

Some of the Indian units that took part in the Battle of Tanga, November 1914, Part 5

Introduction

The title is perhaps a little misleading as this article mainly deals with the maritime part of the operations in connection with the landing at Tanga. However, I have chosen to retain it so that the document can form part of the series of documents dealing with this early part of the Indian Army's First World War effort.

The maritime part of the operations

One of the many prerequisites for a successful landing operation is frictionless cooperation between the navy and the army, and such cooperation was not present, either at the political or leadership level. Only at the executive level can it be said that things worked roughly as they should.

The authorities in London failed to inform the Commander of the Expeditionary Force, Major-General Arthur Aitken, that a kind of truce covering the port cities of Tanga and Dar-es-Salaam had been concluded locally - 8 and 17 August 1914 respectively. The British government had rejected the agreements, which the Admiralty informed the naval staff in Mombasa on 30 August 1914. At the same time, they were instructed to - immediately before any operations - inform the German authorities that the agreements were not valid. With such advance notice, any possibility of a real surprise attack on Tanga was thus eliminated.



Captain on the Bridge, Royal Navy, ca. 1914.

From a simultaneous postcard.

The officer in charge of the signal means is a first lieutenant (*Lieutenant*).

Quite unaware of this, General Aitken and the transport fleet approached the coast of East Africa, where, approximately 100 nautical miles from Mombasa, they were met by HMS Fox, whose commander, Commander Francis W. Caulfield, Royal Navy,

embarked on board the S/S Karmala, which was the command vessel of the Expeditionary Force.

The commander invited the general on board so that he could direct the operations from here.

Space conditions on HMS Fox made it impossible to accommodate the General's staff, so General Aitken declined the invitation and the opportunity for a joint command platform was lost.

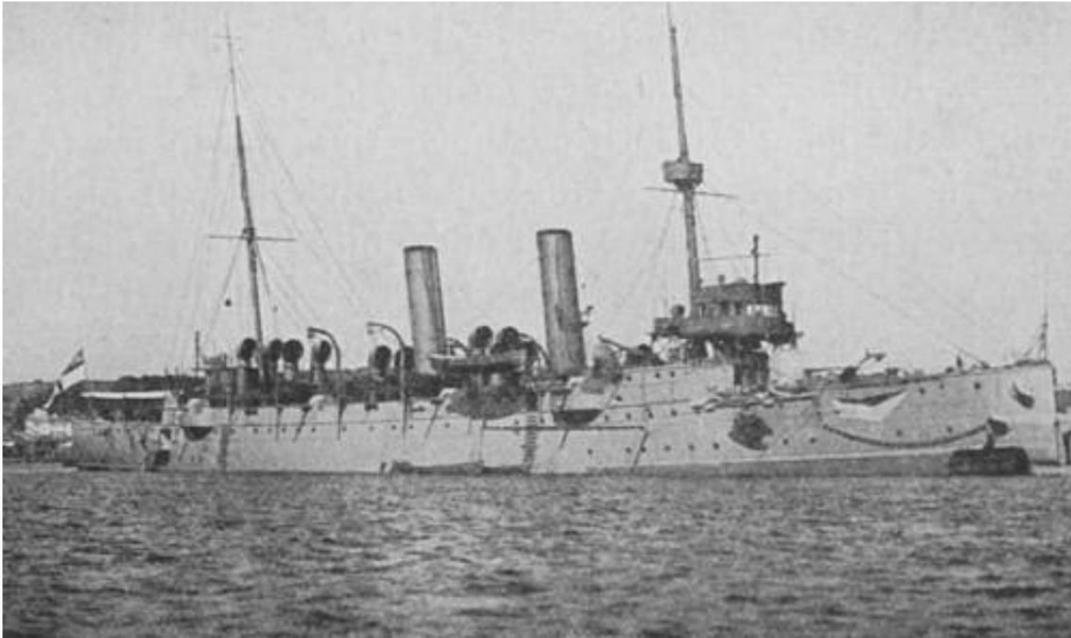
Considering the need to keep the upcoming operations as secret as possible, it was agreed to let the transport fleet anchor out of sight from the coast, and let only Fox and Karmala sail into Mombasa.

Staff meeting in Mombasa

On October 31, 1914, a staff meeting was held in Mombasa, during which General Aitken was informed of the briefing required by the German authorities, immediately prior to the operations. There was discussion back and forth, and in the end the general set the briefing deadline at 1 hour, which should accommodate both the formal consideration of a warning and the possibility of a certain element of surprise.

Participants in the staff meeting include also Brigadier-General JM Stewart, who was in command of Indian Expeditionary Force C, the vanguard of which had arrived in British East Africa on 1 September 1914. Expeditionary Force C was to reinforce the units here, and simultaneously with the landing at Tanga launch a push across the border between English and German East Africa - see *The Battle for Longido Mountain, 3 - 4 November 1914* by Dennis L. Bishop and Holger Dobold (By Jingo!).

HMS Fox



HMS Fox.

Fra FirstWorld War.com.

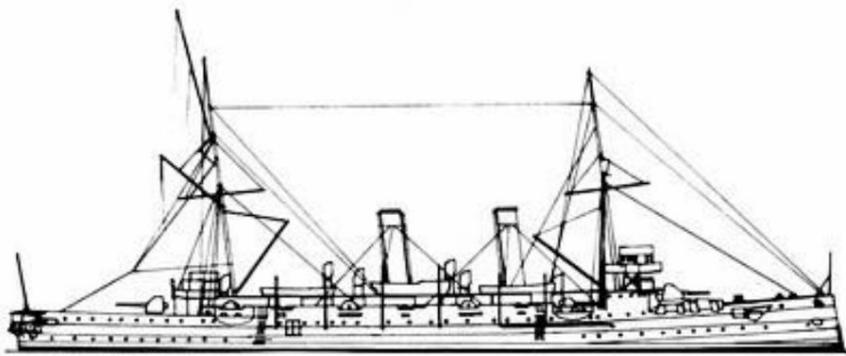
Originally, the battleship HMS Goliath (see Part 2 as well as [HMS Goliath \(Wikipedia\)](#)) was supposed to have provided maritime support, but the ship suffered engine damage off Mombasa, whereby further support was provided by the light cruiser HMS Fox.

The ship was of the *Astraea* class, which included: *Astraea*, *Bonaventure*, *Cambrian*, *Charybdis*, *Flora*, *Forte*, *Fox* and *Hermione*.

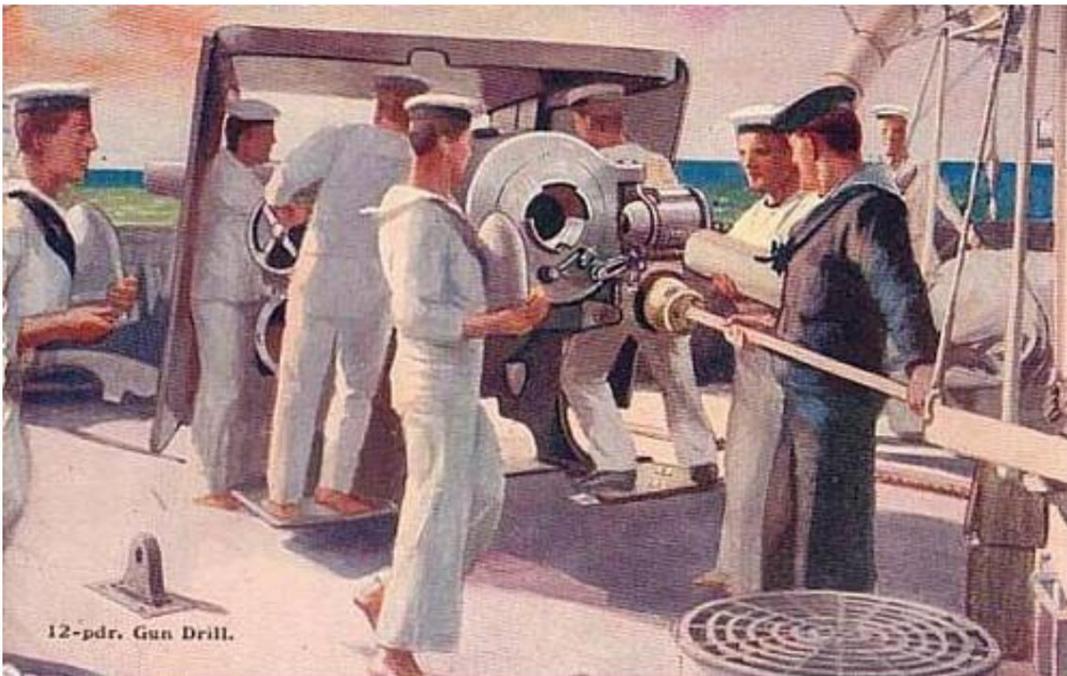
The light cruisers were commissioned from 1894 to 1896.

By 1914 Fox was effectively obsolete. Later in the war, the ship operated i.a. in the Red Sea, and first came out of

service in 1919.



Data	HMS FOX1)
In service	1896-1919
Armament	2 x 6" guns 8 x 4.7" guns 1 x 3-pdr. gun 4 x 18" torpedo tubes
Length	m 14.9
Width	m 5.8
Draft	m 18
Speed	knots
Crew	318



Cannon exercise.

From a postcard seen for sale on the Internet.

The cannon is of a different caliber to those used on HMS Fox, but other than that, the scene could fit very well.

A picture in Source 2 shows one of Fox's guns. Here, however, parts of the crew wear troop helmets.

Functions in connection with landing

The head of the naval part of the landing itself (*Naval Transport Officer*) was Commander *Edward J. Headlam*, Royal Indian Marine, who had arrived in Mombasa on 3 October 1914 with the main force of Indian Expeditionary Force C. To assist he had a staff officer (*Assistant Marine Transport Officer*).



Getting ready for Sea Signalling.
From a postcard seen for sale on the Internet.

Ashore, a *Beach Master* - First Lieutenant (*Lieutenant*) Petrie, Royal Navy - handled the practical side of things. To assist him he had a number of beach commandos, which consisted of soldiers from a double company of the 61st Pioneers (see Part 1).

Five officers from the Pioneer Battalion were designated to act as *Assistant Beach Masters*. Each beach command included an additional 5 marines, including 1 signalman.



Navy service corps embarking, ca. 1914.
From a simultaneous postcard.

The Expeditionary Force's Operation Order No. 1 further stipulates that there should be 2 Marines in each barge that transported soldiers ashore.

Judging from the pictures, however, the barges used at Tanga were not of the same type as here.

The head of the land military part of the landing (*Military Transport Officer*) was Lieutenant Colonel C. Bailey,

1st Duke of York's Own Lancers (Skinner's Horse), which was also to hold the function of commander of the Expeditionary Corps' base area. Assisting him was Major GM Orr, 11th King Edward's Own Lancers (Probyn's Horse), who also acted as Quartermaster Officer. A number of signalmen formed the immediate staff.

Furthermore, each landed battalion had to leave a command of 2 non-commissioned officers and 6 privates to guard the battalion's equipment.

The civilian transport fleet

The very interesting thing about the official history's (Source 1) description of the operations is that there is an overview of the ships that were chartered to transport Expeditionary Force B to East Africa.

This makes it possible to gain an exciting insight into an otherwise somewhat overlooked chapter of history.

The order in Table 1 is as, cf. Operation order no. 1, the ships were expected to discharge, and this part of the plan is a result of i.a. Commander Captain Headlam's staff work. The ships' data is primarily provided via extensive searches on the Internet, which e.g. in connection with genealogical research, contains a lot of information about older ships.

Table 1: Ships chartered in India

Vessel	company	Year	Gross tonnage	Netto tonnage				
S/S Pentakota	British India Steam Navigation Company	S/S	1890 3.418	2.051				
Jeddah Arab Steamers Ltd., Bombay	S/S Homayun		1895 4.686 2.996 *)	1895				
Bombay & Persia Steam Navigation Company	S/S Khosrou Bombay & Persia Steam Navigation Company	S/S Barjora	British India Steam Navigation Company	S/S Karmala	Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company	1914 8.983 5.687 *)		
S/S Abbassieh	Khedivial Mail Steam Ship & Graving Dock	3) Company	1889 3.199	S/S Assouan Khedivial	1.919			
Mail Steam Ship & Graving Dock Company	S/S Nairung	Bombay & Persia Steam Navigation Company	S/S Laisang	?	That. 1,600 1,008			
			1892 Ca. 4,100	2,460				
			?	?	?			
S/S Muttra	British India Steam Navigation Company	S/S Bharata	1891 4.644	2.786				
British India Steam Navigation Company	Opbragt i Bombay		1902 4.039 1.950 *)					
S/S Rheinfels	1914; heard from the German Steamship Company "Hansa".		1905 5.614	3.368				

S/S Karmala

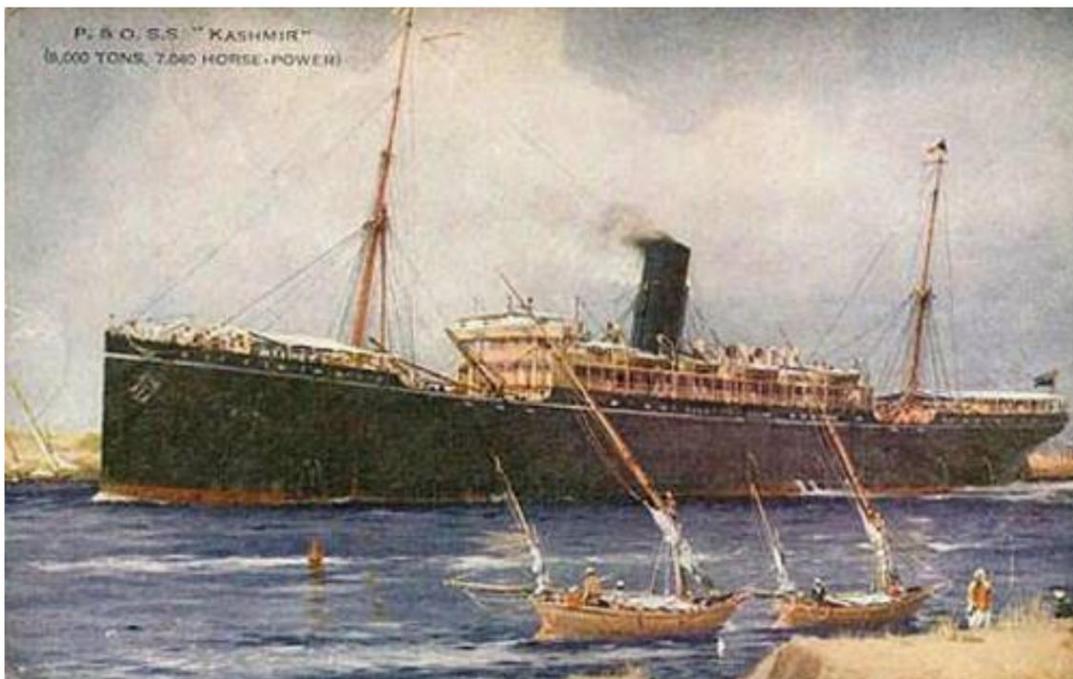


S/S Karmala calls at the port of Colombo.
From a postcard, dated April 2, 1924.

The expeditionary force's command vessel was the *S/S Karmala*, which was the largest and most modern of the transport fleet's vessels.

The ship was chartered from *the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Company*, which incidentally merged with *the British India Steam Navigation Company* in 1914.

In civilian service, the ship was intended to carry 80 passengers in 1st class and 68 in 2nd class.



S/S Kashmir, sister ship to S/S Karmala.
Fra P&O Liners (Simplon Postcards).

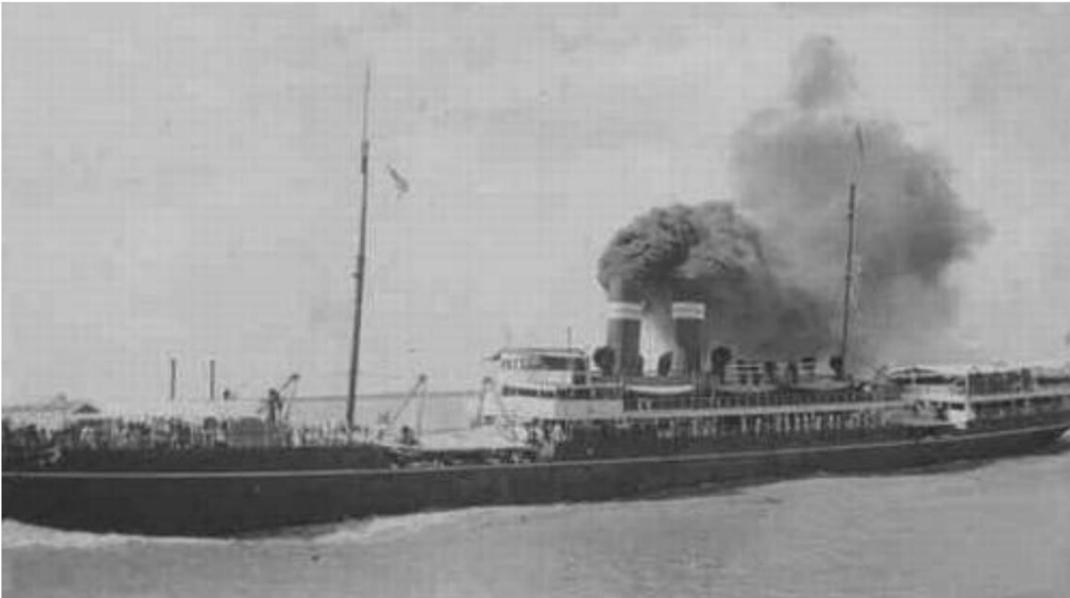
S/S Karmala

Data

	1914-1932
In service	
Armament	Perhaps none in 1914 4)
Length	146,3 m
Width	17,7 m
Draft	5,8 m
Fart	15 knob
Crew	?

In 1914-15, P & O Line built a total of six vessels of the so-called K class: Khiva, Khyber, Karmala, Kashgar, Kashmir and Kalyan.

S/S Bharata



S/S Bharat.

Fra British India postcards (Merchant Navy Officers.com)

In civil service, the ship was intended to transport 42 passengers in 1st class, 32 in 2nd class and 2,438 deck passengers [5\)](#). —

During the operations at Tanga, the Bharata carried the 28th Mountain Battery, commanded by Major CE Forestier-Walker).

A picture of the battery's guns, in position on the deck of the Bharata, is reproduced in Part 1.

	Quantity
28th Mountain Battery	
English officers	5
Indian officers	3
Indian NCOs and Privates	277
Helpers	31
Total	316
10-pdr mountain guns	6
Mule	164

In addition to the crew, guns and mules, the Bharata must also have carried the battery's ammunition stock.



British India Steam Navigation Company - Insignia for officers, non-commissioned officers, etc.
 Fra British India Steam Navigation Company.

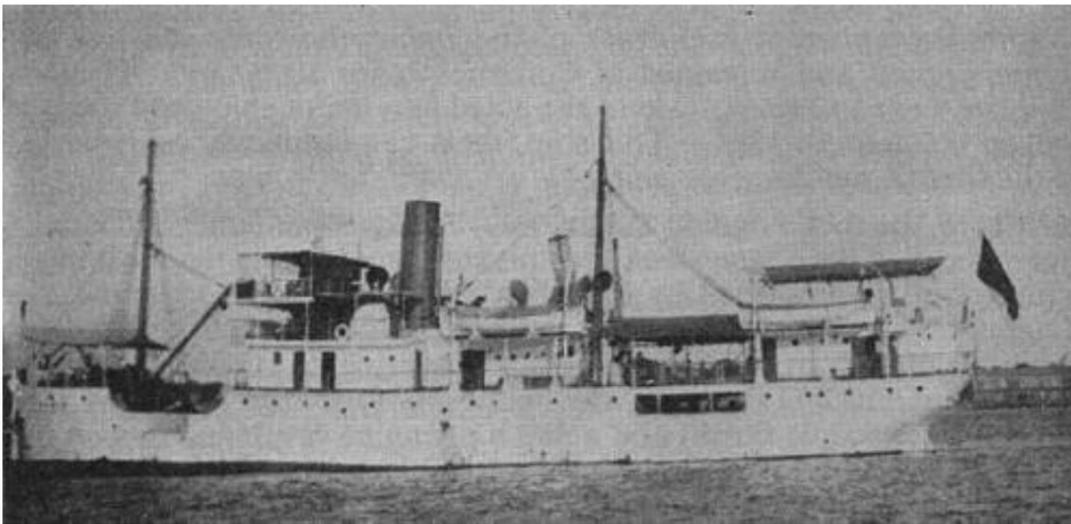
On the white troop uniforms, probably worn during current operations, the insignia were worn on the shoulders, while the sleeve insignia shown here were worn on the company's dark blue uniform.

Local vessels

During the day and evening of November 1, 1914, a number of local vessels from Mombasa and Zanzibar, with barges in tow, joined the Expeditionary Force's convoy:

Table 2: Ships chartered in East Africa

Vessels from Mombasa Type	Vessels from Zanzibar Type	
S/S Bajune	Tugboat S/S Cupid	Smaller steamship (611 grt.)
S/S Mvita	Tugboat S/S Khalifa	Smaller steamer
Unknown	Tugboat S/S Helmuth	Tugboat
Unknown	Tugboat S/S Tanga	Tugboat



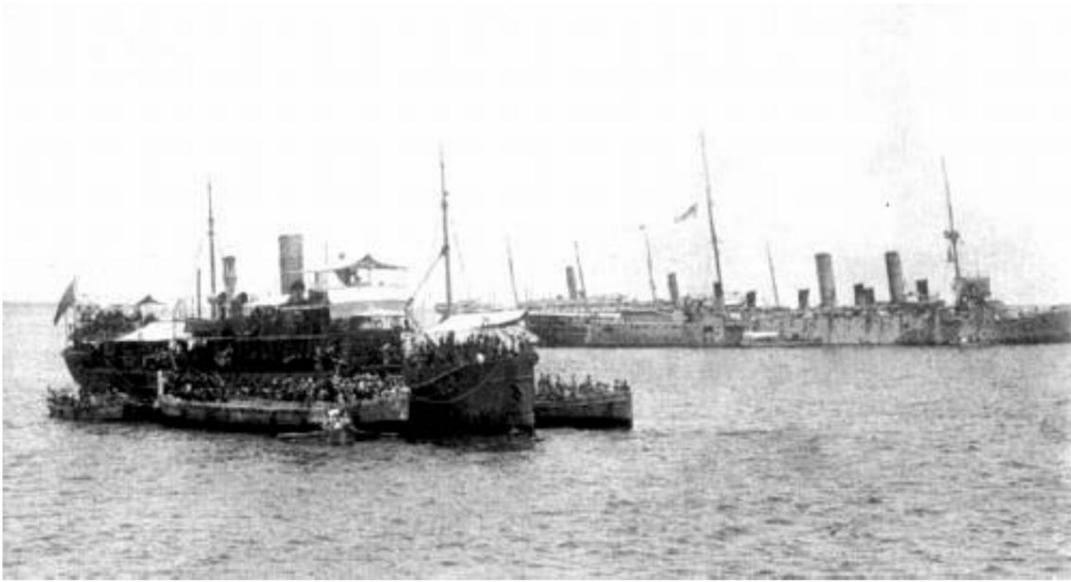
S/S Cupid, ca. 1920.
From Zanzibar Unveiled.

The vessels from Zanzibar also transported the well over 2,000-strong corps of native helpers, recruited in Zanzibar, who were to assist the Expeditionary Force. These smaller vessels and the barges were to be used in the landing of the troops.

S/S Helmuth was originally German, but was seized on 4 August 1914 in Zanzibar Harbour, while S/S Tanga was previously based at Tanga. Source 1 refers to the two tugs as "large", but the available sources do not provide further information.

The plan for the landing

None of the naval or land military units were known to have experience of landing from an open beach, and it was not rehearsed - or even tested - in advance. It thus took longer than expected to get the soldiers transferred to the barges and boats that were to transport them ashore.



S/S Cupid at anchor off Ras Kasone, with i.a. HMS Fox in the background.
From Source 2.

Of special interest here are barges on the side of Cupid, as well as boats from one or more of the transport fleet's ships.

The picture may have been taken in connection with the evacuation on 5 November 1914.

Table 3: Distribution of the units on the transport fleet's ships

Planned landing on D-Day

Vessel	Primary units on board	People
S/S Pentakota	13th Rajputs	824
S/S Jeddah	61st King George's Own Pioneers	836
S/S Homayun	Faridkot Sappers and Miners (1 Company) and the Punjab Supply Coolie Corps	850
S/S Khosrow	2nd Kashmir Rifles	840
S/S Barjora	3rd Kashmir Rifles and 3rd Gwalior Infantry (each ½ battalion)	835
S/S karmala	The staffs of the Expeditionary Corps and the two brigades, and the 2nd Loyal North Lancashire Regiment *)	1.174
S/S Abbassieh	Sanitary units and No. 5 Pontoon Park, Bombay Sappers & Miners	740

**) The 2nd Loyal North Lancashire Regiment and the brigade staff from the 27th (Bangalore) Brigade were to go first, however landed D+1.*

Planned landing on D+1

S/S Assouan	63rd Palamcottah Light Infantry	820
S/S Nairung	98th Infantry	820
S/S Laisang	101st Grenadiers	820
S/S Nut	25th og 26th (Railway) Companies, Sappers and Miners, samt Railway Coolie Corps	1.492

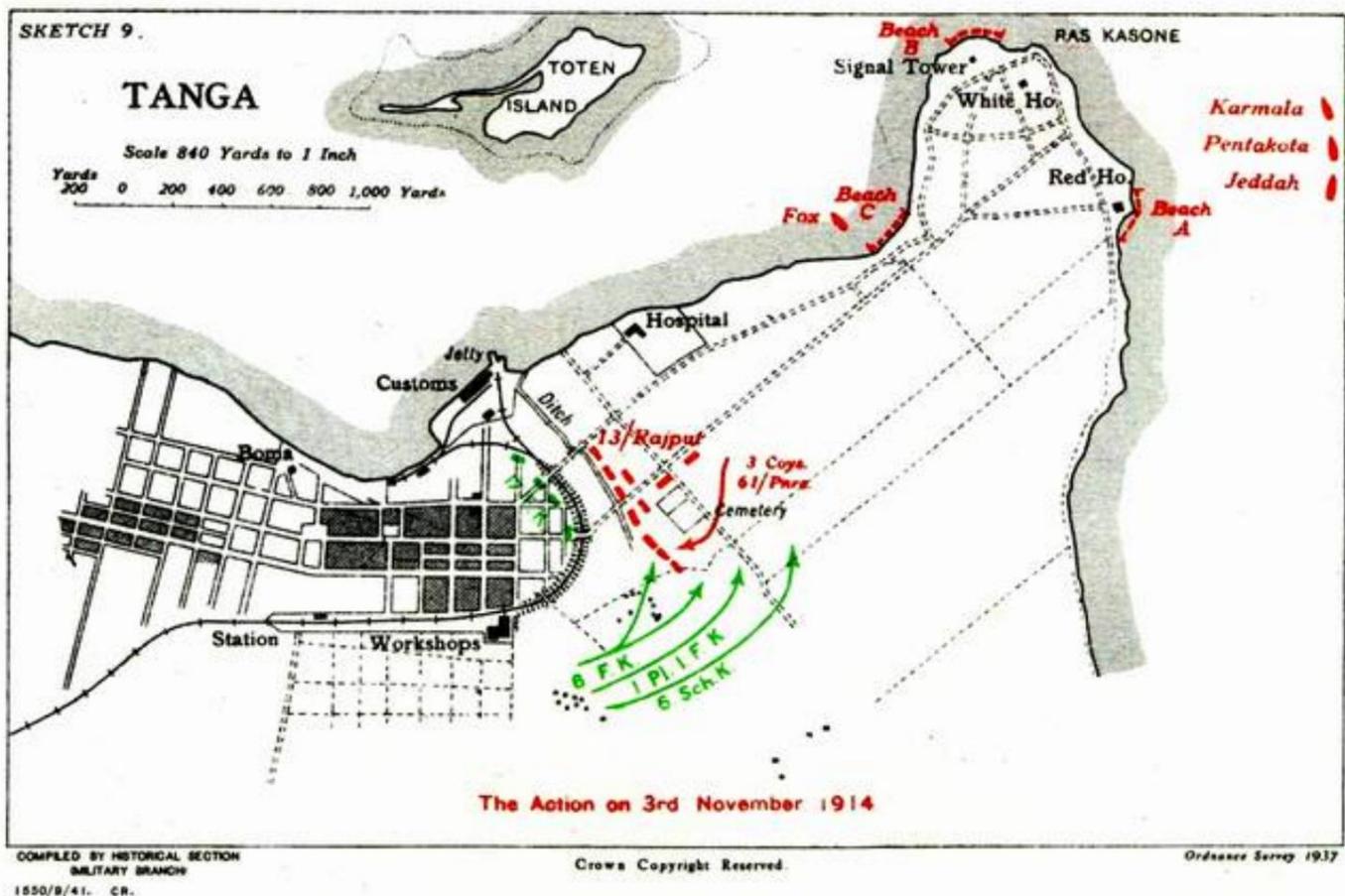
As a rule of thumb (Source 5), the formula 4 tonnes of net tonnage per man and 12 per horse when calculating how much a ship could transport. An analysis of the ships' transport capacity compared to the number of people and mules that were on board confirms the sources' information that the space conditions were tight, and at Assouan even extremely tight (see Part 1).

Ministrygning

One of the factors delaying the landing was the danger of mines in Tanga's harbor.

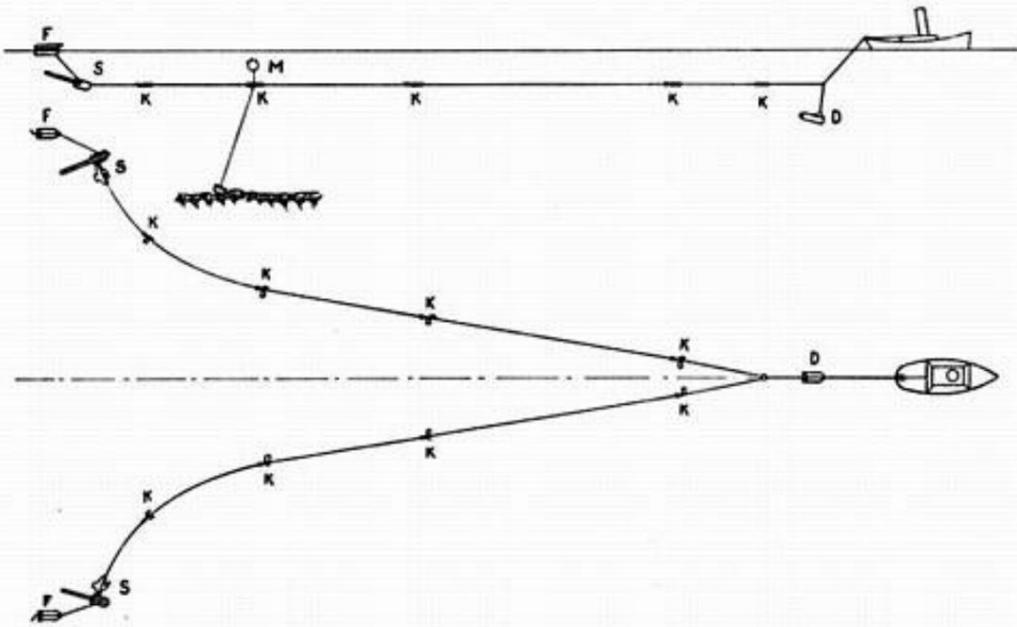
When Commander Caulfield gives the German District Governor, Bernhard Auracher, the official notification that the local ceasefire has lapsed with 1 hour's notice, the Commander asked if the harbor was mined, and the District Governor succeeds - quite contrary to how it was in reality - to convey the impression that the harbor was unfortunately mined.

Originally, it had been intended to make the landing at Tanga itself, but the danger of mines - and the risk of the town being occupied - meant that Beach A was chosen as the starting point. The intention now is for the 13th Rajputs and 61st Pioneers to land at Beach A and then secure Tanga. When this has happened - expected on the night between 2 and 3 November 1914 - the rest of the Expeditionary Force must be landed in Tanga, in accordance with the original plan.



Situation map - Tanga, 3 November 1914 (D-Day).

From Source 1.



*Principle sketch - Mine ironing,
using a so-called Y-iron (seen from the side and from above).*
From Source 9.

D: Dragon **F:** Float (pavane)
K: Blaster **M:** A captured mine **S:**
Scissors

The former German tug S/S Helmuth, under the command of Second Lieutenant (*Sub-Lieutenant*) CJ Charlewood, deployed as minesweeper (Source 3).

The mine sweep could be done as shown in this illustration.

The kite is a wooden float that keeps the tow line at a suitable depth.

When a mine's anchor rope is caught by the steel wire and then cut by the scissor knife, it floats to the surface where it can be neutralized.

I imagine that HMS Fox either brought or could improvise similar equipment so that Helmuth could be equipped for the task. In any case, the drawing brilliantly shows a "tug" used as a minesweeper.

None of the sources I've read deal with how this work was done or what equipment was used, but only with the result: *No mines were found, only various sunken timbers.*

Just as important is that the mine clearance and not least the communication of the result from HMS Fox to S/S Karmala takes so long that it delays the landing, which can only begin on the night between 2 and 3 November 1914.

The gangway at Beach A

The expeditionary force only has 3 pilots with sufficient knowledge of the waters. Sailing in the waters around Tanga is made even more difficult, as the Germans have removed all markings of fairways, seamarks and the like.



English vessels at anchor off Ras Kasone, off Beach A.

From Tanga History.

Beach A can hardly be described as an ideal starting point for a landing, as the barges which were supposed to transport the soldiers ashore could not be towed all the way to the coast, as the water was too shallow. They were therefore pulled the first distance by the tugboats and then drifted under their own power, helped along by boat hooks and the like. However, some ran aground in the shallow water and the personnel had to wade the last distance.

The picture is reproduced in Part 3, but is also interesting here, as the ship on the far right of the picture could be the S/S Cupid; the front ship on the left in the photo could be the S/S Bharata.

In the foreground you can see the mangrove trees that characterized this coastal section, as well as jetties.

Closing

Commander Caulfield was called home on November 12, 1914. The Secretary of the Navy, Winston S. Churchill, wanted to fire Caulfield for incompetence, but was persuaded not to. Source 2 states that Caulfield was given command of an older battleship (name not given) and that he ended the war as a rear admiral.

During the ensuing scramble to place responsibility for the failed operation, Commander Caulfield wrote that he had not been made aware in any way that it was important for General Aitken to land his entire force as quickly as possible. If he had only sensed it, he (Caulfield) would have disregarded all considerations of possible mines, and let the whole fleet sail into Tanga harbour. That he didn't think that far himself is surprising today.

If the two commanders had been on the same ship, the cause of this misunderstanding would probably not have been present, but to what extent the somewhat phlegmatic General Aitkens actually expressed his desire in the current situation, one can only guess. In a somewhat later report, which must of course portray his own actions in a favorable light, Aitken does not hide his desire, however.

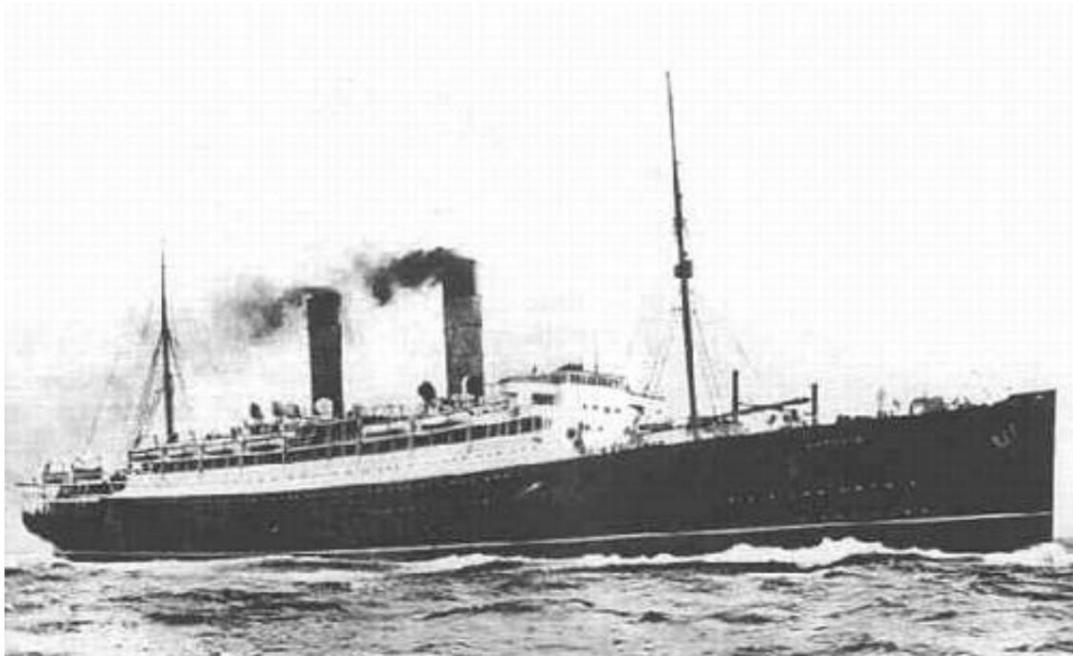
Sources

1. *History of the Great War, Military Operations East Africa, Volume I, August 1914 - September 1916* by Second Lieutenant Charles Hordern, HSMO, London 1941. (Can be borrowed from the Royal Garrison Library.)
2. *The Battle of Tanga 1914* of Ross Anderson, Tempus Publishing Ltd., Stroud, Gloucestershire 2002, ISBN 0-7524-2349-5.
3. *Seventeen Letters to Tattam - A WWI Surgeon to East Africa* of Ann Chricton-Harris, Kenney

West , Toronto , 2001 , ISBN 0-9689142-0-9 .

4. HMS Fox (1893) (Wikipedia).
5. *Field Service Pocket Book (1914)*, published by the General Staff, War Office, London 1914, Reprint af David & Charles Reprints, London 1971, ISBN 0-7153-5225-3.
6. *Manual of Combined Naval and Military Operations (1913)*. Excerpts from this are reproduced in *Grasping Gallipoli - Terrain, Maps and Failure at the Dardanelles, 1915* af Peter Chasseaud og Peter Doyle, Spellmount Ltd., Tunbridge Wells/Kent 2005, ISBN 1-86227-283-2.
7. *Memory book for use in the field, during exercises and war games* by lieutenant colonel HH Jørgensen, N. Olaf Møllers Forlag, Copenhagen 1936.
8. S/S Karmala (Encyclopaedia Peninsular).
9. *The Defense Book* by Colonel T. Andersen, Gyldendal, Copenhagen 1941.

Postscript - HMAMC Laconia



S/S Laconia.

Fra The Cunard Line, Part 6 (Merchant Navy Officers).

In my article The Battle of Tanga by Geoffry Regan I state that HMAMC Laconia [6](#)) was command vessel during the operations in November 1914.

Closer investigations have shown that this information is incorrect and that S/S Karmala, cf. above, had this role.

Laconia, which originally belonged to the Cunard Steamship Company, was at this time part of the British naval forces stationed in South Africa. A summary of a telegram [7](#)) of 1 January 1915 from the Admiralty to the Commander-in-Chief of the Fleet in South Africa reads:

"Telegram from Admiralty to C. in C., Cape, on movements of South African troops to Walfisch Bay for expedition to German South West Africa [later Namibia], regretting that no cruisers were available to provide escorts. Instructing him to retain armed storeship Laconia until further notice."

A re-reading of my original source - Troopships (Spartacus.net) - shows that Laconia first operated off East Africa from April 1915 and four months onwards, after which she was deployed (again) in solving patrol duties in the southern part of the Atlantic. The effort in East Africa took place, as far as is known, during the hunt for the SMS Königsberg [8](#)).

To note:

- 1) The drawing comes from Technical Details of HMS Fox (Naval History).
- 2) From the Danish *Huskebog for use in the field, during exercises and war games* (Source 5). In 1969, the unit of measure gross register tons was replaced by gross tonnage, cf. Maritime glossary (Lodsen.dk). See also On sea transport of the Army's units, 1905-1939 for detailed information on e.g. conversion of gross tonnage to net tonnage. The conversion formula from gross to net register tonnage is on average 100 to 60. Net tonnage indicated with *) is based on specific information about the vessels, while the other net totals are calculated according to the above formula.
- 3) *Digging dock* = dry dock.
- 4) I 1915 blev Karmala igen fragtskib, men blev i 1917 indsat som troppetransportskib mellem Amerika og England. En amerikansk soldat, William J. Schira (Base Hospital No. 53), beskriver 14. juli 1918 Karmala som "... a British ship with a British crew, an old freighter turned into a troop transport. Very dirty and no room." Senere nævner han, at "... there must be about 2,000 troops on this ship" og "... Our transport has 3 guns on - a long 6-inch on the rear and a 6-inch howitzer on each side." The Personal Diary of William J. "Bill" Schira in World War I (The World War I Document Archive).
- 5) Fleet list 1900-1909 (British India Steam Navigation Company).
- 6) HMAMC (= His Majesty's Armed Merchant Cruiser) were armed passenger vessels/troop transport ships.
- 7) CHAR 13/38/69-70 (Churchill College Churchill Archives Centre).
- 8) Read about SMS Königsberg in the articles The Königsberg Incident and the Great War in East Africa (War Times Journal) and Blockading German East Africa 1915-16 (Australian Navy), which, however, do not mention Laconia.