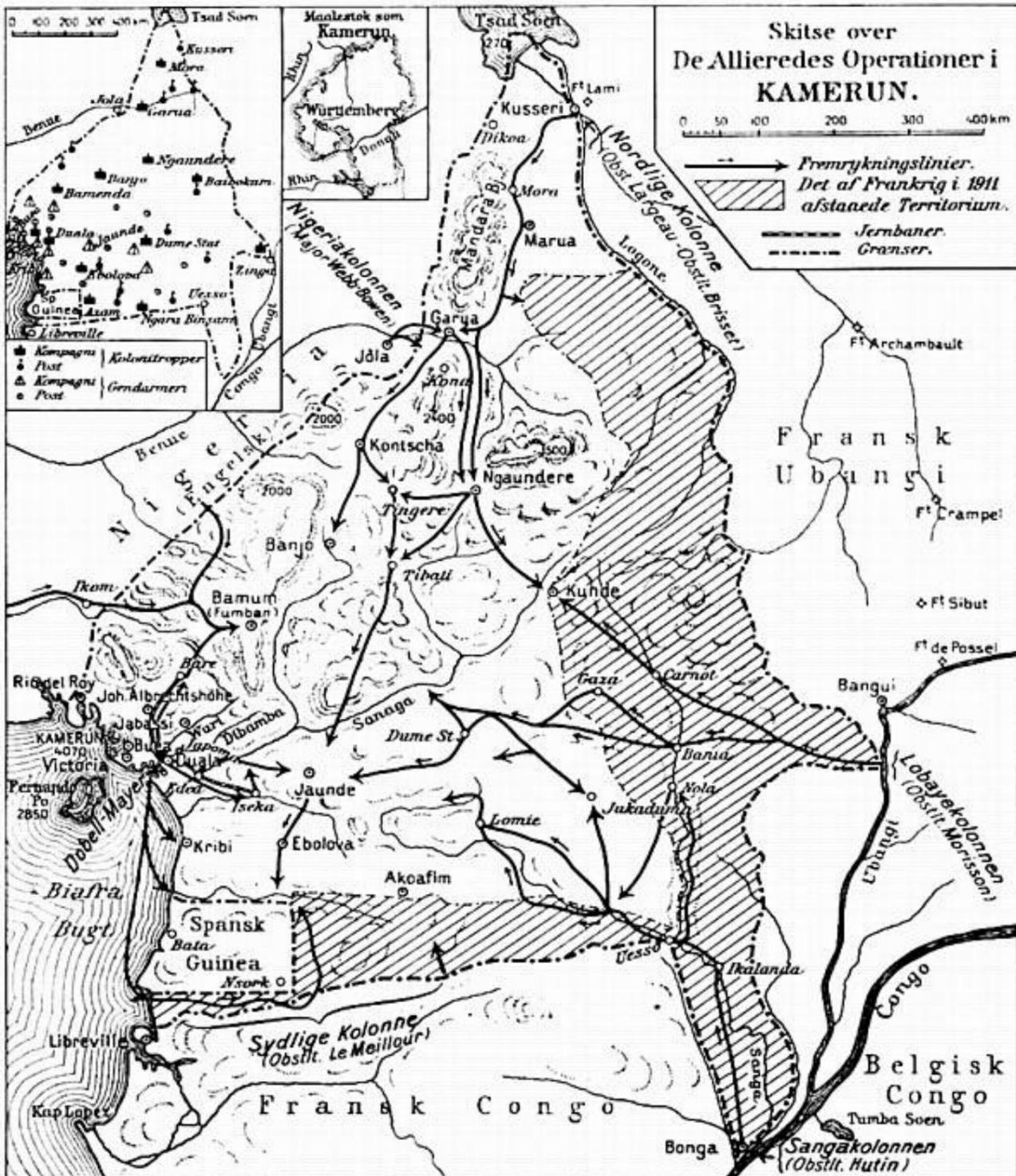


# The Cameroon Campaign, 1914-1916

## Introduction

This article is essentially a reproduction of the chapter Cameroon in *the World War, Issue 75, Battles in South Africa* (Source 1). The original text has been reproduced with modern orthography and supplemented with headings and some new illustrations.

## Cameroon



Map 1: Outline of Allied operations in Cameroon.  
From Source 1.

A series of agreements between France, England and Germany (1885, 1886, 1890, 1900, 1905 and 1911) gradually determined the boundaries within which the German colony of Cameroon 1) [existed](#) at the outbreak of the World War. [\\_\\_\\_](#)

Cameroon lies between 2° and 12° north latitude and extends from an approx. 330 km long coastline, which is broken by a small piece of the small enclave of Spanish Guinea, to the east and north to the southern part of Lake Chad. The entire area is approx. 450,000 square kilometers, and the population is approx. 2,000 whites (in addition to the troops) and approx. 2 million natives of various Negro tribes. The country is crossed by several rivers, partly tributaries to the Benue and Congo and partly the Sanaga River, which flows into the Bight of Biafra. In the interior, there are several forested mountain ranges from 5-1,500 meters high. The climate is unhealthy for Europeans, being very hot and humid. Cameroon is divided into four districts: Duala, Edea, Victoria and Kribi. The city of Duala, located on a bay just opposite the Spanish island of Fernando Po, was the capital and the governor's residence.

Communications - railways and roads as well as telegraph lines - were developing strongly. Although the country is not very rich, a considerable trade has developed. Rubber, bananas, palm oil and coconuts are produced, and attempts have been made to grow coffee and cotton. Trading turnover had gradually reached approx. 60 million marks per year.

## German units

The troop force that was at the disposal of the German governor Karl Ebermayer at the outbreak of war numbered approx. 4,000 men (Schutztruppen), divided into staff and 12 companies, of which 3 were mounted 2), also a considerable [contingent](#) of native troops 3).



*German tent camp in Cameroon.*  
From Source 1.

This force was distributed over the whole territory, and a number of well-protected strong points, abundantly equipped with machine-guns, guns and ammunition, had been established.

The Germans, however, like to give the appearance that these measures were directed only at the native population and not at any warlike enterprise on the part of a European power.

## The Allied Plan of Operations

The Allied plan of operation was to cut off the Germans from any connection with the outside world, both over the sea and over the approx. 4,150 km long land border and then to carry out a concentric action along the most suitable lines of advance in order to force the enemy to split his forces.

The various attack columns were gradually set up as follows (see Map 1):

1. Towards the north, Colonel Largeau immediately attempted an offensive at the beginning of August 1914, which failed, but was later taken up and carried out, and an expeditionary corps under Colonel Brisset advanced from this corner towards Garau.
2. From Jola in Nigeria, an English column moved east to link up with Colonel Largeau.

This column was also beaten in the first place.

3. The Lobaye column under Lt. Col. Morrison was to move westward along the river valley.
4. The Sanga column under Lieutenant Colonel Hutin from the Congo went north.

Columns 3 and 4 were under the command of General Aymerich.

5. A Franco-English corps under General Dobell and Colonel Mayer made the attack on Duala supported by a united Franco-English squadron.
6. Smaller thrusts were made across the southern border, towards the north.

## The operations

The first operations, carried out both on the French and English sides, were completely unprepared, and therefore also led to defeat and useless losses. It was in the middle of the rainy season, and a campaign in these parts can offer many unpleasant surprises.

On August 25, 1914, an English command crossed the border at Tepe and attacked the Germans under Captain von Cralsheim at Garau on August 29; but a German counterattack threw the English back into Nigeria. The English losses were very great, 5 officers died, several were wounded, and approx. 40% of the native soldiers were lost as wounded and prisoners. It was the fire of the German machine guns in particular that was so devastating. An Englishman writes ... "It was a terrible loss, and there was no honor attached to this battle, which took place in a distant spot, about 5,000 km from Old *England*, not known to one in a thousand of my countrymen.. ."

Two other English expeditions at the same time tried to advance further south-west, but they too were thrown back, and the Germans pursued over into English territory.

While the attacks from the land side were for the time being stranded by the German resistance, the undertaking from the sea side succeeded better.

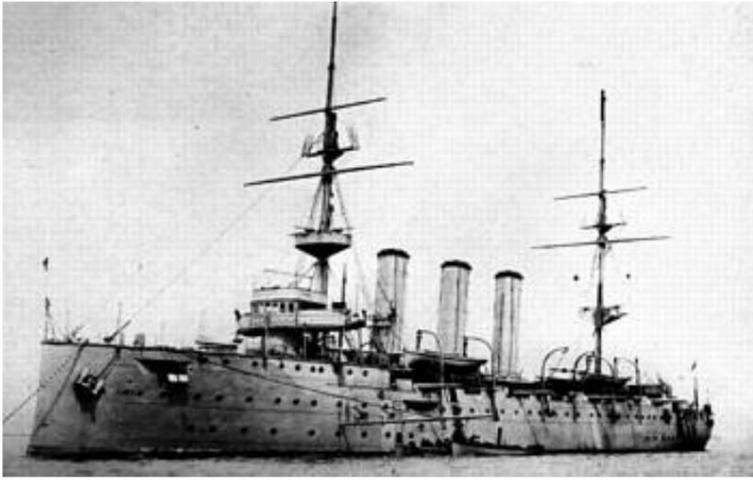
### Duala is captured

For some time the English cruisers CUMBERLAND and CHALLENGER, the gunboats DWARF, JOY and REMUS and two French cruisers blocked the entrance to Duala Bay.

The Germans had sunk several ships in the estuary and thereby prevented the attack on the city of Duala for some time, and they were also very active in throwing out drift mines and the like; but on September 27 the city could be taken under fire, and it was immediately surrendered. Several German merchant steamers that had sought refuge on the river were hijacked by the English, as was the German gunboat Soden. Further south, the French, supported from the lake by the cruiser SURPRISE, had advanced from Libreville towards Ukoko, which was occupied.



HMS CUMBERLAND Fra World War 1 Naval Combat.

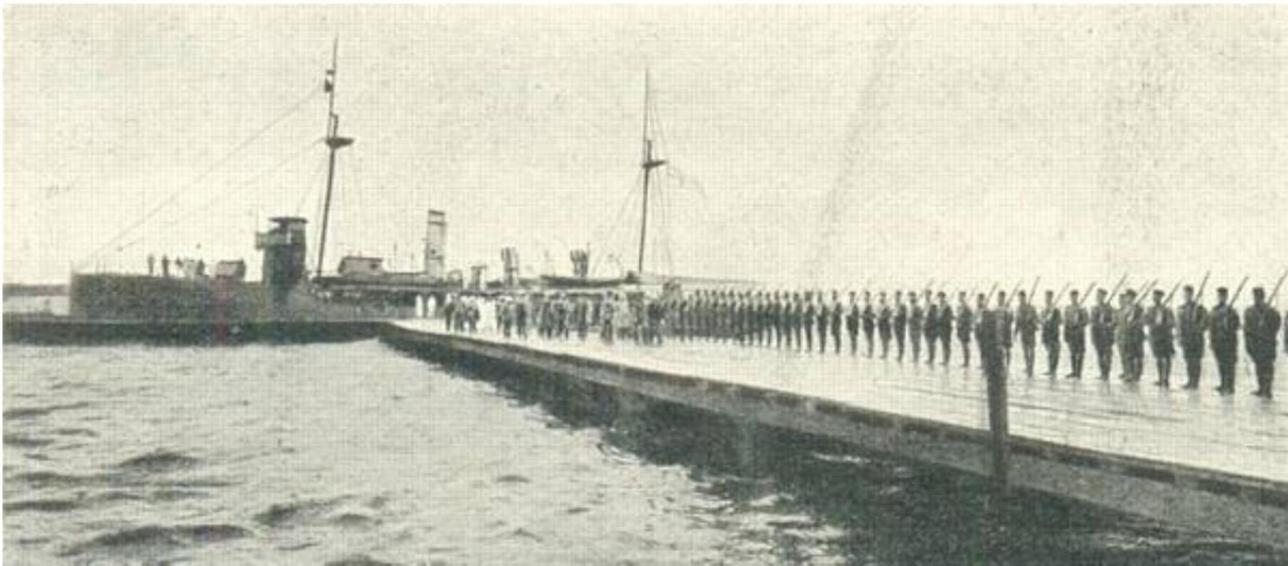


*HMS CHALLENGER*

Fra World War 1 Naval Combat.

From Duala, the Germans retreated along the railways into the country, although they had to leave approx. 300 prisoners and some equipment.

During the month of October the Anglo-French columns extended their base, thus occupying Jabassi at Wuri and Japoma, lying between Duala and Edea; but even though the most valuable areas had now been taken from the Germans, approx. 1¼ years before the colony was completely wrested from them.



*General Aymerich is received in Duala by General Dobell and Colonel Mayer. A native company parades on the bridge.*

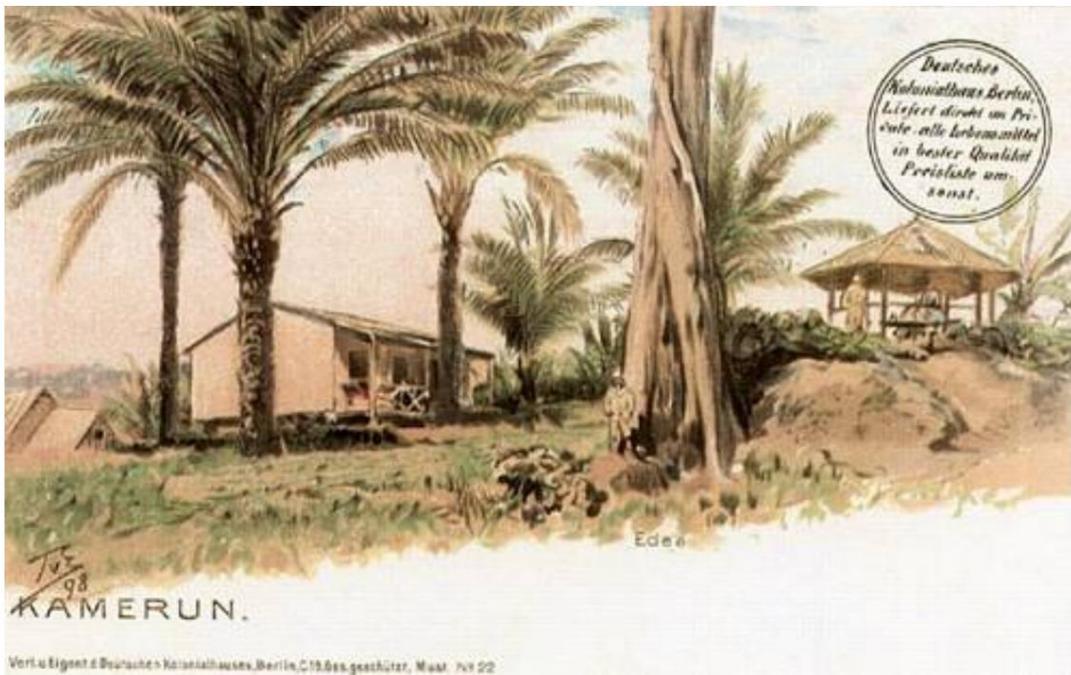
From Source 1.

The vessel is currently not identified.

## **A Dane's experiences in Cameroon**

Some details about the battles at Duala and Edea have been described by a Danish man as follows:

**September 13:** Everything here is in a state of war and most Europeans are called up as soldiers. Here in Edea, redoubts and trenches are being dug, and off Duala are some English warships which are trying to bombard the city. From the southern edge the French and from the north the English penetrate the country, so the end will probably be that Cameroon is occupied by the English just like Togo. The war is fought by black soldiers and non-commissioned officers, only the officers are Europeans.



*Edea, Cameroon. From a postcard drawn by Themistokles v. Eckenbrecher, 1898.*

Fra Traditional Association of Former Protection and Overseas Troops.

It will be more difficult to wage war here than at home, because here there are no roads. Provisions and the like for Europeans must be brought along, and pushing through the primeval forest with 2 to 3 companies of soldiers is extremely difficult.

At the beginning of the war we heard regular news from the theater of war through telegrams sent to the governor, but now the cables have been cut by the English and we hear nothing more.

We have nothing to order here, as the business is closed all day, because business has come to a standstill. All the English in Cameroon have been made prisoners of war and are sitting at Duala on board a steamer.

**October 3:** I continue today my report, which, like the previous and subsequent ones, cannot be started until the war is over, or the English are masters of Cameroon.

Cameroon is now attacked from all sides by the French and English. Duala has fallen and been captured by a few English warships, and the English are now seeking to reach Edea.

**October 5:** I've had a lot to do. We have in our house the accommodation of a lieutenant, who has command over the conscripted soldiers living in Edea. Here, shooting with machine guns and the like is practiced daily on the river Sanaga at Edea. A few hours' drive from here by train reaches the theater of war in Cameroon, namely at a Negro village called Japoma, which lies on the Dibamba river. The Germans have blown up the bridge over this, and they are now in a defensive position on the other side of the river.

The English have landed a few thousand white and black soldiers who seek to drive the Germans from Japoma to reach Edea. It has now lasted eight days; but Japoma is not yet taken. However, from South Cameroon and from both east and west, the English and French are pushing forward.

The war out here is probably nowhere near as bloody as at home in Europe, but just as stubborn; it is led, as mentioned before, by black soldiers with white officers. The black soldiers know no mercy, butchering and looting wherever they can. Already here in Cameroon, approx. 5-600 men on each side. Now we have the moonlit nights, and then the war can also be fought at night. When the dark nights come, it becomes a cruel slaughter, then the black soldiers attack the Europeans, who cannot see anything at night.

**October 11:** The English have now taken the Japoma position and are slowly advancing along the line; however, they are now also coming with armored barracks via Sanaga, so we are probably within 8 days

time English prisoners of war. Hopefully I will escape because I am Danish; but the Germans here are at least certain of handing over the rifle and bayonet and coming as prisoners of war to Lagos or another English colony.

If it comes to that, there will be only three Europeans here in Edea, namely two Swiss besides me.

There is no question here of moving away from Edea before the "enemy" comes, as the city is completely surrounded by primeval forests, and you have to take provisions, bed, tent and clothes with you, without which you will be completely helpless in the forest. Here, in addition to the danger of war, there is the danger of getting sick, even the black soldiers can get sick. When the poor people have nothing to drink, they have to drink the dirty water in the forests, and the result in most cases is dysentery, and even worse are the Europeans, as they also easily get malignant skin diseases and at least malarial fever, and what remains for the Europeans is even sunstroke, while under all this the diseases cannot be treated as under normal conditions.

**12 October:** Today we had a moving day in Edea. Three black soldiers who had stolen a canoe from the government had to pay with their lives. The English slowly push forward and have a tough fight here at Edea before they can get further inland. The bridge over the river is to be blown up as soon as the English appear, and all the troops from Cameroon are here at Edea, which is to be defended to the utmost. It will not be pleasant if the city is bombarded with their "shrapnels".



*Faktorei Plantation (Cameroon). After drawing by Ernst M. Heims.*

Fra Traditional Association of Former Protection and Overseas Troops.

As the English advance with great superiority, it is probably a given that Edea will also become English as long as the war lasts in Europe. Our factor 4) will hopefully not be destroyed when I hang out the Danish flag. Although the English will probably protect the factories, the black soldiers loot and steal like ravens wherever they can.

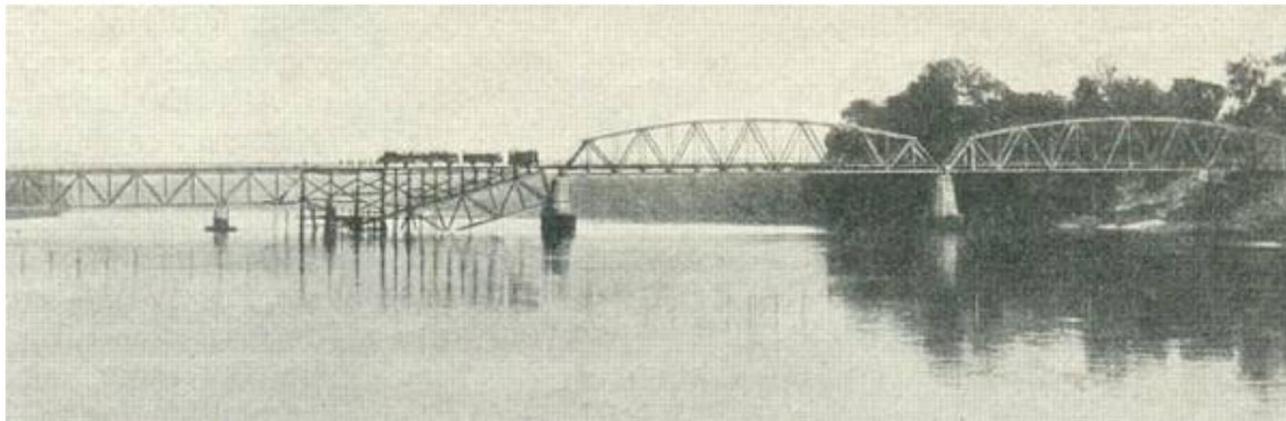
I was recently with the district superintendent, who told me that the natives of Duala have revolted and helped the English, and in that case things do not look good for the Germans, as the Duala negroes in particular are plundering and beating down the foot. If these negroes go with the English, then the Germans might as well pack up and let the English take Cameroon and then put themselves under English protection as prisoners of war. As previously written, the French are helping, and they have two cruisers lying off the small coastal town of Kempo, which was shot to pieces yesterday.

**October 26th:** I'm skipping the time from October 12th - 26th, but will post about that later. Today at 09:00 the first English and French soldiers moved into Edea. All the Germans were gone; I raised the Danish flag, and I was quite alone in the town when they came. I have two English officers in accommodation, and we get on well with each other. By the way, I am well and healthy.

The reason why I have to interrupt this letter so abruptly is that the one English officer is going back to Duala tomorrow, and he has promised to take my letter with him.

Our house and warehouse are all in order and I have avoided looting.

(And this is where the Danish part of the story ends.)



*The railway bridge at Japoma, the middle part of which was blown up by the Germans, was repaired by the Allies, as the blown away parts were used as bridge piers.*

From Source 1.

## The operations to the north

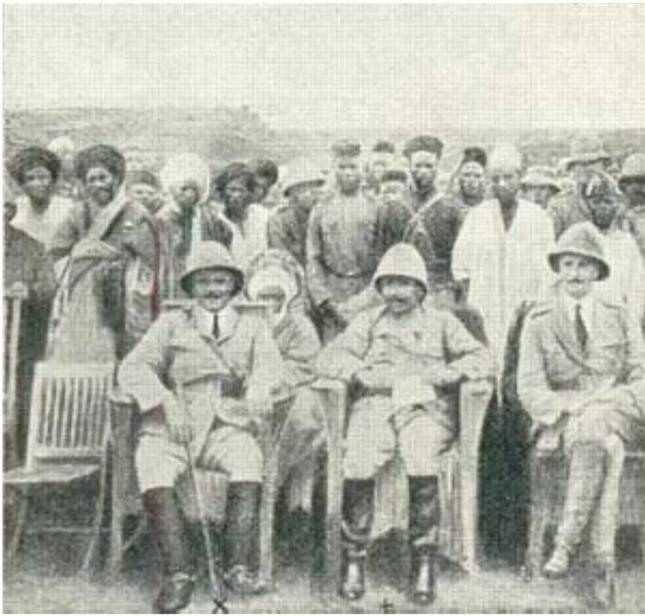
As already mentioned, the French colonel Largeau, who later died a hero's death at Verdun, advanced from the north towards Kusseri, somewhat south of Lake Chad, but was thrown back. On 21 September 1914, the attack was renewed, and the Germans had to flee from the French bayonets.

From Kusseri, Lieutenant-Colonel Brisset advanced towards the town of Mora, strongly fortified by the Germans, which could not be taken in the first rush, which is why the French left a company to observe the Germans and then continued the march towards Marua, which was immediately taken. Having received some reinforcements, Brisset's column arrived in the area around Garua in early January 1915. An English column under the command of Major Webb-Bowen with four guns and some machine guns joined the French here.

Finally, new English reinforcements were brought forward by Colonel Cunliffe, who now assumed command of the entire force.

The siege of Garua could begin. It lasted five months, and it was only on 10 June 1915, after a French 95 mm gun had been brought forward, that the German crew had to capitulate.

250 prisoners were taken, including 37 Europeans, and the spoils of war amounted to four cannon, 10 machine guns, 200 rifles, 700 grenades and 80,000 cartridges. Brisset's column then marched towards Ngaundere, who had escaped, whereupon the pursuit was continued south to Kunde, and there they made contact with the columns coming from the south.



*English Major Webb-Brown (x) and French Lieutenant Colonel Brisset (+), surrounded by native chiefs and soldiers in Ngaundere.*



*The English Colonel Cunliffe (x) and the French Lieutenant Colonel Brisset (+) after the occupation of Garua.*

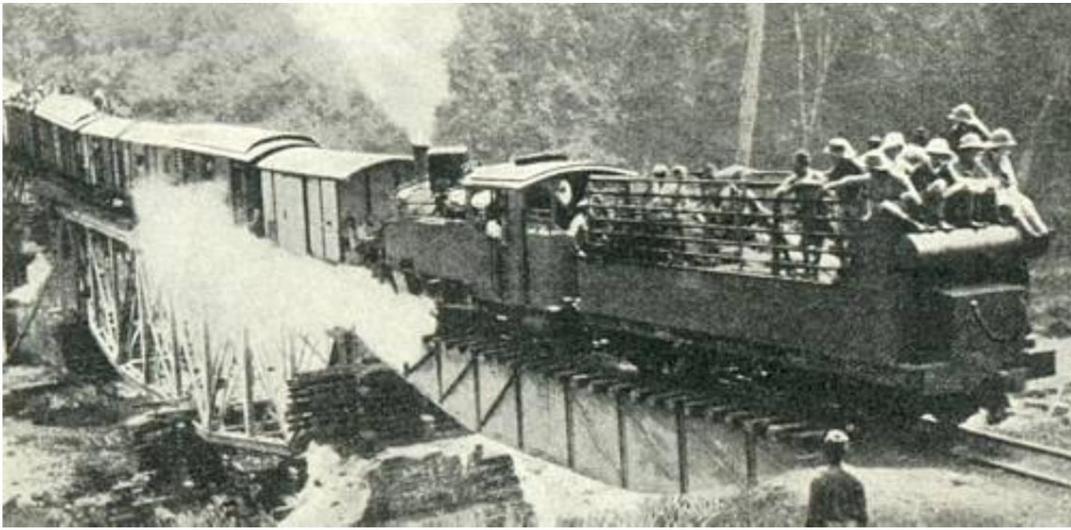
Morrison's and Hutin's columns linked up at Nola, and after a hard-fought battle on 29 December 1914, Bertua was occupied. A longer halt in operations then occurred.

Both images come from Source 1.

On 3 and 4 June 1915, fighting took place in the Moopa Forests south-east of Bertua, and the Germans held out for approx. 20 days until the French brought out artillery. On July 25, Dume was occupied.

One of General Aymerich's columns came from the south over Molundu and pursued the Germans up towards Lomie, which was occupied on 25 June 1915.

The various attacking columns from the north, east, and south, to which the Belgians in the Congo had also provided a contingent, were now united, and the unity of leadership, which had been so difficult to establish at the beginning, could now be employed to bring about a decisive result.



*A train of British soldiers passes a railway bridge in northern Cameroon.*  
From Source 1.

At the beginning of October 1915, they got down to business again in earnest; the enemy was driven little by little back to his last entrenchments, and the ring about him closed narrower and narrower.

On November 3rd Brisset's column took Tibati, and the next day they had contact with Webb-Bowen, who came over Tingere. From Tibati the movement towards Yoko was continued in connection with Lieutenant-Colonel Cuniffie's column across Banjo. Furthermore, two smaller columns from Bertua and Dume marched towards Tina.

These various forces were now to operate together against Jaunde, the last German stronghold, where the terrain favored a stubborn defence.

## **The operations in central Cameroon**

We now turn again to the coast, where a portion of the Germans, after leaving Duala, took refuge in Buea, the port town of which Victoria was bombarded by the cruiser Bruiz, and in November the Allies were masters of Buea.

In the spring of 1915 the united French and English columns commenced the advance from the west towards Yaounde, having inflicted on the Germans the defeat at Edea before referred to; but the difficulties of this march were almost overwhelming. The month of May was devoted to constant fighting in the almost impassable forests, and as an example of the difficulties it is mentioned that the column advanced only 17 km in 19 days, when, however, disease also attacked the troops, Lieutenant Colonel Mayer's column had to join the retreat on June 14, and it succeeded to reach back to base with very little loss, namely from April to June only 46 dead and 92 wounded.

The three months of July, August and September were now used to give the troops a much-needed rest and to prepare for a new offensive, which was commenced in early October 1915, and the columns reached Iseka, or 75 km from Yaounde, by November. On 3 November an English force had arrived at Nsork on the southern border.



*The gate to the Jang Fort at Yaoundé is blown up by the English troops after the capture.*  
From Source 1.

The Germans were now almost surrounded, and finally on 1 January 1916 the news came that Jaune had been captured, the garrison having fled.

The German Governor Ebermayer and the last brave defenders sought to reach the neutral territory - Spanish Guinea. English troops followed by Lieutenant-Colonel Brisset's column and the brave Belgian contingent, which had been with them throughout the campaign, now entered Yaounde. Generals Aymerich and Dobell then sent out several flying columns to catch up with the enemy and bar his way to the south. Of the refugees, approx. 4,000 the neutral Spanish possession, where they were disarmed and then interned on the island of Fernando Po.

On January 25, General Dobell was able to telegraph that all of Cameroon was cleared of enemies.

## **The last German post**

The small crew up in Mora, who surrendered on the intelligence that Jaunde had been taken, had had a hard fate, they are described from the German side as follows:

On 27 August 1914, British troops attacked the 3rd Company, commanded by Captain von Raben, stationed in Mora, but were repulsed with heavy losses. The company then retreated to a mountain position near Mora, where it was hemmed in by English and French troops. At the beginning of September the garrison made a fortunate sortie. In the ensuing battle the English commander-in-chief and several of his officers are said to have fallen. The last intelligence from the Mora came in October, 1914, at Yaounde, and bore testimony to the excellent spirit which animated the crew, both its European and colored troops. However, they were threatened by a lack of ammunition and food, and the stocks of quinine as well as other important medicines were almost exhausted. The herd's health had deteriorated, and as a result of the monotonous diet, scurvy raged among the natives.

After all, the heroic crew still held out for six months. During the unequal struggle, now in the hot weather, a further shortage of water has occurred, and the lack of ammunition, food and water has succeeded in accomplishing what an overpowering enemy has failed to do in a year and a half of attacks.

## **Closing**

The occupation of Cameroon was now complete. The Germans carried out the defense with great bravery, they had probably relied and hoped for more support from the natives; but these seem rather to greet the arrival of the allies with joy, and only in a few places did some tribes rise up against the English and French soldiers.

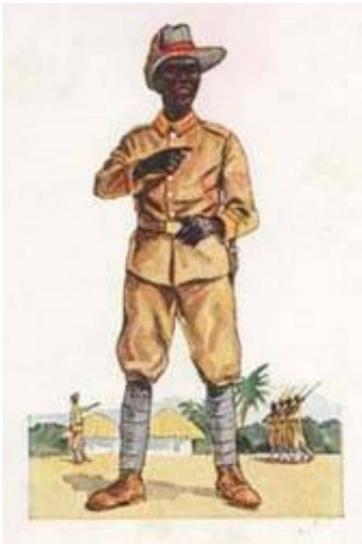
## **Sources**

## Postscript

I thank Ole Thureholm, who was recently kind enough to hand me some material on the German protection troops in Cameroon.



*Askari from Cameroon.*



*Native non-commissioned officer from Cameroon.*

The following articles are in preparation:

- German Colonial Troops in Cameroon - Uniforms and Organization, 1914
- On English units during the Cameroon campaign, 1914-1916
- On French and Belgian units during the Cameroon campaign, 1914-1916

Illustrations of the cigaret kortene 86 and 85 from the series *uniforms of the Navy and Schutztruppe*, delivered to the tyske cigaret company Waldorf-Astoria, Munich 1933. Gengivet fra Prussian history and military history (Great General Staff).

Per Finsted

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**To note:**

- 1) Om Kameruns historie se f.eks. Cameroun (Wikipedia) and Cameroon (German protected areas).
- 2) Possibly, however, the three companies contained only mounted elements.
- 3) The German protection troops in Cameroon were indigenous, with German officers, although the text here gives a different impression.
- 4) Gyldendal's foreign dictionary: European business in overseas countries (led by a factor).