Unforeseen combat at Naulila.
German South West Africa, Angola, and the First World War in 1914 — 1917

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Abstract
This article examines the First World War in Angola that saw a victory for German colonial troops over the Portuguese in December 1914. Encouraged by his enemy's defeat Oukwanyama King Mandume ya Ndemufayo, fought against Portugal (1915) and South Africa (1917) in a vain attempt to save the independence of his Kingdom. In 1920, Portuguese government initiated legal proceedings against Germany claiming for damages inflicted upon Portuguese nationals and the state during these wars. Both the Luso-German arbitration case in international law and the (politically charged) memorial practices for King Mandume have had ramifications up to the present day.

The First World War, commemorations, and changing research perspectives
Where and what is "Naulila"? Is it ‘relevant’ to write about a battle over a fortress in Angola in late 1914 involving perhaps 900 men? With the ongoing celebrations and commemoration of the centenary of the First World War (1914–1918), historians and journalists have been drawn to new details of the war — even in those regions far away from the trenches of Northern France and Flanders, seemingly or factually the epicentre of the war. The attention of readers who are interested in history, but also the policies of funding agencies which support research projects, or of editors and publishers, very much leave the impression that dates such as ‘the centenary’ are still important in the ‘making’ and writing of history. In bookshops all over Great Britain, France, and Germany new books on the war have appeared, with some — such as that by Christopher Clark — on the bestseller lists.¹ The opportunities offered by the internet have also been used in recent years for academic ventures, and have coaxed those in possession of source materials to share it with the world. The website <europeana1914-1918.eu> tries to

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widen research perspectives and source materials by asking individuals from all over Europe "to contribute their story". In order to offer the internet-user a wide array of views this website “mixes resources from libraries and archives across the globe with memories and memorabilia from families throughout Europe.”\(^2\) A more scholarly undertaking, the “1914-1918-online – International Encyclopedia of the First World War is an English-language online reference work on World War One. Launched in October 2014, the multi-perspective, public-access encyclopaedia is a collaborative project by the largest network of WW1 researchers worldwide, spanning more than 50 countries.”\(^3\)

As can be seen from this and other projects, historians and other researchers are increasingly focussing on the ‘World’ in the term ‘World War’ and thus the global aspect of this war has been given far greater attention than hitherto.\(^4\) For instance, the <http://www.europeana1914-1918.eu/en> \[accessed 31 October, 2016\] project includes several articles on the war in Africa (subdivided in four “Regional Surveys”) and “Regional Thematic Articles” reaching from "Afrikaner (Boer) Rebellion" to “War Losses (Africa)”, plus “Encyclopedic Entries” from “Askari” to “Wireless Telegraphy”. All entries on (Southern) Africa are written by experts and represent the latest thinking on the issue.

So, Africa is – more than ever – on the map of First-World-War-historians and this is certainly a positive development. Another question – especially for readers of this journal – is, how much of this research concerns Namibia and how much of this research is 'homegrown'.

**Historiography of the First World War in Namibia — new research and old perspectives?**

In Namibia, there has been little public awareness of the centenary of the war — a war which brought a change from German to South African colonial rule. A few articles in local newspapers reminded their readers of the centenary. A touring exhibition entitled “100 Jahre Ende des 1. Weltkriegs/Changing History”, opened in August 2015 in the Namibia Scientific Society building in Windhoek.\(^5\)

As the centenary of the outbreak of the war approached, the Namibian book market saw a number of new publications dedicated to the war: In mid-2014, Mannfred Goldbeck, a


\(^3\) <http://www.1914-1918-online.net/index.html> [accessed 31 October, 2016].


\(^5\) “Gedenkausstellung zur Historie sehr gefragt”, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, Windhoek, 5.8.2015, <https://www.az.com.na/nachrichten/gedenkausstellung-zur-historie-sehr-gefragt> [accessed 31 October, 2016]. According to *AZ*, the exhibition was a collaborative project of the British High Commission, the Museum Association of Namibia (MAN), the National Archives of Namibia, the German Embassy, and the University of Namibia.

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former teacher and managing director of Gondwana Lodges, together with Gordon McGregor, a Namibian author of several books on militaria and medals, published *The First World War in Namibia* (Windhoek, Gondwana). The volume is also available in a German edition as *Keine Chance: Der Erste Weltkrieg in Namibia August 1914 – Juli 1915*. In the same book series “Gondwana Collection” a re-publication of the German Walter Nuhn’s *Auf verlorenem Posten. Der Erste Weltkrieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* also appeared in 2015. McGregor had previously published his analysis of *Die Südafrikaanse Vrykorps van Duits-Suidwes-Afrika 1914-15* (2000), available also in German. In 2016 his collection, *Orden- und Medaillenverleihung für den Feldzug in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1914-1915*, appeared. Since 2011 a series of probably six volumes on the First World War in GSWA of altogether around 900 pages have appeared in Windhoek’s Glanz & Gloria Verlag. The anonymous author ‘Historicus Africanus’ from Germany (who, according to the publisher Bernd Kromeier, passed away in 2006) did not find a publisher for his treatise in Germany and his heirs agreed to the publication in several smaller volumes in Namibia. The latest appeared in 2014 as volume 3 *Die Kämpfe im Süden*, detailing the war in the south of GSWA from November 1914 to April 1915. The previous volumes concerned the German engagements with the Portuguese in Fort Naulila and along the Kavango River (vol. 2, 2012), the first South African attacks and the beginning of the German retreat up to November 1914 (vol. 1, 2011). An account by the last German governor Theodor Seitz, *Südafrika im Weltkriege – Der Zusammenbruch in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, was also re-published in 2014 by Namibian historian Andreas Voigt. Finally, the long-awaited history of the “Baster rebellion” of 1915 by Kuno Budack was published in 2015.

A review of these titles is beyond the scope of this article; however what is evident from a glance at the introductions (or sometimes just at the title of the publishing house) is the strong endorsement of (not to speak of enthusiasm for) German colonialism and individual German *Schutztruppe* officers. In a nutshell, these books depict the Germans as ‘brave’ and ‘proud’, fighting for the ‘honourable cause’ of legitimately defending ‘our colony’. It comes as little surprise that South African or Portuguese troops are – without any irony – called ‘the enemy’. In a way, the language and the perspectives applied in these texts very much resembles the old-fashioned colonial narratives of the 1920s and 1930s. In their celebration of the German deeds they remain within the bounds of

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traditional colonial hagiography. The accounts of the campaign are written from a purely German perspective. For instance, apart from Budack’s work, Africans and their actions during the war are considered barely worth mentioning. At the risk of delivering too harsh a judgement, most of the above-mentioned titles – despite sober archival research that could serve as material for further research – do not follow academic standards for writing modern military and African history. They mostly target a readership outside academic circles that is still open for colonial apologetics. Having said this, the book by ethnologist Kuno Budack on the “Baster Rebellion” is to be judged differently as his subject does not allow the silencing of African voices. He embeds his account within a broader cultural and political context of this Namibian community since the nineteenth century. Budack made use of interviews he conducted decades ago with Baster men who remember the events in 1915 when Baster troops rose against their German overlords.

What becomes manifest from this short overview on recent Namibian titles on the First World War in the German colony is that German voices certainly dominate – irrespective of the fact that several titles are also available in English (are translations into other Namibian languages not commercially viable?). However, here historiography is also continuously evolving as more recent publications especially about the South African involvement in the war show. And still, irrespective of the centenary, the “volume of writing about Africa and 1914–18 remains comparatively modest”. Historians tend to characterise the war in GSWA as “a relative sideshow” as compared to the campaign in East Africa. Yet, what makes this campaign particularly interesting and what is all too often disregarded is the fact that the war was more than a conflict between European colonial powers. It was inextricably linked to the attempt of an African King, Mandume ya Ndemufayo, to resist colonialism.

The few accounts of the ‘Angola campaign’ fought between Portuguese and German troops were mainly written by eyewitnesses, who barely had access to archival documents from 1914. Soon after 1918, in Portugal, but also in Germany, novelists, amateur

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historians, retired soldiers and colonial officials began to write about the events in Naulila, leaving no doubt about the true culprits: it was always the other party. The majority of these authors had a patriotic purpose: to pay tribute to the fallen ‘heroes’. Thus, courageous Portuguese troopers were depicted in their fight against brutal Germans and ‘barbaric savages’ led by soba Mandume.\textsuperscript{14} Among these authors was Angola’s former Chief-of-Staff, General Ernesto Machado, in 1914 a lieutenant who took part in the battle of Naulila. In the 1950s he collected data in the military archives and in the memorial literature about the causes of the Portuguese defeat. Written from a Portuguese perspective (he spoke about ‘us’ and rarely drew on German literature), the resulting 450-page volume (\textit{No Sul de Angola}), published by the Overseas Ministry in 1956, is still the most comprehensive treatise on all military aspects of the Naulila incident and the battle. The book is to a large extent a self-justification and furthermore has a ‘pedagogical’ purpose in its explanations for future officers about ‘dos and dont’s’ in African ‘bush’ warfare. At the same time, in West Germany, the community of former colonial soldiers still alive in the 1960s continued the apologetic tradition of the 1920s and 1930s of ‘moral justification’ for the German reprisals in their publications.\textsuperscript{15}

Interestingly, up to the present, secondary literature mentioning the Angola campaign has depended on these memoirs or other contemporary books and they are often quoted uncritically.\textsuperscript{16} The works of René Pélissier (1969; 1977),\textsuperscript{17} Eduardo dos Santos (1978), Thomas Morlang (1998), or most recently Luí s Barroso (2015) show however, that based on archival documents, the German campaign against ‘neutral Portuguese-Angola’ can be analysed without a ‘national’ concern for the ‘moral’ justification for the attack on Naulila or with a preconceived image of German expansionism or Lusitanian disorder.\textsuperscript{18} Lastly, the author of this article has published a treatise on the First World


\textsuperscript{15} For example Ernst Dammann, “Der Kampf um Guangar am Okavango 1914”, \textit{Mitteilungsblatt des Traditionsverbandes ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen}, 45, June 1968: 2-5.


War in Angola and its legal aftermath, the so-called Naulilaa arbitration (2016). It is for others to judge how this volume fits in with or differs from the exiting literature and contributes to the discussion. The aim of this article is to summarise a number of issues and findings.

The coming of war in German South West Africa

The military defensibility of the German colonies was not only debated early on; it was seriously doubted by many German decision-makers. For this reason, Chief of Staff Count Waldersee hoped in 1889, that Germany would rid itself of the overseas possession just ‘acquired’. Most famous is the question Chancellor Leo von Caprivi put to Governor Eduard von Liebert, who had recently returned from German East Africa: “But how will you defend East Africa against England?” The course of the first months of the World War would prove that their doubts were well-founded. In the end, German East Africa was the only German colony that held out against the British and Allied invasion over an extended period.

On August 2 and 3, 1914 Germany’s Colonial Secretary, Wilhelm Solf sent his often quoted wireless messages to the German colonies: “Calm own settlers. No threat of war for the colonies.” He soon recognized that this was an illusion. Solf was later heavily criticized for his ‘naïvety’ in assuming that (southern) Africa would remain neutral territory as stated in the provisions of the Berlin Act of 1885. Governor Theodor Seitz – not as anglophile as Colonial Secretary Solf – assumed that German South West Africa (GSWA) would become involved in the war sooner rather than later. When on August 5 the British declaration of war on Germany became known in GSWA, rumours spread immediately that Portugal had also declared war on Germany. Haunted by the possibility of an attack from all sides, the Governor asked the Colonial Office in Berlin via wireless message about the relations with Portugal and received on August 8 the answer that there is no war with Portugal. This was correct yet told him only half of the truth.


22 National Archives of Namibia (NAN) BOM 34, GA 5, Governor Seitz to BA Omaruru, 2.8.14; BA Omaruru to PoSt Omaruru, 5.8.14.
When Great Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914 following the German invasion of Belgium the Portuguese parliament voted by a small margin against entering the war on Britain’s side.\(^{23}\) For fear of Portugal’s “demands for more [colonial] territory” Britain had “applied diplomatic pressure upon Lisbon not to become belligerent”. However, Portugal was requested \(^{24}\) not to explicitly declare its neutrality. In 1912 the Admiralty War Staff in London had defined what Britain should expect from Portugal in time of war: Portugal should be “a neutral sufficiently strong to make her neutrality respected, whose ports were free to the British mercantile marine but denied to the warships of the enemy.”\(^{25}\) The Portuguese government “declared [on August 7] that she was quite prepared as the ally of Great Britain to give every assistance”.\(^{26}\) Considering the fear of German pretensions on Portugal’s African possessions, the government in Lisbon was anxious to protect the colonies against potential threats. The government decided on August 12 to reinforce the colonial garrison with infantry and artillery troops from Europe.\(^{27}\) On August 5, Britain’s Minister to Portugal reaffirmed the Luso-British alliance and a few weeks later, Portugal was given the assurance of British military support in event of a German attack on Portuguese possessions. In the meantime, the first border skirmishes between German and Portuguese border posts occurred in Mozambique resulting in the death of one Portuguese officer in Mauzia. On August 12, 1914, a Luso-British treaty of commerce was concluded and one day later the British requested Portuguese authorization for the passage of British troops across Portuguese territories in Africa. These steps did not remain unnoticed by the German minister in Lisbon, who filed in October a formal protest against the hostile Portuguese attitude towards Germany. Nevertheless, on November 16, 1914, yet another Luso-British Convention declared operative the ancient Treaties of Alliance.\(^{28}\)

Irrespective of any assumption of the neutrality of colonies in Africa, the Allies decided to attack German colonies for several reasons: their occupation would allow better control of the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean; the German wireless stations could be destroyed; Germany’s breach of Belgian neutrality undermined the claim of Africa’s neutrality according to the Berlin Act and had repercussions on the Belgian Congo; thirdly, the exclusion of Germany from Africa and colonial expansion developed into an Allied war

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\(^{23}\) Archives des Ministère des Affaires étrangères, La Courneuve (MAELC) CPC/NS, v. 6, Portugal: 121, French Minister in Lisbon, Daeschner to MAE Delcassé, 8.12.14.


\(^{25}\) Quoted in Stone, “British Attitude”: 730.

\(^{26}\) US National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) RG 84, Lisbon, v.151: 820, US Minister in Lisbon to Secretary of State, 24.11.14, translating Prime Minister Bernhardino Machado.


aim. As a first step, Britain used its maritime supremacy to prevent ships from reaching German colonial harbours. The Royal Navy sealed off the entrances to the North Sea. The German colonies found themselves in an economic stranglehold. GSWA’s agriculture was incapable of producing sufficient food to sustain the roughly 14,000 Europeans. In the mostly arid or semi-arid country cereals or fruits and vegetables were grown in insufficient quantities. Storage capacities were limited. Barely any provisions had been made to feed the Europeans for an extended period of time without constant supply from Germany and the neighbouring British Union of South Africa. It was foreseeable that food would become scarce in GSWA within weeks. The blockade proved the German assumption correct that the colonies must be defended in the North Sea, allegedly “England’s weak point”. This defence failed, however.

In GSWA the mobilization of the colonial army, the Schutztruppe, was ordered on August 8, and simultaneously Governor Seitz prohibited the export of weapons, livestock, and foodstuffs from GSWA. The mobilization was rather disorganized, transport capacity (four lorries) seemed miserable. The General Staff in Berlin had little interest in the colonial theatre of war and considered these troops as helpful only to bind enemy forces in Africa. Contrary to what was claimed during the World War, no “large military force” was stationed in GSWA. Ordinary soldiers were almost exclusively recruited among volunteers from the army and navy in Germany or conscripts from GSWA. They were employed as ‘mounted infantry’ or in the field artillery. ‘Native troops’ were recruited only reluctantly and in small numbers. The Schutztruppe in 1914 consisted of 1,960 men; including all reserves it increased to 6,000 soldiers in September 1914.

On August 4, South Africa’s government under General Louis Botha offered support to the British government which responded with the request to “seize such part of GSWA as will give [the South African government] command of Swakopmund, Lüderitzbucht, and the wireless stations there or in the interior”. South Africa declared war on Germany.

30 The situation was different in German East Africa where farmers were able to produce foodstuff, see the boasting article “Deutsch-Ost und der Weltkrieg”, DOAZ, Jg. 17, no.28, 3.4.15.
On September 14 the Royal Navy bombarded the wireless station at Swakopmund. On September 1916 man-of-wars landed in Lüderitzbucht. German troops withdrew and the town with its wireless station surrendered. Also in September the Caprivi Strip in GSWA’s north-east was secured by British Rhodesian forces.36 “The total [South African] forces which at one time or another took part in the operations numbered some 50,000, though probably no more than 40,000 were ever in the field at one and the same time”. Botha’s troops were detached in four columns of 8,000 to 10,000 men. Three columns carried out operations in the south of GSWA targeting the railway junction Keetmanshoop; in 1915, a fourth would attack Windhoek from South Africa’s Walvis Bay enclave.37 Not German military capacity but geography made the conquest of GSWA a challenge. According to one South African officer “it was a case of ‘sand and sand, and sand, and sand, and not a drop to drink’.”38

Misunderstandings at a colonial border and German food transports in Angola

Having declared neither war on Germany nor its own neutrality, but emphasized its alliance with Great Britain the position of Portugal seemed unclear in the early months of World War I. Unquestionable was however, the Republic’s stand towards its colonies: to defend if necessary the overseas territories at all costs. Rumours about German attempts to take over Angola were decades-old and the German-British agreements in 1898 and 1913 on the division of Angola and Mozambique into ‘spheres of interests’ of both parties did not alleviate Portugal’s concerns about its sovereignty in Africa.39 Official relations between the colonial administrations in Angola and GSWA were thus

rather reserved and mostly limited to reciprocal demands via telegrams to respect the course of the border (which was not demarcated until the 1920s).\(^{40}\)

In mid-1914, the Luso-German border region of southern Angola was thus of particular concern for Portuguese politicians and administrators. Most of all the central part of this region, called Ovamboland and located between the rivers Kunene and Kavango, seemed to offer a potential route for a German invasion.\(^{41}\) In 1886 Ovamboland was divided according to a colonial border treaty between Portugal and Germany. Life on this new ‘border’, however, was barely affected by the ‘paper partition’. Ovamboland’s geographic isolation was underlined politically by this treaty. From a colonial perspective, the border cutting Ovamboland in two ascribed to it the status of ‘periphery’ and marginality. Similar to Darfur, the Rif Mountains, or the interior of British Somaliland, Ovamboland “remained outside European control” before the First World War.\(^{42}\) Prior attempts by the Portuguese army to establish some form of European authority in the region that was, according to estimates populated by about 100,000 people and subdivided into eight kingdoms, had met with strong resistance.\(^{43}\) In September 1904, a Portuguese column of over 1,000 men led by Captain João de Aguiar took off to occupy the territory east of the Kunene River. While trying to cross the river at Pembe Drift south of Humbe, the Cuamato (Ombandja) attacked Aguiar. The ensuing battle resulted in the Cuamato’s “great victory”. More than 300 Portuguese were killed. This “catastrophe” created a “state of overexcitement” in Angola and spared the Ovambo kingdoms to the East a military confrontation with the Portuguese.\(^{44}\) The defeat also became the starting point for what historians have called a Portuguese “Ovambo complex”.\(^{45}\) Only in 1907 Captain José A. Alves Roçadas succeeded in overcoming the resistance, taking ‘one tribe after another’. He set up a string of fortresses to the east of the

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(40) NAN ZBU 10, A 1 d 3: 9, Telegram Governor General, Luanda to Governor, Windhoek, 25.7.11, assuring his order to Portuguese troops to respect the border and adding « je vous prie aussi de faire maintenir même respect de la frontière portugaise. »


(43) Ovambo territory was politically divided into eight Kingdoms: Ondonga (South), Ukwanyama (north), Ukwambi (center), Ongandjera, Ombalantu, Uukwalamushi, Uukolongadhi/Eunda, Ondombondola (west); each forming distinct language groups. Cf. Lovisa T. Nampala and Vilho Shigwedha, Aawambo Kingdoms, History and Cultural Change: Perspectives from Namibia, Basel, Schlettwein, 2006.

(44) Archives Générales de la Congrégation du Saint-Esprit. Chevilly-Larue (AGCSSp), 3L1.12a9, Superieur J.M. Antunes (Hüla) to Cardinal Prefet Gotti, 6.1.05.

Kunene River with the intention of controlling the seemingly conquered Africans and proving to the Germans that Portugal was willing and able to defend its colonial sovereignty everywhere in Angola. From 1909 Roçadas’ successor João de Almeida continued these military ‘explorations’ when he was the first to set up military forts along the Kavango River. Now, the most powerful and populous, yet unconquered kingdom among the Ovambo, Kwanyama (Cuanhama in Portuguese spelling) was now encircled on three sides. However, the Portuguese overestimated their colonial neighbours in GSWA. Despite some thought about it, the German administration did not even attempt to subdue Ovamboland south of the colonial border. Namutoni at the south-eastern end of the Etosha Pan remained the northern-most German fort in GSWA, located around 180 kilometres south of the border.

Actual power thus rested with the Ovambo kings. Comparing what was intended according to colonial rhetoric and what came to pass on the ground highlights the deficiencies and limitations of colonial rule, and — at times — the impotence and inability to rule the areas intended for future colonization. Furthermore, the colonial state was not constantly on the offensive. The defence-potential of the colonial state was to be upheld not only against ‘rebellious’ Africans, but also against European competitors on the African continent. The history of the campaign in Angola thus also attests to the limited military capacity of German and Portuguese colonial forces. As a result of misunderstandings, rumours, and suspicions Ovamboland became the scene of fighting between the two colonial powers in 1914 – it was an unforeseen war for which neither power was prepared and which had dramatic results, most of all for the population of Ovamboland.

After the outbreak of the war in Europe the Portuguese struggle for sovereignty in Angola included a two-part task: 1) to finally occupy Kwanyama territory, seemingly the last of the Ovambo Kingdoms within Angola which had not yet been subdued. An ‘expedition’ had been planned since 1913; and 2) to preempt a possible German invasion of the same region of Angola triggered by the war in Europe. Angola’s colonial forces, traditionally staffed mostly by Africans, were to be reinforced with troops from Portugal. On August 18, 1914 the Minister of War, General Antonio J. Pereira d’Eça ordered the “hero” of the 1907 war in Angola, Colonel Alves Roçadas, to lead the troops 1) to subdue the Kwanyama, since they continued to “raid unpunished the Kunene margins”, and 2) to safeguard the border with GSWA.

Roçadas, the “experienced Africa-hand” who knew the region well, was “seen as the natural choice to

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command the First Expeditionary Force.” His force of 1,569 men (infantry, artillery, cavalry, engineering, and ambulance corps) left Lisbon on two steamers on September 10 and 12. They arrived in Moçâmedes, southern Angola, on September 27 and October 1 (with Roçadas having been appointed District Governor for the south of Angola). Considering the climatic and sanitary conditions of the warfare it was wise not to send too many soldiers from Portugal. The rainy season was particularly difficult with its “torrential downpours […] that brought the calenturas, or fevers […]. Contingent after contingent of European conscripts sent to support the military manoeuvres of Portuguese conquest sickened and died away in disabling numbers.”

Given South Africa’s invasion from the south, the Germans in GSWA were deeply concerned about the amassing of European troops close to their northern border. The Portuguese troop movements were even more disturbing since Governor Seitz, being concerned about the food security of GSWA, had requested that food supplies be sent from southern Angola to GSWA. Even before the first South African attacks Seitz had to consider from where food could be imported. With its harbours sealed by the Royal Navy and being surrounded by three British colonies, only neutral Portuguese Angola seemed to offer GWSA any possibility for relief. On the day of mobilization, August 8, 1914, the German Consul in Luanda, Ernst Eisenlohr, sent from the German steamer Adelaide (which had ‘escaped’ to the harbour of Luanda) an encrypted telegram to Governor Seitz asking whether he should procure foodstuff and coal in Angola for GSWA. Governor Seitz affirmed and requested Eisenlohr “to buy as much foodstuff as possible” and to send it over land fearing that ships might not accept loads to GSWA. Seitz hoped that Eisenlohr would come to an agreement with Angola’s Governor General José Norton de Matos. However, this would not be the case. But Seitz would never learn about the ensuing difficulties because he and Consul Eisenlohr were soon no longer able to communicate directly since all telegraph lines had been cut and wireless messages prohibited. Both were left to their own devices. In September, Germans in Angola procured several tons of food; but they were unable to transport them across the border to GSWA as the Portuguese authorities knew their intentions and were “not well disposed towards Seitz’ plan”. On September 12 Governor General Norton de Matos published a decree according to which the export of foodstuff from Angola was only possible with permits from the district governors and only if these products were not indispensable in Angola. Furthermore, he declared the state of emergency for the southern border district of Huíla and a few weeks later for the districts of Moçâmedes.

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53 PAAA Luanda 3 (Südwest Krieg) Telgr Governor Seitz to German Consulate Luanda, 9.8.14.
54 Stals, “Naulila”: 186 (“nie goedgesind teenoor Seitz se plan nie”).
and Luanda thereby rendering illegal any German movements in southern Angola. All German attempts to convince Norton de Matos to permit the food transports and the transfer of mail to GSWA were in vain.55

Portuguese officials and the population thought the deliveries were German preparations for war. Near the German frontier east of the Kunene River the string of small Portuguese fortresses set up since 1907 under the command of Roçadas and de Almeida now proved to be most valuable as they allowed for the close surveillance of the border. This was deemed most important in monitoring any suspicious German movements. Sub-Lieutenant (alferes) Manuel Sereno, Commander of Fort Otoquero, near the German border, received the order from his new District Governor Roçadas to intercept several ox wagons sent from the towns of Lubango, Humbe, Chibia and elsewhere heading towards GSWA. Near the Kunene River Sereno and his men confiscated 12 wagons.56 They also discovered three alleged German storage facilities.57 While a Luso-German “study commission” was surveying southern Angola for a possible railway connection to GSWA settlement plans for the colony were seen as evidence of sinister German schemes. For Portuguese officials, the region was teeming with German spies preparing for a German invasion. Consequently, ox wagons for the Study Commission were also withheld. The Portuguese suspicions that there was no difference between the provisions sent to the “study commission” and those sent by the Consul to GSWA, proved well founded.58

Within days, misunderstanding and distrust led to self-fulfilling prophecies with catastrophic results. A German patrol of around 15 men lead by the head of the Outjo District (the north-western part of GSWA), Hans Schultze-Jena, arrived at the border on October 16, 1914. They waited at the Kunene River’s Erickson Drift in order to take over and pay for the ox wagons, which alferes Sereno had already confiscated days earlier. In this situation the first misunderstanding occurred: The Portuguese feared that this small group (headed by a civilian but accompanied by soldiers in uniform) was a military reconnaissance troop. It seemed not unlikely that there was a German army approaching to invade Angola. After all, it seemed to be no secret that the German Empire wanted to take over southern Angola. Rumours (boatos) created their own realities in the early days of the World War. On October 18, Sereno and his soldiers intercepted the Germans in their camp at Erickson Drift and claimed they had crossed into Portuguese territories. The Germans, pointing to their map, denied this. This was the second misunderstanding: The Germans were intrigued by the Hills of Calueque on the Portuguese bank of the river. The border treaty of 1886 mentioned the ‘Serra Cana’ as the border point along the river. However, the Germans, none of them had ever been to this place, were

confusing several distinct sites: Erickson Drift, Serra Cana, and the cataract mentioned in the treaty of 1886. They all seemed to be one and the same place; a fatal misunderstanding as would soon become clear. The Germans responded to Sereno: “it is well known that Erickson Drift forms the border and the two small hills beyond the Kunene assure me that we are at Erickson Drift. The hills are part of the cataracts.”59 In fact, Erickson Drift was six miles upstream of the Kavale cataracts. The next morning the Germans were invited to join the Portuguese in nearby Fort Naulila for further discussions. They were even asked to take their bedding gear with them. In Naulila the third misunderstanding occurred. It should be emphasised that the parties could barely communicate with each other. The Portuguese soldiers neither spoke German nor French. The Germans had one ‘interpreter’, Jensen, a Danish national, who spoke a few words Portuguese and had difficulties understanding the language. Having arrived in Fort Naulila, the Germans had expected to meet a high ranking officer (this is what they believed to have understood). Instead they learned that they were not allowed to leave the fort. They did not accept this and when they tried to leave, Sereno seized the bridle of Schultze-Jena’s horse. According to Sereno, Schultze-Jena was at that point about to take out his gun. Feeling threatened (ameaça), he ordered his men to shoot at the Germans.60 This fourth misunderstanding — and not the last in this affair — led to the deaths of Schultze-Jena and two officers. The ‘interpreter’ Jensen was wounded and arrested.

When news of the shooting in Naulila reached GSWA, Governor Seitz erroneously assumed that Portugal had declared war on Germany (in fact it was still neutral). The German colonial administration, knowing that fresh Portuguese troops had just arrived in the port of Moçâmedes, interpreted the shooting as the first step of a Portuguese invasion of GSWA from the north, similar to the South African military activities in the south. It was not possible to receive news from Germany and when Governor Seitz sent radio messages to all wireless stations in southern Africa about the death of Schultze-Jena, expecting an explanation of the incident in Fort Naulila from Norton de Matos, no reply was forthcoming (later the Portuguese argued that no such messages had been received).61

A European battlefield in southern Angola, Naulila 1914

It has been said of World War I in Africa that it was a European conflict fought by Africans on behalf of their ‘masters’.62 The war in GSWA between South African and German troops and the Luso-German border war were the exceptions to this rule. The majority of

the combatants originated in Europe. The participation of Africans was nonetheless marked and relevant.

Taking for granted the war with Portugal and fearing Allied encirclement, German troops were sent to retaliate and attack the Portuguese forts along the border. The military rationale behind this was to prevent Portugal from using the forts as basis for attacks on GSWA. Furthermore, the ‘murder of Naulila’ was to be avenged. The only German police station at the border with Angola, Kuring Kuru at the Okavango (Cubango) River appeared to be under threat from the Portuguese soldiers in Fort Cuangar, on the opposite site of the river. On October 24, Governor Seitz and the Police Commander, Heinrich Bethe, decided that Fort Cuangar should be destroyed by the German policemen at Kuring Kuru. From Grootfontein, a few additional men were dispatched to reinforce the Germans 250 kilometres further north. On the Angolan side there were rumours that Fort Cuangar might be attacked by the Germans. Nevertheless, Commander Durão was taken by surprise when 12 Germans attacked at 4 a.m. on October 31. On the night of the attack, Fort Cuangar was guarded by one Sergeant and three to six African soldiers. The German police squad, equipped with two maxim guns, had crossed the Okavango River a few kilometres downstream. They first blindsided the fort guards and killed Lieutenant Machado and four men. They then mounted a maxim gun on a bastion and fired at the surrounding huts where the soldiers of “native company 10/V” and their officers slept. It has been recently assumed that Constable Ostermann, the head of Kuring Kuru police station, “very reluctantly obeyed the order to attack the Portuguese post at Cuangar” (after all, Commander Durão had been his ‘neighbour’ for several years), but he faithfully followed his orders from Windhoek to “give no pardon”. The attack lasted for around 1½ hours. The unlikely ‘victory’ of 12 against approximately 100 men was soon called a ‘massacre’. Nine Portuguese and 14 Africans soldiers were shot during the raid. Afterwards, the fort was burned down to prevent the Portuguese from using it as base for military expeditions against GSWA. The fort’s livestock was distributed among Africans in the vicinity; the rest of the booty was taken to Grootfontein. The large amounts of food and ammunition found at Fort Cuangar were taken as further proof that Portugal was preparing to invade GSWA.

After the destruction of Fort Cuangar the Germans under Constable Ostermann continued their raid of Portuguese forts along the Okavango River. They burned down Bunja and Sambio on November 4 and 8. The Portuguese soldiers already knew about the destruction of Cuangar and had left their forts before the arrival of Ostermann and his men. The troops of Fort Dirico were defeated on November 12 and the fort was destroyed too. Fort Mocusso was finally taken and destroyed by the “marauding

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63 BAB R 1001/6639: 109, testimony of da Rocha, 30.4.25.
66 BAB R 1001/6634: 162, Ostermann to RMW (27.06.21), Annex 15 “Memoire Allemand”, 23.05.22.
Germans" on November 16, 1914 without fighting. Portuguese prisoners were taken to Grootfontein.58

Given the Portuguese silence after the German wireless-messages, rumours about Roçada’s army approaching the border zone, claims that the Portuguese had extended their patrols into German territory up to Ondonga, a southern Ovambo Kingdom, and attempts to instigate a revolt against the Germans, Governor Seitz and Schutztruppen Commander Joachim von Heydebreck not only concluded that the two colonies were at war, they also assumed that an attack on GSWA from Angola was likely and imminent. They concluded that it would be irresponsible to send another official as negotiator to Angola to demand satisfaction for ‘Naulila’. Since previous attempts to contact Portuguese authorities with envoys had failed (in September a ship was sent to Moçâmedes, but it was immediately ordered to return; Schultze-Jena was shot) they expected that only a strong military expedition would clarify whether Portugal was at war with Germany or not. It was expected that if they were not at war the Portuguese would immediately start negotiations to avoid a confrontation. Seitz therefore agreed to send an expedition to conquer Fort Naulila. GSWA’s most experienced officer, Major Victor Franke, who had been in the colony since 1896, was to be its leader.59

The decision to send Franke to Angola was not dictated by “strategic consideration”, but by the perceived threat of an imminent invasion. The Germans, anxious to defend their porous southern border against South Africa along the Orange River and the Kalahari Desert, would have liked to avoid establishing “a decisive presence in the northern border region.”70 Furthermore, the decision to dispatch an entire regiment of the Schutztruppe to the northern border had only been made possible by the anti-British rebellion in South Africa that forced Botha to first turn against the ‘rebels’. The preparation of Franke’s ‘expedition’ took several weeks. Since the Germans were convinced that the Portuguese were preparing their own attack on GSWA, time seemed of essence to avoid being crushed between British and Portuguese forces. A large train of ox wagons was assembled for the 300 kilometre trek from the railway station Otjiwarongo to the Kunene River. Instead of the rainy season, Franke’s soldiers were faced with a drought. Hundreds of the 2,000 oxen pulling weaponry and supplies through the sand perished. On December 11, the regiment arrived near the Kunene River. It consisted of around 400 soldiers (four maxim guns, six artillery pieces).71


small number of soldiers — less than 10% of the Schutztruppe’s force level after mobilization — shows the preeminent German concern with the South African invasion. According to Portuguese sources, the Germans also enlisted African support, most of all Shihetekela, the former chief (soba) of Little Cuamoto (Ombandja) who had been deposed by Roçadas after the conquest in 1907.72

In the meantime, Colonel Roçadas moved most of his expeditionary forces closer to the border, from Lubango crossing the Kunene River to Fort Roçadas, which he had erected in 1906. The Portuguese knew about Franke’s march by November 12 at the latest. They expected an attack from GSWA. However, Roçadas “had been instructed by Lisbon not to take any offensive action against the Germans due to Portugal’s ambivalent neutrality in Europe”, nor was he allowed to cross the border.73 So, due to the “political conditions [he] was prevented from taking the initiative.”74 Roçadas gave order to concentrate the troops along the border and in particular near the Kunene River fords. He relied on the guerra preta, African auxiliary forces, as he ordered Cuamoto men to be provided with weapons to be used against the Germans. From the direction of the German march it became clear that Franke would indeed target Fort Naulila. Roçadas closed in and amassed his men in Fort Cuamoto and Fort Naulila. However, he was eager to protract Franke’s attack since reinforcements were scheduled. 600 marines from Moçâmedes were expected to arrive any day.75 Finally, of his almost 3,000 men in southern Angola about 420 European and 300 Mozambican infantrymen and 60 dragoons were stationed in Fort Naulila; an unknown number of ‘irregulars’, local Cuamoto combatants were given guns by the Portuguese to support them from outside of the fort by attacking the German flanks.76

Neither the German nor the Portuguese colonial army was prepared to fight European adversaries in Africa. None of the colonial powers in Africa had a strategic plan when hostilities broke out in Europe.77 Forces stationed in the colonies were intended to act as the primary vehicle through which European rule was manifested towards those to be colonized. In December 1914 this the situation had completely changed. The body of

74 Barroso, “Primeira Guerra Mundial”: 142 (“não podia tomar a iniciativa”).
the sacrosanct white colonial master now became the target if he belonged to the enemy’s army.

Fighting started on December 18, 1914 around 5 a.m. Franke had planned a pincer movement. He knew that the Germans were taking a risk since Roçadas’ men were stronger in numbers and protected by fortifications. However, Fort Naulila was in a dilapidated state and many of Roçadas’ men were inexperienced army recruits who had just recently arrived in Angola. Early on, an ammunition depot was hit and the barracks inside the fort caught fire. By 7 a.m. Franke’s troops had come within 200 metres of the fort. Roçadas made a fateful decision: he left the fort; but he did not organize relief forces from his other regiments. The men he left behind tried to keep the Germans at bay with increased firepower. The fort was equipped with four guns and four maxim guns. In addition, the nearby trees served as a base for snipers. The Germans found themselves attacked by “native franktireurs”, who had been equipped by the Portuguese. They supported the Portuguese “tremendously”, as Franke later remembered. The Germans were shocked by this tactic; but the Portuguese were dissatisfied with the guerra preta who had allegedly left their left flank unguarded. Captain Varão complained in his memoirs that many of the “Cuanhama” (meaning Cuamoto; Ombandja) auxiliaries had escaped the night before the fighting commenced. This was, it was assumed, also due to soba Shihetekela’s influence. Alferes M. Sereno, whom the Germans held responsible for the “murder of Naulila” took part in the battle. The troops stationed in Naulila had a rather low level of combat moral which led to panic in the ranks the closer the enemy came to the fort. When a white flag was seen on the fort, Major Franke left his cover, but was shot and wounded. Captain Georg Trainer took over the command. The Germans stormed Fort Naulila with bayonets. In one forenoon the Portuguese had lost not only their face but also “the fruit of their previous campaigns. Inability and inaction of the officers, most of all Roçadas, were responsible for this revers.”

“Fighting terminated after three hours.”

Directly after the battle, German troopers started to reconnoiter the vicinity of the fort for Franktireurs who were still shooting at them after the Portuguese had surrendered. Seven of these Africans, wearing loincloths and no signs of affiliation with the Portuguese – so the Germans said- were caught with their guns. A drumhead court-

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78 BAB R 1001/6641: 12, extra-file: 29, statement Commander Antonio F. Varão, 11.11.21.
79 Southern, “Border Incursions”: 12.
80 BAB R 1001/6634: 66, General ret. Franke to RMW, 23.03.22.
82 AHM/Div/2/2/21/16: 44, ‘Oficiais que tomaram parte nos combates de Naulila’.
83 Pélissier, “Campagnes militaires”: 100; idem, Guerres Grises: 485; on tactical details of the battle see Machado, Sul de Angola: 140-173.
84 AHM/Div/2/2/25/12: 2, Amaral Polonia, report on Alferes J. Pissarra (Sa de Bandeira), 3.2.15.
martial was convened and sentenced the ‘irregulars’ to death. They were hanged the same day. 500 Africans were assumed to have fought for the Portuguese, a number probably exaggerated in order to raise the ‘glory’ of the German victory. The *soba* stated to Major Trainer they were forced to fight by the Portuguese and were promised bounty after the battle. The Germans considered it a disgrace that Africans would see Europeans fight one another. The employment of African “irregulars” would damage the “respect” for and the “nimbus of the white man” This hysterical ‘debate’ would continue well into the post-war period.

The number of men killed, wounded, and imprisoned during the battle of Naulila is not consistent in the literature. At least three Portuguese officers, among them probably *alferes* Sereno, and 65 ordinary soldiers were killed. However, there were German claims that 200 Portuguese soldiers died during the battle. 75 soldiers were wounded. The Germans took 37 (or 66 as Germans claimed) Portuguese soldiers prisoner, among them three officers. Nine German soldiers were killed in action, three men died of their wounds on their way back to Windhoek. Around 30 German soldiers were wounded, among them Franke. Contrary to what has been stated, German troops did not raid “deep into southern Angola”. After tearing down the fort, Franke’s regiment returned the next day to GSWA. Their supplies were exhausted and no order or intention to raid deeper into Angola is discernible from the sources. Under the cheers of Windhoek’s residents Franke’s regiment, now called ‘Naulila Regiment’, was welcomed back on January 14, 1915. Soon the soldiers were sent south to resume fighting against South African forces. Governor Seitz and Commander Franke signed the unconditional surrender of GSWA in Khorab on July 9. At this point in time, the *Schutztruppe* consisted of 3,497 men. Portugal remained neutral until March 9, 1916, when Germany declared

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89 BAB R 1001/6638: 24, Dr. Suchier to AA, 13.10.24.

**The European war turns against Africans. The Portuguese withdrawal and the campaign against Kwanyama 1915**

When the Portuguese soldiers retreated on December 18, 1914 they were convinced that Frankes’s regiment was the spearhead of a large invading army.\footnote{AHM/Div/2/2/16: 46, Anexo XIX, ‘Relação dos oficiais e pracas’ [n.d.].} The withdrawal was disorderly and morale was broken although there had been no outright destruction of Portuguese forces at Fort Naulila. Continuous shooting created hopeless confusion. Hundreds of Portuguese soldiers began to run for their lives — but the victorious Germans did not pursue them. Instead, African ‘irregulars’, who had been armed by the Portuguese, changed sides. While the Germans complained that they were still being shot at by some of these irregulars after the surrender of Fort Naulila, others had already begun to target the withdrawing Portuguese — an army that had conquered Cuamoto and disposed their soba only seven years previously. The Portuguese soldiers, in their panic, could not know who was firing at them.\footnote{AHM/Div/2/2/21/14: 1, E. Machado, ‘A retirada de Naulila após o combate do dia 18’ [n.d.].} Provisionally assembled at Fort Donguena, they assumed that an invading army was following them. As at other theatres of the First World War, most famously in the trenches on the Western Front and in German occupied Belgium, the rumour (boato) developed its own truth. “Rumors tend to emerge in times of crisis”; and crisis had set upon the Portuguese soldiers in southern Angola.\footnote{Tim Cook, “Black-Hearted Traitors, Crucified Martyrs, and the Leaning Virgin. The Role of Rumor and the Great War Canadian Soldier”, in: Jennifer Keene and Michael Neiberg, (eds.), \textit{Finding Common Ground: New Directions in First World War Studies}, Leiden, Brill, 2011: 21-42 (21); he concludes: “We can no longer listen in on the soldiers gossip, but we need to acknowledge the importance of the spoken word in their lives” (42); cf. also Lars-Broder Keil and Sven Felix Kellerhoff, \textit{Gerüchte machen Geschichte: Folgenreiche Falschmeldungen im 20. Jahrhundert}, Berlin, Links, 2006:20, describing the First World War as “eine Blütezeit aller Arten von Gerüchten”.

The shooting that could be heard everywhere near Naulila was thought to be that of the approaching German army. Many soldiers fled in horror to Humbe. The next day, December 19, in Humbe, rumours spread that the Germans had (again) crossed the Kunene River (which they never had). The order was given to vacate Fort Roçadas and destroy everything that could not be taken away. A hut housing all artillery ammunition was set ablaze. The detonation could be heard in Humbe where soldiers and settlers alike presumed that they were under attack from Germans. The ‘false alarm’ was followed by panic. Humbe was vacated too and subsequently sacked by the Cuamoto and the population of the vicinity. The degree of panic that had stricken the Portuguese
troops can be seen from the continued march northwards for the following ten days until December 28. It was said that the Portuguese were pursued by Africans up to Fort Gambos, 150 kilometers north of Fort Naulila. Lacking any intelligence about their retreat, Roçadas still assumed that the German invasion was continuing and this was the reason for all the shooting. This assumption led him to his second, ‘monumental error’: He ordered the evacuation of all forts east of the Kunene River. Major Franke had become the “bogeyman” of the Portuguese and Roçadas thought it necessary to win time and space in order to organize the defence of the Huíla plateau.

The German invasion announced so often in boatos never took place, but the people of Humbe, Cuamoto and Ovamboland, more particularly the as yet unconquered Kwanyama under King Mandume Ya Ndemufayo rose against the colonial masters and sacked many more Portuguese forts and plundered their arsenals. For a few months it seemed as if Portugal’s rule in southern Angola had come to an end. So effectively were the Africans destroying the colonial infrastructure that the Portuguese authorities assumed for decades that the Germans had supported them. In response, the government in Lisbon sent in a fully-fledged army of roughly 8,000 additional men. The campaign led by General Pereira d’Eça was the “most extensive military campaign” in Angolan history until the 1961–1974 war. His men had three tasks. They were supposed to safeguard Angola’s border against any further German incursion, they had to reoccupy the territories that were lost in the panic of December 1914, and they had to finally subdue the Kwanjama. However, since the Germans had already surrendered when the campaign started in earnest, the full force of Portugal’s modernized army was brought against King Mandume. This time it meant the end of autonomy for the Kwanjama Kingdom. D’Eça, called by the Kwanjama “Ndjangaladi”, the tall man or warrior, conducted his campaign with fearful brutality. Violence was employed purposefully to achieve a political goal — the conquest of the region. The aim to instil terror to suppress any opposition but also to sustain the army as was evident in the manner the campaign was fought. D’Eça was alleged to have “ordered the killing of all natives aged over 10: some were hanged with barbed wire, other crucified.”

The size of King Mandume’s army is hard to estimate. It may have had between 5,000 and 10,000 guns at its disposal. With the exception of the battle of Adwa (1896) in Ethiopia, a European army in the heydays of imperialism had never faced an African adversary of this size. The final
battle of Mongua, where Mandume attempted to stop a column under d’Eca of around 2,800 men, lasted for three days (August 19-21, 1915) and ended in Mandume’s retreat. This battle has been described as the ‘Armagedon of Ovambo’. In his final report, General Pereira d’Eca paid tribute to the military prowess of King Mandume and his army who held off the Portuguese advance for three days.\(^{102}\)

Among the reasons for the defeat of the Oukwanyama was the terrible drought that had plagued the region since 1911. The resulting famine had weakened all Ovambo societies and made them militarily more vulnerable. By 1916 around 200,000 people are said to have starved to death in the south of Angola and northern (G)SWA. The victorious Portuguese troops had to camp in ruins surrounded by “tens of thousands of skeletons”. In 1915 the drought and the war had turned Ovamboland into a “great cemetery”.\(^{103}\)

Following his defeat, Mandume escaped south of the colonial borderline that divided his Kingdom and set himself up in Oihole, hoping for the protection of the new colonial masters of the former German colony, the South Africans. Since August 1915 the latter began — without meeting any resistance — to install themselves in Ovamboland by sending a few officers; among them the future longtime Resident Commissioner of the norther regions of SWA (1921–1946 Lieutenant Carl Hugo L. Hahn, called “Cocky” by his friends and *shangolo* (the whip) by Ovambo.\(^{104}\)

Mandume, from his new *embala* in Oihole in the neutral zone continued “to wage war against the Portuguese in the north” and then withdrew south.\(^{105}\) Recognizing the tactical advantage the border offered to him, “Mandume’s incursions [into Angola] continued”. The Portuguese demanded his extradition. But the King also “increasingly defied the terms of South African ‘protection’”. In October 1916 a Portuguese patrol was ambushed by Mandume’s men, killing one officer and 16 privates. General Botha was so upset that he told Mandume to explain his conduct in Windhoek. He received the response that Kwanyama law prohibited the King from leaving his territory. Mandume had his “own proud view of his actions — ‘My heart tells me I have done nothing wrong’.” In early 1917, open conflict between Mandume and South Africa’s recently appointed Resident Commissioner Manning erupted and the King uttered his famous

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warning: “If the English want me, I am here [in Oihole] […] I am a man, not a woman and I will fight until my last bullet is expended.”

Refusing joint operations with the Portuguese, who “thirst[ed] for his blood”, the South African administration deemed it sufficient to send in 700 soldiers under Colonel de Jager against Ovamboland’s once most powerful ruler. Over the previous year, Manning and “Cocky” Hahn had collected enough intelligence on the King to make feasible an open attack on him. King Mandume who “embodied the ethnic nationalism of [his] dependents” was killed in action on February 6, 1917 near his embala in Oihole. “It is widely alleged that [Ndjukuma, whom the King had displaced from Oihole to Omhedi,] collaborated with the South African troops to dispose of Mandume.” Subsequently, the South African administration abolished the Kwanyama-Kingship.

The war’s aftermath – legal, memorial and political aspects

Imperial borders from the past cast long shadows into the present, affecting modern-day populations. The conflict between German and Portuguese troops can serve as a case study in how the First World War led to a breakdown not only in colonial cooperation but also in colonial order. On a wider perspective, the Naulila campaign sheds light on how global war can reflect (older) local tensions.

And yet there is more to it. The death of the three German colonial officers in Fort Naulila and the German attacks across Angola’s border in 1914 had a legal aftermath that still influences international law. After the First World War Portugal claimed damages from Germany for the destruction of Naulila and others forts. In the context of the Treaty of Versailles (Article 298, Annex § 4) an arbitration procedure was initiated in 1921. The case started, with two rounds of legal memorials and responses provided to the arbitrator and several testimonies in Portugal, Germany, Angola and South West Africa. Three Swiss arbitrators ruled against Germany in 1928, stating that Germany had committed an excess in 1914 when, while claiming to act in self-help and retaliation, German forces destroyed the Portuguese forts and killed an unknown number of Portuguese troops. This arbitration award became a landmark decision since it defined the three major preconditions for lawful reprisals under international law: 1) a previous

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act contrary to international law; 2) the obligation to inform the (allegedly) offending state and to demand reparations; and, if the demand remained unsatisfied, 3) any retaliation from an aggrieved state had to be proportional to the injury it sustained. The arbitrators decided that: 1) The Portuguese troops were entitled to use weapons on Portuguese territory; there was thus no breach of international law. 2) A German notification stipulating a demand of reparation had not been sent to Portugal. 3) The destruction of six forts and the death toll of around 100 Portuguese soldiers was an act of violence that was not proportional to the injury sustained by the Germans (three men killed in the incident in Fort Naulila). Therefore, the German retaliation measures were in breach of international law. There is barely a serious treatise on international law that does not mention the so-called ‘Naulilaa Case’ (a misspelling from the arbitral award that has survived in the legal literature to this day) and the case is still cited by law bodies as an important precedent in current state disputes.109

Evidently, the war in Angola also had repercussions in the colonial metropolis. In Portugal, the debate about the causes and effects of the military debacle in Naulila began within days of the disaster becoming known. Parliamentarians in Lisbon raised questions. The government was quick in its decision to send more troops to “maintain our territory”.110 When in August 1915 a former prisoner of war, who was captured by the Germans in Naulila, Captain Francisco Aragão, now called ‘hero de Naulila’, returned to Portugal and was frenetically greeted first in Funchal, Madeira, and afterward in Lisbon’s main square Terreiro do Paço, Fernando Pessoa, then an “obscure poet”, was highly disturbed by the warmongering speeches delivered (“Viva a República! Viva a guerra!”).111 Was the Naulila-campaign to be used to involve Portuguese soldiers in the European theatre of war? Given the “enthusiasm” to that effect, Pessoa wrote a sarcastic “Letter to a Stupid Hero”, in which he asked the self-declared connoisseur of German mores and war attitudes: “What, Sir, do you know about Germany, save for the fact that you had to face Germans – and did so heroically – along with your troops?” Pessoa concluded: “You know nothing, it’s clear, and no one would blame you for knowing nothing”. The Germanophile attitude of one of Europe’s greatest poets of the twentieth century has puzzled literary historians time and again. Pessoa’s pamphlet against Aragão, this Romulo de Naulila, remains a key text of political “intervention” among writers of early Portuguese modernism.112

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Once the war was over and the arbitration procedure commenced, a memorial literature developed around what had occurred in Naulila and Ovamboland in 1914/15. The memoirs of eyewitnesses or works of authors based on hear-say were drastic stories of ‘heroic’ undertakings in the African bush, apparently quite close to the ‘heart of darkness’. René Pelissier, the leading historian of the Portuguese conquest of Angola, rightfully remarked about one of these accounts: “there are a little bit too many cannibals in that story”. Glorification of war efforts in Angola was, however, not left exclusively to individuals. Governments also raised funds to remember the fallen (European) soldiers. In 1937 a huge monument was raised in Luanda to honour the Portuguese victims of the First World War in Angola. In Cuangar, a monument was inaugurated in 1955 that commemorates those killed in the German raid. Also in Naulila a Portuguese monument was erected whose remains are – according to pictures available on the internet – still visible. In Porto, a street was dedicated to the “Heroes of Naulila”. To remember the centenary, in December 2014, a ceremony, including military honours, was held in Nelas municipality, Portugal, to honour the fallen.

In South West Africa there was a distinct division in memories of the war between the German and South African populace; African voices were added later and thus underlined the complexity of remembering war in a colonial context. A small column erected in 1919 opposite Windhoek’s railway station commemorates the South African soldiers who lost their lives during the “Mandume Expedition” in 1917. Consisting of an obelisk with six sides (in reference to the battle of Oihole on February 6, 1917) and surrounded by nine palm trees (in reference to the nine South Africans killed in combat), the monument soon became the object of competing interpretations of the past. “Virtually no whites knew of the Kwanyama belief that [Mandume’s] head had been cut off [after he had committed suicide during the battle of Oihole in 1917] and buried under” the Ovambo Campaign Memorial in Windhoek. Ovambo groups did not shy away from proposing their own version of history, which clashed with colonial history, and


“claimed a [public] space [of their own] within the capital city (a white controlled area) when they claimed the monument.”

By projecting alternative contents of memory onto the “column”, “urbanized Ovambo were drawing on ‘tradition’ to mobilize some form of self-constituting unity, which they could present” to others. Much to the surprise of the colonial administration, a “Mandume Memorial Committee” consisting of Christianized Ovambo emerged and in 1937 it “obtained permission to lay a wreath at the memorial” to honor King Mandume, whose head they believed to be buried there. However, when they reapplied in January 1938 their request was refused by the South African administration as inappropriate because the monument “stands as remembrance of the British troops who fell in the war with Mandume”. The memorial was meant to remain a decidedly ‘colonial space’ that left no room for different — joint or competing — forms of commemoration. The Memorial Committee “seems to have disappeared”.

Whereas South Africa’s administrators considered the Ovambo belief as “irrational”, the remaining German community in Windhoek also adopted the notion of a monument (re-)dedicated to King Mandume. They called it Mandumesäule (Mandume Column) in memory of the “faithful Mandume”; thereby underlining their supposed good relationships with Africans and their rulers and countering the claims of the Allies during and after the war about German colonial ‘incapacity’.

With the consent of the South African mandate administration (who sought to reconcile the grudging German community with their conquering overlords from Pretoria), a small column was erected (privately financed) in Outjo in 1933 by the German community to commemorate the Germans who fell in Naulila in 1914. The battle was, however, also remembered by Africans. In 1931, Hans Lichtenfels, a German visiting South West Africa and describing himself an artist who wanted to preserve ‘original’ African ‘culture’ recorded with phonograph cylinders (Wachswalzen) Ovaherero praise songs (omitandu; sing. omutandu). In one of these songs the performer Willfried Tjueza paralleled the lives and personalities of two military leaders from the German colonial period, Zacharia Zeraua and Victor Franke. This genre has been masterfully analysed recently by Anette Hoffmann; here it suffices to point to one detail that is important in our context: Franke is depicted as “a bull”, the one “of Naulila’s Ovambo”. Franke was “the bull” who returned, “he has been with the Ovambo of Naulila”. The song thus identifies the German officer with the place of Naulila where he had reason to go to “the Ovambo” (even though Ehinga, the people living in the vicinity of Naulila, are not ethnolinguistically considered Oshiwambo-speakers). The good fortune in war “the bull” enjoyed in


118 Silverster, Wallace and Hayes, “Trees Never Meet”: 10f., quoting Location Superintendent O. Bowker, 2.2.38.

119 Shiweda, Mandume: 13; Eckenbrecher, Afrika: 182.
Naulila, however, is not specifically mentioned. The performer Tjueza may not have considered this relevant for his audience in Hereroland. The *omutandu* refers rather to Franke’s role in the Herero war of 1904, when Franke was a ruthless opponent of the Herero troops.¹²⁰

Nowadays, South Africa’s “ruthless campaign” against Kwanyama in 1917 forms part of the “raw material of public memory” in Namibia with regard to the “struggle” for independence from 1884 to 1990.¹²¹ Those who were excluded from public memory (but whose names were never forgotten over the decades) now receive the attention that was reserved in colonial times for Europeans. After Namibia gained independence, one of Windhoek’s main avenues was renamed after King Mandume ya Ndemufayo. The Namibian National Assembly in 1990 discussed whether the remains of the King could be located, more specifically his head — that was allegedly severed by the South Africans “for the purpose of erecting a national monument.”¹²² Kwanyama Kingship was reestablished in 1998.¹²³ When the highly controversial multi-million dollar national monument, the “Heroe’s Acre”, was inaugurated near Windhoek in 2002, King Mandume was among the nine national heroes and heroines initially identified. Here, he was given a symbolic tombstone with his name and picture. King Mandume’s military skills also earned him a “place in the pantheon of early Angolan protest and dissent.”¹²⁴ A huge monument was erected in 2002 in southern Angola at Oihole, the place where the King was shot in 1917 (or killed himself, as others would say) and that fell to Angola after a border revision.¹²⁵ Recently, Namibia’s Ministry of Veteran’s Affairs announced “the erection of monuments of important historical figures” among them King Mandume.¹²⁶ Apart from the political exploitation of the historical figure, “the enduring magnetism Mandume holds for researchers” is also remarkable.¹²⁷


¹²⁷ Hayes, “Mandume Ya Ndembuyayo”: 91.
Apart from these paper-based and physical remains of the colonial frontier and the war that was fought over it in 1914/15, it should be remembered that, as a result of this war, Ovamboland was drawn into the colonial orbit of two colonial states and their economies. The frontier became a demarcated borderline in the 1920s so that misunderstandings and disputes about the exact course of the border as in October 1914 could be avoided. In line with the legal principle of *uti possidetis*, which was to ensure that newly established post-colonial states’ frontiers followed the original boundaries of the old colonial territories from which they emerged, modern-day Angola and Namibia are still separated by the same demarcations. It was the Organisation of African Unity that insisted on the integrity of colonial boundaries: according to Art. 3 III of the 1963 Charter of the OAU member states pledged “respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each state”. And in the OAU’s Cairo meeting: “all Member States pledge themselves to respect the borders existing on their achievement of national independence.” Thus, the character of the ‘center’ has changed from colonial to independent government, but local communities still have similar issues with the borderline to those of the 1910s and 20s: access to water and pastures, family and business connections. Control of the border is more strictly enforced today than in 1914. The official languages differ (Portuguese and English) but the local languages dominate on both sides. This is a sign that the sense of inseparableness in Ovamboland remains strong among the present-day population. “The borderline — Onhaululi — is hated by many, mainly in Ovamboland” wrote the teacher Petrus Ndongo in 1994. Calls to redraw the border have been aired in Namibia, but there is stiff resistance to such a development among leading politicians in Namibia and Angola. The centre holds fast to its periphery.

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