

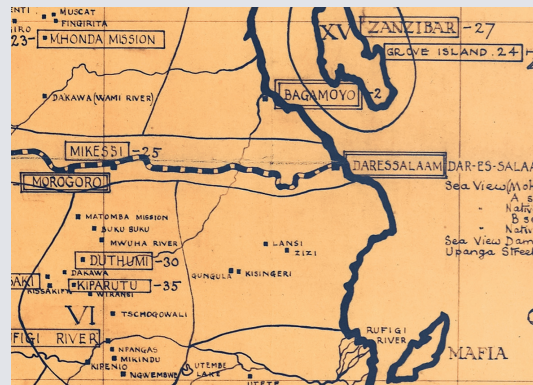
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COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES

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RECONSTRUCTING THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE IN SEARCH OF THE MISSING WAR DEAD

The First World War carrier cemetery
in Dar-es-Salaam



DISCOVER LEARN REMEMBER

COMPILED AND WRITTEN FOR THE NON-COMMEMORATION PROGRAMME
COMMONWEALTH WAR GRAVES COMMISSION

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Introduction

In November 2022, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's (CWGC) Non-Commemoration Programme published a report linking several sites in Mombasa, Kenya to lost First World War carrier cemeteries.¹ It is known that hundreds of thousands of carriers were recruited from across East Africa to undertake labour work with British and imperial forces during the First World War, and that many – tens of thousands at least – died during their service.² In some cases, this was the result of combat or exhaustion in the field, but as with the rest of the forces serving in East Africa, it is likely that many more died in hospital of disease.³ However, as a result of decisions made outside and within the then Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) during and after the war, the organisation possesses very few of their names and even fewer burial locations. Following the same methodology utilised for Mombasa, this report presents evidence for the existence and location of a lost First World War cemetery in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania.

Like Mombasa, Dar-es-Salaam is a focus of the Non-Commemoration Programme because of its significance as a seaport during the First World War and the vital role it played in the movement of manpower into and out of the operational theatre in East Africa. It is known to have played host to a sizeable carrier depot that raised locally more than 32,000 personnel, and that the same depot handled and deployed tens of thousands more who arrived by ship. It is known it had four hospitals serving its military population, including the largest carrier hospital in East Africa and No.3 East African Stationary Hospital, which was the facility through which the majority of the sick and wounded were evacuated by sea.⁴ It is also known to have been a stopping point for hospital ships passing along the coast before returning to destinations like Mombasa. Despite this wartime significance and the knowledge of large numbers of carriers having died at Dar-es-Salaam, what we do not know is what happened to those men.

¹ See [Mombasa war graves research update | CWGC](#).

² For more information see *Report of the Special Committee to Review Historical Inequalities in Commemoration*, (Maidenhead: CWGC, 2021), [Report of the Special Committee to review historical inequalities in commemoration \(cwgc.org\)](#)

³ By way of example, the official statistics of the Military Labour Corps show that between January 1917 and November 1918, a total of 231,387 carriers were admitted to its hospitals, and of those, 31,293 died.

⁴ See for example TNA, CO 533/216, CO 533/216, Report by Lieut-Colonial O.F. Watkins, CBE, DSO, Director of Military Labour to the B.E.A. Expeditionary Force on the period from August 4th, 1914 to September 15th, 1919; TNA, WO 95/5349-5352, Headquarters Branches and Services: Adjutant General (Base); Edinburgh University, Col-207, Papers of John William Arthur; Bodleian Library, MS. 5901/1, Papers of Lieutenant-Colonel O.F. Watkins relating to the First World War in East Africa.

As named commemoration sits at the heart of the Commission's philosophy, the search for missing names has always been a priority for the Non-Commemoration Programme. Sitting alongside this work, however, is the search for the graves of those who died. This report aims to provide answers for the second of those issues for those laid to rest at Dar-es-Salaam.

Carrier units in Dar-es-Salaam

Dar-es-Salaam was part of an important transit hub, with tens of thousands of soldiers and carriers passing through it during the war, entering by sea before being dispatched inland or further around the coast in support of operations. Many of those men would then have transited back through Dar-es-Salaam for medical or repatriation purposes. Like many of the important towns and cities of East Africa, this presence has left a legacy, and Dar-es-Salaam still maintains a cultural link to this distant history, albeit only in name and largely without people's knowledge. The Kariakoo Ward with its substantial market complex is situated in Ilala District in the west of the city and takes its name from the Military Labour Corps' (MLC) operation based there during the First World War.⁵ Known colloquially during the conflict as the 'Carrier Corps', the memory of the organisation's temporary presence in this space was strong enough to long outlive it. After the war, its corrupted name was adopted by the developing 'African Quarter' in the west of the town. However, beyond this important cultural connection ingrained in local language and titles, there appears little to physically link the modern ward with the MLC sites that preceded it.

The ties that bind the historical and modern Kariakoo area are, however, quickly revealed by overlaying contemporary mapping on satellite imagery. A 1918 map extracted from Colonial Office correspondence shows the key features of the MLC's wartime presence within Dar-es-Salaam.⁶ Georeferencing this map (see figure 1) shows the major street layout remains similar, and the covered warehouse section of the depot (see figure 2) directly overlays the site now occupied by the famous covered market. Critically, however, this map also shows us more than the carrier depot, and includes the extensive medical facilities built to support it. This is not only important for our general understanding of how MLC operations were run from Dar-es-Salaam, but because this is also likely to be where the majority of carriers died.

⁵ With 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. See TNA, CO 533/216, Report by Lieut-Colonial O.F. Watkins.

⁶ The correspondence concerned a complaint made by the Belgian authorities regarding the removal of landing facilities at Dar-es-Salaam. TNA, CO 691/23, file 55144, Facilities at Dar-es-Salaam for goods destined for Belgian Congo, August 1919.

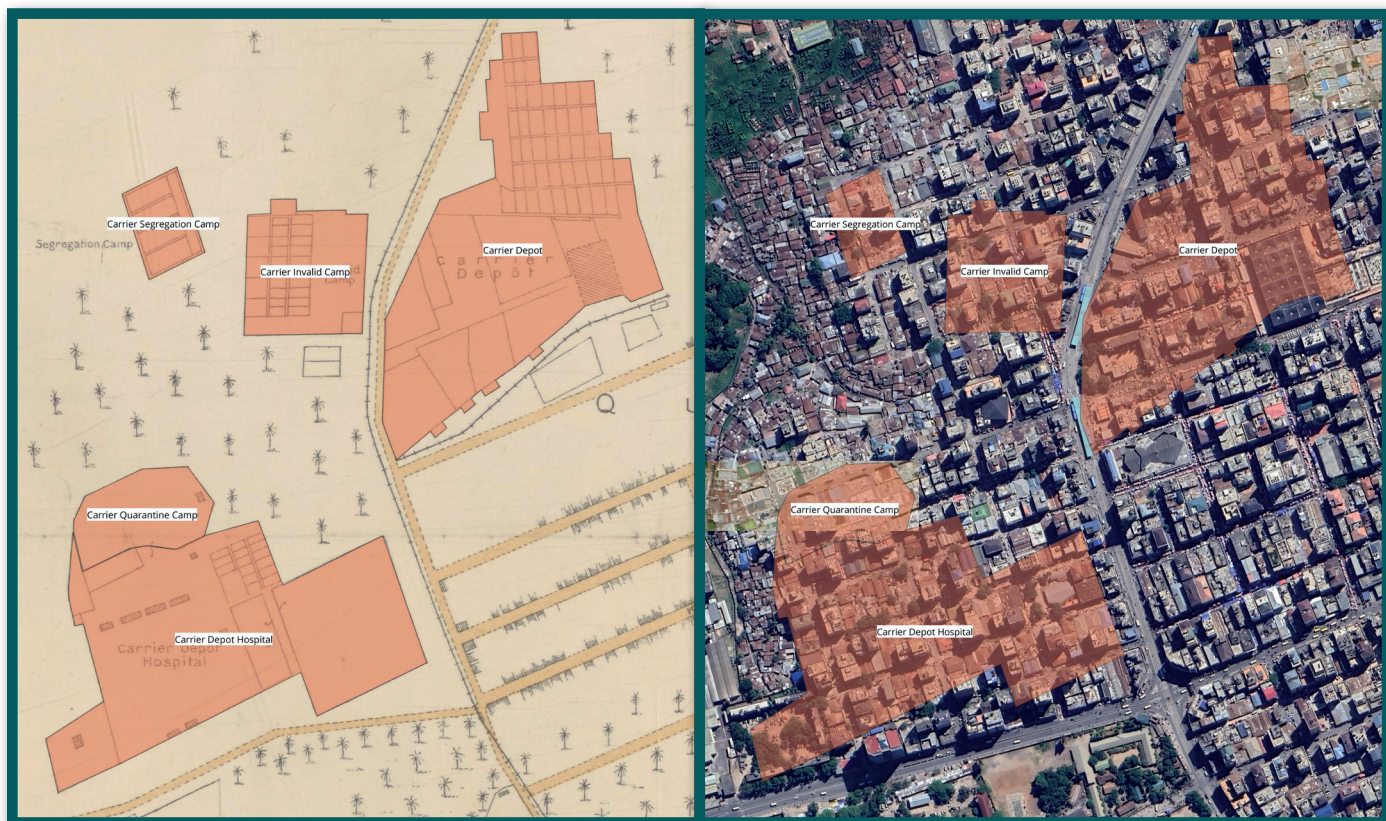


Figure 1-1 & 1-2 – Map extract from TNA, MPG 1/1086, Plan of Dar-es-Salaam No.523, March 1918.



Figure 2 - Inside of the Carrier Depot Dar-es-Salaam, from the papers of Archibald Clive Irwin, National Library of Scotland,
<https://doi.org/10.25549/impa-c123-81635>.

A separate British military map dating from 1942 shows the development of the city between the wars, having been compiled from aerial photographs from the mid-1930s.⁷ By this time, the 'African Quarter' in the west of Dar-es-Salaam was well developed on a grid system with the only remnant of that earlier history being the covered market. This appears to have grown slightly from the footprint of the colonial 'exhibition hall' after being rebuilt in the early 1920s to create a more sanitary and spacious auction market.⁸ Although most other traces of the previous war were long gone by this time, the sites built and maintained by the IWGC are clearly marked, along with several civil cemeteries (see figure 3).

More than anything, what these enduring links between the past and present tell us is how significant the MLC presence was within Dar-es-Salaam. At least in part this is simply connected to the scale of the operations there. Although we cannot say accurately how many carriers died there during the war, we can assume that death rates were likely similar to those seen at Mombasa, which places the estimate in the thousands. By way of example, within the medal rolls of the comparably modestly sized Sierra Leone Carrier Corps, 354 men are listed as having died at Dar-es-Salaam between January 1917 and November 1918. This accounts for 37% of all those lost from the Corps during the whole conflict.⁹ Although some of these carriers will have been the victims of accidents and other events, the vast majority will have died in hospitals from disease. To add weight to this and demonstrate the significance of Dar-es-Salaam to the wider carrier operation, the carrier hospital there had the largest capacity in East Africa, with as many as 2,000 beds.¹⁰ It is also known that the occupancy of that hospital peaked at nearly 1,500 in the summer of 1917, the period at which the official medical history of the war described carrier deaths as excessive and during which time deaths in Mombasa were also unusually high.¹¹

There is no question these spaces maintained a nominal connection to carrier operations because they had been dominated by the MLC and were loaded with the memories of those who served or witnessed the spectacle. Yet while this evidence says a lot about this legacy, it does not tell us what happened to those who died there.

⁷ BL, Dar-es-Salaam [town plan], EAF 1049, 23 July 1943.

⁸ The original structure was built by the Germans to house a colonial exhibition that was due to be held in 1914. The outbreak of war and the later occupation by the British saw it repurposed. Green, L. *Harbours of Memory* (Timmins, 1969); 'The New Market', *Dar-es-Salaam Times*, 4 August 1923, p. 8.

⁹ This includes one listed as 'stowaway or missing, died Dar-es-Salaam'. See TNA, WO 329/2371, Sierra Leone Carrier Corps Medal Rolls, 1914-20. All are commemorated on the Freetown Memorial in Sierra Leone.

¹⁰ TNA, CO 533/216, Report by Lieut-Colonial O.F. Watkins, Appendix 2, Table 3.

¹¹ See Macpherson, W.G. & Mitchell, T.J., *Official History of the War: Medical Services General History, Vol. IV*, (London: HMSO, 1924), p. 490; TNA, WO 95/5349-5352, Headquarters Branches and Services: Adjutant General (Base).

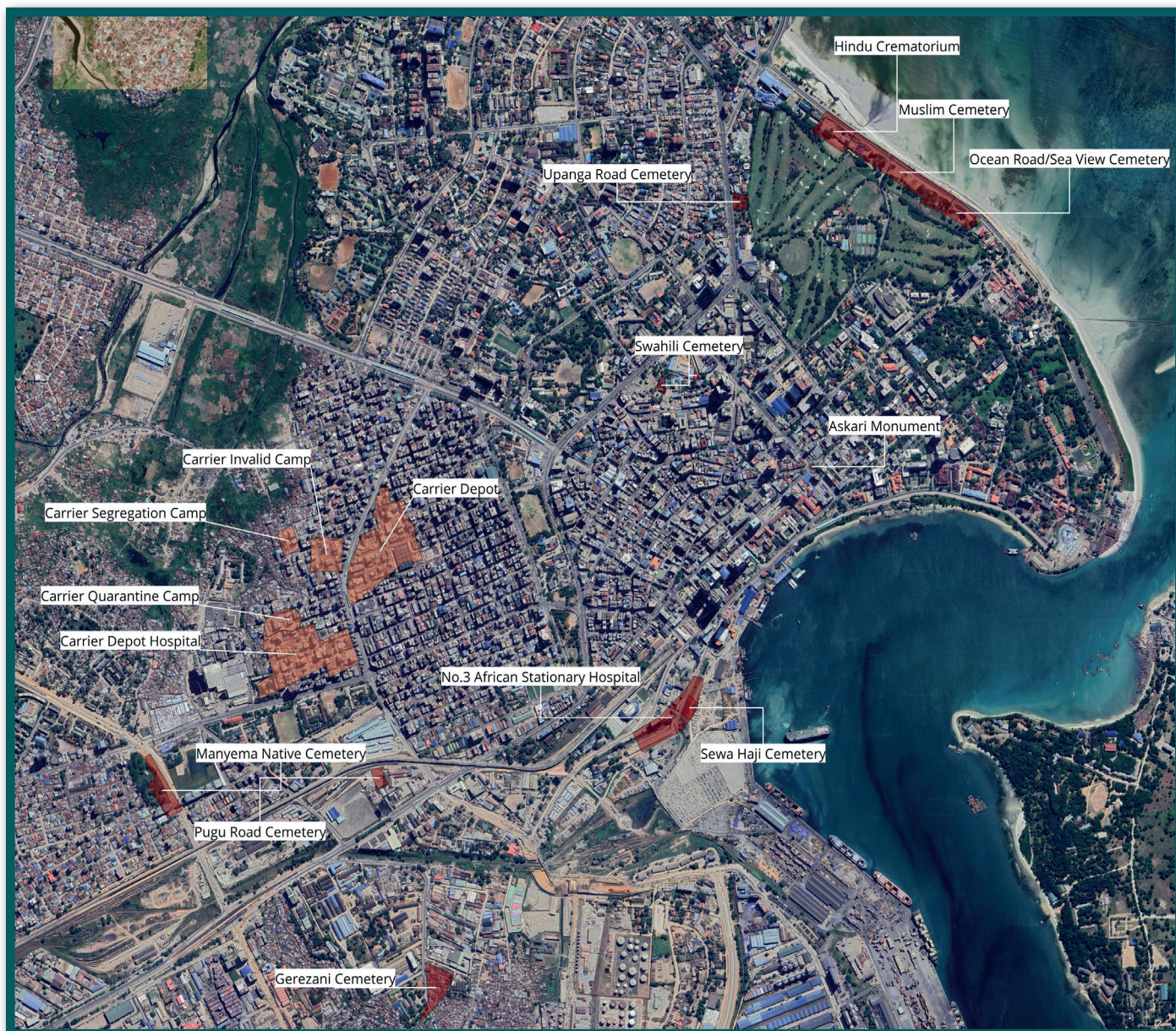


Figure 3 - Overlay of historic sites and recorded cemeteries onto modern satellite map of Dar-es-Salaam.

Known burial grounds

An inventory of historical and surviving cemeteries in Dar-es-Salaam shows a complex landscape, with many of the sites having unusual histories. Looking north of the old town on the same historical maps, a handful of small and presumably long-established 'Arab' and 'Swahili' cemeteries are present, while there are also several others about which little is known – Gerezani Cemetery is isolated to the south and Sewa Haji Cemetery is to the east near the harbour, abutting what had been No.3 African Stationary Hospital.¹² There is no written or other evidence to suggest any of these were used for wartime burials, but the absence of evidence is also not confirmation that it did not happen.

The large cemeteries on the coast to the east of the town, originally founded during the German colonial period, were to become the IWGC's Ocean Road (later Sea view) Cemetery. This was closed in the late 1960s to make way for a new coastal road, with the remains of those buried moved to Dar-es-Salaam War Cemetery – a newly constructed CWGC site to the north-west of the old town. While carrier burials were present at Sea view and now at Dar-es-Salaam War Cemetery, they are predominantly those who served with fighting units and must make up a very small portion of the total known to have died in the town.

Another site of note on the early maps is 'Dar-es-Salaam (Pugu Road) Native Christian Cemetery' to the south of the carrier depot. Not on any pre-war German surveys and located, at that time, on the outskirts of town, it is known to have contained 113 wartime labourer or carrier burials, 109 of whom were South Africans.¹³ Despite an orderly looking burial plan from the 1920s broken into plots and rows, similarly dated photographs of the cemetery show the only marked graves appeared in Plot 1, which was said to be the civilian portion.¹⁴ Later, a memorial dedicated to those buried was erected without their names on the grounds that the records were too incomplete to print a cemetery register or erect individual headstones.¹⁵ Although the latter seems to have come to pass, a register of the names of those known to be buried there was ultimately printed, including a note about 11 unknown burials.

¹² In other documents, the one abutting No.3 African Stationary is named as Sewa Haji Cemetery, and it housed 'practically all Germans'. See Tanzania National Archives, District Book, Dar-es-Salaam Vol. III, Cemetery Register Dar-es-Salaam Town, undated.

¹³ CWGC/7/4/2/21301, Letter: F. Silvester White, Director of Town Planning Dar-es-Salaam, to, Brigadier C.L. Fox, IWGC Nairobi, 7 February 1959; Those buried in Pugu Road, by country of service and regiment, are the following – India: 2 Indian Hospital Corps, 1 Indian Postal and Telegraph Department. United Kingdom: 4 King's African Rifles, 2 East African Forces, 1 East African Mechanical Transport Corps, 1 East Africa Military Labour Corps, 1 Mercantile Marine, 1 Nigeria Regiment W.A.F.F., 1 Seychelles Carrier Corps. South Africa: 47 South African Native Labour Corps, 43 Military Labour Corps, 18 Military Labour Bureau, S.A. Forces, 1 South African Field Artillery, 1 South African Labour Corps.

¹⁴ CWGC/9/1/1. Collection of photographic negatives from the Commission's Photographic Library, 1920-1980.

¹⁵ CWGC/1/1/7/E/60. Letter: Cormack to Chief Secretary, Dar-es-Salaam, 26 March 1926.

Unusually, a further six casualties were interred at Pugu Road during the Second World War, although by the time permanent headstones were being erected in 1949, the burials were already lost. The state of the rest of the site, sections of which were still being used for civil burials and showed signs of 'over-burying', caused these military graves to be deemed unmaintainable by the IWGC.¹⁶ A decision to transfer the commemoration of the Second World War casualties to the Tanganyika Memorial soon followed in the early 1950s, and the whole cemetery was ultimately closed in 1959 when the Tanganyika authorities requested the site for railway development.¹⁷ The IWGC subsequently re-erected its First World War memorial in Upanga Road Cemetery, although unlike at Sea view, none of those buried were moved – presumably because their graves had never been individually identified and marked.¹⁸ Again, however, despite evidence of wartime carrier burials, this 'native Christian' cemetery appears to have been used for a limited and specific group of casualties, most of them South African. As this precludes the majority of those we are looking for, and as the space is clearly too limited for the thousands we believe to have been interred, another site must have existed.

The search for the missing cemetery

The war diaries held by The National Archives in the UK provide small fragments of information about what happened to the dead, but nothing is definitive. The Senior Roman Catholic Chaplain of the East African Expeditionary Force wrote of holding funerals at the 'Native Christian cemetery' and the 'Military Cemetery (native section)' in Dar-es-Salaam. However, beyond stating that the latter was 'filled' by December 1918, no other descriptive information was provided.¹⁹ Another, potentially more significant but equally vague reference is made in the diary of the Director of the Military Labour Bureau, where on 26 March 1917 he spoke of an inspection being undertaken at the 'M.L.B. Cemetery'.²⁰ Again, while useful for its overt reference to a dedicated carrier cemetery, it gives no indication of its size or location. An undated register of cemeteries for Dar-es-Salaam held by the Tanzania National Archives also makes no reference to any such named site.²¹

¹⁶ CWGC/7/4/2/21301, Extract from Secretary's Tour of East Africa, April-May 1949.

¹⁷ See CWGC/7/4/2/21301, Letter: IWGC Secretary to Chief Administrative Officer, 25 August 1955; Letter: IWGC Legal Advisor to Chief Administrative Officer, 5 August 1955; Chief Administrative Office to Secretary, 16 July 1955.

¹⁸ See [Pugu Road 1914-1918 Memorial | Cemetery Details | CWGC](#)

¹⁹ See references throughout TNA, WO 95/5308/1-2, General Headquarters Branches and Services; Senior Chaplain RC. For the 'Native section of Military cemetery filled', see WO 95/5308/2_2, p. 44.

²⁰ TNA, WO 95/5311/5, General Headquarters Branches and Services; Director Military Labour, p. 43.

²¹ In total 8 were listed: Sea view/Ocean Road Cemetery; Upanga Cemetery; Sewa Haji Cemetery; Pugu Road Cemetery; Ocean Road Crematorium; Manyema Cemetery; Parsee Cemetery. See Tanzania National Archives, District Book, Dar-es-Salaam Vol. III, Cemetery Register Dar-es-Salaam Town, undated.

There is no evidence to show the IWGC knowingly took possession of unmarked carrier graves within the cemeteries the organisation took over after the war. Based on evidence from other sites in East Africa, however, it has been shown that African carriers and soldiers were often buried in civil or dedicated sites that never entered IWGC stewardship, and there are certainly hints that something similar may have happened at Dar-es-Salaam. In a 1922 interview with the Commission's Deputy Director of Works in East Africa, the governor of Tanganyika, Sir Horace Byatt, stated 'he considered that the vast Carrier Corps Cemeteries at Dar-es-Salaam & elsewhere should be allowed to revert to nature as speedily as possible'. Byatt claimed he had not wanted 'to contemplate the statistics of the native African lives lost in trying to overcome the transportation difficulties of the campaign'.²² However, he was also clearly troubled by the unhappy legacy the MLC left in the town and was presumably conscious of the disparity in the number of burials present at these sites in comparison to the predominantly European military cemeteries within and outside Dar-es-Salaam.

While the spatial information available for 1918, 1924-5, 1928, and 1943 does not identify a cemetery or cemeteries that fit this description, it is possible these men were buried somewhere that was never formalised or recognised by any authority.²³ The only direct suggestion within the CWGC's historical archive that any such carrier cemetery existed is found in a 1921 IWGC table of sites, which makes reference to four cemeteries in the town containing military burials, one of which is described as 'Dar-es-Salaam Carrier Corps Cemetery'.²⁴ Promising though this obviously sounds, it shows it to contain only 8 'native' burials, though there is no way of knowing if this table references only 'registered' graves among many more anonymous and otherwise invisible ones.²⁵ Either way, of the contemporary cemeteries located in spatial records, including those later adopted by the Commission, none in their recorded form is a convincing candidate for this carrier cemetery. As a result, the evidence would suggest that one or more sites within the environs of post-war Dar-es-Salaam was, as Byatt desired, allowed to revert to nature.

²² CWGC/1/1/7/E/53, Memorandum of interview between the Governor of Tanganyika Territory and the Deputy Director of Works IWGC East Africa, 7 December 1923.

²³ See the township maps in Tanzania National Archives, AB917, Dar-es-Salaam Native Quarter, 1924; No. 12589, Vol. 1, Tanganyika Secretariat, Dar-es-Salaam Township, Layout of, 1928.

²⁴ See CWGC/1/1/7/E/56, Table of cemeteries, p. 123 of pdf.

²⁵ Grave registration is the formal identification and recording of an individual grave. It is the process that produced official paperwork connecting a known individual to a specific grave or marked a specific grave as an unknown burial. If the majority of graves were left completely unmarked during the war, it is entirely possible that no record was made of them during registration work.

The missing link

After searching archives in Tanzania and the UK, the answer to this question was finally unearthed within closed CWGC legal records concerning the organisation's ownership rights to its cemeteries and memorials. Here, in a June 1923 letter about identifying and securing permanent sites across Dar-es-Salaam, the Deputy Director of Works in East Africa, J. N. Cormack, stated:

*The vast Carrier Corps Cemetery or burial area near Bagamoyo Street is situated in a coconut plantation and has already practically reverted to nature...Individual commemoration of the burials which took place during the period of the war over the area is impossible, as the names of and even the number of burials are not known.*²⁶

Like the road to Pugu, German pre-war maps show that Bagamoyo Street had always been a major thoroughfare running out of the old town, leaving the conurbation in the direction of Bagamoyo.²⁷ In all pre- and post-war mapping, the road passes to the north of the carrier depot and its associated sites.

The history of land ownership in Dar-es-Salaam in the years before the British occupation helps to narrow this search further. Before the war, a coconut plantation belonging to a German called Schoeller occupied the space of what is now Kariakoo Ward. Purchased from the Sultan of Zanzibar in the early days of German rule, Schoeller allowed African plantation workers to settle on his land in return for rents. As a result, by the time British forces occupied the town, the plantation contained more than half of the total African population of Dar-es-Salaam. This naturally made the area the logical home for carrier operations, and the plantation itself offered sufficient space to act as a cemetery.²⁸

²⁶ The CWGC Legal Services team maintains files concerning the organisation's ownership rights to its cemeteries and memorials. These files are confidential and closed, as they contain legal advice and analysis relating to those rights. Given the importance of the Non-Commemoration Programme to the CWGC and the limited archival sources available to the project globally, exceptional access was granted to the research team, initially to legal files relating to Dar Es Salaam. This was to assess their content and its significance to the Programme, and it resulted in this single find. The CWGC Legal Services Team has now made all legal files that are potentially relevant to the Programme available to the research team for review. While these files cannot be made available for external consultation in their current form, the Non-Commemoration Programme is working with colleagues in the CWGC's Archives and Legal Services teams to see if there is further information contained within them that is not legally restricted and could, therefore, be extracted and made available. CWGC/LAN1/81. Letter: Cormack to Chief Secretary, Dar-es-Salaam, 22 June 1923.

²⁷ Although one pre-war German map labels a smaller connecting road in the south-west 'Neue Bagamojo Str', the principal road was always to the north. The latter is the only road to be so labelled on British maps.

²⁸ Lupala, J. M. *Urban Types in Rapidly Urbanising Cities – Analysis of Formal and Informal Settlements in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania* (PhD thesis, KTH, Sweden, 2002), pp. 92-93.

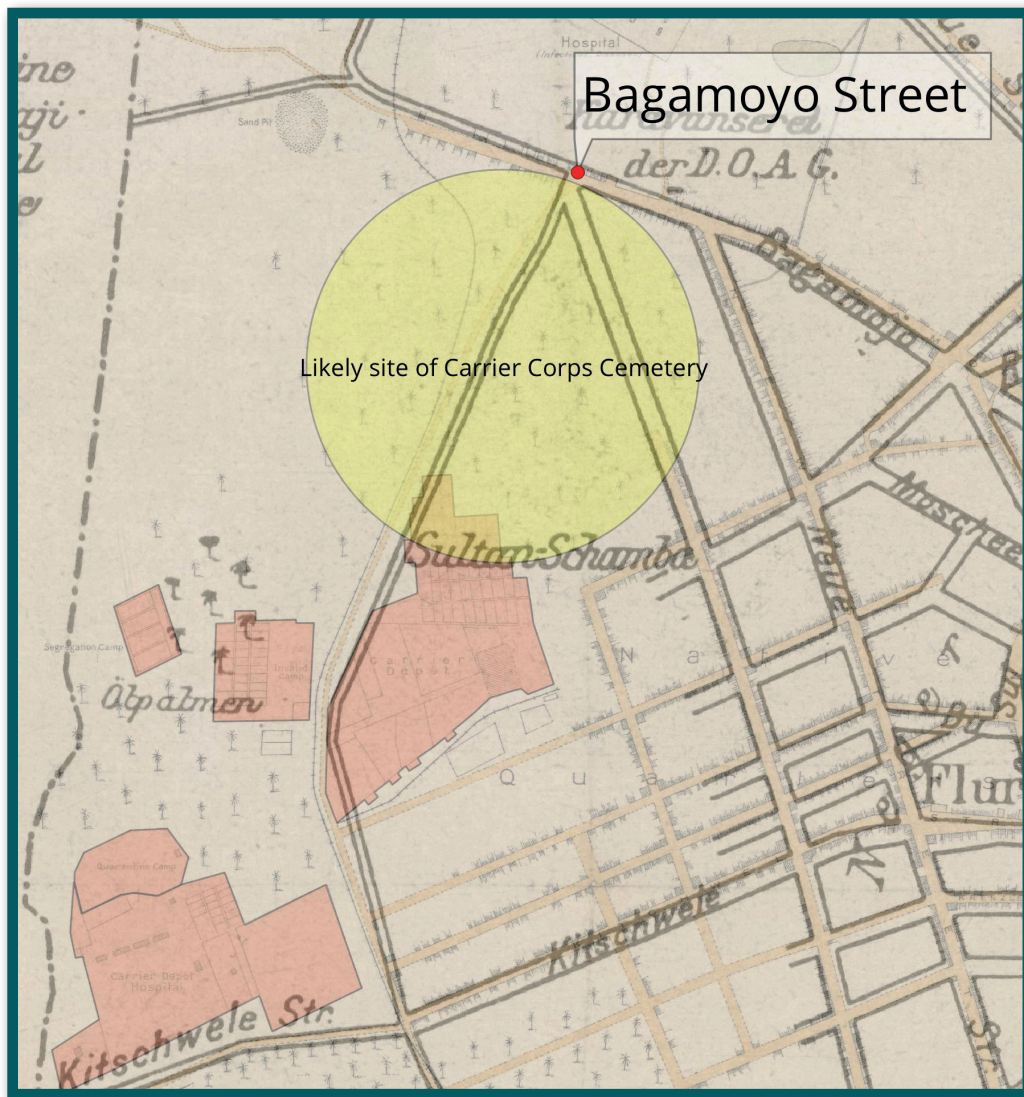


Figure 5 – Composite of German pre-war mapping and British mapping from 1918 showing alignment of streets and locations of carrier sites (pink), the likely site of the carrier cemetery (yellow) and palm plantations (TNA, MPG 1/1086 and NMHC, P.70.783)

What this spatial evidence and Cormack's language tell us is that the vastness of the cemetery was not only a reference to the likely number of burials within it, but also to its extensive, sprawling and informal layout. It is clear the site had grown organically and had never been managed with the preservation of graves in mind. Cormack's use of the term 'burial area' also seems deliberate, immediately contrasting it with the military cemeteries and those associated with organised religion. In his correspondence with the Chief Secretary, Cormack went on to note that the site was still in use, with burials since the end of the war extending its limits to the west. With the decision taken 'to erect a handsome monument...to the Non-Christian African Native soldiers and Carriers who lost their lives during their period of War Service', Cormack elected not to submit to the Commission a proposal to secure burial, monument erection or maintenance rights at this spot.²⁹

²⁹ CWGC/LAN1/81. Letter: Cormack to Chief Secretary, Dar-es-Salaam, 22 June 1923.

Later mapping shows the area once occupied by the plantation – and within it, the carrier cemetery – was quickly consumed by the expanding town and, by 1924, just a year after Cormack's letter, the street layout seen today was firmly established (see figure 6).



Figure 6 – Cemetery overlay on Dar-es-Salaam 'Native Quarter' map, 1924. (Tanzania National Archives, AB917).



Figure 7 - Cemetery overlay on present day Dar-es-Salaam Kariakoo Ward.

Conclusions

Piecing together history from snippets of dispersed paperwork can make categorical or comprehensive conclusions difficult. What can be said in this case, however, is that the lost carrier cemetery stood alone from those formally identified on maps and, by 1923, the unmarked graves within it had become difficult to identify. It had also continued to be used for unregulated civil burials, further blurring its unique nature and any original boundaries. Perhaps most significantly of all, just two years after the decision not to request rights over the cemetery, the area was built over by the developing 'Native Quarter' of Dar-es-Salaam – a process that was likely already well underway within Schoeller's shamba in the years before the war. Those buried there, along with tens of thousands of other carriers, were instead commemorated namelessly by the Dar-es-Salaam African Memorial – known colloquially as the Askari Monument.

Despite the significance of these findings, we cannot pinpoint the graves of individual carriers. In fact, the extensive development of the area since the end of the war means the physical evidence of all those who were buried there is likely to be completely lost. Nonetheless, the archival evidence currently available allows us to map the Military Labour Corps' presence in Dar-es-Salaam and provides an accurate position for this lost cemetery. Once nestled amongst the palm plantations off Bagamoyo street, it now sits beneath the streets of the heavily developed Kariakoo Ward of Dar-es-Salaam – a name that now has even greater resonance and meaning.

The search for further details about this site and those buried there is ongoing.

**MORE
INFORMATION**

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