

Chapter IX

The ultimate impact

I hope to God I have fought my last battle. It is a bad thing always to be fighting. While I am in the thick of it I am too much occupied to feel anything; but it is wretched just after. It is quite impossible to think of glory. Both mind and feelings are exhausted.

*Duke of Wellington*¹

1. Guerrilla war? Yes or no

The first part of this chapter is devoted to the question whether the period of the Anglo-Boer War that is commonly known as the “guerrilla phase” was truly a guerrilla war. This phase of hostilities began, symbolically at least, when the ZAR leadership destroyed their war equipment and supplies at Hectorspruit Station. It lasted until the afternoon of 31 May 1902 at Vereeniging, or technically until that evening, when the treaty was signed in Melrose House in Pretoria. This issue is important because it forms the cornerstone for the psychological element of this study.

Chapter III deals with the theory of guerrilla warfare and it is therefore relevant to compare what is known as the guerrilla warfare phase of the Anglo-Boer War, with the theoretical explanation provided in that chapter. Firstly, it is meaningful to reiterate the four principles of guerrilla warfare and to compare them with what actually took place. These principles can be summarised as the harassment of the enemy, the avoidance of decisive battles, the sabotage and destruction of the enemy’s communications and supply lines and finally, tactical use of the elements of surprise and confusion.

Concerning the issue of harassment, the analysis of the guerrilla war in Chapter VIII makes it clear that as the months passed the Boers’ assertive strategy of harassing the enemy whenever practical was gradually replaced by a policy of avoiding the enemy if at all possible. Furthermore decisive battles were not always avoided as they should have been. Even towards the end of the war the battles in the western Transvaal, that the Boers generally regarded as successful, but which ended with General Jan Kemp’s ill fortune at Roodewal, were in fact essentially contrary to the second principle of guerrilla warfare. Thirdly, sabotage and destruction of the enemy’s

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H. Binneveld, *From shellshock to combat stress*, p. 2. Quotation from a letter by the Duke of Wellington to Lady Shelley written one month after the Battle of Waterloo.

infrastructure – tactics which the Boers frequently effected with great mastery in the early stages of the guerrilla phase of the war – steadily declined as the British became better equipped to counter these moves. Finally, towards the end of the war, the British were generally well informed of the position of large commandos and the whereabouts of important generals, thanks mainly to their use of Boer collaborators who acted as scouts. However, smaller groups of burghers still managed to surprise patrols and blockhouse squads, although it should be recognized that the scarcity of ammunition limited the implementation of this kind of enterprise.

Lack of manpower was doubly problematic for the Boers. On the one hand they were steadily losing men who were opting out of the war and those who were being captured by the British, as is illustrated in Table VIII–5 in the previous chapter. On the other hand the British numbers increased and the replacement of wounded and sick troops was ongoing. On 17 May 1902 it was reported that the total number of Boer prisoners of war was 32 384, of whom 24 277 were in overseas camps and 3 192 in refugee camps.² This number should be compared with the 10 816 burghers in the field in the Transvaal – 3 296 of them were horseless – and 6 100 in the Free State, according to statistics reported in the minutes of the peace talks at Vereeniging. These same figures were also provided in the *Journal of principal events* on 16 May. Furthermore, General Smuts claimed that there were 3 300 men active in the Cape Colony.³ This meant that by May 1902 there were just over 20 000 burghers under arms to face the British force of approximately 207 000. Although this seems to compare favourably with the ideal ratio of 1:10 mentioned in Chapter III, numerous other factors should also come into reckoning before such a claim can be made.

It was mentioned in Chapter III that Mao Zedong saw the three fundamentals of successful guerrilla warfare as *time*, *space* and *will*. It was also shown that *time* and *space* are closely related. First of all, space became a dilemma for the Boer commandos as the expansion of the blockhouse system increasingly restricted their movements. Secondly, as their sources of food began to run out, time became a compounding factor. At Vereeniging these two fundamental issues were mentioned time and again by the representatives in their reports on the state of affairs

² TAD: A. 2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, XVII, p. 14.

³ D.J. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandeling tussen die regerings van die twee Suid-Afrikaanse Republieke en die verteenwoordigers van die Britse regering wat uitgelopen het op die vrede wat op 31 Mei 1902 op Vereeniging gesluit is*, pp. 59, 62; TAD: A.2044, *Journal of principal events connected with South Africa*, XVII, p. 13.

in their areas. As far as Mao's third fundamental is concerned, the *will* to fight, the number of Boers who surrendered as illustrated in Table VIII–5 above, linked to the widespread longing for peace,⁴ shows that the element of *will* was also fading. Their strong commitment to the Boer cause had gradually weakened as the circumstances became more difficult and as the influence of the scorched earth strategy became more pronounced. Strümpfer indicates that in Antonovsky's theory of a sense of coherence (SOC), the components of *meaningfulness* and *manageability* are most vital, just as is *commitment* in Kobasa's construct of hardiness.⁵ These essential elements were clearly diminishing. For many burghers the time had arrived when, for numerous reasons, they decided to offer their pioneer-hardiness and their knowledge of local circumstances to assist the enemy. This is in direct contrast with the requirements of ideological armour that both Laqueur and Taber set for the guerrilla fighter, as described in Chapter III.⁶

The scorched earth strategy furthermore deprived the Boers of the civilian support that is so essential for successful guerrilla warfare. In fact it left the country open for the third party that was affected by the war – the Black and the Coloured people. Although some of them were friendly towards the Boers, the majority harboured strong feelings of animosity and many black people joined the enemy as scouts and guards.⁷ This in turn led to Boers summarily executing any Black or Coloured people who were found to be armed and several outrages and atrocities occurred, such as the burning of Bremersdorp by General Tobias Smuts in June 1901 and the massacre of 35 Coloureds by General Manie Maritz at Leliefontein Mission Station in late January 1902.⁸ According to Laqueur actions of this type should be guarded against by guerrilla leaders and should be avoided at all costs.⁹

On the basis of the discussion of Stage 1 in Chapter VIII, it can be accepted that the first months of the conflict, the period September 1900 to January 1901, could well be called *guerrilla warfare*, forming part of a limited war as was explained by Campbell.¹⁰ However, as hostilities

⁴ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899 - 1902*, p. 127.

⁵ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *South African Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, pp. 268-270.

⁶ W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla – a historical and critical study*, p. 129; R. Taber, *The war of the flea guerrilla warfare theory and practice*, p. 147.

⁷ P. Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899 - 1902*, p. 25.

⁸ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 298-299.

⁹ W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 129.

¹⁰ A. Campbell, *Guerrillas - a history and analysis*, pp. 1-2.

dragged on and the situation changed, it could probably more correctly be defined as a war of attrition. President Steyn's justification for the continuation of the war, provided just before the commencement of the peace negotiations, confirms this view. He, and probably many others, had hoped that even though it became impossible to wage guerrilla warfare in its true sense, a situation would eventually be reached where it would become unrealistic and pointless for Britain to continue with their efforts.¹¹ Whatever the exact technical definition of guerrilla warfare may be, the fact remains that the conflict between September 1900 and May 1902 was a form of *small war* where the "flea kept on biting the dog". The term *guerrilla warfare* is therefore regarded as justified, in the search to determine its psychological impact on the Boer forces.

2. The impact of the guerrilla war on the Boers: some case studies

It has been already been made clear that the guerrilla war made for a wide variety of stressors among the Boers. The stress caused by these stressors impacted differently on different individuals – while many Boers were able to cope with the stress, despite all its negative effects, there were many who could not and yielded under the pressures. The resistance resources (GRRs) at an individual's disposal determined whether, and to what degree, he was impaired by the stress – as explained by Selye's GAS theory. Alternatively whether he might have been stimulated by the challenge of the situation, as expounded by Strümpfer's theories on salutogenesis and fortigenesis. To demonstrate the wide dissimilarity of the psychological impact of the guerrilla war on the Boers, the experiences, perceptions and reactions of seven individual Boers are examined in this final chapter. It should be emphasized that the selection of these seven men was made to illustrate the multiplicity of psychological reactions in a number of different individuals. It does not presume to be a representative sample of Boers based on rank, age, geographical area of activity or educational background, although these factors might well play a role in the way they experienced and reacted to the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War.

a. President M.T. Steyn

The psychological impact or stress experienced by the president of the Free State,

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N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn, 'n lewensbeskrywing*, II, pp. 86-88.

Marthinus Theunis Steyn, was extremely severe and eventually resulted in serious physical affliction. Steyn was relatively young, only 42 years old, when the war began in 1899. He had been the president of the Orange Free State since 1896,¹² and prior to the outbreak of hostilities between Britain and the two republics he had been deeply involved in the military relationship between the Free State and the ZAR. Nevertheless Steyn had no military training or experience.

Probing into his background reveals that Steyn had a solid grounding for his task as the president of the Free State. He came from a prominent family in Bloemfontein and as a young boy had spent some time on his father's nearby farm. He enjoyed local and overseas studies and qualified as a lawyer in London. Back home Steyn served as the Free State's State Attorney and at an early age became its Chief Justice. He married a refined and very capable lady, Rachel Isabella (Tibbie) Fraser, who grew up in the southern Free State.¹³ In terms of his general resistance resources it can safely be argued that he possessed hardiness and stamina,¹⁴ which were supported by a wide field of reference as well as numerous acquired skills, such as his knowledge of the veld, shooting and horse-riding abilities, leadership, the aptitude for problem and situation analysis and a proficiency to express himself in writing. All these elements contributed to a very solid foundation of GRRs, which must have been a bulwark that protected him, as a leader who was constantly under pressure, for a considerable time.

Although he was actively involved in the military treaty between the ZAR and the Free State, he had not been in favour of a war against Britain and even took positive steps to avoid hostilities – such as hosting the meeting between President S.J.P. Kruger and Sir Alfred Milner in Bloemfontein in May 1899.¹⁵

Steyn was exposed to numerous stressors even before guerrilla warfare became a reality. Despite the many stressors that a head of a state would normally have to face when at war, the ZAR's inclination to call an end to the war, was a recurring stressor which he had to endure. This issue began as early as 5 March 1900, when he was confronted by President Kruger's idea of making certain proposals to Lord Salisbury concerning peace. Soon afterwards Steyn suffered the ignominy of the loss of his capital, Bloemfontein, and the resulting reluctance of his own burghers

¹² F. Rompel, *Marthinus Theunis Steijn*, pp. 31-32.

¹³ F. Rompel, *Marthinus Theunis Steijn*, pp. 18-23.

¹⁴ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, pp. 270-274.

¹⁵ J.H. Breytenbach, *Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902*, I, pp. 118-119.

to continue fighting.¹⁶ His difficult role at this stage as the chairman at the extended *krygraad* on 17 March 1900 in Kroonstad, where it was decided to continue the strife according to new guidelines, should not be overlooked.¹⁷ As the Boers' position deteriorated, Steyn remained steadfast and on 2 June 1900, shortly before the capitulation of Pretoria, he found it necessary to send a strongly worded message on continuing the war to the wavering ZAR leaders.¹⁸ On his own home front he unquestionably must have experienced a feeling of let-down and dismay after the debacle of the Brandwater Basin. Finally there was the critical role he fulfilled during his visit to President Kruger and the ZAR leadership in August-September 1900, just prior to the well known events at Hectorspruit.¹⁹

In a matter of roughly six months – the so-called transition period of the war – Steyn was time and again forced to take the initiative to keep the ZAR from yielding to the British force. It is also significant that during this period he spent roughly three months in the Transvaal, knowing full well that in his own republic the tide had also turned against the Boers. These facts clearly demonstrate that when general guerrilla war began by the end of September 1900, Steyn was already heavily burdened by a multitude of stressors.

As the guerrilla war got underway in the ZAR, Steyn continued to play an important role in reorganising and motivating of the ZAR force, even participating in the planning meeting with Generals Botha, De la Rey and Smuts at Cyferfontein in the last days of October 1900.²⁰ Returning at last to his own republic – *en route* he once more had to reassure Transvaal burghers at Klerksdorp, following one of Kitchener's proclamations – he and De Wet narrowly escaped capture on the morning of 6 November 1900 at Doornkraal near Bothaville. The Boer's losses were significant, including 17 dead, 17 wounded, and 97 taken prisoner – as well as all of De Wet's artillery.²¹ This was one of many close shaves Steyn experienced while he was in the veld

¹⁶ W.J. de Kock, "Pres. Marthinus Theunis Steyn, Die siel van die vryheidstryd" in J.H. Breytenbach (ed.), *Gedenkalbum van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, p. 248; A.J. McLeod and F. Pretorius, "M.T. Steyn se ervaring van die Anglo-Boereoorlog vanuit 'n sielkundige perspektief" in *Historia* 47(1), May 2002, p. 41.

¹⁷ M.C.E. van Schoor, "President M.T. Steyn: sy rol in die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899 - 1902" in *Genl. J.B.M. Hertzogedenklesing*, XXVIII, pp. 9-10, 11.

¹⁸ P.G. Cloete, *A chronology*, pp. 153, 154; J.H. Breytenbach, *Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog 1899-1902*, V, pp. 539, 541; T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 432.

¹⁹ F. Rompel, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, pp. 106-107.

²⁰ G. Nattrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts Memoirs of the Boer War*, pp. 124-132.

²¹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 16-20; A. Wessels, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902 'n oorsig van die militêre verloop van die stryd*, p. 35.

with De Wet, and it can be surmised that this all contributed to the stress load impacting upon the president.

Steyn also accompanied De Wet on his first unsuccessful attempt to cross into the Cape Colony in December 1900, a move that was frustrated by the determined British pressure and by full rivers.²² After being re-elected as president of the Free State on 25 January 1901, he again accompanied De Wet on his second attempt to enter the Cape Colony. Although they were able to cross into the British colony, from the Boers' point of view the manoeuvre was a disaster. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the tide was beginning to turn against the Boers. Steyn himself described the foray as follows: "De grootte macht werd achter genl. De Wet en mij gekoncentreerd. Daar de Brakrivier onpassabel was konden wij niet dieper doordringen, en keerden wij tussen de linies van de vijand naar de Vrijstaat terug. Manschappen en paarden waren uitgeput."²³ On their trek through the central Karoo they repeatedly lost burghers, horses and wagons. For the most part it was a situation of fight or flee and ended with the Boers fleeing, with very little to show for their effort.²⁴ This issue must surely have impacted upon Steyn's cognitive awareness.

It was just at this time that General Botha held peace talks with Lord Kitchener at Middelburg. Steyn received this news as soon as he was back on Free State soil. It certainly caused his displeasure and he urged the burghers with him to remain firm and to withstand the onslaught.²⁵ By the end of March 1901, following the failure of these talks, Steyn received a serious request from Botha to meet with the ZAR government; yet again as so often before, they were showing signs of wavering.²⁶ At the meeting at Klip River in April 1901, it was once again agreed that the two republics would persist with the struggle. Needless to say, when Steyn received the letter from the ZAR State Secretary, F.W.Reitz, in May 1901 which suggested that peace talks should nonetheless be held with Kitchener, he was bitterly disappointed and indignant. The ZAR's suggestion was the outcome of the De Emigratie *krygsraad*, which was discussed in the previous chapter. It is entirely understandable that Steyn was under severe stress prior to

²² A.Wessels, *'n Oorsig van die militêre verloop van die stryd*, p. 35.

²³ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 68. [Translated: "The great force was concentrated behind General De Wet and myself. Because it was not possible to ford the Brak River, we could not penetrate any deeper and we retreated through the enemy lines, to the Free State."]

²⁴ L.S.Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 142, 144, 152; R. Kruger, *Good-bye Dolly Gray*, pp. 402-404.

²⁵ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 68.

²⁶ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 69.

meeting the ZAR leaders at Waterval . The problem with an unwilling ally was becoming so pervasive that mistrust of the ZAR's intent had begun to emerge. In his written reply to them he used strong words: "Al deze punten doen mij gelooven dat wij een volksmoord zullen begaan als wij thans ingaven. Broeders! staat dus nog langer vast! Maak toch niet dat ons lijden en strijden in het verleden vergeefs is geweest en dat het vertrouwen op den God onzer vaderen tot spottenij wordt."²⁷ But surprisingly at the meeting of 20 June 1901,²⁸ the ZAR again agreed to continue the war.

The strong foundation of GRRs which helped Steyn to master his stress, was gradually being eroded. Soon after he returned to the Free State with De Wet, political frustration was replaced by an unfortunate episode of a military nature. On 11 July 1901 Steyn, with the help of his *agterryer* (groom) Ruiters, narrowly escaped capture during a dawn raid by the British on the town of Reitz. The Free State's entire Executive Council, the presidential secretaries and bodyguard, most of the important state documents and £11 500 in cash, were seized in the raid. Thereafter Steyn was left without any administrative support services for the remainder of the war, further compounding his tribulations, albeit on another level.²⁹

Throughout these months Steyn was acutely aware of the outcome of the enemy's scorched earth policy, and of the suffering of the women and children in the concentration camps. These concerns would also have nagged at his conscience. Nevertheless, on 15 August 1901, he replied dryly to Kitchener's proclamation which threatened the loyal Boers with deportation, that Kitchener's authority stretched no further than his best gun could shoot.³⁰ However, when Kitchener threatened to release the women and children from the camps in December 1901, Steyn became most upset. No matter how deeply he wanted to see their sufferings come to an end, the grievous consequence of releasing them at that stage, to return to their destroyed farms and homes was unthinkable. His reply to Kitchener was strongly worded: "Now as if the martyrdom of the women and children were not sufficient ... His Majesty's Government knows ... that there is hardly a single house in the Orange Free State that is not burnt or destroyed, that all furniture

²⁷ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, II, p. 74. [Translated: "All these points make me believe that we will be committing genocide if we surrender now. Brothers! Continue to stand firm! Don't be the cause that our suffering and struggle of the past become futile and that our trust in the God of our fathers become a mockery".]

²⁸ G. Natrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts*, p. 36.

²⁹ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 301; T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 513; M.C.E. van Schoor (ed.), " 'Dagboek' van Rocco de Villiers" in *Christiaan de Wet-Annale*, 3, pp. 24-29.

³⁰ P.G. Cloete, *A chronology*, p. 259.

... bedding and clothing have been burnt or looted by His Majesty's troops ... therefore ... we must on account of the above-mentioned reasons emphatically refuse to receive them ..."³¹

Early in 1902, together with De Wet and thousands of Free State burghers, Steyn was exposed to Kitchener's new model drives, described in the previous chapter. Days of being conscious of the enemy's preparations, being aware of the threat of this colossal operation, realising at all times that capture by the British would mean the final blow to the republics, were unquestionably days of continuous stress. It is no wonder that the physical body of the president began to break down. Steyn was by then developing double vision. After he and De Wet had at last broken out of the threatening entrapment, he convinced De Wet to accompany him to General De la Rey and his surgeon Dr. Von Rennenkampf to examine and treat his eyesight problem. Steyn was greatly concerned that his duties as head of state would suffer because of his inability to read. This demonstrates a situation of multiple stressors, where the result of stress, in other words the double vision, in itself becomes a secondary stressor, thereby exacerbating the problem.³²

No sooner had they joined up with De la Rey, in mid March 1902, near Wolmaransstad, when they received word that the ZAR government had unilaterally been in contact with Kitchener to discuss peace and that they were awaiting Steyn in Kroonstad. Steyn was shattered by this new development. He recalled: "Al die overwegingen waren nu ijdel; want de kogel was door de kerk. De Zuster-Regering zat te midden van de Engelsen ... Toen ik genl De la Rey z'n tent had verlaten, bespeurde ik, voor de eerste maal, dat mij benen zwakker werden, daar ik mijn paard niet kon bestijgen."³³

Then followed a series of events which rapidly wore down Steyn's previously inflexible resistance, increasing his physical distress. Flexibility is, according to Antonovsky, an essential prerequisite for successful coping. Steyn was still bitterly opposed to any idea of compromise in the pursuit of peace, well knowing that he was regarded as a hard-headed stumbling block by some individuals in the ZAR government.³⁴ Although Steyn's lack of flexibility could, according

³¹ Quoted in S.B. Spies, *Methods of barbarism?*, p. 258.

³² C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology challenging the biomedical model*, p. 150.

³³ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, II, pp. 83-84. (Translated: "All the considerations became irrelevant; it was too late in the day. Our ally was in the midst of the English ... When I left General de la Rey's tent I noticed for the first time that my legs had lost their strength and I had difficulty in mounting my horse.")

³⁴ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 85.

to Kobasa's theory, have provided him with a sense of being in control, it also posed the risk that it could limit his ability to adjust to changed circumstances.³⁵ While accompanying the delegations to Pretoria in mid-May 1902 to discuss proposals with Kitchener, and later with Milner, he visited a local doctor, who diagnosed his ailment as *locomotor ataxy*, literally meaning the loss of the ability to move from one place to the next.³⁶ By the time the sixty delegates had gathered in Vereeniging, Steyn's condition had declined to such a degree that he remained in his tent where he had to receive verbal reports on the progress of the meeting. Even at that stage he could not escape from the pressure of the dissent between the Free State and Transvaal leaders – including General De la Rey who had declared that the Boers had indeed arrived at the bitter end. At a later stage Steyn recalled that he was aware that he was becoming progressively weaker and he believed that the end was near.³⁷ Eventually his infirmity became so bad that on 29 May 1902, on the advice of Dr Van der Merwe, he resigned as the Free State's president, transferring his authority to De Wet. He then left for Krugersdorp with his physician.³⁸

The psychological impact of the guerrilla war on the Free State leader is perhaps an extreme example of the power of continued stress on the physical being and it should moreover be underlined that Steyn was not a conventional warrior. Conceivably he did experience many more stressors than the average burgher or officer. However, it is important to realise that despite Steyn's exceptionally firm foundation of resistance resources, the prolonged stress eventually overcame the president and contributed to his breakdown.

b. Chief Commandant C.R. de Wet

It is well known that Christiaan Rudolph de Wet spent long periods in the guerrilla phase of the war with President Steyn, but this does not imply that the psychological impact of guerrilla warfare on De Wet followed the same pattern as it did with Steyn. In fact, it was significantly different, probably because of the marked dissimilarity in their predispositions and background. De Wet, who was also born and raised in the Free State, had received only limited schooling.

³⁵ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 160; D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 270.

³⁶ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 95.

³⁷ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, p. 97.

³⁸ N.J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, pp. 99-100; D.J. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vreesonderhandelinge*, p. 145.

Having lost his mother at the age of fourteen, he spent his youth helping his father on their farm in the southern Free State. As a boy of eleven years old he had already accompanied his father to the Free State-Basuto War of 1865.³⁹ The seed of his lifelong sentiment about the independence of his homeland, may well have been sown at this early age.⁴⁰ Later in his life, the strong conviction which he held about independence was to steer him to take part in the Battle of Majuba on 27 February 1881, and – even though he lived in the Free State at the time – he was just too late to play a role in terminating the Jameson Raid in the first days of January 1896.⁴¹ It can therefore be presumed that De Wet placed a high premium on the principle of independence, which according to Antonovsky's SOC construct, would have made the war against the much stronger Britain *meaningful* to him.⁴²

De Wet's *commitment* to his beliefs and values – together with his conviction that he had *control* over events – formed an integral part of his hardy personality, and was a powerful source of resistance against stress during the guerrilla war. However the third element that according to Kobasa shapes a hardy personality – the recognition of the *challenge* that change is a norm of life⁴³ – was lacking in De Wet. An example of this can be found in his refusal in May 1902 to accept the reality that the war was indeed lost.⁴⁴ This also suggests an inflexibility in his character, although he generally seemed to be able to cope with stress. Perhaps this was the result of his remarkable confidence in his own capability, a feature which is associated with Ben-Sira's personality construct of *potency*. In other sources this attribute is labelled *self-efficacy*.⁴⁵ As a commander he was never averse to confronting larger forces, always believing in the superiority of the Boers.⁴⁶ In many sources he has been portrayed as an outstanding military strategist, a natural leader and a man embracing action rather than placidity. It is clear that he was a man who saw matters in either black or white. For De Wet there was no compromise, no in-between.

³⁹ W.J. de Kock (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse biografiese woordeboek*, I, p. 243.

⁴⁰ B. Olivier, *Krygsman Christiaan de Wet: 'n lewenskets van genl. C.R. de Wet*, pp. 4-5.

⁴¹ W.J. de Kock (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse biografiese woordeboek*, I, pp. 243-244.

⁴² D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 269.

⁴³ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, pp. 270-271.

⁴⁴ J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge*, pp. 83-85.

⁴⁵ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 272; R.A. Baron and D. Byrne, *Social psychology*, p. 180.

⁴⁶ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp. 102-106, 249-250.

De Wet could well be called the instigator of the *small war* phase of the Anglo-Boer War. Soon after the occupation of Bloemfontein in mid March 1900, he executed a number of actions using limited numbers of burghers and aiming at aggravating the triumphant British. According to his memoirs he was rightly proud of these encounters. On the entrapment of a large British force at Sannaspost on 31 March 1900 he wrote: "As soon as they reached the stream they were met by the cry of 'Hands up!'... a forest of hands rose ... More troops quickly followed, and we had disarmed two hundred of them before they had time to know what was happening. The discipline among the burghers was fairly satisfactory until the disarming work began ... the burghers kept asking: 'Where shall I put this rifle ... what have I to do with the horses?' ... this sort of thing sorely tried my hasty temper."⁴⁷ Here he admitted the fact that he had a quick temper and wanted duties and matters generally, to be speedily resolved.

He described the destruction of the British supplies the Boers had captured at Roodewal on 7 June 1900 particularly eloquently: "...I ordered fifteen men to set the great heap of booty alight. The flames burst out everywhere simultaneously ... When we had covered fifteen hundred paces, we heard the first shells, and wheeled round to view the conflagration ... It was the most beautiful display of fireworks that I have ever seen."⁴⁸ It is clear that De Wet was proud of the victory which was in reality a serious blow to the British supply line at a most critical stage of the war.

Lord Roberts soon realised that De Wet had become a thorn in the British flesh and ordered the first "De Wet-hunt". However the Free State general outwitted his pursuers for many weeks, moving rapidly through the northern Free State and western Transvaal. He then turned his flight into triumph when he and about 250 men crossed the Magaliesberg in spectacular fashion on their way back to the Free State.⁴⁹ But gradually the British tightened the screws in their effort to capture De Wet. He found himself increasingly in the position of being the hunted rather than the hunter. Despite this his own perception of the situation was that he was not starting to lose control. Nevertheless, in his numerous endeavours to elude the enemy and to avoid capture, an issue that is often overlooked, is the high price he had to pay for his success. Time and again he

⁴⁷ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp 72-73.

⁴⁸ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 108.

⁴⁹ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, pp. 147-150; F. Pretorius, "Die eerste dryfjag op Hoofkmdt. C.R. de Wet" in *Christiaan de Wet-Annale*, 4, pp. 187-188.

suffered heavy losses in terms of men, artillery, other equipment and animals. This, for example, was the case at Bothaville on 6 November 1900, again so at Springhaansnek on 14 December 1900⁵⁰ and also after the ineffective invasion of the Cape Colony in February 1901. Rayne Kruger alleged that, as he was pursued through the Karoo by Lieutenant-Colonel H. Plumer, De Wet left a “trail of hundreds of exhausted horses ... [and] a great litter of derelict vehicles.”⁵¹ Nevertheless, the fact that he regularly forfeited parts of his force did not seem to concern him. De Wet remained the great opportunist, always ready to enter into any contest if there was a chance to harm the enemy in any way. This was evident at Graspan on 6 June 1901 and even as late as 25 December 1901 at Groenkop near Bethlehem.⁵²

The British inability to capture De Wet received international attention on a regular basis as the British, European and American press kept abreast of the war in South Africa. Eric Rosenthal devoted a full chapter in his biography on De Wet to “Oom Krisjan’s” international fame, citing remarks made by a cockney outside the Bank of England, a conversation among a few Frenchmen on a Parisian Boulevard, an advertisement board on a sidewalk in New York and even a picture of De Wet in a hotel in Siberia.⁵³ As discussed in Chapter VII, it is reasonable to assume that De Wet was well aware of this acclaim and that it bolstered his continued self assurance and the high degree of impression management he exhibited.

This by no means suggests that De Wet did not experience stress. His farm was the first to be destroyed by Roberts’ proclamations and the scorched earth strategy that followed. His wife was held by the British in Pietermaritzburg and he had two of his sons under his direct care during his many dangerous exploits, as well as having the responsibility of escorting President Steyn on many occasions. To his absolute disgust De Wet’s brother, Piet, had not only surrendered to the British, but was playing a leading role in assisting them to win the war. Moreover, the loss of a major part of the Free State’s force at Brandwater Basin was a cruel blow that must have lingered at the back of his mind for many months. Pakenham’s criticism of De Wet and Steyn’s early departure has been discussed in Chapter V. To become the prime target hunted by the many British operations, might have verged on being glamorous for a man of De Wet’s predisposition,

⁵⁰ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, pp. 16-20, 40-42.

⁵¹ R. Kruger, *Good-bye Dolly Gray*, p. 402.

⁵² P.G. Cloete, *A chronology*, pp. 242-243, 287.

⁵³ E. Rosenthal, *General de Wet – A biography*, pp. 69-74.

but prolonged pressure would certainly have had a negative influence on his person and undoubtedly it wore away his GRRs. On the other hand his natural positive self-esteem would have acted as an important bolster in his stress management structure.⁵⁴ He managed to control stress not least because he was enjoying the esteem of so many people, including his comrades, his enemies, the press and even the international public.

In the words he spoke and the stance he took during the peace talks at Vereeniging, and in the final, for him unpleasant, role he fulfilled when he signed the peace accord as acting president of the Orange Free State,⁵⁵ it is clear that throughout it all, he was able to cope successfully with the multitude of stressors he encountered. It seems reasonable to conclude that because of his hardy personality and his highly developed self-efficacy he experienced the guerrilla war as an arena where he could satisfy his energy and drive. It provided him with the opportunity to exercise his natural urge for leadership, to live by his conviction that he was in control of matters and to satisfy his need for taking risks. In short, it is conceivable that the guerrilla war suited De Wet and even if his arguments were highly unfounded or egocentric, he would indeed have preferred the war to continue.

c. General J.C. Smuts

The psychological impact of the guerrilla war on Jan Christian Smuts differed markedly from that on most other commanders and burghers. The stress he must have experienced apparently had a positive rather than a negative effect on the young Smuts. It could probably be claimed that it had a *salutogenic* or even, according to Strümpfer's theory, a *fortigenic* affect on him.⁵⁶ Smuts did not enter the war in a military capacity, although, as the State Attorney for the ZAR, he was intensely involved in the preparations for the war. He played a leading role in assisting President Kruger with administrative and policy matters during the first phase of the war.⁵⁷ It was only after Pretoria had fallen into British hands, with the ZAR government located in Middelburg, that it was decided that Smuts should become directly involved in military matters

⁵⁴ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 158.

⁵⁵ J.D. Kestell and D.E. van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge*, pp. 83-85.

⁵⁶ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "The origins of health and strength: from 'salutogenesis' to 'fortigenesis' ", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 25 (2), 1995, pp. 81-89.

⁵⁷ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years 1870- 1919*, pp.85-104; G. Natrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts*, pp. 43-51.

by assisting General De la Rey in the reorganisation of the Boers' campaign in the western Transvaal. He embarked upon his military career when he followed De la Rey to the west in the second week of July 1900.⁵⁸

Although Smuts had only turned thirty in May of that year, he had already accomplished a great deal in his life. At the age of twenty one, after spending five years at Stellenbosch, he achieved a "mixed" bachelors degree – in literature and in science – and was awarded a scholarship for advanced study at Cambridge University. At Christ College he studied law in which he excelled and then proceeded to the Middle Temple in London where he achieved his Honours degree at the end of 1894. After less than two years of practising law in the Cape, it was the inequitable Jameson Raid that awakened his republican sentiment and prompted him to move north. In June 1898 he became State Attorney of the ZAR and in that first year in office, apart from attending to his normal legal duties, he worked unceasingly to prevent the looming war. By September 1899 when all his efforts were clearly futile, he suddenly changed his position and recommended that certain assertive actions be taken by the ZAR government "... to launch a sudden whirlwind of assault and simultaneously to prepare for a long war; to fall on the British in Natal and destroy them before they built up their forces; to drive through to Durban and Cape Town ...".⁵⁹ His tract *Een eeuw van onrecht*, which the ZAR government published in September 1899, outlined his three-point plan to resist the British threat.⁶⁰

For the twenty-nine year-old Smuts it must have been a few hectic weeks before 11 October when the war officially began. According to Hancock he played a crucial role on 3 October 1899 in a meeting with the young Quaker, Guy Enock, in convincing the State Secretary, F.W. Reitz, General F.A. Grobler and President Kruger himself, that there was no alternative but war.⁶¹

It is clear that Smuts, who had the ability to convince people not only older but also more senior than himself, also possessed the faculty to accept realities and to change his position when the situation demanded it. Not only was he a well-educated man, but he had read widely on modern as well classical history and had also studied philosophy and German literature during a

⁵⁸ G. Nattrass and S.B. Spies (eds.), *Jan Smuts*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, pp. 104-105.

⁶⁰ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, pp. 108-112. [Translated: "A century of wrong".]

⁶¹ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, pp. 105-106.

short stay in Germany. Prior to this he had received a firm grounding in botany in his undergraduate years. Jan Smuts was married to Sybella [Isie] Krige, who came from a well-known Stellenbosch family.⁶² Smuts was, however, slight of build, with “flaxen hair and a clear, glowing complexion which was always ready (such a nuisance to him, even after he had grown middle-aged) to flush like a girl’s.”⁶³ He had a high pitched voice, serious blue eyes and an earnest nature. He certainly lacked the forceful, devil-may-care, look that is often associated with military leaders.

When he arrived in the western Transvaal, Smuts observed the military strategies and tactics of his mentor, General Koos de la Rey, and although he had no previous experience of war, his intelligence and his general knowledge of similar events – such as the American Civil War (1861-1865) – soon saw to it that he not only participated in battles but could take up the responsibility of leadership. He arrived just in time to take part in the siege of Elands River in August 1900. After the conference at Cyferfontein, he was involved in the encounter at Buffelspoort (3 December 1900), the well-remembered battle at Nooitgedacht (13 December 1900), the fight at Modderfontein (29 January to 2 February 1901) and several others. He had by then been promoted to the rank of Combat-General and was rapidly making a name for himself as a military leader. His self assurance, sound comprehension of situations and wide frame of reference all contributed to his success in a realm that was as yet completely new to him.

In a letter to his wife on 2 June 1901 he was optimistic and in high spirits. He assured her that military life agreed wonderfully with him. However, even at that early stage of the guerrilla war – probably because it was a private communication to his wife – he wrote: “Our [the Boers’] future is very dark – God alone knows how dark. Perhaps it is the fate of our little race to be sacrificed on the altar of the world’s Ideals; perhaps we are destined to be the martyr race.”⁶⁴

What is more, he was still playing a role as adviser to the ZAR leadership during their vacillations in the winter of 1901. At the meeting between the ZAR leaders and the Free State leaders at Waterval on 20 June of that year it was decided that Smuts would lead the invasion into

⁶² W.J. de Kock (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse biografiese woordeboek*, I, pp. 770-771.

⁶³ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, p. 68.

⁶⁴ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, pp. 130-131.

the Cape Colony to relieve the enemy's pressure on the Boer forces within the republics.⁶⁵ This plan came into operation a month later and after a difficult trek through the Free State he and 250 men eventually crossed into the Cape on 3 September 1901.

At that stage, when the British were rapidly increasing their stranglehold on the Boers, Smuts found that he had stepped into a cauldron of troubles. Shearing claims that Kitchener had sent six units to block Smuts' route.⁶⁶ The problems began during the first few days when Smuts and three of his men were ambushed while they were out scouting for a reported British camp. Smuts narrowly escaped, but his three companions did not. On this episode Reitz observed: "Had Smuts been killed I believe that our expedition into the Cape would have come to a speedy end, for there was no one else who could have kept us together."⁶⁷ This must be regarded as an indication of how crucial their general's leadership was to the burghers. Their situation was also aggravated by the cold, windy, rainy and misty weather of the mountainous northeastern Cape, a vexation that lasted for many days. Although such inclement weather is not unusual for that region in September, the Boers from the north were ill-equipped for it and their horses also suffered, many of them dying. To make matters worse, they could hardly put up a fight when they encountered the enemy, because of the shortage of ammunition.⁶⁸ On 12 September, Smuts and 200 men escaped after being completely surrounded and outnumbered by a British force near Penhoek Pass; according to both Reitz and Shearing their escape was only made possible with the aid of a hunch-backed cripple who lived in the area.⁶⁹ The British were pressing ever harder and closer and it seemed as if the weather had also joined the fight against them. It is needless to emphasize again the many stressors experienced by the burghers and to an even greater extent by their leader.

Miraculously they escaped one encounter after another. They passed west of Queenstown and on 17 September 1901 at Modderfontein in the Tarkastad district, they surprised a unit of the 17th Lancers, killing 28 and wounding 51 British. The triumphant Boers ransacked the tents and wagons and Reitz remarked that they left the scene with "fresh horses, fresh rifles, clothing,

⁶⁵ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, p. 129; P. G. Cloete, *A chronology*, p. 245.

⁶⁶ T. and D. Shearing, *General Jan Smuts and his long ride*, p. 37.

⁶⁷ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 211.

⁶⁸ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 212-214; T. and D. Shearing, *His long ride*, pp 42-43.

⁶⁹ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 218-219; T. and D. Shearing, *His long ride*, pp. 45-46.

saddlery, boots and more ammunition than we could carry away, as well as supplies for every man.”⁷⁰ This event was a significant boost to the morale of the commando: “... we had renewed confidence in our leader and in ourselves, a factor of considerable importance to a body of men in a hostile country.”⁷¹

This was also perhaps a turning point in Smuts’ invasion, a venture that had started off very shakily. They left the mountains and moved into the open plains of the Karoo and fortunately for them the weather improved as the summer approached. But the pressure on Smuts and his commando had by no means diminished and as they moved southwards they had numerous encounters with the enemy. Besides, the local military units were a constant threat.⁷²

To add to the military tribulations they experienced a setback of another nature. On reaching the Zuurberg at the end of September, between sixty and seventy men of the commando, including Jan Smuts himself and his two lieutenants, fell seriously ill after eating wild fruit from the Zuurberg cycad (*Encephalartos longifolius*), also known as *Hottentot’s Brood*.⁷³ From the two major sources it appears that Smuts was indeed extremely ill and that his recovery was slow,⁷⁴ and all the time pressure from the British forces persisted. Smuts and his lieutenants, perhaps instinctively, employed the correct guerrilla tactic of dispersing into smaller units. And if the encounter at Modderfontein can be regarded as the turning point in the success of the invasion into the Cape, the *Hottentot’s Brood* incident should be regarded as the turning point in Smuts’ personal military strategy in the Cape. He decided to swing west, towards the Atlantic Ocean, taking Commandant Ben Bouwer with him, while Commandant Jaap Van Deventer and his commando moved northwestward into the Greater Karoo.⁷⁵

Smuts probably still had a holistic strategy in mind for upsetting the British control in the Cape Colony. After splitting his force in October 1901 he moved steadily towards the western Cape. Shearing claims that he reached the Tanqua River by 3 November 1901. “Gen Smuts

⁷⁰ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 230; P.G. Cloete *A chronology*, p. 266.

⁷¹ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 230.

⁷² T. and D. Shearing, *His long ride*, pp. 65-73.

⁷³ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 240-242; T. and D. Shearing, *His long ride*, p. 74; P.G. Cloete, *A chronology*, p. 269.

⁷⁴ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 244, 248; T. and D. Shearing, *His long ride*, p. 76.

⁷⁵ D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 248; Also refer to map of route taken by Commandant van Deventer in T. and D. Shearing, *His long ride*, p. 122.

though, was just getting his second wind. He was clearly in better health, and had informed Boucher and Pypers ... that he felt restored to health and indifferent to the enemy knowing where he was.”⁷⁶ In the weeks of November and early December there were frequent fragmented contacts between the many enemy troop-units – both local District Mounted troops (DMTs) as well as British and Colonial troops – and small groups of Boers (Rebels). The one major action as mentioned in the previous chapter, was when a number of commandos combined their efforts on 28 November 1901 and surrounded the remount depot at Tonteldooskolk. By this time Smuts must have realised that numerous disparate and uncoordinated actions did not yield the required results. In December 1901, when he had reached the Calvinia district, he called a general meeting of commandos and roving bands on the farm Soetwater near Calvinia (also mentioned in Chapter VIII). He reorganised the insurgent force into three main commandos, each with an allotted operational area.⁷⁷ He thus took overall command of all operations in the Cape, which was more in line with Smuts’ predisposition to orderliness. This certainly demonstrated to the various loose units that he was the man who was in command. It also signified his strong sense of being in control of the situation, of perceiving it as eminently *manageable*.⁷⁸

It can justifiably be argued that during the extended period that Smuts’ physical strength was being restored after the food poisoning episode – a matter which in itself would naturally have caused him a certain amount of stress on a psychological level – his mind was, in all likelihood, also going through a salutary evolution. It is credible to suggest that he was in the process of developing a stronger SOC. Strümpfer points out that Antonovsky sees a SOC as follows: “It embraces components of perception, memory, information processing and affect, into habitual patterns of appraisal, based on repeated experiences of sense-making that have been facilitated by [the individual’s] GRR’s.”⁷⁹ This definition can be directly applied to Smuts, if his personal attributes and qualities are considered in the light of his experiences over the previous few months.

The success of the Soetwater reorganisation was demonstrated by the subsequent Boer actions and have been discussed in the previous chapter. Hancock claimed that in the first few

⁷⁶ T. and D. Shearing, *His long ride*, p.145.

⁷⁷ P.G. Cloete, *A chronology*, p. 287.

⁷⁸ D.J.W. Strümpfer, “Salutogenesis a new paradigm”, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 268.

⁷⁹ D.J.W. Strümpfer, Salutogenesis a new paradigm, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 268.

months of 1902 Smuts was still hopeful of success.⁸⁰ But Smuts' plan to penetrate into the southwestern Cape floundered at Windhoek on 25 February 1902,⁸¹ and thereafter he settled in for the siege of the Okiep mine. This proved to be a period of irritating inactivity but it seems that his forces gradually gathered around him.⁸² During this time Smuts himself must surely have contemplated the swing in the tide of the war and the possible outcome, not only of his invasion into the Cape Colony, but of the military and social developments within the republics. Reitz recalled that when the two British officers brought Kitchener's message to Smuts at Concordia one afternoon near the end of April 1902, Smuts initially walked away into the veld to ponder the matter. The question that arises is what made the young general act in the way that he did? Was he accepting the inevitable or exhibiting farsightedness as a cognitive component of coping?⁸³ Whatever the true reason, by that same evening he had made his decision and agreed to proceed to Vereeniging.⁸⁴ The role that he played there and at Melrose House is well documented.

Considering all the information discussed above it is posited that Jan Smuts' experience of the guerrilla war and the multitude of stressors that he managed to cope with so successfully, helped to lay the firm foundations – or to develop the strong sense of coherence – on which his later career was built.

d. Commandant G.J. Scheepers

In comparison to J.C. Smuts, a study of the psychological impact of the guerrilla war on Commandant Gideon Johannes Scheepers – particularly his time as a leader of rebels in the Cape Colony – illustrates the extreme negative impact of stress on a young leader, who finds himself pressurised on all sides by a maelstrom of forces.

Gideon Scheepers was born in on 4 April 1878 and died on 18 January 1902. His short life was filled with action and drama and in retrospect it may well be asked whether he was promoted

⁸⁰ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, p. 142.

⁸¹ W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, pp. 143-144; A. Wessels, *Die Anglo-Boereoorlog 1899-1902 - 'n oorsig van die militêre verloop van die stryd*, p. 39.

⁸² D. Reitz, *Commando*, p. 313; J.D. Kestell and D.E van Velden, *Die vredesonderhandelinge*, p. 62; W.K. Hancock, *The sanguine years*, the photograph opposite p. 144 shows that two of Smuts' three generals (Maritz and Van Deventer) and numerous other officers were present at Okiep.

⁸³ D.J.W. Strümpfer, Salutogenesis a new paradigm, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 271; C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 160.

⁸⁴ D. Reitz, *Commando*, pp. 314-315.

as captain of a scout-corps too soon, before being exposed to life's realities and the rigours of war for a long enough period. He joined the ZAR Artillery at the age of 16 and lived through the months before the war as the sergeant responsible for the installation of the heliograph system between the Free State and its northern ally, the ZAR. When the war broke out he became involved as a member of the Free State Artillery. He saw the Battle of Magersfontein on 11 December 1899 and served as a scout under General De Wet in the weeks leading up to General Piet Cronjé's surrender at Paardeberg on 27 February 1900.⁸⁵ De Wet recognised his potential as a leader and in May 1900 Scheepers was promoted to the rank of captain, commanding a corps of about thirty scouts.⁸⁶ From this time onwards Scheepers' career became a whirlwind of adventure.

Scheepers had already been involved in the action at Sannaspost on 31 March 1900⁸⁷ before leading his newly-formed corps to fetch ammunition at Greylingstad on 28 May 1900,⁸⁸ and he also advised De Wet before the battle at Roodewal on 7 June 1900.⁸⁹ Together with Steyn and De Wet he escaped from the Brandwater Basin on 15 July 1900,⁹⁰ and he remained with De Wet throughout the first De Wet hunt in the northern Free State and into the western Transvaal. He and his thirty men were engaged in a skirmish with an enemy convoy near Zandnek on 8 August and he was still scouting for De Wet when they escaped over the footpath across the Magaliesberg on 21 August 1900.⁹¹ On his return to the Free State, De Wet could once again concentrate on his original objective, namely to disrupt the enemy's lines of communication and transport as much as possible, and it appears that Scheepers was an important instrument in the execution of this mission.⁹² Shearing quotes *The Times history* that the railway north of Kroonstad was wrecked repeatedly between 3 and 20 September 1900 and attributes these successful forays to Scheepers.⁹³ In October of that year Scheepers went south to assist General J.B.M. Hertzog

⁸⁵ W.J. de Kock (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse biografiese woordeboek*, II, p. 643.

⁸⁶ W.J. de Kock (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse biografiese woordeboek*, II, p. 643.

⁸⁷ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers and the search for his grave*, p. 20.

⁸⁸ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 21.

⁸⁹ C.R. de Wet, *Three years war*, p. 103.

⁹⁰ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 22.

⁹¹ F. Pretorius, "Die eerste dryfjag op Hoofkmdt C.R. de Wet" in *Christiaan de Wet-Annale* 4, pp. 58-61, 67, 129-130, 134, 158, 187-191.

⁹² C.R. de Wet, *Three year war*, p. 115.

⁹³ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 25.

with the re-recruitment of burghers in the southern Free State and on 18 October 1900 he was in command of an unsuccessful attack on Philippolis.⁹⁴ Thereafter, when De Wet's first attempt to invade the Cape Colony in December 1900 failed due to the raging Orange and Caledon Rivers he ordered Commandant P.H. Kritzinger with Captain G. Scheepers and 300 men, to wait until the river became fordable, and then to cross into the Cape.⁹⁵

In the relatively short period from March 1900 to December 1900 the 22 year old heliographer was thus turned into a reliable scout and became the leader of a scout corps. He had developed into a pillar of reliability for De Wet, mastered the handling of dynamite and the demolition of railway lines, bridges and culverts, and had been involved in several active encounters with the enemy. He had also been used by his superiors in the remotivating and recruiting of demoralised burghers. Although still young, he had proved himself to be a man with many talents and exceptional energy. It was therefore predictable that he be nominated by De Wet as second in command under the more sedate Commandant Kritzinger on a venture into the Cape Colony.⁹⁶ They crossed the Orange River near Norvalspont on 16 December 1900.⁹⁷ Scheepers was destined to remain in the Cape Colony until his death on 18 January 1902.

The first weeks of the invasion resembled the first rounds of a boxing bout with the contestants testing each other's strengths and weaknesses. Minor skirmishes, attempts to wreck railways and a brief foray into Venterstad, made Burghersdorp and Steynsburg farmers eager to rush and join the invading Boers. The local defence system proved inefficient and General Hector MacDonald was soon obliged to despatch reinforcements to the area to bolster the Town Guards and District Mounted Rifles.⁹⁸ Despite this the Boers managed to harass the enemy while keeping continually on the move. They were the aggressors while the enemy, most of whom were untrained men, were more often than not on the defensive.

But Sir Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner, who had been uneasy about a general uprising among the colonists for some time, managed to have the Colonial Defence Force called up throughout the Cape Colony on 1 January 1901. In his diary he confessed that he would have

⁹⁴ P.G. Cloete, *A chronology*, p. 194.

⁹⁵ C.R. de Wet, *Three year war*, p. 183.

⁹⁶ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 32.

⁹⁷ A. Wessels, *'n Oorsig van die militêre verloop van die stryd*, p. 37.

⁹⁸ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 35.

preferred to have Martial Law proclaimed in the entire Cape,⁹⁹ and this was indeed accomplished on 17 January 1901, with the exception of the Cape ports and black territories.¹⁰⁰

The screws were now turned even tighter on the men under Kritzinger and Scheepers. Scheepers' commando, known as the "Witkoppen" because of the distinctive white bands they wore on their hats, began to move eastwards in an attempt to reach Middelburg where they believed that there was plenty of looting to be done.¹⁰¹ However Middelburg proved to be a difficult nut to crack because Lieutenant-General H.M. Grenfell and a significant force had arrived there first. According to Shearing, newspapers reported that by the first day of 1901 there were 2 000 soldiers camped around the Middelburg station, with more units arriving.¹⁰² Although this development tied in with Kritzinger's aim to draw the British forces out of the Free State, it more than likely did not fit in with Scheepers' idea of adventure. Shearing contended that "Scheepers rode into the Cape Colony, self-confident and sure of Boer victory."¹⁰³ When the Boers realised that Middelburg was not to be taken, they promptly diverted to Graaff-Reinet.

The implementation of Martial Law in the middle of January 1901 appeared to have an immediate affect on the fortunes of the invaders. The Colonial authorities promptly removed farmers who were suspected of conspiring with the Boers – the so-called "Undesirables" – from the community. Land owners who would previously have provided the commandos with food, fodder and other essentials, now frequently came up with the same excuse: "Commandant ... the problem is actually my young family, my old mother, and all my dependents. Without them I would be in the saddle riding with you tomorrow. Why, if I were free and had no wife, if I were poor and needy, I would be the first to rebel!"¹⁰⁴ This might have been typical journalistic reporting of the situation, but Shearing nevertheless contends that it was mostly the young men who heeded the call to adventure and excitement and that Scheepers was still able to recruit colonials for the Boer cause.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 486.

¹⁰⁰ T. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, p. 486.

¹⁰¹ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 36.

¹⁰² T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 37.

¹⁰³ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Sergeant A.W. Arnold's report in the *Beaufort Courier*, quoted by T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 37.

It seems that Kritzinger and Scheepers parted company for short periods in January, as shown on the map depicting their movements from 17 January to 1 February 1901.¹⁰⁶ Although Shearing does not provide exact dates, the execution of two of General H. Settle's Coloured scouts, Jacob Fillies and Kiedo, as spies and the alleged castration of one Arrie Maans, apparently took place at this time, as did the alleged shooting of a Black constable, Moyewka, west of Willowmore.¹⁰⁷ Scheepers was apparently responsible for these deeds. Coloured people were often employed as Town Guards much to the dissatisfaction of the Boer.¹⁰⁸

Kritzinger and his second-in-command, Scheepers, finally parted company after having been together for eight weeks in the Cape Colony. Shearing alludes to a disagreement between the two leaders and she adds: "There was no De Wet to stop the nonsense and enforce the respect that should have kept them together ...".¹⁰⁹ At a later stage Shearing makes a sidelong remark hinting that a feud of some sort had developed between Kritzinger and Scheepers.¹¹⁰

A period followed when Scheepers and his commando were primarily active in the Greater Karoo, visiting Murraysburg no less than 17 times.¹¹¹ They made a habit of taking prisoners – often from the District Mounted troops (DMT) – and then forcing these men to accompany them on foot.¹¹² Whether Scheepers hoped to demonstrate the authority of his commando to the local population or whether his actions stemmed from his conviction that these colonials rightly belonged on the Boer side and should identify with the Boer cause is not clear. What is certain is that his bullying attitude led to unnecessary animosity and could not have been of any military advantage to the commandos.

Two aspects that have a bearing on Scheepers' behaviour at the time are discussed by Shearing. Firstly, that he was very conscious of the fact that he was a trained soldier and the leader of his commando, and secondly, that he was inclined to be restless; he slept very little, and

¹⁰⁶ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁷ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, pp. 43, 48.

¹⁰⁸ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁰⁹ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 55.

¹¹⁰ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 96.

¹¹¹ Information supplied on map of Scheepers' routes from 1 February to 18 March 1901 in T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 58.

¹¹² T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, pp. 59, 69.

never camped where he ate.¹¹³ Both these elements could be interpreted as signs of insecurity and psychological distress, although admittedly moving camp during the hours of darkness can be viewed as a normal guerrilla tactic when under pressure.¹¹⁴ Perhaps Scheepers was uncertain of his capability and was overly cautious. Another source, George Claassen, assistant editor of *Die Burger*, remarked that in the evenings Scheepers often paced up and down, cracking his knuckles and would suddenly give the order for his burghers to saddle-up and move on.¹¹⁵ It can of course be speculated whether the constant looting and burning of shops and houses, the ill treatment of prisoners and the execution of Coloureds and Blacks, often on unsubstantiated suspicion of supplying information to the enemy, was troubling his conscience. On the other hand, the fact that he and his commando were constantly pressurised, not only by local colonial troops, such as the Graaff-Reinet Guides, Taute's Scouts, Brabant's Horse regiments and the Kaffrarian Rifles, but also by units of the Imperial Yeomanry, the Inniskilling Dragoon Guards and the 9th Lancers led by the determined Lieutenant-Colonel H.J. Scobell, could possibly have affected his mental stability.

A turning point came on 16 March 1901, when Scheepers, with Captain Wilhelm Fouché, one of Kritzinger's original captains, and their commandos, met up with Captain Wynand Malan, formerly of "Theron's Verkenning Korps" (TVK), and his men in the Aberdeen district. With Malan was Manie Maritz, also an old TVK member and later to become one of Smuts' Combat-Generals, and a promising young "embrionic De Wet", Piet van der Merwe. This combined Boer force then experienced a time of increased pressure from the enemy. For the next few months they were repeatedly compelled to seek refuge in the Camdeboo Mountains north of Aberdeen and within easy reach of Graaff-Reinet.

In June 1901 General John French was given the supreme control of operations in the Cape Colony,¹¹⁶ and on 14 July 1901 French forced Scheepers out of the Camdeboo Mountains prior to commencing on the first of his concerted drives to curtail the operations of the Boers and the Rebels.¹¹⁷ Scheepers and Van der Merwe, who was now assistant commandant, still had time to

¹¹³ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, pp. 59, 60.

¹¹⁴ R.A. Baron and D. Byrne, *Social psychology*, p. 180.

¹¹⁵ Written information from Dr George Claassen of *Die Burger* supplied by e-mail on 17.9.2003.

¹¹⁶ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 311.

¹¹⁷ L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times history*, V, p. 315.

destroy and loot a train at Ganna Siding, in the Nelspoort Hills, but then trekked in a southerly direction, leaving the plains of the Great Karoo behind them, entering the Langkloof at Misgund. In Shearing's words: "Now that Scheepers and the aggressive Van der Merwe trekked together, they threw caution to the wind, and, living only for the day, took off for the southern Cape, surrounded by 300 young men intent on war."¹¹⁸ This marked the beginning of a new phase of house-burning, sjamboking or shooting of Black and Coloured people and unduly harsh treatment of prisoners. It appears that the combination of Scheepers and Van der Merwe led to mayhem and destruction. The upshot was that by August 1901 Scheepers had been informed by the British authorities that should he be captured he would be brought to trail for the killing of unarmed scouts.¹¹⁹

The sequence of events subsequent to the combination of the two Boer groups under Scheepers and Van der Merwe is unclear and is not directly relevant to this study. However, the three maps in Shearing's work that trace Scheepers' movements from 21 July 1901 to 11 October 1901, paint a picture of frenzied and hectic movements in the last weeks of his leadership.¹²⁰ Unfortunately these maps do not demonstrate the highly relevant information on the topography of the region and how the commandos were confined between enormous mountain ranges running parallel south and north of the Langkloof and the Little Karoo. Squeezed in between the mountains their area of operation became more limited and the chances of detection greater. Moreover the passes and mountain trails were easy for the enemy to guard, further inhibiting the Boer's freedom of movement. On the other hand they enjoyed an advantage that guerrilla fighters relish – that is the protection of mountain gorges and bushy terrain.

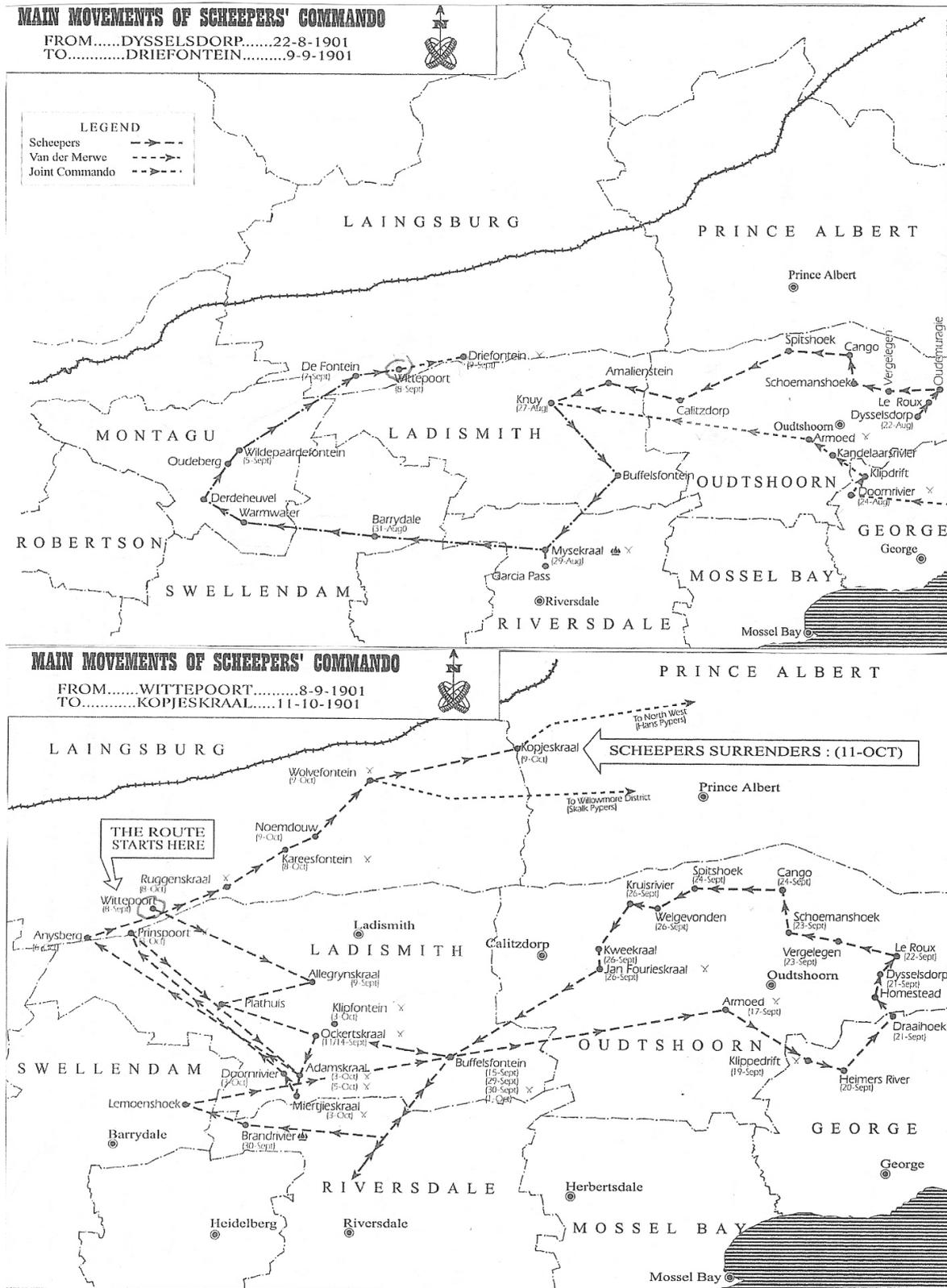
The British units – The Hussars and the 12th Lancers¹²¹ – kept up the pressure relentlessly and it is reasonable to assume that Scheepers' stage of resistance (SR) eventually moved into the

¹¹⁸ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 109.

¹¹⁹ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, quoted from a communication between Lord Kitchener and the Governor [Lord Milner], GH 32 a/21 Folio 321, 2.8.1901, p. 112.

¹²⁰ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, Maps covering Scheepers' movements for the periods 21.7.1901 to 22.8.1901, 22.8.1901 to 9.9.1901, 8.9.1901 to 11.10.1901, pp. 108, 116, 128.

¹²¹ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 122.



Map IX-1. Maps illustrating Commandant G.J. Scheepers' erratic moves from 22 August to 10 October 1901. From T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, pp. 116, 128.

stage of exhaustion (SE).¹²² Shearing claims that by the end of August 1901, Scheepers had become a shadow of his former commanding self. "Gone was the man of energy, the first to leap into the saddle ... Scheepers was brooding listlessly in a cart, staring into space or tagging behind his riders. His eyes were weary and his face exhausted. He didn't cough, he wasn't wounded."¹²³ On 1 or 2 September 1901 he did not mount his horse, Albany, but struggled into the cart and lay down, pulling a blanket over him. Two doctors were present, Drs Smith and Bosch, but apparently they could do nothing to help him. At this stage it is perhaps appropriate to consider two conditions that may have had a bearing on this case, given that Scheepers had been under severe stress for a considerable length of time. The first of these, called burnout, was mentioned in Chapter II. Burnout normally follows long periods of chronic stress and ensues when the individual has reached the limit of his endurance and is no longer concerned about the consequences of his actions. Although Scheepers' surrender does not indicate this, there may in some cases even be a negative or callous attitude towards those the individual is supposed to help. At this juncture the individual is often troubled with fatigue and insomnia, feels shivery and experiencing stomach trouble and believes that he has nothing more to give.¹²⁴ Dr M.J.A. Paffen, a prominent Dutch author on stress prevention, explains burnout as having three related features, namely emotional exhaustion, de-personification (a feeling of becoming a mere object) and thirdly, experiencing feelings of diminishing competence.¹²⁵

The other condition that may have been present in Scheepers' case is an affliction known as fibromyalgia or chronic pain syndrome. As yet the exact cause of this condition has not been determined but it is generally agreed that the ailment is stress-related, and has a bearing on a negative personal history. It is also said to be associated with chronic sleeping disorders and depression.¹²⁶ In the notes made by Scheepers in the diary he started at the time of his surrender, there are several remarks which can be related to fibromyalgia. A biokineticist with a special knowledge of fibromyalgia, Christa Venter, has identified several entries in the diary for the period from 1 October 1901 until Scheepers arrived in Naauwpoort in mid-November 1901, as typical

¹²² H. Selye, *The stress of life*, p. 57.

¹²³ T. and D. Shearing, *Commandant Gideon Scheepers*, p. 123.

¹²⁴ Written information: Professor J.B. Schoeman, Department of Psychology, University of Pretoria, 24 October 2002.

¹²⁵ <http://burnout.health.nl/thema/burnout>.

¹²⁶ <http://my.webmd.com/content/article/1680.51256>

symptoms associated with this condition. These include his frequent references to pain – for example the intense pain during his journey on horseback while crossing the Witteberg – subsequently the descriptions of the extremely uncomfortable journey by train to Naauwpoort, enduring a night of pain, weakness, sleeplessness, bouts of alternating cold and hot (night-fever).¹²⁷

There are many parallels between what today is termed burnout and/or fibromyalgia, and the mysterious malady that affected Scheepers. He eventually decided that his condition had become so bad that he should surrender rather than place his comrades in jeopardy. This clearly does not indicate any callousness. He took leave of his men early on the morning of 10 October 1901 and stayed behind on the farm Knopjeskraal, waiting for the arrival of his captors. Scheepers' trial began in Graaff-Reinet on 18 December 1901 and he was executed on 18 January 1902.¹²⁸

Although there are many mysteries and myths surrounding the Scheepers saga, there can be little doubt that the burden became too heavy for the volatile young man. He clearly did not have enough GRRs at his disposal, and according to Antovsky's theory, GRRs facilitate making sense out of the countless stressors that an individual encounters and help him to develop a sense of coherence.¹²⁹ Scheepers' inadequate SOC probably led him to the irresponsible actions which eventually caused him to crumble.

e. Chief Field Cornet H.S. van der Walt

Hendrik Stephanus van der Walt was a relatively unknown officer during the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War and the psychological impact of the war on this earnest, and God-fearing man was dissimilar from that experienced by many other burghers. Van der Walt was a farmer from the central region of the Free State. He was in his late forties and had married for a second time after the death of his first wife. The editor of his diary, J.H. Coetzee, mentions that he could read and write well, was a man of some prominence in his community and was an elder in the Reformed Church in Ventersburg. He evidently had a firm belief in the Bible and in the principles

¹²⁷ Information supplied by Mrs C. Venter, biokinetist, after studying G.S. Preller, *Scheepers se dagboek en die stryd in Kaapland (1 Okt 1901 – 18 Jan 1902)*, pp.73-79.

¹²⁸ G.S. Preller, *Scheepers se Dagboek en die stryd in Kaapland (1 Okt 1901 – 18 Jan 1902)*, pp. 91, 45-49.

¹²⁹ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 268.

of his church, which helped him to evince a well developed understanding of matters in general.¹³⁰ The diary kept by Van der Walt is concise and often written in a terse style; he was a man of few words, numbering the days rather than making use of dates.

It becomes clear in the diary that Van der Walt relied heavily on the Bible and his relationship with God to help him in times of stress or uncertainty. Like most of the Boers on commando he was subjected to many stressful situations but his strong faith was a source of resistance. His religious predisposition was part of his culture and tradition, which according to Antonovsky helps to give the individual a SOC.¹³¹ A number of examples of the situations that Van der Walt experienced during the war are taken from the diary in order to demonstrate the psychological impact that the guerrilla phase had on him and how he was able to cope with this stress.

After the fall of Bloemfontein, in middle March 1900, Van der Walt also returned home. On the Sunday during their family devotions he read from Jeremiah 48, verse 10: “vervloek zij die des Heeren werk bedrieglik doen: ja vervloek zij die zijn swaart den bloede onthoudt”.¹³² This, to him, was the sign that he should rejoin his commando. According to his diary, a few days later, he again experienced a strong urge to return home but was able to resist this because he had received a divine message not to succumb to this feeling, but rather to continue fighting. This was enough to keep him on commando until the “bitterend”.¹³³ Together with his comrades he managed to escape from the Brandwater Basin, where Marthinus Prinsloo so ignominiously had surrendered. For several weeks he and his commando maneuvered in the eastern Free State and when he reached his home, nearly three months later, he was grateful to find that his family was still safe, although they complained to him about the hardships they had experienced. Despite this unhappy news, his first reaction was for them all to go down on their knees and thank God for His love and safekeeping during the time that he had been away from his home.¹³⁴ He did not reflect on any feelings of hatred or harsh judgments about those who had victimized his family.

¹³⁰ J.H. Coetzee, “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek” in *Christiaan de Wet-Annale* 8, p.109.

¹³¹ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 153.

¹³² J.H. Coetzee, “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, pp. 120-121. (Translated: “A curse on him who is lax in doing the Lord’s work! A curse on him who keeps his sword from bloodshed!” – From the Holy Bible, New International Version).

¹³³ J.H. Coetzee, “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 5, p. 122.

¹³⁴ J.H. Coetzee, “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 167, p. 128.

About a month later he recounted the problem of his son's breakdown while they were on commando. This episode undoubtedly would have caused stress for the father. From his brief description it would seem that the young boy was so overwhelmed by anxiety, that he moved as if in a daze and refused to have anything more to do with the war. He had buried his rifle and was only prepared to ride on his father's horse. Although it is not quite clear what Van der Walt meant, it appears that a measure of fatherly intolerance had crept in. A fortnight later, however, he reported that his son was again prepared to use a rifle, albeit one captured from an enemy, and to continue as before. Van der Walt's only comment was that by God's grace his son had once more completely recovered.¹³⁵ But it is clear that this episode must have placed additional stress on Van der Walt as father and as Field Cornet. The important issue here is not the son's breakdown but the recognition that the father's calm conduct during a time of crisis relates to his utter dependence on God as his resource of resistance to the stress.

Despite his piousness, Van der Walt was not reluctant to engage in battle, whether this involved fighting against the British themselves or Boers who had changed sides. He collected a group of burghers and joined De Wet on his second invasion into the Cape Colony in February 1901.¹³⁶ However, due to the poor condition of their horses he and his burghers were obliged to turn back early.¹³⁷ Calculated from other known dates in his diary, they probably re-crossed the strong flowing Orange River towards middle February 1901.¹³⁸ On their difficult return trek most of his men were on foot and with empty bandoliers. After they had crossed the railway line near Belmont station they were once more in the Free State but he still refused to allow his burghers to take horses which were not rightfully theirs. Instead he bought horses where he could until all his men were mounted.¹³⁹ His firm conviction in the morals of his religion meant that he refused to sanction any plundering which was a widely-accepted practice, even in a difficult situation.

They moved back towards their homes and Van der Walt recounted that on the evening of the 361st day he was able to visit his ailing mother. There he must have stopped over, because on the 364th day he wrote: "Door de zegen des Heeren hadt ik die paar dagen aan het krankbed

¹³⁵ J.H. Coetzee, "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Days 198 and 212, pp. 130, 131.

¹³⁶ J.H. Coetzee, "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Day 268, p. 132.

¹³⁷ J.H. Coetzee, "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Day 274, p. 133.

¹³⁸ J.H. Coetzee, "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Days 276 and 364, pp. 134, 136.

¹³⁹ J.H. Coetzee, "H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek", Day 280, p. 134.

mijner moeder mogen door brengen. Deze morgen is zij overleden.”¹⁴⁰ On Sunday 4 August 1901 his own house was burned down and his family taken away. He saw this as a loving chastisement by the Lord, for his sacrilegious act of helping another woman on the Sunday two weeks previously, reflecting that this mission could well have been left until the next day. In his own mind this was God’s warning, not only to himself but to everybody.¹⁴¹ Still, he did not complain and in the same entry he even marvelled that his mill, after nine months, had not been destroyed by the enemy.

Gradually he and his men were forced to operate increasingly to the west of the Free State. When they linked up with Assistant Chief Commandant C.C.J. Badenhorst, Van der Walt was appointed as a member of a tribunal to try two men for alleged treason. As mentioned in the previous chapter, when the men were sentenced to death, Van der Walt requested permission to assist the condemned men in their spiritual need.¹⁴² This clearly indicates that the stamina or emotional resilience¹⁴³ which he derived from his faith was a mainstay in his life, helping him in a very demanding situation. Not only could he comprehend and accept the fact that they had to be punished for their treason, but, above all, he had the compassion and the courage to undertake an extremely sensitive task. Once again, comparable to the situations referred to above, and as defined by Antonovsky, this relates to Van der Walt’s comprehension of the situation and his perception of its implications.¹⁴⁴

And, finally when the burghers received the news that peace had been negotiated, he observed that there was a general feeling of indignation among the burghers. In contrast Van der Walt exclaimed “Let us kill the fattened calf.” He argued that De Wet and Steyn had done all they could; if there had been a better way, they would surely have taken it. But God had decided otherwise. “Hij is de Heere, hij doet dat reg is en zijne oogen.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ J.H. Coetzee, “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 364, p. 136. [Translated: “By the grace of God I had a few days to stay by the side of my mother’s sickbed. She passed away this morning.”] A footnote by the editor mentions that his mother died on 24 May 1901.

¹⁴¹ J.H. Coetzee, “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 440, p. 137.

¹⁴² J.H. Coetzee, “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 698, p. 143.

¹⁴³ D.J.W. Strümpfer, “Salutogenesis a new paradigm”, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 272.

¹⁴⁴ D.J.W. Strümpfer, “Salutogenesis a new paradigm”, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 268.

¹⁴⁵ J.H. Coetzee, “H.S. van der Walt: Oorlogsdagboek”, Day 743, p. 146. [Translated: “He is the Lord, he does what is right in his eyes.”]

During the guerrilla phase Van der Walt had been faced with the burden of having to lead others and receiving little or no physical support from his government. As a leader he encountered the same dangers and hardships of commando life as thousands of other Boers. He lived daily with the same concerns and uncertainties about his family, whether they were with him or at home. Notwithstanding it all Van der Walt was able to cope with the stressful elements and, moreover, to stay positive. The information gathered from his diary shows that there can be little doubt that the foundation of his forbearance and tenacity was the exceptional strength he gained from his faith. The guerrilla war certainly had an impact on him, as it did on others, but Van der Walt managed to cope with his stress and to persevere until the very end.

f. Burgher P.J. du Toit

The psychological impact of the guerrilla war on burgher Petrus Johannes du Toit contrasted from that of the individuals discussed thus far, primarily because his perception of the war was completely dissimilar to the previous cases. Firstly, when he was commandeered on 5 September 1900, he was most unwilling to comply. According to the first entry in his diary he appealed to the Field Cornet to exempt him from taking up arms again, because he had already completed two spells of duty. This unwillingness was probably partly due to his lack of commitment towards the republican ideals, having been born in the Cape Colony, educated in English and brought up in the English tradition.¹⁴⁶ Secondly, he was not a robust, physically strong man and his health seemed to fail as the guerrilla war progressed.¹⁴⁷ Thirdly, it is pertinent that he was a teacher by training and probably had little in common with the other burghers, many of whom were semi-literate or illiterate farmers.¹⁴⁸ C.M. Bakkes also makes the point that he was an artistic, sensitive bachelor.¹⁴⁹

From Du Toit's diary it becomes apparent that he did not feel a strong sense of loyalty towards the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek. The editor immediately makes this point clear in the chosen title of the diary: *Diary of a National Scout*. Then too the entry for 16 December 1900

¹⁴⁶ C.M. Bakkes, Commentary on the inside flap of the dustcover of J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout P.J. du Toit, 1900 - 1902*.

¹⁴⁷ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout P.J. du Toit 1900 - 1902*, 16.12.1900, pp. 2, 30.

¹⁴⁸ F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 131.

¹⁴⁹ C.M. Bakkes, Commentary on the inside flap of the dustcover of J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*.

reads: “Dingaansday! Independence day! Where are they now? Poor Transvaal.”¹⁵⁰ Notwithstanding his lack of loyalty he initially did not choose to disobey the orders that commandeered him for the third time. And throughout the section written while he was with the Boer guerrilla fighters – which, in fact, only lasted from 5 September 1900 to 31 May 1901 – he frequently considered the possibility of laying down arms and joining the British. This incessant inner vacillation was heightened in late November 1900, when a Klerksdorp lawyer, J.A. Nesor, sent a letter to General P.J. Liebenberg, for whom Du Toit acted as secretary. In the letter Nesor wrote that the Boers had fought bravely against mighty odds, but he believed that they should take up Major-General C.W.H. Douglas’ offer to lay down their arms while their property would still be respected. Du Toit made it clear that although Liebenberg did not respond to the letter, he himself felt rather inclined to go with Nesor’s plea, as he was of the same opinion.¹⁵¹

Du Toit was often gloomy and depressed. On 6 October 1900 his entry began: “A windy, sad and melancholy day. I am lying in the tent writing and reading.”¹⁵² Then on 31 December 1900 he complained “Last day of century and bloody year of 1900. How sad the century closes, with blood and fire, thousands of weeping widows and orphans, thousands of homeless mothers and families ... What misery, what lamentations, broken hearts ... Oh, God of Gods, hast thou let us over to ourselves ... If our case is a hopeless one, what can I do to stop it? All is a mystery. I shall act soon, yes this very day or tomorrow.”¹⁵³

The problem he had in taking the final step to “act”, in other words to lay down his arms and change sides, could well have been a major cause for his downcast feeling. It certainly caused him a great deal of stress, which probably precipitated his attacks of feeling “seedy” or perhaps even accounts for the bouts of asthma that plagued him.¹⁵⁴

When he was called to give evidence at a treason trial at Wolmaransstad on 16 January 1901, and five of the accused were sentenced to death,¹⁵⁵ it affected him to such an extent that

¹⁵⁰ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, p. 7.

¹⁵¹ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 18.11.1900 to 25.11.1900, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵² J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 6.10.1900, p. 12.

¹⁵³ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 31.12.1900, p. 33.

¹⁵⁴ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 16.1.1901, p. 35; C.M. Bakkes, Commentary on the inside flap of the dustcover of J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*.

¹⁵⁵ A.M. Grundlingh, *Die “hendsoppers” en “joiners”*: die rasionaal en verskynsel van verraad, p. 55.

he retired to a farm that he frequently visited. He stayed there until 11 February 1901, reporting that he was feeling “very seedy”.¹⁵⁶ For the following three and a half months Du Toit remained in a state of indecision about what action he should take until 31 May 1901, when he finally changed sides and became a paid scout for the British.¹⁵⁷

When an examination is made of the psychological aspects of Du Toit’s situation during his nine months with the guerrilla forces it is clear that, in terms of GRRs, there were a number of weak links in the chain. Strümpfer quotes Kobasa who claims that hardiness involves three components namely commitment, control and challenge. These elements were all lacking to some extent in Du Toit’s makeup.¹⁵⁸ His first entry on 5 September 1900 and several subsequent remarks point to the fact that he did not feel himself committed to the republican cause. Moreover, the mere fact that he meekly accepted the commandeering orders, albeit reluctantly, suggests that he experienced a feeling of powerlessness and that he did not have firm control over the circumstances of his own life. As mentioned before the perception of not having control over one’s life may well lead to physical ailments and psychological distress.¹⁵⁹ Strümpfer quotes examples where it is considered that hardiness and social support are two sides of the same coin of coping resources.¹⁶⁰ According to Du Toit’s diary he had very little social support while on commando. Another possibility in Du Toit’s case is Antonovsky’s theory concerning the “health ease/disease continuum”. This maintains that all individuals fall somewhere between the extreme poles of illness and well-ness, depending on how well they are able to cope with their stress.¹⁶¹ Salutogenesis arises from highly efficient coping with stress, and the inability to cope may lead to physical ailment. This theory probably explains many of Du Toit’s maladies.

It could be argued that after Du Toit had taken the “action” that had been tormenting him for so many months, his general disposition improved. Although he spent two months in Wakkerstroom hospital towards the end of the war, this was due to typhoid fever and apparently

¹⁵⁶ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 16.1.1901, p. 35.

¹⁵⁷ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, 31.5.1901, 1.8.1901, pp. 51-52, 63.

¹⁵⁸ D.J.W. Strümpfer, “Salutogenesis a new paradigm”, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, pp. 270-271.

¹⁵⁹ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 162.

¹⁶⁰ D.J.W. Strümpfer, “Salutogenesis a new paradigm”, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 271.

¹⁶¹ D.J.W. Strümpfer, “Salutogenesis a new paradigm”, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 267.

was not related to his earlier ailments.¹⁶² Petrus du Toit was discharged from the British force on 13 June 1902 and subsequently became an attorney in Klerksdorp. He continued living an active life, taking part in local politics and cultural activities, until his death from asthma at the age of seventy.¹⁶³

In conclusion, it is surmised that the negative psychological impact of having to fight in the guerrilla war for the republics, defending a cause to which he was not committed, was the prime reason for his frequent bouts of moodiness and depression, as well as his numerous physical ailments. Furthermore, these conditions were apparently of a temporary nature which passed when he had taken the step to change sides.

g. Burgher R.W. Schikkerling

The psychological impact of the guerrilla war on the Boers was not always as extreme as some of the cases discussed above. There were many thousands of burghers and officers who experienced the stress of the guerilla war – and suffered the hardships caused by stress – but who coped with the situation, who relied on their resistance resources and stayed on commando until the peace was signed. One such burgher was a young man from Johannesburg, Roland William Schikkerling.

When Schikkerling left from Braamfontein station for the Natal front on 4 October 1899, he was only 19 years old.¹⁶⁴ He remained a member of the Johannesburg Commando until the end of the war. Before considering the impact of guerrilla warfare on him, it might be worthwhile taking a closer look at the youth Roland Schikkerling. He grew up with his mother and sisters in Johannesburg and enjoyed only two years of formal schooling,¹⁶⁵ but was knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects. His love of books and reading – particularly the works of Shakespeare which he often quoted in his diary – played a big role in his life,¹⁶⁶ presumably contributing greatly to his knowledge in other fields such as geometry and astrology. One example that demonstrates his insight of the world around him was his attempt to construct a sundial with the help of a piece

¹⁶² J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, notes following the entry for 2.3.1902, p. 93.

¹⁶³ J.P. Brits (ed.), *Diary of a National Scout*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous (A Boer's diary)*, p. 9.

¹⁶⁵ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 5.12.1901, p. 336.

¹⁶⁶ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 18.9.1901, 7.10.1901, pp. 306, 313.

of mahogany and a brass pin. This venture was prompted by his growing interest in the stars: “I have fallen into primitive ways, and can tell the time by the stars to within a few minutes. I know when Orion, the Pleiads and several other heavenly bodies, rise and set, and the time the Southern Cross dips ...”.¹⁶⁷ He also knew that salt could be produced by reacting bicarbonate of soda with hydrochloric acid,¹⁶⁸ and he enjoyed describing the colourful lowveld birds and the delicate role of insects in the pollination of flowers.¹⁶⁹ It is obvious that Schikkerling possessed an above average general knowledge for such a young man. His understanding of life and its mysteries would have been a significant resistance resource in times of stress.

Schikkerling had a leaning towards philosophical comments, a feature that became more pronounced as the war wore on and the situation on commando became more gloomy. Even at the beginning, when it was clear that war was unavoidable, he professed: “I must confess I saw very little hope of— for us — a successful issue. But why need there be hope? And who of so little spirit as to regard the odds, when so much was at stake?”¹⁷⁰ One could argue that this was a typically bold statement from an impetuous young man, however, it is clear that from the outset he had a highly developed sense of loyalty towards his country and a firm resolution to stand by that allegiance. Kobasa claims that the firm belief in the truth and the value of what one is doing are key components for a hardy personality.¹⁷¹ Schikkerling’s commitment and his inclination to become philosophical might furthermore have gone hand in hand. In April 1901, when the burghers under General Viljoen were pursued in the course of General Bindon Blood’s drive in the northeastern Transvaal, Schikkerling, with two of his comrades and an old gentleman, Mr. Cogill, were fleeing from the enemy over mountainous terrain. They carried on until after dark, but when they became lost and hungry they simply slept at the roadside. His comment on the event was: “Old Mr. Cogill, though stricken in years and in sorrow, had made the gruelling ride with us. If one has not known utter exhaustion, the pangs of natural thirst and hunger, or has not been soothed to sleep by the wind and the stars, one has not lived.”¹⁷² This is only one of many philosophical remarks related to his determination and commitment that he made in his diary.

¹⁶⁷ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 5.12.1901, pp. 334-336.

¹⁶⁸ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 18.10.1901, pp. 318-319.

¹⁶⁹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 24.8.1901, 17.10.1901, pp. 289, 318.

¹⁷⁰ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, p. 8.

¹⁷¹ D.J.W. Strümpfer, “Salutogenesis a new paradigm”, *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 270.

¹⁷² R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 21.4.1901, p. 187.

Towards the end of May 1901, Schikkerling entered into a lengthy discourse – partly technical and partly philosophical – on the military strategy of the Boers as compared to that of the British.¹⁷³ He clearly recognized the Boers' strengths, such as their field-craft, their mobility and ability with the long-range magazine rifle, but he did not hesitate to criticize their lack of discipline and excessive individuality. His sound approach can be closely associated with Antonovsky's opinion that rationality, meaning accurate, objective assessment of a situation, is a major component of coping.¹⁷⁴ Twenty months after his arrival on the Natal border in October 1899 he had experienced both victory and defeat and lived through some very harsh realities of war. Schikkerling's lucid and comprehensive discussion strongly suggests that at this stage of the war he had begun to develop the "dispositional orientation" that Antonovsky describes as a SOC. As in the case of Jan Smuts the phrase Strümpfer uses, namely "... habitual patterns of appraisal, based on repeated experiences of sense-making that have been facilitated by [one's] GRRs ..." fits in completely with Schikkerling's circumstances.¹⁷⁵

By suggesting that Schikkerling may have had a well developed sense of coherence, it is by no means implied that he did not undergo the usual forms of stress encountered by the guerrilla fighter. He too longed for his loved ones, looking for social support from home. "Every day comes the longing to see dear ones who may be no more, for much may have happened during the year and a half in which I have heard no word from them."¹⁷⁶ This was written at a stage of the war when the "watershed" had already been reached as is illustrated in Table VIII–3 in the previous chapter.

Schikkerling's mood of despondency was also evident when he wrote on 9 September 1901: "A losing cause and a lingering war blunt one's courage and every battle takes a little off the edge. I have seen men of steel tempered down to hoop iron ...".¹⁷⁷ Many of those "men of steel" had crossed his path during the months of the guerrilla war, and he had witnessed the death of such men. His deep distress at the death of some of his comrades and close friends who were "... all

¹⁷³ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 28.5.1901, pp. 207-211.

¹⁷⁴ C.L. Sheridan and S.A. Radmacher, *Health psychology*, p. 159.

¹⁷⁵ D.J.W. Strümpfer, "Salutogenesis a new paradigm", *S.A. Journal of Psychology* 20 (4), 1990, p. 268.

¹⁷⁶ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 27.11.1901, p. 333.

¹⁷⁷ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 9.9.1901, p. 300.

touched by Death's purple finger ..." was related in Chapter VI.¹⁷⁸ Schikkerling came face to face with death several times as the months of guerrilla warfare passed. He managed to avoid being present at the execution of the traitor, Drosky, on 26 June 1901, but on that same evening his bedfellow,¹⁷⁹ Field Cornet Meyburgh, was shot dead at his side during an attack on a blockhouse.¹⁸⁰ However, it does seem as if it was the death of a young boy, Japie Olivier, during an early morning attack on three wagons on 24 October 1901, that disturbed the by now seasoned Schikkerling more than usual. "When we came up to our companions we saw one leading a horse to which Japie's body was strapped, his lifeless arms and purpling hands dangling limply against the horse's flanks ... we buried Japie on a bleak prominence where he will await the Day of Judgement. He was a youth of outstanding bravery."¹⁸¹ Of significance here is that a traumatic experience of stress does not require that the person involved must be directly exposed to the stressor, such as a battle during war. According to Baum, *et al.* merely being exposed to the consequences of an event such as the grotesque death of a person or learning about violence against somebody close to one, could be severely distressing to a person.¹⁸² Perhaps it was the fact that the war had gone on for so long that heightened his grief at this particular stage. The repeated contact with death, either that of his comrades or of the enemy, certainly did cause stress in the young burgher's mind, but at no time did it appear that he was unable to cope with his stress.

Food played an important part in the daily thoughts of the young Schikkerling, as it probably does in the lives of most young men between 19 and 21. Shortage of food or of certain ingredients, and the monotonous diet of burghers in the field has been dealt with extensively in Chapter VI where stressors were discussed and also in Chapter VII which deals with resistance resources. However the subject is mentioned so frequently in Schikkerling's diary that the procurement of food in general and of certain basic ingredients, such as sugar and salt, seem to have been more than a mere hassle to him. In the later stages of the war it became a personal stressor, although not a private one, as it was shared by all his comrades. He was, however, not disinclined to be involved in the preparation of food – in fact he confidently described how best

¹⁷⁸ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 8.1.1901, p. 130.

¹⁷⁹ See F. Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, p. 252, for comment on partnerships and bedmates among burghers.

¹⁸⁰ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 26.6.1901, pp. 234-236.

¹⁸¹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 24.10.1901, pp. 322-333.

¹⁸² A. Baum, R.J. Gatchel and D.S. Krantz, *An introduction to health psychology*, p. 92.

to prepare a sheep's head in the embers of a fire.¹⁸³ While looting the camp of the 5th Victoria Mounted Rifles, following a large scale capitulation of the much-feared Australians, Schikkerling recounted that despite articles such as an overcoat and two blankets which he flung into his bag, he expressly looked for " ... jam and sugar, for I had almost forgotten what sweets tasted like."¹⁸⁴ A few weeks later, on 24 July 1901, he described how he and a good friend, Sidney Rocher, and two others went under cover of darkness to steal eighteen pumpkins and some mealie cobs. The next day his entry begins with: "We have pumpkin and chops for breakfast."¹⁸⁵ By 18 January 1902, by the time when everything about the war had become gloomy, he recounted: "All this for a breakfast of coarse porridge, without meat or milk or salt. We have today been twenty-six days without salt".¹⁸⁶ There is no doubting that he was stressed about the issue of food on commando.

It should, however, not be assumed that the stress brought on by food shortages and the monotonous diet could not be coped with by the young burgher and his comrades. On the one hand young people tend to have short memories about their adversities, while on the other hand there were those special occasions when the hardships were temporarily set aside. On Christmas day of 1901, Schikkerling and three of his friends had Christmas dinner with the Munros in Pilgrim's Rest. "The feast, to me at least, with my now shrunken standards, beggared all description. Among other fare we feasted on plum pudding, tarts, custard pudding and jelly."¹⁸⁷ Is it possibly incidental that he remembered to mention only the sweet dishes? On another occasion Schikkerling and his comrades came upon a farm with a variety of wild as well as cultivated fruit ranging from figs and pomegranates to medlar (*mispel*) and wild plums (*stamvrugte*).¹⁸⁸ So there were times of good and abundant food as well as lean and trying times. When studying the diary it becomes apparent that the topic of food became increasingly important to Schikkerling from the middle of the winter of 1901 onwards. This is in accordance with the account of the war provided in Chapter VIII.

The stress caused by the unavailability of horses and the merciless effect of horse sickness is discussed in Chapter VI and VII. Schikkerling experienced this when his trusty horse, Ramkat,

¹⁸³ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 21.1.1901, p. 137.

¹⁸⁴ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 12.6.1901, pp. 219-224.

¹⁸⁵ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 24.7.1901 and 25.7.1901, p. 265.

¹⁸⁶ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 18.1.1902, p. 346.

¹⁸⁷ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 25.12.1901, p. 343.

¹⁸⁸ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 14.9.1901, p. 304.

succumbed to the dreaded disease. With the sorrow born of the affection that grows between a man and his horse in time of war, he simply sat down and cried. This was a man who had seen death on the battlefield and had somehow coped with everything yet he felt that he had an unpaid debt to his gallant animal.¹⁸⁹ All he could do was to weep. This was a natural coping mechanism for the stress he was experiencing. It might well have been a means of release after troubled days of flight before the British drive of April 1901, which has been mentioned above, but it was nevertheless prompted by the sudden anguish of losing his horse.

For the greatest part of the guerrilla war phase Schikkerling was in the region of the northeastern Transvaal where the extremely high rainfall of the late summer months, February to April of 1901, was experienced. Not only did the rain cause physical discomfort among the burghers, it also led to melancholy and psychological dulling. On 2 March 1901 Schikkerling's entire entry was about the weather: "Rise early from my watery bed, it having rained during the night, seek my horse in the mist, and ride eighteen miles to laager. Shortly after our arrival, a terrific hailstorm breaks over us, overflowing the tiny moat around our dwelling, and flowing beneath us drenches our bedding. The storm subsides as quickly as it came. We slaughter a few sheep, and all is well."¹⁹⁰ This shows clearly that despite the stress and hardship of a hailstorm and drenched bedding, Schikkerling – and his mess mates – could cope with the situation. As soon as they had slaughtered some sheep and, by implication, the meat was grilling on the fire, all was well and the distress had been dispelled.

After the battle of Helvetia on 29 December 1900 when the famous "Lady Roberts" was captured, rain was a major factor limiting the removal of the prize. Schikkerling and a comrade, Kenny Malherbe, were temporarily separated from their friends. "We found them struggling in the rain, on the steep and slippery road, with the 4.7 which was being drawn by eighteen oxen and was skidding to and fro in the mud. Up to now this is the biggest gun taken in the war and as I admired it I reflected: 'But for these vile guns I would myself have been a soldier' – Shakespeare."¹⁹¹ The rain and the mud did not dampen the flush of victory which he saw fit to punctuate with a witticism from Shakespeare.

¹⁸⁹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 22.4.1901, p. 187.

¹⁹⁰ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 2.3.1901, p. 160.

¹⁹¹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 29.12.1900, pp. 118-119.

Throughout his diary Schikkerling managed to palliate the stress with his two strongest resistance resources. The first was his inclination to humour and wit and the second his strong feeling of compassion and loyalty towards his comrades and to others. His ability to see the amusing side of events and people was a GRR that braced him on frequent occasions. But his kindly predisposition towards others, his sensitivity and empathy go hand in hand with his humour. An example of this is his remark about a middle aged mess mate, Boetdan de Villiers, whose main task it was to mind the horses. “Of the good things, Fate had dealt him only 6/8 in the pound. He is nevertheless happy; either because he is too philosophic to be unhappy, or, because he had at one time become so submerged in wretchedness that his point of view had shifted ...” He continued to liken this man to Cervantes’ Sancho Panza, saying: “... every man is as God made him, and some a great deal worse”.¹⁹²

The anecdote of “Swart Lawaai” who because of his greediness was pecked by a breeding hen is one of the classic tales of humor of the war. He firmly believed that he had been bitten by a snake and that he was about to die. He begged his comrades to read to him from the Bible in his saddlebag before he died. Like any good yarn this one also had its punchline – the pages with the most appropriate words for a “dying” man had been torn out of the Bible to roll a cigarette.¹⁹³

As will become evident in the discussion below, Schikkerling’s relationships with others was characterized by what Baron and Byrne describe as prosocial behaviour.¹⁹⁴ Some of his comrades formed part of his war experience right from the very beginning of the war. The brothers Jack and Sidney Rocher and Barn and George Greeff were among his comrades during the campaign in Natal, and they were often mentioned in his diary even in the last months of the war.¹⁹⁵ In June 1901 when food was scarce and they had only Kubu mealies for breakfast, he wrote: “We are fortunate in having the restless Barn [Greeff] with us. He is ever on the move and foraging, therefore we will not starve. With his impulse and fire he has the kindest heart and will give away his last item. He has spent much pains on me and helped me out of dangers innumerable.”¹⁹⁶ Among his companions there was also the strange character Blankenberg, who carried his violin

¹⁹² R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 21.7.1901, p. 260.

¹⁹³ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 27.5.1901, pp. 205-206.

¹⁹⁴ R.A. Baron and D Byrne, *Social psychology*, pp. 406-407.

¹⁹⁵ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 25.12.1901, pp. 13, 16, 343.

¹⁹⁶ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 29.6.1901, p. 241.

with him at all times, there was Kenny Malherbe who accompanied him on many expeditions. Another was the compassionate Polly Burger who once held a water bottle to the lips of a wounded enemy and who at a later date accompanied Schikkerling on a carefree visit to Mrs Munro in Pilgrim's Rest for a sumptuous meal. Then there was also the good Boetdan de Villiers, who cared for the horses, and several others.¹⁹⁷ Schikkerling formed part of a social group who provided moral support and he gave as much as he received. He knew he could rely on these men and this was an important GRR to Schikkerling. Then too the assistance which he could give to them must have made him feel good, and probably was an uplifting experience in a time filled with distress.¹⁹⁸

His compassion for those comrades who surrendered is illustrated by his account of the farewell scene when, during Bindon-Blood's drive of April 1901, a number of men decided that they could run no further and would wait for the British to capture them. There was no recrimination or bitterness in his words; rather there were a sense of empathy and perhaps just a touch of sadness to be detected in his words.¹⁹⁹ Baron and Byrne stress that empathy does not merely mean "I feel your pain," but also "I understand your pain".²⁰⁰ In his characteristically philosophical manner, reinforced by a quotation from Shakespeare, Schikkerling extolled the virtues of the women and young girls who endured a great deal of suffering. "One girl of about eighteen, barefoot, and with hardly a dress to her body, was all alone catching and harnessing donkeys. No one cared to help her ... A woman is probably more adaptable than a man ... There are few women that have not a store of pent up virtue against the call of need."²⁰¹

Schikkerling was certainly an extraordinary burgher and his diary paints a vivid picture of the guerrilla war seen by a young man with remarkable sense of coherence, humourous streak and social disposition, but it is important to realize that there were many Boers who possessed similar positive traits and coped successfully in various ways with the many stressors. Some of them, like Field Cornet Meyburgh, perished. Others, like the unusual Barn Greeff or the reliable Boetdan de Villiers disappeared from the pages of history once the war ended. Nevertheless, the psychological

¹⁹⁷ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous, ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ R.A. Baron and D Byrne, *Social psychology*, pp. 406-407.

¹⁹⁹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 19.4.1901, p. 182.

²⁰⁰ R.A. Baron and D Byrne, *Social psychology*, p. 408.

²⁰¹ R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 19.4.1901, p. 179.

impact of guerrilla warfare – encountered in its many different forms – was experienced by all and countless burghers managed to cope with it in a positive spirit.

Perhaps Schikkerling's balanced nature can be best summed up by his penultimate entry in his diary. On his way home, after the peace accord had been signed, he spent a last night near a British blockhouse adjoining the road, "...occupied by a few of the 3rd Kings Royal Rifles. The half-dozen occupants were kinder than I am able to describe. They questioned me and listened with great deference, treating me like a long-lost brother. They walked up and down with me in the cool evening air and would hardly let me go. Two came with me down to the stream, H.T. Dell and John Cornish, and on parting asked, of all things, for my card. This guerrilla etiquette is overpowering."²⁰²

3. Resolution

In analysing the psychological impact of guerrilla warfare on the Boers it is of course necessary not only to examine the examples that are reviewed above, but to look far wider. By keeping in mind the experiences of the many other burghers and officers that have been dealt with in this study it becomes clear that there was not simply one universal effect on all the thousands of men who were involved in the war. The impact varied; indeed it varied greatly. It cannot simply be assumed that the stress experienced by every Boer during the guerrilla phase, albeit at different intensities or under different circumstances, had the same negative result on everyone who was engaged in the war. Nor can it be claimed that the physical hardships and the mental suffering made the burghers better or stronger individuals. The eventual outcome of the stress differed from one man to the next. However, and this is unquestionably true, the guerrilla phase engendered an extremely wide range of stressors and in fact the burghers and officers experienced stress in many ways, to a greater extent and over longer periods of time than was the case in the conventional phase of the war or, for that matter, in time of peace. Therefore the demand on their resistance resources in order to cope with the stress and eventually survive the ordeals of the war in other words, to be a bitterender, was huge. Hopefully this multi-disciplinary approach will lead to a better understanding of the history of the Anglo-Boer War.

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R.W. Schikkerling, *Commando courageous*, 16.6.1902, p. 395.