

## WHO FIRED THE FIRST SHOT?

The [German Empire](#) had established a protectorate over Togoland in 1884, which was slightly larger than Ireland and had a population of about one million people in 1914. A mountain range with heights of over 3,000 ft (910m) ran south-east to north-west and restricted traffic between the coast and hinterland. South of the high ground the ground rises from coastal marshes and lagoons to a plateau about 200–300 ft (61–91m) high, covered in forest, high grass and scrub, where farmers had cleared the forest for palm oil cultivation.

The climate was tropical, with more rainfall in the interior and a dry season in August. Half of the border with Gold Coast ran along the Volta river and a tributary but in the south, the border for 80 miles (130km) was beyond the east bank. The Germans had made the southern region one of the most developed colonies in Africa, having built three metre-gauge railway lines and several roads from Lomé the capital and main city. There was no port and ships had to lie off Lomé and transfer freight via surfboat. One line ran along the coast from Anekho to Lomé, one ran from Lomé to Atakpame and one from Lomé to Palime. Roads had been built from Lomé to Atakpame and Sokode, Palime to Kete Krachi and from Kete Krachi to Sansame Mangu; in 1914 the roads were reported to be fit for motor vehicles.

German military forces in Togoland were exiguous, there were no German army units in Togoland, only 693 *Polizeitruppen* (paramilitary police) under the command of Captain Georg Pfähler and about 300 colonists with military training. The colony was adjacent to Allied territory, with French Dahomey on its northern and eastern borders and the British Gold Coast to the west. Lomé and the wireless station at Kamina about 62 miles (100km) inland, which was connected to the coast by road and rail, were the only places of military significance. Kamina was near the town of Atakpame and had been completed in June 1914. The transmitter was a relay station for communication between Germany, the overseas colonies, the Imperial German Navy and South America. The Admiralty wished to prevent the station from being used to co-ordinate attacks on shipping in the Atlantic. At the outbreak of war the Governor of Togoland, Duke Adolf Friedrich of Mecklenburg was in Germany and his deputy, Major Hans-Major Georg von Döring was the acting-Governor.

When the British Empire declared war on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1914, it was impossible for Germany to send military support to its colony in Togoland.

Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of the Gold Coast, Lieutenant-General Charles Macpherson Dobell, commander of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) and Lieutenant-Colonel R. A. de B. Rose, commander of the Gold Coast Regiment were absent during July 1914. W. C. F. Robertson was the acting-Governor and Captain Frederick Bryant was acting-Commandant of the Gold Coast Regiment. The Gold Coast Regiment had one pioneer company, seven infantry companies with a machine-gun each, and a battery of four QF 2.95-inch Mountain Guns, amounting to 1,595 men including 124 carriers and about 330 reservists. There were four "Volunteer Corps" with about 900 men and 1,200 police and customs officers. The Defence Scheme for the Gold Coast (1913) provided for war against the French in neighbouring Ivory Coast and the Germans in Togoland; in the event of war with Germany, the colony was to be defended along Lake Volta and the north-eastern frontier against the possibility of a raid, which was the most that the Germans in Togoland were thought capable of.

The plan also provided for an offensive across the lake into the north of Togoland, before making a thrust south to the more populated portion of the colony. On 29 July, a Colonial Office telegram arrived at Accra, ordering the adoption of the *precautionary stage* of the Defence Scheme and Robertson forwarded the information to Bryant the next day. Bryant dispensed with the Scheme, which had not been revised after the wireless station at Kamina was built and by 31 July, had mobilised the Gold Coast Regiment along the southern, rather than the northern border with Togoland. In London on 3 August, Dobell proposed an advance if war was declared, along the coast road from Ada to Keta and thence to Lomé, which was fewer than 2 miles (3.2 km) from the border. Bryant had reached the same conclusion as Dobell and had already organised small expeditionary columns at Krachi and Ada and assembled the main force at Kumasi, ready to move in either direction

## Anglo-French offensive preparations

On 5 August 1914, a day after Britain declared war on Germany, the Allies cut the German sea cables between Monrovia and Tenerife, leaving the radio station at Kamina the only connection between the colony and Germany. The same day the acting-Governor of Togoland, Döring sent a telegram to Robertson proposing neutrality, in accordance with articles X and XI of the Congo Act, which stated that colonies in the Congo Basin were to remain neutral in the event of a conflict in Europe. Döring also appealed for neutrality because of the economic interdependence of the west African colonies and their common interest in dominating local populations.

On 6 August, the Cabinet in London refused the offer of neutrality and Bryant on his own initiative, after hearing that the French in Dahomey wished to co-operate, sent Captain Barker and the District Commissioner of Keta to Döring, with a demand the surrender of the colony and gave 24-hours to reply. The next morning the British intercepted a wireless message from Döring that he was withdrawing from the coast to Kamina and that Lomé would be surrendered if attacked. A similar proposal for neutrality from Döring had been received by the Governor of Dahomey, who took it for a declaration of war and ordered an invasion. A French contingency plan to seize Lomé and the coast had been drafted in ignorance of the wireless station at Kamina, only 37 miles (60 km) from the Dahomey border.

## Capture of Lomé

Late on 6 August 1914, French police occupied customs posts near Athieme and next day Major Maroix, the commander of French military forces in Dahomey, ordered the capture of Agbanake and Aneho. Agbanake was occupied late on 7 August, the Mono River was crossed and a column under Captain Marchand took Aneho early on 8 August; both moves were unopposed and local civilians helped to see off the Germans, by burning down the Government House at Sebe. The 460 colonists and Askaris retreated inland, impressing civilians and calling up reservists as they moved north.

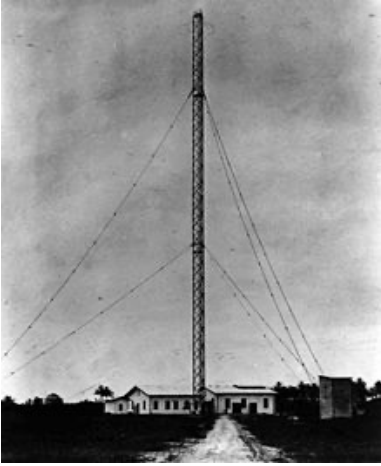
Repairs began on the Aneho–Lomé railway and the French advanced to Porto Seguro and Togo before stopping the advance, once it was clear that Lomé had been surrendered to British forces. The British invasion began late on 7 August 1914, the British emissaries returned to Lomé by lorry, to find that the Germans had left for Kamina and given Herr Clausnitzer discretion to surrender the colony up to Chra, 75 miles (120 km) inland, to prevent a naval bombardment of Lomé. On 8 August, the emissaries took command of fourteen British soldiers and police from Aflao; a telegraph operator arrived by bicycle and repaired the line to Keta and Accra.

The British flag was raised and on 9 August, parties of troops arrived having marched 50 miles (80 km) in exhausting heat. Over the border, Bryant had arranged to move the main force by sea and embarked on the *Elele* on 10 August. Three other companies had been ordered to Krachi, to begin a land advance to Kamina. The *Elele* arrived off Lomé on 12 August and the force disembarked through the surf. Arrangements were made with the French, for a converging advance towards Atakpame by the British and the French from Aneho, a French column under Maroix from Tchettii in the north and the British column at Krachi under Captain Elgee. Small British forces on the northern border, were put under the command of Maroix and ordered to move south, as 560 French cavalry were ordered across the northern border from Senegal and Niger, towards Sansane Mangu from 13–15 August. The British force at Lomé comprised 558 soldiers, 2,084 carriers, police and volunteers, who were preparing to advance inland, when Bryant received news of a German foray to Togblekove.

## Advance to Kamina

The Battle of Bafilo was a skirmish between French and German troops in north-east Togoland on 13 August. French forces had crossed the border between French Dahomey and Togoland on 8–9 August. The French were engaged by German troops in the districts of Sansane-Mangu and Skode-Balfilo. The French company retreated, after facing greater resistance than expected. After the capture of Lomé on the coast, Bryant was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel, made commander of all Allied forces in the operation and landed at Lomé on 12 August, with the main British force of 558 soldiers, 2,084 carriers, police and volunteers. As preparations began to advance northwards to Kamina, Bryant heard that a German party had travelled south by train the day before. The party had destroyed a small wireless transmitter and railway bridge at Togblekove, about 10 miles (16 km) to the north. Bryant detached half an infantry company on 12 August and sent another 1 ½ companies forward the next day, to prevent further attacks.

By the evening, "I" Company had reached Tsevie, scouts reported that the country south of Agbeluvhoe was clear of German troops and the main force had reached Togblekove; at 10:00 p.m. "I" Company began to



advance up the road to Agbeluvhoe. The relatively harsh terrain of bushland and swamp impeded the Allied push to Kamina, by keeping the invaders on the railway and the road, which had fallen into disrepair and was impassable by wheeled vehicles. Communication between the parties was difficult, because of the intervening high grass and thick scrub. The main force moved on from Togblekove at 6:00 a.m. on 15 August and at 8:30 a.m., local civilians told Bryant that a train full of Germans had steamed into Tsevie that morning and shot up the station. In the afternoon, the British advanced guard met German troops near the Lili river, who blew the bridge and dug in on a ridge on the far side.

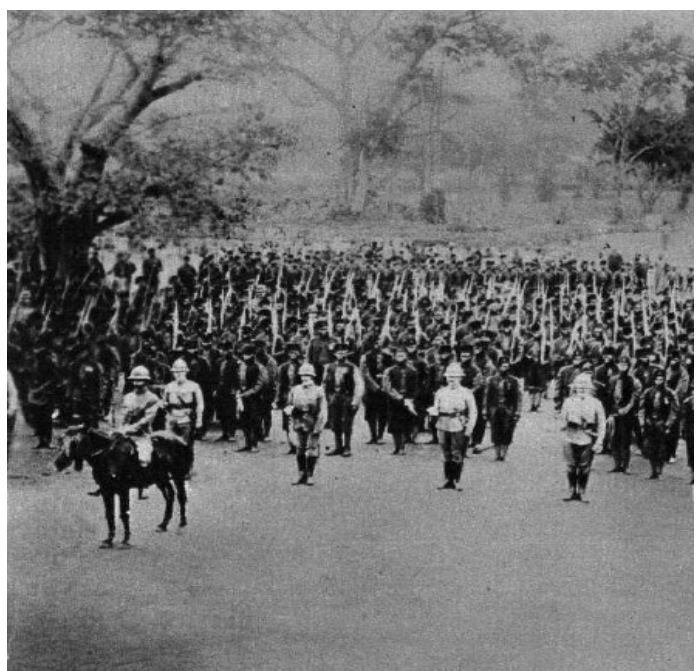
An aerial mast at the *Kamina Funkstation*, (wireless transmitter)

The demolitions and the delaying action, held up the advance until 4:30 p.m. and the force spent the night at Ekuni rather than joining "I" Company as intended. Döring had sent two raiding parties with 200 men south in trains, to delay the advancing Allied force. "I" Company had heard the train run south at 4:00 a.m., while halted on the road near Ekuni, a village about 6 miles (9.7 km) south of Agbeluvhoe. A section was sent to cut off the train and the rest of "I" Company pressed on to Agbeluvhoe. A local civilian guided the section to the railway, where Lieutenant Collins and his men piled stones and a heavy iron plate on the tracks, about 200 yards (180 m) north of the bridge at Ekuni and then set an ambush. One of the trains of 20 cars was derailed by the obstacles placed on the tracks and the other train was halted by the rest of "I" Company at the Battle of Agbeluvhoe. In the fight between German troops in the railway carriages and the British, the Germans were defeated, Pfähler was killed, and a quarter of the German force became casualties.

## Battle of Chra, 22 August 1914

Despite the skirmish in the north-west at Bafilo and the action at Agbeluvhoe, Allied forces advancing towards the German base at Kamina had not encountered substantial resistance. The last natural barrier south of Kamina was the Chra River, where Döring chose to make a stand. The railway bridge over the river was destroyed and the approaches to the river and village were mined. On 21 August, British scouts found 460–560 German police troops entrenched on the north bank of the river. The West African Rifles, supported by French forces from the east, assembled on the south bank and during 22 August Bryant ordered attacks on the German entrenchments. The British forces were repulsed and suffered 17 percent casualties. Lieutenant George Thompson became the first British officer to be killed in action in the First World War.

Although the Germans had repelled the Allied force from an easily supplied, fortified position, French troops were advancing from the north and east towards Kamina unchecked and a British column was advancing on the station from Kete Krachi in the west. On the morning of 23 August, the British found that the German trenches had been abandoned. The Germans had withdrawn to the wireless station and during the night of 24/25 August, explosions were heard from the direction of Kamina. French and British forces arrived at Kamina on 26 August, to find that the nine radio towers had been demolished and the electrical equipment destroyed. Döring and 200 remaining troops surrendered the colony to Bryant; the rest of the German force had deserted. The Allied troops recovered three Maxim machine-guns, 1,000 rifles and about 320,000 rounds of ammunition

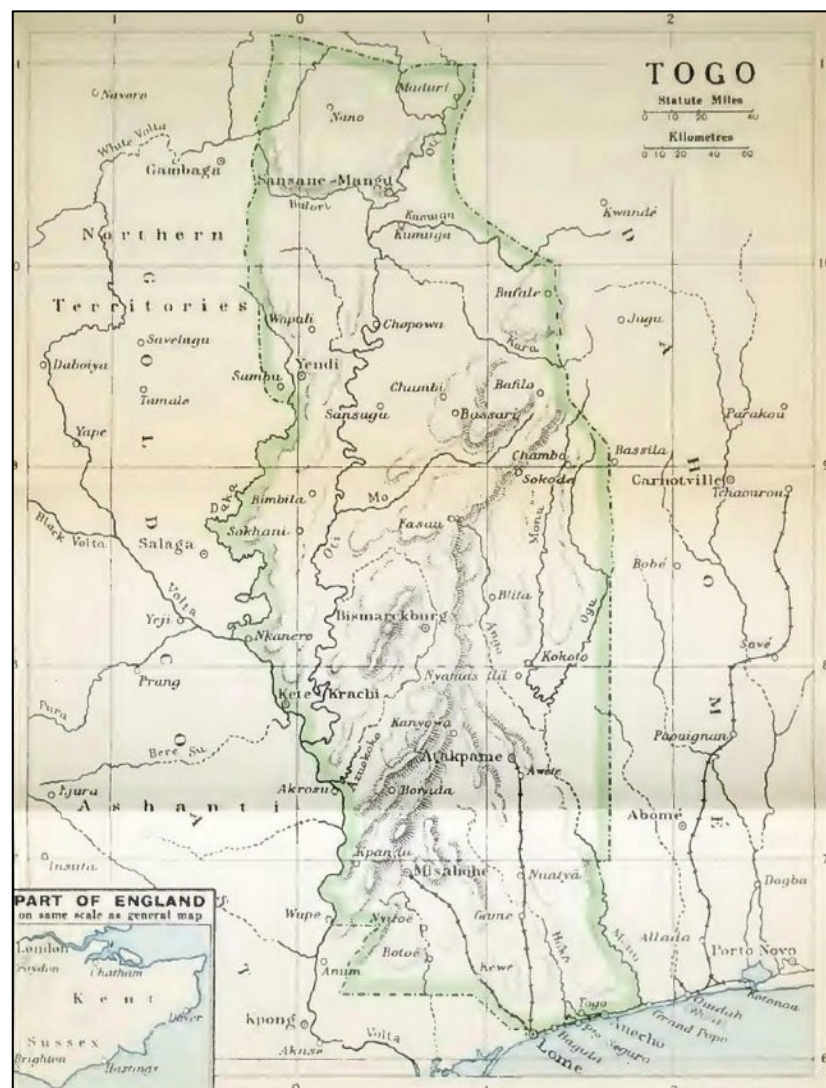


British troops on parade in Togoland, 1914

Before the wireless station at Kamina was destroyed, 229 messages were passed between Germany, the navy and colonies following the outbreak of war. The first military operations of British soldiers during the First World War occurred in Togoland and ended soon after British operations began in continental Europe. In December 1916, the colony was split into British and French occupation zones, which cut through administrative divisions and civilian boundaries. Both powers sought a new partition and in 1919, Article 22 of the Treaty of Versailles partitioned former German colonies between the Allies. In July 1922, British Togoland and French Togoland were created from former German Togoland, as League of Nations mandates. The French acquisition consisted of about sixty percent of the colony, including the coast. The British received the smaller, less populated and less developed portion of Togoland, to the west. The part administered by the British, united with Ghana upon its independence in 1957; French Togoland gained independence in 1960, becoming the modern Togolese Republic. The surrender of Togoland marked the beginning of the end for the German colonial empire, which lost all of its African and Pacific possessions.

## Casualties

British casualties in the campaign were 83, French casualties were about 54 and German casualties were 41. An unknown number of troops and carriers deserted on both sides.

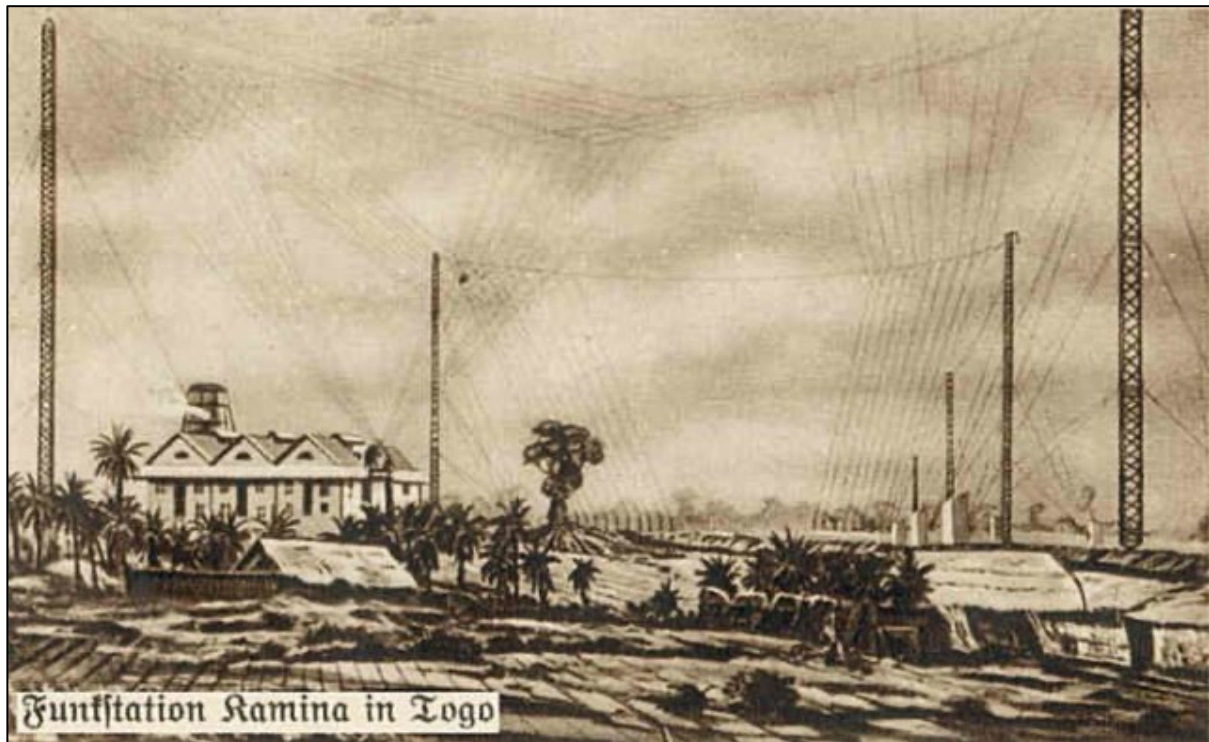


There wasn't much for Germany in Togoland and for the 690 or so Togolese Police Officers serving under 10 German Sergeants to protect from the British troops, but there was an innovative piece of technology in the small town of Kamina, very important to the Germans. It was a wireless Radio Station which was the only link between Germany and its colonies in Southwest Africa and in East Africa.

The device was one of its kind at the time, very original and quite a benefit for any military in the world. Even though it wasn't finished yet at the outbreak of the First World War, it was soon clear to the Germans



and the Togolese Police Officers, that they wouldn't be able to defend themselves, nor the country. So, their biggest fear was the Radio Station. It could have been a big asset to any military that controlled it.



**The Kamina radio transmitters prior to the outbreak of war.**

As soon as the war was declared, troops from the Gold Coast Regiment (today's Ghana) entered Togoland through the British Gold Coast and entered the capital, Lome, a patrol of the Gold Coast Regiment got into a factory in Nuatja where they confronted a group of Police Officers led by German Sergeants. The police opened fire, and Alhaji Grunshi returned it. He was the first soldier in British service to fire a shot in the war.



**Alhaji Grunshi of the Gold Coast Regiment, 1918.**

He was the first soldier in British service to fire a shot in the First World War.

The next day, when the Police Commander was killed, resistance in Togo collapsed. The German technicians destroyed the Radio Station in Kamina on 24<sup>th</sup> of August and on the 26<sup>th</sup>, the whole country surrendered to the British and French.

Alhaji Grunshi remains known as the first soldier in British service to fire a shot in the First World War. He survived the war and became a Lance Corporal. By 1919, he was a Sergeant and awarded the Military Medal for his part in the East African Campaign.

## The first British Shots of WW1

The first shot fired by a British soldier in World War One came on August 22<sup>nd</sup> 1914 in the village of Casteau in Belgium. Cavalry reconnaissance patrols had been sent out ahead of the advancing British Expeditionary Force to investigate claims that the Germans were advancing towards the BEF in huge numbers. 120 men from C Squad of the 4<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards were part of this wholesale reconnaissance effort. In the evening of August 21<sup>st</sup>, the men from the 4<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards stopped to rest on a road that led to Brussels. C Squad was commanded by Major Tom Bridges and his second-in-command was Captain Charles Hornby. The 120 men they commanded were split into four troops of thirty men.

At 06.30 on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, the men from C Squad were informed by locals that 4 German cavalrymen were seen just down the road. Hornby was given permission to set out with 1<sup>st</sup> Troop to pursue them. He ordered that 1<sup>st</sup> Troop formed into a traditional cavalry charge. The Germans were caught in the main road in Casteau, to the northeast of Mons, and a fight ensued. It was here that Drummer (later Corporal) E Thomas from 1<sup>st</sup> Troop fired the first shot by a British soldier in World War One despite the fact that the fight seemed to be mainly between British swords and German lances.

No British casualties occurred in this skirmish though one horse was shot, and it had to be put down and was given to a Belgium butcher. Hornby and his men returned with three German POW's. A British medic in the 4<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards described the captured men as "German plough boys" because the POW's did not come up to what he had expected – fearsome soldiers who were steamrolling over Belgium. In fact, they were conscripts who had been hurriedly moved to the front with minimal training.

Hornby and his men received the following message on August 22<sup>nd</sup>:

"The Brigadier desires to congratulate the 4<sup>th</sup> Dragoon Guards on the spirited action of the troops on reconnaissance which resulted in establishing the moral superiority of our cavalry from the first over the German cavalry." Cavalry Division HQ memo, 22/08/14



Britain had been at war with Germany for 18 days when our first shot in World War One was fired. But the man who pulled the trigger at that turning point in our nation's history was never to find out whether he'd killed his target.

The shot was fired by a 20-year-old private, Ernest Edward Thomas, a strapping young soldier of the 4th Dragoon Guards. At 6.30am on August 22, 1914, Edward was part of a 120-strong force sent forward to investigate the advance of a German cavalry unit in the village of Casteau in Belgium. But when the enemy were spotted on the road to Brussels the first exchange of hostilities involved no firearms at all. Instead there was a traditional cavalry charge and Brits armed with swords went up against German lances .

Only then did Edward make his move.

"I was rather noted for my quick movements and athletic ability in those days – I was first in action," he said in an interview after the war. I could see a German cavalry officer some 400 yards away standing mounted in full view of me. "Immediately I saw him I took aim, pulled the trigger and automatically, almost as it seemed instantaneously, he fell to the ground, obviously wounded. Whether he was killed or not is a matter I do not think was ever cleared up."

The only British casualty in the August 22 battle was a horse, which was killed and sold to a local butcher.



Edward Thomas Royal Dragoon Guards in WWII