

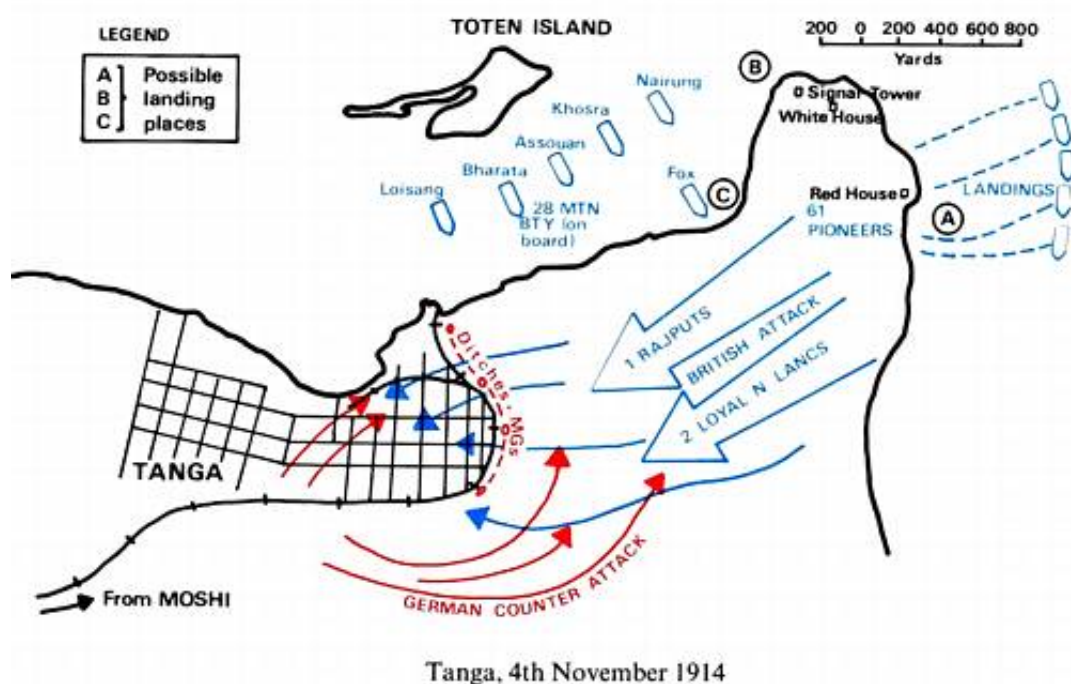
# The Battle of Tanga - 1914 af Geoffrey Regan

## Indledning

Den følgende artikel stammer fra hjemmesiden South African Wargamer og bringes her efter aftale med Kevin Hoyle, der er sidens webmaster.

Selve artiklen stammer fra indledningen til *Brassey's Book of Military Blunders* af Geoffrey Regan [1\)](#). Jeg har stort set bibeholdt den originale tekst, men suppleret den med noter og illustrationer.

## Steaming down to Tanga...



Fra Kilde 1.

From the outset the British regarded the campaign against the Germans in East Africa [2\)](#) in 1914 as a minor operation.

It could, they felt, be safely left to their Indian Army. Regrettably the Secretary of State for India was to take this attitude of insouciance a stage further: in his opinion such a trifling venture could be quite happily assigned to second-rate troops. In choosing a commander, however, the British slipped badly from the second-rate standards they had set themselves, appointing a bungler - Major-General Aitken [3\)](#) - whom few would have rated so highly.

Aitken was a soldier more suited in style and appearance to the colonial campaigns of the nineteenth century. He had a supreme confidence in his own ability and that of his troops. Thirty-five years in India had convinced him that Indian soldiers would soon make mincemeat of a 'lot of Niggers'. He preferred to base his campaigns on prejudice rather than reasoned argument, stressing the weaknesses of 'Blacks' and 'Huns', and refusing advice from anyone professing local knowledge or intelligence.

In fact, no one in the expeditionary force sent from India knew anything of their destination, which was the port of Tanga. During their brief stay at Mombasa, Aitken was offered the help of Lieutenant-Colonel B. R. Graham of the King's African Rifles, but refused, preferring to stick to his Indian troops. When Graham warned Aitken that the German native troops (Askaris) should not be underestimated, the

General disagreed, saying they were untrained and that he would thrash them all well before Christmas.

## Expeditionary Force 'B'



*The 46<sup>th</sup> and 33<sup>rd</sup> Punjabis, ca. 1910 [6](#).*

Aitken's description of his troops as 'magnificent' was touching if hardly accurate. Of the 8,000 men under his command, only the North Lancashire Regiment and the Gurkhas [4](#) were anything other than mediocre. The Indian troops were some of the worst in the Indian Army, being untrained, ill-equipped and poorly led. Some had only recently been issued with modern Lee-Enfield rifles and did not understand how to use them properly.

There were soldiers from all parts of India, speaking twelve different languages, following different 'faiths and commanded by men who, in some cases, had never even seen their units before the embarkation at Bombay. Aitken's Intelligence Officer, Captain Meinertzhagen [5](#) despite his name an Englishman - described the Indian troops as, 'the worst in India ... I tremble to think what may happen if we meet with serious opposition. The senior officers are nearer to fossils than active energetic leaders.'

Tegningen af A.G. Lovett forestiller blev oprindeligt bragt i bogen "Our Indian Armies" af oberst A.G. Lovett og major G.F. MacMunn.

Her er der tale om en gengivelse af postkort nr. 21 i serien "Our Indian Armies" udgivet af A. & C. Black, London, fra ca. 1920. Illustrationen kendes også fra en senere postkortserie udgivet af National Army Museum, London.



*Den øverstkommanderende i Tysk Østafrika*

*Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck.*

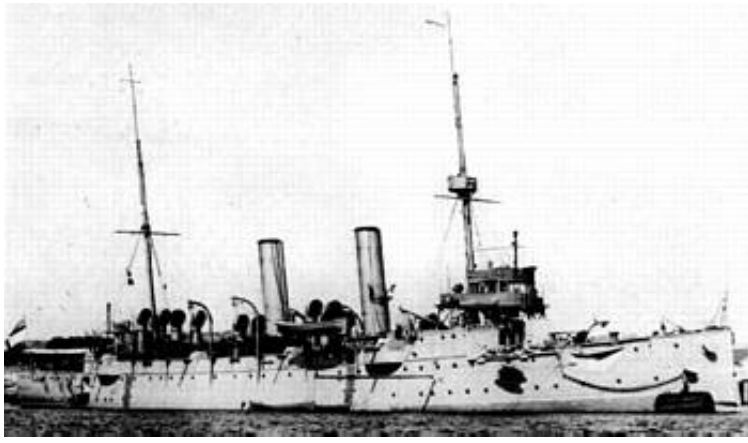
Fra Auf den Spuren

der deutschen Schutzgebiete, Ostafrika.

The soldiers may have been of poor quality, but the treatment they received during the voyage from Bombay to Mombasa served to reduce morale to rock bottom. Because of a delay in sailing, the soldiers spent sixteen unnecessary days aboard the transports in crowded conditions and appalling heat. When they finally embarked no consideration was given to the differences in caste, religion or dietary needs. Most of them spent the voyage either seasick in their bunks or suffering from diarrhoea brought on by eating food to which they were unaccustomed. When it was suggested to Aitken at Mombasa that he should allow his men ashore to recuperate from the effects of the voyage he pooh-poohed the idea and said that it might alert the Germans. It was safer to take his men straight on to Tanga.

### **See them shortly landing...**

Although the expedition was supposed to be secret, the Germans had every possible warning that it was coming. The labels on the crates in Bombay dockyards announced, 'Indian Expeditionary Force "B", Mombasa, East Africa', and headlines in the British and East African press heralded the imminent arrival of the force. In addition, there were the plain radio messages between the convoy and Mombasa and the letters from German residents in British East Africa to their friends in Tanga. The German commander, Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck [7](#)), had a lot to thank the British for. The fleet even travelled down the African coast in sight of land, just in case any Germans might have missed it.



*HMS Fox* [8](#)).

Fra World War 1 Naval Combat.

Sailing ahead of the main force, the cruiser HMS Fox under Captain F. W. Cauldfield entered Tanga harbour to discuss the status of the town with the German Governor, von Schnee. Von Schnee had been in the habit of arranging truces with the Royal Navy in order to save Tanga from bombardment. But with Aitken's convoy not far behind, Cauldfield had come to tell the Germans that all truces were cancelled. Von Schnee was missing, but the local commissioner, Herr Auracher, told the captain that he would need time to consult higher authorities. The ingenuous Cauldfield then asked Auracher if the harbour was mined and, not surprisingly, the German replied that it was full of mines. Leaving the trusting naval officer waiting, Auracher rushed off to send a message to Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck that the British had arrived.

He then donned an army uniform, raised the German flag, and went off to join his military unit. After a while, Cauldfield began to suspect that Auracher was not coming back so, returning to the Fox, he ordered a tug to begin the laborious task of minesweeping. When the rest of the convoy arrived they had to endure the frustration of waiting while a variety of logs, oil cans and, for all we know, old boots, were swept from the harbour. There were, in fact, no mines, but Auracher had won valuable time for von Lettow-Vorbeck to begin entraining his troops for Tanga.

**Foes unsympathetic...**





*Heiße Grüße für die englischen Landungstruppen.*

Tegning af Fritz Grothemeyer

fra Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und überseetruppen.

The landing and its aftermath could easily have come from the pen of Evelyn Waugh (it was recently fictionalized by William Boyd in *An IceCream War*). Cauldfield, convinced that there were unknown hazards at Tanga, persuaded Aitken to land at a point a mile farther down the coast, out of sight of the town.

This proved, in fact, the worst possible place to land, being a mangrove swamp full of leeches and water snakes and covered by a miasma of mosquitoes and tsetse flies. Into this horror the miserable Indian troops were plunged, 'fresh' from their experiences on the voyage.

Little Wonder that they were ready to jump at every shadow and panic at every sound. Meinertzhagen landing with the first troops at 10 pm, made himself a bed in the garden of a dwelling designated 'The White House', with a mattress filled with 'nice bits of lingerie' taken from the house, and blankets consisting of a large Union jack and a German flag.

By the time the British troops were fully ashore the Germans had had 48 hours in which to make their preparations. As soon as Aitken ordered the advance on Tanga a number of things started to go wrong. Although outnumbered by eight to one, von Lettow-Vorbeck was not without hope, remarking on 'the clumsiness with which English troops were moved and led in battle'.



*Askaris im Angriff.*

Tegning af L.R. Döbrich-Steglitz

fra Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und überseetruppen.

As the British advanced towards Tanga through the cocoa plantations they could not see any Germans waiting for them. In frustration, three British officers climbed up a small hill to see better and were immediately shot dead.

Suddenly, a German bugle was heard and the Askaris rushed to attack the 13th Rajputs, who simply turned and ran, leaving their twelve British officers to be killed on the spot.

When Meinertzhagen tried to stop the panic, an Indian officer drew a sword on him and had to be shot. Brigadier Tighe, commanding the Imperial Service Brigade, signalled to Aitken, watching from the deck of one of the ships, that his men were facing 2,500 German rifles. In fact there were just 250 Askaris. This first assault had cost the British 300 casualties, mostly officers and NCOs. So panicky were the Indian troops by this stage, that when a rifle went off by accident 100 Rajputs rushed all the way back to the beach, some of them standing up to their necks in the sea.



*Schlacht bei Tanga 3-5 November 1914:*



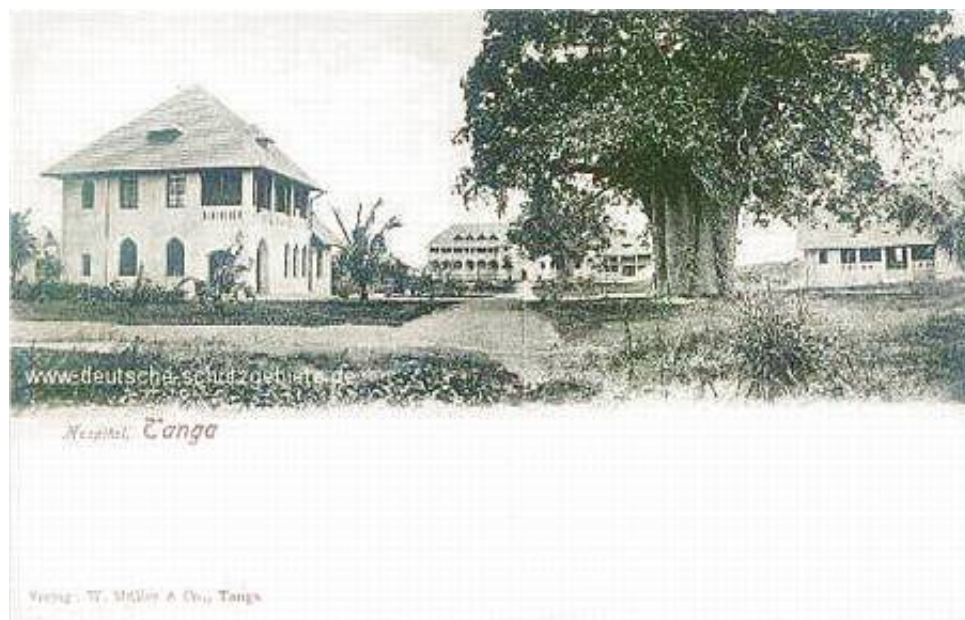
*Angriff der Royal North Lancashire und Kashmir Rifles gegen die 6. und 16. Kompanie Kaiserliche Schutztruppe Deutsch Ost-Afrika.*

Samtidig postkort, tegnet af Martin Frost.

Fra Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen.)

Meanwhile, the British transports had been landing masses of military supplies on the beaches, irrespective of whether they were needed or not. The scene was one of pandemonium. Since no scouting was taking place none of the British had any idea of the Germans' position or numbers. Aitken had in any case decided to use his full strength in the next attack. Spearheaded by his best troops, the North Lincs and the Gurkhas, with the Indian regiments bringing up the rear, he renewed the attack on Tanga. Curiously enough, he had refused the offer of a naval bombardment to soften up the German positions, partly because he did not want to damage civilian property, but mostly because he did not actually know where the Germans were and did not like to admit it.

The Germans had set up a strong defensive position, linked by field telephones and fronted by barbed wire. There were snipers in the baobab trees and machine guns at intervals on the ground. It was a formidable challenge for even the best troops. But by this time many of the Indian soldiers were in a state of collapse from heat stroke or thirst, having already drunk the contents of their water bottles even though it was only midday. As they approached their invisible enemies the Askaris shouted insults such as 'Indians are insects'.



*Hospitalet i Tanga.*

Samtidig postkort fra Deutsche Schutzgebiete.

The Imperial Service Brigade, which contained the weakest units, found themselves wading through fields of corn eight feet high, while unseen Askari snipers in the trees drilled holes in the tops of their heads. The Indians were also terrified by the clouds of smoke issuing from the black-powder rifles of the Askaris.

In one part of the field matters were going better for the British. The North Lincs and Gurkhas had routed the Askaris and captured the customs house and hospital in Tanga, marking the fact by raising a large Union jack.

## **The Battle of the Bees 9)**

But elsewhere the Indians were about to face an even greater enemy than the Germans. Hanging from the trees across the battlefield were hives of hollow logs containing African bees, a particularly large and aggressive form of the insect. Infuriated by the noise and the bullets, the bees emerged in clouds from

their hives and descended on the advancing Indian troops. At once panic spread, with troops fleeing towards the safety of the sea pursued by bees, which stung them as they went. Refreshingly impartial, some bees stayed to sting the Askaris, but the main attack was directed at the British troops. One engineer [10](#)) was stung 300 times while another, unconscious from a wound, returned to consciousness to find himself being dive-bombed by hundreds of bees. To the hysterical British soldiers it seemed as if the bees were yet another cunning German trick. Even The Times later wrote that the bee hives had been used as weapons by von Lettow-Vorbeck. When asked about this the German merely smiled, saying 'Gott mitt uns.'

On board the HQ boat the appearance of hundreds of British troops on the beach, waving their hands above their heads and leaping into the sea, must have been an astonishing sight. 'You don't suppose they're being driven back?' asked a bright staff officer. On the beach one British officer could hardly bear to report the cowardly behaviour of his troops, remarking, 'I would never have believed that grown-up men of any race could have been reduced to such shamelessness.'

Furious, Aitken ordered an immediate naval bombardment, which had to be stopped when the only hit recorded in Tanga fell on the hospital, crammed with British dead and wounded. The other shells fell into the retreating British lines, causing further casualties. The Indian troops were shooting so wildly that they were doing more damage to their own side than to the Germans. One North Lancs soldier commented, 'We don't mind the German fire, but with most of our officers and NCOs down and a bloody crowd of niggers firing into our backs and bees stinging our backsides, things are a bit 'ard.'



*Hotel Kaiserhof i Tanga.*

Samtidig postkort fra Deutsche Schutzgebiete.

## **Back to old Mombasa steams Force B again**

The British suffered over a thousand casualties in this one attack and overall lost 800 dead, 500 wounded and 250 missing [11](#)). Against this von Lettow-Vorbeck's losses were light - 15 Europeans and 54 Askaris killed and wounded. His success was complete, the more so when Aitken promptly re-embarked his troops, abandoning all their equipment. After the British had gone von Lettow-Vorbeck was able to equip new regiments with British rifles and machine guns and had enough food, coats, blankets, motorbikes, telegraph equipment and other supplies to last him for a year.

The evacuation of the wounded was arranged by Captain Meinertzhagen, who found the Germans magnanimous in victory. 'You English', they told him, 'are really quite incomprehensible. You regard war as a game.' As if to prove the point a group of men from the North Lancs Regiment amused themselves by swimming in the sea while the evacuation was taking place, horrifying the Germans with this breach in



protocol. What the Germans would have thought of the British sailors who rowed into Tanga harbour at the height of the fighting, hoping to buy some food in town, is anyone's guess.

But the travails of General Aitken and his Indian troops were not ended. Arriving somewhat chastened back at Mombasa, they were refused permission to land by customs officials unless they paid a five per cent ad valorem tax. It was the bayonets of the North Lancs Regiment which managed to convince the customs men that 'Expeditionary Force "B" had come to stay. But for General Aitken there was no happy ending. Kitchener, the Secretary for War, refused to see him on his recall to Britain and he was reduced in rank to Colonel and retired on half pay.

## Afslutning

Denne fremstilling af hændelsesforløbet er generelt i overensstemmelse med andre kilder, f.eks. Kilde 1 og 3. Forfatterens mission har, med bogens overskrift in mente, ikke gjort noget for at fremhæve eventuelle positive træk ved operationerne. Ikke at der nødvendigvis var nogle, men jeg synes dog, at Kilde 3 formidler et billede, der er en anelse mere nuanceret.

Man bør måske læse bogen *The battle of Tanga 1914* af Ros Anderson, der udkom i 2002, for at få alle vinkler på historien, men efterfølgende nogenlunde samtidige digt, gengivet fra Kilde 5, efterlader ingen tvivl om, at operationen ikke var nogen succes.

### Steaming Down to Tanga

<i>Steaming down to Tanga Over the brine main, See our major general And his brilliant train. Three brigade commanders Colonels, stuff galore. Majors count for little, Captains they ignore.</i>	<i>See them shortly landing At the chosen spot. Find the local climate Just a trifle hot. Foes unsympathetic Maxims on them train; Careful first to signal Range to ascertain.</i>
<i>Armoured trains and sleepers, Guns of different bores, Telephones and mess plates, Hospitals and stores. Medicos in thousands Anxious to avoid Work outside the units Where they are employed.</i>	<i>Ping, ping go the bullets; Crash, explode the shells. Major General's worried Thinks it just as well Not to move too rashly While he's in the dark. What's the strength opposing Orders to reembark?</i>
<i>Earnestly they study Each Little Book Which, compiled in Simla, Tells them where to look. Local knowledge needed; Native scouts of use. For so quaint a notion There is small excuse.</i>	<i>Back to old Mombassa Steams Force B again, Are the generals ruffled? Not the slightest grain. Martial regulations Inform us day by day They may have fozzled Tanga But they've taken BEA.</i>

## Kilder

1. *History of the Royal Regiment of Artillery - Forgotten Fronts and Home Base, 1914-18* af Sir Martin Farndale, Royal Artillery Institution, London 1988, ISBN 1-870114-05-1.
2. *India's Army* af Donovan Jackson, Purnell and Sons, London 1940.
3. *Tanganyikan Guerrilla: East African Campaign 1914-1918* af major J.R. Sibley, Ballentine's Illustrated History of the Violent Century, Campaign book No. 20, Ballentine Books Inc., New York 1971.
4. *Armies in East-Africa 1914-18* af Peter Abbot, Men-at-Arms Nr. 379, Osprey Publishing, London 2002, ISBN 1-84176-489-2.
5. *Wargame scenario 6: Steaming down to Tanga* af Greg Novak, Over the Top - WWI Miniatures Wargaming, A Command Decision Series Game, Game Designers Workshop, Bloomington/Illinois 1990, ISBN 1-55878-012-2.
6. *Styrkeoversigt: Battle of Tanga - German East Africa Nov 1914*. Nærmere oplysninger om forfatter m.v. fremgår ikke af siden.

Per Finsted

## Styrkeoversigter

(Fremstillet med udgangspunkt i Kilde 3 og 6.)

### **Indian Expeditionary Force B** (*Major-General Arthur Aitken*)

#### **27<sup>th</sup> (Bangalore) Infantry Brigade**

(*Brigadier-General Richard Wapshare*)

2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Loyal North Lancashire Regiment

63<sup>rd</sup> Palamcottah Light Infantry

98<sup>th</sup> Infantry

101<sup>st</sup> Grenadiers

#### **Imperial Service Brigade**

(*Brigadier-General M.J. Tighe*)

13<sup>th</sup> Rajputs (The Shekhawati Regiment)

2<sup>nd</sup> Kashmir Rifles

3<sup>rd</sup> Kashmir Rifles (- 2 kompagnier)

3<sup>rd</sup> Gwalior Rifles (- 2 kompagnier)

#### **Engineers**

61<sup>st</sup> King George's Own Pioneers

25<sup>th</sup> og 26<sup>th</sup> (Railway) Company, Sappers and Miners

One company, Faridcot Sappers

#### **Artillery**

(*Major C.E. Forestier-Walker*)

28<sup>th</sup> Mountain Battery (6 stk. 10pdr bjergkanoner)

*Se f.eks. min artikel The Road to Basra - 1914 for et billede af bjergkanonen.*

#### **Royal Navy**

HMS Fox (Captain F. W. Cauldfield)

HMAMC [12](#) Laconia (kommandofartøj)

Hertil kommer ca. 40 yderligere fartøjer.

### **Tyske enheder** (*Oberst Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck*)

#### **II. Bataillon**

#### **Abteilung von Merensky**

(Major Baumstark - muligvis)

15. Feldkompanie

16. Feldkompanie

17. Feldkompanie

#### Abteilung Bahnschutz

4. Schützenkompanie

#### Abteilung Kepler (-)

4. Feldkompanie

13. Feldkompanie

2. Batterie [13\)](#)

6. Feldkompanie

6. Schützenkompanie

#### Abteilung von Prince

(Hauptmann Tom von Prince "Bwana Sakkarani")

7. Schützenkompanie

8. Schützenkompanie

Underafdelinger betegnet *Feldkompanie* består af *askarier*, mens *Schützenkompanie* består af lokale tyskere.



*Indfødte soldater fra Tysk Østafrika.*

To eksempler på cigaretkort fra serien *Uniformen der Marine und Schutztruppe*, udgivet af det tyske cigaretfirma Waldorf-Astoria.

Hele denne serie findes gengivet på hjemmesiden *Preußische Geschichte und Militärgeschichte (Großer Generalstab)*, se under *Uniformen der Alten Armee*. Af seriens 96 kort, har de 36 tyske kolonitropper som motiv.

---

#### Noter:

1) Se f.eks. en omtale af *Brassey's Book of Military Blunders* på hjemmesiden Potomac Books Inc.



2) Tysk Østafrika er i princippet det nuværende Tanzania.

3) Arthur Edward Aitken (1861-1924).

4) Der er intet i de rådige kilder, der antyder, at der skulle have deltaget gurkhaer i denne operation, og

måske forfatteren forveksler gurkhaer med 3<sup>rd</sup> Gwalior Rifles fra *The Indian State Forces*, som var betegnelsen på de enheder, som blev opretholdt af de forskellige lokale herskere, i dette tilfælde Maharajaen af Gwalior. En styrkeliste med de deltagende enheder findes sidst i dette papir.

5) Richard Meinertzhagen (1878-1967) blev senere efterretningsofficer hos General Allenby under felttoget i Palæstina i 1917-18. Har man set den australske film *The Light Horsemen* fra 1987, husker man givet den engelske skuespiller Anthony Andrews i rollen som daværende major Meinertzhagen.

6) Regimenterne deltog ikke i operationerne, men skal her tjene som eksempel på indiske soldaters uniformering.

7) Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck (1870-1964).

8) HMS Fox (fra 1896) havde som hovedbevæbning 2 stk. 6" kanoner (for og agter) og 8 stk. 4,7" kanoner (4 stk. i hver side). Se også et billede og beskrivelse i *Jane's Fighting Ships 1919*.

9) Disse - temmelig uvenlige - indbyggere har gjort, at kampene om Tanga også kendes under denne betegnelse.

10) Der er muligvis tale om den telegrafsoldat, som blev tildelt Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for - skønt stukket af 400 bier - at have fortsat med at udføre sin opgave.

11) Tabstallene er muligvis mindre end anført, således anfører Kilde 3, det samlede tabstal som 800.

12) HMAMC (= *His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruiser*) var betegnelsen for bevæbnede passagerfartøjer / troppetransportskibe.

13) Denne oplysning stammer fra Kilde 6 og batteriet er sandsynligvis anført for at give et afbalanceret krigsspil - det anbefales således kun indsat, såfremt engelsk parti vælger at landsætte 28<sup>th</sup> Mountain Battery, der rent faktisk skød fra stillinger på dækket af troppetransportskibet *Bharata*. Det tyske batteri eksisterede, men var ikke indsat i de aktuelle kampe.

# The Battle of Tanga - 1914, Supplement

## Om det tyske feltartilleri

Jeg anfører i min artikel, at der ikke deltog kanoner på tysk side. Denne oplysning er, skønt den er i overensstemmelse med hovedparten af kilderne, muligvis ikke korrekt.

Jeg er stødt på en beretning - *Erinnerungen an Tanga* von Dr. med. Hauer - som er skrevet i 1924 i anledning af 10-året for kampene om Tanga. Doktor Hauer, der selv var med ved Tanga, nævner, at der deltog to tyske kanoner, som begge havde en fortid som salutkanoner i Dar es Salaam (hovedstaden i Tysk Østafrika).

Ved daggry den 5. november 1914 skød kanonerne et engelsk transportfartøj i brand, umiddelbart før englænderne rømmede området.



*7,7 cm feltkanon Model 1896 fra Tysk Østafrika.*

Oplysningen understøttes af Kilde 6, der anfører, at der kan være tale om kanoner af ældre model - C.73, hvilket kan antyde den 9 cm feltkanon Model 1873, som var forløberen for Model 1896.

I mangel af et billede af de aktuelle pjecer, skal følgende illustration derfor blot anslå temaet.

Tegning af Fritz Grothemeyer, dateret 1918, fra Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen.

Postkortet stammer fra en serie ved navn *Kolonial-Krieger-Spende* (= indsamling).



*Dar es Salaam.*

Tegning af Rudolf Hellgrewe, fra Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen.

Doktor Hauers beretning stammer fra hjemmesiden *Auf den Spuren der deutschen Schutzgebiete, Ostafrika*, der også indeholder en mængde yderligere oplysninger om Tysk Østafrika.

## **Kilder**

1. *German Artillery 1914-1918* af David Nash, Almark Publications, London 1970, ISBN 85524-003-2.

Per Finsted