

Britains figures - The King's African Rifles

Introduction



Britains No. 225: King's African Rifles.
From Source 1.

Britains Ltd. introduced their King's African Rifles figure in 1926, and it came very close to the real King's African Rifles. For further reference, see my article on The King's African Rifles.

Set No.	Description	In the catalogue...
225	King's African Rifles	1926-1941 1946-1959
9162	King's African Rifles	1966

The figures to the left in the photo are the standard configuration of Set 225 - 8 native soldiers. The figures to the right are a special version, including a native officer - the standard figure with a "plain" arm; the rifle arm is another type, with a rifle, without bayonet.



Britains No. 225:
King's African Rifles.
From Source 4.

The latter are either made on demand or for sale in Hamley's - the big London toy store. As "specials" they are painted with greater care for detail, and e.g. their eyes are not as distinctive as on the standard figures.

In Source 2, Jo Wallis gives the regiment as *3rd (East Africa) Battalion, King's African Rifles*, perhaps identified by the tassel on the fez.

The figure catches the characteristics of an native soldier at the time, including bare feet.

From a collector's perspective, an officer figure is in great demand. The above example is today almost unobtainable, or in a price league out of reach for most collectors. Consequently, you will have to look for other sources, either your own creations or figures from other sets.



*Britains No. 1544:
Australian Infantry,
Service Dress, officer.*
From Source 4.

My own solution is to use the officer figure from *Britains set 1544: Australian Infantry, Service Dress (marching at slope arms)*, which is not unlike a British officer, seconded to The King's African Rifles.

The officer figure from *Britains set 1294: British Infantry in Tropical Dress* is an alternative, but then he will be out of step with his troops, since this figure is marching with the right foot forward. The figure is shown on the last photo in this article.

From a display perspective however, I found this solution to be "idle", thus reaching the in-step "Australian solution".

Egyptian Infantry



Britains special paint - Egyptian Infantry, 1938.
From Source 1.

The figures shown here are a paint variation of the King's African Rifles figures, representing Egyptian infantry.

The figures were made for sale at Hamley's, who still have non-standard figures for sale (from the present day Britains range, of course).

The Egyptian variation is extremely rare, and in February 2005, when I wrote this article in Danish, I only knew about an Egyptian set put up for sale in 1981, as part of L.W. Richards' huge collection (Source 6).



Britains special paint - Egyptian Infantry, 1938
From Bonhams' homepage.

However, the auction house Bonhams has a set (Lot No. 1020) for sale at their 10 May 2006 Lead Soldiers and Figures auction in Knightsbridge.

Bonhams gives an estimated price as £700-1,000, but I expect the set will reach an even higher price.

Portuguese East African Native Infantry



*Britains No. 2020:
Portuguese East African Native Infantry.*
From Source 5.

An even rarer variation is the post-war *Britains set 2020: Portuguese East African Native Infantry*.

As far as I know this set was never part of the ordinary catalogue, but were mere prototypes. In 1994, Britains sold their archive collection - Source 5 - and among the many rare figures were a white officer and a native soldier.

The native soldier is a paint variation of the King's African Rifles figure, whereas the white officer derives from the very smart naval officer, with shorts, in *Britains set 1911: Officers and Petty Officers of the Royal Navy, in Blue Uniforms, and in White Uniforms*.

The hand written numbers below the figures are Britains' internal reference numbers.

At the 1994 auction, the two Portuguese figures were sold at £1,980 plus a buyers fee - and this was perhaps the "once in a lifetime" opportunity to obtain the original Portuguese East African Native Infantry figures.

This being said, the Vectis' auction at 4 May 2006 - The Wentworth Collection of Britains Military Figures and Equipment - included the below set as Lot 592. According to Vectis' homepage, the set was not sold however.

I am not aware of the reason, but perhaps it is not as original as it looks on the photo - a lot of fiddling is going on with figures, offered as original figures, but when inspected more closely turns up to be repaints etc. - or perhaps it was just too expensive, even for hardcore Britains collectors. The estimated price was given as £2,000-2,500!

Having not seen the figures in real, I can't tell if they are original, but the set does look very interesting, in could very well be used in the context of a First World War East African campaign.



*Britains No. 2020: Portuguese East African Native Infantry
From Vectis.*

Recasts



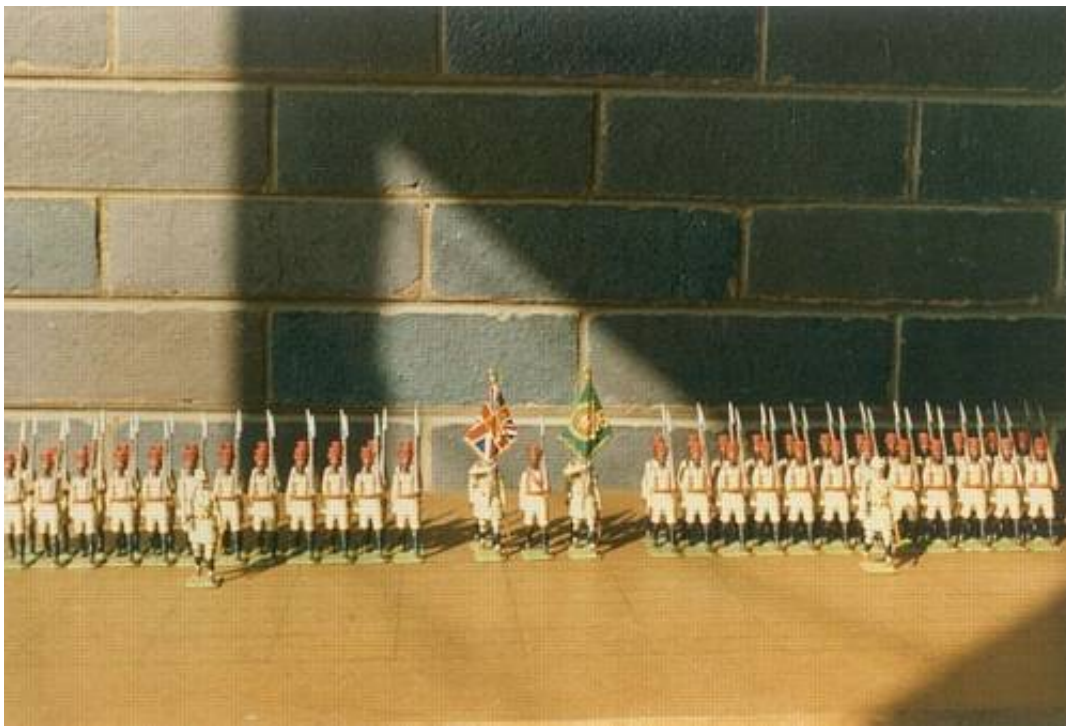
*Recast of Britains
King's African Rifles figure.
Casting C-192 from
London Bridge Collector Toys.*

While original figures are becoming scarce and/or expensive, one may be tempted to create one's own figures. To this end, castings of original figures will come handy.

Until recently, the UK firm Soldier Pac had a huge collection of various castings for sale, but while writing this I discovered that their homepage is not working, so perhaps they are out of business.

However, the US firm London Bridge Collector Toys can be used as a supplier instead, at a price of \$4.00 per figure.

Figures made by Kenn Jackson, South Africa and Regimental Colours



In the 1980'ies, the South African collector Kenn Jackson made his own recasts in resin, and what a magnificent result he got!

The figures were not made for sale, but for Mr Jackson's private collection.

At the time we discussed how the colours did look like, but since then a number of sources have come to my attention, the last one just recently.



Regimental Colours - 6th Bn. King's African Rifles (Tanganyika).

From The Regimental Association of
The King's African Rifles & East African Forces.

The colours were presented to the battalion on 16 September 1955, in Dar-es-Salaam, and are now in safe custody at the National Army Museum, London.

I was made aware of this illustration by Jan Britton (UK), whom I thank for this, since it concludes an ongoing discussion as to the base colour - blue (correct) or green (incorrect) - of the Regimental Colour.



*A close-up of the Colours of
The King's African Rifles
made by Kenn Jackson.*

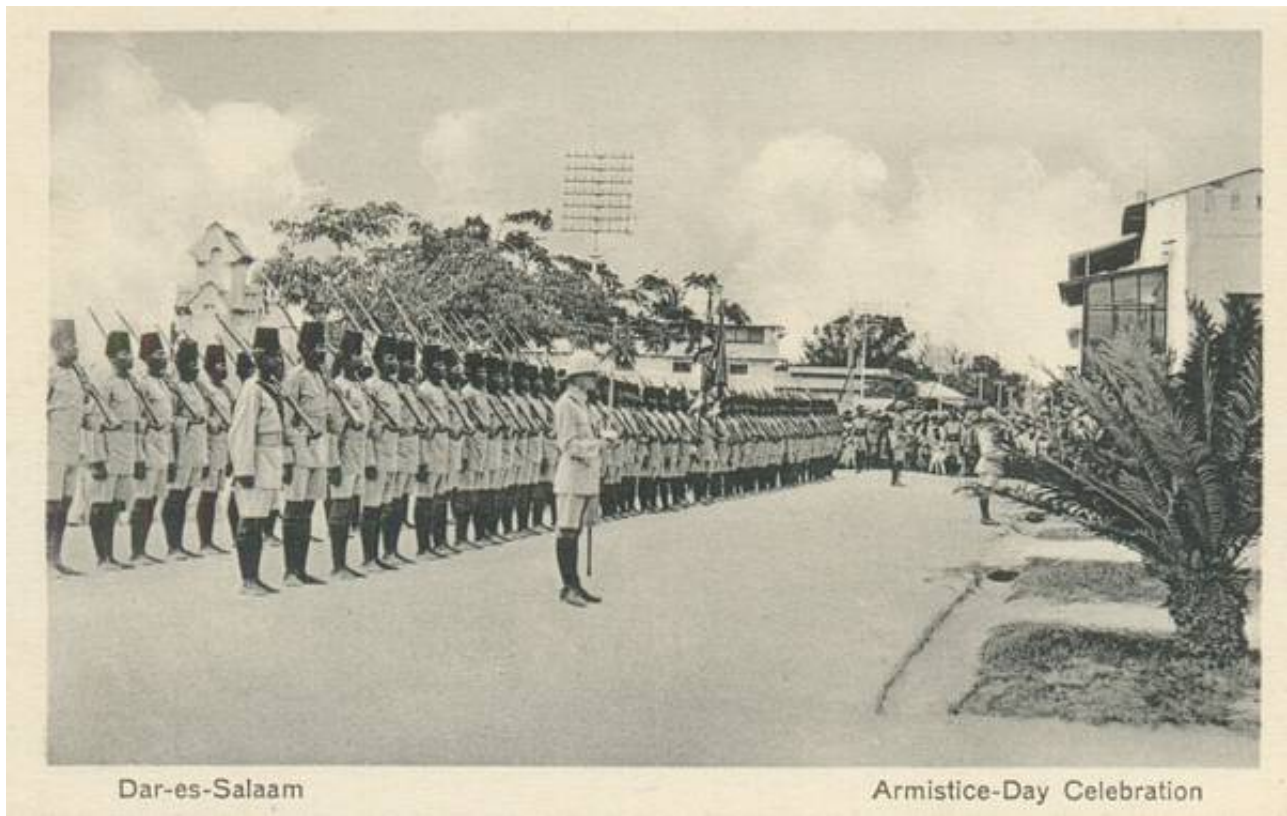
The ensigns are some of Mr Jackson's most talented conversions of various Britains figures.

At the time, Mr Jackson painted his Colours there was some doubt as to the base colour of the Regimental Colour, and Mr Jackson opted for the green colour, which was originally meant to be in use.

At the time I was unable to supply any evidence, but later, the description in *Flags of the World*, King's African Rifles (Kenya) has come to my attention, as well as the description given in *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa, 1890-1945* by Lieutenant-Colonel H. Moyse-Bartlett, reprinted by Naval & Military Press.

The latter gives the following description:

- Kings Colour** The Union Jack, gold-fringed, with a red circle surmounted by the crown. On the circle in gold, the inscription The Kings African Rifles, and within the circle the battalion number.
- Regimental Colour** On a royal blue background, the red circle and crown, inscribed as above and surrounded by the Union wreath. A lion sejant (i.e. lion) in gold within the circle. The battalion number in the dexter canton.



Armistice-Day Celebrations, The King's African Rifles, Dar-es-Salaam, in the 1920'ies.
From a contemporary postcard.

The King's and Regimental Colours can be seen in the middle of the parade.



Britains No. 225: King's African Rifles.

Some of my own figures

Giving the figures a closer scrutiny, a mystery comes up.

Seen from the front, the equipment is not unlike the British Model 1908 webbing equipment...



Britains No. 225: King's African Rifles.

... but seen from behind - with their Y-shaped straps - the equipment are similar to the basic German type.

I have no information as to why the figures were made this way, but one may speculate that the figures perhaps were originally meant to represent German Askaris...

As an addition to their equipment, the soldiers wear a machete on the right hip.

Sources

1. *The Great Book on Britains - 100 Years of Britains Toy Soldiers* by James Opie, New Cavendish Books, London 1993, ISBN 1-872727-32-8.
2. *Armies of the World, Britains Ltd. Lead Soldiers 1925 - 1941* by Joe Wallis, Private publication, 1993, ISBN 0-9605950-2-3.
3. *Regiments of all Nations, Britains Ltd. Lead Soldiers 1946-66* by Joe Wallis, Private publication, 1981, ISBN 0-9605950-0-7.
4. *A Collector's all-colour Guide to Toy Soldiers* of Andrew Rose, Salamander Books, London 1985, ISBN 0-86101-149-X.
5. *The Britains Archive*, catalogue from the 27 June 1994 auction at Christie's South Kensington, London.
6. *The Richards Collection of Lead Soldiers and Figures*, catalogue from the 12-13 August 1981 auction at Phillips, Bond Street, London. L.W. Richards made a lasting contribution to the toy soldier literature with his booklet - *Old British Model Soldiers 1893-1918*, Arms and Armour Press, London 1970, SBN 85368-028-0.
7. *Collector's Guide to Britains Soldiers* by John Ruddle, Argus Books, Watford/Herefordshire 1980, ISBN 0-85242-568-6.



Three figures from *Britains set 225 - King's African Rifles* surrounded by other native African figures by Britains, depicted in a "native" environment.

The photo is taken from Source 7.

The figures in the dark blue jackets and white trousers are from *Britains set 116: Sudanese Infantry*.

The figures in the light blue/grey uniforms are from *Britains set 117: Egyptian Infantry*.

The British officer derives from *Britains set 1294: British Infantry in Tropical Dress*, mentioned previously as a possible officer for The King's African Rifles.

The hut is from *Britains set 188: A Zulu Kraal*, whereas the palm trees are *Britains set 919: Coconut Palm*.

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