

*'It was the best of times, it was the worst of times'*¹

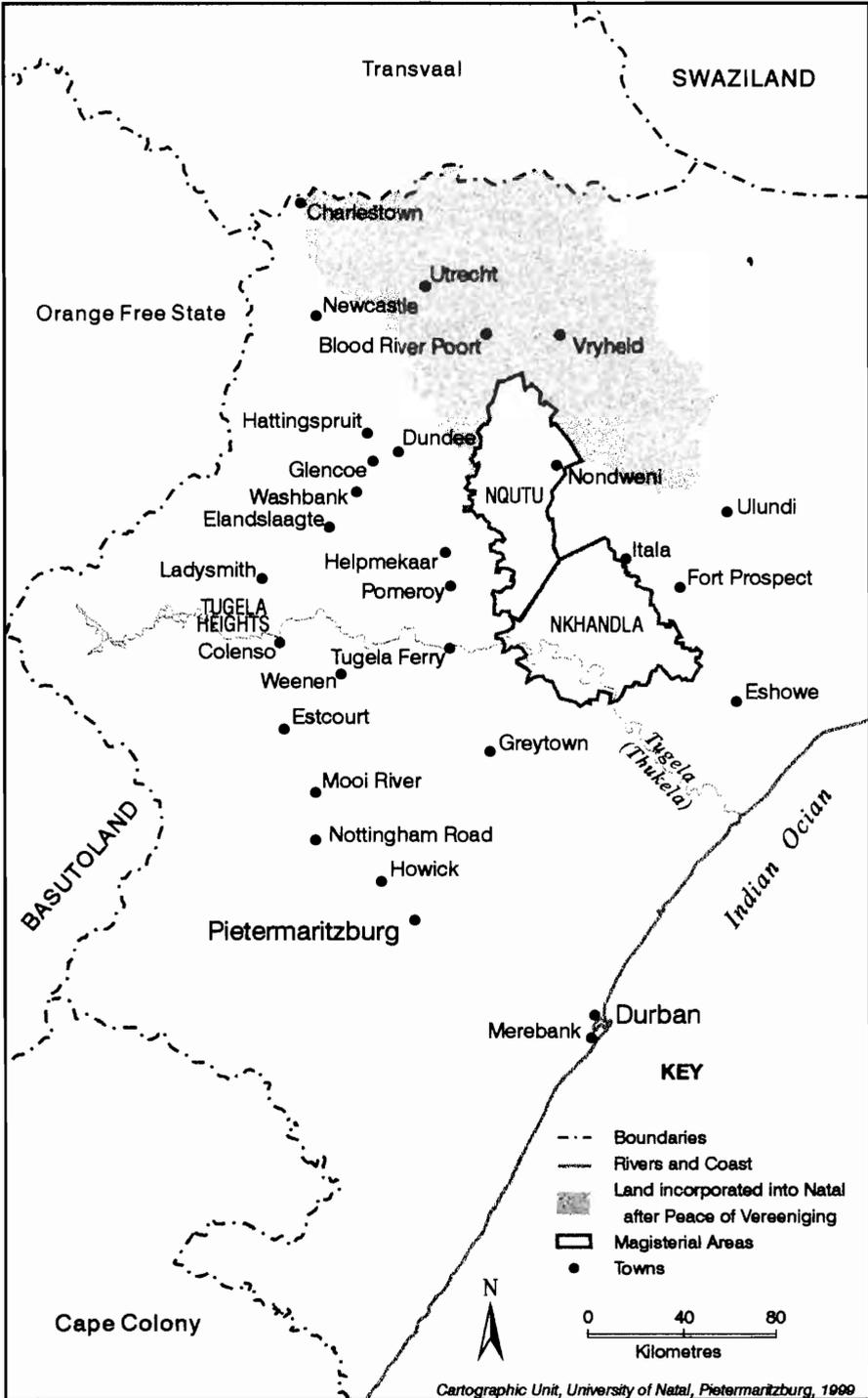
*Natal and the Anglo-Boer War of 1899–1902*²

At the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War the British colony of Natal stood to gain and to lose by virtue of its geographical position, and duly did both as the ensuing conflict unfolded. The territory was obviously vulnerable to Boer invasion, yet the support of its inhabitants for the British war effort was not as axiomatic as might be supposed. The reaction of the colony's African majority to the prospect of war was not recorded, though many were to be affected and some actively involved in what was supposed to be a whites-only conflict. Most white Natalians were slow to rally to the flag as they wrestled with ambivalent feelings towards the Boer republics and uncertainty concerning the sincerity of aggressive imperial diplomacy in southern Africa. Significantly, perhaps, when war was declared less than 20% of the colony's white adult male population of military age (20 to 40 years old) enlisted for service, excluding the existing rifle associations which were on standby.³

Pre-war sentiment

While the imperial defeats of 1881, culminating at Majuba, still rankled in loyalist hearts, by the 1890s Natal inescapably depended more than ever before upon the overberg trade as a source of both public and private income. President Kruger was warmly received when he visited the colony in April 1891 to celebrate the completion of the main Natal railway line to Charlestown on the Transvaal border.⁴ By then more than 62% of Natal's imports, upon which customs duties and railway rates were levied, were bound for the interior republics. Within eight months of the completion of the line to Johannesburg in December 1895 it was already carrying the bulk of the Transvaal's sea-borne imports. Most of the colony's £9 million imperial loan was invested in railway development and more than £1 million was devoted to harbour improvements in order to accommodate this vitally important transit trade. As early as the 1870s some colonists, especially those in Durban with a stake in the import business, favoured closer union with the Transvaal in preference to the Cape Colony, with which Natal was in keen competition for commercial advantages in the interior.⁵

The attitude of white Natalians towards their republican neighbours only began to harden in the wake of the Jameson Raid into the Transvaal at the end of 1895.



Cartographic Unit, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1999

Natal and Zululand and the Anglo-Boer War

The Natal ministry formally expressed its regret at this armed invasion but there were pro-imperial demonstrations in the colony when Jameson and his men passed through *en route* to Britain, and again when the Kaiser sent a congratulatory telegram to Kruger for dealing so effectively with the incursion. Even then the South African League, whose purpose was to promote the cause of British supremacy in the subcontinent, did not attract as much immediate support after establishing its Natal branch in July 1896 as it did elsewhere. Reports concerning the Kruger government's harsh treatment of the Transvaal's *uitlander* community did help to strengthen the colony's pro-imperial lobby. So, too, did a gradual decline in Natal's railway profits in 1897 and a subsequent improvement in her financial circumstances following her agreement, at last, to join the Cape-Free State customs union in May 1898.

The Natal colonists still needed to be assured that the imperial authorities would continue in their resolve to impose a political settlement on Kruger in spite of the efforts of the Cape government to avert military conflict. Natal could not afford to be left in the lurch at the eleventh hour to face Boer retaliation for nailing her colours to the imperial mast. It was really only from the middle of 1899 that white sentiment coalesced around the war effort as the British High Commissioner to South Africa, Sir Alfred Milner, ensured that the diplomatic pressure upon the Transvaal government was maintained and as more military reinforcements were directed to the colony.⁶

Military build-up

As the pre-war tension mounted, one of the first effects felt in Natal was the build-up of British military forces. In May 1897 these were augmented in the colony by the arrival of an infantry battalion and three field batteries. By July 1899 the commander of the Natal garrison, Major-General Sir William Penn Symons, concluded that diplomatic relations with the Boers had deteriorated sufficiently to necessitate additional reinforcements and in September another 2 000 troops arrived in response to his request. By the end of that month the British garrison in Natal had been distributed amongst five camps: at Glencoe, Ladysmith, Estcourt, Eshowe and Pietermaritzburg.

Some of these were subsequently deployed at Dundee and Colenso, with the whole force being further strengthened during the course of October 1899 by nearly 6 000 troops transferred from India, as well as two battalions and three batteries from Britain. The decision, taken in early September on the advice of the War Office, to dispatch these additional forces began to transform Natal from what was initially intended from a British perspective to be a side-show into a major theatre of military operations against the Boers. The subsequent arrival of even more reinforcements eventually made the British army in Natal capable not only of defensive but also offensive activities.⁷

From the outset of the conflict British imperial forces in the colony were supported by the Natal Police, in training for military service since June 1899, and by the Volunteer Militia, which had been reorganised in 1895. Joint manoeuvres with the imperial garrison over Easter 1899 satisfied Penn Symons, as general officer commanding in Natal, that these local forces were of equivalent quality to the regulars. The Natal Police were assigned to guarding bridges as early as August 1899,

and the Volunteer Militia was deployed in October. The Natal Carbineers, Natal Mounted Rifles, Border Mounted Rifles, 'A' Battery Natal Field Artillery and most of the Natal Naval Volunteers were encamped at Ladysmith with the smaller volunteer forces, while the Durban Light Infantry were stationed at Colenso and the Natal Royal Rifles and some Naval Volunteers at Estcourt.⁸

The recruitment of Transvaal refugees in Natal was already under way in September 1899 when Milner officially requested permission for it. The move was prompted by his perception of Britain's military vulnerability in the subcontinent and the imperial government's tardiness in despatching reinforcements to the region. The Imperial Light Horse (ILH), as the regiment became known, was the brain-child of former Johannesburg Reform Committee members Percy FitzPatrick and Aubrey Woolls-Sampson, who became its commander during the war.⁹ Recruitment for the ILH was not confined to Natal but the raising of volunteers highlighted another early effect of the conflict on the colony: the influx of refugees from the interior.

Refugees and relief work

Refugees from the Boer republics, mainly women and children, began to arrive in May 1899 and by July it was estimated that more than 5 000 persons had already left the Transvaal for Natal and the Cape Colony. Large-scale withdrawals were being made from post office savings accounts in Johannesburg, and mining houses like Ecksteins, Barnato Brothers and A. Goertz and Co., were reported to be transferring their business records to Durban. As the refugee influx gathered momentum Natal newspapers carried increasing numbers of job inquiries from experienced clerical and sales assistants. There was growing concern that the colony would soon face a massive unemployment crisis. By September the number of refugees escaping to Natal by bicycle was sufficient to prompt the *Natal Mercury* to publish a recommended route for 'Rand ladies' who were heading for Durban. The last batch to arrive by train made the journey in 33 open cattle and coal trucks, each conveying 30 to 40 passengers. After the declaration of war more arrived by ship from Delagoa Bay.¹⁰

By November 1899 the white refugee population in Natal had risen to between 20 000 and 26 000. Various relief organizations emerged to supplement the efforts of existing benevolent societies. In August 1899 the Speaker of Natal's Legislative Assembly and the mayors of Durban and Pietermaritzburg launched fund-raising appeals. The Durban Benevolent Society, the Pietermaritzburg Relief Committee and the Mansion House Relief Fund were among the new welfare bodies formed. By mid-October the Pietermaritzburg municipality was providing relief work in the form of stone-breaking and road construction but the rates of pay offered did not attract many refugees.¹¹

The Uitlander Council, formed earlier in 1899 to articulate the grievances of *uitlanders* in the Transvaal, played a significant role in organizing relief for the refugee influx. Members of the council began to arrive in Natal in August 1899, some reportedly in disguise to avoid possible arrest by the Boers. Before the end of the month it was falsely rumoured that the entire council had arrived in Pietermaritzburg, where several wives of council members were already engaged in relief work. The Uitlander Council requested all refugees to register on arrival in the colony and on

this basis attempted to distribute aid. In November 1899, in conjunction with the Pietermaritzburg Relief Committee, it opened dining facilities to provide meals for deserving cases, and also shelter where possible.¹²

Relief funds were not as readily available in the capital as they were in Durban and early in 1900 the Pietermaritzburg Relief Committee was obliged to withdraw its support of all able-bodied men, most of whom had by then either left or found employment. The mayor's relief fund did eventually establish several homes for indigent women and children, while the Volunteer and Sufferers' Relief Fund assisted the dependents of those who had joined the volunteer and irregular corps raised in Natal. Other more intriguingly named relief funds that emerged during the ensuing conflict included the Special Relief Fund, the Mauritius Relief Fund, the Kipling Poem Fund, the Armoured Train Relief Fund and the Telegraph Shilling Widows' and Orphans' Fund. Natal's Indian community also provided relief, in cash and in kind, especially for members of the Indian stretcher-bearer corps and their dependents, and for Indian refugees from the Transvaal.¹³

As the war ran its course public attention was diverted increasingly towards alleviating the suffering of casualties from the front. In Durban and Pietermaritzburg the public made large donations of food, reading-matter, bedding and clothing which were distributed daily among the ill and wounded by women's organisations. In addition to public hospitals and the hospital ships in Durban harbour, further accommodation was provided for this purpose by the conversion of schools and other public buildings. In November 1899 parts of Maritzburg College were converted into a military hospital, resulting in a three-month holiday for the pupils before alternative facilities were provided for them in the new Native High Court building in College Road. Fort Napier and St. George's Garrison Chapel were also requisitioned to shelter the wounded before the spacious Legislative Assembly buildings in the centre of the capital were equipped to do so.

In addition, an 'epidemic hospital' was established in Pietermaritzburg and quarantine restrictions imposed on parts of the city following outbreaks of smallpox in October 1899 and again in January 1900. These were attributed to the influx of indeterminate numbers of African refugees who were not treated to the same consideration as their white counterparts when they arrived in Natal.¹⁴

'Marwick's March'

The colony's African migrant workers on the Witwatersrand goldmines became increasingly uneasy after June 1899 as the political tension increased. J.S. Marwick, the Natal Native Agent in Johannesburg, tried to reassure them in order to avoid a panic flight homewards which might unsettle the rest of the African population. Apart from possible social instability, Natal also stood to lose a substantial amount in unpaid hut taxes if migrant workers' wages were not remitted smoothly back to the colony. As the situation in the Transvaal deteriorated Marwick helped them to transfer their earnings home as rapidly as possible. When the passenger-train service to Natal ceased at the beginning of October 1899, he persuaded the Transvaal authorities to allow him to lead the stranded migrants home on foot.

'Marwick's March', assisted by his colleagues G.O. Wheelwright and W.A. Connorton, involved between 7 000 and 8 000 workers proceeding 30 abreast with

their own musicians leading the way. The journey lasted about 10 days although the participants had been instructed to provide their own rations for only five. There were several deaths from exhaustion among the stragglers and some harassment on the part of Boer commandos who commandeered 400 men to serve as labourers. By mid-October the majority of marchers had reached the British camp near Dundee, where they were charged £1 each to complete their journey southwards by train from Hatting Spruit station. Most of them were too exhausted to quibble about the loss of nearly two weeks' earnings for a ticket out of the war zone. There were no relief committees to greet them when they eventually disembarked.¹⁵

Boer invasion: the road to Ladysmith

Marwick's marchers barely made it home. On 9 October 1899 President Kruger delivered an ultimatum on behalf of the South African Republic demanding the withdrawal of British troops from southern Africa. The British government cabled its rejection the following evening and hostilities commenced on 11 October. The last Natal train was intercepted by Boers at Harrismith even before the ultimatum had expired. The subsequent course of military events is well known. Republican forces seized the initiative by launching a major thrust into the colony before the bulk of imperial reinforcements had arrived from Europe and India. Commandant-General Marthinus Prinsloo led 6 000 Free Staters through the Van Reenen, Tintwa and Bezuidenhout passes while Commandant-General Piet Joubert advanced with 14 000 Transvalers across terrain which had witnessed the Boer victories of the 1881 Anglo-Boer War, including his celebrated triumph at Majuba.

The northern extremity of the Klip River triangle had already been dismissed as indefensible by the British and was quickly overrun. Charlestown, on the Transvaal border, and Newcastle to the south were abandoned within the first two days of the conflict. As the inhabitants of Charlestown fled southwards, the last to depart were local government and railway officials who withdrew under instructions on 11 October, just before the Boer ultimatum expired. That evening the mayor of Newcastle addressed the townsfolk at the railway station and advised them to leave. By the following morning the village was deserted as it was considered defenceless against artillery fire, much to the annoyance of the local rifle association whose members had hoped to make a stand. Six hundred members of the Natal Mounted Rifles, the Natal Carbineers and the Border Mounted Rifles briefly delayed the Boers' advance by engaging them near Besters station, though no attempt was made to impede them by destroying bridges or blocking the mountain passes. At Newcastle all railway rolling stock was destroyed but large quantities of provisions, including 5 000 muids of mealies, were abandoned to the invaders.¹⁶

Several towns, including Charlestown, Newcastle, Weenen and Colenso, were pillaged by the Boer commandos. Private homes as well as public buildings were burgled and shops were looted of provisions, clothing, blankets and saddles. Liquor was plundered from bars and hotels, resulting in riotous scenes of inebriation in the streets. Railway stations, bridges and sections of line were severely damaged or destroyed as far south as Elandslaagte. Lack of discipline in the commandos, coupled with the necessity of foraging for supplies, underlay the extensive looting that took place. Boer leaders tried in vain to restrain their subordinates, several of them posting

guards to protect likely targets. The Boer commander Piet Joubert repeatedly warned against pillaging, but remote farms were particularly vulnerable and many in the upper reaches of the colony had been hastily abandoned. These were stripped of everything movable including livestock, food supplies and even furniture, while other items and entire homesteads were destroyed. In some instances whole orchards were chopped down, rainwater tanks punctured and livestock slaughtered.¹⁷

Contemporary accounts attributed much of the wartime destruction to the local 'Dutch' who, it was claimed, carried off booty to their own farms or drove captured livestock across the border into the Boer republics, never to return. The Dundee district in particular was so terrorised until near the end of the war by marauding groups of local 'rebels' that some far-flung farming families regularly slept out in the veld to avoid being molested in their homes. The minority of English-speaking farmers who opted to remain on their northern Natal properties were generally left alone, though most of their livestock was commandeered. Those who decided to leave thronged the main road to the coast, causing a congestion of wagons, horses, cattle and sheep which had never been seen before on the section between Mooi River and Nottingham Road.¹⁸

The decision taken earlier by Penn Symons to divide the still small British forces in Natal into several camps, with 4 000 troops eventually deployed as far north as Dundee, was an attempt to defend as much of the colony as possible against likely invasion, including the coal mines owned by influential London and Durban businessmen. It was also intended to anticipate a potential uprising of local 'Dutch' and/or Africans against British authority. His overconfidence, followed by the initial hesitancy of Lieutenant-General Sir George White, who arrived on 7 October 1899 to succeed him as general officer commanding Natal, meant that the resistance encountered by the Boers was not only divided but indifferently led. On 16 October Penn Symons evacuated the women and children from Dundee, thereby adding to the stream of refugees moving southwards from the northern districts of the colony. On 20 October at Talana Hill, overlooking the town, he successfully attacked the Boer positions but at high cost. He was mortally wounded and the pursuing imperial cavalry was forced to surrender to another Boer force after suffering more than 200 casualties.

The Boers, meanwhile, placed a 40-pounder gun on Mpati mountain, whence on 21 October they began to shell the British camp and the town below. That evening, as General Joubert's main force drew nearer, the order was given to abandon Dundee. The remaining 300-odd inhabitants, led by Mr Edward Ryley, chairman of the local board, and accompanied by marshals, retreated on foot through torrential rain to Ladysmith. They were followed the next night by the town's 4 000-strong garrison which stole away silently without arousing Boer suspicions. Penn Symons and the other British wounded were left behind, along with large quantities of military stores, while the survivors reached the main force at Ladysmith four days later.¹⁹

The town of Dundee was particularly badly devastated by the advancing Boers, possibly because it was the scene of the first major battle of the war and an obvious target for reprisals immediately after their initial setback at Talana. Dundee had only recently been described as 'a fair-sized little town' making 'rapid strides' by virtue of its central position in the Klip River coalfield and an 'extensive trade' in wool

purchased from Transvaal farmers who considered it 'a much better market than Vryheid.' The pre-war presence of British troops had given a further boost to the town's commerce as well as to its social life and, briefly, there were also numbers of refugees from the Transvaal and Newcastle seeking board and lodging.²⁰

All this was in stark contrast to what followed the Boer occupation on 23 October. Abandoned shops, homes and offices were plundered and items of value carted away. Oldacre's store was spared because it supplied goods to the invaders, under orders from the commandant. Mr Brokensha, the owner of the building, persuaded them not to break into the bank, though they could not resist throwing stones at the town clock on its roof. The Masonic and Royal Hotels were both drained of their liquor stocks, the former becoming a recovery station for inebriated burghers and the latter being converted into the Boer Commissariat Department with the Vierkleur flying over its roof.

After the initial plundering the veld-kornets eventually established some order. A *vrede rechter* or justice of the peace was appointed to serve as resident magistrate, as well as an assistant and a jailer, supported by a locally recruited police force. Its function was to prevent looting, safeguard commandeered livestock, press-gang fresh reserves for the Boer commandos and enforce the quarantine regulations upon the African population following the outbreak of smallpox among them. The surviving contents of unoccupied houses in Dundee were stored for safekeeping in the Masonic Hall and many of these dwellings were then used to accommodate an influx of Boer families into the town. Peter Smith's home on the slopes of Talana Hill (now restored as part of the Talana Museum) was used by the Boers as a hospital for their wounded but by the end of January 1900 they had established a new hospital in the government school at Dundee and a day school for Boer children.

Dundee, like the rest of Klip River County, was administered, for a time, as though it was part of the South African Republic. On 9 November Joubert proclaimed martial law over all of Natal's 'northern districts', recognised the neutrality of any who desired this status, and granted seven days' grace to those who wished to leave Boer-occupied territory. At some places, like Waschbank, the proclamation was only publicised after the seven-day deadline had expired but there were few loyalists left in northern Natal to take up the offer. The handful who remained in Dundee and elsewhere were not ill-treated but eventually a number of English and German-speaking residents were sent to prison in Pretoria. They were subsequently brought back to be placed under Boer guard at Tombi's Spruit near Ladysmith. By then the siege of that town was already under way.²¹

The siege of Ladysmith, and beyond

The unhindered arrival at Ladysmith of the retreating Dundee garrison under the command of Brigadier-General James Yule was facilitated by Sir George White's successful assault on the intervening Boer forces at Elandslaagte where they held a commanding position looking down on the railway station. This engagement was to become a particular source of bitterness on both sides, for an apparent Boer surrender was quickly followed by a counter-attack that was repulsed with a cavalry charge in which many Boers were put to the sword and lance.²²

Instead of seizing the initiative White prepared for a siege at Ladysmith. The Boers duly surrounded the town between 29 October and 2 November while also capturing a 1 000-strong force of British troops under Lieutenant-Colonel Carleton near Nicholson's Nek. The four-month siege and its eventual relief on 28 February 1900 emerged as the primary focus of the Natal theatre of conflict.²³ Immediately prior to the war Ladysmith had enjoyed a mini-boom with money 'circulating very freely' as imperial expenditure amounted to nearly £100 000 per annum in a town that had rapidly become a major military depot and assembly point while diplomatic pressure on the Boer republics mounted. Local businesses and the surrounding farming community all benefited from the increase in demand for produce, goods and services. Building activity gathered momentum as some shops were upgraded, houses were enlarged and the Royal Hotel was reconstructed in stone.²⁴

The mood began to change as the Boer noose around Ladysmith tightened and the last train to the south departed. It was initially estimated that the available food supplies in the town were sufficient for the remaining population of 13 745 imperial troops and Natal Volunteers, as well as 5 400 civilians, to survive a siege of approximately 50 days. The likelihood of such a prolonged inconvenience seemed remote, but morale was steadily eroded by a combination of factors.

British efforts to land a sufficiently large force at Durban and then to breach the Boer line along the Tugela Heights were disturbingly cumbersome. White's attempts to deal the enemy a decisive blow from within the besieged town were ineffectual.²⁵ Boredom, punctuated by bombardments from the Boers' 'Long Tom' which took a human toll but caused little material damage, also had its effect. The outbreak of dysentery and typhoid, which reached its height in the early months of 1900, was compounded by poor hygienic precautions and inadequate diet. Rations became more meagre, except for those who had taken the early precaution of hoarding supplies or who were sufficiently affluent to buy what the town still had to offer. By 10 February the decision was taken to begin slaughtering the cavalry horses, in order to provide additional protein for the garrison as well as mealies which would otherwise have been used as horse-feed. Less than three weeks later the British relief column arrived in town.²⁶

White was to be severely criticised for allowing the siege to take place, though he could not have retreated further south before Yule's desperate column reached Ladysmith. By then the Boers were almost upon him, and there was no obvious alternative position north of Pietermaritzburg where he could have made a stand.

General Sir Redvers Buller VC, who arrived in Natal in December 1899 as the new British commander-in-chief, also attracted criticism. The strategy of dividing the British forces in South Africa proved highly controversial, the intention being to advance into the interior on three fronts. Two followed the Cape's rail routes inland and the third, led by Buller himself, was directed through Natal towards Ladysmith. His ponderous efforts in the latter regard, only raising the 118-day siege at the fourth attempt, were characterised by setbacks at Colenso (on 15 December 1899), Spioen Kop (24 January 1900) and Vaalkrantz (5–7 February). They were accompanied by major defeats on the other two fronts as well, in particular between 10 and 17 December 1900 or what became known in Britain as 'Black Week'. Buller's personal courage and concern for the well-being of his men won him popularity among the

rank and file, if not in Whitehall. The final outflanking thrust over the Tugela Heights into Ladysmith (19–27 February 1900) was expertly planned and executed but it had involved more than 50 000 troops and 7 000 casualties to lift the siege.

The struggle for Ladysmith similarly did nothing to enhance the reputation of the Boer commander, Piet Joubert. He has subsequently been accused of lacking enterprise and vision in allowing virtually his entire force to be concentrated for four months on the siege instead of heeding the advice of capable subordinates and thrusting southwards towards the coast. The capture of Pietermaritzburg and even of Durban may indeed have been feasible, even allowing for the 28 naval guns positioned in the hills around the port. As most of the British reinforcements were then still on the high seas, the garrisons at Colenso, Estcourt and Pietermaritzburg were small and White's large force at Ladysmith would have been incapable of swift pursuit. A sustained Boer occupation of the capital and the harbour city was nevertheless improbable, though the stalemate at Ladysmith made eventual Boer defeat in Natal the likely outcome as British forces gained in strength and purpose.²⁷

Joubert did allow a force of 4 000 Boers under the command of General Louis Botha to advance south of the Tugela (Thukela) river, but only 10 days after the investment of Ladysmith, by which stage the small villages of Estcourt and Mooi River had had some opportunity to prepare for their defence. The Boers advanced no further south than the latter town, where an exchange of artillery fire occurred on 22–23 November 1899. On the previous day the garrison at Estcourt launched an audacious assault on the Boers ensconced on Brynbella Hill near Willow Grange, just south of the town. It was there that Percy FitzPatrick's brother George was killed in action.

After these discouraging engagements Joubert ordered Botha's force back to the siege of Ladysmith, though the Boers had enjoyed some minor successes in the Natal midlands. These included the derailment of an armoured train on 15 November at Chieveley north of Estcourt where 57 prisoners were taken, including war correspondent Lieutenant Winston Churchill. The incident was highlighted by his subsequent escape from Pretoria via Delagoa Bay to Durban, where a plaque on the steps of what is now the Central Post Office commemorates the site of his address to local loyalists the following month.²⁸

While the Boer campaign in northern Natal became a struggle along the Tugela Heights to resist the relief of Ladysmith, Zululand was also subjected to invasion. At the outbreak of war a commando entered the territory on what amounted to an extensive looting raid. In February 1900 another invaded from the north-east and assumed brief control of the Nquthu and Nkandla magistracies. Eshowe was also seemingly at risk but the Boers soon withdrew in the face of a 500-strong contingent of 'Colonial Scouts' supported by naval guns supplied from Durban.²⁹

It took nearly three and a half months following the relief of Ladysmith on 28 February 1900 to clear northern Natal of Boer forces. Dundee was recaptured on 15 May and Newcastle two days later, but the last of the large commandos only left the colony on 11 June 1900. While the Cape and Natal war fronts advanced into the Boer republics in September 1900 the Natal Volunteer Militia was demobilised. Most of its members had been trapped in the siege of Ladysmith and perhaps for that reason the Volunteer Regiment which replaced the Militia immediately attracted 500 recruits.

This was fortunate as northern Natal was not completely pacified until near the official termination of all hostilities in May 1902.³⁰

Guerrilla warfare: raid and counter-raid

After June 1900 small guerrilla bands of local 'Dutch rebels' continued to operate in the upper reaches of the colony, especially in the Dundee district. They posed little threat to British military forces but severely disrupted civilian road traffic, looted farmhouses and drove off livestock. Early in 1901 the neighbouring south-eastern Transvaal was subjected to a similar but even more severe campaign when a large British force under General French destroyed buildings and crops and seized cattle in an effort to deprive Boer commandos of their sources of supply in the region. The use of Zulu scouts and guides had already become a source of friction between the British army and Natal government but the recruitment of a Zulu force to participate in this looting of Boer property caused consternation in Pietermaritzburg. Government ministers feared that their involvement in military operations, for a 10% share of the livestock captured, was a recipe for post-war inter-racial conflict. Several Zulu chiefdoms participated enthusiastically, with the blessing of their King, Dinuzulu ka Cetshwayo, and acquired at least 10 000 cattle and a few thousand sheep before the campaign ended in June 1901. It helped them to recover from their recent losses to the rinderpest, though some of their new livestock had to be destroyed due to lung sickness.³¹

In the spring of 1901 Louis Botha, Commandant-General of the Boer forces in succession to the ineffectual Joubert, launched a second invasion of Natal with a force of barely 2 000 men. Its purpose, along with those led into the Cape Colony by Jan Smuts and Christiaan de Wet, was to conduct a campaign of highly mobile guerrilla warfare in regions inhabited by known Boer sympathisers who still had the means to supply them. Botha's initial victory on 19 September over Major Gough's force at Blood River Poort alerted the British to his presence and Natal's Volunteer Regiment was ordered to assemble at Greytown and Pietermaritzburg. The precaution proved unnecessary, for there were nine imperial columns blocking his advance and he exhausted his limited resources by taking heavy casualties in unsuccessful attacks on the British positions at Itala and Fort Prospect.³²

This invasion of Natal proved to be the last, for a third attempt, planned in March 1902, failed to reach the border. By then the Natal Volunteers had already been demobilised, in October 1901, followed by re-enlistment in February 1902 into another composite unit called the Natal Mounted Infantry. Its services were hardly needed, as the Boer republics were already on the military defensive. Their leaders signed the Peace of Vereeniging a few months later, on 31 May 1902, thereby surrendering their independence to British rule. By their own admission one of the factors which persuaded the Boers to negotiate peace was the night attack on 6 May 1902 by a Zulu impi on their camp at Holkrans (Ntatskana) near Vryheid. It resulted in the death of 56 burghers and raised the spectre of ethnic conflict which had so concerned Natal's ministry a year earlier when Zulu recruits were used to raid the south-eastern Transvaal. It also highlighted the extent to which Africans had actively participated, and suffered, during the course of the conflict.³³

Black involvement in the war

Louis Botha subsequently described the Holkrans incident as the 'foulest deed of the war' but an official inquiry conducted on the instructions of the British government revealed that the Boers had frequently requisitioned African-owned livestock in the Vryheid district without the issue of receipts, or had simply raided cattle as punishment for alleged desertion from Boer employ, for supplying the British, or for acts of theft. Some Africans had been summarily executed on suspicion of collaborating with the enemy, or for carrying weapons. Moreover, since the outbreak of war, many in the Vryheid district had been conscripted to assist the Boer forces and numerous households had been intimidated in an attempt to counteract the extensive pro-British intelligence network controlled by King Dinuzulu from Zululand.

There was a longstanding conviction that the Vryheid district rightfully belonged to the Zulu, not the Boers, while at the personal level Chief Sikhobobo, who led his Qulusi people in the attack at Holkrans, had only recently had his homestead burnt and livestock driven off on the orders of Louis Botha. The latter insisted that this had been retribution for Qulusi attacks on his forces when they returned to the Vryheid district in February 1902, but it may have been in settlement of a personal vendetta between Chief Sikhobobo and local Veldkornet J.A. Potgieter.³⁴

Such involvement and suffering during the war was not confined to the Africans of the Vryheid district. As in other parts of southern Africa many in Natal and Zululand participated in the conflict, and even more were numbered among its victims. Indeed, they were far from being the 'passive onlookers' described in some contemporary accounts. The informal agreement of October 1899 that this was to be a 'white man's war', in which no Africans would bear arms, was soon broken and the Natal theatre of conflict was no exception. They were employed on both sides in numerous supporting capacities and, as casualties mounted, were increasingly deployed as combatants.

The Boers used armed Africans at the siege of Ladysmith as they did at Kimberley and Mafeking while the British conceded a total of at least 10 000 African combatants in their ranks. Some of these were used in Natal, not counting the numerous African armed scouts and sentries. In addition to the Zulu impis that operated in the south-eastern Transvaal, the Edendale Horse were armed with rifles as were the Zululand Mounted Police who relieved Fort Prospect at the time of Botha's attack in September 1901. Some 300 'free' and 800 indentured Indians who were resident in Natal joined the corps of stretcher-bearers along with M.K. Gandhi. They served with distinction, often under heavy fire as at Spioen Kop, and were mentioned in dispatches before their disbandment in 1900 when British Red Cross units arrived at the front.³⁵

For Africans living outside the war zone there was ample opportunity to recoup their recent losses to the rinderpest by meeting the demands of the military for labour and fresh produce at rates substantially higher than those previously paid in the colony. By contrast, combatant and non-combatant Africans in the northern districts suffered severely in the wake of the Boer advance, and as a result of the commando raids into Zululand. During the period of effective Boer occupation between November 1899 and January 1900 General Piet Joubert was anxious not to disturb

the local population unnecessarily and insisted that African communities should not be provoked. In practice, Boer administration was extremely harsh and left a lasting legacy of distrust between Africans and whites. They were restricted to their kraals, in part as a measure against smallpox, pressurised for information about enemy movements, forced to provide labour for the commandos and resident Boer families, and brutally flogged for trivial offences. Moreover, their farming activities were dislocated and their cattle, crops and wagons looted by the invading forces.³⁶

Not surprisingly, the Boer occupation of northern Natal generated a wave of African refugees into the midlands and coastal districts. In turn, the upper reaches of the colony subsequently received an influx of Africans who had been displaced by military operations in the Orange Free State and Transvaal. The Natal government eventually allowed more than 6 000 to settle on reserves and deserted farms along the Drakensberg between Witzie's Hoek and Botha's Pass. A Superintendent of Refugees was appointed to distribute some relief among them and to arrange temporary employment with local farmers.³⁷ The loss of jobs, not only on farms but also on the Natal collieries, was another major setback which local Africans had to endure as a consequence of the conflict.

Disruption and recovery: coal-mining and agriculture

The wartime disruption of the northern Natal coal industry resulted in a decline in total output of 146 481 tons (37.8%) between 1898 and 1900. The collieries were only closed for approximately six months but their subsequent recovery was impeded by a number of factors. These included the difficulties encountered in re-assembling the dispersed African labour force, the need to repair and drain neglected mine shafts, the shortage of railway trucks to transport the reviving coal output due to heavy military demands on available rolling stock, the damage inflicted by the Boers on machinery and railway lines and the theft of tools and looting of mine stores.

Natal-owned mines, including Dundee, St George's and Elandslaagte, sustained much more severe war damage than those owned by non-residents, such as the New Campbell, Natal Navigation and Natal Marine collieries. At mines such as West Lennoxton, where the manager or owner remained in charge, no damage was done at all. Some of the destruction was inflicted by the invading commandos, who also looted the Mines Department's district offices at Dundee and Nondweni in 1899 and 1900, but much of it was attributed to local 'Klip River Dutch' rebels. The effect was to increase the price of coal in Natal from £1 to between £5 and £7 per ton, though this decreased as the collieries came back into full production. By 1901 the industry's total output already exceeded any previous year when it rose to 569 200 tons, amounting to a 135.8% increase over 1900.³⁸

Agricultural production in that region took much longer to recover its momentum, for the Boer invasion was only one of a series of disruptions for local farmers. A locust plague in the mid-1890s was followed by an outbreak of rinderpest in 1897–8 that enveloped three-quarters of the colony but was most severe in northern Natal. The drought of 1899–1900 facilitated military operations but inflicted crop and stock losses which compounded the damage done to the region by Boer commandos and their local allies. Such depredations were extensive, quite apart from the deterioration

of properties which had been abandoned by loyalists fleeing southwards and pro-republicans moving northwards into the Transvaal and Orange Free State.³⁹

As early as November 1899 it was observed that 'years must elapse before the agricultural sector will be able to replace their stock'. Farming activity in the upper reaches of the colony was seriously disrupted for some two-and-a-half years. The poor condition of livestock and the shortage of forage in the district which was noted at the 1903 Dundee Agricultural Show was attributed both to the war and the continuing drought. Only in 1904 was it reported that 'the indications are in the direction of a gradual return to normal times'.⁴⁰ The process of recovery was long and difficult for all those on the land in northern Natal but for none more so than for the 'Klip River Dutch' community.

The Klip River Dutch: a dilemma of loyalty

Prior to the war the Boer or 'Dutch' inhabitants of Klip River County constituted approximately 60% of its 5 000-strong white population and, natural disasters aside, enjoyed a modest level of prosperity. At the end of the conflict they still retained their land but many of them were destitute. The invasion of 1899 confronted them with a traumatic choice between co-operation or some form of resistance to 'the enemy'. Relations with their English-speaking neighbours had been good but, as descendants of the trekkers who had settled in Natal in the late 1830s with close linguistic and family links with the interior republics, they constituted a cohesive community whose loyalty to the government and crown was decidedly fragile.

In that respect they were quite distinct from the Boer minority who resided south of the Thukela, some of whom were prominent members of colonial society. Even allowing for strong blood-ties and pro-republican sentiments, the decision which most of them took to side with the invaders was made under coercion, for there was understandable fear of the possible consequences for them if Klip River County did not remain under Boer control.⁴¹

There were many who readily provided information, shelter, slaughter-stock and forage. Those who resorted to guerrilla activity in the northern districts presumably did so voluntarily, particularly after the republican forces had retreated from the colony, and there were some who willingly joined them. The reliability of such local recruits may have been in doubt, for the Boers tried to keep them together in a Natal Commando which was held in reserve at Helpmekaar, even when the struggle along the Tugela Heights was at its zenith, and entrusted it with little more than patrol duties.⁴²

While some of the 'Klip River Dutch' welcomed and willingly collaborated with the Boers, the fact that the invaders had to rely on a system of commandeering through their own locally-appointed police forces indicates that the majority of Natal's 'rebels' co-operated under compulsion. The English and German-speaking residents of Klip River County who had remained on their properties were, with few exceptions, fairly treated. This was not true of the local 'Dutch' community despite General Joubert's professed respect for the right of neutrality and his concern to maintain tranquillity in occupied territory. His prohibition on the looting of property did not exclude forced enlistment for military service. He almost certainly conceived the twin deceptions that, following the Boer occupation, the 'Klip River Dutch' had

become liable for this duty as republican citizens, and that this was a necessary precaution against an imminent African uprising in the region.

Joubert did not formally declare the annexation of Klip River County to the South African Republic, despite subsequent claims to the contrary, but some of his subordinates may have created that impression and he did give local 'rebels' the assurance that the Boer occupation relieved them of loyalty to the crown. It is not clear whether he genuinely believed in the possibility of violent African opportunism in the wartime situation but this prospect was undoubtedly exploited to pressurise the 'Klip River Dutch' into compliance.⁴³

By the end of 1902 a total of 409 Natal residents had been convicted of acts of high treason during the course of the war. Approximately 80% of them were Dutch speakers and 330 were inhabitants of Klip River County, amounting to roughly half of that district's 'Dutch' adult male population. When allowance is also made for those who fled permanently to the Boer republics, or were tried outside the colony, or pardoned before trial, or who were never caught, or who were released for lack of evidence, it is evident that virtually the whole 'Klip River Dutch' community was disloyal to the crown.

The Natal government was well aware of the possible impact of a Boer invasion on the local 'Dutch' community and its response to their 'rebellion' was both efficient and conciliatory. It indignantly rejected the British proposal of an Imperial Special Commission to ensure fair treatment of 'rebels' in both Natal and the Cape Colony but did agree to the creation of a Natal Special Court to try such cases and to hear appeals arising out of convictions in local magistrates' courts, military courts, the Supreme Court and the Zululand High Court. The 'Klip River Dutch' were not the only inhabitants of Natal faced with a dilemma of loyalty by the outbreak of the conflict in October 1899. There were a number of colonial families of British origin with sons and brothers who had settled in the interior republics, married Boer women and, in some cases, had joined the invading commandos. There were also English-speaking colonists married to Boers in Natal, whose children were more Dutch than British orientated.

Prosecutions were only brought against those deemed to be guilty of 'overt acts or deeds' of treason, including the provision of material assistance or information to the Boers, taking up arms on their side, or leaving Natal for the interior republics under their protection. Compulsion was recognised as a mitigating factor but was not accepted as sufficient justification on its own for co-operating with the enemy. There were some severe fines, but most of the sentences handed down were fairly light, imposing terms of imprisonment of less than twelve months. The heaviest involved ten years' penal servitude, and ten years' imprisonment with the option of a further year in jail or a £500 fine. The Royal Commission which investigated all sentences passed under martial law in the Cape and Natal recommended only one revision in the case of a Natal 'rebel'.

There was considerable agitation on the part of Natal loyalists to inflict heavy punishments on all 'rebels' and the member for Melmoth, a Mr Yonge, led a vigorous campaign in the Legislative Assembly for the confiscation of their land. The Natal government had decided against such severity even before the outbreak of war, and in March 1903 it pardoned all Natal 'rebels', including those against whom treason

charges were pending, much to the annoyance of the Governor, Sir Henry McCallum. Two years later it restored their civil rights, including the franchise, nearly a year ahead of the amnesty granted by the Cape government.

This spirit of reconciliation did not extend to the granting of immediate financial aid to destitute 'rebels', or to funding post-war reconstruction in Klip River County. They were entitled to return to their abandoned farms or to find shelter in the government's refugee camps but all appeals for financial assistance were rejected under clause 10 of the Vereeniging Articles of Surrender which specifically excluded them from such relief. Similarly, their claims for compensation to the Invasion Losses Enquiry Commission set up by the British government were almost all rejected, such awards being restricted to applicants who had suffered for their loyalty to the crown.

Private relief organisations were also unsympathetic and their painful post-war rehabilitation was further hampered by outbreaks of rinderpest and drought in 1902–3. The 'Klip River Dutch' community nevertheless remained on the land but while cordial pre-war relations with English-speaking neighbours were quickly restored, their at best tenuous loyalty to the government in Pietermaritzburg had been replaced by an attitude of hostility.⁴⁴ This process of alienation was doubtless further promoted by post-war accounts of the manner in which Boer men, women and children had been treated in Natal's concentration camps.

Concentration camps

Three concentration camps were initially established in Natal during the war: at Pietermaritzburg and Howick in August 1900 and at Merebank, south of Durban, in September 1901. They were intended to accommodate the overflow of wartime internees from the overcrowded Transvaal camps, while similar facilities in the Cape Colony received the surplus from the Orange Free State.⁴⁵

The Pietermaritzburg camp, situated just out of town near Fort Napier and the Botanical Gardens, was considered the best-equipped in the colony, though it did not escape the criticism of internees. The first of them arrived there in November 1900, comprising 24 so-called 'undesirables' who it was considered necessary to remove from the war zone because of their continued attempts to assist the Boer commandos and to disregard camp rules. The Natal camps received large numbers of these troublemakers whose fierce loyalty to the republican cause soon clashed with the more moderate views of 'hensoppers' ('handsuppers' or 'joiners') among the internees, and fomented a variety of grievances.

Life under canvas was uncomfortable, exposing internees to extreme variations in temperature, invasions of insects and high winds which frequently blew tents over before they were eventually replaced with corrugated-iron dwellings. Bedding and furniture were in short supply and internees brought little in the way of personal possessions as a result of farm-burnings and transport shortages in the war zone. The rations provided in Natal camps were superior to those supplied in the Transvaal but their quantity and quality soon became another source of complaint, as did badly-organised, slow-moving ration queues and fuel shortages during the winter months. The presence of camp shops, and of Indian hawkers who were in daily attendance, was problematic as many inmates were too poor to buy the creature comforts which they offered in the form of extra food, clothing and medicines.

Some male internees could earn ready cash by accepting the employment which camp administrators were instructed to provide in the form of building covered stoves to replace open fireplaces and digging stormwater trenches. Females could work in camp hospitals and schools, or sew clothes for new arrivals. Men who had formally surrendered and women whose menfolk were not still in the field could earn even better wages by taking jobs in town, but the issue of passes allowing them to spend daylight hours out of camp and, in some cases, to reside there with friends or relatives, became another source of grievance. The use of Africans to police and guard the camps also caused resentment, though some internees brought African servants with whom they shared their accommodation and rations.

Attempts were made to isolate 'hensoppers' from 'bitter-einders' ('bitter-enders') and to reward the former with superior accommodation and food while punishing the indiscretions of the latter with hard labour and short rations. The harshness of camp life was, to some extent, softened for all internees by religious services, Bible classes, gardening activities, sports events and the availability of materials for home industries such as carpentry and furniture manufacture. Camp schools, using a British curriculum but initially employing internees to teach through the medium of Dutch, were much appreciated and well attended. Older children were allowed to register at government schools in town. The erection of new buildings and importation of teachers from Britain to instruct in English increased the rate of daily school attendance quite significantly at all three of the Natal concentration camps. These facilities gave large numbers of up-country rural children their first experience of formal schooling and they were joined by many adults who took the opportunity to acquire a basic education while escaping the boredom of camp life.⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the children were also the most frequent victims of the ill-health and infectious diseases that were so prevalent in the camps and which became such a major source of grievance among internees. Those assigned to the Pietermaritzburg camp were fortunate in having access to the hospital at Fort Napier, as well as their own resident medical officers and special facilities for maternity cases and for children with infectious diseases. Inmates of the Howick and Merebank camps had initially to make do with small canvas hospitals and suffered much higher mortality rates in consequence.

The overall death rate in the Natal camps was never as bad as those in the Transvaal and Orange Free State but it did reach 1.74% of internees in September 1901 as the British 'sweeps' through enemy territory forced increasing numbers of people into already overcrowded facilities. The number interned in Natal rose from 4 370 in September 1901 to 10 216 in November and more than 24 000 in April 1902. Additional camps were opened during the latter months of the war at Eshowe, Mooi River, Colenso, Ladysmith, Wentworth and Jacobs Siding (near Merebank) but these were unable to cope with the huge additional influx.

Deaths among internees were attributed to a variety of factors including inadequate accommodation, food and medical facilities. The Natal camps were much better provided with water than those elsewhere, though inmates often complained about the paucity and quality of the supply. Camp authorities, on the other hand, pointed to their unsanitary personal habits, arguing that their rural background

rendered them unfamiliar with the basic rules of hygiene which were so essential among such dense concentrations of people.

In July 1901 the War Office appointed the all-female Fawcett Commission, headed by a prominent suffragette, Mrs M.G. Fawcett, to investigate conditions in the South African concentration camps following the public attention drawn to them by Emily Hobhouse and others. The commission condemned the Merebank camp, where the majority of deaths in Natal had occurred, as unfit for human habitation. Yet its criticism of the camp's poor siting and inadequate drainage was subsequently attributed to the heavy rains that had preceded the commission's visit. Merebank was later expanded to become one of the largest concentration camps in Natal, with more than 8 000 internees but with hospital facilities for only 130 patients.⁴⁷

The Fawcett Commission also decried the transfer of internees who had already contracted contagious diseases to previously uninfected camps like Merebank. Indeed, all the Natal camps had to contend with periodical influxes of new arrivals many of whom were weak not only from illnesses contracted in Transvaal camps but also from the long, slow journey in third class carriages, and even in cattle and coal trucks, with little or no food and bedding. The findings of the Fawcett Commission confirmed the opinion of Emily Hobhouse, and of internees themselves, that camp conditions in Natal, with the possible exception of Merebank, were much better than those to the north. Some internees actually applied to be transferred to the Natal camps and to have friends and relatives moved there. Camp conditions in Natal, as elsewhere, did improve further after the transfer of control in November 1901 from military to civilian administration. This trend was also promoted by the arrival of more British doctors and nurses and by more conscientious efforts on the part of camp superintendents.

The Natal camps remained open, some as long as a year after the war had ended, until all internees had been resettled on their devastated farms in the interior.⁴⁸ By then the colony had already counted its own losses in material and human terms.

Natal's financial losses

There was a substantial decline in public revenues derived from northern Natal because local officials were unable to collect licence fees, fines, stamp and transfer duties and, not least, the hut tax during the period of Boer occupation. Recovery was slow following their retreat as financial records had been destroyed and the inhabitants of the region were not all immediately able to resume payments. A much more serious loss was incurred as hostilities reduced Natal's vital import-export transit trade with the trekker republics to a trickle and halted the traffic in coal for several consecutive months. The combined effect of the invasion and of the disruption to the overberg trade was a deficit of £68 400 in the colony's 1899–1900 budget.

This constituted only part of Natal's wartime losses. State expenditure had, for a variety of reasons, been increasing since responsible government was attained in 1893, but the all-time high of £5 102 000 expended in the 1902–3 financial year was attributable to the additional costs incurred during the conflict, coupled with an attendant increase in economic activity and a rise in prices. It was estimated that the expense of maintaining the volunteer forces amounted, for a time, to as much as

£80 000 per month, and that the war cost the colony nearly £500 000 including the customs duty rebate granted on imported military stores. In terms of Natal's constitution this additional expenditure could not be paid out of the consolidated revenue fund, except by an act of Parliament. Instead, credit to a maximum of £1 000 000 was arranged with the Bank of England and all extraordinary costs attributable to the war were euphemistically accounted for as 'advances made in connection with the South African Crisis'.⁴⁹ The colony also contributed human resources to the war effort.

Natal's manpower contribution

At most 2 710 Natalians formally enlisted for military service, excluding the existing local rifle associations, some 300 Natal Police, and the non-combatant volunteers. This active participation is insignificant when compared with the 85 000 burghers who rallied to the flags of the two Boer republics and the overall total of approximately 450 000 involved on the British side. Moreover, most of those involved were disbanded after the Boer retreat from Natal in June 1900, though a few who had enlisted in British and Cape regiments served for longer periods. Fatalities amounted to 4.9% of men on active service in Natal units or 134 in total, including 39 members of the Natal Carbineers, 27 in the Border Mounted Rifles, and 21 from the Durban Light Infantry. Not surprisingly, the majority of the Natal volunteers were English-speaking. There were also some Afrikaners, particularly in the Umvoti Mounted Rifles. Part of this regiment was stationed at Tugela Ferry, where it checked a Boer force that had previously sacked Helpmekaar and Pomeroy, and another section was sent from the war zone to patrol Natal's southern border against the possibility of an African uprising there.⁵⁰

The bulk of the Natal volunteers were besieged at Ladysmith but others formed part of the relief column and, with their local linguistic and topographical knowledge, also provided an invaluable service as scouts and guides. None of them were recipients of the 71 Victoria Crosses awarded during the war but one gained the KCB, one the DSO, two the CMG, two the DCM and 90 were mentioned in dispatches.⁵¹ The fact that less than 20% of Natal's adult white male population of military age enlisted to bear arms in the conflict is particularly surprising in view of the prevailing levels of unemployment in the colony, even allowing for the existence of (unpaid) rifle associations. Many Rand refugees whose applications to join the Imperial Light Horse were unsuccessful vigorously petitioned for the formation of an additional corps, subsequently known as the Imperial Light Infantry. Natalians were less enthusiastic. They had not experienced Boer government, it was not their war, some had positively opposed it and others feared its economic implications.

Natal's African majority had even less cause to identify with the war though many were employed by the British forces and some became involved as combatants, culminating in the Zulu attack at Holkrantz. Indians could also be excused for a lack of pro-war enthusiasm after being largely excluded from the franchise and subjected to increasingly hostile legislation since the colony gained responsible government in 1893. Even so, more than a thousand of them served as volunteer stretcher-bearers and, in some cases, exposed themselves to enemy fire.⁵² But Natal's financial losses,

if not its human sacrifices, consequent upon the war were more than offset by the material benefits it derived.

The credit balance: territorial gain

Territorial gains were more modest than those initially envisaged by some prominent Natalians in discussions which began almost as soon as war broke out. One proposal was that Natal and the Boer republics should be merged under one administration. Before his death in December 1899 Harry Escombe insisted that after the war the entire Transvaal should be annexed to the colony. In March 1900 committees similar to Cape Town's Vigilance Committee were formed in Pietermaritzburg and Durban to maintain a watching brief for local loyalists over negotiations concerning a post-war settlement. In April 1901 Natal's Hime administration proposed that as part of the peace terms 17 553.6 square kilometres of Transvaal territory together with 10 268.8 square kilometres of the Orange Free State's Harrismith and Vrede districts should be incorporated into the colony.

It eventually settled for much less, as well as undertaking responsibility for £700 000 worth of the Transvaal debt which had to be met out of Natal's own loan fund. The territorial gain amounted to between 11 200 and 12 800 square kilometres in the form of the Utrecht and Vryheid districts (formerly part of Zululand before being annexed to the New Republic in 1884 and then to the Transvaal in 1887) and also part of Wakkerstroom. These areas enlarged Natal by roughly a quarter of its existing size and increased its population by more than 14% with the incorporation of approximately 50 000 African and nearly 10 000 white inhabitants, who were to be represented in the Legislative Assembly by the addition of four new members.⁵³ Territory was not the only gain that the war brought to the colony.

The credit balance: economic boom

While the northern districts suffered varying degrees of dispossession and destruction, the effects of the conflict south of Mooi River were largely beneficial as the midlands and coastal belt experienced a wartime and post-war boom. Local newspapers complained about the hardships of military press censorship but the agricultural and commercial sectors in particular benefited from the army presence as the British Government spent approximately £250 000 000 on maintaining a force of nearly 450 000 men at its height in southern Africa. This amount was by no means all spent in Natal but as large numbers of troops passed through the colony to the war front livestock and agricultural commodity prices soared in response to increasing demand. Farmers also turned a good profit transport riding for the military as they did during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, or else by hiring out their wagons and draught animals.

In the major urban centres traders acquired additional business by acting as middlemen for military provisions, local manufacturers enjoyed a temporary boost, particularly in the heavy engineering sector, with the value of their total output increasing from £2 282 in 1900 to £5 304 in 1902, while brothels and bars had not been as busy since 1879. Domestic consumption and the demand for accommodation was boosted further by the arrival of refugees from the Witwatersrand and northern

Natal and, towards the end of the war, by an influx of immigrants attracted by the boom conditions.⁵⁴

These benefits were not confined to the colony's white population. African farmers also responded to the increase in agricultural prices and increasing numbers of African work-seekers were attracted to the major urban areas by increased job opportunities arising out of the military presence, the influx of white refugees and the burgeoning harbour activity. African peri-urban communities expanded so rapidly that a pass system was imposed on incoming work-seekers under the 1901 Identification of Native Servants Act, and tight regulations governing the employment, payment and accommodation of togt daily labourers were implemented in terms of the 1902 Togat Labour Amendment Act.⁵⁵

The value of exports through Cape and Natal ports declined by almost two-thirds between 1898 and 1900 as the overberg trade evaporated, but there was no loss of purchasing power abroad due to the huge inflow of imperial funds to finance the war effort. There was a sharp increase in imports in response to the needs of the imperial forces and the temporary increase in population. The duty levied on these eventually more than compensated for the loss of excise income normally derived from the overberg trade. The imposition of higher wartime customs duties inflated prices and increased the cost of living but this was accompanied by more readily available credit and improved levels of income and employment in the private sector.

In addition to public income derived from customs duties, Natal's railway revenues were also dramatically improved by the heavy traffic in troops, equipment and supplies to the war zone, even though most trucks returned empty to the port. Increased railway earnings were largely responsible for the 57% increase in Natal's revenue in 1900–1, amounting to nearly £3 million more than the previous financial year. This additional income was achieved in part by investing in improved railway infrastructure costing nearly £2.5 million but still left a hefty surplus of £471 000.

As the trend continued a surplus of £387 200 was achieved in the 1901–2 financial year, during which the loans from the Bank of England amounting to £835 000 for the payment of additional wartime costs were repaid. In 1902–3 the colony's public revenues rose to an unprecedented level that would have yielded a surplus of £372 000 had it not been for the Natal government's undertaking to pay war expenses. This resulted in a substantial deficit for the financial year but also in the elimination of all expenses connected with what had been budgeted as the 'South African Crisis'.⁵⁶

Confidence in the future was high as the inflow of immigrants and capital continued. Real estate business increased and traders continued to import goods in expectation of an ongoing post-war boom in Natal and especially in the Transvaal, and in anticipation of higher customs duties under an imminent new customs convention. In 1903 Natal's imports increased in value to a record £15.3 million, largely in response to the needs of post-war reconstruction in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. Governmental and municipal authorities were sufficiently encouraged to launch their own construction programmes, some initiated before the termination of hostilities. These included extensive harbour and railway development to cater more adequately for the import–export trade, tarred urban roads, electric

lighting, telephone services, schools and offices, and new town halls, one of which was built in Pietermaritzburg at a projected cost of £60 000.⁵⁷

Other public works initiated in the capital included new colonial offices (the Colonial Building in Church Street) for £80 000, described as 'one of the handsomest blocks of architecture in South Africa', Legislative Council buildings for £25 000 and new railway workshops. In addition, plans were drawn up for post and telegraph offices, a museum, drill hall, market buildings and enlargements to the railway station and police court. By January 1901 several privately-owned shops were being rebuilt or otherwise improved and the city was reported to be 'in a very prosperous condition' due to the high level of military expenditure and an influx of 10 to 12 000 upcountry refugees.⁵⁸

Durban also benefited from the flow of military traffic and the arrival of 'several thousand refugees'. Wholesale merchants engaged in the overberg trade fell upon hard times but retailers thrived and actually increased in numbers, partly in response to the demands of the Army Services Corps and also the Field Force Canteen which for a time placed orders to the value of £80 000 per month. By the end of 1900 buildings to the value of at least £250 000 were under construction and land prices had risen not only in Durban itself but as far as two hours' journey up the main railway line into the interior where affluent members of the community built summer residences. The Durban City Council embarked upon several major works including an extended sewerage scheme, new reservoirs, electric tramlines and market-houses, the completion of the Victoria Embankment on the city side of the Bay and the reclamation of parts of the foreshore on the beachfront, necessitating loans of more than £1.25 million.⁵⁹

Even parts of northern Natal benefited from the prevailing boom conditions after the invading commandos had been forced out of the colony. By 1901 coal had become Natal's second largest export commodity due largely to the prevailing wartime conditions. Coal exports through Durban harbour amounted to only 9.7% of the colony's total output but the bunker trade at the port (considered to be part of 'exports') absorbed no less than 43.4% in that year and 49.2% in 1900 as a result of the heavy volume of shipping generated by the war. The domestic consumption of coal also increased temporarily due to the huge imperial military presence. This more than compensated for the loss of access to inland markets, which in 1900 absorbed only 0.17% (430 tons) of Natal's output.⁶⁰

The bunker and domestic markets, supplemented by the reviving consumption of the Natal Government Railways, provided the local coal industry with a strong incentive to make a swift recovery from its wartime setback. The demand for food crops and slaughter-stock, which was in short supply by mid-1900, provided a similar incentive for the agricultural sector in the northern districts but, as previously indicated, its rehabilitation was a much longer process.

By contrast, business in Newcastle enjoyed a boost from the advancing imperial forces, and from the arrival of refugees who temporarily settled there when the town was re-occupied, preparatory to returning to the Transvaal. After the siege was lifted the mini pre-war boom in Ladysmith resumed even though most contracts to supply the army were rumoured to be already 'in the hands of Pietermaritzburg men'. The commercial life of the surrounding district was still severely dislocated as many

farmers were either in jail or on the run after collaborating with the Boers. Yet several inhabitants of the town had made a great deal of money during the siege and Ladysmith continued, for a time, to be in 'a fairly flourishing condition' with the local hotel business already enjoying a steady tourist trade attracted to the battlefields.⁶¹

Indeed, the impact of the Anglo-Boer War was to be felt all over southern Africa for nearly half a decade but, in most places, the wartime boom did not survive the termination of hostilities in 1902 by more than a year.

Post-war recession

The long recession experienced in Natal from 1903 until as late as 1909 was due to several factors. Expenditure in the colony declined as the inflow of imperial funds to fuel the war effort and the resettlement of refugees dried up. Imports also slumped, merchants were stuck with stockpiles of unwanted foreign goods and prices dropped as surplus military stores were dumped on local markets. By 1905 several small businesses in Pietermaritzburg and Durban had closed down, numerous offices and shop premises were standing empty and property prices had plunged between 20 and 30% since the war. There was very little building activity except for the construction of the new Post Office in Pietermaritzburg where the municipal debt exceeded £1 million and necessitated the raising of an additional loan of £490 000 to finance public works currently under way.

Ratepayers in Durban objected strongly to the proposed construction of a new Town Hall at a cost of £200 000 as the number of local insolvencies and mounting unemployment expressed itself in a rising incidence of crime and drunkenness. The older, established firms managed to survive but their capital resources were seriously eroded and business was reckoned to have 'scarcely been worse during the past 20 years'. There was a noticeable decline in the white urban population, particularly in Durban where it dropped from 40 000 in 1903 to 25 000 in July 1908, with most emigrants leaving for Europe, Australia or Argentina.⁶² The agricultural sector was also adversely affected by these recessionary conditions, its recovery being further retarded by recurrent drought, locust swarms and rinderpest, followed in 1904 by a major outbreak of east coast fever.

The financial burden involved in the implementation of preventive measures against the spread of cattle diseases and the provision of more efficient agricultural services was compounded by the costs incurred in completing the process of refugee repatriation and replenishing railway stores looted during the war. The Natal government was also faced with increased military expenditure in the immediate post-war era when it was informed that it would henceforth have to finance its own defence, as provided for in terms of the granting of responsible government in 1893. The subsequent establishment under the 1903 Militia Act of an active militia of 3 500 men, supported by three reserve militias and equipped with the latest weapons, constituted an additional heavy demand on the colonial exchequer when it was still paying for the ambitious public works initiated during the wartime boom.⁶³

Natal's post-war recession was, in large measure, attributable to circumstances which were entirely external to the colony. The economic and political future of the whole subcontinent depended heavily upon the revival of the Transvaal gold industry, which was slow to recover its momentum due to a shortage of unskilled labour.

Confidence in Natal's future well-being was further undermined by a new isolationist movement among Transvalers. This group, including some leaders of the mining industry, proposed to terminate the free importation into the Transvaal of goods from other British colonies in southern Africa. They also wanted to encourage greater use of the shorter route through Mozambique for railway traffic between the Witwatersrand and the coast.

In 1901 the British military government, already installed in the Transvaal before the war was over, negotiated the *modus vivendi* agreement. This assured the Portuguese that goods in transit to the Witwatersrand would enjoy equal treatment with those passing through the Cape and Natal. In return the Portuguese were to provide a guaranteed supply of unskilled Mozambican labour which was much needed in the mining sector. Not least, the agreement also exempted Mozambican goods from import duty into the Transvaal. This posed a serious challenge to Natal in view of the similarity of their sub-tropical products, but the problem was insignificant compared with the colony's potential loss of income from customs and railway revenues generated by the overberg trade. In addition to the shorter distance to the sea, railway rates on the Delagoa Bay line were lower and while negotiations concerning the allocation of the Witwatersrand's rail traffic continued, Mozambique's share rose to as much as 60%.⁶⁴ It was only in 1908 that there were at last some indications of an economic upswing in Natal, after a worldwide recession had made local conditions even worse. By then declining customs and railway receipts, rising public debt and a succession of budgetary deficits had also impacted upon the colony's political life. Sir Albert Hime's ministry fell in mid-1903 when its Supply Bill was rejected. The next ministry, led by Sir George Sutton, collapsed over disputes concerning the raising of revenue. He was followed by Sir Charles Smythe who resigned eighteen months later after Bambatha's uprising — sparked off by a new £1 poll tax introduced to improve state revenues — added another £700 000 to the public debt by way of military expenses.⁶⁵

The ordeal by fire of 1899–1902, followed by prolonged post-war recession and financial hardship, gradually made it clear to many reluctant white Natalians that the long-term future of the colony lay in some form of closer political association with her neighbours and, in particular, with the gold-rich Transvaal. Yet again, as before the Anglo-Boer War, they had to contend with ambivalent attitudes towards their neighbours across the Drakensberg.⁶⁶

NOTES

1. Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (London, 1859), p. 1.
2. The term 'Natal' in this context includes the territory between the Thukela and Phongolo rivers known as 'Zululand' that was annexed to the colony of Natal in 1897. The title 'Anglo-Boer War' is preferred here to the currently fashionable 'South African War' because it indicates the major belligerents involved. This is not to deny the active participation in the conflict of other persons including Africans and Indians, as well as American, French, German, Irish and Russian volunteers.
3. J. Stirling, *The Colonials in South Africa, 1899 1902: their record based on the despatches* (London, 1903), pp. 27–8, 42–3; R. Russell, *Natal: the land and its story* (Pietermaritzburg, 1904), p. 302; C.H. Stott, *The Boer Invasion of Natal* (London, 1900), p. 216; *Colony of Natal Statistical Year Book*, p. 12; H. Paterson, 'The military organisation of the colony of Natal, 1881–1910' (MA, Natal Durban, 1985) pp. 94–6.

4. *The Natal Witness*, 9 April 1891; A.F. Hattersley, *Pietermaritzburg Panorama: a survey of one hundred years of an African city* (Pietermaritzburg, 1938), p. 111.
5. Standard Bank of South Africa Ltd Archives, Johannesburg (hereafter, SBA) General Manager's Office 3/2/1/1 Half-Yearly Letters 1890–1896: Joint General Managers to The Secretary, Standard Bank, London, 10 February 1891, pp. 62–3; W.R. Guest, 'Natal and the confederation issue in the 1870s' (MA, Natal Durban, 1966) pp. 6–9, 85–6, 130; R. Owendale, 'The politics of dependence, 1893–9', in A. Duminy and B. Guest (Eds) *Natal and Zululand from earliest times to 1910: a new history* (Pietermaritzburg, 1989) pp. 328, 337.
6. Duminy and Guest op. cit., pp. 327–38; F.H. Brookes and C de B. Webb, *A History of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1965), pp. 192–3, 200–1.
7. Paterson, 'Military organisation of the colony of Natal', pp. 75–9.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–2.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 76; A.H. Duminy and W.R. Guest (Eds) *FitzPatrick: South African politician, selected papers, 1888–1906* (Johannesburg, 1976), pp. 222, 242.
10. *The Natal Witness*, 1, 6, 8 July 1899; *The Natal Mercury*, 4 July, 23 September, 3, 13 October 1899; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 18–20.
11. *The Natal Mercury*, 18 August, 4 November 1899; M.D. Bollmann, 'War and Natal urban communities: the socio-economic life of Pietermaritzburg and Dundee, during the first phase of the Anglo-Boer War, October 1899 to April 1900' (BA Hons, Natal Pietermaritzburg, 1987) pp. 42–3; P.J.B. Savory, 'The Uitlander Council (with special reference to Natal)' (BA Hons, Natal Durban, 1973) pp. 28–9, 32–3, 39.
12. *The Natal Witness*, 23, 26 August 1899; Savory, 'Uitlander Council', pp. 31–6; Bollmann, 'War and Natal urban communities', pp. 43–4.
13. *The Natal Witness*, 27 October 1899, 16 February 1900; F. Meer (ed), *The South African Gandhi. An Abstract of Speeches and Writings of M.K. Gandhi, 1893–1914* (Durban, 1995) p. 743; Bollmann, 'War and Natal urban communities', pp. 44–5.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 75–7; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 220, 223.
15. Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban, MAR 2.08.5, 'March with Zulus from Johannesburg to Natal'; P. Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Johannesburg, 1983), pp. 127–8; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 30–1. (See also the book review of *The Long March Home* by Elsabé Brink elsewhere in this issue. Ed.)
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 33, 38–9; R. Kruger, *Good-bye Dolly Gray* (London, 1974), p. 55; A.F. Hattersley, *Carbineer: the history of the Royal Natal Carbineers* (Aldershot, 1950), pp. 36–7.
17. Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 28–9, 107–9, 120–22, 164, 211; D. Reitz, *Commando* (London, 1929), p.32–6.
18. V.S. Harris, 'The reluctant rebels: the impact of the Second Anglo-Boer War upon the Klip River Dutch community, with special reference to the Dutch community of Dundee' (BA Hons, Natal Pietermaritzburg, 1982) p. 22; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, p. 111; S. Spencer (Ed), 'Catherine Portsmouth's letter. . .', *Natalia*, 27, 1997, pp. 6–18.
19. Kruger, *Dolly Gray*, 76–8, 100–1; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 44–64.
20. SBA, Inspection Reports on Branch Offices 1/1/465, Dundee 24 December 1898; Bollmann, 'War and Natal urban communities', pp. 7–8.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–15; Harris, 'The reluctant rebels', pp. 24–8.
22. T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (Johannesburg, 1993), pp. 75–9, 93–4.
23. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–5; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 90–8.
24. SBA, Inspection Reports on Branch Offices 1/1/101, Ladysmith 15 November 1898.
25. Pakenham, *Boer War*, pp. 82–5, 142–5, 185; R. Chisholm, *Ladysmith* (London, 1979), pp. 92–4, 128–33.
26. *Ibid.*, pp. 98–9, 127–8, 162, 164, 190–3, 195; Pakenham, *Boer War*, pp. 183–4, 188–9.
27. *Ibid.*, pp. 82–5, 87–9, 93–4, 186–91; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 23–4, 125–213; J. Symons, *Buller's campaign* (London, 1963), passim.
28. Pakenham, *Boer War*, pp. 93–8; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 99–118.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 219–20; Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, pp. 80–3.
30. Symons, *Buller's campaign*, pp. 279–82; Stirling, *Colonials in South Africa*, pp. 42–4; Paterson, 'Military organisation of the colony of Natal', p. 83.

31. Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, pp. 87–90; Harris, 'The reluctant rebels', pp. 21–2; S.J. Maphalala, 'The policies of the Transvaal and Natal Governments towards Dinuzulu 1897–1913' (D.Litt et Phil., Unisa 1989) pp. 90–107.
32. D.M. Moore, *General Louis Botha's second expedition to Natal* (Cape Town, 1979), pp. 14–16, 36, 49; Paterson, 'Military organisation of the colony of Natal', p. 85.
33. Pakenham, *Boer War*, pp. 279–83; Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, pp. 90–3.
34. Maphalala, 'Policies towards Dinuzulu', pp. 107–22; Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, pp. 90–3.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 87–90, 132–3; Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, p. 216; M. Palmer, *History of the Indians in Natal* (Cape Town, 1957), pp. 63–4.
36. Harris, 'The reluctant rebels', pp. 26–7; Bollmann, 'War and Natal urban communities', p13; Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, pp. 78–80; See also S.J. Maphalala, 'The participation of the Zulus in the Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902' (MA, Zululand, 1979) passim.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 158–9.
38. Blue Books for the Colony of Natal (Departmental Reports), Annual Reports of the Commissioner of Mines: 1898 p. 11103, 1899 pp. 1129, 35, 1900 p. 1149 and 1901 p. 3; Commissioner of Mines Records (Dundee), File 65/1900: W.N. Muir (Asst. Inspector) to Commissioner of Mines, 29 March 1900, Files 126 and 149/1900: Correspondence re War Damage; Ruth Edgecombe and Bill Guest, 'An introduction to the pre-Union Natal coal industry', in B. Guest and J.M. Sellers (Eds) *Enterprise and Exploitation in a Victorian Colony: Aspects of the economic and social history of colonial Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1985), pp. 316, 318.
39. Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, p. 223; Bollmann, 'War and Natal urban communities', pp. 28, 30–1; J. Lambert, 'The impoverishment of the Natal peasantry, 1893–1910', in Guest and Sellers (Eds) *Enterprise and Exploitation*, pp. 300–1.
40. SBA, Inspection Reports on Branch Offices 1/1/46, Dundee 15 November 1899, 1/1/208, Dundee 31 January 1902 and 19 May 1904; Bollmann, 'War and Natal urban communities', p. 32.
41. V.S. Harris, 'The Klip River Dutch Community 1843–1899', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, VII, 1984, pp. 1–10; Harris 'The reluctant rebels', pp. 1–5, 32, 48.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 21–4.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–9, 38–9, 40–1.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 30–6, 42–50, 53–6.
45. P.A. Dry, 'Concentration camps during the South African War (1899–1902) with particular reference to the Natal camps, 1900–1902' (BA Hons. Natal Pietermaritzburg, 1990) p. 7; see also E. Hobhouse (Ed) *War without glamour: women's war experiences written by themselves, 1899–1902* (Bloemfontein n.d.), passim; A.C. Martin, *The Concentration Camps, 1900 1901: facts, figures and fables* (Cape Town, 1957), passim; S.B. Spies, *Methods of Barbarism?: Roberts and Kitchener and civilians in the Boer republics, January 1900 May 1902* (Cape Town, 1977), passim.
46. Dry, 'Concentration camps', pp. 7–15, 26–39, 42–59, 67–9.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 11–26, 72–5, 80, 92–9, 102, 105–6, 110–11, 118–19.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 95–6, 105–6, 137–8, 142.
49. Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, p. 224; Z.A. Konezacki, *Public Finance and Economic Development of Natal, 1893 1910* (Durham, N.C., 1967), pp. 54, 86–7.
50. Stott, *Boer Invasion of Natal*, pp. 214–16; Stirling, *Colonials in South Africa*, pp. 27–8; Russell, *Natal*, p. 302; Brookes and Webb, *History of Natal*, pp. 203–4; Paterson, 'Military organisation of the colony of Natal', p. 95.
51. Stirling, *Colonials in Natal*, pp. 47–9 (KCB: Knight Commander of the Bath; DSO: Companion of the Distinguished Service; CMG: Companion of St Michael and St George; DCM: Distinguished Conduct Medal.)
52. Bollmann, 'War and Natal urban communities', pp. 46–8; Stirling, *Colonials in Natal*, pp. 42–3, 49; *Colony of Natal Statistical Year Book*, 1901, p12; Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, pp. 87–90, 132–3.
53. *The Natal Mercury*, 19 December 1899, 27 and 28 March 1900; Konezacki, *Public Finance and Economic Development*, p. 107; Brookes and Webb, *History of Natal*, pp. 211–12.
54. Konezacki, *Public Finance and Economic Development*, pp. 13, 54, 70–1; *Twentieth Century Impressions of Natal: its People, Commerce, Industries and Resources* (London, 1906), pp. 67–83;

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56. Konczacki, *Public Finance and Economic Development*, pp. 54–5, 72–3, 100; D. Hobart Houghton and J. Dagut (Eds) *Source material on the South African Economy: 1860–1970* Vol 2 1899–1919 (Cape Town, 1972), p. 1.
57. SBA. Inspection Reports on Branch Offices 1/1/208, Durban 31 January 1902; Duminy and Guest. 'Anglo-Boer War and its economic aftermath', pp. 351, 353–4.
58. SBA. Inspection Reports on Branch Offices 1/1/129, Pietermaritzburg 31 December 1899 and 31 January 1901.
59. SBA. Inspection Reports on Branch Offices 1/1/53, Durban 24 November 1900 and 1/1/208, Durban 31 January 1902.
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61. SBA. Inspection Reports on Branch Offices 1/1/251, Newcastle 26 December 1901; 1/1/101, Ladysmith 25 August 1899 and 8 September 1900; 1/1/238, Ladysmith 15 September 1903 and 23 September 1905.
62. SBA. Inspection Reports on Branch Offices 1/1/256, Pietermaritzburg 6 May 1905 and 21 April 1906; 1/1/209, Durban 20 March 1905, 3 March 1906 and 18 July 1908.
63. Konczacki, *Public Finance and Economic Development*, pp. 55–6, 58, 75; Paterson. 'Military organisation of the colony of Natal', pp. 97–110; Duminy and Guest, 'Anglo-Boer War and its economic aftermath', pp. 354–7.
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BILL GUEST