Good evening, goeie aan, goed en abend and habari za jioni. It’s an honour to be talking to you about the First World War in East Africa, in a country I regard as my third home, South Africa and Britain being one and two.

Before we get down to business, I would like to thank the following for organising this evening: Antony Shaw for linking people together, Tammy Clayton and her team for co-ordinating all the arrangements, Her Excellency the Acting High Commissioner for Britain, Penny Smith, His Excellency, the Ambassador for Germany, Egon Kochanke and for Belgium, Koenraad Adam. I cannot tell you what it means to me, personally, that this event is co-hosted by Britain and Germany and is taking place in East Africa. Africa is quietly leading the way. It is also fitting that there are so many ambassadors here as they are a group of unsung heroes in my opinion. The role they played during the First World War is yet to be acknowledged. So, as my Tanzanian colleagues in Moshi know me to say: Asante sana kubisa! Thank you.

_Fuhali wa kipigano ziumiazo ni nyasi -_ when two bulls fight, the grass suffers.

The fact that you are here, suggests you have heard of the campaign and might have some knowledge of aspects of it. In giving my overview of the First World War here in East Africa, I hope that everyone will discover at least one aspect of the conflict they did not know before. I know I’ve made some discoveries in putting this talk together.

I’ll give a basic overview of the conflict - from the European or white perspective and then move to what this meant for East Africans. I set myself this challenge as the war is generally regarded as a colonial or white man’s war and that local or black participation tends to be regarded as ‘puppet’- like - both points I dispute. However, the recorded history of the war is that of the white man or woman if I include myself and a few others I know working on the theatre. There are a few sources available which give the local voice and I’ve drawn on these as appropriate. Otherwise, it has been through a slightly different reading of the existing Eurocentric material.

It is also appropriate at this stage to deal with terminology. When I refer to African, I mean all those who were present in Africa at the time who saw themselves as African or who were born or resident in Africa. This includes black, white, Indian and Arab, people whose vested interests and attachments to the war differed, sometimes considerably to those who came in from Europe, Asia and elsewhere to participate in the struggle between the great European powers. Where possible, I prefer to refer to specific groups, acknowledging that the national identities we know today did not exist 100 years ago. Excluding the various East and Central African tribes, there were at least 23 different ethnic groups involved in the East African theatre, some living in the area and others who enlisted. I will also use the word ‘native’ - this is in no way done in a derogatory fashion but to keep true to the recorded documents of the day.

War between the British and German empires broke out on 4 August 1914. Before British forces had even arrived in Europe, the war in Africa had begun with action in Togoland on the 6th. The war in East Africa began, here in Dar es Salaam, on 8 August when the British ship _Astrea_ bombed the port to put the wireless station out of action. Soon after, on 15 August German troops prompted by General Paul von Lettow Vorbeck ventured into British East Africa at Taita/Taveta and were to occupy the only British territory of the First World War for 20
months. There is some debate over who fired the first shot. According to James Willson, author of *Guerrillas of Tsavo*, the Kenya Police have recorded the death of Private Mwití Murimi on 15 August as the only soldier killed that day and fittingly attribute the first shot of the war to him. The District Commissioner of the time, Hugh La Fontein maintains the first shot was fired by a corporal of the Mtembe tribe. Whichever of the two men it was, it is certain that he fired his shot when the base at Taveta was approached by 200-300 German East Africans at 3am led by Captain Tom von Prince, otherwise known as Bwana Sakkarani (the Wild One). German officer Broeker was fatally wounded, dying the next day. After this, with the Germans occupying Taveta, things calmed down apart from the odd raid further into British East Africa to derail trains on the Uganda Railway.

On 16 August, the captain of the British ship *Guendolen*, on Lake Nyasa, located its German counterpart, *Hermann von Wissmann* and called on its captain to surrender. The Governor of Nyasaland had determined on the outbreak of war that Nyasaland needed to react quickly to obtain control of Lake Nyasa from the Germans as whoever controlled the lake had the communication advantage and as Mel Page points out could take the war in any direction given the location of the Malawi. The head of the Malawi Historical Association, Janie Hampton claims this action was a turning point in the war enabling the British to achieve what they did. Personally, I don't think this was the case. The capture or destruction of the *Hermann von Wissmann* by the *Guendolen* is the story of how duty and national interests overrode friendship when the British admiral arrested his German counterpart who thought they were meeting for a whisky - he had not been notified of the state of war - quite probably because Britain controlled the communication channels. Threats of further invasions by the Germans led the British in Northern Rhodesia to ask the Belgians for support, which the latter did by sending a battalion but only to serve on the Congolese side of the border.

On 17 August, 300 troops and 1,000 levies invaded German East Africa from Uganda at Budu.1

On 22 August, the Germans raided across Lake Tanganyika into Congo at the harbour port of Albertville (Kalémie) and put the Belgian *Alexandre del Commune* out of action. This was followed by a German raid into Portuguese East Africa on 24 August where they attacked Maziua on the Rovuma River. Here, the Portuguese commanding officer and 12 askari were killed. Both Congo and Portuguese East Africa were ostensibly neutral at this time.

Various other minor incursions and raids continued to take place on the British East African border, which I won't go into but you can read about them in Ed Paice's *Tip and Run*.

On the ocean, too, East Africa was a feature with the SMS *Konigsberg* having made an early getaway from Dar es Salaam. She caused concern about her whereabouts, having given the British the slip on 30 July 1914 before heading to the Gulf of Aden where she sank the British merchant ship, the *City of Winchester* on 11 August - the first of the war - carrying the first crop of the year's tea harvest.2 Instead of the tea heading to Britain, it found its way to German East Africa. However, the need for coal was soon pressing and on 3 September the *Konigsberg* moved into the Rufiji Delta in search of a place to repair and re-coal. She was in a position to raid on 20 September when she heard that HMS *Pegasus* was in Zanzibar harbour. Within hours, *Pegasus* was sunk and *Konigsberg* back in the delta where she remained until she herself was sunk in October 1915, making this the longest naval battle recorded. This was also one of the first battles where the use of aeroplanes was used strategically by the British to spot the

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1 Ed Paice, p19fn
ship and to direct fire. The Germans had done so in South West Africa.

On 9 September, the Germans attacked Karonga and Kasoa in Nyasaland. This followed an enquiry from the local German administrator to his counterpart in Nyasaland about whether a state of war existed as he was aware of forces being mobilised on both sides, but his colleagues at Mbeya were not responding to his requests for information. On hearing that a state of war existed, he wrote to the British administrator advising him to remove women and children from the town as he could not safeguard them when the town was attacked. Peter Charlton covers the events in Nyasaland in his *Cinderella's Soldiers: the Nyasaland Volunteer Reserve* whilst Mel Page gives a wider overview particularly from the black perspective in *The Chiwaya war*.

On 10 September 1914, the British Government received a request from Germany via the American Ambassador to declare the area neutral. Following some discussion with its Belgian ally, it was decided two months later to decline the request given all the actions which had already taken place.

During the first weeks of war, discussions in London determined that an Indian Expeditionary Force would be sent to British East Africa to help defend the protectorate whilst another would invade German East Africa from Tanga. The former, Indian Expeditionary Force 'C' landed at Mombasa on 1 September whilst Indian Expeditionary Force 'B' arrived at Tanga on 3 November to disembark straight into battle, after the Germans had been given 24 hours' notice ending the unratified truce which was in place. The Tanga expedition was a disaster all round but more so for the British who withdrew leaving piles of equipment and ammunition on the beaches. Ross Anderson covers this admirably in his *Battle for Tanga*. It is fitting to mention here, that Tom von Prince, who farmed in the Usambara mountains, lost his life in service to the country he had called home since 1896.

The net result of the attack on Tanga and the failure of a diversion at Longido was that the British War Office took over control of the East Africa campaign from India, although the latter continued to supply equipment and men. The next spurt of action was at Mafia on 9 January 1915 when the island was captured by the British in preparation for actions against the *Konigsberg*. This was followed by Jasim on the coastal border. The British had occupied Jasim on Christmas Day 1914, but, by 18 January, they were pushed back into British East Africa.

1915 was a quiet year on all fronts in East Africa - at least on the surface. Behind the scenes, much was being done to prepare for action. The Belgians, desperate to get control of Lake Tanganyika, liaised with the British. This was timely as a local hunter in the Katanga region was suggesting to the British admiralty that two boats could be taken overland from Cape Town to Kalemie to surprise the Germans on the lake. This became the Lake Tanganyika Expedition which Giles Foden recounts in *Mimi* and *Toutou go forth* while Alex Capus tells it from the German perspective in *A matter of time*.

John Lee, the hunter concerned, was the second hunter to have a strategic impact on the war. The first was Pieter Pretorius, a South African who had settled in German East Africa. On the outbreak of war, Pretorius was on safari, unaware of what had been happening. In his account *Jungle man*, he tells that on his return home, his black staff managed to warn him that the German schutztruppe had come looking for him but not before he had been spotted. He was wanted for poaching and not paying taxes. After a skirmish, he was shot. Severely wounded he managed to work his way through Portuguese East Africa to the Union. On arrival, he immediately came under suspicion as a spy, until the British government asked for his services.
to track the Konigsberg in the Rufiji Delta. Due to his years in the bush, with a little disguise, he was able to pass as an Arab, obtaining vital information which led to the sinking of the ship. Other hunters in British and German East Africa served as scouts and guides for both sides, many assisted and supported by black and Arab trackers and hunters, some previous slave traders such as Mbarak and Mzee Ali, the latter, a Wanyanyembe, whose story is told by Bror MacDonnell, in a book of the same name, Mzee Ali.

In 1916, things began to happen again. Discussions with South Africa led to 10,000 South African troops joining the forces in British East Africa. Their first action at Salaita Hill on 12 February was repulsed. But within a few weeks of South African Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for War, General Jan Smuts' arrival as the new British commander, the Germans were pushed south to Moshi and then onto the Pangani River, Kahe, Handeni, and eventually by October 1916, they were south of the Central Railway. The harbour towns were brought under British control, Tanga falling on 7 July 1916 and by 18 September the whole coast line was in British hands. In the south, during 1915, the Nyasaland and Rhodesian forces had been combined under the leadership of General Edward Northey who in 1916 began to put pressure on the Germans in his area.

On the Lake Tanganyika side, the British and Belgians had obtained command of the Lake and on 19 September 1916 the Belgians occupied Tabora. However, there was still a German column raiding the area until mid-October 1917 when they surrendered to the Cape Corps. On 23 November 1917, the Germans moved into Portuguese East Africa and German East Africa was regarded as clear of German troops.

During 1918, the Germans remained in Portuguese East Africa for ten months before they returned to German East Africa in October 1918 and raided into Nyasaland attacking Fife. They finally surrendered after fighting their last battle at Kasama on 13 November 1918, two days after the armistice in Europe. They agreed to lay down their arms having been assured of the situation in Europe and formally surrendered at Abercorn on 25 November 1918 bringing the war in East Africa to an end. At the surrender, General Jaap van Deventer of South Africa, the 10th British commander to lead forces against Lettow-Vorbeck during the war, disobeyed his instructions and allowed the German General and his officers to retain their arms as a mark of respect.

This in a nutshell is the war in East Africa, but what often gets overlooked in many of the accounts is the role of the local population, many of whom, over one million, served as porters and labourers for the British, 260,000 for the Belgians, 90,000 Portuguese and 362,000 with the Germans. Another 155,085 were soldiers comprising 12,000 German and 126,972 British, 13,113 Belgian and 3,000 Portuguese. We know from available accounts that in addition to white troops, the Germans used black and Arab, the Portuguese Indian and black whilst the British used Indian, black and South African coloured troops and Chinese labour. However, of the local troops, first-hand accounts are known to be available from white settlers, a German Wanyanyembe, Mzee Ali, already mentioned, KiKamba in Kenya through recordings made by Gerald Rillings in the 1980s and translated this year, 2014, and black soldiers in Nyasaland who were interviewed by Professor Melvin Page when he was completing his doctoral study in the 1970s. Geoffrey Hodges who served with the Carrier Corps recorded accounts and perceptions which he included in his book Kariakor and there is a recording of one of the last surviving German askaris in a Deutsche Welle film from the late 1990s which I am still trying to trace. However, the voices of Indians and Arabs appear to be completely missing unless captured in one-off comments in the writings of those who were there or which are hiding somewhere in an archive or personal collection waiting to be brought to light. The closest we have are the Aga
Khan’s memoirs which provide some insight into the politics of the time and his support for the British.

From the KiKamba and other accounts it is clear that the stage of the war and the role one fulfilled determined one’s experiences of the war, chances of survival and memories. Geoffrey Hodges notes that there were four phases of recruiting for the British forces: the pre-war system where labour was partly voluntary and partly compulsory, general compulsion through the 1915 Native Followers Recruitment Ordnance which enabled Europeans and Asians to be conscripted, the mass levy from March to November 1917 and then a return to the pre-war system. More work needs to be done on the local accounts which do exist in terms of when/where they enlisted as I am sure this will demonstrate that there were other reasons for individual involvement in the campaigns and not purely pressure from the coloniser on the colonised. Of the total British armed forces in East Africa, it is estimated that 11,189 died, compared to over 95,000 carriers and labourers of which 41,000 were from German East Africa serving with the British.

To give some idea of how local blacks saw the war, I’m going to use the KiKamba interviews as these have not yet made it into the public domain having only been translated this year. They can be found at the Imperial War Museum in London. This is a selection from the 12 interviews which demonstrate the varied experiences men from the same area or tribe had.

Kilonz Mbeva says ‘I did not volunteer. We were rounded up here, a large group, and taken to Nairobi where we were sorted. Some people went to the war but I stayed in Nairobi to distribute food. I received those who broke their limbs in the war and their belongings. I also received the belongings of those who died in the war. I was injected here for immunization (or testing). After immunization and testing, they decided I would stay here (in Nairobi) to distribute food. I distributed dates, maize, rice, flour, and bread’

Mbeva’s account provides some idea of the 'behind the scenes' work on the British side. Soldiers who died had their items returned home as explained by Harry Stirling to a mother who lost her son: 'I opened all your son’s letters enough to see where and from whom they came, and the date, and then burnt them, thinking you would like to know what had become of them. A ‘Committee of Adjustment’ of 3 officers is usually appointed, but I don’t like the idea of a whole committee dealing with a dead man’s private letters. He had only a few personal belongings with him on the 16th, which were lost. Everything else is further back and will be dealt with by a committee. They generally sell all clothes, camp kit etc, and send home only small things as have sentimental value or are likely to be of interest to the family.’

Mbeva also hints at the variations in diet which needed to be taken into account. Hodges records that the Ugandan forces struggled medically with a sudden change in diet when their usual staple could not be provided. Cultural and religious practices impacted on dietary requirements and many starved or suffered when they could not cook their maize properly.

By far the majority of the local population was employed as porters, carriers and labourers, but even here the role varied from carrying food to specialisms such as carrying gun parts and being placed in the front lines to carry wounded. Here, a few excelled themselves, remaining in the face of danger and on occasion going beyond the call of duty to help keep a machine gun in

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1 Hodges, 35
2 Paice
3 RH: MSS Afr S 2051 J Harry Miller Stirling
operation despite their life being in danger. More often than not, carriers dropped their loads and took the bush when firing started. No fewer than 4,300 lost their lives in the front line.

Ntheketha Nyete, a porter tells of his enlistment: 'A white man came here and recruited us. Ngovi was in charge then. When we went to Ngovi’s office, we were called by name. They had rounded up the young men who paid taxes and we were told that married men were not desirable, that they wanted those who were not married. They said a married man would escape from KAR because his woman would always be on his mind. There were one hundred of us from Ngovi’s area. We went to Machakos and spent the night there and then early the next morning we left for Ithoini where we spent the night again. From there, we went to Mavoko where we spent the night again. We walked all the way. There were no vehicles. Then we went to Kariokor in Nairobi where we found other people. We stayed there for a while. A white man would come and call a group to help them with work. We lived there for two months and then I got employed to collect meat from Nairobi in sacks. We went to collect the meat and when we came back around 12 o’clock we found clothes stacked on the table and as we off loaded the meat, we were told that we were going to the war.’

Stirling gave an indication of the diversity of carrier role in the field: 'On Oct 4th [1917], the 1st, 2nd & 4th Battalions, under Colonel Mann, began a march across country, hilly, dusty, hot, and covered with thick bush. In most places we could only get water in cupfuls, sometimes having to dig for it. There were 8,000 people in the column, far the larger proportion being non-combatants – supply carriers, ammunition, baggage, signal section, field ambulance with all their stores stretchers and personnel. It was seldom that we could walk two abreast, and when in single file the column covered 7 miles of path. This made the marches frightfully slow and tedious.’ (Samson)

Stretcher-bearers were specially trained for the job and a forthcoming memoir by Doctor Norman Jewell provides evidence of the large numbers of stretcher-bearers required to clear the battle fields. He recalls how a German askari surrendered himself and became a stretcher bearer rather than be a prisoner or porter. Indians from South Africa formed two stretcher bearer corps specially for service where Indians were serving and were sent to East Africa by the War Office.

Blacks and Arabs were used as trackers and scouts, some in specially raised corps such as Wavell’s Arabs and Delamere’s Scouts, the latter comprising Masai and KiKamba who spoke Swahili to act as intermediaries.

Blacks, and coloureds from South Africa, were used as drivers and overseers of cattle. Cattle were driven along the lines of communication as a source of food - ‘on the hoof’ as one of the KiKamba recounted. Use was also made of oxen - many suffered and died when taken through tsetse fly area, which was the reason for the use of manpower instead. Bärker Olden, a German transport rider in East Africa at the outbreak of the war tells of his experiences in what appears to be the first German novel of the campaign, Kilimanscharo or On virgin soil (1922).

One of the feats of the campaign concerning oxen was the transport of Mimi and Toutou, the two British boats of the Lake Tanganyika Expedition, through Katanga in Congo. Using two span of oxen the boats were manoeuvred to a plateau 6,000 feet above sea level and down to the rivers en route to Albertville, now Kalémie. The ox teams were from South Africa.

The story of the boats is told by Giles Foden as mentioned earlier and by Peter Shankland in The phantom flotilla. Neither of these two books, and to some extent Ed Paice in his account in Tip
and run, make mention of the large numbers of local men, or Belgian forces, who helped transport these two boats. The main attention is given to the 28-35 white British men who made up the core of the expedition. Some of the men in the group were resident in Africa as hunters, farmers and miners. In the accounts you hear of the women who walked eight miles carrying water to fill the steam engines which were used to move the boats. Little, however, is said of the many men used to move the boats from the trailers onto trains, off trains, onto boats and into the water. It was seeing a photo of the latter that brought home to me the invisible workforce that made things happen. These men, contracted from local tribes as needed, were responsible for cutting down trees to fill dry river beds so the boats could cross - some 200 river beds, one 20 foot deep and half as wide. The number of trees felled is unimaginable as is the manpower used when you realise the speed with which they covered the terrain.

The British Admiralty had some foresight when setting up the expedition as they made financial provision for the employment of 500 local men, but I believe they may well have used more. Local men were also contracted to move the equipment - no numbers are given but two contracts of £50,000 were signed for the transport of goods.

This expedition also highlights the role of the 'boy' - generally a derogatory term for a black personal servant or batman. However, I have come to regard reference to Boys in diaries and memoirs in the same way as a rank within the military structure. Perhaps even more so than porters and carriers they were the backbone of the forces. Lettow-Vorbeck noted in his Reminiscences of East Africa that food was scarce when they got to Rufiji as they were waiting for the maize to ripen. This left him with the only option of reducing the size of his force. He says 'The non-combatant personnel of the companies was also reduced. Among other things, it was laid down that henceforward no European should have more than five native attendants. That sounds a generous allowance to European ears, but under African conditions native attendance is really indispensable to the European. He requires at least one man or boy to cook for him and attend to his personal needs, and, in addition, it must be remembered that all baggage, kit, rations, blankets, and tent-material, has to be carried whenever he moves. When one considers that in peace-time a travelling official on a long safari (journey) took with him from eleven to thirteen bearers, in addition to two or three personal servants, it will be understood how drastic this new order was and what a storm of indignation it aroused.'

The Boys did all the manual labour as explained by Lettow and also organised luxuries such as baths when they were possible of which there is a wonderful description concerning Spicer-Simson the commander of the Lake Tanganyika Expedition. A bush-bath was described by Lieutenant Erskine of 1 KAR: 'I have my bath every afternoon. I get a hole dug in the ground then place an oil sheet inside and fill it with water'. (Samson)

There are accounts of Boys closely nursing their charge when the latter was incapacitated by fever and on occasion performing miracles given the position people often found themselves in. One seasoned African hand commented that if it wasn't for the Boy, even the Boers and hunters would not survive in the field as they did not know how to cook and fend for themselves, especially when removing jiggers and carrying their charge's rifle when the latter was too exhausted. More work definitely needs to be undertaken on these men.

Black and Arab were also used on the boats. On Lake Tanganyika, we hear about Fundi (expert), the stoker of the German boat Kingani which was captured by the British and renamed Fifii. When the boat was hit, Fundi managed to escape and hid until he was presented to Spicer-Simson. He was then appointed to the same position on Fifii and was later presented with a medal made by one of the expedition engineers in recognition of his services. Mention has been
made of Pretorius the hunter disguised as an Arab in gathering intelligence about the Konigsberg. His success implies that Arabs were used to work around or on the boats. In the harbours and on the railways, local manpower was used for transferring goods, maintenance and construction.

The local populations seemed to have little idea why they were fighting. Carrier M’Inoti wa Tirikamu from Meru 'naturally wondered why white men hate each other so much. They looked so much like brothers. We asked ourselves: “Do they fight for land, or for the power to rule, or is it because they are all white, or why?' Adding to the confusion was that when the Germans and British were not fighting, they 'were reported to have seemed be very friendly. “German officers would come to the British camp, and we would see them talking, not as enemies would do. This often surprised and confused us', noted two carriers from Machakos. Food and hospital supplies were often left for British prisoners of war in German hands and letters were exchanged between commanders concerning the conduct of the war.

Members of the Kikuyu Mission Volunteers in Murang’a District noted: 'The Germans and the British were fighting for power, each seeking to have a larger territory than the other. We thought the British would win when they drove the Germans out of Voi and Kisii, and then capture Tanga and Dar es Salaam. The difference between them and the Germans was that the Germans were men of violence, while the British were men of thought.' (Hodges 113) When Bishop Weston formed his carrier corps it comprised Zanzibaris, mostly Muslim predominating, but there were Christians also, especially the catechumens. Some pagans volunteered too.' Weston marched with his men suffering the same hardships as they did and earned huge respect.

The askari, men of the King’s African Rifles and of the German Schutztruppe too, had little idea what they were fighting for. Odandayo Mukhenye Agweli, a Luo in 4KAR, recalled: 'At Lindi, we had some battles. Indian troops joined us here to fight the enemy. The actual area was called Kampi ya Ndege (Aeroplane Camp)... using mortars we levelled the whole place before attacking... to this day, I still do not know why we fought the Germans and how the war began. Though we admired the European ways of fighting, we were still left wondering why so many people had to die. In our tribal wars, the number of the dead was never very big'. (Hodges, 106)

Mention has already been made of the use of planes in sinking the Konigsberg, they were also used to locate the enemy, drop bombs, parcels and propaganda leaflets. The Belgians made use of two planes lent by the British to attack Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika which led to the scuttling of the Graf van Gotzen. Reaction to the planes was mixed. Thornhill records that 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.' 6 As the war progressed, however, and blacks became more familiar with the plane, or ndege, 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. (Samson) In contrast, a doctor asked his Boy or servant if he was impressed by the planes to be told that it was not surprising. Whites had made carts go fast with engines and on tracks therefore making them go in the air was natural.

The askari enlisted for various reasons. Daudi Musyimi Muthwa who joined 4/2 KAR

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Headquarters says: 'I joined KAR in Machakos. I was not forced. They said that there was a letter from KAR that had asked for strong young men to join the war effort. So, they called us and asked if we wanted to join. I was strong and so I was the first volunteer. There were about eighty of us. So we were then taken to Nairobi. We found a vehicle waiting for us at the stage to take us to Milimani, close to where Kenyatta National and Referral Hospital is located. That’s where the tents had been built and it’s also where we were trained.'

Muindi Muindi explained that 'We volunteered to be employed because of poverty. When I went to join, I had been told that they do not terminate people at Ngomeni, that’s where you people are now calling KAR. So I said I would go and try to get in even if I died because I did not have any wealth. I went there because I did not have anything. When we started, we were ready for work so we passed the shooting accuracy test quickly and let the fools get fired and go home. We were hired in Nairobi before the war.'

Another KAR recruit, Private Norman Kimomo Kitui who served in 1/3 KAR tells a slightly different story. 'The white District Commissioner came from Machakos and built a house at a place called Mukaa. He camped there and called the old men together with the local chief then he told them he needed people. Twenty or thirty. So the old men proposed men from different families to make the list. ... They walked the whole journey. They were received in Nairobi by the white man who was in charge of war affairs. The white man came with a doctor and instructed the recruits to line up and take off all their clothes. The doctor then tested the recruits for any diseases and handed them to another officer for more testing. We were headed by a Nubian. They took us to a house where we slept. In the morning we were woken by a whistle to go to parade. In the parade we were taught how to march while others were assigned to carry some luggage with their heads while others were assigned to carry people in the war. The ones who carried people had a piece of white cloth with a cross on it. They would carry the injured out of battle. I and others were chosen in the morning, put in teams and trained in marching exercises. There were thirty two of us in the group. We were trained for one week. During the second week, we trained in the morning and then we were ordered to go and cook because that evening we would board the train. We were not told where we would be going.'

Kitui's account is quite significant. It draws attention to the fact that men were tested, inoculated and trained before heading out into the field. This supports other accounts and aligns with the concerns the military had with all new recruits - they could not be sent straight to the front without training. The same happened to Kitchener’s New Armies in Europe. It also appears that there was an attempt to allocate people to roles they were better suited to which would maximise the use of manpower. This accords with CP Fendall’s diary where he commented on the time it took to get carriers in the field and the impact this had on getting supplies to the front lines urgently. On the fighting front, it was this difference between newly trained troops in the British forces and the German force which had fought and worked together for more than two years, which made all the difference when push came to shove. The German forces had become like a well-oiled machine.

All sides complained of deceit. Mwanga Mbiti provides an account of his recruitment to 1/7 KAR in 1917: 'Naa wa Makovo was the Chief and the DC was Einsworth (John Ainsworth) an Englishman. Einsworth tried very much to lie to black people. ... [He wanted to see local dances and music and in return would supply aid.] A huge store had been built ... so we were pushed in and the police surrounded the place. We found a lot of food and so we ate to our fill. The police surrounded us the whole night. The house was then opened and then we were counted. With police on both sides of the group, we took the road that goes through Komarock as we sang the same song we sang at Mitaboni. They took us to Kariakor in Nairobi. They put us in a
big house there. There was a big needle that they used to inject medicine into both of our hands. We stayed in Kariokor for three days. We ate enough in those three days. In the third night, they took us to the train station in Nairobi. They put thirty five of us in every train and locked it. There was food and toilets inside the train. There was another train that carried cattle."

A veteran from Malawi recalled his experiences: 'Think of lying on the ground where the hot sun is beating directly on your backs; think of yourself buried in a hole with only your head and hands outside, holding a gun. Imagine yourself facing this situation for seven days, no food, no water, yet you don't feel hungry; only death smelling all over the place. Listen to the sound from exploding bombs and machine guns, smoke all over and the vegetation burnt and of course deforested. Look at your relatives getting killed, crying and finally dead. These things we did, experienced and saw.' (Page thesis).

Others could not understand why the British and Germans were so lenient towards their captured enemy. The Germans would often give parole to the British troops they captured. Another Malawian told of his father's experience of captured enemy: 'Germans came all over our place and we were ordered to charge with bayonets. We killed a lot of them and others put their hands up in surrender. We captured them and we stayed with them there for four days. I did not understand why we should not kill them and so was every soldier perplexed. During the third night the soldiers conspired and agreed to eliminate them and by morning, every captive was dead. The Officer Commanding went mad ... and was fuming to our misunderstanding, as to why we should do it. Being white, we thought he did not like us killing his fellow white man. We almost shot him too because to us, we were at war in which enemies were to be killed... Those Germans killed our companions yesterday and for what reason we should tame them and herd them was beyond our capacity to accept.' Anger was greater when it turned out that one's fellow villager was in the opposing force.

Between actions and marching, life on the front was boring and waiting for battle to commence was a challenge. Page notes that songs were sung to help pass the time and to insult the enemy. He quotes:

He has failed, the German has failed
He has failed, the German has failed
German has failed
Take the machine gun and leave it on the door.
German has failed, Oye! Oye!
We are the lions
We're the lions of the white men.

The last line of this little song, perhaps sums up the fears the white man had at the start of the war about getting the black man involved. Their superiority would be undermined. As with all things, regular exposure numbs the senses as set out in a letter from Karonga intercepted by the censors: 'It is very sad but I may as well tell you that I killed one German (European) myself. I am not sleeping well. I am sleeping very badly. I am afraid because I killed him and I got my head muddled when I think of it... I am a soldier and delight in war. I have killed many black men and not felt like this, but that one white man I killed has made me afraid - why I don't know. I must [tell] you so that you will know how worried I am.' As another who fought for both the British and German said 'It was just a matter of kill or die.' (Page thesis) Another Malawian recalled that often askari turned to drink or smoked something 'so that they looked like one who had been intoxicated' in an attempt to deal with the horrors they faced. The cultural divide and misunderstanding extended to dealing with the dead too, a speedy action
necessitated by the nature of war.

One young man on being recruited was advised by his father about the differences between the two sides. He could tell the Germans from the British as the former wore long trousers and the latter shorts. This worked for some of the campaign, but as supplies on both sides became scarce, men adapted their uniforms with additions from those dead on the battle fields and whatever other material came to hand. In the south of the German colony, there was an added complication as German officers gave instructions in English due to the number of English speaking recruits who had joined the schutzepeople following the British disbandment of 2 KAR in Nyasaland. On finding themselves unemployed by the British in 1911, they joined the German forces providing evidence that boundaries had little or no meaning at the time.

There was an attempt to keep the different cultural groups separate, however, the nature of the campaign meant this was almost impossible. This meant that men learnt from each other and exchanged ideas. One of the lasting outcomes of the attempts to keep the groups separate was the rumour spread by the British in particular that certain tribes were cannibals. This was proven to be false but the idea has remained concerning the Belgian Force Publique. The humorous exchange between a Nanyuki carrier, Korombo, and a Belgian askari, is a case in point. On his return to his farm after two years' service in the carrier corps, Korombo explained to his employer that on one occasion a Belgian askari set eyes on his 'substantial frame and shouted “nyama! (meat)” He remained very weary when these troops were stationed nearby.

Where men were found to be able to read and write, they were often moved into administrative roles or allowed to continue in their existing pre-war roles. Musyoki Nzyima worked for a Scottish Missionary and noted that he did not get involved in the war other than supervising building work. He says 'I only worked for the church, praying for the war until we came back home. After the war, I came home. We prayed for the war, not the sick or wounded. We prayed for the war to end and for the British to win.' Harry Thuku learned 'how to print maps and sketches of war positions' in his role as compositor and machine man with The Leader in British East Africa, while Jomo Kenyatta, apparently served in the Public Works Department. Such work resulted in the politicisation of the local communities as the value of organisation was learned. Jonathan Okwirri, a head man who had been involved with the Carrier Corps in Mombasa, noted: 'When the word began to go round that Kenya was to become a colony, those of us who had some understanding, at least could read and write, [knew that] a colony means a settlement containing foreigners [and that] finally the land would fall into the foreigners' hands'.

Paice notes 'Mobility also brought the opportunity for those from inland communities to learn Swahili, the language of commerce, and in so doing a whole new vocabulary was spawned including words like daktari, kuli (dockyards), sigara and papa (literally shark and therefore submarine)'. There is a document in the British National Archives concerning a submarine in Lake Tanganyika - there is no explanation of how it could possibly have got there, but the rumours were sufficiently strong for the idea to have reached London.

White settlers in British East Africa (Kenya) were able to leverage power through committees councils, and commissions. 'The Native Registration Ordinance of 1916 introduced the kipande or identity token, which was enacted and became a major grievance [in 1919]. Ironically, it was vital to the running of the Carrier Corps, particularly in ensuring the men got their pay'.

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7 Hodges, 198
8 Hodges, 200
settlers also pushed for Crown Colony status, which led to conflict with the Indian population which wanted Kenya for an Indian colony.

The end of the war saw towns destroyed and changes in administration. Mzee Ali says of Tabora: 'Many old houses and landmarks were gone. The boma we had built so long ago still stood. The German flag now replaced by the British flag that fluttered above. On the hills west of Tabora were a large number of war graves - Belgian, German and British soldiers... The advent of the British in our country caused much confusion. They took over the administration and introduced British rule, once again with strange new laws and customs.' Ali's account continues setting out how the more relaxed British regime impacted on life, leading to illegal activities as men tried to survive economically.

New diseases, too, made their mark. The flu epidemic which entered Sierra Leone on 15 August 1918 ravaged the men, four per cent of the East African population lost their lives to this virus. And then there was the peace treaty of Versailles which saw German East Africa split four ways - Portugal got the Kionga Triangle in the south which it had long desired, Britain got what is today's Tanganyika whilst Belgium was given the remainder of the German territory split into two parts - Burundi and Rwanda.

In all the number of lives lost in the East Africa campaign was more than double the losses of Australia or Canada or India. Paice believes the number of African deaths in WW1 was the same as the combined Indian dead and wounded or the entire workforce of the South African gold mining industry. What is not included in these figures or this account are the number of women, and children, who lost their lives in the war looking after their men as camp followers - black and white.

So, in conclusion, I hope this brief overview of what is traditionally regarded as a white man's war and a side-show, has challenged that perception. For me the East African campaign, despite its horrors provides an opportunity for reconciliation and the grass to regrow where the bulls have fought - there was technically no military victor which allows for a more integrated approach in studying the campaign and perhaps, one day, my dream will be realised: to see MV Liemba, also 100 years old this year, become a commonwealth museum commemorating all that was achieved and lost in this longest struggle of the Great War of 1914-1918.