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On: 25 August 2015, At: 23:23

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London, SW1P 1WG



The Mariner's Mirror

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmir20>

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Published online: 22 Mar 2013.

To cite this article: John MacKenzie (1984) THE TANGANYIKA NAVAL EXPEDITION OF 1915-16, *The Mariner's Mirror*, 70:4, 397-410, DOI: [10.1080/00253359.1984.10655994](https://doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1984.10655994)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00253359.1984.10655994>

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THE TANGANYIKA NAVAL EXPEDITION OF 1915–16

By John MacKenzie

ON 9 August 1916, the Colonial Office in London received a telegram from its High Commissioner in South Africa announcing that the German gunboat *Görzen* on Lake Tanganyika had been 'sunk in eight fathoms'.¹ This message marked the end of one of the most remarkable naval expeditions of the First World War, which has been described as a 'glorious epic . . . too long forgotten'.² The Germans had in fact sunk the *Görzen* themselves, but they had been forced to do so because their position on the Lake had been rendered untenable by the remarkable operation of an Anglo-Belgian flotilla of vessels that were tiny by *Görzen*'s standards. Larger steamers were even then being built on the Congo lakeshore to match the *Görzen*, but it is fortunate that they were never required to deliver the *coup de grace*, for the *Görzen* was to rise again, re-named *Liemba*, and still sails to this day.

When the campaign in East Africa opened, it was recognized that an essential objective was the command of the three East African lakes, Victoria, Tanganyika, and Nyasa (now Malawi), each of which had a German East African shoreline. Of these Lake Tanganyika was the most important because while it remained in German hands it afforded them the opportunity of moving troops from one end of the Colony to the other along the extensive littoral of the Lake. Lake Tanganyika is the second largest lake in Africa, after Victoria, and the second deepest in the world, after Baikal, lying in the deep gash of the Great Rift Valley. It has a surface area of 13,000 square miles, and is 400 miles in length. Its average breadth is only 40 miles (50 at the widest point). It lies at an altitude of just over 2,500 feet, and depths of well over 3,000 feet have been recorded. Almost all its shoreline is mountainous. Not only was it a vital artery of trade, it was the strategic key to the whole of eastern central Africa.

In April 1915 the Admiralty gave approval for an expedition to place two British gunboats on the Lake, with the consent and co-operation of the Belgian Government.³ The problem was how to get them there. The British shore of Lake Tanganyika in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) was much too far from the nearest railway line; the Belgians had not yet completed their railway network in the Congo, such that the Lobito Bay line to the



Fig. 1 *Mimi* and *Toutou* on trials on the Thames, 1915.

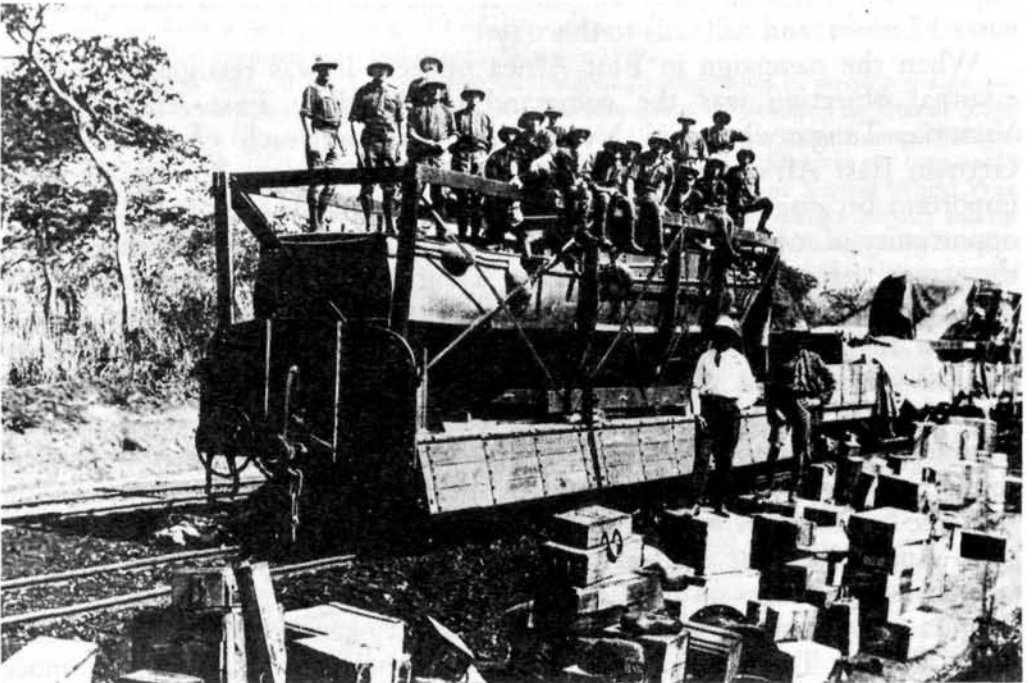


Fig. 2 H.M.S. *Mimi* and members of the expedition at the Fungurume railhead in the Congo, 2700 miles from Cape Town.

Katanga, connecting with the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt, was as yet not linked with the line leading to Lake Tanganyika at Lukuga. There was no alternative to the transportation of the gunboats by rail to the Congo, manhandling them over land, sailing down the Lualaba River, and entraining them again for Lukuga.

The gunboats commandeered for the task had been built for another purpose at Thorneycrofts on the Thames, each of a mere $4\frac{1}{2}$ tons, 40 feet long, powered by twin-screw petrol motors, and each armed with a threepounder Hotchkiss and a .303 Maxim. On trials in the Thames they achieved a speed of 15 knots. What they lacked in size they were to make up for in speed, since it was known that none of the wood and coal-fired vessels of the Lake was capable of more than ten knots. They were given the unlikely names of H.M.S. *Mimi* and H.M.S. *Toutou*, and the expedition to place them on the Lake was put under the command of Lt. Comm. Geoffrey Spicer Simson, assisted by two R.N.V.R. officers. It was to be under the general command of the Commandant General of the Rhodesian forces, Brigadier General Edward Northey, and was to receive its stores and personnel from the Admiralty base at Simonstown.

The gunboats were shipped complete to Cape Town by late June 1915. By 10 July they had been railed, with their attendant armaments and stores, from the Cape through Bechuanaland, Southern Rhodesia and Northern Rhodesia to Elizabethville (now Lubumbashi). At Elizabethville there was a considerable delay while extra stores, the materials for their cradles, and teams of oxen were purchased. The expedition was then railed down the Lobito Bay line to Fungurume, where it arrived in early August. Now the remarkable part of the journey began.

The entire expedition had to travel overland some 140 miles to the next railhead at Sankisia. There was a road of sorts, but it had been designed only for ox wagons, and crossed the Manika Plateau. It rose from 4,200 feet above sea level at Fungurume to over 6,300 feet on the Plateau. Moreover, countless streams and rivers had to be crossed, and the only bridges in existence were footbridges. The cradles bearing *Mimi* and *Toutou* were to be hauled by traction engines which had to perform the operation in short legs returning to tow the trailers of stores. One motor lorry was available. The difficulties were immense, and there were those who proclaimed the feat an impossibility.

In fact, the 140 miles were completed in about six weeks. The traction engines repeatedly broke down; their boilers were fouled by muddy water, all that was available; at one stage water was so scarce that members of the expedition had to hand over their drinking water for use in the boilers. The motor lorry also experienced a serious breakdown. The cradles bearing the gunboats had to be strengthened several times. No less than 200 bridges, ranging from a few feet to 100 feet in length, had to be built. Difficult dips

to fords had to be filled in. On the steepest slopes, the traction engines were aided by oxen, and purchasing on rocks and trees, the cables frequently breaking. A large number of African labourers prepared the road and the bridges.

Sankisia was reached on 28 September 1915; the expedition was railed to Bukama, whence it was sailed down the Lualaba River to Lake Kisale, and on to Kabalo, reached on 22 October, where it was entrained yet again for Lukuga on Lake Tanganyika. Simson reached his goal on 26 October, exactly four months after leaving Cape Town.

He did not like what he found. Although Kalemie, just to the south of Lukuga, had a natural harbour, and was protected by a fort, there were no harbour works, and it was consequently exposed to the severe north-easterly gales experienced on the Lake. The rains, and the storms that accompany them, were at hand. In consequence he declined to launch his vessels until a harbour had been built. Moreover, the railway connection to Kalemie from the main line had not yet been laid. He surveyed the Belgian vessels that were to work with his tiny gunboats, and found them wanting. In one of his earliest reports he predicted that the Belgian *Vengeur* would fall to pieces if her guns were fired.

It is now necessary to describe the forces that were ranged against each other in late 1915. The Belgians had the *Vengeur*, formerly the steamer *Alexandre del Commune*.⁴ She was of 46 tons, was 80 feet in length, had a 16 foot beam, and a draught of 3 ft 10 in. She had a 35 horse power Belgian engine, capable of $7\frac{1}{2}$ knots, and was eventually armed with a 12 pounder forward and a 3 pounder aft. Then there was the *Netta*, a vessel of 8 tons, with a triple screw paraffin motor, capable of no less than 16 knots. She was armed with a 37 mm pompom, a colt machine gun, and torpedo dropping gear. There was another motor boat named the *Chaloupe Canonniere*, powered by a single screw petrol motor, and armed with a $2\frac{1}{4}$ inch gun. These, together with various other smaller vesels as well as the newly arrived *Mimi* and *Toutou*, constituted the entire allied force on the Lake. It was pitifully weak.

Against this allied flotilla, the Germans possessed two remarkable vessels, as well as several small ones. The *Hedwig von Wissmann* had been built by the Schiffswerfte and Maschinenfabrik, formerly Janssen and Schmilinsky of Hamburg, from August 1897 to February 1898, when she was taken over by the Tanganyika Steamship Committee. Plans to build her of aluminium were abandoned, and she was built of iron. She was not riveted but screwed together, and shipped in parts to Chinde, at the mouth of the Zambezi, by the steamer *Bundesrath*. The parts were then transported, ironically by the British African Lakes Corporation, up the rivers Zambezi and Shire. African porters carried her in packs of 50 lbs (apart from some heavier engine parts) to Lake Nyasa, where she was shipped by her sister *Herman von Wissmann*



Fig. 3 *Mimi* and *Toutou* at Kalemie.



Fig. 4 The *Baron Dhanis*, launched by the Belgians in 1916, just too late to take part in the chase of the *Götzen*. She later carried von Lettow Vorbeck and his troops at the end of the war. This postcard was issued to commemorate the Belgian occupation of part of German East Africa.

to Karonga, where again African porters took over, transporting her from Lake Nyasa to Lake Tanganyika. This complicated route was necessitated by the fact that the Germans did not complete their railway line from Dar-es-Salaam to Kigoma on Lake Tanganyika until just before the First World War broke out. She was reassembled at Wissmannhafen, Bismarcksburg (later restored to its African name of Kasanga) and launched on 20 September 1900. Her displacement was 60 tons, her dimensions 20 m (65 feet) long, 4.65 m (15 feet) beam, and 1.25 m (4 feet) draught. She had a compound engine of 60 i.h.p., single screw, with a two drum boiler fired by timber. She was capable of 9 knots, had a crew of 12, and could carry 200 passengers. She had an armament of a 40 mm Krupp gun which was reinforced at the outbreak of the War by three 37 mm guns from the surveying vessel *Möwe* which had been scuttled at Dar-es-Salaam. In 1915 the armament was changed to an ex-British 47 mm gun and a 37 mm gun.

The larger vessel was the splendid *Görzen*. In 1913 the German East African Railway Company ordered two vessels for Lake Tanganyika, the *Görzen* and the *Rechenburg*. The *Rechenburg* was never built, but the *Görzen* was completed in November 1913 at the yard of Joseph L. Meyer of Hamburg. She was dismantled at once, shipped to Dar-es-Salaam, transported up the newly-completed railway line, 781 miles in length, and reassembled at a small dockyard in Kigoma. By the time she was ready for launching in February 1915, the war had of course already started, and she was immediately converted for war use and troop carrying. She was commissioned on 9 June 1915. She was a remarkable vessel, by far the most impressive African lake steamer built to date. She was given the highest class rating by German Lloyd, was 67 m (nearly 220 feet) long, 10 m (32½ feet) broad, 2.3 m (7½ feet) in draught. She had a loading capacity of 480 tons, in addition to 60 tons of coal and 10 tons of water. Her displacement was 1,125 tons, 800 tons gross. Two triple expansion engines of 200 horse power gave the *Görzen* a speed of 9½ to 10 knots. The main machinery had a cylindrical diameter of 257 mm (high pressure), 422 mm (medium pressure), and 673 mm (low pressure). There was a Co2 cooling plant, two generators supplying 110 volts for lighting and ventilation, and two steam winches for the two steel jibs of 10 tons loading capacity. There was accommodation for first (6), second (10), and deck (300) passengers, together with a crew of 60.⁵

The *Görzen* and *Wissmann* were capable of towing barges and dhows filled with stores and troops. The *Görzen* was armed with an 88 mm gun and two 37 mm guns. Later the 88 mm gun was moved from the quarterdeck to the stern, and a 105 mm gun was brought up from the cruiser *Königsberg* trapped in the Rufiji River.

In addition to the *Görzen* and *Wissmann*, the Germans possessed a vessel about which there is very little information. This was the *Kingani*, a tug of

38 tons, 55½ feet long, 12½ feet in beam, and 5 ft 11 in in draught. The engine generated 40 horse power, drove her at 7 knots, but gobbled up vast quantities of fuel. There were also two fast pinnaces, each of 25 to 30 feet, one steam and one motor, which carried mails and despatches along the coast. They never crossed the lake alone.

In November 1915, the Germans seemed to have all the advantages and the freedom of the Lake. It was no wonder that Simson was apprehensive. In early November, the port at Kalemie and the new railway line to the harbour were started. Mines were laid outside the harbour. Very early there were tensions between the British and the Belgians. Simson failed to have the harbour built to his specifications, and accused the Belgians of having more concern for commercial use after the War than naval exigencies during it. So the entrance was placed to the north, exposing it to the fierce north-easterlies, whereas he had wanted it to the south. These tensions were to rumble on right through the campaign. Simson found it difficult to work with the Belgian military, particularly the later commandant of Kalemie, Lt. Col. Moulaert. On 1 January 1916, the entire allied flotilla was placed under Simson's command, but still the jealousies and tensions continued, breaking out into particular acrimony in July and August of 1916. This was not simply a matter of local personality; the British and the Belgians were fully aware of their rival ambitions in a post-War re-partition of Africa, and these jealousies communicated themselves at every level.

Simson refused to risk *Mimi* and *Toutou* until the harbour was completed, and they were not launched until 22 and 23 December respectively. Meanwhile Kalemie had been visited by the *Hedwig von Wissmann* (and was shelled unsuccessfully, much to Simson's disgust, by the Belgian shore batteries), as well as by a number of storms of great intensity, including one that caused considerable damage and lasted for 48 hours from 10 to 12 December. Indeed storms were to continue to inflict more damage than the Germans. It is a mystery why the Germans failed to act during this period. Simson pointed out that the *Görzen's* armament was such that she could lie offshore, out of range, and pound Kalemie out of existence. But the Germans were throughout loath to risk the *Görzen*. Clearly she was seen essentially as an auxiliary to the land campaign. Her capacity to convey troops north to Usumbura and south of Bismarcksburg was too important to risk her in a lake battle. Moreover, the Germans only had a hazy idea of the allied ships and armaments. The German failure to act against Kalemie permitted Simson to take the offensive, and by February 1916 he had reduced the German fleet of larger vessels from three to one.

The first great success came on Boxing Day 1915. After a rest day on Christmas Day, the German vessel *Kingani* was sighted on the morning of the 26th. She was sighted off Cape Popelin steaming south just as the Kalemie men were mustered for divine service. The service was hurriedly

abandoned, as *Kingani* passed Kalemie, closed the shore at Ngubwa and stopped. *Mimi* sailed under Simson's command, *Toutou* under the command of Sub-Lt. Arthur Dudley R.N.V.R. The Belgian *Netta* stood off lest one of the vessels was sunk. *Mimi* and *Toutou* attacked from port and starboard such that *Kingani* could not bring her bow gun to bear. She attempted to escape to Kigoma, but *Mimi* gave chase, firing until she brought *Kingani*'s top hamper down, killing her captain and other officers. The rest of the crew promptly surrendered. She was under the command of Leutnant S. Junnge and had a crew of 17, including the former second officer of the Deutsche Ost-Afrika Linie *Khalif*. She was brought into Kalemie in a sinking condition and sank in the harbour at 2.30 that afternoon. For this success, Simson was promoted Commander from the day of the action, and awarded the D.S.O. Sub-Lt. Dudley was promoted Lieutenant.

By 29 December, *Kingani* was already refloated and repaired. She was given the name of H.M.S. *Fifi*, continuing the tradition of whimsicality, to match *Mimi* and *Toutou*, and was armed with a 12 pounder forward, and a 3 pounder borrowed from the Belgians aft. Simson promptly telegraphed for more personnel to man *Fifi*. She was a notable addition, even although she could not take heavy weather, and had a very small fuel capacity. It was, however, the beginning of the Allied success. The *Kingani* had been endangered because the Germans clearly had not appreciated the speed and capacities of *Mimi* and *Toutou* despite their tiny size, if indeed they knew of their existence at all. From now on the Germans were afraid to expose either of their bigger vessels to the same dangers.

As for poor *Mimi* and *Toutou*, firing their guns had seriously damaged them, opening up many of their plates. They took several days to repair in January, a month which was once again rent by a succession of storms. On 14 January a storm caused *Fifi* to foul *Vengeur*; *Netta* went ashore, and *Fifi* was forced out to sea to save herself. On 30 January, during another storm, *Toutou* was sunk and beached.

An important further step towards the securing of the Lake was taken in February. With *Kingani* now transformed into H.M.S. *Fifi*, and, despite her disadvantages, able to carry her armament more satisfactorily than either *Mimi* or *Toutou*, Simson was ready to take on the *Hedwig von Wissmann*. She was sighted on 6 February and chased, but escaped at sunset. She was seen again on the 9th, but on the 10th she was not so lucky. She was sighted from M'toa at 6 a.m., and immediately, *Mimi*, *Toutou*, *Fifi*, and a Belgian motor boat, *Vedette*, gave chase. The weather was tryingly hot, and the gunners were faced with serious refraction problems. But the greater speed of Simson's flotilla told. *Mimi* caught the *Hedwig von Wissmann* and forced her to yaw to bring her forward gun to bear. *Mimi* darted from one quarter to the other, forcing her to tack repeatedly. The former German vessel, *Fifi*, opened fire at 5,000 yards and scored a hit on the fifth round. Later she

opened with high explosive shells and hit the *Wissmann's* engine room. The Germans' second largest vessel on the Lake sank at 11.15. Of the 14 European crew, under the command of Ober Leutnant Jop Odebrecht, 2 were killed; 3 of the 12 African crew members died.

The capture of the *Kingani* and the sinking of the *Wissmann* resulted in a number of German prisoners falling into Simson's hands. One, Lindolff, an engineer from the Deutsche Ost-Afrika Linie *Leutnant* declined to speak, but two others, Schlosser, the chief engineer of the *Somali* sunk by the British in the Rufiji, and Fritsche, gave Simson remarkable accounts of the German dispositions. Of even greater value was the information supplied by African prisoners, including the plan of the port of Kigoma and its fortifications, the movements of the *Wissmann* and *Götzen* in troop carrying (known to Africans as *Sitima* and *Meri* respectively, following their usual tradition of providing people and vessels with their own often very graphic names), the situation in Tabora, and even the ships lying in Dar-es-Salaam. It is interesting to note in this connection that African pilots were invariably used on the Lake.

Even after the sinking of the *Hedwig von Wissmann* Simson was not confident. It is clear that the Germans were nervous too. The *Götzen* had been seen on 10 February actually during the chase of the *Wissmann*. That she did not come to the aid of her fellow vessel is an indication of the reluctance of the Germans to expose her.⁶ She was seen again on the 14th, and was sighted repeatedly throughout March. When at the beginning of April General Northey was preparing to assume the offensive from Southern Rhodesia, he telegraphed Simson to enquire whether the *Götzen* was in a position to transport troops to the south end of the Lake, and whether Simson could attack and sink her if she did. Simson replied that he could not hope to attack *Götzen*.

Simson has been accused in the two popular accounts of the campaign of 'funking' an attack on the *Götzen*, of being content to rest on his laurels after the capture of the *Kingani* and the sinking of the *Wissmann*.⁷ This is nonsense. In fact, *Mimi* and *Toutou* were in no position to pursue the *Götzen*. He dared not risk them in the open Lake, and their speed on Tanganyika was only 13½ knots rather than the 15 they had managed on the Thames. The *Götzen's* size formed a steady gun platform on the choppy Lake against which he felt he could do nothing without a larger vessel. Moreover, the Germans kept the *Götzen* out of the way, using her in the latter part of the campaign almost entirely at the northern end of the Lake where the weather was particularly bad, and which was too far from Simson's base. He seems to have had an exaggerated idea of the extent of her armament, and was not of course to know that from May von Lettow Vorbeck had ordered her heavy guns to be landed.

It was because of *Götzen's* outstanding size and armament that strenuous

efforts were being made to put larger Belgian and British vessels on the Lake. The Belgians brought up a tug, the *Tanganyika*. Originally built in 1894, she was 112 feet long, 19½ feet beam, and had a draught of 6 feet. She burned wood, and was capable of 9 knots. She was not launched on the Lake until June 1916, and although the Belgians armed her with a 12 pounder, she never saw active service. She was ready just in time for transport work, and was mainly employed in towing barges across to occupied German territory conveying troops, railway locomotives and wagons. In April 1916 the Belgians commenced building the *Baron Dhanis*, a vessel much closer to the scale of the *Götzen*, being 600 tons gross, 180 feet long, 28 feet beam, and with a draught of 5 ft 7 in. She was powered by twin screw Kromhout motors, burning crude oil, providing a speed of 8 knots. She was to have been armed with two 4 inch guns, but as she was not launched until 24 August 1916, the guns were not needed.

Soon after his arrival Simson demanded a larger vessel for the British part of the flotilla. But it was not until March 1916 that he heard that the British consul at Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) possessed a river steamer called the *St. George*. Simson immediately proceeded to Leopoldville, and telegraphed that she was just what he wanted, having plates that were much thicker than those of *Vengeur*. She was of 115 tons, 110 feet in length, and had a beam of 21 feet, and draught of 3 ft 4 in. Her engine generated 230 horse power, and she was capable of 15 knots. Her most notable characteristic was her great range. She was capable of a radius of 1,100 nautical miles at full speed, and 1,500 at half speed. She was purchased by the Admiralty, dismantled, transported to the coast of the Lake by lorry, reassembled, and launched on 20 August, her name changed to H.M.S. *George*.⁸ She, like the *Baron Dhanis* was too late to see action, but the British decided that they required a gunboat on the Lake in any case, so she was armed with a 4 inch mark VII gun forward, and a 23 pounder Hotchkiss aft. She was supplied with torpedo dropping gear.

The Germans were also attempting to augment their fleet in the last months of the campaign. On 8 June, Smuts telegraphed that he had information that the tug *Adjutant* had been transported from Tanga, where she had been sunk in February 1915, to Kigoma for use on the Lake. She was a vessel of 250 tons, and would clearly be a force to be reckoned with. However, on 17 May, Simson had already run into Kigoma harbour in the high-speed *Netta*, and found no sign of shipbuilding, nor any German vessel in port. He fired into the inner harbour, and the Germans returned fire in the wrong direction. It remains a mystery whether the *Adjutant* ever reached the Lake. It may be that the vessel which blew herself up on 28 July (see below) was the *Adjutant* – certainly the Colonial Office and the Admiralty so surmised – but it could have been another German vessel.⁹

While Kalemie was a hive of boat-building activity, with the *Tanganyika*,

the *Baron Dhanis*, and the *George* on the stocks, a new element was introduced to the scene in early April. Four Belgian seaplanes, their crew and stores, arrived at the Lake railhead. Their commanding officer, Commandant de Burger, selected a lagoon at Toa as a suitable base, and for the ensuing few weeks all the vessels were engaged in transporting these planes, their aviators, and their supplies to this base. By May the Belgians were feeling confident enough to act independently of the British. Simson discovered that General Tombeur had ordered Col. Moulaert at Kalemie to withdraw from the joint action. What actually was happening was that a new scramble for the German territories in Africa was underway. Tombeur was preparing to advance round the north end of the Lake; Northey was preparing to advance from the south, while Smuts with his South African forces was advancing from the east. Although the Germans had withdrawn men, armament, and officers from the coast to strengthen the interior, it was increasingly apparent that their time was up. There would be a new African dispensation after the War, if things came out similarly in Europe. Already in Rhodesia and South Africa there were those who talked of the British taking over Belgian territory after the War in view of what was seen as Belgian weakness in the imperial club. It was essential, therefore, from the Belgian point of view, that they should show their strength and seize as much as possible of the German Tanganyikan coast. Both Smuts and the British had their own ambitions for the territory.

Simson faced much more immediate problems than these questions of international politics. The heat and storms were trying in the extreme. Simson frequently suffered from malaria, and eventually his health broke down. The vessels were continually incapacitated by defective fuel and by repeated breakdowns. To make matters worse, as Simson's vessels proceeded round the lakeshore establishing fuel dumps and making reconnaissances, they were frequently fired upon by lakeshore garrisons manned only by African troops on the Allied side who refused to recognize the Belgian or British ensigns.

Nonetheless, the campaign was developing to its climax. By late May the British and Belgians were visiting the other side of the Lake. Simson made reconnaissances to Kituta and Bismarcksburg in the south west, and fired shots into the latter town. By 9 June, Bismarcksburg, the main German port at the south end of the Lake, was taken by the British. British officials were being moved in from Northern Rhodesia to administer the occupied territory, and *Mimi* and *Toutou* transported them and a Rhodesian landing party across the Lake. African chiefs, like the one at Kipange on 30 June, understandably hurriedly changed sides, announcing their disaffection from the Germans and their loyalty to the British. The German effort to raise the Muslims in Holy War in support of the German ally the Sultan of Constantinople failed.

The *Görzen* continued to be elusive to the end. On 9 July, the Belgian aviators took photographs of her, and on the 10th they bombed her. London was informed prematurely that 'Tanganyika was free of the enemy'. Officials minuted, 'This is excellent; Comm. Simson will be at a loose end'. In reality only a rent had been torn in her starboard side, aft. This was not to be an early demonstration of aerial power in a naval engagement. On 29 July *Netta*, crewed entirely by Belgians – Simson having withdrawn British crew members because of the Anglo-Belgian friction – reported that on the previous day she had surprised the *Görzen* offloading troops south of Kigoma and had engaged her. *Görzen* tried to escape south, but was cut off by *Netta* and headed north. Again cut off by *Netta*, she blew herself up. On the 29th, the story, found its way into the War telegrams, and again London thought that the *coup de grace* had been delivered. Indeed, there was some discontent that British personnel had not been involved. On 31 July, the Belgian captain Jadot went across the Lake, could see nothing, but was convinced by the discovery of a dinghy from the *Königsberg* – presumably brought up to the Lake for use with the *Görzen* – that the pride of the German Lake fleet was indeed sunk.

It was several days before the truth was known. *Netta* had seen not the *Görzen*, but the *Adjutant* or some other vessel. The captain of the tug *Tanganyika* had seen the masts of the *Görzen* near the estuary of the Malagarassi river. The British and the Belgians were cheated of the final victory, for the Germans had sunk the *Görzen* themselves, possibly by overloading her with sand, since hundreds of sandbags were seen nearby. The Germans had removed her armament in May for use by the land troops, and had determined to dispose of her in such a way that she could be re-used after the War, so confident were they of eventual victory.

It was at this stage that the mutual recriminations broke out between the British and Belgians again, frustrated as they were of their prize. The British advance from the south via Kala and Kirando was held up, according to Simson, partly by the lack of co-operation of the Belgian vessels, and partly because of the dilatoriness of British officers. After the taking of Ujiji (a few miles from Kigoma, and famous for the meeting of Stanley and Livingstone), Karema was occupied by the Belgians in early August, and could, so Simson reported, have been taken by the British. Anglo-Belgian rivalry was being matched by a British forces rivalry. When the Germans were reported to have withdrawn to Uwiwa, a Colonial Office official minuted despairingly that he could not find Uwiwa on any map. Another minuted more significantly that the Belgians seemed eager to reach Tabora first.

Indeed, the Belgians did reach Tabora first. Their objective was to secure part of the spoils of German East Africa, and establish bargaining counters for ambitions elsewhere in Africa, notably at the Congo mouth. They also had their eyes on indemnities from the Germans. It has been said that

through these months of the campaign, the British were as much concerned with the Belgians as they were with the Germans. British energies in late 1916 and early 1917 were devoted to getting the Belgians out of Tabora, the town which the Germans had intended as their capital.¹⁰ The Belgians did secure Ruanda and Urundi at the end of the War, thereby acquiring the important Lake port of Bujumbura. All this helped to explain the tactics of the Belgians, and the difficulties in the joint operations on the Lake.

By September 1916, Simson's health had been seriously impaired by malaria, and he was described as suffering from 'acute nervous debility'. He was withdrawn, command of the Lake being given to the officer commanding Lake Victoria. The new British base was to be temporarily at Kasanga (Bismarcksburg). *Mimi* and *Toutou* were, like Simson, exhausted, their engines no longer operational.¹¹ The Belgians and the British were to command the Lake with the *Baron Dbanis* and H.M.S. *George* respectively. *Fifi* was given over to the civil authorities.¹² The armament and stores at Kalemie were divided up, the torpedoes returned to Europe. The final prize, the *Görzen*, remained at the bottom of the Lake.

It must have given Simson some satisfaction that the *Görzen* did eventually fly the red ensign. The Belgians controlled Kigoma during the War, and attempted to salvage *Görzen*, but they failed. It was left to the British to raise her in 1923, refit her completely, rename her *Liamba* (the name Livingstone had been given for the Lake) in 1927 and set her to work again. The engines had been so heavily greased by the Germans that they were found to be in good working order. The German railway line became part of East African railways, and the *Liamba* part of its operations. She was overhauled once more in 1945, converted from wood to oil fuel in 1952, and underwent extensive refitting yet again in 1973.¹³ She still sails, an extraordinary link with the strangest naval operation of the First World War.

Notes

1 Telegram, Buxton to Bonar Law, 16 August 1916, Public Record Office, Kew, C.O. 417/577.

2 C. E. Hamshere, 'The Campaign in German East Africa', *History To-day*, Vol. 15, 1965, 249-58.

3 All the expedition reports can be found in the Colonial Office files, Public Record Office, Kew, in the C.O. 417 (High Commissioner, South Africa) series, Nos. 562, 563, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578. There are brief accounts in Sir Henry Newbolt, *History of the Great War, Naval Operations*, Vol. IV, London, Longmans, 1928, 80-85, and Sir Charles Lucas, *The Empire At War*, Vol. IV, Oxford University Press for the Royal Colonial Institute, 1924, 243-247.

4 The *Alexandre del Commune* had been attacked and sunk by the *Hedwig von Wissmann* early in the War. She was raised and reappeared as the *Vengeur*.

5 I am grateful to Herren Andreas Beyer and Thomas Keil for detailed information about the German steamers.

6 'It seemed the *von Görzen* was as windy of us as we were of her'. G. S. Tasker, 'Naval Occa-

sions on Lake Tanganyika in the 1914-18 War', *Northern Rhodesia Journal*, Vol. 3, 1956, 57-68.

7 Peter Shankland, *The Phantom Flotilla*, London, Collins, 1968, and Charles Miller, *Battle for the Bundu*, London, Macdonald and Jane's, 1974. Miller bases his account on Shankland, who relied heavily on the oral evidence of Dr H. M. Hanschell, the doctor of the expedition, who was hostile to Simson. Both of these popular accounts are lurid and frequently inaccurate.

8 H.M.S. *George* was too flat-bottomed to be much use as a gunboat, but she had the distinction of conveying von Lettow Vorbeck and his staff to Kigoma after their surrender at Abercorn.

9 G. W. Hatchell, 'Maritime Records of the 1914-18 War', *Tanganyika Notes and Records*, Jan. 1954, No. 36, 1-21, provides an exciting career for *Adjutant* - she was captured by the British on 14 August 1915, off the coast of Mozambique; she was re-captured by the Germans on 15 February 1916, and reached Dar-es-Salaam on 15 April. She was dismantled, sent to the Lake in pieces for re-assembly, but the Germans blew her up on the stocks. He also introduces another vessel, the *Wami*, a wooden steamer of 50 tons, which escaped from Rufiji to Dar on 15 September 1915, and was sent to Kigoma. She was scuttled by the Germans in the mouth of the Malagarassi River. I can find no other reference to this vessel, but it is clear that the Germans attempted to build up their Lake fleet in 1916, and the British certainly repeatedly referred to mystery vessels arriving at the Lake.

10 W. R. Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies, 1914-19*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1967, 62-68.

11 According to Tasker, 68, one went to Durban for use by the R.N. Volunteer Reserve, and one went to Dar for use in harbour work.

12 According to Hatchell, 18, *Fifi* was used by the Marine Department of the Tanganyika Government on a passenger and cargo service between Kigoma and ports at the south end of the Lake until she became unseaworthy and was scuttled off Kigoma.

13 *Liemba* was put back in service in 1979, re-engined and with her passenger accommodation improved. She now carries 20 first, 35 second, and 350 deck passengers.

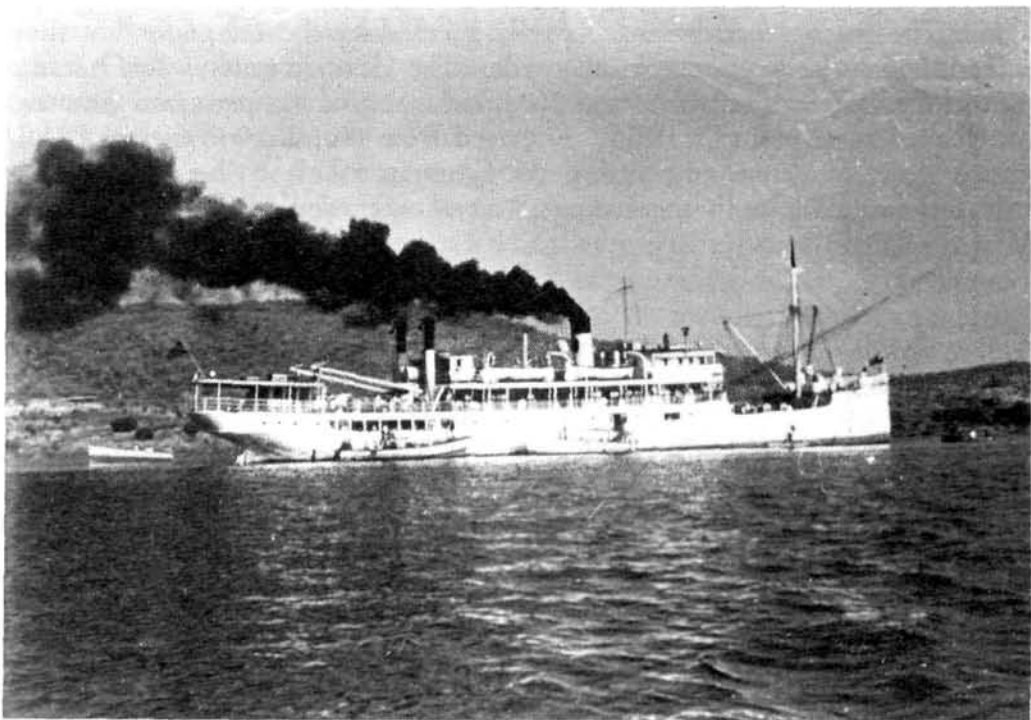


Fig. 5 *Liemba*, formerly *Görzen*, still very much in steam on Lake Tanganyika in 1970.