

The attack on Sha Falls Tin Fields Ltd.

By Quentin Cooper and Rey Banzaert

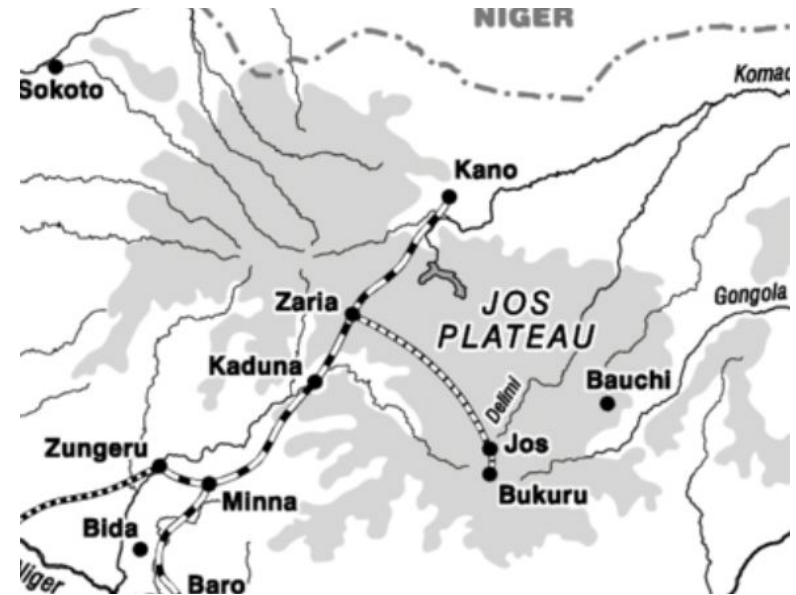


Margin

In early 1914 a series of confusing telegraph messages were sent, relating to native attempts to free themselves from the oppressive control of the British. This resulted in a violent demonstration and a hearing for three murders. Read through as we attempt to uncover what actually happened.

British Tin Mining in Nigeria

Tin is one of the resources that was mined by British colonial powers in Nigeria during its colonization, and one of the locations where tin mining occurred is the location of the events outlined by our primary source. A lot of this tin mining occurred on the Jos plateau, where tin mining had been occurring for over a hundred years before the British began to mine there. The events occurred in 1914, which was near the beginning of a period of about 20 years where the amount of tin mined on the Jos plateau increased drastically.¹ WW1 also started at this time, which meant that the value of tin went up as it was needed for the war effort.



Margin

The opportunity presented by the tin mines caused many people to migrate to the Jos plateau. However, for the native peoples "wealth [was] then recorded not by the amount of cowrie (money) a person had, but [by how much material wealth they had]".² Because of this, most of the workers were from the Hausa kingdoms, and were the people who provided skilled labor. The other group of people who worked there were people who were either in debt, or had who's farmland had been taken for tin mining.³ Many of these people were from areas closer to or on the plateau.

¹Azgaku, et al., "Socio-Economic Effects" p. 37

²Azgaku, et al., "Socio-Economic Effects" p. 36, 37

³Azgaku, et al., "Socio-Economic Effects" p. 36

British Exploitation of Nigeria

Nigeria was initially colonized in 1884, and was ruled indirectly by the British until 1960, when it gained independence. Britain's rule of Nigeria as a colony was heavily based on economics, to the point where "the idea of the nation as a business enterprise defined its subjects and resources." This was done by giving out charters to the companies that they were using to control the area (for example the Royal African Company or Royal Nigerian Company), which were then followed by treaties and contracts. Corporate interests then led to the companies having violent encounters with native peoples, and ultimately gave them both a monopoly over commercial goods, and political power on the level of the colonial administrations.



Margin



Part of the reason that this way of ruling through companies was used is that it allowed the British leaders to not be directly involved in the effort of exploitation. The charters were useful for this in that they allowed Britain to avoid having direct control, but they were also advantageous for the companies as they then did not have to worry about politics interfering with their profits. The most direct change where the British companies actually took control of areas for their own occurred after the Berlin Conference, with the smaller scale control through companies occurring before it. The RNC (Royal Nigerian Company) took both political and commercial control of Nigeria, and became Britain's way of controlling the country.

4. Maiangwa, et al., "Nation as Corporation" p. 2
5. Maiangwa, et al., "Nation as Corporation" p. 7
6. Maiangwa, et al., "Nation as Corporation" p. 8

Mr. Percival

Mr. Percival was the owner and manager of many mines. He began his work in 1902, when he worked in the Crown Reef Gold mine. He then hunted for coal in Swaziland, and began working as a contractor at the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Later, he went back to Swaziland, investigating deposits. In these deposits, he found a lot of tin veins. Because of this research, he started to get a liking for tin, and more specifically tin mines. He studied these deposits for 3 months, working for a government license. Afterwards, he started surveying and prospecting work in Waterberg, Transvaal.



Margin



Later, in 1910, Mr. Percival went to Northern Nigeria to work for a company to find land that contained tin deposits. During this investigation, he also found silver and lead deposits in the Muri Province, which other European contractors acquired. After this work, he was employed as a manager of said company. The next year, he worked as the manager of Nigerian Consolidated Tin Fields, Ltd, before getting hired as assistant engineer to Sha Falls (Nigeria) Tin Fields Ltd¹, where the document takes place. At the beginning of World War 1, he joined the Expeditionary Force in Nigeria, to fight other African countries. However, in Togoland and the Cameroons, he was shot, and later pronounced dead.

¹Northern Mine Research Society, Maurice Perceval

Background and People

The document "Mr Perceval of Sha Falls Tinfields Ltd attack on Events Leading to Extension of Unsettled Area", describes a series of events occurring in the area around Sha Falls Tin Co. The source comes in the form of a series of messages - telegrams and letters - all dated to various months in 1914. Sha Falls Tin Co. is in Nigeria, meaning that the events occurred after British Colonization. The language used in the telegraphs uses the very minimum number of words to be understandable, and rely on context to be understood. This is because people are incentivised to make telegraph messages as short as possible in order to communicate faster, but makes it difficult to figure out what is happening without the longer letter messages.



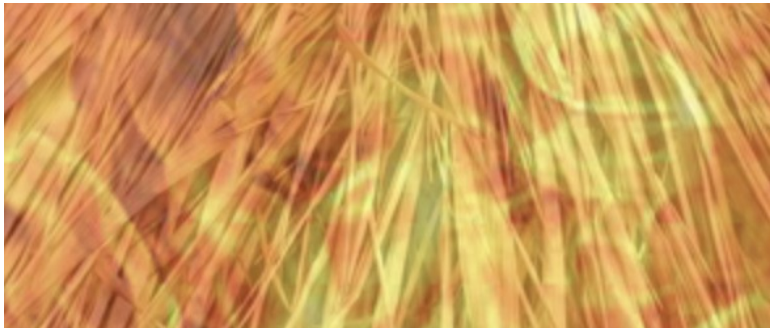
Margin



The series of communications that make up the document are between seven people. The first three of the people are simply referred to as "Resident", "Resident Jemaa", and "Resident Nass." These people appear to have some level of trust from the government, as they are often told to investigate events that have occurred and are trusted sources of information by the other people involved. They also often seem to communicate with each other before they communicate with others. The fourth person is "Secretary Zun." who appears to be in a position with enough power that they can send police to a place under their orders. The fifth and sixth people are Norton Traill and Stobart, who appear to be people who are working for the government as they are only ever mentioned as they are being told to investigate events or rumors. The last person is Mr. Percival, who is the manager of the tin company and is in charge of multiple mines. The messages between them were not confidential, but they were still intended only to be read by the people who they were sent to, so they didn't explain much about what was happening; they were all expected to already know the situation.

What happened?

The first event talked about was a invitation from the leader of the 'Sha' to Norton Traill that occurred on the 3th of January 1914 for them to make a mock arrest of them on the 4th, which would then resulted in the 'Sha' having to pay ransom for them; as no explanation for this was given, Norton Traill assumed this was a trap and declined. The 'Sha' went to Sha Falls Tin Co. at some point between the 4th and 10th after Norton Traill left it. When he returned, he saw the 'Sha' fleeing after having burned around 200 bundles of roofing grass. This incident reportedly interrupted the work for the day and caused them to get nothing done. According to 'Resident', 'Resident Nass.' reported that the 'Sha' were coming back to Sha Falls Tin Co., which resulted in them asking for police aid from 'Secretary Zun.' on the 14th. When the police got there, Mr. Percival sent them away saying that there was no reason for them to come.



Margin

On the 16th, Ibrahima Blacksmith claimed to be witness to the murder of three people as the four of them were going to Sha Falls Tin Co. The person who sent the four of them there agreed with them (saying that they had people not reporting in for work), though the witness's story changed and the person who was in charge of them eventually denied that any murder had happened. This was around the time that the supposed witness disappeared on the way from Sha Falls Tin Co. to the place where they were meant to give their testimony about the murders.

Potential Biases and Conclusion

This source likely isn't terribly biased in the reporting of events, as it was not meant to be given to the public for them to see, and was instead meant to share an accurate understanding of the events that occurred to the other people trying to deal with what was happening. However, there was clearly some bias as the 'Sha' were often referred to as "pagans," rather than a more descriptive term. Bias of views around the implied conflict with the native peoples is difficult to determine. The Europeans could either be overstating the violent intentions of the native peoples (to make what they are doing seem more justified), or they could be understating them as they do not respect the native people's potential for combating them. The use of the word "demonstration" instead of "attack" to describe the burning of the roofing grass adds to this confusion, as it makes it unclear how violent the event actually was.



Margin

Overall, it is clear that an event occurred and resulted in property damage for Sha Falls Tin Co. as well as caused no work to get done that day. From the description of the event, people native to the area were the ones who were involved in the event. We also know that the event on the 14th was likely talking about the 'Sha' working at the facility (they said that they never did and never will have the intention of causing violence, and the people not working there already have), who were likely workers forced to work there by economic need as referenced by the section on tin mining. As for the potential murders, what actually occurred is very difficult to tell, but it would not be surprising if it was completely unrelated to the events at Sha Falls Tin Co. as all the people in that group were referred to as 'skilled laborers', implying that they are most likely from the Hausa kingdoms and not a part of the 'Sha'.

Bibliography

Azgaku, Charles B.A., and Osuala Uzoma Samuel. “The Socio-Economic Effects of Colonial Tin Mining on the Jos- Plateau: 1904 – 1960.” IISTE, 2015, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234682488.pdf>. Accessed 5 March 2023.

Maiangwa, et al. “The Nation as Corporation: British Colonialism and the Pitfalls of Postcolonial Nationhood in Nigeria.” *Peace and Conflict Studies*, vol. 25, <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1438&context=pcs>. Accessed 8 March 2023.

Margin

Mr Perceval of Sha Falls Tinfields Ltd attack on Events Leading to Extension of Unsettled Area. 1914. *Endangered Archives Program*, British Library, <https://eap.bl.uk/archive-file/EAP532-1-3-4#?xywh=-223%2C-726%2C3019%2C4106>. Accessed 8 March 2023.

“Maurice Perceval.” *Northern Mine Research Society*, <https://www.nmrs.org.uk/resources/obituaries-of-members/obituaries-of-members-names-beginning-with-p/maurice-perceval/>. Accessed 9 March 2023.