

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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IMW-11
The Hehe

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

It was the first time anyone had ever offered to show us his grandfather's skull. We looked at it from all angles, investigated it thoroughly and admired it fully, but afterwards we found it rather difficult to say much in response. But for Adam Sapi, the Paramount Chief of the Hehe, it is more than a relative's skull. It symbolizes the Hehe's proud military tradition and their fierce resistance to the Germans at the end of the last century. They are intensely proud that they were the only Tanganyikan tribe to defeat the Germans in open battle, as any visitor to the chiefdom soon sees.

The Hehe* are the eighth largest tribe in Tanganyika and the main tribe in the Iringa District (in the south central portion of the country). They number approximately a quarter of a million and by African standards are generally wealthy. In spite of their importance remarkably little has been written about them save a few words in every East African history. The literature now available is unfortunately long outdated. At present, however, two anthropologists are working on the tribe in an effort to fill this gap.

The Handbook of Tanganyika describes the Hehe "as of early Bantu stock. They are a patrilineal tribe practising both arable and pastoral farming. The bulk of them live on a plateau at an altitude of between 4,500 and 7,000 feet, while the remainder inhabit the plains in the north and east, at an altitude of about 2,500 feet. Maize is the staple crop, though millet or rice predominates in some of the low-lying areas. They have as subsidiary crops eleusine, beans, potatoes, ground-nuts and marrows. Livestock is a secondary source of wealth, and the large cattle population is increasing as a result of dipping against East Coast Fever. Sheep and goats are also reared."

The Hehe's political unity is a relatively recent growth. Until the middle of the 19th Century the tribe constituted a

*Pronounced Hay-Hay. Properly the tribe is called WaHehe, one Hehe is MHehe, the country is UHehe and the language is KiHehe. For simplicity I shall use only Hehe.



Grain is stored in these small granaries.

the original tribe to which they belonged.

The Hehe were united largely by the efforts of two men, Muyugumba and Mkwawa, Adam Sapi's great-grandfather and grandfather respectively. Muyugumba was chief of one of the small groups and by adding to his lands peacefully he became more powerful than the other petty chiefs. He then embarked upon a career of conquest and by his death, which probably occurred in 1879, he had conquered all the people now called Hehe and waged war with several neighboring tribes.

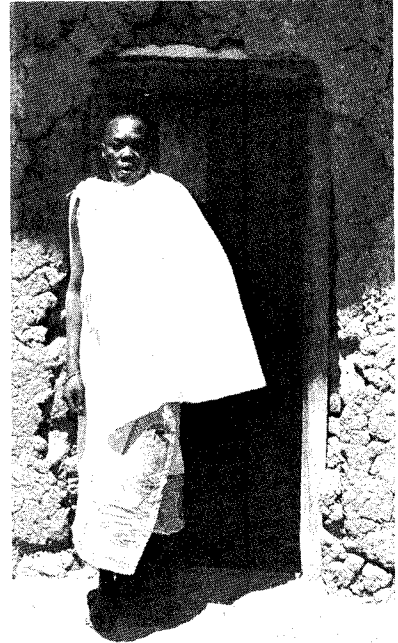
When Muyugumba died Mkwawa was initially driven away by a hostile faction, but two years later he returned and established his authority. During his reign he consolidated the tribe as a whole, and he showed himself an able military commander. He led numerous expeditions against neighboring tribes, and after ten years of fighting he had enlarged his kingdom tremendously. During that time the warlike Masai had invaded his domain, only to be defeated in a decisive battle in which the Hehe were led by Mkwawa's sister, one of his sub-chiefs. For the Masai, this must have been a bitter pill.

During this period Mkwawa levied tribute on all trading caravans passing through his domains, and he attacked those which attempted to evade payment. This was bound to bring him into conflict with the Germans as they penetrated further inland. It did. Mkwawa realized the dangers he would encounter, and so when a political alliance with a coastal tribe to oust the Germans failed, he tried to make his peace with them. Meanwhile he continued to raid caravans.

In 1891 the Germans decided to put a stop to this practice and sent a force of 1000 men to subdue the Hehe. Mkwawa learned of their advance and sent a party with presents to placate the

German commander. Only one survivor of this party returned to report that the Germans had fired upon them. Mkwawa then successfully ambushed the invaders at the mouth of a narrow valley. The German force was nearly annihilated, and a large quantity of their arms fell into the hands of the Hehe.

For three more years Mkwawa continued to raid caravans until in 1894 the Germans decided to send a strong punitive expedition against him. By then Mkwawa had built himself a strongly fortified post at Kalenga, a few miles west of Iringa. (The walls can still be seen today.) After bombardment and fierce fighting, Kalenga fell to the Germans, but Mkwawa himself managed to escape. His subjects remained loyal to him and he continued to wage constant guerilla warfare. The following report from a German officer shows his people's loyalty to him even in the hour of defeat:



A MHehe

Mkwawa always moved between our patrols. He was supplied with information and food in the very localities where our troops operated, but the inhabitants declined to give our forces any information and denied all knowledge of his presence. When we were hot on Mkwawa's trail, food and liquor would often be found in the pathless bush; his people always knew where to find him, the direction he had taken and the points he would traverse. Altogether, it was certain that Mkwawa exercised an inexplicable influence over the natives, who, when the pursuing troops surprised his camp, would, time after time, blindly hurl themselves on the soldiers, sacrificing themselves merely to give Mkwawa the chance of escape. No scheme for his capture was possible and no one even knew what he looked like.

Finally in 1898 the Germans offered a reward of 5,000 rupees for his capture, dead or alive. This amount was too tempting, and an informer soon told them of his whereabouts. An account of the hunt follows:

On June 19 after a hot pursuit they captured a boy at Pawaga, who admitted that he was Mkwawa's servant and that his master was lying sick in the bush three hours away. They were led to a spot near the village of Humbwe on the lesser Ruaha River, where they saw two figures apparently asleep. Crawling up to the spot and firing at the figures in case they were being led into a trap, they

found that the figures were those of two dead men, Mkwawa and his servant Mwenyiowala. Sergeant-Major Merkl's bullet had struck Mkwawa on the head, but both bodies were cold and the two had evidently been dead for some time. Mkwawa had evidently shot his companion first, as the body was stiff, and then shot himself in the stomach. Sergeant-Major Merkl handed over the body of their dead chief to the Hehe for burial, having first of all cut off Mkwawa's head, which he handed over to his superior officer, Captain von Prince. Eventually the skull was sent to the Anthropological Museum at Bremen.

His body was buried with great pomp, and thereafter he became a national hero. When at the end of the First World War, the British took charge in Iringa, almost the very first request was that Mkwawa's head should be returned to the tribe. Representations were made to the German authorities who denied that the head was in Germany. In 1949 the Governor, Sir Edward Twining, took the matter up and in 1953 he visited the Anthropological Museum in Bremen. With the assistance of a forensic surgeon he identified Mkwawa's bullet-shattered skull. On June 19, 1956, fifty-eight years to a day after Mkwawa's death, Sir Edward Twining handed the skull over to Chief Adam Sapi.

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Until 1958 the Hehe were the most autocratic of tribes and one of the last strongholds of feudal aristocracy. Traditionally they were ruled by an Mtwā or Paramount Chief who virtually held absolute power. Under him he appointed twelve sub-chiefs as rewards for reliability and service. In times of peace the position of sub-chief, mnzagila, tended to become hereditary, even though it was an appointive office. Until 1958 the present Mtwā, Adam Sapi, appointed his friends and relatives and in general was in complete control.

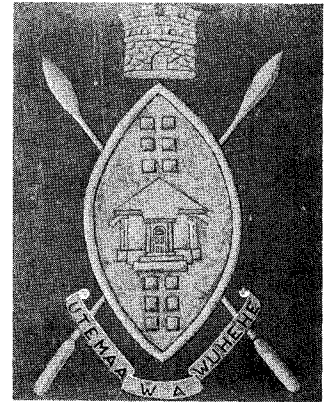
At that time Government was (and still is) encouraging the development of democratic local government, and in the fall of 1958 a "constitutional conference" was convened with Hans Cory (Government Sociologist) as Chairman. Adam Sapi, the twelve sub-chiefs and representative elders attended the conference, and with the assistance of their European advisors and mentors a constitution was promulgated which established an elaborate system of local government that largely coincided with their traditional forms. The result was a combination of directly and indirectly elected councils on five tiers, mostly presided over by hereditary chiefs or their choices. The majority were official members, and there were in all about 500 different councils divided into the following categories:

Village (Chole) Councils---there are approximately 300;
 Jumbe Councils---formed of several Village Councils;
 Sub-Chiefdom Councils---one for each of the twelve sub-chiefs;

Division Councils---there were four, each consisting of three sub-chiefs and appointed members; and

Hehe Council---as Paramount Chief, Adam Sapi was ex-officio Chairman of the Council, two-thirds of which was composed of officially nominated members (himself, his twelve sub-chiefs and a small number of officially nominated members), and one-third of which were elected indirectly by the Sub-Chiefdom Councils from their own numbers.

Thus each tier of local government was an electoral college for the next higher level, and the only direct elections were at the lowest level. Some people were in all five tiers of government, and the strain of this kind of arrangement was considerable and proved unsatisfactory.



The coat of arms
of the Hehe Council

Under the 1958 Constitution future sub-chief vacancies would be filled in a more democratic manner, upon the advice of the Sub-Chiefdom Council. Together Adam Sapi and the District Commissioner, however, could reject any nominee. A sub-chief has already been appointed in this manner. Women also were guaranteed rights as electors and four were nominated to the Council (none were elected). The primary effect of the 1958 Constitution was that Government changed recognition from the Chief to the Chief-in-Council.

Since 1958 the Hehe have moved forward rapidly. People began agitating for a majority of directly elected councillors, and Government didn't consider the 1958 Constitution democratic enough. Therefore the Hehe Council appointed a Committee to write a new constitution which has recently been completed. It has been approved in principle by the Minister for Local Government, although it will not be promulgated until the Ministry's Legal Counsel has approved the precise wording. Nevertheless its general outline is known. The Division Councils have been abolished, leaving only four tiers of local government and a simpler administration. There will be direct elections to each tier. Adam Sapi's position is to be that of constitutional monarch, and although he is still an ex-officio member of the Hehe Council, the Chairman will be elected by the Council. The drafting committee wanted to write into the constitution that the Paramount Chief should be Chairman, but it is reported the Minister turned thumbs down saying they could always elect him if they so wished. The composition of the new Council is as follows:

- The Paramount Chief;
- The twelve sub-chiefs;
- Forty-eight councillors (four from each sub-chiefdom); and
- Up to four co-opted members.

Government considers the new constitution a great advance, and both Adam Sapi and the District Commissioner of Iringa, P.J. (Sam) Humphries, were awarded O.B.E.s at the Queen's last Birthday Honors.

Elections for the revamped Hehe Council were held this past November 25. Less than half of the eligible electorate voted. Although several women ran, all lost. Perhaps one will be nominated, but under local circumstances it would take a pair to be effective. There were several unexpected results, however. TANU tried to move in and ensure the elections of its men. They endorsed candidates for all 48 seats and, by one method or another, were successful in persuading the majority of the opposition candidates (mostly also TANU members) to withdraw, leaving their nominees for 37 seats unopposed. There were no elections in these constituencies and they were returned to the Council. In the remaining eleven districts, however, opposition candidates were unwilling to stand down. One sub-chiefdom, that of Mlolo, refused to be brow-beaten by TANU and each of its four districts rejected the TANU candidate and returned its own choice (all of whom were TANU members). One of the best and ablest members of the old Hehe Council, Michael Kabogo, was defeated here. If his defeat stands (there is a rumor that the election was rigged), he will probably become a co-opted member of the new Council. The sub-chief, Gaudenzio, has a long rivalry with Adam Sapi. In fun his sub-chiefdom is called "the Katanga of Iringa", and he is jokingly compared with Tshombe. In another constituency, Mloa, the TANU candidate was resoundly trounced by another TANU member. Of the eleven contested elections, TANU won six and lost five. Although the overwhelming majority support TANU, many disliked its intervention in local affairs.

While the Hehe are the predominant tribe in the District, there



Adam Sapi (left), and a sub-chief, Mnzangila Vangisada, and his clerk, our interpreter (below).



are also a few Masai and WaBena. All have accepted Adam Sapi as chief, often a condition of settling in the area. In the past they were treated separately but this is no longer true. Thus the Hehe Council is the Local Authority for the entire District and has responsibility for all Africans residing there. While the only non-Hehe on the old Council was European, it is probable that in the future, members of other tribes will become councillors.



A local headman and some of his wives and children.

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Much of the Hehe's recent development has resulted from the personality and approach of their Mtwa, Adam Sapi. He has been active in Tanganyika politics as a nominated member of Legco and the Executive Council until 1958. He has served on many committees, has often been used as an arbitrator in disputes, and has been called the most neutral man in Tanganyika by no less a personage than Julius Nyerere. He has had to curtail his activities in national affairs, because the new effort at development keeps him busy.

We found him one afternoon at Kalenga inspecting his fields in his cream-colored Mercedes-Benz 220. A warm and friendly person, he invited us into the reception room of the Hehe Council headquarters. To our left was a pair of tusks from an elephant he had shot, and he told us that he was the first honorary captain in the King's African Rifles, an honor of which he is justifiably proud. About a fifth of the K.A.R. is Hehe, a direct result of their military tradition.

Chief Adam told us that before 1958 "I was the absolute ruler of my people, but since then we have made every effort to establish a more democratic set-up. Under the old constitution I retained much of my power. I will probably remain the top man under the new arrangement, but only as a result of the loyalty my people feel towards me. That is the difference. They can depose me whenever they wish. This has meant a great deal more work for me, but it is rewarding to see my people develop a realization and interest in what they can do for themselves." When we asked him about the recent elections, "People have been a bit unhappy over TANU's intervention, and that is why they lost five seats. As for Michael Kabago's defeat,

I've heard some voters had to mark their ballots in public, and so I've asked for an investigation. If the results stand, however, I'll co-opt him for the Council. I'll do the same with Father Sciolla, the only European member."

Later he showed us the museum and the mausoleum where his ancestors are buried. Afterwards, we went to see the one European member of the Hehe Council. Father Sciolla is Vicar-General at the Consolata Mission at Tosamaganga near Iringa. He came to Tanganyika in 1922 and except for brief home leaves in Italy, he has been here ever since. The Consolata Fathers have a beautiful site on the top of a hill looking down on the Rungwa Game Reserve seventy-five miles to the west. The Mission at Tosamaganga is primarily a school (and the foremost in Iringa District at that), and Father Sciolla has taught virtually every educated Hehe there from Adam Sapi on down, all of whom are still "boys". He probably knows more about the Hehe than any other European. He is a rare and fine old man who says exactly what he thinks. We first asked Father Sciolla about the religious convictions of his students. "We take in any child with the qualifications. Many are pagan and Muslim, but many are also Christian, although only in name. The Christians believe in their religion, will fight and die for it, but they can't live it."

His great interest, naturally, is education. "We took this Mission over from some German Fathers after the First World War. Since then we have built it up to be the finest Mission-school in the area. We're proud of our graduates, and our reputation is such that we have the pick of the bunch. Students pay what they can and Government subsidizes each one. Our greatest problem is with girl students. Often, after only a few years of education, the families want them to return home to help their mothers in the fields or else get married. This puts the child in a dilemma since she rarely wants to return, and yet family discipline is strong. Those who decide to stay know they can never return home. Needless to say few remain in school under those circumstances. Our next greatest problem is to get qualified teachers. Do you know any Americans who would like to come out here for a couple of years?" We assured him we would look into it.



Land Rover in mud!

To round out our trip, we visited a small village in the lowlands, Idodi, and talked to the sub-chief, Mnzagila Vangisada. He unfortunately spoke no English and since our Swahili is somewhat primitive, we used an interpreter

to supplement our efforts. We were especially interested in how the failure of the last three rains had affected their crops. (The short rains have not failed this year, as we discovered with mixed emotions. Idodi was the only place where we were stuck on our whole safari. And when a Land Rover gets stuck in the mud,...) He told us their yields have fallen drastically. Government has made maize available from the higher and better watered areas nearby for the villagers to buy, although Vangisada is authorized to distribute it free to hardship cases (and no doubt to relatives and good friends).

The lowland areas are the only ones in trouble, and at the moment their needs have just begun. There will be no substantial crops until June or July, and so serious famine relief will have to begin soon. One person working extensively in the lowlands told us he felt Government wasn't taking the famine seriously enough. Although there is no starvation on a large scale, a number of older people are dying from seemingly minor illnesses, the effects of malnutrition. Things will get worse before they get better.

When we visited the local headman, a full scale pombe (native beer) party was in progress in his house, and a bleary-eyed crew was wandering in and out. Much to their surprise and Kitty's obvious enjoyment we had some. Pombe is quite different from our beer. Made primarily from maize, it has lots of food value in it. Its alcoholic content is not great, but so much is drunk (mostly by men---the women realize that they still have to get up in the morning and take care of the cattle, farm, house and children) that whole villages can be in a stupor for days. Without doubt this is a great hinderance to the local development now being undertaken. Government leaders have recently been touring the country urging restraint over uhuru, and one of their main attacks has been on the evils of pombe. It really lays them low.

It didn't taste very good, but I doubt if it goes out of style.

Very sincerely yours,



Ian Michael Wright