

British Journal for Military History

Volume 11, Issue 2, August 2025

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ISSN: 2057-0422

Date of Publication: 26 August 2025

Citation: George Hay, John Burke, 'African manpower statistics for the British Forces in East Africa, 1914-18: a reassessment', *British Journal for Military History*, 11.2 (2025), pp. 25-50.

www.bjmh.org.uk



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African manpower statistics for the British Forces in East Africa, 1914-18: a reassessment

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ABSTRACT

This article offers a new estimate for the number of soldiers and carriers raised from across East Africa who died in British imperial service during the East Africa campaign of the First World War. It does this by examining and challenging figures present in the historiography and returns to contemporary records to provide meaningful data on which to base new calculations.

Introduction

In April 2021, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) published a report examining historical inequalities in its commemoration of the dead of the British Empire following the First World War.¹ A significant acknowledgement in that report was that it could not provide comprehensive answers to all the questions raised, and perhaps the most significant of those unresolved questions concerned the number of dead still unaccounted for and not commemorated by name following the East Africa Campaign of the First World War.

In a theatre lacking all-weather roads and railways and plagued by insects that often made the use of pack animals impossible, the solution to the resulting transport problem was human portage. Although drawing in fighting and labouring forces from across Africa and further afield, this mobile war with its stretched supply lines put particular pressure on the regional populations of East Africa, with over a million personnel likely to have been raised by the warring colonial powers. A sizeable portion of those men contributed to the fighting, but many more provided the backbone to the logistical effort, which in British service became colloquially known as the 'Carrier

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DOI: [10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v1i1.1891](https://doi.org/10.25602/GOLD.bjmh.v1i1.1891)

¹George Hay and John Burke, *Report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration*, (Maidenhead: CWGC, 2021), p. 53.

Corps'. This force was raised largely through compulsion, with the authorities exploiting the power imbalances inherent in the British imperial system and often resorting to coercion and extortion.² These carriers were forced to work through wet seasons and unfamiliar climates, and for large parts of the war were generally overworked and poorly cared for. Understandably, these conditions and this treatment took an enormous toll, and the campaign is now infamous for the number of deaths suffered by these labour forces. Nonetheless, despite this infamy, our understanding of the true number who perished remains imprecise. To provisionally quantify these losses, the CWGC's 2021 report drew on broad and conflicting figures from the historiography to provide an estimate of between one hundred and three hundred thousand dead. Accepting that all their names are now unlikely to be recovered, a more accurate and meaningful figure is required to enable the CWGC to find ways to recognise and fittingly commemorate them. This article does that by returning to archival material and contemporary publications to provide a new estimate for the number of East African personnel who died in British service in this campaign.³

An initial estimate and issues in the historiography

The lower end of the estimate given in the 2021 CWGC report is double what many contemporary sources suggested and double the figure the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) believed it was commemorating namelessly in the 1920s.⁴ The upper end reflects the decision of some scholars to utilise 'wastage' figures (which incorporate all reasons for leaving service, including death) to suggest the total number of deaths could reach, or even exceed, 300,000.⁵ The imprecision of these figures

²See for example Geoffrey Hodges, *Kariakor: The Carrier Corps*, (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1999), pp. 37-43; Melvin Page, 'The War of *Thangata*: Nyasaland and the East African Campaign, 1914–1918', *Journal of African History*, Vol. xix, No. 1 (1978), pp. 87-100.

³Unlike East African forces, those who died in the campaign who were raised in West Africa, South Africa, the Seychelles and India are commemorated by name either in the former theatre of war or in their country of origin. They are believed to be fully accounted for and are not included in this analysis.

⁴The organisation replaced 'Imperial' with 'Commonwealth' in March 1960.

⁵Works cited in the 2021 Report included Edward Paice, *Tip and Run – the Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa* (London: Weidenfield & Nicolson, 2007), pp. 392–3; Richard Fogarty and David Killingray, 'Demobilisation in British and French Africa at the End of the First World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2015), p. 105; G.W.T. Hodges, 'African Manpower Statistics for the British Forces in East Africa, 1914–1918', *Journal of African History*, Vol. xix, No. 1 (1978), pp. 101-116; Michael Pesek, 'The war of legs. Transport and infrastructure in the East African Campaign of the First World War', *Transfers*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2015), pp. 113–114; John

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obviously invites further study, and this analysis will start by examining the figures present in existing scholarship.

What is immediately striking on studying the historiography is the limited number of cited documentary sources. While there is rightly an observation that contemporary record keeping was inadequate and inconsistent, and that the preservation of what was created is patchy, it is commonplace to see a figure given without evidence or drawn solely from the work of others.⁶ This failure to re-engage with source material has seen the wider historiography repeat a figure of 100,000 dead without explanation, challenge or critical analysis. This issue is especially problematic because the most influential – and thus most referenced – historian of this field appears to have manipulated the raw data without explaining his logic or working.

In 1978, Geoffrey Hodges concluded that over 10,000 troops and 100,000 carriers died in East Africa. As Table 1 shows, he supported this by providing the first, and to date, only tabulated breakdown of deaths by country.⁷ Though powerful and at first glance convincing, close scrutiny of the sources used to build these figures shows a potential issue with his method: rather than use the numbers as presented, he shifted 42,476 men into a 'missing presumed dead' category who were never described as such.⁸ These numbers, drawn from the evidence of the Director of Military Labour in East Africa, Lieutenant-Colonel Oscar Watkins, were recorded in legislation from the Kenyan government connected to the distribution of unclaimed pay, and actually show

Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 249–250; David Killingray and James Matthews, 'Beasts of Burden: British West African Carriers in the First World War', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1/1 (1979), pp. 18–19.

⁶For figures offered without citations, see for example David Olusoga, *The World's War: Forgotten Soldiers of Empire*, (London: Head of Zeus, 2014), p. 147; Paice, *Tip and Run*, pp. 392-393; M. Crowder, 'The First World War and its consequences', in A. Adu Boahen (ed.), *General History of Africa VII – Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, (California: Heinemann UNESCO, 1985), p. 283.

⁷Note these figures include a little over 2,000 dead raised outside East Africa who are excluded from this analysis – see footnote 3. This is also the only mention of 10,000 soldiers, with Hodges table stating 6,000+. Hodges, 'African Manpower Statistics', p. 115; Hodges, *Kariakor*, pp. 19-21; Geoffrey Hodges, 'Military Labour in East Africa and its impact on Kenya', in Melvin Page (ed.), *Africa and the First World War*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1987), p. 148.

⁸Hodges' carrier death figures for the territories listed as 1-8 in his Table 1 were drawn from the Watkins Report, Appendix 1, Tables 6-10. Statistics for missing presumed dead were drawn from the Kenya Secretariat Circular 104 of 18 December 1922. See footnote 7 in Hodges, 'African Manpower Statistics', p. 102.

these men classified as 'reported dead, as having deserted, and as being missing'.⁹ In the simplest terms, this means Hodges declared as dead all those who had deserted and gone missing, a proportion of whom the authorities asserted had fled the service and survived.¹⁰

Crudely reclassifying this entire grouping is erroneous and unduly skews the figures, as it was frequently recorded that desertion rates in carrier units were disproportionately high.¹¹ In fact, it was for this reason that the normal practice of issuing presumptions of death for those unaccounted for was not adopted for carriers in East Africa, with the Military Labour Corps (MLC) instead reclassifying the missing as deserted unless proof could be found to the contrary.¹² This inability to provide more meaningful information about the fate of these men led the War Office to conclude that the only reliable figure was Watkins' confirmed deaths. This, of course, created another flawed statistic given the other contemporary assertion that a proportion of the deserted and missing were, indeed, deceased.¹³

⁹UK National Archives (hereinafter TNA) WO 32/4136, No. XXXV 1918, An Ordinance to make provision for the Distribution of Pay and Personal Property belonging to Natives attached to the Military Labour Corps, 31/12/1918, Point 9 (I). The ordinance for Kenya was used as the model for Uganda, with their Ordinance passed on 16/06/1919.

¹⁰ See for example comments under Appendix I, Table 7 in TNA CO 533/216, Report by Lieut-Colonel O.F. Watkins, Director of Military Labour to the B.E.A. Expeditionary Force on the period from August 4th, 1914 to September 15th, 1919.

¹¹TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, Para. 29; TNA CO 95/5331/13, Despatch No.1 by Lt. Col. E.B.B. Hawkins, 14 November 1918, p. 28.

¹²With its origins in less formalised transport units, the Military Labour Bureau (MLB) was formed in February 1916. In March 1918 the name was changed to Military Labour Corps (MLC). For the sake of simplicity, MLC will be used, unless explicitly referencing an earlier period. In notes regarding draft ordinance to wind up the MLC on 27 January 1918 it was noted that the D.A.G. was informed that Ordinance 31/16 'which presumed the death of all missing men unless evidence to the contrary could be found was just the opposite of what we wanted. The only solution is presumption of desertion failing evidence to the contrary' (emphasis in original). TNA WO 95/5311/5, East Africa, GHQ, Director of Military Labour, Dec 1915-Dec 1918, pp. 85-86.

¹³TNA WO 32/4131, Note for the Finance Member on the suggested payment to the Native Tribes of East Africa of the Unclaimed Balances of the E.A. Military Labour Corps, August 1931. See comments under Appendix I, Table 7 in TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report.

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	DEATHS	Troops other than KAR	1	2	3	1-3 Total Dead
			A) Gun Porters & B) Medical Staff	C) Carriers	A-C Missing presumed dead	
1	EAP (Kenya)	64	2,022	23,869	13,748	39,639
2	Uganda	113+	136	3,734	780	4,650
3	GEA (Tanzania)	?	195	12,934	27,535	40,664
4	PEA (Mozambique)	-	-	450	?	450+
5	Zanzibar & Mafia	?	3	210	349	562
6	Sierra Leone	-	-	808	44	852
7	Nigeria	589	?	814	20	834
8	Seychelles	-	-	222	-	222
9	Gambia	38?	-	?	?	?
10	Gold Coast	400	25	50	?	75
11	Nyasaland (Malawi)	?	37+	4,440	?	c.4,480
12	Northern Rhodesia (Zambia)	200?	-	2,300	?	2,300
13	Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)	250?	-	?	?	?
14	South Africa	163	-	?	?	?
	KAR	4,237				
	TOTAL	6,000+	c.2,418	49,831	42,476	c.94,725

Table 1: Figures extracted from Hodges's article on 'African Manpower Statistics'.¹⁴

Removing the men Hodges reclassified *en masse* as 'presumed dead' reduces his overall total to that ultimately accepted by the authorities at just over 50,000. While we know this figure is omitting a substantial proportion of missing personnel who did die, estimating that proportion requires careful calculation. Whether through error or deliberate manipulation, Hodges' total is not supported by documentary evidence and nor does his accompanying text explain how or why he reclassified all these men.¹⁵

¹⁴Hodges, 'African Manpower Statistics', p. 116.

¹⁵The work of Hodges has been cited by, amongst others, Fogarty & Killingray, 'Demobilization in British and French Africa', p. 104; Pesek, 'The war of legs', pp. 110-111, p. 113; Christian Koller, 'The recruitment of Colonial Troops in Africa and Asia and their deployment in Europe during the First World War', *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 26, No. 1/2 (2008), p. 112; Michèle Barrett, 'Afterword Death and the afterlife: 29

Despite these issues, the influence of Hodges work is clear in the wider historiography, with many taking his figure as accepted to the point of not referencing it. Taking one example, Joe Harris Lunn has attempted to account for all African soldiers and labourers who died under British command across all theatres, reaching totals of 7,850 and respectively. However, the only contemporary source he cites is the 1922 Official Statistics of the War, while all the secondary literature he references is ultimately underpinned by Hodges.¹⁶ Taking the most prominent examples for East Africa, Paice offers no citations for his figures (although they are clearly drawn from Hodges), while Strachan draws his estimates from the work of Page and another historian, Crowder, who provides no citations.¹⁷ Page, in relation only to African deaths under British command, cites the IWGC's register for the East African memorials as the highest contemporary official estimate of 50,000, and Hodges' figure of 100,000 for East Africa as a whole.¹⁸

Given the absence of any detailed analysis and considering the work currently being undertaken by the CWGC across East Africa, it is clearly timely to return to the source material to reassess these figures. While we must accept that these records are incomplete, any new calculation for the known dead must be underpinned by contemporary data drawn from wartime records. Although we know these will not tell the full story, they will ultimately provide a base figure from which informed, evidence-based estimates can be made to account for those who were omitted.

Britain's colonies and dominions', in Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 303; David Killingray, 'Labour Exploitation for Military Campaigns in British Colonial Africa 1870-1945', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1989), p. 487 & p. 493; Andrew Roberts, 'East Africa', in A. D. Roberts (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa: Volume 7. From 1905 to 1940*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 667; The figures were also repeated, but not directly cited, in Paice, *Tip and Run*, pp. 392-393.

¹⁶Joe Harris Lunn, 'War Losses (Africa)', in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2015-06-22. [War Losses \(Africa\) | International Encyclopedia of the First World War \(WW1\) \(1914-1918-online.net\)](https://www.1914-1918-online.net/). Accessed 1 July 2024).

¹⁷See Paice, *Tip and Run*, pp. 392-393; Crowder states, in relation to Africa as a whole (all colonies), that 'over 150,000 soldiers and carriers lost their lives during the war', however no citation is provided. See Crowder, 'The First World War', p. 283; Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 3.

¹⁸Melvin Page, 'Introduction: Black Men in a White Man's War', in Melvin Page (ed.), *Africa and the First World War*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), p. 14.

Quantifying The Known Non-combatant Dead

Figures recorded for non-combatant deaths varied in the immediate aftermath of the war, sometimes even within the same document, but they were all within a general range of 40-50,000. The official statistics of the war, published in 1922, quoted three separate figures based on different dates that ranged from just over 42,300 up to 48,000.¹⁹ The lower of these figures was repeated in the official medical history of the War but is known to exclude labour units operating out of Nyasaland.²⁰ A middling figure provided no information on the territories included, while the highest gave an approximate number of 44,000 dead from Kenya, Uganda, and Zanzibar, and another 4,000 for Nyasaland. The most comprehensive contemporary source for these figures is the Watkins Report of 1919, although this, too, provides conflicting numbers and an admission that some manpower cohorts were not accounted for. Nonetheless, if the figures given by Watkins in Appendix 1, Table 6 (*General percentage of deaths to recruitments*) and Table 9 (*Maxim Gun Carriers, Stretcher Bearers and Ward Orderlies*) are combined, they give an overall total of 40,998 dead from 406,914 enlistments across East Africa up to 15 September 1919.²¹

Within his report, Watkins claimed to have no information for carriers raised in several formations. This included 8,624 men who served as part of the B.E.A. and Uganda Carrier Corps of 1914, the Uganda Transport and Belgian Carrier Corps, and those serving with NORFORCE (drawn largely from Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia). He acknowledged he could not account for the casual labourers used in the latter stages of the campaign, but perhaps more importantly, he also noted that an unknown number of those classified in his statistics as 'deserted and missing' were very likely dead. Despite these limitations, Watkins still felt confident to conclude that a mortality rate of 10 per cent amongst all recruits was 'approximately right'.²²

Two other units not explicitly referenced in Watkins' statistics were the Kikuyu Mission Volunteers (KMV) and the Bishop of Zanzibar's Carrier Corps. The former

¹⁹The figures were: 42,318 (up to 30/09/1918), 44,635 (up to 28/02/1919) and 48,000 (no date included). *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920* (London: HMSO, 1922), p. 240, p. 303, pp. 382-383, p. 753.

²⁰W.G. Macpherson & T.J. Mitchell, *Official History of the War: Medical Services General History, Vol. IV*, (London: HMSO, 1924), p. 504; This figure was also adopted by the IWGC within their Annual Reports from 1928-9, having previously a range of 40-50,000 dead. See CWGC/2/1/ADD 6.2.1, *Annual Report No. 10*, (London: HMSO, 1929), p. 57.

²¹This figure excludes the 9,768 recruited and the 1,844 who died from Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Seychelles, as they are commemorated in their countries of origin. TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report.

²²*Ibid.*, Para. 48.

operated from April 1917 to January 1918, while the latter was raised in August 1916.²³ Of these, the KMV has been repeatedly singled out for its significantly lower casualty rate in comparison to the wider MLC average.²⁴ Nonetheless, although both maintained their independence while working within the wider body of carriers, surviving acquittance rolls demonstrate these men were formally registered with the MLC and issued with depot-specific service numbers.²⁵ For this reason their recruitment and casualty statistics are believed to be incorporated into Watkins' wider calculations.

In relation to the territories and corps not included within Watkins' report, for Nyasaland, the official statistics noted that 4,000 died out of 200,000 non-combatants raised. While there is no immediate reason to doubt the death figure – at least beyond its convenient rounding – the seemingly large number of recruits does throw up an anomaly: unlike Watkins' numbers, some of these figures do not represent individuals but the number of engagements they served.²⁶ This issue was explained in a January 1919 report on manpower in the colony where it was stated the total number of labourers recorded was made up of individuals who served multiple stints as carriers, most having served twice, but some upwards of three times.²⁷ Because of this, it was believed that the actual number of individuals raised was more likely around half the given total. A Nyasaland section of a separate post-war publication dedicated to the empire's contribution to the war provides a fuller breakdown. Listing figures for 1916-1918 for 'front-line carriers' with troops (43,809), 'transport on lines of communication' and 'labour on roads' (95,134), it provides a likely more accurate total of 138,943. This deliberately excludes short-term engagements under which 56,709 men, women and children were employed on 'wood-cutting and miscellaneous' tasks and for 'carrying foodstuffs locally', as this was considered standard civil employment

²³For KMV see Edinburgh University, Col-207, Box 1, Folder 3, Annual Report 1918 by John W. Arthur; For Zanzibar see Charles Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, Vol. 4, (London: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 204.

²⁴See for example John Iliffe, *East African Doctors: A History of the Modern Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 36-37.

²⁵Edinburgh University, Col-207, Box 1, Folder 1, Acquittance Roll K.M.V. M.L.B, 22 June 1917.

²⁶Mel Page has suggested this mortality rate was conservative on the grounds it did not include labourers within Nyasaland. No evidence is cited to support this statement. See Melvin Page, 'The War of Thangata', pp. 94 & 97; This is repeated in John McCracken, *A History of Malawi 1859-1966*, (Woodbridge: James Currey, 2012), pp. 151-5.

²⁷TNA CO 525/82, Report on the manpower effort of Nyasaland by Acting Governor, 27 January 1919.

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with the agreements lasting only days.²⁸ For the military labourers under analysis, the Nyasaland authorities recorded the deaths of 4,440 men, broken down as 3,487 front line carriers and 953 second line carriers.²⁹

As in Nyasaland, the number of individual carriers raised in Northern Rhodesia is hard to accurately determine as most figures again refer to the number of engagements rather than individuals. To demonstrate this, statistics show 312,891 deployments for carrier work in Northern Rhodesia from 1914-17. However, the majority of these carriers were raised from North-Eastern Rhodesia, which at the time had a male population of 119,606 (a figure that included the old and infirm). Nonetheless, there was said to be between 15,000 and 40,000 Northern Rhodesian labourers in employment at any given time inside and outside the territory, at least until the end of 1917 when demand 'slackened considerably'. More useful to this analysis, however, is a reference stating that nearly 41,000 were enrolled as 'first line military porters' serving with troops in German and Portuguese East Africa.³⁰ Casualties amongst all these carriers appear to have been poorly recorded, with a figure of 1,467 ultimately provided to the IWGC by the Commandant of the Northern Rhodesia Police in 1928.³¹ However, in 1924 the colonial administration had estimated that 'rather more' than 2,300 of the 41,000 serving outside the country had died or were missing, whilst a further 300 men were estimated to have died 'within the borders' of the territory.³² Given the small numbers involved, the missing here will be presumed dead. In recognition of the administration's admission that its estimate was insufficient, these figures will be reconsidered in the final section of this paper, but it can be accepted that Northern Rhodesian casualties included at least 2,600 dead.

In relation to Ugandan carriers raised separately from the MLC, a report from September 1918 noted that the Uganda Transport Corps (38,310) and the Congo Carrier Corps (8,429), which both disbanded in December 1916, suffered a combined

²⁸These short-term engagements account for the large numbers, as the count refers to each engagement rather than individuals engaged. See Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, p. 270.

²⁹TNA CO 626/6, Summary of the Proceedings of the Legislative Council of Nyasaland, Twenty-first Session, 15-16 July 1919. The note for these figures added that it included deserters who had not returned.

³⁰Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, pp. 281-314; *Statistics of the Military Effort*, p. 383; Edmund Yorke, 'War, Mobilisation and Colonial Crisis in Northern Rhodesia, 1914-16', *British Journal of Military History*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, (2016), pp. 130-131, pp. 156-157.

³¹ CWGC/1/1/7/E/76, Letter: Major E.G. Dickinson, Acting Commandant Northern Rhodesia Police, to, The Chief Secretary, 17 May 1928; Letter: C.R. & M.M. Branch to Director of Records, 6 February 1928; *Statistics of the Military Effort*, pp. 382-3.

³²Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, p. 309.

2,056 dead and 836 missing out of 46,739 recruited.³³ For the purposes of this calculation, those declared missing from these units will be considered dead as the number is relatively low and there is no suggestion these figures incorporate deserters. Combining the dead and missing figures above, it can be said that at least an additional 2,892 Ugandan labourers died with these units.

Of the 3,576 Ugandans who served in the B.E.A. and Uganda Carrier Corps of 1914, the Ugandan authorities recorded 1,526 as dead or invalided, although there is no evidence to suggest how many fell into each category.³⁴ Similarly, no mortality figures were provided for the 1,000 men who served with the Uganda Pioneers (500) and Belgian Military Telegraph Construction (500), nor 1,741 auxiliary labourers attached to the Uganda Transport Corps.³⁵ The final section of this report will offer an estimated figure for deaths within these units, as well as for the Kenyans who served in the B.E.A. and Uganda Carrier Corps.

By adding to Watkins' death figures those he acknowledged were missing at the time – a portion of those raised in Uganda and the Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesian carriers – we reach a figure of 48,038; a number so close to the round figure given in the official statistics that this must be its origin. As demonstrated, there are also other cohorts of manpower absent from Watkins' numbers. Overall, it can be shown there were at least 9,932 recorded deaths outside the MLC's jurisdiction. With the various caveats accepted, Table 2 shows a new total for the number of confirmed labour force deaths at 50,930.

³³The Uganda Transport Corps suffered 1,267 dead and 434 missing carriers. The Congo Carrier Corps suffered 789 dead and 402 missing. See TNA CO 536/90/60006, *The Handbook of Uganda* (II Edition), 24 September 1918.

³⁴TNA CO 536/90/60006, *The Handbook of Uganda*.

³⁵Totals here exclude 5,763 recruitments and 402 deaths listed within *The Handbook of Uganda* who were raised for operations in German East Africa in 1917. These men were under MLC command and are included in those statistics. See *Ibid* and TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, para 7-25, 53; Auxiliary roles within the Uganda Transport Corps included 844 stretcher bearers, 149 medical details, 161 headmen, 152 Ox transport (Belgian), 149 Ox Transport (UTC), 114 maxim gun porters, 49 syces, 38 veterinary details, 38 telegraphs, 25 supply, 22 pioneers. TNA CO 536/90/60006, *The Handbook of Uganda*.

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	Recruitments	Deaths
British East Africa (Kenya)	186,689	25,891
Uganda	64,922	4,207
German East Africa & Zanzibar (Tanzania)	204,858	13,342
Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique)	10,931	450
Nyasaland (Malawi)	138,943	4,440
Northern Rhodesia (Zambia)	41,000	2,600
TOTAL	647,343	50,930

Table 2: Combined registered frontline non-combatant deaths.³⁶

Quantifying The Known Combatant Dead

The official statistics of the war give an approximate number of African combatants killed or died in the East Africa Campaign as between 4,300 to 4,500.³⁷ The King's African Rifles (KAR), which expanded from a base of 2,319 in 1914 to 30,658 in January 1918, was the largest locally raised combat force. Of these men, the battalions

³⁶This is a baseline figure for officially recorded deaths and will be expanded upon within the text. The basis for each total, unless otherwise stated, is drawn from TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, appendix 1, Table 6 & 9; For British East Africa, recruitment total combines MLC (179,189) and BEA Carriers (7,500); For Uganda, recruitment total combines MLC (11,936), Uganda Transport Corps (40,051), Congo Carrier Corps (8,429), Uganda Carrier Corps (3,576), Uganda Pioneers (500) and Belgian Military Telegraph Construction (500). Does not include around 120,000 'job porters' known to have been raised on temporary arrangements within the western province by Belgian forces, something that falls outside the scope of this exercise. Death figures combine Watkins Report (1,315) with non-MLC Carrier dead (2,056) and missing (836). See TNA CO 536/90/60006, The Handbook of Uganda; For Nyasaland, recruitment figures include front-line (43,809) and second-line (95,134) carriers from Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, p. 270. Death figures from TNA CO 626/6, Summary of the Proceedings; For Northern Rhodesia, these totals are for front-line carriers only. Lucas (ed.), *Empire at War*, p. 309. Please note, re-calculations of this figure, as well as the inclusion of totals for internal portering, will follow in the final section.

³⁷*Statistics of the Military Effort*, pp. 302, 382-3.

recorded 4,237 dead up to 14 February 1919, with the vast majority dying from disease.³⁸

	Killed	Died of Disease	Total
1 st KAR	228	161	389
2 nd KAR	434	369	803
3 rd KAR	322	910	1,232
4 th KAR	199	1150	1,349
5 th KAR	9	111	120
6 th KAR	3	251	254
7 th KAR	3	87	90
TOTAL	1,198	3,039	4,237

Table 3. African rank and file deaths in the KAR by Battalion, 14/02/1919.³⁹

Although these figures are so close they might be seen to corroborate one another, in September 1923 the Officer Commanding 6th KAR wrote to the Military Records Office in Nairobi saying the figures appeared low.⁴⁰ There are also complications elsewhere. The 1st and 2nd Battalions of the KAR, which were based in Nyasaland, account for 1,192 of the 4,237 deaths given in Table 3. However, a colonial government report of July 1919 recorded 1,256 dead, while a memorial dedicated to these men at Zomba lists 1,285.⁴¹ Although there is no additional information to question these figures any further, we can adjust the table to include the additional deaths from the 1st and 2nd KAR for a new total of at least 4,330.

³⁸177 British officers and NCOs were also reported as dead. See TNA CO 534/30_07, KAR Strength and Casualties, 14/02/1919, p. 38.

³⁹CWGC/1/1/7/E/14, Letter: Colonel H.S. Filsell, O/C 6th KAR, Dar es Salaam to O/C War Records, Nairobi, 13/09/1923

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹TNA CO 626/6, Summary of the Proceedings; Zomba Memorial statistics are: 1st KAR 474 deaths; 2nd KAR 811 deaths.

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Territory	Regiment	Total
British East Africa	Arab Rifles	31
	East African Pioneers	5
	East African Remount Depot	4
	Jubaland Irregular Constabulary	39
Uganda	Baganda Rifles	8
	East African Army Medical Corps	31
	East African Medical Service	7
	East African Native Medical Corps	84
	Uganda Police Service Battalion	41
German East Africa & Zanzibar	East Lake Border Police	1
	Zanzibar African Rifles	2
Nyasaland	Nyasaland Field Force	3
Northern Rhodesia	Northern Rhodesia Police	128
	Northern Rhodesia Regiment	3
Southern Rhodesia	British South Africa Police	40
	Rhodesia Native Regiment	169
British Somaliland	Camel Corps	30
	Somaliland Camel Corps	23
Un-territorialised	Army Ordnance Corps	1
	East African Animal Transport	3
	East African Forces	23
	East African Intelligence Department	51
	East African Mechanical Transport Corps	20
	East African Scouts	12
	East African Veterinary Corps	1
	Royal Army Veterinary Corps	1
Unidentified	1	
Overall		762

Table 4: Named East African combatants recovered from archival sources and added to the CWGC Casualty Database.⁴²

The CWGC casualty database also contains the names of a further 762 military casualties from other locally raised units, as detailed in Table 4. To this can be added

⁴²Dead as recorded in the CWGC casualty database and, as far as possible, excluding British Officers. Some of these casualties have always been present, but the majority were recovered through archival research connected to the CWGC's Non-Commemoration Programme. In some cases, like the Arab Rifles, figures reflect the name count not the total recorded as dead. Owing to ongoing research, it is possible these statistics will change. They are correct as of 1 April 2025.

another 12 Arab Rifles and 21 deaths within police units, as recorded by the Acting Governor of Kenya in December 1919.⁴³ This produces a total of 795. When combined with the KAR casualties, this results in a total confirmed figure of 5,125 dead. Taking the KAR statistics alone – the East African force that saw the bulk of frontline fighting – this equates to a 14.12 per cent mortality rate. As most fighting personnel served with the KAR, whose existing administration and casualty reporting processes were more robust than those of the carrier forces prior to the establishment of the MLC, we can assume any further omissions in this category would be small in scale and should not greatly affect the totals here.

A New Baseline for the Confirmed Dead

Adding the totals for combatant and non-combatant dead provides a new baseline figure of at least 56,055 deaths (Table 5). While this is a sizeable reduction of the estimate put forward by the CWGC in 2021, it does not include those believed to be completely unaccounted for at the end of the war.

Non-Combatants	50,930
Combatants	5,125
Total	56,055

Table 5. Total number of verified deaths

Accounting For the Unrecorded Dead

While we can provide a number for the officially recorded dead, it is universally accepted this does not incorporate all those lost amongst the carrier units. There are four issues of particular significance here:

- 1) potentially unreported MLC deaths due to influenza;
- 2) potentially unreported deaths amongst MLC casual labourers;
- 3) MLC carriers reported as deserted and missing who actually died; and
- 4) forces raised for which there are overall statistics but no death figures.

As much of the evidence informing the estimates for the first two issues is the same, they will be dealt with under a single heading.

⁴³TNA CO 533/216/7624, Letter: Charles Bowring, Acting Governor British East Africa to Viscount Milner, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 31 December 1919. These were for African casualties only.

1 & 2. Potentially unreported MLC deaths due to influenza and potentially unreported deaths amongst MLC casual labourers

An anomaly in the tabulated statistics of Watkins' report is the apparent absence of deaths caused by influenza in 1918. The reason to doubt their inclusion is an almost passing reference to the impact of the disease in an appended chart, which appears in isolation and clearly diverges from the statistics given elsewhere. The chart, entitled 'deaths per cent per annum of all porters in the field' (henceforth 'per cent per annum' chart), shows a single trace until November 1918, when it splits into deaths caused by influenza and deaths from other causes. Also unique to this chart is the apparent inclusion of casually employed labour, something that Watkins suggests is absent from the statistics elsewhere in the report.

Taking the chart at face value and as the title suggests and then attempting to extract and tabulate the figures therein, shows that the influenza line rises sharply to a peak of 58.45 per cent for the week ending 7 December 1918. When subtracting deaths from other causes, the suggestion is that 55.24 per cent of carriers in the field that week died from influenza.⁴⁴ This would obviously be a startling statistic, suggesting that during one week in December more than half the carriers still active with the MLC succumbed to the disease. While the number of active carriers was undoubtedly falling quickly during this period, this would still account for a significant number of men.

The largest issue with these figures is the fact they do not connect with the rest of Watkins' report. These details are neither referenced elsewhere nor directly linked to data showing strength in the field, something that prevents an immediate calculation of the number of deaths using the chart. Furthermore, the obvious and substantial spike in recorded deaths in December 1918 does not appear in any of Watkins' other statistics or his narrative, which seems unduly odd, especially as he singled out and explained the excessively high mortality rate seen in the middle of 1917.⁴⁵

Death percentages for the entire period of this chart, from January 1917 to December 1918, also do not align with any other statistics produced for similar periods elsewhere in the report. For example, a separate chart that plots mortality against estimated strength (henceforth 'mortality and strength' chart) shows that, for the week ending 16 November 1918, estimated strength was around 55,000 and mortality around 150.⁴⁶ If the axes of the 'per cent per annum' chart are taken to be just that – the percentage of a given number of men in the field who died – and are applied to this

⁴⁴TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, Appendix 2, Graph 5.

⁴⁵Watkins attributed the mid-1917 spike in deaths to campaigning in the rainy season, a lack of doctors and stretched lines of communications. *Ibid.*, paras. 28-30, 124.

⁴⁶This was a considerable increase from the months preceding, which averaged less than 100. *Ibid.*, Appendix 2, Graph 1.

55,000 strength figure, the total deaths for the same week would jump to 7,893 (6,380 from influenza and 1,513 from other causes). Given the virulence of the disease, these numbers are not necessarily impossible in isolation – especially in the context of the other hardships faced by carriers – but the tenfold increase in deaths from other causes is harder to explain. Additionally, a war diary entry from a few days later written by the Deputy Director of Medical Services, East African Expeditionary Force, noted that carrier influenza deaths from the previous week had been unusually high but that this had cost 205 lives.⁴⁷ The difference is simply too large to ignore.

Continuing this comparative exercise just causes further issues. Using the same method across the entirety of the month of November would yield a total death figure of 33,703: 25,914 due to influenza and 7,789 due to other causes. Though not expressly stated, it is not believed the ‘mortality and strength’ chart includes casual labourers, something the ‘per cent per annum’ chart does, which would mean the total death figure would be even higher. Given that Watkins’ death figures provide a total for the entire war of nearly 41,000, a monthly toll like this that went unmentioned within the tabulated figures or narrative of the report begins to seem questionable.

Extending the analysis back before the influenza period is also revealing. While we might accept that a substantial increase in deaths due to this disease was deliberately excluded, it is harder to explain large anomalies elsewhere. Using the same method of calculation in pre-pandemic 1917 produces weekly mortality rates that would amount to a total annual loss of 944,462. Given the total wartime population of British East Africa was said to be around 2,596,000, and assuming that approximately half that population was female, such numbers would have been quickly unsustainable. Pushing this crude calculation further and continuing to ignore the existence of children and the infirm, you would get to an annual death figure that equated to 73 per cent of the entire male population of British East Africa. While recruitment was by this time drawing on the population of German East Africa and beyond, the total recruitment recorded for the entire war by Watkins – admittedly, again, not including casual labour or those raised in territories outside of the MLC’s control – amounted to approximately 400,000. Even if we expand this to include those believed to have been raised elsewhere and compare this against a total of 690,072 known recruitments for the entire war, this still suggests an additional 300,000 deaths above that total. This, of course, is not possible and the chart cannot be made to compute before or after the influenza period.

The flaws in this chart, or at least the absence of raw data that might give it meaning, prevent its use in this analysis. Nonetheless, its existence and other references to

⁴⁷See entry from 19 November 1918. TNA WO 95/5300/9, Deputy Director of Medical Services, East African Expeditionary Force, p. 32.

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carrier influenza deaths elsewhere suggests there is still a need to account for them. The figures provided by Watkins come with several caveats, most of which he mentions and are already recorded here, however, the impact of influenza on carriers is conspicuous by its absence. His loss figures for the influenza period support this, where contrary to expectation, their general trend is gradual decline. Although the monthly death percentages shifted to longer periods towards the end of the war – a 4-month composite figure covering August 1917 to November 1917, and a 17-month composite figure for December 1917 to April 1919 – dividing this out to a monthly average shows a steep decline, with the final period – the one covering the pandemic – falling to just 0.33 per cent. Given what is known about the impact of the disease globally, this strongly suggests these deaths are absent from the totals. While it is known that the war was highly conducive to the spread of influenza, there was a general tendency towards underreporting across all theatres owing to censorship, non-registration, missing records and misdiagnosis. This has also been said to be especially prevalent in the colonial context.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, we can begin to account for these men by benchmarking against other statistics.

The US Army is said to have suffered nearly 46,000 influenza related deaths during the whole pandemic (c.30,000 in US training camps and 15,489 in France), with the highest week of fatalities ending 4 October 1918, where there was a peak of 6,160.⁴⁹ With an army totalling 1.2 million, this equates to a mortality rate of 38.3 deaths per 1,000 population.

Contemporary statistics from colonial settings are rare but do exist, although their accuracy is often doubtful. Within German East Africa, post-war statements from newly arrived British administrators show the war-ravaged country ‘suffered severely’. A June 1919 report by the District Political Officer for Rungwe estimated that the total number of deaths across the Central Area ‘must have reached’ 15,000 to 20,000, out of a total population of c.180,000.⁵⁰ Although clearly given as an unscientific estimate, it translates to an average mortality rate of 83.33 to 111.11 per 1,000. A far more detailed and evidenced-based report from South Africa produced by the

⁴⁸Raised in, amongst others, Niall Johnson & Juergen Mueller, ‘Updating the Accounts: Global Mortality of the 1918-1920 “Spanish” Influenza Pandemic’, *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, Vol. 76, No. 1, (2002), pp. 105-115; Fred Andayi, Sandra Chaves & Marc-Alain Widdowson, ‘Impact of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic in Coastal Kenya’, *Tropical Medicine and Infectious Disease*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (2019), pp. 1-14.

⁴⁹Peter Wever & Leo van Bergen, ‘Death from 1918 pandemic influenza during the First World War: a perspective from personal and anecdotal evidence’, *Influenza and Other Respiratory Viruses*, Vol. 8, No. 5, (2014), pp. 539-541.

⁵⁰Tanzania National Archives, Tanganyika Territory reports, Rungwe District 1918, Report by District Political Officers, 22 June 1919.

Influenza Epidemic Commission in 1919 provides a firmer base for comparison. Here it was noted that between August and November 1918, the infection rate among non-Europeans was 27.19 per 1,000 population, with a total of 2,162,152 confirmed cases and 127,745 deaths.⁵¹ This amounted to a mortality rate of 59.08 per 1,000 infected, and an overall mortality rate of 27.19 per 1,000 of the non-European population. When focused solely on the statistics of military hospitals within the Union, there were 1,288 recorded cases and 79 deaths among ‘natives’, with a mortality rate of 61.34 per 1,000 cases (which is to say per 1,000 people infected rather than per 1,000 population). Allowing for the small sample size, this is broadly comparable to the mortality rate within the wider population.⁵² Similar findings were reported by the Principal Medical Officer of Nyasaland in February 1919, where a mortality rate of 63.8 per 1,000 military cases was reported.⁵³

More recent regional calculations have explored these historical figures and applied various means for their adjustment, usually on the assumption that the recorded figures were underestimations. Looking specifically at the Coast Province of Kenya, Fred Andayi et al. calculated that, from September 1918 to March 1919, out of an estimated population of 181,199, there were 31,908 confirmed cases and 4,593 deaths. This produces a case rate of 176 per 1,000 people, and a mortality rate of 25.3 per 1000.⁵⁴ In a recent recalculation of the impact of influenza and its incidence and virulence within global populations, Niall Johnson and Juergen Mueller have calculated that out of a population of 2,596,000, Kenya colony as a whole suffered 150,000 deaths – a mortality rate of 57.8 per 1,000.⁵⁵

This final figure of 57.8 per 1,000 is not only the most useful to this analysis given its regional focus, but by being the highest per-population rate amongst the more robust analyses, it also allows us to err on the side of overestimation – something that fits more comfortably with the wider carrier experience. Applying this figure to the 64,622 men known to still be in the field at the time of Armistice – coincidentally the moment

⁵¹These statistics were noted as being as reliable as possible, although it was accepted there would be gaps.

⁵²TNA CO 633/112/14, Report of the Influenza Epidemic Commission, Union of South Africa, 8 February 1919.

⁵³Figures in this report, which included totals for European and Indian deaths, were recognised as ‘far from being an exhaustive record of the epidemic’. They also apply to those infected rather than total population. TNA CO 525/82 21731, Letter: The Principal Medical Officer & Assistant Director of Medical Services Nyasaland Protectorate, to, The Acting Chief Secretary Zomba, 14 February 1919.

⁵⁴Infection figures only available for three out of five districts. Andayi et al., ‘Impact of the 1918 Influenza Pandemic’, pp. 6-11.

⁵⁵Johnson & Mueller, ‘Updating the Accounts’, p. 110.

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that influenza cases appeared to spike – suggests an additional 3,735 carriers could have died in MLC service. As recruitment is known to have stopped on 13 November, this is one of the rare occasions we can be confident about the total number of men likely to have been affected. Furthermore, we know that over the six months that followed Armistice, the depots repatriated 55,175 men; a figure that comfortably absorbs this additional death figure with a small excess. Most of those left over were said to be working with salvage units, with some others also possibly waiting for the provision of artificial limbs and pension arrangements.⁵⁶

Attempting a comparable calculation for carriers raised in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia is more complicated due to a lack of statistics. For Nyasaland, it is known that 20,000 carriers were at least promised to NORFORCE in October 1918.⁵⁷ Although recruitment from Northern Rhodesia is said to have slackened considerably in that year and effectively ceased in September owing to unrest, it is likely some men were still in the field. Drawing on lower average strength statistics from preceding years is still likely to overestimate the number employed, but it is also the only figure available. Thus, adding 15,000 from Northern Rhodesia to the Nyasaland figure gives a combined total of 35,000, which closely aligns with NORFORCE's earlier carrier demand.⁵⁸ Using these figures, it is possible to estimate that 1,156 carriers from Nyasaland and 867 from Northern Rhodesia died from influenza while on active service.⁵⁹ Although far less robust than many other statistics included in this analysis, this allows us to account for influenza deaths in these cohorts while erring on the side of overestimation.

MLC casual labour presents a unique issue in this calculation given the difficulties found in applying a mortality rate to a cohort of personnel that was, by its very nature, temporary and constantly fluctuating. What we can say of this group is that they were largely used to undertake short-term sanitation work in Dar-es-Salaam and other towns, and that their maximum period of consecutive employment was 30 days. In emergencies they were used to supplement the MLC's regular labour force, but only

⁵⁶TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, para. 129-30 & Appendix I, Table 5.

⁵⁷For Nyasaland see TNA WO 95/5298/3, East Africa GHQ, entry for 5 October 1918.

⁵⁸For Northern Rhodesia see Yorke, 'War, Mobilisation', pp. 120-59. Although average is from 1916-17, and it is known that demand for carriers slackened in 1918, it is used here as the only estimate relating to carriers in the field during a given period. In late 1917, the total number of carriers engaged by NORFORCE was 30,000. See Lucas (ed.), *Empire at War*, p. 265.

⁵⁹Infections within the civilian population averaged 10-30% with deaths at 3-12%. The highest mortality rate was amongst children. See M.C. Musambachime, 'African Reactions to the 1918/1919 Influenza Epidemic in Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland', *Zambia Journal of History*, Vol. 6, No. 7 (1994), pp. 1-24.

while working on this 30-day card system rather than being registered on the books of the MLC. While this almost certainly meant some of these men fell ill and died in ways similar to enlisted MLC carriers, the method and nature of their employment suggests this number would have been comparatively low. Where we might assume a larger casualty rate, however, is in connection to the influenza pandemic, the deadliness of which had little direct connection to the campaign and the dates of which coincided with the peaks in casual labour employment. Following the method applied to the wider carrier population, and using the figures Watkins provided for casual labourers under 'contract' at given times during the pandemic period, we can add a further 3,863 deaths from influenza.⁶⁰ The extent and nature of the information available makes it impossible to distil more from these statistics and, in all likelihood, this is an overestimation, but it allows these men to be included in the analysis and any excess likely offsets those casual labourers who died in service outside the influenza period.

In sum, this estimate suggests a further 9,621 deaths due to influenza can be added to Watkins' total for carrier casualties.

3. MLC carriers reported as deserted and missing who actually died

The penultimate group unaccounted for in these statistics is the proportion of those who were recorded as deserted or missing who had in fact died. A particular frustration is the fact that MLC statistics do not disaggregate the deserted from the missing, something born out of the high desertion rate and dispersal of forces. As previously stated, it was this uncertainty that led the MLC to classify as deserted all the missing unless proof to the contrary could be obtained.⁶¹ The two categories are treated as one in this analysis.

At the end of the war, over 130,000 carriers raised in British East Africa, German East Africa, Zanzibar, and Uganda fell into these categories. In setting out this figure, Watkins added that most early deserters (1914-15) 'must in the majority of cases have obtained work with European or Indian employers to avoid being again conscripted in the native reserves'. Likewise, later into the campaign, he noted that local impressment meant that many 'who did not like it simply went home' – a fact reflected in MLC statistics, where 77 per cent of those listed as deserted and missing came from German East Africa, where most of the fighting occurred. Watkins clearly believed that most of these individuals deserted rather than died in service, stating 'the majority

⁶⁰The MLC made short-term contracts with local Chiefs and Headmen to complete specific tasks. They then found and provided the labour. TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, paras. 73, 84-6 & Appendix 1, Table 11.

⁶¹See TNA WO 95/5311/5, East Africa, Director of Military Labour, 27 January 1918, pp. 85-6.

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of local natives undoubtedly reached their homes', although he added that those attempting to reach British East Africa were more likely to have perished.⁶² In essence, the further from home a deserting carrier was, the less likely he was to survive.

Acknowledging that a proportion of the deserted and missing were actually dead is significant, but determining that proportion is difficult. This is complicated by the fact that many who were conscripted allegedly provided false names, meaning they could have served and deserted multiple times.⁶³ This is just one of several factors that introduces uncertainty to any calculation, but this is not the first time this exercise has been attempted. In December 1919, the acting Governor of Kenya, Sir Charles Bowring, wrote to the Colonial Office to state his belief that of the 27,936 from the territory who were listed as missing and deserted by Watkins, 'it may be assumed that 14,000 died'. While accepting that an exact total 'will never be known', he felt compelled to account for these men.⁶⁴ Although Bowring did not show his working, he almost certainly formulated his calculation from the statistics Watkins provided for Maxim Gun Carriers, which were the most detailed.

Whilst compelling, there are several issues with this calculation. Firstly, machine gun carriers operated as frontline porters, as opposed to transport carriers who operated on the lines of communications. Frontline porters were specially picked and trained, and attached permanently to formations, as their duties 'frequently took them under fire'.⁶⁵ Watkins, too, noted that the higher proportion of deaths amongst carriers raised in Kenya was attributable to the fact they served longer, furnished the majority of gun-carriers, stretcher bearers and front-line porters, and served further from their own country.⁶⁶ As such, whilst it is understandable that Bowring used the most complete statistics for this calculation, they also potentially skew the result given the fact these porters made up just 3% of the total manpower raised within the MLC.

⁶²TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, Appendix I, Table 7.

⁶³Ibid. See also para. 29, where desertions were described as 'rampant' in German East Africa, especially when men were near home or 'some harbour of refuge'. Watkins believed many would have lost their lives in the attempt but declined to estimate numbers; For prevalence of desertion see also TNA CO 95/5331/13, Despatch No. I by Lt. Col. E.B.B. Hawkins, 14 November 1918, p. 28.

⁶⁴Bowring estimated deserted and missing at 27,936. Combining the figures in Appendix I, Table 7 & 9 of the Watkins' Report equal 27,794. See TNA CO 533/216/7624, Letter: Charles Bowring.

⁶⁵C.P. Fendall, *The East African Force 1915-1919*, (London: H.F. & G. Witherby, 1921), pp. 202-209.

⁶⁶TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, Appendix I, Table 6.

A more significant issue is found in the calculation itself. Within Watkins’ statistics for Maxim Gun Carriers, there are three knowns (the number recruited, the number discharged and the number dead) and one unknown (the number of missing and deserted likely to be dead). Removing those known to have survived, which Bowring appears to have done, is an error, as their absence dramatically and incorrectly increases the mortality rate. Instead, Bowring should have removed the unknown from his calculation – the deserted and missing – so that the number of recruits with known outcomes could be identified as either discharged or deceased, thereby providing a percentage mortality rate that could be applied to the unknown (the missing and deserted).

While the wider MLC statistics do not include a figure for those discharged, this is of no significance as those not dead or within the missing or deserted groupings must have filled this category. Removing the deserted and missing from the total recruitments allows us to determine the percentage of those remaining who were known to have died. This mortality rate can then be applied to estimate unrecorded deaths (Table 6). This is done using the following calculation:

- Subtract the deserted and missing from the total recruited.
- Calculate the percentage of those left known to have died.
- Apply this percentage to the deserted and missing.

	Figures from Watkins Report			Calculation			
	A)	B)	C)	D)	E)	F)	
Territory	Recruitments	Deaths	Deserted & Missing	Total recruitments minus recorded deserted & missing (Col A minus Col C)	Percentage of recruitments (minus deserted & missing) recorded dead (based on Col B and D)	Potential dead amongst deserted & Missing (% in Col E applied to Col C)	Combined total of recorded & presumed dead from all recorded MLC recruitments (Col B plus Col F)
BEA	179,189	25,891	27,794	151,395	17.10%	4,753	30,644
Uganda	11,936	1,315	2,921	9,015	14.59%	426	1,741
GEA	201,343	13,129	103,719	97,624	13.45%	13,949	27,078
Zanzibar	3,515	213	1,628	1,887	11.29%	184	397
TOTAL	395,983	40,548	136,062	259,921		19,312	59,860

Table 6. Calculation based on Watkins Report for potential missing (presumed dead).⁶⁷

⁶⁷Figures are compiled from Appendix I, Tables 6, 7 and 9 of the Watkins Report.

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Using this methodology with MLC statistics for the deserted and missing from British East Africa, German East Africa, Uganda, and Zanzibar suggests an additional 19,312 men should be considered dead, with the remaining 116,750 being classified as deserted.

4. *Forces raised outside of the MLC for which there are overall statistics but no death figures* For the B.E.A. and Uganda Carrier Corps whose deaths are not recorded elsewhere, it is possible to apply the death percentages from Column E, Table 6. For the Ugandans, who suffered a combined 1,526 dead or invalided from 3,576 total recruits, we can suggest that 522 died and 1,004 were invalided. For Kenya, by drawing on a figure of 7,500 pre-MLC carrier recruitments and applying the relevant percentage, the result is 1,283 deaths.⁶⁸ This suggests a further 1,805 carriers died outside of the MLC between August 1914 and March 1915. Of the 1,741 auxiliaries who served as part of the Uganda Transport Corps and for whom no mortality figures were provided, the same approach results in 254 deaths, while applying the same methodology to the 1,000 Ugandans who served in the Uganda Pioneers (500) and Belgian Military Telegraph Construction (500) results in 146 deaths. Overall, this adds a total of 2,205 deaths.

Finally, also absent from Watkins' figures are Northern Rhodesian carriers. Although the colonial government did provide casualty numbers for these men and women, in the same sentence it acknowledged they were likely too low for first-line carriers. Taking this group first, and accepting a total wartime strength of 41,000, more focused statistics based on discrete groups within this cohort provide a mortality rate that can be applied globally. Taking one contingent of Fort Jameson carriers loaned for operations alongside Nyasaland forces in 1916, evidence suggests a mortality rate of 7.91 per cent.⁶⁹ Applying this across all those who served outside the territory (41,000) provides an estimated total of 3,243 deaths. For those carriers operating internally within Northern Rhodesia, the colonial government believed casualty rates were comparable to peacetime and estimated 300 deaths. Using more detailed statistics from neighbouring Nyasaland, where the type of service and conditions were

⁶⁸Watkins' Report referenced 8,624 Kenyans and Ugandans served in the B.E.A. and Uganda Carrier Corps. While we can disaggregate the Ugandans, subtracting them from this total (5,048) conflicts with a figure (7,500) provided in a separate report by the colonial government in Kenya for pre-MLC enlistments. This higher estimate will be used here. TNA CO 533/216/7624, Letter: Charles Bowring; TNA CO 533/216, Watkins Report, para 47.

⁶⁹Of 12,427 personnel, 983 were said to be dead or missing. Mutale Mazimba, 'African Reactions to the First World War: The Case of the Mtenga-Tenga of Northern Rhodesia (Zambia)', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 49, No. 4, (2023), p. 561; Comparable statistics are in Yorke, 'War, Mobilisation', pp. 144-145.

comparable, and accepting that second-line enlistments numbered approximately 44,889, we can suggest a more accurate estimate of 449 deaths.⁷⁰

Although it is unlikely these calculations can be developed further, they provide the most comprehensive estimate attempted to account for the true human cost paid by locally raised forces in the East Africa campaign of the First World War.

Recorded deaths (non-combatants)	50,930
Recorded deaths (combatants)	5,125
Unreported MLC influenza deaths	3,735
Unreported NORFORCE influenza deaths	2,023
Unreported influenza deaths amongst MLC casuls	3,863
MLC missing presumed dead	19,312
Dead unaccounted for in other statistics	3,297
Total	88,285

Table 7. Total estimate for East African deaths.

Conclusion

Despite the enormous effort put into raising and administering carrier forces during the war in East Africa, there is little remanence of the paperwork that recorded their extraordinary endeavours and the awful price they paid in lives. Although soldiers seem to have been better served in this respect, both groups remain underrepresented in named commemoration by the CWGC. The absence of all this information has had a substantial impact on the way this campaign is remembered and how these casualties are commemorated.

Although attempts to quantify the losses experienced by East African communities mobilised in this war have been made in the past, these have been satisfied with sweeping figures based on the application of percentages to approximate overall numbers. While this has been effective in emphasising magnitude, looking at the issue in round figures has stripped the individual from this tragedy. By digging deeper into the available statistics and applying careful and informed calculations using information that has survived, this analysis provides a figure very likely to be closer to reality. Although it only differs by a little under 12,000 from the universally accepted 100,000 dead, these statistics are now disaggregated and territorialised. It is hoped this returns

⁷⁰44,889 figure comprised of 12,000 paddlers, 6,000 Barotse, 6,000 from Kasama, 17,134 from Fort Jameson, 3,755 from Mkusi. Lucas, *Empire at War*, p. 295; Mazimba, 'African Reactions', p. 556.

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some dignity and individual recognition to every one of the 88,285 East Africans (Table 8) who lost their lives in British military service during this war, and that this helps the communities of today to better connect with those casualties.

Territory	Soldiers			Enlisted Carriers			Casual Engagements		Overall total deaths
	Recruitments	Deaths	Percentage	Recruitments	Deaths	Percentage	Engagements	Deaths	
British East Africa (Kenya)	c.9,643	1,464	15.18%	186,689	31,927	17.10%	13,096		33,391
Uganda	c.14,039	1,520	10.83%	64,992	5,555	8.55%	120,000		7,075
German East Africa & Zanzibar (Tanzania)	c.5,554	347	6.25%	204,858	27,475	13.41%	218,411		27,822
Portuguese East Africa (Mozambique)	-	-	-	10,931	450	4.12%			450
Nyasaland (Malawi)	c.19,000	1,288	6.78%	138,943	5,596	4.03%	56,709		6,884
Northern Rhodesia (Zambia)	c.3,437	131	3.81%	85,889	4,559	5.31%	-		4,690
Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe)	c.2,752	209	7.59%	204	-	-	-		209
British Somaliland (Somalia)	c.1,500	53	3.53%	-	-	-	-		53
Un-territorialised		113		-	3,735	-	-	3,863	7,711
Total	55,925	5,125	9.16%	692,506	79,297	11.45%	408,216	3,863	88,285

Table 8. Combined Totals.⁷¹

⁷¹Note once more that, unlike Hodges, this table deals only with manpower raised in East Africa. For the section on soldiers, the figures provided here are primarily based on the territory in which a regiment was based, not on the number of recruitments and deaths from that territory. Citations for enlisted carriers are drawn from the tables above. For casual engagements, the figures here denote number of 'engagements', not total number of individuals who served. For British East Africa, soldier recruitment and casual engagement figures from TNA, CO 533/216/7624. Soldier deaths combined from Table 3 – 3rd and 5th KAR - and Table 4. For Uganda, soldier recruitment figures from TNA, CO 533/93/20072, War services of Uganda, 12 February 1919, soldier deaths combined from Table 3 – 4th KAR – and Table 4. For German East Africa and Zanzibar, recruitment figures combined 900 for Zanzibar with the total strength of 6th KAR and 7th KAR in Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, p. 204; TNA, CO 534/25_2, p. 47. Death figures from Table 3 – 5th and 6th KAR – and Table 49

This article has adopted a quantitative approach to a history that deserves a qualitative one. It does not attempt to document the experiences of Africans in this war, the horrors they endured on behalf of a colonial power, or the lasting impact of their service. Nor does it touch upon those who served and perished with German forces. Instead, it has very deliberately been written with a singular and specific purpose to quantify those lost in British service who should have been commemorated alongside their counterparts from across the British Empire. In making these calculations, it is acknowledged that the cost of this war did not end with the peace, and that many who survived their service returned home weakened, sick or injured. Others will have died after discharge before even reaching home. There is also no question that the movement of hundreds of thousands of people around the region helped the spread of disease, particularly influenza. The impact of these events and the voids left in these communities were long-lived, with many struggling to bounce back. These uncountable costs of war, as well as the lived experience of those involved, are clearly just as important to our understanding of the conflict and its legacies. However, it is hoped this paper not only enables the CWGC to renew efforts to commemorate those who lost their lives and never received the recognition they deserved, but also draws renewed focus on a largely forgotten history that merits further attention.

4. Casual engagements are combined as the majority were from these territories. See TNA, CO 533/216, Watkins Report, Appendix I, Table 11. For Nyasaland, soldier and carrier recruitment figures from Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, pp. 270 & 275. Soldier deaths from Table 3 – 1st and 2nd KAR – and Table 4. For Northern Rhodesia, recruitment figures drawn from Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, p. 309. Soldier deaths from Table 4. For Southern Rhodesia, recruitment figures drawn from Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, p. 344 (figure excludes 22 ‘Cape Boys’). Moreover, 169 Southern Rhodesians served with the BEA Transport Corps and 35 with the Union Labour Corps. Two deaths were recorded within these cohorts but they are incorporated into the wider MLC and South African statistics. The small number recruited for the territory is owing to the labour demands of civil mines. See National Archives of Zimbabwe, A3/11/25/5/2, List of Natives, exclusive of members of the Rhodesia Native Regiment, who left Southern Rhodesia to proceed on active service during The Great War, 1914-18. For British Somaliland, recruitment figures from Lucas (ed.), *The Empire at War*, p. 568. For unterritorialised casualties, the carrier total is from influenza deaths.