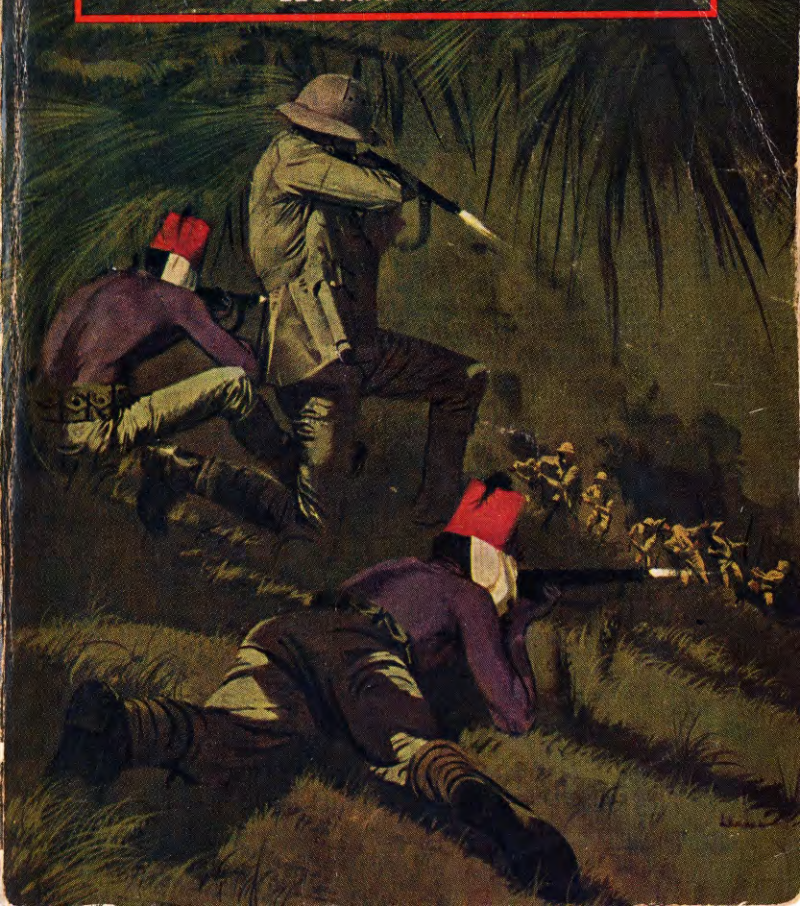


DUEL FOR KILIMANJARO

AFRICA 1914-18 — THE DRAMATIC
STORY OF AN UNCONVENTIONAL WAR

LEONARD MOSLEY



DUEL FOR KILIMANJARO

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An Account of the East African Campaign
1914-1918

DUEL FOR KILIMANJARO

LEONARD MOSLEY

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Contents

PREFACE	ix
1 STEPFATHER SAYS 'NO'	13
2 BWANA SAKHARANI	31
3 DISASTER AT TANGA	50
4 'AKO, AKO, AKO!'	71
5 WAR IN THE BUSH	88
6 KILIMANJARO	110
7 THE CHASE BEGINS	125
8 'SMUTS IS OBSESSED'	143
9 BEYOND THE RUFIJI	152
10 THE ROUT OF THE PORTUGUESE	167
11 SEARCH FOR KOKOSANI	178
12 'SURRENDER—PLEASE!'	197
EPILOGUE	210
MAPS	213
SOME STATISTICS	217
BIBLIOGRAPHY	219
INDEX	221

List of Illustrations

following page 112

General von-Lettow-Vorbeck, Commander of the German Forces in East Africa from 1914 to November, 1918.

Governor Schnee with his troops.

Transporting one of the *Königsberg* guns up country.

A German machine-gun post in the bush.

A German carrier-column on the march.

A German lookout post in the bush.

A German mounted column.

A German patrol post on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro.

German Askaris camouflaged for patrol operations.

A German mounted column of the type which raided British territory.

General Smuts who commanded the British forces from 1916 to 1917.

Where British and Italian troops landed at Tanga.

A British Army camp in German East Africa.

Indian Troops crossing a blown German bridge at Kahe.

A British train crossing the East African "Pori" in the area where von Lettow-Vorbeck's saboteurs operated.

Von Lettow-Vorbeck surrenders to the British at Abercorn, Rhodesia, November 25, 1918. From a painting by an unnamed native artist in the King George V Museum, Dar es Salaam.

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Most of all I should like to thank General von Lettow-Vorbeck himself, 94 years old, but ever willing and active, for talking to me and helping me in every way possible. To meet him today is to understand why the British who fought against him came to admire him so tremendously, and why they treated him so honourably after he had finally surrendered.

He once asked me to dedicate this book to him, and this I gladly do.

L.M.

Preface

In March, 1964, there died in Germany one of the bravest and most daring army commanders in the history of warfare. His name was General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, and at the time of his death he was a few days short of his 94th birthday. Outside of Germany he has never, until now, had his fair share of fame, yet von Lettow was a guerilla leader in World War One whose achievements surpass those of the legendary Lawrence of Arabia.

The battleground he chose for his remarkable exploits was East Africa. Here, when war began, the German colony (known today as Tanganyika) was almost completely surrounded by British territory. The tiny army he commanded consisted of a handful of white officers and non-coms and a few thousand native troops, whereas, across the border, the British would soon be pouring in troops and preparing to invade. He could expect no reinforcements from Germany, for the Royal Navy had thrown a blockading screen along the coast to cut him off from men, food and ammunition.

In the circumstances, what was the use of fighting? Why not declare German East Africa neutral territory—as the German Governor, Heinrich Schnee wished to do—and opt out of the conflict?

That was not von Lettow's way. Far from viewing his situation as hopeless, he saw it as a splendid opportunity for the exercise of military cunning. Though outnumbered ten to one, he did not wait to be invaded and defeated, but crossed into British territory—and attacked. From that moment the fight was on. It swayed across thousands of miles of African territory, from the game-filled bushlands in the lee of snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro to the pestilential swamps along the disease-ridden Rovuma River. Since his force was too puny for pitched battles, General Lettow-Vorbeck ducked for cover each time the British commander, General Jan Christian Smuts—the famed Boer leader—tried to force him into the open. Instead, he followed a policy of devastating hit and run,

forcing the clumsy British fighting machine to lumber after him through the jungle in a hopeless pursuit.

It was not all triumph for von Lettow, of course. The hardships he and his men suffered were great. They ran out of food, and made themselves ill from eating grass. They operated in a jungle where the malarial mosquito was king, and their home-made supplies of quinine were not enough to go round. They starved and they suffered. But they never gave in—not even when the German war machine collapsed in Europe. They were undefeated until the end. The British had to plead with them to surrender; and when they did so they were given full battle honours, for the British had learned to admire the guts and superlative skill of General Lettow-Vorbeck, and regarded him more as a friend than a foe. Rightly. For he not only fought well but honorably and chivalrously, too. And, in a sense, his was the victory, for he had pinned down a quarter of a million British and allied troops and kept them from the battlefields of Europe.

This, then, is the story of von Lettow's colorful campaign. If I were asked why I have chosen at this moment to write an account of a war in East Africa which took place nearly fifty years ago, I suppose the easy way out would be to answer that it is an adventure story pure and simple. General von Lettow-Vorbeck is of course its central character, and, like my fellow-Britons of a generation earlier who fought him, I make no bones about admitting that I admire him as a person and as a great guerilla soldier. With a small band of men he outwitted a mighty army.

It is true that he was a German, and the Germans were the villains of World War One, were they not? So far as Africa is concerned, I am not so sure. The white men whose interests were being fought over in Africa in 1914-18 had little to choose between them; they were both fighting to preserve the same things—their rich markets, their hegemony over the natives, their reserves of cheap labor, an easy white life at the expense of a brutish colored servitude.

In deciding to fight the British, General von Lettow-Vorbeck may well have had in mind simple patriotism. But the impact of his decision had much more important results for the future than that. He sowed the seeds, albeit unwittingly, of African independence.

Throughout the age of European colonialism in Africa, one thing had been drummed into the native—his inferiority. The white master was not only his superior. *Any* white was the superior to *any* native. It was the fear that this might

be disproved which moved Governor Schnee to attempt to keep the war out of his territory. "The prestige of the white man is at stake," he said. "If natives learn that they can overcome white men in battle, it will give them ideas which will be dangerous for the future of all Europeans in Africa."

Of this possibility, von Lettow had no fear. It would be too much to suggest that he ever thought of his askaris (native troops) as his equals. To him they were always children; but his children, to be guided and educated. He believed that it would take far longer for them to grow up into maturity than it has taken in fact. He certainly did not expect to see them independent in his lifetime, but he had no qualms about giving them the opportunity to show that they had the makings of mature men. "Here in Africa we are all equal," he said. "The better man will always outwit his inferior, and the color of his skin does not matter." When he addressed his askaris, he used the phrase "we Africans" and was proud of it.

It would be naive not to admit that when his campaign began, von Lettow believed along with many other of his officers that the method of getting the best out of an askari was by shouting, iron discipline and a flick of the whip. But he learned. Soon he was writing: "The feeling of comradeship which our askari had for us Germans and we for them . . . led on this occasion to a curious incident. After climbing Kasigao Mountain by night, among rocks and thorn bush, an askari noticed that Lieutenant von Ruckteschell was bleeding from a scratch on his face. He at once took his sock, which he had probably not changed for six days, and wiped the 'bwana lieutenant's' face with it, anticipating the somewhat surprised question with the remark: 'That is a custom of war; one does it only for one's friends.'"

To many of the Europeans on both sides, the Africans who fought in this remarkable campaign remained "kaffirs" and "apes off the trees." But they were never that to General von Lettow-Vorbeck. It is no accident that some of the sons of the askaris who fought beside him are high in the Government of Tanganyika today. So this is a story of an adventurous war and of heroism and endurance in exotic places, but it has, I hope, implications which go beyond the events it chronicles in a long-forgotten campaign.

To gather the facts for it I have been to Africa several times in the past few years. There are still relics of the old German *bomas*, or fortresses, in the bush. In the delta of the Rufiji River, the hulk of the German cruiser *Königsberg*,

whose guns were dragged ashore and trundled over Africa after she was sunk by the Royal Navy, still wallows in the mud, overgrown with creepers, a sporting ground for crocodiles and hippos. But the diseases which decimated the 'green' British troops in the early days of the war have been brought under control, and it is difficult to believe now that so many men could have died so easily.

When this book was published in hard covers a copy was read by President Nyerere of Tanganyika who wrote to praise the author for having written such a vivid and accurate account of the campaign, and to make a request. President Nyerere asked me whether I would visit him in Tanganyika and advise him on the preparation of a history of East Africa's native troops. He also asked me to convey his "warm admiration" to General von Lettow-Vorbeck as a soldier, a man, and a friend of the African.

I sent a copy of President Nyerere's letter to General von Lettow-Vorbeck the same day. It arrived in Hamburg a few hours after the gallant old soldier died in his sleep.

CHAPTER ONE

Stepfather Says 'No'

IN DAR ES SALAAM in the last days of July, 1914, Dr Heinrich Schnee wrestled with a difficult problem. How could he, as Governor of the German colonies in East Africa, and also as a patriotic citizen of the German Reich, keep his territory and his peoples out of the war in which the Fatherland seemed imminently to be involved?

Dr Schnee was an administrator whose character will come as something of a surprise to those who accept as writ the charges against Germany's colonial servants which were made at Versailles, when they were described as 'cruel, brutal, arrogant and utterly unsuited for intercourse with primitive people, lustful and malicious in their attitude towards subject races'. He was a governor who genuinely believed in reform and trusteeship. He once summed up his mission in Africa in these words: 'It has always been my policy to make the welfare of the natives entrusted to my care the dominant feature of my administration.' And in 1914 he saw that policy about to be smashed to pieces by a war in which, he believed, the African colonies should have no part.

But how could he keep them out of it?

'The Minister who sent me to Africa as Governor of this colony,' he said, in a speech in Dar es Salaam in July, 'gave me a programme to follow. "Colonizing means missionizing," he said, "and missionizing the lofty sense of education towards culture. The task of the colonizers is wide and diversified. The natives are ignorant, they must be instructed. They are indolent, they must be taught to work. They are unclean, they must be taught cleanliness. They are ill with all manner of distempers, they must be healed. They are savage, cruel and superstitious, they must become peaceful and enlightened. They have also a right to demand that they should be regarded as an end and not as a means."'

He went on: 'But how can these precepts be followed in this dark but gradually lightening land if we are to be involved with the quarrels which do not concern these people? All responsible men must realize that the provocation of wars

in Africa, in which black men would be forced to fight against white men, would deal a deadly blow to the prestige of the whites among the blacks, just when they are beginning to look up to us. They must also see that the extension of conflicts between European nations to the African peoples is contrary to that spirit of humanity which should inspire modern colonization.'

In the circumstances, the rumours of approaching war which kept coming in from Europe filled him with alarm and dismay, plus a determination to opt out of the conflict. It was towards this end that he strove all through the hot, stuffy days of July in Dar es Salaam as the sands of peace ran out at home. He worked on a twofold scheme to avert what he sincerely believed would be German East Africa's tragedy. In 1885 the great powers with colonies in Africa had signed a pact, known as the Congo Act, which created a free-trade zone in the following territories: German East Africa and parts of the Cameroons, the British colonies in East Africa bordering on German East Africa, Uganda, Nyasaland, a part of Northern Rhodesia, part of the Belgian Congo, and that part of French Equatorial Africa which bordered on the Cameroons. In Article II of the Congo Act, the signatories—Germany, Great Britain, France and Belgium—pledged themselves in the event of war to do their utmost to bring about the neutralization of their territories in the Congo Basin. The Treaty declared: 'The belligerent parties would be required from this time [the outbreak of war] to refrain from carrying out hostilities in the neutralized territories and from using them as a basis for warlike operations.'

It was Clause II upon which Governor Schnee relied for his colony's inviolability, and he begged his Minister in the Kolonialamt in Berlin, Dr Solf, to invoke it. 'Better neutralized than occupied,' he urged. He found a certain sympathy there. If Dr Solf was not quite so idealistic in his regard for the welfare of his native subjects, at least he realized that German East Africa was almost completely surrounded by potential enemy territory and would have little chance of survival in the event of hostilities. 'I will do what I can,' he cabled on July 14, 1914, 'but do not anticipate any support from the military.'

Dr Schnee had also made some private arrangements of his own. The British Consul in Dar es Salaam in 1914 was a certain Mr Norman King. He was a popular member of the Dar es Salaam Club, an expert bridge-player, and he had the ear of many of the most influential business men in the colony,

most of whom had visions of bankruptcy at least, and massacre at most, if German East Africa should be subjected to the turmoil of war. He was also a frequent visitor to Government House and it would appear that the conversations which took place between Mr King and Governor Schnee in the weeks immediately preceding the outbreak of war gave Schnee the impression that there was a way out for his colony even if his home government failed to secure its neutrality by international agreement. King appears to have persuaded him that a local *modus vivendi* might be arranged; if Governor Schnee would agree to the closure of German East Africa's ports, especially Dar es Salaam and Tanga, barring them particularly to ships of the Imperial German Navy, and if he would restrain the defensive forces of the colony from anything but purely internal activity, King would be prepared to promise that the territory would be left free from interference from Britain. Could such an agreement be guaranteed, and would the British honour it? King departed on July 24, 1914 by boat for Zanzibar, which was British-controlled territory, and spent the next forty-eight hours exchanging communications with London. He returned with nothing in writing, but with such strong assurances of British willingness to recognize the German colony's neutrality that Dr Schnee jubilantly told the members of his advisory council that he had secured a Gentleman's Agreement for the removal of the territory from the strains and stresses of war.¹

'All that is necessary, gentlemen,' he told members of the advisory council at a meeting on July 28, 'is to make sure that in no way, except in our thoughts and sympathies, shall we in this colony do anything that may be considered *militarily* aiding the Fatherland. It will be a difficult time for us, for we all know where our hearts lie. But for the ultimate good of Germany and the furtherance of our aim to keep the flag of the Fatherland flying in these savage territories, it will be the duty of all of us in the colony to refrain from all belligerent activity. The Day will come for us, too, but it will come through patience and forbearance.'

It was pointed out to him by one of the members of his council that German East Africa could hardly claim to be neutral in view of the fact that, from the windows of the Council Chamber itself, a prime example of German belligerence was within sight. In the harbour of Dar es Salaam the

¹ In fact it seems doubtful whether the British Government ever gave such a pledge. King seems to have been bluffing; but Schnee was not to know that.

German light cruiser *Königsberg* lay at anchor, but under steam. Now it so happened that the *Königsberg* had arrived in German East Africa in June 1914 in connection with a colonial exhibition which was due to open in Dar es Salaam in mid-August, but before that date Dr Schnee had planned to sail in her to Tanga, Lindi, Bagamayo and other ports in his bailiwick. This had now been cancelled and anyone who took field-glasses and scanned the ocean from Dar es Salaam's outskirts could see why. Two British naval vessels, *Astraea* and *Pegasus*, disported themselves like basking sharks just beyond the three-mile limit, and it was obvious that they were waiting both for the declaration of war, and for the *Königsberg*. It was unlikely that the German cruiser would wait long inside a land-locked harbour with such a threat within gun-range; she would be far safer at sea, where her superior gun-power and speed could be used to bite back at, or elude, her sentinels.¹ There was no embarrassment likely to be felt from the *Königsberg*'s presence.

Then what of the land forces in the colony, the Schutztruppe? Could they be relied upon not to exacerbate the delicate situation by needless provocation of German East Africa's neighbours? Governor Schnee had little doubt that he could keep a tight hold on that situation too. It is true that some months before, the German High Command had detached an officer from its staff and seconded him to Dar es Salaam as Commandant of the Schutztruppe, with instructions to bring the defence forces of the colony up to a pitch of preparedness for war, and the officer in question was at that moment somewhere in the interior inspecting units in his command. Schnee told his advisory council that he had summoned the commandant to return to Dar es Salaam immediately for a conference, and he left his hearers in little doubt that he knew exactly how to handle him. How could it be otherwise? As Governor of the colony, Dr Schnee was ex-officio Commander-in-Chief of the Schutztruppe. It was within his power to countermand any order the commandant might give. He was bound, in any case, to submit to Government House for approval all or any instructions to the Schutztruppe which went beyond those concerning pure administration or internal defence.

The Governor felt reasonably confident that everything would work out neatly and happily for everybody. Either by

¹ *Königsberg* did, in fact, sail from Dar es Salaam on July 31, outdistanced the two British naval vessels, and escaped, for a time, into the shipping lanes off the Gulf of Aden.

international agreement or by private arrangement with Consul King, he had arranged for the colony's ports to be spared the terrors of bombardment from the sea. He was sure that the Commandant of the Schutztruppe would agree that it would be hopeless to use his puny force—which was, at that time, not much more than 2,000 strong—for anything but internal defence.

He might have been less confident had he known what was going on in the mind of his commandant as he travelled back by goods train to Dar es Salaam from the interior. The commandant's name was Lettow-Vorbeck, and he held the rank in the German Army of lieutenant-colonel.

Had they deliberately tried, the home Government in Germany could hardly have sent to East Africa two men more different in temperament, training, ideas, ambitions and appearance than Dr Heinrich Schnee and Lieutenant-Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck.

I do not suppose that the present rulers of the independent countries of Africa would have called Schnee anything but a *colonialist*, using the word in its modern, opprobrious connotation, and unabashed colonialist he certainly was; but for a German in 1914 this made him one of the more enlightened of his fellow-countrymen. Germany had been in the colonization business for less than a generation, and the administrator who regarded the native subjects of his territory as men and women whose welfare should concern him, whose lot should be slowly but continuously improved, whose children should be educated, was still an unusual phenomenon among a settler-class for whom the natives were but cheap labour there to be exploited. It would be too much to say that he ever visualized anything approaching real freedom—in the modern political sense of the word—for the black subjects of the vast territory over which he exercised control in 1914. But by training and conviction, he had come to regard his position in German East Africa as that of a trustee, and under his aegis the nature of German colonization had changed profoundly from the brutal and often bloodthirsty exploitation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. 'We must remember that the black man is a human being,' he once said, and it is remarkable how many of his fellow-countrymen in East Africa at that time would have disagreed with him.

What makes Schnee's attitude towards his black subjects piquant is the fact that he never really ceased to be afraid of them. He made great efforts in East Africa to meet the

peoples of the territory and few governors before him had travelled so widely in the interior of the country, and he made too a special point of always being available to personal approach from the chieftains. But he had never forgotten the files in the Kolonialamt in Berlin which gave a detailed, day-by-day account of East Africa's bloody Maji-Maji rebellion of 1905, when the natives were egged on by witch doctors to kill their white overlords; and always present in his mind was the thought that it could happen again. His great fear was 'native unrest'. His recurrent nightmare was one in which the blacks once more revolted and turned upon the whites. Human beings the natives might be, but they were also dangerously unpredictable and any weakness in his rule, any decline in authority, might well unleash the devils damped down inside them. Trustee he was, but trust them he could not: and if his rule was benevolent it was also autocratic. It was fear of the latent ferocity of the blacks which, albeit subconsciously, conditioned his attitude towards the prospect of war in East Africa.

Heinrich Schnee was forty-three in 1914, thin and sallow-faced, with a carefully groomed moustache and an almost foppish taste for clothes. His scholastic record was distinguished, and it had always been directed towards the colonial service. He was born in 1871 at Neuahaldensleben, near Magdeburg, and studied at Heidelberg, Kiel and Berlin universities, after which he passed into the Oriental Seminary in Berlin to learn colonial administration and Swahili, the lingua franca of East Africa. He was a Doctor of Laws when he entered the Colonial Service of the German Foreign Office in 1897, and in the following year he got his first overseas job, as Resident Magistrate and Deputy Governor of German New Guinea. It was a land of black aboriginals with tusks through their noses, with a contempt for the law, and a taste for human flesh. Schnee was brilliant in dealing with them. He was firm but just; he taught them to respect the white man's laws and to change their diet, but otherwise did little to interfere with their customs; and he was at home with these peoples. Their mental processes were such that he was never afraid of *them*. At the turn of the century he went on to become District Administrator and Deputy Governor of Samoa, and it was while on local leave in New Zealand that he met and married his English-born wife.

Henceforward, his promotion was rapid: Counsellor for Colonial Affairs at the German Embassy in London in 1905, Director of the Colonial Department of the Foreign Office

in 1907, Minister and Director of the Political and Administrative Division of the Imperial Colonial Office in 1911, and in the following year Governor of the plum colony of the Empire, German East Africa.

In the context of his time, Heinrich Schnee was enlightened. He liberalized the harsh labour laws of the colony and backed an impressive programme of medical care for the natives of the colony. He was always pleading for money to open new schools and training colleges, and backing experimental stations where the natives were taught to grow cash crops. The peoples of East Africa respected him; but it pained him sometimes to find that the people did not love him as they did some of his countrymen whose treatment of the blacks was so much rougher and so much less paternal. You could almost call him the Great White Stepfather of the peoples of German East Africa.

Lettow-Vorbeck, on the other hand, once said that 'all these people need to make them happy is a strip of land on which to grow their maize, a small herd of cattle to demonstrate their importance, nubile women to make their nights short, and a flick of discipline to prevent them from making their short nights last too long.'

The British Army has known many bold and unorthodox soldiers and has seen them come to flower—as Gordon, Kitchener, Lawrence and Wingate did—in unexpected places. The phenomenon is less frequent in the German Army, where originality of action has been discouraged and eccentricity positively crushed. Had it not been for the particular circumstances of the war in East Africa, it is possible that blind obedience to the dictates of the General Staff in Berlin would have made Lettow-Vorbeck as rigidly conforming as the rest of them.

Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck was forty-five when he arrived in East Africa in 1914, a broad-shouldered, ruddy-faced man with tufts of hair over each ear but otherwise bald from forehead to occiput. Unlike Dr Schnee, he was unmarried.¹ There was a rumour current at the time that his failure to contract a suitable union had mitigated against his promotion in the Army. He had rebuffed an approach from one of his influential superiors, it was said, to make a match with his daughter, and this had never been forgiven. This Lettow-Vorbeck assures me was untrue. He was a cheerful and gallant companion of the ladies of the colony, and he not only liked good

¹ Although he had become engaged just before leaving for Africa.

food and drink but could also get roisteringly drunk with his comrades. Nor could he be described as a misogynist, though he did not, like most of the unattached males in the colony, come to an arrangement with one of the local chieftains and bring a girl from the kraal to become an ornament and comfort of his household.

After leaving the famous military school at Kassel he was posted to routine and regimental duties in Prussia, but escaped from them in time to be with the German garrison in Peking at the time of the Boxer Rebellion. But it was in German South West Africa that he found his real love—a passionate devotion to the arts of war in wild places. In 1904 he was posted to South West Africa as adjutant to Lieutenant-General von Trotha. This was the year when the aborigines of the region, the Hereros, rose in revolt against their German masters and began to rob, pillage and burn. They were joined by their more intelligent and cohesive neighbours, the Hottentots, and there began the most serious campaign against white men in Africa since the Zulu Wars.

The Hottentots proved themselves a redoubtable enemy, and, unlike the Hereros, they fought for ideological reasons. '*Afrika für die Farben!*' was their rallying cry, and their ambition was to drive all the hated Germans from their land. The might of the German Army turned against them, and with field-pieces and machine guns the troops marched out into the desolate wastes to smash the rebels. But they were not smashed so easily, for these were far from being berserk savages on the loose in a rabble-risen revolt. They were cunningly led and skilfully organized. At their head, as commander, counsellor and strategist, was a remarkable old man of eighty named Henrik Witboi. His lieutenants were Joseph Marenga, a Herero-Hottentot bastard, who had worked in the gold mines of South Africa, spoke English, Afrikaans and German; a polemicist and race-rouser named Samuel Izaak, and a master tracker known as Cornelius. The landscape over which this quartet operated was as bitter and remote as the mountains of the moon, shrubbed in some places but mostly an expanse of scorched earth through which volcanic upheavals have thrust crazily-tilted rock formations and sour valleys of green-veined stones, rubble in heaps like giant peas drying in the sun.

They led the Germans a dance that often ended in death. Since their arms were archaic—spears, axes, muzzle-loading rifles—they specialized in ambush rather than pitched battles, stole upon their enemies by night, led them into traps, drew

them away from the water-holes. They were on foot and the Germans were mounted but they always moved faster; and in a desert which seemed as bare as a swept table, and as dry as an oven-top, they always succeeded in finding cover for hiding and water to drink.

It was from these brilliant and fanatic Hottentots that Lettow-Vorbeck learned the bushcraft that was to prove of such value to him in his war against the British in East Africa. When Samuel Izaak was captured and brought in for questioning, it was he who conducted the interrogation, and what he learned was something more than information to be put into a divisional report. His questions were about how to run in conditions when most men have barely the strength to walk, how to condition the body to go without food or water; and, most important of all, how to become so much a part, so much absorbed into, an unfriendly wilderness that survival is possible as the snakes and land crabs and lizards survive. His place was at headquarters beside his general, but he was forever going off by himself into the wastes to match his eyesight and his wits against the Hottentots who seemed to elude the Germans so easily. Towards the end, his hunt for Cornelius became a game in which he pitted all his new-found knowledge of the land against a man who had been bred into it, and by the time the campaign was over and the rebels were crushed there was hardly a stone or a thorn-bush or a ripple in the sand that Lettow-Vorbeck could not read like a page of a book. But not so perfectly as his Hottentot adversaries. In an ambush while on their trail, he was wounded in the chest and eye and invalided South to Cape Town. But he took away with him from South West Africa a lesson he never forgot—that in savage lands it is not necessarily the big army that will win the campaign, even if it eventually wins the war. A small force led by the right men can contain, frustrate and even defeat the biggest and most modern of armies.

There followed for Lettow-Vorbeck a period as Commander of the Marine Battalion in Wilhelmshaven, back in Germany, and then a succession of regimental and staff jobs. His appointment as Commandant of the Schutztruppe, the Colonial Army, in German East Africa in January 1914 was a welcome return to foreign places, though, as he wrote later: 'When I landed at Dar es Salaam I hardly suspected the nature of the task that was to confront me in a few months' time.' He dutifully added: 'Grateful as I was for every expansion of my horizon, I owe the best of all to the Army at home, in

which I had the privilege, under the guidance of admirable commanders, of learning to know the spirit of military life and true discipline.'

In his dealings with Governor Schnee, his sense of discipline was about to be severely tested.

Lettow-Vorbeck was on a tour of inspection of his troops upcountry when the telegram from the Governor summoned him back to Dar es Salaam, and he was not in much doubt why he was being recalled. The question of the colony's position in the event of war had already been discussed between the two men—to the extent, at least, that Dr Schnee was ever prepared to discuss anything with a subordinate—and Lettow-Vorbeck had sent a memorandum to Government House on May 15, 1914 in which he wrote:

'It is increasingly doubtful whether, in view of present developments in the colony, such as the extension of the railway and other projects going on before our eyes, we can continue to plan for a purely defensive role in the event of war, or whether we should wish to do so. The war here is likely to be nothing more than an incident. But our war and the big war outside can have their mutual influence upon each other. We have it in our power to hinder the enemy by sheltering our navy during its campaign against enemy transports, and by keeping as many troops as possible pinned down in Africa. The Schutztruppe under my command is ready to do anything in its power to help to win the war.'

At that time he had received only a non-committal reply in which the Governor wrote: 'So far as I can see, there have been no developments here which could be considered to have changed the situation in any way.' But that was when peace still seemed capable of being preserved. Now that war was so obviously imminent, the commandant hoped that in Government House there had been a change of attitude.

'The question which immediately forced itself upon us,' he wrote, 'was whether, in the now obviously imminent war in which England would obviously join, the colony would remain neutral or not. I considered it to be our military object to detain enemy, that is English, forces if it could by any means be accomplished. This however was impossible if we remained neutral. In that case the situation would be that we, who did not command the sea, would have to remain inactive, with a force which, though small at the moment, had behind it a loyal, very efficient population of eight millions suitable for military service. England, on the other hand, would have no

need to employ a single man in East Africa on our account; it would be able to take away the very last fit askari [native soldier], after providing for internal security, for employment in other theatres more important than East Africa. It would therefore obviously have been an advantage for England if any agreement had existed which condemned us to neutrality.¹

He arrived back in Dar es Salaam on August 3 and found the city in a state bordering on panic. Foreign visitors who had arrived for the Colonial Exhibition were swarming round the docks, hiring dhows to take them across the water to Zanzibar. Lettow-Vorbeck noticed with some amusement that many Indian traders (who, as holders of British passports, faced internment in the event of war) were also preparing to leave, but were meanwhile doing a brisk trade on the dock-side in the sale of American, Swedish and Swiss flags. 'The blacks stood around in groups' he noted, 'watching with grinning wonder the hysteria and fear among these people who had for so long claimed to be their superiors, and my orderly said to me: "I had never thought, Colonel, that I would see white men behaving this way. Our women could show them an example."'

The trouble was that for the past three days the colony had been almost completely cut off from news from the outside world. The only overseas cable from Dar es Salaam went out by way of British-controlled Zanzibar, and the line had gone dead to all outward and incoming traffic. From the radio station on the headland overlooking the harbour only two telegrams had been received from Berlin, one warning all German ships of the imminence of war and ordering them to eschew British, French or Russian harbours, and a second ordering a general mobilization of German troops. After that a complete silence.

That evening Lettow-Vorbeck cycled through the warm dusk to Government House to see Governor Schnee. He found him in a highly nervous condition, in startling contrast to the calm confidence he had been displaying a few days before; the isolation of the colony appeared to have got him down. When the commandant was shown into his office the first thing he did was to thrust into his hand a sheet of paper and bid him read it. It was a Reuter dispatch which had been brought in from Zanzibar by dhow and it announced that a state of war now existed between Germany, France and Russia, and that England's entry into the war was imminently expected.

¹ *Meine Erinnerung aus Ostafrika*, 1919.

'Good,' said Lettow-Vorbeck. 'I shall send an immediate message to my troops telling them to stand by for my orders.'

'What orders?' asked the Governor.

'It is obvious what we must do,' the commandant replied. 'I have always said that there is only one way we can help the Fatherland in this war, and that is by pinning down British soldiers in Africa. We can do that best by attacking the British where they are most vulnerable.'

Governor Schnee was looking at him in astonishment. 'You say you actually intend to *attack* the English?'

'But of course, Excellency. And the obvious place to do it is in the North, across the border from the Kilimanjaro-gebiet, where British East Africa shares a frontier with us. Just beyond it is the Uganda Railway. If we cut it, we cut Britain's supply line from the ocean at Mombasa to Nairobi and the interior—and that Britain cannot afford to have happen. She will react.'

The Governor's agitation had been increasing and now he seemed to be angry too.

'Colonel Lettow-Vorbeck,' he said, 'I think you should clearly understand the situation, so that there will be no confusion in the days to come. I did not call you here tonight to hear what plans you have formulated or what orders you wish to give your troops. I summoned you to hear the orders I am going to give you.'

'Excellency,' replied Lettow-Vorbeck, 'I do not think it is within your powers to give me orders. I am responsible to the supreme commander of colonial troops in Berlin, and he is in turn responsible to the High Command.'

Schnee: 'But Berlin is cut off from us, colonel, and it is a fact which seems likely to be with us for some time. I would remind you that in the meantime I, by virtue of my position as Governor of this territory, am also Commander-in-Chief of the Schutztruppe. I have already worked out with my advisers what you must do. I have made certain plans for the welfare and security of Dar es Salaam and the coastal ports, and in furtherance of those plans this is what I wish you to do—or should I stress the word again and say order. By midday tomorrow, I order you and all troops under your command to leave Dar es Salaam.'

Lettow-Vorbeck: 'I do not understand, Excellency. How can the evacuation of my troops help the security of the city or the welfare of its citizens? What are your intentions?'

Schnee: 'I am under no obligation to discuss that with you, colonel. You have had your orders. I warn you that I intend

to see that they are obeyed, even if it means relieving you of your command and putting you under arrest. Is that clear?"

Lettow-Vorbeck: 'I would like to ask again, Excellency. What are your intentions? What do you intend to do about Dar es Salaam and the other ports?'

Schnee: 'I am waiting for an answer, colonel. Do you obey my orders or not?'

There was a short pause, and then Lettow-Vorbeck said: 'If I am to remove my troops from the city, I would ask one thing, Excellency. I ask permission to remove them not only from Dar es Salaam but from all the other coastal garrisons in the colony, and I will reassemble them at New Moshi, in the area of Kilimanjaro.'

Schnee shook his head. 'Permission is refused. New Moshi is close to the British frontier and at such a delicate moment the presence of reinforcements there might constitute the kind of provocation which I do not wish to arouse. You will take your troops from Dar es Salaam but you will take them inland and well away from the frontier. Is that understood?'

A long pause and then Lettow-Vorbeck drew himself up and said: 'Yes, Excellency. It is understood.' He saluted and marched for the door.

Schnee: 'Come back, colonel. We will have a drink before you go. You must understand that I am doing this because I am thinking of the welfare of the colony.'

Lettow-Vorbeck: 'And I am thinking of the welfare of the Fatherland, Excellency.'

Just before midday on August 4, 1914, before a large crowd of silent whites and giggling natives, the garrison of Dar es Salaam paraded in the barrack square, hauled down its flag, and then, with its commandant riding at its head, ceremonially marched out of the city, a native band playing *Deutschland über Alles* as it went. They marched for twenty miles and then bivouacked outside the settlement of Pugu, where advance units had already requisitioned the local telegraph office. From it Lettow-Vorbeck telegraphed two other garrisons in the area to join him at all speed. For a moment, there was little else he could do except to keep his soldiers on stand-to.

In Dar es Salaam itself they were waiting too, though for what they did not quite know. A state of emergency had been declared in the city, but were they at war with Britain or not? Outside the harbour the British naval ships *Astraea* and *Pegasus* still fumed up and down the horizon like angry busi-

ness men puffing cigars, but otherwise came no further. It was not until 6.15 on the morning of August 5 that the radio station on the headland picked up a message from the high-powered transmitter at Windhuk in German West Africa saying briefly: 'England declared war on Germany on August 4'; and no one thought of conveying this news to the Schutztruppe at Pugu. But for Governor Schnee it was the signal for the implementation of his plans 'to preserve order and safeguard the interests of the Colony', as he called it in an official proclamation. One of Dar es Salaam's proudest possessions was a huge floating dock capable of receiving large merchantmen and medium-sized men-o'-war; for mothering cruisers like the *Königsberg*, merchant raiders or U-boats it might have proved invaluable; but it was also, of course, a tempting prize for the British should they invest the city. Dr Schnee had it towed into the main channel leading to the sea and there sunk, thus denying its facilities and those of the port to all major enemy warships—but to the *Königsberg* too.

To the civilian administrators and police chiefs of all German East Africa's ports, he then dispatched the following message:

'In the event of enemy approach to your area, all dispensable police are to be withdrawn an appropriate distance into the interior, thus protecting them from attack but ensuring availability for post. Area Commanding Officer remains on the spot, negotiates with enemy emissary, explains lack of resistance due to "open city" character of the place, and asks that armed police should be left intact under his command. If refused, draws enemy's attention to his international obligations with regard maintenance of order and safety. Then transfer police forces—also those at first kept on the spot—to appropriate point in interior and send us information speediest possible method. You will then receive instructions for police. Maintain services as far as possible, particularly in keeping natives peaceful. In detail use discretion within duty obligations. Police dispensable in coastal area at present are to be transferred to appropriate points in the interior immediately. Give telegraphic confirmation of this action.'¹

This was, of course, playing into British hands. It amounted virtually to relinquishing all the ports on the coast without a fight.

¹ German Colonial Ministry Records.

At 10.30 the same morning, August 6, the supply ship *König* edged past the sunken dock in Dar es Salaam harbour and made past the mangrove swamps for the open sea; she was making for a pre-arranged rendezvous with the *Königsberg* to bring her supplies. Before she had reached the open sea, she was straddled by warning shots from *Pegasus* and retreated hastily back into the harbour. The biggest merchantman in the port, the *Tabora*, took the hint and sent a swarm of seamen over her sides to paint red crosses, after which she raised the Geneva flag and declared herself a hospital ship.

It was not until twenty-four hours later that the British were heard from again. Shortly after dawn on August 7 the *Astraea* and the *Pegasus* moved into the main shipping road outside the harbour and opened fire on the radio tower on the headland. The shots were wide, but they came sufficiently close for the Governor to see what they were aiming at. He sent a demolition squad to blow up the tower. Simultaneously, he raised a white flag over Government House and it is fair to say that from this moment on he panicked. When the English cruisers signalled that a spokesman should be sent out to see them, he ordered the harbourmaster, Captain Berndt, to go at once to the enemy ships and tell them that all firing should cease at once since Dar es Salaam would not be defended. He ordered the personnel of the city police to retire and join Lettow-Vorbeck in Pugu; and he sent a written message to the police chief of the city, Geheimrat Methner, appointing him as spokesman for the Government and pressing upon him that 'in negotiating the occupation of Dar es Salaam you should make sure that at all costs the bombardment of the city should be avoided.'

He then packed his bags, and, as the British spokesman was arriving in the harbour aboard a Royal Navy pinnace, Governor Schnee departed in a special train for Morogoro, in the interior. He seemed convinced that the occupation of Dar es Salaam was about to take place and was abandoning his capital to the British. The British, in fact, were far from being in a position to occupy anything, let alone a capital the size of Dar es Salaam; they had problems and confusions of their own. Captain Sykes, commander of the *Astraea*, explained to Harbourmaster Berndt that his mission was to see the radio tower destroyed, but if the authorities in Dar es Salaam insisted he would be prepared to give them six conditions under which he would consent to respect the white flag flying over the city. These were:

1 The radio tower and its transmitting apparatus must be completely and permanently destroyed;

2 Radio apparatus aboard any ships in the harbour must be put out of commission;

3 A promise must be given that there will be no further warlike acts of any kind emanating from the city or its harbour;

4 Henceforward the authorities should guarantee that Dar es Salaam harbour is completely cleared of guns, munitions and coal of a kind likely to be useful to the enemy;

5 All war and merchant ships in the harbour should be regarded henceforward as legitimate prizes of war, and that the captains of these ships should guarantee that they will make no further voyages either for a warlike or peaceful purpose; and

6 There should be a guarantee that the floating dock, which has been sunk in the sea lane, shall not be raised.

Methner, the police chief, asked whether his acceptance of these six points would mean that the British authorities would take over the maintenance and security of the city, and would be prepared to guarantee the safety of the white population from any possibility of uprisings in the native quarter. Captain Sykes quickly disillusioned him.

'I am here only to secure the safety of our fleet,' he said. 'What happens in the city can only be arranged by the local authorities administering their own laws. Furthermore, I would point out that this arrangement is binding only on the British officer who signs it, and is not made in the name of the British Government.'

Methner signed it anyway. Not only that. He called in the crews of all the German ships in the harbour—including those from the naval vessel, *Möwe*, which had sunk itself when the British cruisers began their bombardment—and persuaded them to sign an undertaking that they would consider themselves neutral for the remainder of the war.

During all this time, Lettow-Vorbeck and his troops waited in Pugu still completely ignorant of what had been happening. Governor Schnee had a short meeting with his commandant when his special train, en route for Morogoro, passed through Pugu, but he carefully neglected to mention that the white flag was flying over Dar es Salaam. Lettow-Vorbeck told Schnee that there were reports of a projected British landing along the coast at the little settlement of Konduchi, and asked for permission to move his forces up to repel it. To his surprise,

the Governor agreed. The report proved to be false, but while in process of moving his troops, Lettow-Vorbeck met two envoys from Dar es Salaam on their way to report to the Governor and they showed him the document which Methner had signed.

'As the Governor had told me nothing about it,' Lettow-Vorbeck wrote later, 'and I was also in a hurry, I only glanced superficially at the document. It did not occur to me that this might be any kind of agreement drawn up with the consent of the Governor. But when, during the night, my force had reached a mountain ten miles north of Dar es Salaam, and on the next morning we obtained a view of the harbour and the English cruisers lying off it, it became clear to me . . . that the English ships had communicated with the shore, and now it did appear to me probable that negotiations with the enemy had taken place. I now advanced on the town and, as I could not but fear that in the confusion of the moment a disadvantageous agreement might be concluded at Dar es Salaam, I sent my envoy, Captain Tafel, on ahead. He was to announce that I was taking over the executive power, and that the negotiations with the enemy must be conducted through me alone.'

He was furious at the 'craven actions' which had been taken by the authorities in Dar es Salaam, and was determined to remedy them at once; it did not occur to him that they had been made with Governor Schnee's consent. After his conference with Schnee at Pugu he considered it impossible that he could possibly have agreed. So the message Captain Tafel carried and handed over to District Commissioner Kausch when he reached the city read as follows:

'The executive authority in the District of Dar es Salaam is herewith transferred to me. I nominate District Commissioner Kausch as my deputy. The superior officer of the British forces must conduct all negotiations exclusively through me.'

While the message was being delivered, the police chief, Methner, entered and listened to what was going on. He at once telephoned to Governor Schnee, who summoned Tafel to the telephone and dictated a message to Lettow-Vorbeck. His whole plan for the colony's neutrality was threatened now and he was fearful of the consequences.

'Your instructions regarding Dar es Salaam,' he dictated, 'are invalid. I approve the instructions issued by my deputy and forbid you to issue contrary instructions. I approve transfer of executive authority to you in Dar es Salaam district,

outside the town and harbour, but in town and harbour executive power remains in the hands of my deputy. At all costs such measures in town and harbour as could lead to a bombardment of Dar es Salaam must be avoided. I make you personally responsible for the strict execution of this order.'

Two hours later this order was supplemented by a telegram to Lettow-Vorbeck saying:

'I repeat the orally issued order that town and harbour must not be attacked by our troops in any circumstances, not even in the event of a British advance on land. Operations in district of Dar es Salaam must be confined to area outside town and harbour and must be kept at a distance which would exclude any risk of a bombardment of the town.'¹

In fact, the British had no intention of bombarding Dar es Salaam. A few hours after Methner had accepted the six-point ultimatum, both *Astraea* and *Pegasus* had sailed back to Zanzibar. It was lucky that they had done so, for Lettow-Vorbeck was now in a mood to disobey and there is little doubt that he would have opened fire on the British ships had they still been there. Instead, he bivouacked his troops on the outskirts of the capital.

There, for twenty-four hours, he nourished his anger and humiliation; and then he made up his mind. If he could not help the German war effort by defending the colony's ports, he would do it by attacking the enemy's territory. He wrote out a telegram which he sent to Captain von Prince, an old friend and colleague, who had raised a troop of white farmers and volunteers from the farms around Kilimanjaro.

'You have my permission to move,' he telegraphed. 'Destroy stations and railway lines, cut telegraph wire, confuse the enemy.'

On the night of August 8, Captain von Prince and a small band of commandos crossed the frontier into British East Africa, and, a few hours later, were in battle.

As an official German report put it later: 'The gulf between Governor Schnee and his military commander had widened.' But the colony could hardly be said to be at war—yet.

¹ These two messages and the one from Lettow-Vorbeck quoted from German Colonial Ministry Records.

CHAPTER TWO

Bwana Sakharani

WHAT SORT OF LAND was it that Dr Heinrich Schnee was so desperately anxious to protect from the rigours of war and Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck so determined to throw into the conflict?

German East Africa in 1914 had a population of 7,650,000 natives of 53 different tribes, 15,000 Indians, Arabs and Goanese, and 5,336 whites, mostly Germans. Its area covered 650,000 square miles of forests, swamps, bush-land and highlands which stretched from the Indian Ocean to the Congo Basin, and from the shores of Lake Victoria to the frontiers of Portuguese Mozambique. It contained Africa's highest mountain, Kilimanjaro, and on its slopes Masai herdsmen wandered except in those places where the white settlers had supplanted them and grew sisal in the rich red earth and basked in a benevolent climate. There were vast expanses of plain known to the natives as the *pori* and here millions of wild animals teemed, especially in the Serengeti. There were damp dark forests filled with snakes, anopheles mosquitoes, leeches and tsetse fly, and with foetid bogs and pestilential diseases. It was a land of great rivers, the Row-*u*-ja, Rufiji, Wami, Pangani and Tsavo, and enormous lakes like Victoria, Tanganyika and Nyasa.

Germany's dominion over it was barely a generation old, for the Reich had come late into the colonial business, and then only reluctantly. It could be said that it was Chancellor Bismarck who laid the foundations of the colony in 1885, and he did it (against the opinion in the Reichstag in Berlin) more because he wished to spite the British than because he believed in the idea of a German empire overseas. 'For Germany to acquire colonies,' he once said, 'would be like a poverty-stricken Prussian nobleman providing himself with silks and sables when he needed shirts.' But the situation in Europe in 1884 was such that a dabble in muddy African waters might produce some useful political dividends nearer home. France, still smarting from her defeat by Germany in 1870, estranged from Britain over the events in Egypt, was

brooding, isolated and unhappy, and dreaming of revenge for the humiliation at Sedan. It seemed to Bismarck that this was a time to appease his former enemy by making an alliance with her in goading Britain. This could be done most simply by challenging the power which Britain was building for herself in Africa and demanding for Germany, too, a place in the tropical sun, preferably close enough to British territory to threaten her rising commercial interests. In 1885 he granted, on behalf of the German Emperor, a 'sovereign authority' to the German East Africa Company, which had been founded some time before by a shady and unscrupulous adventurer named Dr Peters. Peters, during a number of foot safaris in East Africa the previous year, had collected a series of 'treaties' with various chieftains in the mainland territories adjacent to and nominally under the suzerainty of Zanzibar. These he was now given authority by Bismarck to exploit on Germany's behalf, and supported this initial period by the despatch of a consul and a naval squadron, the latter to cow the Sultan of Zanzibar into accepting the company's incursion.

Beyond that, however, Bismarck was not prepared to go. Not then, at any rate. The company was expected to provide its own finance and control its territory by its own methods and manpower, and left to sink or swim. It sank. In 1886 its settlements were sacked at the behest of Arab traders whose livelihood it threatened, its plantations were destroyed, and though it fought back it was eventually driven from all its stations except Bagamayo and Dar es Salaam. It seemed as if the German adventure was over, and since Bismarck repeated about this time: 'I am opposed to colonies, to the kind of colonies where officials must be placed and garrisons established', it might have seemed that the Chancellor would be glad that it was over; he had achieved his purpose of pricking England, and, since the European political situation had changed again, there was no more reason to continue.

But it was then that national prestige came into it. There was a feeling among many Germans that the humiliating retreat of the German East Africa Company was a humiliation of Germany too, and Bismarck found himself goaded into responding to the agitation which resulted. In 1889 he asked the Reichstag to vote him two million marks to provide a military expedition to East Africa, and he appointed as its commander a redoubtable soldier-statesman named von Wissmann. Ostensibly the purpose of the expedition was not to restore Germany in Africa but to throw Germany behind the anti-

slave trade operations which European powers were then conducting in Africa, but von Wissmann's secret instructions were to set up a new trading company and Bismarck's farewell order to him was: '*Siegen Sie.*' His victory was not long in coming. He recruited Sudani troops and Zulus from South Africa and landed at Bagamayo in April 1889. A few weeks later he had overcome the Arab leader, Bushiri, who had driven the original East Africa Company from its stations. New ones were established and the trade routes to the interior reopened. In 1890, the German Foreign Office, at the behest of its new Chancellor, Caprivi, brought into being a new department to deal with the affairs of the colonies, and a far-seeing civil servant and economist, Kaiser, was made the director. In the same year the German East Africa Company, convinced that it would never prosper on its own, spent almost its complete resources of four million marks in buying from the Sultan of Zanzibar complete control of the coastal strip on Africa's mainland opposite the island, with the right to levy taxes and exact customs dues at the coastal ports. It then asked Kaiser, on behalf of the German Government, to take over control of its affairs, and the territory was proclaimed as a protectorate of the German Empire in 1891. Dar es Salaam was chosen as its capital. A force of young civil servants and seconded army officers was sent out to man a makeshift administration, and Germany was in the colonial business, with the full intention of staying there, from then on.

It was an administration which expanded north, south and eastwards, and it ruled by the twin instruments of askari and *boma*; and though it took the frontiers of German East Africa far beyond the boundaries of the original settlement, its régime was marred by inefficiency, corruption, cruelty and strife. The askaris at that time were mercenary troops who had been recruited principally from other African lands, and they were interested in the territory only as a place in which to fight, rape and loot. The *bomas* were the semi-fortresses from which, under German officers, they operated whenever trouble threatened, which was often. Those were the days when the natives of the colony were truly exploited. The Germans had come to put down slavery, but they stayed to enforce a slave-system of their own. The Masai and other great tribes were driven from their lands to provide farms for settlers. Plantations were manned by forced labour exacted from the chieftains under pain of beating or death. Because white administrators were in short supply, much of the internal organization of the colony was put under the control of *akidas*,

Arab or Muslim-educated natives, who ruled like profligate monarchs, took bribes, bullied, oppressed, wenched, secure in the knowledge that the German authorities in Dar es Salaam would back them, because they had no other choice.

Those were the days of *kiboko* rule in German East Africa. The *kiboko* was a whip made of hippopotamus hide, and most white men, women and even children, as well as every *akida*, carried one, and used it. It was not as much an instrument of punishment or discipline but of terrorism, and it was used everywhere to turn the natives into cringing animals ready to do everything their masters demanded of them. For hesitation in obeying an order, for a stumble or a cough, and often just for a planter's whim, the lash would come down. Chieftains were lashed for not providing sufficient recruits for the labour corps, men were lashed for failing to do their quota of work, and in some areas in the south once a month was designated *kiboko* day by the *akidas* when men were chosen at random to be whipped, simply as an example to the others.

It was this brutish oppression of the people (a system, incidentally, which completely failed to turn the colony into a viable community) which was one of the chief incitements to the Maji-Maji Rebellion of 1905, when the tribes rose and turned upon their masters. Neither the menace of the *kiboko* nor the threat of askari rifles cowed them on this occasion, for they had been given a magic potion, a *maji*, by the witch doctors, which when drunk was supposed to make them impervious to pain, sickness or white bullets. Led by a firebrand named Abdullah Mapanda, a torrent of frenetic natives poured into the *boma* at Kilosa, in the south of the colony, and slaughtered its German officer, under-officer and all the men. When the news reached Dar es Salaam the white population became almost hysterical with fear, for they imagined that they themselves faced massacre at any moment. They goaded the administration into action, and there began in the next few months one of the bloodiest programmes of reprisal even in Germany's history, and its overwhelming brutality is not to be forgiven or excused by the fact that the Germans really believed their very existence in Africa was now at stake. Reinforcements of askaris were rushed to the centres of the rebellion, and their orders were to kill and burn. They fought a small number of pitched battles with the tribes and mowed them down, captured their chiefs, whipped them, and then hanged them. The uprising was quickly brought to an end, but the reprisals

were not. In the south, where the rebellion had been most powerful, the country was laid waste; villages were burned hut by hut, crops were destroyed, and the male members of the community shot. In all, according to an official German estimate, 120,000 natives out of a population of two millions were killed in the reprisals, and many thousands more died in the famine of the next two years.

From this dreadful bloodbath, however, some good was to emerge. Shocked by the slaughter, and by rumours of the corruption and cruelty which had preceded it, the Government in Berlin ordered an inquiry, and a commission was set up and presented its report in 1907. Like many another report of its kind, in other lands besides Germany, it white-washed the administration on the spot. But the facts which did emerge made it clear that if Germany was to remain in Africa a new start must be made and a new policy adopted towards the natives.

By 1914 it could truthfully be said that the days of brutal exploitation were over, and if the Germans in East Africa were far from regarding the black population as their brothers, at least they no longer acted towards them like wicked uncles. Heinrich Schnee had succeeded a governor who had propagated a policy of native improvement, and he had a sympathetic Minister at home, but it was his personal influence which had brought about the principal reforms. He sponsored laws to prevent the sale of land on which the natives tilled or herded, and he defied some heavy opposition from the planters and the big companies in getting native reserves extended to compensate for land which had been seized by the white men in more buccaneering years. He encouraged the opening of schools, and in 1914 he had a hundred of them operating at the expense of the administration; and in addition, there were 465 mission stations operating in the territory, dispensing rudimentary teaching and healing. At his invitation, a seminary of German geologists, surveyors, archaeologists, geographers, anthropologists and medical scientists came swarming into the country to build, dig, measure, heal, cure and research with a thoroughness typical of the race. Among them were Koch and Ehrlich (the discoverer of '606, the antidote to blackwater and tick fever). 'In 1914,' R. F. Eberlie wrote, 'Germany had three stations active in East Africa against sleeping sickness and a research institute at Dar es Salaam. In a countryside wide campaign against

smallpox connected with the names of Drs Kreuze and Kulz, sixteen medical stations were set up and over three million of the African population of the country are said to have been vaccinated—no light task. The country's hospital service was widely praised, and the administration spent an unprecedented amount on hospital construction, notably in Dar es Salaam itself. A European staff of 48 was maintained, advised by the Hamburg Institute of Tropical Medicine.¹

It was far from being a paradise of freedom under Schnee's administration for the natives of the colony. The *kiboko* had not entirely disappeared from the white man's hand, but now, at least, it could be used only as a punitive and never as a disciplinary measure, and there was much grumbling among the settlers because a doctor had to be present at all beatings and no more than twenty-five lashes (!) could be administered at one time. There were abuses, of course. Forced labour was now supposed to be reserved for official projects only, but planters could plead 'exceptional circumstances' in order to recruit natives for their land, and the 'exceptional circumstances' were only too frequent. But at least the labour had to be paid for at prevailing wage rates.

German East Africa had never been viable territory, and its upkeep had always been a drain on the treasury in Berlin. It was still not viable in 1914. But at least it was shaping that way. The railways had been pushed across the territory as feed-lines for the plantations—from Tanga in the North to New Moshi, at the foot of Kilimanjaro, and from Dar es Salaam across bush, forest and swamp to Tabora and the shores of Lake Tanganyika.

'In this economic policy,' writes Eberlie, 'the plantation was the most vital element. Great encouragement was given to this form of agriculture, with, however, a new regard for the interests of the labour force. The acreage under plantation cultivation increased vastly between 1908 and 1914; certain crops were singled out and their cultivation was widely extended . . . Twenty million rubber trees were planted . . . Then sisal appears for the first time as the export crop of greatest value. The market grew so favourable to the sisal planter that in 1913 the dividend of the Sisal Planters' Company was reckoned at 50 per cent. Meanwhile the export of coffee was quadrupled; exports of cotton were also growing and were strongly favoured by the Government. There

¹ *Tanganyika Notes and Records*

were finally 165 cotton plantations just beginning to work economically.¹

It was an achievement of which Governor Schnee was proud, and with some reason. In the circumstances he regarded the colony's involvement in war as a tragedy to be averted at all costs, and Lettow-Vorbeck's efforts to thwart his neutralist policy he took as a personal affront.

Captain von Prince, who led the first German foray into British territory, was just the man Lettow-Vorbeck needed in those early days of August, 'for he despised Governor Schnee as 'a liberal, a pacifist and a weakling', and he cared nothing for civilian authority. He was a handsome, bearded adventurer of forty-five who had settled on a farm near Usambora after a lifetime fighting Germany's wars in the more savage zones of the colony, and the pugnacity and courage with which he had led repeated expeditions against rebellious natives had earned him the 'von' as a prefix to his name from the Kaiser and the nickname among the blacks of Bwana Sakharani or The Man Who Is Drunk with Fighting. His full name was Tom von Prince and its un-German character was due to the fact that he had been born a Briton. His father was a Scotsman, Thomas Henry Prince, who had risen through the ranks to become Superintendent of the British Police Force in Mauritius and his mother was the daughter of a German missionary working on the island. The three children of the marriage, Tom, May and Emily (who died early) were educated at English schools and Tom Prince until the age of fifteen had three heroes whom he worshipped, Nelson, Wellington and General Gordon; the latter had once stayed with the family in Mauritius. In 1880 the children were orphaned and taken by their maternal relatives, the Ansorges, to Germany, where May was sent to a girls' college and Tom enrolled in the famous Ritter Akademie. He made an attempt after his graduation to get a commission in the British Army serving on Heligoland, but was turned down; so he enrolled in the Military School at Kassel, where one of his fellow-students was Lettow-Vorbeck.

But he was an irrepressible rebel and life in a cadet school of the German Army was too tame for him, especially since his tempestuous courtship of the fourteen-and-a-half years old daughter of a Prussian officer, General von Massow, was thwarted by her outraged father. He used his British nation-

¹ *Tanganyika Notes and Records*

ality to secure his release from the service, took ship to Africa, and after being shipwrecked in a dhow taking him from Zanzibar eventually joined von Wissmann's expeditionary force which Bismarck had sent to fight the Sultan of Zanzibar's minions on the mainland. He was rarely out of trouble from then on, but it was the kind of trouble upon which he thrived, for uprisings were frequent and he and a picked troop of askaris from the Sudan were always in action. His dashing bravery won him fame at home and promotion in the German Army (which he rejoined, though he never changed his British nationality), and even General von Masow now looked upon him favourably; his daughter, Magdalene, had never faltered in her passion for the handsome Tom Prince. They had waited for twelve years, but they were married in Silesia in 1896 and sailed back to Africa at the end of that year. It was the moment when Germany had conquered and subdued all the tribes inside the colony except one, the fierce and rebellious Hehes, who were ruled by a wily, ruthless and magnificent sultan named Mkwawa—later to be nicknamed the Black Napoleon—and lived on a plateau separated from the coastal plain by the almost impregnable Uzungwa escarpment, 7,000 feet high. An expedition led against them by the German commander, Zulewski, was decimated, and Tom Prince was given the task of exacting revenge. It took him years of bloody fighting before he stormed the Sultan in his fortress at Iringa; but in the subsequent assault, Mkwawa first killed all his wives and then escaped. Again and again he escaped Prince's ambushes, and there were hints from Dar es Salaam that perhaps it would be best to forget about him. But Prince had a score to settle with Mkwawa over the death of Zulewski who had become one of his closest friends, and the search for the sultan became an obsession with him. He had appointed a gentle, intelligent chieftain named Mpangire, a brother of Mkwawa, as 'viceroy' of the Hehes when the sultan fled, and Mpangire was a frequent guest in the Prince household. Magdalene, who had moved into the Hehe territory with her husband, was particularly fond of him. But when Mpangire was discovered to be in communication with his brother, Prince arrested him and his nobles, tried them by court-martial, and sent them before the firing squad despite the tearful pleadings of his wife. 'I wept bitterly,' Magdalene wrote in her diary, 'and even now I am mourning for the black gentleman, though my reason struggles against it. He could not betray his Mkwawa blood. Tom is quite upset too.' But not upset enough

to call off his hunt for the Black Napoleon. He was tracked down in July 1898, but shot himself before the Germans could reach him.¹ And no member of the Hehe tribe would accept the 5,000 rupees which the Germans had offered for his capture.

Tom von Prince had retired from active service in 1900 to a prosperous farm at Usambara, where he built a reputation as a stern employer of labour who resented government interference and believed in keeping the natives 'in their place', which, so far as he was concerned, was in the labour corps on his farm. His neighbours elected him Chairman of the Planter's Union and he fought a series of sharp, if verbal, battles with Dar es Salaam over the new labour laws which restricted the use of indented labour. In 1913 he raised a volunteer defence corps among the planters which was designed, initially, as a white bulwark against the Masai tribesmen who resented the encroachment on their herding grounds and were showing signs of fighting back; but he switched the target of the corps to England when war clouds began to gather in Europe. Lettow-Vorbeck visited him on his first tour of the colony in February 1914 and found him an enthusiastic supporter of an active campaign in East Africa in the event of war. 'We East African's,' he said, 'should there be war against England, should not sit still, but should go ahead if there is even the slightest chance of relieving the war in Europe.' He was still nominally a British subject, but he was by this time heart, mind and instinct more German than many of the Germans around him, and itching to get at the British.

He was overjoyed when permission came from Lettow-Vorbeck for him to lead the first foray into enemy territory. He had received a telegram from Governor Schnee reminding him that the Congo Act could protect the colony from attack providing there were no provocation, and he had queried Lettow-Vorbeck about its implications. 'Forget about the Congo Act,' the Commandant replied. 'Take your troops and join the command in the North. We have information that the British are sending heavy reinforcements of Indian troops to Mombasa for service inland. The destruction of the Uganda Railway and telegraph lines along it should begin at once. Fast work and surprise attacks will have the best result.'

¹ Mkwawa was reputed by the natives to have devilish allies and to wear a horn in his forehead which protected him from earthly harm. It was discovered after his death to be the scar from a bullet wound.

Off you go. Take the initiative. Wipe out the British on the frontier.'

Von Prince moved his force of mounted Europeans and a flock of native attendants to New Moshi, on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro, and then deployed along the railway line towards Taveta. It could hardly be called a professional army. The men rode their own horses and were armed principally with shotguns and sporting rifles. Their servants ran beside them to be ready to fix camp, cook food, and do all the heavy work, and all von Prince's efforts to instil discipline into them were unavailing; it was more a picnic than a foray. They would break off the march to dash into the bush to shoot the game with which the countryside abounded; they lit fires by night and had sit-down dinners of buck, guineafowl and hock and Moselle from the crates of wine they had brought along with them. But with the help of two troops of native police, they invested and took Taveta after a short, sharp battle and occupied the railway station and telegraph office. But an attempt to go further into the British protectorate and occupy the railhead at Voi was less successful. The British defence post there had been reinforced from Mombasa and the Germans were beaten back and several German officers taken prisoner.

It was hardly the glorious offensive against the enemy which Lettow-Vorbeck had envisaged when he first planned his campaign in East Africa, but psychologically its effect was salutary. Von Prince sent back a message by a relay of native cyclists to his Commandant: 'The German flag flies on British territory.' Lettow-Vorbeck passed on the intelligence to Governor Schnee who telegraphed: 'What is going on? I have forbidden concentration of troops in the North. All forces and all arms are needed to protect the defenceless white civilization from possible native uprisings. I forbid their use in unnecessary provocation of the enemy.'

Certainly the British were provoked, but not, so far, alarmed. The British consul in Dar es Salaam, Mr Norman King, had transferred to Zanzibar after the outbreak of war, and there he wrote a long report on the state of preparedness and the willingness to fight of the German authorities in East Africa, and his opinion of the situation—one which was accepted both in London and Nairobi—was that the colony was a plum almost ripe for plucking. 'There is no stomach for fighting either in Dar es Salaam or in Tanga,' he wrote, 'and so long as the white population of these two centres, where four-fifths of the Germans are concentrated, can be guaran-

teed reasonable security from native unrest or bombardment from our ships, they will exert their influence against the minority elements who wish to provoke hostilities.'

He agreed that the German planters had 'sporting instincts and patriotic fevers' which they would like to translate into action, and that they would back Lettow-Vorbeck and the Schutztruppe in any expeditions they might be tempted to undertake. 'But the Schutztruppe consists at this moment of only 216 officers and 2,450 askari, plus a police force of 45 officers and 2,154 askari. So long as the white civilian population remains undisturbed in their peaceful pursuits, they will have neither the incentive to reinforce this protective force nor will they work to keep it supplied so long as we make it clear that such aid would be considered a hostile act.'

The danger would come, King went on, if the security of the civilians was wrecked by some precipitate act of force on the part of the British, an act of the kind, he explained, that would convince them that they were going to suffer death or damage either way, and might as well suffer it fighting. He therefore counselled the authorities in British East Africa and the British Navy at sea to respect any arrangements Governor Schnee might make to neutralize the ports—and to move in any occupying force through these ports as swiftly as possible.

The Government at home read this report from their man on the spot and, for once in a way, acted upon it. To Lettow-Vorbeck's forays across the frontier, and to some bustling belligerence from German ships on Lakes Tanganyika and Nyasa, they replied with a series of short attacks. But the ports they left alone so long as they flew the white flag and barred their channels to German vessels of war. Meanwhile, they loaded a convoy of ships in Bombay with a division of 8,000 British and Indian troops and ordered them across the Indian Ocean for what was going to be, they hoped, the peaceful occupation of Dar es Salaam, Tanga, and, subsequently, the other ports in the Colony. Thereafter, Lettow-Vorbeck's force, they reasoned, cut off from the sea and from ammunition, would perish from malnutrition.

Long before the convoy of British troops arrived off East Africa, Lettow-Vorbeck's agents in Mombasa had apprised him of the British plan, and he feared it. So long as Governor Schnee ruled the lives of the inhabitants of the coast, and so long as those inhabitants remained safe and comfortable, the plan would succeed and the whole of his *raison d'être* in Africa would be destroyed. He could continue to sting the British by his fighting patrols along the Uganda Railway, but how could

he stir the German civilians on the coast from their apathy? How could he provoke them into giving him their whole-hearted support?

It was the German cruiser *Königsberg* which came to his rescue.

The *Königsberg*, it will be remembered, had stolen out of Dar es Salaam harbour a few days before the outbreak of war, and had escaped to the Gulf of Aden despite a guard of British ships which had been waiting for her in the roads outside. On August 6, 1914, two days after Britain declared war on Germany, the *Königsberg* surprised and captured the 6,600-ton merchant vessel *City of Winchester* and held her for a week while helping herself to coal, water, food and other supplies. (She was the first British ship to be captured in the war.) The *City of Winchester's* crew were then transferred to other German auxiliaries, the ship was scuttled, and the *Königsberg* disappeared into the Indian Ocean. Of the two British cruisers on station in East Africa, one of them, *Astraea*, was called away on August 24 for convoy duties, leaving *Pegasus* with the job of watching German East Africa's ports and keeping an eye cocked for the *Königsberg*. But she had been badly in need of an overhaul even before war began, and now it became vital; she sailed into Zanzibar early in September for her engines to be overhauled and her boilers de-furred.

Now Lettow-Vorbeck had not only spent the months since his arrival in East Africa in refurbishing the Schutztruppe but also in bringing his intelligence services up to date. He had agents in Mombasa and several other towns and settlements in the enemy territories which surrounded him, and a remarkably efficient espionage service in Zanzibar. Not that he needed professional agents in Zanzibar at that period of the war, for many of the German residents there were still allowed to move freely in the town, and, moreover, a German doctor from Bagamoyo was permitted to come across weekly by dhow to visit them. The news that *Pegasus* was being serviced in Zanzibar harbour, with all but one of her boilers cleaned out, was soon in his hands and being relayed in code to Captain Loeff, the *Königsberg's* commander.

Early on the morning of September 20, a British patrol vessel, *Helmuth* (it had been seized from the Germans in Zanzibar harbour, hence its name), was steaming out to sea when a large vessel came out of the dawn mist. *Helmuth's* captain, Lieutenant (now Commander) Charlewood at first believed

that it was the Union Castle liner *Gascon*, then due for arrival, and he steamed towards her with the intention of informing her that she was approaching Zanzibar by a forbidden channel.

'In a matter of moments the brief tropical dawn turned into broad daylight,' he wrote, 'and the rapidly approaching vessel altered course a few degrees. To my horror I saw that she had three funnels and I knew she must be the *Königsberg*. At that instant German colours were broken from her foremast head and the peak of her gaff, and a blank shot warned us not to pursue our enquiries further. As *Pegasus* was having her boilers cleaned and was therefore anchored she was immobile and helpless against the *Königsberg's* heavier armament. The German cruiser opened fire on her immediately and after two or three salvoes every shell was finding its mark. The gallant little ship put up a heroic fight against helpless odds. Her shells were falling short and there could be only one end to the duel. In the meantime *Helmuth* was in a very unenviable position. Shells from *Pegasus* were falling uncomfortably close and the *Königsberg* was still slowly approaching. While I was trying to manoeuvre *Helmuth* clear of *Pegasus* the German opened fire on us with one of her smaller guns. The first round fell short and the second one over. We did not wait for the third. I ordered all hands on deck and told them to jump overboard. With the exception of the Indian engineer, who refused to leave the engine room, we were all in the water as the third shell severed *Helmuth's* main steam pipe.¹

In ten minutes it was all over and the *Königsberg* turned away and made off back to sea, but not before bearing down on Charlewood and throwing him a lifebelt.²

Pegasus had sustained eighty casualties in killed and wounded and was out of action; she rolled over into deep water and sank during attempts to refloat her the same afternoon.

The effect of the *Königsberg's* coup panicked the population of Zanzibar (for they thought they were about to be invaded and occupied) and sent shivers down the spines of the strategists at British headquarters in East Africa. In ten minutes, Britain's only naval protection in these waters had been wiped out, British naval prestige had suffered a heavy blow, and the *Königsberg* was still at large and obviously off on a

¹ *Tanganyika Notes and Records*

² 'I was astonished to hear a voice in English call out: "Are you all right?"' he wrote later. 'My reply was not compatible with that of an officer or a gentleman, and I declined to make use of the lifebuoy fearing that a line might be attached to it and I should be hauled aboard and made prisoner.'

career as a raider. It was vital that she should be sought out and sunk as rapidly as possible. The Admiralty radioed the cruiser *Chatham*, which was in the Red Sea, to sail at once for East Africa and seek out the *Königsberg*, whom she out-gunned and out-paced. She was shortly afterwards joined by the cruisers *Dartmouth* and *Weymouth*. Captain Drury-Lowe of *Chatham*, now senior officer in command, sent out the following message to the other ships:

'The Admiralty have ordered *Chatham*, *Dartmouth* and *Weymouth* to act as a detached and separate squadron under orders of Captain of *Chatham* to be exclusively employed hunting *Königsberg* and direct that on no account are ships to be diverted from their sole object, namely, capture of *Königsberg* by any pretence like capture of tugs or enemy's merchant ships. We know that *Königsberg* has been and is being helped in her movements by an extremely well-organised intelligence system, including lookout stations along the coast and that the information so obtained is sent to her by German wireless stations inland. Included in this intelligence system is the use of certain tugs and steamers which have been reported and named from time to time as operating with *Königsberg* . . . The capture of the above, if met with, should be effected as a means to corner *Königsberg* but on no account is time to be wasted by taking or sending any captured ships into port. Captains will exercise their own discretion in this, keeping in mind Admiralty instructions quoted above.'

For the next few weeks the ships of the squadron tracked across the waters off the East African coast hunting for the cruiser, but with no success. It was obvious that the *Königsberg* had gone into hiding. But where? In fact, in the course of her searches, *Chatham* had picked up two clues which would have provided her with the answer had she been able to evaluate them correctly. The first came from the German merchantman *Präsident*, which *Chatham* had discovered when she had made a routine search into Lindi harbour—neutralized under Governor Schnee's instructions—early in September. The *Präsident*, like the *Tabora* in Dar es Salaam, flew the Red Cross flag and claimed to have turned herself into a hospital ship; but when a British crew boarded her they found few signs that she had ever received patients or was prepared to deal with them. The British dismantled her engines and took documents from the captain's cabin, one of which proved to be a chart of the Rufiji River, a chart moreover much more modern and detailed than any in the possession of the British. From an investigation among the crew it was discovered that the

Präsident had recently sailed up the Rufiji with a full cargo and had returned empty. Where the cargo had been discharged and on behalf of whom they do not appear to have inquired very thoroughly, but later on they began to suspect that it must have been the *Königsberg*. Was the *Königsberg*, then, hidden somewhere in the Rufiji Delta?

A few days later, while cruising off the small island of Komo, opposite the entrance to the Rufiji, they got their second clue. A watch on the bridge caught sight of a khaki-clad figure running along the shore into the shelter of a clump of palm trees, and, judging that this was a European, a boat-party was sent ashore to investigate.

They found a German reserve officer hiding in a hut and he told them he had been sent out from Dar es Salaam to man a signal station on the island. With him was found a diary in which the *Königsberg* was mentioned and also a town named Salale, but none of the charts aboard *Chatham* (except the one from the *Präsident*, which they did not look at then) contained the name and no one could decide whether it was a code-name or a real place. They were still speculating as to its exact whereabouts when a message was received from the British Resident in Zanzibar telling them he had been given important information from a reliable agent operating in Dar es Salaam. It was about the *Königsberg*.

I should perhaps emphasize that the island of Zanzibar was little more than twenty-five miles from the coast of German East Africa, and it was not very difficult for native dhows to pass between one and the other. It was impossible to search the coastlines of either of them, for they were covered by scrub, bush and forest and their shore-lines were hidden by mangrove swamps, so that enemy agents from both sides were never really impeded from landing. If the intelligence services which Consul King had left behind in Dar es Salaam were any good at all—and one suspects that they were either hopelessly incompetent or their reports were ignored—they should have been able to provide Zanzibar with an almost day-to-day account of what was happening in the city and its harbours of reasonable accuracy.

Yet the news which a British agent brought to Zanzibar from Dar es Salaam on October 20—and its purport was passed over to the captain of *Chatham*—reported that the *Königsberg* had been in the harbour during the past few days and had taken on coal and water from the merchantman *Tabora* which was anchored there. It was stated categorically that this was the

Königsberg's refuge when the British hunt for her became too hot.

A little gentle recapitulation of its information might have shown the British at once that they were being fed false information. When *Pegasus* had made her approach to Dar es Salaam on August 8, she had sent a certain Lieutenant Turner into the harbour in a pinnace to arrange for the neutralization of the city, and he had reported that the big floating dock had been sunk in the main shipping channel, thus denying entrance to any sizeable vessel, particularly one as large as the *Königsberg*. Unfortunately, Lieutenant Turner was one of those who had been killed by the bombardment of *Pegasus* by the *Königsberg*; but he had written his report. The pity is that no one bothered to re-read it.

So the news from the 'reliable' agent was believed instead. No one in Zanzibar or aboard *Chatham* stopped to wonder whether it was false. Why should it be? They knew very little of Lettow-Vorbeck's feud with Governor Schnee about how the war should be faced, and it never entered any British head that they were deliberately being *encouraged* to suspect Dar es Salaam as a haven for a dangerous German warship. They accepted the agent's report not as the 'planted' information which it was, but as a genuine revelation of the *Königsberg's* whereabouts. And they decided to act.

On October 21, *Chatham* sailed from Zanzibar for Dar es Salaam and dropped anchor in the open sea about two miles off the Makatumba lighthouse, at the entrance to the harbour. The British did not realize, of course, that they were playing Lettow-Vorbeck's game from this moment on. According to the arrangements which *Pegasus* had made with Governor Schnee's representative in Dar es Salaam, a white flag should have been flying from the lighthouse to indicate that the town was taking no part in hostilities and could be considered an open city. But when the British turned their telescopes on the lighthouse, they could see no white flag flying there. Or said they couldn't. (Though why it should not have been there is strange; the Germans said it was; and certainly there was nothing going on in the city to prevent its being flown.) Perhaps Captain Drury-Lowe of *Pegasus* was too concerned with the prospect of trapping the *Königsberg* in Dar es Salaam harbour to bother about flags. At any rate, he sent his observers up aloft and told them to report to him what they could see in the harbour. They were by this time at least six miles from the harbour and mangrove swamps intervened between their ship and the shore, but the observers reported that

they could just see the masts of two ships to the left of the town, and another close to the town flying a red cross flag.

Pictures of the *Königsberg* were consulted, and Captain Drury-Lowe and his officers convinced themselves that one of the masts was so similar to that of the German cruiser as to leave no doubt that she was inside the harbour. He gave orders for one of his guns to be fired and sent up a flag asking for a boat to be sent out. Then he waited twenty minutes—hardly time enough, it might be thought, for a boat to be launched from the town and a spokesman put aboard and sent six miles out to sea. At the end of twenty minutes, he commenced a bombardment with his six-inch guns and did not stop until white flags sprouted from buildings everywhere along the coastline. A boat presently appeared flying a white flag and German officials came aboard *Chatham* and complained bitterly and indignantly at the attack upon a defenceless harbour. They spoke little English and the officers aboard *Chatham* spoke no German, so they were sent ashore again and told to come out again on the following day. That night *Chatham* went back to Zanzibar, took aboard Consul King as interpreter (and Colonel McKye, who was intelligence officer to the British force which was now arriving in British East Africa for operation against the German colony) and sailed again to Dar es Salaam on October 22. This time British naval officers went into the harbour with German officials and satisfied themselves that the floating dock was still sunk in its original position, that the lane out to sea was still blocked, and that the *Königsberg* was definitely not there. The Acting Governor had been on the telephone in the meantime to Governor Schnee at Morogoro and he had been instructed to convey his outrage and indignation at the bombardment of Dar es Salaam.

Chatham sailed away to resume her search for the *Königsberg*, but she left behind an atmosphere of smouldering resentment among the population of Dar es Salaam, which was just what Lettow-Vorbeck needed. A few days later a message from the Acting Governor of Dar es Salaam was sent to the British Resident in Zanzibar which said, in part:

‘Lieutenant-Commander Turner of Pegasus made the following agreement. That all ships of the Deutsch Ost Afrika Line in Dar es Salaam were to remain untouched and that nothing was to be removed from them. It was further agreed that the crews on board should take no warlike action against England. Both these orders have been obeyed by the Civil Authorities and by the crews on board. The carrying out of the first as

promised to Lieutenant-Commander Turner, ie the non-removal of the wireless poles etc, caused the Commander of an English cruiser to bombard the *Feldmarschall* and *König* while some of the crew were aboard. Both ships are badly damaged, some of the crew slightly wounded. This is contrary to the arrangement made with the town of Dar es Salaam, which is unfortified. According to Article 1 of the Hague Convention of 18th October, 1907, it is forbidden to bombard an unfortified town. Even if the Commander of the English cruiser had suspected the presence of a German warship, according to Article 2 of the same Convention, he could only start bombarding after parley. I protest against the break in international law. The Commander of the English cruiser declared that he did not feel himself bound in any way to respect the arrangement made between Tanga, Dar es Salaam and the *Astraea* and *Pegasus*, as since the sinking of the *Pegasus* the arrangement was void. I have taken note of his views and informed the crews of the Deutsch Ost Afrika Line that they have no longer to keep their promise re fighting against England.'

This did not mean that Governor Schnee's resentment of the bombardment had caused him to alter his policy of neutrality for the coastal ports of German East Africa. On his instructions, the note added:

'I again draw your attention to the fact that Dar es Salaam and Tanga are defenceless harbours and that their inhabitants have undertaken no warlike act. I beg you to inform the Admiralty of the contents of this dispatch.'¹

But what was important, from Lettow-Vorbeck's point of view, was that the German inhabitants of the coastal ports no longer believed that agreements with the enemy would protect them. The bombardment of Dar es Salaam in direct contravention of what they believed was a solemn promise had made them realize that, as Germans, there was no safety for them in neutrality. A wave of patriotism swept through the city and men began to queue to join the colours.

First to come were the crews of the ships in the harbour. They formally repudiated the agreements they had signed to take no further part in the war, and offered themselves for service. After them came the civilians. The womenfolk of the town formed themselves into nursing corps and began making plans for the formation of auxiliary services to aid the troops in the interior.

¹ German Colonial Ministry Records.

When the next crisis arose over a coastal port, Lettow-Vorbeck was now confident that he need no longer worry about Governor Schnee or about obeying his orders. The time of neutrality was over. The war proper against Britain could begin. It began at Tanga on November 2, 1914.

CHAPTER THREE

Disaster at Tanga

THE BRITISH expeditionary force which sailed from India at the beginning of October 1914 arrived off Mombasa, the principal port of the British Protectorate, just before the end of that month. There were 8,000 troops aboard a convoy of twenty-one ships and they were escorted by an obsolete battleship, *Goliath*, and a cruiser, *Fox*. Their voyage had been slow and uncomfortable and most of the troops had been badly seasick. Since none of the men and only one or two of the officers had ever been in Africa before it might have been thought that a few days ashore were necessary to restore the spirits of the troops and get them acclimatized; but now they were here, East African Command wanted them in action as speedily as possible, so the convoy lay-to out to sea, rolling in the heavy swell of the Indian Ocean and sweltering in tropical heat, while the Staff went ashore to get their orders. Until that moment they had no idea exactly where they were going.

It could hardly be said that this was the most martial or most efficient body of men which the British had sent to war. Expeditionary Force 'B', as it was called, consisted of two brigades. One, the 27th, was commanded by Brigadier-General Wapshare and consisted of the 2nd Loyal North Lancs Regiment and three Indian infantry battalions, and the other, the Imperial Service Brigade, commanded by Brigadier-General Tighe, contained the 13th Rajputs, the 2nd Kashmir Rifles and half a battalion of the Gwalior Infantry, plus a mountain battery. Neither Wapshare nor Tighe had seen their troops before embarkation, and, as one of the officers later remarked, 'It can be safely said that from top to bottom nobody knew anybody.' The Commanding Officer was Major-General Aitken.

Attached to the force as Intelligence Officer was a certain Captain R. Meinertzhagen and he was one of the few who had ever visited Africa and certainly the only one who knew anything of its terrain, climate and conditions. He had the direst doubts about the success of the operation from the start, and wrote in his diary even before the convoy left India: 'I look with misgivings on any attempt to invade German East Africa from the coast . . . Neither am I enthusiastic about the troops sent

with the Force. They constitute the worst in India, and I tremble to think what may happen if we meet with serious opposition. I have seen many of the men and they did not impress me at all, either as men or as soldiers. Two battalions have no machine guns and the senior officers are nearer to fossils than active energetic leaders of men. But it serves no purpose to be critical at this stage. One can only hope for the best and rely on our British battalion, mountain battery and the element of surprise.¹

He was the only officer in the force who was at all worried. General Aitken openly expressed his contempt for the Germans. He maintained that they made poor officers and their native troops were ill-trained and badly directed, though he does not appear to have heard of the name of Lettow-Vorbeck at this time; and he went on record as saying that he was confident his troops would have thrashed the enemy by Christmas.

On October 31, General Aitken took his staff ashore with him at Mombasa for a Conference with the Governor, Sir Charles Belfield, at Government House. Also present were General Stewart, who commanded an Indian brigade which had landed in Africa in September, and Colonel Graham of the King's African Rifles. A discussion followed as to whether Dar es Salaam or Tanga should be the target of the expeditionary force, but finally Aitken decided to plump for Tanga. His troops would take the town, he said, and then push along the tracks of the Northern Railway to its terminus at New Moshi, 120 miles away. Meanwhile, General Stewart would take his force of 5,000 rifles and drive through Taveta (still held by the Germans) to make a link-up with the main invading force. Meinertzhagen pointed out that this might not be as simple as the general made it sound. Intercommunication between the two forces would be impossible; the countryside was thick bush and swamp, ridden with malaria and other fevers, and the troops had had no experience of operations in such conditions. Moreover, the reaction of the Germans was likely to be stiff, since Tanga was one of their most vital ports, and the Northern Railway was their only link with Moshi and the Kilimanjaro area, where their troops were concentrated.

General Aitken then asked him to make a report on what he knew about the enemy. 'I said,' wrote Meinertzhagen in his diary, 'that perhaps Stewart who had been in East Africa for a

¹ Col. R. Meinertzhagen, *Army Diary*, 1899-1926.

month might give us his views. They were nil, beyond the fact that the Germans had occupied Longido and that a "strong" German force was on the coast, threatening Mombasa . . . He knew nothing of the German dispositions. So I spoke, giving my opinion that there was probably very little in Tanga but that there must be a large concentration in the Kilimanjaro area whence troops could be rapidly transported by rail to Tanga in 30 hours.'

It was at this point that Commander Caulfield of the cruiser *Fox*, who was also at the meeting, intervened to suggest that there was really nothing to worry about. Both Tanga and Dar es Salaam, on orders of the German Governor, had agreed not to allow their harbours to be used for naval and military purposes. He added that, as part of the truce which the Navy had contracted, he would have to give the authorities in Tanga previous warning of the British intention to occupy the town, and to this, over Meinertzhagen's protesting that it would destroy any chance of surprise, General Aitken agreed. He could not bring himself to worry over the possibility of German opposition. As he saw it, the enemy was inferior in both numbers and quality; they would crumble and run before the first British fusillade, and the natives would welcome the force as their long-awaited liberators from the brutal German yoke. He shook hands with General Stewart, wished him good luck and a speedy reunion on enemy territory, and led his staff back to rejoin his queasy troops aboard the convoy.

It sailed for Tanga, 120 miles down the coast, at noon the same day.

Now if the British had been uncertain until the last moment where to make their landing on German African soil, Lieutenant-Colonel Lettow-Vorbeck had never had any doubts at all that the place would be Tanga. 'Captured mails spoke of an impending attack by an Indian expeditionary force of 10,000 men,' he wrote, 'and as I had always expected a hostile attack on a large scale in the neighborhood of Tanga, I went there at the end of October, drove all over the country in a car I had brought with me, and discussed the matter on the spot with Captain Adler, commanding the 7th Company, and with District Commissioner Auracher.'¹

Auracher was in a quandary. He too had heard that the British were coming to Tanga and he had telegraphed for instructions to Governor Schnee at Morogoro, asking in particular whether conditions had changed in view of the naval bombard-

¹ Lettow-Vorbeck, *Meine Errinerung aus Ostafrika*.

ment of Dar es Salaam a few days before. Schnee's reply was simply: 'Your instructions remain the same. Tanga is an open city. A bombardment must be avoided at all costs.' But shortly after the receipt of this order, Lettow-Vorbeck arrived and asked him what dispositions he had made for the evacuation of his civilian population and the defence of the port from invasion. He showed him the Governor's telegram.

'Ignore it,' said the Commandant.

'I cannot do that,' said Dr Auracher. 'I am a member of the Administration and I must obey my chief.'

Lettow-Vorbeck said: 'Is it true that you are also a reserve officer in the German Army?'

Auracher nodded. He was indeed a lieutenant in the reserve.

'In that case,' said the Commandant, 'your responsibilities to the Army in time of war supersedes your duties in the civilian administration. I am your superior officer now and I order you to make preparations for the defence of Tanga. When the British come it will cease to be an open town and we will fight for it. Under no circumstances will you hand it over to the enemy, on pain of immediate arrest and court martial. Is that clear?'

'Yes, colonel,' said Auracher, 'provided you will absolve me from all responsibility.'

'You are hereby absolved,' said Lettow-Vorbeck.

A few hours later, he ordered his troops to enter Tanga and news of their coming was quickly sped to Morogoro. Back came a telegram from the Governor:

'Stop military occupation of Tanga, town and harbour, because not defensible. Send telegraphic information about such new circumstances as make in your opinion the occupation of Tanga necessary.'

The Schutztruppe commander answered:

'Command has not intervened against stationing in Tanga of parts of second battalion. Use of Tanga lodgings seemed advisable in view of healthy climate. Dar es Salaam was until now used for accommodating First Rifles. Please wire whether despite this Tanga should be evacuated.'

On October 27, Governor Schnee wired:

'Stationing parts of Second battalion in Tanga approved with proviso that forces must be evacuated inconspicuously immediately warships appear. Executive power remains with district commissioner.'

That was all right with Lettow-Vorbeck now. District Commissioner Auracher would do what he ordered; and what he ordered when the time came would not be quite what Governor Schnee expected.

At dawn on the morning of November 2, the British convoy containing 8,000 troops of Expeditionary Force B hove-to about fourteen miles off Tanga, over the horizon where they could not be seen from the shore. HMS *Fox* detached herself from the main force and set off through the muggy haze for the harbour. At 6 am she dropped anchor in the outer harbour and set up a message on her signal mast demanding that an envoy be sent out to her.

Presently a pinnace arrived and District Commissioner Auracher came aboard. Caulfield, the commander of *Fox*, explained to him why he was there, and demanded the surrender of the town and port by 8 am that day. Otherwise fire would be opened.

Auracher carefully explained in halting English (the British never seemed to carry a German-speaking interpreter) that he had come aboard as representative of the civil administration and that, as a junior official, it was not in his power to surrender the town. He would need special instructions. In the meantime he reminded the British commander that Tanga had been declared an open and undefended town by the Governor of the Colony in agreement with the British naval authorities, and that it would be breaking the truce if it were to be bombarded. Commander Caulfield was only too well aware of this. He agreed to withhold his fire until 9:30 to allow Dr Auracher to consult with his superiors.

The District Commissioner was piped aboard his pinnace, and he sailed back to Tanga well satisfied with his visit. The two hours he had spent aboard *Fox* had given time for the town to be evacuated in accordance with plans he had previously made, and for Captain Tafel's company of Schutztruppe, camped on the outskirts of Tanga, to be alerted. Once back in his office in the administration building he proceeded with true Teutonic thoroughness to complete his duties as a civil servant and carefully refrain from any act which could be construed as being of a military nature. He signed the letters waiting on his desk. He wrote a telegram to Governor Schnee announcing his temporary resignation from the service. His last act as District Commissioner was to lower the white flag from the mast over the administration building and raise the German flag in its place. Then he went home, took off his white ducks, and donned the uniform of a lieutenant in the German Army; after which he mounted a cycle and rode out to join Captain Tafel's company camped on the outskirts of the town.

Captain Tafel had already telegraphed Lettow-Vorbeck, who

had returned to New Moshi: 'Enemy has demanded surrender of Tanga. Refused. We expect to be bombarded at 9:30.'

It was, in fact, now well past ten o'clock and there had been no bombardment. This was because Commander Caulfield, tired of waiting for Auracher to return, had sailed his ship back to join the convoy and ask for further instructions from General Aitken. It was not until nearly eight hours later that the British convoy began moving towards the port.

Aitken had decided to wait until dusk before landing any of his troops. It was a decision that was to prove fatal to his enterprise.

Before it was evacuated on November 2, 1914, Tanga had a population of 20,000 natives, 700 Indians, Goanese and Arabs,¹ and 581 Germans. It was German East Africa's second port and did a thriving trade in the export of copra, ground-nuts, bananas, pineapples, cocoa, sesame, coffee, sugar-cane, sisal and cotton. It was the railhead for the Northern Railway which connected it with New Moshi and the fertile farms and plantations around Mount Kilimanjaro, 120 miles away; and the Germans had built solidly and well. The inner and outer harbour were capable of dealing with forty ships.

But Tanga was only five degrees south of the Equator and its climate was hot, damp and fever-laden. The shores surrounding the harbour were fringed with mangrove swamps growing out of the foetid mud, breeding grounds for mosquitoes, leeches and water-snakes. Inland thick bush and thorn trees lapped on the edge of the town, broken here and there by groves of palms, and the only ways through them were by the railway or the dirt road which Lettow-Vorbeck, using forced labour, had pushed out towards Moshi in the earlier months of the year. It was an ugly country in which to fight a war, flat, wet, unhealthy, and so carpeted with trees and spiny undergrowth that a man must hack his way through and could not hope to see more than a yard or two ahead of him. Here too malarial mosquitoes hovered in flocks, cattle and horse-killing tsetse flies abounded, and a particularly ill-tempered and venomous breed of wild bees nested in the thorn-scrub.

If General Aitken had been more aware of the character of the troops under his command, and if he had known a little about the nature of the countryside in which he was going to

¹The Indian population had previously been larger but a number had left to return home or to British East Africa after the outbreak of war.

fight, he might have realized that a direct attack upon Tanga by way of the harbour was the only medium of success. He knew by now that Tanga itself was empty. The first thing that Commander Caulfield had told him was that the place had been evacuated, and he should have realized that it was his for the taking.

For divisional commander he was, however, singularly lacking in initiative and totally without dash and vision. He was a commander who worked by the Army manual, and it was a very early edition. Moreover, he appeared to be overawed by the Navy, and though it was represented on the spot by Commander Caulfield, who was much his junior in rank, he always seemed to defer to him in an argument.

At the urgings of his staff, he had originally planned to land his troops on the jetties of Tanga Harbour. It was true that the negotiations with Dr Auracher had lost him the element of surprise, but it was reasonable to assume that Tanga was only lightly defended and such opposition as there was could easily have been crushed by the overwhelming force he had brought with him. But when he announced (at a conference aboard his command ship, the *Karmala*, at noon on November 2) that he was taking his convoy into the harbour, Commander Caulfield intervened to say that he could not be responsible for leading the ships in until it had first been cleared of mines. At this the Divisional Intelligence Officer, Captain Meinertzhagen, burst out with an angry declaration that there could not possibly be mines in the harbour since Royal Navy ships had been visiting it regularly since the outbreak of war, and that the local Germans had no means of either manufacturing or laying them. (He added in his diary: 'I was not much impressed by Caulfield, the commander of *Fox*. He seemed nervous yet pompous, shifty-eyed and not at all inclined to help. It struck me that he was definitely afraid and was always referring to the safety of his blasted ship, ignoring the fact that it is his duty to protect us even if he loses his ship.') But Caulfield was adamant in refusing to risk his ship, or those of the convoy, until he was convinced that no mines were floating or submerged, and General Aitken deferred to him. He could not be sure, he said, that the empty houses in the town were not, in fact, manned by German troops who would shoot down his force as it landed. A tug was sent off to sweep the harbour (and spent the rest of the night hauling aboard submerged logs) while another landing place was looked for.

Eventually a strip of beach was chosen on a headland about a mile from the town called Ras Kasone, fringed by mangrove

swamps, buttressed by a fifty-foot cliff, and topped by a red house. It was decided that here the 13th Rajputs, the only regular battalion in the Imperial Service Brigade, would be put ashore under its commander, Brigadier-General Tighe. Rarely has such a scrappy, but hardly scrap-happy, force gone ashore on enemy territory. 'In the darkness which quickly fell,' says the Official History, 'the unrehearsed loading of lighters took time, and it was not until 9 pm, after counter-orders to tugs, that the lighters carrying the 13th Rajputs with machine guns at their bows assembled under the lee of the *Karmala* [the command ship]. About 10 pm the order to move was given, and in a smooth sea, in bright moonlight which must have shown them clearly to German patrols on the cliffs, the tows drew in. In shallow water about 300 yards off shore the lighters were slipped and drifted shorewards and grounded almost at once. Rifle fire was opened on them from near the Red House, but on this being returned by the machine guns of the 13th Rajputs and the 4.7 guns of HMS *Fox*, it ceased and the landing continued unopposed. The water, too shallow for the lighters, was breast-high, too deep for heavily equipped men.¹

General Aitken had issued a battle order to the 13th Rajputs. It was one which, in the circumstances that followed, proved singularly over-optimistic. 'The town of Tanga is to be seized tonight.' It was more than the attacking troops could do to struggle ashore and meet, for the first time, the dark terrors of the African bush. They scrambled on to dry land and flung themselves down and lay there, bodies exhausted by weeks of seasickness, minds petrified by the forest sounds around them, and determined above everything not to move another inch until daylight came.

'So here we are,' wrote Captain Meinertzhagen, in his diary, 'with only a small portion of our force, risking a landing in face of an enemy of unknown strength and on a beach which has not been reconnoitred and which looks like a rank mangrove swamp. Meanwhile, the convoy except for three ships here, are still ten miles away at sea. We appear to have made a proper mess of today's operations. . . .'

If he was depressed then, he had even more reason to be on the morrow. At dawn on November 3, half a battalion of the 13th Rajputs with two machine guns, under Lieut-Colonel J. A. Stewart, advanced along the narrow lane running towards Tanga. They reached the outskirts of the town an hour later, and there troops of Captain Tafel's company of Schutztruppe

¹ *Military Operations—East Africa: Official History of the War*, Vol. 1, 1914-16.

were awaiting them. They held their fire until the Rajputs reached a ditch about 200 yards east of the railway, and then they swept them with bursts of machine gun fire. The African porters attached to the troops promptly threw down their loads of ammunition and took to the bush. The second half of the battalion came up and tried to deploy to the left so as to extend the southern flank of the firing line, but the bush was so thick and the situation so confused that they could not see what was ahead of them. One of their officers climbed up on to higher ground to survey the situation and revealed his situation; he and two of the other officers were seen and mown down by a German machine gun post. An attempt to rush the post by Captain Hanson and a section of Indian volunteers failed—they were wiped out to a man.

It was then that the Rajputs began to crack. 'Already exhausted by a night's hard work, bewildered in the dense vegetation, and startled by their first experience of machine gun fire,' reports the Official History, 'they were in no condition to withstand the onset of the African askari who, with much cheering and the sound of horns and bugles, could be heard approaching through the bush against their flank and rear. The Pioneers fell back for some distance; the Rajputs, too, already shaken, had begun to give way. Brigadier-General Tighe decided that he must retreat; and his force withdrew, the surviving British and Indian officers controlling the retirement as best they could.'

Captain Meinertzhagen in his diary put it rather more bluntly:

'On the edge of Tanga, Tighe ran into an entrenched position strongly held by the enemy. Soon after, he was attacked and beaten back, his men breaking and disorganized. No amount of heroic example on behalf of the British officers availed. Officer after officer was shot down trying to rally the men and stem the tide of flight. . . Tighe estimated the enemy strength at 2,500 rifles, but from what I saw it was more like 250 with four machine guns¹ . . . We suffered 300 casualties today and our men behaved disgracefully, showing no military spirit or grit. I have never had much faith in our second-rate Indian troops and the bubble of the Indian Army will now burst. I doubt if even half the Indian Army are really reliable against modern fire . . . To show in what state the Rajputs are, a sepoy discharged his rifle in error. This was the signal for immediate panic, the Rajputs and

¹ It was, in fact, 220 rifles and four machine guns.

Pioneers rising up and rushing back to the shore and were with difficulty persuaded to return to their bivouacs. These are jolly fellows to go fighting Germans with.'

During these sharp, bitter and salutary skirmishes, Tanga had been defended merely by Captain Tafel and one company of Schutztruppe. But, as the Official History puts it, in the meantime 'Lettow and his troops from Moshi were on the way, rattling at full speed down the Usumbara Railway.' Lettow-Vorbeck himself arrived on the outskirts of the town on the evening of November 3, but could not find out from his men whether Tanga was held by the enemy or not.

He blacked his face, mounted a bicycle, and rode off into the town, accompanied by two staff officers. 'It was completely deserted,' he wrote, 'and the white houses of the Europeans reflected the brilliant rays of the moon into the streets which we traversed.' They reached the harbour without interference. There was no one there. A mile away, at the far side of the harbour, British transports had at last moved in and unloading was in progress under a blaze of lights and a noise that drowned the sound of the cicadas and frogs. Lettow-Vorbeck had called Moshi to send the only artillery he possessed, two ancient field-pieces of 1873 vintage, and he longed to turn them on the enemy, but they had not arrived.

'We then rode on towards Ras Kasone, left our bicycles in the German Government Hospital, and went on foot to the beach,' he wrote, 'close to which, right in front of us, lay an English cruiser. On the way back, at the hospital, we were challenged, apparently by an Indian sentry—we did not understand the language—but saw nothing. We got on our bicycles and rode back.'

He was convinced that what had happened so far was but a feint on the part of the enemy and that the main attack was about to begin. Should he risk trying to stop it? There was a telegram from Governor Schnee in his hand saying: 'You are forbidden to subject Tanga and the defenceless subjects of the town to the rigours of war. Even should the enemy land in force, there should be no resistance. Tanga must be saved from bombardment.' On the morning of November 4 (but only from 10.30 am on, for General Aitken had ordered that his troops must first enjoy a hearty breakfast), the bulk of Expeditionary Force B landed, and German observers estimated that 6,000 came ashore between 10.30 and noon. All Lettow-Vorbeck's forces were now in position, but they numbered only 1,000 men all told.

'I had to ask myself,' he wrote, 'whether I dared risk a

decisive engagement with my thousand rifles. For various reasons I decided I would do so. It was too important to prevent the enemy from gaining a firm footing on Tanga. Otherwise we should abandon to him the best base for operations against the Northern territories; in his advance the Northern Railway would afford him an admirable line of communication, and he would be enabled to continually surprise us by bringing up and pushing forward fresh troops and stores. Then it was certain that we would be unable to hold the Northern Railway any longer and that we should be obliged to abandon our hitherto so successful method of warfare. Against these all-important practical reasons, limited considerations such as the Governor's order to avoid a bombardment of Tanga under all circumstances could not prevail.'

Lettow-Vorbeck was well aware of what might happen to him if he failed. 'Already my method of waging active war had met with disapproval. If on top of that we were to suffer a severe defeat the confidence of the troops would probably be gone, and it was certain that my superiors would place insuperable difficulties in the way of my exercising command. My decision was not easy, and as if the military situation alone did not render it difficult enough, it was made unnecessarily harder by the fact that regulations did not allow sufficient freedom to the responsible commander. But there was nothing for it: to gain all we must risk all.'

It was a prospect which inspirited him, and he was in a cheerful and fighting mood when he called his section commanders together for a conference shortly after noon on November 4. He had discarded his solar topi for wide-brimmed slouch hat; his face was still streaked with the blacking with which he had polished it for his cycle patrol the night before; and over his arm was a rifle, in his belt two revolvers, and there were two bandoliers of ammunition around his shoulders.

'I have not much to say, gentlemen,' he said, 'for you already know my plan. Except this. We have already drawn more than 10,000 enemy troops to Africa by our resistance, troops which might otherwise have gone to Europe. If we can win this battle we will drain the enemy's resources even more. We have a splendid chance of victory despite the odds against us. We know the bush, they don't. We know how to move our troops, they don't. We are fighting for land we own, and they are not.'

He had made Captain Tom von Prince the lynch-pin of his

defence system, and the bearded Bwana Sakharani, perhaps even more ebullient than his commanding officer, was itching to start fighting. He had expanded his force of white planters into two companies and had been training them hard over the past few weeks; they were a much more efficient and soldierly force than the undisciplined rabble of sharpshooters which had taken Taveta in September. They would need to be, for their job would be to hold the town of Tanga itself and fight for it house by house if necessary. On either flank, in the bush and the rubber plantations, askaris had been positioned, ready to operate over the kind of tangled ground they knew best.

By this time General Aitken's full force of 8,000 men were ashore and ready to begin the assault on Tanga. His plan was simple—too simple. It was, as the Official History coldly remarks, 'founded on an infantry drill and tactics not yet modified by fresh war experience.' He had sent out no patrols during the past twenty-four hours and had no information as to the enemy's strength and dispositions, but he was confident that a straightforward assault with such numbers would mow down all opposition, and he made no attempt to protect his flanks. For his spearhead he used the seasoned troops of the 2nd Loyal North Lancs Regiment and the 101st Grenadiers, with the shaky troops of the 63rd Light Infantry sandwiched between them. It was the 63rd which had broken in the actions of the day before but Aitken was convinced that the example of the North Lancs would 'put new heart into them,' as he reported later. Behind them in close support came the 13th Rajputs, the 98th Infantry Regiment, and the 61st Pioneers, all of whom were showing signs of nervousness and complaining of heat and thirst long before a shot was fired. The beaches, with their dumps of ammunition and stores, were protected by the Gwalior Infantry.

The line of advance was through thick vegetation, bush, rubber plantations, crops of sisal and thorn-scrub, and the leaden sky threw down a fierce and broiling heat. It took two hours before the force reached within 600 yards of the town, even though there had so far been no opposition, and by that time most of the Indian troops had consumed the contents of their water bottles.

At 3 pm an askari scout reported to Lettow-Vorbeck's headquarters with the words: '*Adui tayari*' (the enemy is ready) and at that moment the shapes of the first troops of the North Lancs were seen. The whole line of advance was at once raked by heavy German fire from every bush and tree. The

North Lancs and the 101st Grenadiers came on, but not the men of the 63rd Light Infantry. These Madras troops, the Official History carefully explains, 'were suffering much from the tropical heat and consequent thirst. In poor condition as the result of their miserable voyage and shortage of sleep during the previous night, the 63rd began to disintegrate from the moment when the German machine gun fire opened on them.' Those who had not been hit turned and ran wildly into the bush, bowling over the officers who tried to stop them. In ten minutes the line of advance had been broken in the middle and the 63rd as a fighting unit had ceased to exist. Behind them, the 13th Rajputs panicked, broke and bolted, carrying with them the 61st Pioneers. 'I could not believe my eyes when I saw it,' wrote Meinertzhagen in his diary. 'It was most demoralizing. We collected most of them, made them lie down and keep quiet, but they were all gibbering like terrified monkeys and were clearly not for it at any price. Individuals were letting off their rifles in any direction and many men were deliberately firing at our advancing troops. Nothing short of violence could stop this sort of thing. I had to use my boots and pistol to stop it . . . We wasted a lot of time trying to get these cowards back, but eventually, gave it up and confined our efforts to keeping those men still up in front in their places.'

It was at this moment that the bees struck and completed the rout. Aroused by the noise and their nests set on fire by bullets, the bees swarmed and descended in angry clouds around the heads of the terrified troops. The stings of African bees are more potent than any other, and the damage they did was extremely painful; but it was the psychological effect as much as their venom which wreaked the worst havoc. Word spread through the ranks that this was a secret weapon of the Germans, and with screams and wails the bulk of the Indian troops bolted in a rabble.¹

The North Lancs and 101st Grenadiers (Indian troops these; not all Indian troops had broken) pressed on into the town itself and house to house fighting had begun, but Captain von Prince had positioned his machine gun posts well and what meagre attempts were made to reinforce them were reaped by German fire. At one point the askaris on both of his flanks showed signs of panic as the Lancs advanced on them, but von Prince leaped from the top storey of a house into the street and rushed out to rally them. At the

¹ A German machine gun section was put out of action by bees about this time.

same time, Lettow-Vorbeck and two of his staff officers dashed over to the opposite flank. One of them flung a bottle at the head of a retreating askari, while Lettow-Vorbeck stood in full view of the enemy, his back turned to them, laughing at his troops, and thus shamed them back into action. It was at this point that Meinertzhagen, who had hidden himself in a house in the town, glimpsed the German commander and began firing at him. 'I saw my bullet splash on the wall just by him,' he wrote. 'So I gave him another and again I missed. Never before have I had such an easy target or made such bad shooting.' (It was not until after the war when he met Lettow-Vorbeck that he realized he had missed the enemy commander.)

While the battle was raging, Lettow-Vorbeck had been moving back and forth across his front and he now realized that the attack which General Aitken had launched was a frontal assault and that his flank did not reach further south than the right flank of the German line. It was here, therefore, that he launched the counterattack for which he had been preparing. 'No witness will forget the moment,' he wrote, 'when the machine guns of the 13th Company opened continuous fire at this point and completely reversed the situation. The whole front jumped up and dashed forward with enthusiastic cheers. In the meantime, the 4th Company had arrived . . . In wild disorder the enemy fled in dense masses, and our machine guns converging on them from front and flanks mowed down whole companies to the last man. Several askaris came in beaming with delight with several captured English rifles on their backs and an Indian prisoner in each hand.'

General Aitken sent an urgent message to the cruiser *Fox*, standing out in the roads: 'Shell town as hard as possible, but avoid the railway.' During the next half hour *Fox* sent 108 rounds of 6-inch and 4.7 inch shells, some of which hit the hospital in which German personnel were looking after both British and German wounded, but most of which landed among the British troops. It was the last straw. The Lancs were ordered to withdraw from the town since there was no one available to support them, and they did so with enormous casualties. 'Most of the men had gone,' wrote Meinertzhagen, 'we were all parched with thirst, ammunition was short, and the last remnants of the firing line were a few British officers each fighting their own battle.'

It was at this point in the battle that the Germans made a mistake. One of the askari buglers believed he had received

the order to recall the Schutztruppe to their old camp outside Tanga, and he sounded the retreat. The troops began to withdraw, once more leaving the town wide open. It was at this moment, as he was marching off with his triumphant planters, that Captain von Prince was hit through the head by a stray bullet and killed.

But if the Germans had boobed, the British were in no mood to take advantage of it. The sound of the German bugler created a panic at General Aitken's headquarters. Several staff officers cried out that it was the signal for yet another enemy counterattack.

'I was close to Aitken at the time,' wrote Meinertzhagen, 'and told him that the Germans had sounded the retreat and not the charge, but he paid no attention. I told him I had lived in a German garrison town for six months and knew their bugle calls, but it was of no avail.'

Meinertzhagen believed that the situation was not so bad that it could not be retrieved by quick and decisive action. He set off on a patrol by himself into Tanga just as darkness was coming down and satisfied himself that the town had been emptied by the enemy. There was still a chance, then. The Lancs Regiment, angry with their withdrawal, agreed with him. One of their officers rushed back to headquarters and found a brigade major to whom he offered information about the situation in the town 'to help us in our next attack'. The brigade major, as the Official History records, cut him short by saying: 'The only information of any value now is that which will help us to get out of this — place as soon as possible.' It is not difficult to fill in the word which the Official History leaves blank.

'I begged him [Aitken] to allow us to collect what we could and go forward,' wrote Meinertzhagen in his diary, 'but he would not, for he was tired out and seemed disgusted with the whole business. His one ambition seemed to be to get away. He was beaten. . . .'

That evening Aitken held a conference of his staff on Ras Kasone and Meinertzhagen urged that a new attack should be launched as soon as the full moon rose, but everyone else was against it and eager for one move only, re-embarkation. But not even this could be risked by night, Aitken decided. 'We must all have a good night's sleep,' he said. Not that they got it. Every time someone dropped a tea kettle or someone shouted, herds of sepoys would rush chattering into the sea. The only calm troops left were the Indians of the 101st Grenadiers and the North Lancs, one of whom summed up

the situation by saying: 'We didn't mind the German fire, but with most of our officers and NCOs down and a bloody crowd of wogs firing into our backs and bees stinging our arses, things were a bit hard.' In their general condemnation of the Indian troops, none of the whites (for those were not the days when such thoughts occurred) took into account the fact that the sepoys whom they had brought like cattle across the Indian Ocean did not know why they were fighting, or would have been inspired to valiant deeds even had they known, for it was not their war. 'It was too piteous to see the state of the men,' wrote Meinertzhagen. 'Many were jibbering idiots, muttering prayers to their heathen gods, hiding behind bushes and palm trees and laying down face to earth in folds of the ground with their rifles lying useless beside them. I would never have believed that grown-up men of any race could have been reduced to such shamelessness . . . I blame the Indian government for enlisting such scum and placing them in the King's uniform.'

At 6 am next morning, November 5, Lettow-Vorbeck led his troops back into Tanga and watched British and Indian troops milling around on the shore, while ship's boats went to and from the convoy. All was confusion, for Expeditionary Force B had never practised emergency embarkation drill—General Aitken had never considered it would be needed—and each time a sound of shot was heard there was panic among the troops. The German commander was still unaware of how great his victory had been, although the piles of bodies strewn over the streets and bush—the sickening smell of putrefaction which curdled the air as the sun grew stronger—gave him a good idea of the extent of the British losses. He ordered burial parties into action immediately and evacuated as many of the wounded as he could handle to the German Hospital, where the male and female staff had been tending casualties (mostly British and Indian) all through the past forty-eight hours; but he could spare only a small proportion of his troops for the work and many a badly wounded soldier lay through the day in the tropical sun, without water, helpless against attacks from jiggers, soldier ants and infuriated bees.¹ Lettow-Vorbeck had no inkling that the British were on their way out and his men were alerted for a further

¹ Conductor Preston of the Royal Signals, when eventually removed to hospital, had 300 stings removed from his head. An officer of the Lancs, knocked out by a bullet in his face, was stung back to consciousness by bees and managed to get back to his ship.

onslaught upon them. General Aitken encouraged him in this belief by sending fake orders in clear over his ship's radio, and the Loyal North Lancs were sent into the bush from Ras Kasone to make a feint attack. The ruse succeeded. The Germans, in any case, were not ready to risk an advance towards Ras Kasone over comparatively open ground for they would then come under fire from *Fox* and the transport *Bharata*, upon which mountain guns had been positioned. They contented themselves with harassing the ships with machine gun fire until a few rounds from *Fox*'s six-inch guns silenced them, at least for a time. It was lucky for the British that shortly after high tide, when the transports could back away from the beach and get out of range, a heavy tropical down-pour swept along the shore, hiding them from view. By five o'clock on the afternoon of November 5, most of the unwounded soldiers had waded aboard the convoy, though it had been a mad scramble in most cases and few of the men were in their right ships. Last to come were the Loyal North Lancs and they could hardly be said to be in a cheerful mood, for on top of the orders for withdrawal, with which they did not agree, came a refusal to allow them to bring their machine guns with them; they were left behind on the beach.

That evening, on Aitken's orders, Captain Meinertzhagen boarded a tug, hoisted a white flag from the mast and chugged into Tanga harbour. He carried with him a letter addressed to the German Commander apologizing for the shelling of the German hospital and asking permission to remove the wounded, under flag of truce. He was taken to the German Hospital while the letter was delivered and 'whilst I was waiting . . . the German doctor called Deppe regaled me with old brandy and conversed freely about the war. And just outside the window were a few Germans lying among the trees sniping at the *Fox*.'

For the first time Lettow-Vorbeck realized that his victory was complete and that the British would not attack again. He could afford to be magnanimous. He agreed to observe a truce until 6 pm the following day, November 5, and said that the wounded could be evacuated on condition that they agreed not to serve again for the duration of the war. Meinertzhagen accepted the condition with the proviso that in the case of officers their agreement must be personally and voluntarily given. He then returned to report to General Aitken and made an arrangement to return the following morning with a staff which would supervise the evacuation.

From this moment on, there was nothing but politeness and courtesy on every side. It was hard to believe that a bloody and agonizing battle had been fought only a few hours before. One of the members of the evacuating team was Lieutenant (now Commander) Charlewood of the *Helmuth*, the captured German tug which had clashed with the *Königsberg* at Zanzibar. 'Several German officers came up and one of them addressed me in English,' he writes. 'He astonished us by inviting us to supper.' [The truce by this time had been extended from 6 pm to midnight.] 'We declined on the ground that we must get on with the job of evacuating the wounded, whereupon he retorted that the work would be easier if we waited for moonrise. This seemed sensible and as we were both ravenous we accepted. Of all supper parties in my experience that was the strangest. Some six Germans were present, and two RAMC captains brought the British total up to four. The food, which comprised soup, fish and steak, all out of tins, was well cooked and the conversation astonishingly bright. The Germans said they thought the war would soon be over because they expected the French to give in, and then of course it would be useless for Britain to continue the struggle. We expressed no opinion and refused to be drawn into a hypothetic argument. I recognized one of the Zanzibar Deutsch-Ostafrika officials, whose firm owned the *Helmuth*. "How is my little man-of-war getting on?" he asked me. "I fired at you the other night." To which I replied: "I know you did, and it may satisfy you to know that you ruined my greatcoat."'

Aitken had decided that it would be too risky to try to get away his stores which were littered over the beach at Ras Kasone. Dobbs, Quartermaster General to Expeditionary Force B, decided that it was his last duty to try to tabulate what was being left behind. While he was totting up, Meinerzhagen came upon him in the course of a tour of the battlefield which he was making with Captain Hammerstein, Lettow-Vorbeck's adjutant. 'I was shocked to see Dobbs, our Quartermaster General, on shore and unprotected by any flag of truce,' he wrote. 'Hammerstein also spotted him and asked me what the officer was doing on shore. I explained that it was a mistake and told Dobbs to get back on board at once or he would be taken prisoner. Hammerstein, with a shrug of his shoulder, remarked: "All right, let him go, but by rights he should be a prisoner. You English are really quite incomprehensible and appear to regard war as a sport."' At this moment a lighter full of troops from the

North Lincs came ashore close by and the men began to bathe about fifty yards away from them. Hammerstein turned to Meinertzhagen and said: 'Really, I must protest at this. If they do not go back at once I shall have to order my men to fire at them.'

Midnight came and still the convoy had not completed its preparations for withdrawal. Lettow-Vorbeck decided that he had given the enemy long enough. He sent a message to General Aitken to tell him that his two field pieces had now arrived from Moshi and that if the convoy did not go quickly he would be compelled to open fire.

The convoy, led by HMS *Fox*, got under way at 4.30 am on November 6, and their bitterness and humiliation sailed with them. Meinertzhagen drowned his sorrows in rum and hot water 'drunk from a bucket', and, in the circumstances, it seemed the best thing to do.¹

Expeditionary Force B left behind them, out of a force of 8,000 troops (which did not include African carriers), 800 dead, 500 wounded and several hundreds missing or prisoner. The German losses, out of 1,000 men, were fifteen Europeans and 54 askaris. Their gains were twelve machine guns, hundreds of rifles, 600,000 rounds of ammunition, and coats and blankets enough to last them for the rest of the war.

But their greatest gain, of course, was psychological. It is true that news of the defeat at Tanga was held back by the Censor from the public in both Britain and India for several months, and the Germans at home did not learn about it until the following January.² But the white citizens of the Colony heard about it and rejoiced and all their doubts and fears evaporated. Lettow-Vorbeck shipped the two European Companies back to Moshi (without, of course, their Commander, Tom von Prince, whose body had not been recovered) and they were given a heroes' welcome and bedecked with flowers by 'the cheering populace.' 'We were literally spoilt by the number of gifts sent us by private individuals,' he wrote. 'If one of my men travelled on the Northern Railway, on which in

¹ There was a pathetic footnote to the Expeditionary Force's misadventure. When the convoy arrived back in Mombasa, the European customs officers there refused to allow anyone ashore until they had paid dues on what stores still remained aboard.

² Kitchener, furious at the reverse, refused at first to allow any decorations to be awarded for the operation, though many an Indian in the 101st Grenadiers and many a soldier in the Loyal North Lincs had deserved them. Major-General Aitken was sacked, reduced to the rank of colonel, and put on half pay for the remainder of the war.

time of peace it was difficult to obtain a little food for love or money, he was now cared for by someone at almost every station. I remember when Freiherr von Schroetter returned to New Moshi, very famished, after carrying out some patrols . . . At Kahe the station guard offered him a second breakfast, at Lembeni the charming wife of the station master had baked him a cake, at Makany . . . until he finally had to wire ahead: "Please, no more food, I can't eat any more."

If there had been fears of a native uprising now that German East Africa was surrounded by her enemies, Tanga put an end to them. The Colony had demonstrated its strength, and it was strength that counted. One of the first results of the victory was a rush of native volunteers to join the Schutztruppe. Europeans too were flocking to the colours in even greater numbers.

Lettow-Vorbeck was everyone's hero, and even Governor Schnee now realized that he could no longer hope to influence him or continue to propagate his policy of defensive neutrality. On November 26 he agreed to let General von Wahle move troops into Dar es Salaam and defend the city should it be attacked.¹ He was just in time. On November 28, a British naval squadron, led by the battleship *Goliath*, arrived off the entrance to Dar es Salaam harbour and demanded that an inspection crew should be allowed inside to examine ships at anchor. The civil authorities automatically, as they had done previously, hoisted the white flag and bid them come in. But Lettow-Vorbeck was tired of what he called 'this endless screw' and he ordered his troops to fire on the British vessels. *Helmuth* was one of the British tugs inside when the firing began and one of the scows she was towing, with a number of Germans aboard, was hit. *Helmuth* herself was holed so badly that, according to Lieutenant Charlewood, by the time the carpenter had finished plugging her, she 'looked like a porcupine below the gunwale and a nutmeg grater above it'. The British got out fast, one of the commanders, Commander (later Captain) Henry Ritchie, subsequently being awarded a VC for escaping with his pinnace through murderous fire; he was hit eight times on the way.

That evening *Goliath* shelled Dar es Salaam with her twelve-inch guns, and though the fire was meant only for the harbour one of the shells hit the Government House at the

¹ Von Wahle, retired German Army Officer, had arrived in German East Africa to visit his son, a planter, and was trapped when war broke out. He agreed to serve under Lettow-Vorbeck.

precise moment when the Governor's representative, Methner, was asking his dinner guests to rise and drink 'to Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck—and victory!' Two days later Dar es Salaam was bombarded again and Government House completely destroyed. But by that time Methner, like many other citizens, was in the Army.

The war-fever which the Commander of the Schutztruppe had spent so much effort in stimulating was now rising to a patriotic fervour. Even the neutralists were behind him now. But while they celebrated and talked wildly of invading the enemies who ringed the Colony, Lettow-Vorbeck was doing some sober thinking. He was only too well aware that one victorious battle does not win a war, and that the British would not rest until Tanga was revenged.

Where would they come, when would they come, and how many would they bring with them this time?

CHAPTER FOUR

'Ako, Ako, Ako!'

FOR THE MOMENT, however, the British were in no position to do more than brush their own frontier districts clean of German patrols, and the forces they used for this purpose were not much more than the military equivalent of a feather duster. Expeditionary Force B was in disgrace and at least two-thirds of its man-power was classed as unreliable. General Aitken had been shipped home (where Kitchener refused to see him when he asked for an interview) and his successor, Wapshare, newly promoted to Major-General, was told by the War Office that he could expect no reinforcements in the near future and must content himself with purely defensive activities.¹ Relations between the Army and civilians in British East Africa were strained, and they were not improved by a song which was circulated in Nairobi and Mombasa clubs about this time which celebrated the humiliation of Tanga in verses which included these stanzas:

See them shortly landing
At the chosen spot,
Find the local climate
Just a trifle hot.
Foes unsympathetic,
Maxims on them train
Careful first by signal
Range to ascertain.

Ping, ping go the bullets,
Crash explode the shells,
Major General's worried
Thinks it just as well
Not to move too rashly
While he's in the dark.
What's the strength opposing?
Orders: Re-embark.

¹ Operations in East Africa were, from this time on, transferred from the India Office to the War Office.

Back to old Mombasa
Steams B Force again
Are these generals ruffled?
Not the smallest grain.
Martial regulations
Inform us day by day
They may have fozzled Tanga
But they've taken B.E.A.

It was a situation with which Lettow-Vorbeck, emerging from his own struggle to make a civilian administration face up to war, would probably have sympathised. The Governor of British East Africa, Sir Charles Belfield, chose this moment to make a speech in which he said: 'I wish to take this opportunity to make it abundantly clear that this colony has no interest in the present war except in so far as its unfortunate geographical position places it in such close proximity to German East Africa.' He gave the support of his administration against all efforts to curtail civil rights and usurp public services in favour of military priorities, and the soldiers were hard put to find space on the railway for the supplies they needed for operations.

General Wapshare was described by Meinertzhagen as 'a kindly old gentleman, nervous, physically unfit and devoid of military knowledge'. He maintained that he was now so terrified of Lettow-Vorbeck that 'the mention of his name at Mess sends him off into a shivering fit of apprehension'. Nevertheless, he did take some steps to improve military morale and tighten up civilian security. Meinertzhagen was put in charge of Intelligence for the whole of the colony and, in his first week in office, rounded up a nest of spies in Mombasa and had two of them (including a local judge's butler) shot before a firing squad. His military patrols uprooted the German encampments which had been established in the vicinity of the Uganda Railway and drove them back across their own frontiers, though this was not difficult; the Germans, short of water and ammunition, retired without fighting. 'Patrol activity was even more hampered by rhino than by Germans,' reported an officer of the King's African Rifles, operating in the teeming game parks around the Tsavo River. 'On one occasion a whole K.A.R. company was completely routed by a charge of three rhinos. Every carrier dropped his load and fled back to Mzima. The operation was abandoned.' Closer to the coast, Lettow-Vorbeck had pushed his troops into the

swamps and forests around the Majoreni and Uмба Rivers, and 5,000 inhabitants of the region had fled northwards. Wapshare decided to recapture this territory and thus demonstrate his determination to clear the whole of British territory of the enemy, and he despatched a force of 1,800 troops under Brigadier-General Tighe with instructions to sweep the frontier clean. There were no roads into the area and 5,500 carriers had to be employed to hunk supplies for the troops through some of the most pestilential country in Africa. The British force not only cleared the frontier region but also crossed the Uмба River and captured the German town of Jasin, which in peacetime had been the headquarters of a company making palm oil and harvesting sisal. There, on instructions from Nairobi, they halted and consolidated; or rather, they *planned* to consolidate. What they did instead was wither away from sickness and heat. For this was appalling country, infested with malarial mosquitoes and tsetse fly, and dank with heavy equatorial heat. Whole batches of men went down with fever and pack-animals sickened and died. Lettow-Vorbeck left them to rot there until the middle of January 1915, and then mounted an attack against them designed not so much to regain the territory he had lost as to remind the authorities that he was still there, that the Schutztruppe was still to be reckoned with, and that the reinforcements which were being withheld from Africa by the strategists in London would have to be sent in the end if he was to be put down.

He ringed Jasin with machine gun nests and field pieces and pushed his men forward through the matted growths of agave to within 200 yards of the town. At the outset his plan was all but knocked sideways by a sudden mutiny of the Arab Company of the Schutztruppe, who were to have led the assault. Lettow-Vorbeck had always made it a rule that his native troops be allowed to take their womenfolk with them, and these camp-followers moved with their men and waited just behind them while they were in action, ready to tend their wounds, cook their meals, and provide other encouragements of a more emotional nature. (Many of the European officers brought native 'wives' along with them, too.) The Arab Company had a camp following not of women but of young men, and Lettow-Vorbeck had no objection to this either. ('With these simple people, whose predilection for their ancient traditions and customs is further confirmed by Islam,' he wrote, 'and who are besides very proud and vain, it is particularly difficult to interfere with such customs.')

But the approach to Jasin was through such parlous terrain, and the need to conserve supplies so great, that he had reluctantly decided that the Arabs should go without their 'boys' on this particular sortie. The Arabs immediately demanded their discharge from the force, and when this was refused they waited until hostilities began, fired their guns uselessly into the air, and bolted. They were shot down by the troops behind them.

The strength of the garrison at Jasin may have been depleted by sickness, but it was well defended. 'Towards noon,' Lettow-Vorbeck wrote, 'the fighting had everywhere become stationary before the strong defence of the enemy. We had, as a matter of fact, no means of making a sufficient impression on them, and even our field guns, which we placed in position at two hundred yards, produced no decisive effect.'

Had the German commander made a mistake in choosing to fight in such conditions? For a time it seemed to be so. The heat was insupportable. There was no water, and the only means of quenching thirst was to shake coconuts down from the palm trees and drink their juice. Between the Schutztruppe and the British garrison was an open creek, dry and sandy, upon which the Indian machine gunners in Jasin directed a murderous fire at all attempts to cross it. 'From a distance of five hundred yards,' said Lettow-Vorbeck, 'the bullets fell close to us, and the spurts of sand they threw up made correction easy. The sand was so deep and the heat so great that one could only run, or even walk quickly, for a few paces at a time. Most of the time we had to walk slowly across the open and bear the unpleasant fire as best we could. Fortunately, it did no serious harm, although one bullet through my hat and another through my arm showed that it was well meant.'

For two days, the Germans attacked and were each time beaten back. Casualties were mounting. Lettow-Vorbeck's adjutant, Hammerstein, had gone down with a bullet in the abdomen as he was walking beside his commandant. (He died in agony a few hours later.) Lettow-Vorbeck was urged by his officers to withdraw from what seemed a hopeless battle. 'But the thought of the unpleasant situation of the enemy,' he said, 'shut up in his works, without water, and having to carry on all the occupations of everyday existence in a confined space, in a burning sun and under hostile fire, made it appear that if we only held on with determination we might yet achieve success.'

At dawn on January 19, he attacked again. Inside Jasin the

four companies defending the garrison were running short of ammunition and were out of water. The senior officer, Colonel Raghbir Singh, had been killed and the two British officers left in the battle, Captains Hanson and Turner, were having difficulty controlling their troops. They did not know that Brigadier-General Tighe had organized a force on the other side of the Umba River and was racing to their rescue. 'About 7 am,' reports the Official History, 'with his ammunition exhausted and seeing no signs of relief, Captain Hanson decided that the defence could be maintained no longer. The white flag was hoisted.'

When Tighe's rescue force arrived an hour later, they were met by German field gun fire. Jasin had fallen. Four companies of Indian troops had surrendered. Seven hundred dead lay bloating in the sun. And Lettow-Vorbeck's troops were once more celebrating a victory against a superior enemy. It was yet another occasion when he could afford to be magnanimous with the enemy. He paraded the Indian prisoners before him and praised them for their conduct in battle and then sent for Captains Hanson and Turner. To them he offered his congratulations on their bravery, returned their arms to them, and released them on parole on condition that they took no further part in the war. He entertained them to dinner that evening and, despite a bullet wound in his arm, he was in a jovial mood. He had good reason to be. He had a telegram in his pocket from the Kaiser in Berlin congratulating him on his victory at Tanga, news of which had just reached Germany after two months. He had again reminded the British, in a manner which hurt, that his was a force to be reckoned with and that no piecemeal effort would quell him.

Now would the British send to East Africa the vast army he was trying to draw away from the battlefields in Europe? Had he provoked them at last?

Not yet. 'We heard last night that Jasin Post surrendered to the enemy yesterday,' wrote Meinertzhagen in his diary, 'after expending all their ammunition . . . Sheppard [Chief of Staff] took a most gloomy view of it all and lost all sense of proportion. He had magnified it into a disastrous reverse and had so worked on Wapshare's nerves that they go about as if we had lost the war. It is pathetic seeing two responsible soldiers in such prostration. Wappy wanders around murmuring that the War Office will now recall him.'

What the War Office did, instead, was to send a strong

denunciation, signed by Kitchener, of Wapshare's tactics in having gone into Jasin at all.

'You are entirely mistaken,' wrote Kitchener, 'to suppose that offensive operations are necessary. The experience at Jasin shows you are not well informed of the strength of the enemy. You should concentrate your forces and give up risky expeditions in East Africa, where we cannot reinforce you sufficiently to be sure of success.'

Meinertzhagen commented: 'Kitchener wired to say we were being too venturesome. Too venturesome! Lord, how I laugh. The sight of a German would send Wappy running into the next continent.'

But still, Lettow-Vorbeck had not achieved his object. His attack on Jasin had been a calculated risk with one aim in mind—to make the enemy heavily reinforce. He could not afford many more such ventures, for though this one had been successful, it had been expensive both in men and ammunition. 'Such losses as we had suffered could only be born in exceptional cases,' he wrote. 'We had to economize our forces to last out a long war. Of the regular officers, five had been killed and one, Captain von Hammerstein, had died of his wounds. The loss of these professional soldiers—one-seventh of the regular officers present—could not be replaced. The expenditure of 200,000 rounds of ammunition also proved that with the means at my disposal I could at most fight three more actions of this nature. The need to strike great blows only quite exceptionally . . . was evidently imperative.'

But where and when? And how could he obtain the reinforcements in men and munitions which would put such power into his punches that the British would at last be provoked into serious and mighty retaliation?

For the first time since the outbreak of war, the German authorities decided that they would lend a hand.

By this time the name of Lettow-Vorbeck was on everybody's lips in Germany. The news of his fantastic victory at Tanga had been well publicized in the Press and his exploits in a distant and exotic outpost of the German Empire did much to bolster civilian morale at a time when news from the Western Front was depressing. Public opinion demanded that the hero should be helped. 'A German David is fighting alone against the British Goliath in Africa,' said a member of the Reichstag in a rush of purple prose, 'and it behoves the Fatherland to ensure that his gallant struggle shall not be lost

for lack of the encouragement to sustain him. If we cannot fight by his side, at least we must make sure that he is well supplied with shot for his sling.'

But reinforcing East Africa from Germany was by this time all but impossible. The Royal Navy had fenced off the North Sea with the cruisers, destroyers, whalers and armed trawlers of the 10th Cruiser Squadron, and the blockade was tight and effective. 'The activities of the 10th Cruiser Squadron,' wrote Admiral Jellicoe, 'were daily increasing, and the number of ships passing the blockade line unexamined was small. During one week in February [1915] sixty-seven vessels were intercepted, and eighteen of them sent in with prize crews aboard.' Nevertheless, the Germans decided that an attempt must be made to bring succour to Africa, and February was the time when it seemed most likely to succeed and when a ship could well take advantage of mist, fog, rain and snow to steal through the gaps in the fence with which they were ringed. Accordingly, a message was sent in code, relayed by the radios of German ships on the high seas, to Captain Max Loeff, commander of the cruiser *Königsberg*. The *Königsberg* (as the British had by now discovered) had, after sinking *Pegasus* in Zanzibar, taken refuge among the swamps of the Rufiji River, south of Dar es Salaam, in waters too shallow for deep-draught British ships to reach her. But she herself could not hope to emerge from her hiding place until the advent of the high spring tides in April, and if she was to make a dash for it then, would need coal for her bunkers.

The message to Loeff of *Königsberg* ran: *'For your eyes and those of von Lettow only. Supply ship is on her way to you. Should arrive before spring tides and will signal her approach by pre-arranged code. Bringing 1,600 tons of bunker coal and rifles munitions supplies for von Lettow. Inform Army Commander. Also convey to him His Majesty's warm congratulations on his victory at Tanga.'*

This ship chosen to run the British blockade was the 1,600-ton merchantman *Rubens*. She was by origin a British ship and had been captured at Hamburg when war broke out. The Germans painted the name *Kronberg* on her sides and provided her with papers giving her nationality as Danish and her home port Copenhagen. Her crew were all volunteers and she was captained by Lieutenant Christiansen of the Imperial German Navy.

The *Rubens* sailed from Hamburg on February 19, 1915, a date which, from Lettow-Vorbeck's point of view, could

not have been more propitious, for on that day he had taken Jasin. She was fortunate in the weather, for gales were running in the North Sea and visibility was obscured by squalls of snow and sleet. Lieutenant Christiansen decided to take a risk and turned his ship away from Iceland, near which the British might guess a blockade runner would attempt to run, and sent her South of Sumburgh Head, between the Shetlands and the Orkneys. His gamble paid off and he was not seen, nor was he intercepted or his presence suspected by Allied cruisers in the Atlantic. Steaming wide of the Cape of Good Hope, the *Rubens* sailed into the Indian Ocean and reached Aldabra Island, less than 600 miles from the Rufiji River, on 9 April, and that was the day when she made her first mistake. Lieutenant Christiansen had no means of knowing whether the *Königsberg* was, in fact, going to risk breaking out of the Rufiji now that the spring tides were running; he did not know, either, that a British naval squadron was patrolling outside the river mouth, ready to pounce if the *Königsberg* came out. But if the German cruiser did make the attempt she must know that the *Rubens* was on the way to a rendezvous with her. Christiansen decided that the time had come to break radio silence and he sent out a message in code as the merchantman came up through the Mozambique Channel. The message was picked up by a French radio station on Madagascar and the alert was given. It was realized for the first time that a blockade runner was in the region and that she must be on her way to join the *Königsberg*, for her message began with the letters: AKO AKO AKO, which was known to be *Königsberg's* call sign. But where was she? Two days later, radio silence was broken again and this time the signals were more distinct.

Admiral Sir Herbert King-Hall, who had taken command of the British cruiser squadron off East Africa, had a problem on his hands. If the *Königsberg* was going to make her escape from the Rufiji River, now was the time, when there was water to float and manoeuvre in; and if the British Navy were to bring her to battle, now was the time to keep a patrol constantly on the watch outside the delta. It was certainly not the moment to go off chasing a blockade runner.

It was finally decided that one ship of the patrol, the cruiser *Hyacinth*, would be detached and sent to chase the enemy merchantman. A good guess was that she was probably making either for Tanga harbour, or, if that was not feasible, the shores of Manza Bay, which were land-locked and had good beaches and excellent anchorage. Admiral King-

Hall accordingly transferred his command to *Hyacinth* and the cruiser sailed north from the Rufiji, taking care not to be seen from the coast, where Lettow-Vorbeck had established a chain of watch-stations whose flags flew by day and fires burned by night to warn anyone on shore or at sea of the presence of enemy craft. At dawn on 14 April *Hyacinth* sighted the shape of a strange ship between her and the shore.

It was *Rubens*. She had penetrated the two greatest sea-blockades of the war and was now within a few miles of her goal. Lieutenant Christiansen had decided that it was too dangerous to wait any longer for a rendezvous with the *Königsberg* at sea and that his most profitable plan was to reach shore as soon as possible and unload his precious cargo. He was making for Tanga when the first salvo of shells splashed ahead of him. He turned at once toward Manza Bay and ran hard for the shelter of its headland. *Hyacinth* gave chase. There seemed no possible doubt of the outcome. *Hyacinth* had the speed to catch her up, and her guns could demolish her long before she reached the shore. At which moment the luck which had ridden on the *Ruben's* shoulder for 10,000 miles alighted there again and rode with her to the shore.

'The Captain [of *Hyacinth*] had just ordered an increase of speed,' reported Admiral King-Hall, 'when crash went the starboard engine which instantly snapped.' A connection between the piston and connecting rod had collapsed and put the starboard engine out of action, and narrowly missed blowing up as it did so. King-Hall added:

'So with the port engine only we limped along like a wounded animal after our prize, who rapidly increased her distance between us.'

Hyacinth went on firing with her bow guns but the shells were poorly directed and except for one hit, they fell short and wide. The *Rubens* slipped around the corner and through the entrance to Manza Bay. By the time *Hyacinth* groaned and grunted around the corner and stood off the headland, the *Rubens* had run herself ashore and opened her seacocks. She was ablaze over the whole of her deck, and that should have aroused the suspicion of the gunners aboard *Hyacinth*, but they were too pleased with the sight of the blaze to wonder how it happened. (Lieutenant Christiansen had covered his decks with wood and other inflammable materials and set fire to them the moment he had been shelled by the British cruiser.) King-Hall watched through glasses as the

crew of the *Rubens* launched their boats and escaped through the surf to the shore, and then ordered a boarding party to go to the blockade runner and see whether her fires could be doused and the ship refloated. They were fired upon from the mangrove swamps as they came in, and although this fire was quickly quelled by shrapnel shells from *Hyacinth*, it may well be that fears of its renewal made the examination that followed perfunctory. The boarding party reached the bridge of the *Rubens* and seized a number of charts and other papers, but reported that the fire was beyond control and the ship could not be refloated. They returned to the cruiser, which at once opened fire on the *Rubens* at close range, ripping open her sides and sending her further down into the water. Should he now go in and finish her off? King-Hall said afterwards that he did not do so for fear of mines, but that could hardly have been a hazard since the *Rubens* had made the passage unscathed and the Germans had no means of mining harbours, let alone lonely bays. What is more likely is that he was afraid of the *Königsberg*. If she had slipped out of the Rufiji and escaped to sea he was vulnerable indeed, hanging around with one engine out of action. At all events, he sent off a signal to the Admiralty reporting that the *Rubens* had been trapped and destroyed and, the moment his starboard engine was repaired, made southwards again to rejoin his squadron off the Rufiji. All was quiet and the *Königsberg* still hid in her jungle redoubt. King-Hall hazarded the opinion not only that the blockade runner was written off but that her cargo had been lost too and 'though no doubt guns and rifles might be saved, there would be little or no ammunition left for them.'

He was disastrously wrong in believing that. In the next few weeks, hordes of native labourers swarmed over the stranded blockade runner (whose deck fires were soon extinguished) salvaging her cargo. Aboard, in addition to the bunker coal, were 1,800 rifles, four and a half million rounds of small arms ammunition, two six-centimetre guns, four machine guns, 1,000 rounds of 4.1 gun ammunition, 6,500 other shells, one ton of explosive, 200 tents and telegraph and telephone material. It is true that much of this material was damaged by seawater, but Lettow-Vorbeck ordered the ammunition broken up and painstakingly remade it into new cartridges and it provided him, at a vital moment in his preparations, with the additions to his armoury which he so badly needed.

But very shortly now he was to receive even more valuable reinforcements from the *Königsberg* herself.

The German cruiser had holed up in the back creeks of the Rufiji Delta shortly after her successful foray against Zanzibar in September 1914, but it had taken the British a long time to convince themselves that she was really there. This reluctance was excusable in the circumstances prevailing. It must be remembered that these were the days before aircraft reconnaissance had been developed—although aircraft did play their part, as will be seen—and the Navy had to rely upon what could be observed from the water or from spies operating inside enemy territory. From the sea the view of the Rufiji Delta was unrewarding. It was a series of eight separate waterways which debouched into the Indian Ocean over a distance of some twenty-five miles, the banks fringed with mangrove swamps or thick forest, the channels blocked by sandbars which made navigation treacherous or impossible. Just behind the delta the rivers were joined by a network of streams which turned the whole basin into a confusing maze of waterways. The largest of the Rufiji rivers was the Simba Uranga, but little was known about navigation through her waters. It is true that *Chatham*, when she boarded the German merchantman *Präsident* at Lindi had come away with a chart which gave more up-to-date information about the Simba Uranga than the Admiralty charts with which she was provided, but it seemed hard to believe that this was a navigable waterway for anything other than a small coastal vessel. At high tide there was only fifteen feet of water while still four miles out from the shore, and natural hazards had been increased by artificial ones. Marked on the *Präsident's* chart was a white house on the shore from which a line had to be taken to find the channel upstream—but the Germans had levelled this house and rebuilt another further along the bank, so that a ship taking a line on it would run straight on to the shoals.

Could the *Königsberg* really be hidden in such a sweating and pestilential place as the Rufiji soon proved to be? It was not only a navigational officer's nightmare—it was also stickily hot and unhealthy and so plagued with insects that even out to sea the sailors, rubbing their stings, christened it Skeeter's Creek, or, when they sniffed the foetid air, Bog's End. It was not until the end of October 1914 that some definite information came into the possession of the Navy. A shore party was dispatched from *Chatham* and landed on the

headland by night at the mouth of the Simba Uranga, from which point they trekked inland until they struck a village. Here they put a gun to the temple of the headman and forced him and two of his men to return with them. Back aboard *Chatham*, the three natives were plied with food and ship's rum and were soon ready to talk. They not only confirmed that the *Königsberg* was hiding up the Simba Uranga but that she had the supply ship *Somali* and two other smaller vessels with her. Moreover, the approaches to the river itself were heavily manned by German fieldposts and machine gun nests, well hidden in the mangrove swamps.

Some days later, when the spring tides were at their highest for that time of the year, *Chatham* came in as close to shore as she dared and a lookout man on the masthead spotted first one pair of ship's masts and then another peeping through the jungle. The *Königsberg* had been sighted at last. Not that it brought her destruction very much nearer. The nearest *Chatham* could get into the shore was two miles even at high tide. From that point the *Königsberg* was 14,800 yards distance over the trees. The range of *Chatham's* guns was 14,500 yards. The captain shifted his ballast and brought his port deck down so that it listed at five degrees to give his guns more range, and opened fire at once, guided by his lookout on the mast. But still the shells fell short.

On 7 November, *Chatham* came close to Simba Uranga again and renewed her barrage, and this time she set the German supply ship *Somali* ablaze. But the *Königsberg* had retreated even further into her green cave, had covered her masts with palm fronds, and could no longer be seen from the masthead. The commander of *Chatham* retired to Zanzibar and wired the War Office with a request that troops should be sent to join him, and that the attack on the German cruiser should be made a combined land and sea operation. He could hardly have chosen a worse moment for his request, for the debacle in Tanga was just taking place. The troops he needed (and they were the only ones available) could hardly be provided from the sorry force of beaten warriors wending their way back to Mombasa. The request was passed on to Wapshare in Nairobi, who replied:

'After conference with SNO (Senior Naval Officer) I am most decidedly of the opinion that the project of cutting out the *Königsberg* from the sea is impracticable from a military point of view for the following reasons. The ship is 12 to 15 miles up the river. The delta is most intricate with many islands and swamps, and with roads known only to

the enemy. There is sea water right up to her—drinking water is only obtainable from wells, situation unknown, which could easily be damaged. It would be impossible to bring water to the troops on boats from the ships, owing to difficult water channels. The climate is very bad. The foreshore is strongly held with many maxims and Q.F. guns, whilst, owing to the reefs, the warships cannot materially support a landing; and surprise is impossible. The water approaches may be mined, and the whole area is covered by the *Königsberg's* guns. The operations would probably last a considerable time, and the Germans can be heavily reinforced from the Central Railway in four or five days . . . I consider that were this proposal to cut the *Königsberg* out attempted, it would probably end in failure, if not worse; and the bad effect of this, considering the present state of feeling among the Arab and Mohammedan population, can hardly be estimated.'

Wappy, as Meinertzhagen might have put it, was ringing his withers again.

But the tides were getting higher; and now she knew she had been spotted, the *Königsberg* might still decide that her only hope was to make a run for it to the sea. A series of worried conferences followed in Zanzibar. It was eventually decided that, for the time being, there was only one thing to do—sink a blockship in the Simba Uranga channel in such a way that the German cruiser could no longer get out no matter what the state of the water. The old merchantman *Newbridge* was chosen for the job and towed to the Rufiji, laden down with rubble and explosive. Escorted by a tug, the *Duplex*, armed with a couple of 3-pounder guns, she was dragged up the muddy main channel under a curtain of concentrated fire from the shore; and there put down in the central channel. It was a supremely hazardous and dangerous expedition and the volunteers who manned it did not expect to return. They not only got back but lost only two, killed during their tricky operation; and it was not their fault that the *Newbridge*, at the highest spring tides, did not quite block big-ship navigation back to sea.

There the operations against the *Königsberg* came to a halt for the time being. On New Year's Day 1915 the cruiser *Weymouth* took over from *Chatham* on patrol outside the Rufiji Delta and sent a radio message in clear to the *Königsberg*:

'We wish you a happy new year and hope to see you soon.'

To which the *Königsberg* replied:

'Thanks for your message. If you wish to see us we are always at home.'

Why the *Königsberg* did not take advantage of the lull to escape from her hiding place is one of the great mysteries of the East African campaign. She had aboard her pilots expert in the ways of the Simba Urunga River who could, if not very easily, have guided Captain Loeff past the sunken *Newbridge*, and there were suitable tides. It is true that the Royal Navy was waiting for her just out to sea from the coast, but for the next few weeks the blockade of the Rufiji was carried out by only one British cruiser, *Weymouth*, with the tug *Helmuth* anchored closer inshore to keep watch for her; and against such opposition she would have had at least an even chance of getting away. It is also true that she was short of coal, but she could have replenished her bunkers from the coal brought in by the *Rubens* had she wished. At one period, in fact, Lettow-Vorbeck signalled Captain Loeff offering him a train of porters to bring the fuel to his anchorage and urged him to make a dash for it. The offer was refused.

So all through the heavy spring rains of 1915, the *Königsberg* stayed on in what Lettow-Vorbeck called 'the cemetery at Rufiji'. He wrote about this time: 'It is a waste of both manpower and seapower that the last of the German cruisers should allow herself to be immured in the jungle when she should be fighting for the Fatherland on the high seas. I have need of the men who must spend their time guarding her and the guns they keep for this purely static operation.' But Captain Loeff was determined to sweat it out. He kept his men fighting trim by daily drills and spit-and-polish routines about the ship, and his vigilance was never once relaxed, and for a region which was a breeding ground for mosquitoes, his casualties from sickness were light. (Four men died from malaria and two from swamp fever; a seventh lost his leg to a crocodile while painting over side and died soon afterwards.)

His reluctance to run played into the Admiralty's hands. Up the Rufiji or out on the ocean, the *Königsberg* remained a menace to be reckoned with so long as she remained afloat, and they were determined to sink her. But how? Towards the end of April, a new plan was formulated and it required for its success the cooperation of two different arms of war which had not hitherto been used in combination. The Royal Navy had already occupied the German-owned island of Mafia, opposite the Rufiji Delta, and from it a number of seaplanes of the Royal Navy Air Service had been out on opera-

tions over the delta, without, so far, much success. The first plane used was a home-built affair manned by its builder, a flying enthusiast named Cutler; but it was such a frail contraption of laths and wire that it never flew very high. It eventually collapsed into the Simba Uranga and its pilot was taken prisoner by the Germans. There followed two old seaplanes whose floats peeled in the heat. (When they were more effectively sealed, they filled so dangerously with hot air that they exploded and had to be fitted with exhaust pipes.) Attempts to fit these planes with 50-pound bombs with which it was hoped to bombard the *Königsberg* failed, for under their weight the planes failed to rise more than a few feet off the water.

More planes were sent out, but these, it was decided, would be used not for bombing but for reconnaissance. At the same time, two monitors, HMS *Severn* and HMS *Mersey*, were armed with six-inch guns and towed by tugs from Malta through the Red Sea to Mafia Island. Their draft was so shallow (they drew only four feet nine inches when fully loaded) that they could easily move up the Simba Uranga at most tides; and the plan was to get them close enough to be within easy range of the *Königsberg* and then direct their fire on the German with the aid of spotters in the air.

On Sunday, April 25, 1915, a seaplane piloted by Lieutenant Cull with a rating, Able Seaman Boggis, as his observer, was lowered over the side of the auxiliary ship *Laconia* and took off for a trip inland. She gained a height of 1,200 feet but failed to hold it and came down to 700 feet. From this height, all the time under fire from German defence posts in the mangrove swamps, she got close enough to the *Königsberg* for Boggis to take a perfect shot of the cruiser, though all he was using was a hand-camera which he manipulated while hanging out of his cockpit. The photograph was brought back with some difficulty, for a German rifle bullet had torn away the air-intake in the plane, but when developed it proved to be just what was needed. It was a panoramic view of the inner reaches of the river and there, pin-pointed exactly, was the *Königsberg*. It was on the basis of this photograph that subsequent actions were taken.

Severn moved into the river just before dawn on July 5, 1915, followed by *Mersey*. They were harassed by shell and machine gun fire on the way from the hidden German posts in the swamps, but they were protected with plating and sandbags and they sustained little damage. *Severn* anchored in a

position behind one of the Delta islands about, according to the chart with which she had been provided, 10,800 yards from the *Königsberg*. *Mersey* positioned herself 200 yards astern. Lieutenant Cull had meanwhile taken off from Mafia Island and he signalled by radio to the monitors at 6.17 am that he was ready to begin spotting.

So the battle (a curious, vicarious one for those times) began. The monitors could not see the *Königsberg*, for a heavily forested island intervened, and exact positions could only be corrected by information from the air. The *Königsberg* could not see the monitors, but had established forward observation posts in the trees and mangrove swamps. It was the *Königsberg* who got in the first shots; they straddled *Severn* and piled her decks with a debris of dead fish. Fifteen minutes later she scored a direct hit on *Mersey*, knocking out her forward gun and killing her gun crew of four, plus four others, including an observer in her conning tower. In the duel which followed through the rest of that day the monitors between them fired 635 shells, but received corrections on their firing from the air-spotters for only 78 of their shots, and scored only one important hit, which knocked out one of the *Königsberg's* forward guns. They retired to refit and land their dead and wounded. The close shots from the German cruiser had shaken their plating loose and they were taking water badly.

On July 11 they came up the river again. Just before noon, with their eighth salvo, they scored a direct hit on the *Königsberg's* forecastle. Thereafter, corrected by Lieutenant Cull in his spotter plane, they made hit after hit. Cull's plane had meanwhile been caught in the shell-fire and one of its two engines tore loose, but as he manhandled his craft down towards the water, Cull and his observer, Sub-Lieut C. V. Arnold, continued to give directions until their view was obscured by treetops and they crashed into the water.¹ One by one, the *Königsberg's* guns went out of action. At 12.52 there was a gigantic explosion and clouds of smoke rose up through the jungle. At 1.40 pm seven more explosions were seen.

'The doomed ship,' as the Official History puts it, 'was now clearly near her end, but before closing the *Severn* continued to fire where she was for nearly an hour . . . By 2.20 the target was a blazing wreck, blazing from stem to stern. The monitors were now recalled by the Admiral, and so ended

¹ Cull made his way back to the shore, but his observer was drowned on the way.

the last of the German cruisers on the high seas. For eight months she had defied all the efforts we were able to spare for her destruction, and had fought gamely to the last. Inglorious as had been her career as a commerce raider, her end redeemed her honour, and the survivors of her crew went on to swell the local defence force.'

They did indeed. The 322 members of her crew immediately volunteered for service with the Schutztruppe, but they were far from being the most valuable addition to Lettow-Vorbeck's forces. He was also able to manhandle the *Königsberg's* guns ashore and distribute them to his forces. By August, 1915, he had ten 4.1 inch and two 3.5 inch guns from the German cruiser ready to operate with his troops, and this 'priceless acquisition', as the Admiralty called it, was to prove a devastating addition to his striking power. The *Königsberg* may not have reached the sea, but she had certainly not died in vain.

As a footnote to the *Königsberg* affair, it seems appropriate to mention here another reason why Captain Loeff may have been so reluctant to take his ship to sea. He had formed a close friendship and understanding with Governor Schnee which may, or may not, have stemmed from the fact that both of them were jealous of Lettow-Vorbeck's achievements. Governor Schnee pointed out to Loeff that should he be forced to remain ashore he would be the most senior officer in German East Africa and therefore superior to the Commandant of the Schutztruppe. Just before the final battle against the *Königsberg* began, he sounded out the Colonial Ministry in Berlin as to the possibility of putting Loeff in supreme command (but naturally, under himself) in the event of his remaining in Africa.

He never received a reply. Though he had involved Captain Loeff in his intrigues, it must be pointed out that it was done without this officer's consent; and later in the campaign, senior officer though he still was, he willingly fought under Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck's command; as, of course, another senior officer, General Wahle, had done from the outbreak of war.

CHAPTER FIVE

War in the Bush

ALL THROUGH the spring and summer of 1915, Lettow-Vorbeck's patrols swarmed like gadflies over the flanks of British East Africa, and there was little that the British could do for the moment but groan and scratch their stings. 'After careful consideration of the circumstances,' cabled the War Office to Wapshare, 'it is considered for the moment that you should adopt a definitely defensive attitude along the Anglo-German frontier from the Lake to the sea, keeping your forces concentrated at suitable points to enable you to act as required . . . Secretary of State desires you to understand that with calls all over the world it is not practicable to meet requirements of East Africa at present, and that you must therefore bide your time.'

This was the period when the German commander came into his own and was able to prosecute the type of warfare which he had learned from the Hottentots in the hard school of the South West African deserts.

His main target, as always, was the Uganda Railway, which brought food and supplies from the port of Mombasa to Nairobi and the hinterland. He organized his troops into small bands of raiders and sent them off, two Europeans and eight askaris at a time, to pillage, destroy and plunder. They hid in the wooded slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro and sallied forth, northwards through the desert, eastwards through the bush, and since it was largely *terra incognita* for Europeans at that time their forays were a test for their fortitude as well as their guerrilla skill. 'I had to teach the Europeans that it was possible, in these waterless wastes, to drink their own urine to quench their thirst,' he wrote. 'It was a bad business when anyone fell ill or was wounded; with the best will in the world it was impossible to bring him along. To carry a severely wounded man from the Uganda Railway to the German camps, as was occasionally done, was a tremendous performance.' He gave orders that it was to stop. A wounded man was relieved of his gun and ammunition, shot through the head, and left to the lions, hyenas or the vultures.

The patrols made use of the telephone equipment which had been captured at Tanga to tap in on the British lines, and then they waited for hostile detachments or ox-wagons to pass. 'From their ambush they opened fire on the enemy at thirty yards range, captured prisoners and booty, and then disappeared again into the boundless desert. Thus, at that time, we captured rifles, ammunition and war material of all kinds.'

Between March and May, 1915, thirty-two trains and nine bridges were blown up by the German raiding parties. 'I am travelling up this evening by rail with [Brigadier General] Tighe, who takes over from Wappy,'¹ wrote Meinertzhagen in his diary on April 7, 'and we had a general talk this evening on offensives and things we might do, but just before turning in there was a loud explosion near Tsavo Station, many bumps, Tighe and I were thrown violently together and bullets splattered through the carriage. I had a rifle with me and was out into the black night at once, firing at enemy flashes in the bush. It lasted but a minute or two. I was furious and tried to follow the enemy, but it was quite hopeless for I appeared to be the only soldier on the train with a rifle. Tighe followed with a thick stick, vowing vengeance on any German he met and using real foul words about Teutons, but alas we met ne'er a soul and we retired to the wrecked engine, bleeding driver and fireman and the front bogey off the rails.'

From an observation post in the Erok Mountains the Germans spied on a British camp for several days and noticed that their horses were sent for water at a certain time each evening. A mounted patrol was dispatched down to the plain and closed around the British encampment. Six of the patrol of ten men rode back with their horses while the four others crept past the enemy sentries and positioned themselves around the water-place. When an English soldier appeared with horses that evening two Germans rose from behind a screen

¹ Major General Wapshare was posted to the Persian Gulf on April 5, 1915. Meinertzhagen wrote: 'He excelled himself on his way down to the coast. Near Athi station he spied some cock ostriches from the train, pulled the communication cord and in the presence of a train loaded with passengers disembarked, lay down on the veldt quite unembarrassed and proceeded to bombard the ostriches, securing a cock and a hen. And all this in a game reserve! . . . Some twenty passengers assisted him in dragging the two huge birds back to the train, where they were loaded into the goods van where Wappy sat for the rest of the trip plucking them.'

of thorn-bush and covered him, while the other saddled and mounted four of the horses and drove off the others, fifty-seven in all. 'This capture,' reported Lettow-Vorbeck, 'increased by a number of other horses and mules we had picked up, enabled us to form a second mounted company. We now had two mounted companies, composed of askari and European mixed, an organization which proved successful. They provided us with the means of sweeping the extensive desert north of Kilimanjaro with strong patrols who went out for several days at a time; they penetrated even as far as the Uganda and Magad railways, destroyed bridges, surprised guards posted on railways, mined the permanent way and carried out raids of all kinds on the land communications between the railways and the enemy's camps. In these enterprises our own people did not get off scot free. One patrol had brilliantly surprised two companies of Indians by rifle fire, but had then lost their horses, which had been left behind in hiding, by the fire of the enemy; they had to make their way back across the desert on foot, which took four days, and they had no food. Luckily they found milk and cattle in a Masai kraal, and later on saved themselves from starvation by killing an elephant.'

These brilliantly timed and executed raids had the effect of paralyzing rather than galvanizing the British, and the omnipresent enemy patrols, who stole in by night and cut men's throats while they slept, reduced the outlying garrisons to a state of nerves which, as might be imagined, aroused Meinertzhagen to fits of contemptuous fury, which grew side by side with his respect for Lettow-Vorbeck's stealthy and cunning strategy. He alone, though admiring the German commander's skill, refused to accept his omnipotence; and it was largely due to the activities of this comparatively junior officer rather than to the supine command under which he served that any countermeasures were put into being at all.

It will have been seen from the quotations which have already been given from his diary that Meinertzhagen was far from being either an orthodox soldier or a boot-licking one. He suffered fools badly and he considered that the High Command in East Africa was full of them. As his name indicates, he was of German extraction (he came from a family of bankers who originated in Hamburg), and he had shattered his father when, after leaving Harrow, he had announced that he preferred a military career to one in the city. Rarely has a man been more fitted for the profession of his choice.

Lawrence of Arabia, with whom he was to campaign later in the War, wrote of him:

'Meinertzhagen, a student of migrating birds drifted into soldiering, whose hot immoral hatred of the enemy expressed itself as readily in trickery as in violence . . . Meinertzhagen knew no half-measures. He was logical, an idealist of the deepest, and so possessed by his convictions that he was willing to harness evil to the chariot of good. He was a strategist, a geographer and a silent, laughing masterful man; who took as blithe a pleasure in deceiving the enemy (or his friend) by some unscrupulous jest as in spattering the brains of a cornered mob of Germans one by one with his African knopkierie. His instincts were abetted by an immensely powerful body and a savage brain, which chose the best way for its purpose, unhampered by doubt or habit.'¹

Lawrence's description of his attitude was accurate enough. Despite his background, he was passionately pro-British and strongly anti-German; though his patriotism did not, in fact, blind him to the great military qualities of the Germans against whom he was fighting; rather the opposite.² He had campaigned in East Africa in the early 1900's and knew how to fend for himself in the bush, and his early experiences had taught him to admire the skill with which the Germans trained and led their native troops. His experiences on the North West Frontiers of India, however, had soured his regard for Indian troops and he despised them for the lack of martial qualities which they displayed in Africa.

After the debacle at Tanga he had been given permission by the War Office to organize a corps of Intelligence units, mostly Swahili Moslems, whom he sent into enemy territory sometimes as individual spies and other times as fighting patrols. The organization was known as the DPM and its agents filtered back information through a series of 'post offices' maintained by Greeks, Portuguese and other neutrals in the German settlements. 'I . . . found that the contents of German officers' latrines were a constant source of filthy though accurate information,' he reported, 'as odd pieces of paper containing messages, notes on enciphering and decoding and private letters were often used where lavatory paper did not exist . . . By June 1915 I had collected, through captured

¹ T. E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*.

² One of the ironies of the Battle of Tanga is that a bullet fired by this 'German' Briton may well have killed Tom von Prince, the 'British' German leader of Lettow-Vorbeck's European companies.

documents and DPM, the signatures and occupations of almost every German employed in German East. These were reproduced and distributed to every officer, so that when a paper with a signature came into their hands they would know who it was and what his job was.¹

Meinertzhagen and his DPM was the only British organization which Lettow-Vorbeck feared in those days, and he was constantly warning his troops to be on the look-out for 'this ubiquitous Englishman,' and he added: 'It is a pity he is not on our side. He would prove invaluable.' By the same token, Meinertzhagen always referred to the German commander as 'the great von Lettow, I wish I could meet him. He is a first-rate soldier.' But he added:

'On the other hand, he is not half so valuable to the German cause as some of our own officers. Up to the present one would never suspect a war was being waged in the colony. Apathy is general.' This was a comparatively mild comment compared with some of his individual criticisms of his High Command. A few weeks after General Tighe had taken over command, he was writing:

'Alas and alack, Tighe has been drinking much more than is good for him, with the result that he is now fast in the clutches of gout and liver . . . I gave him some quite good advice, begging him for the sake of the campaign to pull himself together and exert a little self-restraint. But it is difficult for a junior staff officer to really take his general and shake him into sobriety.' And again, during a boat trip to Kisumu, on Lake Victoria: 'Tighe's gout has made him unapproachable. His irritability, if it were not so tragic, would be too ludicrous. Last night . . . he turned to me and said: "Why is the propeller reversing?" "It isn't, we are going full speed ahead," I said. His retort amazed me. "If I say the ship is going back, it's going back; send for the Captain. . . ." Tighe then blazed up and said: "If the bloody ship isn't going backwards I'll eat my boots and what's more, if I say she's in reverse she jolly well is in reverse, so just get that. . . ." On his way to the cabin, he suddenly said: "What's that smell of burning?" I said it was the ship's crew's supper being cooked. "Can't you smell that the ship is on fire, send for the Captain." So off I went to find Blencoe. "The ship's on fire," says Tighe. "No," says Blencoe, "it's the suppers being cooked." Tighe blazed up again. "Who's the best judge of whether the ship's on fire or not, you or me? I'm in

¹ *Army Diary*

command and if I say the ship's on fire, it jolly well is and damn you all."

Yet on this occasion, Meinertzhagen added: 'Poor Tighe, a most delightful man, great charm . . . It is really a crying matter, for he is such a good man. I felt nearer to tucking him up in bed and kissing him.'

On the other hand, he could write of Belfield, the British Governor: 'When snobbery and jobbery are wedded they make an ugly mixture which one does not expect to find steeping the character of the Governor of a British Colony. Even Portuguese Governors are not as bad as Belfield.' And of the situation: 'Bovine stupidity or chicken-hearted cowardice characterizes our officers . . . It is no longer a question of invading German East Africa or of even undertaking minor operations. We have lost the initiative and are on the defensive, the natural outcome of our stagnation policy.'

He set himself the task of stirring up the enemy and paying back Lettow-Vorbeck with some of his own hit-and-run tactics. On May 18 he led an armed patrol of his DPM agents into the Tsavo Desert beyond Mzima and blazed into a fury when he found the British post there unguarded, no sentries, ringed by a thorn fence too high to see over and too thick to fire through. The Indian officer in command was washing himself in a pool in which he counted twenty-eight hippos, five of them dead and floating bloated in the stagnant water. The Indian officer said he had shot them for target practice and got a roasting from the furious Meinertzhagen.

The patrol went on towards the tracks of the Uganda Railway, where Meinertzhagen noticed that the giraffes, ostrich, impala and zebra with which the plain was dotted were looking disturbed. He ordered his men to drop to the ground and crawl forward in the direction in which the game was looking. After thirty minutes, they sighted a party of eight Germans and askaris squatted under a baobab tree, and opened fire at 150 yards. Five were hit and three scrambled around the back of the baobab tree, only to be caught in the rear. Two more men fell and the last came out holding up his hands. The party had explosives and were on their way to blow up the railway.

A few days later 'I countered the activity of the German patrols near Kasigau by sending out a party who shot birds and beasts and then laid them round the only pool in the neighbourhood as though they had all died of poison. I also labelled the pool "poison", which of course it was not as our men found the pool useful, but every week they went out and

rearranged the wild birds and beasts which are supposed to have drunk of the poisoned water . . . This simple ruse has kept enemy patrols from using the well and it has rendered some eighty miles of railway absolutely secure from attack.'

His tactics were labelled 'damned ungentlemanly' by the brass-hats at High Command and Lettow-Vorbeck dispatched a protest to Nairobi against 'this breach of international law.' Meinertzhagen shrugged his shoulders. 'It may be an offence to poison water,' he said, 'but surely there is nothing wrong in labelling water as poisoned when it is not so treated.'

'Action, that is what we want out here, action,' he kept saying. He was delighted when he succeeded in persuading Tighe to attempt a minor offensive on Lake Victoria Nyanza against the German garrison at Bukoba. The War Office gave their consent to the attack 'on the strict understanding that nothing should be undertaken which would lead to subsequent complications—as had happened at Jasin.' Bukoba was a well-fortified German garrison town on the lake with about 1,500 officers and askaris within three days' march of it. The British assault force, under Brigadier J. M. Stewart, numbered 1,600 men with two field guns and twelve machine guns, and they embarked aboard a flotilla of small ships at Kisumu on June 20, 1915. Meinertzhagen was sent along as General Tighe's personal representative.

'We came, we saw, we conquered and did what Julius Caesar never did—crashed the wireless station,' he wrote in his diary. But even successes were never without their imperfections from Meinertzhagen's point of view, and he was soon damning Stewart for his 'stupidity' and criticizing Jourdain, commander of the Loyal North Lancs, the spearhead troops, who was 'shaking like a blancmange, terrified of casualties and thought he had the whole German Army opposed to him . . . Nothing would move him so I told him I would have to recommend Stewart to remove him from command; he fumed and asked me who was commanding the battalion. I told him I would if he did not get on. More fuming, so I sent a helio message to Stewart telling him the Lancs were not being opposed but were anchored owing to the incompetence of their commander. Jourdain then got a peremptory order to advance or hand over to me. He advanced.'

Bukoba was eventually taken by the Royal Fusiliers on June 22. Their advance into the fort was held up for a time by a German sniper, hidden waist-deep in the swamp, who picked them off with his high-powered rifle as they tried to cross open ground. Fifty guns were turned on him but all of

them missed. In the end, Meinertzhagen waded into the swamp with a Mannlicher held high above his head and shot the sniper in the back of the head from a hundred yards away. By the time he had got back ashore, cleaned off the mud and leeches and changed his clothes, the Fusiliers had hauled down the German flag and hoisted the Union Jack. To Meinertzhagen's disgust, their commanding officer then allowed them to loot the place, and it was a shambles of drunken and licentious soldiery, bedecked in German helmets and women's underclothes and chasing the terrified native women. He stormed around belabouring them back to sobriety with his stick.

That evening the ammunition magazine beneath Bukoba fort was blown up, and so were the two pet pelicans which had been attached to the garrison and now refused to leave it. The molested women were compensated with gifts of food. Sixty-seven captured rifles and 32,000 rounds of ammunition were loaded aboard the ships (though a German fieldgun was lost while being rafted across the lake) and the town, ruined and now all but deserted, was evacuated. Except for fifteen dead, the Germans had got away into the bush, and the only sound to be heard as the last men pulled away was a tame German parrot perched on the shoulder of a Fusiliers officer, screaming: '*Ach, du Schwein, ach du Schwein!*'

The Official History described the sacking of Bukoba as having made 'a considerable and valuable impression on the native population. Though not far-reaching, the success of this well-planned operation, gained at such a slight cost in casualties (we lost seven killed, 25 wounded), did much to restore and revive the morale of the British forces.'

They certainly needed a boost. They were wasting away from sickness and lack of fighting spirit.¹ The name of Lettow-Vorbeck had become as known and feared among them as was Rommel's in a later war; and while they hung around, sweating and on the defensive, he seemed to be everywhere, and they were worn out with futility chasing him. This was a time, especially when the moon waxed in September, that his patrols were busiest and every night there was a raid: on an encampment, on a railway line, or on a passing train. There were now few locomotives left in British East Africa which did not bear the scars of enemy explosives. So aggressive had Lettow-Vorbeck's activities become that the rumour spread among the British that he was preparing an

¹ Just before the Bukoba operation, every single officer and man of the Loyal North Lancs reported sick with fever.

invasion of the Protectorate and the capture of the port of Mombasa. This was a gross exaggeration of his military potential and he was, in fact, simply furthering his policy of harrying the enemy and *forcing* them to bring more troops to the Colony to fight him; but the alarm was raised and the Town Guards of Mombasa were roused from their beds and called out to dig fortifications around the harbour. Even Governor Belfield and his civilian administration seemed to have realized that it was time to put the Protectorate on some kind of a war basis, and a form of universal military service was in process of formulation. In the meantime, Nairobi swarmed with volunteers anxious to get into the war, and not the least spectacular ornament to the scene was a unit of the Legion of Frontiersmen which had arrived from England and included in its ranks such outlandish persons as Mac-Millan, an American millionaire nearly seven feet high and twenty stone, F. C. Selous, the famous hunter, Cherry Kearton, the bird photographer, a general from Honduras and several ex-members of the French Foreign Legion. They were a rip-roaring bunch of eager sharpshooters and had grandiose plans for riding into German East Africa and bringing back Lettow-Vorbeck, dead or alive. Unfortunately, it had been discovered when they arrived in the Protectorate that most of them had never fired a British musketry course and they were still under training in Nairobi when they were dragged off for the Bukoba operation. Neither these nor the locally-raised volunteers were sufficient to satisfy General Tighe's need for reinforcements, and he cabled a cry from the heart to the War Office asking for men. The British Commander now knew that the Germans had strengthened their armaments and munitions from the blockade-runner *Rubens*, and news that the Schutztruppe had weighted their punch with the big guns from the *Königsberg* was an additional blow. Added to this was a rumour (which turned out to be premature) that a second blockade-runner had got through to Lettow-Vorbeck. Tighe began to have alarmist (and quite false) ideas about the Schutztruppe's strength.

'If this is true,' he wired, referring to the rumour of a second blockade-runner, 'it radically alters the whole situation. The Germans have an unlimited recruiting area. Evidently the two store-ships were expected, and recruits have been trained in anticipation of arms being available. The Germans may therefore now have 20,000 reliable troops un-

der arms and may be equally superior to ourselves in field-guns and machine guns; but for the last three weeks Mbuyuni and Taveta have been so strongly picqueted that I have been unable to obtain any information about enemy movements there. Owing to ever increasing sickness among my European and Indian troops my reliable infantry now totals 4,000 men, of whom not more than 3,000 can be concentrated in the Maktau and Mzima lines. Should the enemy make a determined advance on those two lines, the situation will be serious.'

This telegram was acknowledged but never actually replied to, for the High Command was too deeply involved in the offensive on the Western Front and the setbacks in the Dardanelles to worry about East Africa for the moment. In the meantime, Lettow-Vorbeck went on with preparations for what, he believed now more than ever, was going to be a long war. It is true that, as Tighe reported, he was busily recruiting, but the troops he could handle were always restricted by the amount of guns and bullets with which he could provide them, and his strength was not much more this time than 1,500 Europeans and 8,000 askari (though it soon increased to 3,000 Europeans and 11,000 askari). Half of these were equipped with 1871 type rifles. His principal concern was to keep the British across the frontier unpleasantly aware of him without, for the moment, wasting too much ammunition; and, at the same time, build up his resources for the major struggle which he was convinced would face him in the end.

He was, during this period, engaged in making his presence felt not only in British territory but also throughout German East Africa. He had acquired two motor cars for himself and his staff, and though he still continued to reconnoitre by bicycle and horse, the internal combustion engine considerably increased his range.

'The Commando has just been to visit us,' wrote Major Kraut, who was soon to prove one of his most redoubtable assistants. 'He is a veritable demon for work. He seems never to sleep. He has seen that my area of command [from Mount Kilimanjaro to the frontier] will inevitably become the cockpit of this war for the Colony, and he has promised us everything that we need. He asked me what I most needed and I said, "Boots, beer and whisky. Our boots are in a terrible state but not so terrible as the feet we put into them. The spines from the thorn trees and the agave plants slice through our soles like needles through fat, and we are in painful need

of new footwear." He said, "I will get you boots if I have to kill every cow in German East. But what is this about beer and whisky?" I explained that the nights in the *pori* were cold and that it stimulated the askaris if they had *temba*, their native beer, to celebrate in victory and solace them in setback, and that we Europeans needed something against the evening chill. "Well then," he said, "I must become a brewer and a distiller as well."

Kraut added: 'He told me that he had received a complaint from the British commander that we had been using a German woman in our patrols, and that she had been guilty of the most appalling cruelty against the native prisoners who had fallen into our hands. I replied that the only German woman we had seen was one who had delivered us some sausages she had made for us in New Moshi, and that the only cruelty was that some of the prisoners had smelled the delicious odour from them as she distributed them among our Europeans without having the opportunity to taste them themselves.'

But if the British had their Belfield, so had Lettow-Vorbeck his Schnee. Governor Schnee was still not reconciled to a Colony completely integrated for war, nor was he willing to relax his overall control over the operations of the Schutztruppe. On October 23, 1915, Lettow-Vorbeck sent an order for a field company of the Schutztruppe stationed in Lindi, in the south where all was quiet for the moment, to be sent to join his forces. The order was rescinded by the Governor, on the grounds that they were needed to preserve order. In a fury, Lettow-Vorbeck telegraphed to him:

'The situation on my West Front is really serious, and it is necessary to employ all available troops at spots threatened by superior enemy forces. Everything possible must be done to establish such proportion of strength as would be most favourable for us. In no circumstances must the 20th Company remain in Lindi for protection against dangers which exist only in the district commissioner's imagination. I therefore reiterate my urgent request for the 20th Company to be put at my disposal. Should your Excellency be unable to share my opinion, I request a formal order stating the explicit refusal, in spite of my arguments, because I am unable to supply His Majesty with solid reasons for such a grave mistake as the holding back of the Lindi Company in present circumstances.'

Lettow-Vorbeck's implied threat to make a direct approach

to the Emperor did not shake Governor Schnee. He wired back:

'Despite your arguments maintain my order to leave 20th Company in Lindi District and emphatically refuse suggested employment. Situation in south unchanged. Limit your measures to defensive actions. Wire why you consider your planned occupation of Russisi left bank necessary for this purpose, since it is of little value politically.'

Lettow-Vorbeck replied that he was not engaged in politics but in war, and that he wanted the left bank of the Russisi River for military purposes. But it was no good. The Lindi Company was ordered to stand firm.

What was to be done? The Schutztruppe commander decided that there was only one thing to do, and that was to make good his threat and appeal to the Kaiser. On December 31, 1915, he took what was, for a comparatively junior officer, a bold move of writing him direct.

'Most respectfully I report to your Royal and Imperial Highness as follows,' he wrote. 'On the 4th of August 1914 the Governor issued the order not to offer any resistance in the town and port of Dar es Salaam, and on the 8th of August to surrender the town to the enemy without a fight. The execution of this order was out of the question because a landing of enemy forces did not take place. On the 15th of August 1914 the Governor also ordered that in the event of the enemy occupying other coastal towns no military resistance was to be offered. When I objected in accordance with para. 2c of the Schutztruppe regulations, on the grounds that this would constitute a transgression of paras. 58, 62, and 63 of the Military Penal Code, the Governor refuted me. It was therefore necessary to conduct warfare in the Tangá area between the 2nd and 5th November 1914 against the Governor's explicit order. Subsequently the Governor changed his views with regard to coast towns, giving permission on 26th of November 1914 to offer resistance in Dar es Salaam, and on 10th February 1915 also to offer resistance in the other coastal towns. My repeatedly expressed objections to the Governor's interference with the conduct of the war have been ignored. Therefore efficient warfare cannot be carried on, particularly as the Schutztruppe regulations are based on different premises and do not take into account action against an exterior enemy. Because of the risk of this report falling into enemy hands I cannot mention any details. Signed, Lettow-Vorbeck.'

The hands this letter fell into were not the enemy's but

those of Governor Schnee, who immediately sat down and wrote the Kaiser a letter of his own. He opened with a heated defence of his policy of non-belligerence, and went on:

'If the Schutztruppe Commander achieved at Tanga a success considered completely impossible by all other military experts, and if he has, in fact, almost without artillery, and exposed to the fire of the enemy's naval guns, dealt a decisive blow to far superior enemy forces, so this must be considered an outstanding feat of arms by which he has earned the Colony's gratitude. The risk however was in the opinion of myself and many others very great. A failure in this instance would have been disastrous for the Colony. As for the rest, I have left the Commander a free hand in the conduct of the war, apart from two exceptions . . . Because of the risk of a native uprising, I have forbidden the Commander to denude of troops those areas of the colony, politically and economically important, inhabited by strong groups of unreliable natives. If in addition to the war we also had an uprising of the natives on our hands, our position would become untenable. Excellent soldier though he is, the Commander does not have a balanced judgment as regards the natives. Despite the serious uprisings of the past (which proved exceedingly difficult to put down using the whole of the Schutztruppe) the Commander seems to leave this danger out of his considerations altogether.'

He ended: 'His successful defence of the Colony proves that the misgivings of the Commander with regard to my instructions lack justification. I shall also in future leave the Commander—to whom I am linked by the common goal of holding on to the Colony—a free hand in the conduct of the war, so long as political factors or native problems do not compel me to take appropriate measures.'

And he added, nastily: 'I should also like to point out most respectfully that my views regarding the present situation are fully shared by the *Senior* officer of the East Africa Corps, Naval Captain Loeff (commander of the *Königsberg*.) Signed, Schnee.'¹

As it turned out, these letters did not reach Berlin until the end of August 1916, and were never shown to the Kaiser. Instead, the Military Department of the Colonial Office sent back its own comments, and, from Lettow-Vorbeck's point of view, it is a pity that they were so delayed, for they put Governor Schnee firmly in his place. 'The Governor should not have issued orders which hampered the conduct of the

¹ German Colonial Ministry Records.

war,' wrote the Colonial Ministry. 'The attachment to completely outdated defence plans shows in the clearest possible way the misjudgment of the situation by the Governor, who lacks the background of military training.'

It added: 'The correctness of Colonel von Lettow's views has been confirmed by the success at Tanga and the cancellation of the Governor's instructions, which he recognized as inopportune . . . We may say that the playing off of a naval captain against the Commander of the Schutztruppe appears highly inappropriate.'

But this came later, and meanwhile the wrangling continued. Governor Schnee had now moved his capital from Morogoro to Tabora, whence he continued to insist that his principal responsibility was to preserve peace among the natives and the welfare of the white civilian population. These, he said, must have priority over all other needs.

'I must ask again,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck, in a note to him in December, 'that you should co-ordinate civilian activity with the needs of my troops. My men have need of food and clothes, and they have shoes which must be soled. They are fighting and dying in the *pori* without even the necessities to make life tolerable, and even if the civilians in the towns go short I must insist that they be given their vital supplies. I must ask you in future to see that all buffalo hides coming into the towns must be reserved for military use, and that frivolous waste by civilians must be severely punished.'

Schnee resisted this appeal for some time. 'I must do nothing to upset the social equilibrium,' he replied. 'I cannot afford to have a native revolt on my hands.'

Lettow-Vorbeck commented later: 'It is true that some little time elapsed before the authorities complied with the urgent and inevitable demands of the troops in an adequate manner, and, in particular, before they placed at our disposal the buffalo-hides necessary for making shoe-leather.'

But finally, Schnee came to heel, to the extent that he recognized a limited priority for the Schutztruppe; but limited is the word.

'The first boots made in any quantity,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck, 'were turned out in Tanga. Although at first their shape needed improving, they at any rate protected the feet of our white and black troops when marching and patrolling in the thorn bush of the *pori*.'

He raced around, much to Schnee's indignation, arranging for other substitutes for the supplies which no longer came in from Europe. Cotton cloth had almost disappeared from

the markets. 'We had seriously to think of starting manufactures ourselves,' he wrote, 'in order to convert the abundant raw material into finished products. A curious existence now developed, reminding one of the industry of the Swiss Family Robinson. Cotton fields existed in plenty. Popular books were hunted up giving information about the forgotten arts of spinning and weaving; white and black women took to spinning by hand; at the missions and in private workshops spinning wheels and looms were built. In this manner, and in a short time, the first useful piece of cloth was produced. After various trials the most suitable dye was obtained from the root of a tree called Ndaa, which imparted a brownish-yellow colour, very inconspicuous in both grass and in the bush, and therefore specially suitable for uniforms.'

The German civilian population, heartened by the victories at Tanga and along the frontiers with British East Africa, was at last rising to the challenge, and their native ingenuity was stimulated by the shortages which faced them. The word *ersatz* crept into the language, and the substitutes they invented were ingenious. Tyres for motor cars and bicycles were at first produced by tapping rubber trees direct on to rope and then kneaded in to the right thickness, though later, when it was discovered that there were 30,000 pounds of sulphur in the colony, as well as plenty of saltpetre and charcoal, rubber was vulcanized in the normal way. Benzine, paraffin and gas were made from copra, and the benzine—called trebol—was found to be adequate for the few cars at Lettow-Vorbeck's disposal. Candles were made out of tallow and wax, and home-made soap from either animal fat or coconut oil. And at the Amani Biological Institute at Usambara the chemists were soon turning out enough quinine for the whole of the white population, cocoa, chocolate, rubber hose, castor oil and even rubber nipples for feeding bottles. Factories were opened to make nails, and ropes, string and bags were produced from pineapple, sisal, palm leaves and tree-bark. In Dar es Salaam a factory was opened to make ammunition, and at Morogoro tobacco, cigars and cigarettes were made from locally grown tobacco. Nor did the German commander forget the 'whisky'. A distillery was started at Morogoro which was soon producing rum and a potent brew remotely resembling Scotch, which was 98 proof and was henceforth issued to the troops as part of the ration.

All this was done with Governor Schnee's co-operation so long as the substitute products were intended mainly for the civilian population, but he fought hard to prevent Lettow-Vor-

beck from cornering most of the supplies for his troops. He demanded a signed chit for every pound of material turned over to the Schutztruppe, and at first insisted that the Army should pay for its transportation on the railways. He still insisted that Lettow-Vorbeck was his subordinate, under his command, and constantly called him to account.

The Schutztruppe Commander cherished the words of one of his military mentors, von Moltke, who wrote: 'Unhappy is the Commander of troops who has over him a supervisor who demands, every hour and every day, an account of his projects, plans and intentions,' and devoutly wished that he had Bismarck there to say to him, as he had to von Wissmann: 'You are thousands of miles away. Stand on your own feet. I give you again only one order: Victory.'

Amid all these preparations, news came to hearten him and convince him that his struggles were, after all, not going to be in vain. The Germans in East Africa were certainly cut off all but completely from their homeland (Lettow-Vorbeck had only just received a letter from his sister telling him his brother had been killed on the Western Front in 1914) but their service of information from the British Protectorate was good. They already knew that the British were building a railway from Voi, a station on the Uganda Railway, to Maktau on the frontier facing Kilimanjaro, and this had given them hope.

'The construction of this military line,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck, 'proved that an attack with large forces was in preparation and that it was to be directed against this part of the Kilimanjaro country.'

Now came news from spies in Nairobi that 'General Botha was coming to the East African theatre from South Africa with 15,000 Boers.' The German commander's reaction to this was: 'It was important to encourage the enemy in his intention, in order that the South Africans should really come, and that in the greatest possible strength and thus be diverted from other and more important theatres of war. With the greatest energy, therefore, we continued our enterprises against the Uganda Railway.'

Alongside the new line from Voi to Maktau was a pipeline with which it was intended to water the troops and their supply animals once a move was made. This was a natural target for Lettow-Vorbeck's troops and rarely a night passed that one of his patrols did not cut the pipe or put a bullet through it. The most spectacular act of sabotage was performed by a quartet of Germans and six askari who rode up into the Bura Hills to the dam from which the water was pumped, and took

tea with the British guard on the pretext that they were an advance party of Boers surveying the situation. Tea over, they tied the Briton to his chair and laid dynamite charges around the pumps. One of the Germans was injured by the explosions and the rest were captured on their way back to the German lines; but General Tighe's plan to execute them by firing squad, on the grounds that their stratagem was an act of espionage, was vetoed by the War Office and they were eventually treated as ordinary prisoners of war. The waterworks were out of commission for three weeks.

Any act of belligerence on the part of the British was welcome now to the German commander, and he was considerably encouraged by the appearance of the first British warplanes over his troops. The askaris were machine-gunned and Moshi was bombed, and the natives, who had never seen a flying machine before, panicked at the wrath which *Munga* (God) was raining down on their heads. But their confidence was restored when rifle fire brought down one of the machines and the wrath of God was seen to be made of feeble cloth and wood. To Lettow-Vorbeck the bombing was further proof that East Africa, whether they liked it or not, was becoming a major war-front for Britain.

He redoubled his patrol activities, built up his supplies, and waited eagerly for the great offensive.

It was true that the British were now anxious to rid themselves of the turbulent Lettow-Vorbeck. He had plagued them enough and they were anxious for his demise. But exactly how to do it was still not entirely clear. A summary of the situation prepared by Lieut-General Sir Archibald Murray for the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, advocated an offensive 'in order to render our position permanently secure and to restore our damaged prestige in that theatre of war', and added that 10,000 men would be necessary to carry it out. The Belgians, who were operating out of the Congo, proposed that the British should make a large naval demonstration against Dar es Salaam, while they pushed up from the west. A sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence was called together to examine the situation and on November 12, 1915 it recommended:

(1) That steps should be taken 'to ensure the conquest of this German colony with as little delay as possible';

(2) that, accepting the general figure of 10,000 already suggested by the C.I.G.S. for the reinforcements necessary, a new

Army Brigade should be sent to East Africa to make up two complete brigades which, with others already arranged for, would bring the total to 12,600;

(3) that an adequate staff for the large numbers involved should be furnished from England.

Where were the troops to come from? The Union of South Africa had signified its willingness, as long ago as August 1915, to raise a force by recruitment and send it north to East Africa. The sub-committee recorded its opinion that 'since the transport of troops must take time and the rains in the area affected would begin about April, it was desirable to move the Union Government to proffer further assistance to make sure of success during the few weeks available.'¹

The British Government decided to accept these proposals and General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien was selected to command a new expeditionary force in East Africa. He asked for heavy reinforcements in men, heavy guns, aircraft and transport vehicles and mapped out a plan of campaign which was to include an assault on the German forces holding the Kili-manjaro area together with a landing at Dar es Salaam and an advance on the enemy's rear. When Lord Kitchener saw the plan he was enraged. In a formal minute of dissent, he stressed his own knowledge of the East African terrain and all its difficulties and characterized the plan as 'a dangerous project in the present state of the war, when we require to concentrate all our efforts on defeating the Germans in Europe'. But he was overruled. Smith-Dorrien sailed for East Africa by way of the Cape on December 18, 1915. On the voyage he went down with pneumonia but recovered sufficiently to confer with the South Africans in Capetown about the reinforcements he needed. Shortly after his arrival in Mombasa he was taken ill again, and though he stayed on for some weeks eventually he was invalided back to England.

The Government rattled their brains hard about what they should do next. They knew that the bulk of the troops now earmarked for the East African campaign would eventually come from South Africa, but they did not particularly wish them to be commanded by a South African, since it was thought by some of the quaint influences in the War Office that a Colonial (and a Boer, at that) would be likely to prove lacking in the refinements of command. But there was nothing else for it. It was decided to ask General Botha to take over.

But this was no good, either. General Botha was engaged in

¹ Official History: *op. cit.*

an election campaign, and his influence would be needed among the Boers at home (still sullen and suspicious of the British) if a climate was to be created suitable for a recruiting campaign which would send their brothers and sons to fight for the British Empire overseas. In any case, he was a sick man.

So his brother Boer-in-arms was approached instead. On February 6, 1916, it was announced that Lieut-General Jan C. Smuts had been appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Army in East Africa. He sailed from Capetown for Mombasa on February 12, and on that day, as if to demonstrate to the great South African leader what lay in store for him, Lettow-Vorbeck once more struck back at the British forces with devastating effect.

The first of the South African reinforcements had arrived in Nairobi on New Year's Day, 1916. They consisted of a mounted brigade under the command of Brigadier-General van Deventer. Most of them were Boers and many of them, like van Deventer, had fought against Britain in the South African War.¹ They were a rough, tough and confident body of men, convinced that so far the war in East Africa had been fought between 'a bunch of coolies and kaffirs', as they described the Indian and African troops, and that their arrival would ensure the conquest of the German colony in the space of a few weeks. Meinertzhagen wrote: 'I tried to explain to them that they had not the slightest idea of climatic and health conditions, neither had any of them any experience of fighting in thick bush. I told them I thought that perhaps two years might finish the campaign. They smiled and told me I did not understand the Boer.'

They were eager to get into battle against the Germans, and they were speedily given the opportunity. Lettow-Vorbeck's troops still held the British East African town of Taveta and, just beyond it, a steep, bush-covered mountain called Salaita² which looked down like a sentinel upon the Serengeti Plain. The British railway and water pipeline from Voi towards the frontier had, by this time, reached to within three miles of Salaita but could obviously not proceed further until the enemy was pushed off the heights. This Major-General Tighe, with the approval of the War Office, decided to do in order to present General Smuts upon his arrival with a gate-

¹ Van Deventer found it difficult to speak above a whisper owing to a wound in the throat from a British bullet.

² Known to the Germans as Oldorobo Mountain.

way already half open into German East Africa. He gave the command of the operation to Brigadier-General Malleson and assigned to him the newly-arrived South African Mounted Brigade and the 1st East African Infantry Brigade (consisting of the 2nd Loyal North Lancers, and 2nd Rhodesia Battalion and 130th Baluchis). In strength they consisted of 6,000 men with 18 field guns and 41 machine guns. The enemy which faced them consisted of 900 men and two light guns.

The attack was launched at 8 am on the morning of February 12, 1916, and it was short, sharp and disastrous. The South African Brigade was to assault the German entrenchments from the flank while the East African Brigade held a line in front, the object being to hold the enemy firm in case they tried to break out under the South African attack. But the plan never got that far.

The preliminary bombardment of the German positions was directed at a line of trenches cut into the hillside which had been sighted and marked by British reconnaissance planes operating from the Serengeti Plain. But what the reconnaissance did not reveal was that the trenches were dummies, and that the Germans were actually positioned in dug-outs and bomas well-hidden in the thick bush. The South Africans made heavy weather of their advance, even before fighting began. They were not used to hacking their way through thick bush. They were overcome by the heat. They were soon exhausted and ravaged by thirst. In a terrain which provided ample opportunity for cover, they failed to take advantage of it, and soon came under fire from the two German field-pieces, which picked out targets with careful exactitude, since they were short of shells and had no shrapnel.

A thousand yards from the German front positions, they came under heavy machine-gun fire and wavered and turned back. Their retreat was covered by field gun batteries and machine-gun fire from the North Lancers (who must, by this time, have been getting used to this kind of behaviour by soldiers on their flanks), and desperate efforts were made to round up the South Africans and get them back into the fighting. But by this time, the Germans had moved into a counter-attack. They launched a bayonet charge on the 130th Baluchis and added to the confusion by stampeding their transport mules; but the Baluchis held firm and refused all offers of help from the Rhodesian Regiment fighting beside them. In the meantime, however, the bewildered and unhappy South Africans had been shaken further by a series of close quarter attacks upon them from three sides. Major Kraut, the

German Commander, had sent his men in with the bayonet, and the wave upon wave of shrieking black men who suddenly descended upon them completed the rout. They turned tail and ran for it, leaving their guns behind them.

The Baluchis and the Rhodesian Regiment were still holding their line, and the Lancs had even made some ground. But with their flank wide open owing to the rout of the South Africans, it was obviously hopeless for them to stay where they were. The retreat was sounded and the force withdrew down the hill back into the Serengeti Plain. They left behind them 132 South Africans dead. Despite the fierce fighting, none of the other troops sustained any casualties at all except scratches, bruises and superficial cuts.

Next day the Baluchis sent a message to the Commander of the Rhodesian Regiment, saying: 'We, the officers, rank and file of the 130th Baluchis, having come to know this morning from our officer Commanding that all the officers, rank and file of your Regiment requested heartily to the G.O.C. for leave to go to our help when we were surrounded by the enemies; pay our best and hearty thanks for this sympathetic kindness and militarism. We hope for the future that we will all fight side by side to each other. We pray to our Heavenly Father for the victory of our Government.'

To the South African Brigade they sent a different kind of message. Bundles were delivered by mule, and when opened they were found to contain the machine guns which the South Africans had left behind. The Baluchis had picked them up before retreating. Attached to the bundles was a note saying:

'With the compliments of the 130th Baluchis. May we request that you do not any longer refer to our sepoys as coolies.'

The Official History comments on the operation: 'Attributable fundamentally to an unduly optimistic plan, the repulse at Salaita was undoubtedly a setback to the revived morale of the British forces, and in its effect on that of the German askaris its results were even more serious. Its lessons were, however, salutary . . . It gave the South Africans their first experience of bush fighting . . . impressing upon [them] a much-needed realization of the formidable qualities alike of Indian troops and well-led askari whom there had been at first a tendency to regard as "only native troops".'

Mount Kilimanjaro was still in German hands. The gateway to German East Africa was still closed. And General Smuts, reading the news of the defeat while still at sea, was reinforced in his view that he faced a formidable and dangerous enemy. He landed at Mombasa on February 19, 1916, and

four days later cabled the War Office recommending the opening of an immediate all-out offensive against Lettow-Vorbeck's forces. Two days later he received sanction to go ahead.

There were by now 27,350 British, South African, Indian and African combat troops waiting to come under his command, with 71 guns and 123 machine guns to back them.

He would need many, many more before he was finished with Lettow-Vorbeck.

CHAPTER SIX

KILIMANJARO

THE TIME HAD COME, Governor Schnee decided, to heal the breach between himself and the commander of the Schutztruppe. Most of his prognostications about the fate of German East Africa once war began had failed to come true. The natives whose ferocious revolt he had feared had either flocked to the colours or were working for the war effort in the factories or on the farms. The destruction of the coastal towns by the guns of the Royal Navy had, except for two desultory bombardments of Dar es Salaam, been avoided. The white population, after its initial panic, had not only recovered its spirits but had been stimulated into high moral fervour both by the isolation of the Colony and by the example of the troops fighting so successfully the enemy which surrounded it; and far from talking any longer about 'neutrality' the mood of the populace was both enthusiastic and belligerent. Those who continued to preach caution were apt to be thought dangerously defeatist, and Schnee was anxious to demonstrate that he was no longer to be numbered among them.

He chose as the moment for his public rapprochement with Lettow-Vorbeck the Kaiser's Birthday on January 27, 1916, and for the occasion travelled specially from his temporary capital at Tabora to Dar es Salaam, where he took the salute before a ceremonial parade of a detachment of the Schutztruppe. Lettow-Vorbeck was not on the platform beside him, for he was too busy making preparations for forthcoming operations in the Kilimanjaro area, but Schnee sent him a copy by dispatch-rider of the speech which he made to the troops after the parade was over. In view of what had gone on between these two men in the past eighteen months, his verbal amends were handsome.

'The troops in German East Africa,' the Governor said, 'have shown themselves in no way inferior to their German brothers at home. In heroic struggles at Tanga, Jasin and in the Rufiji Delta, and at many places along the frontiers of our colony, they have not only prevented the enemy from setting foot in our protectorate but have also caused him serious

losses in his own territory, especially by frequent mining of the Uganda Railway. It is only we who have experienced the dangers and pitfalls of the climate of our low-lying and swampy districts, we who know the waterless areas and trackless zones of dense thorn-bushes, which many of our detachments and patrols have frequently to cross, who can fully realize the extraordinary performances of our brave troops. By heroic advances against a numerically superior enemy, by their steadfastness in holding out at important posts, by the cheerful endurance of the greatest physical exertions and of the ills and trials due to the climate, the heroes of the protectorate troops and the navy have raised for themselves a memorial which will endure for all time in the colony.'

He added: 'We are still in the middle of the conflict. We must reckon on the enemy bringing stronger forces for the attack on our protectorate. We can nevertheless look with confidence to the future. We are stronger than we were at the beginning of the war, both as regards the perfection of our organization and the strength of our forces on land, and also owing to the arrival of reinforcements from the Imperial Navy. Above all we can rely on the brilliant leadership of the Commander of the protectorate troops, which has been tested in many conflicts . . . and can trust to the proved courage and self-sacrifice of our officers and men, who are ready, one and all, to lay down their lives for the Kaiser and the Empire in defence of our colony.'

Lettow-Vorbeck's reaction to the speech was to comment, wryly: 'Good. At last he has accepted the fact that we are at war. I hope he will speak as resolutely in six weeks from now, when the military situation may not be so healthy for us.'

Up north the waiting time was almost over. General Smuts had lost no time in going forward from Mombasa to reconnoitre the situation and was eager to get his campaign under way. By the end of March the rains would come, turning the red dusty roads across the *pori* into gluey morasses impassable to his motor transport. He had less than a month to hit Lettow-Vorbeck and hit him hard before the weather closed in. For that reason he was forced to adopt—and adapt—the plan which had been previously formulated by General Smith Dorrien for an advance through the Kilimanjaro area by way of the passes through the hills into German East Africa. For that purpose, as has been mentioned earlier, the British had pushed a railway line down from Voi as far as Maktau, and a water pipeline ran alongside it and on for some distance into the plain.

The terrain through which Smut's army must move is perhaps the most spectacularly lovely in all Africa, but it was hardly suitable for conventional military tactics. The avenue of approach lay across the rolling, teeming game parks of the Serengeti plain, thick with thorn-scrub or high elephant grass, crisscrossed by rivers and dried-up waterways, and overlooked by a vast range of high mountains. Here the Germans sat and the British must trek through the heat and dust and tearing thorns to reach them. They had little choice, either, as to which route they must take. The 'gateway' into German East Africa was narrow. To the north was Mount Kilimanjaro, its highest peak, Kibo, capped with snow and its slopes a tangled jungle pierced only by elephant or buffalo tracks. To the south were the precipitous blue Para Mountains, along whose Eastern base lay Lake Jipe, ten miles long and two wide, and the Ruwu River which flowed from it. Both the lake and the river swarmed with crocodiles and hippo, and the river's banks were flanked with the wide and noisome Ruwu Swamps, alive with snakes, tsetse fly and mosquitoes. This complex of hills, rivers and swamps prevented any penetration to the south. Kilimanjaro stood in the way to the north. The only break in the chain of natural obstacles was a pass, twenty miles wide, through the Ngulu Valley and this could be reached only by a trek across twenty-five miles of waterless plain.

It was obvious, therefore, that any advance must come by way of the small settlement of Taveta, in British territory, which Captain von Prince had captured at the outset of war and was still held by the Germans. It sat on the Rumi River and was surrounded by an almost perfect amphitheatre of hills, all under German command. In front was the Salaita Mountain, upon which the first South African troops had broken their backs in the early days of the month and General Smuts, well aware of criticisms in South Africa of any wastage of Boer manpower on behalf of British imperialism, was not anxious to assault that natural citadel again. 'I cannot afford to be called "the butcher of my people",' he said.

He decided that a frontal assault upon Lettow-Vorbeck's defensive system was to be avoided. It would kill too many men and waste too much time. He would 'out-manoeuvre' the enemy instead.

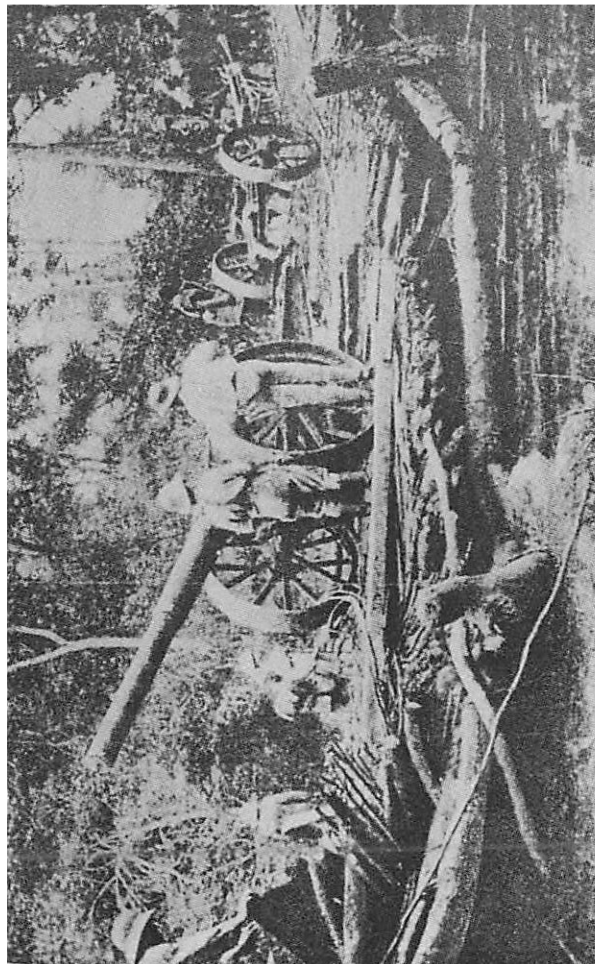
With the aid of a highly mobile (as he thought) force of the South African Mounted Brigade under the Command of General van Deventer, he would seize the heights of a mountain called Chala, which overlooked the fifteen-mile gap be-



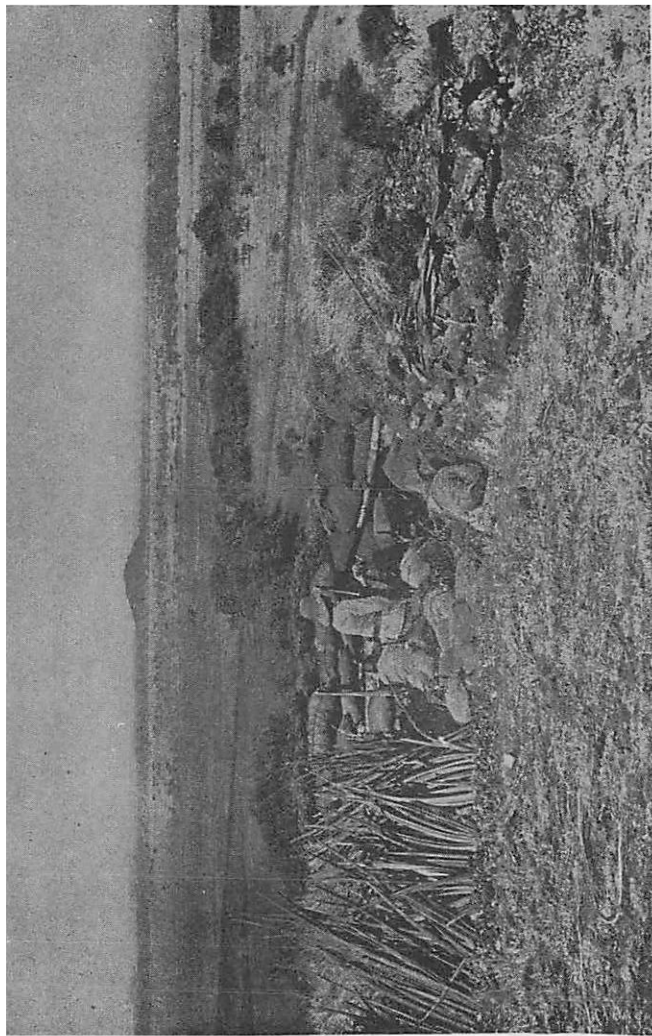
General von Lettow-Vorbeck, Commander of the German forces in East Africa from 1914 to November, 1918.



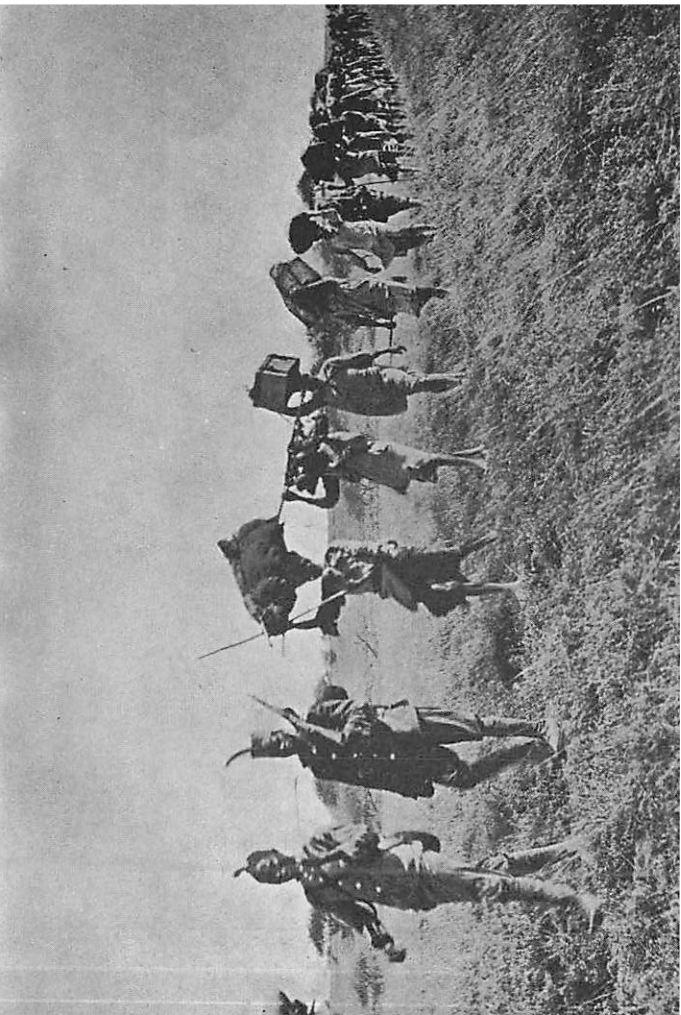
Governor Schnee with his troops.



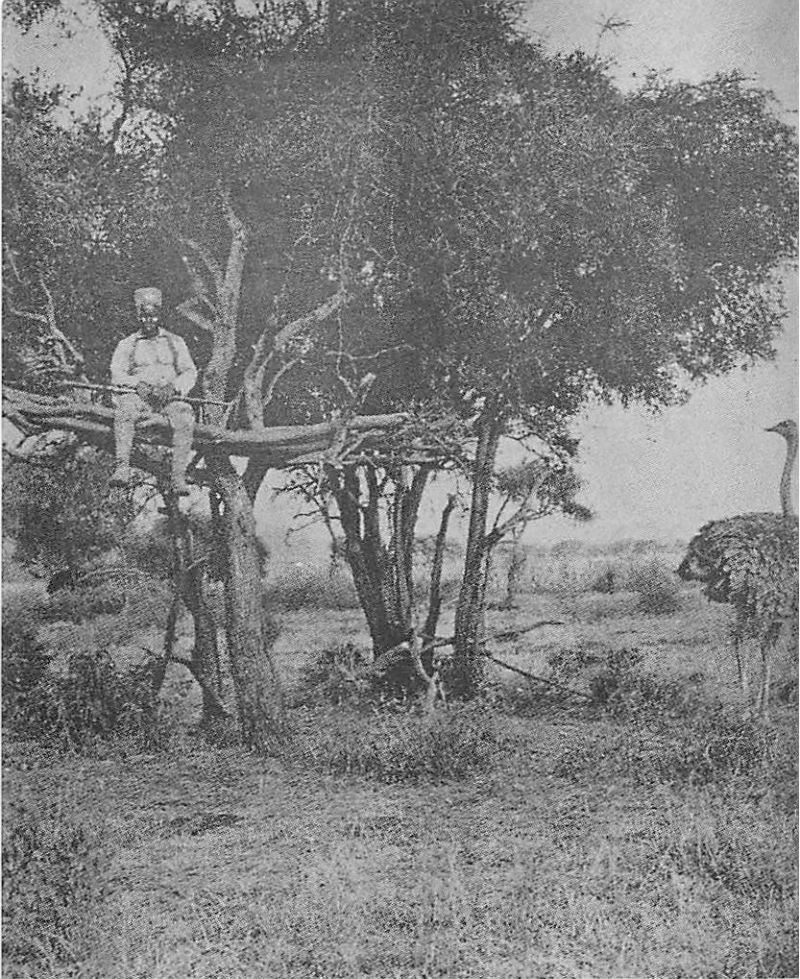
Transporting one of the *Königsberg* guns up country.



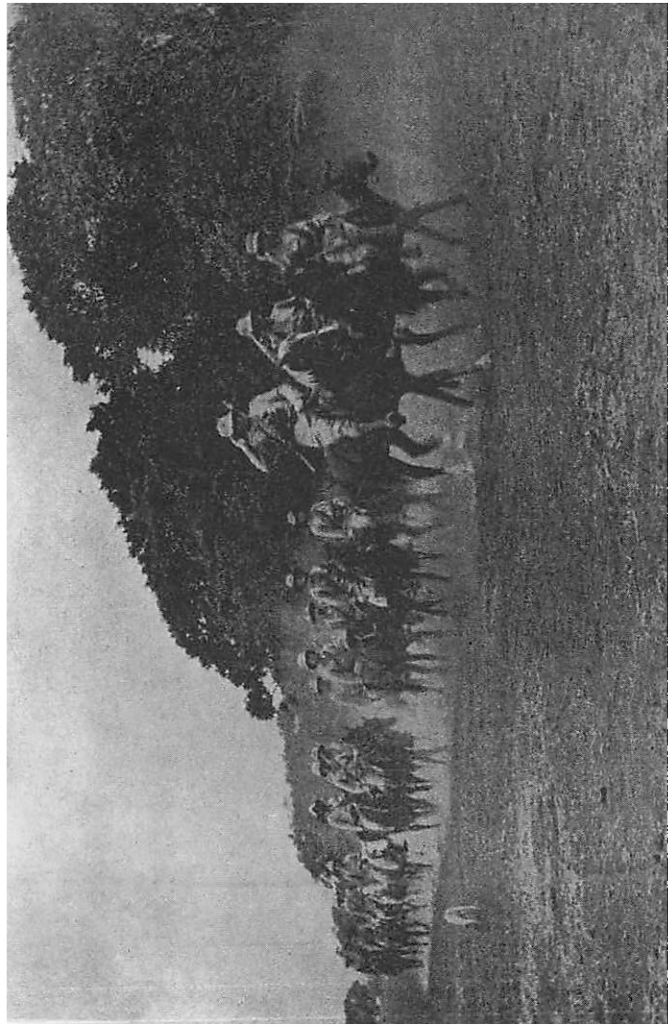
A German machine-gun post in the bush.



A German carrier-column on the march.



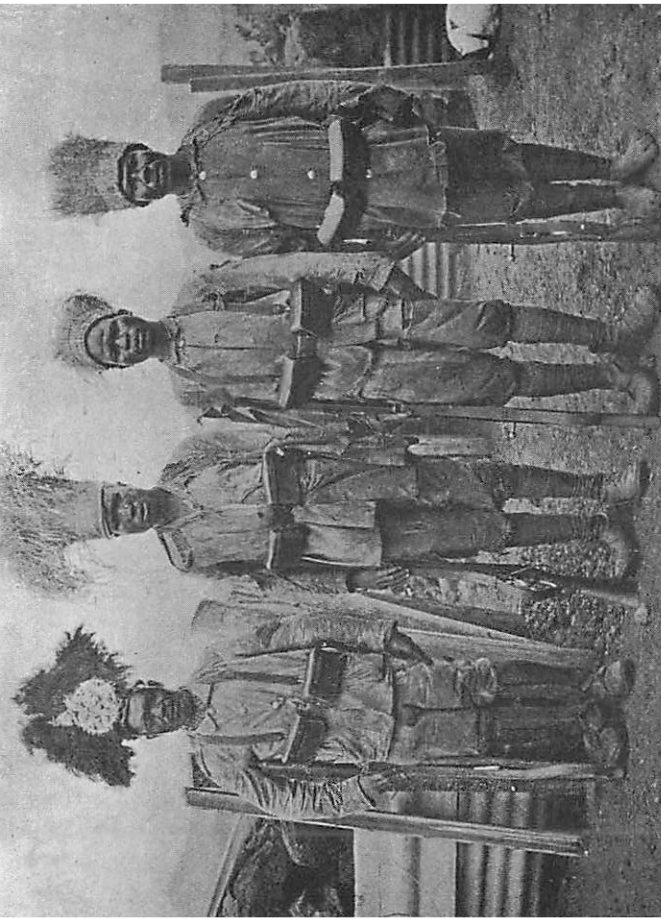
A German lookout post in the bush.



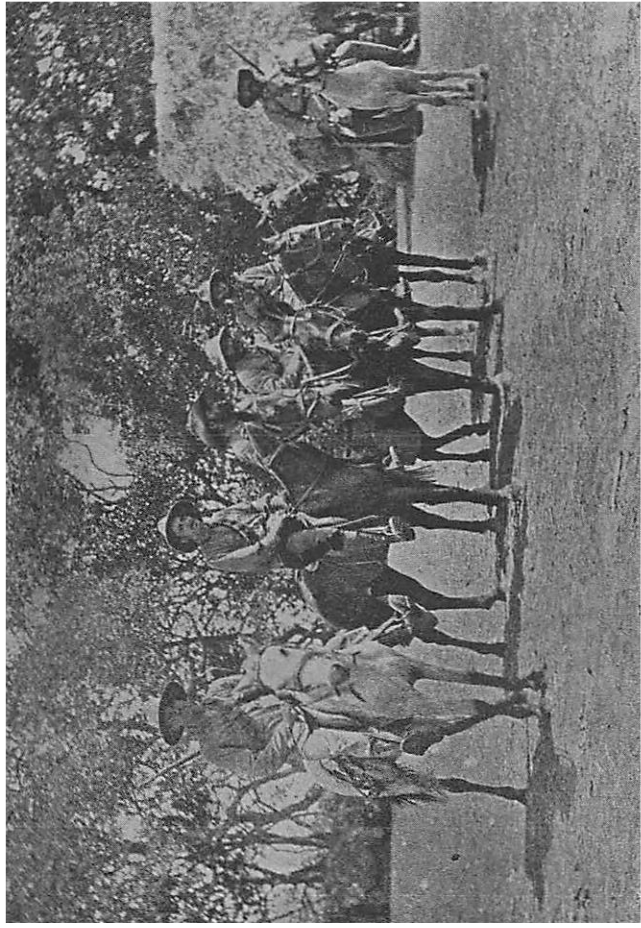
A German mounted column.



A German patrol post on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro.



German Askaris camouflaged for patrol operations.



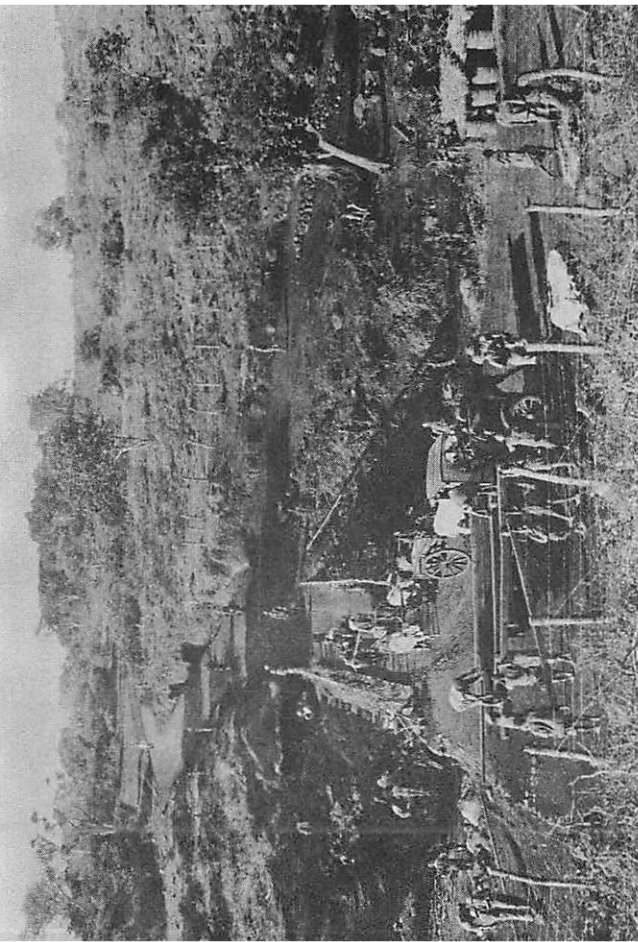
A German mounted column of the type which raided British territory.



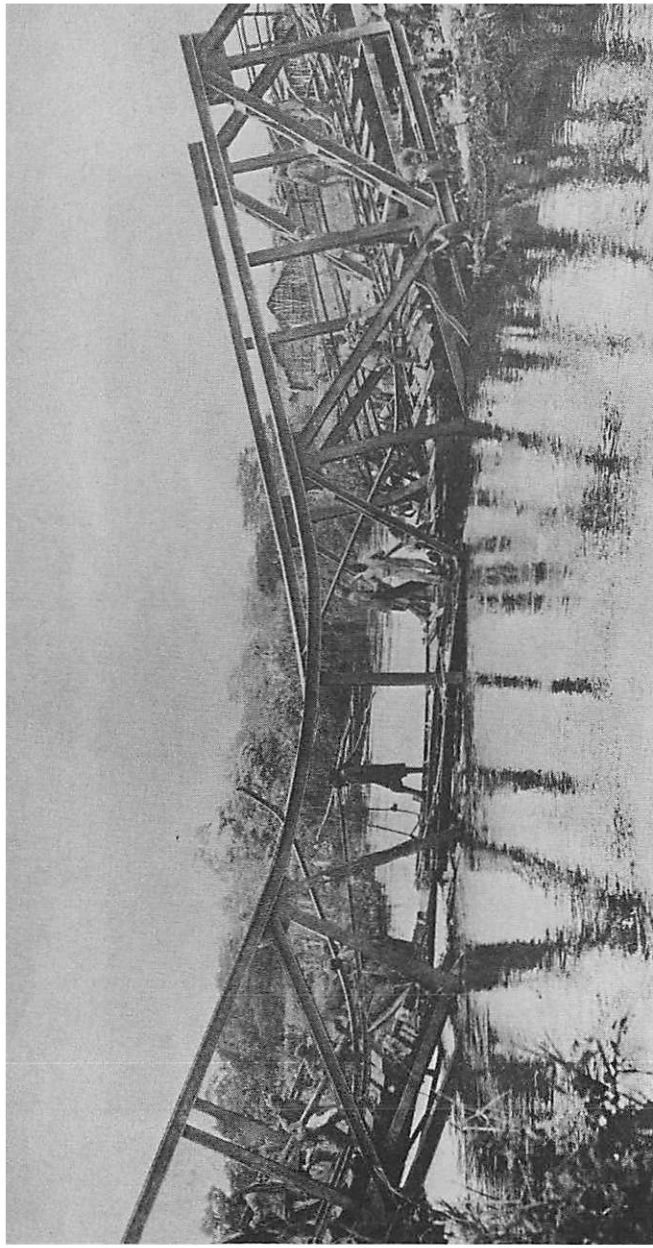
General Smuts who commanded the British forces from 1916 to 1917.



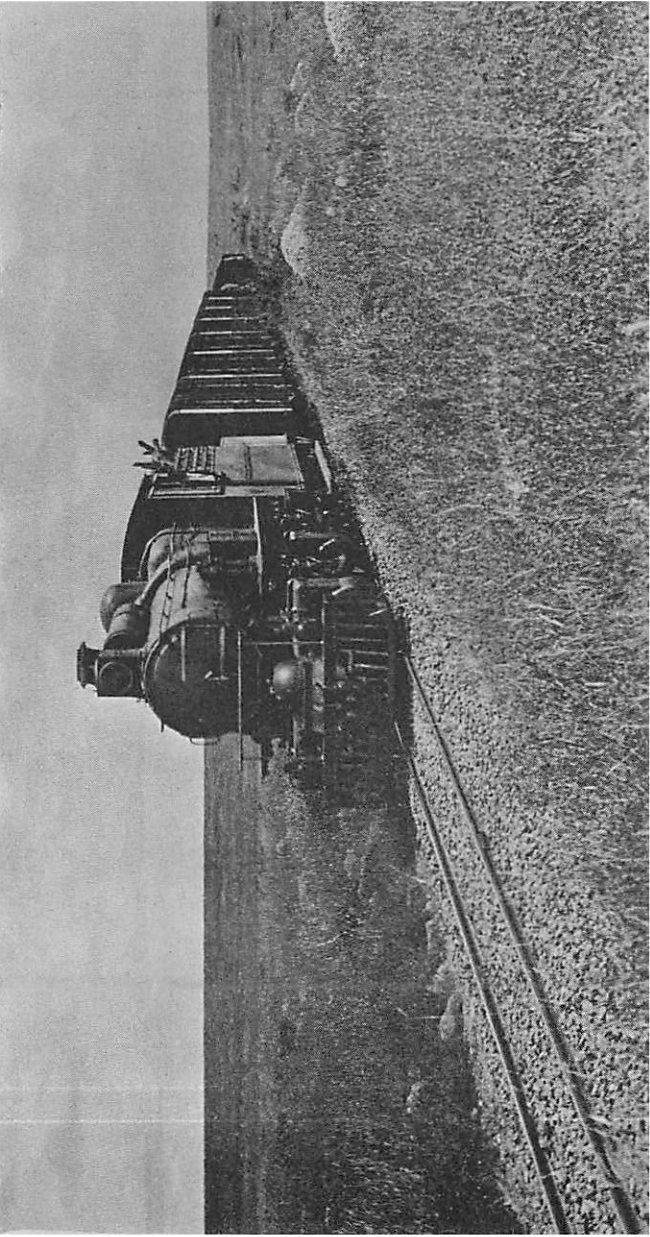
Where British and Indian troops landed at Tanga.



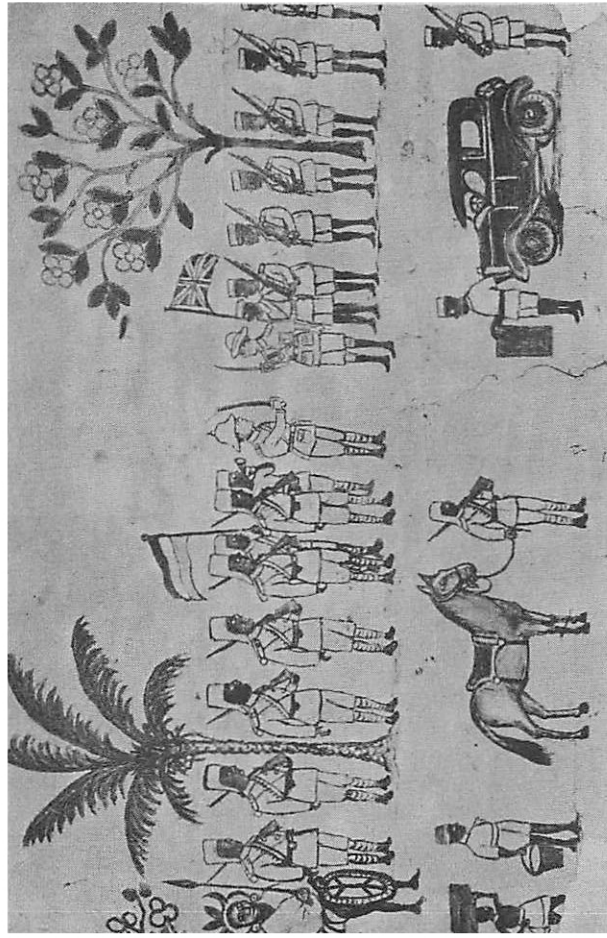
A British Army camp in German East Africa.



Indian Troops crossing a blown German bridge at Kahe.



A British train crossing the East African "Pori" in the area where von Lettow-Vorbeck's saboteurs operated.



Von Lettow-Vorbeck surrenders to the British at Abercorn, Rhodesia, November 25, 1918. From a painting by an unnamed native artist in the King George V Museum, Dar es Salaam.

tween Kilimanjaro and the Para Mountains and led through Taveta towards the German settlement and garrison town of Moshi. His Second Division, commanded by General Tighe, would bypass and contain Salaita Mountain and push on towards Taveta itself. In the meantime, the First Division under General Stewart would come around the west of Mount Kilimanjaro and thrust across the plain between that mountain and Mount Meru in a loop to cut off any German retreat at the town of Kahe, further down the Northern Railway Line from Moshi. He described his plan in a dispatch to the War Office in these words:

'The task of the 1st Division was to cross the thirty-five miles of waterless bush which lay between Lonido and the Engare Nanjuki River, occupy the latter, and then advance between Meru and Kilimanjaro to Vieh Bomaja Ngombe. My intention was thereafter to direct this division to Kahe and to cut the enemy's lines of communication by the Usumbara (Northern) Railway. The task of the 1st South African Mounted Brigade and of the 2nd Division was to advance through the gap between Kilimanjaro and the Para Hills against the enemy's main force, which was reported to be concentrated in the neighbourhood of Taveta with strong detachments at the head of Lake Jipe in the bush, east of the River Lumi and at Salaita.'

It was a good plan—on paper. He had 30,000 men at his disposal and Lettow-Vorbeck's strength was, at the most 6,000. He had all the guns he needed, and the Germans had hardly any artillery at all, only a few light guns. He had aircraft to bomb the enemy's rear at Moshi and Kahe and bring back information as to his movements and dispositions. True, the Germans were up on the heights, and the tell-tale trails of dust on the plains would betray all movements and the enemy heliographs would report them back to Lettow-Vorbeck's command; but until they came within machine-gun range, they were safe from interference, due to the absence of German guns.

Smuts was confident that his plan would succeed and that the campaign in East Africa might well be over even before the rains came. It was just a question of moving forward fast and hitting hard.

And this was where the trouble developed. Jan Smuts was not a professional soldier, though he had made a close study of military history. His own experience in the field had been as a Boer citizen-soldier, fighting against the British on the veldt, as a member of a small band of self-contained raiders,

used to travelling light. He had no experience of the logistics of divisional warfare, of the vast supply problems entailed in moving an army—and the water, food, animals and munitions to supply it—across inhospitable and largely unknown country. Hitherto he had always fought across terrain he knew almost inch by inch against an enemy (the British) which was ignorant and unwieldy. Now the position was almost exactly reversed.

None the less, given commanders with guts and thrust equivalent to his own, the advance which he began on 8 March 1916, towards the German bastions of Kilimanjaro might well have achieved the object of enveloping Lettow-Vorbeck's forces. Unfortunately, his commanders were not of his calibre. General Stewart had been sent off with the 1st Division from Longido on March 6 with instructions to bring his force across 35 miles of bush to Ngombe, ready to block the German retreat, by March 8. There was a road across the plain and at the most 800 scattered Germans to impede him on his route, but his progress was agonizingly slow. He did not like the country or the heat. In the first twenty-four hours of his march he was halted several times by felled trees laid across the road and by two ambushes, in which he suffered two casualties; and these, plus a sudden and unexpected precursor of the rains in the shape of a torrential downpour, seem to have scared him out of his wits—or rather, these events plus the natural hazards of campaigning in these tropical plains. He was so panicked at the thought that his road back to Longido had become a quagmire—through which he might find it difficult to retreat—that he ordered his sappers back down the road to repair it. He kept his artillery in the rear and had them guarded by his mounted troops, who might otherwise have been going forward on reconnaissance. He complained repeatedly that his men were disturbed by wild animals and 'find the roar of lions by night nerve-wracking. There have been instances of these creatures attacking our bivouacks.' He was out of communication at one time for forty-eight hours because he had strung his telephone wires too low across the bush that they were knocked over and broken by a herd of giraffes.

Meinertzhagen, who was by now attached to Smuts as Intelligence Officer, reported on March 8:

'It is typical of Stewart that having wasted two days between Longido and Nanjiki he now wires to propose a day's halt at Geraragua and does not intend being at Ngombe until the 11th, or four days after the advertised time. It shows how little he

appreciates the situation and what little "drive" he has in him. The whole strategy of these operations depends on Stewart and here he is dawdling along and robbing us of success.'

Nor was Smuts much luckier with his commanders on the frontal assault. True, General van Deventer had brought his mounted brigade and an infantry brigade up to the Lumi River by March 8, but the Germans on Salaita still stood between the British and Taveta, or at least they seemed still to be there. In front of it were forces under the command of General Tighe and his brigade commander, General Malleson.

'Tighe, who is now completely under the thumb of that snake Malleson and soaked with drink,' reported Meinertzhagen, 'likewise is quite inactive. We are all furious. Smuts, poor little man, is livid with rage but scarcely dares to remove these dilatory officers so early in the day. Up till now he has fought against British generals, he is now fighting with them. He told me this evening when I went out to see him: "Meinertzhagen, I am now beginning to understand how it was that we always outwitted your leaders in South Africa. Are they all like this?"'

Tighe was persuaded the following day to make an attack on Salaita and discovered, as might have been expected, that Lettow-Vorbeck had evacuated it, realizing that he was being outflanked. The troops moved on to Taveta and found that it too had been evacuated. It was March 10 and the Germans had been expelled at last from the enclave of territory which they had held in British East Africa since the outbreak of war, but they had left behind few casualties and inflicted many more in their going.

It is probably not necessary at this juncture to emphasize that for Lettow-Vorbeck and the Schutztruppe this was, as always, a war of hit and run. It is true that at Tanga the stupidity of the British invaders had enabled them to win a considerable victory against vastly superior odds, but they could not expect such luck every time they met the enemy, and the German commander had little doubt as to the eventual outcome of this battle. Had he guessed what incompetence was being displayed by some of the British generals in front of him, his actions might well have been bolder and been crowned with spectacular success. As it was, he had told the commanders of his field companies: 'There is no need to tell your men of the possibilities of the battles of the next few days, but the circumstances should be obvious to you and if they are not I shall not conceal them from you. We face an overwhelming force and it is unlikely that we can secure anything

more than local victories against them. Our object is to inflict as much damage as possible against them, but rather to give up territory than to risk envelopment. At all costs, we must avoid either being killed or captured, for we must live to fight another day.'

He was a great admirer of General Smuts, for he equated him with Botha (whom he had met and with whom he had argued military tactics) and he gave him credit for speed and ingenuity in battle. In consequence, he too made mistakes that were costly. He had guessed that the mixture of green South African, British, Rhodesian and native troops would find the strange and exotic terrain of Kilimanjaro trying both to nerves and muscle, but did not reckon accurately enough how confused and shattered some of them would become. As a result, he failed to launch against them any decisive counter-attacks in the first few hours, when things were going wrong, but instead withdrew his forces to safer places. He lost complete control of his battlefield at one vital period and ordered a retreat on one wing before what he believed was a major British advance, when no such advance was possible. The British were getting themselves torn to ribbons in the thornbush, were floundering with their oxen-carts in rivers, were flagging from exhaustion, heat and thirst. And General Stewart, who was supposed to cut him off (a possibility of which he was constantly afraid) was, in Meinertzhagen's words 'still dawdling on the other side of Kilimanjaro and clearly has no intention of even attempting to play the game.'

On March 10, General Smuts reported to the War Office that Lettow-Vorbeck had withdrawn in two directions along the Taveta-Moshi road into the Reata and Latema Hills. He believed that a German force had established itself in the neck of hills between Reata and Latemi and 'it was essential to discover whether this was only a covering force, or whether the enemy was in such strength as to threaten a counter attack towards Taveta. In either case it was necessary to drive him from the neck before I could advance beyond Taveta.'

Once more everything went wrong for the attacking forces. The approach to the hills had been sown with booby traps and men crawling through the thick bush tumbled into lion-pits set with sharpened stakes. Warning cans hung from the thorn bushes and rattled as they moved through them, and down came German bullets upon them from fixed lines of fire. Voices cried out to them, in English or in Afrikaans, directing them on to German guns. The Rhodesian Regiment advanced towards Latema in the face of the setting sun, blinding them to

the enemy hidden in the bush ahead of them; they were also invisible to the British artillery behind and were soundly plastered by them. Nevertheless, they and a South African infantry regiment succeeded in reaching two ridges and holding on. Unfortunately, no one told the forces behind that they were there, and these forces were ripe for retirement. A flanking movement by one company had been defeated by the sheer density and viciousness of the thornscrub and came back, many of the men all but naked, their uniforms torn to ribbons and bleeding badly from scratches. A bayonet charge on the frontal German positions was beaten back with heavy losses. General Tighe had long since decided that he could make no further progress that night, and he sought out General Smuts—who had arrived on the scene on horseback—for permission to retire. Smuts went forward into the darkness to see for himself and was shaken by the difficulties and confusions which he found among his men. He agreed that the army should withdraw back to Taveta.

'Neither he [Tighe] nor the Commander in Chief were aware,' says the Official History, 'that the South African and Rhodesian detachments still stood fast on the ridge. . . The withdrawal was unmolested. Unexpectedly, as day broke, it was seen from the plain that British troops. . . were still on the ridge.'

Their position might have been parlous indeed had it not been for the fact that Lettow-Vorbeck's night had not been without its errors and miscalculations. The German Commander had spent the hours of darkness trying to collate an accurate picture of the enemy's dispositions and intentions, but his telephone wires had gone and many of his runners had been shot. At one point his bicycle had been blasted from under him by shrapnel as he cycled between two posts. He had thus little opportunity of checking what information he had received, and it indicated a position much more serious than prevailed in reality. He became convinced that a considerable advance was being launched against his flank by van Deventer's Mounted Brigade (which had, in fact, found the thornbush impenetrable) and he decided to order the retirement of his forces. By dawn, he realized his error, but by then it was too late; his troops were on the way out. He left behind him in this engagement forty dead and took sixty-seven wounded with him. British casualties were 270 in all.

In Taveta, the next day was spent in burying the dead and reorganizing the scattered troops. Some desultory fire was directed at the dust clouds of the Germans retreating towards

Moshi and Kahe. Smuts, meanwhile, had a crisis on his hands concerning his field commanders. At the height of the battle, General Malleeson had complained of sickness and retired. 'I felt like shooting the cur,' wrote Meinertzhagen. 'Just imagine any general leaving his brigade in the middle of a fight and taking a car as fast as it would carry him back to the rear . . . His [Malleeson's] action has evoked some very disagreeable comment in his brigade and Smuts is quite determined that the man never comes back. He mentioned the affair to me this evening and said it saved him from a very disagreeable task, for the man was a coward. I had to agree, but I dislike a Dutchman calling an English general a coward.'

Smuts had also been in touch with the War Office about General Stewart, still 'dawdling' around Kilimanjaro, complaining about his 'lamentable delay'. He removed him from his command on March 21, together with Malleeson, and also asked that General Tighe be posted back to India but that the latter be given an award to signify that he was not being dismissed in the same disgraceful conditions as the other two.

In the next few days, while these changes were being made, Smuts' army moved against Lettow-Vorbeck with the gingerly caution of a soft-mouthed dog padding along in the wake of a hedgehog. Moshi was taken without a fight. The Germans had seen off their women and children down the Northern line to Wilhelmstal and then marched out in good order. Kahe was occupied the following evening. Here, for the first time, one of the *Königsberg* guns shelled the advancing British, but it had arrived too late to be really effective and it had no impact on the campaign. Lettow-Vorbeck was with the rearguard which saw its destruction and the blowing up of the bridge.

Soon, the Schutztruppe was well out of range. It was a moment when Lettow-Vorbeck looked up at the skies and drew conclusions from it. Heavy clouds had been curdling over the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. There were other signs of rain to be seen. The sky became blotched—silver-blotched where the sun shone through them—with descending hordes of locusts, and flapping above them formations of hundreds of storks, a sure indication of heavy rainfall. To the Schutztruppe, these meant unprecedented downpours and, in the circumstances, they took comfort from the fact. They needed rain.

The skies met in a conference over the mountains and then cracked open. The rivers began to swell. The bushes on the *pori* bent and then split, spilling red sap into the ground and turning it into a crimson quagmire.

The first phase of the invasion of German East Africa was

over—or should have been for any commander wise enough to read the signs. And in the conquest of territory, General Smuts had done well. 4,500 square miles of German territory was now in his hands. So far, however, as his campaign against Lettow-Vorbeck was concerned, the advance had hardly been such a success. They had retired without too much hindrance and their forces were still intact. True, there had been casualties which, for so small a force, were heavy to bear—in all some 250 officers and men. But it was more than ever a fighting force, ready to campaign again.

Their retreat took them south across the Masai steppes to Kondoa-Iringa and the comforting blue mountains beyond it, for Lettow-Vorbeck had decided to base future operations on the line of the Central Railway running across country from Dar es Salaam to Tabora. To join them Lettow-Vorbeck called in his outposts from outlying areas to the North and instructed them to make a fighting retreat towards Kondoa. He himself stayed in the neighbourhood of Kahe for a few days consulting with Major Kraut, to whom he had given the task of defending the line of the Northern Railway back towards Tanga, after which he set off to rejoin his retreating columns. It was an adventurous journey.

'The rain came down harder and harder,' he wrote, 'and the roads became deeper and deeper. At first there were only a few bad places, and twenty or more carriers managed to get us through them by pulling and pushing. The *niempara* [heads-men of carriers] went ahead singing and dancing. The whole crowd joined in with "*Amsigo!*" and "*Kabubi, kabubi!*" and to the rhythm of these chants the work went on cheerily, and at first easily enough. But on passing through Tulieni we found that the rains had so swollen an otherwise quite shallow river, that during the morning its torrential waters had completely torn away the wagon bridge. We felled one of the big trees on the bank, but it was not tall enough for its branches to form a firm holdfast on the far side. It was three feet thick but was carried away like a match.'

His adjutant, Lieutenant Miller, tried to swim across but was swept back. Another staff officer, Captain Tafel, succeeded in getting across with a few natives, but it was impossible to get a line to him, 'so there we were, Captain Tafel without any clothes on the far side and we on this one. The prospect of having to wait for the river to fall was not enticing, for I could not afford to waste one minute in reaching the head of the marching troops. At last, late in the afternoon, a native said he knew a ford a little lower down . . . We continued our journey

the whole night through in pouring rain, and had several times to ride for hours at a time with the water up to our saddles, or to wade with it up to our necks.'

Two days later, he reached Kimamba and exchanged his ruined clothes for an askari's uniform from the regimental store. It was in this garb that he attended on Governor Schnee, who, immaculate as usual, was awaiting him. Schnee had come up from Tabora in a state of not unexpected alarm and demanded to know how the 'disasters of Kilimanjaro' could be retrieved. He was given a short, sharp, not altogether diplomatic lecture by the Commander of the Schutztruppe and advised to get back to Tabora, but to be ready to move out of it speedily when the time came.¹ Arrangements were made for Schnee to be warned in good time of a British approach to his administrative capital. Lettow-Vorbeck did not particularly want the Governor to be with him, but neither did he wish him to fall into the hands of the British. His complaints and oppositions were not so great that they would outweigh the propaganda value of his capture by the British.

His own plans depended on Smuts. His hope was to draw the enemy further into German East Africa and force them to waste their manpower and supplies upon the inhospitable wastes of the interior, where flies and heat and disease would do his work for him. To that purpose he had withdrawn south towards the Central Railway. But even he did not believe that Smuts would be so foolish as to follow, slopping in the mud, upon his heels. He was convinced that there would now be a pause during which Smuts would reorganize, reconsider and make grandiose new plans. With his own experience of what tropical rains could do to a countryside, it seemed obvious now that there would be a pause until the skies cleared and the ground dried. He did not welcome this prospect. Enforced idleness would give his askaris time to fret and worry about the cattle they had left behind. His own men would fall victims to disease. There would be problems of food and clothes and boots.

What he did not realize was that Smuts had now become obsessed with him and was desperately anxious to corner him. 'He is irresistibly drawn towards von Lettow,' wrote Meinertzhagen, 'and if he persists he will lose the initiative and the

¹ The moral strength of Lettow-Vorbeck's position was no doubt improved by the news he had received, just before this encounter—via a second blockade runner which had just arrived in German East Africa—that the Kaiser had awarded him Iron Crosses of the 1st and 2nd Class.

campaign will end simply in following von Lettow about wherever he may choose to wander.' For the moment, Smuts had no thought of chasing Lettow-Vorbeck's shadow but of attacking and annihilating his substance. As the German Commander and the Schutztruppe withdrew towards Kondoa-Iringi, he drew up a plan which, he was convinced, would achieve that objective. True it was that the spring rains were falling in sheets upon the African bush, and well aware he was that they were due to go on drowning the landscape for the next eight weeks. But Smuts had a weakness for listening and believing any information that was given him by Afrikaners. His Intelligence officers had several times remarked in the past that he listened to them with only half an ear when they gave him facts and figures which they had discovered as a result of their meticulous espionage and investigation, but that he 'gulped down and swallowed', as Meinertzhagen put it, anything which was told him by Boer farmers living in the Kilimanjaro area. It was these farmers, left behind on their settlements after the German retreat, who expatiated at length on the extent and intensity of the African spring rains. They assured Smuts that though they were soaking and continuous in the Kilimanjaro area, their effect upon the terrain was far less to the south; or, as Smuts put it in a dispatch to the War Office, 'the violence of the coming rainy season would be mostly confined to the Kilimanjaro area' and that farther west and south 'the rains would not markedly interfere with military operations'.

As the Official History reported: 'He resolved accordingly while the greater part of his force would have to stand fast along the Ruwu River during the rains, to detach the new 2nd Division under Major-General van Deventer, which was to move southwards towards Kondoa Iringi and the Central Railway.'

This expedition, numbering 1,200 mounted men, plus 8,600 artillery and infantry, moved southwards from Arusha on April 4, 1916, on the start of what was subsequently described as 'a hell of a journey'. Never have local weather prophets been more wrong.

It rained and it rained and it rained. The mounted troops led the way across the Masai steppe and fought running fights for most of the way against German and askari rearguards picked and positioned by Lettow-Vorbeck to harass them. With them there was not much trouble. The broken bush and expansive grasslands seemed ideal for cavalry operations, and riders came back with askari pangas in their belts and bush-buck slung

across their saddles, and it was only in the evening, when their mounts began to die, that they realized that they were in a land where the tsetse fly ruled. On April 6 van Deventer had 1,150 mounted men. On 12 April he was down to 800, and on April 16, when his force reached to within seven miles of Kondoa Iringi it was only 650 strong.

The infantry and artillery following up behind was in even worse straits. Gun carriages floundered axle deep in mud. Men went down with fever. Pack animals keeled over and died. 'Up to this date,' reported the divisional war diary on April 8, '250 horses and 60 mules had died, and owing to the fact that spades and picks were not available and the brush was too green to burn, the position is better imagined than described.' Casualties mounted from dysentery and malaria, and there were no ambulances to take them back. 'We lay there in the mud and retched from the stench of the dead animals and watched the rats crawl over us,' some soldier wrote. The sticky black cotton soil sucked the boots off the marching men and many of them were barefooted. Others exchanged their worn boots with the natives for food, for the ration wagons had failed to arrive; and they boiled in a turkish bath by day and shivered in a dank mist-bath by night.

Of the 1,200 mounted men who had started out from Arusha on April 4, 1916, 600 arrived in Kondoa on April 19, to find the settlement deserted by the Germans and partly in flames. The infantry and artillery caught up with them on April 30. What was left of it; van Deventer found himself with a fighting strength of 3,000 men out of an original 10,000. The ubiquitous Meinertzhagen, who turned up a few days later, paid them a not undeserved tribute when he wrote:

'Our capture of Kondoa took the Germans by surprise. [But not unpleasantly by surprise, as it turned out.] They never suspected that we could move so quickly over bad roads in the rains. Neither did they credit Smuts with so bold a move. I doubt whether any British general with British troops could have planned and carried out the move in tropical Africa during the rains. Only South Africans born and bred to long distances and living on the country could have accomplished it.'

He added: 'The immediate situation is that von Lettow has about 3,000 rifles not thirty miles from here and probably more on their way from around the Usumbara (Northern) Railway. Van Deventer has about 3,000 rifles and eight guns, a small supply of ammunition and many sick, so his position is by no means secure. His horses are dying fast and few of his squadrons can muster more than half-strength. I discussed the

matter with van Deventer. He was not very talkative but has implicit confidence in his men. I asked him what his plans were. "Let them attack," said the taciturn Dutchman. "Are you well dug in?" I asked. No reply. "For God's sake do not despise the enemy," I said. "Damned kaffirs," he replied . . . I suspect the troops are not dug in. Tomorrow I shall see, and though it is no affair of mine, I have no intention of seeing van Deventer thrown out of Kondoa for lack of a little impertinence on my part.'

He was not thrown out, but it was due more to good luck than good judgment. As the rains eased off at the beginning of May, Lettow-Vorbeck moved his Schutztruppe up from their supply bases along the Central Railway to the foothills surrounding Kondoa. He had brought two guns with him and was, for the first time, able to use artillery; one was a four-inch and the other a 3.5 inch gun rescued from the *Königsberg*, and with them he was able to bombard the South African cantonments below him. (Ironically enough, among the guns which fired back at him was one which had been salvaged from *Pegasus*, sunk by the *Königsberg* at Zanzibar). Unfortunately for him, they were able to do little damage before he was involved, against his will, in battle. On the night of May 9 one of his forward companies, testing the enemy's defences outside Kondoa, found them soft and easy to penetrate, and made the fatal error of going on. Lettow-Vorbeck had been out on reconnaissance all day teeing up an attack he was planning for the morrow.

'I myself went to the headquarters camp,' he wrote, 'which had remained on the big hills further back. I tried to relieve my exhaustion with a cup of coffee and a little rum; but knowing that I had no more orders to issue I soon fell fast asleep . . . I was awakened by Lieutenant Wunderlich; he could not make out the frequent flashes he saw in the direction of the enemy. Neither at first was I certain about them. But soon there could be no doubt that these flashes, which became more and more frequent, were caused by rifles and machine guns . . . contrary to all our expectations, therefore, a stiff fight was taking place on our front, but owing to the great distance and the bushy and rocky country that would have to be traversed, I did not think I could engage the reserves . . . For well or ill, therefore, I had to leave the fight in front to take its course.'

In the circumstances, it was as well that he did so. The German company, led by Lieut-Col. von Bock, had lost its commander by a stray rifle bullet as it advanced towards the

perimeter defences of Kondoa and had been taken over by a daredevil young officer named Captain Kornatzky. Finding the opposition in front of him easy to penetrate, he ordered his men to advance on the town. He did not realize it at the time, but he was advancing on the one point in van Deventer's fortifications which were strongly manned, and at a moment when two regiments were changing over guard.

He was met by concentrated fire. A night battle developed, the bush lit by starshells, in which both sides made bayonet charges and for several hours hand to hand fights developed on the outskirts of the settlement; it was not until 3 am that the ping of bullets and the flash of gunfire died away, and all was quiet again. The Germans withdrew, leaving many dead behind them.

As might have been expected, Meinertzhagen was to the forefront of the battle. He led a patrol on a swarming assault upon a German machine gun post which had established itself thirty yards from the South African lines and "ended using my rifle as a club—with disastrous results, for the stock broke, but it was great". At one point, he found himself in a nullah nudging in the darkness against someone he thought to be a native soldier, and cried out to him in Swahili: "Who are you?" For answer he received a heavy blow on the shoulder and closed in for a rough and tumble in the mud.

"He was carrying a native knopkierie which I finally wrenched out of his hand," he wrote in his diary, "got my knee well into his stomach and then set to on his head with the knopkierie until he was silent."

He returned when daylight came to find that his victim had been Captain Kornatzky, the too-dashing leader of the unfortunate attack on the South Africans. He took his knopkierie as a souvenir and was afterwards never without it.

"All credit to old van Deventer and his South Africans," Meinertzhagen wrote. "It is the first real knock von Lettow has had. My God, I should have liked to have caught old von Lettow instead of poor Kornatzky."

Lettow-Vorbeck's forces had lost fifty killed in the foray and the rest had been considerably shaken. It was a loss he could ill afford and he did not wish it to be repeated. He called off his attack on Kondoa and began to reshape his plans. After all, why should he waste his manpower and ammunition? Heat and disease were doing his work for him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Chase Begins

'I ASK YOU,' said Lettow-Vorbeck, in a conversation with the author, 'to imagine yourself in the position of a Commander, with insufficient means, exposed to attack by superior numbers, who has continually to ask himself what he must do in order to retain freedom of movement and hope?'

There were great temptations confronting him. It was true that the British forces advancing into German East Africa under General Smuts outnumbered him in men, munitions and transport, but their lack of African experience, the quality of their leadership and the stamina of the men themselves was such that the German commander was under a continual itch to attack rather than retreat. Into his hands, for example, came a copy of a telegram from Kondoa-Iringi which General van Deventer sent to Smuts on June 3, 1916, which reported dismally in these words:

'Following is the present situation in my division. Today 711 sick in hospital and 320 in convalescent camp. Lack of strengthening foods such as oatmeal, bacon, jam, cheese, milk, etc renders it almost hopeless to expect convalescents to get fit for active service. This is also the cause of a great amount of debilitation amongst troops. Every effort has been made during the last two months to get forward these essentials and there are now en route seven days' rations of which the greater part will go to hospitals. Empty lorries returning is the only means of evacuating our sick. The majority of men are lying on the ground in tent hospitals as there are no stretchers available. Infantry regiments for the most part arrived here without blankets—dearth of boots, clothing, soap—the very poor rations are the cause of the heavy sick rate. The nearest receiving hospital is at Ufiome. As it has no transport it cannot come forward . . . If immediate steps are not taken the situation will daily become worse . . . the animals are weak . . . arrangements will collapse.'

Should he attack and attempt to annihilate this obviously exhausted and unbottomed force? The urge to do so was strong, for he could badly do with a victory to give his askaris some

excuse to celebrate. But he decided that it was a luxury which he could ill afford at the moment. From all sides now the enemy was pressing in upon the German Colony. The Belgians were coming in from the Congo towards Kigali, in a threat upon Governor Schnee's temporary capital at Tabora. A mixed and extremely well-equipped force under General Northey was attacking from Nyasaland towards the German fortress of Iringi (not to be confused with Kondoa-Iringi) to the south of the Central Railway. Even the Portuguese, who had declared war on Germany at the end of March, had made a foray over the Rovuma River from Mozambique in the south—though, admittedly, with disastrous results.¹ 'In view of this concentric advance from all directions,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck, 'the question arose what should be done with the main body of my protective force now before Kondoa? For an attack the situation was altogether too unfavourable. The problem, therefore, was what should be the general direction of our retreat? I decided on the Mahenge country. By moving there we should avoid being surrounded, it was fertile and suitable for guerrilla warfare. From there also it would be possible to withdraw further to the south and to continue the war for a long time to come.'

This was just what Smuts was now desperately anxious to prevent him from doing. But how?

'Both at Makindu and Kondoa-Iringi,' the Official History points out, 'Lieut-Gen. Smuts' forces had been brought to a standstill by exhaustion, sickness and those enemies to man and beast the tsetse fly and mosquito. It was essential now to restore and improve the lines of communication as well as to give a breathing-space to the troops. A pause was unavoidable; but it was becoming apparent that the South African units, at present the mainstay of the force, would not be able to stand up to the climate indefinitely. Everything therefore pointed to an early renewal of the struggle.'

On May 22, 1916, Meinertzhagen reported:

'What I hope will be the last phase of the campaign commenced today. Our first division, commanded by General Hoskins, concentrated at Kahe and tomorrow commences its

¹ '... a hopeless mess of it,' reported Meinertzhagen. 'Their boats ran aground, they forgot to bring with them any food, they landed at a spot where there was no fresh water, they commenced the operation in the evening having spent the whole day in full view of the enemy trying to make up their minds, and finally they were decimated by enemy machine guns of which I warned them and the whole force was killed or captured.'

march down the Usumbara (Northern) Railway towards Tanga.'

He added in his diary that the advance was not likely to have any serious opposition since Lettow-Vorbeck was still at Kondoa and went on: 'Tanga should be in our hands by the end of June . . . the campaign might be over by the end of the year.'

That indeed was General Smuts' fervent hope, and this time he was determined that nothing would stop his advance, neither the terrain nor the incompetency of his generals. He had rectified the latter situation by replacing his commanding officers with a Briton and two South Africans—Hoskins, van Deventer and Brits—whom he felt he knew and could trust. He needed headlong speed if his plan was to succeed and he believed this could best be achieved by leading the advance personally and 'dragging the troops behind me'. The enemy ahead was, true enough, not Lettow-Vorbeck himself but his most professional and redoubtable aide, Major Kraut, and it was Lettow-Vorbeck whom Smuts was really after; but so long as Kraut still sat on the Northern Railway, with supply bases within easy reach behind him, so long would Smuts have to reckon with him even while advancing southwards. Kraut's force, which had remained behind on the railway after the main body of the Schutztruppe had retreated from Kilimanjaro, was small but in good fettle. It was well armed with rifles, machine guns and, as well, light artillery, two heavy cannons from the *Königsberg*. Kraut had received his instructions from Lettow-Vorbeck at a conference at Kahe just before the two split up, and they were clear and strict: he was to retreat down the railway line under attack, and then swing south to link up with the main body of the Schutztruppe. 'Harass, kill, but don't get caught,' were the last words in his orders.

Smuts was out to catch him. Francis Brett-Young, the novelist, was one of the British officers with the 1st Division in the advance that began on May 22, and he subsequently wrote a book about it called *Marching on Tanga*, but he himself always maintained that the true and uncensored picture of the campaign emerged from his much more vivid and colourful novel, *Jim Redlake*, whose eponymous hero is an officer in the advance. In its descriptions of the campaigns and its references to the chief military personalities involved it sticks strictly to facts; but it is also remarkable for its devastating criticism of military incompetence and complacency (particularly along the lines of communication and among the 'base-wallahs' lounging in comfort back in Nairobi). Brett-

Young's fluent pen graphically brings to life the country through which the pursuing forces were now moving:

'Next morning, the regiment, stripped to the last bare necessities of equipment, marched out in a dusty dawn over the flank of the mountain, over foothills of green bush merging into a purple forest above which a low bank of clouds trailed fleeces of the same grape-like hue. That cloud imprisoned the dust that rose from volcanic earth powdered by the trampling column; it was burdened with odours of bruised, aromatic shrubs that bled oily sap as they passed. The dust, and this drift of heavy essences, made the air dense and lifeless; and the land, too, seemed destitute of life, though once it had been inhabited, as Jim guessed from the thong-bound fire-hollowed cylinders of tree-trunks suspended by natives in the branches of high thorn trees and scarlet-flowered spathodeas to tempt the bees to build their combs of wild honey. In patches another hot odour of death filled the air, rising foully from the bloated or desiccated carcasses of horses and mules and oxen that had fallen beside the track.'

He writes of 'the lean faces' of the troops 'so plastered with a compost of dust and sweat that they looked like Red Indians' and tolls a dirge for them as they go down, in dozens, with dysentery and fever. Of Smuts, he says: 'Jan Smuts is a soldier; a brilliant guerrilla leader. In the kind of war he has been used to men carry rations for a month in their saddle bags, and there's no such thing as an organized medical service. I acquit him absolutely. When he came up here they put into his hands a force that was supposed to be properly equipped for this sort of service, a properly tempered weapon of modern warfare. He's used it already with courage and skill; and if the weapon buckles up in his hands—as it is going to do—you can't blame him. If we are going to strike anything like a big general engagement with casualties like those at Salaita or Latema, I give you my word the medical service will go phut—not because of the country, or the transport, but from sheer, stark lack of provision and supine incompetence . . . The campaign has been going on for nearly two years, but Medical Headquarters in Nairobi don't even know it's begun. It is a month to the day since we started this new invasion. At this moment there isn't a field-hospital within three hundred miles of the front. And such miles!'

On the eve of Smut's great push, Brigadier-General Shepard, commanding the East African Brigade, called a meeting of his staff, and described the general tactics which were to

be adopted. They were out to catch Major Kraut and his troops as they retired along the railway.

'If Kraut does decide to retire, and the G.O.D. thinks he will,' Brett-Young, who was present, quotes him as saying, 'he'll be able to do it much more quickly, thanks again to the railway, than we can advance. He'll probably decide to cross the river between Membo and Korogwe, where there's a light railway of sorts that will enable him to link up with von Lettow. And that's where we come in. We've got to go faster than that railway on our flat feet. From the air, I'm told that the country looks pretty easy. Unhealthy, of course, and marshy in places; it's too much near the river. So even if Kraut *won't* fight, the wastage in horses and men will be terrific. But if we beat the railway and cut off Kraut, as we're going to, we shorten our L of C by 500 miles and get a new base at Tanga. And then von Lettow, if he's any sense, will throw up the sponge.'

In the next few days, the East African Brigade covered 180 miles of country in its chase after the retreating Kraut, and Brett-Young remembers it as 'a series of scattered incidents in one prolonged dream of tense, interminable effort, posed against the background, ever changing but ever the same, of golden grasslands and silvery bush: of a winding, impetuous river, now near, now far, yet ever present to the parched imagination in a vision of greener trees in whose shadow temptation and death were always lurking; of men with cracked lips and bleared eyes staggering on till they dropped; of pitiful transport beast floundering knee-deep in sand, and others, more fortunate, that lay with frothed mouths and glazed eyes black with flies and blue tongues protruding.'

Forced march followed forced march. The ration wagons were left far behind; for Smuts was advancing, as the Official History puts it, 'at times seemingly to the point of disregard for such fetters as the problems of movement and supply, and retaining in his own hands much that might well have devolved upon a trained general staff and subordinate leaders, and driving forward to the very limit of his army's ability.'

Kraut was almost always master of the situation, despite the reckless speed with which Smuts was pressing him. When he felt the weight of the British advance, he swiftly (with Lettow-Vorbeck's permission) abandoned earlier plans of fighting on down the Northern Railway towards Tanga and instead began withdrawing his forces, guns and munitions down the trolley line from Handeni to the Central Railway

—to make a rendezvous there with Lettow-Vorbeck, who was moving to meet him.

At first Kraut moved back through the bush, blowing his bridges behind him as his rolling stock cleared them; but when he reached a point down the line where the River Pangani swerved eastwards and touched the railway, enclosing the British in a bottleneck, he stood and fought.

'It was an ugly business,' wrote Brett-Young. 'On one side the impassable river, on the other the mountains, from whose peaks we, advancing blindly, were plainly visible to the German artillery observers. The railway was so near that their naval guns, mounted on trucks, could command the whole front of the advance with a steady fire of high explosive. In the rear the ochreous dust of the British transport, silting into the bottleneck, set an obvious range. Invisible, unapproachable, beyond the green screens of the river, machine gun fire enfiladed them.'

Kraut's stand gave him twelve hours of respite, just enough to complete his arrangements to retreat down the trolley line to Handeni. Smuts' first turning movement with which he had hoped to crown a fantastic two hundred-mile advance with a smashing success, had failed. Now a further advance of 40 miles faced the invading army, and it was waterless all the way.

'Smuts has made a mistake,' wrote Meinertzhagen, 'in mixing himself up with local situations. They obscure the general with the larger situation. During an advance he is usually with or in front of the advance guard. During an action he is often in the firing line and loses control of the fight. His staff has often pointed this out but it falls on deaf ears.'

His biographer,¹ on the other hand, points out that 'the risks which he ran with his life and his constant determination to see with his own eyes' were part and parcel of his aim to set an example to his troops that 'leadership and drive were the supreme requisites of the campaign in which the really dangerous enemy was not von Lettow and his askaris but the sickness, the slovenliness, the lassitude of tropical Africa. And who would provide these requisites if not the commander-in-chief?'

But if by this laudable example, he may have encouraged his troops (and they needed encouragement; in water, food and medical attention they were in an appalling state) he

¹ W. K. Hancock, *Smuts: the Sanguine Years*

was still playing Lettow-Vorbeck's game, still obsessed with conquering the German general and therefore a prey to his seductive tactics.

'We lunched with Smuts at Nderema near Handeni,' wrote Meinertzhagen in his diary. 'The more I see of the little man the more I like him. He has great charm and he has already won my affection. Always cheerful, witty and prepared to make the best of things. He is, of course, no soldier, for as *Truth* said some weeks back, he is an amateur. His knowledge of human nature, his eye for country, his exceptional power of imposing his will on others, his remarkable personality, reckless disregard of difficulties and very remarkable brain, compel one to respect and admire him. Perhaps it is wrong to say he is no soldier. He is a bad tactician and strategist, an indifferent general but in many ways a remarkable soldier.'

But he added on July 20, 1916:

'Smuts and Collyer [his Chief of Staff] arrived here [at Korogwe] this evening from Handeni. We had a long talk about the situation. Smuts now thinks that the enemy is much weaker than my estimates show and that his native troops have lost their morale. I begged him not to underrate the enemy's askaris. I firmly believe they are as good as ever and if he treats them with contempt he will suffer. We are at present halting on the Lukigura River.'

In fact, Lettow-Vorbeck's forces were stronger than they had been for some time. The Commander of the Schutztruppe had pushed north to meet Kraut's withdrawal. 'Smuts seemed to me to be the most dangerous and important of our opponents,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck. 'I therefore decided to leave in front of the Kondoa force only a detachment . . . but to march my main body back to Dodoma, proceed thence by rail to Morogoro, and move up in support of Major Kraut.'

With these troops under his direct command, he withdrew slowly and methodically, leaving rearguards behind him to delay the advance of the enemy, towards the Rufiji River, where he believed he would be safe for some time.

On August 8, 1916, Smuts occupied the strategic town of Morogoro on the Central Railway. But Lettow-Vorbeck and his troops escaped. 'So we have driven the enemy from the Central Railway, but he is an unbeaten enemy—out-maneuvred but not defeated,' reported Meinertzhagen. 'We have never given him a decisive defeat though he has given us opportunities galore.'

This was perhaps a little unfair, both to the drive of Smuts' forces and the tactics of Lettow-Vorbeck. The country through which the British forces had advanced was crueller, if anything, than they had encountered so far. There were miles of impassable swamps to daunt the infantry, deep river beds and scrub, meshed like fishnet, to hold back the armoured cars and guns, and mountains upon which the rearguards sat and mowed down the infiltrators.

'Whatever Smuts' plans had been originally, it was evident that they had broken down,' wrote Brett-Young. 'That swift enveloping movement, so easily convincing on paper, had petered out ignominiously on either wing; in the swamps on the left, in the mountains on the right.'

In the mountains, Brigadier Sheppard had launched what was to be a turning movement from the West against the German retreat. He found the country so difficult that there was 'little hope of a successful attack: it was so commanded that even watering animals was only possible by night; the bush was virtually impassable to wheeled traffic; while to move southwards down the river in search of easier ground would expose the line of communications to a counter-stroke from Ruhungu.' Sheppard therefore decided to withdraw. The Official History says: 'To this momentous decision, notwithstanding orders . . . to "make his presence felt" he decided to adhere.'

In the meantime, a brigade of South African mounted troops under Brigadier Enslin had been thrusting around the Uluguru Mountains in an attempt to take the Germans from the rear, and they had left their heavy guns behind and restricted themselves to pack-rations only in order to make speed. They were unfortunate in coming under Lettow-Vorbeck's personal observation. He was extremely busy these days cycling up and down the mountain tracks—his motor car having long since been abandoned—and he had spied the tell-tale dust-clouds of Enslin's approach from afar. He deliberately allowed them to complete their encircling movement, enjoining his forward posts to slip away without firing on them, but far behind, near the fortress of Kissaki, he set up a strong rearguard under one of his most trusted company commanders, Captain Otto. 'Evidently the enemy did not expect these German reserves to be posted under cover still further back,' he wrote. 'These reserves were now loosed upon him.'

The askaris and their German officers hid in the dense

bush until the South Africans had passed them by, and then fell upon them from behind with bayonets and pangas.

'With that the enemy's beautiful plans completely collapsed; our further advance simply rolled him up, and he was completely defeated,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck. 'The almost impenetrable bush made it impossible vigorously to push the enemy, or to undertake a pursuit on a large scale; but the bulk of his troops was broken up, and the small fragments were scattered over the bush in hopeless confusion. The led-horses and horse-holders were captured and about fifteen Europeans taken prisoner.'

The soldiers in the British division on the other flank reacted to Enslin's rout with considerable resentment. 'The disheartening news,' wrote Brett-Young, 'fell icily on the hearts of Sheppard's brigade. Their disappointment found vent in murmurs of resentful suspicion. Why had Enslin retired? The answer was easy enough . . . The Boers had funked it, betrayed them . . . When the end lay within their grasp, the Dutchman had given one glance at the enemy and fled. They were a pack of cowards. It was a damnable piece of treachery. Would Smuts have the courage to punish these traitors of his own race?'

Certainly Lettow-Vorbeck had slipped through again. But in the apportionment of blame, the failure of Sheppard's brigade had contributed as much as Enslin's brigade to the collapse of Smuts' plan. As the official History puts it: 'Viewing the operations in retrospect, it is impossible not to deplore the fact that the intended demonstration by Brig.-Gen. Sheppard against Rubungu . . . was not carried out . . . The threat from that quarter was a vital factor in the general plan . . . It seems now very plain that the failure of Lieut.-Gen. Smuts' plan was in large measure due to the absence of any show of attack on the Rubungu position.'

Not unexpectedly, Meinertzhagen had his comments to make on the situation and they were as ascerbic as usual. In one of the last entries in his diary before he returned to Britain on overdue sick-leave, he wrote:

'How the Germans must laugh at our strategy. And an entirely false impression is created at home by the fantastic cables which Smuts sends home. From these one would gather that van Deventer, Brits, Enslin and Crewe were budding Napolcons. Fierce engagements are fought against overwhelming odds, our camps are subjected to intense bombardments, the South Africans have shown themselves to

be stubborn and determined fighters. But what are the facts? The fierce engagements have cost us perhaps five killed [a gross under-estimate]. The heavy bombardments are carried out by one or two guns short of ammunition and the South Africans have proved themselves unwilling to suffer casualties. Van Deventer, Brits, Enslin and Crewe are incompetent gas-bags, their official reports amounting to mere flatulence. Discipline does not exist, bush warfare is not understood, looting is rife, hospitals are full to overflowing with strong healthy men suffering from cold feet or an excess of patriotism.'

He added: 'It is difficult to say what will be the last phase unless Smuts manoeuvres von Lettow into Portuguese East Africa and rounds him up somewhere near Pretoria. But von Lettow is slippery and is not going to be caught by manoeuvre. He knows the country better than we do, his troops understand the last word in bush warfare and can live on the country. I think we are in for an expensive hide-and-seek, and von Lettow will still be cuckooing somewhere in Africa when the cease-fire goes.'

It was an uncannily accurate forecast of what was to come. Shortly after writing it, Meinertzhagen returned to England after nearly two years of most effective Intelligence work inside German East Africa. Nevertheless, it is questionable who was most pleased to see him go—Lettow-Vorbeck or the British commanders in the field.

But not all the difficulties were on the British side. Lettow-Vorbeck was having troubles of his own and was only too well aware that they were likely to increase as his retreat continued. It must have become plain to the reader by this time that there was something quite remarkable in the German general's make-up and personality that could enable him to keep up the spirits of his troops (not to mention his own) in the circumstances which faced him. It is true that the enemy pressing in upon him was not the most competent invading force in the history of warfare, and that it was wasting much of its strength upon the terrain and its pestilences rather than the Schutztruppe; but at least it could buoy up its sagging morale with the knowledge that it was advancing all the time, that victory was certain, that territory was being occupied. For Lettow-Vorbeck and his troops there were no such compensations. One by one the principal cities of East Africa were falling into enemy hands. Tanga first,

Then Dar es Salaam.¹ Tabora, Governor Schnee's temporary capital, fell to Belgian troops marching in from the Congo, despite Schnee's efforts to hand it over before their arrival to General Northey and the British. (He feared Belgian reprisals for German atrocities in occupied Belgium, and when he finally left the city he left his English wife, Frau Ada von Schnee, behind to oversee the welfare of the German women and children abandoned there, some 140 in all.) For the rest of the campaign, Lettow-Vorbeck would have the added burden of Schnee's presence at his side, nagging, interfering, questioning his actions. And yet the picture that his men retain of him at this time was one of a most cheerful and inspiring commander who never once—in spite of rumours to the contrary—thought of giving in.

'One evening towards the end of August 1916,' recalled Frau Engelmann, the wife of a German merchant in Morogoro, 'the colonel came with three of his staff to dine with us at the mission at Mgeta, where a small number of European women had taken refuge after the fall of Morogoro. He was just recovering from a bout of blackwater fever and was thin. It was difficult to believe that he was taking part in a war, let alone a retreat, for he spent most of the time at the table talking about his adventures in China during the Boxer Rebellion. He ate very little and sipped at his wine. Halfway through the meal a message came for him to say that an English division was driving in towards us from the Uluguru Hills and we were in danger of being cut off. "We must leave quickly, colonel," his staff officer said. He replied: "Not until we have finished our meal and made arrangements about these ladies." Some of us had husbands and sons who were attached to the Schutztruppe and these he summoned to spend a last few hours with us. While we said our good-byes and embraced for the last time, he dispatched an envoy towards the English under a white flag with a message for the commander, asking that the womenfolk should be given English protection and promising that until a reply was received he would neither retreat nor allow his troops to fire. The reply came after an interval of some hours to say that the

¹ Captain Loeff of the *Königsberg*, who had been in command at Dar es Salaam, did a remarkably successful job of demolition before quitting the city with his troops. He sank all the ships in the harbour, blew up the railway station, locomotives and trucks, removed the permanent way and destroyed the bridges. He brought away with him one of his *Königsberg* guns with which, subsequently, he plastered the Portuguese pushing in from Mozambique.

women would come to no harm, and ending with the words: "Though if you, sir, come under our gunsights we cannot promise to exercise the same forbearance that we understand you displayed in similar circumstances a week ago." He laughed at this and said: "Last week General Smuts came forward on a reconnaissance ahead of his troops and rode into a nullah overlooked by one of our machine gun posts. I had him in my sights and was about to fire when I recognised from his hat and red beard who he was. I decided that it was unsportsmanlike to shoot an enemy commander in such circumstances, and I held my fire. One of our askaris who was captured by the English—and subsequently escaped—recounted the incident to Smuts, who said: 'Von Lettow is a fool—but a gentleman. But of course, it was the only thing to do. There must be honour and chivalry even in war.'" At dawn the next day he and his troops slipped away into the mountains, and not long afterwards the English came.'

Though he left the civilian women behind at Mgeta, there were still twenty young German female nurses attached to the field hospital, and these travelled southwards with the troops. So did a number of British prisoners. He insisted that these be treated with meticulous courtesy, and rations were shared equally with them. Whenever he could, he released British officers on parole or sent them back under flag of truce to the British lines, providing they would give their word of honour to take no further part in the war in Africa.¹

For the first time in the campaign, he was having difficulty with the natives. On the whole, his askaris remained loyal, though there had been a number of desertions among those whose lands, cattle and wives were being left behind in enemy territory. His own force amounted to some 5,000; there were another 3,000 under General Wahle retreating towards him from the West; and other scattered units amounted to a further 1,500 men. When it is remembered that the forces pressing in upon them now numbered some 80,000 men in all—including three divisions under Smuts thrusting directly at Lettow-Vorbeck—it is remarkable that so many should have chosen to stay under command and continue to fight. It was certainly not terrorism or even discipline which kept them together, for they had ample op-

¹ One British officer, shot in an ambush, was sent back to Dar es Salaam just before its capitulation and treated in hospital there by the young wife of the German officer who had shot him. They were married after the German officer was killed later in the campaign.

portunities in the kind of country in which they were operating to slip away.

With native carriers it was different. These were usually recruited from the chiefs of the villages through which the Schutztruppe passed and turned into pack-trains and road builders (and road demolishers, when the time came). But 'the natives saw that we were evacuating the country,' Lettow-Vorbeck wrote. 'A number of them who had promised to come stayed away, to the despair of the sensible chiefs, who would gladly have helped us.'

At Kissaki, a *boma* in the bushlands some days' march from the Rufiji River, the German Commander found that large stocks of food, clothing and ammunition had been built up. They were the last dumps before the river, and there would be no more after these had been exhausted. It was vital that they should be loaded and taken south ready for the sieges to come. But here the carrier question became acute. 'The numerous inhabitants to whom the war and the many askari were quite new lost their heads and ran away into the bush.' Attempts were made to bribe them with clothing (which the Schutztruppe themselves desperately needed by now) but to no avail. Governor Schnee and the local Civil Administrator went around offering the chiefs sheaves of emergency currency which had been printed at Tabora, but these were scornfully refused, and even the precious golden Tabora sovereigns, one thousand of which Schnee had had minted for emergency, failed to produce the men. 'It seemed as if all the evil spirits had conspired together to deprive us of our transport,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck. 'Our column of several hundred pack donkeys had been driven over the mountains from Morogoro. It arrived at Kissaki late and completely exhausted. Our ox-wagons, which had to go round the east side of the Uluguru Mountains on account of the state of the roads, seemed never to be going to arrive.'

In Kissaki too was a treasure the German commander yearned desperately to preserve. It consisted of a herd of 2,000 cattle which had been driven from the grasslands of the North just ahead of the retreating Schutztruppe, and its presence promised meat, milk, butter and cheese for some time to come. If the herd survived. But already, in the Kissaki district, the tsetse flies had been at work, and the animals were sickening and dying. It was essential to get them south to the healthier uplands overlooking the Rufiji if they were to survive. But to get them there needed time. To rest the ox-wagons and load the stores needed time. To gain it,

Lettow-Vorbeck gave orders that for the time being all retreats must be fighting ones and that no ground should be given unless it was first contested. All through September, he was to be seen everywhere along his front, on bicycle, mule or horse, arranging his outposts, directing counter-attacks, sniping at enemy columns, and riding herd on the cattle as they swarmed across the great waterways that lay between them and the Rufiji River. 'He has lost 12 kilos in the past two weeks,' wrote his adjutant, 'and is yellow with fever, but he will not stop. He seems to live on coffee. But he steams with energy and never complains of the oppressive heat. I watched him coming back to camp today after twelve hours in the bush. He has climbed mountains, swum rivers, waded through quagmires and been badly stung by bees, but he is indefatigable. He arrived dragging his horse behind him, both of them footsore, and I am not sure which one more resembled a skeleton. One thing is certain. The horse will not last the next 24 hours but the colonel will.'

On September 3, 1916, General Smuts wrote home to his wife to tell her that he hoped that he and his three divisions would reach the Rufiji River in a fortnight's time on the heels of the Schutztruppe. By that time he was optimistic that most of Lettow-Vorbeck's askaris would have deserted him and left him with but the remnant of an army. For how could the enemy continue to exist in such circumstances?

'You cannot imagine how dangerous the rains become in this country,' he wrote to his wife.¹ 'An old missionary informs me that the 40-mile plain between Kissaki and the Rufiji River becomes one continuous sea of water in the rainy season. How am I to pursue the enemy thence? And if I do so and the rain comes, how do we get food and water and what will become of us, cut off from the world on Rufiji? But everything will come right, and I shall make other plans. This 40 miles is now an arid desert, so that there is not enough water for the troops to go forward. So it is a case of nothing or too much. We are having a terribly hard time.'

And he added: 'But how much harder a time the fleeing Germans and askaris are having! So let us be patient and persevere to the end.'

In such circumstances (and from his own sickness rolls he knew how devastating they could be) he could not believe that Lettow-Vorbeck could hold out much longer. As his biographer says, 'East Africa was making a deep imprint on

¹ W. K. Hancock, *Smuts: The Sanguine Years*

his imagination; he thought it an appalling country to make a war in and there was no doubt that his admiration for Lettow-Vorbeck was now as great as his consuming need to bring him to heel.'

In an almost Dostoevskian sense, the bond between these two men grew steadily as the campaign plunged deeper and deeper into the seething, pestilential heart of Africa. Here were two men who had much in common. Each was an individualist. Smuts had known the hardships and heartbreaks of fighting against big battalions during the Boer War, and there is not much doubt that his sympathies were with Lettow-Vorbeck as he twisted and manoeuvred to escape the powerful forces that were hunting him down. It would be a denigration of Smuts to suggest that the action he took at the end of September 1916, was a purely selfish one of merely trying to get the war finished in order to go home to his family; though this was a strong consideration too. He was certainly motivated at the same time by an impulse to end suffering and give an opportunity for an honourable peace to an opponent whose measure he considered equal to his own.

He wrote and asked Lettow-Vorbeck to surrender. The opportunity came when Governor Schnee, indignant at reports of the mistreatment of his nationals in British-occupied Dar es Salaam, sent an emissary through the lines to Smuts' forces to protest. The Germans in Dar es Salaam—as in other places, with the possible exception of Tabora, where the Belgians were being somewhat rigorous in their interpretation of the rules of war—had been treated with courtesy and consideration; but rumour and exaggerated reports from spies had indicated otherwise, and Schnee was anxious not to let an opportunity go by of demonstrating that he was still Governor of German East Africa. On September 30 Smuts replied to his letter with one of his own, and made sure that a copy was forwarded to Lettow-Vorbeck. It read as follows:

'Your Excellency, I regret that I am not yet able to reply to your communication of the 18th instant protesting against certain breaches of the Geneva Convention alleged to have been committed at Dar es Salaam, but I shall do so as soon as the information I have called for has been received. In the meantime, I may however be permitted to point out to Your Excellency, and I think you will in fairness admit, that ever since the advance of the forces at my command commenced at the beginning of last March everything possible has been done by me to conduct the campaign with due regard to the principles of international law and the usages

of civilized warfare. I have no doubt that a satisfactory explanation will be forthcoming of the circumstances to which your Excellency alludes.

'From time to time complaints have reached me about wrongful acts committed by the German forces, but convinced as I am that both your Excellency and Colonel von Lettow have exerted your influence to restrain all lawless acts I have hitherto forbore from making representations to you in regard to such complaints.

'May I make use of the present opportunity to raise a different and far more important issue with your Excellency? The present campaign has taken a course and has now reached a stage which must make it clear to your Excellency, as indeed to every observer, that the end cannot be either far off or uncertain. In spite of the conspicuous ability and bravery with which the defence has been conducted, it has not been possible for the German force to withstand the superior forces under my command, nor will it be possible for them by any continued resistance to do more than prolong the campaign for a very short while longer at the cost, however, of terrible losses and suffering to the population, especially the population of this Colony. During the last few months I have had the painful opportunity to witness the sad state and sufferings of your non-combatant population, which I have done my best to alleviate, and to discuss the situation with them. One and all, while remaining loyal to their people and their government, have expressed their conviction that resistance has gone far enough and is now only adding to their misery and ruination without the prospect of any useful result.

'It is unnecessary for me to point out that on your Excellency and Colonel von Lettow rests the responsibility for the welfare of the helpless people of this Colony, who are cut off from all hope of succour from abroad and have already been called upon to make such efforts and sacrifices for more than two years. A continuation of the campaign for even a short while longer at this season of the year and in the deadly country to which your forces are now confined must mean untold suffering and complete ruin for them and at the end there will be no alternative to an unconditional surrender. Under these circumstances I would impress on Your Excellency that the time has come for you and Colonel von Lettow to consider very seriously whether this useless resistance should not now cease in a manner honourable to yourselves. If any discussion with me could assist your Excellency and

Colonel von Lettow in coming to a conclusion on this question I am prepared to meet you and him at a time and place to be agreed upon. I have the honour to be, Sir, Your Excellency's obedient servant, J. C. Smuts, Commanding British East African Expeditionary Force.'

It was a shrewd move to have addressed the letter to Schnee, whose anxiety for peace was well known in British circles, and had the Governor's power been as strong now as it had been earlier in the war, substantial results might have stemmed from it. But Schnee's authority and self-confidence had been shrivelled by two years of warfare and by the glare of Lettow-Vorbeck's personality. There was no doubt what were his wishes, and he voiced them; but Lettow-Vorbeck was now strong enough to pay them no heed.

As for Lettow-Vorbeck, his reaction was to take heart from the letter. 'General Smuts realized that his blow had failed,' he wrote. 'He sent me a letter calling upon me to surrender, by which he showed that, as far as his force was concerned, he had reached the end of his resources.'

And, for the moment, Smuts certainly had.

'Our troops were thoroughly exhausted,' reported Brigadier-General Crowe, a member of his staff, 'their numbers greatly reduced by sickness, in addition to which the supply difficulties were immense.'

Out of 54,000 horses, mules, donkeys and oxen¹ which had been fed into the supply lines south of the Central Railway between June and September 1916, all but six hundred had died. The tsetse fly saw to it that no animal had a life longer than six months—some lasted only six weeks—in this country, and the paths of advance were marked by the thick smoke from piles of burning carcasses. 'As regards motor transport,' wrote Brigadier Crowe, 'a large proportion of the lorries were out of action, and spare parts were not forthcoming to keep the vehicles on the road, apart from absolute breakdowns. The only increase of mechanical transport since he left Moshi had been 300 Ford box lorries and a few Reos. The box lorries were organized as what was known as the "Chigga" convoy. They did not arrive until well in August in Africa, and it was the end of September before they reached the Central Line. Although the rains were not due for some time, there were several spells of wet weather, with heavy rainfall, and these always meant all traffic being

¹Official casualty figures for September-November, 1916 were 10,000 horses, 10,000 mules, 11,000 oxen, 2,500 donkeys.

held up for some days. Not only were the roads impassable, but bridges were washed away and had to be rebuilt, the embankments along the hillsides sank and had to be bolstered up before anything could pass . . . Our force could go no further as the supply difficulties were becoming insuperable. During the whole advance from Kilossa they had been on short rations, and any rains in that swampy area would mean their practical isolation. The effect of these privations, continuous trekking over bad country, and the labours of road and drift-making had been very disastrous. Strongly worded reports went in from the medical officers to headquarters. For the time being the forces remained where they were, facing each other, neither side making any move.'

Such was Smuts' condition in October 1916. Before he could hope to attack again, the Army commander needed a thorough weeding out of his ineffectives, and they were far too many for comfort. His own instinct was to keep pressing forward, but he was constantly aware of criticisms in the South African press of any tendency to overwork soldiers from the Union on behalf of the still-hated 'British imperialism', and he could not afford to risk his white troops in conditions which might decimate them.

'On the strength of the reports of the medical officers,' reported Crowe, 'the Commander-in-Chief authorized the assembly of medical boards to report on the fitness or otherwise of all white troops for further service in the country. The area before us was notoriously more unhealthy than any through which we had previously passed. It was obviously useless to take men who were constantly down with malaria into this country; they would only prove an encumbrance. The result of the medical examinations was that some 12,000 white troops were sent to South Africa as unfit to stand the hardships of further campaigning in this region till they had regained their normal strength by a period of rest in a healthy climate.'

These troops were replaced by the normal shipment of reinforcements from England; by the Loyal North Lancs, who had been taken to South Africa earlier and there re-equipped; with some regiments from India and a brigade of infantry from Nigeria; and with several newly-raised battalions of the Kings African Rifles, recruited in Kenya. At long last Smuts was beginning, albeit still reluctantly, to realize that for war in Africa the Africans fought better than the whites, and the despised 'Kaffirs' manoeuvred, endured and died better than his beloved Boers.

CHAPTER EIGHT

'Smuts is Obsessed'

EARLY IN JANUARY 1917, General Smuts stopped the war for twenty-four hours to allow an emissary to go forward across the Rufiji River under a flag of truce with a message for Lettow-Vorbeck. This time the letter was not to ask for the German commander's surrender, but to convey a piece of news which he might otherwise not have received for some time to come, cut off as he was from Germany—that he had been awarded the *Pour le Mèrite*, Germany's highest military award, by the Kaiser, for his services in Africa. It was news which both heartened and invigorated him at a time when he was most in need of it.

For some weeks now he had been finding it difficult to move about the countryside with his accustomed spirit. He was recovering from his fourth successive bout of malaria. 'Unfortunately,' he said, in a conversation with the author, 'I had soon discovered that I was peculiarly vulnerable to the African mosquito, and he bit me right into my bones. I had long since abandoned a bed or even a hammock and slept most of the time on the ground, but my bearers always draped a mosquito net over me. The mosquitoes always found a way through. If you have not experienced night in the heart of an African swamp you can have no conception of how many insects descend upon you in the hours of darkness. They gather like clouds and they plunge down upon a pink skin like a shower of needles, and so sharply do they bite and so maddening are their stings, that I have known my officers to sleep in the swamp waters, preferring leeches and the possibility of attack by crocodiles and water-snakes, to their tortures. We still carried with us supplies of quinine from our factory at Morogoro, but these were dwindling and our medical officers had begun making it themselves from tree-bark; though of course it could no longer be made in tablet form and we drank it with our coffee, an unpalatable brew known to the troops as "Lettow-schnaps". But neither tablets nor potion seemed to keep me immune from fever. I was sadly told by my medical officers that I was malarial-prone and should not be living in Africa at all.'

To add to the recurrent bouts of fever with which he was plagued, Lettow-Vorbeck—a yellow, shrunken skeleton of a man by this time—was finding it difficult to walk. He had been bitten badly by sand-flies (by jiggers, too, but these his cook Baba, cut out of his feet each evening) and they had inflamed his left foot so badly that it had become a pulpy mass of scabs and festering flesh over which he found it agony to strap even the light sandals which he had adopted in lieu of boots. The medical officer extracted two of his toenails and enabled him to limp around, but in constant pain.

Not only this. While pushing through the long elephant grass on one of his reconnaissances, he had his right eye scraped by the tip of a grass-blade; only by good fortune did he escape being blinded, and even so, the skin ripped from the iris severely impaired his sight. He was already half-blind in his left eye from the shotgun wound he had received in the Hottentot campaign, and he had lost his eyeglasses (which could no longer be replaced, now that Dar es Salaam was occupied). He could still see his way around, but map-reading and the writing of reports was agonizingly difficult. Yet these trials seemed to have done little to slow him down, and if he could not write he could still shoot with uncanny accuracy.

‘Owing to the general demand for fat,’ he wrote, ‘hippotamus shooting became a question of existence. I became quite expert at it. One has to watch until the animal’s head is visible, so as to hit in a spot that will cause instantaneous death. The animal then sinks, but comes up again after a little time when it can be drawn to the bank by means of a rope, quickly made of bark. There it is cut up, and the expert knows exactly where to find the white, appetizing fat. The quantity varies: a well-fed beast provides over two bucketfuls. But one has to learn not only how to prepare the fat but also how to kill immediately with the first shot. Some foolish people had been reckless, and in many places the dead bodies of wounded animals were to be seen, which quickly decompose and become unfit for food.’

He did not much like eating hippo meat, which he found coarse and glutinous, ‘though the tongue is delicate and very tasty’, and he much preferred elephant meat. ‘We began to judge the quality of an elephant from now onwards not by the length of its tusks but the size of its rump,’ he said. At home in Germany he had been an enthusiastic collector of mushrooms and other fungi, and now he experimented with African roots—not always with success, as one of his staff, Doctor Hans Kori (now working as an anthropologist in

Tanganyika) wryly remembers. 'We had some extremely painful experiences from noxious tubers,' Kori recalled. 'Likewise with bread. The Commander believed that one essential article of diet for the European members of the Schutztruppe was bread and he was constantly experimenting with new kinds of flour. It was too early in the season for the maize crops to have ripened, so for a time we took the young shoots and dried them artificially and made flour from this. But we could never stay long enough in the crop areas to reap the fullest benefit from them. So Lettow-Vorbeck tried to make flour from grass, and the results were disastrous. Half a dozen officers and sergeants became seriously ill. Salt was another of our problems, for we had been driven away from the coast and could not evaporate sea-water any longer; but the Commander questioned the natives and discovered a plant from which a form of salt could be distilled.'

For the moment, however, the food situation was not too serious, for the country around the Rufiji was astonishingly fertile, and game abounded. Buffalo, greater kudu, impala, sable antelope, duiker and waterbuck were there to be shot, and there were flocks of guinea fowl. Talking to the author forty-four years afterwards (when he was 93 years old) Lettow-Vorbeck vividly recalled the rich and vivid flora and fauna of the Rufiji region. 'Sometimes as many as five lions would prowl through our encampments in the night,' he said, 'on the hunt for a mule or an unwary soldier. As one stood on the edge of a river gorge at dawn, looking down across the thick vegetation, one was amazed at the richness and vividness of the scene. A few feet away the tiny hyrax, or rock rabbits, would be whistling happily to each other, while across the gorge one of their giant relatives, an old bull elephant, would be trumpeting to his herd and flapping his great ears like sails in the morning breeze. There were birds of every colour and size—goshawks, eagles, red-billed shrike, crowned hornbills—and clouds of *Urania* moths, flittering past like emerald rain-showers. Wherever there were elephants there were elephants' turds, and around them whirled beetles and butterflies of every colour. We grew quite fond of the scarab beetles and the askaris used to run races with them and gamble on which one would be the first to reach a turd.'

I have mentioned earlier that Governor Schnee's power to intervene in the Schutztruppe's affairs was weakening, but over civilian administration he still exercised his au-

thority to the hilt. In the occupied areas of the Rufiji he reasserted his gubernatorial prerogatives and insisted that he be consulted and approve all measures which Lettow-Vorbeck found necessary for the conduct of his campaign. He refused to allow the commander to sign chits of requisition for goods or facilities he took over, and told civilian administrators to demand payment for anything which was taken. To effect one crossing of men and guns, Lettow-Vorbeck put a pistol to the head of the local district commissioner until he released a ferry boat to the troops, and was subsequently excoriated in an official report which Schnee wrote for eventual reference to Berlin for his 'buccaneering' manners.

In these last few weeks before the spring rains of 1917, Lettow-Vorbeck kept his troops on the move despite his own personal discomforts and the increasing hardships which his troops had to face. Just before the end of 1916, he led a force of 2,000 men towards Kibata and took one of the *Königsberg's* guns with him. Eight of these guns were still in action with the Schutztruppe in spite of dwindling ammunition and the fantastic difficulties in hunking them through the swamps and highlands of the Rufiji region. Hundreds of men lifted them bodily over elephant tracks or dragged them on pontoons across rivers and bogs. 'Shortly after its arrival,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck, 'the gun had been placed in position on a mountain saddle from which, later on, the bombardment was successfully carried out . . . We had delayed opening fire on the buildings, where we saw numbers of men and animals walking about on the bare hilltop, until everything was ready. One company which had got round the enemy's rear, and established itself on his main line of communication, running from Kibata to Kilwa (the latest coastal town which the British had occupied), observed that the heavy shells falling near the *boma* caused a frightful panic. Heaps of the enemy's askari ran away as fast as they could, across the front of the company which was lying in concealment.'

In the fighting which took place in the next two weeks, the Germans estimated that they inflicted 400 casualties on the Indian and Nigerian troops pushing in against them (the British estimate was 220) from the coast, and the object of Lettow-Vorbeck's exercise was achieved. General Smuts concentrated his troops on the Kibata area and called off his advances into other regions of the Middle Rufiji, where the German Commander was building up supply dumps of food and munitions ready for operations after the finish of the rains.

He was still thinking in terms of a long war and in no mood to accept even the possibility of defeat or capitulation. 'It is true,' he said to the author, 'that there were those behind our patrols, particularly the civilians, who had begun to question why we still went on fighting. My reply to that was always the same. So long as we continued to resist, so long must the enemy pour his resources into Africa and thus weaken his reinforcements in Europe. We were a knife in his side and the more we turned it, the more he bled.'

He was prepared to use any ruse and any method to burden the enemy and relieve the pressure on himself. From the Rufiji onwards he set out systematically to disembarass himself of all surplus personnel, pushing them off into the enemy's lines.

'There were too many people in Africa,' he wrote, 'whose propensity was for diverting valuable energy to non-essentials. Thousands of useless mouths were devouring the supplies which had been collected with great effort in the region occupied by the fighting forces. The depots did nothing for the supplies but on the contrary lived on them.'

Since the retreat from Morogoro, large numbers of white women and children had attached themselves to the Schutztruppe and moved with the depots. He decided that these cumbersome and importunate camp-followers must now be dispensed with; it was too burdensome to go on feeding them. He therefore announced that he was sending an emissary through to the British lines asking that (like the women from Mgeta) they should be taken over by the enemy and sent back to Dar es Salaam. There was an immediate reaction both from the women and from a number of the white officers, and their part was taken by Governor Schnee. An indignant meeting was held on the grounds of the field hospital at Kungiolu, but the rebellion ended when one of the young German nurses, having listened to a civilian's suggestion that the war should be ended rather than the women evacuated, rose to address the crowd. She roundly attacked the doubters and dissidents, exhorted the crowd to remember patriotism, and ended with these words:

'In one of the wards this morning I heard a civilian patient criticizing the wisdom of our glorious von Lettow for his insistence on carrying on the war. One of the Schutztruppe, lying in bed beside him, badly wounded, leaned over and said: "Anyone who is not for the Commander now is a traitor to Germany and should be shot for it. If you were not a sick man I would shoot you myself. How dare you attack

such a man. Von Lettow is the brains of this campaign, but you sound to me very much like the backside of it.”’

There was a shocked pause and then a laugh, and the mood of the meeting changed. It was decided to accept the order for evacuation. The women were sent across the river a few days later. It was during this exchange that Lettow-Vorbeck learned from Smuts not only that he had received the *Pour le Mérite* from the Kaiser, but also that one of his old friends, the white-hunter, F. C. Selous, had been killed while fighting in the Rufiji area for the British. He sent across a message of condolence and regrets.

In the evacuation of the native women attached to the Schutztruppe, he was not so fortunate. He gave the women three days' rations and sent them north in charge of a German sergeant, with instructions to deliver them to the British. The women retreated a few miles down the track, consumed the rations in twenty-four hours, and then fell upon the sergeant and beat him until he agreed to take them back to Lettow-Vorbeck's forces. Thereafter they remained with the Schutztruppe to the end, and not only the askari were glad of it.

There was just one more chance before the rains came in the spring of 1917 for General Smuts to entrap the man with whom his military life had now become so enmeshed. He had been given an undertaking that he would not be asked to pursue Lettow-Vorbeck south of the Rufiji River, and he was certainly longing to be home again.

To his wife he had written just before Christmas: 'Tomorrow is your dear birthday, and I wish you all possible good fortune for it. Many more of them in health and surrounded by those who love you. A pity that this time one of them is so far away, but I hope that this is the last time, and that we shall in future not be so much separated as in the last 16 years . . . But I shall come back one day, Mama, and then not go away quickly so soon.'

But now here he was on the Rufiji and he was unwilling to relinquish his command. Says his biographer: 'Perhaps he had allowed his personal duel with von Lettow to become something of an obsession . . . He still looked forward to catching him within a few months and thus making a clean finish to the campaign.' As the Official History says: 'On reaching the Central Railway he might well have paused. Viewing the campaign in retrospect it now seems indeed that at that stage he might with great advantage have contented

himself with establishing his new base at Dar es Salaam; restoring the railway and organizing his supply services on shorter and more manageable lines, meanwhile making his dispositions to end the campaign successfully by the use of both of the railway and of the southern ports, with troops invigorated by rest.'

He still refused to believe, however, that Lettow-Vorbeck had it in him to resist much longer, and in that he misjudged the man. If it had been Schnee, the situation would have been different. As he marched with the troops, the Governor wrung his hands, deplored the state of the country, and prayed for a cease-fire. Lettow-Vorbeck not only planned for continued campaigning but even, in his more optimistic moments, dreamed of victory. 'At the end of 1916,' he wrote, 'I regarded the military situation in the Colony as remarkably favourable, for I knew that the South African troops were for the most part worn out with battle casualties and sickness, while a large proportion of the remainder were returning to South Africa at the end of their engagements. Prisoners had repeatedly assured us that they had had enough of the "picnic" in East Africa . . . We could calmly contemplate the continuation of the war for a considerable time . . . I still believe that we would have succeeded not only in holding our own, but even in beating the enemy, if he had not enjoyed the power of continually filling up his reduced units and bringing in new ones.'

Smuts decided not to wait for the bases to be established further back, but to push on. On the night of 5 January 1917, Punjabi troops under the command of General Sheppard reached the Rufiji River at Kimbambabwe. A stream swollen to 800 yards by early rains confronted them, and their night crossing in Berthon boats was disastrously interrupted by herds of hippos, which upset two boats and drowned several soldiers; they could not fire at the hippos for fear of arousing the enemy on the other side.

From East, West and South other columns were pushing laboriously in against the shrinking lines of the Schutztruppe, rolling up their supply dumps and the maize crops upon which Lettow-Vorbeck so desperately depended.

In Berlin prognostications of the experts were gloomy. It obviously could not last much longer. The Kaiser cabled (on 27 January 1917):

'Whatever fate Lord the Almighty has reserved for your little band of heroes, the Fatherland remembers with pride its sons fighting in distant Africa. I wish to convey to the

corps my Imperial gratitude and my high esteem for its heroic stand in the unequal struggle.'¹

Reported Smuts: 'I have a month in which to trap him. At all costs we must move with dispatch to ensure that he does not get away.'

He did not stay long enough to see his hopes dashed once again. Back home in South Africa, Smuts' good friend and comrade in arms, General Botha, was worried that 'Janny will take root in those African swamps,' and realized that he would not voluntarily quit until he had seen his German opposite number either captured or liquidated. So if Smuts would not quit, he must be forcibly removed.

Early in January he sent a telegram to Smuts to tell him that he had been appointed as official South African representative at an Imperial Conference in London, and that he must relinquish his command at once. He returned to Dar es Salaam consumed with a sense of failure. For things were going wrong once more. The enemy was again making his escape.

It was not until several weeks later that Lettow-Vorbeck learned of his departure, and at once sent a letter through the lines to express his esteem, admiration and appreciation of the departed South African. He wrote afterwards that all his dealings, in battle or under flag of truce, had seemed to him 'proof of the mutual personal esteem and chivalry which existed throughout in spite of the exhausting war carried on by both sides. On many occasions also the enemy intimated his great appreciation of the German forces.'

But it was the ants he was watching now. The soldier ants which marched through the African bush and jungles were a confutation of Lettow-Vorbeck's theory that right was not always on the side of might. Where their big battalions marched, opposition crumbled. They moved in solid phalanxes along the paths they had chosen and nothing stopped them. They would approach in the night and find a Schutztruppe encampment in their way, and they would march right through it. They bit voraciously. They pressed relentlessly forward. Anything which impeded them, human or animal, they destroyed. Lettow-Vorbeck and his seasoned askari had long learned to respect them and to get out of their way when they came.

But they knew them, too, as infallible weather-vanes. When they began to move out of the low ground and make for

¹ German Colonial Ministry Records

the heights, it was a certain sign that the rains were coming. He watched them now. The battalions formed. In trains sometimes as wide as a mule's outspread carcase, through which they marched, they surged southwards out of the swamps and dampening bush. The askaris let them go through and then they made preparations to move in their wake. The bearers were sent out to pick the last grains of corn from the district. Then swiftly, they moved. The torrential downpours descended and splashed their heels as they retreated, and it was a bumper year in which the skies spilled over. Overnight, the dry watercourses filled and overflowed. The parched earth soaked and then glugged with too much water and became a floundering sea of mud; and then became a lake rising inches every hour until it drowned the bush and reached for the treetops.

Like everything else living in the region, the Schutztruppe made off for higher land, jostling buck and buffalo and treading through snakes and frogs and scurrying rats on their way. They took refuge on the slopes of the Matumbi Mountains. A great bubbling, scummy sea now separated them from the British forces on the Rufiji; and the enemy would need an armada of boats to cross it.

Lettow-Vorbeck was safe once more; and already planning the next phase of his campaign.

CHAPTER NINE

Beyond the Rufiji

JUST BEFORE HE SAILED from Dar es Salaam in January 1917, General Smuts wrote a long dispatch summarizing his operations against Lettow-Vorbeck and ended with a tribute to the men who had taken part in it.

'Eulogy seems unnecessary and misplaced,' he wrote. 'The plain tale of their achievements bears the most convincing testimony to the spirit, determination and prodigious efforts of all ranks. Their work has been done under tropical conditions which not only produce bodily weariness and unfitness, but which create mental languor and depression and finally appal the stoutest hearts. To march day by day, and week by week, through the African jungle or high grass, in which vision is limited to a few yards, in which danger always lurks near but seldom becomes visible, even when experienced, supplies a test to human nature often in the long run beyond the limits of human endurance . . . May the end soon crown their labours.'

It was a forlorn hope, and in his heart, Smuts knew it. It was beginning to be realized on the British side that though all the advances had been made by them, not once in this tropical war had they scored any tangible victory. There were already those who believed—as Kitchener had done—that they should never have come, and that their biggest defeat was the fact that they were fighting in the jungle at all. There were others who saw Smuts' driving energy and sheer indefatigability as a vice rather than a virtue of the campaign: for instance, his insistence on battling on after Kilimanjaro was gained and the frontiers of the British East African Protectorate secure; and his precipitate eagerness to send van Deventer and the South Africans on their epic (but largely useless) march through the rains to Kondoa-Iringi—where they stuck, fell sick, and died.

As to the course of subsequent operations, from the Ruva River down to the Central Railway, these, as the Official History puts it, 'brought out into harsh relief the fact that mere superiority in numbers, without full ability not only to

move them rapidly but to maintain them adequately, was an embarrassment, not an advantage.'

But now that a vast army was engaged, and Lettow-Vorbeck's challenge accepted, there was no way out for the British but to lumber on in pursuit of him, and in many ways it was like a lepidopterist on the hunt, with holes in his net, for a butterfly which kept turning into a wild African bee. It seemed to General van Deventer (who took command of the Allied forces from General Hoskins, who in turn had inherited them from Smuts) that Lettow-Vorbeck was still the key to the whole campaign. Find and defeat him and resistance in the Colony would collapse of its own accord. But where was the wily Lettow-Vorbeck? 'Captured mails revealed the fact,' wrote the German commander at this time, 'that in spite of his extensive intelligence and spy systems the enemy was groping in the dark. He did not know, for instance, where I was, although he seemed to place the greatest importance upon knowing.'

For the next few months, both sides played what Lettow-Vorbeck himself has called 'the gentleman's game' in order to find out about each other's dispositions. Every week or so, an officer from one side or the other appeared through the bush under flag of truce to propose either an exchange of prisoners or (in the case of the British) to transfer food and letters for prisoners. Both sides never abused these parliamentary exchanges by indulging in belligerent acts, but they certainly kept their eyes open, and Lettow-Vorbeck—who had, in any case, grown a goatee-beard—kept well out of the way, so as not to be recognized.¹

Once more, through the medium of the white flag, a member of the British forces brought a message to the Commander of the Schutztruppe. It was from the Kaiser, and it commemorated the outbreak of war. Lettow-Vorbeck had, in fact, received snatches of it through his mobile radio, but he was glad to have the full message. It said:

'I cannot allow the opening of a new year of war to go by without again expressing to you, my dear colonel, and your gallant troops, my thanks and my boundless recognition for your heroic conduct. Strengthened by the spirit of loyalty, you have displayed undaunted and confident courage in the unequal fight and for three years you have defended East Africa with never tiring energy. Your many victories have

¹ In one exchange, a German column offered to swap a British veterinary officer for two bottles of whisky, and the offer was accepted.

shown me that in a fateful hour the right man is in the right place. In trusty comradeship with my Governor [*sic*] and the whole population of the Protectorate, you were able to meet the heavy demands of a keen defensive, in spite of severe privations, and for three hard years to maintain a forced fight under the hot sun of Africa. Never, never did the world expect what your iron strength of will has rendered possible. In faith and with proud astonishment, today, on the threshold of a new year of war, the thankful Fatherland is mindful with me of its distant heroes and their victorious leader, whose quiet performance of his duty will ever form a brilliant example of the history of the war. May God further bless your arms.'

Lettow-Vorbeck may not have subscribed completely to some of the expressions in the message, but he was a loyal soldier, and he appreciated it.

The whole of German East Africa's coastline from Tanga and Dar es Salaam as far south as the Rufiji Delta and the ports of Kilwa and Lindi was now in British hands, and through these ports the British began to move in against the Schutztruppe with columns rather than divisions. General van Deventer had learned his lesson from the pyrrhic victory at Kondoa-Iringi and was determined never again to rely upon heavy transport and normal army echelons to keep his troops supplied. He divided his army into Han Force (commanded by Brig.-General Beves, though named after General Hannington, who had succumbed to fever) and Lin Force (commanded by Brig.-General O'Grady). There were still British, South African and Indian troops in these columns, but at least half of the strength consisted of East African, Nigerian and West Indian troops familiar with tropical conditions and toughened for bush-fighting. To the north, along the Central Railway, was a mixed force of East Africans, Nigerians, Indians and Cape Coloureds (commanded by Brig.-General Edwards) and, thrusting in from the west, the Nyasa-Rhodesian Field Troops under Brig.-General Northey. Henceforward they travelled light and lived off the country, with plentiful troops in reserve and aircraft to strengthen their punch with bombs. Their instructions were: 'What you cannot eat, burn. At all costs deprive the enemy of sustenance.' Both sides continued to proclaim that it was they who had the interests of the indigenous natives at heart, but neither hesitated to deprive the local inhabitants of food in order to devour it themselves or keep it from their opponents. Lettow-Vorbeck describes how his officers were instructed in

the subtleties of searching out hidden food-stocks in the villages. When intensive questioning of the native chiefs (those who had not fled into the forest) failed to elicit the required information, trees were tapped—for these were often hollowed out and foodstuffs hidden in them—or soggy ground dug up where grain might have been buried.

It has been mentioned that van Deventer now had aircraft to help him in his search for German concentrations, encampments and dumps. The Germans had always been masters of camouflage and were meticulous in draping their trench systems with branches and scrub, and nowadays, bereft as they were of most forms of transport, they left few dust trails. But when they halted to regroup or set up dumps and hospitals, the aircraft searched them out and bombarded them. 'We made ourselves at home,' Lettow-Vorbeck wrote, 'and though rifle bullets often whistled through our camp and aircraft dropped bombs on us, not much harm was done.' Amid all his other troubles, the German commander had contracted severe toothache and needed a back molar extracting. Shortly after his return to his headquarters nursing a bleeding gum, a bomb dropped near the dentist's temporary chair, and blew the next patient out of the room.

His medicos were having trouble. There were for the time being no more drugs to administer to the wounded—and only the capture of enemy supplies would remedy the situation—and such things as surgical bandages did not exist any more. They had to be made out of spare bits of uniform, boiled and disinfected, and from tree-bark. Operations were conducted without anaesthetics. The question of footwear was now acute. For three weeks Lettow-Vorbeck himself, despite his festering foot, marched without shoes in order to test whether it was possible for a European to exist unshod in the countryside over which they were marching.

'It was remarkable how soon the foot became inured to the ground and hardened up,' he said, in a conversation with the author. 'For scaling mountains and slithering over rocks, there was no doubt that the unshod foot gave the surest footing. It was also possible to march over trodden paths without shoes, but never through the bush—for there the spines and spikes bit into the flesh and caused grievously painful sores.'

He counselled his officers and under-officers to become their own masters, self-sufficient 'as our opponent, van Deventer, and Smuts and Botha, became so in their war against the British', and sent round a memorandum on the method

of making shoes from antelope skins, their soles fashioned from captured enemy saddles. Until this period of the war, most Europeans in the Schutztruppe had travelled the jungle with at least nine carriers to look after their wants and carry their paraphernalia. He now cut down this attachment to five at the most—an order which produced an explosion of rage from Governor Schnee, who reluctantly reduced his entourage of forty-six. Henceforward, each European was made responsible for his own 'household' and they proved inventive and ingenious in looking after their wants. So many of them, in fact, now moved with their own flock of poultry that Lettow-Vorbeck had to issue an order decreeing that any cock found crowing before 9 am in the morning was to be shot 'for having given information to the enemy, and its carcass forfeit to headquarters'.

If the enemy did not know exactly where he was, Lettow-Vorbeck decided that here was an opportunity to strike a decisive blow. A strong enemy column had been cutting its way through the bush from the coastal port at Lindi with the intention of annihilating eight companies of Schutztruppe under the command of General Wahle, who had gallantly fought his way through to Lettow-Vorbeck after the capitulation at Tabora. The British force consisted of South African infantry and a brigade of Nigerian troops, and it was commanded by a South African, General Beves. Unlike Meinertzhagen, Lettow-Vorbeck's admiration for the bravery and doggedness of South African troops was profound, and he classed General Beves himself as 'one of the most daring of the English generals'. But he had a fault. He was *too* brave.

By telegraph, runner and occasional telephone calls—when the line was not cut—General Wahle indicated that a great frontal attack upon him was about to begin. "I sent a parlementar into the enemy lines, he reported, 'to ask the enemy to take care of some of their wounded who had fallen into our hands. My emissary, Naval Lieut Sprockhoff, reports that there is every indication that General Beves is planning a total offensive designed to annihilate us and he will use every man he has available. Can you help?'"

He added that General Beves had asked Lieut Sprockhoff several questions designed to elicit the whereabouts of General Lettow-Vorbeck. 'The lieutenant fended off these questions and asked why the English continued to refer to von Lettow as a general when his rank was still that of colonel. General Beves replied that his information was that you are

Colonel Lettow-Vorbeck no longer but have been raised by His Imperial Majesty to the rank of general officer. May one general offer his congratulations to another.¹

It was perhaps the last opportunity that the German commander would have to hit the enemy a decisive blow. On October 10, 1917, he led five companies and two mountain guns across the Linkangara Mountains to rendezvous with Wable, and it was one of the epic treks of the campaign. The mountains were steep and the paths were narrow and treacherous. Time and again the columns lost touch with each other, and came together only by homing-in on the songs of the bearers hunking the guns over the peaks.

They arrived just in time to take part in a battle by which General Beves had decided to smother Wable's troops by sheer overwhelming numbers. He had thrown 6,000 men into the battle. Should Lettow-Vorbeck manoeuvre and try to compress his advance by an assault on the flank? The moment he realized that it was Beves in front of him he changed his mind, and instead concentrated the whole of his force behind Wable's front to stiffen it with every man available.

'A surprising move?' he said afterwards. 'It was prompted by the personality of the enemy commander. I had learned in the engagement at Reata [in the campaign around Kili-manjaro] that General Beves threw his men into action regardless of loss of life and did not hesitate to try for a success, not by skilful handling and small losses, but rather by repeated frontal attacks which, if the defence held its ground and had anything like adequate forces, led to severe losses.'

For four days, wave upon wave of South Africans, Nigerians, East Africans and Baluchis broke across the ravines and tried to smash the Schutztruppe's entrenchments. At the end of it, after repeated German counter-attacks, General Beves decided to withdraw. He left 400 dead, 250 prisoners behind him and sustained a further casualty list of at least a thousand men. The Schutztruppe's casualties were less but, in the circumstances, even more serious; for they had lost 14 European and 81 askaris killed, 55 Europeans and 367 askaris wounded—out of 1,500 men—and none of these could, of course, be replaced.

But it was a victory, and a tangible one. Also captured were one gun, six heavy and three light machine guns, and 200,000 rounds of ammunition. And this, at this moment, was more precious than gold.

¹ The British information was correct but premature. The elevation did not take place until three weeks later.

Yes, a victory. But not one to be exploited. That was no longer possible. If Beves had been thrown back, other forces were coming in from the rear, and these must be fended off if the Schutztruppe was not to be enveloped. Six hours after General Beves had retired—six hours in which the askaris were allowed to eat, loot and sleep and celebrate with their camp followers—Lettow-Vorbeck led them off again for a new engagement across the mountains. They were in action again twenty-four hours later.

In such circumstances was there really any use going on? Even Lettow-Vorbeck realized by now that his position was a perilous, if not a hopeless one. If he had been cut off from Germany before, it now seemed as if he was cut off completely from civilization. His ports were gone. Most settlements in the interior were now in British hands. His force was confined and enveloped by the enemy and crushed into one small, south-east corner of German East Africa; and he was in danger of starving.

'The question of supplies was becoming very serious,' he said, and indeed it was. He had calculated that in his dumps were about 1,250,000 pounds of grain and other foodstuffs, but he discovered when he examined them in the depot he had established at Chiwata that ants, rats and insects had been ravaging on them. He had calculated that this supply would feed him for six weeks, but it was now obvious that it would last him only half that long. There were no crops in the region available until the following March.

As a fighting force, too, he was in an even more perilous position. He was running out of ammunition—and without ammunition he would lose his *raison d'être*. 'Our whole supply had dwindled,' he wrote, 'to about 400,000 rounds, a very scanty allowance for our 2,000 rifles and fifty machine guns in a serious engagement.' For future supplies he would need to rely upon capture from the enemy, and that meant that each future engagement was an enormous gamble: how much ammunition could he risk firing in order to gain victory and replenishment? Nor was this his only headache so far as ammunition was concerned. Most of his cartridges were of the old 1871 type made to fit the ancient rifles with which at least half of the Schutztruppe had been equipped when war began—cartridges which did enough damage when they hit their target but were of the 'smoky' type which gave off a tell-tale puff each time they were fired. Two-thirds of the Schutztruppe were now equipped with captured English or with modern German rifles, and for them the supply of

cartridges was small indeed—twenty rounds apiece. This meant that in an attack only one-third of his force, firing 'smoky' bullets, could be used while the bulk of his troops stayed in reserve ready to fire in the last resort and make every bullet tell.

To complete the gloomy recital of his situation, there was the sorry state of his artillery. The guns from the *Königsberg* had just about shot their last round. They had been man-handled for months over impossible country, over mountains, through swamps, across rivers, up fantastic cliffs. Between them they had travelled thousands of miles over terrain which had never before been traversed by such enormous and unwieldy lumps of steel, and the fire from their barrels had done as much as anything to hold back the enemy troops.¹ But now they were silent. Of ten 4.1 inch guns, one had been taken at Kahe, in the Kilimanjaro area, during Smuts' advance in March 1916. One was captured at Muanza, on Lake Victoria, in July of that year, and another at Bagamayo in August. Two were overrun in Uluguru Mountains during the advance in the same month, and two more in September, at Tabora and Kahama, and yet another at Mohoro in January 1917. Four 4.1 inch howitzers and four 88 cm guns had been captured in the same areas. All of them had been destroyed before the Schutztruppe left them, but, in the circumstances, that was but a small compensation. The British could always call up more. True, the Schutztruppe had captured a British gun during the action at Mahiwa against General Beves, but it had burst when they tried to use it. Lettow-Vorbeck wrote: 'That last two 10.5 cm guns from the *Königsberg* had been destroyed a few days before. On the day after a German mountain gun had been destroyed and sunk at Kitangari. We were thus left with one German and one Portuguese mountain gun. During the last few months the lack of artillery ammunition had been so serious that we had rarely more than three hundred rounds all told. That was about the allowance per engagement for one of the numerous English guns.'

So why fight on?

On October 24, 1917, the Governor of Chiwata, a province of German East Africa midway between the British-held port

¹ The *Königsberg's* crew had a record that was almost equally spectacular. Some had fought on Lakes Victoria and Tanganyika against British and Belgian ships; but the bulk of the crew had been in the field, and their casualties were higher proportionately than any other units.

of Lindi and the Portuguese frontier of Mozambique, arrived at the German Commander's headquarters for a conference. It soon became apparent that he held a brief from Governor Schnee (with whom Lettow-Vorbeck was not talking at the moment; they had quarrelled bitterly a few weeks before over troop dispositions). An acrid conversation ensued.

The Governor asked the commander to give up the struggle. He pointed out all the difficulties which have already been set out and stressed the fact that most of the territory of German East Africa was now in enemy hands. Why prolong the struggle? Why not ask for an honourable peace?

'Because,' replied Lettow-Vorbeck, 'the Fatherland is still at war and every enemy soldier we can entice into the African hinterland will help us to win it.'

The Governor suggested that, according to enemy reports, Germany was far from winning the war and seemed likely to lose it.

'All the more reason to fight,' retorted the Commander. 'If the English win the war, they will seek a reason to take over our colonies. All the more reason to prove beyond all doubt that we have the right, by our fight for them, by the proof of the loyalty of our native troops, to retain them.'

In any case, he might have added, for that was surely going through his mind, you cannot resist for so long in such circumstances and give up until you are really defeated. The Schutztruppe had not been defeated. Time and again, he and his troops had met the enemy and scattered them. It would be a dishonourable act to give up now. He had told his men that they would snatch victory where they could and hold on and fight on in the meantime, and he had done this with little encouragement from anyone either inside or outside the Colony. There was no doubt that the bulk of the Germans left in East Africa were on Schnee's side. They wanted an end of it. The sooner an armistice was concluded, the sooner they could settle down to the old, comfortable, colonial life; but Lettow-Vorbeck was not only a brilliant commander in the field but no fool politically, and he realized more than the gaggle of craven civilians who squawked for peace that the old colonial life was now gone forever, and that what he was fighting for now was Germany's influence in Africa. Win or lose the war, Germany must at least be remembered and be judged by her actions. To capitulate at this moment would lose her all the prestige she had so painstakingly won in Africa in past generations, and defeat

and humiliation would be the result. 'We are fighting for the future,' he said.

His concern was not whether to go on fighting but how to go on fighting.

He realized by now that there was no future for him or his troops if he let himself be compressed yard by yard through the bush into an ever-narrowing corner of Africa.

'We had therefore to withdraw,' he decided—as if withdrawal was something new. But withdraw where, and with what troops?

'Only by a drastic reduction of strength could we carry on with the stores in hand,' he wrote. 'Our supply area had been narrowed, fresh requisitioning had been interfered with by the enemy, and the produce of the land exhausted. The supply of quinine would last the Europeans a month longer. After the consumption of this the Europeans would certainly fall victims to malaria and its attendant evils; they would certainly no longer be able to contend with the rigours of a tropical campaign. Only by reducing the number of Europeans to a minimum could enough quinine be ensured for each man to enable us to carry on the operations for months.'

He decided to cut down the Schutztruppe's strength to a tough fighting column of a maximum 2,000 rifles of which the European officers and men would not number more than 200. 'Our large force with little ammunition was of less value in the field than a smaller number of picked men with plenty of ammunition,' he wrote. Several hundred Europeans and 600 askaris were left behind at a settlement just north of the Portuguese frontier to be picked up by the British. 'Unfortunately, it must be admitted that among those who were left behind at Nambindinga, even among the Europeans, there were many who were not unwilling to lay down their arms. It is, however, worthy of mention that not only the majority of the Europeans but also many askari were bitterly disappointed at having to remain. But we had repeatedly to refuse the request of a brave askari that he might come and fight for us. But when, two days later, Lieutenant Grundmann, though severely wounded and scarcely able to walk, reported himself, saying that he could not in spite of orders bring himself to surrender, I have seldom been so pleased at this breach of discipline.'

For the last time, Lettow-Vorbeck fed his troops from prepared dumps of food. His cook, Baba, packed all the cigarettes, tobacco leaves and paper he could find, for his master was a chain smoker during battle.

'We were off on the greatest gamble of the whole campaign,' said the general in a conversation with the author. 'We needed supplies to make the continuation of the war possible. We must seek them out from the enemy. Meanwhile, we travelled like the voortrekkers of old, living off the country. I had no fears for the future, because I did not look into the future. All I knew was that henceforth we would at least have this over the enemy—we could withdraw quickly anywhere we wished, for we had no more dumps to protect, no more hospitals to worry about. The enemy would have to involve increasing numbers of men in his search for us and would progressively exhaust his strength.'

The new and streamlined Schutztruppe was not exactly a force of nothing but toughened, fighting men. There were 200 Europeans, 1,700 askaris, and 3,000 bearers (though the bearers were left behind as the supplies they carried were consumed). A few horses and mules were taken along and these were consumed as they began to break under the conditions of the march. But also in the columns were women.

The *bibis* or wives of the askaris (and some of the *bibis* of the Europeans) had refused to stay behind.

'This was awkward, but there was little I found I could do about it,' Lettow-Vorbeck said. 'In the conditions which we were facing, it was impossible to deny the troops the comforts to which they had accustomed themselves, and there is no doubt that they would sorely have missed their women, for more than obvious reasons. The women carried the loads. They also carried the children. It had not been unusual in the previous months for an askari to break off for a moment in the firing line to go to his *bibi* not more than a hundred yards behind to see how she was progressing in her delivery of their latest offspring. She was rarely too slow in her delivery to fail to have his hot meal ready when the fighting was over. Most of the women insisted on accompanying their men-folk. When a woman did fall behind in a march, the askari would take up his child and march on with it on his shoulders.'

The columns straggled southwards through the forest, away from the enveloping British columns. And in subsequent weeks Lettow-Vorbeck learned not to be surprised when he saw one of his askaris going into battle with a rifle in his hand and his brat clinging to his neck with hands and feet as he advanced on the enemy.

The direction of their retreat was towards the Rovuma

River. Across its broad expanse lay Portuguese Mozambique. There the General calculated he would find food to eat and Portuguese troops to kill and ammunition to replenish his vanishing stock of cartridges and shells. Then he could turn back and hit the British.

He reached it at the head of his advance guard on November 24, 1917, and that morning—the last he was destined to spend on German African soil for many months to come—he turned to Governor Schnee, who had accompanied his column, and held out his hand.

'*Auf wiedersehen,*' he said. 'Guard the Colony well, and see that the enemy obey the rules of a civilized power.'

Governor Schnee looked at him in cold astonishment. 'Do you imagine that you are leaving me here?' he asked.

'But naturally,' replied the Commander-in-Chief. 'Today we leave German territory and invade an enemy land. You are Governor of East Africa and your powers cease at this frontier. You have duties to perform among our occupied people. You must be eager to go back and help them.'

The Governor shook his head. 'I would remind you, General,' he said, 'of something which you appear continually to have forgotten during this campaign—that part of my prerogatives as Governor is that of remaining supreme military commander of the Schutztruppe in East Africa. I intend to hold on to that responsibility in all conditions and until the last possible moment. To you goes the day-to-day command of the campaign, and I shall try to interfere as little as possible in your conduct of it. But I shall not willingly relinquish my right to question your decisions or to be consulted about them. In other words, where you go, I go.'

Lettow-Vorbeck recalls that at this moment he felt lower than at any moment of the campaign. He had been buoyed up by the thought, for days past, that he was going to say good-bye at last to Governor Schnee. He gestured to forty-six porters, staggering on the river's edge under heavy loads, and asked:

'Do you intend to bring these men with you? At least, then, send them back, and let us have forty-six less mouths to feed.'

Governor Schnee shook his head once more.

'These men above all must accompany me,' he said. 'They are carrying the Government treasury, and with it we will pay our way through enemy territory. It is against German principles to take goods from the people and not give them payment in return.'

He turned to the porters and gestured for them to begin the crossing of the river.

And so, on November 24, 1917, General Lettow-Vorbeck, Governor Schnee, 200 Europeans, 1,500 askaris, 3,000 porters and an assortment of female camp followers waded south into Portuguese East Africa. Among their loads were fourteen solid mounds of Governor Schnee's completely worthless, Tabora-printed German East African rupees.

'I will make a bonfire of those one day,' said Lettow-Vorbeck. And he was a man who kept his word.

It was just as well for Lettow-Vorbeck's peace of mind that he did not know until after the war of what was happening in the skies over Africa as his troops assembled on the banks of the Rovuma. Back home in Germany his struggle had made him the hero of the day, and Press, public and Parliament demanded that somehow help must be got through to him to enable him to continue the campaign. But how? Even if a ship could break through the blockade or a U-boat slip through African waters, there was now no chance of landing stores, for it was known in Berlin that the whole of the coast of East Africa was now in British hands.

And then someone in Berlin had an idea. Why not use a Zeppelin to carry munitions and supplies to the beleaguered Schutztruppe? The L 59 was sent south to Bulgaria and there work began fitting extra fuel tanks for its long journey. There were delays and mishaps, but the L 59 was ready to depart by mid-November. It carried a crew of volunteers and a cargo of three tons of shells, rifles, bullets and clothing. Its captain was instructed to preserve radio silence until he was well over Africa and then to send through a cipher telegram to announce that he was on his way, and to ask for a rendezvous.

Now it so happened that Lettow-Vorbeck's sole remaining radio transmitter in Africa was situated at Newale, three days' march north of the Rovuma River. Through this station he had, late in October, received news of his promotion to general and a message of personal congratulations from the Kaiser. He had assembled his Schutztruppe at Newale on November 17, 1917, and there went through the winnowing process by which he cut down his force for the foray across the Rovuma. He was then informed that the radio station was in such a state of disrepair that it could only receive but not send any messages; a fact which could not, of course, be

communicated to Berlin and does not seem to have been appreciated there.

On November 20, he ordered the station to be dismantled. That same evening he began his march to the Rovuma.

Zeppelin L 59 took off from Jamboli, in Bulgaria, on November 21. At 2.50 am on November 23 it was over Khar-toum after one of the longest journeys ever taken by an airship so far; and there a message was sent out in cipher telling the Schutztruppe of its approach. At first there was no reply, and L 59 cruised on southwards. And then radio silence was broken with a message in cipher to say: 'Go back. Newale has been taken. The war is over and the Schutztruppe has been defeated.'

The message came from British sources, which had set up their own radio station and were in possession of the German code. But L 59 was not to know that. It turned and made off through the night, taking its precious cargo with it; and the last attempt by Germany to aid its gallant commander in Africa had failed, by a trick.

The false news of Lettow-Vorbeck's capitulation which Zeppelin L 59 brought back from its abortive journey to Africa filled the High Command with dismay. It was not until three weeks later that a German agent operating in Dar es Salaam succeeded in conveying to Berlin that the Schutztruppe commander was still fighting.

The Kaiser sat down to pen one of his messages. In the circumstances, it was one of the few hopeful events he was in a position to acknowledge. He sent a note to his Colonial Minister, Solf, and asked him to get a signal at all costs through to Lettow-Vorbeck.

'The Protection Corps command has reported to me,' he wrote, 'the most recent feat of arms of the remnant of our East African Army under the Command of General von Lettow-Vorbeck. According to the latest news there seemed to be no way out of their desperate situation and the merciless hounding-down seemed to be drawing to its end. We receive instead the joyous news that the strength of the band of heroes is unbroken, that they uphold the German flag on the Black Continent, firmly hoping for the victory of German arms in Europe. Only a corps inspired by unreserved trust in their leader and a commander of General von Lettow-Vorbeck's energy are capable of such an accomplishment, which fills us with pride and admiration, and which is held in esteem

even by the adversary. And should in future the courageous band be overpowered by the enemy the history of this war will pay tribute to General von Lettow and his troops. May God grant you his help.'

The substance of the message was sent out by the German radio; and, as usual, meticulously passed to von Lettow under white flag by the British.

CHAPTER TEN

The Rout of the Portuguese

THE PORTUGUESE had declared war against Germany in March 1916, using as their pretext 'numerous barbarous acts' committed against Portuguese lives and territory in Africa by soldiers of the Schutztruppe. One of the principal incidents which they cited—the invasion of a frontier post and the killing of a Portuguese officer—had, in fact, been committed on August 5, 1914, when the Germans believed that Portugal had declared war along with Britain, France and Russia, and a full apology had been made and compensation paid. The real reason for Portugal's belated belligerence was, of course, General Smuts' successful sweep through the Kilimanjaro area and the promise it appeared to give that the whole of German East Africa would soon be in British hands. A small mouthful of the spoils would not be unwelcome to the Portuguese, particularly a tract of territory just south of the mouth of the Rovuma River known as the Kionga Triangle. It was rich and fertile land and had been seized from the Sultan of Zanzibar by the Portuguese in 1887, only to have it snatched away from them in turn by the Germans in 1894—an act which they had been forced out of weakness to accept at the time, but went on bitterly resenting.

The moment war was declared, the Portuguese Government announced that it was sending an expeditionary force to Mozambique to reinforce the garrison already there (which consisted of 1,500 European troops and 2,800 native levies), but the officer commanding the northern border with German East Africa decided not to wait for them before avenging the insult to his country. This officer, Major da Silveira, moved into the Kionga Triangle on April 6, 1916, and found next to no opposition from the few scattered posts; he had occupied the whole area and sat his troops on the south bank of the Rovuma on April 10. But then he grew too bold. There were Germans encamped on the northern bank and they made several minor raids on the Portuguese. Major da Silveira decided to mount an assault with the intention of driving them out once and for all, and towards the end of May, a

Portuguese cruiser (the *Adamstor*) and a gunboat (the *Chaimite*) arrived off the river mouth. Under cover of a bombardment from their guns, da Silveira and his troops went ashore at Mwambo, on the northern lip of the river, and disaster hit him and his 400 men as they walked up the beach. The German defenders consisted of 3 Europeans and 42 askaris under Lieutenant Sprockhoff, a naval officer who has already been mentioned in this narrative, and they held their fire until the last possible moment. Practically the whole of the Portuguese were either wiped out or taken prisoner. This operation, which had been poorly prepared for, and landed in the wrong place at the worst possible time, moved Mienertzhagen to pen one of the most pungent paragraphs in his diary.

'It is a smaller and worse edition of the Tanga fiasco,' he wrote. 'Those who know the Portuguese expected no more and no less. They should have remained outside a war in which northern nations are involved. They certainly have no right to colonies, in fact it is time such a miserable effete and decadent nation came under some form of control, for by themselves they can do only harm. They have had their chance, they have lived for centuries amid western civilization and have lost all they have ever gained. What a change from the days of Vasco da Gama. Their colonies are a scandal, the natives being much worse off than they ever were before. Except for introducing every European vice and withholding every European virtue, they have done nothing.'

In the next few months the Portuguese did the best they could to live down to Meinertzhagen's strictures. The expeditionary force arrived but got itself almost immediately into a sorry mess with tropical sickness. When Smuts' forces reached and occupied the Central Railway and subsequently took Dar es Salaam, the British commander cabled Major-General Gil, commander of the Portuguese expeditionary force, to begin an immediate march northwards to cut off Lettow-Vorbeck's retreat. His urgings were backed up by a cable to Gil from the Government in Lisbon telling him to mount 'a rapid offensive in order not to run the risk of arriving late or of our operations being useless'. He could only reply that he was in no condition to do anything at all, since his transport and supplies had failed to arrive. The original plan had been for him to occupy the ports of Mikandani, Lindi, Kiswere and Kilwa, but the Royal Navy moved in first and took them over. The Portuguese were directed inland to smother the fertile lands north of the Rovuma and

deny their crops to the Schutztruppe, but General Gil, in the words of the Official History, 'demurred, pointing out that his transport was not adequate to supply a large force so far inland, that there were no made roads from the Portuguese frontier'. He decided instead to proceed along the coast into an area which he knew was in process of being invested by the British and had few German troops left in it, anyway. Lisbon announced shortly afterwards that Major da Silveira's defeat had been revenged and that the Portuguese flag had been planted north of the Rovuma. There they tentatively sat for the next few months, bravely withstanding gnat-bite attacks from a small force of askaris under the command of Captain Loeff of the *Königsberg*, who had retreated to this area after the collapse of Dar es Salaam. Loeff had not sufficient numbers to do more than keep them in a constant state of panic, and increase the sickness rate among the troops (950 of whom were sent back in hospital ships to Lisbon in the next few weeks).

It was into General Gil's defensive area that General Lettow-Vorbeck retreated on November 25, 1917, and he had come looking for trouble. His troops, as he recorded at the time, were filled with a sense of *allgemeine Wurchtigkiet*, or bloody-mindedness, and they were ripe for anything. They were short of food and short of ammunition, and they knew that one or the other could only be obtained from the enemy.

'The position could be summed up,' he said afterwards, 'by saying that the British were hunting us, and we were hunting the Portuguese.'

Almost at once they were plunged into the kind of trouble which, physically and psychologically, they were seeking. The passage across the Rovuma River had been made just upstream from its confluence with another wide and fast-flowing stream, the Ludjenda, and there were promising vistas ahead, cropped fields and plantations, food. It soon became apparent that the south bank of the river was held by a Portuguese force which subsequent reconnaissance established as at least 1,500 strong.

'It was as if my men deliberately taunted them to open fire upon them,' said Lettow-Vorbeck. 'We were in a filthy condition and we had our tattered uniforms to wash and our prickly heat to assuage, and it must be admitted that many of the troops flung off their clothes immediately they were in the water and began to flounder in joyous bathing. When fire was

opened upon them from the bank they laughed at it, and I had considerable difficulty in making them take cover.'

The German commander went off on his own for a personal reconnaissance and crawled to within a hundred yards of the Portuguese camps—'men in white suits moving about . . . others were building earthworks and a transport column was also observed. The troops were certainly in great force.'

For a time it seemed as if the Schutztruppe were vulnerable. Askaris were bathing, bearers were moving across the swift-flowing waters with piles of supply on their heads, and on the northern bank the women chattered and lulued at the prospect of strife which they smelled in the air. But the Portuguese, apart from a few desultory shots, seemed in no mood to launch an offensive. Lettow-Vorbeck launched one instead. With his last remaining mountain gun, he bombarded the Portuguese encampment and then sent his men in, some of them still naked, in an enveloping attack which created immediate panic.

'It was a fearful *mêlée*,' he wrote afterwards. For once the 'smoky' 1871 ammunition was no drawback, for the Portuguese had no mortars to direct at those places where they saw the tell-tale puffs rising. The camp was overrun and the askaris went to work with the weapon they liked most, the bayonet, for the next two hours there was indiscriminate slaughter. All efforts to prevent it were useless. 'It was a moment when they needed to kill,' said Lettow-Vorbeck. And they killed. Out of a force of 1,500 barely six hundred survived the subsequent massacre. And then the looting began.

'Again and again our askari troops, in search of booty, threw themselves on the enemy . . . In addition, a crowd of bearers and boys, grasping the situation, had quickly run up and were taking their choice of pots of lard and other supplies, opening cases of jam and throwing them away again when they thought they had found something more attractive . . . Even the Portuguese askaris, already taken prisoner, joined in the plunder of their own stores. There was no alternative but to intervene vigorously. I became very eloquent, and, to make an example, dashed at least seven times to one bearer I knew . . . At last I succeeded in restoring discipline.'

Captured papers revealed that the Portuguese had arrived only the day before on a forced march from the south with express orders to prevent the German crossing of the Rovuma. 'It was really a perfect miracle that these troops had arrived so opportunely as to make the capture of the place so profitable to us,' Lettow-Vorbeck wrote.

The dead were buried. 150 prisoners were released after promising that they would not fight against the Germans again. 300 Portuguese askaris were impressed as bearers. And then the captured ammunition was distributed. There were hundreds of rifles and six machine guns, plus thirty horses. There were enough Portuguese rifles to replace the old 1871 guns for almost the whole of the Schutztruppe, and a quarter of a million rounds to feed into them. 'With one blow we had freed ourselves of a great part of our difficulties.'

In the next few weeks, before the rains descended in December, for they were earlier in this part of the country, more Portuguese posts were overrun and more munitions and supplies captured. Lettow-Vorbeck replenished his supply of cigars and cigarettes from Portuguese stores and it was a balm he badly needed at this time. A chain-smoker, particularly during action, he had suffered his worst torments the previous Christmas when he had watched British planes 'bombing', as he thought, their own troops in the vicinity of Kilwa, only to discover later that they were dropping cigarettes on the troops. He was strongly tempted to launch an attack if only to capture a few of them.

His physical condition at this time was giving his staff considerable anxiety. His bouts of malaria were now almost continuous, and the condition of his feet had not improved. From shortage of footwear, and as an example to his troops, he had been marching barefoot wherever possible, and the result was that both sand-fly and jiggers had got at him again. The sand-fly is a small and delicate creature with iridescent wings which seems to find its greatest pleasure in biting the human feet and provoking not only a maddeningly irritating infection but a three-day fever which lowers the capacity and inflames the temper. The jigger, too, bores into the feet and lays its eggs beneath the pad of the soles, from which they must be carefully cut out—for burst eggs cause poisoning and abscesses. There was, too, the omnipresent bott-fly, which bites a hole in the skin and lays an egg which, when hatched into a larva, must be drawn out whole if a festering sore is not to be produced from its mouldering carcass.

'It is perhaps natural that at this time I was not always very gentle and considerate to those around me,' he said. 'So it happened that those very officers of my staff who were working with me with the greatest devotion to the cause and deserved the most recognition were the objects of much unjustified reproach. For not taking offence or allowing this to prejudice

the cheerful continuation of their work, they deserve particular gratitude . . . Fortunately, it was only a passing phase.'

The significance of that remark would be missed if it were not pointed out that his bad temper coincided with the continuous presence of Governor Schnee in his camp, and that it passed—though the physical discomfort did not—the moment the Governor was sent off to march with a column well away from the headquarters camp. It could hardly be said that relations between the two men were improving as time went on. Schnee was still insistent on his rights and determined that he should be consulted on every move that was made. And his treasure chests still travelled with him.

'The Governor had remained with the force even after leaving the Protectorate,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck, 'in accordance with the regulation (certainly not intended to provide for war with a European power) that he was military head of the Protectorate. He had interpreted this authority in such a way as to interfere most seriously with the Commander-in-Chief, and had often encroached upon my sphere of activity.'

It was not until a blazing row had occurred and Governor Schnee had been ordered out of the headquarters camp that some sort of *modus vivendi* was reached between the two men. 'I attached the greatest importance to the fact that now, at any rate, I had a free hand,' the commander wrote. 'Even if I did not yield to the Governor's claims, it must be understood that in the unprecedented military situation there were enough differences of opinion to overburden the Commander-in-Chief, who, whatever happens, is held actually, if not morally, responsible.'

So Governor Schnee withdrew and there was peace for a time. All through the December and January rains, the main column of the Schutztruppe, with Lettow-Vorbeck limping at its head, or sometimes riding a drooping mule, moved along the Ludjenda River—once more in search of food.

It was thick bush country through which they were now marching, and so spiny underfoot that even Lettow-Vorbeck was forced to don sandals as some protection for his festering feet. He had tried his best to imitate the natives and become completely impervious to pain; he envied them when he saw them squat down on the ground, calmly cut out a piece of flesh which had been pierced by a thorn, and march on again; but it was endurance rather than insensitiveness to the agonies in his feet which enabled him to carry on now. His recollection of the next few weeks is of endless marching, broken by an occasional foray against a Portuguese outpost. The Schutz-

truppe had been divided into three main columns, each one with a supply train and a field hospital. The advance detachment of a European officer or under-officer and a platoon of askaris rose at 3 am each day and set off along the trails with scouts ahead searching for signs of enemy or game; and behind straggled the rest of the column in a crocodile many miles long, for single-file marching was only possible in this country. Behind the lean, tall, campaign-hardened askari, rifles reversed on their shoulders, Portuguese cigarettes fuming in their mouths, came the sturdy Wazakuma machine-gun bearers and the chirruping little signal 'boys', some of them only ten and eleven years old; then the bearers with loads of sixty pounds on their heads, singing as they marched; and drawn up in the rear, jollied along when they flagged by an askari round-up man and column organizer, were the women and their children. The women carried their own loads and those of their askaris on their heads, often had a baby on their backs (several babies were born on the trek), and they were draped with the multi-coloured materials which had been captured from the Portuguese. They, too, sang as they walked and they looked like an exotic carnival procession.

The British by now were a long way away. There were no more bombing raids. In anticipation of the rains, General van Deventer was calling in his troops and re-equipping and re-planning his strategy. He chose this moment to send yet another message through to Lettow-Vorbeck asking for his capitulation, calculating that his patrols would give the impression of a potential striking force which was not, in fact, there. It may be said that the British commanders timed their surrender notes badly; they always seemed to arrive when Lettow-Vorbeck and his men were at their most belligerent and defiant. They were heartened rather than cast down by them.

'A written message from the British Commander-in-Chief, General van Deventer,' Lettow-Vorbeck wrote, 'in which he summoned me to surrender, was brought under protection of the white flag, and strengthened me in my belief that our escape had taken him by surprise, and that our invasion of Portuguese territory had put him at a loss. Neither he nor General Smuts had ever thought of sending a summons to surrender when the situation was favourable to the English. Why should they do so in a situation like the present, or that of September 1916, at Kissaki, which was undoubtedly favourable to us? Only because they were at their wits' end. That was indeed not difficult to see through. The time before the setting in of the

rainy season, at the end of December, was too short to prepare for a fresh operation, and after the rains had begun the enemy transport of supplies, which depended largely on motor transport, would be faced with new difficulties. We had, therefore, plenty of time.'

But time to go where?

General van Deventer's message had contained one item of news which was shattering to the Commander-in-Chief of the Schutztruppe—news that one of his columns, under the command of one of his most trusted captains, had surrendered. Captain Tafel and a picked troop of askaris had been operating on the flank of Lettow-Vorbeck's force and had distinguished itself in both mowing down the Portuguese and keeping the British at bay. But it had run out of food. The area in which it operated had been denuded of its crops, wild game had fled, the earth had literally been scorched—great bush fires calculated by one side or another to burn out opposition, had destroyed foodstuffs. After several days without any rations at all, Tafel's company had reached a point when they gave in or starved. They did not know (for there was no communication) that only an hour's march away Lettow-Vorbeck had seized an area of Portuguese farmland which would have provided them with at least fourteen days' provisions. So they hoisted a white flag and gave up.¹

'It was a time of great hardship,' said Lettow-Vorbeck, 'and only the knowledge that the British were finding it even more difficult, to such an extent that they wanted us to give up, kept us going. At this late date it is perhaps difficult to convey how much the idea that the enemy was in great difficulties too galvanized our forces.'

He wrote of this time: 'Even during the march the obtaining of supplies had to be attended to. Hunting patrols marched ahead of the column or on the flanks through the bush. Often they would remain behind near the old camping sites, where game or traces of game had been observed. On arriving at the camping ground, four askaris and my boy Serubiti, would cut down branches and erect a frame for the tent sections or for a grass hut. Sometimes a raised bivouac of branches was arranged and covered with grass. Soon afterwards the bearded Baba, my cook, would arrive and give careful direc-

¹ Three weeks later, days after Lettow-Vorbeck had heard it from the British, a small detachment of Schutztruppe arrived at his headquarters with a message explaining why Tafel had had to give in. The men were half starved and racked with fever. The long message of explanation ended with the words: 'I am sorry to have let you down.'

tions for the arrangement of the kitchen. The bearers would come in and fetch water, cut grass and firewood with their bush knives. The hunting patrols brought in what they had shot, and soon the smell of cooking rose from the camp-fires on all sides.'

After six to eight hours of marching, there was still work to be done. 'Messages, reconnaissance reports and captured dispatches were brought in; a box in a shady spot served as a desk. During the longer halts a table was built of branches. The evening meal was eaten in company with friends round the camp fire, the boys bringing cases to sit on. The more lordly had deck-chairs. Then to bed under mosquito-nets, and in the morning once more into the unknown. Should we find supplies, and could we make what we had last out until we did? These uncertainties cropped up every day afresh, and haunted us week after week and month after month.'

For Christmas 1917, the officers of the Schutztruppe decided to plan a present for their commander. One of his companies under the command of Lieutenant von Ruckteschell¹ pushed ahead through the bush and enveloped a Portuguese plantation area at Chirumba. The defenders of the garrison were driven off with no casualties on either side, and the settlement taken over. On Christmas Eve, the commander was brought to the settlement. He was taken into a bedroom equipped with a four-poster spread with clean sheets and a hole-proof mosquito-net. He awoke to a breakfast of fresh coffee and mangoes. For lunch there was a haunch of pig with crackling, sauerkraut and sweet potatoes, with some Portuguese wine, and a bottle of port. There was also a box of Portuguese cigars attached to which was a card, saying: 'To the country postman'. It was a reference to an ascerbic remark of Governor Schnee, who had been heard to say: 'Still further? The fellow must come from a family of country postmen!'

The Schutztruppe stayed at Chirumba for several weeks while the rains fell. Hippos were shot for the bearers (they descended upon each carcass and demolished it in a day); the swelling rivers were trawled for sheat-fish, which were fried in hippo-lard. The officers relaxed on a diet of antelope and buck. The *bibis* and other camp-followers held nightly dances and there were few in the Schutztruppe who did not taste the delights of home comfort and the careless raptures of an interlude snatched from the rigours of war.

¹ Who, in his spare time, did some interesting drawings of the natives with whom the Schutztruppe came in contact.

And then, abruptly, it was over.

One morning towards the end of January 1918, a British aircraft flew over Chirumba and scattered leaflets. They could not, from the British point of view, have arrived at a more propitious moment, for supplies were beginning to run out once more.

The leaflets, written in Swahili, said:

'To the German askari. I greet you and bring you a message from the Bana Mkubwa [the leader] of the English. The talks you have had from the Germans are full of lies, and I say to you: if you have heard that the war in Europe is winging towards its end, and that Germany will soon have victory, let me give you an answer which you will find is incontrovertible. The Germans with whom you are fighting know nothing—how can they know when they are driven into the bush, living like wild animals, without forts, without ships, without warships, without even a telegraph line? The war in Europe will go on for some months yet, but already the German Kaiser is being chased by our Bana Mkubwa. You may say: let us hang on. We will get our reward. But who will give you the gold you have so richly earned? They give you notes, rupee notes. But is there any difference between the notes they give you and the leaves on the tree? Where is the treasure to turn them into gold? The Imperial German Government is the guarantee that each note with which you are paid will be turned into gold. But where will this exchange be made—in the bush?'

The leaflets then turned, more subtly, to suggestions that there would be rewards for giving up.

'Your commander has told you that by crossing over the Rovuma River you will be safe. We, the English, will follow you no further, we will fight no longer, it is all over for you. But do you really believe that we have given up the fight? Don't we continue to search you out? Have you not heard our guns sounding in the bush? There you are, without supplies and food. You are getting no pay. Why do you continue to run away, and why not instead run towards us and bring this war which is no concern of yours to an end? Come into Zomba or Blantyre and give yourselves up. There you will find your brothers, your friends, who are already captives and will tell you you will be given food and not be made to work—and where you will be happy once again. Wa salaam. Baxter, Colonel.'

At this point in the campaign they were winning words. As Lettow-Vorbeck said: 'Many of my troops were very war-weary. Added to this there were in many cases the feeling of

uncertainty as to where the campaign was going to lead them. The great majority of black men cling to their homes and their relations. They said to themselves: "If we go further we shall come into country we don't know. We can find our way back home from where we are, but soon we shan't be able to." The English propaganda, by word of mouth and pamphlets, fell in many cases on fruitful ground, and as a result a number of good askaris and even older non-commissioned officers deserted.'

He needed a battle, and some loot, and he pushed his columns forward once again in search of a little bloodshed.

'In so long and trying a campaign,' he wrote, 'the morale was bound to be low from time to time. It was no use to be astonished or discouraged. The important thing was to fight against it firmly, and for this the loyal elements, of which they were many, both among Europeans, askaris and bearers, had firmly made up their minds.'

He wanted a victory. It was perhaps typical of the situation that Governor Schnee should be the man who contrived to cheat him of it when the time came.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Search for Kokosani

IN THE THREE MONTHS from the end of January 1918, when the rains ceased in Portuguese East Africa and the reassembled British forces once more began to chase him, Lettow-Vorbeck and the Schutztruppe marched across 2,500 miles of bush-land, rivers and mountains, and lived almost literally from hand to mouth on the way. For many weeks fungi and *pori* (bush) kept them alive;¹ and only the news over the portable radio, which they had carried with them from Newale, which announced a great German offensive in northern France, spurred on most of the Europeans to keep fighting.

The bloody skirmishes which the commander of the Schutztruppe was seeking to keep his askaris happy had been few and far between; most of the Portuguese had faded away, and it was hard to keep track of the enemy's columns converging on him in pursuit, for he had few men to spare now for reconnaissance.

Late in April one of his companies surprised and attacked an encampment of South Africans which had been pushing in from Port Amelia, on the southern coast of Mozambique, and cut off its water supply; it discovered, when it made a bayonet charge at the end of the fifth day, that the garrison had consumed its liquor ration instead and was captured in what Lettow-Vorbeck describes as 'a thoroughly intoxicated condition'.

The commander of the Schutztruppe was, by this time, too well aware of the paucity of his supplies and ammunition to risk an attack which could not guarantee him complete success, for his watchword was still to live to fight another day; he could not afford casualties. He himself was, by now, a sorry sight to see. His clothes hung in ribbons around him, shredded into rags by the bush. His injured eye was plaguing him painfully and he was racked with fever. Every day he lost some part of his military strength too—askaris deserting into the bush at the urgent behest of their *bibis*, convinced that the war was lost, officers and under-officers falling sick with fever. 'To-

¹ And gave them severe indigestion, Lettow-Vorbeck remembered.

day the faithful boy of Hauptmann Otto has disappeared,' he wrote in his battle diary. 'He is not the first. The sweet words of the English do not always fall on deaf ears these days. It is obvious that we cannot go on carrying our sick with us much longer. They cannot stand the terrible hardship of being carried in their *maschilles* [litters] in country like this, and yesterday we tipped several of them into the river while crossing in our bark canoes.'

He decided that the sick must be left behind in field hospitals for the pursuing English to pick up as they came through. 'Even the senior medical officer of the Protective Force, Dr Meixner,' he wrote, 'was left behind at Kwiri with one such hospital. On that occasion I said good-bye to Lieutenant Schaefer who had rendered such exemplary service in the preparation for the action at Jasini, and was now stricken with black-water fever. This experienced "African" was fully aware of his situation, but was as cheerful as ever and faced his inevitable end, which was approaching fast, with composure.'

If only he could entice the British into a situation where the terrain was suitable and the surprise was complete enough for him to swoop down and reap a harvest in men killed and supplies captured. If only . . . Through March and April and May he manoeuvred in a serpentine path through the bush, forests and hills looking for an opportunity. Towards the end of May 1918, he decided that he had found it.

The long columns had wound their way into a territory of steep mountains south of the Lujenda and just north of the confluence of the Malma and Luri rivers. It was a wild landscape of uncanny beauty—great sweeps of bushland over which, as if rolled by giants, were great masses of piled-up volcanic rocks teetering on top of each other; and two great heights, Koroma Mountain and Timbani Mountain, looked down on it.

From a look-out post on the peak of Koroma, Lettow-Vorbeck saw the smoke of fires from a great camp of British Troops (King's African Rifles under the command of General Edwards) which were obviously teeing up for an attack. Beyond them was a company of *Schutztruppe* under the command of Captain Koehl, and they were vulnerable. Lettow-Vorbeck sent a runner down the mountain to telephone Koehl to get out of the way at once, and then went on with his own preparations for an attack which would drive Edwards' forces back towards the Kimbani Mountain and into a favourable position for annihilation. Unfortunately, Captain Koehl had Governor Schnee marching with him, and it was one of

those moments when Schnee decided to exercise his authority as a military leader. He reacted to Lettow-Vorbeck's peremptory orders with childish stubbornness and refused to pack up and move at once. When he was finally persuaded to march, he did so for only a few hours and then camped again—in a position which could not have been more unfavourable.

At that moment the British descended upon them. 'At noon I had just entered camp,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck, 'when suddenly there was a loud sound of firing, from a very short distance, of trench-mortars, beyond doubt between us and Koehl's detachment. Immediately afterwards telephonic communication in that direction was broken off.'

The Schutztruppe commander had no alternative but to march off immediately to the rescue and abandon his original plan. The country was unfavourable; surprise was lost; and though, in the fighting which went on for the rest of the day, more than 200 casualties were inflicted, it was hardly the sort of victory he had envisioned earlier in the day. The only booty which came into his hands was, in fact, Schutztruppe stores which had been captured by the British from Koehl. To his disgust, Lettow-Vorbeck saw that it consisted principally of loads of German East African rupees from Governor Schnee's stores.

Koehl and most of his men had escaped from the British attack thanks to Lettow-Vorbeck's rescue operations, but of the Governor himself there was no sign. Some askaris reported that he had been captured by the British—and it would have been only human if the Schutztruppe commander had decided that here, at last was one solid advantage gained from what was otherwise a tragically lost day.

That same evening, however, Governor Schnee turned up at the camp on Mount Koroma. He had fled into the bush after the attack, leaving all his baggage behind, and had been found hiding in a nullah, considerably shaken, by a German under-officer who had led him in. The officers on the staff whipped round and re-equipped him from their own scanty stores and shared their evening meal with him. General Lettow-Vorbeck, who had spent the evening in a fuming rage at the destruction of his plans, could barely bring himself to be civil. 'I, too, came to the help of the Governor in his adversity,' he wrote afterwards, sarcastically. 'I honoured him with a pair of blue socks, which his wife had made me at the beginning of the war, but which had unfortunately faded.'

But the following morning he had revenge of sorts. 'Apart

from the serious loss of 70,000 rounds of ammunition,' he wrote, 'we had also lost a considerable amount of notes—I believe it was 30,000 rupees. My desire to give requisition notes in preference to banknotes, and so save a lot of transport of securities and save unnecessary losses, had not been acceded to.'

He was resolved that it should not happen again and that the Governor should be taught a lesson. The quartermaster was instructed to take the remaining notes and pile them up on the mountainside. And then Lettow-Vorbeck himself took a match and set fire to them and burned them.

Somewhere in Portuguese East Africa were large stores of the food, clothing and ammunition which the Schutztruppe needed, but where?

For the next few weeks (it was now June 1918) the columns moved across country searching for them, always a day or two ahead of the pursuing columns, always slightly behind the Portuguese. They were coming in from all directions now—from across the Rovuma in the north, from Port Amelia on the coast to the east, and from Rhodesia to the west. When they came too close, Lettow-Vorbeck left rearguards behind who set up strategic machine-gun posts and snipers' nests when the terrain was mountainous, or set fire to the elephant grass on the plains and erected a wall of flame between him and the advancing British. For day after day, the land fumed and flamed. Meanwhile, the long column of askaris and bearers left the roads and crawled along native paths or cut their way through virgin bush, knowing that along such routes the mechanized enemy was unlikely to follow them.

In an earlier encounter along the Malema River the Schutztruppe had captured a map which showed a place called Alto Moloque as a seat of higher administrative authority with a garrison of at least a company of Portuguese soldiers. This looked like a promising target. But between their situation and Alto Moloque was an English battalion which barred the road. To bypass them, Lettow-Vorbeck marched his columns through the steep, rocky, inhospitable Inagu Mountains, a place of thornbush and polished rock and tortuous paths which taxed the footing of the bearers. Blistered and scratched, they burst down in a conquering swoop—which proved unnecessary, for the Portuguese had fled. Here at least there were crops to be picked and food to be stored. (The Europeans had a happy time chasing and rounding up a herd of European pigs, which a German planter, named Hauter, an expert at the game,

turned into mounds of the kind of sausages that the Germans loved. 'He now had the inside of pigs to practise on instead of the insides of cows,' Lettow-Vorbeck reported, 'and our enjoyment of this unwonted luxury was so great that we did not allow ourselves to be disturbed even by the shots that fell into our camp.'

But no ammunition. And too much food; more food than they could now carry with their dwindling corps of carriers. So they burned nearly three-quarters of a million pounds of grain and fat and meat to keep it from the enemy. They moved off with full stomachs, and, some of the officers, with too much loot. In a situation which must have taxed him in more important ways, the Schutztruppe commander chose this moment to worry about 'loot'. It was part of the perquisites of the askaris, he had long since decided to allow them to pillage each camp they came to and pass on to their *bibis* the sweetmeats, tinned fruit, jams, curtain materials and brightly coloured dresses which they found in the European houses; but his attitude towards similar pillage by his officers and under-officers was old-worldly in the extreme. (Those who came across Nazi depredations in the second world war would have called it un-German.) When he found his officers carrying off a clock or a picture or a vase, he ordered them either to leave it behind (in circumstances where it would come to no harm) or to register it officially. He wrote:

'I was afraid that our wonderful captures of the last few weeks would tempt some of our Europeans to help themselves to things improperly, and I took advantage of the occasion to point out the evils of such behaviour. It must not be forgotten that war booty belongs to the state, and that the individual soldier has to notify his superiors if he happens to want any particular object he has captured. An estimate is then made of the value of an object and he has to pay the amount.'

He added: 'It was important to me to maintain the morale of our troops unconditionally if I was able to appeal to their sense of honour and make calls on their endurance.'

He might have added further that he kept a meticulous record of everything that was taken away and turned it over to the authorities when the time came.

Bullets, not food, not loot, not even battle and bloodshed, were what he needed now, and neither in Alto Moloque nor in Ili and Lugella, which he went on to, had he found them.

The Schutztruppe columns trekked south towards the Zambesi River, and at one time he considered crossing over it and

continuing on through Portuguese East Africa to the frontiers of South Africa itself; and only the problems of supply plus the problem of making so many river crossings turned him against the plan.

In any case, he had by now heard the name *Kokosani*. It was on the lips of all the natives whom they questioned and they coupled its name with stories of rich deposits and garrisons of troops. How many troops? *Kama majani*, they replied, or as thick as grass. But where was Kokosani? It appeared on none of the maps which the Schutztruppe carried with them; and as they cut their way through the bush, the name continued to tantalize them—an Eldorado stuffed with a treasure of munitions. Had they enough troops to attack it? There was only one answer to that question now that their forces were so puny, and that was to strike first and find out afterwards.

For several days they pushed on. And then it suddenly came clear to them. They had forded, neck-high and with some difficulty, the Likungo River and pressed on through fields of agave until they reached the Namacurra River, and there beyond it was the settlement of Namacurra. Yes, yes, the natives said, yonder is Kokosani—much food, many troops. Lettow-Vorbeck sent a company under the command of Captain Muller swing round the flank, and pressed ahead on a personal reconnaissance, bidding the main body of his troops to follow him. He met Muller at the entrance to the town, limping from a leg wound but otherwise triumphant; three companies of Portuguese troops had fled after several hours of fighting and the town was in his hands.

It turned out to be quite a town. There were several factory buildings and a complex of plantations surrounding it, and the European women who had been left behind when the settlement was evacuated had hoisted white flags and prepared coffee and food for the troops. Two Portuguese guns had been captured with a number of shells to fit them, but otherwise no ammunition.

There must be a munitions dump somewhere. But where? From captured maps and reconnaissance it soon became apparent that Namacurra was a railhead for supplies brought up by steamer along the Namacurra River; in fact, a few hours after the place was taken over, a river steamer came in and tied up to the wharf, and an English doctor stepped ashore, into the hands of a waiting German reception committee. He explained that he had brought a load of medical stores for the British troops operating in the area. It was the first news that

the British were in the vicinity. He was made prisoner; his supplies were taken over, and solved the malarial problems of the Schutztruppe for several months to come; and the steamer was sunk. But where were the British—and where were the bullets?

Several hours of questioning eventually produced the answer. The terminus of the railway was some miles down the river and here, it seemed most likely, was where the dumps were assembled. The columns were turned, with some reluctance, for they had had a gruelling forced march, back in their tracks and through the bush to the railway terminus, and there they ran into a fusillade which cut down several of the leading troops.

Lettow-Vorbeck called them back. He could not afford heavy casualties now. Captain Muller had captured two Portuguese guns and some shells, and as luck would have it the guns were similar to a mountain gun which the Germans were still carrying with them although it had been wrecked on the trek and some vital parts were missing. The three guns were cannibalized and a working cannon assembled from the parts; and with this a bombardment of the terminus began. Muller had also laid his hands on a 4 cm gun and a number of shells, and opened fire.

'The enemy was apparently tired of the well-aimed, concentric fire which had been directed at them since the afternoon,' Lettow-Vorbeck wrote. 'They were now being subjected to artillery fire from two sides at once, and the moment there was the slightest movement, machine guns opened up on them. Their young troops could not stand it, and were very restless. Our companies recognized that this was their weakest moment and used it immediately, showing splendid initiative. They leaped up with loud hurrahs, and the next minute were in the enemy's position.'

The enemy—a mixed force of King's African Rifles and Portuguese—began to run away. 'The English maintained that they had been infected by the example of the Portuguese. However that may be, they ran away and our companies immediately went after them as hard as they could.'

What followed was unnecessary tragedy. Lettow-Vorbeck had always made it a cardinal principle of his campaign to extend to his enemies what could still then be called the courtesies of war. He treated his captives with, in the circumstances, extraordinary consideration; and no defeated European ever suffered at his hands worse privations than he had to endure himself. Certainly they were not treated with indignity or

cruelty. But at Namacurra, many of the fleeing British, Portuguese and their askaris, chose to die rather than fall into his hands. They retreated into the waters of the Namacurra River. Whether their intention was to swim across it and escape into the bush will never be known. What happened was that, led by their commander, Major Gore Brown, they struck out for the opposite shore—and they drowned on the way. Not one of them got across. Some simply sank, exhausted and terrified. Others were taken by crocodiles. The next day the Schutztruppe recovered the bodies of 100 native troops and four Europeans, including Major Gore Brown himself. They had killed 100 natives and 5 Europeans, and they captured 5 British, 117 Portuguese and 421 natives. Their own casualties were 3 Europeans and 11 askaris wounded, 9 askaris killed.

Namacurra proved to be an Eldorado indeed. There was so much ammunition that it was impossible to find carriers enough to transport all of it. There were also seven heavy and three light machine guns and bullets to go with them. The factory beside the railway was stuffed with food, and there was also—to the delight of the askaris and their women—a superabundance of sugar, which they proceeded to shovel into themselves in a syrupy orgy which lasted for almost twenty-four hours, for it was long since they had tasted it.

For the Europeans, there was an orgy of sorts, too. Namacurra proved to be a storehouse of wine, whisky and rum—the wine for the Portuguese, the whisky and rum for the British. It was long since the last supplies of ersatz whisky and bush-brewed liquor had run out, and there was now so much that it could not possibly be transported. Lettow-Vorbeck requisitioned a supply for medical purposes and then told his officers and NCO's to consume the rest to the best of their capabilities. 'I explained that what could not be drunk would have to be poured away,' he said. There followed twenty-four hours of what he himself called 'jollification' and he did not stint himself in the enjoyment of it. Only the Governor (who made indignant notes about 'drunkenness, disorderliness and behavior hardly becoming to officers') did not indulge. The following morning what remained of the liquor (the wine had disappeared down thirsty throats) was emptied into the Namacurra, and heavy stocks of food for which there were no carriers were burned. The troops, sated, severely hung-over from this unexpected feast, continued on their way.

Most of them looked back nostalgically on Namacurra in the arduous days to come.

It was not only at British headquarters that the question was now asked: where will Lettow-Vorbeck strike next? He did not know himself. His army now had become a band of freebooters, living off the country, looking for trouble, no longer worried about defending dumps or towns or bases.

He had, as has been mentioned earlier, considered the idea of an advance across the River Zambesi, but abandoned it at the thought of the rivers to be crossed and of the gunboats which could be brought against him once he reached it. He was tempted, too, to capture a port from which he might still be reinforced from Germany, and toyed for several days with the idea of an advance on Quelimane, in the south-east of Mozambique, where he knew from captured papers that there were dock facilities and a Portuguese garrison.

But by this time he was as ignorant of British intentions towards him as they were of his movements. Somewhere in this vast region of forests, rivers, bush and mountains there were (according to the statistics he had captured a few months back) 17,000 white, 1,000 black troops and supply trains of 124,447 carriers, all bent on the task of hunting him down.¹ He knew that the King's African Rifles had been strongly reinforced and were pressing in upon him along several different lines of march. Captured Portuguese papers revealed that at Quelimane itself, the local commander, Colonel Rosa, had received 600 troops from Portugal and, in preparation for a siege, had loaded women, children and the reserves of the local bank aboard the cruiser *Gabriel*. Dare he risk an attack? He calculated that Generals van Deventer and Edwards, commanding the British thrust, would reason that this was just the kind of target that he would find most attractive at this juncture, and for several days he marched in this direction—meantime releasing several captured prisoners who would, he hoped, give the enemy news of his intentions. But early in July 1918, he called a halt and spent the next forty-eight hours in an intensive and rigorous reorganization of his forces. The single-file column of march was abandoned. It was too long and straggled back dangerously into the bush. Instead, he formed the Schutztruppe into three main detachments which cut through the thorn-bush and elephant grass side by side; it made the advance slower and the work, especially for men as exhausted as his now were, much more gruelling, but it left him far less liable to ambush.

¹ These were the figures for April 1918. They were reduced in subsequent months.

And, instead of continuing towards the south and east, he doubled back and began to march towards the north-west. The river Likungo was crossed again. An ironic situation now developed. At least seven different British columns pressed on through the bush southwards, ready to cut him off before he reached Quelimane; and in between them, unknown to them for some considerable time, the Schutztruppe threaded its way back in the direction from which it had come. It was not until July 18 that the law of averages worked out and they ran almost head-on into a column of King's African Rifles, commanded by Colonel Dickinson, advancing from the opposite direction. There was a heavy battle which lasted for the next fifteen hours, during which time, in the thick bush, neither side saw much of each other and both fired by ear rather than by eye. It was in this clash that Colonel Dickinson was captured by the Schutztruppe and Lettow-Vorbeck was all but captured by the K.A.R.'s. Lettow-Vorbeck had, as usual, gone forward on one of his personal reconnaissances and flopped down within earshot of an enemy detachment encamped just over a ridge. Unfortunately, he landed in a bed of cow-itch, a plant whose touch sets up a maddening itch and inflammation. He was so irritated that he allowed himself a sharp exclamation of annoyance which brought a group of native troops crashing towards him; but they passed over him and left him scratching himself in agony amid the itching plant, now enveloping him and covering him with a rash from feet to face.

Colonel Dickinson was more fortunate than to be trapped by cow-itch, but less so with the enemy. He was trapped in a ravine by an askari platoon led by Lieutenant Boell, and his medical officer and adjutant were taken with him; he had a field telephone in his hand and Boell allowed him to report his capture over the line before bringing him back to General Lettow-Vorbeck. The Schutztruppe commander, in the midst of directing the battle, had time only to commiserate with his prisoner and tell Boell to take him away and give him a coffee, and it dawned on Dickinson only when he was being led away with whom he had been speaking.

'Was that General Lettow-Vorbeck himself?' he asked Boell. 'Not General Wahle?'

He was told that it was indeed Lettow-Vorbeck. 'Then please take me back to him,' said Dickinson. 'I should like to shake his hand.'

They retraced their footsteps and Boell explained that the

English colonel admired the general and would like to shake his hand. Lettow-Vorbeck too seemed only now to have realized the identity of his prisoner and remembered that Dickinson, a gallant and brilliant officer, had been fighting the Schutztruppe almost continuously in the bush for nearly four years.

He held out his hand. 'I am proud to shake your hand, too, Colonel,' he said. 'I am sorry for your situation, but *à la guerre comme à la guerre*.' They shook hands, grinned at each other in some embarrassment, and then Dickinson was led away, repeatedly saying to Boell: 'A splendid man, a splendid man!'¹

The prisoners were now becoming something of a problem, for their numbers were increasing—and would continue to do so in the next few weeks: British officers and troopers, a few Indians, more than thirty Portuguese officers, and large numbers of black troops (though these were usually disarmed and set free in the bush to find their own way back to their regiments). All were treated on an exactly equal basis as Lettow-Vorbeck's own officers and men and shared what rations were available; though they ran their own kitchens and generally looked after themselves. Anglophile that he was and a man who judged his fellows by their military virtues, it is perhaps not surprising that Lettow-Vorbeck much preferred the English to his other captives.

'It was interesting to notice,' he wrote later, 'that the English prisoners whom we took with us, for the most part accepted as a matter of course the hardships of the long marches, the constant crossing of rivers and the countless difficulties connected with supply and transport; they realized that we Germans had exactly the same hardships to endure as themselves and were in addition burdened with a number of further duties such as patrol expeditions, fighting, carrying of supplies and watch-keeping. They bore everything with certain humour and it was obviously interesting to them to see the war from the German point of view.'

For the Portuguese he had a barely restrained contempt. 'It is true that they were in an unenviable position,' he wrote,

¹ In the cruel, gruelling privations which the Schutztruppe and prisoners alike suffered in the next few weeks, Dickinson was a valuable ally of Lettow-Vorbeck in keeping up the spirits of the marchers. The two men became fast friends, and it was a crushing blow for Lettow-Vorbeck when Dickinson, having survived all the perils and pestilence of four years in the bush, succumbed to Spanish 'flu in Dar es Salaam hospital shortly after the end of the war.

'for the most part they were infected with syphilis and were carefully avoided by the English prisoners. In addition, they were not real campaigners. They had received a generous share of the booty captured at Namacurra, but had not learned how to make the best of it. They had at once consumed the precious oil with rice and it was too much to expect the Germans should now share with them their own meagre rations. Marching was a burden to them, their boots were torn to pieces—in short their spokesman, the general staff officer captured at Namacurra, was continually complaining to me of the inconveniences which, with the best will in the world, I could not help. He was continually asking to be released. I should have been only too glad to consent if he would give his parole not to fight against us, but this he could not do. I could not be expected to release people without any obligation and so put them back in a position to attack us again immediately.'

The battle diary of the Schutztruppe's progress on its northern march out of Mozambique was largely lost or destroyed by enemy action, but some remnants which were subsequently recovered give some indication of the experiences which they had to face in July, August and early September.

'July 25, 1918. Today we were able to bring into action our captured English trench-mortar, which we seized from the King's African Rifles and have now turned against the Gold Coast Regiment. The first bombs landed in the centre of the enemy's position and scattered both men and animals. [It was a mounted regiment.] Lieutenant von Ruckteschell was hit in the leg from subsequent enemy fire. Captain Muller attacked from the hill on the other side, and there were few survivors. Most of the horses too were killed, and these were consumed by the troops.

'August 1. We captured the settlement at Pekera, east of the Ligonja River, and drove out a Gold Coast mounted squadron . . . capturing some motor transport. These were used until we forsook the roads for bush paths, when they were destroyed.

'August 5. Resting at Chatau. Captain Kruger, in charge of prisoners of war, died today from fever.

'August 7. Enemy patrols came through today under the white flag, offering to exchange sick prisoners and asking for a rendezvous to bring over food and clothing for our European captives. We suspect that this is a pretext to gain information of our plans and have refused the exchange. Our medical supplies are low. Our main diet now consists of millet bread, hippopotamus fat and fungi.

'August 24. We crossed the Likungo River and marched to-

wards Numarroo. Two hours east of it, the advance guard was fired on. An enemy company has camped on our line of march and is retreating before our onward march. Lieutenant Otto wounded in the chest. We cut through the bush and ravines around them and took Numarroo from the flank. Before dark our gun was brought into position and fired on the *boma* and its entrenchments. Goering's detachment made a wider detour to the south in order, by using a ravine, to come close up to the *boma* in the rear . . . When darkness fell firing increased for a time, and then died down. Goering's detachment had surprised the enemy and stormed some strongly held trenches. The retreating enemy was, however, not recognized as the enemy by us and was allowed to pass through. Pouring rain and unpleasantly cold night.

'August 25. Today we buried three English and forty-one native killed. One English and six natives were wounded, one European and seven native troops captured, as well thirty carriers. Among the prisoners was Major Garrod, commanding the elements of the 4th King's African Rifles here. We lost Sergeant Major Nordenholz, shot through the head, eighteen askari and four machine-gun bearers. We took as booty 40,000 rounds of ammunition and two light machine guns, hand grenades, medical stores and large quantities of supplies. We marched on the same evening but left Lieutenant Otto behind to be picked up by the British.

'August 26. We pitched camp in the bush in pouring rain. We are outside the *boma* of Regone. From captured papers we know that the enemy has given orders that we should be allowed to strike at Regone unhindered and then we in turn will be attacked on the flank from reserves held in readiness outside. As a *coup de main* we decided therefore that Regone offered no prospect of success. We resumed our march.

'August 30. On the way to Lioma we captured a large enemy supply dump which included a large supply of tobacco. Everyone, including the prisoners, is now smoking like a chimney. At Lioma a large enemy force was entrenched in the thick bush but had not yet completed his defence. We therefore attacked at once. Muller and Goering marched detachments round the enemy to take him from the north. Suddenly heavy firing was heard from our rear, where our carriers columns were still on the march. A great part of our baggage was lost. Captain Poppe was brought back severely wounded and reported to the General that the enemy had been completely defeated. But the situation was so obscure that when darkness fell the General went forward on a personal reconnaissance.

Of his two companions, Hauter of the Landsturm, had a bullet through his trousers and Lieutenant Besch was wounded in the thigh, an artery being severed. Lieutenant Besch was carried to a dressing station and there left behind.¹ Part of our columns had lost their way in the thick bush and only found us some hours later. After nightfall the dressing station in a ravine was filled with wounded. It was reported that Lieutenant Schroetter and Naval Lieutenant Freund had fallen. Sergeant Major Bolles and Huttig stumbled on enemy positions and were fired on. Bolles was killed, Huttig was captured, severely wounded. Sergeant Major Thurmann reached within five yards of the enemy trenches, hid behind an ant hill and picked off enemy inside their camp, until he too was mortally wounded.'

It was a moment, Lettow-Vorbeck decided, when discretion was the watchword. He could not afford many casualties among his dwindling force of officers and under-officers. But which way? For a time he thought of striking directly westwards into Nyasaland and marching against the British town of Blantyre; but the route west was swampy, disease-ridden, criss-crossed by many rivers, and he had no bridging or boat equipment. Above all, his men were tired. They would be able to make only slow progress, whereas the British would converge upon them by steamer and railway and be waiting for them when they attacked.

He had a better trick up his sleeve. He would march on northwards through the bushlands on the east of Lake Nyasa towards the head of the lake. He calculated that General van Deventer would interpret his move as having two objectives—first, to re-enter German East Africa, and second, to march towards the Central Railway with the aim of recapturing Tabora. If he read van Deventer's mind aright, the South African general would probably anticipate this move by withdrawing his troops on Lettow-Vorbeck's eastern flank and taking them back by sea to Dar es Salaam, and thence by rail to Tabora, there to lie in wait for him. It would relieve pressure upon him when he most desperately needed relief.²

A quick reorganization of his force was necessary after the shambles of the last few days. He left a proportion of his own sick and wounded, together with all his sick prisoners, at a

¹ Lettow-Vorbeck commented on this incident: 'His few possessions he gave to his companions together with his good wishes for the future. I too was honoured with a handful of cigarettes. It was my habit to smoke continuously during serious fighting.'

² This, in fact, was what van Deventer did.

dressing station in the bush, with a captured British medical officer in attendance. Then he reorganized the Schutztruppe into four columns and gave them general instructions to march north and keep in touch with each other; he could not particularize more than that, for he had no maps of the country through which they were now passing.

It was a somewhat dispirited force which set off at 9 am on the morning of August 1, 1918, and almost at once it ran into trouble. Enemy detachments (of the King's African Rifles) were waiting for them in the elephant grass and on the slopes of the ravines through which they were passing. Lettow-Vorbeck went ahead to reconnoitre when he heard the sound of firing, instructing his main force to follow him, but after several hours it did not appear. It had lost its way. At the same time, one of the weaker columns, in which most of the sick which remained with the Schutztruppe were being carried, was seen to be marching head-on into an enemy ambush, and Lettow-Vorbeck raced ahead on foot and headed it off only just in time.

By late afternoon, the Schutztruppe columns were in disarray: Some were marching through the bush, laboriously cutting their way northwards, while others were in the hills.

'In order to bring the force together,' said Lettow-Vorbeck, 'I tried to descend from my hill. The descent, however, proved impossible; the rocks were steep, almost perpendicular. We continued along a native path and evening was falling when Captain Muller reported that this path, too, ended abruptly in a precipice. Fortunately, there was another small by-path. This we followed and succeeded in climbing down. Even here it was very steep in places, but the bare feet of the carriers gave them a good foothold and I, too, after taking off my boots, managed the descent. It was pitch dark and we had no water. At last, however, we found some and a load fell from my heart when we came upon the rest of the force.'

Close-knit this time, they pressed on in the darkness, marched all the next day and the next, and then made camp. It was time for the columns to rest and for the general to take stock of his situation.

In truth, it was more serious than it had been at any time since the outbreak of war. The fight against the troops of the King's African Rifles over the past few days had hit the force badly. Six Europeans and 23 askari had been killed, 11 Europeans and 16 askari wounded, 5 Europeans and 29 askari missing, and many taken prisoner. They had also lost at least 50,000 rounds of ammunition and hundreds of rifles.

Dispirited by defeat, hunger and homesickness, several hundred carriers and a considerable force of askari had deserted into the bush. The strength of the Schutztruppe, as of September 1, 1918, was 176 Europeans and 1,487 askari.

Strength is, in the circumstances, too forceful a word to use to describe the men, for it soon became apparent, as the exhausted columns relaxed for their day of rest—in a countryside which was, for once, well-stocked with food and game—that there was something wrong with nearly all of them. They were racked with fever and coughing painfully, and scores of them, officers and askaris alike, were reporting sick. Surgeon-Major Taute, the chief medical officer, reported to Lettow-Vorbeck on September 12 the unhappy news—Spanish influenza had invaded the camp. The epidemic which had been sweeping over Europe had made its way to Africa and, probably through a prisoner, reached the small band of troops fighting in the heart of the bush.

About half the strength of the force had bronchial catarrh and three to six men in every company were suffering from severe inflammation of the lungs. And more were succumbing every hour. To complete the gravity of the situation came the news, in newspapers which had been captured from the enemy, that the war was going badly for Germany in Europe.

It was at this moment that Governor Schnee, like a bird of ill omen, came back to trouble General Lettow-Vorbeck. He had been travelling with General Wahle's column and it was from Wahle's headquarters, on 20 September, that he addressed an official note to the commander of the Schutztruppe in which he gave it as his opinion that now was the time to end hostilities and seek an honourable surrender, and adding that he would hold Lettow-Vorbeck personally responsible for the 'inhuman sacrifice of the severely sick' if the campaign continued.

Not for the first time, he failed to understand the spirit of the troops with whom he was marching. News of disasters in Europe seemed to inspirit rather than depress them. The *esprit de corps* which had grown between officers and men was such that pride was now their strongest weapon—pride in the fact that, in spite of all the odds, they were still fighting and were still undefeated. Lettow-Vorbeck had no doubt that he was interpreting the wishes of all of them when he curtly rejected Schnee's appeal and announced that the march, and the campaign, would go on.

After twenty-four hours' of rest and good food, the columns picked up their weary bones and staggered on. Only

eighty of the sick could be carried in litters, so the 'flu victims took it in turns to ride for a few hours and then marched, racked with coughs, alongside the others.

'No satisfactory solution of the problem of transport of the sick was to be found, short of abandoning the campaign,' wrote Lettow-Vorbeck. 'We simply could not leave the sick to die in the bush.'

So they walked. 'A number of the askaris and other natives not in a fit state for heavy work followed the force slowly. Many of them lost courage when they continually found our camping places empty. A large number, however, caught up with us, especially when the force did one of its short marches, or was able (a rare occurrence) to take a day's rest.'

Remarkably enough, it was the women and children who seemed to withstand the ravages of 'flu best. They carried their own loads and those of their menfolk and marched, singing, through the bush, as irrepressibly gay and as colourfully dressed as ever.

When he looks back at the fantastic ups and downs of his campaign, Lettow-Vorbeck has no doubt in his mind that September 1918 was the month which seemed most likely to break the spirit of both himself and his men. Governor Schnee was quite right. In a practical way, the Schutztruppe was all but finished. There were now 207 *serious* cases of Spanish 'flu, and nineteen Europeans and askaris had died of it. Those who were not coughing painfully with inflammation of the lungs were sweating or shivering from malaria, for supplies of quinine had almost run out. Of his column commanders, only the devoted and indomitable Major Kraut, who had marched and fought more than all of them, seemed as beefy and controlled as ever; the rest were yellow with fever, translucent envelopes of skin through which the bones showed and on which there were sores from rashes, ant and bott-fly bites, which would not heal. Lieutenant von Ruckteschell led his section from a litter, for he had been badly wounded in the thigh.¹ General Wahle, too, had been wounded and did not heal; he was sixty-six years old and showing increasing signs of nervous exhaustion. Lettow-Vorbeck himself had now grown so used to malaria that he had schooled himself into living with the alternations of burning heat and shuddering cold; his faithful cook, Baba, now carried his rifle—proudly announcing: 'I am an askari now'—

¹ Though this did not prevent him from continuing to draw some interesting portraits of his askaris and their women.

and held it steady to the general's shoulder when he had to shoot, and also passed cigarettes to and from the general's chattering teeth when the shivering fits were bad. Not that Lettow-Vorbeck could fire many shots now, for his eyes were covered with rheum and pus. Inside his antelope boots, his feet were raw and bleeding.

Not many askaris were deserting now. It was as if the Schutztruppe had fined itself down to a *corps d'élite*, and some inner fire of loyalty to the general seemed to keep them marching and fighting beside him when their native instincts might have told them that this was the time to give up and go home to their kraals. But as they came into country close to their homes, many of the carriers and bearers deserted. 'Even one of my own carriers, Samarunga,' Lettow-Vorbeck recalled, 'a very devoted and trustworthy fellow, asked for leave to visit his village, which lay nearby. He came back faithfully enough and brought his brother with him. The two of them then marched on with us, and Samarunga even stayed on after his brother left. To revive his depression, I gave him some of my meat ration, but on the next morning he proved to have disappeared after all, having first put all my things in order.'

The columns marched northwards. They looked like a rabble but in fact they were not. They had simply discarded their ragged clothes and torn boots for anything which they could pick up from the enemy, and the results were sometimes outlandish. One carrier even marched at the head of his troop clad in evening tails and a top hat, and several of the *bibis* had taken to low-cut evening dresses. At one point on the march north, an askari under-officer, who had married her on the way down, left his wife with her father, a local chieftain, to have her baby, and there was a feast of sorts to celebrate the approaching delivery. There was little food and a modicum of local brewed beer and the vestiges of the wine from Namacurra, but much dancing and singing.

The occasion seemed to lift the spirits of the Schutztruppe, and they did not drop from that moment on.

On September 28, 1918, General Lettow-Vorbeck and his followers waded back across the Rovuma River. They shot eight hippos as they crossed. That evening they feasted on meat and made bucketsful of the lard which, by now, had come to be regarded as a desirable addition to their scanty diet.

Once they were back on the northern bank of the Rovuma, something seemed to galvanize them. The numbers of sick

from Spanish 'flu began to drop. Optimism was in the air—hot and pestilential though it still was. Perhaps the most inspiring element of their condition was the fact of their geographical location. They were back home in German East Africa for the first time in ten months, after 3,000 miles of trekking through the wilderness.

CHAPTER TWELVE

'Surrender—Please!'

UNDEFEATED. It is the only word which can justifiably be used for the Schutztruppe from this moment on. The psychological effect of their return to German East Africa seemed to be the cure for their ills of mind and body, and from this moment on they marched refreshed and invigorated. Their bodies filled out again with the game which they shot on the way. Lieutenant Spangenberg distinguished himself by shooting a buck in full flight as it leaped over one of their columns, and Muller and his men brought in six buffaloes in one day. The forests were full of wild figs and succulent fruits. Lettow-Vorbeck woke up one morning to find a python curled up against his body for warmth, and it was killed, cooked and eaten.

The trick had succeeded to this extent. Most of the troops on his eastern flank had been withdrawn by General van Deventer and taken back, by sea and rail, to Dar es Salaam and thence to the region of Tabora, which seemed Lettow-Vorbeck's most likely target.

The result was that for the whole of October only patrols of the Rhodesian Police were there to impede his march, and he brushed them off with little damage to himself or to them. He had bypassed the German East African town of Ssongea because his patrols had discovered it was heavily garrisoned; and he cut through the steep ravines until he reached the fertile Wabena country, over whose purple plains many cattle grazed. He seized several hundred of these and drove them northwards with him as a mobile food reserve.

On October 17, 1918, he reached the settlement at Ubena, and there he said good-bye to General Wahle. The old man had fought gallantly and efficiently from the start. He had come out to visit his son and see the Dar es Salaam Exhibition in 1914, and had been trapped by the outbreak of war. He was a retired officer with little experience of tropical conditions, and in the course of the campaign he had lost his son to the enemy. Had it not been for his diplomacy, many of the quarrels between Lettow-Vorbeck and Governor Schnee might have ended in deadlock, but he had several times inter-

vened to smooth them over. But now he was sick and wounded and tired. He was left behind for the enemy to pick up.

On to Ngombbowano and Brandt. 'A district well stocked with cattle. Missions and schools had been deserted, but we were very glad to find garden fruits, especially mulberries and peaches.'

Mbozi. 'We captured a large English depot, containing among other things 75 loads of salt and 47 loads of coffee.'

And here it was that Lettow-Vorbeck made up his mind. While the enemy was waiting for him in the north, before Tabora, he would wheel his force to the left and make westwards into Northern Rhodesia. It was a decision which plunged the East African Command into confusion, for there were no troops in any strength to stop him. Except for a garrison in the north, at Abercorn, on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, and scattered patrols of the Rhodesian Police in the bush, the country was wide open to him. And panic ensued.

It seemed that the town of Fife was a most likely target for him. The civil administration at Fife had become a food depot for rationing carriers for the army on their way to and from Lake Nyasa, and there were considerable quantities of native food; and he needed food for his askaris and carriers. But otherwise Fife was undefended. Lettow-Vorbeck set his troops forward on a ten-hour route march towards it from Mbozi and allowed no halts on the way, for his patrols had informed him that Rhodesian Police were pressing in from the east in an effort to reach the town before he got there.

They met, on a plain knee-high with thorn-bush and elephant grass, just in front of the settlement, and it was a moment when the end almost came for Lettow-Vorbeck. The Rhodesians had found time to dig themselves in and opened up on the advancing Schutztruppe with heavy machine-gun fire; and then, just as the Schutztruppe was about to reply, their commander was seen between them and the enemy. For once one of his personal reconnaissances had gone wrong and he was in the line of fire, and they held off until he had crawled to safety. An hour later the trench mortar which they had captured from the Portuguese blew up with a shell in its barrel, leaving them with a small mountain gun as their only artillery. It was no moment to go on attacking well-entrenched troops, and while one of his patrols set fire to the factories on the outskirts of the town, Lettow-Vorbeck moved the main body of his troops southwards, on a more promising target. It was the township of Kasama, surrounded

by swamps, blocked by rivers, but, according to natives they had questioned, well stocked with supplies.

'At every moment when we had not been marching or fighting,' Lettow-Vorbeck said, 'I had been studying the map, and Kasama seemed to be our immediate goal. We were told that it had enormous supplies of food and ammunition. After their long march to cut us off at Fife, it was almost certain that the Rhodesians would be in no condition to follow us without first establishing their lines of communication. And Kasama from the map looked ideal for our purpose. It could be defended, for it was surrounded by swamps. We had the prospect of swiftly seizing Kasama and then of making this place our base and giving battle under favourable conditions.'

Once more it was a move which took the defending forces by surprise and frightened them out of their wits. For there were no troops in Kasama to defend it. The local magistrate, Mr Croad, reported:

'On the 31st of October, Captain James had left for Abercorn, taking with him the only police in Kasama who were of any use. Captain Jones at my request wired to ask the military authorities asking them to authorize the release of the askaris in Kasama gaol, and when he left he told me this was authorized, and I released them and handed them over to Lieutenant Leslie. As many of them had been in prison for running away, they were not a hopeful lot.'¹

They certainly were not. In the next few days, they scattered and fled each time they saw a German askari in the neighbourhood. By November 9, Kasama had been taken and a great crowd of drunken natives (who had been left behind to destroy stores, but were looting them instead) was whipped into some sort of discipline by Captain Spangenberg of the Schutztruppe. He had a meal of tinned food, strawberries from the garden, and a bottle of beer waiting on the table at the District Commissioner's house when Lettow-Vorbeck arrived in town on November 12.

It was the second British town that the Germans had captured in East Africa during the war, and they celebrated the occasion. On that day, in the words of Mr Croad, 'von Lettow's command stretched from Kilima, six miles north of Kasama, to the River Chambezi, a distance of 58 miles.' Rhodesia was open to the Schutztruppe and beyond were tempting targets—the Belgian Congo and Elizabethville and, after that, Portuguese Angola.

¹ *The Empire at War*

'We were in a strong position,' said Lettow-Vorbeck. 'Our defences were good. We had stocks of food and ammunition. We had even captured enough quinine to supply us until June 1919. We still had with us 400 head of cattle to keep us supplied with fats and meat. Not for several months had the situation been more promising. It was probable that the pursuing enemy would continue to follow us, and that was what we wanted now—an opportunity to give battle.'

It was at this moment that, to use a phrase which Lettow-Vorbeck would himself never have countenanced, the Germans in Europe pulled the rug from under his feet. They ended the war.

Early on the morning of November 13, 1918, Lettow-Vorbeck (who was cycling again, now that there were roads through the forest) set out on his bike to contact one of his forward detachments which was moving down towards the Chambezi River. Another cyclist suddenly appeared on the road in front of him. It was Captain Muller and he had a message which had been intercepted from the enemy. An English despatch rider had been ambushed on his way through the jungle, and a telegram had been found in his despatch case.

It was from General van Deventer, Commander-in-Chief of the British Forces in East Africa, and it had been sent from Tabora on November 11. It said:

'12.11.18. To be fwded via M.B. cable and despatch rider. Send following to General von Lettow-Vorbeck under white flag. The Prime Minister of England has announced that an armistice was signed at 5 hours on Nov 11th. and that hostilities cease on all fronts at 11 hours on Nov 11th. I am ordering my troops to cease hostilities forthwith unless attacked, and of course I conclude that you will do the same. Conditions of armistice will be forwarded you immediately I receive them. Meanwhile I suggest that you should remain in your present vicinity in order to facilitate communications. General van Deventer. As message is also being sent to Livingstone, it is important Karwunfor (King's African Rifles column) receives this same time as enemy. Every effort must be made to get this message through to him today.'

Could this really be true? Lettow-Vorbeck had read in captured British newspapers, several weeks old, that Bulgaria had given in, that the Belgians had advanced to Roubaix, that St Quentin and Armentières had been captured by the Allies. But these were the fortunes of war and could be remedied. He could not believe that Germany had lost the war; and he

presumed, if an armistice had been concluded, that it must be in favour of the Fatherland.

In that case, why had he not received instructions from the Kaiser?

The answer came in a telegram which reached him at midnight on November 14, and once more it was from General van Deventer:

'13.11.18. To Norforce. Karwunfer via Fife. Send following to General von Lettow-Vorbeck under white flag: War Office London telegraphs that Clause seventeen of the armistice signed by the German Govt. provides for unconditional surrender of all German forces operating in East Africa within one month from November 11th. My conditions are:—First: hand over all allied prisoners in your hands, Europeans and natives to the nearest British troops forthwith. Second: bring your forces to Abercorn without delay, as Abercorn is the nearest place at which I can supply you with food.¹ Third: hand over all your arms and ammunition to my representative at Abercorn. I will, however, allow you and your officers and European ranks to retain their personal weapons for the present in consideration of the gallant fight which you have made, provided that you bring your force to Abercorn without delay. Arrangements will be made to send all Germans to Morogoro and to repatriate German askaris. Kindly send an early answer giving probable date of arrival at Abercorn and numbers of German officers and men, askaris and followers.'

It was the most difficult moment of the campaign for Lettow-Vorbeck, for what must or could he do now? 'All our troops, native as well as Europeans,' he wrote, 'had always held the conviction that Germany could not be beaten in this war, and were resolved to fight on to the last. Of course it was doubtful whether our resources would last out if the war lasted several years more, but we faced all possibilities tranquilly for at least another year. The men were well armed, equipped and fed, and the strategic situation at the moment was more favourable than it had been for a long time. The askaris, it is true, saw that our numbers were dwindling, but whenever I discussed this topic with one of my orderlies he always assured me: "I will always stick by you and fight on till I fall." Many others spoke to the same

¹ This was an ironic touch. In fact, during the next few days, it was the Schutztruppe which supplied the British forces in the neighbourhood.

effect, and I am convinced it was not merely a case of empty words.'

Would he not be letting them down if he gave in now?

While he wrestled with this dilemma, he and Major Kraut cycled 40 miles down the road from Kasama for a rendezvous in a rubber factory at Chambezi with Mr Croad, the British Magistrate, and it was Croad who persuaded him that there was only one thing to do. 'The Commissioner told me that the German Fleet had revolted and that a revolution had also broken out in Germany; further, if he was to accept a report which was official but had not yet been confirmed, the Kaiser had abdicated on November 10.'

Lettow-Vorbeck asked Croad what were the conditions under which he would be expected to accept the armistice. Croad replied:

'My understanding from General van Deventer is that he is asking for your unconditional surrender.'

It was, ironically enough, this use of the phrase 'unconditional surrender' which decided the Schutztruppe Commander to accept the situation. To him the words had no harsh implications; they seemed to him to mean that he would be honourably surrendering without having to accept any conditions whatsoever, voluntarily, still undefeated. He did not know until several days later that the Allies were not, in fact, asking him for 'unconditional surrender' at all. In the original Armistice terms presented to the Germans by Marshal Foch at Fontainebleau, the wording of Section C of Article XVII read as follows:

'Unconditional surrender of all the German units fighting in East Africa within a period of one month.'

The German Armistice Commission, prodded by Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, objected to this clause and asked for its mitigation, pointing out that 'it may be assumed that there is no intention to word this article in such a way as to hurt the feelings of the unit concerned and their distinguished leader.' As a result, Section C was altered to:

'Evacuation of all the German units fighting in East Africa within a time limit determined by the Allies.'

But this he did not know at the time. He accepted 'unconditional surrender' instead. He wrote out a telegram to the Kaiser (whom he could not believe had really abdicated) telling him of his decision and asking Croad to have it forwarded through British military channels, and then he mounted his bicycle and rode back to Kasama to tell his troops of his decision.

'The war in Europe is over,' he said. 'We have been told by the High Command in Berlin that it is over for us too and we have been ordered to cease fighting. As loyal Germans, we have no option but to obey. Some day the achievements as well as the sufferings of all of you in Africa during these past four and a half years will be adequately recognized. For the moment, all I can ask you to do is loyally and bravely and quietly to accept your fate and to remember in your hearts that you were undefeated.'

They listened to him in silence, many with tears in their eyes; and then, as the statement was translated into Swahili, the women began to weep and wail. All during the next days, as the columns marched north up the road to Abercorn, the weeping and wailing went on.

It is typical of Lettow-Vorbeck that his main concern during those next few days was to obtain their pay for his askaris and carriers, for it was years overdue. 'It was a matter of honour for us to see that these people, who had fought and worked for us with such devotion, should receive their rights,' he wrote. 'The sum involved—about one and a half million rupees—was comparatively small, and so Lieutenant Kempner was sent out on a bicycle to get this sum from the English, or induce them to procure it as quickly as possible. Our repeated efforts were without results.'

The march to Abercorn was made in easy stages, and the spirits of the columns were hardly raised by the intermittent rain showers which poured down on them. But they marched proudly, as Major E. B. Hawkins, of the 1/4 King's African Rifles, well remembers. Major Hawkins had led one of the British columns which had been chasing Lettow-Vorbeck all the way from Portuguese East Africa. He wrote:¹

'On the morning of November 16, von Lettow arrived at Kasama and handed in to us his written unconditional surrender, provided the terms should turn out to be as represented to him. This document is now a treasured possession of the battalion. At midday the whole force marched back through our camp en route for Abercorn, a hundred miles away, where the official surrender was to take place. The British column followed at dawn on the 17th . . . After surrender at Kasama no trouble whatsoever was experienced with the German force, whose discipline was extraordinarily good. During the march back to Abercorn and subsequently Von Lettow was perfectly willing to discuss the campaign, and showed surprising frankness in these discussions.'

¹ In an article in *The Times* dated Feb. 8, 1920.

Of the general as he was at this moment, he wrote:

'Von Lettow himself turned out to be a very different man from what we expected. A little over medium height and wearing a short pointed beard, with fair hair turning grey, he is a fine-looking man of 49. In the bush he invariably wore a rather battered sun helmet covered with corduroy, a bush shirt, corduroy shorts, grey puttees and boots, but no badges of rank whatsoever. His boots, which, presumably, he had captured, were slit over the toes to make them fit, and this raggedness undoubtedly gave rise to the rumour that he wore sandals.¹

Hawkins went on: 'Instead of the haughty Prussian one expected to meet, he turned out to be a most courteous and perfectly mannered man; his behaviour throughout his captivity was a model to anyone in such a position. His men, both white and black, were in splendid condition, in spite of their tremendous marching. And whereas the 1/4 K.A.R. column had marched 1,830 miles in the last six months, averaging ten miles a day, Von Lettow's mileage must have been considerably greater.'

On November 25, 1918, the Schutztruppe with Lettow-Vorbeck at its head, marched into Abercorn to make its formal surrender, and the British made impeccable arrangements to see that the enemy whom they so much respected was given its due. There were those in the Schutztruppe now who were trying to persuade the general to go on fighting, and he was tempted. He did not feel it right that his undefeated askaris should be made to lay down their arms (until General Edwards pointed out that each rifle surrendered would be accounted against Germany's reparation in Europe). He was not satisfied with the accommodation given to his troops and objected to them being treated as prisoners of war (their lot was alleviated). He repeatedly pointed out that these were not *ordinary* soldiers.

But the British tried their best. Brigadier-General Edwards had come in from Tabora to receive the surrender, and there was a guard of honour from the King's African Rifles, whom it was known General von Lettow-Vorbeck admired for their soldierly qualities. A flagstaff had been erected on the open ground in front of the Government offices, and at noon Lettow-Vorbeck led his men on to the parade ground.

¹ He wore sandals on several occasions. He also wore all manner of different clothes, including askari uniform, and several different kinds of headgear.

The reporter of the *Bulawayo Chronicle* is perhaps the best authority for what followed:

'Von Lettow, whose striking presence is a good index of what must be a wonderful personality, came in at the head of his first detachment, which consisted of some Europeans, closely followed by some 400 askaris, with their machine guns, carriers, medical unit, and women. After these troops had been quickly formed into three lines in close formation, von Lettow advanced a few paces, saluted the flag, then, taking out a pocket book, read therefrom his formal statement of surrender in German. He repeated it in English, whereupon General Edwards replied, accepting his surrender on behalf of His Majesty, King George V. Von Lettow was then presented to the officers present, and in turn introduced his own officers, among whom some of the more noticeable were Major Kraut, Lieuts Kempner and Spangenberg. Ex-Governor Schnee was also there. Then followed the most dramatic moment of the proceedings, when von Lettow called upon his troops to lay down their arms, the Europeans alone being allowed to retain theirs in recognition of the splendid fight which they had put up. The askaris laid down their rifles, took off and deposited their equipment, and were marched off by companies to the internment camp which had been prepared for them a mile away, an officer acting as guide to each party.'

Lettow-Vorbeck commented wryly at this point: 'The English were mighty quick at getting away the surrendered material.' The *Bulawayo Chronicle* continued:

'During the interval before the arrival of the next detachment, some 400 military porters were busy removing machine guns, arms, ammunition and equipment to the ordnance store. Meanwhile, von Lettow proceeded to General Headquarters and signed the necessary documents of surrender. The above ceremony was repeated twice and by 4 pm the last German askari had laid down his arms . . . Heavy rain fell during a great part of the proceedings but this did not affect anyone but the photographers. It was a most impressive spectacle. The long motley column, Europeans and askari, all veterans of a hundred fights, the latter clothed with every kind of headgear, women who had stuck to their husbands through all these years of hardships, carrying huge loads, some with children born during the campaign, carriers coming in singing with undisguised joy at the thought that their labours were ended at last. All combined to make a sight that was unique.'

Later that day the British officers present asked General von Lettow-Vorbeck and his staff to join them at dinner, but this he declined; he knew the feelings of some of his officers too well to risk the arguments and emotions that might be aroused. The prisoners of war who had marched with the Schutztruppe for so long sent Colonel Dickinson as their representative to express their appreciation of the courtesy he had shown them. They shook hands once more and exchanged expressions of mutual admiration. After which he went to the internment camp to make sure that his askaris were comfortable. They were not. The *boma* in which they were confined was cramped and primitive and surrounded by a thick thorn hedge, and as he approached he could hear his askaris shrieking threats and insults at the English native troops on guard outside.

He quieted them down and then went at once to see General Edwards to protest at such treatment.

'We are not ordinary prisoners of war,' he said. 'You do not have to fear that we will escape. We gave ourselves into your hands voluntarily in the performance of an unpleasant duty. Our feelings, particularly the feelings of my askaris, should be respected.'

Edwards promised to do his best to alleviate conditions. The following day, still escorted by Major Hawkins and the King's African Rifles, the Schutztruppe marched up the road to Bismarckburg, where steamers were being assembled to take them across Lake Tanganyika to the rail head at Kigoma. There was a delay here of several days and it frayed the nerves of both officers and askaris, for they were still penned in by armed guards. Lettow-Vorbeck protested by telegram to General van Deventer at their treatment, and on December 3 he received a reply which fomented serious trouble.

'I beg to acknowledge receipt of your telegram,' wrote van Deventer, 'setting forth your formal protest against your troops being treated as prisoners of war. This will be duly forwarded to the War Office. Meanwhile I am sure you will recognize that pending receipt through the War Office of a communication on the subject of the German Govt. I have had no choice but to act in accordance with the orders of the War Office, and treat your force as prisoners of war.'

When the contents of the telegram became known, Major Kraut came forward with a plan, which he had concocted with the aid of Lieutenants Spangenberg and Kempner, and with the agreement of the native platoon commanders of the Schutztruppe. They would make a night raid on the King's

African Rifles (led by the Europeans, who still retained their arms) and capture enough rifles, machine guns and ammunition to restart the campaign. The Belgian Congo and Portuguese Angola lay open to them; and they knew by this time that the British did not have men or resources to follow them.

It was with some difficulty that Lettow-Vorbeck persuaded them to abandon their plot. 'These suggestions were far from comfortable,' he wrote, 'as I had already enough to do to consider how we should get out of so unpleasant a situation. But putting aside the difficulties involved, I could only feel glad and proud of such a revelation of true soldierly spirit, a spirit which did not shrink, even after we had handed over all our arms, from storming an enemy camp and once more procuring for ourselves the means to continue the war.'

The steamers came at last and the Schutztruppe sailed through blinding rainstorms to Kigoma. The town was in Belgian hands and Governor Schnee (who now feared Belgian reprisals as much as earlier he had feared native uprisings) told Lettow-Vorbeck to demand extra protection for the white officers and NCO's. In fact, the Belgians 'received us with a hospitality which could not have been anticipated' and displayed 'a tactful reserve'. For the first time for years, the Germans sat down at tables covered with cloths and their meal was accompanied by red wine which had been provided for them by the Belgian Governor.

At Tabora, where the askaris were to be interned, General Lettow-Vorbeck took the salute before them for the last time. It was all over—four and a half years of bitter, bloody, cruel but magnificent campaigning. As he looked them over, his conscience pricked him. Had he been wrong to have fought on for so long? Would it not have been better, after all, to have taken Governor Schnee's way out and given in at the start? Had all the sufferings and hardships been worth while?

It was only a momentary qualm, for there was never much doubt in his heart that what he had done had been right. From a practical point of view, his resistance and his strategy had succeeded beyond his calculations; he had brought to Africa at least 150,000 troops who might otherwise have been used against Germany in Europe. But more importantly, as he saw it, he had kept the flag of German pride flying while it lay in tatters in Germany itself. He had pushed his African troops hard, but they had never once revolted and the hard core had stuck by him even when the situation seemed most hopeless and they were far away from their homes.

Would they have fought on if he had asked them? He got his answer when the parade was over and he was due to return to his train. His askaris cheered him as he began to walk away, and then one of them broke out of the crowd, dragging his wife and her baby with him.

'I have been asked to say this to you, Bwana Generals,' he said. 'Where do you go now? Where you go, we will go with you. And if this is not the time, then wait until this son of mine grows up to a warrior—and he will take my place and go with you.' He turned to the crowd. 'We will go with the Bwana Generals, will we not?'

The crowd surged forward. The woman began to luuluu in excitement.

'We will go with the Bwana Generals!' they cried, as he marched away.

General Lettow-Vorbeck and his European troops arrived in Dar es Salaam on December 8, 1918, and marched proudly through the streets to their internment camp, still carrying their arms. Governor Schnee and the Schutztruppe Commander were taken to 'a very pretty house' on the outskirts of the camp, together with Kraut and Spangenberg. There they found General Wahle, whom they had left behind, sick and wounded at Ubene, waiting for them, fit once more. They sat down to a lunch provided for them by General van Deventer, and Lettow-Vorbeck was told that a car had been put at his disposal and, with a British escort, he was free to move about the city.

He did so until, a few days later, he and most of the other Germans went down with the Spanish 'flu which was raging in Dar es Salaam; for ten days he was seriously ill. One of his toughest and most beloved officers, Spangenberg, who had weathered the campaign from start to finish, died in the epidemic.

On January 17, 1919, General von Lettow-Vorbeck and 114 of his men sailed from Dar es Salaam aboard a transport for Germany. It was five years to the day since he landed in Africa. On the dockside to wave him good-bye was his old cook and orderly, Baba, who had somehow made his way there from Tabora.

Lettow-Vorbeck had at least one happy event to look forward to amid the turmoil of defeated Germany. In 1913, just before he sailed to Africa to take over the Schutztruppe,

he had become engaged to Frau Margarethe Wallrath, but had received no further communication from her since 1916. But in Dar es Salaam, he had cabled to ask her if she still considered herself betrothed, and her reply was in his pocket.

They were married in Germany on March 12, 1919.

Epilogue

GENERAL VON LETTOW-VORBECK, now 94 years old, lives to-day with his daughter in a small duplex house not far from the banks of the Elbe at Hamburg-Altona. Despite his great age, he is a spry and lively character for whom the events in East Africa so many years ago are still almost as vivid as if they had taken place yesterday. When he speaks of what has become known in Germany as *Der Lettow-Feldzug*, an animation breaks through the crust of the years and his feet are once more pedalling his bicycle along the jungle paths at the head of the Schutztruppe, and the smell of the worn brown scrublands of Tanganyika seems to hang in the air. His memory of those years is still crystal clear; he can recapitulate a battle or recall a conversation; it is obvious that few things which happened to him after 1919 (I am, of course, referring to non-domestic events) have much meaning for him. As recently as January 1963, he wrote to me (in English) to make it clear that some British ideas on the size and nature of the force which he commanded in East Africa gave a completely wrong impression. 'There is the statement,' he wrote, 'that the strength of the German Schutztruppe was 40,000. That is not right. The highest strength was 3,000 whites and 11,000 black soldiers. They had hardly been beaten in the field and were decided to go on with me right to the West Coast of Africa, and so continue fighting in the Portuguese Colony of Angola on the Bihe plateau. No reasonable man can avoid [*sic*] that this was only possible with a native force whose members are treated like our own children and not with cruelty.'

He had been hurt by a suggestion, made by Field Marshal Smuts' son in his biography of his father, that the natives in East Africa had been badly treated by the Germans. 'Did you see my correction in *The Times*?' he asked. I had seen it. He wrote on December 10, 1952:

'Field Marshal Smuts' son, Mr J. C. Smuts, has published a biography of his father which will greatly interest everyone who has met him during his various campaigns. Concerning East Africa, may I be allowed to remark that the facts al-

leged by Mr Smuts are not absolutely correct? On page 162, for instance, he estimates the German strength at 2,000 German officers and 20,000 natives at the beginning of the War. In reality, there were only 218 whites and 2,542 askaris, which number was gradually augmented to its highest level of 3,007 whites and 12,100 askaris in March 1916. There was no plan to turn the German colonies into military bases (page 149). I regretted profoundly that East Africa was not. We did not have a single cartridge or rifle or depot or any hospital material in case of war (page 149). Mr Smuts speaks about sadistic ill treatment of the natives by German colonial methods (page 150). The natives themselves used to say, "The Germans use rough words but they have good hearts."

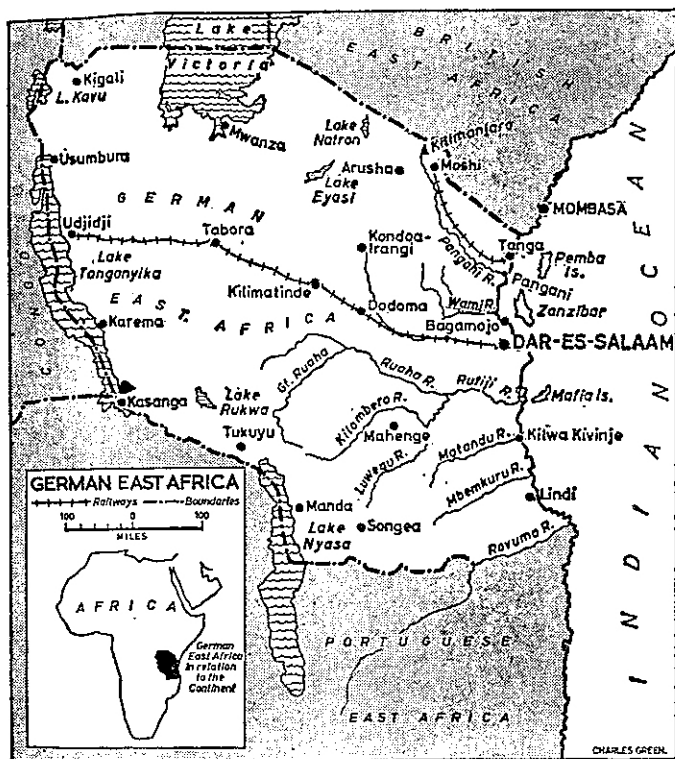
'Of course there were native rebellions, as there have been in every colony in the world, and is now, for instance, with the Mau Mau movement in Kenya. Does Mr Smuts think it convenient to suppress such rebellions only with kid gloves? Was it so in South Africa with the Zulus or the Kaffir? Mr Smuts' condemnation of German Colonial methods is rather superficial and cannot be taken too seriously.'

Lettow-Vorbeck's postwar career in Germany was short, sharp and salutary. He was one of the leading figures in the Kapp putsch in 1920 in which (egged on by Field Marshal von Hindenburg) he led the revolt against Left Wing rule in the Reich. He was court-martialled, imprisoned and temporarily deprived of his rank. He went into politics for a short time afterwards and became a member of the Reichstag but soon grew tired of the cynicism and corruption of the time and retired in disgust to dream of more gallant days in Africa. He never again emerged into public life, though repeatedly encouraged to do so by Hitler and the National Socialists (whom he abhorred). After the Nazis came to power Hitler offered him the post of ambassador to Britain, but it would have necessitated his joining the National Socialist Party and this he would not do. He came to England only once after the end of the first World War, and that was to be guest of honour at an anniversary dinner, in 1929, of the British East Africa Expeditionary Force. The dinner was presided over by Field Marshal Smuts, and the two generals stayed afterwards as guests of Colonel Meinertzhagen in Kensington Gardens. He paid short visits to Tanganyika both before and after the last war and on each occasion was invited to stay at Government House, Dar es Salaam, where

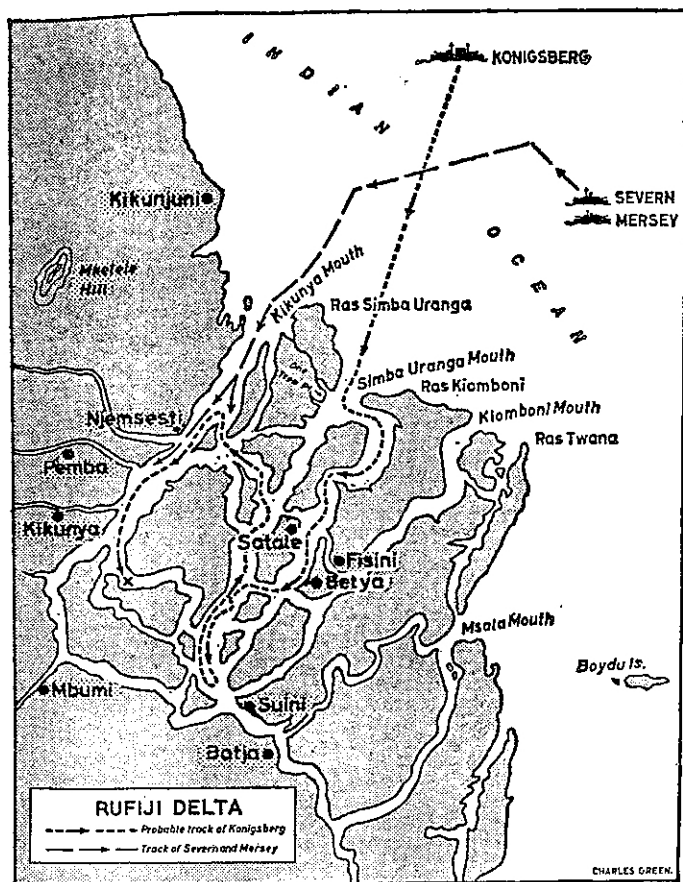
several of his old askaris revisited him and refought the old campaign.

Just before I last saw him, he had been visited by the son of one of his old askaris who is now a member of the Government of the Republic of Tanganyika. 'I gave him a good talking to,' he said. 'I told him not to despise the white people and not to humiliate them for the mistakes they made.' He gently slapped my knee. 'Do you know what he replied. "We only repudiate the small men, father. When the white man is big enough, as you were big enough, we continue to respect him."'

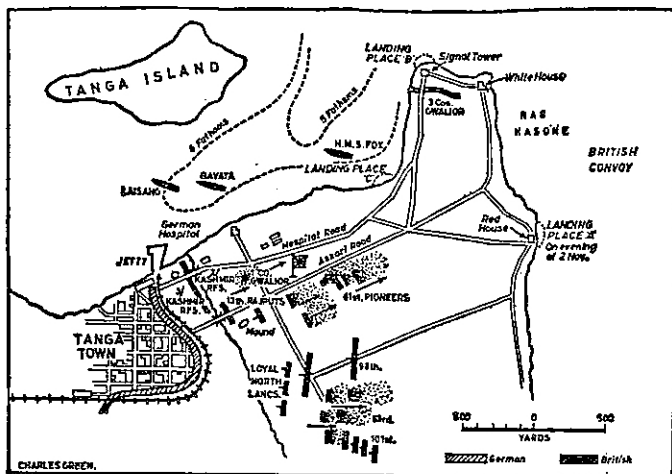
Governor Heinrich Schnee entered politics after he returned to Germany and campaigned for the return of Germany's colonies all through the years after the end of the first World War. As a member of the Reichstag, he became one of the most perfervid opponents of the Versailles Treaty. Soon after Hitler came to power, he joined the National Socialist Party and, in 1937, when the campaign by the Nazis for the return of the colonies was at its height, he was appointed 'Governor of the Colonies (in Reserve)'. He died in June 1949.



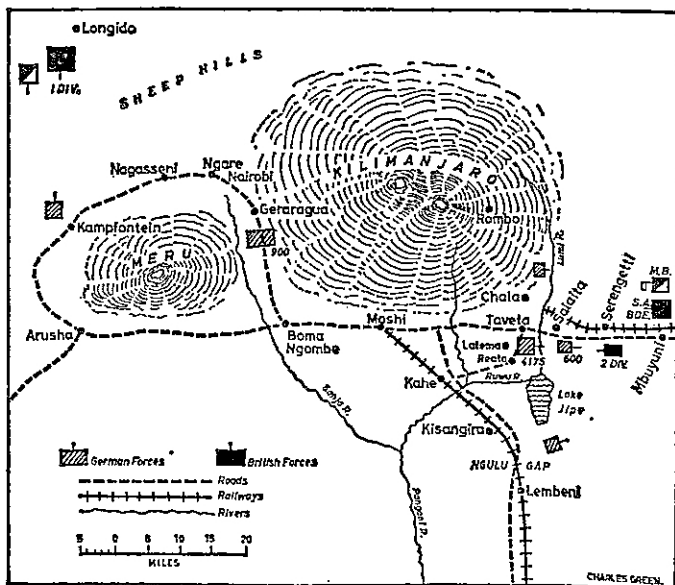
GERMAN EAST AFRICA



THE KÖNIGSBERG'S HIDING PLACE



THE LANDING AT TANGA



THE BATTLE FOR KILIMANJARO

Some Statistics

In the war in German East Africa, the Schutztruppe recruited 3,007 Europeans as officers and under-officers, 12,100 askaris (or fighting troops) and several thousand carriers. Their casualties were:

EUROPEANS

Killed or died of wounds	439 (<i>inc.: 69 officers, 3 medical officers, 3 Government officials</i>)
Accidentally killed	23 (<i>inc.: 4 officers, 1 medical officer</i>)
Died from illness	277 ¹ (<i>inc. 18 officers, 2 medical officers, 2 Government officials</i>)
Wounded	874 (<i>inc.: 181 officers, 8 medical officers, 1 Government official</i>)
Taken prisoner	2,718
Deserted	2

ASKARIS

Killed	1,290
Wounded	3,669
Missing	4,510
Taken prisoner	4,275
Deserted	2,847

(These figures do not include 162 who died from Spanish influenza on the march back from Portuguese East Africa.)

CARRIERS

Between 6,000-7,000 men, women and children died either from wounds or sickness.

In all, the British used some 160,000 British, South African, Indian, East and West African troops during the campaign.² Of these, official casualty figures were:

Fighting troops killed	3,443 (<i>inc.: 270 officers</i>)
Died from disease or accident	6,558 (<i>inc.: 125 officers</i>)
Missing or captured	1,310 (<i>inc.: 66 officers</i>)
Wounded	7,777 (<i>inc.: 514 officers</i>)

² Lettow-Vorbeck puts the figure much higher. '137 generals

¹ 21 of these committed suicide.

had been in the field and in all, about 300,000 men had been employed against us.'

Of the carriers and 'boys' who moved with the Allied forces, 376 were killed, and 44,911 died from disease. 635 were taken prisoner and 1,645 were wounded. In addition, the Belgians lost nearly 3,000 killed and wounded, and the Portuguese, 28 officers, 1,706 under-officers and men killed, and several hundred wounded and captured.

ANIMALS

It was estimated that the British forces lost 140,000 horses, mules, oxen and donkeys during the campaign.

AMMUNITION AND ARMAMENTS

Two-thirds of the Schutztruppe was armed with old 1871 'smoky' type rifles when war broke out in 1914, but these were subsequently reinforced by modern weapons brought in by the two blockade runners which arrived in East Africa during the course of the campaign, by captures from the enemy, and by the big guns off-loaded from the sunken *Königsberg* in the Rufiji River. The arms surrendered to the British by the Schutztruppe at Abercorn on 25 November 1918 (from a force consisting of 21 officers, 5 medical officers, a doctor in the Voluntary Medical Detachment, a senior veterinary officer, a senior telegraph officer, a senior chemist, 125 European other ranks, 1,156 askaris and 1,598 carriers,¹ consisted of:

Field guns	<i>1 (Portuguese)</i>
Machine guns	<i>37 (7 German, the rest British and Portuguese)</i>
Rifles	<i>1,071 (British and Portuguese)</i>
Ammunition	<i>250,000 rounds (British and Portuguese)</i>
Shells	<i>40 (Portuguese)</i>
and three British telephone systems.	

¹ In addition to small arms retained by the Europeans.

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INDEX

- Abercorn, 198, 201, 203, 204-6
Adamstor (Portuguese cruiser), 167
 Aden, Gulf of, 16n., 42
 Adler, Captain, 52
 Aitken, Major-General, 50, 51-52, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63-68, 68n., 71
 Aldabra Island, 77
 Altomnologue, 181, 182
 Arnold, Sub-Lieut. C. V., 86
 Askaris, 33-34, 41, 137, 194-95, 201, 203, 204-6, 207-8, 210-11
Astraea (British naval vessel), 16, 25, 27, 30, 42, 48
 Auracher, District Commissioner, 52-53, 54-55, 56
 Baba (cook), 144, 161, 194, 208
 Bagamayo, 32, 33, 159
 Baluchis, 130th, 107, 108
 Belfield, Sir Charles, 51, 72, 93, 96, 98
 Berndt, Captain (harbourmaster, Dar es Salaam), 27
 Besch, Lieutenant, 191
 Beves, Brig.-General, 154, 156-58, 159
Bharata (British transport), 66
 Bismarck, Prince von, 31-33, 38, 103
 Bismarckburg, 206
 Bock, Lieut.-Colonel von, 123
 Boell, Lieutenant, 187-88
 Boggis, Able Seaman, 85
 Bolles, Sgt.-Major, 191
 Botha, General Louis, 103, 105-6, 116, 150
 Brandt, 198
 Brett-Young, Francis, 127-129, 130, 132, 133
 Bits, General, 127, 133-34
 Bukoba, 94-95, 96
 Bushiri (Arab leader), 33
 Caprivi, Graf von, 33
 Caulfield, Commander, R.N., 52, 54-55, 56-57
 Central Railway, 120, 121, 123, 126, 129, 131, 141, 148, 152, 154, 168, 191
Chaimite (Portuguese gunboat), 167
 Chala Mountain, 112
 Chalau, 189
 Chambezi River, 199
 Charlewood, Commander, R.N., 42-43, 66, 69
Chatham (British cruiser), 44-47, 81-83
 Chirumba, 175-76
 Chiwata, 158
 Christiansen, Lieutenant, 77-79
City of Winchester (British merchant ship), 42
 Congo Act (1885), 13, 39
 Cornelius (tracker), 20, 21
 Croad, Mr (Kasama magistrate), 199, 202
 Crowe, Brig.-General, 141-42
 Cruiser Squadron, Royal Navy, 10th, 76
 Cull, Lieutenant, R.N., 85, 86
 DPM (Meinertzhagen's Intelligence unit), 91-92, 93
 Dar es Salaam, 13-14, 15, 16, 17, 21, 23-30, 32, 33, 35, 44, 45-46, 53, 102, 139, 191, 209; German troops leave, 24-25; Schnee declares an open city, 25-29, 30, 46, 48, 51, 99; British plans to occupy, 41, 105; bombardments of, 47-48, 52, 69, 110; British capture of, 135, 136n., 144, 168, 169
Dartmouth (British cruiser), 43-44
 Deventer, Brig.-General van, 106, 112, 114, 117, 121-27, 134, 152, 153, 154-55, 173-74, 186, 191, 197, 200-2, 206, 208
 Dickinson, Colonel (King's African Rifles), 187-88, 206
 Dobbs (QMG), Expeditionary Force 'B', 67
 Dodoma, 131
 Drury-Lowe, Captain, R.N., 44, 45, 46-47
Duplex (British tug), 83
 East African Infantry Brigade, 106-7, 128-29, 132-33
 Eberlie, R. F., 34, 35
 Edwards, Brig.-General, 154, 179, 186, 204, 206
 Ehrlich, Paul, 35
 Enslin, Brigadier, 132-33, 134
 Expeditionary Force 'B', 45-50, 53, 59, 61-68, 71. *See also individual formations*
Feldmarschall (German ship), 48
 Fife, 198-99
 Foch, Marshal, 202
Fox (British cruiser), 50, 52, 54, 57, 63, 66, 68
 Freund, Naval Lieutenant, 191
Gabriel (British cruiser), 186
 Garrod, Major (King's African Rifles), 190
 Geragua, 114
 German East Africa Company, 32-33
 Gil, Major-General (Portuguese commander), 168-69
 Goering, Captain, 190
Goliath (British battleship), 50, 69
 Gore Brown, Major, 185
 Graham, Colonel (King's African Rifles), 51
 Grenadiers, 101st, 61, 62, 67, 71
 Gwalior Infantry, 50, 61
 Hammerstein Captain von, 66-67, 74, 76
 Han Force, 154
 Handeni, 129-30

- Hannyngton, General, 154
 Hanson, Capt. (13th Rajputs), 58, 75
 Hawkins, Major E. B. (King's African Rifles), 203-4, 208
 Hehe tribe, 38
Helmuth (British patrol vessel), 42-43, 67, 69, 84
 Herero revolt (1904), 20
 Hindenburg, Field Marshal von, 202, 211
 Hoskins, General, 127, 153
 Hottentot rebellion (1904), 20-21
Hyacinth (British cruiser), 78-80
 Ili, 182
 Imperial Service Brigade, 50, 57
 Infantry Regiment, 98th, 61
 Iringi, 126
 Izaak, Samuel, 20-21

 Jasin, 73-76, 77, 94, 110
 Jellicoe, Admiral, 77
Jim Redlake (Brett-Young), 127
 Jipe, Lake, 110, 113
 Kahama, 159
 Kahe, 113, 117, 118, 119, 127, 159
 Kapp putsch (1920), 211
Karmala (British battleship), 56, 57
 Kasama, 198-99
 Kashmir Rifles, 2nd, 50
 Kasigau, 93
 Kausch, District Commissioner, 29
 Kearton, Cherry, 96
 Kempner, Lieutenant, 203, 205, 208
 Kibata, 146
 Kigali, 126
 Kigoma, 206, 207
 Kilimanjaro, 31, 40, 51, 55, 88, 103, 105, 108, 112, 116, 118, 121, 127, 154
 Kilosa, 34
 Kilwa, 145, 154, 168, 170
 Kimamba, 120
 Kimbambabwe, 149
 King, Norman (British Consul, Dar es Salaam), 14-15, 17, 40, 41, 45, 47
 King-Hall, Admiral Sir Herbert, 78, 79-80
 King's African Rifles, 51, 73, 142, 179, 186, 187-88, 189, 190, 192, 200, 203-4, 206-7
 Kionga Triangle, 167
 Kissaki, 132, 137, 138, 173
 Kisumu, 94
 Kiswere, 168
 Kitangari, 159
 Kitchenier, Lord, 68 n., 71, 76, 105, 152
 Koch, Robert, 35
 Koehl, Captain, 179-80
 Komo, 45
 Kondoa-Irangi, 119, 121, 122-24, 125, 126, 127, 152, 154
 Konduchi, 28

König (German supply ship), 27, 48
Königsberg (German light cruiser), 15, 26, 27; raiding career, 41-44; British pursuit of, 44-47, 67; refuge in Rufiji swamps, 77-79, 80-82, 84; British operations against, 82-84, 84-87; sinking of, 86-87; guns from, 123, 127, 135 n., 146, 159
 Kori, Dr. Hans, 144
 Kornatzky, Captain, 124
 Korogwe, 128, 131
 Koroma Mountain, 179, 180
 Kraut, Major, 98, 107, 119, 127, 129, 194, 202, 205, 208
 Kruger, Captain, 189
 Kungiolu, 147
 Kwiri, 178
 L 59 Zeppelin, 164, 165
Laconia, HMS, 85
 Latema, 117
 Lawrence, T. E., 91
 Lettow-Vorbeck, General Paul von: background and early career, 18-22, 37; and Herero revolt, 19-22; does not favour neutrality, 22, 24-25, 28, 29, 37, 99; discusses position with Schnee, 23-24; continued disagreement with him, 25, 29-30, 37, 40, 46, 59, 98-101, 102-3, 171; leads troops out to Pugu, 25; orders Von Prince to enter enemy territory, 30, 39; expects British attack at Tanga, 53; occupies Tanga, 53-54; decides to risk battle there, 60; counter-attacks, 67; victory at Tanga, 65-70; besieges Jasin, 72-74, 76; congratulated by Kaiser, 76; reinforced, 77-78, 87; adopts Hottentot bush tactics, 88, 95; tribute to Meinerzhagen, 92; prepares for long war, 96-98, 101-2, 146; appeals to Kaiser on Schnee's interference, 99-101; public rapprochement with Schnee, 110-11; attitude to Smuts, 115-16, 150; costly mistakes, 115-16, 117; bases operations on Central Railway, 119-20, 122-24, 129; awarded Iron Crosses, 120 n.; retreats from Kondoa, 126-27, 131, 132; difficulties of, 134-38; refuses Smuts' call to surrender, 139-41; awarded *Pour le Mérite*, 143, 148; ill-health and increasing hardships, 143-44, 146, 154-56, 170-71, 178-79; evacuates surplus personnel, 147-48; belief in victory, 148-49; Kaiser's tributes to, 153-54, 165; Lindi victory, 156; perilous position, 158-60; refuses to capitulate, 160-61, 173; reduces fighting strength, 161-62; lives off country,

- 161-62, 185; retreats across Rovuma River, 162-65; crosses Portuguese East Africa, 169 *et seq.*; serious position, 192-96; return across Rovuma, 195, 197; failure of attack on Fife, 198-99; captures Kasama, 199; ordered to surrender on Germany's defeat, 200-203; official surrender, 203-6; protests at treatment of troops, 206; takes last salute, 207-8; interned, 208; return to Germany and marriage, 209; later years, 210-12
- Light Infantry, 63rd, 61, 62
- Likungo River, 182, 186, 189
- Lin Force, 154
- Lindi, 98, 154, 156, 159, 168
- Linkangara Mountains, 157-58
- Lioma, 190
- Longido, 52, 112, 113, 114
- Loeff, Captain Max, 42, 77, 84, 87, 100, 135 n., 169
- Loyal North Lancs Regiment, 2nd, 50, 61, 62, 63-64, 66, 95, 107, 108, 142
- Ludjenda River, 170, 172, 178
- Lugella, 182
- Lukigura River, 131
- Lumi River, 112, 115
- McKye, Colonel, 47
- Mafia Island, 84-85, 86
- Mahiwa, 159
- Maji-Maji rebellion (1905), 18, 34-35
- Majoreni River, 73
- Makindu, 126
- Maktau, 102, 111
- Malema River, 181
- Malleson, Brig.-Gen., 107, 115, 118
- Manza Bay, 78, 79
- Mapanda, Abdullah, 34
- Marching on Tanga* (Brett-Young), 127
- Marenga, Joseph, 20
- Masai steppe, 119, 121
- Massow, General von, 38
- Matumbi Mountains, 151
- Mbuyuni, 97
- Meinertzhagen, Captain R., 50-52, 56, 57, 58, 62, 63, 65, 66, 67-68, 72, 75, 89, 90-95, 106, 114-15, 116, 118, 120-21, 122-23, 124, 126 n., 126-27, 130-31, 133-34, 168
- Meixner, Dr, 178
- Mersey*, HMS, 85-86
- Meru, Mount, 113
- Methner, Geheimrat (Dar es Salaam), 27, 28, 29, 70
- Mgeta, 135, 136
- Mikandani, 168
- Mkwawa, Sultan (Hehe tribe), 37
- Mohoro, 159
- Moltke, Baron von, 103
- Mombasa, 39, 41, 42, 50-52, 68, 72 n., 88, 96, 105, 106
- Mombo, 129
- Morogoro, 27, 28, 47, 53, 101, 102, 131, 135, 143, 201
- Möwe* (German naval vessel), 28
- Mozambique, 159, 162-63, 167-77, 178-95
- Mpangire (Hehe chieftain), 38
- Muanza, 159
- Müller, Captain, 119, 184, 189, 190, 192, 197, 200
- Murray, Lieut.-General Sir Archibald, 103
- Mwambo, 168
- Mzima, 93
- Nairobi, 96, 103, 106
- Namacurra, 183-85, 188
- Namacurra River, 183
- Nambindinga, 161
- Nderema, 131
- New Moshi, 25, 36, 40, 51, 55, 68, 98, 104, 113, 118
- Newale, 164, 178
- Newbridge* (British merchantman), 83, 84
- Ngombbowano, 197
- Ngombe, 113, 114
- Ngulu Valley, 112
- Nordenholz, Sgt.-Major, 190
- Northern Railway, 51, 55, 59, 68, 113, 118, 119, 122, 127, 129-30
- Northey, Brig.-General, 154
- Numarro, 190
- Nyasa, Lake, 31, 41, 191, 197
- O'Grady, Brig.-General, 154
- Otto, Lieut. Hauptmann, 179, 189
- Pangani River, 31, 130
- Para Mountains, 111, 113
- Pegasus*, HMS, 16, 25, 27, 30, 42, 43, 46, 47-48, 77, 123
- Pekera, 189
- Peters, Dr, 32
- Pioneers, 61st, 61, 62
- Poppe, Captain, 190
- Port Amelia, 178
- Präsident* (German merchantman), 44, 45, 81
- Preston, Conductor (Royal Signals), 65
- Prince, Captain Tom von, 30, 37-40, 60, 64, 68-69, 91n., 112
- Prince, Magdalene von, 38
- Pugu, 25, 26, 27, 28
- Quelimane, 186-87
- Rajputs, 13th, 50, 56-59, 61, 62
- Ras Kasone (Tanga), 56, 59, 66, 67
- Reata, 116, 157
- Regone, 189
- Rhodesia Battalion, 2nd, 107
- Rhodesian Regiment, 107-8, 116

- Ritchie, Captain Henry, 69
 Rosa, Colonel, 186
 Rovuma River, 125, 162, 163-65, 167, 168-70, 176, 195
 Rowuja River, 31
 Royal Fusiliers, 94-95
Rubens (German supply ship), 77-80
 Ruckteschell, Lieutenant von, 175, 189, 194
 Rufiji River, 31, 44-45, 77-86, 110, 136-37, 138, 143, 144-46, 147, 148-49
 Ruhungu, 132, 133
 Rumi River, 112
 Russisi River, 99
 Ruva River, 152
 Ruwa River, 112, 121
 Salaite Mount, 106-8, 111, 112, 115
 Samarunga (native carrier), 195
 Schaefer, Lieutenant, 179
 Schnee, Dr Heinrich, 29, 39, 41, 47, 49, 69, 87, 120, 137, 145, 147, 156, 175, 177, 185, 192, 205, 207, 208; determination to keep colony neutral, 13-17, 22, 24-25, 37, 40, 41, 52-53; attitude to Africans, 16-18, 19, 35-36; career, 17-19; discusses situation with Lettow-Vorbeck, 21-25; orders troops to leave Dar es Salaam, 24-25; leaves city, 26, 27, 28; continued feud with Lettow-Vorbeck, 30, 46, 59, 98-101, 102, 160, 172; his colonial reforms, 34-35, 36; public rapprochement with Lettow-Vorbeck, 110-11; leaves temporary capital of Tabora, 135; protests at treatment of nationals, 139-40; accompanies troops into Portuguese East Africa, 163-64; frustrates Koroma success, 179-80; later career, 212
 Schroetter, Freiherr von, 68
 Selous, F. C., 96, 148
 Serengeti Plain, 31, 106, 107, 112
Severn, HMS, 84-86
 Sheppard, Brig.-General, 75, 128, 132-33, 149
 Silveira, Major da, 167-68, 169
 Simba Uranga, 81-82, 83, 84, 85
 Singh, Colonel Raghubir, 74
 Sisal Planters' Company, 36
 Smith-Dorrien, General Sir Horace, 105, 111
 Smuts, General Jan, 106, 108, 111-18, 120-21, 125, 126-28, 129-32, 133, 136, 138-43, 146-48, 152, 167, 173, 210-11
 Smuts, J. C., 210
 Solf, Dr, 14, 165
Somali (German supply ship), 82
 Songea, 197
 South African Mounted Brigade, 107, 108, 112-14, 117, 121-24, 125; 1st Division, 112, 114, 117, 127; 2nd Division, 113, 114-15, 117, 121-24, 125
 Spangenberg, Lieutenant, 197, 199, 205, 206, 208
 Sprockhoff, Naval Lieut., 156, 167
 Stewart, Brigadier J. M., 94, 113, 114-15, 116, 118
 Stewart, Lieut.-Colonel J. A., 57
 Sykes, Captain, R.N., 28
 Tabora, 36, 101, 110, 119, 120, 126, 135, 137, 139, 156, 159, 191, 197, 198, 204, 207-8
Tabora (German merchantman), 27, 45
 Tafel, Captain, 29-30, 54, 57, 59
 Tanga, 15, 36, 41, 49, 51-70, 75, 76, 88, 91n., 100, 101, 110, 115, 127, 129, 130, 134
 Tanganyika, Lake, 36, 41, 159n., 198
 Taute, Surgeon-Major, 193
 Taveta, 40, 51, 97, 106, 112, 113, 115, 116, 117
 Thurmann, Sgt.-Major, 191
 Tighe, Brig.-General Michael, 50, 57, 58, 72, 89, 92, 94, 96, 97, 106, 113, 115, 117, 118
 Trotha, Lieut.-General von, 20
 Tsavo River, 31, 72
 Tulicini, 119
 Turner, Captain, 75
 Turner, Lieutenant, R.N., 46, 47
 Ubena, 197
 Ufome, 125
 Uganda Railway, 24, 39, 41, 72, 88, 90, 93, 102-3, 106, 111, 127
 Uluguru Mts., 132, 135, 137, 159
 Umba River, 72, 73
 Usambura, 39, 102
 Victoria, Lake, 159n.
 Voi, 40, 103, 106, 111
 Wahle, General von, 69, 87, 136, 156-57, 193, 194, 197, 208
 Wallrath, Frau Margarethe (later Lettow-Vorbeck), 209
 Wami River, 31
 Wapshare, Brig.-General, 50, 72, 73, 82-83, 88-89
Weymouth (British cruiser), 44, 83, 84
 Wilhelm II, 99, 100, 120n., 149, 152-53, 164, 165, 202
 Wissmann, Hermann von, 32, 38, 103
 Witboi, Henrik, 20
 Zambesi River, 182, 186
 Zanzibar, 14, 23, 32, 40, 42, 43, 45, 47, 67, 81, 82, 83, 123

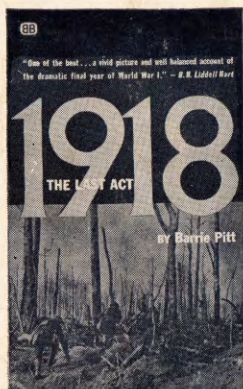
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