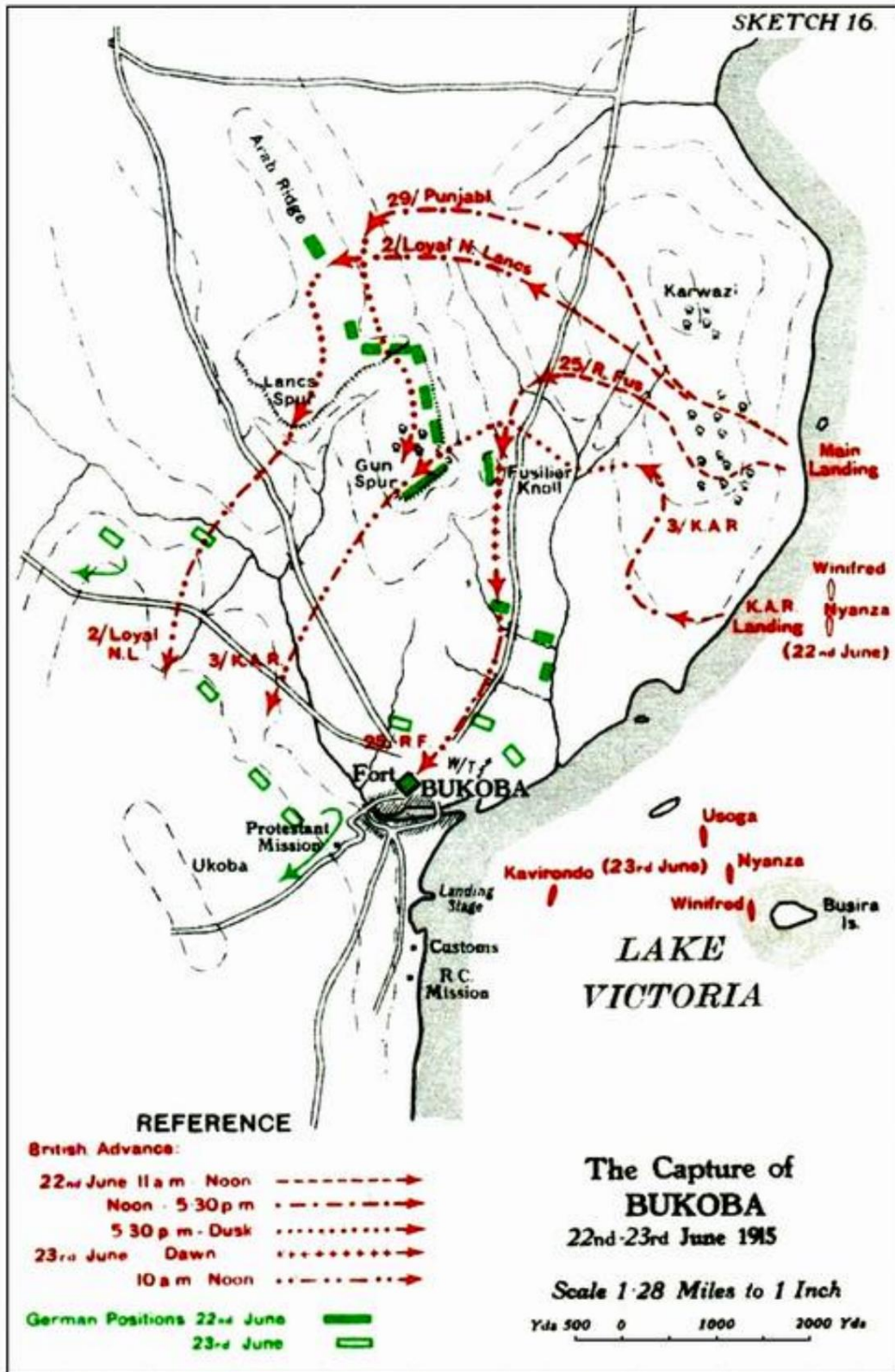


# About the battles at Bukoba in June 1915 - Part 2

## D-Day - The attack on Bukoba



COMPILED BY HISTORICAL SECTION  
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1550/9/41. CR.

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Ordnance Survey 1937

Map 2: The capture of Bukoba, 22 - 23 June 1915.

From Source 1.

On 20 June 1915, at 1:15 p.m., the attack force set out from Kisumu harbor with Bukoba as its target, and over the next day and a half made the journey across Lake Victoria.

The force reaches Bukoba at midnight on 21 June.

The weather is clear, with moonlight, and the vessels are observed by a post on the island of Busira, which immediately alerts the forces on shore by signal rockets.

Originally, the plan had been to carry out the landing under the cover of night - and a team of soldiers was assigned to silence the post at Busira - followed by a surprise attack on Bukoba.

In order not to risk collisions in the dark, Brigadier General Stewart postpones the landing until dawn.

The fleet therefore anchors in order to head to the landing site at dawn approx. 5 km northeast of the town, while HMS Nyanza sails towards the town to secure the landing craft.

The terrain at the landing area is described as approx. 90 m high cliff that was steep and rocky.

From the German side, it was not assessed as a likely landing place, and there was only a small force (approx. 30 men) in the area.

The German defenses were instead concentrated on the harbor as it was expected that an attack would come here.



*Bukoba, as the area looks today.*

Fra Bukoba (Wikipedia).

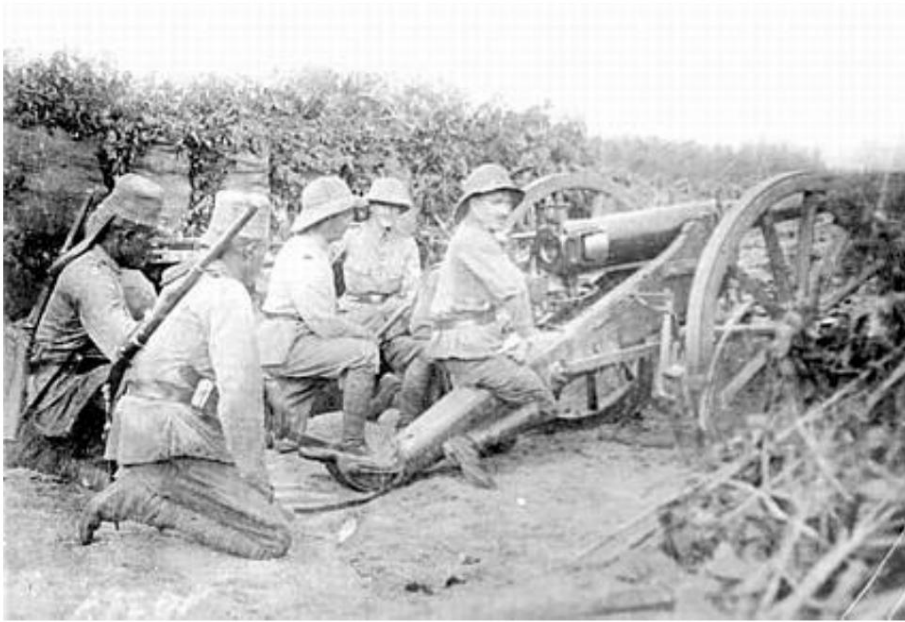
The landing area is behind the ridge at the top - and probably far to the left - in the picture.

The place was out of sight from Bukoba, which General Stewart highlights in his memoirs (Source 9).

#### **The country statement**

First wave consists of 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. Royal Fusiliers, the machine gun division of the East African Regiment and the half company of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners. As the bridgehead is secured, the rest of the force is

landed, apart from the three companies from the 3 customs<sup>rd</sup> King's African Rifles, which were scheduled to be landed at building south of Bukoba.

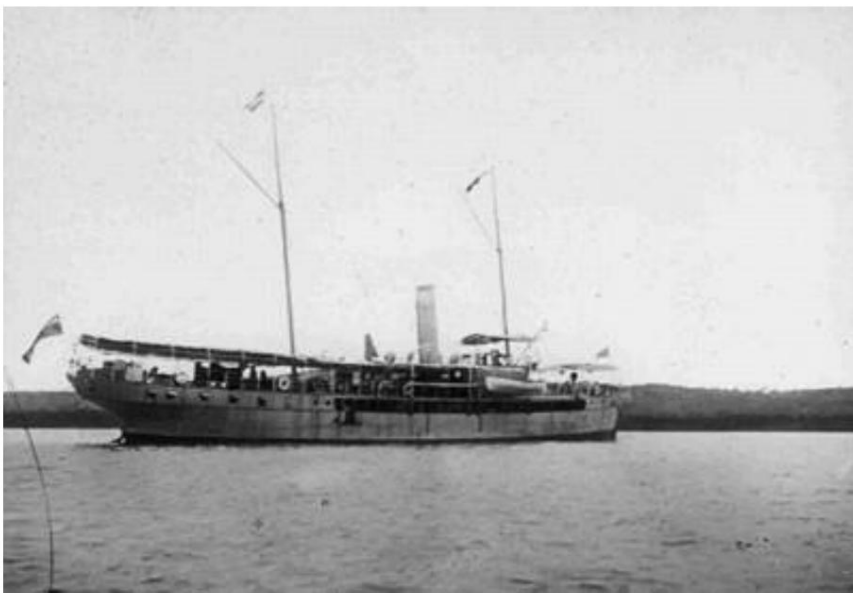


9 cm feltkanon C/73/88 1).\_\_

While the main force is being landed, the ships are fired upon by an enemy cannon [2](#)) from a position at the customs building (marked *Customs* on Map 2).

Paul Döring refers to the cannon as "older and well used", and further writes that they had so little ammunition that there was barely enough for a test firing.

It is therefore decided to divert the 3rd King's African Rifles, which are now landed approx. 1.5 km south of the main force.



S/S WINIFRED.

Fra Colonial Image Archive

(University Library Frankfurt am Main).

The German cannon is shelled by ship cannons, i.a. from HMS Winifred, but although gunpowder smoke clearly marks where the gun position is located, it does not succeed in defeating it.

Paul Döring, who observes the events from his mission station, mentions that the firing from the ships is causing great damage to the Catholic mission station (also referred to as a church).

### Competence disputes

As the main force is landed, Lt. Col. Jourdain, 2nd Bn. Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, the command.



*Richard Meinertzhagen.*

From the Shropshire Star, 11 April 2006 [3](#).

On the way into the country, the two English battalions are exposed to scattered fire, and lieutenant colonel Jourdain apparently panics. Perhaps he will have a flashback to his experiences in the dense vegetation at Tanga in November of the previous year, where similar German fire had severe consequences. The advance stalls as he does not want to expose his soldiers to casualties.



*In heliograph, ca. 1920*

From a simultaneous postcard.

The attack force's intelligence officer, Captain Meinertzhagen, therefore seeks out Lieutenant Colonel Jourdain and threatens to deprive him of command if he does not immediately advance.

A discussion about the conditions of competence arises as Jourdain is not immediately in the mood to follow the invitation, and Meinertzhagen informs Heliograph immediately General Stewart about the situation.

The general's answer is not to be misunderstood: either the half-battalion advances, or the lieutenant colonel hands over command to Captain Meinerzhagen. The battalion advances... 4) —

### **The attack resumes**

The terrain is described as uneven and swampy, but despite this the advance continues during the afternoon, during which 2nd Bn. Loyal North Lancashire Regiment takes Arab Ridge; a German machine gun on Arab Ridge is destroyed by fire from the 28th Mountain Battery.

At nightfall, which at this time of year, close to the equator, occurs approx. 18:00, positions on the ridges north of the town have been reached - Lancs Spur, Gun Spur and Fusilier Knoll, as they are named on Map 2, after the two English infantry battalions and the gun division. General Stewart's command post is established at Gun Spur.

25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. The Royal Fusiliers are the unit that suffered the most on the first day of the attack - 3 dead and 9 wounded 5). The assault force's junction point is established on a banana plantation near Gun Spur, and the area here is secured by a company from the 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. Royal Fusiliers and 29th Punjabis.

Fortunately, the night passes calmly, because the attackers are exhausted from more than 12 hours of advancing through the difficult and wet terrain, as well as the constant search for cover from enemy fire. The catering service does not get many words of praise from 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. Royal Fusiliers. Provisions should have been made to the battalion, but Lieutenant Selous and his men saw nothing of it. The lieutenant manages to dry his uniform when someone sets fire to some thatched huts, and despite his 65 years he does not feel more exhausted than the other soldiers. (Source 10)

### **D+1 - Continue to break**

At dawn, the advance towards Bukoba is resumed, where it is observed that the German forces are digging positions on the northern outskirts.



*Askarii in attack, drawn by LR Döbrich-Steglitz.*

Fra traditional association of former protection and overseas troops.

The advance is slowed between 07:00 and 08:00 by machine gun fire and a German counter-attack (perhaps not quite as dramatic as in the photo) which, however, fails.

Between 08:00 and 09:00 operations have to stop when a torrential downpour breaks out, hampering all movement.

25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. The Royal Fusiliers advance directly towards the town, covering fire from the lake from the lake. 2nd Bn. The Loyal North Lancashire Regiment initiates an immediate movement; 3rd King's African Rifles and 29th Punjabis form the reserve.

For a time the 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn sinks . The advance of the Royal Fusiliers by a sniper, who is unsuccessfully engaged by everything from a platoon of riflemen, a machine gunner to a mountain cannon. The fire comes from a well-concealed position in a marshy area in front of Bukoba; the position can be observed from General Stewart's command station, but not from close range. Finally, Captain Meinertzhagen ventures out on his own and takes down the gunner, who turns out to be a German officer.



*Brigadegeneral Stewart (i trenchcoat) ved Bukoba, 23. juni 1915.*

From Source 10.

The general's trench coat, which would probably be too warm under normal conditions, may indicate that the photo was taken shortly after 09:00, when the torrential downpour stopped.

The kepi-like headdress worn by the two outermost officers shows that they belong to the King's

African Rifles, and one senses the diamond-shaped mark that identifies them as belonging to the 3rd King's African Rifles.

The photo was probably taken at the General's Command Station on *Gun Spur*.

At 10:00 the attack resumes. 29th Punjabis and the two mountain guns are deployed in support of 2nd Bn. Loyal North Lancashire Regiment, and gradually the Germans withdraw from their positions northwest of Bukoba.

Around 11:00 the German field gun is withdrawn, near the Protestant mission station, and the 28th Mountain Battery succeeds in destroying the cannon's bullhead, with two direct hits. Continued accurate fire from the two mountain guns prevents the crew from bringing the gun away and it later falls to the 2nd Bn. The hands of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment.



10 pdr. mountain gun from 21st Kohat Mountain Battery.  
From King Emperor.

The cannon is of the same type as was used at Bukoba 6).

Approx. 13:30 moves 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. Royal Fusiliers and 3rd King's African Rifles into Bukoba, and soon after also the 2nd<sup>nd</sup> Bn. Loyal North Lancashire Regiment up to town.

15:00 the German troops have escaped Bukoba and the positions around the town, and the battle is over.

## Tab

Source 1 states losses on the English side as 7 killed and 25 wounded, including 2 officers. Losses on the German side are estimated at 50.

Compilations of statements in the available war diaries give the following figures:

**Table 5.1: English losses during the battle**

2nd Loyal North Lancs. 25th Royal Fusiliers East African Regiment (*Kilde 6 og 21*)

Fallen Wounded Total Fallen Wounded Total Fallen Wounded Total

Officers					1	1		1	1
Soldiers	1	6	7	8	11	19	1	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

In private notes to a later battalion history, Lieutenant Colonel Jourdain mentions that the 3rd King's African Rifles "lost a few men" during the fighting on 22 June. (Source 18)

The East African Regiment also reported one missing - a native bearer.

The English fallen are buried in Bukoba, including the two who died on 23 June, and who are brought ashore from the docking area on HMS USOGA. The graves have since been moved to various official war cemeteries.

**Table 5.2: German losses** (Source

11) Fallen Wounded Total Germans

2	4	6
---	---	---

Askarier	5	30 42
Ruga-rugas 7		
A total of 14		<b>34 48</b>

My information about the German losses comes from Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's memoirs, but a breakdown per device is not mentioned. This information is also likely to have been the basis for the entry in the official history.

## Bukoba plyndres

The "official" part of the destruction of the city included everything of military value - including the administration building and the telegraph station. The Faridkot Imperial Service Sappers carried out this task; Captain Tillard, Royal Engineers, superintended the blowing up of the telegraph station.

67 rifles and 32,000 cartridges were taken back to Kisumu, while other weapons and associated ammunition were destroyed on the spot [7](#)). An attempt was made to get the captured cannon back, but it fell into the water in several fathoms when it was backed aboard a barge.

The booty from Bukoba included a flag brought home by Acting Lieutenant Dartnel, 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. Royal Fusiliers, and afterwards presented to General Stewart as spoils of war. The flag was given to the Royal Fusiliers after the general's death and can be seen in the regiment's museum at the Tower of London. A section of the flag can be seen in [Source 23](#).



*Officers from 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. Royal Fusiliers with the flag from the administration building in Bukoba. From Source 15.*





The flag is the German national flag, in the colonial edition *Reichsdienstflaggen des Auswärtigen Amtes*, used from 1892 8).     

Lieutenant-Colonel Driscoll had requested, and obtained, permission for his soldiers to plunder the town, on condition "... that there be no violence or drunkenness." It has since been shrouded in a certain mystery as to what actually happened and who was most eager to loot Bukoba.

However, it also led to violence and drunkenness. The official history writes that local tribes completed the looting 9), but diary entries from some of those involved, e.g. referred to in Source 14, leaves no doubt that the looting was at least begun by the conquerors.

The spoils of war also included a lot of ivory, which was brought back. Among the more curious is a parrot that could say: *Ach, Du Schwein!* (Source 5)

## D+2 - Bukoba rømmes

It is said that it took 8 hours 10) to assemble the force and then get it on board the vessels. In the harbor there were officers who, with drawn sabers, threatened the soldiers to leave their loot on land. If not, they would be shot! (Source 11)

Of 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. The war diary of the Royal Fusiliers states that the intake began at 18:00. Two of the companies were deployed for protection, and at 06:00 on 25 June 1915 the last man was on board.

Before the fleet left Bukoba, the 3rd King's African Rifles searched the nearby islands - probably to ensure that the fleet was not surprised during the departure. A number of native canoes are found and destroyed by a force of Faridkot Sappers and Miners.



*Soldiers from 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn.*

*Royal Fusiliers with spoils of war from Bukoba.*  
From Source 15.

The fleet left the harbor at 12:00, bound for Kisumu, which was reached on 26 June 1915.

From Kisumu the units returned to their respective base areas.

25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. The Royal Fusiliers set off per rail to the base camp at Kajiado, arriving at 12:25 on 28 June. In the camp, an inspection of the weapons and equipment of the returnees was carried out, and garrison duty was resumed. On 30 June, a special commission was set up which was to

investigate the background of lost weapons, equipment, etc. (Source 14)

## Afterplay

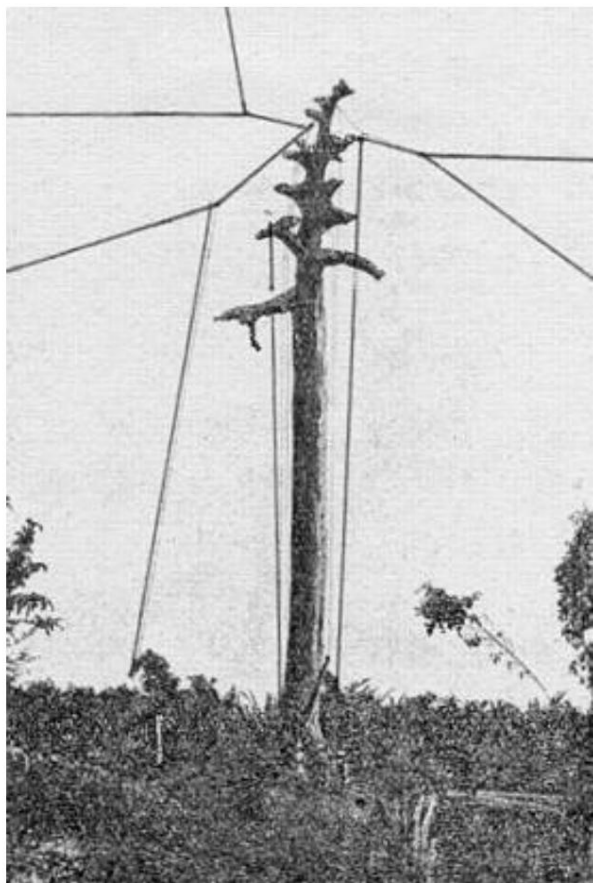
A soldier of New Zealand origin from the 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. Royal Fusiliers, mentions a parade after the return in which the Commander-in-Chief in East Africa, Major-General Tighe, praised the soldiers for their efforts in battle, but at the same time gave a severe scolding for their subsequent actions.

It was also announced that certain settings for decorations, as a consequence of the looting, would not be accommodated. (Source 14)

Acting Lieutenant Dartnell, who captured the flag, was nominated to receive the Distinguished Service Order and to be mentioned in the order of the day, but as far as I can trace, neither happened; however, he was commissioned as a lieutenant in late July 1915. (Source 24)

Brigadier-General Stewart receives a congratulatory telegram from Lord Kitchener on 28 July 1915, and shortly afterwards is appointed major-general.

## After the games



*The emergency antenna at Kamashuma, near Bukoba.*

Fra artiklen pioneering years of colonial telegraph connections af Till Waldorfer.

(Traditional association of former protection and overseas troops).

After the withdrawal of the British forces , *Abteilung Stuemmer* again occupied Bukoba. An emergency antenna was set up at Kamashuma; I cannot determine the location of this locality more precisely than that it should be south-west of Bukoba; the time of establishment is not available either.

The antenna mast was the trunk of a 27 m high tree, on which 6 antenna cables of 80 m length were mounted. Using this antenna one could clearly receive signals from the station in Mwanza.

The station at Kamashuma was designated by the code word *Kaloma*.

The destruction of the telegraph station at Bukoba, which was one of the objectives of the operations, had the unintended effect of cutting off the English side (at least for a time) from the source of intelligence which had consisted in intercepting enemy signal traffic... (Source 4)

It is not clear from the available information whether the emergency station was only capable of receiving or whether it could also transmit.

In the intelligence field, the boring experience of an Englishman who had been interned in Bukoba was further reported, that the Germans had succeeded in recovering the cargo from the S/S KRONBORG - the code name for the English ship RUBENS, which the Germans had brought up and sent to East Africa as a supply ship for the stranded SMS KÖNIGSBERG.



S/S KRONBORG.

From Source 25.

The ship was loaded with i.a. artillery shells, rifles, rifle ammunition, medical equipment, medicine, troop uniforms and 3,000 tons of coal, all things which helped the German forces in East Africa to continue to put up a fierce resistance.

## Closing



Lieutenant Colonel D. Driscoll, DSO,

Commanding Officer, 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn.  
Battalion Royal Fusiliers.

Fra The Australian Frontiersman, nr. 2, 2005 (Legion of Frontiersmen, Australian Division).  
Image published by permission of the Legion of Frontiersmen Australian Division.

A photo of Lt. Col. Daniel Patrick Driscoll, commander of the 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. Battalion Royal Fusiliers, must be a fitting end to this report, which has largely dealt with the efforts of this battalion.

The photograph was taken at Maktou by Captain Cherry Kearton, and was acquired by the Australian branch of the Legion of Frontiersmen, which featured it in its membership magazine in 2005.

Whether the parrot is the one that Major Turner brought home from Bukoba, however, nothing is known.

Viewed in a larger context, the fighting at Bukoba is in itself a modest operation, but it served its purpose, namely to raise morale, and now at last there was an English success story to tell.

From a military historical perspective, the battles are interesting as an example of a *combined operation* that was carried out with relatively small resources and which, unlike the landing at Tanga in November 1914, was a success.

## So

I am indebted to Harry Fecitt, Madeira, for supplying me with extracts from the war diaries of the relevant units, acquired in connection with research prior to the publication of a book on 2 North Lancashire Regiment in East<sup>fd</sup> Loyal Africa.

I have met with much goodwill from Geoffrey A. Pocock and David Alexander-Fleming, of the Legion of Frontiersmen's English and Australian branches respectively. I thank you for the permission to bring the image material.

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### War diaries

*nd Loyal North Lancashire Regiment War Diary for the period 22nd to 30th June 1915.* An extract, 18. 2 prepared by Harry Fecitt, and supplemented by Lieutenant-Colonel Jourdain's private notes and corresponding from Captain G. Atkinson (platoon leader of the 1st Platoon).

From Harry Fecitt. 19. 25th (Frontiersmen) Bn. The Royal Fusiliers' War Diary for the period 19th to 30th June 1915. A transcript prepared by Steve Eeles and supplied as a post in the Great War

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21. *War Diary of the East African Maxim Gun Company for the period 22 June to 30 August 1915.* From the National Archives, via Harry Fecitt.

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23. An East African Victoria Cross af Kevin Patience (Hellfire Corner).
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## Postscript - About police units in East Africa during the First World War



*Uganda Police, ca. 1950.*

From a review of the book  
The Dawn Stand-to - The  
life of IVB (Peter) Mills (Jeremy  
Peirson).

The police units in the protectorates of Uganda and English East Africa were established around 1900. From the beginning, the units were militarily equipped and organized, as the tasks for a large part revolved around the internal and external security of the areas. In the run-up to the First World War, the contours of a police force in a more traditional sense were drawn, although internal security was still high on the agenda.

During the First World War actual military units were multiplied - in Uganda initially an *Active Service Company*, consisting of approx. 200 men.

The force was then expanded to an infantry battalion, *the Uganda Police Service Battalion* consisting of 22 British officers and 4 non-commissioned officers as well as 750 native non-commissioned officers and soldiers, who were deployed on the protectorate's border with German East Africa. The battalion was under the command of Major (originally Police Commissioner) Ernest Henry Thorn Lawrence. The battalion served well until 1917, when it was disbanded.

The police forces retained, as shown in the picture, a military character.

Information about the efforts of the police forces can be found, for example, in Source 1 as well as on the official websites of the respective police units: [History of the Uganda Police \(Uganda Police\)](#) and [History of the Kenya Police \(Kenya Police\)](#).

Per Finsted

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#### **To note:**

1) From *Die deutschen Kolonien - Deutsch-Ostafrika* (Frontline18). Apart from the larger caliber, the 9cm version looks like the 8cm version.

- 2) Source 1 describes the German cannon as a 2.9-inch pamphlet, which does not correspond to any known German pamphlet. 2.9 inches corresponds to 7.3 cm, and it may be an *8 cm Feldkanone C/73*, where the model year is confused with the caliber. The strike force intelligence officer describes the gun as a 75 mm gun. (Kilde 10) Kanonens skuddata mv. fremgår af German Guns of World War One in South Africa (The South African Military History Society).
- 3) In the article, Sarah Hart describes how in 1905 Richard Meinertzhagen came into possession of an African striking weapon - a staff with a ball head - which he then carried with him (although not in the picture).
- 4) This part of the story comes from Meinertzhagen's memoirs *Army Diary 1899-1926* (here from Source 3). Historians do not attach value to the book as a primary source, as it is an edited diary whose purpose has clearly been to portray the author in the most favorable possible light. Whether the situation therefore took place as described can hardly be determined with certainty. However, there is nothing in the battalion's war diary or Lt. Col. Jourdain's private notes to support the experience of panic. It is perhaps rather the experience of the pace of the attack, or lack thereof, that causes the situation.
- 5) Two of the wounded died on 23 June 1915, and another on 16 July 1915, admitted to No. 4 Base Hospital, in Kisumu.
- 6) For further information on Indian mountain batteries, see *The Indian Army - On Mountain Batteries, 1890-1940*.
- 7) Source 19 contains an inventory of the amount of weapons and ammunition that was captured and destroyed.
- 8) Fra *Foreign Office Flags 1892-1919 (Germany)* af Santiago Dotor (*Flags of the World*).
- 9) The view of the involvement of native tribes is supported by missionary Döring, based on observations of how the Protestant mission station behaved when he returned after the fighting. (Source 11)
- 10) Omtalt i *The Great War in Africa* af Byron Farwell, Viking, London 1987, ISBN 0-67080-244-1. Can be borrowed from the Royal Garrison Library.