

# REPORTS OF NEUTRAL MILITARY OBSERVERS DURING THE ANGLO-BOER WAR

'DONESENIIA GENERALNOGO SHTABA  
PODPOLKOVNIKA GURKO KOMANDDIRO-  
VANNOGO NA TETR VOENNIKH DEISTVII  
V UZHNOI AFRIKE'

THE DISPATCHES OF LIEUTENANT-COLO-  
NEL GURKO OF THE GENERAL STAFF SENT  
FROM THE THEATRE OF WAR OPERATIONS  
IN SOUTH AFRICA (WITH THE BOER  
FORCES).

30 January 1900, Pretoria.

I left Lourenço Marques on 25 January 1900 and arrived in Pretoria by train the next day. I was met at the station by the Secretary of State, F. W. Reitz, and was presented to President Kruger on 27 January.

On the way to Pretoria, within the confines of the Republic and now here, I have been and am receiving a big welcome, both from the authorities and from the private people whom I have met. It is clear from their attitude to me that not only the authorities but also the ordinary people are very flattered by the fact that His Majesty the Emperor has chosen to send a military attaché to follow and report on the war operations of the forces of the South African republics.<sup>1</sup> I gathered the same impression from my conversation with the Secretary of State. So far only Holland has followed Russia's example and that is because the British government has refused her request to send a military attaché with the British forces.<sup>2</sup>

During the official introduction to the President of the Republic, the latter asked me why Europe allowed England to attack such a small state as the Transvaal. The Secretary of State, without translating this question, replied to the President that, being the representative of a neutral country,<sup>3</sup> I might not answer such a question during an official interview.

I found out the following facts from talks with people in charge of the home front during my stay in Pretoria. These facts deal with the means of waging war which the Republics have at their disposal. In all there are about 35 to 40 thousand men in the army. Nobody knows for certain exactly how many, as they are not counted in the field. Besides the mounted infantry there are 700 artillerymen, who form the only permanent unit in the forces. All the rifles are without bayonets and belong to one of three makes:

(1) Mauser 1896 type (not yet introduced in Europe), Martini-Henry (of the German type) and (3) the automatic Gras rifles. Usually the men choose the type of rifle they are used to already. There are great stocks of cartridges, 6 to 7 million of them, and smokeless gunpowder is manufactured locally. The dynamite factory, which produces dynamite for work in the gold mines, has now been adapted to war use. Artillery guns are not numerous, about 100 in all, belonging to different types. Shells are also locally made and the troops are satisfied with their performance. However, the actual guns cannot be made locally and have all been imported.

The provisioning of the forces with necessities has been well organised. As for medical services, the troops are so well provided for that there is now, and has been for the last two weeks, a Belgian Red Cross Detachment in Pretoria with nothing to do.<sup>5</sup> This is

accounted for by the insignificant number of casualties in the forces of both the republics. At the present moment there are at most 400 of them. Many of the wounded are recovering in their own homes. The number of men killed or who have died of wounds from the very beginning of the campaign is only 430 men. I have got this information from a reliable source.<sup>6</sup>

The railways are working well. Generally speaking, from conversations with senior administrators and private people I have formed the impression that the Transvalers are hoping to come out victorious from this uneven struggle, with the help of God. The greatest danger threatening them is the possibility of the English inciting the Blacks against them. The English are working hard to do that. A Black invasion would mean a universal massacre of women, children and old people. There have already been isolated attacks by Blacks from Rhodesia. The Kaffir bands have been led by Englishmen, employees of the British companies in Rhodesia.<sup>7</sup>

#### **4 February 1900, from Genl Joubert's headquarters near Ladysmith.**

I arrived at this camp on 1 February. This is the General Headquarters of Genl Joubert. A Council of War was held under the chairmanship of Genl Joubert at the Ladysmith Camp on 29 January. This was done on account of the English retreat from the large to the small Tugela River. The Council met in order to decide what the Allied forces should do next. Eighty men were present in all, generals, commandants and veld-cornets. Genl Botha expressed the opinion that the immediate task was to fortify the positions on the left bank of the Tugela and only after having completed all that work, to decide in what direction an attack should be made.

The others agreed with him. Only Genl Lucas Meyer expressed a different opinion. He said that an immediate attack was essential and should be made with a force of 1 500 to 2 000 men.<sup>8</sup> But his proposal was not seconded by anyone.

I called on Genl Joubert immediately upon arrival and received permission to inspect all the positions around Ladysmith. The surrounding line of the Transvaal positions stretches for about fifty versts (about 60 km) and is

composed of numerous small camps or encampments. Each one of these is made up of a few dozen carelessly scattered tents and huge covered waggons, which are drawn by eight mules or eight pairs of oxen.

These camps are quite concealed from enemy eyes by the crests of the hills surrounding Ladysmith, which is situated in the centre of a large hollow. The following is the routine of the troops besieging Ladysmith: early in the morning the Transvalers open fire with their heavy guns and send out about five to six shells. The English reciprocate in the same manner. Then everything becomes silent and the city together with its camp appears quite lifeless. As for the English hospital camp, it simply teems with people. It is composed of twenty five large marquees and about two hundred small tents.

When it gets dark all the Transvalers and the Orange Free Staters come out of their positions and divide themselves into watches of about twenty to forty men in each. Each watch appoints two sentries who are changed every two hours. The rest of the men sleep on the ground, wrapped up in their blankets, not bothering to pitch any tents.

This is the way the besieging troops spend their nights under the open sky and in fighting order, ready for any eventuality. They have been doing this since the last successful sortie of the English.

They leave their horses in the camps in the care of the natives, except in the case of the very forward posts where the horses are allowed to graze near by.

At the beginning of the siege there were about five to six thousand besieging troops but now there are hardly a couple of thousand left. The day before yesterday about 800 men left in the direction of Colesberg where an English offensive is expected from the South.<sup>9</sup> The besiegers have placed a few dynamos in suitable positions and light up the whole countryside with powerful projectors at night. The English use projectors also.

Today is a Sunday, and so there is no gunfire to be heard, as the Transvalers will never start shooting or fighting on a Sunday. From early morning all one hears in the camp is the sound of psalms.

## 10 February 1900

Genl Botha is one of the best officers of the Transvaal army. He enjoys the full confidence of all the troops. He is still quite a young man and a very energetic one.

Speaking in a general way, from what I have been able to observe personally, I consider the action of the Transvalers insufficiently decisive. The reason for that may be their ignorance of what is happening in the enemy's midst. The Boers do not pursue the retreating enemy. They justify this course of action by saying that their men are too tired and that they have no fresh forces to draw on.

As far as I can see from conversations, both with the most highly placed persons and ordinary burghers, all the Boers are inspired by one thought: to wage war to the very last extremity.

## 14 March 1900, Cape Town

(Gurko was apparently on 7 March at Poplar Grove with the retreating Boer forces. He wanted to witness the British advance and

the retreat of the Transvalers. During this retreat, he saw his own luggage in a broken and already abandoned waggon, by the roadside.

As it contained all his papers and confidential documents he decided to remain behind, as he afterwards wrote hoping that the English commanders would allow him to go back to the Boers at the first opportunity, as they have with people and detachments belonging to the Medical Corps. The Dutch military attaché found himself in the same plight.<sup>10</sup> Gurko was captured and taken to Genl Roberts who gave him an evasive reply as to his future. Furthermore, his Chief of Staff, Lord Kitchener, informed him later that the matter could not be settled except through an agreement with London. At General Headquarters Lt Col Gurko met his Russian colleague with the British forces, Col Stakovich. Gurko went to Cape Town and from there was allowed to send a telegram to St Petersburg. In the end, before he had received a reply, he was informed by Genl Walker<sup>11</sup> that instructions had been received from Lord Roberts to help him in every possible way to



Military attachés with the Boer army in South Africa before the battle of Abrahamskraal, March 1900. Standing from left to right: Capt Reichmann (USA), Lt. Thompson (Netherlands), Capt Allum (Norway). Sitting on chairs from left to right: Lt Col Romeiko-Gurko (Russia), Capt Demange (France) and Lt Raoul-Duval (France), sitting on the ground: Percy Fischer (burgher of the Orange Free State)

board the first boat bound for England. He asked him to sail that same day at 4 p.m. Gurko tried to gain time, asking to remain until he had heard from Russia. When the English military authorities informed him that he must leave that same day he refused point blank. So the English authorities gave a perfect exhibition of that well-known English game of bluff. At the appointed hour the Commandant's aide-de-camp arrived and informed him very politely that the carriage was at the door.)

I replied with equal politeness that I was not ready to leave. When the Commandant himself arrived and repeated the request, I reiterated my former statement. My things were packed next and carried out, possibly to be placed in the carriage. More words and veiled threats — that I could be forced to leave; all this done with the utmost politeness on both sides. Finally, seeing that they could do nothing with me, as a *deus ex machina* a letter from Genl Walker himself, arrived informing me that I could remain here until I had received a reply from St Petersburg, and that he would send a telegram to Lord Roberts to this effect.

It is obvious that to the English military authorities the presence of military attachés with the Transvaal forces is extremely displeasing and they are doing everything in their power, short of actual violence, to send both the Dutch military attaché and myself back to Europe.

### **22 March 1900, on board the MEXICAN from Cape Town to Lourenco Marques.**

It must be stressed that all directives concerned with military operations are made by President Kruger rather than by Genl Joubert.

The reasons for the lifting of Ladysmith siege

1. Too great a weakening of the forces occupying the banks of the Tugela River.
2. The moral effect of the news of Genl Cronjé's surrender.<sup>13</sup> The reasons for the latter are not to be sought so much in the successful action of the English as in the negative aspects of the whole military organization and the traditional methods used by the forces of both the Republics.

The fault lies with

1. The absence of good reconnoitering services. This alone accounts for the fact that Genl Cronjé only heard of the outflanking movement of French's column when it was already in his rear. He would not believe this news for a long time because he would not credit the fact of the English daring to move away from the railway line.
2. When he was surrounded to begin with, Genl Cronjé could have easily broken through English lines; what prevented him from doing so was the fact that his men were on foot, as the horses, because of the shortage of fodder, were grazing some 20 versts (25 km) away. The Boers were thus cut off from their mounts, and also from a considerable portion of their livestock used to draw their waggons, containing all their supplies.
3. However, the chief fault lies in the inability of the Transvaal forces to conduct offensive operations, especially in the open plains, where a horse is rather a handicap than an asset. To the Transvaler the horse is only a means of communications. They do not use them in action, but dismount and look for cover, which is impossible to find on a plain. However, having lost his horse the Transvaler considers himself as fallen out of the line of battle.
4. The presence of women and children impeded any breakthrough. The wives of the burghers came to see their husbands or the families living on nearby farms and sought refuge from the advancing enemy with their own menfolk.
5. De Wet's forces were insufficient to save the situation.<sup>15</sup> Among the Transvaal forces, men adhere to the motto that in battle every man is his own officer. They themselves decide when the time has come for retreating and do not listen to their commanders exhorting them to go on fighting. That is the reason why Genl de Wet could not hold the positions.

What happens is that small groups of men, two or three at a time, begin to leave the trenches, look for their horses and slowly

with no unseemly haste begin to ride in the direction of the main open retreat. This example is followed by more and more people and after a while the whole countryside is dotted with small groups of riders moving towards the rear. The generals and commanders do all they can to bring the men back, but nobody obeys. The men will stop, hear what is being said, listen to the orders given and calmly continue their ride in the same direction.

### 30 March 1900, Pretoria

After an absence of three weeks I re-entered the confines of the Transvaal Republic via Lourenço Marques, and arrived yesterday in Pretoria, from which I hope to proceed to Brandfort.

The general frame of mind, both of the people at the top, and of the troops and the ordinary inhabitants, has improved considerably in spite of two important adverse occurrences: the surrender of the capital of the Orange Free State without a fight, and the death of Genl Joubert, both of which should have had the opposite effect<sup>16</sup> Lord Salisbury's reply to the presidents of the two republics is to a great extent responsible for this attitude. He has turned down the proposal for peaceful negotiations.<sup>17</sup> So both the government and the population are determined to wage the struggle to the bitter end.

After the English advance on Bloemfontein the so-called Big Council of War was assembled, at which a very sensible decision was made — that of giving up the method, used up to now, of occupying strong strategic, but on account of numerical insufficiency, weak positions. Instead, it has been decided to divide the forces into commandos of from 500 to 1 000 men strong and to make attacks, mostly on the flanks, and if possible in the rear of the enemy.<sup>18</sup> It has also been decided to abandon the use of the cumbersome ox-wagons and to use light carriages in their place.

The future will show what will be the outcome of this decision and whether or not the men will follow their commanders.

When the troops operating near Ladysmith occupied new defensive positions on the slopes of the Biggarsberg after a disorderly, not to say panicky retreat, Genl Botha

twice assembled the Council of War, proposing an attack on the English camps, but both times all the camp commanders, with the exception of two, informed him that their men would not agree to an offensive. As a result of this Genl Botha could not put into practice his good plan of attack.

It must be stressed that the Boer forces have not suffered a single defeat yet, for one cannot describe as a defeat the surrender of Genl Cronjé, who a few days before, had successfully repulsed an attack on the enemy, but as usual did not know how to turn this to his advantage by taking the offensive.

The English, in their turn, did not take advantage of the Boer retreat from Ladysmith. It is impossible to know as yet the real reasons for that.<sup>20</sup>

Another sensible measure adopted by the Boer military authorities is to have given permission to all foreigners, both living in the Transvaal and those who have lately arrived from Europe and who have wished to take part in the war, to join separate volunteer commandos.

There are about 800 volunteers in all the Allied forces — not at all five or six thousand, as has been stated in the English press and even by English officers.

The most important of these commandos is under the leadership of Col de Villebois Mareuil. His assistant is Maximoff. The other commandos are much smaller. One of them is quasi-Russian as it is under a Russian officer, Capt Ganetsky. Up to now all the foreigners have been attached to different commandos and have been of very little use to them; now they are going to be used for scouting purposes and also for small raids.

As for the widespread notion that foreign officers are guiding the movements of the Allied armies, that is just one of those English inventions by means of which they want to explain the defeats inflicted upon them by absolutely untrained and undisciplined Boer troops.

Judging by European newspapers, it is not only England which is concerned about the fate of Johannesburg, or rather of the mines, and whether they will be blown up and destroyed or passed on in working conditions, but others as well.

This question has not been decided up to now, because there is a difference of opinion among those in authority. Some afraid of Europe's reactions and also of those countries whose citizens have invested considerable sums of money in the mining industry, or which are themselves affected financially, advise that the mines should be left as they are. Others are of the same opinion because they consider that only the mines can pay for the expenses incurred through the war, — otherwise their weight would become an unbearable burden upon the farmers. But there are many people who declare openly that no stone should be left unturned in Johannesburg and the mines. Many of the ordinary burghers are of that opinion too, for they see in Johannesburg and the gold mines the direct cause for the English invasion.

There is also the question of executing this job properly, to put the dynamite in the right place and to calculate the time needed for this operation. It seems to me that all these factors are additional good reasons in favour of keeping the mines intact . . .

Evacuating Bloemfontein the troops either forgot or did not have time to do any damage to the town. Some talk of an attack with view to destruction, but it is doubtful if anything will come of it. Probably it will be the same with Johannesburg.

The question as to what course of action to take in Pretoria, has not been solved either. Will it be defended or will it be given up without any resistance at the approach of the enemy, with the Allied troops moving east? It is quite obvious that the second decision would be a much wiser one; for in spite of its four forts, Pretoria is no fortress in any sense of the word. It would be futile to defend it in view of the relatively small garrison and the negligible amount of artillery at the disposal of the Allies.

#### **16 April 1900, Brandfort**

The first act of guerrilla warfare under Genl de Wet's leadership has been successful. Its net results are 900 prisoners of war at Sanas Post, 7 guns, 2 machine guns, 100 supply waggons (with provisions and ammunition) taken by the Allied forces. Genl de Wet has been appointed Commander-in-Chief of all the Allied forces on the Southern sec-

tion of the theatre of war. Genl Botha is in supreme command since Genl Joubert's death . . .

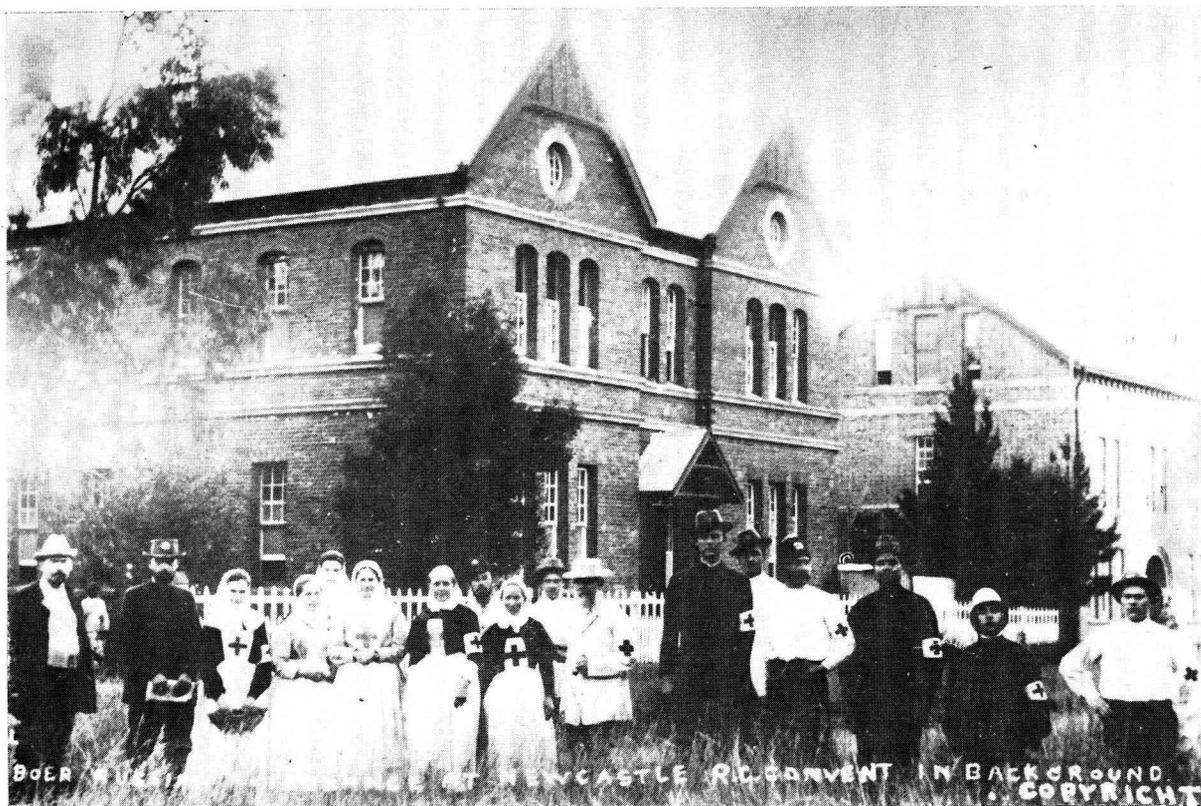
After six weeks of complete inactivity following the occupation of Bloemfontein, English troops are again harassing the Allies. The allegation of the English press that the government is arming natives is utterly false, and even were it true, it would not achieve the desired practical results for natives have no idea how to use rifles and are by nature extremely cowardly.<sup>21</sup> At the present time there are no natives to be seen as they have been sent to the farms together with the heavy ox wagons.

#### **2 May 1900, Brandfort**

The enthusiasm which had appeared among the troops after the publication of Lord Salisbury's reply to the peace offer has abated considerably. There are signs pointing to the fact that the forces are weary of this prolonged struggle. They are also beginning to realize that the resistance is only a question of time. It is only natural that such consideration take away all desire to go on fighting. More and more often one hears remarks that it is impossible to wage war one against ten, especially when having only one gun or so against whole English batteries. This is the reason why many men are returning to their homes. Quite a few malingerers come to the hospitals too and some even wound themselves by firing at their feet with their rifles, only to produce legitimate cause to return home. There are others who openly declare that they are only remaining in the ranks as long as their farms are occupied by the enemy.

It is clear that all this is probably known to the English and that is why they are spreading the rumour that those farms which are left without a master, will be treated as war booty. Men in the forces are much affected by such rumours.

The chief difficulty facing the advancing English army is to find food for the men and the horses. If at the same time the Allies harassed the English with raids on their only railway and the farmers — applying the scorched-earth policy — moved northwards, then some real results would be achieved. But neither is being done; the former on account of the



Russian Ambulance with Boer troops at Newcastle

shortage of energetic commanders, the latter because the farmers cannot bring themselves to face such losses. So it is probable that the English army will move on without meeting any serious obstacles on the way.

Judging by the frame of mind prevailing among the Allied forces the English army will be allowed to move north. There is hope that the entry of the English into the Transvaal will act as a shock and will raise the morale of the men. It is hoped that real partisan warfare<sup>22</sup> will begin then. But that is somewhat doubtful. The Transvaal government, aware of the shortage of men able to wage war against the evergrowing numbers of the enemy, has decided to call up town inhabitants, i.e. artisans, tradesmen, shop assistants, who had never been sent to the front line before. It is quite obvious that one cannot make a satisfactory army out of such material. Besides most of them have no idea of how to handle horses or guns.

A short while ago news has been received about an explosion which occurred in Johannesburg at the Dynamite Factory (producing shells in wartime).<sup>23</sup> Without any shadow

of doubt it is not just an unfortunate accident but an act committed by the English living in Johannesburg.

As result of this explosion, the surviving workers . . . and railway employees have requested the government to deport all the remaining English subjects from Johannesburg . . .<sup>24</sup>

### 3 June 1900, Machadodorp

The expectation that the Allies will offer more stubborn resistance to the English, who are moving north, has not been justified . . .

At Mafeking two thousand Boers and 225 volunteers stormed the town, held by the best English garrison commanded by Baden-Powell.

But the burghers were of a different opinion and many of them, instead of stopping south of the town, as they were told to do, entered it and getting hold of whatever stores and food supplies they could, moved north. So on 1 and 2 June the Commander-in-Chief had less than a thousand men at his disposal. The others had simply wandered away.

If the English had at that moment gone directly to Pretoria, instead of stopping in Johannesburg, they could have had it without a shot being fired, at a time when there were in it still large stocks of provisions and ammunition, which were with feverish haste being removed along the Pretoria-Komati-poort-Delagoa Bay railway line.

But the English would not take the risk of sending even one detachment to cut the way of retreat of the Boers. Seeing the demoralization of the Transvaal army, daily watching men who positively do not want to go on exposing themselves to danger . . . one could come to the conclusion that the cause has been finally and irrevocably lost and that the struggle cannot go on for the lack of those prepared to go on fighting.

However, to form an opinion as to the attitude in this matter of people in highest authority, I decided to go to Machadodorp, which is now the seat of the government and the place of residence of the President and of his associates.

It seems that the military commanders think that a further resistance is impossible, for as soon as the enemy approaches, the men leave their positions.

As for the President and those close to him, they had decided firmly to continue fighting to the very last and do not lose hope that after a while the burghers, having revisited their farms, will once more with renewed strength rally round their commanders . . .

Meanwhile, realising fully that the only hope of forcing the English army to retreat is to deprive it of victuals, the government does not undertake any steps necessary to bring this about.

Thus, for instance, the coal mines near Vereeniging should have been destroyed to lessen the efficiency of the railway transport; but they were taken over intact. It turns out that the proprietor went to see the persons in authority and persuaded them to leave the mines alone, promising to damage the machinery himself, which he assured them would put the mines out of action for a long time.

They had some success to begin with and occupied the native township. Then Baden-Powell sent Black troops against them. The

Boers repulsed their attack but could not advance far and in the end retreated . . .

I managed to arrive in Vereeniging on 26 May, just at the moment when the bridge across the Vaal was about to be blown up to impede the English advance into the Transvaal . . .

The author was riding with Smuts,<sup>25</sup> who tried to stop the Transvalers from leaving their camp. He addressed many of them, asking them why they were leaving. The answer was always the same: 'My horse has fallen sick.'

'It is very odd,' the General remarked: 'Only yesterday I questioned these men. There were no sick horses then . . .'

Under these circumstances it was very difficult to defend the positions and the Allies had to retreat. Genl Botha ascertained by means of the heliograph much used during the war that the other generals were also losing men, who were going back to their farms. Thus the forces which had numbered eight to ten thousand men, had shrunk to only about two thousand.

The English on the contrary were meanwhile constantly increasing their numbers. Genl Botha moved back to the outskirts of Johannesburg and together with the remaining troops spent a night beside a gold mine. Early in the morning when it grew light it was discovered that the Boer troops had passed six hundred paces away from the English camp and had actually spent the night at a distance of about 1 500 paces from the English. Morning also revealed that out of the 350 men who had come with Genl Botha, only about 100 still remained in place. Some of those who left rejoined him later on. He headed for Pretoria and entering it wished to speak to members of the government. However, he soon discovered, to his astonishment, that the President and the administration had left the city the day before without warning anyone.

Although it had been decided not to defend Pretoria itself, nevertheless the Transvaal generals wanted to make use of the natural defence line formed by the hills stretching from west to southeast of the town and thus bar the way of the advancing enemy.

The government believed him and, as a result of their faith, work went on and it appears did not stop for a single day.



Lt Col Romeiko-Gurko

As for destroying the gold mines, the conclusion was reached that such an act would be not only harmful to England but also to many private persons connected with that industry, some of them entirely dependent on it. Just before the English approach to Johannesburg, an attempt to blow up the mines was made, upon private initiative, but the government took measures to prevent any harm being done to them.<sup>26</sup>

The government realized that railway lines should be destroyed; while the fighting took place in the Orange Free State, quite a few bridges were at least destroyed. But when the fighting moved on to the territory of the Transvaal, a change took place. The bridge across the Vaal river was only partially blown up, only one span damaged and the whole railway line as far as Pretoria remained intact. Then the director of the railways approached Genl Botha and asked him if they

could not blow up at least one bridge somewhere near Pretoria, to prevent the English from simply driving into the city in an armed train. Only then was an engineer sent to blow up the bridge closest to Pretoria at Irene Station. It was a small unimportant bridge. That was the final act of destruction of the railway both on the main or branch lines.

The government realized also that all food supplies should be removed from Pretoria but was afraid that the inhabitants might suffer from hunger. In the end the stocks were distributed to the population free. It is certain that, should the English forces have any difficulties with provisioning, an order would be issued to the inhabitants to return the hoarded stocks. In that case they will fall into the hands of the English after they have occupied the city.

Another big problem facing the authorities was that the transfer of the prisoners of war of whom there were about 5 000, including about 200 officers. At one point it was simply intended to give them over to the English government; that was after the English refused to exchange prisoners. Keeping prisoners is no light task . . . Had the English entered Pretoria on 1 June, they would have found all the prisoners of war still there. Now they have been moved and are in a fenced off camp, but most of the officers have remained at Waterval, 20 versts (25 km) from Pretoria.

Thus the actions of the government show some inconsistency. On the one hand there is the determination to continue the uneven struggle; on the other no important measures are taken to make it possible to go on waging the war.

At the present moment much hope is placed in the actions of Genl de Wet and President Steyn, round whom the Orange Free State burghers are once more rallying. A short while ago they both had a success and took about 200 prisoners with whom they do not know what to do . . .<sup>27</sup>

It is hoped that in time the Transvalers will also rally round their commanders and the struggle will be renewed with fresh forces.

A few days ago the English issued a proclamation in the Orange Free State to the effect

that the property of those farmers, who had once submitted to English rule and then later had once more taken up arms, would be entirely confiscated. If this is not just an idle threat but will actually be carried out, it will considerably lessen the fervour of the Free Staters, who are not particularly inclined to make material sacrifices.

### 15 June 1900, Machadodorp

Out of the twenty to thirty thousand men able to carry arms and liable by law to go into the field, there are only about 4 000 men, half of whom are under Genl L. Botha.

A proclamation has just been issued by President Steyn, protesting against Lord Roberts' proclamation which states that in view of the British troops' occupation the Republic will henceforth be called 'the Orange River Colony'.

It is obvious that such English proclamations can only benefit both the republics, for they clearly indicate to the population that if it wants to preserve its independence, it can only do so by continuing the armed fight. Consequently the struggle is going on in the Orange Free State, but unfortunately no man has appeared yet among the Transvalers capable of doing what Genl de Wet is doing in the Orange Free State.

### 24 June 1900, Balmoral

During these last few days, the force commanded by Genl Botha shrunk to half its size, because some of the generals taking their men with them have gone to the districts north and west of Pretoria, in order to recall to arms the men who had gone to their homes. It is doubtful if this will lead to the desired results.<sup>28</sup>

The idea of organising the defence of each district and of using guerrilla warfare to protect the homesteads has not been accepted yet. Side by side with the generals going back to their districts to collect men for purposes of local defence a proclamation has just been issued to the population, in which the President condemns the intention of those who wish to fight only within the confines of their districts, and states that such a course of action would only lead to the perdition of all . . .

This proclamation is very characteristic, and so is the telegram sent by Genl Joubert to Genl Botha, I enclose them both — in the translation and in the original. This is the first time that the government has dared to publish a telegram where it is said, 'Our burghers have lost courage'. Up to now all the communiqués stated: the burghers are full of courage and have fought bravely.

### Causes of failure

Besides the causes already inherent in the character of the local population, one must attribute the failure to the shortage of outstanding leaders capable of inspiring confidence in their men. What can one say about the commanders, when one of the best of them, Lucas Meyer, has passed on the command to someone else for two weeks and has absented himself from his post simply because of the stealing of his saddle horses?<sup>30</sup>

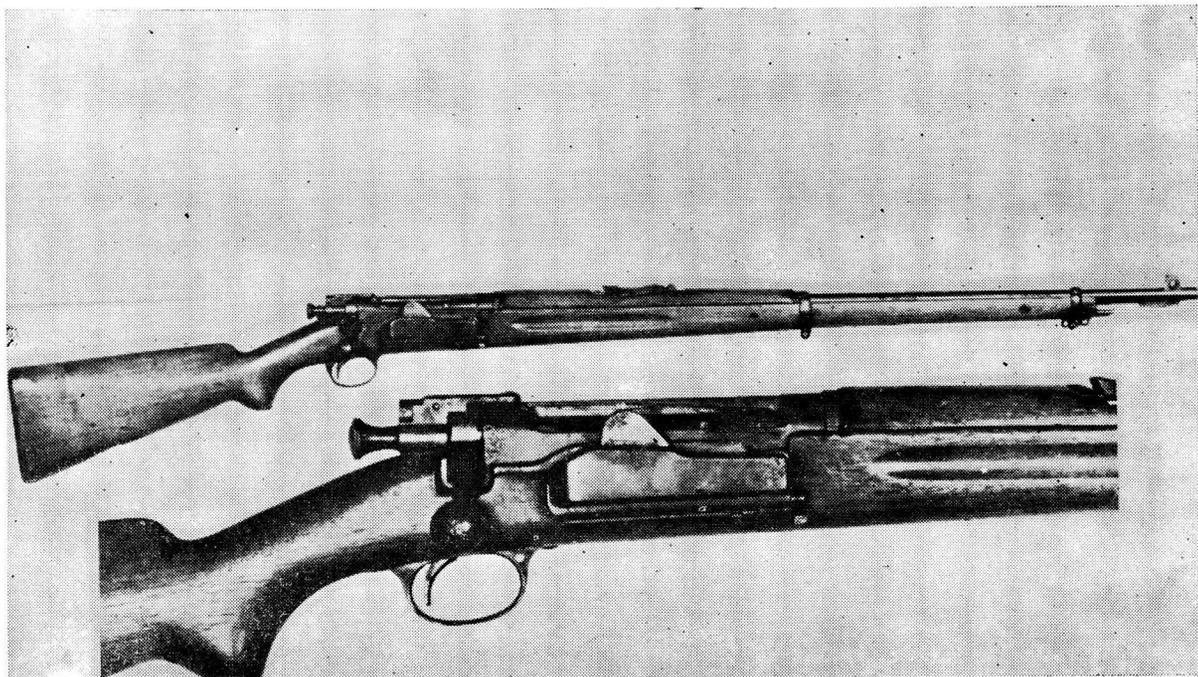
1. The fact that the Boer government and officers felt flattered by the visits of military attachés from neutral powers and their solid faith in the justness of their cause, explain the unrestricted freedom of movement of the neutral military attachés among the Boers, which contrasts so strikingly with the rigorous restrictions imposed by the British headquarters on the movements of the attachés on the British side. This freedom was less conspicuous during the period of Boer victories than during the period of Boer defeats and retreats.
2. Probably Gurko is right here because at a certain time in 1899 the British General Staff thought they had enough foreign military attachés with the Army to care for and refused to accept more of these nuisances. Otherwise it would be strange that the Dutch sent no less than four attachés to the Boer army and none to the British. The Swedish Captain Arvid M.T.E. Wester writes in the foreword of his book, *Kriegerfarenheter fraan Boerkriget* (Stockholm, 1902), that he was refused admission as a military attaché by the British and was compelled to accompany the British army as a muledriver, sutler and war correspondent of the *Midland News* and thereafter of *The Times*. Lord Roberts admitted him at last as a military attaché, attached to Genl French's staff. He was enlisted as a muledriver because Bantu were often afraid to handle the difficult mules.
3. The Secretary of State was F. W. Reitz, ex-President of the Orange Free State, who had a university education as a lawyer in Britain, mastered several European languages and served as an interpreter for foreign visitors.
4. This rifle was probably the Krag-Jørgensen of Norwegian make and some time before adopted by the US Army. The Cmdt Genl P. J. Joubert, bought only 100 Krag-Jørgensens with 25 000 rounds of ammunition; see J. H. Brevtenbach *Die Geskiedenis van die Tweede Vryheidsoorlog*, Vol 1, pp 80-81. Pretoria 1969. See also the annexure to this contribution: *Die Krag-Jørgensen geweer in Suid-Afrika*.

5. This must be the Belgian ambulance under Dr. Coolen: see J. H. Breytenbach, op. cit., Vol 1 p 73. Dr. J. Fessler, head of the German ambulance in Natal with the Boer army, writes very unfavourably about the Belgian ambulance in his book *Unter dem Roten Kreuz in Transvaal*, pp 7-11, 75-76, 224, etc. München, 1902. It showed little activity, remaining most of the time in Pretoria instead of moving to the front.
6. This source was probably the Red Cross information service founded by Dr G. A. F. Molengraaff, a Dutchman who had become State Geologist of Transvaal in 1897 and left South Africa in October 1900. See 'Dagboek van Oskar Hintrager', Christiaan de Wet-Annale, Vol 11, p 14 Pretoria 1974.
7. This refers to the murder at Derdepoort on the frontier of Transvaal and Bechuanaland on 25 November 1899 by a band of Bantu under British officers on Boer people who stayed on their farms.
8. Other authors have described Genl Lukas Meyer as clever but slow moving and inclined to leave the initiative to other people in contrast to the aggressive man reported here by Gurko. Should we possibly read Louis Botha where Gurko writes Lukas Meyer? See C. M. Bakkes, *Die Britse deurbraak aan die Benede-Tugela op Majubadag 1900*. Pretoria 1973. He quotes on p. 75 Cmdt Louis Krause who said of Meyer: 'He lacks the power of carrying out his ideas or of undertaking any bold movement. He is a man of thought but not of action.'
9. This was the attack by Genl French on the position of Genl J. H. de la Rey near Colesberg.
10. The Dutch military attaché had Lt L. W. J. K. Thompson. (Lord Roberts reported this event to the Secretary of State for War in his dispatch dd 15 March 1900. — Ed).
11. This is Genl Forestier Walker, commander of the British troops in the Cape Colony, responsible for transport and Chief Staff Officer.
12. Ladysmith was relieved by Genl Buller on 1 March 1900.
13. Genl Piet Cronjé and his army surrendered at Paardeberg on 27 February 1900, on Majuba Day, anniversary of the victory of the Transvaalers over the British on the mountain of Majuba at the Transvaal-Natal frontier in 1881.
14. Gurko obviously means not only the Transvaal forces but also the Free State forces.
15. Genl Christiaan de Wet made an energetic attempt to relieve the besieged Cronjé at Paardeberg by his attack on the Kitchener's Heights. he succeeded in breaking a gap in the line of besiegers, but only a small number of Cronjé's burghers came out to him because most of Cronjé's horses were killed or unfit. After one day of hard fighting De Wet had to retire and the fate of Cronjé's army was sealed.
16. Foreign professional soldiers often wondered at the quick changes in the morale of the common burghers between buoyant optimism combined with eagerness to fight and deep despondency and aversion to hold their positions and to give battle. Several times a modest success of a small Boer force like that operating under Christiaan de Wet was sufficient to revive the Boers' self-confidence and fighting spirit. Cowards of yesterday were heroes today and perhaps dodgers again tomorrow.
17. Briefly after the fall of Bloemfontein the republican governments proposed to the British to open peace negotiations on the basis of recognition of the republics' independence. The British government, however, refused to negotiate on this basis and insisted on surrender and annexation of the Boer.
18. The Council of War in Kroonstad on 17 March 1900 was attended by the two State Presidents, most of the Boer and foreign head officers and the military attachés on the Boer side. Gurko and Thompson, however, were absent because they were prisoners with the British. Gurko's information that no more strong positions would be held by the Boers to stop the British advance does not correspond with the battles fought by the Boers in positions between Brandfort and Pretoria. Guerrilla operations became their additional method of warfare, not the only one, until the last pitched battle was fought at Dalmanutha.
19. It is true that Cmdt Genl Louis Botha undertook a sortie with a cannonade from the Biggarsberg against the British camp at Elandslaagte in the beginning of April 1900, but that his right wing under the feckless Lukas Meyer would not leave its position to advance and that the sortie came to nothing.
20. The explanation of the criticized slowness of the British advance was the same as that of Roberts' long stay in Bloemfontein after its occupation. The British soldiers and their animals were very exhausted after several weeks of forced marches and heavy fighting. They had to rest, to be reorganized and supplied after the occupation of Bloemfontein and Ladysmith.
21. This refers to rumours of arming coloured people by the republican governments which was untrue. The British, however, armed coloured men to fight against the Boers from the very beginning of the war.
22. Partisan warfare is otherwise known as guerrilla warfare.
23. This explosion occurred in Johannesburg on 24 April 1900; it shattered not the dynamite factory at Modderfontein but the Begbie engineering works which manufactured shells. Sabotage was probably the cause.
24. From Johannesburg and from other places as Pretoria.
25. This was Genl Tobias Smuts, not the State Attorney of Transvaal, Jan C. Smuts.
26. This was the attempt by Judge Kock (son of Genl Jan Kock who died in Ladysmith from wounds received at the battle at Elandslaagte). It is maintained that a high official-according to some State Secretary F. W. Reitz, to others State Attorney J. C. Smuts — commanded him to destroy gold mines. But the German commandant Runck arrested Kock and his party on the order of the commandant of Johannesburg, Judge Krause. The gold mines escaped destruction, to the relief of the whole world.
27. This success was won by Christiaan de Wet who received the surrender of Col Spragg and his troops on Biddulphsberg towards the end of May 1900.
28. There was no question of desertion, however. The commandos were scattered over Transvaal by consent of the Transvaal military leaders, headed by Louis Botha, in order to wage the war more effectively as guerrillas. The measure was very successful.
29. Genl. Piet Joubert had died in March 1900.
30. Probably this is one of the rumours slandering Boer generals of the older, brave but inept generations, among them Piet Joubert, Piet Cronjé and Lukas Meyer. The last mentioned suffered ill health and delegated his task several times to Louis Botha, with splendid results.

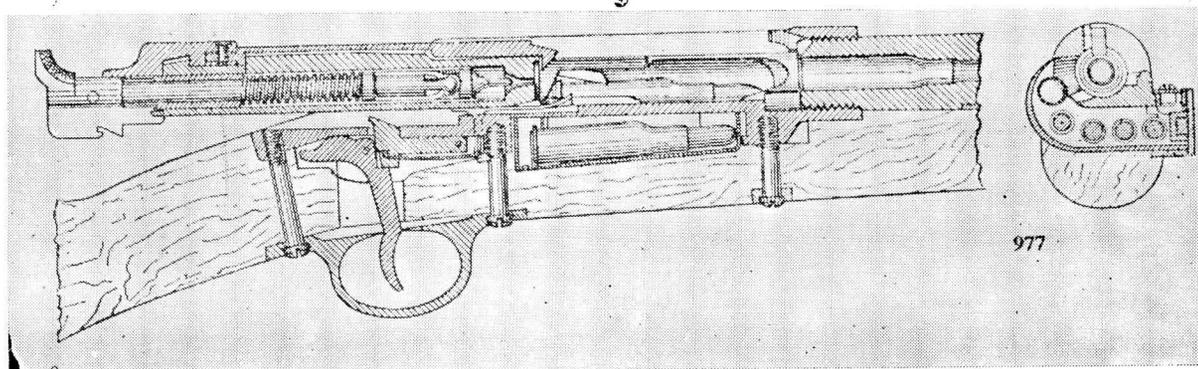
## BYLAAG: DIE KRAG-JÖRGENSEN-GEWEER IN SUID-AFRIKA'

In die Engelse blad **The Spectator** van 6 Oktober 1900 verskyn 'n uittreksel uit 'n brief van 'n offisier op aktiewe diens in Suid-Afrika waarin interessante beskouings oor die gewere wat in die Anglo-Boereoorlog was, voorkom. Onder andere beweer hy dat die Britse geweer 'a rotten weapon' is. Die kolf is nie sterk genoeg vir militêre gebruik nie. 'Onder honderde gewere waarvan ek in Pretoria kon kies was nouliks een onbeskadig: baie het weens 'n los kolf soos 'n dorsvleël gelyk; ander was met stewelveters vasgebind aan die staal loop. Die loop is nogal goed,

maar daar is geen korrelasie tussen die visierstelling en die koeëlbaan nie. Geen wonder dat Tommy die bajonet verkies nie. "Brother Boer" kan 'n man van sy perd afluk op 'n afstand van 'n 100 jaarts, maar die visier van die Lee-Enfieldgeweer rig die skoot 'n akker wyd in die algemene van die teiken, 'aldus die Britse offisier.' Die briëfskrywer meen egter dat die geweer (dit is die Lee-Enfield) tog enkele voordele besit. Dat die magasyn in reserwe gehou kan word en die geweer as enkellaai gebruik kan word, is bewonderingswaardig. Die kort uittrekkerver is beter as die lange in die Mausergeweer wat maklik breek, maar die magasyn is swak geplaas, sodat die laai daarvan met patrone tyrowend



(Foto: Prof F. V. Lategan: Die Boer se Roer p. 69)  
Krag-Jörgensen-geweer



(Tekening: H. L. Blackmore: Guns and Rifles of the World, p. 118)  
Krag-Jörgensen-geweer

en omslagtig is. Die laaiplaatjie met patrone wat in die Mausergeweer geskuif word, is hoegenaamd geen veiligemetode nie omdat dit dikwels vashaak.

Die offisier vervolgt: 'Die Krag-Jörgensengeweer<sup>2</sup> is stellig 'n baie beter geweer. Die magasyn daarvan is makliker om te laai en het geen snellaaiers nodig nie.<sup>3</sup> Dit bevat egter slegs vyf patrone wat te min is en die kaliber is te klein.<sup>4</sup> Nietemin is dit die beste geweer wat hier gebruik word.

Die visierstelling daarvan is "simply beautiful" en blyk buitengewoon noukeurig te wees wanneer dit in die hande van 'n bekwame man kom.

Ek het so 'n geweer van "Brother Boer" gebuit en het daarmee dikwels met goeie gevolg geskiet. Die gewere wat in die buiteland vervaardig is, is beter as ons s'n wat konstruksie en werking betref, omdat hulle met moderne outomatiese profilerings- en freesmasjiene gemaak is.<sup>5</sup> Vergelyk hul af-

werking maar net met ons handafgewerkte rowwe bukse.<sup>6</sup>

1. Druk in **Norsk artilleri-tydsskrift**, Kristiania (Oslo), jaargang 1901, pp 61-62. Die Krag-Jörgensengeweer is vervaardig in Noorweë. (Uit Noors vertaal deur C. de Jong).
2. Ole Herman Krag en Erii Joginser van Denemarke het die geweer in 1888 ontwerp. Dit is later deur Denemarke, Noorweë en die V.S.A. as militêre geweer aanvaar. Die Z.A.R. het slegs 100 van hierdie gewere voor die Anglo-Boereoorlog gehad.
3. Die horisontale kasmagasyn gaan onder om die slot van regs na links en draai op aan die linkerkant. Die magasyn neem vyf rondtes en word een-vir-een met die hand gelaai vanaf die regter lies. 'n Afsluiter vir die magasynrondtes in reserwe gehou kan word. (Redaksie).
4. Kaliber 6,5 mm. (Redaksie).
5. Opmerking van die redaksie van **Norsk artilleri-tydsskrift**: 'Die bewering moet op 'n misverstand berus. Dit is aan die redaksie bekend dat ook die Engelse gewere met moderne masjiene vervaardig word en goed afgewerk is.'
6. Volgens P. A. Nierstrasz (Der Süid-Afrikanische Krieg, 1899-1902) was die Krag-Jörgenson 'n kleinkaliber snelvuur Deense militêre geweer wat rooklose ammunisie gevuur het. Soos die Lee-Metford geweer moet patroon vir patroon in die magasyn ingesit word.