

THE COLONIAL POLICE  
IN  
BRITISH- & GERMAN EAST-AFRICA



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IN  
BRITISH- & GERMAN EAST-AFRICA**

A COMPARISON FROM 1885-1960

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## PREFACE

During a research project on the recent history of Kenya and the resulting intensive contacts with the Kenyan police, the author was confronted with many questions about the origins of the Kenya Police Service. During the project, the collection of facts, literature and photographs about the police began, which in 2007 was summarized in a report for the Coastal Province Officer at the time and, on his recommendation, presented to the commissioner of the Kenyan police. Well, after several years and re-exploring sources, it was time to create this expanded version. In a comparison, this shows the different development of the police in the former British colony of Kenya and in German East Africa from the beginning up to the independence of both countries. The aim of this publication is to compare the development of the police force in both colonies and thus fill a gap in the literature on the early history of the EA police force.

East Africa has been exposed to the influence of various seafaring peoples and conquerors for many centuries. Early traders and settlers were Arabs and Persians; later Indians, Portuguese and other Europeans followed. The first attempt at permanent British influence was in late 1823 when the local Mazrui ruler of Mombasa asked Captain Vidal of the British survey ship *HMS Barracouta* for permission to hoist the British flag at Fort Jesus in order to declare a protectorate.<sup>1</sup>

In 1885 a commission of the big European powers met in Berlin to complete the carving up of Africa between them. Britain and France made vast additions to their overseas territories in the late nineteenth century. Belgium and Germany became new colonial powers. The commission laid down, among other things, the creation of the basic structures of a police force, followed by the Anglo-German Agreement of 1886, in which the two parties agreed that their spheres of influence in East Africa should be divided by a straight line. This line was to begin south of Mombasa, then north of Kilimanjaro up to a point on the east bank of Lake Victoria.

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<sup>1</sup> Owen, (1833), p.403

North of the line, Kenya and Uganda went to Britain. The southern part went to Germany together with Ruanda-Urundi in the west. German East Africa emerged from this area.

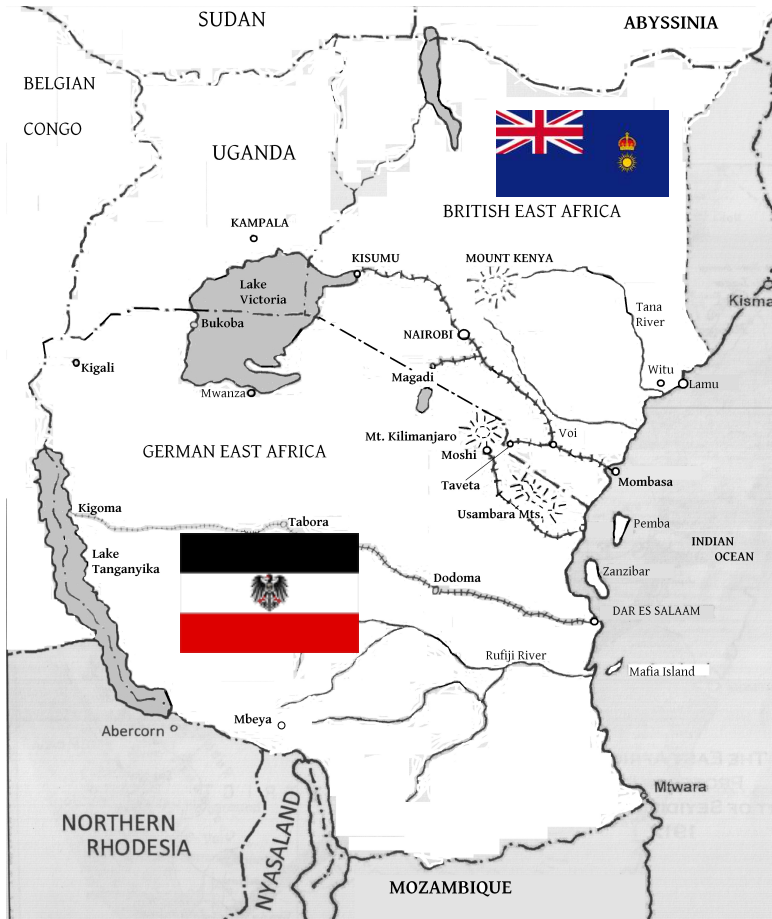


Fig.1: German and British East Africa<sup>2</sup>

2 Farewell (1989) EA Map

The Germans founded the *German East African Society* (DOAG — Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft) in 1887.

The first administrator was Dr Carl Peters. (Fig.2). Germany took the opportunity to reduce the mainland holdings of Sultan Barghash of Zanzibar to a 10-mile-wide stretch of coast in order to keep access to all ports free.

Formal external control was exercised by the colonial powers of Europe, who arbitrarily set borders in the region by assigning what is now Tanzania to Germany and Kenya to the British.



Fig.2: Carl Peters



Fig.3: William Mackinnon

The *Imperial British East Africa Company* (IBEACO) was the counterpart, later in 1895 renamed the *British East Africa Company* (BEAC), which operated in the region as a "tool" for expanding British economic interests without investing in national resources.

Since the founding of the company in 1888, William Mackinnon (Fig.3) was the first administrator. The IBEACO employed the first police officers to protect some shops, warehouses and banks.

As the economy grew, it was soon agreed that a "police headquarters" would be built at Mombasa.

Both companies introduced the rupee as their currency. Since 1890 the German East Africa rupee was divided into 64 pesa and the British rupee into 64 pice. At that time, 15 rupees were worth 20 German Mark or one British pound.



Fig.4: German Rupia, German Pesa, British Rupee, and British Pice  
(from left to right)

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1895, the Protectorate of East Africa was constituted and the functions of the IBEACO were discontinued.



Fig.5 a,b,c: German colonial police uniforms ( German East Africa)

The history of policing in British East Africa began in 1896 when the British Foreign Office ordered the opening of the first police station in the city of Mombasa. During this period, however, the common term was *Askari* - the Arabic and Swahili word means soldier and was used to describe indigenous troops in East Africa and the Middle East who served in the armies of the European colonial powers. The term was also used to describe police, gendarmerie and security guards. During European rule in East Africa, locally recruited *Askari* soldiers were used by the Italian, British, Portuguese, German and Belgian colonial troops.

First, in 1896, the IBEAC established an administration with armed security forces at several fortified stations to protect their trade routes, trading venues, stocks of goods and employees. Later the force consisted of about 150 agents, including Sikhs, Somali, Swahili and some Cormorans in command posts in Vangu, Rabai, Malindi, Lamu and Kismayu.

This was the official birth of the British Colonial Police. In addition, the IBEAC had armed units. To protect its trading and trading activities, the society could rely on the East African Rifles and the Uganda Rifles, two military units that were later merged into an army, the *King's African Rifles*. They played a crucial role in the initial conquest of the various colonial possessions and later served as combat troops and internal security forces. In both World War I and World War II, Askari units served outside the borders of their colonies of origin.

Police units were set up in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu by 1902. These units were soon placed under a single command: the *British East Africa Police*.

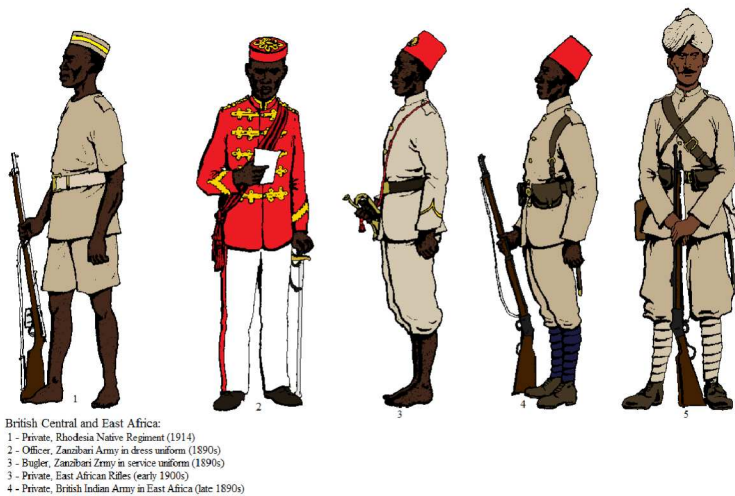


Fig.6: British Colonial uniforms (East Africa)

The lower ranks of the police hierarchy in particular were dissatisfied with the conditions and pay. The first strike by Africans took place in December 1902 in Mombasa when about fifty police constables refused to work. Their strike lasted several days.<sup>3</sup>

Later, in 1920, with the establishment of the Kenya Colony, it was renamed *Kenya Police*.

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3 Durrani, S. (2006), p.29



Fig.7: The first Police headquarters in Mombasa

The contemporary postcard (Fig.7) shows the building complex opposite Fort Jesus, between Mbarak Hinawy Street and to the left of Ndia Kuu Road, as it looked around 1900.

Construction of the police headquarters which also housed the court at the time, began in 1898. There were practical considerations behind this location. As early as 1895, the former Portuguese Fort Jesus was converted into a prison where criminals served their sentences. There was also a special section for mentally disturbed offenders.



Fig. 8: Armed prison guard at Fort Jesus, Mombasa, ca.1918



Name	Rank	Regt.	Dist. No.
BUTLER	Private Guard	PL	7403
George			11572
Start	End	Days	Remarks
15 Nov	16/5/18	1	Ann. U. I. of
Theatre of War Entitled in			
Date of entry theatre			
26-8-14			

Fig.9-11: The 1914-15 East Africa Star Order and Medal Card of Private George Butler, who served as a prison warden in Mombasa at the beginning of the First World War

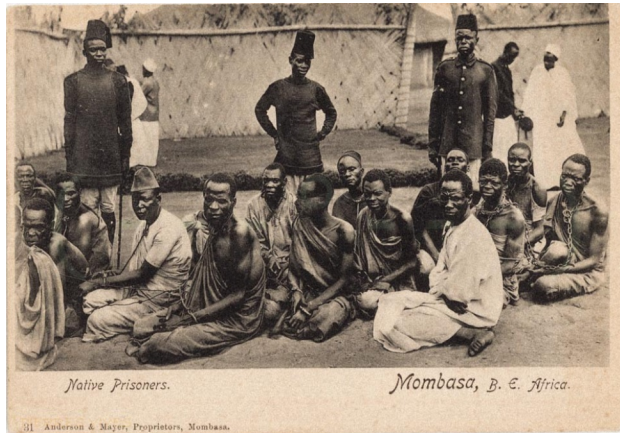


Fig12: Prisoners at Fort Jesus, Mombasa.



Fig 13: Prisoners from Mombasa in chains, ca. 1905, a 'chain gang' was a group of prisoners chained together outside of prison.



Fig.14: Equipment parade in front of the police station, Mombasa, ca. 1902

The photo above shows a group of constables and non-commissioned officers during the equipment parade. Two officers of higher rank observe the proceedings.

The lower ranks were commanded and disciplined very harshly, but not so well paid. They received around half of the salaries of their German counterparts in the *Schutztruppe*.

A few years later the Law Court left the Police headquarters. On December 31<sup>th</sup>, 1902, a new building for the law courts a few metres away was opened by the Commissioner, Sir Charles Eliot.

After the Police head-quarters moved to a new building (now Central Police Station) in 1915, the old building was sold to various private owners.

It last housed the well-known *Ali's Curio Shop* but was abandoned a few years ago due to its constantly deteriorating condition.

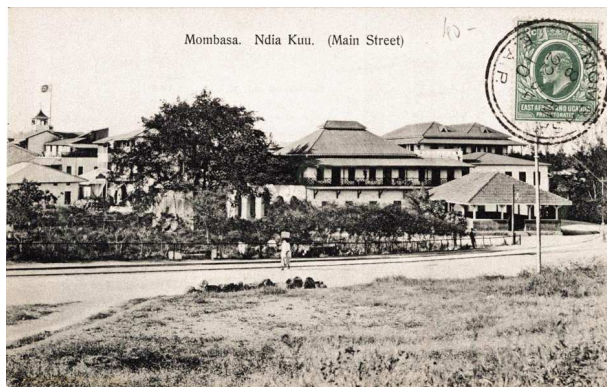


Fig.15: The same complex as Fig.7, seen from Fort Jesus

The pavilion in the foreground was built on the occasion of the "Diamond Jubilee" of Queen Victoria of England, who visited Mombasa in 1898. After that, the pavilion served as a *baraza*, a meeting place for the locals, for many years. The space between the pillars was later closed so the building could be used for commercial purposes. The house on the right was under construction at the time and belonged to the Smith-Mackenzie Company. Unfortunately, the building has been poorly "recon-structed" in recent years and has lost its original style and beauty. Today the building's front and interior are in ruins.

The establishment of a police force in German East Africa was initiated by the order of Kaiser Wilhelm II on February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1889 (Fig.16) and was established as a regular protection force in March 1891.<sup>4</sup>

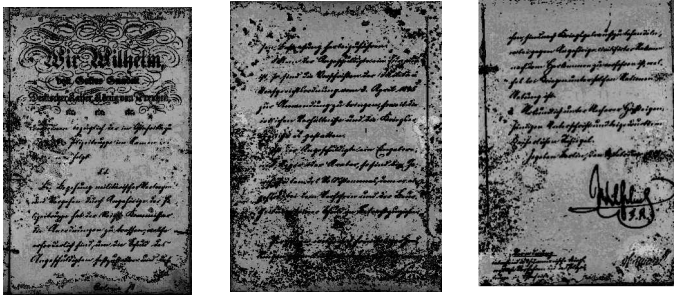


Fig.16: Original sheets of Emperor Wilhelm's decree

The predecessor of the protection force was called *Wissmann-Truppe* (Wissmann troop), named after the commissioner for German East Africa, Hermann Wissmann. A small part of the Wissmann troop, about 45-50 men, consisted of Askari, Swahili soldiers – mostly members of the Zaramo tribes living along on the coast. They were taken over by the German East Africa Company (Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft, DOAG) and were important as translators, guides and scouts. They already had some military training and were considered to be "immediately usable".<sup>5</sup>

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4 Reichsgesetz vom 22. März 1891

5 Michels, S. (2009), p.80

As a result of the law, about 61 officers on duty came from Germany and formed the basis of the protection force.

Most of the Askaris (approx. 600) were recruited by Wissmann from the disbanded Sudanese regiments of the Anglo-Egyptian army. The original Ottoman rank designations were applied to them: *Ombasha* (private), *Schausch* (NCO), *Betschausch* (sergeant major), *Sol* (sergeant) and *Effendi* (officer)<sup>6</sup>.

Three years later, on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1892, the protection force and the police separated for the first time. Some units were selected as police forces assigned directly to the local administration. In 1895 the police were completely separated from the *Schutztruppe* (protection force), which only took on military tasks. The first police force differed from the *Schutztruppe* only in wearing a red sash over the right shoulder. The red sash was an identifying feature of police forces in other German colonies. Later, a white oval patch with the red letter “P” was worn on the left upper arm. The sash was then no longer part of the uniform. The headgear, the tarbush, received a larger imperial eagle made of brass. (Fig.5 a,b,c)

Correspondingly strong departments with one or more NCOs were assigned to the individual administrative districts. A special feature were the so-called *Kanzu Askaris*. Instead of wearing a police uniform, they wore traditional *kanzu* and were

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6 Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon (1920), *Band I*, S. 462 f

not armed. They often played an important role as "secret police" in criminal investigations.<sup>7</sup>

A local police force of 2.200 men was set up based on the example of the protection force and was available to the civil administration. There was a police depot in Dar es Salaam, where supplies of ammunition and equipment for training the troops were stored. The police were led by a police inspector and several inspection officers, as well as a large number of police sergeants.

The native colonial soldiers were loyal but distanced themselves from their German superior officers, who they referred to *Sungura mardardi* (vain rabbit) or *Bwana Dareksao* (Mr dirty pig). A Captain Graf, who was notorious for the 25 lashes that made a classic flogging, was called *Bwana chamse w'eshrini* (Mr.twenty-five) and Lieutenant Wilhelm Schreiner they nicknamed *Bwana mitmene* (Mr thick trees) because he always hid behind the thickest trees in battle.<sup>8</sup>

In German East Africa new prisons were set up for the execution of custodial sentences and remand custody, as in the other colonies of the German Reich. Prisons were established for white residents and natives.

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7 Arning, W. (1942), p. 91

8 Michels, S. (2009), p.177