

Tanga, Battle of

By [Mahon Murphy](#)

Summary

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 \(1870-1964\)](#) 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.

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Selected Bibliography

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- [Samson, Anne: **World War I in Africa. The forgotten conflict among the European powers**, London; New York, 2013: I. B. Tauris.](#)
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Citation

Mahon Murphy: Tanga, Battle of, in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2015-06-15. DOI: [10.15463/ie1418.10661](https://doi.org/10.15463/ie1418.10661)

External Links

- [Harvey, Kenneth J.: **The Battle of Tanga, German East Africa, 1914**, thesis, Fort Leavenworth 2003 \(Defense Technical Information Center, U.S. Department of Defense\) \(Article\)](#)
- [Lettow-Vorbeck, Paul Emil von: **Meine Erinnerungen aus Ostafrika**, Leipzig 1920 \(Internet Archive\) \(Book\)](#)
- [Young, Francis Brett: **Marching on Tanga: With General Smuts in East Africa**, New York](#)

[1917 \(Internet Archive\) \(Article\)](#)

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Author Keywords

Tanga; East Africa; Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck; Arthur Edward Aitken; Usambara

GND Subject Headings

[Deutsch-Ostafrika ; Weltkrieg \[1914-1918\]](#)

LC Subject Headings

[Tanga, Battle of, Tanga, Tanzania, 1914](#)

Rameau Subject Headings

[Guerre mondiale \(1914-1918\) -- Campagnes et batailles ; Afrique](#)

Key Person(s)

[Aitken, Arthur](#); [Lettow-Vorbeck, Paul von](#)

Key Location(s)

[Longido](#); [Tanga](#)

Title

Tanga, Battle of

Author(s)

[Mahon Murphy](#)

Article Type

Encyclopedic Entry

Classification Group

Events

Articles That Link Here

[Union of South Africa](#); [Colonial Warfare and Occupation \(Africa\)](#); [Schnee, Heinrich](#); [Warfare 1914-1918 \(India\)](#); [South Africa and the German East Africa Campaign \(Union of South Africa\)](#); [Schutztruppe \(East Africa, Southwest Africa, Cameroon\)](#); [Prisoners of War \(India\)](#); [East and Central Africa](#); [Lettow-Vorbeck, Paul von](#); [Askari](#) and [King's African Rifles](#)