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Tanga, Battle of

By [Mahon Murphy](#)

The Battle of Tanga was the first major military engagement in East Africa and a significant British set back. It also contributed to the creation of Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's legend.

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Key Figures in the Battle of Tanga

The Battle of Tanga was the first major military engagement in the war in [East Africa](#). It involved the British Indian expeditionary force "B" under Major General [Arthur Edward Aitken \(1861-1924\)](#) attacking Tanga in concert with "C" force which attacked the Germans at Longido in the Kilimanjaro region. It was the decisive first action in [Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck's \(1870-1964\)](#) defence of German East Africa, and the beginning of his legendary military campaign.

Tanga's Strategic Significance to the Germans and the British Defeat

Tanga was strategically important as German East Africa's most important sea port and the connection to the Usambara railway. Aitken's advance on Tanga began on 4 November 1914 after his troops had landed three kilometres south of the town. Outnumbered eight to one, the German forces, composed of European officers and African troops (*askari*), launched a counter attack that ultimately forced the British to retreat to their boats. As well as being a humiliation for the British, their

defeat and hasty retreat left the German troops with an invaluable haul of captured British guns and supplies.

Results of the Battle of Tanga

The battle marked a significant setback for the British and forced the War Office to relieve the Colonial and Indian Offices of responsibility for the East African campaign. This meant that the East African front could no longer be dismissed as a local affair. For the Germans, it cemented von Lettow-Vorbeck's reputation as an effective military commander. Accounts of the battle and the defeat of the British were widely read in Germany after the war.

Mahon Murphy, Trinity College Dublin

Section Editor: [Michelle Moyd](#)

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