

Herero Tribesmen Captured during the Herero War in German Southwest Africa (1904)

Abstract

In 1883, Joseph Frederick, one of the elders of the Nama cattle-herding tribe, sold the nucleus of what would eventually become German Southwest Africa, Angra Pequena Bay, to the Bremen merchant and adventurer Adolf Lüderitz (1834-1886). In 1884, the German imperial government placed “Lüderitz Bay” (as it was subsequently called) and its immediate surroundings under “protection.” Additional land acquisition treaties concluded between 1884 and 1890 led to the rapid growth of the *Schutzgebiet Deutsch Südwestafrika*. This expansion was accompanied by increasing tensions between German settlers and native peoples (Hereros) over access to land and water – tensions exacerbated by the German government’s legal discrimination against indigenous residents. In 1904, the Herero revolted, attacking German farms and killing about 150 German settlers. When 766 German *Schutztruppen* (“protection troops”) were unable to quell the revolt, an additional 14,000 German troops were sent in under the command of Lieutenant General Lothar von Trotha (1848-1920). Trotha defeated the Herero and Nama (who had joined with the Herero) at the Battle of Waterberg on August 11, 1904. He then gave them an ultimatum to leave the territory or be killed. When many of the Herero subsequently retreated into a region of the Kalahari Desert, Trotha made sure they were cut off from all food and water supplies, leading to mass death from dehydration and starvation. This photograph from the early phase of the Herero War showing captured Hereros guarded by a German soldier illustrates not only the imbalance between the two warring parties, but also the extreme nature of the German military action. Trotha’s brutality caused an outcry in Germany and beyond. The uprising finally ended in 1907-1908. Rough estimates of the number of Herero killed run as high as 65,000 (80% of the tribe's population); estimates for the number of Nama killed run as high as 10,000 (50% of the tribe's population). In 2004, the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul, traveled to Namibia and issued a formal apology on behalf of the German people.

Source



Source: Unknown photographer, 1904. National Archives of Namibia

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