## Pietermaritzburg Concentration Camp

he origins of the concentration camps of the South African War are well known. Although groups of republican Boers were gathered into camps before the end of 1900, the great majority were rounded up from the beginning of 1901, as a result of Lord Kitchener's 'scorched earth' strategy to bring the guerrilla campaigns to an end. In order to prevent the Boer commandos from finding sustenance and support, the land was cleared of all its inhabitants, black and white, the farmhouses were burnt, the crops destroyed and the livestock killed or captured by the British army. While the great majority of the camps were in the old Boer republics, by the end of the war there were at least nine camps in Natal. The

majority were established towards the end of 1901 to house families from the Transvaal, as well as a handful from the Free State, by then the Orange River Colony [ORC].

But two camps in Natal, Howick and Pietermaritzburg, had slightly different antecedents. When the war started, a large part of the Boer forces crossed the Drakensberg into Natal and laid siege to Ladysmith. Much of the land over which they fought in northern Natal was occupied by fellow Afrikaners who had settled there during the course of the nineteenth century. This little population of some 5 000 people was only partially integrated into Natal white society. Clinging to their own language and religion, still largely rural, they were poorly represented

politically and played a limited part in the life of the colony. Furthermore, the practice of transhumance, the seasonal trek to better pastures, meant that the borders were very permeable and the distinction between Transvalers. Free Staters and Natalians was by no means clear.1 The Boer leaders gave the Natal men little option but to join the commandos, although many did so reluctantly. Their position was unenviable because. unlike the republicans, as British subjects, they were classed as rebels and their property would be forfeit to the Natal state. As the British slowly regained control over the region, this is precisely what happened. The men were sentenced and imprisoned while their families were incarcerated often penniless, in the Pietermaritzburg and Howick camps.<sup>2</sup> Deported Transvalers were gradually added to their numbers and, given the arbitrariness of war, a number of Free State families also found themselves in Pietermaritzburg camp.

Pietermaritzburg camp was established in August 1900, the first inmates arriving on the 8th of that month.<sup>3</sup> Unlike the Transvaal and ORC camps, which were transferred to civilian administration in February 1901, it was run by the military until October 1901, when the Natal government took charge.

The military cared little for record-keeping, so their camps lacked the detailed reports produced by the civilian administrations. Although Sir Thomas Murray, who administered the Natal system, ran an effective organisation, and reported regularly, the context of a loyal and long-established colony meant that records tended to be brief and to the point; formal accounts of Pietermaritzburg are thin.<sup>4</sup>

Fortunately the voices of some of the inmates have survived, although the majority lack the directness of personal diaries or letters. Most are mediated, selected and edited by Emily Hobhouse or Elizabeth Neethling to illustrate the sufferings of the women.



Distant view of the Pietermaritzburg Camp. It was situated on the bare ridge opposite the Botanical Gardens. Above it to the left, towers Signal Hill while Blackridge rises beyond. (Photograph provided by Steve Watt.)

The camp was well placed, not in the sultry 'sleepy hollow' of the valley, but on the slopes to the northwest, which were cooler. One visitor described the place as 'a vast space, almost like a deer park, on a slope, with much long, coarse grass'.5 But the British were looking for more than picturesque settings for the camps. Behind their siting and layout lay a set of ideas about the proper ordering of society of which the British themselves were perhaps not entirely aware, for they were the product of profound changes in British society during the course of the nineteenth century. A desirable camp site needed to be on sloping ground to ensure good drainage. The neat, straight lines and wide streets between the tents implied good order and management. Left to themselves, the Boers preferred to live in family groups, in an untidy iumble of tents which made it difficult for sanitary wagons to pass through or for the camp staff to keep a sharp eye on the wayward who ignored camp regulations. This becomes abundantly clear as one reads the many camp reports which emphasise these elements.6 A well-ordered camp was not only a healthy camp; it was a microcosm of the desirable modern society, with hygienic sanitation, an effective medical system, good schools and proper record-keeping. Although this was never Kitchener's intention. over time, almost inadvertently, the camps became a part of Milner's project to modernise and 'civilise' the Boers.7 In the last resort, these bureaucratic practices were about the exercise of power in the modern state.8 Willy-nilly, in the camps a preindustrial rural society was dragged into the twentieth century.

Pietermaritzburg camp was never large, with about 2 500 people for most of its existence. Unlike many of the up-country camps, it was located in a substantial town which had a relatively well-developed infrastructure, so there were few problems with water and sanitation. Initially about half the people were housed in tents, but these were gradually replaced, first with canvas rooms, and later with more solid housing. For much of the time there was no hospital, since the sick were treated at the military hospital at Fort Napier. Only towards the end of the period was a canvas hospital introduced. The superintendent, Mr E. Struben, who arrived in December 1900, managed the camp for most of its life but, until October 1901, he was answerable to Captain G.P. the Assistant Marshal, and it is not clear how much independence he had. Appleby's reports were terse and uninformative and separate Pietermaritzburg camp reports disappear after October 1901, so Struben's voice is entirely absent and it is difficult to get any sense of his ability.

In general the camp was well run. The Ladies Committee, which was appointed by the War Office to investigate camp conditions, visited Pietermaritzburg in December 1901 and had few serious criticisms to make. The water supply, they noted, came from the town reservoir. The six wash-houses were 'capital' and the bath-houses 'excellent' and well-used. A gang of Africans took care of the pail latrines which were regularly and thoroughly disinfected with chloride of lime or carbolic. On the other hand, there was no proper system for dispensing rations so the women had to

hang around for hours waiting for the food. There were no public ovens and the supply of wood was inadequate.<sup>9</sup>

The most significant marker of the standard of the camps was mortality. Deaths were few in Pietermaritzburg compared with the Transvaal camps. The great killer was measles and its sequelae, especially pneumonia and bronchitis. Pietermaritzburg did not escape the epidemic entirely. In the worst month. September 1901. 47 people died, 25 of them children between 1 and 5 years. 10 A total of 167 died in the camp over two years, the great majority under five, as one would expect in this age of high infant mortality.<sup>11</sup> Apart from measles most voung children appear to have died of gastro-enteritis or similar complaints. One small boy who narrowly survived an injury to his leg and blood-poisoning was Dan Pienaar, who became the well-known South African general in World War II 12

Measles is a highly infectious disease and it can spread like wildfire in overcrowded conditions, when the viral load may increase and the virulence of the disease become more lethal. Malnourished children are particularly vulnerable which is why measles remains so deadly in undeveloped societies. <sup>15</sup> In Pietermaritzburg, housing was far better than the worn bell tents of the Transvaal camps and food was more nourishing. The meat, the only source

of vitamin C in many camps, was of better quality and fruit and vegetables, including rice and potatoes, were available. By the time that the Transvalers arrived, most of them had already acquired an immunity to the disease and the weakest had died. All these factors contributed to a low mortality, although it did not seem so to the people themselves in the bad months of August and September 1901, when children died day after day.

Typhoid (enteric, *Salmonella typhi*) was the malady which the British most feared since it had created such havoc amongst their troops in Bloemfontein and was believed to be endemic in many South African towns.

Typhoid is caused by bacteria which had been identified by 1900 and the British were well advanced in producing a vaccine against it. In any case, the disease was known to be mainly water-borne and good sanitation could usually eradicate it, which was why the camp authorities laid such emphasis on hygiene.

Measles was another matter since it was caused by a virus, and these pathogens were not yet understood. Doctors had no means of combatting the epidemic except through the timetested method of quarantine, which was virtually impossible in war-torn South Africa.<sup>17</sup> Partly out of frustration, partly because 'scapegoating' is a common phenomenon in epidemics, the doctors

|   | Men | Women | Children<br>under 13 | Children<br>under 5 |    | Total |
|---|-----|-------|----------------------|---------------------|----|-------|
| Deaths under military<br>administration 8/12/1900–<br>15/9/1901 | 6   | 14    | 27                   | 33                  | 21 | 10113 |
| Deaths under civilian administration                            | 8   | 12    | 5                    | 17                  | 34 | 6614  |

were inclined to blame the Boers for the deaths of their children. 18 Appleby in Pietermaritzburg was no different. 'They have very curious ideas for remedying the various diseases that usually attack the young children, which are difficult to eradicate'. he complained. The inmates, he explained, were of a lower social grade. on average, than those in Howick. Many were of the Dopper class, 'who live a very nomadic life under ordinary circumstances'. Sanitary defects were of their own making.19 Fortunately the low mortality and the fleeting length of the epidemic meant that there was no real health crisis.

Unfortunately little else can be said about health in Pietermaritzburg camp. Effective record-keeping was part of the paraphernalia of the modern bureaucracy and statistics were kept meticulously in the Transvaal and ORC under the new regime. But the British did not feel they had a point to make in loyal Natal, as Milner explained. The figures [of Natal towns] would not furnish any basis of comparison with the republic, since 'a good sanitary system on British lines prevails', he stated.<sup>20</sup> Although some Natal statistics were published, they lacked detail and consistency.

While the early inmates were mainly Natalians, quite soon republicans were sent down and, from the end of 1901, they arrived in much greater numbers. The families formed a mixed population, ranging from the wife of General de Wet, who was a source of endless fascination to camp visitors, to the most destitute. Transvalers were deported, not only to reduce the size of the highveld camps, but because Kitchener wanted to remove 'irreconcilables'.<sup>21</sup> For these women,

exile was a bitter punishment and Pietermaritzburg was unusually full of resentful women. Appleby attempted the extraordinarily divisive experiment of bribing the families into loyalty, a system which had long been abandoned in the Transvaal.<sup>22</sup> After six months, the 'disposition and character' of the inmates was entered confidentially in the register in order to encourage their 'loyalty'; the right-minded would be given 'substantial advantages with regard to rations, accommodation, privileges, &c'. The results, so far, had been satisfactory, Appleby claimed.<sup>23</sup> The trial seems more likely to have encouraged bitterness and friction.

Nevertheless, the Pietermaritzburg registers provide a unique insight into the attachments of the inmates. Thus, on the first page of the first register, Mrs D.P. van Aswegen of Kaalplaats farm, Potchefstoom district, whose husband had been 'deported', was listed as 'anti-British'; Mr D.J.J. Akkerman of Wakkerstroom was brought in 'for protection'; Mr C.M.M. Adendorff of Goodhope farm, Harrismith, was 'undesirable: Mr J.H. van As of Renenshoop, Harrismith, was listed as 'refugee - not to be trusted'.24 Mr D.P. Bezuidenhout of Middeldrift, Middelburg, on the other hand, was 'From all accounts trustworthy' and Mr B.M. Beukes of Fraserfield, Harrismith, was 'loyal'.25 These entries take us beyond the conventional categorisation of camp inmates as bittereinders and hendsoppers and hint at much more complex affiliations amongst Afrikaners, which have been poorly explored.

Political associations did not count for much when it came to the process of incarceration. For almost everyone the loss of home was traumatic and the Transvalers found the removal to British territory particularly stressful. As British subjects the Natal families at least had support structures at hand - family, government or local politicians. Unlike republicans, they did not feel to the same extent that they had lost their country and were imprisoned in a foreign state.26 Even so, many arrived destitute, as the camp minister, Ds W.P. Rousseau, recorded. Taken from their homes in what they were wearing, they were almost naked. While some had money, most had nothing.<sup>27</sup> A visitor to the camp described the influx of one group, in hot mid-February:

In an hour the new prisoners came. A few soldiers first, who looked good natured, and as if not particularly relishing their work, then a long, straggling procession, broken often into clumps. Mostly mothers and children, many babies in arms, many toddling alongside, clutching gown or hand, most of them weary, sad, grave, a look of destitution imprinted on faces and clothing alike. One little lad of seven or eight was so tired that he lay down twice in the grass, and was made to go on. All down to the infants had some little thing, presumably the most precious or necessary in one hand, a water-bottle, a kettle, a small bundle of clothing; here and there a bag with a few provisions; one lone woman was cherishing a cat. One old woman, with a little child beside her, came in a ricksha: the rest were all on foot and with no umbrellas against the sun. The general effect was very sombre and infinitely sad.28

One should not take such accounts entirely at face value, however. There is plenty of evidence that Pietermaritzburg was a relatively comfortable camp and the Natal rations were wholesome, if not always to the taste of the Boers. The civilian authorities prided themselves on their economical running of the camps and complaints about the food may have been partly due to this, for the expensive fresh meat the military had supplied was replaced in 1902 with frozen meat, at a saving of about 1d per lb. Since Pietermaritzburg consumed about 1,000 lbs a day, the difference was fairly considerable (£336 15s 7d was saved in January 1902) but the Boers disliked the frozen meat.<sup>29</sup>

Although I have written of the incarceration of the families and accounts often refer to the families as prisoners, in fact most were not. The camp people could visit Pietermaritzburg freely without passes. The war brought labour shortages to loyalist towns in the Cape and Natal, and many men were able to obtain fairly well-paid jobs on the railways, breweries and other businesses. Women, too, worked as seamstresses or occasionally in domestic labour.30 In Natal fresh fruit and vegetables were available for sale and these earnings went a long way to ensuring that Pietermaritzburg inmates were far better off than their countrymen in the interior, although the working men had their free rations stopped, since Pietermaritzburg labourers had complained of the unfair competition.31 This is not to discount the distress of the camp people but these stories of hardship and suffering were often a metaphor for their fears, their confusion and their uncertainty.

The camp was a complex environment in terms of class and gender. It was run by men, many of them upper- or middle-class officers deeply imbued with a homosocial military culture and steeped Britain's class consciousness. This 'hegemonic masculinity' was rarely articulated explicitly but it excluded women so completely from any public presence, that the concept helps to explains why camp officials failed, so resoundingly, to understand that women and children had different needs from the average trooper.<sup>32</sup> This was less striking in Pietermaritzburg camp than in the up-country camps. In the early days tents were overcrowded because the ratio of 15 soldiers to a tent was applied automatically; the rations were unsuitable for small children: recreation facilities like football were provided for the boys but not the girls. Class and gender intersected. To the British officials the Boers were lower-class peasants, to be treated accordingly. These categories did not sit comfortably with Boer society, however, for Boer women were often less submissive than their British counterparts. To the British these women were not 'ladies' and their defiant political stance reinforced their view that the camp women were 'unwomanly'. Part of the civilising project was to train the women into appropriate femininity.<sup>33</sup>

Elizabeth Neethling, who was an inmate of Pietermaritzburg camp and who collected and published many of the women's testimonies after the war, illustrates some of the contradictions implicit in the construction of class and gender in the camp. Neethling's writings have been central to Afrikaner understanding of the sufferings of the camps. Without wishing to minimise the misery, however, Neethling needs to be read with caution for she was one of those Afrikaners who contributed to the reinvention of Afrikaner identity

after the war.<sup>34</sup> While this project was primarily a male articulation, the Afrikaner woman found a role as the *volksmoeder* the mother of the nation The ideal volksmoeder was a member of a happy, homogeneous, middleclass community. There was little place for working-class aspirations in this portraval and the poor were airbrushed out of the picture.<sup>35</sup> This gentrification of Afrikaners is a neglected but not insignificant thread in the creation of post-war Afrikaner identity, shaped partly by the experience of the camps. Much of the Afrikaner anger at British comment on the camps arises from the portrayal of Boers as ignorant and dirty peasants. By the 1930s such depictions could evoke considerable violence.<sup>36</sup>

Neethling herself was a member of the educated Murray clan, but she was not a typical camp inmate, for the vast majority were *bywoners*, landless Boers, although the Natal Afrikaners tended to be more prosperous. Torn between depicting the sufferings of genteel Boer ladies, and the realities of bywoner life, Neethling's accounts are fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, her description of a typical Boer home suggested educated, affluent domesticity.<sup>37</sup> On the other:

The situation was very trying to those who realised the necessity of careful moral training [of children]. Herded together as they were, with all sorts and conditions, the little ones, to their mothers' infinite pain, picked up objectionable language and habits, and became unruly to a degree.<sup>38</sup>

Think what it must be, she continued,

for a lady of refined feeling to live in one room with an unrefined family. To eat, sleep, dress, sew, write – all in that one apartment. No privacy, no quiet. What is spoken in one room can be heard in the next. From five o'clock in the morning till ten at night an incessant din. Absolute misery to a lady who had lived on her own farm, in a house commodiously built of stone, containing six or eight rooms.<sup>39</sup>

Contrast this with Mrs Murray's more dispassionate account of her arrival at the camp (she came from Bethlehem), which Emily Hobhouse (who was also prone to gentrifying the Boers) says is the earliest description of Pietermaritzburg camp.

On arrival at Pietermaritzburg they found tents ready for them, but nothing else. Before evening however, blankets and food were supplied. The tents were the large oblong tents with double canvas, one for each family. The furniture consisted of iron stretchers with straw mattresses, five blankets to each person, a table and two benches, a tin basin, a bucket, and a campkettle. The food was prepared by the women themselves, a shed with good water had been put up for the purpose. The great drawback was the intense heat, and there was no shade for the children to play outside. The women were allowed to go out visiting their friends in the town or to go shopping.

Like many of the women in Pietermaritzburg camp, Mrs Murray herself was allowed to go to friends in the Cape Colony after a couple of weeks.<sup>40</sup>

Life in the camp was certainly not comfortable and tents and frame houses were poorly insulated against the extremes of the Pietermaritzburg climate. To the readers of *Die Kerkbode*, the journal of the Dutch Reformed Church, Ds Rousseau described the effect of the high winds, when no-one could cook unless they were fortunate enough to have paraffin stoves, and church and school came to a standstill.<sup>41</sup> But it was the unfamiliarity of an alien regime with

its endless rules and regulations that many found so hard. The British imposed on the camps a bureaucracy which the Boers found very difficult to live with. Ds Rousseau commented on the problems of issuing clothing:

We have a Ladies' Committee which cares for the clothing and shoes for the most needy. The military authorities have offered help in this respect also; but there is so much red-tapeism about it, and they want each one to sign for what he or she gets so as to pay back after the war, that they do not wish to avail themselves of this help.... 42

Pietermaritzburg camp was in, but not of, the town. Most residents, loval to the core, took little interest in the Boers and this is reflected in the local newspaper, the Natal Witness, which rarely mentioned the camp. However, the presence of such women as Elizabeth Neethling and Mrs de meant that Pietermaritzburg camp probably had some of the most politically sophisticated of any inmates. These women were alert to any slights and were quick to protest, for instance, when a letter to a Natal newspaper suggested that the Boers lived better in the camps than on their own farms. 43 Mrs de Wet was an object of journalistic curiosity. In February 1902 she was interviewed by the Natal Witness. She was living in a small house and attended by a 'Hottentot damsel'. On the walls of her room hung the arms of the Transvaal and Free State, along with photographs of Kruger and other Boer leaders. 'It did not look conciliatory in the least', the Witness commented. She told the reporter that she wanted a house in town, as Mrs Isie Smuts had. Her husband, she said, would never surrender and she would sooner be dead than see him do so. The

report reached Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in London and the Governor of Natal explained hastily that Mrs de Wet was treated no differently from the wives of other Boer generals, although the superintendent had agreed to put flooring into her house.<sup>44</sup>

Boers who surrendered voluntarily, hendsoppers, were held in contempt in the camps and later. Their voices are usually silenced but, almost uniquely, Mrs Dickenson, an Australian journalist, interviewed Mrs Fourie, a storekeeper, whose husband was a hendsopper:

When she knew the English were coming, she packed her waggon full of stores and locked it up, so they brought her and her family down in their own waggon. She had an oil cooking-stove, and they were not obliged to cook out of doors when it rained. Mrs Fourie seemed so cheerful and contented, that I began to think Pietermaritzburg Camp must be singularly well managed; but it occurred to me to ask if she and her husband were taken prisoners or surrendered. "Oh, I made my husband surrender," she said. "As we had to lose the home, we might as well take all we could."45

Such pragmatism may have been more widespread than camp mythology has allowed but it is only rarely articulated by the women.

Even the most recalcitrant usually made some compromises. While most probably cherished their republican ideals, they were not averse to a little fun. The inmates built a tennis court for themselves and cricket and football were played by the boys. Sports were held occasionally.<sup>46</sup> Pietermaritzburg, of course, was in the heart of loyalist Natal, and the townsfolk threw

themselves enthusiastically into royalist celebrations. When the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York visited the town, locals turned out in droves to wave their flags in welcome. But the camp children were there as well, as a report explained:

The children turned up under one of the men of the camp, and are reported to me by my NCO in charge of our school children, to have voluntarily waved the flags and to have joined in the welcome to their Royal Highnesses. They were most orderly and were in every respect well behaved. I had informed the residents of the camp generally, that I would endeavour to assist all their children to see the procession, but could not promise that there would be room in the bays. As for themselves, I looked upon them as citizens and that they were free to come and go where they wished throughout the streets.47

As in all the camps religion sustained the inmates. In Pietermaritzburg camp Ds Rousseau was followed by Ds D.J. Malan and later by Ds E.A.J. du Toit. While there is no record of the revival meetings which occurred in some of the camps, Pentecost was a particularly lively celebration, with over 100 children of the church youth group participating, reciting Dutch and English poems, singing and enjoying tea.48 A weekly routine included a women's prayer young meeting. catechism classes, and a men's prayer meeting, apart from regular Sunday services.<sup>49</sup> It was also the church which co-ordinated charitable visits and gifts. Relatively little has been written about the considerable philanthropic effort in South Africa to aid the camp inmates. Afrikaans residents of Pietermaritzburg formed a committee to visit regularly and gifts came from Afrikaner communities all round the country.

Greytown, sensibly, provided much needed wood for fuel while money came from the Cape – £15.5s from Willowmore, £10 from Cradock, £12.5s from Carnarvon and 3s in postage stamps from a child in Richmond, Cape.<sup>50</sup>

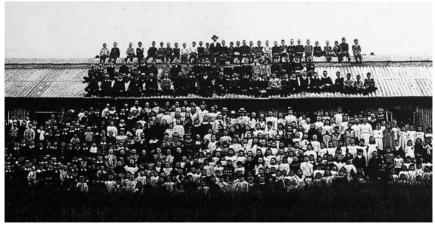
One of the most outstanding features of Pietermaritzburg camp was the education. The school was headed by P.R.N. Vermaak, rather surprisingly since he had been arrested by the British at the start of the war and deported to Pietermaritzburg.<sup>51</sup> The British were usually reluctant to entrust education to rebel hands but Vermaak must have been an effective teacher and his presence may have meant that the camp people were more willing to send their children to school.<sup>52</sup>

While most teachers were Boers, over two hundred young women from all round the empire were imported to teach in the camps as well.<sup>53</sup> The camp schools, as Eliza Riedi points out, were a significant part of Milner's anglicisation project. Education

was supposed to open the Boers to 'progress' and 'modern civilisation' and Milner did not spare money on the enterprise. But the young women had another function for they were also to be role models to the Boers of desirable imperial womanhood.54 Where possible they should be middleclass 'ladies' and Protestant (Catholics were thought to be objectionable to the Boers). Of course, they must be 'loyal' - the Irish were actively discouraged. 'The Scottish elementary teacher is what we want', one official wrote,55 although over a third came from Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

In Pietermaritzburg Lilian Rose and Charlotte Hose, who had previously taught at a 'ladies boarding school', 56 arrived at the end of February 1902. Lily Rose's brief diary and extensive correspondence with her mother have survived, giving a unique glimpse of a young teacher in the camp, her relationships with her pupils and the Boers, and her social life.

Lily Rose appears to have been a sensible, capable and attractive young woman. A staunch Anglican, she



Pietermaritzburg Camp school. Presumably Mr Vermaak is the central figure at the back on the roof, but Lily Rose is unidentified.

(Photograph provided by Johan Wassermann.)



This grainy photograph of Mrs H.A. Alberts, wife of General H.A. Alberts, and her three youngest children, was sent to Die Transvaler by her daughter. The picture is typical of many camp photographs that were sent to POW husbands to reassure them. Such an interchange of photographs was hugely valued. These middle-class family members are dressed in their Sunday best, the women in the snowy aprons which were so demanding to launder, the boys stiff in collars and boots. Their home appears to be reasonably solid. The primus stove is an unusual possession.

The most interesting presence is the lonely figure of Poppie, the kleinjong who had also been taken from the farm, standing slightly apart, not fully a part of the family.

(Photograph: National Archives of South Africa, Photographs, 20938)

attended church regularly, sometimes up to three times on feast days. As a teacher she was particularly well qualified. She had been trained as a kindergarten teacher at the Froebel Institute in West Kensington, which provided an 'interactive educational process' for the very young, based on the idea that the first learning experiences of children are crucial to their later development.<sup>57</sup>

Shortly after her arrival she was asked to take over the disorganised kindergarten classes and she threw herself wholeheartedly into the project. Her affection for the children, her 'little chicks', comes through clearly and her feeling was obviously returned for she was regularly inundated with presents of flowers, sweets and biscuits. She formed limited friendships with the Boer teachers and, when the camp was closed, she received numerous invitations to visit the farms. But she never took up any of these offers. Although she got on reasonably well with the camp people, she never really understood them. Her account of the

peace illustrates this. She, herself, was intrigued by the panoply that went with the declaration:

I went down to Church alone on Sunday as Charlie Hose was in bed with a severe cold. I noticed as I went down Church St. that a good many Union Jacks were flying, and as I neared the Town Hall the chimes were playing "God save the King", so I guessed something extraordinary had happened - when I got into Church I noticed the Governor and his aide-decamp sitting in the front pew, and as the old Dean came in he had a telegram in his hand, which he read aloud as soon as he reached his seat - then the organ pealed forth the national anthem, and the people joined heartily.

The Boers received the news very differently.

When I reached the camp I heard the Governor was coming up to the Camp in the afternoon – crowds gathered up by the "ration-tent" and when the Governor spoke he was received (or rather his announcement) in stolid silence; next day the teachers in the k'garten were fearfully apathetic in their work

Most heart-rending was the response of Miss Pretorius 'the nicest girl in the camp'. Lily asked her what she thought of 'peace' and she said, 'Well Miss Rose, I just feel as though I have no interest in life now'. When Schalk Burger visited the camp a few days later to explain why the Boers had come to terms.

the men listened in silence but the women interrupted a good deal – of course he spoke in Dutch but the Matron interpreted for me – he said that it had been almost an hopeless war for the last 18 months, then shouted out one woman "Why didn't you give it up 18 months ago", the women you

must know have all the "go" the men none. When he had finished speaking the women crowded round his carriage arguing with him, but he said to them "It's peace now, you mustn't quarrel with me".

Lily Rose concluded optimistically, 'I quite believe that all the bitter feeling will die away in time.'

These young women were a magnet to the many men who had come to South Africa during the war. Charlotte Hose was engaged twice in the year she was in Pietermaritzburg. Lily Rose entertained droves of men, from Rudyard Kipling's father to the young Australian lieutenant, Joe Vardy, to whom she eventually became engaged. Their off-duty hours were filled with dinners, theatre, picnics, long walks and 'serious' talks. Although Lily wrote yearningly of her family in England, South Africa brought her experiences she could never have enjoyed at home. It is hardly surprising that she did not return. She extended her stay to teach in Pretoria and, presumably, eventually left for Australia. The South African War changed her life forever, but it brought her opportunity, not suffering.58

An almost invisible presence in the camps were the black inmates. A few of the families brought black servants with them and the records list about 66.<sup>59</sup> It is hard to imagine their lives. They were tolerated by the camp authorities and allowed to sleep with their employers but they were not rationed and had to survive on what their families provided. They were not the only blacks in the camps for blacks also performed the most unpleasant sanitary tasks. South African racial divisions held firm even in a war fought, ostensibly, for equal rights.

Pietermaritzburg camp did not close down as soon as the war ended. The process of repatriation was slow and careful. Women were not allowed to return to the farms unaccompanied so they had to wait, sometimes for months, for their men to come in from commando or return from overseas Nor did they go directly to their farms. The Transvalers were trucked back to their old camps and repatriated from there. Each family was provided with a month's rations and a tent, although they could return for more food. Land schemes and relief works provided for the most destitute but there was still a residue of orphans and elderly indigents who had to be provided for. Eventually all found homes and Pietermaritzburg camp closed down towards the end of November 1902. one of the last in Natal to do so.60

The legacy of the camps is difficult to establish for it has been tainted by post-war political developments.<sup>61</sup> Malnutrition and disease must have damaged some people permanently, especially since measles can have serious long-term effects. Although the social impact of the war has not been well explored, many bywoners were unable to return to the farms which had barely sustained them before the war. Wartime disruptions must have given a considerable push to Afrikaner urbanisation and impoverishment. Personal emotional trauma has been even less considered but studies of the Holocaust and similar experiences suggest that many women must have struggled to come to terms with the destruction of their homes and the loss of their children. In South Africa this suffering has been translated into political activism but individual women often locked up the

memories, refusing ever to discuss them. A few, even if they were almost illiterate, wrote down their stories, sometimes in rambling, confusing and illegible accounts in a proto-Afrikaans which is difficult to read and understand.62 Political women like Elizabeth Neethling and M.M. Postma drew on some of the more readable to publicise Afrikaner suffering but there are very few other interpretations of these writings. 63 Black memories have been even more thoroughly obliterated by the events of the twentieth century. Pietermaritzburg itself also retains little memory of the camp it housed. In the most recent history of the town the war only rates a paragraph and the camp is not mentioned at all.64

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

I should like to acknowledge with gratitude the contribution of the Wellcome Trust in funding this research. They are not responsible for my opinions. My appreciation also goes to the late Pat Merrett, who did the research in the *Natal Witness* for me, and to Professor Johan Wassermann, for his helpful suggestions and some of the photographs.

- See, for instance, Maggie Bester's account of her experiences during the South African war. Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository [PAR], A 72.
- 2 For the detailed history of the Natal Afrikaners during the war see J.M. Wassermann, 'The Natal Afrikaner and the Anglo-Boer War', (PhD, University of Pretoria, 2004). On the position of Afrikaners as loyalists see J. Wassermann, 'Natal Afrikaners as loyalists during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902)', elsewhere in this issue of *Natalia*.
- Wassermann, 'The Natal Afrikaner', p.314.
- 4 At some point the GH records in the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository were resorted and culled, so many of the records on the Natal camps appear to have been destroyed.

- 5 National Library of South Africa [NLSA], SABP 77, A South African Diary, p.2.
- 6 See, for instance, the contrasting reports on Vryburg and Middelburg camps, the former laid out by a qualified surveyor. Cd 902, Further Papers relating to the Working of the Refugee Camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony, and Natal (London, 1902), p.114; Cd 819, Reports etc on the Working of the Refugee Camps in the Transvaal, Orange River Colony, Cape Colony and Natal (London, 1901), pp.329–330.
- 7 E. Riedi, 'Teaching Empire: British and Dominions women teachers in the South African War concentration camps', *English Historical Review*, 120(489), 2005, p.1319.
- 8 J. Horne, 'Masculinity in politics and war in the age of nation-states and world wars, 1850–1950' in S. Dudink et al, *Masculinities* in Politics and War. Gendering Modern History (Manchester, 2004), p.30.
- 9 Cd 893, Report on the Concentration Camps in South Africa by the Committee of Ladies (London, 1902), pp.30–33.
- 10 Cd 893, p.31.
- 11 NASA, DBC 147 Pietermaritzburg and Howick death register. For infant mortality in the Boer republics see E. van Heyningen, 'Medical history and Afrikaner society in the Boer republics at the end of the nineteenth century', *Cleio*, 37, (2005), pp.5–25
- 12 T.B. Frost, St George's Garrison Church, Pietermaritzburg a brief history (Pietermaritzburg, 1998), pp. 5–6. Dan Pienaar was not the only general to spend part of his childhood in the camps. General George Brink was the son of the superintendent of Vredefort Road camp and lived there with his family.
- 13 The register gives the total as 121. Such arithmetical errors are widespread in the records.
- 14 The register gives the total as 65.
- 15 A. Cliff, P. Haggett and M. Smallman-Raynor, Measles. An Historical Geography of a Major Human Viral Disease from Global Expansion to Local Retreat, 1840– 1900 (Oxford, 1993).
- 16 Cd 893 p.31.
- 17 D. Low-Beer, M. Smallman-Raynor and A. Cliff, 'Disease and death in the South African War: changing disease patterns from soldiers to refugees' Social History of Medicine, 17(2), 2004, pp.223–245.
- 18 E. van Heyningen, 'Women and disease. The clash of medical cultures in the concentration camps of the South African

- War' in G. Cuthbertson et al (eds) Writing a Wider War. Rethinking Gender, Race, and Identity in the South African War, 1899–1902 (Athens and Cape Town, 2002), pp.186–212.
- 19 Cd 819, p.202, 282.
- 20 Cd 853, p.9.
- 21 S.B. Spies, Methods of Barbarism? Roberts and Kitchener and Civilians in the Boer Republics January 1900 – May 1902 (Cape Town, 1977), p.224.
- 22 Kitchener had a similar idea and famously introduced a differentiated ration scale for loyal refugees. The families of men on commando or prisoners-of-war were not to receive any meat. It was abandoned almost immediately.
- 23 Cd 819, p.282.
- 24 NASA, DBC 134, Pietermaritzburg camp register, p.1. The DBC registers are not well inventoried and the first in the series is not necessarily the earliest camp register.
- 25 NASA, DBC 134, p.52. See also Wassermann, 'The Natal Afrikaner', pp.314–315.
- 26 Wassermann, 'The Natal Afrikaner', p.317.
- 27 E. Hobhouse, *The Brunt of the War and Where it Fell* (London, 1902), pp.70–71.
- 28 NLSA, SABP 77, p.3.
- Cd 893, pp.30–33; PAR, GH 553/G456/03,
   11 June 1902; National Archives, United Kingdom [NAUK], CO 879/77/697, 13272,
   14 March 1902; CO 879/77/697, 14336, 15 March 1902.
- 30 G. Russell, Anglo-Boer War Concentration Camps in Natal: August 1900 – January 1903, (Durban, 1988).; PAR, GH 1230/153/01, 24 June 1901; Cd 893, p.32; Wassermann, 'The Natal Afrikaner', p.321. Wassermann points out that wealthier Natal Afrikaners were expected to pay their own way.
- 31 Cd 819, p.282.
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- 33 See the discussion on education below.
- 34 L. Stanley, Mourning Becomes ... Post/ Memory, Commemoration and the Concentration Camps of the South African War (Manchester, 2006), pp.101–121.
- 35 L-M. Kruger, 'Gender, community and identity: women and Afrikaner nationalism in the *Volksmoeder* discourse of *Die Boerevrou* (1919–1931)' (MA, UCT, 1991)', pp.335–336. The seminal discussion on the *volksmoeder* concept is E. Brink,

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- 39 Neethling, Should We Forget?, p.77-78.
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- 44 Natal Witness, 15 February 1902, p.5; NAUK, CO 879/77/697, 10686, 19 February 1902.
- 45 Hobhouse, Brunt of the War, p.209.
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- 50 Rousseau, 'Het kamp te Pietermaritzburg',
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- 53 Riedi 'Teaching Empire', p.1323.
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