

On English units during the campaign in Cameroon, 1914-1916 - Part 3

Supply units

The responsibility for the supply service (*Director of Supply and Transport*) lay in the hands of Captain DA Wallbach, Nigerian Service, while day-to-day management was handled by Lieutenant GF Hodgson.

Carriers from...	Number (approx.)
Sierra Leone	1.275
The Gold Coast	800
Nigeria	1.500

The supply service in the English part of the expeditionary force consisted per 23 September 1914 the following of personnel:

- 13 English officers, 1 English non-commissioned officer, 10 native foremen and 3,553 native porters from the three previously mentioned corps

During the campaign, the supply service is supplemented by a significant number of porters from the West African colonies as well as locally recruited. A total of 15–20,000 West African and 10–15,000 local porters served during the campaign. The West African porters were preferred, as they were stronger and more enduring, but it was not always possible to provide the necessary numbers, although personnel compensation was added every month from the various West African possessions.



Ford truck and carriers on the march from Kisaki to the Rafiji River, East Africa, January, 1917 1).

In October 1915, a motorized transport company - No. 581 Mechanical Transport Company, Army Service Corps - which consisted of:

Source 2, from which the overview originates, further states that ample supplies of propellants were included.

- 2 Ford passenger vans 24
- Ford transport vans 4 Ford
- ambulance vans 2 Ford ambulance
- vans 1 armored van (type unknown).
-

The picture here - from East Africa - is the closest I can get to the combination of the older and the newer form of transport - porters and motor vehicles.

Loss figure

An exact calculation of the casualty figures from the 18-month long campaign is not available, but Source 2 states the following:

Casualties in the Anglo-French Expeditionary Force i Cameroon, 1914-1916	English losses		French losses	
	Europeans	Natives Carriers	Europeans	Natives
Dead, incl. died as a result of wounds	24	192	24	249
Wounded	30	557	102	483
Died of disease	6	84	472	9
Missing, prisoners of war and drowned	-	34	-	16

The figures do not include naval losses and losses among the units that operated from Nigeria. Source 3 states the number 4,600 as an estimate of the total loss figure.

Diseases such as malaria, dysentery, pneumonia, rheumatism, beriberi and numerous tropical diseases plagued soldiers as well as the many native carriers. Among all participants on the English side, approx. 2,500 people sent home as unfit for service due to illness. Of the 15-20,000 porters from the West African colonies who operated from Duala during the campaign, 8,219 were sent home as unfit for service due to illness.

Nigerian Marine Department



Nigeria Marine Vessel PORPOISE.
From Source 2.

In 1886, the Royal Niger Company established a civilian transport fleet based in Asaba and later in Lokoja. The ships sailed i.a. rivers Niger and Benue, but were also deployed in support of military operations, both transport and fire support.

In 1900, the British state took over ownership of Nigeria from the Royal Niger Company, including the naval force, which became the Nigerian Marine Department at the amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914.

In 1914, the force included approx. 90 English and approx. 1,000 private, native seamen.

The enlisted sailors came from Nigeria, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone, while the English sailors were officers and petty officers who had previously served in the Royal Navy and/or were members of the Royal Naval Reserve.

In support of the units of the Royal Navy - initially the cruiser HMS CUMBERLAND, the gunboat

HMS DWARF and later HMS CHALLENGER - at the outbreak of war, the Nigerian Marine established and manned an auxiliary fleet consisting of local vessels from Nigeria, which were later supplemented by captured German vessels.



Nigeria Marine Vessel Porpoise.
From Source 2.

Many of the vessels were armed with cannons and machine guns from the English vessels, which also provided part of the crew. A total of 20 midshipmen and 220 sailors from HMS CUMBERLAND, HMS CHALLENGER and HMS DWARF were part of the ship's crews, to which were added a number of marines

The naval force participated, among other things in the reconnaissance work prior to the capture of Duala as well as during the later operations along the rivers in Cameroon and the surveillance of the coastline.

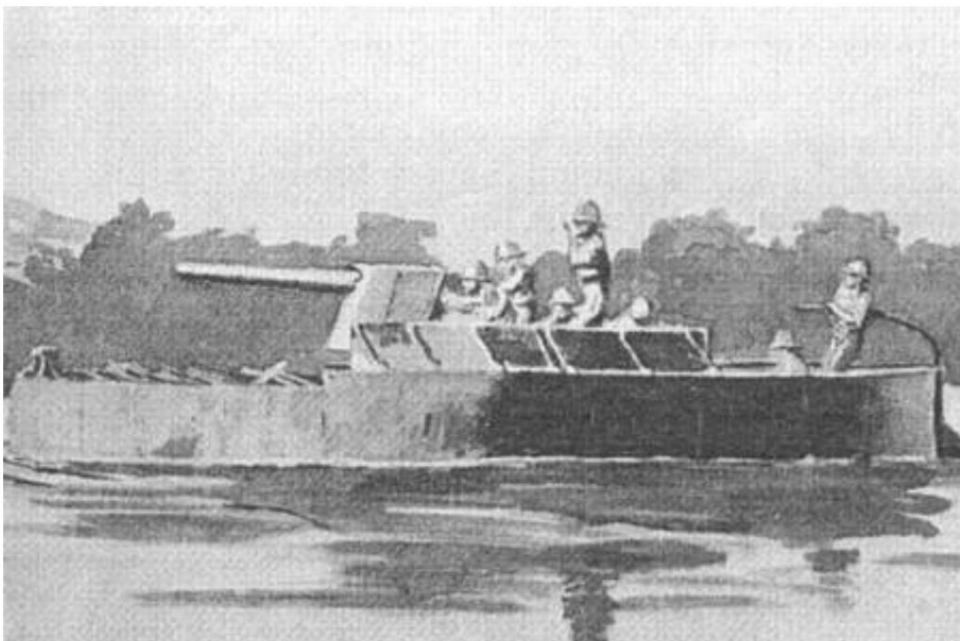
Auxiliary vessels of the Nigerian Marine

Vessel	Type	Remark
IVY	Yacht	1 piece. 12-pdr cannon and 2 pcs. 6-pdr guns
FULLAH	Small transport vessel	4 pcs. 12-pdr guns
REMUS	Tugboat	3 pieces. 12-pdr guns
PORPOISE	Tug boat; wheel steamer, with side wheels	2 pcs. 12-pdr guns
LAGOS	Small transport vessel	2 pcs. 3-pdr guns
UROMI	Small transport vessel	2 pcs. 3-pdr guns

SIR HUGH	Small transport vessel	2 pcs. 3-pdr guns
SIR FREDERICK	Small transport vessel	2 pcs. 3-pdr guns
LALA	Small transport vessel	1 piece. Maxim machine gun

Shallow draft vessels intended to operate on the rivers of Cameroon

BALD	Tugboat	
WALRUS	Tugboat	
ALIGATOR	Motor barge box (30 m long)	
CROCODILE	Motorbarkasse (30 m lang)	
VAMPIRE	Steam barge (24 m long)	Light guns and machine guns
VIGILANT	Steam barge (24 m long)	Light guns and machine guns
MOLE	Mud machine	1 piece. 6-inch gun from HMS Challenger
DREADNOUGHT	Steel barge	1 piece. 6-inch gun from HMS Challenger



The steel barge DREADNOUGHT,

fitted with a 6-inch gun from HMS CHALLENGER.

From Source 3.

The improvised armament of the vessels was in some cases - possibly the steam barges VAMPIRE and VIGILANT - also supplemented with pamphlets from French naval vessels, which also contributed crew.

Former German vessels

MARGARET ELISABETH	Yacht; originally DUCHESS ELISABETH	2 pcs. 12-pdr guns
TROUSERS	Gunboat; originally SODEN	1 piece. 3-pdr gun (paddle steamer, with stern wheel)
ANNA WOËRMANN 2)	Transport vessel (2,335 GRT)	



A crew of Kroo coalers, Sierra Leone, ca. 1910.

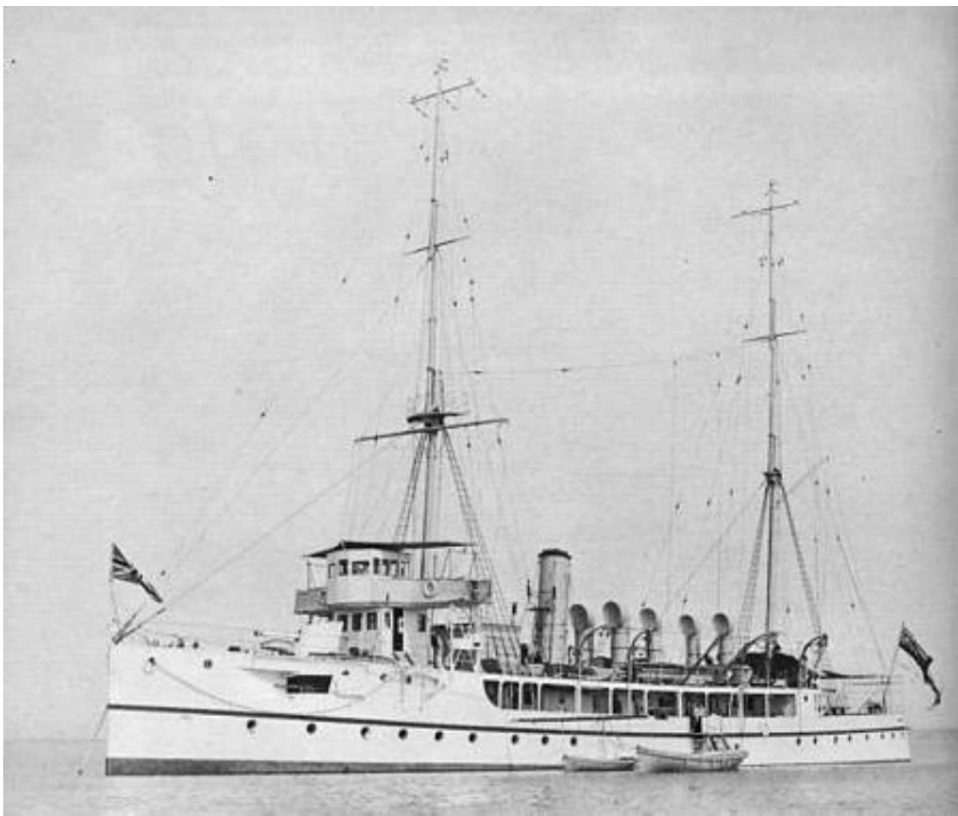
Fra NYPL Digital Gallery.

Although the image does not necessarily represent Nigerian Marine equipment, it gives an impression of the types of vessels involved - a tug and a barge.

The force must also include the cable ship TRANSMITTER from Freetown, which ensured the English naval force a direct telegraph connection from the anchorage in front of Duala to London.

Partial use was made of an existing submarine cable connection between Duala and the English telegraph station at Bonny at the mouth of the Niger River 3).

Royal Navy



*The gunboat HMS BRAMBLE, sister ship to HMS DWARF.
From HMS DWARF (Clydebuilt Warships).*

At the start of the war, the gunboat HMS DWARF (Commander FEK Strong) was the only English naval vessel in West Africa and was then docked in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Prior to the decision to invade Cameroon, the cruiser HMS CUMBERLAND (Commander Cyril Fuller), part of the 5th Cruiser Squadron, which was near the Canary Islands, was sent to the area initially to investigate reports of the presence of large German naval vessels were correct, and then - together with HMS DWARF - to clear up the area around Duala prior to the initiation of the English landing.

Along with the Franco-English expeditionary force, the cruiser HMS CHALLENGER (Commander CP Beaty-Pownall) also arrived in the area of operations. A photograph of HMS CHALLENGER is featured in the online edition of Source 1.

HMS DWARF HMS CUMBERLAND HMS CHALLENGER

Data 4) [_](#)

	1898-1924	1904-1921	1904-1920
In service			
Armament	2 x 4-inch guns 4 x 12-pounder guns	14 x 6-inch guns 11 x 6-inch guns 3 x 3-pounders 6 x 3-pounders	10 x 12-pounders 9 x 12-pounders 2 x 18-inch torpedo tubes 134, 1 m 106.7 m
Length	?		
Width	?	20,1 m	16,5 m
	?	7,6 m	6,3 m

Draft			
Fart	13 knob	23 knob	21 knob
Crew	85 men	678 men	450 men



A naval 12-pounder in action at Fort Dachang, Cameroons, 1915.

From Source 5.

Two 12-pounder guns from HMS CHALLENGER with crew were deployed ashore.

At first the guns were towed by the English sailors, but this - in itself strenuous work - combined with the climate made the crews totally exhausted. Since then, native porters were used to pull the cannons, including their mounts.

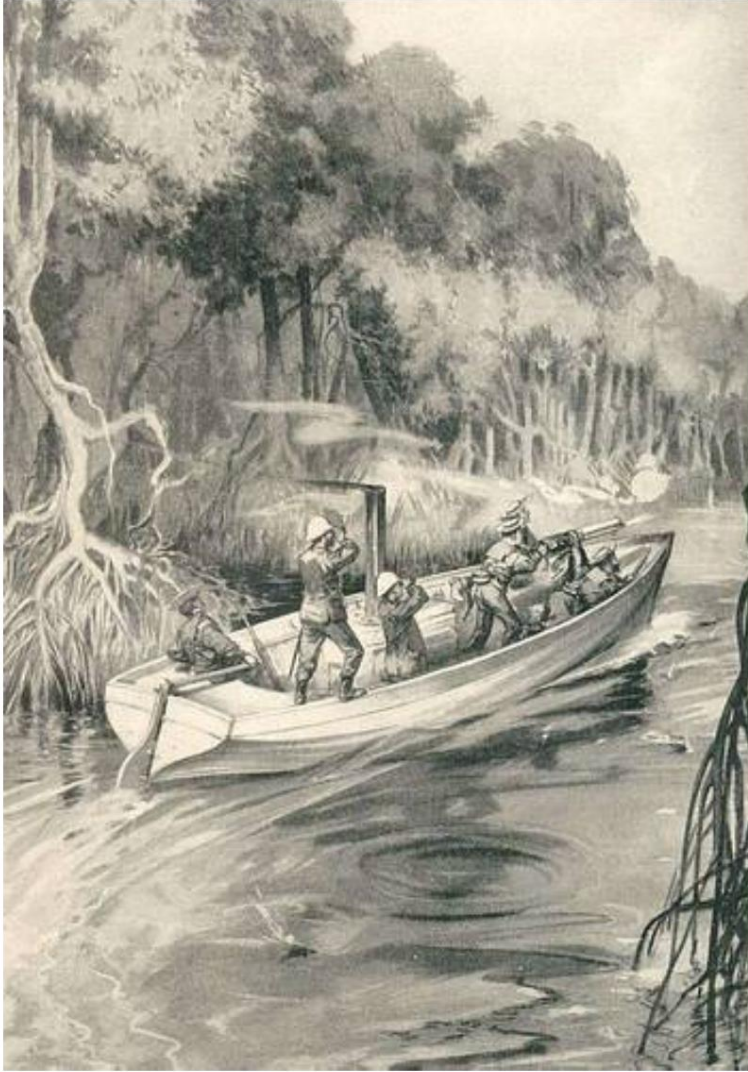


HMS CUMBERLAND.

Fra World War 1 Naval Combat.

Two of HMS CUMBERLAND's own vessels - a guard boat (*picket-boat*) and an outpost boat (*pinnace*) - were deployed in the reconnaissance work prior to the landing at Duala.

When HMS CUMBERLAND was released on 4 December 1914 for other operations - under the auspices of 6. Cruiser squadrons - the two vessels remained in Cameroon until the end of the campaign, after which they were transported back to England by civilian freighters.



HMS CUMBERLAND's picket-boat in the Cameroon River, 1915.

From a roughly contemporary book illustration.

Source 2 states that the guard boat was equipped with a 3-pounder cannon and a machine gun, while the outpost boat was equipped with two machine guns. In the illustration of the guard boat shown here, however, there is only one machine gun.

The accompanying text reads as follows:

"This operation of our naval forces on the West Coast of Africa resulted in the unconditional surrender of Duala, the capital of the Cameroons to a Franco-British force commanded by Brigadier-General C.M. Dobell, D.S.O., following a bombardment by H.M.S. CUMBERLAND and DWARF.

An attempt to blow up and then to ram the DWARF failed, and several hundred prisoners fell into our hands, while the CUMBERLAND captured eight German merchant steamers and a bumboat off the mouth of the river.

Our picture is from a sketch by an officer who took part in the expedition."

Reinforcements - West India Regiment

Battalions of the West India Regiment had traditionally been stationed in West Africa and over the years had participated in engagements in Gambia, Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Nigeria 5). —



Sierra Leone - King's Birthday Parade, ca. 1906.

From a contemporaneous postcard sent from Freetown in 1906.

The bulk of the soldiers appear to be from the West India Regiment.

The soldiers on the far left appear to be English artillerymen, probably from the 50th Company, Royal Garrison Artillery.



*1st Battalion,
West India Regiment, ca.
1897.*

Fra NYPL Digital Library.

In 1914 the regiment consisted of:

- 1st Battalion, West India Regiment (*Lieutenant-Colonel Hepworth Hill*), stationed in Sierra Leone
- 2nd Battalion, West India Regiment, stationed in Jamaica.



Regimentsmærke

The West India Regiment.

Tilvirket efter

The West

India Regiment 1959-1962

(The Ex-West Indian

Servicemen Association).

West India Regiment - Historical Summary

1888

The West India Regiment is created by amalgamation of 1st West India Regiment and 2nd West India Regiment (both established 1798)

1927

The regiment is disbanded

For more information about the regiment, see [About the British West Indies Regiment during the First World War](#).

In Cameroon

In the formation of the forces to take part in the campaign in Cameroon, the 1st Battalion remained in Sierra Leone. In 1915 the battalions rotated between Sierra Leone and Jamaica, as they traditionally did every two years. In August 1915 there was a need to reinforce the units in Cameroon and the 2nd Battalion, West India Regiment provided:

- 2 infantry companies
- Machine gun platoon (2 machine guns)
- A number of signal trained soldiers.

In his description of the regiment, Colonel Gorges (Source 3) emphasizes that they were generally more educated and enterprising than many of the West African soldiers; they were excellent marksmen and particularly useful in the signal service.



2nd Bn. The West India Regiment embarks at Freetown, Sierra Leone, bound for East Africa, 1916.
From Source 20.

The two infantry companies and the machine gun division were deployed as reinforcements for Brigadier General Dobell's Anglo-French Expeditionary Force.

The signalmen were possibly part of the units which - under the command of Brigadier General Cunliffe - operated from Nigeria.

Uniforms

The regiment's gala uniform, shown at the beginning, was inspired by the uniform of the French Zouaves, while the field uniform included the standard English troop uniform, incl. tropical helmet. In East Africa, where 2.

The battalion served from 1916 to 1918, it caused some consternation among the native population to see native soldiers wearing the same uniform as British soldiers; the West Indian soldiers were therefore given the designation "black Europeans".

Reinforcements - 5th Light Infantry



5th Light Infantry and 6th Jat Light Infantry.

From Source 21.

From left to right:

Havildar (*Musalman Rajput*)

Havildar (*Jat*)

In Cameroon, the West Indian companies together with 3 companies from the Indian battalion 5th Light Infantry and 2 mountain guns formed the so-called *Bare Column* (after the town of Bare, from which the force moved out).

The commander of the 5th Light Infantry - and *Bare Column* - was Lieutenant Colonel William Cotton.

Prior to the deployment in Cameroon, where the battalion arrived in August 1915, parts of the battalion's Muslim soldiers had mutinied on 15 February 1915 in Singapore.

There were rumors that the battalion was to be deployed against Turks in Mesopotamia, which did not go down well with some of the soldiers who were recruited from Muslim populations - *Delhi Pathans*, *Delhi Ranghars* and *Baluchis* - as well as Sikhs from Punjab.

Various subversive elements [6](#)) had incited the rebellion, but it was apparently the unfounded rumors that sparked the rebellion. On 16 February 1915, the battalion was supposed to be relocated to Hong Kong, but the then battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Edward Victor Martin, did not inform the soldiers of the destination of the relocation.

The rebellion is discussed in *On Indian Units in East Africa, 1915-1918* [7](#)) (which also contains data on the history of the regiment), *The Malay States Guides 1896-1919* and *On British North Borneo Dyak Police, 1882-1918*. See also [1915 Singapore Mutiny](#) (Wikipedia), which i.a. contains a photograph of some of the

the rebels finally.

The rebellion was put down within days and 126 soldiers identified as the ringleaders of the rebellion were court-martialed. 37 were sentenced to death and 41 deported for life, while the remainder were sentenced to prison terms. The rest of the battalion subsequently made themselves available for war service - anywhere - in order to thereby remove the stain of the rebellion from the battalion's otherwise good name.

In Cameroon



*Regimentsmärke
5th Light Infantry 8).*

The need for reinforcements in Cameroon was great, as tropical diseases made many of the soldiers unfit for combat, but the opportunities to supply these were not great. However, it was decided to transfer the 5th Light Infantry to Cameroon.

In Cameroon, the battalion was initially organized into three double companies. In October 1915, the organization was changed to six companies, whereby the organization became equivalent to the West African units.

The strength figure per 30 August 1915 is indicated in Source 2 as 546 men, of which 19 were on sick leave. The battalion was equipped with two machine guns.

In Cameroon - and during the subsequent effort (from March 1916) in East Africa - the battalion did well, and thus did its part to remove the stigma of the rebellion. The regiment was disbanded in 1922 in connection with an austerity round, but whether the rebellion was a contributing factor to this particular battalion being chosen is not known.

A riddle...

At the war cemetery in Berbera [9](#)) in Somalia (then English Somaliland), 56 fallen from the 5th Light Infantry are commemorated. The majority are said to have died in 1918, but the context in which the soldiers served in English Somaliland is not known.

Source 19 states that some of the rebels were deported to East Africa. One possibility could therefore be that these are soldiers who died in captivity. If this theory holds true, it may be surprising that the official side has chosen to commemorate deceased rebels together with those who fell from combat. Another possibility is that, after the action in German East Africa, the soldiers in question reported for service in English Somaliland, where a number of volunteer Indian soldiers were recruited in 1917 as reinforcements for the Somaliland Camel Corps for the battles against The Mad Mullah [10](#)) .

The Indian soldiers were multiplied into two infantry companies and a camel-mounted company [11](#)). The strength of the Indian companies is given as 400 guns, while the camel corps (two camel-mounted companies and one pony-mounted company) had over 500 guns.



Members of the Native Gendarmerie Corps, Illalos, in English Somaliland, 1919.

Fra Smashing the Mullah - The Navy's Part - II (Naval Review, November 1921) [12](#)). [___](#)

The force further included a number of native gendarmes - *illalos* - (300 rifles). The total force consisted of approx. 1,500 men who also had 2 field guns, 8 Maxim machine guns and 1 Lewis machine gun.

The two explanations could perhaps also coincide, as the need to reinforce the units in English Somaliland was so great that it was necessary to recruit from among the deported rebels.

Sources

The campaign in Cameroon

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9. Africa (The British Empire).
10. *Historical Atlas of Politics*, Politikens Forlag, Copenhagen 1961.

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11. West African Frontier Force (Online Nigeria).
12. Royal West African Frontier Force (Wikipedia).
13. Nigerian Navy (Online Nigeria).
14. Ghana Regiment (Wikipedia).
15. An Overview of the Evolution of the Nigerian Army af Nowa Omoigui (Segun Toyin Dawodu).
16. From "Glover's Hausas" to 4 Guards Battalion - 141 years later af Nowa Omoigui (Omoigui.com).
17. Awudu Katsena, Artillery Carrier & later Sergeant North Nigeria Regiment af Keith Steward (British Colonial History in Africa Research).

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20. *Armies in East-Africa 1914.18* af Peter Abbot, Men-at-Arms Nr. 379, Osprey Publishing, London 2002, ISBN 1-84176-489-2.
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Postscript



Houssa Soldiers, West Coast of Africa.

Fra NYPL Digital Gallery.

Card No. 35 in the *British Empire series*, published by Player's Cigarettes, 1904.

The official reports (*despatches*) about the campaign in Cameroon can be read in the London Gazette - see London Gazette, Fourth Supplement, 30 May 1916. Pages 1-9 were written by the commander of the Anglo-French Expeditionary Force, General Sir Charles M. Dobell, while pages 10-18 were written by General FHG Cunliffe, the commander of the British forces in northern Nigeria.

The following appears from the back of the card:

"This represents a group of sturdy Houssa Soldiers, who after careful training under British Officers have done excellent service on the West Coast of Africa."

Per Finsted

To note:

24) Fra *From Horse to Helicopter - Transporting the British Army in War and Peace 1648-1989* af John Sutton og John Walker, Leo Cooper, London 1990, ISBN 0-85052-724-4.

25) Sunk by the Germans as a block ship at Duala in 1914 and since the mountain. See German East Africa Line/ Woermann Line (The Ship List) and Central Powers Warship Losses, 1914 + 1915 (WWI The Maritime War).

26) Om signal for Bindelserne mellem Tyskland og kolonierne, se The telegraphic connections of Germany with its colonies af Ober-Postpraktikant H. Thurn Koblenz (Jaduland).

27) Data stammer bl.a. fra HMS Dwarf (Clydebuilt Warships) samt Monmouth Class Armoured Cruisers og Challenger Class Second Class Protected Cruisers (World War 1 Naval Combat).

28) Se f.eks. The West India Regiment (Black and Asian History Map).

29) Among the subversive elements was the German captain-lieutenant Julius Lauterbach from SMS Emden, who was a prisoner of war in Singapore. (Source 19) Captain-Lieutenant Lauterbach escaped from Singapore and after an adventurous journey made it back to Germany in October 1915; his own account was published under the name *10,000 Pfund Kopfgeld - tot oder lebendig - Fluchtabenteuer des ehemaligen Prisenoffiziers der SMS Emden*, Verlag August Scherl, Berlin, 1917. In 2006 the story was published in novel form under the title *Rogue Raider - The tale of Captain Lauterbach and the Singapore Mutiny* (Monsoon Books) by Nigel Barley. Judging by the book, Lauterbach's involvement consisted of an indirect incitement to discontent. See also *An Emden officer escapes to Manila* (New York Times July 24, 1915).

30) In the paper in question I ask the question whether Lieutenant Colonel Martin also led the battalion in Africa. With reference to Sources 2 and 3, it can now be established that this was not the case. During the rebellion, the later lieutenant-colonel William Cotton had the rank of major - and perhaps functioned as second-in-command; he took an active part in the suppression of the rebellion.

31) From 5th Light Infantry (The British Empire).

32) Se Berbera Memorial, Somalia (Commonwealth War Graves Commission).

33) See *The Anglo-Somali War 1901-1920* by Major Axel B. Aller, originally published in *Militært Tidsskrift*, April 1982.

34) Se *The King's African Rifles. A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945* af oberstløjtnant H. Moyse-Bartlett, Gale & Polden Ltd, Aldershot 1956, p. 422.

35) The first part of this article can be found in *Smashing the Mullah - The Navy's Part - I* (Naval Review, August 1921). It is possible that the soldier on the left in the picture is not a native gendarme, but from the Somaliland Camel Corps.