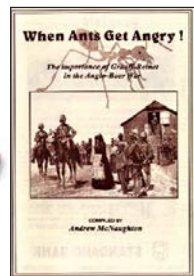


# SOUTHERN AFRICAN HISTORY & MILITARY CAMPAIGNS JOURNAL



**EVERY NOW AND AGAIN, A SPECIAL ISSUE ON A REGION, TOWN, PERSON OR SPECIFIC ARTICLES ON BATTLES WILL BE FEATURED.**

## THE IMPORTANCE OF GRAAFF-REINET IN THE ANGLO-BOER WAR by Andrew McNaughton from *When Ants Get Angry*

From the advent of the Great Trek, the strongest Dutch personalities moved from the Graaff-Reinet region to Natal. They were largely replaced by English settlers. Relative harmony ensued as the district found a boom in sheep and wool production and the limelight switched to the Gold and Diamond fields in the 1870's.



A selection of rifles used by the Boers resting on a South African Republic flag (1857-1902).

Most of the population was by now loyal to Queen Victoria, but Cecil Rhodes was about to disrupt relations with his infamous Jameson Raid. The beady eyes of Joseph Chamberlain had long been fixed on the gold of Johannesburg. War was thus declared, because war was desired.

The invasion of the Boer Republics was considered to be unjust by the Dutch in Graaff-Reinet. Seeing the demise of Presidents Kruger and Steyn, rebellion simmered in the hearts of a people who had conquered South Africa with horse and gun. The harsh climate and all the frontier wars (Graaff-Reinetters had fought in all eight Xhosa wars) had by now moulded the farmers into what were to become the toughest guerrilla fighters the world had seen; little did Lord Kitchener realise that a new method of warfare was to be born on the South African veldt.

By September 1900 Bloemfontein and Pretoria had fallen. With both capitals of the Boer Republics taken, surely an unconditional surrender would follow?

Not so, the British were about to become involved in a war which would last another two years and require half a million men (more than any war since Napoleon) and all because of a few Boer farmers who refused to surrender!

**2021 - ISSUE 3**

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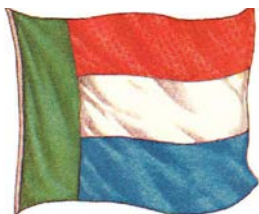
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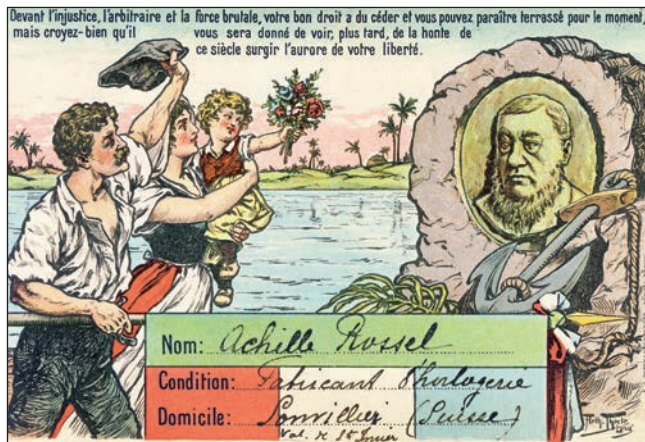
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Left: The flag of the South African Republic, the Transvaal *Vierkleur* (1857-1902), and right: The flag of the Orange Free State (1854-1902).

*Flags over South Africa by R. Gerard 1952*





The Golden Age of picture postcards began at the turn of the century - postcards featured prominently in the Boer War.

Propaganda, patriotic and other cards showing merely personalities, scenes and events of the war were also produced and collected in their thousands.

When Kruger toured Europe, the pro-Boer Committees under the guidance of Leyds, the two Republics' roving ambassador, published cards which purchasers were urged to send to Kruger directly expressing solidarity with his cause.

Celebrations by English speakers of British victories humiliated the pro-Boer in his home town. Dutch speakers began to polarize. Were they not warned by their fathers never to trust the British?

At this crucial moment the Boer Generals Botha, de la Rey, Smuts and de Wet launched the Commandos of Kritzinger, Scheepers, Malan, Lötter, Fouché and others across the Orange river. The invasion of the Cape Colony had begun.



These elusive Commandos led the British a merry dance, becoming a nightmare for military commanders who employed slow moving and ponderous tactics. In time the British were to learn and it is significant that Col. Scobell (left) would end the war with the reputation of 'Best cavalry officer in the British army' and also with the rank of Maj-General and Maj-General French would become a Field Marshal within a few years.



With urgency, Lord Kitchener declared Martial Law and dispatched 600 troops of the Coldstream Guards Regiment to Graaff-Reinet. Their arrival at midnight 1 January 1901, was the beginning of a good stir of the pot! All the old enmity returned. As Major Herbert Shute (below left), Military Commandant of the town made good the defences of the town; he was also preparing certain measures. His senior officer, Colonel Douglas Haig had instructed him, that these should be severe. They were; arms, ammunition, unnecessary stocks of food, bicycles, horses and fodder were to be handed over to the authorities. It is not difficult to imagine the impact of these regulations on a community where the horse was the means of transacting business, the means of a livelihood. Travel was prohibited without permission. A 2100hrs curfew was imposed. Eventually all commodity prices were set by the authorities. Seditious utterances could be

reported. This might include anything from a grouse about the British to the whistling of a Boer anthem! One man, a Van Heerden of Richmond, was fined for getting married. His marriage was adjudged to be an illegal gathering and not a religious service! Tempting rewards of up to £20 sterling were paid for information. Most people were afraid to open their mouths. Truly the administration of Martial Law produced more rebels than it helped to capture.

Frustrated beyond endurance, Kitchener showed what has become known as his 'iron fist'. Scorched earth meant exactly that to him. He was, after all Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, who were these ignorant farmers to oppose his will? Burn the grass, commandeer the cattle and horses, bayonet the pigs and sheep, burn the houses of Boers who would not admit defeat and remove their women and children to concentration camps! He would force them to their knees. Kitchener employed a ruthless efficiency which had to be admired. Nothing like it had ever been seen in warfare.





A damaged photograph of a group of Boer commandos, poorly attired and armed with a variety of weapons from Mausers to hunting rifles. This group could have been part of Lötter's Commando.

In the Cape Colony the Commandos now had the audacity to do the same. Farmhouses of pro-British were burnt, phone lines and railways were cut. Towns were occupied, flags torn down. Kitchener's response was to erect 8 000 blockhouses with miles of barbed wire, manned by 85 000 troops. The numbers of troops continued to swell and eventually reached some 440 000 British as well as 115 000 Black and Coloured troops. Kitchener began to sweep the country with large numbers of mounded troops in an effort to clear it section by section.

Nature stepped in as so often happens in Africa. The destruction of the environment had begun at least a century before; this generation was to pay the price. Grazing, which had for aeons supported myriad herbs of wild game in migratory ecosystems, could not support the thousands of domesticated cattle, sheep, goats and horses placed on it by greedy farmers. Enclosed as they were, in prisons of wire fence, these voracious feeders had denuded the vegetation; erosion did the rest. A searing drought occurred leaving a parched and sterile land.

If ever there could be a fitting parallel, it is in the behaviour of the Karoo red ant. These insects take to the most exposed, hot soil to make their nests. On a really boiling, summers day these ants become angry at the least provocation. So it was to be with the Boers and British in Graaff-Reinet. Soon they would be swarming about aggressively on the bare soil, ready to bite!

Tempers flared. No one was immune, for no one could remain neutral. If an Afrikaner sided with the British he was a marked man, he had betrayed his 'volk'. An English speaker who defended a Boer was surely treasonous? A neighbour with a grudge could have found this convenient, a way to get even. Boer sympathizers were deported. Their property might be unattended and so stolen or destroyed. The farming economy built up over the previous century was at a standstill.

The black and coloured people, afraid of the Boers, flocked to the town. British troops had found it convenient to use these people as scouts. They knew the country backwards; perhaps they also took delight in seeing their former masters humiliated by the British. We do know that



The Graaff-Reinet Town Guard.  
With Lee-Enfield rifles and bayonets, and an assortment of bandoliers, uniforms and hats.  
PHOTO: William Roe, Graaff-Reinet.

on numerous occasions the Boers had shot such spies out of hand. (At Mafekeng so had the British). Some Afrikaners, had over the years perpetuated a sort of feudalism in their relations with the indigenous people. Exploitation of them with the threat of violence was the way of life on many farms.

A bonfire and fireworks on Magazine hill to celebrate the relief of Ladysmith, marching with a band in the streets by coloured folk, as well as stones thrown on their roofs at night, angered the Afrikaners. Followed by the jubilation shown by pro-British at a Boer defeat. Outside the offices of one of the local newspapers stood a notice board on which war news was posted. It is said that many a friendship ended there!

A harvest of hatred had been sown between Afrikaner and English speaker. It lasted for many years, the attitudes formed in Graaff-Reinet influenced the entire country in the politics of the future.

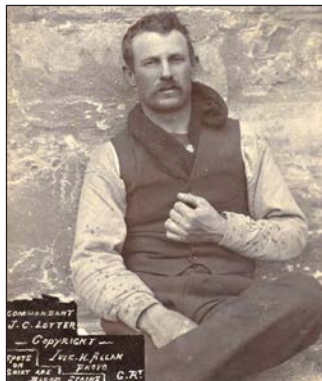
Scheepers was causing mayhem in the area. Derailing of trains, cutting communications, burning houses, taking prisoners (in all over 1 200, all of whom he released) and capturing supplies - finally the greatest humiliation of all - his epic escape in the Camdeboo mountains with 240 Boers from a huge British force of 2 000 mounted troops under Scobell, only some stragglers being captured.



Derailement caused by the Boers 'Accident to Troop Train Col. Doran's Column Graaff-Reinet. 2nd November 1901.'

Gradually the British attitude changed. Olive Schreiner, Emily Hobhouse and others influenced attitudes in Europe and America. Letters in *The Times* of London became more strident and more numerous. The condemning to death in Graaff-Reinet of 201 Boers, the vindictive execution of Scheepers and Lötter. The many complaints by reasonable men concerning the administration of Martial Law by Maj. Shute resulted in a journey to Cape Town to answer 70 charges against himself.





On the 5th September 1901 Commandant Lötter (left) was captured early on a rainy, cold dawn. His Commando was hungry, tired and hopeless. They had been chased to death. It is significant that on 21 September, only sixteen days later, 26 members of the District Mounted Troops resigned. Perhaps they felt a grudging admiration for these Boers who would surely be executed, but perhaps they had no stomach for the job any more.

Commandant Scheepers (right), arrested at the Dwyka River on 10 October, with appendicitis was scrupulously nursed back to health so as to be fit for trial. He was convicted of murder and shot. Later, his



body was dug up and reburied within the confines of the town defences so as to avoid him being raised to martyrdom. Unfortunately this kind of skullduggery spoke of a feeling of unease among those responsible in regard to their actions. It could be said that the Anglo-Boer War had pricked the balloon of Victorian arrogance and there was now a certain measure of uncertainty in the Empire.

At this time the British appear to have felt that the South Africa War was a hot potato. They came to see the injustice of what they were doing, it was time for peace. Graaff-Reinet had played a pivotal role in ending the war. Dr Thomas Te Water, Colonial Secretary of the Cape Government and his father FK Te Water, Mayor of the town for many years, were the most prominent Graaff-Reinet family. They had resolutely resisted temptation putting principle before expediency, supporting the Boer cause, unpopular though it was. The Afrikaner had been wronged and in their hearts the British knew it.

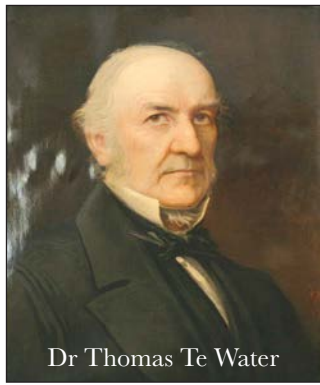


W. ROE

GRAFF REINET

Heavily armed Boer commandos, complete with bandoliers. Interesting to note that two seem to be in khaki. The bandoliers were the type used by the Boers and the rifles are Mausers. The slouch hats are all similar which is unusual as few Boers dressed alike.

PHOTO: William Roe, Graaff-Reinet.



Dr Thomas Te Water

Lord Milner and Joseph Chamberlain could hardly have envisaged the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 and the handing over of the former colonies of the Cape and Natal to the Union when they instigated war in 1899.

A Boer War memorial was to be erected after the war, to commemorate the names of eight Boers executed at the town. The authorities refused to allow this, even the Dutch Reformed Church, probably hoping for reconciliation, would not approve. It was finally erected on private land at the corner of Somerset and Donkin Streets, on land donated by Mr Jurie Laubscher.

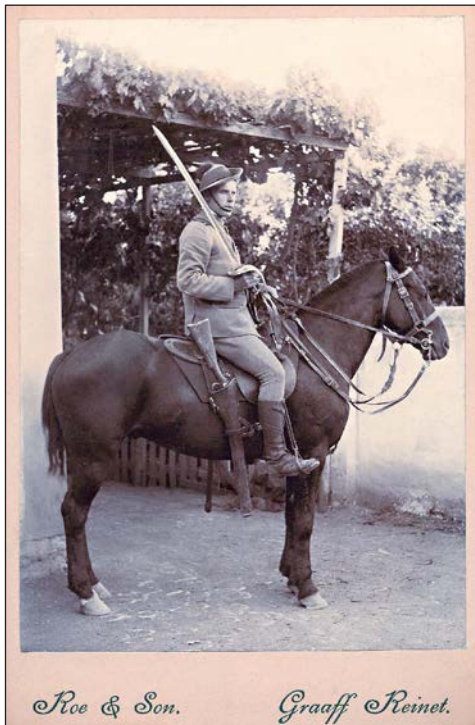
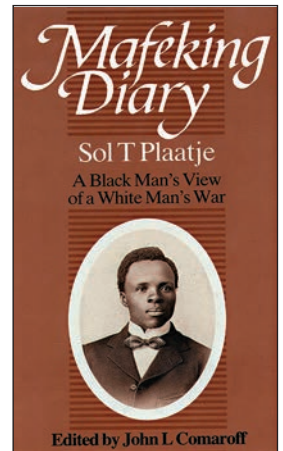
Another war memorial, in the form of an angel standing guard over the names of the town's war dead, was erected on Church square after the First World War of 1914-1918.

It is said that soon after, an Afrikaans speaking mother walked purposely past, without a glance. Her little daughter pleaded with her to look at the angel. The mother only walked faster, the child despairing cried out "look, look mother it's an angel!" The mother replied "yes, but it's an English angel!" So deep were the wounds.

Graaff-Reinet under Martial Law was without doubt a launching pad for Afrikaner nationalism. The culmination was the Republic of South Africa.

Looking back we can see that this war, painful and full of horror, hateful as it was, had been the crucible which gave birth to South Africa as a country. The first step toward the future had been taken, yet it had created a new problem, in trading with the Boers to forge a peace treaty, the British had compromised and forsaken the native races of South Africa by not insisting on rights for them.

Significantly, in 1912 Sol Plaatje founded the African National Congress. Seeing no hope of recognition from either the British or the Afrikaners, the indigenous peoples came to the realisation that they had to fend for themselves.



Lieutenant Abernathy of the Scottish Regiment during the Anglo-Boer War. He was based in Graaff-Reinet when this photo was taken.

It is interesting to note the Enfield carbine in the saddle holster is on full-cock!; and the excellent condition of his mount. The sword scabbard is on his left side.

### Scheepers and the Heliograph

At the farm Stellenboschlei about 2 500 British surrounded the Boers from four sides. They had to find a way out and quickly too.

One of the patrols had captured a heliograph.

Cmdt. Scneepers, was a qualified heliographist and using the British army code, instructed one of the British commanders to move sharply to the left as the Boers were escaping that way!

The Boers then slipped through the opening.

That night the British stormed the farmhouse where the Boers had been, but they were now kilometres away.

## **ANECDOTES**

### **Featherstonehaugh near Klipplaat**

Thick smoke billowed from the windows ... at the door of one of the outbuildings stood the farmer's wife in tears. Cmdt. Scheepers, seeing this addressed her "Lady it is a bitter task for me and I have sincere sympathy for you, but think of all those thousands in the Free State and Transvaal whose homes are going up in smoke at this moment. .. perhaps the burning of your home will bring an end to all the house burning." "I understand Commandant" she replied.

### **Scheepers in disguise**

Lt. Tennant (intelligence Officer for Maj. Shute) knowing that the people of Adendorp were thoroughly disloyal went out with Charlie McNaughton of the DMT at 2300 hrs pretending to be Scheepers. He had all the lights put out and assembled the leaders of the village telling them he wanted all information about the defences of Graaff-Reinet as he meant to attack it next night. Thinking that he was Scheepers, they told him everything and offered to guide him. After a few days Maj. Shute sent for them, asked them about Tennant's presence, they lied like fury, posing as great loyalists saying that they had told Scheepers nothing ... Maj. Shute told them the supposed Scheepers was a man he had sent and that they were a pack of lying traitors ..... He reported that their faces were a picture!

### **"Put back that jam"**

Cmdt. Scheepers saw that his men were helping themselves rather too liberally, to Mrs McNaughton's jams and preserves on the farm Aloe Ridge, ordered that the unopened bottles be given back. While the commando were feeding their horses with sheaves of oat hay from the loft, Archie McNaughton slipped away unnoticed and alerted Gorringes' column which was near Fonteinplaats, a farm nearby. The Boers were almost caught napping, some leaving their saddles behind and riding bareback.

### **Secret footpath in the Camdeboo**

Cmdt. Scheepers' favourite haunt was the Camdeboo valley. This was where his men and their horses could rest, be properly fed and whenever attacked could escape via footpaths known only to them. however Gen. French mustered a huge force of 2 000 mounted troops to finally put an end to Scheepers and his Commando which numbered about 240. For once they traveled light, Col. Scobell leaving behind all the usual cavalry paraphernalia including wire cutters etc.

As they converged on the farm Onbedacht, Scheepers seemed to be trapped at last. A volley of shots from the Imperial Yeomanry alerted Scheepers to Scobell's position on a plateau above them. The Boer Commando now turned aside to a secret footpath. Seeing the Boers leading their horses up a precipitous path, which the British had considered impassable and about to make their escape Col. Scobell began a 4 mile dash to cut them off. They might have been in time, but they came up against a wire fence and remembered to their horror that they had no cutters! Most of Scheepers' Commando escaped over the farm Morgendal, but a rearguard and some stragglers whose horses were poor climbers surrendered on the plateau. Thirty-one in all were captured of whom 8 were later executed.

### **Narrow Escape**

Major Lord Douglas Compton of the 9th Lancers charged towards the Paardefontein house where Cmdt. Lötter was thought to be. In so doing his 'A' Squadron galloped past a shed in the dark. Maj. Compton dropped his pistol accidentally, he swung out, dismounted picked it up and survived. The four men following were all shot dead as they passed the shed opening. Inside were Lötter and his men!

### **Runaway Train**

On 2 November 1901 at 0630 hrs, the first train of Col. Doran's column ran away down the hill at Graaff-Reinet. From the Location to the river bridge where the couplings broke, the first truck containing men derailed and partly overturned. The next 5 trucks contained horses and these were telescoped and about 40 were killed.



## SELECTED GRAAFF-REINET ACCOMMODATION



**Cypress  
Cottages  
Guesthouse**

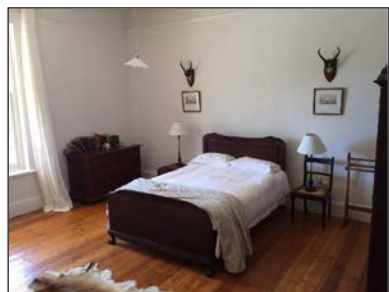


76 Donkin Street, Graaff-Reinet 6280. Tel: 049 892 3965  
e-mail: [info@cypresscottage.co.za](mailto:info@cypresscottage.co.za) • website: [www.cypresscottage.co.za](http://www.cypresscottage.co.za)

The 4-Star Cypress Cottages Guesthouse offer a 'genuine Karoo experience', few can make the claim quite as truthfully as Cypress Cottages. After a hot drive to this historic Karoo town, it is an immense relief to be welcomed by people as easy going as the staff at Cypress Cottages, and to be installed in the beautiful early 1800's Cape Dutch cottages which are exclusively guest accommodation...and to find yourself minutes later, cold beer in hand, on a stoep with magnificent mountain views. The bedrooms in the cottage are decorated with a taste for the natural and comfortable. Guests can swim in the bore-hole fed reservoir, now a swimming pool. The magnificent garden is a pleasure to enjoy. Breakfast is laid outside on the terrace - free-range eggs, homemade preserves and fruit from the orchards.



**Bloemhof Farm  
Guesthouse**



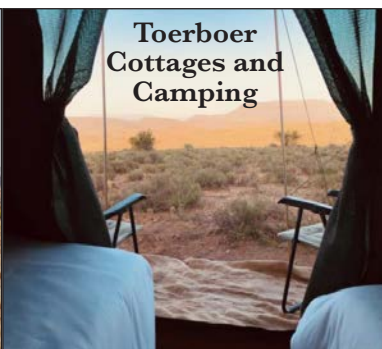
Bloemhof Farm. Tel: 049 840 0203. Cell: 082 325 6037

email: [murraybloemhof@yebo.co.za](mailto:murraybloemhof@yebo.co.za)

Bloemhof Farm Guesthouse is located on Bloemhof Farm, a charming working Karoo farm, near Graaff Reinet and Nieu-Bethesda in the Great Karoo. The Guesthouse is conveniently located 32km north of Graaff Reinet, just off the N9, and half an hour from Nieu-Bethesda.

Bloemhof is a charming, old-fashioned farm, steeped in history. Guests stay in the one hundred year old, double storey house and are hosted by the current seventh-generation farmer, Julian Murray.

The Historical Homestead has one en-suite bedroom with double bed. The house has a further 5 x bedrooms, one with Double Bed, and four with Twin Beds. There are two additional separate Bathrooms off the passage. The house can accommodate ten single people or six couples.



Toerboer, Graaff-Reinet. Cell: 083 538 2865.

email: [dawid@toerboer.co.za](mailto:dawid@toerboer.co.za)

Toerboer Cottages: Self-catering accommodation in the heart of historic Graaff-Reinet.

Toerboer Tours: Immersive experiences in the Karoo, which include Hiking, Cycling, Exploring and Camping, Experience waking up to a glorious Karoo morning with the birdsong and a breakfast prepared in the traditional bush style over hot coals in a boma. Then a brisk walk or stroll in the Karoo.



# CAPE REBELS AT GRAAFF-REINET GAOL



Cape Rebels captured and imprisoned temporarily at Graaf-Reinet.

The following is a list of their names of which some were executed by the British forces.

- |  |  |                                      |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Willem Vorster, Middelburg.         | 2. Willem Naudé, Petrusburg.           | 3. Andries Roode, Graaff-Reinet.     |
| 4. Jan Jacobus Posthumus, Cradock.     | 5. Jacobus Cornelius Coetzee, Cradock. | 6. Jacobus Daniel Marais, Cradock.   |
| 7. Barend Jacobus Bester, Cradock.     | 8. Albert Olivier, Cradock.            | 9. Johannes Engelbrecht, Maraisburg. |
| 10. Jan Benjamin Hough, Cradock.       | 11. Barend Bischoff, Middelburg.       | 12. Rolf van Heerden, Aberdeen.      |
| 13. Hans van der Merwe.                | 14. Hendrick Haarhoff, Middelburg.     | 15. Eugene Brezelle, Cradock.        |
| 16. Johan Christiaan Troskie, Cradock. | 17. Paul Johannes Marais, Cradock.     | 18. C. Jan van Heerden, Tarkastad.   |
| 19. Daniel Hemming, Middelburg.        | 20. Willem Vorster sen, Middelburg.    | 21. Hans Kruger, Cradock.            |
| 22. Stephans Francois Marais, Cradock. | 23. Garhardus Olivier, Cradock.        | 24. Stephanus Schoeman, Cradock.     |

Nos 9 Johannes Engelbrecht and 16 Johan Christiaan Troskie were sentenced to death, but the sentences were commuted to imprisonment for life.

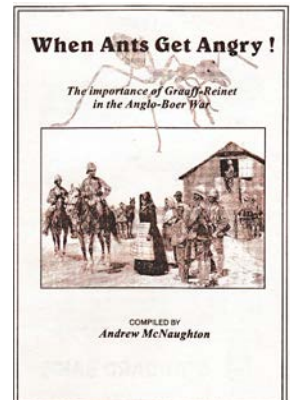
No. 24 Stephanus Schoeman was sentenced to be hanged, but the sentence was commuted to imprisonment during the war.

Then they marched them through the township,  
For their friends and foes to see;  
They were 'ignorant bywoners', [squatters]  
Rich in neither land nor fee:  
But they marched with head uplifted,  
Men of upland veld and farm,  
With their bearded country faces,  
And their air of stately calm.

On 5 September 1901 Commandant Lötter and his commando of Cape Boers were captured near Cradock and brought to Graaff-Reinet for trial. The group consisted largely of so-called poor whites, and was no more than a marauding gang.

Alice Greene - *'The Last March of Lötter's Commando'*

*Drummer Hodge* by M Van Wyk Smith 1999





- |                                      |  |                                    |
|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------------------|
| 25. Isaac Loots, Graaff-Reinet.      | 26. Louis Stephanus Roode, Cradock.    | 27. Hermanus van Meyeren, Cradock. |
| 28. Paul Roode, Tarkastad.           | 29. Louis Barend van Meyeren, Cradock. | 30. John Brooks                    |
| 31. Tjaart Coetzee, Middelburg.      | 32. Stoffel Snyman, Graaff-Reinet.     | 33. Barend Vorster, Middelburg.    |
| 34. Louis Vorster, Middelburg.       | 35. Thomas Wm. Engela, Cradock.        | 36. S van Rooyen, Somerset East.   |
| 37. David Schalk Booysen, Cradock    | 38. GP de Preez, Somerset East.        | 39. Hans Els, Pearston.            |
| 40. Jacobus Schoeman, Tarkastad.     | 41. Jacobus Rossouw, Murraysburg.      | 42. Philip Greef, Graaff-Reinet.   |
| 43. Daniel Jacobus Coetzee, Cradock. | 44. Casper H le Roux, Cradock.         | 45. John Nagel, Cradock.           |
| 46. Piet Wolfaardt, Middelburg.      | 47. Barend de Haaste, Middelburg.      |                                    |

No 27 Hermanus van Meyeren was sentenced to be hanged, however the sentence was commuted to imprisonment during the war.

No. 40 Jacobus Schoeman was shot at Tarkastad.

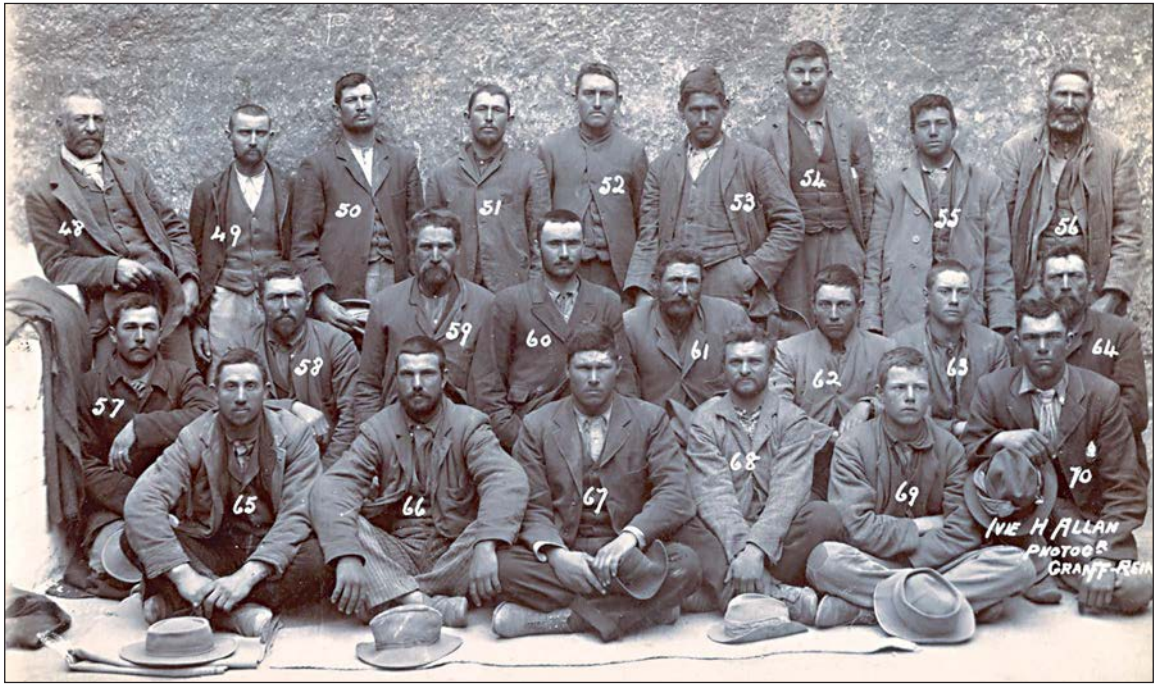
No. 46 Piet Wolfaardt was shot at Middelburg.

### Did You Know!

- THAT 9 700 Rebels were found guilty of treason in the Cape.
- THAT 201 Boers were sentenced to death in Graaff-Reinet. Most were later commuted to life sentences which were reduced to only a few years prison sentence after the war.
- THAT the Boers employed over 10 000 black and coloured people mainly in non-military roles.
- THAT, due to the shortage of Martini-Henry cartridges, the Boers wrapped the Lee-Enfield cartridges in brown paper and fired them from Martini-Henry rifles. Dr Beattie of the Midland Hospital reported that the bullet tumbled causing the worst kind of wound - a keyhole wound where the bullet enters sideways and continues to tumble in the body.

*When Ants Get Angry* by Andrew McNaughton





- |                                     |                                       |                                      |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 48. Julie Kemp.                     | 49. Frans Lötter, Pearston.           | 50. B Bosch, Pearston.               |
| 51. M Greef, Pearston.              | 52. Gert Willemhardus Botha, Cradock. | 53. Hendrik Erasmus, Cradock.        |
| 54. Albert Viljoen, Middelburg.     | 55. S Viljoen, Middelburg.            | 56. David Viljoen, Middelburg.       |
| 57. Hendrik van Rooyen, Cradock.    | 58. Johannus van Rooyen, Cradock.     | 59. Hendrik Coetzee, Middelburg.     |
| 60. Willem Joubert, Hanover.        | 61. Louis Petrus Kruger, Cradock.     | 62. Johannes Kruger, Cradock.        |
| 63. Johannes Jacob Kruger, Cradock. | 64. Lodewykus Kruger, Cradock.        | 65. Gert MJ Steenkamp, Cradock.      |
| 66. John Bester, Middelburg.        | 67. Dirk D Breedt, Bethulie, ORC      | 68. Fred Abraham Pretorius, Cradock. |
| 69. J Lötter, Somerset East.        | 70. H Visser, Richmond.               |                                      |

No. 57 Hendrik Jacobus van Rooyen was sentenced to death, but the sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life.

No. 67 Dirk D Breedt of Bethulie in the Orange River Colony was shot at Cradock.

### Khaki

‘It was dark before we reached there, and the owner, a well-to-do Dutch farmer named le Roux, quickly told us such news as he had gleaned from the officers and soldiers during the day.

In the first place he said that three or four of our delaying party had been captured, and that one of them, my friend Jack Baxter, had been executed that morning at an adjoining farm for wearing khaki. We were thunderstruck. The inhabitants of the districts through which we had passed could not have known of the death penalty or they would surely have mentioned it to us, and it was only when le Roux produced a recent newspaper containing Lord Kitchener’s proclamation, that we understood the position. We learned too, for the first time, that other men of ours had been shot for the same reason, although it was only later, as more newspapers came into our hands, that we found out their names.

From what I could make out, the executions had been kept quiet, but now, for some reason or other, perhaps the killing of Captain Watson, the military authorities were giving them publicity. From a farm labourer who came in, we had details of Baxter’s shooting, which brought home to me how narrowly I had on several occasions missed a similar fate, so I lost no time in changing the tunic I wore for a coat which I borrowed from our host, who also supplied such of my companions as were in khaki with whatever he had in the way of civilian dress.’

*Commando by Deneys Reitz MCMXXIX*



- |                                     |                                       |                                    |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 71. Sarel Jacob Bloem, Cradock.     | 72. Barend Vorster.                   | 73. Cornelius Smit, Richmond.      |
| 74. Gert Malan, Middelburg.         | 75. Isaac Viljoen.                    | 76. Albertus Hough, Cradock.       |
| 77. Carel Krige, Cradock.           | 78. David Nel, Cradock.               | 79. Gert Vorster.                  |
| 80. Johannes du Plessis, Tarkastad. | 81. Christian van Heerden, Tarkastad. | 82. Frans van Heerden, Middelburg. |

Nos. 76 Albertus Hough and 78 David Nel were sentenced to death, but the sentences were commuted to imprisonment for life.

Like any war, the Anglo-Boer War at the end of the last century created passionate political divisions; nowhere is this better illustrated than in the terse newspaper reports of the time. One dated 18 March 1901 reports that:

‘Young Eckard, who escaped from the College here some time ago and joined Kritzinger’s commando, as already stated in this paper, was brought to town last week by his uncle, Corney Eckard. This morning he was thrashed in the presence of the College boys and expelled.’

An undated item (but probably in 1901 when commando raids into the Cape Colony were frequent) reads:

‘Murraysburg girls.’ ‘Harbour and Assist the Enemy’ ‘Punished for their Crime’

It appears that nine girls aged between fifteen and twenty and one married woman were charged before Mr Harrison, RM, with harbouring the King’s Enemies and supplying them with food etc. (what was this etc?) on the occasion of their entry into Murraysburg. Two were discharged. The remainder were sentenced to 30 days. Did they actually serve this time? Under what circumstances?

In June 1901 Reuters had better news.

‘The news that peace had been signed created tremendous rejoicings in this town on Sunday. Flags were immediately hoisted, bells were rung and general congratulations were exchanged, Boer and Brits shaking hands. From everywhere the neighbourhood vehicles, inspanned and with flags flying, were driven through the town. Yesterday was observed as a public holiday, the town being beautifully decorated with bunting.’



# ABERDEEN AND THE ANGLO-BOER WAR



Gun carriage and ammunition trailer being drawn by mules passing the newly built Magistrates Court.



Lancers leaving Aberdeen on their way to Graaff-Reinet and the Camdeboo.



A sandbagged redoubt being managed by the Town Guard. In the background is the Post Office and Magistrates Court.

Aberdeen in the Cape Colony during the Anglo-Boer War was held by a detachment of the Derbyshires and 20 men of the 6th Dragoon Guards together with a small Town Guard under the command of Colonel Priestly.

At 1600 hrs on 5 March 1901 the 300 strong Boers began their attack with an attempt to rush the village from the South. Foiled in the attempt by the vigorous resistance that the Town Guard offered, they then made a bold effort to storm a kopje held by the Dragoons and Derbyshires, but again they were repulsed. Yet in spite of these checks they were able to enter Aberdeen, which like most South African towns was a very scattered one, covering a large area. They were attempting to loot the shops when they got something they had not bargained for - a fusillade of bullets from the men of the Town Guard, who had taken-up a new position where they covered the stores menaced by the would-be plunderers.

In the meantime, the prisoners in the gaol were released by the Boers and the telegraph office was entered, but the Boers could not dislodge the Town Guard from their positions. Towards evening after the skirmish had continued for more than twelve hours without any result being reached, British reinforcements began to arrive.

First came Colonel Parsons with a column of regulars and Colonials, and then followed Colonel Scobell from Beaufort West, who had to cover a distance, today which is 150km by road; which was a long march in difficult country especially in the heat of March month, even for mounted troops. Yet they reached Aberdeen in twenty hours!

On 6 March 1901 the Boers were attacked by Colonel Parsons outside Aberdeen where they had taken up a strong position. A series of kopjes which they had entrenched were taken by the Imperial Yeomanry, led by Major Warden of the 18th Battalion, cleared the enemy away in fine style. At last the Boers fell back across the Camdeboo Spruit in some confusion - but without any heavy loss.



A sandbagged redoubt being built by the Town Guard on a street facing Graaff-Reinet.



Another view of the same redoubt with troops and Town Guard setting-up a telegraph.



Troops stopping and interrogating a couple of locals in a Scotch-Cart.

On the 6 April 1901, a post, ten miles north of Aberdeen consisting of one hundred men of the 5th Lancers, 32 Imperial Yeomanry under Captain Bretherton and Brabant's horse, was assailed by a horde of 400 Boers. After fighting vigorously from dawn until 1100 hrs, the force was overpowered. Twenty-five of the number escaped, one was killed and six wounded.

On the 21 July 1901, a number of Boers appeared early in the morning. They approached using a donga as camouflage, intending to surprise; but discovered to their chagrin that it was garrisoned and on the alert. The forces on the British side were the Town Guard and a detachment under Captain Miller, of the North Lancashire. They advanced against the Boer Commando and drove them off in some confusion with a loss of only one man wounded. On the following night the attack renewed in pitch darkness, but towards midnight a detachment of Australian Artillery arrived and put the enemy to flight. The Boers retired once more into the hills, but the Camdeboo was now closed to them by the British posts.

Then in March 1902 the Boers again attempted to attack Aberdeen.

Captain Lawrence Oates was with his regiment the 6th Inniskilling Dragoon Guards at Aberdeen on the 5th and 6th March when the Boers attacked Aberdeen. He was wounded in the defence of the town.

### John Alexander Baxter

On being asked to write on the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, a war which never should have happened, I do not wish to stir up a hornet's nest but simply report facts.

Concerning Aberdeen, I wish to tell the story of John (Jack) Alexander Baxter, a 22 year old who was shot for wearing Khaki; but let me start at the beginning. By 1901 the Boer commandos biggest problem was clothing. Their coats and trousers were in tatters, and most had no shirts or underwear at all. A few had frayed blankets, but hardly any had footwear, and this condition led them to the practice of "capturing" and wearing British uniforms. This was done purely out of necessity but led to confusion as British troops, who failed to recognise Boer soldiers wearing Khaki as the enemy, were killed.

Kitchener issued a proclamation stating that Boers found wearing British uniforms would be shot. Several executions took place in the Karoo. One is John Alexander Baxter who was a Boer supporter who came from Klerksdorp in the Transvaal. Initially he tried to sign up with the British forces but was refused due to his poor eye-sight; he apparently wore very thick glasses and, even so, couldn't see well at all. He then, in a strange turn-around, went to Klerksdorp and joined the Boers under Gen. Liebenberg's Commando.



Stationed in the Camdeboo region, he wanted to return to his commando, but never reached his camp. In the early morning light he asked a shepherd to show him the road to his camp but was shown the English camp under Scobell instead. This was probably due to his wearing Khaki with a black coat over that, and he was therefore presumed to be British. In his near-sighted state he simply walked in amongst the 17th Lancers.

He was captured by the British and tried by Colonel Scobell on the farm Goewermentsvlei, now Uitkyk owned by Johnny de Jager. Shortly before this Smuts' commando had been saved by wearing Khaki, and this sealed Baxter's fate. Baxter was English (although he claimed to be German) and this counted against him. Although Scobell was impressed with Baxter, a Court Martial was heard the same day. Baxter borrowed pen and paper from the farmer, a man named Dors Kleinhans, and wrote numerous letters to his parents and his Commando. In fact it was misty weather at the time and Kommandant Ben Bouwer had gone back to look for Baxter but he was not to be found.

HIERDIE STEEN IS OPGERIC  
TER GEDACTENIS AAN  
**JOHN ALEXANDER  
BAXTER**  
CEB. 20 JAN. 1879.  
'N HELD UIT DIE  
**ANGLO BOERE OORLOG.**  
1899-1902.  
VEROORDEELD DEUR 'N KRYCSRAAD  
OP 13 OKT. 1901.  
VONNIS VOLTREK OP DIE PLAAS  
GOEWERMENTS-VLEI ABERDEEN.





It has been said that this is the tree, on a farm, that Baxter sat against when being executed.

Baxter sat on a box to be shot after writing his letters. The British shook hands with him, saying how sorry they were and how much they admired his bravery. Baxter said "I am all right. Don't bother about me. We are both soldiers and have to die sooner or later. I am not afraid to die". 30 seconds later he was dead. But before this happened he asked to smoke his pipe and had a glass of whisky with Scobell.

After writing to his father he knelt to pray. The officers saluted as though he was a British soldier and fell in behind to march to his grave. Baxter refused to be blindfolded or sit on a kist. He wanted to die like a man. He was asked to turn around. 4 bullets penetrated the back of his head. The British left his body for a few hours before they rolled him in a blanket and buried him. He was given the burial of a soldier and not of a rebel.

and shot on the same day. Smuts later commented that this man wore khaki because he had nothing else to wear. Scobell again accused Smuts of failing to do his duty as commanding officer in not warning his men of the danger of wearing khaki.

There is an urban legend that General Smuts met Scobell during the First World War and was seen to completely ignore him. On being asked by a close friend for his reason, he mentioned that he would never forgive Scobell for executing Baxter and others for wearing Khaki during the Boer War.

Baxter's remains were interred and brought to Aberdeen in 1938 where he was re-buried, in what is today a well kept grave. His glasses, a magnifying glass, comb, spoon and a few buttons found in his grave have been removed to the Old Residency Museum in Graaff-Reinet as part of a Boer War display. His name is also on the Ermelo Burgergedenksteen Monument.

SOURCE: *Commando* by Denys Reitz

### The Case of Jan Momberg

In September 1901, Jan Daniel Momberg of Aberdeen was a young man. Earlier that year he had joined a Boer Commando but, unfortunately for him, he had been captured. He was tried by the British on charges of joining the enemy's forces and marauding and was sentenced to death. This sentence was remitted by Lord Kitchener, the reason being that Momberg, faced with death, had been induced to give evidence in the prosecution of various rebels, as those who joined the Boer forces while resident in the Cape Colony, which was under British rule.

While he was free to go, the Kommandant at Graaff-Reinet was obliged to keep him in the Guard Tent of the Garrison as it would be unsafe to turn him loose in Graaff-Reinet or in neighbouring districts as his life would be under threat. Attempts were made to get rid of him, perhaps by his enlisting or joining the navy, or by possibly getting him apprenticed to a trade; even De Beers was approached, but nobody wanted him.

Kitchener eventually washed his hands of him and ordered that he should be released and that he should take his chances. It was pointed out that any person who molested him should be dealt with and punished. Cold comfort to Momberg, most probably!

He survived by moving to Pretoria where he succeeded in qualifying as a printer.

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**EMAIL: ROSEWILLIS705@GMAIL.COM**

## Johannes A. Smith

Johannes Antonie Smith was born in Aberdeen, and when he grew up he became an artist and art critic, and eventually became the youngest member of General W.A. Malan's Commando. As a fourteen year old, on holiday on an Aberdeen farm, he heard that Kommandants Scheepers and Fouché were heading in the direction of Aberdeen.

The youngsters of Aberdeen loved to tease the British soldiers by throwing paper bags filled with sand at their forts. When the local school children could not or would not sing "God Save The Queen" they were treated as rebels, and punished with 'fatigue duty' in the form of chopping wood for the hospital and off-loading wagons coming from the railway station.

J.A. Smith tells of how these boys (*penkoppe*) decided to run away. On 10 June 1901 at about 2000 hrs Johannes told his mother that he would be inside before the 2100 hrs curfew bell. He then put on his one and only long pants as he feared the Commando would turn him away if he arrived wearing shorts. Although he was still under 15 years old he was tall. Johannes intended to leave his parents a letter but didn't and the only person who knew of his whereabouts was his teacher, a Mr van der Berg, who wished him luck.

Three other boys accompanied him; George Brown, B. Daniels, and Japie Weideman. They had to climb through a fence and at 2000 hrs they reached the wire fence which had been hung with empty tin cans so as to act as a warning device to the British soldiers. A shot was fired and then the whole British line fired.

The boys finally managed to get through the fence and ran across the veld to a drift about 5 km away; the Camdeboo was still another 32 km further.

They learned from a farmer that the Commando had dismounted at a neighbouring farm, and it was here the J.A. Smith saw Scheepers for the first time. He described Scheepers as a "twenty-two year old man, of medium height with dark hair, friendly features and a calm look, strong mouth and a soft voice. Dressed in the Free State Artillery dark blue jacket wearing his white hat-band on his felt hat with Free State badge and a black Ostrich feather."

Here Johannes was given a pony, so he really felt a part of the Commando, and spent the first night sleeping under the stars.

Johannes moved to Wynand Malan's Commando to be near his uncle, and shortly afterwards was involved in capturing and robbing a train of it's supplies between Murraysburg and Nelspoort.

For the next few months he crossed the Cape fighting all the way, and after nine months of being away from home he came to the van der Merwe farm in Aberdeen, where he quickly wrote a note to his parents at Oudeplaats (dated 14 March 1902).

Apparently ill, J.A. Smith was taken to Murraysburg Hospital, where he could have been shot if captured by the British. He fled at night while still not strong or well.

At last he he found his own Commando and pony at De Cust farm, and eleven months after leaving home he was once again operating in the Camdeboo Mountains.

Kommandant Carel van Heerden wanted to raid Aberdeen but General Malan would not give his permission as the town was strongly defended. J.A. Smith knew Aberdeen very well as he lived in sight of the church on the corner of Noord (North) and Murray streets. He drew a map on a piece of paper for van Heerden, showing the streets and indicating where the forts were located.

Johannes was forced to lay down arms at Cradock and was sentenced for high treason on 2 June 1902, the death penalty being mandatory. After six weeks imprisonment the prisoners were sent back to their Magisterial Districts where they had to report to their respective Magistrates upon arrival, and after a year Johannes Smith returned home. The Cradock Magistrate mentioned that Smith was a scholar.

SOURCE: *Die Stad Aberdeen 1855-2000* by Ds.F.S. Vivier.



# BOER WAR - BOER COMMANDANT

## COMMANDANT CAREL VAN HEERDEN

### Raid on Aberdeen



On 18 May 1902 Commandant Wilhelm Fouché and General Wynand Malan met with Commandant Carel van Heerden where they had taken shelter in the Camdeboo Mountains. They were worried as their horses were in poor condition and something had to be done about it. The British forces at Aberdeen had horses, but both Generals were reluctant to attack as they believed they would incur heavy losses due to the fact that Aberdeen was defended by a substantial force of 450 soldiers and 300 Coldstream Guards. In addition, the hilltop above the town was under British control and the town itself was surrounded by a criss-cross network of wire, and a strong column under Colonel Price was in Aberdeen at that time.

Being a stubborn and fearless man Carel van Heerden wanted to go in alone, but Fouché and Malan allowed him to ask for volunteers to accompany him. Amongst those who volunteered the following names have been confirmed:

Commandant Carel van Heerden (killed in the raid), J.A. Smith (Johannes), author of *Ek Rebellee*, Field Cornet Willie van der Merwe, John Londt (killed in the raid), Koos van Aarde, Field Cornet Bezuidenhout, Francois Retief, Boy du Plessis, Josef Coetzee (who died the following day as a POW), Louis Fourie, G. van der Walt (Watt) (Burgersdorp), Louis Coetzee, Pietie de Wet, Joseph Erasmus (Cradock), Piet Bekker, and A.J.J. van Eck (Aberdeen).

Their horses were left at Kraai River and they entered the village via Bell Street, where Malan and Fouché waited. A guard on the left-hand fort shouted "Halt, who goes there?", and a shot was fired as the nine o'clock bell had already rung. Van Heerden crossed the first street and was confronted by a constable who asked, "Why are you so late? The bell has rung." Van Heerden answered "I am van Heerden. Where are the horses?" and at this the constable fainted. Van Heerden warned his men that the English could shoot them from the house tops. As they progressed they found many horses and also encountered town guards. The plan was to break down the two middle walls of what is now Marx House, 50 yards from the corner of the street, and to lead the horses out by that route. In the shooting that followed first Hurdle was shot and then John Londt of Aberdeen was struck down opposite the church door by a bullet fired from the flat roof of what is now the Municipal Building. A bullet struck the trigger guard of van Heerden's rifle and ricocheted into the main artery at the top of his leg. Two of his men helped him walk another 10ms before he collapsed in the middle of the tar road outside the church. With the noise of bullets all around them they started to run, and Josef Coetzee was shot in the shoulder. As the British soldiers approached Louis Fourie of Jansenville was shot in the cheek. Josef Coetzee was taken to Graaff-Reinet where he died the next day and was buried there.

Carel van Heerden's body lay naked in the Municipal Building before he was buried. He was only 26 years old when he died.

In all 54 horses were stolen, including one particular animal which van Heerden had badly wanted. Of the British contingent Pearson was one of those shot at the church, and is buried in the Aberdeen graveyard.

Van Heerden was a blacksmith by trade, a huge strong man who was daring and reckless by nature, called "Die kwaai baas" (the hot tempered boss) who carried a sjambok (whip) about with him. He was a restless man who couldn't sit still and always wanted to storm in to where the "Khakis" (British) were. For the record his parents lived at 39 Cathcart Street, a small dwelling which would have at that time been on the edge of town.

SOURCE: Wendy van Schalkwyk



Key	
	- Forts
	- Trenches
	- Where the wire was clipped
	- Where the raid took place
	- Fight in backyard
	- Where the horses were taken
	- Skirmish with Enemy in ring wall
	- Komdt van Heerden Shot
	- John Londt Shot
	- Coetzee Shot



Top:

The plan of Aberdeen showing the route taken by Carel van Heerden's commando when entering the town and van Heerden's chase for a specific horse.

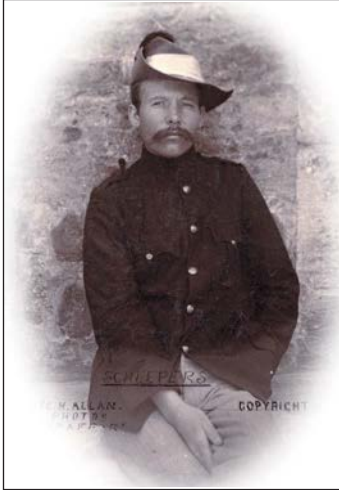
Centre left: Carel van Heerden's family with Carel van Heerden on right.

Left: Commandant van Heerden's monument in Aberdeen Cemetery.



# BOER WAR - BOER HERO

## COMMANDANT GIDEON JOHANNES SCHEEPERS



Although Gideon Scheepers was executed by a British firing squad, he was not one of the Cape 'rebels'. Born in the Transvaal, Scheepers was just 17 when he joined the republic's only professional military unit, the Staats Artillerie, in 1895. During the South African War he was seconded to the Orange Free State Artillery and promoted to commandant, leading a small commando in the Cape. A fearless and popular leader, Scheepers welded his men into a tight unit. They wrecked trains, burnt the farmsteads of those unsympathetic to the Boer cause and kept the British occupied trying to capture them. Scheepers was taken prisoner on a farm near Prince Albert and tried by a military court at Graaff-Reinet on more than 30 charges (including murder). Found guilty, he was executed outside the town beside an open grave in January 1902. His body was apparently disinterred by the British during the night and secretly reburied. Many believed that a British military court was not competent to sentence a non-British prisoner of war to death during the war, and there was an outcry.



*"I have never anticipated any personal danger from the Boers, for having lived amongst them nearly all my life, I know that they are not what the press represents them to be. I feel quite sure that they will respect defenceless women and children ... Five rebels have been put to death in Graaff-Reinet in the short space of a week. They are charged with murder if they have been in an engagement where British soldiers have fallen! I am afraid the Dutch will retaliate and our soldiers will have to suffer for this".*

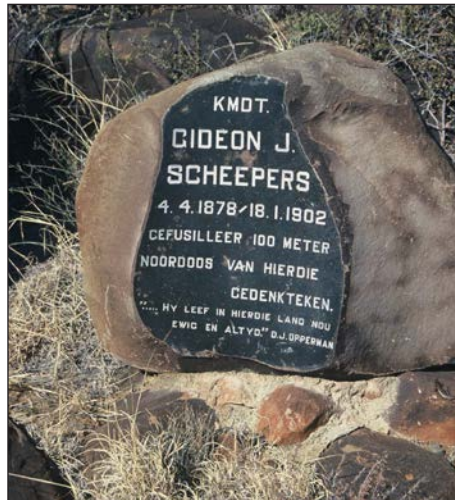
From Mrs Susie Brooks, Brooklyn, Graaff-Reinet.  
*Drummer Hodge. The Poetry of the Anglo-Boer War*  
 by M van Wyk Smith.

After Scheepers was captured with appendicitis, he was scrupulously nursed back to health so as to be fit to stand trial. A drawing of him in hospital.



A photograph of the trial of Scheepers, aged 23 years, taken by Ivie Allan.

The prosecutor was Edwin Tennant and his defence council was Thomas Auret, a local Graaff-Reinetter. The trial commenced on 18 December 1901.



The monument was erected by the Graaff-Reinet Afrikaans Cultural Society and is located approximately 2 km from the town on the road to Murraysburg [R63]. It is positioned as close as possible to the place of execution.

## Gideon Scheepers

During July 1901 Kommandants Scheepers and Schalk Pypers had set up their base in the most rugged part of the Camdeboo Mountains. They set up two camps, one of which was at Middelplaas. It is known from an intercepted letter that Scheepers had 240 men with him, 40 of whom were Free-Staters and the rest were Cape Rebels. Frequent raids were made from these two camps by small Boer patrols, and farmers on neighbouring farms were made to bring wagon-loads of grain and lucerne to the laagers.

The British were informed of their activities and organised a raid on the camps. On 14 July 1901 General French ordered four columns under Sir Charles P. Crewe, G. Wyndham, and Colonels Beaucamp, Doran and Scobell into the Camdeboo Mountains to try and trap Scheepers. However, Scheepers escaped on the steep sides of a small kloof and only twenty eight of his men were captured. Eight of these men were later executed, six of the Free-Staters were sent to POW camps, and the remaining fourteen were sentenced to imprisonment.

Kommandant Theron moved from Nieu Bethesda to the Camdeboo where he joined Scheepers.

Scheepers was captured a month later on 11 October 1901 at a farm house near Prince Albert, once known as Bloodriver Inn. He had fallen ill with appendicitis and was unable to continue travelling. A detachment of the 10th Hussars found him lying in a farm house where he'd been for three to four days, unable to move, and his Commando scattered and joined other bands of rebels. Scheepers was hospitalised and later brought before a military court after which he was led out of Graaff-Reinet on 18 January 1902 and shot.

SOURCE: *Graaff-Reinet and the Second Anglo-Boer War* by A.de Villiers Minnaar.

### The Gideon Scheepers Affair

The Gideon Scheepers affair, an incident during the Anglo-Boer War, has been kept alive to this day by the descendants of the Boers. Scheepers was from the Cape but took up arms on the side of the Zuid Afrikaanse Republiek against his Queen and Country.

Captured by the British, he was tried as a rebel in Graaff-Reinet, found guilty, and according to the history books, executed there.

Arthur James Knott had sent his family south of his headquarters at Middelburg in the Cape to a railway siding called Aberdeen Road in order to get away from the Boers.

The Knott-Craig grandmother maintained that Scheepers was not taken into the veld to be executed but by wagon to a train and then fifty kilometres down the line to Aberdeen Road Station. Feelings were running high in Graaff-Reinet at the time and transferring the execution out of the town was prudent to avoid an incident. On that particular night no one was allowed near the Graaff-Reinet station.

Scheepers was taken from the Aberdeen Road Station into the veld by wagon, to a place only a short distance from the Knott-Craig grandmothers' door, and shot over an open grave. After the grave had been filled in the whole entourage entrained and returned to Graaff-Reinet.

Gideon Scheepers death certificate is not available at the Cape Archives as no such certificates were issued in cases where Boers were shot as rebels.

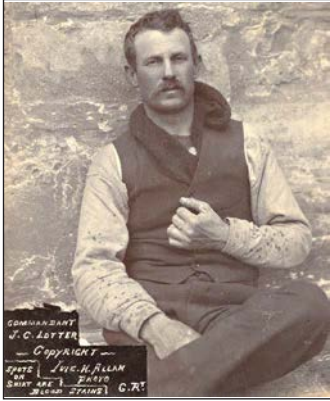
SOURCE: *The Knott-Craig Family History*. Permission by Allan Knott-Craig.

**WHEN VISITING GRAAFF-REINET DON'T FORGET TO VISIT THE MILITARY MUSEUM AT 'THE RESIDENCY' AND THE CULTURAL MUSEUM AT 'REINET HOUSE'. ALSO, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF EXCELLENT ACCOMMODATION PROPERTIES IN AND AROUND GRAAFF-REINET.**



# BOER WAR - BOER HERO

## COMMANDANT JOHANNES CORNELIUS LÖTTER



September marks the anniversary of the Battle of Paardefontein which took place in the hills of Mount Camdeboo, bringing an end to the pursuit of Commandant Johannes Lötter, believed to be one of the last Boer rebels. No visit at Mount Camdeboo is complete without a visit to this battle site and stirring account of this remarkable story.

It is the stuff legends are made of. Deep in the Camdeboo Valley, at a farm once known as Paardefontein, which today forms part of the much larger Mount Camdeboo Private Game Reserve, Anglo-Boer War hero 'Hannes' Lötter's luck finally ran out.

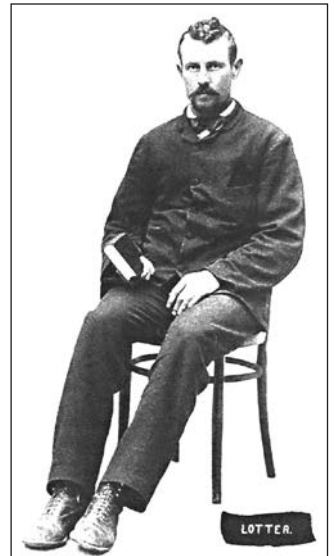
The year was 1901 and Lötter, then only 26 and a former barman from Nieu-Bethesda, had established himself as one of the Boers' toughest commando leaders. This bitter, ugly war was nearing its end and Lötter's was the last commando yet to be captured by the British, who had heard

whispers of their elusive enemy's activities for many months, but had repeatedly failed to engage him and his men.

There were 128 Boer fighters huddled in the sheep kraal when a British scout working under Colonel Harry Scobell came looking for them. It was a half-starved band of men, some mere boys, who had found shelter in a sheep kraal on the farm on the fateful night of 5 September 1901. Their clothes were reduced to rags and their shoes so worn that many only had sheepskins on their feet. And they might well have remained safe had it not been for the worst kind of bad luck - or so we believe.

The 9th Lancers 'A' Squadron, having got wind of Lötter and his rebels were hiding out on the farm, presumed they would be stationed at the old farmhouse. It being a dark and miserable night, they rode right past the kraal, totally unaware of Lötter and his men's presence. Then, after everyone had passed, one of the soldiers at the back dropped his rifle. The Boers woke up with a start and, believing the man to be a scout, shot him on the spot. This alerted the rest of the squadron, and a shoot-out ensued. Hopelessly outnumbered, many of the Boers lost their lives and the rest were captured, while the English too recorded several fatalities. Some of the injured were treated at farms in the areas, including at Camdeboo Manor, today one of Mount Camdeboo's magnificently restored farm houses.

Lötter was captured and later killed by firing squad in Middelburg, where he is buried. He is still regarded as something of a hero by many Afrikaners.



### That bugger Scobell

Tired, cold and hungry Cmdt. Lötter and his Commando took a little-used footpath up the mountain. It was raining, their tracks would be difficult to find, but as they slept fitfully in a farm shed that night they must have felt safe from the British forces who had been hounding them unmercifully of late. Their direction had been noted however, Col. Scobell was informed and he determined to catch them napping. The British saddled up in the dark and were guided to the farm Paardefontein. In the cold rain they waited for the dawn. Lötter's position was unfortunate - the whole Commando was asleep inside a low shed in a hollow. This meant that the British could surround him and fire downwards through the corrugated iron roof into a mass of closely huddled bodies. This was exactly what happened, a fierce fight took place, within ten minutes 51 men were killed or wounded. There were heavy casualties on both sides. After 45 minutes a white flag was raised. Lötter and Scobell eyed each other bleakly. Lötter was heard to say "I knew that bugger Scobell would get me sooner or later."

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### **Saved by an Antbear hole**

Daantjie Jonker an ‘*agterryer*’ or groom with the Boers had escaped around a grove of prickly pears, when the firing started at Paardefontein; here he found an antbear hole. Digging frantically with his hands he was able to widen it sufficiently to ease himself inside. Safe in his hiding place he heard the battle sounds die away. After three days a hungry and thirsty Jonker emerged to make his escape. He was the only member of Lötter’s Commando to evade capture.

### **Doctor Lötter**

Zirk Daniel Lötter (brother of Cmdt. Hans Lötter) had attended St Andrews College, Grahamstown before the war. Wounded in the eye at Paardefontein, he was sentenced to death for High Treason. This was commuted to 7 years in prison. He completed his medical studies at Edinburgh University after the war and practiced in Pearston for many years.

### **Not Neighbours!**

Lötter’s dispatch rider Pieter Wolfaardt, met his neighbour, a dispatch rider for the British. Wolfaardt was quicker on the draw, but recognizing his friend he put down his rifle saying “No neighbour, not us.” He got out a half-jack from his saddlebag. Finding a place to sit down they shared the brandy; Wolfaardt embraced his friend with a bear hug, swung himself onto his horse and trotted off. At the top of the hill he turned and waved, then vanished from sight.

## **THE HYENA TRAP**



A perfect example of a stone-trap on the farm ‘Bluegum House’ declared a National Monument in 1977.

The early farmers in the area had to cope with many problems, not the least of which were the marauding wild animals that preyed on their stock.

They had to devise means of eradicating these wild animals, and one method was to trap them. They built stone ‘traps’ in which they placed bait, probably meat, to draw the hyena or leopard into the closed structure. When the animal tugged at the lure a thong attached to it released a gate which fell to close the entrance. The animal was then shot through slots left in the stonework.

Martin Hinrich Karl Lichtenstein, a physician and naturalist, in his travels through the interior of the Cape from 1803 to 1806, became aware of these structures and wrote the following account

of them in his journal *Reisen im südlichen Africa in den Jahren 1803, 1804, 1805 und 1806*.

A translation of his comments are:

‘At almost every farm is to be seen at some little distance from the dwelling house, a wolwehuis, as it is called; that is, a snare for catching hyenas. It is a building from six to eight feet square, constructed of rough stones, with a trap-door, and a bait within, which closes, on the animal attempting to seize the carrion within. Snares of the same kind are made to capture leopard, only that they are closed by a beam from above, whereas the wolf-traps (wolf in those days referred to hyena) are quite open, because this animal neither springs or climbs.’

SOURCE: *National Monuments & Places of Interest* by E.S. Whitlock.



# BOER WAR & THE ANTARCTIC

## LIEUTENANT LAWRENCE EDWARD GRACE OATES



Lawrence Oates was born on St Patricks Day 1880. In 1901 he was commissioned into the 6th Inniskilling Dragoons whom he joined as they were fighting in the Anglo-Boer War.

As a much younger Second Lieutenant, Oates had arrived in South Africa in January 1901 attached to Colonel Charles Parsons' column. They had pursued the Free State commandos through the Oudtshoorn district, Klaarstroom and Willowmore, when they received a summons for help from Aberdeen. Two horse-commandos under Kommandants Gideon Scheepers and W.D.Fouché had raided the village.

The commandos withdrew into the flats around Aberdeen as reinforcements approached. The following day Oates was sent out on his first scouting patrol leading the Inniskillings.

They left the village at 0530 hrs that morning and 2 hours later were 10km away when they were fired upon by the Boers, who captured one scout and wounded 3 men. The patrol withdrew to a defensive position in a river bed. The Boers concentrated on Lt. Oates and his men, wounding several, and all but the two who could not move managed to carry out Oates' order to steal back to Aberdeen undetected, as ammunition had run out.

At 1030 hrs a young boer appeared with a white flag and a note signed by Fouché demanding immediate surrender and promising to release Oates at once. Oates did not give in; "We came here to fight, and not to surrender" was his message. Then a bullet shattered his left femur and lodged itself in the leg. He lay there until found at 1830 hrs. Oates was nursed in Aberdeen in the home of a bookkeeper, Mr Charles Harvey, where he stayed for some weeks until he could be sent to base hospital. Whilst in Aberdeen he celebrated his 21st birthday.

Ten years on of peace-time soldiering Oates was now 33 with the rank of Captain, and because of his passion for horses and dogs, exploration and adventure, he applied for leave from the regiment to join the ill-fated Captain Scott's South Pole expedition in 1911. During this expedition he was regarded by the other members as a very silent man, a tower of strength, and devoted to animals.

After a rough voyage from New Zealand to the Antarctic and many delays on the way to the South Pole, Captain Scott and his companions arrived on 18 January 1912 only to find that the Norwegian Amundsen and his team had reached the South Pole on 16 December 1911. Disappointed but undaunted Captain Scott's expedition turned for home only to be faced by further misfortunes.

It is from Captain Scott's diary that we know of Lawrence Oates' selfless courage. It was in helping Edgar Evans who was injured by a fall that he sacrificed his own safety and dangerously exposed himself to the searing bitter cold. Struck by the most dreadful frostbite and almost completely crippled, he struggled on, his one thought being not to hold back his companions. As soon as he saw that he was hindering the march, he asked his comrades to leave him where he was, in his sleeping bag. They refused, and for one more march he struggled gamely on, then as Captain Scott wrote. "He slept through the night hoping not to wake, but he awoke in the morning. It was blowing a blizzard. Oates said, "I am just going outside and I may be some time." He went out into the blizzard and we have not seen him since. We knew that Oates was walking to his death, but though we tried to dissuade him, we knew it was the act of a brave man and an English Gentleman".

It was on his birthday St Patricks Day 1912 that Lawrence Oates walked out into the snow to his death.

SOURCE: *Soldier and Explorer* by Sue Limb and Patrick Cordingley.

# WORLD WAR II HERO T/LIEUT. CECIL RHODES FEATHERSTONE

On 4 September 1939, the Union Parliament, by a small majority of 13, adopted a motion to enter the war against Nazi Germany. In Jansenville, the district sprang to arms - volunteers for active service coming from all walks of life.

The first contingent of volunteers left for the front in September 1940: On the occasion of the departure, the Mayor, Sid Fourie, addressed the parade on the Market Square:

“Those of us who, 25 years ago, went through the greatest of human contentions, little thought that a new generation, in its turn, would be seared in the flames of war.

I am proud of you. You are men of substance, intellectually and other- wise. You are drawn from responsible walks and stations in life. And I claim that Jansenville is sending the finest batch of men a town in South Africa could send. That you will acquit yourselves with honor to your- selves, with honor to Jansenville, and above all, with honor to South Africa - of that I am certain. So to your tasks - and God speed”.

Among the volunteers addressed that morning was Cecil Rhodes Featherstone. [In the First World War he served in Flanders and was mentioned in despatches.]

Soon after the Second World War broke out the people of Jansenville collected sheep as a gift to the people of Britain. 1 000 from the 1 200 collected were sent over, and the Committee responsible for the gift decided to sell the rejects, which realised the amount of £200. The sum was remitted with an accompanying letter to the British Minister of Food.



16th July, 1942

JANSENVILLE CHRONICLE

## EPIC DASH FROM TOBRUK

### OFFICER BRINGS OUT 49 MEN

The inhabitants of Jansenville were proud when news came through that Lt. Cecil Featherstone had brought out 49 men from Tobruk. On more than one occasion Lt. Featherstone asserted he would not allow himself to be taken prisoner,—no idle boast in the light of subsequent events. And when news went round that the fortress had to be surrendered, he collected his men and resolved to run or fight through. Here follows the story in Lt. Featherstone's own words; it is the story of the exploit of a modest but brave man:

“Up to 9.15 a. m. on that fateful day I knew that every South African was determined to fight to a finish against overwhelming armour, and when the news came the reaction on my platoon was to make a break for it to a man. I had 27

DMR and 8 N.E's, so we loaded our trucks determined to run through or fight to get through. We were very late in getting through the mine field as I first of all tried to contact Bun Kingwill. This almost proved to be our undoing as when I was approaching his position enemy tanks were advancing on to it, and there was every chance of my being cut off from my men who were waiting in a little hollow for my return. Anyway I turned back and after including in our convoy 7 men from another regiment we started off for the perimeter.

“When we approached the gap in the minefield we saw three or four cars in the wire which had been





## THE CITATION

*T/Lieut. C. R. Featherstone was in command of No. 14 Platoon D.M.R. in Tobruk, when advice was received that the garrison had surrendered and that all weapons and anything of value to the enemy had to be destroyed.*

*Although enemy tanks were approaching towards him, this Officer, without hesitation, rallied his men and others in the vicinity to escape. He led six trucks loaded with men through freshly made gaps in the minefields, and later came across and picked up a number of men, whose truck had broken down, abandoning all personal equipment to do so. The trucks were engaged by enemy mortar and Arty fire, one man being killed, but Lieut. Featherstone kept on, boldly passing through gaps in enemy columns. He was continuously harassed and frequently in difficulties, having to elude enemy elements, including tanks.*

*As a result of this Officer's determination, initiative and devotion to duty 46 men were restored to their units.*



*The War of 1917-1918.*

*London Regiment [T.F.]*

*2nd Lt. C.R. Featherstone, 1/7th Bn.,*

*was mentioned in a Despatch from*

*Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, K.T., G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.B.E.*

*dated 7th November 1917*

*for gallant and distinguished services in the Field.  
I have it in command from the King to record His Majesty's  
high appreciation of the services rendered.*

*Ernest Churchill*

*New Office  
Whitehall, S.W.*

*15th March 1918.*

*Secretary of State for War*

The Despatches Citation awarded to 2nd Lt. C.R. Featherstone, 1/7th Battalion of the London Regiment [T.F]. "...was mentioned in a Despatch from Marshall Sir Douglas Haig dated 7th November 1917 for gallant and distinguished services in the Field."

blown up by mines, and we therefore revised our idea of gaps, and went a little further east where we got all six trucks out safely. At this stage we picked up 17 more men whose vehicle caved in. We then proceeded onward but it wasn't too long before enemy artillery opened up on us. We scattered a bit and thanks to the half hearted shooting, we lost only one man (one of the men to whom we had given a lift.) Then onward through more mine fields and over main roads crowded with enemy transport directed by their controller who even tried to give direction to some of my trucks, thinking we did not know the way. I was actually driving the leading truck, so could not devote much attention to anything else. The element of surprise carried us through, and being the front truck I think we had the best chance. As we passed a battery of artillery about 100 yards from us, the officer waved us to stop; in turn, I waved him cheerily away. He became suspicious, and machine gun fire followed. The officer was shot by one of our men.

"Further on, a Jerry staff car drew up to let us pass. We judged vehicles crossing our path just to miss them. I was happily thinking everybody was with us, when I learnt that we had lost touch with three trucks. Never saw them again, but I hope the men are unhurt.

"On one occasion while vehicles were approaching us from all directions, we slowed down to allow two enemy motor cyclists to pass, before we got on one of the lug roads. As we loaded up folks along the road so we discarded baggage etc. In the end I had only the clothes in which I was standing, and all the men were in a similar plight. Ultimately after 24 miles of Jerry dodging we got through their lines in broad daylight, as all this was in the morning. We were picked up by our own A.A.s whom we first of all gave a good run for their money, not knowing for certain whose they were.

"We then proceeded down for about 360 miles before we joined up with Jack Southey where we spent the day resting. Actually 49 men were brought out in my three trucks. As regards the other three trucks I still have faint hopes that they will turn up - but very faint.

"Dewyl Kingwill and a Lt. Kinghorn of the 1st Division, were my mainstay, and I could not have done it without them. My only regret is that I did not follow out my first plan which was to go right out into the desert first and then turn east. If I had done so I might have had the other three trucks as well.

"I give you this brief account of our dash through the enemy lines; and the only excuse I have to offer for this dash is that a certain number of men got through and are here ready to fight again."

## WORLD WAR I HERO 2/LIEUT. C. R. FEATHERSTONE

During the First World War of 1914-1918 2/Lieut. Featherstone was mentioned in Despatches in the Citation shown left for bravery in Flanders, France.

The February Issue will feature the Eastern Cape; the 1820 British Settlers; Xhosa chiefs; Forts of the Eastern Cape; including stories and anecdotes.

If you wish to receive the FREE issues, email: [tony@tonywestbynunn.com](mailto:tony@tonywestbynunn.com)

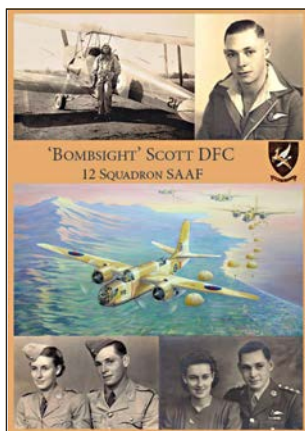
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The following is another of the many quality family history books I have produced. Each month an additional family history book will be featured.



### **'BOMBSIGHT' SCOTT DFC 12 SQUADRON SAAF**

The Second World War story of Captain James Henry (Jimmy) Scott who flew as an Observer with 12 Squadron South African Air Force.

Jimmy Scott, as he was known by his colleagues. At school he excelled at maths, a subject which helped him to obtain a scholarship to Grey High School in Port Elizabeth. He was an enthusiastic sportsman and on leaving school, he decided to join the South African Air Force to fight for his country, instead of entering university. His father opposed his choice, however James Scott's mind was made up.

He acquired his flying experience at Poteschefstroom Air Base, September 1941, where he did his elementary flying in a Tiger Moth. During his flying career with the SAAF he totalled 685 hours on the following planes: Tiger

Moth 46, Hart 71, Anson 178, Oxford 40, Hind 5, Blenheim 25, Baltimore 4, Boston 190, Dakota 45, Marauder 71, Harvard 10.

Jimmy Scott kept a daily diary of his life in the SAAF during the war years. It starts on 16 October 1942 when he left South Africa and continues to 16 May 1944 when he returned home.

The book contains many photographs of his life before joining the air force and a number of photographs of his exploits during the war in the desert and Italy as well as Malta.

He was flying Boston's and Marauders. He obtained his DFC for his bravery flying over the Mareth Line in the Western Desert when he was wounded by shrapnel.



"Wakened at 0430 for early morning raid on Mareth town, headquarters of German Brigade. After a quick breakfast we took-off at 0715 - 18 machines. Jerry put up the heaviest barrage ever seen in the Western Desert and we flew right through it and wrecked the town completely. I was hit in the right arm just as we crossed the coast and my arm went dead. Ten seconds later another piece hit the brim of my steel helmet and made a hole an inch long. We got back with 35 holes shot through the kite. After having the wound dressed by the M.O. I was taken over to the CCS at Zuara and spent the day there waiting removal to the RMS for x-ray."

There are additional exploits and vivid recollections of an Observer during sorties over Sicily, Italy, Yugoslavia and Lampedusa Island. Additional photos and scans of his life in a SAAF Squadron during the war and after.