

GENERAL PAUL VON LETTOW-VORBECK'S EAST AFRICA CAMPAIGN:
MANEUVER WARFARE ON THE SERENGETI

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General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's East African Campaign was a conventional war of movement. Lettow based his operations on the military principles deduced from his thorough German military education and oversea deployments to China and German South West Africa. Upon assignment to German East Africa, he sought to convert the colony's protectorate force from a counterinsurgency force to a conventional military force. His conventional strategy succeeded early in the war, especially at the Battle of Tanga in October 1914. However, his strategy failed as the war in East Africa intensified. He suffered a calamitous defeat at the Battle of Mahiwa in November 1917, and the heavy losses forced Lettow to adopt the counterinsurgency tactics of the colonial protectorate force.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
Chapters	
1. BILDUNGSROMAN: LETTOW ABSORBS GERMAN MILITARY CULTURE	12
2. MOBILIZATION, JANUARY 1914—OCTOBER 1914	31
3. VICTORY, STALEMATE, AND RETREAT, OCTOBER 1914— JANUARY 1917.....	53
4. EXIT STRATEGIES, JANUARY 1917-NOVEMBER 1918	76
CONCLUSION.....	96
BIBLIOGRAPHY	103

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
1. Rebellion in German South West Africa	24
2. German force arrangements and the British plan of attack.....	58
3. Battle of Tanga, 4 November 1914.....	63
4. The general routes of the Schutztruppe's retreat	80
5. Lukuleidi Valley, October 1917	87

INTRODUCTION

General Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck “felt convinced that the conclusion of hostilities must have been favourable, or at least not unfavourable to Germany,” yet his “feelings were very mixed.” The stolen British telegram dated 13 November 1918 claimed the Entente had reached an armistice with Germany.¹ The East African Campaign was over. For four years, three months, and sixteen days, Lettow’s miniscule ad hoc force evaded superior numbers of capable British, South African, Belgian, Indian, and Portuguese troops. The sheer effort involved in waging such an isolated campaign made him a legendary figure and ensured his place in the history of World War I as the illustrious architect of a successful guerrilla campaign.²

However, the historical memory of Lettow as one of the great captains of German history and an expert guerrilla commander is inaccurate. His reputation rests on a series of postwar German writings that painted a false picture of a wily commander accompanied by his beloved African soldiers known as *Askaris*.³ Interwar Germans, unaware of his shortcomings, celebrated Lettow as a symbol of national resistance while early campaign historians praised his unconventional leadership.

¹ General von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa* (London: Hurst and Blackett, n.d.), 315.

² Charles Miller, *Battle for the Bundu: The First World War in East Africa* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1974); Edwin P. Hoyt, *Guerrilla: Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck and Germany’s East African Empire* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1981). General Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck referred to himself as “Lettow.” Historians have chosen to use “Lettow” as the acceptable shortened form of his name.

³ Askari is an Arabic word for “soldier.” Swahili speakers and colonial powers borrowed the term to describe the soldiers of their colonial armies.

In reality, the German General Staff banished Lettow for his leadership failures to the obscure theater of East Africa, where he played a marginal role in the war as the commander of the Schutztruppe, the colony's protectorate force.

Lettow's East African Campaign was a conventional war of movement—a *Bewegungskrieg*. He based his operations on his thorough German military training and extensive combat experience.⁴ Upon assuming command, he replaced the Schutztruppe's counterinsurgency doctrine with conventional German battle doctrine. The Schutztruppe's original doctrine emphasized the use of guerrilla raids and economic warfare to defeat the enemy. He reformed the Schutztruppe's war plans and called for aggressive offensive operations into Kenya. In the early months of World War I, the Schutztruppe's decisive victory over the British at the Battle of Tanga legitimized his plans. His pursuit of decisive victory culminated in defeat at the Battle of Mahiwa and although opposed to guerrilla methods, heavy losses compelled Lettow to lead a guerrilla raid into Portuguese East Africa.

Prior to East Africa, Lettow dedicated his life to the perfection of *Bewegungskrieg*. He attended the German military's most prestigious schools and joined the elite German General Staff. As a staff officer, he learned maneuver warfare from the revered Chief of the German General Staff Graf Alfred von Schlieffen who taught that inferior forces executing bold enveloping attacks would defeat larger, more cautious

⁴ Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2005). Professor Citino brought the *Bewegungskrieg* concept to the forefront with his book *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich*. Citino argued that Germany has a distinctive military culture that promoted short, lively wars of movement and downplayed long-term, position based warfare. He speaks to the German military's penchant to treat war as an art rather than a science. Chapter 1 discusses *Bewegungskrieg* or a war of movement in detail.

foes.⁵ He put his *Bewegungskrieg* skills into use as a volunteer on expeditions to China and South West Africa. His experience overseas increased his dedication to conventional warfare in proportion to his abhorrence of guerrilla warfare.

While Lettow's education and combat experience made him an excellent candidate for senior leadership, his uncharismatic personality held him back. Germany's colonial military rejected him because of his dogmatic adherence to conventional warfare doctrine in South West Africa. The German General Staff dismissed him because he lacked the requisite interpersonal finesse of a field grade officer. His assignment to an insignificant theater prior to the First World War indicated his alienation from his European colleagues.

Undaunted by the assignment to East Africa, Lettow was determined to contribute to the approaching war in Europe. He ignored his superior Heinrich Schnee's calls for neutrality and prepared the colony for a conventional war. He centralized command under his authority, improved his soldiers' weaponry, and altered their training to align with the latest theories of the German General Staff. He altered the Schutztruppe's mobilization plans, exchanging the colony's guerrilla war strategy for a preemptive advance into Kenya.⁶

Lettow's preparations profited the colony at the outbreak of World War I. In August 1914, German military forces seized Taveta from the British, and in November

⁵ Alfred von Schlieffen, *Cannae*, trans. The Army War College, (U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Press, 1991) under "Cannae," <http://www.cgsc.edu/car1/resources/csi/Cannae/cannae.asp#intro> (accessed June 7, 2011).

⁶ Major Hermann von Wissmann, *Afrika: Schilderungen und Rathschläge zur Vorbereitung für den Aufenthalt und den Dienst in den Deutschen Schutzgebieten* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn, 1903); *Emin Pasha, His Life and Work*, trans. Georg Schweitzer (Westminster: Archibald Constable, 1898).

1914, the Schutztruppe repelled a British amphibious assault at Tanga and an overland attack at Longido. The victory gave the Germans a morale advantage over the British, who temporarily abandoned their campaign and shifted resources elsewhere.

Furthermore, the Battle of Tanga allowed Lettow to void Schnee's policy of neutrality.

Although the Schutztruppe's decisive victory over the British strengthened Lettow's position, he failed to invade Kenya. The war settled into a stalemate in 1915. *Bewegungskrieg* operations simply required more soldiers and infrastructure than German East Africa could offer. Nevertheless, he remained intent on fighting the British in battle and refused to commit to a guerrilla strategy. He stockpiled resources and continued to increase the size of his force. He pressed his commanders to advance on all fronts and authorized a series of raids against the Uganda Railroad.

In spring 1916, the Allies' renewed commitment to the theater thwarted Lettow's preparations. Under the leadership of Jan Smuts, a soldier-statesman from the Union of South Africa, the Allies advanced rapidly from Kilimanjaro to the Lukuleidi Valley. Lettow's aggressive defensive strategy failed; the combined Belgian, British, and South African advance overwhelmed his force and countered his many attacks. The German and Allied armies destroyed much of the colony, disrupted Germany's orderly rule over the native African population, and weakened the Schutztruppe.

Fortunately for Lettow, Smuts's poor logistical planning stalled the Allies' steady advance in early 1917. The Allies' pause offered Lettow a pristine opportunity to end his ineffective attacks and adopt one of two alternative strategies. Captain Max Wintgens and Heinrich Naumann demonstrated the feasibility of guerrilla warfare by campaigning

deep behind enemy lines. The duo complicated the Allies' precarious supply situation by raiding transportation nodes and avoiding battle. Conversely, Captain Max Looff of the SMS Königsberg tried to persuade Lettow to adopt a positional strategy. Looff's strategy would have allowed Lettow to concentrate the remaining German forces and take advantage of Africa's rough terrain.

Unwilling to accept either alternative, Lettow's conventional strategy destroyed his army in 1917. Assuming that another victory on the scale of Tanga would change the campaign, he engaged in increasingly risky attacks on British forces. His attacks culminated with the Schutztruppe's self-annihilation at the Battle of Mahiwa. From 15-18 October, German forces fought outnumbered against veteran British units in trench-to-trench combat. The Schutztruppe inflicted heavy losses on the British, but the Germans' tactical success proved indecisive as the Allies occupied the remaining territory within the month.⁷

Despite the decisive defeat, Lettow refused to surrender, and for the first time in his four years of campaigning, he considered an alternative to *Bewegungskrieg*. The Allies' growing strength and the Schutztruppe's lamentable condition forced him to wage a guerrilla war, a form of war he despised. In the middle of November 1917, the Schutztruppe retreated into Portuguese East Africa and evaded capture until the war's end. His new campaign relied on the Schutztruppe's paramilitary skills, the same skills he attempted to eradicate prior to the war. The resulting trek across southern Africa tied down hundreds of thousands of enemy troops at a negligible cost to Germany.

⁷ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 210.

Lettow may have entered the war sidelined by the German General Staff, but he left German East Africa a hero. The German General Staff forgave him for his previous failures and respected his refusal to surrender. The German people held Lettow a parade in Berlin and accepted him into their pantheon of heroes. His fame led to several speaking tours and helped him publish six autobiographical accounts of his career.

Fortunately for World War I scholars, Lettow was not the only combatant to write about the East Africa. German and Allied combatants pioneered the historical study of the East African Campaign with their prolific memoirs, published journals, and tracts.⁸ These primary accounts provided invaluable information to secondary historians, but lacked the perspective of later accounts. For example, accounts like Col. Richard Meinertzhagen's *Army Diary, 1899-1926* (1960) defended the British Army's performance at the debacle at Tanga with falsified information.⁹ Likewise, Jan Smuts supported his country's territorial expansion by embellishing the flaws of German colonialism.¹⁰

In early German histories, the strong passions within Weimar and Nazi Germany diluted the objectivity of German accounts. Lettow's vigorous resistance in East Africa

⁸ Dr. Ludwig Deppe, *Mit Lettow-Vorbeck durch Afrika* (Berlin: Verlag August Scherl, 1919); Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*; Walter von Ruckteschell, *Der Feldzug in Ostafrika* (Berlin: Hugo Vermuehler Verlag, 1919).

⁹ Col. Richard Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary, 1899-1926* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1960), 96; Brian Garfield, *The Meinertzhagen Mystery: The Life and Legend of a Colossal Fraud* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2007). Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen's critique of British involvement in East Africa heavily influenced the historical memory of Lettow. Meinertzhagen and Lettow became friends after the war, aiding each other's reconstruction of the campaign. Brian Garfield's demonstrates that Meinertzhagen embellished his exploits with post facto knowledge and straightforward lies.

¹⁰ Jan Christian Smuts, "East Africa," *The Geographical Journal* 51 no. 3 (March 1918): 140. Smut's article covers geographical topics but it also provides insight into Smuts and the British Elite's view of the German colonial project. Smuts argues the colonies were for world politics and not economics or colonization. Smuts's characterization of German *Askaris* and imperial designs in the article is particularly interesting for its propaganda value and the victim status Smuts establishes for the Union of South Africa.

became a significant part of the *Im Felde unbesiegt* legend—the mistaken belief that the German army never lost a battle during the war.¹¹ His works of the 1920s *My Reminiscences of East Africa* and *Heia Safari* extolled Germany’s military virtue and strength.¹² The German Colonial Society and nationalist propaganda published material on the East African Campaign that shamed the German people for their apparent lack of effort in the First World War. For example, Lettow’s own writings portrayed the *Askaris* as some of the most loyal soldiers of Germany.¹³

The official British history of the East Africa Campaign, the *History of the Great War: Military Operations East Africa, Volume I, August 1914-September 1916* (1941), appeared in the midst of World War II. Utilizing British documents and the occasional German published work, Lt. Col. Charles Hordern provided a detailed operational account of the campaign. Although he avoids criticizing the British Empire’s wartime strategy, he thoroughly revealed the operational shortcomings of the Allies. Hordern maintained the participants’ deference towards the Schutztruppe’s combat skills, but offered a more critical view of German practices. For example, Lettow’s combat leadership generally appeared superior to British combat leadership; however, Hordern

¹¹ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, trans. Jefferson Chase (New York: Picador, 2001), 203-205. Schivelbusch provides a complete analysis of Germany’s postwar propaganda including both the “*Im Felde unbesiegt* [In the field unbeaten]” and the “stab in the back,” myths.

¹² Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and Hauptmann von Ruckteschell, *Heia Safari* (Leipzig: K. F. Koehler, 1920).

¹³ Heinrich Schnee, *German Colonization Past and Future: The Truth About the German Colonies* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1926); Volker Langbehn and Mohammad Salama, *German Colonialism: Race, the Holocaust, and Postwar Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). The German Colonial Society began as a political action group for the expansion of Germany abroad. The society lobbied the German government for Germany’s colonies during the colonial period and helped organize expeditions to explore Africa. Post World War I, the colonial society lobbied the Weimar Government and the various governments of the world for the restoration of Germany’s colonies.

differentiated Germany's barbarism from the humane practices of British colonialism by revealing the Germans' apparent disinterest in the established rules of war.¹⁴

A semiofficial German campaign history written by Ludwig Boell—*Die Operationen in Ost-Afrika: Weltkrieg 1914-1918*—appeared ten years later.¹⁵ A subordinate of Lettow, Boell welded personal experiences with primary British and German documents to create one of the most objective and detailed accounts of the campaign. Significantly, he incorporated information from two of Lettow's strongest critics Schnee and Loeff.¹⁶ He was the first military historian to combine a history of German East Africa's tense wartime politics with detailed operational sequences. His approach reconciled many of the disagreements between the diverse viewpoints expressed during the interwar period. Despite the book's essential perspective, it was not available in an English translation, which limited its use to scholars who did not read German.

Decolonization and Lettow's death in 1964 reinvigorated historical interest in the East Africa Campaign. Titles like Charles Miller's *Battle for the Bund: The First World War in East Africa* (1974), Edwin P. Hoyt's *Guerrilla: Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck and Germany's East African Empire* (1981), Byron Farwell's *The Great War in Africa, 1914-1918* (1986), and William Boyd's fictional piece *An Ice-Cream War* (1983) appeared

¹⁴ Lt. Col. Charles Hordern, *History of the Great War: Military Operations East Africa, Volume I, August 1914-September 1916*, Committee of Imperial Defence, ed. Maj. H. Fitz M. Stacke (Nashville: The Battery Press, 1941).

¹⁵ Ludwig Boell, *Die Operationen in Ost-Afrika: Weltkrieg 1914-1918* (Hamburg: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1951).

¹⁶ Vice Admiral a. D. Max Loeff, *Kreuzerfahrt und Buschkampf: Mit S.M.S. "Königsberg" in Deutsch-Ostafrika* (Berlin: Andon Bertinetti, 1929); Schnee, *German Colonization Past and Future*.

after decolonization sparked a renewed interest in guerrilla warfare.¹⁷ English accounts from this generation preserved Lettow's positive historical image by emphasizing his victory at the Battle of Tanga, his raid into Portuguese East Africa, his flexibility of command, and his courage. For example, Miller suggested that Lettow treated his African troops with exceptional respect.¹⁸ In general, twentieth century military historians underemphasized the influence of local East African politics and downplayed Lettow's lack of charisma as a commander.

The historical memory of Lettow slowly changed after decolonization brought European excesses to the forefront. John Iliffe and the Tanzanian nationalist historians led a movement to provide African accounts of German colonial rule, which revealed several limitations of early campaign histories.¹⁹ Importantly, African historians revealed evidence that contradicted Lettow's image as a humane commander of African troops.²⁰ Concurrently, social historians Jamie Monson, Ralph A. Austin, and Felicitas Becker advanced the scholarship of German colonial rule and promoted a negative postcolonial view of the German empire.²¹ These postcolonial historians improved the breadth of East

¹⁷ Miller; Hoyt; Leonard Mosley, *Duel for Kilimanjaro: An Account of the East African Campaign* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963); Bryan Farwell, *The Great War in Africa (1914-1918)* (New York: WW Norton, 1986); William Boyd, *An Ice-Cream War* (New York: Vintage, 1999). Boyd's narrates his novel through the eyes of an American named Walter who travelled to East Africa with Theodore Roosevelt and chose to stay through World War I.

¹⁸ Miller.

¹⁹ John Iliffe, *Tanganyika under German Rule, 1905-1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

²⁰ G.C.K. Gwassa, "The German intervention and African resistance in Tanzania," in *A History of Tanzania*, eds. I.N. Kimambo and A.J. Temu (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1969), 85-122. Tanzanian nationalists swung from intense denunciation of Africans who collaborated with Lettow to a stance of reconciliation. Tanzanian nationalist G.C.K. Gwassa described collaboration as a form of passive resistance in which the Tanzanians used Germany to advance the interests of Tanzania.

²¹ Ralph A. Austen, *Northwest Tanzania under German and British Rule: Colonial Policy and Tribal Politics 1889-1939* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968); Felicitas Becker and Jigal Beez, eds. *Der Maji-Maji-Revolt in Deutsch-Ostafrika, 1905-1907* (Berlin: Auflage, 2005); Gregory H. Maddox, and

African Campaign histories by defining the relationships between the *Askaris*, German colonists, and the divisions within the German Empire.

The most recent histories expanded the argument developed in the early postcolonial period by incorporating previously unreleased documents from German archives and Lettow's wartime journal.²² Modern German historians focused on Lettow's harsh treatment of East Africans, his abuse of civil government, and his ruthless military methods. In Germany, historians Uwe Schulte-Varendorff's *Kolonialheld für Kaiser und Führer: General Lettow-Vorbeck—Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (2006), Sandra Mass's *Weisse Helden, schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte koloniale Männlichkeit in Deutschland 1918-1964* (2006), and Eckard Michels's '*Der Held von Deutsch-Ostafrika*': *Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, Ein preussischer Kolonialoffizier* (2008) criticized Lettow's leadership and his personal scholarship heavily.²³ Their accounts reinvented his legacy, ending his era as a hero and beginning his era as a villain.

Outside of Germany, current historians writing in English remain divided over Lettow. Hew Strachan's brief account of the East Africa Campaign in *The First World War* (2005) concurs with recent German scholarship while *World War I: The African Front* (2008) by Edward Paice provided a thorough defense of a more traditional

James L. Gibling, eds. *In Search of a Nation: Histories of Authority & Dissidence in Tanzania* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005).

²² Hew Strachan, interview by F. Jon Nesselhuf, Personal, University of North Texas, October 2010.

²³ Eckard Michels "*Der Held von Deutsch-Ostafrika*" *Paul von Lettow Vorbeck: Ein preussischer Kolonialoffizier* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schoeningh Verlag, 2008); Sandra Mass, *Weisse Helden, schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte Kolonialer Männlichkeit in Deutschland, 1918-1964* (Cologne, Germany: Böhlau, 2006); Uwe Schulte-Varendorff, '*Kolonialheld für Kaiser und Führer*': *General Lettow-Vorbeck—Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Berlin: Links, 2006).

viewpoint.²⁴ Strachan's account incorporated many of the same critiques as the colonial historians and current German scholarship. Strachan's strident argument that Lettow used a conventional strategy instead of a guerrilla strategy represented a strong shift in the English-language accounts. Paice's analysis, though hardly innovative, eliminated most of the romanticism that surrounded Lettow in early campaign histories. For example, Paice defended the combat record of Allied *Askaris*, emphasizing the similarities between German and Allied *Askaris*. His work provided unparalleled coverage of the primary front as well as the secondary fronts along the western border of German East Africa.

The historical evaluation of Lettow continues to shift from a positive to a negative view. The earliest accounts uphold Lettow as an expert guerilla leader and rely heavily on Lettow's own description of his campaign. However, new evidence and greater skepticism leads twenty-first century scholars away from the traditional interpretation. Lettow's leadership appears more ordinary and less ingenious, more destructive of native populations and less progressive. Previous histories downplay his belated rise to fame and incorrectly assume he received the same admiration prior to the war as he did after the war. New scholarship and a greater emphasis on his prewar activities illustrate that the conventional aspects overshadow the unconventional aspects of the East Africa Campaign.

²⁴ Hew Strachan, "Global War," *The First World War* (New York: Viking, 2004):80-95; Edward Paice, *World War I: The African Front* (New York: Pegasus Books, 2008). See also David M. Keithly, "Khaki Foxes: The East Afrika Korps." *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 166-186.

CHAPTER 1

BILDUNGSROMAN: LETTOW ABSORBBS GERMAN MILITARY CULTURE

War makes extremely heavy demands on the soldier's strength and nerves. For this reason, make heavy demands on your men in peacetime exercises.

Erwin Rommel, Infantry Attacks.

A robust military education and two overseas expeditions cemented Lettow's faith in conventional German warfare. He attended three military schools including the prestigious Kriegsakademie and studied the art of annihilation through maneuver on Graf von Schlieffen's German General Staff.¹ He volunteered for Germany's expeditions to China and South West Africa hoping to fight decisive battles, but to his disappointment, both conflicts denied him the opportunity to implement *Bewegungskrieg* theory. Instead, the Boxers in China and the Herero rebels in German South West Africa fought a guerrilla war. His experience with the Chinese and the Hereros made him wary of guerrilla warfare and strengthened his belief in conventional warfare.

Lettow excelled as a company grade officer; however, he failed to achieve the same success as a field grade officer. From 1907-1914, Lettow isolated himself from the military elite by remaining intractable. Although he demonstrated personal bravery fighting abroad and attended the best military schools, neither the German General Staff nor the colonial military accepted him. His tactlessness and stringent discipline, which were nonissues as a junior officer, estranged him from his peers as he rose in rank.

¹ See Schlieffen's *Cannae* for a more detailed discussion on "the art of annihilation through maneuver warfare."

Similarly, the colonial officers resented him for forcing his conventional theory of war upon them in South West Africa. In his desperation, he left for German East Africa, hoping to reinvigorate his stalled career.

Lettow's acculturation into the German military began in his youth. Lettow was born in Saarlouis in 1870 to the hard-driving General Paul Karl Wilhelm von Lettow-Vorbeck and his wife Marie von Eisenhart-Rothe, a general's daughter.² General von Lettow-Vorbeck possessed enormous influence over young Lettow's habits, schooling, and aspirations.³ He served as a role model, a man Lettow remembered as abrupt, practical, and demanding.⁴ General von Lettow-Vorbeck prioritized his military career and guided his son down a similar path by pushing his son through the full gambit of German military education.⁵ Lettow attended a French-instructed private school in Berlin from age six to eleven before his father transferred him to the Potsdam Cadet Corps in 1881 and the *Gross-Lichterfelde* Cadet Corps in 1883.⁶ The cadet corps took over from General Lettow-Vorbeck, shaping Lettow's view on war and initiating him into the German military.

The cadet corps increased Lettow's efficiency, knowledge base, and inured him to personal hardship. Officers introduced him to applicable military topics, while civilian

² General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, *Mein Leben* (Biberach an der Riss, Germany: Koehlers Verlagsgesellschaft, 1957), 15-18; Horst Gründer, "Lettow-Vorbeck, Paul von," in *Deutsche Biographie* 14 (1985): 358-359, under "Lettow-Vorbeck," www.deutsche-biographie.de/pnd118779737.html (accessed September 6, 2011).

³ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

professors handled the bulk of his liberal education.⁷ His officer advisor Freiherr von Schele guided him through Plato, Emanuel Kant, and Arthur Schopenhauer.⁸ Schele introduced him to the idea of *Bildung* or continual education in an attempt to make his advisee an officer with a self-regulating morality.⁹ Officially, the cadet corps staff taught Lettow obedience, honor, self-reliance, fiscal responsibility, objectivity, cleanliness, orderliness, and most importantly, leadership.¹⁰ Unofficially, the cadet corps emphasized the glory of dying in battle and reinforced his strong loyalty to the Reich.¹¹

However, the cadet corps' physical brutality, conservativeness, and intellectual rigidity hindered Lettow's development. The cadet corps intended to make him a well-rounded, freethinking leader, but rigid intellectual standards and hazing incited homogeneous thinking.¹² Cadets believed corporal hazing ensured the loyalty, perseverance, and honor of its members.¹³ The cadet corps fostered his aristocratic elitism and unquestioning loyalty to the monarchy, estranging him from progressive parties within the Reich.¹⁴ Lettow viewed Wilhelm I's reign under Otto von Bismarck's chancellorship as the pinnacle of German culture and Lettow never forsook his devotion

⁷ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 29; See also *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives> for concise summaries of each philosopher's ideas.

⁸ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 32-33.

⁹ Charles Edward White, *The Enlightened Soldier: Scharnhorst and the Militrische Gesellschaft in Berlin, 1801-1805* (New York: Praeger, 1989), 6-10, 17; Detlef Bald, Gerhild Bald-Gerlich, and Eduard Ambros, *Tradition und Reform in Militrischen Bildungswesen: Von der Preussischen Allgemeinen Kriegsschule zur Fhrungsakademie der Bundeswehr: eine Dokumentation, 1810-1985* (Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos Verlag., 1985), 102-104; John Moncure, *Forging the King's Sword: Military Education between Tradition and Modernization: The Case of the Royal Prussian Cadet Corps, 1871-1918* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 189, 239; Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 29.

¹⁰ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 186.

¹¹ Heiger Ostertag, *Bildung, Ausbildung und Erziehung des Offizierkorps im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1871 bis 1918: Eliteideal, Anspruch und Wirklichkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 129.

¹² Ostertag, 135.

¹³ Moncure, 205; Ostertag, 110.

¹⁴ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 29, 32-33.

to the aristocratic ideals of the early imperial period.¹⁵ Furthermore, Germany lacked Britain, France, Russia, and the United States of America's vast experience with colonialism. Germany's cadet curriculums responded slowly to the Reich's emerging interest in overseas colonization; the cadet corps only dedicated four pages of its 132 page military curriculum to colonial warfare, implying that colonial warfare did not matter to the military or that the Germans thought officers needed a similar skill set for both forms of war.¹⁶

In 1887, Lettow finished his secondary education at *Gross-Lichterfelde* and began his mandated three year period as a probationary officer. In the following year, General von Lettow-Vorbeck secured him a position in the 4th Foot Guard Regiment and entrance into the Kassel Kriegsschule.¹⁷ Kassel provided Lettow with the equivalent of an undergraduate education in military leadership. German commanders designed the Kriegsschule to evaluate a probationary officer's leadership aptitude and teach German combat doctrine. The Kriegsschule alternated periods of theoretical training with practical field exercises; the curriculum included tactics, weapons, defensive fortifications, geography, military writing, honor, drill, gymnastics, shooting, fencing, and riding. An officer candidate proved his ability by implementing learned theories during the field exercises.¹⁸

¹⁵ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 31; Ostertag, 136.

¹⁶ Moncure, 213-214.

¹⁷ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 33; See also Jörg Muth, *Command Culture, Officer Education in U.S. Army and the German Armed Forces, 1901-1940, and the Consequences for World War II* (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2011). Kriegsschule lacks a comparable program in the US but its content level is similar to company-grade officer schools of the United States Armed Forces.

¹⁸ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 44; See also Detlef Bald, Gerhild Bald-Gerlich, and Eduard Ambros.

While at Kassel Lettow made good use of his leisure time “sharpening” his military skills with dueling and hunting. Lettow believed dueling against other officers steeled his nerves and fortified his sense of honor.¹⁹ Dueling, often seen as a critical process in proving one’s masculinity, replaced cadet hazing as an officer’s means of enforcing homogeneity. Lettow also made time in his busy schedule for what he called “Diana’s Duty”—hunting—which he considered crucial to a soldier and officer's development. He assumed hunting improved his tracking skills and increased his visual acuity.²⁰

Lettow completed *Kriegschule* in 1891 and commissioned into his infantry regiment as a lieutenant. He enjoyed four years away from the classroom before applying to the *Kriegsakademie* in 1896.²¹ The *Kriegsakademie* initially rejected him because he failed the entrance examination, but accepted him after he passed reexamination.²² The German “War Academy” suited his career ambitions, providing him with the most enviable graduate education available in Germany. Germany’s best military minds taught applicable topics like operations, weaponry, fortifications, military history, math, and languages.²³ The *Kriegsakademie* only accepted 20% of applicants, and provided graduates with approximately ten years of seniority over their peers.²⁴

¹⁹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 35.

²⁰ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 38, 47; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 12. He refers to hunting in *Mein Leben* as “Diana’s Duty.”

²¹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 44-45. The *Kriegsakademie* was the German Army’s war college, similar to the Army Command and Staff College of the United States.

²² *Ibid.*, 44-45.

²³ Martin van Creveld, *The Training of Officers: From Military Professionalism to Irrelevance* (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 24-25.

²⁴ Creveld, 27.

For three consecutive years, instructors at the Kriegsakademie broadened Lettow's understanding of Germany's military strategy and doctrine. The German Army's goal was to annihilate an enemy's armed forces so that the German government could dictate the peace terms. Thus, the Kriegsakademie encouraged him to annihilate the enemy's field forces through decisive battles of maneuver and discouraged occupying enemy territory. Furthermore, German strategists discouraged defensive operations assuming that the attacker possessed a moral advantage, and that defensive operations allowed the enemy to dictate the pace of the war.

German doctrine encouraged Lettow to err on the side of aggressive action.²⁵ Instructors taught him that the German Army's qualitative advantages in speed and skill would counter Germany's quantitative shortages in soldiers and supply.²⁶ Instructors emphasized that maneuver war demanded a man's full effort, and that only "the utmost daring" promised victory to German forces.²⁷ He learned to make risky decisions and disobey orders if necessary to win a battle.²⁸ He believed Germany's decentralized command doctrine gave the Germans an advantage in battle, but understood such a

²⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 92, 291, 358; Friedrich von Bernhardi, "On War of Today" in *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Gérard Chaliand (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 849; Citino, *The German Way of War*, xiv.

²⁶ Friedrich von Bernhardi, *How Germany Makes War* (New York: George H. Doran, 1914), 12, 25.

²⁷ General Erich von Ludendorff, *The "Total" War*, trans. Sir Herbert Lawrence (London: Westminster Friends of Europe, 1936), 16, 22-24; Schlieffen, "Chapter 2," post map 25; Clausewitz, 275; Eric Dorn Brose, *The Kaiser's Army: The Politics of Military Technology in Germany during the Machine Age, 1870-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 24. Ludendorff and Lettow came from the same generation of officers. General Erich von Ludendorff argued that World War I emphasized the necessity of surprise, aggression, and ruthlessness.

²⁸ Bernhardi, *How Germany Makes War*, 30-32; Brose, 88-91, 152-156; Boell, 128; Azar Gat, *The Development of Military Thought: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), 68; Martin Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma: German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 4, 13, 70.

doctrine “required greatly skilled subordinates,” to prevent chaos. He praised Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, “whose strategy [in the Wars of German Unification] gave his subordinates great freedom,” and, “who acknowledged subordinates should act against orders on their conviction that the orders coming from above were obsolete or did not correspond to the real situation.”²⁹

Lettow graduated from the Kriegsakademie in 1899 and accepted an assignment on the German General Staff. Schlieffen’s steady supply of staff work nearly overwhelmed Lieutenant Lettow, but he remembered Schlieffen fondly, referring to him as a brilliant man.³⁰ Many officers agreed with Lettow’s analysis, admiring Schlieffen as a theorist, but resenting him as a commander; Schlieffen habitually assigned subordinates staff problems on Christmas.³¹

Schlieffen and the German General Staff cultivated Lettow’s aggression, independence, and trust in maneuver warfare.³² As Chief of the Imperial German General Staff from 1891 to 1906, Schlieffen praised *Bewegungskrieg* in his publications, favored risky maneuvers in field exercises, and promoted officers who shared his view.³³ In retirement, he constructed a theory of war based on Hannibal’s decisive defeat of the Romans at Cannae. In the resulting work entitled *Cannae*, Schlieffen used the exemplary

²⁹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

³¹ Walter Görlitz, *History of German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), vii.

³² Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 46-47, 59; Bernhardt, *How Germany Makes War*, 7-10; Citino, *The German Way of War*, 36; Görlitz, 130.

³³ Alfred von Schlieffen, *Dienstschriften des Chefs des Generalstabes der Armee Generalfeldmarschalls Graf von Schlieffen: Vom Generalstab des Heeres, 7. (Kriegswissenschaftliche) Abteilung* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1937), 50; Trevor N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1967), 116; Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 111-112.

victories of Hannibal, Frederick II, Napoleon, and Moltke the Elder to spread his ideas throughout the German military. He encouraged his successors to avoid defensive operations and to seek battle with the enemy, concluding that an offensive best secured Germany against attack. He emphasized that Germany would need to take significant risks to defeat its many enemies.³⁴

In *Cannae*, Schlieffen established a three-phase formula to annihilate enemy forces: “Reconnaissance, Victory, and Pursuit.”³⁵ In the “Reconnaissance” phase, he directed commanders to determine the position and the size of the enemy forces with scouts moving ahead of the army. Upon reconnoitering the enemy, *Cannae* encouraged commanders to prepare for battle by positioning forces for attack.³⁶ In the attack, German commanders were to encircle the enemy at any risk. Schlieffen did not encourage commanders to keep a reserve, but to encircle the enemy with every available soldier.³⁷ While the first army fixated the enemy with frontal assault, the following armies were to flank the enemy and deliver a crushing blow.³⁸ If the enemy escaped envelopment, Schlieffen stressed the need to keep the bayonet in the backs of the retreating enemy until none remained.³⁹

While First Lieutenant Lettow adjusted to life on the German General Staff, the Boxer Rebellion threatened to end Germany’s influence in China. Kaiser Wilhelm II

³⁴ Schlieffen, *Cannae*, Chapter 1.

³⁵ Schlieffen, Chapter 1; Dupuy, 132.

³⁶ Schlieffen, *Cannae*, “Gravolette.”

³⁷ Citino, *The German Way of War*, 208. Citino argues the basics of the Schlieffen plan are aggression, rapidity of movement, and flanking encirclement.

³⁸ Schlieffen, *Cannae*, Chapter 2.

³⁹ Robert M. Citino, *Quest for Decisive Victory: From Stalemate to Blitzkrieg in Europe, 1899-1940* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), xii. Citino argues that the pattern of decisive victory is assault-turning movement-pursuit—but it is in the pursuit that a battlefield victory becomes decisive.

decided to commit German forces and assigned command of the China Expedition to his former Chief of the Imperial German General Staff Field Marshall Alfred von Waldersee.⁴⁰ Lettow volunteered for the assignment, excited to gain combat experience and advance his career.⁴¹ He believed education could improve his leadership, but felt that he would be ill prepared for a European war without combat experience.⁴²

The China Expedition strengthened Lettow's belief in annihilation warfare by demonstrating the inglorious nature of guerrilla warfare. His initial enthusiasm waned when he realized the German expeditionary force was in China to occupy territory and not to defeat the Boxers in battle.⁴³ *Kleinkrieg* or guerrilla war was not the short, defined, grand scale annihilation operations the army prepared him to fight, but a prolonged, undefined, and inglorious paramilitary action.⁴⁴ The German army conducted constant patrols of the countryside searching for malcontents and fending off ambushes. Lettow concurred with Waldersee's analysis that the Boxer Rebellion incubated bad habits within the army because China was a small war rather than a big war.⁴⁵ For example, German soldiers plundered the countryside at will and treated the Chinese civilians

⁴⁰ Steven E. Miller, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Stephen Van Evera, eds., *Military Strategy and the Origins of the First World War: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 170; Miranda Carter, "Imperial Imperatives, 1898-1901," in *George, Nicholas, and Wilhelm: Three Royal Cousins and the Road to World War I* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010): 205-234.

⁴¹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 48-50; Schivelbusch, 194-197.

⁴² Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 45.

⁴³ Count Alfred von Waldersee, *A Field-Marshal's Memoirs: From the Diary, Correspondence, and Reminiscences of Alfred, Count von Waldersee*, trans. Frederic Whyte (London: Hutchinson, 1924), 256.

⁴⁴ J.H., Morgan, Trans, *The War Book of the German General Staff: Being "The Usages of War on Land," Issued by the Great General Staff of the German Army* (New York: McBride, Nast & Co., 1915), 80-82. *Kleinkrieg* is the German term for guerilla warfare. *Kleinkrieg* translate directly as "little war."

⁴⁵ Waldersee, 287.

brutally.⁴⁶ Lettow's unit often controlled areas by holding village leaders hostage, hanging rebels without trial, and destroying entire villages in response to attacks.⁴⁷

The China Expedition, despite its disappointments, provided Lettow a modicum of combat experience. He related his experiences in China to his father's generation facing the *francs-tireurs* in the Franco-Prussian War.⁴⁸ He connected with contemporary German histories that overrated the French partisan threat and proclaimed the barbarity of civilians attacking officers.⁴⁹ Although assigned to a staff position, he often accompanied line officers on combat patrols. On a snowy day in 1901, a gang of Boxers ambushed Lettow's patrol and his column responded with indiscriminate fire. He struggled to coordinate a counter attack and remembered the isolating feeling of his first combat action. His inability to determine friend from foe frustrated him, and he felt he and his soldiers shot many innocent Chinese farmers out of fear.⁵⁰

Captain Lettow returned from China in 1901, relieved to be back in Germany. He worked in the German General Staff's mobilization department preparing mobilization plans for war against France. He also followed the Second Boer War, which began in 1899 and lasted until 1902, raging in southern Africa. Lettow took special interest in the Boer Commando Christiaan de Wet, who fought the British military in set piece battles until circumstances forced de Wet's units into small train raiding parties. De Wet and his

⁴⁶ Walderssee, 217-218, 234; Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 65.

⁴⁷ Hull, 188; Friedrich Engels, "The Spirit of Resistance," in *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Gérard Chaliand, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 771. Friedrich Engels called the resistance, "a piece of rudeness," and he feared no amount of punishment would break the *francs-tireurs*' resistance.

⁴⁸ Hull, 117, 188.

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 238.

⁵⁰ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 58-59, 65; Hull, 148.

fellow resisters' tactics extended the war, increased the cost, and extracted concessions from the British.⁵¹ He concluded the British soldiers' possessed an unmatched fighting ability in colonial wars, but felt the British could not match the skill of German troops in conventional combat.⁵²

Since the campaign in China, Lettow fostered an important political connection with General Lothar von Trotha, a man he considered an enterprising leader and a good comrade.⁵³ During the 1890s, Trotha served as the commander of the East African Schutztruppe, where he made a name for himself as a brutal counterinsurgency commander. In 1904, the Kaiser called on Trotha to quell the rebellious Herero, who had overwhelmed German South West Africa's defense force.⁵⁴ Trotha needed experienced soldiers and Lettow, his friend and a member of the China Expedition, made a great candidate. Trotha requested Lettow to serve as an adjutant, and Lettow, flattered by the invitation, joined the expedition.⁵⁵ Lettow's less than stellar experience in China did not deter him from leaving his post for a second guerrilla war in German South West Africa.⁵⁶

Trotha's expeditionary force arrived on the coast of South West Africa in the summer of 1904 and took over command of the colony from the governor—Colonel Theodor von Leutwein. Trotha, convinced he could end the rebellion in a single battle,

⁵¹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 46; Christiaan Rudolf de Wet, *Three Years' War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 227-229. De Wet provides a lively account of his adventures against the British as a guerrilla. De Wet hated the term "guerrilla" and believed it could only be applied to uncivilized troops. The mood after World War I changed greatly when T.E. Lawrence popularized guerrilla warfare.

⁵² Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 61.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 58, 65-68.

⁵⁴ "Nama" is the most common modern name. The Germans referred to the Nama as the "Hottentots."

⁵⁵ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 72.

⁵⁶ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 77; Hull, 133.

replaced Leutwein's counterinsurgency strategy with a conventional strategy of annihilation.⁵⁷ Trotha encircled the Herero's holdout in the Waterberg Mountains and planned to crush the Herero with a steady tightening of his forces. However, Trotha's encirclement operation left the Herero a route of escape into the Kalahari Desert. Lettow revealed the flaw to his commander, but Trotha refused to reposition his forces. The Germans attacked, and as Lettow forewarned, the Herero escaped into the desert. The Germans pursued the Herero briefly, but the Kalahari Desert inhibited a thorough pursuit.⁵⁸

The Herero's escape upset Trotha's plan to end the war quickly and spawned further violence within the colony.⁵⁹ Failing to defeat the Herero in battle, Trotha tried to force the Herero to leave the colony by killing those who returned from the Kalahari Desert. His policy decimated the Hereros' population, but the rebels refused to surrender. Leutwein offered to mediate a political reconciliation with the rebel tribes but Trotha refused. The conflict continued for several years and the Germany's indiscretions incited previously supportive Nama populations into rebellion. Germany's colonial officers, including Leutwein, criticized Trotha for his failure at Waterberg, genocidal policies, and inability to end the war.⁶⁰ Trotha responded to criticism by clinging more tightly to his

⁵⁷ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 75-77.

⁵⁸ Hull, 37.

⁵⁹ Mary Evelyn Townsend, *The Rise and Fall of Germany's Colonial Empire, 1884-1918* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 225-230.

⁶⁰ Great Britain, House of Commons, prepared by Union of South Africa, Administrator's Office, Windhuk, South-West Africa, "Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany," *Papers by Command: Colonies and British Possessions, Colonial Reports (Annual): Ashanti to Zanzibar. Colonies (General): Africa; Australia; Canada and Newfoundland; New Zealand*, Vol. 13 (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, January 1918): 95-96; Hull, 26-27.

casualty intensive and ineffective military solution. Trotha was determined to end the conflict on his own and only shared information hesitantly with Leutwein.⁶¹

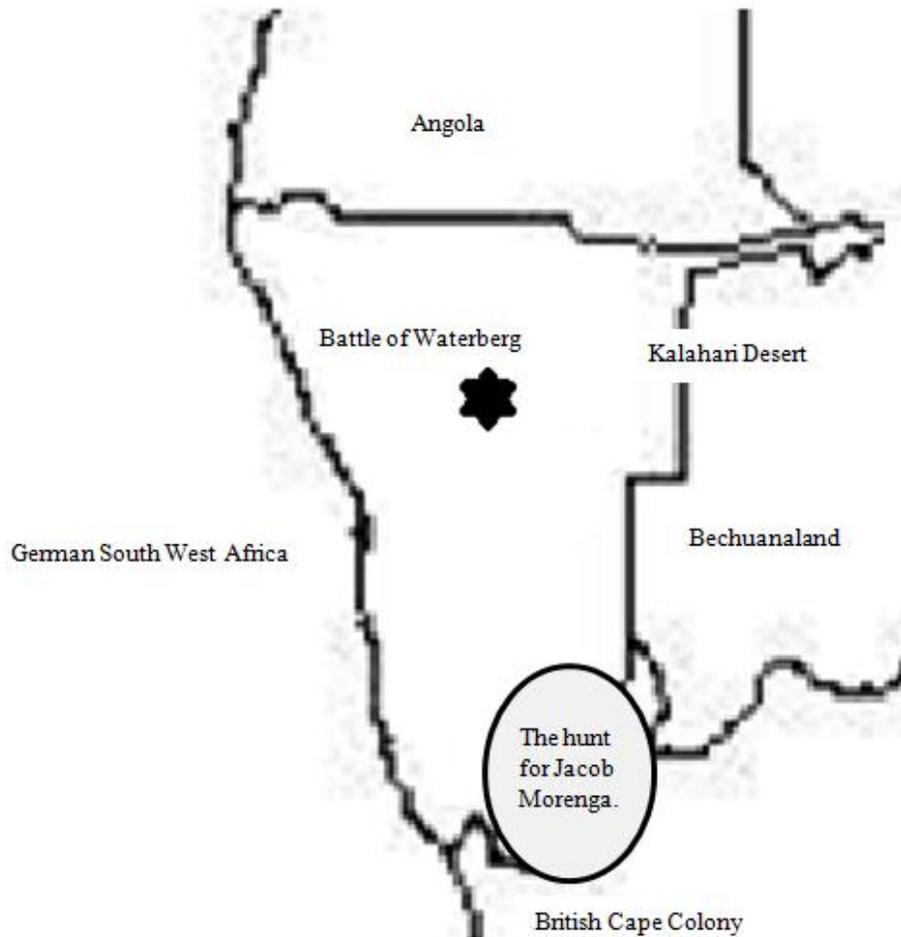


Figure 1. Rebellion in German South West Africa.⁶²

In Germany, Trotha's failure led to a political standoff between the Social Democrats and the German military. The Social Democrats disagreed with Trotha's

⁶¹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 28; Citino, *The German Way of War*, xiv; Wawro, 164-185. See Wawro's account of the Battle of Gravelotte in *The Franco Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* for a perfect example of German officers' detrimental infighting.

⁶² Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 90-95.

methods and used the crisis to take control of the Colonial Department.⁶³ Nevertheless, Schlieffen backed Trotha's decision and encouraged him to continue his mass murder of the rebels. Trotha ignored the Colonial Department, effectively stifling any coordination between the various departments of the German government.⁶⁴

The battle between Trotha and his various detractors reaffirmed Lettow's belief in a commander's prerogative and the subservience of civil government to the military's needs.⁶⁵ Lettow sympathized with his patron Trotha, who was overwhelmed by the barrage of conflicting demands from Schlieffen, Wilhelm II, and the Colonial Office. Lettow wrote, "As the Bible says, it is difficult to serve two masters."⁶⁶ He argued that only the leader in the field could react to altered situations and that being a good officer meant knowing when victory required him to break the rules.⁶⁷ He felt that the German attack at Waterberg ultimately succeeded and that Germany's civilian leadership lacked an appreciation for the German military's skill. He viewed colonial officers' calls for negotiation skeptically because he believed the Herero needed to be punished before the government could take civil measures to maintain peace.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, South West African rebels provided Lettow valuable experience with African guerrilla warfare. He gave great credit to the teachings of his Boer advisor, his enemies, and his own African soldiers.⁶⁹ Lettow compared guerrilla warfare to a

⁶³ Hull, 63-65, 111-112.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 63-66.

⁶⁵ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 76.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 118. The original reads "Das Mag nach der Bibel ist es schwer, zwei Herren zu dienen."

⁶⁷ Citino, *The German Way of War*, xiii, 237; Bernhardt, *How Germany Makes War*, 20, 111-112; Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 28-29.

⁶⁸ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 81, 96-97.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 81, 89.

great hunting adventure, obsessing over the need for German soldiers to develop tracking and marksmanship skills. He felt the Germans fired their rifles more accurately than the Herero rebels, but believed that civilization weakened the German's stalking skills relative to the Africans' finely tuned tracking skills.⁷⁰ The Herero Revolt challenged Lettow's understanding of race; he found his enemies talented, cunning, brave, and mobile.⁷¹

Germany's hunt for rebel leader Jacob Morenga provided Lettow his most important leadership experience. One morning, Lettow's column discovered Morenga's rebels encamped in a valley, and Lettow decided to attack. He led a bloody assault of the encampment on the following morning, taking several bullet fragments to his right eye and ribs. His column succeeded in killing many rebels including Morenga's brother, but the rebellion's leader Morenga escaped.⁷² Nevertheless, Lettow took pride in his contribution to Morenga's final capture and execution by the British in late 1907.⁷³

Requiring intense medical care for his eye injury, Lettow left South West Africa for Cape Town before returning to Germany in 1907. He took a few months off to adjust to his glass right eye, but soon returned to duty. His assignments as a wartime staff officer in China and a company commander in South West Africa made him an atypically experienced staff officer.⁷⁴ His efforts earned him a promotion to major and an

⁷⁰ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 81-82.

⁷¹ Mark Cocker, *Rivers of Blood, Rivers of Gold: Europe's Conquest of Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Grove Press, 1998), 351; Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 76.

⁷² Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 90-95.

⁷³ J.R. Masson, "A Fragment of Colonial History: The Killing of Jakob Marengo," *Journal of African Studies* 21 no. 2 (June 1995), 254-256.

⁷⁴ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 103.

assignment under General Colmar von der Goltz in Kassel where he applied his experience toward improving his soldiers' training.⁷⁵

In 1909, the German General Staff provided Lettow the opportunity to command the 2nd Sea Battalion stationed at Wilhelmshaven.⁷⁶ German marine units, lacking their own officer corps, relied on the leadership of German Army officers. Lettow grafted his *Bewegungskrieg* mentality onto the marines rather than adapting himself to marine culture. He determined the battalion's best use would be "in the field" rather than "occupying coastal forts," and arranged for the sea battalion's training to resemble the army's training.⁷⁷ He increased the marines' rifle practice and orchestrated small-scale field exercises against nearby military units. Significantly, Lettow modified the unit's machine gun and night tactics to reflect his combat experience. He recorded, "Many officers and NCOs wrote me later, that the training at Wilhelmshaven served them well on the Western Front in World War I."⁷⁸

Despite Lettow's prowess as military tactician, his lack of charisma and human understanding affected his ability to lead as a major.⁷⁹ Few soldiers accused him of sloth or cowardice, but even fewer enjoyed working for him. One subordinate described him as a man generally lacking people skills and remarked that Lettow's highest compliment was, "He fills his post."⁸⁰ In theory Lettow recognized, "The soldier is not a machine,

⁷⁵ Paice, 28.

⁷⁶ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 106.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

⁷⁹ Norman F. Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (New York: Random House, 1994). Psychologist Norman Dixon offers a possible explanation for this phenomenon in his book.

⁸⁰ Deppe, 25-27.

but a man with a heart. Humor is a better form of motivation [than force].”⁸¹ However, in practice, he regularly ignored the health of soldiers to his own detriment and his units suffered from a high casualty rate. In South West Africa, he regularly whipped his emaciated porters if they refused to go further.⁸²

Lettow struggled with his family after his return from Southwest Africa. Lettow’s competitiveness and ambition, encouraged by the culture of the German General Staff, fed an aloof and elitist nature. Although in his late thirties, he remained single due to his relative lack of charisma and marriage to his career.⁸³ He claimed to have met many fine girls, but he just did not care enough to settle down. Ostensibly, his one serious love married another man when he was abroad. His failure to find a wife and start a family angered his parents, especially his father who had played a key role in facilitating Lettow’s success as a junior officer.⁸⁴

On the eve of World War I, Lettow’s personal and professional failures derailed his career and encouraged him to look for opportunities elsewhere. He reported several naval officers who illegally took their wives on board German ships in a particular naval exercise; the abrupt and laconic report angered his naval superiors who placed his name on many blacklists.⁸⁵ These failures caused Lettow to apply for a leadership position in Africa as a means of putting space between his professional enemies and personal disappointment. The Colonial Office rejected Lettow’s initial request to head the

⁸¹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 139. “Der Soldat ist keine Maschine, er will auch ein Herz fühlen. Und kommt dazu noch etwas Humor, um so besser.”

⁸² *Ibid.*, 83, 89.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 97, 103,

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 106, 114.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 114.

German East Africa Schutztruppe. Lettow's association with Trotha and his personality made him an unpalatable choice for the Social Democrats in the Colonial Department. Luckily, Wilhelm II and the staff overrode the Colonial Department's decision and appointed him commander of the East African Schutztruppe.⁸⁶

His assignment to Africa on the eve of war was a slight and indicated his declining respect within the staff. Traditional histories imply the German Army chose Lettow because of his overseas experience and talent, but that was not the case.⁸⁷ The German Army promoted Lettow out of the central theater. Lettow and the German Staff Officers prepared arduously for the anticipated war in Europe.⁸⁸ Bismarck stated that his map of Africa resembled Central Europe, implying that the African colonies existed to serve Germany's European policies.⁸⁹ Bellicose staff officers like General Friedrich von Bernhardt occasionally encouraged political leaders to use African conflicts as *casus belli*, but staff officers normally perceived the colonies as a drain on the army's resources.⁹⁰ Moreover, German officers conceded that Britain would snatch up the colonies in event of a war.⁹¹

Lettow left for East Africa a chastened outcast in need of redemption. Although an educated and experienced officer, Lettow's relationship with his service came unglued. He was an ardent advocate of *Bewegungskrieg*, who forced his ideas upon his

⁸⁶ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 115.

⁸⁷ See Miller, Farwell, Hoyt, and Paice's descriptions of Lettow.

⁸⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 3. Lettow admits he had been anticipating war for over ten years.

⁸⁹ Farwell, 34.

⁹⁰ Friedrich von Bernhardt, *Germany and the Next War* (New York: Longmans, Green & co., 1912), 105-107.

⁹¹ James Retallack, ed., *The Short Oxford History of Germany: Imperial Germany, 1871-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 52; Smuts, "East Africa," 140.

subordinates regardless of the conditions. China and South West Africa disinclined Lettow to guerrilla war and encouraged his faith in conventional strategies. East Africa offered Lettow his first theater level command, and a disappointed man with his ambition would not dare waste it. Germany had largely turned its back on him, but he had not turned his back on Germany.

CHAPTER 2

MOBILIZATION, JANUARY 1914—OCTOBER 1914

He will become hated, above all, as I said, by being rapacious and usurping the property and women of his subjects, from which he must refrain; and whenever the majority of men are not deprived of their property or honor, they live contentedly, and one only has to combat the ambition of a few, which can easily be held in check in many ways.

Niccolò Machiavelli, The Prince.

From the moment Lieutenant Colonel Lettow stepped onto the dock at Dar-es-Salaam in January 1914, he began preparing the German East Africa for a *Bewegungskrieg*. World War I would start in six months, and he would face his first major test at the Battle of Tanga in nine months.¹ During the intervening period, he familiarized himself with the colony's government, settlers, and the Schutztruppe: German East Africa's elite paramilitary force.² He learned that the colonists' priorities differed from his own as they lacked interest in supporting Germany's effort in a European war. Undeterred by the colonists' ambivalence, Lettow set about converting the Schutztruppe from a paramilitary force to a conventional military force in June 1914.

¹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 3, 18.

² Wissmann. Germany created Schutztruppe or Protectorate Force from the Wissmanntruppe, a mercenary-expeditionary force created by entrepreneur appointed officer, Major Hermann von Wissmann. Wissmann's legacy defined the military culture of German East Africa. See also Col. Ernst Nigmann, *German Schutztruppe in East Africa: History of the Imperial Protectorate Force, 1889-1911*. Robert E. Dohrenwend trans. (Nashville, TN: The Battery Press, 2005) and Mike Bennighof, "The German Colonial Soldier," (master's thesis, University of Alabama, 1989).

The colonial establishment resisted Lettow's efforts to reform the Schutztruppe and his efforts nearly led to disaster.³ The colony's war plans moved in opposite directions: Lettow prepared for an active defense while the "Old African" officers of the Schutztruppe prepared for a passive defense. His subordinates resisted Lettow's centralization and doubted his ability as a recent arrival to Africa. His officers hoped to defeat an Allied invasion with *Buschkrieg*: a decentralized form of guerrilla warfare, and avoid offensive operations. His superior, Governor Heinrich von Schnee, planned to preserve the colony's neutrality in case of a European war. A Social Democrat who disliked Lettow and the German Army, Schnee dedicated himself to the colony's economic prosperity and internal stability regardless of the outcome in Europe. Schnee's relationship with Lettow steadily declined, and coordination between the civil government and the Schutztruppe worsened.

The outbreak of World War I accelerated Lettow's efforts to convert the colony into a conventional war mindset. The war deepened the divide between Schnee and Lettow, but improved Lettow's relationship with the colonists and the Schutztruppe. Lettow captured the crucial region of Taveta in a combined settler and Schutztruppe operation. Taveta, close to the home of colony's settler population, improved the colony's security and promised to supply the ambitious settlers with more water and fertile farmland. Allied and German raiding parties clashed in minor operations as the opponents waited for a major Allied operation.

³ Hull, 26-27.

Lettow's preparation for war started with a tour of German East Africa's fourteen districts to survey the land and introduce himself to his new command.⁴ The Schutztruppe, organized into nineteen field companies, employed a paltry 2,540 professional *Askaris*, 2,154 African police officers, and 1,000 Askari reserves.⁵ *Askaris*, native soldiers hired from the colony's Swahili speaking populations, served as the force's professional non-commissioned officer corps and soldiers. The Schutztruppe also counted 218 Europeans including sixty-three officers, thirty-two doctors, and fifty-two medical assistants. The standard field company consisted of a captain, two lieutenants, two European non-commissioned officers, a doctor, a doctor's assistant, 160 *Askaris*, and approximately 250 carriers.⁶ Commanders depended on their Askari NCOs for interpersonal leadership, the first-rate medical staff for hygiene, and the carriers for supply.⁷ The Schutztruppe's force structure ended at company size because decentralized, small units best suited the force's peacetime occupation mission.⁸

The Schutztruppe only accepted volunteers to serve as officers and NCOs. To encourage volunteers, Germany made Schutztruppe service twice as valuable as home service in pension calculations.⁹ East Africa especially offered ambitious men opportunities for wealth, adventure, and fame.¹⁰ East Africa offered men of limited means aristocratic privileges such as land, hunting, travel, and novelties like Swahili

⁴ German East Africa included the modern states of Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda.

⁵ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 19; Boell, 28.

⁶ Boell, 28.

⁷ Wissmann, 9-10; Hull, 19-21.

⁸ Nigmann, 177-180; Miller, 18.

⁹ Lewis H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The Rulers of German Africa 1884-1914* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1977), 106-108; Miller, 17.

¹⁰ Gann and Duignan, 270. Major Wissmann and Captain Prince were famous beyond the indications of their relatively low rank. East African settlers expressed the ideologies of self-made men.

culture. Schutztruppe commanders assigned captains districts the size of minor European states to administer and many district commanders willingly remained in the position for the rest of their career, rarely leaving their district.¹¹ Some soldiers, like Lettow, joined to escape disappointments in Europe, hoping to redeem their name.¹² If nothing else, colonial service broke the monotony of barrack life and constant training in Germany.

Schutztruppe officers led some of the best-trained and most experienced bush soldiers in Africa.¹³ Many *Askaris* gained two years of combat experience fighting against the Maji-Maji Rebels and most had participated in one of the innumerable village skirmishes. A typical Askari spent his entire life in the Schutztruppe, starting as an Askari's "boy" and retiring on land leased to him by the German government.¹⁴ German field companies benefited from a higher ratio of officers to soldiers than the German Army, which allowed officers to devote more attention to each soldier. Moreover, the Schutztruppe's small size and isolated nature of colonial service often fostered strong camaraderie between colonial officers and *Askaris*.¹⁵

Askari training emphasized drill, field exercises, and target practice with rifles and machine guns.¹⁶ Drill, although outdated and impractical in Africa, strengthened the *Askaris'* legs and demonstrated the *Askaris'* prowess to the public. Commanders

¹¹ Boell, 21; Nigmann, 261-263. Captains Paul Baumstark, Theodor Tafel, and Max Wintgens represent three such colonial officers who made names for themselves during the war. Baumstark started his colonial service in East Africa in 1898, eventually serving as a resident governor in the districts around Lake Victoria. Tafel, resident since 1906, served as liaison between the Schutztruppe with the colony's businesspersons. Captain Max Wintgens, a 1909 arrival, governed modern day Rwanda.

¹² Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 76.

¹³ Michelle R. Moyd, "Becoming *askari*: African Soldiers and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa, 1850-1918" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2008), 173.

¹⁴ Boell, 19; Moyd, 247; Nigmann, 173; Paice, 388. Most of the long serving *Askaris* would have fought in the Maji-Maji Revolt, the last major African rebellion in East Africa.

¹⁵ Gann and Duignan, 114; Moyd, 229-230.

¹⁶ Nigmann, 100.

regularly led their *Askaris* in field exercises to practice building camps, defending against ambushes, and attacking enemy fortifications. A field exercise often served a dual purpose as a combat patrol. Combat patrols provided the company intelligence, settled local disputes, and showed the flag.¹⁷ Companies encouraged marksmanship with shooting challenges that offered the best riflemen distinguishing armbands, monetary gifts, and prestige.¹⁸

Despite the common perception, Lettow considered the *Askaris* of lesser quality than his European soldiers. *Askaris* were merely a means to an end. Lettow wrote:

The question of course was whether we, with our Askari, would be able to fight modern troops; it was denied by many an experienced hand. But from what I had seen during the revolt in South-West Africa, from 1904-1906, I believed that courage and military efficiency could be awakened in the East African native... but the matter was greatly simplified by the fact that there was no possible alternative [emphasis added].¹⁹

The Schutztruppe's focus on guerrilla war differed from Lettow and the German army's focus on annihilation warfare. Hermann von Wissmann, the Schutztruppe's founder, realized the German General Staff's battle theory failed as an occupation strategy.²⁰ Colonial officers called their method of war *Buschkrieg*, an occupation theory

¹⁷ Miller, 18; Nigmann, 173; Paice, 388.

¹⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 9; Nigmann, 175. Lettow considered his *Askaris* poor shots when he arrived.

¹⁹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 22.

²⁰ Charles E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principle and Practice* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1899), 819; Col. Louis Hubert Lyautey, *Du Role Colonial de L'Armee*. (Paris: Armand Colin, 1900); Joseph Gallieni, "The Conquest of Madagascar," in *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Gérard Chaliand, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 813-815.

English methods, as espoused by General Charles E. Callwell, combined battle, blockades, camps, and flying columns. British methods resembled Enclosurement in England; the British broke an area into smaller walled off pieces and handed them to local commanders. Once sectorized systematically, flying columns would seek to destroy the rebels who could not easily escape. Callwell adamantly supported attacking the enemy forces, engaging them in battle. British participants of the East African Campaign referenced Callwell's ideas to argue against Smuts's campaign of maneuver.

that combined elements of German *Kleinkrieg* with lessons from Africa.²¹ Wissmann summarized *Buschkrieg* in his short treatise, *Afrika: Schilderungen und Rathschläge zur Vorbereitung für den Aufenthalt und den Dienst in den Deutschen Schutzgebieten*.²² Wissmann called for preventative measures such as conflict mediation, outposts, and economic benefits with active measures such as armed patrols, sieges, and economic warfare.²³

Germany's policies of "scientific colonialism" and Swahili intermediaries served as the colonists' first line of defense against revolt.²⁴ Direct rule would have been impossible because the colony's African population of 7.5 million dwarfed the German population of 6,000.²⁵ Germany indirectly ruled East Africa through the Swahili

French methods proved more systematic and refined than German methods. Wissmann's main method was to beat the population into submission through a combination of mobile columns, sieges, and scorched earth in which reprieve only came after submission. French methods, commonly called *Tache d'Huile* or the oil spot technique, were better coordinated and less violent. General Louis Hubert Lyautey and General Joseph Gallieni stressed a patient approach to counterinsurgency; neither commander stressed destruction or speed of action like Wissmann. Lyautey's three-step plan required commanders to conquer the enemy, occupy the territory, and then pacify the people through good government and economic incentive. Once an area was pacified, doctrine called for French commanders to offer colonized populations land in unconquered areas. Instead of punishing whole villages for insubordination, French colonial officers were to redistribute rebel property to loyal populations as a reward for continued fidelity.²¹ Morgan, 147-186. "*Kleinkrieg*" is German for "Guerilla War". German training, as established in the first chapter, focused on battlefield leadership at the expense of occupation or counterinsurgency methodology. The only steadfast counterinsurgency theory in the German Army was the ambiguous concept of military necessity: if the mission required killing prisoners, then one had a duty to kill prisoners.²² Wissmann. Translates as "Africa: Examples and Advice in Preparation for Life and Duty in the Protectorate Forces."

²³ Wissmann, 53; Nigmann 174. Significantly, campaigns in East Africa differed from campaigns in Central Europe because East Africa required the construction of trails, bridges, forts, and boats whereas Central Europe some of the best infrastructure in the world. When officers planned a campaign, they needed to balance the need for water, firewood, and defense while simultaneously avoiding malaria-laden mosquitoes and feline predators. Colonial officers took campaign planning seriously, maintaining a *Military Orientation Notebook*, that detailed available assets including reinforcements, friendly tribes and locations of available porters. Wissmann recommended packing as light as possible, focusing on food and water at the expense of pleasantries to facilitate the campaign. German soldiers also adopted African bivouac methods, which reduced cost, minimized supply burdens, and provided climate appropriate shelter.

²⁴ Gann and Duignan, 28. Bernard Dernburg, a leading member of the Social Democrats, called his colonial program "Scientific Colonialism."

²⁵ Boell, 15.

speaking population. The Swahili provided tax farmers, civil servants, *Askaris*, and village chiefs. Given the profitability of such positions, Africans seeking social advancement adopted the Swahili language and Islamic faith.²⁶ In return for Swahili collaboration, Germany preserved their trade monopoly, permitted graft, provided European style education, and tolerated their practice of slavery.²⁷

Germany developed Africa's infrastructure as part of their "scientific" effort to encourage investment and strengthen its hold on East Africa.²⁸ Colonists operated shipping routes in coastal waterways and Lake Tanganyika for north-south communication. The Northern Railroad and the Central Railroad, which the Germans built in the early twentieth century, provided east-west communication for the northern half of the colony.

The colony's negligible infrastructure could not reach most areas, especially the southern half of the colony. Therefore, the Schutztruppe maintained fourteen fortified outposts referred to as "*Bomas*" in major trade centers to compensate for slow communication. *Bomas*, often the only conspicuous sign of German rule, functioned as both centers of commerce and government.²⁹ Interactions between natives and *Askaris* at the *Bomas* and district patrols kept commanders aware of their districts' needs.

Wissmann advised questioning local tribes and passing caravans for information and tips

²⁶Nigmann, 281. Prosser Gifford, "Indirect Rule: Touchstone or Tombstone for Colonial Policy?" in *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, ed. Prosser Gifford, WM. Roger Louis, and Alison Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 374-375.

²⁷ Felicitas Becker, "Traders, 'Big Men' and Prophets: Political Continuity and Crises in the Maji Maji Rebellion in Southeast Tanzania," *The Journal of African History* 45, no. 1 (2004), 10.

²⁸ Wissmann, 46-54.

²⁹ John Illife, "The Effects of the Maji-Maji Rebellion of 1905-1906 on German Occupation Policy in East Africa," in *Britain and Germany in Africa: Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*, ed. Prosser Gifford, WM. Roger Louis, and Alison Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967), 374-375.

from collaborators often alerted commanders to unrest.³⁰ However, colonial officers carried over the German military's disdain of intelligence gathering and preferred personal reconnaissance taken from patrols of their district.³¹ German captains dispatched their *Askaris* to facilitate the orderly attainment of revenue, settle local feuds, and preserve local economic interests.³² Commanders preserved order through various methods of hostages, regime change, combat patrols, and executions.³³

Should minor actions fail and a serious rebellion erupt, doctrine called for a forceful strategic offensive coupled with defensive tactics.³⁴ Colonial officers recognized that the Africans' superior knowledge of the land, greater numbers, and minimal logistics gave them the tactical initiative. Native tactics included killing European officials, besieging *Bomas*, and ambushing relief columns. East African tribes used similar tactics as the Zulu's Buffalo Horn Tactics. Spear and musket-wielding warriors hiding in the thick brush attempted to disjoint their enemy with surprise, disciplined mass charges, and rapid envelopment.³⁵ Lettow wrote during his initial inspection of the colony that:

The exercises in native warfare presented a spectacle, which differed widely from our European inspections. At Arusha, on this occasion, the company marched through thick bush, the "Pori," and was in native fashion surprised on the march. The enemy was represented by Meru warriors who, arrayed in full wardress, with spears and headdress of ostrich feathers, remained concealed, and then at only a

³⁰ Wissmann, 9.

³¹ Citino, *The German Way of War*, xiv; Wissmann, 9.

³² Nigmann, 281; Gifford, "Indirect Rule: Touchstone or Tombstone for Colonial Policy?" 374-375.

³³ Wissmann, 30-33, 43.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵ Henry Francis Flynn, "Shaka," in *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Gérard Chaliand, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 747-753; Wissmann, 11. Mkwawa and his Hehe warriors annihilated the Captain Zewelski Expedition in the 1890s. The Ngoni people were a subgroup of the Zulu kingdom and spread the Zulu's methods through much of the colony.

few paces distances fell upon the Safari, the column of route, with loud war cries.³⁶

To end the uprising, commanders led field company sized columns towards the rebellious population. Modeled on a safari, the column commander arranged his column to fight outnumbered, surrounded, and isolated from relief forces.³⁷ Commanders headed the column with a loaded machine gun team and *Askaris* trailed behind, marching rifles loaded.³⁸ Columns responded to ambushes by saturating attackers with machine gun fire while the *Askaris* arranged themselves into a hedgehog formation around the column's supplies. Hedgehog formations allowed soldiers to fire in all directions, thereby protecting the baggage train and deterring panic.³⁹ In formation, German sharpshooters fired at will, while the *Askaris* supposedly fired on command.⁴⁰ After defeating the ambush, colonial officers avoided the conventional pursuit of enemy forces due to the attacker's superior mobility, knowledge, and numbers.⁴¹

The Schutztruppe's tactics inflicted high casualties, but defeating ambushes rarely ended rebellions. However, sieges and economic warfare—the essence of *Buschkrieg*—typically induced the population's submission. After recovering from the ambush, commanders led their column to the rebellious villages and laid siege to holdouts. Wissmann offered three effective methods of subjugating African villages:

³⁶ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 9. Lettow recorded his observations after watching the equivalent of a Meru war game. The Meru lived southwest of Mount Kilimanjaro and their tactics were similar to those of Massai.

³⁷ Wissmann, 7, 49. "Safari" means a "journey" in Swahili and is the only term capable of describing the mode of transport. German *Askaris* marched in columns supported by porters and their families. Safaris began as trading expeditions, but Europeans adopted them as a means of hunting and campaigning against rebellious African populations.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 4-6; Wissmann, 34.

⁴⁰ Wissmann, 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

shelling the village into submission, burning the village down, or storming a weak point in the walls. Colonial officers intensified their sieges by destroying the local food supply and villages.⁴² Starvation eventually broke the rebel's unity and chastened rebels would accept Germany's "golden bridges" or political incentives, resetting Germany's colonial defense process.⁴³

Lettow admitted he "was still considered a raw hand," and did not understand his role in the functioning of the colony.⁴⁴ He recognized that his subordinates' service culture differed from the German army's service culture though both groups underwent the same officer training.⁴⁵ Likewise, his subordinates noted their isolation from Europe and the experiences of Africa estranged them from their European counterparts.⁴⁶

Captain Tom von Prince and Lettow attended Kriegsschule together, but Africa had changed Prince's priorities. In the 1890s, Prince successfully pacified the rebellious Hehe tribe of central East Africa, and subsequently received the Germans' noble title "von."⁴⁷ Despite his success as a military officer, he stayed in Africa to manage a profitable plantation southeast of Mount Kilimanjaro. Prince's loyalties to the national cause lessened as his plantation began supplying his wealth. He believed that local threats, like a native revolt, represented a greater threat to the colony than interference from other nation states. Therefore, Prince organized 2,700 vigilante settlers into Rifle

⁴² Wissmann, 18-24, 41; Hull, 101.

⁴³ Wissmann, 10, 17-19.

⁴⁴ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 16.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-9.

⁴⁶ Wissmann, 77; Hull, 26-27.

⁴⁷ Gann and Duignan, 270.

Companies for the purpose of local defense. Rifle Companies agreed to fight if their service preserved the operation of their settlements and integrity of their companies.⁴⁸

Lettow responded to the difference between his subordinates and himself as he had responded to the incongruity between the marines' training and his own; he forced the Schutztruppe into a mold of the Imperial German Army.⁴⁹ On 15 May 1914, he proposed a mobilization plan to Governor Schnee calling for the Schutztruppe to attack the British colony of Kenya. Lettow's plan involved the creation of a strong military unit around Kilimanjaro equipped to advance deep into Kenya. He believed the colony's weak position called *for offensive action against the enemy* to compensate for Schutztruppe's small size. He planned to turn the colony into life-support for his army, discounting the colonial establishment's concerns of a native rebellion. He intended to draw British soldiers into East Africa, forcing the British to divide their limited resources between Kenya and important theaters like the Middle East.⁵⁰

Schutztruppe officers, whom Lettow referred to derisively as "Old Africans," insisted on executing their original defensive strategy.⁵¹ Colonial officers concluded the internal threat of rebellion still outweighed the external threat of invasion. The colonial officers argued the colony could barely maintain order in peacetime and anticipated that a war would spark rebellions across the colony.⁵² The Schutztruppe's original strategy called for a conservative threefold plan of action. The colonists would abandon the coast,

⁴⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 4-6, 31; Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 121.

⁴⁹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 15-17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 19-26.

⁵¹ Boell, 22-23.

⁵² Kurt Gregorius, *Bwana Mzungu, Der Weisse Mann: Selbsterlebtes in Ostafrika unter Lettow Vorbeck* (Bahia, Brazil: Tipografica Manu Oficina, 1953), 135. Schutztruppe veterans recounted stories of the rebellion in World War I despite the saturation of new violence.

dismantle the colony's two railroads, and retreat into the interior. Colonists would assist the Schutztruppe's efforts to maintain order and fight if necessary. If an enemy invaded, company commanders would avoid contact except to ambush isolated enemy units.⁵³

Schnee rejected both plans and refused to subjugate himself to his military officers' interests.⁵⁴ His desire to preserve peace between the settlers and Africans outweighed his desire to see German East Africa contribute to a far off war.⁵⁵ He came to power as part of the Social Democrats takeover of Germany's Colonial Department. He blamed the 1904-1908 revolts on the German General Staff's mismanagement and personally hated Lettow's patron Trotha.⁵⁶ He helped institute a "scientific" method of colonialism that prevented uprisings through greater equality, economic opportunities, and a civil police force separate from the Schutztruppe.⁵⁷

Schnee rejected both plans brought to him for approval. He refused to see the Schutztruppe force the colonists to abandon the coast and destroy the railroads. He vetoed Lettow's proposed force expansion, which would strain the colony's budget. Schnee forbade the colony's paramilitary forces from conducting large offensive operations and promised enemy naval forces access to East Africa's ports in a time of

⁵³ Nigmann, 281; Prosser Gifford, "Indirect Rule: Touchstone or Tombstone for Colonial Policy?" 374-375.

⁵⁴ Schnee, See Schnee's book for a detailed account of scientific colonialism. John Iliffe, Isabel Hull, and Mark Cocker provide thorough study into the growing divide in Germany's colonial enterprise.

⁵⁵ John Chilembwe, "The Voice of African Natives in the Present War," in *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856-1870: Documents on Modern African Political Thought from Colonial Times to the Present* ed. J. Ayo, Langley (London: Rex Collings, 1979): 394-395. Chilembwe resisted the British Empire during the war and provided one of the few unadulterated African accounts during the war. His writings suggest the frustration felt by Africans towards their colonial masters in the war.

⁵⁶ Hull, 26-27; Lettow *Mein Leben*, 65

⁵⁷ Townsend, 225-230; see also Iliffe, *German Colonial Rule in Tanganyika, 1905-1912*.

war.⁵⁸ Schnee worried foremost about the colony's fragile infrastructure, a personal project of his since his appointment as the colony's governor. He proposed that the colony could avoid a war by adhering to a neutrality clause in the Congo Act of 1912, which promised states port access during war. He recognized the colony's 5,000 German colonists had invested their lives in the survival of German East Africa and he hoped to protect their property.⁵⁹

Despite Schnee's objections, Lettow altered the Schutztruppe's training, armament, and force structure. As in South West Africa, he felt his civilian commanders did not understand military matters. He intended to defend the colony as his counterparts in Europe intended to defend the Reich. His vision for his soldiers resembled that of the *Jäger*—Germany's scout infantry troops. He hoped to compensate for his inferior weaponry and numbers with machine guns, aggression, and his soldiers' superior skill.⁶⁰

Lettow sought to upgrade the Schutztruppe's aging weapons with modern rifles and as many machine guns as possible.⁶¹ Lettow placed orders in German arsenals for either the magazine fed Mauser Model 1891 Carbine (M/91) or the famous Mauser Model 1898 Rifle to upgrade the standard rifle of his *Askaris*.⁶² Germany responded with adequate arms to equip his six best field companies with M/91, but the majority of field companies carried the outdated Mauser Model 1871 *Jäger* rifle (M/71).⁶³ The German

⁵⁸ Boell, 36, 46-47.

⁵⁹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 28; Boell, 22-23.

⁶⁰ Boell, 93.

⁶¹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 8.

⁶² Boell, 28-29; Wissmann, 28. The Schutztruppe had 1,676 M/91s, 579 M/98s, 10,507 M/71s, and 67 machine guns.

⁶³ Miller 39; See Robert W. D. Ball, *Mauser Rifles of the World*, 4th ed. (Lola, WI: Krause Publications, 1996), 155, for a technical description of the *Model 71 Jäger Rifle*.

Army purchased the M/71, a single-shot bolt-action rifle, to equip scouting units after the Franco-Prussian War. German bureaucrats passed it on to the Schutztruppe as a cost saving measure. Theorists justified the action stating that the M/71's large slug stopping power worked more effectively against natives, and the M/71's slow rate of fire discouraged wastage.⁶⁴

Simultaneously, Lettow tried to standardize Schutztruppe training, which he considered deficient, with the German Army. Lettow never entered a unit trained to his satisfaction and earned a reputation as a dour martinet. Lettow demanded high performance from his troops, regardless of color, and expected the highest performance from himself.⁶⁵ Colonial officers kept their field companies in excellent condition to control the East African population and fight in the bush.⁶⁶ However, colonial officers did not prepare the *Askaris* to fight decisive battles of annihilation against European enemies. For example, Schutztruppe doctrine required *Askaris* to train with machine guns for use against lightly armed rebels but not against a symmetrically armed enemy.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Wissmann, 28; Ball, 12, 152, 174. Ball's book provides a cursory overview of each rifle discussed in this paragraph. Interestingly enough, he includes a picture of the Schutztruppe with M/71. The theorist's ideas seem irrationally racist and impractical, however, the Schutztruppe's inferior armament is less irrational than one may assume if viewed from a different perspective. The Schutztruppe served as a paramilitary and police force, not a conventional military force, equipping the Schutztruppe with the advanced M/98 would be akin to equipping patrolling American Cops with assault rifles instead of pistols. America's transition from the M-1 Garand's 30.06 round to the M-14's 5.56mm round to the M-16's 5.56mm round demonstrates a correlation between the rifle and method of war. The heavy and powerful M-1 worked well for positional warfare while the light M-16 served the US well in mobile counterinsurgency operations around the world. US armed forces opted for the M-16's carbine derivative, the M-4, for its new imperial wars. The light M/91 would have been better than M/71, but the M/71 served its purpose prior to World War I.

⁶⁵ Deppe, 27.

⁶⁶ Miller, 18; Nigmann, 173; Paice, 388.

⁶⁷ Nigmann, 100; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 9.

Kurt Gregorius, an artist turned volunteer rifleman, provided a detailed account of Lettow's training regimen. Gregorius learned to soldier under Herr vom Adili, a colonial officer from Southwest Africa who had fought against the Herero. Adili conditioned Gregorius and his unit by marching and sharpened their shooting skills with recurrent ventures to the shooting range. Mentally, Adili described the intricacies of fighting in the bush and encouraged his soldiers to be brave in the face of danger. He told them that they would feel impervious after a few battles and Gregorius felt his unit's resistance bordered on fanaticism.⁶⁸

Lettow's attempt to standardize the Schutztruppe's training and customs with the German Army angered the *Askaris*. He expected *Askaris* to obey orders like German conscripts, but the *Askaris* resisted Lettow's conventionalization because his reforms challenged their privileged position in the colony.⁶⁹ For example, *Askaris* customarily brought their household on campaign, a practice ended centuries earlier within European armies. Though the entourage slowed columns and stressed supply chains, Schutztruppe officers accepted them as indispensable to campaigning. Lettow tried on several occasions to end the practice and send the wives away, but the *Askaris* rebelled and the wives refused to leave.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Gregorius, 9, 43-47.

⁶⁹ Wissmann, 63; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 318; Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst, *Treu bis in den Tod: Von Deutsch-Ostafrika nach Sachsenhausen—Eine Lebensgeschichte* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2007). His recorded statements from his soldiers like, "I will always stick by you and fight on till I fall," proved a major volte-face in military literature. Bayume Mohamed Husen served Germany loyally in the colonies and followed the Germans back to Germany as a curio of sorts. Husen was true unto death, death at the hands of those he served so faithfully.

⁷⁰ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 177.

Unlike Lettow, the colonial officers appreciated the delicate system that maintained an Askari's loyalty. A professional Askari no longer considered himself an African, but a member of an elite ruling group within the colony. German officers encouraged the *Askaris* sense of superiority, recognizing that Germany's, "Good pay, good uniforms, and good equipment raised the young soldiers [*Askaris*] above the level of their tribesmen, and soon let them look down upon them [tribal Africans] with contempt."⁷¹ *Askaris* collaborated with the Schutztruppe to protect their status as empowered intermediaries. *Askaris* fought for the wealth, power, and respect, rather than a sense of German nationalism suggested by primary campaign accounts.⁷²

German Officers generally referred to all African soldiers as "*Askaris*," but not all *Askaris* accepted each other as equals.⁷³ Professional *Askaris* distinguished themselves from new conscripts by their clothing, attitude, and violent displays of superiority. War photos showed the vivid stratification between the European style clothing of *Askaris* and the rags of porters, servants, and local tribesmen.⁷⁴ The Schutztruppe spoke Swahili and

⁷¹ Nigmann, 94.

⁷² See also Sandra Mass, *Weisse Helden, schwarze Krieger: Zur Geschichte kolonialer Männlichkeit in Deutschland, 1918-1964* (Cologne, Germany: Böhlau, 2006); Volker M. Langbehn, ed. *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Thomas Morlang, *Askari und Fitafita: "Farbige" Söldner in den deutschen Kolonien* (Berlin: Christoph Links, 2008).

⁷³ Walther Dobbertin, *Lettow-Vorbeck's Soldiers: A Book of German Fighting Spirit and Military Honor*, trans. Robert E. Dohrenwend (Machesney Park IL: Gerald Rilling, 2005), 10; Gann and Duignan, 98, 114; Iliffe, *Tanganyika Under German Rule*, 68; O.F. Raum, "German East Africa: changes in African Tribal Life under German Administration, 1892-1914" in *History of East Africa*, ed. Vincent Halow et al. (Oxford, 1965), 2:1919, 192 cited in Gann and Duignan, 203. Prior to the war German East Africa employed 172,000 wage earners (Raum) in a population of roughly 7 million (Nigmann) of which 91,892 (Raum) were planters and only 6,000 were fulltime askari. Central Highland Tribes include the Bantu and Swahili speaking Nyamwezi, Sukkuma, Manjema, and Kimbu tribes. As the war blockade ended commercial intercourse, plantation owners brought many of their workers with them to fight in the Schutztruppe. Plantation workers were typically Central Highland Tribes as well.

⁷⁴ Dobbertin, 21, 77, 103, 109, 125, 124, 132; Deppe, 79, 111, 143, 178, 254. As the war went on European uniforms were in better shape than the African uniforms. Notice the feet specifically, Europeans always have boots on while many Africans wear rags or nothing. The headgear on pages 77 and 109 are especially

encouraged Swahili customs such as Islam, keeping women as war prizes, and maintaining servants to show their affiliation with the traditional elite of East Africa.⁷⁵ Askari NCOs regularly prescribed twenty-five lashes by the whip for disruptive conscript *Askaris* and *Schenzi* or “Bush niggers” to both enforce discipline and demonstrate power.⁷⁶

The start of World War I fueled Lettow’s efforts, providing impetus to his reforms. Europe slid into war in July 1916 as negotiations failed to produce an acceptable agreement over the status of the Balkans. Kaiser Wilhelm II stood with the Austrian Hungarian Empire against the Entente and drew the British into the war by invading Belgium. In response, he organized his forces to fight a battle-centric war, grouping companies in *Abteilungen* or detachments under the command of like-minded subordinates Major General Kurt von Wahle, a retired officer who happened to be visiting his son at the outbreak of the war, Major Kraut, and Captain Paul von

interesting. Obviously staged photographs, the *Askaris* are wearing traditional headgear of different types and one Askari is barefoot in both pictures. See also pages listed for Deppe.

⁷⁵Dobbertin, 10; Nigmann, 172; Arnold Wienholt, *The Story of a Lion Hunt: with Some of the Hunter’s Military Adventures during the War* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1922), 177-178; Strachan, 81-82; Moyd, 180. Germany allotted favorably discharged *Askaris* small-leased estates similar to the Ottoman *Askari-timar* from which the practice originated. The land preserved the *Askaris* social status, but limited the accumulation of capital.

⁷⁶ Christopher J. Thornhill, *Taking Tanganyika: Experiences of an Intelligence Officer, 1914-1918* (London: Stanley Paul, 1937), 142; Gregorius, 80-81; Dobbertin, 10; Gann and Duignan, 98, 114; Iliffe, *Tanganyika Under German Rule*, 68; O.F. Raum, “German East Africa: changes in African Tribal Life under German Administration, 1892-1914” in *History of East Africa*, ed. Vincent Halow et al. (Oxford, 1965), 2:1919), 192 cited in Gann and Duignan 203. Prior to the war German East Africa employed 172,000 wage earners (Raum) in a population of roughly 7 million (Nigmann) of which 91,892 (Raum) were planters and only 6,000 were fulltime Askari. Central Highland Tribes include the Bantu and Swahili speaking Nyamwezi, Sukkuma, Manjema, and Kimbu tribes. As the war blockade ended commercial intercourse, plantation owners brought many of their workers with them to fight in the Schutztruppe. Plantation workers were typically Central Highland Tribes as well.

Baumstark.⁷⁷ He called on Captain Tom von Prince to muster the Rifle Companies, incorporating the volunteer companies into the colony's defenses.

He expanded the size and number of field companies, convinced the Schutztruppe was too small for conventional operations. Lettow incorporated retired officers, thinned his own corps, and conscripted civilian doctors in the colonies to study tropical diseases to make structural room for expansion.⁷⁸ He converted the original *Askaris* into NCOs, and established a training camp near Dar-es-Salaam to refill the ranks with new conscripts.⁷⁹ He acquired hordes of *Trägers* or supply carriers, to meet the requirements of his expanding force. German East Africa kept contracts with porters in peacetime as a precautionary measure, but Lettow's mobilization plans exceeded the colony's preparations.⁸⁰ Hundreds of thousands of Africans would serve one side or the other as carriers.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 9.

⁷⁸ Hull, 19-21; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 23-25.

⁷⁹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 25, 68.

⁸⁰ Moyd, 134; Alyward Shorter, "Nyungu-Ya-Mawe and the 'Empire of the *Ruga-Rugas*,'" *The Journal of African History* 9, no. 2 (1968): 240-241. Germany employed *Ruga-Ruga* to serve as auxiliary troops and scouts to the Schutztruppe. Germany relied extensively on the neighboring tribes and *Ruga-Ruga* scouts for reconnaissance of the British positions. The *Ruga-Ruga* were "the muscle" of local tribal chiefs who used them to protect their property, trade routes, and to attack competing chiefs. *Ruga-Ruga* were often unmarried young men with little hope outside of the mercenary corps, took to banditry and brutality to make a living. "*Ruga*" translates literally as "Phallus." *Ruga-Ruga* traditionally wore the organs and blood of their slain enemies as part of their headdress. As Germany stabilized its rule in East Africa, many *Ruga-Ruga* abandoned their chiefs and joined the Schutztruppe. In many ways, the Schutztruppe was just the German's mercenary force used to advance German trade.

The line between conscript *Askari*, *Trägers* or supply carrier, and *Ruga-Ruga* could be thin in desperate situations. *Trägers*' auxiliary duties included maneuvering machine guns in battle and helping guard supplies. Safari tradition mandated that all members contributed to the defense and prosperity of the column. The Germans often encouraged and impressed *Trägers* into *Askari* service with mixed results. Once partisan to the Schutztruppe, the next best thing to a successful escape was moving up the food chain. *Askaris* were better fed, clothed, and looked after medically. Food was the most valuable resource during the campaign and often made the difference between dying or being left behind for the British and other roving bands of malcontents.

⁸¹ Boell, 28.

Schnee and the Schutztruppe commanders, many of whom had been in command positions for decades, resisted Lettow's directives. The German military's reoccurring conflict between the commander and policy, European and colonial officers, and the commander and subordinates followed Lettow into Africa. The Schutztruppe needed a persuasive soldier-statesman, not a military technician. Schnee denied Lettow the use of the police force for offensive operations, limited his expansion program by denying funds, and pledged the colony to neutrality in opposition to Lettow's war preparations. Schnee communicated with neighboring governments about his intention to remain neutral and encouraged them to commit to a similar stance.⁸²

Lettow's subordinates resented their loss of power under his centralization while the settler volunteers refused to take orders.⁸³ Schutztruppe officers rarely released their best soldiers for service in the new companies and many officers lacked command experience.⁸⁴ To make matters worse, rumors of tribal unrest among the Hehe, friendly Portuguese-Makonde relations, and Massai-Sukuma cattle rustling confirmed the Schutztruppe's dire predictions. His subordinates called for patrols into these regions to deter rebel.⁸⁵

From the morass of resistance, Lettow created a compromise strategy that satisfied the colonists and Schnee.⁸⁶ Schnee's demands forced Lettow to assume a

⁸² Boell, 36, 46-47.

⁸³ Nigmann, 281; Boell, 128.

⁸⁴ Lettow, *East Africa Campaign*, 7, 35-39.

⁸⁵ J. Gus Liebenow, *Colonial Rule and Political Development in Tanzania: The Case of the Makonde* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 85; Deppe, 21.

⁸⁶ Helmuth von Moltke, "On Strategy," in *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age* ed. Gérard Chaliand (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 769. Moltke said.

defensive posture that avoided the coast.⁸⁷ Therefore, Lettow avoided garrisoning coastal cities and limited his forces to areas of colonial interest like the Taveta Gap, Jassin, and disputed territory west of Lake Victoria. Lettow instructed his commanders to focus on the enemy army at the expense of objectives such as the destroying infrastructure, riling up natives, or defending territory.⁸⁸

Lettow's reforms and thorough mobilization plans gave German East African forces an advantage over British military forces in Kenya. He decided to seize the initiative by invading Kenya with Prince's Rifle Companies and several Schutztruppe companies. On 15 August 1914, the Germans captured Taveta from the British with little resistance.⁸⁹ Offensively, Taveta brought Lettow closer to the Uganda Railroad, brought him closer to the goal of major advance towards Nairobi, and gave Germany the initiative.⁹⁰ Defensively, occupying Taveta gave Germany control over the easiest overland route into German East Africa. Mount Kilimanjaro and the Pare Mountains protected Taveta's flanks and the nearby Northern Railroad promised the Schutztruppe a secure line of communication. Occupying the gap pleased the settlers, of which forty percent lived near Mount Kilimanjaro on plantations.⁹¹ The abundant water and fertile soil appealed to local plantation owners who did not have to travel far to play soldier.

"Strategy is a system of expedients." Lettow's strategy failed to meet his ideal conception of the war, but he manipulated the situation the best he could to achieve a semblance of his ideal.

⁸⁷ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 28, 52. Schnee temporarily surrendered a port city to English marines, but the threat of counterattack sent them back to the ocean.

⁸⁸ Boell, 93.

⁸⁹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 29.

⁹⁰ Smuts, "East Africa," 135.

⁹¹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 29; Boell, 15. A quick glance at a map of Tanzania will demonstrate the arbitrary bulge of Kenya into Tanzania and the fertility of the region.

Moreover, Taveta's salubrious climate allowed German soldiers to avoid many of Africa's illnesses.⁹²

Along the eastern coast, Baumstark frightened the residents of Mombasa and Captain Max Wintgens harassed the Allies in the west. Baumstark countered a British probe by raiding twenty-one miles deep into British territory with three companies. The British panicked, but a meager British counterattack drove Baumstark back to Jassin.⁹³ Baumstark proved overly cautious for a commander educated in Germany's aggressive military culture. Wintgens occupied a special place as the resident governor of the disputed district of Rwanda. Wintgens's attacks in September 1914 hinted that he had the daring for operations like the one he would conduct in 1917.⁹⁴

Lettow's new command in the Schutztruppe presented him with the greatest challenge of his career. He inherited a paramilitary force designed for guerrilla war, but he pushed the Schutztruppe towards conventional military norms. Lettow's reforms nearly obliterated the Schutztruppe by removing the *Askaris'* entitlements. Fortunately, his subordinates protected the Schutztruppe from Lettow's idealized vision of the force. Lettow never intended to wage a guerrilla campaign; his war planning called for an aggressive attack against British forces at the expense of other objectives. His strategy showed his disregard for the colony and his intent to make the colony an appendage of the European war effort. The colonial establishment, including his superior, Governor

⁹² Ruckteschell, 40; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 28, 33.

⁹³ Hordern, 47.

⁹⁴ Boell, 61-62; Hordern, 29, 50.

Schnee, opposed the offensive element of his plan. The colonial establishment's future depended on East Africa's internal order and economic success.

War accelerated Lettow's efforts to conventionalize the armed forces of German East Africa. He pushed for centralization, greater numbers, and attacks on British forces. The Taveta operation proved an easy sell as a minor operation that promised economic gain for the settlers. The Taveta operation allowed him to centralize his force and prepare for future attacks. He sought even greater achievements than the seizure of Taveta.

CHAPTER 3

VICTORY, STALEMATE, AND RETREAT, OCTOBER 1914—JANUARY 1917

The King owed this brilliant success to the independent zeal of his officers, which no mishap could quench, their desire to conquer, to the fighting lust of the soldiers, and most of all, to the fire against rear and front, after an attack from two sides, which even the bravest cannot withstand for long.

Graf Alfred von Schlieffen, Cannae.

Lettow's legend started in November 1914 with his decisive victory at the port city of Tanga. The British, sensing a threat to their empire, planned to take German East Africa with an amphibious assault at Tanga supported by an overland advance north of Mount Kilimanjaro. The poorly planned operation allowed Lettow to shift the colony's armed forces quickly from Taveta to Tanga. The Battle of Tanga demonstrated his adherence to *Bewegungskrieg* theory; the German counterattack exemplified brash aggression, independence of command, and enveloping maneuvers. Most importantly, Tanga solidified his commitment to a conventional military strategy.

Following Tanga, both sides turned to small-scale operations. The British Empire's early defeat encouraged the British to withdraw forces from the theater and adopt a defensive strategy. The Germans and Allies needed more soldiers and better infrastructure to conduct further major offensive operations. Lettow kept his force concentrated around Taveta and refused to divide his force into guerrilla columns. Unable to advance, he sanctioned raids against the Uganda Railroad in the hopes such

attacks would facilitate a conventional campaign against Nairobi. As an unintended benefit, the war's stagnation allowed German East Africa's colonial government to continue relatively unaffected.

In March 1916, General Jan Smuts and an army from the Union of South Africa advanced against the German position in Taveta. Smuts's policy of strategic maneuver forced the Germans to retreat, and despite Lettow's inability to stop the Allies' advance, he refused to abandon his strategy of decisive battles. The logistics of the Allies and Germans determined the pace of operations; both sides struggled to maintain large forces in the barren African environment. German colonial rule collapsed as the dueling armies cut large swaths of destruction through East Africa. By the time Smuts transferred to Europe in January 1917, the Schutztruppe appeared to be days from dissolution.

Peripheral operations against colonies were a British specialty and taking Germany's prized colony promised empire from the Suez Canal to the Cape of Good Hope.¹ Secretary of State for War Lord Hubert Horatio Kitchener decided to occupy German East Africa at the outset of World War I; however, he recognized Britain's commitments to France overwhelmed the War Office and decided the Colonial Office was in the next best position to take the colony.² He provided the Colonial Office soldiers from India, unsuited for European warfare, and a small, outdated naval contingent.³

¹ Julian S. Corbett, *Principles of Maritime Strategy* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 49-56.

² George H. Cassar, *Kitchener's War: British Strategy from 1914 to 1916* (Washington D.C.: Brassey's Inc., 2004), 38, 43, 55; Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 118; Hordern, 65-68. The British assigned Expeditionary Force A to operations in the Middle East. Lettow believed entrepreneur Cecil Rhodes wanted East Africa.

³ Cassar, 38.

The Colonial Office appointed Major General Arthur E. Aitken commander of the East African Theater. He initially proposed limited operations on the coast and border, but expanded his aims to include the occupation of German East Africa. Aitken and his staff proposed simultaneous advances at Longido and Tanga, assuming the dual strike would force the Germans into an untenable situation. Aitken created Expeditionary Force B for the amphibious assault at Tanga and assigned 8,000 soldiers to the task. He assumed direct command of Force B, though he divided Force B between Brigadier General R. Wapshire and Brigadier General M. J. Tighe. Aitken designated 2,000 soldiers for the Longido operation and referred to the unit as Expeditionary Force C. Aitken assigned Brigadier General J. M. Stewart command of Force C. A small naval contingent under the command of Captain F. W. Caulfield would transport Force B to Tanga. After establishing a beachhead at Tanga, British forces would advance northwest along the Northern Railroad to destroy the Schutztruppe and occupy the colony. At a minimum, Aitken and his staff thought the campaign would deflect the threat to the Uganda Railroad.⁴

Historians and contemporary British officers often cast a disparaging tone on the units the India Office provided for the dual assault on German East Africa.⁵ Relative to the Germans, however, Force B and Force C consisted of effective soldiers. The 101st Grenadiers, 2nd Loyal North Lancashires and 13th Rajput of Force B were capable units with great reputations and even Force B's less capable battalions, the 98th and 63rd, had

⁴ Hordern, 65-68.

⁵ Meinertzhagen, 96; Garfield. Meinertzhagen provides the most quoted and derisive account of the Indian forces. Brian Garfield's acerbic account argues convincingly that many of Meinertzhagen's claims were overstated or simply lies.

conventional force structures and battalion level officers.⁶ The Schutztruppe's force structure stopped at the company level and few colonial officers had experience directing battalion level forces. Moreover, the British equipped their soldiers with modern magazine rifles, while over half of the Schutztruppe still operated the black powder M/71.⁷ Modern magazine rifles provided British soldiers a greater rate of fire and the ability to fire undetected. The German M/71 forced *Askaris* to reload after each shot and take aim through a cloud of black smoke.

Lettow's intelligence apparatus informed him in mid-October that approximately 10,000 sepoys were en route to East Africa. At the time, he did not know where the British planned to strike, but he considered a naval landing on the coast or an overland assault through the Taveta Gap likely options. Lettow pressed the governor for permission to fortify the coast, but Schnee refused. Schnee trusted the British to comply with a neutrality agreement stating the British would avoid destroying German ports as long as the Germans did not resist a landing at the port.⁸ His decision forced Lettow to maintain his current troop deployments in Taveta. Lettow held two field companies and one rifle company under his direct command in Moshi. In the Longido region, Major Georg Kraut monitored the border with three field companies and a rifle company. In the Taveta Gap, Major Kepler protected the northern portion with four field companies, and Captain Prince occupied the southern portion with one field company and five rifle

⁶ Hordern, 69-70; Meinertzhagen, 110, 120.

⁷ Miller, 53; Paice, 37.

⁸ Boell, 74-75.

companies.⁹ Baumstark kept watch of the coastal plain with three field companies and local volunteers.¹⁰

On 22 October 1914, Captain Baumstark confirmed that the British intended to land a significant force at Tanga. Baumstark immediately dispatched the 17th Field Company to Tanga and the 16th Field Company midway between Jassin and Tanga to monitor the coast. As the local commander, Baumstark tried to convince Schnee to place the local police under his command but failed. Concurrently, Lettow claimed the British violated the neutrality agreement, but Schnee refused Lettow's request to defend Tanga with units from Taveta.¹¹ Lettow considered the governor's decision unacceptable and planned to defend the city anyway; he traveled to Tanga on 29 October to prepare the city for the coming attack.¹² He convinced the city magistrate, Lieutenant Colonel retired Dr. Auracher, to ignore Schnee's orders and defend the city. He returned to Moshi on 30 October to await the coming attack.¹³

Force B arrived off the coast of Tanga at dawn 2 November 1914. British leadership lacked a sense of urgency, and their decisions hindered a smooth landing.¹⁴ Captain Caulfield, with Major General Aitken's approval, complied with the colonial governors' wartime agreement to provide seaports twenty-four hours to surrender and evacuate prior to attack. The same agreement that prevented Lettow from fortifying the

⁹ Boell, 53. See "Figure 2," for a visual aid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 75. Baumstark also commanded the Arab Corps consisted of about a hundred local Swahili speaking notables who volunteered for the Germans to protect their trading monopolies, encourage German goodwill, and to support the Ottomans.

¹¹ Ibid., 74-75.

¹² Ibid., 129.

¹³ Ibid., 53. See "Figure 3," for a visual aid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 77.

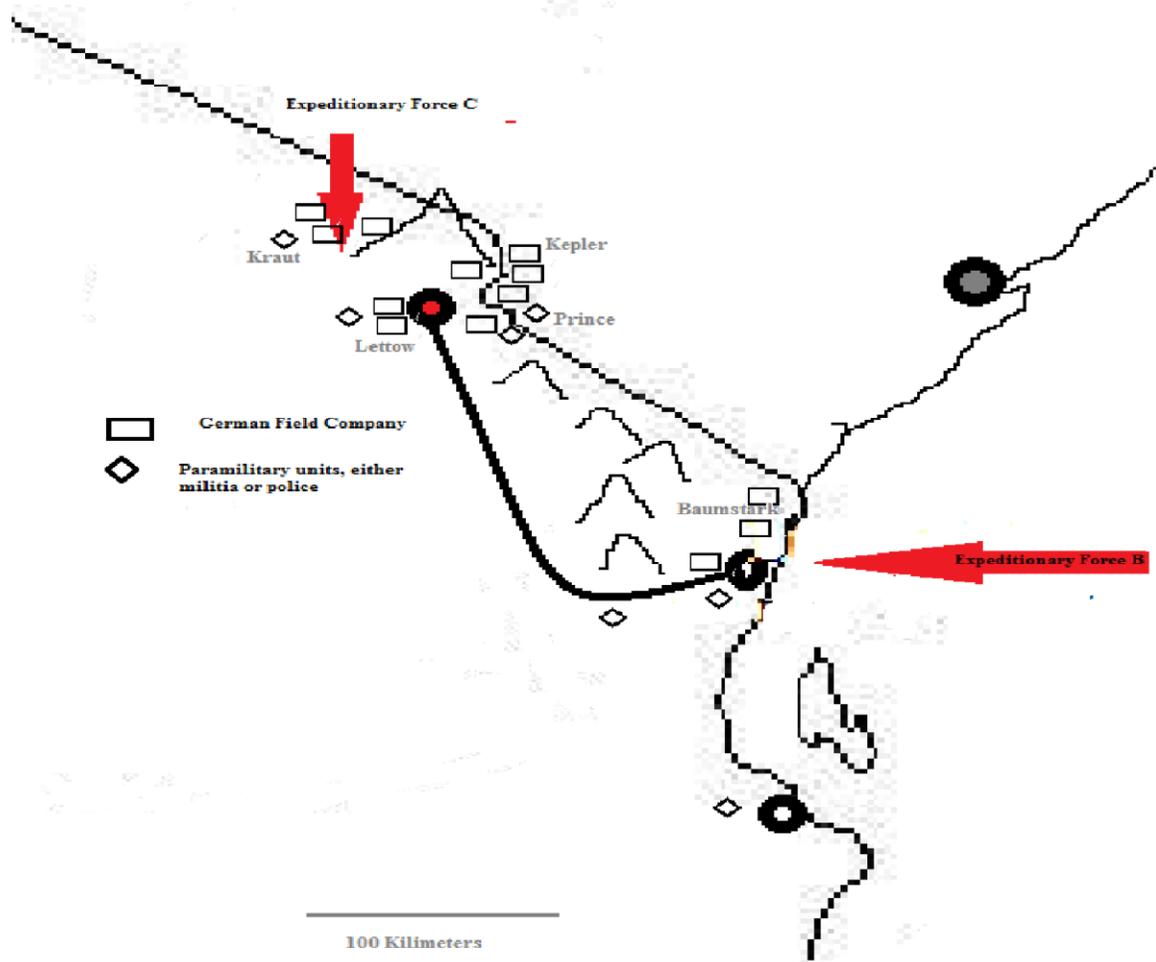


Figure 2. German force arrangements and the British plan of attack.¹⁵

coast also provided him forewarning of the British assault.¹⁶ Although Force B's landing site lay outside of the bay and over a mile from the port, neither Caulfield nor Aitken considered landing and warning Tanga at the same time. The warning party landed in Tanga at 7:30 am to inform Dr. Auracher of the coming invasion.¹⁷ Caulfield further delayed the landing by searching the Tanga Bay for mines; though Aitken protested

¹⁵ Boell, 53, 55; Hordern, 65.

¹⁶ Hordern, 76-77.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

Caulfield's decision, he deferred to the naval commander.¹⁸ The delays forced the British vanguard, the 13th Rajputs and the 61st Pioneers, to unload at night during a rainstorm.¹⁹

Force B's lethargic landing contrasted sharply with the Schutztruppe's swift redeployment. While the British complied with Schnee's requests, Lettow ignored them. Dr. Auracher evacuated Tanga and cabled telegrams across the colony, warning of the impending attack. The 17th Field Company, local police, and volunteers positioned themselves in a strong defensive position behind the mound of the train track running through Tanga while Baumstark marched the 16th Field Company south to provide reinforcements.²⁰ Lettow received a telegram from Dr. Auracher at 10:00 am and immediately sent three-and-a-half companies by rail from Moshi towards Tanga.²¹ Lettow's staff simultaneously organized a multi-day transfer of the units remaining in Taveta to Tanga²²

At 4:30 am on 3 November, Force B's exhausted vanguard marched northwest from the mangrove-dominated beach into the forest separating them from Tanga. The 1,000 strong vanguard had not slept in over twenty-four hours and suffered from insufficient provisions. The previous night's activities had included fighting the surf, finding supplies, and entrenching the beach. After a mile, the vanguard saw Tanga's white walls, but they did not see German soldiers.²³ German *Askaris*, rested and filled with beef sausage from the local butcher, waited for the British behind the railroad

¹⁸ Meinertzhagen, 87-88.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁰ Boell, 77.

²¹ Boell, 77; Hordern, 80.

²² Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 35-36; Boell, 77.

²³ Hordern, 80-81.

mound. British soldiers advanced as close as two hundred yards to the railroad, before squealing battle whistles, rifle bullets, and the steady roar of three machine guns broke the quiet of the morning.²⁴

The British suffered grievously from the opening barrage of German rifle and machine gun fire. Five of the twelve British officers present, including the commander of the 13th, died in the assault. The British vanguard fell back to a ditch at the edge of clearing and exchanged ineffective fire with the German *Askaris*. Thirty minutes into the fight 500 German reinforcements detrained at Tanga and maneuvered around the British left, threatening to flank the ditch. The remaining officers cancelled the assault and retired the 13th and 61st to their trenches on the beach; Aitken postponed further attacks until he could advance on Tanga with his entire force.²⁵

Meanwhile, Force C's attack on Longido north of Mount Kilimanjaro also failed, thereby freeing Lettow to focus his efforts on Tanga. Lettow ordered Kraut to march towards the railhead in Moshi for transfer to Tanga, intending to concentrate his forces on the primary British threat; however, the British attacked Kraut before he could execute his orders. Force C approached Longido on November 3 undetected. Using Massai scouts, the British advanced through the rocky terrain to the German position. The slightly larger British force surprised the Germans, but failed to overcome Kraut's entrenched force.²⁶

²⁴ Hordern, 81.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

²⁶ Boell, 82-83; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 46-48.

Baumstark arrived with the 16th Field Company around 9:00 pm on 3 November. Fearing Tanga's 1,000 defenders could not withstand an assault by Force B's 8,000 troops, Baumstark withdrew the force.²⁷ Lettow arrived in Tanga at 3:00 am on 4 November and reconnoitered the battlefield after speaking with Baumstark. Undaunted by the enemy's superiority in numbers, Lettow wrote "to gain all we must risk all," and reinserted all his 935 available soldiers and fifteen machine guns back into Tanga. He considered the port so essential for the defense of the colony that he risked the survival of his entire force on this one battle.²⁸

Lettow's battle plan reflected his training as a German General Staff Officer.²⁹ He designed a high-risk envelopment maneuver to counter the British advance. He decided to remain on the defensive until the British concentrated their forces on the city's perimeter. The railroad offered Lettow a strong defensive position, and he expected it to draw his enemy north. If Tanga's defenses disrupted the enemy advance as planned, he would envelop and destroy the British force with his strong reserve. The ocean covered his left, and the town provided his soldiers' secure cover, but his right remained vulnerable to a British flanking attack.³⁰

Lettow arranged his forces so that his right flank was seven times stronger than his left. He placed the able 6th Field Company in a strong position behind the railroad

²⁷ Boell, 78.

²⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 38-40, 41. Determining the number of German combatants is a delicate issue. Lettow recruited or at times impressed carriers and local mercenaries known as Ruga-Ruga into his units. The Germans also refuse to count support troops as part of their army. The British persistently double the number of troops Lettow had available. The number of available troops was probably higher, but the number provided represents the number of troops in the German payroll.

²⁹ Schlieffen, *Cannae*.

³⁰ Boell, 79-80.

and protected their right flank with the 16th Field Company, extending the line southward from the railroad.³¹ Captain Baumstark would command the 16th along with a reserve of the 1st Field Company, 6th Rifle Company, 17th Field Company, and some volunteers. Lettow held Prince's two rifle companies, and the 13th Field Company behind Baumstark as a general reserve. He impatiently awaited the arrival of units from around the colony including the 4th Field Company scheduled to arrive in Tanga around 4:00 pm.³² Lettow's headquarters lay south of the Moshi railroad close to both the German right flank and the train station.

On 4 November, Aitken spread Force B's 7,500 available troops across the cape in five columns facing the northwest towards Tanga. Aitken felt confident that his right would hold the Germans down in Tanga, allowing his left to pivot around his central column. He ordered Tighe to lead a frontal assault with the northern two columns against the seaport, and he ordered Wapshire to flank the German position with the southern three columns. Aitken assigned Tighe the 2nd and 3rd Kashmir Rifles along with a reserve of the battered 13th Rajputs and the 61st Pioneers to protect the right. He provided Wapshire the excellent Lancashires to hold center and reinforced their advance with the 98th Infantry. He assigned 63th Palamcottah Light Infantry and the 101st Grenadiers to the British left flank. To cover the advance, he requested the three British warships waiting in the harbor to offer fire support. Aitken hoped Force B's superior numbers would overwhelm the Germans, allowing the British to capture the port intact.³³

³¹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 39.

³² Several more companies arrived after the battle but did not play a role in the events of 4 November 1914.

³³ Hordern, 544-547, 84, Sketch 10; Meinertzhagen, 88-89. Meinertzhagen's published war diary probably offers the best maps of the battle and campaign. The official British history's maps are more precise

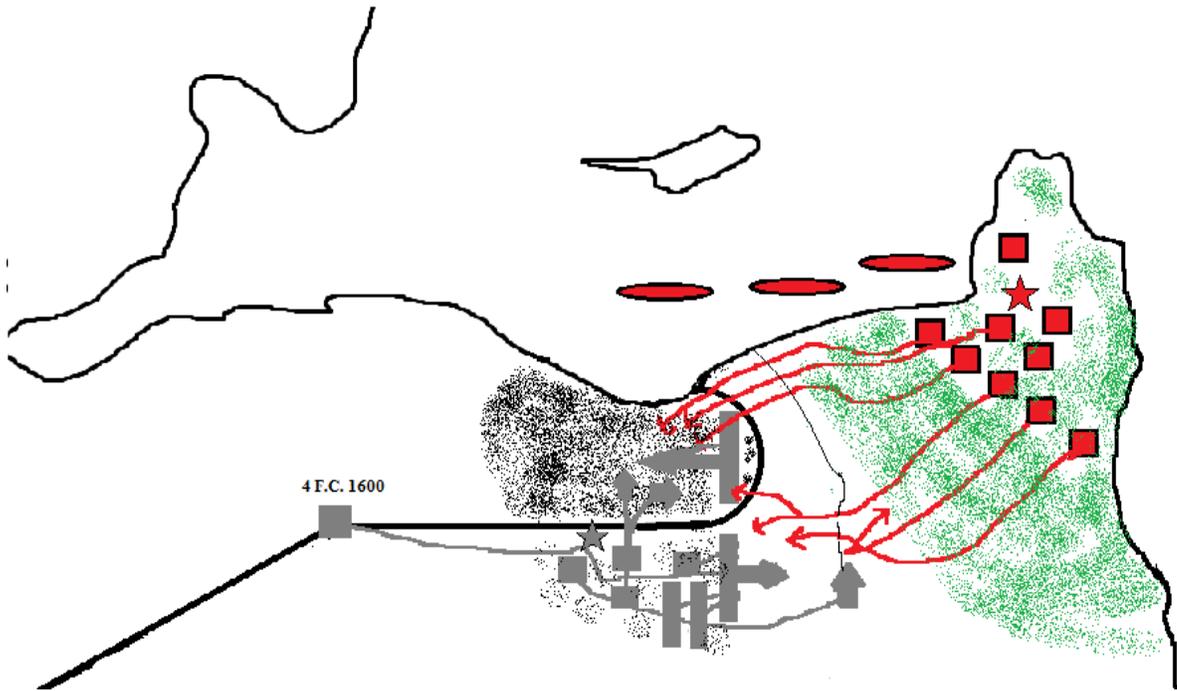


Figure 3. Battle of Tanga, 4 November 1914.³⁴

Lettow and his *Askaris* awaited attack in the hot African sun until shortly after 2:30 pm when patrols alerted the Germans of Force B's advance. General Tighe's columns opened fire at Tanga from along the coast, having drifted northwards in the thick brush. The three units pressed hard against the railroad and naval shells crashed into the city.³⁵ Despite its strong position, the 6th Field Company faltered under the crossfire. The Kashmir Companies broke through the railroad line, chasing the *Askaris* into the city. Lettow sent Prince's two-company force over the railroad to seal the rupture, leaving himself only one company in reserve after just fifteen minutes of combat. The

though technically complex. The German official history offers large pullout maps, but its map of the battle does not compare to either of the British offerings.

³⁴ Meinertzhagen, Maps 3, 4, 7; Boell, 81; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 39-47; Goggle Maps, under "Tanzania" maps.google.com (accessed June 20, 2011). The city of Tanga has expanded, but the railroad, European District, and Native District are still visible on Google Earth.

³⁵ Hordern, 85.

ratio between the German left and right switched from 1:7 to 3:5. The British had overrun the strongest position only to find themselves in an urban melee—a soldier’s nightmare.³⁶

As Lettow expected, Tanga’s defenses drew the British north and left the southern flank vulnerable for counterattack. Force B’s displacement northwards ended its opportunity to flank Tanga and forced it to take the port house by house. The Lancashires drifted north as well to reestablish contact with Tighe’s columns in Tanga. The Lancashires’ maneuver forced Baumstark to commit his three and half reserve companies to hold the line. However, the Lancashires’ drift northward opened up a gap between them and the southernmost columns. The dense brush south of the city left Wapshire’s columns isolated and his formations thinned as elements worked north to reestablish contact. As the 63rd attempted to reconnect with the Lancashires, they crossed Baumstark’s machine guns on the right flank. The 63rd fell back haphazardly under the copious fire, drawing the dispersed 101st further north.³⁷

At 3:15 pm, Tighe committed his reserve battalion into Tanga at the same time the Lancashires broke across the railroad into the city. Baumstark checked the advance by pushing his units forward into a gap created by the 63rd’s retreat. At 3:45 pm, the 101st finally found its way to the fight and pushed Baumstark’s attack back with a counter flank.³⁸ Having committed all of Force B, the British had reached their culminating point

³⁶ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 40-41.

³⁷ Hordern, 85-87.

³⁸ Boell, 80. The British official accounts are very vague on the time of events and its battle rendition is inferior in precision to the German account of the 4 November. The German and British accounts battle accounts from 1914-1916 are very similar. The correlation breaks down at the Battle of Mahiwa in 1917.

within the battle.³⁹ The Germans looked ready to crumble at 4:30 pm, but Lettow saved the 13th Field Company, his best-trained and equipped unit, for this very moment. The 13th flanked the 101st from the south, spraying four machine guns and hundreds of M/91s' fire into the British flank. Luckily for Lettow, the 4th Field Company arrived by train ten minutes later. He immediately directed the 4th to maneuver to the south of the 13th, intending to surround the British. Exhausted from travel and barely aware of the situation, the 4th emerged from the morass of the native housing district to the north of the 13th.⁴⁰ Regardless of the mistake, the rifle fire from the 4th disjointed the beleaguered 101st. Their panic rippled north into the city, and Tighe withdrew his bloodied force to a ditch at the forest line where angry bees compounded the misery. The tumult was over by 5:30 pm.⁴¹

Commanders on both sides of the line bickered amongst themselves over their next action. Lettow intended to finish his "Cannae" by pursuing the British back to the beach, but a misunderstood signal and drooping heads denied him a vigorous pursuit.⁴² Rather than counterattacking, Lettow's subordinates on his left flank retreated from the city. Force B braced for attack in fear that the German left flank's retreat signal was for a charge. Intelligence officer Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen recognized the retreat signal from an inspection tour in Germany, and though he tried to convince Aitken that the Germans were retiring, the shaken general would not budge.⁴³

³⁹ Clausewitz, 85, 528. Clausewitz defines the culminating point of an attack in "Book Seven."

⁴⁰ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 42.

⁴¹ Boell, 80.

⁴² Paice, 58.

⁴³ Meinertzhagen, 93.

Aitken believed the British operation at Tanga had failed by 4 November. Over the next two days, Force B's leadership negotiated with Lettow and reloaded Force B onto transport ships. Some British officers worried Lettow would assault Force B on 5 November as it re-embarked, but Lettow contented himself with shelling the beach.⁴⁴ Force B still outnumbered his army and the only way to take the British position was a frontal assault against an entrenched enemy. Moreover, Lettow lacked the troops and facilities needed to keep such large quantities of prisoners as Force B outnumbered the total population of Germans residing in the colony.⁴⁵

The victory at Tanga dominated Lettow's thinking, confirming his belief in the effectiveness of battles. His early aggression distracted British forces from the Middle East, and he decisively defeated British attempts to disrupt his operations.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Tanga had an adverse effect of scaring the Allies away from East Africa. The British transferred their resources to the Middle East and Southwest Africa, leaving British East Africa with only a skeleton defense force. Lettow's battle tactics, which promised quick victories, conflicted with his own strategy of tying down a large enemy force for an extended period.

In 1915, the East Africa Campaign entered into a *Stellungskrieg* or "war of position."⁴⁷ Lettow reacted to the stagnation like General Erich von Falkenhayn—he

⁴⁴ Meinertzhagen, 99.

⁴⁵ Boell, 15; Hordern, 69-70.

⁴⁶ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 130-133.

⁴⁷ General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, *Ostafrika Siedlungland? Welche Kriegserfahrungen liegen hierueber vor?* (Dusseldorf, Germany: 1934), 11; See also Citino, *The German Way of War*. The opposite of *Stellungskrieg* or "war of position" is *Bewegungskrieg* or "war of movement." Citino's work *The German Way of War* posits that *Bewegungskrieg* is the German way of war. He argues that *Stellungskrieg* is a scientific form of war while *Bewegungskrieg* is an artistic form of war.

hoped to bleed the British white through increasing the number of raids on the Uganda Railroad.⁴⁸ He ordered his commanders to attack the enemy's army through any means available, determined to destroy the enemy's fighting power.⁴⁹ He issued requests twice a month for eight to twenty volunteers to venture against British trains.⁵⁰ He sent forty-five raids across a "no man's land" of thorns, sun, foul water, and aggressive animals; the Schutztruppe's casualties grew steadily. Many first-time soldiers volunteered for raids, but few volunteered for a second mission because raids proved dangerous and unrewarding ventures.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the small raids kept his units active and slowed British railroad construction to less than one hundred meters in 1915.⁵²

Lettow hoped to provoke the British into a major battle by advancing on Nairobi; however, he did not have the transportation, support, or troops to carry out such operations.⁵³ The Schutztruppe needed a railroad to conduct a mobile offensive. Lettow mobilized the colony's resources to build infrastructure and accelerated the growth of his force to facilitate such attack. Lettow constructed a narrow-gauge railroad from the Northern Railroad to the Central Railroad to prepare for increased construction in the

⁴⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 64; Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 52; Boell, 136; Görlitz, 176. Falkenhayn and Lettow both participated in the China Expedition. Neither officer truly embraced guerilla strategy nor a war of position and reacted to failure very similarly. When their operations failed, they assumed they had not tried hard enough to achieve the objective.

⁴⁹ Boell, 93, 117.

⁵⁰ Moyd, 199; Boell, 135-136.

⁵¹ Gregorius, 103.

⁵² Boell, 115; "The War of Stagnated Fronts," trans. Colonel George Ruhlen, *Militär-Wochenblatt* 32 (1922); Charles Ardant du Picq, "Confidence, The Soul of Victory," in *The Art of War in World History: From Antiquity to the Nuclear Age*, ed. Gérard Chaliand, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994):754-759. Picq recognized the absence of action as a pernicious evil in modern combat. Bored and inactive troops are panicky, unruly, and less motivated to fight.

⁵³ Boell, 104-105.

north, but efforts further north failed. He tried to build roads to substitute for tracks, but the ambitious plan never came to fruition.⁵⁴

Like the Germans, the British lacked the resources to conduct a major advance against the colony. Many young British officers pressed for an attack, but the British generals remained hesitant to chance a full-scale invasion. British generals contented themselves with a passive defense of the colony, especially the Uganda Railroad, and preparations for a future advance; they focused on constructing a track toward Taveta.⁵⁵ Britain successfully seized Jassin in January 1915, but Lettow repelled the attack shortly after, inflicting heavy losses. The failure to hold Jassin discouraged further conventional operations across the border.⁵⁶ In June 1915, the British destroyed the German's only radio station at Bukobu, but British forces evacuated shortly after.

The break from major operations allowed the colony to function at a certain level of normality. By emphasizing construction within the colony and volunteer raids against the British, Lettow mollified the critical settler population by preventing their campaigning far from home. Schnee continued his traditional role as governor, accommodating the native's concerns, settling domestic disputes. He contributed to the war by encouraging a shift in local industry away from exports towards military supplies.⁵⁷ Intertribal trade continued as normal and both sides took advantage of trade caravans for information.⁵⁸ The colony's major concern remained preserving the social

⁵⁴ Boell, 110.

⁵⁵ Meinertzhagen, 125.

⁵⁶ *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung*, January 20, 1915; Deppe, 95. Deppe noted that Lettow and other officers used this newspaper and their own publications as propaganda to lift the spirits of the soldiers.

⁵⁷ Boell, 154.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

order despite the war.⁵⁹ For example, the colonists worried more about the Africans' plundering of Bukobu in June 1915 than the Allies success at taking the city.⁶⁰

Overall, the Schutztruppe's competence, size, and supply increased. By March 1916, the Schutztruppe employed 16,000-20,000 combat troops.⁶¹ Lettow increased his fighting power by 9,000 *Askaris* and over 3,000 Europeans, but the growth presented new problems.⁶² The Schutztruppe ran out of enough officers to maintain the segregation between white units and Askari units and increased the size of his force. Many of the new officers absorbed from the settlers and naval personnel could not speak Swahili, which hindered communication between *Askaris* and their new officers.⁶³ In order to resolve the problem, he standardized the company structure by mixing in one European for every ten *Askaris* to create 220-soldier field companies.⁶⁴ The Schutztruppe perfected several ad hoc means of supply including making homespun clothes, converting naval guns to field artillery, and stealing enemy uniforms.⁶⁵ East Africa received welcomed reinforcements and supplies from two blockade-runners and the SMS Königsberg.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the Schutztruppe stole 1,250 rifles from the Allies and impressed some

⁵⁹ Boell, 129, 154.

⁶⁰ Hordern, 153.

⁶¹ Boell, 28.

⁶² Boell, 28; Michelle R. Moyd's dissertation "Becoming askari: African Soldiers and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa, 1850-1918" (PhD diss., Cornell University, 2008). Boell claims the Schutztruppe reached a maximum of 3,007 Europeans and 12,100 *Askaris*. The British always put the number much higher for a variety of reasons. Boell's claim is not fabricated, but it does not include the occasional tribal militias or the ready reserve of carriers ready to take an Askari's place. See Chapter 2 to get a better picture of why it was honorable to be an Askari. Moyd's dissertation is the best monograph available on Askari service.

⁶³ Deppe, 77.

⁶⁴ Hordern, 260; Farwell, 110.

⁶⁵ Lettow, *Ostafrika Siedlungland*, 12.

⁶⁶ Vice Admiral a. D. Max Looff, *Kreuzerfahrt und Buschkampf: Mit S.M.S. "Königsberg" in Deutsch-Ostafrika* (Berlin: Andon Bertinetti, 1929); D. R. Earl Christiansen, "Durch!" *Mit Kriegsmaterial zu Lettow-Vorbeck* (Stuttgart: Verlag für Volkskunst, 1918), 113-120.

1,000 private rifles into regular service, bringing their armory to 8,250 smoky rifles and 6,250 smokeless rifles.⁶⁷

Although the Allies remained passive in East Africa, Allied forces advanced energetically on other German colonies. Most importantly, General Jan Smuts and an army from the Union of South Africa deprived Germany of South West Africa. Following the success, Smuts hoped to continue the Union's expansion. As an experienced political leader and a hero of the Boer War, Smuts convinced the Union to fight in East Africa. Smuts argued Germany's continued presence in East Africa would destabilize the tense racial politics of southern Africa.⁶⁸ He intended to unify as much of Africa's white population as possible, especially those south of the Zambezi River. Britain promised Smuts South West Africa as a protectorate, and several of Smuts's associates envisioned making East Africa a protectorate as well.⁶⁹

Smuts and 15,000 Boer soldiers arrived in theater early 1916, changing the war.⁷⁰ His strategy focused on entrapping Lettow's forces through a dual-pronged assault of the Taveta position. Smuts's strategy avoided pitched battles and relied on maneuverability, which opposed Lettow's strategy of decisive battles.⁷¹ The Allied army's superior capabilities and Smuts's aggressive maneuver-based strategy gave the Allies the

⁶⁷ Boell, 142.

⁶⁸ Jan Smuts, *Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.3 June 1910-November 1918*, ed. W.K. Hancock and Jean van Der Poel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 100, 373. Smuts speaks of grand racial aristocracy and promotes white racial unity as ballast against Black African influence. The Union of South Africa underwent a civil war in 1915 prior to Smuts support for an East Africa Campaign.

⁶⁹ Jan Christiaan Smuts, *The British Commonwealth of Nations: A Speech made by General Smuts, On May 15th, 1917* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918); W. K. Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years, 1870-1919* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 416; Robert Citino, *Germany and the Union of South Africa in the Nazi Period* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), Chapter 1. Smuts achieved rapprochement with the Weimar Republic after the war.

⁷⁰ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 71-72.

⁷¹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 119-120; *Selections from the Smuts Papers*. 440-444.

initiative.⁷² Smuts failed to trap the Germans at Taveta, but his offensive threw the Germans into a rapid retreat.

Meanwhile, Lettow celebrated the diversion of troops to East Africa, falsely attributing renewed interest in the theater on his raids into Kenya rather than the Union's imperialism. He planned to defeat the invasion with conventional strategy, not a guerrilla strategy. His defense plan adhered to the conventional military principal of concentration of force rather than the unconventional principle of dispersion. He intended to create localized superiority by using his interior lines to concentrate his forces on disparate British columns; however, East Africa lacked the transportation needed to execute his complicated scheme. Tactically, he sought to destroy Smuts's army through aggressive attacks and unsuspected attacks to the flank and rear.⁷³

Lettow claimed to have planned the retreat in order to weaken the British, but his actions indicated he thought a decisive battle would change the war.⁷⁴ He attacked the British vigorously at Salaita Hill, Latema, Reata, Kondoa Iringi, Morogoro, and Dutumi, but failed to win a decisive victory and suffered heavy losses. Smuts responded to German attacks by advancing along other axis, limiting the impact of Lettow's strategy.⁷⁵ Nevertheless, the Schutztruppe repeatedly escaped Smuts's counter envelopments, encouraging German soldiers to compare their retreat to Xenophon's retreat in *Anabasis*.⁷⁶

⁷² Meinertzhagen, 112, 120, 186.

⁷³ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 79, 119-120; Boell, 248-252.

⁷⁴ Boell, 105.

⁷⁵ Boell, 187, 230; Hordern, 370.

⁷⁶ Gregorius, xiii.

East Africa, as a rule, lacked the rail or supply network needed to sustain major offensive operations. Fighting on friendly territory eased the Schutztruppe's supply, but German colonial rule disintegrated under the weight of advancing armies.⁷⁷ Lettow ensured his European soldiers and Askari NCOs received excellent medical care and proper rations, but largely ignored the health of other campaign members.⁷⁸ Commanders expected conscript *Askaris* and carriers to march and fight on subsistence rations and little rest.⁷⁹ The constant toiling, changing climate, and food shortages led to a high desertion and illness rates.⁸⁰ Lettow survived ten bouts of malaria during the war, mostly on imitation Quinine, which soldiers referred to as "*Lettow Schnapps*."⁸¹ Lacking the supplies and desire to provide medical care to his soldiers, officers frequently abandoned the sick and wounded to the mercies of Africa.⁸² Food shortages also angered African populations as soldiers pillaged, poached, and prematurely harvested crops for food. Lettow wrote, "After the enemy had penetrated the country...the native became a real danger to us: and then it was, indeed, very great. The native has a fine sense of the transfer of real power from one hand to the other."⁸³

⁷⁷ Deppe, 197-198.

⁷⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 220; Deppe, 101. Deppe and other campaign members refer to the toll disease took on the German force. Fortunately, the Germans had an advantage as the best doctors in exotic diseases were researching in East Africa when the war broke out. German *Askaris* were also more resilient than the British Boers and Indians. Deppe, a field doctor, blamed the change in climate for the high sickness rates.

⁷⁹ Deppe, 176-177.

⁸⁰ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 59; Thornhill, 164. A German Askari had an opportunity to escape after British disturbances but refused the offer, maintaining his composure while fellow Africans looted his supplies.

⁸¹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 25, 195.

⁸² Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 25, 195; Thornhill, 137-138.

⁸³ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 34.

Fighting in East Africa was as miserable for Allied soldiers as the Germans. On the march, Boer soldier-diaries reiterate the sheer amount of carnage—human or otherwise in the war. Regiments of vultures and a trail of horse carcasses followed each British column. British soldiers noted the confusion of their battles as the enemy seemed both invisible and ubiquitous in battle. They remembered the screech of Askari battle whistles awakening them at night, the shock of hidden machine guns, and the occasional sniper disrupting the march in the African sun. Their fear inflated both the German threat and the Schutztruppe’s legend.⁸⁴

English sergeant Daniel J. Fewster remembered:

I freely admit that there was much more metal flying about in France and that there was a lot of gas, which was unknown in East Africa, but then one had good food and a decent supply of it. The climate was more congenial to our natures [as much as seventy-five percent of South African units were sick at any one time]. One had spells off duty when things were a bit cushy. In France, one was troubled by only one kind of insect, not dozens of different species. And again, France was a civilised country, and East Africa, away from the larger towns was not. I would sooner hear a big shell travelling along like an express train, than hear a lion roar a few yards away. I have heard both very often, but a shell never made my flesh run up my spine until it turned my hair into pin wire.⁸⁵

British supply lines nearly buckled in early 1916 and finally broke later in the year. Smuts tried to keep British frontline units supplied from depots in Kenya, but the rudimentary supply system could not keep pace with the advance. Smuts temporarily alleviated the problem by seizing ports connected to Germany’s railroads, but supply

⁸⁴ Hordern, 254; Frances Walton Lister, *Diary of Frances Walton Lister: Number 545 of B Squadron 3 Troop, 4th South African Horse in German East Africa*, The South African Military History Society, <http://rapidttp.co.za/milhist/diaries/lister.html> (accessed April 15, 2011). See also Thornhill, Wienholt, Smuts, and Meinertzhagen.

⁸⁵ Joseph Daniel Fewster, *A Hull Sergeant’s Great War Diary* on The South African Military History Society, <http://rapidttp.co.za/milhist/diaries/zgead0.html> (accessed 15 April 2011), “Postscript.”

remained the Allies' greatest obstacle. Smuts's supply measures took the Allied forces to the Rufiji River, but heavy rain and increasing supply distances forced him to stop. Further offensives would be virtually impossible until his armies could receive supplies from new coastal landings.⁸⁶

Nevertheless, Smuts's offensive earned him a position in the War Office. His claims of conquest attracted British politicians and his advance appeared impressive on a map, despite his inability to catch Lettow and conclude the struggle. Smuts's campaign promised to leave his successor a disease-ridden force and a failing supply system in the midst of the rainy season. He left East Africa for Britain in January 1917, transferring command to Lieutenant General A. R. Hoskins.⁸⁷ Hoskins decided to avoid major actions until the weather improved.⁸⁸

Lettow's victory in Tanga solidified his commitment to a conventional strategy espoused by the German General Staff. He ranked his victory at Tanga alongside Hannibal's victory at Cannae.⁸⁹ The situation between the German and Allied armies in East Africa remained unchanged from November 1914 to March 1916. The British refused to launch a conventional campaign against the German colony after their defeat at Tanga while Lettow could not advance against the British given his miniscule resources. The static conditions forced him to adopt raiding to erode the enemy's numbers, provoke a response, and deflect resources from crucial theaters. Smuts's invasion defeated

⁸⁶ *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 261, 425; Hordern, 217-218; Meinertzhagen, 200; Donald C. Savage, and J. Forbes Munro, "Carrier Corps Recruitment in the British East Africa Protectorate, 1914-1918," *The Journal of African History* 7 no. 2 (1966): 313-342, for an excellent recount of British recruitment troubles and Smut's efforts of raising more African soldiers while avoiding racial conflict.

⁸⁷ *Selections from the Smuts Papers*, 438, 461-463.

⁸⁸ Capt. W.D. Downes, *With the Nigerians in German East Africa* (London: Methuen, 1919), 84-88.

⁸⁹ Boell, 80, 429-430; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 44-5, 47-48.

Lettow's conventional strategy, but his supply chain prevented the Allies from maximizing their success. The Schutztruppe struggled to continue the war, but Lettow remained confident that a decisive battle would change the war.

CHAPTER 4

EXIT STRATEGIES, JANUARY 1917-NOVEMBER 1918

If the same terrible time was to come again, and I had my choice, I should choose the civilised country.

*Joseph Daniel Fewster,
A Hull Sergeant's Great War Diary.*

Between January and May 1917, circumstance provided Lettow impetus to abandon his strategy of decisive battle and pursue other methods of resistance. Smuts's campaign deteriorated the Schutztruppe's battle-worthiness and stressed the *Askaris'* relationship with their German overlords. Lettow needed to rectify the dire situation to continue the war. He rejected the unconventional solutions offered by three talented subordinates and continued his conventional German strategy with greater ardor than he had in 1916. In spite of contrary evidence, he believed a great victory would delay the British assault, instill confidence, and provide supplies for his shrinking army. Lettow remained faithful to his conventional battle strategy.

Captain Max Wintgens and his protégé Captain Heinrich Naumann offered Lettow a guerrilla war alternative, utilizing the techniques of *Buschkrieg*. They led their detachment on a journey back north into German territory occupied by the Allies. Lettow, however, dismissed Wintgens and Naumann's alternative because he did not consider guerrilla warfare an effective substitute for battle. He assumed a similar strategy only after the Schutztruppe was too weak to fight another battle.

Naval Captain Max Looff beseeched Lettow to adopt a new strategy that combined defensive tactics with his defensive strategy. Influenced by his defense of the Königsberg in the Rufiji Delta, Looff argued for a fortified position in the fertile Mahenga Mountains. Lettow spurned Looff's plan as unaggressive and inherently defeatist because it contradicted Lettow's trust in *Bewegungskrieg*.

Lettow attempted his last decisive battle at Mahiwa along the Lukuleidi River. His attack drove the British from the field and inflicted heavy casualties, but the Schutztruppe's losses at Mahiwa only worsened the German's desperate situation. With the British closing in on his headquarters, Lettow grudgingly accepted that he could not continue his conventional campaign. He refused to surrender, and instead committed a detachment to a guerrilla raid into Mozambique. The new guerrilla campaign aligned well with the Schutztruppe's capabilities and *Buschkrieg*. He avoided capture from November 1917 to November 1918, detaining large Allied forces. His success as a guerrilla in 1918 eclipsed the defeats of 1916 and 1917, and encouraged historians to view 1918 as a continuation of his original battle strategy rather than a profound shift towards guerrilla warfare.

Short of ammunition, medical goods, soldiers, and food, Lettow struggled in 1917 to keep field companies at full strength. His force was a third of the size it had been at its apex and morale sunk to its nadir.¹ Lettow's army stood in the least developed region of the colony and had no chance of receiving supplies from Germany. Although German and Swahili plantation owners of Lukuleidi Valley supported Lettow, a dismal

¹ Boell, 300; Deppe, 101, 197.

maize harvest in 1917 limited their usefulness. The resulting famine emptied supply depots, starved *Askaris*, and impoverished the native population.² Disease thinned the ranks as German doctors lacked the necessary supplies to cope with black water fever, dysentery, and malaria; the doctor's bitter pseudo-quinine drink "Lettow Schnapps" helped counteract malaria among the malnourished army, but many soldiers became too sick to continue.³ Furthermore, the Allies denied him access to the colony's main supply of recruits by occupying the Central Highlands and several large tribes, including the Hehe and Makonde, joined the Allied cause.⁴

To make matters worse, internal unrest forced Lettow to divide his limited resources between his base area and the British army.⁵ Desertion forced Lettow to increase the number of loyal *Askaris* guarding porters and conscripts.⁶ Recruits feared German vengeance should they be caught trading sides and Askari non-commissioned officers took their frustrations out on their inferiors.⁷ Hungry *Askaris* aggravated the tense situation by stealing food from the natives, and in the ensuing revolts, a tribe killed forty out of sixty-six soldiers in a German foraging party.⁸

² Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 175, 178, 193; Boell, 316. Post-war propaganda masked much of the native hostility in order to press the British to return the colony. Unfortunately, the propaganda also masked the strategic realities of operating in partially hostile territory.

³ Lettow, *My Reminiscences*, 25, 195.

⁴ Liebenow, 85; Loeff, "Chapter 11;" Boell, 242, 255; Hordern, 509; Paice, 388. Central Highland Tribes like the Nyamwezi, Sukkuma, and Kimbu supplied the Schutztruppe with the majority of its soldiers. The Central Highland Tribes served as the Swahili Coastal Tribes' ally and trade partners in the interior prior to the German arrival. Swahili traders founded Tabora, the greatest city in the Central Highlands, to facilitate the symbiotic relationship between the tribes. The tribes expediently switched their allegiance to the Germans after a series of costly rebellions.

⁵ Strachan, 9; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 196; Boell, 309.

⁶ Thornhill, 165; Hordern, 158; Miller, 12.

⁷ Thornhill, 142, 164; Gregorius, 80-81; Wissmann, 63; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 59.

⁸ Boell, 240.

Politically, Lettow faced new external threats in addition to old internal threats. In 1916, Portugal officially joined the war, forcing Lettow to open up a new front to the previously quiescent south.⁹ The Portuguese sent a force of 5,000 *Askaris* to take control of the Rovuma River, which formed the pre-war border between the colonies.¹⁰ Compressed into a small region, the conflict between detachment commanders intensified. Loeff, Schnee, and Lettow struggled to delineate their zones of influence.¹¹ Schnee and many of Lettow's subordinates considered it pointless to continue and encouraged Lettow to surrender. For example, Major von Grawert refused to continue the fight and surrendered his company to the British in January 1917. Lettow dismissed Grawert's reasoning, claiming the Major greatly exaggerated the desperation of the supply conditions.¹²

Grawert's contemporaries Wintgens and Naumann rebelled against Lettow's strategy, but their insubordination forced him to consider another option—guerrilla raids. Their strategy demonstrated their training as colonial officers in the art of *Buschkrieg*. Wintgens and Naumanns avoided battle and instead preyed on the Allies' tenuous supply chain. British soldiers remarked that "he [Wintgens] stripped the country of food so that rear of him the country appeared as if a plague of locusts had past that way."¹³ Wintgens and Naumann moved their force deep into the British area by moving through weakly defended areas, avoiding search parties. To resupply their arms, they ambushed small

⁹ Boell, 300.

¹⁰ Paice, 269-271; Loeff, 130-132.

¹¹ Boell, 239,258, 298-300.

¹² Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 188.

¹³ Downes, 116.

units of men and besieged isolated outposts. The duo treated natives who supplied food and intelligence well, but punished resisters with rampant pillaging.¹⁴

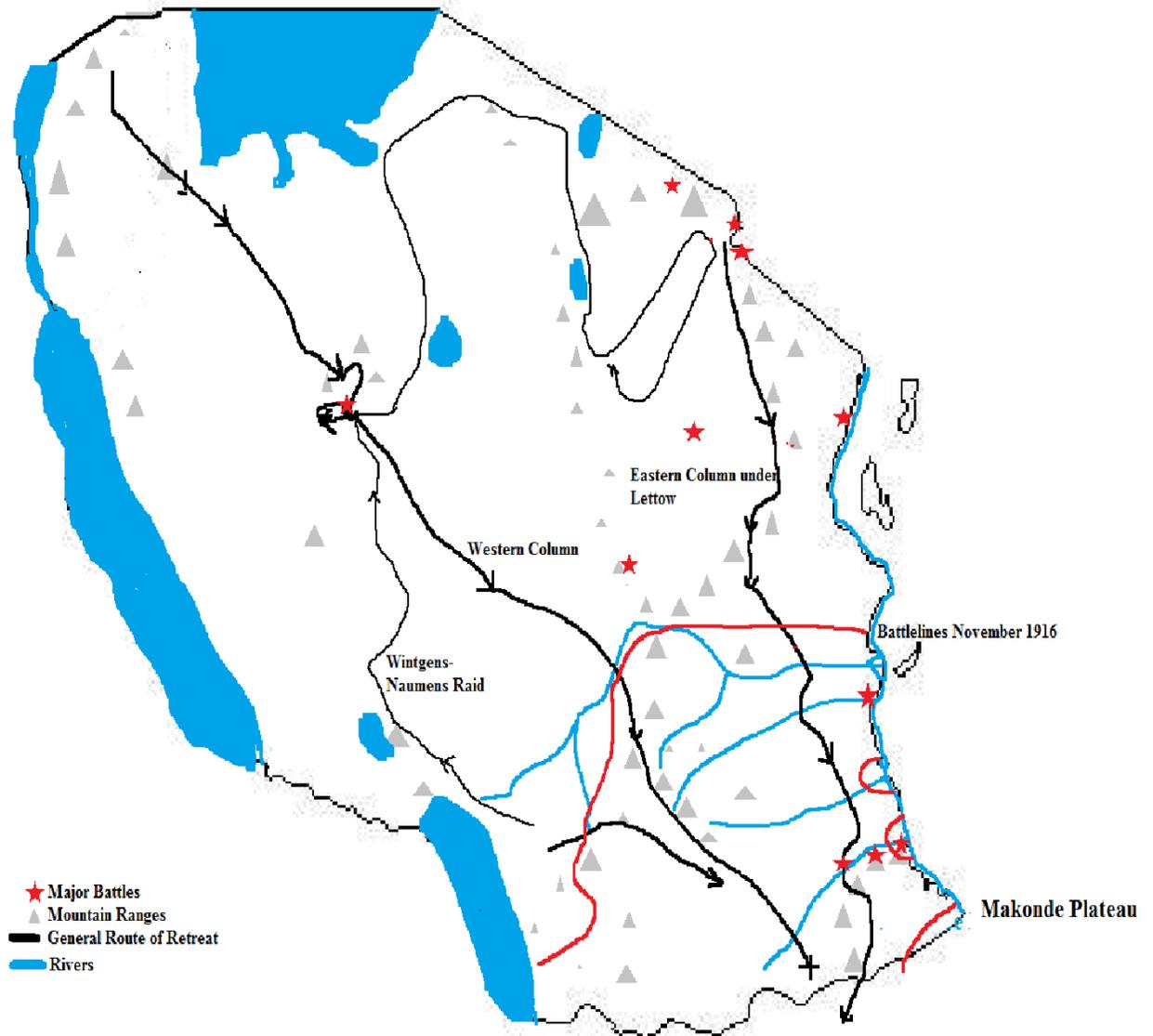


Figure 4. The general routes of the Schutztruppe's retreat.¹⁵

Prior to the raid, Wintgens and Naumann had demonstrated their skill fighting border patrols during the first two years of the war. Neither officer participated in the

¹⁴ See also Chapter 2 and Wissmann.

¹⁵ Paice, xxiv.

Battle of Tanga because Lettow left them to conduct independent raiding operations in Rwanda. Wintgens's defense of Tabora in 1916 checked the Allies advance for several months and retook several lost positions.¹⁶ Although his column was capable of continued resistance, Lettow's retreat in the east and General Wahle's retreat in the west isolated Wintgens in the "Tabora Pocket."¹⁷ On Lettow's orders, Captain Wintgens skillfully escaped the closing Allied pinchers and journeyed south.¹⁸ Wintgens and Naumann reconnected with the German forces during a bad harvest, and Lettow ordered them to requisition food from the local tribes.¹⁹

On 18 February 1917, Wintgens disobeyed Lettow's general order to remain in contact with Kraut's detachment, venturing north in search of forage.²⁰ Wintgens led his force of approximately 500 men toward Tabora, a region with strong indigineous support for German colonialism.²¹ Their effort distracted approximately 6,000 troops from the main front to pursue the guerrillas soldiers.²² Wintgens became too ill to continue in May 1917 and transferred his command to Naumann, who continued the campaign until September 1917. Naumann led the dwindling force towards Taveta where he encountered stiff resistance and then redirected his raid to the south. The British captured Naumann in October 1917 near the Central Railroad using information from native scouts.²³

¹⁶ Boell, 282.

¹⁷ Ibid., 283.

¹⁸ Hordern, 461, Sketch 62.

¹⁹ Boell, 298, 325.

²⁰ Ibid., 325.

²¹ Boell, 298; See also Downes, "Chapter VII: The Naumann Pursuit," 116-133.

²² Strachan, 91-92;

²³ Paice, 314; Boell, 332. Boell wrote that Naumann's campaign ended in September, but Naumann official surrendered in early October.

Though the Wintgens-Naumann strategy offered several advantages over Lettow's strategy, he rejected it.²⁴ Lettow believed his subordinates wasted their men because their operation "became separated so far from the main theatre of war as to be of little use."²⁵ Lettow would have preferred that Wintgens and Naumann had attacked the British field forces directly; he considered guerrilla war a dirty, inferior form of war which unnecessarily involved noncombatants.²⁶ For once, Schnee agreed with Lettow as raiding within the country damaged colonial infrastructure.²⁷ A guerrilla campaign required him to reverse the centralization of command and shrink his field forces. Lettow believed that a conventional strategy best protected the rich Lukuleidi Valley, which he expected to supply his force in 1918.²⁸

Captain Max Looff and his sailors' success defending the Königsberg against British assaults encouraged a positional strategy. Looff began the war raiding British shipping along the coast of East Africa as the captain of the German cruiser the Königsberg. In October 1914, failing equipment and a superior British fleet forced Looff to take refuge in the Rufiji River Delta south of Dar-es-Salam. The delta proved innavigable for British oceangoing vessels, and Looff placed his ship beyond the range of British naval guns. He further complicated the British effort by building hidden machine gun nests, stringing chains across the inlets, and digging protected artillery positions along the banks of the largest inlets. His sailors' intricate defense system, shrewd

²⁴ Downes, 116-130.

²⁵ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 189.

²⁶ Boell, 117, 326. See also Chapter 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 196.

gunnery, and the Rufiji River's natural barriers collectively denied the British victory for eight months.

The British brought in shallow draft gunboats and effectively ended the standoff in August 1915. Nevertheless, the Germans salvaged most of the ship's valuable war material including its main guns, which the Germans converted into field artillery.²⁹

Looff spent the period from August 1915 until the end of 1917 combating British naval landings. In late 1916 Lettow replaced Looff with Wahle after Lettow decided the British advance from the coastal port of Lindi threatened the Schutztruppe's survival.³⁰ Looff's final assignment pitted him against the rebelling tribes and Portuguese intruders on the Makonde Plateau. Looff drove the Portuguese away by denying them access to water and crushing the Portuguese native rebels with superior arms.³¹

According to Looff's plan, the Germans would concentrate the remainder of their force in the isolated yet fertile Mahenga Mountains. Lettow maintained a force of approximately 1,000 soldiers at Mahenga, and the British struggled to dislodge them.³² Looff argued that a strong defensive system maximized the Schutztruppe's limited firepower and would solve many of the logistical problems; by staying in a single location Lettow could demobilize the Schutztruppe's extensive supply corps. Schnee

²⁹ Farwell, 158.

³⁰ Boell, 319-321; Looff, "Section 1;" Christiansen, 113-120. Provides a direct example from a naval officer co-opted into the Schutztruppe force structure. Lettow only grudgingly acquiesced to Schnee and Looff's schemes, carefully delineating his zone from Looff's coastal deployment. Looff dedicates the first half of his book to his naval raiding and defense of the colony and his second half to fighting on land. Looff, as may be expected of a naval commander, focuses mostly on his exploits on the Königsberg.

³¹ Paice, 273; Liebenow, 85-87.

³² Boell, 362.

promoted Looff's plan as a means to limit conflict with the natives.³³ Fighting in one location also maximized the effectiveness of Looff's sailors. The navy did not acculturate Looff in the aggressive, mobile warfare traditions of the German General Staff.³⁴ German sailors handled technical military tasks better than they handled mobile operations through diseased country.³⁵

Lettow dismissed the captain's idea claiming Looff's position-based strategy "catered to England's ends," by allowing the British to trap his army in the mountains.³⁶ He would not forsake a war of movement—*Bewegungskrieg*—until he could no longer engage the Allies in battle. Looff's position-based strategy reduced war to a science and eliminated the need for operational artistry.³⁷ He had learned to attack despite extreme odds and that attacks to the flanks and rear of the army would compensate for inferior numbers. He wrote that his force's advantage, "of being able to employ strong troops and with them successfully to engage, and often defeat decisively, superior enemy forces was so great that I held to this system as long as it was at all possible."³⁸ Lettow's idea echoed prototypical German officers who continually rejected position-based strategies and pursued a movement-based war. For example, Deputy Chief of the German Imperial Staff Baron von Freytag-Loringhoven wrote, "The predominant place—it cannot be insisted on too often—belongs to the war of movement."³⁹

³³ Boell, 129.

³⁴ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 167.

³⁵ Hull, 21; Lettow; *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 72, 224, 276.

³⁶ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 167.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 167.

³⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 222.

³⁹ Baron von Freytag-Loringhoven, *Deductions from the World War* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1918), 135.

Lettow believed a major victory would salvage his campaign. He trusted that the Schutztruppe could achieve a “decisive success [against the British] by an unexpected reinforcement;” despite his recognition of the difficulty “in the unknown African bush and in face of the uncertainty of communication...to carry through an operation in which several columns are taking part so as to secure the necessary unity of action on the battlefield.”⁴⁰ He felt a decisive victory would boost his flagging morale, glorify Germany, shore up supplies, and increase operating room for further attacks.⁴¹ He believed that a major victory would reaffirm skittish *Askaris* and inspire the German people. Lettow’s strategy demonstrated his belief in the ability of a good harvest to restore his subordinates’ failing morale.⁴²

Hoskins ably prepared the British forces for a renewed advance, acquiring battle-hardened West African soldiers, pursuing guerrillas, and improving the supply chain. Hoskins exchanged the depleted South African units for experienced and disease-resistant West African units.⁴³ Wintgens and Naumenn’s raiding hindered his supply modifications and distracted him from attacking Lettow’s main force.⁴⁴ He inherited a supply chain that forced soldiers to steal and eat unidentified roots to survive, but he solved many of the problems by shortening the supply routes, improving the organization of his carrier force, and building new infrastructure.⁴⁵ Unfortunately for Hoskins, he did not lead the advance he prepared so diligently for, the British replaced him in May 1917

⁴⁰ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 202-204.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 217-218.

⁴² Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 205-209; Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 135-136.

⁴³ Downes, 42-43, 96-98. See also Melvin E. Page, *Africa and the First World War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987).

⁴⁴ Downes, 95, 116.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 89, -90, 97, 166-167.

with the veteran Union of South Africa General Jap van Deventer.⁴⁶ Deventer pressed the attack, directing his commanders to advance south from the Rufiji River, west from Lindi, and east from Lake Malawi.⁴⁷

Lettow concentrated his forces on the British advance from Lindi because, “there was only one way [to continue the war]: to beat the enemy decisively at Lukuleidi.”⁴⁸ Lettow felt he needed to hold the region at least until harvest to maintain enough supplies for his army, while simultaneously denying the enemy the same advantage. In the summer of 1917, Wahle, Lettow’s officer at the Lindi front, attempted to flank the enemy, but entrenched British forces stood their ground. A decisive victory like that at the Battle of Tanga remained out of grasp, but Lettow pursued a knockout blow with increasing desperation.⁴⁹ By 9 October 1917, Lettow believed he had a final opportunity to generate a great victory and save the valley for another harvest. Enemy columns from the north and west pressed on his flanks, attempting to isolate him from General Wahle’s large task force and relieve the besieged port of Lindi. Lettow ascertained from captured letters that the British did not know his location, leading him to believe that “the situation on Wahle’s front seemed favorable for this attempt [at a decisive blow] ... [as] my march in that direction would not be observed by the enemy in time,” to reinforce the British forces at Lindi.⁵⁰ Lettow’s detachment held a central position between the Allies’

⁴⁶ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 200;

⁴⁷ Boell, 323.

⁴⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 213.

⁴⁹ Boell, 323, 363-364.

⁵⁰ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 209-210. The original reads “I ventured to hope that the intended decisive blow might now be struck for which I had tried twice near Lindi and once at Tunduru, and the success of which Narungombe had hung on a hair. The development of the situation on Wahle’s front seemed favourable for this attempt.”

northern and western front; he could defeat the the British advance at Lindi and march back north to check Deventer's advance.

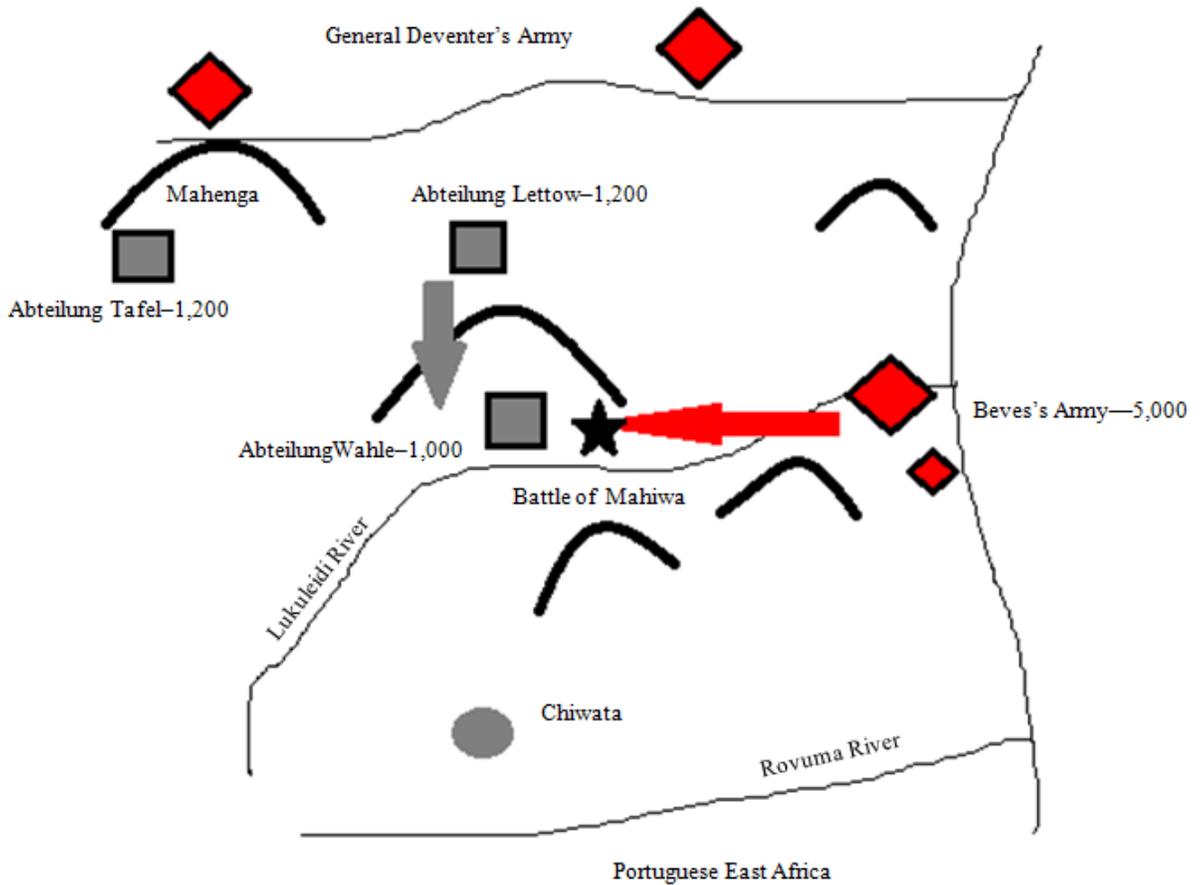


Figure 5. Lukuleidi Valley, October 1917

On 15 October 1917, British forces from Lindi under General P.S. Beves stumbled on Wahle's defenses on the north bank of the Lukuleidi River near the Mahiwa cotton plantation.⁵¹ Wahle positioned his force to protect Lettow's route of advance and

⁵¹ Boell, 370-372. See these pages for a more detailed description of forces.

encourage a British frontal attack.⁵² He entrenched his 1,000 *Askaris* and twelve machine guns in a crescent-shaped defensive position that overlooked the Lukuleidi River, blocked the main road, and anchored his right flank in Mahiwa's buildings. Despite Africa's natural cover and space for maneuver, the trench-machine gun combination remained a powerful tool.⁵³ Lettow simultaneously force marched 1,500 soldiers over forty miles of mountain paths to arrive at Wahle's position on 15 October. His leading two companies arrived in the evening just in time to stop the British from enveloping the right flank while he dug the other companies in for the night.⁵⁴ German forces caught the British columns in the open and killed two out every five attackers over the course of the day.⁵⁵

Like Tanga, Lettow arrived just in time with reinforcements to save the German right flank and the British stumbled into unexpected resistance. Unlike Tanga, the influx of German soldiers failed to disconcert the British. The unflinching British commander Brigadier General P.S. Beves committed himself to destroying Lettow's army, believing his efforts would end the campaign.⁵⁶ Beves's own bush-warfare doctrine emphasized engaging the enemy rather than maneuvering the enemy out of its position.⁵⁷

German and British forces waited out the morning of 16 October in trenches less than 200 yards apart for their opponents to make a move. Around noon, Lettow sent

⁵² Boell, 373. The battle was so chaotic no primary or secondary account agrees on the positioning. Lines shifted so rapidly and forces alternated between encirclement and encircling that a complete recount would require a book's worth of paper. I have chosen to simplify the operation as much as possible without losing the character of the battle.

⁵³ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 190.

⁵⁴ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 24; Boell, 373.

⁵⁵ Downes, 202; Boell, 374.

⁵⁶ Boell, 377.

⁵⁷ Callwell, viii.

three elite companies including the 4th and 13th under the command of Captain Karl Göring northeast to outflank the British trench. Göring maneuvered the detachment north of the British force using the dense bush to cover his movement. Simultaneously, Beves directed his reinforcements, the Nigerian Brigade of approximately 1,500 soldiers, to flank the German trench.⁵⁸ The opposing detachments collided around Njangao. Göring caught the British detachment unprepared and enveloped the superior enemy force with his three companies, killing over a third of the enemy. However, resurgent pressure against the trenches encouraged Lettow to end Göring's attack.⁵⁹ Lettow had failed to achieve a strategic surprise on 15 October, and the British thwarted his risky envelopment operation on the second day.

Beves took the initiative from Lettow on the evening of the 16 October and ordered repeated frontal assaults of the Mahiwa position until 18 October.⁶⁰ Lettow and Wahle frantically shuffled companies and guns from breach to breach to counter each new wave of attack. Lettow resigned himself to reaching a decisive victory through attrition writing: "I thought it expedient to increase the disadvantages that the enemy was bringing upon himself by his costly frontal attack and used all my available strength in such a way that the enemy by the increasing fierceness of his frontal attack was bleeding himself to death."⁶¹

Combatants considered the Battle of Mahiwa their own slice of the Western Front. Continuous machine gun fire and well-directed artillery pinned the soldiers down

⁵⁸ Downes, 215-216, 226.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁶⁰ Boell, 373-375.

⁶¹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 212.

in their trenches. Soldiers expended all their ammunition and were unable to resupply. Supply runners struggled to reach trenches and supply depots were often too far away to rush ammunition to the front. Continuous fire warped machine gun barrels and destroyed rifles. Soldiers consumed all their water in the hot, dusty valley and could not reach the nearby streams to refill their canteens.⁶² Britain's West African soldiers, though experienced fighting German guerrillas in the Cameroon, were not familiar with Lettow's conventional tactics. A British officer wrote:

To those who are used to a bombardment as known in France, this kind of bombardment by two guns may seem ridiculous, but it is all a matter of preparation. One well-directed modern gun, firing high explosive shells at the rate of one round a minute, against troops who are not prepared for shell fire, who cannot change their position, and cannot reply to that gun, is as bad as a heavy bombardment for troops thoroughly prepared for shell fire, and are either under cover or can drop back to another line of trenches out of shell fire...Every direct hit found its human target; the trees above this trench were dripping blood for two days afterwards from limbs and trunks of men that had been blown up and been wedged between the branches.⁶³

Beves called off the assault on 18 October, and pulled his defeated force back towards Lindi. Lettow tried to organize a pursuit, but supply and soldier shortages forced him to withdraw his force to the west.⁶⁴ He proclaimed Mahiwa a great victory and received a promotion to Major General.⁶⁵ British forces suffered a forty percent casualty rate at Mahiwa, but the Allies' reserves overcame the tactical setback.⁶⁶ Deventer

⁶² Downes, 200-202. Ruckteschell, 66-73; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 213-214, 218.

⁶³ Downes, 204-205.

⁶⁴ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 215.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 212.

⁶⁶ Downes, 226. Downes claims 2,700 casualties out of 5,500 participants or 55% casualties. Some sources report a more realistic conservative estimate. Comparatively, it represented a mere fraction of the Allied forces employed in theater while Lettow's army represented most of the soldiers he had left.

removed Beves and captured the Lukuleidi Valley virtually unopposed with a follow-on operation.⁶⁷

Conversely, the Battle of Mahiwa was Lettow's greatest failure of the campaign and his force never recovered.⁶⁸ His gamble failed to increase German morale, slow the British advance, or guarantee a good harvest. He had fallen prey to German General Staff's myth that inferior forces could always expect victory if they executed enveloping attacks with aggressive, skilled soldiers.⁶⁹ The Schutztruppe suffered twenty-five percent casualty rates and was incapable of repeating such bloody attacks. Mahiwa reduced the Schutztruppe to less than 3,000 troops and consumed the bulk of the Schutztruppe's smokeless ammunition.⁷⁰ Within weeks, the Allies cut the Schutztruppe off from its food supply and isolated Lettow's detachment from Major Tafel's 1,000-man detachment in Mahenga.⁷¹ His esteem among the colony's officer corps stood at its lowest. He wrote, "at this time I was not always very gentle and considerate to those around me...For me, who have always delighted in the good comradeship characteristic of our officer corps, this general atmosphere of snarling and fault-finding was naturally not ideal."⁷²

Lettow and the survivors of Mahiwa fought over their next move while hiding from British scout planes circling their headquarters in Chiwata. Despite the unfavorable circumstances, Lettow refused to surrender as, "the war could and must be carried on."⁷³

⁶⁷ Boell, 377.

⁶⁸ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 212.

⁶⁹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 213-219; See also Schlieffen, "Cannae."

⁷⁰ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 231.

⁷¹ Boell, 48; Downes, 226.

⁷² Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 238.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 216.

His first choice remained resisting the British until the harvest in March 1918.⁷⁴

However, he would need to reduce his already undersized force to ration out his resources; the Schutztruppe would starve by January at its current strength.⁷⁵ He hoped Major Tafel's detachment marching south from Mahenga would replenish his force, but he could not communicate with the isolated detachment and Tafel surrendered his starving force en route.⁷⁶

Unable to resist the British in Chiwata any longer, Lettow committed himself to guerrilla strategy for the first time writing that his, "decisions placed the conduct of the war on an entirely different basis."⁷⁷ Lettow left Looff to surrender the unwilling, the disagreeable, and the unwell to the British and compiled the Schutztruppe's remaining supplies to better equip his guerrilla force.⁷⁸ He organized his columns in the Schutztruppe's traditional defensive manner rather than the conventional offensive manner.⁷⁹ He accepted that the Schutztruppe would be on the run for the remainder of the war, and the resumption of conventional warfare would be impossible. Like the Boer Commandos of 1899-1901, he would force the British to pursue him by attacking weak points in the rear.⁸⁰ In November 1917, he led his streamlined detachment across the Rovuma River into Mozambique.⁸¹

⁷⁴ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 216, 237-239.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁷⁶ Boell, 396.

⁷⁷ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 221.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 220-224, 238.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 233-235.

⁸⁰ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 46; de Wet, 227-229.

⁸¹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 238.

Supply remained the dominant concern of Lettow and his *Askaris*. The force's morale moved in close correlation with availability of plunder and food.⁸² Colonial officers noted proudly that few *Askaris* deserted in 1918 and 261 black Africans joined the Schutztruppe.⁸³ With some reluctance, Lettow granted the *Askaris* license to loot Portuguese *Bomas*.⁸⁴ He told them to, "fetch it from the enemy," telling them to reward themselves with a new rifle.⁸⁵ The *Askaris'* lust for loot outraged Ludwig Deppe, a doctor on Lettow's medical staff, who recounted a story of a grievously wounded patient leaving the hospital to plunder.⁸⁶ Moreover, plundering spread the war to the native populations of Mozambique as the *Askaris* turned to stealing from neighboring tribes to meet their demand for food and treasure.⁸⁷ One colonial officer wrote snidely that the *Askaris* methods "which were often less than moral," angered Schnee and other inexperienced campaign members.⁸⁸

Lettow adopted the *Buschkrieg* mentality, waging a dirty war against the enemy's economy and civil population while avoiding Allied armies.⁸⁹ Lettow's slowly dwindling force of 2,000 troops, and as many supply carriers, journeyed across Mozambique pursued by 200,000 Allied soldiers. He traveled south at a pace of fifteen to twenty miles a day until his forces approached to within 200 hundred miles of the mouth of the

⁸² Deppe, 197-198; Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 231-232, 276.

⁸³ Paice, 388.

⁸⁴ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 231-232.

⁸⁵ Deppe, 26; Dobbertin, 10.

⁸⁶ Deppe, 79-80.

⁸⁷ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 300.

⁸⁸ Ruckteschell, 55.

⁸⁹ Boell, 419.

Zambezi river, there they headed northwest to the Mamirru river.⁹⁰ Threatened with capture, Lettow headed west to Numarro before trekking north back into German East Africa. The Schutztruppe skirted the shores of Lake Malawi before eluding the border guards of Northern Rhodesia. The raid ended in Rhodesia having covered 1,600 miles of enemy territory.⁹¹

Two weeks after the armistice, Lettow handed over his defiant force of 1,168 *Askaris*, 155 Europeans, and 3,000 supply carriers, to British control.⁹² The end of hostilities dismayed the German soldiers, but excited the *Askaris* and porters who celebrated jubilantly laden with spoils of war and the opportunity to return home.⁹³ To the *Askaris'* disappointment, the British stripped them of their weapons and imprisoned them in squalid concentration camps.⁹⁴ Furthermore, the Germans lacked the ability to pay the *Askaris*, who had often served for over fifteen years, with anything except promissory notes.⁹⁵ Lettow lobbied successive German governments to reimburse his faithful troops, but the *Askaris* had to wait until 1964 to receive their pay.⁹⁶

Lettow and the Schutztruppe faced a crisis in 1917 of supplies, morale, and leadership. Lettow's force faced destruction at the hands of the Allies, but Allied command changes and supply problems provided him an opportunity to alter his strategy along the lines of his subordinates. Wintgens and Naumann illustrated the possibility of

⁹⁰ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 233; Ruckteschell, 50-60. Ruckteschell offers a detailed account of the German columns and their practice in his tract the *Der Feldzug in Ostafrika*.

⁹¹ Boell., 424-425.

⁹² Ibid., 424-425.

⁹³ Ruckteschell, 99, 104-110. Ruckteschell lead a company during the Lukuleidi Valley Campaign. He helped hold the right flank at Mahiwa.

⁹⁴ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 321-322, 324.

⁹⁵ Paice, 388.

⁹⁶ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 319; Miller, 333.

waging a guerrilla campaign aligned with the precepts of *Buschkrieg*. Looff pressed for a positional defense that suited his experience and belief in a defensive strategy. Lettow rejected both and relentlessly pursued a decisive battle that would change the course of the war, but he failed to achieve a decisive victory at the Battle of Mahiwa. The Germans drove the British from the field with high losses, but the intense battle maimed the Schutztruppe, leaving it unable to capitalize on its victory.

Faced with another pivotal choice, Lettow forsook his previous conventional strategy and embraced a guerrilla strategy for the first time. Lettow avoided the enemy's armies and waged a war against the Allies' civilian population. His guerilla strategy proved effective against the British and increased his fame. Lettow left East Africa a legend on 17 January 1919.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Boell, 325.

CONCLUSION

Lettow's East Africa Campaign outlasted other German efforts in the Cameroon, Southwest Africa, Togo, and Europe: from 1914 to 1918, the Schutztruppe's 3,598 Europeans, 14,598 *Askaris*, and 100,000 support troops survived destruction against superior British, Belgian, Portuguese, Indian, West African, East African, and South African armies.¹ Lettow proclaimed the virtues of his campaign to the world, claiming the Schutztruppe detained upwards of 300,000 Allied troops from other theaters and killed 20,000 to 60,000 enemy combatants.² Moreover, he calculated that his campaign cost the British more pounds than the Boer War of 1899-1901.³ Modern analysis refutes the scale of Lettow's impact, revealing the Allies committed around 200,000 soldiers of which only a fraction were eligible for war in Europe. Nevertheless, he still prompted the Allies to invest heavily in an insignificant theater and boosted his country's morale at a dire time in its history.⁴

Lettow trained diligently in *Bewegungskrieg*—the German Army's movement based theory of annihilation warfare. He was born into a military family, and he spent 33 of his 44 pre-war years in Prussian grey. He attended two cadet corps, the Kriegsschule at Kassel, and the Kriegsakademie, earning his staff stripe in 1899. German military schools taught that attacking irrespective of the situation, rapid movement, and deference

¹ Boell, 28.

² Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 325.

³ See Lettow, *Afrika Siedlungland ?*

⁴ Strachan, 83-85; Boell, 325. See also Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, "Section 3: Germany."

to the commander in the field led to decisive victories; he fully absorbed this German theory of war, especially the theories of his Chief of the German General Staff Graf Alfred von Schlieffen. Schlieffen emphasized the destruction of the enemy's field forces through risky offensive battles of envelopment⁵.

Lettow's experiences in China and Southwest Africa reinforced his belief in *Bewegungskrieg* and the German General Staff. The China Expedition assaulted his idealized vision of war and provided him his first combat experience, while Southwest Africa introduced Lettow to the practices of African guerrilla leaders. He considered guerrilla war uncivilized and he revolted at its muddled nature. Southwest Africa especially strengthened his belief in a commander's prerogative and importance of subjecting all aspects of government to military necessity.

An obstinate, mechanical, ambitious, and arrogant man, Lettow rose quickly through the ranks until Major, where his personality inhibited his performance. Importantly, his inability to mitigate interpersonal conflict diminished his talent as a battlefield technician. As a military expert of the German General Staff, he expected civilians and colonial officers to defer to his decisions without altercation, yet he expressed callousness towards his subordinates, rarely praising them and demanding they give him their utmost effort. His lack of popularity in Europe contributed greatly to his pre-war transfer to the backwaters of the German Empire. However, his fame as the commander of the "unbeaten" Schutztruppe rehabilitated his tarnished image.

⁵ Schlieffen, "Cannae." See also Citino's *The German Way of War* and Dupuy's *A Genius for War*.

Lettow understood that the colonial officer's mindset differed from his own, despite his inability to grasp the intricacies of colonial rule. He almost destroyed the Schutztruppe by attempting to standardize its practices with the practices of the German Army. Schutztruppe personnel focused on internal threats to the colony, like tribal unrest, rather than external threats, like a British army. "Old African" officers practiced *Buschkrieg*, a complex theory of colonial rule that integrated civil measures such as limited government and increased trade with paramilitary measures like espionage, armed patrols, sieges, and economic warfare.

Regardless of the unit's mission, Lettow trained his soldiers in *Bewegungskrieg*. At Wilhelmshaven, he essentially converted the marines of the 2nd Sea Battalion into German Army infantrymen by deemphasizing amphibious operations and emphasizing field maneuvers. In German East Africa, Lettow worked to convert the Schutztruppe, a decentralized paramilitary force, into a centralized military unit. The Schutztruppe's force structure, training, and mentality made it an ideal force for an insurgency, but because Lettow did not like guerrilla war, he worked to conventionalize the Schutztruppe. He called for an aggressive, offensive strategy of battles to keep the British off balance, increasing recruitment, modifying training, and altering mobilization plans. However, his subordinates preferred the original defense plan calling for the passive defense of the German colony, and his superior Schnee's desire for neutrality forced Lettow to limit his plans.

The outbreak of World War I in 1914 intensified Lettow's ambition and the opening battle at Tanga confirmed his belief in *Bewegungskrieg*. Though heavily

outnumbered, the Germans held the port city of Tanga and delayed further major operations in East Africa. The poorly planned British operation pandered to Lettow's strengths. He violated orders not to defend against the British landing, demonstrating his belief in his prerogative. The Battle of Tanga demonstrated Schlieffen's influence as Lettow held the British forces with his weak left and sent his reserves to flank the British from the right; this battle set a benchmark he attempted to repeat until the last major battle in 1917.

The war in East Africa remained static throughout 1915 as both sides prepared for renewed operations. Lettow and the British generals adopted raid strategies that conserved their forces, but kept their military sharp and their enemies tense. He considered the railroad raids an inferior way of war, a concession to colonial politics, and a stopgap measure. He continued to prepare the colony for future operations against enemy field forces and hoped to advance on Nairobi. The dangerous raids slowed British construction, but proved indecisive over the course of the war.

Soldier-statesmen Jan Smuts, hoping to expand the Union of South Africa's influence, led a new assault on German East Africa. His efforts reintroduced mobility to the theater and a string of indecisive battles. The new Allied force so overwhelmed the Schutztruppe in number and equipment, Lettow's attacks merely corroded the German's fighting power. Smuts's strategy of maneuver defeated Lettow's battle strategy, but Lettow refused to abandon his conventional strategy. He believed his attacks slowed the Allied advance, but in reality, his enemy's slow advance resulted from poor supply planning and East Africa's dearth of infrastructure.

In 1917, Smuts outpaced his logistical support and the Allied advance stagnated. Smuts left Africa for Britain, handing off command to Hoskins who paused offensive operations to solve the Allies' supply failures, import better soldiers, and clean the Allied rear of resistors. The Schutztruppe languished in the Lukuleidi River Valley and faced the possibility of implosion. Max Wintgens and Heinrich Naumann, experienced practitioners of *Buschkrieg*, demonstrated the feasibility of a true guerrilla strategy while Naval Captain Max Looff promoted a positional strategy to replace Lettow's conventional strategy. Lettow briefly contemplated the alternative strategies, but decided to continue his conventional strategy of battles. He thought that he could reverse the German's detrimental position by extracting a decisive victory from the British army near Lindi.

Lettow's desperate pursuit for a decisive victory led to the disastrous Battle of Mahiwa in October 1917. The intensity of battle approached that of the major offensives along the Western Front. Although outnumbered, the Schutztruppe enveloped significant portions of the British force and dispersed their numerous charges with accurate artillery and small-arms fire. German resistors destroyed almost half of the British force in four days of unceasing combat. Nonetheless, Lettow lost over a quarter of his army and exhausted his ammunition depots. The Schutztruppe's self-annihilation failed to check the British assault, improve morale, or resupply the starving German forces. He wanted to continue his conventional strategy, refusing to recognize the absurdity of proclaiming his strategic defeats as victories.

The Schutztruppe's losses at the Battle of Mahiwa, the renewed British advance, and limited food supply forced Lettow to adapt a guerrilla strategy. Lettow's obstinate personality, which had nearly destroyed his career prior to WWI, served him well as a guerrilla. Across the Portuguese colony of Mozambique and British Rhodesia, Lettow used *Buschkrieg* tactics such as attacking non-military targets. His idealized war of battles devolved into a dirty little war of armed robbery and running from danger.⁶

Lettow used his fame to obscure the least favorable aspects of his leadership. Though he never considered the guerrilla strategy a preferable option, he emphasized the guerrilla aspects of his campaign in his writings to hide the failures of his conventional strategy. Moreover, he minimized the success of Smuts's strategy by emphasizing his limited tactical success.⁷ His postwar publications illustrated the influence of the German General Staff theory of *Bewegungskrieg* on his actions.⁸ He falsely advertised his campaign as a civilized war, censuring the "dirty" portions of extortion, brutal punishment, and attacks on civilians.⁹

The German military's distinguishing characteristics— independence, reckless aggression, emphasis on mobility, and obsession with the enemy's field army— resonated with Lettow. By writing that a field commander's "spontaneous activity generally achieved the best results," he demonstrated his approval for military independence from civilian control.¹⁰ Throughout the war, he focused on the destruction of the enemy by means of attacks on the enemy's flank and rear. Moreover, his orders to

⁶ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, 326.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 318, 325-326.

⁸ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 59, 147, 166-167.

⁹ Lettow, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*, vi.

¹⁰ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 28.

his subordinates also emphasized the destruction of the enemy's field forces. He risked the survival of the colony on a single battle twice; he succeeded at Tanga and failed at Mahiwa. He marched his soldiers to the point of starvation yet expected them to fight with relentless aggression. He refused to adapt a passive or immobile strategy and attempted to outmarch his superior foe to achieve localized superiority in battle.

Life taught Lettow that, "war was and remains an art."¹¹ Lettow was neither a committed guerrilla strategist nor a colonial officer, but a conventional strategist. His leadership covered the positive and negative spectrum of the German art of war. His victory at Tanga deserved commendation: however, his conduct from 1915 to 1917 did not deserve the same credit. His subordinates Wintgens and Naumann outperformed him, and his opponent Smuts outwitted him. The Battle of Mahiwa destroyed his force, illustrating the absurdity of the traditional German strategy of offensive battle. His refusal to surrender in the midst of despair and his ability to evade British capture from November 1917 to November 1918 deserved respect. His obstinate and ambitious personality, which nearly ruined his military career in Europe, redeemed him in Africa.

¹¹ Lettow, *Mein Leben*, 29.

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