

MILITARY COMMANDERS OF THE WAR (1880-1881)

* **Cmdt C. J. Nöthling**

(Biographical Portraits)

Anstruther, Lt Col Philip (1841-1880)

Commander of the British Garrison at Lydenburg who marched to Pretoria when the war broke out. Son of an official in the English East India Company, he joined the 94th Foot in 1858 and came with his regiment to South Africa in 1879 where he distinguished himself at Ulundi. Anstruther was promoted Lieutenant-Colonel and given command of the Lydenburg battalion in August 1880. Not heeding warnings that he might be ambushed, Anstruther was taken by surprise when he encountered a Boer force under Cmdt F. G. Joubert near Bronkhorstspuit. In the ensuing battle he was forced to surrender, having lost one officer and 55 men. Anstruther, who was among the 99 wounded, died as result of shock following the amputation of his leg. His grave is situated five kilometres south of Bronkhorstspuit, just to the east of the Delmas road.

Auchinleck, Maj Daniel (d. 1886)

He started his military career as an ensign in the 21st Regiment in January 1867 and received his first commission in September 1869. Auchinleck, who first saw active service in the Ashanti Campaign (1873-74), was employed as an instructor of musketry prior to his promotion to Captain in October 1878. In the following year he was present at the Battle of Ulundi and took part in the expedition against Sekukuni (1879). During the First Anglo-Boer War he commanded E Company of 2nd Battalion (21st Royal Scots Fusiliers) which came under heavy fire during the siege of Rustenburg Fort. Notwithstanding the fact that he had been wounded four times during the siege, Auchinleck distinguished himself as an efficient and intrepid officer. Despite the half-rations and exposure in a crowded mud fort, the health of the garrison remained sound and Auchinleck received a brevet-majority for his exemplary conduct. In 1884 he served in Madras (India) but in the following year he was back at his HQ unit in Portland (UK) where he served until his

transfer to Burma with the 2nd Battalion in 1886. This fearless soldier, who in the past had courted death on numerous occasions and survived, met his ultimate fate on 15 September 1886 in Thayabin (Burma) where he was fatally wounded. A photograph of Maj Auchinleck depicts him as a big, burly man of fair colouring with a large moustache.

Bellairs, Sir William (1828-1913)

Son of Sir William Bellairs, veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, Bellairs, who started his military career as an ensign in the 94th Regiment, fought in the Crimean War (1854-1855) and served with distinction in the West-Indies, Ireland, Canada and Gibraltar. He also saw service in South Africa and during the 9th Frontier War (1877-78) was appointed Deputy Adjutant-General of the British forces on the Eastern frontier. During the Zulu War of 1879 he served on Lord Chelmsford's staff and in the following year was appointed acting Administrator in Natal. Soon afterwards he was sent to Pretoria to take charge as brigade commander of the forces in Transvaal. When the war broke out, he was charged with the defence of Pretoria and the garrisons stationed at Potchefstroom and Lydenburg. His warning to Anstruther about a possible ambush could not prevent the disaster on 21 December 1880 at Bronkhorstspuit. Despite having the arduous task of taking care of 3 700 civilians in the warm summer of 1881, Bellairs proved himself an able administrator and thanks to the efficient distribution of food, the rate of diseases was fairly low. Due to a lack of mounted troops, he was virtually forced to take a defensive stand and as the Boers never really exerted pressure on the besieged camp, the Pretoria garrison held out until the ceasefire in March 1881. In April that year he succeeded Sir Owen Lanyon as Administrator in Transvaal, his main task being the withdrawal of British troops. He was promoted major-general in 1884 and on his retirement three years later held the rank of lieutenant-general.

**Brook, Maj-Gen Edmund Smith
(1845-1910)**

In August 1866 he joined the British Army as an ensign in the 94th Foot Regiment and received his first commission on 25 January 1871. Following his promotion to captain in December 1878, he was posted to South Africa where he took part in the Battle of Ulundi (1879) and operations against Manyanya and Sekukuni. During the first Anglo-Boer War he succeeded Capt Campbell as commanding officer of the British garrison at the Marabastadt Fort (Eerstegoud) which was situated to the south of Pietersburg. As the site selected for the garrison was most unsuitable with Gen Vorster's men occupying the surrounding hills overlooking the fort, Brook and his small force of 60 men were constantly under fire. He distinguished himself as an able commander and despite the fact that the Boers shelled the fort with two ship carronades, casualties on British side were relatively low — five killed and eight wounded. Brook, who was made colonel in February 1886, later on became a battalion commander in the Connaught Rangers at Galway. Promoted to maj gen in 1891, he also commanded the 2nd Brigade Tchi Field Force (India, 1897-8) and the Harrismith and Cape Colony Districts during the Second Anglo-Boer War. He died at Ballinahown, Cork, on 17 April 1910.

Clarke, Sir Marshall James (1841-1909)

Born in Shronell (Ireland), his military career started at a training base in Woolwich in 1860. Commissioned in the Royal Artillery in 1863, he served in India and consequently in Natal where he was appointed to a civil position in 1873. In the same year he took part in an expedition against the Hlubi Chief Langalibalele and prior to his appointment as aide-de-camp to Shepstone in 1877, he was resident magistrate at Pietermaritzburg. He accompanied Shepstone on his march to annex the Republic and took over as Special Commissioner in Lydenburg. When fighting broke out in December 1880 at Potchefstroom, Clarke, who had taken command of the garrison in the town, surrendered after a brief skirmish. In 1880 he became a magistrate in Basutoland (Lesotho). In 1881 he was appointed Chief of the Cape Police but soon afterwards was given command of the Turkish Regiment in Egypt. After his retirement from the army in 1883, he became resident commissioner of Basutoland. Knighted in 1886, Clarke also had terms of service as resident commissioner in Zululand and Southern Rhode-

sia until 1905. He died four years after his retirement and was buried in Dublin.

Colley, Sir George Pomeroy (1835-1881)

Colley whose military career started in 1852, was a seasoned soldier when the war broke out in 1880. He had served in various parts of the world inter alia China, India and South-East Africa. At the onset of the war, Maj-Gen Colley, who at the time was Governor of Natal and High Commissioner for South-Eastern Africa, advanced with a force of 1 200 men into the Transvaal but was checked at Laing's Nek. After suffering reverses at Ingogo and Laing's Nek, Colley encamped his troops on Majuba Hill on 26 February 1881. However, the Boers stormed the hill and in the ensuing battle Colley was mortally wounded. He was buried in the military cemetery at Mount Prospect near Amajuba.

**Cronjé, Gen Pieter Arnoldus
(1836-1911)**

Born on a farm near Colesberg, he accompanied his family on a trek to the Orange Free State in 1844. After the Battle of Boomplaats (1848) the family moved to Potchefstroom. Appointed Assistant field cornet in the Schoonspruit ward in 1857, Cronjé bluntly refused to take up arms against the Free Staters in that same year and in 1860 also refrained from getting involved in the Transvaal Civil War. Following the annexation of Transvaal, he was elected chief Boer leader of Potchefstroom district and during the Paardeberg meeting in December 1880 rose to the rank of assistant commandant-general. When he and 500 burghers arrived in Potchefstroom to have the proclamation of Transvaal's independence published, the first shots of the war were fired when he came up against the British garrison stationed there. After two days the garrison under Maj Clark surrendered but instead of taking the nearby British camp under Col R. W. C. Winsloe, Cronjé opted for a siege. While this siege dragged on Cronjé, who obviously set regional above national interests, made no serious attempt to end the impasse at Potchefstroom, thereby immobilising forces that otherwise could have been deployed elsewhere. In 1896 he achieved military fame for the conquest of the Jameson raiders at Doornkop, and when the second Anglo-Boer War broke out he was given command of the western front. Despite his early successes at Modder River and Magersfontein, he proved himself a poor tactician. As at Potchefstroom 18 years before, he besieged instead of captured Mafeking. His

demise took place at Paardeberg in February 1900 where he and his encircled force of 4 000 men had to surrender to Lord Roberts. He was sent to St Helena and he remained there until the end of the war. Bed-ridden and embittered at the end of his life, he died on 4 February 1911. He was buried on his farm Palmietfontein.

Joubert, Cmdt Francois Gerhardus (1827-1904)

From an early age he played an active role in public affairs; he was present at the Sand River Convention (1852) and became a member of the Transvaal Volksraad. He distinguished himself at the Battle of Bronkhorstspuit on 20 December 1880 when, commanding a force of 200 men, he intercepted Lt Col Anstruther's relieve column 60 kilometres east of Pretoria. Following Anstruther's refusal to remain stationary as Joubert had requested, a sharp engagement took place in which the British force was defeated. In her book *The Transvaal War 1880-1881*, Lady Bellairs relates that after the battle Commandant Joubert shook hands with Anstruther, expressing his regret at seeing him among the wounded. According to Bellairs, the two commanders afterwards shared a glass of champagne with Joubert proposing a toast to the Queen and expressing the hope that the British soldiers would leave the Transvaal. Joubert's feat of arms at Bronkhorstspuit earned him the nickname 'Frans Held' (Frans the Hero). He died at Elandsfontein (Carolina) on 17 April 1904.

Joubert, Cmdt Gen Petrus Jacobus (1831-1900)

Joubert, who accompanied his family during the Great Trek to Natal, arrived in the Transvaal where he settled as farmer in 1847. Entering politics while still in his twenties, he was elected to the Volksraad. He became chairman of the legislative body in 1873 and served as acting State President during President T. F. Burger's visit to Europe in 1875/76. Although he retired from public life shortly afterwards, the annexation of Transvaal prompted his return to the political fray and in 1878 he accompanied Paul Kruger to Britain in an attempt to secure independence for Transvaal. When war broke out in 1880, he served as a member of the triumvirate, and interim body responsible for running the affairs of the country. Joubert was also given charge of the Boer commandos on the Natal frontier where he and his sub-commanders defeated the British at Laing's Nek, Ingogo and Majuba. After the war he

remained in politics, and from 1882 onwards held the posts of Vice-President, Commandant-General and Superintendent of Native Affairs. When the Second Anglo-Boer War broke out in 1899, he directed the campaign in Natal. Following an injury during the retreat from Estcourt, he handed his command over to Gen Louis Botha and returned to Pretoria. However, he became seriously ill on 24 March 1900 and died three days later. He was buried in the family tomb on his farm Rustfontein in the Wakkerstroom district.

Lombard, Cmdt Johannes Petrus La Grange (1846-1939)

Born at Riversdale, Lombard grew up in the Bloemfontein district and took part in the Basuto War of 1865. When the First Anglo-Boer War broke out in 1880, Lombard, who had settled in the Heidelberg district, was appointed commandant of the Boer forces that laid siege to Standerton. From 1882 until the Second Anglo-Boer War he played an active role in politics, representing the wards of Standerton and Bethal in the Transvaal Volksraad. During the Second Anglo-Boer War he commanded the well-trained Dutch Corps. When the corps ceased to exist as a separate unit in October 1899, Lombard became first a member and later chairman of the military court in the eastern districts. He died on 12 August 1939 in Pretoria.

Long, Lt Walter Hillyar Colquhoun (b. 1858)

He was appointed second lieutenant in the 6th Dragoons on 5 October 1878 and transferred to the 94th Regiment in March 1880. When the garrison (companies of the 94th Foot) were withdrawn from the Lydenburg Fort in December 1880, a small detachment under Lt Long was left behind to guard the military stores. During the siege of the fort numerous skirmishes took place in which both sides made ample use of improvised artillery pieces. Prolonged illness and a slight splinterwound forced Lt Long to give over the command to Surgeon Officer Falvey from 12 to 15 March 1881 but during the last two weeks of hostilities he resumed charge, seeing to it that the enemy's last desperate attempts to take the fort failed. However, the British soldiers who so brilliantly distinguished themselves during the siege tarnished their fine record through acts of insubordination when the hostilities came to an end. Accusations that Long had behaved cowardly during the siege led to a court of inquiry and he was given the choice of resigning his commission

or facing a court decision. Long resigned but evidently he was reappointed in the same year. He retired in February 1888.

Montague, Maj Gen William Edward (1888-1906)

He received his first commission in August 1860 and was a staff officer at Port Marshall prior to his transfer to the 'Flying Column' which conducted operations against hostile chiefs in the Transvaal. Shortly before the First Anglo-Boer War he also took part in the Zulu Campaign (1879) in Natal. When the war broke out in 1880, Maj Montague, who was attached to the 94th Regiment at the time, was sent from Pietermaritzburg to take over the command of the British garrison at Standerton. During the siege of the town which lasted 88 days, he led two sorties against the enemy positions but only slight casualties were suffered on both sides. In 1881 Montague was promoted to lieutenant-colonel, a rank he held until his retirement in July 1887 when he received a honorary rank of major-general. He died on 5 June 1906 at Ilfracombe.

Pretorius, Cmdt Henning Petrus Nicolaas (1844-1897)

Born at Pietermaritzburg (Natal), he began his military career in 1876 as a field-cornet in the Republic during the Sekukuni campaign. During the first Anglo-Boer War he was in charge of the Elandsfontein Boer laager some miles due west from Pretoria. Following an incident on 11 January 1881 in which his men captured a fodder mowing machine from the enemy, a British force under Lt Col Gildea launched a reprisal attack on Pretorius's camp four days later. Although the Boer stronghold came under heavy artillery fire during the encounter, some last minute reinforcements enabled Pretorius to repulse the enemy attack. In 1882 he was put in charge of the 'Transvaalsche artillerie korps', a position he held until his appointment as Commandant of the south-western frontier. During Gen Piet Joubert's absence from the Transvaal in 1890 he acted as Commandant-General and in 1896 was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel of the 'Staatsartillerie'. He died on the farm Abrahamschoot (Albany) while searching for the beam from which those condemned after the Slagtersnek incident had been hanged in 1816. He was buried in the Hero's Acre, Pretoria.

Saunders, Lt Col Haloven Morley (b. 1842)

Born on 10 December 1842, he received his first commission on 31 March 1863. Prior to the First Anglo-Boer War he saw service in Natal where he took part in the Zulu War of 1879. When the war broke out in 1880, Capt Saunders was sent from Newcastle to Wakkerstroom to succeed Capt George Froom as commanding officer of the British camp there. During the war skirmishes took place about the besieged fort frequently, the Boers occupying the surrounding hills from where they could dominate the area around the British camp. Capt Saunders and the two companies (58th Regiment) under his command resisted a strong attack on 22 February in which one of his men, Private Osborne, gallantly saved a fellow-soldier (he was awarded the Victoria Cross afterwards). Saunders, who was promoted to Major in July 1881, received the brevity rank of lieutenant-colonel shortly before his retirement in December 1882.

Schoeman, Cmdt Hendrik Jacobus (1840-1901)

Born in Pietermaritzburg, he accompanied his family when they moved north to settle in the Transvaal. He supported his father, Commandant General Stephanus Schoeman, during the civil strife in the Republic between 1860 and 1864. After the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877, he was elected member of the Volkskomitee which came into being in 1879. After the Paardekraal meeting in December 1880 Schoeman took the proclamation of independence to Sir William Lanyon in Pretoria. When fighting broke out soon afterwards, he was given command of the Boer forces in the Pretoria area. During the siege of the town he operated from the 'Red House Laager' (Rooihuiskraal) which was situated some miles south of the town. Except for a few sharp encounters on 29 December 1880 and 6th Jan 1881, fighting in this area was sporadic and indecisive. During the Second Anglo-Boer War Schoeman was given command over the Pretoria and Witwatersrand contingency which operated on the southern front along the Orange River. Following a personal clash with Gen De La Rey he was promptly removed and appointed in an administrative post. As a result of his surrender to the British in June 1900, he stood trial on a charge of high treason and although acquitted, was held in safe custody. Following the British occupation of Pietersburg where he had been imprisoned, Gen Schoeman was allowed to return to Pretoria.

This man, whose life was fraught with destiny died in a fateful way — shortly after his timely release from jail which saved him the ordeal of a third court martial, he was killed when a lyddite shellcase which he had kept in his house as a souvenir, exploded. He was buried in the Old Cemetery in Pretoria.

Smit, Lt Gen Nicolaas Jacobus (1837-1896)

Born in the Graaff-Reinet district, he went with his family to Natal in 1840. After the annexation of Natal the family moved to the Western Transvaal where he obtained the farm Leliefontein near Ventersdorp. Before the First Anglo-Boer War he participated in various punitive expeditions against rebellious tribal chiefs including Moko-pane (1854) and Mapela (1858). In 1864 he was appointed field-cornet of the Mooirivier-Potchefstroom ward in which capacity he took part in the 'Katlakter-Matshem' campaigns (1867-1868). Although he distinguished himself in the Sekukuni War, the campaign was a failure and Smit withdrew from public life. After the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877, Smit, who at the time was devoting his attention to his farm Goedehoop in the Ermelo district, joined the passive resistance movement. During the war he gave ample proof of his combat leadership and military strategy, especially in the battle of Schuinshoogte in Natal where he defeated the force of Gen Colley. When Gen Joubert noticed the presence of the British forces on Amajuba Mountain on 27 February, 1881, he ordered Smit to 'bring the enemy down from the mountain'. Smit, who had a fair knowledge of the terrain, carried out a methodical attack from three sides. Shortly after midday the enemy was completely overwhelmed. Entering into politics, Smit became a member of the Volksraad in 1882 and four years later he rose to the position of permanent chairman. He became vice-president and member of the Executive Council in 1887, offices he held until his early death on 4 April 1896 in Pretoria. He was buried in the Old Cemetery in Church Street, Pretoria.

Vorster, Assistant Cmdt Gen Barend Jacobs (1830-1898)

Born in the Colesberg district, he settled in the Soutpansberg in 1855. He participated in several campaigns against unruly tribes and when the war broke out in 1880, he was appointed assistant-cmdt gen (Soutpansberg). In this capacity he commanded the Boer force that laid siege to the

British garrison in Marabastadt Fort. From 1888 until his death he was native commissioner in the Kalkbank region (Pietersburg district).

Winsloe, Col Richard William Charles (1835-1917)

At the outbreak of the war he was a seasoned soldier with a war service dating back to the Crimean Campaign (1855-56) and the siege of Sevastopol. During the Zulu War (1869) he was seriously wounded at the Battle of Ulundi. Following the 'waggon affair' at Potchefstroom, Lt Col Winsloe with 140 men of the 21st Regiment and Maj R. A. Thornhill were sent to the town to restore order and apprehend Cronjé and his ringleaders. Arriving at Potchefstroom, Winsloe selected the site for a camp outside the town on open rising ground. After a few skirmishes in the town Maj Clarke surrendered on 18 December 1880 but Winsloe, although in a state of siege, decided to continue the fight. He held out until 21 March 1881 when he surrendered conditionally to Cronjé. During the siege he was wounded. Winsloe, at one time aide-de-camp to the Queen, also took part in the Burmese Expedition (1886-87) in which he commanded the relief force at Thabyabin. He retired in January 1887.

Wood, Sir Henry Evelyn (1838-1919)

Born at Braintree (Essex), Wood, who joined the Royal Navy in 1852, served with distinction in the Crimean Campaign (1855) and later as an officer in the 13th Light Dragoons in the Indian Mutiny (1858). He also saw active service on the Gold Coast (Ashanti Campaign) and in South Africa where he played an important role in the Zulu War of 1879 during which he was on many occasions mentioned in dispatches. After a brief stay in Britain he returned to South Africa in 1881 and during the First Anglo-Boer War was second-in-command to General Sir Pomeroy Colley. After the death of Colley he was entrusted by the British Government to conduct negotiations with the Boers which he did with distinction. From 1882 onwards he was given a succession of impressive commands, including that of the 2nd Army Corps. He was created field-marshal in 1903.

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