

German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

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German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 38, No. 1
(May 2016), pp3-19

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IMPERIAL ENTANGLEMENTS: BRITAIN, GERMAN EAST AFRICA, AND INTERNMENT DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Introduction

The transnational nature of the First World War is receiving more and more attention in current historiography and nowhere seems more apt for a reappraisal of the war under these terms than the East African theatre. The war in East Africa was not merely a sideshow to the fighting in Europe, but from a geo-strategic viewpoint was heavily connected to the global war. In the minds of British strategists, the East African coast posed a serious threat to shipping routes from Britain to India. In the post-war period, and with the establishment of the Mandate system, the conquest of German East Africa became intertwined with the re-establishment of imperial loyalties and the conflicting process of internationalization.¹ British imperial planners hoped that the war sparked in Europe and the territorial gains from the takeover of the German colonies would ultimately strengthen the British Empire. It was also clear from the outset of the war that this takeover would mean there was to be no place in the sun for the German residents of these colonies, necessitating their removal. British internment and expulsion policies may have operated differently in the extra-European theatres, but there was an Empire-wide strategy that will form the subject of the current analysis.

In mapping the British establishment of what was a global internment network that included East Africa, four issues are of note. First, treatment of *European* prisoners of war in a colonial context was con-

¹ Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire*, (Oxford, 2015), 4.

nected to how perceptions of prisoners should be treated under international law. Standards which were applicable in Europe could not always work in East Africa because of various local factors, as Daniel Steinbach has expertly shown.² Prisoner treatment was also a means to bring out contrasts in how each belligerent looked after its captives with the focus on the civilized European centre and the less developed periphery. Secondly, the terms of surrender in Dar es Salaam caused logistical problems and were out of step with how the Admiralty and War Office had enforced surrender on the other German colonies, leaving a civilian population at large in an enemy city.³ Thirdly, repatriation of prisoners of war to Germany was initially seen as a viable option. In the opinion of the Foreign Office, Germans would cause fewer problems for the British Empire as a whole if they were at home in Germany than if they were loitering around the Dominions and colonies. The sinking of the *Lusitania* and the naval blockade, however, meant that new strategies had to be brought into play. Finally, and related to the first point, the British, like the other colonial powers, were concerned with maintaining racial hierarchies in post-war East Africa, highlighted through the treatment of Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck and other German officers upon their surrender. From a British perspective, the ideas and practices of the Great War placed imperial interaction at the heart of the conflict.

This article will look at British internment of German colonial settlers in the extra-European theatres of the war with a focus on German East Africa. British imperial policy on internment outside Europe was formed around a policy of deportation and repatriation to Germany. Enacting empire-wide policies, however, was not as easy as it first seemed. The nature of warfare, racial prestige, and the various geo-political differences from region to region brought up unexpected complications. Using the East African theatre as a guide

² Daniel Steinbach, 'Challenging European Colonial Supremacy: Internment of "Enemy Aliens" in British and German East Africa during the First World War', in James Kitchen, Alisa Miller, and Laura Rowe (eds.), *Other Combatants, Other Fronts: Competing Histories of the First World War* (Newcastle, 2011), 154–75.

³ For the conflict between the various government ministries see Anne Samson, *World War I in Africa: The Forgotten Conflict Among the European Powers* (New York, 2013), 186–210.

and supported by archival sources from the British Foreign Office, War Office, and Admiralty, this article will plot British attempts at disentangling pre-war imperial entanglements.

Expulsion and its Complications

A common policy enforced throughout the former German colonies during the war was the expulsion of the resident German colonialists on takeover. This was the initial plan of the War Office, who had not only the immediate strategic aim of preventing any potential agitation among indigenous populations and securing the rear, but also the long-term objective of preventing Germany from having any foothold outside Europe in a future conflict.⁴ The war was an opportunity for the Allies to take over German-held territory and secure it for their own colonial ambitions. Further afield, Japan saw the war as a once in a century opportunity to establish a strong position not just geographically but also politically in China. The Australians and the New Zealanders saw the war as a chance to establish their own spheres of influence in the Pacific. Poor colonial administration had left German possessions wide open to the expansionist ambitions of Japan.⁵ Japan, while Australia's and New Zealand's ally, was viewed with suspicion—this was, after all, the period of heightened anxiety over the Yellow Peril and the fear of Japanese and Chinese immigration. Taking over Germany's colonies would not only prevent them falling into Japanese hands but would create a buffer zone from which to protect any direct threats to the mainland from the Japanese Empire in the future. Britain was also keen, from a military and naval viewpoint, to eliminate German presence overseas. The immediate necessity of taking over the colonies to disable any ports which could be used for German shipping and the rounding up of German civilians to prevent agitation among the native populations, comple-

⁴ For a case study of perceived agitation among indigenous populations see Heike Liebau, 'Kaiser Ki Jay (Long Live the Kaiser): Perceptions of World War I and the Socio-Religious Movement Among the Oraons in Chota Nagpur 1914–1916', in ead. et al. (eds.), *The World in World Wars: Experiences, Perceptions and Perspectives from Africa and Asia* (Leiden, 2010), 251–75.

⁵ See Frederick Dickinson, *War and National Reinvention: Japan in the Great War, 1914–1919* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999).

mented the long-term objective of confining Germany to Europe and disabling its naval threat to ensure British dominance in sea power and weaken Germany's position in future conflicts.

However, this policy was not enacted in some areas, causing complications. The most notable area, of course, was German South-West Africa, where a combination of fear of potential revolt by the Boers in light of any evacuations and the wish of the Union of South Africa's government to keep the colony white meant that plans to repatriate the German population were aborted once the colony was fully defeated. Similarly in Samoa and New Guinea, which put up very little resistance, Germans were initially allowed to remain in the colonies, partly to avoid having to import any more Chinese labour.⁶ This changed in the post-war years with the order of expulsion for Germans from New Guinea to make way for Australian servicemen who had served in Europe. In East Africa, wherever prisoners were taken or civilians interned, it was deemed necessary to remove them from the colony to camps in Malta, Egypt, and India, which hosted the biggest prisoner of war camp in Ahmednagar (in Maharashtra state in east India). These evacuations, however, did not apply to the residents of Dar es Salaam.

The surrender terms of Dar es Salaam had been made before a coherent colonial policy was written up and it had explicitly been mentioned that civilians would be allowed to remain in the city.⁷ The surrender taken by HMS *Vengeance*, on 4 September 1917, stated:

You have done remarkably well and have made a gallant defence. Surrender now or your town will be bombarded and destroyed. We guarantee the lives of all the populace provided the immediate surrender of all armed forces and material takes place. Private property will be respected, noncombatants will be permitted to remain in the town. For this purpose we request that your town police will continue to carry out their

⁶ For the conflict in the Pacific see Hermann Joseph Hiery, *The Neglected War: The German South Pacific and the Influence of World War I* (Honolulu, 1995).

⁷ The National Archives (hereafter TNA), ADM 116-1543, letter from War Office to Admiralty, 13 Apr. 1917.

duties of the protection of property until our armed forces occupy the town.⁸

There had been complications with terms after the fall of New Guinea and Samoa and the subsequent desire to remove all the German civilians to Australia and New Zealand respectively. Initially it was suggested that German mistreatment of the French and Belgian civilian populations would be reason enough to reassess the terms of capitulation, but the Admiralty were reluctant to go 'back on a promise which had been so definitely given'.⁹ They felt that German treatment of their enemy civilians was not cause enough for removal and a more likely argument in favour of removal would arise if it could be shown that it was dangerous to the peace of the country to allow these people to remain in their former colonies.¹⁰

European Comparisons: The Expectations of Internment

The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 established uniform treatment of prisoners of war which was expected to be applied no matter what the circumstances. The obvious differences in terrain, supplies, and climates were not taken into account, leaving room for exploitation of the regional differences in camps in propaganda accounts of internment. Media presentations of internment in the former German colonies fit the notion of a common western 'colonial archive' as conceptualized by historians where the imagined barbarity of the colonial world overshadowed its realities.¹¹ This portrayal of camps could also have negative consequences in the form of reprisals against British prisoners in Europe. In 1916, in an attempt to force France to remove its German prisoners from North Africa, 30,000 French prisoners were sent to work in reprisal camps in

⁸ TNA, ADM 116-1543, General Hoskins to War Office, 9 Apr. 1917.

⁹ TNA, ADM 116-1543, draft despatch to the War Office, 18 May 1917.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, 'Hannah Arendt's Ghosts: Reflections on the Disputable Path from Windhoek to Auschwitz', *Central European History* 42/2 (2009), 279-300, at 287.

German-occupied Russia.¹² The extra-European camps were not immune to the waves of reprisals that, in Isabel's Hull's words, 'disfigured the Great War' and this reprisal system linked the extra-European to the European theatres of war.¹³

In September 1915 Guy Stephenson, Director of Public Prosecutions Department, forwarded a letter from an acquaintance in Germany, Adolf Fuld, to the Foreign Office discussing the perceived differences between captivity in Europe and captivity elsewhere. The letter inquired about the possibility of a man-for-man exchange for a family friend, Dr Walther Sulzbach, who had been on a hunting trip in German East Africa at the outbreak of the war and consequently found himself interned in Ahmednagar. As Sulzbach was the son of a 'wealthy banker and of a British mother', Fuld was sure that some kind of arrangement could be made for his release.¹⁴ Fuld suggested that Stephenson's cousin, a Mr Honeywill, could be exchanged for Sulzbach. Unfortunately for Sulzbach, the Foreign Office was not willing to entertain the idea of like-for-like exchanges.

However, the content of the letter, not its desired outcome, interests this article. Fuld drew some stark contrasts between Sulzbach and Honeywill's detention. Sulzbach had first to be 'imprisoned in Nairobi with Nigger criminals and afterward shipped to India, where he is interned in Achniednagar [*sic* Ahmednagar]. He fell sick there with malaria . . . He has only two complaints; the one is the climate of Achniednagar which he thinks he cannot endure for much longer, the other is the absolute prohibition of reading matter. His family have sent him boxes of absolutely harmless books—scientific and novels—and he is not allowed to have any of them.' Fuld ended his letter with a request for help that echoed two aspects of complaints common to internment in the extra-European theatre, climate and lack of European culture: 'I fear that, Dr Sulzbach who is not

¹² Heather Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War in the First World War: Britain, France and Germany, 1914–1920* (Cambridge, 2011), 115.

¹³ Isabel Hull, *A Scrap of Paper: Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War* (Ithaca, NY, 2014), 278.

¹⁴ TNA, FO 383/77 134067, 18 Sept. 1915, Adolf Fuld's correspondence with Guy Stephenson.

very strong would in deficiency of help, either be killed by the notorious climate of Achniednagar or go mad by lack of reading stuff.¹⁵

Mr Honeywill, in contrast, was faring much better in Germany. 'Regarding your relation Mr Honeywill, I am enchanted to be able to give you good news . . . he is in a sanatory where he finds every medical help and comfort, that he is allowed repeated leaves of absence to a watering place.'¹⁶ According to Fuld, however, there was one problem: 'the German authorities do and will do anything for the health of the interned; but they are prohibited to go further than they do, by the fact, that the British government do not, by far, the same for interned Germans.' The contrast between Honeywill's and Sulzbach's internment is again brought up through the climate. Fuld claimed that Honeywill was interned in the 'healthiest town in Germany . . . I had to walk through long avenues of old trees and found Mr Honeywill in a pretty, very proper house in the middle of a pretty garden of some acres . . . having his tea with four or six nice looking Englishmen. . . . He is allowed to be in the garden as much as ever he likes and has free access to a well furnished library.'¹⁷

Despite Fuld's pleas, the Foreign Office was unwilling to budge on either letting Sulzbach go or exchanging him for Honeywill. In a telegram from the government of India it was noted that the 'personal convenience of the prisoner appears to be the only grounds urged for his transfer to a place of internment in England. We have refused similar applications made to us by prisoners of war at Ahmednagar and consider it undesirable to make [an] exception in this case.'¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ TNA, FO 383/77 134067, 18 Sept. 1915, telegram from the Government of India to the Foreign Office, 16 May 1915. The case of the retired German officer Baron von Tucke is an interesting example. He had refused to sign an oath of parole and was held in solitary confinement for seven months at Yeruada prison in Bombay. The German ministry sent a telegram that threatened that an English officer of similar age (55) to von Tucke would be held in solitary confinement until von Tucke's case received 'favourable consideration'. Von Tucke's case was quickly reviewed and he was given a bungalow in the civilian section of Ahmednagar camp. TNA, FO 383/171 38062, 28 Feb. 1916.

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Whether Fuld was prompted by the German government to write the letter we do not know, but it coincided with publication of a booklet on the good conditions of camps and good treatment of British prisoners in Germany, which was for sale in neutral countries. Indeed, Horace Rumbold of the Prisoners of War Department himself had attended a lecture by 'a Swede or Norwegian' in London who had used photographs from the booklet in a talk on the good conditions for British prisoners. The idea of a counter-booklet was raised and referred to the War Office, although Rumbold feared 'they [the War Office] may take the view that we should be competing with the Germans in advertising our camps'.¹⁹ Fuld's letter contained all the characteristics of propaganda relating to the colonial camps: the negative effect of the climate, the lack of medical attention, unreasonable camp regulations, and, most importantly, the degradation of the European, in racial terms, in this case keeping Sulzbach in the same prison as black prisoners. For Fuld, the contrast between the apparently civilized treatment afforded British prisoners in Germany serves further to highlight how Britain had abandoned the bond of European racial superiority and overlapped with German propaganda on the war in the colonies.

In more extreme cases one can see how the humiliation, real or imagined, of Germans in front of the indigenous other, such as in Cameroon or New Guinea, played a role in the German propaganda campaign and helped fuel accusations that Britain had turned its back on the civilizing mission. Complaints from Ahmednagar camp, as with complaints from other extra-European camps, were framed from the context of European racial supremacy as highlighted by the following note from the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Office to its British equivalent:

The treatment shown to the prisoners in the Indian camps especially, where they are obliged to wash their soiled linen, sweep their floors, clean latrines etc. . . . is derogatory to the European race in a country inhabited by an eastern people whose creed it is to despise and hold in contempt such work.²⁰

¹⁹ TNA, FO 383/77 134067, 18 Sept. 1915.

²⁰ TNA, CO 323/709 1288, 8 Jan. 1916, from the KUK Ministerium des kaiserl. und königl. Hauses des Äußeren to the Foreign Office.

From a cultural point of view these complaints are interesting. In the European narrative of prisoner treatment, the gender role reversal through the emasculation of prisoners in the camps and the role of women in the work place are often cited and analysed.²¹ In the extra-European context, however, it is the racial role reversal that forms the broader part of the narrative. This reversal also impacted on British policy, and in this case prisoners who had the means were allowed to hire help, either less well-off prisoners or servants sourced from the local population. The British in their reply to the Austrians were keen to point out that they were doing all they could for the prisoners and would be willing to repatriate them if the Austro-Hungarian government could persuade its ally, Germany, to cease torpedoing ships. The hardships caused by the German use of unrestricted submarine warfare were often cited as the reason for internees suffering privations.

Expulsion and its Complications Continued

One of the first repatriation proposals was to have the prisoners sent to a neutral European power where they could be interned until the end of the war. One of the few powers willing to take in German prisoners of war was Spain. Previously Spain had taken in a number of Germans from Cameroon after pressure from the British and French governments to have them transferred from Fernando Po (Bioko, Equatorial Guinea) off the coast of Cameroon to the Spanish mainland. The precedent these prisoners had set in agitating the Spanish public against the Allies deterred the Foreign Office from inviting a repeat performance. The Foreign Office bluntly rejected German proposals to send internees from East Africa to the Netherlands or some other agreeable neutral country: 'In view of our experience in Spain it seems highly undesirable to allow Germans to make further propaganda in neutral countries.'²² The German government, in exchange

²¹ See Alon Rachamimov, 'The Disruptive Comforts of Drag: (Trans)Gender Performances Among Prisoners of War in Russia, 1914-1920', *American Historical Review*, 111/2 (2006), 362-82.

²² TNA, FO 383/436 73240, 26 Apr. 1918, minutes of a meeting on the removal to Europe of German women and children brought from East Africa

negotiations, proposed that each government would have the right to detain thirty invalid civilians who would otherwise be eligible for exchange. The Foreign Office shrewdly noted that this was 'in fact the maximum number of civilians at Ruhleben who are believed to be entitled to repatriation on grounds of health'.²³

The British had toyed with the idea after the fall of German South-West Africa and a handful of civilians were sent to live with their German brethren in the former Reich's colony. However the idea of a full-scale transfer was abandoned because of objections from the Union of South Africa government. The blockade and the length of the war caused the issue to be revised, partly prompted by the memory jogging of German inquiries. In late 1918 the Foreign Office again investigated the possibility of taking internees, especially those who were still to be transferred to India, to German South-West Africa. The original reasoning had been financial. In German South-West Africa in 1916–17 there were willing Germans ready to accept and take in refugees, thus taking the burden off His Majesty's Government. However the Foreign Office found in 1918 that, as a result of the privations of the war, the colony's German population was impoverished and dispirited and no longer eager or willing to accept more mouths to feed.²⁴ Thus in line with the transfer of civilians from Hong Kong, the idea of sending captives to Australia was drawn up, with the intention, as Lord Newton wrote,²⁵ of passing responsibility for the decision on to 'the Huns in S[outh]-W[est] Africa'.²⁶ The war was almost coming to a close and Britain could act

to India and the modification of existing invalid civilian agreements. For German propaganda in Spain see Jens Albes, *Worte wie Waffen: Die deutsche Propaganda in Spanien während des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Essen, 1996).

²³ TNA, FO 383/436 73240, 26 Apr. 1918. Ruhleben, situated on the outskirts of Berlin, was the main civilian internment camp for British civilian internees in Germany. See Matthew Stibbe, *British Civilian Internees in Germany: The Ruhleben Camp, 1914–18* (Manchester, 2008).

²⁴ TNA, FO 383/436 115440, 18 Oct. 1918, telegram from C.O.C. Dar es Salaam to War Office.

²⁵ Thomas Wodehouse Leigh 2nd Baron Newton. Lord Newton was the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Head of the Prisoners of War Department. He was also involved in organizing overseas propaganda.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

from a position of strength. If this policy had been enacted earlier in the war, Newton commented, Germany would have been able 'to put the screws on us', either by enacting reprisals against British civilians held in Germany, or appealing to neutral public opinion.²⁷ The reasons eventually given for not sending women and children to South-West Africa was the risk of infecting the internees with the Spanish flu, of which there was an outbreak in the Union of South Africa at the time.²⁸

During the war there were extensive, if not altogether successful, talks on prisoner repatriation. We saw in the case of Sulzbach that the institution of like-for-like exchanges was not going to be the norm in the First World War. Numerous petitions and appeals were sent to the Foreign Office or directly to some of its staff, along the lines of the Sulzbach case, and time and again they were refused. In one situation Newton received a request from an old family friend, Lady Courtney, that some friends of hers, Germans who were interned in the Belgian Congo, be transferred to British internment. He noted in his reply that it was no wonder, in view of 'German precedings [*sic*] that they should object to being handed over to the Belgian government', but they were prisoners of the Belgians and would remain so.²⁹

Belgium also controlled internment in Tabora, German East Africa and German civilians, such as Ada Schnee, the wife of the former governor of German East Africa, were interned or on parole there. The *Reichs-Kolonialamt* published a book on internment in the Belgian Congo in 1918 in which it accused the Belgian authorities of forcing women and children to endure periods of up to twenty-four hours without food or water while being taunted by black and European guards during their transport from Tabora to the west coast of Africa.³⁰ Perhaps in an effort to balance out Allied propaganda on German brutality in Belgium, Germany accused Belgium of being complicit, along with Britain and France, in the racial role reversal in the African theatre. First Lieutenant von Botsch, writing

²⁷ TNA, FO 383/436 115697, 22 Oct. 1918.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Telegram Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Administrator of German East Africa, 19 Oct. 1918.

²⁹ London School of Economics Archives, Courtney 12/58.

³⁰ *Die Kolonialdeutschen aus Deutsch-Ostafrika in belgischer Gefangenschaft* (Berlin, 1918).

about his transfer from the Belgian Congo to North Africa, noted: 'I have had altogether the impression . . . that it was the expressed intention of the Belgians to shame and lower us before the natives as much and anyhow possible.'³¹ Later on in the war, however, prisoners who had been captured by Belgian troops but were then sent to India, found themselves eligible for repatriation under Belgian-German agreements. The Foreign Office was keen to get any British civilians, notably those in Belgium, out of German hands and repatriated back home, but the blockade caused problems when it came to exchanges.

Belgian-British relations were also strained during the war. Jan Smuts (commander of the British Forces in East Africa until 1917), in particular, was concerned about the possibility of Belgium using the conflict to encroach on German East Africa. Early on in the war Belgium had gained control of Ruanda-Urundi (Rwanda and Burundi), and in the summer of 1916 it looked as if it might reach the southern shore of Lake Victoria, thus straddling the proposed British Cape to Cairo corridor. This led to a propaganda war between Britain and Belgium, with Belgian Askari accused by Britain of all manner of atrocities, even cannibalism, while Belgian officers were accused of brutality in their treatment of soldiers and carriers.³²

In the initial stages of the war in the colonies, the paramount strategic objective was to secure the military lines. Prisoners of war were to be interned but civilians were all earmarked for repatriation to Germany. In the Cameroon campaign this was roughly how events transpired, although there were some very vocal complaints about the harsh manner in which German civilians were turned out of their homes and packed on transport ships with inadequate living quarters.³³ The transfer of German civilians from German East Africa to either India or Malta and their internment there was to be only temporary, with the view that all civilians would be sent back to

³¹ Bundesarchiv Berlin, R8023/88, 'Flugblätter Deutscher Gegenrechnung für feindliche Kriegsverbrechen', Schriftleitung die *Gesundheitsblätter für Auslandsdeutsche* (1921), 32.

³² Edward Paice, *Tip and Run: The Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa* (London, 2007), 226–8.

³³ For the Cameroon campaign see Uwe Schulte-Varendorff, *Krieg in Kamerun: Die deutsche Kolonie im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Berlin, 2011).

Germany before the conflict was resolved. However, with the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the Allied blockade, this policy changed. Because of the blockade, the Admiralty was not only restrictive on allowing ships for transport; it banned all passage through the Suez Canal, especially for ships containing enemy subjects. The argument against the transportation of enemy subjects also centred on the British population who were abroad. How would it look, commented one official, if they spent enormous resources in ensuring the safe transport of German civilians from India to Holland, while at the same time banning mothers and children who were in Australia from returning to the UK while the war was on?³⁴ The Admiralty noted that it was 'not right that we should accord to our enemies facilities which we are unable to accord our own people'.³⁵

In March of the following year (1918) the debate was still unresolved, but arguments in favour of repatriation were winning out, especially once a proposed exchange had been worked out with Germany, by which British subjects in Belgium and France were to be swapped for German East Africans. Again, the movement of British citizens came into question, with the problem remaining: 'if the arrangement is adopted the Colonial Office will be subjected to very great pressure to remove the ban which at present exists against British women and children crossing dangerous waters.'³⁶ Ship space was limited and reserving room for German civilians would naturally prevent British women and children taking spaces, should they be allowed to travel. Of secondary concern was that German civilians would gain an insight into the workings of the convoy system, but such information, as the Admiralty noted, was probably obtained by Germany from crews of neutral ships.³⁷

³⁴ The war effectively ended migration within the Empire. In the post-war years there was a renewed determination to reinvigorate the Empire through a 'free passage scheme' for ex-servicemen and women from 1919 to 1922. The newly taken German colonies were to provide an outlet for the 'lust for adventure' that young British men had gained from their experience in the trenches. Kent Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire Between the Wars* (Manchester, 1995), 25–35.

³⁵ TNA, ADM 116-1543, 9 Sept. 1917.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 18 Mar. 1918, P/W Department 34091, memorandum and minutes.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Discussions over repatriations continued until the end of the war but hit a number of problems. Germany protested over the treatment of its *U-Boot* crews and, as Heather Jones has shown, the use of forced labour was a particularly thorny issue.³⁸ German civilian internees from the East Africa theatre and all civilian internees outside Europe were considered by the British as a separate entity from those civilians held on the British Isles. This was easier to present once the Union of South Africa took over most of the fighting, and plans were enacted, although never completed, in July 1918 to have all civilian internees in either India, Hong Kong, or Singapore sent to Australia, where they were to remain under the supervision of the Australian government.³⁹

European Prestige

Before concluding, it will be necessary to look briefly at the treatment of prisoners of war in the context of maintaining imperial and European prestige.⁴⁰ As the former governor of German East Africa, Heinrich Schnee, noted in his diary, on capture the German officers were shown very gracious treatment by their captors: 'General Edwards [remarked], that it gave him great pleasure to be able to allow the brave [German] Officers and Europeans to retain their arms, and he expressed his admiration for the bravery of all the troops.'⁴¹ Because there was fear that disarming and rounding up the white German officers might spark off a rebellion in the colony, the officers were allowed to retain their weapons while within German East Africa. They marched in file as if on regular manoeuvres towards the trains that took them to their ferries for Zanzibar, and it

³⁸ Jones, *Violence Against Prisoners of War*, 374.

³⁹ For South African participation and the decisions taken to enter the war see Anne Samson, *Britain, South Africa and the East Africa Campaign, 1914-1918: The Union Comes of Age* (London, 2006), 93-117.

⁴⁰ For an in depth analysis of this aspect see Daniel Steinbach, 'Defending the Heimat: The Germans in South West Africa and East Africa during the First World War', in Heather Jones, Jennifer O'Brien, and Christoph Schmidt-Supprian (eds.), *Untold War: New Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden, 2008), 190.

⁴¹ TNA, WO 106/1460, Heinrich Schnee's Diary, 26 Nov. 1918.

was only on board these ferries that they were requested to hand in their arms. They were, however, after some bargaining allowed to bring all their servants with them.⁴² Transition from Zanzibar to Germany would not be immediate, but von Lettow-Vorbeck, Schnee, and the other officers would spend their time in European-style housing under curfew.

This treatment was in distinct contrast to that of the majority of the Askari, who were kept at more makeshift camps in Tabora before being allowed to make their way back home. However, contrary to what Schnee believed, the British were not 'doing everything in their power to ruin our [German] prestige in front of the natives',⁴³ but were explicitly allowing the European rank and file to retain their arms, in the words of General Jacob (Jaap) van Deventer (who succeeded Smuts as commander of British Forces in the region), 'in order that they should not lose prestige with their Askari'.⁴⁴ Van Deventer was wary of the unrest that the veteran Askari could cause, to the extent of offering to pay the wages that were owed to them by the German government. This, he argued, would in the long term be much better than the 'very serious trouble' the new occupying force would have 'if we repatriate nearly 3,000 veteran Askari and carriers practically penniless'.⁴⁵ It would, in his view, 'have an excellent effect. It may save us very serious disturbances and will be an excellent investment'.⁴⁶ Fearing revolt in the region, van Deventer wished to ensure decent treatment of Askari troops.⁴⁷ The War Office refused this request and African soldiers were left to find their own way in a devastated post-war political and economic environment.⁴⁸ His fears, however, seem to have been exaggerated and the Askari peace-

⁴² Ibid. 29 Nov. 1918.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ TNA, WO 158/907, 6 Dec. 1918, General Jacob Van Deventer to Dirmiliat.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 20 Nov. 1918, General van Deventer to the General Staff.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ There was also the fear that disturbances in German East Africa could cause political unrest in South Africa. Samson, *Britain, South Africa and the East Africa Campaign*, 139.

⁴⁸ Michelle Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries: African Soldiers, Conquest, and Everyday Colonialism in German East Africa* (Athens, OH, 2014), 209.

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fully disbanded after reaching the camp at Abercorn.⁴⁹ Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck fought hard during the inter-war years to ensure that German Askari received pensions from the German government.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Prisoner treatment was very fluid across the British empire. Not only in East Africa, many prisoners of war taken from the German colonies and interned civilians within the British empire experienced the war on the move. Perceptions of how treatment in the colonies differed from that within Europe were based very much on pre-war ideas of colonial backwardness, and in the initial stages of the war it was quite easy for the German government to provoke official British investigations into alleged and often much exaggerated claims of mistreatment.

Civilian internees in Dar es Salaam, due to surrender terms, were spared expulsion from the colony, but it was a different story for those in other parts of East Africa. Those who were not captured in the first year of the war would not be repatriated back to Germany and spent the war either in India, Malta, Egypt, or some of the more temporary camps in East Africa itself. The Allied blockade meant that resources would not be directed to helping these internees back to Germany and thus their exclusion from any exchange agreements. However, the British were aware of colonial prestige and the negative influence internment camps could have on the surrounding populations. The solution was to send as many internees as possible to Australia, which had a more trustworthy white population that was strongly anti-German and also, unlike that of the Union of South Africa, quite willing to accept the influx of internees into the country.

Finally, the magnanimous treatment of the German officer corps, who on surrender were allowed to maintain their weapons while in the colony and to march to the train stations as a unit, may have

⁴⁹ Bror Urme McDonell, *Mzee Ali: The Biography of an African Slave Raider Turned Askari and Scout* (Johannesburg, 2006), 214. There are very few memoirs by Askari troops and those that exist can be quite problematic.

⁵⁰ Moyd, *Violent Intermediaries*, 208.

helped prevent any disturbances from the indigenous population, but no doubt contributed to the image of an army undefeated in the field. Von Lettow-Vorbeck created this myth in the aftermath of his well-documented return to Berlin, and Heinrich Schnee kept it alive through his constant pamphleteering. While this ensured public awareness of the loss of Germany's colonies, it ignored the internment and expulsion of German colonial settlers from their former colonial homes. The image of strong, brave Europeans fighting in the African bush, as Steinbach has argued, fits much better into the traditional imperial narrative than that of humiliated Europeans behind the wire.⁵¹ While the internment experience of German colonial settlers fell very much into the background of the inter-war colonial revisionist literature, the presence of captives in places such as Ahmednagar meant that extra-European spaces were spun into the global narrative of the Great War.

⁵¹ Steinbach, 'Challenging European Colonial Supremacy', 172.

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