

THE BOER WAR: ARMY, NATION AND EMPIRE

SOUTH AFRICA AND THE BOER MILITARY SYSTEM

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Although the war began disastrously for Britain, the Boers¹ were administratively weak. Their commando system, ideally suited to an African enemy, was incapable of a major offensive against an enemy with the war potential of the British Empire. Unable to convert tactical success into strategic victory, the Boers could not resist the growing stream of men and equipment that Britain poured into the country. There were no great battles; the war was characterised by a series of ambushes, skirmishes and sieges. The last set battle was fought on 8 September 1900 at Spitzkop. Having lost all hope of winning the war, the Boers harassed the British with guerrilla tactics; denying pitched battle and concentrating, whenever possible, against British weaknesses. Frustrated at there being no centre of gravity at which to strike, the British attempted to deny the commandos their source of physical and emotional succour: the farms were burned and the women and children of the two republics² herded into concentration camps. In Lord Wolseley's words: 'Your first object should be the capture of whatever they prize most, and the destruction or deprivation of which will probably bring the war most rapidly to a conclusion'.³

The Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) was one of the crucial events in South African history. It has been the subject of much research and reassessment, and the battle for the naming of the war reflects the tremendous impact it had on all the peoples of southern Africa.⁴ As General JC Smuts pointed out, it was in many respects a total war, amongst the first of the twentieth century mould, and for this reason its ramifications on South Africa's development were profound.⁵

The war cost Britain 22,000 men and £223 million. The cost to the Afrikaner totalled 6000 men in addition to the camp deaths, and incalculable economic loss. Yet these statistics misrepresent the physical and psychological impact of the war. With a long history of foreign wars, it was easy for the British to 'forget' the pain of the Anglo-Boer War, soon dwarfed by the losses sustained in the First World War. British casualties of the Anglo-Boer War became more insignificant than the lesser numbers held in the collective Afrikaner mind.

Dis die blond,
dis die blou:
dis die veld,
dis die lug;
en 'n voël draai bowe in eensame vlug—
dis al.

Dis 'n balling gekom
oor die oseaan,
dis 'n graf in die gras,
dis 'n vallende traan—
dis al⁶

With these simple, evocative stanzas war poet, Jan FE Cilliers (1865-1940) has vividly captured something of the loneliness, the gloom and devastation faced by the thousands of exiles returning after Vereeniging to burned farms, empty lives and the loss of missing family. Although Boer society had been engaged in numerous conflicts since the founding of a permanent European settlement at the Cape in 1652, not all perhaps classifiable as wars, none other has had the impact of the Second Anglo-Boer War. Prior to the outbreak of the war, few Boers shared General JH de la Rey's concerns regarding the nature and impact of a war with Britain.⁷ While most Boers looked forward to a second Majuba; the British predicted a swift and easy victory. The Boers were not the only foolish belligerents.

British Over-confidence and Self-deception

In October 1900, after a year of operations, Sir Alfred Milner expressed his disillusionment to the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain: 'I am fairly taken aback at the vitality and ubiquity of the enemy, the staleness and dissatisfaction of our men, and the aimlessness and inconsequence of our present operations'.⁸ When the declaration of war came in October 1899, the War Office and people of Greater Britain—the world's strongest power—did not expect serious resistance from the two, tiny, agrarian South African and Orange Free State republics. Britain was overconfident and quite underestimated the (albeit limited) military potential of her opponents.⁹

Yet, from Milner, this was a feigned surprise. He, their proconsul in southern African and the person ultimately responsible for their deception, had 'always regarded war with the Republics as a very formidable war indeed'.¹⁰ With the possible exception of Redvers Buller, who had seen action during the First Anglo-Boer War (1880-81), Milner, more than anyone else, 'believed in the Boer's capacity for war'.¹¹ He knew the true size of the Boer arsenal and of what the Republican forces were capable. He, furthermore, not only had timely warning of ZAR (South African Republic) preparations¹² but was also in possession of the Boer campaign plan and as early as June 1899.¹³ These were details, it would seem, he failed to pass on to the War Office.

As Thomas Pakenham has shown, Milner had been less than frank with his principals in London. The War Office in their *Military Notes on the Dutch Republics*, expected the Boers to limit themselves to a raiding strategy conducted by no more than two to three thousand men; and that after a serious defeat they would surrender. British soldiers 'asserted over and over again that the death of a few hundred of their comrades would be enough to scatter the commandoes (sic) to their farms'.¹⁴ The Intelligence Department correctly predicted the coalition of the two republics but underestimated the number of rifles by at least 10,000. Ardagh's *Military Notes* estimated that 26,500 ZAR burghers were liable to military service. However, as the War Office appreciated, these figures were untrustworthy and that any estimate 'should rather be too high than too low'.¹⁵ The inability of the ZAR Government to hold an accurate census worked against Britain's war preparations, and London remained unable to gauge figures of reasonable precision.¹⁶ The total number of burghers liable to service (ages 18 to 34) in the ZAR was eventually estimated at 14,391, those between the ages 34 to 50 at 7242, and those aged below 18 and above 50, at 4666.¹⁷

This figure of 26,299 was too low. The armed forces of the two Boer republics including the approximate 2000 foreign volunteers, numbered as many as 66,667 (Table 1), although this was only approximately one-tenth of the size of the British Army.¹⁸ Thus at the outbreak of war the Boers outnumbered Britons in South Africa by at least 2 to 1. Had they maximised the benefit of their initial numbers, their knowledge of the country and superior mobility, they might very well have swept the British to the coast, occupied the harbours, contested the landing of reinforcements, and undermined the resolve of the British parliament.¹⁹ As we know, caution and ineptitude prevailed, and the moment was lost.

Table 1: The Republican Forces

Commandants	41
Field Cornets	140
Assistant Field Cornets	99
Troops:	
South African Republic (Transvaal)	32,353
Republic of Orange Free State	22,314
<i>Agterryers</i> ('After-riders' or servants)	+/- 10,000
Foreign corps	+/- 2,000
Total	+/- 66, 667

Milner had different figures and he failed to route cardinal intelligence gained by the British Agent in Pretoria, through to London. He was 'a middle-aged man in a hurry',²⁰ and as such could not afford to be frank: he wanted to reshape the sub-continent and for this he needed a war.²¹ While Milner believed the power of the Boers could be broken, he believed that the war would be fierce yet short. As the man-on-the-spot, he had not underestimated the military power of the republics but, like most others, had 'overestimated the competence of the British Army'.²²

Moreover, as to the 'vitality and ubiquity of the enemy', the British should have been familiar with the Boer military system. The common pattern for colonial warfare—serious defeat followed by British adaptation to local circumstances—should have been unnecessary. The British had faced the Boers on a number of previous occasions: most notably at Boomplaats (1848) and in the various battles of the First Anglo-Boer War (1881).²³ Furthermore, during the nineteenth century, many British regiments had fought against the Xhosa—in no less than seven of the nine Eastern Cape frontier wars—and so gained field experience in South Africa.²⁴ Yet all the colony's soldier-settlers, 'many ... [of whom] had fought and hunted side by side with the Boers ... all asserted that the Boers could not shoot, and were wanting in every military quality except cunning and endurance'. This was probably based upon 'personal dislike and racial feeling'.²⁵ Thus, although having ample opportunity to study the Boer military system, the British thought that the Boers of 1899 were not the same men as they had been in 1881. Majuba, no matter how humiliating, was a fluke and despite Butler's study of Colley actions in 1881, no 'lessons' were seemingly learned.²⁶

The British had nothing but contempt for the farmers against whom they fought. While the Boer republics lacked a military force in the conventional sense and their generals and commandants possessed a coherent grasp of neither strategy nor tactics; they did have' modern rifles, and their men were hardy, expert marksmen, and admirable horsemen. Although the commandos at the best of times held to the loosest of discipline, they knew the veld and had the toughness born of struggling to farm a harsh and forbidding land. This lack of conventional military forces induced overconfidence in a well-disciplined and organised British Army, few of whose generals understood South African conditions. How could a country of backwoodsmen, whose entire population was no more than that of an average British town, stand against the British Empire?²⁷

Although the republics had not faced a European enemy since the Transvaal had inflicted their blow to British pride at Majuba, they had considerable experience in the so-called native wars. The Transvaal arsenal was stocked with 155mm Creusot and large numbers of rifles of the latest technology. The officers and men of the two republics, and principally their State Artillery, also had significant contact with European officers, particularly French and German artillerists, instructors who may have shared the so-called 'lessons' of the Franco-Prussian War—of cover, and fire and movement—with the Boers.

The republics might also have done more to recruit foreign veterans with their valuable experience from European wars, and ensure the return of South Africans living abroad. Offers of military hardware and expertise, from hot-air balloonists, German, French, Austrian and Dutch officers, medical doctors and artillery officers, met with a less than warm reception.²⁸ Some talent was recruited before the war, especially from Germany and Austria, to assist particularly with the republican artilleries.²⁹ Germans lay the foundations for the Transvaal state artillery and a Hollander established its Field Telegraph Section; while a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War, Major RFW Albrecht, founded its Orange Free State state artillery. Captain Adolf Zboril, an Austrian artillery officer, was second-in-command of the Transvaal artillery before the war, during which time, as the only officer with training in the Western way of war, he tried to improve its organisation and efficiency. This reorganisation gathered pace following the appointment of Adolf Schiel, a former Prussian hussar, as Zboril's lieutenant. Zboril could, however, not convince Joubert, the commandant general, 'of the importance of a modern and efficient artillery force—and despairingly, devoted more time to his remarkably beautiful wife than to the artillery'.³⁰

Although some two thousand foreigners fought with their commandos, the two republics failed to exploit the knowledge and experience of foreign soldiers, many of who were trained and (as veterans of the Franco-Prussian War) experienced in the use of the latest military technology. Their ideas on the application of the new technology in the art of warfare, particularly the rifle but also artillery, fell on deaf ears. However, their impact was lessened by not only the inaction of the Boer governments but also xenophobia, and the hatred for *Uitlanders* brought suspicion and increasing Boer control.³¹ The development of doctrine and training may also have been compromised by rivalry between the Austrian Zboril and the Prussian Schiel.³²

The British were nonetheless surprised by their strength in artillery. The British had not shared in the recent experience in European warfare, in which the rifle and the defensive had come to the fore, and few of her officers attempted to keep pace with developments where Britain was not involved.³³ Boer tactics, more sophisticated than they had been in 1881, surprised the British and Lieutenant-Colonel ES May, professor of Military Art and History at the British Army Staff College, had reason to commence his *Retrospect on the South African War* (1901) thus:

There has probably never been a more striking example of a foe being underrated than has been given to the world of late in South Africa ... each and every one of [our] assertions has been shown to have been untrustworthy, and every cannon by which the potential strength of our opponents was gauged may be shown to have been misapplied.

The Country and its Military Geography

Yet, the qualitative and quantitative underestimation of the enemy was not Britain's only intelligence failure. She also erred in terms of the theatre. The war was fought in a theatre approximately thirteen times the size of England, encompassing the two Boer republics and the British colonies and territories of the Cape, Natal, Bechuanaland and British South Africa. The size of the operational theatre and the relatively small forces employed resulted in a war of mainly movement: something for which Britain was ill prepared. She could only surmount the difficulty in containing enveloped Boers by drastically increasing her troop strength and employing counter-guerrilla strategies.

While South Africa possessed numerous good anchorages and harbours, Saldanha Bay, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban—and all were situated within the Cape and Natal colonies—Britain encountered problems the moment her lines left the coast. From then on her operations were limited to the area traversed by railroad and, more so, by the lack of transport animals. Buller complained repeatedly that he found 'greater difficulties than [he] anticipated in obtaining Ox Transport in [the Cape] Colony'.³⁴ South Africa possessed few navigable rivers and the only river of consequence, the Orange, flowed east-west. On the other hand, although the South African Republic had to import horses from the Orange Free State in 1899, the commandos enjoyed a supply of horses almost to the end of the war.³⁵

Topography was certainly problematic. The general physical features of the theatre comprised:

- A coastal region, rising gradually to an upland country, narrow on the east and west coasts, with terraced country or a gradual slope running up to the escarpment at which the great plateau starts.
- An interior tableland (the *veld* or *veldt*) 3000 to 6000 feet above sea level, flat or undulating, and only broken here and there by solitary rounded hills (*koppies*). With an average altitude of 3000 feet, the veld sloped down gradually from east to west. All the major rivers thus flowed across the plateau to the Atlantic, where there were no ports of consequence for the British invading forces to utilise.
- An escarpment marked the transition, sometimes gradual, but generally abrupt, between the coastal region and the *veld*. The escarpment commences near the Tropic of Capricorn in the north-east and runs parallel to the coast. As it passes southward it gradually becomes more precipitous until it rises to a height of over 10,000 feet in Natal. From the south-west end of the Drakensberg the escarpment takes a westerly course and runs along ranges of mountains such as the Stormberg, the Sneeuberg, the Nieuveld, and the Kornberg, where for a time it becomes merged in the parallel ranges north of Cape Town.

Climate was also difficult. On account of its height and remoteness from the sea, the veld was subject to marked variations between winter and summer. These extremes of heat and cold, and the general tendency for the temperature to become hotter in summer and cooler in winter as the British moved from the sea to the interior, is shown by the following (degrees in fahrenheit):

	East Coast (Durban)	Veldt (Bloemfontein)	West Coast (Cape Town)
January (summer)	74.1	73.4	59.5
July (winter)	68.4	47.3	54.3
Variation in average temperature	5.7	26.1	5.2

The timing of the ultimatum at the start of the South African summer was also crucial. Much of the coastal region, through which the British troops had perforce to move, burns up almost to a desert during the hotter months. The moment the British broke through the escarpment and moved beyond Ceres, they were exposed to severe heat, lack of water and little from which to live on the countryside, perhaps only some sheep, goats, and ostriches.

Farther inland, beyond the escarpment, the *veld* (and thus the Boer republics) received summer rains. Growth at the start of the war would therefore be luxuriant; with ample food and fodder, animal and water resources. In the winter the picture changed drastically with only coarse grasses surviving, mostly growing in tufts and showing the bare earth between. Despite a low GNP and the dependence upon outside supply for manufactured goods, the two republics seem to have had no problem regarding food. The State Secretary of the South African Republic, Francois Reitz, could say with some satisfaction in late August 1899, that food sufficient for six to eight months had also been laid up in storage and that there would be no shortage of meat or flour.³⁶ He and other government counterparts, expected the war to be over by the end of summer.

The Boer strategists attempted to make the most of the geography. They realised that the British would rather roll up rail way line to Bloemfontein with holding actions elsewhere and so avoid having to move through Natal—particularly the northern apex of the colony. Through skilful distraction, they would divert British energy to the relief of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking; the imperial regiments into the semi-desert hinterland of the Cape and strike at the enemy's logistic lines. A similar strategy had great effect in 1881. Few British commanders, excluding Buller and Butler (who, having written a biography of Colley, was acquainted with the dangers of pushing troops into the northern apex of colonial Natal), understood the realities of fighting in South Africa.

The guerrilla activities increased after the British had defeated the two republics with a persisting strategy. The commandos conducted raids against weak detachments of the occupying forces and at railroads and other logistic objectives. The Boers, almost invariably mounted, broke British railway lines more than 250 times in 12 months. During the early, persisting phase of the conflict, they captured and held for 27 days the waterworks of the city of Bloemfontein, forcing the British garrison to resort to unsanitary water resources. This contributed to the subsequent doubling of the typhoid mortality rate. Fevers and infections accounted for the majority of imperial and colonial casualties for much of the war. In April 1901, for example, the colonials in South Africa suffered 385 casualties, almost 52 per cent having contracted acute infection or fever. Only four patients were released from medical care during this period.³⁷

Britain responded with attempts to impede the movement of the commandos. They built across the country vast networks of barbed-wire entanglements, guarded by blockhouses that could keep the wire lines under rifle fire. Eventually, the 9000 blockhouses and 8000 kilometres of barbed-wire lines, effectively inhibited the movement of the commandos and assisted the mobile columns in the capture of many burghers. In addition, the British used a logistic strategy. They burned farms and crops and drove off livestock. This denuding of the countryside had two aims: to supply their own forces, and deny such supply to the enemy.³⁸ Friendly civilians, the so-called *Hensoppers* or 'Joiners' together with women and children were brought into concentration camps to protect them from the full effect of this extreme application of a logistic strategy. There they were provided with food and shelter. There they were exposed to incompetence, indifference and maladministration; and more than 43,000 died in the British camps. One must question whether the British drew any political advantage by 'shielding [their] supporters from the effects of the programme of terror implicit in such a logistic strategy' by concentrating them in these camps.³⁹

The Nature of the Boer Forces: The Origin of the Commando System

The very nature of the Boer commandos facilitated their transition to a guerrilla force. The majority of Boers lived in the country, surviving in relative isolation with the constant threat of a possible attack by wild animal or African warriors. In a constant state of preparedness, they acquired essential survival skills at an early age. A hardy people, excellent marksmen, and knowing their own country intimately, they were a stubborn foe—even for a nation with the resources of Britain. They had a natural sense of minor tactics and, although nearly all were mounted, they fought on foot. Thus, although incapable of conducting major operations, the Boer made excellent raiders.⁴⁰

Cas Bakkes commenced his impassioned statement on the commando system, which was published in 1979, with these emotional words:⁴¹

Die burger, geklee in sy werksdrag, met ryperd, saal, toom en soms 'n bykomende perd met 'n paar dae se mondprovisie, 'n geweer, koeëls en kruut of patrone, aangewese om sy eie verdeiging waar te neem, was die kern van die kommandostelsel, want (soos dit uit hulle nagelate dokumente blyk); 'Wij hebben geen staande Armee soldaten, maar ons arme boer is zelfs de zoldaat. Wij zijn van zelfs Beschermers van onze land en Bewaaksiers tegen alle invallen van vijanden. Van achter zijn wij neen in het midden, van over den eenmaal hondert duysen wilde barbaare en moordenaars en roovers geplaats, en soo ons niet Godt voor dát behoed, wie sal ons redden? Wij zijn omringd van duizende van barbaren, die ons alle in een dag, ja, om zoo te zeggén in een uur kunne verdelgen.'⁴²

Yes, the commando system played a key role in the history of South Africa. The principle of compulsory service by all able-bodied males came into force soon after the establishment in 1652, of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) refreshment post at the southern tip of Africa. Since then, this principle and the system to which it gave rise—namely the commando—was a central feature in burgher society and one which the trekboers and later the voortrekkers took with them to the republics they carved out of the hinterland. The commando was both a military and an economic institution, and—together with religion— was a key determinant

holding together and ensuring the survival of the burgher communities scattered during the Great Trek. Although the average Boer was an excellent shot, horseman and fieldcraftsman, most historians have presented a somewhat romanticised view. For example, to date, due to the emphasis placed in past studies upon Afrikaner nation-building and hence a common history, the intricate web of social relations—crucial for an understanding of the commando system—has been neglected.

The commando developed as an institution of the frontier when the Company could no longer afford border defence. While a town-based Burgher Militia, modelled on the militia in the United Provinces⁴³ and comprising cavalry and infantry companies, was instituted at the time of the first VOC-Khoikhoi War (1659), this proved inadequate in the hinterland. Although the militia served with merit against the British during the two invasions of the Cape in 1795 and 1806, active service against the Khoisan and later the Xhosa was quite a different thing.⁴⁴ The Burgher Militia, like the company garrison in Cape Town—many of whom were raw recruits straight from Europe, were 'Western' soldiers. They were uniformed, trained and organised according to the western way of war. Familiar with musket and pike and deployment in line and column, they were quite unprepared for the surprise, manoeuvrability and flexibility inherent in Khoisan and Xhosa tactics, and the essentials of fieldcraft. Unfamiliar topography and poor intelligence compounded this, particularly at greater distances from the Castle.

While the company garrison and burgher militia were retained for use in the event of a sea-borne attack by a European enemy, a third institution—the commandos, a mounted peoples' militia—gradually developed on the frontiers. Service in the commandos, like the Burgher Militia, was compulsory. Law and custom obliged all free burghers between the ages of 16 and 60 to undergo military training and render service whenever so required.⁴⁵ Progressively, the free burghers came to dominate the expeditions formerly comprised of company soldiers only. There were sound reasons for this increasing burgher participation. They were more familiar with the veldt and the local topography, the habits of the enemy and, through their servants, they could acquire not always accurate intelligence. For the VOC, a profit-based trading company, the use of burghers implied a financial saving. Furthermore, with further expansion into the hinterland, the Castle became more and more removed from the threatened borders of the colony. It took the garrison longer and longer to reach remote frontier areas, and, as a result, frontiersmen felt more and more vulnerable and unprotected. A lack of confidence on the part of the burghers, in the Company and the competence of its soldiers accompanied this. Hence, there was pressure from burghers to protect themselves.⁴⁶

Although the number of free burghers gradually exceeded the number of soldiers on expedition, the Company attempted to maintain a strong grip by issuing definite instructions to the commandos and appointing garrison officers to their command. However, the eventual elimination of the company's presence was not far off and the first Burgher commando—consisting entirely of volunteers—was raised on 3 August 1715.⁴⁷ This reflected an important change in policy and, in effect, meant that the free burghers, no longer having to wait for government troops, could act immediately against alleged thievery. Secondly, the initiative and control was now left in the hands of those, on the spot, whose well being, was immediately threatened.⁴⁸ Finally, the friction between the frontiersmen and the company soldiers; between the natural shot and master of bushcraft and the Western-trained soldier (often mercenary) was done away with.

The combination of rifle and horse made the Boer commando almost invincible against African opponents armed largely with assegai and knobkierrie. As a general tactic, Boers rode to within range of African enemy, fired, reloaded and returned to within range and repeated this as necessary. Africans had little chance of coming sufficiently close to use their weapons. Moreover, most African formations were tightly bunched, so enabling maximum effect of concentrated fire.⁴⁹ When they halted, the commandos always fortified in the form of *laagers*. Their tactics were to draw their enemy onto the *laager* and so derive maximum use of their firepower. Against the British, this did not work. They had to keep moving, denying pitched battle and operating against British weakness. Bombardment by British artillery—as General Piet Cronjé was to experience—made life in the *laager* none too comfortable.

This was all good and well as long as the commando system was not abused. However, from at least 1739, there are indications that the commandos were becoming increasingly violent and more proactive.⁵⁰ The Company, in an attempt to stabilise the volatile situation on the frontiers, tried—mostly in vain—to exercise a measure of control through the selection and appointment of the burghers to lead the commandos, the issue of standing instructions, the supply of ammunition and the later despatch of company soldiers.

The *landdrost* (magistrate and district commissioner) personified the district's link with the central authority in Cape Town. He passed on the Castle's instructions to the commandant, who in turn passed these through to the *veldkornette* (field cornets), *wagmeesters* and so on to the burghers of the district. This 'interference' from far-off Cape Town was not welcomed on the frontier. The structure of this secluded, rustic (perhaps backwoods) society was typical of any open frontier. Very wealthy frontier farmers and particularly the Commando leaders (they were often one and the same) wielded authority based upon access to arms and ammunition and 'sustained through the distribution of spoils'.⁵¹ Controlling enormous acreage and commanding local respect, they were a law unto themselves. Large farms or small constellations of homesteads and smallholdings were almost 'states in miniature'—independent fiefs. The commando, as a band of armed retainers, had certain feudal features.⁵² The word of the local notable and not the wishes of distant Cape Town-based officials, was law. A number of these so-called 'frontier ruffians' refused to accept direction from Cape Town and a few even felt strong enough to come out in open revolt. The Prinsloos played a central role in the Graaff-Reinet rebellion of 1795 while FC Bezuidenhout—the 'hero' of the Slagter's Nek rebellion—'stood up to the impudent British who dared tell him how to treat his dependants'.⁵³

The system survived the British occupation and was taken to Natal, Orange Free State and Transvaal, where it served as the defensive system for the Voortrekker communities. Religion and the commando—with its accompanying social structure—held these migrating communities together. Without exception, the Voortrekker leaders were all experienced commandants.⁵⁴ These Trek leaders who 'emerged from the wealthiest of the migrants'⁵⁵ set off with their clientage in tow, in search of new lands. The Great Trek was the largest expedition the commandos had to undertake, and soon a commandant in charge of all commandants was deemed necessary. This gave rise to the ranks of commandant general and chief commandant (*hoofkommandant*).⁵⁶

The relationships of power and property that had existed in the Cape Colony were thus reproduced in the newly established South African Republic and perhaps to a lesser extent in the Republic of the Orange Free State. The position of the field cornet—described by Trapido as 'the pivotal official of the burgher state'—remained essentially unchanged. Invariably he was elected from a family of local notables. He was the official with the most local authority. He was responsible to the *Krygsraad* (Military Council) and to the administrative and judicial authority of the *landdrost*. He was not only entrusted with the maintenance of combat-ready burghers in his ward and their mobilisation in case of emergency, but was also responsible for the registration of farms and administration of black people with his ward. Thus he was ideally placed for the accumulation of a large landed estate and acquisition of the necessary labour.⁵⁷ Moreover, the office of field cornet was a useful escalator to higher office. According to Van Jaarsveld, a very high proportion of those who became members of the *Volksraad* began their careers as field cornets.⁵⁸ Paul Kruger, Piet Joubert and Louis Botha were all land magnates who started their careers as field cornets and served some time as the commandant general.

The commandant general held a central and more than just a military position in Boer society. He fixed the prices of all commodities, acted as general broker in relation to the sale of ivory—the key means of exchange—and controlled the distribution of arms and ammunition, normally procured through Cape, Natal and Portuguese traders.⁵⁹ Following the defeat of the British in 1881, the *Volksraad* of the now independent South African Republic decided that the term of office of the commandant general be ten years and that the incumbent sit on the Executive Council of the ZAR government. The commandant general, in effect, became a cabinet minister responsible for defence. At the same time, commandants were elected for a term of five years; and field cornets for three years. The ordinary burghers formed the

electorate. In 1894, possibly to limit the powers of the all powerful commandant general and the personal differences between Kruger and General Joubert, the latter's period of office was shortened to five years.⁶⁰

The commando system and its officers—drawn from a class based upon the control of land, labour and trade—dominated the 'web of farmers, land speculators, merchants, and government officials, with the occasional lawyer, minister of religion, and journalist'⁶¹ that formed Transvaal society. The field cornets formed the pivot of this network, particularly after 1868 when they had become involved in tax assessment, collection and the liquidation of farming interests.

Most of those belonging to the *bywoner* class migrated to the South African Republic during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, at a time when farmland was no longer obtainable. They were men with movable property, who provided a share of their crops to the landowner and so added to his status. They also provided the rank-and-file for the commandos, inevitably commanded by the local landowner. Gradually, as land became commercially viable, the *bywoner* became an encumbrance. His status declined and his tenure became more precarious. The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) provided the opportunity for many landlords to refuse to resume patronage for those *bywoners* who had left the land to serve with the commandos.⁶²

If one accepts this, one must deduce that Christian principles and a strong sense of community can not have been that pervasive. According to Stan Trapido, 'the weakening of client-patron relationships and ... growing, but regionally uneven, impoverishment might have led to intra-Afrikaner class conflict'.⁶³ Here much research needs to be done. We know that Afrikaner society was divided—both politically and economically—but we still need to ascertain how many landless *bywoners* became *hensoppers* (i.e. joined the British in the overthrow of a corrupt, land-based oligarchy)⁶⁴ and how many served to the 'bitter end' (i.e. were *Bittereinders*). The *bywoner* had nothing to fight for. He was essentially landless and after the first months of the war, his movable property (mostly livestock) had been destroyed. The *bywoners* may have generally opted out.

Military Capability of the Republics

Although by 1899, the military system of the Boer republics had reached a peak in sophistication, the majority remained members of the commando system. While the officers of the two republics—even the generals—were elected⁶⁵ they were in other respects no different from their British counterparts. At the outbreak of the war, the officers of the ZAR not only belonged, almost without exception, to the ruling oligarchy but many of the generals were related through ties of kinship and economic interests. Gustav Preller, for example, was the son of Commandant RCL Preller and Stephina, daughter of Commandant General Stephanus Schoeman. The incompetent General Hendrik Schoeman was his uncle. His wife, whom he married in 1898, was the daughter of Lieutenant-Colonel HPN Pretorius, commander of the Transvaal State Artillery, who (in turn) was a grandson of both Piet Retief and Piet Pretorius, brother of Commandant General AWJ Pretorius, and a cousin of President MW Pretorius. There was even a pre-war attempt by Kruger's government to establish a peerage for the Transvaal!⁶⁶

The election of officers, of course, did not always lead to creative strategy and tactics, or effective command. The very wealthy, or at best the popular, were not always military geniuses. Perhaps correctly, Pakenham has described the republican forces as a people's army—'commanded willy nilly'.⁶⁷ Some of the best Boer generals, including De Wet, started the war as ordinary burghers. Boer veterans wore no medals, no uniforms. Their status was gauged by a white beard. Age often in combination with family credentials, bought respect and—as Botha and De Wet experienced—not young, innovative genius.⁶⁸ According to Smuts, De Wet's 'active genius was thwarted at every stage by the stupidity of his superiors and the insubordination of his undisciplined men'.⁶⁹

However, the grip of the landed interest upon military command changed as the war progressed. The older guard, composed chiefly of Kruger's favourites, dishonoured themselves. General FA Grobler ('Groot Freek') 'was a staunch supporter of Kruger ... Many generals were appointed for no other reason—with dire results...'.⁷⁰ General Erasmus 'should have been dismissed and punished ... for incapacity and disobedience'.⁷¹ Lukas Meyer was seized with paralysis and unable to operate offensively even under the most favourable of conditions. Jan Kock, exceeding his orders, led his commandos to a bloody defeat at Elandslaagte.⁷² Piet Cronjé's subordinates had to suffer his 'arrogant stupidity'.⁷³ Hendrik Schoeman, perhaps the most pitiable of all the Krugerite generals, voluntarily surrendered, was arraigned for high treason and lynched by fellow burghers.⁷⁴ Krause ascribed the heavy losses at Platrand:

to nothing else but want of discipline, and the ill-advised policy of the Kruger Government in interfering with the war operations, and appointing and keeping in command men like Schoeman, Erasmus etc, who are hardly fit to be employed even as common soldiers.⁷⁵

According to a contemporary observer, 'the conduct of these men was reported to the Government, time and time again ... But the President refused to believe anything against his favourites. He closed his eyes and stopped his ears and professed his belief in the help of God'.⁷⁶

Younger men, more deserving of the general's rank and 'in spite of gross prejudice and conservative stupidity', gradually replaced them. The four geniuses of the war, Botha, Smuts, de la Rey and de Wet all 'started and remained in a subordinate position until it was too late'. They could only push through to the front rank after the death of Joubert, the surrenders of Cronjé, Piet de Wet and Marthinus Prinsloo, the disgrace of Hendrik Schoeman, who 'represented in his person a whole vanished or vanishing order of things, both political and military', and, most importantly, the exile of Kruger. Nonetheless, by this time it was too late. Bloemfontein had fallen and the entire Boer campaign was being rolled back steadily. The nepotism of the Republican governments and the incompetence and arrogance of the military leadership, brought a situation that by late 1900 was past redemption.⁷⁷

Ineffective, even counterproductive, leadership was only part of the problem. Contemporary observers recognised that undisciplined troops severely affected operations. Discipline was generally bad. Officers who through the force of personality could not enforce their authority and attain respect experienced tremendous problems. In fact, most officers, particularly in the beginning, experienced problems in command and control.⁷⁸ Even the charismatic Christiaan de Wet was no exception.⁷⁹

The State Artillery and ZARPs (South African Republic Police)—referred to as 'the disciplined force of Transvaal'⁸⁰—also experienced severe disciplinary problems.⁸¹ There are a legion of references to generals and commandants having to use force (de Wet had a whip) to keep the burghers at the front or enforce obedience. One must doubt de Kiewiet's description of the commando (although in a different era) as 'the sum of individual willingness'⁸² and Charles Townshend's belief that they were 'held together by voluntary co-operation'.⁸³ Thus the weakest feature of the commandos was indiscipline: the burghers disliked being organised and their officers could never count on all the men on the muster roll being present to go into action.

However, to be fair, the burghers were untrained in matters military. Discipline and blind obedience to orders were foreign concepts. Townshend has stated that 'the Boer forces had always been at best (or worst) semi-regular armies ... loosely organized in "commandos" rather than conventional military structures'.⁸⁴ Although this facilitated the transition to guerrilla warfare, following the defeat of the main Boer field armies; it certainly complicated the opening phases of the war. While one must agree with Preston et al that 'the Boers were hardy farmers who were excellent marksmen', one must question their too generous statement that the Boers 'were not hampered by traditional military concepts and methods'.⁸⁵ Training in the art of war, and perhaps even the study of military history, might have produced quite different results. Not every Boer general was a de Wet, a Smuts or a de la Rey.

The British Army and the armed forces of both Boer republics went through an extensive rearmament programme during the last three decades of the century. The armies of both belligerent parties introduced breech-loading rifles that enhanced the rates of fire and allowed soldiers to fire from a prone position. Further sophistication—a bolt mechanism and magazine, smaller calibre ammunition, and smokeless propellants—enabled infantry to maintain rapid, aimed fire without powder obscuring the field of vision. The artillery of both armies also converted to breech-loading ordnance and adopted a smokeless propellant that had been available since the early 1890s.⁸⁶

Table 2: Rifles used by the Boers and British during the war, 1899-1902

Boers			British		
Rifle	Calibre	Number	Rifle	Calibre	Category
Mauser	7 mm	49,810	Lee-Netford	7.69 mm (.303 inch)	Infantry
Martini-Henri	11.4 mm	43,752	Lee-Enfield	7.69 mm (.303 inch)	Yeomanry (Reservists)
Guédes	8 mm	6150			
Lee-Netford	7.69 mm (.303 inch)	2730			
Krag-Jorgensen	6.5 mm	100			
Total		102,542			

[Total is for the two Boer republics at the start of the war.
Rifles in private ownership not included.]⁸⁷

But how effective were these rifles? A comparison between the Mauser—chief weapon of the Boer commando—and the standard British Lee-Netford is revealing. Mauser rifles and cartridges were lighter. They could fire further and at a greater speed; and their magazines, accommodating five cartridges, were filled by means of a loading strip. The magazine of the Lee-Netford, on the other hand, could accommodate ten cartridges, but then these had to be loaded individually (Table 3). The deadly effect of the Mauser in the hands of the burghers eventually forced the British to alter their tactics.

Table 3: Comparison between the Mauser and Lee-Netford⁸⁸

Characteristic	Mauser	Lee-Netford
Calibre	7 mm	7.69 mm (.303 inch)
Means of propulsion	smokeless cordite	smokeless cordite
Weight of bullet	24.8 g	31 g
Speed (muzzle velocity)	728 metres per second	610 metres per second
Maximum distance	4000 m	2560 m
Weight	4 kg	4.24 kg
Length	1.235 m	1.21 m
Loading method	magazine, 5 cartridges, filled with loaded strip	magazine, 10 cartridges, filled individually

However, not all burghers carried the Mauser. Many, and particularly Free Staters, still carried the cumbersome, and now out-dated, Martini-Henris. According to a veteran: 'Enkele dra nog Martini-Henri gewere en gaan gebuk onder die gewig van die swaar loodkoeëls, waarvan nie baie nodig is om 'n pond gewig op te maak nie'.⁸⁹ The burghers expressed a strong preference for the Mauser and in Krugersdorp they refused to accept anything else.⁹⁰ However, the older generals, familiar with the Martini-Henri, did not trust the newer technology. In 1896, the Commandant General, Piet Joubert, in a less than lucid moment, placed an order for antiquated, and by then already much-maligned, Martini-Henris.⁹¹

Most burghers were excellent marksmen. Their ability to estimate distance ('goed om distansies te skat') resulted in deadly accurate fire. The British regiments, on the other hand, fired in volleys at the command of officers who also determined the distances, without actually aiming at a particular target. This was perhaps the reason why Boer veterans believed British fire at close quarters to be less accurate than at between 600 to 1000 yards.⁹² Although experiencing an initial difficulty in judging distance, the musketry of British troops improved after 1900. To say that all burghers were excellent marksmen is also an oversimplification. Although some (perhaps most) attended the annual *wapenschauw* (literally 'weapon show') no structured military training took place in either of the republics.⁹³ Burghers living on farms and in rural areas grew up with a rifle in the hand and were masters at bushcraft. Those living in the towns, on the other hand, had no better acquaintance with either rifle or bush than the average British soldier did.⁹⁴ This may perhaps explain the poor showing of the Johannesburg Commando under General JHM Kock at Elandsplaagte on 21 October 1899. Urbanisation, the accumulation of wealth and a generally easier life certainly impacted negatively upon musketry and fieldcraft. The requisitions for supply submitted by the logistics commissioners on the front also present an interesting picture. Many commandos spent the first months of the war ordering extra bedding—pillows, mattresses and blankets—cutlery, and crockery.⁹⁵ Ardagh's *Military Notes* were perhaps correct. The burgher of 1899 was possibly not as hardened, rough and ready as his counterpart in 1881.⁹⁶

Doctrinally, the British and republican armies were poorly prepared. The British soon found that 'technology and organisation were only adjuncts to, not substitutes for, inventive operational solutions', and that they could not always press what should have been their strong suit—technology. Their firepower, which normally gave them 'an important, but by no means decisive, advantage' in colonial warfare was somewhat counter-weighted by the artilleries of the two republics.⁹⁷ European rivalries played a role in arming the Boers with modern weapons, comparable to those in the British arsenal. Of the two republics, the Transvaal, with approximately 450 well-trained artillerists in the State Artillery Corps, had the better artillery. Their guns were of heavier calibre than even those of the enemy, and comprised 12- and 15-pounders, Krupp guns, a few old Armstrongs, and the quick-firing Maxim-Nordenfeldts in addition to the heavy Creusots (Long Toms).⁹⁸

The British, however, had guns in greater numbers and the impact of these increased following the fall of Pretoria and the loss of the workshops there. The remoteness of some battlefields also made artillery a liability. The use of larger guns, such as the Creusot 75, could be maximised only if the battlefield was accessible and the enemy was willing to fight on the defensive. The Long Toms, which remained under-utilised, even wasted, had to be sacrificed early in the war in view of their bulkiness and relative immobility.

In the darker, earlier days of the war, Milner, in view of the 'colossal armaments of the SAR, could not but anticipate a terrible struggle ...'.⁹⁹ A year later the situation had changed drastically. Unlike Britain, the Republics had a limited infrastructure and little logistic support to keep their weapons in service. For the first year, maintenance of guns and the manufacture of shells took place in Pretoria. By December 1899, the government stocks of rifles were diminishing and there was grave concern after Boer victories of that month that ammunition supplies would be exhausted. Thriftiness in battle was coupled with return of cartridges to Pretoria for reloading at the South African Explosives Factory. The NZASM (The Netherlands South African Railway Company) workshop repaired defective guns; while the engineering firm of Grunberg and Léon ensured a supply of gun ammunition: perhaps as much as 200 Krupp shells per day. Local manufacture and repair ended following the fall of Pretoria in June 1900.¹⁰⁰

The flow of consumables—spares, ammunition, fuel, clothing, and food—to the republican armies was difficult at the best of times. Much equipment and consumables could not be produced locally and had to be imported. Communication with the outside world, from whom the promise for support never came, was erratic and dependent upon the Portuguese at Lourenço Marques. These shortcomings seriously diminished Boer combat capability.

Britain thus had strategic reach. She could not only project manpower and firepower but also institute a naval blockade to halt the passage of arms and ammunition to the republics. Already in August 1899, consignments from the Creusot and Carlsruhe factories were stopped from leaving the docks at Lourenço Marques, following British pressure.¹⁰¹ War materials had to be sent under the guise of machinery.¹⁰² The republics, on the other hand, had no means to hamper British sea communications and the passage of materiel to South Africa.

Fighting over their own country they had no problem about supply. In terms of rations, the two republics did not seem to have a problem. The government of the ZAR was satisfied that food sufficient for six to eight months was laid up in storage and that there would be no shortage of meat or flour.¹⁰³ After its many recent wars, the Transvaal logistic system was both in place and exercised. Yet despite this, the commandos experienced a shortage of food right from the start.¹⁰⁴ Logistics broke down after the burghers had consumed their own supplies. The meat was of poor quality and in small quantity. The *boere beskuit* (rusks) were likewise inferior and in short supply.¹⁰⁵ Faced with these conditions, alternative means had to be sought: goods were bought and looted at Belmont, where the burghers also did some 'drinking at the Bar'.¹⁰⁶ The commissariat depots disappeared with the start of the guerrilla phase of the war.

National Will

As the clouds of war cast their long shadows over southern Africa, the Republics entered a defensive pact in 1897 and the younger burghers—bursting with patriotism—looked forward to a second Majuba. While cooler minds did not show the same enthusiasm, many—even in government circles—believed that the republics stood at the very least a reasonable chance of victory and that the war would last no more than six to eight months.¹⁰⁷ A future combat general and later 'joiner', Piet de Wet, cautioned:

Ons gaan nie net te doen hê met 'n klomp weerlose wesens nie, wat ons soos 'n klomp skape voor ons kan uitjaag nie, maar julle moet in gedagte hou dat die vyand net soos julle bekend is met korrel en visier, en glo aan dieselfde Voorsienigheid.¹⁰⁸

Although Calvinism was a common denominator, the Boers were not a united people with a common vision. Friction between the Transvaalers and Free Staters became more pronounced as the war progressed. Furthermore, as has already been noted, class differences existed in both republics. Traditional Afrikaans historians have emphasised the lack of social distinction within the republican military systems and founded their argument upon the practice of officer election and the accessibility of officers to the ordinary burghers.¹⁰⁹ While the builders of the Afrikaner nationalism stressed this equality, other historians, chiefly neo-marxists, have questioned otherwise.¹¹⁰ The ballot was not secret and *bywoners* (tenants) were pressed to elect their landlords or at least the foremost landlord of the district, to the position of field cornet.¹¹¹ Yes, ordinary burghers had immediate and personal access to their officers.¹¹² But the preponderance of evidence seems to suggest that this was the access *bywoners* would normally enjoy in presenting their personal problems or grievances to the landowners.

As with the squirearchy of rural England, Transvaal country society was inward looking.¹¹³ They married with other notable families and rapidly a network of familial, economic and political interests was formed. This was due to the small number of such notable families, bad roads, and marriages to secure inheritances. A class of quasi-feudal Afrikaner notables, with the assistance of their functionaries, came to acquire a monopoly over both the ownership of largely under-utilised land and government office. The British Agent, Conyngham Greene, described the position in 1899:

The Kruger-Schutte-Kock-Wolmarans Gang ... was a mutual-benefit society, bound together by family and other ties of personal interest, whose aim it was to monopolize (sic) all the places of power, & plant their own relations in all the good positions.¹¹⁴

The wealthy intervened in the interests of their children, relatives and associates. They appointed them to the relief committees to keep them out of the front lines. According to Ludwig Krause, Paul Kruger 'set the example of keeping his relations and children out of the fire as much as possible'.¹¹⁵ Or relatives were endowed with a military command.¹¹⁶ Kruger appointed Barend Vorster as Hoofd Commandant of Zoutpansberg, 'an office specially created by the President for a favourite' and over the head of the elected commandant.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the notables also interfered in the judicial process. Kruger intervened to save a favourite. He had the sentence of cowardice and desertion against Field Cornet Jan du Preez reversed.' ... [T]hat the poor private burger was punished, but that rich influential officers like Jan du Preez could do what they liked with impunity' obviously worked against high morale and esprit de corps.¹¹⁸

According to Stan Trapido, a marxist historian, 'the weakening of client-patron relationships and ... growing, but regionally uneven, impoverishment might have led to intra-Afrikaner class conflict'.¹¹⁹ We know that Afrikaner society was divided—both politically and economically—but we still need to ascertain how many landless *bywoners* became *hensoppers* (ie joined the British in the overthrow of a corrupt, land-based oligarchy)¹²⁰ and how many served to the 'bitter end' (ie were *Bittereinders*). The *bywoner* had nothing to fight for. As land became commercially viable before the war, the *bywoner* became an encumbrance. His status declined and his tenure became more precarious. The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) provided the opportunity for many landlords to refuse to resume patronage for those *bywoners* who had left the land to serve with the commandos.¹²¹ Having lost their movable property (mostly livestock) in the first months of the war, these landless *bywoners* may have tended to opt out of the war. Here much research needs to be done.

Relations between the Boers and the foreigners who—from as early as June 1899—volunteered to help 'oppose British aggrandisement'¹²² were less than cordial. The rank and file had nothing but contempt for the foreigners, their education, manners and language. Boers saw them furthering their problems instead of lightening their burden. A clash between the educated, largely urban, middle class foreign volunteers and the 'rustic, patriarchal and conservative' Boers was to be expected.¹²³ This was not a new thing. Kruger's erudite Dutch officials were ridiculed and criticised.¹²⁴ They had 'no knowledge of the Afrikaners language or morality and were unsuited to his style of warfare'.¹²⁵ Joubert also complained that he was continually harried by requests for accommodation, food, transport and arms.¹²⁶ This is a little unfair, and archival evidence seems to point to the contrary.¹²⁷

The growing pace of surrenders and defections took its toll on morale. The unnecessary surrenders of Cronjé early in 1900 and that of Marthinus Prinsloo in July of that year, broke not only the spirit of Joubert but also of the republican cause. 'What a shock it was to see him [General Joubert] only a few months later, grey-headed, with care-worn features and hollow cheeks. His heart was broken then, after Cronjé had blundered by allowing himself with close on 4,000 men to be captured, thereby breaking the spirit of nearly all and well nigh ruining our cause'.¹²⁸ Both Smuts and De Wet realised that the republican forces had to be 'purged by these losses and defections' in order for the war to continue.¹²⁹

Furthermore, just as Boer national resolve seemed to be crumbling, that of the British Empire seemingly kicked in. The great hope of the republicans was a true people's war: a rising of the whole Afrikaner population including the Cape Dutch. This, their only realistic chance of success, might have swept the British out of southern Africa. Many of the most ambitious guerrilla operations were designed to inspire such a rising, but it never came. In its absence, the Boer commandos were effectively confined to defensive operations and, although the guerrilla war lasted nearly four times as long as the conventional phase, many (if not most) Boers recognised the futility of their struggle against an empire with her immeasurable war potential and her seemingly limitless military capacity.¹³⁰ According to General Christiaan de Wet:

We knew, I need scarcely say, that humanly speaking ultimate victory for us was out of the question—that had been clear from the very beginning. For how could our diminutive army hope to stand against the overwhelming numbers at the enemy's command.¹³¹

Endnotes

1. The term 'Boer' is used in its historical context. Gradually, after 1902 with the move from country to town and the solidifying of a common nationalism among South Africans of largely Dutch/German descent, 'Afrikaner' supplanted the term 'Boer' (meaning farmer).
2. These women and children included Boers and Blacks: indeed all those who rendered (or were suspected of rendering) assistance of any kind to the commandos in the field.
3. Quoted by Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War* (London: Routledge, 1993), 78.
4. The South African War, the Second War of Independence, the English War and the Boer War all insufficiently describe the complexities of the conflict. The Anglo-Boer War—perhaps too simplistically—is taken from the two main belligerents. This has several problems. Firstly, it excludes the 'other' parties (Cape Afrikaners, Australians, New Zealanders, Dutch, Belgians, Austrians, Russians, Germans, Frenchmen, Canadians, the Englishmen of Natal and the Cape, the so-called *Uitlanders*, and the thousands upon thousands of Black South Africans). Furthermore, it was not the second conflict between Boer and Briton. If one enumerates the events culminating at Slagtersnek and Bloomplaats, the war, which erupted in 1899, must number as the 4th Anglo-Boer War. The 'Three Years War' (De Wet's terminology) is too vague yet perhaps the best of a poor list. In South Africa, each of these terms carries a certain political baggage.
5. G Natrass and SB Spies (eds), *Jan Smuts: Memoirs of the Boer War* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1994), 19.
 6. 'It's the tawny,
it's the blue:
it's the veldt,
it's the sky;
and a bird flies above in lonely flight—
that's all.

 - 'It's an exile come
from over the ocean,
it's a grave in the grass,
it's a falling tear—
that's all.'
7. J Meintjes, *De la Rey: Lion of the West* (Johannesburg: Hugh Keartland, 1966), 26, 80-81.
8. Milner to Chamberlain, 28 October 1900, in Cecil Headlam (ed), *The Milner Papers*, vol II, *South Africa, 1899-1905* (London: Cassell, 1933), 166.
9. Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Abacus edn, 1995), 77, 96, 117.
10. Cape Archives Depot (hereinafter CAD): Government House archives (hereinafter CH) 26/398, Draft General and Confidential Despatches, Notes of discussion, Molteno-Milner, November 1899.
11. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 117.
12. Transvaal Archives Depot (hereinafter TAD): archives of the British Agent, Pretoria (hereinafter BA) 20, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 11 May 1899.
13. TAD: BA 21, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 28 June 1899.
14. ES May, *A retrospect of the South African War* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1901), 3.
15. TAD: A 12, Correspondence from High Commissioner, Chamberlain-Milner, 5 January 1899.
16. Ibid, 30 March 1899; and BA 20, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 6 May 1899
17. TAD: BA 21, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 8 July 1899. The total white male population for both republics (?) was estimated at 66, 498. This figure is ludicrous.
18. This comparative estimate includes the approximate 10, 000 agterryers but excludes the substantial colonial forces on which Britain could call. The number of agterryers varies between seven and eleven thousand. See P Labuschagne, *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902: The Role and Contribution of Agterryers* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1999), ix, 1; and Fransjohan Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Cape Town, Pretoria and Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau, 1999), 294.
19. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, chapters 7 and 8; MJ Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen: Generaal Prinsloo en die Bethlehem-Kommando* (Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers, 1937), 33-34; and numerous items in the Leyds Correspondentie.
20. GHL le May, *British Supremacy in South Africa, 1899-1907* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 10.
21. TAD: BA 21. Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 8 July 1899, and Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 77, 96, 117.
22. le May, *British Supremacy in South Africa, 1899-1907*, 35-7.
23. GFH Berkeley, 'Sir Harry Smith: A Reminiscence of the Boer War in 1848', *The Fortnightly Review*, 1 December 1899 (<http://www.btinternet.com/~rrnotes/bmh/smith1848.html>).
24. Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, 77-78.
25. May, *A retrospect of the South African War*, 24.
26. W F Butler, *The Life of Sir George Pomeroy-Colley* (London: John Murray, 1899), 113-39, 260-64; and W F Butler, *Sir William Butler: An Autobiography* (London: Constable 1911), 383.
27. Halifax (pop. 105,000), Southampton (pop 105,000), and South Shields (pop 101,000).

28. Many were prepared to travel out to South Africa at own cost. See Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 30 August 1899; Regeering Pretoria-Leyds, 31 August 1899; Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 22 September 1899, Regeering Pretoria-Leyds, 28 September 1899; Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 30 September 1899, and Regeering Pretoria-Leyds, 2 October 1899, in *Leyds Correspondentie*, 130, 173, 177, 180.
29. TAD: KG 1139, Briewen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps, Schiel-Commandant General, 15 September 1899.
30. EA Schmidl, 'Adolph Zboril; An Austrian officer in the Transvaal artillery, *Militaria* 18: 2 (1988), 49-50.
31. TAB: archives of the Commandant General, ZAR (hereinafter KG) 1139, Briewen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps, Schiel-Commandant General, 20 September 1899.
32. Schmidl, 'Adolph Zboril'; 53-54; and M van Niekerk, 'Adolf Schiel en die Duitse Kommando' (Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis 1951/II).
33. Ian Hamilton. Majuba veteran and student of military history and strategy, was again an exception.
34. CAD: GH 39/12, Military Secretary, Letters Received, Miscellaneous, Buller-Milner, 12 November 1899.
35. TAD: KG 1139, Briewen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps. Lt Col Adolf Schiel-Staats Secretaris, Afdeling B, 25 September 1899 (f 54); and Schiel-Staatssecretaris, 1 October 1899 (f 168).
36. 'Als het tot vechten komen moet, zijn "onze menschen" gereed. Kost hebben wij ook in de laatste 6 of 7 weken veel opgekocht, en al duurde de oorlog 6 of 8 maanden zou er geen gebrek aan vleesch en meel zijn', K W Reitz-Leyds, 28 August 1899, in *Leyds Correspondents*, 126-27.
37. CAD: GH 40/8, Casualty Returns 1901.
38. Free State Archives Depot (hereinafter FAD): archives of the Military Governor (hereinafter MG) 24, Confidential Instruction, 7 December 1900: 'The Commander-in-Chief has noticed that, after the passage through a district of a column of troops, the food supplies therein do not appear to have sensibly diminished. The Commander-in-Chief knows how difficult it is to collect supplies over a scattered area, and at the same time defend a long column and complete a long march before nightfall, but he urges on officers commanding the columns that they should fully recognise the necessity of denuding the country of supplies and livestock, in order to secure the two-fold advantages of denying subsistence, and of being able to feed their own columns to the fullest extent from the country.'
39. Archer Jones, *The Art of War in the Western World* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 418-19.
40. Montgomery of Alamein, *A History of Warfare* (London Rainbird edn, 1982), 452.
41. C M Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur' in P G Nel (red), *Die Kultuurontplooiing van die Afrikaner* (Pretoria en Kaapstad: HAUM, 1979), 294.
42. 'The burgher, clothed in everyday dress, with horse, saddle, bridle and sometimes another mount, with a few days of rations, a rifle, cartridges and powder or bullets, dependent upon his own defence, was the core of the commando system. As the documentary residue testifies: "We have no standing army, but the poor farmer is himself the soldier. We are the protectors of our land and the guardians against all enemy invasions. We are in the middle of a hundred thousand wild barbarians and murderers and robbers, and were it not for God's protection, who would save us? We are surrounded by thousands of barbarians, who in one day, no, in one hour, could swamp us".'
43. Now the Kingdom of the Netherlands.
44. G Tylden, *The Armed Forces of South Africa with an appendix on the commandos* (Johannesburg: Africana Museum, 1954), 48.
45. I D Bosman, *Kommando-stelsel; HOIK tydperk*, vol I (undated ms; Pretoria: Ms Documentation Centre, SANDF), 12-13.
46. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur', 296.
47. Cape Archives Depot: Council of Policy, C1457, 600-01.
48. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur', 297.
49. For the example of the Battle of Vegkop (October 1836), see P Becker, *Path of Blood: The Rise and Conquests of Mzilikazi, Founder of the Matabele Tribe of Southern Africa* (London: Longman, 1962), 166.
50. R Elphick and V C Malherbe, 'The Khoisan to 1828', in R Elphick and H Giliomee (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1989), 26.
51. M Legassick, 'The Northern Frontier', in Elphick and Giliomee (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, 380.
52. Ibid.
53. M Legassick, 'The frontier tradition in South African historiography', in S Marks and A Atmore (eds), *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa* (London: Longman, 1980), 65, and H Giliomee, 'The Eastern Frontier, 1770-1812', in Elphick and Giliomee (eds), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652-1840*, 440-41.
54. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur', 301.

55. S Trapido, 'Reflections on land, office and wealth in the South African Republic, 1850-1900' in Marks and Atmore (eds), *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa*, 352.
56. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur', 301 et seq.
57. S Trapido, 'Reflections on land, office and wealth in the South African Republic, 1850-1900', 356.
58. F A van Jaarsveld, *Die Veldkornet en sy aandeel in die Opbou van die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek* (Archives Year Book for SA History, 1950 II), 341-47.
59. Marks and Atmore (eds), *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa*, 33-34.
60. Bakkes, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur', 301 et seq.
61. Robert Ross, *Beyond the Pale: Essays on the History of Colonial South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994), 1.
62. S Trapido, 'Reflections on land, office and wealth in the South African Republic, 1850-1900', 359.
63. *Ibid*, 361.
64. The old republican oligarchy showed a remarkable ability to survive both economically and politically. This can be clearly seen in the landed interests of men like Louis Botha and the composition of the first Union cabinet in 1910.
65. C R de Wet, *Three Years War, October 1899-June 1902* (Johannesburg: Galago, 1986), 14-15, and Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen*, 16, 32, 43, 51.
66. Military Archives Depot (hereinafter MAD): archives of the Adjutant General (hereinafter AG14), Box 25, file KA/TvI, 'How Transvaal lost a peerage'. This was defeated in 1894, following a storm of protest from conservative elements and the satire of Eugene Marais.
67. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 105.
68. Natrass and Spies (eds), *Jan Smuts*, 70, and de Wet, *Three Years War*, 30, 32, 38.
69. Natrass and Spies (eds), *Jan Smuts*, 71.
70. J Taitz, K Gillings and A Davey (eds), *The War Memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause, 1899-1900* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1996), 6, 82. See also the case of Barend Vorster (*ibid*, 82-83).
71. General D J E Erasmus (1845-1914). Taitz et al (eds), *The War Memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, 54.
72. *Ibid*, 54, 142.
73. Natrass and Spies (eds), *Jan Smuts*, 71.
74. General H J Schoeman (1840-1901). Taitz et al (eds), *The War Memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, 109-110, and *South African Biographical Dictionary*, II: 633-34.
75. Taitz et al (eds), *The War Memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, 55.
76. *Ibid*, 7. Krause was a member of the Progressive Party—the parliamentary opposition to Kruger. He nevertheless presents a lucid, plausible picture. The facts speak for themselves.
77. Natrass and Spies (eds), *Jan Smuts*, 69, 82, and chapter 3: 'Reorganization' in general.
78. Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen*, 14-15.
79. See de Wet, *Three Years War*: 'real discipline did not exist among the burghers' (15); 'they were quite unaccustomed to being under orders' (16); 'devoid of all military discipline' (64); and in conversation with General Piet Joubert' ... they don't know what discipline means' (63).
80. Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen*, 31.
81. TAD: KG 1089, Staatsartillerie Strafboek. See for example the entry for FWG König, f 782.
82. De Kiewiet, *History*, 19.
83. Charles Townshend, 'People's War', in C Townshend (ed), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 159.
84. *Ibid*, 159 (parentheses in original).
85. RA Preston, A Roland and SF Wise, *Men In Arms: A history of warfare and its interrelationships with Western society* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1991), 228-29.
86. Edward Spiers, 'The Late Victorian Army 1868-1914', in David Chandler and Ian Beckett (eds), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the British Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 196.
87. JH Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika, 1899-1902, Deel I: Die Boere-Offensief* (Pretoria: Staatsdrukker, 1986), composed from detail in chapter 3.
88. *Ibid*, chapter 3.
89. 'Some still carry Martini-Henri rifles and are bent double under the weight of the heavy lead rounds, few of which weigh a pound.' Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen*, 14.
90. '... wat is dan rede dat Commdt Genl geen Mausers en patronen wil zenden burghers hier weigert nuwe MH geweren te ontvang ...' ('Why is it that the Commandant General will not provide Mausers and send rounds. The burghers here refuse to accept new Martini-Henris ...') TAD KG 457, Ammunisie Anglo- Boereoorlog, Myncoms, Krugersdorp-Dieperink, 12 August 1899.
91. Breytenbach, *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog in Suid-Afrika*, I: 79-80.
92. Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen*, 15-16.
93. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 105, and JE Ellis, 'Musketry: the Anglo-Boer War experience', unpub paper, Second Anglo-Boer War Conference, Bloemfontein, October 1999.
94. TAD: K G 1038 tot 1041, Skyfskietverslae, 1893-95.
95. TAD: archives of the Subkomitee van die Kommissariaat, Dundee' (hereinafter SCD) 1, Krijgs Kommissariaat Dundee Order briefjes, 1899-1900: various folios: The approach of the German

- Commando was quite different: requests for arms, ammunition, horses, and information on the disposition of the guns. See TAD KG 1139, Brieven Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps, Schiel-Commandant General, 25 September 1899 (f 51); Schiel-Commandant General, 25 September 1899 (f 52); Schiel-Staats Secretaris, 25 September 1899, 25 September 1899 (f 54); Schiel Commandant General, 30 September 1899 (f 110); and Schiel-Staatssecretaris, 1 October 1899 (f 168). 96. Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 77.
97. D Porch, 'Imperial Wars: From the Seven Years War to the First World War', in Townshend (ed), *The Oxford Illustrated History of Modern War*, 84-85, 90.
98. Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen*, 30-31.
99. CAD: GH 26/398, Draft General and Confidential Despatches, Notes of discussion Molteno-Milner, November 1899.
100. F Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (Cape Town, Pretoria, Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau, 1999), 84-85.
101. *The Standard and Diggers' News*, 18 August 1899; TAD: BA 22, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Grene-Milner, 18 and 19 August 1899.
102. Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 23 August 1899, Leyds-Portugeeschen Gezant de Tovar, 24 August 1899; Leyds-Max Winterfeldt, Consul-Generaal der ZAR, Berlijn, 24 August 1899; Reitz-Leyds, 28 August 1899; Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 29 August 1899; Regeering Pretoria-Leyds, 30 August 1899; Leyds-Regeering Pretoria, 31 August 1899; PGW Grobler-Leyds, 3 September 1899, in *Leyds Correspondentie*, 122-27, 130-32, 153.
103. 'Als het tot vechten komen moet, zijn "onze menschen" gereed. Kost hebben wij ook in de laaste 6 of 7 weken veel opgekocht, en al duurde de oorlog 6 of 8 maanden zou er geen gebrek aan vleesch en meel zijn. Ik zie dat de Jingo-couranten van 31,500 man spreken die ons zou moeten komen aanvallen. Zij zullen meel troepen noodig hebben dan dat!': FW Reitz-Leyds, 28 August 1899, in *Leyds Correspondentie*, 126-27.
104. JA Mouton, Genl Piet Joubert in die Transvaalse Geskiedenis (Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis 1957 I), chapters 8, 9, 10 and 15; and Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, chap 1.
105. TAD: archives of the 'Sekretaris van die Hoofkomitee van die Kommissariaat in die ZAR' (hereinafter HCC) 2: HOC 610/99. Hoofd Comite Kommissariaat seint aan Assistant Generaal Meyers en Burgers op klacht over tekort aan beschuit, 3 November 1899.
106. CAD: GH 26/398, Draft General and Confidential Despatches, Station Master, Belmont-Chief Traffic Manager, Cape Town, 16 October 1899.
107. FW Reitz, Staatssecretaris ZAR- WJ Leyds, Gezant ZAR Brussel, 28 August 1899 (d 142), in *Leyds Correspondentie*, 126-27.
108. Quoted by Grobler, *Met die Vrystaaters onder die Wapen*, 11. ['We are not simply going to have to deal with a bunch of defenceless beings, who we can chase before us like a flock of sheep but you must remember that the enemy just like ourselves is acquainted with aim and viser, and believes in the same Provision ']
109. See for example CM Bakkes, 'Die Boer as berede skutter gedurende die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog', in RJ Bouch (red), *Infanterie in Suid-Afrika, 1652-1976* (Pretoria: Dokumentasiediens SAW, 1977), 29-45; as well as a chapter by the same writer, 'Die kommandostelsel met spesiale verwysing na die historiese ontwikkeling van sy rangstruktuur', in PG Nel (red), *Die Kultuurontlooiing van die Afrikaner* (Pretoria en Kaapstad: HAUM, 1979), 294-311.
110. S. Trapido, 'Reflections on land, office and wealth in the South African Republic, 1850-1900', in S Marks and A Atmore (eds), *Economy and society*, 350-68: and SS Swart, 'The Rebels of 1914: Masculinity, Republicanism and the Social Forces that shaped the Boer Rebellion', unpub MA thesis, University of Natal, 1997, chapter 3.
111. TAD: KG 465 Veldkornette Openbare Verkiesings. Each burgher had to publicly declare his vote and these were recorded and sent through to the office of the Commandant General. See also the example of the relationship between Coetzee and Dauth in Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 253.
112. Preorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 252-55: 'ranging from leave to horseshoes and lost horses'.
113. Personal communication: Rt Hon The Earl of Iddesleigh, 28 January 1983.
114. TAD: BA 20, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 10 March 1899, quoting Loveday, on the election of GD Wolmarans to the Executive Council, ZAR in succession to his elder brother, JMG Wolmarans.
115. Taitz et al (eds), *The War Memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, 112.
116. *Ibid*, 82.
117. *Ibid*, 82-83.
118. *Ibid*, 100.
119. Trapido, 'Reflections on land, office and wealth in the South African Republic, 1850-1900', 361.
120. The old republican oligarchy showed a remarkable ability to survive both economically and politically. This can be clearly seen in the landed interests of men like Louis Botha and the composition of the first Union cabinet in 1910.
121. Trapido, 'Reflections on land, office and wealth in the South African Republic, 1850-1900', 359.

122. TAD: BA 21, Correspondence to High Commissioner, Conyngham Greene-Milner, 7 June 1899.
123. Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 248.
124. See for example MCE van Schoor, *'n Bittereinder aan die woord; Geskifte en toesprake van Mathinus Theunis Steyn* (Bloemfontein: Oorlogsmuseum van die Boererepublieke, 1997), 21.
125. Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 247. A number of contemporary observers, however, have questioned the moral fibre of certain leaders, whose exploits were public knowledge. See for example Taitz et al (eds), *The War Memoirs of Ludwig Krause*, 6-7. An adequate case has already been made against the simple idea that Boer society was rustic, wholesome and corruption-free.
126. Pretorius, *Life on Commando during the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902*, 247.
127. Schiel's Germans enquired after arms, ammunition and horses. Compare, for example, the requisitions made by the Boer commandos: extra bedding, cutlery and crockery (TAD: SCD 1, Krijgs Commissariaat Dundee Order briefjes) with the requests made by the German Commando (TAD: KG 1139, Briewen Boek van Kommandant van die Duitse Korps) during the same period.
128. Taitz et al (eds), *The War Memoirs of Commandant Ludwig Krause*, 5.
129. Natrass and Spies (eds), *Jan Smuts*, 71.
130. Townshend, 'People's War', 159.
131. de Wet, *Three Years War*, 64.