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Author(s): Melvin E. Page

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## THE WAR OF *THANGATA*: NYASALAND AND THE EAST AFRICAN CAMPAIGN, 1914-1918

BY MELVIN E. PAGE

SINCE Nyasaland shared a common frontier with German East Africa, and dominated the principal trade route linking the southern portions of German territory with the Zambezi River, the protectorate was easily and quickly drawn into the hostilities which began in August 1914 between Britain and Germany. For the Africans of the protectorate, as well as for most of the Europeans, the preceding years had seen trying changes in well-established patterns of life. There were many expectations of further, often more cataclysmic, changes, including predictions of European demise, voiced and otherwise expressed through traditional prophets and spirit mediums. Among some African Christians there was also the more familiar Russellite vision of the end of the world in October 1914. Thus the actual outbreak of World War I and its associated calamities did not shock many people in Nyasaland. Yet the intensity and persistence of the conflict were almost beyond belief. World War I was unlike any war that they had known before, and Nyasaland Africans strained to understand why they should suffer so for a cause which seemed not to be their own. In this frustration and disbelief, they gave the war a name which reflected the intensity of their feelings: 'They called it the war of *thangata*'.<sup>1</sup>

The demand for African labour, known as *thangata*, had become one of the chief characteristics of British rule in the Nyasaland Protectorate. In Chichewa the word literally means 'help' and originally referred to a system of 'narrowly structured exchanges of services between chiefs and their dependents prior to British colonization.'<sup>2</sup> In the colonial situation, however, the term was applied to the demands, usually from new European landlords, for labour in exchange for 'rent' and for taxes. *Thangata* thus reflected a sense of new dependency and gradually came to signify not 'help' but unwarranted demands by Europeans for African service. '*Thangata*,' explained one Malawian, is 'work which was done without real benefit.'<sup>3</sup> In this context the word symbolized the worst features of British rule. Like other assertions of British power within Nyasaland, the

<sup>1</sup> Questionnaire MC/9, Chikani Mtali, 21 Apr. 1973; also interview 118, Petro Zenizeni, 6 Aug. 1973. Details of this and other oral historical data which forms the bulk of the evidence for this article may be found in my doctoral dissertation; Melvin E. Page, 'Malawians in the Great War and After, 1914-1925' (Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 1977).

<sup>2</sup> J. A. K. Kandawire, 'Local Leadership and Socio-Economic Changes in Chingale Area of Zomba District in Malawi' (Ph.D. thesis, Edinburgh, 1972), 80.

<sup>3</sup> Interview 26, Peter Nyimbiri, 13 Sept. 1972.

idea of *thangata* spread slowly throughout the protectorate before the war. The events of 1914–18, however, brought colonial rule sharply into focus, and *thangata* came to have real meaning outside the Shire Highlands, where European rule had been more fully implemented, as men were taken by the government for service during the Great War.

The first demand was for *askari* (soldiers) to defend the protectorate's exposed northern frontier. A general mobilization of Nyasaland military forces was ordered by Governor Sir George Smith on 30 July 1914, and as the word spread, men found their way to Zomba to enlist, following the *askari*, retired veterans, and reservists who had been recalled.<sup>4</sup> For the first few months of the war the King's African Rifles' depot in Zomba was overwhelmed with potential recruits, and although many were rejected, there was no apparent decline in the volume of volunteers.<sup>5</sup> The need for men, however, soon surpassed the numbers who volunteered for service.

Despite early military successes at Karonga and Kasoa, and the destruction of the German lake steamer, *Hermann von Wissmann*, it was soon clear that the protectorate's northern border would require constant patrolling as a defence against persistent German raids. To spur enlistments, government officials made every effort to impress upon people the nature of the German threat. The most pressing argument was that the Germans would otherwise be able to come into Nyasaland, take away the land, and enslave or kill the African population. Chiefs spread the propaganda, often calling meetings of their followers to encourage enlistment, clarifying when necessary, and cajoling their subjects into agreement. Many were enticed into service by the fear of another conquest; others acquiesced in deference to their traditional leaders. 'We wanted to defend our land,' one man explained, recounting the effect such appeals had upon him. Another noted astutely that 'if the land is taken away from our masters we too shall have no land.'<sup>6</sup> Although little is said in official European accounts about this campaign, it is evident from African sources that creating anxieties about another conquest was the major thrust of early K.A.R. recruiting efforts.

The war offered other inducements which also proved necessary in encouraging young men to join the military. For some, the chance to be cast in the traditional role of brave warrior was sufficient. 'We joined the war because we were men,' claimed one former *askari*.<sup>7</sup> Others were more

<sup>4</sup> Nyasaland Field Force war diary, 30 July to 4 Aug. 1914, in Malawi Army Pay and Records Office, Zomba, historical records (hereafter M.A.P.A.R.O.); Frank Dupuis to Prof. R. Coupland [deceased], 26 Jan. 1959, Dupuis papers, in Malawi National Archives, Zomba (hereafter M.N.A.); interview 18, Yosefe Chikoti, 22 Aug. 1972.

<sup>5</sup> Colonel C. W. Barton diaries, notebook 34, 2 Dec. 1914, in Museum of the Northamptonshire Regiment, Northampton. The principal source on the participation of men from Nyasaland in the K.A.R. remains H. Moyses-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles* (Aldershot, 1956).

<sup>6</sup> Interview 105, Diamond Caswell Chirwa, 1 Aug. 1973; questionnaire ZA/1 Che Lukose, 7 Apr. 1973.

<sup>7</sup> Interview 5, Dinala Ndala, 8 Aug. 1972.

interested in the financial rewards which this new employment opportunity promised. One man recalled, 'What I needed was money, so I ran in haste to enrol my name as a soldier.'<sup>8</sup> As the chiefs spread the word, large numbers of men made their way to government bomas in search of this new largesse. Many ignored the all-too-obvious dangers of war for the promise of better pay than was available elsewhere. 'They joined for the money,' remembered one man, noting a contemporary parallel: 'It is just like the way people go to the mines in South Africa.'<sup>9</sup>

Military labour, especially for the carrier service, was also necessary for the defence of the protectorate, but it offered few of the rewards which attracted men into the *askari* ranks. Furthermore, the demands for military labour far exceeded those predicted by pre-war intelligence estimates.<sup>10</sup> Thus it quickly became necessary to begin active recruitment of *tengatenga* (carriers) throughout the country. To insure that men could be found when and where needed, the government adopted the Nyasaland Defence Ordinance in December 1914. The ordinance provided that 'the Governor may require any person to do any work . . . necessary to order in aid of or in connection with the defence of the Protectorate.' This provision, replaced but not changed in 1916 by the British Protectorates (Defence) Order in Council, formed the foundation of recruitment for military labour of all types, though not for the King's African Rifles.<sup>11</sup> No attempt, however, was made to translate the ordinance or the order into any local language, and only rudimentary efforts were made to explain the needs to local chiefs and headmen.

Demands for carrier service, then, often came suddenly, and men frequently ran away from the always unpopular work of portage. In all parts of the country, men chose to flee into the bush rather than engage as military labourers, and those who urged war service were denounced. Where there were forceful, even violent, reactions, they were frequently directed against the local chiefs and headmen whom the government expected to produce carriers for military service. Some headmen were threatened with death if they persisted in sending men to war against their will; at least one headman's house was burned in protest. In other areas the uniformed government messengers who came to escort men to their first duty stations were beaten. However, such incidents were few and sporadic, and only happened early in the war. The effects on recruitment were negligible, as protesters often found themselves sent to war precisely because of their protest.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Interview 132, Ruben Longwe, 8 Sept. 1973.

<sup>9</sup> Interview 83, Bamusi Awasi, 9 Apr. 1973.

<sup>10</sup> Nyasaland Defence Scheme, 1913, K.A.R. 1/2/1, M.N.A. These estimates ignored the necessity for carriers along extensive north/south lines of communication.

<sup>11</sup> *Nyasaland Government Gazette*, XXI (1914), 241, and XXIII (1916), 170. The need for a study of carrier recruitment and service was noted nearly twenty years ago by George Shepperson, when criticizing Moyse-Bartlett's neglect of these topics: see 'The Military History of British Central Africa', *Rhodes-Livingstone Journal*, xxvi (1959), 30-31.

<sup>12</sup> See Page, 'Malawians in the Great War', 37-8, 53-6, 64-8.

No more successful were the only two attempts at organized resistance to wartime recruitment. The most widely known of these is the January 1915 rebellion led by John Chilembwe. While the motivations of Chilembwe and his followers were complex, even confused, there is little doubt that the coming of World War I, particularly the demand for men, was a major factor in prompting the uprising. In November 1914 Chilembwe had addressed a letter to the *Nyasaland Times* which was excised by the government censor.<sup>13</sup> Central to his argument were complaints about wartime service:

We understand that we have been invited to shed our innocent blood in this world's war which is now in progress throughout the wide world. . . .

A number of our people have already shed their blood, while some are crippled for life. And an open declaration has been issued. A number of Police are marching in various villages persuading well built natives to join in the war. The masses of our people are ready to put on uniforms ignorant of what they have to face or why they have to face it. . . .

If it were a war . . . for honour, Government gain of riches, etc., we would have been boldly told: Let the rich men, bankers, titled men, storekeepers, farmers, and landlords go to war and get shot. Instead poor Africans who have nothing to own in this present world, who in death leave only a long line of widows and orphans in utter want and dire distress, are invited to die for a cause which is not theirs.

While he wrote specifically about military service, the demands for carriers distressed Chilembwe as well, and it was *tengatenga* recruitment which had been most intense around his Providence Industrial Mission in the months before he tried to communicate his thoughts to the reading public. Throughout the country, even to the present day, the rebellion and Chilembwe's motives are remembered chiefly as they relate to war recruitment. Men close to Chilembwe and the Providence Industrial Mission recall how the European war and demands for African manpower weighed heavily upon those who planned the insurrection. Their concerns may also have represented the collective sentiments of many Nyasaland chiefs, headmen, and village elders.<sup>14</sup> Just before the rebellion, Chilembwe himself drafted a letter to the authorities in German East Africa, appealing for aid and indicating the conspirators' chief complaint: that they were called upon by the British to assist in the war.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The letter, a discussion of its probable date of authorship, and the story of its censorship can be found in George Shepperson and Thomas Price, *Independent African* (Edinburgh, 1958), 233-6.

<sup>14</sup> Questionnaires: CR/8, Rev. W. B. Mtambo, 7 Aug. 1974; CR/9, Serson Sukwambwe, 10 Aug. 1974. George Simeon Mwase (ed. R. I. Rotberg), *Strike a Blow and Die* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 35. Both Rev. Mtambo and Mr Sukwambwe as young men served in domestic capacities at Chilembwe's Providence Industrial Mission.

<sup>15</sup> The letter is paraphrased in General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, 'War Diary 1914-18, (English translation), volume one, unpubl. typescript, in Imperial War Museum, London (hereafter I.W.M.).

Neither Chilembwe and his followers, nor their unsuccessful rebellion, were able to reduce or end recruitment for the war, despite the extreme consternation which they caused among Nyasaland's European population. Throughout the war, *askari* and *tengatenga* levies continued unabated in Chiradzulu, where Chilembwe's mission had been located. Even during the rebellion itself, African irregulars—the Europeans called them 'friendlies'—were hastily rounded up to assist the Nyasaland Volunteer Reserve and the selected *askari* of the King's African Rifles in tracking down and capturing the scattered rebels.<sup>16</sup>

Equally fruitless, as well as considerably less violent and probably less serious, was the resistance of the northern Ngoni chief Chimtungwa Jere and some of his followers. Chimtungwa, having received government demands for military labourers, at first simply refused to respond and later was openly defiant. As titular paramount of Mbelwa's Ngoni, Chimtungwa was expressing general dissatisfaction with the demands for carriers. The government, however, as well as local missionaries, saw the affair as the boisterous, verbal excess of an incompetent (and frequently inebriated) chief. He was therefore removed from office by the governor and exiled to the far south of the protectorate. Ironically, his protest inspired his people to greater co-operation, since many considered that Chimtungwa's release and restoration might be secured through their own sacrifice in government *tengatenga* service.<sup>17</sup>

Although decisive and forceful government actions had ended the two major attempts at organized resistance, official policy in late 1915 and early 1916 was to avoid any demands which might cause a repeat of the Chilembwe or Chimtungwa affairs. Recruiters were warned specifically to avoid any activities which might cause panic among the African population. Moreover, even greater financial incentives were offered in an attempt to attract men into both military and carrier service. Wages for *askari* recruits serving with Nyasaland units in British East Africa were set at £1.1s. 4d. per month, more than three times higher than the most generous prevailing local wage rates; in a few areas *tengatenga* monthly pay scales were increased to ten shillings. But the expansion of operations in 1916, following the decision to mount a coordinated north/south offensive into German East Africa, called for more manpower than simple pecuniary inducements could produce.

With the creation of a single, unified East African theatre, and the associated demands for ever more men, all manner of chicanery was employed to lure men into service. In South Nyasa district, recruiters spread rumours of disturbances in the north, calling for volunteers to join in putting down what they described as a tax rebellion by Chimtungwa

<sup>16</sup> Interview 17, Tebulo Nkwanda, 22 Aug. 1972; *Nyasaland Times*, xviii, 1 (4 Feb. 1915), 1.

<sup>17</sup> H. W. Mhoni, 'An Assessment of the Resistance and Banishment of Chimtungwa Jere, 1914-1918', unpubl. University of Malawi history seminar paper, 1973-4.

Jere and his followers. A number of Yao from the regions around Fort Johnston enlisted, expecting merely to help bring the defaulters into line; instead, they found themselves at war with the Germans.<sup>18</sup> Recruiters also combed north-eastern Mozambique for men, even though both Lisbon and London had refused to sanction such activity. Even German *askari* prisoners, held in Zomba, were offered freedom in return for joining the King's African Rifles, an offer many accepted.<sup>19</sup>

The most widespread complaint about what were seen as government 'tricks,' however, involved the use of the K.A.R. band as an inducement to recruiting. Various sections of the band dispersed into the countryside and attracted large followings wherever they appeared. 'The band's marching was really thrilling,' one man remembered; 'it was irresistible for brave young men to join the army.'<sup>20</sup> Some expected to learn to play the instruments; others merely wanted to acquire the smart uniforms worn by the *mbaja*, as the marching musicians were known in Yao areas. The band displays resulted in considerable increases in African enlistment, and continued to attract recruits throughout the war. There was frequent bitterness, however, when men found that they were expected to fight and received few if any of the perquisites they had expected. One who felt victimized later reflected that 'the beauty of the parading band blinded us to the real issues of war.'<sup>21</sup>

Resentment among the *tengatenga* generally was much greater, for they had been threatened and pressed into service. One device used by government agents was the arrest of tax defaulters, who were hunted down more enthusiastically than ever. Forced to act as carriers or to work on the roads, they were subsequently given only a tax receipt as payment for their efforts. Individuals became quite skilful at avoiding capture, in which case their wives were not infrequently taken as hostages until the men gave themselves up. Chiefs and headmen were often threatened with removal from office unless they produced enough recruits to meet military labour requirements. 'Chiefs were puppets of the government,' one informant remembered sadly; 'they suffered intimidation so they helped the recruiters to take people to war.'<sup>22</sup>

With the increasing intensity of the military campaign, and the extended lines of supply following the push into German East Africa, simple intimidation proved insufficient. By December 1916 General Edward Northey, commanding British forces on the southern frontier of the German territory, was demanding 'more carriers and more carriers and more carriers.'<sup>23</sup> Given the pressure, it was no longer possible to proceed in an

<sup>18</sup> Interviews: 77, Stambuli Basale, 14 Apr. 1973; 79, Mlekano Wadi Kalisinje, 4 Apr. 1973; 85, Sheikh Mada Wadi Msamu, 12 Apr. 1973.

<sup>19</sup> See Page, 'Malawians in the Great War', 43-5.

<sup>20</sup> Interview 72, Chionda Alidi, 1 Apr. 1973.

<sup>21</sup> Interview 170, Corporal Lipende, 14 Sept. 1973.

<sup>22</sup> Interview 126, Karonga Nkhata, 10 Aug. 1973.

<sup>23</sup> Northey to Governor Smith, 14 Dec. 1916, GOA 2/3/1, M.N.A.

even-handed manner and still produce the necessary manpower; the government's agents were instructed actively to hunt down those who had run away to avoid tax and military labour. 'There was no friendliness in it,' a woman recalled.<sup>24</sup> The boma messengers who served as recruiters would lie in wait for the men, or would simply track them down and capture them. It was really a simple matter, as one informant put it: 'They used to chase people as if they were chasing chickens.'<sup>25</sup>

Some of the recruiting tactics reminded Europeans of the 'press gang', but appeared to the Africans more like the slave raiding which colonial rule was supposed to have ended. Led by the local police, recruiters would enter villages at night, make their way from house to house, rouse the inhabitants, and capture any adult males they might find. The men were frequently bound with ropes or even wooden yokes and marched off to serve as *tengatenga*.<sup>26</sup> Although European officials—from the governor to the district residents—tried to absolve themselves from these excesses, they encouraged such actions. African police were placed under tremendous pressures to procure ever larger numbers of men; in Ncheu district two policemen were fined in May 1918, for 'delay in getting carriers'.<sup>27</sup> In such circumstances, there can be little wonder that excessive force was often employed, not infrequently with the knowledge and even under the orders of protectorate authorities. Consequently, 'there was terror everywhere and people did not feel safe'.<sup>28</sup>

As the odium of these military labour demands grew, it reached a climax which could be expressed only in the one word which Nyasaland Africans had come to associate, and Malawians continue to associate, with the greatest burdens of colonial rule: *thangata*. Their originally benign system of 'help', already distorted by the labour demands of tax and tenancy, had been further corrupted by the war and was now a hideous burden. Moreover, for the first time, the term *thangata* came to have real meaning outside the Shire Highlands as men were taken for *tengatenga* service. '*Mtengatenga* is *thangata*,' insisted an informant from far up the eastern lakeshore; 'we used to call it *thangata* in those days. We were forced to work.'<sup>29</sup> Inevitably, the entire war became associated with the unpopular demands for military labour; it was the 'war of *thangata*'.

Out of a growing sense of desperation, Nyasaland Africans sought ways to escape this widening net of colonial demands upon their lives. Open resistance had yielded nothing; thus it seemed the answer might lie in

<sup>24</sup> Interview 42, Gogo Dorothy Liwewe, 28 Dec. 1972.

<sup>25</sup> Interview 103, Wilson Dolobeni, 5 May 1973.

<sup>26</sup> Interviews: 23, Johnathon Phiri, 5 Sept. 1972; 64, Vmande Kaombe, 9 Apr. 1973; 65, Gogo Gomani Yatina, 10 Apr. 1973. Questionnaire MW/1, Julio Chinkhamdwe, 21 Aug. 1973.

<sup>27</sup> Ncheu district, Civil Police, Record of Summary Punishments, NCN 3/1/1, M.N.A.

<sup>28</sup> Questionnaire NK/7, Chief Malengachanzi, 18 Apr. 1973.

<sup>29</sup> Interview 72, Che Chionda Alidi, 1 Apr. 1973.



more subtle means, of simply avoiding *tengatenga* service. Feigned illness or self-disablement was occasionally successful as a tactic to escape impressment. For a few, the appearance of madness, sanctioned in most Nyasaland societies as a form of spirit possession, became an especially effective means of avoiding wartime recruitment.<sup>30</sup> Escape from the village, however, still seemed the best way to avoid service, and men continued to devise ingenious hiding places. Good fortune and quick thinking were an added advantage, as in the case of one man whose parents 'even accused the whites' of abducting him.<sup>31</sup>

By far the most important avenue of escape involved the *nyau* societies, secret religious groups among the Chewa. Long an integral part of Chewa life, the *nyau* took on renewed importance during World War I as a focal point of opposition to recruitment, and to European institutions more generally.<sup>32</sup> *Nyau* members would flee from their villages and hide in graveyards or special caves in the hills where the societies' dance masks were stored; others donned the masks and hid in small holes, or *machemba*, which they had dug in the earth. The caves, graveyards, and masks were all sacred and could thus offer sanctuary to the fugitive. Since many of the African recruiters were themselves members of the societies, the extraordinary social position of the *nyau* and its sacred precincts successfully shielded some men from the demands for military labour. This success, more than any other factor, may have accounted for the rising popularity of the societies during and after World War I.

Despite such determined evasion, a total of about 200,000 Nyasalanders served as soldiers and labourers in the course of the East African campaign. This figure, while only a careful estimate,<sup>33</sup> represented more than two-thirds of Nyasaland's adult male population and suggests the magnitude of the country's involvement in World War I. The resultant male absenteeism was acute and had a harmful effect on African life in the protectorate. Continual manpower demands disrupted familial institutions and practices, particularly the organization of work and the division of

<sup>30</sup> Questionnaires: DZ/16, Lilifodi Kadigunduli, 14 Apr. 1974; DZ/18, Izeki Katsache, 15 Apr. 1974. One case of 'madness' is documented in Bishop Cathrew [Fisher], *Particulars of Fifty Marriage Cases in the Diocese of Nyasaland* (Likoma, 1926), 70.

<sup>31</sup> Interview 64, Vmande Kaombe, 9 Apr. 1973.

<sup>32</sup> See Matthew Schoffeleers and Ian Linden, 'The Resistance of Nyau Societies to Roman Catholic Missions in Colonial Malawi', in T. O. Ranger and I. N. Kimambo (eds.), *The Historical Study of African Religion* (London, 1972), 252-73. The role of the *nyau* societies has been studied from much indirect evidence; full citations and explanations are contained in Page, 'Malawians in the Great War', 79-81. I am particularly grateful to Dr Matthew Schoffeleers for his helpful suggestions.

<sup>33</sup> This figure is derived from the best official estimates, found in H. L. Duff (Acting Governor), to Colonial Office, 27 Jan. 1919, C.O. 525/82, in Public Record Office, London (hereafter P.R.O.). During his brief term as Acting Governor, Duff carefully sought out information on the African contribution to Nyasaland's war effort, taking upon himself the difficult task of compiling, calculating, extrapolating, and revising wartime manpower statistics. See H. L. Duff, 'Nyasaland and the World War, 1914-1918', unpubl. typescript, in I.W.M.

labour. Communal labour efforts could not replace the missing men, and agricultural productivity, especially, declined despite government incentives. The situation troubled African leaders, one of whom wrote to Hector Duff 'wondering when the war will end because the women are alone, and there is hunger in our villages.'<sup>34</sup> These complaints, born out of the widespread, frequently involuntary participation in the war effort, only served to intensify a growing distaste for the forced labour which colonial rule increasingly represented.

Whether serving as *askari* or *tengatenga*, Nyasaland Africans found that their wartime experience was clearly characteristic of *thangata*: it was work which seemed without benefit. Fighting and dying did not seem, to most *askari*, likely to produce any tangible results, as had the wars of their ancestors. Frequently the only goal of combat seemed to be the destruction of enemies, an idea alien to most of the men. 'This was in the power of the devil himself. There was no sorrow, no mercy in killing,' recalled one man.<sup>35</sup> The magnitude of the casualties rendered warfare, conducted with weapons and tactics never before encountered, even more terrifying. 'The hugeness of the number of dead', and the still greater number of wounded, were not uncommonly seen as the only concrete result of the campaign.<sup>36</sup> The treatment of the wounded did little to alleviate the horror. Medical services were limited and hampered by chronic shortages in basic materials such as bandages and gauze dressings. Burial for the dead became less a matter for ritual and more a concern for sanitation. Bodies were merely sorted, Africans on one side, Europeans on the other, and stacked in common graves. There could be little comfort in that, and nothing of even symbolic value, with dead compatriots now no more than 'a heap of lifelessness'.<sup>37</sup>

The futility was further punctuated, for those who survived combat, by the suffering. Men were ordered to march long distances, through thick bush, often with little rest and inadequate food. The fast marches outpaced supplies, and *askari* were put on three-quarter, half, and occasionally even further reduced rations. Compounded by frequently poor training, inadequate uniforms, and the demands of combat, hunger became all the more painful. 'At war we really starved,' one Nyasaland *askari* recalled.<sup>38</sup> To the last days of the campaign, men went hungry, and they sang about their suffering:

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Duff, 'Nyasaland and the World War', appendix I/D, in I.W.M. For a fuller treatment of the effects of war-related absenteeism on African life, see Page, 'Malawians in the Great War', 169-82.

<sup>35</sup> Interview 132, Ruben Longwe, 8 Sept. 1973.

<sup>36</sup> Interview 25, Disi Katita, 13 Aug. 1972. Nyasaland K.A.R. units suffered 1,741 deaths, 11.7 per cent of their total strength (14,920), while total casualties were 3,936, 26.4 per cent of strength: Chief Secretary to Colonial Office, 22 Feb. 1922, C.O. 534/49, in P.R.O.

<sup>37</sup> Interviews: 82, Kalokwete Wadi Likwapi, 8 Apr. 1973; 12, Mbaisa Mbaisa, 15 Aug. 1972; 116, Amos Isaac, 14 July 1973.

<sup>38</sup> Interview 133, Alufeyo Banda, 8 Sept. 1973.

When I die, bury me at Zomba,  
 So that my heart should pain.  
 Hunger, hunger is painful.  
 Yes, when I die, bury me at Zomba,  
 So that my heart should pain.  
 Yes, hunger is painful.  
 Hunger is painful, hunger,  
 I feel hungry.  
 Bury me, bury me.  
 Hunger is painful, hunger,  
 I feel hungry.<sup>39</sup>

The men understandably were demoralized and depressed. Their experiences bore no relationship to the military glory and the brotherhood of warriors in the stories of their fathers and grandfathers. There was no possible comparison. 'War itself is bad,' acknowledged one veteran, but beyond that, comparison with the past seemed futile as he tried to recount the nature of his experiences:

Think of lying on the ground where the hot sun is beating directly on your backs; think of yourself buried in a hole with only your head and hands outside, holding a gun. Imagine yourself facing this situation for seven days, no food, no water, yet you don't feel hungry; only death smelling all over the place. Listen to the sound from exploding bombs and machine guns, smoke all over and the vegetation burnt and of course deforested. Look at your relatives getting killed, crying and finally dead. These things we did, experienced, and saw.<sup>40</sup>

Whatever the measure of exaggeration—and there was little—Nyasaland men clearly felt they derived nothing from military service in the East African campaign. Most, aware of the problems in their villages, wanted simply to return home; as a result, desertions were not uncommon. There was also the poignant request of *askari* in 2/1 K.A.R., after months of hard marching and food shortages, recorded simply by their commanding officer in his war diary: 'Petition received from "C" Company to return to Nyasaland.'<sup>41</sup>

Although they only infrequently experienced the horrors of battle, the *tengatenga* shared with the *askari* a sense of the futility of their labours. The burdens which they carried, frequently on their heads, seemed never to end; more loads always awaited the carriers at each destination. They were, as the missionary Robert Hellier Napier defined them, truly *tengatenga*: 'Tenga, in our local *lingua franca*, means "take" or "carry." By saying it twice you imply that after taking you go on carrying, yes, on and

<sup>39</sup> This song was recorded twice and is presented here in a form derived and modified from translations of both versions. Interviews: 11, Maulidi Mwina, 15 Aug. 1972; 106, Kildon Wajiusa, 2 Aug. 1973.

<sup>40</sup> Interview 112, Fololiyani Longwe, 23 Aug. 1973.

<sup>41</sup> 2/1 King's African Rifles war diary, 12 May 1918, in M.A.P.A.R.O.

on and on.<sup>42</sup> Typically, they marched for six, perhaps seven hours a day, carrying loads weighing sixty pounds or more, often over mountain passes or across swamps, places where the few motor vehicles brought to East Africa could not venture. And through it all they received little by way of compensation to indicate the worth of their labours.

There was, unfortunately, little official concern for the carriers and other military labourers. Virtually no medical attention was given to them, either when they were taken into service or while they worked. They were seldom issued with any equipment, and this was usually just one blanket to last their entire tour, which might extend to six months or more. Carriers suffered from shortages of food, too, just as did the *askari*. A missionary recalled seeing *tengatenga* 'picking up the seeds of millet, one by one, that had fallen on the ground' in order to supplement their meagre rations.<sup>43</sup> The food that was issued to them, more often than not, was rotten or otherwise inedible; reports circulated in Nyasaland that maize for the carriers was 'ground up, dirt, husks, and all, and then issued as rations'.<sup>44</sup> They were exposed—almost literally—to the elements; especially hard hit were those whose work took them through the cold mountain passes of south-western Tanzania and north-western Mozambique, struggling to carry loads, and to survive.

Disease was much more likely to strike carriers debilitated by such conditions. In addition to the dysentery brought on by poor and inadequate food, the cold damp of the mountains encouraged pneumonia and other respiratory ailments. Frank Dupuis, as a young carrier conductor, listened at night to the 'very grim' coughing of the *tengatenga* assigned to his caravans, and saw the men grow weaker each day under the effects of disease.<sup>45</sup> Enfeebled men, though, were not free from punishment, and many carriers were beaten by overseers in an attempt to drive them further and faster. Indeed, there was little to commend wartime carrier service; to many it seemed more a method of punishment than a means of employment. Men who served as *tengatenga* and returned remembered most the 'mass suffering and death of the carriers'.<sup>46</sup>

All told, government officials concluded that some 4,440 carriers died, although this must be a conservative estimate; it does not include, for example, deaths among military labourers within Nyasaland.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, this figure represents a death rate of about 2.4 per cent of all Nyasaland military labourers; total *tengatenga* casualties, of course, were much higher.

<sup>42</sup> Robert Hellier Napier, 'The "Tenga-Tenga"', in Alexander Hetherwick, *Robert Hellier Napier in Nyasaland* (London, 1925), 143.

<sup>43</sup> Rev. Canon Thomas Hicks, letter to the author, 4 Feb. 1975.

<sup>44</sup> *Nyasaland Times*, XXI, 7 (14 Feb. 1918), 2.

<sup>45</sup> Conversation with Frank Dupuis, Ruthin, Wales, 15 Sept. 1974.

<sup>46</sup> Interview 109, Pilato Kalinzonkho, 6 Aug. 1973.

<sup>47</sup> These figures were offered to the Legislative Council by the Acting Chief Secretary on 16 July 1919; *Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Nyasaland*, 21st session (July 1919), 4.

And when the deaths of Nyasaland *askari* are included, war-related deaths exceeded 2 per cent of the total adult male population of the protectorate. It was, as Hector Duff later observed, truly 'a bloody tale for a bush campaign.'<sup>48</sup>

The dangers and the mere futility of their labour, which seemed equally obvious to both soldiers and carriers, overshadowed the few tangible rewards they received once the campaign was over. Unlike the victorious warriors of the past, they brought no booty or other rewards when they returned to their homes. Almost all the valuable loot of battle was taken by the European officers who, in some cases, even confiscated soldiers' uniforms and carriers' blankets. The *askari*, of course, had drawn a regular salary, but that was reduced by regular allotments sent to their families, and little remained at the end of the war. What gratuities they might have earned were not paid until several years after the conflict was over. Nearly all *tengatenga* received the most meagre wages, if they were paid at all. Some of them were only given tax receipts for their months of hard labour, and others forced to walk to remote district bomas to receive the pittance they had earned. In reality there was only one thing which Nyasalanders took back to their villages when the war was over. 'The most precious thing is life,' one of them observed; 'this I carried back home.'<sup>49</sup>

The demands upon their lives, however, for both tax and *thangata*, intensified even as the fighting ended. World War I had made these features of colonial rule more a reality than ever before. Nyasaland's Africans gained, for the first time, a collective appreciation of the full power, as well as the vulnerabilities, of their European overlords. They also had a sense of shared suffering, and if nationalism is often born of common complaint, the 'war of *thangata*' provided more than enough to nurture their feelings and to become a focal point for future resentments. Their umbrage was seldom expressed in open bitterness, but transmitted through traditional as well as modern modes which had been profoundly influenced by the war.

The *nyau* societies, particularly, continued as one of the principal expressions of resentment. From 1916 on, *nyau* activities grew rapidly in the central and southern regions, with particular success in drawing Africans away from the Christian missions which for most of them were the most familiar manifestations of European civilization. In sharp contrast to the increasingly pervasive demands and restrictions of colonial rule, the *nyau* societies were subject to few social sanctions, a situation which apparently accounted for much of their growing popularity. Although not openly seditious, the anti-Christian demonstrations of the societies brought considerable missionary pressure for their suppression. At the same time, they acquired much African support for the reassertion of old values. Thus, in the context of the war and its aftermath, the *nyau*

<sup>48</sup> Sir Hector Duff, *African Small Chop* (London, 1930), 175.

<sup>49</sup> Interview 11, Kakalala Phiri, 27 Aug. 1973.

societies represented the most significant traditional expressions of general discontent.<sup>50</sup>

The war also channelled resentments into non-traditional movements; one of the most important of these was Islam. With the returning veterans after the war came a number of Islamic teachers, *shaykhs* and *waalimu*, fresh from religious study in Zanzibar and on the East African coast. Many of them were returning to homes in Nyasaland, hoping to convert their own countrymen. By cleverly emphasizing the non-European, non-Christian sources of their beliefs, these teachers were able to capture much of the alienation generated by the war and attracted a large following. As a result, Islamic gains in Nyasaland were greater during the 1920s than at any period in the previous fifty years.<sup>51</sup>

Another notable movement was that of the 'native associations', organized largely by mission-educated Africans to promote their own advancement. Although they antedated the war, the problems which it created gave them a new impetus. Their petitions to the government included protests over the inadequacies in the rewards for war service, the lack of appropriate provision for the widows of *askari* and *tengatenga*, and the continuation of forced labour.<sup>52</sup> Although their efforts met with little success, the existence of native associations throughout the country not long after 1918 is a significant indication of the growing disenchantment occasioned by the war.

These same feelings emerged in the new, military-style *beni*, *mganda*, and *malipenga* dance societies which appeared in the country just as the war was over. Neither traditional nor long-standing, they had a martial organization with a hierarchy of officers and seemed to exalt wartime experiences in dances usually characterized by military dress and discipline. Their origins, though, go back to the Swahili coast of East Africa in the 1890s, and they came to Nyasaland with men returning from war.<sup>53</sup> Thus they were not merely a recreation of *askari* life. George Shepperson has suggested that they reflect 'the confusion into which the white man's new order plunged Africans and their attempts to pull themselves out of it.'<sup>54</sup> Even more, their stylized mockery of European officialdom and ceremony represented thoughtful, yet relatively quiet, demonstrations of keenly felt dissatisfaction, no less than did the growth of the *nyau*, Islam, and the native associations.

Collectively, all these expressions of resentment, however tentative,

<sup>50</sup> Ian Linden with Jane Linden, *Catholics, Peasants, and Chewa Resistance in Nyasaland 1889-1939* (London, 1974), 125, 131.

<sup>51</sup> See Robert Greenstein, 'The Nyasaland Government's policy toward African Muslims, 1900-25', in Roderick J. Macdonald (ed.), *From Nyasaland to Malawi* (Nairobi, 1975), 165-8.

<sup>52</sup> See J. Van Velsen, 'Some Early Pressure Groups in Malawi', in E. Stokes and R. Brown (eds.), *The Zambesian Past* (Manchester, 1966), 386.

<sup>53</sup> T. O. Ranger, *Dance and Society in Eastern Africa, 1890-1970: The Beni Ngoma* (London, 1975), 1-76, *passim*.

<sup>54</sup> George Shepperson, *Myth and Reality in Malawi* (Evanston, 1966), 20.

gave meaning to the 'war of *thangata*'. Born of extraordinary demands for labour which yielded no tangible benefits, they each attempted to deal with the frustrations that accompanied Nyasaland's involvement in the East African campaign. Drawn into that conflict, Nyasaland Africans shared a collective experience which transcended both their parochial concerns and previous colonial attempts to bring them all within a uniform system of governance. In the narrow sense, the widespread association of the war with the oppressions of European *thangata* offered a basis for common complaint. But in a larger context, *thangata* became, with World War I, a national issue requiring responses which had hitherto been impossible. In this way, World War I was a watershed in Nyasaland's history, as important as the creation of the Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland in 1953, which ultimately destroyed European rule in the protectorate.

#### SUMMARY

During World War I, Africans in Nyasaland were called upon to provide large numbers of soldiers and military labourers for the war effort in eastern Africa. Although a few willingly volunteered, many more objected, and some resisted. In this situation, colonial officials used force to secure the necessary manpower. Africans, therefore, called the conflict 'the war of *thangata*', referring to the growing colonial demands for taxes and for labour rent on European estates. The tasks which the soldiers and carriers were called upon to perform were equally likened to *thangata*, being 'work which was done without real benefit'. So far from receiving rewards, Africans found that inadequate food, clothing, and medical care contributed greatly to the sufferings associated with a military campaign. Between 1914 and 1918 wartime manpower requirements, and war service, gave full meaning to colonial rule throughout the protectorate. The response to these demands and this suffering brought, in the form of both traditional and modern religious and social institutions, the first tentative stirrings of African nationalism in Nyasaland.