

Willson: J.G. , **Guerillas of Tsavo; The East African Campaign of The Great War in British East Africa, 1914-1916.** (English Press , 2012), pp 356 . ISBN 978-9966-757 1-3-5

Over the past two decades the First World War German East Africa Campaign has been the subject of several highly commendable regionally and nationally-based political, social and military texts, notably Professor Huw Strachan's magisterial 'Africa' section in **The First World War: To Arms**, Professor Melvyn Page's, **The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War**, Dr Edward Paice's **Tip and Run: The untold tragedy of the Great War in Africa** , Dr Anne Samson's **South Africa in World War 1**, Dr Ross Anderson's **German East Africa Campaign** and, not least my own, **Northern Rhodesia in World War 1: Forgotten Colonial Crisis**. This recent book by J. G. Willson has, nevertheless, filled an important lacuna in the **military** historiography of this Great War campaign.

Through the medium of 355 pages and six voluminous, lavishly illustrated chapters, James Willson has produced a highly commendable 'worms eye view' of this challenging bush war from both the Allied and German perspectives. The first, opening chapter provides an important local perspective of the initial causation and impact of the war but it is the succeeding five chapters which reveal a unique ground-level view of the war, a war eruditely recorded by the author's own personal and intimate knowledge of the war's battlegrounds. His new perspectives on both the major and minor tactical fighting grounds eg the Battle for Tanga, illustrated by a plethora of personal maps and photographs are particularly impressive. The images of military artefacts personally recovered and collected by the author over many years of research are particularly striking. These are supplemented and embellished by his brief but very succinct profiles of key British and German commanders and of eye-witnesses such as those of General H. Smith-Dorrien and the revealing oral memoirs of Oberleutnant George Auger (pp. 178-81).

It was indeed, as the author intimates, a truly horrific war in which chronic environmental and logistical issues such as the prevalence of the tsetse fly and the consequent tragic dependence on human carrier transport, were, alongside conventional force capabilities, equal deciders in determining the outcome of this conflict. Indeed, the stupendous role of local Africans in both challenging and prosecuting this essentially 'white man's war' is duly acknowledged by the author, although most recent scholars might expect an even greater emphasis on their crucial logistical role and, not least, the huge losses they incurred both en route to the front and in terms of the deleterious impact on village economies of mass levies of young male labour. As studies by, for example, Professor Deutsch of Oxford University have recently revealed, huge swathes of British Central and East Africa and especially German East Africa, including scores of African village settlements and mitanda (gardens), were devastated by the depredations of both armies. Nevertheless, the responses and resistance of recalcitrant African tribal polities such as the Giriama, Nandi and Masaai to excessive wartime labour and food demands are significantly alluded to by the author as is the vital role of the British 'Carrier Corps' in winning the war for the Allies. (pp 165-9 especially)

On a wider strategic level, James Willson rightly identifies and graphically illustrates the huge British logistical problems caused by chronic overstretch and the lack of road and rail communications, accentuated by the highly skilful if ruthless guerrilla campaign of the German commander, Von Lettow Vorbeck which extended well beyond the British East African Protectorate and eventually deep into Portuguese East Africa and Northern Rhodesia. As European and Asian casualties mounted, mainly due to disease, the author rightly stresses the renewed dependence of both sides upon the predominantly black African if white-officered KAR and Schutztruppe units who were massively expanded towards the end of the war. The book concludes with an excellent summary of the casualty figures for both sides during the East African Campaign.

There are a few minor grammatical shortfalls in the text such as spellings (eg p. 97 recognizes. p.129, principle) but overall the book is competently structured and competently expressed.

To summarise: this book represents a most valuable (if rather Eurocentric) perspective on the military history of the German East Africa Campaign, packed with original material and few, if any, subsequent authors will be able to match James Willson's passion, unique intimacy with and detailed knowledge of its key battlegrounds.

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