
This biography by Hartmut Bartmuß is the latest publication in the series Jüdische Miniaturen (Jewish Miniatures) in which the former colony of German South West Africa (present day Namibia) plays a not insignificant role.

Dr. med Alexander Lion (1870–1962) was a doctor, a medical officer in the Royal Bavarian army as well as in the Imperial Schutztruppe in South West Africa, who finished his military career in the German army, the Reichswehr, eventually retiring with the rank of Generaloberarzt (Lieutenant-Colonel). Lion came from a Jewish family but converted to Roman Catholicism later in life. The medical officer, together with Hauptmann (captain), later Major, Maximilian Bayer, became co-founder of the German Scouting movement. They met while they were both serving in the Schutztruppe in South West Africa.

Alexander Lion was awarded the Iron Cross 1st and 2nd class but was arrested by the National Socialists and only survived as a result of the intervention of comrades from his time in the military during which, in WW1, he had ended up at the Suez canal. His wife, daughter of one of his superior officers in the Royal Bavarian army, was always there to support him, while one of his brothers, a sister-in-law and his sister Rosa van Emden were killed under NS regime. Other members of his family committed suicide before they could be murdered.

Referring to his time in South West Africa, the miniature states that Alexander Lion arrived in Swakopmund from Hamburg on the 18th April 1904 after a sea voyage lasting four weeks. He was appointed Chief medical officer of the 5th field hospital for a short time, to then become garrison medical officer in Windhuk. One of the soldiers working in the stores there, Hermann Alverdes (1872–1934) remembers the Christmas celebration in 1904: “Stabsarzt Lion was always pleasant and cheerful and took great pride in organizing the Christmas festivities” (p. 18).1 Lion himself wrote: “In German South West Africa I shared the life of a thousand German horsemen, felt with them the same pride in accomplishing our tasks.”2 The sickly young man had turned into a hardened soldier as a result of living in the open for years. He acquired in South West Africa the characteristics necessary to be a scout. The Scouting Movement therefore had its roots in the British and German colonial wars.

After his service in the garrison hospital in Windhuk, Lion was put in charge of the casualty collection centre in Kalkfontain (North) on the river Auob where he was also Senior Officer. He ran the 13th field hospital, also in Kalkfontain (now on the land of the Hofmeyer farm to the west of Stampriet) from 19 March

1 Hermann Alverdes, Mein Tagebuch aus Südwest. Erinnerungen aus dem Feldzuge gegen die Hottentotten, Oldenburg; Stalling, 1906: 64.
1905 until its disbandment on 7 December 1905. Between 2 January 1906 and 15 January 1906 Stabsarzt Lion served as garrison medical officer in Keetmanshop and was then deployed as deputy chief medical officer of the base hospital and in charge of the ambulances of the ‘Sanitätsfuhrpark Süd’ in Keetmanshop. He served in this capacity until his return to Germany on the 19 May 1906, departing from Lüderitzbucht. The premature return home (normally a posting to South West Africa was for 3 years) came about for medical reasons. Lion was declared unfit for active service on 25 April 1906 and was sent home. He had already asked to be put on R and R leave by the coast in December 1905 but later withdrew his request.

Assessing Lion’s service in his various postings in South West Africa his superior officer, Oberstabsarzt (Major) Dr. Schelle, director of the field hospital South, wrote: “Lion always put his sound medical knowledge and ability to good use. He took care of patients and personnel in an excellent way! However, at times he overreacted due to his enthusiasm.” On 30 July 1905 Oberstabsarzt Gustav Duden wrote in Keetmanshop: “Stabsarzt (Captain) Lion always showed great enthusiasm in all his postings and did quite well everywhere.” He managed this “despite weakened health.” But he was still willing to accomplish whatever was expected of him.

Alexander Lion saw combat several times in South West Africa. In 1907 he put together a report with the title “How we avenged the death of Lieutenant von Schweinichen” where he described one such action. After his return to Germany Lion regularly voiced his opinion on a number of subjects pertaining to South West Africa. Although influenced by the Zeitgeist of that period, his opinion differed from the cynical views of other contemporary authors.

This biography is enriched by extensive bibliographical data. In a review in the Bavarian Scouting magazine action it is stated that “[t]his could be the most detailed biography of Alexander Lion on the market today.”

Julia Kleinemeyer-Hale
Oswestry, UK

3 Militärakte Alexander Lion, Kriegsarchiv des Bayerischen Hauptstaatsarchivs, Abteilung IV, OP 44022.
4 Ibid.