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British Concentration Camps of the Second South African War (The Transvaal, 1900-1902)

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BRITISH CONCENTRATION CAMPS OF THE SECOND SOUTH AFRICAN WAR (THE TRANSVAAL, 1900-1902)

By

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The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the above named committee members.
This thesis is dedicated to the 50,000 noncombatants, black and white, mostly women and young children, who perished at the hands of their British captors in the concentration camps of the Second South African War; to a peace that triumphs over greed and arrogance; and to equality over racism. And finally, it is dedicated to Lieutenant Colonel Roger Alvin Poore, a British soldier of the South African War, who I met standing before his gravestone in the cathedral at Salisbury. He died leading his battalion in the Battle of Passchendaele in the First World War, another of the young men, women and children whose lives were cut short by the arrogance, greed and quest for power by the monarchies, dictatorships, and democracies of the twentieth century. I hope this thesis gives a voice to the dead of the concentration camps.
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I would like to acknowledge the superb help of Dr. Charles Upchurch, guiding me in not only my research of this thesis, but in mentoring this old soldier in the ways of academia. I hope one day to make him proud. As always, I thank my wife of 39 years, Mary Scott, who is the light of my life and who showed me those things in life which really count – through Christ. She and Emily Hobhouse would have been fast friends, doubtless working together in the camps.
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ABSTRACT

The Second South African War of 1899-1902 was fought for multiple reasons, ranging from the recent discovery of gold in the Transvaal to British trade relationships with the Germans in West Africa. Central to the road to war was the preservation of the British Empire in South Africa and the upholding of the prestige of the British Army. The war was fought between about 450,000 British, Colonial and native soldiers against an Afrikaner (Boer) and native force numbering about 78,000 combatants, with thousands of native Africans pressed into service on both sides. Despite early losses in conventional battles to Boer forces, the British were able by mid-1900 to invade and occupy the Boer capitals, leading the Boers to resort to guerilla tactics. The British response was a three-pronged strategy: first, destroying the areas where the Boer mounted commandos operated and pursuing the Boers with mobile columns; secondly, building lines of blockhouses and concertina wire across the wide open plains (veldt) to limit Boer mobility; and third, forcibly removing the Boer and African noncombatants from their destroyed farms and kraals into concentration camps.

This thesis examines the British concentration camps and seeks to establish who was responsible for them; what were the conditions were like inside of them, and why almost 50,000 noncombatants, both black and white, died in the camps during a period of about two years. These questions are explored through the use of official camp records, government reports and personal accounts from a wide range of involved individuals.

Most studies of the camps have concentrated on the effects of camp conditions and diseases. This study not only examines these themes, but looks beyond them into the headquarters of Lord Roberts, the man who established the camps, and reviews the decisions of Lord Kitchener, the general who was in charge of the camps when the majority of the deaths occurred. This study also exposes the complicity of the British government’s civilian officials who turned deaf ears to the escalating tragedy and withheld the extent of the humanitarian crisis from the British population. It was Emily Hobhouse, a British subject, who courageously brought the plight of the Boers and natives to the attention of the British and world opinion, and caused changes to be made which undoubtedly saved thousands of lives.

The findings of this study place the blame for the 50,000 camp deaths squarely on the British leadership. Generals gave orders to destroy Boer farms and native kraals on the veldt, and incarcerated destitute families in camps with poor medical and sanitary conditions and little food.
Rations were used as a weapon, and withheld from those families whose husbands were still fighting. British decisions caused the deaths of thousands of innocent people, both black and white, with the majority of the victims being children. It was an arrogant and racially motivated approach to the treatment of the Boers and natives alike that spawned the Generals’ indifference to the dying women, old men, and children. This study concludes it was the inept and uncaring senior leadership of the British Army, coupled with the “hands off” approach of the British government, that led England to implement a program comparable to contemporary notions of ethnic cleansing, taking Britain, at the dawn of the twentieth century, to the edge of the abyss of genocide.
INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth century took a violent turn into the twentieth in South Africa, particularly in the region that was to become its core: the Transvaal. War, invasion, rebellion, and state restructuring marked this place and time during which the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) a Boer state, was eclipsed by a British colonial entity soon to be meshed with other colonies in a union of South Africa, finally consummated in 1910.¹

Jeremy Krikler’s quote on the agrarian Transvaal, at the turn of century, accurately and succinctly captures the bloody collision between a modern, imperialistic, industrialized British nation and the pastoral, newly mineral rich, theocratic Transvaal Republic in the Second South African War of 1899-1902.² It falls short, however, in describing the absolute ruthlessness and devastation visited on the inhabitants of this independent republic. As British columns invaded and occupied the enemy capital, the Republic was annexed as a colony although hostilities were still ongoing, and a policy of scorched earth, complete with farm burnings, livestock slaughtering, and forced deportation of both white and black inhabitants from their homes to state concentration camps, was instituted. Far from being a war of “Liberal Imperialism”, the British war aim of unconditional victory, not peace, was fueled by economic greed and personal manipulation of events by British businessmen and leaders of the ruling Unionist Party.³ The prizes were the newly discovered gold mines of the Transvaal’s Witwatersrand, the reputation of British army, expansion of British territory during the “Scramble for Africa”, and preservation of the Empire.⁴

² Also referred to as the Boer War or Anglo-Boer War.
³ “Liberal Imperialism” is a term originating from Britain’s experience in Afghanistan, specifically dealing with an imperial power coming into a country specifically to help the native citizens; and an imperial government deriving power from local governments. See Thesis, Stephanie Laffer, FSU, Afghanistan as a Catalyst for Liberal Imperialism, Spring 2005, 1.
⁴ Thomas Pakenham, The Boer War (New York: Random House, 1979), xxi. Throughout his book, Pakenham makes the case that British political leaders responded to influences of the “gold bugs,” and that, combined with aggressive imperialists such as Milner in key positions in the Salisbury government, made war not possible but probable. In Pakenham’s Scramble for Africa (New York: Random House, 1991), British ambitions in South Africa are placed in the context of the larger European race for African territory and riches.
The focus of this study is the British concentration camps of the Second South African War, specifically those in the Transvaal. The near and far term effects the camps had on the inhabitants of the Transvaal, both Afrikaner and African; and on the British, their allies and Western Europe, is a key component in understanding the nature of the war and the peoples involved. Although not a political, military, or social study of the South African war, this study, by necessity, will touch on all these aspects as it focuses on the camp system.

Studies of the British camps often evoke emotions of anger, denial and sorrow. Early historical descriptions of the camps are polarized at opposite ends of a spectrum, ranging from beneficial “refugee camps” complete with hospitals and schools, to “death camps” aimed at the genocide of the Boer “volk.” While the Afrikaner camps have been the subject of historians since the late 1970’s, most of these studies are not on the total camp system. Only recently, since the centenary of the war, have the native camps received due attention. A study focusing on the Afrikaner and native Transvaal concentration camps and their impact on the people and culture of the Transvaal has not been published. This thesis fills that gap.

A study of the camps is relevant, although it has been almost a hundred years since the British occupied the Transvaal and the country became part of the free, democratic nation of The Union of South Africa. The British concentration camps in the Transvaal (and the Orange Free State) resulted in the deaths of at least 48,000 noncombatants under direct British control and responsibility and were, at that time, a departure from the actions previously taken by a “civilized” nation when at war with another white, Christian nation of European stock. It is this departure from “the norm” and its subsequent effects on European history that should concern

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5 It should be mentioned that Boer and Afrikaner are used interchangeably in the historical literature. “Boer,” which means “farmer” in Afrikaans, applies more to the white farmers of Dutch heritage who occupied the prairie (veldt) in small farms. It was the Boers who made up most of the commandos during the guerilla phase of the war, and it was their families that the British moved to the camps, or who came into the camps voluntarily to avoid starvation, or who wandered around the veldt to escape the British columns. In this study I will attempt to use “Afrikaners” when talking about the populace in general and “Boer” when talking about the veldt of the Transvaal.

6 At war’s end the British official history shows the number of white Afrikaners in concentration camps as 116,572, with 47, 150 in the Transvaal camps. Nowhere in the official history does it mention the number of deaths associated with the camps, nor mention the native camps. S.B.Spies, writing in 1977, puts the noncombatants in the white camps at 107,344, some 9,000 less than the official history. A total of 27,927 deaths are attributed to the white camps (Spies, 265), and this count has not been changed by more recent research. The death number for native camps has been adjusted upward from Peter Warwick’s initial 14, 154 (1983) to at least 20,000 (due to the work of Pretorius and Kessler in 2003). This is how the total of 48,000 camp deaths is documented. There are no accurate accounts of the number of Boers or natives who died wandering the veldt during the war or immediately afterward. Thus, the total number of deaths of 48,000 attributed to the camps is probably understated.
us. Based on this premise, this study focuses initially on seeking answers to the following questions:

Why would a cultured, democratic and “civilized” nation state, such as Great Britain, adopt and execute policies which literally turned the Transvaal (and Orange Free State, renamed the Orange River Colony) into wastelands?

Why did Britain send its own subjects, both Afrikaner and native noncombatants, into concentration camps, where because of malnourishment, disease, appalling conditions, mismanagement and genuine neglect, the noncombatants would die under British authority at a mortality rate of about 25 percent?  

How did the camps begin under British military control? Were there conscious decisions to put noncombatants into camps, or did the camp systems simply evolve because of other military decisions? Who made the initial decisions to establish the camps, the military alone, or was there British government involvement up front? Were the camps only part of a military strategy or was there a larger political agenda?

Was there intent to commit “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide” by the British leaders against the Afrikaners or the natives? If not, how does one explain the alarming death rates within a fifteen month period, and the seeming inattention of the British military to the mounting deaths in camps under their control?

Did British actions in the South Africa camps continue or even accelerate a precedent of war against non combatants begun by the Germans in France (1870) and the Spanish in Cuba (1898), thereby contributing to a European legacy eventually leading to genocides – specifically the Herero genocide in Southwest Africa (1904-1907), in which 45 percent died in the German camps, and leading eventually to the establishment of the Nazi camps of Dachau and Buchenwald in the 1930s?

Most importantly, what were the effects of the execution of the British policy on the Transvaal, with specific focus on families, both Afrikaner and African? What were the effects on British or Colonial soldiers and the British government and population?

The topic of the Second South African War in general and the concentration camps in particular, are subjects of significant scholarly study, both by British and South African

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8 Ibid.
historians. American historians have largely ignored this topic, with the requirement to have a reading knowledge of Afrikaans, the Dutch-based language of the Boers, in order to properly research the archives and read the diaries, letters and documents of the camp inmates being a major hurdle. The historiography of the war and camps can be divided into three main groupings.

Early contemporary accounts, primarily from British military participants, reporters and official historians, but also from some Afrikaner participants, are characterized by a preoccupation with the military aspects of the war. The concentration camps, the suffering of the noncombatants and the role of natives in the conflict are either simply overlooked, or mentioned in passing. The official British history of the war, compiled by Major General F. M. Maurice with M.H. Grant as editor, was written by British Army officers from field dispatches and reports, and concentrates on British military operations, logistics, and medical support. It largely ignores the establishment of the camps, the treatment of native and white noncombatants, the arming of the natives and the devastation of the Transvaal. The first volume’s publication was delayed until early 1906, as there was deliberate censorship by the Unionist government not to mention political events leading up to the war, and thus it covers only the military aspects.\(^9\)

A second major history of the war was published by the *Times* from 1900-1909, and edited by General L.S. Amery. It presents a more balanced viewpoint of the war, but is also primarily dedicated to military operations.\(^10\) Contemporary accounts by such notables as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Winston Churchill also appeared, and read as if Britain and her soldiers were on a great crusade in South Africa. These accounts are generally discounted by serious historians.

Two notable exceptions to the politicized contemporary sources mentioned above, are the books and journals of Miss Emily Hobhouse (1901-1904), who visited the camps, and the reports published by His Majesty’s Government on the operation of the “refugee camps” (as they

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\(^9\) F.M. Maurice and M.H. Grant (eds.), *The Official History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 7 Vols., 1906-1910). Initiated by COL G.F.R. Henderson, who died during its writing, it was completed by MG Maurice. He was told to rewrite Henderson’s chapters because they were too hard on the Boer leaders (remember Britain was trying to establish cordial relations with its new colonies) and criticized the mistakes of the British generals. All this was edited out of the final product at the direction of the newly installed government. See Jay Luvaas, *The Education of an Army* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 188-189.

\(^10\) L.S. Amery (ed.), *The Times History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902* (London: Sampson Low, 7 Vols., 1900-1909). The incoming British government decided, in an effort to affect cordial relations to its new colonies, to insure the *Times* history and the official history did not point fingers at the causes of the war. Therefore the editing of the two contemporary, overall histories before publication resulted in the late publication dates.
were initially called by British army and government). Hobhouse’s newspaper articles and reports first exposed the tragedy of the camps to the British public and the world. Her actions led to the government moving the Afrikaner camps under the civilian leadership in South Africa and making changes that saved many lives of camp inmates.

Official government reports, part of the Command Documents produced for the British Parliament, provide answers from the General in Charge (Lord Kitchener) to questions posed by the government once the existence of the camps became known and the death rates climbed. These documents, available from the National Archives of the UK and other holdings (Stanford University), contain reports from the camp superintendents on the internal needs and workings of the camps. Included in the official reports is the December 1901 report by the Committee of Ladies, a group of ladies appointed by the Secretary of State for War to visit the camps, identify problems and provide recommendations to the government. 11 These documents provide valuable insights into the operation of the camp system. It is important to note that neither Hobhouse nor the Committee of Ladies visited the separate native camps, and Hobhouse was prevented by Kitchener to go into the Transvaal.12

There is a notable lapse in historiography of the war from about 1930, the date by which most all the diaries and personal papers of the major participants had been published, until the 1960s and 1970s, when Rayne Kruger’s Good-bye Dolly Gray and Byron Farewell’s The Great Anglo-Boer War appeared. Both these works concentrate on military operations; neither delves into the role of natives in the conflict or the extent of the noncombatant deaths in the camps. It was as if the natives were spectators to the British and Boers fighting a major war in their backyard. The arming of the natives, their use as scouts, laborers and blockhouse guards was not included.13 Later research clearly establishes the war was fought by both natives and whites, yet neither the South African or British contemporary historians included the natives within the scope of their writings.

12 Emily Hobhouse, Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies, (London: Friars Printing Association, Limited, 1901), 8. Miss Hobhouse was twice specifically denied permission by Kitchener to visit the Transvaal camps.
In 1979, the definitive history of the war was published by Thomas Pakenham. Simply titled *The Boer War*, this book broke new ground, as it contained material from actual interviews of participants, source material that showed British government officials schemed with industrialists to find a way to take over the mineral riches of the Transvaal, that the concentration camp systems for Afrikaner and natives resulted in the deaths of thousands of noncombatants, the British armed thousands of natives, and the Boers used natives as camp aides, gun bearers on commando, and for constructing fortifications. Following on the heels of Pakenham was Peter Warwick’s illuminating book, *Black People and the South African War*, which outlined the effects of the war on the natives, their participation in the war against the Boers, and their losses in the black camps. Pakenham’s and Warwick’s scholarship filled the historiography gap of native participation in the war.

Preceding the publications by Warwick and Pakenham, a doctoral thesis by S.B. Spies, titled *Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer War* was published in 1977. This is the definitive and baseline historical work on the relationship of British military and civilian leaders with the noncombatants of the Transvaal (and the Orange Free State). Later books and journal articles concerning the war and the camps consistently reference Pakenham, Warwick and Spies.

The third and last grouping of historical works coincides with the centenary of the war and represents not only an expansion of the research by Pakenham, Warwick and Spies, but also contains new, significant work on the gender, race and social aspects of the war. Examples of these studies are *Writing a Wider War*, edited by Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie, which provides essays on the roles of African tribes in the war, gender, women and disease, and British nursing in South Africa. In addition, journal articles such as Paula Krebs’s “The Last of the Gentlemen’s Wars: Women in the Boer War Concentration Camp Controversy”, published in 1992, served to highlight the role of women in the conflict. This

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14 Pakenham, *The Boer War*.
last grouping of historical works ends in about 2003 with the publications of two South African historians, Fransjohan Pretorius and Stowell Kessler, whose scholarship has served to further document the role of natives in the conflict and brings the native concentration camps into clearer perspective. Pretorius’ book, *Scorched Earth* (2001), represents the latest account on the war and the camps in particular and highlights the plight of native and Afrikaner families in the conflict. 19 Kessler’s work in the archives of the Transvaal has yielded a better appreciation of the native concentration camps, and verified a new, higher number of native deaths.

Primary sources used to research this thesis included many of the British Command Documents related to reports on the camps, the Committee of Ladies report and the journals of Emily Hobhouse, including her translations of the accounts of Boer women in *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell* (1902). *The Official History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902*, as well as *The Times History of the War in South Africa 1899-1902*, were consulted for overall accounts of the war and some specifics on the camps. Cecil Headlam’s collection of Lord Milner’s papers, published in 1931-1935, and the diary of Susarha Nel, an inmate of the camp at Mafeking (1902) provided additional contemporary insights.

The records of the Transvaal camps are in the Transvaal Archives Depot in Pretoria, South Africa. These and other records in that depot and other archives in South Africa were used by Spies (1977) and more recently by Kessler and Pretorius in researching their latest accounts of the camps. These records are not on microfilm or fiche, and my attempts to obtain them have been unsuccessful. However, any further work in this area must access the records, along with the records of the Military Governor of Pretoria, Department of Refugees, and the Native Refugee Department, which administered the African camps. This study therefore has utilized secondary source journals, books and papers of authors who have used the archives and have included findings and data from the archival material in their works.

A wealth of secondary sources was used and is described in the historiography outlined above and in the annotated bibliography. A reading knowledge of Afrikaans, a language difficult to master, is required for additional in-depth research. Of all the British scholars, only Pakenham learned Afrikaans in order to research and write his history. An examination of the files within the archives, especially the diaries and letters from the Boer women in the camps, requires this

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skill. This study employs translations of available sources, such as that from Emily Hobhouse’s published material, which she translated herself.

There remain significant gaps in the historiography of the concentration camps. Most notably is the absence of primary material from the native camps themselves. There were very limited official reports to the British government on the native camps, mostly at the overview level. Most information on the camps comes from the official documents of the Native Refugee Department, written by the superintendents, and officials, all in English. Accounts from the black inmates themselves (as opposed to the Afrikaner inmates, who were visited by the Committee of Ladies and had Emily Hobhouse to write down and translate their accounts) are very sparse, although some oral histories have survived. As many natives could neither read nor write, their stories were mainly passed down orally. An exception to this paucity of native accounts is a 1996 book by Charles Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine*, which is a researched account from primary sources and verbal histories of the life of Kas Maine, a South African sharecropper. This book provides insight into the travels of African tenant farmers from the Orange Free State into the southwestern Transvaal at the turn of the century and a glimpse into the relationships of Boer farmers and their tenants. 20

Owen Coetzer’s *Fire in the Sky: The Destruction of the Orange Free State, 1899-1902*, written in 2000, accurately recounts the British invasion and subsequent devastation of that republic by Lord Robert’s massive columns. There existed no similar study for the Transvaal camps and related destruction of farms on the Highveldt by the British columns. This thesis provides that comprehensive study of the Transvaal camps and can be used as an accompanying volume to Coetzer’s work. 21

This study of the British concentration camps (both Afrikaner and native) in the Transvaal (formerly the Zud Afrikanish Republik, or ZAR), suggests the following answers to the questions posed earlier in this Introduction:

The destruction of the Transvaal was related to Britain’s inability to achieve a decisive battlefield victory against growing Boer guerilla forces. The British military was directed by the imperialist Unionist government to pursue a military strategy in South Africa aimed at

unconditional surrender, achieving a complete victory, not peace. This policy, coupled with the racial arrogance of the British military and government leaders against the Boers and Natives alike, led to the adoption of a military strategy which assured the destruction of the Transvaal.

The strategy of clearing the veldt and incarcerating the populace, both Afrikaner and native, was, by modern United Nations definition, an “ethnic cleansing” of the Transvaal Colony. It is, however, somewhat problematic to apply a modern yardstick to earlier actions.

If the British military had been left unchecked and the guerilla war continued beyond May 1902, the mounting concentration camp deaths could have easily escalated to genocidal levels based on decisions and actions by the British military. Only the intervention of the British public and subsequent worldwide opinion, forced the British government to transfer Afrikaner camps from military to civilian control, and require accountability from the military leaders, thereby reversing the momentum on a gradual slope to genocide.

The senior military leaders’ intent was to deliberately execute an “ethnic cleansing” of the Transvaal, with this being solely a military solution to the insurgency. Due to an initial “hands off” approach supported by the civilian leadership, Britain’s military actions drifted into an abyss of mismanagement and neglect by the generals, directly causing the high mortality rates of the concentration camps. While I find no evidence of premeditated intent to commit mass murder or genocide, I have found an intent to clear the Boers and natives off the Transvaal veldt, and subsequent intent to remove them from South Africa both physically and as a political force, both of which failed.

The British actions, following the precedent set by the Spanish in the 1898 Cuban insurrection and begun only months after signing the Hague Agreements, failed to go unnoticed by other European nations. The legacy of British “ethnic cleansing” and concentration camps contributed to the German camps and genocide of the Hereros in Southwest Africa and later to the camps established at Dachau and Buchenwald by the Third Reich. The leadership of the Third Reich frequently quotes the British as “inventing” the concentration camps and killing thousands of noncombatants.22

To understand the camps, one must first understand the war; and to understand the war, one must first understand South Africa and why the Afrikaners and British came there. A brief detail of the causes and conduct of the Second South African War, with emphasis on British military

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strategy and geography, is contained in Chapter two. Chapter three outlines the beginning of the guerilla phase of the war; establishment of the concentration camp system, for both natives and Afrikaners; and investigates why the camps were established and if there was precedent in Cuba, France, or the Sudan.

The Transvaal camps are examined in Chapter four, in an effort to determine what specifically happened. The death rates in the camps; the reasons for the debacle; the impact of Emily Hobhouse and the Committee of Ladies on the operation of the camps; and the transfer of the Afrikaner camps to the civilian government are investigated.

Specific Afrikaner and native camps, drawing on the individual experiences of the Afrikaners, natives and British in the camps, and the cultural differences in medical care, are covered in detail in Chapter five. Also included is a description of the Brandfort native camp. Where direct native experiences could not be found, I have endeavored to reconstruct the camp experience from existing accounts.

Chapter six, covering peace and the aftermath, puts the camps and deaths in historical perspective. Was it neglect or intent that killed thousands of Afrikaners and natives? Was it an unplanned “ethnic cleansing” or actions that got out of hand? The Conclusion summarizes the overall effects of the camps on the Transvaal and its peoples; the legacy of the camps, and seeks to fix responsibility for the thousands of deaths.

The lesson learned from this study is that a nation-state’s moral value system, even if built on Judeo - Christian principles or other such ethical systems, can slip into the cruelest of actions, e.g., “ethnic cleansing” or “genocide,” if its leaders are unchecked and driven by greed, and bent on domination, expansion and victory, not peace. British leaders were on the way to genocide in South Africa before they were stopped by the actions of the public and world opinion, a condition that would later not hamper the leaders in Nazi - controlled Germany. This ability for a people and world to apply pressure to a government is strength of a democracy versus a totalitarian dictatorship or monarchy. In the final analysis, good strong and accountable leadership was required but found lacking. Britain’s leaders, not its people, drifted to the abyss of history’s condemnation, and it took Britain’s people to pull them back.
THE SECOND SOUTH AFRICAN WAR

We are going to war in defense of principles – the principles on which this Empire has been founded, and upon which alone it can exist. ... The first principle is this – if we are to maintain our existence as a great power in South Africa, we are bound to show that we are both willing and able to protect British subjects everywhere when they are made to suffer from oppression and injustice. ... The second principle is that in the interests of the British Empire, Great Britain must remain the paramount Power in South Africa.23

Joseph Chamberlain, Colonial Secretary
House of Commons
October 1899

I precipitated the crisis, which was inevitable, before it was too late. It is not a very agreeable, and in many eyes, not very creditable piece of business to have been largely instrumental in bringing about a big war.24

Sir Alfred Milner, High Commissioner, to Lord Roberts, General in Charge, South Africa
6 June 1900

The British Empire is a mighty empire; but we know that whoever may be mighty, the Lord our God is Almighty. Brother Afrikaners! the great day is at hand. The God of our father will be with us in our struggles: the Lord, whose arm has not been shortened so that He cannot help those who call to Him in their time of trouble. Let us lay aside our trust in princes, and raise our eyes in supplication to God, our Banner. By His help we will do great deeds. ... War has broken out. What is it to be? – a wasted and enslaved South Africa, or – a free, United South Africa? Come, let us stand shoulder to shoulder and do our holy duty! The Lord of Hosts will be our leader.25

F. W. Reitz, Sec of State, Transvaal
November 1899

The above three quotes illustrate the divergent views held by senior political leaders at the beginning of the South African (Boer) War. Chamberlain’s quote in the House of Commons a week after hostilities had started was obviously meant for public consumption. For Chamberlain, “principles” were the guiding factors. Milner’s quote in a letter to Lord Roberts in June, 1900, some six months into the war, reveals the arrogance some senior British statesmen demonstrated in directing the affairs of Empire – personally initiating wars. There were no lofty principles in Milner’s actions. Reitz’s quote, meant to be read by the Afrikaner people in November 1899, describes the totally different mindset of the Afrikaners regarding their commitment to the war, clearly showing the marriage of church and state within the republics’ governments. The clash of a British secular government with Afrikaner governments directed by religious beliefs as much as political interests is an underlying thread of this study.

There is no singular cause of the Second South African War. A multiplicity of factors, with synergistic impacts, brought Britain and the Afrikaner Republics to conflict. Events leading to the Second South African War of 1899-1902 are grounded in the mineral resources of the Transvaal, British imperialism, the Boer and African farming culture on the veldt, the population diversity and distribution in the colonies and republics of South Africa, and the location of the Transvaal (and Orange Free State) on the tip of southern Africa.

Although this study draws on a wide range of issues, to include political and military strategies and impacts of personalities, there are two significant and interrelated areas which require our specific inquiry, and will provide us background, informing us on the causes and later conduct of the war: first is the geography – principally location, climate and population of the geographical area of South Africa in 1899; and second is the history of the British, Africans and Afrikaners in that area.

Before delving into the above two subjects, we need to understand what “location” means in geographical terms. Much like property in a real estate transaction, the overriding geographical factor in the history of a people and an area is usually location. Location cannot be described completely in terms of terrain, temperate, rivers, etc. In many cases, the pivotal issues in location are the relationships of a land and its people with other lands and people in proximity. In the case of South Africa, at the turn of the twentieth century, its geographical location, as much as

newly discovered mineral resources, would determine its future. While it is not the intent of this paper to conduct an exhaustive South African geographical survey, with its sub disciplines of physical, historical, political, and economic, or population geography, it is important to know that geography has been a consistent and determining influence on the history and future of South Africa. It was not solely the Transvaal’s geographic location on the African continent, but its physical relationships to other British colonies and railroad access to the Portuguese port of Delagoa Bay which would contribute to the tipping of the scales from peace to war.

The central location of the Transvaal may have proved its undoing. As we will see, its efforts to expand to the Indian Ocean were blocked by the British at Delagoa Bay and in Swaziland, and its sister republic, the Orange Free State, was similarly blocked in its efforts to expand through Basutoland to the sea. The British colony of Natal was first occupied by the Boers, but then seized and colonized by the British to insure Transvaal expansion remained in check.

Additionally, it is important to think and speak of factors in a wide, interrelated context. For example, when considering the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold on the Witwatersrand in any formula leading to war, it must be remembered that it was not just the discovery of the minerals, but the explosion and impacts of new technology and the availability of coal and cheap labor which allowed the exploitation of this discovery, resulting in the sudden wealth of the Transvaal. The growing railroad networks and the advance of mining techniques are then as much a contributor to the war as the actual mineral discoveries themselves. The synergies of the technological revolution in the Transvaal is but one, although important, of the factors which led to the war.

**Geography - Location, Climate and Population**

The physical geography of South Africa is as diverse as its people, and although classified as semi-arid, it varies considerably in climate and topography. These variations in climate and agricultural conditions considerably shaped the settlement of South Africa, the placement of its

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populace on the ground and resulting culture. In 1899, people and the land were woven together in a tapestry that was undergoing significant changes due to the mineral revolution.  

South Africa stretches between the 22nd and 34th degrees of south latitude, and is part of the subtropical zone. However, compared to other regions at this latitude, temperatures in many areas of South Africa are consistently lower, influenced primarily by proximity to oceans and higher altitudes. It enjoys something close to the temperature ranges of California. For example, the cold Benguela current causes moderate temperatures on the West Coast, and on the central plateau the altitude keeps the average temperature below 86 degrees Fahrenheit in summer. In winter, however, temperatures will drop to or below the freezing point. It is warmest in the costal regions, and rains there mainly in the summer months. Annual rainfall in the area averages about 20 inches or less, with rain decreasing as one moves westward from the eastern mountains.  

The seasons in the southern hemisphere are the direct opposite of those of the northern hemisphere. The South African winter is therefore June – August.

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30 As will be explained later in this study, the discovery of diamonds at Kimberly and gold in the Transvaal altered the population landscape of the Transvaal. An area which was previously a pastoral, sheep raising land, became industrialized and thousands of people, Afrikaners, Uitlanders (foreigners) and natives moved onto the land.

Of the many countries in Africa, the climate in the South African area was most conducive to European settlement.  

Along the coastal regions, especially in the south near Cape Town, the coastline is narrow, with the coastal plain separated from the interior of the country’s high inland plateaus by a mountainous escarpment. Rivers flow into the sea along the coastline, but none are navigable (thereby making the railroads so important in 1899) and there are few natural harbors, due to a lack of fresh water along the coast.

As late as 1884, railway construction in South Africa was behind most of the other British colonies, with track laid only in the Cape Colony and Natal. There was not a single track laid in the Transvaal or Orange Free State. Doubtless, the discovery of gold in the Transvaal in 1886 spurred railway construction, but it was not until 1892 that a railway line from Pretoria and Johannesburg to the Cape was completed and in 1894 a line from Pretoria to Delagoa Bay, in Portuguese territory. Consequently, towns and settlements sprung up along the new railway lines.

In the west, the great inland Karoo plateau, in the northern Cape Colony, where rocky hills and mountains rise from the sparsely populated scrubland, is very dry, especially towards the northwest and the Kalahari Desert. Annual rainfall is rarely more than four inches, and occurs only between December and April, when tropical thunderstorms enter the Kalahari basin. It is extremely hot in summer, and icy in winter (see Fig. No 2.1 above). In winter, June to August, the air is dry and daytime temperatures stay around 77 degrees Fahrenheit. But the nights can be harshly cold. Not suitable for farming, the area was sparsely settled and occupied mostly by hunters and herders.

Moving to the east, up on the high inland plateau, the eastern edge of the Karoo gives way to the flat surface of the Orange Free State, which although semi-arid, receives more rain than the western desert. Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State, receives about 1.8 feet of annual rain. Roughly the size of England, the Free State is north of the Orange River from the Cape Colony. Elevation of the Free State is between 4,000 to 5,000 feet, and to the northeast, is Natal, a British colony in 1899. The Drakensberg Mountains form part of the border with Natal. The country is characterized by miles of gently rolling plains, with most river beds from 40 to 80 feet below the tableland. Average winter temperature is around 49 degrees Fahrenheit, with hard

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32 John J. Stephens, Fuelling the Empire (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd., 2003), 190-197.
frosts common at night. For the rest of the year, temperatures average 66 degrees Fahrenheit. Rainfall is from sixty to seventy days per year and falls quickly in the summer (much like the monsoons of Southern Arizona).

Major towns in the Free State were clustered along the Cape Town to Johannesburg railway line, with Bloemfontein, the capital, being the largest, with an estimated population of about 4,000 in 1899. Kroonstad, which would become the temporary capital, lay further north along the railway line. In the census of 1904, Harrismith and Kroonstad were the only towns having more white inhabitants than natives, and almost 50 percent of the white population of the Free State lived in Bloemfontein.

The chief industry of the Orange Free State was agriculture, mainly sheep farming and raising stock. Grain, oats and barley were grown mostly in the eastern region, with “mealies,” the chief staple of the natives, being predominant there. The Free State was largely a pastoral country, with farming the main occupation. Epidemics of rinderpest had swept the country in 1895-1896 decimating the live stock.

To the north of the Vaal River, which separated the Free State from the Transvaal, is the high plateau, or Highveldt, of South Africa, with Johannesburg located at 1,740m (about 5,700 feet, higher than Denver, Colorado) . Rainfall occurs heaviest in the eastern Transvaal, in summer, from October to March, but is much less in the western regions near the desert. Winters on the Highveld are cold, but snow is rare. Temperatures rise to 70 degrees Fahrenheit in the daytime, but can fall to below zero at night. The Highveldt is somewhat like the terrain and weather of southern Arizona, on the high Sonoran Desert.33 Bordered by the Drakensburg Mountains to the east, the Highveld of the Transvaal is highest to the east of Johannesburg, 5,000 – 6,000 feet, eventually sloping down to 5,000 feet in the central veldt to about 4,000 feet in the west, on the Bechuanaland border.

Due to its hospitable climate, the Highveldt is the most developed part of South Africa, with Johannesburg and Pretoria being the major towns. Gold deposits near Johannesburg are indicative of the mineral richness of the Highveldt, markedly different from the pastoral prairies of the Free State.

33 Ibid.
To the north and east of the Highveld, where the land drops in altitude and temperatures rise, is the Lowveldt (Natal). ³⁴ It is here that South Africa’s subtropical climate is evident. Temperatures climb above 100 degrees in the summer, and rainfall averages 32 inches per year, starting in September and lasting until May. The climate is more tolerable in the winter months of June – August, when days are mild and nights cool. ³⁵ Natal has a major port, Durban, and there is a single track railroad running from Durban to Johannesburg.

South Africa has two major river systems, the Limpopo in the north, which forms the northern border of the Transvaal with Zimbabwe (Rhodesia in 1899), and the Orange River, with its tributary, the Vaal, running across the veldt from east to west before emptying into the Atlantic. In 1899, the Orange River formed the boundary between the Cape Colony and the Orange Free State, with the Vaal forming the southernmost boundary of the Transvaal, separating it from the Orange Free State. In such a dry country, irrigation and dams are important, but in 1899, these did not exist.

The agriculture of the Afrikaners was constrained by arid land and rainfall. Irrigation was not largely practiced, damming of rivers relatively unknown, and thus farms tended to be rather large to produce a living. Modern fertilizers, fencing and crop rotation were unknown to the Boers on the veldt. Rivers, generally cut well into the ground, were major obstacles for transportation. The limited crossings were known as “drifts”. ³⁶

The Transvaal (refer to Fig. 2.1) was landlocked in 1899, bordered by the British colonies of Cape Colony (Southwest) and Natal (Southeast); the Orange Free State (South); the Bechuanaland Protectorate (West); Rhodesia (North); and Portuguese East Africa and Swaziland (East). The British colony of Natal blocked the Transvaal’s access to a deep water port (Delagoa Bay) in the east, and the Cape Colony’s northern districts blocked its expansion to the west. Consisting of about 118,160 square miles, roughly half the size of Texas and larger than Great Britain and Ireland combined, the Transvaal was a nation of rural, isolated farmers on the veldt,

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³⁴ The term “veldt” refers primarily to the wide open rural spaces of South Africa, in particular to flatter districts and areas covered in grass or low scrub. It literally means “field”. The interior of southern Africa consists of a high plateau know as the Highveld mostly above 5,000 feet in elevation, an area of gently undulating grassy plains. This Highveld is what characterized the western Transvaal and northern Orange Free State in 1899.
with large concentrations of Europeans and Uitlanders in Johannesburg and mining towns. In 1904, the first census was taken by the British, and it found only 951,802 acres, less than two percent of the country’s total acreage, was under cultivation, with nearly half being farmed by natives.

![Population of South Africa (1899)](image)

**Fig 2.2 – Populations of South Africa (1899)**

The population of the South African geographical area (Cape Colony, Natal, Orange Free State, and the Transvaal) in 1899 was approximately 4.7 million persons (See Fig. 2.2 above) with 3,500,000 Africans making up 74 percent of the total. Whites, numbering about 830,000, made up only 18 percent of the entire population. Asians and other coloureds (mixed race, descendants of slaves brought to South Africa by the Dutch), totaling 400,000, made up the remainder (8 percent).

The white population was distributed among the two colonies and two republics, with about 480,000 persons being Afrikaans-speaking, thus comprising some 58 percent of the total white population. Less than half of the Afrikaners lived in urban areas (See Fig. 2.3, next page).

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37 *Uitlanders* was the Afrikaner term applied to foreigners in the Transvaal, principally to the British engaged in the gold mining business and finances.


39 Population data in Fig. No. 2-5, comes from state almanacs of the ZAR, Natal, etc. and is found in an essay by Andre’ Wessels, “Afrikaners at War”, John Gooch (ed.), *The Boer War* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 73.
Significant is the low number of Afrikaans/Afrikaners in the entire population of South Africa – about ten percent.  

In the South African area, the African natives largely lived on tribal lands, roamed the veldt with their herds, were tenant farmers on Afrikaner isolated farms in the Orange Free State and Transvaal, worked in the diamond or gold mines in Kimberley or Johannesburg, or worked on larger commercial farms in the Cape Colony and Natal. The Coloured population and Asians were mostly associated with the mines, urban areas, and large commercial farms. The role of the Africans in the war was influenced by their locality and their loyalties. The Bakgatla of the Pilanesberg district in the Western Transvaal actively fought the Boers on the side of the British. In addition, the Ngwane, in northern Natal were also loyal to the British. African tenant farmers on the veldt tended to support their Boer landlords. In subsequent chapters, this study will explore in some detail the impact of the war on the Africans in the Transvaal, who lived mainly on Afrikaner farms and in the urban areas where they worked in the mines.

The next chart’s data, when compared with the history of the war, provides an assessment of the effectiveness of overall Afrikaner strategy. Fig. No. 2.4 (next page) shows there were more

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40 You can roughly equate Afrikaans-speaking persons to Afrikaners, although there were blacks and others who spoke Afrikaans, e.g. tenant farmers on Boer farms, some blacks who worked in the Cape Colony, etc. For the purpose of this study the number of speakers and Afrikaners are assumed to be the same. See Gooch, 74.

41 Greg Cuthbertson, Albert Grundlingh, and Mary-Lynn Suttie (eds.), Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902 (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2002), 85-114; 115-135. This collection of essays on the war features several papers on the role of the Africans in the conflict. Specific impacts will be covered in following chapters of this study.
Afrikaners in the Cape Colony than the Orange Free State and Transvaal combined. In addition, further research shows that within the Transvaal, Afrikaners made up only 49 percent of the white population, with the remainder being classed as Uitlanders or foreigners. It was this imbalance that led to grievances and which the British government advanced as a principal reason for the war in 1899. The Transvaal’s Afrikaners made up only 31 percent of the total number of Afrikaners in South Africa, with the Orange Free State having 15 percent. This total of 46 percent (approximately 219,000) shows that when war broke out, less than half of the total Afrikaners in South Africa were in the two republics that declared war on Britain. The Cape Colony and Natal, containing 54 percent of the Afrikaners, or 260,000, never declared war against the British, although some 10-12,000 Cape Afrikaners did join the forces of the two republics. In other words, half the available Afrikaners failed to take up arms against the British – the Boers fought at half strength.

![Fig. 2.4 – Distribution of Afrikaners in South Africa](image)

The population of South Africa became more diverse with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley (Cape Colony) and gold in the Witwatersrand (Transvaal). An influx of Uitlanders and natives into the mines, and in the case of Johannesburg and the Transvaal, political upheaval, was the result, in many cases incited by the British. The failure of the Cape Colony (and Natal) to rise up and declare war against Britain, despite having over 250,000 Afrikaners living there, shows the Afrikaners of the Orange Free State and Transvaal were not united with the Cape
Afrikaners in their struggle for independence against Britain. A more aggressive and perhaps successful initial Afrikaner military strategy could have been to occupy the Cape Colony and Natal ports, thus denying the British easy landing access in the early phases of the war. This bold action may have influenced significant numbers of the Cape and Natal Afrikaners to have declared independence from Britain, and joined their brothers, presenting a very difficult set of issues for the British to overcome. 

**A History of Conflict**

In 1899, the term “South Africa” would apply geographically, but not politically, to the British crown colonies of the Cape Colony and Natal and the two independent Boer republics: the *Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek* (South African Republic, or the Transvaal, as called by the British) and the Orange Free State (See Fig. 2.5). 

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42 Maurice, *The Official History of the War in South Africa*, 377. In Maurice’s official history of the conflict, there are references supporting the theory that more aggressive raids or invasions by the Boers into the Cape Colony early on in the war would have secured the support of more “disaffected colonists”.

43 The Union of South Africa would not become a political entity until 1910 when the former republics joined the Cape and Natal Colonies into a union under the Crown. In 1899, the two Boer republics were sovereign nations, located to the north/northwest of Natal, which was annexed by Britain in 1843, and north of the Cape Colony, ceded from the Dutch in 1814.
The British Cape Colony, located at the southern tip of the African continent, occupied a strategic position on the trade routes from Europe to India, protecting the sea lanes to the east. The original European settlers, Dutch and mainly Calvinists, called themselves “Afrikaners” or “Boers.” Once slavery was abolished throughout the British empire in 1834, the Afrikaners, already chafing under increased Imperial control, and now faced with a loss of laborers, began to migrate (trek in Afrikaans) from the Cape Colony in 1837 northward across the Orange and Vaal Rivers into what would later become the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Over 14,000 Boers (known as “vortrekkers”) would make what would come to be known as “The Great Trek.”

The Boers established small republics wherever they settled, all with certain common features: Dutch law, a state church, franchise limited to white males, the obligation of all white males over fifteen to report with rifle and horse to their local “commando” when ordered, and reliance on a legislative assembly called a “volksraad.” By 1843, the Boers had established a republic to the east, at Durban, which they called Natalia. This small republic was immediately annexed by Britain and renamed Natal, thereby blocking Boer access to the sea.

By 1847, the British administration in the Cape Colony, with annexation in mind, and with Sir Harry Smith in command, defeated the Boers at the Battle of Boomplaatz and annexed the Boer Orange River Territory north of the Orange River, to the Cape Colony. Smith then attempted to annex the multiple Boer republics further to the north, in what would later become the Transvaal, but the British government was unwilling assume responsibility for the Cape’s imperialistic actions or stretch the finances of the Empire, and thus overturned his efforts. In the Bloemfontein (1854) and Sand River (1852) conventions, Britain guaranteed independence of the Orange River Territory (renamed the Orange Free State) and the newly formed state north of the Vaal River, the Transvaal.

To the Afrikaners, this seemingly inconsistent British policy characterized Britain’s “South African Problem” over the next decades. Britain had already grown wealthy exploiting markets in America and Europe where she had no political control, and it was thought that paying for

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44 Pakenham, The Boer War, 7. It should be noted that the Suez Canal opened in 1869 and thus the strategic position of the Cape Colony may not have been as important as British documents report. The travel time from London to India was cut by a third due to the canal opening.
46 Farwell, The Great Anglo-Boer War, 8.
47 Ibid., 10.
48 Pakenham, The Boer War, 10.
more empire was neither effective, nor desired.\textsuperscript{49} The problem was that in the far flung colonies, local leaders made their own decisions, sometimes having them later overturned by Whitehall.

By the end of the 1860s, the situation in South Africa could be seen by British officials as one of co-existence among the Afrikaans–speaking whites and English-speaking whites. The expected immigration of large numbers of British settlers to South Africa failed to occur, due to the hostility of the Boers, the harsh, arid climate of the veldt, and prospect of conflict with the African tribes over grazing rights. While the Cape Colony and Natal had representative assemblies, and a somewhat open franchise, the Boer republics to the north reserved the franchise solely to white European settlers.\textsuperscript{50}

In 1869, the first of three events occurred that were to change the face of South Africa and in particular the Transvaal – the discovery of diamonds at Kimberly in an area called Griqualand West, a land of disputed ownership between the Orange Free State and the British Cape Colony (See Fig. 2.5).\textsuperscript{51} In 1872, the British simply annexed the territory, and the diamonds, to the Cape Colony.\textsuperscript{52} As a result of the diamond discovery, trade flourished in the Cape.

Confrontation resumed in late 1877, when British troops, led by Theophilus Shepstone, announced annexation of the Transvaal, and established the British flag in Pretoria. The Transvaal, with its treasury depleted, seemingly acquiesced with the forward policy of the British under Lord Carnarvon, who had a vision of federating the Boer republics under the Crown. The Transvaal was again declared a colony. Rebellion simmered, especially with the early British defeats at the hands of the neighboring Zulus in 1879. Sir Garnet Wolseley, Britain’s most brilliant general of the Victorian era, was sent to South Africa to become the High Commissioner.\textsuperscript{53}

Sir William Gladstone, who had opposed annexation prior to his ascension to Prime Minister in 1880, found that in order to keep his cabinet as united as possible he was forced to now support the annexation.\textsuperscript{54} Six months later, the Boers rose in revolt, and led by Paul Kruger, the

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{50} Judd and Surridge, \textit{The Boer War}, 23-24. Boers had initially moved north out of the Cape Colony once slavery was outlawed. They had no intention of treating the Natives as equals and intended to exploit them for economic reasons – e.g. tenant farmers, sharecroppers, etc. In the Cape and Natal, the franchise was opened to all races, although the financial qualification for voting rights disenfranchised the vast majority of Cape coloureds and blacks.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{52} Farwell, \textit{The Great Anglo-Boer War}, 11.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 12.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 13.
Boers inflicted several defeats on British forces, culminating with victory in 1881 at Majuba Hill and the surrender of the British force.\textsuperscript{55} The British were caught in a “muddled” strategy, wanting to protect their investments in the Cape Colony but at the same time seeking to avoid expense.\textsuperscript{56}

Gladstone, seeking compromise, made peace with the Boers and agreed in the Pretoria Convention of 1881 to the independence of the Boer republics, but retained British “suzerainty” and control over the republics’ external affairs. This arrangement was formally adopted in the London Convention of 1884, in which Britain, while relinquishing her annexations, still remained the predominant power in South Africa. However, the agreement was unclear and set the stage for further conflict.\textsuperscript{57}

In the 1884 convention, the Transvaal (the British name) was renamed the South African Republic (Z.A.R.), with Paul Kruger as president. Kruger wanted the republic to expand to the west and east to gain access to seaports. His designs were frustrated by the British, who annexed Bechuanaland and two infant Afrikaner republics on the Transvaal’s western border in 1885, followed by Zululand in 1887, thereby denying Afrikaner access to blue water ports. British actions were in part motivated by the fear that the Afrikaners would ally with the Germans, who had annexed the west coast of Africa in 1884.\textsuperscript{58}

**The Road to War**

The second event that would transform South Africa and the Transvaal occurred in 1886, with the discovery of enormous gold deposits in the Transvaal, near Johannesburg. This discovery on the Witwatersrand (the Rand) irreversibly changed and charged the political and economic

\textsuperscript{55} Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 11.
\textsuperscript{57} Judd & Surridge, *The Boer War*, 30-31.
\textsuperscript{58} J. Alton Templin, *Ideology on a Frontier: The Theological Foundation of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1652-1910* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1994), 200. British concerns in South Africa were in most part motivated by the large investment of British capitalists in the Cape Colony and in the gold and diamond fields of the northern Cape and Transvaal. A persistent British concern was that the Transvaal would ally with the Germans and begin trading with them, not Britain, thus perhaps leading to the Transvaal, not Britain, becoming the predominant power in South Africa. German influence in South Africa remained a consistent item of British concern right up to the outbreak of the South African War.
climate of South Africa, directly precipitating a succession of events and a lengthy crisis, that ultimately resulted in war.\textsuperscript{59}

The infusion of sudden capital transformed the economic fortunes of the Transvaal government almost overnight. Up until that time, the British believed the Transvaal and the Orange Free State would crumble from within, and a move to a federated South Africa under British domination would be accomplished. With the influx of foreigners and their capital into the country, and the payment of taxes to government coffers, the Transvaal’s economy enjoyed a respite from its inefficient bureaucracy and became not only the richest nation in South Africa, but also the most powerful, as it built up its army with the latest rifles from Germany (Mausers) and artillery pieces (French ’75) from France.\textsuperscript{60}

The third and final event was the completion of the Johannesburg to Lourenco Marques railroad in 1894. Enabled by the gold discoveries of 1886, this route did not go through British territory, but eastward through Portuguese Mozambique to Delagoa Bay, on the Indian Ocean (See Fig. No. 2.5). Completion of this transportation corridor meant that no longer did the Transvaal rely on the British ports of the Cape Colony and Natal. The Afrikaners now had an outlet to the sea for their gold and could import goods, not solely from the British Empire but from other European rivals. The railway concerned the British, who now feared a separate South African union could be developed with the Transvaal, not Britain’s Cape Colony, at its center. The specter of European alliances with the Transvaal, specifically German, added to the growing feeling in Britain that the future of the Cape Colony and Natal were at risk.\textsuperscript{61}

In the 1890s the balance of power in South Africa swung from the Cape Colony to the Transvaal. By 1898 the Transvaal was the greatest gold power in the world, surpassing Russia, America and Australia.\textsuperscript{62} In 1886, the Transvaal produced less than one percent of the world’s gold, but by 1898 the republic produced no less than 27 ½ percent of the world’s supply of the precious metal.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{59} Judd & Surridge, \textit{The Boer War}, 32.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 90-91.
\textsuperscript{62} Pakenham, \textit{The Boer War}, 41.
About this same time, in July, 1895, Lord Salisbury’s Unionist government, with a coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists, assumed power in Britain. Appointment of a new Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, and subsequent posting of Lord Alfred Milner, an ardent British imperialist, to the Cape Colony’s High Commissioner in 1897, put in place a new set of personalities to deal with the “South African Problem.” Milner’s personal desire (passion) to achieve British domination in South Africa, combined with the economic issues of the gold discovery, made war not only possible, but probable. 64

The discovery of gold prompted a “gold rush,” which filled the Transvaal with foreigners, who the Afrikaners called “Uitlanders.” At Johannesburg, the Uitlanders came to outnumber the Afrikaners, and by 1896 the number of Afrikaners numbered only 6,000 of a population of 50,000. 65

In addition, thousands of natives were brought in to work the mines, which were dug deeper and deeper. The Afrikaner government, not designed to handle this influx of foreigners, enacted laws to ensure the minority Afrikaners retained political control. The Uitlanders, mostly British, demonstrated for the franchise, prompted by continued British interventions, and tensions mounted.

The “Gold Bugs,” the wealthy Uitlanders such as Cecil Rhodes, who was also governor of the Cape Colony, and Alfred Beit, conspired to instigate an uprising in the Transvaal facilitating a British takeover. On 29 December 1895, Dr. Leander Jameson led a force of some four hundred Rhodesian police (some sources put the force at six hundred total riders) into the Transvaal to respond to a planned uprising of Uitlanders in Johannesburg. The strategy was to ride to the aid at the invitation of British citizens, and take over the government and annex the Transvaal (and its gold) back into the empire. The Uitlanders failed to rise up, and Jameson and his force were captured by the Boer commandos west of Johannesburg. The “Jameson Raid” became an international incident, especially when the complicity of Rhodes, Beit and also the British Colonial Secretary, Chamberlain, became known. This incident served to unite the Orange Free State and Transvaal against further British encroachments, and almost led to the downfall of

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64 Judd & Surridge, *The Boer War*, 37.
65 Templin, *Ideology on a Frontier*, 222. Also see Fig. No. 5 of this study. Most of the Afrikaners in the Transvaal lived outside Johannesburg on the Highveld. Johannesburg was occupied primarily by Uitlanders and natives, none of whom had the franchise. This lack of the vote would become an issue leading to war.
Chamberlain. Sir Alfred Milner arrived in South Africa after the raid, sent to bring order to the chaos.  

**War Guilt – A Short Historiography**

The war guilt of the South African War is as complex a subject as that of its successors, the Balkan Wars and the First World War. However, one item stands out in the controversy – that the Transvaal had by 1899 become the single largest gold producer in the entire world, but by 1901, Britain had invaded, annexed the Transvaal, made it a Crown colony and became the world leader in gold production. Britain’s actions had profound imperialistic and economic implications.

Thomas Pakenham, in his research of personal papers for his 1979 study of the war, found Lord Milner was secretly aligned, not with Cecil Rhodes, but with the “gold bug” firm of Wernher-Beit, and it was this alliance that gave Milner the strength to orchestrate the coming war.  

Scholars, while acknowledging the primacy of economic issues in precipitating the war, have nevertheless in recent years sought to develop a more balanced view of the events leading to the Boer invasion of Natal and the Cape Colony in 1899. This is the result of new archival material being discovered, and examining available material from new perspectives. While recent research is refreshing, it is not more definitive than earlier scholarship, nor does it radically change, as of today, our perceptions of why Britain and the two Afrikaner republics went to war.

As mentioned earlier, the British official history of the war was “censored” by the ruling political party before publication in 1906. Sir Frederick Maurice, the editor, states the reason in his Introduction: “Under the circumstances, His Majesty’s late Government considered it undesirable to discuss here any questions that had been at issue between them and the rulers of the two republics, or any points that had been in dispute at home, and to confine this history to the military contest.”

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66 Ibid., 238-239.
68 Maurice (ed.), *The Official History of the War in South Africa*, 1. The political reasons for the war were edited out of the final volumes before publication.
The other major contemporary history, published by the *Times*, also focuses on military operations. The editor, L. S. Amery, stated: “The present volume has been written frankly from the point of view of one who is convinced that the essential right and justice of the controversy have been with his own country, and that the policy which has been pursued by the British government has been, both politically and morally, justifiable.” The two major contemporary histories of the war therefore deal with only military history.  

J.A. Hobson’s *The War in South Africa*, published initially in 1900, depicted Britain waging war in order to acquire a cheap supply of adequate labor for the gold mines, and another example of imperial aggression. Hobson’s theories have been the recent subject of more rigorous analysis, especially with reference to his Jewish conspiracy theories. But Hobson was on the ground, and actually witnessed the events at Johannesburg and the Uitlander actions. He was convinced that powerful Jewish financiers perpetrated the actions leading to conflict.

Some early contemporary accounts, now reinforced by Pakenham’s research, assign much of the blame for the war squarely on the shoulders of Milner, the High Commissioner (see the quote at the beginning of this chapter). The case for individual responsibility for the war remains strong to this day, especially when viewed in companion with the actions of Chamberlain and the revelation in his papers of his complicity with the Jameson Raid.

In the early 1970s the analytical framework of “metropole” and “periphery” was applied to the South African problem. David Fieldhouse, writing in 1973, saw the problems created on the periphery as determinants in Imperial actions, and Andrew Porter, writing in 1990, suggested that political forces in the metropole also influenced the actions taken in the periphery. Porter also states that modern historians such as E.J. Hobsbawm and Shelia Marks, while giving credit to other than economic reasons for the war, still agree that economic reasons have primacy.

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71 Claire Hirshfield, “The Anglo-Boer War and the Issue of Jewish Culpability”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 15, no. 4 (October 1980), 619-631. Hobson, on the ground as a reporter in Johannesburg as tensions for war mounted, was convinced that a small group of Jewish financiers were responsible for instigating the war.


Porter quotes Hobsbawm as stating: “... whatever the ideology, the motive for the Boer war was gold.”

Centenary accounts, written around the turn of the 21st century and the hundredth anniversary of the war, while exploring race, gender, and other areas previously neglected, nevertheless do not propose new reasons for the war. These accounts do, however, reflect a maturity in scholarship that better realizes the complex nature of war and imperialism. These modern accounts assign the war’s beginnings to a multiplicity of causes, the new mineral wealth of the Transvaal; the British Imperial need to dominate South Africa (and also the gold in the Transvaal), and the imperialistic personalities in prominent positions in the British government that made war probable.

An excellent example of the modern histories dealing with the causes of the war is found in Peter Warwick’s (editor), and S.B. Spies (advisory editor), The South African War, first published in 1980, and containing a collection of essays. The essay by Andrew Porter, titled “British Imperial Policy and South Africa 1895-1899,” examines the impact of the “mineral revolution” in the Transvaal and southern Africa on British imperial policies. It illustrates how the political authority that was being consolidated in the Transvaal shifted the economic and political center of South Africa away from the British Cape Colony to the independent republic, threatening British domination of the subcontinent. Porter also points out that the discovery of gold in the Transvaal made it economically desirable, for the first time, for the republic to be drawn permanently into the British Empire, but that with its new financial independence this became more improbable.  

The Abandonment of Diplomacy

In early 1899 Sir Alfred Milner, the new High Commissioner, and highly regarded in Britain, set about developing a strategy to deal with the Afrikaners. Milner’s personal goal was to annex the Transvaal, and rule it as a Crown Colony, much as his old friend, Lord Cromer, had ruled Egypt. This would result in a “federated” white empire in South Africa. Milner deliberately set

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Ibid., 46. It should be noted that Immanuel Wallerstein’s “World System Theory”, of the “core”/metropole and the periphery, is the standard work in this field.

about provoking a crisis, while Chamberlain, his superior, wanted him to achieve a “climb down”, with lessening of tensions with the Afrikaners. Milner was to get his way with Chamberlain. 76

At the same time President Paul Kruger, now in his fourth term as President of the Transvaal, was determined to retain Transvaal independence, expand its power in Southern Africa, and ultimately rid the nation of British encroachment. Soon after the Jameson Raid, Kruger signed a military pact with the Orange Free State President, Marthinus Steyn. By 1897, both republics were united against further British aggression. 77

Milner, needing to capture British public support for intervention, chose to precipitate a crisis over the franchise for the Uitlanders of the Witwatersrand. As we have noted earlier, the Uitlander population in Johannesburg and the Rand, considerably outnumbered the indigenous Afrikaners, who refused to grant Uitlanders the vote out of fear they would lose political power thus leading to annexation by Britain. Milner knew the issue of maltreatment of British subjects by the Afrikaners would lead to an outcry in Britain, and this public sentiment would give the government (and him) political support for intervention, and the war he wanted. 78

President Marthinus Steyn of the Orange Free State, seeking to diffuse the growing crisis, hosted a conference between Kruger and Milner at Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State. 79 Chamberlain gave Milner plenty of leeway, and Milner purposefully limited the discussion at the meeting to the issue of the Uitlander franchise. In addition, he cut the conference short, and left on 5 June when Kruger insisted on the naturalization of the Uitlanders before giving them the vote. Kruger, however, had shocked Milner by proposing a “Reform Bill”, which cut the residence time for Uitlander naturalization from fourteen to seven years, and would have given the Uitlanders at least five seats in the Transvaal assembly. 80 Chamberlain was furious with Milner. The Afrikaners viewed the outcome of the Bloemfontein conference as the British having no intent to negotiate. Chamberlain had two alternatives: recall Milner or

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76 Pakenham, The Boer War, 61.
77 Ibid., 34.
79 It is interesting that prior to the war, President Steyn did everything he could to settle the differences with negotiations. But, once the war began, Steyn and the “Freestaters” were the ones the Transvaalers had to pressure to agree to accept the British terms for peace in 1902. Once committed, Steyn and the Free State Boers were last to come in from the field.
80 Pakenham, The Boer War, 64-65.
demand concessions from the Afrikaners, concessions he knew would not be granted and thus force would have to be used.\footnote{Porter, “The South African War (1899-1902),” 49-55.}

In July and again in August 1899, the Afrikaners made offers involving the franchise to the Uitlanders, to include reduction of the residence requirement to five years, exactly what Milner had requested. However, Milner’s reluctance to negotiate with the Afrikaners and his continued insistence on additional safeguards and concessions from them led the withdrawal of Afrikaner offers in early September 1899. Milner then obtained a vote by the British cabinet to send 10,000 additional troops to Natal, and if necessary to intervene in the Transvaal’s internal affairs. Chamberlain believed the presence of the troops would achieve his “climb down.” British resolve and threatened use of force on the upper Nile at Fashoda in 1898 had prompted French withdrawal. Chamberlain hoped the reinforcements would have the same effect on Kruger. Milner wanted the additional forces to fight, perhaps even to invade the republics. The British spent the rest of the month considering their position and drafting an ultimatum to be sent to the Afrikaners.\footnote{Pakenham, \textit{The Boer War}, 89-92.}

In late September and early October, the Afrikaners mobilized their commandos along the Cape Colony and Natal borders, and on October 9\textsuperscript{th} 1899, issued an ultimatum to the British government agreeing to arbitration on all points of “mutual difference.” The Afrikaners demanded an immediate withdrawal of British reinforcements (the 10,000 troops recently approved by the cabinet), and recall of British troops currently enroute to South Africa (by this time a British Corps of some 47,000 troops had also been dispatched).\footnote{Hugh Williams, ed. \textit{Selected Official Documents of the South African Republic and Great Britain}. (Washington: Hard Press, 1900),49-51.} The British ignored the ultimatum, and on 12 October, 1899, the Afrikaners attacked into Natal and the Cape Colony with some 30,000 burghers, opposed by about 24,000 British soldiers along the frontiers, including the 10,000 who had recently arrived on 7 October at Durban. The Second South African War, “Milner’s War”, had begun.\footnote{Ibid., 103-108. The number of Afrikaners (also called “burghers”) making the initial cross-border incursions varies according to sources. Pakenham (1979) puts the number at 30,000, about three fourths of the burghers mobilized. John Gooch (2000) puts the number deployed between 35,200 – 33,700. Byron Farwell puts the number of burghers in the field at 38,000 (23,000 Transvaalers and 15,000 Freestaters). It should be noted that accurate strength accounting at the consolidated levels is probably not present. Field Cornets kept field journals of}
The War – General

A detailed history of the war exceeds the scope of this inquiry, however one does need to understand the general dimensions of the conflict; the ebb and flow of the war, and when, where and why, our subject, the Transvaal concentration camps, came into being. The Second South African War of 1899-1902 is divided by historians into at least three phases: early Afrikaner offensives and victories; British reinforcement and counteroffensive, culminating with occupation of enemy capitals and annexation of the two republics; and finally the guerilla war phase, complete with farm burnings, concentration camps and oversea prisoner of war camps. Andre Wessels, however, writing in John Gooch’s *The Boer War*, in 2000, approaches the war in four phases:

I. Boer Limited Offensive (11-31 October 1899)
II. British Unsuccessful Counter-Offensive (31 November 1899-10 February 1900)
III. British Successful Counter-Offensive (11 February – 29 November 1900)
IV. Guerilla or Mobile Warfare (17 March 1900 – 31 May 1902)

Wessels’ four phases are more detailed and illustrative of the actual conduct of the war. They describe the initial Boer attacks; British early defeats in late 1899; British major reinforcement and invasion; and the Boer decision to adopt guerilla warfare. They are used as a guide for this study. It is in the last phase of the war that we encounter the concentration camps.\(^{85}\) The war lasted 963 days, with considerable combat operations occurring after the British occupation of the Transvaal’s capital, Pretoria, on 5 June, 1900.\(^{86}\) Britain, declaring the end of major combat operations in late November 1900, was to spend an additional two years fighting against Boer guerilla forces.

At the start of the war, approximately 30,000 to 35,200 of an available 55,000 Afrikaners, or “burghers,” from both republics, were deployed against a British force of only 24,000 men,

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86 Ibid., 91.
including the recently arrived 10,000 reinforcements.\textsuperscript{87} Although the republics had some full-time police and artillery units, the Boers were not a professional army, but instead loosely organized into “commandos” of between 300 to 3,000 men, consisting of all able bodied men of ages 16-60, with each burgher or Boer, mobilized with his own horse, weapon and initial supplies. The “commando” system was founded in the 18\textsuperscript{th} Century on the South African frontier, and somewhat corresponds to the colonial “minutemen” of the Revolutionary War. The Boers of the Transvaal were largely equipped with modern Mauser rifles and quick-firing artillery. Ammunition had been stockpiled. Each Boer was assigned to a ward (“wyk”) commanded by an elected “veldkornet” or field-cornet, which was a subdivision of a district, commanded by a commandant. Each district supplied a commando. Decisions on the battlefield were made by war councils called “krijgsraad.” The Boers had no overall coordinated war plan, no general staff or headquarters organizations, and although each republic had some plans in case the British attacked, coordinated operations between the commandos were not preplanned, nor executed at the beginning of the conflict.\textsuperscript{88}

In the South African Republic (Transvaal), there was a Commandant-General, elected for a five-year term. Assistant Commandant-Generals were approved shortly after the war commenced. Piet Joubert, of the Transvaal, was declared leader of both the Transvaal and Orange Free State forces when war broke out.\textsuperscript{89}

The overall political-strategic aim of the Afrikaners was to safeguard the independence of the republics by removing British forces from their borders. To achieve this aim, they adopted a passive and defensive military strategy, although they began the war with a tactical offensive into the Cape Colony and Natal, trying to secure the support of the Cape Afrikaners.\textsuperscript{90}

With few trained or experienced generals, and without any military staffs, the Boers were largely reactive to British moves, and failed to take the strategic offensive, e.g. invade the Cape Colony and Natal in strength and capture the ports (Cape Town, Durban, etc.). They allowed the British to take the strategic initiative and reinforce their meager forces. Early on, the Boers besieged Kimberley, Mafeking, and Ladysmith, tying down not only British garrisons, but their

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 92-93.
\textsuperscript{88} Judd and Surridge, \textit{The Boer War}, 90-93.
\textsuperscript{89} Wessels, “Afrikaners at War,” 78-79.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 83.
own forces. More mobile than the British, the Boers adopted immobile tactics and wasted their men, munitions and supplies on sieges.\textsuperscript{91}

The Afrikaners had a “Christian national life and world view.” Most were members of the Dutch Reformed Church and saw imperialism as an abhorrence. They wanted to live peacefully and independently from the rest of the world. Comparing the “Great Trek” and Afrikaner destiny to the Israelites of the Old Testament, many Boers saw themselves as God’s chosen people; thus opposing the British imperialism put them on a crusade for the Lord. At the war’s beginning, a partisan book appealed to the religious patriotism of the Boers. \textit{A Century of Wrong} catalogued the injustices of the British occupation since the 1800s and showed how God was always on the side of the Boers against tyranny. A quote from the book illustrates the integration of the religion of the Dutch Reformed Church into the daily lives (and destiny) of the Afrikaners:

\begin{quote}
Do not be disturbed by such men as Milner, Rhodes and Chamberlain, or even by the British Empire itself, but cling fast to the God of our forefathers, and to the righteousness which sometimes slow in acting, but which never slumbers nor forgets. .... If it is ordained that we, insignificant as we are should be the first among all peoples to begin the struggle against the new-world tyranny of Capitalism, then we are ready to do so.\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

The “Afrikaner Calvinism” permeated the culture and society of the veldt. Everything was ordered and controlled by God. In the experience of the Boers, the army that won the battle was “blessed by God”. The Afrikaners believed they were not only the recipients of God’s “special leading” but able to interpret God’s leading on their behalf. They saw themselves as God’s “chosen people”, central in God’s plan.\textsuperscript{93}

The Boers believed not in running away, as was first thought by the British, but in fighting and then getting away to fight again. Pitched battle was not the \textit{forte} of the Boers, although when forced into major battles at the beginning of the war they acquitted themselves well.

The British Army in South Africa in October 1899 is estimated to number about 24,000 to 27,000 soldiers, scattered throughout the Cape Colony and Natal guarding depots, railways and

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\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, 83-85.  \\
\textsuperscript{92} F. W. Reitz (ed.), \textit{A Century of Wrong} (London: 1900), as quoted in J. Alton Templin, \textit{Ideology on a Frontier: The Theological Foundation of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1632-1910} (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1984), 255. There is some controversy as to who actually wrote the book, as it first appeared in Afrikaans in 1899. Some research points to Jan Smuts as the author. Apparently Reitz, as the Secretary of State for the Transvaal, was the editor.  \\
\textsuperscript{93} Templin, \textit{Ideology of a Frontier}, 299-303.
\end{flushright}
ports.\textsuperscript{94} With half the British Army stationed across the Empire in garrison duties, the British had made a prior decision that only white reinforcement troops would be deployed to South Africa, which therefore limited the number of troops available. The Stanhope Memorandum of 1 June 1888 set the stage for the initial British troop deployments to South Africa, ordering a force of two Army Corps be ready for oversea deployment. In 1899, Britain was the only Great Power able to deploy and sustain large armies across the globe.\textsuperscript{95}

On the eastern front, the Boer commandos crossed into Natal and moved south toward Durban. Their objectives were to isolate or destroy the British forces threatening the borders of the republics and occupy positions where they could halt the advance of arriving British reinforcements moving up from the coast. Met by elements of the Natal Field Force, under Lieutenant - General Sir George White, the Boers succeeded in driving the British into fortifications around Ladysmith (Natal) where they laid siege to the town.\textsuperscript{96}

In the west, on the border of the Cape Colony, the Boers waited until the 1\textsuperscript{st} of November to attack into the Northern Cape, with the main attacks beginning on the 13th. Thousands of loyal Afrikaners joined the invading forces. But the Boers had waited too long to take the offensive, as many commando leaders had argued to take defensive positions along the Orange River and await the British.\textsuperscript{97}

On the 4\textsuperscript{th} of November, the first reinforcing British corps arrived in South Africa, with Sir Redvers Buller as the commander. He found British forces besieged in Ladysmith and in Kimberley and Mafeking (northern Cape Colony). Sir Alfred Milner was concerned that an invasion of the Cape Colony would spark a large scale Afrikaner uprising to overthrow the British rule.\textsuperscript{98} General White dispatched General John French and Colonel Douglas Haig from

\textsuperscript{94} Maurice, \textit{Official History of the South African War}, 89. Other sources list the strength at 24,000. What is important is that the British garrison in South Africa had been reinforced just before the war with the 10,000 troops requested by Milner and approved by the Cabinet.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 5. While the German army was perhaps the strongest in Europe, Germany lacked the strategic deployment capability of a large navy. On the 28\textsuperscript{th} of July 1899, the Prime Minister announced that only white soldiers would be deployed to South Africa, thereby removing a large number of troops from reinforcement consideration. Politically, the British had decided it was to be a white man’s war (this was to change quickly with the addition of native laborers, scouts and guards to the British force).
\textsuperscript{97} Judd and Surridge, \textit{The Boer War}, 98-101.
\textsuperscript{98} Pakenham, \textit{The Boer War}, 163-164.
Ladysmith to report on its precarious situation to General Buller. Buller made a decision to split up the Corps in order to relieve Ladysmith and clear the Northern Cape of the Boers. 99

The British force debarked at Durban and Cape Town and began to move northward (this is Phase II of the war). In Natal, Buller himself led a force to relieve Ladysmith; General Methuen was to march northward along the western railway line to relieve Kimberley; and Generals French and Gatacre were to move against the Boers in the Northern Cape Colony. The attempts to relieve the garrisons and drive the Boers from the Cape Colony met with disaster in “Black Week,” 9-15 December, 1899, when each of the three British offensives were defeated by the Boers: Methuen at Magersfontein; Buller at Colenso; and Gatacre at Stormberg. 100 One of the greatest armies in the world had been soundly defeated in three conventional battles by volunteer farmers.

Once again, however, the Boers failed to take strategic advantage of their victories and drive south to encircle the British forces in the northern Cape. Boer excursions into the Cape would probably have enjoined much support and added volunteers to their cause. 101 On 10 January 1900, Field Marshal Lord Roberts arrived in South Africa with more reinforcements and to take command of all British forces, with Buller retaining command in Natal. Roberts was accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Lord Kitchener. Roberts’ strategy was to move north and relieve Kimberley, then march eastward through the Orange Free State to Bloemfontein, the capital. Buller, reinforced, would relieve Ladysmith. Phase III of the war began on 11 February, with Roberts beginning his march to Bloemfontein. 102 British reinforcements had continued to arrive, and by February the troop strength under Buller in Natal was 34,830, including the 9,780 besieged at Ladysmith (under White). The troops under Robert’s command in the Cape Colony numbered 51,900, not counting the garrisons besieged at Kimberley and Mafeking. 103 Opposing Boer forces numbered about 35,000 men, with supporting natives, that number being unknown.

99 Ibid., 164-165.
100 Judd and Surridge, The Boer War, 118-125.
102 Andre Wessels, “Afrikaners at War”, 93.
103 Maurice, Official History of the War in South Africa, 443.
Invasion of the Orange Free State

Upon entering the Orange Free State on 11 February, 1900, Lord Roberts’ force of an entire army corps consisted of five infantry divisions, a cavalry division and one hundred guns, along with support units. Totaling about 40,000 men, the corps began what would be later called “the steamroller” across the Free State. Bypassing General Piet Cronje’s trenches at Magersfontein, French’s cavalry division struck out to relieve the siege of Kimberley. Almost four thousand African drivers, driving an immense supply train of wagons, oxen and horses, accompanied the force. The “flank march” had been planned while Roberts was still in England, and he consulted the premier strategist of the British Army, Colonel George Henderson, who would head his Military Intelligence staff.

![Fig. 2.6 – Phase III British Offensive](image)

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105 Henderson, from the Staff College, had just completed the book *Stonewall Jackson and the American Civil War*, (London: 1906), which when published would become a military history classic. Henderson had studied the campaigns of Sheridan, Sherman, Jackson and other Civil War generals. He arrived in South Africa with Lord Roberts and spent many hours on the voyage from England in conversation with the general. It would not be too much of a stretch to see that Sherman’s marches through the South would have influenced Henderson’s planning of Lord Roberts’ “steamroller” through the Orange Free State.
British columns began the systematic destruction of the small towns and farms they encountered. Roberts’ march to Kimberley resulted in the relief of that city on 15 February, with Piet Cronje surrendering 4,000 Transvaal and Free State burghers on 27 February 1900, at Paardeberg.  

While there was no major resistance after the surrender of General Cronje at Paardeberg, the pace of the movement, coupled with the lack of forage and water, resulted in the starvation of thousands of British cavalry horses. Frederick W. Unger, an American newspaper correspondent, witnessed the march from Paardeberg: “The roads were generally bad, being either virgin veld – heavy mud bringing the carts to a standstill at times – or, after a day’s sunshine, fine dust three to six inches deep, which was quite as bad.”  

Major General F. Smith, the Director General of British Veterinary Services in the war, described the scene:

> The country was strewn with thousands of dead, dying, exhausted and sick horses, scattered far and wide, and with no one to collect and look after them ... It is clear the commander-in-chief over-estimated the available animal energy in unfit and underfed horses, and under-estimated the length of time necessary for conditioning them. In the Free State half the strength employed would have done the work in a shorter time, had the horses been fit and well fed ...  

Roberts and his Chief of Staff, Kitchener, failed to understand the doctrinal transport and supply system of the Army, as they had spent most of their career on the frontier, engaged in small unit combat and administrative duties. They reorganized the supply and transport system in South Africa, removing the battalion supply trains (carts) and consolidated the assets at the Army level, leaving the soldiers dependent on the arrival of supplies, ammunition, and food on assets outside their control. It was a failure, and Kitchener was given the title of the “K of Chaos.”  

One of Roberts’ soldiers, interviewed in June 1970 by Thomas Pakenham, described the march in these words: “It was the worst run war ever – no transport, no grub, nothing ... .”  

Many wagons of supplies were lost to a commando attack by De Wet at

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109 Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 333. It should be noted here that Kitchener had a penchant for reorganization and changing plans. As can be seen in the supply transport example, he changed procedures he was not familiar with. He was to do the same at the beginning of the First World War, when instead of calling up Reserve divisions organized as part of the Haldane Reforms, he started new divisions from scratch.
110 Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 325. Pakenham conducted interviews with living participants of the war and taped his interviews. The quote from one of Lord Roberts’ soldiers is typical of a quote from an infantryman of any war, there is always “not enough.”
Waterval Drift, which stampeded most of the army’s three thousand oxen. Almost one third of Roberts’ transport wagons were immobile.\footnote{Ibid., 334.}

The British occupation of Bloemfontein, then a city of only 4,000 persons, including Africans, was completed on 13 March, 1900. The British Army was supplied by a single railway line from the Cape, and all ammunition, food and medicines were sent over this line. Still recuperating from its march, and the lack of food due to the transport debacle, the Army remained immobile at Bloemfontein. African drivers and some 11,000 mules attempted to remedy the transport shortage, and thousands of horses were brought into South Africa from India, Burma and Argentina. All had to travel up the single railway line.\footnote{Ibid., 402-03.}

Maurice’s official account of the war, \textit{History of the War in South Africa}, barely mentions the supply crisis, and its appendix on Supply and Transport deals with the reorganization of the supply and transport to support the mobile columns organized to fight the guerilla war. It does congratulate the Commander in Chief’s sound strategy, etc. The official history describes the march across the Free State as: “Wonderfully had the operations of a single month changed the military aspect of the war. In the western theatre of war the thirty days from 11\textsuperscript{th} February to 13\textsuperscript{th} March had seen Kimberly relieved, Cronje’s army defeated and captured, Bloemfontein occupied, and the Cape Colony ... free from the enemy’s presence.” Ladysmith had been relieved by Buller’s army moving northwest from Natal.\footnote{Maurice, \textit{Official History of the South African War}, Vol. 2, 238.}

As the British Army was quartered at Bloemfontein, being refitted and resupplied for the eventual push northward to Pretoria, there was a typhoid epidemic. This fact is not mentioned in Maurice’s official history, nor in Judd and Surridge’s most modern history of the war.\footnote{Denis Judd and Keith Surridge, \textit{The Boer War} (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).} Pakenham covers the breakout in detail. Negligence of proper sanitation, especially in the use of water for drinking, and the overcrowding of Bloemfontein (the population went from four thousand to over forty thousand), all contributed to the spread of the disease.

The men were on half rations of food and water, due to the significant loss of the supplies and transport at Waterval Drift, which was directly related to the centralization of the transport ordered by Roberts. Men and horses simply broke down. There were volunteer hospitals at Bloemfontein, and also an Afrikaner government hospital, all doing service for the British. But
the army hospitals were inept, filled with patients and mired in paperwork and bureaucracy. All depended on the single railroad supply line to the south. Roberts eventually asked for more nurses to be sent from England, but throughout this crisis, Roberts seemed detached and complacent, failing to take corrective action on his medical staff, while “Tommy Atkins” suffered.\footnote{Pakenham, \textit{The Boer War}, 403-05. “Tommy Atkins” was the popular name given the British soldiers of the time, much like the term “G.I.” was used to describe the soldiers in World War Two.}

Burdett-Coutts, a writer for \textit{The Times}, described the situation in Bloemfontein on 28 April:

\begin{quote}
... hundreds of men to my knowledge were lying in the worst stages of typhoid, with only a blanket and a thin waterproof sheet (not even the latter for many of them) between their aching bodies and the hard ground, with no milk and hardly any medicines, without beds, stretchers or mattresses, without linen of any kind, without a single nurse amongst them ... and with only three doctors to attend on 350 patients ... In many of these tents there were ten typhoid cases lying closely packed together, the dying with the convalescent ... there was no room to step between them.\footnote{Ibid., 402. Quotes Burdett-Coutts, as written in the \textit{Times}. Pakenham attributes the epidemic to poor hygiene in the field; the ineptitude of Roberts’ chief medical officer (Surgeon-General Wilson); and the lack of supplies from the single line of communication.}
\end{quote}

Burdett – Coutts reported that 5,000 soldiers remained ill at Bloemfontein, even after another 5,000 had been evacuated to the base hospitals. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of \textit{Sherlock Holmes}, and a civilian surgeon with the Langman Hospital, wrote a letter to the \textit{British Medical Journal} describing the situation at Bloemfontein:

\begin{quote}
The outbreak of enteric among the troops in South Africa was a calamity, the magnitude of which had not been foreseen ... it was appalling in its severity both in quantity and quality. I know of no instance of such an epidemic in modern warfare. I have not had access to any official figures, but I believe that in one month there were from 10,000 to 12,000 men down with this, the most debilitating and lingering of continued fevers. I know that in one month 600 men were laid in the Bloemfontein Cemetery. A single day in this town saw 40 deaths.\footnote{Stephen A. Pagaard, “Disease and the British Army in South Africa, 1899-1900,” \textit{Military Affairs} 50, no. 2 (April 1986): 72-73. Excellent article on the state of British medical corps in South Africa. Although there was an immunization for typhoid, the British made it voluntary before deployment to South Africa, and 95 percent of those who served in the war refused immunization. The inoculation should have been mandatory.}
\end{quote}

It is evident from other sources that the British Army, and also the Boers, suffered from typhoid before the occupation of Bloemfontein. Alice Bron, a Belgium Red Cross nurse who
was initially working in a Boer hospital at Jacobstal, south of Kimberley, describes the situation after Jacobstal was occupied by Roberts’ British columns on 15 February 1900:

There are two hospitals for typhoid cases in Jacobstal: one, containing sixty beds, is in the Protestant church, the other (mine) is in the Kaffir church, and has only twenty. ... Two English doctors asked me yesterday if I would take charge of forty cases of fever and slight wounds for one night. ... but I have only twenty beds. “That does not matter,” I was told. .. “Put the worst cases in the beds, and the others can lie on the floor... .”

The typhoid outbreak within the army highlights a lack of hygiene existing in the field sanitation practices and training of the British Army in South Africa, and its inadequate logistical, field and hospital medical support. It also shows how soldiers, on half rations and having less water than required, are susceptible to disease. These factors were to be seen again, when a sudden influx of thousands of women and children, brought in from the veldt to hastily improvised concentration camps, run by this same army and supported by an already overwhelmed medical organization, experienced the same outbreaks of deadly diseases. The supply and medical systems, already stretched past their limits by an inadequate transportation system, were overwhelmed and simply broke down.

The complacency illustrated by Lord Roberts towards the health of his own troopers at Bloemfontein, occurred again during the establishment of the concentration camps under his command, when the African and Afrikaner women and children began to die of disease in the camps he initiated. An army reflects the leadership and character of its commander. What he cares about, the staff and subordinate commanders care about. Roberts’ complacency was mirrored by his subordinates. This may help explain the initial inaction of the British Army to the deaths of the women and children under their care in the camps. The senior British officers simply did not care, following an established pattern of behavior.

The trail of destruction left by Lord Roberts’ columns in the Orange Free State and into the South African Republic had ample precedence in General William T. Sherman’s marches across Mississippi, Georgia and South Carolina in the American Civil War. Roberts and his successor, Lord Kitchener, adopted Sherman’s practice of “collective responsibility” in which the burden of hostilities were placed on the country’s civilian population, and nearby noncombatants were held

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118 Alice Bron, *Diary of a Nurse in South Africa*, trans. by G.A. Raper (London: Chapman & Hall, L.D., 1901), 25-26. Ms. Bron was a Red Cross nurse working in Jacobstal, Bloemfontain and camps to the west of Pretoria. She went to South Africa to help the Boers. Her diary describes how she, German and Russian doctors established hospitals to help the Boers and also the British wounded and sick.
responsible for guerilla (commando) raids and destroyed railroads, whether they had been involved or not. Homes, barns and livestock were destroyed. The actions of the British soldiers in the Free State and the Transvaal are reminiscent of the looting, plundering and destruction by Sherman’s army against the civilians of the Southern states. A British policy of “scorched earth” quickly evolved to counter the increasingly deadly attacks of the Boer commandos against the British lines of communication, supply depots and scattered garrisons. 119

Reading the reports of Sherman’s march across the South and similar reports on Roberts’ marches through the Afrikaner republics some four decades later, one can draw conclusions that the Union Army in the final years of the American Civil War provided both the German Army in the Franco–Prussian War (1870-1871) and the British in the South African War a strong precedent for the maltreatment of civilian noncombatants. It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate the overall British policies towards Afrikaner and Native noncombatants, but it is important to put the establishment of the camps in a larger perspective of the nature of the war to better understand the seeming indifference of the British to the plight of the Afrikaner and African noncombatants.

119 John B. Walters, “General William T. Sherman and Total War,” Journal of Southern History 14, no. 4 (Nov., 1948): 458-463. The British government conducted a legal study of the doctrine of “collective responsibility,” and although the generals in the field executed the policy, the legal section saw it as: “To lay down this principle seems most dangerous, to carry it out … thoroughly most difficult.” This information/citation is provided in Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 31, 271-273.
THE GUERILLA WAR AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS

Is it not possible for Methuen to send part of his force on a sort of Sherman’s March through Georgia, i.e. to go into the Orange Free State and live in the country. ¹²⁰

Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary for the Colonies, in a 21 December 1899 note to Lord Lansdowne, Secretary for War

Decisions at Kroonstad

From March – June 1900, an estimated 12-14,000 Boers surrendered to British forces, a little less than one third of the total Boers on commando. ¹²¹ Boer morale declined precipitously, especially with the surrender of Cronje at Paardeberg. Carrying on the fight was in jeopardy. Bloemfontein had fallen and Ladysmith was relieved on 28 February. On 17 March 1900, soon after Roberts’ occupation of Bloemfontein, President Steyn, of the Orange Free State (OFS) called the Boer leaders to a krijgsraad at Kroonstad, the temporary capital of the Orange Free State, 130 miles northeast of Bloemfontein. President Kruger (Transvaal) attended. ¹²²

The council decided it was impossible to halt the British advance, but unanimously agreed to carry on the war. Christiaan De Wet, who had just assumed command of the commandos of the Orange Free State, proposed a new strategy – launching a guerilla war, based on smaller, elite units; establishing greater mobility by abolishing the great wagon trains that had supplied the large commandos; and adopting a raiding strategy behind enemy lines, an indirect approach to counteract the superior numbers of the British. De Wet recognized the precarious logistical

¹²⁰ William T. Sherman, Memoirs, Vol I, 349, and Letter of Sherman to John Sherman (brother), 1862, Sherman Letters, by Thorndike, all quoted in John Bennett Walters, “General William T. Sherman and Total War,” Journal of Southern History 14, no. 4 (Nov., 1948): 459-460. This quote from a note from Chamberlain to Lansdowne in December 1899 clearly indicates that senior British political leaders were aware of Sherman’s march in Georgia and citation #118 shows that the doctrine of “collective responsibility”, and its legal pitfalls, were known to these same leaders. See Roberts Papers, N.A.M., R16/11, Chamberlain to Lansdowne, 21 December 1899 (copy forwarded to Roberts) as quoted in Spies, Methods of Barbarism, 31, 271-272. In addition, Lord Roberts had heard COL Henderson, author of Stonewall Jackson, lecture on American Civil Warat the Dublin Military Academy several years before Roberts took command of the British forces in South Africa and made Henderson his Intelligence Chief. Roberts had also read Henderson’s book. It is no stretch to see that Roberts, in planning his “steamroller” march across the Orange Free State, especially after consulting with Henderson on the voyage to South Africa, and knowing the campaigns of Jackson, Lee and Sherman, used this knowledge to plan the march. See Jay Luvaas, “G.F.R. Henderson and the American Civil War,” Military Affairs 20, no. 3 (Autumn 1956), 148.

¹²¹ Andre Wessels, “Afrikaners at War”, 94.

¹²² Pakenham, The Boer War, 407-408.
situation of the British, relying solely on vulnerable rail lines. This strategy coincided with the strategy adopted by the Transvaal general on the Western Front, Koos De La Rey. Organized into smaller units, these flying columns would seek to draw Roberts large columns out into the veldt and then hit the British railway and supply lines with quick, lethal raids.

The Boers had grasped the fact their capitals were not the “culminating point,” as the British, schooled in European warfare, had been taught. The Boer commandos believed their “army” was the true center of gravity. Although not formally schooled in Clausewitz as their British counterparts, the young Boer generals would become household names in Britain and Europe due to their tenacity and fighting abilities. The Kroonstad council marks the start of Phase IV of the war, the guerilla war.

President Steyn, a moderate who had initially preferred peace to war, was now emerging as the embodiment of the Afrikaner resistance. Kruger would soon leave the Transvaal for Europe. Steyn, however, remained in the field until the end. It was also decided to give more respect to the foreign volunteers, numbering about 2,000, and inject more discipline into the commandos.

General De Wet, in his memoirs, takes none of the credit for the revised strategy:

I shall not enter upon all that happened at that meeting. I shall merely note here that besides deciding to continue the war more energetically than ever, we agreed unanimously that the great waggon-camps should be done away with, and that henceforth only horse-commandos should be employed. The sad experience we had gained from six month’s warfare, and more especially the great misfortune that had overtaken the big wagon-camp of General Cronje, were our reasons for this new regulation.

This major shift in the nature of the South African War would eventually force a revision of British national war policy as well as its supporting military strategy. British war aims would change from seeking peace to unconditional surrender; the army in South Africa would be further transformed from dismounted to more mounted formations and almost doubled in size; natives would be armed by the British and used in combat situations; and drastic measures would

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123 Andre Wessels, “Afrikaners at War,” 94.
124 Farwell, The Great Anglo-Boer War, 252-255.
125 Christiaan R. De Wet, Three Year’s War (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 30. It should be noted that in De Wet’s memoirs, he remembers the date the of the Kroonstad meeting as on the 20th of March, not the 17th as Pakenham reports. Byron Farwell, sets the date as 17 March, also. The exact date of the meeting is somewhat immaterial. What is important is that right after the surrender of Cronje, the Boers agreed to continue the fight and adopted new strategies which exploited their inherent mobility.
be enacted against noncombatants, Africans and Afrikaners, to defeat the Boers. Collectively, these measures would lead to eventual British victory, and also lengthen the conflict by at least one and a half years.

**Farm Burnings Begin**

As Roberts’ army prepared to resume its march northwards from Bloemfontein into the Transvaal, the Boers on commando made a second significant decision - to leave their families at their farms on the veldt. Taking the families into the swiftly moving commandos was not possible, as British columns made supply more difficult with each passing day, and the families would lessen the mobility of the raiding commandos. Ultimately, this decision would put the families at the mercy of the British columns and the local native Africans, who, spurred on by the British, began to consider reclaiming some of their long lost lands.

Actions of British soldiers and their commanding officers in their march across the Orange Free State, set the stage for future maltreatment of Afrikaner and African noncombatants at the hands of the British military and civil government. The Colonial Division, comprised mostly of volunteers from the Cape Colony, under the command of Brigadier General F.Y. Brabant, was particularly active in looting of Boer farms and towns in the southern and eastern Orange Free State. The initial actions of the Colonial Division violated the standing orders of the Commanding General, and were not authorized by Roberts. This practice would all change in the spring, from March to June 1900, as by mid-May 1900, it was common practice for homes on the veldt to fly a white flag to indicate that noncombatants were there. But when Boer commandos operated in the vicinity of the homes, these houses were burned and the occupants turned out onto the veldt, white flag or not. Farm burning became a standard practice of British columns operating on the veldt, much as it had for Sherman in Louisiana or South Carolina (the application of collective responsibility). S. B. Spies’ description is to the point: “... Once farm-burning, for whatever reason, had received the stamp of approval from the commander-in-chief, it was not surprising that it came to be applied widely and in a less discriminating manner than he (Roberts) intended.... there was undoubtedly considerable devastation of property in the

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127 Ibid., 42-42.
128 Ibidl, 45.
republics by British troops before the fall of Pretoria.” Roberts was familiar with farm burnings, as it had been a common practice on India’s Northwest Frontier where he had long served.

This evidence of early British farm burning is further substantiated by the contemporary British peace activist, Emily Hobhouse, in her book *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell* (1902):

It already, it appears, complaints had been made that soldiers had entered private houses and molested the civil population. A month earlier (Jan 1900) a Reuter’s telegram had stated that “General Babington’s party, in a short excursion of twelve miles into the Free State, came upon three Boer homesteads, and these they destroyed with dynamite and fire. The homesteads on Zwiegler’s Farm, and two belonging to Lubbe, the Commandant of the local commando, were burnt, having been used as camps by the enemy.

On the 19th of February, 1900, Presidents Kruger and Steyn sent a cable to Lord Roberts, who was at Cape Town, outlining specific cases of destruction of civilian property, stating:

... several farmhouses have already been destroyed near the Jacobstal boundary, among others: Commandant Lubbe’s residence on his farm Lubeshock, and those of his brothers-in-law on Weltevreden, Karulaagte, du Toitsheuvel, and Badenhorstoest were totally destroyed by British patrols late in December. On the farm Greuspan of D. Combrink the furniture was destroyed and a part burnt, and the dwelling-house was practically blown up by dynamite on the 4th of January.... Altogether we received official information during December and January of eighteen houses wholly or partially burnt or destroyed, in the Jacobstal district alone.

The two Presidents also informed Roberts that the British had enlisted the services of armed “barbarians” or natives, and that they had captured some as prisoners of war. They further accused the British of having officers lead natives in attacks on Boer farms, e.g., Derdepoort. Roberts’ reply on the 24th of February was that he knew of no home destructions by British forces unless for military actions. He also said that it had been necessary to arm certain natives to allow them to protect themselves from Boer attacks.

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129 Ibid., 46.
132 Ibid., 6.
133 Ibid.
Other evidence began to surface in England of deliberate farm burnings, as seen in this account by a Private Stanton, originally printed in the *Sydney Telegraph* and reprinted for the *Reynold’s Newspaper* on 27 May, 1900:

> Within 800 yards of the farm we halted, and the infantry blazed a volley into the house. Then we marched up to it, and on arrival found it locked up and not a soul to be seen, so we broke open the place and went in. It was beautifully furnished, and the officers got several things they could make use of, such as bedding, etc. There was a lovely library... I secured a Bible, also a Mauser rifle... After getting all we wanted out of it, our men put a charge under the house and blew it up...

As Roberts marched further into the republics, the burnings intensified, as reported by Mr. E.W. Smith, correspondent of the *Morning Leader*, on April 29th:

> General French and General Pole-Carew, at the head of the Guards and the 18th Brigade, are marching in, burning practically everything on the road. The brigade is followed by about 3500 head of loot, cattle and sheep. Hundreds of tons of corn and forage have been destroyed. The troops engaged ... the Canadians and Australians. ... Rifles were found under the mattress ... When the flames burst from the doomed place, the poor woman threw herself on her knees ... “Shoot me, shoot me! I’ve nothing more to live for, now that my husband is gone, and our farm is burnt, and our cattle taken.”

While the British controlled the towns, depots, cities and rail lines they secured, the Boer commandos roamed freely on the veldt. The longest and deadliest phase of the war had just begun, unknown to the British.

**Afrikaner and African Culture on the Transvaal Veldt**

To fully comprehend the effects of farm burning, and the multiple decisions and subsequent actions that resulted from British adoption of this single policy, it is necessary to first understand the Afrikaner (Boer) and African culture on the veldt, the importance of the farm in Afrikaner and African life, and the complex relationships which had developed among the Boers, Africans, and foreigners, all living on the land.

By 1899, significant differences between the Orange Free State and the South African Republic (Transvaal) had emerged. The Free State has been described as a “cow, sheep and rail

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134 Private Stanton, as quoted in Emily Hobhouse’s, *The Brunt of the War*, 10. Initially printed in the *Sydney Telegraph* and then in the *Reynold’s Newspaper*, 27 May, 1900.
135 Ibid., 10-11.
“republic” because its economy was fundamentally pastoral, and state revenues were based upon rents and freight charges for the railway lines that crossed the country. The population of Uitlanders was small, politically unimportant and economically welcome.

In stark contrast, the Transvaal economy had been radically altered by the mining and mineral revolution on the Rand. President Kruger and his leaders attempted to retain the pastoral way of life, as the large influx of wealth-seeking Uitlanders, with their “alien values” had changed the social, political and economic landscape of the country. \(^{136}\) Earlier, this study examined the effects of the Uitlanders on the relations between the Transvaal and Britain, and the role the Uitlanders played in the road to war. This part of the study deals solely with the Afrikaners, Africans and British actions on the Transvaal veldt, not in the large industrial centers.

Comments made on the Transvaal veldt should apply, in most cases, to the Orange Free State.

Afrikaner culture on the veldt was centered on the farm, which was the hub of family life, and family usually meant extended family. The farms had names, and it was not uncommon to have multiple generations of one family living together, working the land.

It was a patriarchal society, with men owning land and having the franchise. When men went “on commando,” it was the women who held the farm together. It is somewhat paradoxical that the war is chiefly remembered in Afrikaner society (and perhaps worldwide) by the raising of the suffering of Boer women and children to near martyrdom, serving as a unifying symbol for Afrikaner nationalism. Although the historiography of the conflict focusing on gender issues is relatively new, occurring around the war’s recent centenary remembrances, it does provide fresh insights into the culture on the veldt.

Recent scholarship on the gender aspect of the South African War ranges from the well researched commentaries of Shelia Marks, in *Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire* (1999) to Anne McClintock’s article, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family” (1993), in *Feminist Review*. McClintock’s essay states the Afrikaner nation used the “genderizing” of the suffering of the Boer women to build a new male nationalism in South Africa. Professor Marks explores women in the late Victorian period and examines women as victims, symbols and

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political actors. She also shows how the British press put forth the argument that had the Boer men provided for their women, the camps would have been unnecessary.\footnote{Shelia Marks, \textit{Gender, Race and the Writing of Empire} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Anne McClintock, “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family”, \textit{Feminist Review} 44 (Summer, 1993), 61-80. The works cited seem at the opposite ends of a feminism “scale”, from Marks’ researched, and supported theories to those of McClintock, in which statements are made or assertions drawn and seemingly not backed up by facts. I leave it to the reader to sort out, but the perspectives are important.}

The Transvaal had no social stratum of great commercial producers, such as existed in the Cape and Natal. Although some large farms were owned by absentee landowners, individual, small farmers were the rule, and the Boers apparently did not regard profit from farming as the most important objective. Evidence is that the Boers, living on land that was difficult to farm at best, wanted to produce only what they needed to live, not goods for sale at markets.\footnote{Jeremy Krikler, \textit{Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below: The Agrarian Transvaal at the Turn of the Century} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 68.} Fencing of farms was largely unknown, and thus diseases spread easily through the Boer cattle. From 1896-1897 almost 90 percent of the South African cattle died from a “rinderpest” epidemic.\footnote{Peter Warwick, \textit{Black People and the South African War, 1899-1902} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 10.}

No records were kept of brands, thus haphazard branding led to duplication.\footnote{Krikler, \textit{Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below}, 72-73.}

Louis Botha, a famous Boer commando general, stated: “Before the war the majority of high veld farmers only farmed stock, and they planted and sowed sufficient only for their own personal use.”\footnote{Louis Botha, as quoted in Krikler, \textit{Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below}, 73. Botha is referring to the western Highveld, not the Lowveld of the Eastern Transvaal.} The Transvaal, in general, had no developed commercial orientation towards agriculture, no national census of stock, and thus, few commercial statistics are available.

Since small farmers were unable to generate capital to purchase manufactured goods, imports were substantial, and farmers incurred sizeable debts. Although the Transvaal tried to exclude foreign ownership of land, the debts of small farmers often resulted in large tracts of land falling into the hands of absentee landowners.\footnote{Stanley Trapido, “Landlord and Tenant in a Colonial Economy: The Transvaal 1880-1910”, \textit{Journal of Southern African Studies} 5, no. 1 (Oct., 1978): 27.} By the last decades of the nineteenth century, three distinct landowning groups had emerged in the Transvaal: first, settler, generally Boer households; secondly, absentee landowners, with holdings usually consolidated into land companies; and thirdly, land owned by Africans but controlled to a degree by missionaries. This grouping does not include the land ceded to African tribes, or the mostly unsurveyed “common
land”, which was occupied by hunters, nomadic African tribes, and trekkers. Of the above three groups, the focus of this study are the farms owned by individual Boers and the African land owners, not the large holdings by commercial interests.

Boer society was itself stratified, into large and small landowners. However, by the 1880s Boer society also began to include a number of white settlers who did not own land. Coercive relationships between owners and tenants, which had previously existed with slavery and into the middle of the century, were replaced by more economic, wage-oriented relationships on both large and small farms. These tenant-farmers not only worked the land for the owner, but could produce for themselves and use the surplus as they saw fit. Larger landowners attracted more tenants, both African and white, and thus enjoyed a larger labor pool. These tenants were able to produce more for themselves than the tenants on small farms, who were fully engaged in keeping the farm operational.

The close integration of whites and Africans on the farms of the veldt occurred because of the need for labor. Crop-sharing arrangements emerged, and tenants became “sharecroppers” or “bywoners.” In some locations, Africans, who were prohibited from owning land directly by law, acquired land through an intermediary, usually a missionary. Living in small groups, clustered around churches and small buildings, these “mission stations” became viable communities to which Africans moved. Farming around the villages, Africans were able to produce crops that could be sold at local markets.

Competition for labor remained acute in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In 1887 the Squatters Law was passed, which limited the number of tenants that a white land owner or occupier could have to five families. This was an attempt by the small landowners to reduce the power of the large landowners, and share in the labor pool. The mission stations suffered because of the law, and largely disappeared by the turn of the century. Many Africans lost their lands.

The Boer large landowners had certain economic and political advantages, as they usually were local office holders and held the positions of veld kornet, a commando commandant, and were empowered to levy taxes. Tenants preferred working on large farms, especially those

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143 Ibid., 28.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid., 39-40.
146 Ibid., 41. There is no definitive data on how many Africans were displaced.
owned by absentee owners, as the owners rarely interfered in the production of the tenant, and they were able to raise more for their own use and marketing. Rents were often less than those on smaller farms, where the small landowner was constantly in debt and trying to stay solvent.  

On many large farms, natives were hired out to work in the mines, while their families remained on the farms, working. This arrangement provided funds to the native and also security for his family. Some large farms, like the Vereeniging Estates and Land Company, cultivated thousands of acres. In 1903 (no census exists before the war), the company controlled about fifteen farms in both republics, with 20,506 acres under cultivation. Both white and black tenants worked on the farms, but the owners preferred black tenants from whom they received both rent and labor. Natives lived very close together on the farmer’s land and thus the landlord received more rent for less land.

The Africans were mobile and moved from farm to farm, as better opportunities presented themselves. One native, Hwai Maines, moved his family into the western Transvaal to the district of Schewizer-Reneke in late 1892 or early 1893, and the description of his contract with a Boer farmer is typical of the relationships on the veldt:

At the farm Rietput, on the banks of the Harts River ... Hwai negotiated terms with an elderly white farmer named Reyneke. Each of Hwai’s three sons would pledge their labour for a year and in return, be rewarded with a heifer and the right to graze their livestock on the property. In addition, the Maines would provide the services of a young girl to assist with the customary tasks in and around the farmhouse.

On the vastness of the Transvaal veldt, the rural society developed a complex code of unwritten racial etiquette that governed the patterns of daily social relations between the dominant whites and the large mass of natives. Unlike the cities, it was impossible to maintain the distinct boundaries between whites and blacks in working the land. In many rural communities whites and blacks attended church together. Kas Maine, the son of Hwai Maine (above), stated that if a black man was to survive, he had to be like “a chameleon among the Boers.” Relationships changed and one had to adapt to changing social pressures to feed one’s family. On the farms of the Highveldt of the Transvaal, working relationships between white farmers and black sharecroppers were very informal. This arrangement was a distinct change

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147 Ibid., 32.
148 Ibid., 36.
from the coercive relationships of the early nineteenth century and markedly different than the relationships in the larger cities, such as the mining city of Johannesburg.  

The African natives who occupied “communal land” in the Transvaal were herders and sought to produce enough food to feed themselves and their families. Living in small and relatively independent communities, called “kraals”, the natives had no concept of private land ownership, but believed the land belong to all. Men owned livestock, and had the voting power, with a patriarch governing a community. Land was not owned; it was administered by the tribe. The same for game, water, wood, etc. - it was a collective resource. Subject to state taxation, the advance of private property around them, and the arbitrary intervention of the state, the native communities had not yet been significantly transformed by colonialism. As communal land was expropriated by the Boer republics, young black men were forced to labor for landlords on private land or in the mines.

While the culture on the veldt had evolved from the former relationships of slavery to one of tenant farmers and landlords, it was still a Boer, white-dominated society in which the natives were valued for their labor, not their skills. Yet when the British burned a farm and its occupants were turned out onto the veldt, the occupants of the farm were both white and black. This conundrum was to be another puzzle for the British to solve.

The Conduct of the War

Before continuing with British operations in the Transvaal and the British adoption of a new strategy, there are three items that students of the South African war should be familiar with: the provisions and effects of the Hague Conventions of 1899; the definitions of “ethnic cleansing” and “genocide”; and finally, the legality of guerilla forces operating in the latter part of the war.

Britain entered the Second South African War as a recent signatory to the Hague Conventions of 1899, which were the operative international guidelines on the conduct of war when hostilities broke out in South Africa. Although Britain signed the conventions in July of 1899, the convention did not formally go into force until 4 September 1899, about one month before war

151 Krikler, Revolution from Above, Rebellion from Below, 4.
152 Ibid., 4-5.
broke out. The British, therefore, entered the war a recent signatory to conventions that
protected noncombatants during a conflict.

The world at the turn of the century was a world “managed” by the powerful, and the states
with the predominant military power called themselves the “Great Powers.” It was also a world
spending more and more on defense, with an ongoing arms race, as evidenced by Britain’s
percentage of defense spending per net national product leading all other European nations from
1900-1902. It was an “internationalizing” world, with state delegates and interest groups
keenly interested and participating in assemblies and societies worldwide. And finally, it was a
world with an emerging worldwide media that contributed to making the relations of states better
or worse.

The Republic of South Africa and the Orange Free State were not invited to the Hague
convention, and therefore not signatories. Although there is nothing formally in writing, it was
common knowledge that Britain would not allow the republics to attend; otherwise, it would
boycott the conference. The convening authorities, the Russian and Netherlands governments,
realized this stance through informal contacts, and no invitation was issued.

However, there is general agreement the Conventions did apply to the actions of both British
and the Afrikaners. Britain never published instructions to their armed forces as called forth in
Article I, but did concede in communications from the Army to the Cabinet that the conventions
were being honored.

When British actions in the Transvaal are reviewed against the conditions of the 1899 Hague
Convention, the following is found:

- The British practice of putting noncombatant civilians on trains (hostages) to dissuade
guerillas from blowing up the railroad tracks was clearly a violation of Article 44, which
prohibits the compulsion of the population of an occupied territory to take part in military

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153 Convention with Respect to the Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague, II), 29 July 1899, found at The
155 Geoffrey Best, “Peace Conferences and the Century of Total War: The 1899 Hague Conference and What Came
After,” International Affairs 75, no. 3 (Jul., 1999): 619-620. The spread of newspapers, the telegraph and increased	ravel by individuals all contributed to the sharing of information at a much faster rate than before.
156 Pretorious, Scorched Earth, 169-171.
157 S.B. Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 11-14. Article I, Laws of War (Hague II), July 29 1899, found at The
Avalon Project at the Yale Law School. See citation #152 for URL.
operations against its own country. But the convention is strangely quiet on the taking of
“hostages,” which the British clearly did and subjected them to danger.
- The British practice of requiring Afrikaners, both neutral and surrendered, to take an oath
to Britain was in violation of Article 45 of the convention.
- Article 47 prohibits pillage, but first-hand accounts mention numerous cases of pillage by
British imperial and native troops of Boer homes on the veldt, prior to their destruction.
- In forcibly deporting the Boer families from the veldt to the camps, the British violated
Article 46 of the Convention that states: “Family honors and rights, individual lives and
private property, as well as religious convictions and liberty, must be respected.
- In addition, Article 50 specifically states the principle of collective responsibility cannot
be used against the general populace: “No general penalty, pecuniary or otherwise, can be
inflicted on the population on account of the acts of individuals for which it cannot be
regarded as collectively responsible.”

In determining who was a bona fide “belligerent,” the Hague Conventions indicated in
Article I of the Annex to the Convention that the laws, rights and duties of war applied not only
to armies, but also to militia and volunteer corps, providing the units were commanded, carried
arms openly, and that they are included under the term “army.” Although the British issued a
proclamation that pronounced the Boers on commando as “rebels,” this ill-advised document
was withdrawn, as it was condemned by most British jurists and in the House of Commons.
Lord Roberts clarified that burghers on commando would be treated as prisoners of war.

The British military, frustrated with fighting a guerilla war, wanted all Boer men to be
regarded as combatants. Boers who did not go on commando, along with Afrikaner families, and
most of the natives in the Transvaal were and should be clearly treated as civilians
(noncombatants) in any historical study. In the latter part of the twentieth century, the
distinction between combatant and noncombatant would become even more blurred, and
belligerents would extend the definition of combatant to include almost all important elements of

158 The Hague Conventions of 1899, found at The Avalon Project at Yale Law School,
www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/lawofwar/hague02.htm.
159 Ibid., Article I, Section I, Annex to the Convention, Hague Convention, 1899.
160 Roger Barrett and Lester Nurick, “Legality of Guerilla Forces Under the Laws of War,” The American Journal of
161 Spies, Methods of Barbarism, 15-18.
the enemy’s civilian population. While legal arguments and contradicting opinions lie outside the scope of this study, it suffices to say that the Hague Conventions were the contemporary yardstick from which we should gauge British and Afrikaner intentions and actions.

A second set of concepts that applies to the actions of the British against the Afrikaner and African noncombatants, are state-sponsored actions of “genocide” and “ethnic cleansing.” Although “genocide” is probably as old as war itself, the term is relatively new, coined by the Polish jurist Raphael Lemkin in 1944, as scholars struggled to find new words to describe the atrocities of state-sponsored or sanctioned mass murders perpetrated in Second World War. More than half of the people killed in that war were noncombatants, but in the Second South African War almost 80 percent of white Afrikaners who died were noncombatants.

The Second World War prompted the international community to confront the horrors of genocide, and with Lemkin playing a guiding hand, the United Nations adopted the Genocide Conventions in December 9, 1948. According to Article II genocide is: “....any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

(a) Killing members of the group;
(b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
(c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
(d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
(e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

In The Specter of Genocide (2003), edited by Professors Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan (2003), Isabel V. Hull’s article: “Military Culture and the Production of ‘Final Solutions’ in the Colonies,” explores the role of the military in mass murders/genocide. Supporting the theories of Hannah Arendt in The Origins of Totalitarianism (1948), Hull proposes the European military was the link between imperialism and “final solutions.” Focusing on the military’s need to develop a “final solution” to its colonial problems, Hull

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163 Gellately and Kiernan, The Specter of Genocide, 75.
proposes that concentration camps, first used by the Spanish in Cuba and then by the British in South Africa, were a “imperial-military invention designed to frustrate guerrilla warfare by removing the civilian population and thus exposing the remaining fighters to easier and clearer conditions of battle”. She attributes the high death rates in the camps to the lack of European military expertise in mastering complex logistics issues required to maintain women, children, the aged, and the ill in “hastily built but quasi-permanent locations”. This model seems to fit the British experience in South Africa.

In addition, Kiernan, writing on “Twentieth – Century Genocides” in The Specter of Genocide, lists territorial expansion as a significant factor in genocides, and states: “Genocidal regimes often proclaim a need to “purify” not only a race but a territory.”

“Ethnic cleansing” or “ethnic conflict” is described by Gellately and Kiernan as a prelude to genocide in many cases. It involves the purification of a territory, not necessarily that of a population (or race). Helen Fein, in a paper presented at the Association of Genocide Scholars Conference in June, 2001, states that “Ethnic cleansing requires either a protected reservation within a state or a free exit for the victims to escape; genocide precludes both protection and exit.”

A case for genocide cannot be fully supported in the British actions in the South African War; however a definite case exists for ethnic cleansing, based on the definitions laid out in the United Nations’ declarations and by modern research. British actions of forcibly removing both white and black noncombatants from the veldt of the Boer republics to concentration camps; the wholesale killing of sheep and horses; the burning of farms and destruction of crops; the death of over 48,000 white and black inhabitants in state-sponsored concentration camps; and the deportation of Boer prisoners of war to oversea camps, all fall into the actions of ethnic cleansing and border on genocidal actions.

There is, to date, no direct evidence the British Army or government planned or desired to exterminate the African or Afrikaner civilians in their care. However, a full study of the causes of deaths, coupled with an analysis of the cumulative, total effect of British actions on the

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165 Isabel V. Hull, Military Culture and the Production of “Final Solutions” in the Colonies”, contained in Gellately and Kiernan, Specter of Genocide, 141-162.
population of the Transvaal if the war had dragged on even longer, may yield different results. The seemingly noncommittal actions of the senior British military commanders to relieve the suffering of the people in the camps reveal insights that would shift the labeling of British policies, and particularly the results of the policies themselves, into the area of war crimes against noncombatants.

One could construct an argument against application of later twentieth century norms and definitions to turn of the century actions, but it was the British, among several other European nations (Spanish, Germans) who began the practices that were to culminate in the Nazi concentration and death camps of the Second World War. It seems only right the British should be held to the international standard of behavior they helped establish, just as they held the Germans to the Nurnberg standards, which were also drawn up after the war was over.

The final issue that deserves coverage before moving to the specific actions of the British soldiers and columns as they marched across the Orange Free State and the South African Republic, is the legality of guerilla forces under the 1899 Hague Conventions.

The British formally annexed the Orange Free State on May 24 1900 and on June 1, Lord Roberts issued a proclamation that warned the burghers (Boers) that:

... inasmuch as the Orange River Colony, formerly known as the Orange Free State, is now British territory ... all inhabitants thereof, who, after fourteen days from the date of this Proclamation, may be found in arms against Her Majesty with the said Colony, will be liable to be dealt with as rebels and to suffer in person and property accordingly. 168

The Orange Free State government was in existence at the time of Roberts’ declaration and continued in existence for another two years after his proclamation was issued. It was representatives of the two Afrikaner republics, sovereign nations, who signed the eventual peace Treaty of Vereeniging on 31 May 1902, not as British colonies. 169 The proclamation by Roberts as treating those “on commando” as rebels was condemned by foreign and British jurists. James Bryce, a prominent British statesman, issued the following statement in the House of Commons:

A monstrous proclamation, a proclamation absolutely opposed to the first principles of international law, a proclamation based upon a paper annexation

169 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 63.
made seven days before, which purported to treat the inhabitants of the two republics as rebels – rebels, forsooth, on the basis of this paper annexation.\textsuperscript{170}

On September 1st, 1900, Lord Roberts rescinded his proclamation, stating that only those burghers resident in the Orange River Colony, who had not been continuously “on commando” since a time prior to the annexation were considered as subjects of the Queen, and that burghers who had been on commando, should, if captured, be treated as prisoners of war.\textsuperscript{171} If this statement was true, then the British forced the Queen’s own subjects into concentration camps.

Continually frustrated by the constant attacks on their supply lines, the British continued to punish captured Boers under Roberts’ 1 June, 1900 proclamation and also under the title of “marauders.” The Boers were considered hostile persons not belonging to an organized body of a recognized Government, and they could receive the death penalty.\textsuperscript{172} The British refused to recognize the commandos were operating under the directions of the Orange Free State chain of command, to include its President, who was directing the Boer forces from the field. The same was to be later true in the South African Republic.

To add to the confusion, Lord Kitchener, taking over from Lord Roberts in November of 1900, issued yet another proclamation on August 7th, 1901, that said the commandos in the field were not proper belligerents, and pronounced a sentence of “banishment” against all leaders who did not surrender by September 15 of that year. Most jurists condemned this proclamation, and it was denounced in the House of Commons. Even the \textit{Times History of the War} called the proclamation “… a strange tissue of half-truths and perverted logic."\textsuperscript{173} It became another dead letter.

The generally accepted logic of belligerents and guerilla tactics is that as long as the guerillas (commandos) are operating under the direction of a viable government, they are to be recognized as proper belligerents. As the Orange Free State government and the government of the South African Republic never surrendered until May 1902, it is logical to assume the commandos were not marauders or rebels, but legally constituted forces of viable governments, operating in the enemy rear areas.

\textsuperscript{170} James Bryce, as quoted in Lester Nurck and Roger Barrett, “Legality of Gureilla Forces Under the Laws of War,” 578.
\textsuperscript{171} Nurick and Barrett, 579.
\textsuperscript{172} Ibid.
The Occupation of Pretoria and Establishment of British Governance

By the beginning of April 1900, Lord Roberts was ready to begin his advance to Johannesburg and to Pretoria. Roberts had over 170,000 men in the field, and intended to use 100,000 in the advance, first occupying the enemy’s commerce center (Johannesburg) and finally Pretoria, the capital, thus effectively ending the war. The Afrikaners had about 30,000 men on commando, dispersed in small units and operating over a large area.\(^{174}\)

Roberts marched northward in three large columns, with a division guarding his left (west) flank. His east flank lay open.\(^{175}\) Aside from fighting a series of delaying actions against retreating Boer commandos, the British march to Johannesburg and then Pretoria was conducted without significant opposition. Roberts occupied Kroonstad on the 12\(^{th}\) of May and rested the army for ten days, as the cavalry division had again sustained significant wastage of horses. The cavalry finally crossed the Vaal River into the Transvaal on the 24\(^{th}\) of May, and Johannesburg fell on 31 May, 1900. The Boers decided not to defend Pretoria, and Roberts occupied the final republic capital on 5 June, 1900.\(^{176}\)

The British Army had marched over three hundred miles in thirty-four days. The war seemed truly won. But the true threat of the guerilla war had yet to fully descend on the strung out British supply lines. On 7 June, De Wet overran garrisons along the railway line north of Kroonstad (south of the main British force) causing 700 British losses. However in July 1900, the Boer Commandant Prinsloo, was trapped by British forces and surrendered his force of 4,000 men south of Bethlehem. This surrender was another heavy blow to Boer resistance.\(^{177}\)

The Orange Free State was officially annexed by Britain on the 24\(^{th}\) of May, renamed the Orange River Colony, and on the 31\(^{st}\) it was placed under martial law. Major General G. T. Pretymn was appointed first as military governor of Bloemfontein and soon governor of the entire Orange River Colony.\(^{178}\) In retrospect, it was Roberts who was responsible for having the annexation proclaimed while the war was still in progress, no doubt based on his experience in the Second Afghan War. Regarding the annexation of the Transvaal, the High Commissioner, Milner, stated to Roberts on the 6\(^{th}\) of July 1900, that ... “Personally I should like to see our first

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\(^{174}\) Judd and Surridge, *The Boer War*, 179.

\(^{175}\) Ibid.


\(^{177}\) Judd & Surridge, 183-184.

\(^{178}\) Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 55-60.
new colony a little more subdued before we appropriate another. We ought to control rather more of Transvaal than we actually do before annexation.” 179

An occupying power has the right to impose stringent penalties on civilians who attempt or commit acts of sabotage by damaging railroad lines, or supply bases, but attacks on these lines of communications by organized bodies of the armed forces of the opposing army are legal acts of war. Roberts, followed by Kitchener, always acted as if these operations were carried out by rebels in areas occupied by the British and thus were crimes. From May 1900 onwards, their steps of “dubious legitimacy” against the citizens of the two republics were attempts to prevent the increasingly frustrating attacks on the British lines of communications by commandos. 180 Roberts’ proclamations held noncombatants responsible for the safety of his lines of communication. How were they to accomplish this? The proclamations seem to be against the provisions of article 44 of the Hague Conventions, which state: “Any compulsion of the population of the occupied country to take part in military operations against its own country is prohibited.” 181

By November 1900, the Transvaal had been divided into fifteen districts, headed by district commissioners, who like their counterparts in the Orange River Colony, were army officers of the grade of mostly captains and majors. Major General J.G. Maxwell was made governor of Johannesburg, and effectively became the governor of the entire Transvaal (the British controlled the towns they occupied, and various posts throughout the former republic, not the entire country). 182 The South African Republic was annexed the Empire on 1 September, 1900 and martial law declared the same day.

In June 1900, Roberts wrote to Kitchener and other generals:

We must put a stop to these raids on our railway and telegraph lines and the best way will be to let the inhabitants understand that they cannot be continued with impunity ... a commencement should be made by burning De Wet’s farm which is only three or four miles from the Rhenoster Railway Bridge (which had been destroyed by commandos). He like all Free Staters fighting against us is a rebel and must be treated as such. Let it be known all over the country that in the event of any damage being done to the railway or telegraph the nearest farm will be

179 Ibid., 61.
180 Ibid, 51.
181 1899 Hague Conventions, Art. 44.
182 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 65.
burnt to the ground. A few examples only will be necessary and let us begin with De Wet’s farm.”¹⁸³

General Methuen telegraphed to Roberts on 16 June that he had burnt De Wet’s home. That same day, Roberts issued a lengthy proclamation stating that “… houses in the vicinity of the place where the damage is done will be burnt and the principal civil residents will be made prisoners of war.” The mere proximity of a house to the scene of an incident was regarded as sufficient justification to burn the home.¹⁸⁴

As attacks continued, the British resorted to placing Afrikaner civilians on trains to try and stop the commandos from attacking the rail lines. The Germans had adopted this policy during the Franco–Prussian War. The British policy was started, then stopped, then started again, only to be abandoned due to legal protests. These “on” and “off” policy changes resulted from the frustration of the British senior leaders in combating the guerillas, and produced confusion down in the ranks. This unclear “command climate” is one reason why farm burning became so prevalent in the spring of 1900. It was assumed the Commanding General wanted Boer farms burnt. It takes a long time for orders to filter down to troops engaged in operations, and if the orders themselves are unclear and not accompanied by the intent of the higher commander, then the local commanders will supply their own intent.¹⁸⁵

In the summer of 1900, the indiscriminate farm burnings and eviction of the Boers (and Africans) onto the veldt continued, as evidenced by this report of Mr. Hervey de Montmorency, writing for the Daily News on 22 June 1901:

When we retreated from Rustenburg (west of Pretoria) in August of last year (1900), after the evacuation of that town, every building in the neighbourhood of the northern-most road to Commando Nek was burned to the ground without discrimination. No single act of treachery on the part of the Boers occurred on the road. It would be interesting to know what was the motive for the malignant destruction of these farms …¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Telegram by Roberts, as quoted in Spies, 102. Italics by author.
¹⁸⁴ Roberts Proclamation #5 of 1900, 16 June 1900, as quoted in Spies, 102. Also found in Command Document (CD) 426.
¹⁸⁶ Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War, 19-20.
In August 1900, Roberts threatened to burn two farms instead of one if the incidents continued.\textsuperscript{187} In October 1900, LTG A. Hunter burned down the entire town of Bothaville, except for the Red Cross station and church.\textsuperscript{188}

The farm burnings continued, and in July 1900, Roberts tried to send 2,500 Boer women and children, who had been turned out on the veldt by the burnings, to the commandos in the Eastern Transvaal. This was impractical, so Roberts increased his policy of destruction. There was considerable reluctance of the British military to report the number of farms actually destroyed.

It is evident from eyewitness accounts - see Hobhouse, Boer accounts, and British military records, that there was deliberate, massive, widespread and ruthless devastation of Boer property in the two republics from June to November 1900. Coming under increased scrutiny from London, Kitchener forwarded statistics to the government in February 1901, showing 634 buildings burnt in the republics. The accuracy of these figures is suspect, as the Boers maintained that some 30,000 homes were destroyed in the war. The returns to Parliament failed to mention some forty farms by name specifically approved by Roberts on 16 June for burning.\textsuperscript{189} After the war, in October 1902, Milner, replying to a British government query, estimated that 30,000 homes had been destroyed or seriously damaged. Lord Roberts’ replies to the Boer generals and his superiors had been evasive and most likely outright lies.\textsuperscript{190}

On 29 November, Lord Roberts was succeeded by Lord Kitchener as commander-in-chief. Lord Milner became the Chief Administrator of the two new colonies in place of the departing Field Marshal. Milner would remain at his post as governor of the Cape Colony until 28 February, 1901, when he moved to Pretoria. British civil administration in South Africa had been fully established.\textsuperscript{191}

The British, much like Napoleon, who in 1812 fought his way to Moscow and failed to find a government with which to negotiate a peace settlement, discovered their recent triumphs did not lead to the conference table.\textsuperscript{192} In addition, the growing number of men, women and children turned out on the veldt by the farm burning columns were beginning to become a problem for the British, as were the surrendered Boers and their families, who required protection from the Boer

\textsuperscript{187} Spies, \textit{Methods of Barbarism?}, 110.
\textsuperscript{188} Pretorius, \textit{Scorched Earth}, 39.
\textsuperscript{189} Hobhouse, \textit{The Brunt of the War}, 14-15.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 40, and Spies, \textit{Methods of Barbarism?}, 116-118.
\textsuperscript{191} Hobhouse, 79.
\textsuperscript{192} Judd & Surridge, \textit{The Boer War}, 187.
commandos. Clearly, a new strategy was required to respond to the guerilla war and growing chaos on the veldt.

**The Revised British Military Strategy**

By the beginning of 1901, all attempts to capture De Wet and the other commandos had failed. Boer invasion of the Cape Colony and possible widespread insurrection was a persistent fear. Lord Kitchener, frustrated by the continuing escalation of the guerilla war, adopted what would soon solidify into a three-pronged, new British military strategy. First, Kitchener began construction of integrated lines of blockhouses/concertina wire to serve as barriers to Boer mobility, coupled with garrisoning railways, depots, and other critical points. He then followed up by organizing multiple, mobile columns, which would operate in the veldt (prairie) to “drive” the Boer commandos against the blockhouse lines. The third element of his strategy and of most interest to this study, was his intent to denude the veldt of Boer and African noncombatants by burning farms, destroying livestock and moving Boer and African families into concentration camps, thereby denying the Boers their major source of logistical support.

It had all the hallmarks of a Kitchener short cut – big, simple and cheap. He left the details to his two new military governors, Major General John Maxwell in the Transvaal and Colonel Hamilton Goold-Adams in the Orange River Colony. The vagrant Boer women and children and surrendered Boers would be concentrated in “protected laagers” along the railway lines, with the “internees” on half-rations. It was a military operation. The clearance of civilians from the veldt and uprooting a whole nation would come to dominate the last phase of the war.\(^{193}\)

This is how the concentration camps officially began. But, it is evident that local camps were started much earlier, perhaps as early as May or June 1900. It was only in early 1901 the whole plan came together, and the British army moved to establish and support the camps as part of its integrated, new strategy.

Lord Milner had proposed an alternative strategy to Roberts and also to Kitchener. It was far different than the one Kitchener adopted. It was a plan for progressive reconquest of the two republics, involving gradually securing each district before tackling the next, and slowly occupying the country bit by bit. People would be left on their own farms. Milner told Kitchener

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in October 1900 that “… What the bulk of the people (in the new Orange River Colony) require is protection not punishment.” The proposal was not only an efficient way of ending the war, but avoided the need to further devastate the country and it would get the Johannesburg mines back in operation quickly.¹⁹⁴

Milner thought his new position as administrator of the two new colonies as a “farce”, as the government was holding only the railway lines and a few big towns: “… confining our operations in the rest of the country to chasing commandos whom we never catch.” Concerned about the absolute devastation of Kitchener’s plan, he scrawled on his own notes: “…besides tens of thousands of homeless women and children to keep and feed – Heaven knows how or where.”¹⁹⁵ Milner’s plan would be revisited in the future as the war wore on and his fears over Kitchener’s plan were realized.

The Afrikaner Concentration Camps

It was the problem of what to do with the displaced civilian noncombatants on the veldt and those that now thronged into the towns and cities that spawned the idea of the camps. Adding to this problem was what were the British to do with the surrendered burghers and their families, who had been returned (per Roberts agreements) to their homes on the veldt, and were constantly being coerced by the commandos to return to the war. A third factor was the Africans who, displaced with the Boers from burned farms or devastated kraals on the veldt, also thronged into the towns and cities, seeking food and shelter. The military necessity of denying the Boers safe havens by burning their farms and towns on the veldt was foremost in minds of the British. The displaced Boers and Africans were an afterthought, an unforeseen irritant that evolved from the initial decision to burn the farms, something that had to be dealt with, but not the focus of a fighting army. Already stretched thin by lengthening lines of communication, increasingly long and isolated campaigns on the veldt, and an inadequate supply and transport system, the Army simply set priorities. The less than responsive medical care capability, already burdened by typhoid breakouts which had claimed hundreds of British soldiers, could not support the sudden herding of thousands of men, women and children into hastily improvised camps along the

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 514-515.
¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 515-516.
railway lines. The civilians were not Kitchener’s concern, and thus the military operations received first priority. The system was not able to and did not properly provide for civilians, as they were seen by the British as a secondary priority, “undesirables” and the enemy.

It was not until February 1901, that an official report was made to the British government about the establishment of camps for the Boers. There are no statements on the beginning of the camps in the numerous parliamentary papers prior to the February report. The Secretary of State for War, James Brodrick, stated in Parliament in 1902 that the first camps for women and children were formed in January 1901, after Roberts’ departure. This was not correct, as there is substantial evidence of a camp for women being formed at Mafeking as early as July 1900, and others at Bloemfontein and Pretoria in September of that same year. Other camps at Potchefstroom and Port Elizabeth were established along with the beginnings of black camps by the end of the year. Histories which state Kitchener established the camps are in error, as Roberts began the camps before his departure in late November 1900.

Ample European precedents existed for the establishment of noncombatant concentration camps prior to the South African war. The British had established labor camps in India during the 1870s, where thousands died due to insufficient rations. Most recently and notably, General Valeriano Weyler, a Spanish general sent to Cuba in 1896 to crush a rebellion, had been a military attaché in Washington during the American Civil War and greatly admired General William T. Sherman and his tactics of devastation in Louisiana and Georgia. On arriving in Cuba, Weyler divided the country into districts and set about building lines of fortifications. He answered the guerilla attacks by removing civilians to concentration camps (Reconcentrados). Death rates in those camps were significant, somewhere between 100,000 – 400,000 people.

On 25 July, 1900, the Liberal politician David Lloyd George stated in the Commons: “It seems to me that in this war we have gradually followed the policy of Spain in Cuba.” Despite the political overtones of George’s speech, it is nevertheless interesting how later in the war the

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196 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 144.
197 Pretorius, Scorched Earth, 41. Even Pakenham’s book, The Boer War, attributes the idea and establishment of the camps to Kitchener. In addition, neither Keith Surridge or Denis Judd’s, The Boer War, mention that Roberts started the camps in 1900. The research of S.B. Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, and Pretorious, confirms the camps were started during Lord Roberts’ tenure.
198 Sir Richard Temple established labor camps in Madras, India, during the 1877 famine, and implemented policies which resulted in wholesale starvation. Descriptions remind the author of the native camps in South Africa.
199 Spies, 148. An accurate account of the totals deaths in the Spanish camps in Cuba has never been determined. Most modern scholarship put the totals nearer the 100,000 mark than the higher figure.
strategy adopted by Kitchener began to closely parallel that of Weyler in Cuba. There is no direct evidence that either Roberts or Kitchener based their strategy on Spain’s experience in the Cuban insurrection, however the correlation is almost impossible to miss.

The families turned out on the veldt sought refuge anywhere they could find safety – neighboring farms, Kaffir kraals, in laagers formed by the Boers, in hiding places in the hills, in the small towns or cities, and some even managed to migrate south to friends in the Cape Colony (or probably Natal). Sometime around mid summer it became evident that the homeless women and children had become so numerous that something had to be done about them.

In May 1900 Brigadier General Brabant had suggested to Roberts that instead of returning surrendered Boers to their homes on the veldt, that they should be sent somewhere in the Cape Colony, near the Orange River. The British could not protect the surrendered burghers on the veldt as they were in areas not under control of the Army or in districts with no British garrisons. Lord Milner agreed, but Roberts didn’t adopt the proposal.

Near Mafeking (in the Western District of the Transvaal), the first camp was formed in July 1900, for wandering families in the northwest Transvaal. This “women’s laager” had a population of some 188 Afrikaner and British women, 315 children, only ten men, and about 150 African servant girls. When the siege of Mafeking began in October 1899, some 150 plus African refugees fled through the Boer lines to Kanya, some 130 km and formed the first African refugee camp of the war. Susarha Nel, a Boer housewife from the Transvaal, left a diary of her time in the camp, from July 1901 – August 1902.

By September 1900, camps had been set up at Bloemfontein and Pretoria, and by the end of 1900, two additional camps at Potchefstroom and Port Elizabeth. The camps at Bloemfontein and Pretoria were announced by Major General J.G. Maxwell, military governor of the Transvaal Colony, on 22 September, 1900, as “... Camps for burghers who voluntarily surrender are being

\[\text{\textsuperscript{200}}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{201}}\text{Spies, 47.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{202}}\text{Stowell V. Kessler, in Scorched Earth, 41. Emily Hobhouse reports this camp as being the first of the British camps established during Lord Roberts’ tenure. Stowell Kessler, one of the most modern of researchers on the camps, especially the native camps, supplies the camp population described above. The establishment of the African camps is covered later in this study. It is most likely that initial “laagers” for African and Afrikaner families were established where and when the need arose, and only some of these were finally meshed into the formal camp system.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{203}}\text{The Diary of Susarha Nel and her ordeal in the “Death Camp” at Mafeking, July 1901-August 1902, kept at the Lynchburg Museum. See Susarha Nel, Diary: Her Ordeal in the Death Camp at Mafeking, July 1901-August 1902, found at \textit{http://home.intekons.com/lichtengurg/alo-e.htm}. Accessed on July 5th 2004.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{204}}\text{Pretorius, Scorched Earth, 41.}\]
formed in Pretoria and Bloemfontein.”

On the 14th of August, Roberts withdrew the prior privilege he had granted to surrendered burghers of the Transvaal, allowing them to return to their homes if they voluntarily laid down their arms. The camps began as true “refugee camps,” and if only for surrendered burgher families would probably have remained small. This classification of families of surrendered burghers versus the families of burghers on commando or those who were prisoners of war, would be applied to thousands of women and children in the near future, with deathly results.

On the 20th of December, 1900, Kitchener announced a South Africa wide policy where surrendered burghers and their families would be housed and fed in camps, operated by the British military:

> It is hereby notified to all burghers that if after this date they voluntarily surrender they will be allowed to live with their families in Government Laagers until such time as the guerilla warfare now being carried on will admit to of their returning safely to their homes. All stock and property brought in at the time of surrender by such burghers will be respected, and paid for if requisitioned by military authorities.

But the camps were not to be just for surrendered burghers and their families. Meeting with surrendered burghers at Pretoria, on 21 December, Kitchener told the men:

> He was about to form burgher camps at centres on the railway, and he would then collect all men, women and children of the various districts. Stock and Kaffirs from the farms would also be brought in. Burghers who were willing to come in and surrender and (who) desired to live peacefully in these camps would be allowed to do so, and would be given protection ...

As the number of women and children turned out onto the veldt from their burned homes increased, additional camps were established that included families of both surrendered, fighting Boers and prisoners of war. Even English families living on the veldt were subject to deprivations. The deportation of men, women and children to camps became a familiar, daily occurrence in both republics, and it was common practice to see trainloads of families, packed

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205 Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War*, 34.
208 Ibid. While the version published in the Blue Book, CD 547, p. 52, reads a little differently, it basically states that all families could be brought in, “... no difference would be made between those who had and those who had not taken the oath....” Italics by author.
into cars, passing stations or waiting on sidings for passage. The following excerpts from telegrams give some ideas as to the conditions:

... One hundred Boer women and children have been sent to Natal (from Standerton, November 17th)

Yesterday I visited the Racecourse Encampment, where the Dutch women and children who were sent down from Jagersfontein and Fauresmith are quartered. They are practically prisoners, as a military guard has been placed over them .... (Port Elizabeth, October 30th)

... At Heidelberg, the Commanding General has taken a wise step in bringing families known to have been harbouring the Boers into the town. The depleting of farms around Vlakfontein of all food stuffs continues. (Heidelberg, October 19th)

Hobhouse described camps at Bloemfontein, Johannesburg, Irene (south of Pretoria), Potchefstroom, Norval’s Pont, Kroonstad, Vereeniging, Heidelberg, Winburg, Port Elizabeth, and Pietermaritzburg operating by the end of 1900, with the last two camps being established for “undesirables”. This term was applied by the British senior leaders to women and families in the Transvaal or Orange Free State who had husbands out on commando or who were known to have supported the Boer commandos. Many families, initially taken to camps in the Free State or Transvaal, were then further deported to camps in Natal. These inter-camp deportations would be a dominant factor in the spread of diseases within the camp system.210

The Boers were not the only persons subjected to British forced deportations. The occupying British also had to deal with other nationalities in the cities. The Indians, who mainly lived in Pretoria, were moved to a location outside the town.211 An exodus of Uitlanders from the Transvaal had already taken place, with an estimated 100,000 white people fleeing the Rand from May through November 1899, along with probably as many blacks, Asians and Coloureds combined.212

As the camps were being set up, the destruction on the veldt continued. Trooper Bossley, of the 1st Australian Horse, a Colonial unit, wrote to a friend: “The houses are beautifully furnished

209 All three quotes from Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War, 38. These are representative telegrams showing the movement of Afrikaner civilians into the camps that were just being established.
210 Ibid.
211 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 68.
with lovely pianos and organs. The boys break up the organs and vehicles for firewood.”

Another New Zealander wrote: “There is a Boer farm here that has been taken by the troops. You should have seen the things the fellows took. ... Some fellows in the regulars pulled up the floor to see if there was anything hidden there, and others broke the piano, organ and things for the sake of saying they did it.” ²¹³

Letters from soldiers in the field filled English newspapers with stories of farm burning and devastation. Lieutenant Morrison, in Belfast (Transvaal) on November 21⁰, 1900, wrote the following:

We moved from valley to valley, lifting cattle and sheep, burning, looting and turning out the women and children to sit and cry beside the ruins of their once beautiful farmsteads. ... We burned a track about six miles wide through these fertile valleys, and completely destroyed the village of Wilpoort and the town of Dullstroom. ²¹⁴

The mission stations mentioned earlier in this study were also targets of the British columns. Mrs. John Murray, wife of the missionary in the Waterberg District of the Transvaal, wrote the following to a relative (received December 17⁰, 1900). Apparently, the mission station had been burned in September or October 1900:

... Then they gave us two hours notice to leave for Pretoria ... we were all put into cattle trucks ... We were all sent away because the officer said every homestead was to be burned down ... I told the officer that our mission station was Colonial Church property, but he said it made no difference. ... ²¹⁵

This above quote illustrates the extent of the farm burning and devastation that apparently included not only mission stations, with large populations of natives, but churches as well. Mrs. Murray, who was sent to Pretoria, was allowed to later join her parents in Natal.

By October 17⁰, the camp at Bloemfontein had been established, according to this letter from a mother to a prisoner of war:

We were taken out of our house and the house was burnt. ... We are half an hour from Bloemfontein, in a camp; they call it the Refugee Camp. There are thirteen families in the camp. We are placed 12 in one tent, and your mother is cook, for we were forbidden to bring servants.... There are no cattle here, and we have to use mule dung to light the fire with. Your loving mother. ²¹⁶

²¹⁴ Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War*, 41.
²¹⁵ Hobhouse, 59-61.
²¹⁶ Ibid., 62.
By October 1900, thousands of people were being relocated to the camps and already the lodging, health care and supply systems were overwhelmed. These are the Afrikaner camps which were established before Lord Roberts relinquished command to Lord Kitchener on 29 November 1900:

**Orange River Colony (Control)**
- Kroonstad
- Bloemfontein
- Norval’s Pont

**Natal Colony**
- Pietermaritzburg

**Cape Colony**
- Port Elizabeth

**Transvaal Colony (Control)**
- Mafeking
- Vereeniging*
- Potchefstroom
- Heidelberg

Camps continued to be established in the month of December 1900, and by the first week of February 1901, additional camps were in operation at Barbeton, Belfast, Middelburg, Irene**, Johannesburg, Klerksdorp, Standerton, and Volksrust in the Transvaal. By the second week of March 1901 camps were in operation at Brandfort, Vredefort Road, Winburg, Springfontein, Aliwal North, Harrissmith and Kimberley in the Orange River Colony and at Howick in Natal.217

The official order (AG Circular No. 29) that established the concentration camp system throughout South Africa was disseminated by Kitchener in a confidential memorandum on 21 December 1900. The memorandum’s content, although not quoted in its entirety here, stressed the following:

> Of the various methods suggested for the accomplishment of this object (ending the guerilla war), one which has been strongly recommended and has lately been successfully tried on a small scale, is the removal of all men, women, and children and natives from the district which the enemy’s bands persistently occupy. The women and children brought in should be kept near the railway for supply purposes, and should be divided into two categories: 1st Refugees, and the families of neutrals, non-combatants and surrendered burghers. 2nd. Those whose husbands, fathers or sons are on commando. The preference in accommodation,

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217 The listing of camps comes from Hobhouse’s *The Brunt of the War*, but also from dispatches, letters, etc. *The Vereeniging* camp is listed by S.B. Spies as being established during the tenure of Roberts, bringing the total number of Afrikaner camps to nine. Hobhouse lists the camp as established in December, 1900. In any case, the Vereeniging Camp was established early on in late November or December, before the Army reported the camps to the government. **The Irene camp is listed by Stowell Kessler as being established around 21 September in the Transvaal, along with Bloemfontein and Kroonstad in the Orange River Colony. Italics by author.
&c., should of course, be given to the first class. The Ordinance will supply the necessary tents and the District Commissioner will look after the food on the scale now in use.

With regards to the natives it is not intended to clear Kaffir locations (the kraals on the veldt), but only such kaffirs and their stock as are on Boer farms. Every endeavor should be made to cause as little loss as possible to the natives removed and to give them protection when brought in. They will be available for any works undertaken, for which they will receive pay at native rates.\textsuperscript{218}

On 27 December, Kitchener informed the Secretary of State for War (Brodrick) that he was issuing instructions that surrendered burghers and their families would be moved to protective laagers, near railways in their district. He made no mention of the families being swept off the veldt or of the native families. The Secretary of State for War replied the next day by approving the policy and asking Kitchener if he could extend the policy to the “undesirables” rather then send them to Cape Colony. Again, Kitchener made no mention of the thousands of men, women and children already in camps.\textsuperscript{219}

At the same time the British camps were filling up, the Boers were establishing “women’s laagers” in the central and northern Transvaal. A 1902 report by the State –Attorney of the Transvaal recounts the lamentable status of homeless women in the Western Districts of the Transvaal in July 1900:

The Kaffir chiefs (the Bakgatla) have jointed the enemy, crossed the Western border and committed murders and cruelties from which even English soldiers shrank back. ... the greater part of the Western and Northern Districts had to be abandoned by us, because the women and children were constantly exposed to being murdered. Camps for the women were then made in the central parts of the Western Districts, and the women provided with carts, tents, food, and placed under protection of old men who were less fit for military service.\textsuperscript{220}

\textsuperscript{218} Spies, \textit{Methods of Barbarism?}, 183. There are four things in this memorandum to the commanders which set the stage for the coming British victory and the disaster of the camps. First, the order says that all persons should be cleared from the veldt. Second, the rations are set on the “scale now in use”, which means the military ration scale, which was already meager due to the logistical problems and the single railway, being cut daily by the Boer commandos. Thirdly, the directive divides the Boer families into two distinct classes, those whose husbands are not on commando and those who are. This was implemented by the Army in the amount of rations, and those whose husbands were on commando were given even less then the first class. With the rations already being cut short, this further reduction by “class” caused malnutrition and deaths. Lastly, it sets the stage for the establishment of the African camps and eventual use of the Africans by the Army as a labor pool. With the extent of devastation on the veldt growing each day, what the memorandum really meant is that all Boers, Africans, and other nationalities, living on the veldt could expect to lose their homes and be deported to the camps.

\textsuperscript{219} Maurice, \textit{Official History of the War in South Africa}, Appendix 12, 659.

\textsuperscript{220} Hobhouse, \textit{The Brunt of the War}, 79-81. Quoted from the lengthy report by State-Attorney Jan Smuts. This report is an on the ground, eyewitness report of a women’s laager in the Western Transvaal. It should be noted that
As word of the concentration camps spread throughout the Transvaal, one should realize that
the hundreds and ultimately thousands of Afrikaner aged men, women and children, who had
been made destitute by the British columns, were trying to stay out of the British concentration
camps. Many undoubtedly became victims of either native violence, or more likely disease and
the devastating conditions on the barren veldt. In May 1902, General Louis Botha told the
deleagtes at the Vereeniging peace talks that an estimated 2,540 families, some 10,000 aged men,
women and children, were trekking around the Transvaal veldt trying to avoid the British and the
camps. Less were in the Free State. Statistics from these migratory caravans have not been
researched or recorded. Therefore, the overall number of reported Afrikaner noncombatant
deaths in the war is probably lower than actual losses.

The Africans and the Camps

By 1870, the majority of Africans still lived in independent “chiefdoms,” or as either tenant
farmers or nomads on the veldt in the white settler states of the Cape Colony, Natal and the two
Boer Republics. As stated previously, the economic and political landscape of South Africa was
transformed in the final three decades of the 19th Century by the mineral revolution. Diamond
mining in Griqualand West developed rapidly and by the end of the 1870’s there were 22,000
black workers in the diamond fields, with Cecil Rhodes’ De Beer Consolidated Company
controlling the diamond production at Kimberley. In 1886, gold was discovered on the
Witwatersrand, and by 1899 Johannesburg had a mining workforce of almost 100,000 blacks and
12,000 whites. Demands for labor, railroads and construction accompanied the ever increasing
scale of industrial growth.

As far back as the late 18th century, the natives had accompanied the Boers on commando. In
the Boer republics, the natives performed all the behind-the-lines services, herding livestock,
building fortifications, and transportation. This continued into the nineteenth century with the

the statistics of aged men, women and children dying in these mobile and makeshift laagers have never been
documented or recorded. One must surmise that as word of the conditions in the concentration camps spread, that
many Boer women decided to risk it on the veldt, even with the natives moving back into their old (Boer) lands.
The Bakgatla in the Western Transvaal were only one of the native tribes fighting on the side of the British, and
were responsible for the events witnessed by Smuts.

221 Gooch (ed.), The Boer War, 102 and Pretorious, Scorched Earth, 54.
222 Warwick, Black People and the South African War, 7-10.
Boers dependent on the Africans to help them in inter-colonial wars. In the last decades of the century, relationships changed when popular opinion opposed the use of Africans in wars between whites. It was feared that armed native tenants would rise against their landlords and that the use of natives in white wars was something to be avoided. At the beginning of the twentieth century, relationships on the veldt between Africans and Afrikaners were normally based on economic considerations. Africans were still seen as a labor pool with no voice in government.  

The role of Africans in the war itself was initially explored by Peter Warwick, in his 1983 groundbreaking book, *Blacks in the South African War*. More recent scholarship has explored the archives in detail and updated the earlier work of Warwick and S.B. Spies. The Bakgatla in the Western Transvaal, Natal’s native Africans, and the EmaSwati in the eastern theater of war all played an important part of the British effort against the Boers. It is generally recognized that most Africans sided with the British in the war; hoping to gain not only the franchise, but property and freedom from the tenant relationships on the veldt and increased wages in the mines. While the extent of this study excludes examination of the specific roles of African tribes in the war, it should be known that in some districts, especially in the Western Transvaal, the Africans hindered the operation of Boer commandos. As the war progressed, the role of Africans in the overall British war effort increased, and will be dealt with later in this study.

As British farm burning and devastation of the veldt continued, African tenants were displaced from Boer farms and literally “dumped” onto the veldt near railway lines, as were their Boer landlords. Many Africans migrated to the cities to seek security, food, and jobs. Some natives accompanied their Boer landlord families into the Afrikaner concentration camps, where many of their deaths are probably not recorded, but the majority were transported to the initial African camps.

Kitchener’s order No. 29 clearly states the reasons for the removal of Africans from the veldt and into camps – it was part of the military strategy adopted to win the guerilla war. Movement of Africans into camps was not done for humane reasons as some have argued, or solely for the

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223 Warwick, 13.
225 Stowell V. Kessler, “The black concentration camps of the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902: Shifting the paradigm from sole martyrdom to mutual suffering,” *Historia* 1, no. 44 (1999: 137.)
creation of a labor pool. It was only after the stream of Africans from the veldt into the camps, town or cities began that the Army’s need for auxiliaries was matched with the available African labor pool. 226 Like their Boer counterparts, the Africans were forced to leave their homes and were coercively taken to the camps. The main difference between the Afrikaner and African camps was that the Afrikaner camps had some medical support and tentage that the African camps sorely lacked. The Africans were expected to be self-supporting and provide some foodstuffs to the Army. 227

The development of early African camps/laagers/kraals is directly linked to the establishment of the Afrikaner camps. There was increased early migration from the kraals on the veldt into the towns and growing number of British army depots that required an ever increasing labor force to support not only the mobile British columns, but the Afrikaner camps for displaced families. Natives were put to work acting as sanitation workers, washing clothes, and on labor details. 228

Poverty was the prime reason why Africans wanted and accepted work with the British Army. The disruption of the tenant farmer and other labor relationships by the war had disastrous consequences for African families. The closure of the mines meant a return of thousands of men normally absent from the veldt, and increased the pressure on food resources in the already overpopulated areas of Natal, Zululand and the Transkei. Where the war was accompanied by meager harvests, famine rapidly spread. To alleviate the destitute circumstances for themselves and their families, many natives enrolled as ancillary workers with the British Army.

Africans, both those who moved to the towns voluntarily and those swept up off the veldt, found work in the Afrikaner camps as sanitation workers, cleaning the camp grounds, and helping in the hospitals. The supervisors of the Afrikaner camps began to take control of the kraals and makeshift African camps that had sprouted up near the established Afrikaner camps. Systems of mutual interdependence evolved. However, as the British columns swept more and

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226 Kessler writes that it was military necessity which moved the natives into camps. He makes a convincing argument quoting British documents. But, in this author’s retrospect, the British never did anything to or for the natives unless they had a motive involved, usually exploitation. In this case, it was labor for the British Army. Kessler, in my opinion, relies too much on printed words and not enough on the intent of the English. They wanted labor and therefore kept the African camps under Army control, even after the Afrikaner camps went under civilian control. The DNR’s main purpose, I believe, was to supply manpower to the Army. See later paragraphs and De Lotbiniere’s input.
227 Kessler, The Black concentration camps “,121.
228 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 154.
more Africans off the veldt, it became necessary to establish a more formal structure to oversee the displaced Africans. An official system of African camps first developed in the Orange River Colony because in the Transvaal the Afrikaners and Africans were initially just dropped off along the railway lines and left to fend for themselves.\textsuperscript{229}

The first central office to organize the Africans for labor was the Army Labour Depot in Johannesburg, established by the British when they occupied the city on 31 May 1900. The British had opened similar depots in De Ar and Bloemfontein on their march northwards. Arriving in Johannesburg, the Army found 15,000 natives guarding the mines, abandoned by the Afrikaners. Some 6,000 of these workers were used by the Army for logistical support, with the promise that they would return to the mines when they were reopened.\textsuperscript{230}

Lord Kitchener assigned Major De Lotbiniere, a Canadian, to form the Department of Native Refugees (DNR). Taking over the staff of the now defunct Labour Depot, De Lotbiniere’s first act was to return the workers to the mines, that the British (Milner) especially wanted open as soon as possible.\textsuperscript{231} De Lotbiniere, in December 1902, wrote that it was not before Kitchener felt the need for African labor that the question of native refugees received consideration. He gave two main reasons for the formation of the DNR: first, that it became impossible for the supervisors of the Afrikaner camps to also properly administer the African camps; and secondly that the army be provided an adequate labor supply. De Lotbiniere makes no mention of the strategy of clearing the veldt to isolate the Boer commandos. In a letter to Goold-Adams, deputy administrator of the Orange River Colony, De Lotbiniere stated that supplying the army with African laborers “… formed the basis on which our system was founded”.\textsuperscript{232}

Some 2,500 African families were found along the railway; abandoned there by British columns. Unlike the Orange River Colony, the situation in the Transvaal was chaotic. The first major act of the DNR was to close the black camps located near the Afrikaner camps and move the Africans to abandoned Boer farms where they were expected to live and produce food not only for themselves but the British Army. De Lotbinere (and also Major General Maxwell, Military Governor, Transvaal Colony) believed the Africans would save the Army 10,000 pounds per month in rations. Eventually there would be 38 African concentration camps in the

\textsuperscript{229} Kessler, 125
\textsuperscript{230} Kessler, 129. Kessler has done extensive research in the archives, specifically in the files of the DNR. Most of our knowledge of the native camps comes from this relatively new research, and this study draws heavily on it.
\textsuperscript{231} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{232} Spies, \textit{Methods of Barbarism?}, 228-229.
ORC and 28 in the Transvaal. The natives were moved to locations where rainfall was supposed
to be plentiful, thereby stimulating crop production. De Lotbiniere wrote Lord Milner stating
that in the Transvaal there were some 15,000 Africans left by British columns spread out along
the railway, representing about 2,500 families in temporary camps, with no sanitary or medical
arrangements. On March 13 1901, the Medical Officer of Health, Transvaal, sent the following
to the Military Governor of Pretoria:

Much sickness in refugees in camp Heidelberg. There are six hundred Coloured
people in the camp here. Many suffering from the fever (Enteric Fever)
aggravated by want of proper food. ... They are mostly living on the carcasses of
animals dead of lung sickness.\footnote{Ibid., 136. Italics by author.}

The death rates among the groups of natives dropped along the railway lines must have been
significant. There are no records of these deaths. In addition, the British operated several labor
depots through which natives were contracted out to various Army departments. Living
conditions and rations were similar to the DNR camps, but again no records of deaths were
kept.\footnote{Kessler, 136.}

The native families were moved out of the initial camps in August 1901 and into localities
along the railway lines. It must have taken a significant amount of critically needed railway
transport to have moved thousands of families along single track lines in a time of war.
Abandoned farms were used as new locations, but the natives were told they would have no
claim to the land. By September 1901 there were fifteen camps in the Transvaal and by May
1902 the total had grown to thirty-seven. The camps were located along the main and secondary
railway lines at the following locations:\footnote{Spies, 230. Spies lists 39 African camps by location, but states 37 camps were established. Probably a
transcription error. Listing by name is probably most accurate.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Railway Line North of Viljoen’s Drift</th>
<th>Witwaterrand-Pretoria</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vereeniging*\footnote{Spies, 230. These native camps marked with an * indicate they were in the same general location/towns as an Afrikaner camp.}</td>
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<td>Meyerton</td>
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}\footnote{Spies, 230. Spies lists 39 African camps by location, but states 37 camps were established. Probably a
transcription error. Listing by name is probably most accurate.}
By the end of 1900, both Afrikaner and African camps had been formally established, in the
Orange River Colony, the Transvaal, Natal and the Cape Colony. Thousands of families,
Afrikaner and African, were being forcibly and voluntarily moved into the camps. The next
chapter examines the camps in detail, specifically the camps of the Transvaal. Locations, chain
of command, organization, medical support, schooling, disease and deaths in both and black and
white camps will be examined.

The information in the first three chapters provides the reader a background of the war and its
causes; the British devastation of the veldt and homes of the Africans and Afrikaners; and finally
the establishment of the concentration camps as part of a larger military strategy. It is a glimpse
into the command structure of the British Army, and how detached the officer corps was from its
soldiers. It is evident that British officers in the field were not totally honest with their superiors
in London about their actions taken against the noncombatants. In regards to the treatment of the
noncombatants, if British generals didn’t identify with and care about their own soldiers, why
should we assume they would identify with and care about native and Boer noncombatants on
the veldt - their “enemies”? The inadequate British medical care of its own soldiers and
subsequent outbreak of typhoid in Bloemfontein was an unheeded warning. This startling
example of inept British Army leadership would soon result in massive outbreaks of diseases in the civilian camps, and the disastrous outcome will be covered in detail in the next chapter.
THE TRANSVAAL CAMPS

When is a war not a war? When it is carried out by methods of barbarism in South Africa.

From a speech by the leader of the Liberal opposition party in Britain, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, at a dinner at the Holborn Restaurant, given by the National Reform Union, on 14 June 1901.237

Spring 1901 – A Critical Time in the War
(February – May 1901)

Spring, 1901, was the crucial time in the South African War. Both Afrikaner republics had been invaded, their capitals occupied, then annexed as colonies. Faced with a Boer guerilla war, the British Army adopted and implemented a new military strategy to achieve victory, which included the stripping of the veldt of persons, slaughtering livestock, and burning farms and crops to insure Boer commandos had no support base. Thousands of blockhouses, many manned by armed Africans, and linked by wire were being built, to impede the mobility of the Boer commandos. Mobile columns dispatched into the veldt, were clearing whole areas, collecting blacks and whites alike for forced relocation into a steadily expanding camp system. Kitchener’s execution of the revised British strategy was in full swing. A quick end to the war was expected, as the commandos were reeling from the devastation on the veldt. Victory or peace seemed to be achievable; within the grasp.

Eleven Afrikaner camps and more than fifteen black camps had been established in the Transvaal by March, 1901, with approximately 20,000 Afrikaners and thousands of Africans incarcerated in what had begun as refugee camps but had now evolved into a concentration camp system.238 By late Spring (end of May 1901), there would be almost 38,000 Afrikaners in a

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238 There were fifteen African camps in the Transvaal in September of 1901, and this total would grow to thirty-seven by May 1902. The tracking of the number of African camps and inmates by month is not available in early Spring, nor are early statistics of sickness, deaths, etc. It is accurate to say that from the Fall of 1900 the number of African (and Afrikaner) camps steadily increased as thousands of people were swept up by Kitchener’s columns and transported to a ever-growing number of camps being established along the railway lines. See earlier footnote on this taken from Spies, 230. The number of Afrikaners in camps on the 22nd of March 1901 is taken from CD 819, page 16, in which the General Superintendent, Major George Goodwin, makes his initial report to the military governor of the Transvaal, Major-General J.G. Maxwell.
system expanded to thirteen camps. When the British Army concentrated the Afrikaners and Africans into the camps, they reluctantly assumed total and direct responsibility for the lodging, feeding, and caring for thousands of noncombatants, mostly children. This already huge and ever growing logistical and medical burden, added to an already stressed British Army transportation system, and coupled with a proven indifferent chain of command, would prove fatal for thousands of Afrikaners and Africans.

Table 4.1 (see next page) displays the statistics of the Transvaal camps for the spring (English) of 1901, compiled from Command Document (CD) 819, beginning in February with unofficial and incomplete data from the reports and physician visits to the camps, continuing in March with the first official report to the Government, then through April and ending on 31 May 1901.

Analysis of the statistics highlights several trends which would later prove disastrous through the winter in South Africa, from June – December 1901. Significant numbers of Afrikaner men, women and children (17,268) were interned in the Transvaal camps between late March and late May 1901. There is an 84 percent increase in reported camp population during this period, as thousands of Afrikaners (and natives) were forcibly relocated from their homes on the veldt and transported into Transvaal camps. It is important to note not all Transvaal Afrikaners were sent to camps in the Transvaal. Some were transported directly to camps in other South African British colonies or initially put in Transvaal camps and then later moved. When looking at monthly camp statistics, this should be kept in mind.

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239 Statistics taken from CD 819, Working of the Refugee Camps of the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony and Natal, 51.
240 By the end of May 1901, of the almost 38,000 Afrikaners in the Transvaal camps, about 18,634, or 49 percent, were children. In the Transvaal, children were classified as twelve or under, with those older than twelve classified as adults. Therefore, statistics for adults could contain children thirteen years old.
241 CD 819, pages 16, 23, 24, 47, 51. These statistics are taken from official reports of the camp superintendents passed through the chain of command up to Kitchener’s headquarters.
Table 4.1 – Transvaal Afrikaner Camps Statistics
(February-May 1901)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Camps</th>
<th>Feb '01</th>
<th>Early Mar</th>
<th>22 Mar '01</th>
<th>30 Apr '01</th>
<th>31 May '01</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Barbeton</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>578</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Heidelberg</td>
<td>1234</td>
<td>1086</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1434</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Irene</td>
<td>891</td>
<td>3703</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4319</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Johannesburg</td>
<td>5089</td>
<td>3170</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3379</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Klerksdorp</td>
<td>456</td>
<td>991</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Middelburg</td>
<td>997</td>
<td>1292</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6637</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Potchefstroom</td>
<td>4045</td>
<td>5724</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6149</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Standerton</td>
<td>1342</td>
<td>1237</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2983</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Vereeniging</td>
<td>541</td>
<td>733</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>811</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Volksrust</td>
<td>2068</td>
<td>3576</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4810</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Mafeking</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1046</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Krugersdorp</td>
<td>991/1088</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1531</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Pietersburg</td>
<td>2301</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2301</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>20671</td>
<td>23812</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>37939</td>
<td>335</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some camps experienced an exceedingly high increase of inmates in this short time (see table above): Middelburg from 997 to 6637 (a 565 percent increase); Irene from 1497 to 4319 (a 189 percent increase); Volksrust from 2068 to 4810 (a 132 percent increase) and Klerksdorp from 456 to 1963 (a 330 percent increase). In addition, two new camps were established during the period, one in April at Krugersdorp with 1531 persons and the other in May at Pietersburg with 2301 inmates. The issue here is one of capacity and capabilities. To accommodate the tremendous increases, the camps required sufficient supplies, adequate skilled personnel and a supportive infrastructure (tents, latrines, hospitals) in place for the influx of noncombatants. Advance planning and leadership were prerequisites - but were not accomplished.

As early as spring 1901, children predominated in the Afrikaner camps (and probably in the African camps, although early statistics are not available). In March 1901, 7,977 of the inmates of Transvaal Afrikaner camps (excluding Mafeking), were adults, meaning some 11,899 or sixty percent were children.\(^{243}\) In March 1901, only ten per cent of the Africans in the Orange River Colony camps were able-bodied men, and while there are no comparable statistics for the

\(^{242}\) Compiled from CD 819, tables and reports.

\(^{243}\) CD 819, page 16. It must be noted that since children over the age of twelve were officially classified by the British as adults, the numbers of actual children in the camps was probably significantly higher.
Transvaal camps at that time, we can assume they were similar, because in June 1901, there were only 1728 adult males out of a total of 11,570 African inmates, in the African Transvaal camps, a percentage of only fifteen percent. 244

Since the Boers were not tied to any geographical defense, the British had embarked on a war against space, in an area the size of Western Europe, where there were thousands of square miles for the Boers to hide. 245 Concerned the army was already overextended, and seeking to avoid a long war, Kitchener attempted to bring the conflict to an end in March, 1901, offering a negotiated peace to the Boers, whom he sensed were ready to come to the table.

While his strategy was at its height, Kitchener wanted to stop the fighting soonest. The toll on the countryside, the British Army and budget, and the determination of the people of the republics indicated a long war was inevitable unless peace was achieved quickly. Although Kitchener’s strategy was working, it was its low and slow returns, e.g. the small number of Boers captured, surrendered, killed, etc., from the great “drives”, that induced him to try and negotiate an end to the conflict in March. Kitchener warned the government that eventually Britain would have to let South Africa govern itself, as it had with all the other white nations in the Empire. He thought it absurd and wrong to continue the war, costing two million pounds a week, to put three hundred colonial rebels (from the Cape) in prison. 246

Milner (and his supporters in the government) wanted unconditional surrender, total victory, the destruction of the Boers as a political force. The peace initiative fell apart by May. Personal differences between Milner and Kitchener had much to do with this inability to reach a peaceful conclusion, as Milner failed to support and sabotaged the peace effort, convincing the British government to not approve amnesty for the Cape Colony and Natal burghers who had joined the forces of the Orange Free State and Transvaal. By the end of May 1901, the course for the remainder of the war was set – a war of attrition, sure to result in more devastation and

244 Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 192-193. There are official reports and interviews which state the principal reason for establishing the African camps was to provide labor to the Army. With only fifteen percent of the camp populace being adult males, this means that many adult African males, by this time, had been recruited into the Army as transportation drivers or blockhouse guards, etc., leaving their families in the camps.


loss of life, with prospects of total victory for the British certain, but extremely costly. Kitchener was prophetic, and events ultimately proved him correct.²⁴⁷

While the British “cleavage” in policy was between two internal factions, the Boer “cleavage” was between two nations. Failure to terminate the war was not a simple disagreement between the two British war leaders. C. R. Mitchell and Michael Nicholson, writing in *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, in 1983, have characterized the Boer War as “… a splendid example of a war that could be regarded as having finally terminated (1902) in an outcome very little different from the one that had been available a full year and a half previously.” The authors attribute the war’s length to differences *within* the warring parties as much as differences *between* the parties.

The Boer “party” in the war, was not one nation, but an alliance of two, separate nations. As the war progressed, the initial negotiating stance of the Free Staters and aggressive militaristic attitude of the Transvaalers was reversed, with the Free Staters committed to continuing the war to the bitter end, and the Transvaalers frequently ready to compromise.²⁴⁸

The Transvaalers had more to lose than the Free Staters, as the Free Staters believed final unconditional surrender would still leave the ruling Boer class in power in the Orange Free State after the war, and their society was not threatened by an outside, immigrant Uitlander culture. For the Transvaalers, the prospect of continuing the war, and future unconditional surrender, was seen as a greater risk, with total economic and political ruin, their entire country taken over by Uitlanders. On the conscience of both nations was the plight of their families in the camps and on the veldt, the continued fragmentation of the Boer national unity (the “volk”), and the arming of the Africans by the British.²⁴⁹

Within the British camp, the Army was prepared to offer generous terms to the Boers, seeing little gain in continuing the war beyond spring 1901. Milner saw the marginal gains to be won by surrender as worth the mounting fiscal costs and losses by the Army. These “cleavages

²⁴⁷ It was well known that Kitchener undoubtedly had personal motives for wanting to end the conflict. He desired to be posted to India as Commander in Chief, and saw the war in South Africa as dragging on without a decisive, near-term victory possible.


²⁴⁹ Ibid., 508. The number of Boers who had surrendered in the war was significant. The “handsuppers,” or Boers who had surrendered, were often in the same camps as those families who had husbands or sons still on commando, and relationships were not good. Afrikaners were recruited for the British Army and formed units of scouts. Thousands of Africans were armed and were in mobile British columns on the veldt and in blockhouses. All of this contributed to the feeling among many Boer leaders that eventually the Boers would be irrevocably split, the “volk” would be no more. This was on the conscience of the Boers who were still fighting on commando in the Spring of 1901.
within adversaries” kept the war from being concluded in either late 1900 or certainly in March 1901.

It was only through the persistent arguments of the Transvaalers in May of 1902, and the backing of Kitchener by the British cabinet, that peace was finally achieved. The British support of not extending the franchise to the natives and promise of eventual self-government for the Transvaal and Orange Free State was enough to bring the Free Staters to the peace table.\(^{250}\)

Equating victory with the defeat and surrender of the enemy remains a conventional paradigm, but Raymond O’Connor, writing in *The Journal of Peace Research* (1969) sees decisive conclusion to an armed conflict as the exception rather than the rule. He describes “victory” as “... the cessation of armed conflict under conditions satisfactory to at least one of the combatants in terms of stated objectives.” Describing the Boer War, he sees it as a partial victory for both belligerents. He ends by stating “… Hostilities are terminated when the antagonists are convinced that a continuation of combat would not serve a useful purpose.” The above constructs seem to apply to the situation of the Afrikaners and British in the South African War, as early as Spring 1901 and certainly by Summer 1902.\(^{251}\)

**Organization and Locations of the Afrikaner Camps in the Transvaal**

The camps during Lord Roberts’ command tenure (up until end of November 1900) were administered by military officers detached from their duties under the district commissioners, also military. The commissioners reported to the military governors, who were directly responsible to the Commander in Chief. It was a purely military chain of command. Colonel E.M. Flint, on Kitchener’s staff, exercised overall supervision, with Major O. Armstrong responsible for early organization of the camps and their finances.\(^{252}\)

What had begun as “refugee camps” for surrendered burghers had quickly grown into “concentration camps” for not only refugees, but families of burghers still on commandos. As women and children huddled along the railway lines were brought into the camps the populations exploded. S. B. Spies writes, “Virtually from their inception, therefore, these concentrations of

\(^{250}\) Ibid., 510.


\(^{252}\) Spies, 193, and CD 819, page 6, Letter from Major George A. Goodwin, General Superintendent, to Major General Maxwell, Military Governor, Pretoria, on the 22nd of March, 1901, in which Goodwin recounts the military chain of command and responsibilities.
Boer families in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony were not merely camps of refuge; ‘concentration camp’ is therefore an apter appellation.”

The official government designation applied to the camps changed as the war and the purpose of the camps evolved, and became public. The first official report, Command Document (CD) 819, published by the government in 1901, is titled: “Report, &c., on the Working of the Refugee Camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony and Natal”. However, CD 893, published in 1902, is titled: “Report on the Concentration Camps in South Africa”. The name of the camps had changed due to the heated debate ongoing in England as to their true intent.

Two Ministers of Parliament, C.P. Scott and John Ellis, first used the term “concentration camps” in a parliamentary debate in March 1901.

For ease of supply, camp locations were to be proximate to the main railway lines from the southern ports into the Orange River Colony and Transvaal Colony. This directive was provided by the Commanding General on 21 December 1900 to all commanders, and Kitchener informed the Secretary of State for War, Brodrick, on 27 December 1900. It should again be noted that by the time Kitchener informed Brodrick, many camps were already established in both the former republics.

In December of 1900, Kitchener ordered changes be made in the administration of the camps in South Africa. On 19 January, 1900, Major General Maxwell informed Lord Milner that Kitchener had shifted the responsibility for the camps to the civilian authorities. An Army order published on 7 March, 1901, at Army Headquarters, Pretoria, stated:

The Military Governor, Pretoria, and the Deputy Administrator (a civilian), Orange River Colony, will be responsible for the formation and maintenance of burgher refugee camps. ... In the Transvaal, such camps will be administered by civilian superintendents, under the general management of Major Goodwin ... General Officers Commanding and Commandants are responsible only for the external protection of these camps ... arrange to send to the nearest camp all refugee families, or families drawing relief.... Timely notice should be given to the superintendents. ...

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254 CD’s 819 and 893.


256 Spies, 188-190.

257 Extract from Army Orders, Army Headquarters, Pretoria, 7 March 1901, as quoted in CD 819.
At first, the Natal and Cape Colony camps continued to be managed by the Army, as did the native (essentially labor) camps. Kitchener agreed with Major General Maxwell, who warned that his army officers could not cope with the influx of women and children into the camps. Milner eventually indorsed the changes requested by Kitchener, agreeing the civilians would have more time than the military to look after the camps. In perspective, this change was the first effort by Kitchener to “unload” the burdens and problems of the camps on the civilian establishment. Perhaps he saw the political risks of the camps and the tarnishing of his reputation as an impediment to his eventual posting to India as Commander-in-Chief.

The camps went under civilian superintendents before the Army Order was actually published. On the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of March, 1901, Major George Goodwin, responding to Maxwell’s request for reports on the Transvaal camps, stated that civilian staff for the Transvaal camps left Cape Town on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of February, arriving in Pretoria on the 5\textsuperscript{th}, and included eleven civilian camp superintendents. After suitable orientations, and an address by General Maxwell, the superintendents left for their respective camps on the 8\textsuperscript{th} of February.

Goodwin’s report is instructive as it provides a snapshot of the Transvaal camps in late March 1901, prior to the massive epidemics which would ravage the camp populations in the South African Winter. Dr. George Turner, Medical Officer for Health for the Transvaal, had been dispatched to inspect all camps and render a report, and as of the 22\textsuperscript{nd} of March he had inspected camps Irene, Johannesburg and Vereeniging.

The report states the “inmates” of the Transvaal camps have been divided into three “classes”: those coming into camps for protection and are self-sufficient; those who have surrendered, come into camp for protection, and cannot support themselves (this class includes widows and orphans of prisoners of war); and those whose husbands are on commando, and “... have been brought into camp for their own protection against natives, &c., or for military reasons.”

Goodwin then addressed the mixture of the above “classes” and stated the presence of the surrendered burghers and their families in the same camps with the families of burghers on commando substantially increases management challenges. He then recommended the British

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\textsuperscript{258} Spies, 193-194. Spies quotes communications from Kitchener to Maxwell and Maxwell to Milner in this section. There are also references from others that as things started to get bad in the camps, the army wanted to unload its problem on the civilian administration.

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid. Letter, from Major Goodwin to Major General Maxwell, Military Governor, Pretoria, 22\textsuperscript{nd} March, 1901. This letter outlines the dispatch of civilian staffing to the camps (per Kitchener’s order) and provides the governor a comprehensive update on the Transvaal Camps. This was used by Kitchener to provide the first official update to the British government, answering a query by Brodrick, dated 18 March, 1901.
should have given the families of Boers on commando a choice of remaining on their farms or taking up quarters behind the enemy lines.

The report then states that families who are self-supporting or those who have friends or relatives able and willing to “house and support them”, are able to live in towns. The Major reports that no camps have a fence and inmates are allowed to visit adjacent towns. This observation is based on only a sampling of camps, as later in the war, camps were guarded and concertina wire was used to restrain the inmates in the camps.260

Goodwin then states: “Refugees located in one camp, but belonging to another district, are on their request, removed to the camp nearest their home.” This statement isn’t backed up by facts, as thousands of people were herded from burning homes into railroad cars and transported to camps far away from their districts, eventually into the Cape Colony and Natal camps.

The health conditions in the camps were addressed in two ways, first by attaching Dr. Turner’s health reports for the three camps visited; and secondly, stating that for the past fourteen days there has been heavy rains, “.... making camp life unhealthy and distressing ... .”261 His report was forwarded by Major General Maxwell to Lord Kitchener on the same day received (March 22nd 1901), with Maxwell adding: “I have personally visited such camps as I have had time to, and have found the inmates contented and in the main anxious ‘to make the best of things’.” Kitchener forwarded his report on the Transvaal camps to Brodrick on the 22nd of March (the same date as Goodwin’s report and Maxwell’s endorsement).262

There is no mention in the communications between Maxwell and Kitchener, or in the personal note from Lord Kitchener to the Secretary of State for War, of any crisis of health care, epidemics, or issues which must be taken care of immediately. There is also no admission or statement that thousands of the inmates were forcibly removed from their homes and taken into the camps. It is significant the Colonial Secretary was not on distribution for this initial report

260 Note: Need to complete research into specifics of concertina wire in Transvaal camps, as this is hard to ascertain from available reports.
261 Ibid. 7-8. Goodwin’s report is highlighted above. It is not known if the reports of the camps that are attached to the Goodwin letter were sent by Kitchener with his report to Parliament.
262 CD 819, Working of the Refugee Camps, Forwarding letter from Major General Maxwell to Lord Kitchener, CIC, South Africa. The word “contented” appears often in Maxwell and others’ descriptions of the inmates. Lethargy might be a more apt description.
263 CD 819, 5. Note from Lord Kitchener to Sec for War forwarding report on Transvaal camps. Orange River and Natal reports were forwarded to Brodrick later, on 29th of March. It is interesting that Kitchener’s or Maxwell’s staff didn’t take some days to review the report from the subordinates and prepare endorsements for their commanders, endorsements which would highlight issues for Kitchener or Brodrick and provide recommendations for solving big problems, along with requesting additional resources, if needed.
from the theater of war to its government. Kitchener’s strategy was apparently to answer his superior’s queries by providing only a minimum of information, and certainly not to highlight growing issues to other cabinet members.

The geographical dispersion of the thirteen Afrikaner Transvaal camps (including Mafeking) in May of 1901 is shown on the map below (Fig. 4.1). The initial eleven civilian superintendents, chosen from Uitlanders, and who had taken up their posts in February, were not professionals and supervisors of large organizations, and although Maxwell wanted former mine managers, he only got one. The Uitlanders were accountants, surveyors, secretaries, architects, brokers and merchants. This lack of experienced leadership in the superintendent posts would soon play a critical role in the lives of thousands. The superintendents inherited their camp sites from their military predecessors, and the military retained the decision over any proposal to move a camp. Kitchener’s authority still reigned supreme over the camps.  

![Map of Afrikaner Concentration Camp Locations](image)

Fig. 4.1 – Afrikaner Concentration Camp Locations

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In February 1901, shortly after taking over his post, Goodwin launched a series of reports to Maxwell, providing a first look into the growing problems of malnutrition and unsanitary conditions in the Transvaal camps. He visited at least the six following camps in February and March of 1901: Heidelberg, Irene, Johannesburg, Vereeniging, Potchefstroom, and Standerton, recommending to Maxwell that stores be opened in all eleven Transvaal camps where refugees who had money could purchase food and clothes. He states: “But the matter must not be delayed, as those people are barefooted and in rags. ... All that is needed is a temporary store ... instead of calling for public tenders, a storekeeper from among trader refugees from town adjacent to each camp be selected... .”

Major Goodwin visited the camps just after the civilian superintendents sent from the Cape Colony had been assigned. At the Heidelberg camp (13-14th of February) he praised the work of Mr. A.A. Allison, who started the camp and retained him as the superintendent, noting that families were being moved from houses in town into the camp as space became available. On the 16th, at the Irene camp, he noted the camp was close to an adequate supply of running water, but that many children were suffering from measles, which was spreading. Visiting the Johannesburg camp on 17 February, he found children ill with measles and diarrhea, and observed there were no tents, with people housed under the grandstand of a racecourse and its outbuildings. No partitions had been constructed to stop the spread of disease and there was a shortage of beds for sleeping. Many Afrikaners were also housed in the local town. He relieved the camp doctor, Dr. Crozier-Durham, and installed a Doctor Cook as the camp’s medical officer. Mr. A.A. Noble was installed as the superintendent. Goodwin ordered partitions constructed under the racecourse to stop the spread of disease and provide families a place to sleep.

On the 19th of February, visiting the Vereeniging camp he witnessed “... a large amount of enteric fever exists, but patients are doing well and I anticipate little trouble from this camp in the future.” At Potchefstroom, on the 21st of February, a lack of tentage was again found, and the camp population was split between the camp and the town.

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265 Ibid., 25.
266 Arnold Allison was initially a member of the Corps of Guides, and was captured by the Boers at the Battle of Nicholson’s Neck, and was taken to Pretoria, where he was imprisoned next to Winston Churchill. When Pretoria was occupied by Lord Roberts, Allison was released and assigned as the Superintendent of the Heidelberg camp, where he remained until war’s end. He became a big game hunter, and lived until age 79 at his home near Greylingstad, Transvaal. This information is contained in Heidelbergers of the Boer War, by Ian Uys, published by the author in 1981 at Heidelberg, Transvaal.
It was at Standerton, on the 22nd-23rd of February, where Goodwin found his most serious problems, and the most pitiful refugees. The camp was deep in mud after four days of rain, and physically occupied both the north and south sides of the river. The physician sent to support the camp, Dr. Leslie, would not take charge once he saw the camp, and Dr. Pershouse, a local railway medical officer was installed. Mr. W.K. Tucker was installed as superintendent, replacing Mr. Van Mussenhenbrock. In addition, there was a smaller camp at Platrand, which was to be merged into the larger, Standerton camp. There was no camp census, so Goodwin began the difficult job of finding out who was in the camp, who was sick and who had died.267

The differences in rations for surrendered Boers and those families with husbands and sons on commando were causing troubles in the camps. As early as 1 December 1901, General Maxwell had dispatched written instructions on “The Feeding of Indigent Boers”. For bona fide refugees seeking protection from the Boers, the rations included meat. For “all other classes of refugees”, less coffee and sugar were authorized, and no meat. The last classes concerned the families whose husbands were still on commandos or prisoners of war, and who either were evicted from burning farms and taken to the camps or came into the camps because they had been evicted from their homes. In any case, the rations distinctly penalized those families with husbands or sons still fighting or prisoners. This prohibition remained in effect until at least 27 February 1901 (about three months), when Maxwell ordered “... All indigent refugees at your camp drawing rations to receive in future meat rations. Such rations to be in terms of Class I. ...”268 This increase in rations and feeding all inmates on one scale may have been instigated by a report and recommendations by Major Goodwin sometime in February (perhaps the Standerton camp), as he toured the Transvaal camps.269

Although information provided in the above paragraphs is fragmentary, it is important, showing the actual condition of the camps of the Transvaal in the spring of 1901, as reported by the one officer who was charged to manage them. The information from Goodwin’s reports,

267 The paragraphs on the camp visits by Major Goodwin are published in CD 819, and were provided to Major General Maxwell. Whether he forwarded these reports to Lord Kitchener is not known. What is known is that Lord Milner and the Colonial Secretary, Landsdowne, did not receive this detailed type of information until about May 1901.
268 CD 819, 21.
269 Ibid., 22-25. Using food as a “weapon” against the camp families who had Boers on commando was directly approved by the British senior leadership, as a tool to persuade the enemy to surrender. It is just another example of the British taking direct actions against old men, women and children in the camps, which resulted in the deterioration of the inmates’ health, already threatened by the physical conditions around them.
when combined and contrasted with the reports of the Transvaal Medical Officer, Dr. George Turner, who was on his own inspection tour, is the baseline from which future conditions and issues on the camps should be judged and measured.

Goodwin, the most knowledgeable officer on the Transvaal camps, was recalled by his employer (the railway command) in April of 1901, after being on the job no more than three months. He was replaced briefly by H.B. Papenfus, and then in May 1901, by W. K. Tucker, a surveyor, who had been superintendent of the Standerton concentration camp. Within a four month period, three people occupied the position most responsible for the management and operation of the Transvaal camps. Continuity was lost.

The constant leadership turbulence continued down into the camp system. In a report of February 1902, from W.K. Tucker to Lord Milner, covering the period from February 1901 to February 1902, 13 camp superintendents (out of 17) were changed; of the 94 doctors on staff, 47 were discharged or resigned; and of the 217 nurses, 85 resigned. In addition, no fewer than 106 clerks were discharged or resigned. During the short life of the camps, it is obvious not only was there uncertainty and denial as to who was in charge at the very top, but turnover of critical, professional personnel was the norm, not the exception, at the staffs of the camps themselves. Inconsistency in management meant new supervisors were constantly relearning what their predecessors had experienced, and instead of attacking problems they were having to discover them, again and again. A leadership “vacuum” existed from the top down.

It is doubtful Goodwin’s or Turner’s reports were forwarded to the government in Britain, but some were published later in parliamentary papers (such as CD 819). In a military bureaucracy, information from subordinates, especially bad news, tends to get removed or toned down as reports travel up the chain of command. While epidemics of measles and other diseases had not yet hit their full stride, one can see the beginnings of catastrophic problems on the horizon. It is important to note the supervision of the camps were still all under Major General

270 Spies, 194. The release of Goodwin back to a railway job illustrates the low priority of the camps to the British generals and the army. Goodwin is posted to head the camps and then leaves after getting familiar with his job. This was a war, and one wonders why Goodwin’s “employers” were simply told that he had important things to do. Two others replace him within a month. The last replacement, Mr. Tucker, came from the Standerton camp which Goodwin found the worst in his early visits.

271 Report of W.K. Tucker, 22 February 1902, found in the Milner Papers. Quoted in Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 200. The turbulence in the positions of superintendents, combined with the changes described above, and the coming and going of medical personnel all contributed to a lack of understanding by staffs as to what was happening in the camps in general and specific camps in particular. One wonders if the chain of command set up to manage and operate the camps ever really took hold with all the personnel turbulence.
Maxwell, Lord Kitchener, and Brodrick, the Secretary of State for War and not yet under the High Commissioner, Lord Milner and Lord Lansdowne, the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Milner traveled to Britain on the 8th of May 1901, and Kitchener assumed Milner’s duties as High Commissioner. There can be no doubt Kitchener was directly responsible for expanding the camps in late 1900 and what subsequently happened or failed to happen in them, through at least November 1901. 272

**Emily Hobhouse Visits the Afrikaner Camps**

The sudden flurry of concern and actions from Kitchener and Maxwell were a direct reaction to initial and growing inquiries from the British government. The Secretary of State for War, St. John Brodrick, sent Lord Kitchener a cable on the 18th of March 1901, which stated: “Please send by next mail a despatch giving full report on refugee camps in Cape Colony as well as Orange River Colony and Transvaal.” 273

Brodrick’s sudden interest in the camps was spurred by a developing political firestorm. His political problems were to worsen in May, as the exposure of the existence of the camps, and their horrid conditions, was taken to the English public and Parliament by Miss Emily Hobhouse. A member of The Committee of the Distress Fund for South African Women and Children, Miss Hobhouse had been granted permission by Milner to visit the Cape Colony, Orange River Colony and Mafeking camps from January – April 1901. 274 Her reports of the camps, and the treatment of Afrikaner noncombatants, released to the opposition MPs (Campbell Bannerman) and the British public, through her personal meetings, speaking engagements and the newspapers, ignited a storm of controversy in Britain, and quickly spread to other European countries. While Miss Hobhouse was stopped by Kitchener from visiting camps in the Transvaal,

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272 Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 530-531.
273 CD 819, 1. This cryptic note is the first official request for official information from the Government to the Field Commander in South Africa on the status of the camps.
274 Emily Hobhouse, *Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies* (London: Friars Printing Association, Ltd., 1901). Hobhouse’s report to the committee she represented in her visit to South Africa. Visiting mostly camps in the now Orange River Colony, Ms. Hobhouse’s description of the camps, and the mortality causes and conditions served as an impetus to the government to look closely into the camps, which up to this time had remained out of sight and out of mind to the British government and its subjects. While Emily Hobhouse has been somewhat criticized by academicians for only interviewing “middle-class” Afrikaner families in the camps, and not saying anything negative about the mothers’ care of their children, etc., it should be remembered that many of the Afrikaner women could not write and Emily was their only mouthpiece. It was well know that Miss Hobhouse was against the war, her writings bring this fact out clearly.
and never visited an African camp, her accurate descriptions of the southern camps and appeals for investigation of the African camps would soon resound within England, especially in Parliament.\textsuperscript{275}

The niece of Lord Hobhouse, a distinguished Liberal and friend of the “pro-Boers” in England, Emily Hobhouse was a forty-one year old “spinster from Cornwall.” To many Britons, she was known for her lack of humor, tact and prudence. She soon would become known worldwide as a voice of reason and an “angel of mercy” for thousands of Afrikaner women and children in the camps, as well as for her audacity, pluck and steadfastness. Finishing up her tour of the camps, she returned to England, along with Lord Milner (quite an irony), on the \textit{Saxon}, a voyage of sixteen days. On his arrival, Milner was greeted as a hero, taken to meet the King and made a baron. Determined to have his policies on the war adopted over those of Kitchener, he would not return to South Africa until August. Hobhouse, on the other hand, as one of the only English subjects to actually have seen the camps, set out on her mission to “... awaken the conscience of England.” As Hobhouse and Milner set about their contrasting tasks, epidemics had broken out in the camps and were rapidly spreading.\textsuperscript{276}

On June 4\textsuperscript{th}, Miss Hobhouse received an audience with Brodrick, where she presented her findings and recommendations. Brodrick was noncommittal. Hobhouse describes the meeting: “... his gentlemanly incompetence – slippery and pleasant – mediocre and agreeable – ready to listen, ready also to drift. Did not feel I got my claws into him anywhere.”\textsuperscript{277} But what appalled Hobhouse the most was finding a minister in such ignorance of what was being done under his rule.\textsuperscript{278} Miss Hobhouse published her findings (June 1901), in \textit{Report of a Visit to the Camps of Women and Children in the Cape and Orange River Colonies}, which was to be read all over Europe. Describing her visit to the Bloemfontein camp in the Orange River Colony on January 26\textsuperscript{th}, 1901, she describes the horrors of the camps:

I call this camp system a wholesale cruelty. It can never be wiped out of the memories of the people. It presses hardest on the children. They droop in the terrible heat, and with the insufficient, unsuitable food; whatever you do, whatever the authorities do, and they are, I believe, doing their best with very limited means, it is all only a miserable patch upon a great ill. Thousands, physically unfit, are placed in conditions of life which they have not strength.
to endure. ... To keep these camps going is murder to the children. ... 279

She continues to describe the state of the children in the camp:

Next, child recovering from measles, sent back from hospital before it could walk, stretched on the ground ... a girl of twenty-one lay dying on a stretcher ... next tent, his wife was watching a child of six, also dying ... Already this couple had lost three children in the hospital ... 280

After visiting other camps in the Orange River Colony, Miss Hobhouse reached the Mafeking camp, the westernmost camp in the country, on the 9th of April 1901. Technically located in the Cape Colony, it was under the administration of General Maxwell and Major Goodwin, and was only supplied by trains running through the western part of the country. Miss Hobhouse’s description of her drive to the isolated camp is important, as the camp had been moved, and would be moved again.

I had to take a Cape cart and drive out, for it is full six miles – a lonely, lonely spot. There are 800 or 900 people, and it is the oldest of all the camps I have visited. In fact, nearly a year old. 281

The Mafeking camp, visited later by the Fawcett Commission, would soon gain notoriety as one of the worst of the Transvaal camps.

Miss Hobhouse’s travels returned her to Bloemfontein on the 17th of February and again on the 22nd of April, almost three months since her initial visit. What she found can be extrapolated to the camps of the Transvaal. The size of the camp had swelled by almost double since her February visit only six weeks prior, due to the rounding up of hundreds, then thousands of noncombatants from the veldt by Kitchener’s columns of destruction. Passing Springfontein station, to the south, and on her way north to Bloemfontein, that camp had swelled from 500 to over 3,000, and she saw a trainload with about 600 more persons in the station:

It was pitiable to see them – massed in the train, many of them in open trucks. It was bitterly cold, and I was wrapped in a thick grey Welsh shawl. All night there had been a truly torrential down-pour of rain, and water stood everywhere in pools. ... Some women were pushing their way to the platform to try and buy food for

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280 Ibid., 5.
281 Ibid., 12. This quote from Miss Hobhouse places the establishment of the Mafeking camp in April of 1900, one of the earliest camps established in the entire camp system. It has been postulated that the reason the camp was so far from the town was the anger of the townsfolk toward the Boers for the recently ended siege.
their children. The soldiers would not permit this. ... I heard the whole lot were to be sent to Bethulie, for now a camp is forming there. 282

Hobhouse continues with her observations about Bloemfontein and the camps in general:

If only the camps had remained the size they were even six weeks ago, I saw some chance of getting them well in hand, organizing and dealing with the distress. But this sudden influx of hundreds and thousands has upset everything, and reduced us all to a state bordering on despair. 283

The effects of the sudden arrivals, overcrowding and need to establish new camps at a moments notice, was overwhelming to the camp supervisors:

The superintendent of a camp is getting in rations for such a number, and suddenly 200 more mouths are thrust in upon him. ... Last Saturday 200 or 300 families were without meat in Bloemfontein Camp for that day and Sunday. ... Since I left here six weeks ago there have been 62 deaths in camp, and the doctor himself is down with enteric (typhoid). Two of the Boer girls who had been trained as nurses, and who were doing good work, are dead too. 284

It took some time for Miss Hobhouse to realize it wasn’t the discomforts, the conditions, or hardships for the Boer families that was so striking; it was the appalling rate at which people were dying. Recalling a parish she had known at home, where a funeral was an “event”, she now realized that at Bloemfontein there were twenty to twenty five deaths each day. “It was a death-rate such as had never been known except in the times of the Great Plagues. ... the whole talk was of death ... who died yesterday, who lay dying today, and who would be dead tomorrow.” 285

By April, Hobhouse had seen enough. Her conclusions were that the whole system was cruel, and should be abolished. Those having friends or support in the towns should be allowed to leave at once, and no more families should be brought into the camps. Her other recommendations included allowing families who had been separated to reunite; equality of treatment for all families in the camps; appoint a resident minister and a matron, fluent in English and Afrikaner, in all camps; if additional camps be formed do it near the supplies and charitable aid, in the Cape Colony; and that a doctor’s report on the health in the Bloemfontein camp be done immediately. She also appended to her report a list of applications from camp

282 Ibid., 12.
283 Ibid.
inmates concerning living with relatives.\textsuperscript{286} The Hobhouse report, when formally published, sent shock waves throughout England, especially among the pro-Boers, who intensified their attacks on the government.\textsuperscript{287}

Before Milner’s departure to England, both he and Kitchener had told the government that it would be unwise to allow civilian relief agencies and supplies into the camps, due to the need for military transportation. They, in essence, again closed out Brodrick and the government from what was actually happening in the camps. Germans, Russians, Dutch and other foreign nationals, who were living in the Transvaal, and not on commando, were also swept up by the “drives” taken into the camps. Despite complaints by foreign consuls, nothing was done. The administrator of the Transvaal, Goold-Adams, said military authorities were not compelled to explain their actions:

\textit{Removal of this kind does not necessarily imply that any suspicion attaches to the persons removed, and as a matter of fact the Refugee Camps are full of persons who have taken no action in the war.}\textsuperscript{288}

What strikes one when reading the dispatches from the British generals and civilian administrators, is their lack of compassion, and a lack of caring about the people of the republics, now their colonies. Arrogance and racial prejudice of the British is evident, as leaders casually forward information about hundreds of deaths, horrid conditions in the camps, but never ask for more nurses, doctors, or resources. The above quote from Goold-Adams of the Orange River Colony is indicative of the attitudes of not only the generals, but the leading civilians. When people are treated as statistics and the emphasis is on clearing areas, not on the health and welfare of those (the Queen’s subjects) incarcerated, it is no wonder thousands of noncombatants died in the drives, along the railways, on the veldt and in the camps.

On June 20\textsuperscript{th} 1901, the leaders of the two Boer republics met at the farm, Waterval, near Standerton in the eastern Transvaal, and resolved to continue the fight. It was the Orange Free State leader, President Steyn, who led the decision to fight on, saying that the Free State would continue the war with those Transvaalers who were willing to help.\textsuperscript{289} Apparently Kitchener’s “drives” and the “bag” of killed or surrendering Boers, stock and farms burned, was not working.

\textsuperscript{287} Pakenham, \textit{The Boer War}, 538-9.
\textsuperscript{288} Spies, \textit{Methods of Barbarism?}, 217. Goold-Adams, as quoted in a letter from Wilson (writing for Adams) to the consul of Germany (Bloemfontein) on 16 April 1901.
\textsuperscript{289} Ibid., 217-219.
as he hoped. However, the war was wearing on the commandos in the field, as evidenced by this quote from Jan Smuts of the Transvaal to President Kruger, who had moved the Transvaal government to the Netherlands:

Most farms and foodstuffs have been destroyed, almost all families are held in the camps where treatment is not good and the misery very great. ... The two Republics are a desert where food for the troops (commandos) is more and more scarce ... The families who are not captured, are refugees in the bushes and mountains .. Our whole people has suffered extremely and there is no hope for a speedy end to all these miseries.  

There were at least two reasons why Kitchener kept moving noncombatants to the camps. First, was his military initial reason, to denude the veldt, removing the “undesirables” from the field, thereby isolating the commandos from support. Second was the use of the families as a “weapon” against their husbands on commando. There are documented instances of women being sent to their husbands on commando in efforts to persuade them to surrender (for the good of their families). This ploy had little success, as women many times failed to return to the camps. But, seeing Smut’s quote above, it is evident that the plight of the families weighed heavily on the minds of the Boers on commando. The Boer decision, made at Waterval in June 1901, clearly signifies the failure of Kitchener’s extreme measures to rapidly end the war.

Kitchener became increasingly frustrated. He took little interest in the administration of the camps, consistently referring questions and ideas to Maxwell (Transvaal) and Goold-Adams (ORC) for answers or input. Whether he ever visited an actual camp has never been proved. He blamed Colonel Baden- Powell and his South African Constabulary for not protecting the areas that had been cleared, although Milner (and Brodrick) agreed Kitchener was simply using the scouts as another mobile column sweeping the veldt. Predictably, Kitchener finally put the blame for the growing death rate on the families themselves – “It is impossible to fight against the criminal neglect of the mothers – I do not like the idea of using force ... but I am considering whether some of the worst cases could not be tried for manslaughter.”  

Besides using food as a weapon, Kitchener was now blaming his victims for their own death toll.

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290 Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 218. Letter from Smuts to Kruger, recommending peace be made then in June, 1901. This letter angered the Orange Free State President, Steyn, who vowed to continue the battle without the Transvaalers. Kruger, to his credit, gave the leaders in the field, the decision to make peace or fight. Smuts eventually decided to keep up the fight, and both the Freestaters and Transvaalers remained in the field.

291 Ibid., 224.

292 Ibid., 223. Kitchener is echoing the views of General Maxwell and Dr. Kendall Franks, who visited the camps. Frank’s reports and views are covered later in this chapter under Diseases and Deaths.
The Native Camps – Spring 1901

The situation in the native camps of the Transvaal in many ways mirrored the plight of the inmates of the Afrikaner camps. However, there was no Emily Hobhouse to bring their horrible living conditions to the British public. Still under military control, where they would remain until war’s end, it becomes obvious the army ran the separate native camp system primarily as a “pool” for labor, not for humanitarian purposes, and certainly not for purely military reasons, as many historians propose.  

The Army confidential circular memorandum (to all commanders) issued on 21 December 1900, by Kitchener, is unclear when concerning natives. The second paragraph talks of clearing all men, women and children and natives from districts where the enemy operates. Further down in the memorandum it states it is not intended to clear “Kaffir locations”, but only those residing on Boer farms. Most camp natives did in fact, come from Boer farms, where they were swept off the veldt by British columns, however, it is obvious that thousands of natives residing in their own villages on the veldt, were swept up by British columns, their dwellings burned, and they were deported into the camps.

This intent was verified in a letter from Major J. Weston Peters, assistant to Major General Maxwell, to the superintendent of native affairs, 14 October 1901. Peters states Kitchener ordered all “Native stads” (villages) to be destroyed and the inhabitants removed to “refugee camps”. Sufficient documentation is available to suggest that while the Army orders said one thing, field commanders, seeking to deny the Boers a support structure, did destroy native dwellings and move the natives to the camps. In addition, it must have been common knowledge the Army needed native labor to drive transports, guard blockhouses and dig fortifications.

Further evidence of British intent is a letter from De Lotbinere (Native Refugee Department) to Milner on September 30th 1901, in which De Lotbinere states British columns had specific

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293 Kessler and Pretorious quote British documents, but give too much weight to the words of Kitchener and not enough weight to the actual statements from the person in charge of the native camps (De lotbinere), who states the purpose for the native camps was to provide labor to the Army, once the mines were up and working again and the natives had left the Army employment and returned to their jobs in Johannesburg and other mining towns. If the camps were humanely proposed then why did the British devastate the native kraals on the veldt? To this researcher, it was labor first, and military necessity as a supporting argument as to why the native camps were established.

294 Army Circular Memorandum No. 29, as quoted in Spies, 183.


296 Spies, 227.
orders to destroy African huts in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony with exception of those in “native reserves.” In one incident, over 3,000 Afrikaners and natives were “dropped” at the Brandfort Afrikaner camp in the Orange River Colony by British columns, and only through the documentation of the doctors performing examinations do we know many of the refugees were natives.

Although some Africans were cleared from “native reserves” and mission stations, Africans also came voluntarily into camp, sometimes bringing their own livestock. Poverty was the single largest reason natives came into the camps. The devastation of the countryside by the British, and accompanying droughts and famines, forced many natives to accept work with the British Army. By August 1901, there were 53,154 natives in the camps, with 22,295 in the Transvaal. This is about six percent out of an approximate population of 923,787 in both republics. The native population in the Transvaal camps increased from 11,570 in June 1901, to 22,295 in August, 48,932 in January 1902, and finally to 55,910 by May 1902.

The number of males in the native camps working for the Army also steadily increased, from 14.6 percent in June 1901, when the camps were formally established under the Native Refugee Department, to 66 percent by January 1902. At war’s end, May 1902, 71 percent of the males, whose families were in the native camps, were working for the Army (others were old, feeble, or injured). Clearly, the daily native camp population was composed of old men, women and children. They are the ones who died.

Child labor was encouraged, mostly for domestic help. For instance, over 400 children, boys and girls, were employed in Johannesburg alone. In addition, native labor from the camps was also provided to private employers in the neighborhood of the Afrikaner camps, with jobs as sanitary workers, watchmen, or messengers, etc.

As in the Afrikaner camps, there were desertions, and despite guards and barbed wire, some 118 natives escaped in May 1902 from the

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299 Pretorius, Scorched Earth, 111-112. Quotes letter found in the Transvaal archives. SNA 15, 209/02.
300 Ibid., 112.
301 Ibid., 114,116. The data quoted here comes from the May 1902 report by the Transvaal Administration.
302 Ibid., 117.
Transvaal camps. In addition, natives were armed to protect the camps from raids by the Boer commandos, and by war’s end there were some 850 armed natives guarding the native camps.

Most native camps were small in size for control purposes, so huts were located closer together than in the Afrikaner camps. This increased the spread of diseases through epidemics, especially of measles, dysentery, and chickenpox. The locations of native camps are shown on the map below (Fig. 4.2). As the Afrikaner camps, they were located in close proximity to the railway lines, many times in close vicinity to the Afrikaner camps.

The Native Refugee Department was divided into districts for administrative purposes, with the Transvaal having four, organized along railway lines, and the ORC beginning with three and eventually moving to six. Each district had an inspector who moved among the camps. Camps had a superintendent and in most cases, an assistant as well as clerks, etc. Filling the positions was hard, and if the personnel turnover in the Afrikaner camps can be used as a measure, finding and retaining quality leaders and staffs for the black camps must have likewise been a challenge.

Mortality rates were as high or higher than the Afrikaner camps. Although official returns from the native camps are spotty, recent work by Stowell Kessler and other South African historians in the archives of the Native Refugee Department, has shed light on the reported and actual number of deaths, causes, and trends. As stated earlier in this study, it is now recognized that at least 20,000 natives died in the concentration camps. This does not include the deaths in the period before the Native Refugee Department came into being, the deaths from natives displaced from farms or kraals and living in squalor along the railways before the camps were established, nor deaths as natives were transported (or walked) from the veldt to the camps. As many of these forced deportations occurred in the cold winter months of July and August, the death totals are undoubtedly higher. The statistics in the official “Blue Books” released by the British government are grossly inaccurate. Just as the Afrikaner camps experienced a huge

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305 Mongalo and Du Pisani, “Victims of a White Man’s War”, 161.
306 Ibid., 151. Information comes from the Transvaal Archives.
307 Only 7,000 native camp deaths are in the incomplete official records, and Pakenham estimated some 12,000 in his Boer War (518). Peter Warwick estimated 14,000 in his Black People and the South African War. Stowell Kessler, with careful reconstruction of sources indicates 20,000 is the more correct figure. Again, this does not
increase in population in the spring of 1901, the native camps also grew in number, size and population. By war’s end in May 1902, there were 37 native camps in the Transvaal. Therefore, at least 70 native camps with about 115,700 inmates existed in the Orange River and Transvaal colonies. Stowell Kessler’s work in the archives indicates that if the “informal camps” are included, there were some 89 native camps with about 120,000 inmates. Statistics compiled from the records of the Native Refugee Department indicate this population was, at any given time, composed of more than 50 percent children, more than 25 percent women and under 20 percent men. By the end of spring 1901, the native camps were being filled with families, as the men were off working for the Army or in the mines.

Fig. 4.2 – Native Concentration Camp Locations

count deaths from the farms and veldt to the camps, in the settlements along the railways, and those who simply fled to the vastness of the veldt.

308 Mongalo and Du Pisani, 1”Victims of a White Man’s War”, 49. The statistics by Stowell Kessler are probably the most accurate, as his research into the archives of the Native Refugee Department (NRD), and Transvaal repository represent the most comprehensive scholarship done to date on this subject. In any case, some 115-120,000 natives in 70-89 camps of varying sizes, made up the native camp system under the NRD.

309 Ibid., 149.
While schools for children had been opened in most of the Afrikaner camps, the British vetoed the idea for the black camps. According to De Lotbiniere:

… as the Camps are only temporary, it is hardly worth while for the Educational Department to take this matter up ... the introduction of a new element into each camp ... would only tend to unsettle the natives’ present system of control, and weaken the hands of my Superintendents.310

Unlike the Afrikaner camps, personal accounts from the native camp inmates are sparse or nonexistent. The mostly illiterate natives could not record their own experiences, and the British made no attempt to document them. However, there are some observations from visiting religious group representatives and some personal experiences recorded by oral interviews. The story of Kas Maine, then a boy of five, is probably representative of the uprooting of black families in the Western Transvaal. Kas Maine’s father, Sekwala, was ordered into service of the Boers when the war began, as an agterryer (auxiliary troops), and along with thousands of natives, dug the trenches at Magersfontein, which were used to defeat the advancing British in December 1899. During the war, an estimated 10,000 native, noncombatant laborers and service workers were used by the Boers, with another 10-14,000 agyterryers initially serving with Boer commandos.311

Ultimately swept up by British columns, the Maine’s were marched, with other native families, from their home on a farm in the Western Transvaal near Schweizer–Reneke, to the Vryburg native concentration camp, a “makeshift camp” on the outskirts of the village. Facing starvation, and assisted by a relative who was serving with the British, Kas’ mother took him and his siblings on a trek near Mafeking to the Setlagole native reserve where her family resided. This account is probably typical of the dislocations produced by the destruction of the veldt by the British and fate of the natives who were tenant farmers on Boer farms.312

310 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 230. Although time does not allow the coverage of schools in this study, they were perhaps one of the only “good things” in the camps. The intent of the schools, to teach English to the Afrikaner children seems to be part of a larger intent to marginalize the use of the Afrikaner language, which fits nicely in with Milner’s vision of an “Anglicized” post-war South Africa, with the Boers having no political power. .
311 Gooch, John, The Boer War, 126-127. The number of natives working as laborers may have been as high as 20,000.
312 Charles Van Onselen, The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 26-28. Kas Maine was interviewed in 1979 as part of an oral history project of the University of the Witwatersrand. Family members were also interviewed, and their stories checked against official documents, etc. I found the author’s quote about oral history inspiring: He (Maine) proved that in an industrializing society characterized by a high level of illiteracy, history lives on in the minds of its people far more powerfully than the cracked parchment of its officialdom might know.”
Supplies to native camps were given low priority. The railway space allotted to the camps was shared with support of the South African Constabulary, as well as the civilians in the Orange River Colony. About thirty trucks (railcars) per week were allocated, in October 1901 to the Director of Supplies for the Orange River Colony, and prior to that, as few as ten cars were provided. As a result of the military priorities, there was starvation in some of the towns in the ORC, sanitation projects were delayed, sheep were dying due to a lack of medicine to treat animal diseases, and seed to plant crops was not shipped. Located further north along the inadequate supply lines, the camps of the Transvaal were probably just as bad, or worse. Additional transportation was requested but not approved, as Lord Kitchener maintained personal control over the allotment of railway trucks.\textsuperscript{313}

The single track railways from the ports of Durban and the Cape proved a logistics nightmare. Camp supplies waited for cars behind military supplies, troops and ammunition. Malnutrition from rotten meat, spoiled vegetables and just too little food meant a lower immunity, which coupled with the lack of tents, huts and sanitation supplies allowed the disease epidemics to spread throughout the native camps.\textsuperscript{314}

Stowell Kessler, in his recent research, has found that many luxury items were shipped on the railways during this critical period, to include substantial amounts of alcoholic beverages. Statistical data supports that had more trucks been allocated to the supply of the camps, far less natives would have died.\textsuperscript{315} It was a question of priorities.

An inspection of the Brandfort native camp revealed that a black superintendent had been appointed, but that person had died of typhoid. There was a total lack of sanitation in the camp, including no latrines, and inmates were told to use a hill 1.6 km away from the camp. Rations for native camps were significantly lower than the Afrikaner camps, and in March, 1901, the medical officer in Heidelberg, Transvaal, reported that the people in the native camps were “... mostly living on the carcasses of animals dead of lung sickness.”\textsuperscript{316}

By the end of Spring 1901, all indications were present to forecast a forthcoming medical and political disaster – overcrowding in both the Afrikaner and native camps, high turnover of supervisory and medical personnel or no medical support at all, reports of growing epidemics

\textsuperscript{313} Stowell Kessler, “The Black Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War”, 127.
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{316} J.S. Mohalamme, “African Refugee Camps in the Boer Republics”, 120.
from doctors, malnourishment of the general camp population, and lack of tents, sanitary conditions, and proper water supplies. It is evident from the records the British senior commanders were personally aware of the indicators reported to them by their subordinates. They not only failed to report issues and trends to higher headquarters in London, but took little action until the explosion of deaths occurred.

The Coming of Winter to South Africa
(June – September 1902)

In June, 1901, as Emily Hobhouse’s report on the Afrikaner camps was published, parliamentary debate over the war intensified. On 17 June, the Secretary of State for War, Brodrick, admitted during “Question Time” there were now 63,127 people, Afrikaners and natives, in the camps. This was much higher than previously given, but, in fact, much lower than the actual figure. He also admitted that in May 1901, there were 336 deaths in the Transvaal camps, 39 men (12 percent), 47 women (14 percent) and 250 children (74 percent). The mortality data from the other colonies was not yet available. The opposition, led by Lloyd George, stated: “The answer given today proves that, so far from this being the result of temporary conditions, it is growing worse.” Lloyd George accused the government of pursuing “…a policy of extermination against women and children. Not a direct policy of extermination, but a policy that would have that effect. ... I say that this is the result of a deliberate and settled policy. ... for it has taken months and months to do it. ... Why pursue this disgraceful policy; why make war against women and children? ... We want to make loyal British subjects of these people. Is this the way to do it?” Despite the heated rhetoric, George’s motion was voted down. Brodrick shrugged off the charges: “I deny it altogether. ... It is said that they (the camps) are going from bad to worse. Those who have been out there ... assured me things, so far from going from bad to worse, have been steadily ameliorating.”

317 Pakenham, The Boer War, 539. Extrapolated over a year, the May ’01 deaths would mean a death-rate of 12%, more than the British army’s death rate at Bloemfontein’s epidemic of 5%. CD 819 lists the deaths as 338, with two more children. The worst camp death rates for children were: Irene (52 children out of 70 deaths); Johannesburg (68 out of 80 deaths); Volksrust (29 out of 35 deaths). This data is from 1-31 May, 1901.
318 Ibid.
319 Ibid., 540. And who had been out there? Hobhouse.
In April 1901, Kitchener, concerned the camps were getting too large, had obtained approval to send inmates from the Transvaal camps to camps located nearer the coasts, and a new Merebank concentration camp was established on September 13th, south of Durban. By the 22nd of September, some 3,000 inmates had been sent to it and the other Natal camps. By the end of September 1901, Kitchener handed the operations of the camps in Natal over to the governor of the colony. A side benefit for Kitchener was that he was getting “irreconcilables” out of the Transvaal. Chamberlain had approved the policy, thinking it would help get British subjects to return to the Witwatersrand and facilitate the operation of the mines.

As the death toll began to mount in the Afrikaner camps, so it did also in native camps. In August 1901, 145 natives were reported to have died in the Transvaal camps out of a total population of 22,795, a rate of less than one percent. But by September, 441 died out of 28,491 (2 percent), and in October, 687 out of 30,369 (also 2 percent). The reported increase in camp population of 7,574 from end of August to the end of October is a one third increase. It is evident that as Kitchener’s columns swept more and more natives into the Transvaal camps, the death rate and numbers were rising.

In response to the growing furor over the camps, and holding off the visits of numerous private groups, the government dispatched under Brodrick’s guidance, a Committee of Ladies, with the mission of visiting the concentration camps in South Africa and rendering a report to the government (which would also be shared with the Parliament and public). Commonly called the Fawcett Commission, named after its leader, Mrs. Millicent G. Fawcett, the group of six ladies visited all camps (with the exception of Port Elizabeth in Natal), from August through December of 1901. Fawcett was a Liberal, and leader of the suffrage movement in England, and another member, Lady Knox, was the wife of one of Kitchener’s generals. By in large, and unlike Hobhouse, the ladies were supporters of the war. Yet, their report, issued in December, was constructive and to the point.

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320 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 224. The transfer of inmates out of the Transvaal camps into Natal is important. Disease was carried from one camp to another by this method. The “irreconcilables” were the women (and children) whose husbands were still on commando, and who were openly hostile to the men who had surrendered, the “handsuppers”.

321 Spies, 231. Data comes from the Transvaal Administration Reports for 1902, Native Refugee Department, p. 3. The ORC data comes from reports and also from Hobhouse, The Brunt of War. Her data on Transvaal camps is spotty. The accuracy of these reports is suspect when compared with reported deaths in native camps beginning in Dec ’01. What this data does show is that deaths were increasing, contrary to what Brodrick openly divulged to Parliament.

322 Pakenham, 546.
In their criticisms of the camp system, Mrs. Fawcett and her Commission generally confirmed all the essential recommendations of Emily Hobhouse, and even went further in some cases. Looking at some twenty-two points, ranging from rations to hospital accommodations, they found the differences existing between camps so striking that it was misleading to attempt to generalize, and therefore the committee submitted detailed reports on each camp visited.  

Commenting on medical care, the commission stated the success of health care in the camps was dependent on the professionalism and skills of the medical staff, and when quality care was lacking, disastrous results followed. Despite citing instances where children with measles had been moved into a healthy camp and scarlet fever cases left with other patients, the commission praised the overall work of the medical doctors and staffs. The exception to this was the operation of the hospital at the Brandfort camp in the ORC, of which the committee recommended immediate action be taken to stem the tide of disease and deaths.

Regarding camp superintendents, the commission reported each camp’s operation bore the stamp of the superintendent’s leadership, and in some cases this proved fatal to the inmates. Acknowledging that while they had recommended the removal of some superintendents, the commission attributed this to lack of experience, bad health, or being overcome in the complexity of the job, not to a superintendent’s lack of caring for those people in the camp.

Specific recommendations regarding the operation of the Transvaal camps were somewhat similar to those in the ORC, however the commission did specifically point out that all superintendents should reduce “… to a minimum the number of people sleeping on the ground.” While many recommendations dealt with general health improvements, such as improving the water supply and boiling the clothing and bedding of enteric patients, the commission did highlight that the removal from the camp population of seriously ill patients should be strictly enforced. The availability/assignment of “water engineers” to the camps was also strongly

323 Report on the Concentration Camps in South Africa, by the Committee of Ladies Appointed by the Secretary of State for War; containing Reports on the Camps in Natal, The Orange River Colony, and the Transvaal, CD 893, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, Printers to the King, 1902, 1.
324 Ibid., 6.
325 Ibid. The extreme turbulence of superintendents during the period Feb ’01-Feb ’02 evidently negatively impacted the operation of the camps. In addition, the commission recommended the relief of some camp superintendents.
326 Ibid., 7.
Many of the Commission’s recommendations were adopted by the ORC and Transvaal before the ladies left South Africa in December 1901, but not all. The commission condemned the location of the Merebank camp in Natal as being in a swamp and “useless”, strongly recommending to the High Commissioner (Milner) and the governor of Natal that no more people be sent to it. This was the new camp recently established by Kitchener on the 13th of September to which he deported “undesirables”, families with men still on commando, from the Transvaal camps. Visited by the commission on the 6-7th of December 1901, the camp had filled to 5,154 persons in less than three months, about half being children. Transvaal families who had been at Merebank for two months still did not have beds to sleep on: the Commission “... feels very strongly that in this camp no one at all should sleep on the ground. ... There is a great deal of sickness in camp, and no proper system exists for reporting cases of illness ... Diarrhoea, influenza, enteric, measles, whooping cough are the prevailing diseases.” In addition, the ladies stated: “Two days after the formation of the camp a batch of 500 people arrived from Standerton with measles fully developed on some of them ... the camp was infected from the very beginning ...” True to its colors (undoubtedly the superintendent had briefed the ladies), the Committee reported “…morally, undesirable people have been sent here from a number of Transvaal camps.”

The arrival of inmates from the Transvaal camps into Natal’s Merebank and Howick camps was often unannounced, as evidenced in this report from Mrs. Nicholson, of the Transvaal, who was sent from Pretoria down to the Howick camp:

It had been raining for weeks without intermission. ... Then perhaps a wire would come to the Commandant that morning to be ready to receive say a hundred families in the afternoon. ... Then he would get really angry ... ‘Where was he to get dry blankets and food for the poor women and children at such short notice?’ ... This happened on several occasions. ... In the afternoon a train of open trucks would pull up at the siding, and its freight of draggled human beings, wet to the skin, would be disgorged ... poor women, some walking with the aid of a stick, or with children in their arms and children clinging to them, would be

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327 Ibid., 11-12.
328 The Commission recommended that the size of the camps be limited to 3,000 inmates for management and sanitation purposes. This recommendation was not implemented. At the close of the war, eight of the seventeen Transvaal camps were over 3,000 inmates, with four over 4,000. They recommended the Merebank camp be closed: it was not.
330 Ibid., 36.
331 Ibid, 33.
332 Ibid, 36.
marched along muddy roads, knee-deep in the slush. ... yet, the Commandant, Dr. Hunter, was not to blame, for he got no timely notice and in every case was insufficiently provided with necessaries for the newcomers.  

S.B. Spies, using extracts from Milner’s papers, reports that between October, 1901 and February 1902, over 11,000 inmates, mostly wives and children of men still on commando, were sent from the Transvaal to the camps in Natal.

The Committee, in its general recommendations, stated camps should not exceed 3,000 persons in number, due to the size of management and support requirements, and that new arrivals be placed in a segregation camp (as evidenced in the spread of diseases through transport of infected inmates from the Transvaal).

Emily Hobhouse, who was not asked to be on the Commission of Ladies, agreed with most of the Commission’s findings and recommendations, with the exception of the Commission’s findings that the inmates themselves were part of the health problem and caused many of their own children’s deaths. One must remember Hobhouse, a pro-Boer, saw the camps as abhorrent, caused by the British devastation of the republics, and operated by a military which saw the care of noncombatants as a low priority. The Fawcett Commission, representing the British government, took the opposite tack, that the camps were there to help the Boer families who lost their homes due to their husband’s continued fighting, and the British were providing them a humanitarian service by establishing the camps. Nowhere in the Fawcett commission’s report do you read of families being herded off the veldt by British columns from burnt homes. Like Hobhouse, the ladies did not visit a single native camp.

The Commission’s report, published on 12 December 1901, did not recommend inmates be allowed to leave the camps voluntary if they could find support from friends or other family. They saw the republics as devastated and thus the camps were necessary to support the thousands of displaced noncombatants.

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333 Emily Hobhouse, War Without Glamour (Bloemfontain:Nasionale Pers Beperk, undated), 55-56. The experience at the Howick camp was apparently replicated at the Merebank camp. Clearing the Transvaal camps of “undesirables” must have been a priority to allocate the railway trucks to the effort and to move families into camps which were just being established. The Merebank camp, being a new camp, should have been set up knowing all the lessons learned from the ORC and Transvaal camps, e.g. water access, drainage, etc. Apparently whoever set it up (the Governor of Natal?) did a terrible job, which would later cost the lives of many people.

334 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 256.
Diseases and the British Military

To fully understand the deaths in the camps one must first appreciate the nature of endemic and epidemic diseases in South Africa, the capabilities of the British medical profession, as well as its capacity and ability to protect both soldiers and noncombatant civilians at the turn of the 20th Century. Diseases and resulting deaths of the Second South African War have received considerable study and attention, from immediate post-war until recent times. Due to the large number of military disease deaths, a commission was formed to investigate the Army Medical Department’s performance. Two disease “histories” of the war exist, each focused on a different group – first, the British military, in garrisons and on operational missions, and secondly, the noncombatants, on the veldt, the cities or in the camps. This second “disease history” of the war, involving a study of increasing health impacts of war among civilian population, and refugees (inmates), is a relatively new area of study which continues into the present day. As a result, a growing integration of civilians, especially Afrikaner and native women and children, into the history of the war, has occurred. Civilians accounted for about 60 percent of the total wartime deaths, with measles (not bullets) emerging as probably the major killer of the war.335

The Second South African War has been called the last of the “typhoid campaigns”, a “closing chapter” in the predominance of disease over battle deaths.336 From a military perspective, typhoid was the major health issue, killing a reported 8,020 British soldiers, versus only four reported deaths by measles among British soldiers.337

Two contemporary works cover the medical aspects of the war. First, a Report on the Medical Arrangements in the South African War (1904) by Surgeon-General Sir W.D. Wilson, the Principal Medical Officer, South African Field Force, which provides the official Army Medical Department’s position on the war, dwelling mostly on organization for combat, allocation of hospitals, and recommendations for further improvement. Secondly, is The Medical History of The War in South Africa, an Epidemiological Essay (1911) by Lieutenant Colonel R.J.S. Simpson, the Secretary staff officer to General Wilson. This detailed,

337 R.J.S. Simpson, The Medical History of the War in South Africa: An Epidemiological Essay (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1911), 52. It should be noted that British soldiers were mainly from cities where measles had become endemic.
statistically-backed study has served as the “baseline” for all consequent studies of diseases in the war. Both works are applicable to this study.

The Army Medical Department entered the South African War expecting that a typhoid epidemic was possible, if not inevitable. The Department’s “Annual Report” for 1899 warned the prime danger in South Africa was typhoid, citing unsanitary conditions in the towns throughout the country, and the rainy season (February to May), which brought an annual outbreak of the disease as polluted soils were washed into the network of streams and rivers that were sources for drinking water.

While polluted drinking water was realized as the source of enteric (typhoid) fever, British (and American) medical officers correctly concluded the common fly was the primary carrier of typhoid in not only the South African War, but also the Spanish-American War, fought at almost the same time. British correspondents in the South African War found typhoid patients with faces covered with flies, as the men were too weak to sweep them off. Polluted water, latrines and horse feces were the primary breeding grounds of typhoid bacilli which was then spread by the flies into eating and sleeping areas.

A vaccination for typhoid fever was available in 1899, but the British Army refused compulsory vaccination, despite the advice of noted physicians. Vaccination was voluntary, and it is doubtful that more then 15,000 men received the treatment, less than 4 percent of the force. While the vaccine was not perfect, the mortality of 2.04 per thousand of those vaccinated, was ten times lower than the typhoid death rate of the entire South African Expeditionary Force, which was 21.08 per thousand. There is no evidence that civilians in the concentration camps, Afrikaner or native, were offered vaccination by the British army.

Some 465 deaths from typhoid fever and accompanying gastrointestinal disease were recorded during the Ladysmith siege. In Bloemfontein, about 8,568 cases of typhoid were

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338 Lieutenant-Colonel R.J.S. Simpson, *The Medical History of the War in South Africa* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1911), and Surgeon-General Sir W.D. Wilson, *Report of the Medical Arrangements in the South African War* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1904). Lieutenant – Colonel Simpson, who was the Secretary to Sir Wilson, compiled Wilson’s report, then published his own findings on disease in a separate essay in 1903. The official version of his essay was published in 1911.


341 Curtin, *Disease and Empire*, 209. It should be noted that while vaccination for enteric fever was relatively new, it had been tried with success in India, prior to the outbreak of the South African War.
reported with 964 typhoid deaths and 81 other related deaths, about a thousand soldiers lost. 342
The major outbreaks of typhoid at Bloemfontein and Ladysmith could most likely have been
prevented if all deploying soldiers had been vaccinated. 343

The British Army failed to provide modern, and available medical care to its own soldiers
during the war in two primary areas. First, by not providing them vaccinations for typhoid prior
to deployment, and then when soldiers by the thousands fell ill from fever at Bloemfontein
(Roberts’ army of 40,000 encamped next to a town of 4,000), the Army failed to respond quickly
with medical supplies and hospitals to be taken up the rail lines. Ammunition, food and horses
received higher priority. Secondly, a lesson had been learned in the Crimean War, where about
75 percent of soldier deaths were from disease, that an officer schooled in sanitation practices
was needed at troop locations to assist the principal medical officer in recommending and
enforcing sanitation practices. The British Army abolished the sanitation officer positions soon
after the Crimean war, and the duties were assigned to normal medical officers. Sanitation, or
the lack of it, was to play a decisive role in the typhoid epidemics in the British Army and also in
the outbreaks of disease in the concentration camps initially established and operated by the
British Army. The Japanese, on the other hand, had a small number of deaths from disease in the
Russo-Japanese War of 1902-05, due to implementation of strict sanitation procedures.344

General Wilson, in his report (1903) to the Director General, Army Medical Services, dealt
with both the outbreaks of typhoid and the lack of sanitation. When reading Wilson’s report, one
should know that he was in charge of the medical services being investigated. Commenting on
the medical support of the British columns in Bloemfontein, his main point was that
transportation was not available when Roberts first reached Bloemfontein due to the destruction
of the rail lines by Boer commandos. He acknowledges that “... For more than a month after the
occupation the supplies of all kinds received fell short of the minimum considered necessary. ... But the extraordinary sick rate which developed during that month (April) surpassed anything
that had been anticipated, led to very great pressure in the town hospitals ... with the consequent
hardship and suffering to the sick.”345 He acknowledges other supplies received higher priority

343 Curtin, Disease and Empire, 209.
344 Cirillo, “Winged Sponges”, 60.
345 Wilson, Report of the Medical Arrangements in the South African War, 47-51.
than medicines, and states that in future wars as supply lines are lengthened, the support of the army is questionable.

Close examination of the evidence renders Wilson’s argument far from convincing. A total of 9,298 truck-loads of supplies reached Bloemfontein between 29 March (when the railroad was repaired) and 3 May. Only 118 of these, scarcely more than one percent, were allotted for hospital and medical equipment. Hospitals, with supplies and personnel, sat at the ports of debarkation, awaiting transport, while soldiers fell sick and died. A few additional trucks could have carried water filtration equipment and hospital beds forward. Insufficient provision was made for the sick and wounded at the front, resulting from decisions by senior leaders at the army headquarters.346

Preventive medicine was not a strong point of the medical department, nor appreciated by British troop commanders. Water purification was a problem, and although units were to boil water and filter it through porcelain filters, standards were not enforced. Chemical purification was available, but none was extensively used.347

Although sanitation is a shared responsibility between line commanders and medical staffs, Wilson’s report essentially blames the troop commanders for not enforcing standards. He does specifically address sanitation in Annex K of his report and recommends the army reinstate a sanitation staff officer, at the army level, and that troop commanders be trained and held responsible. He adds “… The Committee do not consider that any pattern of filter (water) yet invented will meet the requirements of active service.”348 While some units were deployed with “Berkefeld” filters, there was a shortage in the distribution. It is also known that many units did not use the filters they had.349

In his conclusion, General Wilson restates transportation difficulties were mainly responsible for the thousand deaths at Bloemfontein and that either sick men will continue to be dealt with in an improvised manner or the medcial staffs and supplies must be given priority for the transport of stores.350 Army commanders, faced with choices between medical supplies and artillery and ammunition, left behind ambulances, water filters and hospital equipment, much to the dismay of

346 Pagaard, “Disease and the British Army in South Africa”, 75.
347 Curtin, Disease and Empire, 212-214.
349 Simpson, The Medical History of the War in South Africa, 44.
350 Wilson, 72.
the medical professionals. This low priority for medical support of soldiers would be repeated with even more meager medical support for noncombatants.\(^{351}\)

By June 1901, there were 21,000 Army hospital beds in the South African theater. Wilson states: “This was largely in excess of the total numbers for whom accommodation was needed, and a surplus of total accommodation over total needs was maintained until the end of the war.”\(^{352}\) Regardless of this surplus of ready hospital beds, there is not one word in Wilson’s report which mentions providing medical support to the concentration camps, although most Army stationary and general hospitals were located in towns along the line of communications (railway) as were the camps. Thus, the question is raised - Why, when the civilian deaths began to mount, and hundreds were dying in camps of disease, did not the Army immediately move medical support to the camps or task an adjacent hospital to provide support? It is highly likely that, as women and children lay on the wet ground, sick in the camps, and without tents, there were unused Army hospital beds and tents, within the same area. Both the army medical units and resources and the camps were under the same commander, Lord Kitchener.

**Expansion and Deaths in the Transvaal Camps**

The second major health “history” in the South African War, and of most interest to this study, concerns the epidemics of disease, specifically measles, which swept the Afrikaner and native concentration camps from mid-1901 through early 1902. Differing opinions on why the noncombatants in the camps died at such an alarming rate between March 1901 and February 1902 are presented in a plethora of contemporary and more recent studies. Emily Hobhouse and the Fawcett Commission differ not so much in their findings, or recommendations, but in the causes of deaths. As stated earlier in this study, politics undoubtedly enters into all accounts, especially the official histories (the Fawcett Commission was a commission chartered by the Government) and those published by British participants immediately after the war. There developed a British mantra of blaming the women and children for their own deaths, not those who herded them off burning farms into packed, unsanitary camps, which are then characterized as humanitarian alternatives to starvation on the veldt.

\(^{351}\) Curtin, *Disease and Empire*, 211.

Before entering into a discussion of the causes of camp deaths from disease and/or neglect, it is important to establish what actually, physically happened in and to the camp system during the period April –December 1901, in regards to number and size of camps, number of deaths, deaths among children and death rates. Significant, yet spotty data on the Afrikaner camps are available, with less accurate and consistent data for the native camps. One must project, as appropriate, causes, deaths, rates and effects from the Afrikaner to the native camps to develop a complete picture of the camp system.

From the end of April through the end of December 1901, a period of nine months, the number of Afrikaner camps and inmates in the Transvaal Afrikaner camp system increased from 12 to 17 camps, a 42 percent increase, and from 23,812 inmates to 65,500 (August), then decreasing to 61,961, an increase of 38,149 persons (160 percent) by end December. Four new camps were formed in the Transvaal during that timeframe: Krugersdorp, Balmoral, Nylstroom and Pietersburg. An additional camp was formed in July 1901, under Transvaal supervision at Vryburg. Monthly deaths increased also, from 240 in April to 1616 in October, and decreased to 1040 by end December (a 330 percent increase). As the number of inmates increased, the number of deaths in the camps rose sharply. For data, see Table 4.2 on the next page.

In April of 1900, Potchefstroom had been the only camp with more than 5,000 inmates. By July, the Potchefstroom and Middelberg camps had more than 7,000 inmates, while Krugersdorp, Mafeking, and Volksrust each reached 5,000 by September, and Irene and Klerksdorp each at more than 4,000. By end December 1901, although the Transvaal camps’ total population had increased, only Potchefstroom remained at above 7,000 inmates, with Middelberg decreasing to 5,000, along with Krugersdorp and Volksrust. Irene, Klerksdorp and Mafeking remained at 4,000. Clearly, the population had been spread out throughout the camp system. In addition, from April – September, 9,418 people had died in the Transvaal Afrikaner camps, and thousands were being moved to camps in Natal.

The number of camps from Emily Hobhouse’s *The Brunt of War*, matches that of S.B.Spies. Spies does add that De Jagersdrift and Van den Hovendrift were temporary camps which lasted only for short periods, and that Meintjeskop, established in February, 1902, was for the families of the National Scouts and therefore not a concentration camp. See Spies, 363.

Spies’ data comes from CD893, Hobhouse’s *The Brunt of War*, and other documents. The recently completed Fawcett Commission recommended a “cap” of no more than 3,000 persons per camp, due to housing, rations and management issues. Seven of the 17 Transvaal camps were over this “cap”.


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Significant in the table below (Table 4.2) are the three camps highlighted. The Middelburg camp grew from 1,292 persons at the end of April to 6637 by the end of May, and to 7,425 persons by end June 1901, an increase of 5345 persons in thirty days, or 178 persons per day. With the shortage of tents, supplies and rations along with the high numbers in the camp, there must be a correlation between the sudden population increase and the corresponding increase in deaths from 9 in April to over 166 in June. Lack of proper living conditions must have played a decisive role in the deaths at Middelburg.

Equally significant is the startup of the Pietersburg camp, the northernmost Afrikaner camp in South Africa, located at the very end of the main supply route (railroad). Within sixty days of establishment, there were 54 deaths. Again, supply probably played a significant role.

Table 4.2 – Transvaal Camp Statistics (April – June 1901)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CAMPS</th>
<th>APR,1901</th>
<th>MAY,1901</th>
<th>JUN,1901</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>POP</td>
<td>DEATHS</td>
<td>RATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BARBTN</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
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<td>JOHANB</td>
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<td>0</td>
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The Potchefstroom camp, located southwest of Johannesburg, had a tenfold increase in deaths (24 to 235) in sixty days, but only a slight increase in camp population (+341).
The above data show that large camps with sudden increases in population and smaller camps with little or no population increases each experienced a significantly rising death rate during April – June, 1901. Table 4.3, the second quarter of the data, covering July – September 1901, continues the significant increase in total Transvaal Afrikaner camp population of almost 17,000 people, and the first reports from the Balmoral camp. The most deadly camp in the Transvaal during this period was Nylstroom with a three month death rate of 522 per thousand, per annum. Based on this death rate average, with an average camp population of around 1600, it would have taken less than two years for the death of the entire camp population. Pietersburg, with an average rate of 434 was the second most deadly camp. A host of camps averaged a death rate of over 300. Middelburg had the highest single month’s death rate during the quarter, with 404 persons dying in July 1901, with a death rate of 622.

Table 4.4, below, covers the third quarter of the months studied, October – December 1901. The overall camp population decreased slightly during the reporting period from 63,707 in October to 62,961 in December, a decrease of 746 persons. However, during this timeframe, a reported 4,177 persons died in the Transvaal Afrikaner camps. Significant in the data are the Mafeking and Standerton camps, which in October of 1901 each had a death rate of over 900, with 406 persons dying out of a Mafeking camp population of 5,215, and 240 dying out of a Standerton population of 3115. These are the highest death rates ever recorded in the Transvaal camps during the war.

During the three quarters of data in the charts above and below, several trends become visible.
Table 4.3 – Transvaal Camp Statistics
(July – September 1901)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CAMPS</th>
<th>POP</th>
<th>JUL,1901 DEATHS</th>
<th>JUL,1901 RATE</th>
<th>POP</th>
<th>AUG,1901 DEATHS</th>
<th>AUG,1901 RATE</th>
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<tbody>
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First, the months July – December are the peak months for deaths in the Transvaal Afrikaner camps, with 8,090 of the reported 9,418 deaths (86 percent) occurring. The deaths and camp population both substantially reduce in January – March, 1902.

The overwhelmingly largest group who died in the Afrikaner camps were children (ages twelve and under), followed by women and men – 81 percent of the total deaths were among children, 13 percent among women, and only 6 percent among men (children over twelve in the Transvaal were classified as adults).\(^{356}\) Over half the total Afrikaner population of the two republics was eventually imprisoned in the camps, about 116,572 out of 200,000 people. It is agreed that at least 27,927 (24 percent) died in the camps, and when combined with Afrikaner

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\(^{356}\) Curtin, *Disease and Empire*, 216.
combat deaths, 4,000, and other deaths, the total is about 34,116, which is about 17 percent of the total Afrikaner population of both republics. 357

Emily Hobhouse’s data shows 10,344 people died in the Transvaal camps from January 1901 through February 1902, with no data available until April 1901 from the Transvaal command. Camps were in existence earlier, the populations and deaths were just not reported. The number of children and their deaths in the Transvaal camps was reported beginning in May 1901, with total child deaths until February 1902, listed as 7,905. Using data from command

Table 4.4 – Transvaal Camp Statistics
(October – December 1901)

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publications CD 819, 853, 902, 934, 936 and 939, Hobhouse correctly put the percentage of child deaths of the total deaths in the Transvaal camps during that period at about 78 percent out of a total number of 10,104 deaths. 358

357 The figure of 27,900 deaths is the accepted death totals of the Afrikaner camps. This is based on the early work of Emily Hobhouse, who in The Brunt of War, reports 20,177 from January 1901 through February, 1902, out of a total camp population of 109,041, p.329. Fransjohn Pretorius in Scorched Earth, p. 21, gives the figure at 27,927. Regarding camp populations, The Official History, IV, p. 669 shows the total camp population in May, 1902 as 116,572 with a slight increase in the last month. This is acceptable, and concurred in by Spies, 379, note 117, as a considerable amount of men, women and children undoubtedly came into the camps from the veldt as the war wound down, and peace was certain. For the purposes of this study, 27,927 deaths in a total camp population of 116,572 will be used. 358
The situation in the African camps was similar. From June, 1901 through October, 1901, there were 6,345 recorded deaths in the Transvaal African camps, 5160 children (81 percent); 755 women (12 percent) and 430 men (7 percent). In November, 1901 the death rate in the Transvaal African camps was 291 per thousand, per annum, and in December, out of a total native camp population of 89,407, a total of 2831 deaths (3 percent) in the ORC and Transvaal were reported, with 1160 (1percent) coming from the Transvaal. By May 1902, there were 38 native camps in the Transvaal alone, with 55,910 inmates, 29,684 (53 percent) of them children and 14,727 (26 percent) women. Only 11,499 men (20 percent) were men, most likely old or infirmed, as the young men were working for the army or in the mines.\textsuperscript{359}

The Department of Native Refugees, during its operation, listed 15,423 total native deaths in the camps of both republics, with 7,076 of the deaths occurring in September-October 1901.\textsuperscript{360}

Approximately 77,000 people are reported to have died in the war. The following chart illustrates the war’s deaths by groups: British soldiers in combat and from wounds, sickness; Boers on commando; and Afrikaner and Native noncombatants in the camps, highlighting that over 60 percent of the total deaths were in the camps, among noncombatants. More children died in the camps than British soldiers.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{Fig43.png}
\caption{Fig. 4.3 – Percentage of Deaths in the War\textsuperscript{361}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{358} Hobhouse, \textit{The Brunt of War}, App B., 329.
\textsuperscript{360} Pretorious, 143.
\textsuperscript{361} Death totals in the war do not include any Boers wounded on commando and dying later; destitute Afrikaner noncombatants wandering around the veldt of the Transvaal; destitute African noncombatants who died along the railroads or on the veldt before camps were established; and Africans who worked for the British Army guarding blockhouses or as scouts, in digging fortifications or who were wounded, dying later of their wounds. There are a substantial number of war-related deaths unaccounted for and not in any published totals. Statistics come from Low-Beer. “Disease and Death in the South African War,” 231. Of the Afrikaner deaths in the camp; 81% children, 13% women and 6% men. This data from Curtin, \textit{Disease and Empire}, 216.
The preceding pages of statistics can become just numbers, until we remember the “deaths” and “rates” and “populations” represent the people of the Afrikaner republics being dragged off the veldt, from their burning homes and kraals, deported to concentration camps, with meager support and death all around. Analysis of the statistics, visits and commission reports from the Afrikaner and native camps yields the following issues:

A leadership “vacuum” existed in the Transvaal camp chain of command, from the very top to the bottom, as senior military and civilians differed on who was in charge, and superintendents, doctors, nurses and staff constantly resigned or where replaced in the Afrikaner camps. We should expect the turbulence within the native camp staffs was as significant. Thousands of noncombatants were literally “dropped” into the camps within a very short timeframe, and often the unannounced arrivals of hundreds of people were at camps already short of tents, sanitation facilities, medical staff, sited in unhealthy spots, leading to outbreaks of diseases from the beginning.

The deportation of families from the Transvaal into the Natal and other camps was a factor in the spread of disease, and the reception camps were not ready to receive an influx of thousands of inmates.

The entire camp system was a low priority for the Army and the civilian officials, both in South Africa and in London. Supplies from the railroad were scanty, and Native camps had no permanent medical officers. Once diseases became rampant, there was seemingly little done about it. Army hospitals, not fully utilized, were often in the same area as the camps, yet the senior commanders did not move medical assets to the camps, or move inmates into the empty Army beds.

In some camps the death rates were so high that unless diseases had run their cycle or measures taken, a high percentage of the camp population would have died. If the camps had not been exposed by Emily Hobhouse and others, the death toll would have been more horrific. Kitchener was in total command of the operational theater, medical resources, the railroad priorities, and the camps.

In summary, the death rates in the Afrikaner camps peaked during the months of September to December 1901, with the native camps peaking later, in November 1901 through January 1902. The decline in deaths occurs later in the native camps than in the Afrikaner camps, with mortality of 310, 174, and 114 per 1,000 per annum in January –March, 1902. Regardless of
camp population, most camps experienced significant increases in deaths during the above periods. It should be noted that as early as April 1901, the death rate in the Afrikaner camps was 121 per thousand per annum, as high as the British deaths during the typhoid epidemic at Ladysmith. In the worst months, the mortality was as high as 330 per annum in the Afrikaner camps and 389 per annum in the native camps. The effects of the Fawcett Commission and implementation of its recommended changes did not affect the native camps, and the effects on the Afrikaner camps have yet to be proven. At first glance, the decline in mortality, beginning in November 1901, in the Afrikaner camps seems linked to the effects of the Fawcett Commission and the final transfer of all Afrikaner camp authority to Milner in November 1901.

However as the camps of the Transvaal are examined separately, it is obvious multiple peaks in mortality are seen, and thus the composite (macro) numbers and trends must be viewed with skepticism. Macro-factors must be replaced by micro-factors to gain a true picture of what and when deaths occurred in the Transvaal camps.362

Diseases in the Camps

The causes of the deaths of the Afrikaner camp inmates are well documented. Numerous studies, beginning with Simpson’s essay on epidemiology and ending with the most recent articles on diseases in the war, establish the following as the major “killers” of noncombatants in the camps: measles, pneumonia and bronchitis (secondary effects of measles), diarrhea and dysentery (also secondary effects of measles), enteric (typhoid), and marasmaus (wasting away of the body).363 It is often not possible to distinguish them in the records.364 There were few health personnel to diagnose deaths or disease causes in the Afrikaner and certainly not in the native camps. However, the descriptions of diseases are surprisingly clear in the reports of the Afrikaner camp superintendents. It is an important historical observation that accurate information on diseases in the camps was available as early as April 1901, but was often lost in the various military and civil layers of reporting.

363 Curtin, Disease and Empire, 190.
There are broad health implications of the war which are beyond the scope of this study, but two items should be noted – First, that typhoid had become an endemic disease in South Africa in the decades prior to the war, present in the urban areas and on the veldt, among all groups, black and white. In conjunction with an inefficient sanitation infrastructure, no steps were taken to stop or mitigate the fouling of the drinking water. These two factors show that enteric fever was not imported into South Africa with the British troops.365

Lieutenant Colonel Simpson addresses measles in Chapter XIV of his work, stating that of the 1,218 cases of measles in the British army during the war, only four soldiers died. Meanwhile, in the concentration camps, POW camps and Cronje’s laager (which had surrendered to Lord Roberts), the disease was rapidly spreading and deaths increasing.366

When the data within the Transvaal camps is analyzed by individual camps, it shows a great variation in both the high mortality rates in some camps versus the mean; a striking variation of timing of the deaths and epidemics; and that the Transvaal mortality curve is made up of very different, separate mortality curves from the individual camps. There is then, no single accurate, overall macro-epidemic disease mortality curve for the Transvaal or for the South African camp system as a whole, but a series of individual camp micro-epidemics.367 In addition, individual camps have their own multiple micro-epidemics, which make up the total camp mortality curves.

Individual camp mortality peaked at different times, with Potchefstroom in June 1901, four months before Mafeking. In some instances, Mafeking for example, the very high mortality curve is concentrated within a short time, the month of October 1901. Analysis of the individual camp mortality rates allow comparison of declines in relation to the Fawcett Report and highlight the differences between individual camps.368

Rather than a slowly increasing mortality curve which rises to a peak in October, 1901, then declines with improved conditions initiated by the British, the data suggests a very different timing of individual camp epidemics, with rapid, intense periods of infection and high mortality, not all related to the improvements initiated after the Fawcett (and Hobhouse) report.

366 Ibid., 177.
367 Low-Beer, Smallman-Raynor and Cliff, “Disease and Death in the South African War.” Based on data from Transvaal camps, as reported in Hobhouse, Spies, and official government command documents, there is no single, accurate mortality curve for the combined camps of the Transvaal. Each camp has its own, and in some cases two or more, mortality curves. The analysis is the authors’. 368 Ibid., 234.
When data is analyzed by disease cause, with October 1901, being the month with the highest mortality rates, it becomes evident that measles was the largest single cause of death in the Transvaal camps, accounting for 43 percent of deaths, two to three times more than any other cause. This data is consistent across all time periods (See Fig. 4.4, above). The second largest cause of death is pneumonia, at 13-18 percent, and this is, in part, due to measles. Measles, alone accounted for 80 percent of the 413 deaths in the Middelburg camp in July 1901. Of significance is that measles was the major cause of death of Afrikaners over five years of age, accounting for 33 percent of the deaths, and pneumonia another 24 percent. This provides insight to the low measles immunity of the Afrikaners on the veldt, and suggests that large numbers of them had not been exposed to measles for at least five years previously or longer. Although there are other underlying causes of deaths, measles is the dominant factor in explaining the extreme mortality in the worst camps.

Measles is a highly infectious viral disease, transmitted mainly by airborne droplets and needing a continuous chain of human contacts to survive. As many as 90 percent of non-immunized persons who have close contact with a victim will be infected. There was no measles vaccination at the turn of the century (in America it was not until the 1960s a

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Fig. 4.4 – Percentages of Disease Deaths in Transvaal Afrikaner Camps

Data on this chart is a compilation of numerous CDs, found in Lee-Beer, Raynor and Cliff, “Disease and Deaths in the South African War,” 235.


Curtin, 217.
vaccination was available), and it was primarily a childhood disease. Where populations have been isolated and contact has not provided immunity, all ages may be affected. In addition, malnutrition makes people especially vulnerable to the disease, and attacks leave persons susceptible to secondary infections, such as pneumonia and diarrhea.  

Although precise data of deaths by diseases such as measles are lacking in the native camps, one can postulate these camps suffered many of the same diseases epidemics as the Afrikaner camps, and were probably worse due to the absence of standard medical care in most of the camps. Subsequently, pneumonia and respiratory diseases are listed as the major causes of death. If the estimates of measles mortality are valid, measles may have resulted in over 12,000 deaths in the Afrikaner camps and a large number of deaths in the native camps.

Research into measles epidemics has shown that above a certain population size of about 250,000, measles is sustained in human populations, it becomes endemic, although there can be epidemic cycles. The total population of Afrikaners and natives in South Africa was certainly above the floor described above, however the dispersed population on isolated farmsteads and kraals on the veldt meant that the infrequent contact and interaction did not support or sustain endemic measles. The Afrikaners lost any immunity they may have had on arriving from Europe. Therefore, it is not just the base population necessary for endemic measles, but also a factor of geographical dispersion and population interaction. Previous outbreaks of measles among the Afrikaners and natives were probably isolated, the very geographical isolation which was to later kill them when they were concentrated.

It is evident measles was spread by intra and inter-camp transfers, the introduction of new families in from the veldt, and overcrowding. Camp officials failed to control the entry of infected individuals into their camps. If measles had been identified as a threat, the establishment of isolation camps or designating part of a camp as an entry port for new inmates would have lessened the epidemics. The mass infusion of inmates into the Heilbron camp by Kitchener’s men sent a new wave of measles infected persons into the town. The Fawcett Commission commented:

The death-rate was very heavy, 10 dying on one of the nights of the Commission’s visit. ... There is barely language too strong to express our opinions.

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373 Low-Beer, Smallman-Raynor and Cliff, 236.
374 Ibid., 238.
of the sending of a mass of disease to a healthy camp; but the cemetery at Heilbron tells the price paid in lives for the terrible mistake. ...  

There is clinical study to show that the more physical space people have, their mortality risk decreases. Concurrent infection of multiple family members also increases mortality risks. In the concentration camps all of factors which would have inhibited the spread of disease were violated – overcrowding packed 8-12 persons to a tent, tents were sited within a few yards of each other, multiple sick children shared tents, and camp populations exceeded the population of nearby Afrikaner towns.  

A poor diet, leading to malnutrition, increases one’s susceptibility to diseases such as measles. The Boers were accustomed to a diet of vegetables and fresh fruit, and this was almost completely absent from their forced diets in the camps. In addition, the British initially fed the Transvaal families whose husbands were on commando, no meat. Meat and flour became the main staple of the diet in the camps, and the quality of most meat was so low that it was rejected. The fat intake was very low and the diet was severely deficient in vitamins and other nutrients. 

Malnutrition produced lethargy and apathy, leading to general starvation. As epidemics became more rampant, the poor level of health lowered resistance to disease, and made inmates susceptible to infections. What comes to the forefront is the combination of malnutrition combined with epidemic diseases. Trauma also impacted the population, especially the old. The mortality of the elderly becomes lost in the monthly death rates, and the focus on high infant mortality. Humiliation and grief undoubtedly weakened the health and perseverance of the elderly.

Milicett Fawcett’s commission report lays out all the above abuses. She reported directly to Milner the condition of the camps, significantly that the deaths were not simply the result of circumstances beyond the control of the Army and the government. Although her commission did partly attribute the epidemics to the unsanitary conditions of wartime South Africa, to the almost total devastation of the country, and to the unhygienic practices of the Afrikaner women, the Fawcett Commission also pointed a finger at the military and the red tape in which the camps had been immersed. The terrible mortality statistics had continued to rise, to the chagrin of

376 Cuthbertson, Grundlingh, and Suttie, 192-194.
377 Ibid., 193.
378 Ibid., 194.
Brodrick, who was chained to Kitchener’s “ridiculously ill-informed forecasts”. Fawcett reported to Milner that the spread of epidemics should have been foreseen; elementary rules of sanitation should not have been forgotten; vegetables should have been provided; and doctors and nurses should have been rushed to the scene from England when the epidemics first broke out. Kitchener not only had rebuffed all offers of assistance to the camps, but had been feeding Brodrick only the barest of information, reflected in this outburst from the War Minister:

He never gave anyone his whole mind, lest he should spoil a good hand ... he (Kitchener) piled up unimportant details which provoked a Salisburian comment: ‘Why does Kitchener never tell us anything except the record of every Boer cow his troops have caught by the hind leg?’

Brodrick was not the only person who questioned Kitchener’s reporting, as reflected in this quote from Cromer (Kitchener’s former boss) to Salisbury in December 1897:

... it is sometimes difficult to extract the whole truth from him. He is inclined to keep back facts which he does not wish to be known.

The impact of Kitchener’s lack of integrity with his superiors can be calculated in the deaths of the noncombatants in the camps. One wonders why the British war leaders, knowing that Kitchener was also at odds with Milner on the ground in the theater of operations, put up with his antics. There is a decided lack of “starch” in Brodrick and the other cabinet members when it came to making hard personnel decisions.

By November, the new Colonial Secretary, Chamberlain, had assumed cabinet responsibility for the camps and wired to Milner:

...I should be satisfied that all possible steps are being taken to reduce the rate of mortality, especially among children, and that full and early reports are sent to me. ... If you are in need of trained men ... you must not fail to ask for such assistance ...

Milner was told to take over the operation of the camps in mid November, and his reaction verged on panic: “The women and children would all be dead by the spring of 1903. Only I shall not be there to see as the continuance of the present state of affairs for another two or three months will undoubtedly blow us all out of the water.” As late as November 5th he rebuked General Maxwell at Pretoria:

379 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 301.
380 Ibid. Spies is quoting Cromer’s letter to Salisbury which appears in Magnus’ biography of Kitchener, Kitchener: Portrait of an Imperialist (1968).
381 Pakenham, The Boer War, 549.
What a rumpus about the camps!! What bothers me is that I have not the least idea what the figures are which have caused all the row. The whole thing is in a most anomalous state, for, while K. cheerfully says, ‘the civil authorities are responsible’, the principal civil authority (himself) has no more opportunity of knowing what is going on than the man in the moon, as all your reports go thru the C. in C. to the War Office.  

Ten months after Campbell-Bannerman’s harsh words at the Holborn Restaurant and Lloyd George’s failure in the Parliament, their words had been vindicated, but in the interim, twenty thousand Afrikaners and twelve thousand natives had died in the camps.  

The initial warnings of Emily Hobhouse and the reports submitted as early as April 1901 had gone unheeded. A protracted period of allegation and denial by the government had kept data from the public domain until November 1901. By the time focus was put on the problems, mortality rates were already declining. It is evident that the government played politics with the lives of the Afrikaners in the camps, as evidenced by the release of statistics in July 1901 and information on trends released deliberately on 16 August, the day parliament went into summer recess. Clearly, there is a political history to the reports and responses, which delayed a British response to the deaths. But more importantly, the historical record shows the splits of responsibility within the senior leaders on the ground in South Africa and within the cabinet. Allowing Kitchener to act unilaterally without sharing the issues and situation on the ground with Milner and the Colonial Secretary is the fault of Brodrick. When the story of the camps exploded, Brodrick was caught unawares and had to lie to the public and parliamentary members to cover the debacle. He failed to relieve Kitchener.

A Further Revision of Strategy

In July 1901, the Cabinet had sent Kitchener a long cable which was sent through the office of Lord Roberts (who, incidentally, disapproved). It was an ultimatum to either end the war by

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Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 252, quoting message from Milner to Maxwell some six weeks after his return to South Africa from England. This message shows the dysfunction which existed within the theater in South Africa and within the Cabinet in London. Milner was on the ground and had visited camps, for him to deny that he knows about the conditions, reports is somewhat unbelievable, but it does go to show the split in the command structure which caused much of the British inaction, especially the failure of Brodrick at the minister level to take Kitchener to task.  
Pakenham, 549.  
Low-Beer, Smallman-Raynor and Cliff, “Disease and Deaths in the South African War,” 244.
September 1901, or adopt Milner’s strategy. It spelled out the “protection policy” and told Kitchener that he should be able to reduce his army by 110,000, from 250,000 to 140,000 men. Milner had again worked behind the scenes to achieve his own version of victory. Roberts then dispatched his most trusted general, Ian Hamilton, to be Kitchener’s new Chief of Staff. It was common knowledge, and particularly to Kitchener, that Hamilton was to report back on Kitchener’s mode of operations.

Kitchener had also changed his strategy and adopted himself what was Milner’s “protection strategy”, establishing protected areas, centered on Bloemfontein, Pretoria and the Rand, and working outward from these critical cities, clearing the areas and then garrisoning them. By October 1901, thousands of square miles had been cleared of the commandos. Combined with the blockhouses and miles of wire, the defensive system had turned into an offensive system to box in the commandos, using the system as a cordon to catch the guerillas. At war’s end there would be over 8,000 blockhouses and 3,700 miles of fencing, guarded by at least fifty thousand white and native troops.

Pakenham’s book, *The Boer War*, was the first academic work to bring out the true nature of the war, that it was not a white man’s war, but a total war, involving not only women and children, but thousands of armed natives as well. Pakenham estimates 40,000 native laborers on each side during the war, and Kitchener admitted to having armed about 10,000 natives to guard the blockhouses and railways. In addition, thousands of natives supported Kitchener’s large mobile columns, and it is estimated that some 20,000 natives were out on the veldt driving transport wagons, carrying out intelligence work and acting as scouts. The families of these men were undoubtedly in the concentration camps and this verifies the reason why there are so few young men in the native camps.

Kitchener, in another of his famous diatribes, sent a letter to the Boer commando leaders on 1 December, stating that since they had been complaining about the conditions in the camps that he assumed they wanted him to send all the families to the commandos, and that he would do that as soon as told. Milner concurred in this letter, a remarkable turnaround, since just two weeks before he had stated:

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386 Pakenham, *The Boer War*, 569.
387 Ibid., 581.
... even if the war were to come to an end tomorrow, it would not be possible to let the people in the concentration camps go back at once to their former homes. They would only starve there. The country is, for the most part, a desert ... .

Kitchener’s letter was ignored by the Boer Transvaal commando leaders, but President Steyn of the Orange Free State, gave him a scathing reply.

On December 15th 1901, Kitchener issued instructions to his tactical column commanders that no additional Afrikaner families should be brought into the camps. This order was not strictly enforced and some Afrikaner families continued to be swept up and deported into the camps. However, the large decrease in families being brought into the camp system after December 1901, undoubtedly helped conditions improve in the camps, as superintendents did not have to deal with hundreds of daily arrivals, and infected persons were not coming into camps where epidemics had run their course. In the Transvaal, total Afrikaner camp population reached a peak in August of 1901 with 65,500 and had slowly decreased by December to about 62,000. With Kitchener’s new orders, the population at war’s end would be less than 52,000. The decreases can also be attributed to deaths, and the movement of thousands of Transvaalers to the southern camps.

Conversely, the situation for the families left on the veldt became more precarious as British columns continued to destroy houses and supplies. In the Transvaal, some 10,000 men, women and children wandered around the veldt in Afrikaner laagers. These conditions would exist right up to the end of the war in May 1902.

As the war progressed, and the military strategy continued to change, the distinction between Afrikaner military and civilian involvement in the war became increasingly unclear to both soldiers and civilians in the field. Who was the enemy, and what was “victory”? The adoption of a “try this and try that” military strategy by the British, without a clear national strategy, led to the lengthening of the war. Internal British squabbles as to what constituted an acceptable end to the war were much to blame. After the occupation of the enemy’s capitals, had the British moved directly to Milner’s strategy of cordonning off “protected areas”, it would not have been necessary to devastate the veldt of all living things, and the families, at least the Afrikaners and natives living on their farms, could have remained at home, without the tremendous expense and efforts required of transporting them to camps and operating the camp system. Needless to say,

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388 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 259.
389 Ibid., 260.
thousands of lives would have been saved. Clearly, the British adopted a camp strategy without thinking it through to execution, and started it without knowing the cost and the outcome.

Paradoxically, the Afrikaner and native noncombatants became the single largest “enemy” grouping the British soldiers were to face in the entire war, during either its conventional or guerilla stages. Failing to win on the battlefield, the British killed at least 28,000 Afrikaners and upwards of 20,000 natives in their “war” on old men, women and children, as they stumbled in their efforts to define, then reach “victory”.
INDIVIDUAL CAMPS AND THE CONFLICT OF MEDICAL CULTURES

Children under 12 years of age got half rations. The doctors treated us very roughly. ... Many a time we were told: ‘If all those in camp perished it would not matter.’ The cases of mortality in the camp were very numerous. Last month (October, 1901) we had 580 deaths, mostly children. I have these statistics from my brother, Johannes Smit, who has assisted in making the coffins. ... The cases of mortality varied from 20 to 30 a day. I had a child when I was taken a prisoner; it died in camp. Most of the children die of measles.

Petronella J. Van Staden
Escapee from the Mafeking Concentration Camp
16 November 1901

The individual camps of the Transvaal varied widely in leadership, physical accommodations, rations and overall support of the inmates. Diseases peaked in some camps not only once but multiple times. This chapter examines in detail the varied histories of three Afrikaner and one Native camp of the Transvaal, and highlights the conflict between British medical practices and societal attitudes versus the culture of the Afrikaner Boers. Records, diaries and first-person accounts from camps are utilized. Although there is a scarcity of accounts from native camps, the narrative presented is a compilation of information from various African camps and a composite of what the Volksrust native camp was like.

The three Afrikaner camps examined are: Mafeking, the westernmost and oldest camp in the Transvaal camp system, where the highest monthly death toll in the Transvaal occurred in October of 1901 (the camp was visited by both Emily Hobhouse and the Fawcett Commission); Irene, a camp just south of Pretoria, that was split into two separate camps; and Middelburg, one of the largest camps, from which Transvaal families whose husbands were still on commando, were further deported to the Howick and Merebank camps in Natal.

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390 Emily Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell (London: Menthuen & Company, 1902), 280. One of many “stories” told to Miss Hobhouse during her trips to South Africa. Ms. Petronella Van Staden declared, under oath, to General J.G. Celliers (a Boer general from Lichtenburg and Marcio), her experiences in the Mafeking concentration camp and her escape.
The Mafeking Afrikaner Camp

The Mafeking camp may have been one of the first established in the entire South African camp system. We know from Sol Plaatje’s diary at the start of the siege of Mafeking in October 1899 that a women’s laager was formed some distance from the town to house the women and children, a site safe from shelling. This could have formed the genesis of the concentration camp.391 Visiting the camp in April of 1901, Emily Hobhouse gives these impressions:

... Mafeking itself feels like the very end of the world, and the camp seems like driving six miles into space. There are 800 or 900 people, and is the oldest of all the camps I have visited. In fact, nearly a year old... For miles around no habitation can be seen, and Mafeking folk are too bitter to do anything to help them.392

Further verification of the early formation of the Mafeking camp is contained in Miss Hobhouse’s book, The Brunt of War, in which she states: “Far away near Mafeking a camp was formed in this month (July 1900) where some of the wanderers in the north-western districts were received, but no other was yet established, only laagers formed by the Boers for their protection.” 393 In addition, other primary sources indicate the camp was in operation in July 1900. Adrian Hofmeyr, who arrived at the Mafeking district at the beginning of July, found “… a lager of tents occupied by women, who husbands were still fighting...”394 By the time of the camp’s establishment, Lord Roberts’ “steamroller” had marched over three hundred miles across the Orange Free State to Bloemfontein; it was occupied on March 13th 1900 and the siege of Mafeking was relieved in May 1900.395 Hundreds of families were being forcibly evicted from the veldt and moved to Transvaal camps. The above evidence contradicts the information in Brodrick’s statement to parliament in 1902, that the first camp for women and children was formed in January 1901.396

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391 Sole T. Plaatje, Mafeking Diary: A Black Man’s View of a White Man’s War, John Comaroff (ed.) (Cambridge: Meridor Books, 1973), 147. Sol Plaatje was a native who acted as a court interpreter in Mafeking during the siege. His diary is one, if not the only, native account of the siege. After the war, he went on to become an early leader in the South African civil rights movement.
393 Hobhouse, Brunt of War, 33. Mafeking was besieged by the Boers for months, and this probably accounts for the feelings of the local populace that Hobhouse describes in the quote above.
396 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 144. Brodrick’s speech is in Parliamentary Debates, Fourth Series, CIV, col. 712, 7 March 1902. We already know that Brodrick’s speech was erroneous. Whether Brodrick was led astray by Lords
In his May 1901 report to superiors in Pretoria, the camp superintendent, Mr. L. McCowat, noted that General Lord Methuen directed a site change in the Mafeking camp to a location “...some five miles from Mafeking.” He further comments this movement entailed a lot of work and expense. Patients were displaced to the civilian hospital in Mafeking during the move, but as of the May report patients had been moved back into the camp hospital. Emily Hobhouse’s description of the drive to the camp, quoted earlier, indicates she drove a long way to get to it, and it was isolated, which indicates the camp was probably moved earlier than May.397

First person accounts of internment in the Mafeking camp come directly from women swept up by British columns and transported to the camp. Susarha Nel, a housewife who was taken from her home on the veldt and transported to the Mafeking camp in early July 1901 (in the South African winter), wrote this in her diary:

The following midday we arrived at the kaffer stad (town) on the other side of Mafeking. We moved through two rows of Black man and women who with jubilation shouted that others should come and see the prisoners and the ‘baboons’. Later that night we were deposited on a naked sand hill. Some people were immediately dropped and left on that empty open hillside with nothing. It was a night of much suffering. ... With the arrival of morning, people began dying.398

The official returns on the Transvaal camps begin in April 1901. At that time, the camp had 765 inmates, and a reported four deaths. Three months later (July 1901), when Susarha Nel arrived, the population had swelled to 3,515, but with only nine deaths recorded. However, as families were forced into the Transvaal camps during the South African winter of 1901, the death rates began to climb. By September, the deaths are listed at 155 in a camp population expanded to 5,245, and in October the camp experienced the highest death rate in the history of the Transvaal camps, with 406 people dying out of a population which had been reduced to 4,778. The October death rate of 934 per thousand per annum was the peak of a disease epidemic, one of the micro-epidemics referred to in the previous chapter.399

Roberts or Kitchener or lied to Parliament can be debated, in any case the camp system started before Roberts left South Africa, November, 1900.

397 CD 819, 65. Report from camp superintendent, Mafeking camp to Pretoria, 1 June, 1902.
398 Susarha Nel, The Diary of Susarha Nel and her ordeal in the Death Camp at Mafeking, July 1901-August, 1902, Lichtenburg Museum, Lichtenburg, South Africa.
399 Data comes from Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War, Appendix B, Table VI, taken from official government returns.
The death statistics of the Mafeking camp, from April 1901 to March 1902 are seen on the following graphic (Fig. 5.1):

![Fig. 5.1 – Mafeking Afrikaner Camp Deaths & Death Rates](image)

The deaths and rates peaked in September thru November 1901, and subsided quickly in December. Susarha Nel describes the camp at the height of the epidemic:

> October was the month of great suffering when the sickness began. All the children became sick with a variety of illnesses from measles. German measles, fevers to loose teeth. ... Although everyone tried to doctor the children, it was a grim tableaux to see up to 21 bodies laid out for burial each day. ... There was much pushing and shoving (to get rations) and some who were weak were pushed out the way and either received help from others or lay down and died for there was not much room for charity in the face of starvation. ...

From April 1901 until March of 1902, a total of 995 noncombatants died at the Mafeking camp. This does not count any deaths from the time that the camp was initially established in April or July of 1900 until reports began in April of 1901. Children accounted for 81 percent of the deaths, particularly in the months of October and November 1901, when 547 of the reported 637 deaths (86 percent) were children. The major cause of death was measles, at 71 percent.

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400 Susarha Nel, *Diary*, 7.
The Fawcett Commission steamed into the Mafeking camp on 20 August 1901; Millicent and her ladies found the camp exceptionally dirty, women washing clothes in water fouled by excrement, latrines not properly disinfected, and filthy water thrown out of tents right on the ground. They described the camp as “... deplorably deficient (medicines); many deaths and no mortuary; complete break-down in the supply of fresh meat; no rations of vegetables, and a grossly culpable neglect by the staff.”

The Commission warned the superintendent of a typhoid epidemic, but he paid no attention, citing only forty deaths since March 1901. By early November, there were four hundred deaths a month, many of them caused by typhoid.

The Commission also recommended the camp be moved, and singled out its site as one of the worst in the Transvaal for both availability of water and physical location. As stated earlier in this section, the camp had previously been moved on orders of the commanding general.

Petronella J. Van Staden, who escaped from the camp in November 1901 at the height of the dying, gives us another look into the camp conditions:

... Children under 12 years of age got half rations. The doctors treated us very roughly. Sometimes they assaulted us when we applied for medicines. Many a time we were told: ‘If all those in camp perished it would not matter.’ ... The cases of mortality varied from 20 to 30 a day. ... The tinned meat is very unhealthy, and causes diarrhoea. .... Once we were warned not to eat the meat, as the animals had died from lung disease. ... I had a child when I was taken a prisoner; it died in the camp. Most of the children die of measles.

The Fawcett Commission visited Mafeking again in November 1901 and reported little or nothing had been done by the superintendent to carry out the recommendations of the commission, and that conditions had deteriorated. They reported 2,000 cases of sickness being registered at one time and twenty-nine deaths occurring in a single day. In the ten weeks since the commission’s initial visit, five hundred lives had been lost.

Mrs. Klazinga, swept off the veldt in August 1901, describes being put on railroad cars (trucks) and arriving at Mafeking:

In that way we had to spend three nights and two and a half days. On some of the trucks were more than fifty women, children and old men. There was no space

403 CD 893, 170,174-179, and Pakenham, The Boer War, 548.
404 Pakenham, 548.
405 CD 893, 18.
407 CD 893, 174. The reported deaths for September, October, and November, 1901 for the Mafeking Camp are 155, 406, and 231, a total of 792.
for sleeping ... When we reached Mafeking, after eleven at night, and our little children were sound asleep ... our things were again thrown out of the trucks ... I was conveyed to the camp at 2 o’clock a.m. ... we were set down in front of the so-called schoolroom ... Some have lain out there two whole days in sunshine and rain. ...  

In the account of the Fawcett Commission, the superintendent blames the epidemics in the camp on the arrival of a large number of people in the middle of the night of the 15th of August (probably Mrs. Klazinga’s group). Consequently they were not isolated or examined on their arrival. An assistant doctor, Doctor Limpert, had previously arrived at the camp on August 6th, however the Fawcett Committee stated: “He was found to be useless”. 

Poor or nonexistent leadership was a major contributing factor to the inefficiency and inability of the Transvaal camps, specifically the Mafeking camp, to accommodate the influx of inmates. Superintendents and medical personnel were constantly being replaced due to ineptness, sickness or their death. In his December report to Lord Milner, General Maxwell informs that Mr. Tucker, the superintendent of the Vereeneging Camp has retired; Mr. Howard, Superintendent of the Klerksdorp camp and Mr. Stevens, Superintendent of the Middelburg camp have both died of enteric fever (working in their own camps); and that Mr. Winfield, of the Standerton camp has been replaced.

Regardless of the excuses, the Commission laid much of the blame squarely on the Mafeking superintendent and the camp doctor. The superintendent, Mr. McCown, was removed in December 1901 and the surgeon, Dr. Morrow, resigned. Both were replaced. General Maxwell states: “The health of the Mafeking camp is much improved, and, I trust, will continue so. The new Superintendent promises well.” 

In one month, five of the seventeen Transvaal superintendents (thirty percent) were replaced. There was a traveling camp inspector in the Transvaal, but as of yet, a report on the Mafeking camp to General Maxwell at Pretoria, cannot be found. It is not known whether the general took any corrective actions before the visit of the Commission. However, after the visits of the Commission, three military officers were added as traveling camp inspectors in the Transvaal.

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408 Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War, 276-277.
409 CD 893, 175.
410 CD 936, Further Papers Relating to the Working of the Refugee Camps in South Africa, 13-14, General Maxwell’s endorsement of the December 1901 camp statistics to the High Commissioner (Milner) on 28 January 1901. Notice that the reports go to Milner, not Kitchener, and they were then forwarded to Chamberlain, the Foreign Secretary at Whitehall (not Brodrick). This reflects the November change in management.
and the correspondence between General Maxwell and Lord Milner increased, as did the corrective activity. 411

Lieutenant-Colonel C.B. Vyvyan, the local tactical commander, made efforts to help the inmates of the camp. In mid 1901 he addressed numerous requests for more doctors and nurses and medical supplies in various telegrams to Lord Methuen, the commander of the Western District of the Transvaal, and General Maxwell. He recommended that no more people be sent to the camp. Vyvyan’s efforts were in vain, as he received a terse reply early in August 1901 (as the death rates began to rise) from Maxwell which basically said that he (Maxwell) had 55,000 camp inhabitants to take care of in the Transvaal and he could assure the Colonel: “... that they all get quite enough to eat and except for a bad epidemic of measles the camps are all healthy and the people as happy and contented as they can reasonably be expected to be.”412

It is clear General Maxwell and Lord Methuen (who had visited Mafeking) were aware of the conditions in the camps but did little or nothing to support the recommendations of their officer on the ground, nor provide the camp with competent civilian leadership and needed medical supplies and professionals. The military generals in charge and the superintendent had direct knowledge of the mounting deaths and decided to do nothing to prevent the occurrence of the epidemics. Negligent leadership was the major issue at Mafeking.

The Irene Afrikaner Camp

The Irene Camp, established in November of 1900, was one of the oldest camps in the Transvaal. We can trace its origins to the creation of a “Rest camp” for Boer refugee families on the bank of the Apies River, a site that had initially been a camp for Boer prisoners of war.413 Mr. R.K. Loveday, the mayor of Pretoria after the British occupation, recommended a camp be established for refugees twenty km south of Pretoria on the land of the Irene Estate, along the

411 Ibid. There was apparently some formal or informal direction from Brodrick to Kitchener to rapidly implement the Fawcett Commission recommendations, as the tone and volume of the reports from Maxwell to Kitchener, then Milner seems to increase. While additional English doctors and nurses were not required months before, they are now asked for. Political pressure was mounting on the administration.
412 Fransjohan Pretorius, Scorched Earth, 276-278.
Johannesburg to Pretoria railway line. British military personnel reconnoitered the farm and laid out the camp. Refugee families were then moved from the “Rest Camp” into the Irene camp.  

The first official report on Irene in February 1901, lists its population at just under 900 inmates. In three months, the population increased by almost 400 percent. At the beginning of June 1901 there were a reported 4,319 persons in the camp, with 1,748 (41 percent) being children, 1,407 (33 percent) women and 1,164 (27 percent) men. It is odd the Irene camp had such a high percentage of men, although children over the age of twelve were classified as adults, so it could be the camp contained many Boer teenagers. In addition, surrendered burghers, initially held in southern prisoner camps were moved into the Transvaal camps to unite with their families.  

The camp was initially divided into six equally sized wards, each with five rows of bell tents with about thirty tents per row. The medical staff of the Irene camp initially included two doctors and three hospital nurses. However, they were augmented with civilian volunteer nurses from Pretoria in April 1901, per agreement with Major General Maxwell. Each nurse was assigned to visit a ward, or 150 tents, daily.  

Irene was one of the first camps visited by Major Goodwin, the newly assigned Transvaal General Superintendent of Burgher Camps, on the 17th of February 1901. The camp had already grown to almost 1,400 persons since the first report submitted. Major Goodwin noted the camp was in a healthy location, on a good natural slope, close to a “... adequate supply of running water.” Tents were used to house the refugees, and Major Goodwin reported: “... Many of the children here have suffered from measles, and in spite of the isolation of all known cases the disease seems to be spreading. ... Diarrhea is also prevalent amongst the women and children. ...” The newly assigned civilian superintendent was Mr. N. J. Scholtz.  

Dr. George Turner, the Medical Officer for Health for the Transvaal, came on board about the same time as Major Goodwin, and began his own inspection tour of the camps under his supervision. He visited the Irene camp on March 6th 1901, and reported that 150 refugees had arrived the day of his inspection. Turner’s report on the Irene camp indicated the water source

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414 Ibid., 45-47.
417 CD 819, 23. Part of Major Goodwin’s initial report to Major General Maxwell, his superior in Pretoria.
was good; the camp was well run and that the refugees needed to adhere to camp rules. His major concern was measles:

There have been numerous cases of measles at Irene, and of the 16 deaths registered between 6th February and 3rd March no less than 10 were caused by this disease. ... A hospital is being constructed, and will no doubt be of use, though probably it may diminish the number of deaths from measles it will not produce much effect in the number of cases either of measles or of eye disease. .. The best preventive would be to cause the lower flaps of the tents to be raised and the doors kept open. ...

The growing number of sick inmates also worried Turner; as of the 1,324 persons in the camp on the date of his visit, more than 10 percent (154) were reported sick in the past week. Measles accounted for twenty-four patients, with diarrhea adding on another fifty. Turner remarked fresh cow’s milk was scarce. Condensed milk was available, but the Boer mothers were unfamiliar as to how to dilute the condensed milk and this produced many unnecessary stomach problems in their children. He identified the twenty-four cases of measles as the only serious problem in the camp, yet he well knew the significant mortality he was observing. Children made up twenty-two of the twenty-four deaths reported. 419

Major Goodwin was also concerned with the outbreaks of typhoid in the Transvaal camps, and on March 14th issued Circular No.18 to his superintendents that stressed the proper disposal of typhoid stools and the importance of an unpolluted water supply. Enteric fever is not mentioned in Turner’s report on the Irene camp. 420

The death statistics for the Irene camp from April 1901 through March 1902 are shown in the chart below:

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418 CD 819, 26-27. Dr. Turner’s official report on his initial visit to Irene.
419 Ibid., 28.
420 Ibid., 17.
The above data illustrates the uniqueness of each camp against the general characteristics of disease epidemics. Unlike the Mafeking camp that had one single, large epidemic peak, Irene had multiple death peaks in June-July, and again in September – November 1901, the time when the deaths in the Transvaal and the South African camps were the highest (also Mafeking). Official records show that 808 people died in the Irene camp from April 1901 to March 1902, a monthly average of sixty-seven or two per day.

The medical report for the Irene camp, over time, echoes the concerns of Dr. Turner. Between 2-16 March 1901, there was a weekly average of 273 inmates “under treatment” in the camp, with an average of 152 (56 percent) being children. On the 30th of April, 317 people were in care, and forty-nine had died in that month alone. The increasing number of sick inmates averaged 321 per day in May; seventy deaths were reported, fifty-two of them being children. Clearly, the Irene camp had a significant part of the camp population always ill, and the children made up a large portion of the deaths (74 percent in May 1902). The total camp population as of 31st May was 4,319, so with 321 average sick persons per day, about 7 percent of the camp was being treated. Of the seventy deaths in May; thirty-one are identified as measles, ten diarrhea, five dysentery, and nine from pneumonia or bronchitis. These last diseases are all complications
from measles. Only three deaths from enteric fever were reported. Measles, and its associated secondary infections, was the killer.  

The camp superintendent, N. J. Scholtz, submitted his monthly report on the 8\textsuperscript{th} of June 1901, during the South African winter, emphasizing the people arriving at the camp in June “… are of a very poor class”; scanty clothed; some of the women had sacks tied around them for clothing; and the children covered with lice. He reported the weather as very cold and that he had been issuing blankets, sheep skins, and canvas coverings to keep people warm. It apparently took some time and effort to get these new arrivals to abide by the rules of camp life, especially sanitation. It is evident that Irene had a sanitation system, as Scholtz mentions a sanitary inspector and an assistant with twenty-three natives constantly at work cleaning the camp. Apparently inmates could not go into or out of the camp at will, as twenty-five Burghers were employed as “police” to secure the camp and assist new arrivals into the camp, especially at night.

The medical officer’s health report on Irene, by Dr. Percy Green, dated June 4\textsuperscript{th} 1901, attributes many of the health problems, especially among children, to the very cold weather and the windy location of the camp on high ground. Dr. Green writes:

> The great mortality I attribute to the fact that the great proportion of the sick are young children, who, badly clothed and carelessly looked after, soon succumb to the cold. … Many of the people have only a mattress to lie on … Blankets are liberally provided, but they cannot prevent draughts of chills when lying so near the ground. … I would suggest that all tents be provided with stretchers raised at least three feet from the ground.

For people swept off the veldt with little or no opportunity to pack any clothes before their home was burned and they were transported, the conditions at Irene were severe and debilitating. Children arrived in the winter without adequate clothing or blankets. Their journeys to death started on the way to the camp, and continued there unabated.

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421 CD 819, 47,51, 57.
422 CD 819, 58, Scholtz’s monthly report to his superior in Pretoria. Overall Scholtz seems to have a handle on the camp, what’s wrong, what is needed, and what he is doing to keep all the people alive, fed and healthy. Reading his lucid report, you get some idea of the immensity of the job these superintendents faced.
423 CD 819, 61. It should be noted that Dr. Green only came on board as the Transvaal Medical Officer during the second week of May 1901. In less than four months he was the second medical officer at the HQs level and was working for a third supervisor within that same time period. This turbulence undoubtedly contributed to the inaction of the Transvaal command to address the problems of the camps in a timely manner.
Mrs. Bodde, an English lady, visited the Irene camp on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of May, 1901, and gave this account:

Unless the death-rate is checked there will be no children left in the camp when the winter is over. \textit{The women and children sleep on straw mattresses, on the bare ground} (emphasis original). ... The tents are without lining, and they afford hardly any protection against wind, nor have the women adequate clothing. While the shelter is miserably inadequate, the rations are very bad. ... From one farm alone ten children have died, and there are cases in which every child in the family has perished.\textsuperscript{424}

One of a handful of volunteer nurses who came from Pretoria and served in the Irene camp addresses the situation of bedding for the inmates:

\textbf{The question of beds is another sore point;} there are only beds in the proportion of one to four so that the large majority of women and children sleep on the ground; in fact, an interesting parallel might be drawn between the present lives of these unhappy people and the Kaffirs of the country.\textsuperscript{425}

Miss Van Warmelo, another of the “Pretoria ladies” nursing in the camp, clearly articulates the camp’s overcrowding:

During the whole of May I had 20 people in one of my tents – 3 families: Bronkhorst, Prinsloo, and Venter, 3 married women with 17 children, and though I reported it frequently, I could not get another tent for them. ... when measles broke out amongst them, there were 11 people down at the same time, 2 women and 9 children packed in rows like herrings ... They all recovered from the measles, but 2 of the children have died from complications that followed afterwards. ... In another tent I had 19 people, 5 women and 14 children. ...\textsuperscript{426}

Continuing, Miss Van Warmelo describes the attitudes of the superintendent (Mr. Scholtz) and General Maxwell toward the overcrowding problem:

The General has always been most courteous and kind ... but his power is limited. ... I find in most cases it is quite useless to appeal to him. ... In the Johannesburg Camp not more than 4 are allowed to sleep in a tent ... Why then should there be made so much difference at Irene? ... when I spoke to Superintendent Scholtz about it, he said that the Irene people were of the worst sort, a class utterly unused to any of the comforts of life; that they were far better off in the camp than they could ever have been in their own homes.\textsuperscript{427}

\textsuperscript{424} Hobhouse, \textit{The Brunt of the War}, 173-174. A letter was crafted from the inmates to the Consul-General of Portugal calling his attention to the conditions in the camp, it states: “We are convinced that (this) pitiful state of affairs is aggravated by rough and heartless men such as Superintendent Scholtz at Irene.”, page 175. Kitchener who was delivered a copy of the letter on the 25\textsuperscript{th} of May, refused to acknowledge it.

\textsuperscript{425} Ibid., 182, an account of Miss Malherbe, a nurse at Irene. Italics by author.

\textsuperscript{426} Hobhouse, \textit{The Brunt of the War}, 183-184.

\textsuperscript{427} Ibid., 184.
The Pretoria nurses were initially members of the Transvaalsche Roode Kruis (Transvaal Red Cross) that was formed in 1896 in major towns in the Transvaal. Members worked in hospitals and operated ambulance trains, transporting wounded from the battlefield to hospitals. One of the Irene volunteer nurses, Ms. Armstrong, served in the ambulances at the Battle of Colenso in December 1899. After the fall of Pretoria in June 1900, the unit was dissolved, but she and the ladies then volunteered for duties in the Irene camp, beginning in April 1901.\textsuperscript{428} Ms. Armstrong describes the weather at the camp on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of May 1901:

The cases increasing daily. The cold is getting so intense I could not get warm in my bed last night with plenty of warm covers. I could feel the frost come through the tent. What must the sick in Camp not suffer, who have no proper beds and few blankets.\textsuperscript{429}

The Pretoria nurses were to be asked to leave the camp on the 11\textsuperscript{th} of October, no doubt due to the report of the Fawcett Commission, which visited Irene on 23\textsuperscript{rd} of September 1901. The Commission’s report recommended the Pretoria nurses be sent home, as their influence in the camp was detrimental to the relationships of the Boers and the camp superintendent. Apparently, Dr. Ella C. Scarlett, a commission member, interviewed several of the volunteer Afrikaner nurses and recommended they be dismissed. This was not the recommendation of the camp superintendent or camp surgeon. The Commission did recommend that additional nurses and doctors be sent from Britain to fill the medical shortfall. Ms. Armstrong, reported that when she talked with Dr. Scarlett, the doctor “... was disappointed to hear that I was Dutch, and allowed to work in the camp. ... They asked the doctor if he could trust me with the medical comforts that we had a right to order ...”\textsuperscript{430} Following the departure of the commission, the Transvaal administration moved to implement the numerous recommendations, one of which was to let the Pretoria volunteers go. Politics and prejudices prevailed over the welfare of the inmates. At the height of the second disease epidemic at Irene, the volunteer nurses, visiting 150 patients daily, were dismissed.

In a January 23rd 1902 report, W.H. Tucker, the General Superintendent of the Transvaal camps, highlights to Major General Maxwell an issue of supplies and stores not reaching the camps because of railway congestion, and appeals to the General to get the issue straightened

\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., 78.
\textsuperscript{430} Armstrong, \textit{Camp Diary of Henrietta S.C. Armstrong}, 116-117.
out. In addition, Mr. Tucker indicates the shortage of tents in all the Transvaal camps (especially at Irene) has been resolved and tents are being issued to the camps. There is no mention in either Tucker’s or Maxwell’s report to Lord Milner of a shortage of beds, cots, stretchers at the Irene camp.  

The attitudes of the camp superintendent and his constant reference to the inmates as a “low class” of people shows the disdain he felt for the Boer women and children under his care. Mr. Scholtz was a Uitlander from the Cape Colony, installed during the February 1901 civilianization of the camp leadership. He was eventually reassigned as the Transvaal camp inspector, and replaced by Mr. C.F. Esselen, who was relieved in January 1902, upon the recommendation of the Fawcett Commission.

Mrs. Joubert, the wife of a dead Boer general, was given permission to visit the Irene camp in October of 1901. Her impressions:

The people are dying like flies, of starvation, exposure and disease. ... It is impossible to realize the condition and the sufferings of the women and children.... Standing in deep water, the unfortunate creatures have to clutch their poor belongings, bedclothes, etc. .... Afterwards they have to lie down in several inches of mud. ... If the war lasts another year, not a woman or child will be left.  

Accompanying Mrs. Joubert was an Australian, Mrs. Dickenson, whose account was published in the South Australian Advertiser:

I was astonished to find that at Irene the rations were on a much lower scale. No condensed milk is allowed here as a regulation ration for a child, unless ill ...I saw some terrible instances of emaciation among children which could only be matched by the famine-stricken people of India. ... .

It is evident from the above first-hand descriptions, the reports of the superintendents and correspondence to General Maxwell, that there existed in the Transvaal camps in general (at Irene in particular), a shortage of cots or beds for the inmates as late as the African winter of 1901 (at least a year after the camps were established). Despite Mr. Tucker’s preceding report, there remained a shortage of tents at Irene. Overcrowding of multiple families into bell-shaped

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433 Ibid., 189-190.
canvas tents is evident in the multiple reports of the nurses in Irene, and this further hastened the spread of measles.

In January 1902, in order to address the overcrowding issue in Irene and other Transvaal camps, the Irene Camp was split and moved north and more directly west of the station. A second site (called #2) was established south of the river and about 1.6 km from the main camp. In March 1902 inmates from the Nylstroom camp were moved into the second location.434 The population statistics in March 1902 reflect the moves, with Irene increasing about a hundred inmates, and Nylstroom decreasing by about 180.435

The high number of deaths at Irene continued until the end of the war. In the reports of the Transvaal camps for the month ending 30 April 1902, a month or so before the surrender, Irene and Klerksdorp had the highest number of deaths, each with twenty-one. 436

Overcrowding, caused by a continued shortage of tents (combined with a severe shortage of cots and beds and exacerbated by inadequate rations), led to two major epidemics of measles at Irene and an extraordinary high death toll. Numerous reports cite that one year into the operation of the camp, many inmates were still sleeping on the ground.

As at Middelburg, an arrival of hundreds of persons in one day overwhelmed the capability of an already overloaded camp and its supply system to respond. Add the presence of an uncaring superintendent dealing with destitute families in the middle of the South African winter and you have a recipe for tragedy, especially deaths among children. At Irene, all the above shortfalls converged at once and led to the high death toll that would have been largely mitigated by an aggressive, caring superintendent backed up by a responsive chain of command at the general officer level that apparently did not exist.437

A Clash of Medical Cultures

Any discussion of disease deaths and rates and child mortality in the camps must take into account two considerations: the death rates for persons from diseases, specifically children

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435 Hobhouse, *The Brunt of War*, Table VI, 340.
436 CD 1161, *Statistics of the Refugee Camps, South Africa* (London: Darling & Son, 1902). This is the final return of statistics for the camps before war’s end.
437 It is interesting that Major General Maxwell visited the Irene camp several times, once at the invitation of Ms. Van Warmelo, a Pretoria volunteer nurse. He was shown firsthand the conditions of the camp, but seems to have done nothing to ameliorate the suffering and deaths.
before the war in South Africa; and secondly, the seasonal aspects of typhoid (worst in summer) and measles (worst in winter). Finally, one must understand the cultural context of the British and Boers and their response to disease, which helps illustrate the contrasting explanations of health conditions by the Fawcett Commission’s English ladies and the accounts from the Boer women. All this will help clarify reasons for the mortality trends presented.438

Before the war, no exact information exists as to the prevalence of disease in the civil population. In the sparsely populated areas of the republics, many people died without ever seeing a doctor and the cause of death, if even registered, was usually “fever.” Infectious diseases were rarely reported. Of the “up country” towns, only Kimberley seems to have had an adequate sanitation system. In the Transvaal and Orange Free State sanitation was rudimentary at best, with no public health regulations whatsoever. With limited information available, the following diseases were identified as prevalent in the veldt: enteric fever, dysentery and diphtheria.439

Measles epidemics in South Africa in the nineteenth century were infrequent but lethal. However, by the 1870s outbreaks in the Cape Colony appeared to have diminished in lethality. Some historians propose the British could not have expected a devastating epidemic in the camps, yet this is questionable.440 More than a few British doctors were aware the Afrikaners were vulnerable, as Dr. G. Pratt Yule notes: “... it seems as if the Dutch by their long sojourn in South Africa and the isolation of their dwellings had practically lost this immunity ... as is abundantly shown by the extremely malignant type the disease (measles) assumes in the camp.”441

Even with sketchy information it is possible to trace the spread of measles into the concentration camps. Measles was apparently present in Cronje’s laager when he surrendered to Lord Roberts in spring 1900 and then spread to Boer prisoner of war camps. We know that Boers who had surrendered were initially kept in the Cape Colony detention camps and then

440 Bruce Fetter and Stowell Kessler, “Scars from a Childhood Disease,” Social Science History 20, no.4 1996): 597. This statement can be challenged. The British medical establishment knew the mechanics of the spread of measles from its own experience in Britain’s large cities. The questions are: Did the medical authorities report the risk? And more importantly, if they did, what did the leadership of the British army do with this information?
441 Pretorious, Scorched Earth, 179. Quoted in CD 853, page 114.
allowed to go north into the concentration camps to be with their families. This could have been the impetus for the outbreak of measles which would ravage the camps.\textsuperscript{442}

Mr. H. Dahms, who taken prisoner by the British early in the war, was initially confined at the Greenpoint Prison Camp at Cape Town, before being allowed to move north into the concentration camps. He was taken, along with 240 others to the Bethulie camp in the ORC, where he describes the outbreak of the epidemic:

Then came measles to the fore; the tents contained up to twelve souls; sometimes two families in one tent ... The bare ground was for most all they had to sleep on.\textsuperscript{443}

The most likely scenario is that the disease flared up in the Cape Colony in 1899 and peaked in 1900. Spread by Boer prisoners to the Boers in the two republics, it reached epidemic proportions in the camps during the autumn and winter of 1900 and again in the spring of 1901. It also spread to the native camps. The transport of Boer families from the Transvaal camps into the Natal camps and movement of individuals from one camp to another further exacerbated the spread of the disease.\textsuperscript{444}

In the midst of this sickness, confrontations arose between the English doctors and the Boer women in the camps due mostly to conflicts regarding different traditions of medicine and healing. The British often described the Boer women as superstitious, ignorant, and careless in sanitary matters, while the Boer women described the British as inhumane and lacking the skills or desires to deal with sickness and death. To the British, sick children needed to be at the camp hospital. To the Boer women, when their children went to the hospital, they lost all control over healing and caring for them. They saw the hospital as a place to die.\textsuperscript{445}

For the Afrikaners, especially the Boers on the veldt, the home was the focus of medical care, with the mother taking on the nurturing role of the \textit{volksmoeder}. The situation in the camps, where they were forced to send their children to hospitals was disempowering. The British doctors were forced to defend a policy (the camp system itself) which gave rise to massive mortality. The doctors saw the camps as educational and tended to shift the responsibility for deaths back to the Boer women. The doctors expected the women to learn basic hygiene and

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{442} Fetter and Kessler, “Scars from a Childhood Disease,” 595-597.
\item \textsuperscript{443} Hobhouse, \textit{War Without Glamour}, 148-149. Mr. Dahms then describes the death rate at Bethulie camp rising to 20 to 27 per day. He was 62 years of age, and escaped from the camp, but was recaptured and sent to India.
\item \textsuperscript{444} Fetter and Kessler, “Scars from a Childhood Disease,” 601.
\item \textsuperscript{445} Cuthbertson, Grundlingh, and Suttie, \textit{Writing a Wider War}, 186.
\end{itemize}
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sanitation, yet at the same time their camp “system” was not providing fresh water, adequate sewerage, beds, rations and accommodations.\textsuperscript{446}

British medicine had evolved during the nineteenth century; acknowledging that polluted water supplies, inadequate sewerage, and lack of sanitation were major causes of diseases. The acceptance of the germ theory and of antiseptic surgery instilled a belief in Victorian society and in the medical profession as well, that cleanliness was equated with moral health.

The medical profession in Britain rarely challenged the ruling class and tended to adopt middle class societal values, thereby reinforcing contemporary prejudices and stereotypes. This may have led to the transfer of middle class prejudices about sanitation and cleanliness to Afrikaner society. In fact, medical criticisms of the Boers were very similar to those condemning slum societies, whether they were in Britain, Australia, Ireland, or South Africa. In addition, since the germ theory of disease became widely accepted, historians have discovered a shift from preventive medicine to curative medicine that focused on the pathogens at work in the body once a person became ill. The British medical profession expected the Boers to respond, but yet did not initially provide the environment for this to be achieved. \textsuperscript{447}

Dr. Kendall Franks was detailed by Kitchener to inspect the camps. His results were published in the British Blue Books and widely disseminated in the London \textit{Times} and other newspapers. His findings did much to promote British claims that mortality in the camps was the result of the insanitary lifestyle of the Afrikaner women.\textsuperscript{448} Franks’ reports and other doctors compared the tents in the camps to the British slums: “… the squalor and dirt would equal, if not surpass, some of the residences of the poor in the British Isles, such as Whitechapel, St. Giles, and the Liberties in Dublin. …”\textsuperscript{449}

The accusations against Afrikaner women are repeated at all levels of British authority and in the Fawcett Commission’s report. Frank’s reports were inflammatory, and his choice of words is indicative of his social outlook: the poor were usually “ignorant” or “dirty”; a woman who complained about the meat was “loud-voiced”; but when people were docile, they displayed “… a general air of contentment.” Inmates were probably docile because they were malnourished,

\textsuperscript{446} Fransjohan Pretorious, \textit{Scorched Earth}, 179.
\textsuperscript{447} Cuthbertson, Grundlingh and Suttie, “Scars from a Childhood Disease,”194-195.
which produces lethargic behavior or malaise. Franks, a stickler for precision, was concerned about the alignment of tents at the Middelburg camp. Distinctly middle class British judgments that sanitary behavior was allied to order and taste, are prevalent in British literature describing the Afrikaner women in the last half of the war.450

The Boer medical traditions of healing were derived in part from an earlier European system. The Boers’ methods had been shaped by isolation from modern medical practices and close contact with indigenous people of southern Africa. In 1891 there were about 260 doctors registered in the South African Republic (Transvaal), a ratio of about one doctor for 1,328 Boers and whites. Most were clustered in the large cities with Uitlander populations.451 As a result, most Boers from the veldt had never visited a hospital, nor been treated by a doctor. It was a self-reliant culture, with self-reliant women as care-givers.

Everything about the Boers’ medical practices contradicted British medicine and its central control by a doctor. Practicing a “humoral system” of healing, the notion of sweating out a fever was a long established practice among the Boers; certainly at odds with the British concept of opening up all the tent flaps and letting the air circulate.

Central to Boer beliefs was that the body and the environment formed a whole, and that health or disease came from the relationship between the two. The body consisted of four parts, or “humors”: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, each associated with a specific part of the body. Humors were also associated with a season of the year and had two fundamental qualities. For instance, blood was hot and moist, and was associated with the liver and with spring. Boer medicine was not concerned about diagnosis of a specific disease, but finding out the cause of an imbalance and then restoring that balance.452

The following comment from Major General Maxwell to Lord Kitchener on July 5th 1901 (South African Winter) shows the mutual lack of understanding between the two cultures:

Unfortunately, the death-rate amongst the children continues high owning to prevalence of measles and the extremely cold nights. The Boer mother is greatly

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450 Ibid., 196-197. One can note the use of the word “contented” or “contentment” applied to the inmates of the camps by Franks, Maxwell and others. Perhaps the poor are to be “contented”, besides being “unwashed”, etc. This is but one example of British class terms being applied to the Boers.
451 Staats-Almanak Voor de Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek, 1898, as quoted in Heyningen (see FN #33). The almanac puts the white population of the ZAR at 345,397. Seventy-two of the doctors are listed as located in Johannesburg (the mines), and only four other towns, Krugersdorp, Potchefstroom, Rustenburg and Wakkerstroom, are listed as having white populations over 10,000 people.
452 Cuthbertson, Grundlingh and Suttie, Writing a Wider War, 199. From an essay: “Women and Disease”, by Elizabeth van Heyningen.
to blame, she insists on tending her children, refuses to obey the orders of the doctor, or the advice of the nurse; the Boer remedy for measles, apparently, is a tea made of goat’s dung, this is administered by the mothers with deplorable results. Another favourite remedy appears to be an absolute refusal to wash the children or any attempt at cleanliness.453

The derogatory, middle class attitude of British camp leaders and physicians towards the Boers is present even in the reporting system, where there are no “calls to action” or emergencies described in regards to the mounting death totals. It seems business as usual. In the Johannesburg camp during the month of May 1901, seventy-nine people died, sixty-six of them children. Measles accounted for fifty-one deaths among the young. The camp doctor, Mr. Hubert Crook, begins his report by stating: “The health of the Burgher Camp, Racecourse, Johannesburg, during the month of May, has generally been exceedingly good.” One wonders how many deaths it takes to make the health of the camp exceedingly bad.454

The “Dutch medicines” used by the Boers were patent medicines widely employed by the culture since the 18th century. By 1900 the Huis Apotheek was the most favored. The medicines came in a box together with instructions for their use. Although the Fawcett Commission recommended they be banned and the camp stores would not stock them, the families either brought them with them to camp or somehow procured them.

Dr. Franks disliked not only the medical self-sufficiency involved, but the content of the medicines, including Hoffman’s drops which contained ether, and Essenz dulcis, which contained opium. In actual fact, the Dutch medicines were no less reputable than the patent medicines widely available in Britain, and it was only in the camps’ authoritarian atmosphere their use was prohibited.455

Miss Malherbe, a volunteer nurse who came out from Pretoria to serve at the Irene camp along with a half dozen other Afrikaner ladies, gives us this view of Boer medicines at Irene:

As to the people being poisoned by these home remedies, the idea is ridiculous. They consist of the simplest ingredients of the chemist art, and have been used since Boers became Boers; why they should die of these remedies the first time

454 CD 819, 56, report of the Medical Officer, Johannesburg camp. This went to Major General Maxwell.
455 Heyningen, “Women and Disease,” 188-189. It should be noted that by mid-19th century, the production of patent medicines in Britain had become a lucrative business and opposed by the medical profession. The government would regulate only the most dangerous medicines. This may account for the view of Dr. Franks and others toward the Boer medicines. This time the doctors were able to exercise control within the camps and control the distribution.
they were used under the English flag is inexplicable. In my five months of work in the camp neither did I attend or did I hear of any patient dying of poison from home remedies.  

As stated earlier, the Boer women distrusted the British doctors and hospitals. Dr. Percy Green, medical officer of the Irene camp, describes the attitudes:

The Boers and their families are very difficult to induce to come into hospital, although every facility is given them to visit their relations in hospital, which is situated only a few yards from the centre of the camp. Thus many cases die, which if admitted into hospital early, might have recovered.

Although Western medical professionals had made progress by 1900, their tools to treat and control outbreaks of measles, typhoid and other contagious diseases were still largely confined to traditional methods such as isolation and enforcement of sanitation measures. The Transvaal concentration camps were the worst place to expect to maintain cleanliness and isolation.

The clash of medical cultures in the camps was bound to happen. British doctors were faced with problems for which they had no solution: the camps themselves and all attendant problems, a disease (measles) which they could not cure, and a war against a civilian society with values far different than their own and perceived as backward. Yet, it was the British who deliberately chose to conduct war against the Boer noncombatants by destroying their farms and livelihood, transporting them from isolated farms into concentrated rows of tents (see Fig. No. 5.3 below) with poor sanitation, meager rations and inadequate accommodations. The Boers saw their traditions of healing as part of their culture that was being destroyed by British imperialism; traditions which were more in tune with a rural life than was a system that placed emphasis on urban, middle class values.

The British decisions caused massive mortality amongst the women, children and the elderly. It was the camp medical staff and the inmates who were confronted with the results of Roberts

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456 Hobhouse, *The Brunt of War*, 181. Miss Malherbe was one of about six women who served as volunteer nurses in the Irene camp, the others being Mrs. Siemens, Mrs. Vlok, Miss Findlay, Miss Van Warmelo, Miss Celliers, and Ms. Durr. Miss Van Warmelo had already served in the Transvaal during the British invasion and treated both British and Boer wounded at Jacobstal. Apparently, as the ladies were taking a break, a lady from the Fawcett Commission saw them and thus made an entry that the nurses were doing nothing. They were then dismissed, much to dismay of the superintendent, etc.

457 CD 819, 61. Medical report for the Irene camp covering the month of May, 1901 and submitted on 4th June, 1901.

458 Cuthbertson, Grundlingh and Suttie, *Writing a Wider War*, 205.
and Kitchener’s policy. And it was Roberts and Kitchener who gave the provisioning of medical supplies and the basic needs of the camps a low priority.

The Afrikaner Camp at Middelburg

The Middelburg camp differed from most other South African camps in that it was not only a major initial concentration point for Transvaal Boer families, but also a transitional destination for those Boer families, with husbands on commando, who were later further deported south to the Merebank and Howick camps in Natal.

Fig. 5.3 - The Afrikaner Camp at Krugersdorp

The above photograph clearly shows what a large Transvaal concentration camp (such as Middelburg) looked like, with bell tents lined up and families living in very close quarters. Inmates without bunks or beds in overcrowded tents, as previously mentioned in the Irene camp, faced conditions that accelerated the spread of virulent diseases among the camp populace within a short time. A *British Medical Journal* article appeared in the November 8th 1901, edition of the

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459 This photograph of the Krugersdorf concentration camp shows the alignment of tents, the main street, and outlying areas which are a common feature of most of the Transvaal camps. The immensity of the camp can only be realized through a photograph like the one above. The Krugersdorf camp contained at its height, about 5,400 inmates. Middelburg camp had 7,751 inmates in July, 1901. The larger building at the end of the wide avenue may have been the hospital or the camp school. Orderly, according to the camp guidelines, but also deadly, as at least 735 people died in the Krugersdorf camp from April, 1901 – March, 1902 (Hobhouse, *Brunt of War*).
The camps appeared to be a military necessity, and it was doubtless regarded as more humane thus to mass the women and children than to leave them on their half-ruined homesteads. The results have been calamitous. ... The conditions of life in these camps are doubtless responsible for the greater part of the evil. Dysentery and diarrhoea, enteric fever, and pneumonia, as well as measles, probably prevail in them. ... The habits of the Boers probably make matters worse. But, this is simply a further reason for not permitting the continuance of the concentration of persons under such unsatisfactory conditions. ... Large numbers of cases of measles cannot be safely treated together, unless under the most favorable hygienic conditions. Failing these conditions, the aggregation of patients must be stopped. 460

The Times article correctly identified the lack of immunity amongst the Boer inmates, and also stated that the general habits and poor hygiene of the Boers were additional arguments why the dense aggregations of people should not be permitted. Sharply critical of the British Army’s handling of medical support in general, the article goes on to say: “In view of the excessive mortality from enteric fever among our own troops, to which we have repeatedly drawn attention, we are bound to suspect that the same unreadiness to make provision for probable contingencies has characterised the action of the responsible Army authorities in this as in other health matters.” The article closed with recommendations for isolation of measles cases, and the splitting up of large camps into dispersed locations. 461

Violating almost all the recommendations stated above and established along the lines of the other Transvaal camps, the Middelburg camp was one of the largest camps in the entire South African camp system. It had a reported camp population of over 7,000 in the months of June and July of 1901. In just one month, April to May 1901, the camp increased from 1,292 to 6,637 inmates. As the population increased so did the death rate. 462

The graph below illustrates the sustained death rates in the Middelburg camp from June - December 1901, with over 400 deaths occurring in July and 208 in November of 1901.

460 Times, November 8th, 1901.
461 Ibid.
462 Hobhouse, The Brunt of War, Appendix B, Table VI, 337-340. The size of the Middelburg camp was over twice the recommended size proposed by the Fawcett Commission and certainly violated the recommendations of the British medical profession as seen in the preceding paragraph.
In December 1901, enteric fever would even claim the life of the camp superintendent and ultimately a total of 1,365 deaths occurred, almost four a day. \textsuperscript{463}

Major Goodwin’s initial return of the census of the Middelburg camp to his superiors in Pretoria was dated 22\textsuperscript{nd} March 1901, a month before the first official returns were dispatched to London. He reported a camp population of 977 people, with forty-nine percent being children, and sixty-five adults and children living outside the camp in the town of Middelburg. \textsuperscript{464} Mr. W.R. Tucker, who succeeded Major Goodwin as General Superintendent of the Transvaal camps, submitted a report to Major General Maxwell on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of May 1901, in which malaria is named as the principal cause of illness at the Middelburg camp, which by that date already had over 6,600 people. \textsuperscript{465}

During the worst of the disease epidemics, reports from the superintendent of the Middelburg camp failed to discuss the tremendous number of deaths in the camp during June and July of 1901. However, the reports do include the sudden and uncoordinated arrival of thousands of

\begin{figure}[h]
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\caption{Middelburg Afrikaner Camp Deaths & Death Rates \textsuperscript{466}}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{463} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{464} CD 819, 16.
\textsuperscript{465} Ibid., 46-47.
\textsuperscript{466} Hobhouse, \textit{The Brunt of War}, Appendix B, Table VI, 337-340.
families swept up by Kitchener’s columns. Overcrowding into substandard conditions was the main reason for the death toll. The camp population exploded from fewer than 1,300 in April to 6,637 by May. The superintendent reports are of a chaotic scene: tents could not be procured for hundreds of families arriving at infrequent intervals; people arrived destitute, wearing only the clothes on their backs; and the influxes exhausted the camp’s supply of rations. In addition, the population of men in the camp was substantially increased, as surrendered burghers were returned from detention camps in Natal and Cape Town. As stated earlier, it is believed this is one way measles was spread into the Transvaal camps. Three doctors were in the camp servicing over 6,000 people. Seeing all that happened in a space of only two months, it is easy to see why the camp was quickly overwhelmed and disease epidemics soon broke out.467

The camp suffered thirty deaths in May, but quickly increased to 166 in June and reached over four hundred in July. The Transvaal surgeon, Dr. H.A. Spencer, describes the beginnings of the terrible epidemics that were to soon sweep the camp:

The number of attendances at the dispensary i.e. “outpatients”, this month (May) has been very large, varying from 30 to 60 a day, and on several occasions reaching 80. Besides a large number are daily visited in their tents, bring the number seen and prescribed for daily up to about 150 to 200; I have no doubt often more. ... Measles, however, increased, and took a hold amongst both children and adults; this was caused by the close packing and the impossibility... of isolating the cases as they occurred.468

Dr. Spencer prophetically closes his report, stating that if additional matrons are not provided, more warm clothing procured, milk made available, and better shelter provided for the hospital during the winter “... we must look forward to a largely increased mortality from pneumonia amongst the elderly, and amongst all cases of measles, influenza, and febrile conditions which occur in your (the superintendent’s) camp.”469

Within thirty days, Dr. Spencer’s predictions would become fact.

The Fawcett Commission visited the Middelburg camp in December 1901. They witnessed poor supervision and organization. This is their report:

It (the camp) is one of the most unsatisfactory we have seen. ... There is a complete want of order, method, and organization, and there is hardly one

467 Report of Mr. E.R. Gardner, Superintendent, Middelburg Camp, to Major General Maxwell, 7th June 1901, as found in CD 819, 79-80.
468 Report of Dr. H.A. Spencer to Camp Superintendent Middelburg and General Maxwell, 6th June 1901, as found in CD 819, 80-82.
469 Ibid.
department of camp life which can be reported on as being in a satisfactory condition.  

Almost all Transvaal camp doctors’ reports contain comments about diet and rations. The Boers were used to a rural diet of whole milk, vegetables and meat. In the camps, they were fed flour, some meat (much of questionable quality) and few or no vegetables. When superintendents tried to get whole milk for the inmates, especially the children, they would run into priority problems such as described by the Superintendent of the Bloemfontein camp:

Unfortunately the military authorities found it necessary during the month (December 1901) to commandeer for their hospitals a supply of 180 pints of fresh milk per diem, which I had arranged for a local farmer to provide. I have, however, made arrangements with another dairyman, to supply 300 pints per diem to the Bloemfontein hospital ...  

The Fawcett commission also addressed the issue of diet and lack of medical support in their formal report, stating:

It ought to have been foreseen that a dietary without fresh milk, vegetables, or meat would be followed by a lowering of vitality, and that scurvy would almost certainly result, and earlier precautions ought to have been taken to prevent it. A more determined effort might, we believe, have been made to secure fresh meat, however thin; and lime juice, jam and vegetables or some kind added to the dietary would have been a reasonable precaution to have taken in view of an obvious danger. ... more strenuous and earlier exertions ought to have been made to secure the services of an adequate supply of efficient doctors and nurses to cope with the outbreak (measles).

The abrupt change in diet, combined with the lack of vegetables and meat, led to undernutrition and starvation for many inmates, especially children. Under nutrition is when some food is eaten, but the amount is insufficient to meet physiological needs. Over a prolonged period this becomes chronic and leads to starvation. Adults have a decline in body mass and muscle fiber shrinks. Skin becomes thinner and more easily infected. In starvation conditions, diarrhea may become severe even when there is no intestinal infection. Starving or near-starving children, particularly infants, who lose weight are at far worse risk than adults, for their energy

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471 CD 936, Further Papers Relating to the Working of the Refugee Camps in South Africa, 4. Contained in the monthly report of the Chief Superintendent of the Orange River Colony Camps to H. Goold-Adams, the Governor of the colony. If the ORC camps received lower priority than the military, it would seem as if the Transvaal camps, being even further out on the supply line experienced the same conditions. Women and especially children were deprived of fresh milk due to military priorities.
472 CD 893, 18.
requirements are greater. The lack of potable water is a far more likely cause of death than lack of other nutrients. 473

Looking at the photographs of children in the camps, reading eyewitness accounts, and examining the listed causes of deaths, one can see a prevalence of under nutrition and near starvation in the camps underlying the sickness and mortality. Diarrhea, listed as a major cause of death, is not only a symptom of measles, but related to malnourishment and lack of a supply of potable water as well. Putting children and adults on half-rations, and at the same time taking them from a rural diet into a camp situation produced malnourishment and eventually death. 474 While not being the actual “killers” themselves, under nutrition and near starvation provided a susceptibility for disease, paving the way for the arrival of the epidemics. 475

As Emily Hobhouse earlier realized, one could visit the camps and not know that around you deaths were occurring at an alarming rate. One Boer lieutenant was permitted by General Blood to visit the Middelburg camp in September 1901, about the same time as the Fawcett Commission. He described the camp as “satisfied”, and “finding the people content”. Kitchener quoted this young man as an answer to critics of the camp system. It is interesting to note that in the month the young lieutenant visited Middelburg 102 people died, over three per day. 476

Of the three Afrikaner camps analyzed in this study, the Middelburg camp had the highest annual death toll. Statistics indicate that deaths occurred without letup from April 1901 through March 1902, unlike in other camps where there were definite “spikes” of epidemics.

An eyewitness account from a lady writing to friends in Europe describes the horror of the mounting death rate in July 1901:

All of us suffer much from a severe cold. The number of deaths is very large. Seventeen or more a day. . . The day before yesterday a new cemetery was laid out. Yesterday thirty people were buried there, and this morning there are twenty people lying in the hospital, and how many more in the camp I do not know. . . The mothers themselves are obliged to carry their children to the cemetery if others do not do it for them. Sometimes they themselves draw the cart in which the body had been placed, to the cemetery, which is an hour’s distance from the camp. 477

474 Ibid.
476 Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War, 149.
477 Ibid., 270-271.
In the middle of the deadliest month in the camp’s history, July 1901, the Middelburg camp was moved to a new site. Mrs. A.M. van den Berg, taken from her farm in the Transvaal, describes the chaos:

July 1st the baby and July 8th the mother both died of this sickness (measles). We could say we just had to wrestle with sickness and death. Horrible were the nights. We heard nothing but weeping and groans ... the people thus made homeless ... became just skin and bone – fast shriveling away. ... July 10th they moved our camp a little further from the station. The reason was to improve the health of the camp. There we had to make clay floors to the tents and little walls round them. ... A first sickness was a little better, but again became severe.478

In July 1901, the Middelburg camp also had South Africa’s highest mortality among children, with 342 children dying out of 3,567 in the camp, one in ten.479

To clear out “undesirables” from the Transvaal camps, women whose husbands were on commando were deported further south into Natal camps. Mrs. Burger, wife of the Minister of Middelburg, Transvaal, deported to Howick camp in October 1901, gives this account of why she thinks she was “banished” to the south:

I told General R. that I believed the reason why I had to be banished was just because I saw too much of the misery and suffering of our poor women and children in the cruel, wretched concentration camp at Middelburg. I often heard from dying lips that they were dying of hunger and from many greyheaded people that they were perishing from cold. Never can I forget what I have seen in this camp (Middelburg); it was heart-rendering to see twenty and thirty corpses lying in two bell tents on the bare ground; most of them innocent children.480

In January 1902, after the visits of Emily Hobhouse and the Fawcett Commission, Major General Maxwell informed Lord Milner the Middelburg camp “... has been entirely reorganized.” He reported it was now a model of what a camp should be. He went on to thank the late superintendent, Mr. Stevens, who actually died of typhoid fever while on duty at the camp. Maxwell also remarked that he could not continue with the clearing out of “refugees” from overcrowded Transvaal camps because the Merebank camp in Natal had been pronounced “unfit for the number of refugees intended.” Maxwell intended to “clear out the congested camps” as soon as the Natal camps were ready to receive more refugees (the Fawcett report

478 Hobhouse, War Without Glamour, 29.
479 Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War, Appendix B, Table I, 332.
480 Hobhouse, War Without Glamour, 139.
condemned the location of the Merebank camp and recommended all camps be no more than 3,000 inmates for support reasons.481

From the data attached to Maxwell’s report, analysis of the Middelburg camp’s deaths in December 1901 indicates that 115 people died in the camp (diarrhea, whooping cough and enteric fever being the listed major reasons). Enteric fever can usually be linked to a contaminated water source. The Middelburg camp had been moved the previous July to a “more healthy location.” General Maxwell’s letter states he has detailed an additional Water Engineer to improve the water supply at Middelburg. In a previous letter to camp superintendents on the 18th of December 1901, General Maxwell informed them that he had appointed a Sanitary Inspector for the Transvaal’s Burgher Camps and that individual was to inspect and report on sanitary conditions at the camps. 482

The reports rendered on the camps to Lord Milner are much more detailed than those previously sent to Lord Kitchener. They reflect an increase of activity and improvements in the camps; no doubt as a result of the Fawcett Commission’s report that resulted in Milner and the Foreign Secretary being given responsibility for the entire camp system the previous November. The political pressure on Milner and the government to get the camps under control and stop the horrific death toll had doubtless significantly increased.

The deaths in the Middelburg camp, after peaking in June and July of 1901, were reduced to only six by March 1902. Unlike the other two camps studied, the deaths at Middelburg are due more to sudden overcrowding and uncoordinated arrival of thousands of people from Kitchener’s “sweeps” in the veldt. The camp and its small staff were completely overwhelmed beginning in May 1901 and only recovered near the end of the war. The fault lies with Kitchener and his field commanders who burned homes and transported people in ever increasing numbers to a camp that was filled to far over its capacity for support. The Middelburg disaster was one of sheer numbers.

481 Letter from Major General Maxwell to Lord Milner, Pretoria, January 28th, 1902, forwarding the December reports on the Transvaal camps, as contained in CD 936, 1902, 12-13. Mr. Stevens, the superintendent who died on duty at the camp, replaced Mr. Garner, probably after the visit by the Fawcett Commission.
482 Ibid., 12-13, 16. and 18
The Volksrust Native Camp

Deaths in the Afrikaner camps peaked in the month of October 1901. The native camps death rates reached its peak months later, in December 1901, with a mortality rate of 372 per thousand per annum, more severe than the highest mortality rate in all the Afrikaner camps for one month (344 per thousand per annum).\footnote{Peter Warwick and S.B. Spies (eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1980), 173.} In October 1901 there were nearly 1,500 deaths in native camps; 2,500 in November, and almost 3,000 in December 1901. It was only after January and February of 1902 that the mortality rate in the native camps began to subside. \footnote{S.B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 264.}

A native camp was established at Volksrust on the Natal railroad line in late summer 1901. Natives encamped along the railway line, who had been “dumped” there or migrated there from veldt, were moved into the camp that was under the Native Refugee Department. The Volksrust camp was not as large as the nearby Afrikaner camp, which contained at its height about 5,300 noncombatants.\footnote{Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War*, Appendix B, Table VI, 337-340. The officer commanding the Native Refugee Department reported directly to Lord Kitchener.}

The native camp was situated on a former Boer farm and unlike the Afrikaner camp, the objective was for the natives to become self-sufficient and raise their own food. The camp was primarily made up of old men, women and children. Most young and mature men were working outside the camp for the British Army or in the Johannesburg mines. In the Volksrust camp, 763 of 836 (over 90 percent) of the natives were employed outside.\footnote{The data given is for the Heidelberg camp, with other camps averaging from 56-81% working outside.} However, the overall percentage of adult males living in the Volksrust native camp was surprisingly about the same as in the neighboring Afrikaner camp that contained surrendered Boers and their families, former POWs, and young males not on commando. In December 1901, the native camps in the Transvaal contained about nineteen percent adult males, while the Afrikaner camps contained eighteen percent.\footnote{Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War*, Appendix B, 333 and Appendix D, 355.}

Most of the natives in the Volksrust camp were from Boer farms where they had been tenant farmers and were “swept” off the veldt along with their “masters.” A few natives had been removed from their kraals on the veldt, from native reserves, or mission stations, but almost all were from the farms themselves. Early on in the war destitute native families voluntarily
wandered into makeshift camps or towns from the devastated veldt, seeking shelter, food and work. Many of these ended up in the Volksrust camp. By August 1901, there were 22,295 natives in thirty-nine Transvaal camps (September 1901).  

Natives who did not come voluntarily into camps were escorted to the nearest railway or laager by the mobile British columns, finally arriving at the concentration camp. The large columns leaving the veldt were a mass of soldiers, Afrikaner and native families and with whatever they could carry. Children became lost in the column of refugees and its dust clouds that doubtless stretched for miles. Arriving at makeshift locations along a railway in the cold African winter (our summer) of 1901, the natives were faced with immediate food shortages. Many slipped away to find refuge with relatives living in kraals in the native preserves.  

Up until mid-1901 the African camps were under the control of the larger, local Afrikaner camp commandants. When the Native Refugee Department was set up in the Transvaal in June 1901, the native camps came under its purview. The objective was to make the camps smaller, and self-supporting, in order that the natives would be available to the army, mines and civilians for work. Operating the camps at low cost was paramount to the British Army and government. By February 1902, the number of Transvaal camps had increased to thirty-nine, as more natives were brought in from the veldt.  

Native men acted as drivers for the long trains of supply wagons that accompanied Kitchener’s columns operating on the veldt, served as scouts for the British mounted columns, and were guards for the lines of blockhouses being established across the open veldt. Many natives were armed by Kitchener, especially in the last part of the war. An estimated 20,000 natives served with Kitchener’s columns, and another forty thousand were employed as British laborers (the Boers had about the same number).  

Women and children in the camp were employed as domestics in nearby towns or in the Afrikaner camp. Some natives, mostly young children, accompanied their Boer families into the Afrikaner camps, and unfortunately died with them.

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489 Charles Van Onselen, The Seed is Mine, 27. Describes the Maine family’s deportation from the southwestern Transvaal to a native camp near Mafeking.
490 Pretorious (ed.), Scorched Earth, 113-114. There are also some reports which list 37, not 39, native camps at the war’s end.
491 Pakenham, The Boer War, 580-581.
The native camps were small in size for control purposes (some with only 600 inmates), with long distances between camps. However, huts inside the camp were grouped close together, as if in a kraal. In addition, the Volksrust camp had enclosing wire and guards, but natives still managed to escape. The Chief Superintendent of the Department of Refugees, De Lotbiniere, explained the huts had to be close because of the adjacent land under cultivation. However, the records of the department indicate that it was control purposes which dictated the close quarters.

Again, overcrowding accelerated the rapid spread of disease (principally measles, chickenpox, and dysentery), as epidemics swept through the camps. The death rate among the natives was as high as Afrikaner camps, if not higher. As in the Afrikaner camps, lack of proper food contributed to malnutrition and susceptibility to disease.

A store was opened in the Volksrust camp and natives could purchase supplies of mealies, sorghum, and salt. However, poverty still was prevalent amongst the families. The deaths continued to mount, and in June through October of 1901, there were 6,345 deaths in the native camps, with children accounting for 5,160 (81 percent), a rate not unlike the Afrikaner camps.

Although Emily Hobhouse did not visit the Volksrust or other native camps, she did attempt to call attention to the plight of the natives. In 1901 she visited Mr. Fox Bourne (the Secretary of the Aborigines Protection Society of London), who sent a letter to Mr. Joseph Chamberlain (the Secretary for the Colonies), requesting information on the health of the native camps and questioning the excessive death rates. He received an answer in May that death rates were declining. His proposal to send a “Fawcett –like” committee of ladies to visit the Native camps was never acted upon.

Besides size, there were two other major differences between the native camp at Volksrust and the nearby Afrikaner camp: medical care and rations. Each Afrikaner camp had assigned resident doctors, nurses and a hospital, while most native camps had only visiting doctors, if at all. British Army doctors were to visit nearby native camps twice a week and received extra pay. In the camps of the ORC, in May 1902 there were only nineteen doctors to serve over 60,000 natives. Although medicines were given out freely, the medical care was spotty. We can assume the situation in the Transvaal camps was the same or worse. There is no archival evidence

492 Pretorius, Scorched Earth, 118.
493 Ibid., 121.
494 Hobhouse, The Brunt of the War, Appendix D, 352-353.
495 Mongalo and du Pisani, “Victims of a White Man’s War,”165.
supporting the existence of a medical function or staff in the native camps. The natives in the Volksrust camp were expected to fend for themselves. Rations in the native camp were about half that of the Afrikaner camp. As stated earlier, it was thought the natives should raise their own food, then sell the surplus to the army or the Afrikaner camps. In some camps this strategy succeeded.

The diseases in the Volksrust Afrikaner camp were prevalent in the native camp as well. There was inter-camp trading and workers and animals freely moved from one camp into the other. The best sources for conditions inside the native camp at Volksrust are in the Transvaal archives at Pretoria in the records of the Native Refugee Department. Despite a lack of first hand accounts we are able to discern from the archives what a camp was like. Yet, there was no Emily Hobhouse of the native camps to interview inmates and provide detailed, translated reports on individual camp conditions.

The Volksrust native camp had a native superintendent, but the gentleman died of enteric fever. This is the only example of a native superintendent found, but more may have existed. Enteric fever highlights the lack of sanitation in the native camps. Reports indicate there were no latrines at the Volksrust native camp as late as April 1901. Inmates were told to use a hill a half mile away.

The mostly illiterate natives could not record their own experiences, and because the Afrikaners and British paid little attention to the conditions in the native camps there are few written accounts of conditions inside the native camps. Even visits by the Society of Friends failed to show the plight of the inmates in their reports. However, one missionary did see the camps through humanitarian eyes. Reverend W.H.R. Brown visited the Volksrust camp and stated the “blacks” in the camp had lost everything and were living in great poverty and misery, and that no political party was interested in their destiny.

There are only a few oral interviews of native camp survivors, conducted in the late 70s and early 80s. Phillip Mokgong Masike (1979) described daily life in the Volksrust camp as waking up early in the morning and going to work for the “masters”, building houses made of bricks.

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496 Stowell Kessler, *The Black Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*, 140. The only exception to this statement is a hospital at the Bloemfontein native camp.
497 I have inserted information on the Brandfort Camp of the ORC into this paragraph. See Pretorious, *Scorched Earth*, 140-142.
498 Peter Warwick, *Black people and the South African War 1899-1902*, 156. Whether the Reverend actually visited the Volksrust camp is not known, but his overall impressions form part of our mosaic.
formed from clay mixed with dung. Another inmate, Motshubelwe Moloko, stated in 1980 that men were made to load wagons with stones from the mountains and had to pull the loaded wagons themselves. For security purposes, the natives built stone fences around the Boer concentration camps. Native women often worked cleaning and washing in Afrikaner camps. 499

Research by historian Stowell Kessler in the archives of the Native Refugee Department indicates the main causes of deaths were directly linked to the appalling conditions in overcrowded camps. The hasty establishment of the camps often led to unsanitary conditions, and an acute shortage of tents within the native camps (as well as the Afrikaner camps) contributed heavily to the high death toll. Kessler writes:

> To save 10,000 pounds a month and to provide black labor to the Army Departments the women and children in the ORC and the Transvaal black camps were moved in open railway trucks and by ox wagons to abandoned farms in the areas of high rainfall. ... no preparations for medical service, housing or sanitary facilities appear to have been made. ...This move, and its aftermath, were responsible for these deaths. ... the move itself did not result in the major portion of the deaths. ... I believe the lack of housing and sanitary facilities were the problem. 500

Kessler’s conclusions are that the British Army knew the risk to the natives as they were concentrated into substandard living conditions and that military decisions were made “irrespective” of the expected result. 501 In reading the available material it becomes evident that the stated reasons for the establishment of the native camps was military necessity (the same reason given for the Afrikaner camps). However, it also becomes clear that having men, women and children readily available for cheap labor in the Army, mines, local towns, or camps, became the chief reason why the native camps were maintained and why the Army never gave up control to the civilian government.

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499 P.M. Masike and M. Moloki, interviewed in 1979 and 1980, as quoted in B. E. Mongalo and Kobius du Pisani, “Victims of a white man’s war”, 163. We do not know what specific camp these inmates were in, but have applied their descriptions to the Volksrust camp.

500 Stowell Kessler, “The Black Concentration Camps of the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902,” 142-143. Kessler’s work in the archives has not only increased our validated count of native deaths in the camps to 20,000, but has highlighted where data is not available. There is no detailed record of causes of deaths in the DNR records. But the archives do show that as late as February, 1902, some camps lacked adequate housing and inmates were expected to find materials and construct their own dwellings.

501 Ibid., 145.
Conclusions

All four camps highlighted in this chapter share common, serious shortcomings and when combined with the particular circumstances of each camp, served to kill Afrikaner and native men, women and children in great numbers.

From the onset, the major reason why so many people died in the Transvaal camps was a lack of professional, aggressive, problem-solving, and responsible leadership. This is evident at all levels, beginning with camp superintendents right up to the desks of Generals Maxwell and Kitchener. Weak, incompetent, and uncaring senior leadership allows and produces junior leadership turbulence, ineptitude and mission failure. This is exactly what happened in the camps. Superintendents were regularly replaced, but usually only after someone outside the chain of command (Fawcett Commission) brought their faults to public light. It is expected that senior leaders should supervise their own chain of command, and install solid, responsive and responsible leaders. The initial civilianization of the camp superintendents with Uitlanders from the Cape Colony should be seen as a failure; as most of them were inexperienced in leadership or management, incompetent, and were eventually either removed or resigned.

Kitchener’s ploy to remove the military leadership from the camps proved to be catastrophic in its consequences. The camps were set up along military lines and it would have been far better to have had military officers as commandants, reporting to General Maxwell in Pretoria.

A better option would have been to initially organize the camps under Lord Milner, or moved them when the civilian superintendents were installed. The mixture of junior civilian leaders reporting to a senior military chain of command which operated in secrecy and demonstrated less than caring attitudes toward the civilian inmates, was doomed to failure.

All camps suffered from a lack of basic materials: principally cots, beds, tents, building materials for latrines and hospitals, medicines and clothing (exactly what was required for healthy camp life). Army senior officers intentionally gave low priority to the movement of supplies forward into the camps. The effects of this continued policy decision was that camps which had been in existence for over a year experienced chronic shortages in basic camp needs. It just did not get any better. As a consequence, families were transported to camps that had no capacity or capability to care for them. The British failed to initially equip and sustain the camps that they created.
Despite growing epidemics, the British senior officers isolated the camps from outside assistance, turning down requests for offers of help, although the medical professionals were quickly overwhelmed. Only after the political explosion from the Hobhouse report and the Fawcett Commission’s published findings, do we see the senior generals agree to accept doctors and nurses from Britain and allow other help into the camps. Even then, civilian volunteer nurses from Pretoria were released at the height of epidemics in the Irene camp (and perhaps others).

It is apparent the generals did not want the camps exposed. The civilian leadership, including Lord Milner, who was in country and visited the camps, either denied knowledge, lied or looked the other way as the military went about implementing their strategy. The split between the military and civilian leadership in South Africa meant death for many families in the camps.

Lastly, the Boers in the camps suffered from British arrogance and middle-class value systems that did not work when applied to the frontier, rural traditions of the Boer culture. There is evidence the British knew the risk of concentrating the Boer families into the large and under supplied camps. The weak immunity of the Boers and natives to diseases was known. The question is whether the British leaders listened to their medical professionals (they seldom did) or if the professionals themselves were honest with the leadership. The British medical professionals were caught up in a drama not of their own making; having to treat diseases which required isolation and cleanliness in huge, overcrowded and dirty camps. Exacerbating the adverse conditions was the decision to put the families with men on commando on meatless rations, when even the normal camp rations were causing malnutrition and starvation. Using food as a weapon was an order from the same generals who failed to properly supply the camps.

The narratives in this chapter clearly illustrate there is no “standard camp”. Each camp was different, impacted by local conditions. Disease epidemics came and went within individual camps at differing times and cycles. While the common factors discussed above impacted each camp, we have been given a glimpse into how the decisions and issues looked from the ground up, as told by the inmates themselves or the medical professionals who were dealing with the chaos created by the broken camp system.

Clearly, more professional leadership at the Mafeking camp could have adverted some of the deaths; avoiding overcrowding at Middelburg would have allowed the camp’s staff to support
the inmates up to its capacity; and providing needed tents and cots/beds at Irene would have saved hundreds from disease and epidemics. Even one railway truck loaded with cots and tents could have helped turn the tide at Irene. One general officer could have easily made this decision. The inmates of the Volksrust native camp were undersupplied and underfed. Trying to establish a labor pool “on the cheap”, the British expected the natives to take care of themselves. In some cases, this may have succeeded. However, in most camps (Volksrust included) it just was not possible and the camp system imposed on the rural and somewhat nomadic natives brought to them diseases and death.

Standing on the main street of the Mafeking, Irene, Middelburg or Volksrust camp and attempting to bring order to the chaos was probably a mission larger than the talents of any one leader, but a concentrated effort by the chain of command could have succeeded. The basic decisions, a continued lack of support and inaction by the senior British generals and civilians doomed the camps, and the families in them, from the start.
After listening to all I had to say, he got up without a word and went to a bookcase from which he took a volume of the German *Encyclopaedia*. Opening it at *Konzentrationslager* ... he (Goering) read out, ‘First used by the British, in the South African War.’

Reported by Sir Nevile Henderson, British ambassador to Berlin, of a 1935 meeting with Hermann Goering, in which Henderson raised the brutalities of the concentration camps in Germany.502

Peace

Peace came to the desolate veldt and concentration camps of South Africa late on Saturday, the 31st of May 1902, when representatives from the Orange Free State and South African Republic, meeting at Vereeniging in the Transvaal, agreed to the terms set forth by Great Britain.503 Lord Kitchener had won his war and peace, achieving predominance over Milner’s lobbying within the British cabinet. Milner, whose influence had finally been eclipsed by Kitchener’s support in the cabinet, was forced to accept less than an unconditional surrender and negotiate with the Afrikaners, with Kitchener leading the talks. The Afrikaners, led by the Transvaal leaders, had finally laid down their arms, although the debate had been heated, with some Free Staters arguing to continue the fight. The natives, who had fought for the British, died in their camps, and made up almost seventy-five percent of South Africa’s population, were not represented at the peace table.

The day passed without incident for the 47,150 inmates of the Transvaal Afrikaner camps and over 55,000 in the native camps. They kept right on dying.504 In the preceding month (April), a total of 106 people, 64 of them children, died in the Afrikaner camp system, and May 1902, saw another 190 persons die.505 The Transvaal Afrikaner death toll had been steadily declining from its highest point in October 1901 when 1,616 inmates died, to 287 in February, and to less than 200 in March 1902.506 As peace was declared, the overall South African camp mortality reached its lowest point, 20 deaths per thousand per annum. The death toll had begun

505 Spies, 254.
to decrease when the camps were passed from the Army to the civilian authorities in November of 1901, with Milner and Chamberlain in charge.  

Driven by the publication of the Fawcett Commission report in December 1901, both Chamberlain and Milner had been hard at work implementing the commission’s recommendations and energizing the administrative and camps staffs. Colonels S.J. Thompson and J.S. Wilkins, both experienced in administration of camps, were brought in from India to help add management expertise, with Thompson further assigned to the Transvaal camps. Sir Godfrey Lagden was appointed Commissioner of Native Affairs in the Transvaal, and reorganized the office, rooting out corruption, and Sir A. Lawley was appointed by Milner as Lt.-Gov of the Transvaal, working directly under the High Commissioner.

Lord Milner, inheriting a situation that he had tacitly helped create and support, realized the seriousness of the situation. In December, writing to Goold-Adams, the superintendent of camps in the ORC, Milner expressed his view that unless the camp situation markedly improved in a few months, he (and indirectly Goold–Adams, himself) and the current ruling party would be gone from office:

... the theory that all the weakly children being dead, the rate would fall off, is not so far borne out by the facts. I take it the strong ones must be dying now and they will all be dead by the spring of 1903. ... Only I shall not be there to see as the continuance of the present state of affairs for another two or three months will undoubtedly blow us all out of the water.

Accompanying the transfer of responsibility to the civilians, one can sense denial in the words of the British civilian leadership, as one leader after the other distanced themselves from Kitchener’s policy of clearing the veldt and establishing the camps. We should interpret this as posturing, as Brodrick and even Chamberlain knew precisely what was happening, especially with Hobhouse’s revelations and the Fawcett Commission’s report. Milner had traveled throughout South Africa and seen personally the suffering and devastation in the Transvaal. There was no disguising the facts; the civilians had tacitly approved Kitchener’s grand strategy until the political heat from the conditions and deaths in the camps became a political liability.

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507 Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 254. As explained in Chapter four, this decrease may have also been impacted by the disease cycles, especially measles, which was prevalent in the winter months.
509 Milner Papers, 19(b), 48/ORC, 4 December, 1901, as quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 255.
Even under Milner, deportations from the Transvaal camps into the newly formed Natal camps continued; with 11,000 inmates sent south between October 1901 and February 1902. 510

A burgher peace committee in April 1901, told Kitchener the wives of fighting burghers were a bad influence in the camps (hence their deportation to Natal). As early as October 1901, suggestions about radically changing the camp system had been raised, with Chamberlain suggesting selected inmates be allowed to leave the camps. The superintendent of the Bloemfontein camp, in the ORC, suggested families of surrendered burghers be allowed to leave, keeping only those families of fighting burghers in the camps. This suggestion, much the same as using food as a weapon against the families of fighting burghers that General Maxwell and Lord Kitchener had already tried, was rejected. Milner had opposed Chamberlain’s proposal on the same grounds as stated in the Fawcett Commission’s report - the veldt had been devastated and turning out the families would result in wholesale starvation. 511

Despite continued farm burnings after December 1901, the Boer families still living on the veldt were not sent into the camps. However, the natives, most of whom lived on the former Boer farms, were deported to camps right up until the end of the war. The population of the native camps steadily increased to a high point of 55,696 by war’s end. While clearing the veldt of natives hindered the supplying of the commandos, it also denied the British of intelligence; for in some areas no natives were present. The native camps remained under military control, but reports were now sent to Milner. 512

In a letter to Commandant General Botha, of the South African Republic (Transvaal), on the 7th of March 1902, Lord Kitchener presented his government’s terms of surrender (the Middelburg Proposals) to the presidents or acting representatives of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal. Representatives of the two republics met with Lords Kitchener and Milner at Vereeniging, Transvaal, on the 15 – 28th of May 1902 to work out the terms of peace. Milner and Kitchener presented the British cabinet’s proposal and asked for a “yes” or “no” answer from the Boers. They received a reluctant “yes” late in the evening of the 31st of May 1902,

510 Quoted in Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 256.
512 Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 262.
when the representatives of the two republics voted to accept the British terms. The vote was fifty-four against six.\textsuperscript{513}

It is clearly stated in the proclamation of the representatives of the two republics, approved on the 31\textsuperscript{st}, that the devastation of the republics and plight of the families in the concentration camps weighed heavily on the decision not to continue the fight:

Firstly, that the military policy pursued by the British military authorities has led to the general devastation of the territory of both Republics by the burning down of farms and towns, by the destruction of all means of subsistence, and by the exhausting of all resources required for the maintenance of our families, the subsistence of our armies, and the continuation of the war. ... Secondly, that the placing of our families in the concentration camps has brought on an unheard-of condition of suffering and sickness, so that in a comparatively short time about twenty thousand of our beloved ones have died there, and that the horrid probability has arisen that, by continuing the war, our whole nation may die out in this way.\textsuperscript{514}

Schalk Burger, a representative at the assembly, later stressed in the official Boer account of the negotiations that it was:

...not the arms of the enemy which directly compelled us to surrender, but another sword which they had stretched out over us – namely, the sword of hunger and nakedness, and what weighed most heavily of all, the awful mortality amongst our women and children in the Concentration Camps ...\textsuperscript{515}

Burger’s comments and the proclamation could be viewed as documents for prosperity, showing that the Boers were never defeated in the field. However, analysis from other sources indicates that by the time of the assembly almost two years of farm-burning had failed to stop the guerilla attacks on the railroad or depots. The truth probably lies in the comments of General Botha, who indicated at least eleven districts in the Transvaal had been so thoroughly devastated that commandos could not operate in them, drastically cutting down the guerillas’ operational area and allowing the British to concentrate their forces. Later (1907) Burgher would cite the plight of the families weighed most heavily of all with the Boer representatives.\textsuperscript{516} The deteriorating condition of the thousands of men, women and children wandering around the

\textsuperscript{513} Christiaan R. de Wet, Three Year’s War (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 165-166. Judd and Surridge, The Boer War,296, give the vote as 56 to 6, with three from each republic voting against the resolution.\textsuperscript{514} Ibid. de Wet’s book contains verbatim transcripts of the deliberations of the proclamation, and the final wording. It is obvious that the top two reasons for not carrying on with the fight have to do with two of the three parts of Kitchener’s grand strategy.\textsuperscript{515} As quoted in Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 284.\textsuperscript{516} Ibid., 287.
plains of the Transvaal deeply concerned the delegates. The burghers on commando had seen first-hand the condition of the families living on the veldt.\textsuperscript{517}

All over South Africa, the commandos received the news of the surrender. The Heidelberg Commando gathered at Houtpoort on the 4\textsuperscript{th} of June, and was addressed by General Botha:

> Although we know that we can carry on for years, we are doing this for the Afrikaner nation which is on the point of extermination. Already 26,000 women and children have died in the concentration camps and we have lost 4,000 men on the battlefields.\textsuperscript{518}

The next morning, the 800 members of the Heidelberg Commando surrendered at Kraalstasie, walked down a line of Somersets and put their weapons in a pile. They were then fed and released. This scene was repeated throughout the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, as about 21,000 Boers came in from the field, and surrendered their weapons (mostly captured British Lee Enfields). The British intelligence had estimated only 10,000 Boers were left on commando. Having been freed, the men trekked off to the concentration camps to look for their families.\textsuperscript{519}

Petrus Uys of the Heidelberg Commando went to the Middelburg camp to look for his wife and young children and observed burghers coming into the camp from all directions. Allowed into the camp, Petrus found his wife, Aletta, and his two children, Bessie, 7, and Kosie, 4, alive.\textsuperscript{520}

Others were not so fortunate. Mrs. Gezina W. Joubert, who was initially taken to the Klerksdorp camp and then further deported to Howick, lost her son from wounds suffered when taken off the veldt by the British. She describes the moment the surrender was announced at Howick on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of June:

> Ds. Pienaar held the morning (Sunday) service. When he was about half way through his sermon, Mr. van der Horst came into the church. Everyone could see that something had happened. Mr. Pienaar stopped preaching and climbed down from the box on which he stood, while Mr. van der Horst climbed up and said: “Dear Sisters, the happy day has dawned; it is peace. We know not yet what kind of peace.”\textsuperscript{521}

The situation of the families on the veldt continued to worsen even after the surrender; scarcity of food and continued disease was prevalent. Miss Lotz, a schoolteacher, who lived on

\textsuperscript{517} Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 290.
\textsuperscript{518} Ian Uys, Heidelbergers of the Boer War, 226-227.
\textsuperscript{519} Pakenham, The Boer War, 605.
\textsuperscript{520} Uys, 232-233.
\textsuperscript{521} Hobhouse, War Without Glamour, 84.
the veldt with the commandos, gives this account of the last days of the war (translated by Emily Hobhouse):

Meanwhile diphtheria broke out in our hospital and also in our house. Mrs. de Wet (the woman in whose home Miss Lotz was staying) had eight children; her husband was in Kimberely Camp and strictly guarded. The 6th of June died the favourite little girl of eight years old, there were still four children in bed in danger and without the necessary medicine or food. That same day we heard of the heart-breaking Peace and also of the death of one of Mrs. de Wet’s sons fighting in the Colony. 522

Peace had at last come to the veldt, but at a terrible price, for both the Afrikaners and natives, and even the British.

**Aftermath**

The South African War, which was to have been over by Christmas 1899, cost the British taxpayer over 200 million pounds: “The cost in blood was equally high.” 523 Of the 365,693 British imperial and 82,742 colonial soldiers who fought in the war, over a hundred thousand were casualties, including the 22,000 who were killed in action, or died of wounds or disease (or from lack of concern by the generals, such as in the Bloemfontein typhoid epidemic). Another 75,430 were sent home because of wounds or disease. 524 Today, their white crosses in the Bloemfontein cemetery “… dominate the landscape like their successors in the fields of Flanders.” 525

A few days after the surrender, the movement of the British to the ports of embarkation began. Only a garrison of 20,000 was to be left out of the 250,000 British troops, who were either sent home in units or disbanded. 526

The task now facing both the British and the Afrikaners was to unite families (the parts of them left) and transport them back to their homes, if they still existed. The British official history lists a total of 33,341 Boers surrendered, and most were in oversea camps in Ceylon, St. Helena and India. Two hundred thousand men, women and children awaited transport back to

525 Pakenham, 607.
526 Ibid., 605. The *Times* history of the war lists the British troop ceiling at 25,000 in July ’03 (It was actually at 30,000), and with a target of 10,500 by ’09.
their homes from the Afrikaner and native camps. On the open veldt as many as 20-30,000 people were moving towards their homes. However, the redeployment of the British Army had priority, and Kitchener controlled the transport. Milner had to negotiate with Kitchener for railway trucks to get the families back into their districts.  

The camps became the fixed centers and supply depots for the repatriation. The burghers congregated on the camps to find their families, using the tents, hospitals and available food. Many oversea prisoners of war refused until August 1902 to sign the loyalty pledge to Britain. They thought it was a ruse. It was only by the beginning of 1903 that all prisoners were returned. First sent to rest camps on the coast, the prisoners were ultimately transported to the camps in their districts.

The Times history makes this interesting comment on the camps:

As a purely military measure the camps were no doubt a mistake. But they provide invaluable for the work of repatriation – in fact, if they had not existed already they would have had to be invented for that purpose.

The repatriation was a two year effort, waged in a time of drought, locusts and other difficulties. Most of the livestock were in British Army hands. Getting supplies and families back to their districts was difficult, as the limited railway capacity was being used for the large demobilization. Milner himself worked a plan with Kitchener to get horses, wagons, traction trains and oxen, most of which came from outside South Africa. A Transvaal Repatriation Department was established where the Boers could apply for food, money and livestock. The department remained active until late 1904. For some three months after the surrender the populations of the camps remained constant. Since deaths were not officially reported, we have no idea how many Boers or natives died in the camps during repatriation.

The Pastor G.F.C. Faustmann, from Schweizer-Reneke, in the Southwestern Transvaal, gives this October 1902, account of arriving back at his town of Kerkbode:

A devastated village; the parsonage annihilated with all that was in it, naked burnt walls in the village, and in the district people greatly impoverished. Boers, well-to-do in former years, stand now as beggars round the ration-house ... Then there

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529 Ibid., 44.
530 Ibid., 47-48.
is the terrible bitter relation between burgher and scout (those Boers who had surrendered and fought with the British); they do not greet each other.\textsuperscript{531}

Likewise, DS. Winter, the Minister of Hartebeestfontein, Transvaal, writes in 1903:

The whole town is nothing but a mass of ruins. One sees only burnt houses, bare walls, blackened beams, tottering gables ... Pulpit, pews, organ, lamps... all have been burnt, carried off or smashed to pieces. Our Communion service was carried off by an English officer ... The members of the congregation come slowly back; the men out of prisons in far-off islands, the women and children out of the various Camps of Concentration. ... the household can never again gather complete, but one member or another is missing. ... the homecoming husband finds no one to give him welcome, because his entire family was wiped out in the Concentration Camps. ... There is hardly a farm in the parish which has not been burnt. ... All the cattle have been carried off or killed.\textsuperscript{532}

In all, 78,000 Boers saw action in the war. With the death of 28,000 Afrikaners in the concentration camps and another 7,000 killed on the battlefield, the losses were significant. There are no statistics of Boer guerillas wounded or dying from sickness. In addition, hundreds of Boer noncombatants must have perished as families moved around the veldt in the dead of winter, trying to escape the British columns; or as they were dropped off at railroad points and in transportation to the camps. We will never know the true death count. It is estimated about ten percent of the white population of the Orange Free State and the South African Republic perished. The countryside, as reported by the above eyewitnesses, was devastated.\textsuperscript{533} An estimated 30,000 farms were destroyed, along with forty towns.\textsuperscript{534}

Equally severe losses were sustained by the natives, both by the families in the camps and among the men working and fighting for the British in the field. At least 20,000 natives died in the camps themselves. Inaccurate record keeping and unknown losses from disease and weather as the natives were being transported to the railways and camps, probably makes the camp deaths a number far smaller than the actual losses. It is not known how many natives died working for the British or were killed or wounded in combat, but the number must have been significant.\textsuperscript{535}

\textsuperscript{531} Hobhouse, \textit{War Without Glamour}, 132-133.
\textsuperscript{532} Ibid., 72-73.
\textsuperscript{533} Pakenham, \textit{The Boer War}, 607-608.
\textsuperscript{534} Gooch, \textit{The Boer War}, 101.
\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., 98. Gooch lists 120,000 black or coloured killed or wounded out of those who served the British. It is not clear if this number includes the 20,000 thought to have died in the camps. In any case, the numbers must have been significantly above those dying in the camps.
Repatriation of the natives was the responsibility of the Native Refugee Department, now answerable to the civil, not military authorities. Natives who had resided in towns were allowed to return immediately, as were those who found work in the mines or had received permission to return to their native preserves. However, most natives in the camps had come from those very Boer farms which had been destroyed. The aim of the British was to return the natives to farms so they could provide labor for the re-establishment of agriculture. The British realized some Boers might take retribution on natives who had helped the British; therefore, natives were not forced to return to specific farms where their relationship with the Boer landowners would put them at risk.  

Initially, Boer farmers could apply to the native camps for laborers, and the process was speeded up by allowing the natives to find a Boer employer and contract with him. The repatriation of the natives took a long time, especially as the natives working with the army were disbanded and returned to the camps to reunite with their families. The population of the native camps temporarily swelled after the war. By August 1902, half the natives had been repatriated, and by November only 3,000 remained in the Transvaal camps. In 1903, the final repatriation of natives was concluded by the Orange River Colony that took over from the dismantled Native Refugee Department at the end of 1902. However, there is some evidence that native settlements remained in the vicinity of the NRD camps after 1903.

The conditions for the natives did not markedly improve after resettlement. Drought and famine in 1902 through 1903 made many families destitute. Natives, who had once been farmers, were forced to go to the mines and labor to support their families. It was in the interest of the mining capitalists that the natives were forced into wage labor.

By far the worst loss for the natives was their abandonment by the British at the peace process. During the war, it was reported that at least ten thousand armed Africans served the British as guides, scouts and guards at blockhouses. Another thirty to forty thousand worked as drivers, laborers, and camp support. The number of natives under British arms could have been

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536 Mongalo and Du Pisani, “Victims of a White Man’s War”, 173-181
537 Ibid.
538 Ibid. The bulk of the above three paragraphs comes from the work of the two above listed historians in the archives and files of the NRD.
as high as 50,000. Estimates of natives supporting the Boers in the field or as laborers range from 10-20,000. Another 10-14,000 natives campaigned with the Boers in the field as agterryers, mounted gun bearers and supply assistants. In the peace terms, the British dropped the issue of giving the vote (and property) to the natives who had supported them. The Boers were given back their property and the society was essentially returned to the pre-war relationships. Natives who had settled on Boer farms were told by the British to vacate. Natives were disarmed by the British in a relatively short time, without major incident, thereby lessening the tensions felt by the Afrikaners. It is evident from the numbers of natives serving with the British and Boer forces that the Africans did not sit and watch the war develop, as earlier histories suggest. They were involved from the start and in large numbers.

While the political repercussions of the war are not the focus of this study, some comments of the effects of the camps on the peace and politics are in order. Lord Milner’s dream of an “Anglicized” South Africa went up in smoke at the signing of the peace, and the subsequent failure of British immigrants to populate the two former republics. Rather than receiving an unconditional surrender from the Boers and breaking the back of the Afrikaner nation, the British negotiated a peace – on Kitchener’s terms. Milner resigned as High Commissioner in 1905 after a scandal regarding the flogging of Chinese laborers. This and other events propelled the opposition, Campbell Bannerman and the Liberals, to power in 1906.

In that same year, Campbell Bannerman, acting on the spirit of the Vereeniging agreement, promoted the two Crown Colonies to the status of self-governing colonies. The former commando leaders, Botha and Smuts were voted into power, thereby putting the capstone on the death of Milner’s dreams of an Anglican South Africa. Despite the prior bitterness from the concentration camps, both Botha and Smuts led their respective colonies into a more accommodating relationship within the Empire. In 1910 the Union of South Africa was formed out of the two former republics, Natal and the Cape Colony. Not long after, South Africa was to

539 Gooch, *The Boer War*, 127. The number of armed natives will probably never be known. Estimates from 20,000-50,000 are impossible to validate. What is known is that Kitchener armed more natives than he reported, and armed them earlier on in the conflict than is usually thought.
541 It should be noted that if there was ever a time for the natives to assert their individual rights, it was at the close of the war, when they were armed. No national leadership emerged to lead the natives, and the British dealt with a fragmented native population, who apparently willingly submitted to the orders of the British to turn in at least most of their arms.
542 Pakenham, 610-611.
support and fight for the British empire in two world wars, and despite an aborted Afrikaner rebellion in 1914, the union survived. In 1961 the Union of South Africa left the British Commonwealth to become an independent nation.543

The final payment to the Boers of bringing two white colonies into the empire had been at the Vereeniging Peace Conference, where Article 8 (Clause 9) was inserted, stating there was to be no franchise for the natives until after the introduction of self-government, or in reality, never. In years to come, Britain refused to intervene for the African franchise, quoting the Vereeniging Treaty as the reason. 544

It was well known that Kitchener was the more magnanimous of the two principal negotiators at the peace conference. The Boers neither liked nor trusted Milner, as he had sabotaged the 1901 peace attempts, which were essentially the same as the ones signed in May 1902. Kitchener was given a hero’s welcome in England and in October 1902, left for India, where he was posted to the position he coveted, the Commander in Chief. He was to die in the First World War, drowning when his ship hit a mine laid by a German submarine, and sank.545

543 Pakenham, The Boer War, 611.
544 Ibid., 612-613.
CONCLUSION

I think one could make a case of manslaughter. I doubt that you could succeed with genocide, but [it was] manslaughter on a massive scale, against the most vulnerable of ... the population, the women and children. [There was] intent, yes. [The British] saw there was disease, rampant disease in each camp, 41 camps across the country. There was a central command that received all the statistics and saw this happening. This was a nation dying, why did they not do something about it immediately? The only reasonable inference one can make is that they didn’t want to deal with it.

Colin Steyn
Great-grandson of President M.T. Steyn

There is a tendency when writing a conclusion to a study of the concentration camps to try and cover all the bases - politics, strategy, field operations, racial and gender overtones, and a host of logistics, disease, and other topics. An emotional and complicated subject such as the camps deserves its own conclusions, not those of a larger, more far-reaching South African War. This study has examined the Afrikaner and native concentration camps of the Transvaal, and tangentially, the British war on women and children. Although almost everything in the South African War is interrelated, yet I have endeavored to focus this study’s conclusions solely on the camps themselves and British culpability.

This is easier said than done. The story of the Transvaal camps is complicated and leads the researcher to many levels of command, to whites and blacks as well, and from the bell tents and hospitals of the Mafeking Camp to the halls of the War Office in London. But the story of the camps is best explained by the actions and inactions of the British senior commanders in South Africa: Lords Roberts and Kitchener and Major General Maxwell, in particular. It was in their headquarters, at briefings and morning transportation meetings, that the fate of the Afrikaner and native families was determined. It was the generals’ decisions that led to the deaths of the camp noncombatants.

The British and Kitchener won the South African War, not with a decisive victory over the Boers on the battlefield, but by winning “the war against women and children.” The road to victory in South Africa was not found on the battlefields of the Highveldt, it was found in

\[Quoted in Pretorious, Scorched Earth, 219.\]
hospitals and cemeteries of the concentration camps, where at least 48,000 Afrikaners and natives died, most of them children. Statistics indicate it was far more dangerous to be a Boer child in Kitchener’s Middelburg concentration camp than it was to be a Boer on commando, pursued by mounted British rifleman from one of Kitchener’s columns. It was the suffering in the Afrikaner camps, along with the farm-burning, which brought the Boers to the peace table. The suffering and deaths in the native camps was not important to the British or the Boers.

Lords Roberts and Kitchener adopted policies of “scorched earth” and “collective responsibility” because they could not get to the Boers on the battlefield. The guerilla war frustrated the British efforts to bring hundreds of thousands of men and material to find, fix and fight the Boers. It was frustration, not brilliant military planning, which led the British generals to adopt a strategy (probably copied from the Spanish in the Cuban Insurrection) which exploited the most glaring vulnerability of their enemy— their families. Many historians see Roberts and Kitchener’s grand strategy as based on military imperatives— but it was based on “inabilities.” The Boer families were the only “enemy” the British could find, fix and defeat. They had to fight and defeat someone, otherwise what were the 250,000 soldiers supported by the British taxpayers going to do?

Confronted by the lack of decisive victory in the field, Roberts began, and Kitchener expanded and accelerated, a policy of attacking the homes, then families of their enemies, devastating whole districts of the two republics. This offensive action, initiated by the British, violating the letter and spirit of the 1899 Hague Conventions, especially Article 46, which states:

Family honors and rights, individual lives and private property, as well as religious convictions and liberty, must be respected. Private property cannot be confiscated.547

The Hague Conventions of 1899 were the first time the practices of modern war had been codified. Although concentration camps are not specifically mentioned in the Conventions, British actions to incarcerate noncombatants certainly violated Article 46, as quoted above. One should therefore see the British violations of the convention, which they had just signed in July 1899, months before going to war, as a more blatant disregard for the customs of war then had existed before the Conventions. This British defiance for the rules of modern warfare was to

547 The Avalon Project at Yale Law School, Laws of War: Laws and Customs of War on Land (Hague II); July, 1899, Article 46.
have serious consequences later in the 20th Century. In Vereeniging, on 16 May 1902, General Louis Botha stated that the powers of Europe:

... ought to have known that if the British were tacitly allowed to introduce ... a new principle (to put women and children into concentration camps) into warfare, that principle would establish a precedent.548

Although the practices adopted by the British did have precedents in past wars, they were the first great power after the Hague Conventions to bring multiple methods of coercion to bear on noncombatants; the first to violate the principles of a modern covenant on war. The Germans were to soon adopt many of the British measures against noncombatants, specifically in 1903 against the Hereos in West Africa, which has been classified as a genocide. Later in the 1930’s the Nazi’s first concentrated political opponents and finally the Jews in Europe. The British official position is their actions were justified by the nature of the war, and that they simply adopted practices which had been used against noncombatants in previous wars, namely the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War (and the Cuban Insurrection). The point here is that they furthered the emerging European concept that war against women and children is legal and justified; they didn’t stop the precedent; instead they accelerated and legitimized its adoption.

The British internal reviews and legal opinions about their own practices in the war lean heavily on the precedents of the Americans and Germans. Therefore, we should not be surprised when in later years the Germans also adopted the same defense, and would quote the British actions in the concentration camps as a precedent. Joseph Goebbels made this radio address on 19 April 1940, on the eve of Adolph Hitler’s birthday:

On 3 September last year (1939), two hours after English plutocracy declared war on the German Reich, the British Prime Minister Chamberlain gave a radio speech ...The point of the speech was that England had no intention of waging war against the German people...get rid of the Fuhrer or so-called Hitlerism....At the beginning of the war, however, they sang the same old song....Its melody was dull and worn out. British plutocracy had tried to persuade the Boers during the South African war of the same thing. Britain was only fighting Krugerism. As is well known, that did not stop them from allowing countless thousands of women and children to starve in English concentration camps.549

548 As quoted in Spies, Methods of Barbarism?, 297.
549 Goebbels 1940 Speech on Hitler’s Birthday. Goebbels gave a speech every year on the eve of Hitler’s birthday. The 1940 presentation is the first wartime speech. Taken from the German Propaganda Archive, at http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/unser40.htm. This is the published text from Goebbels wartime book, Die
The British clearly stated intent of denuding the veldt of people, buildings and livestock, combined with Kitchener’s intent to deport the Boers from South Africa, easily meets the 1948 United Nations definition of ethnic cleansing. While the actions arguably may not meet the criteria for genocide, the British generals could have been charged with war crimes, had the Boers won the war. Since winners put the losers on trial for war crimes, the British generals escaped prosecution.

It is interesting that of the British three-part strategy, the establishment of the camps was the worst resourced and had the worst leadership, yet paid the highest dividends. Once the British transported the Boer families off the veldt and dumped them along the railway, they ceased to be important. The British generals abandoned the families and returned to what they were trained to do, defeat an enemy. Yet in this case, the women and children were the only enemy they could find and incarcerate.

The British Army in 1902 wasn’t much of an army. It could barely sustain itself in the field, especially a Field Force of 250,000 men. Medical support was inadequate and spotty at best (mostly due to poor planning), and transport planning and execution was sorely lacking. The Army generals failed to take care of their own soldiers, deciding not to inoculate them against typhoid or to supply them with available medical care in the Bloemfontein and Ladysmith epidemics. These failures were not just one of material, but of leadership. British generals made conscious decisions not to move medical supplies and hospitals from the ports to the troop locations, allowing other supplies to have priority. The British generals were out of touch with their men, and generally regarded the British soldier as dirty and incompetent; the soldiers regarded their officers as pompous, uncaring and equally incompetent.

The Army had no general staff, and strategic planning accomplished in Britain, while adequate in the uncontested deployment of the force, was inadequate once the force was on the ground. Operational planning at the Army and Corps levels was poor. Logistical support of the force hung by a thread: the single track railway running from the ports to the front lines. Surviving British soldiers, interviewed by Pakenham in the 1970’s, described the war as:

*Zeit ohne Beispiel*, 1941. The text of the speech is also in most German newspapers, of 20 April, 1940. Italics by author.
It was a cruel war, it was ... We were half-starved all the time. ... I never saw the point of it. ... It was the worst war ever. ... It was all for the gold-mines.  

If the British logistical support was stretched by the long lines of communications and had trouble supplying its own troops, this meant doom for the persons in the camps. The noncombatants were the lowest priority in the British supply system, with the natives at the bottom of the bottom. It is no wonder that after a year of establishment, inmates were still sleeping on the ground in the camps. It was just a question of priorities, and the British generals, who personally controlled the supplies moving north from the ports, didn’t see the noncombatants as worth devoting an extra train truck of supplies.

The British attitude toward the Boers was at times nearly as racist as towards the natives. Although the Boers were of Western European stock and fellow Christians, the British treated them as a separate, inferior “race”, evidenced by this quote from Kitchener, who advocated to the Cabinet in resettling the Boers outside of South Africa:

There seems to me to be only two safe courses to pursue. Settle on some island or country where we can safely establish the boers. Fiji, for instance, or get some foreign power to take them, such as France to populate Madagascar. Send all the prisoners of war there and let their families join them, have no more voluntary surrenders, and ship all as they are caught to the new settlement. We should then only have the surrendered burghers left, and the country would be safe and available for white colonists. ... These Boers are uncivilized Africander savages with only a thin white veneer ... is a type of savage produced by generations of wild, lonely life.

Professor Bill Nasson, University of Cape Town, who has authored many books and articles on the South African War, makes this observation:

It seems to me one of the ironies of the war is that the Boers discovered that the racial arrogance of the British – or certainly some British – exhibited towards the black population was matched by the way (they felt) towards them, that in fact the British didn’t necessarily distinguish between the Boers and Africans in terms of feelings of superiority.

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551 Quoted in Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?*, 235. Letter, Kitchener to Brodrick, 10 May, 1901. This quote could be easily dismissed as Kitchener’s posturing to the Cabinet. But it is a fact that the British did formally approach the French on resettlement of the Boers. When nations talk to each other in diplomatic channels they are usually serious. Italics of white colonists are the author’s.
There is a British argument that establishment of the camps was a humane action, saving thousands of lives as families would have had no place to go to after their homes were destroyed for military necessity. Early in the war, the English public was told that people came into the camps voluntarily. Only through the revelations of Emily Hobhouse did the truth come out: that whole towns and farms were being torched, families forcibly taken from their homes, and transported to desolate hillsides where camps were established, most of them with encircling wire to keep the inmates from escaping.

The humane argument is further proven specious when in December 1901, as farm burning still raged and devastation on the veldt reached an acute stage, the British stopped bringing Afrikaner families into the camps. This action, by Kitchener should put to rest all arguments about the camps being a humane solution for devastated Boer families. Hundreds of noncombatant families were left to fend for themselves on the veldt; joining the thousands already moving away from Kitchener’s columns and imprisonment in the camps. In contrast, the native families, who provided a labor pool for the Army and civilian authorities that was required to continue the war effort, continued to be brought into native camps.

In summation, the deaths of the Afrikaners and natives rest directly on the shoulders of the British generals in South Africa. They planned and adopted a course of action which violated international agreements on the treatment of noncombatants; they further put the noncombatants in camps without proper food, lodging, and medical care; they used the families as weapons against Boers on commando; they used food as a weapon against the incarcerated families of those whose husbands and sons were on commando; they made numerous decisions not to properly supply the camps, evidenced by the absence of enough tents, cots/beds and rations for the inmates; and finally, they knew the risks of putting the families into camps where they would be exposed to diseases, diseases against which they had no immunity.

Finally, when diseases broke out in the camps and the death toll mounted, the generals attempted to hide the facts, barely giving the civilian leadership a glimpse of the growing epidemics. Only when faced with political pressure did the generals open the camps to outside help. In short, the willful negligence by the British commanders, and tacit approval by Lord Milner and the Cabinet in London, directly caused the death of over 48,000 noncombatants, most of them children. The generals should be held liable for their actions and decisions.
Historians have been too easy on the British generals regarding their culpability and their
direct responsibility in the camps.\footnote{M.W. Daly, “The Egyptian Army Mutiny at Omdurman January-February 1900”, Bulletin British Society for Middle Eastern Studies 8, no. 1 (1981), 5.} Perhaps western historians, especially the British and South African historians who write about the camps and the war, are loathe to put the British in a precedent setting role regarding concentration camps, ethnic cleansing and possibly genocide. The British, as winners of the South African War, escaped the trials and censure of history; unlike the Germans who were tried for their crimes against noncombatants after the Second World War.

Leadership defies footnoting; it has an intangible quality which resists documentation. Generals are expected to “know” what to do, and to do the right thing the first time. The British generals knowingly made decisions which put noncombatants at risk and then neglected to help them when they were dying. As professional soldiers they made war on civilians, and their honor and integrity, two things which should set military senior leaders apart from the rest of society, was irrevocably compromised as a result of their actions and inaction. Their personal, willful neglect killed thousands. They should have been summarily fired and held accountable by history, as are their pupils, the Nazis. Unlike the Nazi camps, which were ordered by civilians, then established and operated by the military; the South African camps, were ordered and established by the military, then operated by the civilians. The senior British generals have no defense.

It seems fitting to end this study with quotes from two authors (both women and both known for speaking out). One was a witness to the sufferings of the Boers in the camps, and both called...
attention to the precedents set by the Western nations in the name of imperialism and nationalism. Hannah Arendt provides an appropriate quote describing the actions of the British lords, generals and bureaucrats in the war:

> The fact that the “white man’s burden” is either hypocrisy or racism has not prevented a few of the best Englishmen from shouldering the burden in earnest and making themselves the tragic and quixotic fools of imperialism.  

Emily Hobhouse ends her book, *The Brunt of the War*, with these prophetic words:

> England, by the hands of Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener, adopted the policy of Spain, while improving upon her methods. She has placed her seal upon an odious system. It is to be a precedent for future wars, or is it to be denounced not merely by one party, but by every humane person of every creed and every tongue ... It ought to become a fixed principle with the English people that no General acting in their name should ever again resort to measures of such a nature. ... It is cruel in the present, and inconceivably foolish in regard to the future ... If we allow it to continue the full responsibility will be ours.  

Emily Hobhouse’s prophecy came true, when in the 1930s Western Europe began to pay the price for the British arrogance, racism and atrocities of the South African War. The British government knowingly allowed the camps to be established, failed to hold its generals accountable for thousands of noncombatant deaths, and should accept full responsibility for the horrifying precedent it set for the future.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Scott received his Bachelors Degree in History from the Florida State University in 1968. He served thirty-five years in the United States Army as a platoon leader in the Viet Nam War; a company commander through battalion commander; and commanded at the Colonel and Major General levels. He is a graduate of the Army War College at Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and retired from the Army in 2003. He then enrolled in the Florida State graduate program in History, where this thesis was written. Mr. Scott plans to teach History and write a book on the concentration camps of the South African War. He is currently in the fourth year of a five year Catholic Church Diaconate program. His goal is to become an ordained minister of the Church. He is married to the former Mary Alyce Hill of Pensacola, Florida and has three children.