

2020/4/5 (EN): Grosch

Namibia as a German „dependency“ 1884 until 1915/19

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From 1884 until 1915, German-South-West-Africa was a German colony („dependency“) in the territory of today's country of Namibia. German-South-West-Africa was the only German colony where a nameable number of settlers settled down. In the course of the First World War, in 1915, the territory was conquered by troops of the South-African Union, put under their military administration, and in 1919 it was transferred under the administration of South-Africa, according to the regulations of the Versailles Peace Treaty, as a mandate of the League of Nations, until its national independence of 21st March 1990. During this phase, by the way, German was introduced as the third official language in 1932. German-South-West-Africa had a highly unsteady history, with the fight of the two ethnic groups Herero and Nama against the German colonial rulers as the most prominent facts. The balance of these wars was absolutely dramatic: The majority of Herero and almost the entire tribe of the Witboi-Nama had perished. In this connection, people increasingly talk about a genocide that might even have been a forerunner of the National-Socialist Holocaust, but this is only based on speculative numbers as well as on dubious backgrounds and sources. The wars between 1904 and 1907, however, were no typical German annihilation campaign and no signal of German National-Socialist racial policy, neither. On the contrary, they were classic colonial wars and thus comparable with the colonial wars of other powers. Here, one ought to mention Italy's failed war of conquest against Ethiopia 1895/96, and, above all, the two Boer Wars of the British 1880/81 and 1899-1902. Especially in the latter, under General Lord Kitchener, a policy of annihilation was practised, 120.000 Boers (especially women and children) were interned in concentration camps, where more than 26.000 of them died. In this connection, one can also mention England's five Ashanti-Wars 1824-1901 in Ghana of today, or the bloody quelling of the Mahdi-riot in Sudan 1899. And even 1952-1961, in the course of Kenya's war of independence, the Mau-Mau-Riot, 90.000 locals were executed, tortured or mutilated by British units.

Nevertheless, the wars against the Herero and Nama were naturally crimes from a present point of view, especially when one considers the inglorious role of General von Trotha as the main person responsible.

When the First World War began, a finished plan for mobilization did not exist in German-South-West-Africa; on the contrary, the German military were totally surprised by the events. As a whole, the situation of the German troops and of the colony was more than parlous. Surrounded by British territory in the South and East, blocked by English battleships at sea, and the actually neutral Portuguese Angola confiscated all food transports intended for South-West-Africa. Additionally, several thousand Portuguese troops were ordered south. On 20th March 1915, the protecting troops had to leave the south, and on 7th March the middle and Windhoek as well. Afterwards, South-African 35.000 soldiers marched north. For this reason, the Germans had to capitulate near Otavi on 9th July 1915.

