



Soldiers and Settlers in Africa 1850-1918

Stephen Miller

BRILL

Soldiers and Settlers in Africa, 1850–1918

History of Warfare

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Soldiers and Settlers in Africa, 1850–1918

Edited by
Stephen M. Miller



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On the cover: The formal annexation of the Orange Free State; Saluting the Royal Standard at Bloemfontein 1916, by Frank Dadd. (Original wash drawing for The Graphic, 7 July 1900).

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Stephen M. Miller

The idea for this edited collection came about in the fall of 2006 just after the Society for Military History put out the call for papers for its annual meeting. The conference has been traditionally dominated by specialists who work on fields related to American and European continental warfare. Africa has been a neglected area of interest. To help redress this imbalance, we submitted to the conference organizers three full panels dedicated to African military history. Most of the contributors to this book attended the 2007 meeting held in Frederick, Maryland; some of the essays in this volume are revised and extended versions of papers delivered there. This book is a small attempt to refocus the attention of military historians on an area of the world that has been for too long considered on the periphery and therefore of marginal interest. It is also a renewed call to historians of Africa and the British Empire to embrace the sub-field of military history and to examine some of the important research that is currently being conducted in the academy.

The essays in this volume concentrate on imperial conflict. Until recently, most historians of empire have concerned themselves with economic issues. Since the 1990s and the introduction of Manchester University's Studies in Imperialism series, research has turned to social and cultural aspects of empire. The role of the military, however, continues to be largely ignored. It may seem obvious, but if not for the military, there would have been no empire. Historians traditionally see the military as simply an arm of the civil power, an institution that did not think for itself but faithfully obeyed the directives given to it. These essays show that indeed the military thought for itself: its officers made policy, introduced new strategies and tactics, and utilized the services of local settlers and indigenes to pursue the interests of empire; the rank and file informed ideas in Great Britain concerning Africa and Africans.

Specifically, some of these essays concentrate on the experience of soldiers in Africa, examining issues of recruitment and service in

Britain's many wars of expansion and consolidation. Others focus on the civil-military dynamic in these types of struggles, and still others demonstrate the influence of the individual officer—his cultivation of the press and the selling of war, and his ability to define the terms of engagement and the character of his command. All of the essays emphasize the difficulties that Great Britain faced in the Victorian and Edwardian eras while sustaining, controlling, and extending its empire by means of military force.

For the past two decades the historiographical debate over the impact of imperialism upon late Victorian Britain has been largely shaped by a school of thought, dominated by John M. Mackenzie, which has emphasized the general popularity of Britain's colonial actions and the widespread influence that imperialism had on society.¹ In 2004 with the publication of *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*, Bernard Porter challenged this accepted wisdom by arguing that elements of British society, in particular the working classes, had been largely unaffected by empire.² Oddly enough, Porter makes little reference to the colonial wars of the era or to the military correspondents and soldiers, largely culled from the working classes, who traveled around Africa and elsewhere, and who through the press, their private correspondences, and published memoirs described the sights and sounds of 'exotic' lands and peoples.

The first group of essays focuses on the experience of soldiers in South Africa. Conflict in South Africa became commonplace in the nineteenth century. By the wars of the French Revolution, British policy had identified the growing strategic importance of the region. A presence at the Cape of Good Hope was crucial in safeguarding Britain's most important trade route to India. After the defeat of Napoleon I, the British consolidated their position by annexing the Cape Colony. Attempts at colonization, including the settlement of a transplanted English-speaking population, began in 1820. Over the course of the

¹ For example see J. M. Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion 1880–1960* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1984); Mackenzie, *Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1988); Mackenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1986); and Mackenzie, ed., *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

² Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

nineteenth century, the British presence in South Africa grew further as soldiers, merchants, missionaries, and settlers began to move into the interior.

With an empire rapidly expanding by mid-century, British resources were often stretched thin. Ministers were always reluctant to open up the Treasury to fund wars of expansion, which could result in even more costs in consolidation in the years that followed. London and, even more typically, local agents sought an effective and cheaper means to further their interests by relying on locally raised troops. In South Africa, British Governors of the Cape Colony, like Benjamin D'Urban, Peregrine Maitland, and Harry Smith, conducted aggressive programs to reduce the power of the Xhosa people in the Eastern Cape in order to obtain more land and labor for Cape settlers and eliminate the threat of an independent polity. In their military campaigns against the Xhosa, they were dependent on local service.

Tim Stapleton looks at the role of the Fingo (Mfengu) in the wars of colonial conquest in the Eastern Cape Colony in Chapter 2. After situating Fingo origins in the current historiographical debate, Stapleton discusses the military significance of the Fingo in five Cape-Xhosa wars. These conflicts include the War of the Axe (1846–47), the War of Mlanjeni (1850–53), the Fingo invasion of Gcaleka Xhosa territory in 1865, the War of Ngqayecibi (1877–78), and the Transkei Rebellion (1881). Stapleton argues that the Fingo played a central role in British plans for the Eastern Cape. British governors did not simply place them between white settlers and the Xhosa to act as a buffer, as the older literature often stresses, but increasingly used the Fingo as mercenaries in their low intensity struggle. Also departing from historical tradition, Stapleton gives Fingo leaders some agency in this colonial struggle. The wars with the Xhosa offered them opportunities to push their own agendas and establish a degree of influence—albeit temporarily—in the region.

In Chapter 3 John Laband and Paul Thompson turn to the Natal and Zululand. Typical of British colonial rule, the governor of Natal had the right to extract labor and military service, and as Laband and Thompson demonstrate, African participation in the wars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was essential in achieving victory over the Zulu and the Boers. It was the Boers who first used African irregular troops, Khoisan retainers, in their war against King Dingane from 1838–1840. The British followed suit when Lord Chelmsford encouraged the civil authority to call out levies and transfer them to

his command in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Unlike the Fingo in the Xhosa wars, the British failed to utilize the Natal Native Contingent effectively, drilling them in the European manner and trying to turn them into 'Regular' soldiers. If service in the Anglo-Zulu War did not meet military expectations, the locally raised paramilitary force, the Zululand Police, proved more effective in enforcing colonial administration in Zululand in the years following the war.

When the South African War erupted in October 1899, both the British and the Boers tacitly agreed that African participation in the war would be limited. In certain theaters of the conflict, however, African participation proved significant. As Laband and Thompson write,

It is one of the ironies of the so-called "white man's war" that the Boers had no compunction in taking blacks on campaign as servants, and allowing them to perform more obviously military tasks like digging trenches and, on occasion, taking part in combat.³

In the eastern theater, the British ordered all Zulu to cooperate, and Zulu were employed as scouts, laborers, and, at times, they participated in direct military engagements against the Boers, as was the case in the raid near Holkrans in April 1902. The British again turned to the Zulu for help during the 1906 Rebellion, this time deploying them against their fellow countrymen.

Not only did the British rely on locally raised troops in South Africa, but as Laband shows in Chapter 4, they employed European mercenaries as well. The British continued the practice of using mercenaries—usually thought to be a pre-modern means of fielding an armed force—beyond the Napoleonic Wars. German, Swiss and Italian legions were organized for the Crimean War. The conflict, however, ended before they made it to the front, leaving the British government with the problem of disbanding these men who were growing increasingly harder to contain in British garrison towns. When Sir George Grey, the High Commissioner for South Africa, asked for colonists to populate the recently conquered British Kaffraria, which would act as a buffer between established settlements at the Cape and the Xhosa, the men of the British German Legion were encouraged to volunteer. German military settlers, some with wives and families, began arriving at the Cape in 1856. Within five years, however, the settlement at

³ John Laband and Paul Thompson, "African Levies in Natal and Zululand, 1838–1906," p. 69.

Kaffraria had been largely abandoned; most of the settlers had either moved to the safety of the Cape Colony or had sailed to India for further military service in the Rebellion.

Laband analyzes the origins and motives of the men who volunteered. He also examines the causes of the failed settlement scheme and the lessons the British drew from them. In doing so, he evaluates the feasibility of turning soldiers into settlers and Germans into Anglo-South Africans. Although many British veterans of the South African War would remain after 1902 and try their fortunes as farmers, miners, and artisans, this would be the last attempt to plant military settlers in southern Africa in such a heavy-handed way.

In Chapter 5 Bill Nasson investigates another kind of ‘recruit’: the *agterryer*. As the British had to turn to local sources to supplement their army in their campaigns against the Xhosa and the Zulu, so too did the Boers. During the South African War, Boer manpower resources were stretched thin and, as they did historically, they turned to black communities to meet these deficiencies. Between 1899 and 1902, the two Boer Republics mobilized over twelve thousand mounted black retainers or *agterryers*, who served alongside white burghers and who were incorporated into the commando system. They dug trenches, performed scouting duties, and at times, took up rifles for the republican cause. The role of these men proved critical to sustaining the Boer war effort, especially in the latter stages of the war when burgher strength was failing.

Nasson examines the ambiguous social position the *agterryers* occupied in the ranks of the Boer commandos. Although they remained subordinates throughout the war, they developed intimate relationships with the Boers who commanded them and often shared a common sense of national outlook and identity. Yet if they expected any reevaluation of their place in South African society after the war because of their contribution, they were deeply in error. Although some were rewarded with freedom, most returned to the same families they served before the war. As Nasson writes, “the commando burgher—*agterryer* bond lapsed back into its pre-war groove of a civilian master—laborer relationship.”⁴

⁴ Bill Nasson, “‘Blacks who Backed the Boers’: Republican Commando Auxiliaries in the Anglo-Boer War or South African War, 1899–1902,” p. 143.

A second group of essays in this book looks at the ways in which events in Africa shaped politics and culture in Great Britain and how these same events shaped the politics and culture of the local landscape. In Chapter 6 Edward M. Spiers continues his ongoing investigation of the ways and means of how British soldiers informed imperial attitudes.⁵ Far from simply grumbling about service conditions, hot climates, and hard work, Victorian soldiers offered a window into a world rarely seen by the British public. They described the old slaving factories still standing along Ghana's coast; referred to biblical commentary and made comparisons to Islamic traditions as they marched from Cairo into the Sudan; and commented on the dress and customs of the Zulu and Xhosa of South Africa. Soldiers' stories—often passed on to local newspaper editors—were widely published and often supplemented by military images. As Spiers demonstrates, they contributed to the popular image of the empire and the army.

Jeffrey Meriwether shows in Chapter 7 how the stresses of the South African War forced the British government to reexamine its military and reassess its capabilities to defend its empire. The new Secretary for War, William St. John Brodrick, saw an army fraught with defects, and he did not want to wait for the war to finish before setting out on a major path of reform. For Brodrick, one of the most serious obstacles to a modernized efficient army was the overly centralized authority of the Commander-in-Chief. Lord Roberts not only rejected a challenge to his personal power, but like Sir Garnet Wolseley before him, saw civil authority as an uninformed hindrance to military competence. As a result, Roberts and Brodrick became locked in a feud over who—civilian or soldier—was best qualified to administer the army.

The war also put tremendous pressure on all aspects of South African society. Not only did it further upset race relations and worsen local Anglo-Boer dealings, it caused a major rift within the Boer community itself. Those who gave in, some of whom joined the British war effort, were labeled as *Hendsoppers* and were ostracized by *Bittereinders*—those committed to continuing the war. General C. R. de Wet, for one, never forgave his brother Piet for switching sides. But there was also

⁵ See Edward M. Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) and *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854–1902* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

a less-known rift within Boer leadership itself over the final terms of the Vereeniging treaty.

The Peace of Vereeniging, which brought the South African War to its end on 31 May 1902, is the focus of Chapter 8. Fransjohan Pretorius examines the motivations of the sixty delegates representing the Transvaal and the Orange Free State for accepting the ‘humiliating’ peace. Pretorius follows their struggles as many of them turned away from their strong conviction that the independence of the republics was not open for negotiation. De Wet, J. H. de la Rey, and others gradually changed their positions between March and May after learning of the desperate military, social, and economic conditions that plagued the republics and put great strains on their own solidarity. It was this change of heart among key figures that made peace with the British possible. In the end, an overwhelming majority of the delegates voted to accept the British terms.

Far from the close scrutiny of the government and the public, individual soldiers in Africa had extensive power in manufacturing their own careers and putting their stamp on colonial policy. Wolseley, immortalized by Gilbert and Sullivan as “the very model of a modern Major-General,” became Victorian Britain’s most beloved general.⁶ He served in the Crimean War, played a critical role in the destruction of Zululand in the wake of the Anglo-Zulu War, failed in his attempt to save Sir Charles Gordon at Khartoum, and eventually held the most senior position in the British army, that of Commander-in-Chief, at the time of the South African War. But it was in the Ashanti (Asante) War of 1873–74 that Wolseley firmly established his reputation. In Chapter 9, Ian Beckett explores Wolseley’s relationship with the press during that conflict and demonstrates how he shrewdly manipulated such well known correspondents as Windwoode Reade, G. A. Henty, and Henry Morton Stanley to project the image he wanted sold to the British public.

War correspondents were relatively new phenomena of modern war. William Howard Russell’s legendary reports of Crimea launched a new age not just in investigative journalism, but in the manufacturing of war propaganda as well. Covering European and particularly colonial

⁶ W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, “The Major-General’s Song,” in *The Pirates of Penzance*, 1879.

engagements in the Victorian era became a livelihood for many reporters. Wolseley was at first tentative about his relationship with this new media, but quickly he understood the importance that journalism was playing during wartime and its ability to create a personal legacy for him in the war's aftermath. Not only did he attempt to control the flow of information back to Britain through these sources, but he enlisted trusted officers to act as correspondents and historians in order to produce his own version of the events. Beckett shows how Wolseley created the image of the 'Ashanti Ring' and consciously manipulated accounts to further his own standing at home.

In Chapter 10 James Thomas looks at one of the most prominent members of Wolseley's Ashanti Ring: Sir Redvers Buller. Wolseley's junior by only half a dozen years, Buller spent most of his career in Wolseley's shadow, accompanying him to Ghana, Egypt, and the Sudan, and serving under him at Horse Guards in various administrative capacities. Although the Liberal Party's selection of Buller as Commander-in-Chief in 1895 led to a falling out with his old chief, Wolseley supported Buller's appointment as British commander at the onset of the South African War.⁷ Despite having little room to maneuver, Buller was able to create a name for himself nevertheless. It was during the Anglo-Zulu War that he earned the Victoria Cross and first grabbed the public's attention.

Buller had been sent to South Africa in 1878 to participate in the Ninth Frontier War against the Ngqika-Gcaleka. His commander, and another member of the Ashanti Ring, Sir Evelyn Wood, had Buller organize, train, and command a force of mounted troops composed of locally recruited settlers. This unit became known as the Frontier Light Horse. With the end of hostilities, Buller and the Frontier Light Horse were ordered to cross the Ncome River into Zululand and to join Wood's new command in the Anglo-Zulu War. The unit distinguished itself against the Zulu and helped earn Buller his reputation. Returning to South Africa twenty years later, Buller immediately set out to reproduce the success of the Frontier Light Horse by creating similar units, notably the South African Light Horse. Thomas analyzes Buller's organizational and training methods, the feasibility of using

⁷ The fall of Lord Rosebery's government on 21 June 1895 occurred on the same day as Buller's appointment. The new Conservative government appointed Wolseley to fill the position instead.

settlers as irregular soldiers, and the legacy of the South African Light Horse in the history of the South African War.

No sooner had the war ended, Lord Milner, the British proconsul in Southern Africa, attempted to strengthen Britain's hold over the conquered republics by propagating and giving preference to English cultural institutions. But British policy makers back in London had a more serious concern. The German presence in southern Africa continued to confound; South Africa's defense was costly, and the imperial administration wanted the colonies themselves to take responsibility for it. For Milner, the practicality of providing for the colonies' defense could also be solved through an English model.

In Chapter 11 Ian van der Waag analyzes the motives behind the creation of the Transvaal Volunteers and explores the phenomenon of 'volunteerism' in the years leading up to Union. Focusing on one regiment—the Eastern Rifles, later reconstituted as the Southern Mounted Rifles—and its commander, Sir Hugh Wyndham, van der Waag examines the structure of Transvaal society and the changing nature of relations between British settlers and increasingly-militant Afrikaners in the aftermath of the South African War. He also looks at how the unit was used during the Bambatha Rebellion and its fate when the Union Defence Forces were created in 1913. In the end, van der Waag demonstrates that this volunteer force was never accepted by many in Transvaal society.

The final chapter in this collection is a review essay of the East African theater in the First World War, a region largely ignored in even general histories of that conflict. Bruce Vandervort surveys the recent literature and shows how it has tried to move away from the 'great men' tradition. While the leadership of Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, Richard Meinertzhagen, and others has not been entirely ignored, in line with the 'new military history' the focus of these works has been placed on issues such as training, equipment, and morale. The role of Black Africans, in particular, has been central to new historical concerns. In recent years, a great deal of research has been done on the *askaris* of the King's African Rifles, the Rhodesia Native Regiment, and West African troops who were raised by the British and used in the East African theater. This research has emphasized the soldiers' performance and how their endeavors were affected by local climate, disease, and terrain, as well as the consequences of the war for the people of the region and the recruits themselves. Despite this new work, as Vandervort shows, the mystique of von Lettow-Vorbeck continues to beguile readers,

and new histories that aim to revise his place in the literature remain extremely popular.

The soldiers and settlers who traveled to, were recruited in, and relocated to Africa left behind a vital imprint on the continent's history. *Soldiers and Settlers in Africa, 1850–1918*, however, has not been assembled to focus on one continent; rather it is an attempt to demonstrate that the histories of Europe and Africa have been intrinsically linked for some time. Just as examination of the economic, social, and political history of this relationship—often explored through the Atlantic Slave Trade, the movement of missionaries and explorers, and the Scramble for Africa—has been seen as fundamental to our understanding of the late nineteenth-century world, so too does the military history of this relationship need to be investigated. Europeans and Africans learned about one another through their military exchanges sometimes as enemies, sometimes as allies, occasionally as equal partners, and more often in relationships of inequality, but always through complex processes with far-reaching consequences. It is the hope of all the contributors to this volume that the military history of the soldiers and settlers who fought in the colonial wars of Africa will further the understanding of broader political, social, and cultural dynamics that shaped and continue to shape our history.

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THE EXPERIENCE OF SOLDIERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER TWO

“VALUABLE, GALLANT AND FAITHFUL ASSISTANTS”: THE FINGO (OR MFENGU) AS COLONIAL MILITARY ALLIES DURING THE CAPE-XHOSA WARS, 1835–1881

Tim Stapleton

Most colonial armies operating in Africa during the nineteenth century employed large numbers of African allies. Examples from Southern Africa include the British use of Swazi mercenaries to overwhelm the Pedi in 1879, the Natal Native Contingent during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, and Cecil Rhodes’ “Cape Boys,” who fought to establish Southern Rhodesia in the 1890s.¹ Perhaps no single African group became as important to colonial military success or fought alongside the British as long as the Fingo (or Mfengu) of the Eastern Cape. From 1835 to 1881, the Fingo played a progressively more central role in the gradual eastward advance of the Cape Colony and the establishment of colonial rule. Although the Fingo are mentioned in every history of the Cape-Xhosa Wars, there are few narratives that concentrate on their military significance.² One exception is a chapter by historian Richard Moyer, written in the early 1970s, that stresses the role of the Fingo as a buffer between settlers and Xhosa in the 1840s and 1850s and the Fingo acquisition of firearms but does not go into much detail on their battlefield contribution. The piece also skims over Fingo participation in the

¹ For example, see Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedie Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth Century Transvaal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), and P. S. Thompson, *Black Soldiers of the Queen: The Natal Native Contingent in the Anglo-Zulu War, 1879* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1997).

² For example, see John S. Galbraith, *Reluctant Empire: British Policy on the South African Frontier 1834–54* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963); A. J. Smithers, *The Kaffir Wars 1779–1877* (London: Leo Cooper, 1973); John Milton, *The Edges of War: A History of Frontier Wars (1702–1878)* (Cape Town: Juta, 1983); J. B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of their Independence* (Cape Town: Ravan Press, 1987); Noel Mostert, *Frontiers: The Epic of South Africa’s Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); and, Timothy J. Stapleton, *Maqoma: Xhosa Resistance to Colonial Advance 1798–1873* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1994).

Cape-Xhosa War of 1877–78, certainly the peak of Fingo military activity, and almost ignores entirely the Transkei Rebellion of 1880–81.³

The War of 1834–35

The origin of the Fingo people of the Eastern Cape has recently been the subject of intense debate and is intertwined with the history of the Cape-Xhosa War of 1835. For many years historians believed that the Fingo had been refugees from the wars that brought about the emergence of the Zulu Kingdom in the early nineteenth century—the Mfecane—who then moved southwest down the Indian Ocean coast where they came to live as subjects, some sources say slaves, of the Gcaleka Xhosa. The 1835 conflict was the result of years of colonial raiding against neighboring Xhosa groups whose retaliatory attacks in December 1834 became an excuse for an all-out colonial invasion of Xhosa territory. During the Cape-Xhosa War of 1835, British colonial forces crossed east of the Kei River to raid Gcaleka Xhosa communities and found that the Fingo became willing allies. British soldiers and missionaries then escorted these newly emancipated people west into colonial territory and near what became Fort Peddie, where most of them were settled; they gathered under a milkwood tree and made a triple vow to become Christians, gain western education, and remain loyal to the colonial government. In the 1930s Fingo westernized elites like D. D. T. Jabavu took exception to the portrayal of their ancestors as slaves of the Gcaleka, and later historians like J. B. Peires began to describe them as newcomers who were undergoing a process of subservience before full acceptance into Gcaleka Xhosa society. The name ‘Fingo’ was seen as a British corruption of the original name of these refugees, AmaMfengu, coming from the Xhosa verb, Ukumfenguza, meaning ‘to seek work,’ which is what they supposedly did when they arrived among the Gcaleka.⁴

³ Richard A. Moyer, “The Mfengu, Self-Defence and the Cape Frontier Wars,” in *Beyond the Cape Frontier: Studies in the History of Transkei and Ciskei*, ed. Christopher Saunders and Robin Derricourt, 101–26 (London: Longman, 1974).

⁴ For various traditional accounts of Fingo origins see J. Ayliff and J. Whiteside, *History of the Abambo: Generally Known as Fingo* (Butterworth: Gazette Printers, 1912); R. T. Kawa, *Ibali Lama Mfengu* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1929); D. D. T. Jabavu, “The Fingo Slavery Myth” *South African Outlook* 1 June 1935; Moyer, “A History of the Mfengu of the Eastern Cape, 1815–1865,” PhD Thesis, University of London, 1976; Peires, *House of Phalo*, 110–11; Mostert, *Frontiers*, 718–19.

The first major reconsideration of Fingo origins began in the late 1980s with Julian Cobbing's rejection of the Mfecane as an internal African revolution in favor of a new view that saw violence and dramatic change in early nineteenth century Southern Africa emanating from various forms of colonial intrusion in the region. Within this revisionist context, Cobbing postulated that the Fingo might not have been refugees from the wars of Shaka in present-day Kwa-Zulu/Natal, but rather were Xhosa people of the Eastern Cape who were taken into the Cape Colony as laborers and given a new identity complete with a fake history that portrayed the colonial British as humanitarians.⁵ Building on this theory, Alan Webster demonstrated that the people who were called Fingo before 1835 tended to come from multiple origins and mostly from the interior north of the country, and therefore were not a single group of refugees from Kwa-Zulu/Natal on the Indian Ocean coast. The nucleus of the Fingo in the Cape Colony came from a group of captives taken by the British army when it crossed east of the Kei River in 1828 to destroy the Ngwane of Chief Matiwane, who had originally come from the Kwa-Zulu/Natal area. All subsequent people called Fingo were then thought to have originated from that place. Furthermore, Webster explained that in 1835 the British organized a number of Fingo settlements in or near the Cape Colony that consisted of Xhosa labor, military collaborators, and Christian mission residents. For Webster, Fingo was the original name coined by the British and later Africanized into Mfengu.⁶

Les Switzer and Timothy Keegan, critics of this revision of Fingo origins, doubt that large numbers of Xhosa captives could have been forcibly kept within a short distance of their homes and coerced into accepting a new identity. Keegan believes that the colonial state lacked the power and resources, and that the revisionist theory does not explain how the Fingo became willing military allies of the British.⁷ What

⁵ Julian Cobbing, "The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo," *Journal of African History* 29 (1988): 487-519.

⁶ Alan Webster, "Unmasking the Fingo: The War of 1835 Revisited," in *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History*, ed. Carolyn Hamilton, 241-76 (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995).

⁷ Les Switzer, *Power and Resistance in an African Society: The Ciskei Xhosa and the Making of South Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 58-60; Timothy Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the Origins of the Racial Order* (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1996), 145-47, 330-31. These authors do not seem aware of the fact that when African people in the Eastern Cape speak English they usually use the term 'Fingo' and rarely 'Mfengu.'

Keegan's critique does not take into account is that many Xhosa wanted to live in the Fingo settlements, as they were safe havens—complete with free livestock, maize, and land—from almost continuous colonial attacks on the independent Xhosa communities. Colonial actions made it obvious that to be a Fingo meant protection and to be a Xhosa meant probable aggression and death. These critics also cannot explain the fantastic population growth of the Fingo during the nineteenth century which, evidence from the time clearly shows, was a result of Xhosa simply changing their identity and moving to safer areas with connections to the colonial economy.⁸ In every Cape-Xhosa war that followed, Africans who saw their interests on the colonial side enlisted in various Fingo levies, and those who resisted went into the bush with the Xhosa leaders.

The British immediately saw the military potential of the Fingo and wasted no time in deploying them in operations. Moyer notes that during the 1835 war the Fingo were used by the British as scouts and messengers, and that they initially offered Benjamin D'Urban, the governor of the Cape Colony, the services of 970 warriors.⁹ In late April 1835, at the same time that D'Urban was assembling thousands of Fingo to take west of the Kei River and the Gcaleka ruler Hintsa was murdered by colonial soldiers, a patrol of Cape Mounted Riflemen accompanied by Thembu and Fingo allies attacked the Gcaleka along the Mbashe River and captured four thousand cattle.¹⁰ An incident in August 1835, shortly after the supposed liberation of the Fingo, would set the tone for their future military employment by colonial forces in the Cape. A colonial patrol of 125 Kat River Khoikhoi, twenty-five Fort Beaufort settlers, and seventy Fingo ventured into the Amatola Mountains, the stronghold of the Rharhabe Xhosa. Captain W. Alexander, the commanding officer, hid his main force in the bush and sent the Fingo out into the open as a decoy. In turn, several hundred Rharhabe, 150 of whom had guns, emerged from the bush, attempted to surround the Fingo, but then pursued them as they ran away. Once the Rharhabe had been lured into the open country, the main patrol charged out

⁸ Stapleton, "The Expansion of a Pseudo-Ethnicity in the Eastern Cape: Reconsidering the Fingo 'Exodus' of 1865," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29 (1996): 233–50.

⁹ Moyer, "The Mfengu," 109.

¹⁰ Sir B. D'Urban to the Earl of Aberdeen, 19 June 1835, British Parliamentary Papers [hereafter BPP], 1836 (279) "Papers Relative to Caffre War and Death of Hintza," p. 32.

from the bush and killed twenty Xhosa, causing the rest to scatter.¹¹ Such tactics would continue in various Cape-Xhosa conflicts for the next forty-six years.

The War of the Axe 1846–47

The ‘War of the Axe’ is not a very accurate name to describe the conflict that was fought in the Eastern Cape in 1846 and 1847. European settlers in the Eastern Cape were dissatisfied by the British withdrawal in 1837 from recently conquered Queen Adelaide Province, the land between the Keiskamma and Fish rivers, and the return of independence to the Xhosa people of that area. The settlers were also frustrated by the ‘Treaty System’ that the British colonial office had imposed on relations between the Cape Colony and neighboring Xhosa groups. Under this system the settlers lost their right to raid the Xhosa under the pretext of pursuing stock thieves, the old ‘Patrol System,’ and both Europeans and Xhosa had to apply for permits from colonial agents to cross the border. Agitation in the settler and British press led to the appointment of Sir Peregrine Maitland as governor of the Cape Colony, his arbitrary cancellation of the Treaty System in 1844, and the subsequent renewal of colonial military aggression against the Xhosa. The event that gave Maitland an excuse for outright war happened in 1846 when a Xhosa prisoner who had stolen an axe from a store in Fort Beaufort was violently freed from colonial custody by his friends. Maitland demanded that the Rharhabe Xhosa ruler, Sandile, surrender the fugitive, which was probably impossible as Sandile had no idea where he was hiding. In turn, Maitland had an excuse to punish Sandile and the Xhosa by leading colonial forces in an invasion of territory east of the Keiskamma River, the erstwhile Queen Adelaide Province. Having experienced colonial firepower in earlier conflicts such as in 1811 and 1819, the Xhosa now employed more firearms and used the rough terrain of the Amatola Mountains and Pirie Bush to inflict hit-and-run attacks on the British and ambush their supply trains. Maitland’s punitive expedition turned into a protracted bush war. He was eventually recalled to London and replaced by Sir Harry Smith, the former commander of British forces during the Cape-Xhosa War of 1835 who had gone on to

¹¹ Captain W. Alexander to Colonel H. Smith, Fort Armstrong, 17 August 1835, BPP, 1836 (279), p. 102 (101).

military fame in India. The colonial forces responded to Xhosa ambush tactics by seizing livestock and destroying food resources, and, as will be discussed, by employing more African auxiliary soldiers. The Xhosa leaders eventually surrendered in 1847 in order to plant their crops and avoid mass starvation among their people. As a result, colonial rule was extended to the area between the Keiskamma and Kei rivers, which became British Kaffraria.¹²

Tensions between Fingo and Xhosa in the vicinity of Fort Peddie meant that this area quickly became a central battleground of the war. However, there was still some debate among colonial officials about Fingo military potential. At the start of the conflict in March 1846, Colonel John Hare, the lieutenant governor of the Eastern Districts of the Colony, reported to Governor Maitland that "The Fingoes are well disposed and determined to stand by their best friends the Government, and recent events at Fort Peddie have strengthened their hatred of the Kafirs."¹³ Maitland was referring to continued stock theft and violence around the Fort Peddie area, which after the retrocession of 1837 was no longer within colonial territory. Captain MacLean, the colonial agent at Fort Peddie, was confident in the loyalty and material motives of the Fingo, but he was skeptical of their worth as soldiers. In late March he wrote that regarding "The Fingoes:—every confidence can be placed in them, for good reason, they cannot exist without the Government. They will attack any given point, if not too far from their own settlement, and they will do it dashing for the sake of plunder; but for a campaign with troops, or for general service, I am very doubtful."¹⁴

The Fingo would soon prove their worth as military allies. When the war began, Fingo living in the vicinity of Fort Peddie left their homes and gathered near the British military post for protection. On 23 April 1846 a Gqunukhwebe Xhosa raiding party under Chief Jokweni attempted to seize cattle from the Fort Peddie Fingo; a skirmish ensued. A detachment of British dragoons with one cannon was sent out from the fort to help the Fingo, but the Xhosa had been driven off by the

¹² For accounts of the War of the Axe, see Milton, *The Edges of War*, 156–71; Peires, *House of Phalo*, 150–58; Mostert, *Frontiers*, 891–935; Stapleton, *Maqoma*, 133–41.

¹³ J. Hare to Governor P. Maitland, Grahamstown, 24 March 1846, BPP, 1847 (786) "Correspondence with Governor of Cape of Good Hope relative to State of Kafir Tribes on Eastern Frontier," p. 89.

¹⁴ Captain MacLean, 26 March 1846, enclosed in Governor P. Maitland to Lord Stanley, Grahamstown, 13 April 1846, BPP, 1847 (786), p. 107.

time they arrived on the scene.¹⁵ On the night of 26 April some Fingo discovered thirty Xhosa “prowling about” and chased them away. On 30 April a large group of Gqunukhwebe raided the Fort Peddie Fingo and made off with many cattle and some goats. Although significantly outnumbered, the Fingo stood and fought until the Xhosa withdrew to the Beka River. British troops from Fort Peddie arrived in the area, but since the Xhosa were so numerous, they shelled the bush from a distance without any obvious result and then withdrew. For the next few days Fingo spies kept an eye on Xhosa gatherings and movements, and reported back to the British commanders.¹⁶ Disillusioned with the lack of British military commitment to defend Fort Peddie, Reverend J. W. Appleyard, a local missionary, wrote that “[t]he Fingoes have had all the fighting hitherto to themselves.”¹⁷

On 6 May 1846 a force of 150 Peddie Fingo and a few Khoikhoi Cape Mounted Riflemen went into the Fish River bush to search for cattle supposedly taken by the Xhosa from settlers in the Colony. They seized five hundred head, but on their way back to Fort Peddie they were pursued by a large group of Xhosa, who were subsequently driven back by a troop of British dragoons—supported by an artillery piece—that had been sent out from the fort. The captured herd was later distributed among the Fingo who had participated in the raid. The same day a British cavalry patrol discovered between one thousand and two thousand Xhosa near the Gwangqa River. The next day, 7 May, Fingo scouts discovered that some Xhosa had moved closer to Fort Peddie and were hiding in a ravine just two or three miles away.¹⁸ It was obvious that the Xhosa were marshaling their forces for a concerted attack on Fort Peddie in order to seize the large herd of cattle kept there. Raids and counter-raids continued through the middle of the month. On 21 May, just after crossing the Fish River at Trumpeter’s Drift, a large party of Xhosa ambushed and destroyed a colonial supply train in the bush on its way from the provincial capital of Grahamstown to Fort Peddie.¹⁹ The next day Fingo spies reported that they had seen a large

¹⁵ John Frye, ed., *The War of the Axe and the Xhosa Bible: The Journal of the Rev. J. W. Appleyard* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1971), 43, 57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 44–47.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49–51.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54–59.

body of Xhosa, probably from Chief Mhala, northeast of Fort Peddie at Line Drift on the Keiskamma River; they believed it was going to join the Gqunukhwebe Xhosa war party. Fort Peddie was immediately reinforced by two companies of British infantry, but Reverend Appleyard noted that the Xhosa forces gathering against them “belong to almost every tribe in Kaffirland.”²⁰ On the afternoon of 27 May a large group of Xhosa were spotted near the fort but were subsequently driven off by British cavalry. That night small parties of Xhosa harassed the Fingo and once again attempted to make off with their cattle.²¹

The expected Xhosa attack on Fort Peddie finally began on the morning of 28 May, with large groups of warriors assembling on the heights overlooking the post. Xhosa delays gave the British time to organize their defense, which included moving the twenty cannon into good firing positions. Formed into a number of large blocks preceded by “clouds of skirmishers,” around seven thousand Xhosa moved down and tried to surround the fort. Their advance, however, was disrupted by accurate fire from British artillery, which shot over the Fingo women and children who were taking shelter in a ditch around the fort. Groups of Xhosa initially tried to take cover in low ground, but ultimately they withdrew before getting into musket range. Fingo infantry and British cavalry swept out and killed Xhosa stragglers. Close to two hundred Xhosa were killed in the aborted attack, but the remaining Xhosa managed to seize around four thousand cattle from the Fingo settlements.²² The Fingo killed sixty-two Xhosa and lost twelve of their own, the only colonial fatalities in the raid. Led by Colonel Henry Somerset, a large relief force of 1,400 men with 105 supply wagons arrived at Fort Peddie on the evening of 1 June. This larger force enabled the British to go on the offensive; they destroyed Xhosa homesteads under Chief Pato, the Gqunukhwebe leader, to the east and south.

Just before 8 June, Somerset’s command was joined by what Appleyard called “a large force of Fingoes.”²³ Worried that sixty supply wagons would be ambushed while moving east from Trumpeter’s Drift to Fort Peddie, Somerset decided to make a diversionary attack on the Xhosa settlements of Chief Stokwe. Under the cover of darkness, Somerset sent a detachment of several hundred Fingo infantry

²⁰ Ibid., 60.

²¹ Ibid., 62–63.

²² Ibid., 63–64.

²³ Ibid., 67.

with orders to move up the Tocha and Mancanzana valleys—the home of Stokwe's people—at first light. That morning, Somerset took the mounted element of his own force—the Cape Mounted Riflemen and 7th Dragoon Guards—along with some artillery, and directly attacked Stokwe's homestead, burning huts and forcing the 150 Xhosa defenders to withdraw to where they were eventually cut off by the detached Fingo infantry. According to Somerset, "The Native Infantry and Fingoes, having got into the valley, attacked the enemy in the most spirited manner, killing several and capturing twelve horses."²⁴ Later the same day this force unexpectedly engaged between five hundred and eight hundred of Mhala's men (at the Gwangqa River) who were on their way to assist Stokwe. Many Xhosa were caught in the open and two hundred were killed in a charge by British cavalry. On the colonial side there were only two fatalities: a Fingo and a Cape Mounted Rifleman.²⁵

With Mhala's Xhosa broken at the Battle of Gwangqa and more supplies and British reinforcements arriving at Fort Peddie, Somerset continued to destroy Xhosa communities between the Fish and Keiskamma rivers.²⁶ This allowed colonial forces to concentrate on disrupting the productive capacity of Sandile's people in the Amatola Mountains and build up their own resources by raiding Sarhili's Gcaleka east of the Kei River. Fingo levies participated in most of the remaining operations of the war. In late July 1846 Colonel Hare, while leading a colonial sweep of the Amatolas, reported he was extremely pleased with "the Hottentot companies and Fingo levies, on whom devolved the arduous task of scouring the kloofs, a duty which they performed in such a manner as to merit the greatest praise."²⁷ Around the same time, Colonel Somerset led a force of 1500 men east of the Kei River to raid the Gcaleka Xhosa. During this expedition "[t]he Fingos and the Kaffirs kept up an incessant exchange of shots, yelling and shouting to each other like demons."²⁸ A few months later, according to Andries

²⁴ Colonel H. Somerset to Lieutenant Colonel K. H. Cloete, Fort Peddie, 8 June 1846, BPP, 1847 (786), p. 160.

²⁵ For Somerset, see *Ibid.*, 161; Frye, *Appleyard*, 66–67; A. Gordon-Brown, ed., *The Narrative of Private Buck Adams: 7th (Princess Royal's) Dragoon Guards on the Eastern Frontier of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1941), 153; *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 13 June 1846.

²⁶ Frye, *Appleyard*, 70.

²⁷ Colonel J. Hare to Lieutenant Colonel K. H. Cloete, Fort Cox, 1 August 1846, BPP, 1847 (786), p. 166.

²⁸ D. E. Rivett-Carnac, *Hawk's Eye: Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Somerset* (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1966), 128.

Stockenstrom, former lieutenant governor and commander of settler volunteers in the war, a rumor began to circulate among the Xhosa that the main Xhosa resistance leaders had become black colonial subjects. Stockenstrom wrote, "the Amatola is broken to pieces, and Kreli's door is closed, Sandilli, Macomo, Pato, Umbala, and Mapassa are Fingoes!"²⁹

It is interesting to note that not all the Fingo seem to have abandoned the Xhosa and joined the British effort. Just before the outbreak of war, Charles Lennox Stretch, a colonial agent, reported: "A confidential Fingo in my service, has been in communication with the Fingoes living under Sandilli who are numerous on the Isonoko and Nase rivers."³⁰ The daughter of one of Fingo leader Jokweni's men, who lived among the Gqunukhwebe Xhosa, fled to Fort Peddie in early May 1846 and reported "that Pato has issued an order that all the Fingoes in his country are to be killed, to prevent them from going over to the side of the Government, and thus strengthen their hands. The father of this girl was accordingly killed, and horrible to relate, her mother was burnt alive in the hut."³¹ More rumors circulated in Fort Peddie that another six Fingo families had been killed in Pato's area.³² It seems possible that these were Xhosa people who saw that Pato had little chance of winning the war and wanted to go over to the Fingo settlement for protection.

During the conflict it was common for Fingo to serve as messengers, sentries, guards, scouts, and spies for the colonial forces. In late March, Colonel Hare reported that "Trumpeter's Post has been reinforced by six Fingoes; they are to act under the orders of the officer commanding that post, as look-out men or messengers."³³ In early May 1846 the British military secretary at Grahamstown reported that "[t]he 200 Fingoes employed on picquet service have shown themselves watchful and courageous in this duty."³⁴ In August 1846, Stockenstrom, while

²⁹ C. W. Hutton, ed., *The Autobiography of the Late Sir Andries Stockenstrom* (Cape Town: Juta, 1887), vol. 2, p. 239.

³⁰ Extract from a Report of the Resident Agent Mr. Stretch, 13 February 1846, BPP, 1847 (786), p. 59.

³¹ Frye, *Appleyard*, 52.

³² *Ibid.*, 54–55.

³³ Colonel J. Hare to Governor P. Maitland, Grahamstown, 31 March 1846, BPP, 1847 (786), p. 108.

³⁴ C. L. Maitland, Grahamstown, 7 May 1846, BPP, 1847 (786), p. 130.

leading a punitive expedition east across the Kei River in Sarhili's territory, wrote that "Kreli's [Sarhili's] Fingoe messenger again met me, holding in his hands the white flag."³⁵

However, not all colonial observers were positive about the Fingo role in the 1846–47 war. Buck Adams, a British dragoon, wrote that the Fingo "were the most abject cowards I ever met."³⁶ John Mitford Bowker, a former colonial official who lost his livestock in the war and eventually led a unit of settler volunteers, responded to a post-war plan to give the Fingo more land between the Fish and Keiskammer rivers by stating, "I owe the Fingo nothing for what he has done in this war; he has not been fighting for me. It was out of the question his joining the Kafir."³⁷ Bowker explained that during the War of 1835 the Fingo had stolen half the cattle taken by colonial forces from Hintsa's territory and that the Xhosa attacks on the Fingo settlements around Fort Peddie were meant to recover those losses. Of the 1846–47 war, Bowker wrote:

There are no captured cattle. The Fingoes have appropriated all that were not fit for killing or work, and many of those as well. They are unmitigated savages, and give them a territory and you establish barbarism to the extent of it. Nay, further, where I am now, under cover of the confusion of the war he has stolen all my oxen, and if I mistake not much of the petty losses now attributed to the Kafir might, but for the confusion he warily takes advantage of, be traced to his door.³⁸

The Fingo view of their role in the war and its impact on them was different. Stressing their loyalty and service to the colonial government, the Fingo of Fort Beaufort wrote to Governor Smith stating that "we, as a people, bore our full share of suffering in the loss of all our cattle and many of our best warriors, still we have this satisfaction that we did our duty, and which we are ever ready of repeat."³⁹

³⁵ Hutton, *Stockenstrom*, vol. 2, p. 276.

³⁶ Gordon-Brown, *Adams*, 213.

³⁷ John Mitford Bowker, *Speeches, Letters and Selections from Important Papers* (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1962), 264.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 264–65.

³⁹ Fingo Inhabitants of Fort Beaufort to Sir H. Smith, n.d, enclosed in Sir H. Smith to Earl Grey, 28 December 1848, BPP, 1849 (1059), "Correspondence Relative to Establishment of Settlement of Natal and Recent Rebellion of Boers," p. 76.

The War of Mlanjeni, 1850–53

Like the War of the Axe, the ‘War of Mlanjeni’ is also not a very appropriate name to refer to a conflict that was essentially a rebellion against Cape colonial rule by a number of different groups in and around British Kaffraria. Mlanjeni was a prophet among the Rharhabe Xhosa who claimed that his people’s problems had arisen because of widespread witchcraft and that society had to purify itself by slaughtering yellowish—or tan-colored cattle. Settlers heard about this and immediately associated the cattle with themselves and blamed Mlanjeni for convincing his people to rebel by telling them that special charms would offer protection from colonial bullets. In reality, the causes of the rebellion were much more political. After the creation of British Kaffraria, colonial officials began to undermine the authority of the Xhosa chiefs, and in late 1850 Governor Smith officially deposed Sandile as the ruler of the Rharhabe Xhosa. Smith had seriously underestimated the Xhosa leaders, who then staged a coordinated attack on colonial settlements and forts on Christmas Day 1850, with Smith himself making a narrow escape from Fort Cox. The Kat River Settlement, a community of mixed race and Khoikhoi people that had been established in the late 1820s as a buffer between the settlers and the Xhosa, also rose in rebellion as they were losing land to the new primary African allies of the British, the Fingo. In a related event some members of the Cape Mounted Rifles, a colonial Khoikhoi unit, mutinied and went off to join the Kat River and Xhosa rebels. The Thembu around Whittlesea in the northern part of British Kaffraria, who had never fought against the colonialists before, also rebelled as they were losing land to the Fingo and settlers.⁴⁰

Even before the war began, Fingo were collecting military information on the Xhosa and passing it to the colonial officials. In August 1850 several Fingo from Victoria District reported that some prominent men from Sandile’s Rharhabe had warned them that if war broke out the Fingo would be evicted and the Xhosa strategy would concentrate on denying the British access to water sources.⁴¹

⁴⁰ For accounts of the War of Mlanjeni, see Milton, *The Edges of War*, 183–222; Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1073–160; Stapleton, *Maqoma*, 143–67; Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856–57* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), 1–44.

⁴¹ G. Cyrus, Interpreter and Superintendent of Natives to Civil Commissioner of Albany, 15 August 1850, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), ‘Correspondence with

The sudden and widespread nature of the rebellion left Governor Smith reliant on hastily raised African auxiliary forces. In late December 1850 a desperate Colonel Somerset wrote: "Our position is most embarrassing; levies and troops we must have, or we shall lose the colony... I have called out the Fingoes, who are invaluable, but I have no authority to call out anybody else."⁴² By 1 January 1851 Fingo 'lagers' commanded by European agents had been organized in several settlements like Alice, and a Fingo 'levy' had been assembled under a European officer.⁴³ In early January 1851 colonial agents recruited a second levy of three hundred Fingo from the Fort Peddie area.⁴⁴ Eventually, Fingo levies were organized in most major Eastern Cape colonial settlements such as Port Elizabeth, Grahamstown, Fort Beaufort, Alice, Fort Peddie, and Cradock.⁴⁵

Right from the start, Fingo colonial allies fought in almost every major engagement of the war. When the rebel leader Hermanus led an attack by Khoikhoi and Xhosa on Fort Beaufort on 6 January 1850, Fingo levies and Christian Africans constituted the first line of defense with detachments of loyal Cape Mounted Riflemen and regular British infantry held in reserve. Singled out for special praise for his role in the successful defense of the town was "Mr. Verity, who commanded a body of most intrepid Fingoes, whose onslaught was irresistible."⁴⁶ Repeating the pattern of 1846, the Fort Peddie area once again became a scene of intense bush warfare. On 13 January 1851, the Reverend Appleyard, still living there, observed three hundred Fingo men arrive from Fort Beaufort to serve as "one of the Levies about to take the field."⁴⁷ A group of 140 Fingo, on 16 January, went out from Fort Peddie to bring in hay from the nearby Peulton mission and were ambushed by

Governor of Cape of Good Hope Relative to State of Kafir Tribes, and Recent Outbreak on Eastern Frontier," p. 42.

⁴² Colonel H. Somerset to Secretary of Government, Fort Hare, 30 December 1850, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 112.

⁴³ Lieutenant C. H. Bell to Major Burnaby, Fort Hare, 1 January 1851, "Frontier District Orders," BPP 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 119.

⁴⁴ H. G. Smith to Earl Grey, King William's Town, 13 January 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 82.

⁴⁵ For Cradock Fingo, see A. J. Cloete, "General Order," Camp Balata, 21 August 1852, BPP, 1852-53 (1635), "Correspondence with Governor of Cape of Good Hope relative to State of Kafir Tribes, and Recent Outbreak on Eastern Frontier," p. 173 (166).

⁴⁶ H. L. Maydwell, Military Secretary to H. G. Smith, King William's Town, 10 January 1850, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 81.

⁴⁷ Frye, *Appleyard*, 127.

three hundred Xhosa. According to Appleyard, "The Fingoes attacked them, however, with such spirit that they soon fled, having 3 of their number wounded."⁴⁸

On the morning of 21 January 1851, Sandile led some two thousand to three thousand Xhosa warriors, including a large mounted detachment, in an attack on Fort Hare, the closest British post to his Amatola stronghold. The Xhosa advanced toward the fort as a diversion, their real goal being the capture of the five thousand cattle, mostly owned by Fingo, grazing in the area. As the Xhosa infantry moved on the fort, their cavalry swept around the flank to cut off and seize the cattle.⁴⁹ Fort Hare was short on defenders as a number of soldiers from its regular garrison had been sent to escort supplies coming up from Grahamstown. This left one hundred loyal Cape Mounted Riflemen to man the walls and cannon, a few settler volunteers to defend the village of Alice, and eight hundred armed Fingo to confront the attackers. Henry Somerset, then a major general and in command of colonial forces at Fort Hare, reported, "The Fingoes advanced to meet the enemy in skirmishing order, in the most gallant style... A sharp engagement here took place; the Kafirs being strongly reinforced, deployed still to their left, but they were still held in check by the Fingoes."⁵⁰ In a later report he explained that after artillery fire from the fort had disrupted the main attack, the Xhosa attempted to seize the cattle near Alice, "but a well directed fire from some of the inhabitants and a body of Fingoes (who were concealed amongst the cattle) drove the enemy off, who at length, being completely routed at all points, retired with severe loss."⁵¹ According to Somerset, one hundred Xhosa had been killed and many wounded, but on the colonial side only six Fingo were dead and ten severely injured.⁵² The raid must have been disappointing for the Xhosa, for at such a high cost they managed to take away only two hundred cattle. Somerset wrote that "the gallant and determined conduct of the Fingoes was the admiration of the whole force."⁵³

⁴⁸ Ibid., 128.

⁴⁹ H. Somerset to Sir. H. Smith, Fort Hare, 22 January 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 127.

⁵⁰ Ibid.; For an account of the battle, see Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1091.

⁵¹ Major General H. Somerset to Major Burnaby, Fort Hare, 23 January 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 127.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ H. Somerset to Sir H. Smith, Fort Hare, 22 January 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 128.

On 24 January 1851 a force of 120 loyal Cape Mounted Riflemen and 150 Fingo were sent out from King William's Town to drive off approximately six hundred Xhosa of chiefs Anta and Siyolo who were threatening the town. Although outnumbered and ultimately surrounded, the colonial force managed to send the Xhosa fleeing into the bush before British reinforcements arrived. A. J. Cloete, a colonial quartermaster at King William's Town, wrote that "the Cape Mounted Rifles and the Fingoes had already given the enemy a glorious defeat, notwithstanding the disparity of number, many having been killed, with a loss on our side of one trooper wounded and one Fingo killed in the act of assisting the wounded trooper."⁵⁴ These events led Sir Harry Smith to report to London that "since the commencement of this war the conduct of the Fingoe race has been as exemplary as intrepid."⁵⁵

Once the Xhosa attacks on Fort Hare and King William's Town were defeated, colonial forces started to take the initiative. On 30 January 1851 Colonel George MacKinnon took a wagon train from King William's Town escorted by a strong force of three hundred British regulars, 150 Cape Mounted Riflemen, 1,500 Khoikhoi who had remained loyal to the British, three hundred Fingo, and one cannon to deliver supplies to the beleaguered forts Cox and White. A large body of Xhosa tried to block their march across the Keiskamma River at Debe Nek by attacking the rear and left flank of the column, but shrapnel shells from the cannon forced them to withdraw and they offered no more resistance to MacKinnon's train.⁵⁶ On 3 February MacKinnon sent two columns from King William's Town, one led by himself and the other by Lieutenant Colonel Napier, to attack the Xhosa of Siyolo. Napier's force, consisting of two companies of British regulars, one hundred Cape Mounted Rifles, and numerous settler volunteers—in total 1,100 men—marched in a direction that would block Siyolo if he attempted to move northwest toward the Amatola Mountains to link up with Sandile's people. MacKinnon's column, made up of three companies of British regulars, one hundred Cape Mounted Riflemen, some settler levies, and the Fort Peddie Fingo—a total of 1,150 men—supported by

⁵⁴ A. J. Cloete, King William's Town, 24 January 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 132.

⁵⁵ Sir H. Smith to Earl Grey, King William's Town, 27 January 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 155 (157).

⁵⁶ Colonel G. MacKinnon to Sir H. Smith, King William's Town, 1 February 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 157 (159).

two cannon, advanced on Siyolo's settlement, destroyed it, and withdrew with some cattle. Both columns spotted Siyolo's fleeing men and pursued them to Mlanjeni's homestead on the Keiskamma River, where they made a brief stand before being dispersed by cannon fire. The colonial forces then destroyed the settlement and sent out a patrol of Cape Mounted Rifles and Fingo, who after some fighting, returned with five hundred cattle. After just three days, both columns then returned to King William's Town with a total of seven hundred captured beasts at the expense of one dead Fingo.⁵⁷

In mid-February 1851, under instructions from Governor Smith, Colonel MacKinnon led a force of 2,750 men consisting of five British regular companies, one hundred Cape Mounted Rifles, and settler and Fingo levies to reinforce Somerset's command at Fort Hare. At the same time the governor ordered another force of three hundred to four hundred Fingo from Fort Peddie to rendezvous with MacKinnon. Once the Fort Peddie Fingo levy determined that all Siyolo's men had been sent to fight against MacKinnon's column, they crossed over the Keiskamma River and raided undefended homesteads in that chief's territory returning with 440 cattle.⁵⁸ On 13 February a group of Siyolo's Xhosa attempted to block the passage of MacKinnon's column through Debe Nek, but "[t]wo shells and a spirited charge by the Cape Mounted Riflemen and Fingo Levy, set them to flight."⁵⁹ MacKinnon's force then joined up with Somerset at Fort Hare and both commanders each led a column into the Amatola Mountains and according to MacKinnon, "had the satisfaction of destroying the huts and laying waste the fields of the ruthless savages who so treacherously murdered the military settlers of Woburn and Auckland."⁶⁰ In late April 1851 Colonel MacKinnon once again left King William's Town with an expedition of two hundred cavalry, 1,800 infantry, and two hundred Fingo that went up into the Amatolas, fought off a number of ambushes, and returned a few days later with four hundred captured cattle. MacKinnon reported that his patrol had killed 250 Xhosa with a loss of only three British soldiers

⁵⁷ Colonel G. MacKinnon to Sir H. Smith, King William's Town, 6 February 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), pp. 164–65.

⁵⁸ Sir H. Smith to Earl Grey, King William's Town, 19 February 1851, in BPP 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 171; see also Frye, *Appleyard*, 129.

⁵⁹ Colonel G. MacKinnon to Sir H. Smith, King William's Town, 19 February 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 171.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

and one Fingo.⁶¹ During another sweep of the Amatolas in June 1851, Somerset, describing how the 74th Highlanders advanced through a hail of gunfire to attack a stubbornly defended Xhosa position, wrote that "the manner in which the Fingoes under their several commanders advanced in the flanks was most spirited."⁶²

In the extreme north of British Kaffraria, where there were even fewer regular colonial soldiers than other areas, Fingo allies were absolutely central to the British campaign against the rebel Thembu and Khoikhoi around Whittlesea. On 26 January 1851 a force of seventy settlers and three hundred Fingo defended Whittlesea from an attack by three thousand to four thousand Thembu under Chief Mapassa; thirty Thembu and one Fingo were killed. Almost a week later on 31 January, a group of one thousand Thembu once again assembled near Whittlesea. Despite protests from Captain R. Tylden, the British commander, the Fingo and a detachment of Christian Xhosa ventured out to meet them, and after three hours of fighting drove the rebels away. Following this success, Captain Tylden sent a party of 350 Fingo and Christian Xhosa to attack the roughly one thousand rebel Thembu and Khoikhoi at nearby Shiloh village before they could receive reinforcements. After six and one-half hours of hard fighting, the rebels had barricaded themselves in a church, which was too wet to burn, and the colonial forces withdrew to Whittlesea with six hundred cattle. More than forty rebels and eight Fingo were killed. The Thembu then attacked the Fingo settlement at Whittlesea in an attempt to recover the herd but were repulsed.⁶³ Smith was impressed with reports of "the services of the intrepid Fingoes."⁶⁴ On 15 July 1851 a patrol of three hundred Fingo left Whittlesea, attacked Thembu homesteads along the Black Kei River, and returned the next day with four hundred cattle.⁶⁵ In explaining war expenses to his superiors in London around this time,

⁶¹ Colonel G. MacKinnon to Sir H. Smith, King William's Town, 2 May 1851, and Lieutenant Colonel A. J. Cloete, King William's Town, 3 May 1851, "General Orders," BPP, 1852 (1428), "Correspondence with Governor of Cape of Good Hope relative to State of Kafir Tribes, and Recent Outbreak on Eastern Frontier," pp. 17-18 (8-9).

⁶² Major General H. Somerset to Lieutenant Colonel Cloete, n.d., enclosed in Sir H. Smith to Earl Grey, 3 July 1851, BPP, 1852 (1428), p. 70 (64).

⁶³ Captain R. Tylden to Major General H. Somerset, Whittlesea, 3 February 1851, BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), pp. 173-74 (175-76).

⁶⁴ A. J. Cloete, King William's Town, 16 February 1851, "General Order," BPP, 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 174.

⁶⁵ Captain R. Tylden to Major General H. Somerset, Whittlesea, 26 July 1851, BPP, 1852 (1428), p. 104 (102).

Governor Smith wrote that “[t]he arming of the Fingoe race, who have been so firmly, zealously; and bravely adhered to British interests, will be an item of large amount. Their services, however,—I scruple not to assert it—have been of paramount utility to this frontier.”⁶⁶

One of the most inventive tactical moves of this war came when the Xhosa leader Maqoma took a few hundred Xhosa and rebel Khoikhoi into the thickly forested valleys of the Waterkloof highlands, which lay within the Cape Colony and overlooked Fort Beaufort, to use as a base for raiding settler farms. As their attention turned to trying to dislodge the rebels, the colonial forces became distracted from destroying the main Xhosa reservoir of crops and cattle in the Amatolas. In early September 1851 Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Fordyce, commanding officer of the 74th Highlanders, responded to Xhosa cattle raids by taking a punitive expedition of 250 British regulars, 250 Fingo of the Fort Beaufort levy, and about 150 other settler and Khoikhoi volunteers up to the Waterkloof. On the fairly open summit this force was engaged in a brief skirmish by the rebels, who then withdrew down into the bush of the ravines. Since his men did not have rations, and believing he had inflicted sufficient damage to the Xhosa force, Fordyce decided to return to Fort Beaufort. The expedition, however, was ambushed by Maqoma’s rebels as it traversed a particularly narrow path through a densely forested valley. The Fingo, who were acting as a rear guard, panicked and ran down the path causing confusion among the highlanders. This gave the Xhosa an opportunity and they immediately charged, killing eight highlanders and wounding another nine before running back into the forest. Fordyce, who had been pleased with the conduct of the Fingo up to this incident, reported, “These casualties must, therefore, be chiefly, if not entirely, attributed to the misconduct and bad discipline of the Fingo Levy.”⁶⁷ Dependent upon the Fingo and satisfied with their conduct up to that point, Somerset dismissed this action as “one of those panics that occasionally occur, and which can never be accounted for.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Sir H. Smith to Earl Grey, King William’s Town, 6 July 1851 in BPP 1852 (1428), p. 86 (81).

⁶⁷ Lieutenant Colonel J. Fordyce to Major General H. Somerset, Camp Riet Fontein, 9 September 1851, BPP, 1852 (1428), p. 156 (157).

⁶⁸ Major General H. Somerset to Lieutenant Colonel Cloete, Fort Beaufort, 11 September 1851, BPP, 1852 (1428), p. 154 (155).

Despite his bad experience with the Fingo, lack of manpower meant that Fordyce had little choice but to continue to employ them on a large scale. He led another force up into the Waterkloof in mid-October 1851 that included two Fingo levies, one from Fort Beaufort and one from Port Elizabeth. Each levy consisted of several hundred men and they were used to search the dense bush, some of which appeared impenetrable. Fordyce recorded that "[a]ll the huts in the valley were burnt and the few articles remaining in them [were] taken or destroyed by the Fingoes."⁶⁹ In early November, during a large but unsuccessful colonial sweep of the Waterkloof, a rebel Khoikhoi sniper killed Fordyce.⁷⁰ During yet another British sweep of the Waterkloof in March 1852, Fingo auxiliaries took the lead and slaughtered anyone they met, including women and children. According to Captain Hugh Robinson, "the Fingos, who make war on a common sense principle, saved the Government the expense of rationing a large number of them. We were on the ridge... and the howling and yelling was fearful."⁷¹ At this time Governor Smith posted groups of Fingo at various points to prevent rebels from fleeing the Waterkloof to the Amatolas. He wrote that "the Fingoes of Fort Beaufort and Fort Hare have been most successful in capturing horses and cattle, and in adding to the consternation of the rebels."⁷² In May 1852 Sir George Cathcart, Smith's replacement, assessed the military role of the Fingo by stating that they "have behaved always faithfully, and often nobly, as armed levies in aid of Her Majesties troops in this war."⁷³ In June Cathcart, haunted by "the bugbear of the Waterkloof," planned to once again attempt to extricate the rebels with a large force of 1,200 British regulars and 450 Fingo, "who have proved throughout the war most valuable, gallant, and faithful assistants."⁷⁴ Cathcart's new strategy for the Waterkloof was to build a series of small fortified posts in the highlands to serve as patrol bases for searching the forested ravines. These posts, occupied by

⁶⁹ Lieutenant Colonel J. Fordyce to H. L. Maydwell, Paviaans Eastlands, 17 October 1851, BPP, 1852 (1428), p. 181 (183).

⁷⁰ Stapleton, *Maqoma*, 160.

⁷¹ Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1142.

⁷² Sir H. Smith to Earl Grey, Blinkwater, 17 March 1852, BPP, 1852-53 (1635), "Correspondence with Governor of Cape of Good Hope relative to State of Kafir Tribes, and Recent Outbreak on Eastern Frontier," p. 70 (65).

⁷³ Lieutenant General G. Cathcart to Sir J. S. Pakington, Fort Beaufort, 20 May 1852, BPP, 1852-53 (1635), p. 114 (109).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 June 1852, p. 137 (132).

detachments of British regulars and Fingo, denied the rebels the high ground for observation and kept them off balance.⁷⁵ On one sweep of the ravines in July, two companies of Fingo were so eager to capture cattle from the rebels that they ran forward blocking the fire of British cannon covering their advance and compelling the British Rifle Brigade to suddenly move forwards in support.⁷⁶ In dealing with surviving rebels hiding in the forests of British Kaffraria, Cathcart also used a “partisan corps, chiefly composed of Fingoes, to hunt them up in their Laagers, and either destroy them in detail, or render their lives so insecure as to oblige them to flee the country.”⁷⁷

In November 1851 violence flared between Ludidi’s Fingo, who were living around the Butterworth Mission east of the Kei River and thus beyond colonial authority, and Sarhili’s Gcaleka. The British resident with Sarhili, W. Fynn, used the incident as an excuse to call on the British to punish the Gcaleka.⁷⁸ In December 1851 colonial forces moved across the Kei River to seize cattle. During this operation Captain Tylden commanded a patrol of 560 infantry, including detachments of thirty men from the Kat River Fingo levy and eighty from the Fort Peddie Fingo levy, and 180 cavalry sent to capture live-stock from people living along the Mbashe River. Encountering stiff resistance, he reported that:

This movement brought on a sharp engagement—the enemy having retreated to a strong position among the rocks and bush, where they defended themselves for some time, but were eventually dislodged with great loss,—the Fingoes having fairly stormed the position, and contested with the enemy hand to hand, driving him and throwing him over the precipices. Thirty[-]eight dead bodies were counted in one spot, and 14 in another; the enemy’s loss therefore, probably exceed 60.⁷⁹

Tylden’s patrol eventually took 1,200 cattle. Lieutenant Colonel William Eyre, commander of the 73rd Regiment operating east of the Kei during December 1851, wrote that “I returned to Butterworth on the 4th

⁷⁵ Ibid., 28 July 1852, p. 167 (160).

⁷⁶ Colonel G. Buller to Captain the Lord Alexander Russell, Camp Waterkloof, 24 July 1852, BPP, 1852–53 (1635), p. 167 (160).

⁷⁷ Lieutenant General G. Cathcart to Sir J. S. Pakington, Fort Beaufort, 28 July 1852, p. 165 (158).

⁷⁸ W. Fynn to Lieutenant Colonel Garvock, Butterworth, 19 November and 20 November 1851, BPP, 1852 (1428), p. 218 (223) and 219 (224).

⁷⁹ Captain R. Tylden to Lieutenant Colonel Sutton, Camp Butterworth, 4 January 1852, BPP, 1852–53 (1635), p. 17 (12).

instant, having captured, with the division under my command, assisted by the Fingoes, about 5000 head of cattle."⁸⁰ The plundering expedition returned to colonial territory in mid-January 1852 with thirty thousand captured cattle plus other livestock like goats and horses. Eyre's column accompanied seven thousand Fingo who had been living around Butterworth mission in Sarhili's country and were now resettled at Fort Peddie.⁸¹ This raid across the Kei, in which Fingo levies participated, gave the colonial forces increased food supplies, loot to reward volunteers, and additional African labor. During another raid east of the Kei in August 1852 a patrol of two hundred mounted Fingo under Captain Tylden burned huts and captured more cattle from the Gcaleka Xhosa.⁸² The mounted patrol was a new development as up to this point Fingo levies had been infantry formations.

Fingo levies were present at other major events of the war and were employed beyond the Cape. In late February 1851, during the destruction of the Kat River Settlement, Fingo were part of the colonial force under Somerset that bombarded and stormed Fort Armstrong, which had been occupied by rebel Khoikhoi. This event brought the Kat River Rebellion to an end and some of the survivors escaped to join the Rharhabe Xhosa of Sandile and Maqoma.⁸³ Throughout the second half of 1851 and early 1852, Fingo, particularly those from Fort Peddie, formed part of a colonial force under Colonel MacKinnon that was attempting to ferret out Siyolo's Xhosa who were hiding in the Fish River Bush.⁸⁴ In late January 1852 Siyolo's wives sent a message to colonial forces that "he was desirous to come in and make peace, but was afraid of the Fingoes."⁸⁵ Some mounted Fingo were part of the British force that fought Moshoeshoe's Basotho at the Battle of Berea in late 1852 and

⁸⁰ Lieutenant Colonel W. Eyre to Lieutenant Colonel Sutton, Camp on the Guoboka about eight miles from the Bashee, 1 January 1852, BPP, 1852-53 (1635), p. 18 (13).

⁸¹ A. J. Cloete, "General Order," King William's Town, 11 January 1852; and Sir H. Smith to Earl Grey, King William's Town, 20 January 1852, BPP, 1852-53 (1635), p. 18 (13) and 22 (17).

⁸² Lieutenant General G. Cathcart to Sir J. S. Pakington, Camp, Sabolela Drift, 15 August 1852, BPP, 1852-53 (1635), p. 171 (164).

⁸³ H. Somerset, Fort Armstrong, 23 February 1851, BPP 1851 (1334) (1352) (1380), p. 177.

⁸⁴ Sir H. Smith to Earl Grey, King William's Town, 8 September 1851, BPP, 1852 (1428), p. 140.

⁸⁵ Major H. D. Kyle to Colonel Cloete, Camp Tomaka, 1 February 1852, BPP, 1852-53 (1635), p. 35 (30).

were used to escort captured cattle.⁸⁶ There is no doubt that Fingo levies saved the unprepared British during the opening days of the 1850–53 conflict; without their military contribution the rebellion would have gone on much longer. In 1867, Lieutenant General H. Storks testified before a House of Commons Committee that the Fingo performed very well in the field, “obeyed orders, and they did not desert.”⁸⁷

The War of Ngcayecibi 1877–78

During the catastrophic Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement of 1856–57, which saw mass starvation in British Kaffraria and Gcaleka territory and the removal of thousands of Xhosa into the Colony as labor, the new Frontier Armed and Mounted Police (FAMP)—an all European force—crossed east of the Kei River and occupied an inland strip of land around the Butterworth mission, removing it from Sarhili’s authority. In 1865, at around the same time that British Kaffraria was absorbed into the Cape Colony, armed parties of Fingo under their own leaders and assisted by missionaries and FAMP units invaded this section of land and claimed it as their own. Gcaleka people living there were evicted to Sarhili’s remaining strip of territory along the coast or stayed at their homes—submitting to the new Fingo leaders and becoming known as Fingo. Cape authorities designated this area as ‘Fingoland’ and, although not officially a colonial entity, it enjoyed colonial military protection. One of the most powerful new rulers in this country was Captain Veldtman Bikitsha, a veteran of Fingo levies in the previous two Cape-Xhosa wars.⁸⁸

It seems that the Fingo, eager for captured livestock, did not restrict their military alliances to the British. In 1866 several large contingents—numbering in the hundreds—of Fingo from the Aliwal Native Reserve joined Boers from the Free State in raids upon the Basotho. They returned home with large numbers of cattle and horses. A missionary from Aliwal reported, “At the commencement of the war a

⁸⁶ For mounted Fingo, see Lieutenant Colonel W. Eyre to Colonel Cloete, Camp Caledon, 21 December 1852, BPP, 1852–53 (1635), p. 117 (207); For a general reference to Fingo in this campaign, see Moyer, “The Mfengu,” p. 120.

⁸⁷ Testimony of Lieutenant General H. Storks, 21 May 1867, BPP, 1867 (478) (478–1), “Select Committee on Duties Performed by British Army in India and Colonies,” p. 163 (155).

⁸⁸ Stapleton, “Fingo ‘Exodus’ of 1865,” pp. 233–250.

body of Fingoes left the Reserve... This party was engaged in the taking of Vechtkop, where so many Basuto women were killed. The same party with another large one again joined the Free State army and were engaged in the war for many months."⁸⁹ In the 1870s, east of the Kei River, there were numerous cases of stock theft and violence involving the Fingo and Sarhili's Gcaleka, and tensions increased. In 1876 Charles Brownlee, the Cape's Secretary for Native Affairs, reported there were forty thousand Fingo living in Transkei and that:

The loyalty of these people has never been doubted, and is beyond suspicion. These men are ready to defend their land and stand by the Government to the last extremity, and supported by us, as they will be in case of need, will hold their position against all attacks upon them.⁹⁰

With diamond discoveries and the confederation of South African territories on the colonial agenda in the late 1870s, British authorities became determined to eliminate the remaining independent African powers such as the Pedi, Zulu, and Gcaleka Xhosa. A clash between Fingo and Gcaleka in August 1877 at the homestead of Fingo leader Ngcayecibi, provided colonial officials with an excuse to demand the return of stolen cattle from Sarhili's people. This allegation led to the last official Cape-Xhosa war. Within a few months, Rharhabe Xhosa—such as those under Sandile and Tini Maqoma living within the Cape Colony—would be bullied into rebellion by settlers and colonial officials who wanted to take their land.⁹¹

In late September 1877, as Sarhili assembled his forces for the coming fight, a Fingo patrol under Veldtman drove off Gcaleka from Butterworth, killing four men and capturing forty horses. On 29 September 1877 a hastily fortified colonial lager at Ibeka, defended by 180 European FAMP and two thousand Fingo, and located only five miles from Sarhili's great place, was attacked on three of its four sides by seven thousand to eight thousand Gcalaka. In the morning small

⁸⁹ Rev. A. Mabile to Sir. P. Wodehouse, Aliwal North, 5 April 1866, BPP, 1868–69 (4140), "Despatches from Governor of Cape of Good Hope and Lieutenant Governor of Natal, on Recognition of Chief of Basutos and His Tribe as British Subjects," p. 25 (16).

⁹⁰ C. Brownlee, the Residency, Kreli's Country, August 1876, "Memorandum from Secretary for Native Affairs," BPP, 1877 (1748) (1776) (1814) (1883) "Correspondence Respecting War between Transvaal Republic and Neighbouring Native Tribes, and Native Affairs in South Africa," p. 123 (108).

⁹¹ For the War of 1877–78, see Milton, *The Edges of War*, 257–80; M. W. Spicer, "The War of Ngcayecibi (1877–78)," MA Thesis, Rhodes University, 1978.

parties of Gcaleka had attempted to probe the lager's defenses, but they were countered by Fingo skirmishers. In mid-afternoon the main assault began, lasting until dusk when the Gcaleka finally withdrew under the relentless fire of cannon, rockets, and repeating rifles. Key to the defense was a nearby stone kraal held by four hundred of Veldtman's Fingo. The next morning the Gcaleka men tried to use the cover of thick fog to attack the post on a flank but were again repulsed by cannon and rocket fire. The Gcaleka fled back towards Sarhili's great place, pursued for several miles by the Fingo and sixty FAMP troopers, who burned homesteads and killed stragglers as they went along.⁹² The FAMP commander, Charles Griffith, reported that "[t]he behaviour of the Fingos under Veldtman and other chiefs was exceedingly good."⁹³

Ibeka now became a staging area for colonial attacks on the Gcaleka. On 9 October several columns of FAMP, settler volunteers, two artillery pieces, and hundreds of Fingoes, including those under Captain Veldtman, converged on Sarhili's great place. A heavy cannon fire drove the defenders away and the Fingo pursued them to the Qora River. Some Gcaleka tried to make a stand on a piece of high ground but were outflanked by armed settlers and Fingo. The great place and many other homesteads were destroyed, livestock captured, and "a vast quantity of miscellaneous loot fell into the hands of the Fingos."⁹⁴ In late October and early November a large colonial force of 5,100 men—the vast majority of whom were Fingo—organized into two divisions, advanced on the Gcaleka along the Mbashe River, and swept through the Dwesa Forest. Various patrols were sent out from the main force to harass the Gcaleka and steal livestock. Two companies of Fingo, one under Veldtman and the other under a European officer, operating near the Mbashe River captured 3,500 cattle and five thousand sheep. During the entire sweep forty Gcaleka and eight Fingo were killed.⁹⁵ At the end of November, Griffith reported "the admirable conduct of the Fingo chief 'Veldtman' throughout this war. I cannot speak too highly of his loyalty, zeal and gallantry. He was actively employed in the field from

⁹² C. D. Griffith to J. X. Merriman, Camp Ibika, 30 September 1877, BPP, 1878 (1961) (2000), "Correspondence Respecting War between Transvaal Republic and Neighbouring Native Tribes, and Native Affairs in South Africa," p. 126 (112).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3 October 1877, p. 160 (146).

⁹⁴ C. D. Griffith to the Military Secretary, Head Quarter Camp, Transkei Field Force, Ibeka, 10 October 1877, BPP, 1878 (1961) (2000), p. 158 (144).

⁹⁵ J. Ayliff to Commandant Griffith, Camp Near Dwesa Forest, 5 November 1877, BPP 1878 (1961) (2000), p. 224 (205).

the beginning to the end of the campaign, and his presence with the forces was of the greatest possible use and assistance to me."⁹⁶

Fingo continued to participate in similar raids and sweeps in December 1877 and January 1878. On the morning of 29 December, near the junction of the Xabacasi and Qora rivers, acting as an advanced guard for the main colonial force, Fingo under Captain Veldtman "came in contact with the enemy, and attacking them with spirit, after a sharp engagement, completely routing them, capturing 910 cattle and some horses; over 100 women and children were in the bush and were forwarded under Fingo escort to Ibeka."⁹⁷ A colonial force sent east of the Kei River to attack the Gcaleka in mid-January 1878 consisted of fifty FAMP, fifty-two settler volunteers, and eight hundred armed Fingo. The Fingo were well equipped with firearms, great coats, blankets, and haversacks. While seizing 2,300 cattle, the Fingo encountered stiff resistance from the Gcaleka, who were forced to retire after one hundred of their men were killed. Among the Fingo only four were killed and seven wounded. Several days later the column was joined by another Fingo contingent of six hundred men under Captain McGregor, who had already captured 2,500 cattle and 5,400 sheep; all the seized livestock were sent west across the Kei into the Colony. Richard Rorke, the commander of the expedition, reported that "[t]he Fingos under Captains Graham and Halliday displayed the most dauntless courage, coupled with surprising energy and activity."⁹⁸

When Sandile's Rharhabe rebelled in the Cape Colony in January 1878, Fingo men with the colonial army in Transkei asked for permission to return to their homes out of fear that they would be attacked from the west. Colonel R. T. Glyn, commander of the Transkei Field Force, gave permission to Veldtman and his four hundred Fingo to return to their homesteads on the understanding that if needed they would return to colonial service.⁹⁹ General Sir Arthur Cunynghame,

⁹⁶ C. D. Griffith to Deputy Adjutant General, Head Quarter Camp, Ibeka, 29 November 1877, BPP, 1878 (1961) (2000), p. 270 (13).

⁹⁷ Colonel R. T. Glyn to Governor, Camp Near Malan's Station, 5 January 1878, BPP 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), "Correspondence Respecting War between Transvaal Republic and Neighbouring Native Tribes, and Native Affairs in South Africa," p. 42 (34).

⁹⁸ R. Rorke to J. Ayliff (commanding Fingo Levies, Transkei), Gaba, 22 January 1878; and J. McGregor to J. Ayliff, Junction Camp, 22 January 1878, BPP, 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), pp. 84–85 (74–75).

⁹⁹ Colonel R. T. Glyn to Governor, Camp Near Malan's Station, 5 January 1878, BPP, 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), p. 43 (35).

the British commander, wrote that the only problem he had with the Fingo levies operating east of the Kei was that rumors of Rharhabe attacks sometimes prompted them to return home to defend their families and herds.¹⁰⁰

In January 1878 a supply and operational base protected by earthen fortifications was established on Centane Hill east of the Kei River and deep within Gcaleka territory. On the morning of 7 February 1878, a combined force of 1,500 Gcalaka and Rharhabe attacked the camp in an attempt to secure food and ammunition. The defenders included four hundred European infantry, mostly British regulars and FAMP, two cannon, and 560 Fingo levies, one group under Captain Veldtman and the other under Fingo leader Smith Poswa. As usual, the Fingo units were deployed on the flanks outside the defenses, which were manned by Europeans. After twenty minutes of heavy firing the Xhosa withdrew, and Veldtman's company and the FAMP cavalry began their pursuit. Almost four hundred Xhosa men were killed at the Battle of Centane with minimal colonial losses. This decisive defeat brought Gcaleka resistance to an end, and Sarhili eventually went into hiding east of the Mbashe River.¹⁰¹ After the battle, General Cunynghame wrote, "The Native Levies proved their usefulness by the rapidity with which they followed up the flying enemy, causing them fearful loss. They were commanded by Veldtman, a Fingo chief, whose services have continually proved valuable in the war."¹⁰² Cunynghame later added:

Captain Veldtman, of the Fingos. The conduct of this officer has been very conspicuous in this war, always ready at the post of danger, and bringing his forces to the front. His influence over a large portion of the Fingo tribe on the borders of Galekaland [*sic*] is very considerable and very valuable to British interests.¹⁰³

Henry Bartle Frere, governor and high commissioner, in lamenting the lack of Fingo allies to support colonial military operations in Natal, praised the loyalty and courage of Captain Veldtman, whom he thought

¹⁰⁰ Sir A. Cunynghame to Sir. H. B. E. Frere, Ibeka, 11 January 1878, BPP, 1878–79 (2374) (2454), "Correspondence Respecting Affairs in South Africa," p. 188 (22).

¹⁰¹ Captain Upcher to Colonel Glyn, Quintana, 8 February 1878, BPP, 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), p. 160 (150); Milton, *The Edges of War*, 267–69.

¹⁰² General Sir A. Cunynghame to Secretary of State for War, King William's Town, 15 February 1878, BPP, 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), p. 158 (148).

¹⁰³ General A. Cunynghame to Sir Bartle Frere, King William's Town, 20 February 1878, BPP, 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), p. 166 (154).

"quite capable of undertaking every duty required for the effective direction in the field of a whole battalion of native auxiliaries."¹⁰⁴ In late April and early May colonial forces consisting of several FAMP cavalry troops, several companies of British regulars, and well over three thousand Fingo, pursued Sarhili and the Gcaleka to the Qora River, but they found only a few cattle. These Fingo levies were divided into volunteers and paid mercenaries; the former fought for loot and sometimes were sent back to camp for disobeying orders, while the latter seem to have been more reliable.¹⁰⁵

With the end of the campaign in Transkei, colonial forces turned their attention to Xhosa rebels within the Colony. During fighting in the Pirie Bush in March 1878, the British would first send in Fingo to determine the location of the rebels and then dispatch British soldiers to attack them. A medical officer wrote:

The ground over which these operations were carried was at one place so rugged, rocky, and precipitous that Europeans could not go into it with the slightest chance of success, and the Fingoes had to be employed; they were most unwilling to do this until told that if they went into the bush and scoured it thoroughly they should have all they captured, besides which Sandilli was in the bush, and 500£ was offered by the Colonial Government for his capture.¹⁰⁶

The roughly one thousand Fingo recruited from places in the Colony like Fort Peddie and Fort Beaufort were not enough to dislodge Sandile's people from the Pirie Bush, and in late March another one thousand hastily assembled reinforcements were brought in from Transkei. These Fingo were compelled to march fifty-three miles within twenty-four hours in order to reach the battlefield. J. Ayliff, the chief magistrate of Fingoland, had to accompany the Transkei contingent "owing to their unwillingness to leave their homes, the reason given being that they had become rich and independent from the spoils of the Galeaka [*sic*]

¹⁰⁴ Sir H. B. E. Frere to Sir M. Hicks Beach, Pietermaritzburg, 30 September 1878, BPP, 1878-79 (2220) (2222) (2242), "Correspondence Respecting Affairs of South Africa," p. 294 (281).

¹⁰⁵ Colonel R. T. Glyn to Deputy Adjutant General, Camp Ibeka, 22 May 1878, BPP, 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), p. 564-655 (178-80).

¹⁰⁶ Surgeon General J. A. Woolfryes, "Medical History of the Galeaka-Gaika War, 1877-78," BPP, 1878-79 (C.2434), "Statistical, Sanitary and Medical Reports of Army Medical Department: 1878," p. 253 (245).

war.”¹⁰⁷ In early April a desperate rebel force was located in the bush and attacked by the Transkei Fingo, supported by two cannon and a company of British infantry. General F. A. Thesiger, the British commander and later Lord Chelmsford, reported that the “Rebels fought well and drove Fingoes out of the bush three times. One hour before sunset Fingoes retired from bush, owing to want of ammunition.”¹⁰⁸ Although they killed forty-one Xhosa at a loss of one European captain and two Fingo, with thirteen additional Fingo wounded, European commanders were disappointed. Just after the war, General Thesiger reported, “These Transkein[sic] Fingos, however, although paid very liberally, came unwillingly, fought unwillingly, and very shortly had to be disarmed, and sent back to their own country, owing to their mutinous conduct and plundering propensities.” The general also stated, “The brunt of the fighting fell upon the Transkeian Fingoes, who, though gallantly led in many instances by their officers, showed no aptitude or inclination for bush fighting.”¹⁰⁹ Major John Crealock, a secretary of Thesiger, described the Transkei Fingo levy as “a wild looking crew” with “a great opinion of themselves,” who warned the Xhosa of their attack by “firing volleys of valuable ammunition into the air! And singing the most magnificent war songs!” Crealock also noted that had the Transkei Fingo obeyed orders, “we ought to have had a sharp fight perhaps but a successful one; but they hung about in groups and seemed quite afraid of entering the Bush.”¹¹⁰ Of course, a “sharp fight” meant many Fingo would have been killed.

Toward the end of the war many rebel leaders were killed or captured by Fingo colonial allies. On 12 May 1878 Fingo police arrested Tini Maqoma as he tried to move from the Fort Beaufort area into his father’s old stronghold of the Waterkloof. On 28 May 1878 Sandile received a fatal gunshot wound while fleeing from ‘Lonsdale’s Fingoes’ in the Pirie Bush. In this same skirmish Dukwana, son of the Xhosa Christian

¹⁰⁷ Surgeon General J. A. Woolfryes, “Medical History of the Galeaka-Gaika War, 1877–78,” BPP, 1878–79 (C.2434), p. 255 (247).

¹⁰⁸ Captain H. Spalding, King William’s Town, 3 April 1878, “Precis of Operations”; for the quotation see telegram from Lieutenant General Thesiger, King William’s Town, to His Excellency the Governor, Cape Town, 8 April 1878, BPP, 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), p. 353 (91).

¹⁰⁹ Lieutenant General Thesiger to Secretary of State for War, 26 June 1878, BPP, 1878 (2079) (2100) (2144), p. 365 (249). Thesiger says one thousand Fingo were recruited from Transkei.

¹¹⁰ Chris Hummel, ed., *The Frontier War Journal of Major John Crealock, 1878* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1989), 56–63.

prophet Ntsikana, was killed outright.¹¹¹ Fingo auxiliaries also killed Soga, the elderly Rharhabe councilor, who had given up the fight and retired to his village.¹¹² In addition, during the war there were reports of Fingo levies abusing and killing Xhosa prisoners.¹¹³

The War of 1877–78, in which Fingo made up a vast majority of colonial soldiers, represented the height of their military contribution to British operations in the Eastern Cape.¹¹⁴

The Transkei Rebellion 1880–81

Just after the 1877–78 war the Cape government passed a law prohibiting all Africans from carrying firearms. In December 1878, just a few months after the Pirie Bush fighting, Fingo at Mount Coke asked the local missionary, Reverend P. D. Hepburn, why they had been ordered to hand in their firearms. While Hepburn encouraged the Fingo to obey, he privately wrote, "I do not think that the disarming of the Fingoes was prudently conducted. The Fingoes have served the Government faithfully during four wars."¹¹⁵ Speeches made by Fingo leaders in late January 1879 and statements made by them to colonial newspapers indicated that they "deeply resent their compulsory disarmament."¹¹⁶ In 1882 Thomas Scanlan, the premier of the Cape, who thought that the mutiny of the Cape Mounted Rifles in 1851 had made the colony's settlers suspicious of permanent African military units, wrote that "[t]he adherence of the Fingoes to us has no doubt been weakened by

¹¹¹ Surgeon General J. A. Woolfryes, "Medical History of the Galeaka-Gaika War, 1877–78," BPP, 1878–79 (C.2434), p. 261 (253).

¹¹² Milton, *The Edges of War*, 272.

¹¹³ Sir H. B. E. Frere to Sir M. Hicks Beach, Cape Town, 25 August 1879, BPP, 1880 (2699), "Return of Officials in Public Service in Cyprus," p. 242 (209).

¹¹⁴ This conflict seemed to demonstrate to the Fingo the advantages of western medicine. At the beginning of the war Fingo wounded often refused European medical treatment, preferring to go home to traditional healers. However, a British medical officer observed that by the end of the conflict wounded Fingo were quick to "claim the privilege" of entering hospital, "and when once admitted are with difficulty got rid of." Surgeon General J. A. Woolfryes, "Medical History of the Galeaka-Gaika War, 1877–78," BPP, 1878–79 (C.2434), p. 257 (249).

¹¹⁵ Extracts of Letter from Rev. P. D. Hepburn, Mount Coke, 17 December 1878, BPP, 1878–79 (2252) (2260) (2269) (2309) (2316) (2318) (2367), "Correspondence Respecting Affairs in South Africa," pp. 303–4 (2–3).

¹¹⁶ F. W. Chesson to Secretary of State for Colonies, King William's Town, 14 May 1879, BPP, 1880 (2569), "Correspondence Respecting Affairs in Basutoland," p. 7 (3).

the application of the disarmament law to a portion of the people.”¹¹⁷ Yet, despite this new law, Fingo were still employed as colonial military allies. In November 1879 a force of two hundred Europeans and Cape Mounted Riflemen and 440 Fingo stormed the mountain stronghold of rebel chief Moirosi on the Orange River.¹¹⁸

The Mpondomise or Transkei Rebellion broke out in 1880 largely because of colonial agents undermining the authority of African chiefs, who had recently agreed to become British subjects. The Fingo people of that area, recently disarmed, remained loyal but were not properly equipped to defend themselves let alone participate in military operations. The chief magistrate of Butterworth, who had quickly organized and armed six hundred loyalist Africans, reported in late October 1880 that “all depends on arms and ammunition being sent up at once, and that a very large number of Fingoes are loyal, but must be well supported.”¹¹⁹ Although the disarmament law had clearly alienated some Fingo, their association to the colonial state was still close.

When the uprising began a large number of Fingo men reported to the colonial town of Umtata to volunteer for military service, but there were not enough firearms for all of them. In mid-November rebels attacked Fingo settlements around Umtata and seized some cattle. In turn, an armed patrol of two hundred Europeans and five hundred Fingo was assembled and moved quickly to a ‘Fingo station’ called Fodo, located in Mpondomise territory, where they engaged eight hundred rebels. After one hour of fighting, the Mpondomise, who had

¹¹⁷ T. C. Scanlan to General Gordon, Cape Town, 7 August 1882, BPP, 1883 (3493), “Correspondence Between Government of Cape Colony and Commandant General of Colonial Forces on Affairs in Basutoland and Native Territories, and Reorganization of Colonial Forces,” p. 40 (32).

¹¹⁸ H. B. Frere, Governor to Secretary of State, Colonial Office, Cape Town, 25 November 1879, BPP, 1880 (2699), “Return of Officials in Public Service in Cyprus,” pp. 505–6 (468–69).

¹¹⁹ G. Strahan to the Earl of Kimberley, Cape Town, 2 November 1880, “Summary of Events in Kaffraria since 26 October 1880,” BPP, 1881 (2755) (2821), “Correspondence Respecting Affairs in Basutoland,” pp. 259–65 (250–55). For more on the Transkei Rebellion, see William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890–1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 106–37; Christopher Saunders, “The Transkei Rebellion of 1880–81: A Case Study of Transkeian Resistance to White Control,” *South African Historical Journal* 8 (1976): 32–39; Saunders, *The Annexation of the Transkei Territories* (Pretoria: Archives Yearbook, 1978), 91–109; Sean Redding, “Sorcery and Sovereignty: Taxation, Witchcraft and Political Symbols in the 1880 Transkei Rebellion,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22 (1996): 249–70.

never faced colonial firepower, ran off in disarray leaving forty to fifty dead. Only two Fingo were wounded in the action. It was reported that "[t]he Officer Commanding says he considers the patrol a great success and a severe blow to the rebels, who appeared quite demoralized."¹²⁰ Around the same time a colonial magistrate reported that Fingo from Transkeian Fingoland were using the rebellion as an excuse to seize cattle from neighboring loyalist Thembu.¹²¹ On 24 November two contingents of rebels under chiefs Mhlonhlo and Mditshwa met near Umtata, presumably to besiege or attack the town, and were driven off by a force of thirty Cape Mounted Rifles, fifty European volunteers, and 1,500 African levies (many of whom were Fingo). Between thirty and forty Mpondomise were killed on the rebel side, but only one Fingo died on the colonial side. It appears there were some problems with the Fingo just prior to and during this battle, as a magistrate reported that "about half the Fingoes to whom badges had been served out on the 23rd left for their homes during the night, and that the remainder who took the field 'did not display bravery,' but absolutely refused to take part in the attack."¹²² In mid-December a patrol of seven hundred Europeans and four hundred Africans, mostly Fingo, raided the territory of the rebel Thembu. The Fingo infantry drove off a rebel assault, killing sixteen and losing one of their own, and the patrol seized 1,400 cattle and six thousand sheep.¹²³ Fingo were involved in further operations against the rebels during late December in which 4,700 cattle and four thousand sheep were captured. However, on 1 January 1881 it was reported that all the Fingo in Colonel A. H. Wavell's column had deserted—some turning to banditry—and it was difficult to enlist more as there was discontent over arrangements relating to captured livestock.¹²⁴ Fingo were important in the suppression of the rebellion,

¹²⁰ G. Strahan to Earl of Kimberley, Cape Town, 23 November 1880, "Summary of Events Reported Since 16 November," BPP, 1881 (2755) (2821), "Correspondence Respecting Affairs of Basutoland," pp. 440–41 (65–66).

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 442 (67).

¹²² G. Strahan to Earl of Kimberley, Cape Town, 30 November 1880, BPP, 1881 (2755) (2821), p. 454 (79).

¹²³ Brigadier General's Camp Near Bashee Hoek to Colonial Secretary, Cape Town, 18 December 1880, enclosed in G. Strahan to Earl of Kimberley, Cape Town, 21 December 1880, BPP, 1881 (2755) (2821), p. 486 (111).

¹²⁴ Lieutenant Colonel J. A. Owen, "Summary of Events Reported Since 28 December 1880," enclosed in G. Strahan to Earl of Kimberley, Cape Town, 14 January 1881, BPP, 1881 (2755) (2821), p. 493 (118).

but their reliability had been strained by disarmament legislation and disputes over loot.

Conclusion

From the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Fingo auxiliaries made a significant contribution to British war efforts in the Eastern Cape and beyond. Previous works have stressed the adoption of guns (and horses) by the Fingo as an important factor in their success, but this observation must have been countered to some extent by the fact that the Xhosa were doing exactly the same. In many engagements of the Cape-Xhosa wars, the presence of Fingo levies increased the size of otherwise small colonial contingents, and therefore reduced the importance of the usual Xhosa numerical superiority. Throughout these conflicts a steadily increasing number of Fingo were employed by the British, and by the late 1870s the Fingo made up the vast majority of the Cape's military manpower. The more Fingo levies that were employed, the less the British had to rely on maintaining more expensive regular units, and the Fingo levies would always be disbanded after each war. The Xhosa adapted to superior colonial firepower by taking to the bush and mounting hit-and-run attacks. The British responded by using a growing number of expendable Fingo allies who, during an engagement, would be sent into rough terrain to locate the Xhosa before a small number of hopefully more disciplined regulars would be committed at a critical point. The British also countered the development of Xhosa bush warfare by concentrating on destroying the productive capacity of their society, which included stealing livestock, disrupting cultivation, and burning villages. In many of these wars the Xhosa eventually surrendered to avoid starvation rather than because of a decisive battlefield defeat.

These types of colonial scorched-earth operations could be accomplished more effectively with cheap Fingo auxiliaries than with the much higher paid and better equipped European regular soldiers. For the British, the Fingo capture of Xhosa livestock would accomplish the dual goals of undermining their enemy and paying off their allies. The Fingo had no qualms about killing prisoners and non-combatants, and so the British officers benefited by their actions, while at the same time they condemned savage African warfare. During defensive operations the dispensable Fingo levies would usually be deployed outside European held fortifications to disrupt and absorb Xhosa attacks long enough

for colonial firepower to take effect. Fingo casualties were always light compared to the Xhosa because the former, although often placed in vulnerable positions, enjoyed support from colonial artillery, trained marksmen, and cavalry, and the latter did not. No doubt the Fingo volunteers fought to enrich themselves and were at their most reliable as colonial allies when there was plenty of loot. Some Fingo military leaders like Veldtman Bikitsha emerged from these conflicts as wealthy and powerful men in the Eastern Cape. There were certainly a few occasions when the Fingo did not perform well on the battlefield, but these were remarkably rare for untrained auxiliaries. British commanders in the Cape, for more than six decades, praised the loyalty and effectiveness of their Fingo levies, and by 1850 knew very well that they were dependent upon them. However, once powerful independent African states had been subdued, the Fingo quickly lost their value as military allies and were disarmed—perhaps somewhat prematurely—and became just another subject people, although with a history and identity closely associated with the colonial power.

CHAPTER THREE

AFRICAN LEVIES IN NATAL AND ZULULAND, 1836–1906

John Laband & Paul Thompson

The colonial conquest of Africa was primarily the work of locally raised African forces commanded by European officers. Indigenous soldiers, especially in tropical campaigns, were far more resistant to disease than white troops and had the additional advantage of being much cheaper to maintain.¹ Their recruitment was a very old practice, dating back in sub-Saharan Africa to the sixteenth century with the Portuguese in what is now northern Angola.² Whereas the French, Belgians, and Germans in the nineteenth century relied overwhelmingly on indigenous troops in their wars of African conquest, the British deployed regular troops drawn from Britain and the imperial dependencies more extensively, and they also created local militias in colonies of white settlement such as the Cape and Natal.³ It is revealing that in his famous treatise on the military techniques employed in the second half of the nineteenth century against ‘native’ forces in Africa and Asia, Colonel Charles Callwell stated firmly that the subject would be discussed solely “from the point of view of regular troops.”⁴ Nevertheless, in some campaigns, such as those in Zululand in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it proved necessary for the British and colonial authorities to raise levies for combat and logistical support. In a certain sense this practice was reminiscent of the press gangs and mercenaries of the European armies of the *ancien régime*.⁵ In Natal, for example,

¹ David Killingray, “Guardians of Empire,” in *Guardians of Empire. The Armed Forces of Colonial Powers c. 1700–1964*, ed. Killingray and David Omissi (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 7.

² Bouda Etemad, *Possessing the World: Taking the Measurements of Colonisation from the 18th to the 20th Century* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 39, 42–43.

³ L. H. Gann and Peter Duigan, *The Rulers of British Africa 1870–1914* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1978), 102.

⁴ Colonel C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practice*, 3rd ed. (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1906), 23.

⁵ H. L. Wesseling, “Colonial Wars: An Introduction,” in *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa*, ed. J. A. De Moor and Wesseling (Leiden: E. J. Brill/Universitaire Pers Leiden, 1989), 7.

the governor, in his capacity as 'supreme chief' over the indigenous population, had the right to exact *isibhalo*, or compulsory labor and military service. Magistrates accordingly raised levies from the chiefs of the Native Reserves, encouraging recruitment with promises of pay and captured cattle.⁶ For their part, many African levies in those parts of the continent under colonial rule saw how their warrior traditions and concepts of masculine honor could be maintained through military service with the colonial power.⁷ Unfortunately for their sense of honor, levies and auxiliaries did not exclusively perform combat roles or serve as guides or scouts where their military skills were appreciated: they also labored as bearers, cooks, water-carriers, porters, and sanitary men, or handled the livestock and drove wagons and carts. Understandably, their motivation was often poor as a consequence. Furthermore, most African levies lacked adequate military training and discipline, and all were consequently prone to desert, especially in the face of military setbacks.⁸

Levies and the War against King Dingane, 1838–1840

The British were not the first to employ African levies in Zululand. The first permanent white settlement in southeast Africa was at Port Natal (now Durban), where in 1824 hunter-traders received the permission of Shaka, the Zulu king who was aggressively extending his sway in the region, to occupy the land in return for recognizing his overlordship as tributary chiefs. They adopted the local laws and customs and gathered Zulu around them who, as their clients, owed them military service. After 1832 other traders joined the settlement and brought with them numerous 'Hottentot' (Khoisan) retainers from the Eastern Cape who were, in fact, recently emancipated slaves.⁹

⁶ John Laband and Paul Thompson, *The Illustrated Guide to the Anglo-Zulu War* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000), 22–23.

⁷ John Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 227–45: chapter 5, "The Honour of the Mercenary."

⁸ Edward M. Spiers, *The Late Victorian Army 1868–1902* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 293–95.

⁹ The pejorative term 'Hottentot' was used by Dutch settlers to describe not just KhoiKhoi but a wide variety of non-white, non-Xhosa people at the Cape. Although limiting, the term Khoisan will be used for the rest of this paper. Charles Ballard, "Traders, Trekkers and Colonists," in *Natal and Zululand from Earliest Times to 1910*:

In late 1837 the Boer Emigrant Farmers (Voortrekkers) from the Cape entered the Zulu kingdom in search of new lands to settle, but they were soon at war with Dingane, king since 1828. In March 1838 John Cane, with a force of 2,100 Khoisan retainers and African client levies from Port Natal who recognized Cane as their chief, struck a blow in support of the Boers by making a successful raid in the vicinity of Kranskop; they carried off four thousand cattle and five hundred Zulu women and children. The following month, emboldened by this success, Cane, Robert Biggar, and John Stubbs led an even larger force, which included sixteen settlers, thirty Khoisan, and four hundred Africans (many of them experienced big-game hunters in the employ of the settlers) armed with firearms and supported by several thousand levies who had given their allegiance to the white Port Natal chiefs. They carried spears and shields and wore white calico to distinguish them from the Zulu. The Zulu surrounded and outmaneuvered this 'Grand Army of Natal' at Ndondakusuka on 17 April; almost all of the invaders were killed or drowned in the Thukela River as they tried to flee.¹⁰

Poor leadership and discipline proved fatal for the white settlers and their force. It was otherwise for the Boers. In their campaign against Dingane in 1838, they were stoutly supported by their own Khoisan or *agterryers*. The *agterryers* had accompanied their masters on the Great Trek into the interior, and as hostile intruders in the Zulu kingdom, they were in the same danger as the Voortrekkers. An *agterryer* is defined as a lackey who accompanied his master on horseback on a journey, hunting expedition, or military campaign. In warfare the *agterryer* might have performed a military role fighting alongside the Boer or offered menial support to the firing line. There is evidence dating back to 1715 that Khoisan on the Cape eastern frontier were an important component in mounted military expeditions, or commandos. Although contemporary accounts, often laden with deep-seated racial prejudice, were reticent to discuss the direct military role in Zululand, the *agterryers* clearly went on commando with the Boers and helped defend their laagers against Zulu attacks. At the significant Boer victory over

A New History, ed. Andrew Duminy and Bill Guest (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Shuter & Shooter, 1989), 116, 118.

¹⁰ Laband, *The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Nation* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1997), 93–94; Kafir Commission, 1852: evidence of D. C. Toohey in *The Annals of Natal 1495 to 1845 Volume 1*, ed. John Bird, facsimile reprint (Cape Town: C. Struik, 1965), 551–52; William Wood, Interpreter to Dingaan, *Statements Respecting Dingaan, King of the Zulus* (Cape Town: Collard & Co., 1840) in *The Annals of Natal*, 383–87.

the Zulu at Ncome (Blood River) on 16 December 1838, it is calculated that sixty-three *agterryers* fought alongside 407 Boers.¹¹ In the joint campaign of January 1840 when the Boers supported Prince Mpande in his successful attempt to overthrow his half-brother Dingane and seize the Zulu crown, the Boer commando consisted of 308 Boers and nearly sixty armed *agterryers*, as well as four hundred African servants, or non-combatant auxiliaries.¹²

The Anglo-Zulu War, 1879

A reduced but independent Zulu kingdom survived the war with the Boers. In October 1843 King Mpande recognized British rule in Natal south of the Thukela River. His kingdom was then wedged between British Natal and the Boer South African Republic (or Transvaal). For the next thirty-five years the Zulu kings maintained Zululand's territorial integrity against its land-hungry settler neighbors. The situation changed when in the mid-1870s the British government began to work for a confederation of the South African colonies of white settlement. This ambitious project depended on the reconciliation of the Boers in the Transvaal to British rule, which had been imposed in 1877. Reconciliation required in part the resolution of the inherited border dispute between the former Transvaal republic and the Zulu kingdom. War was probably inevitable in any case, for the British regarded the Zulu kingdom with its institutionalized military system as a standing threat to its neighbors, possessing the potential to destabilize the proposed confederation. A series of border incidents provided a *casus belli*, and on 11 January 1879 British forces invaded Zululand.¹³

In 1878 the British army in South Africa had successfully concluded the Ninth Frontier War on the eastern frontier of the Cape Colony and moved into Natal and the Transvaal to positions along the Zulu

¹¹ Pieter Labuschagne, *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902): The Role and Contribution of Agterryers* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1999), 7–25. For the war in 1838 between the Zulu and the Boers, see Laband, *Zulu Nation*, 89–105.

¹² Journal of the Commando under Chief Commandant Pretorius against Dingaan (*Zuid Afrikaan*, 10 February 1846), *Annals of Natal*, Volume 1, ed. Bird, 576–80; Adulphe Delegorgue, *Travels in Southern Africa, Vol. 1* (1847), trans. Fleur Webb, introduced and indexed Stephanie J. Alexander and Colin de B. Webb (Durban: Killie Campbell Africana Library and Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1990), 103.

¹³ The literature on the war and its antecedents is extensive. A good recent summary and critique is in Laband and Thompson, *Anglo-Zulu War*, 3–7.

border, preparatory to invasion. Lieutenant General Lord Chelmsford, the General Officer Commanding (GOC) in South Africa, devised a conventional plan in which five (later three) columns would converge on the Zulu king's great place, oNdini. It was presumed Cetshwayo, the Zulu king, would send his army to stop them, resulting in a battle or battles in which the British would demonstrate their military superiority. The Zulu would capitulate, and their kingdom would be reduced to an inoffensive client state.¹⁴ The main thrusts depended on a small British army of regular troops about 6,800 strong, mostly infantry. The shortage of mounted troops was acute and obvious. Small corps of settler militia reinforced the mounted infantry, but other mobile forces had to be found, initially for reconnaissance and pursuit, and later to help secure lines of communication and bridge the gaps between columns. Chelmsford found that African levies had served this purpose in the eastern Cape, and he wished to replicate their use in Natal.¹⁵ The recent mixed record of African levies in Natal did not deflect his plan. In 1873 several thousand African levies carrying traditional weapons had been called out to support a small force of colonial mounted volunteers attempting to prevent Langalibalele, the disaffected chief of the Hlubi, from leading his people out of Natal by way of the Bushman's River Pass into Basutoland. The interception by mounted troops failed dismally on 4 November, and the foot levies did not arrive in time. The only troops to act with any distinction were fifteen mounted Basuto, intended to be scouts and armed with a motley collection of firearms. The Basuto were adherents of Chief Hlubi kaMota Molife of the Sotho-speaking Tlokwa who had originally come from over the Drakesberg into Natal, and were eager to demonstrate their loyalty to the colonial authorities. They would serve the British well in several campaigns over the coming years.¹⁶

On arriving in Natal, Chelmsford outlined the structure of the envisaged Natal Native Contingent (NNC). The Lieutenant Governor, Sir Henry Bulwer, who was the Supreme Chief in the Colony of Natal, could call

¹⁴ Intelligence Branch of the War Office, *Narrative of the Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1881), 11–18; Laband, ed., *Lord Chelmsford's Zululand Campaign 1878–1879* (Stroud: Alan Sutton for the Army Records Society, 1994), xxxii–xxxvi.

¹⁵ Laband and Thompson, *Anglo-Zulu War*, 22–26; War Office, *Narrative*, 145.

¹⁶ For the reverse at the Bushman's River Pass, see R. W. F. Droogleever, *The Road to Isandlwana: Colonel Anthony Durnford in Natal and Zululand* (London: Greenhill Books, 1992), 37–57.

out levies and transfer them to the imperial forces for service under the command of the general. As originally conceived, the NNC would be comprised of seven thousand infantry, 250 cavalry, and three hundred pioneers. It would be organized along European military lines—in companies and battalions and regiments—each theoretically in charge of thirty-three European officers and sixty-two non-commissioned officers. They would be drilled in the European manner to instill discipline and tactical utility. Just enough firearms (one old muzzle-loader for every ten men) would be issued to give them confidence against the Zulu, who were known to have many firearms and a superior reputation in traditional warfare. It must be pointed out that the NNC was not regarded as a potential equal of the British regulars. It was not expected to take major action in a pitched battle, but to serve as light infantry, to scout, skirmish, and pursue a defeated and fleeing enemy.

Africans in service were assured of being fed and paid on a regular basis. The daily ration of the foot soldier consisted of one-and-one-half pounds of meat, one pound of maize meal, and two ounces of salt. Pay was twenty shillings per month. The men received no uniforms (a red cloth tied around the head would distinguish them from the Zulu), but were issued blankets (a different color for each battalion). The Natal Native Pioneers (NNP) received red jackets and white trousers, and some of them were issued rifles. The mounted troops were an elite force. They were completely uniformed (in brown, typical of the irregulars) and armed with standard British carbines. A trooper's monthly pay was thirty shillings, but he provided his own horse. The troopers from the missionary settlement at Edendale were each paid three pounds sterling and provided with special rations.

African response to the call to serve was quite positive. The British queen was regarded generally as a protector against the Zulu king, who was an enemy. All things considered, the units formed in good time; however, once functioning, the NNC revealed serious defects. While the men were grouped and drilled in the European manner, they did not quite understand the purpose. Moreover, the skills of the European officers varied from regiment to regiment. The 1st Regiment got the best—local men who spoke Zulu—and the 2nd and 3rd regiments made do with men who had served with the levies in the Cape; they did not speak Zulu, but some spoke the related Xhosa dialect. In contrast to the officers, the non-commissioned officers were generally ill-equipped for their duties.

Colonial officials connected with the management of the African population, Sir Henry Bulwer, and at least some settlers regarded this system of levies as impractical, even dangerous, but the impresario of war, High Commissioner Sir Bartle Frere, sided with the military, and Lord Chelmsford got what he wanted. The NNC numbered 9,350 at the time of invasion—52 percent of the invading army. When the invasion began there were two regiments of two battalions each and one regiment of three battalions on foot. The 2nd Regiment accompanied the Right (No.1) Column up the coast, and the 3rd Regiment accompanied the Centre (No. 3) Column inland. The 1st Regiment (with the three battalions) formed the No. 2 Column in between them. In addition to the infantry, there were six troops of mounted men and three companies of NNP. The mounted troops were with the 1st Regiment, and the companies of NNP were apportioned among the three columns. There were no units of the NNC with the Left (No. 4) Column operating from the Transvaal, but in early January its commander, Colonel Evelyn Wood, raised about six hundred irregulars (some fifty of them mounted) under local white officers, who soon proved to be of poor quality. The 1st Battalion of Wood's Irregulars was recruited from the Wakkerstroom District, and the men were identified by red and white cloths worn round the head; the 2nd Battalion, recruited from the Utrecht District, wore blue and white head-cloths.¹⁷ Number 5 Column, operating out of the eastern Transvaal and attached to the Left Column in late February, included some 250 levies drawn from the friendly Swazi kingdom (Fairlie's Swazi) and a further 75 levies raised in Wakkerstroom (Vos's Natives).¹⁸ Logistics, economy of force, and terrain eliminated the intermediate column from the initial invasion, and one battalion and another three companies of infantry and five troops of mounted men were shifted to the Centre Column.¹⁹

¹⁷ Huw M. Jones, *The Boiling Cauldron: Utrecht District and the Anglo-Zulu War, 1879* (Bisley, Gloucestershire: Shermershill Press, 2006), 188–90, 202–3, 224–25.

¹⁸ Laband, "Mbilini, Manyonyoba and the Phongolo River Frontier: A Neglected Sector of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879," in *Kingdom and Colony at War: Sixteen Studies on the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879*, Laband and Thompson (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press and Cape Town, N & S Press, 1990), 194, 197.

¹⁹ Thompson, *Black Soldiers of the Queen: The Natal Native Contingent in the Anglo-Zulu War* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 6–8, 17–19, 24–25; Laband and Thompson, *Anglo-Zulu War*, 22–23, 42–43; War Office, *Narrative*, 15, 18, 145–46.

On 22 January 1879 Zulu armies attacked the advancing Right and Centre Columns. The Right Column repelled the attack at the Nyezane River, and then continued to advance to its first objective, the mission station at Eshowe. The Centre Column, under Chelmsford himself, was divided when the Zulu struck the British camp at Isandlwana Mountain. The portion guarding it was destroyed, after which the remaining portion retreated precipitately to Natal. The British defeat at Isandlwana cost 1,300 officers and men (about 25 percent of the column's strength) and valuable *matériel*, which would take months to replace. Lord Chelmsford thereafter adopted a defensive strategy. The Zulu army was not equipped or trained to stay in the field for long, and thus the war languished for two months.²⁰

The NNC did not distinguish itself during the initial campaign; with scarcely a month's training it was not ready for serious combat. One company scouting in advance at Nyezane ran away when the Zulu attacked. It reformed with another company and some NNP, and the lot nervously held their ground while the battle raged about them. The six companies and five troops at Isandlwana became engaged at different times and places on the battlefield. Two companies of the 3rd Regiment in the center of the British line could not have held it for long even if they had wanted. They fled as the Zulu closed in, leaving a gap through which the Zulu poured to flank the British on either side. Lord Chelmsford considered the fleeing companies to be the immediate cause of the British defeat, and the NNC became a scapegoat for the bad judgment of the British commanders on the spot.²¹ Subsequently, the 3rd Regiment was disbanded, and the 2nd Regiment, which had returned in some disorder from Eshowe before the Zulu blockaded the Right Column there, had so many deserters that those remaining were furloughed indefinitely. Only the 1st Regiment, three mounted troops,

²⁰ Laband, *Chelmsford's Zululand Campaign*, xxxvii–xxxviii; Laband and Thompson, *Anglo-Zulu War*, 49–52; War Office, *Narrative*, 22–44, 59–63, 145, 156–57; Laband, *Zulu Nation*, 253–54, 260–62.

²¹ Thompson, *Black Soldiers*, 55, 75–76, 80. The fact that the NNC companies probably lost about 40 percent killed seems to have been overlooked. Recent literature has reduced the role and significance attributed to the NNC in the battle by the official version (and by Thompson). For this trend see Thompson, "The Many Battles of Isandlwana: A Transformation in Historiography," *Historia: Journal of the Historical Association of South Africa* 52 (2007).

and the NNP remained. Their morale was not good, but then, neither was that of the British and the settlers.²²

Bulwer seemed to be vindicated in his opposition to the raising of the NNC, but Chelmsford would not give up. The 1st Regiment and the recalled 2nd Regiment were broken up into independent battalions under abler commanders. At least one officer in every company was required to speak Zulu, and the European non-commissioned officers—who as a group had proven unsatisfactory—were transferred to *ad hoc* mounted units, while African headmen took their places. The men were given firearms and uniforms and drilled until they became proficient in their movements. By the end of March Chelmsford had received reinforcements from abroad and was ready to relieve Eshowe. The NNC was ready to do its part in the resumed campaign.²³

Chelmsford ordered demonstrations along the border with Zululand to distract the Zulu from the Relief Column but with little effect, for one Zulu army attacked the Left Column at Khambula on 29 March and another the Relief Column at Gingindlovu on 2 April shortly after it entered Zululand. Both attacks were repulsed with great loss to the Zulu and broke their offensive spirit. The units of the NNC at both battles acquitted themselves well.²⁴

Chelmsford persisted with border demonstrations during April and May, arousing Bulwer's ire. The governor feared that they would provoke Zulu retaliation, and resented Chelmsford's employment of the Native Border Guard in that operation. The Native Border Guard was a colonial unit, quite different from the NNC, which was an imperial one. Before the war Chelmsford had foreseen that when the imperial forces went forward into Zululand, Natal would be left practically defenseless

²² Thompson, *Black Soldiers*, 74–77, 82–83, 105–6; Thompson, "Town and Country and the Zulu Threat, 1878–9: The Natal Government's Arrangements for the Protection of Settlers," in *Kingdom and Colony at War*, Laband and Thompson, 232–34, and "The Zulus Are Coming! The Defence of Pietermaritzburg, 1879," in *Kingdom and Colony at War*, 279–86; Laband and Thompson, *The Buffalo Border 1879: The Anglo-Zulu War in Northern Natal* (Durban: Department of History, University of Natal, Research Monograph, no. 6, 1983), 45–59; Laband and Thompson, *War Comes to Umvoti: The Natal-Zululand Border 1878–79* (Durban: Department of History, University of Natal, Research Monograph, no. 5, 1980), 35–40.

²³ Thompson, *Black Soldiers*, 85–89.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 91–95, 107–110; Laband and Thompson, *Anglo-Zulu War*, 52–55. A few of Wood's Irregulars were present at Khambula, although most of the 2nd Battalion had decamped after the disastrous engagement on Hlobane the previous day. See Jones, *Boiling Cauldron*, 256–59, 262–64, 274, 277–82, 323–24.

against Zulu inroads unless some force was embodied to discourage them. He had divided Natal into seven defensive districts, and colonial magistrates were required to enroll local Africans for defense. Each district had a commandant with some military background, and European leaders were found for the various African levies, who carried spears and shields and would fight in the traditional way. The Border Guard was embodied only in the three defensive districts—I, VI, and VII—on the Zulu border. Small units guarded the river crossings and large units were placed in the rear to give support. The Border Guard was to give the alert when a Zulu force entered Natal, resist it if possible, and otherwise hang on its skirts and harry it while the commandant called up the remaining Border Guards to add their weight. In this manner the Zulu force would be slowed down and, if not engaged and defeated, then forced to withdraw.²⁵

At the outbreak of the war there were approximately 2,800 Border Guards under arms. When the British went over to the defensive after Isandlwana, the Border Guard was greatly reinforced by levies from the interior. The old 3rd Regiment of the NNC reappeared as the Weenen Corps in District I. A large force from Alexandra County arrived in District VI, and the Ixopo Native Contingent—foot and horse—took position in District VII. Just as important, the new units were given firearms, albeit obsolete ones. By the end of May the strength of the Border Guard was probably about 7,700.²⁶ As the border demonstrations became more aggressive, some units were required to cross the border. Bulwer ordered the Border Guard not to cross into Zululand, raising the question of whether he or Chelmsford was its real commander. The border districts were under imperial control, but the Border Guard, unlike the NNC, had not been formally transferred to the imperial service. A bitter dispute ensued. The British home government intervened in support of Chelmsford, but at the end of May also dispatched General Sir Garnet Wolseley as High Commissioner in South-East Africa, superior to both the general and the governor, to

²⁵ Laband and Thompson, *Buffalo Border*, 33–35, 57–59; Laband and Thompson, *Umvoti*, 28, 32–33, 99.

²⁶ Laband and Thompson, *Buffalo Border*, 57 and appendices I and II; Laband and Thompson, *Umvoti*, 42, 121, 122; Thompson, "Captain Lucas and the Border Guard: The War on the Lower Thukela, 1879," in *Kingdom and Colony*, Laband and Thompson, 168, 170.

take charge of the war.²⁷ Meanwhile, on 20 May a particularly vigorous demonstration at the Kwelibomvu drift excited the Zulu victims to pursue some of the raiders. On 25 June a Zulu raid across the Thukela at the Middle Drift caught the local Border Guard by surprise. The Zulu destroyed many homesteads in the valley and drove livestock back over the river before the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the NNC on the escarpment above could react.²⁸

Chelmsford's second invasion of Zululand, which commenced after the relief of Eshowe, consisted of two thrusts. A column under the general moved eastward and inland, along the high ground to oNdini. Another column created a diversion on the coast. Chelmsford had ample numbers of regulars, including cavalry, yet the NNC remained indispensable, fielding five battalions of infantry, six mounted troops, and three companies of NNP. The column in the interior included the 2nd Battalion, the Natal Native Horse, and Shepstone's Horse. The column at the coast included the 4th and 5th battalions, Jantze's Horse, and the Mafunze Corps. Zulu resistance was negligible until the interior column approached oNdini. Then the Zulu army attacked and was routed on 4 July.

With the defeat at oNdini, King Cetshwayo became a fugitive, and organized Zulu resistance ceased. Chelmsford resigned with a sense of vindication and left for home. When Wolseley reached the front soon afterwards, he applied his energies to capturing the king and inducing the Zulu notables to make peace. The Border Guard of District VI was commandeered practically *in toto* to serve as carriers in Zululand for the two flying columns Wolseley retained to enforce pacification. A further column advanced in support from the eastern Transvaal. It consisted of seven hundred levies comprised of adherents of Prince Hamu, a rival of Cetshwayo's who had defected to the British in March, and of Swazi warriors who saw a safe opportunity to strike at their traditional Zulu foes. Discipline was poor among these troops and they did little but

²⁷ Laband, "Bulwer, Chelmsford and the Border Levies: The Dispute over the Defence of Natal, 1879," in *Kingdom and Colony*, 150–65; Thompson, "The Active Defence after Isandlwana: British Raids across the Buffalo, March–May 1879," in *ibid.*, 144–49; Laband and Thompson, *Buffalo Border*, 57–59, 60–65; Laband and Thompson, *Umvoti*, pp. 42–73; Laband and Thompson, *Anglo-Zulu War*, 38–39; Thompson, "Captain Lucas," 167–76.

²⁸ Laband, "Border Levies," 161–62; Laband and Thompson, *Umvoti*, 56–73; Thompson, *Black Soldiers*, 110–11; Laband and Thompson, *Anglo-Zulu War*, 128–31.

plunder.²⁹ Small mounted parties from the flying columns hunted for the king, and Jantze's Horse was run ragged in a fruitless search of the Mfolozi bush. Finally one of the parties, including a company of the 4th Battalion of the NNC, captured Cetshwayo in the Ngome forest on 28 August. The Zulu chiefs submitted to Wolseley on 1 September, and the war was over. The NNC was withdrawn along with the rest of the imperial forces in Zululand and returned home. The last units were disbanded in September, as was the Native Border Guard.³⁰

The literature on the Anglo-Zulu War has little specifically about the NNC and less on the Native Border Guard; in some cases the two are confused. Beginning with the official *Narrative of Field Operations Connected with the Zulu War of 1879* (1881), histories have given the NNC prominence only at Isandlwana, and the inglorious flight of two companies of the 3rd Regiment has reflected negatively on the entire unit. Only two books have been written on the NNC, and three others contain scattered material on the Border Guard.³¹ None of these is a popular publication. The most likely reason for such neglect is the lack of interest among white writers and readers in black soldiers, except for the Zulu adversary, who is often romanticized as a noble if very martial savage. Yet the NNC was indispensable to the British victory. It did much that the available British regulars could not do, and for which the settler militia was insufficient. Take away the NNC in the second invasion and many more of the British infantry and the lumbering British cavalry would have been tied up on lengthening lines of communication. The mounted African troops, in conjunction with similar small colonial units, were the indispensable eyes and ears of the advancing British columns.

The Later Zulu Wars, 1883–1888

The British had no wish to burden themselves with the administration of a Zululand whose military capability they had overthrown. On

²⁹ Laband, "Phongolo River Frontier," 204–5.

³⁰ Thompson, *Black Soldiers*, 105–167; Laband and Thompson, *Anglo-Zulu War*, 39, 56–65; Laband, *Chelmsford's Zululand Campaign*, xlv–xlv; War Office, *Narrative*, 117, 121–36; Laband, *Zulu Nation*, 325–35.

³¹ Thompson, *Black Soldiers*, and Ingrid Machin, *Antbears and Targets for Zulu Assegais* (Howick: Brevitas, 2002) on the NNC; and Laband and Thompson, *Umvoti, Buffalo Border and Kingdom and Colony* for the Border Guard.

1 September 1879 Sir Garnet Wolseley fragmented the former kingdom under thirteen weak chiefs, appointed primarily for their antagonism towards the deposed royal house, and left them to their own devices. The result was a recipe for civil war between the supporters of the royal house (or uSuthu) and those chiefs who benefited from the British settlement. The British decision in late 1882 to restore Cetshwayo to the central part of his former kingdom as a means of damping down the growing violence only fanned it, because as a counter-weight northern Zululand was allocated to Zibhebhu kaMaphitha of the Mandlakazi, the chief antagonist of the uSuthu. On 21 July 1883 the Mandlakazi and their allies routed the uSuthu at oNdini. Cetshwayo was forced to seek refuge with the British in the Reserve Territory in southern Zululand, which had been created in 1883 as a buffer between his reduced kingdom and Natal and placed under colonial administration. Cetshwayo died in February 1884 and his teenage heir, Dinuzulu, proved unable to prevail against his enemies led by Zibhebhu. In 1884 the fighting for a time threatened the British administration in the Reserve Territory. In desperation at his deteriorating plight, Dinuzulu sought military aid from the neighboring Boers of the South African Republic who were hoping to take territorial advantage of the turmoil in Zululand. With their help, Dinuzulu routed Zibhebhu at Tshaneni on 5 June 1884. In return, on 16 August 1884 Dinuzulu ceded the Boers all of the north-western third of Zululand, which they proclaimed the New Republic.³² The Boers immediately laid out this huge territory as farms, reducing the Zulu living there to labor tenants.

To contain Boer expansionism and for fear of Germany's growing interest in the region, Britain at last intervened directly in Zululand. On 19 May 1887 the rump of Zululand was annexed and incorporated with the Reserve Territory as the British Colony of Zululand. Dinuzulu and the uSuthu were not prepared to cooperate with the new colonial administration that unwisely used collaborators, notably Zibhebhu, to shore up its authority. By April 1888 the uSuthu were in open revolt.³³

³² The British recognized the New Republic on 22 October 1886, although it proved unviable as an independent state and on 20 July 1888 it was incorporated in the South African Republic as the Vryheid District.

³³ For events in Zululand between September 1879 and September 1888, see C. T. Binns, *Dinuzulu: The Death of the House of Shaka* (London: Longmans, 1968), 1–147; J. Y. Gibson (who as a magistrate in Zululand was a sympathetic witness of events), *The Story of the Zulus* (London: Longmans, Green, 1911), 215–316; Jeff Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The Civil War in Zululand, 1879–1884* (London: Longman, 1979),

The civil authorities in the Reserve Territory and subsequently the Colony of Zululand depended on the locally raised African paramilitary police to enforce their administration. In April 1883 Commandant George Mansel created the Reserve Territory Carbineers (RTC). About a third of its complement was mounted, and the RTC headquarters were at Fort Nongqayi, just to the west of the tiny administrative capital, Eshowe. With the establishment of the Colony of Zululand in 1887, the RTC was restyled the Zululand Police (ZP). The men were paid out of the funds of the Colony of Zululand and they were posted to the six newly-established magisterial posts with the task of protecting the white magistrates and enforcing their authority. Like the RTC, the ZP was armed with carbines or rifles and wore khaki frocks and white trousers with khaki puttees above bare feet. Those who were mounted also wore boots. Headgear was a khaki Glengarry. Their white officers wore a blue frock, light-colored breeches, and riding-boots.

Whenever the paramilitary police in Zululand proved unequal to maintaining security, it was for the soldiers of the local British strategic reserve—the soldiers of the Natal garrison with its headquarters at Fort Napier in Pietermaritzburg—to come to their assistance. The recent experiences of the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 and the Transvaal Rebellion of 1880–1881 had demonstrated that locally raised colonial forces were insufficient for Natal's defense, so the garrison was substantially increased after 1881 to make it the largest peacetime concentration of imperial troops in South Africa.³⁴

In May 1884 Lieutenant General the Hon. Sir L. Smyth, the General Officer-in-Command in South Africa, moved forward units of the garrison (eight hundred men) to the Reserve Territory to help contain uSuthu operating in the Nkandla forest. The terrain was difficult and

69–247; Jeff Guy, *The View Across the River: Harriette Colenso and the Zulu Struggle for Independence* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, Oxford: James Currey and Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), 49–310; Laband, *Zulu Nation*, 343–423; Laband and Thompson, “The Reduction of Zululand, 1878–1904,” in *Natal and Zululand*, 202–19. For the only full account of military operations in Zululand 1883–1888 with detailed maps, see Laband, *The Atlas of the Later Zulu Wars 1883–1888* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001).

³⁴ Throughout much of the 1880s the garrison's strength consisted of a regiment of cavalry, a battalion of Royal Field Artillery, and three battalions of infantry and support units. See Graham Dominy, “The Imperial Garrison in Natal with Special Reference to Fort Napier 1843–1914: Its Social, Cultural and Economic Impact” (PhD thesis, University of London, 1995), 363–68, 373–75.

the communications inadequate. The prime objective of the British was to establish fortified bases from which offensives could be mounted. A secondary objective was to secure the lines of communication between posts. The troops accordingly established Fort Curtis at Eshowe as their headquarters, with forts Yolland and Chater protecting the eastern approaches to the Nkandla forest. Fort Northampton at Rorke's Drift provided a military point of entry for operations in the Reserve Territory to the west of the Nkandla forest. In addition to the regular troops, the authorities, in their capacity as the supreme chiefly power, raised local levies in the fight against the uSuthu.

The Sotho-speaking Tlokwa had served Natal in 1873 against Langalibalele, and had fought for the British in 1879 as Hlubi's Troop in the Natal Native Horse. In the settlement that ended the war, their chief, the pro-British and dependable Hlubi, was made one of the thirteen appointed chiefs and given the strategic territory at the confluence of the Thukela and Mzinyathi rivers. Many stalwart uSuthu supporters who lived there greatly resented the alien Tlokwa presence. His chiefdom was then the Nqutu District of the Reserve Territory, and the magistrate called on him to guard the border against the uSuthu. It was in his interests to support the British against the uSuthu, who were also his enemies, and by 20 May 1884, 127 Mounted Basutos (MB) and 270 foot were in the field operating with success against the uSuthu in the Nkandla forest. In addition to calling out the Tlokwa in 1884, in May of the same year the British officials also raised temporary unmounted and untrained levies under mounted white levy-leaders from among the Zulu of the Reserve Territory. These temporary levies wore the usual Zulu dress of the time, and to distinguish them from the uSuthu they wore (as had been the practice in the Anglo-Zulu War) a red cloth tied around the head. They were armed with their traditional spears and shields, although a few carried obsolete muzzle-loading firearms. Three thousand levies in small groups were stationed along the northern border of the Reserve Territory from the coast to the Nkandla forest. An additional 1,600 levies were positioned to the east of the Nkandla forest and 1,500 more to the southwest of them to protect the Natal border and cooperate with the MB. Despite an embarrassing reverse on 10 May when the uSuthu forced three thousand levies and fifty RTC to fall back on Fort Chater, the British troops—supported by the levies—made a successful reconnaissance through the Nkandla forest in July and secured the uSuthu capitulation on 9 September. The

RTC then relieved the British garrison at Fort Yolland, although small detachments of British regulars remained at forts Curtis, Chater, and Northampton.

In conjunction with the annexation of Zululand in 1887, the British built posts at St. Paul's, KwaMagwaza, Entonjaneni, and Nkonjeni along the track northwest from their headquarters at Fort Curtis to the Ndwandwe District in northern Zululand. This situating of posts would allow for the concentration and quick intervention of troops should the uSuthu, who were concentrated in Ndwandwe, resist the new resident magistrate and his small garrison of ZP at Ivuna. On a number of occasions in late 1887 and early 1888 Colonel Henry Sparke Stabb, the Officer Commanding Troops in Natal and Zululand, pushed troops forward to Entonjaneni and Nkonjeni, where their mere presence had the effect of cowing nascent uSuthu resistance.³⁵ They were supported by a company of ZP and three troops of MB (who had been re-embodied in 1887). The latter were dressed in an assortment of blue or khaki frocks, usually with buff trousers and riding boots or puttees. They wore brown slouch hats with a red puggaree around the hatband and carried their ammunition in leather bandoliers.

The strategy of shows of force broke down when the uSuthu took up arms in May 1888 and concentrated on their mountain strongholds of Ceza and Hlophekhulu in northwestern and central Zululand respectively. From there they raided the surrounding countryside, targeting British collaborators.³⁶ On 2 June an attempt by the civil authorities to arrest the uSuthu ringleaders on Ceza was a debacle. The company of ZP guarding the magistrate was repulsed and the six hundred auxiliaries, recruited from the Buthelezi people of Chief Mnyamana,³⁷ refused to advance and got caught up in the general retreat, which the support

³⁵ For British forts in Zululand and military activity between May 1887 and May 1888 see Intelligence Division of the War Office, *Précis of Information Concerning Zululand*, corrected to December, 1894 (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1895), 36, 96–99.

³⁶ For a detailed account of operations during 1888 in Zululand see Col. H. Sparke Stabb's official report in the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository [hereafter PAR], Government House Zululand 716, no. Z767/88: Stabb to Assistant Military Secretary: 19 October 1888; and War Office, *Zululand*, 99–104. [Please note: Since the writing of this paper, the PAR has had its name changed to the KwaZulu-Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg Repository, or KZNAPR.]

³⁷ Mnyamana had been King Cetshwayo's chief minister, but he had decided it was politic to accept the fact of British rule, and this "treachery" (as Dinuzulu regarded it) made him a prime target for uSuthu vengeance.

of British troops narrowly prevented from degenerating into a rout.³⁸ Reinforcements were thereupon dispatched on 6 June from the Natal garrison and concentrated at Nkonjeni, where two hundred MB—Mnyamana's Auxiliaries and a company of ZP—were also stationed. A further 1,500 to 2,000 levies were raised in the Eshowe and Nkandhla districts and stationed at Fort Curtis, St. Paul's, and KwaMagwaza. About eight hundred Mandlakazi levies under Zibhebhu were ordered up to help defend the magisterial post at Ivuna. On 23 June, Dinuzulu and about four thousand uSuthu descended on Ivuna and routed their old enemy, Zibhebhu, under the walls of the earthwork fort held by fifty ZP.³⁹ The military thereupon decided that Ivuna was too distant and exposed to protect, and a column from Nkonjeni (including Mounted Basutos, Mnyamana's Auxiliaries, and ZP) evacuated the Ivuna garrison and the remnants of the Mandlakazi, thus abandoning all of Zululand north of the Black Mfolozi to the uSuthu. In the Lower Umfolosi District on the coast, where the magistrate had called on Sokwetshata, the loyalist Mthethwa chief, to help protect his post, the Mthethwa levies and the garrison of forty ZP at Fort Andries successfully beat off an uSuthu assault on 30 June 1888.

On 28 June, Lieutenant General H. A. Smyth assumed personal command of the troops in Zululand and adjusted British strategy. Fort Curtis remained the base for operations while the forward position at Nkonjeni was reinforced. Smaller detachments stationed in the posts between Eshowe and Nkonjeni secured the line of communication and supply. At this juncture Smyth and Sir Arthur Havelock, the Governor of Natal and Zululand, became embroiled in a heated dispute over the command of troops in Zululand. Havelock desired that the troops act only when called upon to do so by the civil authorities, while Smyth was adamant that such an arrangement would hamper military operations. A compromise was hammered out in which, besides the troops of the garrison, Smyth would also have command of the MB and any African levies organized along military lines that the civil authorities raised. The Resident Commissioner of Zululand would retain control over the ZP and any chiefs and their auxiliaries, provided they were employed in close cooperation with Smyth's forces. The civil authorities

³⁸ For the engagement on Ceza see Laband, *Later Zulu Wars*, 90–93.

³⁹ For a detailed account of the engagement see Laband, "The Battle of Ivuna (or Ndunu Hill)" *Natalia* 10 (1980): 16–22; Laband, *Later Zulu Wars*, 97–100.

would remain responsible for enforcing the law and arresting rebels, but could call on the military for support.⁴⁰

This matter of authority settled, the British secured their line of communications by clearing the uSuthu under Prince Shingana from their stronghold on Hlophekhulu Mountain. This successful assault on 2 July under the command of Colonel Stabb took the form of a running skirmish with the 198 British troops, 141 MB, and 87 ZP advancing in open order, while one thousand men of the Eshowe Levy and four hundred of Mnyamana's Auxiliaries maneuvered swiftly on either flank to protect the British center from being enveloped by the uSuthu. They also served to outflank the uSuthu and partially cut off their retreat when the troops carried the mountain. Then they followed the flying uSuthu and rounded up their abandoned livestock. The operation was supported at a distance by more British regulars on Lumbe Mountain, reinforced by five hundred men of the levy raised in the Entonjaneni District.⁴¹ The next step in the British strategy was to relieve the isolated garrison at Fort Andries. The Eshowe Column, which consisted of 251 British troops with 180 MB and two thousand of John Dunn's Native Levy (five hundred of whom remained south of the Mhlathuze River as border guards), evacuated Fort Andries on 9 July and replaced the garrison with 180 MB. Dunn's Native Levy meanwhile ruthlessly scoured the surrounding countryside and destroyed several hundred uSuthu homesteads. As in all such 'pacification' operations, the lure of booty certainly motivated the levies.

Having stabilized the situation in all of Zululand except for the northern districts, in July the British prepared to restore their authority there, too, by moving more British reinforcements up to Nkonjeni for a final push. At that moment the African levies began to show their discontent with inadequate rations, poor pay, and the failure to receive their promised share of the cattle confiscated from the uSuthu. Moreover, there was a dearth of white levy leaders qualified to instill military discipline. By 14 July all but 150 of the Eshowe Levy had deserted from Nkonjeni, while the Entonjaneni Levy went out of control on 18 July, burning homesteads of loyal Zulu all around their post at Mfule and rustling three hundred cattle. Even the disciplined

⁴⁰ Laband, "The Danger of Divided Command": British Civil and Military Disputes over the Conduct of the Zululand Campaigns of 1879 and 1888," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 81 (2003): 347–52.

⁴¹ See Laband, *Later Zulu Wars*, 106–9.

MB were showing signs of disaffection on account of a lack of supplies for themselves and forage for their horses now that winter grazing had run out at Nkonjeni.

On 1 August Smyth moved his headquarters to Nkonjeni. Troops were pushed forward to advanced posts east of Ceza Mountain, masking Dinuzulu's last stronghold and forcing him to abandon it by 7 August. Meanwhile, in pacification operations reminiscent of those at the closing stages of the Anglo-Zulu War, the Coastal Column consisting of 318 regulars, 180 MB, and 2,400 of Dunn's Native Levies moved up the coast to Ivuna, burning homesteads, overawing the inhabitants, forcing submissions, exacting cattle fines, and fragmenting any further organized resistance. At Ivuna the Coastal Column was joined on 7 August by the Flying Column from Nkonjeni, consisting of 1,760 levies that included two hundred Mandlakazi under Zibhebhu and 150 of the Eshowe Levy who had not deserted. The levies were placed under Colonel Sir Fred Carrington, who had been in command of the Bechuanaland Police since August 1885. Smyth brought Carrington in on account of his experience in order to inculcate organization and discipline among the demoralized levies. Discipline, however, remained poor, and in mid-August even the MB, who had been short of rations for weeks, raided indiscriminately all around Ivuna. At that point 150 men of Addison's Horse reinforced the Nkonjeni garrison, thus making available disciplined veterans of the Edendale Troop of the Natal Native Horse who had taken part in the 1879 campaign. They were issued carbines and uniformed like the MB.

On 18 August the Coastal Column and Flying Column began their joint march back to Eshowe, which they reached on 30 August. On the way all further resistance was suppressed. Those levies (including Mnyamana's and Zibhebhu's auxiliaries) and MB not required during the march were disbanded by 23 August. With military operations over, all advanced posts were given up by 30 September.⁴² The Zululand garrison was reduced to its normal levels and strategically concentrated at Fort Curtis in the south and Entonjaneni in central Zululand. The responsibility for maintaining law and order reverted to the civil authorities, and the 250 ZP were distributed to the various magisterial posts with their headquarters still at the Nongqayi Fort.

⁴² On 7 September 1888 General Smyth and his staff sailed for Cape Town.

The Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902

With the collapse of the uSuthu Rebellion, Dinuzulu was exiled to St. Helena. Although colonial administrators came to believe that his repatriation would help restore harmony in Zululand. They were opposed by settlers in Natal who feared Dinuzulu would provide a focus for Zulu resistance to white rule and the planned white settlement of Zululand, which had been annexed to Natal on 30 December 1897 as the Province of Zululand. So when Dinuzulu returned in January 1898 it was not as king but simply as a chief over the two uSuthu locations set aside for him. Nevertheless, many Zulu persisted in regarding him as their true ruler, and how he responded to the outbreak of war in 1899 between Britain and the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State would have a crucial effect on the Zulu reaction both in Zululand and in the Vryheid District of the Transvaal, where many uSuthu adherents still lived.⁴³ Zululand, as it turned out, did not become a main theater of the war, but remained a sideshow that saw a few short-lived Boer incursions into British territory and the involvement of the Zulu as auxiliaries and scouts in British operations against Boer guerrillas.⁴⁴

Both the British and the Boers tacitly agreed that African participation in the war would be limited.⁴⁵ On the eve of hostilities the Natal authorities informed all chiefs in the Province of Zululand that although Africans were permitted to “protect themselves and their property against attack or seizure by the enemy,” the Queen desired that they “remain within their own borders, as the war will be a White-man’s war.”⁴⁶ Their protection was placed in the hands of the ZP whose headquarters were still at Fort Nongqayi in Eshowe.⁴⁷ To instill confidence,

⁴³ For developments in Zululand between 1888 and 1898 see Laband, “British Boundary Adjustments and the uSuthu-Mandlakazi Conflict in Zululand, 1879–1904,” *South African Historical Journal* 30 (1994): 49–58.

⁴⁴ For a detailed account of the Anglo-Boer War in Zululand see Laband, “Zulus and the War,” in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, ed. John Gooch (London and Portland, Ore.: Frank Cass, 2000), 107–25.

⁴⁵ L. S. Amery, ed., *The Times History of the War in South Africa 1899–1902, Volume 2* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1902), 138–39.

⁴⁶ PAR, Secretary for Native Affairs, Natal [hereafter SNA]1/4/6, no. 48/1899: circular minute from Prime Minister, Natal, to all Zululand Magistrates (confidential), 9 September 1899.

⁴⁷ When Zululand was absorbed into Natal in 1897 the Zululand Police were amalgamated for administrative purposes with the Natal Police.

the government raised the ZP's complement by 350 men to 500, and posted them in small detachments to the various magisterial posts. Since the government was aware that the ZP would be inadequate to stem any Boer incursion, and ordinary Zulu were strictly forbidden from offering any armed resistance of their own, the government also made contingency plans to withdraw the ZP and magistrates from the more vulnerable districts.⁴⁸

The Boers in the Vryheid District were concerned that the Zulu might use the war to reclaim their grazing lands from the white-owned farms, and so they urged Dinuzulu to use his influence to dissuade any Zulu who were Transvaal subjects from taking part in the war.⁴⁹ Perversely, they simultaneously exacerbated relations with the Zulu in the Vryheid District by commandeering Zulu cattle and horses, conscripting Zulu laborers as *agerterryers* to accompany the Vryheid Commando, and flogging those who resisted. It is one of the ironies of the so-called 'white man's war' that the Boers had no compunction in taking blacks on campaign as servants and allowing them to perform more obviously military tasks like digging trenches and, on occasion, taking part in combat.⁵⁰

The war opened in Zululand on 29 October 1899 when a Boer commando invaded the northern Ingwavuma and Ubombo Districts and neutralized the ZP.⁵¹ Meanwhile, to the west of Zululand in northern Natal, on 15 December 1899 the Boers checked General Sir Redvers Buller's attempt to relieve Ladysmith,⁵² and it now became Buller's concern that the Boers might attempt to outflank his position through Zululand. From January 1900 the task of guarding Zululand's western border against such a move was entrusted to the Melmoth Field Force of 730 men, including four companies (three hundred men) of the ZP.⁵³

⁴⁸ PAR, Zululand Archives [hereafter ZA] 32, no. CR49/1899: Sir Alfred Hime to Sir C. J. R. Saunders, 9 September 1899; Saunders to Hime, 13 September 1899.

⁴⁹ PAR, Natal Colonial Publications 8/5/6: *Report by Col. G. A. Mills, C. B. on the Causes which Led to the Ill-Feeling between the Boers and Zulus, Culminating in the Attack on the Boers by the Zulus, under the Native Chief, Sikobobo, at Holkrantz, in the District of Vryheid, on the 6th May, 1902* (Pietermaritzburg: Times Printing and Publishing, 1902), 70: Dinuzulu's evidence, 13 November 1902.

⁵⁰ See Labuschange, *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War*, chaps. 4 and 5.

⁵¹ *Colony of Natal: Departmental Reports 1900* (Pietermaritzburg: P. Davis, 1901), F47: Sub-Inspector H. R. Hellet, "Annual Report, 'R' District."

⁵² For more information on Ladysmith, see James Thomas, "Buller and the South American Light Horse," in this volume.

⁵³ *Colony of Natal*, F44: Sub-Inspector C. W. Lewis, "Annual Report, 'P' District," 25 January 1901.

The inadequately small force of ZP deployed at Nqutu in southwestern Zululand (where the Boers were expected to strike) was reinforced by a detachment from the Melmoth Field Force, and the main body of the ZP was moved forward to Melmoth north of Eshowe.

On 31 January 1900, as anticipated, a Boer commando of six hundred men invaded the Nqutu District, captured the magistracy, and took forty ZP prisoner. The commando then pushed on southeast, occupying the Nkandhla District except for Fort Yolland, which was held by a small force of ZP. The rest of the ZP stationed in Nkandhla fell back to Fort Curtis and remained there until April. Further north, the ZP at Melmoth put the post into a state of defense while the Melmoth Field Force moved forward to Fort Yolland and, with the assistance of the attached units of the ZP, drove the Boers out of the Nkandhla District by 24 February and cleared Nqutu of Boers by May. Thereafter the ZP, reduced in August 1900 to two hundred officers and men, continued to patrol the districts of Zululand abutting the Vryheid District against looting by small parties of Boers.⁵⁴ At the same time they took energetic action against Zulu who took advantage of the breakdown of control along the Zululand-Transvaal border to engage in plundering Boer farms.⁵⁵

Buller relieved Ladysmith on 28 February 1900, and on 5 June 1900 the British forces raised the Union Flag over Pretoria. The war then moved in to its guerrilla phase, and in these changed circumstances the British became more inclined to sanction the active participation of Zulu irregulars in their counter-insurgency operations. From Dinuzulu's perspective, now that the British were clearly going to be the victors in the war, it was in his interests (as it was for other African leaders) to cooperate fully with them.⁵⁶ Consequently, beginning May 1900 Zulu scouts went with Dinuzulu's blessing to serve in Buller's Natal Army operating in Natal and the southeastern Transvaal. Major General H. J. T. Hildyard of the 5th Division of the Natal Army, who from July 1900 commanded in Natal and the southeastern Transvaal, cooperated with A. J. Shepstone, the British Resident Magistrate in the then-occupied

⁵⁴ Ibid., F13: J. G. Dartnell, "Report of the Chief Commissioner of Police for the Year 1900"; F 17-18: G. Mansel, "Report on the Police in Zululand for 1900," 24 January 1901; F43: Sub-Inspector C. W. Airlie, "Annual Report, 'N' District," 10 January 1901; F44: Sub-Inspector C. W. Lewis, "Annual Report, 'P' District," 25 January 1901.

⁵⁵ Ibid., F45: Lewis, "Annual Report, 'P' District," 25 January 1901.

⁵⁶ P. Warwick, "Black People and the War," in *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, ed. P. Warwick and S. B. Spies (Harlow: Longman, 1980), 192.

Vryheid District, to recruit, arm, and deploy an extensive intelligence network of Zulu scouts and spies drawn mainly from the abaQulusi (and called Shepstone's Scouts) to operate there against Boer guerrillas.⁵⁷

Boer commandos continued to operate desultorily in the Vryheid District, which only saw increased military activity in March 1901 when three British mobile columns in the southeastern Transvaal tried to hem the Boer guerrillas into the angle between Swaziland and northern Zululand. The Boers evaded the British and took refuge in the Ngome forest in northwestern Zululand and in the mountains east of Vryheid.⁵⁸ Since it was essential for the success of the British drive to capture the livestock upon which the Boers depended for food and transport, it became necessary to seal the border with Zululand and thereby prevent the Boers from driving their livestock that way. Accordingly, General Lord Kitchener, the British Commander in Chief, ordered Colonel H. Bottomley, Imperial Light Horse, to raise a force in Zululand to monitor the border. To regularize the arming and deployment of the Zulu as combatants, Kitchener placed the Province of Zululand under martial law on 25 March 1901,⁵⁹ and one hundred rifles and ammunition were issued to the Zulu in the Nqutu and Nkandhla districts to supplement their spears and shields against well-armed Boers. On Bottomley's orders these auxiliaries immediately crossed over into the Vryheid District to cooperate with Shepstone's Scouts and the British in rounding up Boer cattle.⁶⁰

To ensure the success of the operation, Bottomley further ordered Dinuzulu on 4 April 1901 to ensure that "all Zulu people" cooperated with the British.⁶¹ Bottomley's assumption that Dinuzulu's authority extended beyond his location to encompass his former kingdom undermined the colonial officials' determined attempt to restrain the latter's royal pretensions, but Bottomley was interested only in practical results. Bottomley built an armory at Dinuzulu's oSuthu homestead for

⁵⁷ PAR, Government House, Natal [hereafter GH] 566: Col. Mills' Enquiry into the Holkrantz Affair (original transcript, 23 November 1902): evidence of Mpela, 13 October 1902.

⁵⁸ Amery and Childers, eds., *Times History of the War*, Vol. 5, 176–80.

⁵⁹ SNA 1/6/25: Miscellaneous Papers regarding Col. Bottomley's Actions, 1901–2: Rough Draft of Civil Commissioner's Evidence before Col. Mill's Commission of Enquiry, 15 November 1902.

⁶⁰ SNA 1/6/25: Bottomley's Actions: telegram no. 1: Bottomley to Prime Minister, Natal, 27 March 1901.

⁶¹ GH 568: Mills' Enquiry: Bottomley to Dinuzulu, 4 April 1901.

the armaments issued to the specially trained force (called the iNkomendala) he encouraged Dinuzulu to raise. With their khaki uniforms, firearms and white officers, the iNkomendala were modeled on the ZP, some former members of which constituted its training core. While the iNkomendala grew to a strength of about eighty men, the main Zulu force that rallied to Dinuzulu's summons consisted of untrained levies, several thousand strong, armed and mustered in traditional style. Bottomley's military agents were authorized to use the inducement that the Zulu levies were permitted to capture any Boer livestock that came their way in the Vryheid District and to keep ten percent of them for themselves. On 4 April 1901 this Zulu force, under the command of Chief Mankulumana (Dinuzulu's chief adviser) and accompanied by Dinuzulu and Bottomley, advanced through the Vryheid District as far north as the Phongolo River. The Boers put up little resistance and the force marched back to oSutho on 9 April with about ten thousand cattle, several thousand sheep, and abandoned weaponry.⁶² Many of these Zulu levies remained in the field with Shepstone's Scouts until Bottomley's operation was brought to an end on 6 June 1902. To the relief of the colonial officials who feared Dinuzulu would take advantage of Zulu levies to rebuild his power-base, the Zulu forces along the border were then disbanded except in the northwestern Ndwandwe District, where small groups were kept under arms for patrol work.⁶³

In September 1901 the focus of the war shifted momentarily to Zululand when the Boer General Louis Botha decided to strike through the Vryheid District at northern Natal. On 25 September his forces failed to take the Itala post in the Nqutu District of Zululand and Fort Prospect to its east in the Entonjaneni District, and subsequently withdrew from Zululand. During this short campaign Zulu scouts kept the British garrisons informed of Boer movements and helped in the defense of the two posts.⁶⁴

⁶² PAR, Registrar of the Supreme Court [hereafter RSC] III/3/16: Duplicate of Official Transcript of Zululand State Trials 1908-9: Rex v. Dinuzulu: Dinuzulu's evidence, 19 January 1909; RSC III/3/4: Zululand State Trials: Lusizi's evidence, 18 December 1908; RSC III/3/17: Zululand State Trials: Mankulumana's evidence, 2 February 1909; RSC III/3/18: Zululand State Trials: Dotela's evidence, 19 February 1909; SNA 1/6/25: Bottomley's Actions: Bottomley's instructions, 25 March 1901.

⁶³ SNA 1/6/25: Bottomley's Actions: no. C121/1901: Hime to Sir H. McCallum, 27 June 1901; RSC III/3/16: Zululand State Trials: Dinuzulu's evidence, 19 January 1909.

⁶⁴ See D. M. Moore, *General Louis Botha's Second Expedition to Natal during the Anglo-Boer War, September-October 1901* (Wynberg: Historical Publication Society, 1979), chaps. 3-7.

The Zululand theater then remained quiescent until late February 1902, when Botha led a commando of five hundred men back into the Vryheid District. Major General Bruce Hamilton marched to Vryheid, and on 8 March requested Dinuzulu's support. Dinuzulu mustered a force at oSuthu which swelled to over one thousand men. Carrying spears and shields except for the hundred or so uniformed iNkome-dala with their firearms, they joined Hamilton's column on 22 March and were placed under the command of an intelligence officer, F. J. Symmonds.⁶⁵ During the operation, which ended on 26 March after a largely fruitless sweep through the northeastern parts of the Vryheid District, Dinuzulu's men from oSuthu were joined by several hundred abaQulusi under their senior headman, Sikhobobo. The abaQulusi had been increasingly alienated by Boer cattle raids and intimidation aimed at them in retaliation for the active support they were giving the British, for their provocative reoccupation of their old lands, and for driving off Boer womenfolk while their men were away on commando. Although by late April 1902 the Boer commanders were committed to negotiations with the British to end the war, on 23 April Botha ordered the Utrecht and Vryheid Commandos to retaliate against the abaQulusi while they still could. The commandos struck with deadly efficiency on 1 May, and the abaQulusi took refuge in Vryheid under British protection. Determined to exact revenge, on the night of 6 May Sikhobobo led an abaQulusi force against the Boers (under Veldkornet J. A. Potgieter) who were encamped near Holkrans with their plunder. The abaQulusi killed fifty-six Boers with fifty-two losses of their own, but recovered their looted livestock.⁶⁶

This was the last action of the war involving the Zulu, and it had an appreciable effect on the Boers conferring at Vereeniging, bringing home as it did ancient fears of an African uprising. As for Dinuzulu, the war had done much to enhance his prestige among those Zulu who were in search of a leader who could bring them the rewards they believed their due for loyally supporting their colonial rulers during the war.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ For this operation see GH 566: Mills' Enquiry: evidence given on 8, 14 and 21 October 1902; and GH 567: Mills' Enquiry: evidence given on 11 and 13 November 1902.

⁶⁶ For the Holkrans incident see Laband, "Zulus and the War," 123–24. A pencil sketch of the scene of the engagement can be found in GH 1304, p. 44, enc. I (d) in confidential dispatch, 29 August 1902: Lt. Col. G. A. Mills to Chief of Staff, Natal, 29 July 1902.

⁶⁷ Nicholas Cope, *To Bind the Nation: Solomon kaDinuzulu and Zulu Nationalism 1913–1933* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1993), 4–7.

By calling upon him to give the loyalist lead to other chiefs and to mobilize levies in both Zululand and the Vryheid District (which was ceded to Natal on 27 January 1903), the colonial officials had effectively conceded his royal status and were left with the problem of diminishing his stature once again.⁶⁸

The Zulu Rebellion of 1906

The Zulu Rebellion of 1906 was quite different from the conflicts of 1879, 1883–1888, and 1899–1902. It was local in origin and scope and limited to a few areas. British imperial forces were not involved; colonial forces quelled the rebellion. According to the Militia Act of 1903, the Colony of Natal's new 'army' consisted of Active and Reserve Militia units, of which the former were established and trained, and ready to take the field at short notice for prolonged operations.⁶⁹

The Colony of Natal had attained settler self-government in 1893, and Zululand had been annexed as a province in 1897. According to the census of 1904 there were 97,109 Europeans, 100,918 Asiatics, and 910,727 Africans.⁷⁰ The settler population was increasing and extending its economic interests in competition with the rapidly expanding African population. The African traditional way of life was changing as a result of contact with the settlers, but African emulation was checked by the settlers, who enjoyed a monopoly of power. The distance and relative tolerance between the two groups that had existed in 1879 was diminishing markedly. The Anglo-Boer War and postwar depression increased tensions. Every year there were rumors portending some disturbance and a restoration of the Zulu kingdom, even though Dinuzulu denied any connection with them. The holding of a census in 1904 was regarded by many Africans as the precursor of some new financial imposition, despite the denials of the colonial authorities. Then in 1905 the colonial legislature sought to relieve the financial embarrassment

⁶⁸ Shula Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion: The 1906–1908 Disturbances in Natal* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 112–14, 158–59.

⁶⁹ See James Stuart, *A History of the Zulu Rebellion 1906 and of Dinuzulu's Arrest, Trial and Expatriation* (London: Macmillan, 1913), chap. 3. The Reserves were incompletely organized and of mixed effectiveness, but some units took the field to supplement the Active Militia forces.

⁷⁰ Colony of Natal, *Statistical Year Book for the Year 1904* (Pietermaritzburg: Davis, 1905), 3. "Africans" includes "mixed and others."

of the economically depressed colony by imposing a capitation tax of one pound sterling, to be collected from 1906—the infamous ‘poll tax’ that ignited the rebellion.⁷¹

There were angry protests against the tax in several places, and the atmosphere was tense. The rebellion began with a clash on 8 February 1906 between tax protesters and police on a farm near Richmond in the Natal midlands. Two of the police were killed. The government proclaimed martial law and mobilized the militia to catch the so-called rebels. A few were captured straight away, and two were court-martialed and shot, after which the military turned over the hunt to the local chief, Mveli, and left to make a display of force in the south of the Colony. Defiant Africans were brought to heel and ringleaders of resistance were punished. Further rebellion seemed to have been nipped in the bud. The only fighting occurred when Mveli’s levy caught up with and captured the original protesters on 20 February.⁷²

The second phase of the rebellion began with an outbreak of violence near Greytown, in the northern part of Natal. In March the colonial government deposed Bhambatha for his involvement in faction fighting. Bhambatha, a chief who the colonial authorities had already identified as troublesome, tried to wrest control of his chiefdom back from his successor by force. Troublingly for the colonial authorities, he declared that he had had an interview with Dinuzulu, who supposedly had given him some rifles and told him to start a rebellion in his name. Bhambatha’s rebels fired on the local magistrate on 3 April, then ambushed the police the following day. The government mobilized the militia again, and Bhambatha fled to southern Zululand to escape capture.⁷³ There he was welcomed by the aged chief Siganda of the Chube, an ardent

⁷¹ Little has been written about the rebellion and its antecedents. There are only two comprehensive scholarly works: Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, and Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*. Other works, most of them more specialized and narrowly focused, are mentioned below in the notes. See also the bibliographical essay in Thompson, *An Historical Atlas of the Zulu Rebellion of 1906* (Pietermaritzburg: private, 2001), 72–73.

⁷² See Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, chap. 7; Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, chaps. 5–6; Walter Bosman, *The Natal Rebellion of 1906* (London: Longmans, Green and Cape Town: Juta, 1907), chaps. 1–3; Jeff Guy, *Remembering the Rebellion: The Zulu Uprising of 1906* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006), chaps. 3–4; Thompson, *Historical Atlas*, 9–15, and Thompson, *Incident at Trewirgie: First Shots of the Zulu Rebellion 1906* (Pietermaritzburg: private, 2005), chaps. 1–4. Those present when the police were killed were subsequently tried and executed.

⁷³ See Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, chap. 4; Guy, *Zulu Uprising*, chap. 5; Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, chap. 7; Thompson, *Historical Atlas*, 16–18; and Thompson, *Bambatha at Mpanza: The Making of a Rebel* (Pietermaritzburg: private, 2004), chaps. 4–9.

supporter of the Zulu royal house. Together they raised a rebellion in Dinuzulu's name, and recruited men from neighboring chiefdoms. The number of armed rebels swelled to perhaps as many as one thousand. The government put more militia into the field and gratefully received offers of additional units from the Transvaal and the Cape Colony. By the first week in May there were 4,316 troops in the field.⁷⁴ Operations were largely confined to the rugged Nkandhla District, and entailed four pitched battles and about twice that number of sharp skirmishes before the rebellion was broken on 10 June in the battle of the Mome gorge.⁷⁵ In this second phase of the rebellion the rebels lost an estimated 1,200 killed. Of those who surrendered 1,421 were tried and convicted under martial law.⁷⁶ Bhambatha was never seen again; probably he was killed at Mome.⁷⁷

As in previous conflicts, the government had found it necessary to call on loyal chiefs to supply levies from their adherents to assist the military. The practice of raising levies was well established by this time, as was that of serving under traditional leaders in traditional formations with traditional weapons, but under the supervision of European officers. Thus in 1906 the levies were like the Native Border Guard of

⁷⁴ Return of forces in the field, May 7, 1906, in Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 546, and in *The Natal Native Rebellion As told In Official Despatches From January 1st to June 23rd, 1906* (Pietermaritzburg: Davis, 1906), 198. Many of the despatches printed in the latter will also be found in *British Parliamentary Papers* (C. 2905 and C.3027).

⁷⁵ See Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, chaps. 5–21; Guy, *Zulu Uprising*, chaps. 6–8; Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, chap. 8; Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, chaps. 8–16; and Thompson, *Historical Atlas*, 18–39.

⁷⁶ The high estimate of killed is given in GH 1466, 115a: Officer Commanding, Zululand Field Force [hereafter OC ZFF] to Prime Minister, Natal, 21 June 1906. See also PAR, Colonial Secretary's Office [hereafter CSO] 3040, and PAR, Prime Minister, Natal [hereafter PM] 102, minute paper C230/1906. The report of the Commissioner for Native Affairs [hereafter CNA] in Colony of Natal, Department of Native Affairs, *Annual Reports for the Year 1906* (Pietermaritzburg: Times, 1907), 15, gives 416 killed and 193 missing, as well as 1,421 convictions. The Nkandhla magistrate's statement, SNA I/1/345, no. NK 635/1906: 27 September 1906, gives 285 killed, 152 missing, and 1,334 convictions. There were also twenty-four convictions by courts martial in Nkandhla. See CSO 2599, no. C147/1906: Appendix G to the report of the Commandant of Militia. Presumably the OC ZFF's estimate of killed included rebels from Natal, e.g., Bhambatha's, Gayede's and Ngobizembe's people.

⁷⁷ Thompson, "Bambatha after Mome: Dead or Alive?" *Historia* 50 (2005): 23–48. It will be observed that while the historic spellings for official place names are retained, current spellings are used for geographical features and modern administrative division: hence Nkandhla Division and Nkandla forest; Mapumulo Division and Maphumulo District.

1879, and not the NNC. The Governor, Sir Henry McCallum, who still represented the British Crown and therefore was the Supreme Chief, invoked his powers in support of the government elected by the white settlers, but the authorities found little or no enthusiasm among chiefs and their peoples to fight their fellow countrymen rebelling against the poll tax they all hated. As it proved, several chiefs and some levies could not be relied upon to do their duty.

In February when the Commissioner for Native Affairs in Zululand, Charles Saunders, proposed to call for two thousand levies from four chiefdoms in the Eshowe Division to assist the military against bellicose tax protesters in Maphumulo, the chiefs found widespread opposition to participation in any action against Africans across the Thukela River in Natal, and the proposal was dropped.⁷⁸ In April the government realized that the strategically placed Khabela and Ngcolosi people in the Krantzkop Division of Natal were thoroughly disaffected, and did not even attempt to use them as levies until the war turned in its favor.⁷⁹ Just north across the Thukela River in the Nkandhla Division, between them and Siganda's Chube, were the Magwaza and Ntuli, whose chiefs remained loyal. They called on their men to serve the government, but the majority joined the rebels, and the loyal chiefs fled for their lives.⁸⁰ In May Chief Ngqambuzana of the Thembu, in the Weenen Division of Natal, offered a levy and was ordered to turn out a thousand men for service in the neighboring Umsinga Division at the confluence of the Thukela and Mzinyathi rivers, but opposition among his headmen resulted in only two hundred coming forward.⁸¹ The government then turned to Chief Silwana with his numerous Chunu adherents to furnish 1,200 men. The authorities expected to capitalize on a traditional enmity between the Chunu and the rebellious Qamu in the Umsinga. The Chunu came forward readily enough and went to the Umsinga, but something went wrong there. The story is a complicated one, but

⁷⁸ Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 147–49. SNA I/1/345, no. 2305/1906: Magistrate Eshowe Division to SNA, 26 July 1906. *Official Despatches*, 26, 29, and 37–38: Governor to Secretary of State, 23 February and 9 March 1906, respectively.

⁷⁹ SNA I/1/414, no. 3263/1908: Magistrate Krantzkop Division to SNA, 27 August 1906.

⁸⁰ *Official Despatches*, 101: CNA to PM, 28 April 1906.

⁸¹ PAR, SNA I/1.367, no. 1116/1907, no. 10: Report of Magistrate Weenen Division; and SNA I/1/414, no. 3263/1908: Magistrate Umsinga Division to SNA, 31 July 1906. The chiefs Bevu and Tulwana also offered levies, which were declined.

the upshot is that the levy became sullen and unruly, and early in June deserted before it saw service.⁸²

There also is the extraordinary case of the government refusing to accept a levy from Dinuzulu, who had fought for the British in 1901–1902. Dinuzulu publicly denounced the rebels, and to prove his *bona fides* offered a levy of his people to go to the Nkandla to hunt down “that dog” Bhambatha. The government was inclined to accept the offer, but Saunders, the Commissioner, would not have it. He trusted Dinuzulu, but believed that the levy would be misrepresented by the rebels as succor from the king in whose name they claimed to fight, and that the resulting confusion could only work to their advantage.⁸³

Overall, more chiefs were loyal than not, and it is difficult to see how the government could have succeeded in suppressing the rebellion without their help. During the first phase of the rebellion the authorities invited Mveli to turn out his Funze (or Fuze) people to search for the rebels hiding in the Enon forest near Richmond. The chief, who had a personal grievance against the leader of the rebels, was willing enough, but only about two hundred of his men turned out instead of the five hundred expected. Colonel Duncan McKenzie, the militia commander, used his inimitable powers of persuasion, including the shooting of two captured rebels in front of the assembled forces. Mveli’s levy quickly attained full strength.⁸⁴

In the second phase of the rebellion circumstances were different. The rebels resorted to guerrilla warfare pending the arrival of Dinuzulu’s army. The terrain of the Nkandhla District lent itself to this strategy, and Saunders was of the opinion that Bhambatha would not “have got a footing in any other part of Zululand.” It was a rugged, broken country, with several thick forests clinging to the slopes of steep ridges and choking narrow valleys. It was reported that not even the forces of the

⁸² Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 327–28. *Official Despatches*, 182: Governor to Secretary of State, 16 June 1906. CSO 2599, no. C147/1906: Diary of Field Operations during Native Rebellion of 1906. Umvoti Field Force—Natal, for 2–7 June 1906. SNA I/1/367, 1116/1907, no. 10: Report of Magistrate Weenen, and SNA I/1/414, no. 3263/1908: Magistrate Umsinga to SNA, 31 July 1906.

⁸³ Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, 26; *Official Despatches*, p. 76: Governor to Secretary of State, 20 April 1906 and p. 102: CNA to PM, 28 April 1906; CSO 3040: CNA to PM, 17, 19 April and 16, 20 May 1906. PM 59, no. 463/1906: PM to CNA, 17 April 1906, and CNA to PM, 18–19 April 1906.

⁸⁴ Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, pp. 3–4; Thompson, *Incident at Trewirgie*, pp. 40–42; *Official Despatches*, pp. 21 and 19: McKenzie to PM, 15 February 1906 and Governor to Secretary of State, 16 February 1906; CSO 2599, no. C147/1906: Interim Report. By Commandant of Militia, Natal, on The Native Rebellion, 1906, p. 5.

great Shaka himself had been able to penetrate them,⁸⁵ and the British had found operations there in 1884 against the uSuthu very difficult. Colonel McKenzie, then in command of the Zululand Field Force (ZFF), arrived at the Nkandhla magistracy on 8 May, reconnoitered the high ground along the forest's edge and decided that with the limited forces at his disposal, the only way to defeat the rebels was to destroy their material base and reduce them by hunger. The militia could not do this alone: African levies had to assist them. The ZFF would take up secure positions and offer battle while levies, under its protection, would scour the countryside, burning the rebels' homes, seizing their livestock, and destroying their food stores.⁸⁶ McKenzie was also tempted to risk bold strokes to catch the rebels off guard. On 17 May the militia converged from three directions on the rebels' main camp at Cetshwayo's grave, deep in the Nkandla forest, and destroyed it along with its granary. Sigananda obtained a truce under the pretence of surrendering, but it was a deception. Operations resumed, and McKenzie applied the strategy of wholesale destruction so commonly resorted to in counter-insurgency operations. A series of 'drives' in Sigananda's ward were mounted between 29 May and 7 June until the main rebel force and many of the people abandoned the area for want of food and security. McKenzie intended to repeat the process westwards in the Qudeni bush, where the rebels in the Nkandla had gone to join a new force drawn from the Nqutu and Umsinga Divisions under Chief Mehlokazulu. Before McKenzie could get to the Qudeni, the rebels moved back to the Nkandla, and McKenzie quickly arranged to intercept them. The militia surprised and destroyed them at the Mome gorge on 10 June.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ *Official Despatches*, 101: CNA to PM, 28 April 1906. The quotation is from Colony of Natal, Native Affairs Commission 1906–7, *Evidence* (Pietermaritzburg: Davis, 1907), 133. On its history as a place of refuge, see Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 208–9 and A. T. Bryant, *Olden Times in Zululand and Natal Containing Earlier Political History of the Eastern-Nguni Clans* (London: Longmans, Green, 1929), 415.

⁸⁶ GH 1465, no. 141: OC ZFF to Defence, 11 May 1906. *Official Despatches*, 103–104: CNA to PM, 28 April 1906; 107: Governor to Secretary of State, 12 May, 1906; 123–24: Governor to Secretary of State, 1 June 1906; and 129–30: Commandant to OC ZFF, 28 May 1906. The policy is justified in Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 239–40 and W. J. Powell, *The Zulu Rebellion of 1906: A Souvenir of the Transvaal Mounted Rifles* (Johannesburg: Transvaal Leader, 1906), 27–28. The vicissitudes of the inhabitants are described in Thompson, "Crossroads of War: The People of Nkandla in the Zulu Rebellion of 1906," *Scientia Militaria: South African Journal of Military Studies* 35 (2007): 95–127.

⁸⁷ See Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, 34–88; Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 237–317; and Thompson, *Historical Atlas*, 24–39. *Official Despatches*, 138–39: Magistrate Nkandhla to CNA, 26 May 1906.

McKenzie's forces that converged in May on Cetshwayo's grave included 2,200 levies, drawn from seventeen chiefdoms in the Nkandhla and Eshowe divisions. They were under the nominal supervision of two experienced magistrates, but in the field they were led by adept young militia officers. When they could do so, chiefs personally accompanied their men, and the loyal chiefs Mfungelwa and Sitshitshili set an example to the others.⁸⁸ The levies were armed and dressed in the traditional way and resembled the rebels, except that they had no firearms and tied strips of red cloth around their heads or upper arms (The rebels wore the *imishokobezi*, or white cow-tail decorations, that were the emblem of the uSuthu, or royalist, cause.).⁸⁹ Rations consisted of one fat beast per day for every hundred men, and vegetables foraged in the vicinity. The stock was often looted and the vegetables taken from the gardens and stores of rebels.⁹⁰ The levies were keener to loot than to fight. They also threatened to kill rebel women and children unless they could hold them to ransom, and the government let them do so as the more humane course.⁹¹ When levies and rebels fought, they did not take prisoners, which was also a traditional practice.⁹² And they did fight each other—at Thathe on 29 May, Manzipambana on 3 June, and Mome on 10 June. At Thathe and Mome the levies performed well. They ran away at Manzipambana, but the number engaged there was small

⁸⁸ Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, 45, 47, 69, 88; Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 63, 229, 231, 235, 252–53. [B. Colenbrander], "An Account of the Zulu Rebellion of 1906: The Unofficial Report of Benjamin Colenbrander, Resident Magistrate of the Nkandhla Division, Province of Zululand" *Natalia: Journal of the Natal Society* 35 (2005): 20, 22. *Official Despatches*, 134: CNA to PM, 26 May 1906 (which puts the levies at 1,800); 137: R. H. Addison to CNA, 20 May 1906; 138 and 140: Magistrate Nkandhla to CNA, 26 May 1906. SNA I/1/345: Magistrate Eshowe to SNA, 26 July 1906, and SNA I/1/367, 1116/1907, no. 34: Report of Magistrate Eshowe. See also Magistrate Nkandhla to SNA, 23 July 1906, in the records of the Nkandhla Magistracy, PAR, 1/NKA 3/2/1/2.

⁸⁹ Stuart, *Zululand Rebellion*, 63, 198, 218, 233, 235, 239, 273, 289n. Statement of Nsuze kaMfelafuti, in *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring Peoples* [hereafter JSA], Vol. 5, ed. C. de B. Webb and J. B. Wright (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001), 165.

⁹⁰ *Annual Reports 1906*, 15: CNA report. GH 569, 154: Notes on the Zululand Field Force May and June 1906, by Major General F. E. Stephenson.

⁹¹ Colenbrander, "Unofficial Report," 25; *Official Despatches*, 137: Addison to CNA, 20 May 1906; CSO 3040 and PM 102, no. C230/1906: OC ZFF to Commandant, 5 June 1906; ZA 28: CNA to OC ZFF, 3 June 1906.

⁹² Much can be inferred from the fact that no prisoners were reported, but see also JSA, Vol. 3, 234: Mlokotwa ka Mpumela. Powell, *Zulu Rebellion*, 49; SNA I/6/27, no. C194/1906: statement of Sanqawe; *Official Despatches*, 136: Addison to CNA, 20 May 1906 and 185: CNA to PM, 12 June 1906, on the wounding of Mfungelwa.

and at a disadvantage.⁹³ Another large levy was drawn from the Bomvu people in the upper part of the Krantzkop Division of Natal. This levy, about 1,200 men under the energetic acting chief Sibindi, cooperated with the Umvoti Field Force, operating along the Natal-Zululand border. It performed well in the battle of Mphukunyoni (28 May).⁹⁴

Scarcely had the rebellion ended in Zululand when it erupted again in the nearby Mapumulo Division of Natal where many Africans had long been disaffected. There was barely time to raise levies for this third phase of the rebellion, although they readily turned out in the Eshowe Division to prevent Natal rebels from crossing the Thukela into Zululand. The militia quickly moved in, and in less than a month defeated the rebels in five engagements, destroying their homesteads and seizing their livestock. After the rebellion had been crushed, several levies were called to assist the militia in mopping up.⁹⁵ In this final phase of the rebellion the rebels lost an estimated 1,439 men; an additional 1,795 surrendered and were tried under martial law.⁹⁶

The rebellion was over by mid-July. Total rebel dead were given at 2,652, and there were 4,368 convictions under martial law.⁹⁷ Government

⁹³ Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, 60–61, 69–70, 88–91. Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 252–54, 284–88, 292, 302–4. *Official Despatches*, 185: CNA to PM, 12 June 1906; CSO 3040 and PM 102, no. C230/1906: OC ZFF to Commandant, 5 June 1906.

⁹⁴ Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, 57–59. Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 63, 180, 264–75, 330. *Official Despatches*, 62, 72, and 127: Governor to Secretary of State, 11 April, 26 May, and 1 June 1906, and 131–33: OC Umvoti Field Force [hereafter UFF] to Commandant, 29 May 1906. CSO 2599, no. C147/1906: UFF Diary, 6–11 April and 27–29 May 1906. SNA I/1/342, no. 1684/1906: Intelligence Officer UFF to Commandant, 27 May 1906, and S. Johnson to Magistrate Krantzkop, 18 June 1906; and cf. SNA I/1/414, no. 3263/1908, Magistrate Umsinga to SNA, 31 July 1906.

⁹⁵ Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 329, 342, 367, 398–99. *JSA*, Vol. 4 56–58: Msema kaBeje. CSO 259, no. C147/1906: UFF Diary, 25–26 June and 13 July 1906; Report of Commandant of Stanger and District, 5–8; and Report of the operations of the Mapumulo Field Force during the recent Natal Rebellion, 27 August 1906. SNA I/1/354, no. 3603/1906: Magistrate Ndwedwe Division to SNA, 29 September 1906, and SNA I/4/1, no. C196/1906: Under Secretary for Native Affairs to Minister of Justice, 29 June 1906.

⁹⁶ See Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, chaps. 23–31; Guy, *Zulu Uprising*, chaps. 9–10; Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, chap. 9; Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, chaps. 16–18; Thompson, *Historical Atlas*, 40–59 and 62; and cf. Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005), chaps. 2–5.

⁹⁷ *Annual Reports 1906*, 4, 15; Thompson, *Historical Atlas*, 62. Stuart states in *Zulu Rebellion*, 404, that 4,700 prisoners were tried under martial law. He gives two further sets of figures he considers only approximate: the military's estimate of a total of 10,000 to 12,000 rebels with about 2,300 of them killed; and the magistrates' figures of 5,904 rebels with 1,391 killed and missing.

casualties were reported as thirty-six dead and sixty-seven wounded,⁹⁸ and expenses as £676,613 7s. 2d.⁹⁹ The militia was demobilized, but special service units were retained for policing and mopping up until early September.¹⁰⁰ It is not surprising then that most criticism of levies, good and bad, concerns those serving during the second phase of the rebellion. Ultimately, 2,842 turned out for government service in Zululand. The commissioner and the magistrates in charge of them said that they did good work,¹⁰¹ but McKenzie did not trust them or think much of them as soldiers, although he conceded their usefulness in the task for which they were required.¹⁰² When he left Nkandla he was touched when the chiefs and men who had assembled to bid him farewell saluted him as “Great Chief ‘Chaka’ McKenzie” and expressed their regret at his departure.¹⁰³

Two other African units that served the government in the rebellion merit attention. One was the Zululand Native Police, which had been incorporated into the Natal Police when Zululand became a province of Natal, but had been reconstituted at the outbreak of the rebellion. About one hundred strong, these tough and dependable policemen (*nongqayi*) fought very well at Bhobe and Mome.¹⁰⁴ The other unit was the Natal Native Horse, descendant of the unit that had served in the Anglo-Zulu War and the last stages of the 1888 rebellion. About three hundred strong, it was recruited from established Christian communities in Natal. The government provided for raising it in February,

⁹⁸ Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 540–42.

⁹⁹ Colony of Natal, *Statistical Year Book for the Year 1906* (Pietermaritzburg: Davis, 1907), 156; period up to 31 January 1907. Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 406, 550 includes consequential expenses and arrives at a total of £883,876 7s. 2d. for the period to 31 May 1910.

¹⁰⁰ Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 394–401; Thompson, *Historical Atlas*, 60.

¹⁰¹ *Annual Reports 1906*, 15: CNA’s report. *Official Despatches*, 135–38 and 138–141: Addison and Colenbrander to CNA. PM 101, no. C142/1906: Addison to CNA, 31 May 1906. Powell, *Zulu Rebellion*, 28–29. In addition to the levies of the Eshowe and Nkandhla Divisions, smaller ones were called out in the Nqutu Division. See Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 63; SNA I/1/345, no. 2305/1906: Magistrate Nqutu to CNA, 12 September 1906; and Mangati’s evidence in *Rex vs. Dinuzulu*, in RSC III/3/4: 2799–2800.

¹⁰² CSO 2599, no. C147/1906: McKenzie’s report to Commandant, September 1906, 61; and CSO 3040 and PM 102, no. C230/1906: OC ZFF to Defence, 25 May 1906. *Official Despatches*, 119, 121, and 159: Governor to Secretary for State, 18, 26 May and 8 June 1906.

¹⁰³ Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, 124.

¹⁰⁴ *Annual Reports 1906*, 15: CNA’s report; Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, 32–33, 88–92; Stuart, *Reluctant Rebellion*, 62, 231–32, 307–9, 559–60; CSO 259, no. C147/1906: McKenzie’s report, 68.

but there were delays in obtaining horses, and one community, at Driefontein, even expressed an unwillingness to serve because they felt that the unit's service in the last war had been slighted. Not until May was the unit organized and dispatched to Zululand under militia officers. The Natal Native Horse was never in battle. Its troops were parceled out to secure the lines of communication and then transferred to the unsettled Umsinga Division in Natal for policing duties. It was disbanded on 16 September, along with the special service units that had been patrolling the former rebel areas. The civil and military authorities spoke very highly of its service, although not all subsequent historians have given it much attention.¹⁰⁵

In his *History of the Zulu Rebellion*, published in 1913, James Stuart, a magistrate who served as an intelligence officer during the rebellion, reflects on the levies' performance and concludes that they had done well enough in difficult circumstances.¹⁰⁶ Almost sixty years later, in the next full account of the rebellion, Shula Marks mentions them only incidentally. Jeff Guy, in his government-sponsored centenary history for schools, pays them only sparing attention. When he does refer to them, he dismisses them as traitors.¹⁰⁷ That Guy does so is not altogether surprising in a post-colonial context where so-called 'mercenaries' in colonial service are frowned upon. African levies—essential as they were in the colonial era to initial conquest, the maintenance of security, and the suppression of revolt—occupied an ambiguous role, as was certainly the case in Natal and Zululand between 1838 and 1906.¹⁰⁸ While some Africans were pressed unwillingly into military service by colonial officials or their own chiefs, others welcomed it as an opportunity to maintain their warrior traditions and embrace the short term inducements of pay, plunder, and soldierly adventure; they seized the chance to strike back at old enemies and rivals. To divide and rule was the well-tried strategy of imperialism the world over, and

¹⁰⁵ *Annual Reports 1906*, 95–96; Government Notice No. 292/1906; *Official Despatches*, 20 and 117; Governor to Secretary for State, 16 February and 18 May 1906; Bosman, *Natal Rebellion*, 74; Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 62, 148, 557–58, 560; CSO 2599, no. C147/1906; McKenzie's report, 72, and R. C. Samuelson's report, entitled "History of the Natal Native Horse." See Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, 335, 364.

¹⁰⁶ Stuart, *Zulu Rebellion*, 62–63, 418–19.

¹⁰⁷ See Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion*, 189, 216, 222–23, 237, 317–18, 327, 334, n.; Guy, *Maphumulo Uprising*, 15, 26, 104, and *Remembering the Rebellion*, 37, 39, 110, 112, 120, 122.

¹⁰⁸ On 31 May 1910 the Colony of Natal became a province in the Union of South Africa, and it ceased to maintain a separate military establishment.

its successful implementation depended on securing enough collaborators to neutralize resistance. Natal and Zululand proved a fruitful environment in this regard, and in all the wars of the period the Boer, British, and colonial forces never lacked African levies to lend them the necessary military support.

CHAPTER FOUR

FROM MERCENARIES TO MILITARY SETTLERS: THE BRITISH GERMAN LEGION, 1854–1861

John Laband

In 1854 the British government began recruiting mercenaries in Europe to fight in the Crimean War. The war was over before any of the three German, Swiss, and Italian legions raised could reach the front, and the government was faced with the problem of disposing of these redundant mercenaries. It was consequently relieved to oblige when the High Commissioner for South Africa requested military settlers for British Kaffraria. The men of the British German Legion (BGL) were encouraged to volunteer, and in 1856 the majority did so. They proved unsuccessful settlers, however. In 1858 half of them volunteered for military service in the Indian Mutiny, and those remaining in British Kaffraria were disbanded in 1861.

The BGL has received piecemeal attention from historians writing in English. Sir George Cory, in the sixth volume of his monumental *The Rise of South Africa*, published in 1940,¹ was the first to treat the BGL thoroughly, although only as one element in a chapter concerned more broadly with “German Immigrants in British Kaffraria.” E. L. G. Schnell’s doctoral dissertation, published in 1954 as *For Men Must Work*,² covers much the same ground as Cory, but in considerable and precise detail. Even if his treatment can be considered over-empathetic and apologetic, Schnell’s remains the standard account of the BGL at the Cape. James Rutherford’s outstanding biography of Sir George Grey, published in 1961,³ is invaluable for gaining an insight into

¹ Sir George E. Cory, *The Rise of South Africa: A History of the Origin of South African Colonisation and of its Development towards the East from the Earliest Times to 1857* (Cape Town: The Archives of the Union of South Africa, 1940), Vol. VI, chap. II.

² E. L. G. Schnell, *For Men Must Work: An Account of German Immigration to the Cape with Special Reference to the German Military Settlers of 1857 and the German Immigrants of 1858* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1954).

³ J. Rutherford, *Sir George Grey K.C.B., 1812–1898: A Study in Colonial Government* (London: Cassell, 1961).

the motives of the proconsul of empire responsible for planting the German legionaries as military settlers. In 1976 W. B. Tyler published an article, "The British German Legion 1854–1862,"⁴ that changed the prevailing emphasis to concentrate on the essentially metropolitan concerns involved in raising and then disposing of the BGL. This study was further developed only a year later by C. C. Bayley's *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, which authoritatively covers all three foreign legions raised for the British service in 1854–1856.⁵ Since then the BGL has apparently ceased to be of concern to historians, although a website exists on the "Anglo-German Legion."⁶

A hiatus of thirty years in the study of any historical subject is surely long enough to warrant a fresh enquiry, especially if the attempt is made to bring together the hitherto disparately treated elements in a single narrative supported by further archival research. Furthermore, it seems that the sorry saga of the BGL weaves together two strands of investigation worth pursuing. The first concerns the mid-nineteenth-century British government's attitude to employing mercenaries and how the government was affected by its dealings with the Crimean mercenaries; the second raises questions about the effectiveness and advisability of stationing military settlers on a disputed colonial frontier.

Mercenaries for the Crimea

Mercenaries, or soldiers of fortune, who serve their paymaster for tangible reward rather than from motives of loyalty or idealism, seem to have been active for as long as war has been waged. They might lack loyal commitment to their masters and even pose a threat to them, and certainly, they cost a great deal of money, but their employers have always known that hiring them is a means of rapidly expanding the armed forces of a state in time of war without the concomitant

⁴ W. B. Tyler, "The British German Legion 1854–1862," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 14 (Spring 1976): 14–29.

⁵ C. C. Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea: The German, Swiss and Italian Legions in British Service, 1854–1856* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977).

⁶ Dr. Keith Tankard, "Anglo-German Legion," <http://www.knowledge4africa.co.za/eastlondon/german201.htm> (accessed 23 January 2007). The quality of research is exemplary. All the secondary sources (both contemporary and modern) known to me are referenced, and the great bulk of the article is derived from original research among the primary sources.

expense of having to maintain them in time of peace.⁷ Today there is a considerable stigma attached to the profession of mercenary,⁸ but until the age of the French Revolution and the nation-in-arms this was not generally so in Western societies, where monarchs employed mercenaries to help fight their foreign wars and control their own obstreperous subjects.⁹ Indeed, some petty rulers were prepared to act as military entrepreneurs, and in the late eighteenth century several small states in the Holy Roman Empire contracted with Britain to provide contingents for service in North America. Even when in the nineteenth century employment of mercenaries began increasingly to be frowned upon, disapprobation was usually confined to participation in wars in Europe itself. Outside the continent, in Asia and Africa, the colonial powers would have been unable to conquer, control, or defend their empires without a heavy reliance on locally raised troops—although whether (for example) Sepoys in India, the *Tirailleurs Sénégalais* in West Africa, or the Rhodesia Native Regiment in southern Africa should actually be construed as mercenaries comes down to vexed questions of collaboration, conscription, and motivation.¹⁰

Naturally, men who relish the opportunities for slaughter and plunder are attracted by the life of a mercenary, but many soldiers of fortune know enough about the hazards of combat to avoid it if at all possible. Such men become mercenaries because they are attracted to soldiering as a way of life, because (as is often the case) as discharged soldiers in

⁷ See Azar Gat, *War in Human Civilization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 266–68, 306–8, 368–69, and 473 for the diversity of mercenary employers across the ages and continents.

⁸ For example see Peter Tickler, *The Modern Mercenary: Dog of War, or Soldier of Honour?* (Wellingborough: Patrick Stephens, 1987), and see Anthony Mockler, *Mercenaries* (London: Macdonald, 1969), 143–273, for a discussion on mercenary motives and activities during the 1960s in Africa and increasingly disapproving world opinion.

⁹ Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983), 8–9. See Philip Mansel, *Pillars of Monarchy: An Outline of the Political and Social History of Royal Guards 1400–1984* (London: Quartet Books, 1984), 2, 7, 80, 82.

¹⁰ V. G. Kiernan, *European Empires from Conquest to Collapse, 1815–1960* (Great Britain: Fontana Paperbacks, 1982), 16–17. See Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour: An Account of the Indian Army, Its Officers and Men* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1976), 121–215; Myron Echenberg, *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991), 7–24, 47–69; Tim Stapleton, *No Insignificant Part: The Rhodesia Native Regiment and the East Africa Campaign of the First World War* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 31–52.

time of peace they cannot adjust to civilian life or find employment that accords with their notions of military honor and status. Others, in the past as well as in the present, sell their swords through adverse circumstances, such as religious or political exile, economic distress, or flight from the law.¹¹

The employment of foreign troops was long established in British military tradition because of the difficulties in attracting recruits at home and the long-established opposition to conscription. When Britain went to war with revolutionary France in 1793 the government was constrained over the next twenty-two years to supplement the undermanned British forces with regiments from Hanover (still part of the British Crown), Hesse, Baden, and Brunswick, from French émigrés and (covertly) from the Swiss cantons. The statutes enacted in 1794 and 1804 regularized this foreign recruitment. By 1814 there were 32,000 foreign troops in British employ as opposed to 227,000 regulars. Widespread disbandment and retrenchment followed peace in 1815, so that when Britain and France declared war on Russia on 22 March 1854, the British Army was once again severely under strength.¹²

Attempts in 1854 to augment regular troops came to nothing, less because of longstanding poor recruiting methods,¹³ than on account of employers' fears of adverse effects on the availability of both industrial and rural labor in the boom conditions the war had brought about, and because army pay and conditions were not favorable enough by comparison to attract many recruits, most of whom now came from urban areas.¹⁴ As always, the recruitment of foreign mercenaries remained the obvious remedy. A bill passed in 1837 had amended previous legislation to regularize the enlistment of foreigners into the King's service,¹⁵ but in 1854 the Earl of Aberdeen's government hesitated to act. Even if it were still the view of the traditionalist military establishment at the Horse Guards that there was nothing inherently objectionable in recruit-

¹¹ Richard Holmes, "Modern Mercenaries," in *The Oxford Companion to Military History*, ed. Richard Holmes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 576–77.

¹² Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 1–43, *passim*.

¹³ Edward M. Spiers, *The Army and Society 1815–1914* (London and New York: Longman, 1980), 40–41.

¹⁴ Peter Burroughs, "An Unreformed Army? 1815–1868," in *The Oxford History of the British Army*, ed. David G. Chandler and Ian Beckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 165, 168–69, and Strachan, *European Armies*, 70.

¹⁵ *British Parliamentary Papers* [hereafter *BPP*] 1837, VI (388): Bill 7 William IV, 10 June 1837: Foreign Officers Enlistment.

ing trained foreign troops, the rising liberal middle classes in an age of self-conscious reform could be expected to balk at this 'aristocratic' view and to denounce it as a typical ploy by a reactionary government intent on destroying liberty. Then came the heavy losses at the battle of Inkermann on 5 November 1854, and for lack of British recruits the government had no choice but to look outside the kingdom.

In recruiting abroad, especially in Germany, the government had a royal ally. As C. C. Bayley has shown, that ally was Prince Albert, the Prince Consort, who on 11 November 1854 wrote Lord Aberdeen suggesting that the Crown should be empowered to enlist foreigners to form a foreign legion. Aberdeen wasted no time and on 23 December 1854 a bill to that effect received Royal Assent. The Foreign Enlistment Act, which was to remain in force only for the duration of the war and one year after its termination, provided for the recruitment of foreigners as volunteers to be formed into separate regiments, battalions, and corps. It prohibited their employment in the United Kingdom itself except when they were being trained, arrayed, and formed into military units; limited the number to be stationed in the kingdom at any one time to a maximum of ten thousand; and stipulated that they would not be billeted on private households. The legionaries would be subject to the British Articles of War. Legionary officers would not be entitled to half-pay when their period of active service expired.¹⁶

As anticipated, the bill met with considerable popular hostility expressed in protest meetings, petitions to parliament, and letters to the press. Members of the military publicly condemned foreign enlistment as unnecessary, unconstitutional, and impractical.¹⁷ Undeterred, the government pushed ahead, though difficulties raised by many foreign governments meant that recruitment was effectively confined to certain states in Germany and Italy and to some of the Swiss cantons that had traditionally supplied mercenaries to Britain. In the Germanic Confederation (or *Deutscher Bund*), young men were legally entitled to leave their state as emigrants only once they had completed their military service and had a certificate to prove it.¹⁸ It was always possible

¹⁶ The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom: War Office Papers [hereafter W0] 43/972: printed text of *An Act to Permit Foreigners to be Enlisted and to Serve as Officers and Soldiers in Her Majesty's Forces, 23 December 1854* (Act of the 18th Victoria Chapter 2).

¹⁷ Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 44–66.

¹⁸ Hajo Holborn, *A History of Modern Germany 1648–1840* (London: Eyre & Spottiswood, 1965), 445–47.

for potential mercenaries to evade this prohibition by clandestinely taking ship at free cities like Hamburg and Lübeck, but it was difficult for recruiting agents to work openly in the *Bund* because on 7 February 1853 its members had passed a resolution discouraging foreign recruitment in their territories. Moreover, by the Declaration of Bamberg on 23 May 1854 the *Bund* had taken a neutral position in the Crimean War.¹⁹ Even so, Sir Alexander Mallet, the British Minister Plenipotentiary to the Germanic Confederation, ascertained that some states would not object if subjects who had completed their military training were approached informally.²⁰ The Duke of Newcastle, the Secretary for War, thereupon approached Richard Charles, Baron von Stutterheim, on 30 December 1854 to form a German Legion.²¹

Stutterheim (born in 1815) was a soldier of fortune with an international reputation, whose most recent commission had been to raise troops in Germany for President Santa Anna of Mexico. Santa Anna was deposed in August 1854, freeing the Baron to sell his services to Britain. He had received a thorough military training in the Prussian Cadet School in Cologne, but his political views led him to espouse liberal causes. He thus served between 1835 and 1838 with the British Legion in the Carlist War in Spain, and subsequently in 1848–1851 as a staff officer in a brigade of volunteers (Freikorps) supporting the failed uprising in Schleswig-Holstein against Denmark.²²

On 25 January 1855 Aberdeen's government fell and on 8 February Viscount Palmerston formed his first ministry with Fox Maule, second Baron Panmure, as Secretary of State for War.²³ In his provocative essay on Florence Nightingale, Lytton Strachey situated Panmure "four-square and menacing, in the doorway of reform," but "The Bison" (as Nightingale and her coterie dubbed him) was in fact an energetic and brusque reformist who antagonized conservative military opinion.²⁴ He was concerned by the reluctance of the *Bund* and the Kingdom

¹⁹ Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 44–45.

²⁰ The National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom: Foreign Office Papers [hereafter FO] 30/168, no. 153: Sir Alexander Mallet to the Earl of Clarendon, 29 December 1854.

²¹ WO 2/65, no. 357: War Department to Baron Stutterheim, 30 December 1854.

²² Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 67–68.

²³ Panmure had previously served as Under-Secretary for Home Affairs, 1835–1841, and as Secretary at War, 1846–1852. As Secretary of State for War (1855–1858) he combined the offices of Secretary for War and Secretary at War.

²⁴ Lytton Strachey, *Eminent Victorians*, ed. John Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 120; 277 (n.); Spiers, *Army and Society*, 108.

of Prussia (whose eastern lands lay outside the Bund) to countenance recruitment in their territories, but when on 16 February 1855 he failed to push through legislation that was widely believed might lead to conscription, he was left with no alternative but to implement the contentious Foreign Enlistment Act. Stutterheim set about recruiting in association with the British consular agents in the German states, and on 10 March 1855 Panmure authorized the erection of sufficient temporary barracks and huts to accommodate up to two thousand recruits on the British island of Heligoland off the northwest coast of Germany, where they were to be assembled before being shipped to England.²⁵

The War Office's heavily annotated draft of the *Articles of Capitulation for the Formation of a Foreign Legion* was initially discussed on 31 January 1855 in the Colonial Office.²⁶ After much modification Stutterheim issued the *Articles of Capitulation* on 26 April 1855. Men and officers enlisted for the duration of the war (Article 1), but could be demobilized at any time (Article 15). Each recruit was promised a bounty of £6 in cash and necessities (Article 4), and each officer traveling expenses and three months' pay (Article 11). All the enlisted were to be on exactly the same footing as British soldiers regarding privileges and duties (Articles 7 and 8). On disbandment officers were to receive three months' pay (Article 12), and the men a gratuity of a year's pay and free passage either to their homes or to North America (Article 9).²⁷

Stutterheim arrived in Hamburg in late April 1855 and appointed recruiting agents who received £975 for every one hundred recruits accepted. They soon recruited the full initial complement of five thousand men, but Stutterheim's agents were not discreet in their methods, and before long the north German city states and Prussia were arresting agents and detaining would-be recruits to ensure that they had completed their compulsory military service. Despite these

²⁵ Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 68–70, 86. The barrack accommodation remained inadequate, however. See WO 43/972: Lt.-Col. Henry Stainback to Secretary at War, 29 May 1855, and to Kinloch, 18 July 1855.

²⁶ WO 43/972: enclosed draft in E. Cockburn and R. Bethell to the Duke of Newcastle, 22 January 1855; WO 43/972, no. 156.602/1: War Office to Colonial Office, 9 February 1855.

²⁷ BPP 1856, XXXIX (228), 1–2: Articles of Capitulation, 26 April 1855. See 8–12 for the Attestation forms in German and English. For a hand-written final draft, see WO 43/972.

embarrassments, Stutterheim raised a second contingent of about five thousand men, although it was clear that with them the supply was exhausted, and men under the age of eighteen were returned to their parents.²⁸ Recruitment in Germany was only ended, however, on 31 March 1856. Official returns of mid-1857 state that a total of 9,682 men had enlisted and that it had cost the government £687,800 to raise and maintain them.²⁹

Stutterheim's recruitment drive in Germany was facilitated by peculiar circumstances. Edward Spiers has shown that during the same period in Britain, even though motivation could be complex, unemployment still represented the major reason for enlistment.³⁰ Germany in 1855 provided a fertile, but rather different recruiting-ground. After the failed revolutions of 1848 and the subsequent conservative reaction, would-be political emigrants in north German coastal cities such as Kiel, Lübeck, Hamburg and Altona, who lacked the funds to take ship, lived in poverty. Their numbers were swelled by many of the discharged rank-and-file who had fought in the Freikorps for the independence of Schleswig-Holstein and were now destitute or feared to return to their native states. Their officers (some of them of noble lineage) had been dismissed without benefits by the states they had previously served, and were eking out a living as tutors, clerks, journalists, or even laborers, and were in danger of losing caste. For these discharged veterans the Foreign Enlistment Act offered a chance of military employment, as it did for men who more conventionally had failed economically, run afoul of the law, or who were seeking adventure.³¹

It is therefore no surprise that according to a report of May 1856, 40 percent of the original contingent of five thousand men possessed previous military training or experience. By occupation 42 percent were artisans and craftsmen, and the balance were farm laborers, clerks, students, and sailors. Only 3.7 percent were illiterate (the corresponding figure for British infantry regulars was 60 percent).³² When calculating the previous civilian occupations of British recruits in 1861, Spiers found that 48.4 percent were laborers (including servants and husband-

²⁸ FO 33/148, 35: Hodges to Clarendon, 23 May 1855; FO 33/148 (unnumbered), 2, 8, and 19 June 1855. Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 80, 83–87, 108.

²⁹ BPP 1857—Session 2, XXVIII (158): Foreign Legions, Return, 16 June 1857.

³⁰ Spiers, *Army and Society*, 44–45.

³¹ Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 81–82.

³² WO 2/65, 244: Report of Lt. Steinbach to the War Office, 22 May 1856.

men), 15.1 percent artisans, 24.3 percent mechanics (including trades involving physical exertion), 9.6 percent shopmen and clerks, and 0.6 percent belonged to the professions.³³ A similar exercise undertaken by examining the Nominal Rolls of the 2nd Regiment Light Dragoons reveals that while 10.6 percent of the men gave their previous occupation as military, only 13.45 percent had been laborers, while 37.1 percent were artisans, 29.60 percent mechanics, 8.84 percent shopmen and 1.41 percent professionals. For the officers, the occupations of 78.57 percent had been military and 21.43 percent professional. These figures represent the occupational breakdown of a cavalry regiment, which usually attracted a better class of recruit than the infantry. Even so, in an infantry regiment such as the 1st Regiment Light Infantry, which consisted of 1,107 NCOs and men, only 194 (or 17.5 percent) had been laborers.³⁴ In the 2nd Light Dragoons the men were young (nearly 90 percent were under thirty years) and were recruited from all over Europe. However, the majority of men (32.5 percent) came from Prussia, followed by Hanover (15.17 percent), Bavaria (10.83 percent), and Baden (8.97 percent). Of the remaining 32.63 percent from twenty-five different states, nearly two-thirds hailed from within the *Bund*. Two-thirds of the officers were Prussian and over half of the rest came from within the *Bund*.

Admittedly, these figures are drawn from the British German Legion's nominal rolls that were based on the attestation papers that supposedly recorded the particulars of a recruit's background to confirm that he was eligible. The problem is that a recruit could fill in any details he pleased, being pretty certain they would never be checked.³⁵ Yet, inherently unreliable as such data must be, it nevertheless is good enough to confirm that the profile of the German legionary was very different from that of the typical British recruit. The majority were not laborers or peasants but men with skills from an urban background and with military experience. These were attributes that made for effective soldiers but not for settlers on a wild frontier.

With a view to recruiting veterans of the Schleswig-Holstein campaign who had emigrated to North America, Stutterheim encouraged

³³ Spiers, *Army and Society*, 46, Table 2.4.

³⁴ WO 15/9: Nominal Roll of 1st Regiment Light Infantry, British German Legion.

³⁵ Spiers, *Army and Society*, 42. The Attestation Papers for the British German Legion can be found in WO 15/84–102.

the British government to open recruiting centers in the United States under accredited agents and various British consuls. The assembly point for attestation and induction was fixed at Halifax, Nova Scotia. However, the Neutrality Act of 1818 prohibited belligerents from recruiting on United States soil and, moreover, the USA was neutral in the Crimean War. Under increasingly sharp American pressure the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Clarendon, halted recruiting in the USA on 22 June 1855, and on 16 July ordered that recruits (mostly destitute German veterans and British emigrants)³⁶ who were making their way to Nova Scotia be rejected when they reached Halifax. In the end, the contentious recruiting drive netted only seven hundred men for the German Legion and soured relations between Britain and the United States.³⁷

The first contingents of the German Legion forming in Heligoland began to land at Dover in May 1855. From there they were moved on to Shorncliffe Camp in Kent, where they were equipped and put into the same uniform as that of other British forces: a red tunic with blue facings and blue or grey trousers.³⁸ On 10 July 1855 they proceeded to camps at Aldershot, Colchester, Hythe, Tarlington, and Browdown near Portsmouth for intensive training with the new Minié rifle.³⁹ There they were grouped into two regiments of light cavalry (1st and 2nd Regiments Light Dragoons), each comprised of the usual four squadrons; six battalions of infantry (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th Regiments Light Infantry); and three of Rifles (1st, 2nd, and 3rd Jäger Regiments), each comprised of the standard ten companies. Each unit was put under the command of a British lieutenant-colonel.

Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort reviewed the German and Swiss Legions at Shorncliffe on 9 August 1855. The Queen objected to the term 'Foreign Legions' and insisted on 3 September 1855 they be called the Italian, Swiss, and German Legions to help recruiting in their

³⁶ For example, it was reported from Halifax on 11 April 1855 that the latest recruits from Boston consisted of five Britons, forty-one Germans, five Swiss, eight French, one Pole, one Dutchman, and one Dane (WO 43/972: Lt.-Gen. The Hon. Charles Gore to Lt.-Gen. Yorke, 11 April 1855).

³⁷ Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 87–94. See also R. W. van Alstyne, "John F. Crampton, Conspirator or Dupe?" *American Historical Review* XLI (1936): 492–502; J. B. Brebner, "Joseph Howe and the Crimean War Controversy between Great Britain and the United States," *Canadian Historical Review* XI (1930): 300–27.

³⁸ Tyler, "British German Legion," 15.

³⁹ WO 2/65, 273: Col. Kinloch to War Office, 10 July 1855; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 107–8; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 51.

own countries.⁴⁰ Yet this bland nomenclature could only camouflage the defining characteristic of the three legions. The Duke of Cambridge, who soon would become Commander-in-Chief,⁴¹ was typically having no nonsense when he wrote Panmure that the Foreign Legions “come to us for the money offered and promised, they being to all intents and purposes mercenaries, though that is a word I do not like to see used in public places, but still such is virtually the fact.”⁴² Panmure was under public pressure to dispatch reinforcements to the Crimea, and by mid-1855 was promising the imminent arrival of the German and Swiss legions.⁴³ In late September he combined the three Jäger regiments in a brigade of 2,700 men under Colonel (Acting Brigadier) James W. Wooldridge and sent them, together with the First Swiss Regiment, to the front.⁴⁴ Embarkation began on 26 October at Portsmouth.

Because the German and Swiss contingents had shown sharp hostility towards each other from the moment they first both landed at Dover, they were sent out on different transports and on Panmure’s insistence were kept apart thereafter.⁴⁵ Warned that they would suffer severely under canvas in the Crimean winter, Panmure halted the legionaries at Scutari, where they went into winter quarters. The 1st Jägers rapidly began to suffer from cholera and were removed to a hospital and barracks in Kulali, on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus. The 3rd Jägers reached Constantinople on 14 January 1856 and the 2nd Jägers on 28 January. However, hostilities were suspended on 1 February 1856, and the three regiments never proceeded to the Crimea, although they lost

⁴⁰ Queen Victoria to Lord Panmure, 5 August 1855 and 3 September 1855, *The Panmure Papers: Being a Selection from the Correspondence of Fox Maule, Second Baron Panmure, Afterwards Eleventh Earl of Dalhousie*, K. T., G. C. B., ed. Sir George Douglas and Sir George Dalhousie Ramsay (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908) [henceforth *Panmure Papers*], Vol. I, 339 and 372; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 109; Tyler, “British German Legion,” 16.

⁴¹ Giles St. Aubyn, *Royal George 1819–1904: The Life and H. R. H. Prince George Duke of Cambridge* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964), 112–14; Queen Victoria to Viscount Palmerston (10 July 1856), Viscount Palmerston to Queen Victoria (12 July 1856), *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty’s Correspondence between the Years 1837–1861*, ed. Arthur Benson and Viscount Esher (New York: Longmans, Green, 1907), Vol. III, 252–53.

⁴² Cambridge to Panmure, 12 June 1855, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. I, 235.

⁴³ Panmure to Raglan (11 June 1855 and 23 June 1855), Panmure to General Simpson (5 July 1855 and 31 July 1855), *Panmure Papers*, Vol. I, 232, 258, 275, 322.

⁴⁴ WO 2/65, 130: Panmure to Queen Victoria, 28 September 1855; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 109.

⁴⁵ Panmure to Simpson, 13 August 1855 and 8 October 1855, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. I, 346–47, 434.

173 men from disease. They returned disgruntled to their encampments in England by mid-1856.⁴⁶

Recruiting Military Settlers for British Kaffraria

The Peace of Paris formally ended the Crimean War on 30 March 1856, and by the terms of the Foreign Enlistment Act the legions had to be disbanded by 30 March 1857. However, faced by the increasingly discontented German, Swiss, and Italian legions, Panmure hoped to disband them as expeditiously as possible. On 1 May 1856 he approached the Directors of the East India Company in London with the proposal that they take over all three foreign legions for the defense of India. The Indian Mutiny was within days of exploding at Meerut, but the Directors most mistakenly believed they had no need for additional white troops, and turned down the suggestion.⁴⁷ With that avenue closed, the Foreign Office approached the European states from which the legionaries had been recruited to find out under what conditions they could be repatriated. Most states were prepared to readmit their citizens if honorably discharged, but Prussia, Bavaria, and Hamburg would not promise immunity. Württemberg, still insecure following the 1848 revolts, refused them entry. Belgium was willing to turn a blind eye if its nationals slipped home quietly.⁴⁸

The Queen, openly sympathetic towards all things German since her marriage to Prince Albert, in March urged Panmure that German legionaries who faced sanctions at home should, as a matter of honor, be treated fairly in terms of the *Articles of Capitulation*. She trusted that “there is no doubt that they will be provided for in the Colonies...as these poor men have many of them lost their nationality, and the Queen is certain that it would be very bad policy to act ungenerously towards them.”⁴⁹ She believed that officers in particular found themselves

⁴⁶ WO 2/65, 131–32, 359: Wooldridge to War Office, 14 and 28 January, 1856; Panmure to Queen Victoria (27 October 1855), Panmure to Simpson (29 October 1855), Panmure to Queen Victoria (17 November 1855), *Panmure Papers*, Vol. I, 463, 469, 491–92; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 107, 110–11; Tyler, “British German Legion,” 16.

⁴⁷ Bayley, 117–18.

⁴⁸ Clarendon to Panmure, 1 September 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 292; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 118.

⁴⁹ Queen Victoria to Panmure, 11 March 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 150. In September 1856 the Government offered free passage to Nova Scotia to men not

“in a very painful position in their own countries for having ventured to enter the Queen’s service,” and that if they were not “considered or treated with generosity, the effect on the Continent would be most mischievous as regards this country.”⁵⁰ Panmure promised to do “all in his power” to carry out the Queen’s wishes, not least because he realized that not to do so would make it difficult ever again to recruit in the German states.⁵¹ For their part, officers of the British German Legion were increasingly alarmed by the prospect of early disbandment and began to bombard the sympathetic Duke of Cambridge with letters and petitions. In an attempt to encourage early disbandment, the War Office promised on 19 April 1856 that any legionary who accepted half a year’s pay would be discharged at once, but this did not satisfy the 3rd Jägers in particular who demanded that the government honor the *Articles of Capitulation* and threatened legal action if not satisfied.⁵² Panmure grudgingly gave way, and instructed that all the legionaries’ debts must be discharged out of pay, leaving gratuities of one year’s pay intact. At the same time he dissolved the troublesome 3rd Jägers on 19 May 1856 for their “mutinous conduct.” The men were allowed to retain their uniform trousers and greatcoats and were sent either to Hamburg or to Halifax, where five hundred men of the BGL finally settled. “Bad and useless men” in other units were also discharged, especially since the disaffected officers could no longer be depended upon to maintain strict discipline.⁵³

Indeed, the BGL was already out of control. There were riots at Shorncliffe and Aldershot where, most seriously in July 1856, the 2nd Jägers became involved in a full-scale brawl with British troops of the 41st and 93rd Regiments; six British soldiers were shot dead and many huts (including Stutterheim’s headquarters) were destroyed. Similar outbreaks also occurred between the 1st Jägers and British troops in the Colchester camp. In parliament accusations were indirectly leveled at the Prince Consort for countenancing “German brigands” and “foreign

permitted to return to their own countries (WO 43/972, no. 156.602/1317: Minute by Charles Addison, 28 September 1856).

⁵⁰ Queen Victoria to Panmure, 14 March 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 153.

⁵¹ Panmure to the Queen, 14 March 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 154; WO 2/65, 89; Lord Bloomfield to Panmure, 11 April 1856; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 120–21.

⁵² Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 121, 124, 134.

⁵³ WO 32/8326, no. 093/37: Kinloch to Panmure, 27 August 1856; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 128–9, 174, n. 46.

hirelings,” and public sentiment turned sharply against the men of the German Legion. In order to exercise tighter control over the scattered units (now numbering 5,100 men) by July 1856 they were all being concentrated at Colchester.⁵⁴

Fortunately for the authorities in Britain, at this juncture a viable means of disposing of the BGL was beginning to present itself. Over a year earlier, on 7 March 1855, Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape and High Commissioner in South Africa (1854–1861), had written to the Colonial Office with a scheme to introduce settlers on the volatile eastern frontier of Cape Colony as a means of increasing security and allowing the garrison of imperial troops to be reduced. The plan failed to attract any settlers, but its rationale, which was not without precedent, persisted.⁵⁵ After all, in Canada at the conclusion of the War of 1812 the British government had approved the settlement of discharged soldiers north of the Rideau lakes as an inexpensive means of defending the frontier with the United States. However, the soldier-settlers did not prosper. The settlement scheme was brought to an end in 1816 and the soldiers’ deserted lots were taken up in the 1820s by civilian emigrants from Britain and Ireland. The problem was that soldiers do not necessarily make good settlers.⁵⁶ As Robert Gourlay wrote at the time of military settlers in Canada: “Soldiers, in general, choose their trade only to engage in idleness, and give rein to a roving disposition; and, after having spent 20 or 30 years in the profession... cannot easily turn to habits of sober and persevering industry.”⁵⁷ The French, it can be noted, had enjoyed no greater success with their much smaller experiment with military settlers in three Algerian colonies established in 1843. These colonies failed, not only because (as in Canada) the men had no motivation to work, but because they lacked women as

⁵⁴ Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 122–24; Tyler, 17–18.

⁵⁵ George McCall Theal, *History of South Africa from 1795 to 1872*, 3rd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1916), Vol. III, 192–93.

⁵⁶ J. Mackay Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada 1763–1871* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 115–17; *The Perth Courier*, 23 November 1923, trans. Ann MacPhail for The Lanark County Genealogical Society website, <http://globalgenealogy.com/LCGS/articles/A~DOBBIN.HTM> (accessed 23 January 2007).

⁵⁷ Robert Gourlay, *Statistical Account of Upper Canada: Compiled with a View for a Grand System of Emigration* (London, 1822), Vol. I, 550, cited in Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada*, 117.

a stabilizing factor.⁵⁸ Such would later prove the case with the BGL at the Cape.

Sir George Grey was not likely to be fazed by these failures in Canada and Algeria, for he arrived in the Cape from New Zealand, where he had been Governor between 1845 and 1853, and where he had successfully planted military settlers. Emerging Maori resistance to closer European settlement in North Island had persuaded Grey and the War Office in 1846 that the best way to quell disorder was not to bring in more troops, but to settle military pensioners with their wives and families on small-holdings in a defensive perimeter around Auckland, the capital. By 1852 the Royal New Zealand Fencibles, recruited in England and Ireland, numbered 721 pensioners organized in two battalions accompanied by 1,859 wives and children located in four villages. The men continued for seven years to undergo limited military training and were available for service in an emergency, but they were otherwise free to farm or work as laborers. On the whole they settled down well and prospered.⁵⁹ This successful example of practical colonization persuaded Grey that he could replicate it in the very different conditions of the eastern Cape.

The Cape, established in 1652 as a refreshment station for the Dutch East India Company, had been a British colony since 1806.⁶⁰ Chronic conflict on the Cape eastern frontier between white frontiersmen and the Nguni-speaking Xhosa chiefdoms exploded in nine Frontier Wars between 1779 and 1878, that of 1811–1812, the Fourth Frontier War, being the first waged by the British as rulers of the Cape. The Cape government attempted various expedients to secure the volatile frontier and maintain a peaceful coexistence. These schemes vacillated between dangling the carrot of treaties, trading passes, mission stations, schools, hospitals, and other instruments of civilization, and applying the stick of

⁵⁸ Jean Gottman, "Bugeaud, Galliéni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, ed. Edward Mead Earl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948), 236, 245–46; Anthony Thrall Sullivan, *Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, France and Algeria, 1784–1849: Politics, Power, and the Good Society* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1983), 142–44, 149–52.

⁵⁹ Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 92–94; Anthony G. Flude, *The Royal New Zealand Fencibles 1847–1852*, NZ Fencible Society, 2005, <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~tonyf/Fencibles/Fencibles.html> (accessed 25 January 2007).

⁶⁰ The First British Occupation of the Cape (1795–1803) had terminated as a result of the Treaty of Amiens.

buffer strips, blockhouses, and military garrisons. The establishment of white settlers seemed the ideal bridge between the two policies, but the introduction of the five thousand agricultural settlers of 1820 was only partially successful and did not bring the cycle of frontier violence to end. Following the War of the Axe of 1846–1847 (the Seventh Frontier War), the Governor of the Cape, Sir Harry Smith (1847–52), annexed the territory between the Keiskamma and Kei rivers to the Crown in 1848 as British Kaffraria.⁶¹ In doing so he abandoned the previous treaty system and imposed direct rule over the Xhosa exercised through magistrates. However, rebellion in 1850–1853 (the Eighth Frontier War) brought down Smith's policy and his successor, Sir George Cathcart (1852–1854), reverted to the gradualist strategy of creating a defensible boundary with co-mingled settlements of loyal Africans and whites.⁶²

Cathcart left the Cape in 1854 for the Crimea and his death at the Battle of Inkerman. His successor, Sir George Grey, proposed to pursue essentially the same approach to stabilizing the Cape frontier by bringing about the socio-economic integration of blacks and whites. Grey, sometimes described as the most outstanding proconsul of the Victorian age and an immeasurably talented man of vision, was also willful, ruthless, and unscrupulous in pursuing his goals.⁶³ In terms of policy he was an assimilationist who believed that primitive societies could advance only through everyday contact with white civilization, thereby replacing the practices of 'barbarism' with those of Christianity and modern farming, commerce, and labor. The harmoniously integrated society he envisaged would collaborate for mutual defense, thus ending the enervating frontier conflicts.⁶⁴

⁶¹ On 7 March 1860 letters patent issued at Westminster defined British Kaffraria's boundaries and the Crown Colony's form of government administered by the High Commissioner. Sir George Grey promulgated these letters patent on 26 October 1860 and appointed a Lieutenant-Governor (Theal, Vol. III, 225–6). British Kaffraria was annexed to the Cape in 1865.

⁶² T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa, 1977), 99–101.

⁶³ Raewyn Dalziel, "The Politics of Settlement," in *The Oxford History of New Zealand*, ed. W. H. Oliver with B. R. Williams (Oxford and Wellington: The Clarendon Press and Oxford University Press, 1981), 90; James Belich, "Grey, Sir George (1812–1898)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2004; online edition, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11534> (accessed 25 January 2007)).

⁶⁴ John Benyon, *Proconsul and Paramountcy in South Africa: The High Commission, British Supremacy and the Sub-Continent 1806–1910* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1980), 60–65; Davenport, *South Africa*, 101; Noël Mostert, *Frontiers: The*

For this to happen, Grey believed it was essential to fill British Kaffraria up with white settlers, not only because they were the “means of promoting civilization and industrial occupations” and thoroughly acculturating the Xhosa, but because they were also potentially an “effective addition” to the military force on the frontier necessary to repel further Xhosa aggression.⁶⁵ Yet in 1856 there were certainly not enough white settlers in British Kaffraria for these related objectives. There were only 626 in King William’s Town; 267 at various military posts; and 56 at mission stations. In East London, not actually part of British Kaffraria, but the port which served the territory, there were another 124. Of these settlers 424 were men, 207 women, and 442 children. These thousand or so settlers dwelt, according to the census of 1858, hugely outnumbered among 38,559 Xhosa and Mfengu.⁶⁶ Nor was there much likelihood of attracting more settlers to British Kaffraria, as southern Africa was hardly a favored destination for emigrants from the United Kingdom. Between 1846 and 1850 only 7.5 percent of assisted emigrants made for the Cape, and this decreased to 1.6 percent in 1860–1863 when the United States replaced Australia as the most desired destination. The expedient of introducing convicts as labor was periodically raised, but foundered on vociferous public antagonism.⁶⁷ An alternative, the very one Grey had adopted in New Zealand, was to encourage ex-soldiers to settle on the frontier where they could also apply their military skills. Previously, however, only a very few of these had been attracted to South Africa by government-sponsored schemes, and the 460 army pensioners who did retire in the Cape between 1849 and 1856 did not generally do so on the border where Grey would have liked them.⁶⁸

Nor could it be denied that the frontier was vulnerable. Between 1851 and 1863 the average number of imperial troops garrisoning

Epic of South Africa’s Creation and the Tragedy of the Xhosa People (London: Pimlico, 1992), 1165, 1167–69, 1174; Raewyn Dalziel, “Southern Islands: New Zealand and Polynesia,” in *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume III: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Andrew Porter (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 581.

⁶⁵ WO 32/8326, no. 093/37: Maj. J. Grant to Panmure, 1 June 1856.

⁶⁶ Theal, *History of South Africa*, Vol. III, 194–95, 219.

⁶⁷ Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 44–45.

⁶⁸ Peter Boyden and Alan Guy, “The British Army in Cape Colony and Natal, 1815–77,” in *Ashes and Blood: The British Army in South Africa 1795–1914*, ed. Peter B. Boyden, Alan Guy, and Marion Harding (Coventry: National Army Museum, 1999), 49–50.

British colonies around the world (excluding India) numbered only about 43,000. These troops included not only regulars but small local corps raised in the colonies.⁶⁹ Grey, as High Commissioner in South Africa, had at his disposal six under-strength battalions of Regiments of Foot under Lieutenant-General Sir James Jackson, Commander of the Forces, Cape of Good Hope (1854–1861), as well as the one-thousand-strong Cape Mounted Rifles and the six hundred Frontier Mounted Police (the most serviceable body of men on the border). Most of the other troops not required in Cape Town to guard the vital port and the nearby naval station at Simonstown were stationed in the Colony of Natal (until July 1856 a district of the Cape) and more were required in the interior where hostilities between the Boer republic of the Orange Free State and the Sotho kingdom were endemic.

Early in 1856 it seemed to Grey that the situation on the eastern frontier was beginning to look especially threatening because the Xhosa were increasingly resisting his assimilationist policies. Grey consequently ordered every soldier who could be spared from other South African stations to British Kaffraria and secured another battalion from the Governor of Mauritius. In September three more battalions arrived from service in the Crimea with drafts that brought the other battalions up to full strength. Thus by the end of 1856 the South African garrison was made up of ten infantry battalions, four batteries of Royal Artillery, and a detachment of Royal Engineers. To best secure the eastern frontier, Grey ordered small, detached military posts abandoned, and concentrated strong garrisons in King William's Town, East London, Fort Hare, Fort Beaufort, Queenstown, Peddie, Tyumie, and Fordyce. Escort parties patrolled the main roads in-between, and a reserve force of four thousand men organized into five mobile columns of battalion strength was kept available for field operations.⁷⁰

Such a strong concentration of troops naturally could not be maintained indefinitely in British Kaffraria, so even while he was making these dispositions Grey was seeking a more permanent solution. In these circumstances the windfall of military settlers in the form of the British German Legion proved irresistible, while the real threat of renewed war on the frontier made it easy for him to convince both the parliament

⁶⁹ Sir Charles Lucas, *The Empire at War* (London: Humphrey Milford and Oxford University Press, 1921), Vol. I, 78–81.

⁷⁰ Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 350–51, 361; Theal, *History of South Africa*, Vol. III, 197.

in Cape Town and the government in London that it was essential to send them to the Cape.

From early 1856 Grey was in communication with Henry Labouchere, the Colonial Secretary (October 1855–January 1858) in Viscount Palmerston's first cabinet, over the advisability of settling the BGL on the Eastern Cape frontier. Labouchere did warn him that they were "not the most orderly and well conducted men in the world," but Grey was undeterred.⁷¹ Accordingly, on 1 April 1856 the War Office directed its representative, the capable Major John Grant, and the not-so-capable Captain Ernst Hoffmann, Deputy Assistant Quartermaster-General of the BGL, to sail to the Cape to confer with Grey.⁷² While they were on their way Panmure warmed to the idea of military settlers when it was pointed out how successful the military colonists of the Austrian Empire were in the territories wrested from the Ottoman Empire in 1699.⁷³ In the Habsburg Military Frontier, a narrow strip of territory, which ran the whole length of the frontier with the Turks, every able-bodied male was liable for military service in rotation, and even the civilian population was directly administered by the *Hofkriegsrat*, or Ministry of War.⁷⁴ Panmure seemed to take no cognizance, however, of the palpable failure of the military colonies of Britain's recent foe, Russia.⁷⁵

Perhaps unaware of this massive Russian failure in military settlement, Grant and Hoffmann arrived in the Cape on 29 May 1856 while the Cape Parliament was sitting. Grey seized the moment, requesting authorization to appropriate £40,000 for settling the legionaries and asked for a guarantee that an annual amount of between £6,000 and £7,000 be at his disposal for the building of schools and other facilities, and for making advances to the settlers on arrival.⁷⁶ The House of Assembly and Legislative Council enthusiastically endorsed Grey's

⁷¹ Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 361.

⁷² Hoffmann was a drunkard. Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 53–54.

⁷³ WO 6/196, 20–1: Mundy to Hammond, 14 May 1856.

⁷⁴ See C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire 1790–1918* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 9, 18–19, 81, 447, 556–57. Between 1868 and 1886 the Military Frontier gradually lost its special military status.

⁷⁵ Hugh Seton-Watson, *The Russian Empire 1801–1917* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967), 161–63; David Saunders, *Russia in the Age of Reaction and Reform 1801–1881* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), 79–81.

⁷⁶ National Archives, Kew, United Kingdom: Colonial Office Papers [hereafter CO] 48/374, enc. in Confidential 6699 Cape: Grey's Message No. 39 to Parliament, 29 May 1856.

proposal on 30 May because, fearing an imminent outbreak of hostilities on the frontier, they saw the legionaries as an “efficient addition” to the military already stationed along the border.⁷⁷ Buoyed up by the approval of the usually fractious Cape Parliament, Grey, Grant, and Hoffmann toured the frontier to select sites for the settlement of the legionaries. On his return to Cape Town, Grant reported fully to Panmure on 14 July.⁷⁸ Crucial among his proposals (which would form the basis of the conditions of settlement later adopted) were the stipulations that the Legion must embark in complete military organization and that the sites for their settlement be selected primarily from a military point of view for the defense of the frontier, and only secondly because of their suitability for agriculture and commerce.

Meanwhile, left in idleness in their camp at Colchester while their future was being arranged, legionaries were further unsettled by recruiting agents from Latin America.⁷⁹ The Queen and Prince Albert were perturbed by the growing foment. So when Grant’s report of 14 July 1856 and accompanying papers were placed before her, the Queen was delighted with the progress being made in settling the legionaries. She suggested that Stutterheim accompany the legionaries to the Cape and supervise their settlement. Labouchere and Palmerston supported her because they believed that “as a German,” Stutterheim “would have more influence over them” than a British officer; while Cambridge opined that “much of the success of the venture will depend on his going out with the Legion.”⁸⁰

Their arguments convinced Panmure. When Grant and Hoffmann returned from the Cape in late August, Panmure appointed a committee drawn from the War Office and the Colonial Office that also included Stutterheim to speak for the BGL in order to draft the conditions for their settlement in the Cape.⁸¹ Discussions took place against the background of the growing unpopularity of the Legion in Britain. At the same time, the government was increasingly sensitive to reports in

⁷⁷ WO 32/8326, no. 093/37: Grant to Panmure, 1 June 1856. See also WO 32/8330, no. 093/63: Grey to Panmure, 12 July 1856.

⁷⁸ WO 32/8331, 1–5: Grant to Panmure, 14 July 1856.

⁷⁹ Clarendon to Panmure, 31 August 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 290.

⁸⁰ Palmerston to Panmure, 25 August 1856; Cambridge to Panmure, 31 August 1856; Queen Victoria to Panmure, 1 and 11 September 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 287–89, 298.

⁸¹ Panmure to the Queen Victoria, 6 September 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 292–93.

the press at home and abroad that it was failing to honor its commitments to the unfortunate men they had “decoyed” into their service.⁸² In an attempt to dampen the unrest among the BGL, the War Office sent Captain Hoffmann (on Grey’s suggestion) to the Colchester camp where, on 7 September, he addressed 5,200 legionaries and painted a glowing picture of the Cape as a place of settlement, which (as the men would discover when it was too late) was seriously misleading.⁸³

On 24 September 1856 Panmure and Stutterheim signed the *Conditions for the Formation of a Military Settlement in British South Africa* based on Grant’s original Proposed Conditions, and incorporating further suggestions Grey had made.⁸⁴ Officers of the BGL were required to enlist for three years as military settlers, and men for seven years to be divided into two periods: during the first three years they were to receive half-pay; and then none in the next four years. Whenever they were on active service, however, either against the enemy or in aid of the civil power, they were to receive full pay. To ensure they remained an effective fighting force they were to attend military exercises as appointed by the Governor, being no more than thirty days a year during the first period and twelve in the second. The government would supply free transport to the Cape for the settlers and their families, but once they landed at the Cape settlers would be put on half-pay (unless on active service), although they would be allowed free rations for a year. Five pounds sterling would be advanced to each man to buy tools and cooking utensils. Noncommissioned officers and privates would be allowed a building lot in a town inhabited by white colonists, with an additional acre of land if they agreed to settle along the frontier. Noncommissioned officers were to be granted £20 to build a cottage and privates £18. Should a married settler die, his property would go to his widow, who would receive a guinea for funeral expenses. If without heirs, the Cape government would inherit. Officers were to be treated more generously with allotments for houses and gardens

⁸² Clarendon to Panmure, 9 September 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 295.

⁸³ Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 126–27; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 60.

⁸⁴ WO 32/8331, Appendix no. 8, 18–20: Conditions for the Formation of a Military Settlement in British South Africa by Panmure and Stutterheim, 24 September 1856; WO 32/8331, Appendix no. 1, 7–9: Conditions on which it is Proposed to Locate the British German Legion in South Africa. See also CO 48/375, no. 7945 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 6 June 1856, and WO 32/8328, no. 093/57: Grey to Labouchere (6 June 1856), Minute by Labouchere (9 September 1856). See also Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 260–63, Appendix II.

double that of NCOs. Field officers were to receive a building subsidy of £200, captains £150 and subalterns £100. They were also to be permitted to bring an unmarried female servant. All settlers who refused to renew their enlistment were to forfeit their house and land and any improvements made to them.

The term 'military settler' is legally peculiar, invoking both military and civil status. After lengthy consultation Labouchere and Grey eventually resolved the issue of dual status through an Act passed in the Cape on 29 June 1857. The Articles of War and Mutiny Act ensured the permanent control of the settlers by military law as Grey wished, but also took into account Labouchere's opinion that when not on active service the men should be treated as settlers rather than as soldiers subject to the Governor's control. In reality, since the character and purpose of the settlement was military, military control in times of peace could not be abrogated.⁸⁵

In late August Panmure had ordered Colonel John Kinloch, the Inspector General of British Foreign Legions,⁸⁶ to go with Stutterheim to the Colchester camp and "induce the men to volunteer."⁸⁷ They had achieved little success, for the men would not volunteer without knowing all the terms of settlement. When Stutterheim returned with the conditions of 24 September he again received a very cool reception. The Duke of Cambridge believed Stutterheim had "made rather a mess" of winning over his officers, and that altogether the BGL was "becoming daily more turbulent and disagreeable" so that the Duke was greatly anxious to get them away.⁸⁸ Part of the turbulence among the legionaries could be attributed to the enticing enlistment bounties offered by Argentine, Dutch, French, and Neapolitan recruiting agents.⁸⁹ Other legionaries desired service in India where pay was good. Many, already in debt, resented losing gratuities and severance pay they believed owed to them in terms of the *Articles of Capitulation*, and were angered by

⁸⁵ BPP 1857-8, XL (389), 27-28, enc. in no. 5: Act No. 5 of 1857 (Cape of Good Hope): An Act for Establishing More Effectually the Settlement in This Colony of Certain Military Settlers. The act was promulgated in British Kaffraria by the Governor as High Commissioner. See also Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 68-69.

⁸⁶ For Kinloch's terms of appointment as Inspector General, see WO 43/972, no. 030/296: G. C. Mundy to the Military Secretary, Horse Guards, 26 May 1856.

⁸⁷ WO 32/8326, no. 093/37: Panmure to Kinloch, 27 August 1856.

⁸⁸ Cambridge to Panmure, 25 October 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 312-13.

⁸⁹ Panmure to Queen Victoria, 4 and 7 November 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 316-17.

the stringent manner in which paymasters were instructed to enforce deductions (normal in the British Army) for routine wear and tear to their uniforms, equipment, and barrack furnishings.⁹⁰ Besides, they were suspicious of Hoffmann's over-enthusiastic endorsement of the settlement scheme.

Officers, indebted and generally untrained for any form of employment other than military, began to inundate Cambridge with their petitions, and he was sympathetic towards their plight, deploring that compensation for their good service was turning out so badly for them.⁹¹ To make their situation worse, in terms of Article 29 of the *Conditions* the government intended to select a reduced number of officers as settlers, so many who believed they had no alternative left but to go to the Cape found they could not do even that. Grey had suggested that officers struck off the roll of the BGL—but wishing to emigrate—could do so with reduced privileges as 'Gentlemen Cadets.' Lord Clarendon took Prince Albert's point that the efficiency of the Legion in defending the Cape would probably be enhanced if there were a greater proportion of officers, and he pressed Panmure into agreeing to an amendment to the conditions allowing for Gentleman Cadets.⁹²

Stutterheim was appointed to command the British German Legion Military Settlers at the Cape (as they were then designated) with the rank of Major General. He was also vested with the semi-civil appointment of Commissioner. Colonel Wooldridge was his Second-in-Command and Assistant Commissioner. Major Grant was attached to the staff as temporary Military Secretary and also attached to the Governor of the Cape to superintend the settlement of the Legion. Panmure had optimistically believed that between six thousand and eight thousand legionaries would volunteer for the Cape, and had intended to organize them into regiments of one thousand each. But when only 2,261 NCOs and men volunteered, spread fairly evenly among the units of the BLG (the largest contingent consisted of twenty-four NCOs and 305 men of the former 3rd Light Infantry, with fifty-nine officers and forty-two Gentlemen Cadets), Panmure decided the BGL must be organized

⁹⁰ WO 32/972: Circular by Charles Addison to Paymasters of the British German Legion, 20 August 1856; Memorandum to the Secretary at War, 25 November 1856.

⁹¹ Cambridge to Panmure, 31 October 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 313; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 127–28; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 61.

⁹² Clarendon to Panmure, 12 September 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 299–300; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 65.

into three corps—called Cape Corps—of about eight hundred men each. Every corps would have a field officer, paymaster, surgeon, and three company officers to every two hundred men.⁹³ The cavalry (160 officers and men) were to form a part of the 3rd Cape Corps with one captain and one lieutenant selected from each of the two regiments of Light Dragoons.⁹⁴ The men would be formally discharged from the BGL on arrival at the Cape and formed into these three new corps, which would not be issued with the expensive Colours that would have been necessary if they had remained infantry of the line.⁹⁵

If it was disappointing that only a third of the BGL volunteered for the Cape, then the small number of women who accompanied them was even more so: 30 officers' wives, 331 NCOs' and men's wives, and 155 children.⁹⁶ The Cape legislators, believing that in order to be an effective settler one must be married with ties to family and home, had supported the scheme on the understanding that a large majority of the military settlers would be married. Understanding this, Grant had urged from the outset that "every disposition on the part of the German Legion to form matrimonial engagements should meet with encouragement,"⁹⁷ while Stutterheim pushed for the payment of £2 to each volunteer to assist in bringing their families to the Cape and for providing for "comforts on voyage."⁹⁸ Panmure acquiesced, offering free passage to wives and families to the Cape (Article 24 of the *Conditions*) and permitting legionaries with wives or fiancées in Germany and elsewhere to bring the women back to England at their own expense for emigration. These women were accommodated in HMS *Britannia*, a dismantled naval vessel in Portsmouth harbor, and in lodging-houses in the city. On 16 November fifty-two couples were married in a single

⁹³ WO 15/1: British German Legion, Military Settlers at the Cape of Good Hope, List of Officers, Officers Gone Out as Gentlemen Cadets and Nominal Roll of Non-Commissioned Officers and Men, November 9–24 1856. The total (fifty-seven officers and 2,117 NCOs and men) is very slightly at variance with the return submitted by Col. Kinloch, the Inspector General, upon which Schnell's figures are based (Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 70 and 265: Appendix IV).

⁹⁴ WO 32/8336, no. 093/172: Panmure to Kinloch, 5 November 1856.

⁹⁵ WO 6/196, 140–2: Mundy to Kinloch, 25 October 1856. Of those not volunteering for the Cape there are records for November of 400 taking ship for Hamburg, 1,000 for Ostend, 400 for Nova Scotia with a further 150 setting out for Buenos Aires. These departures were all marred by local riots. Panmure to Queen Victoria, 10 November 1856; *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 319; Tyler, "British German Legion," 20.

⁹⁶ Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 265: Appendix IV.

⁹⁷ WO 32/8326, no. 093/37: Grant to Panmure, 1 June 1856.

⁹⁸ WO 43/972: Memorandum for Deputy Secretary at War, 1 October 1856.

day on board the *Britannia*, and there were reports of other wholesale nuptials. If the status of these hurried ceremonies was not sufficiently dubious, the Bishop of Rochester added further doubt by suggesting that marriages conducted by the two Lutheran chaplains with the Legion did not conform with British law. To ensure that these unions were legal, Panmure instructed Grey to regularize them, which he did by the Military Settlers' Marriage Act proclaimed in British Kaffraria on 12 August 1857, and which listed 203 couples.⁹⁹

Heartily tired of the misbehavior of the legionaries, it was with great relief that Panmure could report to the Queen on 10 November 1856 that the volunteers for the Cape were beginning to embark "in good order."¹⁰⁰ The *Culloden* and *Sultana* were the first to leave on 10 November, followed over the next two weeks by the steamers *Covenanter*, *Stamboul*, *Mersey*, and *Abyssinian*. The HMS *Vulcan* carried Stutterheim and his staff and put in at Cape Town to take Grey on board. By the end of February 1857 the last ship had landed at East London. Health and behavior had been good on board with the exception of Stutterheim's bulldog, who bit his master.¹⁰¹

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On landing at East London the legionaries were moved inland to Fort Murray, where they were all concentrated by 9 March 1857 and waiting for Stutterheim and Grey to locate them at their various settlements. It is not clear if Grey provided them with the "suitable books" Panmure had ordered for their edification.¹⁰² The legionaries struck the white colonists of British Kaffraria and the officers of the regulars already

⁹⁹ CO 48/379, no. 1041 Cape Military: Under-Secretary of State for War to the Under-Secretary of State for Colonies, 15 November 1856; Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 52–53; Bayley, *Mercenaries for the Crimea*, 127, 173, n. 39; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 71–72. Panmure believed two Lutheran chaplains were sufficient for the Legion and refused to send out a third to the Cape, instructing that a German clergyman be found "on the spot." (CO 48/374, no. 10974 Cape: Under-Secretary of State for War to the Under-Secretary of State for Colonies, 4 December 1856).

¹⁰⁰ Panmure to Queen Victoria, 10 November 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 319.

¹⁰¹ WO 15/1: British German Legion. Military Settlers at the Cape of Good Hope; CO 48/380, nos. 2471 and 2475 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 28 and 29 January 1857; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 72–75, 266: Appendix V.

¹⁰² CO 48/379, no. 10591 Cape Military: Under-Secretary of State for War to Under-Secretary of State for Colonies, 21 November 1856.

stationed there as healthy and young (which they were), and as civil and orderly, although the “rumbustious bachelors of the German Legion”¹⁰³ would rapidly disabuse them on that score. For their part, the legionaries were overcome by the heat of the South African summer and appalled by the violent thunderstorms. Overall, they were dismayed by the wild, strange and undeveloped new land where they found themselves. Grey and Stutterheim moved them quickly to their new locations, and Fort Murray was cleared by 12 April 1857.¹⁰⁴

The legionaries were broken into small detachments to protect the frontier and preserve the main lines of communication, and placed in posts Grey had allocated in June the previous year in consultation with Lieutenant-Colonel John Bisset, the Assistant Adjutant-General.¹⁰⁵ The situation of the posts was dictated by strategic considerations, and Grey had not given sufficient attention to their potential as viable settlements. Some sites were already military posts, and there the military settlers either augmented or replaced existing garrisons of regular troops. Others were near old mission stations. The new posts established to guard unprotected points along the border were given staunchly German names and held by the legionaries alone.

The 1st Cape Corps under Colonel Wooldridge was located at posts just outside the western boundary of British Kaffraria. These posts stretched inland from the headquarters at Keiskamma Mouth on the coast northeast to Bodiam, Bell, Wooldridge, and Fort Peddie; Wooldridge’s men were also posted at East London, thirty miles up the coast from Keiskamma Mouth, with stations at Panmure and Cambridge just to the north of the port. The 2nd Cape Corps, under Lieutenant-Colonel Adolph von Hacke,¹⁰⁶ manned a series of stations at Potsdam,

¹⁰³ Benyon, *Proconsul and Paramountcy in South Africa*, 65.

¹⁰⁴ Diary of Colonel Edward Allen Holdich, 80th Regiment of Foot, 30 December 1856–27 March 1857, *The British Army in the Cape Colony: Soldiers’ Letters and Dairies, 1806–58*, ed. Peter B. Boyden (Chippenham: The Society for Army Historical Research, 2001), 140–48; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 78–85.

¹⁰⁵ CO 48/376, enc. in no. 9875 Cape Military: *Proposed Future Dispositions of Military Force in South Africa* (Graham’s Town, June 28, 1856); CO 48/375, no. 7963 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 12 July 1856; WO 32/8331, Appendix no. 5, 11–15: Memorandum by Lieutenant-Colonel Bisset, Assistant Adjutant-General, on Sites Proposed by Sir George Grey as a Settlement for the German Legion, 30 June 1856.

¹⁰⁶ A quarrelsome old soldier of fifty years’ service, von Hacke was accompanied to the Cape by his wife, children, and grandchildren. Panmure wished to dismiss him from the service for insubordinate misconduct before sailing for the Cape, but Grey and Stutterheim persuaded him not to do so on the grounds that von Hacke would be reduced to destitution if discharged, and the men’s morale would be damaged.

Berlin, Hanover, and Marienthal, which continued the line north from Cambridge along the road through central British Kaffraria, veered west to Breidbach and King William's Town, and then north again to the headquarters at Keiskamma Hoek in the Amatola Mountains. The 3rd Cape Corps, under Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Kent Murray, completed the cordon eastwards along the uplands from Keiskamma Hoek with posts at Greytown, Dohne, and Stutterheim (the headquarters) and then south to Colding, Ohlsen, Frankfort, and Braunschweig, which connected with the posts of the 2nd Cape Corps. The cavalry were stationed on the healthy plateau at Greytown and Stutterheim.¹⁰⁷

The lots in the new settlements required surveying, those nearest the established villages being done first. The legionaries hastily raised dwellings, initially with sod walls and thatched roofs. At some of the new villages the officers insisted that the cottages be laid out and constructed according to a uniform plan so that military regularity was maintained; in others officers exercised no direction and every man built according to his taste, ability, and diligence.¹⁰⁸

The BGL arrived in British Kaffraria at the dangerous moment of the great Xhosa Cattle-Killing. The Xhosa deeply resented the penetration of their lands with white-owned farms and military roads, and rejected the imposition of European culture. Their fervent opposition to Grey's assimilationist policy took a millenarian, rather than a military direction. The young prophetess, Nongqawuse, convinced Sarhili, the Xhosa paramount chief, that if his people destroyed all their livestock and crops as a sacrifice, then on 18 February 1857 a great wind would sweep all the whites into the sea. The wind did not come, and some 35,000 people, about one-third of the African population of British Kaffraria, died of starvation. Another 33,000 destitute and desperate Xhosa moved west into Cape Colony in search of employment. Grey could not permit the complete social and economic collapse of British Kaffraria if it were to remain viable for white settlement, so he drew many surviving Xhosa into large consolidated villages under stipendiary headmen responsible to magistrates, and instituted relief measures. To stabilize the situation he also had to maintain a firm military grip over British Kaffraria. The

See CO 48/374, no. 11630 Cape Military: Under-Secretary of War to Under-Secretary of Colonies, 30 December 1856; CO 48/381, no. 4910 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 17 March 1857.

¹⁰⁷ Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 109; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 365.

¹⁰⁸ Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 54–55; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 90–91.

numbers of the BGL posted along the border were much smaller than Grey had originally counted upon, so if they were to act as any sort of deterrent they had to be maintained on a full military footing.¹⁰⁹

Grey had an additional reason for keeping the BGL mobilized on full pay with rations. Unlike ordinary soldiers the Germans were not quartered in barracks under close military discipline, but in their own cottages. Grey believed that the small number of women who had accompanied the legionaries destroyed all prospects of the men settling down to a farming life instead of dispersing away from the frontier in search of artisanal work and wages. As he put it melodramatically to Labouchere: "They will roam over the whole country in search of females... whilst as a military force they will be quite useless for the defence of the Colony." The only way to prevent "these evils" was "to keep the settlers under arms as soldiers" until he was able to procure more females for them.¹¹⁰ Grey had the support of Stutterheim, who saw the need of women to help develop "thrifty and industrious habits" among the men.¹¹¹ In March 1857 Grey sought Labouchere's approval to apply the proceeds of the sale of allotments in King William's Town to secure female settlers. Labouchere agreed to send out "single females of good character" obtained from Ireland because he believed equally decent single women willing to emigrate were not to be found in England and Scotland.¹¹² In the event, there was difficulty in persuading even Irish women from the workhouse to settle in the Cape because they jibbed at having no Roman Catholic priest to accompany them. Ultimately, the Emigration Commissioners chartered the *Lady Kennaway* that sailed from Plymouth on 6 September 1857 with 153 "respectable young Irish women" accompanied by twenty-one Englishmen, all of them with wives, and thirty-three children. They landed at East London on 23 November, and the young Irish women—except for seventy who preferred to go to Grahamstown where they secured work in domestic

¹⁰⁹ CO 48/380, no. 2475 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 29 January 1857; BPP 1857–58, XL (2352), 67–68, no. 23: Grey to Labouchere, 6 March 1857; Benyon, *Proconsul and Paramountcy in South Africa*, 65; Davenport, *South Africa*, 101; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 359–61; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 113. For a full and detailed account of the cattle killing and its dreadful aftermath, see Mostert, *Frontiers*, 1177–1222.

¹¹⁰ CO 48/381, no. 4915 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 25 March 1857.

¹¹¹ CO 48/381, enc. in 4915 Cape: Stutterheim to Grey, 21 March 1847.

¹¹² BPP 1857–8, XL (389), 10: Grey to Labouchere (23 March 1857), 5–7: Labouchere to Grey (5 June 1857); CO 48/381, no. 4915 Cape: Under-Secretary of State for Colonies to the Emigration Commissioners, 9 June 1857.

service—found husbands, some English, and a few who might have been in the Legion.¹¹³

At the same time as securing the unsatisfactory Irish women, Grey had initiated a much more ambitious scheme to make up the shortfall of wives. He recommended to Labouchere that a thousand agricultural families from whom the legionaries could obtain wives be sent out from Germany, and he nominated two firms in Hamburg and Frankfurt to arrange for the selection and transport of the emigrants.¹¹⁴ Labouchere promptly turned down this plan for civil immigration on the grounds of the “large expense and the difficulty of execution.”¹¹⁵ But Grey, as was his wont, already had the bit between his teeth. On 24 August 1857 he entered into an agreement with the Cape Town agents of John Caesar Godeffroy & Son of Hamburg to bring out four thousand settlers of “respectable character, good health, and free from mental or bodily defects” to be paid for by the government of British Kaffraria, which would issue debentures to the amount of £50,000 and bearing the interest rate of six percent for ten years.¹¹⁶ However, Lord Stanley, the Colonial Secretary between February and May 1858 in the Earl of Derby’s cabinet, put a firm stop to the scheme on 4 May 1858, not least because he distrusted the presence of large numbers of German emigrants “unfamiliar with English habits or English speech.” He permitted the first planned shipment of 1,600 adults to continue but cancelled the contract for the remaining 2,240 and charged compensation of £5,000 against the British Kaffrarian account.¹¹⁷ The German settlers arrived between late 1858 and early 1859, and although their welcome was not very cordial and they found conditions very hard, they proved frugal, orderly, and industrious settlers. But they came too late to affect the fate of the legionaries, many of whose abandoned cottages they took over.¹¹⁸

¹¹³ BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 12–13: Grey to Labouchere (3 December 1857) and enc.: John Maclean to Grey, 26 November 1857. Theal, *History of South Africa*, Vol. III, 216–17; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 363; Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 55–56; Tyler, “British German Legion,” 22.

¹¹⁴ CO 48/381, no. 4915 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 25 March 1857.

¹¹⁵ BPP 1857–8, XL (389), 5–6, no. 2: Labouchere to Grey, 5 June 1857.

¹¹⁶ BPP 1857–8, XL (389), 13–24, no. 4 and encs. 1–4: Grey to Labouchere, 26 December 1857.

¹¹⁷ BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 8–9, nos. 1, 2, and 3: Stanley to Grey, 4, 5, and 20 May 1858.

¹¹⁸ Theal, *History of South Africa*, Vol. III, 217–22; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 264, 362–63, 395; Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 62–65, 70–71; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, chaps. XV–XVIII and Appendices IX–XV.

The legionaries found it impossible to reconcile their dual role of soldiers and settlers. As settlers, the legionaries increasingly resented military constraints and wished to seek their own fortunes where they best thought they could find them. The three thousand felling axes, bill hooks, and spades, and the five hundred pickaxes, standbarrows, and wheelbarrows that Panmure had ordered added to their field equipment made little difference to neophyte farmers on plots too small for African conditions and too far from local markets even for the most experienced agriculturalist to wring out a living.¹¹⁹ Some government assistance was given to enable the men to build their houses and irrigate their gardens. These tasks kept the more industrious occupied for a while.¹²⁰ The most sanguine forced themselves to believe that they could succeed through will-power and hard labor, but the majority were soon enough only too relieved to abandon their miserable experience as settlers and resume the soldier's trade.¹²¹

Grey wrote histrionically in November 1857, deploring some of the "desperate characters" in the BGL who had been recruited from "some of the worst Continental towns" and who were committing some "desperate murders."¹²² The Civil Commissioner of British Kaffraria reported in November 1857 that many of the legionaries had no real intention of making a living by farming their plots and were giving way to idleness and dissolute living. Their food was often uncooked and many were suffering from scurvy. Indeed, most of the legionaries, whose previous occupations had been mainly artisanal, mechanical, and urban, intended to leave as soon as they could to find employment in better developed parts of South Africa where wages were obtainable. Desertion was always an option, but because legionaries would have been apprehended in the Cape, they had to escape to the independent Boer republic of the Orange Free State, a daunting journey through inhospitable country. As a result, relatively few tried, although there were reports of small bodies of them living as freebooters on the margins of Sotho territory, which abutted the Cape and the Orange Free State.¹²³ Yet even if the legionaries' desertion rate was higher than other

¹¹⁹ CO 48/379, no. 10017 Cape Military: Under-Secretary of War to the Under-Secretary of Colonies, 3 November 1856.

¹²⁰ BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 28–29, enc. 1 in no. 6: Stutterheim to Grey, 13 October 1857; Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 55; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 362.

¹²¹ Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 99–100, 123.

¹²² BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 34: Grey to Labouchere, 26 November 1857.

¹²³ Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 58–59.

regiments at the Cape, those who made their escape numbered only 195 up to the end of 1859. Still, it was a telling indication of the legionaries' failure as settlers that by 30 September 1858, when half of them were leaving for India, they had brought only 1,016 acres under cultivation, or 5.08 percent of the 20,000 acres of arable land allotted them. Of the 2,362 officers and men who had come out to the Cape and who were responsible for building a house each, only 628 (or 21.8 percent) had completed one by that date.¹²⁴

The Indian Mutiny broke out in full force on 10 May 1857, but news of it did not reach the Cape until 6 August. Labouchere requested on 26 August 1857 that Grey send as many regulars as he could spare to India.¹²⁵ Grey responded wholeheartedly, although he feared for the security of the frontier. By March 1858 he had contributed 6,789 Infantry of the Line and Royal Artillery and some four thousand horses, which left him with only 2,891 troops for the defense of all of British southern Africa. The garrisons and forts on the Cape eastern frontier were thus almost emptied of regulars, but there were still one thousand Cape Mounted Police, six hundred Frontier Mounted Police, and the men of the BGL who remained on active service at their stations, and thus on full pay.¹²⁶ This last brought further difficulties. Grey's decision to keep the BGL on full pay had not been previously sanctioned by Whitehall and had been aggressively questioned in parliament.¹²⁷ Labouchere conceded on 14 September 1857 that the legionaries should be kept embodied on full pay as they were doing the duty of regular troops required in India.¹²⁸ The truth of the matter is that the legionaries could not have survived if their rations and full pay had been stopped.

¹²⁴ CO 48/389, no. 8479 Cape: Grey to Stanley, 29 June 1858: Returns of casualties since embarkation to 30 April 1858; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 108–10, 125–27, 132, 134–38, 268: Appendix VII; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 362.

¹²⁵ BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 39, no. 1: Labouchere to Grey, 26 August 1857; Col. Holdich's Diary, 3 August–28 November 1857, *British Army in Cape Colony*, ed. Boyden, 150–51.

¹²⁶ CO 48/338, no. 4199 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 22 March 1858. For sending troops to India, see CO 48/383, nos. 9448, 9450, 9451, 9452, 9968, Cape: Grey to Labouchere: 7, 10, 19, 25, and 27 August 1857; CO 48/384, nos. 247, 277, 278, Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 2 and 11 November 1857; CO 48/385, nos. 1274, 1283, 1284, Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 11 and 26 December 1857; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 371–72, 376–78, 383, 390, 400, 412–13.

¹²⁷ See Tyler, "British German Legion," 22–24.

¹²⁸ BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 40–41, no. 2: Labouchere to Grey, 14 September 1857.

On 13 October 1857, at a time when so many legionaries were seriously considering giving up their ineffectual attempt to become settlers and discipline was declining, Stutterheim surrendered his command and returned to Germany to deal with urgent family matters.¹²⁹ Grey was shocked at the loss of the one man possessing the confidence of the soldier settlers and understood the negative effect it would have on the remaining legionaries.¹³⁰ Colonel Wooldridge became provisional commander on 10 November 1857, but a few days later the BGL were placed directly under Lieutenant-General Jackson, the Officer Commanding at the Cape. The legionaries quickly felt the change in command because, while Stutterheim preferred to regard them as primarily settlers, Jackson saw them simply as soldiers drawing full pay while they were on active service along the frontier. Jackson accordingly required them to be properly dressed and equipped—despite disputes with London over who was to be responsible for the cost—as well as regularly drilled, inspected, and disciplined, and made fit through route marches.¹³¹ Hopeless farmers, the legionaries showed they still maintained some good military habits, even if their *esprit de corps* was severely dented.¹³²

To assist deserving legionaries such as Gentlemen Cadets and senior sergeants, and to bolster locally-raised Cape units with good recruits, Grey occasionally gave them the opportunity to leave the Legion and join the colonial forces.¹³³ One Cadet and twenty-eight men joined the King William's Town Police, while another three Cadets and 110 NCOs and men joined the Frontier Armed Mounted Police. In addition, thirty-five men from the Cavalry Squadron enlisted in the Cape Mounted Rifles. Those enlisting lost all their benefits as legionaries, but they considered the exchange an advantageous one.¹³⁴ Indeed, the

¹²⁹ BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 28–29, enc. 1 in no. 6: Stutterheim to Grey, 13 October 1857.

¹³⁰ BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 37, no. 11: Grey to Labouchere (27 November 1857) and 43, no. 6: Grey to Labouchere (5 February 1858).

¹³¹ See BPP 1857–58, XL (389), 47–49, no. 3 and encs. 1–3: Stanley to Grey, 22 April 1858, for the censuring of Grey for supplying the Legionaries with new boots, and CO 48/389, no. 8165 Cape: Grey to Stanley, 19 and 24 June 1858, for Grey's indignant response. See also Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 57, and Tyler, "British German Legion," 24–25.

¹³² Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 117–20.

¹³³ BPP 1857–8, XL (389), 36, enc. in no. 10: Grey to Labouchere, 26 November 1857.

¹³⁴ Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 141–44.

remaining legionaries found their situation to be deteriorating even further. In July 1858 Lieutenant-Colonel Kent Murray sent Grey a pessimistic report on the state of the men in the 3rd Cape Corps. They were “discontented and unhappy” and viewed their life as settlers with “distaste,” as they believed no amount of industry would repay their labor. On the other hand, Kent Murray insisted that they were still efficient as soldiers, and he believed most would volunteer for active service in India if given the chance.¹³⁵

Although Grey considered it necessary to retain the legionaries on full pay to prevent their further dispersion and to keep the frontier posts manned, Panmure decided it was too much to do so indefinitely and instructed General Jackson to stop full pay by 31 March 1858. He forbade any extra pay unless the Cape was directly threatened with invasion and the Legion was called out for military duty in the field. Major-General Peel, Panmure’s successor as Secretary for War in Lord Derby’s short-lived second cabinet (February 1858–June 1859), confirmed this decision on 14 May 1858. Grey grasped at Panmure’s proviso to cite hostilities between the Sotho and the Orange Free State that potentially threatened the northern Cape frontier in order to retain the legionaries on full pay until mid-July 1858, but he could find no credible excuse to do so after that.¹³⁶

Volunteering for India and Disbandment

At the time of the outbreak of the Mutiny in India, Sir James Elphinstone, the Governor of the Bombay Presidency, had requested military assistance from Grey. In late 1857, at the time he was leaving the Cape, Stutterheim had suggested that the Legion be sent with other troops from the Cape to India, but the War Office had not concurred. In early 1858 Wooldridge had repeated the offer, but the Colonial Office made no decision.¹³⁷ Then on 23 June 1858 Elphinstone made

¹³⁵ CO 48/390, enc. in no. 8983 Cape: Lt.-Col. Kent Murray to Grey, 16 July 1858.

¹³⁶ BPP 1857–8, XL (389), 43, enc. in no. 6: H. K. Storks to Herman Merivale, 4 February 1848 [*sic*]; and sub-enc. in no. 6: Panmure to Sir James Jackson, 4 February 1858; CO 48/338, no. 4199 Cape: Grey to Labouchere, 22 March 1858; CO 48/390: Grey to Sir E. Bulwer Lytton, 17 July 1858.

¹³⁷ CO 6/114: Storks to Stutterheim (3 December 1857), Storks to Wooldridge (23 June 1858).

a specific request for men of the Legion.¹³⁸ This was the solution Grey was searching for. General Jackson assured him that the legionaries would volunteer for India “with alacrity,”¹³⁹ and the very next day, on 25 July 1858, Grey wrote to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, the Colonial Secretary from May 1858 to June 1859, suggesting that India would be ideal for the legionaries who were “not formed of the materials indispensable for steady settlers,” but who were “only fit for a purely military life.” This was doubtless a bitter admission for Grey to make, but he conceded to Bulwer Lytton that he could no longer “see his way” with the legionary problem—although this did not prevent him from shifting the blame for the failure squarely onto a government he accused of not supporting his immigration schemes that would have “swamped the German Legion by the good and industrious families mixed up with them.”¹⁴⁰

When Grey alerted Bulwer Lytton to the Indian possibility, he did not indicate that he was determined to pursue it. Instead, he exploited the slow communications between Cape Town and London to make a decisive move before the Colonial Secretary could object. On 4 September Grey offered Elphinstone 1,400 legionaries, assuring him that they were “well trained, and if well led, [would] make most valuable soldiers.”¹⁴¹ Four days later he informed Bulwer Lytton of what he had done. Rather than reprimand him, Bulwer Lytton applauded Grey’s initiative and expressed considerable relief that the troublesome legionaries were at last being “shipped off.”¹⁴² But if Bulwer Lytton had objected, it would have been too late to stop the legionaries volunteering for India, for they sailed on 18 October 1858 under the command of Colonel Wooldridge. They only numbered thirty officers and 1,028 men, well short of the 1,400 Grey had promised Elphinstone. They left behind in British Kaffraria thirty-four officers, thirteen Cadets, 931 military settlers, and the 171 legionaries who had joined Cape units.¹⁴³

The volunteers for India, who were still subject to the *Articles of Capitulation* in terms of Article 1 of the *Conditions*, were regarded as

¹³⁸ CO 48/380, enc. in no. 11041 Cape: Elphinstone to Grey, 23 June 1858.

¹³⁹ CO 48/380, enc. in no. 8904 Cape: Lt.-Gen. Jackson to Grey, 24 July 1858.

¹⁴⁰ CO 48/390, no. 8983 Cape: Grey to Bulwer Lytton, 25 July 1858.

¹⁴¹ CO 48/380, enc. in no. 11041 Cape: Grey to Elphinstone, 4 September 1858.

¹⁴² WO 48/380, no. 11041 Cape: Grey to Bulwer Lytton (8 September 1858), Minute by Bulwer Lytton (4 November 1858).

¹⁴³ CO 48/380, no. 13285 Cape Military: Grey to Bulwer Lytton, 28 October 1858; enc.: Col. E. Smyth to Grey, 22 October 1858; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 141.

being employed in India under Articles 3 and 10 of the *Conditions*, which meant that they were still considered military settlers liable for service in the field against the enemy or in aid of the civil power. This interpretation of their status was just as well, because the British government had already come to the firm conclusion, based on its difficulties with the Foreign Legions for the Crimea, that it was neither desirable nor feasible to recruit foreign mercenaries again, and in October 1857 Panmure had resisted Cambridge's suggestion that mercenaries be raised for India.¹⁴⁴ It also meant that if the volunteers returned to British Kaffraria from India they would continue as military settlers as if there had been no break in their service. In the event, only 386 NCOs and men returned to the Cape on 21 March 1860, of whom 345 were discharged on disembarkation, scattering to find employment. A mere forty-three of the men reverted to being military settlers.¹⁴⁵

Grey's scheme for the military settlement of British Kaffraria effectively collapsed when the 1,058 legionaries sailed for India. In terms of Article 3 of the *Conditions* the legionaries were liable to serve as military settlers for seven years after their location, although their military commitments (in terms of Articles 4, 5, and 9) were demanding only for the first three years. Accepting the failure of the scheme, the government allowed the *Conditions* to lapse and permitted the legionaries to take their discharge without further obligation for military service. The real threat in January–February 1859 of open mutiny by the remaining legionaries living in a "miserable state" in their squalid houses hastened the process.¹⁴⁶ By the end of 1858 only 981 legionaries remained. Most of them had been discharged by 30 June 1860, leaving only 276. This

¹⁴⁴ Cambridge to Panmure (2 October 1857), Panmure to Cambridge (6 October 1857), *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 440–41, 444–45.

¹⁴⁵ CO 48/380, enc. in no. 11041 Cape: Conditions for Volunteers for India, Col. Smyth; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 405; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 139; Tyler, "British German Legion," 25. It seems the Legionaries arrived too late for active fighting in the Mutiny. Between 1858 and 1860 these men formed the Honourable East India Company Jäger Corps, later incorporated into the 3rd Bombay Europeans. Following the reorganization of the Indian Army, the Bombay European Regiments were incorporated into the British Army, and in 1862, 462 men of the former Jäger Corps were listed as members of the 109th Regiment and saw service in Aden 1864–1866. Others were discharged or sent to England (Cory, *Rise of South Africa*, Vol. VI, 60–61; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 140–41; Tyler, "British German Legion," 25–28).

¹⁴⁶ CO 48/393, no. 2173 Cape: Grey to Bulwer Lytton (20 January 1859), no. 3239 Cape: Grey to Bulwer Lytton (21 February 1859).

remnant was disbanded on 31 March 1861, bringing the existence of the Legion to an end.¹⁴⁷

The government did its best to find the men suitable work or give them employment on public works or, if they were officers, in the colonial service. But it was not easy for the former legionaries, now free to disperse in search of work or to stay at their former stations where they could attempt to farm, to eke out a living. Officers and Cadets found it the most difficult. They were not artisans or mechanics with suitable skills, and their honor code made it impossible to engage in manual labor. Many wished to return to Europe, but with their money gone and their properties sold, they did not have the means. Only a handful stayed in British Kaffraria where their settlement had been so unsuccessful; the rest dispersed throughout the Cape and Orange Free State in search of a livelihood. There they intermarried with the Dutch and English settlers and were absorbed into their communities.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

The failure of the German military settlers proved an expensive lesson. Grey, when enthusiastically presenting to the British government the advantages of sending military settlers to the Cape, had optimistically forecast that the treasury would recover most of the outlay involved, chiefly through land sales. It turned out to be quite otherwise, and the aborted settlement cost the taxpayer £251,600.¹⁴⁹ Faith in the scheme took a while to die, and in May 1857 Panmure could still write with desperate optimism to Prince Albert (who, with the Queen, had done so much to support the German mercenaries): "The plan of sending out the Germans will yet bear fruit enough to satisfy the most captious."¹⁵⁰ Never did a prognostication prove more wrong. Grey's intentions in settling the Legion in British Kaffraria may have been cogent in terms of his frontier policy, but the legionaries—soldiers of fortune whose

¹⁴⁷ Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 268: Appendix VII.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 134, 144–49.

¹⁴⁹ BPP 1861, XXXVI (117): German Legion, Return, 16 March 1861; BPP 1862, XXXVI (403): Cape of Good Hope (German Settlers) Return, 9 July 1862; BPP 1857–8, XL (389), 44–45: sub-enc. to enc. 1 in no. 1: estimates for building houses and providing utensils for the British German Legion, 30 April 1857; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 393; Schnell, *For Men Must Work*, 150–53.

¹⁵⁰ Panmure to Prince Albert, 13 May 1857, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 385.

non-military skills (if any) were in artisanal and mechanical trades, not in agriculture—were entirely inappropriate material. The lack of the steadying element of a large body of women among them was fatal, and it was one that Grey could not remedy soon enough with his fresh immigration schemes for Irish women and German peasant families. It made matters worse that the legionaries were mainly stationed for strategic reasons so far from the existing centers of settler population (small as they were), and that Grey had to keep them mobilized with full pay for reasons that were more social and economic than purely military. Ironically, Grey came to the conclusion that having a “large force of mercenaries” stationed in the Cape did not release regulars for service elsewhere as intended, but kept them in the Cape to control the legionaries. Being able to pack half of the legionaries off to India was a godsend both for Grey and for the legionaries who could not make a ‘go’ of it in British Kaffraria.¹⁵¹

The British government would never again raise foreign mercenaries from Europe to fight in its wars, so great were the attendant problems, not least those of “getting finally quit of our legionary plagues,” as Lord Clarendon expressed it.¹⁵² Nor would there be another attempt to plant military settlers in southern Africa on the same terms as the British German Legion. Grey, however, seemed as undeterred by the failure of the military settlers in British Kaffraria as was the Duke of Newcastle, the Colonial Secretary in Lord Palmerston’s second administration (1859–1865). For after Grey returned to New Zealand as governor in September 1861 with the task of breaking the Taranaki Maori and the Maori nationalist King Movement centered on Waikato, Newcastle put the seal of approval on Grey’s plan of 1863 to recruit the Waikato militia mainly from the Australian and Otago goldfields and rewarded these four thousand military settlers after three years of service with the extensive confiscation of Maori lands.¹⁵³ As with the Fencibles earlier, the extent of these land grants and the favorable soil and climate made successful settlement feasible as it had not been in British Kaffraria. This reflection leads to the conclusion that the failure of the military settlement in British Kaffraria was by no means inevitable, but was the

¹⁵¹ CO 48/393, no. 2173 Cape: Grey to Bulwer Lytton, 20 January 1859.

¹⁵² Clarendon to Panmure, 9 September 1856, *Panmure Papers*, Vol. II, 295.

¹⁵³ James Belich, *The Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict: The Maori, the British and the New Zealand Wars* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 126, 198; Rutherford, *Sir George Grey*, 492–94, 499, 501–502, 507–12, 519–22.

consequence of attempting it with the particularly unsuitable material of mercenaries with no commitment to civilian pursuits, and of compounding the error by settling them in under such adverse economic circumstances that the most dedicated of colonists would have been hard pressed to succeed.

CHAPTER FIVE

BLACKS WHO BACKED THE BOERS: REPUBLICAN COMMANDO AUXILIARIES IN THE ANGLO-BOER OR SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899–1902

Bill Nasson

Interviewed many decades after the end of the South African War in 1902, a Boer Republican commando *oudstryder* (veteran) named Klasie Grobler showed that he knew something about the fidelity of war memory. In recalling experience of the sterling service of Willem Gorrel (or Gullet), a personal family commando *agterryer* (after-rider), Grobler sketched a telling picture of the richness and variety of identities caught up in the war, and of how this knowledge was slipping below the horizon of acknowledged history:

Soon now there will be no more witnesses to attest the loyalty of our *agterryers*, for no monument will be raised to them. One of them was old Willem Gullet, *agterryer* of my late father, Commandant H. S. Grobler. Born in about 1860, this Coloured man became known as Willem Gullet because of his large Adam's apple. His father was white, one Forley, and his mother was from one of the Coloured peoples. He was tall, strong, athletically built and he walked with a slight stoop. And what a walker! He was fairly reserved in his manner but was always courteous and addressed everybody as "little master," whereas my father was always "old master." He was particularly partial to a rifle, a drink and his quid of tobacco... He badly wanted to take part in battles but was never allowed to do so. One morning during the Battle of Onderbroekspruit he took my father some food, but since my father was at the far end of the battlefield, somebody gave old Willem a rifle and he fired away... When our commando was operating among the bare hills of the highveld, old Willem drove my father's cart, which carried his provisions and a lot of important documents... On the night of 13 April 1902, when 73 Bethal burgers and I were captured among the blockhouses at Slagkraal near Standerton, old Willem got away. He hid somewhere in a pool of water and, thanks to his stamina as a walker, rejoined his old master safely two days later. After the peace my father gave him £2 and he went off to Johannesburg to find his family. We never saw him again.¹

¹ Pieter Labuschagne, *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902): The Role and Contribution of Agterryers* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 1999), 103–4.

Back in the 1960s, when Klasie Grobler was reminiscing about the intimate associational bonds between Boer fighters and the mounted black servants who accompanied them to the front, the absence of any monument or memorial to their role in the Anglo-Boer struggle was probably the least of it. These combat auxiliaries in republican ranks had never been counted as part of the fighting forces of the South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Orange Free State. As a predictable consequence, despite having been mobilized in substantial numbers, the incorporation of *agterryers* was barely, if ever, alluded to in campaign accounts, except, that is, in one or two notable earlier exceptions. In the war's most distinguished personal memoir, Deney's Reitz's *Commando*, first published in the late 1920s, the author threw light on the duties of trusted black retainers as an essential element in preserving the rituals of Boer household comforts of men in the midst of war.

Reitz's narrative recounts that shortly before his invading Pretoria commando crossed the Natal border in October 1899, his father despatched an African family servant to join him and his brother, Joubert, at their camp. Charley, a Sotho family worker who had been in the employ of the Reitz family for many years in both Boer republics, had returned to the Transvaal from Swaziland at the outbreak of Anglo-Boer hostilities to offer his sworn loyalty and services. For the weary Reitz brothers, Charley's arrival was a boon, for they were immediately able to turn over to him cooking chores and the burden of tending to their horses.

Relief from menial labor was not the only blessing provided. During the lethargic republican siege of Ladysmith, Charley wormed his way in with local Africans in order to procure extra rations for his grateful Boer masters. Horsemen with servants enjoyed perks that were much envied by fellow commandos. And, in turn, deferential, hard-working, and foraging black servants could find friendliness and favor from commandos to whom they were personally loyal. As Reitz recalled of an Orange Free State battle that had gone badly for the Boers, in terrified flight he and his brother found their "only crumb of comfort being our native boy, Charley, awaiting us beside the road, his voice quavering with emotion."²

² Deney's Reitz, *Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War* (London: Faber, 1929), 211.

During the past twenty years or so, the fleeting commando worlds of Willem Gullet and Charley have gradually become a more perceptible presence in writing on the Boer commando experience in the war of 1899–1902. Recent general histories of the conflict mostly have something brief or suggestive on African and Coloured service with republican forces.³ New revisionist national history, sensitive to the diversity and contradictions of the pre-apartheid past, now also reminds us that it is no longer enough to depict the conduct of the Boer republican war effort in simplistic terms. In a recent major volume, the established picture of black involvement is filled out a little further by evidence of the engagement of San or ‘Bushmen’ during the guerrilla phase of the South African War. Drawing largely on oral tradition, scholarship on the margins of commando life has begun to uncover traces of war duties undertaken by San farm laborers in areas such as the eastern Transvaal. These duties included not only scouting, tracking, and labor service as *agterryers*, but the protective herding of Boer livestock, running animals into the safe pasturage of Swaziland, and driving them back to Transvaal farms after the cessation of hostilities.⁴

As expressions of influence, interest, and dependency in the agrarian order, these familiar relationships between masters and retainers had a considerable historical pedigree. In the interior frontier settings of the eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries, many Khoikhoi and Coloured dependants had been tugged into the commando system as tied followers, serving as mounted lackeys to labor and, when in a fix, to substitute for white burghers as makeshift combatants. Indeed, so slack was the settler response to calls for armed service and so adept were skilled black retainers in the use of firearms and at tracking, that in the 1770s and 1780s white commandos formed only a minority of men enlisted to fight for agitated frontier communities.⁵

Inevitably, by the end of the later nineteenth-century, colonial expansion and white settler consolidation had drastically diluted the role of blacks in military operations. Coloured soldiers were trimmed to a

³ See for example Denis Judd and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (London: John Murray, 2002), 100–101.

⁴ Hermann Giliomee and Bernard Mbenga, eds., *New History of South Africa* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2007), 219.

⁵ J. S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1652–1937* (London: Longman Green, 1939); G. Tylden, “The Development of the Commando System in South Africa, 1715–1922,” *Africana Notes and News* 13 (1961): 303–13.

handful of 'levies' in the Cape militia establishment, while the political view that blacks ought not to be used in conflict between warring whites became clear-cut.⁶ Collaboration could not be risked in case black allies under arms grew too big for their boots. Yet, at the same time, this was never entirely a matter of governance or of strictly imposed fact. It may perhaps be thought of best as a customary ambience, an inherited colonial campaigning environment consisting of norms and limits as well as variable possibilities and flexible usages.

After all, a subordinate complement of *agterryers* had long been a sweetener for Boer masters, whether it was accompanying them on horseback journey, on hunting trips, or joining a war. Their continuing presence was not exceptional. It was normal. Acculturated *agterryers* had been an integral cog of the commando system since its founding in the Cape, a common institution of rural Boer society that had been hauled into the interior during the Great Trek of the earlier nineteenth-century. There, before the British annexation of 1877, it had been routine for *agterryers* to participate in all of the commando campaigns of the South African Republic, carrying out not merely menial support duties, but at times assuming a frontal military role, as in offensives against the Pedi.⁷

There was a bit more to this in the next operation by settler forces, a major and more challenging campaign. In rising against British overrule in the anti-imperial Transvaal Rebellion, or First Anglo-Boer War of 1880–1881, the resisting Boers tried to widen the war by doing "their best to entice the Swazi into joining them," but British border authorities leaned on chiefs to keep the peace.⁸ Elsewhere, among the ranks of Transvaal burghers the story was familiar. The presence of *agterryers* to handle pack animals, groom horses, collect firewood, slaughter and cook livestock, service firearms and guard ammunition, dig trenches and emplacements, and carry and aid the wounded and the sick was so taken for granted that it warranted little if any comment. Although their involvement in actual fighting against the imperial garrison appears

⁶ Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 14–15.

⁷ André Wessels, *Die Militêre Rol van Swart Mense, Bruin Mense en Indiers tydens Die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899–1902* (Bloemfontein: Oorlogsmuseum, 1998), 4–5.

⁸ John Laband, *The Transvaal Rebellion: The First Boer War, 1880–1881* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 187.

to have been negligible, “their familiar presence on the battlefields of 1880–1881” can be reliably assumed.⁹

By the end of the nineteenth century a distinctive tributary of dependant servants was a constituent component of burgher military service experience. Indeed, the mobilizing of *agterryers* was customary commando practice for which there was also some latitude in law. Not surprisingly, both Boer republics safeguarded themselves with strict laws that forbade Africans from possessing firearms. Thus, in the 1880–1881 war with Britain, for example, skilled *oorlamse*—acculturated African servants who accompanied commandos—were consigned to rearward pastoral tasks, acting as cattle herders or tending to grazing horses. Yet, the martial law regulations of the Boer states held all able-bodied male inhabitants liable for military duties without pay in time of need. In neither republic did defense regulations stipulate that only white free burghers would be mobilized. Indeed, for anyone who may have found the directives somewhat imprecise, the Boers’ war laws, or *krijgswetten*, provided precision. Regulations clearly stated that Coloureds, or *Kleurlingen*, were liable to be called up.¹⁰

Inevitably, the system left its trespassing mark. At the outbreak of the South African War (1899–1902), about one-fourth of one commando raised in the Orange Free State district of Bethlehem was identified as Coloured men. In another case, men from the Coloured De Buys family of the Zoutpansberg locality of the South African Republic were spotted as members of the Boer forces.¹¹ There can be no doubt of the existence of individuals on commando whose standing, to quote Fransjohan Pretorius, was that of “invariably more than a servant.”¹² Some exhibited a tenacious sense of belonging and duty through lengthy stints of arduous war service. Cornelius Klapper served with the Naude commando from January 1900 until he was captured by the British in February 1902. A tough and obstinate figure, Klapper appears to have resembled another cocky combatant, Willem Jood, described by a bemused British interrogator after his capture as someone who

⁹ Ibid., 62–63.

¹⁰ S. B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics, January 1900–May 1902* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1977), 19.

¹¹ Orange Free State Archives, GS 2113, R6286-2/1899; Transvaal Archives, Lieutenant Governor’s Archive, 121, 110/5, Report of Native Commissioner, Zoutpansberg, 30 January 1903.

¹² Fransjohan Pretorius, *The Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902* (Cape Town: Nelson, 1985), 79.

“could have passed as a white man.”¹³ That kind of likeness applied with equal pungency to some others enlisted on district commando rolls, such as Jacobus Plaatjies, Andreas Smit, Abel Sika, and Frederick and Jacobus Maans, who fought in two Orange Free State contingents from November 1899 to the end of 1901.¹⁴

Then there were identifiably Coloured commandos who had neither been mustered for district commando service, nor were in service without pay like ordinary republican burghers. These were classic collaborators who latched onto roving commandos at various stages and negotiated one or another kind of place and acceptance. While the available evidence is admittedly slender, what exists suggests that in its simplest social form there were two opportunistic situations. Some farm servants, displaced by warfare and in a desperate crisis of need, offered their bodies to commandants, searching for a patron and refuge even of a rather risky kind. Mostly, they seem to have found it hard going, especially in the British colonies of the Cape and Natal. Even if they had been attached to non-loyalist Boer households, they were given short shrift if they lacked an essential trading asset—that of familiarity, or of being known through a possessive rural consciousness. Invading republican commandants were instinctively distrustful of unknown, ‘loose’ farm servants.¹⁵ Some leaders, such as Commandants Conroy and van Heerden, identified Cape Coloured laborers as fickle followers, and declared them to be insufficiently loyal ever to be entrusted with carrying ammunition and guns.¹⁶

At the same time, there was another situation of shrewd concession and strategic improvisation. A trickle of rural drifters with equestrian skills and intimate knowledge of the land, unemployed laborers who knew how to saddle-up, and discontented deserters from colonial militia garrisons who could handle arms were able to make common cause with some republican bands. Part of that cause, admittedly, had little to do with fighting a Boer republican national war. Certainly, it had even less to do with its ideals. Commandos that were stocked with poor and needy burghers could sometimes find a spot for willing

¹³ *Household Brigade Magazine* 32 (1901): 158.

¹⁴ National Army Museum [hereafter NAM], London, 6807/187, Lt. J. R. Gibson, Intelligence Reports on Natives, 26 December 1901, 7 and 12 January 1902.

¹⁵ Archives of the Royal Sussex Regiment [hereafter RSR], Chichester, RSR Mss. 1/98, Boer Letters, W. Lubbe to B. de Klerk, 29 December 1899.

¹⁶ RSR, Mss.1/98, Boer Letters, W. Bekker to Gen. Malan, 19 October 1901.

Coloured men who were down on their luck and willing to chance what slender luck they had left. Splitting up the spoils of organized looting and petty pilfering suggests that any shared morality would have been equally slender.

Unlike subordinate *agterryers*, these small knots of armed Coloured camp followers did not see themselves as being in any way 'owned' by commando masters. Accordingly, as accepted mercenaries of a kind, there could be no submission to disciplinary lashings, nor to any punitive treatment for desertion. Indeed, in common with full commando burghers, such men had no qualms about ducking commando service for short periods, either for domestic reasons or simply because they fancied a bout of riding off independently. At this cozy end of the spectrum was one such wandering individual, Hendrik Booysen, a tenant cultivator nabbed by British forces early in 1900. Literate and conversant in both Dutch and English, like another notably swarthy commando, Silas Damon,¹⁷ he was a confident man of formidable appetite. Rifling through his belongings, Booysen's captors unearthed a list of valuable items (including clocks and jewelry) that had been scooped up from farmhouses, an estimate of the value of his share of livestock swiped from 'Englisch' owners, and chits for various knick-knacks that he had loaned to fellow commandos.¹⁸ In the midst of a war characterized by great mobility, close encounters, and endless accidents of fortune, instances of integration or assimilation of this nature were certainly visible.

Thus, operating in the far southern Orange Free State and near northern Cape during the guerrilla phase of the conflict, the van der Merwe commando incorporated several Coloured horsemen—Jacobus April, Hans April, John Aanhuizen, and Cornelius Witbooi.¹⁹ These were not dependant followers, but free men who had engaged their services independently with Boer command. To the frequently perplexed and speculating British, enemy commandos of varied origin and close relationship appeared to represent a sort of human botany. Confronting a band of surrendered commandos in November 1899,

¹⁷ See Bill Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899–1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 97–98.

¹⁸ NAM, 6807/187, Lt. J. R. Gibson, Intelligence Reports on Natives, 22 November 1901.

¹⁹ T. Shearing, "Coloured Involvement in the South African War in the Cape Colony," *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library* 40 (1985): 9–10.

Private Arthur Dye judged them to be “truly of a dreadful low class, Dutch, half-castes...all mixed in together...not one without a Mauser,” while another soldier not far off fell into conversation with some “Boer prisoners, and found that there were Coloured men among the Boers, half Dutch, half Native...A very mixed lot...several of them black or several shades of it.”²⁰ A feature of relationships repeatedly encountered was an egalitarian closeness or “familiarity,” which British officers found “remarkable” and “surprising”; one NCO was “astonished” at “such familiarity” displayed by Boers, in which “they laugh, talk, eat and joke with them like equals.”²¹

The point that such armed Coloured men on commando were more than *agterryers* may be illustrated partly by their experience of having enlisted spontaneously as volunteers rather than of having been pressed into service. Men like Witbooi and Booysen certainly joined the war rather than having it thrust upon them. Yet this is probably only part of the picture. As scholars such as Pieter Labuschagne have shown, numerous *agterryers* with burgher forces had joined voluntarily, sometimes in search of prestige and status, sometimes through deep ties of personal loyalty.²² The Reitz family retainer, Charley, encountered earlier in this essay, was a notable example of a far distant *agterryer* who resolved to offer his services in war, returning to the Transvaal unbidden.

Perhaps more notable as a mark of real commando membership was the kind of vocabulary and tone used to recognize the identity of ‘free’ Coloured volunteers. Thus, Silas Damon and Jacobus April were set down as properly-named individuals, or men accorded compatriot respect by burghers. Equally, it is evident that *agterryers* did not fall quite within this code. As personalities imposed upon by folksy Boer paternalism, African and Coloured *agterryers* were invariably saddled with confected first names only, often diminutive, and at times simply a gently mocking nickname. A Klaas served with Veldkornet Japie Olivier, while the silk and leather dandy, Roland Schikkerling, author

²⁰ Archives of the Coldstream Guards [hereafter ACG], ACG/R0.10/9/10, Pte. A. Dye entry, Digest of 1st Battalion Movements 1899–1901, entry for 24 November 1899; Archives of the Royal Highland Fusiliers, Kelham Service Diaries, RHF/D.124/45544, 1st Battalion Records, entry for 6 July 1900.

²¹ *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle* 3/4 (1901): 93.

²² Labuschagne, *Ghostriders*, 29.

of *Commando Courageous*, rode with Charlie.²³ General Jan Smuts was sustained by Kleinbooï, while another commander, General Andries Cronjé, was being attended to by a Windvoel, meaning wind-bag. In similar vein, servants dubbed Mooiroos, meaning Nice Rose, and Duimpie, meaning Little Thumb, accompanied Ben Viljoen and David Botes, respectively.²⁴

The rite by which burghers infantilized their personal commando servants judged to a nicety the kind of posture that was appropriate to rank and position. Perhaps nowhere was its authority more conspicuous than in how it expressed a consciousness of age relations. Patriarchal commando culture drew a distinction between mature burghers and inexperienced Boer youths, or *penkoppe*, who joined units in their early adolescence and were consigned to subordinate tasks. Conversely, in a more softened way older burghers often tended to ignore age discrepancies between themselves and more youthful *agterryers*, sometimes sharing drink and utensils, even though those followers might be children of no more than thirteen or fourteen years of age.²⁵

At the same time, in crucial respects *agterryers* and *penkoppe* shared the same tasks at the front: handling wagons, providing forage and water for horses, and holding mounts during battle. But Boer youths were never commando servants, rather having to give an account of themselves as apprentice white republicans in the struggle for independence. No less significant is the fact that *penkoppe* were themselves part of the theater of filial deference in their dealings with young black followers. As recent findings have noted, it was not uncommon for assertive *penkoppe* on commando to call *agterryers* 'klonkies,' meaning little black boys.²⁶ This example offers one illustration of how Boer minors masked their own underdog status in the war by exercising rank over fellow younger Africans. It also exemplifies how the ordinary habits of civilian life continued to imbue petty conduct in a society engulfed by war. Just as the settler-farm master and laborer relationships were sustained, so were the corresponding ties of familiarity and condescension

²³ See Roland William Schikkerling, *Commando Courageous: A Boer's Diary* (Johannesburg: Donker, 1964).

²⁴ Labuschagne, *Ghostriders*, xi–xii.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁶ Pets Marais, *Penkoppe van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog, 1899–1902* (Pretoria: Van der Walt, 1993), 22.

that governed relationships between younger Boers and the children of poor families laboring on their land.

Ultimately, what *agterryers* and lesser African servants of any age represented throughout the conflict was a fighting subsidy, a vital reservoir of labor and technical skills to keep burgher forces in the field. In 1899 both the Transvaal and the Orange Free State had Military and Commando acts for the provision of African laborers to render muscular assistance to their masters in the event of war. The acts amounted to licence to commandeer farmworkers and to enlist unarmed men to help the republican campaign as *agterryers*, trench diggers, herders, horse grooms, wagoners, and the like. Refusal to render such war services—in effect, resistance to commandeering—was punishable by flogging and heavy fines.

Although there are no statistics on *agterryer* service, Pretorius—the leading historian of Boer commando experience in the 1899–1902 war—has provided the basis for a fair estimate. In a normal individual commando complement of some 1,200 men, Pretorius has calculated an average operational ratio of one *agterryer* per every four to five burghers. Naturally, in practice, the size of this laboring establishment would have fluctuated, and not only through desertion, discharge, death, or capture by the enemy. In the earlier, more set-piece battle phase of Anglo-Boer hostilities, it is likely that additional auxiliaries would have been added to meet the heavy transport demands imposed by the bulky wagon laagers that accompanied mounted Boer forces. The subsequent transition to more sprawling and mobile guerrilla warfare then dispensed with heavy convoys, reducing the need for wagon drivers and oxen team leaders. There would, moreover, have been a further decline in *agterryers* as the number of fighting burghers contracted to around twenty thousand *bittereinders*, or die-hards, towards the end of the conflict, when some commanders of severely depleted republican units swallowed harder than ever when deploying armed *agterryers* as substitutes for lost burghers. Given a burgher force of around 45,000 at the very beginning of the war, and making allowance for turnover in *agterryer* complement, a rough figure of up to 11,000 auxiliaries involved in the republican campaign is probably not too far wide of the mark.²⁷

²⁷ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe tydens die Anglo-Boereoorlog, 1899–1902* (Kaapstad: Human & Rousseau, 1991), 316.

One other feature of recruitment levels might be noted. Early in the conflict most older burghers of substance had sufficiently deep pockets to take their personal *agterryers* off to war with them in order to be relieved of various chores. "My groom Willem left with me," or "my helping hand Stuurman rode off with us" are typical of arrangements that turn up in accounts of the outbreak of war in burgher diaries and journals published in the 1940s.²⁸ Seen from this perspective, Boer citizen soldiers were always seeking to perpetuate the servant comforts of civilian life on active service. Still, the life of such ties could also depend very much on how the spoils of war fell. As fortune ceased to favor the republicans, and individual commands ran short of stocks and grew increasingly skinny, so increasingly straitened burghers lost the power of their personal proprietary claims. Observing soldiers of his class during the war's final act, Ben Bouwer, a disillusioned and rueful commander reflected that by then "we were forbidden to keep servants, but nevertheless each still had a few native servants. It was a vexed question that was always cropping up and fading out again... Eventually our increasing poverty did what our leaders were never able to do: it robbed us of our servants."²⁹

In other words, Boer commando masters found that too much could not be taken for granted. In another respect that was true of their adversaries, too. The British had expected Boer republicans to act on the basis of a uniformly strict sense of racial hierarchy in which blacks would be kept always in their inferior place. They did not expect to find black men in the enemy camp waging war against them. Even less did they expect to find such an arrangement resting on an apparently consensual alliance between masters and followers. They soon got over their surprise when regimental journals such as *The Light Bob Gazette* described the sight of an operational commando. In 1900 the *Gazette* reported that "each Boer, it seems, has a stout henchman, or it may be that two or three Boers have a henchman between them. In the event of an alarm, he rapidly catches and saddles up his Boer master's horse, while the Boer collects from him his rifle, bandolier, haversack, and water bottle."³⁰

²⁸ P. H. S. van Zyl, *Waar en Trou* (Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers, 1948), 7; F. D. Conradie, *Met Cronjé aan die Wesfront, 1899–1900* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1943), 17; J. G. van den Heever, *Op Kommando onder Kmdt Buys* (Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1941), 37.

²⁹ O. J. O. Ferreira, *Memoirs of General Ben Bouwer* (Pretoria: RGN Press, 1980), 51.

³⁰ *Light Bob Gazette* 6 (1900): 4–5.

Other constructions were more picaresque. The *agterryers* and their perceived exploits became the butt of vivid popular verse, a distinctive form of British army folklore that exemplified the capacity of a slippery and wily commando enemy to torment imperial forces. Mostly good-humored and grudging in admiration, vigorous portrayals carried blunt titles such as “Kruger’s Kaffir Kin,” “Tale of a Stealthy Native Gun Bearer,” “The Bravest After-Rider in Cape Colony,” and “Story of Their Devilish Dusgies.” With *agterryers* commonly depicted as being one jump ahead—or, more precisely, behind—one typical ditty alerted British infantrymen to:

Watch your back
There are dusky wolves in cunning Piet’s pack
Sometimes nowhere to be seen
Sometimes up and shooting clean.³¹

British observers were also acutely aware of the social intimacy that seemed to structure relations between burgher commandos and their mounted bearers. According to the *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle* in 1901, aside from the notable logistical contribution that *agterryers* were making to republican operations, a striking symptom of their favored place in commando ranks was what the *Chronicle* termed, “Boer familiarity with their Native Riflemen.”³²

There was a tendency for *agterryers* to dress very much like Boers, often wearing felt hats, long-sleeved shirts, corduroy leggings, short coats, and adornments such as dyed ostrich feathers and crests of the Orange Free State or South African Republics. Furthermore, “henchmen” spoke “some form” of Dutch as well as, if not better than, their masters, shared the same food, and sometimes even the same tents.³³ For some flabbergasted British observers there even seemed to be a political tint to all this, with black followers being “part” of the Boer republican fight, or viewed as being “united” with burghers in support of the anti-British war.³⁴ While there is much evidence that *agterryers* served the Boer cause with conspicuous loyalty and great tenacity, whether they could ever be said to have ‘associated’ themselves with a republican patriotism and its independence struggle is a rather more

³¹ *Green Howards Gazette* 101 (1901): 93.

³² *Highland Light Infantry Chronicle* 3/4 (1901): 28.

³³ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁴ *Lloyds Weekly Newspaper*, 22 January 1900; *Morning Post*, 18 August 1901.

doubtful question. As it is, it is hard to say how widely and how deeply actual republican nationalist ideology influenced the consciousness of ordinary rural Boers on commando.³⁵ Those who served them were likely to have been even less touched by unifying nationalist feeling and mobilizing war sentiment in defense of an independent order of white republican citizenship, a community of rights from which they were excluded.

There is, of course, powerful testimony from individual *agterryers* about being drawn into a sense of common struggle and of keeping in step with leaders, as in “we *agterryers* remained with our masters in the field and where they stepped, we stepped too...our hearts were right.”³⁶ Similarly, General Crowther’s companion, Goeiman (Good man), was reported to have been crushed by the outcome of the war. Unlike many republican burghers, he had been prepared to remain in the field and fight on rather than accept defeat.³⁷ What such sentiments added up to was not a clinging to some notion of willing sacrifice for republican freedom, but the pull of a personal loyalism, or a shared link to the trauma of loss experienced by commando masters, particularly those stubborn guerrilla fighters who had gone down to the wire. Probably the most that can be suggested is that what *agterryers* wanted mainly was not to lose the war and face an uncertain future. In that, they would not have been unlike any other part of settled Boer society in the republics.

Equally, in all of this we should not forget those whose ties to the Boer camp turned out to be no more than lukewarm. By the time of the 1899–1902 war there was already a considerable history of individual rupture between Boers and their close retainers. In war, as in peacetime hunting expeditions, mounted followers were of servile status and were regarded in custom as bound by service contract. However assimilated and intimate their relationship with Boers, *agterryers* remained subaltern and subservient to the will of burghers. Commandos, as Hermann Giliomee has emphasized, were habitually addressed as *Baas*, “the classic”

³⁵ See Pretorius, “Afrikaner Nationalism and the Burgher on Commando,” in *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899–1902*, ed. Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie, 67–70 (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).

³⁶ Labuschagne, *Ghostriders*, 94.

³⁷ W. H. Ackermann, *Opsaal: Herinneringe aan die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog* (Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers, 1969), 369; J. N. Brink, “Goeiman en sy Martini—Henry,” *Die Huisgenoot*, 13 February 1948, p. 35.

deferential term that acknowledged "racial and class superiority."³⁸ Seen in this way, as another scholar of the nineteenth-century Transvaal has suggested, the experience of incorporated skilled servants was potentially always paradoxical, with life amongst the Boers simultaneously open-handed and inhibiting, determined by the "contradictory processes of incorporation and exclusion" associated with that society.³⁹

Buffeted by the varied and uncertain pressures of a constantly moving war, relationships at times turned sour. After all, *agterryers* might have been willing to award their deferential service to burgher masters, but not necessarily at any price. In some cases, harsh discipline and short rations saw disgruntled servants fleeing commando service at the first opportunity. That opportunity was often provided by cross-border Boer offensives. In these situations, commando invasions of Natal and the Cape Colony carried burghers and their more sulky dependants away from the known security and stability of Orange Free State and Transvaal soil into unfamiliar territory with open paths, less subject to enclosure and control by Boer rulers. Republican units that found the war especially hard going were also hit by disaffection and desertion following bruising reverses. The increasing ability of British forces in the later stages of the war to corner bands of opponents also dented the credibility and authority of both commandants and ordinary burghers, weakening ties of loyalty and encouraging random acts of insubordination.⁴⁰

Among some burghers, such as Johannes Bekker, the desertion of a once loyal and trusted *agterryer* produced heartstring-pulling emotion and left him with a long face. But men who slipped service could not reckon upon Boer sadness and letting bygones be bygones, for desertion was risky. Commandants were all agreed that auxiliaries had no right to quit commando service for any reason, and disloyal followers received short shrift if apprehended by irate burghers. Operating in the northern Cape, the no-nonsense Commandant Myburgh detailed trackers to sniff down any servants who had decamped, and if caught

³⁸ H. Giliomee, "The South African Frontier: Stages in Development," seminar paper, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1979, as cited in Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War*, 100.

³⁹ Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth Century* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983), 140.

⁴⁰ Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War*, 100.

generally had them executed on the spot.⁴¹ Others placed bounties on the heads of their deserters and issued warnings of the dire consequences facing anyone caught harboring “traitors.”⁴²

The real danger to commandos posed by desertion was not so much the logistical loss but the problem of turncoats. Disloyal *agterryers* who fell in with British forces took with them an intimate knowledge of the state of their former commando, a grasp of terrain, and knowledge of suspect farmers, information on the defensive layout of laagers, and a nose for favored lairs and other hiding spots. Such disloyalty led to an apprehensive war of nocturnal nerves for the rulers of the formerly ruled, as J. C. Joubert recorded. On one occasion when his commando was prowling around Reitz in the Orange Free State, it dismounted at dusk to discover that a couple of its *agterryers* who had fallen back earlier had vanished. As a precaution, its edgy commander ordered burghers to saddle up again and to ride on muffled hooves to a more remote spot before striking camp for the night. Uneasy commandos rested with the reins to their horses close at hand. It was as well that they had smelled a rat. As dawn broke, scouts despatched to check on the site of the earlier commando laager found that it had been surrounded by an ambushing British force, having been led there by their missing retainers.⁴³

Certainly not all of those who surrendered to the British were treated with kid-gloves (there were floggings and other punishments), but there was ready appreciation for putting to use their skills and intimate acquaintance with the enemy. The *agterryers* who switched sides served British columns as scouts and transport riders, and buttered up intelligence officers as eager informers, interpreters, and interrogators of Boer captives. Some defectors relished the chance to get back at their former masters. April, a “surly” and “crafty” deserter from the Boers who, according to his curious British paymaster was “so Dutch in type” that he “could have passed as a white man,” was one of those spoiling for a fight. During 1901 he assembled an irregular mounted

⁴¹ NAM, 6112/190/5, Cmdt. Myburgh to Cmdt. Theron, encl. in Maj. R. H. Massie, secret weekly intelligence summary, Cape Colony, District No. 43, 13 April 1902.

⁴² NAM, 6807/188, special agent, Albert District, weekly special report, 28 November 1901.

⁴³ G. J. Joubert, “Ek will hulle vandag stemreg gee,” *Die Huisgenoot*, 20 February 1948, p. 19.

squad recruited from local drifters to harry republican guerrillas roaming the Cape midlands.⁴⁴

Like many of those who deserted, April had been commandeered and had grown tired of empty promises of some sweet reward for faithful duties. Aside from the lifting of taxes and levies for the duration of the war, *agterryers* received no wages; like white burghers, they were merely fed and clothed. Since they generally gained precious little from the republican camp, it is hardly surprising that the availability of British bribes, payment, and various perks would have motivated followers to chance swapping sides. There is qualifying evidence, however, for another assessment of this prickly equation, and solidarity between loyal servants and burgher masters was not broken easily. "Even after beating them and threatening to shoot them," one British infantryman moaned, two captured black "spies" with the Wessels commando could not be cowed, and "would not tell us anything."⁴⁵ In the same year, 1901, another intelligence officer wrote despairingly of an interrogation at which several of "their Natives just would not give the Boers away, despite being subjected to the most ferocious threats."⁴⁶

Why was there such intransigent loyalty? Part of any answer must lie in the depth of synchronized connections between *agterryers* and burghers. The basis of those ties lay in a mix of laboring tasks that brought hand-picked followers into a fighting world of close and affective living, cheek-and-jowl with known burghers. It was not simply a matter of mounted followers making the war more endurable for republican fighters through menial service. In a sense, what mattered far more was a commando task regime in which campaign chores and domestic needs were intermingled. In another context Helen Bradford has stressed the "proverbial" domesticity of Boer men partial to "wagons loaded with comforts," and rarely falling over themselves to do battle with the invading British.⁴⁷

For commandos those domestic needs were tended to by black companions. Throughout the war *agterryers* saw to cooking, the provision of morning coffee, and the bearing of extra rations. In the lingering

⁴⁴ NAM, 6112/190/15, Capt. Ross to Special Agent, Carnarvon (secret), 2 January 1902.

⁴⁵ *Household Brigade Magazine* 47 (1901): 754.

⁴⁶ ACG, RA.10/9/7/1, Capt. T. H. Eyre-Lloyd, Diary 1899–1901, entry for 13 June 1901.

⁴⁷ Helen Bradford, "Gentlemen and Boers: Afrikaner Nationalism, Gender, and Colonial Warfare in the South African War" in *Wider War*, 44–45.

guerrilla struggle, with lean burghers hungry and exhausted after grueling rides through a countryside bare of provisions, Boer stomachs came to depend more than ever on the skill and ingenuity of retainers. The consumption of prominent figures like R. W. Schikkerling and Koos de la Rey often consisted of concoctions dredged up by resourceful servants, sometimes vegetable scraps scrounged from peasant homesteads, at other times meals prepared from flour and water, bush fruit, herbs, and wild roots. Similarly, when coffee supplies ran dry, they also brewed up often unpalatable substitutes from maize, pumpkin seed, and tree roots.⁴⁸

Slipping into the anonymity of wandering innocents, many *agterryers* also helped to ease domestic ties between front-line commandos and the home front. Carrying small treats from farm families to burghers bridged the separation of republican combatants in the Cape and Natal from relatives in the Boer states. More widespread was the smuggling of letters across British-controlled areas by solitary individuals, more able than a lone Boer to trot through rural districts containing Africans who were hostile towards invading burghers. Even romantic relationships were kept together by wily postal carriers, as in the case of Johannes Groenewald's *agterryer*, Maleeuwa Shabangu, who conveyed letters between his sister and Andries Wessels.⁴⁹

While the worth of trusty dependants in these tricky circumstances was substantial, another arena of corresponding authority was the bearing and treatment of sick and wounded burghers. Once the republicans abandoned their conventional wagon lines for dispersed, light guerrilla formations during the course of 1900, already existing medical service deficiencies were greatly exacerbated. Lacking field hospitals, ambulances, and a trained nursing corps, the Boers had to fall back on *agterryers* with therapeutic proficiencies. Others provided an evacuation system, carrying incapacitated Boers to places of safety. Where commandos lacked the means to treat and tend suffering burghers, men who were skilled herbalists sometimes replaced regular combatants, administering field remedies as "naturopaths."⁵⁰ During the guerrilla campaign, numerous individuals with a sure grasp of herbalism ended up being posted to rear positions and attached to various secluded base

⁴⁸ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, 313, 315; S. Steyn, "Dapper Agterryers," *Die Huisgenoot* 17 Julie 1942, p. 13.

⁴⁹ M. J. Swart, "n Held van Majuba," *Historia* 6 (1961): 115.

⁵⁰ Labuschagne, *Ghostriders*, 42.

camps in order to nurse wounded Boer in tents, caves, and even pits dug from dry river beds.

Agterryers also minded more than just the damaged bodies of their Boer masters. In many commandos they were central to a rich recreational culture that eased the psychological stresses of immersion in lengthy periods of hard fighting, sometimes close to the limits of battle endurance. Thus, some followers carted along concertinas, banjos, and brass horns, parading their music for commandos assembled at camp-sites. Others formed small choirs to serenade bored Boers who were besieging towns like Mafeking in the Cape and Ladysmith in Natal during the opening months of hostilities. In one notable demonstration of Christian choral singing early in the war, *agterryers* along the Natal front banded together to produce "melodious" harmonies, which drew a regular audience of admiring burghers.⁵¹

In another cushioning of morale, commando servants were often the nucleus of staged humor. Flush with brandy or heady from dagga (marijuana), theatrical individuals put on comic treats for resting burghers, sometimes dancing, reeling off obscene jokes, masking up as animals with skins and horns, or indulging in riding pranks and stunts with horses and mules.⁵² More loving than odd was the rapport that *agterryers* established with the small troop of pets or mascots that accompanied republican units into the field. Baboons, dogs, baby deer, and hawks were often in their care as prized assets, providing a service of emotional consolation. Valued by commandos as a source of constant companionship, as well as objects of superstitious luck and surreal humor, mascots such as baboons, sometimes armed with toy rifles, were tended to and fussed over as part of the retainers' animal-keeping duties. The reassurance of faithful *agterryers* ensured the survival of precious mascots, valued as lucky amulets for guarding against misfortune and helping men to stand firm.⁵³

It was more than simple belittling or demeaning Boer racism that saw some favored *agterryers* nicknamed after cherished animals, like Koos de la Rey's muleteer and personal cook, Gert Bobbejaanboud (Baboon Leg). In comforting physical contact with soldiers as "sheaths against misfortune," the baboon and springbok represented "the war of the

⁵¹ van den Heever, *Op Kommando onder Kmdt Buys*, 37.

⁵² J. F. van Wyk, *Die Mauser Knal* (Pretoria: Perskor, 1971), 25.

⁵³ *Volksblad*, 13 Mei 1957.

animals" in South Africa, just as the domesticated rat and the cat would in Europe less than two decades later, hardy symbols of enduring life and vitality amid the trench horrors of the Great War.⁵⁴ No doubt the strength of "the Afrikaners' religious outlook"—with their "trust in God" that they would be delivered from affliction—was a motivating factor keeping them in the field.⁵⁵ Conversely, more account might be taken of their less pious world of spiritual fortification. Intimately connected to the lives of their *agterryers*, this was a rough, mocking world of routine blasphemy, obscenity, raucous humor and superstition, drawing in animals alongside humans, and engaging in good-humored diversions that were often initiated by black companions. Not for nothing did Jan Ruiter enjoy a delicious notoriety among Marthinus Steyn and his Orange Free State coterie for his 'semi-pagan' public vulgarity.⁵⁶ It was all a long way from the Bible into which church-going Protestant burghers constantly dipped for moral fortitude. But in the acute strains and uncertainties of wartime circumstances, solidifying rituals, however irreligious, were more likely to have complemented rather than eroded conventional Christian faith among commandos. In any event, one scarcely needs to note that any exchange and cohabitation between servants and masters did not extend to prayer services, to which *agterryers* were not admitted.

Within all these forms of tightly-knit commando support, skilled horsemanship did the most to integrate dependants into the fighting rhythms of Boer commandos. In the opening conventional stage of the conflict, the control and care of commando mounts was largely in the hands of *agterryers*, whose "task when they went out was always to ride along and hold the spare horse or pack-horse by the reins. When they off-saddled, he had to look after the horses, find firewood and make a fire. When they rode out to fight, the *agterryers*, together with a few burghers, remained in a safe place with the pack-horses."⁵⁷

If anything, at the opening of the war horsemanship was the key connection between frontal burghers and rearward *agterryers* that

⁵⁴ Daniel Baldin, "La guerre des animaux," *La lettre de l'histoire de la Grande Guerre*, 22 November 2007, pp. 4–7; Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *1914–1918: Understanding the Great War*, trans. Catherine Temerson (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002), 133.

⁵⁵ Pretorius, "Afrikaner Nationalism and the Burgher on Commando," 71–72.

⁵⁶ N. J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn-'n Lewensbeskrywing* (Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1921), 37.

⁵⁷ Joubert, "Stemreg," 41.

made Boer battle movements tenable. With republican command having always to contend with British artillery, it was up to their skilled retainers to screen precious horses during battle, beyond the range of enemy guns yet within reach of burghers scrambling for mounts to carry them away from risky battlefields. Abandoning indefensible positions, the Boer tactic was to cut and run, thereby surviving intact to fight another day, a contingency that had the virtue of simplicity: reliable *agterryers* sheltering horses behind low hills, along riverbeds, or in outlying thickets of bush. This strategy was a marked feature of republican maneuvering in the battles of Belmont, Graspan, and Magersfontein towards the end of 1899. Indeed, when classic accounts of these engagements show the Boers pondering the dangers of staying put and then making the decision to break and run “to their horses to escape,”⁵⁸ their retreat was made ready by small bunches of *agterryers*, positioned with the remounts at fixed points on planned corridors of withdrawal.

While these circumstances were mostly advantageous for commando followers, protecting them from becoming enemy prey on the battlefield—at times even being hidden behind hills—turned out to be the wrong place. To tighten the noose around retreating commandos, British gunners sought to fix the Boers by shelling covered spots where horses, water, and other supplies might be concentrated. A target along with the horses they were sheltering, *agterryers* under fire in battles such as Talana and Spioenkop had to descend into hollowed-out earth while all around them animals were being gutted by splinters or driven mad by fear. Many *agterryers* made their reputation by sticking to their station. As Cronjé recorded of his retainer, Kleinbooi, “like other *agterryers* he had the task of holding the horses during battles, sometimes a whole bunch of them. When the enemy shells flew overhead and exploded among the horses, the animals not surprisingly became panicky and kicked and reared wildly; many wrenched free and bolted; but not once in all the time that Kleinbooi was with us did he ever let go of the horses or run away.”⁵⁹

In many ways, then, the Boer war effort was sustained by the work and service of a devoted constituency of black followers, mostly in non-

⁵⁸ Judd and Surridge, *Boer War*, 120.

⁵⁹ C. A. Cronjé, “Op sy maag tussen die wagte deur,” *Die Huisgenoot*, 13 February 1948, p. 8.

combatant roles but also as substitute riflemen in firing lines, notably in the closing stages of the war when burgher strength was dwindling. Dismissing the old myth of the South African War as a white man's war fought on African soil has led some scholars to conclude that many commandos fought their war as integrated units, with the pride of gun-bearing *agterryers* a factor in their morale and cohesion.⁶⁰ Of course, the level of such integration should not be exaggerated; for those who served as *agterryers*, recruitment through subordinating terms of commandeering and compliance was not the contract of collaboration. Yet the continuing ties between burghers and their laboring dependants generated attitudes of mind that equally ought not to be underplayed. Finding themselves within an enclave of burgher commandos, many loyal blacks experienced the war through an almost instinctive, shared Orange Free State and Transvaal identity, absorbing the war outlook of Boer colonists. They, too, rode the high tide of republican resistance until it was spent.

Did immersion in the Anglo-Boer struggle change the nature of the lives of the *agterryers* in post-war South Africa in any significant way? In essence, the answer must be no. In a few cases, as in that of Willem Gorrel with which this chapter opened, men were given minor gratuities and then released to seek new rural or urban laboring livelihoods. For the most part, however, wartime auxiliaries were simply reclaimed by familiar fields. Dick Moshene, Corneel Uys's *agterryer*, could not have put it better when he recalled that "when peace came, the masters lay down their arms, and we went home."⁶¹ *Agterryers* were not demobilized or discharged in any conventional sense; in laboring service, the end of the war was not the end of the road. Accordingly, at the end of hostilities, the commando burgher-*agterryer* bond lapsed back into its pre-war groove of a civilian master-laborer relationship.

Individuals tended to resume lives as herders, grooms, and drivers on the farms of their masters in the conquered republics, including those who had ended up in wartime concentration camps for Africans or who had been banished by British authorities to Ceylon and India, lumped together with white Boer prisoners of war.⁶² Once 'home' again, many loyal followers like Moshene did not have an easy time of it in

⁶⁰ H. T. Siwundhla, "The Participation of Non-Europeans in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902" (PhD dissertation, Michigan State University, 1977), 12.

⁶¹ Pretorius, *Kommandolewe*, 313.

⁶² Labuschagne, *Ghostriders*, 108-9.

the burgher farming districts of the former republics, for if ducking and weaving *agterryers* had escaped death in Britain's war, they had not escaped the dearth brought by its scorched earth policy, with widespread deprivation and hunger for both black and white inhabitants.

There was, however, some favor and dignity in recognition of wartime loyalty. This response was natural enough, for the world of the *agterryer* was a world of particularity. They had never lived by bread alone, but by service, obligation, and favor. Where rural living conditions were badly broken-down, returning retainers could cling to claims of personal 'belonging,' to some dividend for having stuck it out beside the Boers through the worst of the conflict. The subsistence afforded them was rarely more than meager shelter and provisions, and the price for that in field labor for older war veterans might have been hard, but paternalist duties retained some force. Commandant Hendrik Vermaas's *agterryer*, Janenaar (January), settled back on his employer's farm, living there until his eventual death.⁶³ However unequal such relationships were, a farmer like Vermaas nevertheless recognized and needed Janenaar's known working companionship, and his old *agterryer* doubtless knew that he was needed. A relationship of customary reciprocity had survived a major war in which both parties were losers, however different the nature of their loss.

In at least one known case, the relationship may have come to mean more than it seemed to mean. It might even be argued that the responsibilities and protocols of burgher paternalism and servant deference were revived by the legacy of this war. Individual *agterryer* loyalty and sacrifice could receive some dignified recognition. Thus, Jan Ruiter, one-time jockey, farm groom, and *agterryer* of President Marthinus Steyn of the Orange Free State, settled permanently on his Onze Rust farm, collecting his daily perk of coffee and milk until his death in the 1940s.⁶⁴ A commando veteran of the December 1899 Battle of Magersfontein and Steyn's close and trusted companion in the field, his loss did not go unrecorded. On Onze Rust, a few miles south of Bloemfontein, the marked grave of "Ruiter" remains a prominent site of war remembrance on a prominent Free State farm.

Perhaps more significantly, the impact of the relationships also registers something else about this component of the South African War.

⁶³ *Die Volksblad*, 13 Mei 1957.

⁶⁴ Labuschagne, *Ghostriders*, 79–82.

It is not so much that the Boer republican and British imperial camp could not avoid incorporating black auxiliaries into their respective campaigns; ideally, neither side wanted to see Africans getting mixed up in a fight in which white settlers and imperial soldiers were after each other's throats. It was, however, inevitable that men drawn from the region's black majority would have their fingers in the pie, whatever the passing political costs. What is more suggestive about the *agterryer* experience is the toiling nature of the war of 1899–1902, a theater of wide open spaces and strenuous riding distances. A lot of hard work was required to keep a fighting force together in the field. Willem Gorrel and Jan Ruiter embodied that essentially masculine ethos in which, to borrow and adapt a phrase from the distinguished military scholar, John Keegan, "war is a form of work."⁶⁵ In a truer sense, even more than the American colonists who turned out against George III, of whom Keegan was writing, or the South African Boer settlers who stood up to Victoria, commando dependants were bidden to make war their work.

⁶⁵ John Keegan, *Warpaths: Travels of a Military Historian in North America* (London: Pimlico, 1996), 34.

SHAPING THE POLITICS OF AFRICA

CHAPTER SIX

BRITISH MILITARY PERSPECTIVES ON AFRICA IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Edward M. Spiers

In his seminal study, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, Douglas Lorimer argues that the “Victorians perceived the physical characteristics of the Negro largely through the verbal descriptions of lecturers and writers.”¹ Although the commentaries of missionaries, explorers, novelists, scientists, and anthropologists were hardly uniform, certain racial stereotypes evolved, prompting the *Daily Telegraph*, then a staunch organ of liberalism, to commend the heroics of English explorers in August 1866 but describe Africa as a “bore,” for “[n]o one can really be much interested in a black wilderness, inhabited by foul, fetid, fetish-worshipping, loathsome, and lustful barbarians.”² There is no doubt, too, that some of the ensuing campaigns in Africa aroused scant popular interest at the outset (Asante War, 1873–1874) or fierce debate (Anglo-Zulu War, 1879), even if resolve to see the latter through hardened after the disaster of Isandlwana (22 January 1879). A cause of more controversy, however, was the assertion of Richard Price that the British working class was fundamentally indifferent to the major war of this era: the South African War (1899–1902).³ His arguments have been challenged in an analysis of the war’s popularity,⁴ and more broadly in commentaries upon the ‘new imperialism’ by John M. MacKenzie, Jeffrey

¹ Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1978), 17.

² *Daily Telegraph*, 17 August 1866, p. 4.

³ Richard M. Price, *An Imperial War and the British Working Class: Working-Class Attitudes and Reactions to the Boer War 1899–1902* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 238.

⁴ M. D. Blanch, “British Society and the War” in *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902*, ed. Peter Warwick, 210–38 (Harlow: Longman, 1980).

Richards, and others in the series, "Studies in Imperialism," published by Manchester University Press.⁵

In *The Absent-Minded Imperialists* (2004) Bernard Porter returns to the barricades, arguing that many Britons may have been affected by the empire, but that did not make them all imperialists (as he defines the term). The "working classes," he claims, "were either apathetic towards the empire or superficial in their attitude to it."⁶ He accepts that soldiers, coming predominantly from working-class communities, participated in the empire, but asserts that they were relatively few in number and that service in the empire did not make people proud of it. He also contends that soldiers were probably among the least literate members of society (and so the least likely to have left 'any marks'). He then compounds this error,⁷ by claiming that few "ordinary soldiers" wrote memoirs and so one cannot tell about their attitudes to empire.⁸ Overall, Porter argues that most 'first-hand accounts' of soldiers "dwell on their material privations and constant friction with their officers,"⁹ that soldiers, as an occupational group, were not very highly regarded by working-class civilians (which may reflect the popular disdain for the

⁵ John M. MacKenzie, ed., *Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986) and *Popular Imperialism and the Military, 1850–1950* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992); Jeffrey Richards, ed., *Imperialism and Juvenile Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) and *Imperialism and Music: Britain 1876–1953* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); Edward M. Spiers, *The Victorian Soldier in Africa* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

⁶ Bernard Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 311.

⁷ Compare *ibid.*, 25, 28–29, and 37 with Frank Emery, *The Red Soldier: Letters from the Zulu War, 1879* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1977) and *Marching Over Africa: Letters from Victorian Soldiers* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986); Spiers, *Victorian Soldier* and *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854–1902* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

⁸ Compare Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 29 with John M. MacMullen, *Camp and Barrack-Room; or the British Army as It Is* (London: Chapman Hall, 1846); Alexander Somerville, *The Autobiography of a Working Man*, ed. J. Carswell (London: Turnstile Press, 1951); Sergeant John Menzies, *Reminiscences of an Old Soldier* (Edinburgh: Crawford & McCabe, 1883); Robert Edmondson, *Is a Soldier's Life Worth Living?* (London: Twentieth Century Press, 1902); Alexander Robb, *Reminiscences of a Veteran: Being the Experiences of a Private Soldier in the Crimea, and during the Indian Mutiny* (Dundee: W. & D. C. Thomson, 1888); Robert Blatchford, *My Life in the Army* (London: The Clarion Press, n.d.); Carolyn Steedman, *The Radical Soldier's Tale: John Pearman, 1819–1908* (London: Routledge, 1988), 297–98.

⁹ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 220.

terms and conditions of military life),¹⁰ and that their periodic “role in smashing working-class strikes and demonstrations... is likely to have made them poor ambassadors for imperialism.”¹¹

All these attempts to absolve the British working class from any taint of imperialism and to categorize British soldiers as largely illiterate and lacking in interest to the rest of society only works if the evidence of their writing is ignored. In fact, the ‘scramble for Africa’ produced an abundance of material written, sketched, and photographed by soldiers, and this material so interested its recipients—often friends and families in working-class communities—that they passed it on to local newspapers. This eyewitness material had a diverse appeal for newspaper editors, whether based in the metropolis or in the provinces. Sometimes the correspondence constituted the only first-hand record of events in the absence of journalists, as with the column that would meet the Zulus at Khambula (29 March 1879), or if the majority of officers were killed, as in the ambush at Bronkhorst Spruit (20 December 1880).¹² More often when the letters came from soldiers in regiments with county affiliations they had local appeal, producing headlines in provincial newspapers such as “A Barnstaple Man at Ulundi,” “Letters from Bury Lads,” and “A Pitlochry Soldier’s Baptism of Fire.”¹³ Even more attractive than mere locality was the blunt and often graphic prose of the uncensored soldiery accounts. The *Midland Counties Express* commended an officer’s letter as it “contrasts very favourably with the high flown descriptions of certain special correspondents.”¹⁴ Occasionally the letters revealed matters suppressed in official despatches, like the killing of retreating and wounded Zulus after the battles of Khambula and Ulundi (4 July 1879) or exposed blunders by the War Office, especially in the erroneous listing of certain soldiers among the dead or missing.¹⁵ Above all, the correspondence had an appeal by its sheer abundance: after the

¹⁰ Ibid., 221; see also Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914* (London: Longman, 1980), Chap. 2.

¹¹ Porter, *Absent-Minded Imperialists*, 222.

¹² “The Zulu War: Extracts from letters Written by Brigadier-General R. B. Fell, C.B., C.B.E.,” *The Covenanter* 6 (1926): 19; Spiers, *Victorian Soldier*, 7.

¹³ “A Barnstaple Man at Ulundi,” *North Devon Herald*, 18 September 1879, p. 5; “Letters from Bury Lads,” *Bury Times*, 10 September 1898, p. 6; and “A Pitlochry Soldier’s Baptism of Fire,” *Perthshire Constitutional & Journal*, 8 January 1900, p. 3.

¹⁴ “Letter from a Local Officer of the Guards in Egypt,” *Midland Counties Express*, 30 September 1882, p. 7.

¹⁵ “Letters from the Front,” *Dover Express*, 28 March 1879, p. 3; “A Tiverton Soldier under fire in the Zulu War,” *North Devon Herald*, 11 September 1879, p. 5.

South Wales Daily News received its first letter from the battlefield of Isandlwana and stated that it would be “glad to publish any letters from soldiers at the seat of the war,” it was inundated with letters thereafter.¹⁶ Accordingly this material was printed widely and, despite the effects of editorial intrusion,¹⁷ it sheds light upon the interest in, and the passions aroused by, African wars in late Victorian Britain.

In a pioneering account of correspondence from the Anglo-Zulu War, the late Frank Emery (a geographer by training) referred to some eighty-five letter writers from English and Welsh newspapers in *The Red Soldier* (1977). If this example reflected the range and quality of material, he had found only a fraction of the correspondence from Zululand. Similarly in his wider ranging but largely anecdotal account, *Marching Over Africa* (1986), he confirmed that regimental officers were never the sole source of letter-writing from the front, and that non-commissioned officers and private soldiers wrote perceptive commentaries. A more rigorous methodology yielded hundreds of letters from all the African campaigns—many in the archives of the National Army Museum and the under-used regimental collections,¹⁸ but even more in the columns of the daily, weekly, and evening press. In *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, there are quotes or references to many hundreds of letters from 178 newspapers: a ‘treasure trove’ of correspondence in Keith Surridge’s opinion.¹⁹

So what prompted these soldiers to write about their African experiences in such prodigious numbers? There were certainly grumbles about privations when hacking their way through the tropical rain forest of West Africa or trudging through the deserts of Egypt and the Sudan; protests about faulty boots and swords that bent in the Sudan;

¹⁶ “Letter from T. Williams, of the 2–24th Regt,” *South Wales Daily News*, 8 March 1879, p. 3.

¹⁷ Spiers, “Military Correspondence in the Late Nineteenth-Century Press,” *Archives* 32 (2007): 28–40, at 34.

¹⁸ Several regimental museums now publish this material: *My Dear Annie: The Letters of Lieutenant Herbert Charles Borrett, The King’s Own Royal Regiment, Written to his Wife, Annie, during the Abyssinian Campaign of 1868* (Lancaster: King’s Own Royal Regiment Museum, 2003); *The Diary of 2874 L/Cpl. A. W. Rose 2nd D.C.L.I.: His Experiences in the South African War 9th October, 1899–28th December, 1901* (Bodmin: DCLI Museum, n.d.); Heather Wilson, *Blue Bonnets, Boers and Biscuits: The Diary of Private William Fessey D.C.M. Serving in The King’s Own Scottish Borderers during the Boer War 1900–1902* (London: Rotawise Ltd., 1998).

¹⁹ Keith Surridge, review of *The Victorian Soldier in Africa*, by Spiers, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 32 (2005): 292–93.

and rueful reflections on the wearing of kilts when riding a camel or during the heat of a South African summer.²⁰ Such complaints reached a crescendo whenever soldiers found themselves besieged with a mounting toll of sick and wounded; as a Gordon Highlander commented on the siege of Ladysmith (1899–1900), “The authorities may keep much in the dark, but the fearful truths connected with this part of the misery of the siege remain all the same...I know what the pinch of hunger is.”²¹ Sometimes, too, they complained about officers in command, as highlanders did after their defeat at Magersfontein (11 December 1899).²² So there is some grist to Porter’s mill, but military writing from Africa ranged beyond mere grumbling; hence the readiness of so many recipients to pass the letters on to local newspapers and the willingness of editors to publish this material. The latter did so either as a supplement to the reports of special correspondents, central news agencies, and official despatches, or as an alternative to these reports, effectively as local ‘scoops’ for provincial newspapers.²³

Expeditionary armies coming from Britain, the Mediterranean garrisons, and sometimes India (and later the colonies), fought many of these African campaigns. For young soldiers embarking on their first overseas campaign, there were exciting stories to tell, whether about the effusive crowds that gathered whenever military units left the United Kingdom, the novelty of voyages overseas, descriptions of exotic scenes, or the shock of adapting to severe climatic conditions. Adaptation was probably more demanding in some African wars than in other colonial campaigns as the journeys by sea and land were often shorter (other than in the Gordon relief expedition), and the logistical arrangements sometimes accelerated the stress of rapid acclimatization. Ironically,

²⁰ “Gold Coast—Abstract from a letter from Lieut. H. Jekyll,” *Royal Engineers Journal* 4 (1874): 9–10; Michael Barthorp, “A Letter from Omdurman,” *Soldiers of the Queen* 89 (1997): 2–5, at 3; “Before Atbara: With the Seaforths in the Sudan, A Dingwall Boy’s Letter,” *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 30 April 1898, p. 5; “A Soldier’s Letter,” *Ayr Advertiser*, 18 January 1900, p. 7; Spiers, *Victorian Soldier*, 184 and 190, n. 26.

²¹ “Letters from Ladysmith,” *Strathearn Herald*, 21 April 1900, p. 3.

²² Spiers, *Scottish Soldier*, 166–67; see also “A Wail from a Gordon Highlander,” *Manchester Evening News*, 24 April 1900, p. 6 and “A Bridgwater Volunteer in South Africa: Chasing De Wet, Complaint Against Officers,” *Devon and Somerset Weekly News*, 26 March 1901, p. 6.

²³ On the Victorian press, see Lucy Brown, *Victorian News and Newspapers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) and a useful survey by Aled Jones, “The Press and the Printed Word,” in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Williams, 369–80 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

such tensions derived from the awareness of commanding officers and staff that the success of African campaigns would depend upon effective logistic supply; as Colonel Charles Callwell observed, the small wars were first and foremost “campaigns against nature.”²⁴ Although soldiers appreciated the forethought and effort that went into cutting a path with way stations and campsites through the Asante rain forest (thereby dramatically curtailing the time that they would have to spend in that inhospitable climate), they still found themselves plunged into the rain forest within a day of landing ashore. Similarly, in 1898 when Kitchener’s British brigades travelled by train across the Nubian desert (thereby avoiding travel by a massive bend in the Nile that had formerly taken eighteen days by camel and steamer), they completed a journey of over one thousand miles from Alexandria and arrived in the heart of the Sudan in times that varied from about one to two weeks. When Sergeant-Major Clement Riding, Royal Army Medical Corps, reached Fort Atbara in August 1898 after a journey of seven days from Alexandria, he found the heat “something cruel.”²⁵

Even acclimatized soldiers struggled in African conditions. Marching in the Orange Free State, wrote Sergeant William T. Cattanach, Argyll and Sutherland Volunteer Service Company, “was extremely wearisome, the dust choking and a scorching sun overhead.”²⁶ Traversing a river-laced topography as in southern Zululand could also be extremely slow, tedious, and potentially vulnerable. Captain W. Prevost, 91st, later 1st Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, described how “[t]he length of the convoy can give some idea of [the] difficulty of rapid movements in this country, it extended from 1/4 to 1/2 mile...[and] took 3/4 of an hour to cross the Amatakulu, which was fortunately very shallow.”²⁷ At least these soldiers experienced a sense of movement unlike the First British Brigade in the Sudan. Apart from the forced march to Berber and later the Battle of Atbara (8 April 1898), it spent

²⁴ Colonel Charles A. Callwell, *Small Wars: A Tactical Textbook for Imperial Soldiers* (London: Greenhill Books, 1896, repr. 1990), 44–45.

²⁵ “With the Army Medical Corps,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 4 October 1898, p. 6; see also Spiers, “Introduction” and “Campaigning under Kitchener” in *Sudan: The Reconquest Reappraised*, ed. Edward M. Spiers, 3, 55–56 (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

²⁶ “Letter from Sergeant Cattanach, Volunteer Service Company, South Africa,” *Bridge of Allan Reporter*, 28 July 1900, p. 2.

²⁷ “With Second Brigade, Lower Tugela Division, Gingihlovo [sic],” *Bridge of Allan Reporter*, 7 June 1879, p. 4; the author’s name can be found in Spiers, *Scottish Soldier*, 42–43.

months undertaking daily fatigues, mounting guard and training in temperatures that soared over 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Moreover, until that battle officers and men had to sleep in full kit—wearing ammunition belts and boots—an ordeal that lingered in the memory.²⁸

Once landed in Africa, soldiers wrote accounts that were often descriptive and narrative in form, recounting not merely the chores of marching, camping, and training in extreme climatic conditions, but also their impressions of the cities of Egypt, wondrous scenes along the Nile, animals and insects (not least the flies in Egypt), the customs and practices of their 'native' auxiliaries, and the challenges posed by a diverse array of enemies—the Asante, Xhosa, Zulus, Boers, Egyptians and Mahdists. Lieutenant Percy S. Marling, 3rd Battalion 60th Rifles, may have been exceptional in fighting the Boers, Egyptians, and Mahdists before earning his Victoria Cross at the age of twenty-three, but he made a shrewd comparison in regarding the Mahdists as "the pluckiest fellows I've ever seen."²⁹ He was referring not only to their displays of courage, whether in mass or as individual tribesmen—a zeal often ascribed to religious-inspired fanaticism—but also to their readiness to face attacks by a mounted enemy. When the Mahdists faced cavalry, they used the bush-covered and undulating terrain to fight effectively (as at El Teb, 29 February 1884) or laid ambush and inflicted heavy casualties (as at Omdurman, 2 September 1898). By contrast, the Zulu, who were also renowned for their bravery, discipline, and resolve in launching sustained attacks upon British squares at Gingindlovu, Khambula, and Ulundi, were known to be vulnerable whenever they retreated, especially from cavalry and mounted infantry in hot pursuit.³⁰

Military writing not only recounted experiences in alien settings, battles survived, and enemies encountered, but it also sought in many cases to make a point. These soldiers, whether raw or experienced,

²⁸ "Letter from a Nairn Man at Atbara," *Nairnshire Telegraph*, 25 May 1898, p. 3; see also Spiers, "Campaigning under Kitchener," 56–58.

²⁹ Gloucestershire Archives, D 873/C110, Marling Mss., Marling to his father, 3 March 1884.

³⁰ "Letter from Zululand," *Dover Express*, 5 September 1879, p. 5; "Letter from a Ponypridd Soldier," *Western Mail*, 27 March 1884, p. 3; "A Gallant Lancer's Description of the Charge," *Yorkshire Post*, 8 October 1898, p. 9; "The Charge of the Lancers," *Gainsborough Leader*, 8 October 1898, p. 6; see also Spiers, "Dervishes and Fanaticism: Perception and Impact," in *Fanaticism and Conflict in the Modern Age*, ed. Matthew Hughes and Gaynor Johnson, 19–32 (London: Frank Cass, 2005).

were all too aware of the difficulties and dangers of military service in Africa—the risks of relatively small forces moving across inhospitable and roadless terrain, often in tropical conditions; the vulnerability of their logistic support; the isolation of encampments or forts established on the line of communications; and the dangers of disease in some locations. In these circumstances commentary might involve grumbles and complaints as Porter assumes, but it frequently included praise of commanding officers and recognition of the achievements in mastering African conditions. Many soldiers lauded their commanding officers, not merely successful ones like Sir Garnet Wolseley (Asante and Egypt), Sir Horatio Herbert Kitchener (Sudan), and Lord Roberts (South Africa), but also Sir Redvers Buller despite his three successive defeats in Natal (Colenso, Spion Kop [although he was not directly in charge], and Vaal Krantz). In ‘letters from the front’ most of Buller’s soldier’s remained fiercely loyal to their embattled commander and resented the criticisms of him in the press. They commended his personal bravery and attention to the wants of his men; as Private H. Easterbrook, 2nd Battalion, Devonshire regiment, reflected, “where the fighting was the fiercest there he [Buller] was to be found,” and the ranks under Buller lived “very well, even better than I ever lived in barracks. Plenty of biscuits, tinned meat, cheese, jam, fruit and bread, and fresh meat whenever it is possible to get it.”³¹ They maintained, too, that he had faced a formidable task in trying to breach the mountainous defenses along the Tugela (Thukela) River, that he had not pressed attacks when they began to founder, and that he had eventually developed combined-arms tactics, involving the heavy use of artillery and Maxim machine guns in a decisive assault over eleven days (16–27 February 1900) to relieve the besieged town of Ladysmith. Sergeant W. C. Mitchell, 2nd Battalion, Devonshire regiment, commended his approach:

He was in the thickest of the fire at Colenso, and passed close by me just before I got wounded. It is all very well for people at home to criticise, but let those who do so just have a glimpse of the country around here and see the positions the enemy have got. It would open their eyes, and

³¹ “A Teignmothian’s Opinion of Gen. Buller,” *Mid-Devon and Newton Times*, 17 March 1900, p. 7; see also “Letter from a Devonian at the Front,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 1 February 1902, p. 5 and Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 209–10, 236, 368.

they would begin to wonder how a man could tackle them in such places. Take full confidence in General Buller.³²

If soldiers wrote extensively about the natural difficulties that bedevilled campaigning in Africa, and appreciated a military leadership that placed a premium upon securing logistic supply, they also recognized their dependence upon indigenous, or as it was then termed 'native' support. In virtually every campaign, save possibly the very short Egyptian intervention, where victory at Tel-el-Kebir (13 September 1882) occurred despite the near collapse of the transport system, indigenous support whether as bearers, drivers, couriers, laborers, spies, and/or as fighting auxiliaries was often crucial. In many cases the British were exploiting tribal animosities and had no illusions about their local allies. In the assault upon the mountainous stronghold of the Pedi under their chief Sekhukhune (1879), the British force had the assistance of some eight thousand Swazis, whom Lieutenant-Colonel Philip R. Anstruther, 94th, later 2nd Battalion, Connaught Rangers, described as "grand fellows and most picturesque," wearing "leopard skins and huge bunches of black feathers," but fearful demons as "they don't spare any living thing, man, woman, child." As he added, "I don't know what we could have done without them. You see a British soldier is all very well, but he is no match in moving about hills—for these naked savages."³³

When the British fought in the Boer republics, they encountered a particularly warm reception from many black communities. Although blacks supported both sides in a supposedly 'white man's war,' Sergeant William McLanachan, Ayrshire Yeomanry, claimed, "They do it for us for gold. They do it for the Boers for the sjambok (as their backs show by the marks)."³⁴ The prospect of financial reward, though, only accounted partially for the black response; when the Black Watch entered Harrismith on 4 August 1900, Private Robert McGregor recalled that "[w]e entered into the town with the pipes playing and the niggers dancing and singing all around us. They had Union Jacks in their

³² "The Soldiers' Confidence in Buller," *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, 8 March 1900, p. 7; see also "Unbounded Confidence in Buller," *Mid-Devon and Newton Times*, 10 March 1900, p. 3 and "A Perth Soldier before Ladysmith," *Perthshire Constitutional & Journal*, 2 April 1900, p. 3.

³³ National Army Museum [hereafter NAM], Acc. No. 1957-05-22, Anstruther Mss., Anstruther's letters of 30 November and 7 December 1879.

³⁴ "Ayrshire Yeomanry in South Africa," *Ayr Observer*, 15 February 1901, p. 3; see also "Letter from a Liftonian," *Launceston Weekly News*, 10 March 1900, p. 6 and Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

hands, and were shouting out ‘Hurrah, the d——Dutch won’t com-mandeer no more.’”³⁵ British soldiers so often fraternized with blacks that nightly patrols had to be posted around the Imperial Yeomanry encampment at Stellenbosch “to keep the soldiers from speaking to the black ladies for fear it should lower ‘the dignity of the British soldier in the eyes of the Dutch.’”³⁶ Rapport also flourished between the British and their black scouts as reflected in the feelings aroused whenever the latter were captured and beaten by the Boers. “It was a terrible sight,” wrote Trooper McNaught, Ayrshire Yeomanry: “One of the poor blacks named ‘Diamond,’ with whom I had had many an amusing chat, was battered almost beyond recognition—it looked, in fact, as if he had been stoned or kicked to death in the most fiendish manner.”³⁷ Relations with bearers, laborers, and traders were often less cordial, especially if the soldiers felt cheated in their dealings or hampered in their movements by breakdowns or by desertions when crossing difficult terrain. Beatings, floggings, and even threats to “hit” them “on the nose,” as described by Lance Corporal J. A. Cosser in Natal, recurred: “They run about here naked and look horrible, but they are very frightened of the soldiers.”³⁸

The aptitudes and attitudes of these auxiliaries varied greatly, and British soldiers, like Wolseley himself, were not slow to criticize any signs of lazy, feckless, or undisciplined behavior.³⁹ In doing so, they both reflected and reinforced popular stereotypes about blacks in Britain. Despite his “very limited” experience of the blacks in the Transvaal, Corporal J. Henderson, Galloway Rifles, summarized certain assumptions:

[T]aking into consideration their complete ignorance and want of education, they are wonderfully quick, active, and obliging... They seem to stand in awe of us, for we can make them do anything we want, and that without

³⁵ “An Aberfeldy Private’s Letter,” *Strathearn Herald*, 22 September 1900, p. 2; see also “Letter from an Ayrshire Man at the Front,” *Ayr Observer*, 20 August 1901, p. 3 and “With the Royal Scots at Wepener,” *Scotsman*, 29 June 1900, p. 6.

³⁶ NAM, Acc. No. 1972-08-8, Paterson Mss., Corporal J. Paterson to Tom, 20 April 1900.

³⁷ “Ayrshire Men and the War,” *Ayr Observer*, 7 January 1902, p. 3.

³⁸ “Sheffield Soldiers in Zululand,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 17 May 1879, p. 3.

³⁹ G. J. Wolseley, “The Negro as a Soldier,” *Fortnightly Review* 50 (1888): 689–703.

being abusive, and they are respectfulness personified, calling us Boss, Massa, Sir, etc., and doffing their hats or saluting us when passing.⁴⁰

When these auxiliaries were properly trained, equipped, armed, and disciplined, their contribution—as in the reconquest of the Sudan—could prove invaluable. The two British brigades (about eight thousand men) may have formed the core of Kitchener's 23,000-strong Anglo-Egyptian army in 1898, but the Egyptian and Sudanese battalions participated in the assault at the Battle of Atbara and in the firing line at Omdurman (2 September 1898). During the second phase of the battle at Omdurman, when Kitchener's forces advanced across the battlefield, the Egyptian and Sudanese battalions under the command of Major General Hector MacDonald performed the remarkable feat of destroying two frontal assaults in the open. They faced the Mahdists first from the south, then turned about-face to repel another attack from the north: "our men behaved splendidly," wrote Major Nason, Egyptian Army.⁴¹

This candor about 'native' auxiliaries reflects not merely an uninhibited style of writing, but also a lack of censorship, unlike the constraints imposed on the special correspondents from the early 1880s onwards. Ever since the reports of William Howard Russell of *The Times* during the Crimean War (1854–1856), soldiers had generally commended the writing of war correspondents as a means of highlighting their privations on active service. Such concerns arose in Zululand where Cosser claimed that the authorities "do not let the people of England know the half of what goes on here."⁴² Even after the imposition of censorship in Egypt, an indignant officer serving with the rearguard of the Gordon relief expedition complained that it was "a disgrace to keep us in such a fiendish country. Nothing can excuse it. The food is bad, and we are still in rags... For God's sake write about it, and get other correspondents to take it up. They are generally the best friends the troops have."⁴³ By the South African War, skepticism about the press appears to have taken root: after the disastrous Battle of Colenso (15 December 1899), Rifleman Martin doubted that his father would learn

⁴⁰ "Humours and Privations of the Campaign," *Dumfries and Galloway Courier and Herald*, 25 July 1900, p. 6.

⁴¹ "The Great Battle in the Soudan," *Strathearn Herald*, 1 October 1898, p. 2.

⁴² "Sheffield Soldiers in Zululand," p. 3.

⁴³ "Our Soldiers in the Soudan," *Auckland Times and Herald*, 7 May 1885, p. 3.

“the truth through the press, as it us under Government censorship. But that frontal attack was human butchery.”⁴⁴

The Egyptian intervention (1882) exemplified how concerns could arise in African campaigns. After the crushing victory of Tel-el-Kebir (13 September) and the subsequent occupation of Cairo (15 September 1882), highlanders and marines were astonished to learn that Wolseley, their commanding officer, had commended the services of the Irish units—the Royal Irish and Royal Irish Fusiliers of the Second Brigade—and the Guards, which were commanded by the Queen’s son, the Duke of Connaught, but were held in reserve throughout the battle. Unbeknownst to the regimental officers and other ranks, Wolseley desperately wanted a peerage and pension for his services and informed his wife privately that he hoped to conciliate the prime minister, William E. Gladstone, then embroiled in Irish problems at home, and Queen Victoria by these reports.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, a Black Watch officer observed that “The Highlanders are somewhat piqued that no special mention was made of them,” and a Dundonian marine complained that the services of the Royal Marines had been ignored, while “upon regiments to their left and right and in the distant rear compliments were showered.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, soldiers already flushed with victory wrote numerous letters, with a multitude coming from the Highland Brigade, 1st Battalions, Black Watch and the Gordon Highlanders, the Queen’s Own Cameron Highlanders and the 2nd Battalion, Highland Light Infantry. As the first forces to engage the enemy, they had borne the brunt of the casualties along with the 1st Battalion, Seaforth Highlanders, who had led the separate assault of the Indian contingent south of the canal, and the Royal Marines who fought alongside the Irish (and the 2nd Battalion, York and Lancaster regiment) in the front line of the Second Brigade. Now part of an occupying army, they had both the incentive and opportunity to write their versions of the campaign and the means of sending letters home through an efficient postal service, composed of volunteers from the 24th Middlesex (Post Office) Rifle Volunteers.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ “Letters from South Africa,” *Nairnshire Telegraph*, 24 January 1900, p. 3; see also Spiers, *Victorian Soldier*, 182.

⁴⁵ Spiers, *Scottish Soldier*, 74.

⁴⁶ “Tel-El-Kebir,” *Scotsman*, 19 October 1882, p. 2; “Slight to the Marines,” *Weekly News* (Dundee), 21 October 1882, p. 7.

⁴⁷ Peter B. Boyden, *Tommy Atkins’ Letters: The History of the British Army Postal Service from 1795* (London: National Army Museum, 1990), 21.

In extolling their own achievements, soldiers placed themselves in the context of a short but rigorous campaign. They described how they had marched across the Egyptian desert, operated for once with a malfunctioning transport system, drank water whose "smell and taste are more easily to be imagined than described,"⁴⁸ experienced all the tensions of a night-time advance upon the entrenchments of Tel-el-Kebir, and then launched a ferocious assault with the bayonet as dawn arose. Apart from the accounts of hand-to-hand fighting, heroic incidents, near escapes, and noble deaths in battle, they were none too complimentary about an enemy whom they routed in about an hour. Of the Egyptian forces, only their gunners and the black Sudanese soldiers earned much acclaim: the latter, as Captain R. C. Coveny, Black Watch, recalled, "died very game."⁴⁹ In the light of day Egyptian engineering earned its share of the plaudits, particularly the redoubt protected by an exceptionally wide and deep ditch with steep sides that the Highland Light Infantry had carried. A Glasgow highlander regarded these entrenchments as "the strongest of the kind I have ever seen, and in possession of British soldiers would have been deemed impregnable."⁵⁰ Yet the sights, sounds, and stench of an Egyptian battlefield were even more memorable, producing evocative descriptions of the wounded "burying their heads in the sand to cool them" and drinking canal water "that you would not wash the door-step with, as it was thick with blood and mud."⁵¹

Frustration was more evident after the failure to relieve Khartoum, where Major-General Charles 'Chinese' Gordon was killed on 26 January 1885. In the relief force, though, officers and men had less opportunity to express themselves in print. Once apprised of Gordon's death, both the desert column, then isolated at the village of Gubat, and the river column, struggling up the River Nile, had to withdraw from their advanced positions. While the former spent a month fortifying its position and mounting raids on the enemy before a relief force under Buller arrived to escort it back across the Bayuda Desert, the latter defeated Mahdist forces at Kirbekan (10 February 1885) before returning downriver. Although some letters got through, including the plaintiff reflections

⁴⁸ "Letter from a Townsman in Egypt," *Brechin Advertiser*, 10 October 1882, p. 3.

⁴⁹ Black Watch Regimental Archive, 0204, Lieutenant-Colonel Coveny, "Letters from Egypt and the Soudan," p. 8.

⁵⁰ "A Glasgow Highlander's Description of Tel-El-Kebir," *Glasgow News*, 10 October 1882, p. 5.

⁵¹ "The Storming of Tel-El-Kebir," *Strathearn Herald*, 7 October 1882, p. 2.

of Private Robertson, 1st Battalion Black Watch, that "This has been an awful sickener of a job... It is a great pity General Gordon being killed, and so many fine officers,"⁵² a reference to the deaths at Kirbekan of Major-General William Earle and Lieutenant Colonels Coveny and Philip Eyre, the commanding officers of the two battalions engaged in the battle. In any case the postal service from the Sudan was far from reliable, with the special correspondents complaining that several of their reports went missing.⁵³

Wherever possible soldiers sought to describe their military experiences, particularly the demands that service in Africa placed upon them. Often deployed in small expeditionary forces, they realized that African theaters were not those in which they could replicate the maneuvers and grand tactics of European warfare. Whether by design (as in the Asante War of 1873–74) or after bitter experience at Isandlwana, they utilized square formations long since regarded as obsolete in Europe. Just as some 140 soldiers held off an estimated four thousand Zulus at Rorke's Drift (22–23 January 1879), so 2,086 officers and other ranks successfully thwarted the sustained attacks of over twenty thousand Zulus at Khambula, whereupon Corporal Hutchinson described how men had fought from a laager with wagons "formed into a circle, and barricaded up," and sustained rifle and shell fire for nearly five hours: "The number lost on our side was very few considering the immense body of savages that attacked us."⁵⁴ Employing similar tactics routed the Zulus at Ulundi and ensured that British forces never lost a battle in the Sudan even when the Mahdists broke into the squares at Tamai (13 March 1884) and Abu Klea (17 January 1885). Fighting at close quarters with such a ferocious enemy prompted vivid descriptions of the dangers involved in African warfare. At Tamai the Hadendowa Arabs, whom Rudyard Kipling would describe as 'fuzzy wuzzys,' were to one soldier, "half-naked black savages, having heads huge with lumps of woolly hair on end upwards and sideways, brandishing their spears and curved sticks... dancing madly behind the retreating square[,] looked through the smoke like real demons."⁵⁵ In the wake of Abu

⁵² "The Black Watch at Abu Dom," *Scotsman*, 11 April 1885, p. 7.

⁵³ Robert Wilkinson-Latham, *From Our Special Correspondent: Victorian War Correspondents and Their Campaigns* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979), 190; Spiers, *Victorian Soldier*, 6.

⁵⁴ "The Fight at Kambula," *Tamworth Herald*, 24 May 1879, p. 8.

⁵⁵ "Notes from Egypt," *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 12 April 1884, p. 5.

Klea, Gunner George Nixon recalled how “[w]e advanced in square to meet them. We could only see a few of them, when all at once they got up and charged our square. They came on in their thousands. Such a sight!” After describing another “great victory” at Abu Kru two days later, he admitted “I felt rather queer in the first battle, but our guns played on them in fine style.”⁵⁶

Some thirteen years later Kitchener’s Anglo-Egyptian army fought the Mahdists quite differently. By advancing in line and column they overwhelmed the enemy’s defenses at Atbara, and then fought in line with their backs to the Nile in the Battle of Omdurman. In the second engagement the Mahdist charge across an open plain in broad daylight, though heroic and spectacular, proved utterly disastrous. Facing the “unceasing rattle of musketry and crash of artillery,” wrote a County Down officer of the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade,

The Dervishes simply could not face it, and after a brave effort to come on they had to give up the attempt... The men were very cool the whole time, they seemed to think the whole thing was rather a fine field day, and we had some difficulty in making them lie down, as they wanted to see the show.⁵⁷

Feelings were somewhat different one year later when British forces encountered the Boers, a highly mobile enemy armed with smokeless magazine rifles and adept at concealment. For some, the differences were starkly racial: as Private W. Jefferys, 1st Battalion, Devonshire regiment, observed, “the Boers we are fighting are not like those Indian niggers; they are just the same as ourselves, white men, and it will be a great war before it is finished.”⁵⁸ Another Devonian, Sergeant Alfred Seldon of the 2nd Battalion, reflected more thoughtfully upon the difficulty of crossing a fire-zone swept by bullets “flying around us and at our feet like hails in a storm.” Having survived the disastrous Battle of Colenso, he described the enemy as “so well concealed in their entrenchments that... we could not see them. We, on the other hand, being in an open

⁵⁶ “The Battle of Gubat,” *Leicester Chronicle and Leicestershire Mercury*, 21 March 1885, p. 5.

⁵⁷ “The Battle of Omdurman,” *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 14 October 1898, p. 3.

⁵⁸ “An Ashburton Man at Ladysmith,” *Mid-Devon and Newton-Times*, 25 November 1899, p. 3.

plain with no cover whatever except an ant-hill here and there, were entirely at their mercy.”⁵⁹

Irrespective of the tactics adopted, soldiers realized that they had to assume the strategic offensive and bring the enemy to battle (both to reduce the strain upon their logistic supplies and the risks of incurring disease). Hence they were ready to march on enemy capitals, to launch frontal assaults even where the numerical odds were very much against them—as at Amofo (31 January 1874) en route to the Asante capital of Kumase—and to test their discipline, character, and will in adverse conditions. A Black Watch non-commissioned officer was delighted when the peace emissaries of the *Asantehene* (King Kofi Karikari) failed to agree terms with Wolseley. “King Coffee [*sic*],” he wrote, “is going to dispute our entry into Coomasie [*sic*], and of course everybody is in great glee... Everyone,” he added, was “anxious to get pushed on ahead and get the matter over.”⁶⁰

If African wars represented a test of character, they also represented a great opportunity. Quite apart from the sense of adventure and the prospect of escaping from the drab routine of garrison duty whether at home or in colonial bases,⁶¹ there were opportunities for command that young officers readily seized. They volunteered to command irregular forces in east and west Africa, establishing the Uganda Protectorate, suppressing insurrections both there and in Matabeleland, exploring territory in the hope of gaining control of the Upper Nile, and undertaking punitive missions in west Africa.⁶² Robert Baden-Powell kept control of nearly one thousand untrained Africans for six weeks in the Asante expedition of 1895–96, earning promotion to the rank of brevet lieutenant-colonel, five guineas a column from the *Daily Chronicle*, and £170 for his sketches from *The Graphic*. As he informed Lord Wolseley, he had “had a grand time of it,” with his only regret being that the

⁵⁹ “A Barnstaple Sergeant at the Battle of Colenso,” *North Devon Herald*, 25 January 1900, p. 5; see also “The Invisible Enemy,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 9 January 1900, p. 7.

⁶⁰ “The Ashantee War: Diary of a Non-Commissioned Officer of the 42nd Regiment,” *Kinross-shire Advertiser*, 4 April 1874, pp. 2–3.

⁶¹ John Pindar, *Autobiography of a Private Soldier* (Cupar: “Fife News,” 1877), 112, 136.

⁶² Shane Doyle, *Crisis & Decline in Bunyoro: Population & Environment in Western Uganda 1860–1955* (Oxford: James Currey, 2006), 69–70; Fredric A. Sharf, ed., *Expedition from Uganda to Abyssinia (1898): The Diary of Lieutenant R. G. T. Bright with Annotations and Introductory Text* (Hollywood, Calif.: Tsehail Publishers, 2005), 13; Tim Jeal, *Baden-Powell* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), Chap. 5.

Asante had “caved in without a fight,” leaving “a very sad camp as a consequence.”⁶³

If soldiers wanted to test themselves and earn renown, promotions, and medals from African service,⁶⁴ they were frequently disappointed. After several weeks on the veld, Trooper Charles Mitchell, Nesbitt’s Horse, characterized his life as “one continual round of patrol and mounting guards, and I am now on one of twenty-four hours, so that a soldier’s life is not all glory, and easy work.”⁶⁵ In African campaigns British soldiers had to adapt not least to the demanding conditions, to recover periodically from early reverses, and to adjust whenever the enemy refused to engage in battles and fought as guerrillas, exploiting their knowledge of local conditions. As the Boers proved the most elusive and effective guerrilla fighters, the South African War became an unduly protracted and immensely frustrating experience. The toll of sick and wounded exceeded all previous African conflicts, requiring medical operations and treatment by day and night, often in “very hot” conditions under canvas made “miserable” by “very heavy thunderstorms.”⁶⁶ Soldiers also described the chasing of Boer commandos, the destruction of Boer farms and livestock, and later the “monotony” of manning blockhouse lines—tasks that hardly accorded with the heroic warrior ethos.⁶⁷

What sustained these soldiers whether in periods of active campaigning or after major battles, or in their retrospective commentary, were the feelings aroused by African service. Sometimes they were profoundly negative. If appalled by African practices, especially when they involved extensive killings, mutilations, and human bondage, soldiers in their writings perpetuated the images of a dark, barbaric continent. A surgeon with the 42nd Highlanders (later 1st Battalion, Black Watch) described the “many sickening sights” he had seen in the Asante kingdom: “Life is nothing here. Slaves are victimised right and left, and are thrown into

⁶³ Royal Pavilions Libraries and Museums [hereafter RPLM], Brighton and Hove City Council, Hove Library, Wolseley Mss., Autograph Collection, R. S. S. Baden-Powell to Wolseley, 18 January 1896; see also Jeal, *Baden-Powell*, 170.

⁶⁴ “The Zulu War,” *Aberdare Times*, 13 September 1899, p. 4; “An Exonian’s Letter,” *Devon Weekly Times*, 30 March 1900, p. 7; “Soldiers’ Letters,” *Cornishman*, 10 May 1900, p. 5.

⁶⁵ “Another Penzance Man at the Front,” *Cornish Telegraph*, 23 May 1900, p. 3.

⁶⁶ “Letters from the Front,” *Somerset Standard*, 27 April 1900, p. 7.

⁶⁷ “Letter from a Devonian at the Front,” *Crediton Chronicle*, 1 February 1902, p. 5; “Letter from an Ayrshire Imperial Yeoman,” *Ayr Observer*, 26 February 1901, p. 7; “At the Front,” *Argyllshire Herald*, 9 November 1901, p. 3.

large pits. One of these I visited, and there were bodies in hundreds, and all along the road the same way.”⁶⁸ Similarly the outrage caused by the sight of stabbed, ripped, and disembowelled corpses on the battlefield of Isandlwana, with some of the more lurid tales possibly the product of rumor, hearsay, and fevered imagination,⁶⁹ fed the desire as expressed by Private G. Griffiths, 2nd Battalion 24th Foot, for “revenge on the black heathens.”⁷⁰ Such feelings motivated some soldiers at Khambula just as the desire to avenge the ‘murder’ of Gordon inspired forces going into battle at the Atbara. When the 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders shouted ‘Majuba’ as they launched their attack at Elandslaagte (21 October 1899), they were seeking revenge for a previous defeat by the Boers at the Battle of Majuba (27 February 1881).⁷¹

Attitudes towards the Boers were probably the most mixed. Whereas several soldiers commended the marksmanship of the Boers, and the quality of their entrenchments, horsemanship, and treatment of British prisoners,⁷² many more deplored their abuse of the white flag, reports of firing on Red Cross ambulances, the use of explosive ammunition, the penchant for looting, a reluctance to engage in hand-to-hand fighting (regularly attributed to cowardice), and the brutal treatment of black scouts.⁷³ Admittedly some criticisms may have reflected momentary outbursts of anger triggered by rumor, hearsay, and camp gossip in a long and gruelling conflict. As soldiers dissipated their energies in long marches and mounted columns, in guarding supply convoys, and in various garrison, outpost, and later blockhouse duties, they made all

⁶⁸ “Letter from a Surgeon of the 42nd,” *Yorkshire Telegraph*, 28 March 1874, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Emery, *Red Soldier*, 95, 140; Ian Knight, *The Sun Turned Black: Isandlwana and Rorke’s Drift—1879* (Rivonia: William Waterman, 1995), 162–63.

⁷⁰ *South Wales Daily News*, 28 March 1879, p. 3.

⁷¹ “A Sheffield Soldier at Kambula,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 8 May 1879, p. 3; Private Snook quoted in the *North Devon Herald*, 11 September 1879, p. 5; “Remember Gordon,” *Grimshy News*, 17 May 1898, p. 5; “More Letters from the Front,” *Mid-Devon and Newton Times*, 5 May 1900, p. 3.

⁷² “A Cronje Memoriam Card,” *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 19 May 1900, p. 3; “The Trials of the Siege of Ladysmith,” *The Advertiser* (Stockport), 27 April 1900, p. 8; “From a Prisoner at Waterfall,” *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 23 April 1900, p. 3; “A Pudsey Man at the Front,” *Leeds Mercury*, 27 April 1900, p. 5.

⁷³ “Soldiers’ Letters: The White ‘Rag,’” *Manchester Evening Chronicle*, 16 March 1900, p. 3; “Fetching Them to Their Senses” and “The Boers Cannot Expect Much Quarter,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 2 January 1900, p. 6; “The Fighting Near Dundee,” *Western Morning News*, 1 December 1899, p. 8; “A Leeds Reservist’s Return,” *Leeds Mercury*, 5 May 1900, p. 7; “More about Tweefontein: Shocking Treatment of Blacks,” *Glasgow Evening News*, 29 January 1902, p. 6.

manner of comments about the Boers and their womenfolk, not least the insanitary habits of the latter that some thought had contributed to the rising mortality rates of the concentration camps.⁷⁴ If soldiers sometimes discounted the accuracy of Boer shooting, they recognized the ferocity of his fighting when on the offensive at Wagon Hill (6 January 1900) and some realized, as Corporal James Grant, 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders, affirmed, that “the Boer is not easily caught... There are some clever men among the Boers, you take my word for it.”⁷⁵

Beyond these reflections on African wars, soldiers were able to describe their experiences in ways that were readily understood at home, underscoring the linkage between the soldiers at the front and domestic perceptions of their colonial service. They sometimes used biblical imagery to illustrate points: Tel-el-Kebir, wrote Drummer George Paterson, Black Watch, was “situated in the Land of Goshen, a land, I am sure, you have read often about as well as myself.”⁷⁶ They compared sights in Africa with those at home: “The veldt here,” wrote one Devonian, “looks very much like Dartmoor; there is no grass but the ground is covered with little thorn bushes about six inches high, which is like the heather we picked at Okehampton.”⁷⁷ Some sketched or photographed their surroundings and were even hired by the press for their illustrations;⁷⁸ others captured the images in descriptive prose. The Asante rain forest, wrote one officer, comprised

groves of plantains with huge green leaves and flowers of the most brilliant scarlet, masses of convolvuli of all colours and palm trees with their trunks covered with exquisite ferns. Shooting up here and there are bamboo plants looking like bunches of huge green ostrich feathers. Above all this tower the gigantic trees, their stems bare for the first 100 or 150 feet, then leaves spreading out above like clouds of bright emerald green.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Spiers, *Victorian Soldier*, 172–73.

⁷⁵ “Letters from the Front,” *Northern Scot and Moray & Nairn Express*, 6 July 1901, p. 3; see also “A Great Mistake on Someone’s Part,” *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 9 January 1900, p. 7; “The Devons at Ladysmith,” *Devon Weekly Times*, 12 April 1900, p. 6.

⁷⁶ “The Late Lieutenant G. Stirling,” *Strathearn Herald*, 21 October 1882, p. 2.

⁷⁷ “Letter from a North Devon Gentleman,” *The Western Times*, 3 January 1900, p. 4.

⁷⁸ “Some Recollections of the Zulu War, 1879: Extracted from the Unpublished Reminiscences of the Late Lieut.-General Sir Edward Hutton, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.,” *Army Quarterly* 16 (1928): 65–80, at 75; see also Peter Harrington, “Images and Perceptions: Visualising the Sudan Campaign,” in Spiers, ed., *Sudan: The Reconquest Reappraised*, 82–101, at 86–87, 89, 91, 95, 99.

⁷⁹ *Morning Post*, 14 February 1874, p. 5.

The soldiers even conveyed the smells of Africa. After marching through the Asante forest Lieutenant Rolfe, Royal Navy, wrote that he appreciated his bottle of eau de Cologne, "which, with a bit of camphor in the corner of my handkerchief, I find most useful, as the stench along the road of the newly turned soil and dead Ashantees beats Paris."⁸⁰

The interaction went further inasmuch as soldiers often requested and periodically received copies of newspapers from home. They eagerly read accounts of their African service, with literate soldiers sometimes reading these accounts to their illiterate comrades. Whenever they felt slighted or overlooked at home, they protested indignantly, as Sergeant Shirley wrote when the Grenadier Guards left for the Sudan: "I hope we shall be able to give a good account of ourselves (so as to cut the Highlanders out; one can read nothing else but about the canny Scot)."⁸¹ Many were also affronted by the expression of pro-Boer opinions during the South African War, fearing that such views only fortified the resolve of the enemy: "We have to thank a few people at home," wrote Sergeant William Hamilton, 1st Battalion, Highland Light Infantry, "for the war being continued so long."⁸²

What then is the value of this correspondence? In the first place, there is the sheer scale: thousands of letters from soldiers survive, with a prodigious number printed in the nineteenth-century press embellishing the coverage of African campaigns. The correspondence comes from all ranks, including chaplains and doctors, and from all units on active service (front-line, support, and those in garrisons or depots), thus providing a broad and diverse commentary on Africa and African peoples. They complement the writings of missionaries, explorers, and journalists, albeit in prose that is often blunt and graphic and reflects a perspective that is perforce limited, often blinkered by regimental rivalry and laced with camp or hospital gossip. The letters are rarely definitive as sources; many were inaccurate about distances marched, the number of enemies encountered and deaths inflicted, especially if written after a heavy defeat.⁸³ Their appeal at the time—and their value as historical sources—lies in conveying images of Africa, impressions

⁸⁰ "The Ashantee War," *Morning Advertiser*, 28 February 1874, p. 5.

⁸¹ "In the Soudan Campaign," *Hampshire Observer*, 8 October 1898, p. 3.

⁸² "At the Front," *Argyllshire Herald*, p. 3; see also "A Soldier on Pro-Boers," *Ayr Advertiser*, 5 September 1901, p. 7.

⁸³ After their traumatic defeat at Magersfontein, where the British forces possibly faced eight thousand Boers, some Highlanders exaggerated the numbers of the enemy massively. Private Frank Leonard (Black Watch) claimed that they had faced "23,000."

of African peoples and their practices, and in their commentary on African wars. Inasmuch as these letters, like the reports of the special correspondents, found an outlet in the Victorian press, their impact, as Roger Stearns argues with respect to war correspondence, may have “reached an extensive, largely middle-class, already imperialist readership and confirmed rather than converted.”⁸⁴ Yet many of these letters had been passed on to editors, possibly after being read by working-class friends and families of the author. The latter sought to publicize their contents, including such sentiments as those of Private Tom Wood, 2nd Battalion, Duke of Cornwall’s Light Infantry, who wrote from South Africa, “I had no idea of the greatness of the British Empire until I came out here. It is surprising to see men here from all parts of the world, always ready to uphold the Union Jack, and to support each other in any danger.”⁸⁵

How far these letters contributed to imperialist passions in Britain is difficult to assess. They were only part of a much broader phenomenon, but in time of war they complemented the reports, sketches, and photographs of special correspondents, providing personalized insights, eyewitness descriptions, and value judgments that sustained interest in the conflicts. For evidence of the extent of imperialist passions in Victorian Britain, particularly the passions aroused by wars in Africa, reference may be made to the reports of celebrations all across the country when Ladysmith and Mafeking were relieved, and then when Pretoria was captured in June 1900. These instances were not merely premature victory celebrations as Price describes,⁸⁶ but massive displays of enthusiasm at the confounding of the Queen’s enemies (Kruger, Cronjé, et al., were burnt in effigy all across the country) and in support for the achievements of the army in general and of local regiments in particular. As the *Glasgow Herald* commented on the Pretoria celebrations in the second city of the empire, “The working classes required no one to tell them that the occasion was one for widespread jubilation.”⁸⁷

“The War in South Africa: Letters from Local Soldiers at the Front,” *Dunfermline Journal*, 20 January 1900, p. 6.

⁸⁴ Roger T. Stearn, “G. W. Steevens and the Message of Empire,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 17 (1989): 210–31, at 226.

⁸⁵ “A Tauntonian in the D.C.L.I.,” *Devon and Somerset Weekly News*, 30 August 1900, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Price, *An Imperial War*, Chap. 4 at 133.

⁸⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, 6 June 1900, p. 8.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WAR SECRETARIES AND THEIR COMMANDERS-IN-CHIEF: SOUTH AFRICA, PROFESSIONAL RIVALRIES, AND THE POLITICS OF REFORM

Jeffrey Lee Meriwether

When Great Britain went to war with the South African Republics in October 1899, the War Office and the government were certain that they knew what they were getting the country into. The British had a century of experience in dealing with the Boers, and only two decades before they had fought a war against Transvaal commandos. Britain sued for peace in that war, but came out of it with a seemingly healthier respect for their ex-foes. By the end of the century, however, that view had been altered by Britain's imperial successes and the development of a highly professional army. The common opinion was that the Boers had become soft in the last two decades, the victims of population growth, state development, and a realignment of interests toward exploiting the gold riches of the Rand. Matched against such a foe in the next conflict, British military officials could not fathom another loss.

Underscoring this opinion was Britain's very reasonable method of military administration. Ultimately, the army answered to Parliament via the secretary of state for war, and such an arrangement was the only viable option in a modern democracy. Although the mechanics of administration and the nature of the civil-military relationship had changed over time, the fact that the state was able to analyze its methods and mold them when necessary spoke to the overall success of the system. Hindsight points out that even as the structure was tweaked in the years leading to the South African War by those quite impressed with the soundness of their ideas, it failed to serve the nation and the army in the way imagined.

The two Commanders-in-Chief during this period, Lords Wolseley and Roberts, made a concerted effort to convince the government of the need for an alteration in the administrative structure. Both believed that the answer to Britain's military shortcomings was to place ultimate military control into the hands of the Commander-in-Chief. Doing so

would enable the forces to be commanded by an expert, rather than a civilian whose experience with military affairs was limited to his tenure at the War Office. Britain's war in South Africa did indeed result in a re-shaping of the administrative system into a model truly designed to operate in a major international conflict. What prevailed, however, was not victory for Horse Guards, but rather ultimate civilian control.

The government also should have understood the Boer mindset. Britain's history in South Africa was underscored by an ongoing conflict with an Afrikaner desire for sovereignty. The Transvaal had come to embody Afrikaner nationalism, a view the state's military victory in 1881 served to reinforce. In the second half of the 1890s, as the Jamieson Raid had defined more clearly Britain's attitude toward the South African Republic, Lord Salisbury's Unionist administration sought to negotiate with the Boers from a position of strength. The Unionists believed Anglo-Transvaal relations had been bungled in the past because the Liberals were not willing to stand up to the Boers. Just as they were afraid of military spending, so too were they afraid of applying effective political pressure—the kind backed by force.

Salisbury's government failed to see the entire picture, however. The potential for conflict in the present crisis was great and more should have been done to ready the nation for it. Yet these politicians, as skilled as Salisbury and his ministers may have been in other matters, approached the possibility of armed conflict with the small-scale campaign mentality that had worked so well in the Victorian Era and did not see the necessity of planning for possible large-scale operations. In other words, both the British government and the army prepared to fight the last war even if the impending conflict involved new operational and strategic considerations.¹

Most of Salisbury's government showed little concern for the developing South African crisis. The unpopularity of defense costs (except when they pertained to the navy) kept most ministers' minds well away from War Office planning. The post of war secretary was a thankless job, performed in a horrid jumble of buildings in Pall Mall. William Fremantle St. John Brodrick, Secretary for War between 1900 and 1903, agreed with Lord Salisbury that to be a government minister in

¹ See Brian Bond, *The Victorian Army and the Staff College 1854–1914* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1972), Chaps. 1–5.

charge of military affairs was a position of toil, devoid of any type of fame or celebrity.²

When the Salisbury administration entered office in 1895, the man tapped to lead the War Office was Henry Charles Keith Petty-Fitzmaurice, the 5th Marquess of Lansdowne. Lansdowne had been around army policy in the past, having served for a time under Edward Cardwell, Secretary of State for War from 1868 to 1874. Weaned on the latter's schemes, Lansdowne came to Pall Mall prepared to defend them. His tenure as viceroy of India (1888–1894) brought him into contact with colonial politics and colonial military policy. Colonial service was a trait shared with the army Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Lord Garnet Wolseley, another of Cardwell's protégés. Wolseley had replaced the Duke of Cambridge, one of Queen Victoria's cousins, as Commander-in-Chief in November 1895, ending the latter's thirty-nine-year tenure of service at the post.³ Cambridge, who in the eyes of his critics cemented the army into Waterloo beliefs and Crimean practices, had become the target for public ridicule because of his stance against effective change. As a result, civil administrators like Cardwell saw the military authority as an impediment to reform and only consulted it on certain issues, instead relying on bureaucrats and its own advisors to provide most of the necessary advice.⁴

Worseley, a staunch supporter of the reforms that Cardwell and others advocated, also saw Cambridge as an obstacle to change.⁵ As the new Commander-in-Chief, Wolseley recognized that outdated practices were hindering the army from adapting to new methods and ideas. His status as a national hero enabled him to enjoy a degree of outspokenness and effectiveness many officers did not. His colonial

² William St. John Fremantle Brodrick, Earl of Midleton, *Records & Reactions 1856–1939* (London: John Murray, 1939), 75.

³ Cambridge was General Commanding-in-Chief until 1887 when he became Commander-in-Chief.

⁴ Ian Beckett and John Gooch, eds., *Politicians and Defence: Studies in the Formulation of British Defence Policy 1845–1970* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981), 31.

⁵ Halik Kochanski, *Sir Garnet Wolseley: Victorian Hero* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1999), 204; Edward M. Spiers, "The Late Victorian Army 1868–1914," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army*, ed. David Chandler and Ian Beckett, 194–97 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Cambridge also held onto his office after many years at the Horse Guards. He could not fathom the idea that Wolseley the Cardwellian reformer would replace him and destroy regimental *esprit de corps*. For Cambridge's private correspondence see Edgar Sheppard, ed., *George Duke of Cambridge: A Memoir of his Private Life* (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1906).

exploits, including the Red River Expedition in 1870 and the Ashanti operation in 1873–1874, made good press and excellent fare for public consumption. With such exploits to his credit, Wolseley virtually could write his own orders. Good luck and reputation earned him a lengthy tenure as Adjutant General (1882–1890) at the War Office, where he could put his ideas on paper and reach out to the small but growing number of reform-minded officers.⁶

The ironic piece in this puzzle of war planning is that Lansdowne and Wolseley, two men with impressive experience in military and colonial affairs, failed to prepare the army for the war in South Africa. This failure was largely the fault of poor civil-military relations. Wolseley objected to civilian interference. He also despised Lord Lansdowne, which made communication between the two, needless to say, very difficult. The War Secretary, more interested in the immediate domestic concerns of the state and larger foreign policy issues, did little to placate the Commander-in-Chief and did not wish to share responsibility with soldiers. To make matters worse, issues of finance were not controlled by either man, but by a treasury loathe to spend money, especially at a time of economic instability. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Michael Hicks Beach viewed expenditure on military defense as a low priority. With little money forthcoming, Wolseley and Lansdowne constantly clashed over how to make the best use of it.

One of the army's domestic duties remained that of aiding the government during periods of civil unrest. The thought of having an armed force in the employ of the government was enough to force some in the British public to look less than favorably upon the army. Some public venues still refused to admit soldiers,⁷ and the army found itself in the paradox of basking in popularity only during times of war. In peacetime, it was an institution the public would rather have forgotten about. As Edward M. Spiers has argued, governments preferred to fund the army only during crises, otherwise leaving the military to scrape by when the nation was at peace.⁸ It was Lansdowne's unenviable task to convince Hicks Beach to loosen the Treasury's purse strings and to secure sufficient funds to meet the army's minimum requirements.

⁶ This was not Wolseley's first period of service in the War Office. His first assignment came in 1871.

⁷ Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914* (London: Longman, 1980), 219.

⁸ Ibid., "Late Victorian Army," 193.

In addition to Hicks Beach, Lansdowne's duties also brought him in contact with other ministers, most notably through the Cabinet Defense Committee. The government established this body in 1895 as a ministerial think tank for imperial and national defense. The committee provided the setting in which ministers could hammer out policies suggested by the departmental and military advisors. It made sense that such an entity existed where members could meet to discuss all issues—naval and military—relevant to defense. Soldiers and politicians agreed that such a body was necessary, but nobody was certain of the shape it should take.

The army and the navy wanted ministers representing both services to sit on their joint military council. The government, however, believed that ministers should organize themselves at a level above the services, instead meeting to discuss issues passed to them from the soldiers and sailors. W. S. Hamer has argued that Salisbury feared that the Defense Committee would grow into an all-powerful clique with the ability to make and implement decisions at will.⁹ The Prime Minister wanted this body to be as small as possible and not to function as an extraordinary committee outside normal War Office cabinet relations. It would be regulated and assimilated into the overall relationship. Salisbury envisioned that the committee's main task would be to decide the true work of the services.¹⁰ Other ministers suggested the committee mediate between soldiers and sailors in their discussion of the military's role in imperial defense. Some also advocated for the Defense Committee to consider the services' annual Estimates.¹¹ Ian Beckett and John Gooch point out that while the Defense Committee may have been a good idea, the group's irregular meetings and concern with administrative questions (instead of actual defense topics) limited its effectiveness in addressing military issues facing the nation and the empire.¹² Its existence also reinforced critics' claims of inefficiency.

Wolseley naturally disliked the committee for its inclusion of civilian members and its discussions, which reminded him of his office's subservience to the civil authority. According to Wolseley, it was the

⁹ W. S. Hamer, *The British Army: Civil-Military Relations, 1885–1905* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 163.

¹⁰ Salisbury Minute, October 1895, CAB 37/40/64/5, The National Archives [hereafter TNA], London.

¹¹ Lansdowne Minute, 2 December 1895, CAB 37/40/64/15, TNA; A. J. Balfour Minute, 24 August 1895, CAB 37/40/64/3, *ibid.*

¹² Beckett and Gooch, *Politicians and Defence*, x.

civilians, notably Lansdowne, who had cost the army valuable time in preparing adequately for a war in South Africa. Leaving war planning and execution to the professionals, i.e., soldiers like Wolseley, was the only truly effective way for the nation to wage war and win it. Under the reluctant Lansdowne, Wolseley maintained, victory could hardly be achieved.

The Lansdowne records paint the War Secretary as a cool, patient bureaucrat implementing government policy and towing the party line. Alternatively, Wolseley's correspondence presents the not-so-professional opinions of a crusader who sees his life's work crumbling before his eyes. In comparison with Lansdowne's steady demeanor, Wolseley's rancor and contempt for civilian administrators is striking. Lansdowne was not a soldier, and to someone as passionate about the army and defense policy as Wolseley, perhaps the War Secretary came across as aloof and unfeeling. Wolseley often aired his views to his wife and his brother, George.¹³ His depth of feeling is impressive. The Commander-in-Chief's passion, however, was also his undoing, as he could not respect the boundary between his private views and his constitutionally defined duties in Horse Guards.

The inability of Wolseley and Lansdowne to work together spelled trouble for British political and economic aspirations in South Africa in the summer of 1899. Armed with the prevailing view that the Boers were certainly beatable, the War Office held that unmatched force was the key to victory.¹⁴ This view turned out to be more theoretical than actual. To Wolseley, Lansdowne expressed the government's fear that a forceful preparation would be enough to push the Transvaal and possibly the Free State into war.¹⁵ Wolseley held the opposite view: not

¹³ In a letter to his brother, Wolseley complained of the grind of working with the War Office, "where all authority is exercised over the Army by civilians." W. to George Wolseley, 20 April 1899, p. 1, Wolseley Papers [hereafter WP], Hove Central Library. The Commander-in-Chief complained to his wife that Lansdowne was "small minded." W. to Lady Wolseley, 24 June 1899, W/P 28/30, p. 1, *ibid.* To Wolseley, the War Secretary appeared to be the product of a liaison between a "French dancing master" and a "Jewess." W. to Lady Wolseley, 4 July 1899, W/P 28/35, p. 2, *ibid.*

¹⁴ The War Office depended upon its South African intelligence as detailed in its secret *Military Notes on the Dutch Republics of South Africa* (1899); Spiers, *Army and Society*, 225, 228.

¹⁵ Lansdowne to Wolseley, 24 June 1899, L (5) 20/63, Lansdowne Papers [hereafter LP], Bowood House; Keith Surridge, "Lansdowne at the War Office," in *The Boer War: Direction, Experience and Image*, ed. John Gooch, 25 (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 25; Bill Nasson, *The South African War, 1899-1902* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 69-70.

preparing to fight the Boers was the first step toward defeat. Offensively, simply mobilizing the forces might, in Wolseley's opinion, deter the Boers from their own offensive action.¹⁶ Although the 1st Army Corps was prepared to mobilize by June 1899,¹⁷ Lansdowne held back, caught between the government's political and financial constraints and a desire for peace.

One important source of Wolseley's frustration was the administrative result of a new reform conversation begun in the late 1880s. Sitting in 1888, the Hartington Commission considered the military taking a greater share in policy creation and implementation in conjunction with a streamlining of War Office organization.¹⁸ Advocates such as Wolseley and the Duke of Cambridge had argued that soldiers had no voice in military policy and therefore no responsibility. Those seeking change hoped the Hartington recommendations (1889 and 1890) would alter this deficiency.¹⁹

Although the Stephen Commission (1887) condemned the War Office for maintaining too much civilian control of army matters,²⁰ the Hartington reports took the position that the Commander-in-Chief's assumption of the majority of duties invested too much power in one man. While acceptable to include soldiers in army administration, it was completely inefficient to leave everything up to the top military commander. Delegation to a board of senior War Office military staff was essential if the army and the War Office were to become truly streamlined.²¹ This conclusion was Wolseley's point exactly: officers could not be responsible for policies when they were not answerable to government. In the Commander-in-Chief's office, Wolseley envisioned a

¹⁶ Wolseley Memorandum, 8 June 1899, CAB 37/50/38, TNA; Wolseley Memorandum, 8 June 1899, *Report of His Majesty's Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Military Preparations and Other Matters Connected with the War in South Africa* (London: HMSO, 1903) Royal Commission on the South African War [hereafter *RCSAW*], 262.

¹⁷ "Military Preparations and other matters connected with the War in South Africa," 1903, WO 163/611/533, TNA; Dennis Judd and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 65.

¹⁸ "Naval and Military Administration," 1889–1890, WO 163/610/358, TNA; Colonel John K. Dunlop, *The Development of the British Army, 1899–1914* (London: Methuen, 1938), 22; Spiers, "Late Victorian Army," 98.

¹⁹ Beckett, "Edward Stanhope at the War Office 1887–92" *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5 (1982): 286–87; Hamer, *British Army*, 139–40; Spiers, *Army and Society*, 221.

²⁰ Beckett, "Edward Stanhope," 286–87.

²¹ Spiers, *Haldane: An Army Reformer* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1980), 116.

position in which he would be free to concentrate on the reform topics he found most interesting,²² having delegated other duties to his staff. To his chagrin, Wolseley's espousal of the Hartington Commission's recommendations would prove to foreshadow a period of uneasiness and confusion for the office of Commander-in-Chief.

In the new Army Board, members—who, as the War Office department heads, served under the Commander-in-Chief's leadership—gained direct access to the Secretary for War. This was a feature of army administration the Stephen Commission report recommended. Without such access—and the resulting responsibility for their actions—the government could not hold department heads accountable for their advice. Wolseley and Cambridge had argued this point for years. Finally, with such access, military members could speak directly to government. The new Commander-in-Chief might have advocated such a reform, but the resulting board with its direct line of communication between the War Secretary and Wolseley's staff was a feature he despised. The new policy went into effect on 21 November 1895, three weeks after Wolseley assumed command at Horse Guards.²³

The quirks in the War Office system certainly had become deficiencies by 1899. Following a summer of wrangling over state policy and the army's posture in the face of Boer aggression, and with general administrative inertia in the War Office as the war began on 11 October, Britain had yet to land its principal fighting force in South Africa. Ten thousand troops sanctioned by the government in September had arrived, but their purpose was defensive. The delay of the main body would put off the successful conclusion of the war.

It was not simply the defensive nature of their position in South Africa at the start of the war that hampered the initial British efforts. They had grossly miscalculated the Boers' ability to wage war; in 1899 the Boers were every bit as effective in the field as they had been in the early 1880s. Military misfortune was the order of the day in the first few months of the war. Despite setbacks, the government's reaction was to hold on, reasoning that the true campaign would begin once the Army Corps had arrived. Wolseley responded to the setbacks by targeting those he deemed responsible for the disgraceful position in which the

²² Kochanski, *Sir Garnet Wolseley*, 194.

²³ Army Order 193, 21 November 1895, *Army Orders, 1895* (London: HMSO, 1898), WO 123/37, p. 3, WP; CAB 37/40/41–43, 47–48, 51, 58, TNA; Hamer, *British Army*, 135; Spiers, *Army and Society*, 222.

army and the nation now found themselves.²⁴ Lansdowne was high on his list. Wolseley wrote to his wife that the War Secretary could not face him, knowing as he did that he and his associates had landed Britain in this mess.²⁵ Wolseley held some soldiers responsible as well, among them Lieutenant General Sir George White, who held command over British forces in Natal.²⁶ By the late fall, White had become trapped in Ladysmith, and General Redvers Buller, the Commander-in-Chief of British forces in South Africa, was forced to scrap his plan for an invasion of the Orange Free State and divide the 1st Corps in the hope of relieving the beleaguered commander.

Already, in a letter to his brother, Wolseley had reasoned that Buller would be better suited to commanding the army from Horse Guards, while the Commander-in-Chief took over responsibility for the troops in the field. Buller had found campaigning in Natal difficult, and Wolseley believed that a swap was the logical solution to the dilemma.²⁷ The situation took a turn for the worse when the army suffered three defeats during the 'Black Week' of 10–15 December. Stormberg (10 December) and Magersfontein (11 December) hurt, but it was Buller's reverse at Colenso on 15 December that sealed the general's professional fate and blackened Wolseley's reputation. He had recommended Buller,²⁸ yet now that the corps commander had stumbled so badly in his Natal campaign, the government began the process of superseding him.

Prior to and during the South African War, Field Marshal Lord Frederick Roberts, Commander-in-Chief of British forces in Ireland, maintained his correspondence with Lansdowne. They were friends from their years of working together in India, and Roberts commonly discussed his ideas for army reform with the War Secretary. Roberts

²⁴ According to Lansdowne, Wolseley should not have had any reason to complain. In a letter to Secretary of State for the Colonies Joseph Chamberlain, Lansdowne reported that Wolseley was positive that the ten thousand reinforcements would be able to hold off the Boers in Natal. Lansdowne to Chamberlain, 9 September 1899, L (5) 20/69, LP.

²⁵ Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 31 October 1899, W/P 28/71, pp. 2–3, WP.

²⁶ Wolseley to Lansdowne, 5 September 1899, CAB 37/50/69, TNA; Lansdowne to Chamberlain, 9 September 1899, L (5) 20/69, LP; Chamberlain to Lansdowne, 12 September 1899, L (5) 20/70, LP; Kochanski, "Wolseley and the South African War," in *Boer War*, ed. Gooch, p. 62. Wolseley complained to his wife that now he looked like a fool. Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 31 October 1899, W/P 28/71, p. 3, and 3 November 1899, W/P 28/73, p. 1, WP.

²⁷ Wolseley to George Wolseley, 16 November 1899, W/W 4/111, p. 3, WP.

²⁸ Wolseley to George Wolseley, 6 July 1899, W/W 4/96, 2 and 28 September 1899, W/W 4/104, p. 2, *ibid*.

and Wolseley were rivals, a fact not aided by the former's private correspondence with Lansdowne. As the war progressed, Roberts' letters began to describe how he would fight the war if he were commanding forces in South Africa.²⁹ When Lansdowne decided to supersede Buller, he naturally sought out Roberts. The new commander took control in January 1900, relegating Buller to the Natal theater. Adding insult to injury, as Commander-in-Chief, Wolseley wrote the official memorandum of promotion to his professional nemesis.³⁰

By the summer of 1900, Lord Roberts had captured the Boer capitals and had annexed the republics. Certain of victory he left South Africa, passing his command on to Lord H. H. Kitchener. Roberts returned to a hero's welcome in December 1900, and the following month assumed his new position as Commander-in-Chief (Wolseley's term officially ended in November). Initially optimistic in his ability to reform the military, Roberts soon came to discover that the civilian control and bureaucratic red tape that had bound Wolseley so tightly would lead to his own undoing.

On Monday, 18 December 1899, William Fremantle St. John Brodrick, then Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, expressed his condolences to Lord Roberts for the death of the Field Marshal's son. Young Freddy had been killed in Buller's Colenso debacle. Brodrick also recalled Roberts' comments a few years earlier, when the latter communicated his desire to take command in South Africa should the army run into trouble. "[I]t has been my one wish that you should have charge," wrote Brodrick. Now, after two months of setbacks under Buller, the army would have an officer in command who understood what it meant to take the fight to the Boers. Buller had too much to do in Natal, not to mention the Cape. Let him concentrate on relieving Ladysmith, and allow Roberts to put the war back on the proper footing.³¹

Technically Brodrick had been 'out of the loop' when it came to military policy in South Africa. He was quite familiar with the War

²⁹ For a discussion of enlistment terms, see their correspondence between November 1897 and January 1898. Lans (5) 47, LP; Roberts to Lansdowne, 20 June 1899, 7101/23/110, Roberts Papers [hereafter RP], National Army Museum, Chelsea; Roberts to Lansdowne, 20 June 1899, Lans (5) 47, LP; Roberts to Lansdowne, 8 December 1899, 7101/23/110, 203–206, RP; Roberts to Lansdowne, 8 December 1899, Lans (5) 47, LP; Byron Farwell, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1990), 153.

³⁰ Wolseley to Roberts, 21 December 1899, 5504/64/60, RP.

³¹ Brodrick to Roberts, 18 December 1899, 7101/23/13, p. 9, *ibid*.

Office, having first come to Pall Mall in 1886.³² He served Lansdowne faithfully as Undersecretary between 1895 and 1898, and it was he who presented the annual Estimates to the Commons, all the while taking his share of the abuse and praise that defined life in the War Office. In late 1898, however, he moved to the Foreign Office to assist Salisbury in the latter's other role as Foreign Secretary.³³

This relocation did not mean that War Office issues no longer crossed Brodrick's desk. Lansdowne kept him informed of developments in South Africa, and Brodrick even involved himself in Lord Kitchener's possible appointment as Commander-in-Chief in India. Brodrick also agreed to defend the War Office against charges of meddling in command affairs. In January 1900, he told a crowd in Newark that it was the field commanders, and not War Office administrators, who planned operations.³⁴ Brodrick replaced Lansdowne in October 1900 after the government increased its majority in the 'khaki' election that took advantage of Roberts' victory in the Transvaal. Lansdowne moved to the Foreign Office, happy to leave Pall Mall and all its pressures to Brodrick. The former War Secretary told Salisbury that his departure was best for the nation, as the army needed fresh ideas and a new personality to introduce them.³⁵ For a full year, Brodrick watched Lansdowne fight the war, and now he believed he could reform aspects of army administration while winding down the conflict with the Boers.³⁶ Following Roberts' victories, a general feeling of optimism pervaded the

³² Lowell J. Satre, "St. John Brodrick and Army Reform, 1901–1903," *Journal of British Studies* 15 (1976): 117–18.

³³ See Salisbury to Brodrick, 30 June 1895, Brodrick Papers [hereafter Brod. P], PRO 30/67/3, TNA, for Brodrick's appointment to the War Office. For Lansdowne's search for Brodrick's replacement, see the Lansdowne and Balfour correspondence, MS 49727, Add, pp. 58–74, Balfour Papers [hereafter BP], British Library, London.

³⁴ Lansdowne to Brodrick, 17 May 1899, Lans (5) 16/ii, p. 33, LP; Brodrick to Lansdowne, 15 June 1899, Lans (5) 16/ii, p. 34, *ibid.* He also was adamant about employing as many ex-soldiers as possible in the War Office. Brodrick to Salisbury, 18 January 1899, PRO 30/67/4, Brod. P; Brodrick to Lansdowne, 23 January 1900, Lans (5) 16/ii, p. 36, LP. Wolseley was included in the communication as well. Lansdowne to Brodrick, 23 January 1900, Lans (5) 16/ii, LP.

³⁵ Lansdowne to Salisbury, 27 August 1900, Hatfield House, 3M/B, pp. 575–78, and 3 September 1900, 3M/E, p. 587, Salisbury Papers [hereafter SP], Hatfield House; Spiers, *Army and Society*, 243. Before he left, Lansdowne suggested employing only officers who had served with Roberts in India, Lansdowne to Roberts, 12 October 1900, Lans (5) p. 48, LP.

³⁶ Satre, "St. John Brodrick," 119; Stephen M. Miller, *Volunteers on the Veld: Britain's-Citizen Soldiers and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 160–61.

government and the War Office. Similar to Lord Kitchener's reasoning (Kitchener was soon to replace Roberts in South Africa), the war with the Boers appeared to be simply a matter of tying up loose ends.

A few months after Brodrick took up his new post, Roberts assumed his new duties at Horse Guards in January 1901.³⁷ He was the new broom in military affairs, sweeping away the dust and debris of the Wolseley years. Poor Wolseley had reached the end of his term in November, but Roberts' delay in returning forced Lansdowne to ask Wolseley to remain at Horse Guards until his replacement arrived.³⁸ It was just like Lansdowne to send such a letter, Wolseley complained to his wife. He would comply with the War Secretary's wishes, but he certainly did not want to be left hanging about, wondering if each week would be his last. It was bad enough that he had to answer to a man (a "whipper-snapper of a War Office clerk") who, Wolseley argued, owed his cabinet post entirely to birth. Yet, now he stood the chance of having to watch all that he had worked for in the army come crashing down as Roberts yielded to social and political pressure for radical War Office reform.³⁹ During his final days at Horse Guards, Wolseley shook Brodrick's hand in a last farewell. He found the new War Secretary to be an "underhanded" and "tricky prig" and the lowest form of upper-class politician.⁴⁰

Brodrick, however, believed he had the army's and nation's interests at heart. He sought to change the manner in which the army was organized so that it could mobilize for foreign emergencies more effectively than had been the case in the South African situation. Upon Wolseley's departure, the military weekly *Broad Arrow* paid him tribute, but also maintained that Wolseley should take responsibility for the inadequate command decisions taken on the eve of the war. He was the army's top officer and therefore held ultimate responsibility. The present system had proven itself too clumsy, and changes were required.⁴¹ Did Brodrick represent such change? While the Lansdowne-Wolseley relationship

³⁷ Roberts' daughter Aileen was severely ill with typhoid in South Africa.

³⁸ Lansdowne to Wolseley, 29 September 1900, W/P 29/64, p. 1, WP.

³⁹ Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 30 September 1900, W/P 29/64, pp. 2, 4, and Wolseley to Lansdowne, 30 September 1900, W/P 29/64, p. 3, WP; Wolseley to Lansdowne, 30 September 1900, L (5) 37/85, LP; Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 2 October 1900, W/P 29/65, p. 1, WP.

⁴⁰ Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 1 December 1900, W/P 29/80, p. 1, WP.

⁴¹ "The Ex-Commander-in-Chief," *Broad Arrow*, 1 December 1900, p. 617; "Comments," *ibid.*, 8 December 1900, p. 647.

appeared to aid in the hindrance of a more effective response to such a large foreign war, Brodrick did not believe he had to worry about such professional discord. Just as he had done in South Africa, it now appeared that the new Commander-in-Chief would run a successful command from Horse Guards. Brodrick believed his scheme would remedy the army's problems, so there was no reason why Roberts should not support both it and the working relationship.⁴²

One lesson South Africa taught the army was that to engage in what now appeared to be modern warfare (albeit particularly colonial in nature), the War Office required a much larger body of mounted troops. The Boers' field craft revolved around their mobility—a fact often impressed upon advancing British columns in the roughest sense.⁴³ That advantage would be acceptable for the interim, but Brodrick also had to plan for the possibility of future wars against proper, European enemies. This was the task he set himself.

Brodrick believed his duty was not to build a military organization around available resources, but to develop the resources that would support the best military organization for Britain—an effective home defense, and a force capable of overseas deployment and sustained combat. Considering the Estimates from the last few years, that goal may not have been very difficult for the War Secretary to accomplish. Even before the South African War, Lansdowne carried his budgets, with their ever-increasing costs, through each parliamentary session. Now Brodrick had the advantage of fighting the war. In addition, he had the services of the new Commander-in-Chief, just returned from the front dressed in the uniform of victory. If Roberts supported the new program, then it must be the wise choice, and it must be implemented. At least that was what the War Office hoped.⁴⁴

The alternative was to argue that eventually the war would end, and Britain would be stuck paying for a reformed army whose services, save in normal garrison duties, were not required in peacetime. Britain cut her military budget after every war. It was the nature of military policy. The country 'went to sleep' after Waterloo, Brodrick argued. This disinterest could not be allowed to develop again. Although it was only by chance that Britain had become a fighting nation, it was now time to

⁴² Brodrick to the Committee of Supply, 8 March 1901, *The Parliamentary Debates 1901*, Vol. 90 (London: Wyman and Sons, Ltd., 1901), 1084.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1057.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 1062, 1084.

make this condition permanent.⁴⁵ Therefore, the War Secretary would have to appeal to patriotism without tearing a large and long-lasting hole in the public purse. He could also appeal to national defense, for another difficulty facing the War Office in 1901 was the potential for change in international relations. The fact that Britain had been involved in South Africa did not remove her from the duty of maintaining her position as a world power. Fighting a large colonial war six thousand miles away forced the nation to send a vast number of its troops overseas. The country's preoccupation with South Africa was exploitable if another power sought to harm Britain's interests.

Salisbury recognized this vulnerability and sent the Royal Navy to increase its presence in the Mediterranean when the war began. Wolseley worried about the same matter during the planning process for the 1900 Estimates. Brodrick now carried on the tradition when constructing the army budget for 1901. It was silly, he argued, to design a military scheme around the good intentions of foreign powers. No matter how genuinely peaceful they appeared, Britain could not afford to take any chances.⁴⁶

Therefore the War Secretary intended to re-design the army on the basis of a six-corps scheme. Edward Stanhope, in charge of the War Office during Salisbury's second administration (1887–1892), analyzed a similar operational structure in consideration of Britain's growing international commitments. He stipulated five corps for home and foreign service. After manning home defense, India, and other colonial stations, Stanhope envisioned the army fielding two regular corps for combat overseas.⁴⁷ When the South African War began, the War Office duly designated a two-corps expeditionary force. The war made it painfully clear, however, that a larger force was needed. He envisioned six corps districts to serve their needs. Brodrick's plan would provide three corps for foreign emergencies with home defense charged to the other three. The War Office planned to divide Britain up into six administrative regions, each catering to its own corps and each district containing everything that a corps in battle would require.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 1054, 1057.

⁴⁶ Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 742; Wolseley to Lansdowne, 29 December 1899, CAB 37/51/105, pp. 1–2, TNA; Brodrick to the Committee of Supply, *Parliamentary Debates 1901*, Vol. 90, 40, 1063.

⁴⁷ Judd and Surridge, *Boer War*, 62.

This proposition included a permanent staff,⁴⁸ artillery, and corps transport. Prior to this, the War Office had thrown corps together as circumstances required. Men neither knew their commanders, nor were they familiar with their fellow battalions. Brodrick sought to create an effective, complete fighting force. From then on, the same men who commanded in peacetime would command in war.⁴⁹ In order to recruit for his new army, the War Secretary intended to change the terms of infantry enlistment from the current 7:5 (seven years with the colors and five years with the reserves) model to 3:9. Under a shorter active-duty contract, the War Office hoped that a better, more willing recruit might come forward.⁵⁰

The War Secretary's new scheme also considered War Office organization. Wolseley's continuous complaints about the delegation of duties among his advisors forced civilian and military administrators to consider other organizational models. However, following the then common War Office line that it was not a good idea to institute change in the middle of a war, Brodrick announced that Lord Roberts supported a delay in War Office reform until after the conclusion of hostilities. In addition, the new Commander-in-Chief could not make any suggestions until he had the opportunity to see the War Office at work. Therefore, Brodrick asked that the Commons delay the question of War Office reform for the time being.⁵¹ Why not reform the War Office in the process of meeting the army's force requirements? The latter was crucial to the moment, and Brodrick, a firm believer in the established War Office system, sought to put off any alterations to the institution until he could give it his full attention (and assist in defending it against criticism). Until the successful completion of the

⁴⁸ The permanent staff idea was not new. General Sir Edward Bruce Hamley pointed out its merits in his study of the Crimean War. He maintained that a staff could not be thrown together, but had to be cultivated within an assembled army. Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army: British Military Thought, 1815–1940* (London: Cassell, 1964), 134.

⁴⁹ The six districts were to be based in Aldershot, Salisbury Plain, Ireland, Colchester, York, and Scotland. Brodrick to the Committee of Supply, *Parliamentary Debates* 1901, 1063–66.

⁵⁰ Spiers, *Haldane*, 5. Critics had argued for years that the army could not find suitable recruits due to the long active-duty enlistment. Seven years was a lot to ask of young men who would have to break into a trade only in their mid-to-late twenties. By this age, detractors maintained, they would be too old to find respectable employment. Serving only three years still provided veterans ample opportunity to establish themselves in the civilian job market.

⁵¹ Brodrick to the Committee of Supply, *Parliamentary Debates* 1901, 1083–84.

war, the reforms would exist largely on paper.⁵² Roberts' support for this delay was a wonderful selling point for Brodrick's argument. Again, Roberts was the hero of the hour, and it was a sensible move for Brodrick to attach the new Commander-in-Chief's name to the proposal.

Brodrick sought a greater military presence in War Office affairs, and already he had eradicated some of the red tape, ordering his staff to ease up on the minute writing and begin solving issues face to face with the soldiers. In defense of his department, however, Brodrick charged that critics did the War Office an injustice when they blamed the ministry for the nation's military woes. The War Office simply was an instrument, and one ordered by many governments to organize along lines relevant to the moment. Therefore, if the War Office was a mess, it was because parliamentary government had forced it to be so. Brodrick never would have admitted it, but this was Wolseley's old argument. Military efficiency suffered, argued the old Commander-in-Chief, because too many Secretaries of War with too many agendas (representing two different parties) attempted to create a smoothly operating military machine. Such an approach never could guarantee efficiency, and the army's health suffered as a result.⁵³

Brodrick's six-corps scheme appeared logical, especially in light of the difficulties the War Office encountered when attempting to piece together enough brigades to send to South Africa. It was a more modern approach to warfare, one modeled on continental practices, and one absolutely required for fighting a European enemy. The idea certainly had gained traction over the years; indeed Wolseley had suggested it in 1896. At the time, he and Lansdowne argued over whether the suggestion correlated to Stanhope's 1891 directives. As they considered South Africa in 1899, the two disputed the point again. Finally, in 1901, Brodrick sought to implement a revised version of the original plan, moving it from the drawing board to reality.⁵⁴

In the fervor for reform, Brodrick's intention to create command staffs for each corps was crucial to the direction in which the reformers

⁵² Spiers, *Haldane*, 4–5.

⁵³ Brodrick to Roberts, 29 September 1903, 7101/23/13/357, RP; Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 24 June 1899, W/P 28/30, p. 4, WP; 4 October 1899, W/P 28/64, p. 1, *ibid.*; 31 October 1899, W/P 28/72, pp. 2, 4, *ibid.*; 1 August 1900, W/P 29, p. 49i, *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Wolseley to Lansdowne, 27 February 1896, p. 214, RCSAW; Stanhope Minute, 8 December 1888, p. 224, *ibid.*; Lansdowne Minute, 25 January 1899, p. 261, *ibid.*; Lansdowne Minute, 23 January 1900, CAB 37/52/5, TNA; Satre, "St. John Brodrick," 121.

were traveling. While it was easy enough and more sensible for commanders in smaller colonial campaigns to arrange their own staff personnel and even address matters themselves,⁵⁵ as difficulties surfaced in South Africa it became clear that larger conflicts required a centralized approach. This idea was sound, for while he did not envision a general staff covering the entire army (and replacing the Commander-in-Chief, as in the Hartington model), recognizing that operations planning was no longer something to be left to the local commander was quite progressive. South Africa was proving that. With the Commander-in-Chief holding ultimate authority over commanders' fitness, Brodrick and the War Office believed that the new staff and command arrangements would ensure future victory. Clearly, with Roberts' assistance, Brodrick set out to make true organizational changes for the army.⁵⁶

Perhaps the only credible argument against Brodrick's plan was to justify its existence in peacetime. It was easy enough to call for large reforms during a war; however, with peace, could the War Secretary really stand behind an expenditure of £29 million?⁵⁷ Contemporary critics charged he did not spend enough. In the future, he predicted, they would argue that he spent too much. Therefore, reforms had to be implemented while the War Office had the public's support. This course may have been the most intelligent for Brodrick to follow. Otherwise, how could he justify major spending in peacetime? It would be impossible to do so, for as patriotic as the nation and its government were, peace bred stagnation.⁵⁸ Brodrick counted on Roberts' support; only full cooperation and understanding between the two offices would ensure smooth operations.⁵⁹

Roberts returned home to a nation that adored him.⁶⁰ Yet, the power he expected to wield at the War Office remained the prerogative of the government. Very quickly as their working relationship developed, Roberts began to run up against the same obstacles that had disgusted

⁵⁵ Beckett, "Buller and the Politics of Command," *Boer War*, ed. Gooch, 45.

⁵⁶ Brodrick to the Committee of Supply, *Parliamentary Debates 1901*, 1064–65.

⁵⁷ Since 1898, the War Office Estimate had risen by £10 million, £3.5 million of which since 1900, *ibid.*, 1052.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 1061; Brodrick to Salisbury, 28 October 1900, PRO 30/67/6, Brod. P.; Middleton, *Records & Reactions*, 138.

⁵⁹ Brodrick to the Committee of Supply, *Parliamentary Debates 1901*, 1084, 1088–89.

⁶⁰ Byron Farwell writes that the public preferred Roberts to Wolseley. Farwell, *Great Anglo Boer War*, 318.

Wolseley. Roberts criticized his level of responsibility, arguing that the government's 1895 administrative reforms placed the army's top officer on an equal par with his juniors in command of the military departments. Brodrick understood his concerns, blaming Wolseley's mismanagement and loathing of the system for Roberts' confusion. Brodrick was only willing to take it that far, however, and he begged Roberts not to raise the issue until after Parliament passed the 1901 Estimates. While he did not want to hinder Roberts, he did stress that they had to approach reform realistically.⁶¹

With that issue resolved, Brodrick sought to give his new partner all the responsibility consistent with the office.⁶² What must Brodrick have thought when he read Roberts' comments? In the Commons he announced that he could not imagine a struggle for control between his office and the Commander-in-Chief.⁶³ And yet, here was Roberts raising concerns. Perhaps it seemed that Wolseley, through Roberts, would not let go. Lord Salisbury and Arthur Balfour (the leader in the Commons) sided with the War Secretary, with the Prime Minister telling Brodrick that perhaps Roberts had failed to understand the framework of civilian authority in government. Even if it was not the ideal organization, Salisbury stressed that it was *the* system.⁶⁴ Already, both Balfour and Salisbury had warned the new War Secretary not to become the lackey of the Commander-in-Chief.⁶⁵

By September 1901, frustration led Roberts to offer his resignation. He believed Brodrick could not trust him, and he could not work without Brodrick's confidence. The resignation went nowhere, however, and Roberts remained at Horse Guards. Nevertheless, disillusion had begun to set in.⁶⁶ Just as Roberts believed he could not work with Brodrick, so the War Secretary felt Roberts simply would not appreciate the larger organizational and financial aspects of administering the

⁶¹ Roberts to Brodrick, 26 November 1900, PRO 30/67/6, Brod. P; Brodrick to Roberts, 20 December 1900, 7101/23/13, 13, RP; Brodrick Memorandum, 20 November 1900, CAB 37/53/75, TNA.

⁶² Brodrick to Roberts, 20 December 1900, 7101/23/13, p. 13, RP.

⁶³ Brodrick to the Committee of Supply, *Parliamentary Debates* 1901, 1084.

⁶⁴ Salisbury to Brodrick, 11 January 1901, PRO 30/67/7, Brod. P; 24 January 1901, PRO 30/67/7, *ibid*.

⁶⁵ Arthur Balfour did not want the war secretary to serve simply as the "echo" of the Commander-in-Chief. Balfour to Brodrick, 26 January 1901, BP, Add, MS 49720; Salisbury to Brodrick, 24 January 1901, PRO 30/67/7, Brod. P.

⁶⁶ Roberts to Brodrick, 1 September 1901, 7101/23/13, p. 89, RP; Satre, "St. John Brodrick," 127.

army. The War Office was only one of the ministries the government had to fund. Brodrick respected Roberts' position as Commander-in-Chief. In return, he wanted Roberts to understand a War Secretary's responsibilities.⁶⁷

The war's end in May 1902 did not improve their working relationship. Roberts could not move beyond the fact that, like Wolseley, he found himself hemmed in as Commander-in-Chief. It was not the army's fault that inefficiency continued, even as Brodrick sought reform. Rather, it was the fault of the War Office system. Under the current organization, Roberts argued he was no better than the head of the War Secretary's staff. With no power or responsibility it was better that the system be abolished all together.⁶⁸

It is profoundly ironic that Roberts found himself suffering from a lack of activity and responsibility at Horse Guards. He believed that his, unlike Wolseley's, was the best method of command for the army. Wolseley had become a decrepit figure at the War Office. His lambastes against Lansdowne and the entire parliamentary system placed him at odds with the standard operating procedure in Whitehall and Pall Mall. With such attacks fueled by a disregard for anything other than military administration, Wolseley painted himself into a corner from which there was no honorable escape. Alternatively, Roberts believed that he possessed the clarity of vision finally to reform the army. The South African experience had provided him with the momentum of success to carry him through a successful term of command. Yet, upon his return, the new Commander-in-Chief began his own journey down the same difficult road. In answering complaints about his lack of responsibility, Brodrick attempted to assuage the Commander-in-Chief with examples of what Roberts had already accomplished at Horse Guards, while simultaneously defending the government's position as the *final* authority.⁶⁹

Brodrick argued later that Roberts could not understand that decisions were not up to him and the War Secretary solely. Instead, the War Office had to consider cabinet and parliamentary opinion. Furthermore, when rumors of pending organizational reforms suggested

⁶⁷ Surridge, *Managing the South African War, 1899–1902: Politicians v. Generals* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1998), 137, 140–41.

⁶⁸ Roberts to Brodrick, 5 September 1903, PRO 30/67/11, Brod. P.

⁶⁹ Middleton, *Records & Reactions*, 151; Surridge, *Managing the South African War*, 67; Hamer, *British Army*, 193–95.

drastic alterations at the War Office (including the abolition of the office of Commander-in-Chief), Brodrick found it difficult to defend the Commander-in-Chief's position when Roberts continually rebelled against War Office and parliamentary practices. Roberts in fact did appreciate the constraints under which the ministry operated, yet he demanded that more be done to aid the War Office in its present form of organization. While this was the nature of civil administration of military affairs, Roberts came to share the same view by which Wolseley had surveyed his tenure at Horse Guards. Later, he would admit as much to Brodrick after the War Secretary had departed Pall Mall. While the colleagues would part company on friendly terms, the fallout from their contentious professional relationship sealed the fate of the War Office's traditional mode of organization.⁷⁰

Brodrick, a supporter of a strong Commander-in-Chief, was also a firm believer in the present War Office structure, naturally capped by final, absolute civilian authority. Therefore, he intended his reforms to strengthen the *established* system. His support of this status quo would be undermined by two reports published in 1903 and 1904. Generated by the Elgin Commission and the Esher Committee respectively,⁷¹ the reports blasted War Office handling of the South African War and suggested a completely new plan of administration. Included in the Esher report was the replacement of the Commander-in-Chief by a 'chief of the staff.' While Brodrick believed in ultimate civilian control of military matters, he could not accept the Esher Committee's radical reforms.

The official position of Elgin's Royal Commission on the South African War was not to recommend a new scheme for the army's organization. However, that did not stop Esher from placing his own addendum into the commission's report. In this summary, Esher condemned the lack of coordination between War Office departments that hindered the War Secretary's position of ultimate responsibility. This conclusion would have been perfect for supporting Brodrick's position, were it not that Esher went on to suggest that the only option

⁷⁰ Midleton, *Records & Reactions*, 152, 155; Roberts to Brodrick, 4 October 1903, PRO 30/67/11, Brod. P; Roberts to Brodrick, 20 February 1902, 7101/23/124/2, p. 121, RP; 8 December 1902, 7101/23/124/3, p. 663, *ibid.*; 16 July 1903, 7101/23/124/4, *ibid.*; Brodrick to Roberts, 4 September 1903, 7101/23/13, p. 339, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Lord Elgin chaired the Royal Commission on the South African War, a body investigating the War Office's preparation for the South African War. Edward VII and Balfour prompted a member of Elgin's team, Lord Esher, to create his own War Office Reconstitution Committee to analyze the reform of the War Office.

available to reformers was a reorganization of the War Office along the lines of the Admiralty.⁷² The Admiralty Board comprised the four Sea Lords, each one responsible for one section of naval administration.⁷³ Unlike the Army Board with the Commander-in-Chief as its recognized leader, each Sea Lord was equal to his peers, all of whom reported to the navy's civilian head, the First Lord of the Admiralty. The idea was quite similar to Hartington's general staff recommendation, and Esher believed this type of arrangement was infinitely better suited to smooth War Office operations.

Esher backed up his proposition, arguing that the Admiralty always had more success appealing to the Chancellor and Parliament.⁷⁴ He was perfectly correct, yet as far as Brodrick was concerned, it spelled the end of the system Brodrick and Roberts had worked so hard to defend. In September 1903, Brodrick resigned from the War Office,⁷⁵ and he soon took up residence in Whitehall as the new Secretary of State for India. After the creation of the general staff in early 1904, Roberts was forced out of office.⁷⁶

Once again, the reality of the conflict raging in the War Office was that both the War Secretary and the Commander-in-Chief battled for control of war administration. In the case of Wolseley, his position suffered when his men, White and Buller, could not apply tactical theory and conjecture to the reality of warfare against the Boers. Wolseley shifted the blame elsewhere, yet as far as the civilians were concerned, it was the Commander-in-Chief's team, those high-ranking professionals

⁷² Brodrick to Kitchener, 26 June 1902, Kitchener Papers [hereafter KP], PRO 30/57/22 Y/157, TNA; "Military Preparations and other matters connected with the War in South Africa," WO 163/611/533; "Reconstruction of the War Office," 1904, WO 163/611/555.

⁷³ The Fourth Sea Lord administered supply; the Third Sea Lord handled ship construction; the Second Sea Lord oversaw personnel; the First Sea Lord directed operations in peacetime and wartime.

⁷⁴ James Lees-Milne, *The Enigmatic Edwardian: The Life of Reginald, 2nd Viscount Esher* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson Ltd., 1986), 144–45.

⁷⁵ Brodrick to Roberts, 29 September 1903, 7101/23/13, p. 357, RP.

⁷⁶ The Hartington Commission suggested abolishing the office of commander in chief and replacing it with a general staff, "Naval and Military Administration," 1889–1890, WO 163/610/358; Spenser Wilkinson, *War and Policy* (New York: n.p., 1900), 283; Luvaas, *Education of an Army*, 260. The Army Order announcing Roberts' retirement was published in March 1904. Included in it is a message from Edward VII expressing his regret at Roberts' departure. The message also made clear that the office would not be filled again. AO 45, March 1904, *Army Orders, 1904* (London: HMSO, 1905), WO 123/46.

on the ground in South Africa, who had prosecuted this war without producing any of the desired results. Lord Elgin's Royal Commission concluded as much, citing Wolseley's failure to circulate vital military intelligence and develop an effective plan of campaign.⁷⁷ Lansdowne was also a victim of the established system, one which, according to Andrew Porter and Andrew Roberts, was manipulated by Salisbury's steering of state policy and the ministers' quiet acquiescence to the conflict developing with the Boers.⁷⁸ In the chain of command, however, it was Lansdowne, who as a supporter of the constitutional relationship, came to represent (at least to Wolseley) all that was rotten in civilian administration. Had Wolseley been fully responsible for the army's situation, all battalions would have had their full complement of men, and the army always would have been well-prepared to fight. Britain's army, however, was not militarily administered.

Although it was the government that supported Roberts—first as Buller's replacement, and then as Wolseley's—Roberts could not work within the system. Indeed, Keith Surridge describes the government's desire to wrest control of the war away from the military. Bringing in their man Roberts, enabled them to grasp more firmly the reins of control that Wolseley's men had held and essentially dropped.⁷⁹ The difficulty for Roberts was that once at Horse Guards, he too was compelled to follow the chain of command, a chain that ended with civilian administrators. In Roberts' opinion, the Commander-in-Chief had to exercise a certain degree of authority. If he could not, then Roberts believed that his authority was meaningless. Brodrick reasoned that civilian control was the only option, and within that system, the army could become an excellent fighting force. As a representative of the parliamentary tradition, Brodrick supported it wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, like Wolseley, Roberts found himself at the pinnacle of military command in a profession in which he was the expert, answering to the ultimate authority of the parliamentary system. As he had argued to Brodrick, without the proper ability to carry out his duties,

⁷⁷ RCSAW, pp. 14–23; "Military Preparations and other matters connected with the War in South Africa," WO 163/611/533.

⁷⁸ Andrew Porter, "Lord Salisbury, Mr. Chamberlain and South Africa, 1895–9," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 1 (1972): 3, 16–17, 20; Andrew Roberts, *Salisbury: Victorian Titan* (London: Orion Publishing Group, Ltd., 2006), 726, 730, 732.

⁷⁹ Surridge, *Managing the South African War*, 67; Ibid., "Lansdowne at the War Office," 34.

Roberts believed that the office of Commander-in-Chief should be abolished. This it was, and with it the system that had fostered the growth of anger and recrimination in the administration of Britain's imperial military matters.

What is the connection between military difficulties and War Office administration? The war in South Africa would have occurred regardless of War Office or army practices. Secretaries for war could not design the methods with which the army fought its wars, but the civilians could—with the Commander-in-Chief's support—*perpetuate* their existence. Moreover, War Office inefficiency did not cause the army to fail in the opening months of the war. Rather, the army was responsible for its failures. Regardless of the good that the War Office staff believed it was doing, true military reform would come only with service in the field. That the soldiers successfully adapted to fight what became a guerilla war in two-and-one-half years is evidence that it was the army that was in charge of its military destiny in South Africa. Even as Brodrick and Roberts attempted to modify the work of Lansdowne and Wolseley, the soldiers had to put the lessons to work. Defective War Office administration and army inefficiencies during the South African War contributed to reform in these institutions by illuminating the problems so rampant in both.

The war forced civilian and military reformers to make a fresh analysis of the army's role in national and imperial defense. The vigorous quest for reform and Britain's pledge of military cooperation with France against a growing German threat, fashioned an army and military administration capable of waging war in 1914. The divisions that sailed for France were the best ever to leave Britain. Their abilities in the field throughout the opening months of the Great War proved the army to be a highly effective mobile force, able to check the advance of numerically superior German troops.

In that sense, and with the advantages of hindsight, the war in South Africa was good for both the army and the War Office. Its impact afforded both institutions an opportunity to prepare for an even larger conflict looming on the horizon. In sheer length, the war in South Africa was a short affair. Instead of countless small conflicts with the Boers, Britain fought two relatively short campaigns in the final twenty years of the nineteenth century. The war's conclusion brought a lasting peace. For the army, while the road to victory at times appeared to be a long, drawn-out journey, victory was attained. The difference was that new minds began to grapple with the difficulties of military reform.

This time the mistakes could not be ignored. Rather, they demanded change. It was fortunate for the army that Lansdowne and Brodrick left, that Wolseley retired, and that Roberts was removed. The new century required a new way of thinking about military organization and administration. Fighting the Boers prompted a reshaping of British defense policy.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONFRONTED WITH THE FACTS: WHY THE BOER DELEGATES AT VEREENIGING ACCEPTED A HUMILIATING PEACE TO END THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 31 MAY 1902

Fransjohan Pretorius

The peace treaty of Vereeniging, signed 31 May 1902 by representatives of the two Boer Republics and Great Britain, ended the South African War (Anglo-Boer War) that had been waging over the veldt for two years and eight months. At the meetings of the Free State commandos—who gathered at the end of April and early May to choose delegates for the impending deliberations—“a voice as of thunder” was given for retaining independence.¹ The same sentiment was echoed at similar meetings that occurred in the Transvaal.² In addition, at the first Vereeniging meeting on 15 May, President M. T. Steyn and Generals C. R. de Wet (Free State) and J. H. de la Rey (Transvaal) argued that definite instructions had been given to the delegates stating the Republics’ independence was not open for negotiation.³ Why then did the delegates on 31 May decide with fifty-four votes to six to accept the British peace proposals, costing the Republics their independence?

A missive from Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper to the British government on 25 January 1902 offered the Dutch government’s services as mediator and initiated the peace negotiations. The correspondence was forwarded to Lord Kitchener, the British Commander-in-Chief in South Africa; in turn on 4 March he sent a copy to Acting President of the Transvaal, Schalk Burger.⁴ No copy of the correspondence, however, was sent to the Free State President, M. T. Steyn. Steyn was of the

¹ J. D. Kestell and D. E. van Velden, *The Peace Negotiations between the Governments of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State, and the Representatives of the British Government, which Terminated in the Peace Concluded at Vereeniging on the 31st May, 1902* (London: Richard Clay, 1912), 90.

² W. J. de Kock, “Die Vrede van Vereeniging,” in *Gedenkalbum van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, ed. J. H. Breytenbach, 316 (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1949), 316.

³ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 49.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1–6.

opinion that Kitchener deliberately kept him out of the loop, preferring rather to liaison with the leaders who in the past had been prepared to consider peace, such as occurred in June 1900 prior to the battle of Diamond Hill, and again at Middelburg in February and March 1901. He was also indignant that Burger had broken the agreement that Steyn had concluded with Paul Kruger (then Transvaal president) at the beginning of the war, stipulating that neither Republic should negotiate separately with the British.⁵ Dr. W. J. Leyds, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Transvaal in Europe, later declared from a pro-Afrikaner nationalist point of view that Kitchener knew very well with whom peace talks had to be opened: Schalk Burger, “the most vacillating of the leaders, and not with Steyn, the man who stood firmly.”⁶

Despite the exclusion of Steyn from the initial dialogue, Kuyper’s missive took its course. On 27 March 1902 Steyn received a report from Burger on the issue and the possibility of peace. The Boer governments, assisted by Generals Louis Botha, Christiaan de Wet, and Koos de la Rey, would meet at Klerksdorp in the Western Transvaal to discuss the Dutch offer and the larger issue of peace. This meeting took place between 9 and 11 April under Burger’s chairmanship. Although the participants were deeply divided about initiating negotiations for peace, it appears they supported the preservation of the independence of the Republics.⁷ From the reports by Botha, de Wet, and de la Rey, it is clear that the blockhouse lines—erected in a crisscross pattern over the entire operational area and linked by barbed wire fences due to the constant rail disruptions and Boer attacks on trains—were an obstacle to the military operations of the commandos.⁸ There was also a general shortage of grain, livestock, and horses. Despite these condi-

⁵ N. J. van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn, ‘n Lewensbeskrywing, II* (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1921), 71, 82–83; de Kock, “Die Vrede van Vereeniging,” 308–309.

⁶ W. J. Leyds, *Vierde Verzameling (Correspondentie 1900–1902) Deel I, Eerste Band* (Dordrecht: Geuze, 1934), xlix, translation.

⁷ de Kock, “Die Vrede van Vereeniging,” 309–10.

⁸ When Lord Kitchener took over command from Lord Roberts in November 1900, safeguarding the railway lines had become an urgent necessity because of the need to send supplies to the front by train, despite constant rail disruptions and Boer attacks on trains. Kitchener decided on a system whereby stations and train bridges were to be safeguarded by blockhouse structures. These blockhouses were to be linked by barbed wire fences in a crisscross pattern over the entire operational area. The first were erected in January 1901. By the end of the war there were about eight thousand blockhouses over a distance of 3,700 miles, erected at an estimated cost of £1 million.

tions, the spirit among the burghers was generally fine.⁹ At the suggestion of General J. B. M. Hertzog, legal adviser to the Free State, it was decided to make certain proposals to Kitchener as the basis for further peace negotiations. Perhaps naïvely the preservation of independence remained the bottom line.¹⁰

Between 12 and 17 April the Boer governments negotiated with Kitchener at Melrose House, the British military headquarters in Pretoria. On 14 April they were joined by Lord Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner in South Africa. Milner and Kitchener did not see eye to eye about the subjection of the Republics. Milner desired a total military subjection—the war had to go on until all of the Boer leaders had either turned themselves in or had been captured; otherwise the Boers would still regard them as their political leaders after the war. And Milner had little confidence in Kitchener because he felt that the Commander-in-Chief was too lenient and vague in his concessions.¹¹ On the other hand, Kitchener wanted a speedy end to the war. In fact, his increasing impatience to end the lingering war can chiefly be ascribed to his desire to be available for the appointment as Commander-in-Chief in India. This impatience was illustrated by his forceful application of the scorched earth policy.¹²

To no one's surprise Kitchener immediately rejected the Boer insistence on independence, but Steyn, who by this time was already seriously ill—the psycho-physiological result of continuous stress over a period of almost three years—insisted that the Boer people, and not their governments, should decide on the issue of independence.¹³ The British countered by revisiting the terms of the Middelburg negotiations of 1901. In those meetings between Kitchener and Acting Commandant General Louis Botha, a series of positions were first outlined by the British Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain. Those terms, although rejected by Botha, can be regarded as the most important precursor to

⁹ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 21–23; de Kock, “Die Vrede van Vereeniging,” 311.

¹⁰ de Kock, “Die Vrede van Vereeniging,” 311–12.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 312–13.

¹² S. B. Spies, “Horatio Herbert Kitchener,” in *Dictionary of South African Biography*, II, ed. W. J. de Kock and D. W. Krüger, 368 (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1972), 368.

¹³ Andrew McLeod and Fransjohan Pretorius, “M. T. Steyn se Ervaring van die Anglo-Boereoorlog vanuit ‘n Sielkundige Perspektief” *Historia* 47 (2002): 33–55.

the eventual agreement reached at Vereeniging.¹⁴ They stated that both Republics would lose their independence, that military administration would be replaced by Crown Colony government as soon as possible, followed by representative government and ultimately "the privilege of self-government"; prisoners of war would be brought back to their country as quickly as arrangements could be made for their transport; both the English and Dutch languages would be used and taught in public schools when the parents of children desired it, and allowed in courts of law; loans would be granted to repair injuries sustained by destruction of buildings or loss of stock during the war, and £1 million sterling would be set aside to repay inhabitants for goods requisitioned from them by the late Republican governments or Boer officers in the field; and the qualified vote for black people in the Cape Colony and Natal would not be extended to the former Republics before representative government was granted.¹⁵ Milner and Kitchener modified the terms of Middelburg, and it was agreed that the Boer negotiators would take them to their people.¹⁶

At various meetings with the commandos, the Transvaal and the Free State each elected thirty delegates who convened 15 May at Vereeniging on the banks of the Vaal River.¹⁷ The first issue that had to be resolved was whether the delegates were bound by the mandate that they had received from their commandos, or whether they were plenipotentiaries who could listen to each other's point of view and then vote according to their own conviction. Steyn, de Wet, and de la Rey were of the opinion that they were bound by their mandate. Botha, Burger, and Lukas Meyer did not agree. The assessment of Hertzog, legal adviser to the Free State, decided the issue: each delegate could vote according to his own conviction. Jan Smuts, legal adviser to the Transvaal, concurred fully with the opinion of Hertzog, and it was therefore accepted as a principle.¹⁸ This decision proved vital to the peace negotiations.

For the next three days—15 to 17 May—the military, social, and economic conditions of the Republics were discussed under the chair-

¹⁴ See S. J. du Preez, "Vredesposings gedurende die Anglo-Boereoorlog tot Maart 1901" (M.A. thesis, University of Pretoria, 1976).

¹⁵ L. S. Amery, ed., *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, V (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1907), 188–90; de Kock, "Die Vrede van Vereeniging," 304–306.

¹⁶ de Kock, "Die Vrede van Vereeniging," 313–16.

¹⁷ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 44–45.

¹⁸ Ibid., 50; de Kock, "Die Vrede van Vereeniging," 317–18.

manship of General C. F. Beyers. Botha gave a solemn picture of the situation with regard to grain, slaughter-stock, horses, the limitations the blockhouse lines were placing on his commandos, the threat of black communities against the commandos and the Boer women and children roaming the Transvaal Highveld (see Tables 2 and 4), and the dwindling numbers of burghers on commando.¹⁹ Other speakers, however, were more optimistic. Beyers said that there was sufficient food in the Zoutpansberg district—either from buying or merely taking food from black communities—to support the burghers of both Republics for another year.²⁰ Free State generals C. C. Froneman (representing Winburg and Ladybrand), F. J. W. J. Hattingh (Kroonstad), C. C. J. Badenhorst (Bloemfontein, Boshof and Kroonstad) and T. K. Nieuwoudt (southwestern and southern portion of the Free State). George Brand (Rouxville) and Commandant C. A. van Niekerk (Vredefort) also declared that they had enough food in their districts to continue the struggle for another year.²¹

Botha remained resolute in his dire assessment of the situation. At the evening session of 16 May, he remarked:

It has been said that we must fight ‘to the bitter end[,]’ but no one tells us where that bitter end is... We must not consider the time when everyone lies in his grave as the ‘bitter end[.]’ If we do so, and act upon that view, we become the cause of the death of our people. Is the bitter end not there, where the people have struggled till they can struggle no more?²²

The reaction of de la Rey—who up to this point had been considered an unflinching champion of the continuation of the struggle—can be regarded as a turning point in the discussions. Still, in the evening session of 16 May, he stated that after the success his men had experienced lately, he had definite instructions to stand by the independence. “However,” he continued,

since my arrival, and since I have learnt how matters are situated in other districts, I feel the difficulties that are brought forward against the continuation of the war... It is argued that we must fight to the bitter end. The Commandant-General has asked whether that bitter end has arrived. I think each one must decide that for himself. It must be borne in mind that everything—cattle, goods, money, man, woman and child—has been

¹⁹ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 53–55.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55–56.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 56–58.

²² *Ibid.*, 84.

sacrificed. In my division many people go almost naked. There are men and women who wear nothing more than plain skins on the naked body. Is this not the bitter end? ... Therefore I think that the time for negotiating has now arrived.²³

He added that if they could not obtain from the British government the conditions they desired, he was prepared to fight to the finish.²⁴ With these remarks, de la Rey, who carried significant weight among the delegates, paved the way for peace.

Not all, however, were convinced by Botha and de la Rey. De Wet, for example, remained firm in his conviction that the war must continue. He accepted what had been said about the general misery in so many districts of the Transvaal and the difficulty in keeping up the struggle there. However, he felt that nothing had changed for the worse since the unfortunate correspondence between the Boer governments—which had painted such a negative picture of the Boer situation—fell into enemy hands in the town of Reitz a year before. The Free State, he insisted, did not wish to give up the fight, and it was his obligation to carry out the firm resolution he had been elected as a delegate to deliver: “Continue. We have always been prepared to sacrifice everything for our independence, and are still prepared to do so.” The war, de Wet reckoned, was a matter of faith: “If I had not been able to do so in faith, I would never have taken up arms. Let us again renew our covenant with God. If we fix our eyes on the past we have more ground for our faith than I ever expected, and we have ground to continue in faith.”²⁵

On 17 May a commission consisting of Botha, de Wet, de la Rey, Hertzog, and Smuts was delegated to negotiate with Kitchener in Pretoria about peace and to submit any decision to the delegates at Vereeniging for approval.²⁶ For the next ten days, 19 to 28 May, the discussions shifted to Kitchener’s headquarters at Melrose House in Pretoria. On the first day Milner and Kitchener rejected outright a naïve proposal that F. W. Reitz, State Secretary of the Transvaal, had made at Vereeniging, that the Transvaal should cede part of its territory (i.e., the Witwatersrand goldfields and Swaziland) in exchange for the retention of internal self-government under British supervision. After a discourse with Smuts over the lunch-hour, Milner and Kitchener

²³ Ibid., 88–89.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 91.

²⁶ Ibid., 97.

produced a draft that basically entailed the Middelburg proposals. When a deadlock seemed imminent, it was agreed that Hertzog and Smuts would act as a subcommittee to construct a complete draft with Kitchener and Milner for discussion on 21 May.²⁷

Despite earlier Boer resistance it was in essence the Middelburg proposals that emerged on 21 May. Smuts and Hertzog did, however, succeed in assuring that the Boer leaders would sign the final peace treaty as governments of, respectively, the Transvaal (Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek) and the Orange Free State, thus ensuring that Britain's annexations of the Republics during the war were not recognized. In the subsequent discussion, when Botha, de Wet, and de la Rey were also present, participants negotiated terms for £3 million sterling from the British government to be used as payment for receipts produced by Boer officers from the field. The Boer argument was that these receipts for provisions used by commandos during the war were lawful debts of the country, and that if Britain took possession of the assets of the country—worth millions—she should also be responsible for the debts.²⁸ The £3 million sterling was an improvement on the £1 million sterling offered at Middelburg, but it should be noted that the British scorched earth policy caused more damage to civil possessions in the period March 1901 to May 1902 than the difference of £2 million sterling conceded.

On the same day, 21 May, the draft proposal was telegraphed to the British government. A week later, on 28 May, the response of the British government was submitted to the Boer commission at Melrose House. The document contained ten clauses and the Boer delegates at Vereeniging had to accept or reject them by Saturday evening 31 May with merely a 'yes' or a 'no.' The most important issues were:²⁹

1. The burgher forces in the field would lay down their arms and recognize His Majesty King Edward VII as their lawful sovereign.
2. Burghers in the field and in prisoner-of-war camps who accepted their position as subjects of His Majesty King Edward VII would be brought back to their homes.

²⁷ Ibid., 98–115; de Kock, "Die Vrede van Vereeniging," 319–20.

²⁸ Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame* (London: Methuen, 1903), 319.

²⁹ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 133–35.

3. These burghers would not be deprived of their personal liberty or their property.
4. The Dutch language would be taught in public schools where the parents desired it, and would be allowed in courts of law.
5. Representative government and eventually responsible or self-government would be introduced as soon as circumstances permitted.
6. The question of granting the franchise to black people would not be decided until after the introduction of self-government.
7. £3 million sterling would be made available to support the repatriated and the needy and to pay receipts given by the Boer officers in the field.

Milner also read a separate statement by the British government about the lot of the Cape and Natal rebels. They would be dealt with according to the laws of the colonies, which in effect meant losing the franchise for five years.³⁰

On the morning of 29 May a meeting of both Boer governments was held in the tent of a seriously weakened President Steyn to hear the report of the commission. There they learned that Steyn had to resign his position on account of his serious illness.³¹ To Steyn it was a relief, because his illness prevented him from signing the peace treaty, which meant that he could fulfil his promise of December 1899 not to put his hand to paper whereby the independence would be destroyed.³² In this way a huge stumbling block to acceptance of the British peace conditions was removed.

On the same morning, 29 May, the commission reported to the delegates at Vereeniging, thus entering a final debate lasting three days about the continuation of the war. Schalk Burger explained that they had one of three options:

1. Continue the struggle.
2. Accept the proposal of the British government.
3. Surrender unconditionally.³³

³⁰ Ibid., 136–37, 184.

³¹ Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 324, 326; Ibid., *Christiaan de Wet*, 'n *Lewensbeskrywing* (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1920), 140.

³² van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, II, 103.

³³ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 140.

The first reaction of the delegates was to enquire about technical aspects of the peace conditions. No decisions were made.³⁴ During the lunch break in de Wet's tent, the Free State delegates heard the dramatic news that Steyn had been forced to resign due to his illness and that de Wet had been appointed as acting state president.³⁵

When the three options came up for discussion in the afternoon and evening sessions, it was clear that the Free Staters wanted to continue the struggle, but that the Transvalers were of the opinion that it was a hopeless case. De la Rey again confirmed his viewpoint of accepting the peace conditions. This meeting, he declared, was the end of the war. Men speak of faith. What is faith? Faith is: "Lord, *Thy* will be done—not *my* will to be the victor." He rejected unconditional surrender after all the sacrifices the Boer people had made. Another course was to go on with the struggle. But de la Rey was convinced that if they did that, one district after the other would lay down their arms—would have to lay down their arms—and the war would thus terminate in a dishonorable manner. The only way open was to accept the British conditions, because the Boers at least had obtained something.³⁶

De Wet repeated his standpoint of 16 May, namely that their prospects now differed in no respect from what they had been at the beginning of the war. He spoke fervently and ended with the appeal: "Let us keep up this bitter struggle and say as one man: We persevere—it does not matter how long—but until we obtain the establishment of our independence!"³⁷

The difference of opinion continued in the sessions of 30 May. J. F. Naudé of the Transvaal declared that his burghers had given him definite instructions to tell the Boer governments not to sacrifice independence, and with all respect for the explanation of the legal advisers, he could not vote for the acceptance of the proposals before them. Nothing had changed since Botha had announced at Warmbaths in October 1900, "We have nothing more to lose and everything to gain. Let us thus go on."³⁸ General J. C. G. Kemp endorsed Naudé's standpoint, and objected to the peace conditions. The Dutch language, he said, would be allowed where the parents desired it, but what did that avail against Milner's

³⁴ Ibid., 141–46.

³⁵ Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 327–28.

³⁶ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 156–58.

³⁷ Ibid., 164–68.

³⁸ Ibid., 171–72.

remark to Hertzog, that he wanted only one language in South Africa? The Boers had struggled so long for their independence, but everything was just as dark now as two years ago. "I must carry out my instruction and stand for our independence."³⁹

At the opposite spectrum of thought Botha and Smuts gave signs of their formidable future co-operation. A year ago, Botha, argued, they had taken a resolution at Waterval to continue the war vigorously. What had they gained by it? Twenty thousand women and children had died in the concentration camps, almost half the burghers were prisoners of war, and hundreds of their comrades had been killed on the battlefield. When he spoke at Warmbaths in October 1900 the commando there was 2,000 men strong; now it consisted of only 480 men. The great strength of the Boers always had been that they could keep a commando, however small, in each district, which compelled the British to divide their enormous armies over the entire country. But if they were to give up portions of their country now due to a lack of food, they would have to trek to other parts: "In other words, we must concentrate, and therein lies great danger for us, because that will enable the enemy to concentrate their large forces against us, and our fall will speedily follow." He then decided: If they were convinced that their cause was hopeless, then they had to question whether they had the right to allow one more burgher to be shot. "Our object must be to act in the interest of our people."⁴⁰

Smuts in support declared that hitherto he had not taken part in the discussion, although his views were not unknown to his government. From a military standpoint he had to admit that they could still go on with the struggle. However, they did not only have a military question, but also a national matter to deal with: "We may not sacrifice the Afrikaner people for that independence... The longer we continue, the greater will be the gap between us and the object for which we have fought... Comrades, we decided to stand to the bitter end. Let us now, like men, admit that that end has come for us."⁴¹

Saturday 31 May dawned and dissension still prevailed. Aware of the responsibility to respond to the British peace conditions on that day, de Wet proposed that a commission consisting of Hertzog and Smuts

³⁹ Ibid., 194.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 185–86.

⁴¹ Ibid., 188–91.

draft a proposal embodying the views of the meeting. At the same time the Transvaal and Free State delegates should meet separately in order to try to come to unanimity.⁴²

Since his last speech on the evening of 29 May, de Wet had undergone a spiritual change. In his tent he now pointed out to the Free State delegates that there was no chance of continuing the struggle any longer. He said they ought not to be divided, but if possible should unanimously vote for one resolution. After the war the Reverend J. D. Kestell sympathetically testified of this moment: "I see him yet, that unyielding man, with his piercing eyes, his strong mouth and chin—I see him there still, like a lion fallen into a snare. He will not, he cannot, but he must give up the struggle!"⁴³

Why then, the spiritual change? De Wet was aware of Steyn's last instruction to him that if the Transvalers were to decide on peace and if it was clear that he would not get them to persevere in the struggle, he too then should give way.⁴⁴ The directive must have haunted him; as late as the evening of 29 May he still took the stance for continuation of war. His speech had almost dried up in the course of the next two days as he repositioned himself. The responsibility of the acting presidency weighed heavily on his shoulders, but evidently the turning point came when Botha and de la Rey called on him early on the morning of 31 May and pointed out to him it was plain they could not go on with the struggle. Why should there still be division amongst them, they asked. Eventually de Wet agreed with them.⁴⁵

Fully an hour later the delegates met again and the resolution drafted by Hertzog and Smuts was read. The participants of the meeting, it stated, had with regret taken cognizance of the British peace proposals. They had seriously considered the condition of their country and people, and had especially noted the facts with which they were confronted:

1. The territory of the Republics was entirely devastated by the burning of farms and villages; the destruction of all means of subsistence; and the exhaustion of all sources necessary for the support of the

⁴² Ibid., 202.

⁴³ Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 336.

⁴⁴ van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, 99; de Kock, "Die Vrede van Vereeniging," 324.

⁴⁵ Kestell, *Through Shot and Flame*, 335–36; Ibid., *Christiaan de Wet*, 142.

Boer families, for the existence of the burghers on commando and for the continuation of the war.

2. The women and children in the concentration camps experienced unheard-of condition of suffering, disease, and death.
3. The Boers faced the threat of armed black people as participants in the war.
4. British proclamations threatened to deprive the Boers of their property.
5. The Boers were unable to retain the many thousands of prisoners of war, while the burghers captured by the British were sent out of the country; only an insignificant portion of the original Boer fighting force remained in the field.
6. The struggling remnant had to fight the enemy against overwhelming odds, and was practically in a state of famine and privation; in spite of the application of their utmost endeavors and the sacrifice of all that had been dear and precious to them, they could not reasonably expect ultimate victory.⁴⁶

The conclusion was condemning:

This Meeting is therefore of opinion that there is no reasonable ground to expect that by carrying on the war the People will be able to retain their independence, and considers that, under the circumstances, the People are not justified in proceeding with the war, since such can only tend to the social and material ruin, not only of ourselves, but also of our posterity.

Forced by the above-mentioned circumstances and motives, this Meeting instructs both [Boer] Governments to accept the proposal of His Majesty's Government, and to sign the same on behalf of the People of both the Republics.⁴⁷

Acceptance of this proposal was moved by Commandant H. P. J. Pretorius and seconded by General Chris Botha; if it succeeded they would consent to the British peace proposals and the Republics would lose their independence.

When the meeting assembled at 2 p.m., fifty-four delegates voted for the proposal. De Wet's vote was one of them. Six delegates were against—three Free Staters (General C. C. J. Badenhorst and Commandants

⁴⁶ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 203–204.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 205.

A. J. Bester and C. A. van Niekerk) and three Transvalers (General J. C. G. Kemp, Commandant J. J. Alberts, and Mr. J. F. Naudé).⁴⁸

Burger spoke solemnly in the last meeting of the delegates of the Republics: "We stand here at the graveside of the two Republics... Let us not withdraw our hands from doing what is our duty. Let us pray God to guide us and to direct us how to keep our people together."⁴⁹

Of the emotion C. A. van Niekerk later testified:

What went through my heart at that moment no pen can describe... It was as if the death-bell tolled over us. Nothing was spoken. We just sat there stunned, in deep silence...

There I saw men who had no fear of any bomb or gun and who blithely would make any sacrifice for the retention of our independence, be ready to lay down their lives. But now they were broken, shattered, dumbfounded, their suffering beyond description.⁵⁰

So why did so many delegates reverse their opinions and abandon their charge, and agree to a peace treaty that stripped the Republics of their independence? Hertzog and Smuts had given six reasons in their proposal, but an analysis of the discussions of the delegates reveals a more intricate picture. In his study of citizen armies, Jock Haswell specifically refers to the Boer commandos when he mentions that one of the greatest advantages of guerrilla fighters is probably the affinity with their operational area: "They live off it, feeding at the houses of those who sympathize, or who have been coerced into sympathy, with their cause, and while they have sympathizers, and while there are lonely farmhouses where they can pick up their supplies, they have great freedom of action."⁵¹ However, in the guerrilla phase the Boers no longer had the privileges as described by Haswell. Kitchener's scorched earth policy—whereby all available livestock in the Republics were killed and grain destroyed, women and children were swept away to the concentration camps, and a network of blockhouse lines curbed the movement of the commandos (see Tables 2 and 4)—meant that the Boers, with the winter of 1902 at hand, experienced a serious shortage of supplies. The result was a severe crisis, particularly in the Heilbron district in the Free State and eleven districts in the Eastern and south-eastern

⁴⁸ Ibid., 206.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ H. C. Hopkins, *Maar Eén soos Hy: Die Lewe van Kommandant C. A. van Niekerk* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1963), 142. Translation.

⁵¹ J. Haswell, *Citizen Armies* (London: Peter Davies, 1973), 139.

Transvaal: Bethal, Carolina, Ermelo, Heidelberg, Piet Retief, Lydenburg, Middelburg, Springs, Utrecht, Vryheid, and Wakkerstroom—that is, in half of the Transvaal. Other regions could still get supplies from better-off districts, but because of more efficient blockhouse lines, that was no longer possible in the Transvaal.⁵² During the discussions Botha repeated what General P. R. Viljoen had said, namely that if, due to a lack of food supplies, the Boers were to abandon eleven districts, as they would have to do shortly, that would mean the concentration of their forces, which would give the British an opportunity of doing the same, with disastrous consequences for the Boer forces.⁵³

Another related reason for the decision to surrender was the growing threat that armed black communities posed to the commandos. By the end of the war the British army had employed—in addition to a large numbers of white soldiers—at least ten thousand and probably as many as thirty thousand armed blacks against the roughly twenty thousand burghers in the field.⁵⁴ The Boers could not ignore their presence as a military factor. Also, black people in tribal areas within and adjacent to the Republics were a serious threat to the burghers on commando. This danger applied particularly to the densely populated belt extending from the Western Transvaal through Northwest and Northern Transvaal to the Eastern and Southeastern Transvaal, which included mainly Tswana, Pedi, and Zulu people. The blacks not only made their own areas inaccessible to the commandos, but also appropriated white occupied territory, thus further restricting the mobility of the commandos, which had already been heavily curtailed by Kitchener's drives between the blockhouse lines. Besides, these remote areas had previously been used by the commandos to keep livestock and cultivate secret fields, so that the Boer force's supplies situation was also affected. Finally, the black communities were a direct military threat to the Boers, as several attacks on isolated commandos proved. The killing at Holkrans of fifty-six burghers of the Vryheid Commando by a Qulusi impi on the night of 5 May 1902, shortly before the talks at Vereeniging, had made a deep impression on the concerned Boer delegates.⁵⁵

⁵² Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 67, 70, 85; Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1977), 86.

⁵³ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 67, 85.

⁵⁴ Fransjohan Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899–1902* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 1999), 267.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 276–78; Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?* 291–92; Peter Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Cambridge: University Press, 1983), 90–93, 100–101.

As can be seen from Tables 2 and 4, another reason for assenting to peace was the extremely dangerous position of Boer women and children who roamed the veldt in female laagers or even smaller groups. Clearly Hertzog and Smuts made a mistake not to mention in their formal document the situation of these wandering women and children as one cause for surrender, particularly in view of the fact that at Vereeniging, Botha had described their state as "truly... the saddest thing with which he had to do in this war."⁵⁶ Their dilemma was tied to two previously observed reasons, since the scorched earth policy meant that these families, with great difficulty, had to find their own subsistence on the veldt or had to be supplied by the commandos, while armed black groups threatened and sometimes attacked them. These families' hardships were exacerbated in 1902, since after December 1901 Boer women and children were no longer admitted to concentration camps, yet the British columns continued to destroy homesteads and crops and kill livestock, thus making life even harder on the veldt. At the time of the peace discussions, there were still some twelve to fourteen thousand Boer women and children in the veldt, ten thousand of them in the Transvaal, and between two and four thousand in the Free State.⁵⁷

The suffering and deaths of Boer women and children in concentration camps was yet another reason for the Boer leaders to settle for peace. Although there was no mention of this in the preliminary talks at Klerksdorp between 9 and 11 April 1902, the delegates at Vereeniging, as S. B. Spies has shown, expressed great concern about the matter. In fact, since August 1901 they had lodged several protests about the situation with Kitchener. Some speakers at Vereeniging also expressed concern about the harmful moral influences to which Boer women were exposed in the camps.⁵⁸ Apart from a remark by President Steyn in his reminiscences, which could have been added with hindsight, no evidence can be found that the Boer leaders and burghers were aware that the mortality rate in the camps had declined after October 1901.⁵⁹ In October 1901 there were 3,205 deaths; in November 2,926; in December 2,572; in January 1902 the number fell to 1,477; and in

⁵⁶ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 54.

⁵⁷ Pretorius, *Life on Commando*, 309; Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?* 290–91.

⁵⁸ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 85, 93, 162, 175, 178, 189, 196, 198–99; Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?* 289–90.

⁵⁹ Pretorius, *Life on Commando*, 305; Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?* 287–89; van der Merwe, *Marthinus Theunis Steyn*, 87.

February 1902 there were only 628 deaths in the camps.⁶⁰ Even if the leaders had been aware of this decline, the figure would still have been unacceptably high. To a nation aware that it was fighting for its survival, any further large-scale deaths would be considered disastrous.

At Vereeniging the hope of foreign intervention to end the war and assure the Republics' independence was finally abandoned.⁶¹ This realization underscored another reason why the Boer leaders were prepared to accept the unfavorable peace terms, namely the knowledge that Britain could not be vanquished in war by the dwindling Boer forces alone. The military activities of commandos, particularly in the Southern and Southeastern Transvaal, had dropped to a point where fleeing from enemy columns and hunting for food were their main functions.⁶²

The adverse effect of the condition of the Boer horses (See Tables 1 and 3)—and the consequent pedestrians—on the Boers' war effort during the guerrilla phase should also be mentioned. In the talks at Vereeniging, Botha announced that in the entire Transvaal there were 10,816 men on commando at that stage, of whom 3,296 were pedestrians.⁶³ Thus by the end of the war 30.5 percent of the Transvaal forces were on foot—almost double the 15.5 percent figure for the commandos of Pretoria, Middelburg, Bethal, Krugersdorp, Ermelo, and Wakkerstroom at the outbreak of the war.⁶⁴ The crippling effect on the war effort of such a large number of stationary pedestrians in the guerrilla phase, when mobility was vital, was evident in de la Rey's observation: "Without a horse the Boer is useless as a fighter. Often we tried to have them fight on foot, but no officer ever succeeded, so for us the loss of a horse meant the loss of a man and every horse taken from the enemy meant another Boer on the battlefield."⁶⁵

Another problem was the shortage of arms and particularly ammunition among the burghers during the guerrilla phase. Since during this phase the Boers were dependent on loot from British arsenals, unsuc-

⁶⁰ E. Hobhouse, *Die Smarte van die Oorlog en Wie dit Gely Het* (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers, 1941), Appendix C, p. 408; Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?* 254.

⁶¹ du Preez, "Die Vrede van Vereeniging" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pretoria, 1986), 256–62, 428.

⁶² du Preez, "Die Vrede van Vereeniging," 446.

⁶³ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 54–55.

⁶⁴ Pretorius, *Life on Commando*, 340.

⁶⁵ Transvaal Archives Depot [hereafter TAD], Accession A547, General J. H. de la Rey Collection, Reminiscences of de la Rey, pp. 104–105. Translation.

cessful and infrequent military operations implied a lack of ammunition to launch the attacks that were essential for military victory. In regard to ammunition as well, the shortage was particularly acute in the Eastern Transvaal and, on his admission, cost Botha sleepless nights.⁶⁶ By late January 1902 ammunition was so scarce in this region that Ben Viljoen confessed to Botha that they would rather flee than fight.⁶⁷ The result was a widespread absence of military activity, which in turn had a demoralizing effect on the Boers.

After the voting on the afternoon of 31 May the members of both republican governments travelled to Pretoria by train. Shortly before 11 p.m. that evening they arrived at Melrose House, where they were left alone in the spacious dining room to read the resolution of the delegates once more. Thereupon Kitchener and Milner entered the room and took their seats at the head of the table next to each other, with the Transvaal leaders on Milner's left-hand side and the Free State leaders on Kitchener's right. It was five minutes past eleven when Acting President Burger signed first. Then it was State Secretary Reitz's turn. Before signing he rose from his seat, pen in hand, and dramatically stated that he signed only in his official capacity, and not as F. W. Reitz. Then Botha signed, followed by de la Rey, General Lukas Meyer, and J. C. Krogh at the end of the table.

The document was shifted across to Acting President de Wet. Even Milner understood the tremendous pressure put upon the men in the room, and in particular, de Wet, to sign a document to which they strongly objected: "If anything could make me relent towards Boers, it was the faces of some of the men who sat round the table to-night. There was no mistaking the fact that some of them felt it deeply, with all their characteristic self-possession."⁶⁸ After de Wet, Hertzog signed, then Acting Government Secretary W. J. C. Brebner. General C. H. Olivier was the last Boer leader to sign. Finally, Kitchener signed as "Kitchener of Khartoum," and Milner only as "Milner."⁶⁹

Moving are the closing minutes of the proceedings:

⁶⁶ TAD, Accession A787, Dr. G. S. Preller Collection, 11, Letter, L. Botha—J. C. Smuts, 14.2.1901, p. 80.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 34, Letter, B. J. Viljoen—L. Botha, 23.1.1902, p. 116.

⁶⁸ C. Headlam, ed., *The Milner Papers, South Africa 1899–1905, II* (London: Cassell, 1933), Letter, Milner—Friend, 31.5.1902, p. 365; de Kock, "Die Vrede van Vereeniging," 325.

⁶⁹ Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*, 207.

The document was signed.

Everything was silent in the apartment where so much had taken place. For a few moments everyone sat still.

As the members of the Governments of the now late Republics stood up, as men stupefied, to leave the apartment, Lord Kitchener rose, and, going up to each of them, offered his hand, saying "We are good friends now." They then left the apartment."⁷⁰

Table 1^{*71} Free State Reports at Klerksdorp and Vereeniging

Districts and Delegates	Grain	Livestock	Horses
Bethlehem (A. M. Prinsloo)	No complaints	Plentiful	
Bloemfontein (A. J. Bester)			Each burgher at least 22
Bloemfontein – NW (C. C. J. Badenhorst)	Enough to help others	Sufficient for 1 year	
Bloemfontein – SW (T. K. Nieuwoudt)	Little	Little	Excellent condition
Boshof (C. C. J. Badenhorst)	Enough to help others	Sufficient for 1 year	
Fauresmith (T. K. Nieuwoudt)	Only 70 sacks	Nothing	Excellent condition
Ficksburg (A. M. Prinsloo)	No complaints	Plentiful	
Frankfort (W. Wessels)	Available	Are capturing; sufficient for 3 months	
Harrismith (W. Wessels)	Available	Are capturing; sufficient for 3 months	
Heilbron (F. E. Mentz)	Small quantity of mealies	Only 5 head of cattle	Bad; no fodder
Heilbron (J. A. P. v. d. Merwe)		Little; are capturing; can hold out for 1 year	

⁷⁰ Ibid., 208. The minute holders err with the sequence in which the members of the Transvaal and Free State governments sat and signed. See a photograph of the signatures in Pretorius, ed., *Scorched Earth* (Cape Town: Human and Rousseau, 2001), 33.

⁷¹ As can be seen in Tables 1 and 3, it appeared that a lack of grain and livestock was particularly critical in the Eastern and Southeastern Transvaal and the Free State district of Heilbron. As can be seen from Tables 2 and 4, one reason for assenting to peace was the extremely dangerous position of Boer women and children who roamed the veld in female laagers or even smaller groups.

Table (cont.)

Districts and Delegates	Grain	Livestock	Horses
Heilbron (F. J. W. J. Hattingh)	Completely exhausted; obtain from Bethlehem	Completely exhausted; obtain from Bethlehem	
Hoopstad (D. F. H. Flemming)		Little; game available	
Jacobsdal (T. K. Nieuwoudt)	Little	Little	Excellent condition
Kroonstad (F. J. W. J. Hattingh)	Sufficient for 1 year	Sufficient for 1 year	
Kroonstad – W (C. C. J. Badenhorst)	Enough to help others	Sufficient for 1 year	
Ladybrand (C. C. Froneman)	Sufficient for 1 year	Sufficient	
Philippolis (T. K. Nieuwoudt)	Little	Little	Excellent condition
Rouxville (G. A. Brand)	Little; are capturing; can hold out for 1 year	Little; are capturing; can hold out for 1 year	
Vrede (W. Wessels)	Available	Are capturing; sufficient for 3 months	
Vredefort (C. A. van Niekerk)		Little; are capturing; sufficient for 1 year	
Winburg (C. C. Froneman)	Sufficient for 1 year	Sufficient	

Table 2* Free State Reports at Klerksdorp and Vereeniging (Continued)

Districts and Delegates	Black People	Blockhouse Lines	Boer Families
Bethlehem (A. M. Prinsloo)		Prevent distribution of food	
Bloemfontein (A. J. Bester)			
Bloemfontein – NW (C. C. J. Badenhorst)			
Bloemfontein – SW (T. K. Nieuwoudt)			Only 3 women in Blftn SW, Fsmth, Jacdal and Phpolis
Boshof (C. C. J. Badenhorst)			

Table (*cont.*)

Districts and Delegates	Black People	Blockhouse Lines	Boer Families
Fauresmith (T. K. Nieuwoudt)			Only 3 women in Blftn SW, Fsmth, Jacdal and Phpolis
Ficksburg (A. M. Prinsloo)		Prevent distribution of food	
Frankfort (W. Wessels)			
Harrismith (W. Wessels)			
Heilbron (F. E. Mentz)		Major problem	200 families; biggest problem
Heilbron (J. A. P. v. d. Merwe)	A problem		
Heilbron (F. J. W. J. Hattingh)			
Hoopstad (D. F. H. Flemming)			
Jacobsdal (T. K. Nieuwoudt)			Only 3 women in Blftn SW, Fsmth, Jacdal and Phpolis s
Kroonstad (F. J. W. J. Hattingh)			
Kroonstad – W (C. C. J. Badenhorst)			
Ladybrand (C. C. Froneman)	Exceptionally peaceful; clothing from Basutoland		80 families
Philippolis (T. K. Nieuwoudt)			Only 3 women in Blftn SW, Fsmth, Jacdal and Phpolis s
Rouxville (G. A. Brand)		A problem	Only 9 women
Vrede (W. Wessels)			
Vredefort (C. A. van Niekerk)		A problem	
Winburg (C. C. Froneman)	Exceptionally peaceful		

Table 3* Transvaal Reports at Klerksdorp and Vereeniging

Districts and Delegates	Grain	Livestock	Horses
Bethal (H. S. Grobler)	Nothing	Nothing	Very weak
Bloemhof (J. F. de Beer)	Not plentiful	Not plentiful	28% pedestrians
Carolina (J. L. Grobler)	Sufficient for 2-3 months	Sufficient	Weak
Ermelo (J. N. H. Grobler)	Sufficient for 2-3 months	Sufficient	Very weak
Heidelberg (H. A. Alberts)	Nothing	Nothing; receive from Free State	Very weak
Krugersdorp (J. C. G. Kemp)	Nothing	Little	
Lichtenburg (J. G. Celliers)	Plentiful	Plentiful	Good
Lydenburg (D. J. Schoeman)	Nothing	Nothing	
Middelburg (south of railway) (J. de Clercq)	Little	Nothing	Very weak
Middelburg (north of railway) (C. H. Muller)	Sufficient for 1 month	Sufficient for 2 months	Very weak
Piet Retief (C. Botha)	Sufficient for 2 months	Nothing	Very weak
Potchefstroom (P. J. Liebenberg)	Nothing		20% pedestrians
Pretoria (south of railway) (D. J. Opperman)	Nothing	Nothing; obtain from Free State	Very weak
Pretoria (north of railway) (P. L. Uys)	Sufficient for 1 month	Sufficient	50% pedestrians
Standerton (C. J. Brits)	Nothing	Nothing	Very weak
Swaziland (C. Botha)	Almost nothing	Nothing	
Utrecht (B. H. Breitenbach)	Nothing	Fair	
Vryheid (C. Birkenstock & J. F. Jordaan)	Scarce	Nothing	Scarce; very weak
Wakkerstroom (H. J. Bosman)	Sufficient for 2 months; serious	Almost nothing	Very weak
Waterberg (C. F. Beyers)	Abundance	Abundance	Horse-sickness

Table (*cont.*)

Districts and Delegates	Grain	Livestock	Horses
Wolmaransstad (S. P. du Toit)	Scarce	Good	Very weak
Zoutpansberg (C. F. Beyers)	Abundance	Abundance	Horse-sickness

Table 4* Transvaal Reports at Klerksdorp and Vereeniging (Continued)

Districts and Delegates	Black People	Blockhouse lines	Boer Families
Bethal (H. S. Grobler)	Hostile; armed	Major problem	300 people; piteous
Bloemhof (J. F. de Beer)			Serious privation
Carolina (J. L. Grobler)	Hostile; armed	Major problem	Pitiable conditions
Ermelo (J. N. H. Grobler)	Hostile; armed	Major problem	Pitiable conditions
Heidelberg (H. A. Alberts)		Major problem	
Krugersdorp (J. C. G. Kemp)		Major problem	
Lichtenburg (J. G. Celliers)		Major problem	
Lydenburg (D. J. Schoeman)	Hostile; armed	Major problem	Critical
Middelburg (south of railway) (J. de Clercq)		Major problem	50 families; critical
Middelburg (north of railway) (C. H. Muller)	Hostile		Threatened by armed black people
Piet Retief (C. Botha)	Hostile; armed	Major problem	65 families; critical
Potchefstroom (P. J. Liebenberg)		Major problem	93 families + Free State families; pitiable
Pretoria (south of railway) (D. J. Opperman)		Major problem	Lack of food
Pretoria (north of railway) (P. L. Uys)	Hostile		
Standerton (C. J. Brits)	Hostile; armed	Major problem	
Swaziland (C. Botha)		Major problem	

Table (*cont.*)

Districts and Delegates	Black People	Blockhouse lines	Boer Families
Utrecht (B. H. Breytenbach)	Hostile; armed	Major problem	
Vryheid (C. Birkenstock & J. F. Jordaan)	Hostile	Major problem	Critical
Wakkerstroom (H. J. Bosman)	Hostile	Major problem	Critical
Waterberg (C. F. Beyers)	Relatively amicable	Major problem	
Wolmaransstad (S. P. du Toit)		Major problem	500 families
Zoutpansberg (C. F. Beyers)	Hostile		

* Information for tables from Kestell and van Velden, *Peace Negotiations*.

THE ROLE OF OFFICERS IN AFRICA

CHAPTER NINE

MANIPULATING THE MODERN CURSE OF ARMIES: WOLSELEY, THE PRESS, AND THE ASHANTI WAR, 1873–1874

Ian F. W. Beckett

The Ashanti (Asante) War of 1873–1874 was arguably the first Victorian colonial campaign to really catch the public's imagination, and certainly the first to do so in the post-Cardwellian period. In the process it made a household name of the then Major General Sir Garnet Wolseley, the model for "the very model of a modern Major General" in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*. Moreover, while the origins of the Wolseley Ring, or the 'Mutual Admiration Society,' as its critics knew it, can be traced to the Red River Campaign of 1870, it was Ashanti that firmly established it. In wider terms, too, the campaign has been seen as a significant episode in the shifting dynamics of British policy towards West Africa in particular, and towards empire and the projection of military power in general. Consequently, for all these reasons the campaign is an especially significant one, but it is also instructive in terms of the way in which Wolseley set out to project his part in the campaign to the public and his dealings with the press, whom it will be recalled he had characterized in *The Soldier's Pocket Book* in 1869 as "those newly invented curses to armies."¹ He was certainly well aware of the consequences of adverse publicity, writing to his wife, Louisa ('Loo'), in October 1873 of "how coarse will be the abuse... if I prove a failure here," and to his brother, Richard, in November 1873 that

¹ Quotations from The Royal Archives appear by gracious permission of Her Majesty the Queen. Quotations from Crown copyright material in The National Archives (Public Record Office) appear by permission of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. The author also acknowledges his thanks to the following for allowing him to consult and quote from archives in their possession and/or copyright: The Earl and Countess of Wemyss and March; Henry Parker Esq.; The Royal Pavilion Libraries and Museums (Hove Reference Library); the National Army Museum; The National Library of Scotland; The National Archives of Scotland; the Bodleian Library; and Cambridge University Library. Garnet Wolseley, *The Soldier's Pocket Book* (1869; repr., London: Macmillan, 1886), 178–80.

the press could easily “turn round and abuse me as roundly as it had previously lavished unmerited praise upon me.”²

After briefly summarizing the campaign, this chapter will examine first, Wolseley’s relations with the press on the Gold Coast; second, the means available to Wolseley to influence opinion; and third, how Wolseley manipulated the image of one particular aspect of the campaign, namely transport problems.

Britain had maintained coastal enclaves in West Africa since the seventeenth century, exercising a loose protectorate in the Gold Coast over the Fante tribes. The powerful Asante kingdom, which periodically raided into Fante territory, proved to be a serious threat to British interests. Indeed, the British Governor of the Gold Coast, Sir Charles McCarthy, had metaphorically and literally lost his head leading a small Fante expedition into Asante territory earlier in January 1824 in response to a perceived threat. A second abortive expedition in 1863–1864 was brought to a halt by disease. Under an agreement of 1867, the British swapped some of its possessions on the Gold Coast with the Dutch, a move intended to consolidate interests and save money, but that ultimately deprived some of the Fante of British protection. Some Fante resisted the imposition of Dutch rule and also attacked Elmina, a coastal ally of the Asante. The Asante invaded Fante territory in response in December 1872.³

British reinforcements were sent out in May 1873, principally marines and West Indian troops, and on 2 August, a former naval officer, John Glover, who had previously served as Administrator at Lagos, was dispatched to raise the eastern tribes of the Volta region against the Asante. On 13 August it was decided that more forces were needed and Wolseley, then an Assistant Adjutant General at the War Office, was authorized to raise local indigenous forces and lead them against the Asante, simultaneously securing the release of some European missionaries detained by the Asante since 1869 and obtaining an indemnity and a lasting agreement. Wolseley set out with thirty-six special service officers in September 1873, but from the beginning he believed that

² Wolseley Mss, W/P 3/9, Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 17–26 October 1873, Hove Reference Library [hereafter Hove]; Ibid., 163/4/24, Wolseley to Richard Wolseley, 3 November 1873.

³ The general background can be found in W. David McIntyre, *The Imperial Frontier in the Tropics, 1865–75* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 77–151 and idem, “British Policy in West Africa: The Ashanti Expedition of 1873–74” *Historical Journal* 5 (1962): 19–46.

only British battalions could do the job and only by marching on the Asante capital at Kumase. Indeed, as the Secretary of State for War, Edward Cardwell, and the Colonial Secretary, the Earl of Kimberley, had expected all along, Wolseley asked for three battalions almost as soon as he arrived. Initially, he undertook a number of local actions along the coast in October 1873 with those forces already available to him, forcing the Asante army, already weakened by disease, to retire from the coast.⁴

Wolseley spent much of November and early December making extensive and meticulous preparations to overcome the formidable logistical obstacles—dense jungle and innumerable watercourses—before the arrival of the British troops. As Wolseley noted to his wife in December 1873, he seemed “always to be condemned to command in expeditions which must be accomplished before a certain season of the year begins,” in this case before the onset of the rains, which meant he could keep British troops on shore for a maximum of only six weeks to minimize the risks of disease.⁵ The advance on Kumase began in January 1874 with Wolseley rejecting various entreaties received from the Asante King or Asantehene, Kofi Karikari. A sharp action was fought at Amofo on 31 January and another at Odaso on 4 February 1874, before Wolseley was able to occupy a deserted Kumase. It became increasingly clear that there was no one with whom to negotiate, and Wolseley abandoned Kumase on 6 February after destroying as much as possible. He returned his force to the coast as quickly as practical. On 13 February Asante envoys arrived at Wolseley’s camp to negotiate a treaty. The subsequent Treaty of Fomena included an indemnity, renunciation of claimed Asante sovereignty over coastal and some inland tribes, and the promised suppression of human sacrifice in Asante. Although Wolseley had retired precipitately it was certainly a heavy blow to the Asante, with Kofi Karikari being ousted later that year and the kingdom reduced to chaos.

Wolseley’s expedition cost just sixty-eight dead and 394 wounded among the 2,587 European troops involved, including seven dead

⁴ General accounts of the Ashanti expedition can be found in Alan Lloyd, *The Drums of Kumasi: The Story of the Ashanti Wars* (London: Longmans, 1964), 65–152; John Keegan, “The Ashanti Campaign, 1873–74,” in *Victorian Military Campaigns*, ed. Brian Bond, 163–78 (London: Hutchinson, 1967); and Bruce Vandervort, *Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830–1914* (London: UCL Press, 1998), 84–101.

⁵ Wolseley Mss, W/P 3/17, Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 16 December 1873, Hove; WO 147/3, Wolseley journal, 4 January 1874, The National Archives [hereafter TNA].

among Wolseley's special service officers. In addition 1,018 men had been invalided, representing 43 percent of the white personnel. Thus, although invariably regarded as a model campaign in terms of proving the ability to use white troops in the tropics, the sickness rates were still high. In financial terms, it cost a modest £767,093. Wolseley hoped for a peerage, but he was awarded the GCMG and the KCB, received appointment as Inspector General of Auxiliary Forces, promotion to substantive major general, and a parliamentary grant of £25,000. He had turned down the GCB on the grounds that it might give offence to more senior officers—and a baronetcy, because it appeared to be a reward for "common people," such as the Duke of Devonshire's gardener.⁶

Press interest in the campaign was considerable, with the number of correspondents accompanying it substantial, including Winwood Reade of *The Times*; the later prolific children's author, G. A. Henty of *The Standard*; Frederick Boyle of the *Daily Telegraph*; and Henry Morton Stanley—who had recently made his own reputation through the discovery of Livingstone at Ujiji in October 1871—of *The New York Herald*. The Crimean War had been effectively the first British campaign covered in the new more popular national press and had established the pattern, but there had been little British military conflict of note since the Abyssinian campaign of 1867–1868. It was always likely, therefore, that the first supposed test of the army following Cardwell's reforms would attract attention. Moreover, since the widening of the franchise in 1867, politicians were also increasingly attuned to the requirement to take public opinion more into account. In keeping with the views he had expressed in *The Soldier's Pocket Book*, however, Wolseley had little time for any of them. Reade was a "debilitated mute," while Henty was "without any pretence to being a gentleman." Boyle was a dangerously radical republican and, of Melton Prior, the war artist of *The Illustrated London News*, Wolseley observed at one point, "This correspondent is a...and has never been..." the epithets being unfortunately excised irretrievably by Wolseley's daughter when she reviewed his correspondence in the 1920s.⁷ Prior had not covered a war before, and neither had Reade and Boyle, although both the latter were experienced foreign

⁶ Wolseley Mss, 163/4/26ii, Wolseley to Mother, 30 March 1873, Hove; Cambridge Mss, VIC/ADDE/1/7352, Hardy to Cambridge, 25 March 1874, Royal Archives [hereafter RA].

⁷ WO 147/3, Wolseley journal, 18 September and 30 October 1873, TNA; Wolseley Mss, W/P 4/3, Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 4 January 1874, Hove.

travellers. One of Wolseley's protégés, George Colley, considered Reade "not so good as some of the others," although always "well to the front and probably saw more than any other."⁸ Henty, however, had served in the Crimea with the Commissariat, and Stanley had previously reported the expedition to Abyssinia in 1867–1868, as well as serving on both sides in the American Civil War.

Curiously, Stanley is not mentioned in either Wolseley's journal or letters, and it was only in 1903 that Wolseley included an approving account of Stanley's conduct at Amoafo in the second volume of his autobiography, *The Story of a Soldier's Life*: "I can still see before me the close-shut lips and determined expression of his manly face which—when he looked in my direction—told plainly I had near me an Englishman in plain clothes whom no danger could appal."⁹ It can be noted in passing that Wolseley, who was himself Anglo-Irish, tended to use the term English fairly indiscriminately. In reality, when one of Wolseley's officers, George Huyshe, remarked to Stanley that they were fellow Welshmen, Stanley pointedly said he was not Welsh but American.¹⁰ If seeing Stanley in action did change Wolseley's view, he made no mention of it at the time, his contemporary letter to Loo remarking, "I had those horrid newspaper correspondents round me—most of them were in a blue funk all day, and whenever the enemy approached very near us and the firing around us became very hot, I used to catch their eyes watching mine to see if I was in a funk. I whistled, sang snatches of songs, sauntered again and I hope looked thoroughly unconcerned although in my heart I was anxious once or twice during the day in a manner that I have never felt before."¹¹

Well aware of the comments on the press in *The Soldier's Pocket Book*, Stanley concluded that Wolseley must have been exposed in Canada to irresponsible reporters from "the unclassic districts of Western America," since the "representatives of the great London and New York dailies are of widely different material"; Stanley professed himself unoffended by the views that Wolseley and his officers seemed to share with regard to the press. However, there is a hint of tension in Stanley's

⁸ George Colley to Henry Colley, n.d [March 1874], author's collection.

⁹ Field Marshal Viscount Wolseley, *The Story of a Soldier's Life*, Vol. II (London: Archibald Constable, and Co., 1903), 342.

¹⁰ Melton Prior, *Campaigns of a War Correspondent* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), 16.

¹¹ Wolseley Mss, W/P 4/7, Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 28 January–2 February 1874, Hove.

description of one conversation over dinner with an unnamed member of Wolseley's staff. He also pointedly noted that two of Wolseley's staff, Henry Brackenbury and Frederick Maurice, were merely "newspaper writers in military clothes."¹² Interestingly, Wolseley's ADC, the Hon. Alfred Charteris, the son of Lord Elcho, described almost certainly the same dinner, remarking, "We all agreed that we had never seen so offensive a snob. Pompous, vulgar, and not the least amusing. By tacit agreement no one alluded to the Livingstone business." According to Charteris, after a second dinner, at which Stanley was even more offensive, Wolseley declined to have anything more to do with him.¹³ Wolseley's intelligence officer, Redvers Buller, also noted at one point in November that Stanley had yet to leave the environs of Cape Coast Castle and "trusts entirely to fancy which will I should think suit the Yankees better than facts."¹⁴

On a day-to-day basis, however, whatever his private thoughts, Wolseley knew that his reputation depended upon how the press depicted his actions—as the earlier quoted letters to his wife and brother illustrate—and clearly took pains to cultivate a favorable impression among the correspondents. Prior, for example, remarked that Wolseley, who was "most jovial and kind to all... appeared especially so to correspondents." Henty, too, remarked on Wolseley's kindness and concern for the comfort of the correspondents.¹⁵ Although on at least one occasion Wolseley arranged for some of Prior's sketches to be sent back to the coast with his own official dispatch, there appears to have been no attempt to control correspondents' access to the means of communication. In any case, everybody was dependent upon mail steamers (carrying reports and dispatches to Cape Verde) to connect with the submarine telegraph cable to Lisbon, with consequent delay. Wolseley himself was frustrated by the unreliability of the mail steamers and by the breakdown of the cable between Madeira and Lisbon in November 1873, which could not then be repaired until after the winter. It was agreed, therefore, to send out HMS *Vigilant* to run between Madeira and Lisbon with Wolseley's dispatches and telegrams; subsequently, it was

¹² Henry Morton Stanley, *Coomassie and Magdala* (New York: Harper, 1874), 3, 23.

¹³ See Wemyss Mss, Charteris journal, 22 and 23 October 1873, Gosford House, for the two different dinners.

¹⁴ Buller Family Mss, Buller to Lucy, 14 November 1873, private collection.

¹⁵ Prior, *Campaigns of War Correspondent*, 9; G. A. Henty, *The March to Coomassie* (London: Tinsley, 1874), 453.

arranged for an improved steamer service between Cape Cast and St. Vincent at Cape Verde. Reade's first dispatch from Cape Coast Castle, for example, dated 2 October, finally appeared in *The Times* nearly four weeks later on 29 October. Indeed, it was the Asante expedition that prompted laying cable from Madeira to St. Vincent, as well as serious discussion of extending the cable further down the African coast, but argument over the financial cost meant extension to West Africa was only accomplished in 1886.

There were other means besides pleasantries by which Wolseley could influence public opinion. Brackenbury was not writing for the press as Stanley assumed, but Maurice was indeed writing for the *Daily News*, and the expedition's chief engineer, Robert Home, was writing for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Moreover, while Reade, Boyle, Henty, and Stanley published accounts of the campaign (*The Story of the Ashantee Campaign, Through Fanteeland to Coomassie, The March to Coomassie, and Coomassie and Magdala*, respectively), so too did Maurice—based on his reports for the *Daily News* in *The Ashantee War: A Personal Narrative*. Brackenbury was also to write a semi-official campaign history, *The Ashanti War: A Narrative*, in two volumes, and another of Wolseley's officers, William Butler, wrote an account of his part in the campaign in *Akim Foo: The History of a Failure*. Brackenbury had contacted Messrs. Blackwood as early as November 1873, indicating that Wolseley wanted an account based on all the official papers, since Reade, Henty, and Boyle would all be writing their own, and they “know nothing of the main spring of action, or details of events except under their own eyes.” Wolseley also wanted the book to be the “first in the field at all risks.” Wolseley's intention to place his own version of events before the public was also apparent in his reaction to the mistaken rumor that one of the other special service officers, Fitzroy Hart, was writing for the *Daily Telegraph* without his knowledge, indicated by a note stating “he had no objection to it whatever, but that he considered I ought to have informed him of the act.”¹⁶

¹⁶ D. R. Headrick, *The Invisible Weapon: Telecommunications and International Politics, 1851–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 64–66; Blackwood Mss, 4300, Brackenbury to Blackwood, 23 November 1873, National Library of Scotland [hereafter NLS]; *Ibid.*, 4313, Brackenbury to Blackwood, 28 January 1874; Beatrice Hart-Synnot, ed., *Letters of Major General Fitzroy Hart-Synnot* (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), 12.

The approved version of the campaign, which Brackenbury had completed by May 1874, was thus well publicized, although Brackenbury's version caused a number of problems. The officers of the 2nd Rifle Brigade in particular complained to Sir Archibald Alison, who commanded the British troops, that the account of Odaso wrongly implied that the battalion had been unsteady.¹⁷ Alison equally complained to Blackwood of inaccuracies in Brackenbury's account of the incident. Alison was particularly vexed that Brackenbury had used hurried notes penned to Wolseley in the heat of action by Alison and Lieutenant Colonel McLeod of the 1st Battalion 42nd Regiment, which he believed should have remained confidential and, indeed, he queried whether Brackenbury had clearance for any of the official documentation so liberally used. Brackenbury excused himself on the grounds that he had continued to feel the pressures of the "horrid coast." Subsequently, he found his promotion blocked for the next two years, since the army's commander in chief, the Duke of Cambridge, sided with Alison.¹⁸ Another Wolseley adherent, Evelyn Wood, lectured to the Royal United Service Institution in London on the campaign in June 1874, while another special service officer, William Dooner, also published an account, *Jottings en route to Coomassie*, under the pseudonym of 'An Officer.'

In addition to the publication of favorable accounts by others, Wolseley could influence official opinion more subtly. His letters to his wife were not intended for circulation, but his campaign journal was freely circulated among his family. There were also letters to influential friends such as William Earle, then Military Secretary to the Viceroy, and Robert Biddulph, then Private Secretary to Cardwell. Indeed, a letter to Biddulph is preserved among Cardwell's papers, and Cardwell told Wolseley he had seen another letter to Biddulph that has not survived.¹⁹

In terms of official communications, Wolseley's dispatches were not formally printed for Parliament until after the campaign had ended.

¹⁷ Alison Mss, Mss. Eng. Lett c. 450, Warren to Alison, 28 June 1874, Bodleian Library; Ibid., Alison to Military

Secretary, 4 July 1874, Alison statement, 4 July 1874; Blackwood Mss, 4313, Alison to Blackwood, 16 June 1874, and Brackenbury to Blackwood, 27 November 1874, NLS.

¹⁸ Blackwood Mss, Alison to Blackwood, 16 June 1874, and Baker Russell to Alison, 3 July 1874, NLS; Wemyss Mss, RH4/40/10, Wolseley to Elcho, 21 September 1875, National Archives of Scotland.

¹⁹ Wolseley Mss, Autobiographical Coll., Cardwell to Wolseley, 18 November 1873, Hove.

Moreover, most of the printed dispatches were addressed to Kimberley rather than Cardwell. Dispatches had their limitations. Wolseley wrote to Loo in 1879 that he had advised George Greaves when the latter was commanding British forces on Cyprus that "it does not do to insert the whole truth in official correspondence," because "unpleasant truths that can be made use of by the opponents of the Government you are serving should be reserved for one's private correspondence with ministers."²⁰ There are indeed a number of surviving personal letters from Wolseley to Cardwell and Kimberley. Perhaps more significantly, however, there was an extensive private correspondence with the Duke of Cambridge. At this stage in his career, Wolseley was not as overtly hostile to the Duke as was apparent only a few years later, although he did tell Loo that the correspondence he had to have with the Duke was "rather a tax upon my time, as I have to tell him all sorts of fiddling little things."²¹ Nonetheless, it did give Wolseley the opportunity to expound on his views, such as the need to carefully select all those, but especially officers, sent on expeditions; to praise the abilities of those he had chosen; to expose what he saw as the deficiencies in the 2nd West India Regiment; and to aim a few blows at those who had criticized Wolseley's operational plans prior to the expedition.²²

Wolseley's references to the transport problems in Asante exemplify how he used the means described here to influence his public image. As already suggested, all calculations were based on getting the three white battalions of the 1st Battalion 42nd Regiment, 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade, and 2nd Battalion 23rd Regiment to Kumase and back in the minimum amount of time possible in order to preserve health. Hence the necessity to clear a route and have a series of prepared camp sites and supply depots in place as far forward as possible before these battalions even landed. There were to be seven such camps and supply depots at ten-mile intervals between Cape Coast Castle and the forward base at Praso on the river Pra, which marked the frontier of Asante territory, leaving just sixty miles to cover to Kumase. The forward base at Praso was intended to accommodate two thousand Europeans, while each of the other depots could accommodate four hundred Europeans. Some 237 bridges were constructed along the route. All had to be ready by

²⁰ Ibid., Wolseley Mss, W/P 8/19, Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 8–13 August 1879.

²¹ Ibid., W/P 3/9, Wolseley to Lady Wolseley, 17–26 October 1873.

²² Cambridge Mss, VIC/ADDE/1/7217, 7222, and 7258, Wolseley to Cambridge, 24 and 30 October 1873, and 6–7 December 1873, RA.

early December, and it was, therefore, a considerable logistical task. A railway proved impractical, and the traction engines that were landed also failed to deal with the gradients encountered. Consequently, since animals could not be kept alive on the Gold Coast, it came down to native carriers and the cooperation in their recruitment of the local chiefs, from whom it was also intended to acquire fighting levies.

Wolseley first expressed real concern in a letter to Cambridge on 21 November 1873:

The greatest difficulty I have to face in this war is the question of carriers. The people are so naturally lazy, that even the promise of high wages will not induce them to work. I shall be obliged to put some pressure upon them for all that England is doing for these people I cannot afford to allow the expedition to come to a stand still through a too rigid observance of English laws, laws that are in every way unsuited to these nations.²³

One solution was to impress some of those enlisted as fighting levies, as carriers. The first troopship arrived prematurely and had to be sent back to sea, requiring Wolseley to postpone the date of his planned advance across the Pra from 1 to 15 January.²⁴ Having arrived on 17 December, Lieutenant Colonel George Colley was placed in command of the transport arrangements on 19 December and Wolseley allocated seventeen officers to help him.

The carriers, however, kept deserting; Wolseley recorded on 4 January that the entire group intended for the 2nd Battalion 23rd Regiment's transport had deserted en masse. Confiding to his journal that he was in despair at being completely "in the hands of these lying, lazy and worthless Fantee carriers," Wolseley decided to convert the 2nd Battalion West India Regiment, the 1st Battalion West India Regiment, which had also now arrived, and Evelyn Wood's irregular levies into carriers. Volunteers from the 1st Battalion 42nd Regiment were also pressed into temporary service for an extra 1s.0d a day and an issue of grog.²⁵ Wolseley calculated that he needed 3,500 carriers to support the advance beyond the Pra to Kumase, while Colley calculated a require-

²³ Ibid., Cambridge Mss, VIC/ADDE/1/7247, Wolseley to Cambridge, 21 November 1873.

²⁴ Glover Mss, RCS 131/6, Wolseley to Glover, 31 December 1873, Cambridge University Library.

²⁵ WO 147/3, Wolseley journal, 4 January 74, TNA; Cambridge Mss, VIC/ADDE/1/7291, Wolseley to Cambridge, 8 January 1874, RA; Edward Spiers, *The Scottish Soldier and Empire, 1854–1902* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 29.

ment of 8,500 as a whole. On 6 January Wolseley informed Alison that everything was at a standstill and directed that every able-bodied native be seized. Indeed, he began to believe that it would not be possible to bring the 2nd Battalion 23rd Regiment up to the Pra at all, but matters eased by mid-January.²⁶ Wolseley was then pardoning political offences in return for the supply of carriers, but Colley was also burning some villages and raiding others for men.²⁷ In fact, as early as November 1873 Wolseley had got a resolution through the Judicial Assessors' Court to permit the arrest of those who refused to be conscripted for labor, and that they be forced to work without pay and liable to flogging if they refused to work. This option had not been previously utilized, but it was now put into practice. Even then, however, Colley at least believed that it had been a near run thing with only five days' supplies left by the time the troops reached Kumase.²⁸

There was, then, a definite crisis between mid-November and mid-January, of which all those close to operations were well aware. The official contemporary version is presented in Wolseley's dispatches, namely that the problems in recruiting and retaining carriers were the result of the deficiencies of the Control Department, an entirely civilian branch of the War Office established in 1867 in an attempt to ensure that transport and ordnance services did not become involved in combatant roles: Control was to be abolished in 1876, but the commissariat staff continued to be civilian until 1888. In his dispatch to Cardwell on 15 December, Wolseley remarked that handing over carriers to the Control Department was like "pouring water into a sieve." This dispatch to Cardwell, however, was not printed for Parliament, and those dispatches to Kimberley that were eventually published in March and June 1874 made only oblique references to problems with the carriers. Thus, the record of 27 November 1873 still suggested there was no transport problem, and that of 15 December merely stated that the white troops had been sent back to sea until sufficient supplies had been sent to the forward base. Only on 8 January 1874 did a dispatch to Kimberley

²⁶ Alison Mss, Mss. Eng. Lett C. 450, Wolseley to Alison, 6 and 10 January 1874, Bodleian.

²⁷ WO 147/4, Wolseley journal (copy), 16 January 1874, TNA; Cambridge Mss, VIC/ADDE/1/7309, Wolseley to Cambridge, 25 January 1874, RA.

²⁸ CO96/111, Report of Judicial Court of Assessors, 14 November 1873, TNA; Henry Brackenbury, *The Ashanti War: A Narrative*, Vol. II (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1874), 20–21; Cooper Mss, 6112–596, Colley to Cooper, 26 February 1874, National Army Museum [hereafter NAM].

report on the problems of desertion, indicating severe measures had been taken and West Indian troops and irregulars pressed into temporary transport service. The record of 26 January 1874 referred merely to trials of deserters. Wolseley's dispatch on 5 February 1874 summing up the campaign after the fall of Kumase firmly recommended that the lines of communication always be in the hands of combatant officers, something Wolseley had emphasized repeatedly to Cambridge.²⁹

Little of the crisis would have been apparent from a reading of published dispatches, and Colley also suggested in February that the press had no real idea of the predicament.³⁰ This observation is at least partly true. Boyle, who does not seem quite the radical depicted by Wolseley, judging by his comments on the Fante, did report the desertions and the proclamations for impressments, referring at one point to *razzia*, but put the entire blame on the cowardice of the natives, whom he described as fit only to be slaves. Stanley, whose book reproduces his press reports, criticized the Control Department on 16 December, but also implied that Wolseley should have been exercising closer supervision over it and should now seize every able-bodied man. By contrast, however, he also noted the arrival of Colley and the increase in the number of carriers being obtained, and therefore ended by congratulating Wolseley that the "great difficulty of the hour has been tided over so rapidly." In fact, Stanley had been absent for some time visiting Glover, so missed the worst of the crisis.³¹

Reade on the other hand, was extremely critical not only of the Control Department but also of Wolseley for even contemplating the railway idea, for not insisting that more Control Department personnel were sent out to Asante, and for not bringing in elephants, mules, and oxen from elsewhere. Indeed, Reade judged that while Colley did indeed bring order to chaos, it was Wolseley who was culpable for the chaos in the first place.³² Interestingly, however, Reade suggested that Wolseley was not aware of the problem until early December when, of

²⁹ Brackenbury, *Ashanti War*, Vol. II, 357; Cambridge Mss, VIC/ADDE/1/7327, Wolseley to Cambridge, 13 February 1874, RA. For the official dispatches, see XLVI, Cmd. 891-94, 921-22, *Further Correspondence Respecting the Ashantee Invasion*, 1874, British Parliamentary Papers.

³⁰ Cooper Mss, 6112-596, Colley to Cooper, 26 February 1874, NAM.

³¹ Frederick Boyle, *Through Fanteeland to Coomassie* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874), 252; Stanley, *Coomassie and Magdala*, 110.

³² Winwood Reade, *The Story of the Ashantee Campaign* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1874), 229-44.

course, Wolseley's own correspondence makes it clear that the problem had been recognized some weeks earlier. Henty, who had first-hand experience of commissariat work, was also critical, drawing a contrast with the efficiency of the transport arrangements in the Abyssinian campaign and suggesting Wolseley had been too slow to recognize the problem and too hesitant to introduce impressments. His criticism was mitigated, however, by his recognition of the deficiencies of the civilianized Control Department and of the "negrophilists," whose influence over the British government, he contended, had prevented Wolseley from introducing compulsion earlier.³³

In print, the response came from Maurice and Brackenbury. Maurice, whose book is a mixture of his original reports for the *Daily News* and later commentary, touched on the carrier problem in a number of reports, as on 27 November and 8 January, but on such occasions he was quick to suggest that all possible measures had been taken to rectify the situation and declared it solved in a report on 15 January. The commentary added in the book indicated that Wolseley was aware of the problem from the beginning, had taken all the necessary measures as quickly as Stanley or anyone else might have wished, and could not have resorted to compulsion earlier without more officers being available to police the carrier system. Thus, once Colley arrived it was only a matter of time before all was efficient.³⁴ Brackenbury went into fairly exhaustive detail on the administrative and logistical arrangements and admitted the "truth" of the problem having existed, but he laid the blame firmly on the Control Department, indicating that it was not the "business of the General in command to find the means of transport, as was done here." Indeed, Brackenbury, who reprinted dispatches to Cardwell not seen in the public domain previously, repeated no less than three times Wolseley's phrase that putting carriers in the hands of the Control Department was like "pouring water into a sieve." According to Brackenbury, Wolseley could not have acted earlier because too few officers were available to allocate to transport duties, and the problem of desertion only became acute in mid-December. Accordingly, once this was clear, an officer of rank and authority in the form of Colley

³³ Henty, *March to Coomassie*, 209–10, 431–52.

³⁴ The *Daily News* Special Correspondent [J. F. Maurice], *The Ashantee War: A Personal Narrative* (London: Henry S. King and Co., 1874), 53, 163, 251–60.

was immediately put in charge to rectify the deficiencies of the Control Department.³⁵

As with many other aspects of the campaign, Wolseley's journal and personal correspondence give considerable insight into his real concerns. In terms of the crisis of the carriers, it confirms at least what Reade and, to a lesser extent, Henty, said at the time. Maurice and especially Brackenbury were then deployed to deflect the criticism in public, and Wolseley also had several other avenues available by which to influence official opinion. In any case, press criticism of the transport arrangements and other aspects of the campaign, such as the early abandonment of Kumase, was often qualified and the overall success of the expedition could not really be gainsaid. Even Stanley concluded his account with an extract from Wolseley's own final dispatch to the War Office.³⁶ In his relationship with the press as in much else, therefore, Wolseley proved a highly astute and capable practitioner. The Asante campaign, indeed, laid the foundations not only of Wolseley's reputation and of his 'ring' of officers, but also of the way in which he dealt with the press throughout the remainder of his career.

³⁵ Brackenbury, *Ashanti War*, Vol. I, 335, 338, 341, 353–54; *Ibid.*, Vol. II, 35–37.

³⁶ Stanley, *Coomassie and Magdala*, 261.

CHAPTER TEN

SIR REDVERS BULLER AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN LIGHT HORSE

James Thomas

In the 1870s the British Army was undergoing a program of major reform. The modernization schemes of Secretary of State of War Edward Cardwell were beginning to bear fruit. In an attempt to revitalize the officer corps and to produce a more talented crop of junior officers free from the dangers of cronyism, Cardwell was able to end the practice of purchase. Up-and-coming young officers were quick to adapt to the new meritocracy. More and more, experience and expertise rather than political and social connection played a role in an officer's career development, and most sought out any opportunity to prove themselves in the new system. The British Army as a whole received the benefit from these personal ambitions.

Few officers in the post-Cardwellian army were more driven to make a name and a career for himself than Redvers Buller. Buller entered the service in 1858 upon purchasing a commission in the 60th King's Royal Rifles. With the end of purchase in 1874, he could no longer rely on the wealth of his father's estate and his family's political contacts to obtain further promotion. As it turned out, Buller excelled in the new system and over the course of the next twenty-five years he advanced steadily through the British officer corps, becoming one of Britain's most beloved senior generals. The manner in which Buller used his personal experience, much of which took place in South Africa, ultimately helped the British Army prepare for and win the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902.

After establishing a reputation as an officer with a keen mind and strong leadership skills in Sir Garnet Wolseley's military expeditions to Western Canada (1870) and Asanteland (1873–1874), Brevet Major Buller entered the Staff College and took an administrative post at the War Office. Although the work suited him, Buller wanted to pursue other opportunities that could bring him greater accolades and a faster path to professional advancement. In 1878 he accepted a position on

the staff of General Frederick Thesiger (later Lord Chelmsford) in the military operations against the Gaikas in what was generally termed the Third Kaffir, or Gaika War.

Buller was initially appointed to serve as liaison officer between fellow Wolseley Ring member Colonel Sir Evelyn Wood and a group of Boer, British, and colonial volunteers. This group was attached to a column in Thesiger's Field Force under Colonel Wood's command. Buller did not remain liaison officer for long, taking over command of this group of volunteers and forming his own motley 'commando,' naming it the Frontier Light Horse (FLH).¹ Buller initially had few expectations for his new command. He wrote his sister on the day he took command, saying, "They are in terribly bad order...and I fear there is not much credit to be got out of being associated with them, but I will do my best." Later he added, "Whatever happens, I mean to try and make a splash with them somehow."²

The Frontier Light Horse was Buller's first independent command in the field, and he quickly took advantage of the opportunities this assignment offered. He honed his leadership qualities and 'field craft,' but more importantly began to learn the efficacy of mounted irregulars as a component of, and an addition to, traditional British operations with infantry and cavalry. Buller modeled the unit on the principles of the Boer commando, the basic operational body for the South African Boers since before the Great Trek. Unlike the more democratically based commando, however, Buller instituted discipline and order along the lines imposed by the British Army. The FLH was composed of men of various backgrounds, but most significantly, "a fine leaven of Dutch Boers from whom Buller learned a very great deal that was useful."³ According to Buller's biographer, Sir Charles Melville, there was even a deserter from the 80th Foot serving in the group.⁴ From these men,

¹ Little information exists regarding the Frontier Light Horse, especially in the early stages of the war, and Buller's involvement in the regiment's formation can be found at the National Archives. Most of the story can be gleaned from the autobiographies of Wood and William Butler, the memoir of George Mossop, and Buller's official biography. For example see William F. Butler, *Autobiography* (London: Constable, 1911); Evelyn Wood, *From Midshipman to Field Marshall*, 2 vols. (London: Methuen and Co., 1906); George Mossop, *Running the Gauntlet* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1937); Charles H. Melville, *Life of General the Rt. Hon., Sir Redvers H. Buller, V.C., G.C.B., G.C.M.G.*, Vol. 2 (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1923).

² Melville, *Life of Buller*, 88.

³ Butler, *Autobiography*, 33.

⁴ Melville, *Life of Buller*, 88.

Buller learned the importance of maintaining respect through example rather than through brutal discipline. Buller's forceful character and intimidating physical presence also ensured quick compliance. He learned the Boer methods of rapid movement, fighting on horseback and living off the land, combining them with his own knowledge of more traditional British soldiering to create a unique and very capable mounted infantry. In addition to the practical knowledge of Boer-style fighting and life on the veldt, Buller gained respect and admiration for the fighting abilities of Boers in general. He would remember these experiences throughout his career.

Among the men of the FLH, Buller also established a reputation as a fine leader, able to maintain discipline in ways beyond the Queen's Regulations, while adding to his already growing image as a fearless combatant. Boer memories of Buller survived the Gaika War and by the time of the Anglo-Boer War, Buller and the Boers had a level of mutual respect and admiration shared by few other British officers and their adversaries. Wood later wrote that Buller's presence and leadership also helped smooth relations between the British Army and colonists who might before have been hesitant to serve as irregulars in the often fierce campaigns of southern Africa.⁵

Even before the Gaika War came to an end in June 1878, trouble was already brewing farther to the east in Zululand. General Thesiger moved his army there, and the Frontier Light Horse moved with it. Buller's unit was temporarily delayed, however, as he recruited new members, many of the original volunteers having gone back to their farms. One of the new recruits was a teenager named George Mossop. Mossop was the only member of the FLH whose memoir is known to have been published.⁶ Meeting Buller for the first time, Mossop described him as "tall and wiry, with rather small, keen eyes," a man who impressed the young trooper by living under the same conditions as his men. "All the hardships he shared equally with his men. He was the mainstay of Colonel Wood's column, and the idol of all."⁷ As much as the men

⁵ Wood, *Midshipman to Field Marshall*, Vol. 1, 307. Years later a group of Boer veterans signed affidavits protesting British press treatment of Buller in 1902, asserting their view of his talents and the fact that he did well both with them and against them. These affidavits were eventually published by Charles Dudley as, "The Boer View of Buller: New Evidence," *Army Quarterly* 114 (1984).

⁶ Mossop, *Running the Gauntlet*.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 34, 38–39.

of the Frontier Light Horse learned about and grew to admire Buller, Buller was learning from them also.

In November 1878, Buller was promoted to brevet lieutenant colonel for his service with the FLH and soon had his re-enforced unit back up to just over two hundred men and on the move to Zululand to rejoin Wood. He arrived just as General Thesiger, now Lord Chelmsford, was organizing his forces for the invasion. In a letter to his sister, Buller showed great excitement over the prospect of continuing his work with the FLH. The news was "too good to be true," he wrote, "but it would be great fun should it prove correct."⁸

Though few realized it at the time, fighting the Gaika provided Buller and the FLH with vital experience for the larger conflict, which would soon erupt as the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Buller and the FLH continued their education in Zululand. A proper education it was, too. Melville wrote that Buller was "far too large-minded to be ashamed of learning from men whom many regular officers in his position would have looked on as amateurs."⁹ The Anglo-Zulu War proved to be a learning experience for the entire British Army.

Lord Chelmsford's strategy for a British victory over the Zulu called for a three-pronged invasion of Zululand. Coming off the heels of an easy victory over the Gaikas, Chelmsford was overconfident in his army's abilities. He believed overcoming the Zulu posed few challenges. His judgment, of course, was proved wrong when his center column was defeated decisively at the Battle of Isandhlwana. The FLH was attached to Chelmsford's Northern Column, under the command of Colonel Wood. Immediately upon its arrival, the FLH went into action. Two days before the disaster at Isandhlwana halted the overall invasion, Buller's unit defeated a Zulu regiment.¹⁰ Throughout the war, Buller's men continued to perform well, but it was in Chelmsford's second invasion of Zululand that they and especially Buller distinguished themselves.¹¹

⁸ Quoted in Melville, *Life of Buller*, 93. Melville had access to many of Buller's papers, which were later destroyed by Dame Georgiana, Buller's daughter. The remainder are scattered about Britain in various locations and within the papers of his contemporaries.

⁹ Melville, *Life of Buller*, 87.

¹⁰ Wood, *Midshipman to Field Marshall*, Vol. 2, 31.

¹¹ The National Archives [hereafter TNA] WO132/1 for copies of the official accounts of the battle, including Chelmsford's, Wood's, and Buller's versions.

In March 1879, after Chelmsford had reorganized his forces following the disaster at Isandhlwana, the invasion of Zululand was resumed. Wood took his column to a large hill called Hlobane to raid cattle and to force the Zulu to make a stand. The Battle of Hlobane is a story of courage, valor, terror, and distinction shared by all. For Buller and his continuing education in the use of irregulars in South Africa, it represents even more. As a powerful Zulu force moved toward their position, Buller and the FLH remained on the top of Hlobane long enough to cover the escape of the other units under Wood's command, then, cut off from their planned descent, they made their way down an incredibly steep cattle track.¹² For maintaining order, extracting his troops from a seemingly impossible position, and personally returning up the hill under tremendous Zulu pressure to save individual troopers Buller earned a Victoria Cross. The most essential lesson Buller learned that day was that tough, calm leadership is the most essential element of surviving a bad situation. Mossop wrote that Buller was especially concerned that each man bring his horse down the hill with him; otherwise once on the plain below there would be no escape from the rapidly moving Zulus. Unfortunately for Mossop, in his terror and desperation to escape, he had left his horse before beginning the climb down.

[S]uddenly a grip of steel was on my shoulder and I received such a clout on my ear that had the grip not been there to hold me up I would have shot yards away. "Where is your horse?" someone shouted. I looked into the face of Major [*sic*] Buller. "Up there," I said and pointed up the pass. "Go and get him. Don't leave him again." That box on my ear restored what little sense I had left. Scrambling and slipping, clutching at anything I could find, I crawled up.¹³

Mossop retrieved his horse, as did most of those who survived the flight from Hlobane. It was not enough for Buller to get his men down the hill; he knew that saving them meant keeping them mounted. It was the men on foot who suffered the greatest at the hands of the Zulu. Buller's modified commando was able to stay intact once again. An infantry officer by regiment and training, Buller quickly adapted his thinking to that which worked best on the veldt. What could have been a rout and another disaster for British arms became another success story and the FLH carried on to fight another day. Throughout the remainder of

¹² Wood, *Midshipman to Field Marshall*, Vol. 2, 49–50.

¹³ Mossop, *Running the Gauntlet*, 51.

the Anglo-Zulu war, the FLH continued to be in the thick of it, and Buller's schooling also continued. "Wherever the stiffest place was he was sure to be found. In action if you could ascertain for certain where the most bullets were flying, you could be pretty safe in venturing your last dollar that Buller would be in the middle of it."¹⁴

The next day at the Battle of Kambula, Buller used the FLH to entice the Zulu into a premature attack. He and his men rode out in front of the army into the path of one of the rapidly approaching 'horns' of the Zulu impi, dismounted, fired a volley, remounted, and returned to Wood's defensive perimeter. The feint produced the desired effect, and repeating the process brought the right side of the Zulus exactly to the point where the British infantry were placed to best destroy them.¹⁵ For its role at the Battles of Hlobane and Kambula, the FLH earned a reputation among British units that was rarely reserved for an irregular corps. Buller, more than anyone, was responsible for this reputation. Certain of how they would perform under pressure, Buller eagerly volunteered the FLH for the most difficult assignments. When Wood, for example, was explaining to a regular officer a dangerous operation he needed volunteers to accomplish, "Buller jumped up, shouted 'Frontier Light Horse, you will never let these redcoats beat you,' and forming himself into a toboggan, he slid down under fire," leading the FLH ahead of the infantry.¹⁶

In July, at the Battle of Ulundi (oNdini), the final battle of the war, Buller had risen to such status that Chelmsford had him choose the battleground, and the FLH repeated the same tactic performed at Kambula. The Zulus were once again pulled into a premature attack and the British were victorious. Chelmsford's use of the FLH at such a critical juncture in the war must be viewed as a great honor for the unit. Wolseley, who had been sent to supersede Chelmsford after the disaster of Isandhlwana and was only arriving at the time of Ulundi, wrote to Buller, saying that he and Wood were "heroes of the war whose actions have pulled us through the mess and redeemed the reputation of the army."¹⁷

¹⁴ F. N. Streatfield, *A Ten Month's Campaign*, quoted in Melville, *Life of Buller*, 89.

¹⁵ Wood, *Midshipman to Field Marshall*, Vol. 2, 60.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁷ Wolseley to Buller, 13 July 1879, WO132/2, TNA.

With the Zulu war ended, the Frontier Light Horse disbanded, the members returned to their farms and other civilian occupations, and Buller went home to Crediton. In England, he was received by, and named Aide-de-Camp to the Queen. He was also made C.M.G., promoted to Colonel, and given the Victoria Cross. These outward signs of accomplishment were major factors in the development of Buller's career and the building of his reputation in the army.

What he had learned and committed to memory from his experiences in South Africa were extraordinarily important. Buller had a great many other campaigns to wage, offices to hold, and experiences to add to his life and career, but the lessons he learned fighting on the veldt with a band of irregular troopers remained central to his identity as a soldier. His understanding of, and respect for, the Boers and the Boer fighting style—as well as ways of organizing and using civilians, colonials and even misfits from the regular army—stayed with him over the next twenty years. Combined with everything else he learned over the intervening years, the value of his experience with such units as the Frontier Light Horse came immediately to mind when he began organizing the South African Field Force and prepared to take command of the British army for the upcoming Boer War of 1899.

In October 1899, Buller was commanding troops at the military training facilities at Aldershot when he was assigned the task of preparing for a war against the Boers. Now a general at the height of his career, Buller devised a nicely organized plan of campaign that had to be largely scrapped upon arrival in South Africa, due to a series of setbacks experienced by the army already in place before his—and the bulk of the Field Force's—arrival. Not scrapped, and in fact quickly put into place, was his intention to create units similar to his old Frontier Light Horse. The first body created was the South African Light Horse (SALH).

In the build up to the Anglo-Boer War, the British government continually rejected Buller's advice, not only about the seriousness of the Boer threat, but also about the military requirements, the composition of the military force, and strategy.¹⁸ Once the fighting began, Buller's

¹⁸ See particularly Buller's testimony before the Royal Commission [hereafter referred to as RCWSA] established to investigate the war, his notes, and his letters to Prime Minister Lord Salisbury and his brother Tremayne Buller. *Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Royal Commission on the War in South Africa*, 2 vols., with appendix (London: Wyman and Sons, Ltd., 1903), 169–88; Buller to Lord Salisbury, Secret Memorandum,

warnings came true, and he was forced to reconstruct and redesign his plans in the field. From early on, Buller had pressed for the inclusion of colonial mounted troops to be raised from the British and pro-British population in his field force.¹⁹ Columns of non-traditional mounted troops, Imperial Yeomanry, Mounted Infantry, and Irregular Corps, and not the traditional mounted force, the cavalry, eventually decided the outcome of the war in Britain's favor by carrying out a series of successful drives in which the Boers were pushed towards long lines of armed blockhouses that stretched across the veldt. If not for Buller's work at the outset, this tactic would not have been employable. From the start, Buller believed that the war might take the form it did—a guerilla struggle—and he advocated for large numbers of mounted men. On 10 November 1899, for example, he telegraphed his concerns to Secretary of State for War, Lord Lansdowne:

Dutch here, who can be relied upon, predict guerilla warfare as a certainty. I ought, therefore, I think as soon as possible, to have another division. At present my great want is mounted forces, of which I am raising as many as possible. Further, I should like...for service with them, a few good Special Service Officers.²⁰

Even before he left Great Britain, he believed that he would be able to raise eight thousand to ten thousand mounted men from within the various South African colonies, mostly refugees from the Boer republics, all eager to fight.²¹ His opinions were based upon his experience during the Gaika and Zulu Wars and his knowledge of Boer tactics. He felt it likely that should the Boers fail to surrender after his planned breakthrough to Ladysmith, they would turn to a protracted guerilla struggle.²²

The first unit of colonial volunteers to be raised, and ultimately the model for all the rest, was the South African Light Horse, commanded by Major Julian Byng (later Lord Byng of Vimy). The SALH was composed of about five hundred local South African colonials, Englishmen,

5 September 1899, CAB37/50/62, TNA; Buller notes, PRO WO132/24, and Buller to Tremayne Buller, 3 November 1899 WO132/6, TNA.

¹⁹ RCWSA, 173.

²⁰ Buller to Lansdowne, 11 November 1899, No. 27, App. J, p. 520, RCWSA. These "special service officers" would be, like Buller himself in 1879, regular army officers detached from their units to serve with the irregulars.

²¹ RCWSA, 200.

²² *Ibid.*, 199.

and some Americans.²³ Its most famous member was British lieutenant and then war correspondent Winston S. Churchill.²⁴ The SALH served directly under Buller during his campaign to relieve Ladysmith, and then continued as the largest of dozens of similar units raised throughout the war. In the end, Buller's expectations of guerilla warfare proved correct, and his plan of fighting the Boers on their own terms proved the necessary means of defeating them.

Immediately upon his arrival in South Africa in October 1899, Buller authorized the raising of mounted irregular, or volunteer, troops. He assigned Lieutenant Colonel Charles á Court the task of raising the first regiment. After dubbing the unit the South African Light Horse and performing the initial recruiting and organization, á Court handed command over to Byng, who served on Buller's staff.²⁵ Buller knew, again from his personal experience, that a fundamental requirement for the success of such a force was strong leadership. Byng, a cavalry officer in the 10th Hussars, proved to be an excellent choice. Colonel Douglas Cochrane, Lord Dundonald, under whose command the SALH was initially attached, wrote that Byng "was not only a good soldier, but was possessed of that inestimable quality, clear common sense; he and his fine regiment I soon found out could always be absolutely depended upon."²⁶ Byng's later World War One superiors would certainly share Dundonald's assessment of him.

According to Buller's instructions, the SALH was equipped as mounted infantry with horses, saddles and weapons, but their dress requirement was not entirely clear. Perhaps Buller meant it literally as reference to clothing when he said, "I shall...let them ride in trousers as the Boers do."²⁷ Colonel á Court wrote that when initially outfitting them, he remembered "inspecting some cast-off greatcoats of the London Metropolitan Police in a second-hand shop, and wondering

²³ The Americans were a group of Texas cowboys who had accompanied a shipment of horses and cattle purchased for the army and decided to stay and take part in the fight.

²⁴ Churchill was already a hero of the war when he joined the SALH in January 1900, because of his escape from a Boer prisoner of war camp.

²⁵ See Lt. Colonel Charles á Court Repington, *Vestigia* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1919), 198–200. It is interesting to note that á Court takes credit in his autobiography for initializing the idea of an *uitlander* regiment, although all other sources and official records contradict this assertion.

²⁶ The Earl of Dundonald, *My Army Life* (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1926), 101.

²⁷ Buller to Lansdowne, CT 33, War Office Library.

whether it was to be that or nothing.”²⁸ Despite these difficulties, the regiment was eventually equipped, and the men were put into uniforms similar to those of the regular British Army. Buller wanted to pay SALH volunteers and similar corps the same as other British soldiers, five shillings per day.²⁹ The main difference in uniform, intended to make them distinct, was a large-brimmed hat instead of the regulation sun-helmet. There was also a very large feather in each man’s hatband. This feather became the trademark of the South African Light Horse, and other units nicknamed them the ‘cockyolibirds’ because of it. Winston Churchill said that the army called them this out of “miserable jealousy.”³⁰ Another distinction from regular cavalry, and based on Buller’s personal experience with the FLH, was that these regiments were to be issued tough little horses rather than the large standard horses of the cavalry.³¹

Like the cavalry the SALH was divided into squadrons, troops, and sections. The smallest unit was the section, composed generally of four men. Ten or twelve sections formed a troop, two troops formed a squadron of around one hundred men, and a typical cavalry regiment was made up of four or five squadrons. Each troop was commanded by a lieutenant, and a captain commanded each squadron; the whole regiment was commanded by a colonel, with staff officers and a chaplain. After organization and a brief training session, the SALH was attached to Lord Dundonald’s command where the regiment received training in basic cavalry maneuvers.³² The training was necessarily brief, however, as the SALH participated in the Battle of Colenso little more than a month after it had enlisted its first recruit. Histories of the war all note that the SALH performed admirably at Colenso despite the lack of significant training, which undoubtedly met Buller’s expectation from his experience with the FLH. Even Leo Amery, who edited the *Times History of the War in South Africa* and was no friend of Buller or his

²⁸ Repington, *Vestigia*, 199.

²⁹ *Minutes of Evidence*, Vol. 2, 199–200.

³⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1900), 263–64. There is a photograph of Churchill in his uniform in W. K. L. Dickson, *The Biograph in Battle: It’s Story in the South African War Related with Personal Experiences* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), 175.

³¹ *Minutes of Evidence*, Appendix No. 58, 432–42.

³² Dundonald, *My Army Life*, 102.

ideas, wrote that the SALH went through their "baptism of fire with all the gallantry of veteran soldiers."³³

The fiasco of Colenso (15 December 1899) did little to build the reputation of the volunteer, regular soldier and, most especially, Buller himself. In the plan of action for Buller's assault on the Boer position at Colenso, the SALH, as part of Dundonald's brigade, was ordered to take possession of Hlangwane Hill to establish an artillery position. The SALH dismounted, ascended and gained control of the southern slope of the hill under a heavy cross-fire. Unfortunately, they and the rest of the brigade were unable to reach the top of the hill.³⁴ Buller witnessed the action and noted the brief success of the SALH when he rode to that sector to check on Dundonald's progress.³⁵ Because of other problems on the battlefield that day, Buller ordered Dundonald to retire, but nevertheless the SALH and the rest of the brigade received great praise for their efforts.

The SALH was next in action during a skirmish on New Year's Day 1900. Members of the regiment were on picket duty near the town of Frere, when approximately two hundred Boers attacked.³⁶ Almost as if Buller himself was back directing the action and it was the FLH fighting Zulus, members of the unit dismounted and hid in a donga as the rest of the men retired in good order. Those hidden then directed fire to cover the withdrawal of the others and the Boers "were themselves received at 400 yards by a well-directed sputter of musketry, and were glad to make off with five riderless horses, two men upon one horse and leaving three lying quite still upon the ground."³⁷

Another episode involving the SALH, also in the finest tradition of Buller's FLH, occurred on 11 January, when the British Army was struggling with means to cross the Tugela River. At Potgieter's Drift, there was a large ferry-barge that could be used for transporting oxen, wagons, and men. Unfortunately, the barge was tied up on the Boer side of the river, and was guarded by a detachment of Boers. Colonel Byng called for volunteers to swim across the river and retrieve the barge.³⁸

³³ Leo S. Amery, ed., *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, Vol. 5 (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1900–1909), 614.

³⁴ Dundonald, *My Army Life*, 105.

³⁵ *Minutes of Evidence*, Vol. 2, 175.

³⁶ Churchill, *London to Ladysmith*, 227.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ There are several accounts of this episode, including Dundonald, *My Army Life*, 118–19; Bennett Burleigh, *The Natal Campaign* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1909), 284–85; and Churchill, *London to Ladysmith*, 263–64.

The Tugela, at Potgieter's Drift, was about one hundred feet wide and about twenty feet deep. Lieutenant T. H. Carlisle led the attempt; he was accompanied by six men, while another group of men worked their way into the brush to provide covering fire. The swimmers dashed into the water and swam toward the barge. When they were about half-way across the river, the Boers spotted them and opened fire. The covering party returned fire, and the two sides exchanged shots as the men in the water kept swimming. Reaching the barge, they untied it from its moorings and towed it back to the British side, bullets splashing around them the entire time. Lieutenant Carlisle was slightly wounded, and one trooper got a cramp, but no other injuries were reported. The barge was safe and the operation a complete success. A few days later, the barge was used to transport a full brigade of infantry across the river.³⁹

The story of the South African Light Horse during the first stage of the war, when 'set piece' battles and traditional tactics were used, is one of good leadership, courage, accomplishment of orders, and personal as well as regimental success as part of the overall strategy in the Natal campaign. When Buller finally relieved Ladysmith and freed Lieutenant General Sir George White's army from its entrapment, the honor of first entering the town was given to the South African Light Horse. Buller noted afterward that the SALH "performed its duties exceeding well throughout. Lieutenant Colonel Byng proved himself as usual a valuable commander."⁴⁰

The regiment remained with Buller after the relief of Ladysmith and his supersession as Commander-in-Chief of British forces in South Africa by Lord F. S. Roberts. Over the next months, as the war plodded along and traditional warfare provided a string of seemingly profound victories, the SALH was there. From Botha's Pass, to Spitzkop, to the Devil's Knuckles, Byng and the SALH traced a path of success with Buller's army. Roberts remarked on them as Buller had, mentioning them in dispatches, and noting at one point that Byng led a "well-managed night march, forcing the enemy to retire hurriedly."⁴¹

In December 1900, the SALH was transferred to the Cape Colony to meet an invasion force of two thousand burghers led by Generals

³⁹ Dundonald, *My Army Life*, 119.

⁴⁰ Quoted in John Stirling, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1907), 56.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

P. H. Kritzinger and J. B. M. Hertzog.⁴² It was at this time that the British were finally ready to counter Boer guerilla tactics, with a well-defined strategy of their own. Roberts had declared victory in the war, and believing the British mission had been accomplished, he and Buller went home and Lord H. H. Kitchener took over. Unfortunately, the Boers were not ready to accept Roberts' overconfident pronouncements, and the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War began in earnest. For the SALH and other irregular mounted regiments, the change to guerrilla warfare gave them the opportunity to show their true abilities. Buller's predictions had come true.

To counter Boer guerilla activities, Kitchener devised a plan that included the establishment of the blockhouse system, farm-burning, the creation of a network of concentration camps for civilians, and the use of mobile columns. The various mobile units were combined into columns that snaked across the countryside, searching out the widely scattered Boer combatants, destroying the ability of non-combatants to support those fighting, and constructing blockhouses to limit Boer movement. One historian of the war has called the work of these columns as "ploughing furrows of destruction through the former republics."⁴³

The columns worked almost continuously throughout 1901.⁴⁴ Although the various units were in almost constant motion, few historians have examined their specific activities in much detail. A unit's accomplishments were now measured in 'bags' of captured men and equipment, hardly the making of heroic tales. The exploits of the South African Light Horse have been virtually ignored during this phase of the war. As part of a column under the command of Major General Bruce Hamilton, they were kept busy in the southern Orange River Colony, and then the Cape Colony and Transvaal.⁴⁵ The seemingly endless grind of waging war against a highly mobile and elusive foe wore on, month

⁴² Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (New York: Random House, 1979), 514.

⁴³ Byron Farwell, *The Great Anglo-Boer War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 352.

⁴⁴ Louis Creswicke provides a roster of seventy-two columns, by commander, most with a complete list of the unit composition. He also gives a chronological table of the events of 1901, which includes some of the movements of many of the columns. Louis Creswick, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, Vol. 7 (Edinburgh: T. L. and E. C. Jack, 1900-1902), vi-xvi.

⁴⁵ About the only way to trace the particular movements of the South African Light Horse through this period is to compare Creswicke's chronology with the list of awards earned by members of the regiment; *Minutes of Evidence*, Appendix A.

after month. Days were spent sending out patrols, following leads to track down hiding places of bands of Boers, capturing equipment and rounding up prisoners. Occasionally, the tedium was broken by Boer attacks, but increasingly outnumbered and outgunned, the Boers were reluctant to launch any serious offensive.⁴⁶ In such a war, primary enemies become boredom, exhaustion, and maintenance of morale.

In January 1902 several of the small mounted columns that had been in operation throughout the previous year were combined into four large columns. Byng had been in command of one of the smaller columns. It was composed of the SALH, about 450 Imperial Yeomanry, and the 17th Battalion, Royal Field Artillery.⁴⁷ He was now given command of one of the four large columns of about two thousand men. The SALH worked as part of this column for the remainder of the war. In February 1902, Byng returned to Great Britain, and command of the SALH was transferred to Colonel F. S. Garret. The SALH moved into the Orange Free State and continued to fight until the end of hostilities. Despite capturing smaller and smaller 'bags,' Boer resources were stretched thin and their morale crumbled; Kitchener's methods forced the Boers to the bargaining table in May. On the last day of that month, the Anglo-Boer War came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging.

The South African Light Horse, and the other regiments modeled after it, disbanded soon after the war was over. The men who served in the regiments returned to their peacetime lives; many remained in South Africa, some sailed for Britain, and the few Americans headed back to their homes in Texas. The regiment had maintained its strength fairly consistently throughout the war, having had about one hundred sixty officers and men killed, wounded, or missing through January 1901. There were most certainly a small number of casualties during the last year of the war, although no specific record for that period has been found.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ For the Boer side of the story, see Howard C. Hillegas, *With the Boer Forces* (London: Methuen and Co., 1900) and Dietlof van Warmelo, *On Commando* (London: A. D. Donker, Ltd., 1977).

⁴⁷ Amery, *Times History*, Vol. 5, 304.

⁴⁸ Stirling, *Colonials*, 51–52. See also James B. Thomas, *The South African Light Horse in the Great Anglo-Boer War* (Master's thesis, Southwest Texas State University, 1983), for a partial list of names of the officers and men of the regiment, including dates and places of many of those killed in action and other information specific to the participants; Appendix A.

The legacy of the South African Light Horse is the story of British victory in a complex and frustrating campaign. Roberts and the Conservative government that orchestrated the war believed it was over once the conventional fighting was done. In many ways the war had really just begun. Boer tactics, developed over years of fighting in southern Africa, were perfected by the mobile commando. Once they had abandoned fighting the British in set-piece battles and decided to embark in a guerrilla struggle, they were clearly more comfortable and their mobility was able to offset the British advantage in conventional arms. This return to Boer normality in warfare meant the British had to change and improvise to match them. The means by which they successfully did so was with a mobile strategy of their own. The specific tool to carry out this new strategy was envisioned and recommended by Buller before he had left Great Britain and the fighting had even begun. He had predicted the Boers would turn to a guerilla war because he knew his adversary, having served alongside them, even leading some of them, in action during 1878 and 1879. He knew that the only way to fight them was with their own style of combat, and immediately upon his arrival, he put into motion his original plan of recruiting colonials.

As the first regiment formed by Buller with this purpose, the South African Light Horse served as the model for all who followed. The SALH was the ideal combination of British cavalry organization and leadership and Boer tactics, style, and adaptability. Attached to the regular army's operations in the relief of Ladysmith, they functioned more as mounted infantry than cavalry, dismounting to fight and then mounting their horses to move from place to place as needed. They performed well enough with this style, but it was as the war evolved into a guerilla struggle that the SALH came into its own. Matching the Boers with their own version of the traditional commando, they scoured the land, driving the Boers toward blockhouses, burning farms, taking prisoners, and sweeping up resistance. In the end the Boers chose to concede victory, not because of the weight of the mighty British line regiments, but because of the successful tactics employed by units like the South African Light Horse, the brainchild of General Sir Redvers Buller.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

RURAL STRUGGLES AND THE POLITICS OF A COLONIAL COMMAND: THE SOUTHERN MOUNTED RIFLES OF THE TRANSVAAL VOLUNTEERS, 1905–1912

Ian van der Waag

Based on official and private records, both in South Africa and the United Kingdom, this essay analyzes the apparent motives behind the creation of the Transvaal Volunteers and explores the phenomenon of ‘volunteerism’ in the Standerton District of the Transvaal Colony during the post-Anglo-Boer-War period. Despite the great transformations played out in South Africa during this time, historians have largely neglected the study of these volunteer regiments. This neglect is caused at least partly by the nature of the sources; there are many, small clusters of official archives that have been used to present an organizational history of the Transvaal Volunteers, but lend little to our knowledge of what it was like to serve with the volunteer regiments during this difficult time. Moreover, on imperial peripheries, personal records are infrequent. Yet, rare finds, which highlight the struggles of individual volunteers to survive and at times actually serve amid a wash of change, can reveal how the private life of the settler and the public service of the Volunteer inexorably intersected. This study uses one regiment (the Eastern Rifles, reconstituted in 1907 as the Southern Mounted Rifles) and its commander, whose unique correspondence complements the official record, as vehicles through which to range the structure of local Transvaal society and to explore in particular the changing nature of relations between the British settlers and the increasingly-militant Afrikaners of the newly-conquered platteland.

Post-war Transvaal and the Creation of the Transvaal Volunteers

The Transvaal Volunteers were established in 1902 just after the Anglo-Boer War ended and southern Africa entered a new era of undoubted British supremacy, to which Lord Milner, the British proconsul in Southern Africa, had aspired and for which the war had been fought.

Yet Pax Britannica did not necessarily bring a more settled South Africa, then still a geographic concept embracing an assortment of British colonies, former Boer republics, and a number of recently-conquered African kingdoms and chiefdoms. Several strategic problems vexed the British administration. The worst but least likely contingency—never constant and seldom real—was a war between Britain and an imperial power, especially one opposing Britain in Africa. If the enemy were Germany or Portugal, the war would probably include an overland invasion from South West Africa or Mozambique, the firing of an Afrikaner rebellion, and in the case of Germany, a limited naval campaign in the Southern Oceans. A war with France or Belgium would involve the same problems, less the landward invasion but with the possible addition of an African uprising.

Imperial authorities and the colonial administrations in the four British colonies in South Africa drew up plans to counter the eventualities. Milner had realized from the start that the war would first have to be won militarily and then, after a peace, politically. The ravages of a total war had to be repaired: in places whole towns had to be rebuilt and more than 250,000 refugees had to be repatriated and resettled; a difficult task considering that Boers were returning from the camps to the Transvaal in late 1902 at a rate of some 3,500 per week.¹ The Milner administration introduced progressive agriculture and restocked the country with horses, cattle, and sheep. Some farmers received grants, others compensation. Land was purchased for new settlers, who, Milner hoped, would form 'a useful element' in the agricultural population. Government departments were recreated; some that had existed before 1899 received an overhaul, and others were built from scratch. The Boer defense structures, chiefly the commandos of the two former republics, disappeared altogether.

Milner was resolute that "the old condition of things should not be reproduced in which the English-Afrikaans language divide coincided almost completely with a division of interests, the whole country population being virtually Boer, while the bulk of the industrial and commercial population was British."² As he explained to his military secretary, Hanbury Williams, late in 1900:

¹ Milner to Chamberlain, 22 September 1902, The National Archives, London [hereafter TNA]: CO 291/42, No. 43292.

² Milner to Chamberlain, 30 December 1901, British Parliamentary Papers [hereafter BPP]: Cd.1163-1902, Further Correspondence relating to Affairs in South Africa, No. 20.

The majority of the agricultural population will always be Dutch. This does not matter, provided there are some strong English districts and that, in most districts, there are a sufficient number of British to hold their own... The only way to achieve this is by large purchase of land on the part of the Government with a view to reselling [to]... suitable settlers... Men willing to risk some capital of their own should be preferred, and they should be planted on large or middle-sized farms... Our great hope is in getting a considerable number—several thousands—of settlers of a *superior class*, and placing them in districts where there is already a British nucleus... Well-selected settlers will flourish there and raise large families.³

However, Milner was soon concerned by reductions in the imperial garrison in South Africa, a large proportion of whom might have settled and added valuably to the British population.⁴ The adequate defense “of our great central positions” troubled him in particular.⁵ The constant whittling away and eroding of the potential for offensive action would result in a perfectly useless force: “for a few scattered and immobile garrisons would be an absolute danger, and merely so many temptations to would-be rebels, as, in case of any widespread rising, they would either have to be withdrawn or relieved.”⁶

The answer to this vexing military dilemma, a problem that had resulted in the defeat of British arms by the Boers in 1881, was found momentarily in the location of the imperial troops remaining in South Africa and the creation of a geography of loyalism—a heartland on the highveld—and secondly in the restructuring of the *uitlander* regiments formed during the Anglo-Boer War into a Transvaal defense force.⁷

³ Milner to Hanbury Williams, 27 December 1900, Bodleian Library, Oxford: Milner Adds c.687, 175–82.

⁴ Milner to Alfred Lyttelton, 20 July 1904, in *Milner Papers: South Africa, Vol. II, 1899–1905*, ed. Cecil Headlam, 507 (London: Cassell & Company, 1933). The South African Military Command was reduced gradually from approximately 30,000 in March 1903 to 10,500 in 1909. See J. Ploeger, “Uit die voorgeskiedenis van die SAW, 1902–1910,” *Militaria* 1(1969): 2.

⁵ Milner to Field Marshal Lord Roberts, 10 October 1904, *Milner Papers II*, 507–8.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ The term ‘geography of loyalism’ is adopted from K. Lynch, “A Geography of Loyalism? The Local Military Forces of the West Riding of Yorkshire, 1794–1814,” *War & Society* 19 (May 2001): 2. The term ‘Uitlander’ (trans. foreigner) was used largely by the pre-war Boer population of the Transvaal Republic when referring to the mainly English-speaking, but generally foreign component of the Transvaal population. The uitlander regiments served with and alongside British forces during the 1899–1902 war.

Milner's heartland embraced Johannesburg, the center of wealth, and the adjoining districts of Middelburg and Standerton in the Transvaal and Harrismith and Kroonstad across the Vaal in the Orange River Colony.⁸ In these districts, which were relatively untouched by the war, the garrison towns would create opportunities for British troops to rub shoulders with Boers who, it was thought, were less bitter and would be more amenable to British settlement.⁹ Moreover, soldiers were attractive settlers; not only would they enhance efforts to develop the economic potential of newly-acquired territory, they were trained and disciplined and almost certainly loyal. They could bolster colonial defenses and improve regional security if settled in borderlands.¹⁰ In this way a heartland would be secured. In the event of another Boer war, the British would seek to retain this heartland—together with the lines of communication with the Cape and Natal and Delagoa Bay—until the arrival of reinforcements from Britain and India; in peace they hoped that a general sense of contentment and a pro-Britishness would radiate from it.¹¹

The second answer to Milner's dilemma was the restructuring of the uitlander regiments and the creation of an entirely new military system for the Transvaal in October 1902. The Transvaal Volunteers, as the outfit was called, was organized according to the British tradition of voluntary service, and was, to some extent at least, a continuation of the voluntary organization created by the uitlanders, a portion of whom had joined the irregular, mounted corps during the Anglo-Boer War.¹² These units then formed the nucleus of the local defense forces, which were tasked to keep the Boers (from 1910, Afrikaners) and Africans in check and make a smaller imperial garrison possible.¹³ In theory, the area

⁸ For example see Milner to Chamberlain, 6 November 1902, TNA: CO 291/44, No 45910.

⁹ Milner to Chamberlain, 28 October 1902, TNA: CO 291/43, No 44556.

¹⁰ Kent Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes: Reconstruction and Soldier Settlement in the Empire between the Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 4–5. See also Fedorowich, "Anglicisation and the Politicisation of British immigration to South Africa, 1899–1929," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 19 (1991): 222–46.

¹¹ Ploeger, "Suid-Afrikaanse Verdedigingskemas, 1887–1914," *Militaria* 1 (1969): 12–13.

¹² E. Jonker, "Ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die Transvaalse Verdedigingsmag, 1900–1912: Transvaal Volunteers," *Militaria* 3(1972): 1–2. This article is based on Jonker's thesis (MA thesis, UP 1971), but with the academic trappings removed.

¹³ High Commissioner to Secretary of State, 5 June 1902, National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria [hereafter NASAP]: GOV 592, file P.S.323 Volunteer Forces in Transvaal.

volunteers were thought to have better local knowledge, and although considerably cheaper, they would be adequate for most conditions. Milner, moreover, had hoped to achieve good cooperation between the local colonial forces in South Africa under some federal structure, and to “develop some organic connection between them and the Imperial Forces.”¹⁴ Overlapping would be reduced, cooperation and economy established, and the imperial government might even “have a call on some proportion” of the force in the case of an emergency.¹⁵

However, the reorganization of the volunteer regiments and their structuring as the Transvaal Volunteers reflected mounting apprehension among Greater Britons over the adequacy of the military establishment for the defense of expanding British interests in South Africa and for the creation and maintenance of a political equilibrium.¹⁶ Fashioned at this critical juncture, the Transvaal Volunteers was an attempt at unity—albeit of a peculiarly British variety—and reflected the need for a fundamental overhauling of the military establishment. The Britons in the newly-annexed colony were made to understand the advantages a better orientated military policy held for them as a group and as individuals, and Boers were encouraged in this view, too. The formation of the Volunteers and the coincidental establishment of settlers’ unions and agricultural cooperatives represented something of a national, united front against the veldtocracy that sought to exclude Britons from life on the platteland. The Volunteers would stand in stark contrast to the quasi-feudal commandos of the Boer republics, which were rife with intermittent quarrels between Boer and other local notables and were divisive because the Boer military system produced local rather than national loyalty.

Long confronted with a restive Boer population within the empire, British authorities were faced with a real dilemma, for the creation of the Volunteers opened the troublesome question of Boer admission into the force. On the one hand, the Boers were then British subjects, deserving equal rights and liable for equal service. Yet, on the other, both Milner and Joseph Chamberlain, the British Colonial Secretary,

¹⁴ Milner to Colonel Charles Crewe, 27 April 1904, *Milner Papers II*, 508.

¹⁵ Milner to Colonel Charles Crewe, 27 April 1904, *Milner Papers II*, 508.

¹⁶ This term embraces all Britons, such as the Unionists and Liberal Imperialists, who held notions regarding a Greater Britain, as opposed to ‘Little Englanders.’ For further discussion see D. Armitage, “Greater Britain: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis?” *American Historical Review* 104 (1999): 427–45.

were not prepared to re-arm the Boers and take them up into the new defense structures; both men, all too aware that the war had forged a new Boer leadership based on ability, no longer simply kinship, were convinced that the Boers would again attempt to shake off British suzerainty at the earliest opportunity.¹⁷ They had been disarmed after the war. Boer admission to the new voluntary force would imply an immediate re-arming, improved training for the Boers (who had been noted for their indiscipline and individualism) and potential access to positions of command. As British subjects the Boers could not be excluded. Milner found a compromise: admit Boers, but make the organization of the force as British as possible and keep the financial contribution of the government small, so that the burden would have to be carried by the volunteers themselves. By making enlistment unattractive, Milner and Chamberlain aspired to limit the interest of the Boers for at least several years.

At the beginning of 1905, partly in answer to the concerns raised by Milner during the previous year, the Transvaal Volunteers converted to a district-based organization, thus eliminating overlapping areas of recruitment and establishing a 'British' military presence on the platteland. Several regiments were reconstituted; others were raised for the first time. All units were permitted to recruit on the Witwatersrand—the populous hub of the gold mining industry—with the exception of the Northern Rifles, Western Rifles, and Eastern Rifles; their recruitment areas were strictly the military districts of the northern, western, and eastern Transvaal. Local notables were appointed to these regimental commands, and they were charged with the proper arming, supplying, and training of the volunteers in these districts.

Politics and Command of the Eastern (Southern Mounted) Rifles

On 1 January 1905 a regiment called the Eastern Rifles—comprised of six mounted squadrons and three infantry companies and with a headquarters in Standerton—was established; the Heidelberg squad-

¹⁷ Milner had hoped that at least some of the Boer leadership would leave South Africa after the war or not return from exile; none were encouraged to serve in the colonial government. Lord Milner to Lord Onslow, 29 December 1902, and Lord Onslow to General Ben Viljoen, 31 December 1902, TNA: CO 291/45, No 53336. On the emergence of the new Boer leadership after 1900, see I. van der Waag, "Boer Generalship and the Politics of command," *War in History* 12 (2005): 15–43.

ron of the South African Light Horse, the Standerton squadron of the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles, and the Barberton section of the Northern Rifles were all absorbed. The recruitment area, embracing much of the eastern Transvaal, included Standerton, part of Milner's heartland and location of the regimental headquarters, together with the adjoining districts of Barberton, Heidelberg, Wakkerstroom, Piet Retief, Ermelo, and Carolina, as well as the Protectorate of Swaziland.¹⁸ These districts were key in terms of the South African defense plan drawn up by the headquarters staff of the South African Military Command, as the imperial garrisons in southern Africa was called. In the event of a Boer rising, the British would go onto the defensive and all actions would be restricted to the protection of communications with the coast. The triangle Cape Town, Durban, and Delagoa Bay would be defended until reinforcements arrived. The administrative area of the Eastern Rifles fell almost squarely into the northern apex of this triangle; they, together with units of the Natal Militia, were expected to secure the railroad between Johannesburg and Durban.¹⁹

Surprisingly, the man appointed in September 1905 to command the Eastern Rifles knew little about the military.²⁰ Hugh Archibald Wyndham (1877–1963) was born at Petworth House, the Stuart palace of his parents, Lord and Lady Leconfield. He arrived in South Africa at the height of the guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War and from 13 October 1901 served Milner briefly as private secretary. He then settled on Kromdraai, a farm some eight kilometres from Standerton that he had bought in 1903 as a vehicle through which to contribute to Milner's broader policy for the 'leavening' of the platteland. At Kromdraai he established a stud for prize-winning racehorses, a model farm, and a country house that doubled as a hub for his coal mining interests and a platform from which to enter local politics. Moreover, with its own halt, Kromdraai was conveniently placed astride the main railroad between Durban and Johannesburg, enabling its owner to move horses easily between Turffontein and Greyville, and troops to his estate for regimental gatherings.

¹⁸ Jonker, "Ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die Transvaalse Verdedigingsmag," 18, 51–52.

¹⁹ Ploeger, "Suid-Afrikaanse Verdedigingskemas, 1887–1914," *Militaria* 1 (1969): 12–13.

²⁰ Milner to Chamberlain, 6 October 1902, TNA: CO 291/43, No 44193.

Yet, Wyndham, unhealthy and having only limited war-time experience, was an unlikely candidate for the command; he had enlisted with the Rand Rifles in 1901, but saw no action.²¹ As Milner's private secretary he had formed part of the backdrop to the discussions that had preceded the establishment of the Transvaal Volunteers, and as contemporaries noted, he was keen to learn about warfare in Africa.²² He sought the company of a wide variety of soldiers of all ranks, including Julian Byng, Douglas Haig, Neville Lyttelton, and a young Lieutenant Ironside,²³ and as John Buchan who shared his house noted, their appetite for military 'shop' (the talk of an expert on his own subject) was prodigious. In this way they "acquired an interest in military history and the art of war."²⁴ Equally alluring after 1904 were the officers of the imperial regiment garrisoned in Standerton; they provided Wyndham with continuous exposure to the British Army as well as equestrian conversation and riding companions.²⁵

Many of the men of Wyndham's regiment had seen previous military service, some with the colonial regiments raised during the Boer War, others with imperial regiments.²⁶ Many had colonial campaign experience in Afghanistan and India, Egypt and the Sudan, and southern Africa. Their commander, by contrast, was an inexperienced twenty-eight-year-old, lacking in robustness and suffering from tuberculosis. Wyndham recognized the incongruity, and (as he no doubt knew would be the case) he reckoned his mother would find his appointment "very amusing."²⁷

²¹ Hugh Wyndham to Mary Maxse, 15 November 1901, West Sussex Record Office [hereafter WSRO]: Maxse Papers, p. 50.

²² Lionel Curtis, *With Milner in South Africa* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1951), 325.

²³ Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan and His World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 125; Neville Gerald Lyttelton, *Eighty Years: Soldiering, Politics, Games* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1927), 266; Hugh Wyndham to Mary Maxse, 15 November 1901, WSRO: Maxse Papers, p. 50 (for visit of "Kitchener & his whole staff" and a dinner at Lord Milner's residence in honor of the King's birthday).

²⁴ John Buchan, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1941), 111.

²⁵ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 29 July 1905 and 30 July 1906, WSRO: Petworth House Archives [hereafter PHA]. As the British garrison in South Africa was gradually reduced, so too were some of the stations, and Standerton was evacuated as a military base in February 1909.

²⁶ The colonial units included the Johannesburg Mounted Rifles and the South African Light Horse; the imperial regiments included the 19th Hussars, the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and the 1st Shropshire Light Infantry. See the Enrolment Book of the Southern Mounted Rifles, 1 July 1911, NASAP: TVO 50B.

²⁷ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 17 September 1905, WSRO: PHA.

Yet, the implausibility of his appointment did not stop him from commanding his regiment, which he did almost as a condition of his birth and his status as a younger son of a British peer. Volunteer organizations have always been one of the most important social institutions in colonial life, with leadership positions filled invariably by the social and political elite. Regimental mustering and training days were important social occasions during which the colonial pecking order could be reinforced.²⁸ Wyndham was strongly loyalist, and in social terms at least, the premier Briton living in the district of Standerton. He often mustered his regiment for review during civic celebrations; in March 1907, for example, he and his Standerton troop provided an escort for Lord Selborne (Milner's successor as High Commissioner and Governor of the Transvaal and Orange River Colonies) during the town's agricultural show.²⁹ Moreover, Kromdraai was firmly in Milner's heartland, geographically the center of the regimental area, and well-served by the main railroad between the colonies of Natal and the Transvaal. Training often took place on the Kromdraai estate, followed customarily by dinner in the house.³⁰ In this way military and agricultural interests of the colony were met, and Wyndham's status was confirmed.

The social structure of the Volunteers conformed to a large extent to the colonial hierarchy, which in 1905 replicated layered, ordered British society. Men like Wyndham embraced the opportunity to recreate in the colonies a lifestyle that was vanishing at home; they became justices of the peace, founded British-style clubs and societies, and were much concerned with horses, local politics, the military, and similar genteel pursuits.³¹ However, wealth and the holding of plural offices could only go so far. They could look to each other for their social connections and business deals, the command of the local regiments, and the guidance

²⁸ R. L. Boucher, "The Colonial Militia as a Social Institution: Salem, Massachusetts, 1764–1775," *Military Affairs* 37 (December 1973): 125.

²⁹ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 17 March 1907, WSRO: PHA.

³⁰ Ibid., 22 April 1906 and 25 May 1906, WSRO: PHA.

³¹ David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (London and NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27–29; Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 429; see also Robert Morrell, "Volunteer Regiments, Military Men and Militarism," in *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880–1920* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, University of South Africa, 2001).

of a range of local initiatives, but, as a group, they were always aware of alternative nodes of power in the districts.

Platteland Struggles, the Regiment, and the Politics of Identity

Wyndham and his regiment were immediately part of the struggle for control of the platteland—the Transvaal countryside. The early history of Standerton district had been shaped by conflicts between Boers and local African polities over land and labor that culminated by 1883 in the defeat of the last independent chiefdoms in the area. The Boers, pushing the remaining Africans into locations,³² occupied the land and soon their society stratified into landowners and bywoners, the landless working the estates of patrons or powerful relatives.³³ The problems presented by foreign agricultural competition, labor shortages, drought, and pestilence culminated in the Second Anglo-Boer War, along with the social dislocation associated with the farm burning, the movement of men on commando, and the herding and concentrating of refugees and enemy civilians in camps.³⁴ The war, as Selborne noted, reduced the average farmer “from lazy affluence to extreme poverty and misery.”³⁵ Several wealthy, influential Boers, however, remained relatively untouched. Of these, Louis Botha (1862–1919), the former commandant general of the old Transvaal Republic, was *primus inter pares*. Although his war losses may have been considerable, Botha commanded sufficient credit to reorganize his farming activities, which included the move of

³² This term conveys a meaning similar to that which ‘reservation’ carries in North America.

³³ Morrell, “Competition and Cooperation in Middelburg, 1900–1930,” in *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850–1930*, ed. William Beinart, Peter Delius, and S. Trapido, 375 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986).

³⁴ Wilson, “Farming, 1866–1966,” 115–17, 126; T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London 1995), ch. 37–41; and A. M. Hughes, Secretary to the Repatriation Department, Circular letter No 24, 28 September 1902, TNA: CO 291/42, No. 43292.

³⁵ Lord Selborne to Joseph Chamberlain, 24 February 1908, in *The Crisis of British Power: The Imperial and Naval Papers of the Second Earl of Selborne, 1895–1910*, ed. D. George Boyce, 344 (London: Historian’s Press, 1990). On the state of farming in the Transvaal in this period see the report of the Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa, Vol. 1* (Stellenbosch, Pro ecclesia drukkerij, 1932).

the Botha family to Standerton, where they established themselves on Rusthof, a farm two railroad halts down from Kromdraai.³⁶

As Wyndham correctly saw, although the war had been won militarily, the political struggle between Briton and Afrikaner in southern Africa continued. From 1903 this contest was marked primarily by a struggle on the land where farmers, with little in common, remained "divided, between and within districts, on political lines."³⁷ The farmers in the district of Standerton, as was the case throughout the Transvaal Colony, were separated by a range of criteria including wealth and the scale of operations, as well as the distinctions between Boer and British settlers, who pursued their political and economic interests through different parties and associations.³⁸ After the war Milner sought to smash the Boer veldtocracy and to break their hold on the land; in its place he would create a class of commercial farmers. Economically, Milner's policy brought large-scale state involvement in agriculture. He hoped that the new settlers would introduce new and progressive farming techniques. However, as he recognized, the settlement of Britons on isolated farms amidst a purely Boer population was useless. Blocks of land had to be bought and Britons had to be settled sufficiently near to one another so as to offer mutual support, form a presence in the local community, and "consolidate South African sentiment in the general interests of the Empire."³⁹

Politically, this policy, which involved the much-historicized process of anglicization, the preservation of Boers as farmers but with the introduction of British settlers, as well as the suppression of the last African resistance, had brought Wyndham to Standerton. The platteland saw a flood of new agriculturalists, all British, some ex-soldiers, who were settled among the repatriated Boers to act as a kind of 'leaven.' In the end only 1,256 British settlers—approximately one-eighth of the figure for which Milner had hoped—occupied over two million acres in 1907.⁴⁰

³⁶ Stanley Trapido, "Reflections on Land, Office and Wealth in the South African Republic, 1850–1900," in *Economy and Society in pre-industrial South Africa*, ed. Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, 362–63 (London: Longman, 1987; and Frans Vredenburg, *General Louis Botha* (London: G. G. Harrap & Co., Ltd., 1929), 23, 119–20.

³⁷ Beinart and Delius, "Introduction," in *Putting a Plough to the Ground*, 39–40.

³⁸ For example see Morrell, "Competition and Cooperation in Middelburg, 1900–1930," in *Putting a Plough to the Ground*, 381.

³⁹ Milner to Chamberlain, 25 January 1902, BPP: Cd.1163-1902, No. 22.

⁴⁰ Milner to Chamberlain, 30 December 1901, BPP: Cd.1163-1902, No. 20; Smith, *John Buchan*, 119.

This was too few to break the hold of the veldtocracy. Furthermore, the settlers had to be protected both from the inevitable financial disasters and disappointments of the first few years, as well as from being 'squeezed out' either by neighbors or by a premature responsible government. Yet, those who managed to survive the climate—both natural and social—would, he thought, be "a most valuable asset."⁴¹

Boer political discipline and organization had not cracked under the stress of the war. Instead a new leadership had emerged, which, sensing the threat to their landed power after 1902, closed ranks and denied British access to rural society.⁴² Botha, the former commandant general, was the chief pillar of republican identity in the Transvaal and particularly Standerton,⁴³ a district in which he was well-buttressed by Coen Brits (1868–1932) and J. J. Alberts (1872–1947). Brits, whom Wyndham described as "a mere bully,"⁴⁴ had served as a deputy to Botha during the war, and in 1902 he had a run-in with the Milner administration regarding the post-war restitution of cattle.⁴⁵ Alberts, also of local farming stock, served under Brits during the war, after which he returned to farming. The new leadership organized the people soon after 1902 under the cover of agricultural societies, and Milner's loss of control over the countryside was signaled by the formation of a People's Congress on 24 May 1904, chaired by Botha.⁴⁶ In January 1905, this Congress became *Het Volk* (The People), a political party representing the massed interests of Dutch-speakers of the Transvaal.⁴⁷ *Het Volk* had an elaborate organization, comprising a network of committees. This was the old commando system with the military component ostensibly

⁴¹ Lord Milner to Lord Selborne, 14 April 1905, in Headlam, *Milner Papers II*, 554–55.

⁴² A major obstacle, as Milner informed the Colonial Secretary, was "the tendency of Boer owners to hold on to enormous estates, which they [were] unable to develop," Milner to Chamberlain, 30 December 1901, BPP: Cd.1163-1902, No. 20.

⁴³ See Daniel Grove to Louis Botha, 23 August 1903, p. 8–11, NASAP: Preller Collection, Vol 89.

⁴⁴ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 11 February 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁴⁵ C. J. Brits to Lord Milner, 17 December 1902; William Windham to Native Commissioners, 18 December 1902; and Geoffrey Robinson to C. J. Brits, 2 January 1903, NASAP: GOV 615, file PS 383 Restitution of Cattle to Boers by Natives and vice versa.

⁴⁶ Lord Milner to Alfred Lyttelton, 30 May 1904, BPP: Cd.2104-1904. Correspondence Relating to Affairs in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, No. 13; and First Congress of Transvaal Farmers' Association, NASAP: CS 447, file 2415/04.

⁴⁷ "Statues of the People's Union," (Pretoria, 1905), University of South Africa Library [hereafter UNISA]: United Party Archives, Transvaal.

removed: ward committees elected by the people, district committees elected by the ward committees, and all falling under an all-powerful head committee.⁴⁸

Milner and his reconstruction cabinet failed to grasp the realities of colonial Transvaal. They moved in relatively closed circles, while social conventions imported from Britain encouraged snobbery, pretentiousness, and self-conscious class distinctions—none of which endeared Wyndham and his set to the broad Transvaal electorate.⁴⁹ They knew the Transvaal would receive responsible government, but events overtook their plans. The Conservatives suffered a major electoral defeat in the British general elections of 1906, and the new Liberal government promised immediate responsible government, which, according to Wyndham, “would make no difference to the inimitable attitude of the Boers, & would enormously weaken the Imperial position.”⁵⁰ There were insufficient numbers of British settlers scattered across the Transvaal, and to make matters worse, they were divided between four political parties.

The Boers of the Transvaal, by contrast, had one political home, the *Het Volk* movement. Moreover, Boer consolidation centered on the mobilization of history and the use of the British settler as a punch ball.⁵¹ The Dutch Reformed *predikant*, who enjoyed almost unchallenged religious and cultural power, ensured sustained pressure. With the assistance of the various sheep inspectors and later the field cornets of the resurrected commandos, they kept the masses in line. Milner was convinced that “but for the influence of parsons...and the more educated and town-frequenting of their own class,” the Boers as a body would not have been irreconcilable.⁵² Under their direction any Boer who attempted an independent position became the focus of orchestrated goading until the penitent maverick returned chastised to the fold. “No Boer,” as Selborne remarked, “however much he desired

⁴⁸ Transvaaler (nom de plume for Geoffrey Robinson), “Political Parties of the Transvaal,” *The National Review* 45 (May 1905): 480–1; N. G. Garson, “Het Volk: The Botha-Smuts Party in the Transvaal, 1904–11,” *Historical Journal* 9 (1966): 129.

⁴⁹ Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 281.

⁵⁰ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 1 July 1905, WSRO: PHA.

⁵¹ For example see Circular from Louis Botha, November 1903 (561), NASAP: Preller Collection, Vol. 92.

⁵² Milner to Selborne, 18 April 1905, in Boyce, *The Crisis of British Power*, 198–203.

office, would dare do it without the consent of his friends.”⁵³ “The Boer,” as Wyndham told his mother, was therefore “rather a broken reed to rely on”; then a candidate for the Standerton seat, he hoped for a solid British vote.⁵⁴

Somewhat naively, Wyndham proposed first to stand as an independent in order to draw Britons of all political color as well as Boers, but soon he joined the Progressives and fought on a platform “calculated to bring about the ultimate federation of South Africa under the British flag.”⁵⁵ Rushing from Settler meetings in Klerksdorp and Nylstroom to Volunteer maneuvers at Bronkhorstspuit, the Progressive candidate and commander of the Eastern Rifles muddled his politicking and military interests. Unsurprisingly, his troubles with the Volunteers increased as the election approached. In September 1906 he complained that in Vereeniging “resignations have been flying about like locusts,”⁵⁶ while in Standerton, the headquarters of his regiment, “very few turned up” for a bivouac that October.⁵⁷

In December Wyndham heard that his settler clause was inserted into the Constitution, but that the imperial board, seemingly created to protect the settler interests in the event of a Boer government, would last only five years. Moreover, no provision was made for further British land settlement.⁵⁸ It seemed as if all was set for a fresh confrontation. Wyndham spent Christmas with fellow Progressives, the Drummond Chaplins; he found that he had to instill an optimistic view in his hostess, who feared that Britain would “have to fight the war over again in 10 years time or else retire from the country.”⁵⁹ That December Botha was also confirmed as his opponent in Standerton. The seat was particularly hard-fought.⁶⁰ No less than 80.1 percent of the Standerton electorate

⁵³ Selborne to Duncan, 30 November 1907, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town [hereafter UCT]: BC294 Patrick Duncan Papers, D6.3.6. Selborne had succeeded Milner as Governor of the Transvaal and High Commissioner for South Africa in 1905.

⁵⁴ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 8 October 1906, WSRO: PHA.

⁵⁵ Transvaal Progressive Association Principles, NASAP: Dr. F. V. Engelenburg Collection, Vol. 7, 43.

⁵⁶ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 22 September 1906, WSRO: PHA.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 8 October 1906, WSRO: PHA.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17 December 1906, WSRO: PHA.

⁵⁹ Diary of Lady Marguerite Chaplin, 24 March 1906, UCT: BC831 Drummond Chaplin Collection; Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 24 December 1906 (“retire from the country”), WSRO: PHA.

⁶⁰ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 27 January 1907 and 11 February 1907, WSRO: PHA. See also Harold Spender, *General Botha* (London: Constable & Co.,

turned out to vote, the highest for any constituency in the election, and with 74 percent Botha won Standerton convincingly.⁶¹

But Wyndham had not only worried about the outcome of the election; the broader franchise guaranteed a Boer majority. He was more concerned about entrenching the position of the British farmer and consolidating the loyalty of the volunteers ostensibly under his command. He warned his mother in a letter that "the covering of the retreat of the home government" would not be easy.⁶² During the recent election, almost beleaguered on his Kromdraai estate, the Boer press had ridiculed him. They canvassed the opinion that Kromdraai had been allotted him while on Milner's staff and "that it was a disgraceful government job."⁶³ On the eve of the election, a special, free edition of the *Volkstem*—containing a lead article on "The Wyndham Scandal"—was distributed throughout the district.⁶⁴ Wyndham later won a case for damages,⁶⁵ but the belittlement of a British aristocrat and a supposed respected member of society was no small matter. It was part of a larger process to transform Standerton society, the volunteer movement, and possibly even drive out a man who favored the Crown.

Giving up politics after his electoral defeat, Wyndham returned to his horses and to his volunteering. Between these interests, agriculture, and the maintenance of a military presence on the platteland, he also sought a role to play in the Closer Union machine. He used Kromdraai, the Transvaal Volunteers, and the Transvaal Settlers' Union to build some influence in a Transvaal again under Boer government.

For Wyndham the chief hope for South Africa now lay in the other colonies, which he hoped were "surely not prepared to throw over the whole result of the war, whatever the Home Government may be

1919), 178 (Botha "was fought very keenly by a young Englishman, the Hon. Hugh Wyndham, who had a large farm at Standerton.").

⁶¹ Selborne to Elgin, 25 March 1907, BPP: Cd.3528–1907, No. 42. On the Transvaal election see N. G. Garson, "Het Volk: The Botha-Smuts Party in the Transvaal, 1904–11," *The Historical Journal* 9(1966). For Wyndham's role see van der Waag, "Hugh Wyndham, Transvaal Politics and the Attempt to Create an English Country Seat in South Africa, 1901–14," in *The British World: Diaspora, Culture and Identity*, ed. Fedorowich and C. Bridge, 147 (Frank Cass, London, May 2003).

⁶² Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 3 March 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 27 January 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁶⁴ "The Wyndham Scandal," *De Volkstem*, 6 February 1907.

⁶⁵ Illiquid case for Damages, *Hugh Archibald Wyndham v. Wallach's Printing and Publishing Company Limited*, NASAP: ZTPD 5/634, 73/1907; Walter Nimocks, *Milner's Young Men: The "Kindergarten" in Edwardian Imperial Affairs* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1970), 67–8; and Engelenburg, *General Louis Botha*, 144.

prepared to do.”⁶⁶ In London, *The Spectator* talked airily of having another war if necessary, which as Wyndham observed was “indeed... a cheerful ending to the policy of conciliation.”⁶⁷ From a Greater Britain point of view, the political situation depreciated further. The *Het Volk* landslide in the Transvaal was followed in November 1907 by an even larger setback in the Orange River Colony and in the Cape Colony: L. S. Jameson’s Progressive government fell and John X. Merriman, a sworn foe of Milnerism, replaced him. British South Africa underwent a political metamorphosis between 1907 and 1908.

Military Service, Composition of the Regiment

The changing political environment naturally affected the Volunteer movement. The first rumors of a major restructuring by the *Het Volk* government of the armed forces of the Transvaal drew public attention in April 1907. To the horror of some British and many colonial politicians and soldiers, stories of the re-establishment of ‘a Boer Army’ abounded in the press. Pax Britannia, they professed, represented peace in South Africa; militarism was something of the past.⁶⁸ Undeterred, Botha moved forward and, to fund the resurrected commandos (called rifle clubs), he proposed to reduce the Volunteers.⁶⁹ Colonel P. S. Beves, the Commandant of the Volunteers, setting £120,000 as the non-reducible minimum, threatened to resign.⁷⁰ The adroit Selborne intervened, managing to diffuse the tension and at the same time to stem the proposed changes in the Volunteer organization; the original proposals he reckoned “would have destroyed the force.”⁷¹ Wyndham expressed his relief; his regiment was left substantially untouched, apart from a reduction in establishment from eight hundred to six hundred.

⁶⁶ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 8 April 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Percy Molteno to Louis Botha, 23 April 1907, in *Selections from the Correspondence of Percy Alport Molteno, 1892–1914*, ed. Vivian Solomon, 289 (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1981).

⁶⁹ A cost analysis of volunteer organizations throughout the British Empire showed the Transvaal Volunteers relatively cheap; seven thousand men, of whom three thousand were mounted or artillery, cost the colony £183,000 (£26.3.0 per head) in mid-1906. Lord Selborne to Patrick Duncan, 2 April 1906 (D6.2.7) and 22 May 1906 (D6.2.8), UCT: BC294 Duncan Papers.

⁷⁰ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 22 April 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁷¹ Lord Selborne to Patrick Duncan, 3 May 1907, UCT: BC294 Duncan Papers, D6.3.3.1.

Blusteringly he declared that he himself had considered a reduction in numbers “in order to have nothing but good men in.”⁷² As part of these changes, the number of volunteer regiments was reduced, a process that involved the amalgamation of the Eastern Rifles with the Western Rifles on 1 July 1907 to form a new regiment, the Southern Mounted Rifles with a strength of six hundred.

Wyndham remained on as commander of the new regiment until 1912. The enrollment books of the regiment are inaccurate—exact details are not recorded for each volunteer—and thus make comparison and the statistical analysis over time difficult. Nonetheless, farmers represented a majority (435) of the social composition of the regiment. Of the volunteers enrolled 153 or some 20.8 percent specified work identifying them as townsmen; the largest single category here was for clerks (sixteen). However, to keep its horses and therefore its troopers in the field for as long as possible, the regiment benefited from having two saddlers, a farrier, two shoeing smiths, and two veterinary surgeons, in addition to ten professional transport riders, a gunsmith, and a boot-maker.⁷³

But this was no easy command. The extent of the regimental area, embracing at first much of the Eastern Transvaal, made regimental concentrations difficult, and as a result turnout was often not the best. Wyndham had made his first tour of inspection in the Eastern Transvaal in November 1905,⁷⁴ but soon bought a motorcar to assist movement; between inspections, gymkhanas (military games), and Bisleys (rifle competitions), there were inspections each Sunday.⁷⁵ Poor roads, however, forced Wyndham to abandon horse and motorcar and use the train, particularly after July 1907 when the regimental area increased dramatically with the establishment of the Southern Mounted Rifles and the incorporation of the districts to the southwest of Johannesburg.⁷⁶

⁷² Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 19 May 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁷³ Enrollment Book of the Southern Mounted Rifles, Transvaal Volunteers, NASAP: TVO 50B.

⁷⁴ Assistant Colonial Secretary to Commandant, Transvaal Volunteers, 16 November 1905, Military Archives Pretoria [hereafter MAP]: Personnel Archives and Reserves, file 196 Lt. Col. Hon. H. A. Wyndham [hereafter Personnel File].

⁷⁵ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 11 November 1905, 8 Apr 1906, 15 April and 22 April 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25 November 1907, WSRO: PHA. Wyndham complained of the roads. For example see Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 8 April 1907, WSRO: PHA (“[W]e had a very wet motor ride back—the roads all flooded & very muddy.”).

To overcome the distances and the scattered nature of his command, Wyndham deployed the regiment for several days annually at Kromdraai; these deployments often coincided with other events, possibly as a way of ensuring the attendance of the farmer-volunteer. In March 1907, for example, the Standerton troopers of the Eastern Rifles provided Selborne with a ceremonial guard at an agricultural show, which Wyndham had organized as chairman of the Standerton Farmers' Association. After the show, Wyndham hosted a camp at Kromdraai for two squadrons of the volunteers and cadets, together with "nearly all [of] the officers from the other Squadrons."⁷⁷ Kromdraai House was again "turned into a Club House," where lectures and gymkhanas were held.⁷⁸ However, with the land at Kromdraai being so flat and treeless, Wyndham had difficulty preparing schemes for maneuvers.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, although very hard work, the camp was reckoned a great success; Wyndham did not get to bed before midnight each night, and he had to be up before dawn. All this he enjoyed immensely.⁸⁰

Furthermore, although the enrollment books show that the regiment was overwhelmingly 'British' in 1911, it was, at first, remarkably Afrikaan. Some sub-units were particularly so; Wyndham noted in 1906 that in the Bethal troop "all except four [were] Boers."⁸¹ The Boers of the district, many of them republicans bloodied during the countless 'native campaigns' and the 1899–1902 war, accepted the command of a relatively inexperienced twenty-eight-year-old from England with no apparent knowledge of African warfare, with difficulty. Familiar with horse and rifle and colonial warring from a young age, they held British military doctrine in contempt. Being trained by people whom they considered less habituated to arms in Africa was too much.⁸² Some, after a series of none too subtle acts of insubordination, had to be booted out. For Wyndham, this sort of thing eroded the fun value, and within only months of assuming command, he complained to his

⁷⁷ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 17 March 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 17 March 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁷⁹ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 25 March 1907, WSRO: PHA (The highveld has "no trees and few bushes—one to the square mile, perhaps. Just miles of grass broken by kopjes."). See John Dove to Mrs Hunt, 10 November 1907, in *The Letters of John Dove*, ed. Robert Henry Brand, 12 (London: Macmillan, 1938).

⁸⁰ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 8 April 1907, WSRO: PHA.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 17 December 1906, WSRO: PHA.

⁸² This was an old perception and one that seemingly survived the South African War. For example see Milner to Chamberlain, 6 February 1901, *Milner Papers II*, 200.

mother: "This volunteer business is really becoming no joke. I am up to the chin in rows."⁸³

Although the eastern districts had not been devastated during the war in the fashion of the Western Transvaal, many Boers nonetheless struggled to re-establish themselves on the land. The white poor were many and the politics of discontent burned deep. The wealth of their commander, who mixed his volunteering work with settler business, did not heal political differences within the regiment. Many of the Dutch Volunteers of his regiment felt alienated. At the end of August 1906, "the whole of the Volunteers in Standerton rose against" him.⁸⁴ Wyndham wanted to promote a certain man and the rank and file objected and threatened to resign. As a result he found himself "up against a brick wall" and had to give way. "It is no use" he noted, "appointing a man to command a troop if the whole troop resigns."⁸⁵ What is interesting is that most of these objectors were seemingly English-speakers, objecting to the use of patronage in the face of military competence.

Moreover, certain Boer officers taken up into the regiment also made matters difficult. Jan Kemp, a former Boer general then serving in the Piet Retief troop of the Eastern Rifles, caused disciplinary problems, eroded Wyndham's authority, and refused to turn out whenever Wyndham attended a deployment.⁸⁶ Eventually booted out after gross insubordination,⁸⁷ Kemp joined the 'Boer Army' formed by Botha in mid-1907 and was elected field cornet for the district of Piet Retief.⁸⁸ Afrikaners who may have been willing to serve with the British-styled volunteer regiments were lured into the resurrected commandos, then called rifle clubs. Wyndham had difficulty enrolling reserves; Beves noted that reserves in the districts had "not enrolled as freely as one would wish, due probably to a large number of rifle clubs which are being systematically organised, especially throughout the South-Eastern

⁸³ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 22 April 1906, WSRO: PHA.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 4 September 1906, WSRO: PHA.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 31 March, 8 April, and 16 June 1906, WSRO: PHA. In his memoirs, Kemp, himself born in 1872, refers disparagingly to Wyndham and other Kindergarteners as "kêreltjies": J. C. G. Kemp, *Die Pad van die Veroweraar* (Cape Town: Nasionale Pers Bpk, 1942), 66.

⁸⁷ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 31 March, 8 April, and 16 June 1906, WSRO: PHA.

⁸⁸ Kemp, *Die Pad van die Veroweraar*, 109.

Transvaal.”⁸⁹ But there was trouble elsewhere too; in June 1907 the total approved strength of the Transvaal Volunteers was 11,457, while the actual strength was only 6,619.

The Boers of the district flocked to the rifle clubs, which were instilled with republican traditions and where there were positions of command for those disappointed in the Volunteers. Alberts was elected field cornet for the Waterval ward of Standerton district in January 1908; he and his cousins, Commandant Claassen and Commandant P. S. G. Botha, later commanded the two commandos Standerton fielded during the German South West campaign of the First World War. An analysis of the muster rolls reveals a strong pattern of kinship: the men on the commando roll included a large number of Bothas, Brits’s and Breytenbachs.⁹⁰ This was probably a trend in other district and town commandos of the Transvaal and Orange River colonies, too. The tool for Boer militarization of the district would not be the volunteer regiment, but rather their vacation of what was then accepted as an institution riddled with imperially-minded Britons determined to maintain a presence on the platteland. The replacement of men like Wyndham was no longer crucial to the Boer cause; the politically reliable were drawn rather into the leadership of the commandos. Wyndham had never been the chief civilian of the district, and after 1907 his position as the chief military official was also challenged.

The ministrations of *Het Volk* and later the restoration of commandos had made an impact. Across the Transvaal the regiments experienced difficulty in enrolling men. At the time of the reorganization of the Volunteers in mid-1907, the mounted regiments were at only 57.5 percent of approved strength. The rural regiments were considerably worse off; the Western Rifles being at only 23.4 percent of approved establishment. Wyndham’s Eastern Rifles placed comparatively well at 63.3 percent. This difference may be attributed to the long-term political impact of the Boer War and the greater devastation and bitterness that conflict brought to the Western Transvaal.⁹¹ An analysis of the numbers and the location of volunteers do suggest a geography of loyalism.

⁸⁹ The Annual Report on the Transvaal Volunteers and Cadets for the year 1910–1911, 84. See also Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 17 December 1906 and 3 December 1909, WSRO: PHA.

⁹⁰ Mustering rolls of Standerton Commando, MAP: archives of the O.C. Records, boxes 194 and 195.

⁹¹ “Notes of a visit to the South Western and Western Districts of the Transvaal,” by Patrick Duncan, Pretoria, 30 September [1903], UCT: BC294 Duncan papers, A38.14.

The numbers also suggest that some Afrikaners in exposed, isolated areas, particularly on the always insecure borders with Swaziland and Zululand, still rushed to the colors. In 1909, the Piet Retief troop, some 150 strong, were still “nearly all Boers,” and as Wyndham admitted, “all very keen & really very efficient.”⁹² By 1911, however, the situation seemed to be turning. As shown elsewhere, of the 736 men in the Southern Mounted Rifles, some 531 men identified themselves as ‘British,’ a further ten as ‘English,’ three as ‘Irish,’ one as ‘Scotch,’ and one as ‘Colonial New Zealand.’ There were sixty-nine ‘Dutch’ and five ‘British Dutch,’ categories replaced from 1908 by ‘Africander,’ of whom there were twenty. There were a further sixty-seven ‘British Subjects,’ three ‘South Africans,’ and five ‘Colonials,’ one of whom had served in the Boer forces. Such flags are not good measures; of the four attorneys in the regiment, an Oosthuizen from Piet Retief described himself as ‘British,’ and Arnt Leonard Reitz, the son of the former president of the Orange Free State, F. W. Reitz, gave himself as a ‘British attorney.’⁹³ Such were the complexities of British identity, but perhaps the Volunteers became—even if only in measure—a vehicle that defined a British national identity in the colonial Transvaal.

It would seem as if the Southern Mounted Rifles and other regiments of the Transvaal Volunteers cemented the small, often isolated pockets of British settlers and formed a British presence in remote localities. E. P. Thompson has suggested that volunteers were the militant expression of a threatened section of society, chiefly the upper and middling classes.⁹⁴ Yet, in colonial Transvaal, to a large extent at least, whites of all classes wanted to preserve the existing political and social structure and so, undoubtedly, military training and socialization fostered individual Boer-British relations and most probably consolidated, as Milner had hoped, at least some sentiment “in the general interests of the Empire.”⁹⁵ The volunteers were, therefore, in measure a vehicle

See also C. J. Tearnan to Duke of Marlborough, Colonial Office, 19 September 1903, NASAP: Colonial Treasurer (C.T.), 288, 1021.

⁹² Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 3 December 1909, WSRO: PHA.

⁹³ van der Waag, “Hugh Wyndham, Transvaal Politics and the Attempt to Create an English Country Seat in South Africa,” 147. For the original data, see the Enrolment Book of the Southern Mounted Rifles, Transvaal Volunteers, NASAP: TVO 50B.

⁹⁴ Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), 189–90. Thompson relied heavily in this study on the eighteenth and nineteenth century volunteers of West Riding, Yorkshire.

⁹⁵ Milner to Chamberlain, 25 January 1902, BPP: Cd.1163–1902.

for white nation-building. Yet, clearly, the use of bare numbers of volunteers is too simplistic a gauge to measure loyalism and burgeoning colonial nationalism.⁹⁶

*Training and Operational Deployment:
The Bhambatha Rebellion*

Shortly after settling the conquered world, the imperial powers developed a military concept for the occupation, and where they deemed it necessary, for the pacification of colonial possessions. A vast literature developed that embraced both the theory and the practice of such operations. The British, following the fashionable ideas of the Victorian soldier-philosopher Colonel C. E. Callwell, adopted the concept of small wars, a term applied to a variety of scenarios. Callwell, in fact, enumerated seven categories of potential enemies ranging from well-structured armies to guerrillas and irregular cavalry.⁹⁷ Small wars, whether in the form of the pacification of simmering discontent or the crushing of outright rebellion, inevitably accompanied colonial enterprise.

Bhambatha, although a relatively minor Zulu chief, came to embody the spirit of protest in early-twentieth-century Natal. The rebellion that bears his name followed the imposition by the Natal government of a controversial hut tax, which gave vent to popular protest and the sudden spilling over into what the colonial authorities defined as 'rebellion.' The dawning realization by Bhambatha that the uprising could only succeed if its supporters adopted a guerrilla strategy pushed them towards the Nkandhla forests. The Natal Militia was clearly not able to cope with the growing discontent, and the government in Pietermaritzburg appealed to the neighboring British colonies for support. The Cape and Transvaal responded.⁹⁸

Bhambatha gave the Transvaal Volunteers their first battle experience, although only small portions of regiments were deployed,⁹⁹ the

⁹⁶ This argument is well-made by Linch, "A Geography of Loyalism?"

⁹⁷ Colonel C. E. Callwell's *Small Wars: their principles and practice*, which was first published by the War Office in 1896 (Printed for H. M. Stationery office by Harrison and Sons, London) and reprinted several times until 1914; it became the classic primer for colonial warfare.

⁹⁸ The Transvaal Colony despatched 980 volunteers to Natal, including artillerymen, infantry, signallers, and medical personnel and some 471 mounted riflemen.

⁹⁹ For example, of the 658 troopers in the Eastern Rifles, only 33 went to Natal.

argument being that it would be best if the ensuing battle experiences were shared broadly rather than benefiting one or two regiments only. The immediate questions asked related to the adequacy of organization and training. As has been noted, the Transvaal Volunteers were local in character and largely geographically organized. Training, which took place at the behest of local officers in various forms and in some districts irregularly, was the primary activity.¹⁰⁰

In some ways the disbandment of the commandos in 1902 had represented something of a regression. The commando system emerged in war zones on the periphery of empire, freed from cumbersome western conventions and more suited to local conditions. A manifestation of ongoing frontier insecurity and the inability—perhaps unwillingness—of the colonial administration to secure the borders, the commandos were mounted for mobility, but being marksmen and excellent at fieldcraft, they fought on foot. The mounted infantry of the Transvaal Volunteers, on the other hand, were established along British lines and were in many cases officered by Britons with little colonial experience. Here the commander of the Eastern Rifles was typical; asymmetrical warfare was not entertaining, and without highly-structured charges, it was boring and uninteresting.¹⁰¹

For many colonial men, military service was clearly something to be enjoyed—a rite of passage—and war was a source of glory, another justification of the special status of the officer-gentleman for whom command was both recreation and duty. As Wyndham noted,

It is really very good fun training the Boer in the methods of British Cavalry. They are immensely keen but have not the smallest idea as to what the object of it all is. Their turn out is also sometimes very remarkable. Generally spurs upside down & so forth.¹⁰²

Few of the Transvaal Volunteer officers passed through the British staff colleges, despite a declared need for uniform training. The attachment of colonial officers to imperial regiments and the posting of imperial officers to colonial units, mostly for instructional duties, were thought sufficient.¹⁰³ Training exercises were supplemented occasionally by specialized courses in Britain; Wyndham was attached to the Military

¹⁰⁰ Jonker, "Ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die Transvaalse Verdedigingsmag," 19–23.

¹⁰¹ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 27 August 1906, WSRO: PHA.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 17 December 1906, WSRO: PHA.

¹⁰³ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 22 April 1906, WSRO: PHA.

Operations Directorate at the War Office for three months during 1909 for instruction in intelligence duties, and he spent part of September 1909 in Germany on maneuvers.¹⁰⁴ Commanders and adjutants also presented lectures on military and general subjects in addition to undertaking staff rides, long distance marching, volunteer encampments and bivouacs, church parades and military balls, musketry practice and bisleys.¹⁰⁵ Officers had to read and keep themselves up-to-date, and commanders were “constantly advised to replace the least keen Officers, or those whose civil work prevents them from giving a good deal of time and labour to the cause, by gentlemen who are prepared to sacrifice themselves and are in a position to devote the necessary amount of time to the study of Military matters.”¹⁰⁶

Gentlemen, a term not insignificant in this context, had the leisure time to read and study military history and theory. They also had the means to build up their own collections of books, while the majority of volunteers shared a small library in Pretoria of only 310 items.¹⁰⁷ Wyndham could occupy his leisure hours with reading and writing. His reading was eclectic (he devoured the war memoirs of generals Ben Viljoen and Christian de Wet),¹⁰⁸ and he had an extensive network of correspondents, including his brother-in-law, Ivor Maxse, who could keep him abreast of imperial and military affairs back in England. Unlike the average volunteer, Wyndham could devote time to intellectual pursuits, which allowed him to produce several articles for *The Round Table* and the series “Some aspects of South African defence” in *The State*.¹⁰⁹

The training shared with the imperial troops of the South African Military Command was rooted deeply in European thinking about warfare, with lessons on the Franco-Prussian War and the Peninsular

¹⁰⁴ E. W. D. Ward, War Office to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, 11 May 1909, and Agent General for the Transvaal to Assistant Colonial Secretary, Pretoria, 19 May 1909, MAP: Wyndham's Personnel File; and Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 11 September 1909, WSRO: PHA.

¹⁰⁵ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 9 December 1905, 1 January, 4 June and 16 September 1906, WSRO: PHA.

¹⁰⁶ Annual Report on the Transvaal Volunteers and Cadets for the year 1910–1911, *Militaria* 3(1972): 80.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰⁸ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Maxse, 5 January 1903, WSRO: Maxse Papers, p. 50.

¹⁰⁹ Wyndham, “Some Aspects of South African Defence,” *The State* 2 (June 1909): 644–51, and 2 (July 1909): 96–103.

Campaign of 1811–13.¹¹⁰ Yet even Wyndham was surprised during a field exercise in April 1906 when his mounted troops, instead of turning the left flank of the opposing force, “hurled themselves as a frontal attack against an absolutely impregnable position.”¹¹¹ Much practical work took place; as has been noted in the case of the Eastern Rifles, many events were held at Kromdraai, the house serving as regimental headquarters and ad hoc officers’ mess. In May 1906, Wyndham hosted a mock battle at Kromdraai, followed by a gymkhana, which registered no fewer than thirty-nine competitors for tent pegging. Forty invited guests—and ten gatecrashers—sat for lunch on the second day, many of whom entered the smoking concert in the evening and all “went to bed much exhausted.”¹¹² At the beginning of May 1907, Wyndham took the Lake Chrissie troop, composed of very scattered farmers, out for a week’s training. This excursion took the form of a patrol, which Wyndham met at Machadodorp and then marched with some of the distance back towards Lake Chrissie.¹¹³ This type of practical work, which, in the mind of the Duke of Connaught represented real training,¹¹⁴ was the strongest point in the Transvaal Volunteers and made them much better than the Cape Volunteers, which, according to Connaught, were “too much for show.”¹¹⁵

The Volunteers were often short of equipment and facilities, which were at times loaned from the local imperial garrisons; the Eastern Rifles practiced musketry on the imperial range at Standerton.¹¹⁶ Wyndham had grown and was seemingly a good commander; Beves praised him in the 1911 annual report for keeping his officers keen and his men, “a hard, wiry lot, ... well up to the mark.”

¹¹⁰ H. Tennant to Major W. G. Bentinck, 10 November 1905, NASAP: LD 1163, file AG5390/05, Examinations Military History Officers of the Regular Army.

¹¹¹ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 22 April 1906, WSRO: PHA.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 25 May 1906.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 12 May 1907.

¹¹⁴ The third son of Queen Victoria, the Duke of Connaught and Strathearn, was a British field marshal and from 1904 to 1907 Inspector General of the Forces.

¹¹⁵ Lord Selborne to Patrick Duncan, 22 May 1906, UCT: BC294 Duncan Papers, D6.2.8. Little had apparently changed since Merriman’s criticism of the Cape Volunteers in 1881. See the extracts from telegraphic conversation between Merriman and Sauer, August 1881, in *Selections from the Correspondence of J. X. Merriman 1870–1890*, ed. Phyllis Lewsen, (Cape Town: Riebeeck Society, 1960), 94.

¹¹⁶ Report of the General Purposes Committee, 25 October 1904, Minutes of Town Council, 1 November 1904, NASAP: MST 1/1/1 Standerton Town Council.

Their drill [Beves went on, was] quiet and steady but their best work comes when operations start in the field. There one finds a good deal of common sense and subtlety in their way of looking at and carrying out their work. Long distances do not alarm them, and as they are hard and fit thrive on manoeuvres.¹¹⁷

Although organized into regiments, the Transvaal Volunteers rarely deployed as such. As an organization, it was required to arm and train men, and in times of crisis to provide men in order to form part of an expedition force tailored for a particular emergency. This happened in April 1906, when the Transvaal despatched four squadrons of mounted infantry to Natal. The squadrons were brigaded as the 1st Transvaal Mounted Rifles (TMR) and took part in the drives through the Nkandhla forest, where they made almost half of the total number of colonial troops.

In 1906 the Eastern Rifles had a strength of 720 men, including forty-six officers and a mounted band.¹¹⁸ Of these men, thirty-three, including Wyndham's adjutant, Captain E. F. Thackeray, formed part of D Squadron of the composite TMR.¹¹⁹ The TMR assisted in the actions in the Nkandhla forest in May 1906 and played a cardinal role that June in the battle of the Mome Valley, which led to the defeat of Bhambatha's warriors. With the rebellion crushed, the TMR was disbanded on 1 August 1906.¹²⁰

The TMR engaged the Zulus several times, each time inflicting many casualties while sustaining few; only five members of the TMR were killed during these operations. The military actions in Natal were clearly repressive and not at all in line with Callwell's overawing of the enemy, enabling a later relationship based on friendship with firmness. But it did focus attention on the need for small-wars training and greater inter-colonial military cooperation in South Africa.

¹¹⁷ Annual Report on the Transvaal Volunteers and Cadets for the year 1910–1911, *Militaria* 3(1972): 80.

¹¹⁸ Commandant of Volunteers, Transvaal, to Assistant Colonial Secretary, 7 December 1906, NASAP: CS, C.S.2182/1905, Volunteer Returns Strength and Distribution.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, and Ministerial minute, 8 February 1909, NASAP: PS 68/5/1909, Volunteers Reorganisation.

¹²⁰ Jonker, "Ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die Transvaalse Verdedigingsmag," 23–32; James Stuart, *A History of the Zulu Rebellion, 1906 and of Dinizulu's Arrest, Trial and Expatriation* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913), 223–24.

Spurred on by the initial successes achieved by Bhambatha, the troops in the Transvaal, both imperial and colonial, underwent training in asymmetrical warfare. In September 1907, Wyndham went on maneuvers with the Pretoria garrison. A pamphlet on "Savage Warfare," written by Colonel (later Maj. Gen. Sir) H. T. Lukin but published too late for effect against Bhambatha, was studied and then practiced in the field.¹²¹ Wyndham complained that the week of his attachment would "be dull if they devote the whole of the five days to it."¹²² While he may have preferred "a breastplate in the Life Guards,"¹²³ here on the colonial periphery, as Wyndham no doubt recognized, he had the opportunity to progress beyond what he may have been able to achieve in Britain.

Military Planning and Inter-Colonial Cooperation

The Bhambatha Rebellion highlighted several weaknesses in colonial defense planning. Most importantly, as Wyndham noted, the colonial forces—the Cape Colonial Forces, the Natal Militia, and the Transvaal Volunteers—were "quite inadequate to deal even remotely with any extreme contingency."¹²⁴ Gustave Hallé, a pressman on the Rand, noting that the fighting methods of most African tribes favored surprise and dawn attack, "could not help dwelling on the political mischief of such an army to an unsuspecting white community."¹²⁵ Such fears held great currency and did much to militarize the mind of the colonial settler and volunteer. Alarmed at its seriousness, the Cape government requested an inter-colonial conference, which met in Johannesburg on 21 January 1907 to discuss military co-operation. Closer military co-operation was deemed desirable, and although no formal inter-colonial agreement was

¹²¹ H. T. Lukin, *Savage Warfare: Hints on Tactics to be Adopted and Precautions to be Taken* (Cape Town: Cape Times, 1906); P. Truter to Col. Lukin, 10 May 1906, National Archives of South Africa, Cape Town [hereafter NASAC]: CO 8310, file X5114. "Savage Warfare" by Col. Lukin, Requisition for three hundred copies to be printed in cheap pamphlet form.

¹²² Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 27 August 1906, WSRO: PHA.

¹²³ George Wyndham to Wilfred Scawen Blunt, 8 August 1898, in J. W. Mackail and Guy Wyndham, eds., *Life and Letters of George Wyndham* (London: Hutchinson & Co., c.1914), 342–43.

¹²⁴ Wyndham, "Some Aspects of South African Defence," *The State* 2 (June 1909): 647.

¹²⁵ G. Hallé, *Mayfair to Maritzburg: Reminiscences of Eighty Years* (London: John Murray, 1933), 183.

signed, colonial military chiefs followed up by conducting an advisory conference in Durban on 19 October 1908. They drafted suggestions for their governments on matters such as the establishment of permanent and citizen forces, uniform organization and training, and standardized combat dress, and they prepared several emergency plans.

Beves, the Inspector of the Transvaal Volunteers, prepared two plans: one for internal security and the other to meet an external threat, particularly with regard to German South West Africa.¹²⁶ In the first, entitled *Simultaneous Trouble with the Natives in all the Self-Governing Colonies*, its authors thought it impossible to predict an area of greatest potential trouble, but highlighted the Witwatersrand, the Western Transvaal, and the region north and east of Pietersburg as the regions at greatest risk. Planning for each of these possible crises, Beves provided for mounted columns made up from the volunteer regiments of the Transvaal. The impact on Wyndham's Southern Mounted Rifles in terms of numbers and estimated time was predictably high. His regiment would provide one squadron for each of the mobile columns; the squadrons could be attached to any mobile column formed. In terms of the planning, he was committed to have in theater one hundred troopers within four days of the call, increasing to four hundred troopers within fourteen days. Other volunteer commanders faced similar commitments. The Southern Mounted Rifles, however, had the additional responsibility of protecting the Swaziland border; it was presumed that imperial troops would protect the high commission territory itself.¹²⁷

The problem of defense, Wyndham recognized a year later, was "one of remarkable complexity and magnitude," and his articles in *The State* laid down three requirements to be met if South African defense was to be sound on internal security. "Native" rebellions, he observed, "start suddenly and unexpectedly by the murder of outlying farmers," whom, he thought, would benefit from the protection offered by loop-holed buildings erected on every farm in exposed districts. His first call was therefore for fixed defenses, a system whereby farmers in outlying localities would be ready for emergencies and able to defend

¹²⁶ J. Ploeger, "Imperiale militêre beleid ten opsigte van Suid-Afrika, 1908-1910," *Militaria* 3 (1972): 19.

¹²⁷ Jonker, "Ontstaan en ontwikkeling van die Transvaalse Verdedigingsmag," 49-50.

themselves and their families until they could be relieved and offensive action could be taken.¹²⁸

Such action, he argued secondly, had to be short, sharp, and decisive to confirm in the minds of Africans—combatants and sympathizers—that resistance was futile. Flying columns had to be organized, equipped, and trained in peacetime and ready at a moment's notice to take the field and deal decisively with any uprising. Invoking Brigadier-General George Aston, on the British staff in South Africa, Wyndham reckoned that such a force had to have the power and mobility of a queen on a chessboard: able to be moved where and when needed and "not tied by the leg to local defence."¹²⁹ He likened the colonial forces out during the Natal rebellion to pawns; he wrote to his mother on 25 May 1906,

For the present force to pursue Bambata & Siginanda through that country, is like following a will o' the wisp. The native of course retreats & our horses are becoming rapidly exhausted. This is bad, as the chief danger is that the affair should be dragged out too long.¹³⁰

Using previous colonial campaigns as a guide, he recommended a mobile force of at least twenty thousand of all arms. He also thought a permanent force of twenty thousand would be most desirable, but he recognized that this was not viable financially and South Africa would have to rely on volunteers for some time.¹³¹

Yet to Wyndham the disadvantages of a voluntary system were obvious. An unpopular though efficient officer (and here he was possibly writing from his own experience) could have an effect on recruiting, and the volunteer himself may be placed at a disadvantage in the workplace. Patriotism, he also noted, was likely to flourish in waves, fanned during national crises. And, with volunteer forces, "the absence of preparation is admitted only after it is too late, and is followed by a wild rush to join hastily raised regiments, which have to undergo the hardest training of all—the training of a raw recruit surrounded by the realities of war."¹³² More was required of the volunteer than simply an

¹²⁸ Wyndham, "Some Aspects of South African Defence," *The State* 2 (June 1909): 647, 649.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 647–49.

¹³⁰ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 25 May 1906, WSRO: PHA.

¹³¹ Wyndham, "Some Aspects of South African Defence," *The State* 2 (July 1909): 100.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 97.

ability to ride and shoot. This point he argued was amply borne out by the failure of the Boer forces in the 1899–1902 war. He therefore stressed training, acknowledging all the requirements of military organization, which, he argued, as the science of war advanced were becoming more and more complicated. The Boer commandos were regarded by some as “a fortuitous concourse of individuals instead of a highly organised collection of units.”¹³³

Yet, he argued, through the voluntary system the best material could be acquired. The volunteer, he stated,

by the mere act of volunteering, has proved that he has a proper conception of duty, which may be absent from the individual who is compulsorily enrolled. Compulsion is apt to lead to the performance of only the minimum required for efficiency, whereas in a voluntary system a greater degree of competition combined with esprit de corps can be cultivated.¹³⁴

Such was the basis he envisioned for his proposed striking force, provided the required number of men would be forthcoming. It was therefore apparent that a combination of voluntary and compulsory service was required and that the volunteers and conscripts had to be organized into first and second reserves in order to avoid the risk of any district being depleted of defense owing to the absence of its active defense forces, who would form a portion of his proposed flying column. Such local forces, organized in such a way that they could be called on to defend a district against possible trouble, would allow the removal of active mobile forces to deal with trouble elsewhere. If the regular forces were removed and the country left unprotected, suffering a reverse would immediately be translated into proof that colonial superiority was a thing of the past, and the work of massacre would begin.

Wyndham argued that had the Transvaal organized second-line reserves, her active and mobile forces might have been released during the Bamabata rebellion.¹³⁵ When Wyndham’s regiment, the Eastern Rifles, was mobilized, only some thirty-three men could be sent to Natal for service with the Zululand Field Force, and the rest had to remain

¹³³ Ibid., 98.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Wyndham, “Some Aspects of South African Defence,” *The State* 2 (June 1909): 650.

behind to secure the Transvaal border and maintain local security.¹³⁶ Wyndham's third call therefore was for universal military training and a system of cadets, of active volunteers or militia, of first and second reserves. Bolstered by men like General Lord Methuen, who was in South Africa at that time, Wyndham proposed a system where every boy, having received training in a Cadet Corps, either enrolled in the first reserve or volunteered for the active forces. Advantages would have to be offered to encourage the 'best men' to join the active list, but both the active volunteer and first reserve would be required to do the same amount of training. He also proposed a second reserve for older men, who in all probability would only be called upon in the event of the country being invaded by a European power.

Wyndham wrote the series in *The State* shortly before the union of South Africa. He placed his ideas before the first united parliament and 'the people of South Africa,' whom he hoped would see that these matters affecting South African defense were "dealt with broadly and with a proper conception of the requirements of the case."¹³⁷ South Africa he reckoned had a chance in 1910, "which will certainly not occur again, of founding her defence upon a solid and permanent basis."¹³⁸

The Politics of Military Integration: The Union Defense Force

South African defense—militarily, politically and culturally—was one of remarkable complexity and magnitude; one, which Wyndham (soon a member of the new parliament) thought could only be dealt with "by a nation alive to its responsibilities." As he pointed out, "there is no more potent influence than that of a common danger for bringing a nation into being."¹³⁹ Yet, for the moment, this was not to be. Although the 1912 *South Africa Defence Act* introduced the Union Defence Force (UDF), it was in essence a thorny fusion of Boer and Colonial forces

¹³⁶ Commandant of Volunteers Transvaal to the Assistant Colonial Secretary, 7 December 1906; Volunteer Returns Strength and Distribution; Ministerial minute; Volunteers Reorganisation; Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 28 April 1906 and 25 May 1906, WSR0: PHA; Stuart, *A History of the Zulu Rebellion*, 223–24.

¹³⁷ Wyndham, "Some Aspects of South African Defence," *The State* 2 (June 1909): 651.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 2 (July 1909): 98.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 2 (June 1909): 646.

with British instructors, representing in many ways three military traditions.¹⁴⁰

The various arms of the Union Defence Forces—six forces in all—came into being in 1913,¹⁴¹ and the whole was placed under a divided command to protect sectarian interests and diminish the possibility of a coup; Lukin, the former Commandant of the Cape Colonial Forces, became Inspector-General of the Permanent Force, while former Boer general, C. F. Beyers, became Commandant General of the Citizen Force. Military factions were created in the struggle for military power and the rush on posts in the new structures. Beyers and several other officers, including Kemp, who was then District Staff Officer in Potchefstroom, took steps to fill posts with friends and supporters.¹⁴² This cronyism led to appointments based upon criteria other than merit; the establishment of organizational fiefdoms, which stunted development and war planning; and created distrust, even fission, in the new structures. Many Afrikaners could not endure western military conventions and resisted ‘the melting pot’ of the new defense force.¹⁴³ There was a great deal of suspicion, in particular, regarding the principle of compulsory training,¹⁴⁴ and the notion—given currency by former Boer generals, some within the new system—that the leaders of the Union Defence Force “were trying to make British soldiers of the people.”¹⁴⁵

Against this background, the Transvaal Volunteers were absorbed into the new South African Citizen Force in 1913, and Beyers, a close friend of Kemp, who had given Wyndham so much trouble in the

¹⁴⁰ South African Parliamentary Papers: S.C. 7–1912, Select Committee Report on South Africa Defence Bill.

¹⁴¹ These six forces were the SA Permanent Force (SAPF), the Active Citizen Force (ACF), the Coast Garrison Force (CGF), the Rifle Associations (or resurrected Commandos), the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR), and the Cadet Corps.

¹⁴² For example see Kemp, *Die Pad van die Veroweraar*, 109.

¹⁴³ Beyers to Sir John French, 21 July 1913 (“the melting pot”), NASAP: General C.F. Beyers Collection, Vol. 1, and instances of nepotism and “connection” support in J. Kemp to Beyers, 5 April 1909; M. T. Steyn to Beyers, 30 September 1913; Smuts to Beyers, 27 February 1914; “Maurits” to Beyers, 8 June 1914, NASAP: Beyers Collection, Vol. 1, and NASAP: Col. M. du Toit Collection, W.77/1 correspondence between Colonel du Toit and former president M. T. Steyn, 1912.

¹⁴⁴ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 21 and 27 February 1912, WSRO: PHA. See also the Memorial from the Women of Nooitgedacht, n.d. (104–7), NASAP: Beyers Collection, Vol. 2.

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of Evidence on the Rebellion, Evidence of Capt. Hendrik T. Watkins, 9 May 1916, MAP: Diverse, box 3. Watkins was Kemp’s adjutant and gave evidence against De la Rey, amongst others.

Eastern Rifles, was now determined, in turn, to exclude Wyndham and like-minded officers from his organization.¹⁴⁶ He had resolved to relieve Wyndham of his command.

Wyndham's tenure had been renewed by Jan Christiaan Smuts, the Defence minister, at the end of 1910 and again at the end of 1911, in terms of the Transvaal Volunteer Regulations.¹⁴⁷ In October 1912, Wyndham again declared his availability for a further year. However, at this point his command was extended for a three-month period only.¹⁴⁸ Beyers, now responsible for the volunteer regiments, seized upon Wyndham's attendance at parliament in Cape Town as an excuse; Smuts had decided to allow Wyndham to carry out the duties of command from Cape Town,¹⁴⁹ something Wyndham, described by his superior as "a most capable Commanding Officer,"¹⁵⁰ did without trouble. He remained active with his regiment.¹⁵¹

Following the expiration of the three months on 31 December 1912, the option of a further extension was not given. Wyndham was offered the odious choice of either transferring to the Reserve of Officers or formally resigning.¹⁵² These options, together with direct Headquarters intervention in his regiment (Beyers had directed officers of the Southern Mounted Rifles to proceed to the Military School in Bloemfontein to qualify for employment in the new Permanent Force) angered Wyndham.¹⁵³ Roland Bourne, the Under-Secretary responsible for Defence, was asked to mediate; the state of affairs was attributed to the chaos that reigned during the integration of the colonial forces to form the Union Defence Forces. Wyndham—with little choice in the matter and being a good commander who would not stand in the way

¹⁴⁶ J. Kemp to C. F. Beyers, 5 April 1909, and M. T. Steyn to C. F. Beyers, 16 February 1912, NASAP: General C. F. Beyers Collection, Vol. 1, and C. F. Beyers to M. du Toit, 23 December 1912, NASAP: Col M. du Toit Collection.

¹⁴⁷ Botha to Gladstone, 27 October 1910 (1267) NASAP: URU 17; and Botha to Gladstone, 21 September 1911 (2392), NASAP: URU 61.

¹⁴⁸ Staff Officer Citizen Force to Officer Commanding Southern Mounted Rifles, 9 October 1912, MAP: Wyndham's Personnel file.

¹⁴⁹ Acting Under Secretary for the Interior to The Inspector, Transvaal Volunteers, 12 December 1910, MAP: Wyndham's Personnel file.

¹⁵⁰ Inspector, Transvaal Volunteers to Acting Under Secretary for the Interior, 5 September 1910, MAP: Wyndham's Personnel file.

¹⁵¹ Hugh Wyndham to Lady Leconfield, 15 January 1912, WSRO: PHA.

¹⁵² Staff Officer Citizen Force to District Staff Officer, No. 8 Military District, 14 January 1913, MAP: Wyndham's Personnel file.

¹⁵³ Wyndham to District Staff Officer, No.8 Military District, 23 January 1913, MAP: Wyndham's Personnel file.

of advancement for his men—accepted this explanation.¹⁵⁴ A kindergartner, vocal Unionist, and a thorn in the side of many Afrikaners, he was sacrificed. But he did not resign and neither was he transferred to the Reserve of Officers. Although no longer in command of the Southern Mounted Rifles, he continued to be held on the strength of the Transvaal Volunteers (Southern Mounted Rifles), even after this force no longer existed.¹⁵⁵

Conclusion

A large standing army never developed in British South Africa. It was opposed by liberals in South Africa and in Britain on the grounds that it was little more than a costly waste. Moreover, it was distrusted by the Boers on political grounds and by the Africans against whom these forces were putatively aimed. As a result there were general, ongoing reductions in the British garrisons in South Africa between 1902 and the last major withdrawal in 1914; the South African Military Command closed on 1 December 1921. The local, colonial forces, assuming responsibility for local defense in 1909, reflected traditional and conflicting attitudes—Boer and British—towards the military participation of the colonial society.

The Transvaal Volunteers were created in late 1902 to fulfill four functions, at first in conjunction with the imperial garrisons still dotted across the platteland. These functions encompassed the pacification of Africans, the checking of the militant Boer (from 1910 the Afrikaner), the overawing of syndicalism and keeping miners at the workplace, and providing a first line of defense in combination with the Royal Navy against external threats. Colonial security, hollow at the best of times, depended to a large extent upon men like Wyndham and the regiments they commanded to reinforce the always thin red line. Bhambatha seemingly confirmed their importance. But the Southern Mounted Rifles, together with the shrinking British garrison in South

¹⁵⁴ Major Collyer, Staff Officer General Staff Duties to Commandant General Citizen Force, 7 March 1913, MAP: Wyndham's Personnel file.

¹⁵⁵ Active Citizen Force Form 12, MAP: Wyndham's Personnel file. The Southern Mounted Rifles became a Citizen Force regiment of the new Union Defence Force in 1913 and survived as the 7th Mounted Rifles to 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression. G. Tylden, *The Armed Forces of South Africa* (Johannesburg: Cape Times, 1954), 78, 181–82.

Africa, was not only a vehicle through which to maintain a colonial, military presence; it was simultaneously a front in the struggle. The Volunteers, visible and visibly British, were not accepted by broad swathes of Transvaal society.

The Boer commandos had been noted for their indiscipline; the Transvaal Volunteers promised to be more disciplined and therefore effective as a national militia. But the Boer leadership, instilled with hatred of all things British, obstructed efforts to build a Transvaal defense force. A poor post-war strategy, along with political errors made by the Crown and migrant Britons and the presence on the platteland and in the towns of the highveld of a vitriolic Boer leadership, galvanized the Afrikaner population in the build-up to the Transvaal elections of 1907. The Botha government, which swept to power, reintroduced the commando system, then called rifle clubs. The Transvaal then had two military forces, but having lost political support, the Transvaal Volunteers went into decline until the last remaining elements were subsumed into the Union Defence Forces established for the Union of South Africa in July 1912. Her most 'British' officers, including the commander of the Southern Mounted Rifles, were forced to retire.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NEW LIGHT ON THE EAST AFRICAN THEATER OF THE GREAT WAR: A REVIEW ESSAY OF ENGLISH-LANGUAGE SOURCES

Bruce Vandervort

Let me begin with an anecdote. In early 2003 I was invited to give a lecture on the Anglo-Ashanti War of 1873–74, by Dr. Ian Beckett—also a contributor to this volume—who was then teaching at the U.S. Marine Corps University in Quantico, Virginia. I spoke to a roomful of young marine officers, who listened politely to my account of how the British army commander, Major General Sir Garnet Wolseley, with the aid of careful forward planning and close attention to logistics, managed to pull off one of the first reasonably successful European military campaigns in tropical Africa. When I had finished, however, I quickly learned that it was not Wolseley, the “very model of a modern major general” or no, that the young marines wanted to hear about, but another, later European campaigner in Africa, Col. Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, who had led German colonial army units (*Schutztruppen*) in the fighting in East Africa during the First World War.

Lettow-Vorbeck, I was told, had employed guerrilla tactics to outmaneuver and outfight Allied armies much larger than his own, thus accomplishing his objective of tying down Entente troops and resources that might have been used on the Western Front. Further, I learned, he had led his enemies on a merry chase across three East African colonies and had surrendered several days after the Armistice in Europe, his army still intact, to an enemy that had never defeated him.

The marine officers’ interest in the exploits of Colonel Lettow-Vorbeck reflects an earlier period, now superseded, at least as far as academic military history is concerned, in the historiography of the East African theater of the First World War. Its heyday came between the 1960s and 1980s when no less than five English-language popular histories of the East African war appeared, all narratives written in the ‘guns and drums’ style of the ‘old military history,’ largely operational in approach, heavily focused on leading personalities—especially Lettow-Vorbeck—and

resolutely Eurocentric. The best of them was Charles Miller's *Battle for the Bundu: The First World War in East Africa*, 'bundu' being an African word for 'bush' or 'back of beyond,' a reference to the difficult terrain over which much of the fighting in East Africa took place. Miller's book is self-consciously 'popular': "[T]he very last thing I wanted to do (or could do)," he tells us, "was turn out a work of scholarly or military expertise."¹ Thus, the bibliography is skimpy and footnotes are absent. What readers do get, though, is a rousing story, stressing "the spirit rather than the letter"² of the East African theater of World War I.³ Unfortunately, readers also come away from the book with some potent reinforcement for the then widespread but, as explained below, skewed notion that the German commander in East Africa, Col. Lettow-Vorbeck, was one of history's great guerrilla leaders. Miller pulled no punches. His hero, although "an obscure Prussian officer ... could have conducted post-graduate courses in irregular warfare tactics for Che Guevara, General Giap, and other more celebrated but far less skilled guerrilla fighters," he wrote.⁴

This early period also saw the publication of the first popular history of the First World War in Africa as a whole, Byron Farwell's *The Great War in Africa, 1914–1918*. After a career as an auto company executive, Farwell turned his hand to writing histories of Britain's colonial wars in Africa and India. His account of World War I in Africa is very much in the mold of the 'old military history,' but betrays an awareness of new trends in the field. He is much less celebratory about the exploits of the European officers who dominate his narrative than many of his contemporaries. His verdict on Lettow-Vorbeck is particularly interesting: "[W]hat he did in the end was worse than useless... He tore the social fabric of hundreds of communities and wrecked the economies

¹ Charles Miller, *Battle for the Bundu: The First World War in East Africa* (London: Macdonald & Jane's, 1974), ix–x.

² *Ibid.*, x.

³ The other popular histories of the era are Brian Gardner, *German East: The Story of the First World War in East Africa* (London: Cassell, 1963); Leonard Mosley, *Duel for Kilimanjaro: An Account of the East African Campaign, 1914–1918* (N.Y.: Ballantine Books, 1964); J. R. Sibley, *Tanganyikan Guerrilla: East African Campaign, 1914–18* (N.Y.: Ballantine Books, 1971); and Edwin P. Hoyt, *Guerrilla: Colonel von Lettow-Vorbeck and Germany's East African Empire* (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1981).

⁴ Miller, *Battle for the Bundu*, ix.

of three countries. His splendid military virtues were devoted to an unworthy cause and his loyalty given to a bad monarch.”⁵

Miller and the other popular historians should not be criticized too much for their less than analytical narratives. They suffered more than most historians of war from a lack of primary source material. Although a series of volumes on the East African theater was planned for the British official history of the Great War, only one ever appeared. Its author, Major H. Fitzmaurice Stacke, died in 1935, and, while the volume was completed by Lt. Col. Charles Hordern of the Royal Engineers, the larger project was shelved.⁶ Likewise, a number of other older sources, such as staff officer C. P. Fendall’s *The East African Force, 1915–1919*, first published in 1921, quickly went out of print and were difficult to find.⁷ Finally, while German sources existed that might have been useful to flesh out the *Schutztruppe* side of the story, few Anglophone scholars took advantage of them. Perhaps the most potentially useful of these was *Die Operationen in Ostafrika, Weltkrieg 1914–1918* (Hamburg: W. Dachert, 1951) by Ludwig Boell, a former staff officer under Lettow-Vorbeck. Also helpful would have been *Schutztruppe* medical officer Ludwig Deppe’s *Mit Lettow-Vorbeck durch Afrika* (Berlin: A. Scherl, 1919).

What the popular historians can most be faulted for is their uncritical approach to the primary sources they had at their disposal. Lettow-Vorbeck’s version of the “battle for the bundu,” much lauded when it was first translated into English as *My Reminiscences of East Africa* in 1919, has never really been out of public view. New editions were brought out in Britain in 1920 and 1922 and one in the USA in 1954.⁸ And, until fairly recently, the book was taken largely at face value by historians. It was only in the last decade, for example, that scholars began to examine critically the widely-accepted legend of Lettow-Vorbeck as a wizard of guerrilla warfare.

⁵ Byron Farwell, *The Great War in Africa, 1914–1918* (N.Y.: W. W. Norton, 1986), 355.

⁶ Charles Hordern, comp., *Military Operations, East Africa, Volume 1: August 1914–September 1916* (Nashville: Battery Press, 1990 [1941]).

⁷ Fendall’s book was based on a diary kept during the East African campaign. It was reprinted in 1992 by the Battery Press, whose republication of important works on fighting in that theater has left historians in its debt.

⁸ The U.S. edition, entitled *East African Campaigns* (N.Y.: Robert Speller, 1957), is a virtual reprint of the 1919 English edition. It featured a foreword by the famous American journalist and writer, John Gunther. Battery Press, once again, republished Lettow-Vorbeck’s book in 1987 and brought out new editions in 1990 and 1995.

A problem of potentially even more devastating proportions concerns another staple of researchers of the East African theater of World War I: the late Richard Meinertzhagen's *Army Diary, 1899–1926* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1960). While there have been accusations for some time that Meinertzhagen portrayed (and self-promoted) himself as a swashbuckling man of action, soldier, and intelligence operative and was accepted as an 'insider' on the British staff in East Africa (and later in the Middle East), he was, in fact, an inveterate liar. Despite this revelation, most historians have continued to rely upon him for the 'real story' about how the Allies fought (and mismanaged) their war in East Africa. This may not be the case much longer, following the publication in 2007 of Brian Garfield's lengthy exposé, *The Meinertzhagen Mystery: The Life and Legend of a Colossal Fraud* (Washington: Potomac Books). A popular historian and novelist, Garfield was careful to cultivate the Meinertzhagen family in England, who, he says, were helpful to his project and to heavily document his charges; his 352-page book contains 80 pages of endnotes. The author has claimed that the famous *Army Diary* was not, in fact, a diary written during the period it purports to cover, but an often-times rewritten memoir, whose reliability is practically nil.⁹

New African and Military History

The new academic scholarship on the East African theater of the First World War reflects the considerable changes that have taken place since the 1970s in the way that both African and military history are written. Inspired by, among others, Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, historians of Africa in the age of empire now take the view that from beginning to end, imperialism was an interactive process in which indigenous peoples were indispensable participants.¹⁰ "[W]ithout indigenous collaboration," Robinson wrote, "Europeans [could not]

⁹ Scion of a wealthy English banking family, fellow student of Churchill's at Harrow, colonial soldier and spy, Zionist militant, and famous ornithologist, Meinertzhagen is thought to be the model for Ian Fleming's James Bond. His reputed exploits in the Middle East toward the end of World War I made him the hero of a well-received 1987 action film, *The Lighthorsemen*.

¹⁰ Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher, with Alice Denny, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1981 [1961]).

have conquered and ruled their non-European empires.”¹¹ Two conclusions of relevance here spring from that assertion. First, that just as indigenous armies proved indispensable to the conquest of Africa by Europeans, so without massive participation in the fighting by Africans from their colonies, none of the European powers would have been able to stay the course in East Africa in the First World War. Second, that the outcome of the war in Africa for Europeans, i.e., the culmination of the ‘Scramble’ for African territory reflected in the appropriation by Belgium, Britain, France, and South Africa of Germany’s former colonies, has to be measured against its enormous cost to the African combatants and civilian populations who bore its brunt. This is especially the case for the East African theater, where the fighting was much more intense and prolonged and the level of participation by Africans as soldiers, carriers, or hapless civilian victims, was much higher. Finally, another concept deployed by Robinson & Gallagher, that of ‘secondary’ or ‘sub-imperialism,’ has also been put to good use by recent historians of the Great War in Africa. This concept holds that alongside the great imperial powers there emerged in the nineteenth and, especially, twentieth century, satellites of the major powers with imperial ambitions of their own and that those ambitions had to be taken into account by the ‘mother country.’ This notion fits South Africa and its role in the First World War like a glove. That South Africa had designs on German South West Africa is self-evident, but the aim of her leaders to parlay participation in the East African campaign into integration within the Dominion of at least part of the Portuguese colony of Mozambique and perhaps Southern Rhodesia as well is less well-known.

The ‘new African history’ has combined with a ‘new military history’—one as interested in the interplay between war and culture and society as it is in the strategies and tactics of armies; one as keen to know how the private soldier fared on the day of battle as it is to second-guess the general who commanded him—to produce a new historiography of the East African theater of the Great War. In the process, the reputations of the various Allied commanders, already at a low ebb, have been diminished even further, and the tactical virtuosity of Lettow-Vorbeck, long seen as the key factor in the relative success of

¹¹ Robinson, “Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism,” in *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*, ed. R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe (London: Longman, 1975 [1972]), 118.

German arms, has been considerably downplayed. Recent historians of the East African theater are generally agreed that the fortunes of war on both sides ultimately depended on the endurance, courage, and bush fighting skills of their *askaris* (African soldiers).¹²

The way in which the military history of the East African campaign was rendered first began to change noticeably in the late 1970s. In 1977 the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London hosted a conference on the Great War in Africa. The next year, under the rubric of "World War I and Africa," a whole issue of the prestigious *Journal of African History* (*JAH*) was devoted to publication of the papers presented at the conference.¹³ The thrust of the published essays was to demonstrate that while the East African fighting might have been marginal to the war being waged concurrently in Europe, it had a powerful—and largely negative—impact on the African continent. As SOAS professor Richard Rathbone put it in his introduction to the special issue, "[I]t seems clear that the period of World War I was not a Eurocentric time capsule which we artificially introduced into the African context. The War was very much a reality for Africa, a period of immense and significant change of which we have only scratched the surface."¹⁴

The *JAH* issue contained the first fruits of Geoffrey Hodges's extensive inquiry ("African Manpower Statistics for the British Forces in East Africa, 1914–1918," pages 101–16) into the appalling loss of life among the many thousands of African carriers without whose portage of the essentials of war—the tsetse fly ruled out the use of horses and draft animals and serviceable roads were at a premium—neither side in the East African war would have been able to keep the field. Hodges would cap off his research into the topic with the publication of *The Carrier Corps: Military Labor in the East African Campaign, 1914–1918* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1986), updated in 1999 as *Kariakor: The Carrier Corps: The Story of the Military Labour Forces in the Conquest of German East Africa, 1914–1918* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press). Hodges would conclude that well over one hundred thousand African carriers died in the course of the East African con-

¹² *Askaris* is the Arabic/Swahili word for 'soldiers' and was in general use in Belgian, British, German, and Italian colonial armies.

¹³ See *Journal of African History* 19 (1978).

¹⁴ Richard Rathbone, "World War I and Africa: An Introduction," *Journal of African History*, 19 (1978): 9.

flict in British service alone, some from gunfire but the majority from overwork, disease, or malnourishment.

The special issue also featured a piece by Melvin E. Page, quarried from his 1977 dissertation at Michigan State University, "The War of *Thangata*: Nyasaland and the East African Campaign, 1914–1918" (pages 87–100), which characterized the devastating effect of the war on Nyasaland (later Malawi). Page, a history professor at East Tennessee State University, would eventually produce a monograph on the subject, entitled *The Chiwaya War: Malawians and the First World War* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 2000), in which he would demonstrate that the small but populous colony of Nyasaland contributed a larger number of soldiers and carriers to the war in East Africa than any other British African dependency and that more than 26 percent of its servicemen ended up as casualties.

Another milestone in the emergence of a new military history of the East African theater of the Great War was the publication in 1987 of *Africa and the First World War* (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press), edited by Melvin Page. Four of the ten essays in this collection focus on the fighting in West Africa, while the rest either deal with the war in East Africa or with repercussions from it. All of the latter focus on African, rather than European, participation in the East African struggle. And, according to Page in his introduction to the book, all share "the conviction . . . that direct African participation in the war—as soldiers, transport carriers, or in any of a host of other roles—rather than policy decisions made in European capitals—provides the basis for understanding the impact of the First World War upon Africa's peoples."¹⁵

The Askaris

Recent years have seen a relative flood of new writing on the troops who carried most of the burden of fighting on the Entente side in East Africa, the *askaris* of the King's African Rifles (KAR). While still worth consulting, H. Moyse-Bartlett's *The King's African Rifles: A Study in the Military History of East and Central Africa* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1956) has been updated as an organizational and operational account by Malcolm Page, *A History of the King's African Rifles and East African*

¹⁵ Melvin Page, ed., *Africa and the First World War* (N.Y.: St. Martin's Press), xi.

Forces (London: Leo Cooper, 1998). Neither of these books, however, should be read in isolation from the work of Timothy Parsons, in the vein of the 'new military history,' especially his *African Rank-and-File: Social Implications of Colonial Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964* (Hanover, N.H.: Heinemann, 1999). Parsons, a professor at Washington University of St. Louis, is also the author of "All Askaris are Family Men: Sex, Domesticity and Discipline in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964," in *Guardians of Empire: The Armed Forces of the Colonial Powers, c. 1700–1964*, edited by David Killingray and David Omissi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999). Although wartime exigencies obliged the British to recruit widely to fill the ranks of the KAR, they preferred to draw their *askaris* from East African peoples they believed to be 'martial races.' Although this concept is usually thought to be a function of recruitment into Britain's Indian Army, it also applied to British selection of African infantry as well, not only for service in the KAR, but also in the West African Frontier Force, which drew most of its troopers from Nigeria. Tim Parsons examines this phenomenon in "'Wakamba Warriors are Soldiers of the Queen': the Evolution of the Kamba [of Kenya] as a Martial Race, 1890–1970," *Ethnohistory* 46 (1999): 671–701. On this same subject, see Finnish historian Risto Marjomaa's "The Martial Spirit: Yao Soldiers in the British Service in Nyasaland, 1895–1939," *Journal of African History* 44 (2003): 413–32.

Although it contributed only about three thousand men to the struggle in East Africa, the Rhodesia Native Regiment (RNR) of Southern Rhodesia (today's Zimbabwe) has been well served by historians. Peter McLaughlin, whose earlier book, *Ragtime Soldiers: The Rhodesian Experience in the First World War* (Bulawayo: Books of Rhodesia, 1980), dealt almost exclusively with the role of the all-white Rhodesia Regiment in the East African fighting, seven years and a much different political regime later, shifted his focus to "The Legacy of Conquest: African Military Manpower in Southern Rhodesia during the First World War," pages 115–37 in *Africa in the First World War*, edited by Melvin Page. But the most prolific writer on the RNR has been Tim Stapleton, a historian at Trent University in Canada (and a contributor to this volume). He followed up his "Composition of the Rhodesia Native Regiment during the First World War: A Look at the Evidence," *History in Africa* 30 (2003): 283–95, and "Military Hierarchy, Race and Ethnicity in the German East Africa Campaign: The Case of the Rhodesia Native Regiment (1916–1918)," *War & Society* 24 (2005):

1–11, with a full-length study entitled *No Insignificant Part: The Rhodesia Native Regiment and the East African Campaign of the First World War* (London, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006).

During the second half of the war in East Africa, the number of African troops engaged on the Allied side increased until they were bearing the largest part of the burden of fighting. This situation entailed bringing in troops from the West African Frontier Force, primarily from Nigeria, but also from the Gold Coast (today's Ghana). For the Nigerian contingent, see Akinjide Osuntokun, *Nigeria in the First World War* (London: Longman, 1979). Sir Hugh Clifford told the story of the Gold Coast force back in 1920 in his *Gold Coast Regiment in the East African Campaign* (London: J. Murray, 1920; reprint, Nashville: Battery Press, 1995).

Troops of the British West Indies Regiment also served in East Africa during the First World War. Their story has been recounted in C. L. Joseph, "The British West Indian Regiment 1914–1918," *Journal of Caribbean History* 2 (1971): 94–124, and Glenford Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of the West Indians in the First World War* (Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2002).

Surprisingly, given their role as the backbone of the *Schutztruppe* during the East African war, not much has been written in English about Lettow-Vorbeck's *askaris*. There are some pages on the subject in Kirsten Zirkel's wider-ranging essay, "Military Power in German Colonial Policy: The *Schutztruppen* and their Leaders in East and South West Africa, 1888–1918," in *Guardians of Empire* (pages 91–114), edited by Killingray and Omissi.

Indian Role in the East African Theater

Indian troops were on the ground in significant numbers in East Africa from the beginning of the war in 1914 until the *Schutztruppe* finally laid down its arms in Northern Rhodesia in November 1918. S. D. Pradhan's essay, "Indian Army and the First World War," in *Indians and World War I* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1975), edited by Pradhan and Dewitt C. Ellinwood, devotes some pages to this subject. Pradhan went on to expand his treatment of the role of Indian troops in the East African campaign in *Indian Army in East Africa* (New Delhi: National Book Organisation, 1991). The attention paid to the participation of Indian troops in this theater remains minimal, however, compared to

that devoted to their part in the fighting in the First World War on the Western Front and in the Middle East. Much research remains to be done before we have a full picture of the part played by Indian troops in the East African campaign.

New Historiography Comes of Age

The pace-setters in the recent scholarship are the Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford, Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Strachan's former student, Ross Anderson and *The Forgotten War: The East African Campaign, 1914–1918* (Stroud, U.K.: Tempus, 2004); and independent scholar Edward Paice's blockbuster 488-page narrative history, *Tip and Run: The Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007). Strachan's book is a recasting of Chapter 7 of the first volume of his massive history of the First World War, *The First World War—To Arms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).¹⁶ Pages 93–185 of this 224-page study cover the fighting in East Africa. While, like the volume from which it was hewn, it gives a solid account of operations in the field, this account is carefully contextualized and reflects the emphases of recent scholarship on the Great War in Africa. Strachan sees the war as the last phase of the European "scramble for Africa," but argues that its importance "needs to be judged in its local context as well as its global one. The First World War ranks alongside the slave trade in its impact on Africa."¹⁷ And, as discussed later, he is sensitive to South Africa's 'sub-imperial' designs in the war in Africa, and adopts a sweepingly revisionist view of Lettow-Vorbeck's generalship.

Of the three new books on the East African campaign, Anderson's is the most old-fashioned. It is more strictly operational in its thrust than the works of Strachan or Paice, which is perhaps to be expected, since the author served in the British and Canadian armies before he came under Strachan's tutelage at the University of Glasgow. Anderson gave us a first taste of this predilection for the operational in his careful

¹⁶ Strachan's history of the Great War is expected to run to three volumes. Volume 1 comprised 1227 pages.

¹⁷ Hew Strachan, *The First World War in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vii–viii.

reconstruction of the botched amphibious landing on the Tanganyikan coast that began operations for the British in East Africa in the First World War, *The Battle of Tanga 1914* (Stroud, U.K.: Tempus, 2002). Anderson did a prodigious amount of research in both primary and secondary materials for *Forgotten Front*, but, while clearly aware of the tendencies in recent scholarship on the war in East Africa, surprisingly has little to say about crucial African participation in the fighting. He admits that the African voice is largely absent from his account, but adds that "Silence must not be confused with a lack of importance and the African contribution to the campaign was absolutely essential, if far from fully explained."¹⁸ Maps are crucial to histories of military operations, and Anderson's study duly boasts fourteen of them (along with thirty-seven illustrations, many of them from the author's own collection). The numerous endnotes are less satisfactory; readers will need to check the abbreviated titles of sources in the notes against entries in the bibliography. The index also could have been more user-friendly, had subheadings been provided for some of the more important entries.

Edward Paice's *Tip and Run* is exceptionally user-friendly—the book features seventy-six carefully-chosen illustrations, fifteen clear and helpful maps, and eight appendices showing the orders of battle of the two sides at successive stages of the East African war. The book is also more popular in tone, and is likely to find a larger audience than its two competitors. It abounds in anecdotes and does not eschew polemics. Paice goes further than any of the more recent scholars in declaring the war in East Africa an utter waste of blood and treasure for all concerned and an unmitigated disaster for the region and its people. Though he spares no details in describing the appalling Allied mistreatment of the African carriers on whom their success so heavily depended, and the shocking lack of medical services available to the British East African combatants and populations during the war, Paice reserves his harshest words for the German commanders and colonial officials. "German participants in the campaign experienced no 'war guilt' whatsoever," he writes, and Lettow-Vorbeck and Heinrich Schnee, the civilian governor of German East Africa, subsequently stressed the "loyalty (rather than the suffering) of 'Germany's Africans.'" In the 1930s, he recalls, a Nazi pamphlet demanding the restoration of

¹⁸ Ross Anderson, *The Forgotten War: The East African Campaign, 1914–1918* (Stroud, U.K.: Tempus, 2004), 11.

Germany's lost colonies "would claim that just 1,000 carriers had died supporting the *Schutztruppe*. The sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of Africans had simply been erased from German history, although the myth of their 'loyalty' had not."¹⁹

South Africa: Secondary Empire

Hew Strachan's book, *The First World War in Africa*, gives an interpretation of South Africa's participation in the East African theater of World War I that has become a staple of the new historiography of the campaign. "Britain's strategic aims [in the First World War]," he writes, "were influenced by what historians now call sub-imperialism—the ambitions not only of those on the spot but also of the semi-independent dominions of those on the spot... South Africa harbored designs in Southern Africa to which Britain had to pay court... The South Africans could—and did—do London's work for it in Africa, but in doing so were able to set their own agenda."²⁰ The prime mover in the South African scheme to gain new territories in Southern Africa during the war was Jan Christiaan Smuts, hero of the Second Boer War, a leading figure in the South African Union Government, and, ultimately, commander of British and South African forces fighting the Germans in East Africa in 1916. The seminal account of Smuts' ambitions for South Africa is P. R. Warhurst's article, "Smuts and Africa: A Study in Sub-Imperialism," *South African Historical Journal* 16 (1984): 82–100. Drawing on Smuts' speeches and correspondence before, during, and after the Great War, Warhurst is able to demonstrate that the great Boer and imperial politician hoped that South African participation in the East African war would lead to incorporation of southern Mozambique into the Union (Portugal was to settle for part of southern Tanganyika in exchange) and perhaps even Southern Rhodesia (the idea here was that South African acquisitions in Mozambique would deprive Southern Rhodesia of access to the sea, thus forcing her to

¹⁹ Edward Paice, *Tip and Run: The Untold Tragedy of the Great War in Africa* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), 398–99.

²⁰ Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, vii. For a stimulating comparison of sub-imperial ambitions in the context of the Great War, see Colin Newbury, "Spoils of War: Sub-Imperial Collaboration in South West Africa and New Guinea," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 16 ([season/month?]1988): 86–106. Australia would administer New Guinea, a former German dependency, after the war.

join the Union).²¹ But, as Warhurst is also careful to point out, Smuts' sub-imperial drum-beating raised more of an echo in British ruling circles than it did among Boer nationalists or the public at large back in South Africa. The lukewarm domestic response to South African involvement in World War I, even in Africa, emerges clearly from two articles by Bill Nasson (also a contributor to this volume): "A Great Divide: Popular Responses to the Great War in South Africa," *War & Society* 12 (1994): 47–64, and "War Opinion in South Africa, 1914," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 23 (1995): 248–76. Also see N. G. Garson, "South Africa and World War I," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 8 (1979): 68–85.

Other Allies

As far as the European side of the war in East Africa is concerned, the recent scholarship has been much more inclusive, giving increased attention to the other European nations involved in the struggle: Belgium and Portugal. The most recent general works on the subject—by Strachan, Anderson, and Paice—treat the Belgian occupation of Ruanda (present-day Rwanda and Burundi) and advance into western Tanganyika in some detail, demonstrating its importance to British attempts to bring the *Schutztruppe* to bay. The enhanced coverage of the Belgian role in the conflict no doubt owes something to the greater accessibility of Belgian archival materials in recent years, but the most important factor probably is a willingness on the part of more recent historians to go beyond the Anglocentric perspective that colored so much of the older scholarship. Earlier scholars had a wealth of Belgian primary and secondary sources—including a multi-volume official history of the Belgian role in the East African conflict—at their disposal for years but did little with them.²²

Portuguese participation in the East African campaign received more attention from the earlier generation of historians than that of

²¹ Smuts' designs on Southern Rhodesia get some play in Ronald Hyam's *The Failure of South African Expansion, 1908–1948* (London: Macmillan, 1972), but the main focus of the book is South African schemes to absorb the High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland (Botswana), Basutoland (Lesotho), and Swaziland.

²² Belgique, Royaume de. Ministère de la Défense nationale—État-Major Général de l'Armée, Section de l'Histoire. *Les Campagnes coloniales belges, 1914–1918*, 3 vols. (Brussels: Imprimerie typographique de l'I.C.M., 1927–1932).

Belgium, if only because the Portuguese colony of Mozambique was one of the theaters of the war. Highlighting the dismal performance of the Portuguese army in the fighting against the Germans, however, also served as a convenient means of diverting attention away from the shortcomings of British and South African commanders and of adding luster to the reputation of Lettow-Vorbeck. The derisive judgments on the Portuguese role rendered by historians such as Miller almost invariably were made on the basis of English-language—and, occasionally, German—sources. More recent historians of the East African campaign have made significant use of Portuguese archival and secondary sources and have made some strides toward placing the admittedly poor showing of Portuguese arms in its proper context. One of the better attempts in English to contextualize Portuguese performance in the East African campaign is John Cann's "Mozambique, German East Africa, and the Great War," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 12 (2001): 11–41. The best summary of Portugal's difficulties in fielding an effective armed force in its African colonies during the First World War is given on pages 281–93 of René Pélissier's *Les Campagnes coloniales du Portugal, 1844–1941* (Paris: Pygmalion, 2004), a distillation of this specialist's multivolume history of Portugal's colonial wars in the modern era. Still, certain economic and political factors that conditioned Portuguese military performance in Africa have yet to be given their proper weight.

Already one of Europe's poorest countries, Portugal saw her economy, heavily reliant on overseas trade—especially 'tied' trade with her African colonies—slide into recession in the course of the 1914–18 war. Despite strong public opposition to the war, the Portuguese government at first refused to declare the country neutral, then in 1916 entered the war on the side of the Entente. Dependent upon the shipping of its ancient ally, Britain, Portugal's trade suffered from U-boat attacks on the British merchant marine and from the growing shortage of merchant vessels. The crucial importance to Portugal's domestic economy of her African empire is spelled out clearly with a wealth of empirical evidence in Antonio José Telo's study, *Economia e Império no Portugal Contemporâneo* (Lisbon: Cosmos, 1994), a work that merits being translated into English. Portugal also suffered constant political unrest during the war years. In 1910, its royal family was forced into exile in Britain and a republic declared. The victorious republicans, however, ended up badly divided between moderates and radicals and found it difficult to form governments that could command the support of

the nation, much less conduct a modern war on two continents. This state of affairs is surveyed in Stewart Lloyd-Jones' "The Slow Death of the First Republic," *Portuguese Studies Review* 10 (2003): 81–100. The negative impact of political turmoil on Portuguese civil-military relations during the First World War is measured in Filipe Ribeiro de Meneses' "'Too Serious a Matter to be Left to the Generals?': Parliament and the Army in Wartime Portugal," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33 (1998): 85–96.

In spite of its precarious economic and political situation, however, the Portuguese government managed to send three expeditionary forces to stiffen the defenses of Mozambique during the course of the war, and in 1917 dispatched two divisions of troops to the Western Front, just in time to take a pounding during the Ludendorff Offensive in the spring of 1918. These were initiatives that Portugal could neither afford nor sustain. The reasons why the small and desperately poor country nonetheless made the effort it did during the war have preoccupied scholars since the Great War itself and have received considerable attention, especially in Portugal, in recent years. The Portuguese government's belief that unless it made a substantial commitment to the Entente cause, it could well see its economically crucial African colonies swallowed up either by the Germans or its putative allies, Britain or South Africa, is made clear in Richard Langhorne's "Anglo-German Negotiations Concerning the Future of the Portuguese Colonies, 1911–1914," *The Historical Journal* 16 (1973): 361–78; John Vincent-Smith's, "The Anglo-German Negotiations over the Portuguese Colonies in Africa, 1911–1914," *The Historical Journal* 17 (1974): 620–29; Vincent-Smith's, "The Portuguese Republic and Britain, 1910–1914," *Journal of Contemporary History* 10 (1975): 707–27; and Vincent-Smith's, "Britain, Portugal, and the First World War, 1914–1916," *European Studies Review* 3 (1974): 207–38. Portuguese historian Nuno Severias Texeira has written at length on the question of Portuguese motives for entering the war. He addressed the question in an article, "1914–1918: To Die for One's Country? Why did Portugal Go to War?" *Portuguese Studies Review* 6 (1997): 16–25, as well as in a book-length study, *Portugal e A Guerra* (Lisbon: Colibri, 1998) (published simultaneously in French as *L'Entrée du Portugal dans la Grande Guerre* [Paris: Économica, 1998]).

Finally, there is scope for more serious consideration of the impact of indigenous uprisings in Mozambique on Portuguese performance in the fighting in East Africa. Provoked in part by German agents but

mainly the result of mismanagement and exploitation by the Portuguese government or the private companies given leave to 'develop' parts of Mozambique, revolts broke out among the Barue people in the western part of the colony and among the Makonde/Makombe in the far north. Although both rebellions were brutally crushed, they diverted Portuguese troops from defense of colony against German invasion. For the Makonde revolt, see Terence Ranger, *Revolt in Portuguese East Africa: The Makombe Rising of 1917* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963).

Tarnished Icon

This essay finishes where it began, with the legend of Colonel (later General) Paul Emil Lettow-Vorbeck. Hew Strachan believes that the legend of Lettow-Vorbeck as a master of guerrilla warfare, which took shape during the First World War itself, originated with the South Africans who had fought him in East Africa. "The Boers among them," Strachan wrote, "mindful of their own war against the British, and perhaps sensitive about their performance when the roles were reversed, responded happily to the idea that they had influenced Lettow's strategic outlook."²³ The legend endured into the recent past, Strachan is convinced, because Lettow-Vorbeck himself endured until 1964 and saw to it that a new edition of his *Reminiscences of East Africa* was brought out in English in the decade before his death, and because during the Cold War "the practice of communist insurgency gave the techniques of guerrilla warfare fresh fascination, providing the lens through which Lettow's achievements were reassessed, and augmenting his band of Anglophone admirers."²⁴ There is more to add to Hew Strachan's analysis of the reasons behind the persistence of the legend of Lettow-Vorbeck as a great guerrilla leader—at least insofar as his American 'admirers' are concerned. The fascination with Lettow-Vorbeck in the United States probably dates only from the 1950s, and should be seen as concurrent with the love affair among U.S. military officers and military historians with the *Wehrmacht*, particularly its brilliant if doomed fighting retreat on the Eastern Front in the face of Soviet 'hordes,' and the equally brilliant if doomed campaign of the Afrika Korps under the legendary

²³ Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

Field Marshal Rommel in North Africa. We now know that much of this adulation was based on acceptance without much questioning of self-serving accounts of German army campaigns written by former *Wehrmacht* heavyweights like Field Marshal Erich von Manstein. A clue to the conflating of the *Wehrmacht* legend with that of Lettow-Vorbeck and his *Schutztruppe* emerges from the title of a recent piece on the East African campaign: "Khaki Foxes: The East Afrika Korps," by David M. Keithly.²⁵ The intent of the author—to merge the legends of Rommel and Lettow-Vorbeck—is too obvious to belabor, but his breathtaking assertion that "Sheer numbers suggest that Lettow-Vorbeck was the most successful commander in the First World War and one of the most effective guerrilla leaders in history" should stir some controversy.²⁶ Keithly's piece is evidence that the outlook on Lettow-Vorbeck and his strategic and tactical principles in much of the military establishment today, at least in the United States, has changed little from the 1950s. This is borne out in two studies commissioned by the U.S. Army in recent years: John C. Stratis' *A Case Study in Leadership: Colonel Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck* (Springfield, Va.: NTIS, 2002); and Thomas A. Crowson, *When Elephants Clash: A Critical Analysis of Major General Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck in the East African Theatre of the Great War* (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: Faculty of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 2003).

It is important—and instructive—to compare this unreconstructed view of Lettow-Vorbeck and his way of war with that which dominates academic military history today. Hew Strachan is most categorical in his rejection of the image of Lettow-Vorbeck as a master of guerrilla warfare. His remarks in *First World War in Africa* merit quoting at length.

Lettow was never consistently a practitioner of guerrilla warfare. The *Schutztruppen* were trained in bush fighting, and in this both they and their commander excelled. But Lettow's own operational priorities remained those of the German military doctrine in which he was trained. His memoirs contain no theory relevant to the guerrilla; instead, they

²⁵ David M. Keithly, "Khaki Foxes: the East Afrika Korps," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 12 (2001): 166–85.

²⁶ Keithly's favorable comparison of Lettow-Vorbeck's East African strategy with that of "Stonewall" Jackson in his famous Shenandoah Valley Campaign of 1862 should also stir some controversy. *Ibid.*, 166–67.

again and again bear testimony to his desire for envelopment, encirclement, and the decisive battle.²⁷

Ross Anderson raises another criticism of the notion of Lettow-Vorbeck as a guerrilla warrior: his ignorance of and indifference to the political dimension of war. His outlook, Anderson contends, "reflected the civil-military relations prevailing back in Germany, where the Kaiser was determined to keep politicians out of military affairs."²⁸

Finally, today's academic historians writing on the East African theater tend not to accept the notion, still widespread among military thinkers, that the *Schutztruppe's* long, drawn-out campaign achieved its aim of diverting Allied manpower and resources from the Western Front. Again, Strachan is categorical in his judgment. "Very few, if any" of the some 160,000 troops under British and Belgian command engaged in East Africa "would have been available for the Western Front," he argues. Political divisions in South Africa, not Lettow-Vorbeck's fighting retreat, kept South African troops out of Europe. The Indian soldiers who went to East Africa might have gone to the Middle East instead, but not to Europe. The *askaris*, who did the bulk of the fighting for the Allies in East Africa, were excluded from service in Europe by the British command. In the end, Strachan writes, perhaps the greatest German feat in Africa was to tie down, not troops, but shipping badly needed elsewhere.²⁹ Or, as he asks elsewhere, was "Lettow-Vorbeck's principal achievement... the thwarting of the full extent of South Africa's annexationist ambitions?"³⁰

Lettow-Vorbeck may be a somewhat tarnished icon by now, at least among the academic military historians, but the old devil continues to fascinate even his most trenchant critics. While reiterating his view that he was "not a guerrilla," Strachan concedes that Lettow-Vorbeck was "an officer of resource and determination, ruthless in war and honourable in peace."³¹ Anderson is more fulsome in his praise: "He was a highly professional officer who was exceptionally hardworking and highly ambitious... He had definite charm and presence, polished by impeccable manners and bearing."³² It is these qualities of leadership, rather

²⁷ Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 94.

²⁸ Anderson, *Forgotten Front*, 25.

²⁹ Strachan, *First World War in Africa*, 183.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 183–84.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 182.

³² Anderson, *Forgotten Front*, 26.

than the strategic or tactical “lessons learned” he was supposed to have imparted, that most accurately reflect the legacy of the *Schutztruppe*’s commander in East Africa.

ILLUSTRATIONS SECTION



Figure 1. Mounted Basutos serving with the Eshowe Column in Zululand, July 1888. Their commander, Chief Hlubi kaMota Molife, sits in the centre with his sergeant at his right hand. To his left (with terrier) sits Major Alexander McKean, commander of the column.



Figure 2. Jan Ruiter, *agterryer* of President Marthinus Steyn.



Figure 3. Republican Boer Commando.

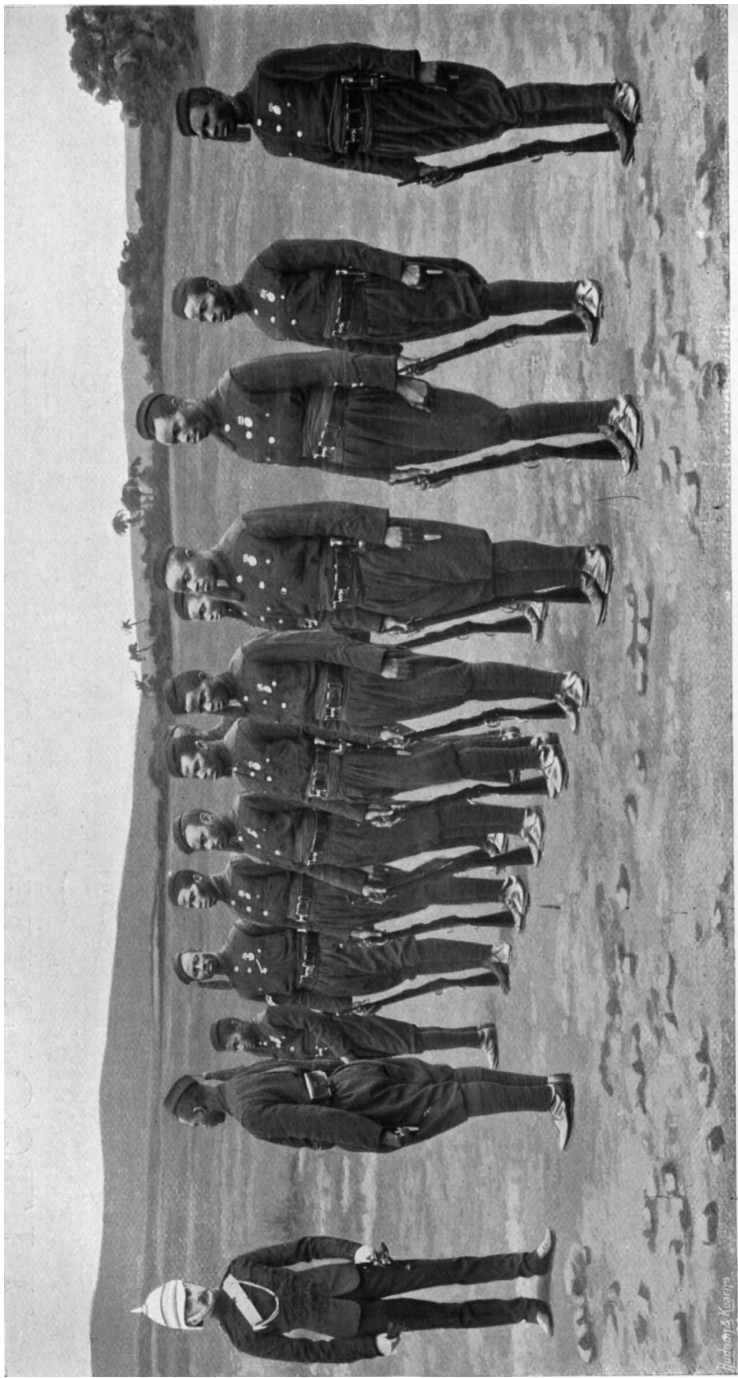


Figure 4. Officer, Non-Commissioned Officer and Detachment, Sierra Leone Frontier Force, (*Navy and Army Illustrated*).
vol. 6 (26 March 1898), p. 22.



Figure 5. Teaching the '2nd Battalion' the Bagpipes. (*Navy and Army Illustrated*).



Figure 6 . This painting of the signing of the Peace of Vereeniging at Melrose House on 31 May 1902 depicts the moment State Secretary F. W. Reitz rose, pen in hand, and dramatically stated that he signed only in his official capacity, and not as F. W. Reitz. Those at the table include General J. B. M. Hertzog, Acting President C. R. de Wet, Lord Kitchener, Lord Milner, Reitz, General J. C. Smuts, General Louis Botha, Acting President Schalk Burger, General J. H. de la Rey, and General Lukas Meyer.

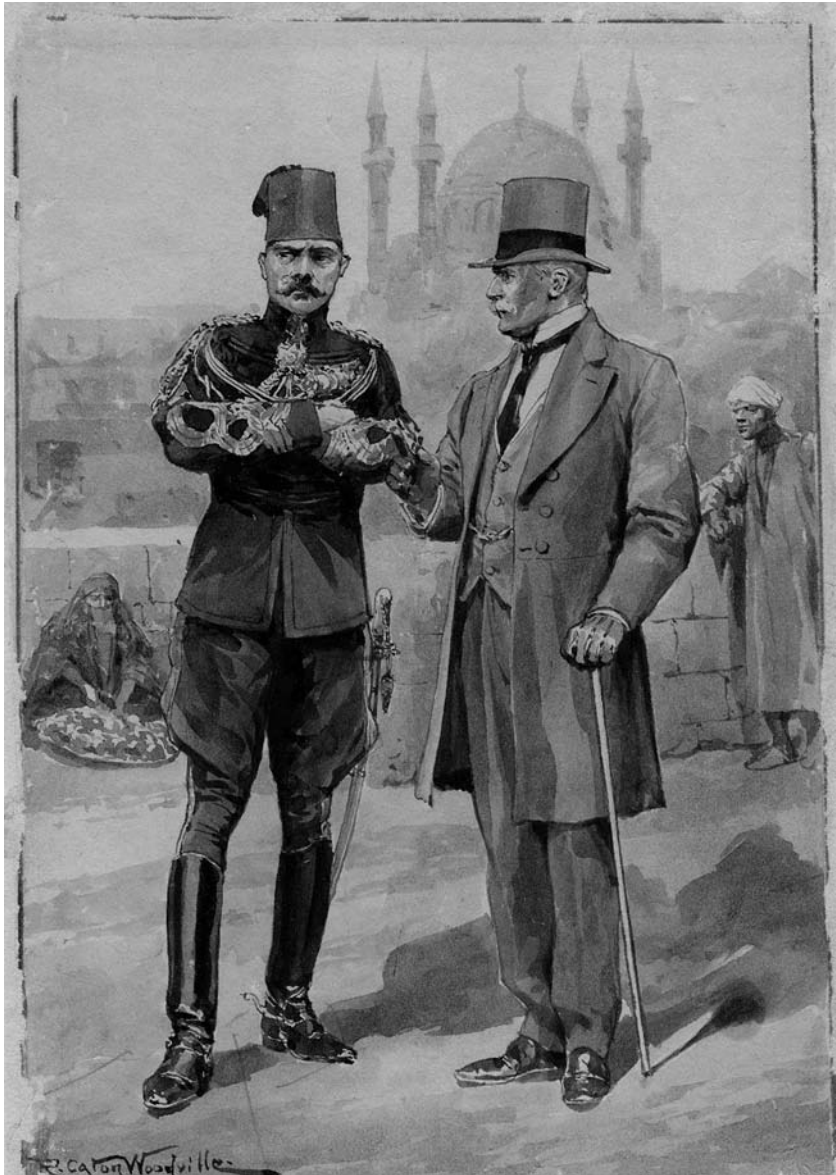


Figure 7. Kitchener in Egyptian uniform with British diplomat, c. 1896
(Richard Caton Woodville)



Figure 8. Milner.



Figure 9. (from left to right) Generals Christiaan de Wet, Koos de la Rey and Louis Botha.



Figure 10. Wolseley.

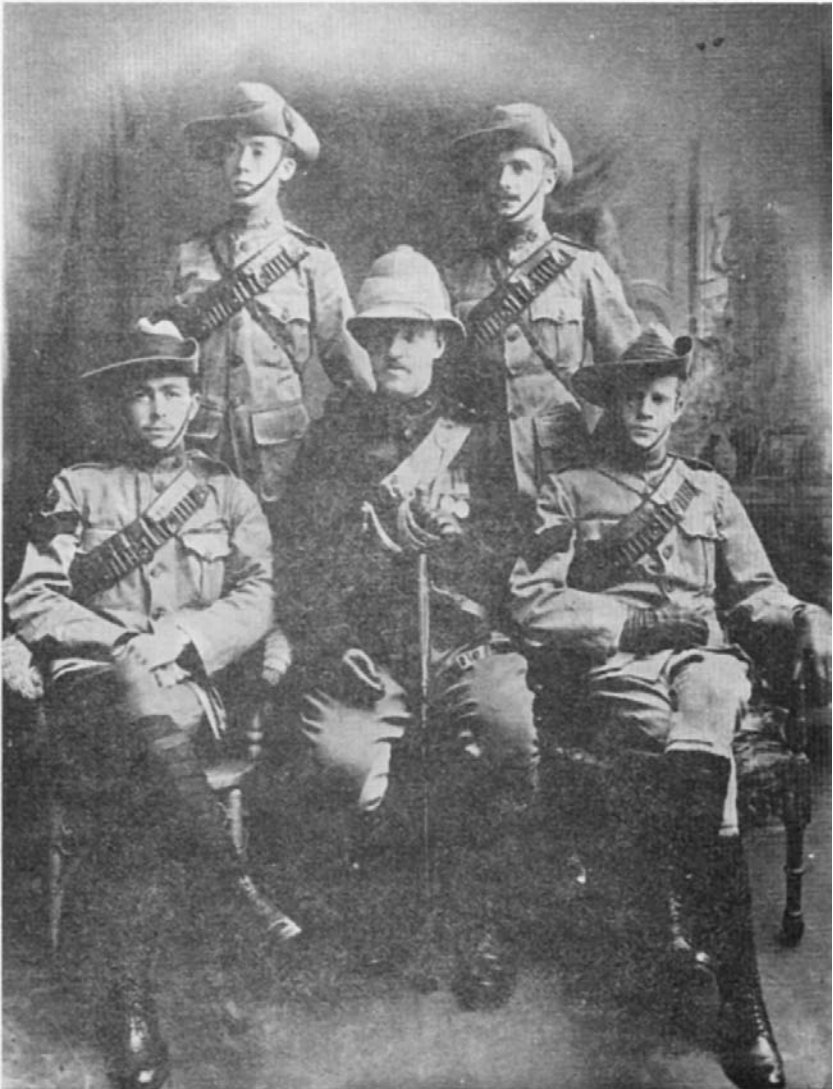
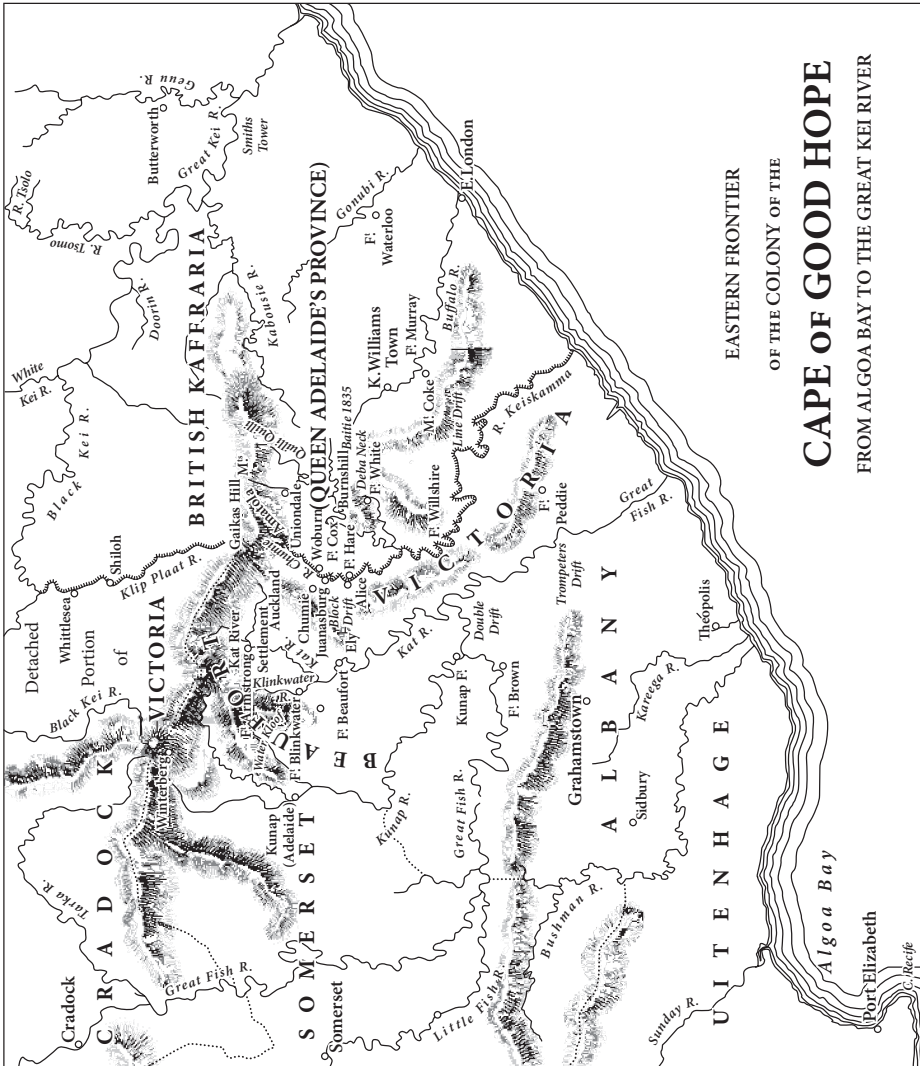
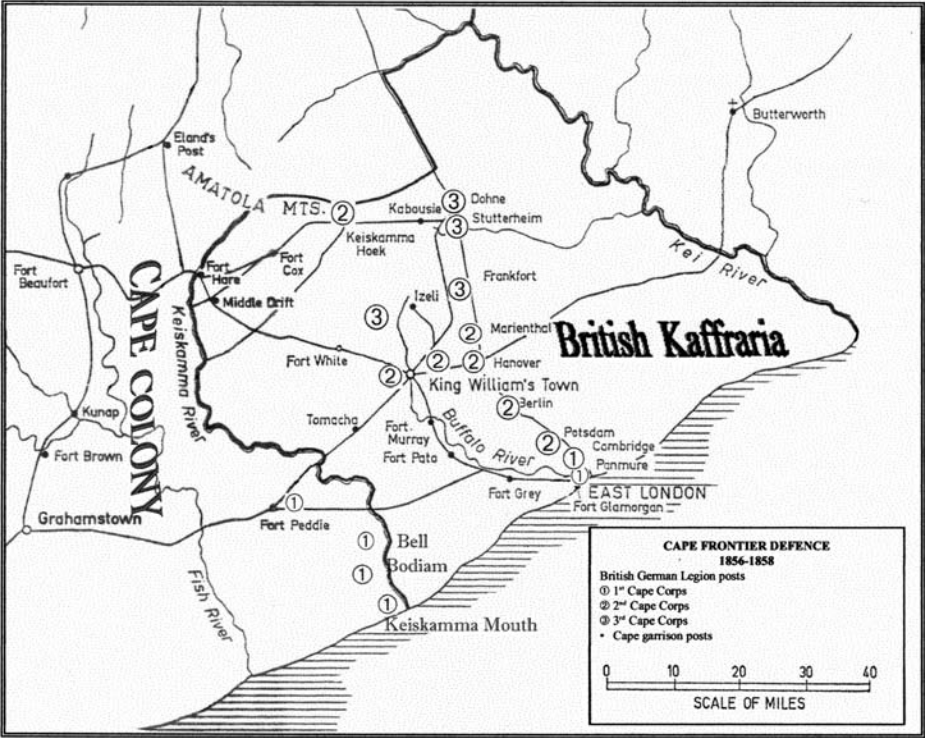


Figure 11. A Group of Transvaal Volunteers, c. 1906.

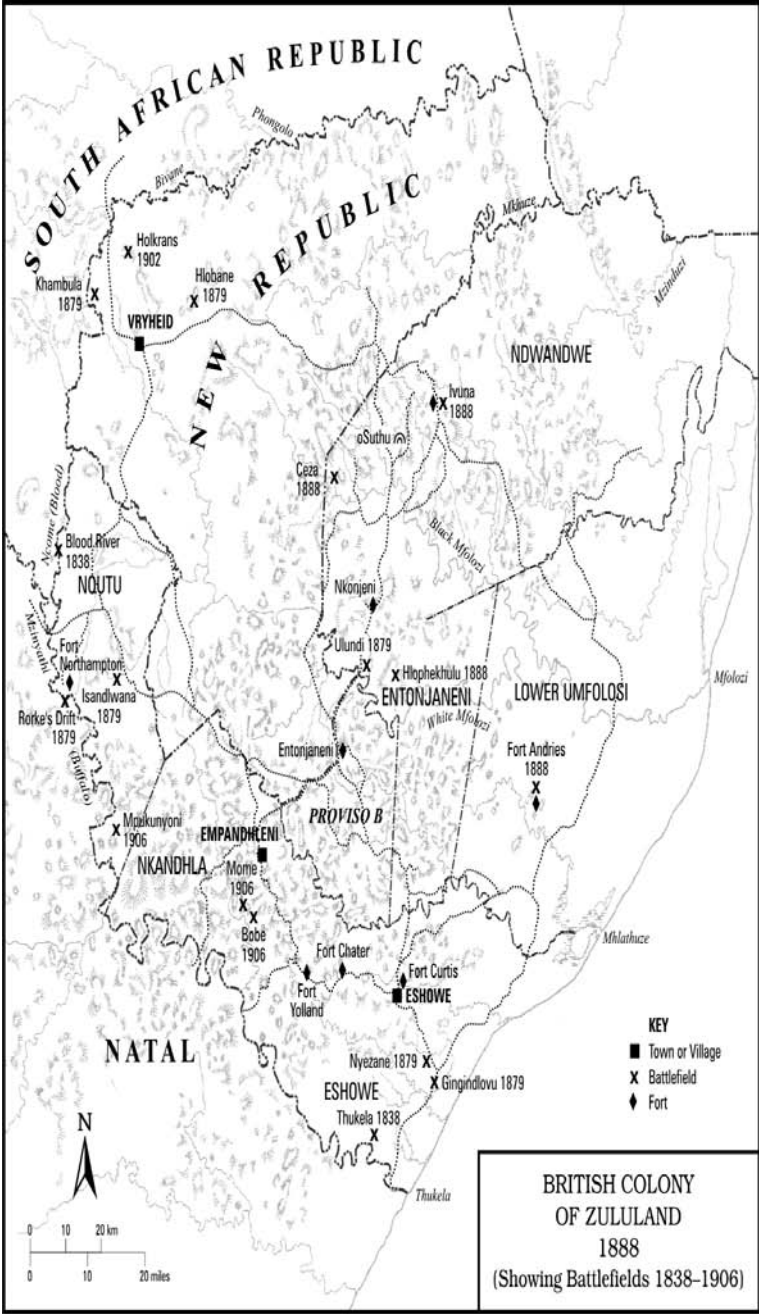
MAPS SECTION



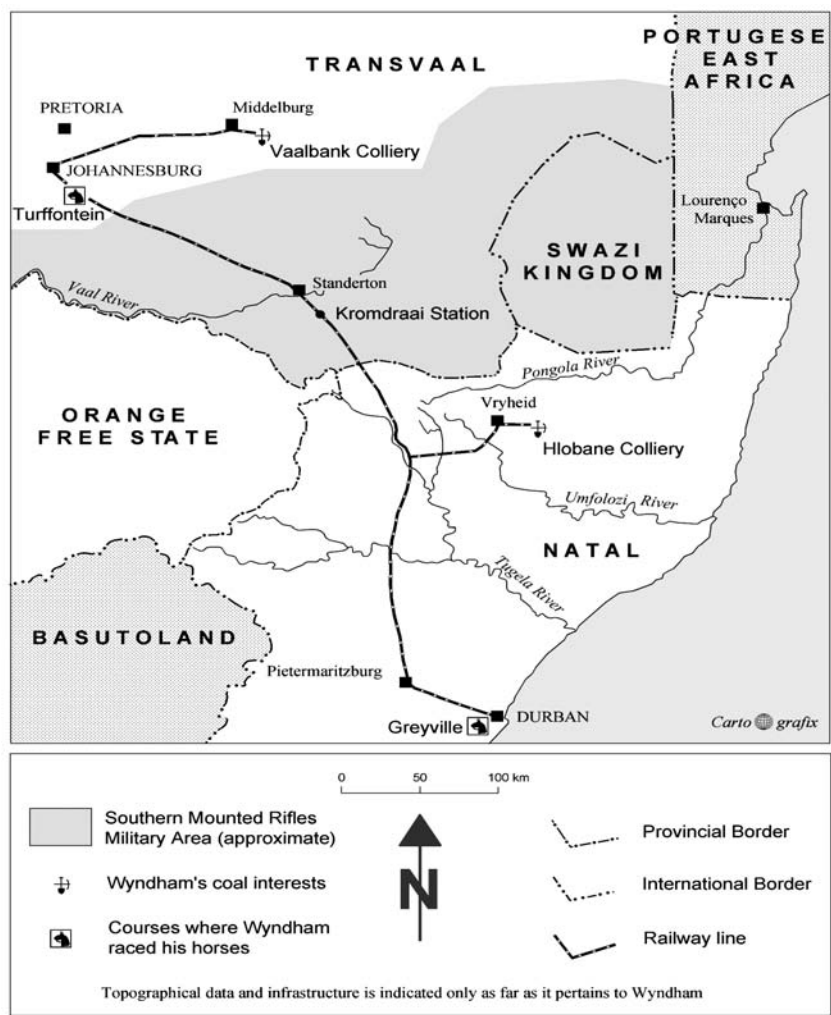
Map 1. Eastern Frontier of the Colony of Good Hope, c. 1850.



Map 2. Cape Frontier Defense, 1856-1858.



Map 3. British Colony of Zululand, 1888.



Map 4. Wyndham's Interests in South Africa, 1905-1912.

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