

*From the Bexhill Observer, 21st August 1915*

**“LIONS AND GERMANS”  
“Fighting In East Africa”  
“PRIVATE J. BLACKBURN’S THRILLING EXPERIENCE”**

“In the great War which the British are waging in various parts of the world, no section of the campaign has been conducted against greater odds and difficulties than that in East Africa; and from no part of the far-flung battle line has news been so scanty.”

“It is therefore with special pleasure that we are able to place before our readers today a graphic account of the fighting in East Africa, from the pen of a well-known Bexhillian, Private Jo Blackburn, of the 25th Royal Fusiliers (Frontiersmen). Prior to the War, Private Blackburn was for many years on the staff of the Bexhill Water and Gas Company, and it will be remembered that on the occasion of the fire in Endwell-Road he gave proof of his personal courage by the manner in which he engaged in the rescue work. Out in East Africa Private Blackburn is having ample opportunities of displaying the same spirit, not only against the human enemy, but against wild beasts, with which this region is populated.”

**“FIERCE TWO-DAY BATTLE”**

“In a letter home Private Blackburn conveys a good idea of the conditions of warfare in this remote quarter of the War area, and describes the victorious encounter which his regiment had with the Germans in the month of June. He writes: –

“I am safely back in our camp once more, having come through one of the fiercest two-day battles ever fought (so we hear on all sides from old campaigners with us).”

“The place we attacked was a strong German base containing a well-stocked arsenal and wireless station (supposed to be one of the most powerful in the world, being in almost direct communication with Berlin), which was blown to pieces and burnt to the ground when we gained possession of the town.”

“After climbing up the heights surrounding the shores of the Lake Nyanza covered by our ships guns, we commenced the attack about 8 a.m. About a mile away the enemy were ensconced in a well-wooded patch with their machine guns, and it was not very long before we had an excellent taste of their range-finding. We blazed away with our rifles until the barrels became quite hot and greasy, then with the cessation of fire for a few moments we made a rush across the open spaces in cover. Of course the fighting here is quite guerrilla warfare, and the enemy being in their own country were at a distinct advantage.”

**“DASH THROUGH STORM OF BULLETS”**

“The battle waged fast and furious, and at 4 p.m. Colonel Driscoll ordered a general concentration of our forces. When this command was issued I happened to be at the point resting beside our lieutenant in charge of my section. There were two companies present and the Colonel required two more, and asked for a man to be sent across the open to hurry the other companies up. The order was given me, and for half-an-hour I had a lively time, hurrying across open spaces, with the accompaniment of pinging bullets, to the friendly shelter of a rock, or a bush, or even a blade of grass (here let me say, that is marvellous what you can hide behind when you are hard pressed by a hail of lead). I found the two companies and the return journey was made in a similar manner, and coming across in odd numbers here and there we all arrived at a given point.”

“The Colonel led us down the kopje side to the bottom where lay a huge swamp and a river. The swamp we struggled through, and the river we had to ford was up to our necks. After much floundering in mid-stream, we got across and rushed up the side of the kopje, and completely routed the enemy.”

**“TOWN CAPTURED”**

“Our next objective was the town (Rukoba), and here, of course, the enemy were in full force, prepared to make their last stand. All our forces were concentrated, and a combined attack was made on the town, and

we marched into it, a conquering army, at 2 p.m. on the second day. The German flag flying in the centre of the town was hauled down, and the good old Union Jack was run up by the Frontiers men, amidst rousing cheers from the troops.”

“Three of us were told off to scar the rocks and dense growth in the vicinity for snipers, but after a good search we had to report “no enemy”. On one kopje we found one of their big guns (which they had abandoned in their flight), and about 40,000 rounds of ammunition and shells. When we again reach the town, the Arsenal, the barracks (both full of ammunition, rifles, shells, and equipments), and the wireless station had been burnt to the ground.”

### **“MEETING WITH A LION”**

“Later – At present we are in the heart of the game country. Four of us had a stroll outside the camp yesterday, and came across the spoor of a lion, and later on saw (His Majesty) about 20 yards distant in some dense undergrowth. He was a monster, too.”

“This morning a giraffe paid us a visit, and he was an excellent specimen, but we are not allowed to shoot them. On sentry in the trench at night one hears the roar of the Lion, and the cry of the hyena and jackal, and even this relieves the deep stillness of an African night on the Veldt.”

“We have got with us about 60 niggers of the Swahili type. Their customs, of course, are peculiar, and their dress very fantastic. This part of Africa in which we are encamped is supposed to be an almost undiscovered tract of country until recent years, bordering on the ‘Great Rift of Central Africa’.”

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*From the Bexhill Chronicle, dated 25<sup>th</sup> August 1917*

### **“War Notes”**

“Private Jo Blackburn, of the Royal Fusiliers (Frontiersmen), a well-known Bexhillian who enlisted in the early part of the war, and took part in the German East Africa campaign under General Smuts, arrived in Bexhill on Tuesday evening on leave after two and a half years service. Private Blackburn took part in several engagements but escaped unscathed. He, however, fell victim to malarial fever, and has only just recovered from a bad attack. During the early part of the campaign opportunity for sport was found, and in that “Hunters, Paradise” lions, giraffes, rhinoceroses, and “bucs” were encountered and accounted for. “Trekking” was hard work, as there were no roads, and paths had to pick up through the bush and over the veldt, while in the rainy season operations were at a standstill, as transport was impossible.”

The home-coming of Pte. Blackburn who married Miss E. Sewell, of the well-known “Devonshire Hotel” family, had a shadow of gloom owing to the death in action of Corpl. Fred Sewell, and to the absence on service of Corpl. Sydney Sewell, who has gone to Egypt.

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*From the Bexhill Chronicle, dated 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1919*

Mr. Jo Blackburn, who a short time ago was demobilised after serving with the British Forces in German East Africa, left Bexhill this week en route for Nigeria, where he has accepted an appointment with a tin and silver mining company.

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