

**“CAUGHT BETWEEN THE BOERS AND THE  
BRITISH” – NORTHERN NATAL  
AFRIKANERS AND THE BOER OCCUPATION  
OF KLIP RIVER COUNTY<sup>1</sup>  
(OCTOBER 1899-JUNE 1900)**

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### **Introduction**

On 11 October 1899, when the ultimatum issued to Britain had expired, the Boer force consisting of roughly 11 400 burghers from the South African Republic (hereafter ZAR), commanded by Generals Erasmus, Kock and Meyer and 6 000 burghers from the Orange Free State (hereafter OFS), under Chief Commandant Prinsloo and Commandant De Villiers, invaded Natal and specifically Klip River County. The Republican objective seems to have been to defeat the force under Major-General William Penn-Symons at Dundee and to proceed to Ladysmith in order to capture the town, which was located at the important railway junction between the Republics and the Colony of Natal. Once this was achieved, the goal was to be defensive and to halt the advance of British reinforcements.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Klip River County consisted of the following districts: Klip River (Ladysmith), Newcastle, Dundee, Umsinga (Pomeroy). This area consisted of the triangle of land north of the Tugela River, west of the Buffalo River – the border with the ZAR, and east of the Drakensberg – the border with the Orange Free State. Most Natal Afrikaners resided in this area which very briefly, in 1847, functioned as the Klip River Republic, see: MM Behn, *The Klip River Insurrection, 1847*, MA-thesis, Natal-South Africa, 1932, *passim*.

2. F Pretorius, *The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, p.14.

Opposing this force were the 5 000 troops under Penn-Symons at Dundee, and the 9 600 troops at Ladysmith under Lieutenant-General George White. For their part, the British hoped to defeat the Republican forces in a single battle that would ensure peace before Christmas 1899. To achieve this the British congregated their forces around Dundee, leaving the Newcastle and Upper Tugela Districts, part of the Dundee District,<sup>3</sup> and the area immediately south of the Tugela River open to an invasion by the Boers.

Either through ignorance or arrogance, or despite leaving almost the entire length of the border with the Republics undefended, the Natal authorities believed that not much would come from a Boer invasion. Proof of this confidence is the fact that very little was done to assist the civilians, mostly Afrikaners, who remained in Northern Natal. In a response to an enquiry regarding his safety, WAC Bester of the farm Fourieskraal on the outskirts of Ladysmith, was informed by the local magistrate, that he could remain on his farm as he would be safe.<sup>4</sup> Others received similar assurances and proceeded to continue with their normal economic activities.<sup>5</sup> Most of the English residents of Klip River County, however, either received different advice, or acted on the principle of safety first, because they fled south to Durban and Pietermaritzburg. As a result only a handful of English and almost all the Afrikaners of Klip River County, the dominant European group resident in the area, remained to face the Boers.

The result of this encounter was one of the enduring questions facing any invading military force: what to do with civilians related to them by language, culture, ethnic origin and kin. At the same time the country being invaded needed to consider what measures or policies to adopt towards their subjects related to the invaders. Military History is littered with similar examples: be it Germans resident in Eastern Europe prior to the Second World War or Japanese resident in America and Canada

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3. Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), Colonial Office (hereafter CO) 179/213: Report by WH Tatham to Governor W Hely-Hutchinson on the condition of Newcastle after the Boer occupation, 2.7.1900; CH Stott, *The Boer Invasion of Natal. Being a True Account of Natal's Share of the Boer War of 1899-1900, as Viewed by a Natal Colonist*, p.29.

4. Pietermaritzburg Archive Repository (hereafter PAR), HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 26.12.1899, p.111.

5. PAR, Archives of the Ladysmith Magistrate (hereafter 1/LDS) 3/1/16: Letter Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, Ladysmith, to WJP van der Westhuizen, 6.10.1899; Attorney-General's Office (hereafter AGO) I/8/72: Correspondence regarding the return to Natal by JP Pretorius, TM Bester and HA Potgieter, 3.8.1900-14.8.1900; PAR, Colonial Secretaries Office (hereafter CSO) 288: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AC Krogman, 5.4.1901.

during the same war.<sup>6</sup> Within this context Natal Afrikaners found themselves in a political vice grip for the 242-days the Boer occupation of Klip River County lasted.

In terms of the historiography of the Anglo-Boer War, apart from some cameos in general works, very little has been written on the experiences of Natal Afrikaners during this conflict. Although limited in scale and scope, groundbreaking work was done by Verne Harris on the experiences of especially the Dundee Afrikaners.<sup>7</sup> Mark Coghlan, in his doctoral thesis, refers extensively to the strained relationship between Natal Afrikaners and the Natal Volunteers. Coghlan, however, generally writes from the perspective of the Natal Volunteers and as such does not treat Natal Afrikaners as victims but rather as collaborators, or at the very least, sympathisers with the Boer cause.<sup>8</sup> Within this context it is envisaged that this article will contribute to the expansion of the existing knowledge on the war experiences of especially the Klip River County Afrikaners.

### **Between the Republics and the Empire**

The Natal authorities were, based on the reports they had received, convinced that the vast majority of their Afrikaner subjects would behave perfectly loyal. Governor Hely-Hutchinson could therefore inform Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain that: “The most one can expect is that they take no active part against us. Here and there, no doubt there are actively disloyal men. But as long as the British troops suffer no reverses here is no probability that, as a body, the Natal Dutch would take an active part against us.”<sup>9</sup>

For their part, the Boers accepted that the Natal Afrikaners would respond to

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6. See for example: W Ng, *Japanese American Internment during World War II: A History and Reference Guide*. Greenwood, Westpoint, 2001; R Daniels, *Prisoners without Trial: Japanese Americans in World War II*. Hill and Wang, New York, 1993; H, Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*. Allen and Unwin, London, 1983.

7. VS Harris, *The Reluctant Rebels: The Impact of the Second Anglo-Boer War upon the Klip River Dutch Community with Special Reference to the Dutch Community of Dundee*, BA Hons-thesis, University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg), 1982, *passim*.

8. MS Coghlan, *The Natal Volunteers in the Anglo-Boer War, September 1899 to July 1902: Reality and Perception*, PhD-thesis, University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg), 2002, *passim*.

9. PRO, CO 179/206: Telegram Governor W Hely-Hutchinson to Colonial Secretary J Chamberlain, 15.9.1899.

the “calling of blood”.<sup>10</sup> A spy sent to Natal by Commandant Weilbach of Heidelberg reported, two days prior to the outbreak of war, that the Natal Afrikaners were very keen to assist the Boers and would merely wait for the invasion before joining. All they needed were rifles and ammunition.<sup>11</sup> This report was given further impetus by claims that Natal Afrikaners were, during the first week of the invasion, joining the Transvaal forces in hordes and rendering service in the intelligence department.<sup>12</sup> These assertions prompted *De Volksstem* to describe the invasion of the Boers as the Africanderising of Northern Natal and a process that “must awake strange feelings in the hearts of the Natal Boers”.<sup>13</sup> This euphoria was best summed up by Paul de Villiers, a rank-and-file member of the Boer forces, when he stated: “Natal really belongs to us.”<sup>14</sup>

Similar feelings were in reality shared by only a small number of Klip River County Afrikaners such as CS (Chris) Botha<sup>15</sup> and CM Wessels of Newcastle<sup>16</sup> and FJ de Jager,<sup>17</sup> DJ (Gert) de Waal and CJ (Cornelius) Pieters of Dundee<sup>18</sup> who joined the Boers as they invaded, and a group who fired on a picket of the 1<sup>st</sup> King’s Royal Rifles on the Helpmekaar-Dundee Road.<sup>19</sup>

In response to the claims that some Natal Afrikaners were taking the first option, the Natal authorities issued Proclamation No. 106 on 15 October 1899. The proclamation reminded all British subjects of their loyalty towards the crown and warned them not to become involved in treasonable or seditious acts, join the Boers in any military capacity, or to interact in an economic manner with them.<sup>20</sup> This

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10. EH Brookes, and C de B Webb, *A History of Natal*, p.204.

11. National Archive Repository (hereafter NAR), Kommandant-Generaal (hereafter KG) 822: Statement by JCJ van Rensburg, 9.10.1899.

12. NAR, A 739 Book 1: Telegram Roos to Reuter, 17.10.1899.

13. *De Volksstem*, 13.11.1899.

14. PAR, CSO 2587: Letter Magistrate P Hugo, Dundee, to Colonial Secretary, 14.3.1900.

15. PRO, CO 179/209: Statement by AJ Johnstone, 11.1.1900.

16. PAR, CSO 2912: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by CM Wessels, 28.11.1900.

17. PAR, AGO I/7/3: Regina vs. FJ de Jager, pp.45-46.

18. Vaal Technorama (hereafter VTR), JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.9, 1941.

19. PRO, CO 179/206: Diary of Events in Natal kept by Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, entry for 13.10.1899.

20. PAR, Natal Colonial Publications (hereafter NCP) 6/1/1/52: Proclamation No. 106 issued by Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, 15.10.1899; *Natal Witness*, 16.10.1899; *Times of Natal*, 16.10.1899.

proclamation issued by Governor Hely-Hutchinson did not please the Natal Government who felt “that a state of war existed in Natal” and that Martial Law should therefore be proclaimed to preserve order. A hesitant Hely-Hutchinson first consulted with High Commissioner Alfred Milner who pointed out that a state of war did not always necessitate the proclamation of Martial Law, and that Hely-Hutchinson had to weigh matters before making a decision.<sup>21</sup> This he did, and, after consulting Attorney-General Henry Bale and the Natal Government it was decided to declare Martial Law in the areas which the Boers had invaded namely, Klip River County and the Upper Tugela District. Proclamation No. 107 was therefore issued on 15 October 1899. The rationale behind this move was very simple – to prevent rebellion and to protect loyal subjects since several local Afrikaners were suspected of providing information and assistance to the Boers.<sup>22</sup>

The timing of the proclamations was questionable because by 16 October the Boers were already in control of the Newcastle District and large parts of the Dundee, Klip River and Upper Tugela Districts. It is unlikely that the proclamations would have reached the residents of these areas, even though the *Natal Mercury* and other newspapers only ceased to arrive in Newcastle after 29 October.<sup>23</sup> Such newspapers were generally only read by English Natalians, most of whom had already left the districts, and a few educated Afrikaners.

Fearing that Proclamations 106 and 107 would not reach the Natalians, the magistrate of Klip River District, on 17 October 1899, mailed Dutch copies of the proclamations to 28 farmers, 24 of whom were Afrikaners or were related to Afrikaners.<sup>24</sup> It is to be disputed if any of the 28 people in question received the proclamation, for by 18 October, the Boers had already occupied Elandslaagte where several of the people in question collected their mail. Fear also prevented the Afrikaners who received their mail in Ladysmith from collecting it after 9 October 1899, because Dan Bester who was riding on his bicycle from Ladysmith was stopped and searched, Pieter van Breda and JB van Blerk were arrested on suspicion of being Boer spies and

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21. PAR, CSO 2581: Telegram High Commissioner A Milner to Governor W Hely-Hutchison, 12.10.1899.

22. *Natal Witness*, 16.10.1899; PAR, NCP 6/1/1/52: Proclamation No. 107 issued by Governor W Hely-Hutchinson, 15.10.1899.

23. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 29.10.1899, p.62.

24. PAR, 1/LDS 3/1/1/16: Copies of proclamations mailed to 28 residents of Klip River District, 17.10.1899.

imprisoned,<sup>25</sup> while WAC Bester was detained for apparently communicating with the Boers and for the firing on a British patrol from his farm.<sup>26</sup>

Afrikaners around Dundee were also intimidated and harassed, especially by the Natal Carbineers, a colonial volunteer unit, as the following report testifies: “That morning we caught what we hoped would turn out a Boer spy, but he proved to be a law-abiding farmer. We had to keep him till our Boer linguists came to interrogate him. We put the fear of death into him to understand very clearly that all spies were to be hung up to a tree and a small fire made under them, and we showed him where it was done – our fireplace under a thorn tree. He was terrified enough to promise anything.”<sup>27</sup>

PC Cronjé,<sup>28</sup> PRN Vermaak and (AJ) Andries van Tonder were likewise arrested near Helpmekaar by the Umvoti Mounted Rifles for allegedly harbouring Boers and providing them with information.<sup>29</sup> Despite these arrests and subsequent harassment by the British forces most Natal Afrikaners in the war zone remained neutral.<sup>30</sup> In the wake of these arrests the first major battle of the war took place at Talana on 20 October 1899. Only a handful of Natal Afrikaners, including JM Maritz, Solomon Maritz,<sup>31</sup> TP Lezar,<sup>32</sup> AC Vermaak (jnr),<sup>33</sup> C van Zyl Lotz,<sup>34</sup> and DC Uys participated in the action. Uys who died in the battle became the first Natal Afrikaner to die in the war.<sup>35</sup> The rest preferred to remain passive and neutral. The battle ended in a stalemate with the Boers gaining a tactical victory as the British, who lost their

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25. *De Natal Afrikaner*, 20.10.1899; PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entry, 11.3.1900, p.206; PAR, CSO 2909: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by JB van Blerk, 11.10.1902.

26. PAR, CSO 1643: Enquiry by Hathorn and Co for the reasons for the detention of WAC Bester by the military authorities, 22.3.1900-27.3.1900.

27. *Times of Natal*, 16.10.1899.

28. PAR, CSO 1640: Minute paper regarding the whereabouts of PC Cronjé, 23.1.1900-20.2.1900.

29. PRO, CO 179/210: List of persons arrested under Martial Law, 6.4.1900; PAR, HF Schoon collection, A 72: Diary entries, 16.3.1900, 23.2.1900 and 29.3.1900, pp.217, 242 and 248-249.

30. CH Stott, p.43.

31. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Documentary evidence relative to Natal rebels who either surrendered or were captured, 21.5.1900.

32. PAR, AGO I/7/4: Regina vs. TP Lezar, pp.71-74.

33. PAR, AGO I/7/19: Rex vs. AC Vermaak, pp.364-367.

34. PAR, AGO I/7/14: Regina vs. C van Zyl Lotz, pp.114-116.

35. PAR, Master Supreme Court Estate Files (hereafter MSCE) 3940/1899: Estate file Dirk Cornelius Uys, killed in the battle at Dundee, 1899. On the memorial at the Dundee Dutch Reformed Church for those who died at the Battle of Talana, Uys is merely identified as D Uys.

commander Penn-Symons, withdrew via Van Tonder's Pass to Ladysmith. During their retreat from Dundee, the British forces treated the Natal Afrikaners abysmally by ransacking farms, assaulting and arresting people.<sup>36</sup>

The retreat of the British forces left the Dundee District open to occupation by the Republican forces. The Boers, under General Lucas Meyer, however failed to take the initiative that the retirement offered and when they were finally engaged in battle on 21 October 1899, a force under Colonel Ian Hamilton, defeated them at Elandslaagte. This was the last major military success for the British forces in Natal in 1899. On 30 October 1899, White failed to defeat the combined Republican forces at Modderspruit and Nicholson's Nek, suffering 1 764 casualties in the process.<sup>37</sup> In the wake of these defeats, George White committed the tactical error of withdrawing into Ladysmith, only to be besieged. This handed the Klip River District (Ladysmith) to the Republicans on a plate and sealed the fate of the Klip River County Afrikaners.

In the light of the British reversal and to protect loyal and faithful subjects, Governor Hely-Hutchinson issued Proclamation No. 108, extending Martial Law to all of Natal as well as Proviso B and Zululand. In the proclamation he made it clear that certain British subjects in the Klip River County and Upper Tugela District were suspected of supporting and providing information to the Boers, while others had rebelled and attempted to incite more people to do the same.<sup>38</sup> With the Boers in complete control of all of Klip River County, Attorney-General Henry Bale deemed the issuing of Proclamation No. 108 "a little late".<sup>39</sup>

Considering that the Natal and British authorities had deserted them, and the Boers had successfully invaded Natal, the Klip River County Afrikaners, in one of the recurring themes in the tragedy of war, were compelled to make some harrowing decisions: co-operate, resist passively or offer active resistance. In making their

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36. NAR, A 739, Vol 5, Book 2: Telegram from Roos to Reuter in Pretoria, 10.11.1899.

37. For accounts of the battles at Elandslaagte, Nicholson's Nek and Modderspruit, see amongst others: T Pakenham, *The Boer War*, pp.133-155; JH Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902. Vol 1. Die Boere-offensief Okt.-Nov.1899*, pp.303-341.

38. PAR, Archives of Government House (hereafter GH) 1454: Proclamation No. 108 extending Martial Law to all of Natal, Proviso B and Zululand, 23.10.1899; *De Natal Afrikaner*, 23.10.1899; *Natal Witness*, 24.10.1899.

39. PAR, AGO I/8/68: Minute paper by Prime Minister AH Hime referring to Proclamation No. 325 as published in the Cape Colony, 28.11.1899.

decision they had to weigh loyalty to the crown and the long term impact of their decision against the imperatives of blood ties and incipient Afrikaner nationalism, sympathy for the cause of the Boer Republics and hope for a Boer victory against the fear of the immediate consequences of the rebellion.<sup>40</sup>

The decision of the vast majority was not what the invaders had anticipated, for despite the military successes of the Boers and the desertion and maltreatment by the Colonial and Imperial forces and authorities the Afrikaners of Klip River County did not join the commandos in significant numbers. They preferred to remain passive and neutral in matters military in all probability because they knew, thanks to the various proclamations and warnings and pre-war talk, the negative consequences associated with any treasonable deeds.

### **The Republican's take action**

When the Boers eventually issued a proclamation, No. 20 of 1899 of the ZAR, on 9 November 1899, it was different from the one the Natal authorities had anticipated. General PJ (Piet) Joubert, proclaimed Martial Law in all the Districts occupied by the Boer forces, thereby authorising officers to seize all supplies required to maintain the commandos. The proclamation also notified the inhabitants of the penalties which would be inflicted for assistance given to the British forces, simultaneously undertaking to protect the life and property of all those who placed themselves under the protection of the ZAR and obeyed its laws. All those who refused to submit would be granted permission to leave the Klip River County within seven days. Persons who were driven from their farms or homes, or who had fled, would be allowed to return.<sup>41</sup>

The proclamation of Martial Law caused a great deal of confusion. ZAR officials like Under Secretary of State JC Krogh, General SW (Schalk) Burger and Justice of the Peace (hereafter JP) DP Wolfaardt from then on repeatedly declared that the institution of Martial Law meant that the Klip River County had been annexed to the Transvaal and that its inhabitants no longer owed allegiance to the crown.

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40. VS Harris, p.4.

41. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, containing the proclamation by Commandant-General PJ Joubert, 10.6.1901; PAR, GH 547: Proclamation by Commandant-General PJ Joubert, 9.11.1899; *De Volksstem*, 11.11.1899.



Within a week of it being issued the gist of Joubert's proclamation was known to many local Afrikaners, and at least two men from Newcastle by the surname of Terblanche indicated that they would join the Boers when the proclamation became "official" with the annexation of the Klip River County to the Transvaal.<sup>42</sup> Before long most Klip River County Afrikaners also took the declaration of Martial Law to mean the same as annexation. In time the renowned Natal historians Russell<sup>43</sup> and Brooks and Webb<sup>44</sup> likewise took the proclamation of Martial Law to mean annexation.

The proclamation was, however, never supposed to mean annexation or give the Natal Afrikaners the right to rescind their loyalty to the crown. Instead, Joubert had a clear picture in his mind of the position Natal Afrikaners found themselves in. He, after all, resided in the Volksrust District, only a short way across the border from Natal and knew the mind set of the Natal Afrikaners.<sup>45</sup> Although they generally received the Boers in a very friendly and helpful manner, they did so without compromising their loyalty to the Empire. An insightful Joubert expressed the fear harboured by many Natal Afrikaners at this stage namely, that the ZAR Government would not be able to defend them against persecution from the Natal authorities if they joined the Boers, or if the latter suffered serious reversals. Many local Afrikaners thought they knew the answer and thus by early November 1899, they had not risen spontaneously to join the invaders in large numbers.<sup>46</sup>

Officials of the Republican Governments, other Boers and some leading Natal Afrikaners, felt differently and viewed the lack of enthusiasm for the war effort, on the part of the Klip River County Afrikaners, as a great disappointment since they could have strengthened the Boer forces and assisted them in combating the lawlessness reigning in the County. Consequently it was determined to "commandeer the Afrikaners in Klip River County so as not only to bring pressure to bear upon the unwilling, but to afford, if possible, a pretext under which waverers who took up arms might shelter

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42. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 14-15.11.1900, pp.84-88.

43. R Russell, *Natal the Land and it's Story*, p.296.

44. EH Brookes and C de B Webb, p.208.

45. Joubert even had a holiday home in Durban. JM Wassermann, Attempts to Strip the Assets of the Transvaal, in JM Wassermann and BT Kearney, (eds). *A Warrior's Gateway. Durban and the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, p.374.

46. NAR, KG 850: Letter General PJ Joubert to President SJP Kruger, 27.10.1899; *Gedenkboek van den Oorlog in Zuid-Afrika*, p.188.

themselves against future prosecution”.<sup>47</sup>

Whence then did the order to commandeer the Natal Afrikaners originate? Historian Verne Harris wrongfully attributes it to Piet Joubert and says his proclamation created the impression that the Klip River County and its citizens had thereby become Transvalers. Joubert could not have created such an impression for on 13 November 1899, four days after issuing his proclamation he, accompanied by General Louis Botha and roughly 3 000 burghers from both Republics, crossed the Tugela River to push deeper into Natal. This left General Schalk Burger, as Assistant Commandant-General, in command of the Klip River County. Burger, possibly encouraged by the local Transvaal officials, Lodewyk de Jager, a wealthy farmer from Wasbank and the brother-in-law of General Lucas Meyer, and other prominent local Afrikaners,<sup>48</sup> decided to commandeer the Natal Afrikaners into service. This is borne out by Judge Mason, who after dealing with hundreds of rebel trials stated: “No direct evidence exists that the order to commandeer the Afrikaners emanated with the government in Pretoria, but the Assistant Commandant-General and Republican officials, directed and pressed for commandeering.”<sup>49</sup>

Using his initiative, and the power vested in him by the absence of Joubert, Schalk Burger took control of the situation by producing a “General Notice”, and in so doing placed his personal stamp on the proclamation issued by Joubert by dividing the County into three divisions – Newcastle, Dundee and Ladysmith – under the Christiaan Botha, JHF Meyer and TR Dannhauser respectively, while Lodewyk de Jager was appointed as Native Commissioner. This crude military administration had the duty to:

- “A. Record the names of all the inhabitants of their respective divisions, noting the loyalty or political attitude which each one wishes to adopt;
- B. Hold meetings in their respective divisions or wards on Wednesday 29th inst., for the election of Field-Cornets for the divisions or wards;
- C. Together with the elected Field-Cornets, each for his ward, to deliver to me the prepared lists and report on the execution of their instructions.”<sup>50</sup>

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47. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

48. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.7, 1941.

49. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

50. Various translations exist of the General Notice. None differ significantly. PRO, CO 179/218: Report

Schalk Burger and his cohorts had done their work superbly, and having thoroughly prepared the Afrikaners, he published his General Notice, printed by the Transvaal Government Printers in the field at Elandslaagte, on 23 November 1899. From then on the leaders of the Klip River County Afrikaners as listed in the General Notice managed the process as outlined by Burger and his henchmen.

In the week and a bit after Generals Joubert and Botha headed south, the world of the Klip River Afrikaners changed forever. In the first instance the clause in Joubert's proclamation that allowed seven days grace for those wishing to leave the County, was never implemented. Secondly, Burger and his inner circle of Natal Afrikaners started with the implementation of the document. For this the press was used. In the 17 November 1899 edition of *De Volksstem* it was announced that the Klip River County Afrikaners, under the leadership of Otto Krogman and Lodewyk de Jager, were set to join the commandos.<sup>51</sup> On the same day a rumour started to circulate that all Afrikaners in the area would have to report to Elandslaagte within days. Missionary Prozesky captured the Afrikaner reactions to this: "My neighbours will have to go too; it will cost many tears."<sup>52</sup> Pressure was simultaneously exerted on other Europeans like the German community at Elandskraal, to swear allegiance to the Transvaal since the proclamation had supposedly also ended their allegiance to the crown.<sup>53</sup>

The perpetrated deception that Joubert's proclamation had turned the inhabitants of the Klip River County into Transvaal subjects was supported by a second ruse. Talk of a possible black uprising first started to surface in late October 1899.<sup>54</sup> These rumours gained substance and local Afrikaners were informed that a black uprising was imminent and that they had no choice but to join the forces of the Transvaal to combat it. By the time Burger had penned his General Notice, rumours about armed Zulus between Wasbank and Dundee had become so convincing that a telegraphist and some railway workers had fled from Wasbank to Elandslaagte.<sup>55</sup> In

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by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, containing the General Notice by General SW Burger, 10.6.1901; PAR, GH 547: General Notice by General SW Burger, 23.11.1899.

51. *De Volksstem*, 17.10.1899.

52. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 17.11.1899, p.91.

53. PRO, CO 179/207: Telegram Major G Leuchars to Prime Minister AH Hime, 16.11.1899.

54. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 26.10.1899, p.57.

55. JH Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902. Vol III. Die stryd in Natal Jan.-Feb. 1900*, p.379.

time the Natal Afrikaners would realise that this rumour merely served as a pretext to conscript them.

Thus, when General Piet Joubert had retreated to north of the Tugela by the end of November 1899, the circumstances in the Klip River County had changed dramatically. Therefore, when he, suspecting that the Boer cause was spent, urged President Paul Kruger to seek means to bring about peace,<sup>56</sup> he was informed that it was not possible for, amongst other reasons, because it would amount to the betrayal of the Natal and Cape Afrikaners who had joined the Republican cause.<sup>57</sup>

### **Conscripting the Dundee District Afrikaners**

The enforcement of the General Notice took place via several meetings, the first of such which took place at Wasbank. All the white male inhabitants of the Dundee District and surrounding areas received a letter from Lodewyk de Jager, the newly appointed native commissioner, instructing them to attend a meeting at Wasbank Station on 20 November 1899.<sup>58</sup> They needed to be armed with food for three days, a rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition. Feeling that it was their duty to obey the order, a large number of Afrikaners from Dundee and Ladysmith attended the gathering. Only some arrived armed. De Jager had organised the meeting under the pretext that a black uprising was immanent and that a commando was needed to put it down. In the process he used his position of wealth and authority to influence many of those who attended to adopt a pro-conscription attitude.<sup>59</sup> The meeting was characterised by vehement and confused discussions.<sup>60</sup> WC Hattingh (JP),<sup>61</sup> JH Ries,<sup>62</sup> AL Jansen, DC Pieters, JH Potgieter and PR Vermaak, amongst others, spoke out very strongly against commandeering. The near chaotic meeting could not be contained to reach a decision

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

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

58. During this period Lodewyk de Jager, for several days, acted as the Commandant for Dundee and Newcastle. Foy Vermaak private collection: Letter JC Vermaak to CT Vermaak alias Miss C Herzog, 24.3.1901.

59. PAR, AGO I/7/23: Rex vs. LJ de Jager, pp.415-420.

60. PAR, AGO I/7/19: Rex vs. JH Ries, pp.352-355.

61. PAR, AGO I/7/29: Rex vs. WC Hattingh, pp.666-667.

62. PAR, AGO I/7/19: Rex vs. JH Ries, pp.352-355.

and several people left.<sup>63</sup> As a result the meeting was adjourned until the next day, 21 November.<sup>64</sup> The majority, however, remained behind that evening and slaughtered an ox, sold for this purpose to the Transvaal Government by Lodewyk de Jager.<sup>65</sup>

The following day Assistant Commandant-General Schalk Burger arrived from Modderspruit to attend the meeting.<sup>66</sup> He proceeded to read Joubert's proclamation, the first time it was aired in public; a full four days after the terms it contained had expired.<sup>67</sup> Burger then informed those present that the Klip River County had become part of the ZAR and that it was therefore their duty to obey the commandeering order, and that the local Afrikaners would in doing so, incur no liability to the British Government.<sup>68</sup> NJ (Piet) van Rensburg of Dundee spoke alongside Schalk Burger and, trying to convince people to join, said that a brother in need must be helped.<sup>69</sup> Again not everyone present accepted this injunction and another debate followed centring on what would happen should they join the Boers and subsequently be apprehended by the British. Burger responded with the question: "Will not they treat me the same as you."<sup>70</sup>

The presence of and speech by Burger paid dividends and a substantial number of the Afrikaners present were convinced that they had become Transvaal subjects<sup>71</sup> and were compelled to throw in their lot with the Boers and be commandeered.<sup>72</sup> Others, in all likelihood, joined out of fear believing the rumour that those Natal Afrikaners who did not take up arms would be treated as rebels of the

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63. PAR, CSO 2900: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by BJ Potgieter, 19.1.1903.

64. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901; VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

65. NAR, KG CR 2777/00: Proof submitted by the Commandant-General of slaughter animals purchased from LJ de Jager, 10.10.1899-8.3.1900.

66. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

67. VS Harris, p.28.

68. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

69. PAR, AGO I/7/29: Rex vs. NJ van Rensburg, pp.646-654. The surname of Van Rensburg was spelt in a number of ways. This spelling was the one he used himself.

70. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

71. PAR, AGO I/7/1: Regina vs. PR Vermaak, pp.1-7.

72. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

Republics and dealt with as such,<sup>73</sup> while the euphoria of the Boer success must also have swayed some. An individual like FDJ Havemann did not regard himself as influential enough to speak out against commandeering and when the powerful members of the community did not resist, he felt he could not do much despite his belief that the Boer cause would falter. Since he was well educated and fluent in Dutch and English, he had to compile commandeering lists.<sup>74</sup> In parting, Burger asked those present to meet on 29 November, as per his General Notice, to elect their officers.<sup>75</sup>

The meeting to do this was originally planned for Paddafontein, the location of the Judith Dutch Reformed Church, half-way between Dundee and Helpmekaar, but it was moved to the magistrate's office in Dundee. Two distinct groups were present at the meeting held under the chairmanship of DP Wolvaardt (JP): loyalists, and those willing to comply with the notice. This made for a volatile mix which was ignited by the opposing views of the local residents regarding their allegiance to the crown. Wolvaardt made it clear: "...that if any Afrikaner is so rotten as not to take up arms, he must be plundered and persecuted by any burgher who come across him." He took the argument one step further and declared that the local Afrikaners' allegiance to Britain was null and void since the British had vacated the area. This was disputed by AL Jansen, who emphasized that such an oath could not be broken. Jansen proceeded to warn all those present against joining the Boers. Another local Afrikaner, Barend Liebenberg, also did not mince his words and made it clear that he was a British subject and intended to remain one. His vociferous manner made him a marked man from then on.<sup>76</sup> Realising that they would possibly be conscripted, a number of those present requested passes to cross the Tugela. The request was refused and only passes to cross into the besieged Ladysmith were offered. Thereafter the loyalists left the meeting.<sup>77</sup>

It seems that the focus of the meeting then shifted to its original task, namely the election of officers. Piet van Rensburg was elected as field-cornet and DC Uys as his assistant. The "Vierkleur" was, amongst cheers raised by a local Afrikaner, Barend van der Linden, and those present were informed that they had to attend a meeting on 2 December 1899, at Dundee to receive arms. Afterwards JC Vermaak was appointed

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73. PAR, GH 556: Affidavit by AJ Oldacre before HR Bousfield, 22.1.1900.

74. PAR, AGO I/7/2: Regina vs. FDJ Havemann, pp.37-42.

75. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.7, 1941.

76. PRO, CO 179/213: Letter Dr Dalzell to Attorney-General H Bale, 10.8.1900.

77. PAR, AGO I/7/42: Statement by AW Illing, 22.5.1900.

secretary and with the assistance of Uys drew up the commandeering lists.<sup>78</sup>

The mood of the majority of Afrikaners at the time of the meeting is best summed up by an impartial observer, GC Bailey, a local minister in the Anglican Church: "A few are quite ready to join in, and a few, and those some of the best standing are most determined in their loyalty. The rest I fear will be frightened into taking up arms, although they would far rather remain quiet. From all I can hear there was a good deal of threatening... If the Boers had not invaded Natal, no Natal Boer would have joined; they are well content with British rule. As some of them say, "What more can we obtain, even if the Transvaal do win, and if they lose, then where are we?"<sup>79</sup>

The meeting scheduled to supply the commandeered Dundee Afrikaners with weapons took place at Dundee on 2 December. The promised arms were, however, not forthcoming and the meeting was rescheduled for 5 December at Paddafontein.<sup>80</sup> The Paddafontein meeting was not without incident and it seems that some Dundee Afrikaners again objected to being commandeered. Their leader, DC (Dirk) Pieters, read Commandant-General Piet Joubert's proclamation to all those present explaining its contents which said that nobody could be forced to take-up arms.<sup>81</sup> Wolfaardt responded by repeating his earlier statement and defying the proclamation of Joubert in the process: "...that if any Afrikander is so rotten as not to take up arms, he must be plundered and persecuted by any burger who come across him."<sup>82</sup> The Dundee Afrikaners willing to join, then received their Mausers, bandoliers, and ammunition.<sup>83</sup>

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78. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901; PAR, AGO I/7/42: Statement by AW Illing, 22.5.1900. JC Vermaak, more than forty years after the incident, stated that Hermanus Potgieter had raised the flag at Wilson's Store. See, VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.8, 1941.

79. Talana Museum, Dundee: Seven months under Boer rule, unpublished diary of GC Bailey, p.119.

80. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

81. PAR, AGO I/7/3: Regina vs. JJ Webb, pp.52-53.

82. PRO, CO 179/213: Letter Dr Dalzell to Attorney-General H Bale, 10.8.1900; Talana Museum, Dundee: Seven months under Boer rule, unpublished diary of GC Bailey, p.121; NAR, KG 819: Letter signed by 96 Natal Afrikaners to General JJ Ferreira, 8.1.1900.

83. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

According to JC Vermaak they were also issued with identification cards so that they could be identified in the event of death while they were informed that three horses would be compensated by the Transvaal Government. The so-called Natal Commando then divided into five corporalships under Cornelius (CJ) de Villiers,<sup>84</sup> Marthinus van Rooyen, Hendrik Davel, Piet Nienaber and Hendrik Laatz<sup>85</sup> and proceeded to march from Paddafontein to the laager at Helpmekaar which they occupied in conjunction with the Bethal Commando and other Transvaal forces.<sup>86</sup> At the front, carrying the Transvaal flag, rode the youthful Jacobus Kemp.<sup>87</sup>

### **Bringing the Newcastle District Afrikaners into the fold**

A meeting to entice the Afrikaner residents of the Newcastle District to join was held at Dannhauser.<sup>88</sup> Like at Wasbank, some concerns regarding the problems those who had taken the oath of allegiance to the crown and who intended to remain loyal would face, should they adhere to the commandeering order, were raised. It can be assumed that these concerns were treated in a comparable manner to the issues which were posed at Wasbank,<sup>89</sup> because shortly afterwards, a large number of Newcastle Afrikaners were forced into the fold.<sup>90</sup>

The meeting to commandeer the Afrikaners of the Newcastle District and to elect officers from their ranks took place on Wednesday 29 November 1899, at the Newcastle magistrate's office.<sup>91</sup> The message conveyed was the same as at Wasbank: they were compelled to join since a black uprising was a possibility and because they were now Transvaal subjects. This point was reiterated by Jan van Rooyen the special

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84. CJ de Villiers in time rose to the rank of Commandant in the Boer forces. PAR, CSO 1661: Receipt handed by Mrs WA Bester to J van Rensburg, 2.2.1900.

85. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.8, 1941.

86. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

87. PAR, AGO I/7/26: Rex vs. GP, JF and JS Kemp, pp.567-569. According to JC Vermaak Gert de Waal was the flag bearer. See, VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.8, 1941.

88. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 14.11.1899, pp.84-86.

89. PAR, AGO, 1/7/ 34: Rex vs. TR Dannhauser, pp.803-804.

90. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

91. PAR, AGO I/7/34: Regina vs. CS Botha, pp.780-786; *Natal Witness*, 21-24.2.1902.



envoy of General Schalk Burger.<sup>92</sup> At the meeting Thomas Joubert was elected as field-cornet, and CS (Chris) Botha, Willem Joubert and CP (Carl) Cronjé as his assistants.<sup>93</sup>

Immense pressure was placed on those who refused to join and many were intimidated and coaxed into enlisting for non-combat duties against their will.<sup>94</sup> In the case of the English who did not want to enlist it was said: “Any man who has been out here 30 years is a Dutchman.”<sup>95</sup> This must have appealed to GH Shorter who despite being born in England, adhered to the commandeering order. He even had his photograph taken under arms in front of the Newcastle Town Hall.<sup>96</sup>

Afrikaners unwilling to join the Newcastle Commando were deployed in non-combat duties,<sup>97</sup> but these orders did not last and some were, within a week, conscripted to do guard duty.<sup>98</sup> Just before Christmas those who persisted in dodging service were told in no uncertain terms that they had to take up arms or leave the county. As a result of this threat many opted to perform police duty while others fled to escape commandeering.<sup>99</sup> PJC Adendorff and his wife departed on 14 December 1899 for Harrismith, while C Bierbaum, W Sander, the Collyer brothers and David Keay, fled into the forests and ravines of the northern Drakensberg.<sup>100</sup>

Unwillingness to comply with the commandeering orders was treated with little mercy. Burgher Steyn, led by a black youth provided by Missionary Prozesky, went in search of Bierbaum, Sander, Keay and the Collyers.<sup>101</sup> Two brothers, Thomas and Michael Collyer, were eventually apprehended and forced to join the Newcastle

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92. PAR, AGO I/7/4: Regina vs. TP Lezar, pp.71-74; *Natal Witness*, 12.10.1900.

93. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs. CP Cronjé, p.510; *Natal Witness*, 11.10.1900 and 29.3.1901.

94. PRO, CO 179/209: Statement by AJ Johnstone, 11.1.1900.

95. *Natal Witness*, 22.3.1900.

96. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. GH Shorter, pp.121-124; *Natal Witness*, 2.11.1900. An interesting Natal Englishman who fought on the side of the Boers was John Weston, the first South African to pilot an aircraft. *Sunday Times*, 21.12.2003.

97. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. MC Adendorff, p.104; AGO I/7/7: Regina vs. JH Hattingh, pp.148-151; *Natal Witness*, 29.10.1900.

98. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 10.12.1899, p.104.

99. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 22.12.1899, p.111.

100. PAR, AGO I/7/7: Regina vs. PJC Adendorff, pp.139-140.

101. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 11.12.1899, p.105.

Commando.<sup>102</sup> PJC Adendorff likewise failed to escape and with his brother's assistance found a position as clerk in the office of the justice of the peace at Charlestown.<sup>103</sup> The attempts by Johannes Theodorus O'Neill to flee to the British lines also failed and he was apprehended and sent on commando to Zululand.<sup>104</sup>

The induction of the Newcastle Afrikaners who opted for combat duty in the Transvaal forces was formalised on 5 December when they were issued with Mausers, ammunition, and bandoliers at the magistrate's office.<sup>105</sup> The 127 strong Newcastle Commando thereafter departed via Dundee<sup>106</sup> across the Buffalo River, Scheepers Nek and Vryheid to the Zululand border. Their duty was to safe guard the border and deal with a possible black uprising.<sup>107</sup>

### **The Klip River District (Ladysmith District) Afrikaners conscripted by the Boers**

Several white male residents from the Ladysmith area had attended the initial meeting held at Wasbank.<sup>108</sup> A short while later all white men from the area received a note from TR Dannhauser who, on behalf of Lodewyk de Jager and Schalk Burger, commandeered them to attend a meeting on 29 November 1899 on Joseph Muller's farm Doornkraal, Elandslaagte. The aims of the meeting was to gain clarity on what it meant to be living under the protection of the Transvaal, to form a police force to deal with the increase in stock theft and to address the spread of smallpox.<sup>109</sup>

Approximately 60 local white men, the vast majority being Afrikaners,

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102. PAR, AGO I/7/4: Regina vs. T and MC Collyer, pp.83-84.

103. PAR, AGO I/7/7: Regina vs. PJC Adendorff, pp.139-140.

104. PAR, AGO I/7/23: Rex vs. JT O'Neill, p.439.

105. PAR, CSO 2876: Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission: Claim by AS Eksteen, 6.10.1902.

106. PAR, AGO I/7/6: Regina vs. WH (snr), WH (jnr) and IJ Boshoff, pp.128-129.

107. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs. TR Boshoff, pp.550-555; AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. G Adendorff, pp.91-93; AGO I/7/6: Regina vs. WH (snr), WH (jnr) and IJ Boshoff, pp.128-129; OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 4.12.1899, p.101.

108. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs. FJT Brandon, pp.219-226; Regina vs. HB Cronjé, pp.237-238; AGO I/7/30: Rex vs. WC Hattingh, pp.666-667; *Natal Witness*, 21.12.1900 and 18.12.1900.

109. PAR, Prime Minister's Office (hereafter PM) 87: Deposition by James Thorrold before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, 1/LDS I/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

attended the meeting. On arrival the men were presented with a document, addressed to the ZAR authorities, which they were expected to sign requesting the creation of a police corps to address the stock theft issue. Under Secretary of State Krogh of the ZAR then addressed the meeting and also facilitated the election of a field-cornet for the area. Three candidates were nominated: Lukas W Meyer, Otto (OW) Krogman and Hermanus Potgieter. In the subsequent election Krogman received 27 votes, Meyer 24 and Potgieter 8. Krogman and Krogh then ordered those present to be at Elandslaagte within 24 hours with whatever arms they had. Half would be deployed on the front and the other half kept in reserve.

FJT Brandon and many others present felt that they had been deceived and betrayed, as they had not attended the meeting expecting to be commandeered but to do police work.<sup>110</sup> WC Hattingh (JP), who at the Wasbank meeting had spoken out strongly against commandeering, likewise felt tricked. He attended the Doornkraal meeting and took part in the voting under the impression that it had to do with police duties, only to realise afterwards that they were being enlisted.<sup>111</sup> Attendees who, in accordance with Joubert's proclamation, requested a pass to leave the area likewise felt that they were misled because they were informed that this request could not be granted since they had voted for a field-cornet.<sup>112</sup> All those present thus, willingly or unwillingly, became members of the Boer forces or administration.

The Boer authorities had a far easier task in enlisting the Ladysmith Afrikaners residing in the lower reaches of the Klip River District. Here many voluntarily joined the Boer forces, possibly because of the overwhelming presence of the Boer Army. Two brothers, JG and IJ Hattingh, for instance, became involved in military operations around Ladysmith and participated in the attempted construction of a dam in the Klip River,<sup>113</sup> MA Smidt joined and worked on the railway and as a border guard on the Drakensberg,<sup>114</sup> while H Engelbrecht of Kromelmsboog joined the Free Staters on invasion and took part in an early skirmish with the Natal Carbineers at

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110. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

111. PAR, AGO 1/7/30: Rex vs. WC Hattingh, pp.666-667.

112. PAR, PM 87: Deposition by James Thorrold before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

113. PAR, AGO 1/7/30: Rex vs. JG and IJ Hattingh, pp.663-676.

114. PAR, AGO 1/7/8: Regina vs. MA and ME Smidt, pp.195-196; *Natal Witness*, 6.12.1900.

Uziko's Kraal, and in military operations around Ladysmith.<sup>115</sup> Most importantly, they readily supplied their knowledge of the terrain to the invaders and in the case of the elderly HA Potgieter of Beauvale, assisted the Boers by pointing out the drifts in the Tugela River.<sup>116</sup>

### **The plight of the Natal Afrikaner rebels**

What then did the Republics gain from forcing large numbers of Natal Afrikaners, ranging from boys in their teens to old-men in their seventies, who were British subjects, against their will into their forces? The 127 strong Newcastle Commando, who were tasked to safe guard the Zululand border and deal with a possible black uprising, saw little or no action.<sup>117</sup> It seems as if this task was done with very little conviction as the personnel fluctuated greatly with some members returning to the Newcastle District in mid-January 1900.<sup>118</sup> In an attempt to reverse the slipping away of the Newcastle Afrikaners from commando strict commandeering instructions were issued.<sup>119</sup> This seems to have had some success and the likes of DL van Niekerk and others,<sup>120</sup> who had previously managed to escape commandeering, were brought into the fold.<sup>121</sup> Field-Cornet Chris Botha, furthermore, overplayed the possibility of a black uprising to such an extent that almost all the men who had remained around Newcastle to perform non-combat duties were despatched to the Vryheid District.<sup>122</sup> The aggressive leadership style of Botha ensured that the Newcastle Commando became part of the 700 strong force<sup>123</sup> that attacked and overran the magistracy at

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115. PAR, AGO I/7/ 9: Regina vs. JC, JF and H Engelbrecht, pp.208-209; *Natal Witness*, 12.12.1900.

116. PAR, AGO I/7/8: Rex vs. HA Potgieter, p.197.

117. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs. TR Boshoff, pp.550-555; AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. G Adendorff, pp.91-93; AGO I/7/6: Regina vs. WH (snr), WH (jnr) and IJ Boshoff, pp.128-129; OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entry, 4.12.1899, p.101.

118. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs. JC and JN Boshoff, pp.519-520; Rex vs. WD Adendorff, pp.491-492.

119. PAR, AGO I/7/30: Rex vs. JP van der Westhuyzen, pp.690-695; *Natal Witness*, 1.11.1901.

120. PAR, AGO I/7/6: Regina vs. JJ, NJ (jnr) and DIP Degenaar, pp.131-133; AGO I/7/7: Regina vs. AM Cronjé, pp.153-154.

121. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs. DL van Niekerk, pp.499-501; *Natal Witness*, 29.3.1901.

122. OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, 13.1.1900, pp.120-121; 23.1.1900, p.123.

123. PAR, AGO I/7/22: Rex vs. PJ de Waal, pp.372-373; AGO I/7/23: Rex vs. DC Uys, p.413.

Nqutu on 31 January 1900.<sup>124</sup>

The attack did not take place without internal conflict. Most of the Natal men were not keen on taking part in an attack on an establishment of their own government and sent memorials to the effect to their leaders. No notice was taken of the protests. According to a black witness, Jonas, CL de Wet and his brother-in-law then aggressively confronted the rebel leaders and threw down their weapons in front of them claiming that the Boers had deceived them and that they “never really wanted to fight natives.” De Wet then challenged the leaders to arrest and send him to Pretoria.<sup>125</sup>

Hereafter the Newcastle Commando continued to operate in the Vryheid District. When the Siege of Ladysmith collapsed most remaining members started to return to the Newcastle District.<sup>126</sup> All subsequent attempts to enlist them were met with defiance.<sup>127</sup> Eventually only a handful of Newcastle Afrikaners persisted in serving the Boers by joining other commandos.<sup>128</sup>

The Newcastle Afrikaners who opted for or were forced into non-combat duties, rendered a range of services to the rudimentary administration set up by the ZAR<sup>129</sup> such as policemen and detectives,<sup>130</sup> bridge guards at the Buffalo River,<sup>131</sup> smallpox guards,<sup>132</sup> town guards,<sup>133</sup> livestock herders of looted animals,<sup>134</sup>

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124. PAR, AGO I/7/34: Rex vs. CS Botha, pp.780-786; JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, pp.383-384.

125. *Natal Witness*, 11.10.1900.

126. PAR, AGO I/7/7: Regina vs. CL, PJ and DR de Wet, pp.131-133; Regina vs. JJ, NJ (jnr) and DIP Degenaar, pp. 135-137; Regina vs. AM Cronjé (snr), pp.153-154; AGO I/7/30: Regina vs. CJS Hattingh, pp.682-683.

127. PAR, AGO I/7/7: Regina vs. AM Cronjé (snr), pp.153-154; AGO I/7/23: Rex vs. AMJ Cronjé, p.429.

128. PAR, AGO I/7/25: Rex vs. JC and JN Boshoff, pp.519-520; AGO I/7/7: Regina vs. CL, PJ and DR de Wet, pp.131-133.

129. PRO, CO 179/209: Statement by AJ Johnstone, 11.1.1900.

130. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. G Adendorff, pp.91-93; Regina vs. GH Shorter, pp.121-124; Regina vs. JH Hattingh, pp.148-151; AGO I/7/30: Rex vs. JP van der Westhuyzen, pp.690-695;

131. PAR, AGO I/7/29: Rex vs. PJ Cromhout, p.687; *Natal Witness*, 28.10.1901.

132. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. JH Hattingh, pp.148-151; Regina vs. JJ, NJ (jnr) and DIP Degenaar, pp.135-137; Regina vs. MC Adendorff, pp.102-104;

133. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. JC Donovan, pp.71-74; *Natal Witness*, 20.10.1900.

134. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. JC Donovan, pp.71-74; AGO I/7/23: Rex vs. JL and DB Fourie, pp.468-469.

commandeering officers both of goods and local men,<sup>135</sup> and native commissioners.<sup>136</sup> In the process the Newcastle Afrikaners, who opted for non-combat positions to avoid taking up arms, possibly rendered greater support to the Republican cause than those performing combat duty.

The so-called “Natal Commando” made up of Afrikaners of the Dundee area, and stationed at Helpmekaar, possibly never exceeded 150. It appears that the Natal Commando had no burning desire to distinguish themselves. Instead, they were very content to stay in the laager without rendering any active service to the Republics.<sup>137</sup> The Helpmekaar Laager accordingly functioned in a very *laissez faire* manner with some of the commandeered Dundee Afrikaners only staying for brief periods at a time. GJ Jordaan for instance, remained for but two weeks and<sup>138</sup> HH Laatz (jnr) for three weeks.<sup>139</sup> So relaxed was the atmosphere that it was exploited by Newcastle Afrikaners like JB Low<sup>140</sup> and JP van der Westhuyzen<sup>141</sup> who reported for duty at Helpmekaar rather than to proceed to Zululand.<sup>142</sup> The Special Court, which was created to try rebels, would eventually describe the role of the Natal Commando as “conducting patrols and general military work” on the Biggarsberg, around Helpmekaar and on the road down to the lower Tugela River.<sup>143</sup> In exceptional cases patrolling occurred further afield.<sup>144</sup>

It soon became clear that the ZAR did not want to commit the Natal

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135. PAR, AGO I/7/23: Rex vs. JA Eksteen, pp.434-436; AGO I/7/35: Rex vs. J Joubert (jnr), pp.849-853.

136. PAR, AGO I/7/5: Regina vs. WPJ Adendorff, pp.97-100; Regina vs. JJA Prozesky, pp.65-69; OE Prozesky private collection, Diary of JJA Prozesky: Diary entries, November 1899 to March 1900, pp.69-139.

137. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

138. PAR, AGO I/7/27: Rex vs. GJ Jordaan, pp.617-618.

139. PAR, AGO I/7/16: Rex vs. HH Laatz jnr and snr, pp.315-316.

140. NAR, KG 886: Letter Field-Cornet T Joubert to General L Meyer, 12.12.1899.

141. PAR, AGO I/7/30: Rex vs. JP van der Westhuyzen, pp.690-695; *Natal Witness*, 1.11.1901.

142. PAR, AGO I/7/24: Rex vs. JB Low, p.458; *Natal Witness*, 22.3.1901.

143. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband’s sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

144. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, pp.11-12, 1941.

Commando to the front line simply because most of its members could not be trusted.<sup>145</sup> On their part the Dundee Afrikaners stationed at Helpmekaar were clearly not content, especially with the policy of the ZAR authorities towards the loyalists who managed to evade conscription. In early January 1900, a letter to General JJ Ferreira, signed by 96 Afrikaners, argued that they were informed at the commandeering meeting held at Dundee on 29 November 1899, “that you either supported the Boers or you were against them”. Those who opted for the second choice were to be expelled across the Tugela within seven days. This did not happen and a third option seems to have opened up, that of remaining neutral. If this was a viable option some of the signatories indicated that they also would like to remain neutral since it was safer and more comfortable. The signatories further argued that if they fell into the hands of the British they could be executed for taking up arms. They therefore called on the Transvaal authorities, for the sake of the rebels, to implement the earlier choice for local whites to either enrol or be expelled across the Tugela.<sup>146</sup> Similar concerns raised with Commandant-General PJ Joubert on his visit to Helpmekaar on 13 February 1900 fell on deaf ears.<sup>147</sup>

In the light of the above it is understandable why the Dundee Afrikaners seemed more inclined to harass the loyalists in the area than to serve the Boers. On several occasions they formed a body of men to carry out arrests and requisition property belonging to loyal British subjects.<sup>148</sup> Intimidation tactics like these had some success and a number of men who did not join at Paddafontein subsequently did so out of fear.<sup>149</sup>

The relief of Ladysmith signalled the end of the responsibility the conscripted Afrikaners from Dundee felt towards the Republics. As a result the Natal Commando was practically disbanded and many rebels were granted leave to attend to their farms and livestock, while others started to retreat with their effects into the Transvaal.<sup>150</sup>

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145. JH Breytenbach, *Vol III*, p.377.

146. NAR, KG 819: Letter to General JJ Ferreira signed by 96 Natal Afrikaners, 8.1.1900.

147. PRO, CO 179/213: Addresses of welcome to General PJ Joubert from Natal rebels and Natal Afrikaner women, 13.2.1900.

148. PRO, CO 179/218: Report by President of the Special Court, AW Mason, in response to the application by Mrs JJ Webb to have her husband's sentence reduced, 10.6.1901.

149. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900.

150. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/14223: Declaration by JJ Kemp, 22.5.1900; PAR, AGO I/7/3: Regina vs. PJ Meyer, pp.59-61; AGO I/7/18: Rex vs. JA Nel, pp.331-332; Rex vs. CFH Posselt and

Only a small number opted to remain with the Boer commandos.<sup>151</sup>

Despite being tricked, most of the Ladysmith Afrikaners who had attended the meeting at Doornkraal gathered at the appointed time at the commissariat at Elandsplaagte. Here they were eventually each issued with a Mauser, bandoliers and ammunition.<sup>152</sup> The following day what became known as “Otto’s Commando” rode to the Boer “hoofdplaagte” at Modderspruit. Those who refused to be commandeered were allocated civil or non-combat positions such as police work and smallpox guards. The Ladysmith Afrikaners were after further delays instructed by General Joubert, since they knew the area, to accompany some burghers on a patrol down the Tugela River to Umhlumayo with the purpose of determining if a drift existed where the British could cross. The 60-strong commando, under Otto Krogman, returned a couple of days later after having lost their way.<sup>153</sup> Hereafter men like FM Colling, AI Marais,<sup>154</sup> IJ Buys, JF, FA, CJ and JT Truscott<sup>155</sup> worked as policemen and smallpox guards. Apart from dealing with smallpox, they also had to search the homesteads of blacks for firearms and deal with stock theft.<sup>156</sup> Some were allocated an additional role, namely that of military policemen, with the task of arresting deserting burghers.<sup>157</sup>

Eventually when Boer resistance started to crumble before the advance of the armies of Roberts and Buller the ZAR deserted the Klip River Afrikaners whom they had compelled into service. A lone Transvaal voice raised the future prospects which the Klip River County Afrikaners faced. In a letter to President Kruger, E Neethling, pleaded with him to put an end to the abandoning by their Republican kin of

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JCL Labuschagne, p.348; Rex vs. SJ and WL Meyer, pp.360-361; AGO I/7/27: Rex vs. AP, TC and HJ van den Berg, pp.585-588.

151. VTR, JC Vermaak collection, 03/2553/1: Memoirs of JC Vermaak, p.19, 1941.

152. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs. JL and AI Marais, pp.233-235; *Natal Witness*, 20.12.1900.

153. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

154. PAR, PM 87: Deposition by James Thorrold before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

155. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs. JC, FA, CJ and JT Truscott, pp.243-245; *Natal Witness*, 24.12.1900.

156. PAR, 1/LDS 1/7/8: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900; PAR, PM 87: Deposition by FJT Brandon before Magistrate HJ Colenbrander, 10.7.1900.

157. PAR, AGO I/7/9: Regina vs. JL and AI Marais, pp.233-235; *Natal Witness*, 20.12.1900.



specifically the Newcastle Afrikaners. Neethling felt ashamed that the Natal Afrikaners were standing to lose everything due to their having sided with the Boers.<sup>158</sup>

And lose everything they did. After the reoccupation of the Klip River County by the British Army and the Natal Colonial authorities those Natal Afrikaners who had collaborated with the invaders were prosecuted, tried and convicted. It is likely that most Natal Afrikaners who resided in the area occupied by the Boers had in one way or another compromised their loyalty to the crown by, as the *Natal Witness* described it, joining “hands in a struggle false in its foundation, cruel and wicked in its action and suicidal in its certain result.”<sup>159</sup> However, only a little over 500 of the Afrikaners of the Klip River County suspected of having taken part in the rebellion were arrested.<sup>160</sup> Eventually 302 of these were convicted of high treason. As far as sentences were concerned, the rebels were fined and/or imprisoned. The heaviest punishment imposed was that on CS Botha of Drycut, Newcastle who was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of £500 or a further year imprisonment.<sup>161</sup> The lightest sentence, that of one day, was given to 17-year-old ME Smit, 15-year-old HJ Strydom, 17-year-old GM Dekker and LW Eksteen.<sup>162</sup> But even worse was the economic suffering the rebels had to endure. Tens of thousands head of livestock, as well as other movable property, were lost to the military and Colonial authorities while immovable property were destroyed in numerous instances.

## Conclusion

When the Anglo-Boer War broke out, the Natal Afrikaners of Klip River County were deserted by the Colonial and Imperial authorities who adopted no measures or policies to protect them against the invading Republicans. On the other hand the Boers, as the invading and eventually occupying military force, expected the Natal Afrikaners who were related to them by culture, language, ethnic origin and kin, to join them in their struggle. When the vast majority did not come forward to do this, they found themselves in a political vice grip which, for the duration of the 242-day the

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158. NAR, SP Engelbrecht collection, A 371, 11, incoming letters to Pres SJP Kruger: Letter E Neethling to President SJP Kruger, 16.3.1900.

159. *Natal Witness*, 20.3.1900.

160. VS Harris, pp.32-34.

161. PAR, AGO I/7/34: Rex vs. CS Botha, p.784; *Natal Witness*, 21.2.1900 and 24.2.1902.

162. PAR, AGO I/7/15: Rex vs. HJ Strydom, p.313; AGO, I/7/23: Rex vs. LW Eksteen, p.445; AGO I/7/30: Rex vs. GM Dekker, pp.703-706; AGO I/7/9: Regina vs. ME Smit, pp.195-196.

Boer occupation of Klip River County, kept on pressurising them into joining the Republican cause. In spite of this pressure the vast majority of Afrikaners from Klip River County opted not to choose the traumatic path of rebellion, but were coerced into it. Within this context the phrase coined by the historian, Verne Harris, “reluctant rebels”, rings perfectly true.<sup>163</sup>

When the British forces finally liberated the Klip River County in May 1900, the Natal Afrikaners were deserted by the Boers. Subsequent claims by the Natal Afrikaner residents of the area that rebellion was forced upon them by means of conscription into a crude commandeering system, pursued in an inconsistent manner and based on deception, was rejected by their liberators.<sup>164</sup> Similarly, claims that they were abandoned by the Imperial and Colonial authorities were not accepted. As a result the Natal Colonial authorities held the rebels responsible for their actions and proceeded to punish them. Subsequently the Klip River County Afrikaners, who were caught between the Boers and the British, felt that they had three enemies – the Boers, the British Army and the Natal Colonial authorities.

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163. VS Harris, p.1.

164. PAR, Archives of the Dundee Magistrate (hereafter 1/DUN) 1/5/2/1: Evidence of FDJ Havemann during the preliminary hearing of CF Hattingh; Evidence of CF Hattingh during the preliminary hearing of same, 26.9.1900.