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AFRICAN MANPOWER STATISTICS FOR THE BRITISH FORCES IN EAST AFRICA, 1914-1918

BY G. W. T. HODGES

THIS essay is a by-product of research into the history of the Carrier Corps, undertaken in Kenya and the United Kingdom. The information obtained is therefore much more comprehensive for Kenya than for other territories. But it is possible to reach tentative answers to two basic questions: How many Africans served in the British forces in East Africa during World War I? How many died?¹ And by way of introduction, it may be helpful to comment briefly both on the existing literature and on the potential significance of such statistics for the historian.

Some of the published literature on the Carrier Corps in general gives little or no statistical information. The first volume of the official history of the campaign is an example; and so, with one exception, are the papers for the unpublished second volume, though they are otherwise essential for any study of the campaign and of the Carrier Corps.² But a semi-official history by Sir Charles Lucas is indispensable, because it shows the figures given by all the African colonial governments; a handbook published by one government gives slightly different figures.³ For West Africa, more information is given in a book about the part played by the Gold Coast Regiment, but a similar volume about the Nigerian Brigade, though essential reading, is of no help with statistics.⁴ A modern definitive study of the King's African Rifles gives figures which only show the growth of the K.A.R. during the war.⁵ Finally, Savage and Munro have produced what is perhaps the only published modern study of any aspect of Carrier history. Their statistical summaries of Carrier recruitment in the East Africa Protectorate (E.A.P.) are based upon provincial and district records, of which only those from the Nyanza Province are clear and unequivocal, involving half of the total numbers raised from 1914 to 1918. Even within these sources, conflicting sets of figures may occur, and earlier in the war returns from some districts in Kenia and Ukamba Provinces are missing, while much of Seyidie Province was distracted by

¹ The statistical Summary on p. 116 which illustrates this essay is based upon evidence in the various sources cited below.

² C. Hordern, *Military Operations in East Africa, I: 1914-1916* (London, 1941); for vol. II, CAB. 44 (3-10) and CAB. 45 (6-74) in the Public Record Office, London (P.R.O.). The 'exception' is CAB. 45/14; see p. 114 below.

³ C. Lucas, *The Empire at War* (London, n.d., 1925), IV; S. S. Murray, *A Handbook of Nyasaland* (Zomba, 1922), 271-2.

⁴ H. Clifford, *The Gold Coast Regiment in the East African Campaign* (London, 1920), Appendices I and III; W. D. Downes, *With the Nigerians in East Africa* (London, 1919).

⁵ H. Moyses-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles* (Aldershot, 1956).

German incursions and tribal unrest to confuse the issue. But a reappraisal of these matters does not lead to any major ultimate disagreement over the total numbers of men raised.⁶ Of documentary sources in British or ex-colonial archives, by far the most important must be the 'Watkins Report' of 1919, by the Director of Military Labour for British East Africa.⁷

Some remarks are needed next as to what these figures imply, first for military history, secondly for social and economic history. First, they enable us to assess the sheer scale of the administrative problems posed by mass recruitment. The war began with absolutely no plans for any transport or military labour corps, nor had there been any recent or serious attempt to face the problems which the conquest of German East Africa (G.E.A.) would involve.⁸ Improvisation was necessary. A district commissioner of the staff of the E.A.P., O. F. Watkins, was seconded to command the East Africa Carrier Corps, including also some Uganda porters. In December 1914 separate transport corps were formed for each Protectorate, Watkins being in command only of the Carrier Section of the East African Transport Corps (E.A.T.C.). In February 1916 the Carrier Section was separated from the E.A.T.C. and became the Military Labour Bureau (M.L.B.), first because it was clear that military labour was not specifically concerned with transport: secondly, because the plans to invade German territory would need a much bigger labour force. But the ensuing failure to destroy the German forces meant that even more labour was needed for the equally unsuccessful 1917 campaign. The war was now seen to be a 'porter's war', but the 'mass levy' which began in March 1917 failed to produce the 160,000 porters demanded by the General Staff, a figure which Watkins told them was unrealistic; the total for the mass levy did not quite reach 120,000.⁹ In 1916 and 1917 the Carrier

⁶ Donald C. Savage and J. Forbes Munro, 'Carrier Corps Recruitment in the British East Africa Protectorate 1914-1918', *J. Afr. Hist.*, vii, 2 (1966), 313-42; see also A. Clayton and D. C. Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya, 1895-1963* (London, 1974), pp. 81-107. The statistical sources are in the Kenya National Archives (KNA): for Nyanza, see PC/NZA/1/10-13. In the present essay, statistics for Kenia Province are mostly derived from PC/CP. 4/1/1 and PC/CP. 1/1/1: for Ukamba, from PC/CP. 4/2/2, and for Seyidie mostly from 16/49 I and II.

⁷ 'Report by Lieutenant-Colonel O. F. Watkins, C.B.E., D.S.O., Director of Military Labour to the B.E.A. Expeditionary Force', typescript (Nairobi, 1919): two copies in the Central Government Library, Nairobi, and one in the P.R.O., C.O. 533/216/4603, with complete appendices. In the present Summary, figures for territories 1 to 8 are from the Report, Appendix I, Tables 6-10 (Followers: Recruitments and Deaths). But only 10,947 of the Uganda Carriers (Column C) were with the Military Labour Corps. For statistics of those listed as missing, see Kenya Secretariat Circular 104 of 18 Dec. 1922 (copy in University of Nairobi, History Department, Research Project Archives, War F/1/2).

⁸ P.R.O., W.O. 106/46 'Scheme for Operations against German East Africa' was one of several plans for invading German colonies, made when relations were deteriorating. Though not detailed, this plan (dated 1897) did establish the Voi-Moshi sector as the obvious route for an invasion from the E.A.P. See also Watkins Report, para. 50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, paras. 6-23 and 35. See also K.N.A. 37/577, vol. I, 'Porters for the Military', John Ainsworth to Provincial Commissioners, 21 Mar. 1917, on his appointment as Military Commissioner for Labour to run the mass levy of 1917. Also Watkins to D.A.A.Q.M.G., 30 June 1917, in the Watkins Papers (by the kindness of his daughter, Mrs E. J. F. Knowles).

staff, who from the start had had to learn from experience, were thus faced with an almost impossible task in trying to cope with ever-increasing numbers on ever-lengthening lines of communication, who had to be fed, paid and medically cared for, often in frightful conditions in the field. Even the greatly improved methods coming into use did not prevent high mortality. The M.L.B. had taken over the Uganda Carrier Section after the fall of Tabora in 1916, and in March 1918 it became the Military Labour Corps (M.L.C.), in charge of about two out of every five of all the military followers in the campaign.¹⁰ The Watkins Report of 1919, which provided an authoritative account of these experiences, was accepted as a blueprint for a Military Labour Corps in any future war.¹¹ Moreover, this war-time experience was used by Watkins and other administrators to improve labour conditions in Kenya after the war; rules for carrier officers were used practically verbatim in the peacetime management of labour by government officers.¹²

The pressures of wartime recruiting on African societies had profound results both at the time and after the war. As conscription levels rose, especially in 1916 and 1917, the labour shortage increased, and social life was disrupted. The effects on African agriculture were particularly serious. The mass levy was called off in August 1917 partly because of fears of popular risings, but also because there were simply no more fit men available in the E.A.P. or Uganda.¹³

There were two distinct types of servicemen, troops and followers. More than three in five troops were K.A.R., of whom over 34,000 were recruited. Their greatest strength was 30,658 on 1 July 1918.¹⁴ Almost half the K.A.R. troops came from Nyasaland: government records indicate that 14,920 men served in the two Nyasaland regiments. A government handbook says that Nyasaland supplied the K.A.R. with 18,920 men; these include at least 4,000 men at Namidi depot who were not credited to either regiment.¹⁵ In the E.A.P. and Uganda, some K.A.R. recruiting

¹⁰ Watkins Report, paras. 33 and 49.

¹¹ P.R.O., CAB. 45/29, Major-General G. J. Giffard, 'The Organisation of Labour in a Campaign in Tropical Africa'. This was put to effective use in the Second World War: the new M.L.C. was inspected by Mr S. H. Fazan (conversation July 1971) and Senior Chief Josiah Njonjo (conversation Nov. 1970).

¹² Military Labour Bureau Handbook (second edition, 1917), para. 19, 'The Duties of Carrier Officers', was reproduced in the *Kenya Official Gazette*, 1921, 184-6, as 'Instructions for the Care of Labour by Government Departments', a point to which Dr Anthony Clayton kindly drew my attention. See also *Kenya Medical Journal*, 11 (1926), 12: Dr C. J. Wilson, 'Native Diet: a lesson from Rhodesia'. The only known copy of the M.L.B. Handbook is in the Library of the Royal Commonwealth Society, by the kindness of the late Mr H. B. Thomas. For a discussion of the impact of labour recruitment in the E.A.P., see Clayton and Savage, *Government and Labour in Kenya*.

¹³ Watkins Report, para. 37; Watkins Papers, secret file: Ainsworth to Watkins, 31 May 1917: the poor physique of recruits 'has been a revelation to me'.

¹⁴ Moyses-Bartlett, *King's African Rifles*, 701, Appendix E.

¹⁵ P.R.O., C.O. 534/49, Chief Secretary, Nyasaland, to Colonial Office, 22 Feb. 1922, cited by M. E. Page, 'The War of Thangata', in this issue, p. 95n. 36; Murray, *Handbook of Nyasaland*, 271; M. E. Page, pers. comm.

was done in Carrier depots.¹⁶ K.A.R. rejects who were otherwise fit may have gone as carriers, just as in the mass levy of 1917 Carrier rejects went as ordinary labour.¹⁷ A small but significant force, whose members differed from other non-combatants in being troops, was the Uganda African Native Medical Corps.¹⁸

The followers were both very numerous and very varied in the tasks they performed. Some, especially from the E.A.P., served for years on end. The total of E.A.P. recruits in the records of Nyanza, Kenia, Ukamba and Seyidie Provinces from 1914 to 1918 differs little from that in the Watkins Report.¹⁹ But the acting governor of the E.A.P. gave the Colonial Office, in what may be called the 'Bowring Report', figures which show how central government records may differ from those at the sources of information.²⁰

	Bowring	Watkins	Provincial Commissioners	
Carriers	162,598	162,578	Nyanza	92,037
Gun Porters	9,237	9,237	Kenia	42,976
Medical Personnel	7,500	7,374	Ukamba	28,906
			Seyidie	14,817
Totals	179,335	179,189	<i>approx.</i>	179,000
Carriers (early period of war)	7,500			
Carrier Police	1,500			
Casuals	13,096	10,961		
Grand Totals	201,431	190,150		

The term 'Gun Porter' includes all front-line carriers of machine guns and their accessories, ammunition, signal equipment, mortars, bombs, shells or even parts of mountain guns; 'Carrier' covers load bearers, general labourers, cooks, *syces* (grooms), personal servants, sweepers, interpreters, armed scouts, canoemen, tailors, carpenters, in fact almost anyone.²¹ It included also Carrier Police, who were appointed to prevent desertion; they seem to have been already on the books and not to have been raised from the E.A.P. or anywhere else. The E.A.P. Secretariat were obviously

¹⁶ Melvin Eugene Page, 'Malawians in the Great War and After' (Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 1977), 49. P.R.O., C.O. 534/22/2356, Report on recruiting progress for the K.A.R., 31 Oct. 1917 to 12 Jan. 1918.

¹⁷ K.N.A. 37/577, vol. V; many references to Class B rejects from the mass levy doing road work in Jubaland.

¹⁸ G. J. Keane and D. Tomblings, *The African Native Medical Corps in the East African Campaign* (Kampala, 1921).

¹⁹ Watkins Report, Appendix I, Table 6.

²⁰ P.R.O., C.O. 533/216/7624, Bowring to Milner (Colonial Secretary), 31 Dec. 1919.

²¹ M.L.B. Handbook, para. 51.

ill-informed about them in supposing them to be a special category.²² As to the early period of the war, the M.L.C. grand total for 1914 to 1918 of 394,880 'does not include about 8,624 in the B.E.A. (British East Africa) and Uganda Carrier Corps of 1914', nor any of the other Uganda carriers before the end of 1916, nor the southern carriers under General Northey, nor the casual labour, nor the military railway workers.²³ There were about 5,000 E.A.P. men in the 1914 Carrier Corps, in which there were 3,576 Uganda men.²⁴ But apart from the extra figures, Bowring's total is not very different from the other two.

During the construction of the military railway from Voi to Moshi in 1915-16, about 2,500 men were raised in Taita District, and seem to have been retained for the duration of war on account of the special skills they acquired. Others went later to the Kilwa Tramway, and elsewhere in German East Africa. They were not on the books of the M.L.C., nor were they shown in the contribution of that district of Seyidie Province to the Carrier Corps as a whole; possibly as many as 4,000 could have been with the military railways, and not the M.L.C.²⁵ Indeed, the provincial records are all incomplete, with the important exception of those for Nyanza Province, which we know raised half the E.A.P. total of carriers. Even the carefully kept M.L.C. records leave some room for doubt about the figures before the setting-up of the M.L.B. in February 1916. Where no organization comparable to the M.L.C. existed, as on the Congo-Uganda or on the Nyasaland-Rhodesia fronts, the uncertainty must be even greater. Only the remnants of these great carrier forces were taken over by the M.L.C.²⁶

The statistics for Uganda from 1914 to 1916 may be summarized as follows:

East Africa Carrier Corps (until November 1914)	3,576
Uganda Transport Corps (Carrier Section) (including 114 Gun Porters and 149 Stretcher Bearers)	40,051
Uganda Pioneers	500
Belgian Military Telegraph	500
Belgian Congo Carrier Corps ('Carbels')	8,429
	<hr/>
	53,056

There was also another, and very much larger group: 120,000 'job porters for food supplies and transport of Belgian Congo munitions. Not

²² Watkins Report, para. 80.

²³ *Ibid.*, para. 47.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, para. 13: there were nine units nominally of 1,000 men each. Assistant Director of Transport to Chief Secretary, 12 Mar. 1917. National Archives of Uganda, Secretariat Minute Paper 4290 (copy deposited in University of Nairobi, History Department, Research Project Archives, War F/1/2).

²⁵ K.N.A. 43/921, Labour for the Voi Military Railway 1915; K.N.A. 16/49, vols. I and II, Seyidie Province Annual Reports, 1915-16: 2,500 Taita railway workers; K.N.A. 37/577 File A (Taita), Ainsworth to D. C. Voi asking for another 1,000 railway workers, 18 Apr. 1917.

²⁶ Watkins Report, paras. 33 and 45.

organized.²⁷ Presumably these came mostly from Kigezi and elsewhere in the south-west of Uganda, which had to bear a huge burden to meet the deficiencies of Belgian administration. Over 70 per cent of all carriers recruited in Uganda worked for the Belgians, who could not supply anything like enough carriers for their 9,000 African troops. The Belgians seem also to have seen little reason, especially after the fall of Tabora in 1916, to do more than the minimum towards conquering lands which they were unlikely to retain after the war; they seem to have taken the view that if they sent troops, their allies could lay on the followers.²⁸

The Uganda records now show a serious and unexplained discrepancy for the most crucial and best documented period, that of the mass levy from March to August 1917. According to H. R. Wallis, the acting Governor, 5,763 carriers were recruited in Uganda for the mass levy²⁹; according to Watkins, 11,936 were so recruited (10,947 carriers, 449 gun-porters, 540 medical staff).³⁰ The likeliest explanation is that about 6,000 Uganda carriers were taken over by the M.L.B. after August 1916. But confusion may have arisen from the acrimony over the alleged failure of the Uganda authorities to give their full support to the mass levy.³¹ John Ainsworth, Provincial Commissioner for Nyanza and the acknowledged leading expert on labour in East Africa, had been appointed to run the mass levy at the request of General Hoskins, who had succeeded General Smuts.³² Wallis was accused both by the Colonial Office and by General van Deventer, who had succeeded Hoskins, of not playing straight, though the M.L.C. records credited him with better results than he claimed.³³ In the circumstances, it may have been difficult for Watkins to ask Wallis for further information when drawing up his report.

²⁷ Uganda S.M.P. 4290 as cited in n. 24.

²⁸ Watkins Papers, report by Senior Military Liaison Officer with the Belgian Forces (undated, probably by E. S. Grogan): 'in all matters concerning porters their Hibernian propensity to interpret "hopes" as facts is ineradicable'. Also telegram, Troopers London to Gen. Smuts, copies dated 20 Dec. 1916. See P.R.O., C.O. 879/119, memo dated 27 Oct. 1918, 'Belgian occupied territory in German East Africa'. The published Belgian accounts of the campaign say very little about African porters. The strength of the 'Kabaka's Carrier Corps' raised in Uganda in 1916 was supposed to be maintained at 5,000: Belgium, Ministry of National Defence, *Les Campagnes Coloniales Belges, 1914-1918*, II (Brussels, 1929), 126-30 and annex, 91. The total number of porters in Belgian service at any one time was said to vary between 10,000 and 15,000; their mortality was almost 25 per cent in 1917-18 (that of African troops under the Belgians in the same period was 4.8 per cent): J. Rodhain, 'Observations médicales recueillies parmi les troupes coloniales Belges pendant leur campagne en Afrique Orientale 1914-1917', *Bulletin de la Société de Pathologie Exotique*, XII (1919), 137-58.

²⁹ Wallis, typescript of the *Handbook of Uganda* (second edition), in P.R.O., C.O. 536/90/60006 (used by Lucas, *Empire at War*, IV, 234-9); according to this source, 173,056 carriers had been recruited in Uganda up to Feb. 1917.

³⁰ Watkins Report, Appendix I, Tables 6 and 9. A typist's error in the former adds 100,000 to the Uganda carriers, of whom only 10,947 were registered with the M.L.C.

³¹ This is dealt with at length in P.R.O., C.O. 536/86/52618 and C.O. 536/88/50149.

³² Ainsworth Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford, MSS. Afr. 379-82, Gen. Hoskins to Belfield (Governor, E.A.P.), 27 Feb. 1917.

³³ P.R.O., C.O. 536/88/50149, van Deventer to Wallis, 18 July 1917, and to Secretary, War Office, 28 July 1917. C.O. 536/86/52618, Colonial Secretary to Wallis, 31 Oct. 1917.

Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia illustrate two related points which must now be discussed: whether many men served more than once, and the length of their tours of duty. The answers depend mainly on whether a carrier was locally employed by government on a short-term or seasonal basis, or whether he was a front line carrier with the fighting forces. Lucas and Murray differ slightly in their totals of followers from Nyasaland: 195,652 and 191,200. But Murray adds that, 'reckoning those who served on two or more occasions, 257,250' would be the total (i.e. number of engagements).³⁴ It would need quite exceptional records to substantiate such a figure exactly, but clearly at least 65,000 were on seasonal employment. Nyasaland carriers fall into three main groups: front line men, line of communication men, and finally road labour, woodcarriers and food carriers who included 'some women and children'.³⁵ The irony of being 'the porters who carry the food of the porters who carry the food . . .' was understood by the Uganda carriers on the road to Tabora in 1916, and no doubt by others elsewhere.³⁶ Certainly the third group, and probably also many of the second, who presumably carried mainly from the head of the lake to the German border, were under civil control, locally based and on short contracts. The same most probably applied to the Uganda 'job porters'. Under such arrangements large numbers could have served several contracts, mainly during the dry season, which is from April to October in that part of Africa. District records may have made it clear that men served more than once, but there is certainly room for error here. Further research in the archives of modern Malawi and Zambia may throw light on this problem.

The situation in Northern Rhodesia was somewhat similar to that in Nyasaland: a six-hundred mile line of communication from railhead to the German border, supplemented by a waterway. In Northern Rhodesia, there was a corps of canoeists, from the Bangweulu Swamps and adjacent rivers, of whom 12,000 were actually registered in 1916-17. This linked the Luapula and Chambeshi rivers in a four-hundred mile water route. As in Nyasaland, the work was seasonal and busiest in the dry season, though it must also have been kept going during the rains. Food supplies could be brought in anywhere en route, and only once did the whole line have to be fed from base. The exact numbers were never recorded, but it would appear likely that about 50,000 men from the east and north-east of Northern Rhodesia served as carriers: the 12,000 canoeists, 30,000 other men on lines of communication, and 8,000 with the fighting forces. Another 6,000 came from the north-western part of Northern Rhodesia.³⁷

³⁴ Lucas, *Empire at War*, IV, 270, and Murray, *Nyasaland*, 271.

³⁵ Lucas, *Empire at War*, IV, 270.

³⁶ H. B. Thomas, 'The Logistics of Caravan Travel', in *The Nile Quest* (Speke Centenary Celebrations: Kampala, 1962), 12; and H. B. Thomas to author, 28 May 1971.

³⁷ P.R.O., CAB. 45/14, Sir Lawrence Wallace, K.C.M.G., Administrator of Northern Rhodesia, paper on 'Transport Difficulties in East Africa during the Great War', used by Lucas, *Empire at War*, IV, 290-6; cf. L. H. Gann, *A History of Northern Rhodesia*

From what has been said so far, it is clear that there was a rise in the rate of recruitment to a peak with the mass levy of 1917. In Nyasaland 72,327 carriers of all kinds were recruited up to the year 1916-17, but 123,325 in 1917-18, nearly half being locally employed, mostly as food carriers.³⁸ In the E.A.P. the totals for each year are approximate, owing to the confusions already mentioned, so that the figures for Nyanza are best shown too, since its contribution was half the total, owing to the size of its population and the standard of its administration³⁹:

	1914-15	1915-16	1916-17	1917-18	Totals
Nyanza	18,169	24,184	21,900	27,784	92,037
E.A.P.	24,728	45,240	45,058	63,710	178,736

The following figures widen the perspective:

(a) *Numbers recruited up to various dates*⁴⁰ (by the M.L.C.).

	31 Dec. 1916	31 Mar. 1917	30 June 1917	30 Nov. 1917	30 Apr. 1919
E.A.P.	81,338	100,921	145,432	159,049	162,578
Uganda			10,671	10,943	10,947
German E.A.	78,172	108,954	128,057	167,675	191,719

In other words, while E.A.P. recruitment rose steadily (or, to judge from Nyanza, even fell back a little in 1916⁴¹), it doubled in a few months with the mass levy in 1917. When the British invaded G.E.A. in March 1916, they quickly began to exploit the large new sources of manpower now available; in 1917 their recruitment of labour in G.E.A. more than doubled. This table does not bear out the suggestion, made earlier, that some Uganda men may have been taken over by the M.L.B. in 1916, nor does it explain the discrepancy of figures previously discussed.⁴²

(b) *Numbers in the field at various periods* ('These figures . . . do not include the thousands of Personal Servants or Casual Labour.')

⁴³

	31 Dec. 1916	31 Mar. 1917	30 June 1917	30 Nov. 1917
E.A.P.	30,369	40,065	66,452	51,394
G.E.A.	31,965	35,897	38,652	54,504

(London, 1964), 164. Elsewhere, it is claimed that the east and north-east of Northern Rhodesia supplied 79,000 carriers (including 24,000 front-line carriers) while the north-west supplied 8,822: W. V. Brelsford, *The Story of the Northern Rhodesia Regiment* (Lusaka, 1954), 48, n. 1.

³⁸ Lucas, *Empire at War*, IV, 270.

³⁹ See p. 101 above and note 6.

⁴⁰ Watkins Report, Appendix I, table 2.

⁴¹ K.N.A., PC/NZA/1/12. There was also a fall-back in Kenia Province in 1916-17: see K.N.A., PC/CP. 4/1/1.

⁴² Watkins Report, para. 33. See p. 106 above for the difference between the figures of Watkins and those of Wallis.

⁴³ Watkins Report, Appendix I, Table 3.

A comparison between these two sets of figures shows that nearly 100,000 had been discharged, or had deserted or died, by the beginning of 1917; the new offensive plans required as many replacements, hence the only partially successful mass levy.

During 1916 and 1917, therefore, the main burden of recruitment fell upon the E.A.P. and the occupied German districts, while Nyasaland's contribution was also high. In both years exceptional rains produced ghastly conditions both at the front and along lines of communication, and 'where the troops suffer the condition of the followers is apt to be pitiable.'⁴⁴ When considering the reasons for the variation in death rates between followers from different territories, length of service and distance from home are crucial factors. There can be no doubt that of all the inhabitants of East and Central Africa those from the E.A.P. suffered worst in these respects. 'They served longer . . . [and] furnished the majority of gun-carriers and stretcher bearers and first-line porters. They were serving much further from their own country, and it is only an occasional African who is adaptable to changes of climate and environment.'⁴⁵ West Africans were even further from home, and suffered severely, while they were also involved in the most bitter fighting in the whole campaign: in the Lindi hinterland in late 1917. As to the E.A.P. men, they had been near home, and on tours of duty of six to nine months, until Smuts's sweeping territorial gains in 1916. They were then deprived of any early or certain prospect of release, and served in increasingly unhealthy country, when the resources of the Carrier staff were gravely overstretched.⁴⁶ Men from Nyasaland served for six months if they were on lines of communication, or a year for first-line porters. The former, where they were under civil control, would have looked forward to fairly certain release dates. If the latter were really released after a year, it would help to explain the comparatively low death rate, officially only 2½ per cent; 3,360 was a lower, and 4,440 a higher, number of deaths given. In 1917 and 1918 the rate was admitted to be nearer 5 per cent.⁴⁷

During the conquest of G.E.A., followers were there continuously, or until they fell sick, lost any hope of return, deserted or died. Desertions were highest at times of offensive effort, as at Moshi in 1916, and later that year during the drive south from the Central Railway, at Dodoma and Mikesse.⁴⁸ A man whose home was far away stood little chance of finding his way there if he deserted; 'many of those who attempted it

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, paras. 27 and 28.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, remarks on Appendix I, Table 6, 'Deaths according to Statistical Records'.

⁴⁶ See Downes, *Nigerians*, 111 for his lurid account of the conditions on the Duthumi Road, and 185-244 for his accounts of the autumn fighting, especially of the battle of Mahiwa, 16-17 Oct. 1917.

⁴⁷ Page, 'Malawians', 154. 37 gun-porters from Nyasaland are commemorated on the K.A.R. War Memorial Tower in Zomba (M. E. Page, pers. comm.).

⁴⁸ Watkins Report, comments on Appendix I, Table 7.

must . . . have lost their lives.’⁴⁹ It would be interesting if field research were to produce any evidence of deserters being taken in by local people, and making new homes for themselves. Officially, all missing E.A.P. carriers were presumed dead, and after long years of bitter argument involving the Colonial Office, Treasury, War Office and colonial governments, some compensation was paid, though only to tribal authorities in Kenya.⁵⁰

The contingent from Uganda in 1917 suffered a death rate which, like that of the E.A.P. men, illustrated the dangers of service far from home, though the Uganda men cannot have served for more than a year. They were raised only in the Eastern Province, where the staple food was grain⁵¹: Uganda porters were notoriously prone to gastric ailments caused by changes of diet, especially the Ganda and Soga who were ‘green food eaters’ from the shores of Lake Victoria, whose staple food was fresh plantains. In 1899 75 per cent of a large caravan bringing Indian troops down from Uganda may have died.⁵² The consequent forebodings when the Uganda carriers left for Nairobi in 1914 were justified when 23 per cent died in three months. Wallis said that the true figure was 32 per cent, counting those who died after returning home. He and others in Uganda felt very strongly about the wasteful demands of the military for carriers.⁵³ Many must have died over and above the official death rate, admitted to be on average 10 per cent. Charles Dundas, seconded from the E.A.P. to the new administration in G.E.A., wrote: ‘to judge by the human wrecks I have seen returning, I am convinced that many die.’ The bad state of ‘returned empties’, and the high medical rejection rate noticed in both the E.A.P. and Uganda in 1917, are arguments against plural enlistment being at all common for regular carriers.⁵⁴ Any man who had survived a long

⁴⁹ Watkins Report, para. 29 on desertion. Hopelessness was a recognized cause of death. To augment diet, breweries were introduced (Watkins Report, para. 126) ‘to combat the depression and nostalgia to which the sick native so readily yields, dying without a struggle because he can summon up no interest in a life in which he feels he will never be well enough to get home’. Ainsworth organized convalescent camps: K.N.A. 37/577, vol. V, Ainsworth to D.A.D.M.L. Nairobi, 16 July 1917.

⁵⁰ P.R.O., C.O. 822/34, H. M. M. Moore (acting governor) to Col. Sec., 7 Feb. 1931, is a long despatch giving the history of ‘the porters’ claim’. The award was recommended in the report of the Kenya Land Commission, 1934 (Cmd. 4556), paras. 2041–68, and the summary of conclusions (Cmd. 4580), paras. 27–8.

⁵¹ P.R.O., C.O. 536/86/52618, correspondence and minutes make it clear that the mass levy was to be restricted to the Eastern Province because, being grain eaters, the men might not be so prone to gastric disease as the Ganda and Soga.

⁵² K.N.A. 75/47 Ukamba Inward, Ainsworth to Crawford, 16 May 1899. The death rate is from C. W. Hobley, *Kenya from Chartered Company to Crown Colony* (London, 1929), 103–5.

⁵³ Obituary of H. R. Wallis by H. B. Thomas, who kindly gave me the details: *East Africa*, 14 Mar. 1946, 704; Uganda S.M.P. 4290 as cited in note 24.

⁵⁴ Watkins Report, para. 48. Watkins Papers: Dundas to Secretary to Administrator, G.E.A., 3 Nov. 1917. See also K.N.A., DC/MKS/1/1/10, Machakos District Annual Reports 1916–18, on the ‘lamentable condition of repatriates’. For medical standards, see p. 103 above, n. 13. This applied probably even more to Uganda. As a carrier officer at Mjanji depot, H. B. Thomas saw two out of every three Uganda recruits rejected during the mass levy (letter to the author, 19 Jan. 1970). This bears out figures given in Wallis to Col. Sec., 25 Oct. 1917, in P.R.O., C.O. 536/86/52618.

stint at the front or on a line of communication was unlikely to be fit again for a long time to come.

Death rates must also be seen against the standard of military labour organization, and against the severity of operations. Referring again to the mortality amongst E.A.P. porters, the Watkins Report observed that 'in the early days before organisation became effective, the percentage was high.'⁵⁵ Carrier officers had an endless struggle to prevent interference with their men. One of the main difficulties facing Watkins, who was never more than a Lieutenant-Colonel, though he was responsible for over 100,000 men, was the persistent refusal of officers outside his command to observe General Staff regulations for the management of carriers, while feeling free to interfere in technical matters such as diet.⁵⁶ The advice of doctors and other officers from South Africa with labour experience helped to build up the M.L.C. as 'a body of considered expert opinion' in the matter of rations, and there must be no return to 'the bad old lines of trusting to individual discretion in essentially technical matters.'⁵⁷ High mortality was caused mainly by dysentery and other intestinal ills which were endemic but brought on by unsuitable food. Under field conditions even first-rate South African maize proved impossible to cook properly, and rice proved to be the only answer as it could be cooked so much more quickly.⁵⁸ In these and in other matters, Carrier staff were always striving to make good the pre-war failure of the military authorities to have any plan for military labour. Many regimental officers seem to have had little idea of the vital need to keep carriers fit and not to overwork them; the high mortality among West African carriers may, as alleged by a carrier officer, have been partly due to exceptionally callous treatment.⁵⁹

Periodic or casual labour has already been noted as a means of manning the southern lines of communication. It also became important in German and Portuguese territory, in both of which very large numbers were raised. In G.E.A., chiefs provided casual labourers who took over from regular carriers on lines of communication, such as the notorious Duthumi road leading to the Rufiji River; like other carriers, they carried loads, maintained the surface and built bridges.⁶⁰ In Portuguese East Africa, lines ran inland from Port Amelia and other places in vain attempts to intercept the fast-moving German column. Here, carrier officers served as political

⁵⁵ Remarks in Watkins Report, on Appendix I, Table 6.

⁵⁶ Watkins Papers, Watkins to D.A.A.Q.M.G., 15 Mar. 1918; his request for a full colonelcy was not granted. See also correspondence in Apr. 1917 with Inspector-General of Communications, a brigadier-general, who had tried to alter rations locally.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, Watkins to Ainsworth, 4 Dec. 1914, also the correspondence with the I.G.C. See also Watkins Report, para. 111.

⁵⁸ Watkins Papers, Watkins to Pike (Surgeon-General) 6 Jan. 1918, enclosing a large file of correspondence on the history of carrier rations.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, letters of Major Lyon, commanding Ibo carriers, on his relations with officers of the Nigerian Brigade, Sept. to Dec. 1917.

⁶⁰ Watkins Report, para. 73.

staff in recruiting labour, in addition to normal duties.⁶¹ The total figures for both these territories could well be inflated by plural enlistment, while it is also certain that many Africans must have served the Germans before they worked for the British.

Pay is a vital source of statistical information, without which we would know far less than we do about the M.L.C., whose pay department not only paid all followers but even disbursed cash for the entire Force.⁶² Before the E.A.T.C. Carrier Section became the M.L.B. in 1916, many men may have enlisted more than once under different names and in any of the various labour units, or as followers with any Indian, British or South African unit. But this cannot have affected the final figures much. Before 1916 the numbers of followers were comparatively small, and only former Carrier Section men went onto the books of the M.L.B. There is little if any evidence of plural enlistment. Of about sixty men interviewed by the present writer, the most varied career was probably that of Marius N'gang'a Karatu: he went with ox-waggons sent by the Roman Catholic Church to Namanga in 1914, was a follower in the Moshi offensive, and was finally a medical dresser at Dar es Salaam. He need not, however, have caused any double entry; although he deserted at Moshi, he was caught, caned, and remained in service.⁶³ After the M.L.B. was formed, no follower could be paid unless he was on the books, and had both a depot number and a *kipande* (identity disc). There were also Finger Impression and Statistical Sections; the latter issued death lists. Only if a man's name appeared on one could his dependants receive his personal effects and any pay credits due to him.⁶⁴ This was done by district commissioners:

An announcement was made, asking the relatives of people who did not come home to a *baraza* (meeting). Kyethe's wife went, crying. Umoa had broken the sad news to her, but she had not believed him. He had died of dysentery. She was given his money.⁶⁵

She was luckier than the relatives of those whose fate was unknown.

In the E.A.P., especially in Seyidie, relatively high wages were necessary as an inducement to enlist. On 10 March 1915 wages for coast porters, who were most valued by the military because of their experience, were fixed

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, para. 49. See correspondence in the Watkins Papers between Watkins and Major F. M. S. Stokes, May and June 1918; see also the Report, para. 132, for Stokes' work on pay and the finger-print section of the M.L.C.

⁶² Watkins Report, para. 102.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, paras. 7 and 22. Interviews with Marius N'gang'a Karatu near Limuru, June and Nov. 1969, assisted by Peter Kinyanjui, Ngureh Mwaniki, Njagi Gakunju, Geoffrey Maina and Danson Kimani. See also Carl G. Rosberg and John Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau'* (New York, 1966).

⁶⁴ Watkins Report, paras. 94-108.

⁶⁵ Interview with Muasya Maitha (ammunition carrier) and Umoa Mbatha (carrier headman), Muthetheni, Machakos District, 14 June 1969, assisted by Raphael Thyaka and Ezekiel Musau.

at Rs. 15 a month with rations extra, as with all carrier wages, and Rs. 20 for headmen. This upset government and private employers because, as the Director of Surveys pointed out, he had men with seven years experience who only had Rs. 10, and inferior men who were 'wholly satisfied' with Rs. 8. Wages in Malindi were then Rs. 12 without rations for Swahili or Nyamwezi, and Rs. 8 or 10 for Nyika or Kikuyu.⁶⁶ But whatever appeal there may at first have been for carrier work, the drudgery, boredom and mortality must soon have brought disillusionment. Conscription was then brought in by the Native Followers Recruitment Ordinance of August 1915, while in September that year settler pressure forced the wage of an ordinary follower down to Rs. 5 a month.⁶⁷ But special training, higher pay and a uniform of sorts may have given machine-gun carriers and other elite followers some feeling of status, which its danger may even have enhanced.⁶⁸ There was certainly far more obvious purpose in carrying guns and ammunition into action, than in the endless and seemingly pointless grind on a line of communication. In these ways, the pay scale and also the scale of equipment issued illustrate the variety of status and experience of service life as recruitment statistics alone cannot do.⁶⁹

We may now attempt to summarize and compare the contributions of the four British territories adjoining G.E.A. The E.A.P. and Nyasaland certainly produced the greatest number of both troops and followers, totalling well over 200,000 men each during the course of the war. But the point has been established that although most of the available manpower may have served, this was at different times and spread over the years of the war. In Nyasaland, over 83 per cent of the available manpower of about 250,000 must have served at some time or other.⁷⁰ The four provinces of the E.A.P. which were recruitment grounds contained about 2,400,000 people, the combined population of the various other areas being relatively insignificant. There is every reason to believe that nearly all able-bodied men were recruited, if they could be found; exceptions were those who managed to hide or to escape into the Rift Valley Province where they were safe as squatters on white farms, or who might be exempted

⁶⁶ K.N.A. 37/577, vol. I; Director of Surveys to Hobley (P.C.), 1 Jan. 1915; Beech (D. C. Malindi) to Hobley, 4 Mar. 1915; Major H. de C. O'Grady to Hobley, asking for gun carriers at Rs. 15 a month; correspondence between Hobley and Chief Secretary, July 1915.

⁶⁷ The War Council, mainly a settler body, recommended this wage, rising to Rs. 6 after three months, to the Governor who made it official policy; Watkins notified carrier depot officers and provincial commissioners by telegram—K.N.A. 37/577, vol. I, 21 Sept. 1915. This was at first questioned because, as Hobley pointed out, the War Council was only an advisory body.

⁶⁸ M.L.B. Handbook, para. 51 on Pay: Rs. 15 for gun-, signal- and stretcher-bearers, who also had boots, brassards, tarbooshes and other items not issued to ordinary carriers (p. 34, on Equipment).

⁶⁹ Although East and Central African gun carriers could not win medals, there are many instances of their bravery in action in campaign literature, though none very specific. See Lord Cranworth, *Profit and Sport in British East Africa* (London, 1919), 46-7. Gun carriers had to be warned off using K.A.R. Badges; see M.L.B. Handbook, Circular 21, 2 May 1916.

⁷⁰ Murray, *Nyasaland*, 271.

for family reasons. Of the men interviewed in this research, only one gave this reason for not having served.⁷¹ Almost all the others had been troops or followers, which bears out the view of one Provincial Commissioner in May 1917 that Mombasa District was already 'swept fairly clean' of available labour.⁷² In the eastern half of Northern Rhodesia, where the available male population was about 80,000, 'it was found that if more than one third of these were constantly away at any one time cultivation suffered, with a consequent loss of the food we so much wanted.' Over 40,000 would be employed during the dry season, and 'perhaps under 20,000 during the rains.'⁷³ In addition, it was important for the Allied war effort to find labour for the lead mine at Broken Hill and the copper mine at Bwana Mkubwa, though restrictions were placed on recruitment in Northern Rhodesia for the copper mines of Katanga.⁷⁴ Uganda cotton was equally vital to the war effort, or so Wallis argued during the mass levy, to the irritation of the Colonial Office.⁷⁵ Uganda's total contribution of about 190,000 carriers may have been limited by its government's sensitivity over the known medical risks of sending Uganda carriers far from home, or by the medical rejection of about 34,500 out of 42,000 recruits in the Eastern Province during the mass levy.⁷⁶ Of the British territories, the E.A.P. contributed the most and suffered the worst, as a result of having an administration geared up by settler pressures to the highest level of efficiency in labour recruitment. It also suffered more as a battlefield than other British territories.

In absolute terms, however, the heaviest burden was borne by German East Africa. In the first place, it was, of course, the scene of almost all the fighting: the ravages of war in the eastern half of the country must locally have been very severe. In the second place, its menfolk suffered conscription by both sides. In March 1916, when German forces were at the peak of their strength, they included 12,100 askari and 45,000 carriers and other followers. By the end of the war, 1,798 German askari had been killed, while 2,847 had deserted; it is not clear how many carriers died in German service.⁷⁷ In the third place, by the end of the

⁷¹ Watkins Report, para. 30. For instances of hiding, H. R. A. Philp, *God and the African in Kenya* (London and Edinburgh, n.d.), 131. Interview with Wabunya Kahindo and others at Kabati Market, 25 Nov. 1970. See K.N.A., DC/MKS/1/3/6 Kitui District Report 1915-16 for 'whole locations' taking to the bush. See also K.N.A., PC/CP. 6/3/1 'Emigration from the Reserves 1917'.

⁷² K.N.A. 37/577, vol. V, Holey to Ainsworth, 28 May 1917.

⁷³ P.R.O., CAB. 45/14, Wallace as cited in n. 37 above; cf. Lucas, *Empire at War*, iv, 296.

⁷⁴ Charles Perrings, 'Good Lawyers but Poor Workers': Recruited Angolan Labour in the Copper Mines of Katanga, 1917-1921', *J. Afr. Hist.*, xviii, 2 (1977), 241; and for further details, idem, *Black Mineworkers in Central Africa* (in press).

⁷⁵ P.R.O., C.O. 536/85/30772 contains correspondence about the importance of cotton, which was recognized in London and by the general staff. C.O. 536/86/52618, Col. Sec. to Wallis, 31 Oct. 1917: 'I specially resent the suggestion . . . that I should regard a diminution of the cotton crop as a greater evil than a shortage of carriers . . .'.

⁷⁶ Ibid., figures given by Wallis in telegram to Colonial Secretary, 25 Oct. 1917.

⁷⁷ L. Boell, *Die Operationen in Ostafrika* (Hamburg, 1952), 148, 158, 427-8.

war the British had recruited more carriers from German East Africa than from any other territory, even though they were only free to do so from early 1916. The death-rate among these carriers was lower than that among those from the E.A.P., but even more of them died.

New documentary evidence may well be discovered to amend or enlarge the figures reviewed in this article, but it is unlikely to cause any very dramatic changes. Undoubtedly, however, much more field work is urgently needed, while there are still primary witnesses to answer questions. More may yet be learned about such questions as plural enlistment, or the fate of some of the deserters or missing. Women as well as men of that generation must be interviewed, if any serious study of the social consequences of the war is to be attempted. The war was a terrible experience for those who served in the Carrier Corps; it may often have been still worse for those left behind to look after fields and families. As an aged Kikuyu woman put it, speaking of the mass levy in Kiambu, 'their mothers were crying as they went; we were left weeping, mourning.'⁷⁸

SUMMARY

For the campaign in East Africa from 1914 to 1918, the British used over 50,000 African troops, and over one million African followers. In 1914 no carrier organization existed, so this had to be rapidly improvised. There were three main carrier forces, based on the East Africa Protectorate, on Uganda and on Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. German East Africa was overrun in 1916 and 1917, but the German forces were not defeated. These offensives necessitated huge numbers of followers. Despite much improved rations and medical services, deaths among followers averaged 10 per cent; over 100,000 must have died. Over 10,000 troops died of disease or were killed, a death rate of 20 per cent. Deaths were most numerous amongst those followers who served for long periods far from home; this applied particularly to those from the East African Protectorate. About half of the million followers were, however, on short contracts or were casual labour. Since they worked nearer home and for shorter periods, their death rate was much lower. During 1916 the carrier force from the East African Protectorate was reinforced from conquered parts of German East Africa, but diminished by 100,000 men through releases, desertions and deaths. Numbers reached a climax in 1917, with the mass levy. The possibility that men enlisted more than once is hard to prove, but long-service carriers on release were unlikely to be fit again for a long time. Many recruits were medically unfit for the mass levy of 1917. During the war very many of the able-bodied male populations of these territories must have served, probably over 80 per cent, but not all at any one time. As it was the main theatre of war, German East Africa probably suffered most, conscriptions being carried out by both Germans and British.

⁷⁸ Interview with Leah Nyamuiru Karuga near Limuru, Nov. 1969, assisted by her grandson Ngureh Mwaniki, and Njagi Gakunju. See also Elspeth Huxley, *Red Strangers* (London, 1938), 272-86.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS OF AFRICANS SERVING WITH THE BRITISH FORCES IN EAST AFRICA, 1914-1918

Territory of Origin	Recruitments										Deaths					Recorded mortality of carriers (II as % of C) See Note	
	Troops			Followers			D				Troops			Followers			I-III Total dead
	A	B	C	Gun Porters	Medical Staff	Carriers etc.	Casual labour	A-D Total	Other than K.A.R.	I A and B dead	II Carriers dead	III A-C Missing presumed dead	I-III Total dead				
1. East Africa Protectorate	10,500?	9,237	7,374	162,578	10,961	190,150			64	2,022	23,869	13,748	39,639	14.6			
2. Uganda	10,000?	449	540	55,974	1,243	57,306			113+	136	3,734	780	4,650	6.7			
3. German East Africa	2,000?	2,436	1,595	197,312	125,817	327,100			?	195	12,934	27,535	40,664	6.5			
4. Portuguese East Africa	—	3	1	10,927	79,083	90,014			—	—	450	?	450+	4.1			
5. Zanzibar and Mafia	1,000?	4	107	3,404	27	3,542			?	3	210	349	562	6.1			
6. Sierra Leone	—	—	—	5,005	9	5,014			—	—	808	44	852	16.1			
7. Nigeria	6,216	812	?	3,987	—	4,799			589	?	814	20	834	20.4			
8. Seychelles	—	—	—	776	—	776			—	—	222	—	222	28.6			
9. Gambia	380	—	—	37	—	37			38?	?	?	?	?	?			
10. Gold Coast	3,976	177	?	204	—	381			400	25	50	?	75	25			
11. Nyasaland	15,000	?	—	195,652	1,262	196,914			?	37+	4,440	?	c.4,480	2.3			
12. Northern Rhodesia	3,437	—	—	56,000?	—	56,000?			200?	—	2,300	?	2,300	4.1			
13. Southern Rhodesia	2,752	—	—	300?	—	300?			250?	—	?	?	?	?			
14. South Africa	1,500	—	—	22+	Urundi 8	23+			163	—	?	?	?	?			
	56,761	13,118	9,617	691,278	218,411	932,424			6,000+	c.2,418	49,831	42,476	c.94,725				

Note: These percentages are based only on those deaths of carriers which were recorded by officials. They are clearly well below the true percentages, for if estimates of mortality among the followers in cols. A, B, C are based on col. III, 'Missing, presumed dead' as well as on cols. I-II, much higher percentages result: 22 per cent for followers from the East African Protectorate, 20 per cent for those from German East Africa, 16 per cent for those from Zanzibar and Mafia.