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Impact of the First World War on marine services in the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria, 1914-1918

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Abstract

Marine services in the Niger-Benue confluence area were awash with crude local navigational technologies that retarded its growth and development before the First World War. The adoption of the naval vessels used by the British to convey soldiers and armoury on the Benue River to the Nigeria-Cameroon border line in the northeast of the country by the locals revolutionalised the marine sector in the area and changed its history. This paper examines historically the use of the British wartime navigation technologies on the waterways of the Niger-Benue confluence area and discovers that they had socio-economic and political impacts on the area. The presence of the British sophisticated and faster vessels in numbers led to the relegation of the extant crude navigational technology to the background by the locals. Marine infrastructure was modernised as the British authorities built jetties, ports, and created ferry crossing services in many places in the confluence area during the war to aid the conscription of the locals into the military to fight against the central powers in the Cameroons. The development created nautical employment in the form of river transport workers and vessels mechanics in Lokoja, Idah, Itobe, Banda and Kotonkarfe and other parts of the area through the emergence of allied industries like vessel making and spare-parts workshops. This created classes of artisans that added to the social strata of the confluence area. Though the Niger-Benue confluence area was only a passage for the British soldiers and armoury for the war against the Germans it led to an increase in population that forced the British to expand and improved the existing navigational, health, social and financial institutions in the area with attendant social, economic and political impacts on marine services in the area.

Keywords: First World War , Marine Services, Niger- Benue Confluence

Introduction

The resources of the Niger-Benue confluence area, particularly its massive navigable water bodies made it more strategic as a useful infrastructure for the prosecution of the First World War against the German in the Cameroons. The

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war led to a huge revolution that had critical impact on the Niger-Benue confluence area and beyond in terms of the relegation of the extant crude navigational technology to the background for more sophisticated ones. Apart from the introduction of sophisticated nautical technology to carry out the marine services, the British in the course of this created a conducive atmosphere for institutions like the postal services, prison services and banks to flourish in the interest of its contingents and administration. Also, the Marine Department which was the British authority that carried out the services made Lokoja its strategic centre in the battle against the German Cameroon in the First World War in which the Benue River around Ibi was the buffer zone. The pseudo naval services which were created by the department in the course of the war got more conscription from the confluence area. Similarly, marine officers in the department were deployed along other indigenes of the confluence that were conscripted into the British army and were conveyed via the Niger to the Atlantic Ocean for onward movement to Burma to fight on behalf of Britain. The Niger-Benue confluence area, particularly Lokoja, was made cemeteries for the fallen soldiers in the wars and the returning contingents became parts of the elites that were revered by the people.

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Economic Impact

The development of the marine infrastructure during the First World War changed drastically the navigational culture of the people in terms of the technology that was in use in moving goods and services on the two waterways. Before this period, locally made canoes built by the Igala, Kakanda, Kyedye and Igbo were used to run the waterways. But the introduction of vessels which were referred to as steam-powered boats with high speed and capacity to move people and goods from one littoral community to the other increased business activities and intergroup relations in the area under study. The development also led to the neglect of canoe building by Kyadya and Igala craftsmen.

The marine vessels in use like Sarota, Burqa, Flamengo, Lagos and Lokoja were sternwheelers with refrigerators. They added very greatly to the comfort of European traders and passengers by enabling them to bring up frozen meat and vegetables, and a varying diet of fowls. The supplies of meat and English fruit and vegetables were bought from the steamers at Forcados, and brought up by the Sarota to the confluence area. These services by the marine vessels, apart from revolutionising sailing in the area, affected the improvement in health and business transactions between the confluence area and the Niger Delta. The

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development also led to the expansion of trading stations in Idah and Lokoja for chief staple commodities like shea butter, palm oil, nuts, groundnuts, gum arable capsicums, rubber, ivory, and hides, while the great article of internal trade was potash, of which very large quantities were brought down from the Hausa states, and shipped via the Niger to the southern territories for sale. Consequently, revenue from river transport increased tremendously from what was derived from the old technologies (canoes) that plied the Niger and Benue Rivers. A licence on canoes, according to their earning capacity, varied from 5 shillings to £3 per annum. Large transport and ferry canoes in the season could earn £2 upward per month.

The proliferation of the steam-powered and later the horsepower boats had a major technological impact that revolutionised nautical occupation in the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria. Though the proliferation began precisely in 1912 when the Marine Workshop was established under Commander Herbert Alexander Child, the Director of Marine, attention of the next generation of canoe builders and paddlers were in the Niger-Benue confluence area were beginning to be diverted by the British authorities to the speedboat technology that were arriving in the area during the war. Consequently, the number of enrolments to the workshop for technical knowledge which were composed of pupils who had passed elementary school subjects like arithmetic, reading, writing, dictation, composition, nature study, geography, and hygiene increased by 250 percent by the summer of 1915. Those in the secondary school category which were given technical instructions in blacksmithing, carpentry, leather-working, embroidering, and weaving also increased almost at the same rate. The tools generally used were such that could be purchased by the apprentices at the end of the course. A large farm was attached to the workshop where the pupils also received elementary instruction in agriculture and the rearing and care of cattle, sheep, and ostriches.[1] The workshop added the knowledge of the speed boat introduced to the area by the British during the war to its curriculum. The first generation of speedboat repairers, its spare-parts fabricators, and the builders of horsepower boats in Lokoja and adjoining communities were trained at the marine workshops in Lokoja.[2]

[1] Annual Report on Northern Nigeria 1919, NO. 1112, 12.
[2] Interviews with Omachi Ochimana, Fisherman, Idah, 17th December 2020, Aluba Umolu, Farmer, Idah, 17th December 2020 and Okpanachi Ameh, Trader, Idah on 12/17/2020.

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Figure 1. Equipment for the manufacturing of vessels and the fabrications of spare parts at the marine workshop in Lokoja.



Source: *Field Work on 22/03/2019*

Copying from the occupational guilds that existed in the confluence area and beyond before the British marine services were set up,the marine trained vessel builders and repairers, together with the river transport workers, set up craft guilds that gave them distinct socio-economic status.[3] They became more economically stable and sufficient than members of other occupational guilds because they got money directly from their clients and passengers who depended on their services for major economic activities.[4] The vessel builders and repairers became highly influential in most of during the war to the extent that their leaders began to occupy such exalted positions as members of the traditional ruling councils. Also, the river workers particularly became more prestigious and respected as owners of vessels.[5]

[3] Mohammed S. Abdulkadir, *An Economic History of Igalaland, Central Nigeria; 1896-1939,* (Kaduna: Abu Press, 2014) p.20.
[4] Interview with Okutepa Idachaba, Ex-Serviceman, Idah, 15th May, 2021.
[5] Interview with Isaac Abogede, Retired Civil Servant, Idah 15th May, 2021.

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Figure 2. 18-Seater Water Bus manufactured at the Marine Workshop in Lokoja on marine service in Lokoja



Source: *M.L. Shuaibu. "A History of Inland Waterways Authorities…121*

The presence of the British World War speedboats and steam engine technologies made the people reduce their patronage of traditional canoes. The reasons were mainly for speed, safety and the capacity to convey more freight advantage which the British marine vessels and other European made vessels have over the locally made canoes. Malam Ba'ala Abubakar, an over 100-year-old river worker in Gbobe, on the eastern bank of the confluence opposite Lokoja who navigated the Benue to Ibi in what is today Taraba State in the Northeastern part of Nigeria with his canoe in the 1930s and 1940s claimed that travelers then preferred the British wartime vessels to their local boats that he inherited from his father.[6] The reason was not far-fetched. The local canoes were nothing close to the marine vessels in terms of comfort and state of the art facilities. The marine department passenger and cargo boat "Sarota" which plied between Lokoja and Burutu in the war period for example, was a stern-wheeler (two wheels), 4 feet 8 inches draught, with 136 feet long and 25 1/2 feet beam. She had cabin accommodation for six first-class and two second-class passengers (and could carry many in addition), with about 150 tons cargo, and was provided with a refrigerator and with electric light.[7] This development made the most cherished technology (canoe) which was used for defence, trade and long-distance transport in the pre-war period appear archaic to the succeeding generations in the area. Consequently, it became a mere fishing instrument for local fishermen.[8] The development of marine infrastructure during the war also made navigation in the confluence area safer with the introduction of navigational indicators like buoys on the waterways, regular

[6] Interview with Ba'ala Abubakar, Former River Transport Worker, Gbobe, 3rd May 2021.
[7] Annual Reports on Marine, Transport and Communication, 1933, 2.
[8] Interview with Ba'ala Abubakar, Former River Transport Worker, Gbobe, 3rd May 2021.

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dredging of the waterways and clearing of hyacinths and other debris that caused problems to vessels and seamless navigations.[9]

Figure 3: Buoys at the Marine Workshop in Lokoja



Source: *Field Work on 20/4/2021*

Dockyards, ports, slipways and jetties were also built by the British authorities in major towns in the Niger-Benue confluence area like Lokoja, Idah, Itobe, Ajaokuta, Shintaku, Banda and Kotonkarfi.[10] The notable routes with high volumes of traffic were Idah-Agenebode, Lokoja-Shintaku and Ajaokuta-Itobe. The routes were operated three times daily with ferries with 125 seaters capacity. Consequently, the revenue generated from freight and other services rendered by the marine department on the Niger River as illustrated in the table below moved astronomically from £7, 456 in 1913 to £16, 798 in 1919.

Table 1: Revenue Generated from freight and other services rendered by Marine Department between 1913 and 1919

Year	Amount
1913	£7, 456
1914	£9, 171
1915	£9,790
1916	£12, 714
1917	£14, 372
1918	£16, 210
1919	£16, 798

Source: *Annual Colonial Reports No. 1016 for Northern Nigeria,* 1920, 58.

[9] Annual Reports on Marine, Transport and Communication, 1920, 10-11.
[10] Interview with Captain Onesimus Ologuna, Captain, Lokoja, 11th May 2021.

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The upward curve in revenue generated from ferry services in the Niger-Benue confluence area started in 1914 even with the presence of the Lagos-Baro-Kano railway. The revenue generated as recorded in colonial documents was partly due to the efficient services rendered and the sophisticated nautical technology used during the war by the marine department and later the IWD in the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria and beyond.[11] The flotilla, deployed on the rivers by the department for the cargo services during the war included the vessels that are outlined in the table below.

Table 2: Flotilla of Vessels used by the Marine Department for Cargo Services

S/N	Name and Description of Vessel	Cargo Capacity Per Ton	Speed in Nautical Miles Per Hour
1	Corona, Twin Screw	150	10
2	Sarota, Stern Wheel	150	10
3	Empire Stern Wheel	100	8
3	No. 4 Lighter and Pontoon	90	8
4	No.1 Lighter	70	10
5	No. 2 Lighter	45	8
6	No. 3 Lighter	45	9
7	Kapelli, Stern Wheel	40	8
8	Kampala, Stern Wheel	10	9
9	Karonga, Stern Wheel	10	6
10	White Swan, Stern Wheel	5	6
11	Black Swan	5	6
12	Snipe	5	6
13	Stork	5	6
14	Pelican	5	6

Sources: *Annual Colonial Reports No. 1013 for Northern Nigeria, 1915-1919.*

With these vessels and other minor ones added to the fleet of the Marine Department during the war, Lokoja became the commercial hub of the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria in particular and the country in general through the department's nautical services. On a yearly basis since 1914, not less than 21 merchant vessels had been entering the port of Lokoja with a total of over 30, 000 tonnage, with the same number of merchant's vessels with a total of 29, 000 tonnage cleared at the same port.[12]

The high volume of traffic and trading activities that ensued marine services in the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria during the war created the need to revamp institutions like banks and postal services to manage and secure the proceeds and accruing resources from the services. Though the Anglo-African Bank was in existence in Lokoja before the war in 1914, the boom in marine transport as a result of the technology introduced into marine service by the British during the war, engendered the British authorities to establish post offices outside Lokoja to play complementary financial services for the marine

[11] NAI, Transport in Nigeria, Comment of the General Manager, Nigerian Railway on Mr Frederick Smith's Report of July 1939.
[12] See Appendix ii, in Annual Colonial Reports No. 1011 for Northern Nigeria, 1918, p.91.

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department and other bank users like the trading companies and the missions' officials in the Niger-Benue confluence area and beyond. The post offices in the confluence area and beyond that in addition to its traditional roles, rendering financial services to complement the services of the Anglo-African Bank in Lokoja were strategically located away from the city for the benefits of the people inland, and communities on the banks of the Niger and Benue with critical infrastructures like port and dockyards. The locations of the post offices are illustrated in the table below.

Table 3: Post Offices that rendered complementary financial services for Anglo-African Bank in Lokoja

S/N	Post Office	Distance in Miles
1	Lokoja – Burutu	305
2	Lokoja – Egga	95
3	Lokoja – Yola	550
4	Lokoja – Kabba	43
5	Lokoja – Dekina	39

Source: Annual Colonial Reports No. 708 for Northern Nigeria, 1917, 34.

What could be deduced from the foregoing illustration was that the proliferation of Post Offices in the area under study was engendered by the high income that ensued the high volumes of river transport services provided in the area by the British Marine Department in the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria. The mail and makeshift financial services rendered by the Post Offices created a high level of communication and socialisation in the area. The people could receive money and mail through the offices within the area and beyond. The Post Office structures were the first set of European architecture in the area. Its services made it become one of the centres of commerce and socialisation. Payment for financial transactions amongst traders was received in the Post Office, while mails were read out to people mostly in the period due to the low level of literacy.[13]

Though the absolute advantages the wartime technology created for colonial marine services had on the local marine services had thrown the Kyadya, the *Ohekpa* (Inland Ebira canoemen)[14] and the *AmmomaOnya* (Igala Marine Service Providers)[15]out of long-distance navigation on the Niger and Benue rivers since 1914, the colonial institutions aided some of them to diversify. For instance, in the KotonKarfi area the *Ohekpa,* abandoned marine business for fishing and importation of timber and other varieties of wood. Alhaji Shuaibu Koto who established the first sawmill in KotoKarfi and Lokoja area in 1920 was an *Ohekpa.*[16] In the same vein, in Idah, Alhaji Barau and his family responded to the dwindling fortune of his maritime business by beginning to import cattle from Ummaisha, Loko and Amagede on the Benue.[17] The move by the Baraus developed the cattle markets in Igalaland. Alhaji Umaru Abdullahi (*Akpela*), a

[13] Aliu B. Fafunwa. *History of Education in Nigeria,* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1974), p. 65.
[14] Inland Ebira canoemen.
[15] Igala Marine Service Providers.
[16] Interview with Yakubu Musa, Retired Civil Servant, Lokoja, 12th September, 2021.
[17] Interview with Okutepa Idachaba, Farmer, Idah, 16th September 2021.

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merchant who expanded the abattoirs Dekina and its adjoining communities in the 1920s was introduced to cow trading by the Barau family.[18] The business of the former mariners was aided by Anglo-African Bank and the colonial post office. Alhaji Barau was said to have collected £700 from Anglo-African Bank through the Post Office in Dekina in 1924 to boost his business.[19] Alhaji Shuaibu Koto was reported to have collected a loan from the same bank in Lokoja in the same period but the specific amount was not known by his offspring.[20]

Due to the marine services and the rise in the settlements of British administrators and workers in the Niger-Benue confluence area as a result of the war, its architecture was revolutionised; the traditional architecture was beginning to gradually give way to the British designs. Lokoja, Idah and Baro, because of their strategic locations on the banks of the River Niger, the high volumes of traffic their ports served in the period had more impact on the architectural revolutions. Before the war, the highest number of European houses in Lokoja belonged to the Marine Department. The war led to the expansions of British architectural quarters in the area to accommodate the rising population. The proliferation of British architecture made the locals begin to perceive their local architectures as inferior. The British architectures also led to the emerging markets for the sale of building materials like zincs, ceilings, nails and woods. The locals before then only used muds and shafts to build their houses.[21]

Figure 4: One of the Marine Quarters in Lokoja



Source: *Field Work on 20/4/2021*

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Interview with Yakubu Musa, 12th September, 2021.
[21] Interviews with Abu Keller, Retired Marine Officer, Lokoja, 10TH December 2020, Alhassan Ejiga, Retired Marine Officer, Lokoja, 10TH December 2020 and Umaru Akwuh, Former IWD Staff, Lokoja, 10TH December 2020.

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The war also forced the British authorities to link Lokoja with Ilorin, Makurdi, Lokoja and Lafia with telegraphic cables. These facilities in Lokoja made the city and adjoining communities like Idah, Gbobe, Itobe, Ajaokuta and Onyedegah to be found conducive by trading firms like John Holt, UAC and others to pitch their imperialistic tents.[22] The marine services were some of the major factors that endeared the companies to the Niger-Benue confluence area. However, the impact of the wartime improved transport was not felt by the contiguous geographical people in the hinterland who generally relied on land tilling and animal husbandry. In ideal cases, as it were in England during industrialisation where improved transport system in turn greatly facilitated the growth of agriculture by lowering transport costs and by raising the farm-gate prices of agricultural products, the case of the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria was dedicated to suit the capitalistic whims and caprices of the British at the expense of the people.[23]

Social Impact

Aside from its economic impact, the prosperity that ensued the British marine transport services as a result of the war also changed the human geography of the Niger-Benue confluence area in the colonial period. The transport services became one of the impetuses that led to steady population rise in the area. The availability of the relatively sophisticated means of river transport provided specifically by the Marine Department and later IWD attracted people of different cultural backgrounds from the lower Niger and the upper Niger, and the Benue to the confluence area as either marine workers, fishermen, or multinational companies' workers. The population of the area, with particular reference to the Ilorin, Bassa and Kabba Provinces, therefore, moved from 523,500 in 1914 to 1,000,285 in 1938.[24] It means the population grew by six per cent annually within the 30 years with multiple ethnicities that created multi-group relations that made the area a confluence of cultures and ideas.

The peoples that migrated into the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria as a result of the improved marine services occasioned by the war included Ijaw, Urhobo, Efik, Itshekiri, Edo and Yoruba. The migrants cohabited with peoples in the littoral communities of Idah, Gbobe, Lokoja, Adogo, Geregu, Shintaku, Banda, Adnakpa and Ajaokuta, and assimilated with little traces of their own cultures. The rise in population and cultural diversification came with its troubles and social vices. Crimes and criminalities rose astronomically in the area leading to the expansion of the police for the protection of lives and property, courts for adjudication, and prisons for punishment and reformation. Consequently, the Lokoja, Ilorin, Dekina, Kabba and Bida prisons were enlarged in 1915 to cater for the rising number of convicted persons in the Niger-Benue confluence area.

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[22] Mohammed S. Abdulkadir, *An Economic History of Igalaland, Central Nigeria,* p.20.
[23] Rick Szostak, *The Role of Transportation in the Industrial Revolution: A Comparison of England and France,* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991);and Philip S. Bagwell. *The Transport Revolution,* (London: Routledge, 1988).
[24] Annual Colonial Reports No. 587 for Northern Nigeria, 1908, 61; and Annual Colonial Reports No. 907 for Northern Nigeria, 1938, 82.

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In the same vein, missions found the confluence area more accessible for proselytisation and other humanitarian services with the availability of marine services. The impact of this was that more missionary groups like the Canadian Industrial Mission which was amalgamated with the Sudan United Mission, and adopted the latter name carried out medical work on over a thousand patients treated at Wushishi and Pateji during the war.[25] The Church Missionary Society stations in the Kabba, Nupe, and Bassa provinces, translated and printed part of the Bible in the Nupe, Yoruba, and Ebira languages. The Roman Catholic Mission also established a station in Dekina in the same period.[26]

The population expulsion and the rise in settlements in the Niger-Benue confluence area which came with the development of the marine transport services also led to the outbreak of different diseases that were probably brought into the area by the migrant workers, traders and artisans. Prevalent amongst the diseases were contagious infections like smallpox, chickenpox, yellow fever, measles and tuberculosis. Others were insect-borne diseases like malaria and trypanosomiasis. There were also rising cases of venereal diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea.[27]

Tsetse-fly, particularly the species that transmit trypanosome of sleeping sickness were prevalent along the waterways of the Niger-Benue confluence area, the activities of the marine department which exposed the people to the tsetse-fly infested areas on the rivers' banks made them vulnerable to the transmission of the ailment by the insects. Consequently, sleeping sickness, malaria which were prevalent in the area, became one of the major ailments to contend with.[28] Though chickenpox and smallpox were known to the people in the confluence area, it became commonplace from during the war when a severe epidemic of the two ailments occurred in Lokoja native town due to contacts with marine passengers and British soldiers from southern Nigeria. Though stringent measures were taken by the British authorities in conjunction with the native council to stamp out the diseases which were also rife in Kabba and Egga, causing many deaths in 1915, they became annual isolated occurrences since then.[29] In addition to this, venereal diseases like syphilis and gonorrhoea became endemic with the surge in the population of migrant communities in Idah, Lokoja, Itobe, Idah and Baro who established high scale prostitution quarters that were unprecedented in these communities to serve the marine workers, traders and artisans. The venereal diseases were transmitted mostly in the brothels which were known to the locals as *Gidan Karuwa, Angwan Tiv, Nyi Ama'achawo, Ile Achawo, Emi Karuwa* and *Nyi Agatu.* Most of the informants claim that brothels only began to emerge with the arrival of the British and their African servants by the waterways.[30]

[25] Annual Colonial Reports No. 551 for Northern Nigeria, 1920, 54.
[26] Annual Colonial Reports No. 551…55.
[27] Annual Colonial Reports No. 551…1920, 21.
[28] Annual Colonial Reports No. 516 for Northern Nigeria, 1921, 93.
[29] Interview with Adamu Baikie, Captain, Lokoja, 12th January, 2021.
[30] Interviews with Adamu Baikie Captain, Lokoja, 12th January, 2021, Amodu Karaworo, Retired Captain, Lokoja 12th January, 2021; Amodu Osuku, Farmer, Lokoja 12th January, 2021; Inno Fati Usman, Trader, Lokoja, 12th January, 2021; Umoru Ocheja, River Transport Worker, Idah 12th January, 2021; Rekiya Ochimana, Trader, Idah 12th January,

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However, the negative consequences of the diseases that came with the social changes that occurred in the confluence area as a result of the wartime marine services were mitigated by the British authorities as early as the winter of 1915 with the establishment of hospitals with special wards in Lokoja, Idah, Kabba, Dekina and Baro for the treatment and management of contagious diseases like small-pox, chicken-pox, yellow fever, tuberculosis and cholera.[31] Despite the establishment of the treatment centres for the medical cases, the Niger-Benue confluence area became more vulnerable to yellow fever owing to its occurrence in Southern Nigeria.[32] The strategy adopted by the British authorities was the establishment of segregation camps for suspects at marine ports' towns in Idah, Lokoja, Itobe and Baro where river steamers were carefully inspected, with every provision made to deal with any imported cases of the disease, or with the suspected person. These segregation camps continued to exist until 1926 when the Quarantine Ordinance No. 18, Chapter 54 of the Laws of Northern Nigeria was repealed and re-enacted with clearer provisions regarding the imposition of quarantine and other steps to combat dangerous infectious diseases.[33]

The hospitals also had wards for the treatment of venereal diseases and malaria which was indigenous to tropical regions like the Niger-Benue confluence area.[34] However, with the arrival of the British contingents, the general use of quinine as a prophylactic was intensified. The usage gave the most gratifying result as evidenced by the continuous fall in the number of malaria-related cases in the area from 1916.[35] The fall in the cases of malaria amongst marine workers and other British officials in the confluence area with the establishment of hospitals is illustrated in the table below.

Table 4: Malaria cases amongst marine and other British officials from 1914-1917

Year	**1914**	**1915**	**1916**	**1917**
Cases	**515**	**445**	**370**	**307**

Source: *Annual Colonial Reports No. 911 for Northern Nigeria, 1918, p.14.*

It has been shown from the table above that the fall in the number of malaria-related cases in the area from 1915, despite the rise in the number of marine workers was due to the effectiveness and efficacy of quinine in the treatment of the ailment. The area which was known as the Whiteman's grave due to the fatality of malaria became gradually safer for Europeans and even the locals from this period onward.

2021; James Okpanachi, Teacher, Idah, 17th January 2021 and Kabiru Atumeyi, Canoe Builder, Idah, 17th January 2021.

[31] Annual Colonial Reports No. 511 for Northern Nigeria, 1918, 107.

[32] Annual Colonial Reports No. 511 for Northern Nigeria, 1918, 15.

[33] NAI, Legislative Council of Nigeria, Address by the Governor, Sir Graeme Thomson, President of the Council, on February 1st, 1927.

[34] Sonia Shah, *The Fever: How Malaria Has Ruled Humankind for 500, 000 Years,* (London: Penguin Books, 2018).

[35] Annual Colonial Reports No. 511 for Northern Nigeria, 1919, 107.

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Political Impact

The British colonial marine services during the war, in addition to pushing the local marine service providers out of business, the colonial authorities through the Marine Department stripped the *Attah* Igala of his power over the Niger and Benue Rivers. Before the war, the *Attah* water chiefs collected custom duties and tolls on the rivers on his behalf. The *Attah* Igala had divided his sphere of the Niger River control into several administrative units under the controlling influence of the chiefs for easy administration. Equally, through the chiefs, the state enjoyed goodwill and support of other confluence people such as Inland Ebira and Kakanda who gave their support to the Igala Kingdom at this period because of their kinship relations.[36] But since the adoption of British vessels for transport by the locals tolls and duties on the Niger and Benue Rivers which had to boost the Igala economy in the 19th century were taken over by the British authorities. The once-powerful water chiefs whose power on the Niger and Benue Rivers were acknowledged by the British explorers in the mid-19th century became ordinary people with ceremonial functions. The control of the waterways since 1914 became the sole responsibility of the British colonial government.

Conclusion

The introduction of sophisticated waterborne technology for transport services in the Niger-Benue confluence area of Nigeria and its attendant high volumes of marine traffic during the First World War, subtly changed the socio-economic and political life of the people. The confluence area, particularly Lokoja became a melting pot for the Igala, Hausa, Ebira, Yoruba, Ijaw, Okun, Nupe, Bassa Nge and other diverse cultures that were attracted to the area for the transport services and other sundry occupations. The settlers, particularly the marine workers, had buildings with British architecture erected for them in the river ports town of Lokoja, Baro and Idah. The development revolutionised housing in the confluence area as most people gradually abandoned the local designs for British architecture. The British wartime navigation technology increased the classes of people who became experts in nautical related occupations like boat builders and repairers. Also, the negative consequences like diseases and criminalities that came with the wartime marine services, led to the establishment of modern institutions and instruments of justice like the police, courts and prisons to deal with them.

In the same vein, the prosperity that came with the services also led to the expansion of banks, post offices and telegraphic services in the confluence area by the British authorities to serve as auxiliaries. Though marine services brought about unknown ailments like yellow fever and aggravated known ones like gonorrhoea, syphilis (with the rise of prostitution), chicken-pox and small-pox, hospitals established by the British authorities to take care of the marine workers against these ailments aided in bringing the diseases, including the hitherto intractable malaria fever under control.

[36] Joseph N. Ukwedeh, "A Development of Dynastic Rule in Ane-Igala," in *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, (2003), Vol. 1, No 2.

Finally, marine services were the major reasons the confluence area, particularly Lokoja, became so important in Nigeria during the war as services created the atmosphere that made the expansion of modern institutions by the British authorities necessary in the Niger-Benue confluence area.

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