

Chapter VI

Stressors Boers encountered

in the guerrilla phase

1. Introduction

According to Hans Selye the term stressor refers to the cause of or the agent leading to stress. Stress is therefore the result of one or more provoking agents.¹ However, Antonovsky pointed out that potential stressors only become actual stressors depending upon the individual's perception or appraisal thereof (refer Figure II-1). A stressor is something that the individual perceives as an issue that will make a demand on him. This demand may be threatening or challenging or may merely require some response – including which might also be a positive response. Whatever that demand may be, it is associated with a potential change as far as the individual is concerned. It may simply be a minor matter or it may be of major importance. As discussed in Chapter II it can be cataclysmic in nature, in other words affecting many individuals, or alternatively it may be private or personal in nature. The demand can merely be perceived as a hassle or recurring frustration to the individual. Certain stressors would not be called cataclysmic, yet may not be private or personal either. These, for the purposes of this study, will be termed common stressors.

There are many physical aspects relating to the Anglo-Boer War, such as the British superiority in numbers, that may be called stressors in this chapter, while in fact it was the interpretation of the particular aspect which determines whether it was a stressor or not. So as not to become too theoretical, there are many physical issues dealt with below which will simply be labelled as stressors when it is clear that they were perceived as stressors of some kind or another.

War in itself is generally recognized as a cataclysmic stressor, but emerging from the general situation of war several types of stressors can be identified which have an effect on the participants. In this chapter which deals with the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War, the stressors

¹ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology challenging the biomedical model*, p. 149.

experienced by the burghers of the two republics are analysed. It should however be emphasized that in an ongoing situation such as the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War, it is clearly incorrect to imagine that one single stressor would incur a level of stress to induce a specific reaction in an individual. Thus, although the stressors are discussed individually, it should be borne in mind that there would certainly have been a cumulative effect produced by various stressors. Then too, because of differences in an individual's resistance resources and coping abilities, the way each person was affected would unquestionably have differed. Resistance resources and coping abilities are dealt with in later chapters, but at this juncture in order to focus on the relative importance of a wide range of stressors they are arranged into various categories.

2. Stress caused directly by military situations

a. War as a life-threatening experience

The mere fact that war is life-threatening, and disrupts the normal pattern of life causing uncertainty and hardship, means that war *per se* can be classified as a stressor. And although its cataclysmic nature also means that those subjected to it will frequently form groups which share their hardships, the varied effects which war brings about on individuals, also places it within the group of personal or private stressors.

During the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War the burghers and their officers all experienced an intense measure of stress, as can be expected in any guerrilla war. Whereas Binneveld places the emphasis on the stress experienced by the "Goliath"- army,² it is only natural to accept that the soldiers of the smaller force will likewise experience high degrees of stress. While the bigger force is mostly subjected to the sudden, surprising and often barbaric nature of the guerrilla's actions, the latter will, on the other hand, be at a disadvantage in details such as weaponry, military discipline and numbers of fighters. This disadvantage in itself will be a major stressor to the guerrilla-fighter.

During the Anglo-Boer War, in those cases where a particular action was planned beforehand, e.g. attacks on enemy camps or convoys or the destruction of railways to capture

² H. Binneveld, *From shell shock to combat stress*, p. 49.

supply trains, the period of time preceding the action became a stressor. The participant would conceivably have reflected how the coming action would change his life. The risk of losing his life or, worse still, of being badly wounded, would naturally have been recognized and reflected on. These dreads would further have been complicated by the looming humiliation of being captured by the enemy and sent overseas or else by the self-doubt in his ability to stand firm under enemy fire. The “time of waiting” can no doubt be defined as a stressor. In this situation the overall gnawing uncertainty of what could happen would become a stressor, probably of a very private nature as each man reflects on his own thoughts. And although this holds true for any soldier in any war, the increasingly unfavourable situation of the republicans as the war progressed made it even more so.

Pretorius related these sensations as they were described by several authors of diaries and memoirs.³ One of the burghers he quoted was the young Roland Schikkerling of the Johannesburg Commando, who wrote about the moments prior to the battle at Bergendal (Dalmanutha) – 21 to 27 August 1900 – : “The minutes preceding a fight, after the enemy comes into view, and until the strife commences, are for me full of nervous excitement ... it cannot be fear, rather intense anxiety to begin ... yet no farther than red is from purple, sweet from sour ...”⁴ Even though this battle took place before the guerrilla phase of the war, the anticipation experienced also applies to later guerrilla encounters. Neither Schikkerling nor Pretorius specifically identified the time of waiting in terms of a “stressor”, and yet it is clear that this was indeed the case. There are examples of other comments made before moving into action. Marthinus Viljoen, the son of General P. R. Viljoen of the Heidelberg Commando, referred to the wisecracks and boasting of some burghers before a planned train derailment and the subsequent looting: “Want ons proe al die jam en die suiker.”⁵ This was probably adrenaline charged bravado caused by the increasing tension but it could also be regarded as humour used in an attempt to release the tension of the moment. Pretorius also quoted the American correspondent, H.C. Hillegas, who made the observation of De Wet’s men before their surprise attack on the British at Sannaspost: “Some walked nervously up and down, others ... prayed, a few lighted their pipes ... many sat ... looked vacantly into space ... younger burgers joked and laughed.”⁶

³ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, pp. 153-155.

⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous (A Boer’s diary)*, p. 47.

⁵ Quoted by F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 153. [Translated: “For already we can taste the jam and the sugar.”]

⁶ Quoted by F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 150.

Although the calm and positive attitude of officers helped burghers to cope with the stress of the waiting period,⁷ there were those officers whose behaviour was the complete opposite. Max Weber, a Swiss volunteer who fought under General De la Rey, mentioned the strange conduct of Commandant Claassen who : “ ... suffered from hernia, which usually worried him at the most inopportune times, such as just before a battle.”⁸ This usually kept him from the battle and would no doubt have heightened the stressful effect of the waiting time for his junior officers and burghers.

The effect of the tension before an encounter is illustrated by the many cases where burghers fired their rifles prematurely, thereby giving the enemy advance warning and so spoiling the surprise element of the planned action. Weber described such an instance before the battle of Yzerspruit, when a shot fired prematurely doubtlessly alerted the unsuspecting British.⁹

Once the battle started there were different emotional reactions. For many the tension was replaced by a calm rationality. Deneys Reitz described how shortly after he entered the Cape Colony with General Smuts, he calmly shot down two gunners during a skirmish when he and his comrades were in a precarious position.¹⁰ Shortly thereafter he shot, and presumably killed, a number of the enemy. In contrast, Dietlof van Warmelo of the Pretoria Commando described how during a battle he experienced an oppressive feeling, always suspecting that the enemy’s fire was meant especially for him.¹¹ The brothers Viljoen of the Heidelberg Commando gave graphic descriptions of the chaos and panic in the dark, during the ill-fated battle at Lake Chrissie. To them it was a wretched and heartbreaking night, culminating in disaster.¹² This sombre picture of a battle gone wrong is reinforced by Schikkerling’s remark: “There is no place in the world where one’s feelings bounce up and down so much as on the field of battle.”¹³

Not all burghers were prepared to remain on the battle field under difficult situations. Weber recalled that during the battle at Yzerspruit, he saw how Generals De la Rey and Kemp

⁷ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 151.

⁸ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 152.

⁹ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 211.

¹⁰ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 227.

¹¹ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 154.

¹² F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 162.

¹³ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 29.11.1900, p. 106.

made liberal use of their sjamboks on “indecisive” burghers.¹⁴ For many Boers, the trauma of battle at this late stage of a war – which was well-nigh lost – was just too much. However, seen from General De la Rey’s point of view, victory on 25 February 1902 at Yzerspruit was an important factor in boosting the morale of the burghers at that very late stage of the war.¹⁵ Pretorius has pointed out that during the guerrilla phase certain Boer officers recognized the effect of a full-out charge (stormjaag). A concerted effort of this kind not only instilled fear in the enemy, but also dislodged any doubts within their own ranks, encouraging them once more.¹⁶

The visual result of battle was frequently experienced as a stressor. The sensitive Jan Celliers wrote in his diary of his aversion to seeing slain comrades arriving at Bokkraal in the western Transvaal after the battle at Driefontein towards the end of October 1901. The ten corpses lay in the pale moonlight with half-dried blood clinging to their hair and their bodies, their eyes staring, their faces without expression. “O, wat een aandoening van afgrijzen voelde ik mijn liggaam doortrekken!”¹⁷ The harsh reality of battle is suddenly realized and it is an extremely unpleasant feeling. General P.R. Viljoen witnessed the horrific death of his son, Henning, when he was decapitated by a shell: “Het verlies van myn kind was bitter zwaar, voornaamlyk de wreede wijze, zijn geheele hoofd was weg. O dat was bitter te aanschouwen.”¹⁸ Schikkerling recounted the distress he felt at the deaths and the subsequent burial of his comrades Field Cornet Seroni, Antonio Lamberto and Botha, who were all touched by “death’s purple finger” in the battle at Belfast.¹⁹ Schikkerling was a young man, not yet twenty-one years old and even though it was not his first encounter with the “purple finger”, these men were his close companions. He probably reflected that it might well have been his fate too, but does not say so. Weber recounted the death of “Mot” Meier, the German Field Cornet, who “received a death shot in this purposeless skirmish. The news that Meier was missing made a very deep impression on the

¹⁴ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 212.

¹⁵ J.J. van Heerden, “Genls. De la Rey en Kemp en die stryd in die Wes-Transvaal”, in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, p. 183.

¹⁶ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 157.

¹⁷ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 26.10.1901, p. 307 [Translated: “Oh, what an sensation of horror do I feel spreading through my body.”]

¹⁸ Quoted by F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 163. [Translation: “The loss of my child was very painful, especially the cruel manner in which it happened, he was completely decapitated. Oh, that was bitter to behold.”]

¹⁹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 8.1.1901, p. 130.

commandos”.²⁰ And although Weber was proud of Meier, it is likely that he too would have had deeper thoughts about their loss.

b. The British numerical superiority

It is a well-recorded fact that Britain had an immense advantage in the number of men which they could field, as compared to the limited strength of the republican forces. This issue has already been discussed in chapter 1.

Leopold Scholtz also pointed out that whereas the Boers started the war with a slight advantage of approximately 34 000 men in the field and a further 20 000 in reserve, as compared to the British force numbering slightly over 27 000, this advantage was soon wiped out. By the end of the war in May 1902, the Boers could field only approximately 21 800 burghers against the 210 221 of the British.²¹ The increase in strength of the British force was not a gradual one. By the end of February 1900 the imperial forces were 50 000 strong.²² Roberts, and after him Kitchener, continued to increase the number of their forces. *The Times history* reported that the grand total of nearly 240 000 British troops was reached in May 1901, supported by 100 heavy field guns, 420 horse and field-guns and 60 pom-poms. It supplied statistics showing that the effective fighting strength of the imperial force on 19 June 1901 was just short of 164 000 men.²³ This compared to the Boer force of 44 000 men and young lads at large in the veld, of whom only 13 000 were in fighting trim.²⁴ These numbers of Boers are estimates made from the British point of view and could perhaps be disputed. Notwithstanding the possible discrepancies, the fact remains that there was a huge disparity in fighting strength between the two forces in the period when the guerrilla phase of the war was in full swing. This was a crucial issue for the Boers.

In addition to the already overwhelming imbalance in numbers, two further factors should be borne in mind. Firstly, that blacks were increasingly used not only for unarmed auxiliary duties but also armed for direct military service. Peter Warwick, a British historian, quoted Lloyd George who suggested in March 1902 that there were 30 000 armed blacks in British military

²⁰ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 183.

²¹ L. Scholtz, *Waarom die Boere die oorlog verloor* het, p. 216; F. Pretorius, *Scorched earth*, p. 21.

²² J.H. Breytenbach, *Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, IV, pp. 125.

²³ L.S. Amery, *The Times history of the war in South Africa*, V, pp. 248-249.

²⁴ L.S. Amery, *The Times history*, V, p. 251.

employ in South Africa. Warwick believed that this number was not widely exaggerated.²⁵ Secondly, it is also significant that many surrendered Boers were starting to assist the British. *The Times history* mentioned that by January 1902 there were 1 000 National Scouts (ex ZAR-fighters), a number which increased to 1 480 by May 1902. There were also nearly 500 Orange River Colony (ORC) Volunteers. Grundlingh calculated that the final strength of these units was 1359 and 448 respectively.²⁶ These two local corps provided valuable knowledge of regional conditions and of their enemy's *modus operandi* to the British forces.

The ever increasing pressure of the enemy, combined with strategies such as the blockhouse-lines deprived the republicans of vital freedom of movement. This predicament was no doubt experienced as a stressor by officers and burghers alike. The initiative, which is such an essential element of successful guerrilla warfare, was taken out of the Boer's hands. They were being forced into a defensive mode and the realisation that they were no longer in control of the situation became a general stressor – probably more so to the leadership, as they were faced with the problem of developing alternative tactics.

This is mentioned several times in the literature. Fritz Rothmann, who was with General B.J. Viljoen and General C.H. Muller in the northeastern Transvaal described in his diary how their movements were curtailed during July 1901 by the ever increasing presence of the British troops. On 28 July he recounted how the burghers were threatened by the enemy from several sides: "Ons kommando's is nie sterk genoeg om aan al hierdie Engelse weerstand te bied nie."²⁷ In terms of coping with the situation the manageability had been taken out of their hands.

Soon afterwards, in the middle of August, his daily entries concentrated on how the British forces closed in on him and twenty of his comrades while they were escorting nine families with their wagons and cattle. Several times they were surprised by British soldiers in places where they had assumed that they were safe. It became a cat and mouse game with the Boers constantly pursued, and moreover suffering from the miserably cold, misty weather, from lack of food, little sleep and the loss of many of their horses.²⁸ One can only conclude that these circumstances

²⁵ P. Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899 - 1902*, p. 25.

²⁶ L.S. Amery, *The Times history*, V, p. 408; A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners": Die rasional en verskynsel van verraad*, pp. 254, 267.

²⁷ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van 'n Transvaalse burger te velde*, 29.6.1901 to 28.7.1901, pp. 194-204. [Translated: "Our commandos were not strong enough to withstand the multitude of English."]

²⁸ M.E.R.(ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 11.8.1901 to 19.8.1901, pp. 210-213.

linked with the dominance of the enemy gave rise to further distress in their everyday lives.

J.F. Naudé, who was with General J. Kemp in the western Transvaal, described how the British came after them at the battle of Vlakfontein on 29 May 1901: “... kwamen de Engelshen als zwermen bijen, die verstoord en boos gemaakt waren omdat wij in het nest gestoken hadden. Zij kwamen nu, zooals zoo dikwijls te voren, om de astrante Boeren te vangen. Ze trokken uit drie oorden...” Kemp subsequently divided his force into three, and eventually he and his men managed to escape unscathed, due mainly to the British lack of intelligence and the Boers’ better use of the terrain. Naudé described how the horsemen and infantrymen teemed in front of, next to and behind the wagons of the one British column. Not a single scout was active to the left, the direction from which the Boers watched. Although Naudé described this escape as if the Boers had achieved an extraordinary feat, the episode was nonetheless stressful. The relieved Naudé regarded the success of their escape as a fitting birthday present for the young General Kemp, but it should be noted that once more the guerrillas had been forced into a defensive position.²⁹

c. The blockhouse lines

General Christiaan de Wet is said to have called Lord Kitchener’s blockhouse system the “blockhead” system.³⁰ Johan Hattingh, a historian who has researched the issue of blockhouses, argued that this label, as well as De Wet’s other nickname, “white elephants” were in truth unwarranted. He pointed out that during the peace talks at Vereeniging Commandant General Botha acknowledged that the blockhouse lines divided the country into camps and that this undeniably hampered the mobility of the Boers.³¹

From the beginning of 1901 blockhouses were erected to protect strategic points in the British supply lines, for example railway bridges and stations.³² Once the Boers had decided to continue the war despite the British advance and occupation of their capitals, the principle of disrupting communications and capturing supplies became an important Boer strategy. De Wet recollected his resolution after his success at Roodewal and his subsequent manoeuvres to avoid

²⁹ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten van Beyers en Kemp “bôkant” De Wet*, pp. 272-273. [Translated: “... the English came at us like a swarm of bees, disturbed and angered because we had agitated their nest. They came, as so often before, to ‘capture these impudent Boers.’ They advanced from three directions...”]

³⁰ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 541.

³¹ J. Hattingh, “The British blockhouse system”, in F. Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth*, pp. 236-237.

³² J. Hattingh, “The British blockhouse system”, in F. Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth*, pp. 227-228.

Kitchener during June 1900: “I also felt myself bound to wreck this line, for it was the only railway which Lord Roberts could now utilize for forwarding the enormous quantities of stores which his vast forces required.”³³ Records show that the destruction of railway lines and the seizing of supplies, led by men such as Danie Theron, Jack Hindon, Henry Slegtkamp and Gideon Scheepers, did in fact take place regularly during the early months of the guerrilla war.³⁴ Yet the British soon realised how vulnerable they were and extended their blockhouse lines. They also began using armoured trains for the protection of their communications. Nevertheless after the capture of most members of the Free State government in July 1901, De Wet reiterated in his memoir that he was still convinced that the answer lay in the destruction of the enemy communications: “I now impressed upon my officers as forcibly, as I could the importance of intercepting the communications of the enemy by blowing up their trains.”³⁵ Notwithstanding these words the number of rail disruptions indicate the success of the counter measures.

Table VI-1: Number of rail-disruptions per month.³⁶

Year	Month	Number of reported rail disruptions
1900	September	23
	October	32
	November	30
	December	21
1901	January	16
	February	30
	March	18
	April	18
	May	12
	June	8
	July	4
	August	No report
	September	2

³³ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 115.

³⁴ P.G. Cloete, *The Anglo-Boer War a Chronology*, pp. 184, 216, 223.

³⁵ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 257.

³⁶ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, *passim*.

After September 1901 no further reports are made.

Naudé reported that in July 1901 General Beyers ambushed a train between Naboomspruit and Pietpotgietersrust in the northern Transvaal. After a brief skirmish with the Gordon Highlanders, the train provided more clothes and food than the Boers could handle.³⁷ This was probably one of the last “train-battles” and it is worth noting that it did not take place in the highly contested northern Free State or the western Transvaal.

Once an individual’s ability to control a particular situation declines, stress is bound to develop. Therefore the mere fact that the disruption of railways became increasingly difficult would have become a stressor for the Boers. This applied not only to those directly involved in the act of the destruction of lines and capturing of supplies, but also to the officers who fully realised the importance of this guerrilla activity. The looted goods were usually sorely needed by the burghers in the veld, and if one superimposes the effect of this dwindling “source of supply” on the already difficult situation in which the Boers found themselves during the first half of 1901, the importance of De Wet’s second remark becomes understandable.

The system of blockhouses was soon adapted to accomplish more than guarding critical railway installations against damage or disruptions; it was also applied to redress the British inability to occupy the vast country effectively. It gave them a greater presence in the rural areas and it was soon evident that it curtailed the mobility of the Boer commandos. Although it could not completely check the movement of determined Boers, the possibility of death, the likelihood of being wounded or captured always loomed. Hattingh claimed that even the mercurial De Wet was forced to plan his crossings with great care every time it became necessary. He added that at the peace talks at Vereeniging Louis Botha conceded that the blockhouses had a negative impact on the burghers’ morale and that it frustrated them to have to move through the lines.³⁸ Frustrations, like hassles, might well be regarded as stressors of low intensity, but when the senses of fear and uncertainty are added and the situation is further compounded with cold, hunger and possibly longing, a desperate picture emerges. The blockhouse lines eroded the guerrilla warriors’ confidence and enthusiasm which were crucial elements in their bid to keep going. The Boers certainly sensed that their control of the situation was threatened. Strümpfer quotes Suzanne Kobasa who asserts that having a sense of control is an important component of

³⁷ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 259.

³⁸ J. Hattingh, “The British blockhouse system”, in F. Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth*, p. 237.

“hardiness”,³⁹ one of the constructs of salutogenesis that was discussed in Chapter II.

Table VI–2 below demonstrates that it took the British several months to install the system and that therefore it did not have an immediate overall impact on Boer commandos. Nevertheless it must be remembered that reasonably reliable news, inevitably augmented by wild rumours, would inflame the burghers’ nagging awareness that these dreaded lines were relentlessly snaking over the veld, depriving them of the space which they needed. This must undoubtedly have been perceived as a growing threat, a common stressor.

Table VI–2: Kilometres of blockhouse lines completed per month. (June 1901 to April 1902).⁴⁰

Year	Month	Kilometres completed per month	Cumulative total
1901	June	565	565
	July	-	565
	August	290	855
	September	80	935
	October	500	1 435
	November	200	1 635
	December	760	2 399
1902	January	700	3 095
	February	387	3 482
	March	95	3 577
	April	608	4 185

Deneys Reitz related how he and his comrades unexpectedly ran into a blockhouse in the dark, while trying to cross the railway in the southern Free State on their way in to join Smuts in the Cape Colony. He described how he and his horse became entangled in the barbed wire, how he had to abandon his mount and how their group were eventually forced to spend a cold night

³⁹ D.J.W. Strümpfer, “Salutogenesis a new paradigm”, *South African Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 170.

⁴⁰ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology, passim*.

behind a kopje.⁴¹ Although the ever enthusiastic Reitz, who did not compile his memoirs until after the war, did not mention it, it can be expected that this experience made him and his friends aware of the dangers of blockhouses. Field Cornet H.S. van der Walt recounted in his diary that during January 1902 the British were speeding up the construction of the blockhouse line along the Vet River in the western Free State and that his men were thus forced to restrict their “work” to the Hoopstad region.⁴²

On 17 August 1901 the National Scout P.J. du Toit reported in his diary that the British were building blockhouses along the crest of the Magaliesberg range in the vicinity of Damhoek while they were trying to clear the mountains of Boer refugees.⁴³ Weber confirmed this detail in his memoir: “The English then built the row of blockhouses on the mountain. That broke the spirit of the hidden Boers. Thirst and hunger chased them out, while others were found in their hiding places by dogs.”⁴⁴ Grundlingh pointed out that the blockhouse lines indeed compelled the Boers to travel long distances in order to avoid advancing British troops.⁴⁵

d. Drives to pin down mobile commandos.

When Kitchener succeeded Roberts as Commander-in-Chief at the end of November 1900, one of his priorities in his aim to bring the war to a speedy end, was to clear the rural areas of fighting Boers. He ordered large sweeping manoeuvres, which later became known as drives. *The Times history* described the first of these drives, early in 1901, against Botha in the southeastern Transvaal as follows: “Kitchener’s conception for this movement was to make a clean sweep of the country between the Delagoa and Natal Railways by an eastward advance from Johannesburg to the Swazi or Zulu Borders.”⁴⁶ MapV-1 in the previous chapter illustrates the territory in question. The operation was made up of five columns, four of which were under the command of the vigorous General John French. The columns were to move from the base line in an easterly direction hoping to “envelope and annihilate the enemy in the neighbourhood of Ermelo or driving

⁴¹ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 192-193.

⁴² J.H. Coetzee (ed), “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, *Christiaan de Wet-Annale* 8, Day 610, p. 141.

⁴³ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout P.J. du Toit 1900 - 1902*, 17.8.1901, p. 65.

⁴⁴ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 90.

⁴⁵ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p. 169.

⁴⁶ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 158.

them against the Swazi and Zulu borders and there forcing them to surrender.”⁴⁷

It was a long drawn out operation, lasting from 27 January to 14 April 1901. It was marked by Botha’s unsuccessful attempt to crush General H.L. Smith-Dorrien at Lake Chrissie in the dark morning hours of 6 February and by the failed peace talks between Kitchener and Botha at Middelburg which started on 28 February and ended with Botha’s rejection of Britain’s terms on 16 March. It was further marked by extremely heavy rains on the Highveld, which hampered French’s movements. In the end, like the peace talks, Kitchener gained very little by the whole manoeuver. *The Times history* reported that 1 332 Boers were taken out of the war, of which 730 surrendered voluntarily.⁴⁸ The cost to the British, even though it is unknown, was probably unduly high for such a disappointing result.

It is not within the domain of this study to examine this or subsequent drives from a military perspective, but to probe them as stressors. Firstly, the fact that during this very early stage of the guerrilla war, the commandos under the commandant general of the ZAR were placed in a defensive situation, focussing on avoidance of the enemy and continuous flight, could not have augured well for the burghers in the veld. Secondly, the wide-ranging destruction of their farms would naturally have aggravated their apprehension.⁴⁹ Thirdly, even though the Boers were exposed to the same foul weather conditions as their opponents, they most probably were obliged to survive with less protection against the elements than their British opponents. Fourthly, all around them comrades were being lost, not in the act of seriously harassing their enemy as they should have, but in actions of evasion and escape. And moreover, the rumours which reached them about their leader’s peace talks in Middelburg would have raised uncertainties in many minds, uncertainty as to whether the war had lost its meaning. It can be understood that these circumstances would doubtlessly have contributed to a general feeling of discontent amongst the Boers.

Although the results of this drive was not as shattering to the Boers as Kitchener had hoped it would be, he followed it up with yet another drive in the northeastern Transvaal, in which he tried to curtail General Ben Viljoen’s activities. During the subsequent avoidance manoeuvres Viljoen moreover experienced motivational difficulties among his men. *The Times history*

⁴⁷ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 159.

⁴⁸ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 180-181.

⁴⁹ H.F. Wichman, *Oorlogsherinneringe van ‘n oudstryder*, pp. 13-14.

reported that 100 burghers deserted him when he ordered them to escape between two advancing British columns.⁵⁰ Viljoen's personal feeling at that stage was probably one of having lost control over the entire situation. Eventually the drive cost Viljoen about 1 100 men, most of whom had voluntarily surrendered.⁵¹

Schikkerling described the chaos of that flight when they were informed on 18 April of the advance on the British from Middelburg to Tautesberg: "We pass more farms and many wagons, men, women children and cattle, moving along and flying [fleeing] to some place or other."⁵² On the following morning he wrote: "In wagons, in carts, on horseback and on foot came the men. Trekboers with their wagons, families, and cattle ... many barefooted ... now realized that their independence had shrunk to ... these few stony hills." The chaos among the fleeing people finally caused him to cry out: "Shall I ever forget the sight. The shouting and confusion of exited people, each with his wagon, mule or donkey, to which he selfishly clung, loading and preparing to get away or meditating to remain and surrender."⁵³

That evening a number of Schikkerling's comrades also decided to surrender. He too was utterly weary of flight and lack of sleep and remarked: "I am sick at the thought of going back all the way with my weary beasts ... I am almost tempted to remain and surrender or die ..."⁵⁴ It is quite possible that a measure of depression had set in at this stage after the days of sustained tension.

Schikkerling's entries of those fateful days clearly prove that the drives not only reduced the numbers of the Boer forces, but that the methodical advance of great numbers of troops, destroying farms and capturing women and children as they went, became a severe stressor to the burghers. Yet, once again this stressor did not stand alone. It was linked to the superior numbers of the British as discussed above.

Once Kitchener realised that the tactics used in the drives did not yield the expected results and once the blockhouse lines had reached a point where they could effectively be used as a

⁵⁰ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The times history*, V, p. 211.

⁵¹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The times history*, V, pp. 214-215.

⁵² R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 18.4.1901, p. 177.

⁵³ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 18.4.1901, pp. 178-179.

⁵⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 18.4.1901, p. 182.

barrier, a new method or “new model drive” was implemented. These drives were expressly aimed at capturing De Wet and thereby removing his annoying presence in the northern Free State. *The Times history* described in detail where the lines of men, consisting of enormous numbers of British troops, theoretically enough men to advance ten yards apart, stretched over the veld. They pointed out how the blockhouse lines and armoured trains with searchlights were incorporated in the plan and how, during night-time, these lines would remain effectively in place, preventing breakthroughs in the dark.⁵⁵ De Wet exclaimed: “We have seen them: they are a great big lot!”⁵⁶

Three of these new model drives took place in the early months of 1902. Of these the second drive yielded the best results from the British point of view: 778 prisoners were taken, 50 Boers killed and 25 000 head of cattle captured.⁵⁷ To these figures Pakenham added 2 000 horses, which were most vital to the Boers survival, as well as 200 wagons.⁵⁸ At a period when the burghers were fighting with the minimum material support, this loss unquestionably caused a significant further dent in their morale. According to De Wet’s own account the ever-closing net of British soldiers caused panic and fear. With his sjambok he tried to force his burghers to break through, yet many turned back. In the resulting chaos, his son Kotie who was his secretary, together with his horsecart containing all his documents, were lost.⁵⁹ The presence of large numbers of women, children and old men only added to the disorder and the lack of discipline within the Boer-ranks.

Those late summer days and weeks preceding the drive, while the enemy’s preparation was visible to many Boers and civilians in the area, must be recognised as another mushrooming stressor of cataclysmic nature shared by many. Compounding the vexing uncertainty of the morrow, were the existing hardships relating to food and clothes and an alarming awareness of the enemy’s superior forces. The eventual pandemonium and terror that followed were the culmination of this stressful period.

One more factor which one should keep in mind, is the awareness of the burghers, as guerrilla fighters, of having become the hunted – instead of being the hunter. The reality that they

⁵⁵ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 473-492.

⁵⁶ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 302.

⁵⁷ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 491.

⁵⁸ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 549.

⁵⁹ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp. 302-303.

had been encircled, forced into a “kraal” (corral), that they had been deprived of the opportunity to harass, disrupt and cause setbacks to their enemy, would no doubt have caused many to wonder about the sense of any further resistance. According to De Wet’s memoir, Commandant Jan Meyer and 400 men fell into the hands of the British on 27 February 1902, ironically 21 years after the ZAR had triumphed over the British at Majuba. De Wet perceived this event as an adverse sign: “We had sinned – but not against England!”⁶⁰ Yet, although he himself remained positive until the very last day of the peace negotiations, it is doubtful if many of those burghers whom he had to compel into fight with his sjambok and many of those who had escaped his “encouragement”, shared his confidence.

Nevertheless, if it seems as if Kitchener’s NMDs ended in an anticlimax because De Wet and Steyn were not captured, this perception is wrong. Considering the gradual building up of tension among the Boers when it became clear what the British were planning and the eventual cost of the drives to the already crippled republican forces, then it should be recognized that the NMDs were probably the last straw for many guerrilla commanders and their burghers.⁶¹

e. Night attacks

The Times history, pointed out that although the British scarcely interfered with Botha’s plans for the coming summer during the winter of 1901, a column under Lieutenant Colonel G.E. Benson was indeed active in the Highveld districts of the southeastern Transvaal. According to *The Times history* his method of night raiding proved successful: “... the best way of catching a commando at a disadvantage was to march for it by night and attack at dawn. The Boer detested this method. Once in the saddle, rifle in hand and a full bandolier buckled round him, he was more than a match for the British trooper; pounced on while he was still in laager, he was liable to panic.” It continued that the horseless Boers, many of whom were always present in any laager, were even more vulnerable.⁶² On the open Highveld, where daytime manoeuvres were always a problem, Benson’s night raids made good military sense.

During August and September 1901, Benson carried out numerous night raids on Boer commandos, with varying degrees of success. Although his activities only impacted upon a small

⁶⁰ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 305.

⁶¹ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp. 294, 303.

⁶² L.S.Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 329-330.

corner of the Highveld "... he surprised laagers and made his column a terror to the district."⁶³ Similar tactics were soon to be implemented by other British commanders, including Colonel M.F. Rimington in the Free State.

The threat of nightly strikes – especially in those areas where the aggressor was known to have implemented these tactics before – would torment the burgher by night and by day. Not only was his commando forced to move its camp site every day, but the burghers' much needed rest was interrupted, leading to catnaps (jokingly called "kleindood" or small death) by day and sleeping with his rifle close at hand by night.⁶⁴ The mere menace of having to get hold of his horse in the dark, saddling, loading his belongings and absconding without losing touch with his comrades, was in itself a strenuous exercise. The unpredictability of his immediate future then became the stressor; the Boers were only drifting with the tide of events. Having to put up with the likelihood of such nocturnal interruptions and speculating on the probability of a recurrence when he and his comrades rolled themselves into their blankets on the bitterly cold Highveld of August 1901, indubitably turned night attacks into a common stressor among the burghers .

That Benson's night raid system was successful at a time when little else was happening on the war front, cannot be denied. However, when *The Times history* discussed the strength of the Boer forces by the end of September 1901, it stated that the British official estimate of approximately 6 500 men who were still in the field was inaccurate. It was argued that this was a grossly shrunken estimate and that a figure of "about 35 000" was closer to the mark. On the other hand this figure may have been inflated and it is also debatable. Be that as it may, it should be acknowledged that "... the proportion of weak men was relatively smaller and the proportion of stalwarts relatively greater, and ... more formidable...".⁶⁵ Fortigenesis – gaining strength through stress – among the hard-pressed Boers was clearly recognized by the compilers of *The Times history*.

f. The influence of the British proclamations on Boer morale

During the course of the Anglo-Boer War numerous proclamations were issued by the British. Roberts' first proclamation on 17 January 1900 shortly after his arrival in South Africa,

⁶³ L.S.Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 331.

⁶⁴ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 139.

⁶⁵ L.S.Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 332.

was aimed at the Free State burghers. It warned them to desist from hostilities and promised them that if they stayed at home they would not be made to suffer.⁶⁶ Subsequently numerous proclamations with similar promises were issued, promises which were seldom adhered to. Roberts' second proclamation, issued after his victory at Paardeberg declared that those "... who are willing to lay down their arms ... bind themselves by an oath to abstain from further participation ... will be given passes to return to their homes ... will not be made prisoners of war ... [and] property will not be taken from them."⁶⁷ Proclamations of this nature were thus – even though it was not realised at the time – used as a psychological instrument to change Boer attitudes.

Those Boers who reacted positively to these promises and laid down their arms were subsequently called "hendsoppers" by their former comrades-in-arms. These men soon realized that the British occupying force did not view their undertakings as binding. According to A.M. Grundlingh Brigadier General H.H. Settle declared in November 1900 that: "... the order of the day appeared to be capturing those farmers, who had remained true to their oath, and rounding up all their stock without giving receipts."⁶⁸

Gradually the Boers became wary and took less heed of Roberts', and later Kitchener's, proclamations, because it had become clear that the pledges were not intended to be met. Many sources mentioned these proclamations – which became known as Kitchener's paper bombs – and many jokes about them were circulated. On 26 April 1901 Rothmann, with his tongue in cheek, wrote of a proclamation from "My Lord Kitchener" urging the burghers to surrender and become lawful and loyal citizens of His British Majesty. He remarked that proclamations had been sent out on such a regular basis that a joker from Middelburg approached the British under protection of a white flag asking for the latest proclamation from their supreme commander.⁶⁹

The ultimate of this "paper-bomb" tactic of breaking down the enemy morale was probably Kitchener's "banishment proclamation" of 7 August 1901. The reaction to this proclamation varied considerably. Celliers' entry on 15 August read: "Wij lachten hartelik om de nieuwe

⁶⁶ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 101.

⁶⁷ Quoted by A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, p. 27.

⁶⁸ Quoted by A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, p. 59.

⁶⁹ M.E.R (ed.). *Oorlogsdagboek*, 26.4.1901, p. 176.

jakhalsstreek van Khaki en daarmee was alles uit.”⁷⁰ Rothmann was in an optimistic mood on the day that he reported Commandant N. Groenewalt’s success in capturing a train well laden with coffee, sugar, flour, shoes and shirts, and he was understandably condescending when he mentioned this proclamation as an afterthought: “Lord Kitchener is weer aan huil in sy jongste proklamasie ... Genl Botha het hom geantwoord dat die burgers nog nie lus het om sulke stappe te doen nie.”⁷¹ Reitz recalled that they received this proclamation only two days before 15 September 1901, the expiry date which Kitchener had set, and that the announcement was met with derision by Smuts’ commando.⁷² Nevertheless the matter was more serious for certain burghers. Field Cornet Van der Walt, in his austere manner, called the proclamation “harsh”, but made no further comment on how he felt about it.⁷³ Weber stated that the effect on the fighting burghers would amount to very little, but that on the bushlancers (local Boers with little or no inclination to fight for the republican cause) it might have been different: “as it [the proclamation] had been written for the fickle and the doubting.”⁷⁴ Naudé recounted that General Beyers convened a meeting of his officers on 7 September 1901 to discuss the matter openly. It was agreed that although the destruction of property, burning of homesteads and maltreatment of women caused them grief, bitterness towards their enemy compelled them to carry on their struggle until the very end.⁷⁵ It appears that for some Boers it was not a simple laughing matter, yet from a psychological perspective it can be claimed that the threat of banishment merely made the burghers more united and more determined to continue the strife.

President Steyn, immovable as ever, viewed the proclamation seriously but quipped: “May I be permitted to say that your Excellency’s jurisdiction is limited to the range of your Excellency’s guns”. He subsequently pointed out that Kitchener had hitherto ruined the country, wrecked their homes, looted and killed cattle by the thousand, imprisoned, insulted and carried away their women. “Can we now – when it is merely a question of banishment – shrink from our

⁷⁰ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 15.8.1901, p. 277. [Translated: “We laughed heartily at this new jackal stunt of Khaki and that was it.”]

⁷¹ M.E.R (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 8.9.1901, p. 219. [Translated: “Lord Kitchener is crying once more in his most recent proclamation ... General Botha answered him that the burghers were not yet ready to take such steps.”]

⁷² D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 221.

⁷³ J.H. Coetzee (ed.), “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 451, p. 138.

⁷⁴ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General de la Rey*, p. 95.

⁷⁵ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 263.

duty? ... but we are not asking for magnanimity, we demand justice.”⁷⁶ Although Steyn did not take it lightly, neither did he flinch from the threat. Kitchener’s proclamation was probably a stressor to him, as it surely was to many of his subjects, but it was a stressor that gave the Boers even greater determination to continue their struggle. *The Times history* agreed on this point when it called Kitchener’s proclamation a serious error. What was said about fortigenesis above is also pertinent in this context. The “skulkers and incapables” mentioned in *The Times history* and in Weber’s words the “fickle and doubting” might well have succumbed to such a threat.⁷⁷ But the fact that in contrast, the “stalwarts” became even stronger, is undeniably true. For them the meaningfulness of the war – in terms of Antonovsky’s sense of coherence (SOC) theory (refer Chapter II) – did not disappear in the face of setbacks and threats.

What President Steyn wrote later about his opinions concerning peace, was likewise applicable to the threats in this proclamation: “Van de plus minus 20 000 man die nog in het veld waren, waren de meesten veteranen, die gehard waren in de strijd, die alles reeds hadden opgeofferd, en die nu streden voor iets hogers dan bezitting.”⁷⁸

Grundlingh regarded the proclamation as a tool aimed at intimidating the burghers, pressing them to surrender. According to him J.D. Kestell, the Free State minister with the commandos, claimed that he was not aware of more than 30 Boers who actually withdrew from the strife as a result of the proclamation. Grundlingh, like *The Times history*, considered the proclamation a pitiful failure.⁷⁹

Whether this “deportation proclamation” was derided or whether it was taken seriously by the Boers, it should be noted that many diarists and authors of memoirs and other historians have made mention of it. It was issued at a time, soon after a gruelling winter, at a stage when numerous stressors were building up. It is clear that one way or another it did have an effect on the guerrilla fighters who were still in the field. And if that effect was negative it most probably became a private stressor among burghers, one which the individual naturally preferred not to discuss with his comrades.

⁷⁶ Quoted by P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 259.

⁷⁷ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General de la Rey*, p. 95.

⁷⁸ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn, 'n lewensbeskrywing*, II, pp. 86-88. [Translated: “Of the more or less 20 000 who were still in the field, the majority were veterans, toughened by the struggle, who had sacrificed everything and who now fought for something greater than possessions.”]

⁷⁹ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p. 171.

g. The effect of the scorched earth policy on burghers on commando

The scorched earth policy of Roberts and Kitchener is well documented. Pretorius wrote in the introductory chapter of *Scorched earth*: “The republics were subjected to systematic devastation. Whole towns, as well as thousands of farmhouses, were burnt down or extensively damaged. This onslaught on the Boer’s means of survival was intensified by the destruction of all food supplies: livestock was killed in enormous numbers, and fields of grain and maize were burnt and destroyed.”⁸⁰ Grundlingh estimated that approximately 30 000 houses were destroyed.⁸¹ Most Boers had struggled over years and endured many hardships to secure and develop their property, it was their little piece of independence. Its destruction naturally embittered them, yet it also hardened their resolve.

Deneys Reitz, who was a youngster at the time, recalled the scene in January 1901, as the British were implementing their first drive in southeastern Transvaal. They were near Olifantsfontein between Johannesburg and Pretoria when they became aware of the British advance: “During the course of the morning, pillars of smoke began to rise behind the English advance, and to our astonishment we saw that they were burning the farmhouses as they came ... it was borne in on us that a more terrible chapter of the war was opening.”⁸² Naudé described how several houses were destroyed in the “Moot” – the long glen south of the Magaliesberg. He described how the “moot” was blanketed in by smoke for at least nine miles, with new smoke pillars constantly rising. Burghers who were on the crest of the mountains saw their labour of many years disappear in smoke, yet, according to Naudé, they were ever calm, courageous and full of trust. He expressed his emotion in a short poem:

“Hij sien zijn vruchtbaar land
Door de oorlogsvuur vernielen
Maar voelt met nieuwen moed
Zijn edele borst bezielen;”⁸³

His memory of the events was perhaps clouded by subjectivity. Did the burghers comprehend the British aim with their strategy of destruction and did it not perhaps make them question the meaningfulness (see Antonovsky’s SOC theory) of the war? This will never be

⁸⁰ F. Pretorius, “The Anglo-Boer War: an overview”, in F. Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth*, p. 28.

⁸¹ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p. 167.

⁸² D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 148.

⁸³ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, pp. 205-207. [Translated literally: “He saw his fertile land despoiled by the fire of war. But a new valour infused his noble breast ...”] [The poem is probably from Goethe’s play *Torqua Tasso*.]

known and at this stage one can only speculate on it.

P.J. du Toit, who laid down his arms and joined the British as a National Scout on 31 May 1901, wrote in his diary on 25 May 1901: “Everywhere I saw signs of the English visit: here a burnt house, there an empty dwelling, while the ‘bults’ were literally strewn with dead cattle, horses and sheep, killed by the enemy on their devastating tour.”⁸⁴ Once again one can only speculate if this was perhaps a final prod in Du Toit’s long vacillation about the issue of surrender.

This was only the beginning of the thrust of destruction which was to continue for many months over large parts of the country. Schikkerling described his visit to a spot where five fine farmsteads had once stood. He found only the blackened ruins, as “the Torch of Civilisation” had been applied to them. Furiously, he wrote that: “I would have given my life to have been at hand with fifty rounds and my trusty Mauser.”⁸⁵ This loathing for the British action was a typical reaction among the Boers. Rothmann depicted how the town of Roosenekal was totally destroyed, with not a living soul to be seen. Here and there he saw a piece of furniture or an undamaged pot or pan, items collected by housewives over twenty or thirty years: “Dit was jammerlik om te aanskou ... deur sulke ellendige werk kan die vyand sy doel nie bereik nie.”⁸⁶

The destruction continued throughout the middle of 1901. Van Heerden described, somewhat emotionally, how Methuen and Kekewich continued their terrible expeditions of destruction and plunder, how the Boers were in danger of losing all their sustenance, yet not they did not lose their spirit.⁸⁷ The destruction of homes, animals and crops, apparently failed to break the Boers’ resolve. In fact, the opposite was rather true and could, in the light of modern research, be termed fortigenesis (refer Chapter II). The ever optimistic character of the farmer came to the fore when Naudé described how, in October 1901, the good rains had caused the wheat, which had been trampled by the British, to sprout once more ... but this time even better than before.⁸⁸ In his diary Celliers several times mentioned the devastation of houses, orchards and wheat, as well as the stealing of money, rings, knives and forks. His entry of 1 November 1901 also referred

⁸⁴ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 25.5.1901, p. 49.

⁸⁵ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 28.3.1901, p. 165.

⁸⁶ M.E.R (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 22.8.1901, p. 214 [Translated: “It was pitiable to see ... by such wretched method the enemy will not reach their goal.”]

⁸⁷ J.J. van Heerden, “Genls. De la Rey en Kemp en die stryd in Wes-Transvaal”, in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum*, p. 178.

⁸⁸ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 299.

to the wheat which the British had trampled and which was upright once more, because not even the plants would bow to the “Khaki”.⁸⁹

Grundlingh quoted Smuts who stated that a weak man is broken by adversity and that there is little doubt that the devastation discouraged some burghers.⁹⁰ The destruction of farms and denudation of the country was indeed a stressor to the Boers. The Free Stater Van der Walt, somewhat forlornly, wrote that as the enemy could not overpower them, they were trying to starve them.⁹¹ But most of the sources indicate that instead of causing distress, as Kitchener had no doubt hoped, the deprivation made the Boers even more determined to overcome their predicament. Pretorius quoted the historian S.B. Spies who suggested that rather than hastening the end of the war, the destruction and devastation had the opposite effect on the Boers.⁹² It was indeed a matter of fortigenesis, where strength, and not distress, evolved from the stress. The brutal destruction of personal belongings and animals, was probably more perturbing to the Boers than the sight of blackened ruins and warped corrugated iron.

The scorched earth policy of the British is one aspect of the war which, together with the “black spot” of the concentration camps, has remained imprinted on the memories of the defeated Boers. Yet the real impact was not felt as keenly while the Boers were still on commando. It was after the war, when the Boers – the bitterenders as well as the prisoners of war – returned to their desolated farms that great hardship was experienced. Both Emily Hobhouse and J. Ramsay MacDonald described this suffering in detail.⁹³ This aspect of the war however does not fall within the confines of this study.

3. Stress caused by the loss of infrastructure

a. Loss of capitals and towns

Lord Roberts’ fixation on capturing the two republican capitals, which is often regarded as one of his serious misjudgements, was in fact not completely misguided. Once Bloemfontein

⁸⁹ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan. F.E. Celliers*, 1.11.1901, p. 310.

⁹⁰ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p. 168.

⁹¹ J.H. Coetzee (ed.), “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 492, p. 139.

⁹² F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 357.

⁹³ R. van Reenen, *Emily Hobhouse, Boer War Letters*, pp. 163-320; J. Ramsay MacDonald (translated by J.A. Coetzee), *Wat ek in Suid Afrika gesien het, September en Oktober 1902*, pp. 76-95.

fell into British hands, the Boers of that “model republic” had to make do with Kroonstad, thereafter with Bethlehem, Fouriesburg and finally Vrede as their republic’s capital.⁹⁴ Similarly as the Transvaal republicans retreated eastward the towns of Middelburg, Machadodorp and then Nelspruit were all called the “capital”. Although these towns were the temporary seats of the respective republican governments, they were never capitals in the true sense of the word, but were rather makeshift venues for members of the governments to convene, with a core of civil servants to aid them and supply elementary services.

Although the republics were both relatively young, the burghers had every right to be proud of the infrastructure in Bloemfontein and Pretoria. As far as government buildings, churches, schools, military installations, banks and shops, official and other residences, parks and squares were concerned both towns were at the time well developed. In contrast, the improvised and often primitive facilities used in the makeshift “capitals” were somewhat belittling. On 14 April 1900 Celliers diarised that Hurmans Hotel in Kroonstad had to be used to house the Free State *Volksraad*. He was clearly not impressed with Kroonstad: “Kroonstad is niet veel bijzonders. De kerk is het eenige gebouw dat eenigszins de aandacht trekt.”⁹⁵

According to the historian W.J. de Kock, President Steyn was deeply moved by the occupation of Bloemfontein and later said: “Niemand die de verslagenheid na de inneming van Bloemfontein niet persoonlijk heeft aanschouwd, kan ‘n denkbeeld vormen hoe groot en diep dié was. Er was geen moed, geen lust meer om te strijden bij de burgers.”⁹⁶ Grundlingh alluded to the wave of defeatism generated by the circumstances of the war as one of the factors which led to the laying down of arms.⁹⁷ This mood of despondence was confirmed by Naudé, who observed that when the British crossed the Vaal River without the anticipated bloody battle: “...een vlag van neerslachtigheid had van het volk bezit genomen; men kon niet gelooven dat deze dezelfde Burgers waren, die zoo vrolijk en moedig den strijd tegemoed gingen.”⁹⁸ He continued to describe how it was decided that Pretoria would not be defended, in spite of the costly forts and

⁹⁴ Personal information: Miss. E. Wessels, War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, 31 May 2002.

⁹⁵ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 14.4.1900, p. 93. [Translated: “Kroonstad is hardly impressive. The church is the only building which draws the attention.”]

⁹⁶ W.J. de Kock, “President Martinus Theunis Steyn, die siel van die vryheidstryd”, in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum*, p. 248. [Translated: “No one who had not observed the dejection can envisage how great and how deep it was. There was no spirit, no urge to fight left in the burghers.”]

⁹⁷ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p.172.

⁹⁸ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 104. [Translated: “... a wave of despondence had taken hold of the people; one could hardly believe that these were the same burghers who had so cheerful and fearless when they began the war.”]

the guns which were supposed to guard the capital. When some stalwart burghers, including Danie Theron, wanted to stand firm, they had to learn at Irene that the government had already left Pretoria. “Er heerschte diepe verontwaardiging bij velen, die zich in sterke taal openbaarde.”⁹⁹ This was virtually a repetition of the situation at Bloemfontein a few months earlier. The keys of the city were peacefully, even somewhat ceremoniously, handed over to the British. That the indignation described by Naudé, would gradually turn to dejection and despondence is a logical deduction.

The instability and uncertainty caused by the constant shift of their capitals and the loss of their symbols would have played an important role in causing the moods described above. These were most certainly stressors; as change was the main element which threatened them. The burghers who survived this threat and who continued their war-effort after losing their capitals, were soon faced with new problems such as the lack of commissariat and medical support, impaired government and commercial services – including banks, shops and hotels – and even the inability to detain and feed their prisoners of war.

Although universally this could be called a normal situation for guerrilla fighters, the difference lies in the fact that as far as the Transvaal and the Free State were concerned the guerrilla fighters had previously enjoyed these benefits from their governments. In other cases such as those of Cuba and China, the guerrillas were without these facilities from the beginning.

The phrase “te velde” – meaning: in the veld or in rural areas – was frequently used to indicate that the element or person was not operating from a capital or a major town. It was used for example to indicate that hospitals, government printing presses and even the makeshift press used for minting the one pound gold coins, called *Veldponde*, near Pilgrim’s Rest had been set up in the veld. Yet on closer analysis this phrase appears to convey some sense of forlornness, as it suggested being without a capital. Burghers who were without the backing of normal government facilities, who were truly “te velde”, were bound to start asking questions, to appraise whether all their self-denial was really worth their while.

b. Governments on the move

Both republics’ governments, that is to say a few elected members under the president or acting president (in the case in the ZAR) and their staff, were also “te velde” for most of the

⁹⁹ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 109. [Translated: “Intense indignity was experienced by many, which resulted in strong language.”]

guerrilla phase of the war. Furthermore, as the net flung out by the British was a constant threat to them they were forced to remain mobile. After the fall of Pretoria, President Paul Kruger and the ZAR government fled eastwards, until Kruger entered Mozambique. Pakenham put it: “President Kruger, after weeks as a fugitive in a railway carriage, had finally crossed the border to Mozambique ...”¹⁰⁰

Thereafter the ZAR government, under acting president Schalk Burger, operated primarily in the eastern Transvaal. They were stationed on Paardeplaas near Tautesberg in the Dullstroom area under the protection of General Ben Viljoen until 5 April 1901. They then left the area in order to avert capture by the British who were executing a drive under Lieutenant General Bindon Blood.¹⁰¹ Thereafter they stayed on the Highveld for most of the remainder of the war, but were obliged to move their headquarters frequently so as to stay out of enemy hands. *The Times history* indicated 51 positions in this area where the government had stopped during the critical eight months from April to November 1901.¹⁰² To claim that they were constantly on the run is by no means exaggerated. Many burghers were aware of this situation and it most certainly eroded their confidence in the eventual outcome of the war.

The fact that in the early morning hours of 11 July 1901 virtually the entire Free State government and their entourage including the presidential bodyguard, the republic’s money-boxes and all its documents were captured in the town of Reitz by the British, lends further support to the above argument. President Steyn himself escaped capture thanks to the cunning of his *agterryer* Ruiter.¹⁰³

To fight for the independence of one’s country under such arduous conditions, while the government was either on the run or indeed captured, could only have sown yet more seeds of doubt, nagging away at the back of the burgher’s minds, accumulating daily along with the many other stressors.

c. The vain hope of foreign intervention

The governments of the two republics optimistically decided that a deputation should be sent to Europe to support Dr. W.J. Leyds, the ZAR’s envoy in Europe in his quest to mobilize aid

¹⁰⁰ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 458.

¹⁰¹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 233; J.W. Meijer, *Generaal Ben Viljoen, 1868 - 1917*, p. 171.

¹⁰² L.S. Amery, *The Times history*, V, map at end of chapter XX..

¹⁰³ W.J. de Kock, “President Martinus Theunis Steyn, die siel van die vryheidstryd”, in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum*, pp. 255-256.

from either France, Holland, Germany, Russia or the United States of America. The three men who were entrusted with this task, A. Fischer, A.D.W. Wolmarans and C.H. Wessels, left for Europe in March 1900. Pakenham called them fortunate, perhaps because they were escaping the hardships that were to follow.¹⁰⁴ Breytenbach pointed out that at least two of them, Wessels and Wolmarans, had no diplomatic background at all,¹⁰⁵ implying that they had little hope of making an impression on the governments in Europe and elsewhere.

But this was written with hindsight. For the duration of the guerrilla phase the Boer leaders and burghers were hopeful that the mission would bring relief. At times it was even believed that the aid might be in the form of direct military intervention and at others it was hoped that enough pressure would be placed on Britain to end the war. Towards the end the hope was merely for financial support.

When it became clear that President Kruger could not remain in the ZAR he too was sent to Europe. He left for Lourenço Marques on 11 September 1900. Part of his mission was to bolster the effort of the four men who were already working in Europe. Two constructive developments took place while Kruger was en route. Firstly the deputation reported on 15 September 1900 that the Czar of Russia might be willing to help them, but that there were certain stumbling blocks as far as Germany was concerned. Two weeks later the International Peace Congress passed certain resolutions in favour of the republics. But these were, however, later toned down to suit Britain.¹⁰⁶

Even before Kruger arrived in Europe a request for an audience with the German Kaiser Wilhelm II was denied and a few days later Leyds was requested not to visit Germany.¹⁰⁷ This stance of Germany, and in particular that of Kaiser Wilhelm II, can probably be traced back to the reprimanding letter he received from Queen Victoria, his grandmother, following his expression of support to Kruger and the ZAR after the Jameson Raid in January 1896.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless Kruger was received enthusiastically in countries such as France and the Netherlands, and in June 1901 Czar Nicholas II approached King Edward VII directly about ending the war.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 389.

¹⁰⁵ J.H. Breytenbach, *Geskiedenis*, V, p. 172.

¹⁰⁶ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 187, 189, 191.

¹⁰⁷ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 192-193.

¹⁰⁸ M.S. Geen, *The making of South Africa*, pp. 184-185.

¹⁰⁹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 217, 233, 242.

In March 1901 Celliers reported that a formal debate had been held in their laager questioning the desirability of foreign intervention. According to him the general feeling was against intervention. But he added that most burghers probably did not understand what was meant by intervention. On 31 May 1901, one year before peace was signed, Schikkerling reported that General Ben Viljoen, addressing his men from a wagon, told them that rumours of intervention were nonsense and added that it was the intention of the leaders to ask for an armistice. Despite this he said that he was sure that “some pecuniary aid will come from Europe.” Schikkerling was clearly not impressed by his general’s talk and his entry for the day ended: “Intervention will not come, and who will interest himself in a lost cause? We must just continue.”¹¹⁰ Bruce Catton, whose work is on the American Civil War, agreed with this sentiment; foreign powers do not support a loser.¹¹¹ And as the weeks and months rolled on there was indeed no intervention, nor any financial aid from Europe or America.

Schikkerling’s steadfast attitude was, however, not the standard emotion among the Boers. Grundlingh, in summing up the burgher’s reasons for laying down of arms, stated that certain burghers held on to the futile hope of European intervention: “Toe dit nie die geval blyk te wees nie, het sommige burgers alle hoop laat vaar en was hulle nie soos hul makkers bereid om die stryd in eie krag voort te sit nie.”¹¹²

As the possibility of foreign support dwindled and the hope faded that deliverance would come, dejection would probably have been a common reaction. But this did not necessarily lead to the decision to handsup or to change sides. This did not cause enormous private stress, as will be explained later when intangible stressors are discussed. There were many other factors that also played a role. The lack of foreign intervention on its own, would most likely not have caused burghers to abandon the war, but combined with the multitude of other stressors, this aspect cannot be ignored.

4. Stress caused by environmental factors

a. Hardships caused by the weather

¹¹⁰ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 31.5.1901, p. 213.

¹¹¹ B. Catton, *The Civil War*, pp. 131-132

¹¹² A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p. 170. [Translated: “ When it became clear that this would not happen some burghers lost all hope and were not, as were their comrades, prepared to continue the war on their own.]

The critical first summer of the guerrilla war was marked by an exceptionally high rainfall over most parts of the southern African interior, as illustrated in the table below:

Table VI-3: Monthly rainfall in millimetres.

		1900 : 1901							
		Sep.	Oct.	Nov	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.
De Aar	A	0	0	11	81	?	80	46	55
	Y	13	19	25	20	30	27	52	34
Maseru	A	0	12	0	93	76	145	152	61
	Y	26	61	81	85	124	113	96	63
Kimberley	A	0	42	10	60	17	81	198	50
	Y	12	27	40	45	63	67	71	41
Johannesburg	A	?	61	201	95	132	69	176	108
	Y	27	67	125	143	149	128	114	43

A = Actual; Y = Long Term Average; ? = figure unknown

Source: SA Weather Bureau, Statistics Department

These figures reveal that during the late summer months, February, March and April of 1901, the rainfall was significantly higher than the long term average. Seen from the Boer leadership's viewpoint, these were precisely the critical months, when the guerrilla warfare should have been escalated according to the plans agreed upon at Cyferfontein, in October 1900. But it was also the time when the British realised that the war was far from over and that new counter measures had become necessary.

The days, often weeks, of rainy weather, are reflected in many of the diarists consulted in this study. The virtually unbroken wet weather had two major influences on the Boers. Firstly, the mobility of the commandos and especially that of their field guns and wagons, was greatly impeded. This issue will be discussed in this section. Secondly, the personal well-being of the burghers, living in the veld under unpleasant and unhealthy conditions, was adversely affected. This aspect will be discussed later, under the heading of health and well-being.

Regarding the mobility of both the guerrillas and the British, the excessive rainfall caused

two major obstacles. The areas where the guerrilla war was waged, as described previously, are such that most of the rivers and streams do not flow permanently. They are at best dry ditches, sometimes with pools of standing water in deeper places. To cross them meant finding a place where the embankments were not too steep for oxen, horses or mules pulling a wagon or field gun. The Afrikaans term *drif* was adopted by the British military, and others as *drift* and this term will thus be used in this study. These places where crossings were possible were naturally of paramount military significance in a country where few other natural barriers exist.

Due to the topography of the country the rivers and streams flow fast and strong when they are fed by good rains in the higher lying areas. The quandary which arose due to the excessive rain in early 1901 was that even the few drifts became virtually unfordable. Nor did the Boer commandos enjoy the use of the main or even the secondary roads, since by early 1901 these were mostly controlled by the enemy. The occasional bridges that were to be found on these major roads were simply not available to them. Moreover, the British attempted to control the smaller drifts as a means of restraining the free movement of the commandos. The Boers therefore had to make use of the little known roads crossing difficult, often dangerous, drifts. When excessive rain caused the rivers and streams to flow, and to flow fast, the Boers' progress was frequently blocked.

A well known example of this kind of situation was when De Wet, was prevented from invading the Cape Colony in December 1900, by a raging Orange River.¹¹³ When he eventually succeeded on his second attempt, to invade the Cape and crossed the Orange on 10 February 1901, sudden flooding of the river between 10 and 12 February provided him with some respite from the pursuing British, who had been constantly on his heels.¹¹⁴ Once De Wet and President Steyn were on Cape territory, they were by no means left in peace to enlist the support of loyal colonists they had planned on: "De grote macht werd achter genl. De Wet en mij gekoncentreerd ... Manschappen en paarden waren uitgeput ..." ¹¹⁵ Writing many years later Steyn said they were worn out and exhausted, not only by the constant British pressure, nor by the unusual weather, but also because they had been obliged to search along the swollen Orange River, all the way from Prieska almost to Norvalspont before, at their fifteenth attempt, they were able to cross the river

¹¹³ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 183.

¹¹⁴ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 138-139.

¹¹⁵ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn, 'n lewensbeskrywing*, II, p. 68. [Translated: "The vast force was concentrated behind General De Wet and myself ... both men and horses were exhausted ..."]

once more on their return.¹¹⁶ The pressure exerted by their pursuers was aggravated by the full river. The stress and frustration caused by this situation becomes evident in De Wet's description of the burghers' relief on being back on Free State soil: "I can hardly describe the different exclamations of joy, the Psalms and songs that now rose up from the burghers splashing through the water."¹¹⁷

It was not only the swollen rivers and spruits that hampered operations; the continuous rain turned low-lying areas into muddy bogs, making the passage of heavily laden wagons and field guns, most agonizing and at times impossible. Celliers reported on 7 April 1901 while they were near Syferfontein in the western Transvaal, how a heavy laden wagon could not be hauled through a stretch of mud and water, even after they had inspanned 46 oxen. The only solution was to offload the wagon and carry the goods through the water manually, before the wagon could be freed.¹¹⁸ There were many occasions when the turf made it impossible to move a wagon, and it simply had to be abandoned.

However, it should be appreciated that the inclement weather did not only affect the Boers. *The Times history* referred to the difficulties experienced in February 1901 by French's drive in the southeastern Transvaal, due to the floods: "On the 17th the rain came down in torrents; three execrable drifts were met with, and, by extraordinary exertions, safely crossed; but a final drift at the Pivaan River was too much for the exhausted cattle ..."¹¹⁹ Hence the Boers also enjoyed some measure of benefit from the heavy rains.

During the following spring, heavy rains in the southeastern Transvaal once more came to the Boers' assistance, when two loaded wagons from Benson's column became bogged down. Rain was falling in the form of cold, misty showers – weather which is not unusual on the Highveld at that time of the year. The column's rearguard halted to wait for the two wagons and to keep the harassing Boers under control. However, at that stage Louis Botha, who had been approaching the position in great haste, arrived with reinforcements for the Boers. A fierce battle, the well remembered battle of Bakenlaagte, on 30 October 1901, ensued and the tormentor of the southeastern Transvaal, Benson, was fatally wounded.¹²⁰ The comparatively minor problem caused

¹¹⁶ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 219; P.R. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 226.

¹¹⁷ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 219.

¹¹⁸ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 7.4.1901, p. 231.

¹¹⁹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 175.

¹²⁰ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 366-374.

by two bogged down wagons, the result of heavy rain in an area known for its heavy turf soils, precipitated the battle. Moreover, it had happened at a stage when the Boers in the eastern Highveld needed a morale booster. They had managed to transform a stressor, the Highveld spring weather, into an advantage.

b. Lack of mobility due to loss of horses, cattle and wagons

The Boers' mobility, one of the basic elements of guerrilla warfare, suffered several serious setbacks as the guerrilla war progressed and the circumstances became more difficult for the republicans. Without horses and mules as mounts and pack-animals, and without well nourished oxen for the wagons that carried the few remaining possessions, the Boers' mobility was seriously hampered and many hardships followed. These hardships were outlined in *The Times history* which sketched the Boers' position as the winter of 1901 set in "... with all its attendant hardships and disabilities for guerrillas whose home was the veld, whose horses and draught cattle depended on fresh grass ... Surely ... the Boers could not survive the winter."¹²¹ This might have reflected wishful thinking on the part of the British, who were themselves at that particular stage seriously reappraising their own war effort. But there can be little doubt that the Boers themselves, the burghers and even their leaders, were speculating along these lines.

In truth, there were numerous cases where there were no horses left for activities as winter set in. A few examples can be noted. Field Cornet Van der Walt returned from De Wet's second invasion of the Cape with a group of men most of whom had lost their mounts and were essentially *voetgangers* (footsloggers). He described their difficult journey home, crossing the rail near Belmont station and how he forbade his burghers to loot horses from farmers.¹²² Celliers, on the other hand, who had lost his own horse during the battle at Lake Chrissie, lamented that as a "wagon-rider" he and his rifle had become no more than an encumbrance because the wagon was fully loaded, with seating space only. Moreover, during the night it had started to rain once more and he found that his coat had been lost together with his horse. He was exhausted, wet and thoroughly miserable.¹²³ Reitz also became a footslogger when his horse died of horse-sickness while he and his mount were alone in the veld. He wrote: "I threw my saddle over my shoulders, and carrying my rifle in one hand, and my cooking-tin in the other, I started back on a journey that

¹²¹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 277.

¹²² J.H. Coetzee (ed.), "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Day 274, p. 133.

¹²³ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 7.2.1901, p. 207.

was to take me very far indeed.”¹²⁴ Without a horse a guerrilla fighter experienced a feeling of uselessness. Indeed his situation was no longer self-manageable. The impact of this will be discussed later.

Many Boers enjoyed the luxury of a pack horse or a pack mule. Schikkerling described the virtues of a mule in the harsh winter veld of the Steenkampsberg, having no need for horseshoes nor for food other than the available meagre veld grass. He compared mules, previously mainly used as draught animals, with horses and concluded that even for riding purposes the mule measured up favourably. He alleged that in some commandos roughly one half of the burghers were mounted on mules.¹²⁵ Schikkerling was very appreciative of his own mule, Vos, when he and his comrades abandoned their wagon during Colonel Bindon Blood’s drive in the northeastern Transvaal during April 1901. At this stage Vos became his pack mule. His praise for this much-maligned animal can well be interpreted as an expression of the importance of mobility for the guerrilla.¹²⁶

Although De Wet struggled to free commandos from their cumbersome wagon trains, in practice his ideal could never really be implemented, and the quota of one wagon for every 25 burghers proved unrealistic.¹²⁷ There were always necessities and certain luxuries which “had” to be transported. The utopian picture of burghers mounted on horses, carrying all their requirements – including weapons, blankets and food – is a figment of the imagination and over simplified. Right up until the end of the war there were wagons – although the numbers did decrease as the war lingered on. The British drives played a major role in effecting this decline. French’s drive in the southeastern Transvaal early in 1901 yielded 2 300 vehicles while Bindon Blood’s drive during April of that year in the northeastern Transvaal netted 6 11. At the theoretical ratio of 1 wagon for 25 burghers, these wagons would have been enough for 72 000 burghers.¹²⁸ Pakenham claimed that during Kitchener’s second new model drive, during the latter half of February 1902, no fewer than 200 wagons, compared to 778 prisoners and 25 000 cattle were captured.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 157.

¹²⁵ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 23.6.1901, p. 264.

¹²⁶ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 23.6.1901, p. 263-264.

¹²⁷ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 218-219.

¹²⁸ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 234, 237.

¹²⁹ T. Pakenham, *The Boer war*, p. 549.

Every wagon that was abandoned or lost to the enemy made life just that fraction more difficult for those who carried on fighting, because with the wagon a multitude of belongings were also lost. It can well be imagined that even the loss of modest possessions, items that made life a little more bearable, be it a blanket, an extra jacket, a few pots and pans or perhaps a personal diary – as indeed happened to Schikkerling – would cause added misery. Nevertheless, as the number of wagons dwindled, the efficiency of the guerrillas was not automatically decreased: “As we have now [29 May 1901] no more wagons, nearly every man is in consequence burdened with a pack mule.”¹³⁰

Ultimately, whether it was the loss of a horse, a mule, a wagon or some cherished possession, that loss undeniably became a personal as well as a common stressor. It meant that there had been some change for the worse and that henceforth life could become even more difficult.

c. Winter grazing on the Highveld

Those burghers who still had horses at the beginning of the winter of 1901 and who were operating in high lying regions, areas which are known as “sour-veld”, for the sour grass which normally grows there,¹³¹ were most decidedly dreading the effect which the coming months would have on their animals.

While it is growing actively in the spring or early summer, sour grass is both palatable and nutritious for grazing animals. But as soon as the seed has set and the leaves lose their green colour, sour grass not only becomes low in its protein content thus less nutritious, it also becomes unpalatable to most grazing animals. Winter in these regions therefore meant that less grass was available, it was moreover less nutritious and less palatable. Horses and other grazing animals which live relatively inactive in camps, can probably survive on substandard veld grass but working animals, especially hard working horses suffer a great deal if grazing is inferior. Furthermore, even in those districts where the natural grazing was of a better quality during autumn and winter – the so-called *sweetveld* – the amount of roughage available in the veld was frequently insufficient for horses who were constantly on the move. It should also be noted that under normal circumstances any fodder, either green or dry, should ideally be supplemented by

¹³⁰ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 29.5.1901, p. 211.

¹³¹ The Highveld areas include the southeastern Transvaal, the adjoining portion of the northeastern Transvaal and the northeastern Free State. See chapter V.

some form of grain, usually oats. This was seldom available for the Boers' horses once they were on the move.

The Boers realised fully that they were dependent on healthy, well fed horses. Rothmann reported with delight on 13 May 1901 that he was able to supply his horse with green fodder and maize found on a deserted farm. The following week he loaded supplies onto a scotch-cart, prior to his move to a warmer area and included were the two pails of mealies for his horses. This was clearly so important to him that it was mentioned second on his long list.¹³² In the narrative about his mule, Vos, Schikkerling stressed the fact that this animal could subsist on less and humbler food than a horse.¹³³ Then too, Van der Walt described how numerous burghers who were with De Wet's invading force in the Cape Colony, lost their horses during the heavy rains.¹³⁴ In the light of the testimony that these commandos were constantly under British pressure and considering the type of veld (Karoo) in that area, these horses were certainly not only over-worked but also under-fed.

It is undeniable that if the burghers were to remain mobile and effective it was of prime importance that their horses be properly maintained. Contemplating the dilemma of supplying food during the approaching winter, would naturally have been experienced as a threat to the burgher's ability as a fighter and most probably this would have developed into yet another stressor for most of the burghers.

5. Stressors caused by daily hardships

a. Food

When the Boers realized that war with Great Britain was imminent, certain steps were taken to put the republics on a war footing. Food was to be supplied by the government although the burghers had to prepare it for themselves. In certain privileged cases the cooking was done by coloured servants. According to the young Reitz, at the start of hostilities Boers would group themselves into corporalships, pooling their cooking utensils and collecting their food supplies

¹³² M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 13.5.1901, p. 187.

¹³³ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 23.7.1901, p. 263.

¹³⁴ J.H. Coetzee (ed.), "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Days 271 to 274, p. 133.

from the food depot. Meat was supplied from an immense herd of cattle.¹³¹ This system was used throughout the conventional phase of the war, but was no longer practical once the guerrilla phase began.

Pretorius explained how the Chief Commissariat, supported by the Provisions Committee, and generally operated by the magistrates, functioned in the ZAR to obtain food, cattle and sheep, horses and mules and distributing these necessities to the commandos. The Free State had a similar arrangement for its commissariat, but they relied heavily on the ZAR as indeed they did for arms and ammunition.¹³² However, in practice these systems did not function as smoothly as was hoped. The large volume of supplies caused bottlenecks that neither rail transport nor wagons were able to cope with. Pretorius quoted Dietlof van Warmelo who recounted that despite assurances given to them earlier by their field cornet, on their arrival at the Natal border there were no tents nor foodstuffs for the burghers, although arms and ammunition were readily available.¹³³

These supply problems were encountered throughout the first months of war until, in the middle of September 1900, when it was decided to continue the war in another style, all surplus provisions were destroyed at Hectorspruit station. Thereafter commandos had to supply their own needs. Schikkerling described how he and his comrades secured a wagon and some mules and loaded it with necessities and several “dainties”. When they left on their trek to Pietersburg he had less than 10 shillings in his pocket to carry him through the guerrilla period.¹³⁴ The time for the burghers to supply their own needs had arrived.

During the early stage of the guerrilla war the Boers were not unduly concerned about the availability of food. The scorched earth policy had not yet exposed their dependence on being supplied with food from surrounding farms. Naudé recalled that initially there were no real problems in obtaining food because there were enough *zakpatriotten* – burghers who were out to make a quick profit from the war – who were prepared to sell cattle to the commandos.¹³⁵ This was supplemented by food supplies seized after successful battles, for example the one at

¹³¹ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 22.

¹³² F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 44-45.

¹³³ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 46.

¹³⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 16.9.1900, p. 66.

¹³⁵ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 183.

Nooitgedacht on 13 December 1900 when commodities such as tea, coffee, sugar, jam, soap as well as numerous other luxuries were looted.¹³⁶ Trains that had been derailed or captured were likewise a ready source of food.

However, as 1901 progressed the food situation deteriorated. The farms were methodically razed and denuded of food and livestock, the drives by the British forced the burghers to flee rather than to attack and loot, and the supplies from captured trains dwindled as rail-disruptions declined.

During the early months of 1901 fruit was a frequent item on the Boer menu. Schikkerling and Rothmann mentioned that on the Highveld peaches and prickly pears were welcome additions to their diets. On 29 March 1901 Schikkerling and his companions found one particular peach orchard with: “ ... plenty of sweet and juicy peaches. Some had worms, but we were not vegetarians”.¹³⁷ Vegetables such as pumpkins, potatoes, onions and sweet-potatoes were always welcome because of their good keeping quality. These were frequently supplied by the women or old men who kept their gardens going.¹³⁸ Celliers scorned the British, who in their destruction process, did not realise that sweet potatoes bore their harvest beneath the soil. Their oversight supplied him and his comrades with two wagon loads of sweet-potatoes. “Try again Khaki!” he wrote with a snigger.¹³⁹

However, when the winter of 1901 set in the supply of food gradually dried up. Schikkerling indeed refused the position of field cornet to replace the fallen Meyburgh, although Commandant W. Viljoen tried to persuade him. “If it were only for the fighting I would be charmed and honoured ... my chief objection lay in the disagreeable duty of seeking food and clothing for the grumbling and ragged men, at this stage when farms, cattle, and crops have been plundered, denuded and destroyed; also ... forcing from the poor and helpless farmers their few remaining cattle for nothing but worthless receipts and blind blue backs [printed money].”¹⁴⁰ This was written on 5 July 1901 when the impact of winter and of the scorched earth policy had only

¹³⁶ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 137; A.G. Oberholster (ed), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 14.12.1900, p. 180.

¹³⁷ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 12.1.1901, 29.3.1901, pp. 135, 168; M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 17.1.1901, 5.2.1901, pp.121, 133-134.

¹³⁸ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 70.

¹³⁹ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 6.9.1901, p. 285.

¹⁴⁰ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 5.7.1901, p. 245.

began to be felt. One should consider this comment in combination with Grundlingh's statistics on the increase of capitulations as winter approached:

Table VI – 4: Number of Boers who laid down their arms during the winter months of 1901.

May:	1 055
June :	894
July :	451
August :	554

This total of 2 954 Boers represents 49% of the 6 025 capitulations during the period January 1901 to May 1902.¹⁴¹ The destruction of farms, the fear that food would become scarce and the unwillingness to “stick it out” undoubtedly weighed heavily when taking the decision to surrender.

Food as such should not only be viewed in terms of availability but also as far as the variety and method of preparation as well as from a social perspective. Rothmann remarked once how strange it seemed to be able to enjoy a good meal once again, at a table set with white linen and clean serviettes.¹⁴² Utensils for the preparation of food were likewise valuable and often ingenious. Weber mentioned items such as enamel cups, tar cans, oil cans, paraffin tins, milk and jam tins and naturally the trusty old three-legged black pot.¹⁴³ Schikkerling mentioned the shortage of salt several times during the last few months of the war and could even find the humour to remark wryly: “Salt is now so scarce that notwithstanding our sorrows we dare not shed tears.”¹⁴⁴ Reference to the shortage of salt was made frequently by other authors including Pretorius who claimed that in high rainfall, the eastern Free State districts such as Harrismith, salt was virtually unobtainable. Lizzie Geldenhuys, the young Free State woman who helped a group of Boers along the banks of the Valsch River, recalled the occasion when a couple of burghers travelled all the way by wagon from Bothaville to Brandfort in order to fetch salt.¹⁴⁵

Still, despite the hardships which the bitterenders learned to accept, certain positive aspects

¹⁴¹ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, p. 170.

¹⁴² M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, 5.2.1901, p. 134.

¹⁴³ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 102.

¹⁴⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 1.12.1901, 1.2.1902, 4.3.1902, 29.3.1902, 20.4.1902, pp. 333, 350, 366, 375, 381.

¹⁴⁵ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 63; L. Geldenhuys, *Die oorlogsherinneringe van Lizzie Geldenhuys*, (unpublished), p. 66.

arose from the food dilemma. There are several references to the fact that Generals De la Rey and Kemp used the spring of 1901 not only to organise the harvesting of wheat and other small grains in the Marico district, but also to send burghers to their farms to plant maize for the coming summer season. Rothmann also mentioned that there was wheat along the Orighstad River that could be harvested and which would be a welcome substitute for the inevitable *mieliepap* – maize porridge. Both Naudé and Van Heerden mentioned the Boers' inventiveness in using the entire hide of an ox, sewn up into a huge holder to serve as receptacle for grain. This could safely be buried; it withstood fire and at the time was a very practical solution when jute bags were unobtainable. Naudé was perhaps somewhat partial when he wrote in November 1901 that the Boers were cheerful and were prepared to carry on with the war.¹⁴⁶ It should be remembered that stressors do not always cause distress but may also lead to eustress or positive stress.

Many Boers had grown up on the veld, and they did not flinch from eating veld fruits when they came across them.¹⁴⁷ This was probably a welcome variation to their dismal diet, except for the incident when Smuts and his commando, whilst invading the Cape Colony, ate a plant locally known as *Hotnotsbrood*. Reitz reported that both Smuts and his second in command, Lieutenant J.L. van Deventer, along with several others, became seriously ill at a critical stage when the British were attacking.¹⁴⁸

Another significant factor which merits attention is the tendency of Boers to raid black communities for food. This mainly happened later in the war when conditions became extremely grave. Schikkerling wrote on 4 February 1902: "Our provisions have run very low, and a dozen of us therefore decide to make a little foray, of a private nature, into the territory of the native." Their booty was considerable and included eight goats, two bags of mealies and four bags of sorghum. Schikkerling could not help lamenting that this did not compare at all well with the 60 000 bags of flour destroyed at Komatipoort [Hectorspruit].¹⁴⁹ Similarly Celliers reported on 16 December 1901 that a raid was carried out on blacks at Saulspoort and that roughly 8 000 head of livestock were looted. He reasoned that the resistance was negligible as only three

¹⁴⁶ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 307; J.J. van Heerden, "Genls. De la Rey en Kemp en die stryd in Wes-Transvaal", in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum*, p. 181; A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 18.10.1902, 1.11.1901, pp. 304, 310; M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 26.11.1901, p. 244.

¹⁴⁷ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 5.11.1901, p. 311.

¹⁴⁸ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 240-241.

¹⁴⁹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 4.2.1902-6.2.1902, pp.353-356.

burghers were lost.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless raids such as these, where burghers were forced to take actions to improve their food predicament, meant that they were exposed to added danger. This was probably perceived a stressor by many.

In summary it can undeniably be claimed that during the guerrilla phase of the war the issue of food, in its widest sense, was experienced as a common stressor by the majority of burghers on commando. It surfaced in many forms and was of varying intensity, at times leading to distress, and at others to eustress.

b. Clothing

The ordinary republican forces, that is those who were not attached to the State Artillery units or police units, did not wear regulation uniform. Even during the first part of the war their clothes were diverse. Each man chose his clothes from what he had available or whatever he could lay his hands on or commandeer. It is logical that burghers coming from farms dressed differently from townsfolk. Primarily their dress comprised trousers worn with braces, waistcoats and loose fitting jackets. Popular fabric was moleskin (fustian), corduroy, tweed and serge. According to Malan and Carelson, researchers at the National Museum for Cultural History, many different types of material were used, while Pretorius claimed that the sole requirement was that the clothing be serviceable and functional.¹⁵¹ This wide assortment of clothing led a British prisoner to remark: “You seem to have a lot of regiments, as each man has a different dress.”¹⁵²

Of course there were personal quirks and mannerisms found among the Boers. Pretorius noted that certain officers were always neatly dressed and were recognized as officers without wearing insignia.¹⁵³ Commandant General Botha normally wore a suit of military cut, as did General Ben Viljoen, while General De Wet favoured his distinctive narrow banded hat and jodhpurs. General C.H. Muller affected a starched white dress shirt until the end of the war and Commandant F.J. Potgieter of Wolmaransstad wore his characteristic blue shirt until the day he

¹⁵⁰ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 16.12.1901, p. 325.

¹⁵¹ A. Malan en A. Carelson, *Kleredrag tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, p. 4; F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 82.

¹⁵² W. Lane (ed.), *The war diary of burgher Jack Lane 1899 - 1900*, 12.12.1899, p. 44.

¹⁵³ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 82.

was killed during the heroic charge on 11 April 1902, at the battle of Roodewal.¹⁵⁴

Once the guerrilla war was in full progress, clothing became a constant vexation to the burghers. There were no more supplies from the commissariat, as there had been at Magersfontein on 13 December 1899.¹⁵⁵ Towns, with proper shops, had either been occupied by the British, or had been looted by the Boers themselves. Pietersburg for example, had been looted by the burghers of General Ben Viljoen and the artillerists under Major Lood Pretorius.¹⁵⁶

As the war dragged on, and clothes either became worn, torn or lost, the situation worsened. Reitz who was well-known for the bad condition of his clothes, wrote that by the end of March 1901 "... my clothes had fallen from my body, owing to the rains, and my entire wardrobe consisted of a blanket and a pair of sandals ... with winter coming on, I felt the cold pretty severely." He was still bedraggled and tattered when eventually he entered the Cape Colony with General Smuts in September of that year.¹⁵⁷

Blankets were always important to the guerrilla fighters. Weber felt that when one was forced to flee, your blanket was more important than your rifle: "... it is a man's house and home and mantle ..." he wrote.¹⁵⁸ According to the historian M.C.E. van Schoor President M.T. Steyn's clothes became so threadbare and worn by the end of the war that a suit was made for him from a blanket.¹⁵⁹

The diary of Jan Celliers perhaps depicted the problems of clothing experienced by a burgher te velde most vividly. He of course, was not brought up in a rugged rural community. At the age of eight he went with his family from Cape Town to Pretoria, but he received his schooling in Stellenbosch and Wellington. At the age of 22 he went to Holland to train as a land surveyor but he disliked the work as a surveyor, and at the age of 28 he became the State Librarian of the ZAR. From his diary it becomes clear that Celliers was indeed a man of books,

¹⁵⁴ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 533; C.H. Muller, *Oorlogsherinneringe van Generaal Chris H. Muller*, pp. 136-137; M.A. Gronum, *Die Bittereinders*, p.124.

¹⁵⁵ W. Lane (ed.), *The war diary of burgher Jack Lane 1899 -1900*, 12.12.1899, p. 46.

¹⁵⁶ J. Taitz (ed.), *The war memoirs of commandant Ludwig Krause*, p. 133; See also F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 247.

¹⁵⁷ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 163, 209.

¹⁵⁸ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 110.

¹⁵⁹ M.C.E. van Schoor, "President M.T. Steyn: Sy rol in die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899-1902" in *Genl. J.B.M. Hertzoggedenklesing XXVIII*, p. 11.

rather than a son of the veld. Nevertheless, he joined the commando voluntarily despite finding life inordinately difficult.

On 9 June 1901 he received a “new” pair of trousers from his brother Isaac. It needed only five patches to be fairly presentable while his own had worn as sheer as paper. On 15 July he related that he had spent an entire day fiddling with and adjusting his trousers and on 5 August he boasted that he had no less than 15 patches on the pants. Six days later he despaired that no one else in the laager was more dishevelled – *verplukt* – than he. On 25 September he once more remarked that he had spent the whole morning patching his trousers with patches coming from an old alpaca jacket. And finally, on 11 October 1901, he received a very worn pair of pants to use for patches. “Het waren *gelapte lappen* waarmede ik de *gelapte lappen* van my broek weder wat moest opknappen, want zelfs voor ons ingewijden, vond ik dat toch wat al te onfatsoenlijk uitzag.”¹⁶⁰

Footwear, whether it was boots, *velskoene* or sandals, was of great importance to the burghers, especially those on foot. Schikkerling bemoaned the fact that on 9 March 1901 his boots had “gone all to pieces”. Celliers too reported with some distaste on 9 September 1901 that he was forced to tie wet oxhide around his feet to serve as shoes. Pretorius even alleges that certain burghers were forced to face the cold and wet seasons with no shoes at all. When Commandant N. Groenewald derailed a goods train early in September, Rothmann was bound to mention that besides the food that was salvaged, there were shirts and shoes.¹⁶¹

Shoes and boots coming from the British, did not only fall into the Boers’ hands because of train derailing. The clothes shortage on the one hand and the fact that during the guerrilla phase the Boers were forced to set prisoners free immediately, led to the custom known as *uitskud*. This was the practice whereby British prisoners were deprived of their clothes and boots, and then left in the Boers’ castoffs or indeed in their underclothes and on bare feet. Pretorius discussed the practise in detail in *Kommandolewe*. According to him it was usually done with a certain amount

¹⁶⁰ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 9.7.1901, 15.7.1901, 5.8.1901, 11.8.1901, 25.9.1901, 11.10.1901, pp. 252, 262, 270, 276, 293, 301. [Translated: “It was with *patched patches* that I *patched* the *patches* of my trousers which I had to revive once again, as even for us, the initiated, I find the sight somewhat indecent.”]; also see F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 89-94.

¹⁶¹ R.W. Shikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 9. 3. 1901, p. 161; A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 9.9.1901, pp. 287-288; F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 91; M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 8.9.1901, p. 218.

of goodwill on both sides, often with a touch of humour, usually because the Boers knew very little English or because of the *laissez-faire* attitude with which the soldiers accepted their plight.¹⁶²

The arguments about whether this practice was acceptable in terms of the Hague Convention, or indeed whether the Convention applied to the republican fighters, had little effect on the burgher in the field; he needed trousers or boots and was suddenly placed in a position to secure them. What was probably of more importance to him was the British proclamation that all Boers captured wearing British uniform would be executed. On the one hand they desperately needed the good quality clothes, while on the other hand they lived in the uncertainty and fear of the British decree. Reitz, who fitted himself out in a British officer's uniform complete with regimental badges and insignia, knew about the proclamation, but claimed that he never dreamt that he was under sentence of death. In fact he admitted that his khaki uniform saved him twice on one day: "... for a batch of troopers rode by in the dusk, and, mistaking me for one of their men, shouted that I was to hurry ..." ¹⁶³ Then, from a local farmer, he heard that his friend, Jack Baxter, had been captured and shot for wearing khaki: "We were thunderstruck," he exclaimed.¹⁶⁴

There were other cases where this proclamation was enforced, but that did not stop the custom of *uitskud* – the need was too great. Nevertheless, the threat of being captured whilst wearing khaki would most certainly have been one of those nagging stressors. It was yet another of the risks that constantly pressured a guerrilla fighter.

Weber saw it from a different perspective. He reported that a bushlancer told them that he had wounded an "Englishman" and shot another's horse. It later turned out that the "Englishmen" were in reality Boers wearing khaki uniforms. One of these burghers was later found dead and the other was shot through the arm.¹⁶⁵ The mistaken identity of a Boer in Khaki uniform could certainly have had negative effects, and this threat would have indeed caused stress.

The dilemma of worn and torn clothing was solved in other ways than *uitskud* or the looting of trains. Several diaries and memoirs mentioned inventive methods used to replace clothing.

¹⁶² F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 95-100.

¹⁶³ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 255.

¹⁶⁴ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 258; see also F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p.100.

¹⁶⁵ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 114.

Reitz related how he and his comrades entered a large farmhouse after it had been raining continuously. “The housewife at the farm gave me a pair of old-fashioned elastic sided boots, and I unearthed an empty grain-bag in which I cut a hole for my head and one at each corner for my arms, thus providing myself with a serviceable great-coat.”¹⁶⁶

The mere fact that there were ample animal skins available made it a logical option to switch to “buckskin” clothes. In his memories of the final summer months, Naudé recalled how many of his comrades were wearing clothes made from hides – as neatly made as any suit – which one could acquire from the best tailor.¹⁶⁷ Celliers, while discussing how the war had forced the people to return to a primitive way of life where they would literally “... in het zweet onzes aanschijns ons brood zouden eten ... er zijn er onder ons die een heel pak kleeren dragen – hoed in kluis – van zelf gelooide en gebreide vellen, zelf genaaid, met eigen gemaakte naalden ...”.¹⁶⁸ This statement is borne out by samples of such clothing that are housed at the National Museum for Cultural History in Pretoria.

Even more remarkable is the incident reported by Rothmann on 9 November 1901. In the Pilgrim’s Rest hospital he came across a mattress ticking cover. He disinfected it with “Jeyes Fluid” and forthwith made a fine shirt for himself. He added that afterwards his friends were always on the lookout for mattresses. Schikkerling, however, clearly steals the show with his story of how he used the outside canvas, which he removed from a disused mine hosepipe, to fashion firstly a pair of trousers and a few days later a jacket with “... epaulettes on the shoulders and flaps over the pockets”.¹⁶⁹ Even in the final stage of the war when living conditions had indeed become critical, there were still those who could turn the negative features of stressors into useful assets.

It has been stated authoritatively that a good wash and shave and clean clothes are at present an accepted routine to reverse low morale of soldiers who have endured long periods of deprivation.¹⁷⁰ This idea is borne out by Izak Meyer’s anecdote about Reitz and Van Warmelo

¹⁶⁶ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 213.

¹⁶⁷ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 322.

¹⁶⁸ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 20.11.1901, p. 317. [Translated: “By the sweat of our brow we will eat our bread ... there are those among us who wear a complete suit, including a hat, made of dressed and tanned skins, self stitched with home made needles...”]

¹⁶⁹ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 9.11.1901, p. 241; R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 4.3.1902, 7.3.1902, 13.3.1902, pp. 366, 368, 369; see also F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 93.

¹⁷⁰ A. Jansen, Paper on battle weariness, presented at Bloemfontein conference “The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902): a reappraisal”, 12 October 1999.

who gleefully danced naked on a counter of the shop where they were taken to buy new outfits in readiness for their journey with Smuts to Vereeniging. When he next saw them, Smuts asked sardonically: “Waar het jy ingebreek?”¹⁷¹

c. Arms and ammunition

Even though about half the Boers had been issued with new Mauser rifles at the beginning of the war, it appears that situations frequently arose where burghers on commando were without weapons. According to Pretorius the explanation for this can be found in the many burghers who rejoined the commandos after the first abandonment, and the subsequent laying down of their arms. Furthermore the fact that many burghers joined the commandos for the first time during the rebuilding of the Boer forces in 1900, meant that they had not been issued with Mausers.¹⁷²

When he rejoined the Pretoria commando in September 1900 Celliers was apparently without a rifle for nearly a month. On 16 October he was given a Lee Metford which was left behind by a deserter, but unfortunately he had to hand it back when the very same man returned and claimed his weapon. Thereafter he received a rusted old Martini-Henri, after refusing to do guard duty without a rifle. From his diary it appears that it was expected of him to borrow a rifle from a comrade, something Celliers refused to do. Evidently he was obliged to continue with the old Martini until after the battle at Nooitgedacht. His entry for 14 December 1900 read that, as of that morning, “they” all had rifles.¹⁷³

From the psychological perspective Celliers’ struggle to obtain a decent weapon, was probably linked to the fact that he was a loyal burgher who had escaped from Pretoria while it was under British occupation, because he felt himself driven to be with those who were fighting for the Boer cause. His escape and subsequent eventful journey to reach acting Commandant C.P.S. Badenhorst’s commando on 13 September 1900, confirms his commitment to his country’s plight. Yet, once he had joined them, he was not only snubbed by his new tent mates, but was left without a rifle for over a month.¹⁷⁴ He was frustrated in his quest to do what he had come to do

¹⁷¹ J.H. Meyer, *Kommando-jare: ‘n oud-stryder se persoonlike relaas van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, pp. 335-336. [Translated: “Where did you break in?”]

¹⁷² F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 34.

¹⁷³ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 16.10.1900, 27.10.1900, 14.12.1900, pp. 150, 157, 180.

¹⁷⁴ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 16.10.1900, p. 150.

– to defend his country. That this paradoxical situation – being a combatant but having no weapon – was a private stressor which this highly impressionable man was forced to bear, is evident.

When Van der Walt and the burghers he had assembled, joined De Wet's second attempt to invade the Cape Colony he approached De Wet to supply them with weapons. This could apparently not be done and instead they were sent home.¹⁷⁵ Once more we find men who volunteered their services, but who did not have any weapons; they were sent home because of a technical weakness in the Boer command.

Mausers were gradually replaced by the British Lee Metford rifles simply because there was a sustainable source. With a bit of ingenuity the .303 ammunition was freely available as Reitz confirmed. He and his comrades followed a British column collecting fallen cartridges until they had enough.¹⁷⁶ Of course the scarcity of Mauser ammunition, as pointed out by Pretorius, also promoted the use of Lee Metfords. He quoted Steyn's message to the Boer deputation in Europe: "Ons Mauser ammunite is byna geheel en al uitgeput ... gelukkig zyn onze burgers voor het grootste gedeelte met Lee Metford geweren gewapend en zyn wy van tyd tot tyd door de Britsche troepen ... met patronen voorzien ..."¹⁷⁷

Towards the end of the war, on 25 February 1902, when all necessities, including ammunition, had become extremely scarce, De la Rey seized a half a million Lee Metford cartridges at the battle of Yzerspruit. Together with the captured rifles, horses and mules, these would have made a considerable contribution to ease the critical shortages that worried western Transvaal burghers.¹⁷⁸ But by then it was too late.

Reviewing the matter of arms and ammunition, it could be argued that those Boers who were still in the field during the guerrilla phase of the war, constantly lived under the threat of not having the necessary equipment to continue the war. Their generals urged them to persevere, despite the threat of confiscation of their possessions¹⁷⁹ or worse still, execution, if they were

¹⁷⁵ J.H. Coetzee (ed.), "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Day 264, p. 132.

¹⁷⁶ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 187.

¹⁷⁷ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 35. [Translated: "Our Mauser ammunition is virtually depleted ... fortunately most of our burghers are in possession of Lee Metford rifles and periodically we are supplied by the British troops ... with cartridges."]

¹⁷⁸ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 37; J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 326; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 304-305.

¹⁷⁹ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 25.11.1900, p. 27.

found to be traitors. Yet they could not supply them with the most basic means of battle such as rifles and ammunition.

Even though Grundlingh did not mention this issue as one of the reasons for capitulation, he quoted Smuts in a letter to Kruger in June 1901 as saying “Is het wel verwonderlijk dat een zeker gedeelte der burgers ontmoedigd, teneergeslagen is ...?”¹⁸⁰ On the other hand Pretorius pointed out that Smuts later claimed that burghers often came away from battle with more ammunition than they had when battle started. Nevertheless he acknowledged that there were specific situations where commandos opted to flee rather than fight with insufficient ammunition.¹⁸¹

That the issue of arms and ammunition would have been one of the reasons for the despair of which Smuts wrote in June 1901, seems very probable. In truth, it would most likely have been a stressor to many burghers. Shortage of weapons could perhaps have been experienced as a private or a personal stressor for the majority, but there were certainly also those who made it a common stressor as they sat around their camp fires, discussing the course of the war.

d. Weather conditions

On 3 May 1901 Schikkerling ended his daily entry with the words: “At one time our halting spots were camps of tents and vehicles. Now they are merely fields of saddles ...”¹⁸² This passage serves as evidence that the burghers literally lived in the veld. They were utterly exposed to the elements. Supporting the rainfall figures in Table VI–3 several diaries and memoirs relate to the very wet, late summer of 1901.

Celliers made 21 entries of rainfall for the period December 1900 to April 1901. Schikkerling mentioned rain and mist on ten occasions in the period from January to March 1901. Rothmann made 15 entries which refer to rain between 4 December 1900 and 25 February 1901. Furthermore Naudé remembered that while they were at Groenfontein in March 1901 it rained

¹⁸⁰ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p. 170. [Translated: “Is it any wonder that a certain segment of the burghers are depressed.?”]

¹⁸¹ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 43.

¹⁸² R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 3.5.1901, p. 194.

for eight consecutive days and P.J. du Toit mentioned rain twice during March of 1901.¹⁸³

Roland Schikkerling noted briefly but somewhat disgustedly on 2 March: "Rise early from a watery bed, it having rained during the night, seek my horse in the mist." Fritz Rothmann, who was evidently not a robust man and who was in the same area, wrote that he had slept on the mountain, in rain and mist on 20 February. P.J. du Toit, who was at that stage already considering yielding to the British, was probably discontent when he wrote on 8 March: "Arrived on 'bult' close to Witpoort where we slept in a continuous pouring rain," and Deneys Reitz grumbled about the incessant wet weather aggravated by cold winds during the spring of 1901 when he was part of Smuts' invasion of the Cape Colony: "We now travelled on for the next three days across windy barrens ... The weather grew more and more tempestuous ... we suffered severely from the cold and intermittent rains."¹⁸⁴

These are the remarks made by some of the thousands of Boers who were in the veld at the time. It is clear from the rainfall figures that this wet late summer in 1901 was experienced in most parts of the country where the war was in progress. Furthermore, the burghers were not all young, healthy men. Fritz Rothmann, who was 41 at the time, suffered of bronchial troubles, arthritis and general body aches.¹⁸⁵ If the incessant wet weather had become a stressor, the ensuing prolonged stress would probably also have affected the immune system of the burghers, more than likely resulting in actual illness.

When winter set in, the privations simply continued, because the burghers were not as well kitted out with warm clothing, blankets and shelter as their opponents were. Naudé reported on 7 May 1901 that while they were trekking to Baberspan in the western Transvaal a piercing cold wind caused the burghers to pull their blankets up over their shoulders as they led their weary horses. Reitz remembered his trek to the Cape Colony: "By day clouds of dust and biting winds drove across the bleak plains, and at night we could hear the crackle of ice forming on the pools as we lay shivering beneath our threadbare blankets. From now onward ... five months ahead, we

¹⁸³ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan.F.E. Celliers*, 6.12.1900 to 9.4.1901, pp. 175-231; R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 4.1.1901 to 20.2.1901, pp. 122-155; M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 3.12.1900 to 23.2.1901, pp. 94-139; J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 219; J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 8.3.1901, 16.3.1901, pp 41, 42.

¹⁸⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 2.3.1901, p. 160; M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 20.2.1901, p. 137. J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 8.3.1901, p 41; D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 211.

¹⁸⁵ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 30.3.1901, 10.7.1901, pp. 158, 198.

endured great hardship and suffering, for never ... had there been so prolonged a spell of bitter weather all over South Africa.”¹⁸⁶ The time Reitz referred to was probably May 1901 while he was roving through the southern Free State. It was shortly after he had broken his leg.¹⁸⁷ Indeed an extremely harsh season was to follow as it has been confirmed by Raath and Louw in their work dealing with Springfontein concentration camp. They referred to heavy snowfall there on 21 June 1901.¹⁸⁸ Yet that winter’s cold weather was experienced countrywide. Schikkerling’s entry for 19 May stated that his blankets were white with frost and frozen stiff each morning, and some of the burghers decided to move to the warmer bushveld, with or without permission from their officers.¹⁸⁹

As is mentioned above, Grundlingh’s statistics of the number of Boers who laid down their arms during the winter months and returning home, prove that giving up was undeniably associated with the harshness of that particular winter. Being cold as well as hungry were demoralising in the extreme. For those who were determined to persevere until their enemies had disappeared, the awareness in May, or early June, that their situation would most certainly deteriorate in the months to come, would have become a serious stressor.

e. Lice

During the first stage of the war, when large camps existed, where large numbers of people were assembled, flies were the important problem. However, once the phase of large immobile concentrations of soldiers had passed, the fly problem was replaced by a lice problem. Pretorius ascribed this to the fact that commandos – and surely also the British units – moved around much more, hence unhygienic situations were less likely to arise.¹⁹⁰ However, it was the very fact that they were more mobile that brought the Boers into contact with the another vexation, namely lice. Pretorius maintained that lice were an even greater plague than flies. One burgher complained that someone who had no experience of them, would never know what it meant to be tormented, day and night, by lice. Another burgher said to his brother: “Boetie die Here weet ik sal nooit

¹⁸⁶ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, pp. 244-245; D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 168.

¹⁸⁷ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 167.

¹⁸⁸ A.W.G. Raath and R.M. Louw, *Die konsentrasiekamp te Springfontein gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899 - 1902*, pp. 25-26..

¹⁸⁹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 18.5.1901, p. 199.

¹⁹⁰ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 110.

Hands up, maar als ik moet Hands up dan sal die luise die oorsaak daarvan wees.”¹⁹¹

The Boers believed that the lice were brought upon them by their enemies. There appeared to be two routes of contamination. The first was to use a campsite previously used by the British. Weber asserted that when they occupied a camp vacated by the enemy, it would be infested with lice. “What neither hunger, horse sickness nor the English could bring about, was achieved in a very short while by a small insect,” he wrote.¹⁹² Du Toit also mentioned the fact that their commando preferred not to sleep at a campsite near Eleazer, where the British had camped previously, because they feared that it would be overrun by lice.¹⁹³ The Khaki uniforms which the Boers looted were the second way in which lice reached the burghers.¹⁹⁴ In this case it was a choice between two evils – wearing rags or putting up with the vexation.

Many diarists made mention of this annoyance, however for the refined Jan Celliers the problem was evidently particularly repulsive. In January 1901 he complained that he slept on a wagon with three other burghers but that the lice preferred to feast on him. The next month he spent a sleepless night after the battle at Lake Chrissie. Despite being dog tired he could not sleep because of the vermin that crawled over his body. In June 1901 he comforted himself with the fact that the German doctor was also experiencing the same horrors. By the end of July he bemoaned the fact that not only did the lice cover his whole body, the “Khakis” were moreover threatening to attack. His disgust was clear by the end of August when he wrote that he was driven to nausea.¹⁹⁵

Lice were a hassle in the form of a physical irritation that gradually became a psychological stressor. The plague was not life threatening, it did not pose a looming danger, it was experienced as a common annoyance. It was most likely the cause of many complaints and a source of moods of pessimism amongst Boers, especially during the long periods of inactivity during the last months of the war.

¹⁹¹ Quoted by F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 111. [Translated: “Brother the Lord knows that I will never handsup, but if I do handsup, then the lice will be the reason.”]

¹⁹² M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 76.

¹⁹³ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 28.9.1900, p. 10.

¹⁹⁴ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 110.

¹⁹⁵ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 20.1.1901, 7.2.1901, 2.6.1901, 31.7.1901, 30.8.1901, pp. 197, 207, 250, 268, 282.

6. *Stress caused by anguish*

a. *Concern about women*

Women, children, non-combatant men and servants were selectively placed in camps after the occupation of the Free State and the ZAR. These are well known and well reported facts. This process was, however, accelerated early in 1901, after Kitchener had taken over from Roberts. Kitchener's precise rationale in establishing these camps, badly placed and poorly planned as they were, will probably never be clear. Whether the sudden rush to establish the camps suggested by surrendered Boers – as was stated in the official memorandum of 21 December 1900, which ordered the formation of the camps¹⁹⁶ – is not of relevance to this study. Furthermore, the fact that Lord Alfred Milner who initially agreed with the policy and eventually, in his "Black Spot" letter, recognised that it had been a mistake, provided scant consolation to the Boers who were fighting their guerrilla war.

What is indeed of significance is the fact that thousands of men who were on commando had their close families, relatives and friends removed from their homes to one of the 50 white concentration camps.¹⁹⁷ The methods applied in the process of removing these people were often inhuman. Another important issue is that many women and children fled before the British arrived and lived in the veld managing as best they could, rather than be taken to the camps. These women and their families were in many cases an additional responsibility for the Boer officers. This whole situation was fraught with various threats and hazards; all of which became a torment to the Boers.

The Times history claimed that the Boers probably welcomed the fact that their women were placed in camps because " ... they were relieved of all responsibility for their women and children, were free to devote their energies with a clear conscience to the single aim of fighting".¹⁹⁸ This perception is grossly incorrect. It does not correspond with irrefutable evidence found in the literature. The sentiment of the burghers was unquestionably one of anxiety about the well being of their women and children in the camps.

¹⁹⁶ S.B. Spies, *Methods of barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer republics January 1900 - May 1902*, p. 183.

¹⁹⁷ F. Pretorius, "The Anglo-Boer War: an overview" in F. Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth*, p. 8.

¹⁹⁸ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 88.

Rothmann was most distressed about the way in which the women were rounded up. He regularly referred to the treatment that the women received at the hands of the British soldiers and blacks. On 19 January 1901 he described how callously the women were treated while their homesteads were being burnt down. Useful objects which they tried to save were often thrown back into the fire. The treatment which befell the widow Steenkamp of Skoonpoort he described as “beastly”, as even her plough was destroyed. Three months later, when the rounding-up operation was in full stride, he told about the horsemen who tracked women into *kloofs*; and once they were caught, they were borne away like prisoners of war. On 15 May he diarised the testimony of a Mrs Breytenbach. She and several other women and girls were pinned down by British fire on a group of Boers. One woman who tried to flee, was shot by a mounted British officer with his revolver, who claimed that she could have been a Boer informer. Rothmann made several similar entries including, on 28 June, an account that a number of women, some of them with infants not even wrapped in blankets, being marched along over the cold Highveld. He was so shocked that he exclaimed: “God slaap. Ja vas ook.”¹⁹⁹

Naudé, who was mainly active in the northwestern Transvaal, also made several references to the injustice of Kitchener’s policy regarding women. He related how in July 1901 they were awakened by weeping women and children from Damhoek in the Magaliesberg. They had left their homes, braving the cold night and the hazards of the rough veld, in their fear of being taken to the camps. Naudé painted a vivid picture of old grandmothers, weak women and crying infants who had to cross the mountain by a narrow footpath: “Wie kan een denkbeeld vormen van de ellende en gruwelen van deze oorlog?”²⁰⁰

At approximately the same time the volunteer, Weber, reported coming across a number of women and young girls hiding in the ruins of a house near Swartkoppies, north of the Magaliesberg. Despite their miserable situation, these women offered the burghers each a cup of mealie-coffee. One young girl was wearing a linen dress made from tobacco bags that had been stitched together, with the well-known blue elephant trademark on each bag. “The women were just as sorry for us as we were for them, but there was little we could do for each other.” wrote

¹⁹⁹ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 10.1.1901, 25.4.1901, 15.5.1901-16.5.1901, 28.6.1901, pp. 123, 173, 189, 194. [Translated: “God is asleep. Fast asleep.”]

²⁰⁰ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 279. [Translated: “Who can even begin to visualize the misery and atrocities of this war?”]

Weber.²⁰¹

Nevertheless, there were occasions when the Boers were able to help these women. More than once Boer commandos confronted their enemies in attempts to free women who were being taken to camps. On 6 June 1901 De Wet and De la Rey with 53 burghers attacked a much stronger British column, that was taking a group of women off to a camp. The well known battle of Graspan ensued. De Wet related how, when De la Rey asked what their action should be, he straightaway replied that the women had to be rescued.²⁰² The fact that they were on a different mission – indeed a very important one – that their force was far smaller than that of the enemy, and that they had the president of the Free State under their protection, did not change the situation. The women simply had to be freed.

General Beyers, who was operating in the northern Transvaal, gathered women in laagers in order to care for them. He hoped to prevent their being taken to camps and to protect them from maltreatment at the hands of the enemy.²⁰³ Indeed in most areas women were gathered in groups to escape being taken to camps.²⁰⁴ Celliers reported on 20 October 1901 that once more there were numerous women and children with their commando, fleeing from the “Khaki”.²⁰⁵ It is thus clear that it was not only women and children in camps who suffered because of the scorched earth policy. And, furthermore, those who were not in camps placed a heavy burden of responsibility on the commandos, who were themselves enduring dreadful hardships.

However, the fact remains that the women who were held in concentration camps, and the burden they had to bear, were a hard yoke for the Boers in the veld to bear. Early in April 1901 when H.S. van der Walt reached his home on his return from the ill-attempted invasion of the Cape, he diarised: “O, het was een blijdschap onze dierbaren noch bij onze woningen te vinden.”²⁰⁶ In contrast to this, J.J. Heinecke of the Potchefstroom Commando suffered intense torment because his family was in a camp: “Het is bitter zwaar. Denk tog my fammili zet en de

²⁰¹ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, pp. 87-88.

²⁰² C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 249.

²⁰³ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 263.

²⁰⁴ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 329-331.

²⁰⁵ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 20.10.1901, p. 305.

²⁰⁶ J.H. Coetzee (ed.), “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 287, p. 135. [Translated: “Oh, it was such a pleasure to find our loved ones still at home.”]

medde van de vyand en geen kost kan ik daar krygt. Denk tog wat bittere bekommernes ... Zwaar is geen naam ... Denk wie kan dit staan ... zonder dat wij haar kan behulpzaam wezen.²⁰⁷

Spies pointed out that as early as the middle of 1901 the Boer leadership were aware of the suffering in the camps and raised their concerns with the British authorities.²⁰⁸ The burghers themselves were also very much aware of the situation. Pretorius quoted the case of P.A. Vermeulen who received news that his wife, one of his children, his parents and several of his sisters had died in a camp.²⁰⁹ That bad news like this would soon spread among burghers, leading to anguish and uncertainty is revealed in Dietlof von Warmelo's opinion. According to him it would have been perfectly understandable that upon hearing grievous news a burgher would simply lay down his arms and rush back to his wife and children – thereby implying that he would capitulate.²¹⁰

Apart from the threat posed by the British in their scorched earth operation, there was the added menace that blacks and coloureds were often involved too, either as informants or in assisting with the burning and evacuation activities. This concern was probably even more distressing for the Boers. Both Naudé and Rothmann mentioned this quandary.²¹¹

According to Grundlingh, both Kitchener and Lieutenant Colonel D Henderson of the British Intelligence Service, ascribed the increased laying down of arms in the winter of 1901 to the influence of the concentration camps on the fighting Boers.²¹² Although there might well have been certain burghers on whom the pressure of having their families in the camps was enough to abandon the strife, it is difficult to gauge the impact of this with any accuracy. Certainly the concern for their womenfolk and children would have been an important stressor in the minds of those who carried on the fighting.

The historian, J.J. Van Heerden, stated that by February 1902, General De la Rey received

²⁰⁷ Quoted in F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 329. (Translated: "It is bitter hardship. Just think of my family in the midst of the enemy and I cannot get food to them. Think about the terrible anguish ... Hardship is putting it mildly ... Think how I can withstand it ... not being able to help her.")

²⁰⁸ S.B. Spies, *Methods of barbarism?*, pp. 220-221.

²⁰⁹ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 329.

²¹⁰ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 329.

²¹¹ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 258; M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 25.4.1901, 12.9.1901, pp. 174, 220.

²¹² A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, p. 168.

regular reports about “ ... die jammerlike toestande in die konsentrasiekampe, die genadelose agtervolging van swerwende vroue en kinders ... volgens inligting ... ergste gruweldade in die omgewing van Jakkalsfontein ... ”²¹³ These reports would doubtlessly have had a telling impact on the psyche of a man who was at heart a pacifist. They could probably explain the stance taken by De la Rey during the peace talks at Vereeniging when, on the evening of 16 May 1902, he demanded: “Daar is manne en vroue wat niks meer aan het nie as die skone vel op die naakte liggaam. Is dit nie die bittere einde nie?”²¹⁴

The burghers fighting the guerrilla war, were exposed to a multitude of stressors, and the ever present concern for their women and children was simply one more burden to bear. It is impossible to determine how great the influence of this stressor was, but it certainly caused ongoing distress, uncertainty and anguish among the Boer fighters. Certain officers carried the unremitting responsibility for the welfare of vulnerable women and this could well have caused profound stress, even leading to burnout.

b. Concern about their horses

*For the want of a nail, the shoe was lost;
For the want of the shoe, the horse was lost;
For the want of the horse, the rider was lost;
For the want of the rider, the battle was lost;
For the want of battle, the kingdom was lost,
All for the want of a horseshoe nail.*²¹⁵

The mobility of the guerrilla fighter depended largely upon his horse. Naudé recalled that during the spring of 1901 “Het paard was in een Kommando bijna meer waard ... dan een Burger, want een voetganger was gemakkelijker te bekomen dan een paard ...”.²¹⁶ Even though he made this comment with reference to the threshing of wheat in the Marico area, its truth cannot be

²¹³ J.J. van Heerden, “Genls. De la Rey en Kemp en die stryd in die Wes-Transvaal”, in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum*, p. 182. [Translated: “ ... the miserable conditions in the concentration camps and the merciless pursuit of women and children who were roaming in the veld ... according to information ... the worst atrocities were committed in the vicinity of Jakkalsfontein...”]

²¹⁴ J.D. Kestell en D.E van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge tussen die regerings van die twee Suid-Afrikaanse Republieke en die verteenwoordigers van die Britse regering wat uitgeloopt het op die vrede wat op 31 Mei 1902 op Vereeniging gesluit is*, p. 83. [Translated: “There are men and women with no more than the skin on the naked body. Is that not the bitter end?”]

²¹⁵ <http://www.Google.com>, keyword: For the want of a nail.

²¹⁶ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 306. [Translated: A horse was worth more to a commando than a burgher ... because a footslogger was easier to come by than a horse.”]

denied. Horses had to be used with care. The well being of his horse was always of paramount importance to the burgher.

The nursery rhyme quoted above is of direct bearing to the Boers. Schikkerling made the point that while mules could go unshod, horses, once shod, can never again be used on rough ground without shoes.²¹⁷ And a lame horse is even worse than no horse at all. It must still be fed and cared for. On 3 January 1901 he diarised that he had his horse shod – the nails had to be made from fencing wire. To disrupt the enemy communications even further, they used telegraph wire when fencing wire ran out. J.A. Smith recalled that nails were so scarce that they were used as currency – four nails was the asking price to take someone’s place in standing guard.²¹⁸ The want of a nail may well have become a stressor to the burgher who cared for his horse.

Still, there were other factors which caused concern. Horses, as mentioned previously, had to be well fed if they were required to do strenuous work. The republicans did not have the back-up that the British army enjoyed, such as the provision of good quality feed for their mounts. Rothmann remarked on 4 August 1901, after he had seen British horses killed during the skirmish at Mazebe’s Drift, how plump they seemed compared to their own thin and jaded horses. Cold, wet weather, as Reitz described while on trek into the Cape, only intensified the effect of poor feeding and he remarked that many horses simply had to be abandoned: “with tuckered flanks and drooping heads, waiting for the end”.²¹⁹ He added that the burghers were nevertheless urged on by Smuts, as the enemy was near to their right. They were ordered to go on foot and haul their horses along, in order to husband the horse’s strength. This was not a new experience for the young Reitz. A few months earlier, while still in the western Transvaal, he and his group stuck close to the heels of a British column, which in turn was following the same commando they were trying to reach: “... our worst anxiety being the weak state of our horses ... the dust clouds ahead of us showed us that the English were advancing too, and in this manner we crawled along on foot, leading our horses by the reins.”²²⁰ Horses in poor condition had been a predicament not only to Reitz and Rothmann, but most likely to the large majority of Boers on commando. The officers, who themselves might well have been better mounted, were nevertheless impeded by the

²¹⁷ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 23.7.1901, p. 264.

²¹⁸ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 3.1.1901, p. 121; F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 77-78.

²¹⁹ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 4.8.1901, p. 207; D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 211-212.

²²⁰ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 174-175.

poor condition of their burghers' horses. This hampered a commando's mobility and curtailed any aggressive actions the officers might have planned.

A third problem which the burghers had to contend with, was that of horse sickness. At the time there was no preventive treatment, as there is today. Horse sickness is a virus infection where the vectors are gnats or midges. The disease is usually contracted during the months January to March primarily in low lying areas, near rivers or marshy terrain, in the warmer regions.²²¹ Although mules and donkeys are both susceptible, horses are much more vulnerable. Naudé confirmed that in January 1902, horse sickness kept Kemp's commandos in the Highveld regions of the western Transvaal, which meant the Boers found themselves within the territory where the blockhouse lines were restricting their movements.²²² Horse sickness is a fast acting affliction as several burghers confirmed. Reitz reported how his "Malpert" died overnight in an orchard near the Magaliesberg, after showing signs of distress and lagging in his steps only the previous afternoon. Schikkerling's trusty "Ramkat" contracted the dreaded disease during the wet April of 1901. Early in the morning he noted that the horse was exceptionally dull and by midday the animal was dead. "I had always hoped to be able to pay this gallant animal my debt to him," Schikkerling wrote, "and now he dies. I sat on a stone among the suikerbosch and wept over my latest sorrow."²²³

c. Dread about roving blacks

The issue of blacks who assisted the British forces has been mentioned above. In his well-known work Warwick pointed out that the participation of black people in the war was eventually so extensive that the name Anglo-Boer War could justifiably be replaced by South African War.²²⁴ As the guerrilla war continued the large number of blacks who sided with the British and the role they played became a serious problem to the Boers. Although there were those – many of them armed, wearing some type of uniform and frequently under the control of a white officer – who openly helped the British forces to carry out their scorched earth policy, there were also the informal "roving bands". Although Warwick claimed that "during the guerrilla war they [the black

²²¹ H.O. Mönnig and F.J. Feldman, *Handboek oor veesiektes*, pp. 79-80.

²²² J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 320.

²²³ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 154; R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 22.4.1901, p. 187.

²²⁴ P. Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899 – 1900*, p. 4.

people] effectively closed hundreds of square miles of the annexed states to commando penetration ...”,²²⁵ the Boers themselves saw these roving groups in a different light. They perceived the vagrant blacks as cattle thieves, plunderers and even murderers, particularly threatening the groups of women and old men.²²⁶

The Boers, on the other hand, were not altogether blameless for committing atrocities. A black captain complained to General C.H. Muller in the northeastern Transvaal about a burgher who had shot and killed a young black girl,²²⁷ and General S.G. Maritz and his men were responsible for the massacre of coloured people at Leliefontein in the northwestern Cape Colony on 28 January 1902.²²⁸

Incidents of outrages by blacks were not uncommon and the Boers generally perceived the black people as a threat. Rothmann’s diary has several entries which pointed to the danger of armed black groups in the northeastern Transvaal. On 2 July 1901 he started his day’s log with: “Rapport van Jaap Kruger van genl. Viljoen. Tien burgers, wyk Roosenekal, vermoor deur Kaffers deur die Engelse bewapen.”²²⁹ He made similar entries on 10 August, 27 August and 4 October 1901.²³⁰ Weber recalled that when they were near Toelandsdriif in the northwestern Transvaal the commandant “warned everybody not to go far from the camp, since in the dense bush one could not be safe from the blacks ... blacks were able, despite all the sentries, to approach camp without being seen through the dense bush.”²³¹ The threat was thus not only to the women, but also to the burghers themselves. The massacre of 56 Boers on 6 May 1902 by Sikhobobo’s Zulus at Holkrans, was perhaps the final manifestation that the threat was indeed a real one.

It is clear that particularly in the northwestern, northern and northeastern regions of the Transvaal and in northern Natal, the peril which hostile blacks held for the Boers would undeniably have been experienced as a common and highly incessant stressor.

²²⁵ P. Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899 – 1900*, p. 5.

²²⁶ M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, 4.4.1901, 20.4.1901, 30.4.1901, pp. 161, 171, 177; M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, pp. 85, 135.

²²⁷ C.H. Muller, *Oorlogherinneringe van Generaal Chris H. Muller*, pp. 150-151.

²²⁸ Bill Nasson, *Abraham Esau’s war. A Black South African in the Cape, 1899 - 1902*, pp. 108-112.

²²⁹ M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, 2.7.1901, p. 196. [Translated: “Report by Jaap Kruger of Geneneral Viljoen. Ten burghers, Roosenekal ward, murdered by blacks armed by the English.”]

²³⁰ M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, 10.8.1901, 27.8.1901, 4.10.1901, pp. 209, 216, 226.

²³¹ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 124.

7. Stressors prompted by the individual's disposition

a. Personal doubts or misgivings

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines *doubt* amongst other things as “a state of affairs giving rise to uncertainty, hesitation and suspense.” It also defines *misgiving* as “doubt concerning a future event.”²³² Although the experience of doubt or misgiving could be confused with that of fear, for the purposes of this study, fear is regarded as an emotion concerning the situation presently at hand, while doubts or misgivings are seen as threats which are embodied in future events and are thus classified as stressors.

Normally these stressors would be private or personal, experienced as the innermost soul-searching of the individual concerned. Yet it is also feasible for people to discuss their misgivings with others in an attempt to gain support and empathy. In modern times this behaviour would probably be called “counselling” and it would be a structured exercise. However, at the time of the Anglo-Boer War, these discussions would only have happened spontaneously when conditions were conducive, and then probably only on a restricted scale. But then too, many burghers were on commando as part of a family group and the stern example and domination of the senior members of such groups would naturally have restrained what might have been termed loose talk.

A commonly felt misgiving was the individual's uncertainty of how he would withstand the grim realities of combat in a battle situation. This concern was not unique to the Anglo-Boer War; it has always been a reality of war. In the book of Judges we read that Joshua sent the faint at heart home, prior to the attack on Jericho. A few years after the American Civil War, Stephen Crane wrote a novel about a young Union soldier's inner uncertainty and doubts of his ability to stand firm in the proximity of death.²³³ During the First World War women in Britain would shame men who were not in uniform by presenting them with a white feather, indicating that they were cowards who were unable to deal with the thought of war.

It is thus probable that there were many burghers in the commandos to whom the gnawing uncertainty of being able to cope with combat acted as a powerful stressor. Sheridan and

²³² Encyclopaedia Britannica 2002, *Merriam Webster dictionary*, keywords: doubt, misgiving.

²³³ S. Crane, *The red badge of courage*, pp. 8-9.

Radmacher explained that the secondary cognitive appraisal of a stressor poses the question: “How am I going to handle this?” to the person.²³⁴ After all, they were not trained soldiers, nor were they strengthened by military discipline and comradeship. To aggravate matters many of them had misgivings about the need for the war and the fact that it was being prolonged.

The burghers’ reluctance to face the danger of battle has often been mentioned and debated by historians, and reasons for this have been posited. Whatever the cause, it is probably true that many burghers stayed on commando because they were under pressures to do so, even though they were obviously loathe to risk their lives if this could possibly be avoided. The poor discipline which has often been under discussion probably made avoidance of battle just that much easier.

There are numerous indications in various sources that the Boers were generally reluctant to go into battle. Naudé reported that on 28 May 1901, when the Rustenburg commando under Commandant L.P. Steenekamp was called to arms, only 100 out of 2 000 turned up. The rest simply remained on their farms.²³⁵ Did they simply lack courage? Or were they being selfishly concerned about their own possessions? Or alternatively were they unconvinced about the necessity of the war? It was probably a combination of all these issues, but self preservation would have been high on the list. Weber remembered how many burghers preferred to remain in camp when the call came for help from their compatriots during the battle of Moedwil at the end of September 1901. Moreover, he criticised those burghers who, despite having possessed horses, and thus being geared for battle, preferred to shun from “the far more exiting service of the fighting commandos” and rather stayed with the wagon laager, acting as guards and scouts. He did not elaborate on this tendency, but plainly it confirms that many men preferred to stay out of harm’s way: “There was the usual confusion,” wrote Weber. “a few especially nervous Boers were immediately swallowed up by the surrounding bushes. They appeared only when the crack of bullets had ceased.”²³⁶

Schikkerling’s reflection of the anxious anticipation immediately before a battle as discussed above would probably not fall within this category, however Rothmann provided a good example. He diarised on 15 April 1901 that the Lydenburg commando virtually disintegrated because many

²³⁴ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 150.

²³⁵ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 249.

²³⁶ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 109.

Boers had gone home or had taken their wagons and were hiding in the veld with their families. Commandant Schoeman had no more than 60 or 70 men left in his commando.²³⁷

Weber's description of Commandant Claasen's frequent absences due to his hernia (as discussed above) could either indicate that the stress caused a physical intensification of the commandant's hernia problem or alternatively that his gnawing doubt about his own ability to withstand the pressure of a skirmish took over. The possibility of the stress actually exacerbating the hernia – or any other chronic physical disorder – should not be simply overlooked. P.J. du Toit's suspected asthma²³⁸ is a case in point.

An element of life on commando that could without doubt be experienced as a stressor by many burghers, was the need to do picket duty – *brandwagstaan* – on the outskirts of the laager. This was invariably an unpleasant task and when the night attacks became popular it was also highly dangerous. After the mounted scouts who were roving in the vicinity, had formed the outside shield, the *brandwag* was usually placed on guard two to six kilometres from the camp.²³⁹ Apparently the attitude and diligence with which burghers performed this duty depended largely upon the prevailing dangers in the area. Pretorius mentioned that commandos in the Cape Colony, particularly those under the two commandants, namely P.H. Kritzinger and Wynand Malan, regarded this as a most important duty, because of the constant threat of night attacks by British columns. He added that P.J. du Plessis claimed that this duty was not only the most difficult and boring task but was also the most nerve-racking, yet without which a commando could not function in the eastern Cape.²⁴⁰ The climate naturally played an important role and inclement weather could make picket duty decidedly unpleasant. Nevertheless tension was often relieved by the many pranks and humorous incidents that took place at the posts.²⁴¹ The prospect of leaving the relative security of the camp, of becoming the eyes and ears of one's comrades, braving the elements, and facing the associated dangers all made it natural to try and avoid *brandwag* duty, even to the extent of paying four horse-shoe nails for the privilege.²⁴² It is once again evident that

²³⁷ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 15.4.1901, p. 166.

²³⁸ C.M. Bakkes, Commentary on the inside flap of the dustcover of J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout P.J. du Toit, 1900 - 1902*.

²³⁹ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 115.

²⁴⁰ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 117.

²⁴¹ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 117-118.

²⁴² F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 77.

responsibility for the welfare of others can be perceived as a stressor. A burgher's misgivings about his safety, how he would cope with facing the enemy, his avoidance of battle and his decision to capitulate are all linked to the issue of personal stress. The influence of the multiple British proclamations on what Weber calls the "fickle and the doubting" are also significant in this respect. It all relates to stressors impacting negatively on certain burghers, while others were able to cope with them. Therefore, it is clear that the personal perception of a circumstance comes into play.

Cape Rebels faced another distressing issue which would certainly have tormented their thoughts. If they were captured by the British, there was only one punishment that awaited them – the death sentence. Their ZAR and Free State comrades may well have feared the idea of being sent by boat to an unknown place, far over the sea and far from their homeland, but the fate of the Cape Rebel was sealed. Over and above this, the man who decided to join the Rebels went through much soul searching even before his decision to join the republican cause was taken. What would his family and neighbours say about his intended action? In many cases he was loyal to the Queen but family ties with republicans were also strong. What would happen to his family, property and community if retaliatory measures were taken? What would the loyalists do to them? The fact that the average age of the Rebels was below 25 serves to indicate that the daring and dauntless youths were more easily coaxed to join the ranks of the Rebels than older men who had families and property to consider.²⁴³

b. Frustrations, irritations and hassles

Frustrations, irritations and hassles all relate to unpleasant experiences taking place over an extended period of time. *Frustration* can be defined as a chronic sense of dissatisfaction arising from unresolved problems. *Irritations* provoke anger or displeasure. *Hassles* are persistent, annoying and troublesome concerns.²⁴⁴ It is of little relevance to establish the exact difference in meaning of these expressions, as far as to the experiences of the burghers during the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War are concerned. The American psychologists R.S. Lazarus and S. Folkman classified them together as "the small, but persistent problems that irritate and distress people".²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Personal information: Miss E. Wessels, War Museum of the Boer Republics, Bloemfontein, 19 September 2002; Personal information: Dr. R. Kotzé, Jakkalskloof, Redelinghuys, Western Cape, 20 September 2002.

²⁴⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica 2002, *Memriam Webster dictionary*, keywords: Frustration, irritate, hassle.

²⁴⁵ Quoted by C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 150.

Sheridan and Radmacher added that in the long run these elements may even cause more damage than cataclysmic or personal stressors. They also referred to this category of stressors as “background” stressors.²⁴⁶ In an endeavour to discuss circumstances prevailing during the guerrilla war as accurately as possible, it has been decided that the term “frustration” is the most appropriate one for the purpose of this section. It would be normal to expect that the burghers would have suffered from numerous frustrations; which would depend on the individual’s disposition and the prevalent circumstances he experienced.

It was a major frustration for a burgher to be horseless. This made him a pedestrian or footslogger (*voetgangers*). The physical problems of being without a horse, including having to beg a ride on an overloaded wagon and then bumping along over the veld or otherwise walking and carrying one’s belongings – often including a saddle, as Reitz did when his Malpert died – was agonizing in itself. The many ways in which horses were lost during the guerrilla war and the extent to which the guerrilla operations were curtailed by the burgher’s lack of mobility have already been discussed.

But even worse than the physical discomfort of being without a mount was probably the stigma of inferiority which seemed to cling to the horseless men. Pretorius discussed the matter in some detail, stating that mounted burghers frequently looked down on the *voetgangers* with disdain. He pointed out that the horsemen felt that these burghers were in fact hampering the war effort, because of their restricted mobility. The horseless burghers, on the other hand, felt slighted. Despite their loyalty and the personal sacrifices they had made to be on commando – in most cases voluntarily – they were accorded the status of second-grade Boers.²⁴⁷ Hendrik Verloren van Themaat described the social gulf between horsemen and footsloggers: “Als voetganger kan men toch niets goeds uitrichten, men hoort niet in het boerenleger thuis en is steeds te zamen met een minder slag Afrikaners.”²⁴⁸ Weber, who had experience as a horseman and a footslogger during the war, apparently agreed with Verloren van Themaat and generalized somewhat in saying that while mounted men were united in times of danger, footsloggers were inclined to be without

²⁴⁶ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 150.

²⁴⁷ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 276-277.

²⁴⁸ Quoted by F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 277. [Translated: “As footsloggers were men who could serve no real purpose, they do not belong in the Boer army and are associated with a lower class of Afrikaner.”]

purpose and had no understanding for the great ideal of freedom.²⁴⁹

Similarly officers had little use for footsloggers, except to fulfil menial tasks such as guarding the horses and harvesting crops. Naudé confirmed the general feeling about horseless burghers when he reported in July 1901: “Hij [genl. Beyers] had nu een Kommando van 500 voetgangers, doch slechts 100 paardenruiters. Wegens de wijze, waarop er in die dagen gevochten moest worden, betekende een voetganger niets op kommando, zoodat hier slechts van 100 man sprake kon zijn, ...”²⁵⁰ Naudé’s statement was probably a true reflection of the general’s feeling. M.A. Gronum confirmed that in the western Transvaal “... Kemp en Celliers [het] honderde voetgangers in die grammadoela’s rond gehad wat gehunker het om perde in die hande te kry vir aktiewe diens.”²⁵¹ As has been shown above it seems that most burghers were footsloggers at one stage or another, due to a wide variety of reasons.

There were various ventures undertaken to secure wild horses. Schikkerling reported that on 31 January 1901 such an attempt was made on O’Grady’s farm in the Steenkampsberg after lightning in the vicinity had killed nineteen mules and three horses. The attempt, however, only yielded two horses that were in good condition.²⁵² Reitz recalled that at the end of August 1901 shortly before joining Smuts to go to the Cape Colony the “Rijk Section” were able to corral several wild horses in the southeastern Free State, enough to supply every member of the section with two fresh mounts,²⁵³

Even though being horseless was a great frustration, Celliers preferred this to the alternative that General De la Rey devised. During March 1901, in an attempt to relieve the situation, De la Rey supplied a number of them with donkeys for travelling alongside the wagons. Celliers was pleased that he no longer had a saddle or bridle and therefore could not be appointed to the “donkey corps”. His droll description of the donkeys’ nocturnal behaviour indicated that he preferred to be a footslogger. On 1 July 1901 when he eventually was assigned a horse, it was an

²⁴⁹ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 75.

²⁵⁰ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 259. [Translated: “He (General Beyers) now has a commando of 500 footsloggers, with only 100 horsemen. According to the way that the war was fought in these days a footslogger means nothing on commando, so that one can really only talk of there being 100 men.”]

²⁵¹ M.A. Gronum, *Die Bittereinders*, p. 24. [Translated: “...Kemp and Celliers had hundreds of footsloggers who hankered after horses to take part in active duties.”]

²⁵² R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 31.1.1901, pp. 140-141.

²⁵³ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 199-200.

unmanageable animal that kicked one of his comrades before he could halter it. It took Celliers a full nine days before he finally managed to ride it. Then, only one day later he abandoned his horse, during a desperate flight from the enemy.²⁵⁴ Perhaps being a footslogger was even less humiliating than being the owner of a spiteful horse.

The literature on the war provides many examples of the negative influence of passivity on the burghers. The historian, A.N. Pelzer, declared that the lack of action in the northeastern Transvaal during March 1901, led to a passivity which in turn led to a negative attitude amongst burghers.²⁵⁵ The seeds of the poor performance by Ben Viljoen's burghers during Bindon Blood's drive the following month may well have been planted during this period of passivity. Factors such as lack of ammunition, dwindling faith and hope of eventual victory and increased despondency, took their grip on the burghers and played into the hands of the British. Certainly the sedentary days led to long hours of complaining and negative speculation.

This was by no means the only instance of inactivity during the war. Like any other, this was also a war of watching and waiting. The untrained and largely undisciplined burghers were, however, unaccustomed to sitting around idly, biding their time, waiting endlessly for their officers to plan their tactics while back home their own farms were being ruined or at least were fast deteriorating.

On the other hand, M.A. Gronum related that in the western Transvaal the footsloggers were by no means idle. According to him they planted and harvested, cured hides to make shoes and made horseshoe nails from telegraph wire.²⁵⁶ Although Weber and Celliers confirmed that the burghers did indeed undertake these various tasks, Gronum appeared to generalize and was inclined to be subjective. Weber reported that their commando enjoyed their extended stay on the farm Wagenboomskop until conditions became disagreeable. Because there was very little to do, "... the men had grown lazy and bored. They complained and quarrelled as always when no enemy was there to cause the necessary excitement ...".²⁵⁷ It seems clear that inactivity caused boredom which in turn led to internal quarrels – and probably a measure of soul searching, self-questioning

²⁵⁴ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 27.3.1901, 1.7.1901 to 10.7.1901, pp. 226, 256-260.

²⁵⁵ A.N. Pelzer, "Generaals Louis Botha, Ben Viljoen en Christiaan Muller en die stryd in die ooste", in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum*, pp. 155-156.

²⁵⁶ M.A. Gronum, *Die Bittereinders*, p. 24.

²⁵⁷ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 165.

and eventually to doubt.

The lack of reliable news about the progress of the war, the well-being of relatives and friends and about the strategies implemented by the enemy were also bound to create a feeling of uncertainty, which could well be perceived as a stressor by the burghers who were isolated in the veld. Naudé reported that by September 1900, while they were trekking over Heanertsburg, the isolation and lack of news was dreadful, something which could not easily be described.²⁵⁸ The republican leaders wisely employed a system of dispensing news called *oorlogsberig* or war reports. Each region informed the others of their activities, concentrating on the more successful events. These reports, which were read out to the men in the veld, served several purposes. Firstly it assembled the scattered groups of men and was at least a form of activity that could possibly create some feeling of expectancy. Secondly, the positive news would tend to lift their spirits. Thirdly, and this is purely a speculative deduction, it might have given the burghers fresh topics to discuss and debate during the long idle hours. It probably also had an inhibiting effect on the grumbling and quarrelling which Weber mentioned. Consequently it may be regarded as an effective tool employed by the leadership to alleviate the stress and despondency.

Rothmann mentioned several of these *oorlogberigte*, one as early as 20 December 1900 – in which the battle of Bloubank and the capture of 60 wagons was reported. Another as late as 4 December 1901 described the constant pressure applied on De la Rey.²⁵⁹ He also made at least 13 similar entries about war reports and their news in the intervening months.²⁶⁰ On 7 November 1901 he stated that the news that fighting was still continuing throughout the country was significant to them.²⁶¹ From this remark it may be deduced that a measure of despondency was setting in. Pelzer confirmed this when he stated that during the spring of 1901 Viljoen constantly reorganised his force because his burghers were becoming disgruntled and disheartened.²⁶²

News that came in via the *oorlogsberigte*, at least had some measure of validity, but the burghers were also constantly exposed to rumours and campfire gossip. The bone most frequently

²⁵⁸ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 165.

²⁵⁹ M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, 20.12.1900, 4.12.1901, pp. 99, 247.

²⁶⁰ M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, *passim*.

²⁶¹ M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, 7.11.1901, p. 240.

²⁶² A.N. Pelzer, “Generaals Louis Botha, Ben Viljoen en Christiaan Muller en die stryd in die ooste”, in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum*, p. 164.

chewed upon was “peace”. Camp debates were usually about their ardent wish that the authorities would negotiate a peace agreement. Celliers made frequent mention of his deep yearning for peace, but he remained sceptical whether it would realize in the near future. On 15 March 1901 he wrote: “Vredespraatjes zijn bij ons in de laatste dagen erg in de mode – voor de zooveelste keer sedert de oorlog begonnen. ... Door zure ondervinding wijs geworden behoor ik tot de beslist ongeloovigen.”²⁶³ However, on 3 September 1901 he claimed that there was a general feeling among the men that the time for fighting had passed, and on 13 December he noted that it had been prophesied that by February there would be peace. Then by 13 February 1902 he remarked that the so called peace date was repeatedly being moved nearer to the end of that month and that there are rumours that white flags were being flown in the Free State and on the British forts.²⁶⁴

Some rumours were extremely far fetched. Rothmann reported on 15 October 1901 that De Wet was rumoured to have occupied Ladysmith. However impossible these stories may have been, they nevertheless improved morale.²⁶⁵ It was something new, something heartening to talk about during the difficult times.

Another frustration concerned officers. Not only the burghers but many of the more efficient officers, were disgruntled by the shortcomings of some of their leaders. There were even allegations of dishonesty directed at several officers. According to Pretorius no less than seven Boer generals, who had taken part in the Battle of Donkerhoek (Diamond Hill), were eventually replaced.²⁶⁶ P.J. du Toit remarked after the battle at Frederickstad in late October 1900 that the officers concerned were neither trustworthy nor capable. Japie Brits, the editor of his diary and historian, confirmed in a footnote that only half the Boers who were ordered to occupy a certain position obeyed this instruction.²⁶⁷ By the end of March 1901, in the vicinity of Hartbeesfontein, Du Toit once more blamed “rotten generalship” for the lack of positive results in an operation which included the generals Koos De la Rey, Jan Kemp and Jan Smuts.²⁶⁸

²⁶³ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 15.3.1901, p. 223. [Translated: “Rumours of peace are becoming fashion these days – for the umpteenth time since the beginning of the war ... Through experience I have become wise and remain unconvinced.”]

²⁶⁴ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 3.9.1901, 13.12.1901, 13.2.1902, pp. 283, 324, 343.

²⁶⁵ M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, 15.10.1901, p. 230.

²⁶⁶ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 229.

²⁶⁷ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 22.10.1900 to 25.10.1900, pp. 17-19.

²⁶⁸ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 17.3.1901 to 25.3.1901, p. 43.

There were apparently no *brandwagte* posted at Doornkraal near Bothaville when the British almost captured Steyn and De Wet on their return to the Free State in early November 1900. Celliers also related a similar case when on 7 September 1901 the British attacked Field Cornet Marthinus Schoeman's laager in the early hours of the morning. He subsequently escaped with only his rifle, ammunition and blanket, but he blamed their predicament on the negligence of the officer because no guards had been placed on duty. This allegation was confirmed by J.P. du Toit in his diary.²⁶⁹ The absence of picket guards merely because it was assumed to be safe, was inexcusable and pointed to poor leadership and indeed to negligence.

Not only did the burghers criticise the ability of their officers, they also accused them of several other failings. Celliers declared that many officers suffered from excessive ambition and selfishness. Weber related, with some bitterness, General Kemp's disparaging remarks when he and his group rejoined Kemp's commando. Here the officer's high-handed opinion of foot-sloggers once again becomes apparent.²⁷⁰

The officers' lack of sincerity was likewise often criticised. Weber described an incident when some burghers found a large quantity of hidden goods along a small stream. They were quick to search for more booty until Camp Commandant Mynhardt appealed to them to refrain from taking items that clearly belonged to poor compatriots. Weber commented that he "... would immediately have put the coffee-mill I had found back again had I not known that the camp commandant had tied a strip of shoe-leather round his waist and hidden a roll of tobacco in the mealie-meal before he made his speech".²⁷¹

Unfair favouring of horsemen by officers would obviously cause offence among those who were without mounts. The uneven distribution of livestock looted at Mafeking in early January – giving footsloggers less of the booty – caused bitterness that was reflected by Celliers in his entry of 16 January 1902. He maintained that if the horseless burghers had possessed horses they would certainly have been part of the operation. Moreover he argued that footsloggers were often sent over long distances to harvest mealies, which was evidence that they were indeed of great value

²⁶⁹ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 118; A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 7.9.1901, p. 286; J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 7.9.1901, p. 68.

²⁷⁰ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 22.5.1901, p. 245; J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 311; M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 104.

²⁷¹ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 111.

to the Boer cause. Nevertheless Celliers preferred not to join in any protest action that would divide the Boers.²⁷²

Some officers were alleged to have made irresponsible statements to the burghers. Schikkerling recounted that on 31 May 1901 Viljoen urged the burghers to persevere, because there was money somewhere in it for all of them. Schikkerling was sceptical: "For myself, I do not see eye to eye with the general. Having reached this pass, and everything being now lost save honour, we may as well go to the last extremity by continuing to fight as long as humanly possible."²⁷³ This was Schikkerling's view exactly one year before the peace treaty was finally signed. In other words, he lived through the winter, spring and summer harbouring his doubts.

The fact that officers were often a source of frustration which could well have become a stressor to the burghers should, however, be regarded in the light of the circumstances. Firstly, the generals, commandants and field cornets were not trained military leaders. They came from a very limited number of available candidates. That all of them could not be of the same calibre as the De Wets or De la Reys, is only natural. The situation of commandants and field cornets, whether they had been appointed or elected, was a more disconcerting one. As the numbers of Boers in the veld dwindled, the pool of potential leaders became even more restricted. Moreover, the willingness of men to fill a vacant position and so become exposed to all the criticism that went with it was a definite obstacle as Schikkerling argued.²⁷⁴ Secondly, during the guerrilla phase the task of an officer when his men were widely scattered, must have been a truly daunting one. Pretorius remarked that "Diegene wat al aan 'n verlate sytak van een van die talle Oos-Transvaalse riviere gestaan het, sal besef hoe moeilik dit moet gewees het om die verspreide kommando's te beheer en toe te sien dat hulle aktief bly en die Britse kolonnes soveel skade as moontlik berokken."²⁷⁵ There is a great deal of insight in this statement.

This naturally brings up the issue of the frustration which officers must have endured as a result of the poor discipline of the burghers. This lack of discipline of the Boers had widespread

²⁷² A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 16.1.1901, p. 334.

²⁷³ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 31.5.1901, p. 213.

²⁷⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 5.7.1901, p. 245.

²⁷⁵ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 231. [Translated: "Those who have stood next to a remote branch of one of the many eastern Transvaal rivers, will realise how difficult it must have been to control the scattered commandos and to ensure that they remained active and did as much damage to the British columns as possible."]

implications, and although discipline in general improved markedly after the beginning of the guerrilla war, and many personal interests were overcome, many examples of poor discipline are found throughout the literature.²⁷⁶

There was some divergence of opinion about Boer discipline. General Muller declared that his burghers were aggressive and brave during the attack on 7 January 1901 on the Delagoa railway, and that it was a pleasure to lead men and officers of such a nature. In contrast General Viljoen reported to Botha in December of that year that he found it difficult to keep the absconders together.²⁷⁷ Indeed at times even the strict De Wet and the unrelenting Kemp had to deal with the unwillingness of their subordinates.²⁷⁸

The officers were frequently confronted with reluctance on the part of the burghers to undertake dangerous missions – as would be expected from any untrained and nonprofessional people's army. This frequently required the application of the sjambok by the general. Weber quoted Kemp after the rout at Lindleyspoort as saying: "I can tell by the way a Boer catches his horse and saddles it, whether we will be successful or whether we will be put out to flight. In the first case one finds it difficult to keep up with the commando during the attack. In the second case, on the other hand, every Boer requires a General at his back to chase him forward."²⁷⁹

Once a skirmish was nearing victory, the Boers were inclined to start plunder rather than complete the skirmish.²⁸⁰ Moreover, the burghers would simply take leave and return home as and when it pleased them, regardless of the situation in the veld.²⁸¹ Burghers would easily move from one unit to another, often from one commando to another, as the whim took them.²⁸² Small groups would roam independently or hide in a kloof, making life extremely difficult for the officers.²⁸³

²⁷⁶ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 229.

²⁷⁷ C.H. Muller, *Oorlogsherinneringe*, p. 110; F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 232.

²⁷⁸ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 15; J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 250.

²⁷⁹ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 140.

²⁸⁰ J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, pp. 252-253.

²⁸¹ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 233-234.

²⁸² D.Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 61, 127, 175.

²⁸³ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 10.6.1901, p. 215; D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 195; see also F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 231.

Cases of theft of belongings, food or horses were reported frequently.²⁸⁴

Although there were many incidents of this nature, it is the impact of this poor discipline on the officers concerned, that is of real importance here. Apart from serious misdemeanours such as treason for which regulations existed, the officer, especially during the guerrilla phase of the war, was more or less powerless to deal with day-to-day stumbling blocks. This, naturally, would have led to a lack of respect of his subordinates, as discussed above. Not all officers were as outspoken and forceful as Kemp. To many officers, probably to the majority, the unsatisfactory conduct of their burghers which left them powerless, would have been sensed as a stressor. A feeling of ineptitude, of being unable to perform his task properly, must conceivably have plagued many officers. This could possibly have been a private perception or it might have been shared with fellow officers, as the sloppy discipline was widespread throughout commandos. Either way it would have been an ongoing awareness, constantly eroding the officer's self-esteem. All the more so, if the specific officer secretly suffered from a lack of self-confidence, but presented a facade to the contrary.

c. Faith and superstitions

The Boers were generally regarded as a God-fearing people, though Pretorius warned that this idea should not be overrated. There may have been superficial similarities to the Cromwellites, with the republicans regarding themselves as the chosen people, and there was an implicit pious fervour in their prayers and psalm singing, but one should not generalize.²⁸⁵ There was indeed a deepening of spiritual life during the war which included the belief that they were fighting for a just cause. Many Boers believed that God was on their side, and that they should trust in Him, that if every man continues to do his duty— despite all the terrible sufferings — they will be saved.²⁸⁶ One should, however, remember that among the Boers there were many different views on their dependence on God and why they were being made to suffer. The origins of the *Boervolk* were too varied and their religious perspectives too dissimilar to group them under one category.

As the guerrilla phase of the war progressed the religious outlook of the Boers changed

²⁸⁴ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 157; D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 194-195. R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 26.5.1901, p. 204; see also F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 243.

²⁸⁵ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 185.

²⁸⁶ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 194-195.

somewhat. The fact that the ministers who had been active in the commandos dwindled from about 45 in the early stage of the war to a mere 7 *bitterenders* is perhaps a feature of this turnabout, although the changed method of warfare could likely have influenced this decline.²⁸⁷ Various burghers took over the responsibility of leading religious services as the number of ministers shrunk. This was confirmed by both Celliers and Van der Walt.²⁸⁸

The pressure exerted by the enemy – probably even more than their deep rooted faith – caused the leadership of the two republics to turn to God in time of need and they called for a day of atonement and a day of thanksgiving on 8 and 9 August 1901 respectively. Certain doubts can be raised about the religious sincerity of the leadership in the matter of these two official days of prayer. By August 1901, partly as a consequence of the scorched earth policy, the numbers of Boers who had laid down their arms during that winter had swelled significantly. Then too there were smouldering differences between the two republics about peace-talks. Nevertheless the two days were widely observed. The accent of the gatherings was to fall on the violation of the Sabbath, drunkenness, lack of faith, lovelessness, selfishness, ceremonial religion, unfaithfulness to one another such as capitulating and lastly the problem of theft.²⁸⁹ Judging by the issues, it seems as if the point of departure was indeed more man-orientated than religious.

Reports on the response to this call by the governments varied. Rothmann wrote that he decided not to end, as he did not think that his prayers could be of much help. General Muller, on the other hand, was enthusiastic about the success of the whole enterprise. The adventurous young Reitz, who was roaming in the southern Free State, made no mention of these days at all, as he and his comrades were probably unaware of the arrangement. Celliers, who was indeed religious but despised hypocrisy, could not attend the service as his feet were too painful. The occasion was attended by General Kemp, but it was soon disrupted by approaching British. Schikkerling noted that he attended the thanksgiving service on 9 August, which was held, according to him, to ensure their safe conduct across the railway line on 26 July: “In these panting times our gratitude is falling in arrear, and our causes for thanks accumulating,” he writes. The conservative and deeply devout Van der Walt merely mentioned that the thanksgiving was held as was laid down by the authorities.

²⁸⁷ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 171, 173.

²⁸⁸ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 3.11.1901, p. 311; J.H. Coetzee (ed.), “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Days 444, 445, p. 138.

²⁸⁹ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, pp. 190-191.

He soon moved on to add that Boer houses were still being burnt and their animals taken.²⁹⁰

What none of these sources mention in their subsequent entries, is whether, in their view, the days of atonement and thanksgiving had any effect on later events, or whether, indeed it had led to better morale among the burghers. Of course, these issues cannot really be evaluated, neither then nor now. What the topic does however indicate, was that the leadership of the republics still professed to their dependence on their God. On the other hand some burghers might have interpreted it that their leaders were distressed by the war situation and were now suddenly seeking support on a spiritual level. This could have had both favourable and unfavourable affects. Favourable, if the burghers held strong religious feelings themselves and had their convictions strengthened by attending. Unfavourable, if the deduction was made that the leaders were grabbing at straws – that they had waited until things were going really badly before turning to God for help. If this latter reaction was the case it would certainly have undermined the burghers' trust in their leadership.

Among those who were in the veld during 1901 and the first months of 1902, there were also burghers who, because of their own lack of faith, caused misgivings in the minds of others. Celliers, described a situation in October 1901 when a friend's answer to his proclaiming his firm faith was: "Ja...ja vertrouw maar niet te veel."²⁹¹ This mood of desperation was most probably exploited by certain Boers who had already capitulated. Piet de Wet, C.L. Botha and D.J.H. van Niekerk, all prominent "handsuppers", claimed that in the light of the setbacks the republics had experienced, to continue the struggle was directly against the will of God.²⁹²

Closely related to the matter of religion was the role that superstitions played in the Anglo-Boer War. The Great Comet of 1901, which the Boers could see clearly during most of May, was declared to mean peace, as the double tail formed a V which meant *vrede* (peace). This, according to Reitz, was the "prophet" Van Rensburg's view. But a disbelieving joker retorted that it actually stood for *vlug* (flight). *Siener* Van Rensburg, "a strange character with a long flowing beard and

²⁹⁰ M.E.R. (ed.), *Dagboek*, 9.8.1901, p. 209; C.H. Muller, *Oorlogherinneringe*, p. 147; D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 170; A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 8.8.1901, p. 273; R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 9.8.1901, p. 279; J.H. Coetzee (ed.), "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Day 444, p. 138.

²⁹¹ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 27.10.1901, p. 308. (Translated: "Yes...yes, trust but not too completely.")

²⁹² A. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, pp. 173-174.

wild fanatical eyes, who dreamed dreams and pretended to be possessed of occult powers,”²⁹³ was with General De la Rey and made many predictions, some of which proved to be uncannily correct. Celliers reported that the sight of the comet led to many different interpretations,²⁹⁴ but although Schikkerling mentioned it twice, he attached no supernatural meaning to the phenomenon.²⁹⁵ Carla Gallorini states in her book *Spells from Ancient Egypt* in times when there were no rational explanation for things they were attributed to spiritual powers. She adds that in the countryside where traditions are stronger, superstition is usually more active.²⁹⁶

d. The indecision before capitulating

According to Grundlingh the number of burghers and officers who capitulated during the seventeen months of the guerrilla war, was slightly more than 6 000 compared to the 12 000 to 14 000 who capitulated in the first period until just after the occupation of Pretoria.²⁹⁷ This number was nevertheless significant in terms of the meagre manpower resources the Boers had at their disposal after the first abandonment, and the mass surrenders at Paardeberg on 27 February 1900 and Brandwaterkom on 30 July 1900. It has already been established that most of these burghers laid down their arms during the winter of 1901.

Grundlingh also pointed to the detail that *The Times history* suggested that by May 1901, that is a full year before peace was signed: “... two opposite processes were at work, a sifting process and a moulding process, corresponding to the different effects produced by stress of war on individual characters. Outside the existing nucleus of sturdy fighters, there was a large class of burghers whose course was undecided.”²⁹⁸

It is not clear just how large this undecided group was, but it was on these burghers that the the question of continuation or capitulation would have been a stressor. This indecision would most likely have been a private matter, one which silently but perpetually seethed within the individual. The history of P.J. du Toit clearly validates this reasoning. Since his third call-up in

²⁹³ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 162.

²⁹⁴ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 170; J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten*, p. 238; A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 3.5.1901, p. 239.

²⁹⁵ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 2.5.1901, 17.5.1901, pp. 193, 199.

²⁹⁶ <http://www.metimes.com/issue51/commu/03superstition.htm>.

²⁹⁷ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p. 167.

²⁹⁸ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 251.

September 1900 he clearly had his misgivings, until he eventually wrote sardonically on 13 May 1901, that after the sacking of Hartbeesfontein and the subsequent looting of the remains by “... common class Boers ... I am damn certain this is a bloody mug’s game to keep on. The whole country is going to blazes and we are daily being reduced to starvation and ruination.”²⁹⁹ There is little doubt that he had reached the end of his tether.

There were a number of factors which tipped the balance for a wavering burgher. Grundlingh discussed these details at length. One of the most important was Kitchener’s campaign of destruction, as Du Toit saw it in Hartbeesfontein and again on 25 May 1901, six days before his capitulation. The concentration camp system was another important issue. The yearning of many burghers to join their families in the camps and thereby to assist them was definitely a strong motivation. The physical exhaustion and demoralising effect of the blockhouse system played an increasingly crucial role. Finally the effect of the harsh commando life, demoralizing as it was, further aggravated by the effects of the harsh winter were all, no doubt, vital stressors.³⁰⁰

There was of course the reverse side of the coin, which caused the unsure burgher to pause before acting. Du Toit mentioned his fear of losing his property: “We are under strict control and orders of our generals and if one deserts, your property is confiscated by your own people.”³⁰¹ However, it should be realised that this entry was made on 25 November 1900, at a stage when many thought that there might still be a reasonable chance that the Boers would eventually be the victors or at least preserve their much-valued independence. As the months of 1901 dragged on, and the picture gradually changed, the fear of losing property would naturally have diminished. The likelihood that their farms might still be damaged or even destroyed by Boers, would no doubt have remained. This was a real risk and “the fickle and the doubting” would have been well aware of this.

The Boers who contemplated capitulation also realised that they would be sent to a concentration camp, to be confined with the women, children and old men. Even though this may have been what they wanted, as mentioned above, it is also probable that they had heard of the

²⁹⁹ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 13.5.1901, p. 49.

³⁰⁰ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, pp. 167-170; J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 25.5.1901, p. 49.

³⁰¹ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 25.5.1901, p. 27.

scorn and derision which awaited these “handsuppers” in the camps.³⁰² Finally, the hazard of losing their reputation and dignity among their family and friends would have kept many of the irresolute burghers on commando. The threat of becoming a pariah, even after the war was over, might well have stopped many men from laying down their arms and taking the oath of allegiance.

From the above it is clear that, whatever the eventual decision, the procrastinator would initially have experienced his sense of uncertainty and internal conflict as a stressor. And it must be repeated again that in the majority of cases, this would have been a private, nagging matter, which would once again be part of an accumulation of stressors.

8. Résumé

The wide variety of stressors and potential stressors discussed above were by no means unique to the Boers fighting during the Anglo-Boer War. Nevertheless it is important to note that these stressors had different roots, as is indicated by the six main groups of stressors used above. Some may have been the result of military situations, others because of the lack of infrastructure. Natural circumstances, daily hardships, anxiety and personal disposition are the other groups into which the stressors are arranged. It is further important to realise that as the situation deteriorated from the republican point of view, so the stressors continued to spiral in number and intensity.

³⁰² A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “handsoppers” en “joiners”*, pp. 177-178.