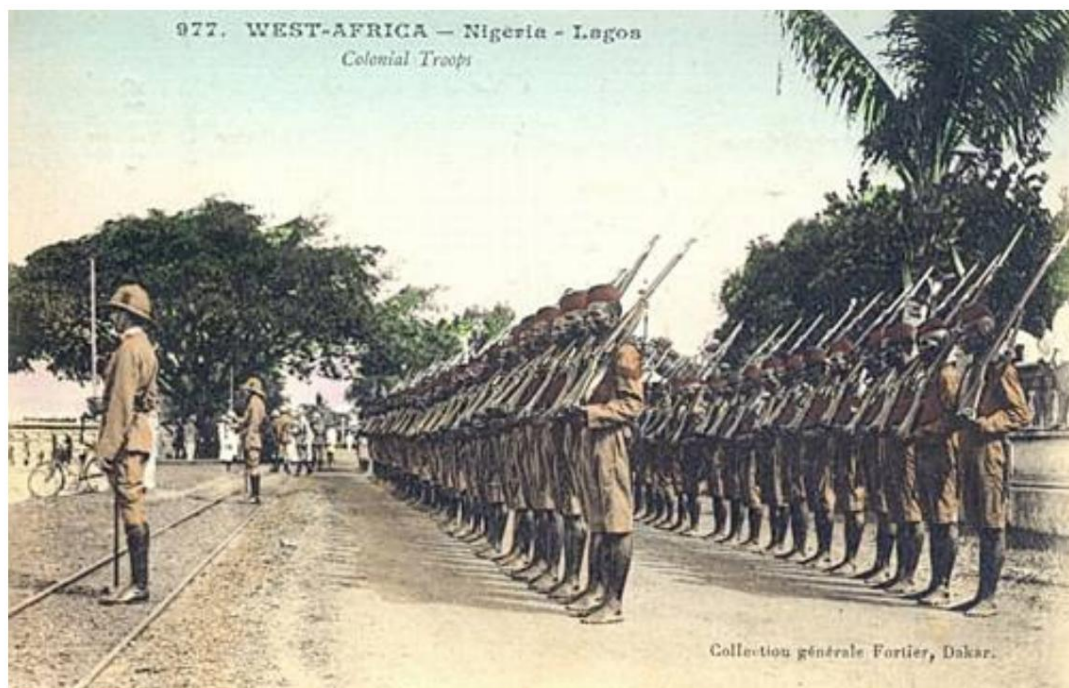


On English units during the campaign in Cameroon, 1914-1916 - Part 1

Introduction



Colonial Troops, Lagos, Nigeria, ca. 1914.

From a contemporary postcard, sent from Lagos in 1914.

During the First World War, military units from the British West African colonies of Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Nigeria participated in campaigns against the German colonies in West Africa - Togoland and Cameroon - and some of the units were later sent to German East Africa to reinforce the Allied units there.

This article can be read in conjunction with *On the Campaign in Cameroon, 1914-1916* (Source 1), which provides the military historical background for the present presentation of the organization and uniforming of the British, West African, West Indian and Indian units. The focus is on the units that landed in Cameroon, rather than the units that attacked from Nigeria.

English units in West Africa, 1914

In 1914 the following units were stationed in the English colonies in West Africa:

Garrison

Unit

Sierra Leone

50th Company, Royal Garrison Artillery

(The capital, Freetown, was an important port and maritime supply point.)

Sierra Leone Company, Royal Garrison Artillery

36th Fortress Company, Royal Engineers

West African Regiment

1st West India Regiment

Sierra Leone Battalion, West African Frontier Force

Elements from

- Army Service Corps,
- Royal Army Medical Corps and
- Army Ordnance Corps

Gambia

Gambia Company, West African Frontier Force

The Gold Coast

Gold Coast Battery, West African Frontier Force

(from 1957: Ghana)

Gold Coast Regiment, West African Frontier Force

Nigeria

1st Nigerian Battery, West African Frontier Force

2nd Nigerian Battery, West African Frontier Force

1st Battalion, Nigeria Regiment, West African Frontier Force

2nd Battalion, Nigeria Regiment, West African Frontier Force

3rd Battalion, Nigeria Regiment, West African Frontier Force

4th Battalion, Nigeria Regiment, West African Frontier Force

5th (Mounted Infantry) Battalion, Nigeria Regiment, West African Frontier Force

The total strength figure was approx. 350 English officers and non-commissioned officers, 150 English soldiers (Sierra Leone Company, Royal Garrison Artillery and 36th Fortress Company, Royal Engineers) as well as approx. 8,000 native non-commissioned officers and privates.

West African Regiment

The regiment, which was part of the regular British army, was formed in 1898 for the defense of Freetown in Sierra Leone. The regiment consisted of 12 infantry companies, commanded by Colonel EH Gorges.



West African Regiment.

Kort nr. 5 i serien Colonial & Indian Army Badges, John Player & Sons, 1917.

West African Regiment - Historisk resume

1898 West African Regiment oprettes

1928 West African Regiment disbanded

The following appears from the back of the card:

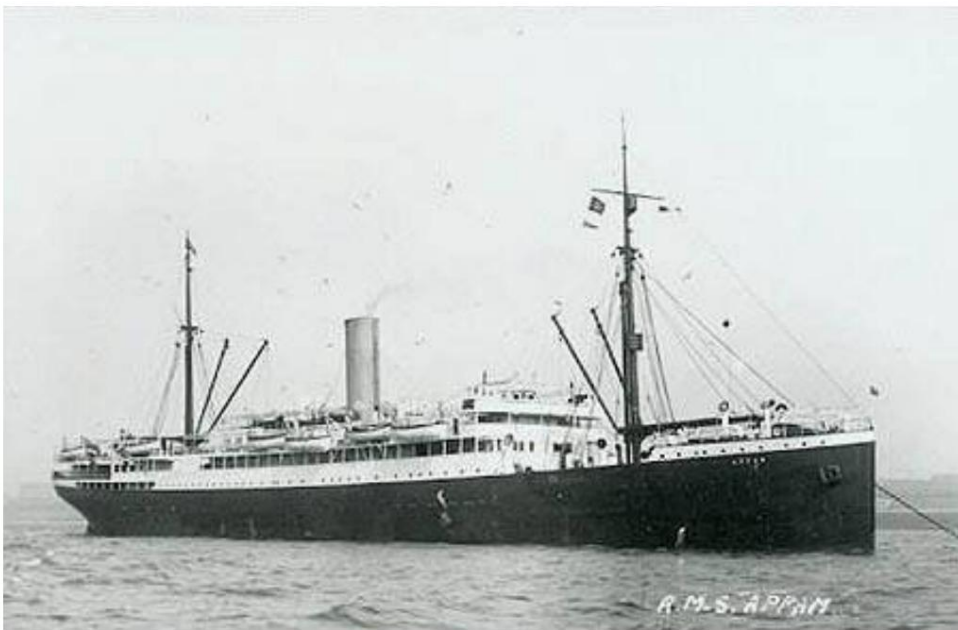
"The illustration shown is the badge of the West African Regiment. The headquarters of the regiment are at Sierra Leone, with detached stations in various parts of the Colony. The regiment served in Sierra Leone in 1898-99, and also took part in the Ashanti operations in 1900. In the present war it has taken an active part in the Expeditionary Forces operating in the Cameroons."

The regiment was awarded the banners of Duala and Cameroons 1914-16 for its service in the First World War [1](#)).

In Cameroon

West African Regiment (*Lieutenant-Colonel E. Vaughan*)

- 23 English officers, 18 English non-commissioned officers and 643 native non-commissioned officers and privates.
- The battalion was organized into 6 infantry companies as well as a machine gun platoon with 3 machine guns.



S/S APPAM 2). [_](#)

From the Elder Dempster Line (Simplon Postcards).

The force left Sierra Leone on 12 September 1914 on board S/S APPAM, escorted by HMS CHALLENGER.

S/S APPAM brought with it the Commander of the Expeditionary Force, Brigadier General CM Dobell, and some staff officers.

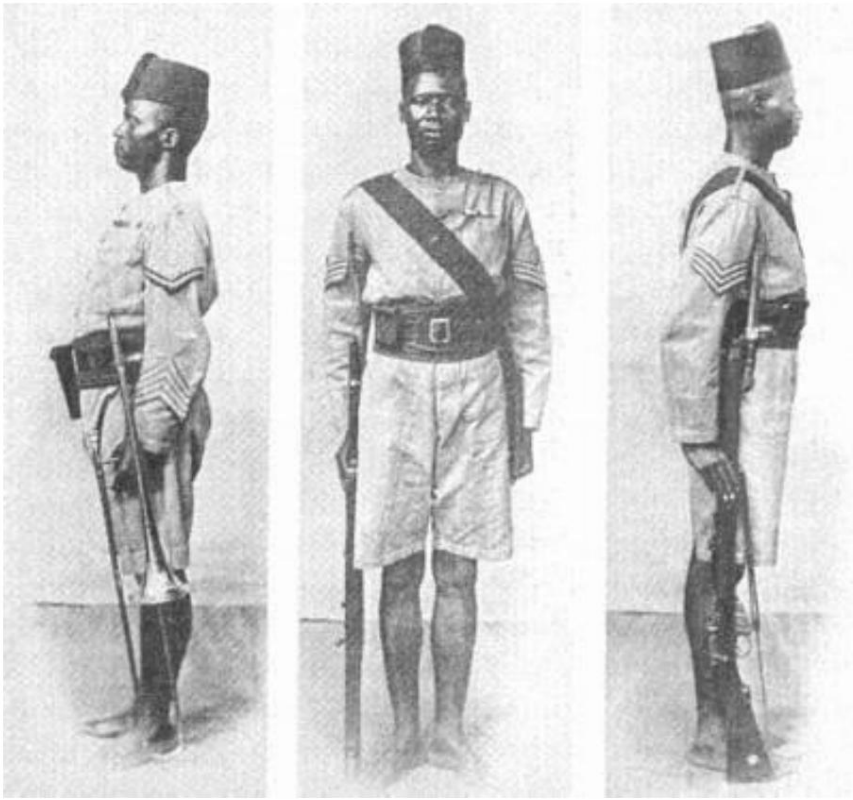
En route from Liverpool to the area of operations at Duala in Cameroon, the ship anchored in Gambia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria to take parts of the expeditionary force on board.

The ship was subsequently to serve as a support vessel for the expeditionary force until it was finally established in Cameroon.

The regimental commander, Colonel Gorges, who became commander of the English part of the expeditionary force, accompanied the S/S APPAM.

A corps of 1,275 porters from Sierra Leone also accompanied S/S APPAM.

Uniforms

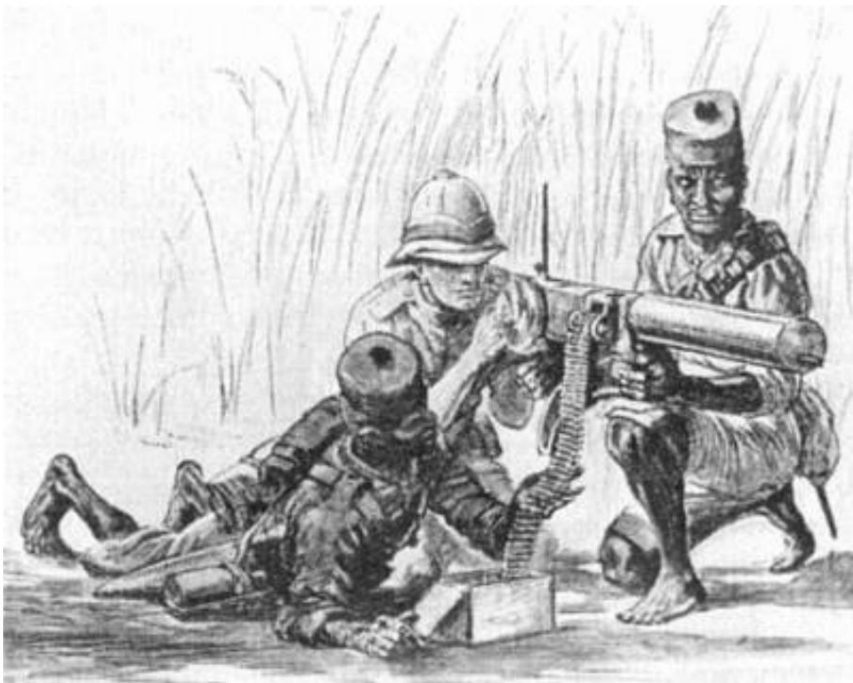


NCOs of the West African Regiment, c. 1914.
From Source 3.

The soldiers in the West African Regiment were recruited from among the tribes Temne (in the north) and Mende (in the south) [3](#) as well as the Muslim population group in Sierra Leone.

From 1901, the uniforms were khaki, with a red fez and red sash. Previously, dark blue uniforms similar to the West African Frontier Force were used.

During the campaign in Cameroon, the red fez was replaced with a slightly lower green round hat (*Kilmarnock*) with a green pompon (*tourie*).



Staff Sergeant Potter and machine gunners of the West African Regiment during the skirmish at Njanga.

The drawing is reproduced from Source 3, where it is stated,

that the field exhaust had been destroyed,
why the machine gun is held by the aide!

Similar caps were worn in the field by the units of the West African Frontier Force, and thus all English units were uniformly uniformed. See subsequent illustration under *Gold Coast Regiment*.

The reason for the change was that the soldiers with their red fezzes could easily be mistaken for German askaris, which happened on at least one occasion.

The drawing shows the low green hat with green pom-pom.



Sierra Leone Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery, ca. 1900.

Drawn by Richard Simkin.

From a postcard published by Dorset Soldiers in 2007.

Sierra Leone Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

The coastal defenses of Freetown in Sierra Leone consisted of:

- 50th Company, Royal Garrison Artillery Sierra
- Leone Company, Royal Garrison Artillery No. 36 Fortress
- Company, Royal Engineers

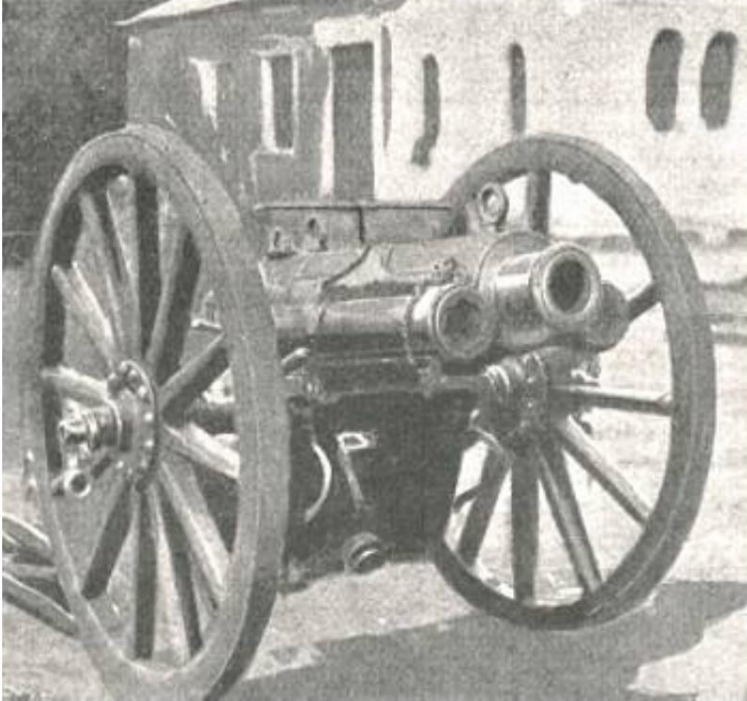
The Sierra Leone Company, Royal Garrison Artillery, raised in 1892, formed the mobile part of the coastal defences, but the 50th Company may also have had a number of field guns for deployment outside the fixed gun emplacements.

The officers and certain non-commissioned officers in it were English, while the rest of the battery consisted of native soldiers.

The coastal defenses themselves were decommissioned or mothballed in 1922, but restored immediately before the Second World War. Here the shield consisted of 2 pcs. 9.2-inch coastal defense guns 4). (Source 6)

This may also have been the equipment in the past, but my sources give no information on this.

2.95-inch QF Mountain Gun



2.95-inch QF Mountain Gun.
From the Great War Forum.

The Sierra Leone Company, Royal Garrison Artillery, was equipped with 6 pcs. 2.95-inch mountain guns.

The booklet was produced by Vickers-Maxim from 1897 and a total of 30 pieces. was procured for use in the West African colonies.

Data	Remark
In service	1901-1920 The cannon was called a " <i>Millimetre Gun</i> ".
Caliber	75 mm
Shot range	4,3 km

The "tubes" on the side of the barrel are recoil brakes.

The artillery units from Nigeria and the Gold Coast were equipped with corresponding pamphlets.



US Army Artillery Practice - 2.95-inch QF Mountain Gun, ca. 1910.
From a contemporary American postcard.

Another 90 pcs. was purchased by the American army, where they e.g. was deployed in the Philippines during World War II [5](#).

A number of pamphlets were also used by the Egyptian army.

Native carriers

Cannons and ammunition etc. were transported on the heads of native porters. The total weight of the pamphlet was approx. 450 kg; The cannon barrel and the laver each weighed approx. 110 kg, while a wheel weighed approx. 32 kg. 32 porters were required to transport a cannon, in addition to 30 porters to transport ammunition [6](#).



Carriers from the Gold Coast Battery transport the cradle for a 2.95-inch mountain gun. The cannon barrel itself was mounted in the cradle.
From Source 3.



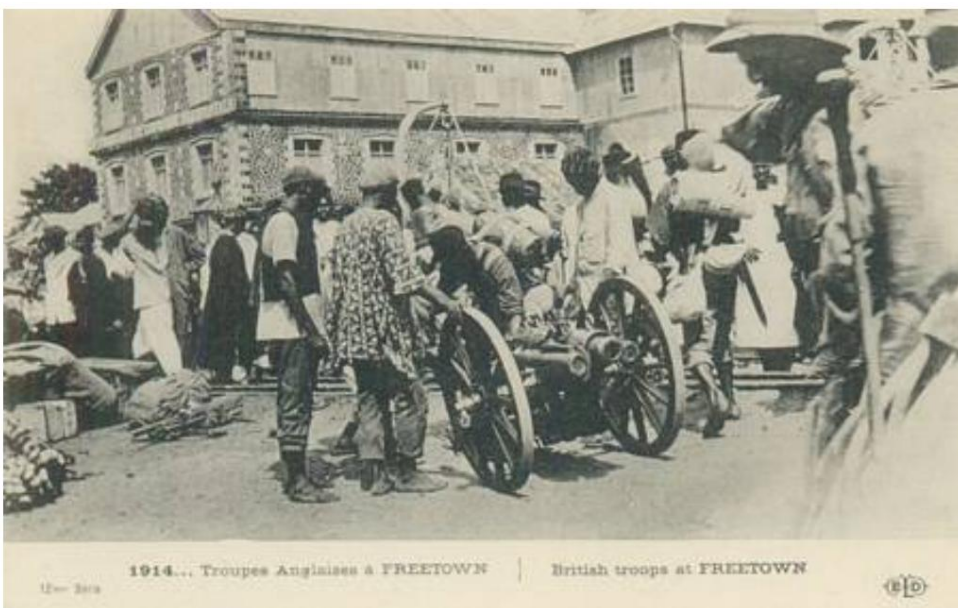
Carrier from one of the Nigerian mountain batteries, with a wheel for mountain cannon.
From Source 4.

Unlike porters who were conscripted into service in supply and transport units, the porters were recruited from the same tribes as the soldiers and were part of the unit. The carriers were generally unarmed.

The Nigerian bearer shows the field uniform, with a rolled up blanket and a bread bag over the right shoulder and a field bottle over the left. A machete may also have belonged to the equipment.

In Cameroon

In the mobilization of the forces for the Anglo-French Expeditionary Corps to be landed at Duala, the Sierra Leone Company, Royal Garrison Artillery, contributed a battery consisting of 4 pamphlets.



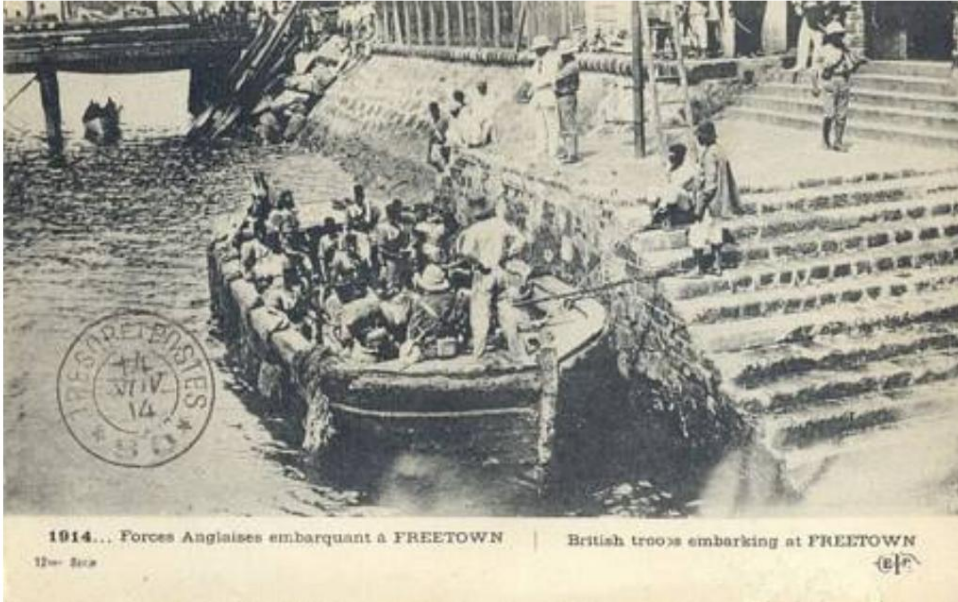
British troops at Freetown, 1914.

From a simultaneous postcard.

Sierra Leone Company, Royal Garrison Artillery (Captain N. d'A. Fitzgerald) .

- 3 English officers and 2 English non-commissioned officers as well as 46 natives
- The battery was equipped with 4 pcs. 2.95-inch mountain guns.

A number of porters must be added to the above figure for the crew.



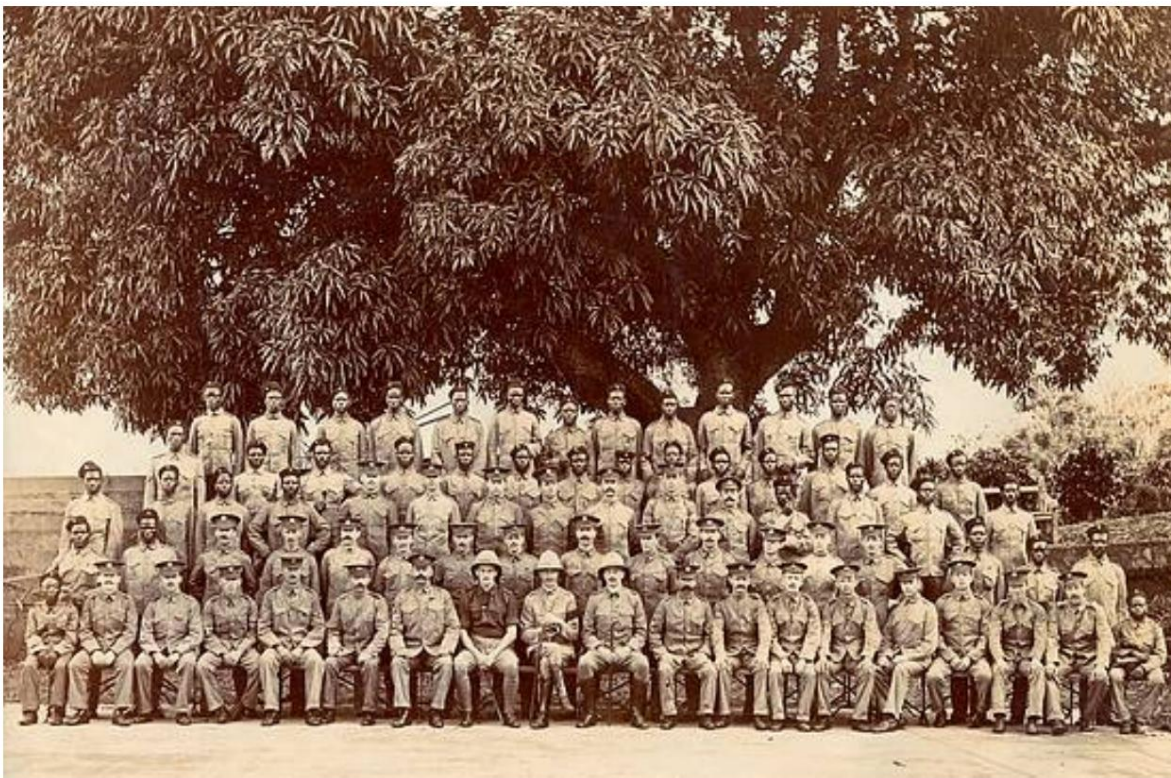
British troops embarking at Freetown, 1914.

From a simultaneous postcard.

It must be assumed that the soldiers are from the West African Regiment or the Sierra Leone Battalion, West African Frontier Force.

No. 36 Fortress Company, Royal Engineers

The company was established in 1858 [7\)](#) and in 1887 was given the status of a fortress engineering company. From 1890 to 1906 the company was stationed in Bermuda, after which it was sent to Sierra Leone. Here half the company consisted of native soldiers, under the command of English officers and non-commissioned officers.



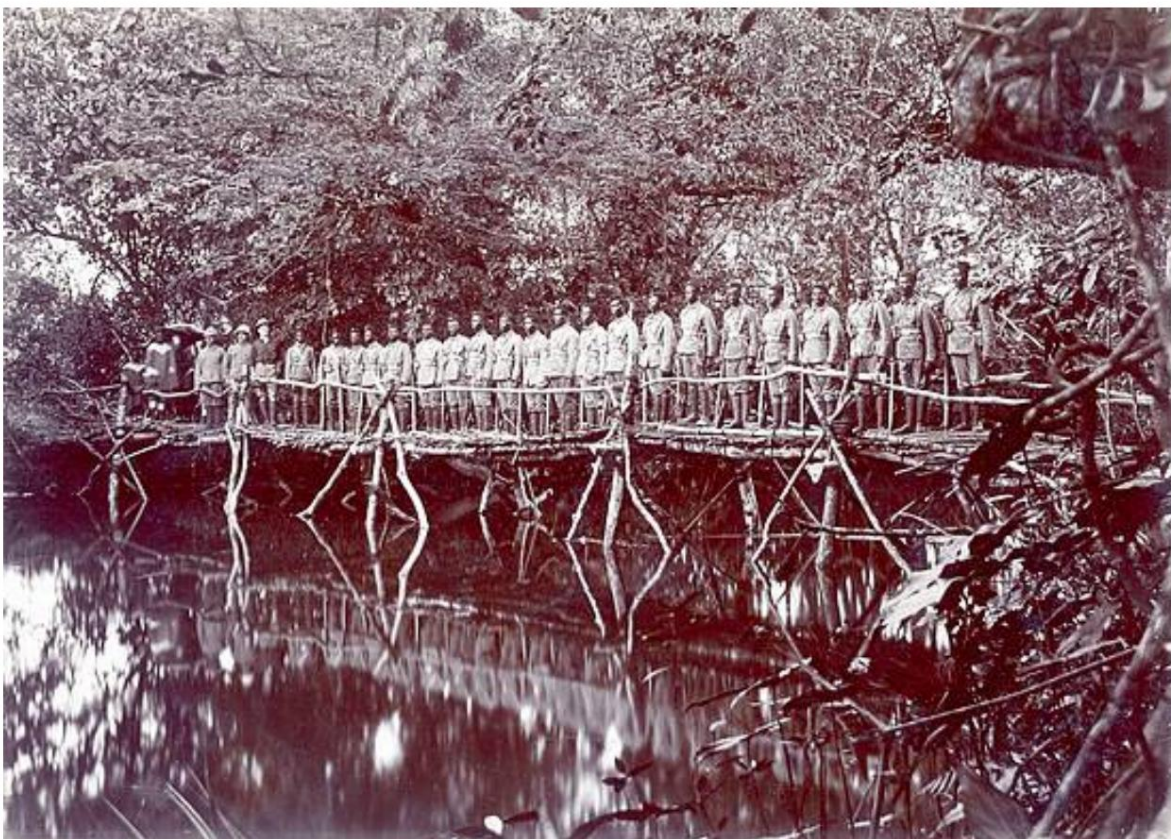
No. 36 Coy, Royal Engineers, Sierra Leone, 1908.

From an original photograph.

The photograph on the right shows 42 natives and 36 English engineer soldiers, including 3 officers.

In Sierra Leone one of the Engineer Company's duties was to operate the searchlights and means of signaling which formed part of the coastal defenses at Freetown, in conjunction with the 50th Company, Royal Garrison Artillery [8](#).

The Native Engineers wear the Engineers flaming shell as their cap badge (usually worn as a collar badge by English Engineers), while the English NCOs and Privates wear the Engineers badge.



No. 36 Coy, Royal Engineers, Sierra Leone, 1908.

From an original photograph.

The photograph below shows one of the company's platoons, consisting of 1 English officer, 2 English non-commissioned officers and 21 native engineer soldiers. In addition, a number of native carriers can be seen (on the left in the picture).

The bridge over the stream has been built by the engineer division.

In Cameroon

The company provided an engineer platoon for the Anglo-French expeditionary force. The overall engineer element was under the command of Captain PJ Mackesy, Royal Engineers. In the autumn of 1915, a further detachment is sent to Cameroon, as well as a field post unit, although the latter may not have been set up by the company.

The engineer element's other English personnel were former engineer officers and non-commissioned officers who worked in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, as well as civilian employees from the colonies' departments of public works and railway and telegraph services.

In September 1914, the engineering element of the Expeditionary Corps consisted of:

Telegraph Section (*Lieutenant HM Wolley*)

- 6 English officers and non-commissioned officers and 12 native non-commissioned officers and privates.

Railway Pioneer Division (*Lieutenant HE Kentish, Royal Engineers*)

- 10 English officers [9](#)) and non-commissioned officers and 7 native non-commissioned officers and privates.

Engineer Division (*Lieutenant CVS Jackson, Royal Engineers*), from No. 36 Fortress Company, Royal Engineers

- 1 English officer, 1 English non-commissioned officer and 13 native non-commissioned officers and privates.



Heliograph from one of the units of the West African Frontier Force.
From Source 2.

Captain FLN Giles, Royal Engineers, was the Expeditionary Force's Signals Officer (*Director of Signals*).

The expeditionary force's staff also had a signal company with the following strength:

Signal company

- 2 English non-commissioned officers as well as 20 native non-commissioned officers and privates.

The native soldiers came from the Gambia Company and the Nigeria Regiment.

The units directly attached to the *General Headquarters Troops* also included a *Headquarters Escort* of 25 native NCOs and privates from the Gold Coast Regiment; Lt. A. McC. Inglis, Gambia Company, was Commandant at Headquarters (*Camp Commandant*).

Sierra Leone Battalion, West African Frontier Force



Royal West African Frontier Force.
From *Regimental Badges*
by TJ Edwards,
Gale & Polden Limited, 1951.

Sierra Leone Battalion - Historical summary [10](#)

1829 Sierra Leone Police Corps

1890 Sierra Leone Frontier Police

1901 The Sierra Leone Battalion, West African Frontier Force

1928 The Sierra Leone Battalion, Royal West African Frontier Force

1959 The Royal Sierra Leone Regiment, Royal Sierra Leone Military Forces

1971 The Sierra Leone Regiment, Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces

The battalion consisted of 6 infantry companies, with Major FE Le Mesurier, Royal Dublin Fusiliers, as commander (1908) and Captain HH Bond as second-in-command and adjutant.

The regiment was awarded the banners of Duala and Cameroons 1914-16 for its service in the First World War.

In Cameroon



S/S AKABO.

Fra Picture Australia [11](#)).

The battalion fielded 2 companies for the campaign against Togoland. The companies arrived at the port city of Lomé in Togoland on 28 August 1914 aboard S/S AKABO, escorted from Freetown by HMS CUMBERLAND.

By this time the German units in Togoland had surrendered, but the soldiers from Sierra Leone were quickly needed, being assigned to the Anglo-French Expeditionary Force; they left Lomé 16 September 1914 aboard S/S ELMINA - see below under *Gold Coast Regiment*.



Sierra Leone Frontier Police, ca. 1897.

Fra NYPL Digital Library.

The 2 companies constituted from 25 September 1914 together with 2 companies from the Gold Coast Regiment

a composite *battalion* that was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel RA de B. Rose, Gold Coast Regiment.

C and E Company, Sierra Leone Battalion, West African Frontier Force

- 14 English officers, 6 English non-commissioned officers and 211 native non-commissioned officers and privates.

Later, the remaining 4 companies were sent to Cameroon and at the beginning of July 1915 the total strength was 579 men, of which 65 were on sick leave due to various tropical diseases.

Uniforms

The uniform consisted from 1903/1904 of khaki-coloured uniform blouses, trousers and wraps. The field uniform was like that of other units in the West African Frontier Force - see below under *Gold Coast Regiment*.

Gambia Company, West African Frontier Force



Royal West African Frontier Force.

From Regimental Badges

by TJ Edwards,

Gale & Polden Limited, 1951.

The smallest unit in the West African Frontier Force was the independent company in Gambia. Originally it was intended that the company should be part of the Sierra Leone Battalion, West African Frontier Force, but in 1902 it was decided that the company should be independent.

Gambia Company - Historical summary 12) [_____](#)

1901 The Gambia Company, West African Frontier Force

1928 The Gambia Company, Royal West African Frontier Force

1959 1st Battalion, The Gambia Regiment, Royal West African Frontier Force

1965 The unit is closed down

However, part of the company's 120 soldiers were recruited in Sierra Leone and only approx. 1/4 were recruited from among local tribes. From 1913 the company commander was Captain VB Thurston, Dorset Regiment. In 1914, the company numbered 137 men.

The company was awarded the banners Cameroons 1914-16, Nyangao and East Africa 1916-18 for its efforts in the First World War.



Royal West African Frontier Force.

One of six 54mm figures originally produced by Brigadier's Toy Soldiers and Military Figures; the figures are sold today by the company SoldierPac.

In Cameroon

When the Anglo-French expeditionary force was formed in August-September 1914, only a small command from the company was included, but in January 1915 the force was supplemented by half the company, after which it now functioned as an independent unit. A company from the West African Regiment was sent to Gambia to take over the company's role in the defense there.



Soldiers of the Gold Coast Regiment.
From Source 2.

At the beginning of July 1915, the total strength was 61 men, of which 27 were on sick leave due to various tropical diseases.

It has not been possible to find illustrations showing the Gambia Company, nor have my sources - apart from what is mentioned in connection with No. 36 Fortress Company, Royal Engineers - also does not give details of the company's efforts in Cameroon.

Per Finsted

1) See West African Regiment (Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth). (The page no longer exists.)

2) S/S APPAM (7,781 GRT) was built in 1912 and belonged to the British and African Steam Navigation Company, a subsidiary of the Elder Dempster Line. APPAM was later picked up on 15 January 1916 en route from West Africa to Liverpool by the German cruiser SMS MÖWE, and then taken to America by prize crew. The ship was released by a judgment of the US Supreme Court on March 6, 1917. See *Berg vs. British and African Steam Navigation Co.*, 243 US 124 (1917) (US Supreme Court).

3) Read about these tribes in Sierra Leone (Wikipedia).

4) See WW2 People's War, Article A2083231 (BBC). See also About English coastal artillery, 1910-1940, which includes contains examples of the possible pamphlets.

5) Se f.eks. Kapitel 28 i United States Army in World War II - The War in the Pacific, The Fall of the Philippines af Louis Morton, 1952 (Hyper War). Et amerikansk reglement - Handbook of the 2.95-inch mountain gun matériel and pack outfit, June 10, 1912 (1916) - kan downloades fra University of California Libraries.

6) A half-battalion of 650 men, incl. 3 guns, required at least 1,078 carriers if it was in the field for more than just a few weeks. Mentioned in Source 17, citing *Bush Warfare* by Colonel WCG Heneker, Hugh Rees Ltd., London, 1907.

7) See no. 36 Company, Royal Engineers (Royal Engineers Museum), containing an overview of important dates in the company's history.

8) On the cooperation between the coast artillery and the engineer troops, see *On English Coast Artillery, 1910-1940*.

9) One of these officers, Lieutenant CL Hewson, who had served as *Locomotive Superintendent* in various African colonies and Egypt since 1905, worked on the Nigerian Railways. During the operations in Cameroon he worked on the Northern Railway. The Imperial War Museum in London has in its document collection an account of the service in Cameroon, with information about the railway service. Easiest to find using the keyword *Cameroons*.

10) From The Sierra Leone Battalion, West African Frontier Force (Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth). (The page no longer exists.)

11) S/S AKABO (3,814 GRT) was built in 1912 and belonged to the Elder Dempster Line. See Elder-Dempster Line (The Ship List).

12) From The Gambia Regiment, West African Frontier Force (Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth). (The site no longer exists.) The source states that a 2nd Company existed from 1914 to 1919, but the information cannot currently be confirmed by other sources.