

The battle for Tanga 1914

'THE BATTLE OF THE BEES'



When in July/August 1914 World War I erupted in Europe, the eyes of the world were mostly focused on Belgium and France. The German steamroller made a wide flanking move, heading for Paris. The world held her breath. Also in the east a bitter struggle

between the ruling powers there was taking place. Russia went to the aid of Serbia when Austria-Hungary attacked this country. Germany entered the fray too and several smaller countries saw a chance to take their share of the spoils of war.

But in an era where many European countries held colonies overseas, it can come as no surprise that this conflict would spread to this part of the world too. Africa had been divided between the European powers, and looked like a patchwork quilt. Of colonies The British were mainly concerned by the presence of German harbors on both sides of the continent. These harbors could shelter German warships and be used for attacks on the British supply lines. So, action needed to be taken to annihilate this threat.

Invasion

And so the British went over to action. In cooperation with the French and Belgians, they conquered Togoland (Kenya), Cameroon, and Southwest-Africa (Namibia) in August and September 1914 respectively. In November 1914 they sent out an invasion force, Force 'B', to German East-Africa (Tanzania) in order to end the German presence there too. Since the war in France and Belgium was using up many men of the British army, and they assumed that they had enough manpower present in Africa already, and that any resistance could easily be brushed aside, they decided to use 'second rate' troops from India. Unfortunately for the British, things turned out quite differently.

On the 1st of November 1914, the British battleship HMS Fox entered the harbor of Tanga to demand a German surrender. Obviously the Germans turned this demand down.

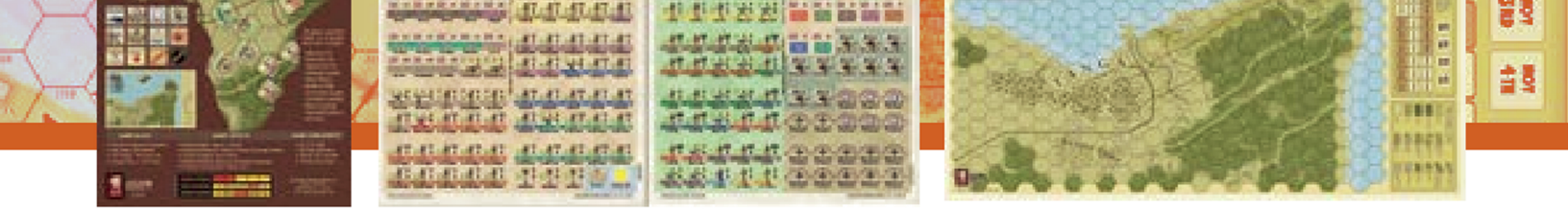
And while HMS Fox left the harbor, the Germans immediately started to bolster their defenses in preparation for an attack. The German commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul van Lettow-Vorbeck, did this quite thoroughly. The British attack was stopped, this despite an initially successful landing. The attacker had to evacuate and left the field like a beaten dog, tail hanging, leaving behind loads of equipment and ammunition. Despite a superiority in men, 1.000 vs. 8.000, the invasion ended in a German victory. Von Lettow-Vorbeck would be making a nuisance of himself for many years by waging a guerilla war. He finally surrendered to the Allies on 25th November 1918.

The Game Components

Tanga 1914 comes in a beautiful yet shallow box, with an attractive image on the box top. Unfortunately the box is too narrow to fit your run of the mill countertray. This means that the counters likely will end up in ziplock bags. The game has three booklets; one rulebook, one scenario book, and one historical booklet containing a wealth of historical information on the battle and the participating forces.

The map is of the well known 22" x 34" size, but contains nice large hexes. A hex represents about 180 meters of terrain. The map looks beautiful, and fits really well with the era it represents, so it doesn't have this ultra modern look. Well chosen. Large hexes, means large counters. The 360 counters are of the 3/4" size and really colorful, each formation has its own colored band on the counters. This colored band matches with the morale markers used to track morale of the formation. Because of the size, the counter can easily be moved around or picked up. So no juggling with tweezers to move a stack of counters around!

At the bottom of the counter the name of the unit is printed. On top of this is the colored band, with on the right the number of movement points available to the unit, and an abbreviation of the religious group the unit belongs to. A religious group? Yes, since we are talking Indian troops here they hail from a different caste or religious group, like Gurkhas, Tamils and Hindoes. Combining these different groups in your stacks is not such a wise decision since this will negatively influence the morale status of the units.



Above the colored band is the morale factor and to the right the range over which the unit can fire. Top right is the firepower. On some of the German units there will be a black background behind this factor. This means that the unit is equipped with the M71 Mauser rifle, which produced a lot of smoke due to the black powder used it fire the weapon. The counter art consists of a soldier. The counters used for support weapons and artillery use an almost identical format.

The front of the counter shows the units at full-strength. They are either company or platoon sized. The back of the counters shows the unit in a disrupted state. The leader counters only have a colored band and the name of the formation below it. Top right is the Leader Effectiveness Bonus, which is used during fire combat and checking morale. The markers are nicely done and look well. When the game is on the table it not only looks good, but is also functional. The game also contains five player aid cards. One shows you how to read the unit counters and markers. Another card shows you the different types of terrain on the map, their movement cost, their effect on line of sight, and melee. A third card shows you the procedure for fire combat, combat, and checking morale. And there are two other cards that are used to track formation morale, but more on this later.

The Game

The scenario book contains four scenarios, their length differs from 5 to 69 turns. The latter represents the full campaign. Each turn represent an hour in real time, and is divided in different phases. In a phase a unit can try and restore morale, resupply, fire, move, or enter melee. Next to this the British player can land new units as reinforcements. The German player can interrupt the British movement phase to use opportunity fire. There is however a restriction, and a risk: a German unit cannot use opportunity fire in each hex entered by a British unit, and if he has done so, the British unit can move three hexes before the German unit can fire again. And there is also the risk of running out of ammunition. This happens when he rolls an unmodified '6' on two d6. He can only lift the out of ammunition status by rolling a '5' or a '6' on one die later in the turn. But since the British have the force ratio in their favor, this is a situation you'd rather avoid.

Morale is a key factor in this game. This is represented by so called Formation Break Points (FBP). The status of each formation is tracked by using markers on the earlier mention cards. Each formation has its own breaking point. The moment a formation loses a leader or unit, or gets disrupted, this event is immediately noted on the card by changing the position of the morale marker. When the breaking point of a formation is reached, it stops to function and morale needs to be restored. Adjacent formations will be influenced by the 'break down' of the neighboring formation, and so a chain reaction of collapses can take place, creating all sorts of problems. An interesting mechanism.

Conclusion

Tanga 1914 is a beautiful and interesting game about a little known battle in the history of the First World War.

Bees

Now I can hear you saying, "Why is this called the battle of the bees?". Well, the plantations in which much of the battle took place were also the home of many bees. Agitated by the military actions all around them, they decided to 'sting in' and attack the soldiers. And so it could happen that the British 98th Infantry Regiment was stopped during an attack and went head over heels, out of harm's way.

Text: **Hans Korting**

Rating: 7/10

Pros: Not your everyday battle, nice large map and counters

Cons: Some mistakes in scenario book, smallish box