

CHAPTER 4

THE WAR EXPERIENCES OF THE NATAL AFRIKANERS SOUTH OF THE TUGELA RIVER AND IN PROVISO B: OCTOBER 1899-JUNE 1900

The experience of Natal Afrikaners south of the Tugela River during the conventional phase of the war is in stark contrast to that of their kin resident in the Klip River county. Only the Weenen county districts,¹ Upper Tugela, Estcourt and Weenen were invaded by the Boers. Of these districts only Upper Tugela and Estcourt were occupied by the Republican forces, the latter only for a brief period of time. In turn the counties of Pietermaritzburg, Umvoti and Proviso B, the only other areas in Natal with a significant Afrikaner population, experienced a different kind of war namely a pseudo-war waged on ethnic grounds against Afrikaners. The strategies employed displayed very little resemblance to real war but were based on suspicion and rumours and fueled by intimidation and persecution. In this chapter an attempt will be made to explain, describe, analyse and contextualise the experiences of each Afrikaner community south of the Tugela River, as well as that of Proviso B, for the conventional war period in Natal.

4.1 The war experiences of the Afrikaners of Weenen county - October 1899 to June 1900

4.1.1 Natal Afrikaners in the Upper Tugela district and the conventional phase of the war

The Upper Tugela district, with Bergville as the seat of the magistracy, spanned sections of the Weenen and Klip River counties and encompassed the lower and upper reaches of the Drakensberg, from south of Van Reenen up to Champagne Castle. The Weenen county section of the district bordered on Basutoland (present day Lesotho) while the area in the Klip River county had a common border with the OFS, making it very vulnerable to an invasion. Many of the residents of the district, like the extended Bester family, had both property and family members on both sides of the border.² As a result several families resident in the area owed allegiance to both Natal and the Republics.³

Five days after the outbreak of war the Afrikaners of the Upper Tugela district, under AWJ Pretorius of Oppermanskraal, PCD Bester and an English colonist, MJM Wales, asked the local magistrate, DG Giles, to attend a meeting to be held at Green's Store, Acton Homes/Venterspruit. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss what was to be done in case of a raid by OFS Commandos, or if a battle should take place on their properties. They also wanted to know if the government would compensate them for any losses sustained. Giles was afraid of attending the meeting as he feared that the purpose

1. Weenen county consisted of three districts, Estcourt, Weenen and a section of the Upper Tugela district. The latter district will, for the sake of creating a uniform picture, be discussed under this chapter. See the map of the Colony of Natal on p.ii.

2. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: My experiences during the Anglo-Boer War by Maggie Bester, pp.11-20, 26.9.1900.

3. Examples of such Afrikaners resident in Upper Tugela was AM, EM and HJ Pitzer who were Transvaal subjects and NJ Robbertse who was a Free State citizen. See, PAR, AGO I/7/33: Rex vs HJ, AM and EM Pitzer, pp.762-772; AGO I/7/33: Rex vs NJ Robbertse, pp.762-772.

was to ask him to disclose the point of view of the Natal Government, a view he was unsure of. The magistrate furthermore distrusted the loyalty of the local Afrikaners since AWJ Pretorius' son was on commando at Tintwa Pass and PCD Bester's son, a burgher whose rifle he had removed, was still in Natal. He also suspected that they "kept their friends and relations informed of the troop movements on the Natal side." Giles believed the solution to this problem would be to move the Afrikaners away from the Drakensberg into the interior of the district or into a laager where they could be watched. This idea appealed to some Afrikaners but others were afraid that their houses would be burned by Africans should they evacuate them. From the perspective of the Afrikaners it can be assumed, with some certainty, that they distrusted the Natal authorities, and especially Magistrate Giles, who had to admit that he made bitter enemies amongst them by confiscating their unlicensed and unregistered firearms.⁴

For instructions on what to do Giles contacted Prime Minister AH Hime and Governor W Hely-Hutchinson. Their directive was simple: Giles should use his magisterial duties as an excuse not to attend the meeting and instead send a person whom he could trust and who spoke Dutch, to attend.⁵ As far as the concerns raised by the residents and the defence of the district, no instructions were given.⁶

As a result of the lack of a defensive plan for the district, the Upper Tugela was easily overrun by the Free State Commandos.⁷ By late October 1899, eager Free Staters posted proclamations in the Upper Tugela proclaiming the area part of the Republic.⁸ The Natal authorities reacted speedily and issued their own proclamation informing the residents of the area that such a step was invalid and should be ignored, and if adhered to could result in prosecution on the charge of high treason.⁹ It is highly unlikely that this proclamation ever reached the Upper Tugela Afrikaners, and the fix they found themselves in is best explained by a letter to the *Natal Mercury*. In the correspondence the author explains that loyal Afrikaners of the area, despite having sympathy with the Boers, did not want to fight, but the annexation changed matters since they were now commandeered as if they were Free Staters.¹⁰

From a personal perspective Magistrate Giles found it regrettable that Upper Tugela was not

4. PAR, CSO 2588: Report Magistrate DG Giles, Upper Tugela, to Prime Minister AH Hime, 2.11.1899.

5. PAR, CSO 2581: Correspondence between Magistrate DG Giles, Upper Tugela, and Prime Minister AH Hime, 13.10.1899-15.10.1899.

6. PAR, CSO 2588: Report Magistrate DG Giles, Upper Tugela, to Prime Minister AH Hime, 2.11.1899.

7. JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, p.176.

8. PAR, CSO 2588: Proclamation announcing Upper Tugela as part of the OFS forwarded by FH Orwin, 30.10.1899.

9. PAR, NCP 6/1/52: Proclamation No. 119 issued by Governor W Hely-Hutchinson declaring the OFS proclamation null and void, 3.11.1899; NCP 6/1/52: *Natal Government Gazette*, 3.11.1899; *De Natal Afrikaner*, 7.11.1899.

10. *Natal Witness*, 16.11.1900.

defended as it not only opened up the Colony all the way to Estcourt, but had resulted in a successful invasion. He also believed that this was the signal for the local Natal Afrikaners to join the invaders.¹¹ Giles's observation seems plausible in the light of the fact that a commando of the OFS, under Commandants Strauss and Erasmus had, amongst its 180 members, several Natal Afrikaners, including an Oosthuysen and Van der Merwe and their sons. According to the British informant, Chief Ncwadi, Natal Afrikaners also rendered a range of services to the invaders: JN Scheepers transported goods to Bezuidenhout's Pass; MJ van Rooyen had some scouts arrested; the Lombard family assisted the enemy by feeding them; while AWJ Pretorius had apparently led the commando that looted Acton Homes, down the berg. The majority of the remaining Afrikaners in the district apparently also contributed to the war effort in one way or another.¹²

The information provided by Ncwadi proved to be only partially true. Almost all Natal Afrikaners, including those in the Upper Tugela were aware of the proclamation that warned against treason issued on, 29 September 1899, by the governor.¹³ The only Afrikaner of the district who joined the Boers upon invasion was the 19-year-old Johannes Jurie Bester of Abergeldy farm who was forced to do so by his father.¹⁴ It thus seems that the vast majority of the other 29 Afrikaners of the district who were eventually found guilty of high treason were commandeered during late November and early December 1899. Although the Special Court later rejected their claims of forced conscription it seems to be true, for why would they have resisted the euphoria and momentum of the initial invasion only to join in December 1899?

Once the majority of Afrikaners resident in the Upper Tugela district were coaxed into the fray, a large number were ordered to move, with their families and belongings, to the OFS.¹⁵ It seems that for many of the Upper Tugela Afrikaners this was the only way they could escape the war in Natal. A case in point is GI Minnaar who made it clear that he did not want to fight but was willing to reap crops for the government in the OFS.¹⁶ The moment their families and possessions were secured, a large number of the Natal men were employed as guards along the border between Natal, the OFS and Basutoland. Others took part in operations, especially patrolling towards Witzies Hoek and

11. PAR, CSO 2588: Report Magistrate DG Giles, Upper Tugela, to Prime Minister AH Hime, 2.11.1899.

12. PAR, CSO 2588: Report Sergeant von Puttkamer on his patrol in Upper Tugela, 12.11.1899.

13. PAR, NCP 6/1/1/52: *Natal Government Gazette*, 29.9.1899.

14. AGO, I/7/11: Regina vs JJ Bester, pp.259-262; *Natal Witness*, 10.1.1901. In local Afrikaner folklore JJ Bester lived on as one of the foremost sharpshooters at Spioenkop. See, VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.19-23, 1941.

15. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs WAL Bester, pp.169-172; AGO, I/7/11: Regina vs HAJ Leibrandt, pp.227-231; Regina vs GI Minnaar, pp.247; Regina vs JJH, GJ and WJ Swarts, pp.255-258; Regina vs JJ Bester, pp.259-262; Regina vs JJ Potgieter, pp.269-270; AGO I/7/12: Regina vs JJ, SJ and HS van den Berg, pp.281-283; AGO I/7/13: Regina vs JN, JN (jnr) and GJ Scheepers, pp.287-290; AGO I/7/14: Regina vs PJ and CCJ Bester, pp.300-304.

16. PAR, AGO I/7/11: Regina vs GI Minnaar, pp.247; Regina vs JJH, GJ and WJ Swarts, pp.270 and 282-283.

Oliviershoek, from the laager at Putterill's Farm below Tintwa Pass.¹⁷

Some, however, did return to Natal and, alongside the Free State Commandos, became actively involved in the war by both looting and military activities.¹⁸ HJ Leibrandt, for example, joined the Harrismith Commando and took part in the Battle of Platrand on 6 January 1900 and assisted with capturing and taking English-speaking Natalians to Harrismith.¹⁹ GI van Benecke, GJ (Piet) Swart as well as JN and GH Scheepers, in turn, took part in the attack and looting of the magistracy of the Upper Tugela by Free State Commandos and of farms and stores in the area,²⁰ while PJ and CCJ Bester and JJ, SJ and HS van den Berg took part in action at Thabanyama and the looting of farms belonging to English colonists like George Coventry.²¹

When the OFS Commandos, during May and June 1900, withdrew across the Drakensberg they were, as was the case in Klip River county, followed by some of the Afrikaners who had compromised their position as British subjects. Others returned to their farms while, AM, EM and HJ Pitzer and NJ Robbertse, fled to the Transvaal.²² The Upper Tugela magistracy eventually reopened on 11 June 1900 and the process of taking preliminary statements against the suspected rebels proceeded. By the end of 1900, five suspected rebels were released for want of evidence and 23 were fined or sentenced to various terms of imprisonment for high treason and/or theft.²³ Eventually 30 Afrikaners from the Upper Tugela were found guilty of rebellious activities.²⁴

The experiences of the Upper Tugela Afrikaners, after the retreat of the OFS commandos, are possibly best illustrated by the events surrounding Johannes Jurgens Potgieter of the farm North Dalton. He was a member of the Venterspruit Rifle Association and took the oath of allegiance prior to the war but was deserted by his government. Numerous military activities took place on and around his farm driving away all his neighbours leaving them as the only white residents in the area. The Boers, for their part, suspected the Potgieters of spying for the British, saving some of the cattle

17. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs WAL Bester, pp.169-172; AGO I/7/11: Regina vs HAJ Leibrandt, pp.227-231; Regina vs GI Minnaar, pp.247; Regina vs JJH, GJ and WJ Swarts, pp.255-258; Regina vs JJ Bester, pp.259-262; Regina vs JJ Potgieter, pp.269-270; AGO I/7/12: Regina vs JJ, SJ and HS van den Berg, pp.281-283; Regina vs JN, JN and GJ Scheepers, pp.287-290; AGO I/7/14: Regina vs PJ and CCJ Bester, pp.300-304. *Natal Witness*, 21 and 24.1.1901; PAR, CSO 2904: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by SJ Schoeman, 28.8.1901.

18. *Natal Witness*, 9.12.1899.

19. PAR, AGO I/7/11: Regina vs HAJ Leibrandt, pp.229-231; *Natal Witness*, 18.12.1900.

20. PAR, AGO I/7/10: Regina vs GI von Benecke, pp.240-241; AGO I/7/11: Regina vs GJ Swarts, pp.256-258; AGO I/7/12: Regina vs JN and GJ Scheepers, pp.287-290; *Natal Witness*, 21.1.1901.

21. PAR, AGO I/7/12: Regina vs JJ, SJ and HS van den Berg, pp.281-283; AGO I/7/14: Regina vs PJ and CCJ Bester, pp.302-304; *Natal Witness*, 24.1.1901.

22. PAR, AGO I/7/33: Rex vs HJ, AM and EM Pitzer, pp.762-772; Rex vs NJ Robbertse, pp.762-772; *Natal Witness*, 15.11.1901.

23. PAR, NCP 7/4/7: Annual report magistrate Upper Tugela, 1900.

24. For the names of Upper Tugela Afrikaners convicted of high treason see Appendix A.

belonging to an English neighbour, Spearman, and providing information to the British military regarding horses in the area. Despite these suspicions he was commandeered by the Free State forces. Potgieter's claims before the Special Court that he was innocent and compelled to join the OFS forces were later rejected in favour of the evidence of 17 Africans. After spending nine months in prison awaiting trial, and having lost all his movable property, he was eventually sentenced to five months imprisonment.²⁵

4.1.2 The war experiences of the Estcourt Afrikaners

At the outbreak of the war Magistrate RH Addison could report that all was quiet in the Estcourt district and that Afrikaners and Africans alike were continuing with their normal activities. This did not imply that the Afrikaners of the district were not concerned. Even before the war some had enquired from Addison what they should do. His advice was that they should remain on their farms.²⁶ Not all were satisfied with the advice given, for instance - Mr Hattingh of Springfield was concerned about the boastful talk of some of his fellow Afrikaners, and also afraid that the Republican forces would force the Afrikaners to take up arms against the Natal Government. He was, however, unsuccessful in persuading his neighbours to go into laager as they were fearful that this would be construed as a hostile act by the British forces. Despite his loyalist intentions, the magistrate was convinced of Hattingh's sincerity since he was the apparent cause for the Afrikaners of Springfield not taking the oath of allegiance.²⁷

The raging war, and the suspicions of Afrikaners, made the authorities very reluctant to allow Afrikaners to own firearms, even though they had ordered them prior to the outbreak of war. J and H Hattingh of Estcourt ordered rifles from JF King of Durban. King refused to forward the rifles without a certificate of consent from the Estcourt magistrate. The Hattinghs obtained the certificate and it was forwarded to King, yet the rifles could still not be forwarded as the Durban magistrate under instruction from the controller of firearms, wanted the Hattinghs to appear before him. Acting on behalf of the Hattinghs, CJ (Casper) Labuschagne (MLC), wrote to the colonial secretary pointing out the absurdity of expecting the two men in question to travel such a long distance to receive their rifles. This letter had the desired effect and King was instructed to forward the rifles to the Hattinghs. The colonial secretary, however, made it clear that he was doing Labuschagne a favour since it was normally expected of both the purchaser and licensed seller to appear before the magistrate.²⁸

The negative sentiments of Magistrate Addison towards Estcourt Afrikaners were confirmed by his

25. PAR, AGO I/7/11: Regina vs JJ Potgieter, pp.198-206; *Natal Witness*, 11.1.1901.

26. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 10.3.1900, p.143.

27. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 16.10.1899.

28. PAR, CSO 1628: Minute paper regarding refusal of Durban magistrate to transfer rifles to JH Hattingh, 14.10.1899-17.10.1899.

report of 23 October 1899, in which he gleefully described that the local Afrikaners in town “bore unmistakable signs of sorrow” at the actions at Talana and Elandsplaagte.²⁹ Addison’s glee, however, changed when the war came to the Estcourt district. Employing a pincer movement, a OFS commando under Commandant De Villiers and a commando of Transvalers, occupied Colenso on 6 November 1899.³⁰ This, coupled by the retreat to Estcourt of the British forces in the area which left the district open to the Boer invaders, caused most of the English residents to flee south to Mooi River with their livestock. Although few Afrikaners followed this example, exceptions did occur. Thys Marais and the Afrikaners of Umhlumba moved their stock to the farm of Lang Piet van Rooyen near Mooi River. Those who did not move were immediately subjected to rumours that they had joined the Boers.³¹

Meanwhile, rather than exploit the fact that the British forces had congregated in Estcourt and that reinforcements were yet to arrive in Southern Natal, the Boers remained passive until Commandant-General Piet Joubert arrived with two cannons and enough burghers to increase the numbers of the invading Boer force to 2 100 men.³² Especially from then on groups of Boers roamed freely and scoured the district either for booty or to supplement their commissariat. They would visit local Afrikaners, some of whom were relatives, lodge for a couple of days, gather information and during this time loot the property of those absent from their farms or from the buildings of the Natal administration. At times the Natal Afrikaners were coaxed into participating in these operations. Many a time the looted goods were returned to the houses of those Natal Afrikaners who provided the accommodation, implicating them in the process.³³

When Joubert’s commando retreated at the end of November 1899, the Estcourt magistrate reported that “the amount of damage to furniture is most deplorable, the destruction has been most wanton” and he had little doubt that several local Afrikaners were involved.³⁴ Numerous accusations of such co-operation eventually came out of the Estcourt district: JE Jordaan assisted in the removal of belongings from the farm Zuur Laager, JF Robbertse (jnr) helped with the looting of the Gourton Police Station, the wagon and oxen of JH Hattingh were used to plunder the store of Wilson near Frere and the goods were stored at his house, while the wagon of CJP Hattingh was commandeered by the Boers to gather booty.³⁵ Although, almost without exception, only the houses of the English residents who had fled south that were looted, there was a case in which the house of a loyal

29. PAR, CSO 2581: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 23.10.1899.

30. JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, p.366.

31. PAR, CSO 2583: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 6.11.1899.

32. JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, pp.364-371.

33. PAR, AGO 1/7/8: Regina vs JF and JF(jnr) Robbertse, pp.183-188.

34. PRO, CO 179/208: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 6.12.1899.

35. PAR, AGO 1/7/8: Regina vs JE Jordaan, pp.173-176; Regina vs JF Robbertse (jnr), pp.183-188; AGO 1/7/31: Rex vs JH Hattingh, pp.691-702; Rex vs CJP Hattingh, pp.747-754.

Afrikaner, JG Hattingh of the farm Rama, was also looted.³⁶ These actions did not have the support of the Boer commanders and constituted a flagrant disregard of orders issued by the commandant-general.³⁷ The damage wrecked by the Boer commandos is best described by Mrs SA Wood of the farm Longwood on her return two months after the Boers retired:

The first thing I happened upon, nearly a mile from the house, was a folding chair, in a plantation. Close by were two glass fruit jars, and a little further on lay one of my husband's Parliamentary Blue Books...close to the stable were some broken plates, a silver egg cup and the horsehair from my new mattress...on the manure heap lay the remains of a stain-lined work basket...below were sixty turkeys, shot, but not eaten...the doors were smashed with crowbars. Not a whole one was left in the house...everything, excepting two tables, bedsteads (one was minus castors), a washstand, and an iron-bound military packing case, was literally smashed to atoms...According to the accounts, unanimous, of our natives, our Boer neighbours, men who have eaten of our salt, and have been treated with every neighbourly kindness, went up to Longwood with the Boers and helped in the looting and general destruction.³⁸

Despite numerous such accusations, and even a rumour that five pianos were found in a single house,³⁹ only four Estcourt Afrikaners were convicted of theft.⁴⁰ Andreas, John and Daniel Oosthuisen and Marthinus Jansen were arrested near Gourton by the Natal Carbineers, who came under fire during the process. The belongings of local English colonists such as furniture, mealies and a mixed herd of 120 cattle were found in the possession of the men.⁴¹ The four were tried by a military court and found guilty of looting. A prison sentence of one year with hard labour, confirmed by Lt-Gen Clery, was imposed on them.⁴² Prime Minister Hime immediately requested that the men be sent to Durban where they could be employed on the breakwater in the harbour.⁴³

Simultaneously to the pilfering more legitimate military operations also took place. Having decided to withdraw his forces to Estcourt, Major-General Wolfe-Murray, in trying to scout on any Boer movements, ordered that an armoured train should run to Colenso on a daily basis. In the first significant action near Estcourt, a Boer commando under General Louis Botha, on 15 November 1899, captured the train, killing four troops and taking another 68 prisoners, including Winston Churchill.⁴⁴ This success was not followed up. Instead it was decided by Commandant-General

36. PAR, CSO 2584: Confidential report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 1899.

37. JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, p.373.

38. *Natal Witness*, 26.1.1900.

39. *Natal Witness*, 9.12.1899.

40. PAR, CSO 2583: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 6.11.1899.

41. *Natal Witness*, 9.12.1899.

42. PRO, WO 108/302: Extracts from the proceedings of military courts, 1900; *De Natal Afrikaner*, 19.12.1899; PAR, AGO I/7/42: Military court trial of A, D and J Oosthuisen and M Jansen, 23.12.1899; PAR, AGO I/8/70: Military court proceedings against A, D, J Oosthuisen and M Jansen, 4.4.1900-16.5.1900

43. PAR, GH 1445: Letter Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to GOC, communications, 17.12.1899.

44. JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, pp.368-371.

Joubert to avoid the British forces at Estcourt while conducting reconnaissance into Southern Natal. The strategy decided upon was that a 600 strong commando under Commandant David Joubert should proceed east towards Weenen, while the main force under Piet Joubert would bypass Estcourt in a westerly direction. The two units would then again join forces south of Estcourt on 17 November 1899.⁴⁵

The arrival of the Boers in Southern Natal caused anxiety levels to rise. In Mooi River rumours spread that the local Afrikaners would join the Boers should they prove to be victorious. It was claimed that not one of the local Afrikaners supported the British.⁴⁶ In the neighbouring Impendhle district an uneasiness also set in. Magistrate Boast was unsure if the local Afrikaners had created a laager at Van der Westhuyzens near Mooi River,⁴⁷ while he also feared that some might join the Boers and take control of the magazine. Boast therefore called for a better defence of the magistracy.⁴⁸

Such measures were not necessary because after several light skirmishes, followed by the Battle of Willow Grange on 23 November 1899, which the Boers claimed as a victory, the Republican forces started to retreat. The retreat was partially due to the arrival of the large number of British reinforcements in Natal and partially due to the hesitancy on the part of Piet Joubert. The main commando retired via Weenen and a commando of Free Staters via Ulundi, driving, conservatively estimated, 2 000 looted cattle and horses, and thousands of sheep.⁴⁹ This retreat to north of the Tugela River marked the end of the Boer offensive in Southern Natal specifically, and in Natal in general.

General Piet Joubert, after the retreat, suspected that the Boer cause was spent and urged President Paul Kruger to seek means to bring about peace.⁵⁰ Kruger refused to even consider such an idea, amongst other reasons, because it would amount to a betrayal of the Natal and Cape Afrikaners who had joined the Republican cause.⁵¹ Kruger's point of view was possibly more applicable to Cape Afrikaners because very few Natal Afrikaners, and hardly any from Estcourt, rushed to enlist with the invaders. In fact, only 18 of the local Afrikaners were found guilty of collaborating with the

45. T Pakenham, pp.171-175; JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, p.373; *Natal Witness*, 13.6.1900 and 15.6.1900.

46. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter EJ Boshoff to AA Boshoff intercepted by the Criminal Investigation Division (hereafter CID), 6.10.1899.

47. PAR, CSO 2582: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 30.10.1899; Report Magistrate C Boast, Impendhle, 30.10.1899.

48. PAR, CSO 2583: Reports Magistrate C Boast, Impendhle, 5.11.1899 and 13.11.1899.

49. T Pakenham, p.183; JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, p.373; *Natal Witness* of 13.6.1900 and 15.6.1900 contains evidence of the stock losses by English Natalians. WJ Carter of Estcourt, for example, lost 344 sheep and Herbert Blaker of Mooi River 14 head of cattle and 61 sheep.

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

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

Boers during the three week long operations in the Estcourt district.

The Boers, now under the leadership of the Natal-born General Louis Botha, withdrew to defensive positions north of the Tugela to face the 21 000 British troops and 46 guns under General Redvers Buller. At the end of November 1899 the Boers had therefore begun to prepare to engage in a defensive struggle along the hills just north of the Tugela River.⁵²

The greatest support for the Boer operations in the district came from the extended Hattingh and Zietsman families residing around Frere and Chieveley, the scene of the armoured train incident. The chief suspect from the area was Johannes Hendrik Hattingh. Africans taken prisoner were kept at his property,⁵³ he frequently had Boer visitors, visited the Boer laager, and was accused of providing the information that led to the capturing of the armoured train.⁵⁴ Another Afrikaner of the area who was linked to the armoured train incident was JG Zietsman of the farm Snelster who, with the aid of his mother, provided some of the Boers involved with milk and eggs.⁵⁵ JH Hattingh and JG Zietsman were not the only Natal Afrikaners who compromised their position as British subjects; W Zietsman and CJP, JM and CP Hattingh, also joined the Boers in their retreat across the Tugela River on 26 November 1899. Both the Hattinghs and Zietsmans made it very clear that they decided to flee because rumours had reached them that the Natal Volunteers and the British forces had threatened to shoot them.⁵⁶ Zietsman later added that they were afraid they would be blamed for the extensive damage caused by the Boers and accused of supplying the enemy with food while it was in effect commandeered. Fearing arrest by the Natal authorities for crimes they did not commit, they fled.⁵⁷

Other Afrikaners of the district who harboured similar fears initially congregated at the DRC at Moira, close to the bridge over the Little Tugela River,⁵⁸ before departing for the OFS. Some of the Natal Afrikaners who followed the Boers became/remained actively involved in the war. NJ Robbertse (jnr) took part in the Battle of Platrand on 6 January 1900,⁵⁹ while JH Hattingh who was without means, received a directive from General Piet Joubert to take charge of some cattle on behalf of the Boers, while he also acted as a special policeman.⁶⁰

52. JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, pp.372-385.

53. PAR, PM 18: Refusal of application by JG Hattingh to purchase gunpowder by Magistrate RH Addison, 10.8.1900.

54. PAR, AGO I/7/31: Rex vs JH Hattingh, pp.691-702; *Natal Witness*, 1.12.1899; *Natal Witness*, 31.10.1901.

55. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Rex vs JG Zietsman, pp.211-217; *Natal Witness*, 14.12.1900.

56. PAR, AGO I/7/31: Rex vs W Zietsman and CJP, CP and JM Hattingh, pp.747-754; PAR, CSO 2911: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by MP Wallace, 6.4.1900.

57. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 10.3.1900, p.143.

58. PAR, CSO 1628: Letter CJ Labuschagne to Prime Minister AH Hime, 18.10.1899, and reply on 19.10.1899.

59. PAR, AGO I/7/8: Regina vs JF (jnr) Robbertse, pp.183-188; *Natal Witness*, 30.11.1900.

60. PAR, AGO I/7/31: Rex vs JH Hattingh, pp.691-702; *Natal Witness*, 31.10.1901.

In the wake of the retreating Boers followed various units of the British military, as well as agents of the Natal colonial administration, such as the Natal Police and the Natal Carbineers. One of the first issues they had to deal with was that of the Afrikaners and English who resided on the southern bank of the Tugela River, opposite the positions occupied by the Boers. These inhabitants were removed by the military and placed on the farms of those Afrikaners who had joined the Boer forces. Only after the Siege of Ladysmith ended were they allowed to return home.⁶¹ The military, furthermore, seized 800 to 900 head of cattle,⁶² and thousands of head of sheep from the farms deserted by Afrikaners.⁶³ Advantage was also taken of the occasion by the British forces “to secure a supply of delicacies, such as poultry, fresh butter and eggs” from these farms.⁶⁴

With the Estcourt district once again under British control, investigations into the activities of the local Afrikaners during the brief Boer occupation started. Finding witnesses willing to testify, especially amongst the African population, did not prove to be difficult for the Field Intelligence Department, the Natal Carbineers and the Natal Police. A labourer of David Evans’ implicated JJ Jordaan, and FH Orwin identified 14 possible rebels,⁶⁵ while some Africans recognised Dewald Pretorius of Proviso B in the area. In the end it did not take the investigators long to compile a rudimentary list of the Afrikaners who had allegedly committed treasonable offences.⁶⁶ Initially it was estimated that 25 Afrikaners from the Estcourt district withdrew with the Boers.⁶⁷ By 27 July 1901, 18 Afrikaners from the area were still at large.⁶⁸ In the end only 18 men of the area were found guilty of high treason,⁶⁹ while IJ and John Meyer of Evertsholt were acquitted.⁷⁰ Others who were suspected of treason, like Miss L Neizel, JA van Niekerk and J van Aken, were banned to Pietermaritzburg.⁷¹

The main target of the British authorities in the Estcourt district was, however, Casper Labuschagne (MLC), resident on the farm Haasfontein near Colenso. In his report of 6 November 1899, Magistrate Addison mentioned that a rumour was circulating in Colenso that Casper Labuschagne had been

61. PAR, NCP 7/4/7: Annual report magistrate Estcourt, 1900.

62. PRO, CO 179/208: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 6.12.1899.

63. PAR, AGO I/7/8: Regina vs JF and JF (jnr) Robbertse, pp.183-188; *Natal Witness*, 30.11.1900.

64. *Natal Witness*, 30.11.1899. The economic impact of the war on Natal Afrikaners will be analysed in Chapter 12.

65. PAR, GH 525: Statements taken by the Field Intelligence Department, 12.1.1900.

66. PRO, CO 179/208: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 6.12.1899.

67. PAR, PM 20: List of Afrikaners of Weenen and Estcourt who had left their farms, 2.5.1900; PAR, GH 1446: List of Afrikaners of Weenen and Estcourt who had left their farms, 2.5.1900.

68. PAR, Archives of the Weenen magistrate (hereafter 1/WEN) 3/2/4: List of Natal Afrikaners from D District still not apprehended, 27.7.1901.

69. PAR, CSO 1944: Annual report magistrate Estcourt, 1901

70. PAR, NCP 7/4/7: Annual report magistrate Estcourt, 1900.

71. PRO, CO 179/210: List of persons arrested under Martial Law, 6.4.1900.

shot.⁷² This rumour was partially squashed when Addison received a letter from Labuschagne. Chief Faku was, however, not convinced and insisted that Labuschagne was wounded in the arm and that his horse had been shot. Although Addison passed this off as African gossip,⁷³ rumours that Labuschagne had given active support to the Boers continued and as a result Governor Hely-Hutchinson could inform Joseph Chamberlain, on 2 December 1899, that Labuschagne was, arrested under Martial Law by the military.⁷⁴ The arrest of Labuschagne⁷⁵ was followed by the arrest of WJ Pretorius, an MLC from 1893 to 1897, on similar charges.⁷⁶ Both men were paroled to Durban while the case against them was investigated. The Natal Government contributed two shillings per day towards their expenses.⁷⁷

From the outset Labuschagne was not perturbed by his arrest and wrote a cheerful letter to his wife in English playing down his situation. In a second letter to his wife, written in Dutch, and on government paper, but not in Labuschagne's handwriting, someone complained on his behalf about the food and the dishonour of being suspected. The Natal Police, under the guise that they were worried about the health of Mrs Labuschagne who could have been disturbed by the news in the letter, promptly investigated the matter. The prime suspect was Ds WP Rousseau of the DRC in Pietermaritzburg. Although nothing could be proved, rumours were abound about Rousseau's disloyalty.⁷⁸

It was difficult to prove the charges against Labuschagne. One of the accusations levelled at him was that he had received between £4 000 and £5 000, from the National Bank, in Durban in February or March 1897 to pay secret service agents. This money was subsequently transferred to Labuschagne's account in Ladysmith. According to the informant, Captain RJ Taylor, two other MLC's and a man with the surname of Hugo had also received money. When this information was revealed 8 December 1899 by HC Shepstone it opened a can of worms and the Natal Government instantly decided to investigate the matter. The criminal investigation officer was instructed to obtain statements from the banks in Durban, Ladysmith and Estcourt on any payments into the accounts of Labuschagne and Pretorius. This could only be done once the bank had received an order to do so from a judge in

72. PAR, CSO 2583: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 6.11.1899.

73. PAR, CSO 2583: Report Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, 13.6.1899.

74. PAR, GH 1301: Letter Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to Colonial Secretary J Chamberlain, 2.12.1899; *Natal Witness*, 1.12.1899.

75. How family ties between Natal Afrikaners and Republicans transcended borders are illustrated by the case of Casper Labuschagne (MLC). His brother, Jan Hendrik Labuschagne, a burgher of the OFS, was taken prisoner early in 1901. See, PAR, CSO 1672: Request by C Labuschagne to have JH Labuschagne paroled to his farm, 26.3.1901.

76. PRO, CO 179/208: Letter Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to Colonial Secretary J Chamberlain, 9.12.1899.

77. This was certainly an exception. Generally Afrikaners paroled to other parts of Natal had to carry their own expenses. Ds HF Schoon, for one, took exception to the double standards. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 3.5.1900, p.264.

78. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Documents on the proceedings of and the investigation into WP Rousseau, 11-16.12.1899.

chambers. Once granted, enquiries were made at the National Bank branches in question. No evidence was found of corresponding amounts of money paid into the accounts of either Pretorius or Labuschagne. As a result the spotlight shifted to the informant, and Attorney-General Bale approached the GOC for Natal to get Captain Taylor to confirm the information he had provided to Shepstone under oath, as this would have allowed the Natal Government to institute criminal proceedings. When the military authorities finally got hold of Taylor he denied having made such a statement and insisted that Shepstone had misunderstood him. Taylor maintained that he was merely repeating what he had heard. This shocked Shepstone who insisted that he took down the statement and read it back to Taylor who refused to sign it simply because he wanted to remain anonymous. To Bale, who knew Shepstone, there was no doubt to the accuracy of the latter's statement.⁷⁹

Labuschagne did not take his position lying down and he entered into correspondence with General Redvers Buller enquiring when he would be allowed to return home. Buller's response was that the office of the attorney-general had to undertake a preliminary enquiry into the case. This answer did not satisfy Labuschagne who could not help but wonder when this enquiry would take place for he had been arrested four and a half months earlier and had still not been charged. In the process he was deprived of his liberty as a British subject and faced economic ruin.⁸⁰ Labuschagne's letter to Bale elicited a prompt reply. The investigation against him would be completed by 4 May 1900 since witnesses who resided some distance away were subpoenaed. In the meantime Labuschagne could either remain in Durban on parole or in the prison at Estcourt.⁸¹

The position Casper Labuschagne found himself in, apart from the fact that he received a government stipend, was no different from that of numerous other Natal Afrikaner men. What did count in his favour was that he was an MLC, who was summoned by the governor to take his seat in the Legislative Council on 3 May 1900. Yet, if he had obeyed this command he would have been arrested for leaving Durban. As the opening of the Natal Parliament approached the *Natal Witness* picked up on the circumstances surrounding Labuschagne. The newspaper recommended bringing Labuschagne to trial so that the public could know once and for all whether he was guilty or not.⁸² The media coverage of the case, as much as the lack of evidence, resulted in the release of Labuschagne, in time for him to take up his seat. Pretorius was likewise released.⁸³

Although Labuschagne and Pretorius were the most well-known Afrikaners in the Estcourt district to

79. PAR, MJPW 116: Investigation into secret service money allegedly forwarded to agents in Natal, 8.12.1899-29.9.1900.

80. PAR, AGO I/8/79: Letter CJ Labuschagne to Attorney-General H Bale, 17.4.1900.

81. PAR, AGO I/8/70: Telegram Attorney-General H Bale to Prime Minister AH Hime, 25.4.1900; Letter Attorney-General H Bale to Prime Minister AH Hime, 26.4.1900.

82. *Natal Witness*, 26.4.1900.

83. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 22.5.1900.

come into conflict with the British, they were certainly not the only ones. In total 13 Afrikaners from the area were convicted of treason, a very small number considering that the district was overrun and occupied by the Boers. This in itself is also a clear indication of the determination of the Afrikaners of the area to, under trying circumstances, remain neutral.

4.1.3 The war experiences of the Weenen district Afrikaners

Shortly after the outbreak of war the Weenen magistrate, Maynard Matthews, reported that all was peaceful in his district. Only two Afrikaner families had left the area to proceed to Middelburg in the ZAR to honour a prior engagement. Before departing both families declared themselves willing to join the Boer invasion because they feared the consequences if they failed to do so. Matthews was very confident that the majority of Afrikaners in the district would endeavour to remain neutral.⁸⁴

The resolve of the local Afrikaners to remain loyal was soon tested, because on 16 November 1899, Commandant David J Joubert and 600 burghers of the Carolina and Middelburg Commandos entered the district. This invading force was the left pincer of an investigative probe into Southern Natal. The Boers took control of Weenen on 17 November 1899, and then headed in a southwesterly direction to meet up with the main force under General Piet Joubert.⁸⁵ The retreat of the Boers from the Mooi River area started on 24 November 1899. After an arduous journey, which included crossing the Bushmans River 18 times, the main party reached Weenen on Sunday 26 November. After several hours rest, during which time some of the burghers attended the service in the local DRC, the retreat was resumed.⁸⁶

Hours before the Boers entered Weenen for the first time the local Afrikaner and English residents gathered around the court house to hear first-hand from Magistrate Maynard Matthews, who had communicated with Commandant Joubert, what they were to do. They were informed to remain quietly at their homes and protect their property. Contrary to a promise given by Joubert, some properties were looted by drunken Boers and only the intervention of RJJ van Rooyen (JP), prevented the looting of the house of the schoolmaster. To end the looting, Matthews and the local DRC reverend, Andrew Milne Murray, rode out to Joubert to ask him to keep to his undertaking. Their venture met with limited success.⁸⁷

On the invasion of the district three local Afrikaners, CJ Triegaard of Schoongezicht, and JF and JA van der Merwe of Sophia's Rest, joined the Boers. Triegaardt and the Van der Merwes accompanied the raid towards Mooi River. On the return of the commando, Triegaardt, fearing prosecution,

84. PAR, CSO 2581: Report Magistrate M Matthews, Weenen, 17.10.1899.

85. JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, p.372.

86. T Pakenham, p.183; JH Breytenbach, *Vol I*, p.383; CJ Barnard, p.42.

87. PAR, NCP 7/4/6: Annual report magistrate Weenen, 1899.

proceeded to his farm in the OFS, while the Van der Merwes assisted the Boers in their attempt to free two burghers captured near Gourton by the Natal Police. This was the end of the involvement of the 18-year-old Jacob Albertus van der Merwe. Johannes Francois, however, continued to serve the Boers at the laager of the Wakkerstroom Commando near Ladysmith and rendered service as a policeman.⁸⁸ Along with these men, 33-year-old Philip Rudolph Buys (jnr), was convicted of high treason for accompanying the Boers south to Mooi River and for taking horses from an African, Usapo.⁸⁹

Suspicious also fell on numerous other Weenen Afrikaners and, consequently, the following eight were arrested as rebel suspects: GM Rudolph (jnr), JH and JHD McDuling, A Steyn, Nathaniel Scheepers, Barend Scheepers, Isak Marais and Daniel Snyman. All these Afrikaners were initially deported to Pietermaritzburg but were eventually released and allowed to return home,⁹⁰ possibly because the evidence consisted of rumours such as those spread by Frank Grant. According to Grant, G Rutter, the headmaster of the government school at Weenen, provided him with information on the Natal Afrikaners who had joined the Boers. Rutter denied this as he was in Pietermaritzburg at the time. He also stated that it was not the first time that Grant had fabricated stories in his name.⁹¹ When confronted, Frank Grant denied ever mentioning the name of Rutter as a person with information relating to treasonable offences, for he had only spoken to trooper Williams of Estcourt who had accompanied Willem Pieterse and CH Heine to the Pietermaritzburg Prison. Williams had apparently told Grant that Louis Nel, Gys Pieterse, Hendrik de Villiers and Roelf van Rooyen of Weenen were going to be arrested. One Walmsley, stated that Grant was again lying as he had a conversation with him in a tobacconist shop in Pietermaritzburg during which Grant stated that Rutter was the provider of the information. The Natal Government nevertheless took these rumours seriously and considered the appointment of a competent legal person to investigate the matter.⁹²

Eventually only nine Afrikaners from the Weenen district were convicted of high treason. They, just like the Afrikaner in the neighbouring Estcourt district, were well aware of the negative consequences they could face if they answered the call of the Republican brothers.

4.2 The Afrikaners of Pietermaritzburg county and the conventional phase of the war⁹³

88. PAR, AGO I/7/8: Regina vs JF and JA van der Merwe, pp.163-168; *Natal Witness*, 25.11.1900; AGO I/7/25: Rex vs CJ Triegaardt, pp.536-537; *Natal Witness*, 4.4.1901.

89. *Natal Witness*, 13.6.1900 and 15.6.1900; PAR, AGO I/7/1: Regina vs PR Buys and A Fuhri, June 1900.

90. PRO, CO 179/207: Letter Magistrate RH Addison, Estcourt, to under colonial secretary, 20.11.1899; PAR, NCP 7/4/7: Annual report magistrate Weenen, 1900; PAR, AGO I/4/40: Minute paper minister of lands and works to chief commissioner of police, 16.10.1899; PRO, CO 179/210: List of persons arrested under Martial Law, 6.4.1900; PAR, MJPW 72: List of suspects incarcerated in the Estcourt and Pietermaritzburg Prisons, 18.12.1899-1.3.1900.

91. PAR, CSO 2582: Statement by G Rutter, 12.12.1899.

92. PAR, CSO 2582: Minute paper on information respecting Natal Afrikaners of Weenen who have apparently joined the Boers, 7.12.1899-18.12.1899.

93. Pietermaritzburg county consisted of the districts of Ixopo, Upper Umkomanzi, Umgeni, Pietermaritzburg, New Hanover, Lions River, Impendhle and Ipoleta. See the map of the Colony of Natal on p.ii.

The county of Pietermaritzburg, including the city itself, had no more than a few hundred Afrikaner inhabitants. Although it was at no stage seriously threatened by the Boer forces, the local Afrikaners experienced the wrath of the Natal authorities and public, even if it was in a different manner from that of their kin in the Weenen and Umvoti counties.

The vulnerable position the Pietermaritzburg county Afrikaners found themselves in was driven home by the arrest of Jan Odendaal and Solomon Maritz of Noodsberg. Odendaal, while on business in the capital, was arrested under the Treasonable Offences Act and remanded for seven days. Although the criminal investigation officer admitted that it was difficult to prove anything against Odendaal, he deemed the arrest apt for its “moral effect” on the local Afrikaners, of which only the Wolhuters were regarded as loyal.⁹⁴ Odendaal’s arrest scared the Afrikaners from the neighbouring Umvoti county to such an extent that they felt they were unsafe in the capital where, according to them, any Afrikaner could be arrested illegally while the Natal Government merely stood by. As a result they sold their wool at Greytown and not as normal in Pietermaritzburg.⁹⁵

JF (Frikkie) and PH Tredoux, Thomas Hannah (married to a Tredoux) and SS Maritz who resided in Pietermaritzburg, but with economic and other links to Umvoti, decided on a different strategy. They approached the CID office to enquire why Odendaal was arrested, and why they were suspected of being rebels when they were perfectly loyal. Superintendent UCH Senge, the officer in charge, suggested that they inform the colonial secretary of their loyalty.⁹⁶ The men complied, and at a meeting that took place on 21 October 1899 declared their loyalty to the Natal Government and the crown. At the same time they complained that they were insulted in the streets for being Afrikaners, that the local newspapers were extremely anti-Afrikaner, and that they feared that false information could be lodged against them leading to their imprisonment. The men were even prepared to inform the governor in person of their loyalty, and to take the oath of loyalty.⁹⁷

Hannah was not passive while awaiting the outcome of their dealings with the Natal authorities. He regularly acted as a correspondent for the *South African News*⁹⁸ and in the edition of 24 January 1900 relayed the story of the arrest of Jan Odendaal and Solomon Maritz at the Pietermaritzburg Station, as well as that of numerous other Natal Afrikaners who were detained, imprisoned and then released, suffered economically in the process. He, furthermore, maintained that the jingoistic nature of the Natal press made the Natal Afrikaners suffer indignities and that this was a major reason for the

94. PAR, MJPW 71: Letter WP Rousseau to Attorney-General H Bale, 22.10.1899.

95. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter Magistrate HC Koch, Umvoti, to Attorney-General H Bale, 13.11.1899; AGO I/9/67: Letter Attorney-General H Bale to minister of justice and public works, 8.11.1899.

96. PAR, MJPW 71: Report Inspector UCH Senge, 21.10.1899.

97. PRO, CO 179/207: Letter Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to Colonial Secretary J Chamberlain, 21.10.1899.

98. PAR, GH 549: Letter GS Malan to T Hannah, 17.1.1900.

rebellion of Afrikaners in Northern Natal.⁹⁹

Negotiations with the Natal authorities, as well as the articles by Hannah in the *South African News*, did little to improve the situation. The authorities continued to arrest Afrikaners visiting the capital under Martial Law or clauses thereof. One such clause determined that non-residents had to register when visiting the town. Henry Joseph van der Merwe, Jacobus Nicholas and Johannes Henning Boshoff of Mooi River were arrested by the police in Pietermaritzburg when they were unable to provide such a registration document. They spent the evening at a boarding house under police guard, after a relative, Judge Henry Boshoff, failed to secure their release. The following day the men, who were in Pietermaritzburg on business, were brought before Magistrate Beaumont who remanded them in custody until such time that he received instructions from the commandant on how to deal with the case. That afternoon they were again brought before the magistrate, who by now had affidavits from the men and from Messrs Lister and Peters with whom they were conducting “bona fide” business. This, and the ignorance of the men regarding the law, secured their release on condition that they took the first train home.¹⁰⁰

Another member of the Boshoff clan likewise suffered at the hands of the authorities, this time the kind of verbal abuse Hannah referred to in his correspondence with the *South African News*. While on business at the Mooi River Station “eenige Engelsche Lords”, including the station master, verbally abused him, simply according to Boshoff, because he was a “Bloody Boer.” Under these circumstances Boshoff found it difficult to remain a loyal British subject. What annoyed him even more was the fact that the Martial Law proclamations seemed to be applicable only to Afrikaners since the English could say what they like. Boshoff made it clear that if he was ever again insulted by the station master, the latter would suffer the consequences.¹⁰¹ A similar spat between William Keyter and William Brewer, both of St Andrews Street in Pietermaritzburg, turned out differently. According to Brewer, Keyter and his friends called him a “verdomde rooinek.” Keyter denied this and accused Brewer of saying “You lousy Boer verneuker, come into the street and I will show you up” without any provocation. As a result Keyter took the matter to court. Brewer was sentenced to a fine of £5 and told to keep the peace with Keyter for six months.¹⁰² The experiences of Boshoff and Keyter were not unique and verbal slander of Afrikaners became such a problem that a member of the Legislative Assembly, Baynes, even wanted to introduce a resolution that would curb unnecessary slander of Afrikaners. An intervention by Prime Minister AH Hime prevented this.¹⁰³

99. *South African News*, 24.1.1900.

100. *Natal Witness*, 16.11.1899; *De Natal Afrikaner*, 21.11.1899.

101. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 31.10.1899. Constant quarreling between Afrikaners and English in Mooi River already started before the war. See, PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter EJ Boshoff to AA Boshoff intercepted by the CID, 6.10.1899.

102. *Natal Witness*, 28.12.1899.

103. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 29.5.1900.

Intimidation and abuse of Afrikaners by local English also took other forms. On the relief of Ladysmith local English broke into the DRC in Pietermaritzburg, rang the bell and hung all kinds of celebratory material on the church. This led to Ds WP Rousseau requesting a guard for the evenings from the local commandant.¹⁰⁴ When Pretoria was taken by the British forces under Roberts, “God save the Queen” was sung in front of the house hired in Pietermaritzburg by Ds HF Schoon who was banned to the capital from Ladysmith. Stones were also thrown at the house of P Keyter where many of the Natal Afrikaner suspects sent to Pietermaritzburg resided. The houses of other Afrikaner residents were likewise stoned.¹⁰⁵

In the outlying areas of the county things were no different and all Afrikaners were viewed with suspicion. The New Hanover magistrate reported that the four Afrikaners, known to have sympathy with the Boers, had been remaining quietly on their farms. They were nevertheless watched by the police.¹⁰⁶ When a young Afrikaner with the surname of Maritz arrived in Howick from New Hanover, on his way to conducting business in Nottingham Road, he was instantly labelled a spy and the minister of lands and works ordered the police to keep an eye on him.¹⁰⁷

Local Afrikaner residents by virtue of their ethnicity, were treated with the same suspicion as those from out of town, as illustrated by the case of Hansmeyer and Becker, employed as sorters in the post office in Pietermaritzburg. The chief press censor was concerned that their employment gave them the opportunity to observe which letters were removed for scrutiny and the fear existed that they could inform the parties involved. Postmaster-General WG Hamilton did not share these fears but nevertheless had them watched.¹⁰⁸ In the end no real evidence was found that they were abusing their position to convey information to fellow Afrikaners. While Hamilton did not regard either as particularly good clerks he could not give sufficient grounds for their dismissal but he noted that “if their removal be desired on political grounds, their employment can be terminated by a month’s notice.” This was the route favoured by Attorney-General Bale. The Natal Cabinet were, however, more sensible and suggested that one of the men be employed in the surveyors general’s office, while an effort would be made to find a position for the other outside the post office.¹⁰⁹

104. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Letter WP Rousseau to HF Schoon, 6.3.1900.

105. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 7.6.1900, p.353.

106. PAR, CSO 2586: Report Magistrate A Ritter, New Hanover, 13.2.1900.

107. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Report on the behaviour of Maritz, 21.10.1899.

108. This fear was based on the fact that hundreds of letters written in Dutch were detained by the CID for investigation. See, PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter Inspector UCH Senge to minister of lands and works, 8.11.1899.

109. PAR, GH 1455: Correspondence regarding the position of Becker and Hansmeyer employed by the post office, Pietermaritzburg, 10.2.1900-15.2.1900. Working in the post office as a Natal Afrikaner must have been far from easy as proven by the case of SBLE Maré, supernumerary clerk in the Durban Post Office, who left in February 1900 without giving notice. PAR, PMG 84: Minute paper regarding SBLE Maré leaving his position, 28.2.1900.

Apart from the suspicion, discrimination, unfair treatment and persecution the war brought to the only urban Afrikaner community of significance in Natal, that of Pietermaritzburg, it also provided them with the opportunity to reach out to both Boers and Natal Afrikaners alike. Substantial numbers of Boer POWs, captured in Northern Natal, especially after the Battle of Elandslaagte, arrived in Pietermaritzburg from October 1899 onwards. These POWs were imprisoned in the Pietermaritzburg Prison.¹¹⁰ They were joined by Natal Afrikaners, such as PRN Vermaak, captured as a suspect even before war broke out, as well as suspected rebels who were apprehended as the Boers retreated, like TH, JHD and JJ McDuling, CJ van Rooyen and IM and JJ Botha, all from the Weenen district.¹¹¹ Concerns about the plight of such Afrikaners made the Pietermaritzburg Afrikaners exhibit great resilience and stretched their limited resources to the maximum. Essential goods and £14 in cash were forwarded to Ladysmith,¹¹² and in collaboration with the Afrikaners from Umvoti a “Dutch Relief Fund” in aid of “Dutch wounded, widows and orphans” was started. By 11 November 1899 the fund was already £301.17 strong. Major contributors to this fund were SC and PJ Boshoff who contributed £15 each and PH Boshoff, Isaac Buys and PH van Rooyen who contributed £10 each.¹¹³

4.3 Umvoti county Afrikaners and the war - October 1899 to June 1900¹¹⁴

4.3.1 The Umvoti district (Greytown) and the conventional phase of the war

The Umvoti district was, at the time of the Anglo-Boer War, the political and cultural stronghold of Afrikaners in Natal. Thus, when war broke out, and especially after the Boers successfully invaded Natal, rumours regarding the Umvoti Afrikaners spread like wildfire. One such rumour had it that Boers were crossing into Umvoti county in twos and threes and were sheltered by the local Afrikaners. Another stated that there were 7 000 Mausers concealed somewhere near Pietermaritzburg, with one house allegedly containing seven. Inspector Campbell of the Natal Police, correctly so, passed this off as mere rumours.¹¹⁵ Even Governor Hely-Hutchinson got into the act. On several occasions, he expressed the fear that disloyal Natal Afrikaners from the Umvoti district could try and attack Pietermaritzburg.¹¹⁶ Another rumour had it that the local Afrikaners were erecting a laager between Greytown and Rietvlei. On investigation it proved to be nothing more than a small hall with a wire fence around it intended for church services and public meetings.¹¹⁷ Similarly information supplied by an African informer that a posse of 200 armed Boers were seen near Seven

110. *De Kerkbode*, 19.4.1900.

111. PAR, PM 17: List of suspects in Pietermaritzburg Prison, 28.2.1900.

112. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 27.10.1899, pp.34-35.

113. *Natal Witness*, 11.11.1899; *De Natal Afrikaner*, 21.11.1899.

114. Umvoti county consisted of two districts, Umvoti, which included Umvoti (Greytown), and Kranskop. See the map of the Colony of Natal on p.ii.

115. PAR, CSO 2581: Letter Prime Minister AH Hime to Campbell, 16.10.1899.

116. PRO, CO 179/206: Telegram W Hely-Hutchinson to admiral Simon's Town, 16.10.1899; PRO, WO 32/7863: Minute paper Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to GOC, Natal, 17.10.1899.

117. PAR, CSO 2582: Report by Inspector Meiners on possible laager building by Afrikaners, 13.10.1899.

Oaks proved, upon investigation, to be nothing more than the local Public Works Department (hereafter PWD) road workers. Even Boer refugees from Vryheid and Harrismith, who crossed the Tugela into the Umvoti district, were falsely identified as a major force.¹¹⁸

These persistent rumours were taking its toll and the English inhabitants of Greytown were starting to feel unsafe, especially after 50 Afrikaners held a meeting at the store of CJ Nel where they apparently discussed the taking of the local magazine and laager. The young men wanted to proceed immediately, but their elders persuaded them to wait for a more opportune moment.¹¹⁹ This perceived threat left the defences of the town in a quandary. The 50-strong local rifle association, from which all Afrikaners had resigned, felt that they could not defend the magazine. The Natal Government was in two minds on how to react to the “impending danger.” The feeling was that the small force defending the magazine would not be able to stand up against the attackers, while removing the arms and ammunition would merely serve to show distrust in the inhabitants of the Umvoti district. In the end it was decided to adopt a wait and see attitude.¹²⁰ To ensure that the local Afrikaners could not participate in such rebellious acts, the applications by JJ Potgieter and PR Botha to purchase ammunition and gun powder were denied on the grounds that they were not members of the local rifle association.¹²¹ None of these rumours were, however, taken seriously by Magistrate Herbert Millar, and a week into the war he reported that his district was quiet. Thanks to TJ Nel (MLA) he knew that the impromptu meetings held by Afrikaners were merely to share news and had no sinister objective. He could therefore afford to dismiss the talk going around as “wild rumours.”¹²²

The petty nature of most of the rumours, accusations and counter-accusations is borne out by the spat between the local blacksmith, Cornelius de Haas, and William Livingstone, a carpenter. While discussing the war De Haas disputed the fact that the British had large guns. Livingstone immediately reported the matter to Magistrate HC (Henry) Koch, stating that De Haas was spreading false rumours. Although he regarded the incident as mere gossip, Koch left it to the military to decide whether they wanted to press charges. This they oddly enough did and Koch was instructed to issue, under Martial Law, a summons against De Haas.¹²³ The decision by the military would have carried favour with at least one English inhabitant of Greytown, W Perry, a shoemaker by trade. Perry bombarded the authorities with illogical letters, consisting mainly of quotations from the Bible, on how they should deal with suspected rebels.¹²⁴

118. PAR, CSO 2582: Report by Sergeant Fothergill on a alleged meeting of armed Boers at Seven Oaks, 25.10.1899.

119. PAR, CSO 2582: Magistrate H Millar forwards anonymous letter he received, 23.10.1899.

120. PAR, CSO 1628: Letter WJ Slatter to AH Hime, 16.10.1899.

121. PAR, CSO 2581: Instructions to magistrates to issue no ammunition to non rifle association members, 12.10.1899.

122. PAR, CSO 2581: Report Magistrate H Millar, Umvoti district, 17.10.1899.

123. PAR, Archives of the Greytown magistrate (hereafter 1/GTN) 3/2/8: Deposition by W Livingstone, 6.2.1900-9.3.1900.

124. PAR, CSO 1643: Letter W Perry to Lord Roberts, 29.3.1900.

What these rumours and the outbreak of war served to do was to alter the relationship between the Afrikaners and English in the Umvoti district, resulting in a series of spats between the two groups. Both groups viewed each other with suspicion. As a rule the Afrikaners spoke as little as possible about the war and thus the English viewed the Afrikaners, with the odd exception, as disloyal. In reality, as in all other districts, very few Greytown Afrikaners were willing to assist the Republican forces, except if the latter gained the upper hand in Northern Natal, or were to invade Greytown *en mass*.¹²⁵

Happenings on the battlefield did not help to ease the racial tension. Claims that the British were victorious at Talana were received without any demonstration of emotion by the Afrikaners, while some disbelieved the accuracy of the report.¹²⁶ On the English side, however, the reception of the news “of the Glencoe victory” was celebrated by hoisting two small Union Jacks into the clock tower of the town offices. This created much unhappiness amongst the local Afrikaner community and those on the town board. In a letter of complaint the local DRC minister, GS Malan,¹²⁷ wrote that the basis of the Afrikaner complaints was that they had family members who had taken part in the battle and may have been killed. Raising the flags smacked of a rejoicing over the dead. Those who raised the flags were convinced by the argument and the flags were immediately removed.¹²⁸ One local English person who found the removal humiliating was a local tailor, EW Ireland, who complained bitterly to Attorney-General Bale.¹²⁹ Bale in turn complained to Prime Minister Hime who demanded an explanation from the local magistrate.¹³⁰ Magistrate Millar regarded the matter as a storm in a tea cup and not worthy of an official report since the flags were out of place and offensive to the local Afrikaners. The only complaint concerning the removal he was aware of, was that of Ireland.¹³¹

Millar was wrong in his assumption. Giving in to the Afrikaners also did not please an employee of the local board, AA (Allan) Duff, who raised the matter with Prime Minister Hime. Duff maintained that after the flag incident the racial stress in Greytown became so intolerable that he felt it necessary to request an appointment elsewhere. What bothered Duff was the “beastly race feeling which lately has become very conspicuous is more than I, a subdued Britisher, can stand, and as there is a move on to return nothing but Dutch Members at the next election of the (Town) Board my position will be

125. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Report Magistrate H Millar, Umvoti district, 14.10.1899; AGO I/7/42: Minute paper regarding statements by GW Rae, 26.3.1900.

126. PAR, CSO 2581: Report Magistrate H Millar, Umvoti district, 21.10.1899.

127. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter AA Duff to Prime Minister, 23.10.1899; Letter GS Malan to Glennie, 24.10.1899.

128. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter Magistrate H Millar to Prime Minister AH Hime, 28.10.1899.

129. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter EW Ireland to Attorney-General H Bale, 26.10.1899.

130. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter Attorney-General H Bale to Prime Minister AH Hime, 26.10.1899.

131. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter Magistrate H Millar to Prime Minister AH Hime, 28.10.1899.

intolerable...”¹³²

The day was probably won by the Afrikaners of the Umvoti district for when news of the relief of Ladysmith reached Greytown it was decided to send a wire of congratulations from the town board only, and not on the behalf of all the people, since not all of them shared in the joy.¹³³ When arrangements were made to celebrate the relief, the local Afrikaners refused to participate.¹³⁴ Actions such as these, constant accusations of seditious talk,¹³⁵ and of communication with the Boer forces by means of African runners, meant that the Umvoti district Afrikaners were soon all labelled disloyal.¹³⁶

Such a tag did not bother the vast majority of the most politicised Afrikaner community in Natal. They proceeded to collect money for the women and children of the Afrikaners imprisoned as suspects in the Newcastle district,¹³⁷ forwarded a consignment of 18 bags of flour, various bags of sugar, salt, rice, coffee and soap to Newcastle,¹³⁸ and raised funds for Afrikaners banned to Pietermaritzburg, of which £5 went to Ds HF Schoon of the DRC in Ladysmith.¹³⁹ HJ Martens went a step further and requested permission from the Natal Government to go to the Boer lines to assist sick and wounded Boers as he felt that it was his duty “to assist as well we can our sick and wounded brethren.” He based his request on the fact that Afrikaners in the Cape Colony were allowed to assist sick and wounded Boers.¹⁴⁰ The sympathetic attitudes of Afrikaners of Umvoti towards the Boers should also be understood in terms of family ties. PR Botha was the nephew of General Louis Botha, ZL Nel and his wife had family members on commando, PH and TC van Rooyen had a brother in the OFS Artillery, CJ Nel had family members on commando, PN van Rooyen had a brother on commando and C Havemann had sons, brothers and nephews on commando.¹⁴¹

What really attracted the attention of the Natal Government were the organised meetings taking place in and around Greytown. The first such meeting of leading Umvoti Afrikaners that came to the

132. PAR, SGO III/1/140: Letter AA Duff to Masson requesting a transfer from Greytown, 22.3.1900. Racial feelings in Greytown ran so high that a case involving nothing more than theft by Joseph Shennan from Nel and Thole became a “Dutch versus English” struggle. See, *Natal Witness*, 5.11.1900.

133. PAR, 3/GTN 1/1/1/2: Minutes of the meeting of the Greytown Local Board, 5.3.1900.

134. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 13.3.1900.

135. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Depositions by J Zuma, 12.10.1899, 6.11.1899 and 11.11.1899.

136. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 31.10.1899.

137. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky : Diary entry, 5.7.1900, p.143.

138. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky : Diary entry, 3.10.1900, p.353.

139. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 10.9.1900, p.442.

140. PAR, CSO 1629: Letter HJ Martens requesting permission to go to Boer lines to support sick and wounded, 20.10.1899.

141. PRO, CO 179/211: Letter C Taham to PUS, 24.4.1900.

attention of the authorities took place on 18 November 1899 at the house of Ds GS Malan.¹⁴² The information of what happened at this meeting was divulged by a local teacher, Joachim van der Merwe, to JH Kleinschmidt the school inspector for Dutch, who unbeknown to him, worked as an agent for the British. Kleinschmidt was immediately tasked to investigate the matter. To hide the real reason for his visit to Greytown he examined some pupils at the government school before proceeding to gather information. He was informed that meetings were held at the houses of Ds Malan, Ds Hofmeyr a local missionary who resided at Seven Oaks, LMJ van Rooyen (snr), and Philip Nel. Informal meetings also took place at the offices of Nel and Rossteuscher, two local lawyers. The arrangements for these meetings were announced during the Sunday church services, under the guise that they would be dealing with educational and religious matters. The meeting of 18 November centred around the issue of what needed to be done if the Boers invaded Umvoti. Apparently it was decided that Malan and other leading local Afrikaners would meet the Boer force, welcome them, and offer assistance. The ideal person to infiltrate the meetings was, according to Kleinschmidt, the original source of his information, namely Joachim van der Merwe.¹⁴³ This proved to be a mistake as Van der Merwe was totally loyal to the Republican cause and was subsequently suspended as a teacher for his political activities. He would probably immediately have informed his fellow Afrikaners that they were being investigated.¹⁴⁴

In reality officers were elected for the area at these so-called prayer meetings. Adrian Nel, son of Lang Louis Nel, was elected as commandant, Lucas van Rooyen, LMJ van Rooyen (jnr) - a former Lieutenant in the UMR - and Lucas and Philip Nel were elected as assistant commandants or field-cornets. This the authorities only found out almost two years later when young TJ Nel, after a family feud, broke ranks and joined the British forces.¹⁴⁵

Based on the various rumours, and in an attempt to nip any treasonable activities in the bud, Prime Minister Hime called for an immediate investigation into the doings of the Umvoti Afrikaners. This task fell to AJ Fraser of the Natal Police. In his report Fraser identified whom he perceived to be the problem in the Umvoti district, namely Magistrate HC Koch, and Superintendent of Police Meiners. Both men were German, attended the DRC, and were friends with prominent Natal Afrikaners. Hence their subordinates were afraid of supplying them with information regarding disloyalty, and when they did so the resulting investigations were unsatisfactory. This meant that communication between Umvoti and the Boer lines could take place without any obstacle.¹⁴⁶

With the authorities gaining little from the investigation by Fraser, a more direct approach was

142. PAR, GH 549: Papers with reference to the possible arrest of certain leading Afrikaners in Umvoti, 29.11.1899.

143. PAR, GH 549: Letter JH Kleinschmidt to Inspector WCH George, 30.11.1899.

144. PAR, AGO I/8/70: Letter Minister of Education H Bale to minister of lands and works, 27.4.1900.

145. PAR, SNA I/4/9: Information given by TJ Nel on treasonable acts of Afrikaners in Umvoti, 5.8.1901-3.10.1901.

146. PAR, GH 549: Report by AJ Fraser, no date.

decided upon. While away in Pietermaritzburg, the house of IM van Rooyen, previously the president of the Seven Oaks Rifle Association who refused to take the oath of allegiance under the new rules, was searched by 40 members of the Sterk Spruit Rifle Association.¹⁴⁷ Apart from searching every room, Mrs Van Rooyen was also questioned about provisions such as mealies, forage, tinned meat and bread. Van Rooyen complained bitterly to Magistrate Koch who could do nothing, since under Martial Law, the military had the authority to conduct searches.¹⁴⁸

As part of this more direct approach the colonial authorities kept a close eye on the correspondence of the Umvoti Afrikaners.¹⁴⁹ A letter mailed in Greytown on 6 November 1899, by Sarah Strydom to Mrs PH Tredoux, which stated that there were only six families left in the neighbourhood and that the rest had left for the Transvaal, prompted an enquiry by the Natal Police. In a thorough investigation Sub-Inspector Meiners tracked down every Strydom resident in Natal. Some resided near Dundee and one in Proviso B, but none in Umvoti. Meiners finally resolved the enquiry when he discovered that Gert Strydom of Proviso B and his wife Sarah had moved to Umvoti and that her letter therefore did not refer to Umvoti, but to Proviso B.¹⁵⁰

The year 1900 arrived with the Natal authorities making little headway in their investigation into the doings of the Greytown Afrikaners. Gathering information on them did not prove to be difficult but reliable intelligence proved to be the problem. One SB Jones, a self appointed spy, informed the authorities that Philip R Botha, his son, and CE Grundlingh who had arrived from the Cape Colony, needed to be treated with suspicion. He also implicated colonial stalwarts like Dr Dalzell, AJ Oldacre, WH Tatham, and Magistrate Hugo. Jones, furthermore claimed he had heard that the Boers would be making a rush for Greytown where they would be joined by the local Afrikaners and jointly launch an assault on Pietermaritzburg.¹⁵¹ This was corroborated by African witnesses who added they had heard that the local Afrikaners would rise up if the leading Umvoti men were arrested.¹⁵²

Once again the Natal authorities launched an investigation, this time conducted by Inspector Campbell. Campbell decided that in “trying to collect information against Dutch residents” interviewing Africans residing in the area would be the best strategy. This approach did not succeed as the Africans were afraid to provide evidence against Afrikaners out of fear that they would be evicted from the farms. He did, however, manage to compile a lengthy list of “malcontents and Boer

147. PAR, CSO 1632: Letter C Tatham to PUS, 4.12.1899.

148. PAR, 1/GTN 3/2/7: Declaration by IM van Rooyen regarding the conduct of the local rifle association, 2.12.1899-9.12.1899.

149. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Originals and translations of letters obtained by the criminal investigation officer, 8.11.1899.

150. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Investigation into letter written by SJ Strydom, 6.11.1899-13.11.1899.

151. PAR GH 549: Letter SB Jones to HC Simpson, 22.1.1900.

152. PAR, GH 549: Letter HC Simpson to Capt K Herbert, 27.1.1900.

sympathisers in Greytown” containing the names of Afrikaners already under suspicion.¹⁵³ Campbell’s list was supported by other lists which included some of the names he mentioned. The bottom line was that these lists did not constitute evidence. Attorney-General Henry Bale therefore, with the support of Governor Hely-Hutchinson, decided not to arrest any of the men.¹⁵⁴

One of the names that cropped up in all the investigations and compiled lists was that of Magistrate HC Koch. The evidence against Koch proved to be more concrete. Anthony Petrus Keyter and his son-in-law, Charles Jerome, reported him to the Intelligence Department of the Natal Government for having said that Britain was not going to have things his own way during the war, and for warning Keyter against the jingoism of his son-in-law. The pair also accused Koch of deeming it legally fair to release the three Natal Afrikaner prisoners who were brought from Helpmekaar by the UMR. Koch’s behaviour and statements were, as far as they were concerned, anti-British. When he received the complaints Attorney-General Bale requested an explanation from Koch.¹⁵⁵ In a lengthy report Koch disputed the claims against him and offered a plausible explanation for each of the allegations. To him this was nothing more than an effort by Thos Tatham to get rid of him so that he could rule the Greytown district. The Natal Government accepted Koch’s explanation, concluding that his conduct was “indiscreet.”¹⁵⁶ This was, however, not the end of Koch’s troubles. Lt-Col E Bethune described his conduct as “generally unreliable and unsatisfactory.”¹⁵⁷ A letter from Koch to DC (Vaal Dirk) Uys (MLC), in which he suggested that ICJ Vermaak, a rebel from Proviso B, be sent a message so that he could save his farm which was to be sold to pay FW White the money owed to him, was interpreted by Thomas Maxwell, the magistrate for Melmoth, as communicating with a rebel. For reasons unknown the government again took a lenient view, pointing out that prior to his appointment as a magistrate Koch acted as a legal advisor to Natal Afrikaners.¹⁵⁸

Since the colonial authorities were making no headway with their investigations into the actions of the Umvoti Afrikaners, it was hoped that the arrival in March 1900, of Lt-Col Bethune and his force, would bring better luck. Bethune indicated that if the GOC had no orders for him he wanted to distribute troops on all the main roads to “keep all the Dutch farmers in order who are practically rebels though they did not rise.” In addition he believed that he had a very strong case against a Afrikaner that had been signalling to the Boers. The suspect was followed for ten days but managed, just as Bethune and his men thought they had the “swine”, to escape.¹⁵⁹ When the Imperial Light

153. PAR, GH 549: Report Inspector Campbell to the chief commissioner of police, 23.3.1900.

154. PAR, GH 549: Papers with reference to the arrest of certain leading men at Greytown, 29.11.1899-7.4.1900.

155. PAR, CSO 2586: Depositions made by AP Keyter and C Jerome, 23.2.1900-26.2.1900.

156. PAR, CSO 2586: Papers relative to the conduct of Magistrate HC Koch, 26.2.1900-13.3.1900.

157. PAR, CSO 2586: Telegram Lt-Col E Bethune to GOC Natal, 17.2.1900.

158. PAR, CSO 2586: Investigation into the correspondence between Magistrate HC Koch and DC Uys, 8.2.1900-26.2.1900.

159. PRO, WO 132/20: Letter Lt-Col E Bethune to Lt-Col AE Sandbach, 13.4.1900.

Infantry arrived in Greytown to join Bethune's Mounted Infantry, their arrival was "viewed with ill-disguised rancour" by the local Afrikaners. At the same time these Afrikaners apparently benefitted from the business they did with the soldiers.¹⁶⁰

Unperturbed, the Umvoti Afrikaners continued to pursue pro-Boer political agendas. One such agenda centred around the creation of a Natal Conciliation Committee, similar to the ones created in London and Cape Town.¹⁶¹ To promote this idea Thos Hannah approached Ds GS Malan and asked him to speak to the leading Afrikaners of Umvoti.¹⁶² Malan did this and on 13 April 1900, under the chairmanship of Hannah, a meeting was held in Greytown to establish a conciliation committee. The rationale for the establishment of the committee was to assist with the dissemination of information regarding the war, to help maintain peace in Natal, to support those who had suffered during the war, and to re-establish goodwill between Afrikaners and English in South Africa by recognising the claims of both parties. LJ Nel was elected chairman and the various other positions were filled by PR and TJ Botha, LL Nel, PH van Rooyen, T Hannah, CJ Nel, TC and PN van Rooyen, JHB, SW and HE Cadle, and C Havemann. Two resolutions were adopted, one which stated that if any future settlement did not respect the independence of the Transvaal peace and progress in South Africa would be fraught with danger. Hannah forwarded the minutes of the meeting to Governor Hely-Hutchinson with the request that they be submitted to High Commissioner Milner for publication in the next blue book.¹⁶³

The reaction of the governor to the high ideals of the committee was to call for a police investigation into the affairs of Hannah and the other members of the committee. This time the task fell to Inspector WJ Clarke who, like his predecessors, could not come up with much apart from the fact that all the members of the committee had relatives fighting on the Boer side. In the case of Hannah, Clarke procured more information. Hannah, who originally came from Malmesbury in the Cape Colony, and brought with him a certain sophistication and some political aspirations, was politically very active both in Pietermaritzburg and in Greytown.¹⁶⁴ He came to Natal via Johannesburg and tried to start a business in Pietermaritzburg but went insolvent. Since the outbreak of the war he had been "stumping this county (Umvoti) obtaining the signatures of Dutch men, women and children, to some document or documents." Clarke also supplied the governor with intercepted letters exchanged between Hannah and FJ Centlivres in which the latter thanked him for his letters which were "doing an immense deal of good in London." In his reply Hannah asked Centlivres a favour namely to assist him in getting a good Afrikaner lawyer and doctor from the Cape Colony to settle in Umvoti as the

160. CHS Boscawen-Wright, *With the Imperial Light Infantry through Natal*, pp.65-67.

161. *South African News*, 28.2.1900.

162. PAR, GH 549: Letter GS Malan to T Hannah, 17.1.1900.

163. *Natal Witness*, 24.4.1900; PRO, CO 179/211: Minutes of Natal Conciliation Committee meeting, 13.4.1900.

164. PRO, CO 179/211: Letter T Hannah to JH Hofmeyr, 4.4.1900.

Afrikaners were tired of British insults and decided to boycott English businesses and import their own people. Hely-Hutchinson forwarded all this information to Chamberlain. According to Hannah, in the end nothing much came of the Natal Conciliation Committee because of Martial Law and the fact that most Afrikaners resided on farms.¹⁶⁵

The politicised Afrikaners in Greytown did, however, find other ways to show their discontent about the lot of the Republics. At a meeting in Greytown they made their point of view very clear: the Boer Republics must remain independent.¹⁶⁶ Petitions in this regard were forwarded not only from Greytown, but also from other parts of Natal, to Queen Victoria. The editor of *De Natal Afrikaner* warned against such political practices since it was contrary to British policy. Even more problematic for the Umvoti Afrikaners, according to the newspaper, was that they tainted themselves as rebels and that such petitions in favour of the Boers would merely serve as evidence and make a mockery of the statement in the petition that they were loyal.¹⁶⁷

In reality *De Natal Afrikaner* was wrong. PH van Rooyen of Umvoti who stated at the annual Farmers' Congress that not a single Afrikaner in the Umvoti county was disloyal,¹⁶⁸ was closer to the truth. Despite unconfirmed rumours that the following Afrikaners had joined the Boers: Hoffman who was residing on the farm of Piet van Rooyen near Rietvlei, Meyer, a teacher on the farm of Philip Nel near Kranskop,¹⁶⁹ and AL Pretorius of Greytown,¹⁷⁰ only one Afrikaner of the Umvoti district, LC Hansmeyer of Rose Cottage, was found guilty of treason for assisting MP and GE de Jager to cross the Tugela to join the Boers. He was fined £20.¹⁷¹

4.3.2 Kranskop district Afrikaners and the Anglo-Boer War

The outbreak of war made the Afrikaners of Kranskop, as it did the others in districts south of the Tugela, worry about their safety. In this case the professed fear was not for a Boer or British attack, but for a possible raid by Africans. In an attempt to address this issue, WG Havemann, Petrus Nel, John Landsberg, Philip Vermaak, LMJ van Rooyen junior and senior and C Keyter approached Magistrate FP Shuter with the proposal of forming a guard to assist the government in protecting the district against a possible African uprising. Havemann, the chief spokesperson, with the support of the others suggested that a meeting to the effect be held on 19 October 1899 in the court house under

165. PRO, CO 179/211: Documents related to the Natal Conciliation Committee, 26.3.1900-2.5.1900.

166. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 1.5.1900.

167. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 27.3.1900.

168. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 1.5.1900.

169. PAR, SNA I/4/9: Information given by TJ Nel on acts of treason by Afrikaners in Umvoti, 5.8.1901-3.10.1901.

170. War Museum of the Boer Republics (hereafter WM), 2056: Memoirs of AL Pretorius, 30.6.1941.

171. PAR, SNA I/4/9: Information given by TJ Nel on acts of treason by Afrikaners in Umvoti, 5.8.1901-3.10.1901.

the chairmanship of the magistrate. On granting permission for the meeting the prime minister described the Afrikaner fears of an African uprising as “mortal funk” and possibly a smoke screen for a hidden agenda. Prime Minister Hime therefore suggested that someone who not only understood Dutch, but could write shorthand, should attend.¹⁷²

The meeting was attended by 27 people, mostly young Afrikaner men. The first resolution moved was that of Havemann who felt it necessary: “That considering the comparative defenceless state of this District in case of a serious Native rising, a guard need to be formed to protect ourselves and our property against such Natives...” Magistrate Shuter was asked to open a list for the names of the inhabitants willing to join such a guard. In an amendment LMJ van Rooyen proposed: “That we decide upon our own protection today and that we fix upon a place where we are to meet, because we are unable to defend ourselves our wives and property without aid.” The amendment was carried by 20 votes. In a further submission it was decided that the Hermannsburg Laager, and not the Kranskop Laager, should be the rendezvous point. A final suggestion by Philip Vermaak, that the Natal Government should provide a substantial Police force for the protection of the district, was carried unanimously.¹⁷³

The outcome of the meeting worried Magistrate Shuter, for the young men had outvoted the older men and in the process the decision taken on the location of the laager changed the decision of 7 October 1899, where it was decided that Kranskop would be the congregation point in case of danger. The new position of the laager also served to divide the Afrikaners of the area. Havemann attempted to clarify the decision by ascribing it to the independent nature of the Afrikaners and the fact that they deemed Hermannsburg safer since it was further away from the borders of the locations and had a bigger laager. Philip Vermaak, however, in the strictest confidence informed Magistrate Shuter that the real reason for the change of venue was that if the residents of the Kranskop district used a government building for the purpose of a laager, they would be treated as rebels by any Boer commandos invading the district. By moving the laager to Hermannsburg, the Afrikaners would be viewed as acting in a neutral manner independently from the Natal Government, and would therefore not be molested. Reacting to the information provided by Vermaak, the magistrate decided to return the arms and ammunition requested earlier for the defence of the district.¹⁷⁴

The decision by the magistrate to send back the arms and ammunition meant that the Afrikaners had to purchase their own. Philip Zietsman, Lucas van Rooyen, Theunis Nel, and Van Rooyen of Paul's

172. PAR, CSO 2581: Minutes of a public meeting held at Kranskop, 19.10.1899.

173. *Ibid.*

174. PAR, CSO 2581: Confidential report Magistrate FP Shuter, Kranskop, on the meeting held on 19.10.1899. Philip Vermaak on another occasion informed the magistrate that WW Maré had boasted to the Africans that the British had suffered a defeat at Mafeking and that the Boers were going to do the same in all the battles. See, PAR, AGO, 1/7/39: Report by the Kranskop magistrate, 16.10.1899.

Rust, therefore applied to the Kranskop magistrate for permission to purchase ammunition. On the recommendation of the magistrate, Prime Minister Hime gave permission for Zietsman to buy five pounds of powder, Lucas van Rooyen to buy one hundred cartridges, and Van Rooyen to buy five pounds of gunpowder. The application of Theunis Nel of Spitzkop was denied.¹⁷⁵ Clearly the magistrate had his suspicions regarding the loyalty of certain Kranskop Afrikaners.

In the meantime Magistrate Shuter had appointed AL Varty to investigate the Afrikaner claims that an African uprising could take place. Varty's report made it clear that the followers of Chief Hlangabeza had every intention, should tribal fighting with Chief Gayede erupt again, to raid the cattle of the Kranskop Afrikaners. Hlangabeza and his tribe despised the Afrikaners because they assisted Gayede, asked exuberant prices for their cattle, only employed the people of Gayede, assisted Gayede's followers financially by paying the fines imposed for tribal fighting, and some men like JC Martens, even physically supported Gayede during faction fighting. Fear of a possible uprising therefore made LMJ van Rooyen of Wonderfontein come forward, in the strictest confidence, with information regarding Gayede. He informed the magistrate that Gayede had gone to Pretoria two years previously, under the guise of visiting a sick relative but in actual fact had gone to negotiate with President Kruger.¹⁷⁶ This investigation ended the fears of an African uprising as expressed by the Kranskop Afrikaners, and vindicated Prime Minister Hime's opinion that there was a hidden agenda.

The fears of an African uprising were soon overtaken by real issues related to the raging war. Two months into the war and with tens of thousands of British troops and their logistical support arriving, transport problems arose. This was partially due to the fact that there was a shortage of wagons up for hire. Suggestions were consequently made to commandeer wagons from districts which were not directly influenced by the war, such as Kranskop, Greytown and New Hanover. Sir Redvers Buller on 1 December 1899, requested the Natal authorities to commandeer 100 wagons, each with a span of 16 oxen, a leader and driver. Prime Minister Hime was unwilling to issue the order before consulting Attorney-General Bale. Bale felt that the Natal Government did not have the authority to commandeer wagons under Army Act 44 and 45 Vic. C. 58. Buller could, however, under the powers of Martial Law conferred upon him, forcibly requisition wagons. If Buller decided to do it this way, he could command the services of the officers of the Natal Government. Having made the legal objection, Bale declared himself willing to give effect to Buller's wishes and to include the commandeering of wagons and oxen in the Act of Indemnity which was under preparation. Buller reacted positively to these suggestions and requested the civil authorities to do the commandeering. As a result Hime immediately ordered the police and magistrates in the Kranskop, Weenen, Umvoti

175. PAR, CSO 2581: Report Magistrate FP Shuter, Kranskop, on request to purchase ammunition, 19.10.1899-24.10.1899.

176. PAR, CSO 2581: Confidential report Magistrate FP Shuter, Kranskop, 20.10.1899.

and New Hanover districts to proceed with the commandeering.¹⁷⁷ The decision to commandeer wagons and oxen in the mentioned districts pleased one Britisher immensely. In a letter to the *Natal Witness*, "Colonist" wrote that the English would respond with alacrity while he awaits the Afrikaner response with interest.¹⁷⁸

The process of commandeering the wagons was undertaken on the understanding that poor farmers would not be deprived entirely of their means of transport and cultivation. In the case of the commandeered wagons, oxen and equipment from the Kranskop and Umvoti districts, it was stipulated that the goods had to be delivered to the Greytown magistrates office by 12:00 on 9 December 1899. The conditions for the commandeering read as follows: "(a) The amount to be paid you by the Military Authorities shall be at the rate of £2 per diem. (b) The Military Authorities guarantee compensation against death of cattle from lung sickness, or capture, or from extraordinary risk (c) compensation not to exceed sixteen guineas (£16. 16s) per ox and eighty pounds (£80) per wagon and gear. (d) That a driver and a leader shall be supplied by you to accompany the wagon and oxen. Such Natives shall be fed by the Military Authorities."¹⁷⁹

Commandeering commenced on Sunday 4 December 1899.¹⁸⁰ The Kranskop district immediately became the centre of the process and 22 wagons, 20 with spans of 16 oxen, one with a span of 14 oxen, and one with a span of eight oxen, were commandeered. AP Keyter of Dingley Dell volunteered two wagons and 32 oxen, and John Keyter of Glen Eland three wagons and 48 oxen. Of the 31 wagons commandeered in the Kranskop district, only four did not belong to Afrikaners.

The commandeering process was soon criticised. TJ Nel (MLA) complained to the Natal Government that the wagons and oxen of poor Afrikaners, their only means of transport, and used for ploughing and harvesting, were being commandeered. According to Nel, RP Martens had only one wagon and 17 oxen, GH van Rooyen, an invalid, had only one wagon and 18 oxen, LJ Potgieter who was landless and who had ten children, lost his sole means of economic survival, Philip J Nel of Elands Kop had only one wagon and 16 oxen shared by three brothers, IJ Nel had only one wagon and eight oxen and Philip J Nel of Ongegund had only one wagon and was suffering from heart disease.

177. For a list of inhabitants from Greytown who had their wagons confiscated see: PAR, 1/GTN 3/2/7: List of owners who had their wagons commandeered, 6.12.1900-20.12.1900.

178. *Natal Witness*, 9.12.1899.

179. PRO, CO 179/208: Correspondence regarding the commandeering of oxen and wagons, 1.12.1899-3.12.1899.

180. As the Boers were driven out of Natal so the districts in which commandeering of oxen and wagon took place shifted north. For example: In February 1900 commandeering commenced in the Weenen district. PAR, 1/WEN 3/2/3: Regulations issued by Lt-Col Bamford regarding the commandeering of wagons, 1.2.1900. In September 1900, 30 oxen were commandeered from Engelbrecht of Tintwa and 12 oxen from Maritz of Maggiesdale in the Ladysmith area. PAR, 1/LDS 3/1/1/16: Letter magistrate Klip River district to Inspector Dorehill, 13.9.1900. Six months later more wagon and oxen were commandeered in the Ladysmith area. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 19.3.1901, p.606.

Magistrate Shuter was quick to defend and explain his actions. According to him, Philip J Nel of Ongegund had other oxen left and he could borrow a wagon from one of his brothers who lived close by; LJ Potgieter indicated that if possible he would not like to lose his wagon “but in a sense he volunteered” and was allowed to keep a second wagon in his possession; GH van Rooyen of Scotsdale was deemed to be poor and was exempted; JP Zietsman was a poor man and could only supply 14 oxen “but he offered no real objection...and I took it that he was glad to earn money by the unused wagon and oxen for he informed me that he had finished cultivating for the season”; RP Martens was deemed by the magistrate not to be a poor man although he confessed that “...he might have been left out.” Shuter suggested that Martens should use his brother’s wagon. In the most serious case Shuter admitted that the commandeering of the wagon and oxen of PJ Nel aggravated the latter’s heart disease. According to the magistrate he endeavoured to have it returned but the military refused. The wagon of TJ Nel of Spitzkop was commandeered by the magistrate based on information that he apparently had a second wagon, and that his son who resided with him also had a wagon. Nel later visited the magistrate and solemnly swore that he had only one wagon. Other poor Afrikaners such as Philip Nel of Paul’s Rust and LL Nel of Diepfontein were not visited on the advice of WG Havemann. Despite the magistrate admitting that he might have erred in certain instances, TJ Nel’s representation failed and he was informed that: “as the wagons which have been commandeered are now under the control of the military authorities it is not possible for the government to take any further action in the matter.”¹⁸¹ This was true except for the case of PJ Nel who had his wagon and oxen returned in March 1900.¹⁸² At least one of the men unhappy with the commandeering, LM van Rooyen of Lucks Hall, took matters into his own hands. He secretly sent an African to remove his oxen from the kraal near Umsinga in which they were held.¹⁸³

That the magistrate and his posse of colonial scouts were quite forceful in the commandeering process, and that the Afrikaners did not take kindly to indirectly supporting the war effort, can be gleaned from the incident between Adrian IJ Nel of Berning and the authorities. According to Nel the commandeers arrived on his farm on 7 December 1899. He reluctantly shook hands with Magistrate FP Shuter, but refused to do the same with one of the colonial scouts, Otto Schwikkard.¹⁸⁴ Nel then refused the magistrate entry into his house thereby becoming the only person in the district to do so. Shuter explained that they had come to commandeer Nel’s wagon. Nel replied that his wagon was hired out for two months. The magistrate responded that it was none of his business. Nel

181. PAR, CSO 1633: Report by the magistrate Kranskop on the commandeering of wagons for military use, 4.12.1899-22.12.1899.

182. PAR, Archives of the Kranskop magistrate (hereafter 1/KRK) 3/1/3: Letter Lt-Col E Stanley to magistrate Kranskop, 23.3.1900.

183. PAR, SNA I/4/9: Information given by Jan Nel on Afrikaners in Umvoti, 5.8.1901-3.10.1901.

184. In *Schwikkard of Natal and the old Transvaal* edited by L Herman, it is claimed (pp.145-146) that on one occasion a number of young Afrikaners of the Kranskop area planned to ambush Otto Schwikkard as he was commandeering.

then undertook to try and get hold of the wagon. At this point Schwikkard entered the discussion and scolded Nel in Dutch for insulting him as he too was an Afrikaner and had lost everything. He then informed Nel that he expected proper treatment from him and his men in future. Nel was warned that “a day of reckoning is coming and it will be remembered against you.” The meeting ended without the shaking of hands. All subsequent attempts by Nel to apologise to the magistrate failed and Shuter later insisted that Nel come to Kranskop to apologise. What concerned Nel was the kind of justice he could expect from the magistrate in future, while the magistrate did not consider Nel in a position to demand any protection due to his attitude towards the colonial authorities as reflected in his refusal to take the oath of allegiance.¹⁸⁵

The problems surrounding the commandeering of wagons and oxen did not end with this confrontation. Magistrate Shuter suspected that TJ Nel of Spitzkop, who only supplied eight oxen owned substantially more, even as many as three spans which he was hiding. Investigations by Shuter came to nothing. In an attempt to solve the problem he requested the local stock inspector, FE van Rooyen, to bring him his stock books for inspection. Van Rooyen did not heed the request and also ignored a subsequent demand for a meeting brought to him by his brother. As a result the magistrate wrote him a letter demanding that he visit his office and threatened to report him to the Natal Government if he did not. FE van Rooyen did not take this threat lying down and he informed the magistrate that he could report him as he had not given any cause for punitive action. At the same time he objected to the disrespectful manner in which the magistrate treated him and disputed the authority the magistrate could exercise over him as a stock inspector. Stock Inspector Van Rooyen then went onto the attack and wrote to his superior, the principal veterinary surgeon, complaining that he resented the way he was being treated and adding that he would gladly assist the magistrate if he was treated with respect. In the meantime, in his own report, the magistrate took to attacking Van Rooyen, describing him as hostile, troublesome and not fit for a position under the Natal Government. All in all the magistrate put Van Rooyen's anger down to the fact that he was part-owner of a wagon and span of oxen which was commandeered. The magistrate, however, had to admit that he could bring no evidence against Van Rooyen. In this squabble there could be but one winner and after careful consideration the minister of agriculture instructed Van Rooyen to take his stock books and returns to the magistrate and to give him all the assistance he had asked for.¹⁸⁶

The economic impact, and the thought that wagons belonging to Afrikaners were used to fight the Boers did not endear the authorities to the Natal Afrikaners. The vast majority of the Kranskop Afrikaners developed an attitude which can be summed up as: “We shall have nothing to do with the

185. PAR, CSO 1633: Affidavit by AIJ Nel and the response by the magistrate, 11.12.1899-14.12.1899. The *Natal Witness*, 7.12.1899, picked up on the events at AIJ Nel's farm and added their own truths such as that Nel refused to have his wagon commandeered and that he had refused the volunteers water.

186. PAR, CSO 1634: Documents relating to Stock Inspector FE van Rooyen of Kranskop, 16.12.1899-22.12.1899.

Natal Government - we shall take good care not to offend the Transvaal Government.” In addition to this, other comments such as “the next thing to be taken would be our wives”, “remember the Battle of Congella”,¹⁸⁷ and “the money paid by the military for the hire of the wagons is blood money”, were expressed.¹⁸⁸ In a nutshell, it was a case of a dilemma in which morality outweighed the money made.

The commandeering process also proved crippling to many Afrikaners because the rent paid by the military had to be used to hire wagons, while trained oxen became casualties of war. For example, an ox belonging to JC Nel of The Gem, Greytown, was shot by members of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry near Chieveley when they found it suffering from some disease,¹⁸⁹ while Mrs PW van Rooyen of the same farm lost ten oxen to lungsickness. Although the military paid compensation to the tune of £16.6. for each of the animals in question, they were only prepared to pay half rates for the three oxen which had died of rinderpest. Fearing a further outbreak of these diseases the military embarked on an extensive inoculation process which meant that some of the wagons commandeered stood idle, resulting in a loss of income as the military refused to pay hire for days when the wagons were not working. The military likewise refused to pay for the cost of the rail freight to return the wagon since, they had apparently paid an extra eight days hire to cover such contingencies.¹⁹⁰ In the end it is questionable whether it was worth your while to have your wagon commandeered, or volunteered as in the case of John Keyter. One of his wagons broke a wheel and he therefore received no rent from it for several months. At the same time the loss of oxen meant that the military had to supply some for his wagons which then became his property. As a result, by January 1901, Keyter owed the military an estimated £60.¹⁹¹

The wagons commandeered from Kranskop were eventually returned in December 1900 to great inconvenience of the owners. They had to collect the wagons and oxen in Ladysmith within eight days after the discharge.¹⁹² The initial commandeering in the Kranskop was followed by further commandeering in April 1900.¹⁹³ The military continued to commandeer wagons and oxen from both Natal Afrikaners and English colonists from time to time. In the spring of 1901 it was deemed necessary to again commandeer all ox wagons and spans in the Weenen, Greytown, Kranskop, Klip

187. PAR, CSO 1633: Report by the magistrate of Kranskop with reference to the commandeering of wagons for military use, 13.12.1899.

188. L Herman (ed.), pp.145-146.

189. PAR, Archives of minister of agriculture (hereafter AGR) 6: Report on the shooting of an ox belonging to JC Nel, 14.12.1899-4.1.1900.

190. PAR, 1/GTN 3/2/9: Letter Colonel E Stanley to PW van Rooyen, 12.5.1902.

191. PAR, 1/KRK 3/1/3: Letter Colonel E Stanley to J Keyter, 23.1.1901.

192. PAR, 1/KRK 3/1/3: Letter Staff Lt for AAG director of transport to MHL van Rooyen, 29.11.1900.

193. PAR, 1/KRK 3/1/3: Letter Lt-Col Bamford to magistrate Kranskop, 9.4.1900.

River county and Estcourt districts for, amongst others, the construction of blockhouses¹⁹⁴ and because large number of wagons were reputedly burnt near Vryheid by the commando under General Louis Botha.¹⁹⁵ An outcry followed and the magistrates of Greytown and Kranskop explained that the residents in their districts had only few oxen on short spans and that it would be harsh to take these away.¹⁹⁶ These sentiments were shared by private individuals throughout the affected districts,¹⁹⁷ and questions were posed in the Legislative Assembly about the process of commandeering which came at a bad time for all involved. All of this, however, proved to be fruitless and the military did not relent.¹⁹⁸

The actions and attitude of Magistrate Shuter during the commandeering process, made him extremely unpopular with the Afrikaners of Kranskop.¹⁹⁹ As a result, on 8 March 1900, HL van Rooyen of Wonderfontein requested permission from Prime Minister Hime to hold a meeting to object to the way in which Shuter treated loyal British subjects and for the fact that he had imprisoned their servants. Hime did not object to the holding of such a meeting and undertook to give any resolution passed due consideration.²⁰⁰ The government, however, would not allow such a treasonable meeting to pass without investigation. A Mr Murphy, accompanied by C Luyt of Kranskop, was sent by the Natal Police to attend the meeting under the guise of reporters for the *Worcester Standard*, an Afrikaner Bond orientated newspaper. The exercised failed miserably. The two men claimed that they were watched from the moment they left Pietermaritzburg by one CJ van Rooyen, and to boot they found the local Afrikaners to be loyal.²⁰¹

Shuter, on hearing of the proposed meeting, assumed it would call for his removal from the district and informed the prime minister that he would like his removal to be effected by government order and not by public request. The government responded that it had not received any suggestion for his removal.²⁰² At the public meeting held on 13 March 1900, and attended by 45 Afrikaners, several

194. PAR, PM 23: Order by GOC Natal that wagons and oxen be commandeered in the Weenen, Estcourt and Greytown districts, 23.9.1901.

195. PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 19.3.1901, p.606.

196. PAR, CSO 1687: Telegram colonial secretary to magistrate Greytown, 4.10.1901; PAR, 1/KRK 3/1/3: Telegram colonial secretary to magistrate Kranskop, 4.10.1901

197. See for example: PAR, CSO 1689: Telegram J Farquhar to Prime Minister AH Hime, 28.10.1901.

198. PAR, PM 28: Correspondence regarding the question posed by Mr Pepworth relative to the commandeering in Klip River county, 14.4.1902.

199. Animosity by Kranskop Afrikaners towards magistrates continued. In April 1902, CJ van Rooyen pressed charges against Magistrate GW Adamson for trespassing onto his property. Adamson, the president of the local rifle association, was visiting the rifle range that was located on the farm of Van Rooyen. The matter was settle when it was agreed that the rifle range be removed from the farm of Van Rooyen. See, PAR, 1/KRK 3/1/4: Correspondence regarding the charges brought by CJ van Rooyen against Magistrate GW Adamson, 22.4.1902-24.4.1902.

200. PAR, CSO 2587: Correspondence relating to meeting of Kranskop Afrikaners, 8.3.1900.

201. PAR, CSO 2587: Report on the meeting by Kranskop Afrikaners by PJ Murphy, 14.3.1900.

202. PAR, CSO 2587: Correspondence relating to meeting of Kranskop Afrikaners, 8.3.1900.

complaints were aired against Shuter. They ranged from his threatening several Afrikaners, to his handling of the commandeering process, to being described as too weak to hold the position of magistrate. As a result Stock Inspector FE van Rooyen proposed, seconded by LMJ van Rooyen, that the government transfer Shuter.

In his response to the accusations, and possibly giving substance to them in the process, Shuter considered taking action against FE van Rooyen for libel, and in a tirade declared that a true Englishman like him could never gain the popularity “amongst such people.” Shuter continued by elaborating on how all the past frictions and meetings, starting in late September 1899, up to the commandeering of the wagons, were merely a case of him performing his duties loyally and that this was the sole reason for the Afrikaners’ fury. After what they described as careful consideration, the government concluded that the accusations against Shuter were groundless and that it would take no further action in the matter.²⁰³ This ended the squabble and must have sent a clear message to the local Afrikaners - you will submit to the authorities.

Despite the anger at the commandeering of wagons and oxen and the animosity between the magistrate and the Kranskop Afrikaners, only one person was found guilty of high treason. WJM van Rooyen of Klipnek was arrested and removed to the Pietermaritzburg Prison for treasonable offences.²⁰⁴ Van Rooyen was accused of harbouring two Boers and providing them with food and information. Six weeks after his arrest Van Rooyen was tried in the Supreme Court in Pietermaritzburg.²⁰⁵ Although the African witnesses, on whose testimony the case was based, contradicted each other, the pleas by Mr Tainton, the representative for Van Rooyen, to disregard their evidence were ignored by the jury who found him guilty. A fine of £100 or one year imprisonment was imposed. Friends and family immediately paid the fine.²⁰⁶

4.4 The Proviso B Afrikaners and the Anglo-Boer War, October 1899-June 1900

The most isolated group of Natal Afrikaners were those resident in Proviso B around Melmoth. Because of the historical legacy of the area, they were both geographically and politically within the sphere of influence of the Transvaal rather than Natal. This was reflected in the first report after the outbreak of war, issued on 20 October 1899, by Magistrate Thomas Maxwell, namely that the local Afrikaners had held several meetings and refused to take the oath of allegiance. They had also decided to get ammunition from the Transvaal because Maxwell, on instruction from the prime minister, had refused to sell them ammunition. In his report Maxwell gave the undertaking that he

203. PAR, CSO 2587: Documents regarding the proposed removal of Magistrate F Shuter from Kranskop, 13.3.1900-24.3.1900

204. PAR, 1/KRK 3/1/3: Order for the removal of WMJ van Rooyen to the Pietermaritzburg Prison, 18.5.1900-28.5.1900

205. PAR, AGO I/7/1: Regina vs WMJ van Rooyen, 5.6.1900.

206. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 3.7.1900; *Natal Witness*, 23.6.1900.

would do his best to intercept the ammunition and arrest the culprits. As far as laagering was concerned the local Afrikaners were divided. DC Uys (MLC), advised against it, while Tom Smith and Julius Ortlepp both wanted to form a laager near the DRC in Melmoth, as a precaution since the authorities allowed Africans to carry arms. Their argument, however, did not carry favour with the magistrate who informed the men that Africans had to protect themselves and would be peaceful if not interfered with. Since the idea of a laager was prohibited, the rendezvous-point for local Afrikaners apparently became the house of widow Pretorius. The restlessness in the Afrikaner community worried the magistrate since he feared that they could spy on the movements of the small British force stationed at Melmoth.²⁰⁷

Maxwell's fears were understandable because the Natal Police reported in early November 1899, that Piet Koekemoer, Labuschagne, three Kritzinger brothers, Dewald Pretorius, and Louwrens had left their farms for the Transvaal. They were followed by JJ Uys and JJ Moolman, who resided on Uys's farm, and the brothers Robert and Isaac Vermaak. All of these men took their stock with them. Isaac Vermaak apparently wanted to go to Vryheid with the purpose of bringing his wife and children to Proviso B. However, according to African reports, he returned with 60 burghers to guard the Transvaal/Zululand border. Another Proviso B Afrikaner, one Kritzinger and his family, were suspected of spying for the Transvaal and inciting Africans against the British.²⁰⁸ SJ Müller, who was born in Pietermaritzburg and had resided in the OFS prior to moving to the Melmoth district, also applied for permission to join the Boer forces as a member of the Transvaal Ambulance Department. On the recommendation of Attorney-General Bale, permission was denied.²⁰⁹

These happenings disturbed EA Brunner MLA for Eshowe, and he approached Bale for some protection for the area. Bale's reply was simple: "We do not apprehend an attack upon Eshowe and there is not a Regiment to spare for Eshowe."²¹⁰ This lack of security forced a loyal Afrikaner, Dirk Uys, to apply via Magistrate Maxwell, for permission to purchase 100 rounds of ammunition. Maxwell did not trust Uys and deemed it necessary to inform Prime Minister Hime that Uys had made some remarks which were sympathetic to the Transvaal. Despite this revelation permission was granted to Uys to purchase ammunition since it was regarded as "bad policy just now to refuse it."²¹¹ Uys must have got wind of the fact that his loyalty was questioned since he complained that the newspapers constantly carried articles calling for the confiscation of the property of Natal rebels while nothing is mentioned or done to protect loyalists from being looted and threatened by the

207. PAR, CSO, 2582: Report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 20.10.1899.

208. PAR, CSO 2584: Report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 14.11.1899.

209. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Minute paper on the application by SJ Müller, 28.12.1899.

210. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Extract confidential report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 18.10.1899.

211. PAR, CSO 2582: Telegram Magistrate T Maxwell on application by DC Uys to purchase 100 rounds, 19.10.1899.

Boers. This Uys believed was one of the main reasons why local Afrikaners joined the invaders.²¹²

Magistrate Maxwell, in an effort to maintain control over his district, wanted the letters addressed to local Afrikaners and mailed by them investigated since he suspected these letters could contain incriminating evidence and information about future military plans hatched in the Transvaal.²¹³ This investigation immediately came off the ground and a letter from Johanna Joubert of Stellenbosch to her father, RJ Ortlepp of Melmoth, was intercepted. In the letter she expressed regret that only jingoistic newspapers were available to him, and informed him that she had visited a certain Alan who was captured at Elandslaagte and who was a POW on board the *Penelope*. Johanna further wrote that she “shall teach her sons not to give in to anyone or anything English” and was hopeful that the day of reckoning for the “wretched British” would surely come.²¹⁴ In his reply Ortlepp commented mostly on farming matters and the fact that the little news they got was from the biased Natal newspapers. Ortlepp suspected that their letters were opened and informed his daughter accordingly.²¹⁵ Despite this knowledge the Ortlepp’s continued to portray their true pro-Republican sentiments. In a letter to her daughter Mrs Ortlepp bemoaned the surrender of General Cronjé and found it “very sad to think that after all we shall have to loose our country.” She also revealed that her brother David was wounded and made her feelings regarding his engagement to an English woman, Miss White, very clear. Although White was not a bad person, she was “awfully English.”²¹⁶ By now the Ortlepps were well aware that their mail was intercepted and that certain items such as the *South African News*, forwarded on a weekly basis by Johanna and her husband to Zululand, were not reaching their destination. In spite of this Johanna still spoke her mind in her letters to her mother with sentiments such as “My respect for the English is all gone...” and “the only place the English can put their prisoners seems to be on their dirty old transport ships.”²¹⁷ Apart from labelling Johanna a “rebel”, the Natal authorities took no action against the Ortlepps.

Similar seditious writings were also produced by other Proviso B Afrikaners. JG Maritz of Königsberg, Melmoth stated that “we (the Boers) will still rule Africa as God will not forsake his people.” Like the Ortlepps he place little faith in the reports of the war published in the Natal newspapers.²¹⁸ Other Proviso B Afrikaners were more circumspect. Theodor Hansmeyer heeded the advice of Magistrate HC Koch of Greytown, to keep himself quiet, especially since the few Afrikaners left in Proviso B were being watched.²¹⁹

212. PAR, A 357 XVIV/1/1: Letter DC Uys to friend, 8.2.1900.

213. PAR, CSO 2584: Report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 14.11.1899.

214. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter J Joubert to RJ Ortlepp, 16.11.1899.

215. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter RJ Ortlepp to J Joubert, 24.11.1899.

216. PRO, CO 179/210: Letter J Ortlepp to J Ortlepp, 1.3.1900.

217. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Letter J Ortlepp to J Ortlepp, 7.3.1900.

218. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Letter JG Maritz to T Smith, 24.11.1899.

219. PAR, GH 549: Letters T Hansmeyer to HC Koch and M Berning, 8.1.1900.

The intercepted letters did not provide Magistrate Maxwell with the information he hoped for and his suspicions of the 30 Afrikaner men that remained in Proviso B remained unsubstantiated. He had them, as well as the farms of those who had left and who were in the care of Africans or family members, watched. In the monitoring of the Afrikaners, the authorities received enthusiastic support from both the English and Africans. Bernard Cressey declared that JAF Ortlepp, a former candidate for the Legislative Assembly and owner of the farm on which the town of Melmoth was created, had told him that a commando consisting of 600 Boers intended to cross the Transvaal/Zululand border. KJD Ripley likewise informed the magistrate of a conversation he had with Ortlepp in which the latter said that he fully expected an attack on Melmoth by 600 Boers. According to Ripley, Ortlepp did not sound bitter but indicated that in case of an attack he would not go to the fort with the rest of the civilians as he regarded it very dangerous place.²²⁰ African scouts such as Manlinzela Ka Ngombane, the Native Police, and ordinary Africans, also informed Magistrate Maxwell about the movements of the Proviso B Afrikaners.²²¹ The information, unfortunately for the Natal authorities, was laced with speculation and rumours. One report had it that seven of the Proviso B Afrikaners, including a certain Liversage, were killed and that another, FC Meyer spied for the Boers.²²² The chief magistrate and civil commissioner of Zululand, Sir Charles Saunders, did not pay too much attention to any of this information. He did, however, believe that Ortlepp and other Afrikaners were in constant contact with the Boers and would therefore receive early information of any attack. Such information could be used as an early warning system by the local authorities.²²³

The consistent newspaper reports calling for the confiscation of the property of rebels, galvanised the remaining Proviso B Afrikaners into action and they started to remove property from the homesteads of those who had left for the Transvaal. This left Magistrate Maxwell unsure of what action to take. The advice of Governor Hely-Hutchinson was that no action should be taken for the moment because of insufficient manpower which did not allow for the enforcement of stringent measures, but that once a force of Colonial Scouts was raised, the matter could be pursued.²²⁴

The lack of a substantial British force in Proviso B, as outlined by the governor, was starting to show and the two hundred Colonial Scouts who were raised could hardly plug all the holes.²²⁵ Some Boers, assisted by Proviso B Afrikaners, took advantage of the situation and the resident magistrate of Ndwandwe and Border Scout Owen Roberts reported that 40 Boers were stationed at the house of

220. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Depositions by B Cressey and KJD Ripley, 6.12.1899.

221. PAR, CSO 1639: Deposition by Manlinzela Ka Ngombane, 15.1.1900; CSO 2584: Report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 28.11.1899.

222. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Report Attorney-General H Bale on Proviso B Afrikaners, 29.11.1899.

223. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Depositions by B Cressey and KJD Ripley, 6.12.1899.

224. PAR, AGO I/7/40: Telegram Prime Minister AH Hime to Chief Magistrate CJR Saunders, 16.12.1899.

Andries Pretorius within the Melmoth district.²²⁶ Also in Melmoth the Afrikaners acted with confidence. In a letter to the *Natal Witness* "Scout by name only" complained that the Melmoth Afrikaners behaved with little respect when the cortege of Trooper Glen passed.²²⁷

Subsequently Magistrate Maxwell once again focussed his attention on the Afrikaners who remained on their farms. As far as Maxwell was concerned their passivity was not due to loyalty but to the intimidating impact of lists of Boer dead published in the newspapers. The magistrate specifically focussed on LJR Kritzinger and his son MAS Kritzinger, who persisted in conveying false information to the African population in the hope of influencing them against the Natal Government. Kritzinger, apparently in fear of the Colonial Scouts, was also seen burying a rifle.²²⁸ To put an end to this Maxwell suggested that the Kritzingers should be arrested as he believed that such an arrest would not influence the other Afrikaners negatively, for they apparently also viewed Kritzinger as a doubtful character.²²⁹ As a result both Kritzingers were arrested on 21 February 1900.²³⁰ This step had the desired effect especially amongst the Africans who could not understand why the Kritzingers were allowed to preach sedition. In a subsequent search of Kritzinger senior's home the police found a Martini Henry marked "Z.A.R." which had been buried in the garden by his wife. Some ammunition was also found in a flour barrel.²³¹ Maxwell had, however, made a mistake in his assumption on how the Proviso B Afrikaners viewed Kritzinger (snr). His arrest was perceived as without justification, while it was rumoured that the British had taken all his possessions not even leaving a cow for milk.²³²

In the meantime the Proviso B Afrikaners, who had left the area to join the Republican forces, seem to have participated in several operations in the area. Dewald Pretorius and Theuns Strydom, the latter at one stage reported to have been killed at Talana, were identified as part of the force which on 9 February 1900, attacked the Nkandla Magistracy and looted Fry's store.²³³ During other Boer incursions into the Nkandla district a local shopkeeper, TW Cooper, also recognised several Proviso B Afrikaners namely, L Kritzinger, M Koekermoer, Piet Koekemoer, the two young sons of Hendrick Labuschange, and the son of Anton Potgieter. In a later raid on Hyslop's Store an assistant,

225. PAR, GH 549: Letters T Hansmeyer to HC Koch and M Berning, 8.1.1900.

226. PAR, Archive of the Nongoma magistrate (hereafter 1/NGA) 3/2/6: Report Owen Roberts, 16.1.1900; 1/NGA, 3/2/6: Report resident magistrate Ndwandwe, 16.1.1900.

227. *Natal Witness*, 29.3.1900.

228. PAR, CSO 2586: Report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 28.1.1900.

229. PAR, CSO 2586: Report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 19.2.1900.

230. PRO, CO 179/210: Telegram Chief Magistrate CJR Saunders to colonial secretary, 21.2.1900.

231. PAR, CSO 2587: Report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 5.3.1900.

232. PRO, CO 179/210: Letter J Ortlepp to J Ortlepp, 1.3.1900.

233. PRO, CO 179/210: Deposition by Matabata Ka Nhlebo before Magistrate JL Knight, 14.2.1900.

RJ Hutchinson, recognised L Kritzinger and Piet Koekemoer.²³⁴

Despite the involvement of a substantial number of Proviso B Afrikaners on the attack on Nkandla, the deed itself seems to have changed the attitude of the Proviso B Afrikaners who had remained behind. It is possible that because they feared they would somehow be held responsible and receive the same treatment as the Kritzingers, their attitude towards Magistrate Maxwell changed overnight. Where previously they had shunned the magistrate for two months and in private spoke against the Natal Government, they now undertook no journey without informing him. Several Afrikaners even asked Maxwell what they should do when Boers arrived at their homes. They were told to remain quiet or to come to the small fort in Melmoth. Dirk Uys (MLC) even offered to negotiate with the Transvaalers. He proposed that in exchange for the removal of all the British forces from the Zululand border, the Transvaal should remove its commandos. Magistrate Maxwell requested the government not to consider this idealistic proposal because Uys had until then remained aloof of the government and not used his influence to the benefit of the Imperial cause. Maxwell's advice was accepted and the Natal authorities made it clear that they "entirely and totally disapproves" of Uys's proposal.²³⁵ As the tide of war turned against the Republics, the attitude of the Afrikaners who remained in Proviso B changed from submission to loyalty and Maxwell could report with a certain amount of glee, that the local Afrikaners were very quiet since the surrender of General Piet Cronjé at Paardeberg on 27 February 1900, and that they showed more inclination to meet with him and to report the most trivial matters. According to Maxwell, in these meetings he did all in his power to conciliate them.²³⁶

The driving of the Boers from Natal in June 1900 did not mean the end of the low-key conflict along the Transvaal/Zululand border. Up until the signing of peace on 31 May 1902, cross-border raids by Boers, Zulus and British forces occurred, mostly to acquire cattle.²³⁷ The most serious invasion of Zululand took place in September 1901, when a large force under General Louis Botha invaded Zululand. This invasion was foiled at the Battles of Itala and Fort Prospect.²³⁸

Of the large number of Proviso B Afrikaners that joined the Boers before and during the early part of the war only ten were eventually apprehended and sentenced as rebels, namely: D Brodie, AB de Lange, LJR Kritzinger (snr), LJR Kritzinger (jnr), MA Kritzinger, JP Moolman (snr), JP Moolman

234. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Depositions by TW Cooper and RJ Hutchinson, 17.3.1900.

235. PAR, CSO 2586: Proposal by DC Uys, 16.2.1900-17.2.1900; PAR, CSO 2909: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by DC Uys, 23.8.1902.

236. PAR, CSO 2587: Report Magistrate T Maxwell, Melmoth, 5.3.1900.

237. For a detailed description of the low-keyed war fought in this area, see: JM Wassermann, *The Eshowe concentration and surrendered burghers camp during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)*, pp.1-18.

238. DM Moore, *General Louis Botha's second expedition to Natal during the Anglo-Boer War, September-October 1901*, pp.37-76.

(jnr) DJ Pretorius, TP Pretorius and RJ Vermaak.²³⁹

4.5 In the shadow of war

The experiences of the Natal Afrikaners in the counties south of the Tugela River and in Proviso B were in stark contrast to those experienced in Northern Natal. Furthermore, along a northwest to southeast axis in the area south of the Tugela wartime conditions also differed radically. For a brief period of time, the Afrikaner residing in the Upper Tugela districts and parts of Estcourt and Weenen experienced similar conditions to those experienced by the Afrikaner in Northern Natal. Those in the southeast, however, underwent a different war, namely that of life in the shadow of war. Under Martial Law, and with little support from their own government, the rule of law and British fairplay were at times an illusion. Under the rules of war, spying, suspicion, rumours, discomfort, verbal and other abuses and persecution became the order of the day in this pseudo-war between Natal Afrikaners on the one hand, and the British forces, the Natal authorities and the Natal public on the other. All of this was based on the premise that being of Afrikaner origin meant that the maxim was, guilty until proven innocent. These actions proved to be invalid as only a handful of rebels came from the region under discussion, a clear indication that the vast majority of Natal Afrikaners wanted to remain neutral while reserving the right to sympathise with the plight of the Republics.

239. For a detailed analysis of the rebels from Proviso B, see Appendix A.