

Chapter VIII

The final appraisal

“Napoleon never waited for his adversary to become prepared, but struck him the first blow.”

Stonewall Jackson¹

1. Introduction

In the previous two chapters the various factors responsible for the stress experienced by the Boers during the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War and the resources that had to deal with the stress were discussed. The ability, or the want of ability, to cope with the different types of stress, were explored primarily from a psychological angle. However, from a historical viewpoint, these factors cannot be assessed in isolation. In order to gain a broad perspective of the psychological impact of guerrilla warfare on the Boer forces, an overview of the unfolding of events of approximately the last 20 months of the war is needed. With this in mind an outline of the development of war strategies and the implementation of operational tactics, as well as other issues of a political and personal nature, will be reviewed for that period. This will throw more light on the psychological developments that took place simultaneously. Hence this chapter embraces a final appraisal of the war. But it can only be meaningful if the theory of guerrilla warfare, as discussed in Chapter III, is taken into account.

The different issues that were involved will become clearer if the period known as the *guerrilla warfare phase* is divided into four sub-phases or stages. Stage 1 is the period lasting roughly from September 1900 until the end of January 1901, and deals fundamentally with the beginning of the guerrilla war, the strategy that the Boers had decided to use to continue the conflict. Stage 2 covers the late summer months of 1901 until the end of the winter, when the British regained some of the initiative and the first cracks appeared in the armour of the Boers. Stage 3 constitutes the watershed period, that lasted from the end of winter, through spring and early summer, until the end of 1901. Finally, stage 4 covers the decisive few months of the war in 1902. It should nonetheless be emphasised that this classification cannot be bound by rigid dates, because conditions varied throughout the theatre of war. This arrangement is simply a

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G.F.R. Henderson, *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*, p. 317.

technique to demonstrate the flow of events and to give an indication of how the circumstances changed as the guerrilla war progressed.

2. Stage 1: Guerrilla war begins

From September/October 1900 to January 1901

The Free State's President M.T. Steyn advocated a new form of warfare when he visited President S.J.P. Kruger and members of his government in the eastern Transvaal by the end of the winter of 1900. He persuaded the ZAR leadership, first at Waterval Onder and again at Nelspruit and finally at the general *Krygsraad* at Hectorspruit, to implement his scheme of using the enemy's own ammunition against them and living from their food supplies.² During September 1900 the Executive Councils of the two republics had also agreed to implement new structures, concentrating on smaller commandos and sub-units. Furthermore officers would henceforth be appointed according to their leadership ability instead of the commandants and lower ranks being democratically elected as previously.³ Although it was not called guerrilla warfare at that stage, the principle that was visualized at that point was very similar to that which is outlined in Chapter III.

When the ZAR government destroyed its remaining war supplies in October 1900 at Hectorspruit station, it was the symbolic ratification of the joint decision of the two governments to reorganise and to continue with guerrilla warfare. But at that point the future for the ZAR looked decidedly bleak, as was the case in the Free State after the Brandwater Basin debacle. According to Cloete only about 2 000 burghers, officers and government members left Hectorspruit to travel northwards in order to escape the British advance.⁴ Many burghers who were not suited or who were not prepared to continue the battle, moved over the Mozambique border and were handed over to the Portuguese authorities.⁵ Roland Schikkerling, Deneys Reitz

² F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, p. 227; F. Rompel, *Marthinus Theunis Steijn*, pp.106-107.

³ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 227.

⁴ P.G. Cloete, *The Anglo-Boer War a chronology*, p. 189.

⁵ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous (A Boer's diary)*, p. 65.

and Fritz Rothmann were among those present at Hectorspruit and lived through the subsequent dispersal of the Boer force. Rothmann listed the twelve serviceable field guns, as well as a few older field pieces, that were destroyed, and having been an artillerist himself he commented on the feeling of regret at losing these old friends. Schikkerling recounted the willful wrecking of a train by a drunken locomotive driver, an incident that resulted in the death of many horses and mules that could later have been of use to the fleeing Boers. Supplies and equipment were distributed among the burghers and the remainder was destroyed by fire or dumped into the river.⁶ All these actions must have been a harrowing experience for all the burghers who experienced the changes.

It must be emphasised that at that stage a number of guerrilla-type encounters had already been carried out with great success in the Free State following the *Krygsraad* of 17 March 1900 at Kroonstad. These actions were initiated for the most part by General Christiaan de Wet. The successes at Sannaspost, Mostertshoek and Roodewal, as well as several attacks on the railway line north of Kroonstad,⁷ were the first strides in the transitional stage between the initial conventional war and the guerrilla war phase that is discussed in Chapter IV. De Wet's confidence as leader and his conviction about the new strategy, was certainly bolstered by these achievements. And this was at a stage when the tide of the war was clearly turning against the Boers. His ability to encourage and, if necessary, to drive his men became clear to all, and this issue will receive closer attention in the next chapter.

The burghers who set out from Hectorspruit after the large scale destruction, cannot be described as stalwart fighting material. They had been on the retreat for many months, subjected to one misfortune after another. Although some followed an easier route over high-lying veld, most of them were obliged to trek in smaller groups through the unknown, dry and fever-infested Lowveld, in their attempt to reach Pietersburg. They were responsible for providing in their own needs as far as food, water and medicine were concerned. This was indeed an inauspicious beginning for the new guerrilla warfare.

The fact that Roberts – as well as some prominent British authors such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle – considered that the war was over at this stage and that only a few clearing up operations

⁶ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, pp. 63-64; D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 125; M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van 'n Transvaalse burger te velde*, 17.9.1900, p. 85.

⁷ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 123-124, 156, 163.

were needed before the final chapters could be written, should not be regarded as altogether ludicrous.⁸ The seemingly desperate actions taken by the Boers, following the forceful progress made by the British force into the eastern Transvaal, probably explains why Roberts judged that he might just as well hand over the command to Kitchener and return home. Kitchener could deal with the dreary routine details of installing a British administration.

But the tenacity and resolution of the Boers had not yet been crushed. In fact, in the weeks that followed several developments led to the reappearance of a positive spirit. In accordance with the decision taken at Waterval Onder, Botha reorganised his force as explained in Chapter V. This action alone once more brought some form of structure into an army that had all but collapsed. Burghers sensed that they were again part of a larger entity. Ludwig Krause, a jurist from the northern Transvaal, explained this new spirit that arose after the period of chaos in Pietersburg. General C.F. Beyers assigned him the task of uniting a number of independent scouting corps, but before accepting this responsibility he requested that Beyers consult with the men involved and was informed that they all welcomed him as their new leader.⁹ Reitz, who had previously been a member of one of these corps, known as the Africander Cavalry Corps (A.C.C.), was one of those who accepted the invitation to become part of Krause's command.¹⁰ Thus from a few loosely functioning groups a stable new unit was developed that soon became a significant factor in the war. In his entry of 5 November 1900 Rothmann mentioned a similar case. Major F.G.A. Wolmarans, previously of the ZAR State Artillery, whom Rothmann refers to as Majoor, had received orders to assemble all artillerists who were at a loose end after their guns had been destroyed. He was then to proceed with them to Bothasberg in order to form a new mounted troop.¹¹ It becomes clear that the reorganisation of the Boer force did not end with the appointment of new commanders for certain regions. Indeed, it also served to form new fighting units which no longer acted independently or were uncertain of their function.

These and other measures which were implemented at the time, were in accordance with the decisions taken in September 1900. Viewed from a psychological perspective they served to

⁸ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 458; R. Kruger, *Good-bye Dolly Gray*, p. 365, Bill Nasson, *The South African War 1899 - 1902*, p. 190; A.C. Doyle, *The great Boer War*, p. 508.

⁹ J. Taitz (ed.), *The war memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause 1899 - 1900*, pp. 117-119.

¹⁰ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 128-129.

¹¹ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 5.11.1900, pp. 89-90.

restore the burgher's sense of solidarity and security. This had previously been at a very low ebb. According to Baron and Byrne self esteem and interpersonal trust stand to benefit when a sense of greater security is perceived.¹² It would furthermore have led to a sense of increased manageability of the situation – one of the three components of Antonovsky's concept of sense of coherence (SOC). It can also be linked with Kobasa's views on a sense of control.¹³

At the same stage some strategic planning was undertaken. As mentioned in Chapter V, towards the end of October 1900, certain generals of the Transvaal and President Steyn of the Free State gathered at Cyferfontein to plan future strategy. It should perhaps be noted that the arrival of Botha and Steyn at Cyferfontein to discuss general policy and a new plan of action, was somewhat unexpected and unplanned.¹⁴ At the time the ZAR government was on the move east of Ermelo and De Wet who had just completed his assistance to General P.J. Liebenberg at Frederickstad, was heading back to the Free State.¹⁵ The fact that not all parties were present at Cyferfontein indicates that it did not have the full status of a planning conference. In fact Smuts experienced the days that they spent at Cyferfontein rather as refreshing and pleasant although they all realized that the British were well aware of the gathering.¹⁶ It is natural to presume that the leaders not only discussed the greater strategy but also more immediate problems such as morale, discipline, supplies and the developing plight of the women and children. All these were daily problems that the leaders naturally had to deal with. Even though the meeting was not entirely representative, those present went away with a formulated plan, something to guide their decisions and actions in the days to come.¹⁷

It is significant that although this gathering took place towards the end of October 1900, De la Rey had been actively rebuilding the Boer force in the western districts since July and August. In his memoirs Smuts described the reaction of those Boers who had returned home after the British occupation of Pretoria and certain parts of the western Transvaal. They had thought that the war had been lost and had consequently signed the oath of neutrality. However, the return of their

¹² R.A. Baron and D. Byrne, *Social psychology*, pp. 308-309.

¹³ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *South African Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 267.

¹⁴ G. Natrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts Memoirs of the Boer War*, p. 124.

¹⁵ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history of the war in South Africa*, V, map at end of chapter XX.; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 195.

¹⁶ G. Natrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts*, pp. 123-124.

¹⁷ G. Natrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts*, p. 133.

erstwhile comrades and leaders convinced them that the struggle had to continue. Their patriotism was revived and they responded to the new call to arms with alacrity. They had been deceived by Roberts' promises of compensation which were never honoured. Smuts was scathing in his criticism: "It was the antecedent promise of payment wilfully broken when the promise had served its purpose that disgraced the name of the military and disgusted the duped surrenders."¹⁸ De la Rey soon proved to the burghers that he was determined to disrupt and harass the British, when he attacked Colonel Hore's garrison of colonials at Elands River. It has been claimed that this action was designed to relieve the pressure on De Wet.¹⁹ But perhaps it is more appropriate to ask whether this was not De la Rey's formula to remotivate the burghers from the west. After all, that was a major part of his mission. According to Smuts after the siege at Elands River the awakening among the people of the west and the rush to arms exceeded all expectations. "The weak knees and weak hearts received a new access of strength and ardour and were flocking to the commandos ... youngsters ran away from the farms in order to join the commandos ... women laughed, and baked, and cooked ... and told yarns of the British occupation."²⁰ De la Rey was certainly accomplishing his mission, namely to rebuild the Boer forces in the western districts.

Table VIII – 1. Analysis of military actions during **Stage 1** of the guerrilla war – September 1900 to January 1901.²¹

	SE-TVL		NE-TVL		W-TVL		N-TVL		N-OFS		S-OFS		Cape	
	Column 1		Column 2		Column 3		Column 4		Column 5		Column 6		Column 7	
Mth	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit
Sep '00	+	●●●● ● + +	+	●●					▲		+●			
Oct	▲▲ ▲+	Dr Dr		++	(●+) ++	Dr ● ●+ +			▲	Dr	++ ++ ++ +			
Nov	*+ +	Dr ●	+	*+		(+●)			▲+	●+	*+	Dr + +		
Dec	++ ++ +▲		*		*+ ++						+	++ Dr	●● +	+
Jan '01	*+ ++	Dr	▲▲ ▲		** ++ +				+	Dr		Dr	●	

¹⁸ G. Nattrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts*, p. 88.

¹⁹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 177.

²⁰ G. Nattrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts*, p. 104.

²¹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, *passim*.

Key:	Boer	= actions initiated by the Boers
	Brit	= actions initiated by the British
	+	= light contact or skirmish
	*	= major battle
	♣	= ambush
	Dr	= drive
	▲	= railway disruption
	●	= town burning or occupation

During those first months, as the Boer forces were becoming more accustomed to their new role as aggressors and became more forceful, several encounters took place that frustrated the enemy. *The Times history* comments about that period: “The first symptoms had appeared of a vigorous offensive revival among the Transvaal Boers ... In the period under review Viljoen’s activities ... were the first murmur of the storm which was to break with violence in December.”²² It was a new storm that would take the British forces unawares; it would certainly require some time to adapt to the new Boer tactics.

One such encounter occurred in the southeastern Transvaal. Major-General H.L. Smith-Dorrien with a column of 1 000 infantry, supported by 250 mounted troops and six field guns were advancing towards Carolina when they came into contact with the Boers under General J.C. Fourie and Commandant H.F. Prinsloo. On the morning of 7 November 1900, after a day of skirmishes between the two sides, Smith-Dorrien decided that it would be best to retreat to Belfast, leaving the rearguard duty to the Royal Canadian Dragoons. By engaging in classical guerrilla tactics Fourie and his burghers executed a daring charge on the Canadians, but by sheer determination the gallant Dragoons managed to escape with the guns. In a renewed effort to capture the guns the Boers ran into a cluster of Canadians hidden in the summer grass. Commandant Prinsloo was mortally wounded and shortly thereafter General Fourie too received a bullet in the head. Three of the Canadians were awarded the Victoria Cross for their valour in saving their field guns, but it was a high price to pay because their casualties totalled 31 of the 95 men who were engaged in the encounter. On the other hand, the death of a Boer general as well as a commandant – two exceptionally brave officers – from one commando in a single battle, seriously affected the future operation of the Boers in the Carolina district.²³

The calculated attack on 3 December 1900 by De la Rey and Smuts on a supply column

²² L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 60.

²³ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 198; E. Wessels, *Veldslae Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902*, pp. 179-181; <http://www.Google.com>, keyword: Witkloof.

under Major A.J. Wolridge-Gordon, provides another example of aggressive Boer action in the early stage of the guerrilla war. The convoy was transporting much-needed supplies to General R.G. Broadwood's troops near Rustenburg. According to Smuts the Boers themselves were sorely in need of new clothes and ammunition, and they were also looking forward to "... success on the field of battle ... when our untiring efforts would find their proper reward."²⁴ However the Boers eventually only succeeded in capturing the 138 wagons of the convoy. Their attempt to take the British guns had to be abandoned as ammunition and time were running out and the risk had simply become too great. They had to be satisfied with 15 wagons filled with selected supplies and nearly 2 000 oxen and simply burned the rest of the supplies. From the guerrilla perspective, De la Rey and Smuts followed the correct tactic, which is to strike at a weak victim and take as much as was needed. The burghers were not to be exposed unnecessarily in extended battles and should disappear before the enemy can be reinforced. Smuts concluded his report by stating that they "... slept that night with the profound pleasure which only the weary know".²⁵

There are several other examples of guerrilla-type battles or skirmishes during the same period. One of these was General Ben Viljoen's attack on 19 November 1900 on the stations of Balmoral and Wilgerivier, east of Bronkhorstspuit. According to Cloete the Boers failed in their main objectives, capturing only an outlying post near Balmoral. But Schikkerling's account of the early morning battle and of the wild rush on the British fort tells much more about the perceptions of a guerrilla fighter. "There are few truer sayings than that fortune favours the brave. A determined rush is rarely unsuccessful, whereas halting or lying down at such time is nearly always fatal."²⁶ His portrayal of the encounter exhibits the adrenaline-charged determination and daring of the burghers.

Two other battles that also demonstrate the high spirit in the Boer ranks at the time are worth mentioning. The first was the well-known Battle of Nooitgedacht in the Magaliesberg where Major-General R.A.P. Clements had established a big camp in a kloof. At daybreak on 13 December 1900, De la Rey's western Transvaal commandos and the northern Transvaal commandos under Beyers attacked the British camp. However, because the attack was ill co-

²⁴ G. Nattrass and S.B. Spies, *Jan Smuts*, p. 142.

²⁵ G. Nattrass and S.B. Spies, *Jan Smuts*, p. 146; T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, pp. 476-477; G. van den Bergh, *24 Battles and battlefields of the North West Province*, pp. 97-101.

²⁶ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 199; R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 19.11.1900, pp. 94-102.

ordinated, the Boers were not able to crush Clements completely. Nevertheless, apart from capturing the British field guns the Boers inflicted serious damage. The British casualties were 295 killed or wounded and 368 prisoners were taken and large quantities of military supplies and livestock were captured. Smuts recounted that the victory was followed by "... indescribable pandemonium in which psalm-singing, looting and general hilarity mingled with explosions of bullets and bombs ... Kemp had unwisely set most of the wagons on fire ...". The encounter and its aftermath has been described by various authors, many of whom were present at the scene.²⁷ The other notable example was the Battle of Helvetia on 29 December where General Ben Viljoen and Commandant Chris Muller captured the 4.7 inch British naval gun known as "Lady Roberts". This feat generally afforded the Boers great pleasure and even inspired the State Secretary, F. W. Reitz, to write a poem which soon became a popular song, the words of which were recorded by Rothmann in his diary.²⁸ There can be no doubt that despite the difficulties encountered in the beginning of the guerrilla war, the latter months of Stage 1 revealed great enthusiasm among the Boers - principally those in the Transvaal. *The Times history* reports on six attacks by Boers on British garrisons early in January, that were "carried out with extraordinary punctuality but were not all pressed with equal vigour ... in every case fog permitted the enemy to get within close range ...".²⁹

De Wet had escaped in spectacular fashion from the British hunt on him, a hunt which had commenced immediately after he and Steyn had averted capture at the Brandwater Basin. But apparently he had his own agenda and although he was a staunch advocate of the principle of guerrilla warfare, his actions did not conform with the plans laid at Cyferfontein.³⁰ He did not engage the same level of harassment and ransacking of the enemy as he had done previously. His new mission was to mobilize as many faint-hearted Free State burghers as possible and have them operate in their local areas while he himself planned to invade the Cape Colony with a selected group of men. The various records of events during this period show that De Wet, the chief-commandant of the Free State, furthermore spent precious time helping a Transvaal comrade at Frederickstad. From that time onwards he tried to keep out of the hands of the British, making

²⁷ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 133-138; J. Taitz (ed.), *The war memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause 1899 - 1900*, pp.123, 126-127; J.F. Naudé, *Vechten en vluchten van Beyers en Kemp "bókant" De Wet*, pp. 189-193; T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, pp. 476-481; G. Nattrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts*, pp. 148-151.

²⁸ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 28.12.1900, pp. 104-107.

²⁹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 124-125.

³⁰ L. Scholtz, *Waarom die Boere die oorlog verloor het*, pp. 128, 142.

his way southwards to the Orange River.

The same cannot be said about the other Free State leader, General J.B.M. Hertzog, who was annoying the British in the occupied towns in the southwestern Free State.³¹ No major battles took place, but the role of the guerrilla can be likened to that of a wasp – to irritate, to sting and then to disappear. Hertzog's campaign can therefore by no means be regarded as meaningless.

The destruction of rails and the capture of supply trains played an important role in the Boers' plan to fight the war with the enemy's food, their clothes and ammunition. A few examples of this important tactic will suffice. De Wet's wrecking of a train on 1 November near Wolwehoek in the Free State was followed by two incidents near Vlakfontein on the Natal line on 8 and 9 November. Another was De Wet's destruction of the line from Bloemfontein to Kroonstad near Doornspruit on 10 November, while he was on his way to the Orange River. To dampen the British spirit even more Colonel S.P.E. Trichard captured a train loaded with supplies and Christmas presents for the troops at Uitkyk Station near Middelburg.³² It has been mentioned before that destruction of rails and the capturing of supply trains were frequent affairs during the early months of the guerrilla war. Cloete cites 137 incidents of rail damage for the six month period from August 1900 to January 1901.³³ Despite the danger that was always involved in these operations, the sabotaging of railway lines serves as another indication of the Boers' spirit of enterprise that marked the first stage. Nevertheless, Table VI-1 illustrates that the peak had been reached in the last three months of 1900.

Mao Zedong declared that fundamentals of guerrilla warfare are *time, space* and *will*.³⁴ Against the background of dynamic guerrilla operations the fundamental involving *space* in the early period should be closely investigated. Referring to the situation in October 1900, Ludwig Krause argued that the *conquest* and *annexation* of the two republics was: "... only *on paper*, that excepting the towns and a small stretch of country around them – say 0 to 10 miles radius, the enemy has not possession of the field, moving about as they like – the reader will understand how President Steyn was able to move about in this manner."³⁵ Krause made this claim about President

³¹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 193, 194, 196.

³² P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 191, 192, 199, 208.

³³ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, *passim*.

³⁴ R. Taber, *The war of the flea guerrilla warfare theory and practice*, p. 27.

³⁵ J. Taitz (ed.), *The war memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause 1899 - 1900*, p. 102.

Steyn's journey through the northern Transvaal on his return to the Free State. It illustrates that the Boers were largely at liberty to travel around the countryside at will. This freedom gave the commandos the opportunity to position themselves strategically, to move just about anywhere they chose, and to keep in contact with the many women who were still on the farms. In other words the Boers still experienced a sense of control over the situation. De Wet also had the opportunity to trek southwards, through virtually the entire Free State, in his quest to reach the Orange River. At that stage the British forces had not yet been able to restrict the mobility of the guerrilla fighters and consequently the Boers felt that they had control over the situation. Sheridan and Radmacher point out that having a sense of control over a difficult situation is associated with an increased ability to deal with stress.³⁶

Notwithstanding the Boers' successes during those initial months and the fact that they were generally, perhaps instinctively, doing the right things in accordance with guerrilla warfare theory, a number of basic errors were made. One such mistake was their inclination to lay siege to their enemy, hoping to force them to surrender. This had often been the strategy in their battles against black communities in the 1880s and 1890s. The same tactic was applied at Potchefstroom during the 1880-1881 Anglo-Transvaal War³⁷ and it seemed natural that this should be the approach at Mafeking, Kimberley and Ladysmith during the first part of the Anglo Boer War.³⁸ When the new form of warfare was launched in the second half of 1900, the Boers were still very much inclined to this passive form of campaigning – a tactic which is contrary to the essence of guerrilla warfare. One of the first instances was De la Rey's siege of Colonel Hore's colonial troops at Elands River from 4 to 16 August 1900. Later there was De Wet's siege of Dewetsdorp from 18 to 25 November 1900.³⁹ Despite the fact that there are some logical motives for these tactics, the fact that the burghers were inactive and were tied down in one locality – when they were supposed to be mobile and aggressive – means that important principles of guerrilla warfare were ignored. In addition, the pattern which De Wet allowed to develop, namely to be pursued by the British while he was attempting to reach and cross the Orange River, whereas he should rather have been harassing the enemy, did not conform to the spirit of guerrilla warfare.

³⁶ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology - challenging the biomedical model*, p. 162.

³⁷ G. van den Bergh, *24 Battles and battle fields of the North West Province*, pp. 28-40.

³⁸ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 40, 41, 50.

³⁹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 177-179, 200-201.

During the period under reflection the scorched earth policy had not yet been fully implemented. This strategy was intended to denude the country of all means of survival and so to contain the Boer forces. The farm burnings were supposed to be a punishment to the Boers for the damage they had caused to rails, bridges and other British installations.⁴⁰ The camps that Emily Hobhouse learnt about on her arrival in Cape Town towards the end of this first stage of guerrilla war,⁴¹ were indeed primarily refugee camps, although the term concentration camp soon became more appropriate. But many women were still on the farms, helping the commandos in any manner of ways. Kitchener's large-scale destruction of farms and the rounding up of women and children only really begun in earnest after his circular of 21 December 1900 to his commanding officers. This outlined ways to halt the threatening guerrilla war: "... one which has been strongly recommended, and has lately been successfully tried on small scale, is the removal of all men, women and children, and natives from the districts which the enemy's bands persistently occupy. This has been pointed out by surrendered burghers who are anxious to finish the war ...".⁴² The mere fact that the presence of women on the farms disturbed Kitchener indicates that they were indeed helping the so-called "roving bands".

If the above arguments are viewed collectively, then the conclusion must be that up to the end of the first stage in January 1901, the wide range of stressors discussed in Chapter VI had not yet become a serious obstacle to the Boers. Certain stressors would have been present from the beginning, factors such as the life-threatening character of war, the British superiority in manpower, the loss of the Boer capitals and major towns and the fact that the two republican governments were reduced to small groups of men moving from one sheltered site to the next. For some burghers the inner conflict resulting from having taken the oath of allegiance to the British Empire and subsequently breaking their pledge to resume fighting, might also have been a stressor. But this has to remain pure speculation. For many burghers and officers regular retreat from the persistent pressure of a pursuing enemy could have become stressful. The important offensive element of guerrilla warfare was forfeited and the issue of not having a sense of control arises once more. An example of this is the response of many burghers, firstly during the so-called First De Wet-hunt and later in his trek to invade the Cape Colony which led to the Second and

⁴⁰ F. Pretorius, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899 - 1902*, p. 54.

⁴¹ R. van Reenen (ed.), *Emily Hobhouse Boer War letters*, p. 34.

⁴² Quoted by A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners": die rasional en verskynsel van verraad*, p. 115; See also: Transvaal Archives Depot (TAD), Pretoria, A. 2044 *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, VII, p. 74.

Third De Wet-hunts.⁴³ The burghers had become the hunted instead of the hunters. It follows that they depended heavily on their GRRs in order to cope with the stress they were undergoing. But then too their knowledge of the veld, and their ability with rifle and horse would generally have gone a long way towards helping them to cope with the situation. On the other hand this does not imply that there were no cases of burghers laying down their arms, or that all burghers were prepared to continue the fight. Grundlingh mentions two cases of burghers of the northern Transvaal – A. Pohl and L.J. le Grange – who declared in October 1900 that they were no longer prepared to continue because the ZAR no longer had a legitimate government.⁴⁴ P.J. du Toit declared in his entry of 18 November 1900 that he was inclined to agree with the Klerksdorp lawyer, J.A. Nesor, who recommended to General P.J. Liebenberg that the Boers under his command should lay down their arms. Despite these cases, which were probably only exceptions, by the end of January 1901 the influence of stressors had not yet taken a firm grip on the war and on the Boer forces.

In summary it can be claimed that during Stage 1 the Boers still had access to numerous GRRs – including forms of material, emotional and social support – and to the majority it seemed meaningful to continue with the war even though there were hardships and setbacks. From the entries made during January 1901 in their diaries by burghers such as Celliers, Schikkerling, Rothmann and Van der Walt, it can be deduced that although there were many tribulations a general feeling prevailed that they were still able to cope with the situation.⁴⁵

3. Stage 2: The tide turns

From February 1901 to approximately August–September 1901

By the late summer of 1901 the tide was about to turn against the Boers. However, *The Times history* is of the opinion that during December and January the events in the Transvaal were

⁴³ J.H. Coetzee (ed.), “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek” in *Christiaan de Wet-Annale*, 8, day 274-day 277, pp.133-134; C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp. 209-210, 218-220; N.J van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn, ‘n lewensbeskrywing*, II, p. 68.

⁴⁴ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*, p. 33.

⁴⁵ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 1.1.1901 to 31.1.1901, pp. 191-203; R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 1.1.1901 to 31.1.1901, pp. 121-141; M.E.R. (red.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 1.1.1901 to 31.1.1901, pp. 108-131; J.H. Coetzee (ed.), “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, in *Christiaan de Wet-Annale*, 8, day 231 to day 261, p. 131.

far from satisfactory from the British point of view and that the Boers had been the aggressors in almost every section.⁴⁶ Table VIII-2 illustrates that by February and March 1901 the fervour of the Boers' military offensive began to wane. By this time the British had had recovered from their first naive opinion that the war was virtually over and that they were only faced with a few roving bands. During the first months of Stage 2 they began to implement their new strategies which had a dramatic effect on events to come. The table below shows the sway in the control of the campaign. This transformation occurred gradually as the summer ended and winter approached.

By February 1901 the number of confrontations initiated by the Boers had declined significantly, while on the other hand the British actions were better planned and executed more purposefully. The random defensive tactics that they had been obliged to adopt during Stage 1, merely reacting to counter the offensive approach of the Boers, was gradually replaced by an aggressive strategy aimed at taking the initiative, following up on their successes and thus neutralising the Boers.

Table VIII – 2. Analysis of military actions during **Stage 2** of the guerrilla war – February 1901 to July 1901.⁴⁷

SE-TVL : NE-TVL : W-TVL : N-TVL : N-OFS : S-OFS : Cape
 Column 1 : Column 2 : Column 3 : Column 4 : Column 5 : Column 6 : Column 7

<i>Mth</i>	Boer	<i>Brit</i>	Boer	<i>Brit</i>	Boer	<i>Brit</i>	Boer	<i>Brit</i>	Boer	<i>Brit</i>	Boer	<i>Brit</i>	Boer	<i>Brit</i>
Feb	* +	+ Dr ● ●	▲	Dr		* + + Dr					▲ ▲	+ +	+ +	+ +
Mar		+ Dr-cont		+	* ♣	+						+ Dr	●	
Apr		Dr-cont	▲ ▲ +	Dr ● ● +	*	+		● ● + +	+	Dr Dr ●	▲	+	+	
May	+			Dr-cont	+ *	Dr Dr Dr +				Dr			+ + +	+
Jun	*		▲ ▲		+				+	Dr			(+●) +	+
Jul	▲ ●			+ +	+ +	+ Dr	▲		+	* Dr Dr			+	+ + + Dr

Key: Boer = actions initiated by the Boers

⁴⁶ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 125.

⁴⁷ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology, passim*.

- Brit*** = actions initiated by the British
 ✚ = light contact or skirmish
 * = major battle
 ♣ = ambush
Dr = drive
 ▲ = railway disruption
 ● = town burning or occupation
cont = action continued

This was the stage when *drives* became the main British strategy, under the command of the newly appointed British Commander-in-Chief Lord Kitchener. The first of these was the great drive in the southeastern Transvaal aimed against Botha and his commandos (see Map V – 1). It commenced on 27 January 1901, when 21 000 British troops with 58 field guns under five commanders began their march eastwards from five points south and east of Pretoria.⁴⁸ The starting point was a line drawn north and south from the Delagoa railway line to the Natal line through Springs.⁴⁹ The main purpose was to sweep the country in an easterly direction and thereby enveloping and destroying the Boers in the vicinity of Ermelo or if necessary to drive them against the Swazi and Zulu borders and so force them to surrender.⁵⁰

Initially four of the five columns were under French's command, but as the net tightened he took command of the entire operation and it became known as *French's drive*. It was an enormous operation, with great concentrations of troops and support systems sprawled over the undulating Highveld. But there were only the two railway lines skirting the operational area to supply the columns with the enormous quantities of war materials that were needed. Subsequent transport from the railway stations to the troops had to be undertaken by ox wagon. It should be kept in mind that the operation took place during that particular late summer when there was exceptionally high and continuous rainfall over a wide area, particularly in the eastern Transvaal Highveld. The logistical magnitude of this operation would clearly have made it highly vulnerable and there should have been ample opportunity for guerrilla fighters to strike at their enemy. To what extent these opportunities were seized is unclear, although Table VIII – 2 does not reflect any major encounters of this nature.

The one notable encounter where the Boers took the initiative did not help to improve their

⁴⁸ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 218-219.

⁴⁹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 159.

⁵⁰ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 159.

waning morale. On 4 February 1901 a 20 km gap developed between the columns of Colonel W.P. Campbell and that of Major-General H.L. Smith-Dorrien near Lake Chrissie. General Louis Botha, with a strong detachment of the Carolina, Ermelo, Witbank and Pretoria Commandos, about 2 000 men in all, managed to slip back through the gap. The rest of the eastern Transvaal commandos, about 1 500 burghers, continued their retreat eastwards. On the night of 6 February three British regiments were camped near the tiny village of Bothwell, on the northern shore of the large pan, known as Lake Chrissie (Map V– 1). Under cover of darkness Botha's burghers approached the village from the direction of Ermelo and at about 02.50 a tremendous fusillade broke out near the encampment of the West Yorkshire Regiment. According to *The Times history* it was a pitch dark and misty night and the sudden rifle fire caused the horses of the nearby 5th Lancers and Imperial Light Infantry to stampede, contributing to the general confusion.⁵¹

Celliers, who was present as part of the Pretoria Commando, also recorded in his diary that – typical of the eastern Highveld – it was a cold night with wild, low, misty clouds racing across the moon.⁵² The Boers had tied up their horses and approached the camp quietly on foot, until heavy rifle fire broke out from both sides, sometimes as close as 30 or 40 yards from where they were. There was no rocky shelter on the grass hillock and they were forced to fall flat in the grass – which in late summer would normally have been high with seed. *The Times history* sums up the battle with the following paragraph: “Botha had staked his success on surprise and a crushing volume of magazine fire. A very short time sufficed to prove that his calculations had failed. His gallant men were falling fast, and once the golden moment for an assault had gone by, persistence was futile.”⁵³ This seems to confirm with Schikkerling's opinion that to fall down instead of continuing the determined rush, is nearly always fatal.⁵⁴

When the Boers decided to retreat, they found that their horses had stampeded and many men were forced to flee on foot. Reitz, who for once was a spectator, commented: “... for by sunrise came the trampling of many riderless horses, followed later by galloping riders ...”.⁵⁵ The outcome of the night's attack was disheartening. The Boers had not achieved their goal of occupying the British camp at Bothwell; moreover they had been forced to flee in disarray. Reitz

⁵¹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 167-168.

⁵² A.G. Oberholster (red.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 6.2.1901, p. 205.

⁵³ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 168.

⁵⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 19.11.1900, p. 95.

⁵⁵ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 151.

added that when it grew light they could see the English camp lying intact below. Botha, stoically, was not discouraged, and commented that there were bound to be ups and downs. Celliers, on the other hand, was less complacent. According to him the Boers had lost 40 men killed or wounded and he and his brother had both lost their horses. Not only had they now become footsloggers but to add insult to injury he had lost his coat and the rain was pelting down again. Celliers concluded that it was a great pity that such a brave charge had ended in panic. *The Times history* reported that the British casualties were 75 killed or wounded and the loss of 300 horses, either killed or stampeded. The Boer losses were reported as 80. The result of the encounter was inconclusive. Smith-Dorrien's mobility had been severely checked by the loss of his horses and Botha, for his part, was forced to disperse his men and leave the small groups to forage for themselves. In his diary Celliers' related how his commando set off on a disheartened trek back to the northwest.⁵⁶

Whether it was the indecisive result of the battle at Lake Chrissie that prompted Botha to accept Kitchener's invitation to attend peace talks at Middleburg at the end of February 1901 is not clear. What ever the case may be, on 8 February Mrs Annie Botha, Louis Botha's wife, received permission from Kitchener to visit her husband and on 22 February she returned to Pretoria with a letter from Botha to Kitchener.⁵⁷ The fact that Botha was prepared to partake in peace-talks following Kitchener's suggestion, disturbed many burghers and especially the Free State leaders, who had not been consulted in the matter.

By the middle of April, when French's supply lines became threatened, he abandoned Piet Retief and moved northwards to the Delagoa railway line. The extended drive over the eastern Transvaal Highveld had eventually come to an end. Despite the many problems of mud and the transport that became bogged down, the drive had not been without some measure of success. The British had taken 1 332 Boers, consisting of combatants, non-combatants, old men and boys, out of the field of action. They also captured 272 000 rounds of ammunition, between 7 000 and 8 000 horses and 2 300 vehicles.⁵⁸ This, from a guerrilla's point of view, represented a serious loss.

⁵⁶ A.G. Oberholster (red.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 8.2.1901, p. 208; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 221-222; D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 151.

⁵⁷ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 222, 225.

⁵⁸ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 180-181.

Kitchener was determined to break the back of the Boer resistance, which was continually tormenting him. His next target was the Boer force under General Ben Viljoen in the northeastern Transvaal. Unlike French's sweep of the southeastern Highveld, this drive was to be a three-pronged operation under the command of Lieutenant-General Sir Bindon-Blood. The one column was to approach southwards from Pietersburg, the second would move northwards from Middelburg and Belfast, while a third force was to move in from Lydenburg and Witklip in the east.⁵⁹ The aim was to clear the mountainous area between Dullstoom and Roosenekal (see Map V- 2) of Boers and remove the women who were supporting the guerrillas. In Chapter V it is made clear that the topography of this region differs considerably from the gentle undulating grass hills of the Highveld. The task that awaited the British columns was entirely different from that in the southeastern Transvaal.

At the time of French's drive the ZAR government was located at Tautsburg, east of Roosenekal. According to Meijer the preparations for Bindon-Blood's drive in the northeastern region soon became known to Botha and the ZAR government and consequently they decided to move south crossing the Delagoa line on 6 April 1901. They proceeded to the vicinity of Ermelo, thus escaping the danger of being trapped by the British columns.⁶⁰ Viljoen himself did not flee and in Chapter VI there is a discussion on how Schikkerling and Rothmann experienced the increase of British troops in their area in this period. Suddenly they too became the hunted, hiding in valleys and wooded country. Meijer claimed that there was a certain degree of indecision and lack of leadership, an opinion based largely based on Schikkerling's report of events. Viljoen left his burghers to their own devices – divided up into small groups.⁶¹ From the guerrilla's point of view the dispersal of one's men when the enemy is applying pressure, is the correct thing to do. However, the impression grows that the Boer generals and the government steadily moved into a mode of hide and evade, instead of employing tactics of opportunistic offensiveness and aggression. They were now fighting from the back foot, defending, evading, hiding and merely trying to survive. It was this type of negative approach that allowed the British to gradually take over the initiative.

The situation in the western Transvaal where Lord Methuen was constantly criss-crossing

⁵⁹ J.W. Meijer, *Generaal Ben Viljoen, 1868 - 1917*, pp. 200-202.

⁶⁰ J.W. Meijer, *Generaal Ben Viljoen, 1868 - 1917*, p. 201; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 233.

⁶¹ J.W. Meijer, *Generaal Ben Viljoen, 1868 - 1917*, p. 203.

the region in an attempt to neutralise De la Rey and his generals, was significantly different. Until May 1901 the Boers were still in a position to initiate a number of important battles, such as the attack on Lichtenburg on 2 and 3 March – which only failed because of one general's independent and impulsive action. On 22 March De la Rey with 400 burghers conducted a charge on the Imperial Light Horse at Geduld, firing from the saddle as they went. The ILH escaped in the nick of time and eventually managed to fight their way through to Hartbeesfontein. Then too, on 22 April a commando attacked a British convoy with 400 escorts, at Platberg near Klerksdorp. The escort put up a gallant defence, allowing the convoy and the two guns to escape.⁶² It is clear that the growing lack of enterprise shown by the Boers elsewhere had not yet reached the west. On 1 May Methuen launched a drive to clear the Lichtenburg/Venterdorp/Klerksdorp triangle. This was a short-lived and unproductive manoeuvre because by 11 May Methuen abandoned his drive having taken less than 100 prisoners.⁶³

The various Transvaal operations were not the only military enterprises that occupied Kitchener's attention. In the last days of January 1901 De Wet left Doornberg near Winburg with 2 200 men, one field gun and a pom-pom, on his second crusade to invade the Cape Colony. The British were aware of this development and Kitchener felt compelled to divert two columns that had been designated to join French's drive, in order to protect the Cape Colony from an invasion by the dreaded De Wet. Lieutenant-General N.G. Lyttelton was appointed to take charge of the force around Naauwpoort.⁶⁴ According to De Wet himself, since leaving Doornberg they were pressed by British units from all sides, trying to impede the Boer progress.⁶⁵ The main adversary was Major-General C.E. Knox, the officer of whom De Wet conceded: "My old friend, General Knox, whose duty it had been to prevent me entering Cape Colony on a previous occasion, was once again entrusted with the same task. Any person who has had dealings with this General will acknowledge that he is a rather troublesome friend; for not only does he understand the art of marching by night, but he is also rather inclined to be overbearing when he measures his strength with that of his opponents."⁶⁶ De Wet did not say so in as many words, although President Steyn

⁶² P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 227-228, 231, 235.

⁶³ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 237, 238.

⁶⁴ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 219.

⁶⁵ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp. 197-199.

⁶⁶ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 199.

did,⁶⁷ but he and his commando were hunted from the very beginning of their expedition. His burghers were constantly under the pressure of pursuit and the spark of aggression had weakened.⁶⁸ The continuous hardship and peril caused ongoing stress – extending the stage of resistance (SR) according to the GAS-theory and causing prolonged demands on the hormonal supply of each individual. The fact that they were in a situation where they probably felt that they were not in control, would naturally have aggravated the state of affairs.

Despite this general negative attitude, General C.C. Froneman and his burghers, who were at the time moving towards Zand Drift, between Norvalspont and Hopetown, captured a train close to Jagersfontein Station and the burghers were able to seize much-needed supplies, including blankets, saddles and ammunition, before they destroyed the train.⁶⁹ This episode was a pinpoint of light in the all-but-forgotten guerrilla strategy of the Boers.

The rest of De Wet's expedition appeared to have been one continuous flight, breaking through cordons and experiencing narrow escapes. Eventually, on 10 February 1901, De Wet and those who were still with him crossed the Orange River at Zand Drift into the Cape Colony. With him was President M.T. Steyn, Commandant (later General) W.C. Malan and Corporal (also later General) S.G. Maritz. The heavy rains of early 1901 had begun and the British were hard on their heels. Steyn's summary of the expedition namely that a vast force was concentrated behind them and the burghers and horses were exhausted is quoted in Chapter VI.⁷⁰ This was certainly not the type of guerrilla action visualised by De Wet when he began the *small war* at Sannaspost and Roodewal.

One other strategy upon which the Boers still relied heavily was the disruption of enemy rail transport. This not only upset the enemy's supply of war goods needed in the vast interior of southern Africa, but was also a source for their own much-needed necessities. However as Stage 2 progressed the British began exercising better control over this vulnerable aspect of their campaign. The rail disruptions totalled 137 during Stage 1 (September 1900 to January 1901) but Cloete reports only 82 disruptions in Stage 2 (February 1901 to July 1901). Table VI–1 illustrates this clearly. In the northeastern Transvaal the names of Captain Jack Hindon, Captain Henry

⁶⁷ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn, 'n lewensbeskrywing*, II, p. 68.

⁶⁸ J.H. Coetzee (ed.) "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek" in *Christiaan de Wet-Annale*, 8, day 274, p. 133.

⁶⁹ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp.200-201; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 221.

⁷⁰ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn, 'n lewensbeskrywing*, II, p. 68.

Slegtkamp and Commandant S.P.E. Trichardt were well known for the leading role they played in train disruptions. Naturally the British realised that to counter these setbacks the blockhouse lines should be systematically and, above all, rapidly extended, with connecting barbed wire entanglements to make the system more efficient.⁷¹ This new development presented yet another quandary for the Boers just at a time the tide was gradually turning against them.

Stage 2 was also the period when the distrust between the two allies, the ZAR and the Free State, began to take on serious proportions. It began with Botha's much publicised talks with Kitchener at Middelburg at the end of February 1901, where Botha eventually turned down the British proposal. The ZAR leaders were still irresolute and a *Krygsraad* was held on 10 May 1901 at De Emigratie, where the ZAR decided to renew peace negotiations and to contact President Kruger in Europe to ask his advice.⁷² Following this development they were of course under an obligation to discuss the matter with their Free State partners. A meeting took place at Waterval on 20 June 1901, where President M.T. Steyn, General C.R. de Wet, General J.B.M. Hertzog and General J.H. de la Rey were all present. Steyn was once again ready to take the ZAR leaders to task about their unwillingness to continue the struggle and was about to declare that the Free State was prepared to continue the war on its own. However, an about turn came following the tone set by President Kruger's answer, in which he seriously urged the burghers to continue the struggle. The ZAR leaders thereupon agreed that no peace would be made and no peace conditions accepted that would endanger the independence of the two republics.⁷³ But a crack had now appeared in the bell of solidarity. Its sound would henceforth be one of mutual distrust. Cracked bells don't ring true.

Associated with the strained relationship between the two partners was the conviction held by many leaders and burghers that there was still a possibility of international intervention. This hope faded as the tide turned against the Boers. It is notable that Bruce Catton, an author on the history of the American Civil War, aptly claimed: "European recognition and intervention – that will-o'-the-wisp which still flickered across the Confederate horizon – could never be won by defensive warfare."⁷⁴ This view seems to have been equally applicable to the situation in the

⁷¹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 227, 247.

⁷² P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 238.

⁷³ L. Scholtz, *Generaal Christiaan de Wet as veldheer*, p. 261.

⁷⁴ B. Catton, *The Civil War*, p. 131.

Transvaal and the Free State more than three decades later.

Another issue which began to weigh increasingly on the burghers on commando was Kitchener's escalation of the scorched earth policy. The burghers knew about the new camps that had been so hastily erected and many of the burghers had seen the women being carried away, frequently by means that were quite ungentlemanly.⁷⁵ It was also common for the men to worry about the fate of their families who were in the camps. The burghers were often witness to homesteads and farms being destroyed, or came upon the grim results of these acts. Although it has been claimed that the British actions only served to make the burghers more determined – as Naudé's brave quote in Chapter VI reflects – it was without a doubt a painful awareness that they constantly carried in their heart of hearts. It was certainly a crushing blow to any remaining morale. From a more practical angle, the scorched earth strategy was systematically depriving the burghers of food, or at least of sources where food could be foraged, and this did not only apply to the burghers themselves, but also to their horses, cattle and mules. This was, after all, what Kitchener was aiming to accomplish.

At that stage Kitchener certainly had more than enough men at his disposal to execute his scorched earth policy. *The Times history* claims that by May 1901 the total British army in South Africa, including the defence forces of the Cape Colony, was 240 000 strong.⁷⁶ This massive number shows just how serious the British authorities were to destroy the "few roving bands" of Boers who were frustrating their war effort. *The Times history* also discusses at some length the role played by surrendered Boers – they referred to them as a lower class of Boer – and by black people in aiding the British to implement their scorched earth strategy.⁷⁷ According to this source both these groups were used as scouts, transport drivers and labourers. The debate about Kitchener's use of surrendered Boers and black people is also covered by Grundlingh, Nasson and Warwick and it becomes clear that every effort was made to break the spirit of the Boers.⁷⁸

Compared to the early months of the summer, November and December 1900, the late summer, January to March 1901, brought about the unusual rainfall pattern discussed in Chapter

⁷⁵ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 25.4.1901, 28.6.1901, pp. 173, 193-194.

⁷⁶ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 248.

⁷⁷ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 249.

⁷⁸ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, pp. 201-233; Bill Nasson, *The South African War 1899 - 1902*, pp. 215-216, 224-225; P. Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899 - 1902*, pp. 22-23.

VI. This pattern prevailed over almost the entire area where war was waged, causing unforeseen hardships and obstacles. The discomfort of constantly living and sleeping in the soggy veld, preparing food in the rain with wet wood as fuel and the effect on the health of the weaker or infirm burghers, men such as Rothmann and Du Toit, was significant. The high incidence of horse sickness due to the influx of midges in the many wet, swampy areas, was a secondary disadvantage. Additional problems were experienced with mobility in the muddy low lying areas and when brimming rivers had to be crossed. De Wet experienced this dilemma in his effort to return to the Free State between 19 February and 28 February 1901. For men who were sleeping out in the open veld, the appearance of the Great Comet of 1901 in April and May must have seemed like an omen. Many different interpretations were attached to its appearance at that specific time and it was even optimistically suggested that it signified the coming of peace.⁷⁹ Superstition is mentioned in Chapter VI as being a stressor, simply because it is a reflection of uncertainty and vacillation within the individual.

After the extremely wet late summer and autumn, and with their daily requirements becoming increasingly scarce as the scorched earth policy took effect, it was natural for the burghers to reflect on the coming winter. At this stage there were in fact only two options open to them. Either they believed so strongly in the cause for which they were fighting and were prepared to endure the coming hardships. For these men perseverance was the only possible answer. Schikkerling must have held this opinion. In Chapter VI it was stated that on 31 May 1901, after listening to Viljoen's words, he declared: "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."⁸⁰ Alternatively, there was the option of avoiding all the hardships and surrendering to the enemy. Reasons to justify such action were numerous. It was during May 1901 that Du Toit decided that he had had enough of the "mugs game" and joined the British in Ventersdorp. He was by no means an exception. The numbers given by Grundlingh and quoted in Chapter VI illustrate clearly that the approaching winter was indeed a weighty obstacle to many of those burghers that Weber called "the fickle and the doubting".⁸¹ It also corresponds with the statistics given in the *Journal of the principal events connected with South Africa*, namely that 4 293 Boers

⁷⁹ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 170.

⁸⁰ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 31.5.1901, p. 213.

⁸¹ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General de la Rey*, p. 95.

surrendered during the six months of Stage 2 while 5 448 burghers were taken prisoner in the same period.⁸² According to the source, there were 14 624 men in “refugee” camps on 1 July 1901, while one month later, on 31 July 1901, it reported a total of 15 359 men.⁸³ It should be recognized that these figures included all adult male republicans, including those who were too old or too ill to do commando service. The sudden increase in July should probably be attributed to burghers whose GRRs had by that time been depleted to such a level that further coping became impossible.

An overview of Stage 2 shows that although the enthusiasm which was demonstrated by the Boers in Stage 1 was gradually on the wane as the enemy introduced new strategies, the majority of the Boers were still willing to continue fighting, striving to stay free and mobile and looking for means of survival. But the basic elements of guerrilla warfare were becoming increasingly difficult to apply, and stressors were beginning to mount. In fact for the average burgher his life had been invaded by a multitude of stressors. His sense of helplessness at the British superiority in numbers, the hardships he was obliged to endure due to the incessant rain, his concern for his wife and family and the dread caused by the constant hiding or fleeing all weighed heavily on him. The statistics above indicate that many could no longer cope with the stress and decided to yield, to lay down their arms and to abandon the struggle.

Moreover, by the end of June 1901 there were 15 377 Boers – relatives, neighbours, friends and comrades of those who were still doing battle – who were held as prisoners of war, 13 060 of whom were in camps in far-off countries.⁸⁴ The fear of the unknown is explained by Baum *et al.* as the individual being concerned about future dangers, in other words, the anticipatory appraisal of a threat without knowing what the situation actually holds.⁸⁵ Regardless of all these menaces there were still several thousand burghers, who like Roland Schikkerling, believed that they had nothing more to lose except their honour and who were prepared to carry on into the period that has been outlined as Stage 3.

⁸² Transvaal Archives Depot (TAD), Pretoria, A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, IX, X, XI and XII, *passim*.

⁸³ TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, XI, pp. 1, 39.

⁸⁴ TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, X, p. 47.

⁸⁵ A. Baum, R.J. Gatchel, D.S. Krantz, *An introduction to health psychology*, p. 80.

4. Stage 3 – The watershed

August 1901 to December 1901

As the winter of 1901 continued the daily hardships became increasingly trying for the burghers who were still *te velde*. Rothmann made numerous entries during August about the many British patrols and black scouts that were active in the northeastern Transvaal. There was a constant need for Boers to hide in kloofs with their livestock and wagons. It was cold, rainy and misty and they had little sleep.⁸⁴ Celliers' entries for that period focussed on the difficulties of fleeing over the Magaliesberg to the north into the Bushveld, with the British constantly at their heels. No sooner had they settled down, when the order "Inspan!" was heard. In his diary Du Toit confirmed that in August 1901 – soon after he had crossed over to the British – he was involved in clearing the Magaliesberg of Boers and women, and on 17 August 1901 he recorded that blockhouses were being built on the mountain range.⁸⁵ The Boers were doing their utmost just to stay out of the enemy's net. Table VIII – 3 below illustrates that it was only in September 1901 that meaningful offensive action, as seen from the Boers' perspective, was resumed.

Table VII – 3. Analysis of military actions during **Stage 3** of the guerrilla war – August 1901 to December 1901.⁸⁶

Mth	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit
	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7							
Aug		++	▲+	+		●				+	+	Dr Dr (Bh) ++	++	+
Sep	+++ +	+++ + Dr Dr			* +			++		++	++	Dr +	++ +	++ ++ +
Oct	+++ **	+++ +	+Bh		*	Dr	+	+		*			●+ ++ ++ +	++
Nov		+++		+					+	Dr + +			++ ++	++
Dec	Bh + +	+++ ++	♣		++	++			** + +++	Dr		+++	++	

⁸⁴ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 1.8.1901 to 30.8.1901, pp. 206-216.

⁸⁵ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout 1900 - 1902*, 6.8.1901 to 21.8.1901, pp. 64-66; A.G. Oberholster (ed.) *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 3.8.1901 to 23.8.1901, pp. 269-279.

⁸⁶ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, *passim*.

Key:	Boer	= actions initiated by the Boers
	<i>Brit</i>	= actions initiated by the British
	*	= light contact or skirmish
	*	= major battle
	♣	= ambush
	Dr	= drive
	▲	= railway disruption
	●	= town burning or occupation
	Bh	= attack on blockhouse

On 3 September 1901 Smuts and his small band of only 200 burghers at last managed to commence their journey to infiltrate the Cape Colony, while a few days later, on 7 September, Botha left Ermelo with 1 000 burghers to invade Natal. As explained in Chapter V both these manoeuvres were the outcome of the decisions originally taken at the Cyferfontein meeting of October 1900, when one of the two main resolutions was to take the war into the enemy's territory. However this planning had been done a year earlier and in the intervening months the tide of war had certainly changed. The necessity of implementing such an invasion remained and it was reiterated during the meeting between the leaders of the two republics which took place at Waterval on 20 June 1901 where General De la Rey was instructed to send General Smuts with a well-supplied commando to the Cape.⁸⁷

A cursory glance at the table also reveals that the military actions initiated by the Boers were mainly small skirmishes, the bulk of which took place in the Cape where a number of small rebel commandos were stirring the hornet's nest. A few examples of these encounters will suffice. Commandant S.G. (Manie) Maritz and his commando attacked Vanrhynsdorp on 7 August, but their major achievement was the seizure of three heavily laden supply wagons. Maritz and his commando went as far as Darling, only 60 kilometres from Cape Town, presumably the most southernly point reached by republicans during the war.⁸⁸ On 17 September 1901 Smuts, while still on his way to the eastern Cape, clashed with a squadron of 17th Lancers at Modderfontein in the Tarkastad district. Smuts achieved a resounding victory, but his triumph was cut short by the arrival of more lancers and he was forced to leave his prisoners behind and destroy the two captured guns.⁸⁹ On 15 October Commandant J.L. (Jaap) van Deventer overpowered a column of Somerset East District Mounted Troops at Doornbosch where he captured 210 troops and 220 horses.⁹⁰ On 28 November four commandos – those of W.C. (Wynand) Malan, Manie Maritz, Jaap

⁸⁷ L. Scholtz, *Generaal Christiaan de Wet as veldheer*, pp. 261-262.

⁸⁸ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 258, 272.

⁸⁹ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts the sanguine years 1870 - 1919*, p. 139.

⁹⁰ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 271.

van Deventer and H.W. (Hendrik) Lategan – attempted to seize the remount depot at Tonteldooskolk, 85 kilometres northwest of Calvinia. Although they were unsuccessful, and a standoff lasting several days followed, they managed to capture 300 horses, a most meaningful accomplishment.⁹¹ Many of these encounters were no more than casual skirmishes, and contributed little in general military terms. But their success lay in the fact that the British authorities were forced to react and consequently to spread their manpower over vast, arid areas far away from the critical war arenas in the republics.

Despite their achievements, the invading republicans and their Cape rebel comrades received a number of setbacks when certain spirited leaders were captured. Commandant J.C. Lötter was born in the Cape Colony and was thus a British subject and consequently a rebel. He was captured by Colonel H.J. Scobel near Cradock on 5 September 1901 and was executed on 12 October.⁹² Commandant G.J. Scheepers was taken captive on 11 October 1901 while he was seriously ill. From the description given by T. and D. Shearing the unknown illness had been plaguing Scheepers for some time. The diagnosis was a mystery, and varied from suspected typhoid to slow poisoning, while Scheepers himself mentioned on 3 October that he had been sick since 28 September and that his pain had become so acute that he could not mount his horse. At the time his commando was under severe pressure from the Hussars. Shearing claims that the “British was handling the commando roughly.” and “Now the Hussars were waiting for them at every turn.”⁹³ It could well have been that he had psychologically reached the extreme stage of exhaustion (SE) (or even that the point of complete burnout, as discussed in Chapter II, had been reached). This issue is discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Although Scheepers was a ZAR subject, he was sentenced to death and executed on 18 January 1902 at Graaff-Reinet.⁹⁴ A third Boer leader to be captured was General P.H. Kritzinger. This happened on 16 December, after he had been seriously wounded at Hanover Road Station. Fortunately for him he was acquitted of the charges of murder and was then classified as a prisoner of war.⁹⁵ These incidents are mentioned to illustrate two important aspects. Firstly, that the British and colonial forces in the Cape Colony were very serious in their pursuance of the rebels and invading republicans. Secondly the Cape Afrikaners who ventured to take up their weapons and confront the British, were exposing themselves to

⁹¹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 280.

⁹² T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Johannes Lötter and his rebels*, pp. 31, 41; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 263, 271.

⁹³ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers and the search for his grave*, pp.136-137.

⁹⁴ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers and the search for his grave*, pp. 140-141, 167-169.

⁹⁵ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 283, 317.

conviction as traitors.

Smuts' original aim to rally the Cape Afrikaners and thus form a significant force in the Cape Colony, led him through the eastern Cape, into the Little Karoo in the southern Cape until eventually he reached the farm Soetwater between Calvinia and Nieuwoudtville in December 1901. It was a long, meandering trek, marked by many encounters with the enemy.⁹⁶ Some of these were of major import, such as the one at Modderfontein, while many were merely isolated contacts. However his extended trek proved to be reasonably successful in recruiting local inhabitants for the Boer cause.

At this point one should perhaps speculate on the impact of Queen Victoria's death to see if there was any decline in the loyalty of Cape Afrikaners towards British rule. But this would have to remain mere speculation, as no firm conclusions can be drawn. It might also be worthwhile to deliberate upon the antagonism caused by the introduction of Martial Law in virtually the entire Cape Colony in early 1901, and particularly on the harsh way that it was implemented. The question may well be asked whether Milner's fear of a unified uprising of the *platteland* population did not act as a backlash against him and encouraged the younger rural population to take action in favour of the republics.⁹⁷ This probably played a positive role in the success of the republicans' mission to take the war into the enemy's territory.

On 27 December, upon Smuts' instructions, there was a gathering of about 3 000 rebels, 16 commandos and roving bands, at Soetwater. Here Smuts reorganised the Cape rebels into three units under the command of three new Combat-Generals: Manie Maritz, Wynand Malan and Jaap van Deventer.⁹⁸ This was to be the operational structure in the last stage of the war.

Botha's incursion into Natal, which formed the other leg of the plan to extend the enemy's manpower over the country, met with numerous setbacks and was short lived. After the initial successful encounter on 17 September 1901 at Blood River's Poort, where Colonel G. Gough's column was surprised by 500 galloping Boers and suffered heavy losses, the invasion did not produce decisive results. The unexpected early rain of September was heavy and made the roads virtually impassable. The Buffels River which was in flood and the British forces – 16 000 men

⁹⁶ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 202-274; T. and D. Shearing, *General Jan Smuts and his long ride*, pp. 31-156.

⁹⁷ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 215, 216.

⁹⁸ T. and D. Shearing, *General Jan Smuts and his long ride*, p. 156; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 287.

and 40 guns according to Johannes Meintjes – both obstructed Botha’s progress.⁹⁹ He was forced to adapt his plans and move his 2 000 burghers towards Zululand. The two attacks on relatively small fortified posts on the Zululand border, Itala on 25 October 1901 and Fort Pospect on the next day, both failed despite the Boers’ significant superiority in numbers. They had to be satisfied with capturing 30 wagons that were being escorted by a few Zulu policemen near Melmoth.¹⁰⁰ The concerted British effort to capture the Transvaal military commander meant that Botha and his burghers suffered virtually the same strain and hardships as did those under De Wet when he invaded the Cape earlier in 1901. Botha decided to return to the eastern Transvaal, but even in this manoeuvre his commandos were harassed and frequently forced to take evasive action before reaching Piet Retief on 9 October 1901.¹⁰¹ For many burghers, however, the safe return was not so sweet. Meintjes recorded that a “howl of rage went up from the men from Ermelo and Carolina who found that their homes had been burnt down in their absence and their lands and crops devastated.”¹⁰²

In sharp contrast to the action in the Cape Colony, the military initiative within the two republics was by this time dominated by the British, primarily in the form of drives and in the rapid completion of their blockhouse lines. For the guerrilla it became a lean time. In the southeastern Transvaal the night attacks, discussed in Chapter VI, led by Colonel G.E. Benson, forced the Boers to fight constantly from a defensive position. One exception to the Boers’ tribulations concerned the same Benson. The heavy spring rains and the ponderous British columns, combined with the Boers’ spirited riding power, enabled Botha and his men to defeat Benson at Bakenlaagte on 30 October where the British commander was mortally wounded.¹⁰³

In the Free State De Wet had been under intense pressure for some time. Kitchener launched a concentric drive with 15 000 troops in the central Free State starting early in November, a manoeuvre which lasted only six days and had limited success as far as the number of burghers captured or killed was concerned. However, on the positive side for the British, the drive resulted in the seizure of 10 000 cattle. At that time when the food shortage was becoming such a serious dilemma for the Boers, this was a grievous blow to the people of the area. In December another

⁹⁹ J. Meintjes, *General Louis Botha a biography*, p. 87.

¹⁰⁰ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 268.

¹⁰¹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 269-270; M.A. Gronum, *Die Bittereinders*, pp. 27-28; J. Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, pp. 87-88.

¹⁰² J. Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, p. 88.

¹⁰³ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 274-275.

elaborate drive was launched in the Kroonstad, Heilbron and Frankfort areas, once again with the primary intention of cornering De Wet. This drive lasted five days and not a single burgher was captured.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, these two drives certainly increased the pressure on the burghers even more. Following this, and probably as an act of retribution, De Wet's burghers then achieved two notable victories in close succession. On 20 December the deceptive tactics of General Wessels completely fooled Colonel J.H. Damant's force at Tafelkop near Frankfort. Wessels and his burghers approached in typical British cavalry fashion, until they disappeared from sight into a small ravine where they left the horses and attacked on foot. Before reinforcements could arrive the Free Staters had inflicted serious casualties and would have captured the field guns and pom-poms, had the gun horses not been killed.

Five days later, in the dark hours of Christmas morning, De Wet and 500 burghers approached a British camp on the summit of a hill called Groenkop. Once within range, the enthusiastic De Wet ordered "Storm burgers",¹⁰⁵ and the Boers overwhelmed the sleeping pickets and unleashed murderous fire into the tents of the Yeomanry. The British defeat was staggering although the Boers could not follow the fleeing British, because they had left their horses at the foot of the hill. Despite this failing the encounter was a resounding success, considering that the booty included an Armstrong gun, a Maxim-Nordenfeld, twenty wagons with oxen plus ammunition, rifles, 500 horses, and mules – and one wagon laden with liquor "... so that the burghers who were not averse to this, could now satisfy their thirst."¹⁰⁶ The guerrilla principle of using a small force, relying on surprise, causing confusion, and avoiding a prolonged battle, had once again proved successful for De Wet.

However, it should be emphasized that these three encounters – Bakenlaagte, Tafelkop and Groenkop – were only a few remaining tokens of the original Boer guerrilla type aggression. By the last weeks of Stage 3 the British had virtually taken control over most of the *space* of the republics.¹⁰⁷ The tables had already been turned.

The strategy which Kitchener implemented in his effort to bring the war to an early end, the scorched earth policy, also bore fruit. The concentration camps that were opened in Stage 2,

¹⁰⁴ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 276-277, 281-282, 283.

¹⁰⁵ L. Scholtz, *Generaal Christiaan de Wet as veldheer*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁶ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp. 290-292.

¹⁰⁷ L. Scholtz, *Waarom die Boere die oorlog verloor het*, p. 157.

hastily constructed along the railway lines, had by September and October all but broken the Boer spirit. The statistics may show that the death toll had reached its peak in October, but it is reasonable to assume that the Boers' grief and their loathing of the enemy, surely lingered in the hearts of those burghers who were still active in the battle zone. Of the 27 927 white people who died in these camps, 22 074 were children under the age of 16 years.¹⁰⁸ Considering the large number of men in the camps it can also be accepted that at the time of their death some of these children may have had their fathers with them. But most were still on commando and probably only received the tragic news weeks or even months after the event. Whatever the individual's circumstances, there can be no doubt that information on the shocking death rate in the camps, would have filtered through to the commandos. Most certainly it would have crushed the spirit, not only of those who were directly affected, but also of their comrades, friends and relatives. Kitchener's letter to his commanders of 21 December 1900 has a paragraph about the camps as a possible means to hasten the end of the war and these words were probably far more prophetic than even he realised at the time.¹⁰⁹

To aggravate matters, the second leg of the scorched earth policy, namely the destruction of farm buildings, killing of livestock and devastating the crops, had been completed by early spring of 1901 and the lack of food indeed had become a serious problem for the Boers, just as Kitchener had foreseen it would. In certain areas Boers were able to harvest winter grain and in other cases livestock was seized from black people. But these were the exceptions. The gravity of the food shortage during this stage and the innovative methods they devised to cope with the problem need not be repeated here. A fact that should, however, be appreciated is that the shortage of food endured by the burghers on commando, as well as the many women and children who were seeking the protection of the commandos, was part of the turn-about phase that had been reached in those months. Besides, lack of grazing and feed for horses and cattle would have troubled the burghers. Good veld grazing is normally not available before the end of October or even later in the western areas. The heavy rain reported at Bakenlaagte, and presumably in other parts of the eastern Highveld on 30 October 1901, would only have had an impact on the grazing two to three weeks later. The situation became a vicious circle: without sufficient feed the horses were of little use, without a good horse a guerrilla was unable to raid enemy columns to obtain

¹⁰⁸ F. Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁹ Quoted by A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, p. 115; See also :TAD:A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, VII, p. 74.

food for himself, feed for his animals and much needed weapons to continue the war. This was one more element in the accumulation of stressors tormenting burghers by the end of Stage 3.

The speedy progress with the construction of the blockhouse lines was just one more factor adding to the mounting problems. Table VI – 2 illustrates that whereas only 565 kilometres of these fortified lines had been completed by the end of July 1901, the increased rate of construction of the Rice blockhouses,¹¹⁰ meant that there were 2 399 kilometres completed by the end of December 1901.¹¹¹ This rapid increase had an impact on the Boers in several ways. Firstly, the essential mobility of any guerrilla fighter was suddenly restricted and commandos were often forced to take long, time consuming detours or to run new risks to reach their objectives. Secondly, the greater number of blockhouses naturally restricted their ability to target the railways and so to capture supplies. Thirdly, the many blockhouses – all of which had to be manned and serviced – provided the British with a larger presence across the countryside of the republics, a presence which they previously had lacked. All these factors clearly hampered the Boer cause and made life more difficult for men already under strain.¹¹²

Threatening proclamations had become one of Kitchener's popular strategies to impose his authority. However, because the burghers had become accustomed to the many proclamations, most of them scoffed at the so-called banishment proclamation of 8 August 1901. Nonetheless it was considered more seriously in certain cases, as discussed in Chapter VI. The important issue is that this proclamation was issued at a time when the Boer was already overwhelmed by a host of negative issues and his morale was at an unduly low ebb. The number of Boers who yielded to the different forms of pressure applied upon them by the British was nevertheless declining. According to British statistics only 1 562 Boers surrendered in Stage 3 (August 1901 to December 1901), compared to 4 293 in Stage 2 (February 1901 to July 1901).¹¹³ This in itself might have been perceived as a promising turn of events for the Boers, had it not been for another related matter. In early December 1901 the National Scout Corps was formally inaugurated in the Transvaal, although Grundlingh states that the corps had been operating on an organised footing since October 1901. In the northern Free State a similar body, known as the Orange River Colony

¹¹⁰ J. Hattingh, "The British blockhouse system", in F. Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth*, pp. 233-234.

¹¹¹ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, *passim*.

¹¹² H.F. Wichmann, *Oorlogsherrineringe van 'n oudstryder*, pp. 49-51; J. Hattingh, "The British blockhouse system", in F. Pretorius (ed.), *Scorched earth*, pp. 233-234.

¹¹³ TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of the principal events connected with South Africa*, XII, XIII, XIV, *passim*.

Volunteers (ORC volunteers), was also organised at about the same time.¹¹⁴ It should, however, be made clear that many Boers, who had laid down their arms, had in fact been actively aiding the enemy for some considerable time, as witnessed in the case of P.J. du Toit of the western Transvaal.¹¹⁵ Grundlingh also mentions that a third group – ex-burghers who rendered service to the British on an *ad hoc* basis – existed, but that they did not enjoy fixed conditions of service.¹¹⁶ The effect that the support of these groups by their ex-comrades had on the Boer commandos was severe. Because of the skills that these ex-burghers took with them, they could inform the British on how the commandos operated, where they normally sought shelter and how they used the terrain. Therefore, the most important factor was not so much the number of National Scouts or ORC Volunteers, but the mere fact that a strong, but unskilled British unit needed only a few of these men to convert the unit into a productive and aggressive contingent. It stands to reason that the burghers who were still fighting for their cause considered these men as out-and-out traitors and treated them as such.¹¹⁷

Despite the smaller proportion of burghers who surrendered voluntarily during this period, the number of men captured as prisoners of war was actually increasing during the latter months of 1901. The statistics provided for the five months of Stage 3 show that 6 303 burghers were captured compared to the 5 448 burghers in Stage 2.¹¹⁸ There are a number of reasons for this trend, most of which have already been examined above. It can thus be asserted that a turning-point had been reached during the five months of Stage 3; the drives, the blockhouses, the manpower and the expertise service of ex-burghers were beginning to yield results for the enemy. Also notable was the loss of loyal burghers who were taken prisoner, which resulted in a further reduction in the number of Boers still on commando. Although it could be argued that the statistics supplied by the British War Office and quoted in the *Journal of the principal events connected with South Africa* could possibly have been questionable or even inflated, the crux of the matter is that the already limited number of active Boers was progressively shrinking. It was more likely that those who were still able to enter into battle, those who were in the frontline, would be the men who had now been taken prisoner, thereby making the loss so much more significant.

¹¹⁴ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, p. 209.

¹¹⁵ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 31.5.1901 to 28.6.1901, pp. 51-58.

¹¹⁶ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, pp. 208-209.

¹¹⁷ J.H. Coetzee (ed.), "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek" in *Christiaan de Wet-Annale*, 8, day 698, p. 143.

¹¹⁸ TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of the principal events connected with South Africa*, XII, XIII, XIV, *passim*.

Throughout most of this stage the body of men that acted as the ZAR government was roving in the southeastern Transvaal Highveld, attempting to evade of the British net. *The Times history* reports that during the period from 5 August to 26 November they had occupied twenty different positions in the vicinity of Ermelo, Lake Chrissie, Lothair and Klipstapel (Breyten). Then in early December they moved back to Viljoen's headquarters, Windhoek, in the northeastern Transvaal. They were there on 16 December when *Dingaansdag* was commemorated. Contrary to what one might expect, the morale of the burghers at that late stage was apparently reasonably buoyant. The eldest son of General P.R. Viljoen, Marthinus Viljoen – who was a member of the Presidential bodyguard – described the events at Windhoek in his diary as “uplifting”. According to him the proceedings were ceremonious, with a mounted guard of honour to receive the acting president, a salute played on the trumpet and a word of welcome delivered by General Muller. Viljoen claimed that the 300 to 400 burghers and 30 women and girls were quite taken up by the proceedings: “De oorlog moeilikhede ware voor gehelen dag uit ons midde en onze gedachte. Alles scheen zoo naar vrede te zyn, op een ieders aangesicht kon men een glimlacht bemerken, elkeen had een vrolijke houding. Men moet aannemen dat zy hun gedurende de dag hebben verbeeld op een Paardekraal Feest in vredestryd te zyn want net waar men kykt zag men de vier en vyf-kleur aan een stokje wapperen ...”.¹¹⁹ Although the turning point had in fact been reached and the situation had swung greatly in favour of the British, certain republican leaders still tried to boost the morale of their people, and there were many who believed that there was still hope for victory. It should however be noted that despite the positive drift of the report, Viljoen began his day's entry by referring to the hardships caused by the war.

If the shortage of food, fodder, clothes and weapons, that have been discussed as stressors and all the other adverse factors that have rapidly accumulated over the months of Stage 3, are considered collectively, then it must be clear that whatever GRRs the burghers had been able to draw upon, were now becoming exhausted – just as overuse will deplete any source – and as a consequence coping was becoming increasingly difficult. Many had yielded by this time, or were taken out of the turmoil of war by the enemy's strategies. Despite this, by the end of 1901 there must still have been in excess of 25 000 burghers on commando. To what extent they were still physically and psychologically militarily fit is open to conjecture.

¹¹⁹

TAD: W81, Viljoen Accession, 3, M.J. Viljoen, Diary no. 9, 15.12.1901. [Translated : “All thoughts of the hardships caused by the war was out of our midst and our thoughts for the entire day. Everything seemed just as it was in peacetime, and a smile could be seen on everybody's face, people were in a amiable mood. It was as if in their imagination they were at a Paardekraal festival in peacetime and all over you could see *vierkleurs* or *vyfkleurs* being waved ...”]

5. Stage 4 – The last scene*From January 1902 until the end of May 1902*

By the time the sands of 1901 had run out the pendulum was swinging in favour of the British. But the final outcome was still in the balance. In the last days of December 1901, Kitchener wrote to Lord Roberts that as long as De Wet was “out there” he could see no end to the war.¹²⁰ The trouncings at Tafelkop and Groenkop must still have rankled in his mind. In the Cape Smuts had optimistically reorganised the Boer forces with the clear intention that the enemy would be harassed on a wider front.¹²¹ Both Schikkerling and Celliers, however, mentioned that rumours were circulating that peace was imminent, although Schikkerling regarded such idle talk as only “a sure forerunner of fighting.”¹²² The pendulum swung even further in favour of the British when on 25 January 1902 General Ben Viljoen was captured while on his way back to his commandos after consultations with the ZAR government.¹²³

Before the final curtain could come down, a number of important events were still to take place. By this time the scorched earth strategy had virtually run its course and the British were no longer eager to accommodate the Boer women and children in their concentration camps.¹²⁴ However, the months of witnessing the destruction of homesteads, crops and fodder and the savage killing of sheep, pigs and poultry were still having its disheartening affect on the Boers. Many of the stressors that are discussed in Chapter VI were either the indirect result of the scorched earth policy or the outcome of the war of attrition.

At this stage it is perhaps worthwhile to reiterate a few of the issues that played an important role in the general sentiment among the Boers at the beginning of 1902. First of all, there was the widespread and persistent predicament of food shortages and lack of clothing. Celliers continued with the patching of his clothes, until he was even driven to patch his trousers with cloth already

¹²⁰ Quoted in P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 287.

¹²¹ W.K. Hancock, *Smuts the sanguine years 1870 - 1919*, pp. 140-141.

¹²² R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 11.1.1902, p. 345; A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 26.12.1901, p. 328.

¹²³ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 295.

¹²⁴ D.J. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge tussen die regerings van die twee Suid-Afrikaanse Republieke en die verteenwoordigers van die Britse regering wat uitgeloop het op die vrede wat op 31 Mei 1902 op Vereeniging gesluit is*, p. 79.

patched. Schikkerling's fashioning of a suit from discarded canvas strips also comes to mind.¹²⁵ The persistent rumours about peace certainly raised the hopes of many burghers, only to have them shattered again.¹²⁶ There were cases of a lack of faith in the republican cause which, in terms of Antonovsky's SOC construct, meant that the burghers failed to regard the war as meaningful.¹²⁷ This issue should perhaps be considered jointly with Grundlingh's arguments on the reason why Boers switched their loyalty in favour of the British – the reasoning behind their betrayal or selling out.¹²⁸ There was, moreover, the longing for their loved ones and the concern for the women and children, both those in the camps as well as those looking for support from the commandos. This was demonstrated by Van Heerden who claimed that from October onwards De la Rey regularly received reports about the grave position the women were facing in the camps.¹²⁹ Many burghers endured daily anxiety about black people in the knowledge that hundreds of them were being armed and were often under the control of the British.¹³⁰ Other stressors such as the torment of lice, horse sickness and the physical discomfort due to the weather as well as countless other issues, were a constant part of their lives. The statistics mentioned above show that by that time many burghers had yielded to these pressures and had laid down their arms. Of course these stressors also impacted heavily on the morale of those Boers who still persevered. It can safely be presumed that by the beginning of January 1902 a discouraged and disheartened mood prevailed among large numbers of the burghers who remained on commando.

But it would be a mistake to create the impression that throughout the republics there was only widespread despondence. To large numbers of burghers the strength of their conviction and their ability to make sense of the situation – or other words, their strong *sense of coherence* – supported them through that difficult time. Such a man was Chief Field Cornet Hendrik van der Walt, who served under Assistant Chief Commandant C.C.J. Badenhorst in the northwestern Free State. In mid April 1902, when two burghers were sentenced to death for treason, Van der Walt, although he had been part of the tribunal, still possessed the fortitude to request permission to assist the condemned men and sustain them in their last spiritual needs. According to his diary he

¹²⁵ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 11.10.1901, p. 301; R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 7.3.1902 to 13.3.1902, pp. 368-369.

¹²⁶ A.G. Oberholster (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek van Jan F.E. Celliers*, 29.11.1901, 13.12.1901, pp. 319, 324.

¹²⁷ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, pp. 267-268.

¹²⁸ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, pp. 284-294.

¹²⁹ 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.

¹³⁰ M.E.R. (ed.), *Oorlogsdagboek*, 12.9.1901, 16.10.1901, pp. 220, 230.

undertook this most difficult task with empathy and composure.¹³¹

Against this background of low morale, and in many cases complete disillusionment, four elements still need to be explored. Three of these are of a military nature. Firstly, the persistent offensive approach to the war under General Koos de la Rey in the western Transvaal; secondly, Lord Kitchener's elaborate new model drives in the northern Free State as part of his continued crusade to capture General Christiaan de Wet. Thirdly, attention must be given to the intensified activities of the Cape rebels after General Jan Smuts' reorganisation at Soetwater at the end of December 1901. The fourth and final issue that will be surveyed is the diplomatic and tactical developments that took place and ultimately led to peace. The military scene of the period is summarised in Table VIII – 4 below.

Column 3 of the table reveals that four major battles were initiated by the Boers in the western Transvaal during Stage 4 (January 1902 to May 1902). The first of these was the Battle of Ysterspruit on 25 February 1902, when De la Rey concentrated his commandos west of Klerksdorp, waiting for Von Donop's supply column that was approaching from Wolmaransstad. It was still early morning and the conditions were wet and misty. On the banks of the Jagd Spruit the Boer attack created chaos among the wagons and De la Rey ordered that the burghers charge while firing from the saddle. The British lost 48 men killed and 130 wounded, and large quantities of rifles and ammunition and artillery were seized. It was a resounding Boer victory at a very significant stage for the faltering Boer cause.¹³²

Less than a fortnight after the battle at Ysterspruit, on 7 March 1902, a melodrama unfolded when Lord Methuen assembled an unusual heterogenous column of 1 500 troops, coming from 14 different units. For two years he had been duelling with De la Rey and he now aimed to accost the Boer general, whom he thought to be on his way to the Marico Bushveld. The mixed column was moreover burdened with 39 ox wagons, 46 mule wagons, four guns and two pom-poms. But De la Rey was not on his way to the Marico. He was waiting for the column at Tweebosch (near the present day Sannieshof). The Boers attacked the entire length of Methuen's column from the rear right with three successive lines of skirmishers, pouring accurate fire into the strung out British line. De la Rey then ordered a fourth line into attack, the burghers firing from the saddle as they charged past.

¹³¹ J.H. Coetzee (ed.), "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Day 698, p. 143.

¹³² L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 499.

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Table VII– 4: Analysis of military actions during **Stage 4** of the guerrilla war – January 1902 to May 1902.¹³³

	SE-TVL	NE-TVL	W-TVL	N-TVL	N-OFS	S-OFS	Cape							
	Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5	Column 6	Column 7							
Mth	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit	Boer	Brit						
Jan	++	++ ++ +		+		+	++		+	+		▲+		
Feb	♣♣	+		+	*	++ +			+	+Ndr Ndr			▲+	Dr
Mar		+			** +	Dr Dr Dr + +	●	+++		Ndr				+
Apr		Dr Dr Dr Dr			*	Dr Dr Dr +			++	Dr			+●	+
May		+				Dr							++ ++ +	

Key Boer	= actions initiated by the Boers
Brit	= actions initiated by the British
+	= light contact or skirmish
*	= major battle
♣	= ambush
Dr	= drive
Ndr	= new model drive
▲	= railway disruption
●	= town burning or occupation

Supported by their dismounted comrades, De la Rey's commandos crushed Methuen's assortment of troops. "A rout ensued, shameful in one sense, natural enough if we consider the ... troops concerned," *The Times history* concludes.¹³⁴ The battle continued for some time, with two brave British officers being killed while giving tough resistance. Then, at 09.30 Methuen was wounded in the leg and his thigh was crushed when his horse was hit and fell on top of him. Lord Methuen was captured, the first British general to fall into Boer hands since the beginning of the war. After a somewhat stilted conversation between the two opposing generals, in an act of traditional Boer compassion General De la Rey's wife Nonnie sent a dish of fried chicken to the wounded Methuen. Amid protest from some burghers, General Koos de la Rey nevertheless decided to release Methuen, so that he could receive medical care in Klerksdorp. He was even allowed to travel in his "own" springed wagon, which he had taken from a farm in Zeerust. In a further act of humanity De la Rey sent a telegram with the news to Lady Methuen. The melodrama climaxed when Kitchener, on hearing the

¹³³ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology, passim*.

¹³⁴ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 505.

shocking news, experienced a nervous breakdown that lasted for 36 hours.¹³⁵

Shortly after the “Methuen disaster” De Wet and Steyn escaped from the net of the second new model drive in the Free State (to be discussed below) and the British decided to clear the one region which was still giving them serious problems – the western Transvaal. Troops were rushed from the Free State to Klerksdorp, but on 24 March their first hastily organised one-day drive failed dismally and De la Rey, with Steyn under his care, escaped with ease.¹³⁶ Thereafter four British columns, a total of 16 000 troops, were organised to operate throughout the western Transvaal. On 31 March a section of General Walter Kitchener’s force under Lieutenant-Colonels Cookson and Lowe ran into 2 000 burghers led by Generals P.J. Liebenberg, J.C.G. Kemp, S.P. du Toit and J.G. Celliers at the farm Boschbult on the banks of the Brak Spruit. The burghers under Kemp and Du Toit attacked from the brush on the north bank of the spruit, and Liebenberg’s men galloped in from the northeast. When the mule drivers panicked and the mules stampeded, the British decided to fall back to their fortified positions at the farmhouse. A prolonged battle loomed – until De la Rey turned up in the late afternoon and sensibly called off the attack. The Boers dispersed into the night, once again conforming with an important guerrilla principle of avoiding any long drawn-out battles.¹³⁷

The final encounter came on 11 April 1902. General De la Rey had left for Klerksdorp to attend the peace talks between the leaders of the two republics. He appointed General Kemp as Acting Commandant-General in his absence, leaving him with a warning to avoid contact with the enemy if at all possible.¹³⁸ But Kemp, as Weber had remarked, was “... this ambitious twenty-eight-year-old firebrand”.¹³⁹ No sooner was he in control of the 2 600 burghers under Generals L.A.S. Lemmer, Du Toit, Liebenberg, Celliers and Commandant F.J. Potgieter, when he decided to exploit a tactical error in the enemy’s sweeping manoeuvre because a gap had developed between the columns of Colonel S.B. von Donop and Colonel H.M. Grenfell at Roodewal. On the afternoon of 10 April Kemp tried to draw the left column away, thereby widening the gap. But his ploy failed, and unbeknown to Kemp, Grenfell had closed the gap during the night. Kemp therefore acted on misleading information when he attacked the British on the following morning. He also misjudged the size of Grenfell’s column because of the tall maize plants that hampered the Boers’ vision. The Boers approached at a leisurely canter but the

¹³⁵ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 501-505; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 309-310, 312; G. van den Bergh, *24 Battles and battlefields of the North West Province*, pp. 144-153.

¹³⁶ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 515-516.

¹³⁷ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 314-316.

¹³⁸ P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 317.

¹³⁹ M. Weber, *Eighteen months under General De la Rey*, p. 257.

situation suddenly changed when the enemy realised that the approaching horsemen were not their own mounted infantry. Prompt action by Grenfell, and the fact that the Boers had by then approached too far to be recalled, led to a courageous, but desperate, charge by 800 Boers, with the eccentric Potgieter in his blue shirt, in the lead. According to *The Times history* the Boers stormed ahead despite the “torrent of bullets and shells ... the line should have been annihilated ... ponies fell headlong ... a desperate minority, still led by Potgieter, pressed on ... Potgieter fell ... 70 yards from the British bayonets.”¹⁴⁰

It was a heroic attempt but an unfortunate one based on unnecessary errors. Van den Bergh argues that Kemp failed in his attempt to emulate the successes of Ysterspruit and Tweebosch because of poor reconnaissance of his enemy’s strength and formation.¹⁴¹ In the British pursuit that followed, Kemp once more misjudged the situation and only just managed to save his men, but the two field guns and one pom-pom that had been captured from the British at Tweebosch were lost. The Boer losses were 43 killed, 50 wounded of whom 40 were captured, with a further 36 also captured. The death of the audacious and beloved Commandant F.J. Potgieter made the defeat even harder to bear.¹⁴²

These four confrontations, all initiated by the Boers, differ in important aspects. At Ysterspruit the aim was still firmly founded on the basic guerrilla principles of harassment and looting, Tweebosch was an opportunity provided to warriors who were still radiant in the aftermath of their recent victory, Boschbult was a chance confrontation that was fortunately terminated in good time, but Roodewal was an uncalled-for and unfortunate episode due to the overzealous “firebrand” Jan Kemp. What is noteworthy is that these four encounters all took place within a period of less than seven weeks and what is more, at a stage when it is generally accepted that the Boers had lost their fighting spirit.

The second notable element of this final stage was Kitchener’s obsession to net De Wet and Steyn, which led to his so-called new model drives. The drives as stressors have been examined in Chapter VI. All that remains is to evaluate them as part of the final scene. The previous two drives had not yielded the results Kitchener had hoped for. He was therefore compelled to improve his tactics. The new model drives were elaborate manoeuvres using the British superiority in numbers and means. The blockhouse system – there were 300 blockhouses in the northeastern Free State alone – as a method of restricting mobility, was by then in place. There were seven armoured trains and 17 000 troops used

¹⁴⁰ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 530-534.

¹⁴¹ G. van den Bergh, *24 Battles and battle fields of the North West Province*, p. 167.

¹⁴² L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 534-535.

in the first drive.¹⁴³ The operation yielded 286 burghers killed, wounded or taken prisoner. De Wet and 1 000 burghers broke through the southern section of the line on 7 February 1902.¹⁴⁴ The second drive was to be even more elaborate, with roughly 25 000 troops employed, spread over a much larger area.¹⁴⁵ However, *The Times history* observes that on the night of 23 February De Wet and Steyn, their staff, plus a multitude of burghers, followed by "... a medley of bellowing cattle and yelling Kaffirs, of wagons, buggies and spiders, of frightened women and crying children ..." ¹⁴⁶ all managed to break through at Kalkkrans. As mentioned in Chapter VI the British took 778 prisoners and seized a significant number of cattle and horses in the second drive. A third drive was launched from 4 to 11 March but "... the great machine worked blindly and badly ..." ¹⁴⁷ and produced less than 100 prisoners.¹⁴⁸ However, despite all the planning, all the men and means involved, all the energy spent by generals and other staff officers, De Wet and Steyn, with thousands of their burghers still had not been trapped. They would continue to take part in the war, when the British had firmly believed that the drives would surely allow the final curtain to descend. It is interesting at this point to restate that the Battle of Tweebosch, the capture of Methuen, and the nervous breakdown of Kitchener, occurred on 7 March 1902, while the third, comparatively unsuccessful, new model drive was just winding down. But Kitchener's personal distress does not form part of this study.

The third notable issue of a military nature is also clearly evident in column 7 of the table, namely the relative high rate of activity instigated by Boers (or Cape Rebels) in the Cape Colony. Compared to the stalemate situation in most of the regions in the two republics, the Rebels were still dynamic and aggressive, although their campaign eventually ended on a more subdued note. When the commandos went their separate ways after the meeting at Soetwater, January 1902 produced a number of diverse events. There was the controversial execution of Commandant Gideon Scheepers at Graaff- Reinet, General Ben Bouver's farcical attack on *HMS Partridge* at Doorn Bay, General Manie Maritz's infamous action at Leliefontein on 27 January 1902 and General Jan Smuts recruiting and collecting grain in the dry northwestern Cape Colony.¹⁴⁹ February opened with Malan's 800 men harassing Crabbe's column that was clearing the way for Major Crofton's convoy of 100 donkey wagons

¹⁴³ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 478.

¹⁴⁴ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 489.

¹⁴⁵ L. Scholtz, *Generaal Christiaan de Wet as veldheer*, p. 302.

¹⁴⁶ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 489.

¹⁴⁷ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 493.

¹⁴⁸ L. Scholtz, *Generaal Christiaan de Wet as veldheer*, p. 308.

¹⁴⁹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 545; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 295.

transporting supplies from the railhead at Beaufort West, through the dry Karoo to Fraserburg. The encounter lasted several days and ended on 5 February when Malan attacked the entrenched convoy on Uitspanningsfontein. Crofton, after fighting valiantly, lost his life and the convoy was looted and burned.¹⁵⁰ On 6 February Smuts reinforced Van Deventer at Middelpost where 30 wagons and 400 horses and mules were seized. Then, on 10 February Boucher overconfidently attacked a convoy of 1 500 troops between Calvinia and Clanwilliam but was repulsed. French consequently ordered a sweep with six commanders north of Beaufort West, an operation that began on 17 February. This, again conforming to good guerrilla principles, induced the commandos under Van Deventer and Malan to scatter and according to *The Times history* "... the result [of the drive] was only to multiply the centres of disturbance in yet more inconvenient regions ... Malan, with 200 men, doubled round the British right ... and flung himself into the peaceful midlands. At the end of February the situation ... was worse than it had been since ... Smuts made his entry."¹⁵¹ The vigour of the rebel units in the midlands – under the command of experienced generals who came from the republics – was becoming a serious concern to the British.

Further west the cost of Smuts' confrontation with the Cape Police at Windhoek on 25 February caused him to revise his plans. He realised that French was launching a systematic campaign against him and he abandoned his intention to invade the western Cape, turning instead to the north to Namaqualand.¹⁵² By taking this option he virtually brought the Cape campaign to an end, because the vital guerrilla concept of surprise, harassment and mobility once more reverted to the passive occupation of towns and the beleaguering of the copper mine at Okiep on 4 April. A stalemate had been reached. On 26 April Smuts was called to the peace talks in Vereeniging and on 4 May the siege of Okiep was lifted by Colonel H. Cooper.¹⁵³ *The Times history* claims that this brought the Boer campaign in the Cape Colony to an end, as four-fifths of the rebels were in the west. The same source adds that Smuts had raised 3 000 men in arms during his seven month long invasion of the Cape, of whom 85% were rebels. It concluded: "Strategically, by means of an insignificant abstraction from the fighting strength of the two republics, he [Smuts] had kept one of the best British generals [French] and eight or nine thousand Imperial troops actively employed in defending British territory".¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 546-547; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 300.

¹⁵¹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 549.

¹⁵² L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 550; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, p. 306.

¹⁵³ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 550-553; P.G. Cloete, *Chronology*, pp. 316-324.

¹⁵⁴ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 553.

This more or less sums up the issue of extending the war into the enemy's territory, except that certain aspects should be noted. Although there was no scorched earth policy as applied in the republics, the enforcement of Martial Law caused much stress and discontent among Afrikaner colonials. The divided loyalty of the Cape Afrikaners, and the uncertainty of where the loyalty of individuals truly rests, also played an important role. Then too, the psychological growth, or *fortegenesis*, of Smuts must be considered and, on the other hand, the possible *burnout* of Scheepers must be considered.

The last, non-military aspect of Stage 4 is the diplomatic and tactical developments that led to the final signing of the peace accord. It is appropriate to mention at the outset that the international intervention on which the Boers had placed such a high premium, was in fact realised, but in an unexpected manner. On 25 January 1902, the government of the Netherlands sent an *aide-memoire* to the British Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Lord Lansdowne, suggesting that because one of the contending parties was completely enclosed and cut off from the rest of the world, his British Majesty might find it beneficial to make use of the services of a neutral country to facilitate peace negotiations. The Netherlands was prepared to undertake this responsibility.¹⁵⁵ The detail of this offer, as well as Lansdowne's rejection of it, was passed on to Kitchener and Milner with the request that they communicate directly with the Boers. The offer from the Netherlands government, even though it was turned down by the British, can therefore be regarded as the international impulse that sparked off the final peace negotiations.

According to the *Journal of the principal events connected with South Africa*, the sequence of events was reported in the parliamentary report of the [*London*] *Times* of 7 February 1902.¹⁵⁶ Kitchener, however, only informed Acting President Schalk Burger of the ZAR of this new development on 4 March. In the light of Kitchener's commitment with, and hopes for the new model drives that were under way in the northern Free State during February, the delay until March, before the matter was finally taken up with the Boers, certainly raises a question. Besides President M.T. Steyn of the Free State was not informed of the offer at all.

The events that followed are well recorded, especially in J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden's work on the peace negotiations and S.J. du Preez's D.Phil. thesis on the subject,¹⁵⁷ and do not form

¹⁵⁵ J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁵⁶ TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, XIV, p. 29.

¹⁵⁷ J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge*; S.J. du Preez, *Die Vrede van Vereeniging*, Unpublished D.Phil thesis, University of Pretoria, 1986.

part of this study. A few issues with regard to the tactics used by the various parties during the process should, however, be examined. Firstly, it should be noted that Kitchener and the British government were very aware of the rift that existed between the ZAR and the Free State on the urgency for peace, and this was certainly exploited by them. Not only did the British accommodate the Free State and the ZAR delegates from 9 to 11 April 1902 in separate suburbs of Klerksdorp but they did so again in Pretoria from 12 to 17 April. According to Steyn the Free Staters were lodged in the less prestigious suburbs of the towns and were all but isolated from their allies.¹⁵⁸ During the Vereeniging meeting the tents of the delegates of the two republics were once again separated by the great central meeting tent.¹⁵⁹ In a telegram to the War Office on 17 May, when the debate between the delegates in Vereeniging was already in progress, Kitchener reported to the War Office that there was no love lost between the leaders of the two republics and that some chance existed that there might even be a split between them. He added that this would be for the best.¹⁶⁰ It is thus reasonable to deduce that the British were following a strategy of “divide and rule” in their effort to expedite peace. This apparent eagerness of the British to end the hostilities ties in with Steyn’s argument that the British too had reached a point where the continuation of war would be to their disadvantage.¹⁶¹ These apparently insignificant issues of separate accommodation were increasing the tension between the two parties, who, at the beginning of the Vereeniging talks, clearly held different views on the subject of peace. From the telegram mentioned above, as well as several others that Kitchener despatched to the War Office, it is clear that the British knew exactly how the talks in Vereeniging were progressing and the sentiments of the delegates. For example during the afternoon of 16 May Kitchener sent the following messages to the War Office: “The conference held their first meeting yesterday. The Orange Free State people were very truculent, and it transpired the majority of them were pledged to vote for independence. This caused some discussion and recriminations.” and later “Smuts gave an account of Cape Colony. He said they could not expect anything from the movement in the colony and that the only advantage of operating there was detaining a large number of troops, which would otherwise be deployed against the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.”¹⁶²

The information which Kitchener relayed to the War Office and the guidance that he received in return placed him and Milner too, in a solid position regarding the British reaction to the proposals

¹⁵⁸ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn, 'n lewensbeskrywing*, II, pp. 84, 92.

¹⁵⁹ J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge*, p. 51.

¹⁶⁰ TAD: A. 2044, Secret War Office Telegrams – S.A. No 1152, 17 May 1902.

¹⁶¹ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, pp. 87-88.

¹⁶² TAD : A 2044, Secret War Office telegrams – S.A. No 1149, 16 May 1902.

made by the Boers. Kitchener and Milner did not really stand alone facing a battery of patriotic Boers, who were demanding, above all else, that they retain their independence. They were actively assisted by professional politicians. What Rayne Kruger had to say about the political astuteness of Paul Kruger, namely: “His courage had been proved by prodigious feats in his youth ... his patriotism by leadership of the revolt against the annexation ... he lacked formal schooling and experience of government in a modern state ...”,¹⁶³ could equally as well apply to many of the 60 delegates who were debating the future of their republics in Vereeniging. They were faced by men who had been schooled in the political arena. Men such as St John Brodrick, Lord Lansdowne and Joseph Chamberlain. While comparing these men with the Boers, it is important to recognize that Steyn, who was perhaps of the same stature, was already a very sick man. At the first Pretoria negotiations his health was declining and he was not even present during the second round of talks. Hertzog and Smuts were two young jurists with a certain degree of military experience, but they were by no means knowledgeable in international diplomatic matters. The remainder of the Boers had been involved in their own republican governments but this was not comparable to the level of British diplomacy. In addition, the unyielding attitudes of both Steyn and De Wet made the match between the Boers and the British even more lopsided.

The subject of Smuts’ presence at the Vereeniging talks raises certain questions. He was not a member of the ZAR delegation that was involved in the initial discussions at Klerksdorp on 9 to 11 April. However the Free State legalist, General J.B.M. Hertzog, was present at the time. In fact it was he who pointed out to Steyn that according to the constitutions of the two republics, only the *volk*, the people, could take a decision on the question of relinquishing their independence or not.¹⁶⁴ In Pretoria this argument was put to Kitchener on 12 April and again on 14 April, when Milner was present. After much debate, and communication with the War Office, this eventually led to the agreement that 60 representatives of the people – or *volksverteenwoordigers* – would be selected to decide on the issue of independence.

At that stage Smuts was still in command of the siege of Okiep and was based in the nearby village of Concordia. Apparently he had read about the negotiations in the north in a Cape Town newspaper on 18 April.¹⁶⁵ On 26 April – while the *volksverteenwoordigers* were still being elected, he received a communication from Lord Kitchener, delivered by two British officers, “... to say that a

¹⁶³ R. Kruger, *Good-bye Dolly Gray*, p. 11.

¹⁶⁴ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 89.

¹⁶⁵ T. and D. Shearing, *General Jan Smuts and his long ride*, p. 189.

meeting between English and Boer leaders was to be held at Vereeniging ... with a view to discussing peace terms, and he was summoned to attend.”¹⁶⁶ According to Reitz, who was included in the Smuts group, they travelled by cart and by train to Port Nolloth. He recollected that before boarding the train they were received by a British guard of honour. At Port Nolloth they boarded one of the many troopships, the *Lake Erie*, which took them to Simonstown in just five days. From there they travelled northwards by train. At Matjiesfontein, Smuts met French briefly, and from there they travelled by night, with an armoured train as escort, “... puffing ahead all the way, its searchlight sweeping the veld ... it took us the better part of a week to reach Kroonstad ... where Lord Kitchener was to meet us.”¹⁶⁷ Kitchener and Smuts held a meeting in Smuts’ compartment, and according to Reitz it became clear that Kitchener was anxious to bring the war to an end. Smuts and his staff were taken all the way to General Botha in the eastern Transvaal, whereupon they retraced their steps to Vereeniging.

It is notable that Kitchener went to great lengths and in the process spent a considerable amount of the British taxpayer’s money in order to make certain that one specific Boer general could be present at Vereeniging. Meintjes maintains that Smuts was not at Vereeniging as a delegate, but that he had been invited.¹⁶⁸ Who summoned or invited him is not clear. According to T. and D. Shearing the invitation originated from General Botha and reached Smuts via Van Deventer.¹⁶⁹ President Steyn mentioned that when it was agreed to elect people’s representatives, it was suggested that General Smuts, Commandant Fouché and Commandant [General] Malan be allowed to attend the meeting. However, at that stage he did not elaborate on his statement.¹⁷⁰

It could be argued that Kitchener took the trouble to have the young general on hand to counter-balance the obstinate stance of the Free State delegation. But the fact that Smuts was present did nothing to cheer the ailing Steyn. He complained that Smuts’ report about the situation in the Cape Colony painted a sombre picture and only helped to create a gloomy atmosphere. He maintained that things might have been different had Malan and Fouché also been present, but that the British placed all kinds of obstacles in their way to block their attendance.¹⁷¹ What Steyn did not take into account was that approximately 80% of the rebels were situated in the western part of the Cape¹⁷² and that

¹⁶⁶ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 315.

¹⁶⁷ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 317-319.

¹⁶⁸ J. Meintjes, *General Louis Botha*, p. 100.

¹⁶⁹ T. and D. Shearing, *General Smuts and his long ride*, p. 189.

¹⁷⁰ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 94.

¹⁷¹ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 96.

¹⁷² J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge*, p. 62.

Smuts probably knew best what the situation was.

But by then Steyn was a very sick man. He lay in his tent in Vereeniging receiving regular reports about the progress of the deliberations from men such as Hertzog.¹⁷³ Besides his anguish about the direction that the peace talks were taking he was disturbed by other matters, such as the fact that relatives of certain delegates were allowed into the camp. He also experienced dismay at the presence of Sammy Marks and others and about the dispute between Botha and De Wet concerning private discussions that Botha and Smuts had held with Kitchener. Steyn's illness has been described as the culmination of the protracted stress which he had endured during the months of war. In other words, according to Selye's GAS-theory, he had reached the stage of exhaustion (SE) as it is described in Chapter II.¹⁷⁴ Before the negotiations were finalised and the final voting took place Steyn signed his parole and left with Dr. Van der Merwe to receive medical treatment at Krugersdorp.¹⁷⁵ The fact that the man who had stood so firmly for upholding the independence of the two republics, was no longer on the scene on the night before the final vote was to be cast, might well have contributed to the fact that 27 of the 30 Free State representatives eventually voted for the acceptance of the British terms, despite what Kitchener had expressed in the telegram of 16 May. But that is pure speculation.

From the above discussion it is clear that notwithstanding the hard arguments about food shortages, the suffering and deaths of women and children in concentration camps, the ever declining number of Boers in the field, the shortage of arms and ammunition, the influence of the blockhouse system, the need for serviceable horses, the danger of belligerent black groups as well as the religious and patriotic arguments, there were additional factors involved when 54 out of the 60 delegates voted for the acceptance of the British peace proposal. These factors, of a more psychological nature, included issues such as the rift between the leaders of the two republics and the British capitalizing on their knowledge of this rift, the British professional manipulation of diplomatic affairs, Smuts' influence to counter the Free State's unyielding attitude and the affect of Steyn's illness at a crucial time. These facets were all to a greater or lesser extent involved in the Peace of Vereeniging.

6. *Resumé*

¹⁷³ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁷⁴ A. McLeod and F. Pretorius, "M.T. Steyn se ervaring van die Anglo-Boereoorlog vanuit 'n sielkundige perspektief", *Historia* 47(1), May 2002, pp. 52-55.

¹⁷⁵ J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge*; p. 145; TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, XVII, 29 May 1902, p. 24.

When the guerrilla war had moved through the four stages as set out above and the peace agreement was signed on 31 May 1902, the cost to the Boers, in terms of the number of able-bodied men that were lost to the republican cause during the major part of the guerrilla war, was considerable. The extent of this loss is demonstrated in Table VII – 5 below. Other physical costs, such as those caused by the destruction of homes and farms and the killing of animals are not considered in this study, nor are the mortalities in the concentration camps included because they do not fall within the parameters of the study.

This indicates that the strength of the Boer forces declined by a very significant 29 217 men in the 17 months that followed the initial creative and offensive stage of the guerrilla war. In terms of the total reserve of able-bodied men that were available in the republics the loss of such a great number would undoubtedly have had a crippling effect on the capability of the Boers. The fact that 60,8% of the total were captured indicates the success of the British strategy to deploy greater numbers of troops, the various drives and perhaps the fact that due to the blockhouse lines, troops were spread more evenly throughout the country. It could furthermore be argued that the British success in this area had an indirect influence on the number of burghers who surrendered. The line between being captured and surrendering was a thin one and often unclear. The statistics reported in the *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa* makes no division between burghers who were captured during battle and those who surrendered during a drive. An example of this was described by Schikkerling who was among those hunted during Lieutenant-General Sir Bindon-Blood's drive through the northeastern Transvaal in April 1901. Eleven of his comrades decided that they would surrender rather than proceed one step further before the advancing troops.¹⁷⁶ Hence the reported total of 6 359 Boers who surrendered does not reflect the number who voluntarily laid down arms.

The total number of Boers who were wounded during this period can also be misleading. It surely does not include burghers who were wounded but did not fall into the hands of the enemy. In other words, those who were removed from the scene of battle by their comrades and who then – like General J.G. Celliers and Commandant (later General) L.A.S. Lemmer, who were both wounded during the battle of Lichtenburg on 3 April 1901¹⁷⁷ -- returned to their commandos and continued their duties. It is also uncertain how many of those reported as wounded in the table above were also counted as captured.

¹⁷⁶ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, p. 182.

¹⁷⁷ G. van den Bergh, *24 Battles and battlefields of the North-West Province*, p. 118.

Table VIII-5: Numbers of Boers lost to the republican forces during 1901 and the first five months of 1902.¹⁷⁸

<i>Year</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Died</i>	<i>Wounded</i>	<i>Captured</i>	<i>Surrendered</i>
1901	February	161	175	530	501
	March	199	234	610	406
	April	105	118	1100*	1093*
	May	237	315	1164	948
	June	220	193	970	894
	July	160	135	1074	451
	August	186	75	1384	529
	September	242	164	1505	334
	October	155	97	1192	162
	November	133	118	884	162
	December	148	64	1338	375
1902	January	124	70	1013	256
	February	150	146	1921	334
	March	70	85	599	261
	April	128	121	736	164
	May	29	6	942	28
	Total	2447	2643	17768	6359

* This is an arbitrary division of the single number of 2 193 Boers captured and surrendered in April 1901, that was reported in the *Journal of the principal events connected with South Africa X*, and is largely based on the statistics for May.

Despite the fact that these uncertainties cast some doubt on the validity and reliability of the figure of 29 217, it is undisputedly true that the Boer forces suffered heavy losses during the last 17 months of the war. The total number of Boer prisoners of war by the end of the war was reported to be 29 188 of whom 3 194 were in the so-called refugee camps.¹⁷⁹ Although it is unknown how many of the 3 194 were old, sickly or otherwise unable to take up arms, it can be assumed that it included a significant number who were able-bodied men, but had surrendered to the enemy. However, they did not form part of the National Scouts (that totalled 1 359 by the end of the war), the ORC Volunteers (that had 448 members by the end of the war) or other ex-burghers who served the British army on an

¹⁷⁸ TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, XI to XVII, *passim*.

¹⁷⁹ TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, XVII, p. 37.

ad hoc basis (the numbers fluctuated between 2500 and 4000 in the last few months).¹⁸⁰ The two groups – the able-bodied burghers in the refugee camps and those who were actively aiding the enemy – were made up of those burghers who yielded to the pressures, the hardship and the stress of the guerrilla war, or indeed those whose dedication to the republican cause simply flagged. As Grundlingh pointed out, an accurate final number of this group simply cannot be calculated. On the strength of the above numbers a good estimate would probably be between 7 000 and 8 000 men. This figure can then be compared to the estimate provided by Pretorius that by the end of the war there were still about 20 800 Boers, or *bittereinders*, in the field.¹⁸¹

It can thus be concluded that despite the fact that the burghers who were on commando during the guerrilla warfare phase had suffered a multitude of hardships under a wide variety of stressors – and that many had succumbed to the stress – the general resistance resources (GRRs) of the burghers and officers were for the most part powerful enough to afford them the ability to cope with the psychological impact of the guerrilla war.

¹⁸⁰ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die "hendsoppers" en "joiners"*, pp. 252, 257, 207.

¹⁸¹ F. Pretorius, *Scorched earth*, p. 21.