



SECOND SUPPLEMENT

TO

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SATURDAY, 26 APRIL, 1919.

War Office,
26th April, 1919.

The Secretary of State for War has received the following despatch from Lieutenant-General Sir J. L. Van Deventer, K.C.B., C.M.G., Commander-in-Chief, East African Force:—

Pretoria,
20th January, 1919.

My Lord,

I have the honour to submit the following brief report on the operations in East Africa from September 1st to the conclusion of hostilities.

On August 30th the enemy had been repulsed with considerable loss at Lioma, and on the 31st had barely escaped from the converging attacks of the 2nd King's African Rifles Column east of that place.

On September 1st my troops in the immediate vicinity of the enemy were disposed as follows:—

In touch with enemy, 2nd K.A.R. Column (1st/2nd, 2nd/2nd, 3rd/2nd K.A.R. under Col. Giffard). At or about Lioma, five bat-

talions (three temporarily immobile owing to desertion of porters).

Malokotera, one battalion.

Near Malema, one battalion.

1. The enemy was about six miles north of Muanhupa. I calculated his strength at 170 Europeans and 900 askari, with 40 machine guns and one field gun. These figures were subsequently shown to be approximately correct, with the exception of the askari, who probably numbered 1,200. That they were troops of first-class calibre was shown by the quickness with which the German force recovered its morale after the severe handling it had received on August 30th and 31st.

The enemy continued his move northward, and plunged into the difficult and broken country between Muanhupa and Mahua, for which place he was reported to be heading.

The 2nd K.A.R. Column followed hard on his tracks, and two battalions were sent from Lioma to try and forestall him near Anguros.

2. On the 6th September a very curious encounter took place, which exemplifies the extreme difficulty of bush warfare. On the 5th

the 2nd K.A.R. Column got into touch with the Lioma force, which was engaging the enemy's rearguard. The 2nd K.A.R. Column pushed ahead by a forced march to try to catch up the enemy's main body. On the 6th the column was well north of Anguros, and was marching hard in a northerly direction, thinking the enemy main body (which was often a day's march ahead of its rearguard) was still further to the north. As a matter of fact, the 2nd K.A.R. Column had, unknown to either party, overrun the enemy's main force, and was well ahead of it.

At 11 hours on the 6th the enemy advanced-guard struck the column's rearguard, and it is hard to say which was most astonished. Colonel Giffard at once counter-marched his force and attacked, but this took time, and before a decisive result could be obtained night fell and the enemy extricated himself, leaving ten German whites and fifty askari killed or prisoners, and losing a considerable amount of ammunition and baggage. The Lioma Column meanwhile was engaged with the enemy's rearguard 10-12 miles to the south, and could not get up in time to join in the fight.

The enemy vanished in the bush, and was next heard of on the 9th September at Kanene.

3. It was now certain that the German commander, finding Portuguese East Africa too hot for him, was again making for German East Africa.

There was hardly any food between Mahua and Undis on the Rovuma, and the Lindi-Massassi area was suffering from scarcity. There was, however, plenty of food in the Muembe area, in the Luchulingo Valley and at Ssassawara; while the Songea district is one of the richest in German East Africa. I therefore ordered General Hawthorn to take up the direct pursuit of the enemy with two battalions and to transfer troops as fast as possible via Lake Nyassa to Mbamba Bay; while, on the eastern side, I began to move troops northward towards the Medo line and to the Linda area via Ngomano. This latter move was much facilitated by a motor-road which had been made between Medo and Ngomano, in the construction of which the Portuguese engineers lent me valuable assistance.

4. We did not succeed in engaging the enemy again for nearly a month. He possessed the immense advantage that must always attach to a force independent of lines of communication as opposed to a force dependent on regular lines of supply. The German askari was a most expert and entirely ruthless forager. His motto was "Thou shalt want ere I want," and as he was also a past master in applying persuasion to induce the villagers to produce hidden food and cattle, the German force lived, and lived well, in country where our troops, following up, found only a desert.

Through our patrols and intelligence agents on the Rovuma we learnt that the enemy was (as anticipated) making for the Songea area, and his main body reached Muembe on September 17th, and crossed the Rovuma into German East Africa at the end of the month.

5. A new phase of operations now began, in which a wide field of choice was open to the German Commander. The rains in the Mahenge, Iringa and Tabora districts generally begin in December, and the roads southwards from the Central Railway then become almost

impassable. If, therefore, the German force could establish itself at Mahenge or Iringa by the end of November, it would be extremely difficult to institute active operations against it until after the rains.

It was also possible, though less likely, that General Von Lettow Vorbeck might make for Tunduru, where it would again have been most difficult to engage him during the rainy season. It was most probable of all, however, that the German force would follow the footsteps of Wintgens in 1917, and move via Ubena and the vicinity of Lake Rukwa to Itunda, with the idea of passing the rainy season there. The whole route lay through rich country, whereas most of the other parts of German East Africa south of the Central Railway were suffering from scarcity. Above all, a great proportion of this line ran through cattle country, and meat on hoof is of course an incalculable benefit to a force that lives entirely on the country.

All the above courses had, however, to be taken into consideration. It was a comparatively simple matter for the German Commander to march from Songea to Mahenge or Iringa, provided he could evade our troops; it was, however, by no means a simple matter to transfer our troops to either of these places from the heart of Portuguese East Africa.

Preparations were at once taken in hand to meet any of the above contingencies. The Lindi area was strengthened, and troops kept ready to move towards Tunduru. The Kilossa-Mahenge road was put into order; the garrisons of Mahenge and Iringa increased, and both places strongly fortified. A motor-road was opened up from Tabora to Itunda, and a garrison placed at the latter spot; while strong reserves were kept on the Central Railway, ready to move out as mobile columns to attack the German force wherever it might appear. As the Tabora area appeared to be the most likely scene of operations, I placed General Edwards in command of all troops operating from Tabora. All this naturally took time, but by the beginning of October things were well in train, and I was ready to meet any move of the enemy northwards.

6. Meanwhile, General Hawthorn had been straining every nerve to get troops to the Songea area ahead of the enemy. He was, however, much hampered by the inadequacy of his available shipping; for the boats on Lake Nyassa were small, had been worked to their limit during the campaign, and frequently broke down at critical moments.

The 2nd/4th K.A.R. and Northern Rhodesian Police were landed at Mbamba Bay by the end of September, two companies of the former being just too late to block the Germans' passage of the Rovuma east of Bangalolo.

The rest of the 2nd/4th proceeded as fast as possible to Songea, followed by the Northern Rhodesian Police. On October 4th, when the latter had reached Fuses, 15 miles west of Songea, they were attacked by the main enemy force, which had travelled due north after crossing the Rovuma. The attack was beaten off, after a sharp fight, but before the 2nd/4th could co-operate from east and south, the enemy had drawn off round the western flank of the Northern Rhodesian Police, and, crossing the Songea-Mbamba Bay road on the 5th, continued his rapid movement northwards.

7. It was difficult to feed more than one battalion in direct pursuit; so the 2nd/4th fol-

lowed the enemy, while the Northern Rhodesian Police were ordered to stand fast, with a view to being shipped by steamer to the head of the lake after the 1st/4th, who were already en route there. Just at this juncture, however, two out of the three lake steamers broke down, and it was not till October 18th that the last company of the 1st/4th reached Old Langenburg. By the 20th, the battalion was concentrated at Tandala, and the Northern Rhodesian Police were en route to Mwaya. Meanwhile, the 2nd/4th had been closely following the enemy, on the 17th their advanced guard engaged the enemy rearguard south of Ubena, and entered that place on the 18th, finding an abandoned enemy hospital containing General Wahle, a few other German whites, and a number of sick and wounded askari. The enemy's main body had gone towards Brandt. This disposed of any idea of his making for Mahenge or Iringa, and though the direction of his move pointed to Itunda as his objective, it was also possible that he might make for Bismarcksburg, and then move northward by the fertile Ufipa plateau towards the Tabora area. I therefore despatched the 1st/2nd K.A.R., who had been brought north by sea from Port Amelia, to Bismarcksburg, where they began to arrive on the 31st of October.

General Malfeyt, the Belgian Commissaire Royal, was of course kept fully informed of the situation, and it was owing to his kindness in placing the Tanganyika steamer "Dhans" at my disposal, that I was able to send troops to Bismarcksburg so quickly.

8. The speed of the enemy's movements had been remarkable. Since leaving Chalaua, in the Mozambique district, on August 12th, he had only had two or at the most three days' halt, and frequently averaged 18 miles a day for considerable periods. He still had some 1,600 long-service German East African porters, mostly drawn from the Wanyamwezi tribe, renowned as the best porters in Africa and stout fighting men as well. The rest of his transport was impressed in the villages that lay on his line of route. All able-bodied men were taken and had to carry loads until others were rounded up to take their places. The enemy's methods were often brutal, but always effective; and very rarely were our columns able to catch up the German force, once the latter had got a fair start. The exertions of our own forces were little less remarkable. One column did 1,600 miles in five months, and one battalion covered 1,000 miles in 97 days.

9. The 1st/4th made a determined effort to cut off the enemy at Brandt; but, in spite of forced marches, the battalion only arrived in time to engage his rear-guard, the main body having proceeded to New Utengule. The 1st/4th now took up the pursuit; the 2nd/4th, which had been out-distanced, moving to New Langenburg in reserve. The Northern Rhodesian police were ordered to Fife.

From New Utengule, roads branched off towards Itunda in the north and Bismarcksburg in the west. Once committed to either of these the German Commander could not, it appeared, change his plans, owing to the vast and impassable swamps of Lake Rukwa; I was ready for him on either line. But "there are always three courses open to the enemy, and he usually takes the fourth" — and so it was to prove in this case.

10. North-East Rhodesia was at this time practically devoid of troops. All had been transferred to Nyassaland when the enemy invaded Portuguese East Africa, and the limitations of the Lake steamers made their re-transfer a slow business.

There was, however, no objective of any importance for the enemy nearer than Broken Hill, 500 miles from Fife, and Elizabethville in the Belgian Congo, 400 miles from the same place. The latter was, of course, an important place. But Col. Olsen's Belgian Brigade was available on the Western side of Lake Tanganyika, and the troops could readily be sent via Beira and Salisbury to any threatened part of the Rhodesian railway line.

North-East Rhodesia is not rich in food stuffs; farms are few and far between, and old residents considered that the enemy would be quite unable to subsist on the country. Moreover, deserters had told us of unrest among the German askari at being kept so long away from the vicinity of their homes in the Tabora district; and it was therefore considered that, although Fife might be attacked for the sake of the supplies there, it was improbable that the German Commander would go further South.

But this is exactly where he did go.

Possibly General Von Lettow Vorbeck recognised that the end of the war was at hand, and thought he had more chance of remaining "in being" until that time by going southwards than northwards.

11 On the 2nd November the enemy attacked Fife in force, but two companies of the Northern Rhodesian Police had arrived the day before, were strongly entrenched, and beat off the attack with loss.

The 1st/4th were in hot pursuit from the North and the enemy retired towards Kayambi Mission, and by November 8th his advanced troops had reached Kasama, about 100 miles due south of Abercorn. Thus, after a brief incursion of five weeks, German East Africa was again clear of the enemy. The Northern Rhodesian Police moved to Abercorn to be ready to meet any Northward move from Kasama; the 1st/4th continued the pursuit, and by very rapid marching caught up half the enemy's force near Kayambi on the 6th November. A stiff engagement ensued, in which the 1st/4th captured two machine-guns and drove the enemy out of his position. Suitable measures for the transfer of troops to the Rhodesian Railway had by this time been taken, and Colonel Olsen's Brigade was moving southwards, when, on the 11th November, news of the signing of the Armistice was received. I at once took steps to get in touch with the German Commander, but telegraph communications had been interrupted, and it was not until the evening of the 12th, after another fight north of Kasama on that day, that hostilities ceased. On the morning of the 14th November, my terms, based on Clause 17, were handed to General Von Lettow Vorbeck, in accordance with which he formally surrendered to General Edwards, my representative, at Abercorn on November 25th.

In view of the gallant and prolonged resistance maintained by the German Force in East Africa, I allowed General Von Lettow Vorbeck and his Officers to retain their swords, while the European rank and file were permitted to carry their arms as far as Dar-es-Salaam.

12. Thus ended a remarkable, and in some ways unique, campaign.

Never before had operations on a large scale, with modern weapons, taken place within a few degrees of the Equator. Seldom, perhaps, has one consecutive series of operations been conducted over such a vast area, extending from the Uganda Railway to the Zambesi, and from Lakes Kivu, Tanganyika and Nyassa to the Indian Ocean.

Unique in civilised warfare was the fact that the East African campaign was performed one of virtual extermination. At the beginning of the 1916 advance the German forces amounted to 2,700 Europeans and 12,000 Africans. By the end of that year three-quarters of German East Africa was in our hands, and the enemy's force had been reduced by half. Those remaining were, however, the pick of his troops, and were by no means conquered; and the stubbornest fighting of the whole campaign took place in the Lindi and Kilwa districts in the latter part of 1917.

When Gen. Von Lettow Vorbeck retired across the Rovuma into Portuguese East Africa in November, 1917, he was followed by 320 whites and 2,500 black troops.

He, however, possessed a valuable reserve of trained porters of good fighting stock, from whom he enlisted recruits from time to time; and when the German Commander finally surrendered in accordance with the terms of the Armistice his force still numbered 155 Europeans and 1,168 Askari. In a civilised country, with good communications, the fighting life of such a force would have been short; but with the extraordinary advantages of evasion that the East African terrain gave to a commander of a compact and mobile force, independent of lines of communication and adept at living on the country, it is possible that the operations might have been prolonged for a considerable time.

Diverse as are the physical features of the East African theatre of operations, ranging from the uplands of Arusha to the swamps of the Rufigo, and from the 9,000 passes of the Livingstone Mountains to the deadly coast-belts of Kilwa and Lindi, yet there is one feature that, as an obstacle to military operations, varies little—the bush.

It stretched over nine-tenths of the country. Its extent was reckoned in hundreds of thousands of square miles. It enormously increased difficulties of movement, made the accurate timing of combined operations almost impossible, and magnified tenfold the normal "fog of war."

In many parts of the theatre of operations two considerable forces might be within a few miles of one another, and yet be totally unaware of each other's presence. Perhaps no other country in the world could so well have suited Gen. Von Lettow Vorbeck's purpose.

His force, even at the time of his surrender, was by no means to be despised. His troops consisted mainly of veteran Askari; and, backed by thirty to forty machine guns, formed to the end a formidable little fighting force. The Germans rewarded their black troops by giving them a free hand in respect of loot and the treatment of women; but it nevertheless says much for the character of the German commander that he was able to keep these men with him through four years of most strenuous campaigning.

There were occasions when atrocities were committed on our wounded, and the treatment of our prisoners—especially the Indians—was at times infamous; but the Germans themselves, with rare exceptions, tried to stop the former, while the latter was the work of men far behind the firing line, most of whom have already been punished; and though it is impossible entirely to exonerate the Higher German Command with regard to these matters, it must in justice be said that the actual fighting of the East African campaign was, on the whole, clean—and sometimes even chivalrous.

13. To the troops that achieved and maintained the conquest of German East Africa unstinted praise is due. Not only were they opposed to an enemy composed of first-class fighting material, and specially trained to the peculiar conditions of African bush warfare, but they had also to contend with Nature in some of her most difficult aspects. The vastness of the theatre of operations, the difficulties of supply, and the deadliness of many parts of the country to all but the indigenous African greatly enhanced the hardships inseparable from any form of campaigning in the tropics. The distances covered by the troops, especially in the later stages of the campaign, would have been remarkable even in a temperate climate; carried out in the heart of Africa, under a blazing sun or in torrential rain, they were wonderful feats of endurance. Though few engagements in the East African campaign rose to the dignity of battles, yet the fighting was often continuous and always most determined; and there are, perhaps, few fields of operation more trying than the bush, which invariably produces in time a feeling of depression in those who have been accustomed to more open warfare, while the sensation of continually groping in the dark tries the moral and physical courage of the bravest.

The theatre of war was perhaps the most difficult in which any large body of troops has ever fought, and as a test of sheer human endurance the operations in East Africa must rank high among the campaigns of the world.

The following immediate awards have been granted by me for the period 1st September, 1918, to end of hostilities:—

- 2 Bars to Military Crosses.
- 5 Military Crosses.
- 5 Imperial D.C.Ms.
- 9 K.A.R. D.C.Ms.
- 9 Military Medals.
- 6 monetary awards (to porters, etc.).

14. The administrative work of such a campaign was naturally exceptionally heavy. The number of sea-bases ran into double figures. The length of the lines of communication can be estimated from the fact that 3,500 miles of motor-road were made. The difficulties of supply and transport in a trackless country thrice the size of Germany, in which the life of a beast of burden only averages two months, and a porter consumes his own load in 20 days, seemed sometimes almost insuperable; and it reflects the greatest credit on all branches of the administration that these difficulties were successfully overcome.

Perhaps the greatest problem of all was that of health. No country is more rife with disease than tropical Africa, our greatest enemy being malaria, which thinned the ranks of the force to an alarming extent. Towards the end of

the campaign, also, the troops suffered severely from Spanish influenza. These and other diseases filled our hospitals to an extent which taxed the medical services to the utmost; and, in spite of all their care and devotion, claimed a far larger number of victims than the weapons of the enemy.

The Royal Navy has, as ever, co-operated most loyally, and has often either anticipated my requests or given even more than I asked for.

The Governments of India and of the Union of South Africa have never ceased to render me unflinching assistance; the Governments of British East Africa, Uganda, Nyassaland and Rhodesia have helped me in every possible way; and the Administrator of German East Africa has worked in close agreement with me throughout the campaign.

My relations with the Governor-General of Portuguese East Africa and the Commissaire

Royal of the Belgian Congo have always been most cordial, and I have never asked for their assistance in vain.

Finally, I desire to record my deep obligation to my General and Administrative Staff, to all Commanders and Staffs in the field, and to all Heads of Services and Departments for their loyal, capable, and untiring assistance, and I desire to bring to Your Lordship's notice the names of certain Officers, Warrant Officers, Non-commissioned Officers and Men which are included in the list attached to this despatch.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's obedient Servant,

J. L. VAN DEVENTER,

Lieutenant-General,

Commander-in-Chief, East African Force.

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