



The Lake Tanganyika Expedition 1914-1917

A Primary Source Chronology

Vol 1: 1914-1915

 The National Archives

The Great War in Africa Association

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Preface

The idea for this chronology came out of trying to plot the exact route Commander Geoffrey Basil Spicer-Simson and his team travelled for a group of enthusiasts to follow. Trying to reconcile the various accounts and the discovery of two files entitled *Lake Tanganyika* (ADM 137/1414 and ADM 137/242) at The National Archives in Kew, London, naturally led to the need for such an account. That it should be published was prompted by a comment on the Great War Forum¹ by a contributor living outside of England yearning for access to the aforementioned two files.

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in Spicer-Simson and his merry band which cut across uncharted African territory with two motorboats to defeat the Germans on Lake Tanganyika. A few accounts of the expedition were published in the years after the war, but the first popular account was that by Peter Shankland, *The Phantom Flotilla* (1968), which was based primarily on the recollections of the expedition doctor Hother McCormick Hanschell. While this account has not been regarded as favourable to Spicer-Simson, it did ensure that Spicer-Simson became a 'character' of the war and someone to be investigated. The result has been a few subsequent articles, various novels and the well-known *Mimi and Tontou go Forth: The Bizarre Battle of Lake Tanganyika* (2004) by Giles Foden. In addition, the tale features rather more prominently in general histories of the East Africa campaign, the most notable being that by Edward Paice, *Tip and Run: The Forgotten Conflict of World War 1* (2007). See p11 for complete list of known texts on the Lake Tanganyika Expedition.

A perusal of the various publications will show that there is not much new about the expedition, with the same sources (and photographs) being used. The consequence is that myths have been perpetuated and the full significance of the expedition glossed over and exaggerated. The purpose of this chronology of correspondence and events is to bring the contemporary sources of the expedition to a wider audience which will enable new interpretations and the reconfiguring of myths.

It does not propose to offer interpretations or to tell a gripping yarn; that is for others to do. What it does, is provide a 'one-stop shop' of all diaries, letters, reports and official documents that are known to be available on the expedition.

In compiling such a text, there are many people to acknowledge. This has been a truly international project with individual contributions ranging from New Zealand and Australia, South Africa, Zambia, Congo, the United States, England and Belgium. There are too many people to acknowledge individually, but the following, ordered alphabetically, have made a significant contribution: Robert Brunson, Harry Fecitt, Christopher Hill, Dave Hunter, Paul Naish and Gerald Killings. Organisations which have played a significant role in making documents available include: The National Archives at Kew, The Imperial War Museum which holds a significant number of photographs of the expedition, Shankland's recordings of his interviews with Hanschell and the German Headquarter Diaries, and The Royal Museum of the Armed Forces and of Military History in Brussels. They are all thanked for their hospitality and permission to access and publish the documents in this format. The South African National Defence Force Archive

¹<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/>