East Africa. These colonies had been apportioned to Germany at the Berlin Conference in 1884-5. There the European powers sat around a table on which rested a large map of Africa – a whole continent they were determined to carve up and distribute among themselves, with a 'fair' distribution of the most vital resources. (Africa is roughly three times the size of the whole of Europe.) The allocation had to be 'fair' in order to prevent the necessity of fighting each other for access/control. So boundaries were drawn and re-drawn until agreement was reached. Existing national boundaries - that is, of the existing African nation-states - were completely ignored.⁸ (There were no Africans sitting around that table!) This, and the consequences for Africa evident today, are seldom, if ever, mentioned in any discussions.

Germany used the colonies, as did the other Europeans, as a source of gold, precious metals, raw materials such as cotton, tin and other minerals, manganese, and food; as a market for its products (manufacturing was forbidden in the colonies); and as naval ports in case of wars. Regiments were organised by the Europeans to enforce their demands for labourers to do the work (also for the government roads, etc), for as little pay as possible, or no pay at all. But what the Europeans proclaimed was that Africans needed to be civilized and Christianised – not that they wanted to grow rich by exploiting these colonies. Thus, if relevant data was kept, it was best not to make it public.

German traders were very successful – for example, in the British colony of Sierra Leone 80% of the import/export trade was with Germany as was half of the Gold Coast's trade, and it was the main customer for Nigeria's major export, palm products.⁹ Conditions for their workers, which was initially very harsh, were ameliorated from 1908.

Contributions to World War I by the colonies

Men in the forces in Europe

⁸ There were at least 2,000 languages and thus cultures, traditions, religions and histories – and thus 'nations'.

⁹ Michael Crowder, *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, London 1978, p.256; A. Adu Boahen (ed), *General History of Africa, volume VII* (abridged edition), London, 1990, pp. 135, 137.

France used c. half a million troops from Africa to fight in Europe and about a quarter million African workers. Britain refused to let a Black man point a gun at a White man, but did import c. 122,00 'civilian war workers to work behind the British front'.¹⁰

Men in the forces in Africa

Only total numbers are listed here as each 'battle' is described below and includes the reported/estimated numbers of troops and 'carriers'.

How were the troops and carriers corps raised? The accounts in UNESCO's *General History of Africa, VII* (pp.133-141), can be used as an *indication*. In France's colonies the 'Decree of 1912 made military service compulsory for all African males between the ages of 20 and 28 [but many more were raised from 1915 onwards]... In British East Africa and the Ugandan Protectorate the Compulsory Service Order made all men aged over 18 liable for military service... Over a million troops were actually recruited during the war to supplement the generally small forces maintained by the colonial authorities... In addition to troops, carriers were recruited on a massive scale – some three carriers were necessary to keep each fighting soldier in the field... There was forced recruitment of porters in Northern Rhodesia. About 260,000 porters were impressed by the Belgian in the Congo'.

The UNESCO report cited above would indicate at least three million being used as carriers, especially as sometimes officers are reported as often having 4-6 carriers each! The numbers of carriers, sometimes noted as 'labourers' are reported as: France used 221,668; David Killingray states 57,508 were recruited in West Africa; Paice gives 'more than a million' used by the Allies and 350,000 by the Germans in the East Africa battles; Padmore's figure for Ugandan, East African and Congolese carriers, and 'Belgian Military Telegraph Constructors' in East Africa is 53,034.¹¹

Deaths

¹⁰ Christine Koller, 'The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa', *Immigrants & Minorities*, 26/1-2, March-July 2007, pp.111-133; C.M. Andrew & A.S. Kanya-Forstner, 'France, Africa and the First World War', *Jnl. of African History*, 19/1, 1978, pp.11-23. The numbers vary with each publication you look at. See also George Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*, London: ITUCNW, 1931, pp.111-120 – Padmore writes much of the French methods of recruitment.

¹¹ James Morgan Read, *Atrocity Propaganda 1914-1919*, New Haven, 1941, p.137, n.146; Crowder (n.9), pp.261; 268, n.27; Padmore (n.10), p.117; David Killingray & James Matthews, 'beasts of burden: british west african carriers in the first world war', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 1979, 13/1-2, p.10; Paice (2007, n.3), pp.393, 398; Hew Strachan in *The First World War*, London: 2003 [edition used Pocket Books, 2006, p.81] also gives 1 million as the number of carriers used in East Africa.

(The data, as ever, is conflicting. See below for numbers of military and carrier death for each campaign in Africa.)

Carriers: Erlikman calculated the deaths of 'recruited labourers' as 44,911 in East Africa; Paice believes 95,000 died there and a total of 105,000 in the four wars in Africa; Killingray found no accurate data for the numbers of West African carriers 'killed/died of disease; missing, etc invalidated'. Stapleton states that 'one million were employed on both sides.... The men were literally worked to death (in the East Africa campaign)...the precise number of deaths will probably never be known'. Germany made no attempt to keep records, states Paice; he calculates that about 'one in seven' of the 'certainly not less than 350,000 men, women and children' who served in the German carrier corps died.¹²

Military: Erlikman estimated that 200,673 Africans and 952 Europeans died; Paice gives a death rate of 9% for the British troops in East Africa.¹³

Civilians: in Kenya 30,000; Tanzania 100,000; Mozambique 50,000; Rwanda 15,000; Urundi 20,000; and the Belgian Congo 150,000. Paice estimates that 300,000 civilians died in German East Africa. Others estimate that 'a million people died in East Africa as a direct result of the war'.¹⁴

As in East Africa animals and crops had been confiscated by both the Germans and the Allies, many Africans died of hunger and then in the drought-induced famine of 1917-18. Edward Paice estimates that 200,000 men women and children died when the Spanish flu was brought in by English ships bringing ammunition, etc.to British East Africa. An estimated 10-20% of the population of German East Africa died of the 'famine and disease' and c.200,000 died in the British East African colonies.¹⁵

¹² <http://das-tannenbergnationaldenkmal-ostpreussen.urlaub.pm/the-tannenbergmemoial/african-people---world-war-i-casualties---the-tannenbergmemoial-east-prussia>; Paice (2007, n. 3), p.392; he quotes a British official stating that 'the full tale of the mortality among the native carriers will never be told'. (p.392). Strachan and Paice argue that the death rate was c.20%. At times the death rate rose to 'almost 30%' because of the lack of rations and medical facilities. (Paice (2007, n.3), p.393); Killingray & Matthews (n.11), p.10; Tim Stapleton, 'The Impact of the First World War on African People', in John Leband, *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Africa*, University of Kwa-Zulu Press, 2007, p.117; Paice (2007, n.3), p.398. See also Geoffrey Hodges, *The Carrier Corps: Military Labor in the East African Campaign 1914-1918*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

¹³ Erlikman, *Poteri narodonaseleniia v XX veke : spravochnik*. Moscow2004 quoted on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I_casualties_-_German_colonies; Paice (2007, n. 3), p.392; Gregory Maddox outlines the food requisitions by troops and gives the estimated death rate as 20% in the Ugogo area in central Tanzania. ('Mtunya: famine in Central Tanzania 1917-20', *Jnl. of African History*, 31/2, 1990, pp.181-197)

¹⁴ Erlikman (n.13); Paice (2014, n.4), p.398; Strachan (2003, n.11), p.82.

¹⁵ Paice (2007, n.3), p.397; n.13; Hilke Fischer, 'Africa and the First World War', www.dw.de/africa-and-the-first-world-war/a-17573462

Financial and other contributions

Little has been recorded. Nigeria's 'extra expenditure for the war' was £1.4 million, which included financing its Cameroons campaign. Fred Omu reports that the Emirs in Northern Nigeria contributed £38,000; the Sultan of Sokoto £1,000; the Alake of Abeokuta £510; Southern Nigerians, £100,000.¹⁶

The Togo campaign cost the Gold Coast £36,500 and war expenses for 1916 and 1918 totalled £62,000; £80,000 was raised for what seem to be local war relief funds (eg Red Cross, hospitals); and the colony sent a total of £700,000 from its 'reserve funds' to London. The Gambia contributed £36,000.¹⁷

Troops and carriers had to be fed: whether the local suppliers were ever paid, how much and by whom, is not possible to discover. Richard Rathbone reports on 'uncompensated crop requisitioning'; Tim Stapleton found that in East Africa 'looting did occur and that the 'Germans simply confiscated what they wanted'.¹⁸

Exports from Africa

There is little data available. Sir Charles Lucas reported that rubber production in the Gold Coast was increased and there was, of course, 'an increased demand for strategic minerals'; bauxite was mined and exported for the first time. The colony's exports, mainly manganese, gold, cocoa, timber increased in value from £5.8 million in 1916 to £10.84 in 1919.¹⁹

Propaganda in Africa

Was propaganda important in Africa? What were Africans' attitudes to the war? Some historians believe they just viewed it as a fight between Europeans for which they were unwillingly conscripted. The 'educated elite' in the British colonies are believed by some to

¹⁶ Fred Omu, 'The Nigerian Press and the Great War', *Nigeria Magazine*, March/May 1968, #96, p.46.

¹⁷ Crowder (n. 9), p.257. D. Kimble (*Political History of Ghana*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1963, p.376): '11 aeroplanes were presented to the British Government by the people of the Gold Coast' – is this the £700,00 stated by Crowder? (n.9, p.257) Sir Charles Lucas, *The Gold Coast and the War*, Oxford University Press 1920, pp.29-31, 47. (Lucas was a senior official at the Colonial Office.) As always, the figures differ.

¹⁸ Richard Rathbone, 'World War I and Africa: Introduction', *Jnl. of African History*, 19/1 1978, p.5; Stapleton (n.12), p.123.

¹⁹ Lucas (n.17), p.29 ; Rathbone (n.18), pp.5, 9;

<http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doifinder/view/10.1057/9780230270503.0077>, pp.248-252. I can find no information on the private companies' profits from the increased trade, or on the recruitment of or wages paid to their workers.

have been very pro-British – after all, that was at least partly the aim of the few schools the government had set up; those with a university education had all been well indoctrinated during their years in the UK.²⁰

Unsurprisingly therefore, an analysis of the Nigerian press during the war years found that Africans were usually highly critical of the colonial administration, but at the same time they stood for the acceptance and submission to the rule of the British Government. They considered British colonial policy definitely more humane than the colonial policies of other European powers.... So Britain appeared also to be fighting Africa's battle against one of the representatives of outrageous colonialism... England and her allies were defenders of right and justice while Germany was the upholder of the might and brute force.²¹

Literacy rates were very low and lack of radio broadcasting made propaganda by the colonial powers somewhat difficult. Research of the holdings in the British Library have not revealed any propaganda sent to Africa.²² (One librarian at the Library has found some posters which *might* have been made for use in Africa, but has not 'yet found any reference to how they were used'.²³) There are no depictions of any posters aimed at Africans or regarding Africans in the Imperial War Museums' *First World War in Posters* (1974).

Historian Roger Thomas reports that in the Gold Coast a poster, signed by the Acting Governor, was issued on Christmas Day in 1917, appealing for volunteers. It was addressed to the 'Chiefs and the People of the Gold Coast Colony' and appears to have been a very long, verbose message.²⁴ How many could read it? Or understand such English?

In Britain there was much propaganda about German cruelty in their colonies. The notion that Germany wanted more bases in order to attack British colonies was propagated. Similarly, Germany disbursed information on British cruelty, and also 'assailed the Allies for their use of coloured troops in the European theatre of war'.²⁵

That news of the war was possibly withheld by the colonial authorities is indicated by the Ugandan 'National Affairs Department [being] preoccupied with controlling the flow of war

²⁰ In 1914 there were 12 government schools in the Gold Coast and a number of missionary schools; almost all were in the South, as was the case in Nigeria. On propaganda in Britain regarding the colonies, see eg John MacKenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The manipulation of British public opinion, 1880-1960*, Manchester University Press, 1984.

²¹ Omu (n.16), pp.45-6.

²² <http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/themes/propaganda>

²³ Email correspondence with Ian Cooke, November 2014.

²⁴ Thomas (n.7), p.64 and fn26.

²⁵ See Read (n.11), quote is from p.136; Wm. Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies 1914-1919*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1967, pp.37, 50.

news to Africans' from 1914. Though the Colonial Office refused to permit full censorship of the papers published in Africa, criticism of the colonial master was not permitted. For example, the editor of the *Nigerian Times* was imprisoned for noting the 'tyranny and exploitation of the British merchants'.²⁶ In the *Gold Coast Leader*, 'African soldiers were rarely discussed... the issue of conscription was ignored... [that in the] Cameroon campaign 35,000 were admitted to hospital and that 4,600 had died was not reported'.²⁷

William Roger Louis reports that 'the Germans used South-West Africa as a base from which they conducted "active and disloyal propaganda" and attempted to "undermine" British authority'.²⁸

The Armed Forces in Africa

According to historian V.G. Kiernan, France recruited about a half million men for the military as well as 'nearly a quarter million labourers....In Dahomey and other areas, under pressure of "intensive recruitment for the army, forced labour, heavy taxation" revolts broke out.... Chiefs were paid a premium for each man they brought in'.²⁹ What proportion served in Africa is uncertain..

Apart from France and her colonies, the Allies' troops were from: Britain, South Africa, India, the West Indies Regiment, the British West India Regiment; the West African Frontier Force (WAFF); the King's African Rifles (KAR), Rhodesia (all Whites till 1917, when due to illness all were returned to South Rhodesia, and were replaced by 978 African troops commanded by 138 White officers and NCOs³⁰); and from Belgian and Portuguese colonies in Africa.

Britain's West African Frontier Force (WAFF) had been set up in 1897. It comprised battalions from Gambia, Gold Coast, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. The men were recruited from ethnic groups deemed to be the 'martial races'. For example, it is recorded that 69% of the Gold Coast Regiment's men were from the Northern Territories, though the Territories' population was less than 30% of the total Gold Coast population.³¹ The King's African Rifles

²⁶ Stapleton (n.12), p.23 ; Omu (n.16), p.48.

²⁷ S. Newell, 'An Introduction to the Writings of J.G. Mullen, an African Clerk in the *Gold Coast Leader*, 1916-1929', *Africa*, 78/3, 2008, pp.384-400 (quote is from p.385). Is the reported number of hospital admissions possible?

²⁸ Louis (n.25), p.53.

²⁹ V.G. Kiernan, *Colonial Empires and Armies 1815-1960*, 1998, p.184.

³⁰ Stapleton (n.12), p.21.

³¹ Thomas (n.7), p.61. We shall never know *who* the recruits were as they were often just given the names of the territories/ethnic groups from which they were recruited. Thus, for example, 'Alhaji Grunshi', mentioned above, must have been a Muslim Gurunsi from the Gold Coast's Northern Territories, who had been on the Hajj to Mecca. What was his name?

(KAR), set up in 1902, was comprised of regiments in the British colonies of Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Kenya and Uganda. Prior to the War, in all the colonies the regiments' job was to keep the peace and ensure the borders. All African troops' officers, including most of the non-commissioned, were Whites.

How were the men for the military, and for the carrier corps, recruited? Some might have volunteered as in the military the pay rates were in some areas higher than what was paid in the mines or on the plantations. It was also preferable to being 'recruited' into the carrier corps. However, the men, especially for the carrier corps, were often 'recruited' by their chiefs who were 'compelled to serve as recruiters'.³² There was some resistance to this 'recruitment': for example, 300 of the Egba in SW Nigeria, who revolted in 1918, were killed; in Benin there was a mass desertion in protest against the Oba (the King) serving as 'an instrument of the British government'.³³ On the Gold Coast desertions were common: for example, the desertion of 13 new recruits in the Northern Territories resulted in enquiries which revealed that 'pressure was put on certain Chiefs to obtain recruits...which accounts for the men deserting....The recruitment efforts of 1915-16 were later to be described as a failure'.³⁴ It must be emphasised here that some of the nations/ethnic groups did not traditionally have hierarchical systems of government and thus had no kings/chiefs; as the colonizers needed chiefs to administer for them, they appointed chiefs, whom it was particularly easy to threaten with removal.

Some chiefs feared to disobey requests/demands by local colonial administrators while some hoped to gain some sort of political advantage. I have not been able to find any information on whether some chiefs were punished/deposed, or on what advantages some gained. Roger Thomas quotes Dr W.W. Claridge, Medical Officer in Tamale in the Northern Territories, complaining of 'recruits' suffering 'physical defects'. Were the chiefs purposely 'donating' men useless to the community? If so, the chiefs were disloyal, and 'serious consideration should be given to the possibility of their being dismissed "having thus deliberately insulted the Government"'.³⁵ In French West Africa the 'coercive methods [used to recruit] provoked both active and passive resistance... The chiefs generally did what was required, more or less reluctantly... As the war went on...hostile reactions became more evident' and there were some armed revolts.³⁶

In South Africa, according to historian B.P. Willan, 'the government seems to have exercised a strong degree of compulsion through the agency of the chiefs... It seems that a regular –

³² David Killingray, 'African voices from two world wars', *Historical Research*, 2001, 74/186, pp.425-443; quote is from p.429.

³³ Peter B. Clarke, *West Africans at War*, London 1986, p.14.

³⁴ Thomas (n.7), p.62.

³⁵ Thomas (n.7), p.78.

³⁶ John Hargreaves, 'French West Africa in the First World War' (a review article), *Jnl. of African History*

and unofficial – system of payment to both chiefs and other recruiting agents was instituted'.³⁷

Who were the 'carriers'?

The wars in Africa could not be fought without men (and women?) 'recruited' as 'carriers'. These men are often completely omitted from the brief accounts of these wars in books on World War I. 'After all, who cares about native carriers?', Colonial Office official Fiddian asked.³⁸ As David Killingray explains, the British records refer to 'enlisted' carriers', to 'recruited carriers', to 'porters' and 'labourers' – it is therefore hardly surprising that there is no reliable data on the numbers used and the numbers who died or were 'invalided'. He also notes that 'carrier recruitment' was 'a contemporary euphemism for forced labor'.³⁹

The railways, built to carry goods from mines to the ports for export, were very quickly destroyed by the Germans to prevent their use by the Allies. Tsetse fly, especially in East Africa and southern Cameroon made the use of animals impossible. Thus everything had to be carried: medical supplies, food, ammunition, guns, tents clothing and drinks for European officers, who often had 4 or even 6 carriers supporting them. The 'carriers' were also used to cut tracks/ build roads, restore/build bridges and medical centres, while others served as stretcher bearers for the wounded.⁴⁰

Their conditions of work were usually appalling: historians of the carriers agree that their food was inadequate, as was their clothing, which often did not include shoes, or blankets. They were supposed to be paid a minimal wage, but even this is noted by historians as being 'irregular'. The British promised pay and a 'death gratuity', but these were often not paid; neither was 'disability compensation'.⁴¹ Historians also agree that the numbers recruited, and the numbers killed and injured are mainly guess work. David Killingray notes that 'carrier pay records all through the war were carelessly kept'; and that 'it is impossible to calculate the total number of African labourers who were employed in military campaigns during the colonial period'.⁴²

³⁷ B.P. Willan, 'The South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916-1918', *Jnl. of African History*, 19/1 1978, pp.61-86 (the quote is from pp.67-8).

³⁸ Clarke (n.33), p.17.

³⁹ Killingray & Matthews (n.11), p.11, n.14; p.12.

⁴⁰ John Starling & Ivor Lee, *No Labour, No Battle: military labour during the First World War*, Stroud: Spellmount, 2014, pp.192-4.

⁴¹ Killingray & Matthews (n.11), pp. 5-23.

⁴² Killingray & Matthews (n.11), p.20; Killingray, 'Labour Exploitation for Military Campaigns in British Colonial Africa, 1870-1945', *Jnl. of Contemporary History*, 1989, 24, pp.483-501; quote is from p.485.

As accurate data of the numbers 'employed' is so infrequent, as is the data for deaths, one has to presume that in fact some/many were not ever paid and that certainly widows received no compensation. (I am presuming that if men had been paid, there would have been some form of records in the colonial Treasurers' reports.)

The wars in Africa

Togoland

It was very important for the Allies to capture Togoland, as the German wireless communications station was housed there, in Kamina. It was the only radio link between Germany and its other African colonies and also the only German radio communication with shipping in the South Atlantic. Nevertheless, the colony was defenseless: it only had a police force of 660 Togolese policemen serving under 10 (some state there were 30) German officers; their guns were from the 1870 Franco-Prussian war.

The attack began with the Post Office ship *Alert* severing the underwater communication cables. The French and the Gold Coast Regiment, supported by two thousand carriers, had no problems overtaking the colony in a few days. On 26 August 1914, having dynamited the transmitters, the Germans surrendered. Togo, as it was now called, was divided between France and Britain.

How many people died, troops, carriers or civilians, is either never stated or the figures conflict: for example, Russian journalist Vadim Erlikman's estimate, based on sources published in the Soviet Union, is that 2,000 died.⁴³ F.J. Moberley noted in 1931 that there had been 83 British, 'c.54' French and 41 German casualties. He also states that 'an unknown number of troops and carriers deserted on both sides.'⁴⁴ David Killingray and James Matthews' numbers for 'carriers' recruited for Togoland is 'c.2000' from the Gold Coast, but they give no figures for the numbers killed. I can find no data re the French troops and carriers.

How many civilians were caught in the fighting and died?

This vast discrepancy as well as lack of data is reflected in the records of the other three 'battles' fought in Africa.

⁴³ Erlikman (n.13).

⁴⁴ F. J Moberly, *Military Operations Togoland and the Cameroons 1914–1916. History of the Great War Based on Official Documents by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence (1931)*, Battery Press, 1995, pp. 29, 30–31, 36–39, available on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Togoland_Campaign

Kamerun

The day before Togoland surrendered, the British troops from Nigeria and French troops from Equatorial Guinea began the conquest of another German colony, neighbouring Kamerun. They were soon joined by the West African Frontier Force, and Belgian troops. According to Hew Strachan there were also 864 White British soldiers, and 5,927 Africans; he then adds 7,000 French forces - were they Africans? Most likely Africans, as Crowder notes that there were 'some 13,000 African troops'.⁴⁵ An estimated 3,000 soldiers were killed or wounded; but Erlikman reports 5,000 military *deaths*. As noted above, a clerk then working for the Gold Coast government noted in his diary that '... [in the] Cameroon campaign 35,000 were admitted to hospital and that 4,600 had died was not reported'.⁴⁶

David Killingray states that the British troops were supported by 'nearly 14,200 carriers drawn mainly from Sierra Leone and Nigeria... most of the 3,300 carriers supplied by the Gold Coast...were Ewe from occupied Togoland'. As the carriers were not even issued with shoes/boots despite the many miles they had to march, and were on 'half-rations', within a few months of the commencement of their arrival, many, I presume, absconded. The total number of carriers Killingray notes as *killed* was 26; the numbers who died of disease, 7,708; and the numbers 'missing, etc. invalided' was 8,638.⁴⁷

Just how large the German forces were also depends on which account you read. Hew Strachan states that in 'the maximum force achieved at any one time was 1,460 whites... and 6,550 blacks'. Michael Crowder notes 1,550 soldiers, 1,200 police and 215 German officers. Or were there 2,000, or '1,550, with the corresponding number of German officers' in the military and 2,200, or '1,285 policemen, with the corresponding number of German officers'? David Olusoga believes that about three-quarters were *askari* – ie, Africans. As the total White population for 1913-14 is given as 1,871 by one author and 1,455 for 1911 by another (of whom 1,311 were German), the true number is (yet again) impossible to determine. There certainly could not have been a thousand or so German officers, unless some of them were women!⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa*, Oxford 2004, pp.9, 32; Crowder (n.9), p.253.

⁴⁶ Clarke (n. 33), p.15, Killingray & Matthews (n.11); give similar figures Erlikman (n.13); Newell (n.27).

⁴⁷ But as Killingray gives the same numbers for deaths and invalids for Sierra Leoneans and Ewe, we can only presume that the British government documents, which Killingray gives as his source of information, did not keep accurate data. Killingray & Matthews (n.11), p.10. Clarke (n.33, p.15) gives similar figures.

⁴⁸ Quotes are from Townsend (n.6), p.289 & population date on p.265; Strachan, (2004, n.45) p.22; Crowder (n.9), p.253; W.O. Henderson, *The German Colonial Empire 1884-1919*, London 1993, Table 1; David Olusoga, *The World's War*, London, 2014, p.109.

Did the Germans also have 'carriers'? Hew Strachan notes that 'about 6,000 askaris and 7,000 families and followers followed 1,000 Germans into Muni'.⁴⁹

The war in the South lasted till February 1916 when the governor capitulated. According to David Clarke, in the North the German troops and some Cameroonians retreated into Equatorial Guinea and continued fighting the British conquerors for another year.⁵⁰ David Olusoga, states that there were 'large scale defections by the *Askari*. Eventually the remaining *Askari*, Germans and their families escaped over the border into Spanish Muni (Equatorial Guinea), effectively surrendering the colony'.⁵¹

How many civilians died? Only Erlikman gives a figure: 50,000.⁵² Other questions have to be asked: what does 'missing' mean? Had they absconded? Could some bodies not be identified? And how long did those 'invalided' survive?

Kamerun became 'Cameroon', and after some quite acerbic discussion, Britain and France divided it between themselves. Africans, of course, were not represented at these discussions.

South-West Africa⁵³

Britain feared that the Germans from their colony of South-West Africa might attack Britain's dominion of South Africa. So the British began to bombard the colony's coastal towns in September 1914. When requested by Britain, the self-governing dominion of the Union of South Africa agreed to take over the fight for the German colony. It raised 50,000 White troops, and led by General Smuts began to invade in September 1914. They were defeated, despite the German forces numbering less than three thousand, supported by a White police force of about 600.

General Smuts had to rush back to South Africa to deal with a rebellion by the Boers (Afrikaners), who were totally opposed to the attempted conquest. After all, they had received support from Germany during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Now they refused to fight against Germany and some even joined the German forces. The rebels were subdued by the end of December.

Simultaneously, the Germans began to invade South Africa to attempt to prevent another invasion. In January 1915 Generals Botha and Smuts, commanding tens of thousands of White troops supported by c.35,00 African 'carriers', began to invade from the North and

⁴⁹ Strachan (2003, n.11), p.90.

⁵⁰ Clarke (n.33), pp.11-12.

⁵¹ Olusoga (2014, n.48), p.110.

⁵² Erlikman (n.13) Half-rations is from Strachan (2004, n.45), p.38.

⁵³ In their conquest of the area in 1904 the Germans killed c. 70% of the 4 Herero people living there.

the South; the capital of Windhoek was captured without a fight. With a total lack of supplies, on 15 July the German Governor surrendered his force of '204 officers and 3,166 men'. One historian believes there were 1,603 European, 600 white police officers and 5,000 native soldiers. Before surrendering, the German military command burned their archives.⁵⁴

The total number of Whites in the South African military, according to most historians, was c.43,400; 295 (or 427?) died and 318 (or 560?) were wounded; 782 were 'missing/prisoners'. Whether this data includes the 1st Battalion of the White Rhodesian Regiment is not clear. As ever, the figures given by Hew Strachan differ: he recorded '113 South Africans killed in action and 153 died of disease or accidents; 890 Germans were taken prisoner'.⁵⁵

Lt. Kleynhans from the National Museum of Military History Documentation Centre in Pretoria sent me somewhat different figures on 30 October 2014 and on 3 November added that 'as far as I have it, they were all volunteers and they were all paid':

67,347 European Troops were raised for the campaign and 35,000 Non-European troops served during the campaign as non-combatants. 88 Soldiers were killed in action; 25 Soldiers died of wounds; 153 Soldiers died of disease and/or accident; 263 Soldiers were wounded. There is no separate figure for Non-European soldiers that died in German South West Africa. The casualties listed included ALL South African soldiers, regardless of their race.

Byron Farwell gives the number of German deaths as 1,331.⁵⁶

At the Versailles peace conference in 1919, South Africa was granted control over what is today Namibia.

German East Africa

In this huge area of 393,500 square miles, the total German population in 1914 was 4,107 and included 152 military officers who commanded the native soldiers – the numbers depend, yet again, on whose book you read: these vary from 2,000 to 11,000; or '11,000 African regulars, and some 3,000 irregulars'. The 63 White police officers commanded a police force of c. 2,140, and 2,542 of the settlers were 'reservists'. They

⁵⁴ Louis (n. 25), p.54; Olusoga, (2011, n.6), p.259; B.P. Willan (n.37), pp.61-86; Townsend (n.6), pp. 289, 366.

⁵⁵ Louis (n. 25), p.54; Hew Strachan, *The First World War: To Arms*, OUP 2001, pp.568, 641 (accessed from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South-West_Africa_Campaign); War Office, *Statistics of the Military: Report of the British Empire during the Great War*, London: War Office, 1922, p.753.

⁵⁶ Byron Farwell, *The Great War in Africa, 1914–1918*, New York: Norton & Company 1989, p.103.

were supported by 362,000 'porters/labourers', some of whom were women and children.⁵⁷

Fighting was at sea, on land and on the lakes. The British navy bombed Dar-es-Salaam in August and in September the British armed some Ugandan steamers on Lake Victoria to fight against the Germans on the lake. All German vessels on Lake Tanganyika were sunk by February 1916.⁵⁸ The Allies' troops were from: the WAFF; the KAR (c.34,000 drawn from Nyasaland, Uganda and Kenya); Belgian Congo; 13,000 'mixed-race' Cape Corps; White South African and Rhodesian troops; the Rhodesia Native Regiment; 12,000 troops from the Indian Expeditionary Forces B and C; the 2nd Battalion of the West India Regiment, which was supplemented by 500 men from the British West Indies Regiments.⁵⁹

The 25th Battalion of (British) Royal Fusiliers also served in this campaign. Their attitude towards Africans is evident from Capt. Angus Buchanan's book *Three years of War in East Africa* (London, 1919). En route to Africa he writes of 'gibbering ill-thriven Maltese natives' (p.9); and on arrival he finds 'low-caste porters' (p.28), 'ignorant natives' (p.107) and 'primitive races' (p.170) who had 'the instincts of animals' (p.201). A similar attitude is expressed by William Watmough from the same regiment.⁶⁰ As in most regiments Africans could not rise even to the rank of Non-Commissioned Officers, presumably such racist were widespread.

Carriers, as elsewhere, were obtained by whatever means were possible. Historian David Olusoga notes that many were 'press-ganged'.⁶¹ Ordinances were introduced in the British colonies of Nyasaland in 1914 and then Kenya in 1915 empowering district commissioners

⁵⁷ Kiernan (n.29), p.188; Olusoga (2014, n.48) p.114; Paice (2014, n.4); Townsend (n.6), pp.289, 367; Anne Samson, 'When two bulls fight, the grass suffers: the impact of World War 1 on East Africa', <https://thesamsonsedhistorian.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/when-two-bulls-fight.pdf>, p.4

⁵⁸ See, eg Janie Hampton, 'Victory on Lake Nyasa', *History Today*, July 2014, pp.49-51; Samson (n.57) p2.

⁵⁹ G.W. Hodges, 'African manpower statistics for the British Forces in East Africa, 1914-1918', *Jnl. of African History*, 19/1, 1978); Olusoga (2014, n. 48), pp.127, 136; Kiernan (n.29, p.188) states there were '10,000 white men and 14,000 blacks' in the Rhodesian army.

⁶⁰ William Watmough, 'Soldiering in East Africa', *The Shipley Times and Express*, 6 April 1917, http://www.25throyalfusiliers.co.uk/william_errol_glanville_watmough.html There are many excerpts from Buchanan's book in Peter Englund, *The Beauty and the Sorrow*, London: Profile Books, 2011.

⁶¹ Olusoga (2014, n.48) p.137.

to conscript Africans for carrier corps; in 1916 forced recruitment for the military was introduced.⁶²

At first the Germans managed to repulse the Allied invaders, but when General Smuts took command in 1916 the Allies began to win. German commander General von Lettow-Vorbeck now changed his policy to fighting guerrilla skirmishes, attacks followed by strategic withdrawals, here there and everywhere. His aim was to force the Allies to concentrate large numbers of troops (and, of course, guns, ammunition) away from the European theatre of war. His main problem was that he could not obtain more arms (or food) from Germany. Nevertheless, he held out till the armistice was signed and surrendered on 13 November 1918. General von Lettow-Vorbeck, 'expressed great pride in the fact that as many as two million Africans had "served the military [in East Africa] in some capacity or another" by providing supplies or services'.⁶³

The official report states that the maximum number of the Allies' combatant troops was 24,156 with 17,256 'casualties'. Paice gives the figures as 126,972 'British troops' of whom 11,189 died. Anne Samson's figure for the allied troops is 143,085 (comprising British Belgian and Portuguese) and 12,000 German troops. Brian Gardner's figures are 'at least 130,000' in the army; 'official casualty figure... 62,000 of whom 48,328 died of disease'. G.W. Hodges notes that 'military and civil records differed'.⁶⁴ For example, the KAR lost 3,000 men due to disease and malnutrition and 1,198 were killed in battle. Of the 700 West Indians, 44 died and 300 were invalided out as unfit for further service – how many of them died is not recorded. Hew Strachan notes that 1,377 African soldiers died in combat and 2,923 from disease; '3,156 whites in British service died; 2,225 were victims of disease... By end of 1916, 12,000 out of 20,000 South Africans had been invalided home'.⁶⁵

Not surprisingly, the figures for the numbers of carriers/labourers vary even more hugely than the data for combatant troops. The official number of 'non-combatants' is given as 187,309, with 44,572 'casualties'. But there were c. 173,000 carriers from the Congo, transporting munitions and food supplies; there were c. 190,000 from Uganda: c.191,000 from Nyasaland, and about 107,000 from Northern Rhodesia, including 12,000 canoemen.⁶⁶

⁶² Melvin E. Page, 'The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and The East African Campaign, 1914-1918', *Jnl. of African History*, 19/1, 1978, pp.87-100; Donald C. Savage & J. Forbes Munro, 'Carrier Corps Recruitment in the British East Africa Protectorate 1914-1918', *Jnl. of African History*, 7/2, 1966, pp.313-342; Starling & Lee (n.40), p.193

⁶³ Paice (2007, n.3), p.398.

⁶⁴ Paice (2007, n.3), p.392; G.W. Hodges, *Kariakor: The Carrier Corps*, Nairobi Univ. Press 1999, p.174. Samson (n. 57); Brian Gardner, *German East Africa: the Story of the First World War in East Africa*, London, Cassell 1963, p.194.

⁶⁵ Strachan (2004, n.45), pp.8-9.

⁶⁶ Hodges (1978, n.59), pp.101-116; data from p.107.

The estimated number in the South African Native Labour Corps was 18,000⁶⁷; there were also an unknown number of Chinese Labour Corps. In the coastal areas Indians and Arabs were also recruited as labourers and as drivers, stevedores, saddlers, blacksmiths, masons and canoemen.⁶⁸ Historian Anne Samson believes the total number was 1,350,000; Starling and Lee believe the total number was at least one million and that between 23,311 and 95,000 died and 25,695 were missing, who might have died 'on the way home or after reaching home'.⁶⁹ Edward Paice believes that 'more than one million had been recruited, and that well over 100,000 had died.'⁷⁰ Lt. Col. O.F. Watkins of the Kenya Central Government Library agrees: 'as there were over 1 million carriers of all kinds on all fronts the total mortality was well over 100,000'. A German estimate of the number of carriers in the British forces who died is 250,000.⁷¹

Between a third and a fifth of the West African carriers are believed to have died, mainly from diseases and malnutrition, and 'exceptionally callous treatment' by their officers. Lack of appropriate footwear for the day-long marches crippled many men; they suffered from 'malaria, yellow fever, sleeping sickness, black water fever, malnutrition and guinea worms'.⁷² An estimated 192,000 men were also 'recruited' from lands taken over from the Germans. Historians note that 'pay records' were 'carelessly kept' during the war. Some years later when this was questioned, a Colonial Office official minuted 'after all, who cares about native carriers?'; and as another British official wrote in 1930, 'the full tale of the mortality among [the] native carriers will never be told'.⁷³

The number of German military deaths has been estimated as 65,000 by Vadim Erlikman. A German estimate of carrier deaths is between 100,000 and 120,000.⁷⁴ The German government did not record the numbers recruited as carriers. Edward Paice believes it was probably in the region of 350,000 men women and children, with a death rate of at least one in seven. Hodges writes that 'in March 1916, when German forces were at the peak of their strength, they included 12,100 askari (African soldiers), 45,000 carriers and other followers. By the end of the war 1,798 German askari had been killed while 2,847 had deserted; it is not clear how many carriers died in German service.'⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Willan (n.37), p.64.

⁶⁸ Olusoga (2014, n.48), p.134. Starling & Lee (n.40), p.194

⁶⁹ Samson (n.57), p.4; Starling & Lee (n.40), p.194.

⁷⁰ Paice (2007, n.3), p.393.

⁷¹ Hodges (1978, n.59), p.21; he notes that 'provincial records are all incomplete' (p.105); 'Uganda records show a serious and unexplained discrepancy' (p.106); Olusoga (2014, n.48), p.143.

⁷² Olusoga (2014, n.48), p.131.

⁷³ Paice (2007, n.3), pp.392-3; Paice (2014, n.4).

⁷⁴ Olusoga (2014, n.48), p.143.

⁷⁵ Hodges (1978, n.59), p.114.

At the Versailles Peace Conference, after much acrimonious discussion the conquered lands were divided among the conquerors: Belgium was granted Ruanda and Urundi while Tanganyika became a British possession.⁷⁶

Questions to be asked

- a) How many men were recruited for the military and for the carrier corps?
- b) How many women were recruited?⁷⁷
- c) How many men and women died?
- d) How many were permanently disabled?
- e) Were they ever paid?⁷⁸
- f) Did widows receive any payment?
- g) How many women were raped?
- h) How many of the civilian population died due to starvation, even before the drought and the arrival of Spanish flu? One of General Lettow-Vorbeck's doctors reported in September 1918 that 'Behind us we leave destroyed fields...and, for the immediate future, starvation. We are no longer the agents of culture; our track is marked by death, plundering and evacuated villages'. Historian Tim Stapleton reports that 'German and Allied armies lived off food produced by the local population....looting did occur.... Germans simply confiscated what they wanted... Britain tended to pay for the grain and livestock they acquired, but there was an underlying element of coercion... it was common to see corpses along the paths ...in one village the people's skulls littered the ground like coconuts'. 'An official post-war German estimate suggested that around 300,000 civilians had died from starvation attributed to the conflict.' 'Some historians estimate that a million people died in East Africa as a direct result of the war'.⁷⁹
- i) What was the long-term effect of this depopulation and devastation, especially in German East Africa?

⁷⁶ Initially Britain tried to stop Belgian involvement in the war as it feared Belgium would want to take over much of the German territory; but as the war dragged on Britain had to accept Belgian participation. (Louis (n.25), pp.64-68).

⁷⁷ Kiernan (n.29, p.189) writes of 'women as well as men bring roped together as carriers' by the Germans.

⁷⁸ The only indication of supposed payment is that Kenyan army regulations permitted carriers and labourers, or their families to claim compensation 'in case of unclaimed pay, disablement or death'. How this should be paid was debated between the War Office, the Colonial Office and the African governments from 1918 until 1934 when it was decided to make a payment of £50,000 to the Kenya colonial government, but nothing was given to the governments of the colonies of Zanzibar, Uganda or Tanganyika. (Starling & Lee (n. 40), p.194)

⁷⁹ Strachan (2004, n. 45), p.82; Stapleton (n.12) p.123; Olusoga (2014, n. 48), p.148; Fischer (n. 15).

Postscript

We get a glimpse of the non-release of information by governments from the recent disclosure by the British government of the existence of some missing files. In 2011 the government announced, after many requests, that yes, it had found some files from the colonies. Many thousands were 'discovered' in a 'secure building'. Named 'migrated archives', they would have to be cleared/vetted to ensure that they 'might [not] embarrass Her Majesty's Government or other governments; or members of the police, military forces, public servants or others, eg police informers; comprise sources of intelligence information...' ⁸⁰

When I looked at some files dated mid-1940s removed from the then colony of the Gold Coast, I found that many pages had been 'dedacted', as had some lines and paragraphs on the released pages. Furthermore the intelligence agencies (MI5 and MI6) have not released their papers and are not 'subject to the Freedom of Information Act'.

⁸⁰ Mandy Banton & Susan Williams, 'The records of Empire', *New African*, October 2014, pp.47-9 (quote is from p.48).