

## BOOK REVIEWS / BOEKBESPREKINGS



### MILITARY OPERATIONS - EAST AFRICA: AUGUST 1914 TO SEPTEMBER 1916; VOLUME ONE

[History of the Great War - Based on Official documents - By the Directors of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence.]

Charles Hordern

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Of all the "sideshow" of World War One, the campaign in East Africa is probably the least well known. For South Africa it was nevertheless an important theatre of war due to the sizeable portion of the Union's war effort which was carried out in the region.

From the time that the South African troops began arriving in Mombasa in February 1916, they played a vital role in the Allied campaign. The Union's forces in East Africa, which consisted of the 2nd and 3rd Infantry Brigades under brigadier-generals Beves and Berrangé respectively, were supplemented by mounted and artillery regiments as well as a field hospital. Furthermore, almost the entire logistic support for the Imperial contingent came from South Africa as a constant stream of vital supplies consisting of animals, provisions and material was sent from the Union to East Africa. The South African contribution to the campaign was therefore great enough to merit more than

just a passing mention in the annals of our history. The responsibility of command and strategy also fell upon the UDF at times, although the Imperial government always had the "final say" on important decisions. No less than two South African general officers exercised the office of chief command at various stages of the campaign. Early in 1916, Lieutenant General J.C. Smuts was appointed GOC East Africa and conducted the Allied campaign until 20 January 1917, when he left for London to attend the Imperial conference. Another South African - Lieutenant General Sir J.L. van Deventer - became GOC at the end of May 1917.

The existing lack of in-depth and well researched material available on the war in East Africa has consequently not passed unnoticed by those who are interested in this area of World War One operations. A notable exception in this case would be General Collyer's book *The South Africans with General Smuts in German East Africa, 1916* which to all intents and purposes is considered to be a classic on the subject. Another recent publication on the subject is *For King and Kaiser* by James Ambrose Brown which is a less detailed account and therefore more readable. The latter does, however, lack important detail in places. With both these books, the focus falls on the South African forces and not the entire Allied contingent and to this extent a general history has been seriously lacking.

In view of the above, *Military Operations in East Africa* can consequently be viewed as an important new release. The eleventh title in the "Battery Press Great War Series", it is a reprint of one of the British official histories of military operations carried out during the great war. The original editions of the series were produced by the Historical Section of the Committee for Imperial Defence. The book was based on a draft written by Major H. Fitz M Stacke who died before he was unable to complete the project, his death proved to be a serious setback. The new writer - Charles Hordern eventually wrote what amounted to an almost completely new and different manuscript. Stacke's draft was, however, useful to some extent in that it provided the basis for the chronological framework of the book.

The history of the campaign which is contained

in the first volume begins with an extensive introductory section. First is an appraisal of the physical conditions pertaining to warfare in East Africa followed by an interesting background to the campaign by means of an early history of East Africa dating from the century when the first arab slave traders arrived in the region. With regards to the campaign itself, *Military Operations in East Africa* covers the period dating from August 1914 until late 1916. This is a little unfortunate as, in many respects, this is an unnatural cut-off point as it was only a year later that the conventional phase of the operations in East Africa came to an end. At this instant, General von Lettow-Vorbeck's army of German regulars and Askaris, deprived of supplies and reinforcements, retreated deep into Portuguese territory from where they waged a very successful guerilla war against the Allies. The undefeated von Lettow was finally forced to lay down his arms at Abercorn on 25 November 1918 after it had been made known that the German Army had surrendered in Europe.

This account of the first half of the East African Campaign is very detailed and, in fact, so much so in fact that some may find it "heavy going". This need not be viewed as a drawback but it would be prudent to bear in mind that the volume was not intended to make for light reading. *Military Operations in East Africa* should be viewed as a book for serious students of military history and to this extent it is an invaluable reference work.

While it is rather unfortunate that Hordern's work does not contain any source notes. Although this sheds some doubt as to what exactly was used to provide the research material from which the book was written, it should be remembered that this was not the historical method of the time. It would appear as if extensive use has been made by the writers of diaries and records in the hands of campaign veterans in addition to the government papers of Britain and the various Commonwealth countries which had forces in the theatre. In this respect Collyer's book presents stiff competition with regard to research and accuracy as he was known to be meticulous in his method and made extensive use of the UDF War Records Office. Nevertheless, in the final analysis it should be emphasised that regardless of whether sources are acknowledged or not the text would appear to be accurate and sufficiently complete. What is interesting to note is that much of the information used for the analysis of the German side of the campaign was gathered by Charles Hordern at the *Kriegsgeschichtliche Forschungsanstalt des*

*Heeres* in Germany. The German army personnel there commendably continued to assist him right up until the outbreak of the Second World war in 1939.

While the book is quite obviously not illustrated, it should be noted that the extensive and detailed maps found in the original edition could not be included in this reprint. The reason for this is two-fold, firstly the inclusion of maps would have escalated printing costs to an untenable level, and secondly, most of the maps were very inaccurate. Be that as it may there are nevertheless still plenty of maps in this book for the topographical enthusiast.

From a South African interest point of view the book is informative and important with extensive coverage given to the exploits of the South African Expeditionary Force in East Africa. The strategic spotlight also falls largely on the Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Forces in the theatre, Lieutenant General Jan Smuts. For those who are interested in this theatre of First World War history this book may well provide the most comprehensive overview of the East African campaign yet written and would make a worthwhile addition to any military book collection.

*N.M. Cowling, Documentation Service, Private Bag X289, Pretoria 0001.*

## DIÉ WAT WEN

**'n Generaal se storie uit 'n era  
van oorlog en vrede**

Jannie Geldenhuys

J.L. van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria : 1993

261 pages

illustrated

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The title of this book of General Jannie Geldenhuys he explains in his ultimate paragraph. Napoleon, when asked on an occasion, which soldiers were the best, replied : "Those who are victorious" - Dié wat wen. Jannie Geldenhuys served during his last decade in the South African Defence Force as Chief of the Army and thereafter as Chief of the SADF. During those years he certainly exercised command over victorious South African soldiers, soldiers (or rather servicemen) who