

= Battle of Ngomano =

The Battle of Ngomano or Negomano was fought between the German Empire and Portugal during the East African Campaign of World War I. A force of Germans and Askaris under Paul Emil von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck had just won a costly victory against the British at the Battle of Mahiwa , in present @-@ day Tanzania and ran very short of supplies . To find food , the Germans invaded Portuguese East Africa to the south , to escape superior British forces to the north and supply themselves with captured Portuguese materiel .

Portugal was part of the Entente and a belligerent , employing troops in France and a force under Major João Teixeira Pinto was sent to stop von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck from crossing the border . The Portuguese were flanked by the Germans , while encamped at Ngomano on 25 November 1917 . The battle saw the Portuguese force nearly destroyed , with many troops killed and captured . The capitulation of the Portuguese enabled the Germans to seize a large quantity of supplies and continue operations in East Africa until the end of the war .

= = Background = =

By late November 1917 , the Germans in East Africa were left with few options if they wanted to continue the war . They were outnumbered drastically and were split up into several different columns . The two largest of these , under Theodor Tafel and Paul Emil von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck , were completely cut off from each other . Although von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck 's column had defeated a large British force at the Battle of Mahiwa he had lost a large number of troops and expended virtually his entire supply of modern ammunition . With only antiquated weapons and no way of resupplying , von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck decided to invade Portuguese East Africa in hopes of acquiring sufficient supplies to continue the war . There was no legal impediment to this attack ; Germany had declared war on Portugal on 9 March 1916 .

Although Tafel 's force was intercepted by the Allies and capitulated before reaching the border , von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck and his column was able to reach the Rovuma River . Facing supply shortages , the German general then reduced his force by dismissing a large number of Askaris , who could not be adequately equipped , as well as a number of camp followers . With his reduced force , von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck made plans to attack the Portuguese garrison across the river at Ngomano . The Portuguese force was a native contingent led by European officers under João Teixeira Pinto , a veteran with experience fighting in Africa . Rather than prepare defensive positions , the Portuguese had begun building a large encampment upon their arrival at Ngomano on 20 November . Pinto had at his disposal 900 troops with six machine guns and a large supply cache but his inexperienced force was no match for von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck 's force , which crossed the river with between 1 @,@ 500 and 2 @,@ 000 veterans as well as a large number of porters .

= = Battle = =

At 07 : 00 on the morning of 25 November , the Portuguese garrison at Ngomano received word from a British intelligence officer that an attack was about to commence . Nevertheless , when the attack came they were unprepared . In order to distract Pinto and his men , the Germans shelled the camp from across the river with high explosive rounds . While the artillery attacked the camp , the Germans moved their forces upstream and crossed the Rovuma safely out sight of Pinto and his men . The Portuguese did not resist von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck 's forces when they crossed the river and remained encamped at Ngomano . The Germans were easily able to flank the Portuguese positions and completely envelop them with six companies of German infantry attacking the camp from the south , south @-@ east and west .

Having been forewarned about the attack , the Portuguese commander had been able to begin preparations for the assault ; however , he had planned on receiving a frontal assault and when the force came under attack from the rear he was completely surprised . The Portuguese attempted to entrench themselves in rifle pits , but they became disoriented after Pinto and several other officers

were slain early in the engagement .

The Germans had very little in the way of heavy weapons , as they had discarded most of their artillery and machine guns due to lack of ammunition . Despite the chronic ammunition shortage von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck was able to move four machine guns up close to the rifle pits , using them only at close range to ensure his ammunition would not be wasted . The inexperience of the Portuguese proved to be their downfall , as despite their firing over 30 @,@ 000 rounds German casualties were extremely light , including only one casualty among their officers . Taking heavy casualties , having lost their commanding officer , and finding themselves hopelessly outnumbered , the Portuguese finally surrendered despite the fact that they had enough military supplies to continue the action .

= = Aftermath = =

The German casualties were light , with only a few Askaris and one European killed . The Portuguese , on the other hand , had suffered a massive defeat and by failing to prevent von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck 's force from crossing the Rovuma allowed him to continue his campaign until the end of the war . Estimates of Portuguese casualties vary , with some sources providing figures of over 200 Portuguese killed and wounded and nearly 700 taken prisoner ; other writers state around 25 Portuguese killed along with 162 Askari , with almost 500 captured . The prisoners of war were used by the Germans as porters for the 250 @,@ 000 rounds of ammunition , six machine guns and several hundred rifles that were also captured . With this equipment , the Germans managed to completely resupply their force . Von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck abandoned and destroyed the majority of his force 's German weaponry for which he had no ammunition and armed his troops with Portuguese and British weapons . Portuguese uniforms seized from the captured prisoners were used to replace the ragged old German ones that the force had previously worn .

Von Lettow @-@ Vorbeck did not stay at Ngomano for long and soon marched his force south to attack more Portuguese positions , leaving only one company at Ngomano as a rearguard in case the British decided to follow him into Portuguese East Africa . His force won several more victories while seizing even more supplies and ammunition before moving back into German East Africa in 1918 .