

# REPORTS OF NEUTRAL MILITARY OBSERVERS ON THE ANGLO- BOER WAR 1899-1902

CAPTAIN DEMANGE AND LIEUTENANT  
RAOUL-DUVAL, FRENCH MILITARY AT-  
TACHÉS WITH THE BOERS.

The General Staff of the French army sent three officers as military attachés to the theatre of war in South Africa in 1899. They were Commandant d'Amade with the British army and Captain Demange and Lieutenant Raoul-Duval with the republican forces.

This article concentrates on the French attachés on the Boer side. The main sources used were Demange's record of service and the book published by Duval, his adjutant: **Au Transvaal et dans le Sud-Africain avec les attachés militaires** (Librairie Ch. Delagrangé, Paris, 1902, 318 pp.). The military history section of the French ministry of defence could not find any record of service for Duval, nor any reports to the General Staff or the Minister submitted by these officers regarding their experiences in the war. We know that the other military attachés wrote reports because this was one of their duties and we may infer that the French attachés did the same.

The record of service of Marie Georges Demange states that he was born in Cenville on the river Meurthe in Lorraine on 9 February 1860. He was the son of Jean Baptiste Demange and of Catharine Adèle Mathelin. On 22 March 1886 he married the widow Jeanne Louise Hastinée Colomb and settled in Saint Mihiel in the Department of the Meuse. He attended the Ecole Polytechnique (a university institution) in 1880-82 in Paris and the military academy of artillery and engineering in 1882-84. In 1891 he received the diploma of the Ecole Supérieure de Guerre with the predicate 'very good'. He rose in the ranks and was a captain when the General Staff sent him as a military attaché to South Africa on 6 January 1900. As his knowledge of English was inadequate he was accompanied by an adjutant, the military attaché with the

French embassy in London, Lieutenant Roger Raoul-Duval.

En route to South Africa on the orders of his Officer Commanding he visited the French naval base at Diego Suarez on the northern tip of Madagascar on 4 February 1900. The island had been annexed by France in 1896. At Diego Suarez he was joined by his adjutant, Duval, who arrived there by the French steamer 'Yang-Tse' from Marseilles. They travelled to Lourenço Marques, took the train to Pretoria and arrived there on or shortly before 23 February 1900. Here they organized their convoy of mule carts and black servants and journeyed by train to Bloemfontein, occupation of which was expected at any moment. Demange followed the Boer army under General Jacobus de la Rey and General Christian de Wet. He was with the Boer forces during the retreat from Paardeberg to Bloemfontein and from there to Pretoria and farther on to Komatipoort in the company of other military attachés. He was present at the engagements at Poplar Grove (7 March 1900), Abrahamskraal (10 March 1900) and Sannapost (31 March 1900) and probably at Donkerhoek (11 and 12 June 1900) and Dalmanutha (27 August 1900).

Demange was slightly wounded at Abrahamskraal; Duval states on page 152 of his book: 'Standing beside a gun whose firing he was observing through his lorgnette he was hit by a shrapnel bullet which descended obliquely and struck him in the hip, causing a superficial but very painful wound. For several days he lay in our cart and had to stand a difficult journey to Bloemfontein during which the shaking and jarring increased his pain. But he wished to complete his mission at all costs.' Apparently Demange's wound healed after a few weeks.<sup>2</sup>

There are few details available about Demange's participation in the campaign from Paardeberg via Bloemfontein and Pretoria to Komatipoort on the frontier between the Transvaal and Mozambique. Duval mentions very little about the activities and character of his chief and companion in South Africa. There is no doubt that with other military attachés Demange crossed the frontier into Mozambique in September or October 1900 when the Boer commandos scattered after the last pitched battle at Dalmanutha on 27 August 1900. His record of service mentions that his mission in South Africa ended on 26 October 1900; presumably on that day he returned to Lourenço Marques or more probably boarded the ship that brought him back to Europe.

In 1903 he was an officer in the fortress at Laon, Northern France.<sup>3</sup> He participated in the First World War and in 1915 he commanded the 57th Infantry Division which defended the Western front between Belfort and the Swiss frontier. In the same year he became commander of that section of the front cen-

tering on the fortress of Belfort. In 1917 he became an adjutant of General Rogues and army inspector. In 1919 he was appointed president of the council of the Ecole Polytechnique, his *alma mater*. In 1922 he joined the Reserve with the rank of Commandant. He died on 28 April 1941 in Paris.

It is a pity that no record of service is available for Lieutenant Roger Raoul-Duval, but to some extent we are compensated for this lack by his book **Au Transvaal et dans le Sud-Africaïn avec les attachés militaires**. Several military attachés in South Africa not only wrote the professional military reports which they were bound to write, but also published articles and books about their experiences in a journalistic vein. Duval published the largest of these books with memoirs in a lively though restrained and objective style.

The first chapter of his book sketches his impressions of the British reactions to the unexpected outbreak of the war. He thinks that both sides underestimated their enemy. The British thought that President Kruger was bluffing and that after his ultimatum they could just march to Bloemfontein and Pretoria. Officers of the Coldstream Guards used to invite friends to their weekly lunch. When Duval was their guest they complained that they would arrive in South Africa too late from their garrison service and that the war would be over before their arrival. Their experience of the war was to be very grim, however; Duval states that of his five hosts, two were killed in their first battle in South Africa, two others were wounded, one so seriously that he had to leave the service, and only one was still in active service toward the end of the war. (Duval, loc. cit. p. 11-12). At a meeting in London with the foreign military attachés who would accompany the British army in South Africa, Buller, the Commander-in-Chief, told them that the whole affair was not worth their trouble as the Boers' resistance would be insignificant (Duval, p. 12). This lightheartedness is amazing, because Buller knew South Africa and the Boers well and had previously expressed a high opinion of their martial qualities, and it is difficult to believe that he revealed his true opinions to the foreigners on this occasion.<sup>4</sup>

From London Duval returned to Paris. He left Marseilles for South Africa in the old French



Roger Rauol-Duval.

mail steamer 'Yang-Tse' at the beginning of January 1900. Most of the passengers were French soldiers and officials with their families, sailing to French colonies, but there were adventurers from many nations, bound for South Africa to fight there or to profit by the war. From Port Said to Aden Duval sailed in the more comfortable British liner 'Caledonia', from Aden again in the slow 'Yang-Tse'. In Diego Suarez he met Captain Demange and together they sailed to Lourenço Marques. On or a few days before 23 February 1900 they arrived by train in Pretoria, accompanied by the military attaché Captain Reichman from the USA, and joined other attachés.

In another publication I have described the great difference in the treatment which the British and the republican governments gave the foreign military attachés.<sup>5</sup>

The military attachés had to follow the Boer commandos and to join the Boer officer of their choice on their rapid marches, to share their fatigues and to face the dangers of British fire and capture: Demange and Duval were no exceptions, Duval was at the engagements at Poplar Grove and Abrahamskraal. He deplored the panicky flight of the Boers at Poplar Grove and praises the valour of the Johannesburg and Pretoria police at Abrahamskraal where they suffered heavily.

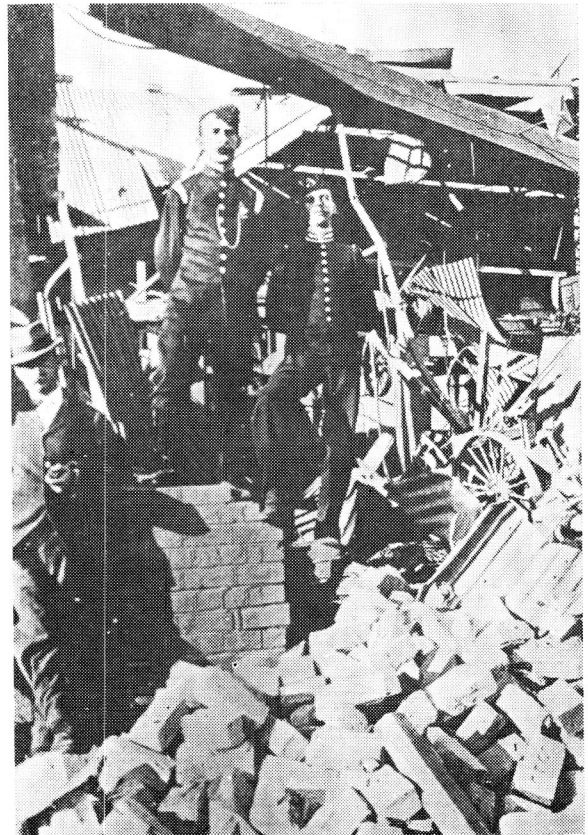
Duval describes the wild scenes caused by drunken foreigners during the retreat from Bloemfontein to Kroonstad and the Council of War in this town on 17 March 1900, attended by the military attachés in the hall of the largest hotel at Kroonstad. The attachés do not stress the remarkable fact that they were invited to attend a full Council of War of the two republican governments where the defeats and future strategy of the Boer forces were discussed, a practice which would be unthinkable in Europe. The meeting lasted from 2 to 6 p.m. and was attended by the two State presidents, the head officers of the republican armies except Louis Botha who was on the Natal front, and the attachés except Gurko and Thomson who were prisoners with the British. It was at this meeting that the Boer officers decided to prohibit the wagons and families of the burghers following the commandos and to resort to guerilla warfare.

The first general to apply this strategy was Christian de Wet. He started his campaign with his surprising of General Broadwood's detachment at Sannaspost on 31 March 1900. Duval was not among the attachés who witnessed this fight, for on 23 March he went to Pretoria to look there for fresh horses and he left the capital on 27 March.

In Pretoria he met two Frenchmen, Messrs. Grunberg and Léon, who had assisted the Boers in the use of the heavy Cruesot guns, nicknamed Long Toms. Léon was recovering from a serious headwound incurred during the siege of Kimberley.

On a second tour from the Free State to Pretoria in April 1900 Duval stopped in Johannesburg to visit the Begbie foundry where ammunition was manufactured for the Boer army. On the following day this factory was destroyed by an explosion, possibly due to sabotage.

He was present at the action at Brandfort in April where the Canadians were repulsed and lost their colonel. He saw the start of the



Rauol-Duval and Lt Koustoff standing amid the ruins of the Begbie factory.

renewed British advance, aimed at Pretoria, and the renewed panic seizing the Boers who left their positions at the Vet River after a few shots. Soon thereafter, in the vicinity of Ventersburg on 11 May, Duval's galloping horse stumbled and threw his rider, who suffered concussion as a result. He was moved to the hospital near the Fort in Johannesburg and gradually regained his health. He left in the last train for Pretoria before the occupation of Johannesburg by the British. There he saw increasing chaos. Also as this town was bound to fall to the British he continued his journey to Lourenço Marques.

This port was full of fugitives and it was with difficulty that he obtained a berth in the slow steamer 'Indouna' sailing to Durban. Here most people were in a flush of exalted patriotism and victorious mood. They believed that the war was over, but Duval did not share their optimism, although he wisely kept his opinion to himself.

In the last chapters Duval describes the recovery of his health and the agreeable receptions and sightseeing in Durban and Cape Town. Here he met the French military attaché, Commandant d'Amade, and his Italian colleague, Colonel Gentilini, both recovering from dysentery, a common war illness in the field. They returned to Europe in the comfortable Union Castle steamer 'Briton'.

Duval sympathized with the Boers and sent a complimentary letter to President Kruger when the President in exile visited Paris in November 1900. He reproduces the answering letter, signed by Kruger, on page 21 of his book. This marked the end of Duval's South African adventure.

#### **Duval's impressions of warfare in South Africa**

Duval's thoughts of the South African war as recounted in this popular work are somewhat superficial and do not deviate essentially from those expressed by other attachés in their reports. All of them saw the war through the eyes of professional European officers. Duval appreciates the Boers' abilities in riding, and in shooting with rifles and guns, but he points out that their army was only a militia, not a regular force, and suffered from a lack of drill and discipline. This shortcoming was caused among others by the system of choos-

ing officers by the burghers. He praises the deeds of valour performed by small regular Boer forces, namely the Johannesburg and Pretoria police and the artillery corps of the republics, and occasionally by burghers, as well as the exertions of the overburdened railwaymen of the republics. He disapproves of the burghers' susceptibility to sudden panic and wild flight and the irresponsible behaviour of many foreign volunteers. He has a high regard for the Boer State presidents — especially Steyn and Reitz —, Boer officials and generals, but he criticizes them for ignoring the advice of foreign officers such as De Villebois-Mareuil whom he met several times. De Villebois was a French officer and author of military treatises and served as an officer in the Boer army. He urged the Boer generals to attack and pursue the fleeing enemy to destroy him because a war can only be won by taking the offensive.

Duval contradicts the superficial opinion that a militia army such as the Boers had, could defeat a regular army (p. 163). Like De Villebois and other military attachés Duval's opinion is that the Boers could inflict occasional defeats but would lose the regular war, their towns, fortresses and railways, that they could wage a long guerilla war but would also lose this war in the long run.

He praises the Boers' magnanimity and leniency and mentions two cases of incredibly light punishment of insubordination and treason. A drunk artillerist menaced General Joubert at Smaldeel in March 1900 during the retreat and was sentenced to one year of prison (p. 178). In April 1900 two Free Staters were caught with proclamations from Lord Roberts persuading the Boers to surrender. After a hearing of 20 minutes President Steyn sentenced them to one month of prison and General Joubert shook hands with them when they left (p. 194-195).

Duval criticizes sharply the many bad elements among the foreign volunteers and the widespread stealing of horses which were sold to the republican governments and stolen for resale.

Of the other military attachés, his chief Demange included, Duval writes only pleasant things.

He has little to say about the British army. He criticizes it because of its deficient recon-

noitring and foolhardy pursuit of retreating Boers (p. 167). He states that the Boers owed the delay of the British invasion in their country as much to the errors committed by the British as to their own courage. He points out that of the 250 000 British soldiers on active service in South Africa not less than 175 000 were volunteers and only 75 000 well-drilled regular forces (p. 163). so that errors were inevitable.

Apparently Duval was a diligent photographer, as were many British officers in South Africa. In his book are many pictures of the military attachés but alas, most of them are little larger than a postage stamp.

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1. A photostat of the record of service of Demange is in the collection on the second Anglo-Boer War in the State Archives, Union Buildings, Pretoria.
  2. Captain Otto von Lossberg gives on page 27 of his book **Mit Santa Barbara in Südafrika** (Leipzig 1903) another, less glorious explanation of Demange's wound. He states: 'During this ride (from Abrahamskraal to Bloemfontein) I met the French military attaché, Major Demange, at present commander of the 39th Artillery Regiment at Laon; engaged in an operation which was as necessary as it was discreet, he was hit in the backside by a shrapnel splinter.' We should remember, however, that Von Lossberg liked to find fault with others

and was not always reliable in his criticism. He was a United States citizen of German birth and an officer in the Boer artillery.

3. Von Lossberg, **Mit Santa Barbara in Südafrika**, p. 27.
4. In March 1881 Buller wrote a letter to a friend in Britain and stated that he was glad the Anglo-Boer War was over. He had learned that the Boers were tough and gallant fighters, excellent horsemen, scouts and shots. In the letter he writes that as they are a completely rural and mobile people they would continue to fight after the occupation of their towns and villages. Then the only way to subdue them would be to ravage their homesteads and country and this would be a cruel war. See C. H. Melville, **Life of general the Right Hon. Sir Redvers Buller**; Arnold and Co., London no year, volume one. In this way Buller predicted the course of the second Anglo-Boer War with a better insight than Lord Roberts and Kitchener.
5. 'Verslae van neutrale militêre waarnemers tydens die Anglo-Boere-oorlog 1899-1902.' in **Militaria** 4/1, Pretoria 1974, p. 2, en **Militaria** 5/1, Pretoria 1975, p. 4.

**NOTICE:**

The article 'Reports of neutral military observers during the Anglo-Boer War' in **Militaria** 5/4, 1975, contains 'The dispatches of Luitenant-Colonel Gurko of the (Russian) General Staff sent from the theatre of war operations in South Africa with the Boer forces' was composed by Mrs E. Foxcroft of the University of South Africa, who received microfilms of these unpublished despatches from the State Library in Mosow and translated them from Russian into English, and by Dr C. de Jong, also of this University, who annotated the translation and added the Annexure regarding the Krag-Jørgensen rifle in South Africa.