

The use of flight in the African campaigns of World War 1

Dr Anne Samson



The topic of flight in World War 1 Africa is a little messy but hopefully by the end of this talk, we'll all have a clearer idea of what it entailed. I'm going to follow a rough chronology and will mention plane specifications for those interested, but please don't ask me specifics about those as I don't know.

We first turn to South Africa and South West Africa. Following this, we will turn to East Africa where planes

were used relatively extensively. West Africa won't feature as planes were not used there as far as I can tell and North Africa was a different type of war, so we'll ignore that for the purpose of this talk too.

At the start of the war, Britain asked South Africa to put the wireless stations in neighbouring German South West Africa out of action. The South African government decided to go one step further and take the whole German colony. Most of the military action would be ground-based: horses and mechanical transport, however sea and air power would also be employed, the last by both sides.

Whilst the Germans had two planes already in South West Africa, the problem for the South Africans was that most of their military airmen were in Britain undergoing training and on the outbreak of war went to the Western Front.

The Minister of Defence, Jan Smuts, had had the foresight back in 1913 to start an air force in the Union, a year after the Union Defence Act had been passed in 1912. The move followed a visit by Brigadier General CF Beyers to England in August 1912. On 13 May 1913 an advert appeared for me to join the South African Aviation Corps. They would be paid 17 shillings and 6 pence together with an aircraft allowance of 5 shillings.¹ Under the auspices of the General CF Beyers' Active Citizen's Force,² ten men first learned to fly locally in Kimberley with the Paterson Aviation Syndicate and then underwent a military course at Tempe near Bloemfontein before going to Upavon, England for their final training. They were Captain Wallace, Lieutenant Kenneth van der Spuy, GS Creed, EC Emmett and BH Turner. In November 1914, they were recalled to the Union to form the Aviation Corps to serve in South West Africa under the command of Captain Wallace.³

Everything had to be supplied from England: machines, transport, tools, material and mechanics. The Royal Naval Air Service came to the rescue and sourced 34 mechanics to join the aviation corps. The planes were Henri Farman and the engines 135 HP Canton Unné. There was a total of six planes, the two BE2Cs being found unsuitable for desert terrain because of their wooden frames.⁴ The majority of the

¹ <http://www.sapfa.org.za/history/1910-1920-early-flying-south-africa> (15/2/2017)

² CJ Nöthling, *Suid-Afrika in die Eerste Wêreldoorlog (1914-1918)* (SAMHIK, Silverton, 1994) pp 59-61; HA Jones, *The war in the air* (1931) pp 15-16

³ TNA: AIR 1/1247/204/7/4; <http://www.sapfa.org.za/history/1910-1920-early-flying-south-africa> (15/2/2017) included in the training were three civilians – Ann Maria Bocciarelli being the first female pilot on the African continent.

⁴ CJ Nöthling, *Suid-Afrika in die Eerste Wêreldoorlog (1914-1918)* (SAMHIK, Silverton, 1994) pp 59-61; HA Jones, *The war in the air* (1931) pp 15-16



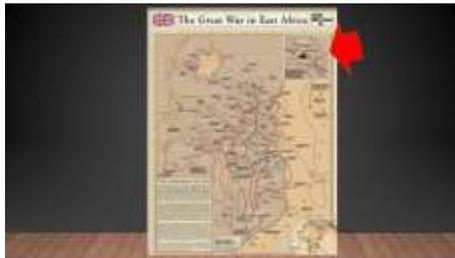
mechanics left for South Africa on 15 March 1915 while eight returned to England for specialist training. Wallace, his officers and the eight mechanics left England on 3 April arriving at Walvis Bay on 30 April. They were joined by the recruits Turner had sourced in South Africa during the previous two months. The squadron had eight pilots and three observers. They were armed as the infantry were but later in East Africa, their rifles were substituted for pistols. Transport was 25 HP six-cylinder Studebakers. The

Corps was assigned to General Head Quarters as it moved north to Otavifontein.⁵

The first sortie was undertaken by Kenneth van der Spuy on 6 May 1915 from Walvis Bay to report on enemy ground movements to General Louis Botha who was commanding the Union Forces.⁶

The Germans used their planes in South West to drop bombs on the Union forces, Member of Parliament and owner of a goldmine, Sir George Farrar wrote to his wife that 'one morning,' a German plane dropped two bombs on the camp – Farrar was fifty yards away. 'One good thing was they put a parachute on, and you could see the bomb drop.' It killed one man and injured another nine. The following day another came and then not again. 'I don't think they will worry us much more, because they have only two aeroplanes and they can't afford to lose one.'⁷ During the campaign, whilst the German planes were operational they dropped fifty bombs and reconnoitred taking photographs.⁸

At the end of the South West Campaign all the volunteers returned to Europe where they formed No 26 (South African) Squadron Royal Flying Corps. The Union was meant to supply 30 reinforcements a month but failed to do so resulting in the squadron constantly being short of manpower.



The squadron arrived back in Cape Town on 29 July 1915 leaving for England in stages, the last arriving in late November. They left again on 25 December 1915 (along with the new Commander in Chief for East Africa General Horace Smith-Dorrien), arriving in Kilindini, East Africa on 31 January 1916.⁹ On 1 February 1916 they arrived at Mbuyuni from where the attack on Salaita Hill near Taveta was to take place on 9 February. They returned to Aircraft Park at Mbuyuni in April to sit out the rains, before

moving with the forces to Kahe and later to Morogoro on 31 August 1916, a distance of 300 miles. In September 1916, Aircraft Park was moved from Mbuyuni to Dar es Salaam, the move being completed in December. A shortage of shipping had caused the delay in moving the park. Flight B was sent to Tulo, A to

⁵ TNA: AIR 1/1247/204/7/4

⁶ <http://www.saafmuseum.org/exhib/other-exhibits/propellers/283-henri-farman-propeller> (15/2/2017)

⁷ RH: MSS Afr s. 2175 George Farrar, Box 12/1, 3 Jan 1915 to Lady Farrar; S Monick, 'The third man: Willy Trick and the German Air Force in South West Africa in World War One' in *South African Military History Journal* 5:3 (1988) dates the attack as 17 Dec 1914; V Alhadeff, *South Africa in two World Wars: A newspaper history* (1979) p20

⁸ JOEO Mahncke, 'Aircraft operations in the German colonies, 1911-1916: The Fliegertruppe of the Imperial German Army' in *South African Military History Journal*, 12:2 (2001)

⁹ TNA: AIR 1/1247/204/7/4; Detail on East Africa is sourced from Peter Dye's articles in *Cross and Cockade* unless otherwise specified.

Iringa becoming part of Edward Northey's force operating from Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, and C to Kilwa. A and B eventually joined when the ground forces merged in late 1917.¹⁰

On 8 February 1918 the Squadron left East Africa arriving in Durban ten days later. Those from Nyasaland left via Beira in Portuguese East Africa, all eventually reuniting at a camp on Young's Field, near Cape Town.¹¹

During its time in East Africa, No 26 Squadron was involved in reconnaissance, dropping bombs and propaganda leaflets as well as conveyancing officers from one base to another in an emergency such as when Reginald Hoskins took over from Smuts as Commander in Chief during a battle in January 1917.¹² It is recorded that Christmas 1917 the planes dropped cigarettes for those they could find. The German glee at thinking the British were bombing their own turned to dismay when they realised it was comforts being delivered and not 'iron eggs'.¹³ On 31 May, Union Day, the planes buzzed the South African forces letting them know they were not alone in the bush.



Alongside the South African flying contingent there were others who saw flight action in East Africa. Whilst the Aviation Corps was in South West Africa, a Curtiss plane was sourced in Durban, South Africa to try and find the SS *Konigsberg*, a cruiser which was causing concern and fear along the East African coast. In addition to sinking the first British merchant ship of the war, the *City of Winchester* carrying the first tea harvest of the year, the *Konigsberg* had made a daring raid from its base in the Rufigi Delta to sink HMS *Pegasus* in Zanzibar harbour during September 1914. In December 1914 the decision was taken to locate and destroy the German vessel where she was blockaded as this would free approximately 35 vessels for service elsewhere.

The services of Dennis Cutler who owned a pair of Curtiss F flying boats was called into action by the Royal Naval Air Service. Cutler was commissioned into the RNAS and one of his boats leased to the local Admiral. His observer was Arthur Gallehawk. Cutler was eventually able to spot the *Konigsberg* having had to reconfigure his plane for the local conditions. On 10 December 1914, Cutler was forced to land in the water and was taken prisoner although his plane was salvaged by Gallehawk. *Konigsberg* was too far inland for the British warships to take action so other means had to be found.¹⁴

The result was 4 Expeditionary Squadron RNAS under the command of Flight Lieutenant John Tulloch Cull. With a contingent of 20 men and officers and two seaplanes, Tull left Tillbury Docks on 16 January 1915. The planes were of the Sopwith Type 807. They arrived at Zanzibar on 20 February and left almost immediately for a nearby island Niororo where they would be based. The local climate, thinner air in the tropics, played havoc with the flights – the Sopwith could only fly with a pilot and one hour of fuel and no bombs.¹⁵ The sun also played a part causing men to suffer sunburn and skin to peel off the floats of the

¹⁰ TNA: AIR 1/1247/204/7/4

¹¹ TNA: AIR 1/1247/204/7/4t

¹² AMD Howes, 'Some details of the first twenty-five years of flying in Tanganyika, 1914-1939 in *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, no 50 (Jun 1958) p 40; HA Jones, *War in the air* (1931) p 22

¹³ E Paice, *Tip and run* (2007) p 204

¹⁴ Peter Dye, *Cross and Cockade*, pp163-4

¹⁵ Peter Dye, *Cross and Cockade*, p165

planes resulting in them half submerging on landing. It was eventually discovered that half filling the floats with water when onboard and reinforcing the outer skins with metal plates made from flattened petrol cans helped. In March the squadron was moved to Mombasa where further trials could be undertaken and in April the squadron returned to Durban where new planes and personnel were met. The new planes were three elderly ShortFolders from the Isle of Grain. By 25 April, the first reconnaissance of the *Konigsberg* was undertaken with Cull at the controls of Short 122 and Leading Mechanic EHA Boggis as observer.

Observations continued until June when two monitors, *Mersey* and *Severn*, arrived which could access the delta. Arriving with the monitors were further reinforcements and four planes (two Henri Farman and two Caudron) which were now based at Mafia Island. By the time the planes for attacking *Konigsberg* were ready, one Henri Farman and one Caudron had been lost. On 6 July the attack on *Konigsberg* began but with little success. The next attack was scheduled for 11 July. The *Konigsberg* was successfully disabled but both planes were lost, the last on landing back at Mafia.

The *Konigsberg* brought to bay, 4 Expeditionary Squadron RNAS was relocated to Mombasa where it was met by the arrival of two Caudrons and 3 Short seaplanes. The planes were offered to the Army which accepted. Leaving Mombasa on 8 September 1915, Cull, together with the new planes moved inland to Maktau to join General Michael Tighe's forces on 10 September. Commander Gordon who had taken command with the arrival of the monitors proceeded to Mesopotamia with the seaplanes.



Cull had with him two Caudrons, two Bessonneu hangers, aviation spirit and stores. Their base was 10 miles away from the enemy camp at Mbuyuni. An airstrip of 200 by 200 yards was constructed outside the camp perimeter although the planes were brought in every night to prevent sabotage by the enemy. Before a flight took place, the area was screened for snipers and the aerodrome dragged for hidden mines. The weather here, too, played a major part in flight plans. Mist and

low cloud affected early mornings whilst the heat caused turbulence. Hills presented a hazard when taking off and landing.

In October 1915 another Caudron and spares was received together with a workshop lorry. A delivery in November brought the number of planes to six, one of which was wrecked soon after. The crew consisted of 13 men including two pilots.



Between 22 and 30 November 1915, 20 ratings and three pilots added to the ranks. A shortage of men resulted in Captain Carlo Bruno and Lieutenant Cherry Kearton being detached from the Army for service with the RNAS. Kearton's wife Ada records that Kearton 'took many photographs from the air, in planes of the Royal Naval Air Service, and later explored the shores of Lake Victoria photographing the *Koenigsberg* guns. On one occasion, Smuts sent for him

personally to try and photograph a certain gun position that had remained undetected for twelve days. Within three hours Cherry had a well-defined picture of it.' Kearton had 'set up his dark-room in a large

packing-case, which had once, contained an aeroplane. He developed and printed the films, which were taken by the pilots of the reconnaissance aircraft...'¹⁶

Between March 1916 and December 1917 over 500 aerial photos were taken, the majority of which were from seaplanes or working from seaplane carriers. Others were exposed from seaplanes by the unit working with the army from Lindi and Massassi. This army unit might well have included Kearton, but this needs to be confirmed. 'Practically all flying had to be done in the early morning as the air became too bumpy later during the heat of the day. Owing to this early morning flying, it was very difficult to obtain a fully exposed negative without getting movement, and in many cases, the under exposed negatives had to be intensified before the required prints were taken off. The cameras used were Thornton Pickard Aerial, Nos 24A with Aldis lens and 1A with Cook lens and Mckenzie Wishart slides.' However, it appears that Kearton used Prozenski's Aeroscope Camera according to Richard Abel's *Encyclopaedia of Early Cinema* (p355). This camera, using compressed air allowed it to be handheld which was quite a breakthrough when one considers the 'common' camera used at the time.¹⁷ How Kearton's camera compared to the Thornton Pickard one is not clear although to this unexperienced eye, Kearton's looks more compact and therefore manageable in an aircraft.¹⁸

On 2 February 1916, the first plane arrived at the advanced airfield at Mbuyuni which had been cleared of German forces. A kite balloon arrived in April but it is not certain whether it was used or not. On 12 May, 100 personnel relocated to Mbuyuni.

The conditions being harsh, the Admiralty suggested the return of the RNAS men to Britain but Smuts refused and instead replacements of ten percent were sent out. At some stage, the RNAS squadron had split in two: 7 RNAS working upcountry and 8 RNAS from Zanzibar.

In February 1916 when the RNAS moved to Maktau it met up with No 26 Squadron (RFC). The latter would support the main advance and the Voisins General van Deventer's move on Kondoa Irangi where an airfield would be set up. To assist this, Gallehawk, five mechanics and 1,000 porters walked the 200 miles over three weeks preparing another airfield at Lol Kissale on route. The airfields were ready by 29 May 1916 although the planes took a little longer to arrive as faulty maps led them astray.

Two British planes were used to bomb Neu Moschi and also Handeni towards the end of 1915. On 18 December 1915, Capell based at Maktau recorded 'another plane fallen and come to grief, pilot uninjured; this leaves us five out of the eight we started with, it would appear they are most unreliable.'¹⁹ Another crashed on 30 December 1915 and again the pilot was unhurt.²⁰ On 27 January 1916, a plane returning from Oldorobo was brought down by the German infantry whilst another successfully bombed Taveta. After this, they were used to track the Germans when the ground forces lost contact and in 1917 they dropped propaganda leaflets amongst the German askari and porters.

¹⁶ Norman Parsons Jewell (ed), *On Call in Africa in War and Peace, 1910-1932* (Gillyflower, 2016)

¹⁷ <http://www.victorian-cinema.net/proszynski>

¹⁸ Bowhill report, RAF Hendon, B3820

¹⁹ AE Capell, *The 2nd Rhodesian Regiment in East Africa* (1922) p 39

²⁰ AE Capell, *The 2nd Rhodesian Regiment in East Africa* (1922) p 41



Two planes out of three arrived at Kondoia Irangi on 6 June and by 12 June the airfield had received 53 shells. This resulted in a temporary relocation to Salim for safety, Kondoia Irangi being reoccupied on 26 June. Another two planes, BE2Cs added to the force bringing a total of four planes by 18 July in the southern sector.

Meanwhile, No 26 Squadron was based at Mbagui near the Tanga Railway. It received new aircraft during July 1916 – Henri Farmans which although underpowered were found to be more reliable than the BE2c. The squadron had a total of six aircraft. On 31 August the squadron moved to Morogoro with three serviceable planes and was based near Smuts' headquarters.

Generally materials and stores had to travel 900 miles to get from Mombasa on the coast to the base until Dar es Salaam was captured on 3 September 1916. By December the Airpark had been transferred to Mombasa resulting in shorter lines of communication for both the RNAS and RFC. In December Dar es Salaam became the Airpark base for the RFC with an airfield at Maneromango, 50 miles south east of the city.

Towards the end of December 1916, a base was set up at Njombe in the south to support General Northey. The planes undertook reconnaissance, bombing of fortifications and camps. The men used rifle grenades and locally manufactured 16 pound bombs.

In January 1917 Smuts returned to South Africa before going to England to represent South Africa at the Imperial Conferences. Before he left, General Hoskins his successor flew from Kilwa to Nairobi during an engagement with the Germans to confer with Smuts about the change.²¹ Smuts, having left, declared that the war in East Africa was in effect over with only mopping up operations to take place. As a result, 7 Squadron was ordered to return to England on 13 January. Their equipment was handed over to 26 Squadron on 30 January. 7 Squadron had spent seven and a half months in the theatre and had flown 55,000 miles.



We return to Zanzibar where an RNAS unit was based from early 1915. In January 1916, when Air Mechanic Jack Furniss joined the personnel numbered approximately 150.²² The aircraft included four Voisin landplanes and four Short seaplanes.

On 9 May 1916, No 8 Squadron left Mbuyuni for Mombasa and arrived at Zanzibar on 11 May before moving to Chukiwani seven miles south of Stone Town. The planes had to be moved by lighter as they were too big for the narrow streets of Stone Town. Some material, including 10,000 gallons of petrol, had to be swum to shore as the tide was out when the lighters arrived. The Squadron's role was to support the naval blockade of the coast, a length of 620 miles. The squadron consisted of carpenters, engineers, generals (who did everything), two writers, stores party and armourers. Their armoury contained 65 and 16 pound bombs, incendiaries, petrol bombs and darts.

²¹ TNA: CAB 45/35, p 49

²² Peter Dye, *Cross and Cockade*, p160

It was supported by the supply ship, *Laconia*, the kite balloon ship *Manica* and the *Himalaya* which had been sent from service in the Dardanelles. All three were equipped to take seaplanes. A contingent of two planes, pilot and a dozen ratings would cruise the coast for about ten days.

On 15 August 1916, 7 Squadron RNAS moved to Dodoma and on 12 August Cull and Gallehawk of 4 Squadron RNAS together with 34 ratings left for Cape Town. Squadron Commander FWI Bowhill from Mesopotamia took over from Cull and his, Bowhill's report here at Hendon is most insightful especially on the photography and storage of equipment.

A new base was set up for the RFC at Kilwa in December 1916 and after it took one Voisin two hours of difficult flying to arrive, the remainder of the planes were moved by sea. The planes were soon put into storage as the airfields were waterlogged. In February 1917 the men left for Dar es Salaam returning to Kilwa in May to renew operations. They mapped the area in preparation for the land attack. Around January 1917 *Himalaya* was returned to its owner as kite balloons were no longer needed – the seaplane was found to be more than efficient. The *Manica* left in June.

The RNAS had a base at Lindi, Zanzibar providing the overhauling facilities. On 6 December 1917 the squadron returned to Dar es Salaam as von Lettow had moved over the border into Portuguese East Africa. On 9 January 1918 the Squadron was recalled to England which marked the end of planes being used in the war in Africa.²³



The achievement of the RNAS and RFC was, in my opinion as a non-flight specialist, absolutely remarkable. My fascination with the air war was sparked reading about all the attempts by Cutler and Cull to get their seaplanes into the air. The reasons given resonated with my own experience of being a regular flight passenger travelling between England, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa. I now understood the reason why we always took so much longer to get off the ground in Africa

than in Britain. For example, the altitude at Alt Iringa was 6,000 feet above sea level. Guaranteed, there will be turbulence as you cross the equator at any time of day or night and that's in a big plane. I couldn't imagine it in a flimsy construction like a BE2c.

In addition to these atmospheric challenges, there was the impact of rough terrain which had to be cleared, the mountains and hills which channelled wind in different directions with little warning and dust devils. Vegetation was often thick making clearing of landing spaces difficult and impeding vision. The rains caused airfields to become waterlogged and roads to be so churned that vehicles could not move without getting stuck or overturning. Hangars and protected workshops were scarce, the men often working in the open which meant dust got into parts affecting their efficiency and men were sunburnt. Earwigs caused concern although how and why is not specified. This could be to do with the myth that they burrow into people's ears to lay their eggs or because they found resting places in plane crevices, eating the wood and emitting a foul smell when disturbed.²⁴ Malaria and other ailments affected the men too. In January 1917 it was reported that about one third of 7 Squadron RNAS was ill at any one time.

²³ HA Jones, *The war in the air* (1931) pp 21-68 also contains further exploits of the air services in East Africa

²⁴ Earwigs: <https://owlcation.com/stem/Earwigs-Facts-Myths-and-Natural-Pest-Control>

During the East Africa campaign, the squadron was to receive 193 recruits from South Africa, 72 reinforcements from England and 46 from Egypt. Officers came from England or Egypt. The planes in East Africa were BE2Cs and BE2Es. They had a mix of 80HP Wolseley-Renault and 90HP RAF engines. The Henri Farman's had 135HP Canton Unné engines. In total there were 12 planes, although one arrived late in May 1916. The distances the planes had to cover in 1917 resulted in the War Office approving an increase in the squadron from 287 men to 310 and later again to 352.²⁵

Transport in East Africa was initially 24 Crossley Light Tenders, 6 Leyland Heavy Lorries, Workshops, trailers and motorcycles in line with other RAF squadrons.²⁶ In April 1916, a further 10 Leyland Lorries and a photographic lorry were sent to East Africa to supplement those already there, but a year later in January 1917 it was determined that the lorries would not be suitable for the terrain in the southern part of the German colony. Thirty-two Crossley Light Tenders were therefore supplied and the 10 Leylands transferred to Mechanical Transport for use at the base.²⁷

It is quite remarkable, that so few of the RNAS and RFC were lost in action. On 29 April 1916 the first RNAS fatalities occurred. In the Maktou area, Cecil R Terraneau and Italian Captain Bruno were forced down by engine trouble, and were shot before being captured. In January 1917, Richard Orlando Beaconsfield Bridgeman was killed when his plane crashed and he was washed out to sea. His companion Edward Roland Moon was taken prisoner on 9 January. He spoke of the kindness of his captor who provided him with clothing and food. He was also carried along when too ill to walk and noted that his colleague Commander Bridgeman was given a full military burial.²⁸

Despite these challenges, between the beginning of June and 8 September 1916, the Voisins had flown 6,500 miles and on 10 January 1917 William Geoffrey Moore, carrying additional fuel, was able to stay airborne for over five hours. This is quite remarkable when one thinks of the first flight in South Africa lasting twenty minutes and that in 1908.



There were others in East Africa who had planes as well. Once the British assumed control of Lake Tanganyika, the Belgians were able to make use of two British-loaned planes with Belgian pilots to bomb Kigoma. As a result of their flights, the Germans scuttled their newest ship on the lake, the *Gotzen* which had only made a few journeys since its completion in July 1914. This allowed the Belgians to send troops across the lake to clear the Germans out of what is today Rwanda and Burundi and occupy Tabora in September 1916.

²⁵ TNA: AIR 1/1247/204/7/4

²⁶ TNA: AIR 1/1247/204/7/4

²⁷ TNA: AIR 1/1247/204/7/4

²⁸ C Cato, *The navy everywhere* (1919) pp 54-57



At the start of the war, the Germans had a bi-plane which crashed on its second flight killing the pilot, Lieutenant Henneberger, on 15 November 1915.²⁹ After being rescued and repaired by its owner Bruno Büchner, the plane was used to fly goods to Morogoro where he and his wife were later interned by the British.³⁰

Later, in November 1917, the German government sent out Zeppelin L-59 in an attempt to supply the German forces in East Africa. However, the attempt failed as the British supposedly intercepted communications about the flight and were able to convince the pilot that von Lettow-Vorbeck had surrendered. On 23 November the Zeppelin turned back.³¹ The real purpose for sending the Zeppelin remains unclear with W Lloyd-Jones and Ed Paice, noting that Lettow-Vorbeck denied any knowledge of the zeppelin except for having heard rumours from the locals at Lindi.³² GL King claims, based on 'authentic, inside (unofficially supported) information and statements [...] that VonLettow (sic) was stated to take over relatively high command on the Western Front.' The purpose of L-59 was therefore to fetch Lettow-Vorbeck back to Europe.³³ L-59 was 'three times the length of a Boeing 747, but it could only carry 14 tons of cargo: 11 tons were equipment and ammunition, including 30 new machine-guns, and the rest were medical supplies. In addition, it carried 22 tons of petrol fuel and 9 tons of water ballast. Its crew of 22 lived under spartan accomodations [sic] and high-stress work conditions--each of the five propeller engines required a mechanic in attendance, and was shut off in turn for 2 out of every 10 hours for lubrication and maintainence [sic].'³⁴ The crew had not slept for 92 hours and recorded the longest non-stop flight to date – 4,200 miles.³⁵

The reaction to aircraft was mixed. CJ Thornhill notes that an old man, a *mzee*, believed that the King of England directed his men from the 'four-winged bird' which flew over 'making a loud noise' and which, when it 'lays [eggs] on the German camp', they 'explode and kill people.' He continued, 'Yes, I always had my thoughts that it was only a king who could manage so formidable a bird.'³⁶ As the war progressed, and the local inhabitants became more familiar with the plane, or *ndege* (Kiswahili for bird), they learnt to avoid its 'iron eggs' by hiding. Every time a plane crashed, its prestige diminished and not just amongst the black population as recorded by Capell.³⁷ Norman Jewell, a doctor who served in East Africa and became a friend of Cherry Kearton recorded:

It was at Maktau that I saw an aeroplane for the first time and was intensely interested in its operations in contrast to the casual and resigned attitude of my personal servant. It was on our first morning in Maktau when there was a lot of noise and the plane rose and circled around the camp rising very slowly until it was high

²⁹ JOEO Mahnke, 'The *Fliegerstruppe* of the Imperial German Army: Aircraft operations in the German colonies, 1911-1916' in *Military History Journal*, 12:2 (2001)

³⁰ JOEO Mahnke, 'The *Fliegerstruppe* of the Imperial German Army: Aircraft operations in the German colonies, 1911-1916' in *Military History Journal*, 12:2 (2001)

³¹ Frank Contey to B Garfield, *The Meinertzhagen mystery: the life and legend of a colossal fraud* (Potomac: Washington, 2007) pp 126-127, 281-282 fn 17; R Anderson, *The forgotten front* (2004) p 249; E Paice, *Tip and Run* (2007) pp 347-350

³² W Lloyd-Jones, *KAR* (1926) p 200

³³ GL King, *A study of the operations in German East Africa during the World War 1914-1918* (1930, Fort Leavenworth) pp 14-15

³⁴ <http://memoryofthisimpertinence.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/strange-mission-of-zeppelin-l59.html>

³⁵ <http://memoryofthisimpertinence.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/strange-mission-of-zeppelin-l59.html>

³⁶ CJ Thornhill, *Taking Tanganyika* (2004) pp 146-147

³⁷ AE Capell, *2nd Rhodesian Regiment* (1922) p 39; Lettow-Vorbeck in HA Jones, *War in the air* (1931) p 23

enough to leave and go out on reconnaissance. I was fascinated and asked Juma, who was preparing my bath, what he thought of it all. He glanced at the plane and said: 'It is very like a bird. Your bath is ready.' Later, I asked him if he was surprised to see a machine flying. 'No,' he said, 'If you can make a cart go without something to pull it, then why not a cart that can fly?' I could not follow the argument, but it seemed clear and concise for Juma.³⁸



The fascination of flight in World War 1 Africa has filtered through to the world of fiction and a number of novels have been published. The most recent in 2014 is by Maya Alexandri. *The Celebration Husband* has a Denys Finch Hatton character combined with Kearton whose dog, Simba, joined him on the battlefield and on one occasion took to the air in search of his master. Wilbur Smith's 2009 *Assegai* features a dog-fight between a British plane and the German Zeppelin. Also

breaking with tradition, Smith has a female pilot. The third plane dominated novel of the campaign is William Stevenson's 1980's *The Ghosts of Africa* which draws inspiration from the German planes and the Zeppelin. Others which deal with the Konigsberg will also invariably include the use of aircraft – *Shout at the Devil* by Wilbur Smith in 1968.



The war in the air was supported from Africa in Europe too and this is often more forgotten than the air war in Africa. Chiefs in Africa who couldn't send manpower to Europe to support the King sent money and cows to be sold. Much of this went towards comforts but also to purchasing planes. For example, Egypt eight, Basutoland 28, Benin (Nigeria) two, South Africa 41, Gold Coast 95, East Africa Protectorate one, Gambia seven, Sierra Leone 3, Swaziland 3, Rhodesia 13, Zanzibar 73.³⁹ A total of 274 at a cost of

£2,086 per plane.⁴⁰ A remarkable contribution when one considers the economies today.

Approximately 2450 South Africans served with the RFC during World War 1, known as Miller's Boys following Major Alistair Miller's recruitment drive.⁴¹ Van der Spuy and Pierre van Ryneveld were to serve in Russia before 1919. On his return from serving in Russia, Pierre van Ryneveld successfully flew from London to Tanganyika and in February 1920 from Cairo to Cape Town. This achievement was to make the cross-continental railway redundant.⁴²

And that in a nutshell covers the role of flight in World War 1 Africa. For those interested there were four DSMs, 10 DSCs and 4 DSOs awarded across the various units⁴³ and as with all aspects of World War 1

³⁸ Norman Parsons Jewell, *On Call in Africa in War and Peace, 1910-1932* (Gillyflower, 2016)

³⁹ Thank you to John Hurst of Spitfire Organisation for supplying this information.

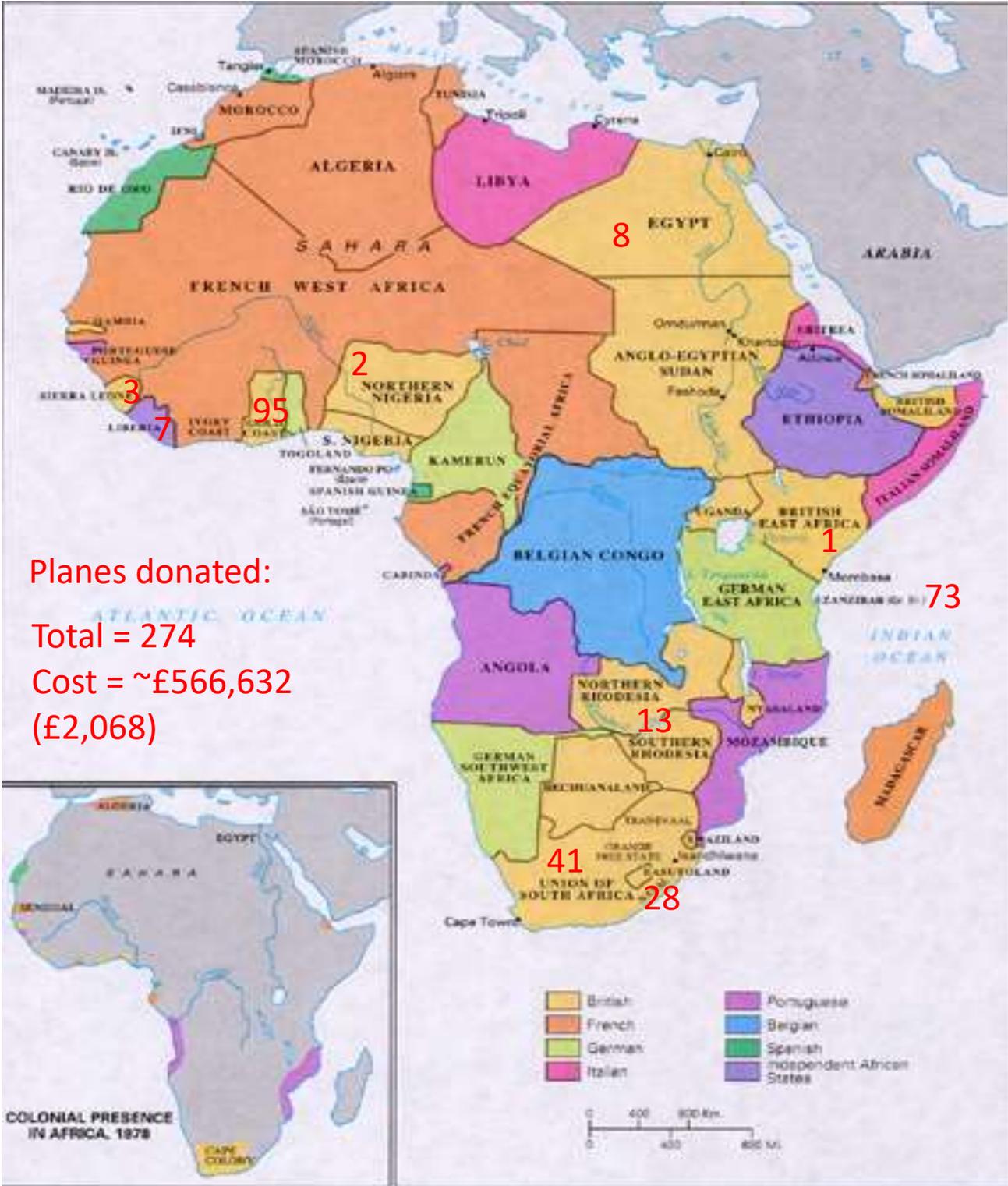
⁴⁰ https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Aircraft_Factory_R.E.8

⁴¹ Miller had been born in Swaziland; <http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol056dt.html>;
<http://www.sapfa.org.za/history/1910-1920-early-flying-south-africa>

⁴² AMD Howes, 'Some details of the first twenty-five years of flying in Tanganyika, 1914-1939' in *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, no 50 (Jun 1958)

⁴³ All listed in Peter Dye's articles.

Africa, there are the generally unmentioned labourers and carriers who helped make it all happen. We will not forget.



Planes donated:

Total = 274

Cost = ~£566,632
(£2,068)

Images and further information can be found at:

<http://www.thevintageaviator.co.nz/projects/be2/history-be2-series>

<http://www.britmodeller.com/forums/index.php?/topic/234992274-henri-farman-hf-27-south-african-air-corps-june-1915-scratch-built-in-172/>

<http://www.sapfa.org.za/history/1910-1920-early-flying-south-africa>

<http://s400910952.websitehome.co.uk/germancolonialuniforms/hist%20aircraft.htm>

<http://www.britmodeller.com/forums/index.php?/topic/234992274-henri-farman-hf-27-south-african-air-corps-june-1915-scratch-built-in-172/>

<http://samilitaryhistory.org/vol056dt.html>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Short_Admiralty_Type_81

<https://wolfgangthome.wordpress.com/2016/09/15/the-early-days-of-flying-in-kenya/>

http://lzdream.net/marine/konigsberg_photo.php

http://lzdream.net/marine/allemanne/konigsberg/01_06KaiserlicheMarine293a.jpg

<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/133302-south-africans-in-rfc-in-east-africa/>

http://www.naval-history.net/OWShips-WW1-04-HMS_Manica.htm

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Manica

<http://s400910952.websitehome.co.uk/germancolonialuniforms/hist%20aircraft.htm>

<http://www.44th-entry.org.uk/SCL1.html>

<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/171083-flag-commander-rob-bridgeman-dso/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_for_Lake_Tanganyika#/media/File:Watervliegtuigen_WO_I_Tanganyikameer.jpg

<http://s400910952.websitehome.co.uk/germancolonialuniforms/hist%20aircraft.htm>

<http://memoryofthisimpertinence.blogspot.co.uk/2009/07/strange-mission-of-zeppelin-l59.html>

<http://www.avalancheprss.com/L59.php>

<http://spitfireheritagetrust.com>

Cameras: <http://collectionsonline.nmsi.ac.uk/detail.php?type=related&kv=8247351&t=objects>