

The First World War in Africa: The Historical Background of *African Queen*

Study Leader: Scott Rappeport

Tuesdays, 1:30 - 3:30 p.m.

4 weeks beginning January 21

AIL Classroom, Lethbridge Lodge, Colby-Sawyer College

Maximum number of participants: 40

Who doesn't remember the memorable movie *The African Queen*, in which the characters played by Bogart and Hepburn struggle mightily in their attempt to sink the fictitious German warship *Marie-Louisa* as it sails around a large lake in Africa? The colonial conflict during WWI is the historical context underlying this famous film.

Many of us grew up watching films such as *Sergeant York* or *All Quiet On The Western Front* and saw WWI as the clash of massive armies facing each other across a hellish European landscape of trenches, blast craters, barbed wire and enormous death. Millions of soldiers were mired in the trenches of France for four long years. While we may know that many colonial troops (especially from French colonies) did fight in Europe, it is less well known that the conflict naturally spilled over into European colonies in Africa.

Prior to WWI, French, Belgian, Italian, Portugese and, of course, German and English colonies were geographically intermixed and freely traded with each other in relative peace. However, with the start of hostilities, inter-colonial conflict commenced as European powers saw the opportunity for colonial expansion and executing the strategic goals of cutting off natural resources and drawing critical forces from Europe for defense.

WWI in Africa saw fighting between small numbers of colonial troops led by European officers, colonial police and deployed European troops. The fighting consisted mostly of raids by small units equipped with outmoded rifles and a few machine guns across a jigsaw of colonial frontiers. Since there was little interior transport infrastructure such as roads and especially trains, however, all food, weapons and medical support often had to be carried by porters over tough jungle terrain. Disease ravaged transport animals and people alike. Nearly one million porters died from disease and malnutrition in carrying supplies compared to about 200,000 colonial and European troops who died during combat.

In this course, we will explore the historical context and actual events of WWI in Africa through lectures, photographic and film elements, as well as in-class discussion.



Scott Rappeport

Dr. Scott Rappeport is a retired marine geologist/system engineer. He received his PhD in earth sciences from Stanford University in 1981. Since then, he has led a varied career in R&D as a scientist/engineer. Over that time, he has held various supervisory and program management positions leading technical teams in offshore geologic studies and in the development and qualification of highly reliable electronic and mechanical systems for harsh marine environments.

Among his varied interests are English Premier League soccer, the intersection of civilization and paleo-environmental rapid climate changes, all things outdoors and, lastly, an abiding curiosity about the role of human psychology in game theory. He lives in Sunapee, New Hampshire.