

**THE TRAVAILS OF BAMENDA GRASSFIELDS HOMEMADE SOLDIERS IN THE  
WORLD WAR I IN CAMEROON: SCENES OF DISAPPOINTMENTS VERSUS  
PASSIONS OF FULFILMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

*In keeping with their war prestige of defeating the enemies on home and away grounds, Britain and France never hesitated to make the Cameroon soils one of their African battle ground when World War I began in Europe following the assassination of Arch Duke France Ferdinand in the Bosnian town of Sarajevo.<sup>1</sup> The Germans from the onset of the war were taken by surprise because they never anticipated a war against the allies on African soils. However, they benefited from the treaties earlier signed with the ethnic or tribal groups to recruit local fighters to sustain their war efforts against the allies. In the Bamenda Grassfields region especially among the Nso, Kom, Bum, Bafut, Widikum and Bali, the Germans recruited a significant number of able men (Homemade) soldiers. These soldiers are considered homemade because their skills or techniques used in the battlefields of the First World War; were essentially local or borne at home. In substance these soldiers were called up to fight in a war which they knew or mastered little especially with regards to the entire essence of the War. Again, they were required to perform War time duties which they were not convinced of and far more, they were expected to fight with advanced weapons which they mastered very little. In this confusion, these local soldiers became a veritable source of embarrassment both to the Germans and the allied forces. In the Background too was the fact that; instructions from the German War lords to these locally recruited soldiers were given in the German language which they knew little or nothing at all. This was accentuated by the fact that; the consent of many of them was never sought by their fons before giving them out as soldiers. To say the least, a greater percentage of these locally recruited troops were societal out-casts, presumed criminals, heady people and aspirants to the thrones whom prior to their recruitment to the German army, most of the fons yearned for an opportunity to get rid of. Interestingly a greater percentage of these soldiers were not killed as prayed and wished by their fons. A majority of them were caught and taken to the internment camp at Fernando-Po where they embraced Christianity. This paper uses the secondary and*

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<sup>1</sup> The murder of this noble and his wife by a Serbian student was the last straw that triggered the First World War. Tension had been mounting between the two camps( triple entente and triple alliance) ostensibly yearning for an episode of grave magnitude to launch attack especially in the Balkan that had pushed European nations against each other following the collapse of the Turkish empire but no situation provided a fragrant declaration of War than this assassination.

*primary sources complimented with oral interviews to examine the plight and fortunes of the homemade soldiers during the World War One. It identifies their scenes of disappointments and passions of fulfilment. It argues that it was a strategic blunder for the Germans to be feeling that on Germans were gifted with the art of advanced War techniques but also not to have anticipated a war some day with the allies of any other power in African soils.*

**Key words:** Grassfields, Homemade soldiers, War, Disappointment, fulfilment

## **Introduction**

Though the comportment of Germany in European politics visually indicated that she wanted war at all cost, she seemed not to have prepared to fight a serious War( meaning a war against great powers)on African soils. The Cameroon case was so glaring because by 1910, the resistances put up by the natives against them had virtually, stopped or destroyed. Safe for the Douala land expropriation problem that still fermented friction and tension, Germany could boast to have made Cameroon a safe haven for her exploitation. Indeed by this time, the Germans and the Cameroon natives' problems had been gradually tilted away from War and hostilities that had animated their relations earlier. Natives had the problem of coping with a new order where the German barons, alien cultures and worldview triumphed while the Germans colons had the problem of getting a means of raising funds for administrative functioning, enhance public work and recruit enough labourers for their plantations in the coast. Going by this, it will be reasonable to posit that by 1914 when the First World War started in Europe, war in Cameroon soils of the First World War magnitude had been far removed from the issues of immediate concerns. This can be substantiated by the fact that; the Germans apart from setting up military and police posts in the interior parts of the country put no scheme in place that drilled the natives even on the basic techniques of war let alone the usage of advanced war weapons. Just a handful of natives were recruited into the Police and the German military force but their training was focused more on tax raids as well as the basic methods of ensuring German sovereignty. The British, the French and to some extent, the Belgian decision to make Cameroon a veritable war theatre was a classic embarrassment to the Germans. Frightened both by the degree of the allied commitment, the fall of Douala and the connivance of the coastal natives, the Germans turned their hearts to

the grassland area (Bamenda) reputed for men of enormous energy and courage. To their credit was the fact that the fons and most people in the region were still very loyal to the Germans.

In this atmosphere they got a good number of men(homemade soldiers) who were hurriedly drilled on the basics of war and not the reasons for engaging in that war. It should also be noted that most of those recruited were done under duress especially by the fons who had been yearning for opportunities to send them away. The plight and fortunes of these men(Bamenda homemade soldiers) during and after the war is the main trust of this paper. Their plight came mostly from the fact that;they were recruited under hard time conditions, through fear and confusion than genuine trust on their prowess of war by the Germans. These men served like porters, leads on bush paths and soldiers in the different episodes of the war and in that course, became subjected to extensive plight and fortunes. From its various archival and oral sources sustained by a wide literature dealing on the first world war, this papers zooms and present the passions of sufferings and fortunes encountered and enjoyed by the soldiers recruited from the grassfields by the Germans to fight with them against the allied forces. It argues that these seemingly rejected lots upon their return became veritable elements of change and transformation; a thing which the traditional folk fought hard to destroy or were at best, not prepare to entertain.

### **The contextual Conception of the German Rule in Cameroon**

The plight and fortunes of the Bamenda homemade soldiers in World War I handled by this paper emerges from a clouded conception of the offerings of the German Rule in Cameroon. These conceptions changed according to circumstances and again from one geographical region to the other.

The coastal people throughout the German colonial period had for close to three decades cultivated deep rooted rancour against the Germans. This was rooted mostly on the fact that the Germans were forcing them to do public work accompanied by the fact that they developed the sordid habit of humiliating them in full public glare as well as, deprived them of some of their natural rights and claims. All of this ran contrary to the wishes they expressed on the Kings

Memorandum of 11<sup>th</sup> July 1884. In the Grassland, the situation was a little different. Through Wars of resistances the different ethnic groups had come to realize that the only way forward was to cooperate with the Germans. This motivated the Fons/chiefs to sign treaties of friendship through which they accepted to collect taxes and assist in coordinating public duties as well help in the recruitment of Labour for the German plantations. In the central region around Yaounde, Charlse Atangana had risen and gained reputation as a very strong German ally. In this profile, he did his best to ensure that everything in his kingdom and even beyond worked according to German wish. In Northern Cameroon, the situation was not far different from the one obtained in the grasslands. A majority of the people were ready to succumb to the German whims and caprices. When the First world started, it was easier for the Germans to tap homemade soldiers mainly from three areas notably Centre, South, North and the North West.

True enough, the 30 years of German consistence presence in the Cameroon (Kamerun Stadt) had much to show in terms of material infrastructure like roads, railway lines, administrative buildings and plantations to name but a limited few. To this should also be added a strict order in the tenure and execution of public duties. Most of this was achieved through brute force which expressed itself in public flogging, fines and punishments of all sorts. No author presents a graphic comparative account of the German presence in Cameroon better than Harry Rudin R. who made a thorough review of the people's sentiments and growing criticism for the German administration in Cameroon and admitted in his concluding remarks that:

The frequently made comments about the Germans were that; they were very strict, at times harsh but always just. That is high praise and greater praise lies in the affection that the natives had for the individual Germans officials. A nation cannot ask for higher tribute to the excellence of her administration than such opinion from the administered people...it should be made clear that if the Germans had not occupied the Cameroons the English or the French Could have done so. In the second place if the European powers had not occupied the territory the presumption is that the Mohamedan Fulbe would have extended the conquest of the Cameroon which they began at the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century...One will have to consider great sums of money spent on schools and hospitals, on roads and other aids of administration. All these points taken together might appear to make the native more content with European imperialism [than Islamic conquest]<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this high praise, the need for resilient, loyal and faithful labourers from the entire grassfields in the German plantations in the coast rather tilted this passions of praise to a different direction. It some sort of rekindled or chisels the wounds of defeat registered on these traditional grassland units during the wars of resistances. They were wrongfully overwhelmed and often driven by the feeling that such stations could besides keeping Cameroonians of all walks of life under check, equally destroy any military build-up or uprising against them. As indicated above, War against the German in the German colonial lexicon, especially from the local folk had been far removed and sent to the abyss of no return. By the stretch of their imagination, Cameroon had been made safe for their plantations to blossom and war in territory was not envisaged in the horizon.

Again, technological advancement in Europe further sustained by the Policy of Appeasement alongside the overriding conviction that the natives were too uninformed, busy, hungry and confused enough to be initiated in modern War fare made the Germans never to think about a situation where they will require natives as war partners. Back home in Germany, things were neither working together for the good of the native folk nor to the Germans on foreign soils. Recruiting and training natives in the techniques of modern warfare could only help to bulge the already compounded and heavy financial responsibilities the Germans were facing in Cameroon. There was growing concern raised that the tropics were not a “garden of Eden” as the Germans traders earlier claimed. Enveloped in this realm, they considered the training of some trusted natives in profound military technics and weaponry build up to be too cosmetic and in that count, a direct waste of resources. The fact that the British and the French made efforts to train armies in the territory under their colonial sphere meant nothing to the Germans who for the most part, naively lend credence on the fact that the natives were not suited for modern warfare. It must be stressed that this naivety on the part of the Germans had little material backing because during most of the wars they encountered with/against the different ethnic groups, the casualties on the German part always rose far more than earlier imagined. Infact, to say the least, throughout the German colonial reign in Cameroon little effort was made to recruit Cameroonian to play key roles in Germans military regiments and even when this was made, steps were taken to ensure that that the natives remained as much as possible within the limits of

rank and File. When the British and French decided to export the Great War of 1914-18 to Cameroon, the Germans in a hurried response decided to woo, recruit and use the natives in their colonial army. This was globally seen as a major departure from a long time honoured and upheld traditions. Such a departure that was provoked by the emergencies of the time and not from genuine conviction had its own kind of repercussion on the way the home made soldiers were conscripted into the army as well as their conduct during and after the War.

### **Colonial versus Homemade Pre-War Antecedents**

The political, economic and socio-cultural climate alongside the events that occurred in Cameroon prior to the First world War with the native folk and the Germans on one hand and the British and French in Africa on the other hand needs to be placed in their proper time and context perspective in order to understand the rudiments of the passions that animated the War drama.

To begin with, the decision made by the allied forces to fight the Germans both on home and away grounds especially in Cameroon by the stretch of this paper, appears to be a whole episode of shock and bewilderment to the Germans. This can be read from the fact that in their colonial assignment here, they made little or no effort to recruit and whole heartedly drilled the natives in the technics of modern War fare. To this can be added the fact that the during the reign of Jesko Von Puttkammer, natives were sufficiently provoked and humiliated by the Germans through flogging, forced-labour, taxes and other social ills so much that, any power in War against the German in Cameroon could harvest the natives support with little stress or wooing. This was made so real by the fact that the Germans infatuation of the masters race theory which was variously upheld as a people of a special higher breed. This conviction gave the Germans the guts to maltreat the Cameroon natives with absconding impunity. In all, they saw the natives through the spectacle of any naïve Whiteman. The natives of all grades were seen by the Germans to be limited in time and space in that handicap could only be capable of providing the manpower desperately needed in the Plantations along the coast. Again, from 1887 when the German administration was effectively installed up 1910, Cameroonians in the German colonial mind were only worthy of serving as ready porters for goods bought by the Germans

traders from the interior as well as in the performance of public duties; a task that was performed in the most part under duress. Out of this brackets could also be found the chiefs who were given some auxiliary rules of administration and limited justice. This conviction further buttressed by the kind of hard peace that reigned between them and the natives folk nurtured in them a mistaken feeling that they were in full control of every aspect of life in Cameroon. Encouraged by that comfort, the Germans took upon themselves the latitude to ride or use the people as they deemed worthy. This reasoning continued to convince them that relations between them and the natives hung on a delicate balance where any German administrator stood in a better position to issue command. This thinking reduced the natives to the rubbles of receiving and executing instructions without need for interpretation. They fought and succeeded in the main to push through and forced this thinking to work but the First World War provided the lone opportunity for them to negotiate natives support.

For reasons far distant from professional war fare, the Germans during the reign of Jesko Von Putkammer and Theodore Zeitz recruited some natives into the German police; Polizeistruppe and the army schutztruppe. Unlike the British who had taken significant steps to drill the African recruited in their colonial army on foreign soils on organized warfare, the Germans were interested in drilling those recruited into their forces on the technics of catching those who were evading taxes, refusing to carry out public responsibilities or were identified to be posing as threats to their colonial wishes in Cameroon. From their experiences during the various wars of resistances they were convinced that these natives were experts of traditional war fare and that no amount of training could remove them from their stagnant traditional method that was replete with the firm belief on magic, ambush, poisoning as well as the lavish usage of the “hit and run tactics”. In the best of their judgment, organized war fare was a cosmetic affair better understood and managed by people both grounded and cultured in the art of advanced technology and intelligence and few Cameroonians if any of these informed individuals, were found among the native folk. At best, their education scheme had a curriculum which placed a high premium on practical subjects that reflected the needs of the time like Agriculture, German Language, Hygiene and Arithmetic and not organized warfare that was not envisaged to be looming in the horizons. In a way, they bestowed a lot of confidence in the transmission center they built in

Douala. Since Douala was the main gate into Cameroon, they thought that this transmission center alone was enough to nib any external aggression on them at its bud. In this spirit, they failed to commit themselves in any programme that could entail a broad ranged training of the natives in any war fare. With this they continued to be convinced that it was easier cheaper and in keeping with the German genre of prestige to bring in additional soldiers from Germany to engage in any uprising in Cameroon than condescending to the levels of training the natives folk in ventures which by their colonial judgment, went far above and out of their limits of reasoning and grasp. Buried in this conviction, they could not see the help of the natives necessary as far as war was concern.

As indicated, the situation was far different in colonies under the colonial grip of Britain and France. In Gold Coast (present day Ghana) and Kenya for Britain as well as Senegal and Ivory Coast for France, significant steps were taken to recruit Africans in their numbers to be trained in the essentials of modern Warfare and the operation of basic war weaponry. Indeed, the military personnel from these colonial powers undermined the fact that the Africans were natives bounded by moribund mindsets in that account, ill placed to master lessons of modern Warfare. In this respect they failed to give them any significant trainings and this paid them in their coins or decidedly poorly during the First World War campaign in Cameroon. The memories of the German intrigues in Cameroon accompanied with the deteriorating relations with natives gathered, vim and paced against the Germans.

On the part of the native folk especially from the Grass fields, the threshold of our homemade soldiers the socio-political and economic climate was fused up by fear, rancour and confusion which generally expressed itself in voluntary and involuntary collaboration with the Germans.<sup>23</sup>With regards to war, the need to expand beyond the confines of traditional boundaries, ward off or engulf loosely settled ethnic entities had led to the growth of states like Nso,Kom Bafut, Bali, Bum and Mankon.<sup>4</sup> Prior to the German arrival and their eventual distortion of the natural established order, these people had their own technics of War.<sup>5</sup> Intertribal/ethnic wars in this area were fought with Bows and Arrows alongside Rifles; a skill which was certainly gained from the Chamber War fares and the Islamic Jihads that had a



significant influence in this region. Locally, Dane guns, spears and machetes were produced from the black smiting industries that had grown to majestic repute in the fabrication of weapons and tools in the Grassfields throughout a greater part of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sustained by the overriding conviction on charm, magic<sup>6</sup> and ancestral support better justified in the realm of African traditional religion, the people of the grass fields under the auspices of their fons formed military battalions. These battalions were usually constituted by people sorted to be of distinguished bravery and tact either through hunting and mastery of traditional art. This traditional prowess going by the judgment of the Germans had little to offer because in spite of the resistance put up by the local folk, defeat was the consequent result. It was in this atmosphere that the Germans launched a broad-based campaign to recruit soldiers to help them against the British and French during the First World War in Cameroon.

### **Grassfields Pre-war Situation and the Context of Contrasting Passions**

The period leading to the First World War in Cameroon and most decidedly, 1913-1914, was pregnant with mixed passions. There were passions emanating from the fear of the unknown, others from anxiety that in the changing context of German administration they were brought into the decision making bodies and others globally emerging from natives that the constant raids for labourers and porters was making both their present and future uncertain. As indicated earlier, by 1914 either the Germans or the natives were not prepared for war. Memories of the German defeat were still fresh in the minds of the grassfields native folk and news about the number of deaths registered in the German plantations continued to keep them in permanent fear. Their fears were again accentuated when in 1903; the German military station was transferred from Bali to Bamenda.<sup>7</sup> With the Germans in constant full glare, accompanied by some slight adjustment on their policies to improve upon the welfare of the natives and above all, a skewed official show of respecting the chiefs, the people in this area were almost entirely caught in a trance. The chiefs from all walks of life decided to provide labour, collect taxes and provide intelligence information to the Germans in pious hope that they (Germans) in return, were to allow them in peace.

By so doing, the chiefs fears and hatred for Germans were shifted aside leaving the natives who were victims and crux of all contentions between the Germans on one hand and the Grassfields' chiefs on the other, to negotiate their survival and future in this context, in a broad wild. Pointedly, it was the boisterous nature of the grassfields working force that advertised and elevated the status of this area to the Germans otherwise, there was little of natural offering in this part of the country to show compared to the coast that was rich in terms of soils and natural resources.<sup>8</sup> Labourers and porters from this region were a veritable asset to the survival of the German trade and plantation agriculture though the way most of them were recruited and transported to the coast constituted a scene of bewilderment. When the war started, the natives in the grass fields had mixed feelings emerging from a number of perplexed circumstances and events all of them directly linked or induced by the Germans. Firstly, through brute force the Germans had killed a number of their kinsmen during the war of resistances and forced their fons to become surrogates in their kind of administration.<sup>9</sup> This most of the time left the natives in a volatile situation because they were left as the items of bargain between the chiefs and the German in the course of healing their wounded relations. Secondly, their (German) administration had helped to destroy the confidence most natives had in their chiefs and the military techniques used in defending their kingdoms. Thirdly, many of them had been rendered homeless and left at the mercy of nature during the war following the burning down of their houses. The pain in this laid not in the fact that it became difficult to rebuild the houses but that; they were for the time being removed from the comfort of their ancestral sites upon which so many passions were attached. To this should be added the fact that a few of them had been recruited to perform "Rank and File"<sup>10</sup> rules in the German Polizietruppe and Schutztruppe<sup>11</sup> created in 1891 and 1895 respectively. Though they were kept in constant check through internal controls, these men held themselves to be out of the ordinary esteem. They were no longer answerable to the fon/chiefs as it was in the past but now to the new force and administration which were out to protect their interest. In this thinking these somewhat "cosmetic" natives were ready to serve the Germans in whatever assignment that could come their way.

Interestingly, the arm diplomacy adopted by Europeans which was aimed at keeping the gun from the natives as far distant as possible, had been variously violated in the grassfield by the

German traders.<sup>12</sup> Through this violation a few natives and chiefs in exchange for carriers, labourers and Ivory acquired guns and were definitely anxious to test the effectiveness though it still remain doubtful how such guns were to be use by people not drilled in the art. The War provided the surprising opportunity where all the different passions were encountered. Seen from any angle passions for and against the German and the situation at hand in the Bamenda grassfields had intrinsic elements of contrast. This ultimately set the scenes that animated the recruitment and conduct of the homemade soldiers during the War.

### **The Recruitment of Homemade Soldiers and the Encounter of Passions**

When the First World War began, the allied powers though resolved to fight the central forces on home and away grounds never really had a strategy to fight the Germans in Cameroon. This lack of strategy worked to the advantage of the Germans who were easily defeated the first segment of forces that advanced against them in northern Cameroon.<sup>13</sup> This preliminary victory by the Germans against the English and French taught the allied forces fresh lessons. The first was that concerted action was necessary and second that, that they needed to change their directions of attacking the Germans in Cameroon. It was for this reason that they decided to form the West African Expeditionary Front that was led throughout the war by British born Charles Dobell.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of September barely a month of the war in Europe, this allied force already stationed in Douala gave an ultimatum to the German governor Karl Ebermaier to unconditionally surrender the town, people and administration of the Douala town to them. This was a request which gravely ran counter to the German prowess and military grandeur. The response to such a demanding request was obvious; blatant rejection and some meagre attempt to prepare for war. With the allied forces not ready to bulge and the Germans though enveloped with mixed passion not ready to bulge, War around Douala became real. Within a few days the powerful transmission center which constituted a veritable fortress for the Germans in war times not only in Cameroon but for the entire West African region, changed hands. Not only this station but all the German property and people in Douala alongside their plantations in the Coast soon failed under the control of the Allied forces. The defeat of the Germans in Douala and the seizure of this main gateway to Europe where additional supplies for the war ventures were to be made raised the

Morales (passions) of the allied forced and damaged the ambitions of the Germans throughout the War. Though this somehow taught the Germans a lesson that it was a mark of naivety in military strategic and intelligence planning to keep your eggs in one basket (meaning; devoting your attention to a single direction), such lessons were not necessary taking the urgencies of the time into context. It was indeed, a fatal misconception for the Germans to have built their hope in a single station even if war was not envisaged or a future possibility.

In the slopes of mount Cameroon and Victoria that had earlier fallen for the Allied forces, Colonel Zimmerman who controlled the German forced quickly retreated into the interior with his troops in hope of building a better riposte. With a possibility of additional soldiers and weapons from home far removed, the Germans were left with no option than to recruit to natives to use them as soldiers. This was the context under which the recruitment of homemade soldiers became necessary. The recruitment of African to fight in European campaigns was a not a new thing in the History of War.<sup>14</sup> It was however new for the Germans who never anticipated such an unprecedented action even in a worst case scenario. It was an action which ran counter both to their passions of war and pattern of prestige. German traditional practice was not necessary in this case because the need to continue the war in the interior was growing continuously acute.

Faced with this rising needs the Germans readily turned once again to the Bamenda grasslands renowned for people with enormous energy. The suitability of men that could serve as soldiers and porters in the war was indeed an open secret and any procrastination could have put the Germans in grave danger. By 1917, just a year after the war campaign in Cameroon, captain L.W G Malcolm buttressed the aptness of men from this region by emphasizing that;

In physical appearance the men are well built and in many cases are of excellent physique. It is an extraordinary thing that whenever men have been recruited for Nigeria they always turn out to give the first shots. This has been marked over and over...<sup>15</sup>

Physique and appearance were good things but not the necessary condition for a war of that magnitude but in any case the grassfields remained as the reservoir through which men of all calibre necessary for the continuation of the war were to be tapped. Working in the German

favour in the grasslands was the fact that there were a number of undesirable elements (people) who were odds with fons for various genuine and unfounded reasons. Again, they were other who had already been employed in the German army and the police who were already immune to the matters of War not leaving out those who still mastered traditional warfare and were prepared at any given opportunity to engage in full battles. To this should be added a legion of others who through trade had acquired guns from the German traders which could be readily used against the allied forces in Germany favour as well as the fact that those to be recruited were people who mastered the Cameroon terrain.

Critically speaking, all these favour in times of a veritable modern war summed up to nothing of substance because such ventures required the expertise of well-trained soldiers who mastered the use of modern war weaponry. On ordinary circumstances, joining the military is an issue of a vocation that require a genuine decision to serve ones country. It suffice to note here that the strength of any soldiers in war depended not only on their type of ammunition and training but largely on the moral of the soldiers in question. The moral of any being is like a boaster which for his/her passion and conduct thereby being an important ingredient for a soldiers transcript in a War.<sup>16</sup>

The moral of soldiers in any battle largely depended on this principle. The German military or soldiers that served them in Cameroon were well trained, equipped and led but had the misfortune in that among them were other forces whose performance in the war depended on the trend of circumstances. This situation only gained greater appealing heights when the natives were recruited and sent to the War front.

### **The Passions of the Soldier Recruited**

As early indicated, when Douala a much honoured German fortress collapsed like a mud house and was switched to the allied camp by September 1914, the remaining German forces were given an exceeding difficult task to handle. Zimmerman retreated into the interior and not because he found that as the safest zone but because it had no other choice. Deprived of the possibility of getting additional troops and weapons from Germany the single option left was to

recruit soldiers from the grassfields who were essentially homemade. The description fits them best because they had skills mostly of traditional warfare and not a modern war like the one the first World was promising to be. Secondly, this appellation fits them because most of them were never trained and had never really been part of a regular army. To this should be added the fact that a greater number of them were given out by their fons/chiefs not really an intention to provide the desperately needed troops but rather upon thinking that they will be killed. It should be recalled here that by 1914 when the War started the fons of the grassfields in the course of satisfying the German growing and consistent request for labourers and porters as well as the unprecedented tax raids instinctively won wide spread unpopularity among their native folk. The case was particularly true of Bali Nyonya, Bafut, Kom and Nso where a number of people looked for various means to undermine native rule which pointedly glorified the righteousness of the Fons.

Though the Germans were generally seen to be rude and obtrusive, they never allowed the fons to continue to practice capital punishment as it was done in the pre-colonial period. The German request for soldier's en masse gave the fons the much awaited opportunity to discard the undesirable people in their different traditional fiefs. These were first band of people that were readily given to the Germans.

It was in this atmosphere that about 150,000 soldiers (homemade) were recruited to join the German war campaign against the allied forces in Cameroon. In this number, a whopping number of about 120,000 of them were from the Grassfields especially from Bali, Kom, Wibus, Nso and Bafut.<sup>17</sup> The problems with this kind of forcefully enrolled people into the army were in two folds. Firstly, they were not trained and psychologically prepared to engage in a war not even to talk of the First World War whose essence was far remote from their understanding. Secondly, the least they knew about the Germans was that; they were people whose moral had a rich dose of tyranny. Just these two problems speak volumes for the passions and conduct of these soldiers in the war camp. Most of them became a veritable source of embarrassment during the war not only because they were unable to fight but also because they were ready to change camps at any time that the opportunity presented itself. This already bad situation was

accentuated by the fact that; as hard time friends the Germans even in their military camps repeatedly failed to treat them fairly and more importantly as new recruits whose moral and courage needed to gradually build.

In this twisted passions the homemade soldiers lacked not only the required skills but a motivation of a veritable sort to fight in the War. They however served the German as porters and led them through some of the paths that could otherwise be a real problem<sup>18</sup>. It should be underscored here that the war progressed with the allied forces consistent in their victories over the Germans and the native lots that found it very safe to give up to be taken as war captives. The need for additionally troops was continuously growing more than the ability of most grass field's fons/leaders to provide. This unwillingness provided another opportunity to the Germans to recruit people of doubtful morality and intent in the Wars into their camp. Anywhere like Binka of Nkambe land where the fon openly displayed his unwillingness to further provide troops, the Germans raided their palaces and took away notables and other subjects that were a source of strength to the fons' royalty. This practice continued throughout the grassfields with very disturbing outcomes. Once in the battle front, the Germans barely managed to command these forcefully recruited soldiers and the end was obvious; a true embodiment of mixed passions.

### **The Crux of War Passions**

Though it is plausible to say that the grassfields soldiers played a role either as carriers or frontline soldiers that helped to sustain the German resistance against the allied forces, it should be noted that the world war was an episode of adventure to most of them who survived. It was challenging having to fight in war whose outcome had little to do with your daily survival and philosophy of life and at the same time fulfilling to leave and fight in the same camp with whites who had all long been seen as Masters. To the fons, it was good to have seen an opportunity where possible enemies could be liquidated from their traditional fiefs but equally disturbing to think that the Germans could soon be defeated and replaced by another alien administration whose philosophy of governance especially on the treatment of the natives was never known. On the part of the Germans, their frustration was visible on a number of fronts. As a hard time choice and even without lag time necessary for any military operation they decided

to recruit people they had not been trained, nurtured or mentored on the ideals of War to help them in such an exacting task. Again, they were fast running out of both soldiers and weapons and the fons dubious stance<sup>19</sup> in such circumstances only helped to frustrate them further. It was these mixed passions that finally led Colonel Zimmerman to flee with a contingent of homemade soldiers to Spanish Guinea (Fernan Do Po).

### **From Homemade soldiers to Fernando-Po made Missionaries**

Indeed, a good number of homemade soldiers died in the course of the First World War in Cameroon. Out of about 120,000 that we earlier identified to have come from the grassfields, most died in open battle against the allied force especially in Nsanakang(present day Mamfe) where the battle was fiercest, many more died in the course of transporting war weapons to the different grounds and a lot more simply went missing either by crossing camp or escaping to Nigeria. This way, it is difficult to say for sure how many people were killed in the war from the grassfield but it suffice to know that still a greater number surprisingly returned. The Life of the soldiers in the military camp in fernan-Do- Po exposed the captive grassfield soldiers (Ex-Soldier) to a battery of new things. Firstly, they found themselves no longer under the yoke of war and in the forest and grassland pastures negotiating life between death and survival. Secondly, although under strict control they espoused alien cultures and for the period of close to four years in the same camps with white men developed changed mindsets. Thirdly<sup>20</sup> and most importantly, many of them became Christians. Christianity buttressed so many things that did not only emphasize on the supreme nature of God and the necessity of worshiping him through His Son Jesus Christ but the promises of Heaven and an assuring life after death made these war captives exceedingly happy. The list of those who became Christians and engaged in full battle to changed their societies upon their return can never be exhaustive in a single research but included Michael Timneng of Kom.Mamadou of Wum Taiyo head boy, Wakeim Sama of Bali Nyoungha and many others. It was these Ex-soldiers who upon their return to the grassfields in 1919 brought multi-dimension changes. They took bold steps to implant Christianity and became a veritable headache to the fons that had wished them dead during the war drama.



## **Conclusion**

The passions of the soldiers that were recruited to fight with the Germans during the Great War of 1914-16/18 are indeed interesting and multi-coloured. Indeed, the context under or within which they were recruited, their comportment both at the battle front and at the internment camps constitute a drama of mixed passions of disappointments and fulfilment. When they were been ferried away from home through negotiation or force they were disappointed. This disappointment turned into fear in the War fronts or in the military camps where they were called to perform assignments which ran contrary to their pattern of prestige and traditional philosophy. Interestingly, this fear and confusion rather metamorphosed into fulfilment when they were exposed to some truths about Christianity. This has been the crux of this paper. It has examined the passions of these soldiers along with general developments that animated the scences of the First World War both in Cameroon and the world at large. While positing that the mix passions constituted an important element in understanding continuity in change, this paper from its evidences insist that but for German strategic blunders and the misguided conviction that Africans are and can only be experts in traditional warfare, ,the entire transcript of the Germans performance during the First World in Cameroon could have been different. It offers that the neglects of local sentiments and geostrategic realities can and shall always be a tragic miscalculation in Geopolitics and military planning.

## **Notes**

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<sup>1</sup>Harry Rudin (1968) *Germans in Cameroon 1884-1914: A case Study in Modern Imperialism* ,New York: Green wood Press Publishers,pp.419-20.

<sup>2</sup>A proper reading of the Whitemans' regard to anything African can be wholly understood if a thorough study is made of the "Hamitic Hypothesis" .Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* ,Basile Davidson In *The Lost Cities of Africa and The Black mans' Burden* have dueled on this bias regard extensively.

<sup>3</sup> Details about this kinds of mixed passions are found in the different Assessment Reports carried out on the Grass fields in the early 1920 by G .V Evans and Haws worth.

<sup>4</sup> See Emmanuel Ngam Chia and Michael Aletum Tabuwe(1996) "The Traditional Institutions of Government in the Grassfield", in *African journals of History vol. II*.p.15. The intrinsic qualities of Grassfield kingdoms that grew to eminence through war and diplomacy of wooing has also been well detailed by P.N. Nkwi (1976) *Traditional Government and Social Change: A study of Traditional Institutions Among the Koms of the Cameroon Grass fields*, Fribourg: pp.44-5. Also see PN Nkwi and JP warnier(1982)*Elements of a History of the Western Grassfields*, Yaounde: SOPECAM

<sup>5</sup> Most traditional states and kingdoms in the grassfields had form military battalion who had wewre recruited and train for traditional war fare. There were variously known as Njong in Kom, Majong, in Bali. George Njung in "Soldiers of their own: Some coastal and Bamenda Grassland in the great War in Cameroon" a paper presented on the occasion of the celebration of the centenary of the First World War in Portugal describes these soldiers more aptly as "Soldiers of their own"

<sup>6</sup> Mark Bolak Funteh argues that charm and magic were and have always remained a sustaining ingredient of war in African societies. He uses he grassfields situation to argue these beliefs were enough to boast the morals of the soldiers during their war of resistances with the Germans.

<sup>7</sup> The first and of course the most influential of all German station in the grassland was in Bali in 1891 shortly after the Gareaga Zintgraff blood treaty. By 1903 relations between the Germans and the Bali especially following the death of Garega I was already cooling off. Again, the Germans saw the need to get a more strategic position where intelligence information, tax collection reports and other administrative information could reached them with little difficulties.

<sup>8</sup> If the coast especially the slopes of mount Cameroon had fertile soils and flats and extensive parcels of land suitable for agriculture such treasures were hardly visible in the grassfields. German exploration inland gave them the certainty about this but their decision move and extend their administration here was done partly, to respect the Berlin Hinterland theory, secondly to usurp the middlemen trade advantages and most importantly to use the area as a reservoir for labourers and carriers of all sorts. To have an excellent idea on how this was obtained see E.W Ardener (1965) *Historical Notes on the Scheduled Monuments of West Cameroon*, Buea : Ministry of education and social welfare and Cameroon antiquity Commission. The idea runs through the whole text.

<sup>9</sup> Confidence Chia Ngam (2013) in his Ph.D thesis " Kom Leadership in its tregional sub-setting Ca. 1865-2005: A Study in Power Diplomacy within a Traditional State of the Cameroon Grasslands" calls this switch of power and decision of the chiefs to play alien rules, cosmetic administration. He uses the Kom case to argue that natives especially those within the brackets of the working age were exposed to difficulties of a disturbing sort. See Chapter 3.

<sup>10</sup> "Rank and file" here comes to buttress the fact that natives were judged and sentenced by the Germans as ill-suited fellows to be given grandiose titles and ranks in their force. They were to remain as far as possible in the rear regardless of their strength and intuition. To see how the German forces were organized in Cameroon read file no cb/1916/11, Annual reports for the Bamenda division 1916-17. NAB.

<sup>11</sup> These were the German police force and the army. The police was created for civil matters while the army was only created when it was realized the police force made of Dahomians was unable to check hostilities streaming

from the natives on several fronts. They differed significantly in training moral and conduct. at any level, the Germans made sure that the natives though recruited were fully drilled in higher skills of using the gun. For a full grasp of this see; Rudins, pp. 193-4.

<sup>12</sup> This doctrine found its basis on the assumption that the natives were likely to go to war against each other if they found out that the European made guns were far effective. In the Brussels conference of 1890 it was generally accepted that slavery, slave trade and slave raiding in the African hinterland could only ended if the natives were sufficiently discouraged from it. One of the ways which this could happen was through a technical plan design at depriving them from acquiring arms.

<sup>13</sup> For a detailed account on how this war unfolded in Cameroon see Helmut Stoecker(1986) "THE first World War" in *German imperialism in Africa: From the beginning to the Second world War*

<sup>14</sup> Cases of substantial contribution of African in the War abound. A few of them have been documented in details by Myron Echenberg(1991)*Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Senegalise in French West Africa 1857-1960*, Portsmouth NH: Heinmman, Gregory Man(2006) *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the Twentieth Century*, Durham, NC: Duke University

<sup>15</sup> L WG ( 1917) " Notes on the Cameroon Province" in the *Scottish Geographical Magazine* vol.XXXVI, pp145-53.

<sup>16</sup> A Good Discourse on this has been excellently documented by Dean G.Pruit and Richard,C.Snyder(1969) in *Theory and Research on the Causes of War*, London: Printice Hall International Inch.Pp.135-6. Here they mostly handle issues related to deterrence but a full grasp of the conduct of soldiers in battle front can be discern upon reading the whole text.

<sup>17</sup> Chilver and Kaberry(1967) *Traditional Bamenda: The pre-colonial History and Ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields*, Buea; Government printing press.p.15. Also see file number cb/1916/11 here after included in annual Reports for the Bamenda Division 1916-1917 in Buea National Archives,

<sup>18</sup> See Gregory Mann(2006), *Native Sons: West African Veterans and France in the twentieth Century*, Durham Nc Duke University, Marc Michel(2003) *Les Africaines et la Grande Guerre: L ,appellee a L,afrique*, Paris Kartahala for a general picture of the war in west Africa presented in details by George Njung in "Soldiers of their Own" p.3. For Specific issues about the war and the conduct of most grassfields soldiers in the First World War in Cameroon see Charles Dobeles' treatise titled " Factors Affecting the Military operations in the Cameroons" file No AdM 137/224.

<sup>19</sup> As the war progressed the Fons/ chiefs further confused the Germans when they proved to like the allied forces more than he Germans. According to Bikom Assessment Report file No Ad/2 of 1927 ,p.33 of BNA fon Ngam who played a key role of providing most the soldiers that fought during the first world war was identified to have been one of the fons who played a double role .