EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN
1914 – 1918
FARIDKOT SAPPERS & MINERS

In commemoration of all those, including civilians, porters, and troops, involved in the East African campaign of 1914 to 1918.

Compiled by Richard Sneyd

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Part One

Figure 1. *Colonial Africa in 1914*

**British Colonial Defence Policy 1912**

The British colonial defence policy was normally directed towards the prevention and suppression of African uprisings rather than defence against hostile forces from neighbouring colonies. However, a comprehensive defence plan had been drafted and updated by 1912. The priorities were to defend British East Africa (BEA) and the vital Uganda Railway, built between 1896 and 1901 from Mombasa on the Indian Ocean to Kisumu on Lake Victoria, from the potential threat from German East Africa (GEA).

German East Africa lay within the area identified by the Berlin Act of 1885 as being within the Congo Basin and therefore under certain conditions could be declared neutral in time of a general European war. If neutrality failed, the Germans would fall back on the Hague Convention which prevented the bombardment of undefended cities.

Both the British and the German Governments realised that the two colonies had negligible strategic value and therefore were given minimum resources. The British had the King’s African Rifles (KAR) and the Germans, the *Schutztruppe*. The KAR were under the control of the Colonial Office through the local governor.

In German East Africa, the *Schutztruppe*, was a small force of Europeans and local Askaris. Initially, the force came under a military governor who quietly ignored the policies of the German Imperial Government. Between 1905 and 1907 there had been a large scale uprising from the black African population in the south east of GEA and the *Schutztruppe* had taken a bloody and ruthless revenge. At least 75,000 black Africans died and the area was totally devastated. By 1912 the Governor Rechenberg was forced to resign and was replaced by Dr Heinrich Schnee, a lawyer and experienced colonial official.

As Europe slid towards war in July 1914, life in both BEA and GEA continued at its normal pace. Few of the white settlers or officials had any great enthusiasm for fighting their neighbours. The black Africans were largely unaware of this remote quarrel between Europeans. The Germans in GEA were preparing a major exhibition particularly to celebrate the completion in February 1914 of the *Zentralbahn* between Dar-es-Salaam and Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika.

European rule in BEA and GEA dated back less than thirty years and despite a steady influx of settlers the over-whelming majority of the inhabitants were black. GEA had nearly 7.5 million black Africans, 28,000 Indians and over 5,300 Europeans. It is alleged that the boundary between BEA and GEA decided by a joint Anglo-German team was marked by a trail of empty vermouth bottles; vermouth supposedly built up resistance against blackwater fever.

GEA and BEA had similar terrain ranging from arid steppes to humid jungles and rugged mountains. Roads were very few and the main means of transport was by railway; in GEA the Usambara railway ran inland from Tanga and the *Zentralbahn* (Central Railway) from Dar-es-Salaam. In BEA the Uganda Railway ran from Mombasa through Nairobi to Kisumu on Lake Victoria.

The only regular Army Unit in British East Africa before the war was the 3rd Battalion King’s African Rifles. They had their headquarters in Nairobi and a detachment in Zanzibar. For internal security there was a small force of armed police.
The Outbreak of War. 4 August 1914

On 5 August 1914, a sub-committee of the British Cabinet met to discuss the possibilities of worldwide action against the Germans. The idea of an operation against German East Africa was raised including an attack against the port of Dar-es-Salaam to remove a naval base likely to service German ships patrolling the Indian Ocean.

The War Office was pre-occupied with sending the British Expeditionary Force to France. Responsibility for providing troops for an East African campaign was passed to the India Office and through them to the Indian Army. The India Office was not expected to direct military operations as such but Army Headquarters India did have its own general staff working under the direction of the viceroy and Commander-in-Chief.

In 1914 some defence forces were raised in Mombasa and Nairobi including two European volunteer units, the East African Rifles and the East African Regiment. A corps of Arab Rifles rendered good service until 1916.

Some 7,500 African porters were enrolled after the declaration of war. By 1918 the Carrier Corps had increased to 200,000 men.

The Colonial Office still controlled the Kings African Rifles and wanted reinforcements quickly. The India Office found a small force of three battalions of Indian troops to be known as Indian Expeditionary Force IEF(C) under Brigadier General J.M. Stewart. Although part of the Indian Army they would come, on arrival, under the Colonial Office’s control through the Governor of British East Africa, Sir H.C. Belfield.

Brigadier Stewart and one battalion sailed from Karachi on 19 August 1917. The bureaucratic arrangements of the British were in direct contrast to the flexible system under which the commander of the Schutztruppe, Colonel von Lettow, worked, as he was responsible only to Dr Heinrich Schnee, the Governor of German East Africa.

The British had difficulty in finding troops for the attack on Dar-es-Salaam as the Indian Army was trying to mobilise a corps IEF(A) for service in Egypt. On arriving in BEA General Stewart copied his plans to the War Office and Army Headquarters in India as was standard practice. General Stewart got rebuked by the Colonial Secretary who forbade him to communicate with either the War Office or Indian Army HQ.

Brigadier General Arthur Aitken was nominated to command IEF(B), the second Indian Expeditionary Force. Aitken was an infantry officer who had served in the Indian Army since 1882. Aged 53 he had commanded his Brigade for nearly three years before his appointment to command IEF(B). He seems to have been an average officer with no distinguishing talent or drive. Aitken did not inspire great confidence and some of his subordinates questioned his judgement.

In London, General Barrow had assumed general control over IEF(B) although detailed planning remained with Army Headquarters India. General Barrow came up with a breath-taking change of plan.

The new objective of IEF(B) was to bring the whole of British East Africa under British authority. This revised plan escalated the simple objective of protecting the shipping lanes by destroying, with a small Indian Force, the German port of Dar-es-Salaam, to driving the Schutztruppe from an area considerably larger than Germany.

General Barrow greatly underestimated the strength and capabilities of von Lettow and his well trained Askaris who were native to German East Africa and used to the climate and the terrain.

The General greatly overestimated the capabilities of the Indian Army and the Imperial Service troops
from the Princely States. Both forces were only trained to deal with local opposition in India and Afghanistan and unused to overseas campaigns. Their Generals were also inexperienced in commanding Indian troops outside India. Apart from neutralising the ports there were no strategic reasons for widening the conflict over the whole of German East Africa.

The new plan was that General Aitken should start with occupying the port of Tanga. Having taken Tanga, Aitken was expected to attack Dar-es-Salaam before going on to secure the whole of GEA, a large tropical country, with 10,000 troops of IEF(B) assisted by some of the 2,000 in IEF(C). Barrow completely ignored the previous assessments that had been made of the strength and calibre of the Schutztruppe as well as the difficulties of the terrain. He may have been influenced by the belief that the black African population would rise up and massacre the Europeans and Indians.

Barrow’s new plan transformed the East African Front from being a strategic backwater to a substantial commitment.

The German Government, but not Colonel Paul von Lettow their military commander in German East Africa, supported neutrality; their offer to negotiate passed through the United States but did not reach the British until late September 1914 by which time it was too late to take effect.

Back in India General Aitken and IEF(B) had to wait until sufficient shipping was available to move them to East Africa.

The Indian Army had never been trained for large scale expeditionary warfare and it was woefully short of machine guns and other equipment. Their role had been to control any uprisings within India and Afghanistan. The shortage of Indian Army regular troops meant that much reliance was placed upon the Imperial Service Corps that served the Princely States; these included the Faridkot Sappers and Miners.

At the outbreak of the War there were in German East Africa a regular force of 216 Europeans and 2,500 Askaris, a police force of 45 Europeans and 2,134 Askaris. During the war 3,000 Europeans and 1,700 Askaris were enrolled.

The war in East Africa really began, four days after the Declaration of War, on the morning of 8 August 1914. The British cruiser Astrea bombarded Dar-es-Salaam and boarded two potential armed raiders in the harbour.

The townspeople in Dar-es-Salaam scuttled a survey ship and sank a floating dock in the harbour entrance rendering it useless as a naval base for the rest of the war. The Naval Officers made truces with the officials at Tanga and Dar-es-Salaam. The truces agreed that both sides would refrain from all hostile acts during the war. These agreements were made without reference to any higher authority and were to result in the disaster to the Allies of the battle of Tanga later in the autumn of 1914.

The German warship Königsberg was based at Dar-es-Salaam. Built in 1907, she was the largest and most powerful warship for hundreds of miles. She was also at least two and a half knots faster than her nearest rival. She had steamed out of Dar-es-Salaam on 31 July 1914 for a secret destination. On 23 September 1914 she sank the British cruiser Pegasus in Zanzibar harbour.

In London few, in the late summer of 1914, had thoughts beyond the great German advance on Paris and the Battle of the Marne.

The IEF(B) Force under General Aitken included:-

1. The 27th (Bangalore) Brigade reputed to be the worst disciplined in the Indian Army included the 63rd Palmacottah Light Infantry.
2. The 2nd Loyal North Lancashires, 98th Infantry, 101st Maratha Grenadiers.
3. The Imperial Service Brigade (ISB), under Brigadier General Michael Tighe was newly made
up of a number of units from native States, including the 13th Rajputs, 2nd Kashmir Rifles, a half battalion of the 3rd Kashmir Rifles, 3rd Gwalior Infantry and the 61st Madras Pioneers, a unit lately employed in extending the Cooner Railway to Ootacamund.

Divisional troops included the Faridkot Imperial Service Sapper Company under Lieutenant-Colonel Harnam Singh with Major Bertie Wilmott Mainprise (an ex-Bengal Sapper) as Special Services Officer; The 25th and 26th Railway Companies Sappers and Miners under Royal Engineer Captains L.N. Malan and E. St G. Kirke, Lieutenants H.L. Woodhouse, J.R. Roberts and R.E. Gordon; A small Bridging Train from No 5 Bombay Sappers and Miners under Captain E.D. Tillard R.E.; No 4 Engineer Field Park Madras Sappers and Miners under Major R.E.M. McClintock R.E.

Altogether there were two full Indian battalions and two half battalions.

Finally on 16 October IEF(B) was ready to sail. The Konigsberg was hiding along the East African coast; the German cruiser Emden was in the eastern Indian Ocean and had shelled Madras. The convoy’s escort included the elderly battleship Goliath and an armed liner.

Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck

Figure 2. Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck

Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck had been appointed early in 1914 as Commander-in-Chief in German East Africa. He was a tallish figure, with a small but firm jaw, thin tight lips, a long, sloping forehead and close-cropped hair, von Lettow looked like a British caricature of a Prussian officer.

The son of a general and forty four years old, he had spent his whole life in the army, to the honour of which he was even more attached than he was to Germany. An admirer of Caesar’s Gallic War he had been an expert on colonial matters for the German General Staff and had fought in China in 1900-1901 when he had become friendly with the British officers also engaged there.

On the outbreak of war Von Lettow was determined that, although his command was tiny, he was going
to play a significant part in the war by keeping as many Allied troops engaged against him as he possibly could, preventing them from being used in more decisive theatres of war. He succeeded brilliantly in this aim. The first plan, which he eventually agreed with the Governor of GEA Dr Schnee was to attack the southern frontier of British East Africa from the area of the Usambara Railway.

C.J. Thornhill in his book Taking Tanganyika comments on the advantages held by Von Lettow:

Our Commander-in-Chief of the East African Campaign had a difficult proposition before him in combating German East Africa, for although this country was completely cut off from Germany, it was self-contained and had a huge amount of very fine raw material from which to recruit soldiers, besides Von Lettow, the German Commander, had a knowledge of the country far superior to that of the half dozen or so British and Allied Generals who were in command at various different times. At one period it was difficult to know who was in command on our side so rapidly did the Generals come and go.

Of course at one time we had a superior brain in General Smuts and if he had arrived at the beginning and had been able to remain through the campaign there would have been a very different tale. It would have been interesting to see the two master brains of Von Lettow and Smuts clash.

The crafty German leader, with his knowledge of the country and its intricacies, must have chuckled each time new hands took up the reins. Perhaps a little comforted too, by the fact that thousands of miles of hostility lay between him and his own superiors, so that he was able to work out his own destiny. Although cut-off he was surrounded with raw material of every sort and ammunition in abundance from the ships which from time to time ran our blockade.

The vast roadless spaces of almost unknown malarial and tsetse fly stricken bush assisted Von Lettow in dragging out his guerrilla operations. It was an entirely different guerrilla action to that of the Boer War, or in fact any other modern war, in that the vast spaces traversed were infected with this deadly fly, which prevented the use of animal draft or mounted infantry.

Motor cars and lorries generally speaking were practically useless, owing to the lack of roads and the heavy rainfall. In the end the Allies had to copy the Germans’ method of transport which was to carry everything on the natives’ heads. When there are tens of thousands of men operating on the offensive a long way from their base, a vast number of porters must be employed to bring up provisions and ammunition. A favourite marching song of the porters was “We are the porters carrying the food for the porters/ carrying the food for the porters/ (repeated appropriately) carrying foods for the porters carrying the ammunition”.

The Germans, on the other hand, lived off the country and did all in their power to destroy food sources as they retired before the Allies invading armies.

Brian Gardner in his 1963 book German East emphasises the different nature of this campaign:-

The war in German East Africa was to be a war of a totally different kind. A war of adventure and initiative, of open movement and small units, of wits and of heroism. It was fought over immense distances, sometimes over unexplored and unmapped areas, in jungles where man-eating lions were often a worse danger than the enemy, in deadly swamps and on remote mountains, in a tropical climate where disease had hardly begun to be conquered as tropical medicine was still in its infancy.

One of the many extraordinary aspects of the campaign was the conglomeration of different races that fought side by side in a comparatively small army - Sikhs, Punjabis,
Arabs, West Indians, Rhodesians, Sudanese, Nigerians, members of many East African tribes, as well as Afrikaners, English, Irish, Scots and Welsh. Only two battalions of the British Army were involved. Many other Britons were engaged in the Indian Army, the Kings African Rifles (KAR) and in the auxiliary services.


German East Africa in 1914-1918.

Imaginate a country three times the size of Germany, mostly covered by dense bush, with no roads and only two railways, and either sweltering under a tropical sun or swept by torrential rain which makes the friable soil impassable to wheeled traffic, a country with occasional wide and swampy areas interspersed with arid areas where water is often more precious than gold, in which man rots with malaria and suffers torments from insect pests, in which animals die wholesale from the ravages of the tse-tse fly, where crocodiles and lions seize unwary porters, giraffes destroy telegraph lines, elephants damage tracks, hippopotami attack boats, rhinoceroses charge troops on the march, and bees put whole battalions to flight. Such was GEA.

Lettow’s forward strategy in the autumn of 1914 depended on good lines of communication between the Kilimanjaro area and the heartland of the colony. Whilst the Usambara Railway was invaluable, its terminus at Tanga was now unusable owing to the British Navy. The two major roads from Morogoro to Handeni and then to Korogwe were cut. The other road was from Dodoma to Kondoa Irangi, to Ufrome, to Aruscha. These roads were suitable for wagons and porters. Fortunately the richness of the land enabled the troops to live off local produce and cattle. There were only four motor lorries in GEA and less than a hundred mules plus a few ox-wagons. As with the British, the use of porters was essential and 7,500 were employed by the Germans in the northern area alone.
Part Two

An account of the role of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners in the Allied Campaign in German East Africa 1914-1918. August 1914 – November 1914

The detailed information about the Faridkot Sappers and Miners comes from Robin Sneyd’s “Record of Faridkot I.S. Sappers. East Africa 1914-1918” and his Field Note Book from 5 March 1916 to 1 October 1917.

Further information has been extracted from The Indian Sappers and Miners by Lt Col E.W.C. Sandes (Institute of Royal Engineers, Chatham, 1948).


Francis Brett Young’s book Marching on Tanga provides detailed descriptions of the countryside in the Pangani valley and the campaign between the autumn of 1915 and the autumn of 1916 when Francis Brett Young, a doctor with the Indian section of the First Division was invalided home.

Taking Tanganyika. Experiences of an Intelligence Officer, by C.J. Thornhill was published in 1917. Mr Thornhill was a settler from British East Africa who joined the Settlers’ Corps with his mule. The description of the Battle of Tanga comes from Mr Thornhill’s book. This was the gist of a description Mr Thornhill received first hand from a Sergeant in the Loyal North Lancashires a short time after the battle.

The Faridkot I.S. Sappers received their orders for mobilisation on 14 August 1914. The company had been raised, and paid for by the His Highness the Maharajah of Faridkot, recruited from his princely state of Faridkot. The Indian officers and troops were all from Faridkot. The ethnic composition was about 93% Jat Sikh with the remainder being Punjabi Muslims.

The State of Faridkot lies forty miles south east of Lahore in the Punjab. The Company was mobilised in October 1914 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Harman-Singh and embarked at Karachi on 14 October. They arrived at Mombasa on 9 November. Major B.W. Mainprise was attached as a Special Services Officer to the Faridkots when they left India with a company of 150 rifles.

Major Bertram Wilmot Mainprise R.E., was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 1894, and spent most of his career with the Roorkee Sappers and Miners. During the course of his career he received four Mentions in Despatches. In 1911 Mainprise married Nesta Port and had a son born in 1913. He accompanied the Faridkot Sappers to East Africa in October 1914. Mainprise left the Faridkots when he was appointed Brigade Major to Brigadier General W. Malleson of the Voi Brigade. He lost his life gallantly leading 25 Baluchis in a charge at the centre of the enemy’s position at the battle for the Kitovo Hills on 12 March 1915. Mainprise fell riddled with bullets from three German machine guns. Only two of the Baluchis survived.

The Faridkots entrained for Karachi on 10 October and embarked on the 14th and finally sailed on the 16th with other units. Their ships joined the convoy from Bombay which included the Bridging Train of the Bombay Sappers and Miners under Captain Elliott Dowell Tillard R.E. and the Madras Sappers and Miners under Major B.E.M. McClintock R.E. and the rest of the Force bound for British East Africa.

They were under Brigadier-General M.J. Tighe, a fifty year old officer who had been brought back from retirement. He had fought in five previous campaigns. He was well known for his courage but could not be described as a thinking officer. His experience was that of tribal warfare and not of a modern enemy. Tighe did his best and managed to concentrate his troops and conducted some preliminary training before departure. They were not crack troops and had serious limitations but there was little else he could do in the time available.
By the second week in October the whole Indian Expeditionary Force B bound for East Africa was embarked and ready at Bombay.

Major General A.E. Aitken was appointed Supreme Commander of IEF(B). On his staff were Lieutenant Colonel S.H. Sheppard R.E. (an ex-Bengal Sapper, as G.S.Q.I.; Lieutenant Colonel C.B. Collins R.E. as C.R.E.; Major G. Lubbock R.E. as Deputy Assistant Director of Railways under Sir William Johns as Director and Captain; H.C. Hawtrey R.E. as Assistant Director of Signals.

An Officer who inspected troops in Bombay remarked “The campaign will be either a walk-over or a complete disaster.”

Because of the general fear of the German battleship the Konigsberg, it was decided that the expedition would have to join a convoy, protected by warships; the ships lay out in Bombay harbour, with the troops inactive, cramped and bored. At 5pm on the sweltering hot day of 16 October 1914, the convoy steamed away into the ocean to be joined by the ships from Karachi making a total of 45 ships which moved in nine columns abreast. They were led by HMS Goliath and followed by HMS Swiftsure. Their final destinations were initially undisclosed. The transports for the Persian Gulf split off first, then the fourteen ships bound for East Africa, the remainder set course for Egypt and Marseilles.

The force was to go first to Mombasa where Aitken and his staff were to meet Brigadier J.M. “Jimmie” Stewart C.B., experienced in fighting on the North West Frontier who was in command of the troops in British East Africa. Stewart had arrived with an Indian Expeditionary Force in September 1914.

Two days out of Bombay the greater number of ships departed for the Red Sea, Suez and the Western Front, leaving Aitken’s little force chuffing across the basking ocean at an average speed of less than eight knots, accompanied by two ancient warships. Two days later the convoy was delayed 24 hours by having to turn back for three of the straggling transports which had been left behind.

The voyage was a nightmare for the troops. IEF(B)’s voyage lasted a fortnight. It was described by one of those on it as “a hell on crowded ships in tropical heat”. The majority of the Indian troops had never seen
the sea before. There was a gentle but persistent swell, which was just enough to provide misery-making sea-sickness. The ships were small and over crowded. There was little deck space and exercise was difficult. Near the Equator the heat below decks became intense. Many of the Indians were not supplied with their customary food. To a man, they were dispirited, discouraged and wretched.

The Headquarters ship steamed into Mombasa leaving the rest of the convoy at sea out of sight of the land.

It was decided that the British East Africa force under Brigadier Stewart was to attack at Longido, a post on a mountain north-west of Kilimanjaro, to coincide with the attack on Tanga.

The little information that was available about the German troops indicated that the main German Force was at Moshi at the northern end of the Moshi to Tanga railway line. Tanga was thought to be unoccupied by troops. The fact that German troops could be quickly rushed down the railway if Tanga was attacked was largely ignored.

General Aitken was told of the truces at Dar-es-Salaam and Tanga which had been made by the British naval commanders. The German officials at Dar-es-Salaam had not been told that the truces had been officially repudiated. Captain Caulfield of HMS Fox insisted that before any attack on Tanga, the citizens must be notified of the repudiation of the truce. Aitken gave in and agreed that it was essential to “play the game”.

In February 1914 Lieutenant-Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck on his way to German Cameroon was posted to German East Africa. In August, von Lettow had a small garrison of just 2,600 German nationals and 2,472 African soldiers in 14 Askari field companies. Von Lettow ignored orders from Berlin and the colony’s governor, Heinrich Schnee, who had insisted on neutrality for German East Africa. Von Lettow-Vorbeck prepared to repel a major amphibious assault on the city of Tanga. Von Lettow realised that German East Africa would only be a sideshow so his policy was to avoid confrontation and tie down as many Allied troops as he could, keeping them away from the Western Front. He succeeded brilliantly. For four years with a force that never exceeded 14,000 (3,000 Germans and 11,000 Africans) all well trained and well disciplined, he held in check much larger forces totalling 300,000, including British, Indian, South African, Nigerian, Rhodesian, Portuguese and Belgian troops.

Lettow realised that a hostile offensive was planned and had identified Tanga as the obvious objective. While the conference, discussing neutrality and truces, was taking place in Mombasa, Von Lettow was in Tanga discussing how best the place could be defended. Aitken had agreed that the first landings were to be by the Imperial Service Brigade under Tighe. They were to occupy Tanga and take up a position inland. The Faridkots were one of two small units that were never disembarked.

General Aitken issued orders saying: “It appears improbable that the enemy will actively oppose our landing”. HMS Fox became the only accompanying warship, as the other one had broken down.

**Figure 9. IEF(B) Transports approaching Tanga in November 1915**
(Ed Paice, *Tip and Run*, scroll down or click on Result 2)

The **Battle of Tanga**

C.J. Thornhill in *Taking Tanganyika* gives a description of the Battle of Tanga which he had received first hand from a Sergeant in the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment a short time after the battle:-

*On arriving at the German port of Tanga the troopships and HMS Fox anchored outside the harbour and a message was sent to the enemy to the effect that the British meant to bombard the town; but a generous period was given to get the women and children out of danger. This prolonged period of grace proved the undoing of the British and resulted in*
the cruel butchery in cold blood of many of our men. The German Commander, Von Lettow, took full advantage of every hour. He had only a few men at the time to defend Tanga, but at once set his railway running day and night at high pressure, sending almost every man in the country who could fire a gun to Tanga.

If the Allies had walked into Arusha, Moshi or any important up-country position there would have been no resistance as everyone was in Tanga.

Fortifications and earthworks were thrown up around Tanga and the country mapped out until the defence of the place, where our forces were about to attack, was fully prepared. When the time was up, our men landed in open boats and barges. The Naval Officers and Blue Jackets with their great guns were itching to bombard the place where our men were to land, thus rendering it safe; but not a shot was fired. The troops were massed on the foreshore. They started to advance towards the town and the waiting and entrenched Germans opened fire with machine guns on our men, who calmly returned fire in spite of being mown down like ripe corn.

The Germans held their positions, our men were exposed and at a disadvantage; and with heavy losses slowly retired to their boats. They were shot to pieces and forced down to the shore, but the naval guns covering them did not dare to fire a shot to assist their comrades, for they did not know how far our troops had penetrated inland and were afraid of killing them. Apparently another factor leading to the Allies’ defeat was that a regiment of Indian troops fled from the battlefield. They had never before faced machine gun fire and were further panicked by swarms of bees from their nests in the trees, who, frightened by the gun fire, indiscriminately attacked the troops both Indian and German. Some men received more than a hundred stings and at a decisive moment even the machine guns of one of von Lettow’s companies were put out of action.

The bulk of our forces embarked in the boats and got safely away, but there were not enough vessels to take everybody, as some of the boats were still away bringing in equipment. The poor fellows who had to remain behind desperately kept back the enemy while embarkation slowly took place, but they became weaker and weaker and at last were forced right back to the water and seeing there was no cover, had to surrender. But the blood-thirsty enemy Askaris, finding them helpless, rushed down and butchered them.

Figure 20. Re-embarkation of Indian Troops at Tanga
(see Ed Paice, Tip and Run)

The Battle of Tanga has been described as “One of the most ignominious defeats ever inflicted on the British Army”. Some of the units involved were in no condition to fight for some months afterwards.

The hard pressed War Office in London relieved the Colonial and India Office of their responsibility for military affairs in East Africa on 22 November 1914.

After their victory at Tanga, von Lettow’s men especially his black troops, were full of themselves for having slaughtered, like sheep so many, usually invincible white men. A black man always fights best under these conditions, and it was a long time before the Allies were able to make the enemy forget their victory. Tanga was one of the very few “conventional” confrontations between the Allies and the Germans. Most of the four year campaign was a prolonged chase of the German troops through some of the most inhospitable country in Africa. The German policy was usually to avoid confrontation and tie up as many allied troops and resources as possible.
The Germans initially thought that the Allies planned to invade German East Africa from Longido in the north. Many of the German troops were at Longido rather than Tanga. Due to a breakdown in communications these troops had not received the orders to proceed to Tanga, and were strongly positioned on a ridge halfway up a mountain.

The British column approached the German lines by night but found itself in a thick mist 1,500 feet above the plain. When the mist lifted a strong German force attacked and was only beaten off after a fierce counter attack by the Punjabis. Unfortunately, however, the firing had stampeded the mule train, which careered back down the slopes leaving the Punjabis without water. Isolated, without prospect of support and with no water under the hot sun the Punjabis decided to withdraw under cover of darkness.

The Faridkot Sappers and Miners based at Voi, British East Africa.

Defending the Uganda Railway. November 1915 – January 1916

Initially the Faridkots were the only Field Engineer unit deployed in the East African Campaign. The Faridkots’ assigned task at Tanga had been to land as soon as the covering force had established itself and to prepare the beaches for the disembarkation of heavy material. The covering force never got established; the Faridkots never disembarked, and were landed back at Mombasa.

The Faridkots and a half battalion of Kashmiri Rifles were immediately railed to Voi, a station on the Uganda Railway which ran from Mombasa, via Nairobi, to Kisumu on Lake Victoria.

After the Battle of Tanga Lieutenant-Colonel Paul von Lettow assembled his men and their scant supplies to attack the Uganda railway in British East Africa (Kenya). Apparently these attacks and the much later ones on Northern Rhodesia were the only times in the First World War that British administered territory was occupied by German troops.

The Faridkots did not possess many tradesmen and initially their usefulness was more that of a Pioneer unit, but their morale and enthusiasm remained high throughout their three and a half years service in East Africa. Military engineering skills were learned on the job and they soon became a very efficient unit.

In March 1915 the Faridkots, the 61st Pioneers and large gangs of Africans connected Voi with Maktau by a 37 mile long motor road.

A similar road was later constructed through dense bush from Tsavo to Mjima and involved the construction of three bridges over the Tsavo River. The work was hard and the unit suffered much sickness. There was a constant deficiency of stores and equipment and the Faridkots had to improvise.

Papyrus reeds in transverse layers were found to wear down in time to form a tough surface and for “Corduroying” (laying a track transversely with tree trunks). It was sometimes necessary to use ebony scantlings for boring and measuring rods in the absence of cheaper material.

Major Tillard R.E. was now attached to the Faridkots in charge of the bridging train which could not initially make floating bridges of any sort because its pontoons had been requisitioned by the Royal Navy who had left them with collapsible Berthon boats.

Elliot Dowell Tillard 1880-1967. Born in Cheltenham 22 July 1880; Educated Malvern College and Royal Military Academy; 2nd Lieutenant Royal Engineers 20th August 1809; Lieutenant 1st April 1902; Served in the 1903 Somaliland Campaign 1903 with the 17th Company Sappers and Miners under Captain Bovett R.E. He received the African General Services Medal with clasp SOMALILAND 1902-1904.

Tillard played first class cricket for the European team in the Bombay Presidency matches at Pune and the Bombay triangular competition also for Somerset in 1912. He sailed from Bombay for East Africa with IEF(B) in October 1914 in charge of the Bombay Sappers and Miners Bridging Train. In 1915 Major
Tillard succeeded Major Mainprise in 1915 as a Special Services Officer with the Faridkot Imperial Services Sappers and Miners. He received a Mention in Despatches in 1916, and the Distinguished Services Order in 1917.

In September 1924 Tillard was the Commandant of the Bombay Corps of the Sappers and Miners in the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Edwin Tillard died in Flexbury, Bude, Cornwall in 1967 aged 86.

In 1915 under Major Tillard’s guidance, the Faridkots built a fine suspension bridge of 100ft span designed to carry heavy lorries over the Voi river. They had plenty of timber for the roadway and the long trestled approach but otherwise the only materials available were nails and old mine working cable from South Africa. The Faridkot Sappers were enthusiastic workers and did splendidly considering they were untrained in this type of work.

The Company was employed, in two sections, on building blockhouses for the defence of bridges, stations and any other strategic targets. They bridged the roads from Tsavo, a station north of Voi on the Uganda line, to Mzima, and from Voi to Bura, and later constructed a jetty at Kilindini, the port for Mombasa.

Occasionally the Company went with the columns which were sent out to drive back the Germans when they became too venturesome in their raids against the Uganda Railway.

The Company acquired a grey parrot which had been trained by the Germans to screech *Gott straff England* and *Hoch der Kaiser* in the best Teutonic style, but when the bird began to imitate the “fall in” whistle at all times of the day and night it had to be suppressed!

![Figure 31. Map of the Battle of Bukoba June 1915](image_url)

**The Raid on Bukoba**

In June 1915, General Tighe detailed some of the best troops in BEA including the 25th Royal Fusiliers (Frontiersmen) and the Loyal North Lancashires to take Bukoba, a German port on the west side of Lake Victoria. A total of 1,600 men under the overall command of Brigadier-General Stewart, including a half Company of the Faridkots under Major Mainprise R.E. and Major Tillard R.E., embarked with two guns and twelve machine guns, on a fleet of six steamers. About 20 hours later the force arrived during the evening off the shore north of Bukoba with lights ablaze. The Germans immediately realised what was happening and sent up a rocket and flares for aid from nearby troops. At this, the little Allied fleet turned about and steamed back into the night. It returned four and a half hours later and the Fusiliers were the first to disembark. Heavy fighting followed and the Allies were unable to make much progress against an enemy located outside the town in rocky land, and with well-placed machine guns. There were no reserve troops.

Firing ceased at night and the troops bivouacked where they found themselves. There was no food; it had, apparently, been forgotten.

The following day the town of Bukoba was taken. After a number of light skirmishes the outnumbered Germans retreated to the bush. The Faridkots were among the first to land from the S.S. *Nyannza*. Led by Major Tillard they destroyed the German wireless station managing to salvage two boxes of spare parts from the telefunken system. They also removed a German field gun only for it to fall off the lighter transporting it to the British flotilla.

Colonel Patrick Daniel Driscoll D.S.O., a veteran scout of the Boer War, and one of the Legion of Frontiersmen, once described “as a curly headed buck-nigger who couldn’t even get into the Mandalay Club” had asked Stewart for permission to loot the town, and this was granted. The Official History says that the “Sack of Bukoba” occurred after the force had re-embarked when the town was at the mercy of
the surrounding tribes. This sordid little affair was of very little military value in the war against Germany. It provided an outlet for the frustrations of soldiers who had been too long on the defensive against an enterprising enemy.

The Campaign in German East Africa. November 1914 – February 1916
Much of the information in this section comes from Brian Gardner’s *German East*.

The story of the failure at Tanga was cabled by General Aitken to London on 5 November 1914. It was a bitter shock to the British Government who until then had displayed little interest in the East African campaign.

The general situation was gloomy at the time. In Flanders there was desperate and inconclusive fighting at Ypres. In the Middle East, Turkey had joined Germany and the Central Powers. The German Admiral von Spee had won a victory at sea. It was felt that the time was not appropriate to inflict on the public the news of the total defeat at Tanga. East Africa was a long way off; few home troops were engaged there. Strict censorship was imposed and steps were taken to prevent the news spreading in India.

Lord Kitchener was furious. Although he refused Aitken’s request that Indian regiments that had particularly disgraced themselves should be sent home in disgrace, he discouraged decorations for any who had taken part in the Bukoba affair. Major Bertie Mainprise did receive one of his four Mentions in despatches for his work with the Faridkot Sappers at Bukoba.

Later in November 1914 the Secretary of State for India sent Aitken a telegram saying that he reluctantly accepted Aitken’s opinion that he temporarily adopt a defensive role. The two Indian Expeditionary forces, the Tanga force and the force that had already been stationed in British East Africa, were to become one force. Control of operations in East Africa was to be taken over by the War Office.

![General Richard Wapshare](image)

**Figure 42. General Richard Wapshare**

A few days later the unhappy Aitken was ordered home. His command was to be taken over by Brigadier-General Richard Wapshare, who was already in East Africa. Wapshare was promoted to Major-General. When Wapshare received the news of his promotion, Aitken was in hospital with malaria. Aitken sailed for England on 17 December. Wretched years of disgrace and a bitter fight for his honour awaited him. Wapshare although well liked, was an administrator and had never led troops in battle.
The defence of British East Africa was put on a sounder footing. The staff moved up country to Nairobi, the administrative capital, and two military areas were set up: one from Nairobi and one from Mombasa under Brigadier-Generals Stewart and Tighe respectively. All kinds of administrative problems had to be dealt with. Many of them were in fact never sorted out.

From December 1914 to February 1916, the East Africa campaign was almost entirely on the defensive against an enemy who was unable to launch a large scale offensive. For 15 months von Lettow-Vorbeck was able to perfect his little army which eventually consisted of some 14,000 soldiers, most of them well trained and well disciplined. Von Lettow was fluent in the Swahili language which earned him the respect and admiration of the Askaris. He appointed black officers and said, and believed, “we are all Africans here”. In one historian’s opinion no other white commander of the era had so keen an appreciation of the black African’s worth not only as a fighting man but as a man. During this 15 month lull in military activity von Lettow had to consider ways and means of maintaining his blockaded economy. Von Lettow was not only an excellent administrator and a talented commander; he was also a brilliant improviser which meant that he was able to rally the people of German East Africa to supply him with all the much needed medicines including quinine which was produced from wood bark by a Biological Institute at Usambara.

**Figure 53. Map of operations against the Konigsberg**
(Ed Paice, *Tip and Run*, Result 1)

The German warship *Konigsberg* which was trapped in the Rufiji River delta was finally put out of action on 11 July 1915, (this was later to be the inspiration for the film *African Queen* starring Katherine Hepburn and Humphrey Bogart) but her guns (including ten 4.1 inch) were salvaged and converted into artillery pieces for fighting on land, they were the largest standard land artillery pieces used in the East African campaign, much to the discomfort of the Allies, as they were larger than anything in the Allied artillery.

**Figure 64. C.P. Evill as a civilian**
Chetwode Percy Evill 1887-1918 joined the Faridkot Sappers in January 1915. He was born in East Grinstead 6 May 1887, educated Malvern Wells; Haileybury; King’s College, London, Engineering Department, and went to India in 1911 as an Assistant Engineer on the Bombay and Baroda and Central Railway. Evill volunteered for active service and was gazetted 2nd Lieutenant (temp) with the Indian Army Reserve of Officers to the Faridkot Sappers. He served with them from 1915-1918. He was Mentioned in Despatches twice and was awarded the Military Cross for his gallant and distinguished service at the Kibambawe crossing of the Rufiji River in January 1917. Captain Evill M.C. died 17 July 1918 at the Station Hospital Meerut, India of fever contracted in East Africa. Captain Evill is in the various official photographs taken during the welcome home ceremonies by the Maharaja of Faridkot in March 1918.

Robert (Robin) Thomas Stuart Sneyd 1886-1954, was born at Bray, Morval, East Cornwall, educated at Waynflete Preparatory School, Harrow School, and the City & Guilds Central Technical College, Exhibition Road, London.,

Robin and was working as a civil engineer at Penakunda in Madras Province, India when he joined the Indian Army Reserve of Officers in March 1915 and joined the Faridkots at Voi in British East Africa in October 1915.
Part Three

The Campaign in German East Africa: The British Offensive. February/March 1916

Information about the Indian troops comes from The Soldiers Burden by Harry Fecitt.

Much of the background material for the next sections comes from Brian Gardner’s German East. The Story of the First World War in East Africa.

In the spring of 1916 the Battle of Loos on the Western Front had been a disaster. In the Mediterranean the attack at Gallipoli was at a standstill; in the Gulf and Mesopotamia an uncertain advance was in preparation against Baghdad; on the Eastern Front the Russians were giving way under heavy Austro-German pressure; the Allies in East Africa had been on the defensive since the autumn of 1914. A new army from South Africa, bigger and better equipped than anything seen before in East Africa landed at Mombasa in British East Africa.

In London the Conservative Bonar Law, then Colonial Secretary in a coalition government pressed for a sufficiently large force, including South African troops, to conquer German East Africa, once and for all. Lord Kitchener wanted East Africa to remain on the strategic defensive so as to limit its requirements to the minimum possible. While Kitchener had authorised the extension of the Voi railway and the raid on Bukoba these were minor operations which made few demands on national resources.

Lieutenant-General Sir James Wolfe Murray, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), based on information from General Tighe, asked the South Africans for a Brigade of Infantry plus support units to be sent to East Africa. Brigadier General Edward Northey was appointed to command the Nyasaland and North-Eastern Rhodesia Field Force in 1915.

In November 1915, the War Cabinet approved the plan of sending South Africans to East Africa and in December the British General Horace Smith-Dorrien was appointed to join the South African troops and take over the command of the Allied troops in East Africa. Smith-Dorrien was known to be not only a man of independent mind, but a thoughtful and intelligent commander. Unfortunately he developed pneumonia on the very first day of his voyage out to Africa. After a brief recovery Smith-Dorrien relapsed and instead of resting tried to continue with his work. Ill health forced him to resign and he returned to England.

By early 1916 the situation in East Africa was worsening for the Germans. The Schutztruppe was now reaching its peak strength, 2,712 Europeans, 11,637 Askaris and 2,591 auxiliaries. The bulk of these were placed in the Kilimanjaro area.

The South African Lieutenant-General Jan C. Smuts was appointed to take Smith-Dorrien’s place. Smuts’s appointment caused considerable confusion and dismay to the staff being assembled for Smith-Dorrien in British East Africa. The staff found that they might be replaced by Smuts’s henchmen, all “amateur” soldiers. Among them there was some bitterness at the choice of Smuts, who was considered a politician rather than a “professional” soldier. However Smuts’s appointment had considerably helped recruitment in South Africa.

For the Allies, January 1916 marked the arrival of the first South African reinforcements and two Indian battalions from the Western Front.

On 19 February 1916 the overwrought Major-General Tighe, was at the quayside to welcome Smuts as he arrived at Mombasa. The short, well knit figure, red beard streaked with grey beneath his red staff cap, stepped quickly and purposefully down the gang plank. No one was more delighted to see him than Tighe, who had commanded the forces defeated at Salaita Hill on 12 February1916. Within days, confidence had returned to British East Africa.
Smuts went straight to Nairobi and then set off on a personal reconnaissance, close to the enemy lines in the Longido area. Smuts was preparing for an immediate offensive before the rains came in March, the object would be to clear the Germans from their important area around the foothills of the great snow capped mountain of Kilimanjaro. The War Office immediately gave permission and preparations were put under way at once. Smuts’s plan was the same, in all except detail, as one prepared by Tighe and much of the organisation necessary had been made before Smuts arrived.

Troops in the western area and around Nairobi were to be formed into a new 1st Division, roughly corresponding to the previous Nairobi area force under Brigadier-General Stewart. Stewart was still to be in command of the division which initially included the Faridkot Sappers and Miners. The 2nd Division was to be made up of those troops who had been largely concerned with the defence of the railway. The 2nd Division was to be commanded by Tighe. Brigadier-General W. Malleson who had commanded the Mombasa area, was given the command of a Brigade in the 2nd Division.

The two Divisions consisted of Indian, British, East African troops and the King’s African Rifles. Most of these were men who had already seen long and frustrating months in British East Africa. These troops were now reinforced by the South African and Rhodesian reinforcements.

The bulk of the South African Expeditionary Force, under Brigadier-General Jacobus “Jaap” van Deventer, also made up a Division. There were two infantry brigades, a mounted brigade, a battalion of Coloured troops (the Cape Corps) and five artillery batteries together with medical and other ancillary services and a squadron of the Royal Flying Corps. The South African Expeditionary Force consisted of about 18,700 men.
During the Boer War, Smuts and van Deventer, as Boers, had been fighting many of the senior British Officers they now commanded. Van Deventer, a giant of a man, spoke with a husky voice that was the result of a British bullet in his throat. He was taciturn by nature and spoke Afrikaans as his first language; although he was perfectly fluent in English he often used an interpreter when speaking to British Officers.

Smuts, like his opponent von Lettow, was anxious at that time to avoid a stand up fight. He was determined to out manoeuvre von Lettow from every position as quickly and painlessly as possible, without actually defeating him openly in the field. Many of the British officers thought Smuts wrong; they thought that von Lettow should be conquered there and then in one blow, no matter what the cost while the South Africans were still eager and fresh.

Smuts’s plan was for the 1st Division under Stewart to march on Longido and then go south and east round the base of Kilimanjaro. Tighe’s 2nd Division and the South Africans under van Deventer were to approach west and north of the mountain, through Salaïta and Taveta. The objective was Moshi at the head of the Usambara Railway, a large and important place by colonial standards at that time. The intention was that having captured Moshi the Allies should push down the railway as far as possible, through jungles and heavily vegetated country to the foothills, before the rains came.

Stewart’s Division, harassed by problems of supply, especially of water, was well behind schedule; Stewart decided to leave his mounted troops behind. The 2nd Division and the South Africans made good progress on the other side of Kilimanjaro. Salaïta was taken unopposed and Taveta was occupied by South African cavalry after a minor skirmish.
Part Four

The Faridkot Sappers and Miners: The start of the Invasion of German East Africa. February – May 1916

The Faridkot Company had been at Voi since November 1914. Their main task had been the defence of the Uganda Railway, building blockhouses and repairing the damage done by German troops raiding the railway from German East Africa.

Figure 18. Map of the East African Campaign 1914-1917
The Faridkots left Voi without regret for Kajiado at the end of December 1915. The High Command had taken the decision to invade German East Africa. The Faridkot Sappers’ reinforcements included Lieutenant Sneyd. The whole Company moved to Kajiado, a settlement in British East Africa, north-west of Voi and closer to the border with German East Africa. The Faridkots found themselves attached to a Column under Major-General Stewart which was to advance, first to occupy Longido, and then between the two great mountains of Kilimanjaro and Meru to the ultimate objective of Moshi. This advance was not completed until the end of March.

The Faridkot Sappers were employed uninterruptedly, clearing the path for Stewart’s column, drifting* or bridging all rivers while the column advanced and making the road fit for motor traffic while it halted.

*A drift was a river crossing where the river bottom had been raised so that the river was fordable on a reasonably level surface without a bridge having to be built.

On 5 March 1916 General Stewart began his advance with the 1st Division from Longido, traversing thirty three waterless miles at night to reach the swamp at Engare Nanyuki by dawn on 6 March.

The regimental historian of the 129th Baluchis described a typical march:

*This march over semi-desert country in a tropical sun, in column and on a strictly limited water supply was an extremely exhausting task requiring good march discipline. All the*
troops, except a small number in the advance guards and on the flanks, were enveloped in a thick haze of dust from the moment the march started until the halt, at the end of the day. Only those who have done such marches know what they mean. It is one thing to picture war in terms of smartly aligned columns marching on good roads, it is another to see the reality – columns of filthy sweating men, staggering with fatigue, at the end of such a march, and with parched mouths gasping for water. And to see these troops, in such a condition, pull themselves together for battle with an entrenched enemy, is to see real soldiers and to know the meaning of real discipline.

Captain Molloy wrote to his mother on 7 April 1916:

India can produce soldiers worthy of that name who have maintained the best traditions of the British Army in German East Africa.

Everything depended on Stewart appearing near Moshi simultaneously to the advance from the east. Brigadier Malleson of the 2nd Division reported sick when an action known as Latema Nek went wrong. Tighe took over command of the Brigade and ordered a night attack with bayonets. Finally Smuts ordered a withdrawal but the advance continued and on 14 March van Deventer’s force of South Africans, entered the broad, tree lined streets of Moshi. The town was deserted except for a few Greeks and Boers. All the rolling stock had left down the railway line towards Tanga. On the same day a motor cyclist at last established contact with the “lost” 1st Division.

Figure 8. Major Tillard and Lieutenant-Colonel Nand Singh

At Longido one half of the Faridkot Company under Major Tillard was detached for work with General Smuts’s advance from Voi towards Moshi. The main work accomplished was the building of the Himo River Bridge.

The other half, to which Lieutenant Sneyd was attached, was employed uninterruptedly clearing the path for General Stewart’s “lost” column.

The only brigade in the 1st Division under General Stewart was the 2nd East African Brigade under Brigadier-General S.H. Sheppard; consisting of the 27th (Bengal) Mountain Battery; the 29th Punjabis; the 129th Duke of Connaught’s Own Baluchis; the East African Squadron of the 17th Cavalry; the 25th Royal Fusiliers (Frontiersmen); the South African Cape Corps and four Companies of the 1st King’s African Rifles from Nyasaland.
General Smuts criticised the length of time that General Stewart had taken to march through the Western Kilimanjaro foothills to reach Moshi. A British reconnaissance plane had incorrectly reported his position as being further behind than it was. The division had not been involved in serious fighting. They had cut and blocked the Arusha road as they had been ordered. Despite or perhaps because they displayed an enormous Union Jack the 1st Division came under fire from South African troops just outside Moshi where the South Africans were busy looting the town.

Having secured Moshi, General Smuts discovered that the bulk of the Schutztruppe had not moved west but had withdrawn down the Usambara Railway. The 1st and 3rd Divisions were ordered to “left wheel” and advance through thick bush towards Kahe station, south of Moshi.

The difficulty of advancing formations of men through thick bush soon became obvious to General Smuts. He therefore ordered his infantry to advance directly in columns towards the Ruwu River. Advancing in formation had until then been the traditional method of advance in the British Army.

Van Deventer’s mounted brigade was sent around to the west to deny the Germans a withdrawal down the Usambara Railway. The mounted brigade took advantage of the full moonlight to move from Moshi, halting before daybreak west of the Pangani River opposite Baumann Hill.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 9. Faridkots Longido Central, March 1916**
Figure 10. Weri Weri River, April 1916

Figure 11. Faridkots on the march below Longido, March 1916
The first few pages of Robin Sneyd’s Field Record Book have been torn out. Presumably the book was issued to him when he joined the Faridkots in October 1915. The first surviving entry is dated 5 March 1916 and is written at Longido West.

March 5.
Major Tillard and half the Company left at 10 am arrived at Sheep Hills and stopped till 7 pm. Self with 2nd line transport marched 2 pm, got water for men at Sheep Hills, one gallon. The whole Company marched for seven miles from Sheep Hills at 7 pm. Arrived next day at the Nanjuki swamp at 10:10 am, arranged a water supply with the help of two pumps. The animals were drinking in the swamp. The Company was 34 miles from Longido West.

March 7.
The half Company marched at 7 am for four miles to Nagarseni where they cut down the banks on both sides of a bridge which had been taken down by the Germans. They worked till 2 pm, by which time all the transport was over.

March 8.
At 5 am they marched from Nagarseni to Gerargua a distance of 13 miles. There were fifty Germans at Gerargua who left, having been shelled by a mountain battery. The half Company cut down the banks of the Gerargua river to make a drinking place.

March 9.
The First Division halted at Gerargua. I went back with 25 men in motor cars to Mgawe Nairobi to help with road. Cut a few trees etc. Most of the work had already been done by the Cape Corps got back to Gerargua at 6 pm.

March 10.
The half Company marched at 5:30 am for M’Biri with the Advanced Column to locate the road. They arrived at M’Biri at 12 noon as arranged. They drew water for the animals, the water quality was bad and the men were not allowed to drink it. The Division had started from Gerargua at 12 noon and arrived at 9 pm. The guns (half Battery of South African 15 pounders) and cavalry had started from Gerargua but did not arrive! A small scrap with 150 Germans cost 13 men, killed and wounded. Returned to Gerargua.

March 11.
The half Company had orders to march at 6 am. They waited for the cavalry until 2 pm of which there was no news. They marched to the Sanya River, the water was good and plentiful, there was still no news of the cavalry and the gun batteries.

March 12.
Halted at the Sanya River. It was a rainy day and the half Company cut out brush at the river and cut down drift in the afternoon.

March 13.
Marched 3 miles to M’Bore Ngumbe. Received orders in morning to proceed with General Sheppard’s 2nd East Africa Brigade as a light column to cut the railway south of Moshi. Left M’Bore Ngumbe at 3 o’clock. Crossed the West Ruware at dusk, halted for two hours and did some work on drift. The rain started at 10 o’clock. Covered three miles. had a section of the Faridkots and 25 Waleilas.

March 14.
Orders received during the night to make Neue Moshi our objective. Went two miles back from camp at dawn and made road passable for our wheeled transport. The column marched at 7:30 am. The Faridkots spent the day working on the bad drifts at Kifafrie, Wera Wera, N’dozo and Garangua so that the Column could make progress. The Faridkots were helped by working parties from the 129th, 29th, and 25th Fusiliers. Fired on, one and a half miles from Neue Moshi and one man from the Faridkots was wounded in the leg. The group first camped below the bazaar at Neue Moshi then moved into billets in the bazaar.

Sneyd ends the day’s entry with the cryptic comment “Hard Day”.

March 15.
Marched back to Garangua Drift. Started to improve Drift. Met the other section of Faridkots under Tillard and McClintock working on it. Got back to camp at 3 pm and moved into billet by Moshi Railway station.

Extract from Robin Sneyd’s Record of the Faridkot I.S. Sappers.

On arrival at Moshi, in spite of the fact that the rains were now starting, the Faridkots now reunited were set to work on repairing the numerous bridges along the German track from Moshi to Arusha preparatory to the advance of the South African Division under General van Deventer. The South African Division passed through the Faridkots while they were thus employed. The rains came early in 1916 and the Faridkots worked under an almost continuous downpour, with no shelter other than grass huts which could be hastily constructed at each halting place, and with generally a very serious lack of rations owing to the impossibility of the movement of wheeled traffic over the black cotton soil of which much of this so called road was composed.

Background material taken from Brian Gardner’s German East:
The British advance to Kahe, von Lettow’s temporary headquarters and a station on the Usumbara Railway line, began on 18 March. On the following day Stewart, finding Smuts’s dissatisfaction with him
obvious and impossible, resigned. In fact Smuts had already made up his mind to relieve Stewart of his command. Stewart returned to India. On 20 March 1916 Stewart’s 1st Division was given to Brigadier-General S.H. Sheppard who formerly commanded a brigade in the same division. The Faridkots Sappers and Miners were now under the command of Brigadier Sheppard, a Sapper. The Germans resisted Sheppard with the 1st Division and van Deventer with the 2nd Division all the way down the railway line to Kahe. The British troops came under fire from one of the Konigsberg’s guns which was found abandoned when the British troops eventually marched into an empty Kahe. No sooner had Kahe been taken than the rains came down in the torrential, soaking, disspiriting fashion common to much of the tropics.

Figure 13. German bi-plane with pilot, guarded by Askaris. “The big bird in the sky”.

The first phase of the British offensive was ended. The Germans had been forced from one of the most prized and settled corners of their colony. British East Africa was now safe from German attack.

The end of the Usambara Railway, vital to the economy and communication of the northern area of the colony had been captured.

Some of the likeable but incompetent British officers had been removed. Stewart had left for India, after a final angry session with Smuts. Malleson had also left and Tighe had received his orders for India.

The pattern for the future of the campaign had been set. Von Lettow would slowly retreat, fighting just enough to weary and tax the British, never too much to suffer too many casualties himself, taking every advantage of natural cover, using every ounce of guile and wit that he possessed to keep as large a force of Allied forces in East Africa as possible. Already von Lettow’s 6,000 troops in the northern area had caused a good deal of trouble to the invading force of about 45,000 men.

An East African Brigade Order 17-14, 12 March 1916.

1. The enemy is reported to have evacuated Kame and to have retired on Mombo.
2. The South African Mounted Brigade is at old Moshi. Patrols of the S.A. Horse will probably be acting to the South, South East and South West of New Moshi, all picquets and sentries should be warned of this.
3. The remainder of the First Division will arrive at New Moshi tomorrow.
4. All must be made clearly to understand that GREEKS and GOANESE and their property must be absolutely respected.
5. It is of the greatest importance to restore a feeling of security among the native inhabitants, they must be treated kindly and all articles of food etc must be bought in open market and paid for at reasonable prices.
6. All sources of wine, food, etc. found in houses occupied by the troops, must be collected and will be distributed later under orders of the G.O.C.
7. The greatest care must be taken regarding sanitation, as the First Division may remain here for some time. Incinerators should be built herewith.

March 16.
Went out to Garangua Bridge on the middle Moshi-Arusha road, got back at 11 am. The section of Faridkots & the Waleilas were making a drift at Rua River near the Moshi to Tervela road, started taking planks off the old bridge in the afternoon. Arrived in camp at 5 pm.
March 17.
Half Company started work on trestle bridge across the Rua River at New Moshi, 7 spans of 11 feet. Trestles of 6 to 7 feet constructed of timber from road bearers and flooring of the destroyed German bridge alongside and some material from the workshops in Moshi.

March 18.
Worked on Rau Bridge all trestles and road beams in place by 4 pm.

March 19.
Completed Rau Bridge, Moshi approaches etc. All work finished except for metal required on approach.

March 20.
Marched from New Moshi to Wera Wera on the middle road from New Moshi to Arusha.

March 21.
Started work on Wera Wera Bridge. Erected leg of trestle on right bank. The old trestle had not been demolished by the Germans.

The following sections are taken direct from Harry Fecitt’s Soldiers Burden: [http://www.kaiserscross.com](http://www.kaiserscross.com)

At dawn on 21 March, van Deventer’s South African Horse failed to cross the deep and fast flowing Pangani River. They moved north towards the Kahe railway bridge which had been blown up by a German demolition party. Some intrepid South Africans swam the Pangani to seize the vital Kahe Hill. The Germans now used two of the Konigsberg’s salvaged guns, one on a railway wagon and the other hauled alternatively by oxen and large black African labour gangs. They fired on Kahe Hill whilst German infantry attacked it, but the South African defenders held their ground. Van Deventer had left his two radio sets behind at Moshi and therefore had no direct communication with Smuts. However a British plane flew over the battlefield, observing and assessing the situation on the ground and dropping reports onto Smuts’s headquarters. There was no contact at all between Sheppard and Deventer.

**Figure 14. Royal Naval Air Service preparing one of their sea planes**
(Ed Paice, *Tip and Run*, scroll down or click on Result 2)

East of the Pangani, Sheppard’s 1st Division was advancing directly on the Ruwu River bridge which carried the main dirt road coming south from Moshi. The Division advanced with the attached 2nd South African Brigade on the right and the 2nd East African Brigade on the left. The battlefield was confined by the Defa River on the west and the Soko-Nassai River running in from the north-east to join the Defa. Both rivers were strongly running and housed crocodiles. The German main road running north to south down the battlefield was both the axis of advance and the boundary between the two Brigades. Support was provided by South African 13 pounder field guns, British howitzers and the Indian Army’s 27th (Bengal) Mountain Battery. Two armoured cars manned by men from the Machine Gun Corps (Motors) operated on the main road.

Unfortunately Sheppard’s patrols had not realised that the main German defensive position was on the Soko-Nassai River so the 1st Division ran straight into the Germans’ well prepared position. The troops fought well and there were many awards for gallantry. Sadly while 1st Division fought and bled before the Soko-Nassai River the South African Horse to the west was busy looting Kahe station and village including the Kilimanjaro Hotel. Van Deventer declined to drive south and block the German withdrawal. More than a few South African senior officers appeared to dislike risking their men’s lives in direct confrontation, but preferred manoeuvring to force enemy withdrawals. That evening von Lettow ordered his abteilung commanders to silently break contact and withdraw down the Usambara railway. This they did with military efficiency while the 1st Division licked its wounds and the South African Horse
slumbered. Allied dawn patrols found the German guns and an abandoned and destroyed *Konigsberg* 4.1” gun. It had been too heavy to drag away speedily.

The Germans had very limited military manpower and other resources but did have the whole of German East Africa in which to roam.

In the fighting on 20 and 21 March the British lost forty dead and two hundred and twenty wounded. The Sepoys lost thirteen dead, seventy seven wounded and three missing. The German losses between 18 and 21 March probably totalled 200 men killed, wounded or missing.

As very heavy rains set in, Smuts halted his advance on the Ruwu River and sent most of his troops back to higher ground near Moshi and Taveta. Further south, the Germans were back-loading stores down to the Central Railway that ran from Dar-es-Salaam to Lake Tanganyika and were digging extensive defensive positions.

The battle at Kahe was the best chance that the British had to destroy the *Schutztruppe* in 1916 and the chance was squandered. Sheppard commented “General van Deventer lost a chance of defeating the Germans badly when near Kahe”. General Smuts dealt mildly with his old Boer War comrade van Deventer’s failure and promoted him to command a new 2nd Division.

Major-General van Deventer and his mounted troops were despatched westwards on an epic trek through the mud to seize Kondoa Irangi with two Indian Army units, the 28th Mountain Battery and the Indian Volunteer Maxim Gun Company. Jacob Louis van Deventer ended the war as the Commander of the East African theatre of war.

Robin Sneyd’s diary continues. As usual the Faridkots continued working throughout the rains.

22nd March. 1916.
*Captain Evill and the right half of the Company arrived from Aimo. Erected trestle on Wera Wera Bridge.*

March 23.
*Right half started on Serri Bridge. Two spans 40 ft x 20 ft. Crib piers, left half Weri Weri Bridge. Three spans 14 ft 6”, 35 ft 6” and 16 ft. Two trestles. Two double Companies of the 61st Pioneers under Flackwell and Robertson making approaches.*

March 23-26th.
*Both half Companies building the two bridges and collecting materials from the old wooden bridge across the Garanga. 5 x 40 ft road beams. 18” x 10” connected from this with planking and other material.*

March 27.
*Both bridges opened for traffic. Left half the company resting. Went out at 3 pm with the left half of the Faridkots and rebuilt the road about one and a half miles from camp towards Moshi reducing the span of the road from 20 ft to 12 ft. The work started at 4 pm completed at 7 pm.*

March 28. 29. 30.
*Completing details of the two bridges. Serri and Weri Weri. Brushing sides etc.*

March 31.
*Marched the two and a half miles from Weri Weri to Kifafa River.*

April 1.
*Commenced work on completion of the German Bridge and approaches left unfinished by them. One masonry and one concrete arch. Approaches to be blasted and roadway built up from ring of arches.*
April 2.
Continued work on blasting approaches to the bridge over the Kikafu River. Received orders to march towards Arusha.

April 3.
Marched from Kikafu at 7 am. South African Brigade on road, halted at the Sanya River between 11 am and 3:30 pm.

April 4.
Marched from Kirigori at 6 am. The road very bad. The Company arrived Maj-y-Chai at 12 noon. Transport 2 pm halted.

April 5.
Maj-y-Chai - Urra river. Commenced clearing site for trestle bridge in the afternoon.

April 5 to April 14th.
Building a bridge across the Urra River. Total span 76 feet. Longest bay 29 foot, three trestles and four spans, the weather was very wet, this was a very uncomfortable camp.

Robin Sneyd wrote to his mother on 9 April 1916. The letter was addressed from German East, Robin explains that a despatch riding motor cyclist had halted with them for the night, which had given them the chance of sending in letters:

Except for stray people we are practically cut off from the world and posts at the moment. We are still without any English mails later than your letters of the 29th of January but I believe one has arrived in the country. My plum pudding and the other things you sent out for Christmas were in Mesopotamia (Iraq) when last heard of but they have been re-addressed and will I hope turn up in time for midsummer and my birthday.

Can’t tell you much of what is going on at present in these parts. We are as usual hard at work building bridges and trying to make what this part of Africa considers a road, into something that will allow transport to get along somehow or other. Motor lorries on the whole give us most of our amusement, they come along thinking they are going to get to places miles away and you meet them a couple of days later, three or four miles further on.

I wish the German in these parts would quickly make up his mind that he has had enough and let us get out of Africa.

The Bosch of these parts has not been having a particularly good time as he has been able to get very little into the country, through Portuguese territory, since the war started. Though he has probably got enough to eat, he cannot have anything much in the way of ammunitions and imported stuff generally.

In fact a cargo ship the Rubens had, on 14 April 1915, been chased by HMS Hyacinth into a bay just north of Tanga and had supposedly been destroyed by shell fire. The German Commander had ordered the decks to be soaked in petrol, the burning of which had deceived the British. Most of the munitions were salvaged and were eventually taken by bearer to Tanga.

Sneyd went to Taveta and Moshi in McClintock’s car on 10 April. He returned to the Urra River on 13 April. The road was very bad. On 13 April they received orders that the bridge they had previously built at Weri Weri had been washed away.

April 15.
Heavy rain on the night of the 14th and all day on the 15th. Left Urra River at 11 am and reached the Kingori River at 7 pm. Met the 7th and 8th South Africans marching to Arusha. Abandoned one wagon half way down the hill above Kingori. Proceeded from Kingori at 10 pm. Arrived at Sanja at 1 am on the night of the 15th and 16th of April. Pack
mules and the two A.T. carts got in.

April 16.
The armour with the mule wagon arrived at 7 am. One ox wagon came later. It rained all
day and the Sanja River was impassable.

April 17.
The level of the Sanja River dropped. Left Sanja at 10 am with pack mules, one mule
wagon and two A.T. Carts. Low went back with double span to bring in abandoned carts.
Arrived at Kikafu at 3 pm. The water over the drift was very high, sent animals across
stone bridge in course of completion. Unloaded and dragged wagon and carts by ropes
through the drift. The drift was dangerous. Arrived at the Luis plantation at Weri Weri at 8
pm. Very heavy day, but fine weather.

April 18.
Camped at Luis plantation, bridge to be built across the Weri Weri River, other bridges
completely gone.

April 19 & 20.
Started corduroy on road near bridge.

April 21 & 22.
Started pulling down the approach to the old German Bridge which was in the way of the
construction of piers for the new bridge.

April 22 to May 18.
Construction of suspension bridge at Weri Weri.

May 19.
Marched to Moshi, Self, Gunda Singh, 2 mule drivers and 5 mules stopped night at Royal
Engineers. H.Q.
Part Five

The Campaign in German East Africa: The new offensive in May 1916. Following the retreating Germans down the Usambara Railway line towards Tanga

Extracts from Brian Gardner’s *German East*:

General Smuts spent the long rainy season in planning an early thrust towards the Central Railway from Dar-es-Salaam on the Indian Ocean to Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika. The army was to be re-organised into two divisions of South African troops and one division of Allied troops. Communications were to be improved by constructing roads and bridges. The Faridkots had spent the rains desperately trying to keep open the old German road between Moshi and Arusha.

The British Division was to be under Major-General A.R. Hoskins, who had come from France to add to the bewildering covey of Generals already on the scene. One South African Division was to be under Major-General C.J. Brits on the way from South Africa and General van Deventer who was already commanding the South African Division in East Africa.

Troops from the Gold Coast and Nigeria, having dealt effectively with the Germans in the Cameroons were to come to East Africa, after a period of rest.

The South African Division under van Deventer was to march south, across the Masai Plains, first to Kondoa Irangi, an important road junction, and then straight on to the Central Railway.

The main body, under Smuts, was to proceed down the Usambara Railway and then leave it to go on to the Central Railway parallel to van Deventer by way of the township of Handeni.

Local pro-German Afrikaner settlers cunningly convinced Smuts that the heavy rains were confined to the Kilimanjaro area.

Smuts was able to wait until the end of the rains as he wanted van Deventer to get a good start before he himself moved.

In the last week of March 1916, van Deventer headed the 1st South African Mounted Brigade, 1,200 strong out of the camp at Arusha and rode south in the pouring rain. After occupying the town of Madukani, the column met and defeated a further small German force. A fortnight after it had left Kilimanjaro, van Deventer’s column was reduced to 800 men. Behind it an infantry brigade was toiling on through sodden bush, mud and an almost incessant torrent of rain. On half rations, men and horses dropping behind every day, van Deventer forced his column on. They reached Kondoa Irangi on 19 April, after nearly three weeks of riding over swampy plains. Kondoa Irangi was a substantial township, with a native village beside the European buildings, and a military fort. The Germans had left some of the houses in flames. Supplies were still not reaching the troops and the retreating Germans had been careful to leave no food stuffs behind. For a time the troops lived mainly on local fruit, mostly paw-paws and ground nuts. The strength of the mounted brigade was now below 600.

In the base area around Moshi and Arusha the tracks were impassable, despite the Faridkots’ best efforts. The state of the road was indescribable, wet black cotton soil poached to a morass. At Moshi four inches of rain was falling in a day. The intrepid and remarkable engineers available to Smuts had completed a new railway line joining the Uganda Railway to the Usambara Railway. On 25 April, the first train from Voi, on the Uganda Railway, steamed into Moshi.

Van Deventer was a perfect man for the job in hand: Imperturbable, courageous, with as fine an eye for country and a talent for open manoeuvre as Smuts himself, and a dry humour. Van Deventer was also perhaps the only commander throughout the campaign who refused to be overawed by the personality of von Lettow.
Artillery reinforcement for van Deventer eventually arrived in the form of naval guns salvaged from HMS Pegasus. These guns crashed away, to little practical purpose, against the guns salvaged from the Konigsberg. The rains stopped towards the end of May and van Deventer began making plans and preparations for the second half of his thrust to the Central Railway.

Smuts began his push southwards down the Usambara Railway on 22 May 1916 to fulfil his plan to move down the railway as far as Tanga and then strike off south, parallel to van Deventer and about 150 miles east of him, making for the road junction of Handeni.

From the railway on, the advance would be through bush country completely unknown to the Allies. About 3,000 Germans were opposing this force. The country was difficult. On one side of the railway, to the north east, were the Usambara Mountains, which fell in almost sheer cliffs to the track.

At the base of the mountains, and on the other side of the railway, was a strip of dense bush country about twenty miles wide, difficult to get through between the mountains and the Pangani River which flowed into the Indian Ocean just south of Tanga.

On the left bank of the river there was, however, a strip of open ground a few hundred yards wide before the thick bush started again. Smuts decided that he would advance with two columns, one going down the railway line under Brigadier-General J.A. Hannyngton, and the other, his main force, along the left bank of the Pangani under Sheppard. For miles the route seemed deserted.

The railway, had been destroyed by the Germans as they retired, and behind Hannyngton’s column came three hard worked companies of engineers who restored the line as they went. The railway line was re-laid at about two miles a day, a remarkable rate in the circumstances.

The columns left the railway with little incident and proceeded southwards to Handeni, with persistent but ineffectual opposition from the small retiring German force under a Major Kraut (to whom von Lettow had handed over command in the north).

Francis Brett Young, a young doctor, was working with the Indian troops. He had arrived in East Africa early in 1916 and was eventually invalided home with fever. Brett Young wrote a book in 1917 called Marching on Tanga about his experiences. The book was reprinted again in 2003 having already been reprinted several times as it is one of the very few books about this campaign and the first to record the horrific conditions in which the troops operated.

Brett Young wrote:

At the beginning of the rains, in March 1916, the whole of the Kilimanjaro area had been cleared of the enemy, while the Tanga line had been taken as far south as the station near Soko Nassai. The Pare mountains, overlooking the railway, were still in German hands.

The first East African Division under General Smuts moved down the left bank of the Pangani River. The Second Brigade under General Hannyngton pressed on down the Tanga line.

A third mobile column consisting mainly of the King’s African Rifles struck across from M’Bugani past Lake Jipe to either the N’gula or the Gonya Gap, the only passes in the unbroken chain of the Pare mountains.

The 1st East African Brigade under General Sheppard consisted of the 2nd Rhodesia Regiment (Colonel Essex Capell), the 130th Baluchis (Colonel Dyke), the 29th Punjabis (Major James) to which were added a company of the 61st Pioneers, a section of the 27th Mountain Battery, the 5th and 6th Batteries of the South African Field Artillery, a squadron of the 12th Cavalry, 25th Royal Fusiliers (Colonel Driscoll), the East African Mounted Rifles, a Corps locally raised, the machine gun section and mounted infantry of the Loyal North Lancs and a Cornish Territorial Battery.
Attached to the Division but acting under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief were the 5th and 6th South African Infantry under General Beves known as the Force Reserve. These troops were at Sokol Nassai on 22 May 1916. They were to free the Tanga railway line from the stubborn enemy and go on through savage and waterless country to strike at the Central Railway. These men endured with a wonderful patience, hardships which were unequalled in any other campaign, lacking food and water, working day after day without respite beneath a vertical sun, ravaged by diseases from which there was no escape in a country which even the natives of Africa had found to be incompatible with human life.

The road towards Tanga, ran westward across the valleys of a whole system of streams running to the Lume or Pangani Rivers. At every valley bottom there was a rough bridge or else a sandy nullah, in these valleys the character of the dry bush would suddenly change, greater trees appeared with a green foliage which contrasted with the bush, tall spathodeas, (African tulip tree) with a fiery blossom. Baobobs grew in some of these nullahs, only a trickle of water or a rock pool remained.

The valley of the Pangani bounded by the Pare Hills, was richly wooded, a green country and one worth fighting for.

From the Indian lines came the slightly rancid odour of burning ghee with which they browned their “chapattis” of “atta”. On a fine night the Southern Cross hung, beyond the misty stars, over the land.

Along the road quick butterflies hovered among the flowers of the small shrubs. Melancholy hornbills called to one another from the depths of the bush.

Brett Young described the Indian troops in the 130th Baluchis as fine fellows, frontiersmen, lean and lithe and of a splendid physique. He could not wish to be in a tight corner with better men.

From the Baluchi lines there came no sound except the falsetto singing of some Pathan minstrel singing the song “Zakhmi Del” (the wounded heart), when the singer had finished, there was absolute silence.

**The Faridkot Sappers and Miners: From Moshi to Buiko. May/June 1916**

Robin Sneyd records that at the end of May 1916 the rains finished. The Company of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners once more returned to Moshi and were enjoying a short lived rest which, after only one week, was interrupted by orders to take a small heavy pontoon section down the Pangani River to Buiko where the First Division under Major-General Hoskins was waiting to cross the Pangani River.

Sneyd had arrived in Moshi on 19 May, accompanied by Gunde Singh, 2 mule drivers and 5 mules. He stayed the night at the R.E.H.Q. According to the Field Notes he left Moshi at 11:30 am the next day and marched to a point on the Mue-Ruvu River road opposite where the short cut from M’Grighal joins the former road. The short cut was in a bad state, one bad swamp, another one by the Nullah river crossing also bad.

**May 21.**

Marched at 5:30 am and reached Soko-Nassai at 8 am. Found General Sheppard and reported to him.

**May 22.**

Went out in the morning at 6:30 am with Major Moore of the 130th Baluchis and Captain Ryde-Major. Reconnoitred road as far as Kahe Hill from Ruvu River, also had a look at Pangani River at a point west of Hohe Hill, a railway diversion, got back to camp at 10 am. Marched at 11:20 am.
May 23.
Marched all through the night of the 23rd and 24th of May. Arrived at Camp Point 695 at 9 am, left immediately and went down the river with cavalry, got back at 2:20 pm and had first food of the day, having marched 14 miles.

May 24.
Went from Camp Point 695 to Marago-y-Mewa. Halted there for three hours. Thence to two miles north of Revu Lager, arrived there at 12 midnight after a march through dense bush, helped a telephone cable company through. Travelled 17 miles in the day.

Francis Brett Young was travelling with the brigade and describes the country and the conditions:-

At the confluence of the two rivers, a day’s march from Soko Nassai, lay a great tangle of creeks and reedy backwaters which had been spanned by a whole series of trestle bridges. These bridges were ‘guarded’ on either side by a palisade of grasses to shield the eyes of the mules and oxen from the terrifying sight of water. The Brigade marched slowly over these bridges as though the animals were feeling their way in the dark, with very little noise except when hoofs stumbled on the wood corduroy of the track or the A.T. carts heavily jolted. Below all these sounds, and almost part of the night’s silence, the whistling of many thousand frogs filled an air which smelt fairly mephatic.

Over the marshes fireflies flickered. With sunrise we had gained upon a more open steppe, made up of stretches of red sand spilled upon a sloping land.

The 61st Pioneers and the 2nd Kashmiris went ahead of the brigade, cutting their way with their “Kukris” through the thin bush and making a road more direct than the old trading road. The bush was not unlike any other patch of dense undergrowth within 100 miles, the same twisted shapes of multitudinous thorns. Same tangles of lush cactus and chevaux de frise of wild sisal with now and then a dry candelabra tree lifting its symmetrical branches above all.

Robin Sneyd’s Field Record:-

May 25.
Started at 6:30 am with Brigade, marched for three miles and halted for three hours, thence on to Marago Epune where the Brigade arrived after dark having marched 10 miles.

May 26.
Started at 6 am from Marago Epune and marched 19 miles to a fishing village arriving there at 3:20 pm.

May 27.
Marched 16 miles from the fishing village to a point west of a hill in the middle of the plain.

May 28.
Left at 6 am and marched with the vanguard. A German 4.1” gun from the “Konigsberg” shelled selves and our transport from the railway all the afternoon. We camped behind a small low hill at a Trigonometrical Station. The Brigade two miles in front.

May 29.
Sheppard’s Brigade moved out in the morning and met the Germans in a position close to the railway. The Germans were unprepared and cleared out very quickly. Found German Bridge at position evidently being prepared to enable them to retreat across the Pangani if threatened in rear from M’Komasi. Went out with Walmsley and McHaig to bridge in evening and got back to camp after dark and had bad time finding our way.
May 30.

*The Brigade marched at 6:30 am. Rode a mule most of the way. Arrived at Buiko at 5:30 pm. Germans fired a few shots into the camp but otherwise there was little opposition.*

Francis Brett Young describes Buiko as being a mile or so from Buiko station on the Usumbara Railway. The town was placed within a wide arc of hills, and bounded to the west by a reedy swamp. Many troops had been struck by fever. Brett Young remembered Buiko by the odour of bruised reeds under a heavy sun. The delay at Buiko was supposedly due to difficulties of supply. The men were thankfully resting. Beasts were dying of the tsetse fly. G.H.Q. was a mile from the brigade near the station. The Germans were still at Mombo, the station for Wilhelmstal, a pleasant hill town, where most of the German ladies remained; it was also the end of the military trolley line to Handeni.

The Allied troops at Buiko were on the wrong side of the river. The left bank was guarded by swamps, below these a tangle of mountains separated the Pangani from the valley of M’Komazi, in which the railway ran. The Pangani had to be crossed. Then the troops would have to go through unknown country and pathless bush. Tsetse fly would be rampant. The Germans were retreating fast down the military trolley line to Handeni.

**The crossing of the Pangani River at Buiko**

On 30 and 31 May Sneyd was at Buiko waiting for the small heavy pontoon to arrive on lorries from Moshi 150 miles away. On 1 June McClintock, Smith and a Berthon boat bridge arrived by motor lorry from Moshi. The Berthon collapsible boat bridge is named after Rev’d Edward Berthon who invented it. Much used in India particularly on the North West Frontier. Twelve boats are required to cross a 100ft wide river.

Robin Sneyd recorded:-

>The pontoons and gear were loaded on to lorries at Moshi and rushed down the 150 miles of sandy track along the Pangani River. Immediately on arrival, as the river was too broad for the available bridging material, a flying bridge was formed and guns, lorries, armoured cars and heavy transport ferried across. The infantry having previously crossed by a light Berthon boat bridge erected by the bridge train of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners. This flying ferry was maintained until no longer required.

**June 2.**

Doing odd jobs for McHaig.

**June 3.**

Marched with the 29th Punjabis, who were the vanguard, across the river, first started at 6 am but could not find the crossing over the swamp on the right bank. The 29th Punjabis were ordered to re-cross by O'Grady. While this was in progress I found a perfectly practicable way across. Restarted at 11 o’clock and marched the 7 miles to Palms, a site distinguished by a few raffia palm trees.

**June 4.**

A very hard day. Left Palms at 6 am. Bush cutting all the way, me leading, got to first bad drift at 12 midday, walked on to 3rd bad drift about two miles further on and then walked back to first drift. Drifts will not give much trouble but all the bush cutting is through appalling bush. Started from the first drift at 1:30 pm. Walked back to Buiko with Soki and two porters, arrived back at Buiko at 5:30 pm, all very tired. Palms to 3rd drift 3 miles and back Palms to Buiko 7 miles.

**June 5.**

Out with working parties from the Kashmiris all day. Cutting approach for the big raft and doing up swamp crossing. Tillard arrived in the evening with the raft, 70 men and 20 porters all came down from Moshi in lorries.
June 6.
Erecting approach trestles for big raft, practically finished in evening after 12 hours work.
had fever all day.

Francis Brett Young describes in detail his crossing of the Pangani near Buiko on 6 June 1916.

Two bridges had been built, the upper of the two was a narrow foot-bridge carried on pontoons, its pathway strewn with rushes, and on either side, screens of palm leaves so high that a mule or bullock could not see the water on its way over. A little below this and depending for its stability on the same pontoon, a floating raft made a zig zag course, swinging over with the swift current on its beam. Over the footbridge trooped the infantry and their animals. The floating bridge carried the transport carts, which were run down to the beach and dragged up at the further side by their drivers.

Hard work since most of the carts were over laden for want of bullocks as many of them had died. Fifty yards below these bridges the Sappers were busy on a third bridge which would be strong enough to transport the guns, the heavy transport and even the armoured cars.

The morning of the 7th of June was dull and oppressed, the mountains of the Pare were veiled in cloud, but a little later the sun struggled through, making a fine picture of that gathering by the river.

The sun shone on the halted files of the Kashmiris and the variously dappled cattle. It picked out the red armlets of the water police whose chief, the A.P.M. was condemned to swim backwards and forwards across the Pangani, on that little raft for two whole days.

The river raced under green shadows. The Kashmiris were talking lazily together in Gurkhali. The ‘Drabis’ were driving their bullocks towards the bridge, and all the while the river sang its own swift song. Somewhere in the bush a hornbill called.

In the foreground of our picture stood the Brigadier’s car, in it sat General Sheppard himself, reading a play of Shakespeare and well content. (Could the play have been ‘All’s Well that Ends Well’ or ‘Much Ado about Nothing’?).

Sheppard was by training a Sapper and would have been pleased with the way the Faridkot Sappers and Miners were getting the stalled division over the Pangani River.

Francis Brett Young goes on to say that the news of the Battle of Jutland fought on 30 May came through whilst he was waiting to cross the bridge over the Pangani River. The news intimated that the Royal Navy had been defeated. In fact the Battle of Jutland resulted in an inconclusive draw. It had always been taken for granted that the Navy was almost invincible. The British lost 14 warships with a total tonnage of 115,025 tons. The Germans lost 11 warships with a total tonnage of 61,280 tons. The German Fleet retreated from the battle zone and the German Grand Fleet was more or less confined to their home bases for the rest of the War.

Brett Young had crossed the river by 9 am and was skirting the margin of a vast swamp. By midday the air of the swamp had become intolerably hot.

Having crossed the Pangani River, the brigade moved into a more open plain, where raffia palms were growing, and a single grove of palm trees which was shown on the map had been chosen as the furthest spot at which the division could concentrate. The floating bridge for the heavy equipment was not yet ready, and the howitzers, field artillery, and the ambulance wagons had been sent back to the German Bridge at Mikocheni which was now in use.

At “Palms” the brigade halted, not in any shadowy oasis, but on the open plain beneath a cruel sun.

The Germans were reported to be advancing in force down both banks of the Pangani. The brigade went
to support the 29th Punjabis who formed the advance guard. Brett Young records that the Kashmiris had been reported by the local natives as having stolen two sheep to meet their particular food needs.

June 7.
Sheppard’s Brigade started crossing at 5 am, working until 6 pm and made 53 trip across the Pangani River.

June 8.
The Divisional troops, transport, and armoured cars crossed. Working from 6 am until 6 pm.

June 9.
Crossed a few strays. All the troops were now across the Pangani River, except one Company of South Africans whom we crossed in the afternoon. Buiko now empty except for selves.

June 10. 11. 12.
Waiting for orders to proceed. Received orders on the 13th of June.
Part Six

The Faridkot Sappers and Miners: Campaign in German East Africa: From Buiko to Handeni. June until 27 July 1916

The Faridkots remained, waiting for orders at Buiko until 13 June 1916.

Sneyd records:

June 13.
Received orders to leave raft on Buiko bank of the Pangani River and proceed in the wake of the 1st Division to M’kalamo, 35 miles down-stream on the left bank. M’kalamo was where the German trolley line from Mombo to Handeni was first touched by the Allied advance. The Faridkots transport arrived from Moshi at 8 am. Put it all across the river, packed remainder of Berthon boat bridge in Scotch carts and pulled raft and approaches to pieces leaving everything on the left bank. Got clear of the river at 4 pm. Transport started at 2:30 pm and arrived at Palms at 5:30 pm. Found Evill and remainder of Faridkots had arrived an hour earlier.

June 14.
Marched from Palms at 8 am. Halted midday and camped about 9 miles south. Clear of the bush country.

June 15.
Proceeded to M’kalamo, started at 7 am and halted at midday. Arrived at M’kalamo at 5 pm. Found Smeath and bridge train. No other troops at M’kalamo.

The Germans had cleared out of M’kalamo, taking the big guns from the Konigsberg, and their men along the trolley line to Handeni. The Tanga railway was now clear of Germans as far south as Mombo. Major Kraut’s Northern Army had ceased to protect the line. Wilhelmstal fell into Allied hands with a large number of the enemy’s women and children. Their abandonment implied an appreciation of the Allied methods of warfare. The Germans also had a policy of leaving behind their sick and wounded, except for the German Askaris, for the British to look after and feed.

When Francis Brett Young marched with the brigade into M’kalamo, the trolley station was still smouldering. The brigade camped between the town and the river. The South Africans were laughing and shouting over the few trucks the Germans had left behind on the trolley sidings, running them down a little incline and making mock collisions with them.

Brett Young marched out beside the broken trolley line towards Handeni. There was no water in the valley bottoms. Great gangs of Pioneers and fatigues from other regiments were at work on the road.

The Germans had had time to wreck all the bridges on the trolley line, by which the railway had crossed the ravines. The rails had been so lightly laid that they had been ripped up again without any trouble. Brett Young caught up the brigade but they passed him on a little hill where he was tending the men who were sick in the 29th Punjabi Regiment.

The Masai in war paint were scouring the country behind the Allied troops making free with isolated German farms in revenge for the cattle the Germans had taken from them.

Lieutenant Sneyd recorded that the German method of demolition of the trolley track was worth noting:

The heads of the fish plate bolts had almost all been struck off with sledge hammers and the fish plates thrown into the bush alongside the track. The Germans had however been too methodical in their destruction and throwing away of the fish plates. The result was
that the fish plate bolts were quickly obtained and the fish plates were recovered in pairs from the bush exactly opposite the original joint in the rails. The rails of this trolley line were of many different weights and the whole affair a rough line laid by the Germans since the commencement of the War. With the help of a Company of the 61st Pioneers this line was roughly relayed, and such trolley as were not hopelessly smashed, were despatched back to the workshops at Mombo from the terminus at N. Derema, the line was working again on July 14th roughly three weeks after work had been started.

June 16.
The first day at M’kalamo. I had a day off. Captain Evill had been on the march from New Moshi since June the 5th. Colonel Collins and Cooper arrived in the afternoon.

June 17.
Evill and self with the whole Company left for work on the trolley line working towards Mombo, the junction with the Tanga line. Dropped the right half of the Company who worked back towards M’kalamo at kilometre 21:5. I proceeded working towards M’kalamo at German Shamba Rubber.

June 18.
Took left half Company out on line towards M’kalamo to start work at mile 18:4. Evill and self started at 11:30 am and walked to Mombo ten and a half miles away, arrived 2 pm. They were taking grades en route. Had some tea with Ford and looked round Mombo got back to camp at 6:15 pm.

Dr Francis Brett Young joined the division for their attack on Handeni. General Sheppard marched into the town unopposed, on the morning of 18 June. Handeni became an important base despite its unhealthy situation. A Casualty Clearing Station was set up. The patients were made slightly more comfortable with beds and other essentials taken from German planters’ houses in the area. A herd of cows was brought up to the hospital from far back, in order to provide milk for the patients. Brett Young had collapsed with fever and was being sent home. He spent his time guarding the herd from lions and the Masai. Brett Young recorded how the hospital was unable to get rations for either staff or patients from the hard pressed supply depot a hundred miles away.

Now that Handeni was in Allied hands, Smuts wanted to push the Germans well south of the railway so as to protect his own supply lines, but his troops needed water, with no sources between the Rivers Pangani and Lukigura the decision was made to push on to the Lukigura.

Handeni, an important centre of communications and local administration, was a strange place to find in the remote bush of German East. Its European houses had been built for some extraordinary reason in the Norwegian style. The town suffered from a permanent plague of rats. Handeni was an unhealthy place; many black Africans there had typhoid, and this, as well as malaria and dysentery, spread alarmingly among the tired and fed up troops.

Brett Young writes that there was one great rubber estate, covering many miles, around Handeni. The Force Reserve, the 5th and 6th South African Infantry had caught the retreating Germans to the South West of Handeni and handled them roughly in a short brush. This was the first time on the Pangani trek that these regiments had been in action. The rest of the division camped a little above the terminus of the trolley railway at N’Derama. The area was horribly littered with the refuse of the German Askaris. The station had been destroyed by fire. Friendly blacks brought in fresh food. The Rhodesian troops were at half strength.

June 19. Evill went on to kilometre 7:4 with left half of Company. I went back to M’kalamo with spare kit and stores.
June 20.
Marched with Tillard and right half of the Company to German Rubber Shamba at kilometre 16:4. Worked from 16:0 towards Mombo from 2:30 pm to 5:30.

June 21.

June 22 and 23.
Kilometre 14 to 12. Worked out to kilometre 7. Received orders to go back to M’kalamo, walked back to camp and all marched for M’kalamo at 2 pm arrived 4:30 pm. Found Major Skinner, McClintock, and Smeath. Evill arrived in the evening.

June 24.
Spent the day in M’kalamo.

Robin Sneyd records that the 1st Division which the Faridkots had put across the Pangani at Buiko had now halted at Maiha some 20 miles south of N’Derema. The Faridkots had been on half rations since leaving Buiko on 13 June and a rest was badly needed. Lieutenant-Colonel E.D. Tillard D.S.O. (Retd) noted in January 1945. For months the Faridkots never got full rations or replacements of kit. Once we drew two days’ rations and at the end of the period were asked to make the issue last another two days. Foraging parties went out daily to hunt for bananas but most of the men became very weak from lack of proper food and the effects of malaria.

June 25.
Marched at 7 am. Halted Luckamo midday and on for about three and a half miles along the trolley line in the evening. Camped. No water.

June 26.
Marched at 6:30 am. Found no water at the Funda River and repaired the line near the station. Fever all day.

June 27.
Marched at 7 am from Funda River Station to M’bigui. Water holes at M’bigui where we camped.

June 28.
Evill, all transport, mules and blacksmiths went on to N’Derema, the terminus of the trolley line to repair trolleys. The rest of the Company remained working on the trolley line. The Faridkots had been ordered to put N’Derema in a state of defence.

June 29.
Still working on the trolley line. Mules came back to M’bigui. Low and ox wagons left for N’Derema in afternoon.

June 30.
Marched from M’bigui to N’Derema. Repaired one kilometre of line on the way.

July 1 to July 3.
At N’Derema. The Company working back to the trolley line. Took out their camp and camped as convenient. Water and supplies sent out on trolleys.

Early on the morning of 3 July, a modest force of 500 soldiers, mainly from the 5th Indian Light Infantry, was embarked at Mombasa to take the port of Tanga. The town had been evacuated but German troops remained in the surrounding bush, sniping whenever they got the chance. Once Tanga was in British hands there would be some slight easing of the supply situation.
July 4.
The trolley line was completed and the Company came back to camp

July 5.
Sent off 15 good trolleys loaded with damaged trolleys and pushed by our Teita porters for Momba where the trolley line joined the main Tanga Railway.

July 6 to 23rd July.
At N’Derema. Built three blocks

On 24 July the Faridkots received orders houses and obstacles for N’Derema defences. Surveyed the trolley line between N’Derema and Handeni. Marched to Korogwe on the Usumbara Railway, a distance of 45 miles and then went on to Tanga.

They reached Korogwe on 27 July to find the original orders had been cancelled and fresh orders issued to return to Handeni, three miles from N’Derema, doing all that was possible on the way to put the Korogwe-Handeni road into a fit state for four motor convoys.

Brett Young described N’Derema as the end of the trolley line where three great military roads converged. He said that he would rather be with the Punjabis than any other regiment in the country.

The fresh green of the rubber plantations with their ordered uniformity was pleasing to Brett Young’s eyes, so very different from the endless grey of the bush. Here too were trim native “bandaa” thrusting their pointed roofs above the paler green of mealy fields. Apparently the Germans left 200 black Africans to die in a long shed (labelled “Typhus” on the door). Trolley trucks lay overturned with their bearings shattered.

Brett Young noted that the Indian troops eschewed beef, but ate lamb. They stripped the country of eatable greens as Indians on active service particularly miss their greens.

The general campaign in German East Africa. June to August 1916
N’Derema to Morogoro; Kondoa Irangi to Kilosa

Figure 15. South Africans crossing the Lukigura River

Once they had left N’Derema, Smuts’s force advanced to the Lukigura River. The Germans held a defensive position guarding the river crossing. When the main British column reached this place, it had
been marching for 24 hours, on very little food. Almost incredibly, they went into battle. They were fighting an obscure and lowly war that many must have thought hardly mattered compared to the real “show” in Flanders and France. Orders rang out down the ragged ranks of tattered soldiers, in strange and assorted headgear. Fusiliers from London, adventurers from Mexico, Kashmiris and Gurkhas, all fixed bayonets. Supported by machine guns manned by Punjabis and men from Lancashire, they cheered and charged. The Askaris and their German officers fled. It was described, officially, as an utter rout. After this rare victory, morale was considerably raised, perhaps, after all the wily von Lettow could be beaten but for the moment the Force could move no more.

Von Lettow had arrived in the Kondoa Irangi area and had ordered the German forces there to withdraw. He and his staff were in rags and had had to change into Askari clothing, for want of anything better. Fearing gradual encirclement of his main force near Kondoa Irangi, because of the moves from Rhodesia and the Congo, von Lettow had decided, after some weeks, to transfer his main force back again to the east to support Major Kraut. He realised that Smuts’s force was about to make a final push for the Central Railway so he withdrew his force to Morogoro, under himself, and Kilosa under Kraut. Both these towns were important railway towns.

After von Lettow’s withdrawal, van Deventer was soon able to leave Kondoa Irangi. After ten days, a small party of advance motorcyclists sighted flashes not far to the north. This was not gun fire; it was the African sun glinting on the steel rails of the great Central Railway of German East Africa. From the fort of the small rail town of Dodoma, its white buildings gleaming in the sun, a white flag was flying. Van Deventer’s remarkable trek, with his small force of British and Dutch South Africans, had struck right across one of the least hospitable parts of Central Africa. After a few days, van Deventer decided to push on down the line towards Kilosa. Von Lettow was causing some havoc by sending train loads of troops speeding up and down the line from one of his fronts to the other.

Smuts’s force, better off from the point of view of supplies, as Tanga was now available to them, pushed forward in two columns nominally under the command of Major-Generals A.R. Hoskins and C.J. Brits. But Smuts took personal control, making even minor decisions. The country was as difficult as any so far encountered, mountainous, overgrown with thick vegetation, and punctuated by rivers and steep escarpments. There were few heavy engagements, the Germans with von Lettow as their supreme commander made their customary retreat, holding any natural barriers against Smuts’s advance as long as they could before their own casualties became too heavy.

While the force under Smuts was still struggling towards the Central Railway, fighting more battles against nature than it ever did against the Germans, van Deventer was more than sixty miles away.

Von Lettow had no difficulty in selecting his stores from Kilosa and Morogoro and disappearing into the bush south of the railway, into the country he had already reconnoitred.

Van Deventer who was proceeding down the railway from Dodoma met similarly irritating but momentary resistance at various places favourable to German defence along the line, which ran through a gorge in a chain of rocky hills. His advance was hindered by a Konigsberg gun, which was able to find an excellent range.

Von Lettow was able to reinforce and withdraw troops in a matter of hours, making the fullest use of the railway between Morogoro and Kilosa.

Van Deventer entered a deserted Kilosa on 22 August. Kilosa was a town at the foot of the hills and on the edge of the plain. Van Deventer settled his H.Q. there.

Smuts’s force experienced possibly the worst of all its marches on the last thirty miles to the railway line. It was achieved in an equal number of hours, in extreme heat, with little water, and was hampered by serious grass fires.

On the afternoon of 22 August the the 2nd Rhodesia Regiment, with two companies of Baluchi entered
Morogoro. Von Lettow had watched their approach, marked by clouds of dust, from the hills above the town. A considerable number of German civilians, wounded and various non combatants, had been left behind. The town was in disorder and looting had taken place. Bridges had been destroyed down the railway for miles. Rolling stock had been damaged, much of it beyond repair. Any stores that von Lettow had been forced to leave behind, and he had taken a great deal with him, had also been destroyed.

The great goal of Smuts’s campaign had been won. The Central Railway was in British hands. But von Lettow, with an army greater than he had possessed at the start of the war, was still at large.

Smuts planned to corner the Germans in the Nguru Mountains to the south of Morogoro. On 26 August Smuts’s advance guard heard the crashes and saw the flames as the Germans ran their engines and rolling stock from both sides of a destroyed bridge into a deep gorge. Morogoro with its broad avenues, Sadler’s Hotel and acre upon acre of mango and palm trees, was as an Allied Officer said “Really an insignificant little town but it was the first we had seen for 300 miles and so most exciting, local Africans and Boers excelled in looting”.

Von Lettow managed to retire both from Kondoa and the Nguru Mountains; the bush, the black cotton soil and the climate all favoured him.

At the end of August 1916, three of Smuts’s divisions were astride the Central Railway. The fall of Dar-es-Salaam was only a matter of time. The Navy’s first kite balloon ship, formerly at the Dardanelles was used as an observation balloon for the bombardment of the enemy’s on shore position. Dar-es-Salaam finally surrendered on 4 September 1916.

Smuts was under pressure from London to wind up operations. Once the Ruaha River had been reached the campaign could be left to an Indian Brigade consisting of 12,000 troops, Norforce and a mixed brigade of South African and West African troops. A further 7,000 troops would be needed for the lines of communication and once the Nigerian Brigade and the six new battalions from the King’s African Rifles were ready then the white and Indian troops could be relieved for deployment elsewhere.
Part Seven

The Faridkot Sappers and Miners: German East Africa. July to September 1916

Lieutenant Sneyd’s Army Book 153, Field Message Book for the use of Dismounted Regimental Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of Cavalry and Infantry contain several pages of Sneyd’s notes including shopping lists:

- Boots 13 pairs, Coats 14 pairs, puttees 14, Waterbottles 2. Stores for Sappers working on bridge.
- Letters to be obtained and got. Various indents. Medicines for mules. Whisky, bottles of liqeur brandy, Ideal milk, butter, sparklets, sausages. 12 tins of herrings, 12 tins of cheese, envelopes, sauces, serge, bandages, vaseline, syrup, tea, biscuits, pickles, asparagus, salt, beans, matches.

There was a wanted list for canvas, travel pumps from Dar-es-Salaam, Acetylene lamp, also required 2” or 1½ “ rope about 100 fathoms for loading.

Lieutenant Sneyd kept accounts for Major Tillard and himself for goods bought from the Boma Company, in 1916, including 6.90 rupees for Major Tillard’s cigarettes in April. In August eggs and other items were bought at Korogwe. On 19 October 1916, Sneyd sent a cheque for stores for 300 rupees to Major Kemphthorne R.E., toothpaste and razor blades were bought from Boma.

Another list contained 8 tins of sardines, 4 rupees. 4 tins of bloater paste 2 rupees 40 cents, 2 tins of salmon 1 rupee 50 cents. 1 tin apricots 1 rupee 25 cents. 1 tin sardines 1 rupee. 47 rupees and 50 cents of goods were spent at the YMCA at Mikesse 3 March 1917.

The Faridkot Sappers marched from N’Derema to Korogwe arriving there on 27 July 1916.

Sneyd left Korogwe on 29 July 1916 with left half of the Faridkot Company and spent until 17 August 1916 working on the Korogwe to Handeni road.

Major Tillard and Lieutenant Sneyd left Handeni on 19 August 1916 and travelled via Makindu to Turiana where they spent from 21 August 1916 until 4 September 1916 working on the Turiani-Quedi-Hombo track. On 5 September, Lieutenant Sneyd and the Faridkots travelled to Morogoro where they stayed until 13 September 1916.

The Faridkots received orders on 24 July 1916 to proceed to Korogwe, a station on the Usambara Railway, and then go on to Tanga. The company had been spending some three weeks at N’Derema, the terminus of the trolley railway, building block houses and other defences.

The Faridkots left N’Derema on 24 July 1916 to march to Korogwe 45 miles away but they only got three miles before it was dark as the oxen refused to pull the wagons. Lieutenant Sneyd notes that “it was a bad afternoon”. They got on better the next day and reached within 6 miles of Zindeni. On the 26th they were 17 miles from Korogwe which they finally reached at 5 pm on the 27th.

They stayed in Korogwe the next day. The original orders to go on to Tanga were cancelled and fresh orders were issued for the Company to return to Handeni, doing all that was possible to put the Korogwe to Handeni road, now much worn by the constant traffic, into a fit state for motor traffic convoys.

Lieutenant Sneyd left Korogwe on the 29th with the left half of the company. In the morning they went to the railhead at M’Kombasi for rations and then on to mile ten where they camped.

From 30 July to 3 August the Faridkots worked on the Korogwe to Handeni road three miles each side of the camp. This earth road was now ankle deep in dust and pitted to a depth of a foot or more. A fresh track was cut where possible in the bush alongside and the repair left to the labour corps which was now arriving.
Lieutenant Sneyd and the left half of the Faridkots continued to work on the Korogwe and Handeni road from 5 to 15 August 1916. They made places for drinking water for animals and men, and dug out old native water holes and connected them together. The road work consisted of cutting the bush on the side of the German road, so that lorries could run off the public road which was cut to pieces and had 4” to 6” of dust.

From the 15th of August the Faridkots were working from mile 15 to a point about six miles west of Zindene.

They heard a lion roaring as they left the camp six miles west of Zindeni at 3 am on 16 August 1916. They arrived at Handeni at 10 am. The carts did not get in until 6 pm. They heard that they were to go on with the pontoon bridge by motor lorry. They spent the next day at Handeni awaiting the arrival of the lorries carrying the pontoons. The Bridging Train under the command of Lieutenant W. Smeeth helped the Faridkots for a month or so in the reconstruction of the Handeni trolley line.

The convoy of lorries arrived on 18 August 1916 loaded with pontoons and bringing orders to pick up the right half company and push forward to the 1st Division who were held up by a river some 60 miles ahead.

Major Tillard and Lieutenant Sneyd and the right half of the Company left Handeni by motor lorry at 10 am on 19 August 1916. They arrived at Makindu, some fifty miles southeast from Handeni at 8 pm having had various accidents. Four lorries had broken down on the way. The next day they left Makindu at 7 am and arrived at Turian, near the Wami River, at 10:30 am. On arrival they received orders that the pontoon bridge was no longer required. The pontoons that they had gone to such trouble to bring to Turian were therefore unloaded and the Company set to work on the Turiana-Quedi-Hombo track.

The Faridkots were now under the Nguru Hills and the “small rains” of autumn were starting. The next three weeks were a record of strenuous work on half rations, with little or no shelter. The so-called road crossed numerous streams under the Nguru Hills and in two or three places was carried across swamps.

There was nobody but the Faridkot Sappers sufficiently far forward for the maintenance of this track which was the only line of communication from Handeni to Dokowo on the main Central Railway from Dar-es-Salaam to Ujiji and had to be kept passable. Twice during this time the two main bridges, one of 65 ft and the other of 80 ft were washed away, and had to be replaced, while the smaller culverts and bridges needed constant attention.

In one period of ten days during this time the Company marched 70 miles, built three bridges, of spans as above, and repaired one, with one whole day’s work on road repairs.
Figure 16. Official photograph of the Faridkot Sappers, accompanied by a man with a bicycle,

Lieutenant Sneyd’s Field Record:-

August 21 to August 24.
Turian. Road repairs, rebuilt one culvert, and repaired bridges.

August 25.
Marched from Turian to camp on the road six and a half miles away.

August 26 to August 28.
Repaired road.

August 29.
Marched from the six and half mile point to Manwero, eleven miles away on the Kilorsa road.

August 30.
News came through at 5 pm that the bridge near Kuradi Humbo and the Turian Bridge had both been washed away. Marched at 6:30 pm from Mandani and arrived at around 10 pm.

August 31.
Started work at 5:30 am by pulling a F.W.D. lorry out of the remains of the broken bridge. Worked till 5 pm when the repair of the bridge was completed. Trestles 5 ft. Total span 56 ft. Height above water 4 ft.

September 1.
Passed waiting traffic, across at 5:30 am Completed details. At 1 pm marched to Turian arrived there around 5 pm.

September 2.
Rebuilding Turian bridge. The 61st Pioneers cut one approach. The Faridkots and porters were doing the bridge and the other approach. Worked 6 am to 6:30 am.

September 3.
Completed the bridge at 10 am. 6 trestles with a span of 85 ft. Height above the water 3 ft 6”.
On the arrival of companies of the 61st Pioneers and the East African Pioneers the Faridkot Sappers were relieved from their hard work on the Turiani Bridge and on 4 September 1916 the Company marched to Quadi Hombo at 6:30 am en route for Morogoro. Lieutenant Sneyd, who must have been exhausted and had intermittent fever, went in a car with Colonel Collins R.E. direct to Morogoro and arrived there at 5 pm. He put up for the night in the old hotel buildings near Morogoro station. He notes, “Fed with the Royal Flying Corps, (RFC)”. This would have been a great treat for Sneyd as for weeks he had been camping out in the bush and living with his troops on very meagre rations.

The Faridkot Sappers halted at Morogoro for three days.

Lieutenant Sneyd moved on 5 September 1916 to a house, in a rubber plantation, on a hill, two miles south of Morogoro. With a working party of the 2nd Kings African Rifles he made a drift to replace a small bridge cut at the end of Morogoro on the Morogoro to Turiani road. Between 5 and 8 September he did odd jobs for Colonel Collins, and then on the afternoon of 8 September he fetched Major Tillard, who was down with fever, in a car from the Ngere Ngere River. The next day he moved the Faridkots to a camp on the slopes near Morogoro. He and Captain Evill stayed with the Company; Major Tillard, still with fever, stayed with Colonel Collins.

The Faridkots repaired bridges in the town of Morogoro on 10 and 11 September 1916.

In what was a very rare slack interval, Captain Evill and Lieutenant Sneyd, walked up the hills flanking the town. They agreed “it was a very nice country”. Perhaps this exchange prompted Robin Sneyd to think about settling in East Africa after the War.

The Faridkot Sappers and Miners Company left Morogoro on 13 September 1916.

The Campaign in German East Africa. August and September 1916

General Smuts chased Colonel von Lettow to Kisaki which was taken by General Brits on 7 September 1916. Von Lettow retreated from Kisaki to the southern bank of the Ngeta River just south of Kisaki.

Von Lettow had disappeared into the dark passes that loomed over Morogoro. These passes could easily be blocked to following troops. Smuts was bitterly disappointed at von Lettow’s escape and decided to continue the pursuit in spite of the fact that his troops and animals were worn out with the exertions of the last three weeks. His transport, as Sneyd’s reports indicate, had reached its extreme radius of action. Smuts decided not even to pause at Morogoro, but to push on south of the Central Railway as fast as he could in a last desperate hope of effecting a decision to the campaign. No one was certain where exactly von Lettow had gone, but it was thought that he would make his base at Kisaki, on the far side of the mountains from Morogoro.

The Official History notes that Smuts had driven forward to the very limit of his army’s ability. His rear-organization, sometimes overcome with problems of supply for diverse units from several races, had surmounted difficulties of almost unmanageable proportions. His engineers had worked on bridges and railways with truly astonishing speed in the most appalling conditions. Intelligence service had supplied him with a constant stream of intelligence. Above all, his infantry and mounted troops had shown great endurance, courage and perseverance in a task which at times must have seemed hopeless.

By now it was clear that there was a limit to how much the white African (including South African and Rhodesian), European, and Indian units, could take.

Smuts’s force going south from Morogoro encountered stiffer opposition than for some time previously. Von Lettow had evacuated his main force to Kisaki. A great mass of supplies had been assembled there, which he was anxious to transport further south before the arrival of the British
column under Smuts. The “small rains” of autumn had made the mountain tracks muddy and slippery, and almost impassable to Smuts’ wheeled transport. The heights, of exquisite beauty for those who had the time or inclination to see, were clad in a thick forest of tall dark-foliaged trees, with every now and then, from some high road, a glimpse of the luxuriant valleys below.

About sixty miles long from east to west, the mountains averaged fifty miles in depth and provided an excellent natural barrier for von Lettow while he organised his further retreat from Kisaki.

As Smuts’s advance party progressed, the remainder of the Division, under Major-General Sheppard, slowly followed, working on repairs to the road as it went.

Two mounted “brigades” (one was only 600 men strong due to sickness among men and horses) were to take part in a flanking movement on Kisaki, von Lettow’s temporary headquarters.

![Figure 17. Brigadier General P.S. Beves](image)

Brigadier-General B.G.L. Enslin and Brigadier-General A.H.M. Hussey were to take part in the flanking movement. Behind the two mounted columns were two battalions of South African infantry, grandly entitled the 3rd Division under Brigadier-General P.S. Beves, with Major-General Brits in overall command.

Both flanking columns experienced horrific conditions and great hardship. At the final approach to Kisaki each column was unaware of the position and intentions of the other. Brits’s force, part of Smuts’s main force moved in to take Kisaki on 7 September.

Von Lettow had great difficulty in getting all his stores out of Kisaki. He moved his tired force to the southern bank of the Ngeta River, just south of Kisaki, leaving all the European women behind except for a few nurses. He stayed on this site for many weeks, depending on supplies brought up from the Rufiji River, some forty miles away.

**The capture of Dar-es-Salaam. September 1916**

While the British Army under General Smuts had been attempting to continue its advance south of the Central Railway, the coastal area had been left in the hands of the Germans. Bagamayo a port south of Tanga was captured by the Allies at the end of August. A force of nearly 2,000 Allied troops was assembled at Bagamayo, with twenty machine guns, under Colonel C.V. Price. The force marched
down the coast towards Dar-es-Salaam forty miles south of Bagamayo. Four warships steamed close to the shore. The march was an arduous one, in scorching heat through sandy waterless country. The hills to the north of Dar-es-Salaam were reached on the fifth day, and the troops were able to look down on the town and port three miles away. By 18 September the whole of German East Africa’s coastline was in Allied hands.

A British warship flying a white flag entered the harbour with a summons to surrender. In bright, early morning sunlight the Deputy Burgomaster crossed the glistening green water in the ship’s boat, boarded the vessel, and accepted the terms laid down.

The Allied troops then marched into the capital of German East Africa and took over the town. They found it to be an attractive place of shady, tree-lined streets, with a beautiful harbour bordered by a white strip of coral and sand, with several fine stone buildings, well-spaced homes with verandas screened by mosquito gauze, soft red-tiled roofs, and its environs graced with mango trees and huge baobabs that had stood there since Vasco da Gama’s soldiers had passed that way long before.

Up-to-date wharves for the lighters, with electric cranes, were as impressive as anything to be seen in British Africa, and the warehouses, which had once stored produce from the plantations for Hamburg and Bremen, had been especially designed for the tropics.

There were 370 non-combatant Germans in Dar-es-Salaam and eighty hospital patients. The rest had all left to join von Lettow in the south-eastern corner of the territory. The railway station was in ruins, as was the Governor’s palace, a reminder of the beginning of the war that seemed so long ago. The rest of the town was in good order. A number of vessels had been sunk in the harbour and considerable damage had been done to port facilities. Supplies from Dar-es-Salaam started to flow to the troops, from 4 October as the supply lines had been greatly shortened.

One of the first consignments to be shipped into the port included a large batch of Russian decorations. They were “for distribution”. Apparently the wholesale exchange of medals was common practice amongst the Entente Cordiale. There was some argument about the rank of the various orders, van Deventer especially was difficult to please. He only accepted the Order of Vladimir after Smuts had assured him it was senior to any of the others.

On 31 August 1916 General Smuts sent a message to the War Office which read:

I would submit that on occupation of Central Railway it will be advisable to make a serious effort to effect the surrender of the German forces without running the risk and expense of protracted guerrilla operations in the far south of the country.

In September General J.C. Smuts was forced to halt his advance at the Mgeta River. His troops were exhausted and his lines of supply which depended on under-nourished and over-worked African porters were too near collapse. Very often the administrative arrangements for the clothing and feeding of porters and for the caring of the sick were deplorably basic, and a number of Europeans in the theatre appear to have considered porters as being expendable.

Fortunately many European missionaries in East Africa volunteered to serve with porter units and this, combined with better centralized management of military labour, led to improvements in administration.

However, throughout the campaign the number of porters required to support Allied operations was never achieved by the recruiting teams. The Germans displayed a more pragmatic and ruthless edge to their recruitment, requisitioning porters from villages by force when necessary.

At the end of September 1916, Smuts wrote to Dr Heinrich von Schnee, the German Governor of German East Africa:

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 effort and sacrifices for more than two years. A continuation of the campaign even for 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 unconditional surrender. Under these circumstances I would impress upon 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.

This overture was a judicious mix of bluff and blackmail, and von Schnee “declined the offer”. Von Lettow-Vorbeck regarded Smuts’s missive as confirmation that his opponent’s blow had failed and that he was at the end of his resources. He still had 2,500 Germans and 7,500 Askaris in the field, and had succeeded in moving large quantities of supplies and munitions – including several thousand cattle – before abandoning Dar-es-Salaam.
Part Eight

Faridkot Sappers and Miners: German East Africa. September – December 1916

On 13 September 1916 the Faridkot Sappers and Miners left Morogoro with orders to join the 1st Division who were at the Summit 46 miles south east of Morogoro.

They never reached the Summit as the rain once more intervened, and the Company found themselves maintaining the roads and bridges en route to the Summit.

There was again a hiatus in the very extended lines of communication. The Division’s rations were not coming through properly, and for the next month the Faridkots found themselves committed to the impossible task of maintaining 35 miles of hilly and un-metalled road in a good enough condition for the convoys of motor lorries and Cape carts carrying food to get through to the troops moving towards Kisaki, the other side of the Uluguru Mountains.

There were times when owing to excessive rain the convoys did not get through, and even the normal half ration was not forthcoming. The road was kept open, more troops were moved up. The Faridkot Sappers moved back to finally arrive back at Morogoro for a refit. This was none too soon as the daily working strength was now reduced to only about 50 men.

Robin Sneyd’s Field Record gives details:-

September 13th 1916.
Left Morogoro. Marched 9 miles and camped.

September 14.
Arrived at Mikessa at 10 am. 18 miles from Morogoro. Marched a further 5 miles in the afternoon.

September 15.
Midday halt at Msimbisi. 5 miles in the afternoon.

September 16.
Midday halt at the Ruwu River. Marched for four and a half miles and camped for the night near the Matombo Mission.

September 17.
Arrived at Biekee and met Lieutenant Colonel McHaig who was in command of engineers in the 2nd East African Division. Told to camp, as we were not required at the Summit but were to improve the road lower down.

September 18 to September 28.
Based at Buku Buku. Working on road, heavy rain. Road practically impassable owing to the use of lorries and wagons in the rain, when porters are available locally to carry what is required.

September 29.
Moved down to Matumbo with Motj Singh, 20 men and 20 porters.

September 30 to October 3.
Based at Matumbo. Worked on repairs from the Ruwu River to two miles south of Matumbo. Evill and self cut a diversion 2 miles south of Matumbo in the last 2 days.

Moved all the men back to Buku Buku in the evening.

October 4 to October 9.
Worked on road near Buku Buku. Got full rations for the first time for months, practically
since Buiko with the exception of the time at Korogwe and mile 15.

October 10.
Moved back to Matumbo with the left half of the Company and worked on road en route.

October 11.
Worked on road.

October 12.
Tillard arrived with the remainder of the Company. Evill went into hospital with fever.

October 13 to November 1.
Worked on road from Ruwu River to Buku-Buku.

November 2.
Moved camp back 6 miles to one and a half miles north of Ruwu River. Commenced work on hill, up from river on north side.

November 3 to November 19.
Worked on hill above Ruwu River and erected two travellers across Ruwu River. Span 250 feet. 3" rope to cross goods and if necessary light cars.

November 20.
Whole Company moved into Mikesse by light cars Snow’s convoy.

November 21 to November 28.
Rested at Mikesse. Major Tillard in Morogoro from the 23rd of November.

Figure 18. First Mention in Despatches
Lieutenant-General Smuts, the Honourable J.C. Smuts, mentioned Lt R.T.S. Sneyd I.A.R.O. attd Faridkot Imp. Serv. S & M. in a Despatch dated 22nd November 1916 “For gallant and distinguished
services in the Field. I have it in command from the King to record His Majesty’s high appreciation of the services rendered”. Signed by Winston S. Churchill, Secretary of State for War. This was the first of two Mentions in Despatches that Robin Sneyd received. In this case it was probably for his work in keeping passable the road up to the summit. The award was marked by oak leaves on a campaign medal ribbon.

November 28.
Started by road with convoy for Morogoro at 2:30 pm. Halted near Koroka Pass turning.

November 29.
Marched 5:30 am and arrived at Morogoro at 8:30 am.

November 30 to December 9.
The whole Company was at Morogoro for a rest and a refit. None too soon, as the daily working strength of the Company was now reduced to about 50.

Robin Sneyd records that reinforcements of 60 men were received from Dar-es-Salaam bringing the rank and file up to 134.

Robin Sneyd took advantage of the first break that he had had for months and wrote on 4 December 1916 to his brother Ralph. The letter is written on paper headed Ostafrikansche Eisenbahngesellschaft (East African Railway), which has been taken from the railway station office originally intended as a bill of loading.

Letter from Lieutenant Sneyd to his brother Commander Ralph Sneyd D.S.O., R.N.

Dear Ralph

Many months have passed since I last wrote to you but you have probably seen everything I have written, or rather, what arrives of what one writes. A good deal, I fancy never turns up, as one very often has to give letters to stray persons to post. Our post for the last few months has been most extraordinarily bad, though I think that we now have most of the letters that are in the country. One I got a few days ago from Norna, (Robin and Ralph’s eldest sister) was dated the beginning of August.

We are at present having a rest and refit but expect to start off again before very long or at any rate go off and sit somewhere out in the blue.

This is absolutely the first time we have sat down with absolutely nothing to do since the beginning of the year, as until now we have always had a job on our hands when the infantry have had their periodical sit down at the end of a spasm. We all hope that the next spasm may finish off this show.

The Hun is of course pretty well tied in now but he has still got a large bit of country to roam, and so much, in fact everything, depends on the weather, about which very little seems to be certain, sometimes it rains in the next few months and some years it does not.

The Rufiji valley and the country to the south of it is perfectly beastly.

We had a very thin time in September owing to its coming on to rain when we chased him into these parts but we are of course now in a totally different position as the Central Railway is working. Although I believe the Hun thought it was going to take six months to get it going again after he had blown up all the bridges. Our line of communication ran right away back to Korogwe on the Usumbara railway a journey of 300 miles over rails of sorts.

I haven’t come across any of your West Coast (Cameroon) people with the exception of one Indian battalion. The thing they tell you about is the excellent way in which they were fed. Chop boxes full of all sorts of unheard of luxuries regularly delivered once a week.
Thanks to Evill getting into hospital with fever and being sent over to Zanzibar to convalesce we have managed to fill up with stores and are doing fairly well at the moment. It’s impossible to carry stuff to carry on with for long. Rations are well enough up to a point, you can live on them but that is about all you can say. There is of course absolutely no variety. Meat and biscuit are not ideal foods for a tropical country.

We can’t get hold of any writing paper. This stuff belongs to the Central Railway and was looted from their store I believe. The only people in this country, beside the Boma, who sell anything are the Y.M.C.A. and they never have any goods except at the bases.

I haven’t been down to Dar-es-Salaam yet, but am told it is quite a decent well laid out sort of place and practically undamaged.

Morogoro is a wretched little hole. A regular little third class township. A few decent houses round the Secretariat place on the hill behind, but the town itself lies right down in a hole and is chiefly bazaar.

The Bosch has extraordinary ideas of what sort of house is suitable for a tropical country apparently, and never has a decent window or veranda. I expect it was the same in the Cameroons, (Ralph Sneyd had been involved in the German Cameroons campaign winning the D.S.O.). All the houses on the rubber estates and other places where he lives appear to be built in the style which he would like for a small farm in Germany and the furniture also appears to have come from the Hun Maples (famous furniture store in London) in Berlin, the difference between the ordinary English house in the tropics and the Hun’s idea of comfort in a hot climate is extraordinarily marked.

They do not seem to have treated the native too badly, but were of course very strict with them and made him work for their benefit for a wage whether he wanted to or not. Their Askaris certainly have stuck to them in a most marvellous way.

The Hun really has put up a wonderfully good show out here this last year. Their Commander von Lettow deserves his Iron Cross, but it’s about time he chucked his hand in.

Our difficulty has of course been transport and at times we have been very hard put to it. However I hope that we shall never be so far away from our railways and bases again.

I haven’t had any fever for quite a bit, but the whole of this low lying country is bad, and there are very few people in the Force who haven’t had their fair share. We have been in feverish country ever since we started down the Pangani valley, and of course under the very worst conditions, so that the marvel would be if we did not all get fever.

The Hun anyway should be worse than we are, as he has to spend all his time in a perfectly beastly bit of country.

I am afraid we shall have to set out to look for him soon though.

Yours affectionately

Robin T Sneyd.
Smuts’ Campaign in German East Africa. December 1916 – March 1917

Extracts from German East by Brian Gardner (Cassell and Co, 1963)

The months of October, November and December 1916 were months of re-organization for Lieutenant General Smuts’s armies. The Central Railway was under British control. Colonel von Lettow had retired across the Rufiji River into the south eastern corner of German East Africa.

Smuts was anxious to get on the move as soon as possible. The heavy rains would come in March and Smuts wanted to reach the Rufiji River and defeat Von Lettow by then. The area that lay before the army was notoriously unhealthy, even more so than that already covered. It was interspersed with mosquito-infested swamps.

The decision had been taken for the European and South African troops to be replaced by black African troops. Before the end of 1916, 12,000 South African troops had returned to their country.

The 25th Fusiliers, who were by now just a handful of men, were to be reinforced by a large draft from the United Kingdom. Additional battalions of the King’s African Rifles (KAR) had been formed and the Nigerian Brigade, over 3,000 strong, was on its way to East Africa. A battalion had been formed (6th KAR) from captured German Askari and deserters. Some white South Africans would remain with van Deventer for the time being. With this new force, mostly black African, some Indian infantry and gunners, the Gold Coast Regiment and the Gambia Company, Smuts hoped to be able to finish the campaign in January 1917.

The forces of Northey and van Deventer, based on Lupembe and Kilosa respectively, were static, the latter much reduced and practically ineffective through sickness and supply difficulties. They were far apart from the main campaign. It was hoped that Northey would be able to join up with the Portuguese near the Mozambique border and prevent any chance of von Lettow’s forces moving into that area. These two forces would also have to try and stop Wahle’s column from reaching von Lettow’s main force north of the Rufiji.

Smuts decided to land a force at Kilwa, a port on the coast to the south of the various mouths of the River Rufiji, which was behind the enemy lines, and march inland from there. This would be combined with a frontal assault on von Lettow’s positions south of the Mgeta. Northey and van Deventer were to renew their marches south-east at the same time.

Hannyngton, who commanded a Brigade on the Mgeta under Hoskins, was brought back to Morogoro to receive instructions.

Arriving in an exhausted state, Hannyngton was told he was to take charge of the Kilwa force. This was to consist of the Loyal North Lancashires (before their departure from the campaign for Egypt), two battalions of KAR and two Indian battalions.

An article on The Faridkots written in the series about units that served alongside the 2nd Battalion of the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment commented that the Faridkot Sappers and Miners pulled their weight and were a credit to the Imperial Service system organised amongst the Princely States of India.
There were three main German forces: Wahle’s at Mahenge; a town in the hills to the west of the Rufiji River; a small force at the Mgeta under Captain Tafel; Von Lettow’s main force preparing to attack Kibata, a town inland of Kilwa.

Von Lettow failed to take Kibata, keeping Hoskins’s force lightly engaged, he withdrew to the swampy area southwards. Most of Tafel’s force had also withdrawn, to the south bank of the Rufiji, having used up practically every crop between the river and the Mgeta. Von Lettow was now on the very brink of the wilderness. The Portuguese had been forced back across the Ruvuma into their own territory of Mozambique by the tiny German force in that area.

On the Mgeta front preparations by the Allies were now well under way to reach the Rufiji and force a crossing. The Allied Headquarters moved forward from Morogoro (Smuts always liked to be near the front during an attack).

A forward depot of supplies and ammunition had been completed, and the road from the railway had been improved, although work on it was still continuous. As soon as one section of this road was completed, another slipped into a valley below. Some parts of it were supported by stakes driven into
the hillside. Causeways were built across the swamps.

Many thought that the Royal Engineer officers in East Africa did a better job than anyone else, and there is much to support this claim.

On Christmas Day 1916 it rained; and it continued to rain for forty-eight hours. All traffic on the road was suspended and operations postponed. While Smuts was making his final preparations to cross the Rufiji and join up with Hoskins’s force, thus surrounding von Lettow and cutting him off from Wahle at the same stroke, von Lettow had already begun to withdraw from the net of Allied troops which was closing in on him.

As well as the general advance from the Mgeta, a special column, which included a half Company of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners, led by Lieutenant Robin Sneyd, under Brigadier-General Beves, was to make a dash for the Rufiji further west in an isolated crossing. Smuts, who was obsessed with flanking movements, hoped in this way to outflank the German force under Tafel, as a small part in the overall flanking move against von Lettow.

The frontal advance had to be called off after only a few miles. The troops were by then wading in water up to their waists. The Nigerians, who were to be the main attacking force, had nearly 400 men down with pneumonia.

The Nigerian Brigade were after the first few days withdrawn from the offensive as it was found to be only partially equipped, lacking even small arms, these deficiencies were quickly remedied and the Nigerian Brigade was ordered to Beves’s crossing at Kiperio which at the time looked more promising than Kibambwe.

Orders were issued for the general offensive to begin on New Year’s Day.

**The Faridkot Sappers and Miners. 9 December to 31 December 1916**

The right half Company under Major Tillard left Morogoro on 9 December 1916 for the Kuroka Pass. Lieutenant Sneyd and the left half Company left Morogoro on the 10th for Mikasse where they would be based until the 25th. Rejoining the right half Company at Dakawa, Major Tillard and Lieutenant Sneyd left Dakawa with General Beves’s Force Reserve. Sneyd was sent ahead first to Kirengwe and then Lumanga. The following day they left Morogoro for Mikesse where they camped in their former camp site. They stayed there from 12 December to 20 December, unloading the pontoons, naval boats and stores.

On 21 December the left half company of the Faridkots accompanied the Army Artillery as far as the summit of the Morogoro to Kisaki road, and then worked down the Kisaki road gathering assistance from the Road Corps as necessary. Mount Kimmandu in this mountain range rises to 8,681 ft. They camped at Matombo with Lieutenant Colonel Collins in charge of the Royal Engineers in the 1st East African Division. The next day they returned to Mikesse and stayed there until Christmas Day. The left half Company of the Faridkots with Lieutenant Sneyd left Mikesse at 7 am by car to join up with Tillard and the right half Company at Dakawa at 4:30 pm. The latter had left Morogoro on 9 December and had joined the 1st East African Rifles at Dakawa, which was a crossing on the Wami River, a few miles north of the Central Railway and about twenty miles north west of Morogoro.

Rain prevented the movement of General Beves’s column between 26 and 29 December. The left half Company of the Faridkots left Dakawa in lorries on the 27th and eventually arrived at the Rufiji River at Kibambwe on 7 January 1917.

On 30 December the right half Company of the Faridkots with Lieutenant Sneyd and Major Tillard marched from Dakawa with General Beves’s Force Reserve at 4:30 am. This column consisted mainly of South African troops including a battalion of the coloured Cape Corps, that had proved itself a unit that could march and fight better than many others.
The column had been ordered to force its way through jungle and thick bush to reach the Rufiji River at an isolated crossing further west than the main crossing for Smuts’s main force. The column arrived at Kisaki Fort with all the porters and supplies. Lieutenant Sneyd was ordered to proceed ahead of the main Column to Kirengwe. The right half Company and porters marched at 5 pm and camped at 8 pm six miles out.

On 31 December Lieutenant Sneyd and his half Company marched at 5 am and arrived at Kirengwe at 7 am where they prepared the water supply. General Beves’s main column arrived at 9 am, and were ordered to proceed, cutting the road as they went. They marched from Kirengwe at 10 am.

Lieutenant Sneyd with one squad proceeded to Lumanga where, at 4:30 pm, he found water sufficient for the Reserve Force. Major Tillard with the porters and Sappers was cutting and making drifts. Lieutenant Sneyd went back to Major Tillard and reported on the water supply at Lumanga, and then took the porters back to Lumanga. Major Tillard stopped on the road.
The Faridkot Sappers and Miners in German East Africa. 1 January 1917 to 4 April 1917

The establishment of the bridgehead over the Rufiji River at Kiperio on 3rd January 1917 involving the right half Company of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners

Figure 20. Map showing the advance to the Rufiji River.
(See Official History of East Africa, Sketch 76)

In Figure 42 (above) the right hand section of the Faridkots under Lieutenant Sneyd took under General Beves the left hand route to Kiperio. The left hand section under Captain Evill took the main hand route under General Sheppard to Kibambwe.

The above map is taken from “Fighting for the Rufiji River Crossing”, the British East African Brigade in action GEA 1st – 19th January 1917: Article, maps and images contributed by Harry Fecitt.

On 1 January 1917, the day that the new offensive officially began, Lieutenant Sneyd with the right half of the company started porters cutting the thick belt of bush at 5 am. The Sappers were cutting a drift at Lumanga. Sneyd provided the water supply by setting up a tarpaulin and pumping water into it. The column arrived at 8 am and marched at 3 pm for Hobola cutting the road. They arrived at 5:30 pm.

On the morning of 2 January the force set out at 5 am to do its usual march, cutting a track as far as Point 30 at 12:15 pm, and making the road fit for light cars.

Orders reached General Beves from General Smuts that an advance column should push on and seize the Rufiji River crossing by day break on the morning of 3 January. An advance party led by Major Philip Jacobus Pretorius D.S.O. Chief Scout for General Smuts, set off at 2 pm to cover the 17 miles to the Rufiji.

This advance group consisted of a double company of the Cape Corps, a section of the Mountain Battery, and the right half company of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners led by Lieutenant Sneyd accompanied by 400 porters carrying Berthon boat equipment. These boats had been designed by a British clergyman in India, the Reverend E.L. Berthon. They had been introduced into the Indian Army for operations on the North West Frontier and were capable of carrying only three men including the crewman.

The advance group reached Mhumbi, where there were water holes, at 7:30 pm on 2 January.

Sneyd’s Field Notes record that they halted at Mhumbi, and fed. The porters were “done out”, yet were still capable of going on. They marched at 11 pm, and were supposed to arrive at the river at 3 am, but at 3 am they had not yet reached it and Sneyd went up the line. Everything seemed alright and the porters fairly closed up. At 3:45 am Sneyd discovered that the porters had lost touch both with the main advance column, and the track. Sneyd went on a bit and saw the river straight ahead. He sent the Askari down to the river, no sign of the track. Sneyd then took his half company and the 400 porters to the right, parallel with the river and slightly inland, to get behind a ridge as the country was rather open, and all movements were visible from the opposite bank as daylight was breaking. They moved more inland, and managed to pick up the track at 5:30 am. They arrived at the river bank and camped at 6 am on the morning of 3 January. All the porters were absolutely done and had to be driven all the last part of the march. They had been marching since 5 am the day before and had covered 53 miles in four days over a trackless country. The porters carried the boats and other heavy loads by adopting the strategy of two carrying and two resting. By any standards this was an epic effort by everybody concerned, especially the porters.

Sneyd took the boats straight down to the river, which at this point was about 200 yards broad, and
prepared a site, under a sand bank, for launching the rowing boats. There was no sign of anybody on the opposite bank. All six boats were put simultaneously into the water and Sneyd and Cape Corps volunteers rowed the first lot across. There was no opposition from the far bank.

Lieutenant Sneyd records:-

January 3rd
At 9:30 am started putting the raft together. Put up the cable for the flying bridge, but not sufficient current. Progress delayed by tired men breaking the cable etc. Not ready for work until 1:30 pm. I took one section and the remainder of the Cape Corps across the Rufiji. The bridgehead at Kiperio was now safe.
Lieutenant Robert Thomas Stuart Sneyd received the Military Cross for his courageous achievement in crossing the River Rufiji at Kiperio and making it possible for General Beves’s advance force to form a bridge head on the far side of the river.

Lieutenant Sneyd records:-

    January 4.
    Crossed the Advanced Force from 6:30 am till 2 am on the 5th of January.

    January 5.
    Crossed Force and Brigade train from 6:30 am until 3 am on the 6th of January when all transport etc was over.

    January 6.
    Fairly quiet day at the crossing, rations etc.

    January 7.
Beves’ Force moved out and attacked a German Company on the ridge, east of Mamalinso and scattered them. The Germans were amazed to find the South Africans already across the river. At the village, Beves’ signallers were able to tap the German line between von Lettow’s and Wahle’s forces without the Germans being aware of it for 36 hours.

Soon after this Smuts ordered Beves to withdraw his troops to the entrenched bridgehead, probably because of the problems of extended supply lines.

January 8.
Working raft, crossed 400 Cape Corps reinforcements.
January 9.
The right half company of the Faridkots moved their camp at Kiperio and the raft to a better crossing place 600 yards upstream. The necessary pontoons for the raft or flying bridge had been specially built in the Royal Engineers’ workshops some months before.
January 10th to 14th Crossing rations.

January 15th.
Working raft, fitted up tarpaulin, the raft crossed the Nigerian Brigade with all the porters in one day.

The establishment of a bridgehead over the Rufiji at Kibambawe on 7th January 1917 involving the left half company of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners under Captain Evill.

This section includes information from Harry Fecitt’s article “Fighting for the Rufiji River Crossing” The British East African Brigade in action GEA 1st – 19th January 1917.

The advance to to the Rufiji by the 1st East African Brigade started on New Years Eve having been postponed from Christmas day 1916 because of torrential rain that stopped any movement until the ground had dried out. The 130th Baluchis crossed the Mgeta, capturing a forward enemy position and finding that the Germans in it were inebriated, the remaining German champagne was removed to the Baluchi officer’s mess.

A double company of Baluchis was detached to Wiransi, the rest of the battalion cut a road to Dakawa. A German detachment under the command of Lieutenant Udo von Chappuis blocked the Baluchis with machine gun fire killing 36 Baluchis and wounding 29. The Germans broke contact on the approach of the main British Brigade column and moved off through the bush bypassing Wiransi.

On the 3rd of January 1st East African Brigade made an exhausting cross-country march culminating in a 60-metre descent over a field of huge boulders. This stretched the column out and considerably slowed down the porters carrying the machine guns, reserve ammunition, water and rations. The Brigade Commander halted his exhausted men for the night a few kilometres short of their destination.

The following morning at dawn 25th Royal Fusiliers led the advance followed by 3rd Kashmir Rifles and 30th Punjabis. Behobeho Chogowall was reached without incident and the advance turned north to Behobeho Kwa Mahinda where they were attacked by the Wangoni company part of the force commanded by Captain Ernst Otto. About twenty of the Allied troops were killed including the famous Scout Captain Frederick Courtney Selous D.S.O. The Germans only broke contact when the 13th Baluchis approached from the north.
Figure 22. Sketch map of the Rufiji River crossing
(see Official History East Africa, Sketch 77)

The left hand section of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners under Captain Evill established the Berthon boat ferry, top left corner of map.

Figure 23. Rufiji River with hippo. Photo taken by Harry Fecitt.

On the 5th of January, 1st East African Brigade followed up Otto’s withdrawal with the Baluchis leading. On reaching the north bank of the Rufiji, the Germans had entrenched and abandoned a prominent hill above the river. The Brigade occupied the hill naming it Observation Hill because of the wide view it commanded. The width of the river at this point varied from 350 to 650 metres and the depth made it unfordable. The Germans had broken the two sections of the road bridge which crossing a small island linked the north and south banks.

Two Royal Navy ship’s lifeboats had been carried and hauled through the bush by relays of exhausted porters, but when the lifeboats arrived at the Rufiji it was found that the oars had not been packed in the boats.

A small reconnaissance party were rowed across to the south bank under Captain J.C. Pottinger M.C. Throughout the 6th of January the Germans were unaware of this tiny bridgehead. During the day the bridgehead troops, suffering from pangs of thirst and hunger lay still concealed by beds of reeds. That night the remainder of the Punjabis and one company of the Baluchis crossed into the bridgehead and entrenched there under the command of the Punjabi’s commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Arthur Ward. The Germans attacked the bridgehead on the morning of the 7th of January and inflicted heavy casualties on the Punjabis.

On the night of the 7th the remainder of the 130th Baluchis and a company of Kashmiris were ferried across the river by the Berthon boat ferry set up by the left half of the Faridkot Sappers and Miners led by Captain Evill I.A.R.O. bringing the total number of troops on the south bank
to 600 armed with ten machine guns. Enough force to hold the bridgehead but not enough to drive the Germans back.

By the 18th of January Captain Otto had pulled back most of his companies having heard the reports of the successful allied crossing at Kiperio. Von Lettow made another tactical withdrawal and re-grouped his forces for the rainy season.

This crossing of the Rufiji at Kibambwe had been achieved with difficulty and loss of life especially the Punjabis who suffered very severe casualties from the Germans who strongly defended their bank of the river.

A herd of hippotami prevented the first attempts at crossing as they attacked and overturned a boat killing the soldiers aboard. The hippos could not be shot at as the rifle fire would have alerted the German Askari on the far bank.

The left half company of the Faridkots stayed at the Kibambwe crossing until the middle of February.

January 9.
The right half Company of the Faridkots moved their camp at Kiperio and the raft to a better crossing place 600 yards upstream. The Force came back to camp.

January 10 to 14.
Crossing rations etc.

January 15. Working raft, fitted up tarpaulin, the raft crossed the Nigerian Brigade, with all the porters etc in one day.

The Nigerian Brigade had, after the first few days, been withdrawn from the offensive as it was found to be only partly equipped, lacking even small arms. The brigade was at once supplied with arms and once fully armed was ordered to Beves’s Rufiji River crossing which looked at that time the more promising of the two crossings.

January 16 to February 1.
Working the raft at Kiperio (Beves’s crossing), not much doing most of the time.

On 2 February Sneyd walked from Kiperio, via M’kindu to Kibambawe, the other river crossing. He left at 6 am with four porters and a two man escort and arrived at Kibambawe at 3 pm having covered 23 miles. Sneyd crossed the river and found his colleagues Evill, McClintock, Smeeth and the left half Company on the further bank. The next day he saw General Beves and General Sheppard. One possible reason for this personal meeting may have been for Sneyd to receive his Military Cross which he had won for his distinguished conduct in leading the initial crossing of the Rufiji at Kiperio. There had been every chance that the Kiperio crossing would be strongly opposed by the Germans who put up very strong resistance to the Kibambawe crossing. The two Generals made arrangements to bring Major Tillard and one section from Kiperio. Sneyd noted that the Kibambawe crossing was perfectly appallingly bad. Arrangements were being made to move the crossing to a better place four miles upstream.
On the 4th of February Sneyd and an escort started at 7 am from Kibambawe and walked up the new road path getting to Kiperio at 5:30 pm. Tillard with one section had left at 2 pm. Sneyd remained with 25 men, watching the crossing for the next fortnight and then on the 20th left with his section at 2:30 pm and camped 3 miles west of Makalino on left bank to a new crossing at Rubia; they crossed the river after breakfast with Smeath.

Lieutenant Sneyd recorded:

**February 21.**
Arrived at the new crossing at Rubia at 10:30 am. Found Tillard and the half Company of Faridkots. The other half Company with Evill was at Baku Baku.

**February 22 to 24.**
Stayed at Kibambawe.

**February 25.**
Major Tillard, Colonel Nand Singh and 6 Rank and File left Rufiji for Dar-es-Salaam en route for India.

**February 26 to March 1.**
The Faridkots continued to maintain communications across the Rufiji River and bridging the track from Kibambawe back to Bakawa. Good communications and supplies depended on the maintenance of this track.
March 2.
Captain Evill and the other half Company came in.

March 3 to 11.
Running the ferries across the new crossing of the Rufiji River.

March 12.
Left Rufiji new crossing with Headquarters and Company less Subadur Raghubir Singh, Jamadur Chet Singh 20 Rank and File and 20 Wataita porters remaining to work ferries.

As Lieutenant Sneyd records:-

This small detachment had a most difficult and important task during exceptional floods keeping up the flying bridge which was the only means of communication with the Nigerian Brigade who stayed on the further bank during the rains of 1917. Major Singh and two Sappers were respectively awarded the D.S.M. and V.S.M. for their work in clearing the cables during the floods and keeping the boats running, a task of no little danger.

The rest of the company marched to Telagawata with the porters not carrying any loads, covering 11 miles.

March 13.
Marched from Tchogawali for 14 miles to Wiranzi which they reached at 1 pm.

March 14.
Marched from Wiranzi and arrived at Dakawa at 1 pm.

March 15.
Dakawa to Duthomi, 8 miles. - mule A.T. carts.

March 16.
Halted at Duthomi and did a few light repairs to bridge.

March 17.
Duthomi to Tulo 12 miles, porter transport.

March 18.
Tulo to Summit. Porter transport. Stopped with Lieutenant Colonel McClintock R.E. for the night. (McClintock had been promoted from being the Major in charge of the Royal Engineers in the East African 2nd Division).

March 19.
Summit to Ruwu River. Porters to Matombo. Jigger cars (hand controlled trolley or cable cars) from there on.

March 20.
Settled into camp at Ruwu River, building bandas etc.

March 21.
Started building suspension bridge for foot traffic. 210 foot span across the Ruwu River.

March 22.
Cut a few timbers for the bridge. The majority of the men and porters building bandas etc.

March 23 - 25.
Building foot bridge across the Ruwu River.

March 26.
Road bridge washed away by flood ten foot over roadway. Fitted up traveller across river.

March 27.
Continued work on suspension bridge. Traffic on the road between the Ruwu River and the summit held up as several bridges washed away.

March 28 and 29.
Transport brought 30 jiggers across by traveller.

March 30.
Suspension bridge open for traffic.

March 31
Road to Summit open for jiggers.

April 1.
Bridge completed.

April 2.
Moved up to Ruwu top in the afternoon.

April 3.
Went on to Mikesse by jigger cars with all the Company and equipment.

April 4.
Travelled by rail from Mikesse to Morogoro.
Part Nine

The Campaign in German East Africa. From March 1917 until October 1917

Extracts from Brian Gardner’s German East (Cassell & Co, 1963)

General Smuts’s plan to cross the Rufiji, a very difficult task, had met with brilliant success; his attempt to outmanoeuvre and surround his enemy by a series of inter-related flanking movements had failed. On the Rufiji, an advance from the southern bank was slow and meeting considerable opposition. From Kilwa, also, the advance was not nearly speedy enough to achieve its objective, even though the bulk of von Lettow’s opposing force had already retired. Even when the thrusts from the Rufiji and Kilwa were only forty miles apart, the Germans were still able to slip through the gap practically unscathed to their main stronghold at Mahenge.

All the South African troops in van Deventer’s column were to be relieved and replaced by Indians. General Beves’s Brigade was now to return to the Union, in common with the other South African troops except for the coloured Cape Corps. Most of the main force on the Rufiji was also broken up and sent north. This area was now left mainly to the Nigerians.

General Smuts was called away from German East Africa in February 1917 to represent South Africa at the Imperial Defence Conference in London. His work in German East Africa was unfinished. Before leaving, Smuts publicly declared that the campaign was over and that all that remained to be done was to sweep up the remnants of the enemy force. This view was not unnaturally, accepted by the War Office, but it put his successor, Major-General Hoskins, in an embarrassing position. He was expected to finish off the campaign in a few weeks and clear up the mess that Smuts had left behind.

Smuts had succeeded, in eleven months in taking a large tract of enemy territory. On his departure only a small corner in the south east of German East Africa was still in German hands. Smuts had achieved this not only against a resolute enemy, but against every conceivable difficulty of supply and with a dwindling army at times so fatigued and dispirited that only his strength of character and determination seemed to keep the army going. Smuts had worked his troops ruthlessly and hard in his attempt to gain victory.

The British Official History of the Great War after enumerating Smuts’s achievements in the campaign says: “Yet still the enemy, in ever dwindling numbers, but handled with unfailing skill by a master of strategic retreat, remained in being”.

General Hoskins prepared to carry out Smuts’s general strategy. This was for the Rufiji force with the Nigerians to link up with Hannyngton’s force from Kilwa, and for a further advance to take place from the port of Lindi, 100 miles south of Kilwa, which was to cut off the retreat of von Lettow who would, it was hoped, by then be retreating pell-mell before the combined Rufiji-Kilwa forces. General Northey’s column was to move in from the west towards the Lindi force. Hoskins was to make proper use of the ports as bases.

No sooner had Hoskins taken over than the Nigerians suffered a serious set-back. As on previous occasions the Germans were unable to follow up their success. The rains became heavy by the beginning of February, somewhat earlier than had been expected. Before long, vast tracts of the battle area around the Rufiji were impassable swamps. Roads and bridges were so damaged that Hoskins decided to call off any further attempts to advance and many troops were recalled to the railway. There was little activity on the Kilwa front, most of the German force there, under General Wahle, had withdrawn to the Lindi area where there was a large build-up of British troops. The Mahenge force was now commanded by Tafel who had gone there from the Rufiji.

General Northey’s Allied force continued a slow advance, carefully guarding and worrying over its 200 mile long supply line from Lake Nyasa.
The Allied troops’ journey back from the Rufiji area, which had been won with such difficulty, was an unhappy business. All question of using the Rufiji River as a supply line had to be abandoned due to the huge torrent flowing at nearly 20 mph.

March and April continued to see little action, because of months of famine on some fronts and of preparation on others such as Lindi. There is no doubt that during this period many Allied soldiers died of starvation owing to the inability to get supplies through.

Figure 25. The Mahenge Plateau

A German column in the Mahenge area refused to withdraw and spent the spring and summer of 1917 being chased all over German East, and was the cause of considerable excitement at bases and small towns where the war had been thought to have moved on for ever, months before.

Figure 26. General Reginald Hoskins

By the third week of April 1917 some of the equipment that General Hoskins had been asking for, arrived in East Africa including 484 light lorries, 400 Lewis guns, 12 of the new 2.75 mountain guns and twenty Stokes mortars. General Hoskins had taken over a force in the worst of condition and had done much to restore its fighting effectiveness. Much remained to be done, but he had been successful despite an exceptionally wet season, the prevalence of disease and the physical weakness of the troops under his command.

Back in London the CIGS General Robertson had decided that Hoskins had to go and on 23 May 1917
the War Cabinet decided to dismiss Hoskins. At General Smuts’s suggestion his old Boer protégé van Deventer was appointed in Hoskins’s place.

By the spring of 1917 Britain was running out of money to fund the war which was throttling Britain’s seaborne trade. The Russians had been defeated by the Germans and there had been mutinies in the French Army. At home civilian morale was low and Lloyd George was looking for a striking victory that would lift morale.

There was little hope of a major victory in German East Africa but van Deventer was told to prevent the Germans from leaving German East Africa and entering Portuguese East Africa.

On his arrival in East Africa on 29 May 1917 van Deventer as the new Commander-in-Chief passed on his instructions from the British Government, which were to finish the war very quickly because of the needs of the other theatres of war and to release shipping urgently required elsewhere.

It was not until the end of May 1917 that the rains stopped and the land finally began to dry out and the much needed supplies began to get through to the hungry men who had stayed in the front line. From May 1916, till the Armistice 11 November 1918, the campaign in German East was known by those who were in it as “the hungry war”.

Hoskins’ sudden and seemingly un-merited dismissal caused a good deal of bitterness among the non-South African members of his staff. Van Deventer’s first few weeks with his G.H.Q. at Dar-es-Salaam were difficult. He was as taciturn as ever and he still had difficulty in expressing himself in English to the many Allied staff officers. It was found necessary to carry on all business with his English-speaking staff through an interpreter. The new appointment coincided with the end of the rains and the advance continued some way on the Rufiji, against little opposition, until a point nearly parallel with Kilwa on the coast. General van Deventer had learnt from bitter experience the futility of trying to out-maneuuvre the Germans in such difficult terrain and he grasped that they had to be defeated in battle. He also clearly understood that operational plans had to be based on sound planning and administration.

The new policy was to strike hard at the enemy inflicting as many casualties as possible, lowering their morale and the will to continue, cutting the German’s supply routes and eliminating the areas where the Germans grew their food.

Brigadier Sheppard remained as van Deventer’s Chief of General Staff, and commanded most of the Nigerians and Indians from the Rufiji area. A fierce battle was fought near Nahangu, not far from Liwale. The Lindi force was joined by the 25th Fusiliers who had returned from a rest in South Africa in time for the opening of the new offensive which was aimed at Lindi. This was a direct line of advance that would cut off any German retreat towards the Portuguese border. The terrain was difficult and the area unhealthy. Lindi harbour had limitations and could only be used by a proportion of the available shipping.

The Allies’ new offensive in 1917 could not begin before the end of June at the earliest when the countryside had dried out after the rains.

British agents supplied the Makonde people with arms and ammunition for use against the Germans, their nominal overlords. German food gathering parties were attacked and harassed by the Makonde.

As van Deventer’s offensive rolled on the War Cabinet in London recognised that East Africa took up 11 per cent of the shipping needs in all the war zones; 34 per cent of the troop and horse carrying ships and 22 per cent of the hospital ships. The British Government faced a dilemma – it could not cut shipping without finishing the campaign and it could not finish the campaign without adequate shipping. East Africa was a drain on resources but not important enough to justify substantial additional effort.

The last big battle of the campaign began on 15 October 1917 at Mahiwa. The Allied forces from Kilwa and Lindi were only about 12 miles apart. The whole German force was concentrated in a few square miles, desperately trying to free itself and reach the Rovuma River on the frontier with Portuguese East Africa. The four days fighting in the Battle of Mahiwa cost the Allied forces 2,700 casualties, out of a
total infantry force engaged of 4,900. Their losses were, therefore, more than 50 per cent of the number of Allied troops engaged. The German force of 1,500 had 519 casualties. After this mauling, no further advance was attempted by the Lindi and Kilwa columns during October 1917.

Figure 27. L59 Airship sent by Berlin with supplies

While the Schutztruppe was steadily being driven back the Admiralty in Germany agreed that it was feasible to send an airship loaded with supplies and medicine into the heart of the colony. In the autumn of 1917, L57 a naval airship, capable of carrying 15 tons of cargo was prepared but the craft was destroyed by fire during a test flight. The British had been aware of the scheme right from the start.

The Germans arranged for a specially modified dirigible, the 226-metre-long L59, the largest airship built at that time, to make the long journey. After several false starts for technical reasons the dirigible left Jamboli in Bulgaria on 21 November 1917 with ten tons of ammunition and five tons of medicine, equipment and food. The British had intercepted the German wireless traffic and possibly sent the message of recall on the grounds that the military situation on the Mahenge plateau was hopeless. Storms had disrupted German communications and the German Admiralty was unable to recall the dirigible, eventually a message, supposedly from the Schutztruppe was received at Khartoum on 13 November and the dirigible returned to Jumbali having travelled over 6,000 kilometres without delivering its much needed cargo.

The Faridkot Sappers and Miners in German East Africa. From 5 April 1917 until January 1918

Morogoro. Rufiji road from Mikesse to Ruvu Top. Supporting the Belgians around Mahenge. Supporting the Belgians and the Nigerian Brigade in the Rovuma River area

The rains were heavy in 1917. The Faridkots had spent much of the time since reaching the Rufiji River in early January in keeping the river crossings open and then repairing the main track back from the Rufiji to Kibambawe.

On 5 April the two halves of the company were reunited at Morogoro, a town on the Central Railway line. The company was expecting a complete refit and rest at Morogoro until the end of May.

Communications to the Rufiji were however in a parlous condition and the company was despatched on April 18th to aid in the maintenance of the Rufiji road from Mikesse to Ruvu Top, the transport working the road being light car convoys. They were thus occupied in one of the most unhealthy portions of the whole country till the middle of June when the Faridkots were again withdrawn to Morogoro to refit.

Lieutenant Sneyd’s Field Notes record:-

April 5 to 15.
The Faridkots stayed at Morogoro for a rest and refit.

April 16.
Left Morogoro by train for Dar-es-Salaam. Arrived at Dar-es-Salaam at 11 am on the 17th of April

A letter to his sister Norna in India indicated that he had been hoping for a longer leave but got “shot out of Dar”. He left Dar-es-Salaam on 21 April arriving in Mikesse at 11 am where he was met by Major King who took him out to the Faridkot’s Company at Mita.

April 23-25.
The Company working on the road. Waited at Kingi for orders to move on.

April 26.
Left Mita and G10 by car with own kit in the morning. Twelve men had marched to Ruwu Top the previous night. Arrived at Ruwu Top at 10 am.

April 27.
Awaiting porters from Mile 10 to take me on. Porters arrived at 2 pm.

April 28.
The porters and twelve men marched at 7 am at the Summit. Walked to Ruwu River thence by Jigger to Summit, arrived at 2 pm and had dinner and tea with Walmesley.

April 29.
Could not get transport and marched to Mera Bottom in the evening. Halted there for the evening.

April 30.
Porter transport Mera Bottom to Tula, waded half a mile, through 6” to 2 ft 6” water at Mua Swamp.

May 1.
Tulo to Duthumi road, heavy march, a terrible 12 miles. Arrived at 2 pm.

May 2.
Duthumi to Dakawa to Mgeta. The water at the drift at Qua Hondo above one’s waist. Dakawa to Mgeta the water was all the way from knees to waist.

May 3.
Mgeta to Wiransi. 12th mile in water about 18” deep. Remainder good going.

May 4
Wiransi to Tchogawali, fair going, 15 miles.

May 5.
Tchogawali to Rufiji, fair going, last march, found everything correct my journey unnecessary.

May 6 to June 1.
Based at Rufiji. Varying conditions of weather etc. Living in Doctor’s Mess. No 22 CC and 32 B.S.H. with Varvill, Sutton, Rickworth, food fairly plentiful and on the whole not too bad.

Robin Sneyd started a letter on 14 May 1917 to his sister Norna who was still in India.

Got shot out of Dar to walk back to our old haunts, through the rain. It was about the most pestilential safari that can be imagined. The road was bad enough when we went back along it some two months ago. But now it is a case of wading along considerable portions of the last 70 miles, sometimes through rivers, sometimes through swamps up to one’s waist.

The wretched porters generally have managed to get through with food, somehow or other, but they don’t exactly enjoy life and the crocs have also had their whack of them. The rains are at last just about over thank goodness, and our spring campaign will I suppose soon be beginning. I wonder whether it will be the last effort or whether we shall be somewhere in Portuguese East this time next year, it is quite on the cards.

The letter continues on 19 May 1917.

We have just heard of the appointment of Van Deventer to command out here. We are a truly wonderful nation. I expect you will have gone home by the time I get back to India, provided they will let you go which I suppose they won’t do at present or for a
considerable time to come.

The whole show is becoming too boring for words, and I am beginning to feel that I have already spent a good part of my life wandering about the bush and there is an endless prospect of more of it.

It is perfectly easy to say that this campaign is ended but like the old Boer War there is no end to it, and in the meantime one gets no leave, only a modicum of food and all the added joys of the plagues of Egypt.

We don’t know any news so having nothing to tell about except our own grousers. I had better shut up.

Norna Sneyd had written two notes on the bottom of the letter:

1. The Kashmiri Rifles have just arrived back at Lahore from East Africa. So perhaps R’s lot will come soon.
2. I saw in the Pioneer yesterday that the British Navy and the soldiers on shore had attacked a coast port occupied by the Huns, who fled south.

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Figure 28. Lieutenant Robin Sneyd’s 2nd Mention in Despatches

Lt. R.T.S. Sneyd, M.C., I.A.R.O., attd Faridkot I.S. Sappers and Miners, was mentioned in a Despatch from Major General A.R. Hoskins C.M.G. D.S.O. dated 30th May 1917. “For gallant and distinguished services in the Field. I have it in command from the King to record His Majesty’s high appreciation of the services rendered”. Signed by Winston S. Churchill, Secretary of State for War. Sent from the War Office, Whitehall S.W., 1 March 1919.

Robin Sneyd’s second Mention in Despatches was probably awarded for his efforts in trying to keep the supply route to Rufiji in some sort of order through the rains.

Sneyd’s Field notes record:

June 2.
Rufiji to Chogowali. Self, Jamadur Chat Singh, 4 ranks, and 5 Teitas, went by car to within one mile of Tchogowali with Martinel of B.W.I.
June 3.  
Tchogowali to Wiransi.

June 4.  
Tchogowali to Mgeta. Found King and Turner at Moeta River, thence by car to the Summit.

June 5.  
Dakawa to Buthumi in King's car.

June 6.  
Duthumi to Tulo. Three miles in King's car. Thence 5 miles walking. 3 miles in car belonging to No 5 Section, East African Pioneers.

June 7.  

June 8.  

The Faridkots had been working for weeks in the Rufiji area, one of the most unhealthy parts of German East Africa. Previous attempts to have a rest and refit had been cut short. This time the Company remained at Morogoro till the end of July.

Sneyd records:-

June 9 to 22nd July 1917.  
The Faridkot Sappers and Miners had a rest and refit.

July 23.  
Left Morogoro by train with No 1. Section and 25 porters, arrived at Kilossa at 6 pm. Slept in detail camp.

Kilossa was a station to the west of Morogoro on the Central Railway Line. Sneyd’s detachment of the Faridkots had been despatched to assist the Belgian column which was advancing southwards from Kilossa towards Mahenge to prevent von Lettow and Tafel joining forces. The remainder of the Faridkots were attached to a column operating against a German Force which had broken back into the country, north of the Central Railway.

July 24.  

July 25 to July 28th.  
Work on road. Miombe to Mile 6 to Kilossa to Kikumi. Started work strengthening bridge.

July 29.  
Met the Colonel R.E. at Kilossa. Got instructions and went back to mile 6.

July 30.  
Marched from mile 6 to mile 10. Working en route. Camped at Mile 10.

August 1st and 2nd.  
Worked at miles 16 and 17.
August 3rd.
Marched mile 15 back to mile 10.

August 4th to August 26th
Received 200 porters on the 23rd of August for work on the road, previously working with Sappers and 50 of the Company porters. Working on road.

The Sapper Major had on 9 August, sent a memorandum and a report by Robin Sneyd on the bad state of the road between Kilossa, Uleia, and Kikumion to the General HQ of the Sappers at Dar-es-Salaam, asking for 200 porters.

August 31.1917
Started work on road and three bridges to Kidoli.

September 3.
Evill arrived at the three bridges.

September 7.
Major Bishan Singh and remainder of Company, bar one section, arrived. The remainder of the Company had been attached to a column operating against a German Force which had broken back into the country, north of the Central Railway.

September 13th.
At 10 am I left the Company at 10 am working at Point 57 on the Kilossa/Kidodi road for Dar-es-Salaam to proceed on two months leave to India, arrived at Kilossa at 4:30 pm.

September 14.
Slept on the platform at Kilossa waiting for the train due in two hours. The train arrived at 11 am and left for Dar-es-Salaam.

September 15.
Arrived at Dar-es-Salaam at 3 am and slept on in truck. Had breakfast and reported myself to R.E. Headquarters at 9:30 am. Stopping with Colonel Rundle.

September 16 to 27.
Stopped in Dar-es-Salaam waiting for a ship.

September 28.
Embarked at 9 am in “Princess” sailed at noon and arrived at Zanzibar at 4 pm.

September 29.
Went ashore in evening.

September 30.
Stopped on board.
Figure 29. Typical Train in German East Africa

Figure 30. Convalescent Home in Zanzibar

Figure 31. Zanzibar
On 1 October the ship sailed at 6 am and Lieutenant Robin Sneyd left German East Africa to return to India.

**German Retreat. November 1917 to September 1918**

In November 1917 von Lettow continued to move back slowly, getting ever nearer to the Portuguese frontier. His problems were many. His men were getting through their boots at a rapid rate, due to the continual marching. The few supplies that did get through soon ran out. It was possible for Europeans to
walk barefoot on reasonable surfaces, once their feet were hardened. But they could not manage bare feet in trackless bush. They were able to repair boots by cutting up the many saddles they had captured. The German force was now almost self-contained, living off the land as they retreated with their wives and camp followers bringing along chickens and small livestock. The noise from cocks crowing at dawn could give away the German troops’ position. Von Lettow issued an order forbidding the crowing of cocks at dawn! But it brought no relief. The largest flour mill in the area was in this area and it worked day and night to supply the German force. The supply of quinine manufactured from bark early in the war was still holding out, though preciously guarded. Bandages were also being made from bark. Bark bandages were boiled and used again and again until they disintegrated. The German medical units moved with the columns, setting up temporary hospitals in make-shift grass huts and were expected to suddenly pack up and move off again at a moment’s notice. Those patients who could not be helped were left behind if there was a British column near at hand to pick them up.

In the midst of all his other troubles von Lettow was called upon by Dr Schnee, the German Governor, to send a strong force to subjugate a rebellious tribe in the few remaining square miles of German East Africa still under German rule.

Dr Schnee was still marching along with the main column, his baggage taking up all the exertions and time of a number of porters. Schnee was too proud to give up, he got on with von Lettow quite as badly as before. Schnee seemed determined to show von Lettow that, although not himself a strong or adventurous man, he could undertake anything that von Lettow demanded in the way of forced marches or hardships. He also fought hard to retain any authority he could.

The march continued. Askaris in torn, faded uniforms, singing their monotonous songs in their deep voices, rifles reversed on their shoulders, with the butts pointing backwards, as they always did, marched on towards the Rovuma. Many of them had bits and pieces of British uniforms. Most of them were hundreds of miles of from their homes. Behind them came the bearers, and wives with children hung from their shoulders.

Sickness was now taking a heavier toll of the Germans than ever before. Even Askaris going down as quickly as the Europeans. The area was plagued by myriads of mosquitoes and flies, and snakes were in abundance, as were poisonous scorpions. Lions and leopards were also constant hazards. The local blacks were as unfriendly as the insects and pests.

Money was still being exchanged by the German force but coins had been discarded as being too heavy to carry. Before leaving the Central Railway a large quantity of paper money had been printed. Such luxuries as soap were almost impossible to come by. Increasingly the Germans themselves began to ask: How long can it go on? Have we not been through enough for German East Africa? But they carried on all the same and not one so much as thought of letting down the man, Colonel von Lettow whose determination alone held everybody together.

There was a widespread longing to know what was happening in Europe.

In November 1917 there was little space in which the von Lettow’s troops could manoeuvre before reaching the Rovuma River. On 15 November 1917 the village of Chiwata was attacked by the Nigerians and by Hannyington’s and O’Grady’s columns. The Germans quickly evacuated the village and Wahle left behind 650 Europeans and Askari who were considered unfit to carry on any longer. Stores and ammunition were running drastically low and the German Force retired to Nambindinga. Von Lettow decided that at this turning-point in the campaign, he would have to leave behind much of his force and gear, before marching off with the fittest and strongest into the unknown.

Those Askaris and Officers who were to be left behind burned their rifles on bonfires, the sparks and flames lit up the whole camp scene a mile square. Von Lettow’s scouts had found a way out to the Rovuma, and the exhausted British troops who had chased him for months were not fit enough to make serious efforts to stop him.
On the night of 17 November 1917 von Lettow marched out of the camp at Nambindinga into the darkness.

Nis Kock in his book *Blockade and Jungle* describes the scene:-

> The camp fires gleamed on fantastic shapes, black and white side by side, some of the shapes were barefooted, some naked torsos had cartridge belts slung across them like bandoliers, some wore topis all askew, old felt hats, or uniform caps, and some were bareheaded. Rags of every kind of uniform sprang into sight in the firelight, and were gone into the blackness again. Camp-fires shone back from rifle barrels and now and again from machine guns carried between two men.

The Askaris led the column that von Lettow took into the wilderness. Behind the Askaris came the bearers carrying the remaining stores. Behind the bearers were the women and children. Altogether 300 Europeans, 1,000 Askaris and more than 3,000 bearers and followers-on marched past the assembly. The departure of the long column, in the trance like scene lit by quivering fires, took several hours. And then they were gone.

Over 1,000 Askaris and Germans, plus many women and bearers who had stayed behind were waiting to surrender to the Allies next day. The Cape Corps were among the first on the scene, in their comparatively smart uniforms and turned-up South African hats, they seemed like people from another planet. An excitable Allied Officer dashed about flourishing a revolver shouting “where’s the General?” No one answered. At last one of the men lying sick raised his head and began to laugh. Then others began to laugh too. Someone shouted in broken English: “The General – he’s gone to hell.”

![Figure 34. Indian troopers of the 25th Cavalry cross the Rovuma River](image)

While von Lettow was trekking the north bank of the Rovuma, his huge column was struggling for some miles in the sun, looking for a place to cross the muddy, lazy river.

On 25 November 1917 von Lettow’s column started wading across the Rovuma. The column was so long that it took two days to get across. Marching south along a rough native track the column entered into unmapped territory in Portuguese East Africa.

King George V and van Deventer’s old Boer war adversary General Sir Douglas Haig sent van Deventer in November and December 1917 cables of congratulation on having cleared von Lettow out of German East Africa. The British armies in France had just suffered a quarter of a million casualties in capturing an insignificant village called Passchendaele.

Tafel, having marched to a place not far away from von Lettow was almost entirely without supplies and did not know which way von Lettow had gone.

On 26 November 1917 over a thousand of Tafel’s troops walked into the camp of a hundred men from the 129th Baluchis, in order to surrender. The Baluchis were delighted as they had been chasing Tafel for days. They were followed by a messenger with a white flag, saying that Tafel and the rest of his force, over 1,500, wished to surrender as well. Observers were impressed at the orderly way in which the surrender was carried out.
Sir Hugh Clifford in his book *The Gold Coast Regiment in the East African Campaign* (John Murray, 1920) wrote about Tafel’s surrender:

*The little column marched, as though on parade, to the area which had been allotted to it for its encampment, in which each company at once took their allotted place. Baggage having been deposited in a most orderly fashion, the men of each company instantly set to construct bush-huts for their European officers, while the porters cleared the grass and underwood with their machetes and prepared less elaborate huts for the Askaris.*

Six Europeans and twenty Askaris refused to surrender and joined von Lettow a few days later.

On 12 January 1918 the Allied troops began the evacuation of the Rovuma area. The few survivors of the 25th Fusiliers, the Nigerians and the Indians were to leave East Africa. The campaign was to be continued by the King’s African Rifles (KAR) and Rhodesians from Nyasaland, the West India Regiment and the Gold Coast Regiment from Porto Amelia, together with British and South African staff, the Cape Corps, artillery batteries, the Royal Flying Corps and various services. A large staff and depot organisation remained at Dar-es-Salaam.

Untroubled from the rear and seldom effectively opposed by the Portuguese, von Lettow’s column marched on into Portuguese territory. Governor von Schnee insisted that as Governor he was the military head of German East Africa. Von Lettow pointed out that they were no longer in GEA but in Portuguese territory.
It was a difficult time for von Lettow. The news from Europe was bad. On 29 September 1918 von Lettow left Portuguese territory, where he had been for ten months and re-entered German East Africa. He had kept his force together by the strength of his personality. His force had shrunk from 278 to 168 Europeans. The Askaris had dropped from 1,700 to just over a 1,000 and the experienced porters from 4,000 to just over 2,000. Neither the Allies nor the Germans could have operated at all without the porters. The Allies had instituted the forced conscription of porters who were seldom paid and were often hungry.

On 19 October 1918 von Lettow turned west into Northern Rhodesia which had not been touched heavily by the war since late 1915 and there were few defences to slow down the invader. The Germans were aware of the dire situation in Europe.

The German Governor, Dr Heinrich von Schnee wrote in his diary:

Everyone hopes for peace and deliverance from our situation, which grows ever more unbearable and which consciously or unconsciously will leave its mark permanently on us... The terrible privations and hardships, the constant danger from unhygienic and other causes, the perpetual sickness, frequent periods of insufficient nourishment, the uncertainty of the final result, and the very unpleasant conditions, all have told unfavourably on the health and spirits of the Europeans and our good blacks who have worked in vain.

In late August 1918 von Lettow called off an attempt to take a heavily guarded Allied depot, and decided to hurry towards the east of Lake Nyasa, abandoning any idea of marching west into Nyasaland. He guessed that the rail town of Tabora would be seen by the Allies as an obvious objective of his thrust north towards German East. Von Lettow thought that the Allies would withdraw their troops from Portuguese East Africa by sea to Dar-es-Salaam and then on by rail to Tabora.

The march north was a long and tedious affair. No guides could be found. The country was only partly explored and was entirely unknown to the Germans. Von Lettow could only give general instructions to the commander of his advance party, pointing at some hills, or vaguely across the bush. The long column wound its way back across the wilderness, over the Lurio once more and then on towards the Rovuma. As the crow flew, there were 250 miles to go before the ex-German colony was reached, as the German column with bare feet and disintegrating boots marched on.

Once more all the wounded and sick, including sick prisoners, were left behind, this time in charge of an officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps. When the column was nearing the Rovuma River half the column went down with influenza. The column entered a rich and lush countryside. Some of the natives had never seen a white man. Game was everywhere and the Rovuma River was very close. Weak and sick though it was, the German army in Africa, had left its pursuers far behind. Every day the sick were dying of influenza. There was little feeling of triumph when the gently flowing Rovuma, muddy and languid-looking, was sighted on 28 September 1918.

Extracts from *German East* by Brian Gardner and additional information from *The Forgotten Front: the East African Campaign 1914-1918* by Ross Anderson:
In October 1918, the world at large, which had long since forgotten about the German East Campaign, was astonished to hear of a strong German column advancing on Tabora (The inland “capital” of German East Africa), and threatening British territory, some of von Lettow’s Askaris went home to their families. Von Lettow heard from three week old papers of the fall of Cambrai, St Quentin, and Armentieres. He sent his patrols out far and wide and raced a strong column of the King’s African Rifles (K.A.R) for Fife, on the border of Northern Rhodesia.

A small detachment of the Northern Rhodesian Police beat off the attack on Fife, after two days fighting. Having renewed his quinine stocks from an evacuated hospital von Lettow withdrew with his troops, their wives, porters and 400 head of cattle.

Von Lettow’s forces were followed by an Allied Force of K.A.R (750 rifles guided by a local settler). This force could do nothing but follow wherever von Lettow wished to lead it. Its Commander had only a small Atlas of the World, 200 miles to the inch to guide him. No other British troops were in the area. Kasama, a hundred miles into Northern Rhodesia, was taken by the Germans on 9 November 1918. The garrison at Kasama which was only half a company strong and consisted mainly of black African troops, hurriedly released from gaol, had retreated southwards.

Monday 11 November 1918, Armistice Day, in East Africa was a fine day, sunny but not too hot. Von Lettow cycled up to discuss the situation with the commander of his advance guard. After a short conference the march was continued, there seemed no reason why most of Rhodesia should not be put to havoc. Far away millions were rejoicing in the streets and shouting from windows, at the end of the most terrible war man had ever known.

Clause 17 of the Armistice agreement, signed on 11 November 1918 provided for unconditional surrender within one month of all German forces operation in East Africa. It was thought that the terms of the Armistice might take some time to reach the Germans on active service in East Africa.

The German advance party reached the Chambezi River on 13 November. A British motor cyclist arrived with news of the Armistice. The next day the British prisoners of war were released and the Germans started their march back to Abercorn through Kasama.

At Abercorn, the Askaris wanted to take their rifles and ammunition home. There were not enough Allied troops at Abercorn to enforce the surrender of arms and von Lettow had to persuade his men to give up their arms. The Askaris and the porters were owed years of back pay. Von Lettow asked the Allies for the money some million and a half rupees, his request was refused. There was no answer to his request to the German Government in Berlin. Von Lettow drew up lists of the back pay that was due and gave each porter and Askari a certificate showing the amount owed. Although von Lettow took some interest in this matter after the war, apparently in the 1960s, the very few remaining Askaris were compensated by the German Government.

At Kasama the Germans were met by the King’s African Rifles who had recently fought a fierce engagement with the German rear-guard. Their commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel E.B.B. Hawkins asked all the German officers round to lunch. The Germans felt they had to refuse, although they appreciated such an expression of chivalry. Hawkins’ column was drastically short of supplies and von Lettow had to help him out with cattle. Hawkins later wrote to The Times of von Lettow: “Instead of the haughty Prussian I expected to meet, he turned out to be a most courteous and perfectly mannered man”.

General Edwards who had chased von Lettow all the way from Porto Amelia (on the coast of Portuguese East) via Tabora to the Chambezi River, sent a car for the German Commander and he and his staff met von Lettow on arrival at Abercorn.
Figure 36. Governor Dr Heinrich von Schnee with remaining German Officers after the surrender

At 12 noon on 25 November General Edwards accepted the surrender of Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbech. The reporter of the *Bulawayo Chronicle*, possibly the least biased of the African papers gave the following details of the force that surrendered: 30 German officers, 125 other Europeans, including 5 doctors, a veterinary surgeon, a chemist and a signals officer, Dr Heinrich von Schnee the German Governor of German East Africa 32 of his senior officials, 3 subordinate officials, 122 German non commissioned officers, 1,165 Askari, 1,516 porters, 482 Portuguese bearers, 295 followers and cattle tenders, 819 women. There were also thirty-eight machine guns, one field gun and nearly a quarter of a million rounds of ammunition. As a mark of respect for the Schutztruppe, van Deventer defied his orders and the German officers and NCOs were allowed to retain their arms arms, von Lettow and his officers had their swords returned on a ceremonial parade “in recognition of their gallant efforts” and the Askari were dismissed to their homes. It was an unusual ending to a highly unusual campaign.

After hostilities ended, the Allies transferred the German soldiers and POWs to Dar-es-Salaam for eventual repatriation.

Figure 37. General von Lettow-Vorbeck, Governor Dr Heinrich von Schnee and their men receive a heroes’ welcome at the Brandenburg Gate, Berlin, March 1919
Von Lettow-Vorbeck returned to Germany in early March 1919 to a hero’s welcome. In the picture above he can be seen wearing his battered bush hat and on a black charger as he led 120 officers of the Schutztruppe in their tattered tropical uniforms on a victory parade through the Brandenburg Gate which was decorated in their honour. Though he ultimately surrendered, as ordered, he had frequently won against great odds and was the only German commander to successfully invade British territory (British East Africa and Northern Rhodesia during World War One.

Von Lettow married Martha Wallroth (1884-1953) and had two sons and two daughters. Between May 1928 and July 1930 von Lettow held an official post with the monarchist German National People’s Party. He intensely distrusted “Hitler and his Movement”. When Hitler offered him the Ambassadorship at the Court of St James, he “declined with frigid hauteur”. After his blunt refusal he was kept under constant surveillance and his home was searched.

By the end of World War II von Lettow was destitute. His two sons had been killed in action serving with the Wehrmacht. His house in Bremen had been destroyed by Allied bombing and he depended for a time on food packages from his friends Colonel Richard Meinertzhagen, a British Intelligence Officer and General J.C. Smuts, his former adversary and twice Prime Minister of South Africa.

Von Lettow died in Hamburg in 1964. The West German government and the Bundeswehr flew in two former Askaris as state guests so that they could attend the funeral of “their General”. He was buried in Pronstorf, Schleswig Holstein in the cemetery of Vicelin Church.

**The Faridkot Sappers and Miners. End of East African Campaign and Homecoming**

The following paragraphs come from the chapter on the Faridkots provided by the National Archives in Delhi.

In October 1917 the Faridkot Sappers and Miners were sent by sea to Kilma to join the Belgian column again. During the advance the company performed the remarkable feat of cutting and clearing a road 163 miles long in 27 days. In January 1918 the company was operating on the Rovuma River across which it constructed and maintained a flying bridge. On 14 February 1918, the enemy having evacuated German East Africa, the company embarked at Lindi to return to India arriving at Karachi on 21 February 1918 and at Faridkot a few days later. The Faridkots had been on active service in British and German East Africa since November 1914, during which seven Indian Distinguished Service Medals (I.D.S.M.) were awarded. These medals were awarded by the British Empire to Indian citizens serving in the Indian Armed Forces.
Awards for Service in the Great War East Africa Campaign made to the Faridkot Imperial Service Sappers and Miners:

**Distinguished Service Order:** No Citation found

Major Elliott Dowell Tillard, Royal Engineers, attached as a Special Services Officer to the Faridkot Imperial Service Sappers and Miners.

**Military Cross:** No citations found

Lieutenant (temporary Captain) Chetwode Percy Evill, Indian Army Reserve of Officers, I.A.R.O. attached to the Faridkot Imperial Service Sappers and Miners as a Special Services Officer.

Lieutenant Robert Thomas Stuart Sneyd, Indian Army Reserve of Officers, I.A.R.O., attached to the Faridkot Imperial Service Sappers and Miners as a Special Services Officer.

**Indian Rank equivalent:**


Lance Naik = Lance Corporal

**The Order of British India. (OBI)** 1st Class was awarded to Lieutenant-Colonel Nand Singh Buhadur and Senior sub-assistant surgeon Major Majid Abdul. 2nd class was awarded to Major (local Lieutenant-Colonel) Bishan Singh (subsequently cancelled). The OBI was awarded to officers only.

**Indian Order of Merit (IOM)** 2nd class was awarded to Subadar Major and Honorary Captain Nand Singh and Subadar Raghib Singh. The IOM was the second highest decoration a native member of the British Indian Army could receive. The first class had earlier been replaced by the Victoria Cross. There is a third class category.

**Indian Distinguished Service Medal, IDS.M.** The second highest Indian order of merit. It was awarded to:- 577 Lance Naik (Lance Corporal) Kishen Singh; 762 Havildar (Sergeant) Harman Singh, (listed as infantry); 500 Naik (Corporal) Sawan Singh; Subadur (Major) Raghib Singh; Jemadar (Lieutenant) Chait Singh; Jemadar Moti Singh; 654 Naik Thana Singh.

**The Indian Meritorious Service Medal.** The I.M.S.M. was awarded to 427 Havildar (Sergeant) Mangal Singh; 388 Havildar (Sergeant) Hadara Singh; 10 Sapper Lachman Dass; 712 Naik (Corporal) Kanda Singh, later Subadar (Major); 580 Sorain Singh, later Jamadar, (Lieutenant); 544 Mangoo; 720 Lance Naik (Lance Corporal) Bhola Singh; 687 Lance Naik (Lance Corporal) Dina; 671 Lance Naik (Lance Corporal) Kehar Singh; 644 Havildar (Sergeant) Puran Singh; 436 Naik (Corporal) Sadda Singh; 665 Lance Naik (Lance Corporal) Jawahar Singh.

**Mention in Despatches.** Captain E.D. Tillard, R.E.; Lieutenant C.P. Evill IARO twice; Subadar Major Nand Singh Bahadur; Subadar Major Bishen Singh; 1st Class Sub Assistant Surgeon Majid Military Cross; Subadar Raghib Singh (twice); 712 Sapper Abdul; 762 Artificer Havildar (Sergeant) Harmam Singh (three times); Lieutenant R.T.S. Sneyd IARO (twice); Sapper Kunda Singh (twice); Subadar (Major) Bhagwan Singh; 580 Lance Naik (Lance Corporal, Artificer); Sorain Singh; Jemadar (Lieutenant) Moti Singh; 687 Lance Naik (Lance Corporal) Dina; 664 Naik (Corporal) Poorun Singh; 421 Jemadar (Lieutenant) Mangel Singh (three times).

**French Croix de Guerre.** Jemadar Moti Singh. Some of the Allied nations exchanged medals which were given to local commanders to distribute as they thought fit.

The Battle Honours for the Faridkot Sappers and Miners were: Kilimanjaro, Behobeho, East Africa 1914-1918.
In 1919 the company was despatched to the Khyber for employment on lines of communication for the Indian Army’s advance into Afghanistan. Habibullah Khan, ruler of Afghanistan had been assassinated on 20 February 1919 and his son Amanullah Khan took the throne. At his coronation Amanullah declared total independence from Great Britain. The third Anglo-Afghan War started in May 1919. Fighting was confined to a series of skirmishes between an ineffective Afghan Army and the Indian Army exhausted from the heavy demands of WW1. The month long war gained Afghans the conduct of their own foreign affairs. The peace treaty that recognised the independence of Afghanistan was signed on 8 August 1919 before signing the Afghans concluded a treaty with the Russians.

Major Mainprise left the Faridkots to become Brigade Major to General Tighe and was killed in action. In the Indian ranks there was one death from wounds, and twenty seven from disease.

Robin Sneyd records the Faridkots movements after he returned to India in October 1917:

At the beginning of October 1917, the Belgians had driven the enemy forces out of the Mahange area. The Faridkot Sappers and Miners were withdrawn and entrained at Kilossa for Dar-es-Salaam. They were sent from there by sea to Kilwa. Here they were again attached to a Belgian Column which forced its way to Liwale, on its arrival at Liwale, the Germans in this part of the country retreated southwards to join their main forces. The Belgian Column then reunited with the Lindi column from the coast. On the return of the Belgians to the coast, the Company became attached to the Allied advance from Lindi and proceeded with it to the Rovuma river where it was once more employed in maintaining communication by a flying bridge with the Nigerian Brigade, who had been taken across to the further bank. The Germans had now completely evacuated German East Africa and much reduced in numbers had crossed into Portuguese East Africa.

The rains were again very near and it was decided to withdraw our advanced posts from the Rovuma river to Massarai. The Nigerians therefore were brought back and were accompanied by the Faridkots, who a couple of days before leaving the Rovuma River heard the welcome news that all Indian troops were to be withdrawn from East Africa and that their own departure was imminent. So imminent was it, in fact, that they were rushed down to Lindi, 180 miles distant, by returning lorry and tram line as quickly as possible. On arriving at Lindi, they immediately embarked for Dar-es-Salaam whence after a wait of some ten days they again embarked on February 14th in the R.T. Royal George for Karachi which was reached on February 21st 1918.
The Welcome Home. February 1918

Figure 39. Captain C.P. Evill M.C. on extreme left next to Lieutenant Robin Sneyd M.C.

Figure 40. Welcome at the railway station by the Maharaja
Figure 41. Welcome at the Railway Station by the Maharaja with the train on the right

Figure 42. Formal named group at the Palace including the Maharaja and the Resident W.C. Renouf Esq


Lieutenant Robin Sneyd’s Field Book records that at some stage he obtained in Bombay, a dozen stars and medal ribbons for the D.S.M., the M.S.M. and the Croix de Guerre.

After three and a half years continuous service in East Africa, a warm welcome was received in Faridkot, and re-organisation started. Six months were spent in training and re-equipment. On 18 October 1918 the company was ordered to Lahore where they joined the 11th Indian Division. The rapid march of events however precluded any further employment in the Great War and the company returned to Faridkot from Lahore on 5 April 1919.

Lieutenant Robin Sneyd M.C. wrote from Faridkot on 7 March 1918 to his brother Ralph: *We have now sat in Faridkot for nearly three weeks. The first week was occupied by celebrations. The second by General’s inspection and we are now getting down to re-equipment the Company or rather getting out the necessary indents, returns, etc. When we have finished, that is in three or four day's time, Evill and I both go off on sixty days leave. In spite of my having had leave, they seem quite anxious to give me more leave, and I don’t in the least object to taking it. The fact of the matter is that the I.G. Imperial Services Troops does not want us to return us to our depots as he always has difficulty in getting officers and the simplest way out of it is to give us leave. After leave, I come and sit here till the Company is ready to go out again about six months hence, and Evill takes on the job of Assistant Inspecting Officer under the Inspecting Officer also until we are ready to set out, when the present Inspecting Officer, a Major, will also come with us. He is I am glad to say a very decent fellow and is here now. The whole scheme suits me very well as I am a bit full of fever at present.*
Figure 43. Photographs taken by Norna Sneyd in 1918
Summary and Conclusions

During the war in East Africa, von Lettow had employed against him an army of at least 130,000, together with many senior commanders. He had caused expenditure by the British alone of £72,000,000. *The British Official History* records: “Von Lettow had successfully contained in Africa for over 4 years a force considerably larger than Lord Robert’s whole army in the South African War”.

The campaign had cost Britain more money and three times as many lives, if deaths from disease, involving porters, as well as combatants are included, than did the whole South African War (Lord Cranworth *Kenya Chronicles*).

The following sections are taken from Edward Paice’s *Tip and Run*, pages 392-395:-

“As for Allied troops, they had fought one of the most depressing of campaigns following an elusive enemy, never giving up despite hardships through disease, starvation and distances, that at times must have seemed insuperable. Most of them summoned up this courage in a land they had never seen before and that had previously meant little to them. The official Allied casualty figures were 62,220 (not including those admitted to hospital through disease), of whom 48,326 died from disease, mostly malaria. The proportion of deaths to wounded and prisoners in the casualty figures were very much higher in the East African theatre than in other fronts of the First World War”.

The majority of adult males in the five British colonies adjoining German East Africa had been coerced into becoming porters maintaining the supply lines, without their input the campaign could never have been fought at all. Apparently in British East Africa’s Teita District, three quarters of the able-bodied men served away from home. One third of a small labour contingent recruited in the Seychelles never returned home. By the end of the war more than one million porters had been recruited by the British in their colonies and in German East Africa of whom no fewer than 95,000 died including 41,000 black Africans conscripted by the Allies in German East Africa. The full scale of the tragedy was deemed in Whitehall to be a “bloody tale, best ignored”. Many Allied soldiers, missionaries and administrators expressed great concern about the horrors they had witnessed, but for the most part their opinions did not find their way into the agenda of politicians and civil servants in the U.K., who were pre-occupied with “bigger issues elsewhere”.

The rains failed in British East Africa in late 1917 and early 1918 and many were reduced to a state of total destitution. By mid summer, it was reported that “That the people subsisted in many parts on wild roots and grasses”.

October 1918, “Black October,” brought the “Spanish Flu” or as it was known in Abyssinia “the disease of the wind”. Among the civilian population of sub-Saharan Africa this new curse, so virulent that a man could simply drop dead while walking home to his *shamba*, was simply beyond imagination. It arrived in Mombasa and South Africa in September 1918, Southern Nyasaland at the beginning of October and in Portuguese East Africa in the third of October. It spread along the railways, lake steamers, the vast lines of communications, soldiers and porters returning to their homes as the War reached its final stages. In South Africa one returning soldier described how a “Fear and horror of the disease hung over the whole country”.

The life of the soldier in this campaign was hard, with very few of the comforts or distractions normally provided. The African porters and followers who accompanied the troops into battle were expected to carry heavy loads in all weathers and went for very long periods with very meagre food supplies. At least 40,000 are known to have died in Allied service alone, and many others never returned home. Both sides exploited the indigenous manpower ruthlessly and many perished from exhaustion, illness or battle.

The troops on both sides either requisitioned or stole food from the local civilian population in the war zones. Von Lettow was quite ruthless in devastating districts for food, both for his own supplies as well as denying his pursuers sustenance. He was quite prepared to leave a district absolutely destitute regardless
of the consequences for the African population.

This campaign reflected the priorities and methods of nineteenth century colonial warfare with its reliance on largely infantry columns marching through trackless bush, supplied and supported by porters. Manoeuvre and strategy was as often determined by the need to obtain food or water as it was with tactical advantage. Yet it introduced into the unsuitable terrain of a tropical country the industrialised warfare of the twentieth century, with the use of aircraft, motor vehicles, mortars, light machine guns and wireless.

Early in 1917 the whole territory of German East Africa was declared an Allied Protectorate. Under the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 the Belgians got control of the Ruandi Urundi. The Portuguese got back a small chunk of disputed territory at the mouth of the Ruvuma River. The British gained control over the remainder of German East Africa. This became the independent state of Tanganyika in 1962 and then in 1964 Tanganyika merged with Zanzibar to become Tanzania.

Afterthoughts

A poem written by Owen Letcher in 1918. He fought with the King’s African Rifles out of Nyasaland into German East Africa. The poem was first published in the Johannesburg “Star”.

The Return of the Cohort.

We’re a very tiny army, as armies go today. Just an army of the Tropics and beginning to decay, We thought you had forgotten us – so long we’ve been away.

We’ve most of us had fever or a tropical inside, and we’ve foot-slogged half a continent: we’re not supposed to ride, and lots of us have lost the trail and crossed the Great Divide.

Perhaps the blokes in Flanders our little bit will scorn, ‘Cos we’ve never had an order that gas masks must be worn. And have never heard a “nine point five” or a Hymn of Hate at dawn.

But how’d you like to tramp it for a solid month on end. And then go on another month till your knees begin to bend, or when you’re out on picquet hear a lion answer “Friend”? And what about scrapping up a mountain three miles high. A-swearing and a-panting till you thought your end was nigh. And then to hump a Maxim gun that’s dug in on the sky?

And would you like anopheles and jigger-fleas and snakes to “chivvy” you from dusk to dawn, and fill you up with aches. And then go on fatigue all day in a heat that fairly bakes?

There wasn’t any Blighty, no, nor mails in twice a week: we had no concerts ‘hind the lines: We got too bored to speak, and there was no change of rations and our water bottles leak.

So don’t despise our efforts, for we have done our level best. For it wasn’t beer and skittles, those two years without a rest. And though the world forgot us we think we did our best.

We’re a cohort from the Tropics, and we’ve come from far away. Just an unremembered legion, fret with fever and decay, and all of us are weary, and lots have lost the way.

We’re a tiny little cohort, and we’re glad to have a spell, from fever and from marching, and a sun that burns like hell, and now we’re back amongst you, we’ll very soon get well.

Just a tiny army as armies go today, just a handful from the tropics and beginning to decay, just a Legion of the Lost Ones who have wandered far away.

Just a remnant who’ve been fighting for you and for your race: Just a cohort from the northward, where we’d worse than Huns to face.

We thank you for your welcome, and we think you’re very kind, but we’d ask you to remember – all our mates we left behind!
Two poems taken from *Tip & Run* by Edward Paice.

Poem by W. Morison, a government official in British East Africa.

Steam down to Tanga. Over the briny main, see our Major-General, and his brilliant train. Three Brigade Commanders, Colonels, staff galore, Majors count for little, Captains they ignore.

Earnestly they study, each his little book, which, compiled in Simla, tells him where to look, local knowledge needed? Native scouts of use? For so quaint a notion, there is small excuse.

See them shortly landing, at the chosen spot. Find the local climate, just a trifle hot, foes unsympathetic, Maxims on them train, careful first to signal, range to ascertain.

Ping, ping, go the bullets, crash, explode the shells, Major-General’s worried, thinks it’s just as well, not to move too rashly, while he’s in the dark, what’s the strength opposing? Orders, re-embark.

Back to old Mombasa, steams a force again, are these Generals ruffled? not the smallest grain, martial regulations, inform us day by day. They may havefoozled Tanga, but they’ve taken BEA.

A Recitation (German East) by Private Sam Naishtad.

A well damned land is German East. Accursed alike by Man and Beast, a land of rain – till comes a spell when days and nights are hot as Hell. From base to base in quest of foe, we blooming “fed ups” come and go, with scrubby cheeks and blistered knees, our toe nails food for jigger fleas, in dirty huts the lizards crawl with other vermin great and small, while “croc” infest the streams of mud, and mosquitos suck our blood till fever gnaws at throat and spine, instead of rum we get quinine. Let poets sing, but not for me, that Hell’s pup of a country.
Acknowledgements

Text, photographs and sketch maps from:-

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