

THE FORGOTTEN. AFRICAN SOLDIERS AND PORTERS OF THE BELGIAN COLONIAL FORCES IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

- Enika Ngongo -

Between 1914 and 1917, the *Force Publique*, the Belgian colonial army, took part in the First World War. First in defensive actions in collaboration with French and British forces in Cameroon and in Rhodesia, then with offensive campaigns in German East Africa against the German troops of Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck. Their intent was to exchange their territorial conquests against parts of Portuguese territory on the bank of the Congo River, and thus gain access to the Indian Ocean. Even though it did not work, the *Force Publique* realised crucial victories in Tabora (1916) and in Mahenge (1917). If these victories, as well as the role of the colonial troops during World War I, have offered some interesting studies, yet the difficulties among Congolese soldiers and indigenous auxiliaries (porters and boys) remain untold. During these military campaigns, thousands of Congolese men were indeed recruited as soldiers from every part of the colony, while about 260,000 indigenous auxiliaries were recruited as porters, to transport equipment essential for the success of military operations. Alongside them, women and children served as the logistical backbone of the troops, carrying soldiers' equipment and supplies, gathering food and water, cooking and doing the laundry. The living conditions were rendered arduous by the huge mobility demanded by the war. Weakened by insufficient food, a harsh climate, the lack of rest or the unsuitability of hygiene and medical care, many porters died from unhealthy conditions. Men became sick rather than die fighting. After the war, despite the crucial role they played and the harsh conditions they endured, indigenous soldiers and porters, living or dead, were forgotten and disregarded to a certain extent by the Belgian State. If they were granted multiple expressions of appreciation and gratitude, they were not on the national agenda.

Major Abbé [sic.],

This is the last letter I write you. I will inform all the Congolese people who fought in Congo. We did not go to War for Congo, but for Belgium. The Congolese people are afraid to complain, but as I saw death closely, I am entitled to claim my due. If I do not get positive response, I will go further¹.

In November 1925, Philippe Molangi, a Congolese veteran of the Bas-Congo Company, sent a letter to Major Labbe, former military delegate to the Ministry of Colonies, in which he complained that he had not received “his due” for his participation in the African campaigns of the First World War and that he had looked death in the face. From spring 1916 to winter 1917, the Belgian colonial troops, the *Force Publique*, conducted two major campaigns in German East Africa: the “Battle of Tabora” and the “Mahenge Campaign”. During these campaigns, where the use of heavy artillery was not possible in the large battlefields, the main asset of the belligerents were highly mobile troops of indigenous soldiers, alongside with porters². Yet, although they were essential to the success of Belgian and Allied military operations on African soil, and in spite of the huge number of deaths among them, very little has been written about them, about their living conditions during the War, or about the recognition of the Belgian government in the post-war period – the two aspects veteran Philippe Molangi complained about in 1925.

Using Belgian archival material, official reports, published memoirs, photographs and some sources of oral tradition that had been reported, such as school songs, this essay reconsiders the crucial part played by Congolese troops and indigenous auxiliaries during the Great War in Africa, and what might have been their everyday experiences³. Although these experiences remain difficult to assess due to a lack of primary sources and testimonies written by indigenous people or registered by a team of researchers, the crossing of various sources considered in the colonial context of their production highlights a series of elements hitherto unknown. It also considers the recognition shown to them by colonial authorities and by the Belgian State during and after the Great War, by analysing the state’s acknowledgment of the involvement of the African part of the *Force Publique*⁴.

I. Congo at War

As Europe was sliding towards war in July 1914, Belgium⁵ proposed a restatement of the neutrality of all the colonies in the Congo Basin to the British, French and German governments, in accordance with Article 11 of the Treaty of Berlin. Belgium, wishing at all costs to avoid an extension of the conflict on the African soil, that could have endangered its colonial possession, reiterated its request several times until 8 August, when the British bombed the radio

1. Major Abbé [sic.], C’est la dernière lettre que je vous écris : je vais m’informer à tous les Congolais qui ont fait la guerre au Congo. Nous n’avons pas fait la guerre pour le Congo, nous l’avons fait[e] pour la Belgique. Les Congolais ont peur de réclamer mais moi ayant vu la mort de près, je suis en droit de réclamer [c]e qui me revient; si je ne reçois pas une réponse favorable je m’adresserai plus loin. [...] Philippe Molangi to Major Labbe, 20/11/1921 (Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs (FPSFA), African Archives (AA), FP 799)

2. See LUCAS CATHERINE, *Loopgraven in Afrika (1914-1918). De vergeten oorlog van de Congolezen tegen de Duitsers*, Berchem, 2013.

3. Unlike the pioneer work of Melvin Page on Malawians Veterans and, more recently, the important work by Michelle Moyd on German East African’s *askari* (African soldier). See MELVIN PAGE, “Malawians and the Great War: Oral history in reconstructing Africa’s Recent Past”, in *The Oral History Review*, no. 8, 1980, p. 49-61, MELVIN PAGE, « The War of Thangata: Nyasaland and the East African Campaign, 1914-1918 », in *Journal of African History*, no. 19, 1978, p. 87-100, and MICHELLE MOYD, *Violent intermediaries. African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa*, Ohio, 2014.

4. I express my thanks to the anonymous reviewers of this article and to Dr Benoit Henriot for their valuable suggestions.

5. At that time, the diplomatic relations of the Belgian Congo were handled by the Belgian Foreign Affairs, while the Ministry of Colonies was in charge of administering the colonial territory. Both worked in close partnership even though they didn’t share the exact same vision on the involvements of Congo during the war, as it appears in the archives.

station of Dar Es-Salaam, the capital of German East Africa. This event resulted in German military reactions in Kenya and military operations against two Belgian outposts established on the eastern border of Congo: Mokolubu on 15 August and Lukuga seven days later⁶. In quick response, the Belgian State ordered the *Force Publique* to take the offensive, in order to defend Congo's territorial integrity⁷. On 28 August, Congo went to war. In collaboration with French and British forces in Cameroon from 1914 to 1916, on Lake Tanganyika in a "defensive" mobilisation on the eastern boarder of Congo, and in Northern Rhodesia between 1914-1915, the *Force Publique* defeated the *Schutztruppe* of Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck⁸.

Subsequently to these successful campaigns, the Belgian colonial troops took up station in eastern Congo to plan an assault on German East Africa, along with the British forces⁹. For both Great Britain and Belgium, German East Africa was crucial. For the former, it was the missing element from the Cape to Cairo. For the latter, it was the

only way to strengthen its position amongst the very short list of powerful colonial nations and to obtain some territorial and financial rewards at the end of the war¹⁰. The Belgians intended to use any territory that might be conquered by them, according to the Right of Occupancy, as leverage in the negotiation of the future peace settlements¹¹. As claimed by historian Guy Vanthemsche: "the Belgian colonial possessions in Africa gave another dimension to the country's involvement in the Great War"¹². A successful campaign in Africa would have led Belgians to exchange their conquests for parts of Portuguese territory on the bank of the Congo River and, thus, gain access to the Indian Ocean.

Unlike France or, to some extent, Great Britain, Belgium clearly decided to concentrate its strength on African fronts. Besides the thirty-two Congolese people identified in Griet Brosens' *Congo aan den Yser*, no Congolese troop fought on the European fronts¹³. The reluctance to involve Congolese people on European fronts should be related to the fear that relations between Congolese and European

6. GEORGES DELPIERRE, "Tabora 1916: de la symbolique de la victoire", in *Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, no. 3-4, 2002 (32), p. 354.

7. About the *Force Publique*, see "Lisolo Na Bisu", *Notre histoire. Le soldat congolais de la Force Publique, 1885-1960*, Brussels, 2010 and BRYANT SHAW, "Force Publique, Force Unique": *The Military in the Belgian Congo 1914-1939*, PhD Thesis in History, University of Wisconsin, 1984.

8. During the First World War, Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck (1870-1964) was commanding the German military forces in East Africa, which included twelve companies of Askari troops. He remained undefeated until the German Government agreed to sign an armistice. ECKARD MICHELS, "Lettow-Vorbeck, Paul (von)", in *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, ed. by UTE DANIEL, PETER GATRELL, OLIVER JANZ, HEATHER JONES, JENNIFER KEENE, ALAN KRAMER, and BILL NASSON, issued by the Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08.

9. ISIDORE NDAYWELÉ NZIEM and PAMPHILE MABIALA MANTUBA-NGOMA (eds), *Le Congo belge dans la Première Guerre mondiale (1914-1918)*, Paris, 2015 and Ministère de la Défense nationale, *Les Campagnes coloniales belges, 1914-1918*, Brussels, 1927.

10. JEANNICK VANGANSBEKE, "Comrades in arms? Het diplomatieke steekspel tussen België en het Britse Empire in Afrika tijdens de Grote Oorlog", in *Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, no. 1-2, 2008 (38), p. 131-158 and ROGER W.M. LOUIS, "Great Britain and the African Peace settlement of 1919", in *The American Historical Review*, no. 71, 1966 (3), p. 887.

11. Ministry of Colonies to Charles Tombeur, Le Havre, 25/03/1916 (Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, *Diplomatic Archives*, AF. 1.2.). About the Right of Occupancy, see ANNIE DEPERCHIN, "La petite justice au Togo pendant la Première Guerre mondiale", in *Le Juge et l'Outre-mer*, no. 6, 2010, p. 192-193.

12. GUY VANTHEMSCHE, "Belgian Congo during the First World War, as Seen through the Reports of Jules Renkin, Minister of Colonies, to King Albert I (1914-1918)", in *Bulletin des séances de l'Académie royale des Sciences d'Outre-Mer*, vol. 55, 2009 (4), p. 518.

13. See AMANDINE LAURO in this issue and MATTHEW STANARD, « Digging-in: the Great War and the roots of Belgian Empire », in ANDREW TAIT JARBOE, RICHARD S. FORGARTY (eds), *Empires in World War I*, London-New York, 2014, p. 23-48. Those issues were also discussed when France and Great Britain were concerned, see DICK VAN GALEN LAST, *Black Shame. African Soldiers in Europe, 1914-1922*, Bloomsbury, 2014, RUTH GINIO, "French Officers, African Officers and the Violent Image of African Colonial Soldiers", in *Historical Reflexions*, no. 36, 2010 (2), p. 60-75 and CHRISTIAN KOELLER, "The Recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and the Deployment in Europe during the First World War", in *Immigrants & Minorities*, no. 26, 2008 (1-2), p. 111-133.

populations would have threatened Belgian's colonial authority and greatness inside the colony.

When the Belgian administration decided to conduct a major assault in the vast German East Africa, numerous men were needed¹⁴. From its inception in 1886, the *Force Publique* was merely a number of small-armed units at the disposal of the Belgian officials in Congo¹⁵. By 1914, the *Force Publique* numbered some 15,000 men supervised by hundreds of European Officers and Non-commissioned officers (NCOs)¹⁶. There were no specialized units of artillery, engineering or medical support. It was rather an internal police force, intended to maintain law and order within the colony and to undertake military expeditions against "recalcitrant populations"¹⁷. Only in Katanga, there were 2,700 men, better organized, armed and equipped and formed in four mixed battalions¹⁸.

As the Public Force was not an instrument of war, its reorganization was needed. It was necessary to reshuffle the units, train them for war, call the reserves, give the army a powerful European framework, provide it with modern equipment,

reequip it, create the many services required by a large campaign (stewardship, ambulances, chaplaincy, bridges and roads) [...] ¹⁹.

From January 1915 onwards, as the reorganization of the colonial forces was in progress, men were massively recruited from every part of the colony. At first, the contingent was set at 3,750 men, including reservists, and recruitments of soldiers and porters were mostly made by conscriptions²⁰. Most of the time, men were provided by headmen required to produce a quota and who used force to achieve it, in exchange for favours or financial rewards, or through voluntary commitments of former soldiers²¹. During the three years of war, the contingent was raised to 5,000 soldiers, enlisted for seven years of active service and some further five years in the reserve, for a daily pay of 0,35 francs and a daily food ration or a monetary equivalent²². Numerous porters were recruited as well. The lack of roads in Congo implied that the bulk of them were intended to serve to transport equipment essential to the success of military operations. In total, they were about 260,000, without it being possible

14. About this "forgotten front", see ROSS ANDERSON, *The Forgotten Front. The East African Campaign, 1914-1918*, Spellmount, 2014, HEW STRACHAN, *The First World War in Africa*, New York, 2014, ANNE SAMSON, *World War I in Africa : The Forgotten Conflict Among The European Powers*, London, 2012 and ROGER W.M. LOUIS, *Ruanda-Urundi 1884-1919*, Oxford, 1963.

15. AYIWARD SHORTER, *African Recruits and Missionary Conscripts. The White Fathers and the Great War (1914-1922)*, London, 2007, p. 89.

16. *Rapport annuel du Congo belge pendant la guerre*, Brussels, 1919, p. 26.

17. GUY VANTHEMSCHÉ, "Belgian Congo during the First World War ...", p. 521.

18. *Rapport annuel du Congo belge pour l'année 1915*, Brussels, 1915, p. 85-86.

19. *La Force Publique n'étant pas un instrument de guerre, sa réorganisation s'imposait. Il fallut remanier les unités, les former en vue de la guerre, appeler les réserves, donner à l'armée un puissant cadre européen, la doter d'un matériel moderne, l'équiper à nouveau, créer les multiples services qu'exige une grande campagne (intendance, ambulances, aumônerie, ponts et chaussées) [...]*. JULES RENKIN, *Deux discours prononcés par M. Renkin, Ministre des Colonies de Belgique, à Sainte-Adresse (Le Havre), le 2 mai 1917 lors de la réception du général Tombeur et à la Sorbonne (Paris) le 10 février 1918*, Nancy, 1918, p. 2-3.

20. Also, it is likely that war recruitments might have followed the battlefields area, according to the preconception that certain African "races" like the Uele people were naturally more "fond of War and action", and could therefore be excellent soldiers, an attitude consistent with the mainstream western European thought. « Les soldats congolais de la Force Publique », Léon Anciaux, Officer in the Force Publique interviewed by Pierre Manuel, 1914-18. *Campagne d'Afrique*, RTBF, 1965. https://www.rtbf.be/audio/detail_leon-anciaux-officier-dans-la-force-publique-du-congo-belge?id=1938015.

21. It seems clear that distinctions were made in the recruitment of soldiers and porters. According to the Royal Decree of 30/07/1891, recruitments for the Congo Free State national army consisted of voluntary commitments and annual enlistments. Limitations were to be fixed by the King and according to them, the General Governor set the requisite numbers of men in each district. However, porters chosen by headmen were frequently those who were dispensable and probably less fit. Missionaries may also have played a role in supporting efforts to recruit Africans for wartime service like in other Sub-Saharan colonies, but additional research is needed.

22. Félix Fuchs to District Commissioner, Boma, 16/10/1914 (FPS FA, AA, GG 9161).

to count the women and children also present²³. Some of them had to carry supplies from different areas in mainland Congo, some from inland to military depots, and others had to follow the *Force Publique* as military auxiliaries.

Inside the military training camps, soldiers and porters were trained and disciplined, waiting for an offensive to start. Young married men were targeted at first because the presence of wives was needed to look after the cooking and laundry, and it was seen as a guarantee of the good behaviour and the morality of the troops²⁴, but training camps quickly became overcrowded and ill-adapted. Alongside the porters who moved the army's material, numerous women, children and other dependents (*boys*) served as the "logistical backbone" of the troops, carrying soldiers' personal equipment and supplies, gathering food and water, cooking and doing the laundry²⁵. The presence of so many non-combatants necessitated a long "train" of porters to transport provisions for the whole mobile community; flying columns of thousands of Africans led by hundreds of European Officers and NCOs.

In mid-April 1916, the *Force Publique* was prepared to start a major military action against German East Africa. By that time, the Commander-in-Chief Charles Tombeur²⁶ had under his command in Eastern Congo, two brigades, each composed of two regiments, comprising three battalions. Each battalion had an artillery battery, a company of engineers and a telegraph company. There were also independent battalions guarding lakes Tanganyika and Kivu²⁷. In conjunction with the British offensive, the East African campaign led Belgians to take the German strongholds of Kigali, Nyanza, Kitega, Ujumbura in Ruanda and Urundi, then Udjiji and Kigoma on the Tanganyika.

The living conditions of Congolese soldiers and African porters were rendered more arduous by the huge mobility demanded by the war. Since the beginning of the campaign, von Lettow-Vorbeck seemed only concerned about standing up against the Allied troops as long as possible, in order to engage on African fronts as many Allies armed forces as he could²⁸. By tactical operations and targeted attacks, he slowed down the Allied progression. Belgian authorities were not prepared

23. While it is interesting to question the presence of Congolese women in Belgian colonial troops of the First World War, as many war photographs attest to their presence as Anne Cornet states in this issue, Belgian archives do not allow to analyze their case in detail due to a lack of information. Moreover, although it is tempting, it seems to us inadequate to juxtapose the situation of another colony, better documented, on that of Belgian Congo.

24. On the military view of women in a wider colonial and African context see BENOÎT HENRIET, "Ordering the Wetlands. Policing and Legitimate Violence in the Leverville Concession (Belgian Congo, 1911-1920)", in EMMANUEL BLANCHARD, MARIEKE BLOEMBERGEN and AMANDINE LAURO (eds.), *Policing in Colonial Empires. Cases, Connections, Boundaries (ca. 1850-1970)*, Brussels, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2017, p. 41-61, JOEL GLASMAN, "Unruly Agents: Police Reform, Bureaucratization, and Policemen's Agency in Interwar Togo" in *Journal of African History*, no. 5, 2014 (1), p. 79-100, MICHELLE MOYD, "Making the Household, Making the State: Colonial Military Communities and Labor in German East Africa", in *International Labor and Working-class History*, no. 80, 2011, p. 53-76, SARAH ZIMMERMAN, "Mesdames Tirailleurs and Indirect Clients: West African Women and the French Colonial Army, 1908-1918" in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, no. 44, 2011, p. 299-322 and TIMOTHY PARSONS, "All askaris are family men: sex, domesticity and discipline in the King's African Rifles, 1902-1964", in DAVID KILLINGRAY and DAVID E. OMISSI (eds.), *Guardians of Empire. The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers c. 1700-1964*, Manchester, 1999, p. 157-179.

25. MICHELLE MOYD, "We don't want to die for nothing': askari at war in German East Africa, 1914-1918", in SANTANU DAS (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writings*, Cambridge, 2011, p. 97.

26. Charles Tombeur (1867-1947). He served as Vice-Governor-General of the Katanga Province from 1912 to 1920, with an interruption during the First World War. When the war broke out, Tombeur was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Belgian colonial troops on a temporary basis. In January 1916, he was promoted to the rank of Major General Colonial troops, temporarily and for the duration of the war. FERNAND DELICOUR, "Tombeur Charles Henri Marie Ernest", in *Biographie belge d'Outre-Mer*, Brussels, 1968, vol. VI, col. 1022-1026.

27. AYLWARD SHORTER, *African Recruits ...*, p. 90.

28. MICHAEL PESEK, "The Colonial Order Upside down? British and Germans in East African Prisoner-of-War Camps during World War I", in ULRIKE LINDNER, MAREN MÖHRING and MARK STEIN, SILKE STROH (ed.), *Hybrid Cultures – Nervous States. Britain and Germany in a (Post) Colonial World*, Amsterdam, 2010, p. 23-41.

to face the German perseverance and as the war went on, the need for men increased while the military organization of the Belgians collapsed. Due to lack of budget and a critical disorganization of the portering system²⁹, the overcrowded camps had a shortage of many items³⁰ and besides their ration the daily allowance rarely allowed soldiers and porters to buy additional supplies on indigenous markets as “native people commonly request 3,50 francs for a hen”³¹.

Permanent porters’ living conditions were even harsher and despite their crucial role, the Belgian authorities disregarded them. Barely dressed and even more ill-equipped than the soldiers, the porters coming in the firing line were often fired upon, and therefore they risked their lives just as the soldiers who received a much better pay. Porters were most of the time malnourished, as feeding men coming from so many different communities was almost as complicated. Rations mainly made of rice were for instance unfamiliar to men who are used to eat cassava. Extenuated by the huge workload of carrying loads weighing 25-35 kg over long distances, seven to nine hours a day, these men and women became the main victims of the conflict. Whenever it was impossible to use other means of transport, the porters had to provide everything they could think of³². Weakened by insufficient food, harsh climate, lack of rest or the inadequate hygiene and medical care, many died from

unhealthy conditions (influenza or tropical disease)³³. Men became sick rather than die fighting.

Within four months, the death rate amongst porters was so high that it raised the alarm and led the General Governor of Congo, Eugène Henry, to put an end to massive recruitments³⁴. Yet, the difficulties in resupplying and compensating the loss of those men essential to the proper functioning of military operations led him to order a mass levy (*levée militaire*) of 4,500 porters instead³⁵. Recruitments were no longer voluntary, as the deadly conditions were known and desertions were so persistent during the enlistments, that military and administrative authorities were permitted to requisition any man if necessary. From that moment, one can consider that due to the urgent need of men, headmen’s prerogatives – such as their right to use their “subjects” as workforce – were commonly misused to obtain men³⁶.

As September drew near, Belgians were moving fast, and by the middle of the month, the fighting pushed close to the city of Tabora, the largest town and the economic capital of German East Africa, where the Germans had moved their capital at that time. On 19 September 1916, the *Force Publique* achieved a crucial victory in Tabora. After a six-month campaign and an objective that was finally reached, the death rate of soldiers and porters was evaluated³⁷ to the fairly high number of

29. About systems of portering for Great Britain, Germany and Belgium during the First World War, see MICHAEL PESEK, “War of Legs. Transport and Infrastructure in the East African Campaign of World War I”, in *Transfer*, no. 5, 2015, p. 102-120.

30. Inventory of the equipment shipped to the African Campaigns in German East Africa, 13/10/1924 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663, 1205).

31. Camp Commander, Jammes, to District Commissioner, Lukula-Bavu, 04/02/1916 (FPS FA, AA, GG 7477).

32. ADA SCHNEE, *Bibi Mkuba. My Experiences in German East Africa during World War I*, translated and edited by Sam E. Edelstein Jr., San Bernardino, 1995, p. 33.

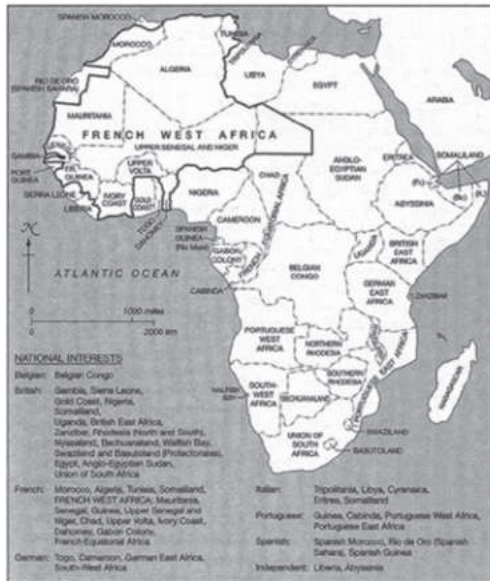
33. About this topic for British West Africa, see the timeless work of DAVID KILLINGRAY and JAMES MATTHEWS, “British African Carriers in the First World War”, in *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, no. 13, 1979 (1-2), p. 5-23.

34. Eugène Henry to Charles Tombeur, 04/08/1916 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663, 1205).

35. *Rapport annuel du Congo belge pour l’année 1917*, Brussels, 1919, p. 82 and HENRI SEGAERT, *Un terme au Congo belge : notes sur la vie coloniale, 1916-1918*, Brussels, 1919, p. 69.

36. MELVIN PAGE, “Introduction. Black Men in a White Men’s War”, in MELVIN PAGE (ed.), *Africa and the First World War*, New York, 1987, p. 5.

37. The Belgian colonial authorities recognized officially that the campaign conditions were such that it is not impossible that certain desertions and certain deaths have not been identified. Therefore, any number should be treated with caution. Note from the Service of the *Force Publique* to the Ministry of Colonies, Brussels, 27/01/1921 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663).



Colonial Africa in 1914



Theatre of War: Central and Eastern Africa

Edward Paice, *Tip & Run. The Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa*, London, Phoenix, 2008, p. xiii, xiv.



Caravan of porters to Mahenge (German East Africa) on September 25, 1917. Photo Album of Second Lieutenant Robert Vincent. Fonds Pierre Daye. ELB-AML-0060-0003. © AML (Archives et Musée de la Littérature).

11,000 men³⁸. The vast majority of them occurred amongst the porters who walked alongside the troops and died as a result of their injuries, or because of disease, as the Tabora area was generally considered to be an “unwholesome nest for fever” at that time³⁹.

With this conquest, the Belgians reached their goals and decided to end their military operations. Commanding General Tombeur was therefore put in charge of administering Tabora and the occupied territories of Ruanda and Urundi until an agreement was concluded with Great Britain, its military partner. As colonial rivalries were strong, the British State, ill-disposed towards the idea of a Belgian administration, or even of a mixed administration, refused to recognize Belgium’s claims in East Africa. The future of these territories was to be decided at the peace settlement and in the meantime, the military occupations were considered temporary, to the great displeasure of the Belgian colonial authorities⁴⁰.

In autumn 1916, the conditions worsened considerably for all the armies involved. The British once again needed the *Force Publique* against the German troops that threatened their forces in the south of Tabora. As their European and Indian mixed troops were nearly decimated by tropical diseases, they were having difficulties to defeat the Germans on their own. The Belgian authorities tried to make

the legal administration of Tabora a required condition to their collaboration, but to no avail. However, many discussions later, in February 1917, Belgian troops were requested to leave Tabora and to help the British forces with military support and thousands of porters⁴¹. In April 1917, Congolese brigades led by Lieutenant-Colonel Armand Huyghé⁴² and working under the superior supervision of the British were engaged against the German forces. Mahenge, their last bastion in East Africa, fell into Belgian hands on October 9, 1917. Forced back to Mozambique, von Lettow-Vorbeck and his last troops eventually surrendered after the Armistice.

During this last campaign, the recruitment of porters was rendered almost impossible. Exhausted by requisitions and frightened by previous massive recruitments carried out in all the territories crossed by the *Force Publique* troops, people fled at the approach of recruiters⁴³. Quickly, measures were taken to increase the numbers of porters. Crackdowns towards fugitives were deepened and indigenous chiefs were sanctioned when they failed to get enough men. The occupied territories of Ruanda and Urundi were not spared either. Even if they provided men in August and September 1916, they were requested to do so again when the new massive recruitments began in 1917 for the second campaign, and losses were numerous. Consequently, new mass levies were ordered, driven by war needs and pressure from British authorities.

38. JAN DE WAELE, “Voor Vorst en Vaderland: Zwarte soldaten en dragers tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog in Congo”, in *Militaria Belgica*, 2007-2008, p. 128.

39. ADA SCHNEE, *My Experiences in German East Africa ...*, p. 29.

40. See Thomas Graditzky in this issue.

41. H. WEBER, “Négociations diplomatiques au sujet de Tabora (1916)”, in *La Belgique Militaire*, no. 62, 1967, p. 11-14; no. 63, 1967, p. 15-16.

42. Armand Huyghé (1871-1944). During the First World War, he first fought on the Belgian front and then left for Congo where he participated, as lieutenant-colonel, in the Belgian campaign in German East Africa. In 1917, he was appointed Commander-in-chief of Belgian colonial troops in German East Africa and led the offensive for the capture of Mahenge on October 9, 1917. PAUL VAN DEN ABELE, “Huyghé de Mahenge (Chevalier Armand-Christophe)”, in *Biographie coloniale belge*, 1955, vol. IV, col. 415-422.

43. Avoidance tactics were clearly not specific to the war period. From the first years of European colonization in Africa, it enabled the local population to escape from taxation, forced labour or coerced recruitments of workers and soldiers. See MICHELLE MOYD, “Resistance and Rebellions (Africa)”, in *1914-1918-online...*, 2017-06-20 and MARC MICHEL, *Essai sur la colonisation positive. Affrontements et accommodements en Afrique Noire 1830-1930*, Paris, 2009.

About 20,000 porters were recruited in total⁴⁴. If the colonial archives are mainly silent as to the general recruitment conditions, or merely stipulate that it “was very well done”⁴⁵, others show a different reality as repressions of fugitives and measures taken against indigenous headmen who failed to mobilize a sufficient number of recruits were intensified. While many young people had been recruited in 1916, 1917 recruitments were less demanding with regard to the physical condition of individuals and many old people and children were part of the recruits.

Desertions and death rates amongst recruits from Ruanda and Urundi were so significant that 3,000 Congolese porters were requested in Katanga in May and 13,000 more in July⁴⁶, while the recruitment of porters originating from Rwanda and Burundi was stopped definitively⁴⁷. This decision of recruiting in Congo was far from being taken lightly, as the consequences of portage on the populations were well-known to the Belgian colonial authorities. But the imperatives of war dictated the decision-making⁴⁸. Within months, recruiters helped by territorial leaders managed to mobilize 13,367 men, more than the required number, which leaves no doubt as to the extreme coercion used on people. Of those 13,367, “only” 10,467 reached East Africa and of the 2,900 missing, some will have deserted on the way, others will have died and others will have been declared unfit⁴⁹.

II. Rewards for the living, Thoughts for the dead

*Mpe Bula-Matari molamu afuti
Basoda baye babundi na bokasi :
Na basusu apesi dekorasio.
Basusu bazwi o likolo mosolo*⁵⁰.
And Bula-Matari benevolent has rewarded
The soldiers who have fought with energy :
To some awards,
To others extra money.

The very last months of 1918 and the following year were dedicated to the demobilization of the Belgian colonial troops. Military campaigns were over but the harsh living conditions led to many more deaths amongst Congolese soldiers and African porters: they were exhausted and suffered from constant reduction in rations⁵¹ and rampant epidemics. The most valiant were used for the construction of shelters (*gîtes*) for former combatants, and infirmaries for sick people who were kept away from their homes in an attempt to prevent epidemics, extending their homecoming for weeks.

At home, the post-war effects weren't easy to manage for the former combatants. As many of them returned with physical injuries and presumably psychological ones, the weight must have been heavy on their family. It was indubitably difficult to get back to a normal life⁵².

44. *Ordonnance du 4 juillet 1917 ordonnant la levée extraordinaire de porteurs militaires, Ordonnance du 18 août 1917 ordonnant la levée extraordinaire de porteurs militaires and Ordonnance du 14 novembre 1917 ordonnant la levée extraordinaire de porteurs militaires.*

45. Report on the recruitment of porters for the requirements of the British army, East African - Belgian occupation, Eastern Zone, post Rukira, 10/04/1917 (FPS FA, AA, RWA 344).

46. Ministry of Justice to Foreign Affairs, Le Havre, 25/06/1917 (FPS FA, AD, AF 1.3).

47. Commander-in-chief of the Northern Provinces Stevens, Kitega, 06/07/1917 (FPS FA, AA, RWA 344).

48. Major Couche to Ministry of Colonies, Le Havre, 23/05/1917 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2659).

49. *Rapport annuel du Congo belge pour l'année 1917*, Brussels, 1919, p. 85.

50. *Et Bula-Matari bienveillant a rétribué Les soldats qui ont combattu avec énergie : Aux uns des décorations, Aux autres de l'argent en plus. "Bobutwi bwa basoda (Retour des soldats)", in PIERRE KITA M. MASANDI and MARC DEPAEPE, La chanson scolaire au Congo belge, anthologie, Paris, 2004, p. 68.*

51. A daily ration was 500 gr. of rice or flour per day in 1918. In comparison, a 1923-daily ration was 1 kg. of *chickwangué*, 100 gr. of palm oil, 500 gr. of bananas, 200 gr. of rice, 100 gr. of beans, 200 gr. of meat or fish and 20 gr. of salt. Eugène Henry to Jules Renkin, Boma, 06/03/1918 (FPS FA, AA, AE 370).

52. MICHELLE MOYD, “Extra-European Theatres of War”, in *1914-1918 – online...*, 2014-10-08.

After the war came a time to remember those who fought and those who fell for *la Patrie*. Despite expressions of appreciation and gratitude, officers and Congolese troops of the *Force Publique* were not on the national agenda of memorial ceremony⁵³. Unlike the French who commemorate since November 1919 the massive participation of Africans and the heavy casualties they suffered, nothing similar was done in Belgium⁵⁴.

Memorials and ceremonies, flourishing, were dedicated to Belgian *Jass*⁵⁵ and civilian deaths during the war but the colonial troops who had returned from German East Africa were not associated with the Armistice parades or with the *Joyeuse Entrée* of King Albert in Brussels at the end of the war. Bitterly disappointed by what was perceived as a lack of consideration, colonial officers expressed their disaffection and strong desire that African campaigns and the *Force Publique* were duly recognized⁵⁶.

At the end of the war, it was assumed that Tabora and Mahenge helped Belgium to assert its status of “victorious nation”. Many were those who recommended the bravery and the loyalty of the *Force Publique* troops. Congolese soldiers and porters emerge as valuable military assistants, trustworthy of being rewarded as “their endurance, tenacity, enthusiasm were unalterable”⁵⁷.

The valiant colonial Army the War had forced us to get up, had achieved without defeat, the task that had been assigned to her. [...] Now, Tabora should be listed in Belgians’ successful military actions alongside Liège, Haelen and Yser. First, it’s a deserved homage, then it’s a political need⁵⁸.

First marks of collective recognition were obviously military and colonial ones⁵⁹. Soldiers and porters could be commended in the Army Order of their battalion (*Ordre du Jour de l’Armée*), be granted honorary distinctions⁶⁰ for “their loyalty to the flag” and their ‘dedication’ to their European leaders⁶¹. Noticeably, these rewards and how they have been awarded to Africans were acutely marked with paternalism and the vivid racial distinction between European and African combatants. Two distinctions existed at that time to grant the indigenous people: the *Ordre royal du Lion* and the *Ordre de l’Étoile Africaine*. Created before the war, as visible marks of recognition discerned to Europeans for services to Congo and, more generally, in favour of Africa’s “civilization”, these two distinctions were chosen to give to European officers and NCOs, and soldiers and porters having distinguished themselves, individually, during the African campaigns.

53. ANNE CORNET, “La réception des campagnes africaines de la Grande Guerre en Belgique pendant l’entre-deux-guerres, entre amertume et reconnaissance”, in PIERRE DEJEMPEPE and NATHALIE TOUSIGNANT (EDS), *La Guerre 14-18 en Afrique. Des mémoires repliées*, Brussels, 2016, p. 73.

54. MARC MICHEL, *L’Afrique dans l’engrenage de la Grande Guerre*, Paris, 2013 and RUTH GINIO, “African Soldiers between Memory and Forgetfulness: The Case of Post-Colonial Senegal”, in *Outre-Mers. Revue d’histoire*, no. 94, 2006, p. 141-155.

55. “Jass” is a term that refers to the Belgian soldier in the First World War, and was popularized in the inter-war period. This term is the direct adaptation of the Flemish word “Jas” which means “coat” which is then an integral part of the Belgian military uniform. LAURENCE VAN YPERSELE, EMMANUEL DEBRUYNE and CHANTAL KESTELOOT, *Bruxelles, la mémoire et la guerre (1914-2014)*, Waterloo, 2014, p. 125.

56. ANNE CORNET, “Le soldat congolais dans la Grande Guerre. Un oublié de la propagande de guerre belge?”, in *Outre-Mers. Revue d’histoire*, no. 390-391 (Special issue: La Première Guerre mondiale et les empires coloniaux), 2016, p. 211-233.

57. CHARLES TOMBEUR, “Campagnes coloniales belges (1914-1918)”, in LOUIS FRANCK (ed.), *Le Congo belge*, vol. 2, Brussels, 1928, p. 176.

58. It corresponds to the idea that this war was a turning point in the struggle between civilization and barbarism. PIERRE DAYE, *Avec les vainqueurs de Tabora*, Brussels, 1935, p. 199 and DICK VAN GALEN LAST, *Black Shame ...*

59. About rewards to European officers and NCOs, see ANNE CORNET, “La réception des campagnes africaines ...”, p. 71-80.

60. BENJAMIN YATA LOKADI, “Les militaires Congolais décorés de la Première Guerre mondiale: des modèles de patriotisme”, in ISIDORE NDAYWEL É NZIEM and PAMPHILE MABIALA MANTUBA-NGOMA (EDS), *Le Congo belge dans la Première Guerre mondiale (1914-1918)*, Paris, 2015, p. 251-264 and A.C. BORNE, “Les distinctions honorifiques belges de la guerre 1914-1918”, in *Militaria Belgica*, 1988, p. 71-86.

61. CHARLES TOMBEUR, “Campagnes coloniales belges (1914-1918) ...”, p. 176.

From September 1915, both General Tombeur as Supreme Commander of Eastern troops and the Governor General were allowed to confer the bronze medal of the *Ordre royal du Lion* to indigenous auxiliaries⁶². “Brave soldiers” who were commended in the Army Order of their battalion for having particularly distinguished themselves by their commitment during the war could be given the silver or bronze medal of the *Ordre de l’Étoile Africaine*.

Sergeant-Major Kwangule, register 47075: Excellent officer. Distinguished himself during the campaign by his military skills, his courage and his coolness under fire. Has carried out in various circumstances difficult assignments entrusted to him. Being a platoon leader, he was seriously wounded in Idete’s battle by launching the assault on enemy positions at the head of his men. Already holds the Bronze Medal of the *Ordre royal du Lion* for acts of war⁶³.

A distinction was also awarded to the most deserving ones. Soldiers who had been commended in the Army Order of their battalion and those who had been proposed an award several times, as well as soldiers killed or dead from their wounds and commended, were also given a posthumous award⁶⁴. Only a few Congolese soldiers were given the gold medal, like the *Premier Sergent Barasi*⁶⁵.

Besides those colonial awards, three decorations were especially established in relation with the war to award to those who took part in the African campaigns: the *Médaille Commémorative des Campagnes d’Afrique 1914-1917*; the *Croix de Guerre, 1914-1918* and the *Médaille interalliée* or *Médaille de la Victoire 1914-1918*. These decorations were awarded by the Belgian War Office at the request of European military commanders⁶⁶. The first medal, the *Médaille Commémorative des Campagnes d’Afrique, 1914-1917*, was the only one that was specifically made as a “precious souvenir” and a “distinct mark” to give to those who took part in the African campaigns and “showed a valour and loyalty such that the Fatherland owes them a special mark of recognition”⁶⁷. Two distinct medals were created, a silver one for European officers and NCOs, and a bronze one for indigenous *gradés* and soldiers. Bestowed by ministerial ordinance, the latter were awarded on a massive scale, about 16,000⁶⁸.

Both the *Croix de Guerre, 1914-1918* and the *Médaille de la Victoire, 1914-1918* were national awards created to reward acts of bravery against the enemy of the Belgian army, that were extended to indigenous people “who performed particularly well” during the African campaigns⁶⁹. Due to the strong racial boundary and the strict military

62. Arrêté-royal du 18 septembre 1915 autorisant le Gouverneur Général et le Commandant Supérieur des Troupes en opération à décerner, pendant la durée de la guerre, la médaille de bronze de l’Ordre royal du Lion, pour faits individuels de guerre accomplis par les soldats indigènes sur le théâtre des hostilités.

63. Sergent-Major Kwangule, matricule 47075 : “Excellent gradé. S’est distingué au cours de la campagne par ses aptitudes militaires, son courage et son sang-froid au feu. S’est acquitté en diverses circonstances des missions difficiles qui lui étaient confiées. Étant chef de peloton, a été grièvement blessé au combat d’Idete en se lançant en tête de ses hommes à l’assaut des positions ennemies. Est déjà titulaire de la Médaille de Bronze de l’Ordre royal du lion pour fait de guerre. Arrêté-royal du 21 juillet 1918 conférant la médaille de Bronze de l’Ordre de l’Étoile Africaine avec palme et attribution de la Croix de guerre au Sergent-Major Kwangule de la 2/XII et au Clairon de 1^e classe, Libanga de la 1/XII (FPS FA, AA, DH 2112).

64. Eugène Henry to Jules Renkin about the *haute-paie* for honorary gratification, Boma, 26/09/1916 (FPS FA, AA, DH 2246)

65. Arrêté-royal du 20 novembre 1916 octroyant la Médaille d’Or de l’Ordre de l’Étoile Africaine au premier-sergent Barasi.

66. A fourth medal, the *Médaille Commémorative de la Guerre 1914-1918* was solely awarded to Belgian citizens who fought inside the metropolitan army during the 14-18 War. Arrêté royal du 21 juillet 1919 créant la Médaille Commémorative de la Guerre 1914-1918.

67. PFS FA, AA, FP 3833. Jules Renkin to King Albert, Le Havre, 16/02/1917.

68. Arrêté-royal du 21 février 1917 instituant une médaille commémorative pour les militaires et fonctionnaires qui ont participé directement aux campagnes d’Afrique de 1914, 1915 et 1916. In 1931, a silver barrette inscribed with “Mahenge” was specifically given to civil servants, European and African soldiers enlisted in that campaign following the Arrêté-royal du 28 septembre 1931, modifiant celui du 21 février 1917 instituant les médailles commémoratives des campagnes d’Afrique.

69. Zwendelaar, attaché of the Minister of Colonies’ Cabinet at Sainte-Adresse, Le Havre, 27/08/1918 (FPS FA, AA, DH 2117).



Gold Commemorative medal of African Campaign, 1914-1918 awarded to Sergeant Major Baras[s]i on 22 December 1917 in Kilossa (East Africa), Musée royal de l'Afrique centrale, HP.1954.95.2-96.

guideline, fewer African soldiers and porters were granted these two decorations.

On a practical level, the fate of those who remained was not altogether enviable and financial gratifications were limited. Even if at the end of each term, soldiers and permanent porters (*auxiliaires des troupes*) received indemnities and even if honorary distinctions went hand in hand with annuities, a *haute-paie* and a *rente tenant compte des conditions de la vie indigène*⁷⁰, all of these were small. In November 1915, Charles Tombeur shared his concerns with the Minister of Colonies, Jules Renkin, to grant specific allowances for indigenous soldiers and permanent porters or their families⁷¹. However, those questions were to be pushed aside and discussed at the end of the war, to determine the budgetary costs that the adoption of governmental favours would entail⁷². A few months later, as the war dragged on, the General Governor Eugène Henry decided to allow each soldier a financial reward equivalent to a month's pay, thus a few francs⁷³. From August 1917, widows and parents of soldiers and porters, who died at war or because of the war, also received 75 francs and 20 francs respectively, in addition of the remaining balance⁷⁴.

After the demobilization, Jules Renkin decided to grant a two-month pay to those having served during East Africa campaigns. In addition, soldiers having served during the demobilization

received 25 francs, but only if "the contract was approved by the Etat-Major office in Boma and on the condition that the interruption of service did not exceed six months"⁷⁵. In 1919, Louis Franck, the new Minister of Colonies, decided to reward those who were directly involved in African campaigns, as "a manner of showing our recognition for their dedication and bravery, once again"⁷⁶. An annual budget was determined and Congolese Veterans of 1914-1918, soldiers and permanent porters, were thus granted specific allowances on demand of a member of the colonial administration. Each of these allowances was related to the value of the man, transcribed in his military record (*livret militaire*) and only on the recommendation of a higher authority. Those having served at war during East Africa campaigns of 1916 or 1917 received a two-month pay and soldiers having served during the demobilization received 25 francs in addition, only if "the contract was approved by the Etat-Major office in Boma and on the condition that the interruption of service did not exceed six months"⁷⁷.

Besides the pension they received after being discharged (*pension de réforme*), Congolese veterans with disabilities obtained specific allowances of 150-250 francs a year, depending on their disability⁷⁸. The lower-limb amputees obtained a sewing machine in addition⁷⁹. Even if some reports suggest that indigenous war-disabled received, individually, other compensations based on their dis-

70. Arrêté-royal du 22 décembre 1916 relatif à l'octroi d'une haute paie ou d'une rente viagère aux militaires noirs décorés pour faits de guerre de la Médaille de l'Ordre de l'Étoile Africaine ou de l'Ordre royal du Lion. Minister of Colonies to King Albert about military decorations for African soldiers, Le Havre, 8/12/1916 (FPS FA, AA, DH 2246).

71. Charles Tombeur to Jules Renkin, Elisabethville, 06/11/1915 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663).

72. Eugène Henry to Jules Renkin, Boma, 09/06/1916 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663).

73. Note from Eugène Henry, Boma, 12/04/1917 (FPS FA, AA, GG 7303).

74. Eugène Henry to Charles Tombeur, Boma, 04/08/1916 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663, 1205). It is obviously difficult to quantify the value of this sum in relation to life lost. However, the fact that a wife accompanying her husband in a military campaign receives five francs a day in compensation for the household chores she performs in the camp would mean that a man's life equals 15 days of service. (Circular adjusting the allowances, 27/12/1915).

75. Jules Renkin to Eugène Henry, Brussels, 22/02/1918 (FPS FA, DA, AE 370) and 6th Direction (FP) to General Director Van Damme, Brussels, 16/12/1921 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663).

76. Minister of Colonies Louis Franck to Eugène Henry, Brussels, 27/06/1919. (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663).

77. FPS FA, AA, FP 2663, 1205. 6th Direction (FP) to General Director Van Damme, Brussels, 16/12/1921 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663, 1205).

78. Ordinance-law on reform pensions for disabled persons, 10/07/1916.

79. 6th Direction (FP) to Ministry of Colonies, Brussels, 26/02/1919 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663, 1205).

ability, no rehabilitation centre was ever built, nor were psychological injuries taken into account⁸⁰.

Yet, when discharged from the *Force Publique* “with almost no financial resources and no job”, most of the Congolese veterans suffered from the complete lack of pension system and faced the grim reality of extreme poverty that shocked colonizers and populations⁸¹. Despite the large increase of these allowances compared to those of 1916, they seemed unsatisfying to some veterans who, like the disabled ones, probably embittered by their living conditions, grouped in *villages de mutilés* and used violence towards local populations and threatened colonial authorities⁸². Therefore, from the 1920s to the 1930s, more forceful efforts have been taken to find former combatants and grant financial allowances, and “marks of interest” to the worthy ones, on a more systematic basis, but without any significant result⁸³. No discussion about an access to any official status ever took place. A last measure was taken in 1946⁸⁴, as the Second World War was over. The Ministry of Colonies decided to reorder allowances, which were

intended for *Force Publique* troops and gave each veteran an old-age allowance (*allocation de vieillesse*), those of 14-18 included. At that time, nearly 8,000 of them were living in dire poverty and were stirring up Provincial Governors to do something as “they were for too long forgotten”, just as indigenous populations were heavily blaming the administration⁸⁵. Following a specific and lengthy procedure⁸⁶, this allowance gave each indigenous veteran in possession of his regiment number or military passbook 150 francs per quarter until their death, with the exception of the ones condemned to a *peine de servitude pénale de deux mois ou plus*⁸⁷.

The number of Congolese veterans who actually received an allowance is not easily quantifiable. Once again, complete records are missing. Yet, it is likely that the complex “Western-based” procedure led to the impossibility for some of them to assert their rights to any allowance⁸⁸. Was the unknown mass of “unrecorded” porters concerned by all these grants? Little is known but it is unlikely they would have been numerous, as lots of them will have remained untraceable⁸⁹.

80. Louis Franck to Eugène Henry, Brussels, 21/05/1918 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2658).

81. “Nos nouvelles coloniales” in *Notre Colonie*, no. 9, 1920 (1), p. 130-131, quoted by ANNE CORNET in “La réception des campagnes africaines . . .”, p. 73.

82. Sankuru’s District Commissioner to Lusambo Prosecutor, Ikoka, 27/01/1922 (FPS FA, AA, GG 5081, 1357). These *villages de mutilés* thus joined the *villages de licenciés*, regrouping former soldiers, above local chieftaincies.

It is also possible to make an analogy with the aspects developed by Nancy Rose Hunt. NANCY ROSE HUNT, “Espace, temporalité et rêverie : écrire l’histoire des futurs au Congo belge”, in *Politique Africaine*, no. 135, 2014, p. 115-136.

83. e.g. Circular of 26 November 1927 deciding the annual grant of a blanket and two blue drill pagnes to certain categories of indigenous veterans; Decree of 3 April 1930 adjusting the pension of indigenous veterans; Royal Decree of 3 December 1930 on the pension of indigenous veterans; Circular of 8 November 1932 on pay and allowances to indigenous soldiers of the *Force Publique*; Circular of 26 November 1932 setting the *haute-paie* and pension for honorary distinction awarded to indigenous soldiers of the *Force Publique*.

84. From 1 January 1960, this old-age allowance was increased to 300 francs every quarter “in order to allow former servants, now old and only enjoying limited resources, to get, periodically, a work, a blanket or any other object”. Ministry of Congo and Ruanda-Urundi to General Governor, Brussels, 24/11/1959 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2614).

85. Pierre Ryckmans to Ministry of Colonies, Léopoldville, 25/01/1946 (FPS FA, AA, GG 2614).

86. Each territorial administrator had to transmit a specific card filled out with as much information as possible on the veteran listed in his territory by Territorial Agents to the Captain-Commander who checked this information in the Military Record and also if the veteran had any sentence in his record. If not, the completed card was sent to the District Commissioner who allowed the grant. Eugène Henry to Provincial Governors, Léopoldville, 12 /07/1946 (FPS FA, AA, GG 10648).

87. The Section of the FP of the Ministry of Colonies to Eugène Henry, Brussels, 16/04/1946 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2614).

88. Lots of allowance cards contained misspelled names. E.g. Soldier AOHE was renamed AHENE, soldier GWETO was renamed GWATA, and soldier ITOLI was renamed ITELU. Lt Jacobs to Territorial Administrator of Libenge, Lisala, 14/07/1948 (FPS FA, AA, GG 22 385).

89. Captain Maertens to Territorial Administrator of Libenge, Lisala, 26/06/1940 (FPS FA, AA, GG 22 384).

III. Burial places and memorials

In the early 1920s, once territorial priorities were settled, the counting of victims and the question of memorials emerged everywhere, thus also for Belgium⁹⁰. How to honour the many dead⁹¹? In the case of Belgian Congo, if there are no official data on the number of casualties, it is mainly because official reports often indicate unmatched or imprecise data⁹². Historian Jan de Waele established that, between 1914 and 1918, 145 European officers and NCOs, 2,000 soldiers and 24,975 porters (approximately 10% of the generally accepted figure of recruitment) died, mainly from malnutrition, official neglect and disease for the latter⁹³.

In the regions crossed by the *Force Publique*, graveyards and tombs were flourishing. Considering wartime's circumstances, indigenous who fell on the battlefields were mostly buried with few marks of recognition other than a wooden stake with a number plate on top of it, and sometimes in mass graves. Little efforts were done for Europeans who were buried in single graves. Yet, years later, those makeshift gravesites were in poor condition and the four military cemeteries of Tabora were abandoned as Captain Armand Delattre, who was

in German East Africa during the Mahenge campaign, reported in 1919.

By walking through the bushes, we realize that we are crossing over mounds: not one cross or sign whatsoever that would allow this place to be recognized as the burial place of many of our war victims, who all deserved better! [talking about the first cemeteries]⁹⁴.

Disillusioned, Delattre spoke out against the absence of care and maintenance of the gravesites to the Ministry of Colonies and committed himself towards erecting tombs in Tabora, "otherwise it would not be done"⁹⁵. A few years later, while the Belgian State was in compliance with practices inaugurated by Great Britain and France, the colonial authorities decided to leave to each District commissioner of Congo the initiative to achieve the erection of European and African military graves without further delay. For budgetary concerns, the Commissioners were invited to improve the situation by using the credits already available.

At first, military graves were localized and grouped into distinct graveyards for Europeans and Africans. Each European tombstone wore a name

90. Part of this question must be answered when compared to the Belgian situation. See AXEL TIXHON, LAURENCE VAN YPERSELE, "Du sang et des pierres. Les monuments de la guerre 1914-1918 en Wallonie", in *Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent*, no. 7, 2000, p. 83-126 and LAURENCE VAN YPERSELE, EMMANUEL DEBRUYNE and CHANTAL KESTELOOT, *Bruxelles ...*

91. About traditional African mourning practices see MESHACK OWINO, "Bereavement and Mourning (Africa)", in *1914-1918-online...*, 2017-01-09.

92. For example, between 1916 and 1918, the annual reports of Belgian Congo grouped under "destination not reached" all the deceased, the convicts and the deserted recruits, and until the early 1920s, military officials admitted that they only possessed inaccurate information about soldiers and porters, recruited, wounded, killed or deserters.

93. JAN DE WAELE, "Voor Vorst en Vaderland ...", p. 128. In comparison, the Belgian (metropolitan) army lost about 34,000 soldiers. LAURENCE VAN YPERSELE, EMMANUEL DEBRUYNE and CHANTAL KESTELOOT, *Bruxelles ...*, p. 24. These figures are confirmed by my own research and can be matched with the numbers established in 1933 by the Belgian Ministry of Colonies: 3,891 soldiers and 23,954 porters were killed or died as a result of their wounds between 1 August 1914 and the Armistice, and 120 European officers and NCOs died at the same period. Rating for loss of Belgian troops established according to reports of the Medical Service of the Eastern troops in February 1919, 01/1933 (FPS FA, AA, FP 2663). In a recognition effort, since November 2017, the Belgian register of war dead mentioned under "First World War – Belgium Congo – Force Publique" nearly 1,500 men, officers, NCOs and soldiers who died during the Belgian campaigns in German East Africa: <https://www.wardeadregister.be>.

94. *C'est en le parcourant, à travers la brousse, que l'on se rend compte que l'on passe sur des tumulus: pas une croix, ou le moindre signe quelconque, qui fassent reconnaître l'endroit où reposent bon nombres de nos victimes de la guerre qui, toutes, méritaient mieux!* Armand Delattre to Charles Tombeur, Tabora, 11/05/1919 (FPS FA, AA, GG 6902).

95. *Idem*.

N° 218.

CONGO-BELGE

Carte d'ancien Combattant 1914-1918
bénéficiaire de l'allocation dite de Vieillesse

N° de la matricule : 71087.

Nom : Ikoko

Prénoms :

Grade : 1^{er} cl.

Catégorie : Médecin

Classe de milice : 1915

Nom du père : Badjeki (+)

Nom de la mère : Momba (+)

Village d'origine : Kobabaka.

Chefferie d'origine : Cumbandjale.

Territoire d'origine : Inongo.

District d'origine : Lac. Léopold. II.

Résidence : K. babaka.

Observations, renseignements divers: Ne bénéficie
d'aucune pension. Condamnations néant.

porteur de M.C. - M.V.

A Inongo, le 26 JUILLET 1947.

par l'Administrateur Territorial

R. GAUBE.

scellé

engraved in a marble plate⁹⁶, while African tombstones were in lava plates, mostly anonymous.

From summer 1921, five memorials⁹⁷ for African soldiers and porters of the *Force Publique* were built by British authorities in present Tanzania: two in Tabora, one in Lulanguru, one in Kigoma and one in Mahenge, in addition to all the European military graves⁹⁸. Refusing to do less than what the British did, the Belgian colonial authorities decided to erect other memorials in Congo too⁹⁹. The idea of individual commemoration and individual memorials for indigenous people was quickly abandoned as the colonial authorities saw it as a waste of public money and declared it impossible because of the lack of complete military records for indigenous recruits. From 1925, there existed three memorials: a mixed one in Kibati¹⁰⁰ (North-Kivu), a mixed one in Luvungi (South-Kivu) and in Albertville (Katanga). Each European memorial bore inscribed marble nameplates for each officer fallen on the battlefield or because of their wounds. On the African memorials of Kibati, Lulanguru, and Tabora, no individual name was inscribed but a bronze plate with the following inscription was hung: "In Memory of the Belgian Soldiers and Porters Who fell for the Fatherland, 1914-1919"¹⁰¹.

It took several more years to see the inauguration of a national memorial in Léopoldville, dedicated to both "Europeans, Congolese soldiers and porters,

dead in Africa during the 1914-1918 campaigns" in July 1927 and it took even longer periods of time to see a similar memorial in Belgium. While the *Rue du Ruanda*, the *Rue Général Tombeur* and the *Rue Général Molitor* were inaugurated in the late 1930s in the Brussels area, the *Monument aux troupes des campagnes d'Afrique*, dedicated to both Europeans and Africans who served in Africa since the Leopoldian era was finally erected in Schaerbeek (Brussels) in 1970, on the personal initiative of a colonial association, the *Union royale des Fraternelles Coloniales*.

IV. Colonial fear, homage and forgetfulness

For Andrew T. Jarboe and Richard S. Fogarty, the Great War "was an imperial contest fought by empires to determine the fate of those empires and protect their own possessions"¹⁰². This is also true for Belgium. The interests of the colony and of the Congolese population were subordinated to those of the *Métropole* and Congo's natural and manpower resources were extensively used for the benefit of Belgium ultimately. The complaint of Philippe Molangi, the Congolese veteran, seemed legitimate; he faced death closely and probably did not receive "his due" for his participation in the African campaigns of the First World War. One can say that despite the very important role they played during the Great War, soldiers and

96. In 1922, 20 military graves were to be erected in the Eastern Province and 13 in Katanga. File on Military graves, 02/05/1922 (FPS FA, AA, JUST 83B).

97. The same distinctions were made in other colonies and dominions. See MICHÈLE BARRETT, "Afterword: death and the Afterlife: Britain's colonies and dominions", in Das Santanu (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writings*, Cambridge, 2011, p. 301-320 and MARC MICHEL, *L'Afrique dans l'engrenage ...*

98. List of Belgian War Graves in Tanganyika Territory, 24/04/1925 (FPS FA, AA, JUST 83B).

99. For a detailed description of the Belgian graves and cemeteries in German East Africa, Congo and the Occupied Territories, see LOUIS HABRAN, "Tombs et cimetières belges de l'Est Africain", in *L'illustration congolaise*, no. 64, 1927, p. 1247-1252 and 1261-1265.

100. At first, this memorial was dedicated to European officers and was erected by the initiative of M. Festraets, mechanic of the Belgian navy in Kivu, in December 1922. Later on, on the occasion of its inauguration in 1924, this memorial was dedicated to both Europeans and Africans dead in 1915-1916 on the Kivu boarder. Festraets to Colonel Olsen, Bukavu, 07/12/1922 and Report on the inauguration of cemetery and monument erected in Kibati, Bukavu, 19/11/1924 (FPS FA, AA, JUST 83B).

101. À la mémoire des soldats belges tombés pour la *Patrie*, 1914-1917. LOUIS HABRAN, "Tombs et cimetières ...", p. 1250.

102. ANDREW TAIT JARBOE, RICHARD S. FORGARTY, "Introduction. An imperial turn in First World War Studies", in ANDREW TAIT JARBOE, RICHARD S. FORGARTY (eds), *Empires in World War I*, London-New York, 2014, p. 1.



Louis Habran, "Tombes et cimetières belges de l'Est Africain", in L'illustration congolaise, no. 64, 1927, p. 1263.



Louis Habran, "Tombes et cimetières belges de l'Est Africain", in L'illustration congolaise, no. 64, 1927, p. 1263.

porters were somehow unrecognized by Belgian authorities as nothing efficient was set up to allow the combatants and their families to effectively improve their situation¹⁰³.

During the war, it seems clear that the Belgian colonial administration, short in money, gave its priority to military supplies and not to the welfare of its *Forces vives* who endured war in very harsh conditions. Besides, the way death rates and impact of morbidity amongst soldiers and porters have been produced, counted and revised is relevant to apprehend how Belgian authorities dealt with them throughout the war. Even though there seem to have been some official concerns about what they were facing, they were seen as a needed sacrifice, in the end.

When returning from the war, African soldiers and porters might have expected the colonial authorities to recognize and honour their, mostly coerced, involvement with lands, jobs and a fairer treatment. But these aspirations were nearly always disappointed. Indeed, from the 1920s to 1946, little was done to ensure that each of them was fairly compensated for his involvement. The fact that the Belgian State “expressed its concerns” with colonial marks of consideration – medals, ribbons, certificates or small allowances – towards the valued ones, those who could prove they had been in the troops – was undoubtedly a way to dissuade the discontent to rise against the colonial administration. By awarding the brave ones¹⁰⁴, the Belgian authorities ensured and reaffirmed their superiority on the Congolese population and restored racial gaps that could have crumbled as the war gener-

ated close contacts between Africans and Europeans. These honorary distinctions, if they undeniably prove the valour of Congolese soldiers and porters during the war, are mostly accurate representations of the colonial system and reflections of racial conflicts and hierarchies. The same is true for the remembrance of the numerous African deaths. In Congo, as in other colonies in Africa, commemorations were also forms of colonial propaganda, means of glorifying the colonial project rather than the Africans who perished in the war. In order to erase the “Poor Little Belgium” status generated by the German invasion and to strengthen its position as powerful empire, Belgium chose to erect memorials as testimony of the large Belgian investment in Africa, since the military conquests of the Leopoldian regime, and as a statement of the success of Belgian colonialism against barbarism. Not a single Congolese was directly involved in commemoration project.

Finally, the effects of the hostilities – such as numerous deaths and the population displacement – and the violence against the populations should still be measured, as well as the permanent changes within Congolese society. Local populations suffered because of armies requisitioning their cattle, food stocks and livestock¹⁰⁵ during “military requisitions” performed “in legal form by the competent authorities” and which had no other limit than the military necessity in wartime¹⁰⁶, while the recruitments of porters was depopulating the countryside and contributed to food shortage and to some extent famine. Nevertheless, Belgian authorities did hardly anything to reward them, bringing out new grounds of scepticism and mistrust of Congolese

103. According to Michelle Moyd, “with few exceptions, Africans had played almost no role in the decisions and acts that started the war, in defining war aims, or in determining how it would be prosecuted”. MICHELLE MOYD, “Resistance and Rebellions (Africa)”

104. In this way, the Stanleyville (Kisangani) military camp “Sergent Ketele” was named in 1935 in honor of this Congolese sergeant who was killed in 1916 during the East African campaign. (I thank the anonymous reviewer for this mention).

105. In her memoirs, Ada Schnee, wife of the former governor of German East Africa, Heinrich Schnee, depicted the Congolese soldiers of the *Force Publique* during the Tabora campaign as ‘dreadful blacks’ who ransacked everything in their path, raped women and girls and murdered villagers. ADA SCHNEE, *Bibi Mkuba* This violent behaviour may not have been new or unusual as it was related with the common practice of soldiers to seize useful supplies after a raid, but the constraints and privations generated by the War might have aggravated and generalized it, as Michelle Moyd pointed it for the German *askari*. See MICHELLE MOYD, *Violent Intermediaries* ..., p. 143-147.

106. Charles Tombeur to Eugène Henry, Tabora, 03/12/1916 (FPS FA, AA, GG 16453).

populations – not just former soldiers and porters – towards the Belgian administration.

In addition, the effects of hostilities on acts of resistance have yet to be measured. In the French and British colonial situations, war experiences may have been a turning point that exacerbated the difficult pre-war conditions¹⁰⁷. Deep grievances against colonial labour, exploitation, taxation, arbitrary violence, racism and political legitimacy have led many Africans to question

or overthrow the colonial order. For the situation of Belgian Congo, the hard effects of the campaigns in East Africa (many deaths, famines, population's indigence and veterans' illness) have created an atmosphere of anxiety and instability. An atmosphere conducive to the emergence of a certain mistrust of colonial authority by manifestations of hostility that we see appear in Congo in the inter-war period such as the "Kimbanguism" (1915- 1921) or the "Pende People's Revolt" (1931)¹⁰⁸.

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107. For an overview of some of these movements, see TERRENCE O. RANGER, "Religious Movements and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa", in *African Studies Review*, no. 29, 1986, p. 1-69.

108. On this topic, see BOGUMIL JEWSIEWICKI, "La contestation sociale et la naissance du prolétariat au Zaïre au cours de la première moitié du XX^e siècle", in *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Études Africaines*, no. 10, 1976 (1), p. 47-70 and SUSAN ASCH, *L'Église du prophète Kimbangu : de ses origines à son rôle actuel au Zaïre (1921-1981)*, Paris, 1983, p. 19.