

# On Commando eBook

## On Commando

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## FOREWORD

Could I have known that the war would last so long, I might from the beginning have taken notes. They would have brought back memories in a way pleasant to me now, and perhaps also to those who have asked me to write down my adventures.

Often it occurred to me to keep a diary, but I was obliged to give up the idea because my clothes were sometimes so thoroughly drenched that the letters in my pocket were not readable. Later on, when clothes were scarce and pockets past mending, I often made the unpleasant discovery that caused the fool, on his journey from the land of Kokanje, to cry to the King: 'We have ridden at such a breakneck pace, see, everything has slipped through this little hole!' Now I am obliged to write down my adventures without any notes, so dates, numbers, and names of places will occasionally be missing. It stands to reason that I—being an exile in a strange country, in the fort of ... in ..., cut off from the world outside and without any official reports—should simply limit myself to my own personal experience. And, lastly, I must apologize to my readers for so often speaking of myself and my friends; but that is inevitable in this tale.

I shall pass rapidly over the first part of my life on commando. If my memory plays me false—which is not very probable, as I still have a lively recollection of the events—I shall be grateful for correction.

*July, 1901.*

I

### AT THE BOUNDARY—ENTRANCE INTO NATAL—DUNDEE—LADYSMITH

When that part of the Pretoria town commando to which my brother Frits and I belonged left for the Natal boundary on September 30, 1899, we were all very enthusiastic, as could be seen from the nice new suits, the new shining guns, and the sleek horses. Many ladies had come to the station to see us off, and we were proud of having the opportunity to fight for our country. Our departure seemed then to us a great occasion, we were inexperienced in war. We had not yet learnt that one could pass unscathed through many a fierce battle. We knew nothing of 'retreating' and we knew all about the enemy with whom we were to come in contact. We imagined that several sharp engagements would take place—that these would be decisive battles in which many of our men would be killed, and therefore the parting with relatives and friends was sad indeed.

Our Field-Cornet, Melt Marais, had told us that we had nothing to see to except provisions for a day or two, as Government would supply us with all necessaries at

Zandspruit, where the commandos were to concentrate; so many of us took neither pots, pans, nor mugs.

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What a disillusion it was to find on our arrival at Zandspruit that there were no tents, and as yet no provisions of any kind! So we were initiated by having to pass the first nights of our commando life on the open veld with insufficient food. And in the daytime our work was cut out for us, as every other minute our horses disappeared—lost among the thousands of horses that all looked exactly alike in the eyes of an inexperienced townsman. Then it meant a running and seeking, an examining of marks and tokens, until the stupid among us were obliged to tie ribbons to our horses as a means of recognising them. And one, the story goes, even tied a nosebag, with a bundle of forage, to his mount so that it should not run away.

At length the provisions began to arrive, but the pots and pans were still scarce and we could not even drink a cup of coffee till a tin of jam or meat had been emptied.

We were just beginning to feel comfortable, when the time stated in the ultimatum expired, and we had to cross the boundary of Natal. General Erasmus was at the head of our commando. We spent the night near Volksrust in a cold hail storm and rain. Those first days we are not likely to forget. They were wet, cold days, and we were still unaccustomed to preparing our own food and looking after ourselves. Fortunately, we had the opportunity, a few days later, of supplying ourselves with all necessities at Newcastle.

Before we crossed the boundary General Erasmus had addressed us and told us the news of our first victory—the taking of an armoured train at Kraaipan; at that time we still made a fuss about such a trifle. Also, in those days, we still looked up with respect to our leaders.

Ds. Postma, who accompanied us everywhere, led us in prayer. Not one of the burghers seems to have known where the enemy were. We advanced slowly and carefully, as we expected *to meet with the enemy at any moment*; but we saw no signs of them until we came to Dundee. After a rest of a few days we undertook the momentous expedition to the mountains of Dundee, to the north of the town.

Towards evening we got the order to 'prepare for three days.' For three days! And we had not even provisions enough for one. But we understood that there could not yet be a proper commissariat, and we fought for our country willingly, convinced of the justice of our cause; so we 'prepared' cheerfully.

Before the commando started, a terrible thunderstorm came on that slowly passed over and was followed by a gentle rain. We rode hard in the dark, through dongas, past farms and houses, zigzagging in a half-circle, to the mountains of Dundee. No sound was to be heard except the dull thud of the hoofs of the galloping horses. Now and again we whispered to each other how delightfully we were going to surprise the enemy. When the horses came to a sudden pause, and an inexperienced rider, owing to a presentiment of evil, involuntarily



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uttered his wish to 'halt,' we turned upon him angrily and called him 'traitor.' We did not then know that we were far beyond earshot of the enemy. It stopped raining, and towards morning we reached the mountains; and after we had with great difficulty got our horses on to the mountains, we had to await the dawn in the cold, drenched to the skin. A mackintosh is of small service in such a rain. When the day dawned we led our horses higher up. A thick fog had come on. General Lucas Meyer was to begin the attack on the west, and we were to surprise the enemy from the heights.

When the roar of cannon announced the battle, we were full of enthusiasm, but General Erasmus forbade anyone to move on before the fog lifted. It was quite possible that the fog might be only on the mountain-tops, because of their great height, and that we would have clear weather as soon as we began to descend, therefore several of our men begged General Erasmus to be allowed to go on ahead as scouts. But he was very much against it, and said that the enemy might cut off our retreat, and 'if the enemy surround us it is all up with us,' said he. As soon as the roar of the cannon ceased, we withdrew some distance into the mountains to let our horses graze. But we had only just off-saddled, when from all sides came the cry of 'Saddle! saddle!' and from our left, in the valley, came the sound of firing. A detachment of 250 khakies, probably knowing nothing of our whereabouts, and intending to pass round the mountains and attack Lucas Meyer in the rear, was compelled to surrender in a few moments, after first having sought cover in a kraal near a house.

We remained three days on the Dundee mountains, and during all that time there was a steady drizzle, with intervals of hail and wind. Once when it cleared up for a few hours we got the order to attack the town, but it began to rain again, and that night we had to keep our positions in the intense cold, without any covering. Fortunately, the enemy abandoned their camp that night, and when we looked down upon the town next morning the khakies had vanished. We had only the preceding day placed our cannon in a position to command the camp.

When we returned to our saddles, the horses had strayed so far that it took us almost all day to get them back. My uncle, Paul Mare, formerly Volksraad member for Zoutpansberg, treated us to kaboe-mealies (roasted maize), the first we had on commando, and we ate with great relish.

Meanwhile the commando had left. We followed, and entered Dundee, where we helped ourselves hungrily to the good things from the shops placed at the disposal of the commandos.

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In an unorganized army looting is a necessary evil. There are always some of the lower classes who are the ringleaders, and when the commandos reach a house or farm that has already been looted, they join in the looting 'because the burghers are on commando, and they must be well supplied with all necessities, so as to be able to fight well.' So we reasoned, and we joined in the looting. I can affirm, to the honour of our burghers, that it was not our intention to plunder, and in the beginning much was done to prevent it. The lower class Uitlander, who joined us for the sake of booty, and not for love and sympathy towards us, was largely responsible for the bad name we got among right-minded people who did not know the facts of the case. It was the same as regards theft. If anyone missed his horse, he had but to look for it among the 'Irish corps,' or some other Uitlander corps, and unless he knew his beast well he would fail to recognise it, as both mane and tail would have been cut short by the thief. I do not wish to pretend that we were always free from blame. It has happened that the Uitlander got a very poor horse in exchange for his thoroughbred because a Boer had tied the token of recognition to his own horse and made off with the better one. The truth is that very few men are proof against the demoralizing influence of war, and I will not deny that this war has shown up our many faults; but in my tale I shall be able to take up the cudgels for my people in cases where the rest of the world turned from us because they were disappointed in their expectations of us.

After our departure from Dundee the looting went on freely. Then we began to witness the devastation that is the irremediable consequence of war. Here and there a house had been completely plundered. At Glencoe Junction I entered the stationmaster's house, a well-furnished house with beautiful pictures, books, and mirrors. Some massive silver mugs and other articles of value were lying about. The family had only just dined, for the cloth was still laid. I ate of the food on the table, wrote a letter home with pen and ink, and left the house. Later on, when I returned, it had been thoroughly looted and some of the mirrors smashed. There were many of the riff-raff, Kaffirs and coolies in the neighbourhood, and in all probability they had done the mischief.

When our commando left Dundee to move in the direction of Ladysmith, part of the Pretoria town commando was sent to reinforce Lucas Meyer, who was to follow the troops fleeing from Dundee with his commando. My brother and I went with it. A terrible thunderstorm came on just then, and during the whole march to Ladysmith it rained heavily. Every moment we expected to come up with the troops, but they had too great a start, and we did not overtake them at all. We were too late again. An English General has said that 'the Boers are brave, and make good plans, but are always twenty-four hours late.' That can be explained in this way. We were accustomed to fighting against Kaffirs, who hid in woods and mountains, and against whom we had to advance with the utmost precaution, so as to lose as few lives as possible. So we were too cautious in the beginning of the war. We would not make a great sacrifice to win a battle.

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On October 30 we were present, under Lucas Meyer, at the battle near Ladysmith, but we did not come into action, as we belonged to a part of the commando that had to hold a position to prevent attack in the rear. The enemy did not attack our position at all, except with a few bombs, because they suffered a great defeat near Modderspruit, and had to retreat hurriedly. From our positions we could see how every time the bombs burst among them the fleeing troops seemed to get 'mazed' for a moment, and then went forward again.

At that time we were often in want of food. One must have suffered hunger to know what it means. In a few linen bags I had some biscuits that had first been reduced to crumbs through the riding, and then to a kind of pap by the rain and perspiration of the horse. Often when I felt the pangs of famine I added some sugar to this mess and ate it with relish.

Some days later we left Lucas Meyer and returned to our commando, which had meanwhile gone to the north of Ladysmith. During our absence Zeederberg had taken the place of Melt Marais as Veld-Cornet.

## II

### **SIEGE OF LADYSMITH—BATTLE OF THE ROOIRANDJES—BLOWING UP OF THE CANNON**

When we surrounded the town and the siege began, all talk of the bananas that we were to eat in the south of Natal came to an end.

Ladysmith ought never to have been besieged. On October 30 we should have made use of our advantage. If we had at once followed the enemy when they fled in disorder, we should in all probability easily have taken those positions that would have involved the immediate surrender of Ladysmith. Many lives would have been sacrificed, but not so many as were sacrificed during the whole siege. And we might have used those men who were necessary to maintain the siege elsewhere as an attacking force. Instead of following up our advantage, we deliberately prepared for a siege. The enemy meanwhile made use of the opportunity to entrench themselves well. Most of our burghers were against our attempting to take the town by assault when once it was thoroughly entrenched.

The Pretoria town commando and that from Krokodil River in the Pretoria district occupied the position nearest to Ladysmith. This was a hill to the north of the town, flat at the top, and surrounded by a stone wall. In all probability the enclosed depression of about 500 paces in circuit had been used as a cattle-kraal. Against that kopje (hill) we gradually put up our tents. From our camp we looked on to a large flat mountain that we called Little Amajuba, because on October 30 the first large capture of prisoners had

been made there. In front of our kopje, near the foot, ran a donga, and at a distance of about 1,000 paces, parallel to us, lay another oblong kopje occupied by the enemy. This kopje we called Rooirandjes.

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On November 8 we received the order from our General to attack the Rooirandjes the following day. We were about 250 strong, and very willing, as that position had not yet been entrenched. On a mountain to our right a cannon had been placed that was to begin firing on the enemy's position towards dawn. Distinct orders were given that our Veld-Cornet was to be at the foot of Rooirandjes with his men before daybreak. But something went wrong again, and it was already quite light when we reached the donga. We found ourselves at a distance of about 700 paces from the Rooirandjes, and we had to cross an open space if we still wished to storm the position. The enemy's watch already began shooting at us.

The corporals let their men advance in groups of four from the donga to the kopje, using the ant-hills as cover when they lay down. Our turn came last, but meanwhile the enemy had received reinforcements, and the nearest ant-hills were nearly all occupied, so that only three men could go at a time. Such a shower of bullets fell that it was a miracle that we came out of it alive. Fortunately I found a free ant-hill. My brother had to share one with a comrade.

At last the cannon from the mountain fired a few shots, but stopped again almost immediately—why, I do not yet know. So we were obliged to lie in our positions. It was terribly hot, and not a cloud in the sky. We suffered horribly from thirst, and scarcely dared move to get at our water-bags. One of our comrades lay groaning behind me. He was shot through both legs. The bullets kept flying over our heads to the kopje behind us, where some of our burghers lay firing at the enemy. Every now and again a bullet exploded in our neighbourhood with the noise of a pistol-shot. I fancy only Dum-Dums make that peculiar noise. We had already seen many such bullets taken from the enemy by our burghers in the Battle of Modderspruit. Another burgher, Mulder, ran past me with a smile on his lips, threw himself behind an ant-hill, immediately rose again with the intention of joining some of our burghers in the front ranks, who sat calmly smoking behind some rocks under a tree, but had not gone two paces when he was shot in the thigh. There he had to lie groaning until our brave Reineke, who was killed later on at Spion Kop, saw a chance of carrying him away.

Some of us fell asleep from fatigue. One of our men on waking heard the hiss of a bullet over his head at regular intervals, and thought that a khaki had got closer up to him, and was firing at him from the side. When he lifted his head he found that he had rolled away from all cover. One, two, three, back he was again behind his ant-hill, and the scoundrel stopped firing at him. It was lucky for us that the enemy were such bad shots, or not many of us would have lived to tell the tale.

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When our cannon at last, towards evening, condescended to bombard the enemy, the firing almost wholly ceased, and we made use of that favourable opportunity to get back to the donga. We had lain nine hours behind those ant-hills, and, strange to say, there were only two wounded on our side. We decided not to run the same risk again. In this way we lost our confidence in men like the brothers Erasmus, General and Commandant, who, in the first place, were incapable of organizing a good plan of attack, and, secondly, never took part in a battle.

The months spent near Ladysmith were to most of us the most tedious of the whole war. We had so little to do, and the heat between the glowing rocks of the kopjes was awful. The little work we had was anything but pleasant; it consisted chiefly in keeping guard either by day or by night. In the beginning a very bad watch was kept. Later on we had to climb the kopje at least every alternate evening to pass the long nights in our positions, while not far behind us stood our empty tents.

When we got back in the morning with our bundles on our backs, dead tired, we simply 'flopped' on to a stone, and sat waiting for our cup of coffee, either gazing at the lovely landscape or at the dirty camp, according to the mood we were in, or exchanging loud jokes with our neighbours. Constantly being on guard and constantly being in danger wears one out. We much prefer active service on patrol or in a skirmish to lying in our positions. It is not in the nature of the Boer to lie inactive far from his home. He soon wants to go 'huis-toe' (home), and very soon the 'leave-plague' broke out in our camp. That plague was one of the causes why the enemy succeeded in breaking through our lines.

Through unfairness on the part of the officers, some burghers often got leave, others never, and the consequence, of course, was a constant quarrelling. Many burghers got leave and never returned—either with or without the knowledge of the officers. No wonder we never had a proper fighting force in the field.

The difficulties we had to contend with through want of organization prevented the Generals from putting their plans into execution.

Fortunately, many burghers were very willing, and if there was to be a fight they always went voluntarily. It was noticeable that those under a capable General fought well, while those under a bad or incapable General were very weak indeed. Sometimes wonders were done at the initiative of some of the burghers. We had a few games in the camp to pass the time, but we were kept busy in a different way also. Sometimes, when we were all just comfortably lazy, the order would be given to 'mount.' That meant a hurried search for our horses and snatching up our guns and bandoliers. But after a while we had had enough of those false alarms, and they failed to make any impression on us. The call of 'The English are coming! saddle, saddle!' became proverbial.

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When we did not keep such constant guard, we sat or lay listening of an evening to a most discordant noise caused by the singing of psalms and hymns at the same time at different farms. We sometimes joined in. As a people we are not very musical.

The day-watch we liked best. Then we often got a chance of firing a shot at a careless khaki on the Rooirandjes. To some of our young men there was something very exciting in the idea that they were in constant danger. Every now and again a bomb, too, would come flying over the camp, and the whole commando would make for the rocks amid shouts of laughter.

At that time we still felt rather down when there was a fight in prospect. When, some time after our attack on the Rooirandjes, we went to the west of Ladysmith to attack Platrand, we did not feel at all comfortable, although we went voluntarily. It was a lovely ride in the dark at a flying gallop, but when we found on our arrival at Platrand that the promised number of men was not there, we rode away again quite satisfied that we had not to attempt the attack. For had we not made up our minds not to risk a repetition of the attack on Rooirandjes?

The blowing-up of the cannon at Ladysmith is one of the episodes of the war that we look back upon with a feeling of shame. A few days after a Long Tom had been blown up on Umbulwana Kop, east of Ladysmith, I warned our Field-Cornet that the enemy were busy spying in our neighbourhood at night. While on guard, we could distinctly hear the flapping of the saddles and the neighing of the horses in front of us. I foretold a repetition of what had happened on Umbulwana Kop. The Field-Cornet promised that the guard would be doubled that night. Towards morning those of us who were not on guard were waked out of our sleep by a loud cry of 'Hurrah!' from the throats of a few hundred Englishmen who were blowing up two cannon on a mountain to our right, close to us. We sprang towards our positions, stumbling and falling over stones, not knowing what was going on, and expecting the khakies at any moment. It was the first time that we had heard a fight at night, and it gave us a creepy feeling. We saw the flames of the guns and from the exploding bullets, and heard the rattling of the shots and the shouting, but we could not join in the fight, as we—eight of us—were not allowed to leave our positions. Now and again a bullet fell in our neighbourhood, and the Free State Artillery, who were on the mountains to the right, fired some bombs at the enemy, nearly hitting us in the dark.

When it got lighter we went to look at the dead and wounded, perhaps from a feeling of bravado, perhaps to accustom ourselves to the sight. The enemy had paid dearly for their brave deed. They know the number of their dead and wounded better than we do, for they had opportunity enough to carry them away. On our side only four were killed and a few wounded. Niemeyer, Van Zyl and Villiers were among the killed. Pott was severely wounded. Niemeyer had several bayonet wounds.



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After that we were, of course, doubly careful. We have never been able to discover who failed in their duty on guard. Cooper and Tossel were suspected and accused. They were sent to Pretoria under arrest, but the investigation never led to any result. We have every reason to believe that our burghers were guilty of treachery more than once near Ladysmith. Government ought from the start to have taken strict measures against traitors and spies.

Some days after the blowing up of the cannon I sprained my left knee, which I had already hurt before the war began. General Erasmus gave me leave to go home for an unlimited time. On my way home I passed my brother Willem without being aware of it. He had come from Holland, where he was studying, to take part in the war.

What a meeting with relatives and friends! How much there was to tell! Even then we had not experienced very much, and how much more will our burghers have to tell their dear ones on returning from their exile in strange countries! There will, alas! be much sorrow, too; for many of our friends and relatives have been killed in this war, and many more will have yet to give their lives for their country!

### III

#### *The eight-day battle of the tugela—talk of intervention—relief of Ladysmith*

Before my knee was quite cured I returned to Ladysmith. The first thing that caught my eye on my return to the camp was the balloon above Ladysmith. It looked just like a large crocodile-eye as it followed all my movements. When I went to look for my horse or to fetch water or wood, there it stood, high up in the sky, and I felt as if it kept its eye specially fixed on me, and as if I might expect a bomb at any moment.

We had never in all our lives seen so many flies as at Ladysmith. We had to hurry over our meals as they made eating almost an impossibility to us. Fortunately, I was only a short time there, as towards the end of January, 1900, part of our commando, including my brother and myself, was sent to the Tugela as reinforcement. We had a distance of four and a half hours to ride, and we had to ride hard, as the enemy were determined to force their way through. We arrived the same day, just two days after the enemy had tried to force their way through to the right of Spion Kop and had been defeated. On nearing the high Tugela mountains we heard more and more distinctly the constant rattling of bullets, interrupted by the roar of the cannon and the bom-bom-bom of our saucy bomb-Maxim, that made our hearts expand and those of the enemy shrink. As we raced on to the foot of the mountains, the bullets that the enemy were sending over the mountains to find the Boers raised the dust around us.



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The following morning we went to lie in a trench that had been dug by our men on a rise to the right of Spion Kop. The previous day eight burghers had been wounded there. Red Danie Opperman was Field-Cornet. Not far from us, to our left, stood a few of our cannon, and facing us, to our left, on the long mountain slope, we could see fourteen guns of the enemy's. In front of us was a large wood, and close to that the English camp. We could see the enemy moving in great close square masses. It was a terribly hot day; we had to lie in the trenches, as all day long the enemy fired at us from the smaller positions facing us, at a distance of 15,000 paces; and constantly the bombs burst over our heads. At regular intervals a lyddite bomb—that gave us a shock through our whole body—came from the wood towards the cannon on our left. Once only part of our entrenchment, where, fortunately, no one happened to be, was blown to bits.

Whenever there was a moment's pause, we lifted our heads above the trenches to have a look at the lovely landscape and at the positions of our enemy. That day not one of us was wounded. Only the artillery suffered. If our few cannon ventured to make themselves heard, eight or more bombs followed in quick succession to silence them. Next to me lay a man whose servant, a restless, impatient Bushman, most amicably addressed him as Johnny. The Bushman went to and fro continually to a 'chum' of his who lay hidden behind a rock close to us. Once, on one of his visits to his 'chum,' a bullet struck the ground close to his heels; he stood still, looked slowly and defiantly from his heels to the enemy, and said in a most emphatic tone, 'You confounded Englishman!' and calmly proceeded on his way to his chum.

To the right of this position was an open space, almost level with the immediate surroundings, but ending in a steep decline some 900 paces further on. There we went towards evening with a reinforcement of the Pretoria town commando that had followed us. The Field-Cornet made us stand in rows, and told off forty men to dig a trench that night. The rest of the men would relieve us the following night. My brother and I were in the first shift. Towards morning, while we were still digging at the trenches, fire was opened across the whole line of battle. We imagined that we were being attacked, and jammed ourselves in the narrow trench. But as the attack did not come off, and the bullets flew high over our heads, we went on digging until daybreak. Then we noticed that the enemy were lying in a trench about 800 paces ahead of us. We fired a few shots at them, but saved our ammunition for an eventual storming.

The whole of that day and the two succeeding days there was a constant salvo over our heads. The bullets flew over our heads like finches, and did us no harm, but we had to be on our guard against the sharpshooters, who occasionally fired close to us. That day (January 24), the heroic Battle of Spion Kop took place, where our burghers, after having been surprised in the night by the enemy and driven off the kop, obliged them, after a stubborn fight, to abandon it again. The Pretoria men, who were to have relieved us in the trench, took a great part in that battle. Reineke, Yeppe, Malherbe, De Villiers, and Olivier were killed. Ihrige was severely wounded.

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All day long we lay listening to the fighting, for we could not sleep. We had to stay in the trench three days and four nights before we were relieved. Water and food were brought to us, or fetched by our men at night, as we did not venture to leave the trench by day. We were safe enough, for the bombs had not much effect on the sand-walls of our trench, and there was always time to stoop to avoid them. The following morning news was brought to us that the enemy had abandoned the whole line of battle and were retreating in the direction of Chieveley.

The battle of the Tugela had lasted eight days.

I had again hurt my knee, and had to leave Ladysmith for Pretoria, from whence I went to Warmbad at Waterberg to stay for a few weeks with Mrs. Klein-Frikkie Grobler, who received me most kindly. My brother Frits got leave for the first time then, too, and Willem remained at Ladysmith. During my absence the English broke through at Pieter's Heights, where Willem was made prisoner and Luetig, Malherbe and Stuart de Villiers were killed. Meanwhile Frits had gone, with some other Pretoria men, to the Orange Free State, where the enemy had surrounded General Cronje.

Since the beginning of the siege our burghers always thought the town would fall soon. 'The khakies cannot hold out any longer! They have no provisions, and their ammunition must be coming to an end! Buller can never cross the Tugela, our positions are too good! What does it matter if I do go on leave? The khakies cannot get through!' That was the opinion of most of the burghers. And if anyone ventured to point out that the enemy *might* force their way through because we did not all do our duty, he was either not believed or looked upon as a traitor. Meanwhile enthusiasm was dying out. The burghers lay in their lagers or went home, trusting to the few willing ones, who ultimately proved not strong enough to withstand the overwhelming force that Buller brought to bear upon one point of our positions when he was obliged to force his way through at no matter what cost.

No leave should have been given during the war, and here I may as well mention—although this tale does not pretend to be a history of the war—that it has been carried on with far too great laxity, owing to the ignorance of our Generals and the demoralizing influence of self-interest and nepotism. We should have sent our forces far into the Cape Colony to get help from our brothers in a war that had been forced upon us by England. The Colonial Afrikaners never had the opportunity of standing by us, because we did not supply them with the necessary ammunition or stretch out our hands towards them. Unless they had help from our invading forces, they dared not risk a rising, because of the confiscation of their property in case of failure.

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We have had to suffer—to suffer cruelly for our sins. Our enemy forced his way through the dyke that surrounded us, and like a stormy sea he ruined our homes, devastated our fields, and caused us endless suffering. Besides this, the talk of intervention had an enervating effect on the commandos. In our commando, which was largely composed of ignorant men, the strangest stories went round. One was that the Russians had landed somewhere in South Africa with 100 cannon. There was always talk of a great European War having broken out; and the consequence was that the Boers counted on intervention or help from the Powers, instead of depending on their own strength and perseverance. The most sensible among us recognised the improbability of intervention. It was not to the interest of any foreign Power to intervene in South Africa where it had no firm footing, particularly as Chamberlain had, by most cunning artifices, forced us to be the aggressors.

War was inevitable. Sooner or later it had to come. After the Jameson Raid, which was really the beginning of the war, the Transvaal Government recognised the dangerous position in which it stood, as an isolated Republic, and was therefore obliged to arm itself with the most modern of military equipments. Before the Jameson Raid race hatred was dying out rapidly. The consequence of the raid was that the gap between Boer and Englishman widened, the sympathy of the Uitlanders for us grew deeper, and the Afrikaner Bond grew stronger. England's prestige in South Africa was threatened, and with it her rank as first Power in the world. She had to maintain her supremacy in South Africa; while for us it had become a question of all or nothing. England has evidently succeeded in keeping up such friendly relations with the other Powers that no intervention seems possible.

The relief of Ladysmith took place on February 28—a Majuba Day—a day that had been marked as a red-letter day in our calendars. For nineteen years the enemy have longed to wipe out the remembrance of that day, and they have done so brilliantly and malignantly. Since that time we have been humiliated and belittled. Our fall was great. For the first time there was a general panic. The two Republics, being forced to venture on war against a powerful kingdom, felt themselves staggering under the heavy blow.

## IV

### DEWETSDRIFT—RETURN TO, AND FLIGHT FROM, PRETORIA

After the relief of Kimberley and Ladysmith we imagined that the decisive battles would soon follow. Although my knee was not yet cured, I went to Glencoe, whither our commandos had retreated. I was not five days there when I had to leave, being unfit for active service. Again I went to Warmbad for some weeks with Mr. Burgemeester Potgieter and his family, and on my return to Pretoria remained in my office until the beginning of May.

Meanwhile Frits had returned from the Free State, and my knee was cured. We each bought ourselves a sturdy pony, and left, with some other burghers, by train for Klerksdorp, from where we went on to Dewetsdrift, on the Vaal River. General Viljoen was guarding the drift there with some hundreds of burghers. We rode from there some four or five hours into the Free State to spy the movements of the enemy.

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From Dewetsdrift we went, under Commandant Boshoff, to Schoemansdrift, Venterskroon, and Lindequidrift. Our division formed part of the escort for the guns. Our route lay through beautiful scenery. The Vaal twists and bends between two high mountains that curve on either side like the roads the khaki makes with his double row of waggons over the hills of the Hoogveld. In every opening of the mountains lies a farm, a mean little house, but among well-cultivated fields. In nearly every farm the family was grieving for one of its members who had been taken prisoner along with Cronje, and of whose fate they were in ignorance. The people received us very kindly. Everywhere we got milk and biscuits, and we found afterwards that those people were the kindest who had suffered the most from the war.

As the enemy were already on their way to Johannesburg, we had to retreat as rapidly as possible, first to Bank Station, near Potchefstroom, and then by train to Langlaagte. To the north-west of Johannesburg we had a skirmish with the enemy, who attacked us as we were feeding our horses. It appeared that our guard was not on duty. I have never seen horses saddled so quickly. Most of the burghers rode off and left us behind with the guns. One ammunition waggon stuck in the mud, and was left behind, but was brought in safety to Pretoria by Frans Lottering, a comrade of mine, who rode back for it with some gunners when we had fled. Lottering was given a sword by General de la Rey for his brave conduct. Through negligence on the part of our officers we lost on that occasion one gun, several waggons, and some of our men.

Almost all night long we retreated with our guns to Pretoria. We had not lost courage. We all spoke of the thorough way in which our Government would have fortified Pretoria, and of the great battle that would take place there. We had all made up our minds to a stubborn resistance at our capital. What a bitter disappointment it was to find that our Government had decided not to defend the town! The causes that led to such a decision will be brought to light by historians. The consequences were that many of the burghers were discouraged, and rode 'huis-toe,' and nothing came of the great battle that was to have been fought.

Frits and I decided to give our horses a few days' rest in their stables before going to meet the enemy.

On June 4, at about twelve o'clock, while we were at luncheon, a lyddite bomb fell close to the fort, raising a cloud of dust. My mother went outside, and came back quickly to tell us that it was not a shot *from* the fort, but from the enemy. The bombs followed in quick succession. They flew over Schanskop fort, and fell close to our house at Sunnyside. As the ground was rocky they exploded well. My mother and sister fled with our neighbours to the town, and my brother and I saddled our horses and rode off to Quaggaspoort.

From over the mountains, to the south of the town, the bombs came flying as a gentle warning from the khakies that it would be better to surrender in order to avoid a great calamity.

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It was sad to see how few horses there were at the foot of the mountain. Here a group of four, there of ten—a sign that the number of burghers in the positions was very small indeed. When the enemy appeared at Quaggaspoort, we noticed that the burghers from the direction of Krokodil River were retreating, and a moment later they were all in full flight. One of my comrades, a brother of Lottering, was wounded in the arm by a shell as he fled, and had to remain behind in Pretoria. That night my brother and I spent in our own home, but we left the town the following morning in the direction of Silverton, just before the enemy entered.

It would be well to try and understand the condition of our country and the temper of our burghers.

As the capital was in the hands of the enemy, it was easy enough to convince our simple-minded men that our country was irretrievably lost to us. Therefore a period of discouragement and demoralization followed. Many burghers, also, who had all along fought bravely now remained behind in the towns or on their farms, not daring to leave their wives and daughters at the mercy of the soldiers. We may not judge those men, neither need we consider it to our credit that we, either from a sense of duty or from a spirit of adventure, acted differently. There were many also who argued that the Government was corrupt, and that the war should have been prevented, or that the Boers did not want to fight. So they also became unfaithful to the cause, and to those along with whom they began the war. And the name of 'hands-upper' was earned by those burghers who of their own free will surrendered to the enemy. The chaff was divided from the grain; cowards and traitors remained behind, and the willing ones went to the veld, even though it were in a retreating direction. We were still very hopeful. There were still the good positions in the Lydenberg district, and we had heard that De Wet had cut the line of communication behind the enemy. We also still had an intact line to Delagoa Bay.

My brother and I met our old comrade Frans Loitering, and the three of us went in search of General Grobler of Waterberg, who lay with his commando to the east of Pretoria at Franspoort, near Donkerhoek. There we joined his commando. Our camp was put up near a Kaffir location, and as the Kaffirs were clean, we often bought boiled sweet potatoes and crushed maize from them.

Nothing particular happened at Franspoort. To the right and left of us some desperate fighting went on for several days, and at Donkerhoek a fierce battle took place, but we were not attacked.

When the news came that the enemy had broken through our lines at Donkerhoek, and that we had to retreat, my brother and I left Grobler's commando. Thinking that the commandos would fall back upon the positions of Belfast, we went to Middelburg to an uncle of ours, the missionary Jan Mare, in order to give our horses a rest. We had lost sight of our comrade Frans. On our way we bought bread at the farms, or had it given

us, cut a piece off an ox that had been slaughtered for the commando, and slept either in a manger or, as was more often the case, in the open air of the cold Hoogveld. We arrived at Middelburg completely exhausted, and are not likely to forget our uncle's great hospitality.



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We accidentally met our former Commandant, Boshoff, who told us that he was on his way with ten men to join General de la Rey, who had gone in the direction of Rustenburg to cut the enemy's line of communication between Mafeking and Pretoria, and we very willingly joined him, after a delightful rest of ten days.

The commando of Commandant Boshoff consisted of nine burghers with an ambulance waggon—that was used for the commissariat and for our bedding—a French doctor, two Kaffirs and two tents. It seemed as if we were going for a picnic. But it was necessary that we should be well provided with all sorts of things, as our journey would be through the Boschland, where fever and horse-sickness play havoc with man and horse in summer. In winter it is endurable for a few months only, so the country is very scarcely populated and almost uncultivated, and in winter the Boers trek there with their cattle from the bare, chill Hoogeveld. I had always longed to see that part of the Transvaal.

## V

### **TREK FROM MIDDELBURG TO RUSTENBURG—BATTLE OF SELIKATSNEK**

Some hours north of Middelburg one suddenly leaves the high plateau of the Boschveld for a difficult road that curves steadily downwards between two high mountains until it reaches a wide, thickly-wooded valley. In the kloof (mountain-pass) a swiftly-flowing river cuts the road that goes along its banks, in several places, before it loses itself in the Olifants River. There the song of many birds, not to be found on the Hoogeveld, can be heard, and there it was delightfully warm, in comparison with the chilly air of the Hoogeveld. Of an evening we made large fires, as there was plenty of dry wood. We sat round the fire, chatting or listening to the comic songs which one of our comrades sang. It was a happy time—away from khaki, far beyond reach of the roar of cannon—a time of rest in preparation for the evil days that awaited us.

Everywhere we saw flocks of sheep and herds of cattle grazing among the bushes—always a sign that we should find a waggon or two with tents close to them, under the nearest trees. Sometimes, near a drift or a good place to uitspan, quite a small lager had been formed of the trek Boers, or, rather, of their wives, for the husbands and sons of many had gone to the war. The Boers who fled with their cattle in that way we called 'Bush-lancers.' We came up with De la Rey's lager near the Elands River, and later on made the acquaintance of Captain Kirsten's scouts, to whom we offered our services. In those days it was very pleasant to belong to the reconnoitring corps. When we went to reconnoitre our horses got plenty of forage on the farms, and as we were few in number and always ahead of the lager, there were always eggs, bread, and milk to be had. We had enough to do, also, as we had to keep a sharp look-out, and we were in constant danger, but not at all afraid of the patrols of khakies, which, being

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small in number and without their guns, were pretty harmless. We advanced almost parallel to the Magalies Mountains, that stretch from Pretoria to Rustenburg, until we came to the neighbourhood of Selikatsnek. Unless one was well acquainted with the highways and byways of that part of the country, one was in constant danger of losing the way; it is a long stretch of bush, consisting of the well-known thorn-bushes of the Hoogevelde, for a distance of about ten miles deep. The principal passes of the Magalies Mountains were occupied by the enemy—Wonderboompoort, Hornsnek, Selikatsnek, Commandonek, Olifantsnek. General de la Rey had made up his mind to take Selikatsnek, and on July 11 he succeeded, by his strong will and military talent.

While we were reconnoitring with Captain Kirsten's party we got the news that De la Rey had attacked Selikatsnek—about an hour's ride from where we were—and that the battle was still going on. We all rode to the scene of action, but my brother and I, with a few other men, remained behind to wait for Captain Kirsten, who was absent at the time. As soon as he arrived we rode off, and arrived at Selikatsnek at about nine o'clock. Our burghers had already taken two of the enemy's guns.

Selikatsnek (or Moselikatsnek) is a narrow opening in the Magalies Mountains, with high shoulders on either side, that slope gradually to a white kopje in the centre. If an attacking party once occupies the shoulders, it can easily keep the enemy on the kopje or on the two slopes. When we arrived our burghers already occupied the principal positions—both shoulders and the smaller positions to the front of the kopje. The enemy had been obliged to draw in their clipped wings, and to concentrate on and in the neighbourhood of the white kopje.

But as the shoulders of the pass were very steep on the other side, our men could not surround the enemy or attack them in the rear; and as there was not sufficient cover for them to go down the slope without great loss, in order to drive the enemy by force from their positions, the burghers remained 'rock-fast' in their positions, and made no progress at all. Thus, the enemy would either get reinforcements from Pretoria or escape when it got dark. Both our flanks kept up a constant fire on the slopes, and on the white kopje, but the shoulders were too high for a proper aim, and the khakies lay fast behind the boulders and in the clefts of the rocks.

Captain Kirsten, with about ten men, was ordered by General Coetzee to hold a position to the right of the white kopje, and prevent the enemy from taking it. This position consisted of a small rise, from which we could fire at the kopje with a sight of 550 paces. To the right of this rise, at a distance of 80 paces, was a small kloof overgrown with bushes, and on the other side of the kloof ran a reef of rocks in the direction of the white kopje. Here some of the burghers had before our arrival forced eleven

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khakies to surrender, but they had not succeeded in occupying the position, as some khakies had remained in the kloof, and had shouted to them that they would not surrender. We were therefore warned against that kloof. But while the others were shooting at the enemy on the white kopje, one of our men went by himself to see if there really were any khakies left there. He kept under cover wherever he could—behind the rocks and behind the walls of an old kraal—and came close up to the kloof without being fired at. On the other side, at a distance of fifty paces, he heard a wounded man groaning and begging for water; but, as he was alone, he did not venture to cross the kloof. He returned to his comrades, but they would pay no attention to his request to cross, as they thought the enemy were only waiting until more men came under fire before they began firing.

We continued shooting at the white kopje, from which the enemy were firing at us. The Captain had a good telescope, through which he could distinctly see the faces of the enemy on the kopje. If a khaki showed himself from behind a rock, the Captain pointed him out to one of our marksmen, Alec Boshoff, who studied the position through the telescope, and took such good aim that the Captain declared he could see the blood on the wounded man's face.

The burgher who had gone to the kloof tried to persuade the rest to cross with him to the other side, as he was sure the enemy were not inclined to make any resistance there. At length, after twelve, he went with two others to the opposite side, but first told a few of the best marksmen to keep an eye on the reef. They crossed the kloof very cautiously. It was dangerous work, as a shot might come at any moment from behind one of the numerous shrubs or boulders. But they did not advance in an unbroken line. Every time they sought cover behind a rock, from which they watched to see whether the enemy would make their appearance. They did not all three advance at the same time, either, but first one and then the other. Whenever they had advanced a few steps, they stopped to ask the wounded man, who lay groaning there, whether he was alone. When they reached him they put some grass under his head, and gave him some brandy from a flask that they always carried with them. The poor man lay in a pool of blood on a rock under some shrubs. He had been shot through the leg. His name was Lieutenant Pilkington.

The wounded man took hold of the hands of one of the burghers and begged him to stay with him. He, however, considered it his duty to advance, but first assured the poor man that the burghers who were following could also speak English, and would look after him. Most of our men followed the three. The rocks and boulders on the reef that we were climbing afforded us splendid cover from the enemy on the white kopje.

To our left we found some more wounded. My brother took charge of one with a ghastly wound in his head. We made some prisoners there, who were too cowardly to defend

themselves. A few of our comrades took them down. We could notice by the guns and rugs that were lying about that the enemy had fled in a panic, or else we should never have ventured to do what we did later on.

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We could fire at the enemy from a much shorter distance now, but were not yet in their rear. It was necessary that we should occupy the next position—a reef running parallel to the reef we were climbing, at a distance of eighty paces. But it was impossible to take that position, as our guns were firing bomb after bomb from the valley at our back, somewhat to the left of us, so that the stones flew up in the air. We also ran the risk of being taken for khakies, as our men knew nothing of our venture. The Captain sent down a message to tell them to stop shelling that position, as we wished to take it. Meanwhile, we kept on firing at the white kopje, and the khakies kept on firing at us.

I went back to the wounded officer, who was being looked after by the Captain. While we were standing talking, he died from loss of blood. Oh the cruel brutality of war! The poor man was not dead five minutes when we sat smoking his cigarettes.

We moved slightly more to the left towards the boulders. Khaki was on the one side, we on the other. Some of our men had a most original and amusing way of getting at the khakies. 'Come out, you rabbits, come out of your holes, else we'll shoot down the lot of you!' Then the poor things answered: 'We're afraid to come out. You'll kill us!' They really thought we would shoot them down if they surrendered. The officers had lost all control over the soldiers. Later on, at Nooit Gedacht, where we had cover as well as the enemy, it was proved that as soon as the officers lose control over the men they remain lying behind the rocks without firing a shot, as they are too frightened to expose themselves. Most of them still had their bandoliers full of cartridges—there, too, when they surrendered.

Before the war the English used to say they would fight us in our own way, from behind rocks; but they forgot that as soon as an officer, having to seek cover himself, fails to keep his eye on his men, they are too cowardly to lift their heads from behind the rocks, as they are not fighting for their independence. On a field like Selikatsnek we are by far the better men.

To get the khakies from behind the rocks, one of our men ran as hard as he could to a rock in their neighbourhood, and aimed at them. Then some of them threw down their guns and put up their hands. Others surrendered more calmly. So he sometimes made five or six of them surrender without their having fired a single shot at him. A shower of bullets always came from the white kopje, but, as his movements were quick and unexpected, they could not take proper aim at him. One of the khakies said as he surrendered: 'It is better to surrender than to be a dead man.' Another: 'Just fancy, in the hands of the Boers! I wonder what poor mother 'll say!'

Meanwhile the gunners had received the Captain's report, and ceased bombarding the reef that we wanted to storm. As it was getting late and there was no other means, one of our men ran forward as hard as he could, making use of every small covering, while the rest kept firing at the white kopje to prevent the enemy from taking a proper aim at him. There were not many khakies behind that reef, neither did they fire at him. The

rest of us followed at intervals, while those who arrived at the reef again fired at the white kopje to cover the others.

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The few khakies who surrendered at the reef we first disarmed, and then we allowed them to seek cover behind the rocks from the bullets of their friends. From that position we could see the enemy from the rear. In the narrow road, at a distance of about 150 paces from us, stood an ammunition waggon with splendid horses harnessed in it; there was no room for them to turn to draw away the waggon. A few khakies showed themselves next to the waggon, but were immediately shot down. A little further on an ambulance waggon, also inspanned, stood against the kopje; one could distinctly see how the empty litter was carried up and brought down again with some of the wounded. Once a man walked next to the litter as it was carried down; I pointed him out to my brother, as I suspected his motive. I was right. Just by the ambulance waggon he disappeared in a donga leading to the valley. My brother, who was a little higher up the reef than I was, could not hit him, as he appeared again only for a moment. He was most likely a despatch-rider who went to warn the guard at Commandonek to retreat.

Further on there were some horses to be seen, and a little further still the small tents of which the camps consisted. We kept up a constant fire, but the enemy seemed to have sufficient cover on the kopje—and they were very obstinate. For some time the firing from the shoulders of the pass ceased, and in the dark shadow between the high mountains we for a moment had the feeling that we had been deserted by our men—only for a moment, for we knew it could not be! The game was in our hands.

The sun sank lower, and we felt if the enemy were not soon compelled, to surrender they would escape in the dark. There was still one position which must be taken—the last reef, to which most of the enemy had retired from the position we now occupied. One of our men, therefore, let the other six fire a salvo at the kopje, and ran as hard as he could to a rock at a distance of twenty-five paces ahead, about halfway to the last reef. But now both the enemy and our own burghers, under Commandant Coetzee, fired at him so persistently that he was thankful to reach the rock. He lay there as still as possible, with his gaze fixed on the reef—as he lay without cover on that side. It was a most critical moment.

Fortunately he heard, almost at once, one of his comrades, Van Zulch, call out ‘Oh, the white flag! Hullo, the white flag!’ and he saw them climbing down. He lay still a moment longer to convince himself of the fact, and then calmly went to the last reef, where many khakies surrendered—and he descended with them. Now the rest of the burghers came running along from all directions to disarm the enemy in the dusk—and to take what booty there was to be had. In their eagerness to get as much booty as possible, they allowed an officer, Major Scobel, to escape.

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As I arrived rather late on the battlefield, I cannot give any account of the order in which De la Rey placed his men, neither do I know the number of the enemy's dead and wounded, nor how many lives our victory cost us. I have never seen any official report concerning this battle. Field-Cornet Van Zulch, who with Commandant Boshoff, took the officers to Machadodorp, and who is at present a fellow-prisoner, tells me that three officers—Colonel Roberts, Lieutenants Davis and Lyall—and 210 soldiers of the Lincolnshire Regiment were taken prisoners, and that four companies of the Scots Greys had early that morning escaped with two guns. Our loss, both dead and wounded, was not more than thirteen or fourteen men. The enemy had made a stubborn resistance, judging from the number of dead and wounded that were lying on the field. Of the seven of us who forced the enemy to surrender by attacking them in the rear, not one was injured, although we were the attacking party. They say that the khaki prisoners whom we left on the reef remained there all night, and came down the following morning with little white flags made of the bandages that a soldier always carries with him, tied to twigs.

## VI

*Guerilla life on the Magalies mountains—narrow escape of President Steyn and general de wet.*

Commandant Boshoff had been ordered to take the prisoners to Machadodorp. He left my brother and me with Captain Kirsten, who had to reconnoitre in the direction of Rustenburg along the Magalies Mountains. We first of all passed through Commandonek, and found that deserted by the enemy. We had no adventures on our way to Rustenburg.

The Rustenburgers, who had nearly all laid down their arms and taken the oath of neutrality, took courage when they saw De la Rey's big commando, and joined us one and all.

Then we recognised a great fault in the character of our people. Without the slightest compunction, they first fail in loyalty to their own country, and then break the oath of neutrality, although the enemy had in no single respect violated their part of the contract. Some of them we, in a way, forced to join us, as we took the guns and horses of the unwilling ones or of those who acted at all in a suspicious way. We also called them traitors. But most of the burghers joined us of their own free will. Many had not taken the oath of neutrality, as they had been beyond the reach of the enemy; others had, after Lord Roberts' threatening proclamations, ridden over to the enemy to give up their arms, but had given up their old rifles and kept the Mausers for 'eventualities,' to use the now historical word of Sir Alfred Milner.



A few of the oath-breakers tried to excuse themselves by the Jesuit plea that either they did not mean what they swore or else they had purposely changed the form of the oath. In judging those who broke the oath of neutrality later on, we must remember that the enemy did not keep to their part of the contract, and so our men were justified in considering it as null and void, and, according to William Stead, their forcing us to take the oath of neutrality was against the Geneva Convention. But it is too difficult a question for me to discuss.

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When the enemy, a few days later, drove us from Olifantsnek, General de la Rey sent Captain Kirsten with twenty men to the neighbouring kopjes to prevent the enemy from going on a plundering expedition. Then I for the first time saw a farm-house burnt down by the enemy. From a high kopje, by the aid of a telescope, we could distinctly see the movements of the khakies. The bitter feeling that was roused in us in our helplessness is not to be described.

General Baden-Powell was in Rustenburg, and Magatonek was also in possession of the enemy.

It was a most interesting and adventurous time that we spent near the Magalies Mountains. By day we went reconnoitring along the hills near the mountains in the direction of Olifantsnek, and towards evening we withdrew into the thick woods of the kloofs, where it was delightfully warm both for ourselves and for our horses. When a small number of the enemy came in our direction, we fired at them unexpectedly from the hills, and so protected the farm-houses on the mountain-sides. Occasionally the khakies ventured a little nearer, but always had to retreat in disorder.

I once nearly fell into the hands of the enemy. As we were reconnoitring on one of the kopjes, I suggested to a friend that we should go to the farm in front of us, where none of us had been since Olifantsnek was in possession of the enemy. We had to ford a donga closed in by barbed wire. When we got to the farm, we were told that the enemy had not been there, with the exception of a khaki who had lost his way. He had taken six eggs from a nest in a kraal and swallowed them greedily, and had then passed on to the garden without speaking a word to the harmless, inquisitive women of the farm.

For safety's sake I put the boys on guard and had the horses tied. The view was so enclosed on all sides that the enemy could appear most unexpectedly from Olifantsnek. We had been there only a short time, when we were told that the enemy were coming in large numbers from the direction of Rustenburg. We mounted at once and rode back, but could not get back to our comrades on the hills because of the barbed wire in the donga. We had gone only about 250 paces along the drift, when the enemy came riding along. Fortunately, they were intent on plunder and did not see us, as they kept their eyes fixed in the direction of the house. If we had been a few seconds later we should have fallen into their hands. The few burghers on the kopjes began to fire at them, and when I got to the top of one of the kopjes I saw the enemy—about 100 in number—fleeing in great disorder. This expedition cost them several dead and wounded, besides their plunder—meal, fowls, and other things—that they dropped in their flight.

When I went back to the farm later on, I was told that one of the girls had clapped her hands with delight when the enemy fled past them. That must have been the reason why she and her family were so cruelly insulted and plundered by the khakies afterwards. We met with great kindness during our stay in the Magalies Mountains. We

always got something to eat, and towards evening we bought some loaves of bread to take back with us to our hiding-place. In those days we could always get forage for our horses, and they were in very good condition.

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Meanwhile General de la Rey had gone with a commando to the west of Rustenburg, and had left two Commandants in the Zwartkoppen, to the north-east of Rustenburg.

When we got the tidings that the enemy had taken possession of Selikatsnek, we went as rapidly as we could to the Zwartkoppen. We had many adventures on our way. My brother and I rode on ahead, thinking that the others would follow, but they went a round-about way, and so did not catch us up. When we left the wide tract of wood that stretches along the Magalies Mountains, we noticed that the enemy from Rustenburg had come to meet the column from Selikatsnek. Fortunately, our horses were good, and we escaped the danger by riding back into the wood to a farm that I knew of. While we were giving our horses a rest there, a despatch-rider came along looking for a reconnoitring corps. We rode with him in the track of our comrades, who had taken a great circuit round Rustenburg. We arrived safely at Zwartkoppen, and immediately joined Commandant Boshoff, who had just returned from Machadodorp.

The Commandants now followed General de la Rey. We came up with his commando to the west of Rustenburg, where he had surrounded a party of the enemy. Commandant Boshoff, however, was immediately sent to Olifantsnek, as the enemy had left Rustenburg and the pass was clear. Our men were most changeable in their moods. The slightest favourable tidings raised their spirits, but any unfavourable news made their courage sink into their shoes. There was much talk about the retreating movement of the enemy. Some spoke of intervention; others said the English soldiers had refused to fight any longer, or that the whole of the colony was in rebellion. This talk went the round even among the officers, probably because they did not understand the enemy's movements.

Now we know the meaning of it all. It was De Wet who was being followed. We were not two days at Olifantsnek, when, to our great surprise, De Wet arrived with a commando of 2,800 men, followed by 40,000 English. He had been by treason separated along with Steyn from the chief commando, and had been chased by the enemy a month already.

It was a great lager that advanced through Olifantsnek—the largest commando that we had seen yet, with numerous carts, waggons, beasts of burden, and other belongings. And it was then I made the acquaintance of President Steyn and De Wet. Our Commandant with his men accompanied President Steyn to Machadodorp to President Kruger. We put up our tents for the time being next to those of President Steyn, so that we had time and opportunity enough to learn to know him. When the enemy a few days later broke through at Magatonek, to the west of Rustenburg, General De Wet sent for me one evening and ordered me to take a report to Rustenburg, and gave me some instructions for the Commandants there.

I had to take a message for President Steyn also, that the ambulance of the Orange Free State was to follow the lager in the direction of the Krokodil River.

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Late at night I arrived at Rustenburg, only to find that the lagers had already taken flight. The enemy were expected at any moment. But the ambulance was there still, and all night long I led it in the direction the General had told me the lagers would take.

Late the following morning I arrived at De Wet's lager, which had moved a few hours further on to Sterkstroom. The commando left there that afternoon, and went along the Magalies Mountains to Commandonek. That day and that night we had a first experience of the long tiresome marches that enabled De Wet to mislead the enemy.

That night President Steyn made a most favourable impression on us with his talk. He did not try to encourage us with hopes of intervention, but merely pointed out that the war might last a long time still, and that we would have to enter the Colony.

At Commandonek we rested a few hours while De Wet himself went to reconnoitre. He sent a message to the English officer in charge of the pass that he must surrender. The officer replied that he did not quite understand *who* must surrender—he or De Wet. I think this was merely a dodge on De Wet's part to find out by the signature of the reply who was in charge of the army at the pass, and so to make a guess at the numbers of the enemy.

He decided not to attack the pass, and before daybreak next day we were on the move again. Some time afterwards at Warmbad I heard that an English General had related this dodge of De Wet's, but he thought De Wet had threatened him with a very small force, as his commando must still have been at Olifantsnek. It is an example of the way we misled the enemy by our mobility.

## VII

### WITH PRESIDENT STEYN TO PRESIDENT KRUGER

Near Krokodil River, on Carlyle's Farm, President Steyn and his attendants separated from De Wet's commando, and went in the direction of Zoutpan to Machadodorp. We were about seventy-five men in all. The little commando consisted of carts, a few trolleys, and horsemen on strong, well-conditioned horses. The Free Staters nearly all had one or two spare horses. Our own commando still always consisted of twelve or thirteen men, and the small ambulance waggon which we used for provisions. The French doctor had remained behind with De la Rey. We moved very fast. At Zoutpan—a sunken kopje like the mouth of a crater, with a pan at the bottom, from which the salt is got—I met some old acquaintances, who pretended to have come there for salt. During our talk my suspicions were roused by their curiosity, and by their knowledge of President Steyn's arrival. I also doubted their tale that their trolley stood behind a kopje, and not at Zoutpan, and I warned the Commandant against them. He became very anxious, and made us move on as rapidly as possible, for once we had crossed the

Pienaars River all danger from khaki would be past. It was a good thing that the Commandant made us travel so fast, for we had only just outspanned at Pienaars River the following morning when the khakies' bomb-Maxim began firing at the outposts of General Grobler's Waterberg commando, which was stationed there. We had only just time to inspan and ride off to the Boschveld, towards the Olifants River, where we would be safe, while General Grobler disappeared in the direction of Warmbad.

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At Pienaars River I made the acquaintance of General Celliers, who was loudly proclaiming the way in which he would squash khaki if only the burghers would fight. He is the exception to the rule that all braggarts are cowards. Most of the braggarts have gradually disappeared from the scene, but the deeds of this hero were always in accordance with his words.

We heard afterwards that a detachment of the enemy had followed us, but we had had too great a start, and had besides taken a short-cut of which they knew nothing. It would not have been easy for the khakies to overtake a well-mounted commando like President Steyn's.

We were also told that the enemy knew of the arrival of President Steyn, which strengthened my belief that the two suspicious characters at Zoutpan were the informers. Whenever we, as the attacking party, made prisoners, they always declared that they had known all about our plan of attack—probably to discourage us with the thought that through the treachery of our own people the enemy always knew all about our movements.

For a long way we followed the same road that we had taken with Commandant Boshoff to Rustenburg. We arrived safely at Waterval-Boven (President Kruger having already retreated from Machadodorp), where we stayed a few days and heard the famous Battle of Dalmanutha (August 27)—the most awful roar of cannon that I have ever heard.

From Waterval-Boven we went to Nelspruit, to which President Kruger had moved in his railway-home. We gave our horses a week's rest and passed the time fishing and hunting. We were content there, as we got plenty to eat, and our horses, too, were well fed—an important matter to us just then. Circumstances were forcing us to attach much value to all sorts of trifles that we would formerly not even have noticed.

If once one has suffered the pangs of hunger, one learns to value the comfort and luxury of home; and if one has wandered about for weeks without seeing woman or child, one learns to appreciate their gentleness and charm and to understand Schiller's Zuechtige Hausfrau in 'Das Lied von der Glocke.' How often in our wanderings we longed for good literature during our long, tiring, monotonous rides! And how terrible was the thought of the moral hurt we were suffering—voluntarily in a way, yet forced to it by a sense of honour and duty. For in this lay the grievousness of the war, that a powerful nation—influenced by a few unscrupulous leaders—was trying to annihilate a small nation that demanded the right of existence, and was therefore forced to defend that right. It was a happy time for us when we had the opportunity of turning our thoughts towards literature and other things than commando work.

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The privations that we had already endured were small indeed in comparison to those which awaited us. It was well with the Uitlander optimist who remained in our country while the Republics could give him the comforts he demanded as his right, but who, as soon as things went wrong, and he saw nothing but misery in the future, left for his own country—there to sit in judgment on our peasant-nation. How I long for the gift of being able to express myself, to give a true account of the self-denial of our burghers and of the misery that we endured! How my heart bleeds when I think of the great sorrow that has come upon my poor people!

When the enemy approached the Delagoa railway-line, President Steyn left with his escort for Hectorspruit. I had to follow with a trolley for which there was no room on the train. Because of the disorder that reigned everywhere I had to wait nearly three days before I could start. I was pretty nearly famished on my arrival at Hectorspruit, and ate greedily of the remains of the porridge left by some burghers, among whom were two sons of State Secretary Reitz. President Steyn's lager had in the meanwhile become 250 men strong, under Commandant Lategan, and was then at Krokodil River.

At Nelspruit I met a couple of old friends, Malherbe and Celliers, with whom I left for the lager. They were both Transvaalers who had been studying in Holland, but had returned before finishing their studies on account of the war. The commando was well supplied with weapons and ammunition, as the Delagoa Bay line brought plenty to our store. What became of the rest I do not know, as President Steyn was in a hurry and our commando left first for the North.

The ford at Krokodil River was about fifty paces wide—made for the occasion and difficult to cross. The trolleys and waggons that had to cross to the lager on the opposite side gave us much trouble, as they sank deep into the sand. We harnessed a double span of oxen to the waggons, undressed ourselves, and had to swim alongside the animals to get them through. Occasionally something dropped from one of the waggons and had to be fished up in a hurry to save it from the strong current. There was much shouting and laughter, and if any crocodile had been in the neighborhood he would have suppressed his hunger until the storm was over.

On the banks of the river there was a constant shooting at fish and game, and even at crocodiles, who showed themselves occasionally. There was game in abundance. It seemed as if all the game of the Transvaal, that is becoming so scarce, had fled to this part.

We were on our way to Pietersburg through the Boschveld of South-East Lydenburg, which might be called a desert in winter. It was a journey difficult even for a trek Boer, and more than difficult for a large commando. A man called Bester was our guide. Some two years before he had made the same journey on a hunting expedition, and now he was able to follow the ruts which the wheels of his waggon had made then, and which would be in all probability deepened by the summer rains. Our means of



transport were chiefly carts and trolleys, on which we also put our bedding to lighten the burden of our riding horses.

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### VIII

#### WITH PRESIDENT STEYN IN THE BOSCHVELD—LOST

On September 12 we left the Krokodil River early in the morning, after first watering our cattle and filling our water-bags. Our guide did not expect to come across any water before the Sabie—a river several days' journey further on. There were several springs on the way, but as that part of the country was so little known, because of its unhealthiness, no one could tell when the last rains had fallen.

The shrubs and bushes had grown high above the ruts made by the waggon two years ago, and were a great hindrance to us. The road we followed twisted and wound rather more than was agreeable, but it was certainly easy to follow for the lagers that came after us. The horsemen rode next to the lagers to shoot bucks. We had no 'slaughter-cattle' with us, so had to live on the game that we shot.

In the neighbourhood of the river we still came across birds and insects, but the further we went the more monotonous and *dead* Nature became. I could never have pictured such a lifeless wood to myself. No sound of insects was to be heard, no chirp or song of bird; and not even the trail of a serpent was to be seen.

There was a melancholy stillness. Traces of game were in abundance. It seemed as if only those animals lived there which, accustomed to the monotonous silence, withdrew noiselessly from the gaze of the interloper, or, in their ignorant curiosity, stood still until a hunter's bullet warned them or put an end to their lives. To them we must have been strange disturbers of the peace. Shots fell in all directions; sometimes a whole salvo was discharged when we came upon a herd of bucks. There were many thornless trees growing in their stately height far above the usual scrub of the Boschveld. Our horses often grazed on the sweet buffalo grass that always grows under trees. Looked at from a rise, the Boschveld appeared to be nothing but trees—trees as far as the eye could see. One shuddered at the thought of what would become of anyone who lost his way there, since for miles and miles there was no water to be seen and no trail to go by. It made one hurry back to the safety of the lager, trusting to the capability of the guide.

To our great joy, the first spring contained water. It was a large pool surrounded by rocks, where the game was accustomed to drink. We arrived there towards afternoon, rested a few hours, and continued our journey with fresh courage. As the waggons moved too slowly for our liking, we rode on ahead; but the consequence was that, when it got dark and we off-saddled, we had no bedding, for nearly all the waggons were obliged to outspan when darkness set in, as there was no road.

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We knee-haltered our horses in case there were lions about, and collected a large quantity of wood to keep the fire going all night. That night our talk, of course, ran upon lion-hunting and shooting expeditions. Then we crept as close to the fire as possible, and were soon in a troubled, or untroubled, sleep, dreaming of lions and other wild animals. But I felt the cold very much, and could not sleep without my rug, and kept turning from side to side to get as much warmth from the fire as possible. If only I had made two fires! In a battle I have been between two fires, and did not find it at all agreeable, but in this case it would have been different.

I lay awake, waiting for the third fire, the red dawn, but not in a poetical mood. There is a time for everything; that I learnt during the war. Rain is lovely, and cold gives energy, but one must be warm to appreciate it. As I lay thus, four mules, tethered together, came closer and closer up to our fire, grazing all the while. I lay still, listening to the peculiar noise made by the biting off of each mouthful of grass. I seemed to expect a joke, and suddenly one of the mules fell on his back. In a moment all our heroes were up and ready to defend themselves against lions or khakies, according to their different dreams. I laughed, and laughed again, so that the hyenas could hear me a mile off, and the startled lion-hunters began to laugh also, so that we woke up the whole camp. This little episode made my blood circulate, so that I very soon also was in the land of dreams.

As the burghers chased all the game on ahead of the lager, the President and Commandant Boshoff agreed to go in advance, so as to have a chance of seeing the numerous kinds of wild buck and larger game. I went with them. Greatly to my distress I forgot to ask our guide what direction we would take that day with regard to the sun. An experienced hunter would not have forgotten it, as he knows from experience that in the excitement of the chase we often leave the beaten track. I had to pay dearly for my forgetfulness. I rode some distance to the left of the President, but took care to keep him in sight. But the Boer is wonderfully disobedient to any authority, and not long after two men made their appearance to my left, and I saw that if I did not look out they would be ahead of me in no time, and chase all the game away from me. As the donga next to which we rode seemed to be a favourite resort for game, I took the same direction as they did, more to the left. The dongas ran into each other with numerous bends and curves, and were sometimes overgrown with high grass, then again quite bare. I paid no attention to the direction we took.

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After a while one of the men wounded a buck, and they both rode into the donga after it. I rode on, to cross the donga a little further on, so as not to have to follow in the track of the other two, and saw a red buck on the other side, which I wounded so badly that it seemed unnecessary to fire again, and I rode leisurely towards it. But when I had crossed the donga the buck had disappeared, and I began to seek for the traces of blood, but I soon had to give up the search, not to lose sight of the other two men. They, however, seemed to be a great distance off, as I did not overtake them, and I did not succeed in tracing them in the direction that the wounded buck had led them, as the track in the grass was invisible to my inexperienced eye.

I rode back to the donga, and deliberated on the course to take. In all directions I heard shots, right and left, but I stood irresolute. I had no watch with me to find the four quarters of the wind, but the sun had only just risen, and I made a guess with an imaginary compass. It was lucky for me that I made such a good guess, and had paid great attention to the direction we had taken with regard to the sun. I was certain that I should come upon the traces of the lager if only I kept within the sides of a right angle, unless the lager had at the start taken a sharp turn to the right or left.

But it was possible that in our excitement we might have crossed the waggon track which the lager was to follow; then the lager would be far to the right. Standing thus like the ass between two bundles of hay, I was not in the mood to think lightly of my case, but had to act at once, so I chose the safest and more probable of the two sides of my right angle—namely, the left, as I would then in any case not be moving towards Portuguese territory, and could always turn to the Krokodil River.

I felt pretty certain now, as it was more probable that we had not crossed the old waggon tract, and every moment I expected to hear the switching of the long whips. But when I had gone some distance I was obliged to return to the donga, and retrace my way to the place where we had slept. A clever Boer would have succeeded in finding the way back, but I soon lost my way altogether. I lost the traces of the horse's hoofs, and the dongas looked to me so different that in one place where a donga branched off I did not know which to follow. An intense feeling of desolation took possession of me. Lost in a wilderness without food or water! I thought of the twelve or thirteen men who got lost in this wood on a hunting expedition, and of whom only one was saved. A great fear came upon me. Gradually I became calmer, and tried to form some plan of action. I resolved to keep to the left, where I had already seen a solitary mountain. Perhaps water was to be found there.

My gun was loaded with Dum-Dum bullets, specially prepared for bucks. I had filed through the steel to the lead, so that the bullet would expand at once when it came into contact with bone. I found a buck tame in its very wildness, but I missed it, for the aim of my gun, a fine sporting Mauser, had been bent by the branches of the trees. It was a good thing that I did not come across a lion, or, rather, that a lion did not come across me.

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I had to ride under trees, through shrubs and grass, and had to keep a sharp look-out, as the king of beasts sometimes takes the lords of creation unawares. And I had to look out for an opportunity to shoot a buck—the only food within my reach. The nearer I came to the mountain, the surer I was that I had lost my way completely, and the more I became reconciled to my fate. I planned how I should build a large fire in the night for myself and my horse, and how I should defend myself against a lion with a burning piece of wood.

Suddenly my horse went faster and pushed to the left. Greatly to my astonishment, I saw that the attraction was a little stream of water that he had scented in a donga. I off-saddled, and let my horse graze in the luxuriant grass.

Now I was strengthened in my belief that I had taken the wrong direction, for we were all under the impression that we should not soon reach water. I prepared some more Dum-Dum bullets with a small file that I carried in my pocket, and did not let my horse graze long, but hastened to the mountain to find a better shelter for the night. To my great joy, I came upon the wide road about a thousand paces further on. I followed the road along the mountain for half an hour, when I came upon the lager, camped near a stream—probably the same stream at which I and my horse had quenched our thirst.

As we sat round our fires that night we heard shots fired in the distance from the direction that we had come. Some men were sent out immediately, and returned after a while with a man quite exhausted from hunger and thirst, and paralyzed with fear; he had been unable to overtake the lager.

## IX

### **PRACTICAL HINTS—ADVENTURE ON THE SABIE—NORTH OF LYDENBURG**

Experience teaches us. The knowledge that we have gained in this war we must pass on to the coming generation. It may be of use in a war of the future, or on some other occasion. Therefore Oom Dietlof will take this opportunity to give his nephews in South Africa some practical hints that may be of use to a burgher in his travels or in a war. If anyone loses his way in the same way that I have just described, he must remember the following way of finding the four quarters of the wind:

The small hand of a watch describes a circle in twelve hours, while the apparent movement of the sun round the earth is in twenty-four hours. The movement of the small hand is therefore twice as fast as that of the sun. If one points the small hand of a horizontal-lying watch to the sun at twelve o'clock, then the hands and the figure XII. lie in the meridian as well as the sun.



In the northern half-circle the sun and the hands move in the same direction. In one hour's time the small hand goes a distance of  $360 \text{ deg.}/12 = 30 \text{ deg.}$ , and the sun goes a distance of  $360 \text{ deg.}/24 = 15 \text{ deg.}$  If at one o'clock one points the small hand of a horizontal-lying watch to the sun, the line that divides the acute angle between the figures I. and XII. lies in the meridian. So one can always find the meridian.

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In the southern half-circle the sun and hands move in opposite directions, therefore one must point the figure XII. to the sun, and then divide the acute angle between the figure XII. and the small hand to find the meridian.

In this way one can at any time find out the direction one has taken. But everyone has not always a good watch, and the sun sometimes hides behind the clouds. Then it is better to have a good compass—but better still not to lose one's way.

Besides such simple articles as a pocket-knife, a water-bag, *etc.*, which are indispensable to a traveller in our country, everyone ought to carry with him a good plaster, a nosebag, and some snake poison; maize (mealies) for his horse, the cheapest and most strengthening food that we know of, can always be carried in the nosebag. Snake poison prepared by a good Kaffir doctor is the only cure for snake-bites or the bite of any poisonous insect. The Kaffirs prepare it from some (to us) unknown shrub, and from the poison of the most venomous snake, which they make into a powder. This powder is used as an antidote by swallowing a small dose—enough to cover the point of a pocket-knife—and also by applying some to the bite, after first having cut an opening into the bitten part with a pocket-knife. Some people protect themselves against the poison of a snake-bite by regularly swallowing some of the poison and vaccinating themselves with it. One can even protect one's self in this way against the bite of the poisonous file-snake of the Boschveld—a snake the shape of a three-cornered file, sometimes from 3 to 4 feet long. It is a fact that the person whose body is proof against the poison of a snake-bite is never bitten, as he is feared by snakes. Formerly I doubted it, but I have myself seen people who have made themselves proof against a bite in this way, and I have also heard it from people in whom I have the utmost faith.

Alcohol is also a good antidote, provided one takes it immediately and in such quantities that it goes to the head. I would recommend everyone always to take a small quantity of brandy with him on commando, if experience had not taught me that some take even a mosquito-bite as an excuse to 'take a drop,' and I am against that on principle.

Often while loading my horse the thought struck me whether the poor brute ever had a wish to protest, 'Surely this is becoming too bad!' and that reminds me that one must be very careful not to overload. The knapsack must not be filled with kaboe mealies (roasted maize) for one's self, while the nosebag of the poor horse remains empty.

More than one prisoner of war has bitterly regretted that he did not take his horse's power of endurance into greater consideration. Now I must take up the thread of my tale.

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The following morning the lager would start at three o'clock, and, as my horse was in good condition, the owner of the horse that had been left behind asked me to fetch it before the lager left. He explained to me where I would find it tied to a tree about half an hour's ride from the lager, so I started with a friend at about two o'clock at night. On the way we came across a mule that had wandered away while grazing, ignorant of all the danger he was exposing himself to in the uninhabited Boschveld. The creature gave us much trouble by refusing to be caught and constantly dodging behind a tree, so we lost a great deal of time. On our way back, close to the lager, we heard the whine of the wild-dog, the well-known feared wolf. We thought it very interesting to come across a wild animal of which we had no fear just then. But when we reached the camping-ground of the lager, where only the trolley stood to which the wandering mule belonged, we found to our surprise that both white men and Kaffirs had given up the search for the mule for fear of the wild-dog. They had all congregated round large fires. The wild-dog, however, is harmless by himself; like the khakies, his strength lies in numbers. We had to leave the sick horse to join the bucks of the Boschveld on its recovery, until the horse-sickness came. After a long, tiring, but very interesting ride we arrived at the Sabie, where the rest of the lager was already encamped. The Sabie is about the size of the Krokodil River, and its scenery of woods and valleys formed a sharp contrast to the deadly monotony of the Boschveld that lay behind us. We had crossed the bare desert and were now in a part of the country inhabited by Kaffirs. The following day the lager was removed half an hour further on, and there we remained a few days.

At night four of us were persuaded to go eel-catching in a crocodile-pool that we had discovered a little further on. We made a large fire to entice the eels, and, as we were none of us great lovers of angling, we made a splendid bonfire, as there was plenty of dry wood to be had.

There was something particularly attractive in these large fires on those quiet, dark nights of the wilderness. The glow threw a sombre light on the water that gave one a creepy feeling, as if a crocodile were on the watch for us in the water, and lions at our back between the large trees. What must they have thought of us?

The bank of the river seemed to be about 6 feet high, and not very steep. We made the fire closer and closer to what seemed the bank. I saw someone lift up a huge branch, walk to the bank with it, and plant his left foot firmly on the ground. The reeds gave way beneath him. What seemed a firm bank, by the glow of the fire, proved to be a mass of reeds and grass, and the poor man fell down a height of 6 feet, his fall being hastened by the heavy branch he held. For a moment we stood irresolute. To jump after him into a crocodile-pool! But he



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called for help, and we had to act immediately. Fortunately, one acts almost instinctively in such cases. One of the others slid down the bank—the thought striking him: ‘If only there are not two crocodiles!’ Landing on a horizontal branch, he stretched out his hand to the drowning man, someone else took hold of his left hand, and so they were both saved. If a crocodile had been in the neighbourhood, he would probably have stood on the defensive. Such a queer, two-legged animal who led the attack in such a strange but decided way must have roused his respect.

This piece of fun put an end to our eel-fishing. We had caught only one eel—and a man.

The following morning there was parade for President Steyn. His speech to us was touching and to the point, and showed that he believed in a good ending to the war, if the burghers were capable of enduring such hardships as at present. Then he also told us in what a hurry he was to reach his burghers, as he was afraid that the enemy were doing all in their power to make them turn against him. We all liked President Steyn very much.

On our journey through the Selatie Goldfields, past the Marietje River to Pilgrim’s Rest, we crossed the steepest mountain that I have ever seen. A double span of oxen was harnessed to each waggon. The oxen were lent us for the occasion by the Boers living on the plateau in front of us. After every few steps upwards we had to put stones under the wheels to prevent the waggons from slipping back. It took our little lager nearly all day to reach the plateau. Then we had a most magnificent view of the Boschveld that lay behind us. In the distance the Lobombo Mountains were visible on the boundary of the Portuguese and Transvaal territory. The first rains had fallen on the plateau, so the green grass was a refreshing change for our eyes. The horses would be able to graze well, and the good feeding would soon make them lose their old coats, and then they would be sleek and glossy again.

From the high plateau we descended, over a ‘lumpy’ veld, with an oasis here and there in a hole or valley, or on the top of a hill, to Pilgrim’s Rest. Some miles before we reached this little town we passed beside the water-works that supply a strong stream of water for the machinery of the gold-mines. We simply stormed the shops, that were still well supplied with provisions, and bought all sorts of luxuries and necessities for our journey. From Pilgrim’s Rest we once more crossed a steep mountain, along a road that for length and height has not its equal. In the neighbourhood of Ohrigstad, a little town that we left to our right, I asked a Boer woman whether the fever did not make one’s life impossible there, and I got a very naïf reply: ‘No; this year the fever was not so bad. We all got ill, but not one of us died.’

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The rest of our journey to the north of Lydenburg, over Spekstroom River, along Watervalop, over Steenkampsberg to Roossenekal, was very tedious. The uninhabited Boschveld was very interesting, and we had sufficient provisions then, but the poor, uncivilized Boer inhabitants of the Lydenburg district were unable to supply us with necessaries, the want of which we were beginning to feel. We could not buy a loaf of bread anywhere. And it is anything but pleasant in a time of war to come across such lax and unenergetic people as they proved to be. The men were nearly always at home, and appeared to be discouraged and unwilling to fight. We had all lost our sweet tooth. That one could tell by such expressions as: 'Even if you give me sugar:—' But occasionally we got a more desirable substitute, when a beehive was discovered in a cleft of a rock. Some of our men are particularly clever at discovering a hive. I have often seen a man stand gazing up at the sky, walk on a short distance, and again stand gazing, and after awhile appear with a bucket of honey. By watching the flight of the bees they find out in what direction the hive is. A practised eye can see the rising and settling of the bees above the hive from a great distance.

## X

*From Roossenekal to Pietersburg—with general Beyers to the Magalies mountains*

We went in a very different direction from that of General Ben Viljoen's commando, which took the road to Pietersburg through Leydsdorp. President Steyn celebrated the anniversary of his birthday at Roossenekal, and addressed us in the same spirit as on the former occasion at the Sabie.

Roossenekal is famous for its caves, or grottos, in which the Mapochers hid themselves so well during the Mapoch War. We made use of the opportunity to visit the grottos, of whose formation I should like to know more. What appeared on the outside to be an ordinary hill proved a most wonderful natural building containing many rooms. The old kraal walls and the peach-trees and 'Turkish figs', (prickly-pears), overgrown by wild trees, and an occasional earthen vessel, were the remains of the Kaffir city. Of course we cut our names into the rocks by way of becoming immortal. We could not help speaking with great admiration of the wild Kaffir tribe who from such a hiding-place fought for months for a life of independence. We had no time to visit the grottos further away.

Although our horses were well fed during this time of rest, they profited little, on account of the constant cold rains that fell. We fortunately still had some tents, that we used only in case of rain. Our Commandant was still always in doubt whether to proceed to Pietersburg, for we were quite ignorant of the enemy's movements during the last few weeks. Later on, when he got the information that

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the enemy were stationed at Pinaars River bridge, and that we could not with safety pass Warmbad and Pinaars River, we had to turn off at Kobaltmyn to the right to cross Olifants River lower down. We had already passed Kobaltmyn in the beginning of July on our journey after General de la Rey. The latter part of our journey, along Olifants River, through Zebedelsland to Pietersburg, was exhausting for man and horse. Some of us often had nothing but a little rice and a small piece of meat for several days in succession. There was scarcely any grass for our horses, and yet we had to ride hard night and day.

After a tiring journey of fully a month, President Steyn's commando arrived at Pietersburg on October 11. Although we had always intended to follow President Steyn to De Wet, my brother and I, with Malherbe, now accepted an invitation from my uncle, Ignace Mare, to stay awhile on his farm at Marabastad. President Steyn left with his commando for Nylstroom. Our horses were worn out, and could not follow the commando. Most of the men had a spare horse that was still in good condition, and although my brother and I had only one horse apiece, we often had to do the hardest work.

My aunt and uncle did their best to make our stay a pleasant one, and our horses were well fed. Soon General Ben Viljoen's commando arrived at Marabastad, and stayed there a few weeks, so that we also experienced the discomfort arising from a lager camped on one's farm. The Boer is deprived by it of all necessities, and all sorts and conditions of men constantly visit his house. Some of them, the riff-raff of the commando, are very unwelcome guests, for they do much mischief intentionally, and thereby give the commando a very bad name. The poles to which the wire is attached for camping at a farm were yet left undamaged. The burghers were still accustomed to get plenty of dry wood in the Boschveld, and were not yet so demoralized as to work damage without scruple.

We stayed at my uncle's far longer than we at first intended. My saddle had chafed the horse's back so severely that I could not ride it for several months. My brother got an attack of malaria, and just as he was recovering had a relapse, so that President Steyn was so far in advance of us that there was no question of overtaking him.

The commando had already left Marabastad when we started for Tweefontein, near Warmbad, on our now strong, sleek horses. There we joined Commandant Kemp, of the Krugersdorp commando, under Wyk III., who had parted from Ben Viljoen at Marabastad because the latter had on a Sunday afternoon during service fired off several cannon-shots for the edification of a few fast women.

Malherbe, my brother, and I formed a sort of comradeship under Corporal Botman—or, to put it simply, we were 'chums.' At Warmbad we heard many interesting things about

the khakies, who had stayed there nineteen days on their hunt after De Wet. We could not understand why they destroyed the bathing-houses, unless it were to deprive our wounded of the chance of recovery.

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The condition of the people in Zoutpansberg and in Waterberg, where the enemy had been, was not very cheerful. Everyone complained that there was no sugar to be had, that the meal was getting low, and that soon there would be no clothes. Pietersburg was exhausted by the commandos, and the courage of the inhabitants was nearly at an ebb. They would not yet make the sacrifice that would part them from their families. The enemy had not yet driven them to despair by the destruction of their fields and goods.

Every sensible person knew that the Republics would lose in the long-run in a guerilla war unless something unforeseen happened. At the time that we fled from Pretoria my mother said she would have hope as long as her 'gorillas' remained in the veld. Even if we clung to a straw, the possibility always remained that things might take a favourable turn as long as a fair number of burghers remained in the veld.

The burghers from the different districts now in Waterberg were earnest and full of courage. Noticeable changes for the better had been made. Beyers, a man in whom the men had the utmost faith, was made Assistant-Commandant-General, and was to lead a commando of 1,500 horsemen from Waterberg, Zoutpansberg, Krugersdorp, etc., to the Hoogeveld. The discipline was much stricter. Cooper and Fanie Grobler, who had been accused of high treason, promised to keep a sharper look-out for spies and traitors. And we still always hoped for an eventual rebellion in Cape Colony. That hope was our life-buoy on which we kept our eyes fixed. We felt that there our safety lay, and the enthusiasm of the commando was heightened by the desire to celebrate Paardekraal Day in Krugersdorp on December 15. As a sailor longs for the sea, so we longed for a meeting with the khakies when we left for the Magalies Mountains in the beginning of December. Our commando was light and mobile, with provisions for a short time only. Such heavy cannon as the Long Toms were of no use to us now. Hence-forward we were to live on the produce of the surrounding country, as there was no basis from which we were to operate. Besides this, the khakies very kindly made over some of their provisions, arms, and ammunition to us in a skirmish or battle, so that afterwards we had more Lee-Metfords than Mausers in our possession.

At Krokodil River I had the privilege of seeing how a honey-bird takes a human being to a bees' nest. As we were lying under a tree, a honey-bird settled close to us. Corporal Botman followed it as it flew chirping from tree to tree, and called to it that he was following, until the bird stopped at the hive. The grateful finder always rewards the bird with a piece of honeycomb that he puts aside for it. But I have never been able to discover whether the bird or the insects eat the honey. I know that the 'bug-birds,' that are always seen on or near cattle, do not feed on the bugs with which the cattle are covered, but on the locusts that fly about the herd. Last week, when our guards took us for a walk outside the fort, I noticed that a kind of sparrow in India has the same trick of catching the locusts that are driven on ahead by the cattle.

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I shall not try to give a description of the works of the machinery that moved mechanically to the Magalies Mountains, for I should have to guess at the particulars in this historical little tale. Mechanical I call the journey, for there were days and nights in which we were numbed, body and soul, exhausted by hunger and thirst and want of sleep.

When we were at Bethany, a convoy of the enemy was seen moving in the direction of Commandonek. When it noticed our guard, it dragged its curved body with great zeal through the pass. I think the khakies also must have been bored to death on those long, fruitless journeys. We left Bethany towards evening, and reached the Magalies Mountains the following morning after a tiring journey in the night past Sterkstroom, through the Kromriverskloof to the foot of Onuapadnek, or Boschfonteinnek. (I learnt the names from the inhabitants.) In the kloof we passed the burnt remains of the convoy that was taken by Commandant Boshoff—who joined De la Rey after having taken Steyn to his destination—and his brave little troop of burghers. They were obliged to abandon the convoy, however, on the arrival of reinforcements for the enemy. A sickening stench came from the corpses that they had left unburied in their flight.

We rested a few hours at the top of the steep nek. On descending on the other side we came, to our mutual surprise, upon De la Key's lager at the foot of the mountain on Barnard's farm.

## XI

### BATTLE OF NOOITGEDACHT

We were busy all evening baking vet-koek (a kind of scone fried in lard), as we had received the order to be ready to leave the following morning at one o'clock, and to take provisions sufficient for two days. Although our officers were beginning to see the advisability of keeping their plans secret, we were able to guess that we were going to attack General Clements' camp, an hour's ride further east at Nooitgedacht—particularly as the chances of success, in case of an eventual attack, were being discussed by some of the officers. The general opinion was that Clements' force was 5,000 strong.

We left quite three-quarters of an hour later than the fixed time in the early morning of December 13, 1900, and recrossed the steep, narrow neck, took a way to our right in the Kromriverskloof, making a sharp turn to Elandskrans, where a strong outpost had been placed by the enemy on the Magalies Mountains.

That was the crust through which we had to bite to get at the dainties of the booty. It cannot be denied that victory and booty, in our impoverished circumstances, were very close together in our thoughts. The enemy's camp lay at the foot of the long, high cliff



that forms a precipice on that side of the mountain, while the slope of the mountain on our side was not steep, and there were a great many footholds and boulders. The artillery had been left in

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the neck of the pass to protect the lagers. Beyers, with some Zoutpansbergers, turned away from us to the right to reach Elandskrans along the mountain ridge. It appeared, therefore, that Beyers and Kemp were going to make the attack from the north, with 1,000 men, and that Kemp had the centre and the left wing. We were again too late. The sun had risen when we began the attack. Corporal Botman was ordered by Kemp to surround the extreme right of the enemy's right wing, with thirty men.

We had to storm the left to enclose the enemy in the half-circle. We were exposed to a rain of bullets, and had to storm through ravines and reefs, sometimes racing our horses, then leading them, and making use of every cover. General Beyers, with his splendid sharp-shooters, was already in hot action with the right wing, and Commandant Kemp in the centre had forced his way close to the enemy. We tied our horses together behind a reef, left them in charge of a few men, and advanced, spreading ourselves in groups of three, four and five. A moment of extreme anxiety followed.

Not to expose ourselves unnecessarily, we had to peep from behind the rocks, shoot the course clear, and run to the next cover. Malherbe and I stayed as close as possible to our cool, collected, brave corporal, and we had to gasp for breath sometimes if trying to keep up to him. The others forced their way upwards more to the left, and so formed the furthest left point of the half-moon.

While the three of us were pushing our way from position to position into the neighbourhood of the few khakies who already dared not raise their heads from behind the rocks, I noticed, some 500 paces to our front, a number of khakies moving in our direction. I warned Malherbe to keep up his courage, as the enemy were getting reinforcements. A moment later, while our corporal had again moved onwards, I noticed several khakies on a stone ridge some 150 paces in front of us. It appeared that they were driven on by part of the centre and right wing, for just then two men made their appearance, whom I at once recognised as Boers from the colour of their clothes and the quick way in which they aimed at me. I stooped quick as a hare, and immediately rose again. The enemy now surrendered, I believe to the number of two or three hundred of the Northumberland Fusiliers, called the 'Fighting Fifth' on account of their courage and bravery. We also took on the mountain a heliograph that the enemy had broken.

The khakies acknowledged that we had taken the position with the greatest possible speed. We were in the majority. But it must not be forgotten that we were the attacking party and had to expose ourselves, and also that, although the battle on the mountain extended over a long line, our right wing had still to reckon with the reinforcements that were sent up through a narrow kloof from the camp. It was a repetition of Selikatsnek.



The khakies had the good positions, and we had good cover behind the rocks on the mountain slope. In such a case he is no match for us.

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We went on a few hundred paces over pretty level ground, and then looked down upon the camp at the foot of the mountain, which consisted of several hundreds of tents and many waggons. Some of these waggons were inspanned, some were already retreating, but most of them were not yet inspanned. The camp lay on the grounds and by the fields of a deserted farm.

Afterwards I heard that Commandant Badenhorst, of Pretoria (who had attacked the enemy before our arrival, at the foot of the mountain, and so suffered the greatest loss), was already retreating, but, hearing the fighting on the mountain, had renewed his attack.

The enemy could not stand the fire that we opened upon them, and had to retreat from the camp in the direction of Commandonek. The inevitable consequence was that the troops on the west, opposite De la Rey, had to retreat hurriedly so as not to be cut off by the wedge that was forcing its way along the mountains into the camp. They were far beyond reach of our bullets. Where De la Rey's cannon were, and why they did not make themselves heard, I do not know. Neither do I know why General Smuts did not cut off the retreat of the enemy to the south-east. They had placed a few cannon to our left in the valley, and bombarded us fiercely on the mountain without much result. The balls of a small Maxim flew past us with a hissing sound and hindered us in our aim.

The waggons that were inspanned fled in the direction of Commandonek, and halted in the valley at a respectful distance from us. Although the camp appeared to be almost deserted, a continual firing was heard below us. I could not make out from where it came until I suddenly discovered several small troops of horsemen who galloped at intervals from behind a wall in the shade of some trees. They were in all probability left there as cover for the waggons. The few shots we fired at them missed their aim. We saw De la Rey's burghers capture a large herd of cattle.

While Malherbe and I were peering from behind our hurriedly erected entrenchment, and occasionally firing a few shots, I discovered four or five brave khakies busy dragging along an ammunition waggon, or a gun; from such a distance we could not distinguish which. We fired at them with a sight of 800 paces, but did not hit them, as the horizontal distance to the camp was not more than 400 paces, and we should have used a sight of 600 paces, but the height of the mountain was very misleading. Immediately afterwards a span of mules came in the direction of the supposed gun, so Malherbe and I retreated as fast as we could, to find a better cover more to the left. It is strange how in a battle one always has an idea that all the threatened danger is aimed specially at one's self.

We had to be on the look-out not to fire at our own people, some of whom were already in the camp. My brother, Malherbe, and I went to the narrow kloof that I have already mentioned, after a fruitless search for our horses, which had meanwhile been taken to the entrance of the kloof, and I heard from my brother that our brave General had been

wounded in the leg by a shell. During the search for our horses we had noticed a long dust-cloud at the end of Kromriverskloof, near Buffelspoort, moving from Rustenburg in the direction of Commandonek—in all probability reinforcements for the enemy, arriving too late.

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The Waterbergers and Zoutpansbergers, who were most undisciplined, had descended through the kloof in quest of booty. But the Krugersdorpers, formerly notorious for their rough behaviour, were now the most orderly, and did not descend before all the men were collected. The kloof was strewn with bodies of khakies, who were sent up as reinforcement and pitilessly shot down by the burghers. The little stream of water was red with blood, so that we could not even quench our thirst. Some of the khakies had fallen from the high cliffs, where they had to lie unburied—like the soldiers on Amajuba in 1881.

We led our horses to the opening of the kloof, and then galloped into camp under the thundering noise of the shells that the enemy were firing at us from the distance. There was no control possible among the burghers. Each one loaded his horse with whatever he could lay his hands on, and there was no thought of following up the retreating enemy. They did not leave us undisturbed in our glory, but aimed lyddite at us, which had the desired effect, that we in our disorder did not storm the front positions, but retreated in the direction of our camp, a quarter of a mile in among the trees. There Veld-Kornet Klaassen ordered his men to off-saddle and give the horses a rest. Meanwhile the camp was burnt, flames arose in all directions, and thousands of cartridges exploded.

After we had watered our horses in a neighbouring spruit we lay down to rest. But ere long General De la Rey came galloping into our midst with a lash in his hand, calling to us whether we were not ashamed to lie there doing nothing, instead of following up our advantage now that we had the chance, when otherwise the enemy would ill-treat our women and children and burn down our homes. One of our corporals rather impertinently informed De la Rey that he served under another General, and would obey no orders but his. De la Rey thereupon rode up to him and gave him a heavy cut with his lash. I went up to the General, and told him that we were quite willing to fight, and had only off-saddled for a rest by order of our Field-Cornet. In his rage he lifted his lash, but, recognising me, lowered it again. If I had aimed at getting a cut from him, I might have called out like the Dutch farmers, who got a box on the ear from Peter the Great for pressing too closely upon him while he was building ships at Zaandam: 'I have had one too! I have had one too!' We then rode with the General to the burnt camp. The enemy had not found the game worth the candle, and had saved their shell for a more favourable occasion.

One can imagine De la Rey's indignation when he saw that waggons, provisions, and ammunition were nearly all burnt. He pointed out to us how ammunition and guns were required on every side. General Beyers, whom we met there, excused himself by explaining that he had ordered only those things to be burnt that we did not require. We then rode to the other positions on the opposite side of the camp, but the enemy were in full flight, followed by an occasional burgher.

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I do not consider myself able to criticise the manner in which our officers organized this battle. But it was easy to see that a great mistake had been made. We had much to be thankful for, but the result might have been more advantageous to us. The whole camp with all its cannon should have been taken with a smaller loss than eighty men killed and wounded.

I do not know the number of the enemy's killed and wounded. If our first attack had been made unanimously and unexpectedly, we could easily have crushed the enemy. The prisoners, as usual, pretended that they knew all about our plans, but why, then, were their reinforcements too late, or, rather, why did they never arrive? When General De la Rey organizes an attack, and his instructions are well carried out, the burghers have so much confidence in him, and like him so well, in spite of, or perhaps because of his violent temper, that they never have any doubt as to his ultimate success.

The prisoners were released. In my presence they were always well treated, and I have seen many khaki prisoners who have never on any occasion been ill-treated.

## XII

### **PAARDEKRAAL DAY—BATTLE IN THE MOAT—ATTACK ON KAALFONTEIN STATION**

From Onuapadnek our lagers went to the farm Rietfontein, near Witwatersrandjes, where we celebrated Paardekraal Day on December 16—under sad circumstances, alas!

Ds. Kriel, who constantly accompanied us in the most self-denying manner, in all our battles and on all our long journeys, led us in prayer that day. Halfway up the kopje, which we climbed in most solemn earnest, he offered up a prayer to God, and then impressed upon us the importance of the occasion. On the top of the kopje he held a short service. It reminded me of that which my own father held for the assembled burghers at Paardekraal in 1880. How true and faithful he was in his position as preacher to the fighting men, and how well he served his adopted country!

After General De la Rey, Smuts, Kemp, and Mr. Naude had all addressed us, Ds. Kriel read out a document in which was expressed, in a few words, the purpose each one of us should attach to his contribution of a stone towards the monument to be erected there. He exhorted the burghers not to add a stone to the pile unless they fully understood and were in earnest about its meaning. So the old covenant was renewed in a different place under different circumstances and in a different manner from the Paardekraal Day of former years, and when the burghers descended from the kopje they were strengthened by the renewing of an ancient pledge in their resolution to fight to the last for their country and their people.

The place where the monument was erected was called Ebenhaezer.

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Between the Magalies Mountains and the Witwatersranden stretches a long valley called the Moat. In the centre runs a gray ridge or rand, parallel to the mountains, and rising into kopjes to the east, near Hekpoort. Thither our commando moved a few days later to meet the enemy, who were approaching from Commandonek, most probably with revengeful intentions. The Moat was well provided with corn, and asked for our protection. We stayed over a day on the gray ridge. When the enemy advanced towards us on the day following, General De la Rey had taken up his position near Nooitgedacht, and so formed the left wing. Commandant Kemp, with his men, was at the south on the foot of the ridge, and Veld-Kornet van Tender, with a small troop of Zoutpansbergers, was on the first kopje, while General Beyers, with the Waterbergers and Zoutpansbergers held the right wing to the west of Hekpoort, in Witwatersrand. The whole of that forenoon the enemy were ready to attack us, and we waited calmly. Towards afternoon their left wing moved towards the first kopje, beyond the reach of the Zoutpansbergers, who were on the Witwatersranden near Hekpoort. They began firing at the position of Veld-Kornet Van Tonder, and when he fell mortally wounded his Zoutpansbergers were obliged to retire from the kopje.

Our Veld-Kornet, Kruger, a fine, brave fellow, then led twenty-five of our men towards Hekpoort, to try and stop the enemy in their forward movement. As Malherbe, my brother, and I were among the twenty-five, I cannot tell what happened to De la Rey on the other side of the gray ridge. We pressed too far forward, and soon had to retreat some distance. Our Veld-Kornet stayed behind with a few of us, on a small rise, while our horses were taken some 300 paces further back, and the rest of our little troop rode in the direction of Hekpoort. The enemy already occupied the first kopje, and were firing at us from a distance. We quickly made an entrenchment of stones and lay waiting. But our people were retreating from the other kopjes, and we had to get to our horses as quickly as possible. A few cowardly burghers on the ridge took us for khakies and fired at us. Then I experienced the difference between the aim of Boer and khaki. The latter's bullets always flew far above our heads, but the former's fell terribly close to us.

As yet we had retired in good order, but soon we fled in a panic. The enemy had come from Krugersdorp in very large numbers, and already occupied the high Witwatersranden behind us.

Whoever has an incapable horse had better hide in a ditch or behind a wall along with the poor, frightened women. More than once I have seen poor frightened women holding their crying children by the hand, and seeking a hiding-place near their houses during a battle. It is indeed a tragic sight!—we men, with our weapons in our hands, not able to defend them at such a time. And then a great feeling of shame came upon us. These same women had only the day before called down God's blessing upon us, and now they cried to us to hurry, or we would be surrounded.

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We rode at a flying gallop for fully half an hour—along the Magalies Mountains, between the Witwatersranden and the many smaller banks, while to the left the enemy were descending and firing at us. The Waterbergers and Zoutpansbergers, who learnt later than we did that the enemy were surrounding us, would all have been taken prisoners had they not forced their way bravely through thick and thin. As far as we can tell, our loss was, fortunately, only one killed.

At the Manharen, a peculiar kind of kopje, we halted, but had to retreat further towards evening.

Beyers' commando moved in the direction of Gatsrand, but had to turn to Zwarttruggens, near Rustenburg, when it reached the farm Modderfontein, where we celebrated Christmas. The enemy was constantly at our heels, and made things hot for us; we often had to hurry most inconveniently not to be surrounded or cut off. We got a few days' rest on the farm Vlakhoek. We were camped near a small stream, and went from there to the different farms in search of the first fruit of the season.

On New Year's Eve General Beyers' commando moved on the wide hard Krugersdorp road. The bullock waggon lager had been left behind, as it prevented us from moving as quickly as was sometimes necessary. The burghers still longed to attack Krugersdorp, and on New Year's Eve, as we moved fast in the direction of the town, our hearts were cheered by the thought of Jameson's failure, when five years ago he passed along the same road in his notorious Raid. We all hoped to add an immortal page to the annals of our history on the following New Year's Day. But we were sadly disappointed in our expectations. The Jameson Raid was not avenged, and we celebrated New Year's Day calmly and peacefully at Cyferbult, on Pretorius' farm, with milie-pap (maize meal porridge) and beef and—green fruit!

Whenever we came to a farm we ate as much green fruit as possible by way of a change in our diet. On other occasions it would have been very bad for us, but now it seemed to have a very wholesome effect. As we moved on past Zwartkop over the Krokodil River in the direction of the railway, we realized that there was no chance of attacking Krugersdorp for the present, for General Beyers had apparently changed his plans. We were quite sure that it had originally been his intention, and some of our officers talked of the attack on the town as if it were an open secret.

Our capable Veld-Kornet, Kruger, had remained behind at Zwartkop to get the burghers of Wyk III. Krugersdorp from out of their hiding-places, as the Generals wanted to concentrate all the small bands for some great undertaking. We joined Wyk I. Krugersdorp under Veld-Kornet Klaassen.



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Near Hekpoort, as we were camped at Dwarsvlei, we attacked a convoy of the enemy in the valley, and very nearly captured it before it was reinforced. I was not present, so cannot give any account of the battle. After a sharp trek of more than one night, we crossed the rails between Kaalfontein and Zuurfontein Stations, just before sunrise one morning towards the middle of January. We captured a few guards who seemed to know nothing of our movements. Why General Beyers did not surprise one or both stations that morning early is still a mystery to us, as our movements were remarkably quick. It could not have been because he thought us too tired, for some twenty minutes further on, while we were resting on a farm, he ordered part of our lager to turn to the left and attack Kaalfontein Station.

Our corporal was unwilling to work us and our horses to death, so he first got breakfast ready. But when our cannon began to roar and Corporal Botman, who still limped from a wound, rode off without a word in his own peculiar way, our conscience began to trouble us, and several of our men followed him. My brother, whose horse's back was chafed, remained in the lager with the rest of the burghers.

When we reached our guns, we immediately saw that the station could be taken only at the cost of many lives—more than the success would be worth. Our guns had not the desired effect, and we should have had to charge across an open space without any cover. The enemy had no guns. They say our left wing very nearly succeeded in taking a small fort near the station, but I cannot give any particulars, for our Veld-Kornet rode with a small troop of burghers to the right of the station, and took another small fort which the enemy had abandoned because it was too far away from the station. What might have been expected happened. Towards afternoon an armoured train came from Pretoria, and reinforcements arrived from Johannesburg and scattered our left wing over the valley. I happened to be with a few others on the outmost point of the right wing of attack—or, rather, since the scene was changed, of the left wing of flight. And as we were retreating at our ease an old man galloped towards us and pointed out that we were retreating in the wrong direction, as the enemy had captured our whole lager. He had never in his life seen so many khakies. They seemed to be on all sides of us. The only outlet for us was in the direction of Heidelberg. I asked him, 'Uncle, are you sure that our lager is in the hands of the khakies?' to which he answered, 'Nephew, I saw with my own eyes how they rode up to the waggons and made all our people "hands up!"' and he continued to give us a minute description of the occurrence.

If we had been greenhorns, we would have blindly followed the startled old man right through the stream of retreating burghers and exploding 15-pounders. But, fortunately, the war had taught us, and we moved on *with* the stream, but a little more to the left, and, I cannot deny it, with a feeling of great anxiety as to what was to become of us if the old man had indeed told the truth.

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Fortunately, it appeared that fright had made the old man believe his own imagination, and the lager was quite safe. My brother told me that the slight attack made upon them by the enemy was easily beaten off.

The opinion of the majority was that we should have left Kaalfontein Station alone. We were thoroughly exhausted by our rapid journeys, particularly by the journey of the preceding night, and besides that the burghers were unwilling to make an attack of which they did not see the advantage. We had several killed and wounded.

The consequence was that we had to trek that night in a way that none of us will ever forget, to get beyond the reach of the enemy. One cannot imagine how terrible it is to sit for hours on horseback, dead tired and overcome by sleep. We did not even guide our horses; they simply jogged along mechanically, too tired even to object to ill-treatment. Our hands rested on the bows of the saddles, and as we sat leaning forwards, apparently lost in thought, but in reality suffering tortures from the effort to keep awake, we forced ourselves to look up and about us, but our eyes half closed in the effort, and everything about us took a strange shape, and the sky became chaos; with a nod we half awoke, only to dream again a second later that we were falling from our horses.

Not a word was spoken, for everyone was dozing. Whenever we had to wait for our guns or waggons, we simply flung ourselves on the grass with one arm through our bridles, and soon we were unconscious of the pulling and tugging of the horse, and if the order to mount woke us up, the tugging had ceased, and our horses were calmly grazing some distance from us. Then we lifted our bodies, loaded with cartridges and guns, into the saddle at the risk of toppling over on the other side, like a lizzard sliding down a bank, and rode on in silence, drowsily and top-heavy.

## XIII

### COMMANDO SUFFERINGS

The horsemen rode generally two by two, partly in front of the waggons as advance-guard, and behind as rear-guard, each corporal with his men in his place by his Veld-Kornet. The Krugersdorpers were no longer allowed to leave their places before they had permission from their corporal. Even those burghers who were most disorderly in the beginning now saw the necessity of discipline, and were obedient to the commands of their officers.

It was a mixed crew of old and young. But the majority were still in the prime of life, and proof against the privations of guerilla life. The old men among us were all men whose powerful constitutions were yet unbroken. It was praiseworthy of them that in their old age they were willing to suffer the difficulties and dangers of a wandering life for their

country's sake, for although their constitutions were strong, they were susceptible to cold and damp, the effects of which they could not shake off. There were also many brave little boys, who were thus early initiated into the privations of commando life; but they shared all bravely, in a careless spirit of adventure.

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Here and there were some Uitlanders who had remained faithful to us. All the others had gradually disappeared, either because they were taken prisoners, or killed through their somewhat foolhardy courage, or because they had left the country in disappointment. The townspeople were by no means superior to the farmers. There were traitors and 'hands-uppers' among them as well. We have been bitterly disappointed in people of all classes, but particularly in the so-called 'gentlemen.'

Our condition and appearance were indeed striking. During the heat of the day, when the dust lay thickly about us, we sat in our ragged clothes, with shaggy, uncombed beards, on our poor, hardly-treated ponies, meekly staring in front of us, seemingly indifferent to the moral hurt that we were suffering and the physical pain that we felt in all our limbs after a long, tiring ride. At the start of one of our journeys an animated conversation sometimes helped to pass the time, but it soon flagged, leaving us staring in front of us in the usual dispirited, dull way. Our talk became daily more prosaic and superficial. We had not the energy to express our deepest sentiments, and things which were formerly pleasant were strange to us now. We had no spur to enliven our thoughts in our monotonous life. To the careless there was nothing startling in this moral numbness, but the more sensitive among us grieved over it, and were humiliated by the shallowness that had come into our lives.

The small necessities of our material existence had become essential to our happiness. If we lost a knife, or if a pot or kettle broke, or a mug was stolen from us, we were depressed for days, as if a heavy blow had fallen upon us. It was not easy to fight against that bitter feeling of depression. Our only safety lay in the fact that we were conscious of the demoralizing effect of these small disappointments of commando life, for to know one's self is always the first step towards conversion.

Some qualities of our highest nature were systematically suppressed. We prided ourselves on our fierce hatred of the enemy, and considered it a mark of patriotism, and we rejoiced when he fell beneath our bullets or when the plague broke out. We even wished that a great European war might begin, if only we might keep our country, and as a consequence of our righteous patriotism an inclination to cruelty became one of the predominant traits in the character of the burghers.

The commando life tended to make many of us melancholy. Wherever we came the thought was forced upon us that our beloved country was deeply injured, morally and materially. We ourselves saw everywhere homes and fields destroyed, women and children taken away by force, and cattle stolen; and rumours told of the most terrible outrages committed upon helpless women and children. If it were not that one becomes hardened to all outward impressions, our commando life would have been pitiful indeed. So we became hardened to almost all these things, but the thought of the ill-treatment of those dear to us, on whose happiness our own happiness depends, was constantly with us, and to that we did not become hardened.

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It is impossible to enter into the sufferings of the married men. Much was suffered in silence. Some men got messages from their wives imprisoned in refugee camps, bidding them surrender for the sake of their wives, since fighting was of no avail and the country was already lost. Who shall blame the man who rides away with an anxious heart to his wife and children, no matter what the consequences may be to himself? Another woman, with a different disposition and a different heart, sends word secretly to her husband that life in the prison camp is endurable, and that he must fight to the end. Then he stays, and proves himself worthy of the courage of his wife.

Some men gave the impression that they were indifferent to the suffering of wife and child. These were the scum of our people, who in time of peace were not of much importance, but were necessary for our fight. But the majority, by far the greater majority, were men who, even in the most troubled times, were faithful to the comrades with whom they began this struggle, the struggle for our independence.

Whenever we came to a 'uitspanplek' (a place where there is water to be found for the horses), some of us had to seek hurriedly for wood to make the fire, others to fetch water, and others to help in various ways. It was a regular struggle for existence. Those who came first got the least disagreeable work. Wood was scarce on the Hoogveld where we happened to be, and the water was muddied by the first water-carriers. When the sun was very warm we made a shelter with our guns and our blankets. Our meals were simple. They consisted of meat and 'mealie-pap' morning, noon, and night, often for weeks without salt. We made coffee of burnt grain ground in a coffee-mill. During the war we learnt to drink all sorts of coffee—of wheat, oats, barley, sweet potatoes, maize, and even of peaches. We became so accustomed to a simple mode of life that our wants were few indeed. Even sugar we no longer missed. And we remained healthy and strong.

We lay in small groups round the fires, leaning against our saddles. Our moods were brighter after our tired bodies had had the needful refreshment and rest. The groups were often picturesque, some of us lying at our ease with soiled books in hands, others grouped round the fire, every now and again adding wood to the flames, and others, again, picking mites out of the biltong with a pocket-knife.

A shower had not much effect upon us. We were accustomed to letting our clothes dry on our bodies. Nature is very kind to people who are day and night in the open air. If the sun did not shine soon after a shower, we made a very deplorable appearance in our dripping clothes. But we never grumbled. We were generally cheerful, unless we were exhausted from fatigue.

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We suffered most on those long nights when, for some reason or other, we could not sleep, for many of the burghers were troubled with fears for their dear ones. Often, after a long ride, we were too tired to prepare a meal, but simply flung ourselves against our saddles and slept before we had time to let our thoughts wander. But if the enemy were not at our heels, we often passed the long nights in sleeplessness, gazing up at the stars with the most bitter feelings in our hearts. No wonder that many a burgher grew gray. We were often kept awake by the tethered horses stumbling among the groups. Sometimes a man would jump up and strike at them till all the others awoke, too, and then there was great hilarity in the quiet of the night.

Sometimes a constant rain cast a shadow over the sunny Hoogeveld and made our lives sombre and almost unbearable. Then our tattered garments could not dry on our bodies, and everything about us was wet and dirty. Even in dry weather fuel was almost unattainable, for the treeless Hoogeveld had been almost exhausted by the many large commandos which had visited the 'uitspan' places. In wet weather it was almost an impossibility to make a fire.

Whoever had an ailment passed unpleasant nights then; each night meant a nail in his coffin. Even the constant rain the burghers bore cheerfully, and many a joke was passed along during an interval in the downpour. But in the morning, as we dragged our weary limbs out of our mud-baths, shivering from cold, we did not venture to put the conventional question, 'Did you sleep well?' to each other.

The spirit among the burghers was very different from what it had been. No swearing was heard, and quarrelling was exceptional. Thefts, too, were seldom committed. We called ourselves 'sifted'; traitors and thieves had gone over to the stronger party. I do not believe that any European army would have kept its moral tone so high under such demoralizing circumstances as did that small army of Boers with the help of their religion. Whereas in time of peace there was much difference in churches, especially in the Transvaal (although no difference in belief), now, during the war, the unity of belief in one Bible had become the means of raising the moral tone of the burghers.

During the last few months a plague had come amongst us that we had heard much about, and now caused us much trouble—a plague of lice. It is not an edifying subject, but anyone can understand how the itching caused many a sleepless night. We were not to blame. When we no longer were able to change our clothes, we could not guard against the vermin that had become a plague among the huge wandering armies of the enemy. Although we boiled our clothes, to our horror the nits appeared again.

## XIV

### BATTLE OF BOESMANSKOP—FLIGHT OF WOMEN

Fortunately, the enemy gave us a week's rest on the farm of Landdrost Schotte. During that time Veld-Kornet Meyer, with his small troop of Germans, blew up the electric factory at Brakpan.

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Then we stayed a few days on Mr. Brown's farm, where a great many little commandos congregated that were camped on the banks of the river. Our horses became quite sleek again from the abundance of mealies they got there. On that farm we first used for fuel the poles that fenced in the farm. I distinctly remember how, after we had received the order from Commandant Kemp, we waited until after dark before pulling up the poles, and how grieved we were at the necessity for doing it. Since that time we have got over such scruples. Even if there were wood to be had on an outspan place, there was always a race to procure the best poles. Of course, when there was abundance of wood, the pulling up of poles was strictly prohibited.

At that time I made the acquaintance of a nephew of mine, Paul Mare, a boy of fourteen, with a noble countenance, who, like so many others of the same age, rode about with gun and bandolier, and was full of courage. When the enemy approached his mother's house he prepared for flight, but she took it for a joke. When she noticed that he was in earnest, she forbade him to go, as his father had been killed already, and he would in all probability be killed too. He merely answered, 'Because they have shot my father, I mean to shoot them now,' and rode away.

We did not like remaining long in one place doing nothing. We always became impatient, and wished to know when we could move on. But the Commandant always answered that he could not tell. And the more sensible of us thought, 'It depends on khaki.' This was really the case now. On the evening of January 28 we got the order to be in readiness. While General Beyers, with 400 or 500 men, passed to the rear of the enemy to destroy the Boksburg mines, our commando of horsemen moved rapidly in the direction of Boesmanskop in the Heidelberg district, to cut off the enemy who were pushing on to our part of the Hoogeveld. We arrived at Boesmanskop the following morning.

The parts of the country that we now passed through had not yet been destroyed by the enemy, but everywhere else the houses and farms were burnt and ruined in the most barbarous way. We were very anxious, therefore, to cut off the enemy's advance. They were camped to the north-west of Boesmanskop. A strong Boer guard occupied this kopje—the, only one in the neighbourhood; for the rest, the surroundings were the ordinary Hoogeveld with its mounds. We pushed up in a long line over a 'bult' that ran north-west of Boesmanskop. Our guns—only a few, as most had been sent away to be repaired—stood on top of this mound without any cover. Lieutenant Odendaal, a very brave gunner, did not like kopjes, but always placed his cannon on a mound, as the enemy's guns always fired too short or too long on account of the misleading distances. They did so in this instance, and the bombs flew far beyond us. Corporal Botman ordered me to stay with the horses at the foot of the 'bult,' while the burghers crept on to the top a few hundred paces further, expecting eventually to charge the enemy. Suddenly I heard, twice over, a noise like that of a train in the distance. My brother told me afterwards how he had seen a detachment of the enemy storming Boesmanskop,



and how the burghers waited until they were close by, and then beat them back completely with a twice-repeated salvo.

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For some time the guns of the enemy ceased firing, because, as I heard later on, Lieutenant Odendaal had shot down the gunners. When they made themselves heard again, they were more accurate in their aim; I most narrowly escaped the bombs. Four or five thundered around me in quick succession, as I fell and stooped and grasped the bridles of the rearing horses. Some of the horses pulled the bridles out of my hands and raced down the valley.

But the left wing of the enemy was surrounding us, and, like a swarm of birds that rise on the wing, the burghers fled back in among the tethered and the straying horses, and retreated as fast as they could. The enemy now bombarded Boesmanskop, so that the retreating burghers in the valley had a bad time of it with the bombs flying over their heads.

Many waggons of Boer families, fleeing for their lives, were pushing along the sides of the long mounds, and the enemy's bombs burst in their midst more than once—perhaps accidentally, perhaps because they knew that 'the Boer nation must be swept off the face of the earth.'

The women seemed to be in a panic. From all sides families came in carts and waggons—long rows of vehicles filled with poor, terror-stricken women and children; large herds of cattle were driven along by the Kaffir servants, but many of them fell into the enemy's hands. The burghers did their best to make a stand in order to give the waggons a good start, but retreated in good order when they saw no chance of checking the enemy's forward movement. Fortunately, a heavy shower fell in the afternoon and hindered the enemy in their advance, else many a waggon would have fallen into their hands.

It was no longer necessary for the burghers to resist for the sake of the waggons. The enemy had camped and left us, with the exception of the guard, to plod our way shamefacedly through the mud. Our ponies, with their quick, peculiar gait, soon caught up the heavily-laden waggons, and we supplied ourselves with mealies, flour, fowls, *etc.*, that had been thrown overboard or left behind on a broken-down waggon. Such is the fortune of war, and the things were better in our hands than in those of the khakies.

When we rode up alongside the waggons, many a meeting took place between relatives and friends who had been parted for months. The women and girls drove the horses, and many of them walked with the Kaffirs in the mud next to the oxen. They did the work of the men in time of peace. Many of them had been delicately nurtured, in spite of the simplicity of their lives, and were not accustomed to the hard work. They were all Transvaal women, and wives and daughters of the burghers who had to look on helplessly at their sad flight. And, oh! the dear little heads of the children that peeped at us from out of the waggons! It was a cruel sight, and it moved us strangely.

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Although most of the women were drenched, they were all cheerful, and seemed proud of taking an active part in the great struggle. And if a young man asked a girl whether he should ride next to her to help her, the answer was: 'No, thank you, we can manage; the men must fight now.' There were many old men and boys who preferred the society of the women to the danger of the bombs. Some of the women were not kind, and reproached us for being the cause of all this misery, as our appearance in the Hoogevelde had brought the enemy in its train.

The waggons were heavily laden with furniture and grain, some even with stoves, and they sank deep into the mud, as the roads were one mass of mud after the numerous waggons and thousands of cattle that had already passed along them. Long rows of vehicles were continually approaching from all sides, all going in the same direction, and when we came to Waterval River a sad but grand sight met our eyes. The river was full. Hundreds of waggons had been outspanned on the banks on either side. The women and children were doing their best to light the fires with the wet wood, and to cook some food. It was just before sunset, but there was no sun to cheer them on their way.

Against the sides of the mounds (bulten) the cattle were moving in black dense masses, making an almost deafening noise with their bleating and lowing. As we rode through the full river, we saw in mid-stream a cart that had stuck fast. A woman was standing in the water pushing at the back, while a girl held the reins. A few of our men jumped down from their horses and soon succeeded in getting the cart to the other side. But we could not stay to help the poor women and children. We rode on, inquiring everywhere after the trolleys and the commissariat. These were higher up on the other side of the river, so we had to cross once more, this time in the dark, at the risk of our lives.

Two little girls were drowned that evening, and the wheel of a waggon had passed over a girl's body. It had been better if the women had stayed at home and depended on the mercy of the enemy. They should not have undertaken this terrible journey. A woman cannot flee from place to place like a man, and life in a 'refugee' (?) camp would have been better; she should bear her sorrow bravely at home. And this was only the beginning of the misery. If they had remained at home, they might have saved their homes, but now the enemy was sure to destroy and burn the deserted farms.

During the day, when the flight was still a novelty, the women and girls were cheerful enough, but who can describe their heartache and misery during their enforced journey on the rainy nights? I do not know how all those waggons and cattle got through the swollen river that night. Twenty paces from where I lay a waggon was being inspanned; I heard the voices of men and women. An old man was talking. He threatened to off-load all the women on the first

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available place, as he had never in his life had so much trouble. A small boy and a Kaffir had their turn also; the boy was on horseback and led, or rather dragged, another horse that refused to move. He had to collect the cattle, which seemed to me almost an impossible task in the dark, among the many horses of the burghers. When he had found Kindermeid, Witlies had disappeared, and when Witlies was found, then Vaalpens was missing again. Kindermeid, a gray ox, was the most troublesome. Repeatedly it passed by me, followed by the boy dragging the unwilling horse. Then the boy exclaimed in sad, shrill tones, 'See how the mare jibs!' When his father angrily asked, 'Have you found Kindermeid now?' he answered, 'Yes, father, but now Vaalpens is missing; the mare jibs so, I can't get the cattle together!' When he had found them all and the rumbling of their waggon was dying away in the distance, I still heard him complain of the unwilling mare, in his sad, shrill little voice. It was a small episode in my life that I shall not easily forget. This was the last I saw of the flight of the women, for we had to stay behind to fight as we were retreating. Later on I heard many sad tales about it, which I cannot repeat in this little book of mine.

The poor women and children were indeed to be pitied, but we had no sympathy with the men who fled in the winter with their cattle to the Boschveld, and now sought our protection, though they had never fought themselves. The flight with the cattle was necessary, as the enemy would otherwise have exterminated them, but many of the men took advantage of the necessity, and sometimes three or four strong, sturdy men went with one waggon, where one man would have been ample.

## XV.

### BATTLE OF CHRISSIESMEER—REUNION WITH GENERAL BEYERS

I will not describe our retreat, as nothing of importance occurred. We were constantly on the alert to move before the cunning French entrapped us within the circle that he was trying to draw around us.

At Trichardsfontein Malherbe and I had to go in search of our horses, which had strayed, so we were separated from our commando for some days. When we found our horses we went to Ermelo, and stayed there until the enemy were so close upon us that General Louis Botha, who happened to be at Ermelo, and knew of our arrival, sent to say that we must leave the town. We then joined his force and rode to Spion Kop.

'In the land of the blind the one-eyed is king!' Even so it was with Spion Kop of the Hoogevelde Ermelo. During the three years of my University life in that distant little country that stands by us now so well in our need, I often climbed a hill about the size of

Spion Kop. That hill is famed for its height throughout the whole country, and bears the formidable name of 'the Amersfoort Mountain.'

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While the officers were holding a council of war, Malherbe and I rode off to our commando. At Klipstapel we were allowed a few days' breathing time, and there we prepared for the night attack on Smith-Dorrien's camp, to the north of us. But our guide lost his way in the dark, and we had to return. It was decided, nevertheless, to attempt the attack the following night at Chrissiesmeer, where the camp was then. We had everything in our favour. We were a strong force of many commandos, and the enemy's force was not much larger.

That evening we were placed in quite a different order from the usual one. The men of each corporal's division rode next to each other. The Commandant or Veld-Kornet at the head, followed by the corporal with his ten or fifteen men riding abreast, was followed by the next corporal riding abreast with his men, *etc.* On looking back from the top of the hill in the moonlight, one saw a broad dark mass of fierce, determined men. Nearly every burgher had one or two extra horses, mostly mares with foals, that we had commandeered and trained during our retreat on the Hoogevelde. At that time every horse, trained or untrained, was put to use. It was a pity that the mares with their foals were not left behind, as they made a terrible noise with their whinnying. We walked our horses; we were not allowed to utter a word or to light our pipes—that was reasonable; but the neighing of the horses was not exactly in accordance with our silence. Every now and again, when the whinnying of the mares was at its worst, some burgher or other would give vent to an exclamation of impatience. Every now and again someone or other would light his pipe, taking care that neither the Veld-Kornet nor the enemy should see it. A dead silence reigned everywhere, broken only by the mares and their foals. These beasts caused us great uneasiness, but so did the order we received that we had to shoot sharp at the beginning of the attack, but then slowly, until it became light, so as to save some of our ammunition in case of need. We had to attack in the dark then. But what if the enemy, prepared for our arrival, were to pepper at us unexpectedly from a different direction, or to point their Maxims at us?

The greatest mistake of all was that we took our horses right up to the hill on the other side of which the khakies were. The horses were tired and had ceased neighing, but we should have left them some miles behind and walked on to make the attack as soon as it was light. An uncle of mine told me that he saw some men on horseback riding over the bull, whom he took to be our spies, but they were of course the enemy's guard.

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When we had tethered our horses at the foot of the bult, we climbed up slowly, but before we could fall into position the enemy opened a sharp fire at us. We charged shouting 'Hurrah!' in wild enthusiasm, and fired as fast as we could straight ahead. The sparks flew up some twenty paces in front of us, and even after the fight we could not tell whether they came from our own guns or from those of the enemy. At intervals we heard the tick-tick-tick of a small Maxim, but owing to the dark we were not mown down. Some of the burghers threw themselves down behind us, and involuntarily one thought of the proverb, 'to hide in another's blood.' Whenever the firing slackened a few of our brave men charged, shouting out encouraging words, and again raised our enthusiasm. Both burghers on my right and on my left were wounded. The latter had a most demoralizing influence on the rest of the men, as he lay groaning and moaning in a heart-rending way. He was only slightly wounded, and eventually escaped on horseback. Our brave Commandant Botman went forward ten paces beyond the rest in his enthusiasm, and served as a target for the enemy. He was severely wounded, but walked back without a moan and fell down close behind me. I did not even know that he was wounded. I turned round to see if the burghers behind me would not take the initiative in the inevitable flight, as I was ashamed to take it upon myself. I did not take it at all amiss, therefore, when I saw several men looking round to see if the way were clear, and darting like an arrow back to their horses, for all round us our men were being shot down, and we did not know where the enemy's camp was, nor could we tell the effect of our shooting in the dark. A slight fog had arisen, through which the moon occasionally succeeded in dimly appearing. The day had dawned; we reached our horses in the greatest disorder, and heightened the confusion by shouting inquiries to each other after friends and relatives. Some did not wait to find their horses, but fled on foot; others jumped on strange horses. Some even escaped on khaki horses that had strayed from the camp.

As my brother and I galloped off, a man fell wounded close behind us, and the bullet struck the ground between us. The burghers rallied at a farm in the neighbourhood of the enemy's camp. Some of our men fled on, but most of them retreated with the guns to the commissariat trolleys, many without saddle, mackintosh or blanket, more hopelessly impoverished than ever, but not discouraged, for although the attack had been repulsed we were not defeated.

In this lay our strength, that we were not disheartened by our defeats, but were able constantly to rally and to renew the attack. We kept on exhausting the enemy by slight skirmishes that are not worth relating, but their effect on the whole weakened him and strengthened us.

On our side that day there were forty wounded, but only a few killed. It grieved us all that Commandant Botman had remained behind on the battle-field. He was universally liked for his bravery and for his simple Christianity. To our great joy, we heard later on that he had recovered, and had somehow succeeded in reaching Krugersdorp.

Fortunately, the fog prevented the enemy from doing us much harm, and towards afternoon our cannon put a stop to their advance.



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The attack on Smith-Dorrien's camp was worthy of a better result. In this, as well as in the Hekpoort and Boesmanskop battles, where also we had no position, the burghers showed great courage and goodwill. In my opinion, the officers should have given up the plan of attack after we had missed our way the night before and been obliged to return. The Kaffirs and traitors must have warned the enemy of our intention to attack, so that they could be in readiness for us.

The enemy were now all round us. We heard the firing of cannon on all sides, but that same night we undertook a cunning backward movement, and when the enemy closed their cordon an hour later the bird had flown. We were careful to avoid a repetition of Cronje's experience.

The burghers were very anxious about our lager. We had left it on Brown's farm on the Wilgeriver, when our commando advanced towards Boesmanskop. How the lager escaped I do not know, for we heard that the enemy were advancing from all sides—Standerton, Middelburg, *etc.* But we reached it in safety the very night that we slipped through the enemy's cordon.

We were now safely on our way back to Rustenburg, and had to leave General French with his 30,000 or 40,000 men to drive along helpless women and children, and all the cattle he could lay hands on. Commandant-General Louis Botha had strictly forbidden the women to leave their farms after the Battle of Boesmanskop, so that the enormous woman lager received no new additions.

Many of the farms were burned down, but some families had been left unmolested, because they said the enemy were ill at ease, owing to a rumour that General Beyers was going to attack them in the rear. The partly-burned granaries bore evidence to the great hurry the enemy were in. On some farms the very rooms that contained grain were set on fire.

Our constant retreat had a most demoralizing influence. This was felt even in our conversation and our expressions. We called this retreating 'kamping,'[A] and it became one of our most common expressions in our daily life. For 'Let us go!' we said 'Let us kamp!' or for 'This evening we start!' we said 'This evening we go on the kamp!' A typical expression was 'kamping' for our independence, when we could no longer withstand the enemy. If anyone boasted of his loyalty to his country and people, he merely said that he had 'kamped' along with the burghers wherever they had 'kamped.' We used in our conversation many military terms; for instance, 'to change one's position' was 'to go and lie with your saddle on another place.' 'I shall mauser you' meant 'I shall strike you.'

At Grootpan General Beyers again joined us, after having done the enemy some harm at Boksburg. He addressed us and explained his reason for countermanding the attack

on Krugersdorp. He had told the secret to a few of his officers, who made it public property, so that the enemy had heard of it and were prepared for the attack.

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Moreover, a great fault of the burghers had come to light at Nooitgedacht—namely, that they shirked their duty in their eagerness for plunder. He was afraid that if they took the town their plundering spirit would get the better of them and so give the enemy a chance of catching them or putting them to flight. Lastly he said that he was going to act in opposition to the orders received from the Commandant-General, and would send the Zoutpansbergers and Waterbergers home that evening, as it was impossible for them in their condition to undertake any military operations. He himself also was going home, but would return after a few weeks, as a large commando, led if possible by himself, was to invade Cape Colony.

Kemp was made fighting General; the Rev. Mr. Kriel left with General Beyers; Klaassen took the place of Kemp, and Liebenberg was appointed Field-Cornet of our commando.

The return to their homes of the Waterbergers and Zoutpansbergers roused a feeling of dissatisfaction in us. Owing to the horse-sickness in those regions, and the home-sickness of the men themselves, we concluded that we were not likely to see them again. We also thought it would have been better to have invaded the Colony long ago, instead of aimlessly wandering about the Hoogeveld as we had been doing. In all probability our Generals put off the invasion as long as possible because many of the men—nearly all the Waterbergers and Zoutpansbergers—were against it. Such were the difficulties against which our Generals had to fight.

In private, both Kemp and Beyers acknowledged to me that a march into the Colony was strictly necessary. I do not mean to criticise, but only to give an idea of the spirit reigning among the burghers at that time.

## FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote A: 'Trappers.']

## XVI

### CAMPED NEAR TAFELKOP

General Beyers' force was again split into small commandos, which it was the intention of our officers to join into one large force, and so make their way through the ranks of the enemy. But this plan was not a success, for the enemy were too strong for us.

The Krugersdorp and Pretoriadorp commandos one night crossed the railway within sight of the khaki camp-lights at Irene Station—quite close to our capital, in full view of khaki's warning, 'No admittance!' We passed Zwartkop, crossed Dwarsvlei, and had to turn back to the right through Hartleyskloof, as we came across a camp of the enemy. We then entered the Moot district, dreaded for its terrible horse-sickness, and in the

beginning of March we arrived at Tafelkop, to the north-east of Lichtenburg, near Mabaalstad.

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Once, as I lay resting against my saddle, I heard an old Boer telling of the courage and hopefulness among the burghers from whom he came. They talked of nothing but peace. It was their belief that a European Sovereign on marriage may make a request which must be granted. He may even ask a million pounds or somebody's head, and cannot be refused. So, they said, Queen Wilhelmina had risen to make her speech at her wedding, and had requested absolute independence for the Republics. The Kings and Princes were against it, but could not break the old custom, and therefore peace would soon reign over our country. But such talk of 'peace' was an exception, not the rule. After the terrible experience of the last months, we had become resigned to our fate, and did not try to anticipate the future. We knew that we must fight with courage and energy, and the rest we left in God's hands. We had ceased to be curious about the plans of our Generals, which were never made known to us. Exhausted in body and spirit, we took no account of time. It was all one to us whether it were morning, noon or night; whether we had to march one, two, or three hours longer; whether we had to march at all, or to remain where we were. But we were not demoralized, not unnerved. An overworked horse allows himself to be caught and ill-treated afresh. The enemy, had only to fire at us to rouse our slumbering energy, for we suffered voluntarily, and were a support to each other, because of our firm conviction that we were giving our lives for the sake of our independence.

It rained when we arrived at Tafelkop, and when we had been there a week it still rained. The only clothes we possessed were beginning to rot on our bodies. Some of the burghers had a change of clothes on the trolleys; others made themselves trousers of their many-coloured blankets, in which they cut a remarkable figure. Others, again, were in tatters, and had to disappear on the few occasions that any lady visited us. Most of the men had no mackintoshes, but always looked forward to the sunshine that was sure to follow a heavy shower. But if the rain continued, we made huts of grass, or clubbed together in the few remaining tents, or if there happened to be an unburned farmhouse, we made for that.

When the rain continued at Tafelkop, and our limbs became stiffened with the cold, some of us went to an outhouse belonging to a neighbouring farm to seek shelter. During the day we sat there in our wet clothes staring dismally out into the rain. At night we tried to warm our naked bodies by covering ourselves with the dirty wool that happened to be lying there. All the outhouses in the neighbourhood were crowded with armed burghers in tatters. On the eighth day, when the welcome sun made its appearance once more, our clothes were still dripping.

Lately we had had fruit as a substitute for sugar; but the fruit season was over now, and we had to go back to meat and mealie-porridge, or mealie-porridge and meat.

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In the Moot our horses died in such numbers—particularly the ‘unsalted’ mares—that many of our men had to walk. On March 10 my faithful brown pony Steenbok died of horse-sickness. For over a year he had carried me through thick and thin, and I could not bear to see his suffering. A few weeks later we got another lot of horses; I will not mention how, as the information might fall into the hands of the enemy. The people who still lived on their farms often told us that the few remaining fowls instinctively recognised khaki as an enemy, and made for the hedges and shrubs whenever they caught sight of him. So here, also, Nature looked after the survival of the species. The cows taken by the enemy also made their way back to their calves that khaki stupidly left behind, and so the little children could again have milk. Even the bees were not left undisturbed; but the bee is an enemy of any nasty-smelling thing, and therefore the dirty, perspiring khakies got many a sting, and the honey usually remained in the hives.

The enemy probably thought that we were helpless in our poverty. But a Boer is not easily made helpless. We patched our own shoes and carried the lasts about with us. Horseshoes and nails we made from the tires of wheels and telegraph-wires. Instead of matches we used two stones. When the enemy have burned and destroyed all our corn-mills, we will still have coffee-mills, and when those are gone we will do as the Kaffirs do, and grind our corn between two stones—and crushed and roasted maize is very good to eat.

The old Voortrekkers wore trousers made of untanned hide. We can do the same if khaki does not supply us with sufficient clothes. Our wives and children and our exiled men we cannot get out of khaki’s hands, and that is the greatest difficulty in our way.

One of the greatest advantages we have over the enemy is that we are among friends, and can move about in small troops without having to depend on a base of operations, whereas they do well not to divide themselves in too small groups, or to venture too far from their base—even in large numbers.

The services in our camp were held by the Rev. Mr. Naude—a man who kept the courage and the moral sense of the burghers up to the mark with his meek Christian spirit. He also formed the debating club that was such a welcome recreation to us. We often thought that the enemy would be surprised if they could know of the debates we had—for instance, ‘Must the “hands-uppers” be allowed to vote after the war is over?’ ‘Must the Kaffirs or natives have more rights?’ ‘Is intervention advisable under the circumstances? *etc.*’ The men in the neighbourhood of Tafelkop were mostly ‘hands-uppers,’ so we confiscated their property, and their grain and cattle we took for the use of the lager, but we always left sufficient for the use of the women and children. The future of a farm on which a lager had camped for some time was dark indeed, for even the grain in the fields was destroyed by the demon of war. If the owner of the farm were not a ‘hands-upper,’ our officers usually succeeded in preventing the destruction. Sometimes the pulling up of the fencing was inevitable, as we were so short of fuel.

The Boer women were sometimes forced to accept the protection of the enemy, after their farms and property had been destroyed by friend and enemy alike.

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The negotiation of February 7, between Kitchener and Louis Botha, was read out to us at Tafelkop. The burghers were unanimous in condemnation of Kitchener's conditions, and were fully satisfied with Botha's short, vigorous answer. Had we indeed fought so long and so fiercely only to become an English colony, and not to be allowed to carry arms unless we had a license? And for the Kaffirs to be eventually allowed to vote? The men who were attached to their families and farms, but preferred losing all to becoming 'hands-uppers,' were unanimous in declaring Kitchener's conditions unacceptable, and all were ready to fight to the bitter end. We often spoke of the terrible suffering of our women and children in the refugee camps, and sometimes doubted whether it were not better for their sakes to give in. We did not know whether patriotism were worth the shedding of so much innocent blood. It cost us more than we can tell to remain firm and brave in our undertaking.

At that time we also heard of De Wet's retreat from Cape Colony, but not officially. It was broken to us gently, and at first as if he had been successful, so that we all thought peace was to follow soon.

How we rejoiced!

But a few days later De Wet's official report was read out to us, and then our courage sank indeed. What was the good of our fighting if the Colony would not help us?

The disappointment was not great enough to make us lay down our arms, but we knew it would be many a long day before peace was in the land. How long should we still be chased from place to place? When would there be rest for our exhausted bodies? And how we longed for our dear ones, if only we should find them alive!

## CONCLUSION

### BATTLE OF STOMPIES—IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

We stayed fully three weeks at Tafelkop. I was appointed commissary of the Krugersdorp commando, and rode round to all the farms to procure the needful for our commando. As General De la Rey had been camping close by at Rietfontein for some time, there was not much left to commandeer, unless we deprived the women whose husbands were in the veld of the necessities of life.

Our lager was moved from Tafelkop to Rietpan, from whence a few hundred of our horsemen started with some guns and a few trolleys for Groot Kafferkraal, in Hartbeestfontein district. General De la Rey had come over to organize the expedition in person, and accompanied General Kemp. I went with a man called Jooste to the neighbourhood of Lichtenberg and Klein Kafferkraal to commandeer cattle. There I heard many tales of the enemy's behaviour as they passed through a week before.



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For some reason or other the houses there had not been burnt, perhaps owing to the verbal negotiation between Botha and Kitchener. I know of only one house that was burned down there. That was the finest house in the neighbourhood and belonged to Willem Basson. Mrs. Basson herself told me how it happened. Her husband had fled with the cattle when the enemy came along. The soldiers asked her for money. They said such a fine house must contain a great deal of money, and when she refused they became most impertinent. The finding of a packet of dynamite in the coach-house afforded a fine excuse. The dynamite was used by Basson for the making of wells. On finding the packet they shouted 'Hurrah!' and rushed off with it to the camp close to the house. They came back after a while and stormed the house, smashing the windows with stones. Truly a heroic storming of a fortress held by women! They destroyed everything in the house, and the women and children were obliged to flee to Mrs. Scheffers at Klein Kafferkraal, where I met them.

We know of many cases of cruelty and violence, cases that have roused us to a passion of hatred.

I do not believe that the cases of violence, which are not spoken of because of the horror, are tolerated by the military authorities, who are probably ignorant of them. One can understand that the worst were committed by isolated patrols who could give free vent to their evil passions. We cannot always hold the chief officers responsible for acts committed by individual soldiers, neither are our officers responsible for the unlawful acts of individuals on our side. But if the English, with their national pride and obstinacy, deny these acts of violence, we can give them sufficient proof of more cases than one.

I was not present when the Krugersdorpers attacked Babington's force near Lensdenplaats, in the neighbourhood of Groot Kafferkraal. But the following morning, when they were retreating, I joined them with some cattle, and was present at the Battle of Stompies. The night before the battle I heard De la Rey's order given to Kemp to march his men at four o'clock the following morning in the direction of the enemy. He was told to retreat fighting, in case the enemy attacked, so as to give our reinforcements an opportunity of attacking in the rear. Kemp ordered the lager, or, rather, the few waggons, to retire to Bodenstein's farm the following morning.

While we were busy inspanning we heard the enemy's bomb-Maxim, and before the waggons had forded the dangerous drift of the donga near Bodenstein's farm the bullets flew over our heads from the bult behind us. The women fled into the house and the burghers retreated as fast as they could. The enemy had surrounded us in the night, and each burgher had to do his utmost to escape from out of the half-circle. The few who stayed behind to defend the guns were soon obliged to fly after the rest, and to abandon one gun still on the other side of the drift. The others might have been saved if the women's lager had not impeded their flight by obstructing the way.

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We retreated to Vetpan. Those of the burghers who retreated more to the right in the direction of Stompies were the best off, as the right wing of the enemy had to be on its guard not to enter the wood there. The enemy fired at us from horseback to enhance our panic, which was clever of them, as it was impossible for us to turn in any direction. My horse was overworked, and had changed its pace into a heavy gallop, a sure sign that it would not last much longer. When I looked round, I saw a few khakies riding on ahead, making our burghers 'hands-up.' Fortunately, someone released a spare horse; I mounted it without a saddle and made good my escape, but was incapable of riding for several days after.

Our men made no attempt to check the enemy's progress. They all fled, each one bent on saving himself. A Boer, if once he flies, is not easily turned aside. But it must be remembered that our horses were terribly overworked. They had to live on nothing but grass, and very little of that. We all also recognised the impossibility of checking the enemy, as we ran the risk of shooting our own men and women; so our only chance lay in flight.

The horses of the enemy were soon 'done up,' and they had to satisfy themselves with our guns—two large ones that we had taken from them at Colenso, a damaged bomb-Maxim and several smaller ones. They took 136 prisoners, among whom were Lieutenant Odendaal, 32 artillerymen, 13 burghers, and for the rest women and children and some big, full-grown cowardly men who were in the habit of fleeing with the women and children. The greater part of the women's lager fell into their hands. The few waggons of Generals Smuts and Kemp that they captured were of no importance. Jooste and Malherbe were also taken prisoners.

I rode with General De la Rey to Tafelkop, where our lager was stationed. In a week's time I was back again at Stompies. I had been there scarcely an hour, when the tidings came that the enemy were camped on Willem Basson's farm. The following morning before daybreak I was on my way to Rietfontein. There, too, I had been only about an hour, when another column came down upon me from the direction of Ventersdorp. I fled to Tivee Buffelgeschiet with two boiled mealies and a piece of meat in my hands. Before I reached that farm, half an hour's ride, my horse was done up. I crept behind an ant-hill and prepared to defend myself against four scouts who seemed to be coming straight towards me. Suddenly, however, they turned off in the direction of their main-guard, because, as I afterwards heard, they were threatened by eight of our scouts.

But the khakies were nearing me, and I was obliged to lead my horse into a mealie-veld and to lie down full length in the rain. They did not appear, however, and I concluded that they had camped at Rietfontein, so I walked my horse to the farm of Mrs. Jansen, one of the few hospitable women in that sparsely inhabited country. She hastily informed me that the khakies had been there.

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The eight burghers soon returned, among them a young man who was nursing a wounded man on the farm. In the night we went into the veld with a small brother of his, who rode a mule, and returned in the morning to watch the enemy's movements from the roof of the house. My horse was so ill with horse-sickness that it shook under me. The enemy suddenly appeared on the long bult (hill) along which I had come the day before. I carried my saddle into the house and fled into the veld. From behind an ant-hill I watched the enemy shooting my poor sick horse. They passed by me several times, but at last I was discovered, and had to give up my beloved Mauser without a chance of defending myself. My two companions escaped. This happened on April 3, 1901.

Fortunately, I fell into the hands of decent khakies who did not insist on examining my old veld-shoes that I was using as a money-box, so I was able to keep my precious four pounds. They took from me only a few trifles by way of curiosities, and said I was sure to be robbed of them sooner or later by the soldiers in the camp. I was told that I could congratulate myself that I was made prisoner, as many columns were coming down upon us from all directions, so that we would be obliged to surrender that very day. I answered that the war had given sufficient proof that their expectations were not always realized.

When the officers of the guard were told that I was taken under arms, a curt order was given to 'Let him walk.' When I protested and pointed out that I was a prisoner of war and not a criminal, I was treated with consideration as an ordinary soldier. I was taken by Babington's force.

The following day the waggon lager arrived at Tafelkop, and the cavalry that had been sent on to capture our lager joined the camp *minus* any prisoners. When the enemy's lager arrived at Potchefstroom a week later, it brought along seventeen or eighteen 'hands-uppers,' one ambulance doctor, several families, and one prisoner of war. Six of the 'hands-uppers' told me that the whole month we were camped at Tafelkop they had hidden from us in their bedrooms so as not to be obliged to break their oath of neutrality.

I came across an old acquaintance of mine in the lager—Phister, who had served under Commandant Boshoff. I knew that he had been wounded in the leg at the Battle of Stompies and taken by our men to Rietpan. On the trek from Ventersdorp to Potchefstroom I discovered him lying on his back in the blazing sun on an open trolley, near to Potchefstroom; he shouted to me that he had had nothing to eat during the whole of the eighteen hours' trek.

In Potchefstroom our trolley, with the twelve 'hands-uppers,' the ambulance doctor, and myself, was sent in the direction of the prison. People came towards us from all directions. Some women called out to us: 'Why were you so stupid as to let yourselves be caught?' Others inquired, weeping, after husbands and sons.

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When we got to the prison I alone was detained, and had the disagreeable experience of being locked up. The ambulance doctor was dismissed, as he was 'Not guilty'; and the 'hands-uppers' were taken to the refugee camp.

The treatment that the prisoners of war receive varies, and depends very much on the prisoners themselves and on the men into whose hands they fall. I was allowed to see my mother and sister, who obtained a pass to come from Pretoria to see me. But I have seen the guards roughly send away weeping women who were begging to be allowed a few words only with their dear ones.

At Elandsfontein Station the Transvaal colours worn by some of the prisoners of war were taken away by force. On the long journey to Ladysmith we were packed like herrings in open trucks, with insufficient covering for the cold nights.

The Ladysmith camp contained chiefly burghers who had been 'tamed' by the enemy, and were ready to take the oath of allegiance. They were well treated.

On April 3 I was taken prisoner, and on May 6 I was on board the *Manila*, together with 490 other prisoners of war, on our way to India.

The burghers, accustomed to a free, independent life, suffered horribly from want of space and insufficient and bad food. They could not get over the idea of having to appear twice daily for the roll-call, although there was no escape possible. But their sense of humour did not suffer.

Our burghers acknowledge that travelling is an education in itself, but they one and all prefer travelling as free men—first or second class—and they even prefer the high walls and limited space of the fortress to being a prisoner-of-war passenger on board the steamer.

The long, galvanized-iron bungalows in which we live here have zinc roofs to guard against the heat of the tropical sun, but at any rate the wind can blow through the openings on either side. The burghers are kept alive and in pretty good health by an extremely temperate manner of life. Once a week they are taken by a strong guard for a walk an hour beyond the fort. They never get out on parole. As far as we are concerned, they might even take cannon along with them to guard us, if only they would take us out oftener.

Here, too, the moral tone of the burghers is kept up by religious services, and by the great devotion of the Rev. Mr. Viljoen, clergyman of Reitz, in the Orange Free State, who is a fellow-prisoner of ours. The gaiety is kept up by sports and by the companionship of many children. The sorrow is enhanced by the presence of many gray-headed old men and by sad and heart-breaking tidings. 'Guard, is there any news this morning?'

We are grieving with the grief of the exile, but we are waiting patiently, and hoping still that a dove will bring us a branch with our colours—Orange, green, red, white and blue: peace and independence.