

## Britain, South Africa and the East Africa Campaign 1914-1918

The Union Comes of Age



Anne Samson

Be different: buy direct  
from [gweaa.com](http://gweaa.com) or  
[tslbooks.uk](http://tslbooks.uk)

## Introduction

This book tests the proposition that South Africa came of age during the Great War of 1914-1918 by using the opportunity provided by Britain to pursue its own imperial desires in German East Africa. The extension of the war from west Africa to the east and south meant that whichever side won the war in Europe would be in an ideal position to alter the map of the African continent in its favour. For this reason, South Africa eventually took part in the East Africa campaign – a move which was to place the country firmly in the international arena and redefine its relationship with Britain but which failed to unite white South Africans.

Despite using archival collections in both countries, previous studies on South Africa have tended to focus on either the South African or foreign perspective. This study breaks that tradition by looking at one event – the war in East Africa – from more than one side, in particular British and South African; an approach which has allowed the interdependency of imperial nations and the process of South African nation building to be explored. In addition, the typical approach of dividing the country into English and Afrikaans speakers has been rejected as too superficial an approach. White South Africa was a complex heterogeneous society with strong views on the country's relationship with Britain and, in making wartime policy, all these groups had to be taken into account. It is possibly for this very reason that earlier historians have avoided this aspect of South African and imperial history.

### Historiography

Investigating South Africa's position and involvement in East Africa during the Great War highlighted the dearth of information, both in Britain and South Africa, directly concerning the event as well as the general political and social situation prevalent in South Africa at the time.<sup>1</sup> Where histories of the East Africa campaign

<sup>1</sup> A Grundlingh's work on South Africa's involvement on the Second World War, supports the claim that very little has been written about South Africa's involve-