

# German medals awarded to native soldiers in Africa, 1888-1918

## Introduction

In original German sources about askaris, the word faithfulness is mentioned almost per automation together with the word askari. Contemporary sources often take an almost opposite view, focusing on European oppression of the natives.



*Loyalty to Askari in German East Africa, tegnet af Fritz Grottemeyer, 1918.*

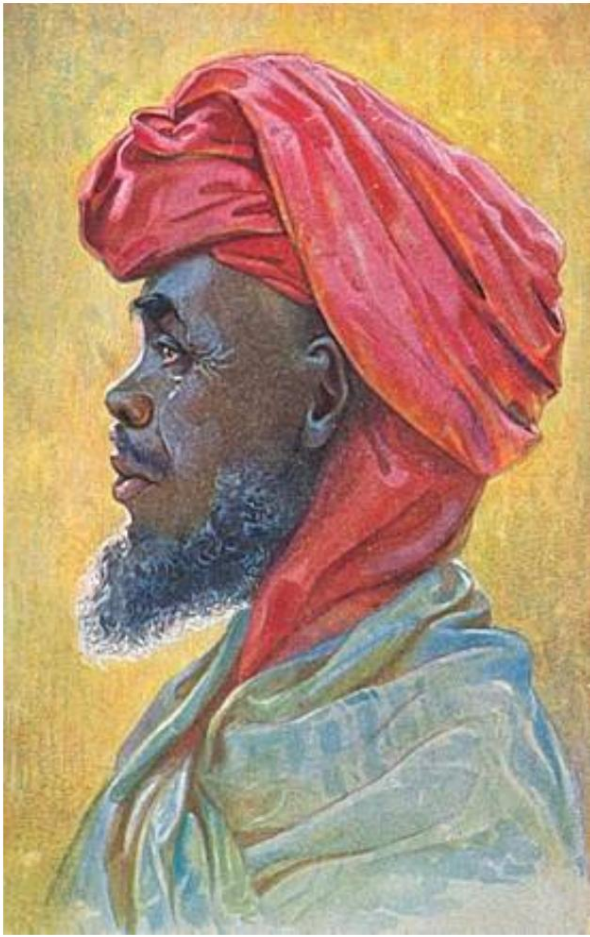
From a roughly contemporaneous German postcard.

Loyalty or not, it is a fact that several were awarded bravery medals for their efforts in German service, just as a considerable part of the askaris were in principle professional soldiers, recruited in various parts of Africa, including Sudan from where many of the first East African askaris stammered.

This article discusses the various awards given to the German askaris.

## Military decoration 2nd class

The first German askari to receive a distinction was Sergeant (*Schausch*) Chomba Wadi Hamit, who was awarded the Militärehrenzeichen 2nd Class for his efforts on 26 March 1889 during the so-called Arab Revolt in German East Africa (from August 1888 to May 1890).



*Arabs from East Africa.*

From a German postcard published in the 1920s.

Sergeant Hamit acted as patrol leader during the fighting at the port city of Bagamoyo [1](#) (the original capital of German East Africa; located off Zanzibar) and his patrol chased away a superior enemy force; Sergeant Hamit personally took three prisoners.



*Rear Admiral Carl Deinhard.*

From Source 2.

On the recommendation of the Imperial Navy, which was responsible for the campaign, Emperor Wilhelm II approved that Sergeant Hamit be awarded the Medal of Valor, 2nd Class, which was normally reserved for German non-commissioned officers and privates.

Sergeant Hamid was presented with his medal by Rear Admiral Carl Deinhard at a parade for the total troop strength



*A soldier of the Schutztruppe as  
a post at a revolver cannon.*

Excerpt from an illustration  
*Marine und Schutztruppen in den Tropen* seen  
for sale on eBay.

The drawing here probably does not depict Sergeant Chomba Wasi Hamit, but is very similar, including the machine gun in the background, to a photograph of him shown in Source 1. In the photograph, however, the sergeant is wearing his medal.

Sergeant Chomba Wasi Hamit was part of the so-called *Wissmann Troop*, the predecessors of the Protection Troops in German East Africa 2). [\\_\\_](#)

At the beginning of the uprising, the Wissmann troops consisted of:

- 600 askaris, recruited in Sudan (6 companies) 30
- Sudanese artillerymen 100
- Zulus (1 company), recruited in Portuguese East Africa 80 askaris,
- recruited locally 40 sailors,
- recruited in Sudan.

The information is taken from the article Arab Uprising in German East Africa 1888-90 by Holger Doebold (Source 3); an absolutely exciting description of the events during the Arab Revolt.

## Order of the Crown Medal



*Order of the Crown Medal.*

From Source 4.

However, Sergeant Hamit became the only native soldier to be awarded the Militärehrenzeichen 2nd Class. Subsequently, 30 copies of it were sent per 1 December 1888 introduced the Prussian *Kronenordenmedaille* to East Africa.

The medal was originally intended for German subordinates, e.g. non-Prussian valets and lackeys, as well as corresponding foreign officials, but a number were thus assigned to askaris in German East Africa. From 1893 the medal could also be awarded to civilians native to the German colonies.

The medal was worn in a cornflower blue ribbon. The back bears the text WR.

I am not aware of how large the medal actually is, but the Governor of German East Africa, Hermann von Wissmann, subsequently requested medals of a considerably larger size. Some of the askaris enlisted in the Sudan were awarded various English (and Egyptian) decorations which they had received for their efforts in Egyptian and later English service, and these veterans were not impressed by the small German medals.



*German Warrior Merit Medal, 2nd Class, Silver.*

Ms. Galerie d'Histoire, André Huesken.



*Principle sketch  
of own design,  
according to Source 1.*

## German Warrior Merit Medal

The medal was instituted by the Reichmarineamt in 1892 to recognize the efforts of native soldiers in German East Africa. The medal was worn with a black and white ribbon. The provisions regarding the medal expressly pointed out that the medal was not part of the Prussian order system.

Per 25 March 1893 it was decided in an imperial regulation that the medal could now be awarded to soldiers as well as police soldiers in all German colonies, but cf. Source 1 it was only awarded in the African colonies as far as is known.

Class	Grade	Text on cover	Text on back	Diameter	Assigned
1.	Sølv	Kriegerverdienst	William II Emperor	>25 mm	Native Officers
2.	Silver	Kriegerverdienst	WR	25 mm	Native NCOs and Privates

Per On 2 October 1895, a 1st and a 2nd class in gold were introduced, so that soldiers who had previously been awarded the silver medal could be recognized for further efforts. The medal was then found in four versions:

Class	Grade	Text on front	Text on back	Diameter	Assigned
1. Klasse	Guld	Kriegerverdienst	William II Emperor	>25 mm	Native Officers
1. Klasse	Sølv	Kriegerverdienst	William II Emperor	>25 mm	
2nd class	Guld	Kriegerverdienst	WR	25 mm	Native NCOs and Privates
2nd Class	Silver	Kriegerverdienst	WR	25 mm	

In addition to the text, the medals of the 1st class also bore the emperor's portrait [4](#)

### The Emperor authorized in April 1918 the allocation of No

Warrior Merit Medal 1st Class, guld	25
Warrior Merit Medal 1st class, sølv	100
Warrior Merit Medal 2nd Class, gold	300
Warrior Merit Medal 2nd class, sølv	2.000

From 1888 to 1918, a total of	Quantity
Warrior Merit Medal 1st Class, guld	3
Warrior Merit Medal 1st class, sølv	18
Warrior Merit Medal 2nd Class, gold	116
Warrior Merit Medal 2nd class, sølv	1.354

Source 1 states that as late as April 1918, Kaiser Wilhelm II authorized the commander of German forces in East Africa, Major General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, to award 2,225 medals of valor.

The extent to which this pool was used is not known, but Source 1 further states that a total of 1,491 copies of the Krieger-Verdienstmedaille were awarded from 1888 to 1918.

## Closing

Perhaps the most highly decorated native soldier was the Sudanese officer (*Effendi*), Gaber Mohamed, mentioned in Source 1. Gaber Mohamed was awarded the following medals:

An Egyptian medal <a href="#">5</a>	—	For distinction during the fighting at Suakin in 1884
Warrior Merit Medal 2nd class, sølv		For distinction during the fighting near Bagamoyo on 8 May 1889
Warrior Merit Medal 1st class, sølv		For distinction during the suppression of the Hehe rebellion in 1894 <a href="#">6</a>
Warrior Merit Medal 1st Class, guld		Nominated for the medal in 1897, but the background is not stated

## Sources

1. *Askari and Fitafita - Colored Mercenaries in the German Colonies* of Thomas Morlang, Ch. Links Verlag, Berlin 2008, ISBN 3-86153-476-1, pp 38-41.
2. German East Africa 1888/89 af M. Bodeux (Imperial German Orders & Decorations, Andreas M.Schulze Ising).
3. Arab Uprising in German East Africa 1888-90 af Holger Doebold (The Heliograph).
4. The Royal Order of the Crown Medal - The Order of the Crown Medal (awarded by 1888-1918) af Uwe Brückner (Imperial German Orders & Decorations, Andreas M. Schulze Ising). Warrior Merit Medal, Meyers Großes Konversations-Lexikon, Volume 11. Leipzig 1907, p. 660 (Zeno.org).
6. Warrior Merit Medal, German Colonial Lexicon (1920), Volume II, p. 379 (University Library Frankfurt am Main).
7. Krieger-Verdienstmedaille; various posts in the discussion forum Gentlemen's Military Interest Club.

Per Finsted



*Native officer (Effendi) from German East Africa.*

## Postscript

After writing the above, I found this photograph in the database Koloniales Bildarchiv (Universität Frankfurt aM).

The photograph shows a native officer - *Effendi* - in German East Africa. Unfortunately, the photograph is not dated, and no further information is available about the subject.

Particularly interesting are the Effendi's two medals, which can be seen above his left breast pocket.



In an enlarged section, you can see that there is a larger and a smaller medal, worn in black and white ribbons, but it is not possible to tell whether the medals are gold or silver.

As a minimum, it must therefore be the Deutsche Krieger-Verdienstmedaille of 1st and 2nd Class, silver.

I became aware of the photograph's existence via a post in the discussion forum Axis History Forum.

It mentions, among other things, that in 1914 there were only two native officers in German East Africa. Further mention is made of a few native officers who were appointed during the war.

- Effendi Said Hassan, 4. Schützenkompanie, who fell during the fighting at Mahiwa, 17-19. October 1917 [7](#)).
- Effendi Juma Mursal, Abteilung Göring [8](#)), who was promoted after a skillful effort as a patrol leader at the Kidunda Heights, 8 June 1916 [9](#)). In November 1917, seriously affected by a liver disease, he came into English captivity.
- Effendi Mitambo, 11. Field Company, which at the outbreak of the war had the rank of *Sol* (= Feldwebel/senior sergeant); no further information is available.

Effendi Said Hassan omtales i arch *under three governors* skrevet af Oberleutnant Wilhelm Methner [10](#)), the var chef for 4. Schützenkompagnie under kampene ved Mahiwa.

*"None of our losses at that time affected me more than the death of Effendi Hassan; he was one of the few native non-commissioned officers whom the commander (Lettow-Vorbeck) had promoted for their great fidelity and bravery. For many years this man of few words had been the backbone of my company, and as a person he was loyal to the utmost and maintained strict discipline. I could therefore trust him in any situation, even the most serious and difficult. I have mourned many fallen comrades, but today I am not ashamed to say that I really wept over the death of Effendi Hassan when I sat alone in my grass hut in the field hospital."*

/Per Finsted

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#### To note:

- 1) Se Bagamoyo (Wikipedia).
- 2) See German colonial troops in East Africa - Uniforms and organization, 1914.
- 3) It is my guess that the reverse bore the text *Guilelmus II Imperator*, analogous to the 1895 edition.
- 4) *"The first class, for officers, bears the bust of the Kaiser with a steel helmet on the back"*. Mrs



Source 5.

- 5) The name of the medal is not stated, but in theory it could be the English Egypt Medal, with the ribbon Suakin 1884, which was given for the battles from 19 February to 26 March 1884. See e.g. Campaign Medals (The Melik Society).
- 6) See Chief Mkwawa (Wikipedia), who was the leader of the Hehe tribe (also known as Wahehe or Uhehe) from 1879 until his death in 1898.
- 7) 25th (Frontiersmen) Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, og 2nd King's African Rifles deltog i disse kampe. Se Battle Honours of the 25th "Frontiersmen" Battalion, RF 1914-18 (Legion of Frontiersmen).
- 8) Karl Göring was adjutant and had the rank of first lieutenant in August 1914; during the battles at Tanga in November 1914 he was the commander of the 4th Schützenkompanie; since then he served as head of department.
- 9) The location of the Kikunda ridge cannot be immediately determined, but it is assumed to be near the town of Mkalamo, where the fighting took place on the 8th-10th. June 1916.
- 10) *Under three governors - 16 years service in German tropes* af by Wilhelm Methner, WG Korn, Breslau 1938.