

CHAPTER 3
THE KLIP RIVER COUNTY AFRIKANERS AND THE ANGLO-BOER WAR
OCTOBER 1899-JUNE 1900¹

On 11 October 1899, when the ultimatum issued to Britain had expired, the Boer force consisting of roughly 11 400 burgers from the South African Republic, commanded by Generals Erasmus, Kock and Meyer and 6 000 burghers from the OFS, under Chief Commandant Prinsloo and Commandant De Villiers, invaded Natal. The Republican objective seems to have been to defeat the force under Major-General William Penn-Symons at Dundee and to proceed to Ladysmith in order to capture the town, which was located at the important railway junction between the Republics and the Colony of Natal. Once this was achieved, the goal was to be defensive and to halt the advance of British reinforcements.²

Opposing this force were the 5 000 troops under Penn-Symons at Dundee, and the 9 600 troops at Ladysmith under Lieutenant-General George White. For their part, the British hoped to defeat the Republican forces in a single battle that would ensure peace before Christmas 1899. To achieve this the British congregated their forces around Dundee, leaving the Newcastle and Upper Tugela districts and part of the Dundee district,³ open to an invasion by the Boers.

3.1 The Klip River county Afrikaners and the Boer invasion

Either through ignorance or arrogance, and despite leaving almost the entire length of the border with the Republics undefended, the Natal authorities believed that not much would come from a Boer invasion. Proof of this confidence is the fact that very little was done to assist the civilians who remained in Northern Natal. In a response to an enquiry regarding his safety, WAC (Willem or William?) Bester of the farm Fourieskraal on the outskirts of Ladysmith, was informed by the local magistrate, that he could remain on his farm as he would be safe.⁴ Less than a week before war broke out, WPJ van der Westhuizen of Gelegenfontein near Ladysmith too was advised by the local authorities that he could proceed on his annual migration with his sheep to the summer grazing area which he used near Newcastle.⁵ Other Natal Afrikaners like BC, BCJ and TC Labuschagne and their families of the farm Kopje Allen and HN Raaths and JC Nel of Putini Spruit, all in the Klip River district, conceivably accepting that the British had everything under control, did not bother to

1. Klip River county consisted of the following districts: Klip River (Ladysmith), Newcastle, Dundee, Umsinga (Pomeroy). See the map of the Colony of Natal on page ii.

2. F Pretorius, *The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, p.14.

3. PRO, CO 179/213: Report by WH Tatham to Governor W Hely-Hutchinson on the condition of Newcastle after the Boer occupation, 2.7.1900; CH Stott, *The Boer Invasion of Natal. Being a true account of Natal's share of the Boer War of 1899-1900, as viewed by a Natal colonist*, p.29.

4. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 26.12.1899, pp.111-112.

5. PAR, Archives of the Ladysmith magistrate (hereafter 1/LDS) 3/1/1/16: Letter Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, Ladysmith, to WJP van der Westhuizen, 6.10.1899.

consult the magistrate before continuing on their annual migration to the Free State.⁶ Most of the English residents of Klip River county, however, either received different advice, or acted on the principle of safety first, because they fled south to Durban and Pietermaritzburg. As a result only a handful of English and almost all the Afrikaners of Klip River county remained to face the Boers.

The Natal authorities were, based on the reports they had received, convinced that the vast majority of their Afrikaner subjects would behave perfectly loyal. Governor Hely-Hutchinson could therefore inform Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain that: "The most one can expect is that they take no active part against us. Here and there, no doubt there are actively disloyal men. But as long as the British troops suffer no reverses here is no probability that, as a body, the Natal Dutch would take an active part against us."⁷

For their part, the Boers accepted that the Natal Afrikaners would respond to the "calling of blood."⁸ A spy sent to Natal by Commandant Weilbach of Heidelberg reported, two days prior to the outbreak of war, that the Natal Afrikaners were very keen to assist the Boers and would merely wait for the invasion before joining. All they needed were rifles and ammunition.⁹ This report was given further impetus by claims that Natal Afrikaners were, during the first week of the invasion, joining the Transvaal forces in hordes and rendering service in the intelligence department.¹⁰ These assertions prompted *De Volksstem* to describe the invasion of the Boers as the Africanderising of Northern Natal and a process that "must awake strange feelings in the hearts of the Natal Boers."¹¹ For many Boers the invasion of Natal was possibly some kind of homecoming. An American journalist portrayed these sentiments as follows: "The sons have come back over these mountains - the sons of the Voortrekkers they have come back, to retake the land of their fathers. They are led by Louis Botha whose mother was in the laager at Bushmans River in 1838 and Schalk Burger whose father left Natal in 1842."¹² This euphoria was best summed up by Paul de Villiers, a rank-and-file member of the Boer forces, when he stated: "Natal really belongs to us."¹³

Similar feelings were in reality shared by only a small number of Klip River county Afrikaners such

6. PAR, AGO I/8/72: Correspondence regarding the return to Natal by JP Pretorius, TM Bester and HA Potgieter, 3.8.1900-14.8.1900; PAR, CSO 288: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AC Krogman, 5.4.1901.

7. PRO, CO 179/206: Telegram Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to Colonial Secretary J Chamberlain, 15.9.1899.

8. EH Brookes, and C de B Webb, p.204.

9. NAR, KG 822: Statement by JCJ van Rensburg, 9.10.1899.

10. NAR, A 739 Book 1: Telegram Roos to Reuter, 17.10.1899.

11. *De Volksstem*, 13.11.1899.

12. JC Voight, Boer War 1899-1902, *North American Review*, CLXX, No. 519, p.224. It is possible that the author was in fact Johan Carel Voight a South African who had settled in Britain and who was renowned for his anti-Imperialist sentiment. *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek, Vol III*, p.843.

13. PAR, CSO 2587: Letter Magistrate P Hugo, Dundee, to colonial secretary, 14.3.1900.

as CS (Chris) Botha¹⁴ and CM Wessels of Newcastle¹⁵ and FJ de Jager of Dundee¹⁶ who joined the Boers as they invaded, and a group who fired on a picket of the 1st King's Royal Rifles on the Helpmekeer-Dundee Road.¹⁷

Considering that the Natal and British authorities had deserted them, and the Boers had successfully invaded Natal, the Klip River Afrikaners, in one of the recurring themes in the tragedy of war, were compelled to make some harrowing decisions: co-operate, resist passively or offer active resistance. In making their decision they had to weigh loyalty to the crown and the long term impact of their decision against the imperatives of blood ties and incipient Afrikaner nationalism, sympathy for the cause of the Boer Republics and hope for a Boer victory against the fear of the immediate consequences of the rebellion.¹⁸

In response to the claims that some Natal Afrikaners were taking the first option, the Natal authorities issued Proclamation No. 106 on 15 October 1899. The proclamation reminded all British subjects of their loyalty towards the crown and warned them not to become involved in treasonable or seditious acts, join the Boers in any military capacity, or to interact in an economic manner with them.¹⁹ This proclamation issued by Governor Hely-Hutchinson did not please the Natal Government who felt "that a state of war existed in Natal" and that Martial Law should therefore be proclaimed to preserve order. A hesitant Hely-Hutchinson first consulted with High Commissioner Alfred Milner who pointed out that a state of war did not always necessitate the proclamation of Martial Law, and that Hely-Hutchinson had to weigh matters before making a decision.²⁰ This he did, and, after consulting Attorney-General Henry Bale and the Natal Government it was decided to declare Martial Law in the areas which the Boers had invaded namely, Klip River county and the Upper Tugela district. Proclamation No. 107 was therefore issued on 15 October 1899. The rationale behind this move was very simple - to prevent rebellion and to protect loyal subjects since several local Afrikaners were suspected of providing information and assistance to the Boers.²¹

The timing of the proclamations was questionable because by 16 October the Boers were already in control of the Newcastle district and large parts of the Dundee, Klip River and Upper Tugela

14. PRO, CO 179/209: Statement by AJ Johnstone, 11.1.1900.

15. PAR, CSO 2912: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by CM Wessels, 28.11.1900.

16. PAR, AGO I/7/3: Regina vs FJ de Jager, pp.45-46. For an attempt to summarise the involvement in the war, of at least those Natal Afrikaners convicted of treason, see Appendix A.

17. PRO, CO 179/206: Diary of events in Natal kept by Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, entry for 13.10.1899.

18. VS Harris, p.4.

19. PAR, NCP 6/1/1/52: Proclamation No. 106 issued by Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, 15.10.1899; *Natal Witness*, 16.10.1899; *Times of Natal*, 16.10.1899.

20. PAR, CSO 2581: Telegram High Commissioner A Milner to Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, 12.10.1899.

21. *Natal Witness*, 16.10.1899; PAR, NCP 6/1/1/52: Proclamation No. 107 issued by Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, 15.10.1899.

districts. It is unlikely that the proclamations would have reached the residents of these areas, even though the *Natal Mercury* and other newspapers only ceased to arrive in Newcastle after 29 October.²² Such newspapers were generally only read by English Natalians, most of whom had already left the districts, and a few educated Afrikaners.

Fearing that Proclamations 106 and 107 would not reach the Natalians, the magistrate of Klip River district, on 17 October 1899, mailed Dutch copies of the proclamations to 28 farmers, 24 of whom were Afrikaners or were related to Afrikaners.²³ It is to be disputed if any of the 28 people in question received the proclamation, for at least 11 of those on the mailing list would eventually be found guilty of high treason. It has to be borne in mind that by 18 October, the Boers had already occupied Elandslaagte where several of the people in question collected their mail. Fear also prevented the Afrikaners who received their mail in Ladysmith from collecting it after 9 October 1899, because Dan Bester who was riding on his bicycle from Ladysmith was stopped and searched,²⁴ Pieter van Breda and JB van Blerk were arrested on suspicion of being Boer spies and imprisoned,²⁵ while WAC Bester was detained for apparently communicating with the Boers and for the firing on a British patrol from his farm.²⁶

Afrikaners around Dundee were likewise intimidated and harassed, especially by the Natal Carbineers, a colonial volunteer unit, as the following report testifies: "That morning we caught what we hoped would turn out a Boer spy, but he proved to be a law-abiding farmer. We had to keep him till our Boer linguists came to interrogate him. We put the fear of death into him to understand very clearly that all spies were to be hung up to a tree and a small fire made under them, and we showed him where it was done - our fireplace under a thorn tree. He was terrified enough to promise anything."²⁷

Dundee Afrikaner, PC Cronjé, was not so fortunate and was arrested by the Natal Carbineers in middle October 1899, on his farm Rest and taken to Pietermaritzburg. His wife, EM Cronjé, only managed to get a letter to the authorities to enquire about his whereabouts on 23 January 1900. The Natal authorities, to their credit, broke the rules of communication to inform Mrs Cronjé via Deleogoa

22. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 29.10.1899, p.62.

23. PAR, 1/LDS 3/1/1/16: Copies of proclamations mailed to 28 residents of Klip River district, 17.10.1899.

24. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: My experiences during the Anglo-Boer War by Maggie Bester, 26.9.1900.

25. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 20.10.1899; PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 11.3.1900, p.206; PAR, CSO 2909: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JB van Blerk, 11.10.1902.

26. PAR, CSO 1643: Enquiry by Hathorn and Co for the reasons for the detention of WAC Bester by the military authorities, 22.3.1900-27.3.1900. When the Bester men, WAC, DR and JJ, were allowed to return to Fourieskraal in June 1900, the military was outraged. PAR, 1/LDS 3/1/1/16: Letter General Officer Commanding (hereafter) GOC Drakensberg to Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 6.7.1900.

27. *Times of Natal*, 16.10.1899.

Bay that her husband had been released on parole in Pietermaritzburg on 6 February.²⁸ PRN Vermaak and (AJ) Andries van Tonder were likewise arrested near Helpmekaar by the UMR for allegedly harbouring Boers and providing them with information. They were removed via Greytown to Pietermaritzburg and eventually released on 7 February 1900, but had to remain in Pietermaritzburg in difficult conditions with little money and clothes.²⁹

As the Boers closed in on Dundee, the British forces dug in. In this process the Natal Afrikaners in and around Dundee were viewed as a problem. According to Rayne Kruger, the local Afrikaners moved about freely in Dundee and Penn-Symons failed to check them, allowing the gathering of information which helped the Boers to plan their attack of the town with precision.³⁰ CH Stott echoed this: "These self-appointed spies were giving the enemy all information possible, and actively, though silently, assisting them in many ways. They became so conspicuous, finally, in Dundee, riding in daily with absolutely no business to perform except to gossip about the streets, that a gentle hint was given them that their absence was preferable to their presence, and they quickly acted on the hint."³¹ A handful of Afrikaners reacted to the hint in an extreme manner by moving to Pietermaritzburg.³²

For others the hint came in the form of arrest. On 19 October Koos Maritz was apprehended on suspicion of spying for the Boers. An incensed Maritz was later released by order of Magistrate Hugo of Dundee.³³ Similar treatment befell JC Vermaak who went to Dundee on business. He was arrested by some soldiers, imprisoned from 09:00 until 14:00, and then, due to the intervention of Magistrate Hugo, brought before Colonel Yule who recommended that he be released and allowed to go home. Others like PRN Vermaak and Lodewyk (LJ) de Jager had to flee from Dundee to escape arrest.³⁴ In spite of the fact that the Afrikaners were British subjects the *Natal Witness* had little sympathy for the treatment they received and reported: "Dutchmen should strictly keep to their farms during this crisis."³⁵

In the wake of these arrests the first major battle of the war took place at Talana on 20 October 1899.

28. PAR, CSO 1640: Minute paper regarding the whereabouts of PC Cronjé, 23.1.1900-20.2.1900.

29. PRO, CO 179/210: List of persons arrested under Martial Law, 6.4.1900; VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.4-5, 1941; PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entries, 16.3.1900, 23.2.1900 and 29.3.1900, pp.217, 242 and 248-249.

30. R Kruger, *Good-Bye Dolly Gray*, p.79.

31. CH Stott, p.43.

32. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 20.10.1899; PAR, CSO 2899: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AM Potgieter, 22.6.1900; CSO 2873: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by A de Haas, 5.7.1900.

33. *Natal Witness*, 19.10.1899.

34. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.4-5. 1941.

35. *Natal Witness*, 19.10.1899.

Only a handful of Natal Afrikaners, including Johannes Marthinus Maritz, Solomon Maritz,³⁶ TP Lezar,³⁷ AC Vermaak jnr,³⁸ C van Zyl Lotz,³⁹ and Dirk Cornelius Uys participated in the action. Uys who died in the battle became the first Natal Afrikaner to die in the war.⁴⁰ The rest preferred to remain passive and neutral. The battle ended in a stalemate with the Boers gaining the moral victory as the British, who lost their commander Penn-Symons, withdrew via Van Tonder's Pass to Ladysmith.

During their retreat from Dundee, the British forces treated the Natal Afrikaners abysmally by ransacking farms, assaulting and arresting people.⁴¹ All the food which belonged to Franz Dekker and his family were mixed in with sheep dip,⁴² while JC Vermaak was arrested by the UMR at Helpmekeer on 20 October for not being at home. After being reprimanded he was released.⁴³ Others were less fortunate. Jan and Ignatuis de Waal's were arrested and the women present apparently raped.⁴⁴ Similarly, Andries Johannes Potgieter of Dwarsberg was arrested on 23 October by the retiring British force leaving his wife and year-old-son on the farm. From here he and the other prisoners had to walk behind the retiring British column until they reached Ladysmith. On arrival they were imprisoned, along with prisoners of war and common criminals. Here Potgieter, and other Natal Afrikaners arrested on similar charges, had to endure the 118-day Siege of Ladysmith.⁴⁵

One ZAR official offered a far-fetched theory behind the arrest of these Natal Afrikaners, namely that they were being sent to Cape Town "in order to dismay Cape Afrikaners" who wanted to rebel.⁴⁶ In contrast, local Afrikaners treated the English fleeing from Dundee with great compassion with GJ Jordaan of Bergvliet assisting a group of 140,⁴⁷ while CL van Breda likewise rendered support.⁴⁸

36. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Documentary evidence relative to Natal rebels who either surrendered or were captured, 21.5.1900.

37. PAR, AGO I/7/4: Regina vs TP Lezar, pp.71-74.

38. PAR, AGO I/7/19: Rex vs AC Vermaak, pp.364-367.

39. PAR, AGO I/7/14: Regina vs C van Zyl Lotz, pp.114-116.

40. PAR, Master Supreme Court Estate Files (hereafter MSCE) 3940/1899: Estate file DC Uys, killed in the battle at Dundee, 1899. On the memorial at the Dundee DRC for those who died at the Battle of Talana, Uys is merely identified as D Uys.

41. NAR, A 739, Vol 5, Book 2: Telegram from Roos to Reuter in Pretoria, 10.11.1899. For a detailed discussion of the apparent rape of the De Waal women see Chapter 10.

42. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 14.12.1899, p.105.

43. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.4-5, 1941.

44. NAR, A 739, Vol 5, Book 2: Telegram from Roos to Reuter in Pretoria, 10.11.1899.

45. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Letter AJ Potgieter to HF Schoon, 12.3.1900; VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.4-5, 1941; PAR, CSO 2899: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AJ Potgieter, 6.2.1901.

46. NAR, A 739, Vol 5, Book 2: Telegram from Roos to Reuter in Pretoria, 10.11.1899.

47. PAR, AGO I/7/27: Rex vs GJ Jordaan, pp.617-618.

48. PAR, AGO I/7/27: Rex vs CL van Breda, p.776.

The retreat of the British forces left the Dundee district open to occupation by the Republican forces. The Boers, under General Lucas Meyer, however failed to take the initiative that the retirement offered and when the British were finally engaged in battle on 21 October 1899, a force under Colonel Ian Hamilton, defeated them at Elandsplaagte. This was the last major military success for the British forces in Natal in 1899. On 30 October 1899, White failed to defeat the combined Republican forces at Modderspruit and Nicholson's Nek, suffering 1 764 casualties in the process.⁴⁹ In the wake of these defeats, George White committed the tactical error of withdrawing into Ladysmith, only to be besieged. This handed the Klip River district (Ladysmith) to the Republicans on a plate, sealed the fate of the Klip River county Afrikaners, and opened up the districts south of the Tugela to the invading Boer forces. This opportunity the Boers failed to exploit as will be explained in Chapter 4.

In the light of the British reversal, Governor Hely-Hutchinson issued Proclamation No. 108, extending Martial Law to all of Natal as well as Proviso B and Zululand. In the proclamation he made it clear that certain British subjects in the Klip River county and Upper Tugela district were suspected of supporting and providing information to the Boers, while others had rebelled and attempted to incite more people to do the same. To put an end to this and to protect loyal and faithful subjects, Martial Law was extended.⁵⁰ With the Boers in control of all of Klip River county, Attorney-General Henry Bale deemed the issuing of Proclamation No. 108 "a little late."⁵¹

3.2 Taking advantage of the war - looting by Klip River county Afrikaners

Despite the military successes of the Boers the Afrikaners of Klip River county did not join the commandos in significant numbers. They preferred to remain passive and neutral in matters military and were more active in the areas of trading⁵² and looting. A prime example of this was the arrival of the first commando at Helpmekaar on 27 October 1899. At the head of the Bethal Commando, under Commandant Engelbrecht, rode a corpulent local Afrikaner, Johannes S (Hans) Vermaak and his wife in their carriage leading the way to where the Boers would eventually encamp. With him were several other members of the Vermaak clan, all unarmed. The Natal Afrikaners, who all seemed delighted by the Boer presence, lingered at Helpmekaar for some time without becoming involved in military matters, but within a short while the stores of Handley & Sons and that of a local Indian, as

49. For accounts of the battles at Elandsplaagte, Nicholson's Nek and Modderspruit, see amongst others: T Pakenham, *The Boer War*, pp.133-155; JH Breytenbach, *Die geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902. Vol 1. Die Boere-offensief Okt.-Nov.1899*, pp.303-341.

50. PAR, Archives of Government House (hereafter GH) 1454: Proclamation No. 108 extending Martial Law to all of Natal, Proviso B and Zululand, 23.10.1899; *De Natal Afrikaner*, 23.10.1899; *Natal Witness*, 24.10.1899.

51. PAR, AGO I/8/68: Minute paper by Prime Minister AH Hime referring to Proclamation No. 325 as published in the Cape Colony, 28.11.1899.

52. See Chapter 12 for the trading that took place between the Boers and Natal Afrikaners during the occupation.

well as the hotel, were looted by the Boers. Many of the goods were carted away in wagons which belonged to Natal Afrikaners. A day or two after the commando arrived JS Vermaak sold two slaughter oxen to them.⁵³

As the Boers advanced and the British withdrew many white residents in the Klip River county fled their homes. By 15 October 1899, only 100 Europeans were still left in Newcastle and law and order had collapsed, as no police force remained, and Magistrate JO Jackson had been arrested. Riff-raff of all races from the goldfields had drifted into Northern Natal and went about uncontrolled. This made it easy for Natal Afrikaners, Africans and Boers to loot the livestock and houses of those who had fled.⁵⁴ The first area to be looted, on 12 October 1899, by burghers from Utrecht, was Newcastle. The local town engineer called on a local Afrikaner to get the Boers to stop the plundering but this person had no success and the town were ransacked.⁵⁵ The wholesale looting continued for three days and only after General Joubert arrived some order was restored.⁵⁶ Abandoned farms were even fairer game. One of the measures taken by Joubert was to place guards,⁵⁷ who were sometimes local Afrikaners, on farms to take care of the property. In one such case, L Fuhri and his family, were placed on the farm of Mr Innis with the order that he had to draw up a proper inventory of the property, guard it against damage, and herd the livestock on the farm.⁵⁸

Measures like these were not very successful and Dundee suffered the same fate⁵⁹ as described by Deneys Reitz: "Officers tried to stem the rush, but we were not to be denied, and we plundered shops and dwelling houses, and did considerable damage before the Commandants and Field-Cornets were able to restore some semblance of order."⁶⁰ According to A von Levetzow of the Boer Commissariat, Natal Afrikaners took part in the looting and carried away wagon loads of goods.⁶¹ Some Natal Afrikaners like LLA Zietsman and her father,⁶² JS Zietsman of Vants Drift,⁶³ and Marthinus Meyer

53. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Deposition by FS Bishop, 31.5.1900.

54. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, 15.10.1899, pp.27-38; 26.10.1899, p.57; 8.11.1899, p.62; 12.11.1899, p.84. F Pretorius, *Kommandolewe...*, pp.234-236.

55. Fort Amiel collection, Newcastle: Portion of a letter written by Jenkins to his wife, *circa* 1899.

56. PRO, CO 179/213: Report by WH Tatham to Governor W Hely-Hutchinson on the condition of Newcastle after the Boer occupation, 2.7.1900.

57. D Reitz, *On commando*, pp.32-33.

58. NAR, KG 852: Note by General PJ Joubert, 15.2.1900.

59. PAR, CSO 1643: Report by Magistrate P Hugo regarding events since the British withdrawal from Dundee up to his arrival at Intombi Camp, 19.3.1900.

60. D Reitz, pp.32-33; A large quantity of goods looted from the Dundee area were eventually located to the houses of Afrikaners resident in Vrededorp, Johannesburg. PAR, Archives of the Dundee magistrate (hereafter 1/DUN) 3/1/10: Correspondence between Assistant Commissioner of Police HI Roberts and magistrate of Dundee, 31.5.1902.

61. NAR, J Ploeger collection A 2030 Vol 20: Handwritten notes by Ploeger regarding the complaints by A von Levetzow, 16.11.1899; *Natal Witness*, 11.11.1899; *Natal Advertiser*, 16.10.1899.

62. PAR, CSO 2914: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by LLA Zietsman, 18.3.1901.

63. PAR, CSO 2914: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JS Zietsman, 15.2.1901.

who farmed near Newcastle, moved into the abandoned houses in Dundee.⁶⁴

The ZAR authorities also managed to gather a large number of goods and livestock from the local people. When Justice of the Peace JB Wolmarans replaced DP Wolfaardt, the former took over 319 head of cattle, 1 088 head of sheep, 3 horses, wagons, spiders and numerous other effects.⁶⁵ In the process Natal Afrikaners also suffered as can be gleaned from the statement of Mrs Arnold Boers, a resident of the Klip River district: "They destroyed their (our) property as far as they possibly could. They took out the poles of the fence for firewood and destroyed the furniture. What furniture they did not take away they dashed on the floor and broke into pieces." Her sister-in-law, Mrs Gert Boers, added: "The burgers hewed down all the black wattle trees, used all the vegetables, took away almost all the posts and fencing wire, robbed the orchard, and destroyed the trees. Some sheep and cattle were also missing but she could not say who took them."⁶⁶ The initial looting by Boer commandos could be attributed to both lack of discipline, and the fact that some had to rely on their own resources to find supplies during the inception of the invasion. The theft, looting and pillaging of shops, houses and livestock by marauding bands became so bad that General Schalk Burger issued a printed proclamation which encouraged the arrest of any burgher found outside the laagers without written permission.⁶⁷ Natal Afrikaners seems to have been divided on the morality of the looting. Missionary JJA Prozesky equated the looters with Achan, a biblical character who was found guilty of plundering and stoned to death by his own people to appease God.⁶⁸ Johannes Spies disagreed with this view for he considered looting as part of war.⁶⁹

Initially the Natal Government blamed the local Afrikaners for the looting in Klip River county. This assumption was based on isolated reports. For example on 17 October 1899, two Afrikaners by the surname of Bester were arrested, along with some Africans, for looting an Indian store at Dannhauser. The Africans maintained that Bester (snr) had given them permission to remove the goods since the region was now part of the Transvaal.⁷⁰ In another case three Natal Afrikaners were accused of initiating the looting of a store and hotel belonging to Moses Greis on Monteith farm, Dundee,⁷¹ while Frederick Potgieter and Barend and Theunis Labuschagne were suspected of looting the farm of Richard Horseley near Ladysmith.⁷²

64. PAR, CSO 2868: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JL Botha, 17.1.1901.

65. NAR, KG 818: Receipt signed by JB Wolmarans, 27.12.1899.

66. *Natal Witness*, 9.6.1900.

67. NAR, J Ploeger collection A 2030 Vol 20: Handwritten notes by Ploeger regarding the notice issued by General SW Burger, 22.11.1899.

68. *New International Version of the Holy Bible*, Joshua 7, pp.238-240.

69. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, 14.12.1899, p.105; 4.1.1900, p.116; 28.2.1900, p.137; 9.3.1900, p.142.

70. *Natal Witness*, 19.10.1899.

71. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Deposition by Moses Greis concerning the looting of his property, 18.10.1899.

72. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Minute paper magistrate Klip River district to Prime Minister AH Hime, 26.10.1899.

It did not take the Natal Colonial authorities long to realise that most of the extensive looting was the work of Boers who were assisted by a small number of local Afrikaners.⁷³ Eventually merely eight Klip River county Afrikaners were found guilty of theft and high treason,⁷⁴ AP Cronjé of Tiger Kloof, Dundee, was convicted of theft for stealing bone dust from the house of Hesom.⁷⁵

The ZAR forces could not allow such anarchy to continue and they soon installed a crude administration with a justice of the peace at Dundee and Newcastle.⁷⁶ In the Newcastle area Moodie (JP) was to be supported by Missionary JJA Prozesky of the Berlin Missionary Association who was appointed to the role of keeper of the order amongst Africans. To support him in this task Prozesky appointed six of the Africans of his congregation as volunteer policemen.⁷⁷

3.3 Bringing the Klip River county Afrikaners into the fold

With the Boers in control of the Klip River county, the Natal Government feared that a proclamation could be issued under Law No. 18 of 1899 of the ZAR. This law made provision for the confiscation of property belonging to persons guilty of crimes against the ZAR, or for refusing to go on commando service. The Natal authorities, therefore, under orders from Sir Alfred Milner, prepared to issue a counter-proclamation.⁷⁸

When the Boers eventually issued Proclamation No. 20 of 1899 of the ZAR on 9 November 1899, it was different from the one the Natal authorities had anticipated. General Piet Joubert, proclaimed Martial Law in all the districts occupied by the Boer forces, thereby authorising officers to seize all supplies required to maintain the commandos. The proclamation also notified the inhabitants of the penalties which would be inflicted for assistance given to the British forces, simultaneously undertaking to protect the life and property of all those who placed themselves under the protection of the ZAR and obeyed its laws. All those who refused to submit would be granted permission to leave the Klip River county within seven days. Persons who were driven from their farms or homes, or who had fled, would be allowed to return.⁷⁹

73. PAR, GH 1035. Letters Prime Minister AH Hime to Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, 8.11.1899, 17.11.1899, 18.11.1899; Telegram High Commissioner A Milner to Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, 19.11.1899; Minute paper Prime Minister AH Hime to colonial secretary, 21.11.1899.

74. See Appendix A for a detailed account of those found guilty of theft.

75. PAR, CSO 2872: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AP Cronjé, 4.12.1901.

76. PAR, 1/DUN 3/1/12: Letter General PJ Joubert to Unspecified, no date.

77. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, 18.10.1899, p.41; 20.10.1899, p.45.

78. PAR, AGO I/1/67: Correspondence regarding the possible confiscation of property belonging to British subjects for refusing to go on commando, 31.10.1899-6.1.1900.

79. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 10.3.1900, pp.343-347, Proclamation by Commandant-General PJ Joubert, 9.11.1899; PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, containing the proclamation by Commandant-General PJ Joubert, 10.6.1901; PAR, GH 547: Proclamation by Commandant-General PJ Joubert, 9.11.1899; *De Volksstem*, 11.11.1899.

The proclamation of Martial Law caused a great deal of confusion. ZAR officials like Under Secretary of State JC Krogh, General Schalk Burger and Wolfaardt (JP) from then on repeatedly declared that the institution of Martial Law meant that the Klip River county had been annexed to the Transvaal and that its inhabitants no longer owed allegiance to the crown.

Within a week of it being issued the gist of Joubert's proclamation was known to many local Afrikaners, and at least two men from Newcastle by the surname of Terblanche indicated that they would join the Boers when the proclamation became "official" with the annexation of the Klip River county to the Transvaal.⁸⁰ Before long most Klip River county Afrikaners also took the declaration of Martial Law to mean the same as annexation. In time the renowned Natal historians Russell⁸¹ and Brooks and Webb⁸² likewise took the proclamation of Martial Law to mean annexation.

The proclamation was, however, never supposed to mean annexation or give the Natal Afrikaners the right to rescind their loyalty to the crown. Instead, Joubert had a clear picture in his mind of the position Natal Afrikaners found themselves in. He, after all, resided in the Volksrust district, only a short way across the border from Natal and knew the mind set of the Natal Afrikaners.⁸³ Although they generally received the Boers in a very friendly and helpful manner, they did so without compromising their loyalty to the Empire. An insightful Joubert expressed the fear harboured by many Natal Afrikaners at this stage namely, that the ZAR Government would not be able to defend them against persecution from the Natal authorities if they joined the Boers, or if the latter suffered serious reversals. Many local Afrikaners thought they knew the answer and thus by early November 1899, they had not risen spontaneously to join the invaders in large numbers.⁸⁴

Officials of the Republican Governments, other Boers and some leading Natal Afrikaners, felt differently and viewed the lack of enthusiasm for the war effort, on the part of the Klip River county Afrikaners, as a great disappointment since they could have strengthened the Boer forces and assisted them in combatting the lawlessness reigning in the county. Consequently it was determined to "commandeer the Afrikaners in Klip River county so as not only to bring pressure to bear upon the unwilling, but to afford, if possible, a pretext under which waverers who took up arms might shelter themselves against future prosecution."⁸⁵

80. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 14-15.11.1900, pp.84-88.

81. R Russell, *Natal the land and its story*, p.296.

82. EH Brookes and C de B Webb, p.208.

83. Joubert even had a holiday home in Durban. JM Wassermann, Attempts to strip the assets of the Transvaal, in JM Wassermann and B Kearney, (eds), *A warrior's gateway. Durban and the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p.374.

84. NAR, KG 850: Letter General PJ Joubert to President SJP Kruger, 27.10.1899; *Gedenkboek van den Oorlog in Zuid-Afrika*, p.188.

85. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

Whence then did the order to commandeer the Natal Afrikaners originate? Verne Harris wrongfully attributes it to Piet Joubert and says his proclamation created the impression that the Klip River county and its citizens had thereby become Transvalers.⁸⁶ Joubert could not have created such an impression for on 13 November 1899, four days after issuing his proclamation he, accompanied by General Louis Botha and roughly 3 000 burghers from both Republics, crossed the Tugela River to push deeper into Natal. This left General Schalk Burger, as assistant commandant-general, in command of the Klip River county. Burger, possibly encouraged by the local Transvaal officials, Lodewyk de Jager, a wealthy farmer from Wasbank and the brother-in-law of General Lucas Meyer, and other Natal Afrikaners,⁸⁷ decided to commandeer the Natal Afrikaners into service. This is borne out by Judge Mason, who after dealing with hundreds of rebel trials stated: “no direct evidence exists that the order to commandeer the Afrikaners emanated with the government in Pretoria, but the assistant commandant-general and Republican officials, directed and pressed for commandeering.”⁸⁸

Using his initiative, and the power vested in him by the absence of Joubert, Schalk Burger took control of the situation by producing the following “General Notice”, and in so doing placed his personal stamp on the proclamation by dividing the county, appointing people, and creating a crude military administration:

Notice is hereby given to all whom it may concern that, in terms of the Proclamation by his Excellency the Commandant-General dated 9th November 1899, for the maintenance of law and good order, for proper administration, and for the protection of life and property within the territory of Natal at present occupied by the Burgher Military Force of the South African Republic and under Martial Law of that State, the said territory has been and is hereby divided into three divisions, namely:

1st Division, Newcastle. Boundaries: From Steildrift in the Buffalo River via Dannhauser Station to Biggarsberg Nek, along the line of the Biggarsberg as far as the boundary-line of the Orange Free State, along the boundary-lines of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic as far as the said Steildrift in the Buffalo River.

2nd Division, Dundee. Boundaries: From Biggarsberg Nek via Wessel's Nek as far as the Sundays River where it meets the main transport road; along the Sundays River as far as Sundays River Poort; from there along the location line as far as the Buffalo River; along the Buffalo River up as far as Steildrift in the Buffalo River.

3rd Division Ladysmith. Boundaries: From Sundays River Poort as far as the confluence of the Sundays River and the Tugela River; further along the Tugela and Klip rivers up to the boundary-line of the Orange Free State; from there along the boundary-line of the Orange Free State and the boundaries of the Newcastle and Dundee divisions as far as Sundays River Poort.

It is further made known hereby that the following persons have been appointed by me:

86. For the proclamation by General PJ Joubert see Appendix B.

87. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.7, 1941.

88. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

For the division or ward of Newcastle: Mr Christiaan Botha, or in his absence Mr Christoffel Bester;
For the division or ward of Dundee: Mr J.H.F. Meyer;

For the division or ward of Ladysmith, Mr T.R. Dannhauser, with instructions to:

A. Record the names of all the inhabitants of their respective divisions, noting the loyalty or political attitude which each one wishes to adopt;

B. Hold meetings in their respective divisions or wards on Wednesday 29th inst., for the election of Field-Cornets for the divisions or wards;

C. Together with the elected Field-Cornets, each for his ward, to deliver to me the prepared lists and report on the execution of their instructions.

In the obvious interest of all the inhabitants and residents of the territory of Natal meant in this Notice, and for the purpose of maintaining security of life and property for all, regardless of political opinion, particularly with an eye to the native tribes living in and around the territory, all are hereby urgently cautioned to facilitate the work of the above-mentioned officials, by supplying all information requested and answering accurately all questions put by these officials.

It is further made known that a Native Commissioner has been appointed for the Dundee division: Mr Lodewyk de Jager of Waschbank (Dundee), to keep a watchful eye on the native population and to handle all disputes regarding them, so that among them, too, order and safety should be maintained.

And finally, it should be understood clearly by every inhabitant or resident of the three above-mentioned wards that this territory is at present under the Martial Law of the South African Republic, and that everyone is advised most earnestly to respect the elected Field-Cornets as lawful officials in the execution of their instructions, and to obey the orders given by them, particularly with regard to the commandeering of persons or goods or the taking of policing measures for the protection of life and property and the maintenance of law and order within the said territory.⁸⁹

The only way in which this notice could be linked to the proclamation by Joubert is by point four which stated: "All commandants, generals or commanding officers of separate or independently acting troops or divisions, have the right to order the requisition of supplies necessary to the maintenance of the burghers and troops. The requisitioning of other supplies which might be deemed to be of essential importance to the army, may only be ordered by the commandant or general or by an officer acting as commandant..."⁹⁰ In the broadest sense this could have been interpreted by Burger as also referring to people.

In the week and a bit after Generals Joubert and Botha headed south, the world of the Klip River Afrikaners changed forever. In the first instance the clause in Joubert's proclamation that allowed seven days grace for those wishing to leave the county, was never implemented. Secondly, Burger and his inner circle of Natal Afrikaners as listed in the General Notice started with the

89. Various translations exist of the General Notice. None differ significantly. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 10.3.1900, pp.343-347, General Notice by General SW Burger, 23.11.1899; PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, containing the General Notice by General SW Burger, 10.6.1901; PAR, GH 547: General Notice by General SW Burger, 23.11.1899.

90. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 10.3.1900, pp.343-347, Proclamation by General PJ Joubert, 9.11.1899; PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, containing the proclamation by General PJ Joubert, 10.6.1901; PAR, GH 547: Proclamation by General PJ Joubert, 9.11.1899; *De Volksstem*, 11.11.1899.

implementation of the document. For this the press was used. In the 17 November 1899 edition of *De Volksstem* it was announced that the Klip River county Afrikaners, under the leadership of Otto Krogman and Lodewyk de Jager, were set to join the commandos.⁹¹ On the same day a rumour started to circulate that all Afrikaners in the area would have to report to Elandslaagte within days. Missionary Prozesky captured the Afrikaner reactions to this: “My neighbours will have to go too; it will cost many tears.”⁹² Pressure was simultaneously exerted on other Europeans like the German community at Elandskraal, to swear allegiance to the Transvaal since the proclamation had supposedly also ended their allegiance to the crown.⁹³

The perpetrated deception that Joubert’s proclamation had turned the inhabitants of the Klip River county into Transvaal subjects was supported by a second ruse. Talk of a possible African uprising first started to surface in late October 1899.⁹⁴ These rumours gained substance and local Afrikaners were informed that an African uprising was imminent and that they had no choice but to join the forces of the Transvaal to combat it. By the time Burger had penned his General Notice, rumours about armed Zulus between Wasbank and Dundee had become so convincing that a telegraphist and some railway workers had fled from Wasbank to Elandslaagte.⁹⁵ In time the Natal Afrikaners would realise that this rumour merely served as a pretext to conscript them.

Thus, when General Piet Joubert had retreated to north of the Tugela by the end of November 1899, the circumstances in the Klip River county had changed dramatically. Therefore, when he, suspecting that the Boer cause was spent, urged President Paul Kruger to seek means to bring about peace,⁹⁶ he was informed that it was not possible for, amongst other reasons, because it would amount to the betrayal of the Natal and Cape Afrikaners who had joined the Republican cause.⁹⁷

3.4 Enforcing the General Notice - meetings at Wasbank and Dannhauser

The enforcement of the General Notice took place via two meetings, the first such of which took place at Wasbank. All the white male inhabitants of the Dundee district and surrounding areas received a letter from Lodewyk de Jager, the newly appointed native commissioner, instructing them to attend a meeting at Wasbank Station on 20 November 1899.⁹⁸ They needed to be armed with food

91. *De Volksstem*, 17.10.1899.

92. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 17.11.1899, p.91.

93. PRO, CO 179/207: Telegram Major G Leuchars to Prime Minister AH Hime, 16.11.1899.

94. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 26.10.1899, p.57.

95. JH Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902. Vol III. Die stryd in Natal Jan.-Feb. 1900*, p.379.

96. NAR, Leyds collection 711: Telegram General PJ Joubert to ZAR Government, 25.11.1899.

97. NAR, Leyds collection 711: Telegram President SJP Kruger to General PJ Joubert, 25.11.1899.

98. During this period Lodewyk de Jager, for several days, acted as the commandant for Dundee and Newcastle Foy Vermaak private collection: Letter JC Vermaak to CT Vermaak alias Miss C Herzog, 24.3.1901.

for three days, a rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition. Feeling that it was their duty to obey the order, a large number of Afrikaners from Dundee and Ladysmith attended the gathering. Only some arrived armed. De Jager had organised the meeting under the pretext that an African uprising was imminent and that a commando was needed to put it down. In the process he used his position of wealth and authority to influence many of those who attended to adopt a pro-conscription attitude.⁹⁹ The meeting was characterised by vehement and confused discussions.¹⁰⁰ According to PR Vermaak a telegram from Piet Joubert was read at the meeting directing Lodewyk de Jager to commandeer the inhabitants of the district.¹⁰¹ WC Hattingh (JP),¹⁰² JH Ries,¹⁰³ AL Jansen, DC Pieters, JH Potgieter and PR Vermaak, amongst others, spoke out very strongly against commandeering. The near chaotic meeting could not be contained to reach a decision and several people left.¹⁰⁴ As a result the meeting was adjourned until the next day, 21 November.¹⁰⁵ The majority, however, remained behind that evening and slaughtered an ox, sold for this purpose to the Transvaal Government by Lodewyk de Jager.¹⁰⁶

The following day Assistant Commandant-General Schalk Burger arrived from Modderspruit to attend the meeting.¹⁰⁷ He proceeded to read Joubert's proclamation, the first time it was aired in public, a full four days after the terms it contained had expired.¹⁰⁸ Burger then informed those present that the Klip River county had become part of the ZAR and that it was therefore their duty to obey the commandeering order, and that the local Afrikaners would in doing so, incur no liability to the British Government.¹⁰⁹ NJ (Piet) van Rensburg of Dundee spoke alongside Schalk Burger and, trying to convince people to join, said that a brother in need must be helped.¹¹⁰ Again not everyone present accepted this injunction and another debate followed centring around what would happen should they join the Boers and subsequently be apprehended by the British. Burger responded with the question: "Will not they treat me the same as you."¹¹¹

99. PAR, AGO I/7/23 : Rex vs LJ de Jager, pp.415-420.

100. PAR, AGO I/7/19: Rex vs JH Ries, pp.352-355.

101. PAR, AGO I/7/1: Regina vs PR Vermaak, pp.1-7

102. PAR, AGO I/7/29: Rex vs WC Hattingh, pp.666-667.

103. PAR, AGO I/7/19: Rex vs JH Ries, pp.352-355.

104. PAR, CSO 2900: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by BJ Potgieter, 19.1.1903.

105. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by resident of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901; VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

106. NAR, KG CR 2777/00: Proof submitted by the commandant-general of slaughter animals purchased from LJ de Jager, 10.10.1899-8.3.1900.

107. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

108. VS Harris, p.28.

109. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

110. PAR, AGO I/7/29: Rex vs NJ van Rensburg, pp.646-654. The surname of Van Rensburg were spelt in a number of ways. This spelling was the one he used himself.

111. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

The presence of and speech by Burger paid dividends and a substantial number of the Afrikaners present were convinced that they had become Transvaal subjects¹¹² and were compelled to throw in their lot with the Boers and be commandeered.¹¹³ Others, in all likelihood, joined out of fear believing the rumour that those Natal Afrikaners who did not take up arms would be treated as rebels of the Republics and dealt with as such,¹¹⁴ while the euphoria of the Boer success must also have swayed some. An individual like FDJ Havemann did not regard himself as influential enough to speak out against commandeering and when the powerful members of the community did not resist, he felt he could not do much despite his belief that the Boer cause would falter. Since he was well educated and fluent in Dutch and English, he had to compile commandeering lists.¹¹⁵ In parting, Burger asked those present to meet on 29 November, as per his General Notice, to elect their officers.¹¹⁶

The speed with which control at Wasbank was gained over a large number of local Afrikaner is illustrated by the case of John Zacharias and Joseph Lombaard Odendaal Colling. At the meeting they were granted permission by Lodewyk de Jager, in his capacity as “Commandant van Natal” with the support of Schalk Burger, to remain on their farm to look after their sick father.¹¹⁷

A meeting to entice the Afrikaner residents of the Newcastle district to join was held at Dannhauser.¹¹⁸ Like at Wasbank, some concerns centred around the problems those who took the oath of allegiance to the crown and who intended to remain loyal, would face should they adhere to the commandeering order, were raised. It can be assumed that these concerns were treated in a comparable manner to the issues which were posed at Wasbank,¹¹⁹ because shortly afterwards, a large number of Newcastle Afrikaners were forced into the fold.¹²⁰

Schalk Burger and his cohorts had done their work superbly, and having thoroughly prepared the Afrikaners, he published his General Notice, printed by the Transvaal Government printers in the field at Elandslaagte, on 23 November 1899. From then on the Klip River county Afrikaners managed the process as outlined by Burger and his henchmen.

112. PAR, AGO I/7/1: Regina vs PR Vermaak, pp.1-7.

113. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

114. PAR, GH 556: Affidavit by AJ Oldacre before HR Bousfield, 22.1.1900.

115. PAR, AGO I/7/2: Regina vs FDJ Havemann, pp.37-42.

116. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.7, 1941.

117. PAR, 1/LDS, 3/3/14: Minute paper regarding JZ and JLO Colling, 1.10.1900.

118. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 14.11.1899, pp.84-86.

119. PAR, AGO, 1/7/ 34: Rex vs TR Dannhauser, pp.803-804.

120. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

3.5 The Newcastle Afrikaners under the cosh

The meeting to commandeer the Afrikaners of the Newcastle district and to elect officers from their ranks took place on Wednesday 29 November 1899, at the Newcastle magistrate's office.¹²¹ The message conveyed was the same as at Wasbank: they were compelled to join since an African uprising was a possibility and because they were now Transvaal subjects. This point was reiterated by Jan van Rooyen the special envoy of General Schalk Burger.¹²² At the meeting Thomas Joubert was elected as field-cornet, and CS (Chris) Botha, Willem Joubert and CP (Carl) Cronjé as his assistants.¹²³

Immense pressure was placed on those who refused to join and, many were intimidated and coaxed into enlisting for non-combat duties against their will.¹²⁴ In the case of the English who did not want to enlist it was said: "Any man who has been out here 30 years is a Dutchman."¹²⁵ This must have appealed to GH Shorter who despite being born in England, adhered to the commandeering order. He even had his photograph taken under arms in front of the Newcastle Town Hall.¹²⁶

Afrikaners unwilling to join the Newcastle Commando were deployed in non-combat duties.¹²⁷ But these orders did not last and some were, within a week, conscripted to do guard duty.¹²⁸ Just before Christmas those who persisted in dodging service were told in no uncertain terms that they had to take up arms or leave the county. As a result of this threat many opted to perform police duty while others fled to escape commandeering.¹²⁹ PJC Adendorff and his wife departed on 14 December 1899 for Harrismith, while C Bierbaum, W Sander, the Collyer brothers and David Keay, fled into the forests and ravines of the northern Drakensberg.¹³⁰

Unwillingness to comply with the commandeering orders was treated with little mercy. Burgher Steyn, led by an African boy provided by Missionary Prozesky, went in search of Bierbaum, Sander,

121. PAR, AGO I/7/34: Regina vs CS Botha, pp.780-786; *Natal Witness*, 21-24.2.1902.

122. PAR, AGO I/7/4: Regina vs TP Lezar, pp.71-74; *Natal Witness*, 12.10.1900.

123. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs CP Cronjé, p.510; *Natal Witness*, 11.10.1900 and 29.3.1901.

124. PRO, CO 179/209: Statement by AJ Johnstone, 11.1.1900.

125. *Natal Witness*, 22.3.1900.

126. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs GH Shorter, pp.121-124; *Natal Witness*, 2.11.1900. An interesting Natal Englishman who fought on the side of the Boers was John Weston, the first South African to pilot an aircraft. *Sunday Times*, 21.12.2003.

127. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs MC Adendorff, p.104; AGO I/7/7: Regina vs JH Hattingh, pp.148-151; *Natal Witness*, 29.10.1900.

128. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 10.12.1899, p.104.

129. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 22.12.1899, p.111.

130. PAR, AGO I/7/7: Regina vs PJC Adendorff, pp.139-140.

Keay and the Collyers.¹³¹ Thomas and Michael Collyer were eventually apprehended and forced to join the Newcastle Commando in the Vryheid district.¹³² PJC Adendorff likewise failed to escape and with his brother's assistance found a position as clerk in the office of the justice of the peace at Charlestown.¹³³ The attempts by Johannes Theodorus O'Neill to flee to the British lines also failed and he was apprehended and sent on commando to Zululand.¹³⁴ Daniel Johannes Pringle, who had lost his wife and four children to measles in September and October 1899, however, managed to remain on his farm. This did not last and towards the end of November 1899, he was informed that he should prepare himself to be commandeered. Pringle's protests that he was a British subject were ignored and shortly afterwards he received a letter from Chris Botha that he had to report for duty. This he ignored and was subsequently arrested and imprisoned in Newcastle for two days. Botha then informed Pringle that he had orders to send him to Zululand, "dead or alive" to perform the duty of shoeing horses. He was kept under guard for a further three days before he managed to escape. Three days later he was again arrested and brought before Botha who ordered his imprisonment while awaiting instructions from Thomas Joubert. After spending twelve days in detention Pringle was released and ordered to repair wagons and harnesses. Only after serious remonstrations did he succeed in getting the Boer military to bring his remaining children into Newcastle, and it was only after the intervention of Field-Cornet Reitz of Standerton that Pringle was allowed to return to his farm.¹³⁵

The Newcastle Afrikaners who opted for or were forced into non-combat duties, rendered a range of services to the rudimentary administration set up by the ZAR¹³⁶ such as policemen and detectives,¹³⁷ bridge guards at the Buffalo River,¹³⁸ smallpox guards,¹³⁹ town guards,¹⁴⁰ livestock herders of looted animals,¹⁴¹ commandeering officers both of goods and local men,¹⁴² and native commissioners.¹⁴³

131. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 11.12.1899, p.105.

132. PAR, AGO I/7/4: Regina vs T and MC Collyer, pp.83-84.

133. PAR, AGO I/7/7: Regina vs PJC Adendorff, pp.139-140.

134. PAR, AGO I/7/23: Rex vs JT O'Neill, p.439.

135. PAR, AGO I/8/80: Statement by DJ Pringle, 18.6.1901; AGO I/8/81: Letter DJ Pringle to Attorney-General H Bale, 9.8.1901. Pringle's luck hardly changed. On the liberation of Northern Natal he was arrested as a suspected rebel. On 27.12.1900, the Boers looted his cattle. The military consequently removed his remaining cattle and sent him to the Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp. PAR, CSO 2900: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by DJ Pringle, 13.10.1902.

136. PRO, CO 179/209: Statement by AJ Johnstone, 11.1.1900.

137. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs G Adendorff, pp.91-93; Regina vs GH Shorter, pp.121-124; Regina vs JH Hattingh, pp.148-151; AGO I/7/30: Rex vs JP van der Westhuyzen, pp.690-695;

138. PAR, AGO I/7/29: Rex vs PJ Cromhout, p.687; *Natal Witness*, 28.10.1901.

139. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs JH Hattingh, pp.148-151; Regina vs JJ, NJ (jnr) and DIP Degenaar, pp.135-137; Regina vs MC Adendorff, pp.102-104;

140. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs JC Donovan, pp.71-74; *Natal Witness*, 20.10.1900.

141. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs JC Donovan, pp.71-74; AGO I/7/23: Rex vs JL and DB Fourie, pp.468-469.

142. PAR, AGO I/7/23: Rex vs JA Eksteen, pp.434-436; AGO I/7/35: Rex vs J Joubert (jnr), pp.849-853 .

143. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs WPJ Adendorff, pp.97-100; Regina vs JJA Prozesky, pp.65-69; OE Prozesky private

Often more than one role was performed simultaneously. JC Donovan of Roselands herded cattle for the Boers, acted as policeman, arrested and guarded prisoners and took part in the commandeering of goods which belonged to the Newcastle Municipality,¹⁴⁴ while others did duty as either policemen or smallpox guards, as clerk to the justice of the peace or as field-cornets and guards to prisoners. In the process the Newcastle Afrikaners, who opted for non-combat positions to avoid taking up arms, possibly rendered greater support to the Republican cause than those performing combat duty.

One of the key duties performed was that of smallpox guards. Although the threat of smallpox was real and the district-surgeon of Newcastle was during December 1899, allowed to visit the area to vaccinate against the disease on three occasions,¹⁴⁵ the appointment of Natal Afrikaners to the position of smallpox guards freed up the Transvaalers previously used to do this, for combat duty. Similarly the services rendered by native commissioners such as WPJ Adendorff¹⁴⁶ and Missionary JJA Prozesky proved invaluable. Not only were Africans behind the Boer lines controlled by means of passes and punishment, but in the case of Prozesky, regularly commandeered from his congregation for labour-intensive tasks along the Tugela Front.¹⁴⁷ Stirling work was also done by those serving as policeman. Deserting burghers were arrested,¹⁴⁸ and in the case of AP Maritz of the farm Margate, he not only arrested Laurens Badenhorst, but escorted him to Scheepers Nek in the ZAR.¹⁴⁹ In other non-combat duties those suspected of disloyalty were trapped,¹⁵⁰ goods were commandeered on the behalf of the Boer commissariat¹⁵¹ and general law and order was established and maintained on behalf of the occupiers.

The induction of the Newcastle Afrikaners who opted for combat duty in the Transvaal forces was formalised on 5 December when they were issued with Mausers, ammunition, and bandoliers at the magistrate's office.¹⁵² The 127 strong Newcastle Commando thereafter departed via Dundee¹⁵³ across the Buffalo River, Scheepers Nek and Vryheid to the Zululand border. Their duty was to safe guard the border and deal with a possible African uprising¹⁵⁴ which, according to rumours, had

collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, November 1899 to March 1900, pp.69-139.

144. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs JC Donovan, pp.71-74. *Natal Witness*, 20.10.1900.

145. VS Harris, p.27.

146. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs WPG Adendorff, pp.97-100.

147. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs JJA Prozesky, pp.65-69; OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, November 1900 to March 1900, pp.69-139; P Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, p.80. Warwick erroneously stated that Prozesky was attached to a DRC Mission.

148. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs GH Shorter, pp.121-124; AGO I/7/5: Regina vs JJA Prozesky, pp.65-69.

149. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs AP Maritz, pp.449-451.

150. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs J van Reenen, pp.461-464; *Natal Witness*, 22.3.1901.

151. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs JL Fourie, pp.465-468.

152. PAR, CSO 2876: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AS Eksteen, 6.10.1902.

153. PAR, AGO I/7/6: Regina vs WH (snr), WH (jnr) and IJ Boshoff, pp.128-129.

154. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs TR Boshoff, pp.550-555; AGO I/7/5: Regina vs G Adendorff, pp.91-93; AGO I/7/6: Regina vs WH (snr), WH (jnr) and IJ Boshoff, pp.128-129; OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky:

already claimed the lives of several white women.¹⁵⁵ To ease the minds of the poor amongst the conscripted men, the ZAR Government provided for their wives and children.¹⁵⁶ A week after their departure, Field-Cornet Thomas Joubert asked General Lucas Meyer if he could, since he had received no orders yet, join this force. Meyer immediately granted his permission.¹⁵⁷ On arrival at the Umfolozi River several of the commando members asked that a commandant be elected.¹⁵⁸ In the subsequent election, overseen by ZAR officials from Vryheid, Thomas Joubert, was elected as commandant by 120 votes to 7.¹⁵⁹

Thereafter the Newcastle Commando assumed its duty of keeping an eye on the long and potentially volatile border between the Vryheid district and Zululand.¹⁶⁰ Cross border cattle raids, especially by Boers and reciprocated by Zulus, led to several rumours that the latter were preparing to invade the Transvaal. These reports proved to be unfounded and it was even suggested that it was spread by burghers from Vryheid who used it as an excuse to remain at home.¹⁶¹ Otherwise very little else is known of the role of the Newcastle Commando along this border. It seems as if the personnel fluctuated greatly with some members returning to the Newcastle district in mid-January 1900.¹⁶² Such a person was Jacob van Reenen, a Natal Policeman up to June 1899, who first served on the Zululand border and then returned to Newcastle to become a policeman, in all likelihood to avoid returning to the front.¹⁶³ In exhibiting such behaviour, Van Reenen was not alone. On returning from Vryheid in January 1900, JN Boshoff reported for duty at Helpmekaar and did not return to the Newcastle Commando.¹⁶⁴

By mid-January 1900 Chris Botha, took over from Thomas Joubert as commander.¹⁶⁵ In an attempt to reverse the slipping away of the Newcastle Afrikaners from commando he requested that more men be despatched to Scheepers Nek. To achieve this, Botha issued an instruction that those who ignored his commandeering order should be arrested.¹⁶⁶ This seems to have had some success and

Diary entry, 4.12.1899, p.101.

155. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 4.12.1899, p.101.

156. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 9.12.1899, p.103.

157. NAR, KG 886: Letter Field-Cornet T Joubert to General L Meyer, 12.12.1899.

158. NAR, KG 818: Notice by PF Henderson, 21.12.1899.

159. NAR, KG 818: Letter PF Henderson to secretary of state, Pretoria, 23.12.1899.

160. JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, p.377. Breytenbach, quoting documents from the Leyds and Commandant-General collections, wrongfully states that 230 Natal Afrikaners, under command of Lodewyk de Jager, were deployed to where the Bloukrans and Buffalo Rivers formed the border with Zululand.

161. JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, pp.378-379.

162. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs JC and JN Boshoff, pp.519-520; Rex vs WD Adendorff, pp.491-492.

163. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs J van Reenen, pp.461-464; *Natal Witness*, 22.3.1901.

164. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs JC and JN Boshoff, pp.519-520.

165. PAR, AGO I/7/34: Rex vs CS Botha, pp.780-786; *Natal Witness*, 21-24.2.1902.

166. PAR, AGO I/7/30: Rex vs JP van der Westhuyzen, pp.690-695; *Natal Witness*, 1.11.1901.

the likes of DL van Niekerk and others,¹⁶⁷ who had previously managed to escape commandeering, were brought into the fray and were forced to join the commando at Scheepers Nek.¹⁶⁸ A certain JP van der Westhuyzen initially resisted commandeering and paid a small fine to Moodie (JP) in lieu of service. The strict orders issued by Chris Botha, however, forced Van der Westhuyzen to relent and since he did not want to pay a second fine of £37.10 he left for Helpmekaar. There he remained for a few days, then pretending to be ill, received permission to return to Newcastle to eventually do duty as a policeman.¹⁶⁹ Botha not only managed to bring dodgers into the fold, but overplayed the possibility of an African uprising to such an extent that almost all the men who had remained around Newcastle to perform non-combat duties were despatched to the Vryheid district. This call-up was so successful that only a few men were available as pall bearers to attend the funeral of the child of Piet Zwart on 23 January 1900.¹⁷⁰

Field-Cornet Chris Botha generally adopted a more aggressive style than Thomas Joubert. Therefore, when Generals Ferreira and Coenraad Meyer, acting on information that a substantial British force was approaching Nqutu from Eshowe, decided to invade Zululand, members of the Newcastle Commando under the leadership of Botha, became part of the 700 strong force. There were also several Dundee Afrikaners within the ranks of the Newcastle Commando on this occasion.¹⁷¹ The magistracy at Nqutu was as a result attacked on 31 January 1900, and overrun after a brief skirmish. The magistrate, staff and others who had sought refuge in the magistracy were arrested,¹⁷² and some of those taken prisoner were escorted to Helpmekaar by DC Uys of the Natal Commando.¹⁷³

The attack did not take place without internal conflict. Most of the Natal men were not keen on taking part in the attack and sent memorials to the effect to their leaders. No notice were taken of the protests. According to an African witness, Jonas, CL de Wet and his brother-in-law then aggressively confronted the rebel leaders and threw down their weapons in front of Chris Botha and Thomas Joubert, claiming that the Boers had deceived them and that they “never really wanted to fight natives.” De Wet then challenged the two leaders to arrest and send him to Pretoria. Joubert refused to do this and explained to De Wet that he could not “get out of it” since he had already

167. PAR, AGO I/7/6: Regina vs JJ, NJ (jnr) and DIP Degenaar, pp.131-133; AGO I/7/7: Regina vs AM Cronjé, pp.153-154.

168. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs DL van Niekerk, pp.499-501; *Natal Witness*, 29.3.1901.

169. PAR, AGO I/7/30: Rex vs JP van der Westhuyzen, pp.690-695; *Natal Witness*, 1.11.1901.

170. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, 13.1.1900, pp.120-121; 23.1.1900, p.123.

171. PAR, AGO I/7/22: Rex vs PJ de Waal, pp.372-373; AGO I/7/23: Rex vs DC Uys, p.413.

172. PAR, AGO I/7/34: Rex vs CS Botha, pp.780-786; JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, pp.383-384; PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

173. PAR, AGO I/7/23: Rex vs DC Uys, pp.413-414.

taken up arms.¹⁷⁴

Hereafter the Newcastle Commando continued to operate in the Vryheid district. When the Siege of Ladysmith collapsed the commando disbanded on 4 March 1900. From then on most remaining members started to return to the Newcastle district.¹⁷⁵ Eventually only a handful of Newcastle Afrikaners persisted in serving the Boers by joining other commandos.¹⁷⁶

Subsequent attempts from mid-March onwards to again commandeer the Newcastle Afrikaners met with strong resistance and the majority boldly refused to adhere to such orders. In the words of Judge Mason of the Special Court: “the Relief of Ladysmith worked a moral revolution.”¹⁷⁷ The new spirit of resistance was publically exhibited and the *Natal Mercury* could report that at a meeting held in Newcastle on 2 March 1900, Chris Botha, Thomas Joubert, Piet van Rensburg and Moodie (JP), as before, stated that the Newcastle district was part of the Transvaal and that a moral obligation existed to defend it against a possible African uprising. This time around the local Afrikaners failed to respond to the demands and threats. According to the report: “To the lasting credit of many of the farmers, notwithstanding the heavy pressure brought to bear on them, they steadfastly refused to take up arms against British troops, signifying their intention to remain loyal to the Crown. The spokesman of the loyal Dutch at this meeting was Adendorff, who, with his followers, is now in Newcastle.”¹⁷⁸

The new-found courage to resist caused relations between the Boers and the Newcastle Afrikaners to deteriorate. On 1 April 1900, AP de Jager of One Tree Hill, Newcastle, informed Thomas Joubert that he refused to do any further duties as he wanted to remain neutral from then on.¹⁷⁹ Joubert responded by accusing De Jager of spying for the British.¹⁸⁰ Another Newcastle resident, SKT Budge, was more circumspect. He was prepared to continue serving but enquired from Field-Cornet Chris Botha if any written guarantees existed that placed him on an equal footing with Transvaal burghers. Botha’s response, that the only such guarantee was the proclamation of 9 November 1899, illustrated the problematic position the Klip River county Afrikaners found themselves in.¹⁸¹

174. *Natal Witness*, 11.10.1900.

175. PAR, AGO I/7/7: Regina vs CL, PJ and DR de Wet, pp.131-133; Regina vs JJ, NJ (jnr) and DIP Degenaar, pp. 135-137; Regina vs AM Cronjé (snr), pp.153-154; AGO I/7/30: Regina vs CJS Hattingh, pp.682-683.

176. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs JC and JN Boshoff, pp.519-520; AGO I/7/7: Regina vs CL, PJ and DR de Wet, pp.131-133.

177. PAR, AGO I/7/7: Regina vs AM Cronjé (snr), pp.153-154; AGO I/7/23: Rex vs AMJ Cronjé, p.429.

178. *Natal Mercury*, 31.5.1900.

179. NAR, KG 886: Letter AP de Jager to field-cornet, Newcastle, 1.4.1900.

180. NAR, KG 886: Note by Commandant T Joubert, 2.4.1900.

181. NAR, KG 886: Letter SKT Budge to Field-Cornet CS Botha, 2.4.1900.

3.6 The Klip River (Ladysmith) district Afrikaners under Boer rule

Several white male residents from the Ladysmith area had attended the initial meeting at Wasbank.¹⁸² A short while later all white men from the area received a note from TR Dannhauser who, on behalf of Lodewyk de Jager and Schalk Burger, commandeered them to attend a meeting on 29 November 1899 on Joseph Muller's farm Doornkraal, Elandslaagte. The aims of the meeting was to gain clarity on what it meant to be living under the protection of the Transvaal, to form a police force to deal with the increase in stock theft and to address the spread of smallpox.¹⁸³

Approximately 60 local white men, the vast majority being Afrikaners, attended the meeting. On arrival the men were presented with a document, addressed to the ZAR authorities, which they were expected to sign requesting the creation of a police corps to address the stock theft issue. Under Secretary of State Krogh of the ZAR then addressed the meeting and also facilitated the election of a field-cornet for the area. Three candidates were nominated: Lukas W Meyer, Otto (OW) Krogman and Hermanus Potgieter. In the subsequent election Krogman received 27 votes, Meyer 24 and Potgieter 8. Krogman and Krogh then ordered those present to be at Elandslaagte within 24 hours with whatever arms they had. Half would be deployed on the front and the other half kept in reserve.

FJT Brandon and many others present felt that they had been deceived and betrayed, as they had not attended the meeting expecting to be commandeered but to do police work.¹⁸⁴ WC Hattingh (JP), who at the Wasbank meeting had spoken out strongly against commandeering, likewise felt tricked. He attended the Doornkraal meeting and took part in the voting under the impression that it had to do with police duties, only to realise afterwards that they were being enlisted.¹⁸⁵ Attendees who, in accordance with Joubert's proclamation, requested a pass to leave the area likewise felt that they were misled because they were informed that this request could not be granted since they had voted for a field-cornet.¹⁸⁶ All those present thus, willingly or unwillingly, became members of the Boer forces or administration.

Despite being tricked, most of those who had attended the meeting at Doornkraal gathered at the appointed time at the commissariat at Elandslaagte. The officers present were, however, not ready for "Otto's Commando."¹⁸⁷ The men therefore lazed around on farms in the area for a day or two

182. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs FJT Brandon, pp.219-226; Regina vs HB Cronjé, pp.237-238; AGO I/7/30: Rex vs WC Hattingh, pp.666-667; *Natal Witness*, 21.12.1900 and 18.12.1900.

183. PAR, PM 87: Deposition by James Thorrold before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

184. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

185. PAR, AGO I/7/30: Rex vs WC Hattingh, pp.666-667.

186. PAR, PM 87: Deposition by James Thorrold before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

187. Name given to the Natal Commando from Ladysmith by an African witness in the trial against Otto Krogman. See,

before they were each issued with a Mauser, bandoliers and ammunition.¹⁸⁸ Those who refused to be commandeered were allocated civil or non-combat positions such as police work and smallpox guards. The following day a posse, consisting of some of the commandeered men, rode to the Boer “hoofdlaager” at Modderspruit. Here “Otto’s Commando” again lazed around for a couple of days. To ease the boredom, FJT Brandon, volunteered to take a wagon to Elandslaagte to collect provisions.

The idle times spent at the Boer laager ended for the Ladysmith Afrikaners when General Joubert instructed them, since they knew the area, to accompany some burghers on a patrol down the Tugela River to Umhlumayo with the purpose of determining if a drift existed where the British could cross. The 60-strong commando, under Otto Krogman, returned a couple of days later after having lost their way.¹⁸⁹

By the time the commando returned, the Ladysmith Afrikaners had already been in the laager for a week and started to grumble about their treatment. Sensing their unhappiness, Krogman managed to get those present in the laager deployed to civil duties. The likes of FM Colling, AI Marais, WC Hattingh, JP van der Westhuyzen, James Thorrold,¹⁹⁰ IJ Buys, JF, FA, CJ and JT Truscott¹⁹¹ received worked as policemen and smallpox guards. Apart from dealing with smallpox, they also had to search the homesteads of Africans for firearms and deal with stock theft.¹⁹² Some were allocated an additional role, namely that of military policemen, with the task of arresting deserting burghers.¹⁹³

The men allocated to duty as smallpox guards proceeded to Elandslaagte and exchanged their Mausers for Steyr rifles. They divided themselves into four parties, each serving the area closest to his home. Smallpox guards like HB Cronjé¹⁹⁴ and FJT Brandon went to work in the four infected areas: Doornhoek, Matawan’s Kop, Schaapplaats and Mielietuinhoek. At the infected farms the guards formed quarantine camps marked by yellow flags. Until mid-February 1900 these camps were guarded. The work was made much easier by the fact that the Africans gave their full cooperation. An estimated eight Africans died and were buried by their fellow inmates before the

PAR, AGO I/7/11: Regina vs OW Krogman, pp.263-268; *Natal Witness*, 11-12.1.1901.

188. PAR, AGO I/7/ 9: Regina vs JL and AI Marais, pp.233-235; *Natal Witness*, 20.12.1900.

189. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

190. PAR, PM 87: Deposition by James Thorrold before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

191. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs JC, FA, CJ and JT Truscott, pp.243-245; *Natal Witness*, 24.12.1900.

192. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

193. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs JL and AI Marais, pp.233-235; *Natal Witness*, 20.12.1900.

194. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs HB Cronjé, pp.237-238; *Natal Witness*, 21.12.1900.

epidemic ended. When everybody was cured, the survivors were bathed in sheep dip, the huts broken down and the area fumigated. The only problem encountered by the guards was with the Irish Brigade who consistently roamed the area in search of African beer. Warning shots sometimes had to be fired to keep them outside the demarcated areas. In mid-February 1900, two weeks before the Siege of Ladysmith ended, the smallpox guards went home.¹⁹⁵

It seems that the tasks of smallpox guards and a policeman also entailed other unrelated tasks. HB Cronjé, for example, had to transport sandbags and railway material to the front¹⁹⁶ and remove commandeered goods, as ordered by Otto Krogman, from the farms of English residents who had fled, and from the coal mines around Elandslaagte to the Boer Commissariat.¹⁹⁷

The valuable service rendered to the ZAR by the Ladysmith Afrikaners was not always appreciated. Three members of the Ladysmith Commando, Izak Buys, Fred Colling and H Dreyer, complained to General Joubert that while the Transvalers received leave to collect goods from either the Dundee or Newcastle Commissariats, they did not enjoy the same privilege. Consequently Joubert intervened and instructed the justice of the peace in Dundee to issue provisions, clothes, and other goods to Natal Afrikaners on commando, on a similar basis to those of the Republicans.¹⁹⁸

The Boer authorities had a far easier task in enlisting the Ladysmith Afrikaners residing in the lower reaches of the Klip River district. Here many voluntarily joined the Boer forces, possibly because of the overwhelming presence of the Boer Army. Two brothers, JG and IJ Hattingh, for instance, became involved in military operations around Ladysmith and participated in the attempted construction of a dam in the Klip River,¹⁹⁹ MA Smidt joined and worked on the railway and as a border guard on the Drakensberg,²⁰⁰ while H Engelbrecht of Kromelmboog joined the Free Staters on invasion and took part in an early skirmish with the Natal Carbineers at Uziko's Kraal, and in military operations around Ladysmith.²⁰¹ Most importantly, they readily supplied their knowledge of the terrain to the invaders and in the case of the elderly HA Potgieter of Beauvale, assisted the Boers by pointing out the drifts in the Tugela River.²⁰² Another form of logistical service, the baking of bread in exchange for flour, especially for Boer ambulances and hospitals, was undertaken by HN

195. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs FJT Brandon, pp.219-226.

196. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs HB Cronjé, pp.237-238; *Natal Witness*, 21.12.1900.

197. PAR, AGO I/7/11: Rex vs OW Krogman, pp.264-268; AGO I/7/9: Regina vs JC, FA, CJ and JT Truscott, pp.243-245; AGO I/7/10: Regina vs BJ Nel, pp.248-254; AGO I/7/11: Regina vs JJ Potgieter, pp.269-270.

198. NAR, KG 852: Letter General PJ Joubert to JP Dundee, 25.1.1900.

199. PAR, AGO I/7/30: Rex vs JG and IJ Hattingh, pp.663-676.

200. PAR, AGO I/7/8: Regina vs MA and ME Smidt, pp.195-196; *Natal Witness*, 6.12.1900.

201. PAR, AGO I/7/ 9: Regina vs JC, JF and H Engelbrecht, pp.208-209; *Natal Witness*, 12.12.1900.

202. PAR, AGO I/7/8: Rex vs HA Potgieter, p.197.

Raath,²⁰³ WC Hattingh²⁰⁴ and Mrs HW Boers.²⁰⁵

While some Ladysmith Afrikaners served in various capacities, a small number were caught up in the Siege of Ladysmith.²⁰⁶ Afrikaners like the Besters²⁰⁷ and JE Muller and J Howell entered the town on business, but were arrested on suspicion of being Boer spies. They were later released and allowed to reside with their relatives. Soon afterwards other local Afrikaners, Salomon (SHF) de Jager, Jan Bester, AJ Potgieter, Andries Meyer, Jan and Ignatuis de Waal and H Dreyer were brought into town on charges of removing fences, spying for the Boers, and using Africans as messengers. Dreyer and Jan de Waal were subsequently released and allowed to return home.²⁰⁸

Meanwhile the Ladysmith Afrikaners, under Mrs G de Haas, nursed ten wounded Boers captured by the British in the DRC, which had been turned into a hospital. Initially no assistance was received from the British authorities but they soon relented and provided food for the prisoner of war (hereafter POW) patients. Further assistance came from the Greytown Afrikaners who forwarded £5 to Ds HF Schoon.²⁰⁹

This situation did not last long and on 5 November 1899, HF Schoon, his wife Mary and their seven children, the sister of Schoon, Mrs Gerhard de Haas, her husband and four children, Widow Adendorff and her two daughters, Widow Van der Merwe and her two daughters, William and Daniel Bester, the wife of Jan Bester and her children, Jan de Waal his wife, five children and one grandchild, JE Muller, James Howell and JF Tredoux were moved to the Intombi Spruit Neutral Camp outside of Ladysmith. The Afrikaners earlier arrested for treason, as well as the wounded Boers accommodated in the DRC, remained in town and were forced to endure the Boer bombardment for the duration of the siege. The church parsonage was taken over by the British Army and the house of the Adendorff's by Leander Starr Jameson of the Jameson Raid fame.²¹⁰

203. PAR, AGO I/7/12 : Rex vs HN Raath, p.292.

204. PAR, AGO I/7/30: Rex vs WC Hattingh, pp.666-667.

205. *Natal Witness*, 10.6.1900.

206. The voluminous publications that exists on the Siege of Ladysmith make no reference of the plight of the small number of Natal Afrikaners caught up in it. See for example the following publications by the Ladysmith Historical Society: *Diary of Major GF Tatham*; *Diary of Bell Crow*; *Letters by Major-General CW Park*; *Unpublished letters from the Siege and an extract from Lt-Col BW Martin's memoirs*; *Notes by AJ Crosby*; *A nurse looks back on Ladysmith*; *The siege diary of William Watson* and B Kaiglin, *A diary of the Siege of Ladysmith*.

207. PAR, 1/LDS 3/1/1/16: Letter Magistrate TR Bennett, Klip River district, to Maj-Gen A Hunter, 15.10.1899.

208. PAR, 1/LDS 3/3/14: Letter F Russouw to his father, 15.8.1900; PAR, CSO 2888: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: MPCs de Jager on behalf of SHF de Jager, 2.10.1900.

209. Another Afrikaner, Nurse Otto, from a notoriously loyal family was also involved in nursing during the siege. PAR, PM 90: Recommendation by Lt-Col Hyslop, 3.5.1901.

210. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entries, 21.10.1899-12.11.1900, pp.21-64; PAR, CSO 2873: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by G de Haas, 5.7.1900. A second group of Natal Afrikaners, not mentioned by Schoon in his diary, possibly because they were either loyalists, not members of the DRC or of an unacceptable class, was also incarcerated in Intombi Camp. In this group were, amongst others, the illiterate John van Wyk and the divorced

The Afrikaners residing in Intombi Camp generally experienced similar hardships and pleasures as all other residents. Schoon, on 12 November, baptised Johannes Francois, the son of JA and ME van der Merwe. Three days later he buried his own daughter, Naomi, aged four, in a groceries box under a Mimosa tree,²¹¹ and little more than a month later he buried Kootjie Lategan, a wounded Boer POW. Some members of the Afrikaner group, who resided in close proximity of each other, became ill of typhoid or diarrhoea and were cured either by using “harmansdrup” or medicine prescribed by the medical staff in the camp. The monotony of camp life was broken by regular visits under the white flag by Boers,²¹² by the release of Jan Bester from prison in Ladysmith and by the odd celebration such as “Dingaansdag” on 16 December 1899 when Schoon read from Psalm 77 verse 15.

Afrikaner residents in the Intombi Camp were also involved in their own private war. In his diary, Schoon complained that hate speeches against, and verbal abuse of, Afrikaners were common. In an extreme case James Howell was, under great applause, arrested by two African policemen while waiting close to the perimeter of the camp for a toilet to become available. Howell was accused of speaking to someone in the nearby veld. After an investigation at both the Intombi Spruit Camp and in Ladysmith he was released because of conflicting evidence. Accommodation provided to the Afrikaners caused further conflict. Mary Schoon complained to Magistrate Bennett that some of the English were receiving additional tents to house their ill. After an investigation Bennett allocated an extra tent to the Afrikaners. Taking delivery of the tent, however, proved problematic because Sergeant Thompson refused to hand it over. With no assistance forthcoming, the Afrikaners took matters into their own hands and took possession of the appointed tent. Subsequent attempts by the magistrate to mend the relationship between Thompson and the Afrikaners failed and they made it clear that they would not relinquish the tent without a fight.²¹³

In the meantime, several attempts by the massive force under General Buller to breach the defences of the Boers along the Tugela line so as to relieve Ladysmith, failed. On 15 December 1899, a frontal attack by the British at Colenso met with disaster when they lost 1 139 men. As a result Buller lost the position of supreme commander of the British forces in South Africa to Field-Marshal Roberts. An effort by the Boers, on 6 January 1900, to take Ladysmith via Platrand south of the

dressmaker Hester Russouw. PAR, CSO 2903: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by H Russouw, 8.4.1901; CSO 2914: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by J van Wyk, 12.1.1903; 1/LDS 3/3/14: Letter F Russouw to his father, 15.8.1900.

211. The Van der Merwe child baptised by Schoon died on 7.6.1900. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 9.6.1900, p.354.

212. These visits only ended when General White became aware of it after receiving six apples as a gift from Gert Aveling, a Afrikaner, who had property at both Newcastle and in the OFS. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 11.2.1900, p.165.

213. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entries, 15.11.1899-28.2.1900, pp.66-112.

town, was also unsuccessful. The British afterwards claimed that one Natal Afrikaner by the name of Griffin was identified among the dead.²¹⁴ The pressure on the Boer forces continued to build up with the arrival of an additional 24 000 British troops. Using the reinforcements, Buller again attempted to overrun the Boer positions. The attempt culminated in the bloodiest engagement of the war, and in a serious defeat of the British forces at Spioenkop on 24 January 1900. A subsequent relief attempt at Vaalkrans, between 5 and 7 February 1900, likewise failed. In the end, however, the military genius of Louis Botha, and the resistance of the small Boer force could not stand-up to the sheer numbers of the British forces and the Tugela line was finally breached at Hlangwane Hill between 17 and 19 February. A general collapse of the Boer commandos around Ladysmith resulted and many burghers started to leave to regroup on the Biggarsberg and the Drakensberg. Via an assault on Pieters Hill, the British forces, managed to, relieve Ladysmith on 28 February 1900, ending a siege that lasted 118 days.²¹⁵

When the siege ended the inhabitants of the Intombi Spruit Camp returned home without delay. The Schoons, for example, proceeded to Ladysmith to reoccupy the parsonage. Their sudden arrival caught the military off guard and after a heated debate during which Dr Robert Buntine of Pietermaritzburg threatened Mary Schoon with a prison sentence, a room was hastily prepared for them. The following day, 3 March 1900, Buntine had his way when the Schoons were evicted and had to take up residence in the church house of Paul Bester. The Schoons did not take matters lying down and confronted General White about the fact that they were evicted from the parsonage. White, to his credit, promised to have the military evacuate it as soon as possible.²¹⁶

The behaviour of the Schoons did not endear them to the authorities and they were suspected of acting as spies for the Boers while residing in the Intombi Spruit Camp. Therefore, it was decided to deport the Schoons, and William Bester, the father of Mary Schoon, on political and military grounds to Pietermaritzburg. After several delays the Schoons, accompanied by three servants, arrived by train in Pietermaritzburg on 21 March 1900. They hired the house of a fellow Natal Afrikaner, Widow Berning, situated at 288 Loop Street for £11 per month.²¹⁷

Widow Adendorff and her two daughters were allowed to leave Ladysmith together with her son-in-law Elimas (EJ) van Rooyen, who along with S Maartens had arrived on horseback from Greytown

214. PAR, Archives of the Empangeni magistrate (hereafter 1/EPI) 3/2/6: Telegram Reuter to Chief Magistrate CJR Saunders, Eshowe, 17.1.1900.

215. A more detailed description of the outlined events is beyond the scope of this thesis. For a more in depth analysis see, amongst others: JH Breytenbach, *Die stryd in Natal Jan.-Feb. 1900, Vol III, passim*; CJ Barnard, *Genl. Louis Botha op die Natalse front 1899-1900, passim*.

216. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 2-3.3.1900, pp.192-195.

217. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entries, 8-21.3.1900, pp.202-235.

11 days after the siege ended.²¹⁸ The arrival of the two men was preceded by lengthy correspondence between the governor of Natal and the families of the interned Afrikaners. Both EJ van Rooyen, on behalf of his wife, and Mrs Maartens of Seven Oaks, a sister-in-law of Van Rooyen enquired about the whereabouts and well-being of the three Adendorff women, and in the case of Mrs Maartens, also about Jack (Jan) Bester. After several enquiries the concerned parties were eventually informed that: “Mrs Adendorff in Intombi Camp well. Miss Adendorff and Jack Bester at Intombi. Have had enteric, but are improving.” This news was received a week before the siege ended. Van Rooyen, on reception of the news, immediately applied for permission on behalf of Mrs Maartens to travel by wagon to Ladysmith to collect the families in question. This request was diplomatically denied as it was impossible for the military to give permission to a particular individual to leave, without extending the privilege to all. The Boers would furthermore not allow it, because it was on General Joubert’s instruction that the neutral camp was created.²¹⁹

The Natal Afrikaners imprisoned in Ladysmith, namely Salomon de Jager, Andries Potgieter, Daniel Bester and Andries Meyer, were released from the prison and deported to Pietermaritzburg²²⁰ from where they were eventually allowed to return home in two groups on 31 May and 22 June 1900. By then De Jager had spent six months and two days either in prison or on parole.²²¹ The exact reason for his arrest and imprisonment was unclear, even to the authorities, because neither the criminal investigation officer nor the Pietermaritzburg commandant could explain to Prime Minister Hime why he had been arrested.²²²

When Ladysmith was relieved many local Afrikaners including women with bandoliers strung around their bodies, steamed towards the OFS.²²³ The *Natal Witness* reported the scene one Afrikaner farm, close to Ladysmith, during this time. Johannes Petrus Buys, aged 71, and his extended family fled his farm Rietkuil close to Modder Spruit leaving “furniture, implements, crops, stores, and most of the household goods, the outcome of years of peaceful residence” behind.²²⁴ This was done because after the relief of Ladysmith General Schalk Burger had indicated, that he intended to set up the “Hoofdlaager” near the farmhouse on Rietkuil. Fearing that they would be caught up in battle should the British attack, the Buys family trekked to the farm Besk near Mullers Pass in the OFS. Here they remained for roughly a month before trekking to the farm Kliprug near

218. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 15.3.1900, p.206.

219. PAR, PM 17: Enquiry and correspondence by EJ van Rooyen about the Adendorff’s caught up in the siege, 11.2.1900-27.2.1900.

220. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 7.3.1900, p.201.

221. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entries, 31.5.1900 and 22.6.1900, pp.339 and 377.

222. PAR, AGO I/8/75: Minute paper regarding the arrest of Salomon de Jager, 28.5.1900.

223. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, AGO I/7/9: Rex vs FJT Brandon, pp.219-226.

224. *Natal Witness*, 20.3.1900.

Dannhauser, and returning to Rietkuil on 18 June 1900.²²⁵

The main reason why the Ladysmith Afrikaners fled was out of fear of reprisal by the British because of their extensive contact with the Boers.²²⁶ These fears were not unfounded since the British forces started arresting all the Afrikaners between the Tugela River and the Biggarsberg.²²⁷ The brothers Gert and Arnoldus Boers of the Spioenkop area were, for example, arrested for aiding the Republican invaders.²²⁸ The military drove most of the remaining Ladysmith Afrikaners south of the Tugela as they cleared the area around the town for military operations. In the process the Afrikaners only managed to take along a portion of their belongings, while losing the rest to looting by the military.²²⁹

3.7 The unreliable Natal Commando

As was the case in the Newcastle and Klip River districts the Afrikaners of Dundee and the surrounding areas met, as requested by the General Notice of Schalk Burger, to elect their officers. The meeting was originally planned for Paddafontein, the location of the Judith DRC, half-way between Dundee and Helpmekaar, but it was moved to the magistrate's office in Dundee on 29 November 1899.²³⁰

Two distinct groups were present at the meeting held under the chairmanship of DP Wolfaardt (JP): loyalists, and those willing to comply with the notice. This made for a volatile mix which was ignited by the opposing views of the local residents regarding their allegiance to the crown. Wolfaardt made it clear: "...that if any Afrikander is so rotten as not to take up arms, he must be plundered and persecuted by any burgher who come across him." He took the argument one step further and declared that the local Afrikaners' allegiance to Britain was null and void since the British had vacated the area. This was disputed by AL Jansen, who emphasized that such an oath could not be broken. Jansen proceeded to warn all those present against joining the Boers. Another local Afrikaner, Barend Liebenberg, also did not mince his words and made it clear that he was a British subject and intended to remain one. His vociferous manner made him a marked man from

225. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Depositions by JP and JM Buys before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 21.6.1900; 1/LDS 3/1/1/16: Declaration by JP Buys, 21.6.1900.

226. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 5.3.1900, pp.197-198; *De Natal Afrikaner*, 13.3.1900.

227. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 19.3.1900, p.144.

228. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 13.3.1900. The brothers Boers became the first Natal Afrikaners to be sentenced for high treason. Arnold Boers lost his 17-year-old son, Arnoldus Boers (jnr), in a skirmish at Pieters Hill. He was compelled into service as a substitute for a burgher.

229. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 4.5.1900, pp.310-311.

230. PRO, CO 179/212: Statement by WW Strydom, 20.6.1900; PAR, CSO 2589: Statement by WW Strydom, 20.6.1900; PAR, AGO I/7/42: Statement by AW Illing, 22.5.1900; VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

then on.²³¹ Realising that they would possibly be conscripted, a number of those present requested passes to cross the Tugela. The request was refused and only passes to cross into Ladysmith were offered. Thereafter the loyalists left the meeting.²³²

It seems that the focus of the meeting then shifted to its original task, namely the election of officers. NJ (Piet) van Rensburg was elected as field-cornet and DC Uys as his assistant. The “Vierkleur” was, amongst cheers raised by a local Afrikaner, Barend van der Linden, and those present were informed that they had to attend a meeting on 2 December 1900, at Dundee to receive arms. Afterwards JC Vermaak was appointed secretary and with the assistance of Uys drew up the commandeering lists.²³³

The mood of the majority of Afrikaners at the time of the meeting is best summed up by an impartial observer, GC Bailey, a local minister in the Anglican Church: “A few are quite ready to join in, and a few, and those some of the best standing are most determined in their loyalty. The rest I fear will be frightened into taking up arms, although they would far rather remain quiet. From all I can hear there was a good deal of threatening... If the Boers had not invaded Natal, no Natal Boer would have joined; they are well content with British rule. As some of them say, What more can we obtain, even if the Transvaal do win, and if they lose, then where are we?”²³⁴

The meeting scheduled to supply the commandeered Dundee Afrikaners with weapons took place at Dundee on 2 December. The promised arms were, however, not forthcoming and the meeting was rescheduled for 5 December at Paddafontein.²³⁵ The Paddafontein meeting was not without incident and it seems that some Dundee Afrikaners again objected to being commandeered. Their leader, DC (Dirk) Pieters, read Piet Joubert’s proclamation to all those present explaining its contents which said that nobody could be forced to take-up arms.²³⁶ Wolfaardt (JP) responded by repeating his earlier statement “...that if any Afrikander is so rotten as not to take up arms, he must be plundered and persecuted by any burger who come across him.”²³⁷ The Dundee Afrikaners willing to join, then

231. PRO, CO 179/213: Letter Dr Dalzell to Attorney-General H Bale, 10.8.1900.

232. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Statement by AW Illing, 22.5.1900.

233. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901; PAR, AGO I/7/42: Statement by AW Illing, 22.5.1900. JC Vermaak, more than forty years after the incident, stated that Hermanus Potgieter had raised the flag at Wilson’s Store. See, VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.8, 1941.

234. Talana Museum, Dundee: Seven months under Boer rule, unpublished diary of GC Bailey, p.119.

235. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

236. PAR, AGO I/7/3: Regina vs JJ Webb, pp.52-53.

237. PRO, CO 179/213: Letter Dr Dalzell to Attorney-General H Bale, 10.8.1900; Talana Museum, Dundee: Seven months under Boer rule, unpublished diary of GC Bailey, p.121; NAR, KG 819: Letter signed by 96 Natal Afrikaners to General JJ Ferreira, 8.1.1900.

received their Mausers, bandoliers, and ammunition.²³⁸ According to JC Vermaak they were also issued with identification cards so that they could be identified in the event of death while they were informed that three horses would be compensated by the Transvaal Government. The so-called Natal Commando then divided into five corporalships under Cornelius (CJ) de Villiers,²³⁹ Marthinus van Rooyen, Hendrik Davel, Piet Nienaber and Hendrik Laatz²⁴⁰ and proceeded to march from Paddafontein to the laager at Helpmekaar which they occupied in conjunction with the Bethal Commando and other Transvaal forces.²⁴¹ At the front, carrying the Transvaal flag, rode the youthful Jacobus Kemp.²⁴²

The number of Afrikaners in the Helpmekaar laager possibly never exceeded 150. The Special Court, which was created to try rebels, would eventually describe their role as “conducting patrols and general military work.” These patrols were mostly carried out on the Biggarsberg, around Helpmekaar and on the road down to the lower Tugela River.²⁴³ In exceptional cases patrolling occurred further afield. A troop consisting chiefly of Natal Afrikaners under CJ de Villiers proceeded in the direction of Job’s Kop in the second week of December to investigate the movement of British forces from Weenen.²⁴⁴ On a later occasion a group of rebels joined the Bethal and Piet Retief Commandos on a reconnaissance expedition to the Tugela River.²⁴⁵ In February 1900, the Natal Commando, along with members of the Newcastle Commando under Field-Cornet Piet van Rensburg, rode a patrol to Umhlumayo. Their orders were to determine if the British could break through the Boer lines further south down the Tugela.²⁴⁶

It appears that the Natal Commando had no burning desire to distinguish themselves. Instead, they were very content to stay in the laager without rendering any active service to the Republics.²⁴⁷ The Helpmekaar Laager accordingly functioned in a very *laissez faire* manner with some of the commandeered Dundee Afrikaners only staying for brief periods at a time. GJ Jordaan for instance,

238. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

239. CJ de Villiers in time rose to the rank of commandant in the Boer forces. PAR, CSO 1661: Receipt handed by Mrs WA Bester to J van Rensburg, 2.2.1900.

240. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.8, 1941.

241. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

242. PAR, AGO I/7/26: Rex vs GP, JF and JS Kemp, pp.567-569. According to JC Vermaak Gert de Waal was the flag bearer. See, VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.8, 1941.

243. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

244. PAR, CSO 2585: Telegram Major G Leuchars to Prime Minister AH Hime, 11.12.1899.

245. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.9, 1941.

246. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.11-12, 1941.

247. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

remained for two weeks,²⁴⁸ HH Laatz (jnr) for three weeks,²⁴⁹ and JS Swart for a month.²⁵⁰ An extreme case is that of Hendrik van den Berg of Brakfontein number 2 who received a rifle at Paddafontein and then proceeded home to resume farming. The fact that he took a rifle and that two family members were at Helpmekaar possibly exempted him from service.²⁵¹ It seems that most of the Dundee Afrikaners stationed at Helpmekaar did what WA and PH Labuschagne did - as little as possible.²⁵²

So relaxed was the atmosphere that it was exploited by the Newcastle Afrikaners like, JB Low, who were unwilling to serve,²⁵³ and who decided to report to Helpmekaar rather than to proceed to Zululand.²⁵⁴ Likewise, on returning from Vryheid in January 1900, JN Boshoff reported for duty at Helpmekaar and did not return to the Newcastle Commando,²⁵⁵ while JP van der Westhuyzen tried to escape service by proceeding to Helpmekaar.²⁵⁶

It soon became clear that the ZAR did not want to commit the Natal Commando to the front line simply because most of its members could not be trusted. This stemmed from the fact that they were intimidated and forced into joining the Boers.²⁵⁷ While the loyalty of the members of the Natal Commando was generally viewed with scepticism, some individuals, especially the local Germans, were completely distrusted. When HGP Volker was eventually forced into service on 31 December 1899, he and another German, Frederich Fröhling, were sent to Modderspruit Laager because the fear existed that they would try and run away. Volker eventually deserted on 23 February 1900, and ignored all subsequent call-ups. On 10 April 1900 he crossed the Tugela to report to the UMR.²⁵⁸ Similarly August Wellmann, who was compelled into a period of service lasting for three weeks, was given very little to do because he was not trusted.²⁵⁹

As a result of this collective distrust, the Dundee Afrikaners, like DJ (Gert) de Waal and CJ (Cornelius) Pieters, who sought action, were granted permission to join the Boer forces around Ladysmith.²⁶⁰ Pieters, who only joined on 22 December 1899, served for nine days with the ZAR

248. PAR, AGO I/7/27: Rex vs GJ Jordaan, pp.617-618.

249. PAR, AGO I/7/16: Rex vs HH Laatz jnr and snr, pp.315-316.

250. PAR, AGO I/7/28: Rex vs JS Swart, p.622.

251. PAR, AGO I/7/27: Rex vs AP, TC and HJ van den Berg, pp.585-588.

252. PAR, AGO I/7/22: Rex vs WA and PH Labuschagne, pp.392.

253. NAR, KG 886: Letter Field-Cornet T Joubert to General L Meyer, 12.12.1899.

254. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs JB Low, p.458; *Natal Witness*, 22.3.1901.

255. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs JC and JN Boshoff, pp.519-520.

256. PAR, AGO I/7/30: Rex vs JP van der Westhuyzen, pp.690-695; *Natal Witness*, 1.11.1901.

257. JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, p.377.

258. PAR, AGO I/7/1: PAR vs HGP Volker, pp.14-16.

259. PAR, AGO I/7/22: Rex vs A Wellmann, pp.401-403.

260. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.9, 1941.

Artillery at Umbulwana outside of Ladysmith.²⁶¹

Unlike the Afrikaners commandeered in Newcastle and Ladysmith, very few Dundee Afrikaners became involved in civilian or non-combat duties. According to the available records, FJ de Jager, CF Marais and JH Ries acted as policemen,²⁶² CC and GS Kok of Driefontein did duty as postmen,²⁶³ PJ and JA Landman respectively as a bridge and station guard at Wasbank,²⁶⁴ HJ Niewenhuizen²⁶⁵ took control of some wagons that transported goods to the Transvaal, while John Craig accompanied prisoners to Pretoria.²⁶⁶

The Dundee Afrikaners stationed at Helpmekaar were clearly not content, especially not with the policy of the ZAR authorities towards the loyalists. In early January 1900, a letter to General JJ Ferreira, signed by 96 Afrikaners, argued that they were informed at the commandeering meeting held at Dundee on 29 November 1899, “that you either supported the Boers or you were against them.” Those who opted for the second choice were to be expelled across the Tugela within seven days. This did not happen and a third option seems to have opened up, that of remaining neutral. If this was a viable option some of the signatories indicated that they also would like to remain neutral since it was safer and more comfortable. The signatories further argued that if they fell into the hands of the British they could be executed for taking up arms. They therefore called on the Transvaal authorities, for the sake of the rebels, to implement the earlier choice for local whites to either enroll or be expelled across the Tugela. Only if such action was taken would the volunteers be protected against later charges.²⁶⁷ The reaction of the Republican Governments to the concerns raised by the 96 Afrikaners was to despatch a telegram to the secretary of state for foreign affairs stating:

We are informed that the British authorities have arrested on a charge of high treason certain African-born (*sic*) inhabitants of the Colonies of Natal and the Cape of Good Hope who had joined us, and as those persons of the Colonies who have joined us in the conflict are considered and treated by us as citizens of the State among the forces of which they are found, we claim that they shall be treated as prisoners of war like our old citizens. Any treatment of them not in accordance with the usages of civilized warfare regarding prisoners of war may be taken by our Governments as justification for reprisals on the British prisoners in our hands.²⁶⁸

261. PAR, AGO I/7/18: Rex vs CJ Pieters, pp.343-344.

262. PAR, AGO I/7/2: Regina vs FJ de Jager, pp.43-46; AGO I/7/3: Regina vs CF Marais, pp.54-57; AGO I/7/19: Rex vs JH Ries, pp.352-355.

263. PAR, AGO I/7/14: Rex vs CC and GS Kok, pp.387-389.

264. PAR, AGO I/7/18: Rex vs PJ and JA Landman, pp.655-662.

265. PAR, AGO I/7/18: Rex vs HJ Niewenhuizen, pp.336-337.

266. PAR, AGO I/7/18: Rex vs J Craig, pp.322-329.

267. NAR, KG 819: Letter to General JJ Ferreira signed by 96 Natal Afrikaners, 8.1.1900.

268. PRO, CO 179/209: Translation of a telegram from the presidents of the Republics to the secretary of state for foreign affairs, 30.1.1900.

Reaction to the Boer demand came from Alfred Milner who made it clear that it would be a “colossal blunder” with serious effects if rebels were to be treated as POWs. According to Milner such a step would not only acknowledge the annexation to the Republics of certain areas of Natal and the Cape Colony but also cause an extension of the rebellion in the latter Colony. The decisive decision by Milner therefore scuttled the Boer attempt to safeguard the position of the rebels.²⁶⁹

In the light of the above it is understandable why the Dundee Afrikaners seemed more inclined to harass the loyalists in the area than to serve the Boers. On several occasions they formed a body of men to carry out arrests and requisition property belonging to loyal British subjects.²⁷⁰ Intimidation tactics like these had some success and a number of men who did not join at Paddafontein subsequently did so out of fear.²⁷¹ Eventually 20 Dundee Afrikaners were convicted for delivering notices to loyalists, commandeering horses, cattle, and provisions from them and for collecting fines and arresting men who did not cooperate with the Transvaal authorities.²⁷²

On 13 February 1900, the laager at Helpmekaar was visited by Commandant-General PJ Joubert. On arrival he was presented with two addresses, one from 22 local Afrikaner women and the other from 61 local Afrikaner men; 35 signatories less than had signed the earlier complaint to Ferreira. This clearly indicated the unhappiness of the Dundee Afrikaners with their situation. The address by the men, some of whom had also signed the letter of 8 January, conveyed the sense of betrayal they were experiencing, and is borne out by the following extract: “...since it has all been done by us under the impression that we were thereby acting for the best interests of land and people.”²⁷³ A far cry from the nationalistic undertones Governor Hely-Hutchinson,²⁷⁴ and historians like Verne Harris²⁷⁵ and Mark Coghlan²⁷⁶ read into the address. According to Judge Mason an effort was apparently also made during the visit of Joubert to procure some commandeering order or notice

269. PRO, CO 179/209: Telegram High Commissioner A Milner to Colonial Secretary J Chamberlain, 1.2.1900.

270. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

271. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

272. For examples of those who took part in such actions, see: PAR, AGO I/7/1: Regina vs NP Jordaan, pp.17-21; AGO I/7/3: Regina vs JJ Audie, pp.62-63; AGO I/7/19: Rex vs JJ and AA Maritz, pp.349-350; AGO I/7/22: Rex vs AC Vermaak, pp.573-577; AGO I/7/23: Rex vs WFJ Prinsloo, pp.393-395; PAR, CSO 1632: Letter WW Strydom to commanding officer UMR, 25.11.1899; Letter Dr Dalzell to commanding officer UMR, 21.11.1899; PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

273. PRO, 179/213: Addresses of welcome to General PJ Joubert from Natal rebels and Natal Afrikaner women, 13.2.1900.

274. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

275. VS Harris, p.37.

276. MS Coghlan, *The Natal Volunteers in the Anglo-Boer War, September 1899 to July 1902: Reality and perception*, Phd-thesis, UNP, 2000, p.36.

from him which “would afford some excuse or defence to the people who were conscious that they had committed an act of High Treason.”²⁷⁷ Mason’s statement is supported by the minutes of a “Krygsraadsvergadering” held at Helpmekaar on the day of Joubert’s visit which indicate that the forced conscription of Natal Afrikaners was discussed.²⁷⁸

In the light of the concerns regarding their position as expressed in the letter to Ferreira on 8 January 1900, and the luke-warm reception Joubert received, it is clear that the vast majority of Dundee Afrikaners feared for their future and their lives, and did not want to be at Helpmekaar. Their objections to the Transvaal authorities, however, fell on deaf ears.

Soon after Joubert’s visit information that all was not well at the Helpmekaar Laager reached the British. The informer reported that Joubert had apparently removed all the Boers from the laager to Ladysmith and had ordered the Natal Afrikaners to return to Dundee.²⁷⁹ This proved to be but partially true. The Bethal commando was, in an attempt to alleviate the acute shortage of manpower, removed from Helpmekaar to the front but the Dundee Afrikaners and a small group of Transvalers from Vryheid remained at Helpmekaar.²⁸⁰ The reluctant rebels, and a few burghers from Vryheid, thus had the very responsible task of defending the lower Tugela River area and the Buffalo River border.²⁸¹

Generally it did not prove difficult for African scouts working for the British to gather information on what was happening at Helpmekaar. One informant stated that the local Afrikaners were forced to join under threat that their property would be confiscated and that they would be made serfs.²⁸² Another African, Tom, declared that Joubert had threatened the uncooperative Afrikaners at Helpmekaar that he would send the Boer commandos to compel them to go to Ladysmith if their attitude persisted.²⁸³ According to JC Vermaak, it was possible to gather this information because of insufficient security measures which allowed numerous Africans to congregate at the laager for meat, tobacco and other goods. Amongst these men were spies who could inform the British of the developments in the Natal Commando. In an attempt to curtail this Jasper Slabbert was given the duty of keeping Africans out of the laager.²⁸⁴

277. PRO, CO 179/213: Addresses of welcome to General PJ Joubert from Natal rebels and Natal Afrikaner women, 13.2.1900.

278. JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, p.377.

279. PAR, CSO 2587: Telegram magistrate Kranskop to Prime Minister AH Hime, 24.2.1900.

280. JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, p.377.

281. JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, p.395.

282. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Statement by Umtiloyi, 16.12.1899; PRO, CO 179/209: Statement by Umtiloyi, 16.12.1899.

283. PAR, SNA I/4/8: Statement by Tom, 26.2.1900.

284. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp. 14-15, 1941.

The relief of Ladysmith signalled the end of the responsibility the conscripted Afrikaners from Dundee felt towards the Republics. As a result the Natal Commando was practically disbanded and many rebels were granted leave to attend to their farms and livestock. Some of the farms in the area were also cleared to allow for Boer military operations. When JJ Kemp arrived back on his farm near Dundee he found it occupied by a Boer commando who ordered him away to the farm Vlaklaagte near Newcastle, where he remained ignoring all subsequent commandeering orders. Many other Natal Afrikaners likewise returned to their farms, while others started to retreat with their effects into the Transvaal.²⁸⁵ Only a small number opted to remain with the Boer commandos.²⁸⁶

Sensing an opportunity the UMR and Thorneycrofts Horse decided on 7 March 1900, to attack the Helpmekaar laager which was guarded by only 12 Dundee Afrikaners at the time. Reinforcements consisting of both Boers and Natal Afrikaners soon arrived whereafter CJ de Villiers took command of about 30 Dundee Afrikaners. In the ensuing skirmish, also called the “Battle of Pomeroy” by the Special Court, neither side suffered casualties.²⁸⁷

The last significant action in which members of the Natal Commando, assisted by members of the Ladysmith Commando was involved in, dealt with the safeguarding of moveable property. A sensationalist article in the *Natal Mercury* alleged that Trooper Nicholson of the Natal Police was shot at Colling’s Farm by a Natal rebel, Meyer, who was accompanied by another rebel, Gregory.²⁸⁸ This article prompted Prime Minister Hime to call for an immediate investigation into the event.²⁸⁹ The enquiry revealed that the area along the Sundays River was being cleared of Natal Afrikaners and that the Natal Police were confiscating their cattle.²⁹⁰ When Trooper Nicholson saw some Natal Afrikaners approaching he drove their cattle towards the farm of Fred Colling. Mrs Sannie Colling came to the door and told him that it was wrong to take the Natal Afrikaners’ cattle. In the process the cattle got entangled in the barbed wire around the house and Nicholson’s horse was shot from under him. An Afrikaner of Cundy Cleugh, Le Roux, then shot him in the knee and Otto Krogman struck him on the head with a rifle butt. The group of roughly ten Natal Afrikaners, including Fred Colling, then removed Nicholson and the African policeman, Tshwapana, to Helpmekaar, forcing

285. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900; PAR, AGO I/7/3: Regina vs PJ Meyer, pp.59-61; AGO I/7/18: Rex vs JA Nel, pp.331-332; Rex vs CFH Posselt and JCL Labuschagne, p.348; Rex vs SJ and WL Meyer, pp.360-361; AGO I/7/27: Rex vs AP, TC and HJ van den Berg, pp.585-588.

286. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.19, 1941.

287. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.10, 13-14, 1941; PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

288. *Natal Mercury*, 24.3.1900.

289. PAR, MJPW 74: Minute paper in which Prime Minister AH Hime asks for an investigation into the shooting of Trooper S Nicholson, 4.3.1900.

290. PRO, CO 179/213: Statement by Trooper ATS Boyle to Sub-Inspector Hellet, 24.3.1900.

the former to ride a horse. When he became too weak he was transferred to a wagon. According to Nicholson he received very little medial attention, was treated in a rough manner and was eventually transferred to Pretoria where he remained until after the occupation of the city by the British. The fate of Tshwapana remains unknown.²⁹¹

In April 1900 African Scouts again reported “considerable friction” at Helpmekaar. The remaining local Afrikaners were tired of rebellion and were threatened with punishment by the Transvalers if they deserted.²⁹² These reports were not unfounded, for on 13 April 1900, General Lucas Meyer confirmed that the remaining Dundee Afrikaners were returning home. He therefore instructed the Boer commissariat and the JP’s that no more clothes and food be issued to “Natal burghers.”²⁹³ Meyer also instructed Field-Cornet Van Rensburg to return the wagon and six oxen commandeered from Abraham Spies.²⁹⁴

3.8 Waiting for Buller

The termination of the Siege of Ladysmith caused the caving-in of the Boer forces in Natal. Numerous burghers lost courage and fled from Natal, others laid down arms and general indiscipline set in. Despite this, several thousand Boers dug in on the Biggarsberg, roughly 50 kilometres north of Ladysmith. Buller in the meantime was not allowed to take advantage of this, but ordered by Roberts to remain passive in Ladysmith. His sole action was to send out small parties to distribute proclamations and collect arms from surrendered burghers and Natal Afrikaners.²⁹⁵ The proclamation drawn up by Buller, claimed that some of the Natal Afrikaners were misled into taking up arms, and having realised their error were keen on redeeming themselves. If they therefore laid down their arms Buller undertook to present their cases to the civilian authorities for a more “considerate treatment” than those who remained in the field after the issuing of the proclamation could expect.²⁹⁶ The issuing of this proclamation angered the Natal authorities who felt that Buller “had no business issuing such a proclamation without consulting the Governor of Natal.” The second paragraph, which promised to treat rebels on the same footing as surrendered burghers, was frowned upon since it morally bound the Natal Government against its will.²⁹⁷

291. PRO, CO 179/213: Statement by Trooper S Nicholson, 24.8.1900. For the disgraceful treatment of Mrs S Colling during the investigation, see Chapter 10.

292. PRO, CO 179/211: Telegram Magistrate M Matthews, Weenen, 12.4.1900.

293. NAR, KG 885: Letter General L Meyer to Mr Hendricks, 13.4.1900.

294. NAR, KG 885: Letter General L Meyer to Field-Cornet NJ van Rensburg, 13.4.1900.

295. T Pakenham, pp.368-370. For a detailed account of the Boer retreat and British advance, see GP Torlage, *The British advance and Boer retreat through Northern Natal, May-June 1900*. MA-thesis, UNISA, 1992, *passim*; K Gillings, After the Siege: The British advance and Boer retreat through Natal, March to June 1900, *Military History Journal*, 11(3-4), October 1999, pp.87-98.

296. PAR, GH 532: Proclamation issued by General R Buller, 11.5.1900; *De Natal Afrikaner*, 15.5.1900.

297. PRO, CO 179/212: Minute paper regarding the proclamation of General R Buller, 1.5.1900-13.6.1900.

With the various rebel commandos disbanded and the Natal Army of Buller ready to pounce, the concerns of the Natal rebels reached panic level. On 7 May 1900, Field-Cornet NJ van Rensburg outlined the position the rebels found themselves in to General JC Fourie. Ignorant of the role of Schalk Burger he stated that they had adhered to the proclamation issued by Piet Joubert and were subsequently commandeered. Those Afrikaners who chose to ignore it were not, as stated in the proclamation, sent south within a week. The fact that the Transvaal authorities had not enforced the second measure, even when instructed to do so by Paul Kruger, meant that the sole defence the rebels had, namely compulsion, would, according to Van Rensburg, not stand up in court as the authorities would merely point to the loyalists to shatter the argument. To the Natal Afrikaners who sided with the Republics this was literally a matter of life and death, as they feared execution or the confiscation of their property. On behalf of his fellow rebels, Van Rensburg therefore pleaded with Fourie to enforce the second clause of the proclamation.²⁹⁸ That this matter had been discussed before is revealed by Fourie's response. He fully supported Van Rensburg and had written to General Louis Botha about this matter. Possibly because he had no response from Botha, he urged the secretary of state to bring the matter before the executive council of the ZAR so that the necessary measures could be implemented.²⁹⁹ Nothing more came of the matter, because the ZAR was preoccupied with the advance of Roberts and the imminent advance of Buller. The unwillingness at any stage to implement the proclamation fully, meant that the ZAR had from the outset deserted the Klip River Afrikaners whom they had compelled into service.

A lone Transvaal voice raised the future prospects which the Klip River county Afrikaners faced. In a letter to President Kruger, E Neethling, pleaded with him to put an end to the abandoning by their Republican kin of specifically the Newcastle Afrikaners. Neethling felt ashamed that the Natal Afrikaners were standing to lose everything due to their having sided with the Boers.³⁰⁰ This plea also fell on deaf ears.

In anticipation of Buller's advance, Commandant Thomas Steenkamp instructed his brother-in-law Hendrik Reis to burn all documents implicating the Dundee Afrikaners.³⁰¹ Not all commanders were careful or thorough enough though, especially while fleeing the British forces was uppermost in their minds. Consequently documents incriminating Otto Krogman and Lodewyk de Jager were found in the Pretoria Commando Laager near Colenso, which was vacated by the Boers in February 1900. Krogman because he had on 10 January 1900 commandeered 30 goats from Mr Innes, and De

298. Letter Field-Cornet NJ van Rensburg to General JC Fourie, 7.5.1900, as published in *De Natal Afrikaner*, 17.9.1900.

299. Letter General JC Fourie to secretary of state, ZAR, 7.5.1900, as published in *De Natal Afrikaner*, 17.9.1900.

300. NAR, SP Engelbrecht collection, A 371, 11, incoming letters to Pres SJP Kruger: Letter E Neethling to President SJP Kruger, 16.3.1900.

301. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.26, 1941.

Jager for buying an ox for £3 as rations from one Oltsch.³⁰² Documents implicating JH Breytenbach, FJ de Jager, G Adendorff and JJ Kemp³⁰³ and large numbers of Newcastle Afrikaners were likewise located in other parts of Northern Natal.³⁰⁴ Even documents which carried the instruction that they had to be destroyed after reading, like a letter from Field-Cornet NJ van Rensburg, were kept and found in Pretoria when the Transvaal capital fell.³⁰⁵

The Republican newspapers, and especially *De Volksstem* were earlier equally irresponsible in giving away information about the Natal Afrikaners. In the edition of 17 November 1899, the paper announced that Natal Afrikaners were to join commandos under Otto Krogman and Lodewyk de Jager. The 25 November issue elaborated on this and predicted that 1 500 Natal Afrikaners would join the mentioned commando. When the *Natal Witness* and *De Natal Afrikaner* picked up on these stories the names of the men mentioned were immediately forwarded to the criminal investigation office.³⁰⁶ The worst enemy from within, however, proved to be the *The Standard & Diggers' News*. In article after article the newspaper reported on the rebellious activities of Natal Afrikaners, incriminating them in the process. An example of such reporting was the 5 December 1899 edition which explained in detail the meetings which Afrikaners in Dundee, Ladysmith and Newcastle had held to join the Boers. According to the paper, "Knowledge of local topography is placed by the farmers at the disposal of Boer commandos, which are thereby enabled to effect rapid and effective movements to the amazement of the foe."³⁰⁷ *De Natal Afrikaner* called these articles part of the "Dubbel verraad" committed by the Republics. Not only had they misled the local Afrikaners into treason and rebellion, but the *De Volksstem* and *Diggers' News* proceeded to reveal their identities to the Natal authorities.³⁰⁸ Thus, when the forces of Buller attacked the northern parts of Klip River county they knew in advance the identity of some of the rebels.

On 11 May 1900 Buller received permission from Lord Roberts to advance his force north towards the Biggarsberg.³⁰⁹ Two days later the Natal Army was clearing the area around Helpmekeer. Using the information supplied by Africans, small commandos were driven from the area and cattle collected. General Buller made his headquarters at the farm Vermaak Kraal.³¹⁰ Within the next few

302. PAR, GH 547: Translations of documents found at the Colenso Laager, 17.4.1900.

303. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Documentary evidence relative to Natal rebels who either surrendered or were captured, 21.5.1900.

304. PAR, AGO I/7/46: Lists of Natal rebels captured as well as incriminating documents compiled by Lt-Col AE Sandbach, 10.5.1900 and 4.6.1900.

305. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 17.9.1900.

306. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Information concerning Natal rebels, as published in *De Natal Afrikaner* and the *Natal Witness*, forwarded to the PUS, 30.11.1899-2.12.1899.

307. *Natal Witness*, 16.12.1899, quoting the *The Standard and Diggers' News* of 5.12.1899.

308. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 5.12.1899. This article reappeared in the 24.9.1901 issue.

309. PRO, CO 179/212: Minute paper Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to the War Office, 13.6.1900.

310. RC Billington, *A mule-driver at the Natal Front. Transport experiences in Natal*, p.53.

days the British reoccupied the Dundee and Newcastle districts.³¹¹ With great tactical aplomb Buller continued to outflank the minimal resistance offered by the Boers. Between 6 and 12 June the Natal Army managed to dislodge the Boer forces from the Laing's Nek area in Northern Natal ending the conventional phase of the war in Natal and the 242-day Boer occupation of the area.³¹²

Prior to and during the rolling up of the Boer resistance three other processes took place; the arrest of suspected rebels by the military which will be analysed in detail in Chapters 5 and 6, the looting and confiscation of Afrikaner property which will be discussed in Chapter 12, and the flight of the Klip River county Afrikaners from the area.

3.9 The flight

The fall of Ladysmith set in motion, amongst a large number of Klip River county Afrikaners, a migratory process that gained full momentum as the dust of the Natal Army appeared to the south of the Biggarsberg. According to Assistant Field-Cornet DC Uys of the Natal Commando, an order was issued in March 1900 by the Boers that all white inhabitants of the Klip River county and their stock had to move across the border to the ZAR.³¹³ Either because of the order, or as a result of a collective fear, many Afrikaners, with wagons loaded high with furniture started to leave.³¹⁴ Some subsequently returned to Natal when the British started to advance to place themselves at the mercy of the Imperial and Colonial authorities.³¹⁵

On 15 March 1900, General Louis Botha telegraphed President Kruger from Glencoe, informing him that the families of the Natal Afrikaners who had joined the Boer side had informed him that they were concerned that the military tide had turned against them. Kruger issued orders that the burghers were to protect the families of the Natal rebels and where necessary, assist them in trekking with all their possessions into the Transvaal. He also made it clear that the process was to take place in an orderly manner and should not resemble an act of fleeing. The day after he had communicated with Kruger, Botha gave orders to Commandant Joubert, General Lukas Meyer, and the justice of the peace at Newcastle to assist Natal Afrikaners who had sought Transvaal protection, in leaving the Colony.

Botha relayed Kruger's order and a large numbers of Natal Afrikaners crossed into the ZAR with their effects. What did cause a problem in early May was the large number of livestock, including a

311. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by president of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

312. PRO, CO 179/212: Minute paper Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to the War Office, 13.6.1900.

313. PAR, 1/DUN 1/5/2/2: Evidence by DC Uys in the preliminary examination of JM van Rooyen, 9.3.1901; PAR, CSO 2897: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by DJ Opperman, 10.12.1901.

314. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 9.3.1900, p.142.

315. PAR, CSO 2897: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by DJ Opperman, 10.12.1901.

large number of looted animals, which accompanied the fleeing Afrikaners because there were not enough herdsmen to guard the livestock. To accommodate the Natal Afrikaners, farms belonging to people who have fled were considered as places of refuge.³¹⁶ This was implemented when some Natal Afrikaners were allowed to settle on the uninhabited farms of the New Scotland Company in ward 3 of the Ermelo district.³¹⁷

The endeavour to assist the Natal Afrikaner families meant that General Lucas Meyer could not adhere to the order of President Kruger to remove livestock and grain from Natal. The fleeing Natal Afrikaners were, therefore, a great burden to the ZAR, but in spite of this they were also fellow Afrikaners who could not be forsaken.³¹⁸

Despite the sentiments expressed by Kruger, the evacuation of the Natal Afrikaners turned into chaos simply because this was the least of the concerns to the commandos. By mid-May 1900 Commandant D Schoeman of Lydenburg was assisting 24 Natal Afrikaner families, who formed the rearguard of the Transvaal forces, to flee Natal. Other fleeing Natal Afrikaners closer to Dundee and Newcastle were, according to the landrost of Wakkerstroom, in trouble since they were about to be overtaken by the advancing British force.³¹⁹ By 19 May an estimated 100 women and 300 children, among whom there were probably Natal Afrikaners, had arrived in Volksrust. They had no idea where to go and so decided to remain in Volksrust despite an offer of free transport. Two days later refugees from Natal arrived in Middelburg to join other British subjects who had preceded them. As was the case in Volksrust, Middelburg was crowded with refugees unsure of where they were heading. In an attempt to alleviate the crisis the landrost requested permission from the Transvaal Government to commandeer abandoned houses and purchase cooking utensils.³²⁰

The flight of especially Klip River Afrikaners turned into a small-scale diaspora. The most popular destination were the Utrecht and Vryheid districts. These two districts were in close geographical proximity to Klip River county and easily accessible because of the flatness of the landscape. Large numbers of suspected rebels like PWC Jordaan,³²¹ TC Vermaak and GP and JF Kemp³²² of Dundee, to name but four, consequently crossed the Buffalo River. Some of the fleeing Natal Afrikaners, however, did not make it to the border owing to the oxen being exhausted. They were overtaken and

316. J Ploeger, *Die lotgevalle van die burgerlike bevolking gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902, Vol III*, pp.20:4-20:7.

317. J Ploeger, *Vol III*, p.21:13.

318. J Ploeger, *Vol III*, p.20:7.

319. J Ploeger, *Vol III*, pp.20:4-20:7.

320. J Ploeger, *Vol III*, p.20.

321. PAR, AGO I/8/80: Letter J Anderson to Attorney-General H Bale, 20.7.1901.

322. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 5.3.1901.

arrested by the British.³²³

Others managed to get away and fled further afield to Swaziland³²⁴ and Mozambique. Especially the latter became a popular destination amongst fleeing Natal Afrikaners as it provided a platform to depart for other parts of the world. One such example was CT Vermaak and his family, of the Dundee district. They crossed into Mozambique and then proceeded into exile in the Netherlands.³²⁵ Similarly other Natal Afrikaner left for either the Netherlands³²⁶ or the USA.³²⁷

Why did large numbers of Natal Afrikaners flee from the Klip River county, mostly towards the Transvaal? Firstly, some of them still truly believed that the Boers would be victorious and were prepared to continue the war as “bittereinders.”³²⁸ A second motivation, was the fear that they would lose their livestock, landed property and other belongings to the advancing British Army and the Natal authorities. Lastly and possibly the most important motivation was the fear of arrest and the subsequent justice that could be meted out. As a result the Natal authorities by November 1901, estimated that there were some 300 Natal rebels still in the field.³²⁹

Many of these rebels remained active in the Klip River county. As late as April 1902, it was unsafe to travel on the road between Dundee and Helpmekaar because of guerrilla activities. Described by the local press as “marauding gangs of Boers” or “highwaymen”³³⁰ the purpose of their operations was unclear. In his 1902 report, the Dundee magistrate fingered local rebels who functioned freely despite the presence of blockhouses, as the culprits. They were looting cattle and driving them across the Buffalo River, and taking horses, clothes, food and whatever valuables they could lay their hands on. Apart from looting and evading the British forces “the threats uttered against the surrendered ex-burghers living in the division, and the local Dutch who had remained loyal, gave rise to a period of terror among the outlying residents, many of whom spend their nights in the veld to avoid being trapped in their homes.”³³¹ The plight of these Natal Afrikaners is possibly best summarised by Byron Farwell’s romanticised tale of Piet, a Natal Rebel, who witnessed the scorched earth policy, sniped at the British, lost family members in the concentration camp, lost his beloved “Anna” and when peace came about became an “irreconcilable” - preferring exile to signing an oath

323. *Natal Witness*, 24.5.1900.

324. Foy Vermaak private collection: Letter JC Vermaak to CT Vermaak alias Miss C Herzog, 24.3.1901.

325. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.42, 1941.

326. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.43, 1941.

327. PAR, AGO I/8/72: Minute paper C Tatham to Attorney-General A Bale, 13.7.1900.

328. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.19, 1941

329. PRO, CO 179/220: Letter Governor HE McCallum to Colonial Secretary J Chamberlain, 8.11.1901. The motivations and treatment of rebels will be fully unpacked in Chapter 5.

330. *Dundee and District Advertiser*, February to March 1902.

331. PAR, NCP 8/1/11/3/2: Annual report magistrate Dundee, 1902.

of allegiance to the king.³³²

Others were less enthusiastic. In March 1900, JF Dreyer and his son, refugees from Natal who were resident in the Wakkerstroom district requested the military authorities of the ZAR to relieve them of military duties but indicated that they were willing to serve in other capacities such as bridge guards in the Wakkerstroom district.³³³

The position that the Natal Afrikaners north of the Tugela found themselves in by June 1900 is best explained by the freely translated questions posed and statements made in a letter from “een correspondent” of Newcastle to *De Natal Afrikaner*:

Who should we have approached for protection, our government that deserted us? Who should we have approached for protection under the Martial Law of the invading Boers? Now Natal Afrikaners are viewed as the lowest people on the face of the earth and not a good word is uttered in our defence. We will be treated as rebels regardless of the fact that three-quarters of those who joined were forced to do so under Martial Law. Now this whole district has been robbed of men and livestock. The Natal Afrikaner families must live in abject poverty-there is no grace.³³⁴

332. B Farwell, *The Great Boer War*, pp.368-369.

333. NAR, KG 821: Letter JF Dreyer to Commandant-General, 7.3.1900.

334. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 3.7.1900.