


2014

## Anglo-French Negotiations Concerning Cameroon during World War I, 1914-1916: Occupation, "Condominium" and Partition

Lovett Z. Elango

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi>

 Part of the [African Studies Commons](#), [International Relations Commons](#), and the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Elango, Lovett Z. (2014) "Anglo-French Negotiations Concerning Cameroon during World War I, 1914-1916: Occupation, "Condominium" and Partition," *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*: Vol. 9: No. 2, Article 10.  
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi/vol9/iss2/10>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

# Anglo-French Negotiations Concerning Cameroon during World War I, 1914-1916: Occupation, “Condominium” and Partition<sup>1</sup>

Lovett Z. Elango

Anglo-French disagreements over Cameroon during World War I and the efforts to resolve them both during the Allied campaigns in the territory and at the end of the war suggest that negotiation can occur even in wartime successfully. At the outbreak of the war Cameroon was a German territory like Tanganyika, South West Africa, and Togoland. The Anglo-French grand strategy and war aims were to seize these territories and oust the Germans from them. Consequently, Cameroon became the theater of an intense military struggle and a pawn of Anglo-French imperial rivalry fuelled by the conflicting territorial ambitions and claims of France and Britain. The outcome was that both countries, after protracted and often acrimonious negotiations over pieces of territory that were typical of 19th-century imperialism, eventually abandoned a proposed condominium for the joint administration of Cameroon in favor of outright partition of the territory although Cameroonians were absent from the negotiations. This paper highlights the issues and traces the main stages in the evolving disagreement that led to this outcome. It is based on research conducted at the Public Record Office (PRO), now National Archives, London. I am grateful to the British Council for its generous bursary, which made it possible.

## Introduction

When Britain and France embarked upon the joint conquest of the German colonies of Togoland and Cameroon<sup>2</sup> at the outbreak of World War I, they seemed to have shelved, at least for the time being, the colonial rivalries which had often troubled their relations before the war. If nothing else, their relatively rapid joint conquest of Togo in August 1914 seemed to encourage this view. Had this wartime cooperation continued it might have enabled them not only to conquer but also to rule those territories jointly during and after the war.

Unfortunately, no sooner had the Allied operations in Cameroon begun than the rivalries resurfaced. The reasons for this are not hard to find. France entered the campaign intent on recovering the territories of Equatorial Africa, now part Cameroon, which she

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of a larger study entitled “The Anglo French Condominium in Cameroon, 1914-1916: History of a Misunderstanding.” Parts of this larger study have been published by Navi-Group Publications in Cameroon, and in the *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19, 4 (1985) under the title “The Anglo-French ‘Condominium’ in Cameroon, 1914-1916: The Myth and the Reality.” I am grateful to the editors of the Journal for permission to use it here in slightly rewritten form.

<sup>2</sup> Henceforth Cameroon.

had been forced to cede to Germany in 1911. Moreover, she had not abandoned the old dream of a French Empire comprising unbroken territory between Algiers and Brazzaville (Osuntokun, 1975, p. 650). Britain, on the other hand, was anxious to capture the port town of Duala and its powerful transmission station which the Germans used to monitor shipping and other movements in the South Atlantic. As the campaign progressed, Britain gradually developed territorial interests and ambitions in Cameroon. In general, she wished to retrieve the lost territories of the Lamido of Yola and the Shehu of Borno whose lands had been divided by the arbitrary map drawing of the partition era (Osuntokun, 1975, pp. 649-650). These ambitions eventually gave birth to the strained Anglo-French relations during much of the 18-month campaign. Essentially, then, the war merely provided Britain and France a pretext for further colonial conquest and annexation. They tried to disguise this fact when, early in the campaign, they agreed to establish a condominium over the territories of Cameroon, which they had jointly conquered and occupied. This study will show that the projected Condominium never materialized because of the clashing territorial ambitions and claims of the two Allies.

On September 27, 1914, a party of British Marines occupied the port town of Duala, shortly after British battleship *H.M.S. Challenger* briefly bombarded it and secured its surrender. The Marines were the first contingent of an Anglo-French force, variously named the African Expeditionary Force, West African Expeditionary Force, and Cameroons Expeditionary Force. After surrendering Duala, the Germans retreated into the interior of Cameroon and established the provisional capital of their administration in Yaounde, where it remained until the end of the Cameroon campaigns.

Henceforth, until the Germans were defeated and ousted from the territory in January 1916, Duala served a dual purpose as the headquarters of the Expeditionary Force, commanded by British officer Brigadier-General Charles M. Dobell and the seat of the Anglo-French administration of the occupied territories, also headed by Dobell. It was from Duala, then, that Dobell administered, in principle on behalf of the Allies, the regions of Cameroon conquered by the Allied troops.

But the adoption and proclamation of the principle of joint administration of the conquered territories by the two Allies were one thing, its application another. Not surprisingly, differences soon arose between the Allies concerning its application. This study attempts to reconstruct the negotiations leading first to the agreement for joint invasion and occupation of Cameroon and next to the eventual partition of Cameroon into British and French territories at the Versailles peace settlement at the end of the war. More specifically, it tries to show that the administrative “arrangement,”<sup>3</sup> which has been rather grandiosely christened the Anglo-French Condominium by Ndam Njoya (n.d.)<sup>4</sup> and others, was in fact so heavily weighted in favor of the British that it was virtually a British administration.

## **Anglo-French (Re)conquest of Cameroon**

---

<sup>3</sup> This is the term frequently used, at least initially, by the British.

<sup>4</sup> Ndam Njoya, *Le Cameroun Dans Les Relations Internationales*, Yaounde: n.d. Also Che-Mfombong, “Bamenda Under British Administration, 1916-1961: From Native Administration to Local Government.” Masters Thesis, University of Yaounde, 1980.

Naturally, the first concern of the Allied troops after the capture of Duala was the consolidation of their position. With this object in view, during October- December 1914, they launched combined military-naval operations to the north, to the south, to the southwest, and to the southeast of Duala. These operations were designed to drive out any pockets of German resistance, prevent their return, as well as secure lines of communication. Consequently, by December 1914, the Anglo-French troops commanded by Dobell were more or less firmly established in the Nkongsamba-Dschang-Bare district in the north, the Victoria district in the southwest, and the Yabassi-Edea district in the southeast.<sup>5</sup>

But these were not the only regions of Cameroon jointly or separately conquered and occupied by British and French troops during this initial phase of the campaign. On August 14, 1914, before Dobell's Expeditionary force arrived in Duala Colonel C. H. P Carter, Commandant of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF) was granted permission to reconnoitre the Nigeria-Cameroon border. Three columns of Nigerian troops of the WAFF were deployed along the Nigeria-Cameroon border pending orders from Lagos. On August 17, Nigerian troops of the so-called Cross River Column, led by Lieutenant Colonel C. T. Mair, launched an offensive from Ikom on the Nigeria-Cameroon border. After a few setbacks, the column resumed the offensive and bravely fought their way to Ossidinge (modern Mamfe), and eventually to Bamenda on October 22, 1915 (Gorges, 2004, p. 132). Two other Columns of Nigerian troops were deployed on the Nigeria-Cameroon border. With some assistance from the French, the British managed to capture Garua and Kusseri, and thus created a Nigerian front in the war. Persistent rumors of an Anglo-French Condominium began to surface. Not surprisingly, these territories became a matter of contentious bargaining between the Allies in talks at the end of the war. But more importantly, the territories made Nigeria—and its Governor-General Lugard—an important factor in the Anglo-French negotiations concerning the establishment of the condominium, its possible extension beyond Duala and contiguous territories, and the provisional and ultimate partition of the conquered territories of Cameroon.

The French, on their own part, had initiated hostilities which opened a southeast front of the campaign. On August 6, 1914 French troops from Brazzaville, capital of Moyen Congo, captured two posts just inside the northeastern Cameroon border (Farwell, 1987, p. 36). This was only the first operation by two columns commanded by General Joseph Aymerich, Commander of French Equatorial African troops. It was also the first strike in the reconquest of the territory which France had ceded to Germany in 1911. One column, under Colonel Hutin advanced from Bongo up the Sanga River; the second, under Colonel Marrison, struck westward from Singa up the Lobaye River and finally reached a line Carnot-Nola-Ouessou on the Sanga River in October 1914. Here the column was reinforced by a Belgian contingent from Congo and continued its westward march.

By Christmas 1914 these troops had captured Betare and Molundu, two principal towns of the southeast. By March 1915 they were within striking distance of Doume and

---

<sup>5</sup> See Dobell to War Office (WO). March 1. 1916. CQ 649110.PRO London. (All documents in the CO series are found in the PRO)

Lomie, the other principal towns of the southeast.<sup>6</sup> Other French troops led by Colonel Miquelard engaged the Germans in the southwest and expelled them from German Muni while a column led by Colonel Le Meilleur advanced northwards parallel with the eastern frontier of Spanish Guinea.

The end result of these Franco-Belgian operations under the overall command of General Aymerich was the complete reconquest of the territories ceded to Germany in 1911. But the reconquest was unaided by any Allied forces commanded by General Dobell. As far as the French were concerned, therefore, the future of these territories was absolutely beyond any negotiation.

Thus, by the end of war, there were three widely separated groups of Cameroon territories jointly or separately conquered and held by the Allies. The first was what may be conveniently called the core territories in the Duala area where Dobell was in direct control on behalf of the Allies. This area had been chosen by the Offensive Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence as the first Allied objective because, together with Victoria and Buea and their surrounding plantations, Duala represented the administrative and commercial heartland of Cameroon. Its conquest, therefore, would cripple German administration and provide a base for further conquests (Henderson, 1962, p. 99).

The second area was Northern Cameroon where Dobell was not in direct command. Cunliffe, a British officer was in command there although there was some question as to whether a French or British officer should be the commander (Osuntokun, 1979, pp. 185-186). The third was Southeast Cameroon, which had been conquered by the Franco-Belgian troops commanded by Aymerich. The withdrawal of German administration from these regions inevitably imposed on the Allies the task of filling the vacuum by organizing a substitute administration even while they pursued their principal military objective of conquering the whole of Cameroon. In the face of repeated German attempts to retake some of these captured areas, especially in the Duala district, the need for some form of administration, as part of the effort at consolidation, was particularly urgent. Otherwise, the Allied hold on these territories would be precarious at best.

This is the immediate background against which the Allies began discussing plans for the joint administration which has been called the Anglo-French Condominium. As will become clear subsequently, this was a misnomer.

### **The Debate over Condominium**

According to Madiba-Essiben, it was the French who first proposed the establishment of a Condominium in Cameroon (Madiba-Essiben, 1981, p. 44). The proposal seemed to have followed logically from the decision by Britain and France to invade and conquer the territory jointly as they had conquered Togoland in August 1914. The first discussions between the two governments on this matter seem to have taken place sometime early in August 1914, apparently soon after the capture of Duala. Those talks were held between the British Ambassador to Paris, Sir Francis Bertie, and the French government, and it is possibly then that the subsequently troublesome word "condominium" was first used. The

---

<sup>6</sup> See Rapport du General Aymerich, Commandant Superieur des Troupes de Groupe de l'A.E.F. sur les operations engages contre le Cameroun Allemand, CO 649/5. Also, Aymerich, *La Conquete du Cameroun* (Paris: Payot, 1933).

talks culminated in a preliminary agreement which Bertie communicated to the Foreign Office (FO) in a despatch dated December 15, 1915.

The precise substance of these talks can be gathered from the instructions which the F.O. sent to Bertie by telegram on January 14, 1915. The Ambassador was instructed to inform the French government that, subject to its concurrence, the British Government “accepted the proposal for a Condominium in Cameroon” (include citation here). The telegram went on,

General Dobell should assume Government with full powers in all matters military and civil, such full powers being exercised with due regard to the joint nature of the administration under his control.

In order to ensure continuity of system and to avoid dislocation of staff work, the next senior British military officer should be designated as temporary successor to Dobell, in case of the latter’s death or disability, pending decision by two Governments as to a permanent successor.

The two Governments will bear the expenses of maintaining their respective troops. If expenses of administration exceed revenues or vice versa, deficit or surplus to be eventually either apportioned between two Governments in proportion to territory annexed or divided equally

Territory on Nigerian boundary and on boundaries of French colonies now occupied by troops under General Dobell’s command to continue to be administered by British and French colonial authorities until circumstances permit of handing them over to Condominium administration. (FO to Bertie, Jan 14, 1915, CO 649/3)

The telegram ended by expressing the hope that if the French government concurred in these “suggestions” it would instruct French colonial authorities to give Dobell “all possible assistance in men and material” to enable him to organize an administration (FO to Bertie, CO 649/3).

On February 6, 1915, the French ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, communicated the French reply to the British “suggestions” to the FO (Cambon to FO, February 3, 1915, CO 649/3). The French agreed to the British “suggestions” on all but one fundamental point. In their view, the attribution of all powers in military and civil matters to Dobell did not “conform exactly to the Condominium principle” (Cambon to FO). The principle would, on the contrary, be respected if the officer charged with the provisional administration were assisted by a civil servant of the other Allied power. The same combination, it added, would obtain if Dobell’s successor were British. If, however, he were French a British civil administrator would be designated as his assistant (Cambon to FO, February 3, 1915, CO 649/3). This naturally raised the question as to the nationality of Dobell’s successor in case of the latter’s death or departure. On this issue, where the British proposed that he be temporarily succeeded by the next senior British officer pending the appointment of a permanent successor by the two Governments, the French merely proposed that he be replaced by “the most senior military officer” (Cambon to FO, February 3, 1915, CO 649/3). In the ensuing weeks, British and French governments continued to debate the condominium proposal. Differences of opinion emerged between their respective colonial and foreign offices, and between these government departments and their “men on the ground” in Cameroon and other parts of West Africa. The debates are contained in official correspondences, minutes, and draft memoranda.

What emerges from these correspondences and the various reservations expressed was a substantial disagreement and misunderstanding between the British and the French on two fundamental and inextricably linked issues revolving around the nature and territorial extent of the proposed condominium administration. The first issue can be conveniently termed the authority issue, the second the territorial issue. The authority issue concerned the competence of the commanding officer and had two aspects, namely, whether he should share his power with a civil administrator and who was to be his potential successor.

The territorial issue concerned whether or not the condominium arrangement should be extended to the regions of Cameroon jointly and separately conquered and occupied by the Allied troops or, alternately, what was to be the basis of eventual partition of those territories between the Allies. The British, pleading military necessity, envisaged the extension of the arrangement to the regions conquered as the campaign progressed. In principle, the French were not averse to this. But they considered its extension to territories which their troops had conquered unaided, including Southeastern Cameroon, out of the question. As far as they were concerned, these were territories of which they had been unjustly deprived by the Franco-German Convention in 1911, but which they had now retrieved with their unaided arms. They would therefore limit the extension of the administration and the partition especially to the core areas around Duala jointly conquered and occupied by the French and British troops.

But there was a new and significant element in the French position on the territorial issue. In the beginning they seem to have envisaged a settlement involving Cameroon alone, but as we have seen, by August, in typical 19th century fashion they saw partition of Cameroon as only part of a broader settlement at the end of the war in Europe and Africa, which would involve all German colonies. Such a settlement, again in a manner characteristic of the 19th century, was to keep in view the interests of all parties and the possibility of tidying up untidy prewar colonial frontiers.

Notwithstanding this impasse Dobell, aware only that there had been an Anglo-French agreement to establish “some sort of Condominium,” but unaware of the details of this arrangement which were still being worked out with difficulty by the two Governments, continued to run things as he had apparently done since the capture of Duala. His only authority in this regard was the rather broad understanding which the two governments had reached to jointly invade Cameroon, for which task he, as commanding officer, had been granted full powers in “matters civil and military,” but only because of “his peculiar fitness for the job” (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 183). The administration which he formed—and which the British government wanted preserved—therefore had few of the features which the French, as a matter of principle, subsequently wished to see included in it. It consisted of “departments” which were run mainly by British officials. The officers who ran these services, and others whom Dobell wished from time to time to associate with this work, acted under his direct orders.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the French informed the British of their intention to appoint French officers, also known as French Delegation, to serve on the condominium government. As early as July 29, 1915, the French minister for the colonies had written to Supplies Officer Dunand-Henry (*sous intendant*) to the French forces in Cameroon, naming him head of the French Delegation (Delcassé to Dunand-Henry, August 29, 1915. CO 649 4), which was to comprise two other officials, Damiens and Decharte, both third class colonial administrators. Damiens was still in Brazzaville at the time of his

appointment and Decharte was due to sail for Duala on September 31, 1915 (Bertie to FO, August 7, 1915, CO 649/3). These men were to be preceded to Duala by a certain Jaillard, who was going to Duala as Postmaster (*Comis des postes*) and was to resume duty there on September 12 (Bertie to FO, September 3, 1915, CO 649/3).

The appointment of these men gave the first clear indication of the French determination to break the impasse between Britain and France and also clearly revealed the scale of the changes which the French envisaged in the existing administrative system. The letter of appointment defined both the structure of the administration and the rights and duties of these men in it.

Regarding the structure, it was to consist of “Commissions of Civil Officers.” These commissions were to function within the framework of political, administrative, and financial division so that neither of the “co-associated Governments” sustained vis-à-vis the other “a moral or material prejudice.” Concerning the financial system, all net revenues from customs, railway accounts, and plantation management were to be paid into a common treasury so that a subsequent division could be made on an agreed basis, and all funds were to be equitably used for French and British expenditures (Delcassé to Dunand-Henry, August 29, 1915. CO 649 4).

To ensure strict adherence to these principles, Dunand Henry’s principal duty was to consist in giving an opinion on all measures discussed in the commissions of which he was a member, and he and his colleagues were to brief the minister on their point of view on these matters but were otherwise to remain within strict limits of subordination to Dobell. On the other hand, Dunand-Henry was to continue personally to ensure the management of the affairs of the French Columns in Cameroon (Delcassé to Dunand-Henry, August 29, 1915. CO 649 4).

If the French had hoped to break the impasse between the two governments with the appointment of the delegation, they were sadly mistaken. Contrary to their expectations, the appointment of the delegation only served to harden the British attitude. To a large extent, this hardening of the British position was reinforced by Dobell’s strenuous objections to the new French move. This was understandable, for as we have seen above, his position was, from the British point of view, a pivotal one. Moreover, Dobell learned of the impending appointment of French Delegation *after* the arrival in Douala of Jaillard, the “Postmaster.” Dobell objected to this appointment and the manner in which it was made. He also objected to the arrangement on financial, organizational, and territorial grounds—as far as he was concerned, the existing postal system was functioning quite well. The British Colonial Office (CO) agreed with him, but the FO reacted differently.

For reasons which are far from being clear, the first British reaction to the French initiative focused specifically on Jaillard’s appointment. This was probably because Jaillard’s appointment to a specific post most directly and immediately challenged Dobell’s system, while the appointment of the delegation was a matter of principle which still left some room for maneuver and negotiation. At any rate, on September 23, 1915, Bertie informed Delcassé that the British government objected to “the despatch of French officials to Duala, including a Monsieur Jaillard as Postmaster . . . without previous consultation with . . . Dobell and without his administrative requirements having been ascertained” (to Dobell, October 18, 1915, CO 649/4) Clearly, the appointment of Jaillard was all the more objectionable because in the meantime, Dobell had let it be known that the postal services



already established were working satisfactorily (FO to Bertie, December 20, 1915, CO 649/4).

The French reply to this protest was surprisingly tame, in view of the fact that the appointments were consistent with their strong belief in the principle of equal representation in the administration. In a note to Bertie dated October 3, 1915, Delcassé claimed that the French had sent Jaillard not to open a post office but to serve in the one already established by the Allied Forces, especially in the section which handled postal money orders (*mandats poste*) addressed to French troops in Cameroon. He then assured the British government that no French civil servants would in future be sent to Cameroon by the colonial administration of the area occupied by the Allied Forces “without General Dobell being informed before hand and without the necessary clarification being provided” (FO to Bertie, December 21, 1915, CO 649/4).

These assurances were, in fact, more than assurances. They were, above all, huge concessions to the British on a matter of principle. But from the CO point of view, however, they were too evasive, and Strachey and his colleagues at the CO were quite rightly dissatisfied with them. What the French in fact promised was that they would not in future appoint any civilian administrator without informing Dobell before hand. But they still reserved the right, as formally equal partners, to make such appointments. Conversely, what the British had wanted them to promise was that they would not make any appointments without previously consulting Dobell and ascertaining his needs. This was a nuance, but it was a nuance with significant implications which were not lost on Strachey and his colleagues. Quite clearly, this was unacceptable because it could only lead to administrative paralysis.

Unfortunately, from the intelligence reaching the French government, it emerged that the representative of the two Allies had placed British civil servants at the head of all services of the new Cameroon administration while asking for the services of only a small proportion, and for subordinate tasks, of French civil servants. This situation, well known in French colonial circles, was causing disquiet there, and informed public opinion could not understand why French civil servants did not play a role in the Cameroon administration commensurate with the role which French troops were playing in the conquest of the colony. For these reasons, the minister expressed the hope that the British government would remind Dobell that “in exercising authority as representative of the two Allies he must willingly accept, indeed equally solicit, for the civil administration of Cameroon, French collaboration as well as British” (FO to Bertie, December 21, 1915, CO 649/4).

The French response again revealed the differences in attitude between the British FO and CO, the former seeming more conciliatory and the latter less so. In what sounded like a mild rebuke of Dobell and presumably his bosses at the CO, Langley, a FO official, regretted that “this whole question has given rise to . . . an amount of friction between the two Governments which is most undesirable between two Allies in the present circumstances” (Langley to CO, December 16, 1915, CO 649/4). He therefore expressed the hope that Dobell would “do his utmost to allay the colonial jealousies which underlie the present situation” (Langley to CO, December 16, 1915, CO 649/4). Quite clearly, Langley also hoped that Dobell’s bosses at the CO would give their man in Duala better instructions about how to placate the French. By the first quarter of 1915, the condominium idea seemed to have lost steam. Having disagreed on how the condominium would be

administered, British and French governments turned attention to what they did best: partition.

### Anglo-French Partition

It was not Dobell—or the British for that matter—that first raised this delicate matter. Rather, it was the French who first explicitly raised it in a Memorandum dated March 19, 1915,<sup>7</sup> which the French Military Attaché in London addressed to the War Office (WO). The Memorandum was apparently prompted by a despatch which the French Ministry for the Colonies addressed to the French embassy in London. That despatch was in turn based on a report by General Pineu, Commander of French West African forces, whose headquarters were at Dakar. What this suggests, therefore, is that the matter had been widely discussed in both French colonial and metropolitan official circles.

Essentially, the memorandum made two points. First, it claimed that the French had been assigned the greater share of the fighting necessary to achieve victory in Cameroon. This was so, the memorandum claimed, because two-thirds of the German forces in Cameroon were “opposed to our forces operating in the south, east and north of . . . Cameroon.” Against these forces, the French claimed to have deployed 7,500 men whilst the British had so far fielded only 4,800. In addition, the front allotted to the French was said to be “by far the more difficult one” on account of the great swamps in its river valleys, and the almost impenetrable forest in the West (See Memorandum, 649/4). This being so, the memorandum concluded, the initial agreement which provided for the deployment of equal forces in the joint effort “is not fulfilled, and France is left to conduct the more difficult and more arduous operations.”<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, in what was clearly a veiled criticism of Dobell’s strategy, the memorandum claimed that French Columns were in the very heart of Cameroon, 500 kilometers from their starting points, whilst the Expeditionary Force led by Dobell “is only some hundred kilometres from the base . . . in Duala” (citation here). The French government therefore felt that it would be dangerous to allow its Columns to advance further, while Dobell confined himself to occupying Duala and the districts bordering Nigeria. Concluding, the memorandum insisted that,

It is all the more necessary to throw light upon the efforts made by the French troops since, in the reports which he sends in and which are kindly communicated to us by Sir Francis Bertie . . . Dobell makes no mention of the progress of the French Columns which are not acting under his immediate orders, and speaks very little of the assistance given him by the French forces operating with him. (WO to French Military Attaché, April 1915, Memorandum, CO 649/4)

Harcourt agreed that the French Memorandum was “not at all pleasant.” He was not alone in holding this view. Harding for his part described it as a “very offensive memorandum” and speculated that it may have been written by the French Colonial Office

---

<sup>7</sup> See “Memorandum On the Operations In Cameroon.” Translation. CO 469/4. Hereafter Memorandum.

<sup>8</sup> See Memorandum. CO 649/4.

“behind the back of the French F.O.” in order “to edge their men in and get effective hold of the country” (Minute by Harding, September 16, 1915 CO 649/5).

As for the Admiralty, its position with regard to the Memorandum and the issues which it raised was the subject of a letter dated May 14, 1915, addressed to the CO (Nicholson to CO, May 14, 1915, CO 649/1). While deploring the raising of this question because of the acrimony it could provoke, the Admiralty nevertheless conceded two points. First, it admitted that the French contention was justified, especially since the advance of the French forces had been through marshy lands and was attended by “great difficulties.” Second, it conceded the numerical superiority of French native troops, although it argued that this superiority was perhaps somewhat offset by the superiority of British white troops. But the core of the Admiralty’s response was again the naval factor argument. In this connection, it agreed with the CO and Dobell that an important aspect of the question had been ignored, namely, the capture of the coastline and especially Duala and the adjacent districts of Buea, Edea, and Bare (Nicholson to CO, May 14, 1915, CO 649/1).

Lugard’s position did not differ much from that of the CO, the Admiralty, and Dobell. In general, he argued that the British had played the decisive and less self-seeking role in the campaign. In his opinion, the French conquests in the east and their operations in the north had been largely made possible by the fact that the British had devoted themselves to the “main object” of engaging the German forces. In sum, the arguments which each government adduced in support of its case indicate that they both felt that their respective contributions to the conquest of Cameroon had been underestimated or ignored by the other Ally.

This was how matters stood on the diplomatic front when the Allies resumed their long-delayed offensive following the long, prohibitive rainy season in Cameroon. On January 1, 1916, British troops commanded by Colonel Gorges entered Yaounde, the Germans having been forced to flee to Spanish territory, 120 miles to the south, by the Allied advance. On January 4, Gorges was joined in Yaounde by Colonel Cunliffe, another British Officer, and General Aymerich. For all practical purposes, the war in Cameroon was over. True, German resistance in Cameroon continued in far-off Mora until February 18 when the town capitulated, but the main issue of the war in Cameroon had by then been largely settled by the fall of Yaounde.

The capture of Yaounde by the Allies opened a new, decisive phase in the Anglo-French negotiations concerning the administration and partition of Cameroon. On January 11, 10 days after Gorges and his Column entered Yaounde, the FO wrote to the CO suggesting that in view of the capture of the capital and the probability that the whole of Cameroon would soon be in Allied hands, it would serve no useful purpose to continue the discussions with the French government concerning the administration of Duala and the form of administration which was presumably soon to be replaced by a new system (de Bunsen to CO, February 11, 1916, CO 649/9). This was so, the FO added, “in view of the discussions which were soon to commence on the form which administration of the whole territory was to take until the end of the war” (The Bunsen to CO, February 11, 1916, CO 649/9).

In a minute dated January 13, Strachey sounded the first note of diplomatic caution with regard to the impending discussions. He suggested that the British make no further proposals but let the French “show their hand” by making a counterproposal. The second comment by a CO official in this connection was even more trenchant: it suggested that

the British at once ask the French for a counterproposal and that in doing so the CO should indicate that no condominium would work. He further suggested that Strachey be sent to Paris to discuss the matter with Bertie and the French government in the event that the anticipated French counterproposal were inadmissible.

Finally, he urged that the CO press the WO to suggest to Dobell that in evacuating Yaounde and concentrating his troops, "he might so arrange that Duala and neighbourhood is effectively occupied by British troops" (de Bunsen to CO, February 11, 1916, CO 649/9).

Given the deep and widespread French suspicion of British motives which Madiba-Essiben has so well documented (Madiba, Essiben, 1981, pp. 41-42), it is more than likely that the French understood the implications of Dobell's attempt to concentrate his troops at Duala and that they wanted to forestall it. In February 1916, the French added another element of acrimony to the negotiations. In a letter to Bertie, they informed him that in view of the Allied offensive and the impending termination of Dobell's powers, they were proposing to instruct Aymerich to "cooperate with the competent British authority on an equal footing" in administering the zone of Cameroon jointly conquered by the Expeditionary Force commanded by Dobell (citation). To this end, Aymerich would be instructed to proceed to Duala on March 1 accompanied by some civilian officials (Bertie to FO, February 13, 1916, CO 649/9).

At the CO, Harding's reaction to this latest French move was characteristically forthright. He proposed to reply to the French that,

the Secretary of State entertains the strongest objections to the French proposal and considers that the Government should be informed that H.M. Government cannot accept it and must ask that any instructions which may have been sent to . . . Aymerich to carry it out may be at once cancelled . . . and that for the French to have given such instructions can only be regarded as an attempt to prejudge the question of the form of administration. (Harding to CO).

With this parting shot, the CO and its administrators faded into the background and the FO and its diplomats formally took over. With regard to the Cameroon question at least, the FO were now in a better position to view and treat the matter in a wider "globalist" diplomatic context. Among other things, this globalist approach permitted the FO to achieve the long-standing goal of conceding West African territory to other powers in order to secure East African territory, which was considered more vital to British interests (Robinson, Gallagher, & Denny, 1916, p. 191). So far as Cameroon was concerned, the FO were now free to take a more conciliatory approach toward France than the one which, as we have seen above, the more unyielding CO had until then forced them to adopt.

In the light of the foregoing, Fage's description of the Allied invasion of Cameroon as "the last fling of the old imperialism in Africa" is particularly apt (Fage, 1978, p. 412). This is certainly so with regard to the Anglo-French negotiations leading to the partition of Cameroon. Those negotiations can be divided into a preliminary and a final phase. The preliminary negotiations opened in London in January 1916. Earl Grey, the foreign secretary, represented Britain while Cambon represented France. To begin with, Cambon told Grey that the French "colonial party were excited over Cameroons" He then went on to accuse Britain of not always being sincere with France in other areas, citing as an example the fact that Britain had excluded France from the campaign against German East

Africa even though France had assembled a large force in Madagascar for that purpose (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 229). Britain, he said, seemed to be suffering from a “land hunger disease and while she had been collecting the spoils of war all over the world, France had been bleeding to death on the Western Front (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 229). He therefore demanded that Britain hand over all of Duala to France since that was the only possible port for French Equatorial Africa whereas Britain had several outlets in Nigeria. He then assured Grey that if Britain gave up Duala France would agree to the incorporation of Dikwa into Bornu and drop her demands for a share of German East Africa (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 229).

The British War Cabinet then took up the matter and decided that since the Union of South Africa was already in possession of German South West Africa, Britain would agree to the French demands with as little reservation as possible (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 229). The negotiations thus ended on March 6, 1916 with the adoption of the Picot Line as the provisional boundary between the British and French spheres of Cameroon (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 229).

On March 6, 1919, negotiations on the final partition of Cameroon opened in London. Britain was represented by Lord Milner, the Colonial Secretary, while France was represented by M. Henri Simon, the French Colonial Secretary (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 283). M. Simon’s opening statements clearly reveal that in the mind of the French the settlement of the Cameroon problem was closely linked with that of Togoland and, indeed, with the problem of all former German colonies. Stating France’s desiderata Simon told Milner that France would be accommodating with regard to Cameroon since, in any case, she had nine-tenths of the territory. With regard to Togoland, however, he said he could not be as forthcoming (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 283). He added that France desired the acceptance of the provisional partition of 1916, but insisted that she still wanted Britain to cede to her a piece of territory near Dschang which would be needed in the future extension to Garoua of the railway running northwards to Bare. According to Simon, Dschang would be on this route (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 283). For their part, the British desired the readjustment of the boundary in the extreme south in order to permit the frontier to coincide with the mouth of the Mungo River, and then to run from there across Bimbria flats (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 283). They pointed out that since the Picot Line had been hastily drawn it would be necessary to make several adjustments for which task a boundary commission would be necessary (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 283). Experts on both sides were therefore set to work to determine in detail where the boundary would be.

Turning to substantive matters, the British said that they wanted all of German Bornu, a strip of which had been left in the French sphere by the Picot Line, together with the Mandara Emirate. They also desired those parts of the Emirates of Kontscha, Lere, and Dodo, which the line had cut off from the rest of those districts and left in the French sphere. In exchange for these areas they declared themselves willing to concede to France the whole Emirate of Banyo, a portion of which had been assigned to Britain (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 283).

The French, on the other hand, agreed that the whole of German Bornu (Dikwa) should go to Britain, but rejected the British demand for Mandara Emirate, claiming that the road from the south to Mora passed through the Mandara Emirate cutting it into two parts. They would concede only that third of the Emirate west of the road which, in its southern section, cut through Meiha and Holma, leaving out pieces of Zumu and Malau to Britain which had

been provisionally united to Yola in 1916. They also flatly turned down the British demand for the former Adamawa possessions of the Lamido of Yola. In the south, after much persuasion, they gave Britain the Mungo River, which formed a most valuable means of transport between the coast and the plantations in the hinterland of the British sphere. Finally, they also secured most of Kontscha Emirate and Dschang district (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 283).

These negotiations ended formally on July 10, 1919 when Milner and Simon signed the so-called Milner-Simon Declaration which recommended the adoption of the boundary worked out by the experts of the two colonial offices (Osuntokun, 1979, p. 283). Despite the work of the experts, and despite the mutual concessions indicated above, the results of the final partition and boundary had been very largely foreshadowed by the provisional partition and boundary of 1916. The settlement was therefore wholly at variance with the contribution which each of the two Allies had made to the conquest of Cameroon.

That this was so is not surprising. As early as January 12, Strachey, who had played a major role in these negotiations on behalf of the British Colonial Office, showed the British hand when he said that the territory which the CO had asked for by map was intentionally designed "to give us more than we really wanted - to leave us something to bargain with" (Memorandum by Strachey, January 12, 1916, CO 649/11). In similar vein, he urged the British government not to undertake the temporary administration of a territory "largely in excess of what we want to hold," because of the immediate difficulty of finding administrative staff to administer the territory (Memorandum by Strachey, January 12, 1916, CO 649/11). In other words, then, the British had wanted only a bargaining chip which, as it turned out eventually, was one that was sufficient to improve Nigeria's strategic position as well as to enable Britain to bargain for all former German colonies in southern Africa (Madiba-Essiben, 1981, p. 52).

It is therefore scarcely surprising that on March 1, 1916, the CO had instructed the Governor-General of Nigeria by telegram to inform Dobell that,

owing to considerations of general policy affecting our relations with the French which have no connection with the respective shares that have been taken by the two nations in the conquest of the Cameroons, and after consideration of the whole subject by the War Committee, His Majesty's Government have felt obliged to accede to the desire of the French Government that with the exception of the portions mentioned below the whole of the Cameroons should be administered by the French during the remainder of the war. (CO, personal communication, March 1, 1916)

In the section of these instructions which defined the proposed British sphere, particular mention was made of the status of Duala: during the rest of the war British naval and military forces were to be allowed to use the port of Duala, and the town of Duala itself was not to be ceded to a third power before the final peace settlement until the British government had had a chance of first refusal (CO to Governor General of Nigeria, March 1, 1916. Telegramme. Paraphrase. CO 649/9). The latter provision indicates that the same strategic considerations which had dictated the British invasion and occupation of Duala in the first place now dictated the need for continued British access to that port. It was consistent with the view of Henry Jackson, the First Sea Lord, that a naval base could be set up at Duala from which West Africa and the South Atlantic could be dominated and

that this gave the port a strategic importance “comparable only with that of Kiel Canal” (Rothwell, 1971, p. 73).

The territorial issue had thus been resolved in the favor of France not on the basis of any formula which took into account the relative contribution of each ally to the conquest of Cameroon, or the financing of the campaign, but through the wisdom and imperatives of compensatory diplomacy. And part of that wisdom seems to have been the British desire to raise France’s morale (Rothwell, 1971, p. 11). Although negotiations bearing on further boundary adjustments lingered until 1922 when the Mandates were formally confirmed by the League of Nations, the main issue had been resolved by then. This resolution of the territorial issue necessarily entailed the resolution of the administrative problem and the authority question which it raised. Indeed, from the British point of view the authority question became a non-issue once the territorial problem was resolved, and as in the case of the territorial issue, the British attitude had been decisive if only because Britain was willing to concede much in Cameroon in order to gain more elsewhere.

On March 17, 1916, therefore, Dobell had issued a Proclamation dividing the Cameroon territories occupied by the Expeditionary Force and administered by him into British and French spheres. On March 14, three days before the Proclamation, the CO had also instructed the Governor General of Nigeria by telegram to make necessary arrangements for the administration of the British sphere of the former German colony, and for the garrisons required to occupy it. In doing so, the instructions emphasized, he was to consult Dobell, especially with regard to the southern districts as defined by the Picot Line. Because of his intimate knowledge of these matters, Dobell was to settle all outstanding problems before leaving Cameroon. Other matters which he considered it capable of handling were to be left to the Nigerian government with the fullest information on such matters. On the other hand, the Nigerian government was to assume the financial responsibility of administering the British sphere of the former “Dobell area” as from the date when Nigerian civil officers took over (CO to Governor General of Nigeria, March 14, 1916. Telegramme. Paraphrase. Copy. CO 649/11).

This arrangement was ratified by a Royal Commission, dated March 23, 1916, appointing the Governor General of Nigeria the Chief Administrator of the British sphere.<sup>9</sup> These dispositions represented a clean break with the previous (Dobell) system, despite the as yet provisional nature of the partition. There was no mention of a condominium or of collaboration with the French in these arrangements. The French reaction to these arrangements is further evidence in support of Madiba-Essiben’s assertion that they were the poorer of the two Allies (Madiba-Essiben, 1981). It is also further proof of the extent to which the previous system had, in fact, been a British system and why the term “condominium” used to describe it is misleading.

On March 19, five days after the Governor General of Nigeria was instructed to assume the administration of the British sphere, and two days after Dobell issued his proclamation, Dobell informed the CO that Aymerich had been “strongly urged” by the French government to reach an agreement with him whereby certain British public works staff would be left behind to serve with the French administration in Cameroon until they could be relieved by French personnel from Europe. The local French administration, he added, had indicated its willingness to bear the cost of the officers’ salaries from April 1, 1916.

---

<sup>9</sup> See CO 649/12.

Characteristically, Strachey urged the CO not to agree to a “perfectly indefinite” retention of British officers in Cameroon. Rather, he proposed that the CO fix a time limit, and he suggested that the limit be two months from April 1 (Dobell to CO, March 19.1916. Telegramme. Immediate. Confidential. Co 649/5). To the very end, then, the French, despite their fulminations against the Dobell administration and their repeated claims to equal representation in it, showed that they were unable to provide for their own basic administrative needs in Cameroon from their slender personnel resources without some British assistance.

## Conclusion

As Osuntokun has pointed out, Britain and France jointly occupied German Cameroon in 1916 with a view to using it as a bargaining chip in the worldwide negotiations that were expected to follow the end of hostilities in Europe (Osuntokun, 1978, p. 257). This study has shown that the entente between the Allies on the basis of which they invaded the territory broke down early in the Cameroon campaign and that the ensuing rivalries, which plagued the Allied war effort to the very end of the campaign, reflected their fundamentally conflicting territorial claims and ambitions and did not differ essentially from their rivalries and conflicts in the period before the war. Because these claims and ambitions were so central in the thinking and calculations of the two nations, the question of any form of joint administration had been virtually abandoned by the time Britain and France opened negotiations to adjust their conflicting claims. The principle of condominium, which seems to have been adopted mainly to redeem imperialism of some of its worst features and to deflect the criticisms of anti-imperialists, was thus sacrificed to the territorial ambitions of the Allies.

Not surprisingly, the negotiations which followed the end of the war were devoted entirely to reconciling the conflicting British and French claims. These negotiations therefore did not differ essentially from other negotiations concerning the distribution of African territories among European powers during the period of the Scramble for Africa. Indeed, the behavior of the Allies in Cameroon between 1914 and 1916 bore all the marks of a mini- scramble. Thus, for example, during their final drive to Yaounde the disposition of their respective forces was at least partly dictated by the desire of each Ally to stake out important enclaves, even though they had previously agreed in principle on closer cooperation between their troops during this final, climactic operation. In view of this preoccupation with potential territorial claims, everything else became, at best, an afterthought and even the mandate formula which was eventually applied to Cameroon was, in Osuntokun’s words, a “simple moralisation of outright annexation”

Consequently, the partition of Cameroon which was the main result of the negotiations paid scant attention to African interests. Little wonder that it was arbitrary in the extreme. For one thing, in seeking to placate each party it imposed a new international boundary which divided the peoples and communities of Cameroon in ways which disrupted their ancient political, economic, and cultural ties and usages. As in Togoland, the new colonial administrations—one British, the other French—which were the practical expressions of the mandate formula created a new political, economic, and cultural ethos which in each case was at variance with precolonial experience.



As in Togo, where the division of the Ewe between British and French Togoland later became the basis of Pan-Ewe nationalism (Decalo, 1976, p. 5), these matters provided some of the focal issues which fuelled Cameroon nationalism scarcely 40 years later. Even today, many years after independence, the political, economic, and cultural legacies of partition continue to pose some of the most formidable obstacles to nation building in Cameroon. The effort to create a genuinely bilingual ethos and the effort to bridge the gap in the differential economic development of the former British and French mandates, not to mention the problems arising from the different styles of thought and action of Anglophones and Francophones, are only the most glaring and pressing of these problems. And, as recent events have shown, even more pressing has been the frontier problem which the partition created for Cameroon and her Nigerian neighbor. Only the Greentree Accord of 2009 brokered by the international community under the auspices of the UN after many bloody border clashes and World Court litigation finally liquidated this lingering irritant of the legacy of the Great War.

## References

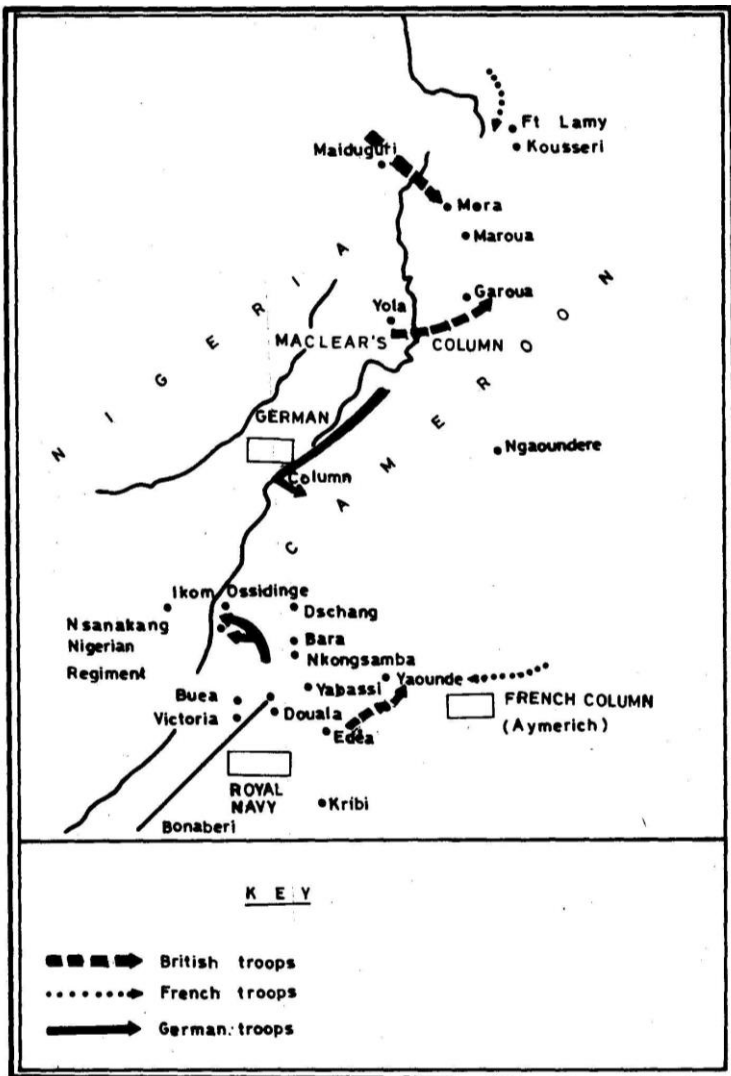
Primary Sources: Files from the National Archives, London

CO 649/1  
 CO 649/13  
 CO 649/5  
 CO 649/8  
 CO 649/9  
 CO 649/11

- Aymerich, J. (1933). *La Conquete du Cameroun*. Paris, France: Payot.
- Barclay, G. (1978). *A History of the Pacific Islands from the Stone Age to the Present*. New York, NY: Talplinger Publishing Company.
- Chandler, D. (1966). West Africa: Seizing the German Colonies. *History of the First World War*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Issue.
- Chandler, D. (1984). West Africa: Seizing the German Colonies. *The Marshall Cavendish Illustrated Encyclopaedia of World War I* (vol. 2). New York, NY: Marshall Cavendish.
- Che-Mfombong, W. (1980). Bamenda under British Administration, 1916-1961. From *Native Administration to Local Government* (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Yaounde, Yaounde, Cameroon.
- Decalo, S. (1976). *Historical Dictionary of Togo*. Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Elango, L. Z. (1985). The Anglo-French "Condominium" in Cameroon, 1914-1916: The Myth and the Reality. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 18(4), 657-673.
- Essiben, M. (1981). La France et la Redistribution des Territoires du Cameroun. *Afrika Zamani*, (12 & 13), 36-52.
- Fage, J. D. (1978). *A History of Africa*. New York, NY: Alfred Knopf.
- Farwell, B. (1987). *The Great War in Africa, 1914-1918*. New York, NY: Viking.
- Gorges, E. H. (2004). *The Great War in West Africa*. Uckfield, England: The Naval & Military Press Ltd.
- Henderson, W. O. (1978). *Studies in German Colonial History*. London, England: Longman.
- Kaspi, A. (1971). French War Aims in Africa, 1914-1919. In P. Gifford & W. R. Louis (Eds.), *France and Britain in Africa Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Keegan, J. (1988). *The First World War*. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

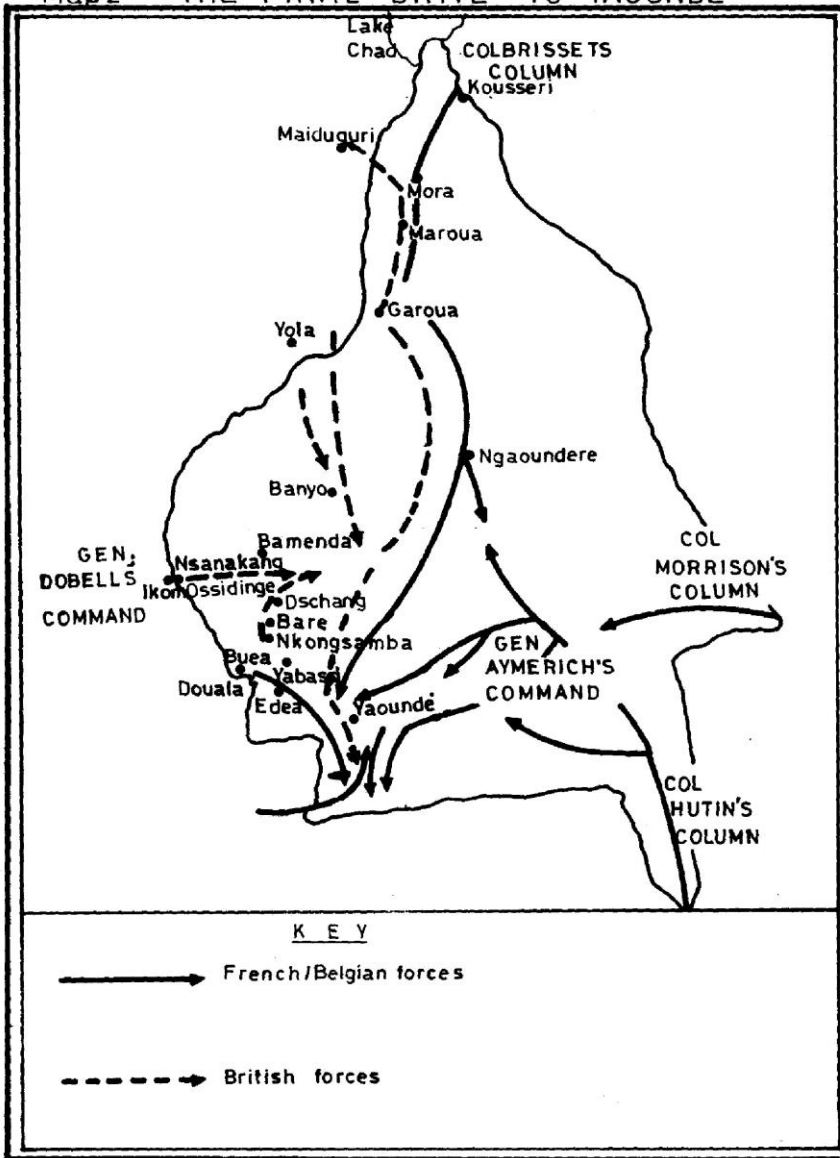
- Moberly, F. J. (1931). *A History of the Great War Military Operations Togoland and the Cameroons*. London, England: H. M. Stationery Office.
- Morell, W. P. (1960). *Britain in the Pacific Islands*. Oxford, England: The Clarendon Press.
- Njoya, A. N. (n.d.). *Le Cameroun dans les Relations Internationales*. Yaounde.
- Osuntokun, A. (1975). Anglo-French Occupation and Provisional Partition of Cameroons 1917-1916. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 7(4).
- Osuntokun, A. (1979). *Nigeria in the First World War*. London, England: Longman.
- Osuntokun, J. (1978). Anglo-French Administration of the Mandated Territory of the Cameroons 1923-1939: A Case Study in Comparative Administration. *Quarterly Journal of Administration*, 12(3) pp. 257-270
- Prescott, J. R. V. (1971). *The Evolution of Nigeria's International and Regional Boundaries, 1916-1971*. Vancouver, Canada: Talantus Research Limited.
- Robinson, R., Gallagher, J., & Denny, A. (1961). *Africa and the Victorians: The Climax of Imperialism in the Dark Continent*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Roger Louis, W. (1967). Great Britain and German Expansionism in Africa, 1884-1914. In P. Gifford & W. Roger Louis (Eds.), *Britain and Germany in Africa*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Rothwell, V. H. (1971). *British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy 1914-1918*. Oxford, England: The Clarendon Press.

**Map 1: The Allied Invasion of Cameroon**



Source: David Chandler, "West Africa: Seizing the German Colonies," *History of the First World War* 2<sup>nd</sup> Issue, July 1966, p. 363.

Map2 THE FINAL DRIVE TO YAOUNDE



Source History of the First World War Vol3 Number 15 P. 1317

