

Africa and the First World War

Africa and the First World War:

*Remembrance, Memories and
Representations after 100 Years*

Edited by

De-Valera NYM Botchway
and Kwame Osei Kwarteng

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements viii

Introduction x
De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway

Section I: Recruitments, Battlefronts and African Responses

Chapter One..... 2
The Role of the Gold Coast Regiment towards the Defeat of the Germans
in Africa during World War I
Colonel J. Hagan

Chapter Two 12
Nigerian Soldiers in the East African Campaign of the First World War:
1916-1917
Ibiang O. Ewa

Chapter Three 24
World War I: The Role of the Gold Coast and Asante towards
the British Victory
Kwame O. Kwarteng

Chapter Four..... 52
Bewilderment, Speculations and Benefaction: Africans' Interpretation
of World War One in the Literature of the Sudan United Mission British
Branch
Jordan S. Rengshwat

Section II: Wartime Colonial Economic Policies

Chapter Five	66
African Mobilization of Agricultural Resources in British West Africa during the First World War	
Adebayo A. Lawal	
Chapter Six	79
Impact of the First World War on Labour Recruitment in the North of the Gold Coast (Ghana)	
Marciana M. Kuusaana	
Chapter Seven.....	91
The Impact of the First World War on Africa’s Transportation Systems: The Nigerian Railways as a Case Study	
Tokunbo A. Ayoola	

Section III: Wartime, Society and Mobility

Chapter Eight.....	110
Detention and Deportation: A Study of the “De-Germanization” of Togoland and the Gold Coast during World War I, 1914-1918	
Augustine D. Osei	
Chapter Nine.....	127
Chieftaincy and Indirect Rule: The Nature, Politics, and Exploits of Chiefs during the First World War in West Africa (1914-1930)	
Samuel Bewiadzi and Margaret Ismaila	
Chapter Ten	145
The Influenza Pandemic in the Gold Coast and Asante, 1918-1919	
Kwame O. Kwarteng and Stephen Osei-Owusu	

Section IV: Memory, Remembrance and Representations

Chapter Eleven	164
Italy’s “Parallel War” in Libya: A Forgotten Front of World War I (1914-1922)	
Stefano Marcuzzi	

Chapter Twelve	188
Historical Connections: Appreciating the Impact of the African Past on its Present and Future through the “3 Cs” of the First World War Adjei Adjepong	
Chapter Thirteen.....	226
Cinema, World War I and the New Nations of Africa: The Case of Ghana Vitus Nanbigne	
Contributors.....	245

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INTRODUCTION

DE-VALERA N.Y.M. BOTCHWAY

The 1914-1918 War, the Great War, World War One, or the First World War as it is variously known stays in contemporary memory and engages popular imagination as an incredible historical experience of human belligerence. Although the crisis that orchestrated and caused the war to break out in July 1914 was the product of the bellicose desires, nationalist activities, imperial struggles and political devices of European countries, the war became one of the most disturbing international conflagrations known in world history. Thus, there is incontrovertible proof that the war had seismic political, economic, social and demographic impacts on Africa. In fact, as Bill Nasson has aptly observed, “it was here (Africa) rather than in Europe that the war was actually fought for its longest period”.¹ It can be argued that the war ended in Africa because it was there, exactly in Abercorn (now Mbala) in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), that General Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, the last of the German commanders of the war to capitulate, yielded on 25th November, 1918. This was two weeks after the signing of the Armistice in Europe.²

The tentacles of the antagonism and violence of Britain, France, Belgium and Germany entangled and ensnared their colonies in Africa; moreover, not even Liberia and Ethiopia, which were not colonies, and the relatively smaller African colonies of Italy, Portugal and Spain remained outside the miasma and indirect embracement and effect of the war. Ultimately sucking in the human resources of every continent like a vortex, it was fought on a far wider dimension than Europe. European colonial powers exploited the manual labour and natural resources of their colonial possessions abroad in Africa and Asia to prosecute the war agenda in both Europe and overseas. Because the African continent was largely a colonised one, where Germany had colonial possessions, with

¹ Bill Nasson, “More Than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck: Sub-Saharan Africa in the First World War”, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 40. Jahrg., H. 2, Der Erste Weltkrieg in globaler Perspektive, 2014, 160. (160-183).

² Duane Koenig, “A Note on World War I: General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck in German East Africa”, *Military Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 1970, 14.

Britain and France controlling the largest colonial territories, all the European colonial powers that were directly in the violent feud drew on the African territories extensively during the war for both human and material resources. Thus, in the long run, the war cannot be regarded as a European event to which others only contributed. It was as much an African and Asian war as it was a European war. Thus, as far as Africa is concerned, we agree with Richard Rathbone's apt observation that clearly the period of the First World War should not be deemed "a Eurocentric time capsule" which is being artificially introduced into the African context.³

Africans also fought in the theatres of the war outside Africa. They were sent there by European colonial authorities. Significantly, the forceful uprooting and shipping of Africans across the Atlantic to fight in Europe, as Nasson has pointed out, made the war a shocking watershed moment for many of those who were shipped off and their relatives in Africa. It opened old wounds of disturbing memories about the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade.⁴ "For some, the experience of being shipped off to the unknown awakened deep inherited memories of the feared Middle Passage of voyages into slavery."⁵ Moreover, in taking men to work, toil and die for European imperial powers in Europe "the war caused the largest movement of Africans from their home continent since the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade".⁶

France is known to have relied heavily on the various services of the thousands of indigenous African soldiers that it deployed to the battlefields in Europe. The soldiers from Africa included West Africans, popularly known as *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* (Senegalese riflemen), Algerians, also known as *Turcos* and *Spahis*, Tunisians, Moroccans, Malagasies, and Somalis.⁷ On the other hand, Britain used a number of African soldiers in

³ R. Rathbone, "World War I and Africa: Introduction", *Journal of African History*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1978, 9. (1-9).

⁴ Nasson, "More Than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck: Sub-Saharan Africa in the First World War", 165.

⁵ *Ibid.* 165-166.

⁶ *Ibid.*, citing Timothy Stapleton, "The Impact of the First World War on African People", in John Laband (ed.), *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Africa. From Slavery Days to Rwandan Genocide* (Pietermaritzburg, 2007), 124-148.

⁷ Christian Koller, "Colonial Military Participation in Europe (Africa)", in Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, (eds.), *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08, n.p. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10193, assessed on 18/12/2017.

the Middle Eastern campaigns; however, it was not eager like France to send African troops to fight in Europe. Nevertheless, a movement for the creation of a “million black army” to fight for Britain on European battlefields started in Britain. Josiah Wedgwood, a man with imperial background, stated in 1916 that such an army was necessary “because we do not want all the whites killed - to put it bluntly. To slow down the rate of killing of our own men and to eke out the finest race on earth”.⁸ The “Million Black Army Movement” was supported by some British officers and politicians,⁹ but the “Colonial Office resisted the idea of using Black troops outside Africa, particularly in Europe or against European troops”.¹⁰ Ultimately, the movement was not successful because of logistical issues, racist prejudices and opposition from colonial authorities in Africa. However, as Christian Koller indicates, many Black men and “coloured” men from the Union of South Africa provided non-combatant supplementary services in Europe in the “South African Native Labour Contingent”, the “Cape Auxiliary Horse Transport” and the “Cape Coloured Labour Corps”.¹¹ Some Blacks who resided in the United Kingdom were able to join the metropolitan British forces.¹² Conversely, Italy’s attempt to use African troops from Libya to fight in Europe was a fiasco in 1915. The colonial troops did not get to the frontline because many died from pneumonia when they reached Europe. Those who survived the disease were sent back to Libya.¹³ In contrast, a number of Congolese soldiers served the metropolitan Belgian army and fought on the Western Front. The Portuguese, however, did not send colonial units to fight in Europe, and the number of soldiers of African descent who fought in Portugal’s *Corpo Expedicionário Português* (Portuguese Expeditionary

⁸ “African manpower”, *The Daily Chronicle*, 7 Nov, 1916, 4, cited in David Killingray, “The Idea of a British Imperial African Army”, *Journal of African History*, Vol. 20. No. 3, 1979, 425 (421-436).

⁹ Koller, “Colonial Military Participation in Europe (Africa)”, n.p.

¹⁰ Killingray, “The Idea of a British Imperial African Army”, 425.

¹¹ Koller, “Colonial Military Participation in Europe (Africa)”, n.p. For further information Koller points to Bill Nasson, *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914–1918* (Johannesburg; New York: Penguin, 2007); N.G. Garson, “South Africa and World War I”, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 8, 1979, 68-85; Albert Grundlingh, *Fighting Their Own War. South African Blacks and the First World War* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press 1987); B. P. Willan, “The South African Native Labour Contingent 1916–1918”, *Journal of African History*, 19, 1978, 61-86.

¹² Koller, “Colonial Military Participation in Europe (Africa)”, n.p.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Corps) on the Western Front is not known.¹⁴ Germany also did not dispatch African troops to fight in Europe because of logistical reasons; however, it employed plenty of African soldiers in the German colonial armed forces known as *Schutztruppe* to fight the war in the “protectorates” of German East Africa, German Southwest Africa and Cameroon.¹⁵

Although many Africans fought on the Western Front in Europe, defending the interests of their colonial masters (with the French alone sending about 450,000 African fighters from their colonies in West and North Africa to fight against Germany on the frontline in Europe),¹⁶ it is a fact that the war turned out to be not only a conflict in which Europeans fought Europeans, but also one in which Africans, compelled or coaxed by the colonial powers, fought against Africans in Africa. It has been estimated that over 2 million Africans were involved in the conflict as soldiers or labourers. About 10 percent of them were killed in action or died from other causes, such as disease, exposure to harsh weather conditions, fatigue and malnutrition. Among the labourers serving in Africa, the mortality rates may have been about 20 percent.¹⁷

The year 2014 marked the one hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the war which brought significant short and long term changes to human life and society globally. Although Africa was involved in the war immediately it broke out and the continent and its peoples were right away and belatedly affected in diverse and profound ways, the history of the war in Africa, more than other regions that engaged in the war, still lacks adequate scholarly zeal and input. Even though the East African campaign, when compared to all others, was the most protracted of the war, it appears that historiographical enthusiasm for the broader social, economic and cultural history of the themes of *the war in Africa* and *the war and Africa* has not been intense, especially in Africa. Even where the history of the issue of the war in Africa has been considered within the scholarship of military history, it has largely been viewed and discussed as an appendix, a military sideshow of a peripheral colonised people and marginal areas, to the real war in Europe, the core. Rathbone comments on this situation thus: “The War was very much a reality for Africa, a period of immense and significant change of which we have only just scratched the surface.”¹⁸ If the war is truly to be called a world war, then the popular memory and

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ See, Hew Strachan, *The First World War In Africa* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

¹⁸ Rathbone, “World War I and Africa: Introduction”, 9.

perception of the war that has remained narrowly confined to the Western Front should change; such limited memory and perception should be engaged and a holistic historiographical review and interest in the ramifications of Africa's engagement and interaction with the war should become a major and imperative undertaking by scholars for a deeper understanding of the war as an event which was global and whose effects were international.

Although colonisers hatched the idea and resolution to turn Africa into a warzone and Africans into combatants, it was the colonised who bore the main weight of fighting the war in Africa. Many of the African combatants, who were professional soldiers in the colonial armies, zealously took pride in their service and military professionalism in the war, but other colonised Africans felt that the war "was for the white man" and an imperial enterprise which was not theirs to support or die for. However, the colonial regimes eventually conscripted more Africans into military service through wheedling and compulsion. African human resources engaged in the war in this state of ambivalence. On the one hand, it was in the vehemence of pride, professionalism and enthusiasm that some African leaders, chiefs and soldiers gathered resources to support the war effort of the two belligerent blocs: the Allies and the Central Powers. For example, it was in that spirit of enthusiasm that some people in the Gold Coast, now Ghana, which was a colony of Britain until 1957, mobilised as soldiers four days before the British actually declared war on Germany to fight in the interest and for the success of the Allied campaign. It was also in a similar state of mind to fight for France and its allies that "rifle contingents of tirailleurs from neighbouring French colonies were parading in readiness at the end of July, ahead of the declaration".¹⁹ In fact, this same zeal was what made the first shot of the forces that were fighting on land for Britain to be fired in August 1914 by Alhaji Grunshi of the Gold Coast Regiment in German Togoland, West Africa, which was the ground for the first British military action in the war in Africa. Before this shot, which one account claims was fired on 7th August 1914,²⁰ and another avers was fired on 12th August 1914,²¹ an

¹⁹ Nasson, "More Than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck: Sub-Saharan Africa in the First World War", 165.

²⁰ For example, see Ray Costello, *Black Tommies: British Soldiers of African Descent in the First World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 1; Edward Paice, *World War I: The African Front* (NY: Pegasus Books, 2008), 17.

²¹ See, for example, George N. Njung, "West Africa", in Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, (eds.), *1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, issued by

artillery gun crew which was stationed at Fort Nepean on the Mornington Peninsula, Australia, had blasted one shell across the bow of the German cargo steamer SS Pfalz in Australian waters on 5th August, 1914. This registered the British Empire's first warning shot at sea.²² It killed no one, but it halted the ship. *The Herald* newspaper of Melbourne recounted this incident with the headline "AUSTRALIA'S FIRST GUN. GERMAN STEAMER FIRED AT WHILE LEAVING MELBOURNE. SHOTS SENT ACROSS BOW. VESSEL AT ONCE RETURNS".²³ It is reported that the British destroyer HMS Lance also fired at a German mine layer on 5th August, 1914.²⁴

The action of Grunshi, however, is very remarkable. This is because contrary to a popular belief that it was Corporal Ernest Edward Thomas of "C" Squadron, 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, who used his gun to fire the first shot of the military forces of the British on land on 22nd August, 1914²⁵ near the village of Casteau, Belgium,²⁶ there is also the view that it was Grunshi who was the first infantry soldier in the service of Britain to

Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2014-10-08, n.p. DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10462, assessed on 22/01/2018; Akwasi Sarpong, "Why was the first German defeat of WW1 in Africa", BBC, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/zck9kqt>, assessed on 22/01/2018.

²² Sarah Farnsworth, "World War I: British Empire's first shot in Great War, fired in Victoria, commemorated", <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-08-05/thousands-commemorate-first-shot-of-wwi-in-portsea-victoria/5647724>, accessed on 12/10/2017; Sarah Farnsworth, "Historians attempt to find WWI's first shot deep in Australian waters", <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2013-11-11/the-mystery-of-the-first-bullet-fired-in-world-war-i/5083444>, accessed on 12/10/2017.

²³ *The Herald*, 5th August, 1914, 12, on "First Shots Fired" State Library of Victoria, <https://blogs.slv.vic.gov.au/such-was-life/first-shot-fired/>, accessed on 15/10/2017; Farnsworth, "World War I: British Empire's first shot in Great War, fired in Victoria, commemorated".

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ For example, see "Edward Thomas (British Army soldier)", Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Thomas_\(British_Army_soldier\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Thomas_(British_Army_soldier)), assessed on 12/10/2017; Stephen White, "The British soldier who fired the first shot of World War I. Dragoon Guard Ernest Edward Thomas fired the first shot of the war between Britain and Germany", *Mirror*, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/real-life-stories/british-soldier-who-fired-first-4029651>, accessed on 12/10/2017; Joe Shute, "First British Shot", *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/10996392/First-of-the-First-World-War.html>, accessed on 12/10/2017.

²⁶ Byron Farwell, *The Great War in Africa, 1914-1918* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1989), 21.

fire his rifle. He did this some thousands of miles away from Europe after Britain had declared war on Germany on 4th August, 1914.²⁷

Although the action of Grunshi has not been memorialised in a bronze plaque in Europe, he was “mentioned in despatches” (MiD), and attained the rank of Regimental Sergeant-Major (RSM) at the end of the war and was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) and the Military Medal (MM). The honours of MiD, RSM, DCM and MM conferred on him were in recognition of his distinguished service in the war, but the incident could and should be viewed in a wider perspective. The honours were symbolic of the enthusiasm and valiant conduct displayed by Africans in the war.

On the other hand, it was also in a state of disinterest and suspicion for the war that many Africans planned and proceeded to hide from recruiters or, for those who had been conscripted, chose to desert or even to have wavering loyalty and consequently changed sides from the German to the Allied army or vice versa.²⁸ Nevertheless, many African fighters fought with great courage, and non-combatant workers including porters, scouts, trackers, and spies also contributed their skills on many occasions to the war effort. For example, the tremendous need to convey items by the armies made a huge number of civilians – adults and even children – to be conscripted by the *force majeure* of the imperial regimes to serve as porters, carrying provisions, military equipment, and injured soldiers, for free or meagre pay. Many lost their lives through illness, lack of good nutrition and physical exhaustion. In the end the Allies won the war, and it must be mentioned that African personnel and natural resources contributed significantly to the success of the Allied cause.

Natural resources, including food and palm oil, and money were mobilised by Africans and from Africa to support the war. Gold Coasters, for example, gave a lot to support the war effort of the Allied Powers. It is a historical fact that money was provided by the people of the colony to help the Allies meet their expenses during the war. For example, J.E. Casely Hayford, an African lawyer of the Gold Coast, helped to set up the Sekondi Gold Coast Imperial War Fund. By December 1914 over GB£3700 had been transferred to London from the contribution of the

²⁷ See, for example, Colonel J. Hagan’s “The Role of the Gold Coast Regiment towards the Defeat of the Germans in Africa during World War I” and Adjei Adjapong’s “Historical Connections: Appreciating the Impact of the African Past on its Present and Future through the ‘3 Cs’ of the First World War” in Chapter One and Chapter Twelve respectively in this volume.

²⁸ Nasson, “More Than Just von Lettow-Vorbeck: Sub-Saharan Africa in the First World War” 181.

chiefs and people of the Gold Coast. In 1915, GB£1500 was raised for an aeroplane.²⁹ Overall, it is reported that eleven (11) aeroplanes were provided by the Gold Coast to the British government for the war.³⁰

The impact of the war on Africa was more momentous and had a far reaching consequence for African lives and communities as a whole. As a result of the fighting, villages, property and livelihood got destroyed. Farms and houses got burnt. Harvests suffered or were plundered and destroyed by troops passing through farms to ensure there would be no food left for their pursuers. Consequently, severe famines hit many communities and thousands of civilians perished. The war affected and shaped epidemiology in Africa, mortality trends in Africa's demographic composition, physical infrastructure, nationalist agitations against colonialism, Pan Africanism in Africa, inter and intra ethnic relations, and national and regional geographical and political cartographies in colonial Africa. The political outcomes of the war for Africans, in terms of gains, if any, were insignificant because their contribution to the war did not result in any achievements in political power. The right to self determination was not given to the peoples of the African colonies, and Africa still remained colonised until the years after the Second World War when the real collapse of the colonial empires started and the gradual spread of independence through Africa began in the 1950s.

Ordinary African men and women are largely invisible in the big narratives of the war. Most histories of the global conflict pay very little attention to the African aspect due to the fact that they fundamentally focus on the warfronts in Europe and, at times, Asia. This bias is partly due to the imperial powers' explicit attempts to marginalise the contribution of Africans and obscure the large degree to which they depended on the colonised Africans to fight the war. Furthermore, because of the clash of millions on the killing fields in Europe, the woes of the hundreds of thousands in Africa were considered as appendages during the colonial period and have thus received less attention from historians since then.

In *Researching World War One: A Handbook*,³¹ edited by Robin D.S. Higham and Dennis E. Showalter, Michelle Moyd points out in the thirteenth chapter, which deals with Africa, that the scholarly treatment of Africa and the war dwindled during the 1980s and 1990s. While Moyd

²⁹ David Kimble, *The Political History of Ghana. The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 376.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Robin D.S. Higham and Dennis E. Showalter, (eds.), *Researching World War One: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003).

commendably walks us through some of the potential areas that can be explored further about the history of Africa and the war nexus, she encouragingly reminds us that primary sources on the war in Africa are widely available in English as published memoirs, unit histories, and official histories; she draws our attention to the fact that original documents from the war in Africa are accessible in various archives in Africa and Europe, and ultimately reminds us in an instructive way about the need for more history research and work to be done on Africa's diverse experiences of the war. This is despite her acknowledgement that some secondary sources, written mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, that provide helpful syntheses of large quantities of disparate operational data, are present. Moreover, she concedes that some recent works, mainly consisting of essays in edited collections or in journals, and dissertations and book chapters of German and French scholarship, exist.³²

This edited volume, titled *Africa and the First World War: Remembrance, Memories and Representations after 100 Years*, constitutes a study that puts into the spotlight of historical interrogation different aspects of the historical experiences of Africa and its people in and of the war. The essays that follow this "Introduction" were selected from some of the papers that were presented at the "Africa and the First World War" conference that was organised by the Department of History of University of Cape Coast in October 2015, at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the outbreak of the war. Together, they offer macro and micro views about some of the several layers, contours and degrees in which African contributions directed and shaped the war and the ways that the war affected individuals, impacted communities and transformed the political, economic, and social landscapes of Africa. One major question, among others, which many of the contributions in this volume explore is, what were the consequences for African societies as they supported themselves, the war effort, and the colonial countries during the war?

In terms of structure this book is organized into four themed sections, excluding the Introduction. In their endeavour to provide fresh impressions and insights about Africa's experience of the war and the centrality of Africa's human and material resources and contributions to the war effort, the sections provide interesting cases about Africa's involvement, experiences, perceptions and remembrances of the war on the continent.

The first section, *Recruitments, Battlefronts and African Responses*,

³² Michelle Moyd, "Africa", in Robin D.S. Higham and Dennis E. Showalter, (eds.), *Researching World War One: A Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003), 279.

features four essays. The first one, titled “The Role of the Gold Coast Regiment towards the Defeat of the Germans in Africa during World War I”, is a requested essay, which was delivered as a keynote lecture by Colonel J. Hagan, who represented the Ghana Armed Forces at the conference. Hagan focuses on troops from the Gold Coast. He discusses the participation of the Gold Coast Regiment, which traces its roots to the Royal African Colonial Corps of Light Infantry, founded in 1822, in the war. In so doing, Hagan highlights the contribution of the Gold Coast Regiment, the predecessor of the Ghana Armed Forces, to the defeat of the Germans in Africa. He outlines and discusses the regiment’s engagements in Kamina in Togoland, the Cameroon Campaign 1914-1916, and the East Africa Campaign 1916-1918 including military actions in Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique). Hagan’s paper finally argues that academics should duly emphasize the achievements and contributions of the Ghana Armed Forces to nation building and world peace in history books instead of focusing on only the army’s involvement in coups d’état in Africa.

Ibiang O. Ewa in “Nigerian Soldiers in the East African Campaign of the First World War: 1916-1917” discusses why and how it became necessary for the British colonial regime to deploy Nigerian troops, who had only been disciplined for colonial military service locally, to go abroad to fight against German forces, the Schutztruppe, in East Africa, after they had previously participated in the conquest of Cameroon. He argues that it was more of innate courage than training and experience in modern warfare that enabled Nigerian soldiers to successfully conduct their first operation against the Germans on the shores of the Mgeta River in January 1917, and rapidly make further gains in East Africa. Shedding light on how the Nigerians contributed to the “chasing” of the German commanding general, Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, and his German forces out of East Africa, Ewa asserts that Nigerian troops played the most crucial and notable role in the conquest of German East Africa by the Allies.

Whereas Ewa considers Nigerian troops, Kwame O. Kwarteng’s “World War I: The Role of the Gold Coast and Asante towards the British Victory” focuses on troops from the Gold Coast. Kwarteng expands on the discussion in Hagan’s paper by examining the participation of recruits from the Gold Coast, especially Asante, towards the victory of the British and French in both West and East Africa. Archival data obtained from Ghana and supplemented by secondary sources are used in the study’s discussion to give insight into the processes of recruitment and to offer reasons why the British resorted to the recruitment of Africans to prosecute the war in West and East Africa. He also discusses recruits’

responses and the effect of military recruitment on the local economy. Finally, Kwarteng analyses the aftermath of the war by focusing on its political and socio-economic impact on the Gold Coast and its dependencies in particular and Africa in general.

Lastly, Jordan S. Rengshwat interprets African reactions, perceptions and interpretations of the war in Nigeria in “Bewilderment, Speculations and Benefaction: Africans’ Interpretation of World War One in the Literature of the Sudan United Mission British Branch”. He discusses how news and ideas about the First World War filtered to Africans through colonial agents and Christian missionaries, especially those of the Sudan United Mission British Branch, which started mission work in Northern Nigeria in 1904. Rengshwat argues that the missionaries communicated news about the war by embellishing them with religious metaphors; thus, many African Christians saw the war largely through the prism of the teachings of European missionaries, and some even went to the extent of giving spiritual interpretations to the outbreak of the war. Consequently, this served as a basis for Africans to empathise and show solidarity with the British Empire. This attitude also provided the necessary enabling environment for conscription.

Adebayo A. Lawal’s work “African Mobilization of Agricultural Resources in British West Africa during the First World War”, the first in the second section, *Wartime Colonial Economic Policies*, is a study of contrasts in the military and economic strategies of two European colonial powers in West Africa that behaved as strange bedfellows even though they fought a common enemy in the First World War. These powers are Britain and France. It analyses how the war affected both the British and French colonies in West Africa, and argues that French compulsory recruitment backfired and resulted in unwholesome political and economic consequences in French West Africa, but a policy of voluntary recruitment and an effective propaganda by the British endeared the colonial government and its war strategy to the African educated and political elite in British West Africa. This, the paper argues, contributed immensely to the comparatively more successful efforts of the British in their mobilization and exploitation of African labour especially for the production of food and raw materials to support the war effort. The paper further discusses the strategies for extensive and intensive colonial mobilization and exploitation of labour in West Africa for food production and military services by the British, through the agency of African chiefs, and the political and educated elites. It sheds light on some of indigenous cultivation techniques and labour strategies used in mass production and

mobilization of agricultural materials, and concludes that such efforts led to the adequate supply of food and materials at the war front.

Marciana M. Kuusaana's "Impact of the First World War on Labour Recruitment in the North of the Gold Coast (Ghana)", provides another account of the complex cooperative efforts between the colonial authorities and African leaders in mobilising labour for the war. It discusses how African chiefs of the northern regions of the Gold Coast recruited labourers for Britain's war effort often with the coercive power of the District Commissioners of the British colonial regime. This created tension between some chiefs and their subjects and, sometimes, led to violent attacks on chiefs by their people. The paper, ultimately, sheds light on how the war situation exposed and unveiled some of the complexities, contradictions and pressures in the British system of administration in the northern zones of the Gold Coast.

In "The Impact of the First World War on Africa's Transportation Systems: The Nigerian Railways as a Case Study", Tokunbo A. Ayoola analyses how the war stimulated production and export of certain items from Africa to support the war effort and brought about modest economic growth. Ultimately, however, this modest growth, according to Ayoola, was at the expense of Africa's transportation infrastructure because they were used repeatedly and intensely and without proper maintenance and rebuilding. Using the Nigerian Railways as practical case study, Ayoola argues that the war's negative impact on this infrastructure surpassed benefits that came from the economic growth from 1914 to 1918. The war damaged Africa's colonial infrastructure up to the eve of the Second World War, and the poor state of Africa's infrastructure could be traced to a stagnation and degeneration experienced from 1914 to 1918.

In the third section, *Wartime, Society and Mobility*, Augustine D. Osei in his chapter titled "Detention and Deportation: A Study of the 'De-Germanization' of Togoland and the Gold Coast during World War I, 1914-1918" interrogates and analyses why and how British colonial authorities embarked on a project of extensive arrests and detentions without trial of German nationals in Togoland and the Gold Coast. The British colonial authorities arrested both German military officers and civilians following the defeat of Germany in the war. Most of the civilians were missionaries. Contributing to the argument about whether imprisonments without trial are done for national security reasons or for quelling political opposition, Osei's paper concludes that detentions without trial were used by the British for the purpose of "de-Germanization" of the two West African territories, largely for the security of the British colonial regime.

“Chieftaincy and Indirect Rule: The Nature, Politics, and Exploits of Chiefs during the First World War in West Africa (1914-1930)”, co-authored by Samuel Bewiadzi and Margaret Ismaila, next examines and compares the nature and operations of the system of the African chieftaincy supported method of Indirect Rule and the ancillary concept and praxis of clientage (patronage) in the British and French colonies in Africa during the First World War. Since chiefs, including the colonial regime created category known as Warrant Chiefs, were central to the colonial system, the paper examines their contribution to the war and colonial economic exploitation, the eventual Allied defeat of Germany, domestic political conflicts and instability, and local popular resistance to colonial policies in parts of Africa.

Lastly, Kwame O. Kwarteng and Stephen Osei-Owusu’s paper titled “The Influenza Pandemic in the Gold Coast and Asante, 1918-1919” focuses on an epidemiological issue that occurred in Africa before the war could end. It was the influenza pandemic that occurred from 1918 to 1919. It killed an estimated two per cent of the population of Africa. The two authors discuss the spread and effects of the epidemic in the Gold Coast, focusing particularly on what the colonial authorities in Asante did to curb the disease. The writers also analyse the economic and social impact of the influenza outbreak on the people of the Gold Coast.

In the fourth section, *Memory, Remembrance and Representations*, are papers from three authors – Stefano Marcuzzi, Adjei Adjapong and Vitus Nanbigne. Marcuzzi’s paper titled “Italy’s ‘Parallel War’ in Libya: A Forgotten Front of World War I (1914-1922)” brings up Italy in the conversations about the war in Africa. It argues that Italy was an important, but often overlooked, practitioner of colonial fighting in the First World War. To explain and give credence to this argument, the paper highlights how the “Third Italy” attacked Ottoman Tripoli in Libya in September 1911, initiating a “parallel war” in the north of Africa and some complex diplomatic and geo-political manoeuvres by Italy. The Italian manoeuvres, the paper points out, led to an escalation of violence that contributed to the Great War. Additionally, the paper argues that the Italian “parallel war” in Libya necessitates a transnational analysis, and a temporal approach that breaks the conventional chronological divisions of the Libyan War, the Great War and the post-war crisis. Marcuzzi’s paper, therefore, contributes to our understanding of the difficult geo-political game played by Italy in the colonial theatre during the First World War and resituates it in a long-term context to explain its enduring impact.

Adjei Adjapong’s paper, which follows Marcuzzi’s own, examines the Africa and the First World War theme from the perspective of philosophy

of history. His paper, which is titled “Historical Connections: Appreciating the Impact of the African Past on its Present and Future through the ‘3 Cs’ of the First World War”, uses the causes, course and consequences of the war to illustrate the connections between past (historical) events, present developments and future trends. Adjapong inserts Africa in these dynamics and stresses conclusively that it is crucial for the contemporary generation of Africans to pay more attention to the systematic study and reconstruction of the past, for example, the First World War, in order to understand the present and the future in their appropriate contexts.

Finally, Vitus Nanbigne’s paper titled “Cinema, World War I and the New Nations of Africa: The Case of Ghana” constitutes the chapter that closes out this volume on Africa and the First World War. His paper is framed within the discourses of the relationship between cinema and history. It reflects on the connections between cinema, which broadly encapsulates the art, industry, economics and spectatorship of filmmaking, and the European imperial project in Africa and how these contributed to the production of the “new” nations of Africa, particularly after the First World War. In this trajectory, the paper initiates a discussion about the relationship between cinema and the historical evolution of Ghana during and after the war. Furthermore, the paper argues that cinema became a propaganda tool of European imperial agents to advance the imperial task and particularly win the support of continental Africans towards the First World War effort. The imperial project in Africa, the paper argues, shared a temporal historical development with the emergence and growth of cinema.

In selecting these papers from among several others that were originally presented at the conference to constitute this compendium, we have endeavoured to contribute a quota to the burgeoning construction of Africa in the full light of the history of the First World War. This collection has no pretensions of grandeur; nor can it aspire to exhaustiveness. There are many more aspects of the Africa and the First World War theme to investigate, but all those aspects will undoubtedly continue to require many more new perspectives. For our part, we wish to share the excitement of the fresh insights in this volume with a broader scholarly and reading audience. We hope that it will put the reader on the road to a more complete interest in and consideration of the subject.

SECTION I:
RECRUITMENTS, BATTLEFRONTS
AND AFRICAN RESPONSES

CHAPTER ONE

THE ROLE OF THE GOLD COAST REGIMENT TOWARDS THE DEFEAT OF THE GERMANS IN AFRICA DURING WORLD WAR I

COLONEL J. HAGAN

Introduction

The Gold Coast Regiment could pride itself on being the first Military Institution to be formed in West Africa, tracing its roots to the Royal African Colonial Corps of Light Infantry which was a militia founded by Sir Charles MacCarthy in 1822. This unit fought the Asante Kingdom at the battle of Nsamankow in 1824 and they were almost wiped out. The remnants also contributed towards the defeat of Asante at the battle of Akatamanso in 1826. During the time of British Governor Captain George Maclean (1830-1843), the militias were performing police duties as well. This was their primary role up to the outbreak of the sixth Anglo-Asante battle in 1873.

In November 1873, there was a conflict between the British and the Asante Kingdom. Field Marshal Garnet Wolseley with an expeditionary force of twelve thousand (12,000) men from the United Kingdom, later to be joined by the Lagos Hausas from Nigeria under the command of Captain G. N. Glover, fought against the Asante Kingdom in the interior of the Gold Coast from November 1873 to February 1874.

At the end of this campaign, about three hundred (300) of the Lagos Hausas refused to go back to Nigeria. In 1879, they were used to form the nucleus of the Gold Coast Constabulary. This was the formal beginning of a professional military force now called the Ghana Armed Forces. The Gold Coast Constabulary in partnership with its sister organization, the West African Frontier Force, defeated the Asante Kingdom in 1900. At the end of the Yaa Asantewaa War (1900), the Gold Coast Constabulary was re-designated the Gold Coast Regiment and was made part of the West

African Frontier Force formed in 1897 in Nigeria by Lord Lugard (Governor of Nigeria).

In 1870-1871, after the Franco-Prussian war, a new nation emerged in Europe called Germany. In 1884, the German Government under Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck sent Dr. Nachtigall to establish a trade agreement with Togoland and Cameroon indigenes but he proclaimed a protectorate over these two countries. In 1885, Great Britain and France signed an agreement recognizing German influences in both colonies. Administrators were given almost absolute powers and this was so resented by the indigenes especially in Togoland that there was a steady emigration to the Gold Coast. The total area of Togoland was 160 to 240 km wide from east to west and 640 km from north to south. In the Cameroon, the territory acquired covered an area of about 480,000 square km. The country is roughly triangular in shape with its apex on Lake Chad in the north and its base, some 960 km long, from the sea to the French territory Congo. Apart from these two colonies, the Germans were in East Africa precisely, Tanganyika—present-day Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi less the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba.

After the Asante Kingdom and the Northern Territories were conquered in 1900 and 1901, the Gold Coast Regiment had sub-units in both territories. In accordance with the principles laid down by the Imperial General Staff in 1911, the forces of each territory throughout the British Empire were to maintain and equip sufficient troops for self-defence for which local defence schemes were prepared. It was in these circumstances that on 5 August 1914, the British Government set up the Offensive Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence to decide the combined Naval and Military operations that should be undertaken in foreign territories; it was agreed that the objectives must all be naval and of these the most important were the enemy's foreign bases and centres of intelligence. Togoland, with its powerful wireless station at Kamina, and Cameroon with its deep-water harbour at Duala, quite definitely fulfilled these requirements. For these reasons, it was decided to invade Togoland and Cameroon. Major General C. M. Dobell, Inspector General West African Frontier Force (WAFF) prepared the estimates for the invasion. It is therefore appropriate at this juncture to look at the contributions of the Gold Coast Regiment towards the defeat of the Germans in Africa.

Aim and Scope of this Study

Drawing views from my personal knowledge as a member of the Ghana Army and employing historical information from some existing writings¹ I discuss the participation of the Gold Coast Regiment in the First World War with the intention of highlighting its contribution towards the defeat of the Germans in Africa. The scope of this paper covers the battle to destroy the German wireless station at Kamina in Togoland, the Cameroon Campaign 1914-1916, and the East Africa Campaign 1916-1918 including actions in Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique).

Battle of Kamina—Togoland (August 1914)

Togoland—the present-day Republic of Togo, two-thirds of the Volta Region and the eastern part of the Northern and Upper East Regions, with a native population estimated at over a million—was bordered on the west by the Gold Coast and on the north and east by the French colonies of Upper Volta and Dahomey, now Burkina Faso and the Republic of Benin. Until its annexation by the Germans in 1884, the majority of the tribes inhabiting the districts along or adjacent to the coast and adjoining the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast had regarded themselves as being under the suzerainty of Great Britain. In this colony was a recently completed high-power German wireless station situated at Kamina about 176 km north of Lome, the capital of Togoland.

This wireless station was able to communicate direct with Berlin in Germany and other wireless stations in East Africa, the Cameroons and Monrovia (Liberia) and also with any German ship in the Atlantic Ocean. It was the chief receiving and distribution centre for Africa and a pivotal point of naval communication. The Anglo-German Frontier for more than half its length was marked by the left bank of the Volta River. A strip of territory extending about 130 km along the left bank of the Volta's lower reaches lay in the Gold Coast colony. The military significance of this land was however lessened by lagoons, swamps and the road-less bush country which covered its surface.

¹ For example, General F. J. Moberly's *Official History of the War, Military Operations, Togoland and the Cameroons 1914-1916*; Lieutenant Colonel Charles Hordern's *History of the Great War, Military Operations, East Africa—August 1914-September 1916*; Colonel A. Haywood and Brigadier General F. A. S. Clarke's *The History of the Royal West African Frontier Force*; General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's *My Reminiscences of East Africa*; and Sir Hugh Clifford's *The Gold Coast Regiment in the East African Campaign*.

At this time, the Gold Coast Regiment of the West African Frontier Force was composed of a battery armed with 76 mm mountain guns and one engineer, and seven infantry companies armed with Lee-Enfield rifles and with a machine gun for each company. Each of the infantry and the engineer companies was about 160 rifles strong with a total establishment of 38 British Officers, 11 British Warrant Officers and 1,584 native ranks including 124 carriers and there were also 330 reservists. The locals were made up of Hausas, Fulanis, Yorubas and men from the Northern Territories with some from the Asante confederacy and the Gold Coast. On 3 August 1914, Major General Dobell drew up brief estimates dealing with the employment of the West African Frontier Force in the event of war. The objectives which seemed worthy to him were Lome and Kamina in Togoland and Duala, Buea and Victoria in the Cameroons.

In Togoland, the total German force was estimated as being 300 Germans and 1200 natives, ill-armed and not too well trained. At this time, the Governor of the Gold Coast Sir Hugh Clifford was on leave as well as Lt. Col. R. A. De B. Rose, the Commanding Officer, Gold Coast Regiment. Mr. W. C. F. Robertson was the acting Governor and Lt. Col. F. C. Bryant was the Acting Commanding Officer. These two gentlemen with approval from London mobilized the Gold Coast Regiment to attack Togoland. Sub-units were drawn from Krachi, Kumasi, Gambaga, Sunyani, Zuarungu, Kintampo and Accra to march to Togoland. Most of the troops were concentrated at Ada. On the morning of 5 August 1914 came a telegram from the colonial office announcing the declaration of war. On the same date, Maj. von Doering, the acting Governor of Togoland sent the following message to Mr. Robertson:

As I understand from home, war has broken out between Great Britain and the German Empire. Having regard to the insecurity of native tribes, it is in the interest of Togoland and the Gold Coast to omit warlike enterprises likely to have no bearing on decisions arrived at in Europe. Propose further that we remain neutral and would be glad to receive an early reply.

Mr. Robertson replied that he could not answer without instructions from London. On 6 August, the Cabinet in London decided that the Togoland proposal of neutrality could not be entertained and thus approval was given to capture the wireless station at Kamina. Mr. Robertson communicated this to Lt. Col. F. C. Bryant. The French in Dahomey (Benin Republic) and Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) were also ready to cooperate with the British offensive in Togoland. On the morning of 7 August, a wireless message from Kamina to Germany was intercepted to the effect that the Governor of Togoland was leaving Lome with the troops

the next day to defend Kamina and that the district commissioner of Lome would surrender that place if the enemy pressed. At 7 pm on the same date, Maj. von Doering left with the troops and authorized the district commissioner to surrender from the coastland up to 120 km inland as far as Khra village. The Germans destroyed telephone cables at Lome before their evacuation.

Receiving colonial office instructions to move against Kamina, Lt. Col. F. C. Bryant had issued orders for the concentration of three companies at Krachi under the command of Capt. P. E. L. Elgee for an advance towards Kamina by land. The French sent in 500 auxiliary cavalry to march to Sansane Mangu in Northern Togoland. At Accra, medical officers, railway personnel and members of public works department also volunteered in various capacities. Lt. Col. F. C. Bryant's men marched and occupied Lome on 12 August 1914. Whilst at Lome, it was learned that a railway bridge and a small wireless station at Togblekove about 10 km north had been destroyed by the enemy. The advance from Kamina commenced on the morning of 14 August when the two companies moved along the road and railway line to the north respectively. The road and the railway line run parallel to one another. On 15 August, Tsevie was occupied and by 4 am on 16 August, Agbeluvoe was captured. At 7 am on 16 August, two German prisoners, Baron Codelli von Fahnenfeldt, the designer of the Kamina wireless station, and one other were captured. The engagement on the railway line and on the road was progressing. At this time, the British casualties were 6 killed from the indigenous ranks and 35 wounded.

In Northern Togoland, British and French detachments had occupied Yendi and Sansane Mangu without opposition. Most of the 400 German local troops had deserted. Other French troops came from Fada N'gurma in Upper Volta.

On 19 August, Lt. Col. Bryant's men captured the railway bridge on Haho River 11 km north of Agbeluvoe while those on the road captured Adakakpe. On the same day, Nuatya was occupied while the French were pressing from the east and the north. On 20 August, there was engagement around Khra village where the Germans had dug defensive positions well supplied with machine guns on their flanks to cover all approaches. On August 22, simultaneous attacks on the railway line and on the road were launched against prepared German positions. On this day, out of the 450 combatants engaged, the allies suffered 75 casualties from the well-concealed German positions, and the Gold Coast Regiments which were facing machine-gun fire for the first time were demoralized. On 23 and 24 August, Lt. Col. Bryant sent officer patrols to Glei and the Amu River